ABSTRACT

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ROBINSON JEFFERS AND HIS POETIC REFLECTIONS OF INHUMANISM

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This study examined the poetry of Robinson Jeffers and the extent to which his philosophy of Inhumanism impacts his verse.

The interpretation was based on the premise that the poet’s doctrine of Inhumanism is not a philosophical detestation of man; rather it is an exhortation to mankind to reach its potential - a consciousness Jeffers describes as “transhuman magnificence.” Moreover, the poet implores man to amend his arrogant conception of humanity as separate and superior to nature, to revel in images of the divine in nature, and to accept the truth that his existence is relatively insignificant in the larger cosmic order.

Jeffers’ oeuvre was divided into three distinct phases; in each one, the poet explores various postures and situations for his theory. The earliest period was analyzed using the narratives “Tamar,” “Roan Stallion,” and “The Women at Point Sur.” The second phase was examined via the longer poems such as “Dear Judas,” and “Such Counsels You Gave to Me.” The final stage was evaluated through interpretations of the shorter lyric poems published in The Double Axe and Other Poems, and The Beginning and the End and Other Poems.

The research confirmed that as Jeffers’ poetic statements matured and evolved to higher artistic levels, so too did his philosophic tenets become more intellectually sound and resonate at a clearer frequency. The conclusion drawn from the findings suggests that Jeffers’ doctrine of Inhumanism is the confluence of several ideological positions and countless personal experiences which suffuse the bulk of his poetic work.
ROBINSON JEFFERS AND HIS POETIC
REFLECTIONS OF INHUMANISM

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Chapter 1

Introduction

For the poet is dead.
The pen, splintered on the sheer
Excesses of vision, unfingered, falls.
The heart-crookt hand, cold as stone,
Lets it go down.

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The great tongue is dried.
The teeth that bit to the bitterness
Are sheathed in truth. (Everson 1114-21)

So opens critic William Everson’s poem, “The Poet is Dead”, which Albert Gelpi calls “one of the most powerful elegies in American literature”(x). Everson’s eulogy is very restrained: Jeffers is simply acknowledged, never praised, but the compressed passion of the poem reveals the critic’s profound sense of loss. From his perspective, as the title suggests, Jeffers was the poet of the modern age.

After Jeffers died on January 20, 1962, other notices appeared. An essay by the critic David Littlejohn reads in spirit as the farthest removed from Everson’s poem. “Robinson Jeffers, the doom-shouting Inhumanist Poet of two generations,” says
Littlejohn, "died early this year at Tor House, his hand-built hermitage on the California coast. It took his death to remind most readers that he had in fact still been alive" (276).

Between the despair of Everson and the disdain of Littlejohn, a full spectrum of responses to Jeffers' death appeared in print. In their otherwise straightforward announcements, the major magazines played on familiar stereotypes. Newsweek, for instance, refers to Jeffers as the "misanthropic poet" (57); and Time describes Jeffers as a "solitary poet of gloom" who disliked civilization and who "wrote from the tower of a massive granite house that he built near the rugged Big Sur region of the California coast" (62). The disparity in reactions to his death by critics of the day underscores the reality that Jeffers has yet to secure his niche in the canon of American literature. He is, in fact, one of the most neglected major poets of the twentieth century. Why this is so reveals much about Jeffers, but even more about modern criticism. A succinct summary of Jeffers' views can be found in a letter to a reader:

As to my "religious attitudes" - you know it is a sort of tradition in this country not to talk about religion for fear of offending - I am still a little subject to the tradition, and rather dislike stating my "attitudes" except in the course of a poem. However, they are simple. I believe that the universe is one being, all its parts are different expressions of the same energy, and they are all in communication with each other, influencing each other, therefore parts of one organic whole. (This is physics, I believe, as well as religion.) The parts change and pass, or die, people and races and rocks and stars, none of them seems to me important in itself, but only the whole. This whole is in all its parts so beautiful, and is felt by me to be so
intensely in earnest, that I am compelled to love it, and to think of it as
divine. It seems to me that this whole alone is worthy of the deeper sort of
love; and that there is peace, freedom, and I might say a kind of salvation,
in turning one's affections outward toward this one God, rather than
inward on one's self, or on humanity, or on human imagination and
abstractions - the world of spirits. (Qtd in Ridgeway 221-2)

Jeffers writes with stoic dignity about the divine beauty of the universe and the relative
insignificance of humankind. His philosophy which he came to call Inhumanism is
prescriptive: overcome self-centeredness and enlightenment can be found. Frederic
Carpenter explains Jeffers' doctrine:

The philosophy of Inhumanism centers upon an experience rather than an
idea: it is poetic rather than logical. All the Inhumanist heroes of Jeffers’
poetry have celebrated the experience of mysticism ... beyond the
consolations of philosophy, they have described a positive “union with
God”, or the cosmic order of things. And what has seemed merely an
acceptance of the inevitable, considered negatively, has become, positively,
the love of even an inhuman God. This mystical ideal of union with God
has expressed the positive aspect of Inhumanism. (66)

The calm that comes with such convictions is at the core of most of Jeffers’
poems. It is a calm born of great struggles - not only of internal turmoil, but also of a life-
long wrestling with a world which he felt was growing steadily more hostile to the
individual, his values, and his search for a concept of self. The critic William Nolte
describes the poet's struggle as:

The eye through which Jeffers gazed throughout his career was like the all-
seeing eye of Horus, or the third eye of Siva, or the eye of the Buddha at
the moment of awakening. It is like the "inward eye" of William Blake
functioning at the fourth or anagogic level of vision. It is identical to the
organ of insight described by mystics everywhere - the mode of awareness
through which ultimate truth and pure beauty can be seen, by which union
with the divine can be achieved. (10)

Those who have this awareness sometimes withdraw from the world and sit absorbed;
sometimes they seek to share it. Jeffers, more the artist than the monk, sought to capture
his experiences in words. What he felt with his two hands, what he saw, what he heard
and smelled and tasted, ignited his passionate nature. His experience of the One occurred
via an intense encounter with the Many.

Thus, Jeffers' doctrine of Inhumanism is the confluence of several ideological
positions and countless personal experiences which suffuse the bulk of his poetic work. It
is not, however, as many critics have asserted a philosophical detestation of man; rather,
it is an exhortation to mankind to achieve its potential - a consciousness Jeffers describes
as "transhuman magnificence." In other words, as critics like James Karman have
commented, the poet implores man to amend his arrogant conception of humanity as
separate and superior to nature, to praise the image of God found in the permanence of
stone more than any to be found in the creations of civilization, and more importantly to accept the truth that man is but a mere component of the cosmos.

The calm one finds in the poetry of Robinson Jeffers is both the source of his vision and a difficult goal to be attained. His lyric poems often show no evidence of struggle; his best ones are uttered with breathless detachment. His long narratives, however, reveal the full extent of his ordeal. With energies like those Blake describes unleashed in his psyche, Jeffers the mystic had to work against the storm created by Jeffers the artist. The calm he strove for was the calm at the heart of the maelstrom.

Jeffers' major work can be divided into three distinct periods; these divisions were basically formulated by Carpenter in his critical treatise of Jeffers in 1962. The first phase is one of experimentation, in which the poet assumed several ideological postures without much concern for their practicality. Beginning with Tamar and ending with The Women at Point Sur, this first period includes the poetry of the twenties. The major import of the poetry from this period is Jeffers' "exploration of the possibilities and positing solutions for the individual who is isolated by external forces or who isolates himself" (Brophy 7).

The transitional second period of Jeffers' development is introduced by the poem "Dear Judas" and includes the volumes Give Your Heart to the Hawks and Other Poems and Such Counsels You Gave to Me and Other Poems. During this phase, Jeffers expanded his field of examination and turned from the individual to the more credible and genuinely involved life of the family: "he stressed the social implications of the subjects treated in the previous period, and violence and sexual license are always described with a sense of societal standards in the background" (Carpenter 34).
The third period of Jeffers’ career began with *Be Angry at the Sun and Other Poems*, in which the poet sought to separate himself from the contemporary events of World War II, but found that he must not and could not do so. This final phase of Jeffers’ development draws mainly on the themes of withdrawal, isolation, and resignation.

* * * *

John Robinson Jeffers was born on January 10, 1887 to William Hamilton Jeffers and the former Annie Robinson Tuttle. The poet’s mother was from a prominent Pennsylvania family who claimed Jonathan Edwards among its ancestors. The elder Jeffers was a senior professor at Western Theological Seminary in Pittsburgh where he taught classes in ecclesiastical history, Old Testament literature, and the history of doctrine. To open their son’s mind as wide and as soon as possible, Dr. and Mrs. Jeffers took him on extensive tours of Europe throughout his childhood and adolescence, enrolling him in private schools across the continent.

In 1903, Dr. Jeffers retired from teaching and moved his family to Southern California. Robinson entered Occidental College with advanced standing and graduated, at the age of eighteen, in 1905. During the next year of graduate studies at the University of Southern California, Robinson met and fell in love with Una Call Kuster. Una was an extremely bright, beautiful, and spirited young woman who also happened to be married. After seven years, a directionless period in Jeffers’ life when he studied philosophy at the University of Zurich, attended University of Southern California Medical School, and entered the School of Forestry at the University of Washington, Una finally obtained a divorce and married Robinson. The couple hoped to move to the southern coast of
England but the outbreak of World War I forced them to stay in the United States. On the advice of a friend, they settled in Carmel, California. (Adamic 7-33)

Marrying Una and moving to Carmel transformed Jeffers' life. Una was for Jeffers, as he himself says, "more like a woman in a Scotch ballad, passionate, untamed and rather heroic - or like a falcon - than an ordinary person." She "excited and focused" his otherwise "cold and undiscriminating" nature and, in doing so, taught him new ways to see and think and feel. Carmel was untamed, too. The "savage beauty" of the sea-coast, where people lived "amid magnificent unspoiled scenery - essentially as they did in the Idylls or the Sagas, or in Homer's Ithaka", offered Jeffers a chance to live a "contemporary life that was also a permanent life" (Jeffers xv-xvi). Civilization was transcended for something more aboriginal and earth-bound. After twin sons, Garth and Donnan, were born, Robinson and Una purchased property on the windblown edge of the ocean and crafted a simple existence for themselves - the result of which was Jeffers' art.

Tor House, located on a bluff overlooking the sea, was constructed out of local granite boulders in the summer of 1919. In helping the masons, Jeffers learned their craft, and so was able to continue working on his own when the house was finished. In the next few years, he added a stone wall around his property and the four-story, freestanding structure called Hawk Tower. "As he helped the masons shift and place the wind and wave-worn granite," says Una in a letter, "I think he realized some kinship with it and became aware of strengths in himself unknown before." Thus, she says, referring to an important moment of transformation, "there came to him a kind of awakening such as adolescents and religious converts are said to experience" (Qtd in Ridgeway 213).
From that moment on, Jeffers knew who he was as an artist and understood the
project laid out before him. He resolved “not to tell lies in verse” - not to feign any
emotion he 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 he believed it. He also resolved to concern
himself with “things that a reader two thousand years away could understand and be
moved by - “permanent things in nature and human experience that unite the present with
the past and future. The aim behind these resolutions was not “to open new fields for
poetry, but only to reclaim old freedom” (Jeffers xv).

From the moment of his awakening, he wrote as a man inspired, at times a man
possessed. For Jeffers, the journey out of the self entails the establishment of a
transcendent relation between the individual and the cosmos. That relation is in its
ultimate form a mirror of universal process itself, of the divine self-relation. Its pursuit,
defined anew by each individual, was the aim of personal experience, the meaning of life.
In the deepest and most comprehensive sense, therefore, Jeffers’ poetry is an orientation
toward the divine. To understand this is to grasp his poetry as meant to grasp experience
and the world - whole; it is also perhaps to understand why contemporary scholarship can
make so little of him.
Chapter 2
The Seeds of Inhumanism

The first phase of Jeffers' poetic development, which is comprised mainly of the long narratives “Tamar” (1925), “Roan Stallion” (1925), and “The Women at Point Sur” (1927), is a study in the isolation of the individual, both through internal and external forces. The main characters of these poems, Tamar, California, and the Reverend Barclay, search for ways to extricate themselves from their situations, but each avenue taken leads to tragedy. Jeffers would argue that the failure of each was not in the desire for freedom from life's cruel perversities, but that each one's vision was too insular, too ego-centric. The tragedy, then, of Tamar, California, and Barclay results not so much from a deficiency of character but of perspective. Each one lacked a cosmic vision, an essential component in achieving what Jeffers terms “transhuman magnificence.”

“Tamar” is an attempt to explore the problems of emotional sterility and inwardness. Jeffers' solution is extremely radical and the results described in the poem are catastrophic. As will be discussed later in this chapter, however, Tamar's fate is of a piece with that of California in “Roan Stallion” and that of the Reverend Arthur Barclay in “The Women at Point Sur.”

Tamar Cauldwell represents the germ of Jeffers' Inhumanist philosophy coarsely embodied in human action. Sensing her entrapment in a household which is both
and corrupt, Tamar struggles to alter her situation, to transcend the limitation imposed on her by life. As she learns more about herself and her forebears, however, Tamar becomes increasingly bitter and eventually involves the whole family in a fiery conclusion. In terms of what she tries to overcome, Tamar's actions become insignificant as she proceeds. She fails to comprehend all of the problems at the outset, yet chooses drastic means to solve them, discovering later that both her understanding of the problems of life and her particular solution have already been acted out by the previous generation, which had also failed. Her victimization by life was actually greater than at first she could comprehend.

The other characters in the narrative exist somewhere between tragic human figures and abstract allegorical masks from whom Tamar extracts a terrible peace. Tamar’s father, David Cauldwell, who always has his Bible in hand and who represents hypocritical orthodoxy, is haunted by the memory of his incestuous love for his now dead sister, Helen. Lee, Tamar’s brother of about the same age, represents wild youth sobered by the sudden seriousness of life - a life-threatening accident and being drafted for military service during World War I. Stella Moreland, David’s sister-in-law, and the “idiot Jinny,” David’s sister, further disturb the homelife of Tamar with their nocturnal rantings, seances, and evil intimations about the past.

“Tamar” is a bold story of a brother and sister who, on a remote coastal point in a year shadowed by World War I, out of a vulnerable innocence, familial isolation, and inscrutable inner forces, desperately become lovers. Dismayed by a spectral revelation that her sin mirrors an affair forty years earlier between their father and a mysterious aunt, Tamar, confounded by pregnancy and unsatisfied by the strategy of a second lover, Will Andrews, frantically seeks counsel from the dead. She is thus assaulted by tribal gods at
the beach tideline and collapses after having executed a sexually frenetic dance. Losing her child, her secret revealed, Tamar turns into a fury at her brother’s repudiation of her. Assuming authority by psychologically seducing her own father, she brings the family drama to a fiery consummation.

Structurally, the major action of the poem begins with the incestuous relationship between Tamar and Lee and is initiated by the formers’ need “to know”: “What are we for ... to want and want and dare not know it” (9). Her father’s biblical piety has satisfied her as to the significance of self and the relationship of human life to the cosmos. To “dare not” implies a hesitation when on the threshold of discovery. The still vague “it” which waits to be known is Jeffers’ ultimate truth - cyclic, violent, inhuman, cosmic, and beautiful. Tamar takes only a first step toward it, beginning here to expect and reveal the “revoked relationships” in her house; certainly she has already a desire for truth’s totality, and senses the need for recklessness. The poem’s omniscient narrator speculates on this point:

Was it the wild rock coast

Of her breeding, and the reckless wind

In was it the wild rock coast

the beaten trees and the gaunt booming crashes

Of breakers under the rocks, or rather the amplitude

And wing-subduing immense earth-ending water

That moves all the west taught her this freedom?

It was not good, not wise, not safe, not provident

Not even, for custom creates nature, natural,
Though all other license were ... (9)

Though highly ambiguous, this passage is crucial: the question seems calculated to prompt speculation in the reader's mind and to create a sensitivity to certain imagery and phrasing which are to come. The question is not simple but complex, the "or rather" seeming to suggest either an alternative or a development.

The wild coast with its twisted, knotted trees is a fitting correlative to the incestuous act which Helen later characterizes as tangling the "net of generations / With a knot sideways" (13). The tree branches doubling back on themselves and human isolation from a world larger than this "withered house" (8) illuminate that individualism that dooms Tamar:

(If the) "twisted coast of breeding" and the "amplitude of waters" are taken not as contradictory but as complementary images - suggesting a progression in psychological understanding of the scene's implications rather than a rigid dichotomy - then the first phrase symbolizes a predisposition to corruption to which the second offers a perspective which rises above corruption. In terms of traditional theology, the "twisted coast" would correspond to original sin - human perversity - whereas "amplitude" parallels the confidence of faith and grace. This accords with Tamar's later acknowledgment of the "fortunate fall" theme: "If I have done wrong it has turned good to me". Her sin has brought her vision and peace which the world cannot give and which no man can take from her (John 14:27). (Squires 89)
There is no God to condemn her sin, but there is a force which would challenge its integrity. Whatever consolation Tamar has found in abjuring the world’s values and moral standards, and whatever wisdom she senses in her primitive experience are immediately clouded by a spirit-visitation to which she is unexpectedly a witness as she returns past midnight to the house. First Aunt Stella in a visionary trance, then Helen, the ghost of her father’s sister, assert that her act was not romantic defiance, not free choice, not even a unique sin - but a foreordained pattern, a pit dug long ago for her and her brother to fall into. One exchange contains the substance of the section - Tamar protests: “It makes me nothing, / My darling sin a shadow and me a doll on wires.” The spectral Helen replies: “A trap so baited / Was laid to catch you when the world began, / Before the granite foundation” (14). Through this ghostly exchange, Jeffers offers his heroine an insight into her potential salvation - a surrendering of her finite existence to the limitless universe. In other words, were Tamar to realize her relative insignificance as compared to the infinite cosmos, she would be able to transcend the baseness of her situation, but alas, she is incapable and thus doomed.

In order to gain further information from the dead Helen, Tamar calls upon Aunt Stella, who helps her “talk to the dead” in a seaside cave. Before Tamar communicates with Helen, she is commanded by masculine voices to strip herself naked and dance wantonly along the tide line, where she soon collapses in ecstatic abandon and submits to the repeated ghostly ravishments of “half a dozen savages, / Dead, and dressed up for Gods” (26). The practical advantage of this otherwise bizarre scene is that, due to the spectral rape, Tamar aborts spontaneously. This beach scene with its “otherworldly” tone underscores an important element of Jeffers’ Inhumanist ideology – namely, the fluid
nature he sees in his cosmic construct. In other words, Jeffers views death not in opposition to life, but as an aspect of it; just as he rejects the idea that man is the center of the universe, rather than a mere component.

Her child aborted, her secret revealed, Tamar recovers from a short coma in the same room where nine months earlier Lee lay almost dead from tidal exposure. The "spoiled house" to which Tamar has "come home" is not only her betrayed body but, more significantly, the corrupt family-line, the grotesque fivesome of the Cauldwell household. While she recuperates, David visits Tamar, Bible in hand, hoping to provide her solace from the good book. Instead, they have a bitter exchange about their respective incestuous loves, after which Tamar seduces the old man psychologically, exposing her father's hypocritical mask of moral rectitude. Repeatedly, Tamar claims that she, not her father, will have power in the household: "You cannot think what freedom and what pleasure live in having abjured laws, in having / Annulled hope, I am now at peace" (41). There is no peace, however, but God's, says the old man, "He never forgives, He never forgives, evil punishes evil" (41).

Still intent on possessing power, yet bothered by the possibility that her sin will appear to the world as simply the pale copy of the sin of her father and Helen, Tamar directs David's thinking in this comparison:

Is the echo louder
than the voice, I have surpassed her,
Yours was the echo, time stands still old man,
you'll learn when you have lived at the muddy root
Under the rock of things; all times are now,
today plays on last year and the inch of our future
Made the first morning of the world. You named me for the
monument in a desolate graveyard,
Fool, and I say you were deceived, it was out of me that
fire lit you and your Helen, your body
Join with your sister's
Only because I was to be named Tamar and to love my brother
and my father,
I am the fountain. (41-2)
The poem concludes with a violent confrontation in Tamar’s bedroom. Tamar, Lee, Will
Andrews, and David face each other in confusion and hatred. Tamar alone feels that she
has control of the situation, for she has gathered her lovers about her. The “idiot Jinny”,
who has been left unattended, manages to set herself and the house ablaze, exclaiming,
“Why I’m like God” (62). Fire consumes the household, and Tamar prevents the escape
of her lovers by barring a window with her body.

The critic, W.S. Milne, synopsizes the Jeffersian philosophical posture in “Tamar”:
This is the action of the poem “Tamar”, simply stated: corruption, descent
to death, and anticipated rebirth. In these cyclic terms and this movement,
one can discover Jeffers’ cosmogonic vision, his psychology of peace, and
his metaphysics of value. To the poet this three-part cycle is encyclopedic,
irreversible, and predetermining; it is the pulse of the universe and yields a
constant cataract of beauty. When its rhythm is contemplated with
distance, it radiates peace - an indifference to the terrible parts, achieved
when one becomes absorbed in the whole. Processes, seen and felt close at hand, instill shame and anguish. Only by setting miniscule daily experience in context with the cosmic totality can one work out peace for himself. (65)

On the surface, the cataclysmic ending of “Tamar” seems final, but Milne rightly asserts that the poet does not destroy the Cauldwell house and its inhabitants without a glimmer of hope, even rebirth. Thus, the poem concludes:

Grass grows where the flame flowered;
A hollowed lawn strewn with a few black stones
And the brick of broken chimneys; all about there
The old trees, some of them scarred with fire, endure the sea wind. (64)

The Cauldwell house, “cleansed by fire,” is returned to nature – a polluted environment thus purified in a more natural and hence less human state.

Next, it is important to discuss Jeffers’ narrative poem “Roan Stallion” because it introduced into verse the fundamentals of Inhumanism that was to define the poet’s poetic and philosophic career. Like Tamar, California in spite of her mystical union with forces both natural and supernatural, finds herself limited at the time of crisis by a part of the same humanity to which her antagonist belongs. The crisis of her experience produces awareness, even moments of true vision, but not material change, and out of some obscure loyalty to humanity California destroys her means of transcendence. The critic Eva Hesse has this to say about the relationship between the two poems:

“Roan Stallion” contrasts with “Tamar” in almost every way. Both poems are consciously mythical, and both myths are naturalized on the California coast. But “Roan Stallion” is brief and concentrated, where “Tamar” is
long and diffuse; it is unified in form and action, but "Tamar" is episodic; it realizes its myth through normal and psychological action, rather than the abnormal and unnatural; and it interprets its story by means of symbols and ideas, rather than by visions and dark sayings. (28)

Hesse's interpretation supports the contention that the early period of Jeffers' development was largely experimental, that the poet was fleshing out his ideas in various situations and to varying degrees of success.

The heroine of "Roan Stallion" is named California, and she is "a nobly formed woman; erect and strong as a new tower" (141) and one-quarter Indian, is married to Johnny, a dissolute, drunken gambler, whose depravity is boundless. Johnny is an "outcast Hollander," and their child Christine has "inherited from his race blue eyes, from his life a wizened forehead" (142). Two days before Christmas, Johnny returns home from the valley with a roan stallion which he has won, but he has forgotten to bring gifts for his daughter. "Don't tell Christine it's Christmas" (141), he says simply. The next day, however, California goes to the village with the wagon to get the gifts, but her husband, sexually aroused by the stallion, delays her departure. The delay means that on the way home California must cross a rain-swollen stream in the dark. In the utter simplicity of her faith, she appeals to Jesus for light - and He appears, a "child afloat on radiance" (146). Safely at home, California ponders the "shining and the power" (146) of God, who can perform such miracles.

Around Easter, Johnny returns to the valley with a man who has come up for the roan stallion as stud to his mare. Johnny leaves with a promise of a sexual performance
comparable to the stallion’s when he returns the following evening. At this point, the poet interjects for the first time:

Humanity is the start of the race; I say

Humanity is the mold to break away from, the crust
to break through, the coal to break into fire,
The atom to be split. (149)

In an article on Jeffers’ *Inhumanism*, Carpenter argues in reference to the central theme of the above quotation:

But this poem emphasizes the human origins and values of this supposedly inhuman idea. In “Roan Stallion” the versification twice accents the word humanity. When humanity suffers and learns through tragedy - “Tragedy that breaks man’s face and a white fire flies out of it;” - then man achieves nobility. Human nature is the start of the race: California’s love for her child started her on her tragic journey both physically and psychologically. The poem achieves a complete integration of the idea with the tragic narrative. (22)

While Johnny is absent, California goes down to the corral and looks at the stallion. Within her mind, she easily identifies the horse with God, herself with the Virgin Mary. Once begun, this chain of associations encourages her to lead the horse out of the corral and up onto a height: “Here is solitude, here on the calvary, nothing conscious / But the possible God and the cropped grass”(153). Up to this point, California has dwelt on the “shining and the power” of God the Father, and she has moved steadily toward an identification of the stallion with God - in retelling her adventure to her daughter,
Christine, she unconsciously substitutes the words “roan stallion” for “God” - and she thinks of herself as a fit vessel, like Mary, for the power of God. Moreover, experience has taught California that sex is a power which she has. Addressing herself to the majestic landscape surrounding her, California proclaims:

O God I am not good enough, O fear, O strength, I am
draggled.

Johnny and other men have had me, O clean power!

Here am I. (153)

Whether or not California absorbs her god-head’s cosmic knowledge with his power, the brute invasion makes her “more incredibly conjugate / With the other extreme and greatness; passionately perceptive of identity” (153). “Out of the fire in the small round stone,” as the poet describes California’s head between the front hooves, rises images:

The fire threw up figures
And symbols meanwhile, racial myths formed and dissolved in it, the phantom rulers of humanity
That without being are yet more real than what they are born of, and without shape, shape that which makes them:
The nerves and the flesh go by shadowlike, the limbs and the lives shadowlike, these shadows remain, these shadows
To whom temples, to whom churches, to whom labors and wars, visions and dreams are dedicate:
Out of the fire in the small round stone that black moss covered, a crucified man writhed up in anguish. (153-4)
When Johnny returns home, he finds his wife unwilling to engage in intercourse. California is able to thwart her husband’s advances and slips out the door. Johnny interprets her actions as sexual play and pursues her down to the corral, where he finds her standing unafraid beside the stallion. In this moment, in almost linear fashion, the poet delineates his Inhumanist philosophy. Johnny represents everything base and inconsequential that Jeffers finds in mankind; while California personifies that rare individual bravely fumbling toward transcendence; and finally, the stallion embodies “transhuman magnificence.” As Johnny approaches California the horse rears up and tramples the man to death, “hooves left nothing alive but teeth tore up the remnant” (157). Having done its work, the stallion appears to express “obscene disgust” for the smear of man that is left on the ground, in what might be viewed as a reflection of Jeffers’ estimation of this worthless human figure. And the poem ends:

then California moved by

some obscure human fidelity

Lifted the rifle. Each separate nerve-cell of her brain flaming the stars fell from their places

Crying in her mind: she fired three times before the haunches crumpled sidewise, the forelegs stiffening,

And the beautiful strength settled to earth: she turned then on her little daughter the mask of woman

Who has killed God. The night-wind veering, the smell of the spilt wine drifted down hill from the house. (157)
By conforming to societal norms and shooting the stallion, a symbol of Inhumanism - the Divine in nature, California forfeits her hard-won freedom and knowledge. Patrick Murphy has this to say about symbolism in "Roan Stallion":

Primitive sex and religion and human aspiration are brought into conjunction without sacrificing any of the validity of an individual symbol; in other words, a plurality of meanings is preserved. California aspires, with the most pure of motives, to the shining and power she recognizes in the eminence of God, and within her psychology she associates the sexual force of the stallion with the power of divinity. By reducing the mysteries of metaphysics to the level of sex, California reaches terms with which she is familiar and which she can use. As California moves toward the godhead, she leaves behind her the contemptible Johnny and his associates: "Humanity is the mold to break away from, the crust to break through". (58)

This theme of sacrifice suffuses the poem which begins on Christmas and ends at Easter as California leads the stallion to a summit: "Here is solitude, here on calvary" (153). The extent to which the poem’s ending parallels the biblical accounts of Christ’s last days is discussed in the following:

The last scene in the cabin is a grotesque, fragmented parody of the Last Supper in the style of Luis Bunuel. We remember that when Johnny spills his wine on the table he declares, “here’s blood, here’s blood”. The trampling of Johnny in the corral may be regarded as a sacrifice to the stallion god over which California presides, having lured her victim to the
horse and having cut short the dog's interference. "Some obscure human fidelity" moves California to fire three shots (perhaps the three betrayals?) into the stallion. Furthermore, it is not a woman, but the mask of a woman, "who killed God", which turns to little Christine. To emphasize the ritualistic significance of this episode, the poem concludes by noting that down through the trees to California came the smell of spilled wine from the house. (Antonius 129)

Whether California might have ever gleaned sufficient insight into the cosmos from the roan stallion is unknowable, but what is recognizable is that the tragedy of the poem lies in California's inability to extricate herself from the constraints of her life and her humanity. As she stands poised to accept the mantle of spiritual knowledge and transformation, California regresses into her former self.

If "Roan Stallion" proclaims that "Humanity ... is the coal to break into fire, the atom to be split" (149), than "The Women at Point Sur" takes readers further into Jeffers' philosophy of Inhumanism by describing the splitting of the atom of human consciousness. To show that this purpose was conscious, Jeffers emphasizes in his Prelude to the narrative how the metatext of the poem concerns the inner "strain" common both to "humanity" and to physical matter:

Always the strain, the straining flesh

who feels what God feels

Knows the straining flesh, the aching desires,

The enormous water straining it bounds, the electric

Strain in the clouds, the strain of the oil in the oil-tanks
At Monterey, aching to burn, the strain of the spinning

Demons that make an atom, straining to fly asunder,

Straining to rest at the center,

The strain in the skull, blind strains, force and counter-force,

Nothing prevails. (10)

As was the case with Tamar and California, the central character of "The Women at Point Sur," the Reverend Arthur Barclay, serves as a literary guinea pig through which Jeffers experiments with his budding doctrine of *Inhumanism*.

And like the protagonists of "Tamar" and "Roan Stallion," the Reverend Barclay seeks to escape the banality of his existence; he turns from a life of orthodox religious views to one in which he desires to transcend mundane life through an act of violence. In a letter to James Rorty regarding "The Women at Point Sur," Jeffers explains that:

Another intention, this time a primary one, was to show in action the danger of that "Roan Stallion" idea of "breaking out of humanity",

misinterpreted in the mind of a fool or lunatic ... just as Ibsen in the Wild Duck, made a warning against his own idea in the hands of a fool, so Point Sur was meant to be a warning; but at the same time a reassurance. (Qtd in Ridgeway 115)

Among other things "The Women at Point Sur" represented for Jeffers, as he continued on in the letter, "an attempt to uncenter the human mind from itself." It was a "tragedy, that is an exhibition of essential elements by the burning away through pain and ruin of inertia and the unessential," and it was "a valid study in psychology; the study valid, the psychology morbid ... a partial and fragmentary study of the origin of religions ... [which]
derive from a ‘private impurity’ of some kind in their originators ... [as well as] a satire on human self-importance” (Qtd in Ridgeway 115-6). Central to the theory of Inhumanism is the need for man to amend his arrogant conception that he is somehow a superior creation within the universe; the only aspect of nature fashioned, as orthodox Christianity holds, in the likeness of God. Thus, the figure of the false “savior”, as characterized by Barclay, is the perfect vehicle with which to demonstrate the poisonous side effects of man’s egocentrism.

The theme of the poem begins with a scene in which Reverend Barclay descends from his pulpit and leaves his congregation, having declared blasphemously, “Christianity is false” (21). Thereupon, Barclay withdraws to Point Sur, where he stays with the Morheads and waits for his messianic talents to develop. Having been told by a voice in the air that “God thinks through action, how shall a man but through action?” (24), Barclay regards all nature, “this show”, as “God’s brain” (25). He struggles with his metaphysical inquiry and the notion that God thinks through action, concluding at last that there are two alternatives for him:

gather disciples

To fling like bullets against God and discover him:

Or else commit an act so monstrous, so irreparable

It will stand like a mountain of rock, serve you for fulcrum

To rest the lever. (33)

On the Morhead ranch lives Natalia Morhead, whose husband is away fighting in the war, her four-year-old daughter, Rachel, her crippled father-in-law, and Faith Heriot with
whom Natalia shares a lesbian relationship. The critic and Jeffers anthologizer Tim Hunt examines Barclay thus:

In “Theory of Truth” Jeffers wrote that Dr. Barclay “touched” the answers to the questions he posed to himself, “but presently lost them again in the glimmer of insanity”. He touched truth, Jeffers would say, when he concluded that the essence of life is strain or constant change. If this is true then humanity composes a part, albeit a rather insignificant part, of all that might be designated as natural and supernatural ... Dr. Barclay, however, must pick at this truth until it festers and becomes injurious to his health. Above all, he must employ logic by which he attaches trailers to the truth, handles to which he might cling. (241)

What could be more logical, and arguably more insane, than to conclude that if all acts are demonstrations of the divine, then everything is permissible? The old values of society are made meaningless by such logic; and until new values are given, one cannot speak of good and evil. In the absence of moral absolutes, one is free to follow wish wherever it might lead.

As Barclay proceeds to gather disciples among the Indians and to tell Natalia that, under his new dispensation, her relationship with Faith is blameless, the Reverend posits:

When you go in,

Kiss Faith Heriot and tell her that what was right is wrong, what was wrong’s right, the old laws are abolished,

They cannot be crossed nor broken, they’re dead. The sanction is dead.

This interval
There is nothing wicked, nothing strange in the world. What the heart
desires, or any part of the body,

That is the law. (37)

Ultimately he mocks those who try to enclose their lives with definitions of right and
wrong and thereby place scruples in the path of discovery. Absolute freedom is the same
thing of course as pure license. Any restraint in one’s actions implies discrimination and
sets up categories. As a test of himself, Barclay turns to “freeing” the flesh and, finding
that for eight dollars the Indian Maruca will prostitute herself, he declares unblinkingly, “I
have bought salvation” (45). Having preached to his “multitude”: “I have come to
establish you / Over the last deception, to make men like God / Beyond good and evil.
There is no will but discovery” (64). It is not without irony that Jeffers foreshadows
Barclay’s ultimate downfall. The Reverend mistakenly believes that by breaking all of
society’s taboos; he is transcending its constraints. But in reality, he is actually
reinforcing the supremacy of these conventions. He is not creating a new and freer
society; he is merely reacting against the established one. And in fact, he is encouraging
the formation of a meaner and uglier civilization than is already in place.

Barclay determines that the deed sufficiently monstrous to put himself “outside of
good and evil” is to rape his twenty-year-old daughter, April. “God has come home to
you” (80), he proclaims from above her. All of these episodes provide foreshadowing and
a sense of development in Barclay’s psychological decline. Interspersed among these
strange vignettes are narratorial apostrophes; in one discussing the divine presence, the
poet says:

I made glass puppets to speak of him, they splintered in my hand and have
cut me, they are heavy with my blood ... sometime

Shall fashion images great enough to face him

A moment and speak while they die. (73)

As the poem continues, and the many sexual liaisons are revealed, April believes that after her rape that she has become her brother Edward, and Barclay’s messianic movement shows signs of deterioration. The narrator returns, echoing what Jeffers had discussed in the letter to Rorty:

I say that if the mind centers on humanity

And is not dulled, but remains powerful enough to feel its own and the others, the mind will go mad.

It is needful to remember the stone and the ocean. (97-8)

The poet, here, reiterates one of the basic tenets of Inhumanism, the intention “to uncenter the human mind from itself.” The Jeffersian ideal is for man to shift his focus from one where the “self” is privileged, to a more cosmic vision where the “self” is largely unimportant. The image of God is not so much reflected in the face of humanity, as it is in nature – in the permanence of a “stone” and the expanse of an “ocean.”

April, under the stress of her predicament, shoots herself - “turned the love inward” - and Barclay, realizing that his disciples are falling away, heads north alone. Lying near death, three days later, at the mouth of a mine, Barclay concludes the poem, “I am inexhaustible” (176). The legacy of Barclay can best be described as:

Behind him he left death, madness, sexual riot, and disillusionment - the fruits of his crusade against “false” Christianity - for he misunderstood the great responsibility of his first act of renunciation. Worse yet, as Jeffers
emphasized, the Barclay type is inexhaustible, for religious zealots will continue to appear and to ignore the God manifest in nature. (Morris 36)

In conclusion, Barclay acts in such a way as to prove that he is outside causal relations, outside the web of necessity, free in a godless universe, or rather as free as God who is the universe and who moves through all things. And like Tamar and California before him, Barclay does perceive a glimmer of the Jeffersian truth, of “transhuman magnificence,” only to the muddle the finding in his private impurity. For Jeffers, “Tamar,” “Roan Stallion,” and “The Women at Point Sur” represent experiments in Inhumanist philosophy as it is embodied in the individual. Each of his protagonists sought to transcend the confines of consciousness, and inevitably, each collapsed back on such limits. If the doctrine of Inhumanism is more experientially based than ideologically, then Tamar is experience incarnate. And it is the violence of her experiences which doom her. California, on the other hand, personifies the Inhumanist ideal of a positive union with the divine; except that she fails to fully embrace her transformation, thus sealing her fate. And finally, the Reverend Barclay illustrates the Inhumanist concept which warns mankind to exchange his egocentric view of the world for a broader cosmic vision, in order to achieve “transhuman magnificence.”
Chapter 3

*Inhumanism* in Society

In Jeffers’ first period of ideological development, his chief endeavor was to find a satisfactory approach to the problem of life as he saw it. Beginning with “Dear Judas,” Jeffers began focusing on the problems raised by his earlier narratives and on the new theme of their impact in a broader social context.

The messianic Reverend Barclay of “The Women at Point Sur” scarcely exhausted Jeffers’ interest in the figure of the savior because in “Dear Judas” the poet does not create a fictive embodiment but confronts the historical Jesus himself. Jeffers’ Jesus and Judas return two thousand years later to the events of the crucifixion, and Jesus is shown to be hungry for power over his followers, his personality having taken on this bent because of gnawing misgivings concerning his legitimacy. In a crucial scene with Mary, Jesus repeats a question he has asked several times previously, “I am either a bastard or the son of God: who was my father?” (30). Mary breaks down sobbing. Her refusal to answer is answer enough.

Jesus wavers, but his faith is too hard-won, and the consequences of doubt too unthinkable:

To go and let the mind sprawl from its throne, in the desert again, talking with demons in the morning
And counting the moonlights with white pebbles ... there's a black one for you my mother ... until this flesh

Falls off, to fall starving across a wind-furrow between the stone and the sand and find repose

This time in earnest, would be a weakness ... not to return to. (31)

Jesus must choose between the truth that kills and the lie that gives life. “It is enough,” he tells Mary, “Stand up. Whatever you’d answered, I’d not / Be weak enough to let go the faith that is the fountain of my life. / ... I will never question you again” (31).

Out of private myth, not mere delusion, Jesus has forged a vision of actual truth, though it is only through the distorting lens of that myth that he sees and interprets it:

He is lovelier than the desert dawns. Three ... four times in my life I have been one with our Father,
The night and the day, the dark seas and the little fountains, the sown and the desert, the morning star
And the mountains against morning and the mountain cedars, the sheep and the wolves, the Hebrews and the free nomads
That eat camels and worship a stone, and the sun cures them like salt into the marrow in the bones;
All, all, and times future and past
The hanging leaves on one tree: there is not a word nor a dream nor any way to declare his loveliness
Except to have felt and known, to have been the beauty. Even the cruelties and agonies that my poor Judas
Chokes on: were there in the net, shining. (32)

These lines seem to express Jeffers' own central mystic vision; one in which man stands outside the "net" of humanity and comprehends "all things in all time." In other words, the poet feels that for man to achieve a true understanding of the Inhumanist ideal of "transhuman magnificence," he must look beyond the limits of his own finite existence into the cosmos. And even more importantly, man must accept the fact that his existence is a relatively insignificant component of this infinite cosmos.

As for the character of Judas, Jeffers provides this commentary:

The mind of Judas, as represented in the gospels, is obscure and sick and divided. It may be tragic, or it may be reptilian, according to the motive that drives him; but surely the motive was not mere lust for money. He was a man who had been entrusted with money, and apparently was honest; he had been accepted among Christ's disciples; his despair at the end was so deep that he threw back the silver to those from whom he had received it, and went and hanged himself. One is left free to imagine his mind, provided only that it tallies with his acts; and I have imagined it as skeptical, humanitarian, pessimistic and sick with pity. (Qtd in Ridgeway 166)

This "pity" is a universal sensitivity to the pain of all living things, a consciousness of suffering. Thus, when one of the other apostles casually wings a bird, Judas winces with its pain and reflects:

Peter has flung a stone and has broken the hawk's wing.

The trustful hawk that perched in the fig-tree: now it will never again
rejoice in the blowing air
And blue spaces, but trail pain till it starves. Its wound saves many
sparrows? I know it. Oh Simon
Well called the Stone: what a net of cruelty
Life gasps in, inextricably involved; so that I know not what to pray for
but annihilation
For a blessing on life. The bird's pain's nothing, though it grinds in my
heart; all the groaning world, Simon.
Flogged slaves and tortured criminals, and bitter deaths of the innocent.
Who created it? Who can endure it? Does no one,
Not even our Lord, feel it all but I alone: My soul is dark with images, and
all are dreadful,
Sword, scourge and javelin, and the Roman gibbet,
Women dying horribly in hopeless birth-pangs, men dying of thirst and
hunger, the miners dying in the mines
Under the stinking torches, in summer by the Red Sea, consumed with
labor in the metal darkness;
And the ankles eaten with rust, and the blood-striped backs, of the oars in
a thousand galleys: it would be salvation
To think that I could willingly bear the suffering - if it were possible - for
all that lives, I alone:
I dare not think so. (17)
Judas' pity is a protest against the conditions of life itself. He would willingly transform his suffering consciousness into a redemptive one by taking universal agony on himself; that is, he would assume the role of a savior. Nevertheless, that would require an assertion of divinity, and in the very helplessness of his suffering Judas finds only the irony of his own solitude, the isolation that defines him as man. Jeffers' empathetic characterization of Judas is examined in the following criticism:

Judas' vision is unassailable in its own terms. The world is in pain; indeed, far more so than he imagines. What Judas feels is only the visible suffering of men and animals. But for Jeffers, the world as such is pain, the condition of balanced agony, of force and counterforce, release and reengagement that he describes in "Point Sur" as "strain". The mineral agony of great rocks and ocean beds, the vast convulsions of stars, were no less "real" than the pain of living creatures. The world's agony was equally distributed; the so-called physical universe, being relatively less sentient (not insentient), could bear proportionately more, whereas man, the most sentient, could bear pitifully little, and Judas Iscariot, as Jeffers' limitary case, could bear none at all. For Judas, the existence of single case of suffering is enough (since any suffering implies all) to invalidate the universe. (Nolte 154)

Nolte's analysis delimits Judas to be too consumed by humanity to ever transcend it. In this way, Judas is the Jeffersian antihero, not in the orthodox religious sense of Christ's betrayer, but because he is the paradigm of what disgusts Jeffers about mankind – self-
absorption and the lack of any insight into the cosmos. In Jeffers' philosophy pain is the very condition of creation and itself. Judas' appeal brings the following response:

Jesus: To other men I say *Be merciful*, to you alone

*Be cruel.* Life is not to be lived without some balance.

Judas: I knew that you had no power to save me. (11)

Jesus tries to convey the cosmic vision of necessity without which reconciliation to the world is impossible. But Judas remains philosophically immovable. He cannot escape that "net" of humanity with all its moral implications. Because Jesus fails to share his view of suffering, Judas concludes that he cannot be God; yet if he did share it, he would be equally helpless, and hence no God. Only by an act of transcendence can Judas be saved, but he is incapable of it - the logic of pity dooms him. The character of Judas, as well as the entire poem, serves as a transitional phase in Jeffes' career, a point supported in this criticism:

It is not too much to say that the difference expressed here between Judas and Jesus is the difference between the Jeffers of "Tamar" and the mature poet of the thirties. But Judas is not merely a version of Jeffers' transcended self, nor is Jesus simply the spokesman of his later doctrine.

(Brophy 159)

Like "Dear Judas" which returns to the theme of a savior used in "The Women at Point Sur," "Give Your Heart to the Hawks" visits the same wild, isolated, mountainous coast of California that is the setting of "Tamar" and "Roan Stallion." In his speech on "The Poet in Democracy," Jeffers comments about the use of the California coast in his poetry:
It is a relief to turn to the simplest and commonest theme in my verse; and that is just the landscape of the Monterey Coast range. I should say that this coast is not only the scene of my narrative verse, but also the chief actor in it. These mountains rise sheer from the ocean; they are cut by deep gorges and are heavy with brush and forest ... many deer; hawk and vulture, eagle and heron, fly here, as well as the sea-birds and shore birds; and there are clouds and sea-fog in summer, and fine storms in winter.”

(Qtd in Bennett 185-6)

The setting of “Give Your Heart to the Hawks” is important because the poem expands on the Inhumanist themes developed in “Dear Judas” by not only examining how the hero’s actions affect society, but also how such actions are reflected in nature.

The plot of the narrative centers around three characters: Lance, his wife Fayne, and Lance’s brother, Michael. Lance personifies the puritan qualities of his fanatically religious father. He is somber, stern and introverted, while Michael is wildly irresponsible, impetuous and inordinately cheerful.

At a drunken party on the beach, Michael and Fayne impulsively make love. With only Fayne as a witness, Lance kills his brother in a fit of rage and half-madness. From the moment of the murder, the poem becomes a study in Lance’s attempt to free himself from his overwhelming sense of guilt. Three alternatives are open to him. He can accept the punishment of society; he can pray for forgiveness from the God of his father; or he can break out of humanity and purify himself in nature.
Jeffers symbolizes the dialogue between these three alternatives in the characters of Lance, Fayne, and the old man. Fayne argues that man must keep his personal integrity by not succumbing to the consolations of society or Christianity:

To be able to live in spite of the pain and that horror and the dear blood on your hands, and your father's God,

To be able to go on in pure silence

In your own power. (45)

Tortured by his inability to accept either his father's or his wife's solution and too weak to act upon his own conviction that he must make restitution to society, Lance curses God, tries to kill the symbolic hawk, and ultimately destroys himself through self-inflicted wounds. Jeffers portrays the deranged state of Lance's mind through vivid, horrifying scenes of violence. Without pity, Lance attacks his father's shaky belief in God and spiritually kills the old man by forcing him to admit that God does not exist. The symbolic destruction of nature is even more horrifying. Lance compulsively hunts and kills every hawk he can find. When this fails to satisfy his insatiable urge to destroy, he methodically tortures a wounded hawk. Lance is finally driven to self-destruction by the realization that he cannot break the indomitable will of the hawk, the symbol of nature. As Lance and Fayne travel, Lance becomes increasingly delirious from blood poisoning, which originated when he compulsively tore his hand on barbed wire as he confessed the murder to his father. Trying to encourage her husband, Fayne says, "We have come out of the world and are free, more hawk than human" (100), and near the end of the poem she summarizes their progress:

Where you and I
Have come to, is a dizzy and lonely place on a height; we have to peel off
Some humanness here or it will be hard to live. If you could think that
all human feelings, repentance
And blood-thirst too, are not very important in so vast a world ... We’re going until the world changes, you and I like the young hawks
Going hunting; we’ll take the world by the throat and make him give us
What we desire. (105)

In contrast to the human weaknesses displayed by Lance and the old man, Fayne exemplifies the fierce, independent spirit of the hawk. Her indomitable spirit is always striving to transcend human limitations because she believes that Lance can be saved only through a purification in nature. In a visionary dream, Fayne is told that Lance’s stigmatic wounds and broken spirit can be healed if he will bathe in the sacred waters of “Laurel Spring.” Fayne leads the dying Lance on a symbolic journey into the high mountains where he will be absolved of his crime by the sacred air and pure waters. The poem ends on a paradoxical note. Lance commits suicide without ever being able to free himself from his tormented conscience. In spite of his death, Fayne still emerges triumphant because she carries a savior in her womb, as she exults, “I could not keep you, but your child in my body / Will change the world” (107). The critic Frajam Taylor offers this interpretation of the poem in respect to its dominant theme which is concerned with man’s attempt to “break with humanity”:

She [Fayne] could not keep Lance for all her fighting but his child she will keep. He shall be borne and raised so that one day he will change the world. The tragic story ends here, with the undefeated Fayne - the truly
hawk-hearted - making an affirmation of life. Note this affirmation of life -
this great "Yes" to life - plays a very important part in Jeffers' philosophy,
but it is necessary to remember that mere affirmation is not enough to this
poet. His ideal and demand is the extreme affirmation of the hawk.
Strength, hardness and power - these belong to the hawks: Jeffers would
have them belong to men as well. (43)

Taylor is correct in asserting that the hawk is an appropriate symbol for Inhumanism, an
expression of the divine in nature.

In "Such Counsels You Gave to Me," Jeffers returns to a realistic setting in which
aberrant behavior is more readily understandable in terms of the facts and ideas of the
poem. It is an examination of the hero's struggle and ultimate failure to transcend his
situation by means of physical action, but its most significant achievement is his decision
to assume the societal penalty for both his own and his mother's crimes.

Howard Howren, who is a medical student at Berkeley, returns to his father's farm
to humble himself by begging for money to sustain him through his studies. Already
physically exhausted and infected by tuberculosis, Howard has fought hard to earn his
position at the top of the class. As he arrives, he meets first a spectral image of himself, a
doppelganger, then his mother, Barbara, who is much younger than her husband, and his
sixteen-year-old sister, France. Howard argues that, given a fair chance, he can continue
to show his scholastic superiority and to meet the other demands of an academic life.
Throughout the poem there are notations of how he conquers the weaknesses of his body,
but at one point, in a self-revealing dream, he sees himself as a dog to which he has nailed
wings in the laboratory. The act of nailing on the wings is cruel, but how else, Howard
wonders, can a dog be given flight? In the dream, the wings tear off and the dog falls “along the facade of a public building.” Representing Howard’s effort to overcome himself, the dream symbolically foreshadows the resolution of the poem - Howard’s determination to surrender himself into the hands of social justice.

With a forced reasoning far too biased for the scientific mind of a brilliant medical student, Howard deduces, according to Mendel’s laws of hereditary traits, that, because his sister’s eyes are brown but the eyes of both parents blue, she is the result of his mother’s adulterous union with a lover. This thought, interestingly enough, makes Howard’s mother “more real and dear” for him “ a living woman / With her own loves and lawlessness” (21). If this information endears her more to him at the beginning of the poem, it is significant that her similar argument at the end, “Good and evil are too much mixed” (68), does not induce him to become her lover, as she desires.

Howard’s father is simply not his son’s kind of man. He is a rugged individual of unsophisticated ways and robust appetites. His son’s dedication to science is beyond his comprehension, especially when the boy could come back to the farm and live a “good” life of outdoor work. Trying to provide a simple explanation, Howard tells his father,

I want to know

What life is; how it works. I want to discover new things about it. I guess

most of all I want to

Succeed. (28)

But such a goal is beyond his comprehension, and the father pleads “almost tenderly” for Howard to return to the natural beauty of his home.
Because old Howren, who is despised by his wife, refuses to provide his son with the money he needs, Howard is ripe for his mother’s suggestion that he use the vial of potassium cyanide which he carries, should suicide be required, to give his father a “heart attack”, since his death would release the property to his wife and son. In Howard’s partial defense, Jeffers has Howard arrange a kind of cyanide roulette, but the father loses instead of the son.

Howard’s mother, however, is not yet satisfied, for she takes up again her plan to have her son as her lover. Howard, who once told his father, “I don’t want women, I hate their faces” (31), is not interested in her offer, but before he turns himself in to the authorities for the murder, he begs her to show him her “beautiful breasts ... And let me cool my face on the white snows. / My life will find its meaning” (64). Howard’s mother misunderstands his interest and renews her offer, from which he recoils, calling her a whore and saying, “I know now, I’ve been your creature all my life. The tortured ambition was yours, God how you worked in me -” (66). When he first came home, Howard warned his mother to be careful, if she still sleeps with her husband: “It would be cruel to breed another like me ...” (16).

Having resisted some of his mother’s charms, Howard begins to help her redress, and Barbara begins to scream - “while a cold inner eye ... watched itself scream / And watched the mirror of its mind split into fragments” (69). Her will, so long and so intently focused on its objectives, simply shatters under the failure of this climactic effort.

Running out of the house, Howard meets his doppelganger again, which asks, “Why did you not / Complete your cycle? You returned to the breasts of infancy, / Not to the womb of birth” (70). Howard answers vaguely, “I loved her.” This ghostly image
represents what Jeffers would term as the potential in Howard to transcend base humanity
and it takes him to task for his reluctance to "break out of (his) humanity":

You are typical: your fever
And your failure from the one fountain. You wanted discovery
And then refused it, desired and yet not-desired, loved and yet hated
The tension of the divided mind drove you on
And brought you down; that tension, the spurs and curb-bit
Of the present human world including its sciences.(70)

Jeffers' use of the poetic device of the doppelganger is a complicated blend of Frueidian
psychology and Nietzschean philosophy, best explained as:

The image criticizes Howard for losing control of the Will to Power, i.e.,
the "tension of the divided mind", and it accuses him twice of having "the
split will". Howard's doppelganger represents another side of himself.
Howard has acknowledged that it was her ambition that inspired him to
succeed, but it is his own sense of propriety and justice which bridles at her
extreme means. In other words, she is Dionysian and he is Apollonian, but
he cannot control her or join with her, which is the symbolic meaning of
her incestuous offer. Howard's own awareness of the differences between
himself and his mother is represented by the self-critical doppelganger,
which can judge and accuse but cannot act for itself. (Zaller 137)

It is important to recognize the progress demonstrated by Howard's decision to defy his
spectral double and to stand trial: "There are certain duties," he says to the image, "Even
for ... modern man" (72). "Such Counsels You Gave to Me" and the volume of the same
name mark the close of the middle period of Jeffers' poetic and philosophic development, a phase in which the poet expanded his field of examination and turned from the individual to the more credible and genuinely involved life of the family with all its social implications.

The significance of "Dear Judas" as a poem bridging the first and second phases in Jeffers' development is underscored by its overt examination of Christianity and of its power and weaknesses, the mixture of humanity and divinity. As compared to "The Women at Point Sur," "Dear Judas" reflects a more mature Inhumanism, particularly in its preference for nature. "Give Your Heart to the Hawks," also demonstrates a maturation of the poet's philosophical posturing. The scope and implications of the narrative are broader than in the first phase. There is a stronger emphasis on society and its concern for the Frasers and that of the family for society is intended by Jeffers as a prefigurement of the fully-realized Inhumanist who has discarded his egocentric views.
Chapter 4
The Inhumanist Incarnate

The third period of Jeffers’ career began with Be Angry at the Sun and Other Poems (1941), in which the poet sought to separate himself from the contemporary events of World War II, but found that he must not and could not do so. The drums of war had again begun their beat around the world, their ominous note coinciding with Jeffers’ gradual realization of his ideas. This new awareness was apparent in a tendency of increasing momentum and justification to move away from society toward isolation and identification with a Nature that was unpolluted by the affairs of humanity. Current events provided daily proof of the poet’s worst suspicions about the insistence of humankind on busying itself with aggrandizement, oppression, and meaningless luxury. The enormous detachment characterizing many of the early long narratives gave way to a personal emotional response that welled up almost uncontrollably in Jeffers.

In “The Stars Go Over the Lonely Ocean,” the poet is “Unhappy about some far off things / That are not my affair,” and, in the final stanza, an ill-disguised wild boar speaks:

“Keep clear of the dupes that talk democracy
And the dogs that talk revolution,
Drunk with talk, liars and believers.
I believe in my tusks.

Long live freedom and damn the ideologies,"

Said the gamey black-maned wild boar

Tusking the turf on Mal Paso Mountain. (134)

“Poetry is not private monologue,” Jeffers wrote in the Note to the volume, “but I think it is not public speech either; and in general it is the worse for being timely.” Jeffers felt that the collapse of a civilization was at hand; it was not “the world’s end, / But only the fall of a civilization”, he wrote in “I Shall Laugh Purely.” He expected another age to follow the total destruction of war, for, as he explained in the same poem, “all that pain was mainly a shift in power ... ‘Oh Christian era, / Make a good end.’” The majority of the poems of this volume touch on themes of withdrawal, isolation, and even resignation. These themes are evident in “Come Little Birds”, where Jeffers addresses his elderly father, who has appeared to him from the realm of death: “Forgive me. I dishonored and wasted all your hopes of me, one by one; yet I loved you well” (121). Carrying the mood of self-examination still further in “For Una”, Jeffers wrote:

Tomorrow I will take up that heavy poem again

About Ferguson, deceived and jealous man

Who bawled for the truth, the truth, and failed to endure

Its first least gleam. That poem bores me, and I hope will bore

Any sweet soul that reads it, being some ways

My very self but mostly my antipodes;

But having waved the heavy artillery to fire

I must hammer on to an end. (136)
Ferguson is the hypocritical hero of “Mara,” and Jeffers’ estimate of him and of the poem is fairly accurate, as the poet felt obliged to hammer home the message in “Mara,” even though, as he suspects in “For Una,” no one will hear the poetry for the hammering.

At the beginning of “Mara,” Bruce Ferguson is visited by a phantom, the now-familiar doppelganger. Ferguson, “all wants fulfilled,” is disturbed because “life in general looked dirty, senseless and destitute / In his dark times” (4), perhaps a reflection of the disdain of Inhumanism for the self-satisfied. The phantom looks exactly like Ferguson, and it asks him either “How long will you be satisfied?” or “How long / Will you endure it?” (4), an echo of the need central to Inhumanism for permanence. The rest of the poem is about Ferguson, who avoids truth even as he searches for it, until at last, hopelessly divided within himself, he takes his own life by hanging. An early episode in the poem reveals Ferguson’s peculiar hypocrisy. As he is about to accept Mary Monahan’s invitation to comfort her in her husband’s absence, Ferguson tells her not to “call it love.” He explains, “The girl I love is five miles from here” (9), meaning his wife, Fawn. Mary, who is astonished, blurts out, “Everyone knows she sleeps with your brother / When you’re away” (9).

It is true that Allen Ferguson and Bruce’s wife are lovers, but, unlike earlier Jeffers’ characters, they question themselves about their deceit and rationalize that their actions reflect the state of the world. Fawn even suggests to Allen that with time they can “make this clean” (13). Ferguson, off in an upland pasture, is gnawed by suspicion, but he concludes his debate with himself:

Either we are animals ... clever in some ways,
Degenerate in others, and follow instinct,
Or else we are something else and ought to do otherwise. (15)

In a narratorial intrusion similar to those of “The Women at Point Sur,” Jeffers asks the Lord:

out of these ordinary

Elements of common life, these two or three persons

Who not without cause question it,

Can any discovery shine, or a hawk rise? (26)

Bruce searches for discovery, but he fails to rise. He delivers a true Inhumanist sentiment as he punishes himself by walking home from a dance, after sending Fawn and Allen home in the car: “You dark young mountains are going up in the world, we the people down. Why? Because / Nobody knows the difference between right and wrong” (41). These lines presage the more fully evolved philosophical statements of “The Inhumanist”, who like Bruce is also disillusioned with humanity and seeks to “break out of” it.

The phantom calling herself Mara joins Bruce and tells him, “You used to want to know the truth about things ... But now you are lost in passion” (42). After his father’s death, Bruce moves into the deceased man’s room, abandoning Fawn and devoting himself to study. He discovers Spengler’s theory of the waves of civilization, and decides that his own age is beyond the crest, headed down. Bruce has made a point of not checking on Fawn and his brother, often going out of his way to demonstrate his trust, as in walking home from the dance; but, after a night of drinking, Bruce discovers more information which questions his wife’s fidelity. Going home, he breaks up before the pressure of opposing images in his mind: “the one of Fawn dead / With a sliced throat, the other of
himself self-hanged” (64). He chooses the second option and hangs himself in the barn; “He no longer / Bawl for the truth, the truth, though it were poisonous” (64). The poet observes:

The cause is far beyond good and evil,

* * *

There are no angels and no devils,

Christ unopposed would corrupt all. (65-6)

As Fawn says, however, Bruce’s death “has given us freedom and happiness” (66). When the self-questioning idealist solves his frustration with suicide, the world of Fawn, Allen, and presumably that of Mary Monahan feels no loss, but rather a sense of liberation, freedom from conscience. Nevertheless, Jeffers ends the poem with a warning: “Look to it: prepare for the long winter: spring is far off” (67). The poet, here, wrenches humankind’s attention from their own self-deceptions and self-involvements, exhorting them to recognize the divinity manifest in the natural order of the cosmos. Bruce embodies Jeffersian values in that he sought truth; yet, having bawled for the truth, he could not bear it.

Between the first and last poems in Be Angry at the Sun, Jeffers demonstrates a significant change in attitude toward the contemporary problem of the truth-seeking man. In “Mara,” Bruce purportedly desires to know the truth, but is ill-equipped to deal with the ramifications of such knowledge, whereas in the title poem, “Be Angry at the Sun,” the poet declares that “public men publish falsehoods” and “America might accept ... corruption and empire”, and one might as well “Be angry at the sun for setting / If these things anger ... [one]” (146).
In perhaps one of his more "human" poems "Contemplation of the Sword," Jeffers writes touchingly of his paternal fear for his sons' future in a war-torn world:

The sword: that is:

I have two sons whom I love. They are twins, they were born in nineteen sixteen, which seemed to us a dark year

Of a great war, and they are now of the age

That war prefers. The first-born is like his mother, he is so beautiful

That persons I hardly know have stopped me on the street to speak of the grave beauty of the boy's face.

The second-born has strength for his beauty; when he strips for swimming

the hero shoulders and wrestler loins

Make him seem clothed. The sword: that is: loathsome disfigurements,

blindness, mutilation, locked lips of boys

Too proud to scream.

Reason will not decide at last: the sword

Will decide. (125)

To God, the poet admits, "now that this thing comes near us again I am finding it hard /

To praise you with a whole heart" (124). And finally, Jeffers opines directly on the specter of war shadows his solitude and poetic life at Tor House in "The Day is a Poem":

Well: the day is a poem: but too much

Like one of Jeffers's, crusted with blood and barbaric omens,

Painful to excess, inhuman as a hawk's cry. (130)
In 1948, Jeffers brought *The Double Axe and Other Poems*, which revealed that the mood of *Be Angry at the Sun* had intensified. The preface to this volume provides Jeffers’ most succinct and thoughtful representation of his *Inhumanist* philosophy:

Its burden, as some previous work of mine, is to present a certain philosophical attitude, which might be called Inhumanism, a shifting of emphasis and significance from man to not-man; the rejection of human solipsism and recognition of the transhuman magnificence. It seems time that our race began to think as an adult does, rather than like an egocentric baby or insane person. This manner of thought and feeling is neither misanthropic nor pessimist nor irreligious, though two or three people have said so, and may again; but it involves a certain detachment. (xxi)

The title poem is divided into two narratives, “The Love and the Hate” and “The Inhumanist.”

The first narrative details a resurrected destroying prodigal who has returned to murder his father, and almost incidentally and yet inevitably, to possess his mother, discovering in his return that he must slay a former friend as well, one who has become his mother’s lover. The central piece, “The Inhumanist,” depicts adultery, hatred of daughter for mother, multiple rape and whipping, attempted suicide and seduction of stepfather by daughter, the old man severing the body of that daughter, the old man’s slaying of the ghost of his youth, a plea to God to exterminate the race of man, and finally a worldwide atomic hellfire. And yet the author has told his readers that “This manner of thought and feeling is neither misanthropic nor pessimist.” It would be difficult not to believe, then, that Jeffers’ ‘lover’s quarrel’ with humanity is here delineated most clearly. The unbridled
and savage anger of "The Love and the Hate" is obvious to the reader, and is a theme present in the concluding poem, "The Inquisitors," which queries, "Such fragile creatures could be so noxious," and, "splitting open the skull of one, find only "A drop of marrow. How could that spoil the earth?" (147-8). Both works posit that the human flaw was inherent, the ruin of the earth only awaited sufficient time for men to ram "their bull-heads / Into the fire-death" (113).

However, even in the "fire-death" at the conclusion of "The Inhumanist," Jeffers does not imagine an end to humanity. The old Inhumanist conjectures:

As for the human race, we could do without it; but it won’t die.

Oh: slightly scorched. It will slough its skin and crawl forth

Like a serpent in spring. (113-4)

Jeffers’ account of the night following the day of atomic armageddon is disturbingly brief, a night during which the old man gives himself "To contemplation of men’s fouled lives and miserable deaths". In conclusion, the old man asserts, "There is ... no remedy. - There are two remedies" (114). The first of these is death, "the only way to be cleansed", as the poet says in "Original Sin." The second is Inhumanist endurance as discussed in "Orca": "and there is endurance, endurance, death’s nobler cousin. Endurance" (144). And so humanity, that "botched experiment that has run wild and ought to be stopped" (81), endures, and more survives. As for the Inhumanist, "About midnight he slept, and arose refreshed / In the red dawn" (114).

"The Inhumanist" is, in many ways, central to Jeffers’ work, in that it outlines both the nature of the Inhumanist quest and the various obstacles confronting one who has
pursued the goal throughout life - the latent but nonetheless real "obscure human fidelities" first mentioned in "Roan Stallion." William Nolte argues that the old man (is) a Grail-seeker - more exactly a God-seeker. Without question it is the search for God in a time of coming catastrophe, and in full view of the whole horror of recorded human existence - the perpetual warfare, the dim fumblings toward freedom, the corruptions of power and the disruptive sexual urgings, and all the various manifestations of human cruelty - it is this search for God which informs the poem. What we are given to see are the Inhumanist's final overcomings, his final breaking free from the last holds which humanity has upon him. (433)

This ultimate transcendence, then, is framed against human-triggered destruction on an immense scale. Ultimately, of course, the entirety of the universe will be destroyed, but a new universe will form. For the immediate present, the spheres interconnect. The old man envisions that "Wildcat, coon and coyote, deer and wild pig, weasel and civet-cat, the stalking puma and the dainty foxes, / Traveled together, they all went the one way" (85) around the mountain; in the opposite direction flow the races of humanity. The beasts move into the past, humanity into the future. Nonetheless, the old man asserts, "I would break both my legs / Liefer than go with beasts or men or angels en masse" (85). In any case, both circle the mountain, and time is cyclical. The Inhumanist says to humanity, "when again you meet the beasts on this pleasant hill ... / I shall be here" (85). The poet reiterates the importance which continuity plays in his philosophy. Specifically, Jeffers is discussing how the existence of most humans is trapped in the unending flux of life, that of the Inhumanist is constant and permanent.
In the Foreword to the present volume, Everson has suggested that in the old Inhumanist, Jeffers has created "something suspiciously like a savior figure," one who "constitutes a model for human conduct" (xvii). Yet the old man rejects the idea of en masse, even as he rejects the role of the savior:

By God ...

I have been in error again; I am full of errors. It is not death they desire,

but the dear pleasure

Of being saved. (99)

The Inhumanist is a savior in spite of himself. He is the Jeffersian hero and other individuals may learn from him, but only by means of finding their own paths.

The old man is not like Barclay of "The Women at Point Sur" whose quest for truth is corrupted by messianic delusions and sexual impropriety. No, the Inhumanist does not allow this to happen, and he remains sane, even gains sanity, and thus emerges whole. In "The Women at Point Sur," Jeffers said that he would sometime "fashion images great enough to face [God] / A moment and speak while they die" (73). The old Inhumanist is such a figure. Even in old age, however, the "obscure human fidelity" continues to draw at him; and so like all mankind, he stumbles toward the place of salvation, for Jeffers the condition of "organic wholeness", his mind growing ever more clear. Truth and beauty alone are the final values, for these represent the condition of God. Man is a part of this wholeness, despite his past transgressions.

The old man speaks to the children of the coming age, advising them in part:

O future children:
Cruelty is dirt and ignorance, a muddy peasant

Beating his horse. Ambition and power-lust

Are for adolescents and defective persons. Moderate kindness

Is oil on a crying wheel: use it. Mutual help

Is necessary: use it when necessary.

But truly, if you love man,

Swallow him in wine: love man in God

Man and nothing but man is a sorry mouthful. (106)

In this sense, even as mankind moves en masse, the individual can still find wholeness in the proper contemplation of God, despite the fact that death "is the only way to be cleansed."

The critic, Diane Ackerman, explains Jeffersian message:

(it) proposes two codes, one dependent upon the other. First, through the contemplation of the transhuman magnificence of natural beauty, one may uncenter one's vision and thereby achieve an essentially nonhuman perspective. Second, since the human condition absolutely implies human contacts and loyalties, human fidelities as well as participation in those drives which are inherent to the race, one must learn the lesson of Stoic endurance, with its resultant possibility of moral victory. Indeed, in order to free the mind for the contemplation of natural beauty, and through it, for the contemplation of the Divinity which has created that beauty, it is imperative that one learn first to endure. (16)
The quotation begs the question “But how does the Inhumanist endure?” Jeffers’ answer is through the use of metaphor - the double axe, for with it one may cut away the errors and even the obligations of the past, just as one may cut away the fears of the future and of death. To be truly nonhuman would be to need no such axe; to be a human requires a weapon. And to use such an axe demands great courage - as well as a nonhuman-centered view. The axe, as the old man says, is “A blade for the flesh, a blade for the spirit: and truth from lies” (54).

It is with this blade that the old man severs the head from the lifeless body of Vere Harnish, as the dead girl has wished. In this action the Inhumanist learns that apparent cruelty may in fact be kindness - and he learns nonhuman strength. After having pleaded with God to exterminate the race of man, and after having heard the voice of God out of the driving storm say, “I will; but not now,” the old man hears his axe neighing like a stallion:

“You wish to kill,” he said,

“Every man that we meet. You two-face violence,” he said, “on the
foresweep enemies,

And on the backsweep friends. But that is for God to do not for you and me; and he has promised it”. (110)

The Inhumanist flings the axe out into the sea and imagines peace. But the axe floats to the surface, swims to shore, and climbs back to the old man’s hand. The inherent violence of the man’s subconscious is overshadowed by the violences of the conscious self, but even so, the Inhumanist addresses his weapon:

“You old gray gnawer,
Be quiet now. Bird with two beaks, two-petalled flower of steel, you rank blue flesh-fly

With two biting wings: will you stop buzzing?

Though you are as hungry to hack down heaven and earth, it is peace now.

We are as old and alone

As the last mammoth in white Siberia". (111-2)

The axe, however, giggles and the day of atomic hellfire is touched off. The weapon has a will of its own; its double blade is not specific but rather universally human. The axe, ultimately, has created this holocaust: “The day like a burning brazen wheel heavily revolved, and in the evening / A tribe of panting fugitives ran through the place” (113).

From the very beginning, the Inhumanist is in search of his “red dawn." The poem opens with its first several sections devoted to a contemplation of the Divine, defining a proposed deity which is “Not a tribal nor an anthropoid God," one which is conscious, one which has generated a cosmos in which there is nothing that is not “alive”, and one which is immortal, even though the cosmos itself is primarily characterized by continual change: “The hills dissolve and are liquidated; the stars shine themselves dark” (53).

And once again in “The Inhumanist,” Jeffers returns to the theme of the intolerable strain of the human condition which he dealt with at great length in “The Women at Point Sur." The old man feels this tension even as he moves away from its implications. He explains:

all the galactic universes
Are organized on one pattern, the eternal round-about, the heavy nucleus
and whirling electrons, the leashed
And panting runners going nowhere; frustrated flight, unrelieved strain,
endless return - all - all -
The eternal fire-wheel. (67)

In contemplation of this, the Inhumanist hears the voice of God crying out, “I am caught. I am in the net .../ I see my doom” (67). The old man laughs and imagines that an Oedipus or a Lear has given issue to the ghostly voice, toys with the idea that human passion “is only a reflex of / Much greater torment” (68). But he strengthens his resolve for endurance and then, having ground down his old axe, he further resolves to pass beyond tragedy:

Every tragic poet has believed it possible. And every Savior, Buddha down
to Karl Marx,
Has preferred peace. Tragedy, shall we say, is a cult of pain, and salvation
of happiness:
Choose and be sifted. (83)

Thus, in order to pass beyond humanity, one must pass beyond the need for tragedy, and the Inhumanist says, “I will grind no more axes” (82). This Jeffersian hero will not go mad; the old Inhumanist will endure, survive even doomsday.

The shorter poems that constitute the remainder of The Double Axe volume are expressions, as Jeffers pointed out in the preface, of his Inhumanist philosophy. In “Cassandra”, Jeffers castigates the “religion-venders and political men” who pour new lies on the old, while he and Cassandra tried to remain “wise” (117). “Pearl Harbor” criticizes
America because, "The war that we have carefully for years provoked / Catches us unprepared, amazed and indignant" (122), and the poem, "Teheran," reveals little hope for the peace made there because Russia and the United States remain "two bulls in one pasture" (128). Both poems confirm the poet's diagnosis of a dying civilization which ignores the beauty of things as truly God's. In "What of It?" Jeffers expresses disinterest in modern man with his experiments and technology, for man "has had too many doctors, leaders, and saviors: let him alone. It may be that bitter nature will cure him" (140). "The state is a blackmailer, / Honest or not," Jeffers declares in "New Year's Dawn, 1947", his appraisal of the state of affairs:

There is no valid authority

In church nor state, custom, scripture nor creed,

But only in one's own conscience and the beauty of things.

Doggedly I think again: One's conscience is a tick oracle,

Worked by parents and nurse-maids, the pressure of the people,

And the delusions of dead prophets: trust it not.

Wash it clean to receive the transhuman beauty: then trust it. (142)

No thought is apparent out there; indeed, thought would be an intrusion on the natural divinity of that consistency. Only the "I" thinks. And Jeffers, ever mistrustful of social convention, rejects the assumption that thinking is an end in itself, in favor of one which forces the individual to go beyond humanity and human institutions.

In 1954, Hungerfield and Other Poems was published. Una Jeffers had died four years earlier, and this work reflects the poet's sense of emptiness at her loss. Una's death reminded Jeffers of Hungerfield, "the man at Horse Creek, / Who fought with Death" (5).
Hawl Hungerfield, who believes that he once won over Death in a hand-to-hand struggle in a French hospital during the war, sits by the deathbed of his mother, Alcema, and waits to grapple with Death again, and thereby save his mother’s life. Hungerfield does win a second time, but fails to understand that the old woman is prepared for and welcomes Death. She is angered by her son’s disruption of the order of things, and repays him with lies and accusations that breed violence and more death in the family. Hungerfield’s wife and son are drowned, and he kills his brother, Ross, for being negligent. Then Hungerfield, whom his mother has called a “worse monster” than Death, soaks the house with sets the himself and the house on fire.

That death comes naturally when it should and that man is a fool to want it otherwise is the obvious lesson of “Hungerfield.” The poem, which is a product of Jeffers’ reconciliation to his bereavement, ends by acknowledging that of Una “nothing human remains”:

You are earth
And air; you are in the beauty of the ocean
... you are alive
And well in the tender young grass rejoicing
When soft rain falls all night. (23)

The critic Helen Vendler, never a great supporter of Jeffers, had this to say about the volume: “Together the poems are sobering indication that the poet is burnt out with nothing more to say, except to repeat his well-worn conviction that the beauty of things is preferable to man and his affairs” (94). However, in “De Rerum Virtute,” Jeffers admits “that man too is beautiful”, and continues: “One light is left us: the beauty of things, not
men; / The immense beauty of the world, not the human world." The beauty of things, according to Jeffers, "means virtue and value in them," but they are "in the beholder's eye." Beauty is "the human mind's translation of the transhuman / Intrinsic glory" (105) of things. According to Jeffers' logic, the beauty of things is not accessible to everyone, unless the individual is willing to, and capable of, following the Inhumanist example of self-denial and self-discipline.

Of the remaining poems in the volume, only "The Old Stonemason" serves to further illuminate Jeffers's poetic ideology, particularly his concept of finding permanence - "things that will remain two thousand years from now". In the poem, Jeffers pictures himself as the old stonemason, who had "much in common with these old rockheads" with which he built his house. He explains:

I have shared in my time the human illusions, the muddy foolishness
And craving passions, but something thirty years ago pulled me
Out of the tide-wash; I must pretend
To be one of the people.

... The old granite stones, those are my people;
Hard heads and stiff wits but faithful, not fools, not chatterers;
And the place where they stand today they will stand also tomorrow. (112)

For Jeffers the granite stones represent the continuity of nature, of things that are beautiful and true in their permanence.

A final aspect of the poetry remains to be discussed. The year after Jeffers' death, Random House published The Beginning and the End and Other Poems, a collection of
forty-eight shorter poems. In the title poem, Jeffers presents a summary of his world view. He observes:

The human race is one of God’s sense organs,

Immoderately alerted to feel good and evil
And pain and pleasure. (9-10)

The mission of man, the poet asserts, is “To find and feel,” to register the sense impressions of God’s world. Men stand in relationship to God, he believes, as poems do to men:

As Titan-mooded Lear or Prometheus reveal to their audience
Extremes of pain and passion they will never find
In their own lives but through the poems as sense-organs
They feel and know them: so the exultations and agonies of beasts and men

Are sense-organs of God. (10)

In “Let Them Alone”, Jeffers posits: “If God has been good enough to give you a poet /
Then listen to him” (35). To which he adds, “A poet is one who listens / To nature and his own heart” (35), and this sentiment, as romantic and hackneyed as it may be, serves Jeffers well. The poet’s poems are sense organs reporting the universe of God to the people. And to the very end, Jeffers insisted on his peculiar reduction of humanity to a level that was usually below that of the beauty of things. Perhaps, now, it is best to allow the poet to speak for his Inhumanist philosophy and its poetic statements:

Whether the people believe

Your bitter fountain? Truly men hate the truth ...
Therefore the poets honey their truth with lying;

... new lies on the old, and are praised for kindly

Wisdom. Poor bitch, be wise.

No: you'll still mumble in a corner a crust of truth, to men

And gods disgusting. - You and I, Cassandra. (117)
Jeffers, who preferred “the beauty of things,” saw society as incapable of achieving and maintaining a sense of genuine identity because it is doomed to be self-corrupting and disappointingly inferior to the endless magnificence of nature. Jeffers, who saw humanity risen but lately from the sea slime, believed that mankind in society had failed nature. Where the Romantic found himself eventually alienated from nature, and post-Romantic found himself alienated from his being or himself, Jeffers declared that modern humanity had proved unequal to its role in the universe and should, therefore, forfeit the miserable existence it had worked out for himself. Only certain individuals, nurtured on life’s experiences - violent though they might be, yet attuned to nature’s glorious beauty, could hope, according to Jeffers, to prove worthy of their existence and possibly achieve “transhuman magnificence.”

In taking this position, Jeffers opposes the major thrust of Western thinking - the detestation of the fallen material world and the exclusive glorification of the human spirit. Jeffers saw clearly that a subjectivity feeding only on itself feeds on nothing and starves, while at the same time it methodically and tragically destroys its only source of nourishment, the divine to be found in nature. He was not first to achieve this insight; anomalous passages such as the voice from the whirlwind in the Book of Job, or Thoreau’s meditations on top of Katahdin in The Maine Woods, contain expressions of
the *Inhumanist* view, and it may be said to permeate much of romanticism generally. However, it may be fairly claimed that Jeffers' work provides the most thorough and profound development of *Inhumanist* thinking.

As is the case with any ideology, Jeffers' philosophy of *Inhumanism* evolved and became clearer over the course of his poetic career. The development of the poet's theory can be divided into three distinct periods. The first phase of Jeffers' career is dominated by three long narratives: "Tamar," "Roan Stallion," and "The Women at Point Sur." "Tamar" is an attempt to explore the problems of emotional sterility and inwardness. Jeffers' solution is extremely radical, and the results described in the poem are catastrophic. "Roan Stallion" is a highly symbolic and artistically unified narrative of undoubted power; it also introduced into verse several of the basic tenets of *Inhumanism* which Jeffers was to elaborate on throughout his poetic development. The violence, both physical and psychological, in the narrative "The Women at Point Sur" is a strategy meant to awaken the audience to the conflicts of being human in nature. This poem and many of the ones to follow seek to lead the reader to attain moments of vision and "organic wholeness" with the "transhuman magnificence."

In the second phase of his poetic and philosophic development, Jeffers began focusing on the problems raised by his earlier narratives and on the new theme of their impact in a broader social context. The dramatic poem, "Dear Judas," marks the beginning of this period which also includes "Give Your Heart to the Hawks," and "Such Counsels You Gave to Me." "Dear Judas" retells the familiar gospel story of Christ's passion in unfamiliar terms. It is a psychological analysis of Jesus' personality which emphasizes biblical incidents often glossed over; and inevitably, Jeffers' interpretation has
particularly antagonized the religiously orthodox. “Give Your Heart to the Hawks” is illustrative because the poem expands on the Inhumanist themes developed in “Dear Judas” by not only examining how the hero’s actions affect society, but also how such actions are reflected in nature. The final poem of this phase, “Such Counsels You Gave to Me,” examines the hero’s struggle and ultimate failure to transcend his situation by means of physical violence, but more significant is his decision to accept the consequences of his actions.

The final phase of Jeffers’ career is comprised of Be Angry at the Sun and Other Poems, The Double Axe and Other Poem, Hungerfield and Other Poems, and The Beginning and The End. The first volume, Be Angry at the Sun and Other Poems, finds the poet seeking to separate himself from the contemporary events of World War II, but ultimately unable to do so, either poetically or philosophically. The poems of this volume are marked by Jeffers’ growing isolationism and identification with a Nature that was being destroyed by civilization. The central theme of The Double Axe and Other Poems can best be explained as poetic statements of what Jeffers felt was lacking in the world - a devaluation of human-centered illusions, the turning outward from mankind to what is infinitely greater, an embrace of personal freedom, and spiritual awareness. Essentially then, The Double Axe and Other Poems is the mature expression of Jeffers’ doctrine of Inhumanism. The next collection, Hungerfield and Other Poems, is Jeffers' reconciliation to his bereavement over his wife’s death. The poems are suffused with intense appreciation for the world’s beauty, as well as a renewed sense of identification with objects which endure and are permanent - stones, the ocean, and the cosmos. The
posthumous volume *The Beginning and the End* brought no new discovery, save that the complaints were brought up to date by considering the cold war and the arms race.

In his poems, Jeffers intended to provide the images and ideas from which the reader could interpret his philosophy of *Inhumanism*. A doctrine not based on misanthropy, but as a tribute to man’s potential - a consciousness the poet describes as “transhuman magnificence.” More to the point, *Inhumanism* implores humanity to “uncenter his mind,” to transcend his egocentricism, to open his mind and his spirit to the beauty of the divine in nature, and most importantly, to accept the truth of his relative insignificance in the larger cosmic order.

Throughout his poetic career, Jeffers had struggled to understand and to describe the universal dichotomy between involvement and isolation, between society and solitude. His early poetry succeeded in suggesting objectively the tragic emotions of total involvement through the techniques of myth and prophecy. His later poetry, however, tended toward contemporary realism and social issues; the poems of idea and interpretation became more intellectual and *Inhumanist*. The best understanding of Jeffers’ struggle with this dichotomy comes from the poet, himself, in “Self-Criticism in February.” The poem is a dialogue between the two sides of the poet’s intellect, between the conventional, rational voice of orthodox self-reproach and that of the intuitional, truth-seeking artist. Against the charge that he has “loved the beauty of the storm disproportionately,” the poet defends himself by answering that he did not write in a “pastoral” time, and that the violence in the poems was not “Perversity but need that perceives the storm-beauty” (124). But the worst fault, charges the poet’s other voice in the poem, is:
you have never mistaken

Demon nor passion nor idealism for the real God.

Then what is most disliked in those verses

Remains most true. Unfortunately. If only you could sing

That God is love, or perhaps that social

Justice will soon prevail. I can tell lies in prose. (124)

That Jeffers chose not to "tell lies in prose," but the truth, terrible and disconcerting as it
might be, is what truly distinguishes him as a great poet.
Works Cited


---. *Give Your Heart to the Hawks and Other Poems.* New York: Random, 1933.


