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In this wild water: The biography of some unpublished manuscripts by Robinson Jeffers, 1887-1962

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IN THIS WILD WATER: THE BIOGRAPHY OF SOME UNPUBLISHED
MANUSCRIPTS BY ROBINSON JEFFERS, 1887-1962

A Dissertation
Presented to
The Faculty of the Graduate School
University of the Pacific

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by
James M. Shebl
May 1974

This dissertation, written and submitted by

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May 7, 1984

In This Wild Water: The Biography of Some Unpublished
Manuscripts of Robinson Jeffers, 1887-1962.

Abstract

For Robinson Jeffers, poet-philosopher and naturalist of Carmel, California, the universe is one entity, a "being out of grasp of the mind enormous." Its parts are only differing manifestations of a single energy; all bear upon one another, influence one another. According to Jeffers we humans attain true freedom and peace by turning away from self, from mere humanity and human contrivances, imaginings, and dreams. This is Jeffers' Doctrine of Inhumanism: a dark philosophy which proved increasingly unpopular as Jeffers more and more adamantly insisted upon dramatizing mankind's smallness in the immense context of the universe.

The biography of The Double Axe and Other Poems, published by Random House in 1948, shows that ten poems were expunged from the originally submitted manuscript. Notes and letters from this period show Bennett Cerf and Jeffers' editor, Saxe Cummins, to be disconcerted by the fierce intensity and the dark political ramifications of Jeffers' doctrine. Consequently, The Double Axe was printed with a disclaimer regarding the "political views pronounced by the poet."

To the dismay of his publishers, Jeffers' often uses political persons--Roosevelt, Hitler, Mussolini, Truman--to represent the ideas he works with aesthetically. But when he removes these topical references, his poetry sounds propagandistic. In using these particulars as metaphors, he makes contemporary issues and personalities point up his philosophy of Inhumanism. Because this is a particularly dark philosophy, these references to living persons have the effect of indicting them all equally, whether it is Hitler or Roosevelt singled out. Jeffers undertakes the task--which is especially unenviable in the milieu of World War II America--of showing that all leaders and all nations (both Nazi Germany and the United States) are equally culpable of distorting the importance and value of human endeavor.

Jeffers' poetry addresses man's "excessive energies." These energies, which received special attention in the excised poems, lead man to "superfluous activities"--activities which "are devoted to self-interference, self-frustration, self-incitement, and self-worship." He writes so as to discover a way to minimize what he interprets to be man's "racial disease." Because of his motives, Jeffers' art is especially dangerous; for he would direct it to influence as well as reflect the reader's experience. He presents his reader with a difficult task: to relate his experience of the poem, an experience distinctive and irreducible, to the larger flow of human experience. Such a challenge requires that the reader be sensitive not only to Jeffers' specific point in a particular poem, but also to the history

of human development. And, beyond that, to the evolution of the natural universe.

Poetry for Jeffers is not merely mimetic or ontological, but polemical as well. Jeffers' later poems are not necessarily or always tracts, but the materials on which they are based and the criteria by which the poet organizes them are frequently the same as the material and arrangements found in philosophical or religious statements. In one sense, it might be argued that Jeffers elevated propaganda to art by making poetry out of the stuff of argument. But in another sense, Jeffers' best poems carry an autonomy and distinctiveness that makes them irreducible; they cannot be finally understood in a complete sense by deciphering the polemic that points back to external, contemporary reality. His poetry builds and inhabits a world of its own. Thus, the statements in a Jeffers poem may not be understood or judged as if they had been made in direct, argumentative speech, for his aesthetic--when it served him best--has its own complicating norms and dramatic justifications. So Jeffers' poetry has an artistic autonomy even though it refers specifically to a moment of history, a real person, or a particular place. But the particulars are intended to point up a "permanent human faculty," and are thus both real and poetic. When he does not use topical particulars, however, he sacrifices not only the reality, but also the poetry.

He considered the double-bladed Axe:

"In Crete it was a
god, and they named the labyrinth for it. That's
long
before the Greeks came; the lofty Greeks
were still bush-
men. It was a symbol of generation: the
two lobes and the
stiff helve: so was the Cross before they
christened it. But
this one can clip heads too. Grimly,
grimly. A blade for
the flesh, a blade for the spirit: and
truth from lies."

"The Inhumanist," The Double-Axe

Preface

The logic of this book is quite easy. Through various and interesting social circumstances I discovered that a number of unpublished Jeffers manuscripts, mostly holographs, had been purchased en masse from Donnan Jeffers, son of the late poet, who yet resides in Tor House, Carmel, California. The purchaser was an agent for the Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin. My initial research brought to light the existence of two tables of contents to The Double Axe and Other Poems along with the manuscripts of those poems published in that book as well as those of ten poems not published. My reading of the extensive correspondence between Robin and Una Jeffers and Jeffers' publisher, Bennett Cerf and his editor at Random House, Saxe Cummins, pointed up the rationale for the two tables of contents, one containing ten more poems than the other which proved to be that of the 1948 published edition. It became clear that for one reason or another, poems from the originally submitted manuscript were expunged. A close reading of Jeffers' unprinted poems illustrated, to a greater extent than previous critics had understood, the poet's philosophy of inhumanism, a philosophy which was so

manifest in The Double Axe. Since this volume appeared at the time when Jeffers' standing as an American poet had fallen drastically, I felt that there might be value in studying what happened to the original Double Axe manuscript. Jeffers' inhumanism, I found, not only caused him serious problems with his publishers over this particular volume, but it also affected the artistic quality of his poetry and, eventually, his reputation as a poet. My intent, then, is to survey briefly Jeffers' philosophy and its inception, to discuss the circumstances about which the original manuscript went unpublished, to explicate the unpublished poems, and to place them within the Jeffers canon while seeking to re-establish a proper perspective from which one may approach the poet.

Chapter One is titled "The Will is the Corruptor." For Jeffers the universe is one entity, a being "out of grasp of the mind enormous." Its parts are only differing manifestations of a single energy; all bear upon one another, influence one another. They change, cease to exist, come into being, . . . stars, atoms, individuals, races, culture-ages; nothing is important in itself, only the universal totality. This being, as a whole and in its parts, is beautiful, and--according to Jeffers--should compel our deepest respect and love. In the final view only the whole alone can be beautiful, deserving of love, regarded and treated as divine. From Jeffers' view, we who are human attain true freedom and peace by loving this one wholeness, by turning away from self, from mankind, from human contrivances, imaginings, and dreams. The Second World

War became a dramatic testing ground for this philosophy. The war showed the inhumanism natural to man--as natural, that is, as the contention of the ocean and the rocks, or the hawk and the hare. As the Doctrine of Inhumanism permeates Jeffers' poetry, the depth of his moral commitment and of his passionate intensity were profoundly tested by the American public. Did he dare treat the war as "natural"?

Chapter Two, "The Double-Axe Murder," shows how as a further consequence of Jeffers' "unpopular doctrine" the text of The Double Axe (1948) was altered. The biography of this anthology points up the Random House Publishing Company as censor for the "American Way." Ten poems were removed from the originally submitted manuscript; a number of changes were made in the remaining poems. Notes and letters from the period show Bennett Cerf and Saxe Cummins to be disconcerted by the intensity and by some of the political ramifications of Jeffers' doctrine. The volume was finally printed without several of the most "offensive" poems and with a publisher's disclaimer regarding "the political views pronounced by the poet." The biography of the book further illustrates the antagonistic and reactionary nature of the public response to Jeffers' views.

Chapter Three, "The Stones of Whiteness," offers close readings of some of the expunged and altered poems. In these poems, and consequently in their analysis, the doctrine of Inhumanism is stated most explicitly--and, perhaps, least poetically. These poems also show the intensity of Jeffers' conviction and the extent to which he

carried the Doctrine.

Chapter Four, "The Parable of the Water," discusses why Jeffers deferred to editorial opinion and allowed the poems to be excised. Curiously, Jeffers reworked two poems which ultimately appeared in The Double Axe. My reading of these poems points up the artistic possibilities of the expunged poems. Jeffers never extricated himself from the aesthetic predicament which his particularly dark philosophy brought about: years after The Double Axe, in his last book, Hungerfield, Jeffers' editor failed again to see his art, though he was intensely aware of the polemic.

Acknowledgment is gratefully made for permission to publish from the collection at The Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin. I should like to thank Mr. William Holman, Director of that center, for the special efforts he and his staff provided.

I am indebted for permission to publish the manuscripts and for conscientious and gentle remarks to Mr. and Mrs. Donnan Jeffers.

Special appreciation is due my editors, Dr. Louis Leiter, Dr. Charles Clerc, Dr. Diane Borden, and Professor James Riddles, for whose criticisms and kindnesses I shall be ever grateful. I am deeply grateful to Dr. Arlen Hansen, whose very talented direction and generous friendship, bolstered my essai on more occasions than memory can provide.

To my family I dedicate this book--a slight compensation for patience, encouragement, and opportunity.

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Introduction

Although many of Robinson Jeffers' early poems addressed "transient civilization" as a sickness, it was not until the nineteen forties that his verse moved from direct concern with nature and became increasingly propagandistic. Yet, in spite of the preachiness which characterized many of his later poems, they evolve from a basically sound aesthetic. Jeffers uses particulars as metaphors; he incorporates in his poetry contemporary issues and political personalities to articulate his philosophy. In Jeffers' hands this topicality causes some very serious problems. Because contemporary and well-known persons are used to illustrate his particularly dark view, nearly every reference to living persons has the effect of an indictment. But this approach is not new. James Joyce, W. B. Yeats, and Dante referred to politicians and other public figures of their day. Much in the same way, Robinson Jeffers uses Roosevelt, Truman, Hitler, and Stalin as specific metaphors to give his poetry immediacy and particularity:

The crackpot dreams of Jeanne d'Arc and Hitler;
the cripple's-power-need of Roosevelt; the bombast of
Mussolini; the tinsel star of Napoleon.¹

And also in "The Love and the Hate":

The boiler of life and death: you can see faces:
there's Tojo, there's Roosevelt.²

The point of the metaphors is that these people represent particular ideas and attitudes which the poet seeks to work with. Roosevelt's crippled body personifies what Jeffers sees as Roosevelt's (and Hitler's and Jeanne d'Arc's and Napoleon's) limited and deformed view of men, nations, and civilization itself. For the reader, however, Jeffers may seem to be taking unfair advantage of--or even ridiculing--Roosevelt's physical handicap. But when Jeffers did not include particular references, his poetry became especially propagandistic and cerebral. Consider the following poem, untitled and--no doubt wisely--unpublished.

Untitled Poem

We see ourselves from within, our minds and senses

Observe our own minds and senses

We see the universe from within, we are little parts of it;

no astronomer

Ever knew the stars from outside the stars. All our knowledge then,

Our opinions, our observations, our science,

Are subjective; are sometimes studying itself

By the light of itself. That is to say that all our knowledge is a

dream dreaming: say rather a dream

Dreaming a dream.

But we must dream it whole: that way lies truth.

We must not say in Berkeley's answer that I am real

And the world is my dream: that's darkness,

I'm only as real as a wave of the sea.

I am the sea.

Don't fool yourself: there is reality

Under the dream: if I dream it whole and not in fragments

nor contradictions,

I shall approach reality. This is called truth. The truth's the

dream

That comes nearest the real:--and we must trust our truth,

We have nothing better. No doubt at all there are huge gaps in it;

but there's nothing

Consciously false.

Very well: what enlarges truth? Experience.

For truth must grow or die. Truth, like all vital things--

When our bodies or minds or truth stop growing,

There begins death.

Experience. What kind of experience?

What kind of experience?

I am fifty years old; I am too old to take intelligently

the limited experience

Of an observatory or laboratory: truth's little workshops, but

how limited! --and those people

Tell us their findings.

As for me: to take what comes:
 not to withdraw from any experience
 An old man finds.
 I have seen over the edge once or twice, at least I
 thought so:
 keep my mind open for it
 I will again. I must find experience never known in my past
 and let it free
 Some gaps in truth.³

An argument for the poem might be made based on its offering a dialectic of ideas. In that sense, the poem perhaps could be regarded as something like an interior monologue, in which a persona deliberates within himself and tries to arrive at some acceptable understanding of the meaning and significance of experience. But such a view must necessarily overlook the absence of concrete images and metaphors, the rambling and unshaped form, the preachy and arrogant tone, and the failure of the words to reach for any universal signification. It is, in short, an expository meditation in the guise of a poem. Jeffers, it should be remembered, probably recognized these failings of this work, for he never offered it for publication.

But on occasion--especially during the war--Jeffers did write and attempt to publish poems quite similar to this one. Some of those poems were among those expunged from The Double Axe. The

reason for this kind of propagandistic poetry becomes clear when one looks at Jeffers' Themes in My Poems:

It seems to me that great poetry gathers and expresses the whole of things, as prose never can. Its business is to contain a whole world at once, the physical and the sensuous, the intellectual, the spiritual, the imaginative, all in one passionate solution. Thus it becomes a means of discovery, as well as a means of expression. Science usually takes things to pieces in order to discover them; it dissects and analyzes; poetry puts things together, producing equally valid discovery, and actual creation. Something new is found out, something that the author did not know before he wrote it; and something new is made.⁴

The discovery which Jeffers seeks in his poetry is the discovery of Inhumanism. He seeks to articulate a way by which man can come to a realization of his role in the universe. Poetry, in effect, is primarily a medium for Jeffers' philosophy. Therefore, when Jeffers avoids concrete and metaphorical particulars, his poetry is little more than a statement of doctrine. Since Jeffers' poems deal with value and perspective, what is experienced is not necessarily a new or revealing sensation, but rather one encounters Jeffers' perception of man's place in the cosmos.

Hitler, Roosevelt, and the World War gave him new ideas--as well

as reinforced his old ones. In a preface originally written for The Double Axe but set aside after the publisher's decision to print a disclaimer, Jeffers speaks of man's excessive energies. These energies, which receive special attention in the excised poems, lead man to superfluous activities--activities which "are devoted to self-interference, self-frustration, self-incitement and self-worship."

The waste is enormous. We are able to commit and endure because we are so firmly established on the planet. Life is actually so easy that it requires only a slight fraction of our common energies. The rest we discharge onto each other in conflict and charity, love, jealousy, hatred, competition, government, vanity and cruelty and that puerile passion, the will to power or for amusement. Certain human relationships are necessary and desirable but not to this extent. This is a kind of collective onanism; pathetic and ridiculous or at noblest, tragic incest. And so I have represented it. But we have all this excess energy. What should we do with it?.... Do I really believe that people will be content to take a walk and admire the beauty of things? Certainly not. I'm speaking of a racial disease. It was in the monkey blood we derived from and no doubt it is incurable. But whoever will can minimize it in his own life.⁵

The later poems of Jeffers grapple with this reading of man's nature.

He writes to discover a way to minimize this "racial disease." In so doing, he finds it necessary to illustrate the sickness of civilization in specifics. Thus, he might dramatically compare the American and the German, or Roosevelt and Hitler--and offend the sensibilities (and patriotism) of Random House and its readers. Jeffers counsels his reader with a "colder saying":

Turn away from each other to that great presence to which humanity is only a squirming particle....Turn outward from each other as far as need and kindness permit to the vast life and inexhaustible beauty beyond humanity. This is not a slight matter but an essential condition of freedom and of moral and of final sanity. It is understood that this attitude is peculiarly unacceptable at the present, being opposed not only by egoism and tradition but by all the currents of the moment. We are now completely trapped in the nets of envy, intrigue, corruption, compulsion, and eventual murder that are called international politics. We have always been expansive, predatory and missionary; and we love to lie to ourselves. We have entered the period of civil struggles and emerging Caesarism that binds republics with brittle iron. Civilization everywhere is in its age of decline and abnormal violence. Men are going to be frightened and herded increasingly into lumps and masses. A frightened man cannot think and the mass mind does not want truth, only democratic or Aryan or Marxian or other

colored truth. It wants its own voices. However, the truth will not die and persons who have lost everything in the culmination of these evils and stand beyond hope and almost beyond fear may find it again. But if in some future age, the dreams of Utopia should incredibly be fulfilled and men were actually free to want and fear, then all the more they would need this sanctuary against the deadly emptiness, and insignificance of their lives at leisure fully realized. Man much more than baboon or wolf is an animal formed for conflict. His life seems to be meaningless without it. Only a clear shift of meaning and emphasis from man to not man can make him whole.⁶

These are the motives behind Jeffers' art. And his is an especially dangerous art, for he would direct it to influence and reflect the reader's experience. He asks of his reader a difficult task: to relate his (the reader's) experience of the poem, an experience distinctive and irreducible, to the larger flow of human experience. Such a challenge requires that the reader be sensitive not only to Jeffers' specific point in a particular poem, but also to the history of human development. And, beyond that, to the evolution of the natural universe. A poem, that is, will ask the reader to consider his--and even mankind's--smallness in the immense context of the development of the universe. Poetry for Jeffers, then, is not merely mimetic or ontological, but polemical as well. Jeffers' poems are not necessarily or always tracts, but the materials on which they are

based and the criteria by which the poet organizes them are frequently the same as the material and arrangements found in religious or philosophical statements. In one sense, it might be said that Jeffers elevated propaganda to art by making poetry out of the stuff of argument. But in another sense, Jeffers' best poems carry an autonomy and distinctiveness that make them irreducible; they cannot be finally understood in a complete sense by deciphering the polemic that points back to external, contemporary reality. His poetry builds and inhabits a world of its own. Thus, the statements in a Jeffers poem may not be understood or judged as if they had been made in direct speech, for his aesthetic when it served him best has its own complicating norms and dramatic justifications.

In an unpublished preface written for Tamar in August of 1923,⁷ Jeffers speaks of poetry "as presenting the universal beauty" thus being "an incitement to life." He writes that "poetry in its higher condition is...an incitement to action, because our actions are a part of that beauty; an incitement to contemplation, because it serves to open our intelligence and senses to that beauty....This poetry must be rhythmic, and must deal with permanent things, and must avoid affectation." Because Jeffers considers conflict and political deceit to be a condition of man, he may call them "permanent things" and deal with them as realities in his poetry. He may even incorporate particular references to persons or events which he considers to exemplify, say, political deceit. He can do this and yet speak of "the passionate presentment of beauty which is

poetry's function." So poetry has an artistic autonomy even though it refers specifically to a moment of history, a real person, or a particular place. But the particulars are intended to point up a "permanent human faculty," and are thus both real and poetic. When he does not use particulars, however, he sacrifices not only the reality, but also the poetry.

Introduction

Notes

1. Robinson Jeffers, "What Odd Expedients," from the expunged poems. Ms. Jeffers, R. Jeffers Collection. Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas, Austin, Texas.

2. Robinson Jeffers, "The Love and the Hate," The Double Axe and Other Poems (New York: Random House, 1948), p. 49.

3. Robinson Jeffers, "Untitled Poem," The Tor House Papers. Ms. Jeffers, R. Jeffers Collection. Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas, Austin, Texas.

4. Robinson Jeffers, Themes in My Poems, (San Francisco: The Book Club of California, 1956), p. 46.

5. Robinson Jeffers, "Preface," the Tor House Papers.

6. Ibid.

7. Tor House Papers.

Eagle and Hawk with their great claws and hooked heads
tear life to pieces;
Vulture and raven wait for death to soften it.
The poet cannot feed on this time of the world
Until he has torn it to pieces,
and himself also.

"Tear Life to Pieces."¹

Chapter One

The Will Is The Corruptor

From his early poetry to his late, Robinson Jeffers reveals a preoccupation with landscape and treats man as decidedly less important. There is little in Jeffers' early life, however, to suggest that such stern naturalism would eventually come from the pen of Jeffers. Melba Berry Bennett, a biographer of Jeffers, credits the young man with feats of endurance, a mental rigor and a driving sense of individuality.

Although only sixteen, Robin was so advanced in his studies that he was given junior standing at Occidental. But this apparently was not held against him by his classmates and it didn't take him long, in spite of his diffidence, to enter into the activities of his class. Neither aggressiveness nor an acute social sense was a necessary tool with which to make friendships in this small college. A similarity of tastes was all that was required to become one with this group whose members were as steeped in the classics as was Robin. They had as serious an approach to their weekend hikes and athletics as to their academic studies. These associations and circumstances were ideal for Robin's development. He felt no self-consciousness and, instead of solitary excursions, he joined the other students on weekend trips to the mountains and nearby canyons. He quickly gained in popularity and soon became known as "Jeff" to his intimates. His inner freedom developed, and he wrote more poetry....²

According to Bennett, Jeffers was apparently well-adjusted and quite at home with the way of life at Occidental College. He was a well-travelled student, a member of the track team, an outdoors enthusiast, who demonstrated a spartan stamina and a sensitivity for natural delights--trees, flowers, birds, and rocks. Jeffers' biographer portrays an intense and self-assured student who in 1913 wooed and won in something of a scandal³ the hand of Mrs. Una Call

Kuster, then a fellow student at the University of Southern California. When "rumors of war...were confirmed in September, 1914, [it] necessitated Robin's and Una's giving up their plans to live in England."⁴ A family friend "told them of a little village called Carmel, near the old historical town of Monterey....It was this little village, with its blue sea, its pine forests, and its fearsome, jagged coast-range mountains, to which Robin and Una Jeffers came."⁵

As the 1914 war mushroomed, the poet was caught up in the feelings of responsibility which many young nationalists were beginning to feel. Jeffers was anxious to "enlist in his country's service," as he later wrote:

As to my motives in offering (rather late) to become a soldier: I did feel a duty to protect the country that had protected me and my few possessions....On the other hand I felt a duty to stay home and help take care of year old sons...I had no conscientious objection to fighting; it seems to me a natural condition of the race. But I was never deluded with ideas of a noble or crusading war; it seems to me an unavoidable spectacular madness.

Throughout the call for troops my mind was perplexed and at conflict with itself. I felt quite sure that this conflict emotionally realized the external world for me and made much of the difference between my verses before the war and my verses since.⁶

Jeffers' sense of nationalism arose in part from his rationalization that it was "a duty to protect the country that had protected [him] and [his] few possessions." Yet at the same time he "was perplexed and at conflict" with himself. It was not simply a conscientious patriotism that he felt; some deeper understanding, a philosophic attitude contributed to his mixed feelings. Jeffers' embryonic form of inhumanism was beginning to take shape, produced by the nature of World War I and the personal tension he felt. Combat, he sensed, is natural to man. In this sensation was the first stage in the development of Jeffers' view: his recognition of man's animalistic tendencies. On another occasion the poet reflected in a third person autobiographical note that

he [Jeffers] regards war with horror and disgust but believes it to be inevitable--and claims that he sees, at a certain level of contemplation, the tragic and the spectacular beauty of war, as of a storm or other natural disaster.⁷

Not only is war intrinsic to man, but it is natural per se, a part of everything of nature, including man.

From letters to his friends, from odd bits of autobiographical commentary still in manuscript form, and from sketches of poems which were never published, the evolution of Jeffers' view of man is clear. It did not evolve without internal or personal tension and deliberations. When Una refused to consent to his desire to enlist, Jeffers

was dismayed. Una was like a part of himself, as he acknowledged after her death in 1950:

It is not that I am lonely for you.

I am lonely.

I am mutilated; for you were part of me.

For her to discourage his engaging in a cause for which he had strong natural inclinations was--in effect--self-contradictory. Throughout their long life together, Una assumed the role of protectress;⁸ she seemed to appreciate Jeffers' destiny as the poet who was to announce and defend man's perpetual self-struggle. And he habitually acquiesced to her protectiveness. One can well imagine Jeffers' dilemma as he entered into negotiations with the armed forces to offer his services, despite Una's express discouragement. Among the Tor House Papers at the University of Texas are a number of brief notes to Jeffers from the War Department. These notes trace Jeffers' negotiations and reveal his vacillation. Following his own feelings exclusively, he apparently volunteered for induction and was directed to respond by January 2, 1917, with "draft data necessary for induction."⁹ Then, in reply to this request, Jeffers filed claim for exemption, apparently having changed his mind at Una's request:

Answering questionnaire, December 31, I claimed
deferred classification (Class IV) on account dependent

wife and two children, claim still pending.

Despite this claim for exemption, which was eventually granted, Jeffers changed his mind again and a few days later volunteered his services in aviation:

January 5, 1918. From the Aviation Examining Board:

Discontinuance of applications for Balloon Division, in the Signal Officer's Reserve Corps. Suggest amending application to read "pilot."

On January 5, 1918, Jeffers received his notice of Classification IV from the Monterey County Selective Service Board in Salinas and then, on January 17, 1918, from the Aviation Examining Board came a request for clarification, noting that:

Application for Commission indicates some question in Jeffers' mind as to his "understanding of the term 'pilot.' "

A subsequent ruling denied his request to be considered as a pilot:

It is to be regretted that the fact that you have reached your thirty-first year excludes a change of your application at the present time to that of 'pilot.'

So, he tried again:

January 21, 1918. From the Aviation Examining Board:

Application for admission. "Board is not authorized to examine at present any applicants for service as aerial observers."

On January 25, 1918, he was successful in getting himself reclassified, and he received notice of his Classification I. The final verdict came November 15, 1918; after armistice had been declared:

From Director of Military Aeronautics, re disqualification:

"Board before which you recently appeared for the purpose of determining your qualifications for commission in the air service (Aeronautics) has reported unfavorably."¹⁰

As cryptic as these governmental documents are, they suggest the predicament in which Jeffers found himself. While answering a questionnaire necessary to acquire a deferred classification (December 31, 1917), he was negotiating with the Signal Officer's Reserve Corps (January 5, 1918). In an autobiographical holograph, probably written preparatory to answering a letter or questionnaire,¹¹ Jeffers again describes this ambivalent behavior. Using the third person, he drafted (and revised) his recollections:

It seemed to him that war was unavoidable as the world was (and is) arranged. He thought in 1916 that our entrance into the war on one side or the other was unavoidable. (Is not so sure of that now.) Disliked the cant of our neutrality, followed by the cant of "our-war-for-democracy" "war-to-end war," our belligerency.

Did not enlist in the ranks because we were very poor, seemed to have no financial future, and had two babies. Suffered considerable disturbance of mind on the subject. Made various unsuccessful applications for training for commission--examined for aviation, rejected on account of high blood pressure.

Disturbance-of-mind-and Conflict of motives on the subject of going to war or not was probably one of several factors that about this time made the world and his own mind much more real and intense to him. A-kind-of-awakening So that he felt at the age of thirty-one a kind of awakening, such as adolescents and religious converts are said to experience.¹²

These notes record Jeffers' early philosophic development. Evolving out of his seemingly tranquil life at Occidental, his early feelings of patriotism, his growing belief in the naturalness of war, and even his submission to Una's protective guidance, Jeffers' inhumanism was forged in the intensity of his contradictory experiences and attitudes. Then, "at age of thirty-one" (1918), as he says, came the

almost religious awakening, and the subsequent formulation of the stark doctrine that his poetry was to illustrate.

In the foreword to The Selected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers (1937), Jeffers wrote

That poetry--if it was to survive at all--must reclaim some of the power and reality that it was so hastily surrendering to prose. The modern French poetry of the time, and the most "modern" of the English poetry, seem[s] to me thoroughly defeatist.... It [is] becoming slight and fantastic, abstract, unreal, eccentric; and [is] not even saving its soul, for these are generally anti-poetic qualities. It must reclaim substance and sense, and physical and psychological reality.¹³

If Jeffers could philosophically accept the naturalness of war, he could not condone man's general folly: the ineluctable conceit of the race which proclaimed harmony even as it practiced hostility. The brutality of war was to be found increasingly well represented in prose, Jeffers felt, but not in the symbolist or imagist poetry then popular. Much of his poetry of these years shows Jeffers exploring the "physical and psychological reality" he called for. In responding to Nietzsche's phrase "The Poets? The poets lie too much," Jeffers acknowledges his sympathies with the poet who speaks the brutal truth about man's natural state:

...I decided not to tell lies in verse. Not to feign any emotion I did not feel; not to pretend to believe in optimism or pessimism or irreversible progress; not to say anything because it was popular, or generally accepted, or fashionable in intellectual circles, unless I myself believed it; and not to believe easily. These negatives limit the field; I am not recommending them but for my own occasions.¹⁴

It is this uncompromising commitment to speak the truth at whatever cost that at once gives Jeffers his integrity as a man and a poet and also causes him much anxiety. It is one thing to speak one's mind if the message is warm and favorable; it is another thing to speak a message such as Jeffers'.

"The Day is a Poem," written on September 19, 1939,¹⁵ develops a theme suggested by a newscast announcing the success of Hitler in Danzig:

Well: the day is a poem: but too much
like one of Jeffers', crusted with blood and barbaric
omens,
Painful to excess, inhuman as a hawk's cry.

The poet pokes fun at himself in a rather macabre way. He acknowledges the harsh and intuitive implications of his poetry in his phrase "barbaric omens;" he admits to having given wounds in the phrase

"crusted with blood." In his admission of being "painful to excess," Jeffers gives his reader to understand that the horrible message of Hitler's success is not unlike the painful message of his own poetry: war and brutality are natural to man, man is himself inhuman. As early as 1939, Jeffers discovers in the word "inhuman" a referential concept to describe the meaning of Hitler and his own poetry: both should warn men against themselves. Especially interesting in this context is the simile Jeffers uses to embody the abstract inhumanism: the hawk's cry. In selecting the hawk as a metaphor, Jeffers joins proud, fierce strength with certain other, more ethereal qualities of attack and freedom. Thus, Jeffers points symbolically to his poetry as a proud, lofty cry of attack. It is a poetry of paradox: mundane in subject; sublime in expectations. It is dissociated from man, although it cries to him, just as the "hawk's cry" might be thought of as a scream of pain, warning, or acknowledgement.

The particular philosophy of Jeffers requires a powerful cry it seems, because man, to Jeffers, appears so unaware of his nature. Man regards himself as a warmly compassionate superior being, immune to natural pressures. The hawk, and for that matter, Hitler, should show him to be otherwise. And so must the poet of integrity. Jeffers' approach, therefore, is marked by a predilection for certain subjects like death, war, the rise and decline of cultures, and naturalism. And yet Jeffers is neither Hitler nor hawk; he is of the society he seeks to awaken. His art is grounded in his sympathetic experience as man; yet, as poet, he must be apart and urge man to seek an

objective and detached perspective. In Themes in My Poems Jeffers speaks to this world-view that informs his poetry. The universe, in all of its fragmentation, is one; "a being 'out of grasp of the mind enormous.'"¹⁶ Each of the constituent parts of the universe function in a relationship to one another: only the totality is important. The oneness alone--contrary to man's wishes and narcissism--is divine. This is the truth that the poet must speak. Man must be persuaded to see his own relative insignificance. Humanity, Jeffers says, is but "a moving lichen/ On the cheek of the round stone." The step necessary for man to attain a correct perspective of himself is for him to "find the secure value/ The all-heal [Jeffers] found when a former time hurt/ [him] to the heart,/ The splendor of inhuman things."¹⁷ Such a message requires a forceful, and perhaps offending, strategy.

Jeffers warns the reader of this particular view in the preface to The Double Axe and Other Poems when he speaks of a "certain philosophical attitude, which might be called inhumanism." It requires "a shifting of emphasis and significance from man to not-man; [and] the rejection of human solipsism and recognition of the trans-human magnificence."¹⁸ Jeffers believes that "this manner of thought and feeling involves no falsehoods," and that "it has objective truth and human value. It offers a reasonable detachment as a rule of conduct, instead of love, hate and envy." Inhumanism "neutralizes fanaticism and wild hopes; but it provides magnificence for the religious instinct, and satisfies our need to admire greatness and rejoice in beauty."¹⁹ In the original and unpublished draft of

the preface to The Double Axe, Jeffers refers to the content of the book as representing "a new manner of thought and feeling which came to [him] at the end of the war of 1914."

It is based on the recognition of the astonishing beauty of things and on a rational acceptance of the face that mankind *fact?* is neither central nor important in the universe.²⁰

In Section 45 of Part II of The Double Axe Jeffers poeticizes this idea: "Love man in God" for God "is rock, earth and water, and/ the beasts and stars; and the night that contains/them. A day will come when the earth/will scratch herself and smile and rub off humanity...." Jeffers then addresses the future children of the race admonishing them to "not cry" for they are but temporarily born to earth.

And when your death-day comes do not weep; you are
not going far.

You are going to your better nature, the nobler
elements, earth, air and water.²¹

Again, in the unpublished preface, the poet challenges man's anthropocentricity, seeing a detached objectivity as essential to morality, freedom and sanity. He writes:

Love your neighbor as yourself, that is, not excessively if you are adult and normal, but God with all your heart and mind and soul. Turn outward from each other as far as need and kindness permit to the vast life and inexhaustible beauty beyond humanity. This is not a slight matter but an essential condition of freedom and of moral and of final sanity.

.

Man, much more than baboon or wolf, is an animal formed for conflict. His life seems to be meaningless without it. Only a clear shift of meaning and emphasis from man to not-man can make him whole.²²

If Jeffers' poetry is to articulate this "truth," its powers shall indeed be tested, for he is asking that his verse completely redirect man's attention and concern. Perhaps the doctrine of inhumanism proves too challenging, doctrinaire, and unflattering to succeed as poetic material.

Jeffers' response to an inquiry from the American Humanist Association asking for an application of the term "humanist" to his philosophy was published in The Humanist in 1951. In the section designated "Ambiguous or Equivocal" Jeffers briefly replied:

March 25, 1951

The word Humanism refers primarily to the Renaissance interest in art and literature rather than in theological doctrine; and

personally I am content to leave it there. "Naturalistic Humanism"--in the modern sense--is no doubt a better philosophical attitude than many others, but the emphasis seems wrong; "human naturalism" would seem to me more satisfactory, with but little accent on the "human." Man is a part of nature, but a nearly infinitesimal part; the human race will cease after a while and leave no trace, but the great splendors of nature will go on. Meanwhile most of our time and energy are necessarily spent on human affairs; that can't be prevented, though I think it should be minimized; but for philosophy, which is an endless research of the truth, and for contemplation, which can be a sort of worship, I would suggest that the immense beauty of the earth and the outer universe, the divine "nature of things", is a more rewarding object. Certainly it is more ennobling. It is a source of strength; the other of distraction.²³

As Jeffers reiterates in Themes in My Poems, humanity is "a small part of the great music."²⁴ If Jeffers would remind man of his smallness, he would also remind him of the great splendor of nature. Lawrence Clark Powell addresses this very point in Robinson Jeffers: The Man and His Work.

A fertile gift of image making, together with a ranging imagination which sees present phenomena in the light of a long evolution, make his verse often unmistakeable....This imagination, fortified by a knowledge of history and science, leads Jeffers to a vision of the vast universe of astrophysics, in which man is an essential, ephemeral part....He holds our civilization to be decadent, centered only in itself and in its anthropocentric universe; and that wars and vice are undermining it, and the whole structure doomed to dissolve in ruins.

Though he is not a reformer he has a message to the world, which is for men to turn from self-worship to a recognition of the greater inhuman universe.²⁵

It is at this point where many critics limit Jeffers' meaning of inhumanism. They see Jeffers' repudiation of human self-aggrandizement, but often fail to see his almost pantheistic admiration of the "greater inhuman universe." Mercedes Cunningham Monjian, for example, recognizes the implications of inhumanism as a negative humanism "which denies" man's interests and development, subduing them in the interests of something greater.²⁶ Monjian refers to Jeffers' prefatory statement in The Double Axe wherein the poet describes inhumanism as a "shifting of emphasis from man to not-man." But Monjian's emphasis leads her to assert that "all of Jeffers' poetry demonstrates this denial of man's importance and potential." Inhumanism is not a philosophy of denial, such as Puritanism might be; rather, it is a philosophy of perspective. Man has a role to play in the universe; it may not be as important as man usually regards it, but it is not unimportant. Man must see himself from the universal perspective of time and space:

Galaxy on galaxy, innumerable swirls of
 unnumerable stars,
 endured as it were forever and humanity
 Came into being, its two or three million years

are but a moment, in a moment it
 will certainly cease out from being
 And galaxy on galaxy endure after that as it
 were forever

...But man is conscious.

He brings the world to focus in a feeling brain,
 In a net of nerves catches the splendor of
 things,
 Breaks the somnambulism of nature...His
 distinction perhaps,
 Hardly his advantage.²⁷

Man, that is, brings consciousness to nature; he can recognize the splendor of it all--even though he is only a small and ephemeral part of it himself. Even though, as Jeffers suggests, man "breaks the somnambulism of nature," he cannot use his distinctive consciousness to decisively alter nature to his advantage. This idea, of course, runs counter to human wish and narcissism and, to man's definition of progress--which often teleologically places man on top of the final heap. Most emphatically Jeffers begs for the repudiation of self-flattering egotism:

You had to fetch me out of the
 happy hill of not-being. Pfah, to hug a woman
 And make this I. That's the evil in the world, that letter.
 I--I....²⁸

To be sure, Jeffers believes in change, in evolution. He believes that all things contribute to the integrity of the evolving and continuing whole. Because man exists, he is essential to the evolution. Though not as significant or as influential as he might think, man does contribute his part. Man's contribution, however, is of the same spirit (though not necessarily to the same degree) as that of other living things. His combativeness, his inhumanity is as much a part of his contribution as his humaness, his harmoniousness. As Jeffers sees it, the evolutionary process will someday (some era) by-pass man; humanity "will certainly cease out from being," and things will still continue, as splendid and miraculous as ever, though there is no consciousness to perceive it.

So Jeffers requires a certain kind of passivity. Hyatt Howe Waggoner, in The Heel of Elohim, tries to draw a logical conclusion from what he sees as Jeffers' world view;

What Mr. Jeffers has lately taken to calling his "inhumanism" calls for just one thing, silence--as, indeed, Mr. Jeffers has recognized in "Margrave" and elsewhere:

I also am not innocent
Of contagion, but have spread my spirit on the
deep world.

I have gotten sons and sent the fire wider....

And have widened in my idleness

The disastrous personality of life with poems.²⁹

Indeed, Jeffers considers the possibility of silence and the consequences of spreading his spirit; in having "gotten sons and sent the fire wider," Jeffers seems to regret his complicity in perpetuating the human contribution to the evolving whole. And yet, in his best known poem, "Shine Perishing Republic," Jeffers acknowledges that he cannot escape the process: "I sadly smiling remember that the flower fades to make fruit, the fruit rots to make earth." If he would be tempted periodically to absolute silence, he nevertheless speaks, in "Boats in a Fog" of "the essential reality/Of creatures going about their business among the equally/Ernest elements of nature." So too must man go about his business, petty and inconsequential though it is when seen from Jeffers' perspective.

Radcliffe Squires studies Jeffers' ideas on the seeming devolution of man--the "disastrous personality of life." He finds that in Roan Stallion, at least incidentally, inhumanism seemed to pose a solution to the problem of decadency. As Jeffers "became more certain," in Squires' words, of the implications of inhumanism,

it became more necessary to stack up the details of a violent nature in order to support his feeling that to live meaningfully one must withdraw from the ordinary ambitions of life.³⁰

Similar to Waggoner, Squires suspects that Jeffers would have us "deny [ourselves] in order to restore [ourselves.]"³¹ Restraint, according to Squires, is the iron from which the steel of inhumanism

is wrought. From Squires' point of view, Jeffers' seems to desire that man behave not like beasts but like beings capable of controlling instinct. Where Waggoner sees inhumanism as encouraging absolute passivity, Squires sees it as a doctrine of reasoned modification.³² Reason, however, can give man only perspective, not restoration of a lost divinity or potency. If man's rational faculties, his consciousness, constitute his distinctiveness, they hardly serve to his advantage. If properly--which is to say objectively--developed, reason may enable man to see his small and ephemeral place in the evolving cosmos, but it will not rescue him from it or its consequences.

Robinson Jeffers argues this position in most of his poems, though more specifically and emphatically in some than in others. In "The Place For No Story," for example, he writes of the pastoral life, and of its tranquility. At the end of the poem he reflects that "no imaginable/Human presence here could do anything/But dilute the lonely self-watchful passion."³³ A "human presence," it seems, would offer little to the pastoral place because man measures his reality in terms of himself. Instead of seeing nature as an objective and peaceful system, he tends to see it anthropocentrically. He "dilutes" the "passion" of that which is supra-human. Jeffers instead would "praise life, it deserves praise,"³⁴ but not just human life. In "Sign Post" he urges man to "turn right away from humanity," to love "things which are so beautiful" and which "are the God." In direct opposition to Waggoner's claim, man will see that "humanity

has a place under heaven." In growing to God--the universe and its many elements--men "are free, even to become human."³⁵ So, for Jeffers, man cannot realize what he currently believes to be his nature and still assume his true place, for what man now believes about himself and his powers gets in the way of his seeing and acknowledging his proper place. Man must proportion his desires to his true abilities; he must find and face the correct, unflattering perspective of himself.

Jeffers' inhumanism and poetry expressly articulates this perspective. In the "Note" introducing Be Angry At The Sun, Jeffers laments

the obsession with contemporary history that pins many of [his] pieces to the calendar, like butterflies to cardboard. Poetry is not private monologue, but...it is not public speech either; and in general it is the worse for being timely....

Yet it is right that a man's views be expressed, though the poetry suffer for it. Poetry should represent the whole mind; if part of the mind is occupied unhappily, so much the worse. And no use postponing the poetry to a time when these storms may have passed, for [he] think[s] we have but seen a beginning of them; the calm to look for is the calm at the whirlwind's heart.³⁶

The difficulties which a reader may have with Jeffers' view stem

perhaps not so much from a lack of understanding of Jeffers' inhumanism as from a confusion which occurs when this philosophy is illustrated poetically. Introspection--which inhumanism decries--is at best, Jeffers would say, dangerous for it usually leads to self-delusion or narcissism. Jeffers poetically asks his readers not to be "deluded by dreams...of universal justice or happiness." He argues that "great civilizations have broken down into violence...many times before" and that man must strive either to avoid such violence "with honor or [to] choose the least ugly faction." So to strive is somewhat less an impossible or immoral effort than it might seem because "these evils are essential." Jeffers rationalizes the dilemma of trying to avoid violence while maintaining a sense of honor or deliberately choosing the "least ugly faction" by stating that no matter "however ugly the parts appear the whole remains beautiful."

Man dissevered from the earth and stars
 and his history...for contemplation or in fact...
 Often appears atrociously ugly. Integrity is wholeness,
 the greatest beauty is
 Organic wholeness, the wholeness of life and things,
 the divine beauty of the universe. Love that,
 not man
 Apart from that....³⁷

It is man alone--apart from the organic wholeness of the universe--

that Jeffers would have his reader beware. He feels that the human race "spends too much emotion on itself," too much narcissism.

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. Or if he is interested in human things, let him regard them objectively, as a small part of the great music. Certainly humanity has claims on all of us; we can best fulfill them by keeping our emotional sanity; and this by seeing beyond and around the human race.³⁸

Inhumanism, then, is a philosophy asking for a perspective of detachment, and for man's acceptance of his relatively minor role. It calls for neither man's repudiation of himself nor his determination to gain lost powers. Inhumanism might well be a misunderstood word, loaded as it is with anti-humanist connotations. The doctrine is, in effect, a supra-humanism which preaches the oneness of the universe. Each constituent part draws nurture and encouragement from the others, though each may sooner or later actively contend with the others; in some necessary way, each partakes of and contributes to the integrity of the whole. This total integrity, given the self-interested desires of man, is continuously being denied or ignored by man who would subordinate the stars, the oceans, and the hawks to his own well-being. Morality, as man would often have it, is what benefits the human family. As Jeffers would have it, morality protects the

integrity of the whole, at whatever expense to man or any other item within it. Jeffers seeks desperately to illustrate what man does to himself when he denies his place of subordination in the totality. Jeffers' position, therefore, does not flatter man, and his message is difficult for man to hear. His poetry is, in a large sense, offending. Thus, Jeffers may often seem to over-illustrate his case, peopling his poetry with grotesque and objectionable human characters, while he treats non-human things with beatific reverence. His is a corrective vision. If Jeffers' characters are phantasms of real men who demonstrate hyberbolically man's truly subordinate place in the cosmos, they show that in their desire to reach beyond themselves, they have lost perspective. Flattering themselves, men fall in love with mankind. The correct perspective is calming and reasoned, in Jeffers' mind, and he seeks to enable man to achieve it. The human will, then, is the corruptor, for by its powers man aggrandizes himself at the expense of his natural harmony with the rocks and the hawks and the cypress and the galaxies.

Chapter One

Notes

1. Robinson Jeffers, The Beginning and the End (New York: Random House, 1954), p. 39.
2. Melba Berry Bennett, The Stone Mason of Tor House (Menlo Park, California: Ward Ritchie Press, 1966), p. 66.
3. Jeffers' courtship of the married Una Call Kuster was a somewhat torrid affair for the times, 1905-1912. Initially, they knew one another only as fellow students. Students and faculty at the University of Southern California commended the friendship for they saw Una as a steadying influence on Robin who had turned to writing "poems all night, fortified with a jug of wine, a packet of Bull Durham, and a sheaf of cigarette papers." During the Summer of 1908, Robin and Una exchanged innumerable letters testifying to their illicit love. They began meeting in clandestinely and the gossip began. But as Una explained to Melba Berry Bennett, "without the wish of either of us our life was one of those fatal attractions that happened unplanned and undesired. We both hated for our families the unwelcome publicity of divorce." (The Stone Mason of Tor House, p. 47.) The Los Angeles papers played up the divorce with headlines and pictures. On February 28, 1913, headlines read, "Love's Gentle Alchemy to Weld Broken Lives;" on March 1, 1913, the Los Angeles Times carried Robin's and Una's pictures with the headlines "Two Points of the Eternal Triangle," and "Parents Wash Hands of it."
4. Bennett, p. 68.
5. Bennett, p. 69.
6. Robinson Jeffers, Jeffers Collection, Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin.
7. Jeffers Collection.
8. As Bennett has observed, "Una was often criticized because she zealously protected her husband...." Knowledge of the vigor of Una's feelings bore heavily on the poet; he felt it keenly. (Bennett, p. 121.)
9. "Red Ink Serial Number 2060
Local Order Number 1529"
[Local Board for Monterey County, Salinas, California].

10. Jeffers Collection.
11. Bennett, p. 86.
12. Jeffers Collection. (*Italics mine*). The cancelled lines
are as they appear in the notes, written in Jeffers' own hand.
13. Robinson Jeffers, "Foreword," The Selected Poetry of
Robinson Jeffers (New York: Random House, 1937), p. XIV.
14. Ibid., p. XV
15. Robinson Jeffers, "The Day is a Poem," Be Angry At The
Sun And Other Poems (New York: Random House, 1941), p. 126.
16. Robinson Jeffers, Themes in My Poems (Book Club of San
Francisco, 1956), p. vi.
17. Ibid., p. 13.
18. Robinson Jeffers, The Double Axe and Other Poems (New
York: Random House, 1948), p. vii.
19. Ibid.
20. Jeffers Collection.
21. Jeffers, The Double Axe, p. 105.
22. Jeffers Collection.
23. Warren Allen Smith, "Authors and Humanism," Humanist,
XI (October, 1951), p.p. 193-204.
24. Jeffers, Themes in My Poems, p. 28.
25. Lawrence Clark Powell, Robinson Jeffers, the Man and His
Work (Pasadena: San Pasqual Press, 1940), p. 209.
26. Mercedes Cunningham Monjian, Robinson Jeffers: A Study in
Inhumanism (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 1958).
27. Robinson Jeffers, "Margrave," Thurso's Landing (New York:
Liveright, Inc., 1932), p.p. 135-136.
28. Ibid., p. 141.

29. Hyatt Howe Waggoner, "Robinson Jeffers: Here is Reality,"
The Heel Of Elohim: Science and Values in Modern American Poetry (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1950), p. 131.
30. Radcliffe Squires, The Loyalties of Robinson Jeffers
(Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1956), p.p. 31-32.
31. Squires, p. 120.
32. Ibid., p. 127.
33. Jeffers, "The Place For No Story," Selected Poetry, p. 356.
34. Jeffers, "Praise Life," Selected Poetry, p. 370.
35. Jeffers, "Signpost," Selected Poetry, p. 374.
36. Robinson Jeffers, "Note," Be Angry At The Sun (New York:
Random House, 1941).
37. Jeffers, "The Answer," Selected Poetry, p. 594.
38. Jeffers, Themes in My Poems, p. 28.

Chapter Two

The Double Axe Murder

In 1948 Random House published The Double Axe and Other Poems.¹ Attached to the cover and following the author's preface was a publisher's disclaimer noting the disputatious nature of the poetry within. Save for the publication and subsequent production of the highly acclaimed adaptation of Euripides' "Medea" in 1946, this book constitutes the printed poetic efforts of Robinson Jeffers following the early years of World War II. In The Double Axe the reader finds much of what is integral to the Jeffers canon: the unorthodox treatment of familial ties, religion, nature and society. He finds the poet's condemnation of humanity on the grounds of man's behavior and cultural mores. Jeffers' naturalism remains intact: man is but a piece of matter and is not of special concern to God. Jeffers celebrates a cosmic unity, beyond man, speaking of one existence, one music, one organism, one life, one God,

Not a tribal nor an anthropoid God.

Not a ridiculous projection of human fears,

needs, dreams,
justice and love lust.²

Herein lies the harmony of the universe which Jeffers seeks to define; anthropocentricity and solipsism distort the cosmic balance. On these terms, the poet's objective, as Jeffers would have it in The Double Axe, is to instruct the reader to a realization of the proper place and function of man in the cosmos, to an awareness of the insignificance of man in the larger scheme. Thus, the poetry is often shocking to man's inflated sense of himself.

I have seen the far stars weighed and their
distance measured, and
the powers that make the atom put into service -
For what? - to kill. To kill half a million
flies - men I should say - at one slap.³

With these words the poet seeks to put man into perspective, addressing man's tendency to build a world about himself. Jeffers questions man's true powers while emphasizing--in "flies"--his transient nature. The graphic rejection of America's intentions in war and the announcements of apocalypse angered many people. Indeed, a glance at the history of this volume shows the difficulty Jeffers had in setting forth his unwelcome message: that only by a philosophic stance, such as inhumanism, which seeks to deny a man-centered

universe, can man live in peace and fruition.

As the McCarthy hearings demonstrated later in the 1950's, America's success in World War II generated among some persons strong nationalist feelings, and it was not popular to find fault with the behavior of the Nation. But Jeffers found fault. Jeffers' own publisher, Random House, proved to be a censor on behalf of American patriotism and idealism. In the first (and only) edition of the poems, Random House disavowed Jeffers' ideas in a note following his preface:

The Double Axe and Other Poems is the fourteenth book of verse by Robinson Jeffers published under the Random House imprint. During an association of fifteen years, marked by mutual confidence and accord, the issuance of each new volume has added strength to the close relationship of author and publisher. In all fairness to that constantly interdependent relationship and in complete candor, Random House feels compelled to go on record with its disagreement over some of the political views pronounced by the poet in this volume. Acutely aware of the writer's freedom to express his convictions boldly and forthrightly and of the publisher's function to obtain for him the widest possible hearing, whether there is agreement in principle and detail or not, it is of the utmost importance that difference of views should be wide open on both sides. Time alone is the court of last resort in the case of ideas on trial.⁴

It may well be that the tenor of the time demanded a less belligerent and isolationist stance than Jeffers'. But the little quarrel of prefaces, from Jeffers' point of view, exemplifies one of war's more pernicious effects--the habit of censorship on nationalistic grounds. The reviewers of The Double Axe quickly pointed out the inconsistency of the publisher's disclaimer. In the New York Herald Tribune, Ruth Lechlitrner noted that

Random House, although the personal beliefs of its editors probably do not coincide with these views of Jeffers--has never felt any need, up to now, to make public statements saying so. Nor do the publishers, apparently feel impelled to repudiate his "philosophical" credo in The Double Axe.⁵

The innuendo of this critic's statement, that Jeffers' philosophical credo may show cause to be questioned, is precisely demonstrative of the attitude which the poet came up against in his public. Curiously, this reviewer would allow freedom of political opinion yet the review itself shows little tolerance for Jeffers' particular doctrine. Selden Rodman, writing in the Saturday Review of Literature, worried that Jeffers may have become "totally irresponsible, politically, poetically, humanly" in his assumption that "Germany could have been permitted to impose slavery on the rest of the world, that our leaders spoke only for themselves and from the vilest of motives, and that from now on we have nothing better to do than give our

hearts to the hawks." Rodman comments further,

Random House deserves credit for publishing this book. Jeffers, whatever one may think of his philosophy, remains as close to a major poet as we have. We have much to learn from him. It did not require a play ("Medea," 1946) to establish his pre-eminence in dramatics. The first part of the title poem in "The Double Axe" (sic) is as gripping and powerfully paced as any of his early narratives. In the shorter pieces he retains that ability, shown sporadically by MacLeish and Sandburg in the Thirties and then abandoned by them, to speak straight (and hotly) on "hot" political issues without hedging his meaning in any of the fashionable contortions of symbolic double-talk, and without sacrificing the spare magnificence of his own style. We must respect his integrity.⁶

Rodman appreciates Jeffers' "ability....to speak straight....on 'hot' political issues without hedging his meaning." But this critic, representative of many Jeffers readers, was unaware of the final import of the publisher's note preceding the poems.

The influence of Random House and, in particular of Jeffers' friend, Saxe Cummins, a Random House editor, on The Double Axe is greater than the prefatory disclaimer might indicate. The book, as Jeffers originally envisioned it, was altered considerably. The Double Axe and Other Poems not only contains poems significantly

changed from their original form, but also the published volume does not contain ten poems which Jeffers intended for publication. The respective tables of contents suggest some of the alterations (* denotes a modified poem, ** denotes an expunged poem):

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New Year's Dawn*		
Inquisitors		
Orcia		
Mamouth*		

In brief, the ten poems stricken at the insistence of Random House were: "Miching Mallecho," "Fantasy," "The Blood Guilt," "Wilson in Hell," "What Odd Expedients," "Ordinary Newscaster," "Staggering Back Toward Life," "Curb Science," "War Guilt Crimes," and "Look All Around You." As shall be demonstrated, the quality of some of these poems is not inferior to some of those published (although, to be sure, some of the expunged poems are artistically unacceptable). Some of the published poems which were altered from their original form reflect concessions which an author may well make upon the advice of his editor. Of these, "Quia Absurdum" and "Historical Choice" bear the greatest changes. In each, several lines were cut and redrawn so as to make major thematic statements clear. The textual implications of these changes shall be discussed in Chapter Four. The biography of The Double Axe and Other Poems begins with Jeffers' philosophy and continues with the relationship between a man of such beliefs and his American publisher.

As early as November 24, 1934, Bennett Cerf, publisher of Random House, had written to Jeffers, by way of the poet's wife Una,⁹ that the firm had "been doing some quiet campaigning along Pulitzer Prize lines....although from the reactions... [he was] afraid that Robin's themes [were] much too strong and bold to suit the moth-eaten tastes of the doddering old chaps who award[ed] the Pulitzer Prize."¹⁰ This observation points to particulars which suggest that Cerf, taking the pulse of the times, felt a duty to prepare his friend and writer, Robinson Jeffers, for the impending reaction of at least

some influential people to a poetry as harsh in its view and as politically frank as Jeffers'. In a letter dated April 21, 1938, Cerf wrote that under separate cover he was sending Jeffers a set of the Roosevelt papers as a gift to the entire Jeffers family. The volumes are, in effect, a history of the United States for the Roosevelt years and Cerf hoped that Jeffers would want to have them in his permanent library.¹¹ This coincidental effort on the part of the publisher to acknowledge his relationship with the poet was honest enough; unless however, it was done to soften the poet's view of F.D.R. With war threatening Europe, the United States was of such a disposition as to cast a jaundiced eye towards international affairs. Cerf, either consciously or unconsciously, felt that there would be a certain wisdom in informing his most holocaustic writer of the achievements of the Roosevelt years to that date. Knowing of Jeffers' distaste for political machinations, Cerf, as a concerned publisher may have wished to expand the poet's seemingly naive political stance--a stance eventually made clear in The Double Axe. Though he acknowledged receipt of the generous gift, there is no indication that the Roosevelt history had any influence on Jeffers.

While vacationing in Europe in 1938, Cerf described to Jeffers an air bombardment he (Cerf) had experienced in Barcelona:

I was scared to death at first but soon got more or less used to it. After the despair of London and Paris I can't tell you how really exciting it was to be in a place where the people

are actually fighting to the death for everything in the world that seems most important to me. If the American government allows these wonderful people to be sold out by Chamberlain and his gang, we will have a lot to answer for.¹²

Cerf made his political bent clear to Jeffers. Using "we" for America, the concerned and morally conscious publisher drives home his "country-united" theme. If Bennett Cerf sought to influence Robinson Jeffers during the early and middle years of their association, one must trust that his efforts did not influence the publication of the poet's verse as he would have it published. Yet when the manuscript of The Double Axe arrived at Random House there was a peculiar reaction.

In the late Forties Robinson Jeffers was still a name respected in literary circles; the publishing of a Jeffers book was a special event. The editorial staff anticipated the arrival of the text of The Double Axe and Other Poems months before its actual delivery. When Saxe Cummins, Jeffers' editor, acknowledged receipt of the manuscript, he wrote:

October 15, 1947

Mr. Robinson Jeffers
Tor House
Route 1, Box 36
Carmel, California

Dear Robin,

During all these years, and it is now over twenty, I've been writing to Una, knowing of course that you would realize that my letters were meant equally for you. Always I must have

made it plain how meaningful and important every word you wrote has been to me. Ever since Roan Stallion, and in book after book in which I was so honored to have a hand, mine was a labor of love. And now before anyone else has had a chance to see the manuscript of The Double Axe I made a lunge for it as a matter of earned right. Once again, I was made to feel your elemental force and could only wonder at your endless resources in creating images and symbols of overwhelming power. Hoult, as a spokesman of the young dead in war, is indeed a daring and frightening conception and his brutality grows out of the brutality in which he was nurtured.

But I am disturbed and terribly worried and that's why I can do no less than be completely candid about my misgivings. I want to put them down here without even mentioning the matter to Bennett or anyone else and I do so entirely on my own responsibility. I'm counting on you to understand my motives. I refer, of course, to the frequent damning references to President Roosevelt. Manifestly, he cannot defend himself and on that score there arises the question of fairness and good taste. But what is worse, in my opinion, is the conviction that these bitter charges will feed the prejudices of the wrong people, especially those with the worst motives in the world who have tried so hard and so vindictively to discredit him. It is startling indeed to find that time after time you lash out at his memory as if the need to do so have become almost obsessive: on page 26 indirectly, on page 29, "to feed the vanity of a paralytic," on pages 91, 122, 125, 126, 129, 135, 136, 137 (and here for the second time you use the phrase "the cripple's vanity of Roosevelt") and so on, page after page, to the end. Frankly, I cannot make myself understand it. This may be because I do not share your bitterness towards Roosevelt or his historic role, nor do I believe, as you reiterate so frequently, that this country was drawn into the carnage by fools and treacherous men or that a better destiny would await us if we had isolated ourselves from the rest of the world.

As I said, I am writing this letter on my own responsibility and with the hope that for the sake of your book and the effect it will have that you can temper these references before we think of beginning composition. (End of page 1.)

Please understand that this is in no way, and I can't make this too emphatic, an attempt to intrude upon your rights as a free artist. It is meant to be the friendliest of suggestions made with the hope that you can be persuaded to my strongly personal views. I would hate, above everything else, to have you of all people to be linked with reactionary elements in America. That would be unthinkable. Please give this your

most serious thought and write to me privately about your own feelings as you would to an old friend.

Always,

Saxe¹³

Jeffers apparently did not immediately reply to this personal plea by Saxe Cummins. This prompted a letter from Cummins dated December 4, 1947, reminding the poet that the Random House Spring Catalog was being prepared and that they needed the revised manuscript of The Double Axe for planning purposes.¹⁴ When the revised text did arrive, Cummins wrote:

February 12, 1948

Robinson Jeffers
Tor House
Route 1, Box 36
Carmel, California

Dear Robin,

At long last I have been able to go over the script of The Double Axe. I noticed, of course, all the changes you have made and in almost every instance they are immense improvements. There are two, however, which give rise to misgivings on my part. I refer to page twenty-five where you change the line "to feed the vanity of a paralytic and make trick fortunes" to "to feed the power hunger of a paralyzed man and make trick fortunes." This is hardly a change at all. Would you consent to a revision to make it read "to feed the power hungry and make trick fortunes?" I do wish I could persuade you to take out the word "little" describing Truman on Page 136. To me it seems the adjective referring to size is as gratuitous an insult as if you described a man by physical defect as "consider hunchback Steinmetz." It would be hitting below the belt in that instance. As it is, your poem, without the adjective, is contemptuous enough.

Otherwise, I can make no specific recommendations for the

changes although, in general, I still disagree, and vehemently, with some of your interpretations of recent world and political events and the causes underlying them. But that is a matter of opinion and consequently open to debate. Certainly, I can't subscribe to your apologia for Peron when you say on page 132 "I would praise also Argentina for being too proud to bay with the pack," nor your defense of isolationism in "Historical Choice," and in "Fourth Act." I cannot subscribe to the mildness with which you chasten Hitler, p. 101, and scourging with which you flay England and America and their war leaders. Because these are matters of opinion and you hold yours so firmly there is a moral obligation to present them in your terms and on your responsibility. But lest there be an misapprehension about the difference of views between us, it occurred to me to write a publisher's note on the flap of the jacket and also on the front of the book as a statement of our position. Here it is as I have written it for that purpose. Tell me candidly how you feel about it. At best it is an honest statement of my viewpoint and at worst it will serve to underline certain passages¹⁵ which otherwise might even go unnoticed. Since both of us are responsible for our convictions and we must stand by them, why not have them out in the open? (Publisher's disclaimer follows.)¹⁶

These letters address a delicate area in the relationship between editor and author. It is here in the substance of the expunged poems that contention lies. In his preface to The Double Axe and Other Poems, Jeffers admits the impact World War II had upon the text, "it bears the scars."¹⁷ "But," he wrote, "the poem is not primarily concerned with that grim folly. Its burden...is to present a certain philosophical attitude." The business of the publisher's disclaimer and of Saxe Cummin's editorial advice was not to the point that Jeffers sought to address. The matter of the involvement and the responsibility of the United States in World War II was futilely argued. These matters "are not particularly important, so far as this book is concerned; they are only the background, or moral climate,

of its thought and action."¹⁸ Jeffers' preface clearly indicates that the war was a correlative for certain ideas imbedded in his philosophy. This, in part, accounts for his use of contemporary figures as metaphors.

Within the omitted poems we find the poet's doctrine of inhumanism defined more clearly and applied more broadly; the poems also reveal the intensity of Jeffers' conviction and the extent to which he carried the doctrine. The correspondence between Saxe Cummins and the poet addressing the relative appropriateness of the verses and Cummins' plea to moderate the tone of those verses, reveals little about whether the poems would have been published had Jeffers refused to alter and, in some cases, cancel certain poems. The expunged poems, then, emphasize and color what is now so frequently misunderstood by Jeffers' readers: that inhumanism is an attitude, a means to an end; it is not an ultimatum.

We must remember that Jeffers' "inhumanism" is a rigorous and demanding doctrine. Observing and interpreting nature, he took a lesson from the non-human: to survive is the gift of the fittest who demand and should receive no quarter in what is always a fight for survival. Jeffers sees himself as fighting for the life of each element of the universe and the integrity of the whole. The point is, he used the infirmities of those who were in a position to effect change in the world as correlatives for the infirmities of man in his struggle against the deterministic powers of nature.

In his first response to The Double Axe, Saxe Cummins drew upon

his personal friendship with Jeffers to plead for moderation and good taste. The second letter establishes a rationale for the publisher's note. The complete motive behind Cummins' disclaimer may never be known, but the private friend became the public editor, speaking of "our position" (presumably, that of Random House).

Apparently without reading the manuscript, Bennett Cerf had also celebrated its arrival:

October 7, 1947

Dear Una;

The manuscript of Robin's new book, The Double Axe, arrived this afternoon and elicited cheers from the entire editorial department.

As ever,

Bennett¹⁹

This was one week before Saxe Cummins made his first response.

Eventually, of course, Cerf read the manuscript and agreed with

Cummins' position as his letter to Una on March 18, 1948, indicates.

Meanwhile, I hope you are pleased with the way Robin's new book is going to be presented to the public. My own opinion is that the slightly controversial footnote about our respective ideologies has been phrased perfectly by Saxe Cummins and most certainly will attract added space and attention from the reviewers.

As ever,

Bennett²⁰

Like Cummins in his reference to "our" position, Cerf also employs the editorial "our" when he mentions the "respective ideologies." Clearly then, both men speak for the corporate Random House in emphasizing the disparity between the publisher and the poet and in sheltering their dissent in a corporate identity. Such an emphasis, as Cerf suspected, was sure to attract the attention of the reviewers.

If Robinson Jeffers seemed discouraged and inhibited by his publisher, who objected to some of the more pointed ramifications of his philosophy of inhumanism, he received even harsher treatment in some of the reviews of The Double Axe. Dudley Fitts, writing in the New York Times Book Review, spoke of "the violent Mr. Jeffers." Fitts claims that The Double Axe "opens beautifully but after the first page the moments of conviction, of poetical (or, for that matter, moral) validity are decreaseinly frequent."²¹ Jeffers' "agonist....mouth(s) hysterical extremely shopworn patchenisms²² on the subject of war," writes Fitts. Pointing up this latter phenomena, the reviewer quotes:

You'll be there, old man, right
 along with the president
 And his paid mouths; and the
 radio shouters, the writers,
 the world-planners, the heavy
 bishops,
 The England-lovers, the little

poets and college professors.

Swing high, swing low....

The irony, of course, is that Jeffers numbered himself among "the England-lovers, the little/poets." Fitts comments on this excerpt from "The Love and the Hate:"

True, these are the sentiments of young Hoult Gore; but there is evidence in short lyrics printed in this book that they are not repugnant to Mr. Jeffers, and it is significant that Random House, in an extraordinary prefatory statement, disclaims any share in them. Their depressing quality is not so much a high-school morality as a high-school cheapness; which is, after all, only another aspect of Mr. Jeffers' violence.

Curiously, the reviewer acknowledges the "extraordinary prefatory statement" by the publisher yet he does not address the publisher's rationale for its presence. By denying the metaphoric value of the poetry and by comparing Jeffers with Hoult Gore, Fitts contentedly leaves the reader to assume the appropriateness of the disclaimer.

Time Magazine discussed the disclaimer in a pre-publication comment entitled "Chapter and Verse." Time saw the need for a disclaimer as an antidote to Jeffer's special power:

The persuasive powers of poetry got thumping recognition from

Robinson Jeffers' publisher. Next month Jeffers' new book of verse would (sic) contain a cautious note-to-the-reader:

"Random House feels compelled to go on record with its disagreement over some of the political views pronounced by the poet in this volume...."²³

Several issues later a review in Time, contained under the caption "And Buckets O' Blood," noted that "readers of this book of poems are advised in a highly unusual (and ungrammatical) publisher's note that Random House does not agree with some of the political views pronounced by the poet Robinson Jeffers."²⁴ Suspicions of the disclaimer, however, did not hinder the anonymous reviewer's disparaging the volume:

Jeffers' political views are, in fact, stark and skinny as a buzzard's craw.²⁵

Gerald McDonald, Chief of the American History Division of the New York Public Library, claimed that Jeffers' "violent, hateful book [was] a gospel of isolationism carried beyond geography, faith and hope. Civilization is an evil, war and peace are equally evil, Christianity and communism, leaders and little men are all contemptible."²⁶ Review upon review notes the violence and some reviews suspect that the poet would deny the survival of "human kindness or decency."²⁷ Yet, as aggressive as the commentaries are, there is one

underlying assumption: that the poet must be allowed his say.

The reviews point up one peculiarity: regardless of the impact of Jeffers' verse, the reviewers acknowledge the publisher's note yet they do not inquire of its genesis. Because of the uniqueness of the disclaimer, there would have had to have been at least some discussion between poet and publisher before such a note could have been published. The lack of investigation is too easily accounted for as another indication of the times: that the safeguarding of national policy from verse bearing little good will was an assumed duty. Jeffers' readers had aesthetic, philosophical, and psychological interests in his poems. The reviewers had an obligation to do more than accept the disclaimer at face value.

Knowing that Jeffers' original manuscript for The Double Axe was in part changed to conform with the wishes of its publishing house, one can better understand that "transhuman magnificence" to which Jeffers subscribed, which made him seem to many reviewers, not to mention his publisher, a violent and immoral man. The poet's belief that only by rejecting solipsism can man peacefully gain his place in the universe is no better illustrated than by his acquiescence in the face of unsympathetic and often bitter reaction to his verse. Rather than compromise his philosophy, Jeffers subscribed to it functionally by allowing editorial opinion its wish. It would seem that Random House was not fully prepared to allow for the fallibility or perniciousness of humanity, at least as it is stated in Jeffers' uncompromising terms. Moved by personal and, hopefully,

altruistic motives, Random House dampened the public's chance for introspection. Robert Fitzgerald, in the New Republic, sees Jeffers from a typical perspective.

Robinson Jeffers...has cast a cold eye on life and death and in his best fragments has written lines, rather hugely and coldly hewn, that truthfully honor the life of rock-faces and external nature; but on a review of his work these outcroppings sink into a quagmire of appalling primitivism from which not even a pterodactyl could take wing. He has been trying to say to all men: "You are corrupted monsters, unworthy of a single mountain range," and in The Double Axe he outdoes himself in the violence of the saying; the two long fables of the volume are full of blood and carrion and incestuous horror.

...The trouble is not in the poet's initial emotion; it is in the mindlessness of its working out; the sheer bombast and fantasy of it, like the vileness that small boys make up to turn each other's stomachs.²⁸

The "appalling primitivism" to which Fitzgerald objects is the condition of humanity which Jeffers saw. Given his philosophical stance, Jeffers will brook little of man's anthropocentricity. His method, in a world of struggle, is to grasp the throats of his race--to catch them breathless.

Seldon Rodman, who regarded Jeffers to be "perhaps our foremost poet," reviewed The Double Axe noting it to be "spiked...with a belligerently 'isolationist' preface by the author." Rodman takes Jeffers' political view at face value. After allowing Jeffers' noninterventionist position, Rodman says:

We must respect his integrity....nuances of tone, ambiguities of meaning, felicities of language and music, are not to be looked for in his verse....It is sad that as the years go by he repeats himself endlessly; that he elects to close his eyes to human heroism and goodness and to manmade beauty; and that he feels compelled to add more than his quota of hatred and violence to the hatred and violence abroad in the world, while he sits in that properly inhuman stone tower of his waiting exultantly for the bomb.²⁹

With one voice praising Jeffers, Rodman speaks in another to the book as "totally irresponsible, politically, poetically, humanly." And to declare this poetry devoid of ambiguity of meaning and "nuances of tone" is to deny it as poetry. Exploration of The Double Axe, as originally conceived, shows the contrary to be the case; Jeffers' poetry is indeed an intense and imaginative though often inconsistent rendering of his perceptions of the world, man, and the interrelationship of the two. The very nature of Jeffers' philosophical stance, his verse, its public reception, its critical

commentary, points up the need to place Jeffers' inhumanism into a proper perspective.

There is little doubt that the confusion subsequent to and consequent of the publication of The Double Axe was caused by the deletion of certain poems from its text by publishers hostile to the poet's psychology. The rationale for the disclaimer negates, for the most part, the tone of the reviews. A careful look at the poetry of The Double Axe will bring the reader to a better understanding of how Robinson Jeffers' philosophy dictated certain poetic devices and characteristics which were repugnant to most reviewers and to his publishers.

Chapter Two

Notes

1. Robinson Jeffers. The Double Axe and Other Poems. New York, 1948.
2. Ibid., p. 53.
3. Robinson Jeffers, "The World's Wonders," Poetry Magazine, (January, 1951), p.p. 191-192.
4. Jeffers, The Double Axe and Other Poems, p. ix.
5. Ruth Lechlitter, "A Prophet of Mortality," New York Herald Tribune Weekly Book Review, 12 September, 1948, sec. VII, p. 4, col. 1,2,3.
6. Seldon Rodman, "Transhuman Magnificence," Saturday Review of Literature, 31 (July 31, 1948), p. 13.
7. Ms. Jeffers, R. Jeffers Collection. Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas, Austin, Texas.
8. Jeffers. The Double Axe and Other Poems, p. vi.
9. Ann N. Ridgeway, in her preface to The Selected Letters of Robinson Jeffers, 1897-1962, writes "When I first proposed to assemble Robinson Jeffers' correspondence, I was warned that it was Una who wrote most letters in order to assure her husband time to write poems." Lawrence Clark Powell, writing in Robinson Jeffers, The Man and His Work (Pasadena, 1940), p. 28, admits that "Jeffers owes a great debt to his wife, Una....All the many details of managing a house without servants are handled by her--as well as the poet's considerable "fan-mail"--and he is left free to work...."
10. Letter from Bennett Cerf to Una Jeffers, November 24, 1934. Mss. Jeffers, R. Jeffers Collection.
11. Letter from Bennett Cerf to Una Jeffers, April 21, 1938. Mss. Jeffers, R. Jeffers Collection.
12. Letter from Bennett Cerf to Una Jeffers, April 1, 1938. Mss. Jeffers, R. Jeffers Collection.
13. Saxe Cummins to Robinson Jeffers, October 15, 1947. Mss. Jeffers, R. Jeffers Collection.

14. Saxe Cummins to Robinson Jeffers, December 4, 1947.
Mss. Jeffers, R. Jeffers Collection.
15. This is evidenced by such reviews as the one found in
The New York Herald Tribune Weekly Book Review, September 12,
1948, p. vii.
16. Saxe Cummins to Robinson Jeffers, February 12, 1948.
Mss. Jeffers, R. Jeffers Collection.
17. Robinson Jeffers, "Preface," The Double Axe and Other
Poems, p. vii.
18. Ibid., p. viii.
19. Bennett Cerf to Una Jeffers, October 7, 1947.
Mss. Jeffers, R. Jeffers Collection.
20. Bennett Cerf to Una Jeffers, March 18, 1948.
Mss. Jeffers, R. Jeffers Collection.
21. Dudley Fitts, The New York Book Review, August 22, 1948.
22. Reference to Kenneth Patchen, poet-novelist, 1911- .
His poetry, marked by religious symbols and intricate figures
recalling the metaphysical poets, is also free in structure and
associations.
23. Time, July 5, 1948. (Vol. LII, No. 1), p. 32.
24. Time, August 2, 1948. (Vol. LII, No. 5), p.p. 79-80.
25. Ibid.
26. Library Journal, June 15, 1948. (73:948).
G. P. Meyer, The Saturday Review of Literature.
27. The New Yorker, September 4, 1948, (24:75).
28. Rob Fitzgerald, New Republic, November, 1948, (119:22).
29. Seldon Rodman, The Saturday Review of Literature, July 31,
1948, (31:13-14).

Chapter Three

The Stones of Whiteness

The relative worth of The Double Axe poems that were excised from the manuscript by Saxe Cummins and Bennett Cerf may be determined only by a close examination of their artistic accomplishments and validity. Are they merely poems which serve a political vendetta, or do they enlarge, deepen, and validate Robinson Jeffers' philosophical and artistic concerns in The Double Axe and Other Poems? The varied quality of the excised work is immediately apparent. Some of the poems are carefully and complexly composed; others are merely interesting, a few are bad. But all radiate aspects of Jeffers' dark philosophy of inhumanism. Although the excised poems may attack political systems and criticize personalities, they are logical extensions of Jeffers' thought, and as such, they must be seriously considered. The poetry fearlessly probes into the shadowy corners of political theory, human behavior, and individual worth. Fearlessly is the operative word here, for the reader can only admire the tenacity with which Jeffers clung to his beliefs. It is the rigorous carrying out of his ideas that the reader should find important, not

the attacks on specific political personalities. What exercises one, perhaps, is the darkness of Jeffers' philosophy, for few wish to respond with warmth, open heart, and sympathy to the sustained barrage of a caustically ironic view of humanity. And especially no one wishes to do so in a time of war, when a country of necessity must remain united in spirit and thought.

Accordingly, by examining characteristic features of the poems, such as Jeffers' manipulation of the resources of poetic technique in order to make his poems as dense and expressive as possible, and his handling of philosophical statement in poetic form, the reader shall come to comprehend more explicitly than before, the merit of Jeffers' work.

The excised poems follow:

Miching Mallecho

(May, 1941)

Wagging their hoary heads, glaring through their bright
spectacles,

The old gentlemen shout for war, while youth,

Amazed, unwilling, submissive, watches them. This is not normal,

But really ominous. It is good comedy,

But for a coming time it means mischief. The boys have memories.

Fantasy

(Written in June, 1941)

Finally in white innocence
The fighter planes like swallows dance,
The bombers above ruined towns
Will drop wreaths of roses down,
Doves will nest in the guns' throats
And the people dance in the streets,
Whistles will bawl and bells will clang,
On that great day the boys will hang
Hitler and Roosevelt in one tree,
Painlessly, in effigy,
To take their rank in history;
Roosevelt, Hitler and Guy Fawkes
Hanged above the garden walks,
While the happy children cheer,
Without hate, without fear,
And new men plot a new war.

The Blood-Guilt

(February, 1944)

So long having forseen these convulsions, forecast the hemorrhagic
Fevers of civilization past prime, striving to die, and having through
verse, image and fable

For more than twenty years tried to condition the mind to this bloody
climate:

---how do you like it,

Justified prophet?

I would rather have died twenty years ago.

"Sad sons of

the stormy fall,"

You said, "no escape, you have to inflict and endure...and the world is
like a flight of swans."

I said, "No escape."

You knew also that your own country, though ocean-guarded, nothing to
gain,

by its destined feels leaders

Would be lugged in.

I said, "No escape."

If you had not been beaten beforehand,

hopelessly
helplessly fatalist,

You might have spoken louder and perhaps been heard, and prevented something.

I? Have you never heard

That who'd lead must not see?

You saw it, you dispaired of preventing it,
you share the blood-guilt.

Yes.

Wilson in Hell
(Written in 1942)

Roosevelt died and met Wilson; who said, "I blundered into it
Through honest error, and conscience cut me so deep that I died
In the vain effort to prevent future wars. But you
Blew on the coal-bed, and when it kindled you deliberately
Sabotaged every fire-wall that even the men who denied
My hope had built. You have too much murder on your hands. I will not
Speak of the lies and connivings. I cannot understand the Mercy
That permits us to meet in the same heaven. ---Or is this my hell?"

What Odd Expedients

God, whether by unconscious instinct, or waking, or in a dream, I do
 not know how conscious is God,
 Uses strange means for great purposes. His problem with the human
 race is to play its capacities
 To their extreme limits, but limit its power. For how dull were the
 little planet, how mean and splendorless,
 If all one garden; and man locally omnipotent rested the energies that
 only need, only
 Bitter need breeds.

 The solution of course is war, which both goads and
 frustrates; and to promote war
 What odd expedients! The crackpot dreams of Jeanne d'Arc and Hitler;
 the cripple's-power-need of Roosevelt; the bombast
 Of Mussolini; the tinsel star of Napoleon; the pitiful idiot
 submissiveness
 Of peoples to leaders and men to death: ----what low means toward high
 aims!----The next chapter of the world
 Hangs between the foreheads of two strong bulls ranging one field.
 Hi, Red! Hi, Whitey!

An Ordinary Newscaster

(January 13, '44)

I heard a radio-parrot, an ordinary newscaster
Say this: "Tonight the German astronomers
Will be looking up at the sky: the moon will eclipse the planet Jupiter:
if our brothers come over
They'll look again." He said with the pride of patriotism, "The
German astronomers
Are interested in the red spot on Jupiter, they hope the eclipse will
help them learn something more
About the red spot. But Our brave kids are interested only in the
red flashes
Made by their folly bombs."

This is perhaps the most ignoble statement
we have heard yet, but unfortunately
It is in the vein. We are not an ignoble people; rather
generous; but having been tricked
A step at a time, cajoled, scared, smacked with war, a decent
inexpert people, betrayed by men
Whom it thought it could trust: our whole attitude
Stinks of that ditch. So will the future peace.

Staggering Back Toward Life

Radar and rocket-plane, the applications of chemistry, the tricks of
physics: new cunning rather
Than new science: but they work. The time is in fact
A fever-crisis; the fag-end of nominal peace before these wars, and the
so-called peace to follow them,
Are, with the wars, one fever; the world one hospital;
The semi-delirious patient his brain breeds dreams like flies, but they
are giants. And they work. The question is
How much of this amazing lumber the pale convalescent
Staggering back toward life will be able to carry up the steep gorges
that thrid the cliffs of the future?
I hope, not much. We need a new dark-age, five hundred years of winter
and the tombs for dwellings---but it's remote still.

Curb Science?

Science, that gives man hope to live without lies
Or blast himself off the earth: Curb science
Until morality catches up? --But look: morality
At present running rapidly retrograde,
You'd have to turn science too, back to the witch-doctors
And myth-drunkards. Besides that morality
Is not an end in itself: truth is an end.
To seek the truth is better than good works, better than survival,
Holier than innocence and higher than love.