1

Lesson One

FOCUS:
Poetry of Place

Begin each day's lesson by reading the poems aloud in class.

For some poets, the place where they live is an essential element of their work. In William Wordsworth's poetry, for instance, we encounter the beautiful Lake District of England, and in Robert Frost's we experience the New England countryside. Such poets look closely at the living landscape around them, seeking to capture the sights, sounds, and human drama found there.

To understand the poetry of Robinson Jeffers, one must know where he lived. In 1941, in a rare public lecture, Jeffers described the rocky coast where he lived as "not only the scene of my narrative verse but also the chief actor in it." Assuming that many people in the Washington, DC, audience had never seen Carmel, California, or its surrounding area, Jeffers offered some descriptive details. "The mountains," he said, "rise sheer from the ocean; they are cut by deep gorges and are heavy with brush and forest. Remember, this is Central, not Southern California. There are no orange-groves here, and no oil-wells, and Los Angeles is far away. These mountains pasture a few cattle and 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."

VOCABULARY WORDS

From "Hands"

Sign-manual, *n.*
1. A personal signature, especially that of a sovereign or king
2. A hand gesture for conveying a command or message

From "Carmel Point"

Deface, *v.*
To mar, spoil, or disfigure

Milch cow, *n.*
A cow kept for milk

Pristine, *adj.*
From the earliest period or state; exuding original purity

Discussion Activities

Read "Carmel Point," "Bixby's Landing," and "Hands" aloud with your class. Using a map of California, locate Carmel, Bixby Landing, and Tassajara Creek, and study the Monterey County coastline. Have students draw an illustration of the general landscape, using the poems as their inspiration. Students will then research some images and see if they are similar to the illustrations. Did the poems clearly capture what students found in the images?

What does Jeffers see in these three settings? In "Hands" and "Bixby's Landing," what do the hand prints and the cable car have in common? What message might they communicate?

Writing Exercise

Ask students to think about the place where they live. Identify its most prominent features. What words describe its distinctive mood? Using Jeffers for inspiration, have students write an essay or poem about their home. To extend the exercise, have them add an interesting character to the setting.

Homework

In the Reader's Guide, read the "Introduction to Jeffers" and "Robinson Jeffers, 1887-1962." Read three poems by Jeffers: "Night Without Sleep," "The Answer," and "The Day Is a Poem." Make a list of all the historical references in these poems.

2

Lesson Two

FOCUS: Historical Criticism

Knowing as much as possible about when a poet lived can be as important as knowing where he or she lived. To fully appreciate a play by Sophocles, a grasp of ancient Greek history is helpful. In the same way, the more one knows about Medieval Italy or Elizabethan England, the better for an understanding of Dante or Shakespeare. This approach to literature is called *historical criticism*. Readers who favor it study literary works and their authors within their social, cultural, and intellectual settings.

Robinson Jeffers was born in 1887 and died in 1962. During this period, scientific discoveries, technological inventions, and artistic revolutions touched every aspect of life in America. After their marriage in August 1913, Robinson and Una Jeffers hoped to live in England for a while. Before they could finalize their plans, World War I began in Europe, and they were forced to remain in America. The monumental loss of life during both World War I (1914-1918) and World War II (1939-1945) affected the art and literature of this period, leading—as was the case at times with Jeffers's work—to expressions of bitterness, nihilism, and pessimism. In the Reader's Guide, Dana Gioia explains that Jeffers "saw the pollution of the environment, the destruction of other species, the squandering of natural resources, the recurrent urge to war, and the violent squalor of cities as the inevitable result of a species out of harmony with its own world."

VOCABULARY WORDS

From "Night Without Sleep"

Cataract, *n.*
1. A descent of water over a steep surface; a waterfall
2. Any furious rush of water

Thwart, *adj.*
Lying crosswise or across

Torrent, *n.*
A rushing, violent stream

"Poetry should represent the whole mind; if part of the mind is occupied unhappily, so much the worse. And no use postponing poetry to a time when these storms may have passed, for I think we have but seen a beginning of them; the calm to look for is the calm at the whirlwind's heart."

Discussion Activities

Read the quote from Jeffers in the margin to the left. The subtitle to Jeffers's "The Day Is a Poem" is "September 19, 1939," the morning of a pivotal Hitler speech at Danzig. Ask students to consider the poem's final lines: "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." Ask students to consider how poetry can respond to profound historical events.

"Night Without Sleep" and "The Answer" were written by Jeffers just before World War II. What do the poems reveal about his response to that gathering storm?

Writing Exercise

In the midst of a whirlwind, where does Jeffers find calm? Select one of the poems from this lesson and write an essay about Jeffers's response to danger. Do you agree or disagree with his strategy?

Homework

Have students read two essays from the Reader's Guide: "Jeffers and California" and "Tor House and Hawk Tower," then two poems by Jeffers, "The Stone Axe" and "Oh Lovely Rock." Who is the speaker in each of these poems? How do you know?

3

Lesson Three

FOCUS:

Biographical Criticism and the Speaker of a Poem

When we read Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, we know we are encountering the poet himself. Likewise, when Emily Dickinson says of a poem, "This is my letter to the world," we can surmise she is expressing her own thoughts. In such instances, one key to understanding an author's work lies in understanding the author's life. Many of Jeffers's poems contain autobiographical elements as well. In "Night Without Sleep" Jeffers presumably shares his own experience, and in "The Day Is a Poem" he refers to himself directly.

Biographical criticism considers the ways age, race, gender, family, education, and economic status inform poetry. A critic might also examine how the poem reflects personality characteristics, life experiences, and psychological dynamics. These critics need to be careful, however, because poets often invent characters, adopt personas, and speak through narrative voices not their own.

VOCABULARY WORDS

From "Oh Lovely Rock"

Precipice, *n.*
A sheer, steep cliff

Felt, *v.*
To mat or press together

Attrition, *n.*
A wearing down or away by friction

Discussion Activities

The speaker of "The Stone Axe" is not Jeffers. The speaker of "Oh Lovely Rock," on the other hand, is Jeffers. Though Jeffers himself appears as the "I" in only one of the poems, both contain biographical information about him. Ask students to discuss what the poems reveal about Jeffers's beliefs, values, and personality. Identify the clues provided in each poem that help determine the narrative point of view.

Writing Exercise

The stone in "The Stone Axe" is small enough to be held in the hand; the rock in "Oh Lovely Rock" is as large as a mountainside. Despite this difference in size, the two entities have something in common: what is it? Have students write a one-page essay that considers this question, explaining the ways in which the understanding of this similarity brings a clearer view of Jeffers's life, beliefs, and poetry.

Homework

Read "Inscription for a Gravestone" and "The Deer Lay Down Their Bones." What words or images does Jeffers use to describe the cycle of life and death? What do you notice about the words and tone he uses to describe the cycle of life and death?

4

Lesson Four

FOCUS:
Word Choice and the Value of a Dictionary

Words are to a poet what clay is to a sculptor or paint to a painter: the basic material of his or her art. Poets see the shape of words, listen closely to their sound, feel their weight. Poets also understand the meaning of words; they are sensitive to their specific denotative applications and to their unlimited connotative power. In the hands of a skillful poet, words bring thoughts and feelings to life.

Before a poem can be appreciated for its deeper meanings, it must first be read literally. Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote in *Nature*, "Every word … if traced to its root, is found to be borrowed from some material appearance. *Right* means *straight*; *wrong* means *twisted*. *Spirit* primarily means *wind*; *transgression*, the crossing of a *line*; *supercilious*, the *raising of the eyebrow*." Students should look up even commonly used words to understand better the careful, conscious choices poets make. Several words from each lesson's assigned poems are already defined in the margins of this Teacher's Guide.

VOCABULARY WORDS

From "Inscription for a Gravestone"

Ravel, *n.*
A tangle; something snarled

Electroscope, *n.*
A device used for detecting an electric charge

Precipitate, *n.*
A substance separated from a solution; a product or outcome of a process

Discussion Activities

Ask the class as a whole to identify three words from Jeffers's "Inscription for a Gravestone" and three words from "The Deer Lay Down Their Bones" that seem especially intriguing. Then divide the class into four groups. With one poem and one reference work assigned to each group, ask the students to look up the chosen words in an unabridged dictionary, an etymological dictionary, a thesaurus, and the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Have each group report its findings to the class as a whole.

Ask students to consider how knowledge of the exact meaning of these words adds to both the literal and symbolic reading of these poems. Have them replace their three words with new words. Is this difficult or easy?

Writing Exercise

Jeffers's father was a Biblical scholar, church historian, and professor of ancient languages. Jeffers himself was expected to follow in his father's footsteps, at least with regard to broad academic training. As a young boy, he learned French, German, Greek, and Latin. Jeffers's knowledge of etymology and language expanded his ability to play with syntax, and as a result, his *diction*—linguistic style as determined by word choice—is highly developed. When students read a Jeffers poem, do they see evidence of his education? Have students write an essay that describes the general *tone* of his voice, as well as the syntax and diction in his poems "Inscription for a Gravestone" and "The Deer Lay Down Their Bones."

Homework

Read Handout One: Jeffers's Inhumanism. Then read Jeffers's poems "Credo" and "The Place for No Story." Ask students to consider their initial response to the world without humans that Jeffers describes.

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Lesson Five

FOCUS: Poetry and Ideas

"No man was ever yet a great poet," said Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "without being at the same time a profound philosopher. For poetry is the blossom and fragrancy of all human knowledge, human thoughts, human passions, emotions, language." Exceptional poets can pursue their craft without aspiring to greatness, as Coleridge defines it here, but the greatest poets through the ages are distinguished by their willingness to confront life's biggest questions: Does God (or do the gods) exist? What is the purpose of life? What happens when we die?

Discussion Activities

Have students read Jeffers's poems "Credo" and "The Place for No Story." With these in mind, along with information contained in Handout One from this guide, ask students to explain the essence of Jeffers's Inhumanism. What are some of the consequences, whether good or bad, of his ideas for human self-understanding? Is Jeffers's philosophy optimistic, pessimistic, or realistic? Discuss the relevance of Jeffers's letter to these two poems.

Writing Exercise

In the poems assigned for this lesson, Jeffers writes of a world without humans. Have students write a one-page essay that responds to these questions: What would the world gain if humans no longer existed? What would the world lose? Ask students to return to the poems from Lesson Two, considering how historical context might provide another dimension to their answer.

Homework

Read Handout Two: Jeffers and the Central California Coast. Read Jeffers's poems "The Purse-Seine" and "The Coast-Road." What role does nature in general, and California in particular, play in each of these poems?

VOCABULARY WORDS

From "The Place for No Story"

Scant, *adj.*
Barely sufficient in amount or quantity

Noble, *adj.*
Distinguished; exalted; magnificent

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Lesson Six

FOCUS:
Eco-Criticism

Eco-criticism is a relatively new approach to literature. Arising in a time of environmental crisis, eco-criticism is primarily concerned with the relationship between humans and the natural world. In particular, it pays attention to the attitudes of the authors and to the precepts of the cultures to which they belong. With works such as *Walden*; *or, Life in the Woods* (1854) by Henry David Thoreau, the aim of eco-criticism is both diagnostic and prescriptive. Readers who make use of this approach identify attitudes, ideas, and behavior that are harmful to people and the environment; they also identify sources of wisdom, help, and healing.

Jeffers is widely regarded as one of the fathers of the modern environmental movement in America. His celebration of the beauty of the Monterey-Carmel-Big Sur coast was rooted in concern about population growth, air pollution, urban sprawl, resource depletion, animal habitat destruction, and other detrimental effects of modern civilization on nature.

VOCABULARY WORDS

From "The Purse-Seine"

Seine, *n.*
A fishing net that hangs vertically in the water

Luminous, *adj.*
Radiating or emitting light

Anarchy, *n.*
Lawlessness; political and social disorder

Hysteria, *n.*
An uncontrollable outburst of emotion or fear, characterized by irrationality, laughter, weeping, etc.

Discussion Activities

Ask students to look at the poems they have read thus far. How do they embrace a spirit of environmentalism and a concern about pollution?

Using the poems assigned for this lesson, discuss the following questions with students:

In "The Purse-Seine," Jeffers draws a comparison between fish caught in nets and people living in cities. Is the comparison valid?

In "The Coast-Road," Jeffers refers to the construction of Highway One through Big Sur. Students from California may be familiar with this highway, but still may benefit from researching its construction. Either way, how do students feel about the anger of the horseman in the poem? Is his anger justified?

Writing Exercise

When Jeffers looked at the conventional relationship between humans and nature, what did he see? Have students write an essay that summarizes his insights, using specific poems to support their ideas.

Homework

Have students read Jeffers's poems "Continent's End" and "Gray Weather," asking them to notice the rhythms of each poem. Ask three students to be ready to read aloud for the Discussion Activity of Lesson Seven.

7

Lesson Seven

FOCUS: Rhythm

A poem's meaning can be found within its structural, stylistic, and verbal components. One such component is *rhythm*, long regarded as a distinguishing feature of verse. Rhythm is created by the pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables in a poetic line. Metrical poetry follows a predetermined pattern (such as iambic pentameter, which has five regular beats in a ten-syllable line); *free verse* is open to rhythmic invention. When reading or reciting poetry, rhythm can also be influenced by a variety of other factors, including rhyme (when present), tempo, cadence, and inflection.

Jeffers occasionally wrote poems that employed traditional rhythms. Most of his work, however, obeyed rhythmic laws of his own devising. Read aloud this statement by Jeffers: "My feeling is for the number of beats to the line; there is a quantitative element too in which the unstressed syllables have part; the rhythm from many sources—physics—biology—the beat of blood, the tidal environments of life to which life is formed—also a desire for singing emphasis that prose does not have."

VOCABULARY WORDS

From "Continent's End"

Ground-swell, *n.*
A broad, deep rolling of the sea due to a distant storm or gale

Migration, *n.*
The act of moving from one country or region to another

Insolent, *adj.*
Rude; contemptuous

Discussion Activities

Ask students to discuss how Jeffers's statement on rhythm helps them understand his poems "Continent's End" and "Gray Weather."

Ask the three previously chosen students to take turns reading either "Continent's End" or "Gray Weather" out loud—one student should read fast, one at normal speed, and one slowly. Which tempo sounds right? Why?

To further explore this, use the NEA's Poetry Out Loud website (*www.poetryoutloud.org*) as a resource and stage a recitation contest in your classroom.

Writing Exercise

In the last lines of "Continent's End," Jeffers identifies the ultimate source of his sense of rhythm. What is it? Look at your own writing. What is the ultimate source of your own rhythms? What do people commonly feel, hear, or see that might contribute to a shared sense of rhythmic repetition? Have students write a brief essay that compares Jeffers's rhythm to other sources.

Homework

Read two poems by Jeffers: "Hurt Hawks" and "Rock and Hawk." Then read Handout Three: Rock and Hawk. Look up the word "hawk" in a dictionary of symbols, or use several websites to find information about hawk symbolism.

8

Lesson Eight

FOCUS:
Symbols

Fluency with a language involves mastering the literal definitions of words and acquiring a sense of their symbolic associations. Poets are especially adept at this. They use words to convey many meanings at once. *Symbols* are interpretative keys to a text. Poets often use symbols that present ideas and point toward new meanings. Most frequently, a specific object will be used to refer to (or symbolize) a more abstract concept. The repeated appearance of an object suggests a non-literal or figurative meaning attached to the object—above and beyond face value. Symbols are sometimes found right in a poem's title.

Personal symbolism arises from a poet's own life; cultural symbolism draws on associations known to a group (which can be as small as a family or as large as a civilization); archetypal symbolism is universal and timeless.

Handout Three in this guide gives an in-depth look at Jeffers's interest in rocks and hawks, specifically in light of Hawk Tower—a structure he built for his wife, Una. Use this class period to analyze Jeffers's use of two of his major symbols: stones and hawks.

VOCABULARY WORDS

From "Hurt Hawks"

Intrepid, *adj.*
Fearless; courageous; bold

Intemperate, *adj.*
Unrestrained; unbridled; severe

Implacable, *adj.*
Not to be appeased or pacified; unyielding

Discussion Activities

Divide the class into groups, asking them to share the results of their research on hawk symbolism. What relevance does this have for students' understanding of "Hurt Hawks" and "Rock and Hawk"? Ask them to connect this with Handout Three, and with other poems they have read by Jeffers such as "Oh Lovely Rock" and "Carmel Point."

Writing Exercise

Jeffers once referred to the hawk as his "totem bird" and said that he had an "almost religious feeling" about hawks. What evidence do students see of this in the assigned poems? Explain in a one-page essay, citing specific passages in the text that develop extended meanings through the symbolism of the hawk and/or other symbols.

Homework

Read "To the House," "Hooded Night," and "Shine, Republic." List the references they contain to religious rituals, historical events, important places, and famous people.

9

Lesson Nine

FOCUS: Allusions

Most poets have an audience in mind when they write—an audience that will understand and appreciate their work. In endeavoring to communicate with that audience, poets sometimes use overt or subtle references—*allusions*—to tap shared cultural memories, or to enlarge the scope of their work. When, for instance, poets allude to a person, image, or event in Homer's *Iliad* or the Bible, they presume readers will be familiar with those texts. In the same way, poets amplify the scope of their work by connecting images and ideas to outside sources. By using such words as "Trojan horse," "Jezebel," or "Gettysburg," poets direct attention to wider, yet still familiar, circles of meaning.

Jeffers's verse dramas such as *The Tower Beyond Tragedy*, *Dear Judas*, *At the Beginning of an Age*, *Medea*, and *The Cretan Woman* drew upon ancient Greece, the Bible, and medieval Europe for inspiration. But even his shorter lyric poems interrogate the Western tradition as a whole and illuminate modern life, often using allusions from literature, history, science, and religion.

VOCABULARY WORDS

From "To the House"

Hold, *n.*
A fortified place; a stronghold

Host, *n.*
A multitude or great number; an army

Temper, *n*
Hardness or strength imparted by treatment with heat, cold, or water

Discussion Activities

In "To the House," a poem written during the construction of Tor House, Jeffers refers to baptism, a traditional Christian ritual. He also compares the Pacific Ocean (both the expanse of water and the vast basin which holds it) to a baptismal font. Have students discuss the meaning of these allusions: Are they familiar? What do they mean? What function do they serve in this poem?

In "Hooded Night," Jeffers refers to ancient Egypt and its pyramids. How, in a simple and economical way, do these allusions help him make his point? Jeffers also compares "the Versailles peace" to the "final unridiculous peace" of the Carmel coast. At the time the poem was written (in the 1920s), most people would have known what Jeffers had in mind. Can that be said for readers of today? Have students research what happened at Versailles.

Writing Exercise

"Shine, Republic" situates American history within the context of Western civilization as a whole. Have students choose three allusions (from among the Roman Republic, the Greek victory at Marathon, America's battle for independence at Concord, George Washington, Martin Luther, Tacitus, Aeschylus [Eschylus], or Julius Caesar), and explain their contribution to the meaning of the poem in a short essay. If students were writing a poem about the value of freedom in America, what allusions would they use?

Homework

Read Jeffers's poems "To the Stone-Cutters" and "Love the Wild Swan." Also read "Jeffers and American Culture" from the Reader's Guide.

10

Lesson Ten

FOCUS: What Makes a Great Poet?

Poets articulate and explore the mystery of daily life in the context of the human struggle for meaning, purpose, and value. The writer's voice, style, and symbols inform the *themes* of the work. A great poem is a work of art that affects many generations of readers, changes lives, challenges assumptions, and breaks new ground.

Robinson Jeffers once said: "Poetry has been regarded as a refuge from life, where dreams may heal the wounds of reality; and as an ornament of life; and as a diversion, mere troubadour amusement; and poetry has been in fact refuge and ornament and diversion, but poetry in its higher condition is none of these; not a refuge but an intensification, not an ornament but essential, not a diversion but an incitement …"

VOCABULARY WORDS

From "To the Stone-Cutters"

Oblivion, *n.*
The state of being forgotten

Scale, *v.*
To lose layers; to wear away

Blithe, *adj.*
Without thought or regard; heedless

Discussion Activities

In "To the Stone-Cutters" and "Love the Wild Swan," Jeffers expresses both humility and pride in regard to his work. Discuss the thoughts about poetry that inspire these emotions.

Read the Jeffers quote above to the class. Can students think of examples of other poems (or lyrics of popular songs) that provide refuge, ornament, or diversion? Do they agree with Jeffers that poetry can offer more than that? What does he mean by such words as "intensification," "essential," and "incitement"? Are these, in fact, characteristics of great poetry? Can students provide examples of poems that possess these characteristics? Based on his own criteria, is Jeffers a great poet?

Writing Exercise

These ten lessons have highlighted only some of Jeffers's poems and beliefs. Have students write a short essay that explains one central theme or major feature of his work. Discuss the theme or feature in detail, referring to specific quotations from more than two poems to support the argument. Which poem illustrates the theme or feature most effectively? Why?

Homework

Jeffers directs our attention to the nobility and beauty of nature. Have students write a paragraph describing Jeffers's legacy in the twenty-first century.

Jeffers's Inhumanism

The word "humanism" refers to a broad set of ideas and values that emphasize the importance, dignity, and beauty of humankind. Leonardo da Vinci's famous drawing of a man with outstretched limbs inscribed within a circle and a square captures the essence of the term. So does a statement by Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, a contemporary of Da Vinci. In all the world, he said, "there is nothing to be seen more wonderful than man." In the Western tradition, the belief that humans are the center of creation is affirmed by the Bible, which says humans were made in God's image, that people were given dominion over all other creatures, and that God provided a path to salvation by coming to Earth in human form.

Robinson Jeffers questioned all this. As extraordinary as humans might be, from his perspective they are not qualitatively superior to other beings, they are not essential to the universe, and they are not the special concern of a man-like God. Jeffers's philosophy of life, which he called "Inhumanism," provides a key to understanding many of his poems.

Jeffers believed in the primacy of the natural world. In a universe as vast and old as ours, with its "innumerable swirls of innumerable stars," our planet is no more than "a particle of dust by a sand-grain sun, lost in a nameless cove of the shores of a continent." Nevertheless, when the scale of measurement is altered, Earth itself is immense, with a history spanning billions of years and with oceans and continents covering thousands of miles. Looked at more closely, the diverse environments of earth brim with flora and fauna. On a flower-covered hillside, a single bee collecting pollen belongs to a web of life that connects all to all, including humans.

According to Jeffers, however, most people are blind to the outer, larger world—especially people dependent upon the conveniences of modern civilization, such as manufactured foods, engineered landscapes, and technological inventions. Much of his work was designed to alert readers to the mental and spiritual danger of human self-centeredness, to awaken them to an order of beauty and truth beyond the human realm. As he explains in a preface to *The Double Axe* (1948), Inhumanism involves "a shifting of emphasis from man to not-man; the rejection of human solipsism and recognition of the transhuman magnificence." Thinking of the many rewards such a shift provides, Jeffers says:

> 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, though two or three people have said so and may again. It involves no falsehoods, and is a means of maintaining sanity in slippery times; it has objective truth and human value. It offers a reasonable detachment as rule of conduct, instead of love, hate and envy. It neutralizes fanaticism and wild hopes; but it provides magnificence for the religious instinct, and satisfies our need to admire greatness and rejoice in beauty.

Jeffers and the Central California Coast

When Robinson and Una Jeffers first arrived in Carmel, they lived in a log cabin near the sea. As newlyweds, they enjoyed quiet days together. "There was housework and continual woodchopping," Una recollects in an essay written for a local newspaper, but most of their time was spent reading, writing, and studying the landscape. "We bought simple textbooks on flowers, shells, birds, and stars and used them," Una says. "We explored the village street by street, followed the traces of the moccasin trail through the forest, and dreamed around the crumbling walls about the old mission. When we walked up from the shore at sunset scarfs of smoke drifting up from hidden chimneys foretold our own happy supper and evening by the fire."

Soon, they decided to venture farther afield. Boarding a stagecoach at dawn one day, they rode with the mail down the coast to the Big Sur post office and general store. "It was night before we arrived," Robinson Jeffers says of the experience in his preface to *Jeffers Country* (1971), "and every mile of the forty had been enchanted. We, and our dog, were the only passengers on the mail-stage; we were young and in love, perhaps that contributed to the enchantment. And the coast had displayed all its winter magic for us: drifts of silver rain through great gorges, clouds dragging on the summits, storm on the rock shore, sacred calm under the redwoods."

Along the way, they listened as the stage driver told stories about the wild countryside and the people who lived there. They stopped at Point Lobos and watched the sea lions. At Soberanes Creek, they saw cypress trees blown over in a recent storm. A ruined lumbermill stood on Notley's Landing. In Mill Creek Canyon, they passed under a suspended cable once used in a defunct limekiln operation. When they stopped at a lonely farmhouse to change horses, they heard about an old man dying a slow death inside. Further along, they came to a place where a wagon had flipped over some time before. Its cargo, the bodies of people drowned in a shipwreck, had spilled down a steep slope; no one knew if all had been recovered. When they reached the Sur River, they passed an albino redwood. Finally, they reached the end of the road, where they spent the night in a cabin set among the redwoods. Their dog "lay at the bed-foot and snarled all night long, terrified by the noises of the water and the forest odors."

Eventually, Point Lobos would serve as the setting for *Tamar* (1924), Jeffers's breakthrough poem; the suspended cable became a key element of *Thurso's Landing* (1932); and a dying old man figured prominently in *The Women at Point Sur* (1927). Each story grew "like a plant from some particular canyon or promontory, some particular relationship of rock and water, wood, grass and mountain." But all that was in the future. All Jeffers knew, as he fell asleep in the cabin that night, was that he had been changed by the journey. The Monterey-Carmel-Big Sur coast was a part of him, and he belonged to it. When he awoke the next day, he understood his vocation: to speak for the landscape and to capture its mysterious beauty in verse.

Rock and Hawk

A vast legacy of symbolism stands behind both "rock" and "hawk" as independent entities, but it is their conjunction that interests Jeffers in his poem, "Rock and Hawk." "Here is a symbol," Jeffers says, of the two together. For him, the hawk represents "bright power," "fierce consciousness," and the readiness to act. The gray boulder, on the other hand, represents "dark peace," mysticism, and utter quietude. Together the two create what students of symbolism call a *coincidentia oppositorum*, a coincidence of opposites—such as male and female, light and dark, hot and cold.

One of the most famous symbols of such conjunctions is that of the Chinese *yin-yang*: two forms, one dark and one light, enclosed within a circle. A wavy line between the forms suggests a flowing reciprocity, as if the two emerge from and dissolve into each other. The dark half (*yin*) contains a dot of light in its center, and the light half (*yang*) contains a dot of dark; each, therefore, holds a portion of the other.

In Jeffers's poem, the rock is the *yin* element. It stands for Earth, matter, physical reality: the bodily dimension of existence. It also signifies endurance, stability, and persistence through time. The hawk represents the *yang* element. It stands for sky, air, ethereal reality: the spiritual dimension of existence. The hawk also signifies force, speed, and the necessity of change. As for consciousness, one of Jeffers's concerns in this poem, the rock symbolizes "knowing" (a profound understanding of fundamental truth), while the hawk symbolizes "seeing" (an immediate grasp of the way things are). Both, Jeffers suggests, are essential to enlightenment.

The poem "Rock and Hawk" might also contain autobiographical symbolism. Throughout his work, Jeffers acknowledges his own stone-like personality. In one poem he refers to stones as "old comrades;" in another, he calls them his "older brothers." Jeffers identified with the hardness and quietness of stones; he appreciated their imperturbability. Also throughout his work, Jeffers refers to the hawk-like qualities of his wife, Una. He admired her bright intellect, fierce loyalties, and active engagement with the world. "My nature is cold and undiscriminating," he once said. "She excited and focused it, gave it eyes and nerves and sympathies. . . . She is more like a woman in a Scotch ballad, passionate, untamed and rather heroic—or like a falcon—than like any ordinary person."

Together, Robinson and Una formed a balanced whole, a fruitful conjunction of opposites. Alone each contained a portion of the other, like the light and dark dots in the *yin-yang* symbol. For Jeffers, as an artist, this meant that part of his personality was hawk-like. In one poem, he refers to a falcon as "the bird with dark plumes in my blood."

With Jeffers's work as a stonemason in mind, one should also remember that "tower" can be used as a verb, specifically in reference to the upward flight of a hawk as it prepares for a strike. When it reaches the top of its tower, it targets its quarry, and then, with a sudden downward rush, lets go. "Hawk Tower," in this regard, is not simply a static name for an edifice built by Jeffers. It is a climb toward heaven with wing-beats made of stone.