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Only the Earth Remains: Exploring the Machine in Selected Lyric Poetry of Robinson Jeffers

A thesis

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Literature and Language

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in English

by

Mark A. Hutton

December 2017

Dr. Scott Honeycutt, Chair

Dr. Jesse Graves, Committee Member

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Keywords: Robinson Jeffers, Leo Marx, Pastoral, Machine Motif

ABSTRACT

Only the Earth Remains: Exploring the Machine in Selected Lyric Poetry of Robinson Jeffers

by

Mark A. Hutton

In *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Idea in America*, Leo Marx

“evaluates the uses of the pastoral ideal in the interpretation of American experience” (Marx 4).

While Marx explores ways that pastoralism has been impacted by factors such as industrialism, it is the purpose of this project to explore Marx’s assertion regarding the presence of the figurative and literal machine within the poetry of Robinson Jeffers.

Jeffers’ poetry is generally located within the landscapes of California. His lyric poetry has a distinct connection to the land and is driven by inhumanism, which works to shift the “emphasis and significance from man to not-man...” (Oelschlaeger 246). Jeffers’ machine like elements highlight the relationship between the natural world and humanity’s intrusion; in doing so, Jeffers furthers Marx’s supposition that American literature continues to be impacted by the machine, by “forces working against the dream of pastoral fulfillment” (Marx 358).

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to my family – Sherry, Cooper, Baker, Thatcher, and Cash the wonder dog – whose willingness to listen to me go on about the genius of Jeffers earned them a spot in the patience hall of fame.

143 Headrush.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to Dr. Scott Honeycutt, Dr. Jesse Graves, and Dr. Kevin O’Donnell for their help in making this thesis coherent and readable. Any mistakes are my own – for they offered great and complete insights into Jeffers as well as into the mechanics.

A generation goes, and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever.
Ecclesiastes 1:4

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Matrix T1xe Treadmill with Virtual Active technology was probably not what Leo Marx had in mind when he wrote about American Pastoralism in his magnum opus *Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Idea in America* (1964). The treadmill, found in YMCAs and gyms across the United States, uses Virtual Active videos to allow people to “transport workouts to some of the world's most iconic cities, breathtaking trails and exotic locales” (Matrix Fitness). This “transport” involves little more than selecting from a list of videos that were shot using forward motion. When a person uploads one of the videos, the treadmill inclines or declines depending on the actual slope of the trail; this action – combined with the video - gives a person the sense of being in nature without ever actually stepping foot into the wild.

However, to acquire the footage used on the treadmill (and other gym equipment) a three-person film team descends on a location, like Mount Katahdin, Zion National Park, or California Central Coast trail. Far from being unobtrusive, one member of the team is fitted with a large harness that supports cameras. The team then walks, jogs, or runs the trails and captures as much with a lens as possible. In some of the footage, other people are somewhat forced to move out of the crew’s way as they pass along the trail. These efforts to obtain footage of some of the world’s most iconic, *breathtaking trails*, although very much in-line with twenty-first century American ways, are in many respects nothing more than an intrusion into the pastoral.

Marx, who is considered by most to be one of the top scholars on modern pastoralism, understands pastoralism’s complex nature and thus does not attempt to apply a simplistic definition. At the same time, he recognizes that within pastoralism, there exists an attraction to the “image of a natural landscape, a terrain either unspoiled, or, if cultivated, rural” (Marx 9). In

American pastoralism, at least, things are idealized holding within itself both popular and sentimental as well as imaginative and complex dimensions (5).

In 1986, Marx wrote an essay entitled “Pastoralism in America,” which was included in the afterword of the 2000 edition of his *Machine in the Garden*. In the essay, Marx revisits his work reflecting on the impetus for writing it as well as recognizing how the “political valence, revisionary criticism, political frustration among academics,” as well as the way the “ideological swerve of the 1970s radically altered the standpoint from which scholars in American studies approach the past,” (Sayre 1; Marx 382). His essay, then, serves as an apologia for his work as well as for his formulation of American Pastoralism. Indeed, at one point he, and others, were accused by some critics of writing “the expression of a timid, elitist, white male mentality in the service of an entrenched establishment” (Marx 382).

Far from being resentful of such responses to his work, Marx sees the great value of the “intellectual and moral turnabout” that grew from the ideological and practical shifts. In fact, he observes that had the pastoral work of Sarah Orne Jewett, Willa Cather, and Jean Toomer been available to him, he would have included them in his work (Marx 383). Nevertheless, as Gordon Sayre points out, the radical shifts as well as the political and social changes, Marx underscores that American pastoralism is “as an ideology that has mediated conflicting desires for technological progress and bucolic retreat, ‘a desire, in the face of the growing power and complexity of organized society, to disengage from the dominant culture and to seek out the basis for a simpler, more satisfying mode of life in a realm closer, as we say, to nature’” (Marx qtd. Sayre 1). Even as Marx recognizes the value of the ideological shifts in culture and the academy, he nonetheless affirms his formulation of American Pastoralism. Reflecting on the way in which the Vietnam era has shaped other “dissident movements,” i.e., “environmentalism, the

antinuclear movements against both nuclear power and nuclear weaponry, the voluntary simplicity movement, as well as ‘green’ tendencies within the feminist, gay rights, Native American, African-American and Hispanic movement,” Marx contends that his formulation of American Pastoralism, and his work related to trope of the machine in the garden continues to be a helpful guide. He suggests,

As noted by one prominent student of these ‘new social movements,’ the chief conflict they represent is not so much that which sets workers against owners, as that which sets a population against the ‘apparatus’ which appears to dominate it. Could it be that this kind of oppositional politics is what the future now holds in store? If so, it is enlightening to American writers in their initial responses to the appearance of the new machine power in the national landscape (385).

Perhaps it is the complexity, that Marx refers to in his essay, which is at the heart of things, as pastoralism is nearly always connected to an idealized representation of the natural world. In other words, humanity sees the nonhuman as being a refuge away from the complications often associated with urbanity. Early in his book, Marx notes that the “pastoral ideal has been used to define the meaning of America ever since its discovery” noting, of course, the importance it has played in shaping identity (3). Lawrence Buell seems to agree with Marx’s understanding of pastoral. Buell holds that the American ego is intricately connected to the pastoral and adds that the notion of the pastoral relates to keeping things out of the shadow of urbanity and within a “natural state of existence” (31). Marx, however, was not simply focused on defining the pastoral, and while he may not have envisioned the video treadmill, he certainly understood the way in which humanity, since the industrial revolution, has continued to intrude upon the dream of the pastoral vision both in reality and within literature.

In fact, the purpose of his work was to “describe and evaluate the uses of the pastoral idea in the interpretation of the American experience” by looking at the “interplay between the literary imagination and what happens outside literature, in the general culture” (4). In other words, the

way literature interacted with what is happening to the pastoral idea is of utmost importance. The interplay that seems to most interest Marx is the one found between the way American devotion to the idealized perception of the natural world and the ways in which the idyllic environment is intruded upon by what he calls the machine. He suggests that “what is attractive in pastoralism is the felicity represented by an image of a natural landscape, a terrain either unspoiled or, if cultivated, rural” and yet that landscape within literature, according Marx, is often spoiled by the human technological advances consistent with the era in which the author is working.

For instance, Marx considers the journal of Nathaniel Hawthorne and what he refers to as a “little event” (17). While Hawthorne is enjoying the raptures of a wood, amidst his description of world around him, he hears the “long shriek, harsh, above all harshness” of a train whistle as it reverberates through the otherwise peaceful landscape (Hawthorne qtd. Marx 13). Marx notes, “And yet there is something arresting about the episode: the writer sitting in his green retreat dutifully attaching words to natural facts, trying to tap the subterranean flow of thought and feeling and then, suddenly, the startling shriek of the train whistle bearing in upon him, forcing him to acknowledge the existence of a reality alien to the pastoral dream” (Marx 14-15). That locomotive (the machine) is an additional dimension – if not counter dimension – to the idea of American Pastoralism.

The woods are to be a place devoid of the harshness of civilization, urbanity. Amid the bucolic expectations, against the tranquility and spiritual rejuvenate qualities of the landscape, according to Marx, that “ominous” sound is the machine that continues to “reverberate endlessly through our literature” (16). This intrusion of the machine, according to Marx, is ever present within literature because it is present within American culture.

It needs to be noted, however, that the machine is not always, though it can be, mechanical. Marx says as much, noting that “the machine represents the forces working against the dream of pastoral fulfillment” (358). For instance, the production crew for *Virtual Active* forcing people from the serenity of Kathadin is every bit the machine as the train’s whistle, or, as Marx shows the riverboat tearing through Twain’s sleepy river or the construction of a road in *The Great Gatsby*. The idea of the machine’s intrusion is everywhere, and most notably its presence can be seen within literature.

In fact, the bulk of examples within Marx come from the literary world. While within the early chapters he focuses on Virgil, Shakespeare, and Hawthorne, the latter half of the book examines *The Great Gatsby*, *Moby-Dick*, and *Huckleberry Finn*. In fact, he contends that perspective between Gatsby and Nick, as well as the work of Faulkner, Frost, and Hemingway provide an illustration “between sentimental and complex pastoralism” in that they all “invoke the image of green landscape – a terrain either wild or, if cultivated, rural – as a symbolic repository for meaning and value” (Marx 363). Nevertheless, these authors also work to portray “a machine or some other symbol of the forces which have stripped the old ideal...of its meaning” (Marx 363). And yet, Marx is forced to admit that “American writers seldom, if ever, have designed satisfactory results for their pastoral fables” (364).

Lawrence Buell, who is the Powell M. Cabot Professor of American Literature Emeritus at Harvard University and considered a pioneer in Ecocriticism, took note of Marx’s focus on the “small group of high canonical literati” that occupied the lion share of *The Machine in the Garden*. Candidly, it is difficult to miss the parade of well-known American authors whose works are generally on must-read lists. However, there is one startling omission throughout his work. While Marx scanned the ways in which the machine intruded upon the pastoral dream, he

did so almost exclusively through novels, omitting poetry almost entirely. In fact, there were only a few times throughout the book when he mentions poetry, and usually it is associated with the works Robert Burns or W. B. Yeats. He does, however, mention Robert Frost but only in a general way. Even the index of the 1964 and 2000 editions reveal the absence of the word poetry, poems, and or poet.

Of course, this is not to assume that Marx did not value American poetry, nor should it be inferred from this omission that the “ominous” sound of the machine does not also “reverberate endlessly” through poetry (Marx 16). In fact, the machine is a vital component of much of twentieth century American poetry; the presence of the machine has helped to advance environmental and ecological efforts and establish ecopoetry, which, like ecocriticism looks at the “relationship between literature, [poetry] and the physical environment” (Glotfelty and Fromm xviii). For, while nature poetry has seemingly always existed, it was in the twentieth century that environmental concerns began to grow within America. While works by Rachel Carson, Frederick Nash, and Edward Abbey helped to further these concerns, poetry took up those concerns as well, and in some ways utilized America’s relationship with the pastoral and its relationship to the machine to bring about an awareness if not a certain degree of influence. After all, one of the great functions of literature, and perhaps especially poetry, is the examination of the great complexities of the natural world especially as they “relate to the human lives which it encompasses” with the hopes of fostering change (Love 231).

Throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first century some “nature” poets became eco-poets. Whether intentional or not, many of these poets utilized either a literal or metaphorical machine, showing it as a force that is working against the pastoral dream. For instance, Wendell Berry is well known for his advocacy for the earth. His poem “Below” speaks to those who “live

by symbols” and thus have their focus more on heaven than earth. This suggests that religious idealism – namely Judeo Christianity - is often associated as a root cause of environmental woes (Abram 94). Thus, Berry uses those who live by “banner, cross, and star” as being so heavenly minded that they are not good stewards of the earth. Unlike them, the poet needs “something to hug” (Berry 110; 9) Indeed, the poet concludes with the fantastic line, “What I stand for / is what I stand on” (19-20). Berry of course is not alone; Gary Snyder joins Berry but speaks directly, less metaphorically, to an actual machine’s intrusion on the natural world.

In his Pulitzer Prize winning *Turtle Island* (1974), Snyder wants to help his reader to “see ourselves more accurately” in relationship to the natural world. Snyder, too, uses the relationship between religion and humanity as means to convey a sense of separateness in his poem “The Call of the Wild.” Snyder describes “The heavy old man...A Catholic. / A native Californian” who spent years mining, ranching, and logging (21). In other words, the poet wants the reader to understand that the old man has done nothing but take from the earth. The man is in bed when he hears the “Coyote singing / in the back meadow,” which is a beautiful, western, pastoral scene; by placing the Coyote in the meadow, the narrator is trying to draw upon the American idealization of the pastoral – evoking even images of a meadow, which is lush and green. However, the heavy man does not appreciate his fellow creature and thus plans to call the government to set “iron leg-traps” to capture and kill the Coyote, which causes the speaker to mourn the loss of the Coyote; it is a loss for his sons who “will lose this / Music they have just started to love” (21). Thus, the machine - “iron leg-traps” as well as heavy humanity – brings an abrupt end to the pastoral dream as well as the harmony with which the narrator longs to see between the human and non-human.

However, while considering the machine within the poetry of Berry and Snyder would prove fruitful, it is better to start with Robinson Jeffers (1887-1962). While Berry and Snyder serve here as representatives to a larger, broader world of poets that have given themselves in some measure to environmental concerns and have used the machine motif in one way or another, though not exclusively, it is Jeffers that came first and was the first significant American poet to write about environmental concerns.

Robinson Jeffers was born in Pittsburgh, PA in 1887 to William and Annie Jeffers. His father, a biblical scholar and an ordained Presbyterian minister, cared deeply about his son's education and saw to it that his formative years were spent in Germany and Switzerland where he mastered German, French, and Italian. Eventually, however, William Jeffers moved his family to California where Robinson would attend Occidental College and the University of Southern California (USC). Initially, Jeffers studied literature but then pursued medicine for three years before turning, briefly, to forestry. When he found that forestry was mostly concerned with selling off natural resources, he moved back into literature and poetry. It was also at USC that Jeffers met another graduate student named Una Call Kuster, who at the time was married to a prominent attorney. Una and Jeffers entered into an affair that became public and resulted in divorce. However, Una and Robinson married soon afterwards. They spent the rest of their lives living on the coast of California in Carmel, where Jeffers focused on building their home and writing poetry.

Indeed, Jeffers, from his vantage point along the California coast, was pondering significant questions regarding the state of nature and its relationship to human beings before many others came onto the scene. Jeffers, like Snyder, was a California poet, and much of his poetry reflects on the landscape that surrounded him along the coast. However, Jeffers did not simply dwell on

the beauty of nature any more than Snyder or Berry. While his poetry embodies the beauty of the natural world, Jeffers locates his poetry in a philosophical attitude he referred to as inhumanism, which underscores the idea that humanity is ultimately insignificant to the natural world and will ultimately vanish from it.

While more attention and additional examples will be given to explain Jeffers' inhumanism in subsequent chapters, it is important to define it at this stage. In the final preface to *Double Axe* (1947), Jeffers defined inhumanism as a "shifting of emphasis and significance from man to not-man" (Jeffers qtd. Green 13-14). In other words, Jeffers wanted to underscore that humanity is not the principal or primary figure of the earth. At the same time, Jeffers' inhumanism recognizes humanity's ecological impacts on the natural world. Nevertheless, humanity will eventually destroy itself but the non-human will thrive. Thus, in some ways, the pastoral in the form of the beauty of the natural world will flourish without humanity. Jeffers' focus on humanity's ecological impact as well as his inhumanism has led scholars like Arthur Coffin and J. Scott Bryson to refer to Jeffers as the father of ecopoetry (Coffin 3; Bryson 7).

Jeffers examines the relationship between the human and non-human in that they both "question the belief that humankind is unproblematically separate from and superior to wild nature and poetically affirms an awareness of primordial being" (Oelschlaeger 243). Throughout his work, Jeffers often presents the beauty and resilience of the natural world, often in a way that points toward aspects of the pastoral; humanity – or a literal machine or war – on the other hand, is often portrayed as an intrusion into the nonhuman world. However, Jeffers' inhumanism often comes through as well because nature survives the machine – these destructive aspects of human intrusions, the forces that work against the dream of pastoral fulfillment. While the nonhuman

world continues the human world dissolves and thus to some extent, then, the pastoral aspects – the beauty of the non-human remains forever.

Indeed, the machine motif is almost omni-present within Jeffers' poetry as it serves as a force against the pastoral vision. This is evident within a great deal of his poetry, but it is more evident within his lyric or shorter poetry. Within those works, Jeffers uses elements of both metaphorical and literal machines related to humanity as means of drawing an implicit awareness of the problems associated with living in the world. Before that examination begins, however, it is important to understand how Jeffers approached his work as a poet; this will be the subject of chapter two. Arthur Coffin suggests that Jeffers' work can be seen to progress in three distinct yet overlapping periods; this format proves to be useful in capturing the way the machine is present within his poetry as well; the following chapters will examine a selection Jeffers' lyric poetry following the same chronological phases that Coffin suggests (8).

Before the process of exploring the machine within the poetry of Robinson Jeffers can begin, two questions must be answered. First, why is Jeffers important enough to invest in this sort of undertaking? Second, how does the machine factor in to Jeffers' poetry? The first question will be dealt with in chapter two. The second question, which is at the heart of this project, requires greater attention. Therefore, the second half of chapter two will again deal briefly with Jeffers' inhumanism, which is the philosophical underpinning of his poetry and the mechanism by which the machine and pastoralism connect. Chapters three through five will focus primarily on a selection of his poems, arranged chronologically, which will show the progression of the machine within his work.

CHAPTER 2

ROBINSON JEFFERS (1887-1962)

The Importance of Jeffers

Again, why is Jeffers important? After all, by the 1970s, despite his meteoric rise to popularity in the early to mid-twentieth century, Jeffers' life and work were considered irrelevant (Boyers 487). This is attested by how often he is passed over or disregarded for selection within anthologies and relegated to little more than a few, selected poems when he is mentioned at all (Hart 126). In fact, Patrick Murphy points out that anthologies often select poems that skew a reader's understanding of Jeffers. Depending on the poem he can easily be "represented as a quiet, meditative nature poet or as a raging antihumanist political poet" (Murphy 31). Worst of all, however, is that there is a degree of silence that surrounds Jeffers. However, for someone who has been relegated by some to irrelevance, scholarship dedicated to both his work and his life is immense as articles and books continue to be written about him well into the twenty-first century.

For instance, George Hart, author of *Inventing the Language to Tell It: Robinson Jeffers and the Biology of Consciousness* (2013), points out the connection between Jeffers and William Everson (1912-1994) and Robert Duncan (1919-1988). Both Everson and Duncan were, like Jeffers, California poets who were shaped by Jeffers' work. Hart notes, "For both Everson and Duncan, Jeffers represented a preceding regional voice that they had to absorb and adapt, yet also distinguish themselves from, but he also offered them a poetics that could openly and forcefully respond to the enormity of current events" (130). It was Everson, however, who – after discovering the poetry of Jeffers – devoted his life to poetry. Of course, these were not the only poets who were influenced by Jeffers.

In fact, several commentators have looked at the literary relationship between the inhumanism of Jeffers and the well-known environmentalist Edward Abbey (1927-1989). Patrick Dooley notes, “Commentators on the inhumanism of Jeffers and Abbey have pretty much confined themselves to observing that, as an ‘outlook,’ Abbey's position is a kinder, gentler version of Jeffers's blunt and often aggressive anti-humanism” (11). It is difficult, once exposed to Jeffers, to un-see the way his inhumanism informed Abbey. In *Desert Solitaire* (1968), Abbey’s personal reflection on his time at Arches National Park, he borrows an idea from Jeffers when he writes, “I prefer not to kill animals...[but] I’d sooner kill a man than a snake” (17). In 1928 Jeffers published “Hurt Hawks” in *Cawdor*. There he wrote, “I’d sooner, except the penalties, kill a man than a hawk” (18).

Of course, Abbey is not the only writer to be influenced by Jeffers. Patrick Murphy points to the way in which Jeffers and Snyder mirror one another in their view that humanity is the non-human world’s problem; in fact, human beings, according to the poets, may actually be “an evolutionary error, a biospheric mistake” (Murphy 93). Murphy notes, “Jeffers's poetic remarks on this score are legendary: ‘As for the human race, we could do without it. ...’ Snyder, in “The Politics of Ethnopoetics,” summarizes that ‘the Gaia hypothesis is a biochemist's hypothesis, that the whole of the biosphere is one living organism which has strategically programmed its evolution for 3 billion years, including producing us.’ And then he adds, parenthetically: ‘Which may have been its one mistake’” (93). While both Abbey and Snyder were influenced by Jeffers, they are in no way to be considered disciples. In fact, Murphy points out that Everson is often thought of as Jeffers’ “lone disciple” (94). Indeed, Snyder points to Jeffers as both an “inspiration” and an “irritant” (Murphy qtd. Snyder 94).

Beyond the scope of Jeffers influence is the matter of his material. One of the main reasons that a study of Jeffers' work is remains an important endeavor within the twenty-first century has to do with the way in which the message of his poetry endures. George Hart points out that Jeffers' poetry remains in "a prominent place in the evolution of environmental literature and ethics" (Hart 126). Those who know Jeffers recognize the important role that his poetry plays as a measure for pushing against the status quo, while at the same time making his reader aware of serious environmental concerns. The issues that Robinson Jeffers raised during his career and his efforts to express his concerns regarding the complex relationship between the human and non-human "remain pressing," as James Karman suggests (7).

In the preface to the 1934 book *Robinson Jeffers: The Man and His Work*, Lawrence Clark Powell suggests that "there are certain truths about Jeffers' poetry which time will not alter" (vii). The weight of Jeffers' subject matter was immense and he did not shy away from matters of controversy. As Powell notes, Jeffers believed that nations were "dissolving in a period of decadence," given that they could no longer expand (178). This decadence was to be the thing that caused a tremendous impact on the earth and would ultimately impact humanity as well. Jeffers believed that humanity had become "enormous leeches sucking the life-blood from the land. The struggle with nature is ended, and man from vicious metropolitan centers drains the earth for his profit" (Jeffers qtd. Powell 178). Humanity is the evolutionary problem or error.

Even James Karman, Jeffers' most recent biographer, points out that his significance as a poet lies in the prophetic overtones of his subject matter. Jeffers' poetry draws the reader's attention to the destructive forces of humanity working against the environment – and thus perhaps working as a force against America's idealized pastoral vision. Karman notes that Jeffers "spoke repeatedly about the destruction of Earth's environment, warning, shrilly at times of the

effects of overpopulation, pollution, and the exploitation of natural resources [...] he condemned violence [...] the cruelty of war” (5).

In more ways than one, Jeffers was speaking into a culture that has set the stage for the current environmental and political issues facing the twenty-first century. To some extent his work opened the door to an anthropogenic understanding – given that Jeffers understood that continued expansion, pollution, and violence will not only influence the environment but change it significantly and not necessarily in a life conducive way. Again, James Karman notes, “Decades before anyone worried about the effects of unbridled development on the environment, or disasters like Love Canal and the Exxon Valdez oil spill, Jeffers mourned ‘the broken balance, the hopeless prostration of the earth / Under men’s hands their minds, / The beautiful places killed like rabbits to make a city, / The spreading fungus, the slime-threads / And spores; my own coast’s obscene future” (6). Jeffers is speaking into humanity’s perceived central role on the earth and its overuse and or abuse of the nonhuman world; his poetic voice continues to ring true.

His poetic vision is why many have considered him to be the first poet of any significance to write about the complex relationship and impact of humanity on the nonhuman world and led some to refer to him as the father of ecopoetry (Bryson, *Ecopoetry: A Critical Introduction* 7). It is for this reason that examining Jeffers’ poetry is essential. However, it is equally critical to examine it from the perspective of the machine’s intrusion into the pastoral vision because Jeffers often employed that trope as a means of conveying his message. Thus, it is necessary to survey what it was that he had to say and how he said it because it ties in to ways humanity continues to impact the environment. His work is not only concerned with the impact of humanity on the natural world, which he often describes in ways consistent with the pastoral, but the mechanism by which humanity impacts the nonhuman, which often employs an element akin

to Marx's machine. All of this relates to the long-term "fate of humanity" and thus makes this a favorable time "for a reexamination [...] and careful consideration of the insights his poetry contains" because Jeffers is "essential to understanding ourselves, the twentieth century, and the world" (Karman 7-9; 225).

Jeffers, Inhumanism, and the Machine

While it is true that Jeffers' subject matter exposes the deep rift between the human and non-human world, it would be wrong to think that his work was all gloom and despair. On the contrary, Jeffers succeeded as an artist with his attention to the beauty of things, a phrase that he used frequently and a term that relates to Marx's idea of the pastoral. For instance, in "Natural Magic" (*Roan Stallion, Tamar & Other Poems 1925*) – one of his early poems - he describes the beauty of water by its sound.

The old voice of the ocean, the bird-chatter of little rivers,
(Winter has given them gold for silver
To stain their water and bladed green for brown to line their banks)
From different throats intone one language (1-4).

Jeffers' ability to capture the essence of the natural was powerful, to say the least, and shows his ability to craft an image through language. Indeed, even in "Natural Magic," the reader can see hints of the idealized pastoral vision that Marx discusses. However, Jeffers was not a romantic in the traditional sense, as the second half of the poem will attest, and in fact, it is within the second half of "Natural Magic" that Jeffers' machine begins to emerge, albeit subtly.

The poem continues,

So I believe if we were strong enough to listen without
Divisions of desire and terror
To the storm of the sick nations, the rage of the hunger-smitten cities,
Those voices also would be found
Clean as a child's; or like some girl's breathing who dances alone
By the ocean-shore, dreaming of lovers (5-10).

What emerges from these lines is something that Jeffers does often in his lyric poetry. He places the pastoral vision alongside the presence of humanity. Nature is described with great beauty but humanity is cast in a far more sinister, lackluster light. While the waters are given gold,

humanity is part of the “storm of sick nations” and “hunger-smitten cities.” Here, as in many of his poems, humanity in one form or another is the force that works against the pastoral vision.

It is important, however, to understand what is behind Jeffers’ approach. To suggest that Jeffers is merely applying the motif of a machine within his poetry would be to overly simplify and reduce the genius of the poet. Jeffers’ poetry is infused with a philosophical footing that he referred to as inhumanism, which in many ways reflects the influence of Nietzsche’s antihumanism.

Arthur Coffin, in his book *Robinson Jeffers: Poet of Inhumanism* (1971) devotes three chapters to Nietzsche’s influence on Jeffers, tracing it from *Tamar* to his final works. It was Nietzsche’s famous quip in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, “The poets? The poets lie too much,” that forged Jeffers’ straightforward commitment “not to tell lies in verse” (Jeffers qtd. Coffin 61). Of course, it played a larger role as well, given that within Jeffers’ poetry a reader is confronted with challenges to humanity’s “religious conception of, or emotional response to God” (Coffin 61-63; 190). One way a reader is exposed to Nietzsche’s influence is through Jeffers near constant prompt to reevaluate values, especially as those values that relate to the connection between the human and nonhuman as well as God.

Throughout much of Jeffers’ poems there is a relationship between the non-human world and human history. This relationship, however, is one where humanity is the lesser. There is a strong anti-anthropocentric dynamic to Jeffers’ work. Within the idea of inhumanism, Jeffers pushes against the notion that humanity is all that can be known. Humanity is not the ultimate, not superior, not above anything else in all creation. Rather, humanity is simply part of creation and a small part at that.

James Shebl explores the suppressed poems of Jeffers in his work *In This Wild Water* (1976). Due to some political and philosophical differences with Random House, Jeffers' publisher, Jeffers withdrew ten of his poems from *The Double Axe and Other Poems*. In this work, he notes Jeffers' "stern naturalism," in that humanity "was but a piece of matter and of no special concern to God" (Shebl 3-4). In fact, humanity is "decidedly less important" than landscapes and wildlife, especially given that humanity is bred for conflict and in some ways bent on self-destruction (3-4). This can be seen through many of Jeffers' poems, which is something that will be taken up in detail in subsequent chapters. Nevertheless, it is the placing of humanity alongside of the beauty of things within the poems that disrupt the pastoral vision.

Ultimately, however, inhumanism becomes the solution to the environmental concerns. Human beings, according to Jeffers, are destined to be flicked off the planet, which is an attitude that may allow for placing the natural world above the lives of people – something that becomes quite clear in "Hurt Hawks" (*Cawdor* 1928), where the narrator confesses a willingness to kill a man rather than a hawk. Humanity is less important than a wounded hawk because ultimately the hawk will remain but humanity will not. It is this expression of inhumanism that may be one of the reasons why Jeffers was so influential on environmental activists like Edward Abbey.

Indeed, within his understanding of inhumanism, Jeffers does not simply speak to his readers about beautiful things, but rather his work has "a sharp moral edge" as it deals with the "destruction of the Earth's environment" and the "effects of overpopulation, pollution, and the exploitation of natural resources" (Karman 6). At the same time, Jeffers understood that poetry was not the force it once was in terms of its power to impact society. In his preface to his *Selected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers* (1937), Jeffers wrote if poetry were "to survive at all – [poetry] must reclaim some of the power and reality that it was so hastily surrendering to

prose...It must reclaim substance and sense, and physical and psychological reality” (Jeffers qtd. in Shebl 10). Thus, Jeffers’ poetry is not simply concerned with forms, nor it is simply concerned with beauty of language. Rather, Jeffers is concerned more about content and conveying a sense of meaning that will bring about awareness and perhaps change. He wants the world to take note of the logical end of where humanity’s excesses are headed (which again is another reason it is important to re-examine his work).

To do the work, Jeffers does not stay within the landscapes but rather engages in the political sphere as well. It was this, despite his meteoric rise, which cost him a lot of popularity. For instance, in several of his works – like “Fantasy” which is a poem that the publishers at Random House asked Jeffers to pull from *The Double Axe* (1947) – Jeffers lays equal fault at the feet of Hitler, Guy Fawkes, and Roosevelt; in others works, he pointed at Churchill and Truman and raised questions about WWII. In some ways, he was like Dante and Yeats – naming names. At the same time, Jeffers calls attention to the disasters that westward expansion, war, nuclear weapons, roads, and development posed to America, the world, and all of humanity. All of this was driven by the Jeffers’ inhumanism. As Deborah Fleming points out, “Robinson Jeffers of course rejected the notion that art could possess independent or transcendent value; he embraced, on the other hand, the idea that artistic beauty could be derived only from natural beauty [...] He did not ignore history and culture [...] rather, he valued history, society, and culture through their relationships to nature” (Fleming 39). That relationship with nature plays a critical role within inhumanism because Jeffers understood that humanity was hell-bent on destruction.

Jeffers started working out the poetic aspects of inhumanism just after the start of WWI. That work continued throughout his poetic career. The following chapters will explore the way in which Jeffers’ inhumanism influences his use of the machine – the forces which intrude on the

dream of the pastoral vision. The poems within those chapters are selected based on the chronological order in which they were written and or published. The reason for this has to do with the fact that Jeffers' inhumanism and thus his use of the machine evolved over his poetic career.

Additionally, the poems that will be explored in the remaining chapters are exclusively from Jeffers lyric or shorter poems. While his epic length poetry contains elements of the machine within them, and while they offer a great deal of insights regarding the way he spoke into environmental issues as well as the relationship between the human and nonhuman, his lyric poetry lends itself to a broader understanding of how the machine came through as the poet's voice matured. Jeffers' epic length poems, like "Tamar" and "The Roan Stallion," are narratives – following the pattern of ancient Greek poetry and even Dante. His lyric poems are, generally speaking, more didactic, direct, and succinct than his epics, which tend to take the bulk of the collections in which they appear. Thus, it is a simpler task to explore the presence of the machine as well as the pastoral aspects of his shorter poems.

CHAPTER 3

THE MACHINE CRANKS UP: TAMAR AND ROAN STALLION TO DEAR JUDAS 1917-1929

The idea and philosophy of inhumanism is well known among those who are familiar with Robinson Jeffers. As mentioned in the introduction, in his preface to *The Double Axe* (1947), Jeffers defined inhumanism as a “shifting of emphasis and significance from man to not-man” (Jeffers qtd. Green 13-14). This shift factors in to his poetry in a variety of ways because for Jeffers, anthropocentrism – indeed Western Civilization – is *the* problem facing the world. While Jeffers’ poetry leans heavily upon “the problem of civilization,” indeed, “the problem of living in what” Jeffers “considered to be an aging, therefore decadent, culture,” he juxtaposes this problem with a sense of “piety toward the out-of-doors expressed in the wilderness cult,” which Marx underscored as part of the sentimental pastoralism (Murphy 93; Marx 5). It is possible, then, to trace the presence of the machine throughout Jeffers’ poetry just as it is possible to trace his inhumanism. Jeffers often employs humanity itself as a force that is intruding and disrupting the pastoral elements of the nonhuman world, and thus working against the dream of the pastoral vision.

While that machine is presented as both literal and metaphorical, it is almost always linked to humanity and its complex and often destructive relationship with the non-human world. A key to understanding the way the machine emerges is linked closely to Jeffers’ understanding of poetry’s function. He believed that poetry was about “the passionate presentment of beauty” but this beauty, far from a romantic ideal, was to be “presented as an ‘intensification’ of life, not a ‘refuge’” (Hunt 6). While Jeffers satisfies the human “need to admire greatness and rejoice in beauty” within the natural world, he does not overly romanticize nature. Instead he presents its beauty through jolting, powerful language that casts an honest light upon nature, but

simultaneously he casts a dim shadow on humanity. Humanity is often described as a dark presence within the nonhuman world. At other times, Jeffers points out the penchant for violence, an unawareness of God, and an arrogance, within humanity which very often intrudes into the beauty of the nonhuman world; humanity then acts as the machine. This is something that can be seen throughout Jeffers' career as a poet, but most notably in his more mature work. While his first works, *Flagons and Apples* (1912) and *Californians* (1916), are fine in their own right, Jeffers' maturing voice as a poet emerges beginning with *Tamar* (1923) and again a year later *Roan Stallion, Tamar and Other Poems* (1925).

A biographer of Jeffers, James Karman, points out that Jeffers considered *Flagons and Apples* (1912) "was little more than a self-indulgent trifle," which he published at his own expense (34). Its poems have been thought to contain elements of his relationship with wife Una, prior to their marriage. Lawrence Powell points out that "though nature is not forgotten, it is the poet's heart that concerns him most [...] there is too close a parallel between the facts of his life during the period 1907-1912 [...] to allow one to view them as objective exercises in versification. If there is not present the close-knit drama of *Modern Love*, neither is there the enigma of Shakespeare's sonnet sequence [...] Nature appears in *Flagons and Apples* as background to the poet's passion and solace for his pain" (32-33). Thus, *Flagons and Apples*, while possessing strengths, does not offer much regarding an exploration of the machine.

Californians (1916) is similar to *Flagons and Apples* in its usefulness, though it does contain elements of growing maturity given its closeness to World War I. Nature, and thus the machine, do not emerge within this collection as much as it does in his later work. While it is possible to read this collection, and find themes that will later take up most of his work, the machine is not as prevalent. In other words, his first two collections offer some insights into his development as a

poet, but are not generally included in a discussion of his broader work. In fact, Jeffers did not include poems from them in his *Selected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers* (1938). Arthur Coffin, as mentioned in the introduction, does not include *Flagons and Apples* (1912) and *Californians* (1916) as part of Jeffers' major works. Thus, while his first works may offer some insights into his development as a poet, they do not offer as much in way of exploring the presence of the machine, but that is certainly not the case for *Tamar* (1923).

Tim Hunt (along with Powell and Coffin) points out Jeffers' mature voice is first noticeable in *Tamar* (1923). Indeed "Salmon Fishing," as well as the other works within *Tamar* – like "Natural Music" (1925) – are the start of Jeffers' "mature aesthetic" as a poet. "Salmon Fishing," according to Hunt, was written early in Jeffers' development, and it is the first poem in *Tamar* "to embody what would become Jeffers' mature attitude toward nature [...] It treats nature as an end, not a means, and in it, the human figures serve to express nature's structures and qualities" (Hunt "A Voice" 233-4). Within "Salmon Fishing," the reader is drawn in, initially, by what Powell refers to as "extreme alliteration" (Powell 123). There are numerous hard "s" and "r" sounds – which may allow the reader to participate in the intensity of the scene – given the sounds of a river. This intensity is something that Jeffers is known for throughout his poetry. Below the poem is given in its entirety to illustrate the way the "s" and "r" reverberates throughout the poem.

The days shorten, the south blows wide for showers now,
The south wind shouts to the rivers,
The rivers open their mouths and the salt salmon
Race up into the freshet.
In Christmas month against the smoulder and menace
Of a long angry sundown,
Red ash of the dark solstice, you see the anglers,
Pitiful, cruel, primeval,
Like the priests of the people that built Stonehenge,
Dark silent forms, performing

Remote solemnities in the red shallows
Of the river's mouth at the year's turn,
Drawing landward their live bullion, the bloody mouths
And scales full of the sunset
Twitch on the rocks, no more to wander at will
The wild Pacific pasture nor wanton and spawning
Race up into fresh water (6).

Beyond the use of the consonants, Jeffers captures the essence of the pastoral vision through the wildness, power, and intensity of this scene. He describes a vision of nature that is imbued with something that has long held the imagination, the image of a leaping salmon as it hurdles itself up river – fighting against the non-human to do what it has instinctively done for millennia. The reader is drawn into the beauty of the nonhuman world, not by a babbling brook but rather by the shouts of the “south wind” as it “blows wide for showers now” (1-2). The intensity builds as his salmon “race up” into the fresh water on their way to spawn (4). There is also the sense of cold, as it is December and yet instead of bells and holly, the reader is subjected to “the smoulder and menace / of a long angry sundown” that ushers in the presence of a dark humanity (5-7).

In contrast to the intense beauty of the natural world, humanity is “pitiful, cruel, primeval;” they literally enter the pastoral and push against the scene (8). These anglers are like ancient, mysterious, priests who interject themselves into the natural world and by hook, haul in “their live bullion” (13). They are not even aware of “the scene’s ritual dynamic and its beauty” but instead fix themselves only to pluck and pull (Hunt, *The Selected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers* 7). In some ways, they are murderous as they trample on the sense of the sacred within the ritual of wind, water, and the salmon. Nevertheless, even though their mouths are bloody, the salmon still possess beauty as their scales are “full of sunset,” even as they “twitch on the rocks” with their last breaths (13-15).

“Salmon Fishing” opens the door to an understanding of how Jeffers employs humanity as the machine, intruding, as it does, upon the pastoral vision. However, at this early stage in the development of his poetry, it seems that Jeffers uses the intensity and the beauty of the nonhuman to draw his reader into the reality of the natural world, to spark a reverence, so to speak. At first, the scene inspires the reader, drawing them into respecting the raw power and beauty of the nonhuman world. Yet, as humanity enters the scene, the salmon is left twitching on the rock rather than racing up the river to spawn. What is more, the reader does not know if the dark form of humanity is fishing for food, or survival, or simply laying the fish out to die. In other words, as the poet observes, humanity is cruel and that cruelty breaks in on the pastoral dream, acting as it does as a force against a pietistic appreciation for the non-human.

“Salmon Fishing,” probably written in 1920, provides an insight into the beginning of Jeffers use of the machine, as well as the maturing of his poetic voice. The machine becomes more complex over time, which is evident within one of his more well-known works: “Hurt Hawks” (*Cawdor* 1928).

The hawk is an image that often appears in the poetry of Robinson Jeffers. Part of the reason for this, Jeffers noted, is the abundance of raptors in California as well as the wounded hawk that he tried to care for. He said, “I nursed a broken-winged hawk once and its savage individualism caught my fancy” (Nolte 25). Indeed, Jeffers describes his experience with the hawk in his poem “Hurt Hawks” in a way that allows the reader to “see and feel and understand what” he “saw, felt, and understood,” which is part of Jeffers’ goal of poetic intensity mentioned earlier (Nolte 57).

This sense of feeling makes the poem that much more intriguing given that the very poet himself functions within the poem as the machine. He intrudes into the nonhuman world and thus

the pastoral dream. "Hurt Hawks" is constructed along the same value driven lines as "Salmon Fishing." Again, Jeffers intends for his readers to engage with the poem because of its "'intensification' of life;" nature is not intended to be a "refuge," as Hunt points out (6). The reader is drawn into hawk's plight through the strength of language. The first fourteen lines alert the reader of violence and tragedy within the nonhuman world: "The broken pillar of the wing jags from the clotted shoulder, / The wing trails like a banner in defeat, / No more to use the sky forever but live with famine / And pain a few days." The hawk, once noble in flight, yet retains his "implacable arrogance" despite this injury and awaits death, and yet not without dignity, "Not like a beggar" (27, 26).

The first fourteen lines of stanza one reveals a beauty associated with the majesty of the hawk. He is wounded but nevertheless strong. While he is tormented by "curs" they know to keep their distance – recognizing the power that yet remains within the hawk (10). His strength though, is also his burden given that "pain is worse to the strong, incapacity is worse" (9). Nevertheless, death for the hawk is the "redeemer," the place where he will find salvation. This great creature remembers and knows "the wild God of the world," from whom he will receive mercy (13-14).

The description of the hawk in many ways aligns with the way Jeffers introduced "Salmon Fishing." For one thing, the initial part of the poem draws the reader into the pastoral in that the natural world takes on transcendence. If the poem ended at line fourteen, Jeffers could almost be accused of romanticizing the death of a hawk. The reader is drawn into a contemplative, compassionate state out of respect for the hawk as it nears death. Initially, the reader is led to be sympathetic with the hope that the bird will find mercy (Green 20). However, it should be noted that the first fourteen lines allow for no human presence within the nonhuman world. Even the

poet's perspective is somehow obscured by the distance between the hawk and human world.

The hawk is described in strength, dignity, power, and in possession of an intimate sense of the divine in its remembrance of the wild God, qualities that are often ascribed to humanity. This description sets up the poet's intrusion perfectly.

Humanity appears in lines 15-17, breaking into the beauty and solemnness that surrounds the impending death of the proud bird. The poet speaks directly to humanity in a chiding, accusatory tone. He tells them "You do not know him, you communal people, or you have forgotten him; / Intemperate and savage, the hawk remembers him; / Beautiful and wild, the hawks, and men that are dying, remember him" (15-17). He uses the second person like a jabbing finger, which throws the reader off balance. The previous lines drew the reader into a pastoral, almost idyllic scene, but the sense of awe is shattered when the poet confronts the reader with an accusatory "You do not know him or you have forgotten him" (15).

The reader is left to figure out if the poet is referring to only to the hawk or only to God, or both. This intrusion works to upend the reader. This develops even further when Jeffers uses "communal people," as Jordan Green suggests, as an insult (15). What humanity thinks of as a great achievement – the rise of cities and urbanity – the poet considers as part of the reason for the loss of memory. It is part of the reason that "You do not know him" (15).

The punches continue. Jeffers elevates the non-human to a special place with God, one that humanity once remembered. However, in doing so he maintains a sort of mystery as well as a mutuality between God and the natural world. The reader is purposely left to wonder: is the poet saying that God is intemperate and savage, beautiful and wild or is it the hawk – or both? It is a clear use of the machine as humanity intrudes into nonhuman, indeed into the dream of the pastoral vision. Humanity cannot go into the wild to find a sense of the divine; it cannot know

the natural world because it is too entrenched in urbanity. It has forgotten the hawk and forgotten God.

Jeffers, however, is not finished. In contrast to “Salmon Fishing” – the narrator in “Hurt Hawks” does not remain outside the poem but instead becomes involved. He becomes the machine when, in stanza two – line 18, he intrudes with a jarring revelation. He says, “I’d sooner, except the penalties, kill a man than a hawk.” The poet ceases to be the narrator and becomes an “antagonistic agent who destroys any aesthetic distance [...] from the poem’s violence” (Green 15). This threat of violence knocks humanity further onto its heels and the insulted reader is no longer concerned about the hawk but “with the threat of death [...] is provoked to indifference to the hawk’s suffering, contemplating instead his or her own mortality” (Green 20).

This threat of violence is clearly an intrusion into the pastoral dream. Humanity has long been reflective and sought out the natural world as a sort of sanctuary and the early lines of the poem play upon that. The reader is drawn into that sort of contemplative, compassionate state out of respect for the hawk as it nears death. The threat of violence to humanity is an abrupt realization and jolting intrusion that even surpasses the insult to ego at the end of stanza one.

Stanza one establishes a certain respect within nature. The hawk, though wounded, is left alone by even the “curs” (10). They keep their distance. The poet, however, speaks of murder – of killing another human being. That abrupt admission of violent intent stands in contrast to the non-human. This idea is carried even further when the poet gives the bird “the lead gift in the twilight” (27). What is noticeable about this is that, despite the fact that the hawk is going to die anyway, the function of the human is to bring death to the non-human, which in many respects is

the ultimate machine in the garden, the ultimate force working against the vision of the pastoral dream.

However, the poem returns the natural world to its beauty and power. While, as Jordan Green points out, the poet does not offer any sort of remorse or guilt, the hawk is released to the sublime despite the intrusion of the machine in the form of humanity and the “lead gift” (16-17; 27). Just like the salmon, the hawk is returned to power and beauty. Though its body falls, it nevertheless rises in beauty to the cry of the heron, “unsheathed from reality” (32).

While Jeffers allows humanity a few moments to appreciate the grandeur of the hawk, he quickly shows them that the “still eyed with the old / Implacable arrogance” of the hawk. In contrast to the glory, the pride, the beauty, even the “implacable arrogance” of nature, humanity’s gift is one of lead – death (27). It is the gift given from human to human, and it is extended to the non-human world as well. Nevertheless, “Hurt Hawks” seems to point in a hopeful direction – at least for the non-human world – for despite humanity’s arrogance and forgetfulness, despite its anthropocentric bent, the non-human will triumph and rise in sublimity over and above the intrusion of humanity. Again, though, the machine has come forth through humanity and through the poet.

While “Salmon Fishing” and “Hurt Hawks” present the machine through a metaphorical lens, “The Machine” (*Cawdor* 1928), printed here in full, is much more direct. He wastes no time introducing the machine.

The little biplane that has the river-meadow for landing-field
And carries passengers brief rides,
Buzzed overhead on the tender blue above the orange or sundown.
Below it five troubled night-herons
Turned short over the shore from its course, four east, one northward.
Beyond them
Swan the new moon in amber.
I don’t know why, but lately the form of things appear to me with time

One of their visible dimensions.
The thread brightness of the bent moon appeared enormous, unnumbered
Ages of years; the night-herons
Their natural size, they have croaked over the shore in the hush at sundown
Much longer than human language
Has fumbled with the air: but the plane having no past but a certain future,
Insect in size as in form,
Was also accepted, all these forms of power placed without preference
In the grave arrangements of the evening.

The poem, published in *Cawdor* (1928), was written at the infancy of the airplane; the sky was not yet filled with jets. The opening line of the poem mentions “The little biplane that has the river-meadow for landing-field / And carries passengers brief rides” is an abrupt intrusion into a literal pastoral scene of a river-meadow (1-2). The passengers take their turn riding along in the open cockpit into the beauty of sunset. In some ways, however, Jeffers’ biplane is related to Hawthorne, Emerson, and Marx’s shrieking locomotive, except in “The Machine” it is a buzzing that intrudes on the pastoral (Marx 15-17).

The plane intrudes on the night herons and, while not as violent as salmon twitching on the shore or the “lead gift at twilight,” the night-herons are nevertheless diverted off the course they have taken for eons (Jeffers, “Hurt Hawks” 27). Humanity, though not addressed directly, is nevertheless involved and the root cause of the intrusion. The birds, headed for the same marsh they have occupied “Much longer than human language / Has fumbled with the air,” now must reorient itself. All five are troubled, four travel east but the other, cut off, flies alone – northward (3-5).

This imagery of the troubled birds as they scatter and “the new moon in amber” leads the narrator to reflect on time and humanity’s place within it (7). The nonhuman world, represented by the moon in amber and the night-herons, come to represent elements of time to the speaker. The amber of the moon gives it a sense of timelessness and the birds that have been dealing with

flight longer than humanity has even had language gives the sense of humanity as the new kid on the block.

The speaker seems to know that the biplane as a time scope as well. The line “the plane having no past but a certain future, / Insect in size as in form” seems to suggest that the biplane, like all human intrusions, have a certain future. The line seems to indicate that humanity’s intrusion via the biplane, which is small now, will with time grow beyond its insect size. There is power in all three forms represented with the moon, the night-herons, and within humanity’s mechanized intrusion into the nonhuman world. That thought leads him to accept the “power placed without preference / In the grave arrangements of the evening” (17). In the end, what becomes clear from this poem is that a literal machine has entered the pastoral and in some ways wrecked the pastoral dream, even as it becomes part of the landscape.

It is apparent from “The Machine” that Jeffers is keenly aware of human intrusion into the nonhuman world. This intrusion is driven by humanity’s technological and mechanistic advancements. Just as his voice gains maturity throughout his poetic career, so does his awareness of the ways in which those advancements impact the nonhuman world. The first two poems reviewed in this chapter dealt with human intrusion – man as the machine. In the final example, the machine is a biplane stirring the night-herons from their normal pattern. In his later poems, which are the subject of the remaining two chapters, the machine follows the advancements of the age.

CHAPTER 4

THE MACHINE GRINDS DOWN: DEAR JUDAS TO SELECTED POETRY 1929-1938

Historians have referred to the late nineteenth and early to mid-twentieth century as the machine age (1880-1945), a time that spanned both WWI and WWII. It was an era in which the nation experienced the turbulence of an economic bust and boom, frenetic growth of national infrastructure like interstates, mass production of the machines of war as well, and the consumption of land for sprawling suburbia. It was also a time ravaged by ideologies that led to war and death of millions, a time in which the impact of humanity on the nonhuman world was palpable. Robinson Jeffers was very much a man of his times, not because he embraced the second industrial revolution, or the nation's expansion, but precisely because he saw the downside and impact attached to it.

The peak of the machine age coincides with the second and third phase of Jeffers' poetry. While he does not abandon the metaphorical use of the machine, it is during this time that Jeffers' poetry exhibits the use of literal machines to invade the pastoral vision to push against the rising tide of thoughtless growth and expansion rampant across the United States and along the coast of California. At the same time, his use of an anti-anthropocentric vision that displaces humanity and exalts the non-human world continues to take shape, and often places humanity on a collision course with extinction. This loss of humanity from the earth is no real loss for the nonhuman world, in fact, within some of his poetry humanity's presence becomes the machine.

Published in *Thurso's Landing and Other Poems* (1932), "The Place for No Story" may appear to be a strange poem in which to explore the presence of the machine. For one thing, there are no humans in the poem. There are no machines. Additionally, there does not seem to be an intrusion into the pastoral, either. Yet, the entirety of the poem resembles a type of pastoral

vision. Nevertheless, this poem, underscored by Jeffers' inhumanism, offers an opportunity to see the intrusion of the machine in a new light. Before continuing, the poem is provided in its entirety.

The coast hills at Sovranes Creek:
No trees, but dark scant pasture drawn thin
Over rock shaped like flame;
The old ocean at the land's foot, the vast
Gray extension beyond the long white violence;
A herd of cows and the bull
Far distant, hardly apparent up the dark slope;
And the gray air haunted with hawks:
This place is the noblest thing I have ever seen. No imaginable
Human presence here could do anything
But dilute the lonely self-watchful passion.

It would serve well to be reminded of Jeffers' understanding of inhumanism, but only while seeing how it relates to the way humanity serves as an intrusion (as the machine) in "The Place for No Story." As Don Scheese points out, this poem is often thought of as "a paradigm of [...] Jeffers' 'inhumanism'" (134). Again, in the preface to *The Double Axe*, Jeffers summarized inhumanism as "a recognition of the astonishing beauty of things and their living wholeness, and a rational acceptance of the fact that mankind is neither central nor important to the universe; our vices and blazing crimes are as insignificant as our happiness" (Jeffers qtd. O'Leary 354).

"The Place for No Story," like "Salmon Fishing," "Hurt Hawks," and "The Machine" opens with a sense of the pastoral, which accomplishes two things initially. First, it establishes the beauty of the natural world. The poet describes the California landscape near his home in such a way that it moves from simply being a scene, to "the chief actor" in the poem (Jeffers qtd. Nolte 24). Indeed, he uses the landscape to "express a reverence for the nonhuman world that can only be called Jeffersian" (Nolte 25). The scenes, as he writes it, is breathtaking in its scope.

Second, the poem invites the reader into the scene and disarms them, which Jeffers will use once again to bring about the intrusion of humanity into the bucolic. The coast is devoid of trees. The lay of the land suggests a closeness to the sea. In fact, the poet's vantage point has the poet on the "coast hills" in a part of California that is known for redwood trees. The poet, has, assumedly, emerged from the trees and now stands in the hills at "Sovranes Creek" (1). His view is unobscured by any obstacle. He can see across pastures and "rock shaped like flame" all the way to the sea (3). The sea is old, ageless, and it extends beyond the place where it meets with the rocks.

Contrasting the violence of the old oceans' waves as they crash into rocks is a lowing herd of cows and a bull "up the dark slope" in the distance (7-8). The presence of the cows and bull is the indication that humanity has ever existed in this place. Indeed, the herd may be the reason that there are no trees. In addition, hawks are present once again and they haunt the gray sky (8). The reader is drawn into agreement with the poet when he says, "This place is the noblest thing I have ever seen" (9). The scene is powerful and yet restful. In some regards it is the epitome of the pastoral and yet it is at this moment that the poet presents an intrusion.

While the reader is enjoying the beauty of the natural world, just as they settle into the scene itself, the speaker interjects, "No imaginable / Human presence here could do anything / But dilute the lonely self-watchful passion" (9-11). With the cows and the bull the only suggestion that a human presence ever existed, the reader is left to infer that humanity's absence from the non-human world is far better and more noble than its presence. This sets the reader back since the pastoral is often conditioned upon human interaction or appreciation. Here, though, Jeffers contends that even the thought of a human presence is an intrusion. In fact, the poem itself could

be construed as an intrusion upon the pastoral. The only thing humanity has to offer the non-human is a dilution of the beauty and so once again it serves as the machine.

In “The Place for No Story” (*Thurso’s Landing* 1931), the natural world is set in such serenity and beauty that humanity has no place in it. That leads the reader not only to question their place in the non-human world but also to wonder if the narrator is intended to be something other than human as well. In any case, the machine, while at first not obvious, becomes obvious given the dynamics of Jeffers’ inhumanism as well as Marx’s understanding that the machine represents a force working against the pastoral vision. While the machine may not be clear in “The Place for No Story” it is pronounced in “The Coast-Road.”

In Jeffers’ early poetry the machine is often either simply human or metaphorical. For instance, the machine is predominately the actions of a literal person like the anglers in “Salmon Fishing” and the shooter in “Hurt Hawks.” However, as the machine age runs its course and as more roads, factories, and houses were being built, Jeffers began to incorporate more literal machines like planes, ships, trucks etc., within his work. From 1929 until his death in 1962, Jeffers employs humanity, its use of literal machines, and the drive for expansion as means of an intrusion into the dream of the pastoral vision.

In Jeffers’ “The Purse-Seine” (*Such Counsels You Gave to Me and Other Poems* 1937) the reader is drawn into another fishing scene. However, unlike “Salmon Fishing,” the sardine fishermen are using nets not hooks to catch fish. Nevertheless, Jeffers continues to employ the beauty of the non-human in contrast to the darkness of humanity. Again, like “Salmon Fishing” and “Hurt Hawks” the reader is lured into a sense of compassion for the non-human as the narrator uses vivid colors in describing the water and the fish. He describes the “milk-color / light on the sea’s night-purple” that reveals the phosphorescent fish (9-10). When the fish are

gathered in the nets the ocean becomes “a pool of flame” as each fish is like a “live rocket” and a “comet’s tail wake of clear yellow flame” (23-25). Sea-lions turn to sympathetic spectators, “sighing in the dark” as part of the circle of their existence is plucked from the water (28).

The narrator describes the scene as “beautiful” but also “a little terrible” (18). While the natural world is infused with beauty of its own, humanity’s disruption can only be described as horrific – terrible. For instance, the fishing boat, its crew, and the net intrude upon the tranquility and beauty of the ocean. Once the fish are spotted the boat begins a slow circle, much like a hunter circling his prey. The helmsman’s action, his turning “of the dark prow,” is described in such a way as to invoke images of Charon from Greek mythology and Dante’s *Inferno* (8-9). The nets “purse the bottom” and snare the fish, which then “wildly beat from one wall to the other of their closed destiny” (14; 16-27). It is indeed a terrible fate for the fish, but it is also a fate that Jeffers foresees for civilization as well.

The speaker extends the scene beyond the ocean and into the city, something Nolte refers to as Jeffers’ “dark prophecy” regarding the “inevitability of disasters that must follow the separation of man from the earth” (121-2). From his vantage point, he looks out over a city at night with its “galaxies of light;” like the ocean it is both beautiful and terrible (24; 27-28). As before, the voice of the poet stirs up empathy but now it is for people who are captured much like the fish. Humanity has “geared the machines” and “built the great cities,” and now there is “no escape,” no “free survival,” because the net draws ever tighter and will lead to death (29-48). This death is the result of “Progress,” which leads the narrator to suggest that “surely one always knew that cultures / decay, and life’s end is death” (42; 47-48).

The conclusion to “Purse-Seine” is, as Nolte suggests, typical in that Jeffers moves from the prophetic to matter of fact attitude when it comes to the way progress intrudes upon the non-

human and the way in which that progress will impact the world (122). However, it is nevertheless jolting to the reader who initially has been drawn into the beauty of the natural world only to discover that the narrator was once again disabusing them of any notion of humanity's future. One central element of this poem is the way the machine is turned against humanity and used as a metaphor not only of disrupting the pastoral vision but even humanity's place within the pastoral. This use of progress as an element of the machine continues in other poems as well but it can be clearly outlined in "The Coast-Road" (*Such Counsels You Gave to Me and Other Poems* (1937)).

"The Coast-Road" opens with a horseman now taking the high vantage point the way the narrator did in "The Purse-Seine." At first, the reader may assume that the horseman is the intrusion on the pastoral much like the first line in "The Machine" where the bi-plane immediately disrupts the pastoral. That notion is quickly set aside as the reader discovers that the horseman is looking into a canyon that has been gouged by "bridge-builders, men, trucks, the power-shovels" (3). Right away the reader is confronted by the machine's intrusion and set off balance by the fact that humanity is at odds with itself.

The horseman that sits "high alone" like "an eagle on the spur of the mountain over / Mirmas Canyon" is part of the pastoral because he is more in-line with the non-human world than with humanity's bent for progress seen in the expansion and development of a road (1-4). As he looks down onto the machines he "shakes his fist and makes the gesture of wringing a chicken's neck, / scowls and rides higher" (7-8). This violent gesture is akin to the narrator in "Hurt Hawks," who would sooner kill a man than a hawk, except here the horseman aligns much more with the non-human than the narrator in "Hurt Hawks" because he turns and rides higher, disdaining the way progress is pushing to the very limits of the earth. Additionally, the horseman is reminiscent of

the centaur who is half man half horse. He is both violent and wild and his placement on the mountain and his retreat further up the mountain is keeping with the mythic, which is something Jeffers employed more often within his epic narrative poems.

The narrator, however, suggests that the hard scrabble life of “men who ride horses,” those “herders of cattle on the / mountain pasture, plowers of remote / Rock-narrowed farms” live “a good life” (9-12). He recognizes the beauty in the association of an age in which humanity was much closer to the earth. In some ways, he is romanticizing a sort of garden motif. This feature aligns to Marx regarding the Virgilian mode and the idea of “America as nature’s garden” and gardeners (75). Of course, this idea overlooks the sweat, blood, and tears associated with cultivating soil that is “rock-narrowed,” but it does convey a sense of the pastoral vision.

The narrator contrasts the horseman and “a good life” with those who disrupt the pastoral – those who build roads (12). These people, who have embraced an unbridled progress, come from “a rich and vulgar and bewildered / civilization dying at its core” (10-12; 15-16). This is akin to Jeffers’ conclusion in “The Purse-Seine,” where progress traps humanity and its ultimate end is death. Herein lies the machine that is both literally scaring up the land and preparing for “peculiarly vicious” wars, “heavier tyrannies,” religions, roads, planes, schools, films, and radio that are more in-line with the pathetic charms and promises of “an old drunken whore” than the good life the horseman and men like him have known (16-21).

The pastoral idea is presented one final time at the end of the poem. Here the narrator takes comfort in the hope that the horseman will die before he sees what progress will do to his children. He is also comforted by the unconquerable character of nature. Even though future generations, too “innocent and credulous” to spurn the advances of the “old drunken whore,” will be corrupted, the beauty of nature will remain intact (28). While the machine has cut into the

land, even in this gouging, nature remains resilient, beautiful, and above humanity. The poet observes, “Beautiful beyond belief / The heights glimmer in the sliding cloud, the great bronze gorge-cut sides / of the mountain tower up invincibly, / Not the least hurt by this ribbon of road carved on their sea-foot” (29-32). Here the narrator recognizes that the machine, though intruding, though destructive, does not take away from the beauty of the non-human.

It is clear from “The Coast-Road” that progress, the ribbon of road and the literal machines employed to develop it, are nonetheless a means by which the pastoral vision is disrupted. That dynamic continues in “The Beaks of Eagles,” though Jeffers employs humanity’s progress as a machine but in a way that is dissimilar than in “The Coast-Road.” In this poem, Jeffers begins as he has done so in previous works, with the pastoral. Here, however, nature is elevated and the reader is forced to see the grand beauty of nature, but he is not luring the reader into sympathy for the non-human. Instead, he elevates the non-human to a place of timeliness and reverence, showcasing attribute that humanity may only hope to obtain. Nevertheless, even here the machine emerges through violence and through progress but ultimately humanity is left to deal with an uncomfortable fate.

The poem opens with a female eagle in her rebuilt nest, high above “Ventana Creek” in a lightning, splintered redwood tree (1-3; 9). From this vantage point, she is seemingly safe from human intrusion, and thus the machine. Only a “meteor will ever plow” where she nests, and no horseman will ever ride where she is, indeed, she need not fear any hunter except those who can fly, the eagle nonetheless has faced hardship and endured (4-5). There is wonder and beauty in this description that leads the reader to a sort of reverence toward the eagle. Then, just as Jeffers often does, the reader is subjected to violence and jolted from the pastoral. The narrator informs the reader that “The she-eagle is old, her mate was shot long ago, she is now mated with a / son

of hers” (6-7). The poem’s early lines lead the reader down a primrose path of serenity and safety for the eagle, perched high above. This comes to an absolute halt with the loss of her mate by human hands. It is an intrusion that reverberates through the eagle’s existence. It is information that unsettles the reader, who is left to contend with an odd image of mother and son.

Nevertheless, the narrator draws the reader to the eagle’s resilience for survival, which tips toward reverence. The narrator reminds the readers that the eagle is ancient, noting that the eagles is “older than I” (11). However, the narrator is not simply placing the eagle’s life span above a singular human. Rather, the eagle in many respects is a placeholder for non-human. Thus, the eagle’s agelessness is an indication that the non-human world is far older than humanity and thus worthy of reverence or at least respect. This agelessness, however is linked to the non-human’s capacity for resilience. Indeed, the voice of the poet lays out a list of things that the eagle has endured. The eagle has risen above disruptions. It has survived the loss of a mate; her nest was destroyed by lightning and she rebuilt it in the “splinters of a thunder bolt,” which may be another nod of Jeffers to the mythic given that Zeus is often represented by lightning and an eagle was his messenger and companion; she survived “the fires of ‘eighty-five;” she learned to eat even “scorched meat” (9-14). The world around the eagle has changed but she has remained “a relative permanence in a sea of change” (Nolte 26).

Showcasing the eagle’s resilience aligns with the way that “Jeffers sought always to focus on those things that abide [...] principles, if you will – that lie behind the visible mask of nature” (Nolte 25). Within the eagle’s resilience and permanence, lie principles that ought to resonate with people. However, the narrator sets up a contrast between the principles that drive the nonhuman as opposed to the progressive elements within humans. It is important to note the

distinction between the eagle and humanity especially as they relate to change and progress. He wrote:

The world has changed in her time;
Humanity has multiplied, but not here; men's hopes and thoughts and
customs have changed, their powers are enlarged,
Their powers and their follies have become fantastic,
The unstable animal never has been changed so rapidly. The motor and the
plane and the great war have gone over him,
And Lenin has lived and Jehovah died: while the mother-eagle
Hunts her same hills, crying the same beautiful and lonely cry and is never
Tired; dreams the same dreams,
And hears at night the rock-slides rattle and thunder in the throats of these
Living mountains.

Humanity has grown in number but not in the eagle's world, not yet. As humanity has progressed, so have its follies. Violence intrudes on the pastoral vision through the mention of mechanized nature of war: the motor and the plane (18-19). The speaker also includes the way ideologies associated with Lenin, Marx, Nietzsche as well as religions associated with Judaism and Christianity have intruded upon the pastoral as well. The speaker states, "And Lenin has lived and Jehovah died" (20). Here the poet's voice points to the way progress is tied to humanity's hopes and thoughts, which lead to wars fought over ideals, politics, religion, and power. The non-human, the eagle, has not changed despite the progression of humanity – save the loss of her mate. She still hunts and dreams in the same place. She is resilient and content, connected to the larger nonhuman existence.

Humanity on the other hand, should "try all the changes, progress and corruption, powers, peace and anguish" that they can (26). This is far better than to simply become extinct. This seems like a disengagement from the narrator's approach. He seems to be advocating for progress and all that comes with it. However, the reader is once again subjected to an abrupt switch that is another form of the machine crashing into the pastoral. Here, the lesson for

humanity is found in the eagle's beak. Human nature, like the beak, has not changed in ten thousand years.

It is within this notion that the reader gets the full sense of the machine's intrusion. Despite the progression of humanity throughout the ages, their nature has not changed. No matter what they try, the narrator is resigned to say they will no doubt face the "dinosaur's way" (27). It is good for humanity to know "that his needs and nature are no more changed in fact in ten thousand years than the beaks of eagles" (29-30). The way of the eagle, her resilience, her strength and nobility, surpass anything in humanity. Once again, this poem, like others, conveys a sense of beauty and power within the non-human world that simply does not exist within humanity. This is an intrusion into the very essence of the pastoral vision. Jeffers is not intimating that humanity should try to change to save itself. Rather, he is suggesting that no matter what humanity does, they cannot change who they are by nature.

The only comfort in this is that nonhuman will continue to thrive long after humanity ceases to exist. Nevertheless, while humanity remains it will consistently be an intrusion in one form or another to the pastoral vision. In fact, the pastoral vision within Jeffers does not include humanity but it remains for the nonhuman. It is this idea, that continues to take shape throughout the rest of Jeffers' work, which will be evident in the final phase of the machine in Jeffers' poetry.

CHAPTER 5

THE MACHINE RAGES FORWARD: BE ANGRY TO THE END 1944-1962

It would be difficult to carefully and chronologically read through the works of Robinson Jeffers and fail to notice the way in which his form and poetic voice change. His first two works, *Flagons and Apples* (1912) and *Californians* (1916), are quite different from his later work, especially given that they “were written primarily in traditional meter and generally in rhyme” while the rest of his poetry is more in-line with free verse (Cates 113). However, this change of form is not the most significant transformation of his poetry.

A close reading of Jeffers’ early poetry (1920 - 1938) reveals the use of literal machines as well as concerns regarding expansion and development as an intrusion into the pastoral. However, his later poetry, what Arthur Coffin refers to as the third phase (1940-1962), not only continues this trend but it introduces the impact of war as a Marx-type machine. In this final phase of the machine, even as Jeffers personally became more reclusive and further distanced himself from the literary world, he nevertheless was keenly aware of international issues, politics, war and the threats those things created for humanity and the non-human world (Gioia 51).

For instance, in his poem “The Moon and Five Planets” (*Be Angry at the Sun* 1941), Jeffers reflects on the pastoral-like wonder of watching the five bright planets in the fading minutes of twilight, in the moments just before night. While Mercury, Venus, Saturn, Mars and Jupiter are frequently observable with the naked eye, it is not often that all five can be seen at the same time. Thus, the poem, early on, takes a sense of rarity, beauty, and mystery as the narrator aligns the planets alongside of a “brilliant young moon” (1). Together these five celestial bodies reach “like a golden ladder” from the place where the sea and the sun seemingly merge to the far reaches

“High up the dark blue dome of heaven” (3). Against the coming on of night, the narrator reflects on the day that has passed. The first hints of spring’s wild-flowers, the “yellow violets and blue-eyed grass,” fill him with a sense of gratitude (4-5). He lets the reader know, against the “splendor” of the day’s dying, that it is the “tenth of March, / Nineteen forty” (6-7).

The use of the date as well as the focus on the coming of darkness points to something ominous. The early wording of the poem sets the reader up for what will become an intrusion of war on the pastoral. The day itself has been beautiful simply as part of the natural order of the universe and the rites of spring. However, on March 10, 1940, even as the flowers are making glad the hills, Finland surrendered to Russia, after fighting them through the winter. The poem’s speaker remarks, “After all her winter valor and the great war in the snow” Finland is “beaten down by machines and multitude” (8-9).

Jeffers, writing at the beginning of the Second World War, once again establishes a powerful contrast between the beauty of nature’s rhythms and the intrusion of humanity. Just like “Salmon Fishing,” the poem highlights the beauty in the order of things. The five brightest, most readily visible planets are in line with the moon; it happens in a naturally driven pattern that has nothing to do with humanity. At the same time, flowers emerge as part of spring-time. It is a time of new life. Humanity, on the other hand, is battling itself. Rather than simply a reflection on the natural wonder and beauty of things, the narrator must contend with the reality that “It will be long before the moon and five planets meet again” and in the space of time “bitter things will have happened; not worse things” (10-11). These bitter and not worse things are somewhat unknown, but nevertheless tied to war.

It is possible to see a great deal of Jeffers’ inhumanism within “The Moon and Five Planets.” Clearly, the nonhuman world is acting above and beyond the scope of warring humanity, which

is not central to the nonhuman. The planets align as they do and flowers bloom in their response to the seasons made possible by the turning of the earth; humans act only as observers of the beauty of the natural world. Nevertheless, as war intrudes the machine becomes visible – perhaps not in the immediacy of the narrator’s western coastline but from thousands of miles away. The narrator must contend with war even as he is drawn to observe the “beautiful day dying in such splendor” (6). Jeffers counter weights and invades the pastoral with war. Indeed, he uses war again in several poems originally published in *The Double Axe and Other Poems* (1947).

Jeffers’ presentation of the natural world often includes the ocean and particularly the Pacific. However, before considering his works dealing with the machine and his poetry related to the ocean, it is important to take one thing into consideration. While much of Jeffers’ landscape poems present the nonhuman in clear, pastoral imagery, his poems related to the ocean do not readily lend themselves to that categorization. In other words, his texts involving the sea may not strike a reader as being pastoral because of the traditional understanding normally involves an element of the land and shepherds. However, Jeffers’ use of the sea captures the spirit of pastoral in that it brings a quiet resolve to heart. At the same time, one must consider the narrator is often reflecting on the sea from hilltop or meadow and the violence of the sea crashing into rocks, while extreme, draws the reader’s attention toward the essence of pastoral qualities.

Jeffers does not always paint the sea as calm or restorative the way someone may read the traditional qualities of the pastoral in a poem like “The Place for No Story.” That poem has clear pastoral implications. However, even within “The Place for No Story” the narrator points out the “Gray extension beyond the long white violence” (5). This is in reference, of course, to the way the ocean pounds into the rocky shore along the “coast hills at Sovranes Creek” (1). While one may not traditionally think of crashing waves or the power of the ocean’s currents as pastoral,

Jeffers included it and thought of it in terms of beauty. There is something beautiful in the power of involving the violence of waves crashing into rocks.

Jeffers recognizes the beauty in the violence of nature largely, as he said, because “Beauty [...] is not always lovely” (Jeffers qtd. Cates 114). He often incorporates what many would consider “the darker aspects of nature: its violence, roughness, excess, and separation from human understanding” within poems (114). From the vantage point of his home in Carmel, Jeffers commanded a view of the sea and it found a place in his poetic imagination and often in a way that it challenges the reader to think beyond the traditional understanding of the pastoral, which often includes elements of a flowing meadow and a shepherd. Of course, he did so with the underpinnings of inhumanism but even in that regard it is possible to see the way in which war, acting as a machine, intrudes upon the non-human, even if the nonhuman is indifferent.

For instance, within “The Eye” (*The Double Axe and Other Poems* 1947) the speaker describes the Atlantic as “a stormy moat” and the Mediterranean as “The blue pool in the old garden” (1-2). These descriptions bear within themselves elements of the pastoral in that a moat is protective which in and of itself is restorative. At the same time, the Mediterranean puts the narrator in the mind of a cultivated garden, complete with azure pools; that image is akin to the pastoral. However, these bodies of water, despite their pastoral qualities, have guzzled down the “sacrifice / Of ships and blood” and yet they “shine in the sun” (4). For “five thousand years” they have endured humanity’s intrusion via war and commerce (3). At the same time, the narrator looks to the Pacific and realizes that even in its vastness it too has dealt with “Our ships, planes, wars are perfectly irrelevant” (5). However, humanity’s presence, to the Pacific, is like a “speck of dust on the great scale-pan” (4-10). The speaker seems to come to this conclusion from some far-off vantage point.

The poet's voice suggests he is looking out on the Pacific from "this mountain shore" where the water cascades into "headland beyond stormy headland" (11). Somehow, this view reveals the vastness of the ocean that stretches to "Asia / Australia and white Antarctica" (11-16). The headlands, despite the violent connection with the water is playful, "plunging like dolphins through the blue sea-smoke" (11-12). However, it is the great bulk of the sea that the narrator underscores. From that sheer size, he senses its power and to some extent attributes a sense of the mythic, in that the ocean is like a great eye that never closes for sleep and thus it is always watching but it is indifferent to humanity and its wars.

This ever-watchful eye creates a sense of the pastoral, even as it indicates an indifference to humanity. In fact, Jeffers uses the ocean to create a sense of the "durability" of the nonhuman, and the object of their endurance in the case of "The Eye" are elements of war (Cates 116). Despite its indifference, the ocean –must contend with humanity's intrusion. The pastoral, even within the violent beauty of the ocean, is interrupted by the force of humanity's ships, planes, wars. Jeffers, however, does not always interject the violent dimensions into sea pastorals. For instance, "Calm and Full the Ocean," also published in *The Double Axe and Other Poems* 1947, is opposite from "The Eye" in that it suggests, as the title indicates, the calming dynamic of the ocean.

The speaker sets up a sense of the pastoral with the ocean itself perhaps a picture of tranquility as it spreads out on the horizon. However, this poem, unlike "The Eye," does not indicate to the reader which parts of the great ocean; it is not named. The reader is only told of the "cool dark sky; quiet rocks and / the birds fishing; the night-herons / Have flown home to their wood..." (1-3). While this description adds to the sense of the pastoral, it is perhaps best that no name is given to the location. The reader must contend with the possibility that this scene

could take place on nearly any shore. At any rate, the scene is one of calm and tranquility; even the ocean is at peace.

This sense of calm emanating from the natural world is important, given the tragedy, the “unimaginable agonies” which intrude upon the pastoral. The speaker tells the reader of “pain, horror, sick hatred; / Famine that dries the children to little bones and huge eyes; high explosive / that fountains dirt, flesh and bone-splinters” (6-8). Even as the natural world keeps step with itself, the “Sane and intact seasons pursue their course [...] the grass flourish, with flowers in it,” the speaker nonetheless notes that the horrors impact millions. These agonies, which stem from humanity itself, seem “separate from nature’s” but they are not (10-12).

In “Calm and Full the Ocean” the speaker contends that these agonies, all the ways in which humanity inflicts sufferings upon one another, are natural. They are part of human nature. He contends that “P-38s and the Flying Fortresses are as natural / as horse-flies” (14). In some ways, this declaration by the speaker is shocking; it is jolting to consider the implements of war as something natural – something that follows the same sort of pattern as the nonhuman world. That, however, is exactly what the speaker is suggesting.

Here, the notion that humanity’s penchant for its own destruction is indeed bothersome but the speaker continues as if it is no revelation at all. These “unimaginable agonies,” he suggests “are not what they seem to man, not great and shattering, but really / Too small to produce any disturbance” because it is part of the natural course of things for human beings. This course, as ultimately suggests, leads to humanity’s utter annihilation. However, when it comes to its impact on the natural world, the “unimaginable agonies” that humanity inflicts upon itself has very little impact on the nonhuman world (4; 15-17). These horrific things impacting humanity are held in contrast to the calm, full ocean and to birds fishing and herons flying. It is important to bear in

mind that for “Jeffers, the earth is greater and more beautiful than all human tragedy” (Fleming 55).

The early lines of the poem establish the pastoral scene, which the speaker returns to in the final line. However, war and the atrocities inflicted by its violence is once again used to intrude upon the tranquility of the pastoral. In other words, this poem, differentiates between a calm sea and birds going about their normal function, with agonies and planes built for war. However, war and all its destructive elements intrude upon the pastoral but only so far.

Ultimately, “the murdered / Cities leave marks in the earth for a certain time” but even this will become nothing more than a “fossil rain-prints in shale” (19-20). These fossilized cities become part of the nonhuman which, to the speaker, is “equally beautiful” (20). Ultimately, the speaker contends, humanity will reach its “climax” and is “thus doomed to collapse like all the great civilizations of the past” (Scheese 133). When it does it will return to the non-human and become part of its beauty. The nonhuman world will continue by its own resilience, despite humanity.

Before going further, it is important to discuss an element of Jeffers’ work that continues to create debate. The focus of Jeffers’ mature poetic voice is largely his view that humanity is to be upended as the central figure within the great chain of being. In other words, he pushes against the notion that humanity is ranked slightly below the divine but always above any other part of the earth. It is clear from his poetry that he believed humanity is on a collision course with self-destructive / self-inflicted fossilizing, which may lend itself to annihilation. As “Calm and Full the Ocean” suggests, the annihilation is the natural progression of things, given human inclination toward destructive behavior. However, as this poem suggests, it is but a little “disturbance” to the natural world (17), which seems to indicate that the natural world will –

despite humanity's impact – continue seemingly unscathed. The nonhuman will survive beyond humanity's destructive nature. This view regarding the resilience of the nonhuman over and above the effects of humanity's excesses continues to meet challenges even now.

Unlike Jeffers, there are those who believe that the nonhuman will not survive humanity's destructive bent. While Jeffers consistently suggested that the nonhuman would continue on even after humanity ceases to exist, there are others who contend that humanity's impact is too great for anything to survive, something that P.J Crutzen and E.F. Soermer referred to as the Anthropocene. Max Oelschlaeger suggests, "So cumulatively consequential are the human impacts on the planet, including species and habitat, bio-chemical processes, oceans and atmosphere, and so on, that geologists argue that the Earth has entered a new age, essentially the climax of the Holocene: the Anthropocene" (231). What makes this so powerfully significant is the understanding that far from a Jeffersian ideal, humanity's all-encompassing impact has the potential to harm the world to the point of unsustainability. However, it is important to note, "The unsettling reality of the Anthropocene has generated a veritable firestorm of argument and counter-argument within what might loosely be called the environmental movement, recognizing that there are as many flavors within 'the movement' as there are in a Baskin-Robbins ice cream parlor" (Oelschlaeger 231). Nevertheless, in all these matters concerning the environment, in the Anthropocene debate, Jeffers continues to speak.

In fact, as the early part of this chapter highlighted, Jeffers used the intrusion of war and its machines into the pastoral as a means of conveying his concerns and philosophical perspective. He does the same thing with housing developments in his poem "Carmel Point" (*Hungerfield* 1953). After World War II, the machine within Jeffers resembles American expansion. The United States experienced a massive economic and social boom in the decade following the war.

Jeffers saw the expansion and development of that era as an issue for the nonhuman world because humanity continued to push into the beauty of things without so much as a thought.

This, of course, is the heart of “Carmel Point,” which is printed here in its entirety.

The extraordinary patience of things!
This beautiful place defaced with crop of suburban houses –
How beautiful when we first beheld it,
Unbroken field of poppy and lupin walled with clean cliffs;
No intrusion but two or three horses pasturing,
Or a few milch cows rubbing their flanks on the outcrop rock-heads –
Now the spoiler has come: does it care?
Not faintly. It has all time. It knows the people are a tide
That swells and in time will ebb, and all
Their works dissolve. Meanwhile the image of the pristine beauty
Lives in the very grain of the granite,
Safe as the endless ocean that climbs our cliff. –As for us:
We must uncenter our minds from ourselves;
We must unhumanize our views a little, and become confident
As the rock and ocean that we were made from.

“Carmel Point” (1953) begins with a bold declaration that is in keeping with Jeffers’ perspective regarding the resilience of the nonhuman. Here he refers to the nonhuman’s “extraordinary patience” presumably with humanity, given the poem’s larger context (1).

However, the second line of the poem knits together the pastoral vision and the intrusion of the machine simultaneously.

The speaker says, “This beautiful place defaced with crop of suburban houses” (2). The irony here is that the suburbs are often marketed as pastoral. Neighborhoods are given names like Forest Hills or Sunset Meadows in order to convey that a family might live within the pastoral dream. However, Jeffers counters that idea of purchased paradise.

Within the poem the natural world is related to a garden, which was once beautiful and unspoiled. Now it is “defaced,” which is an interesting word given that it can be thought of to mean spoiled; gardens can be spoiled. He also uses the word crop, which lends easily to an

understanding of a cultivated garden. The machine's intrusion comes, though, in the form of "suburban houses" (2). This idea of houses acting as the machine, acting as an intruder of the garden is jarring (7). It also raises a question regarding its function as the machine. It is important, then, to note something that James Karman, in his 2015 biography of Jeffers, suggested. Commenting on Jeffers' relationship to the machine age, Karman notes "Housing, too, especially large apartment projects, expressed Le Corbusier's belief that 'a house is a machine for living in'" (107). The speaker looks back on the days when no house intruded on the field (5).

This poem focuses on the area surrounding Jeffers' home, which had for years been a haven for he and his family. The narrator paints a dramatic scene that is akin to the lavish reds that fill Van Gogh's *Field of Poppies* as well as the blue and purple of the lupin, there is an "Unbroken field of poppy and lupin walled with clean cliffs;" its beauty was pristine with horses and "milch cows" the only semblance of humanity's presence (4-6). Now, however, these houses have intruded and "the spoiler has come" (2;7).

Both humanity and its dwelling are acting as Jeffers' machine within this poem, clear that humanity's need for homes and its excessiveness is an intrusion into the pastoral dream that once existed. Yet, this tide of people will, as Jeffers has already put forward in "The Coast Road" as well as in "Calm and Full the Ocean," recede. The narrator compares humanity's intrusion into the pastoral vision around Carmel Point to a tide "That swells and in time will ebb, and all / Their works dissolve" (8-9). This is something that the nonhuman already knows, thus its "extraordinary patience" helps it to endure. Within the strength and resilience, "pristine beauty / Live in the very grain of the granite" (10-11). In other words, humanity will come and go; all of its works will disappear and the beauty of the nonhuman will remain intact, "safe as the endless

ocean that climbs our cliff” (12). The poem ends with the narrator turning toward humanity and, somewhat uncharacteristically, becomes didactic.

Gently he encourages the reader to begin thinking of his or her existence in connection to the nonhuman world as opposed to something above it. Rather than thinking of human existence as the central part of the universe, “We must uncenter our minds from ourselves; / We must unhumanize our views a little, and become confident / As the rock and ocean that we were made from” (13-15). In other words, humanity must align itself with the nonhuman and must think itself less important, simply as part of the rocks and the waters from which existence emerged.

The machine is ever so clear within “Carmel Point.” The ending of the poem circles back, to the essence of the machine from the second line. The houses merely “defaced” the pristine beauty of the “Unbroken field of poppy” but they are the result of humanity’s self-centeredness. The narrator directly engages the reader to embrace the tenets of inhumanism as its own philosophical attitude. All of this, however is done within the framework of seeing homes as a machines intrusion into the nonhuman worlds version of an unspoiled garden.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The entirety of this discussion began with Leo Marx's supposition that American literature which deals with pastoralism has nearly always been impacted by "forces working against the dream of pastoral fulfillment" (Marx 358). Marx's formulation of American pastoralism involves both an unspoiled natural landscape as well as an understanding that it is "an ideology that has mediated conflicting desires for technological progress and bucolic retreat, 'a desire, in the face of the growing power and complexity of organized society, to disengage from the dominant culture and to seek out the basis for a simpler, more satisfying mode of life in a realm 'closer,' as we say, to nature'" (Marx 9; Marx qtd. Sayre 1). This conflicting desire is often represented by the presence of a machine, which acts as a force intruding into the pastoral. Marx traced that occurrence through a parade of canonical authors, like Thoreau, Hawthorne, Twain, and Fitzgerald. In the process, however, he left off an examination of American poetry.

It is fitting then that the final word of this discussion be given to Robinson Jeffers whose poetry contains a plethora of machine like elements that highlight the relationship between the natural world and humanity's intrusion into the pastoral vision. However, Jeffers was not simply operating out of imagination. He understood that human activities were taking a toll on the nonhuman world. Given Jeffers' role as one of the first significant American poets to raise environmental concerns related to matters now realized, issues that some connect with the Anthropocene epoch, his work takes on a more serious and influential tone. That is not to suggest that he was some sort of seer, able to predict exactly how humanity's actual intrusion into the natural world would ultimately impact things.

Jeffers is one of the first to speak into matters at a time when others did not. While it is tragic, war and its impact on humanity as well as the environment are as much of an issue in the twenty-first century as it has been in previous centuries. Concerns over excessive development and human expansion into natural habitats and places of beauty remain as much of a concern as ever, and Jeffers dealt with those issues at various points in his poetry. Yet, this was Jeffers' goal; he "firmly believed that 'poetry must concern itself with (relatively) permanent things' – the subjects 'that a reader two thousand years away could understand and be moved by'" (Cates 116). While this current century is far from the two millennia he thought of, the concerns he raised regarding humanity's view of itself as the central character, and the way he pushed for humanity to see its way clear of the nonhuman, remain pressing as the matters of global warming, oil spills, and threats of wars and nuclear holocausts attest. Nevertheless, Jeffers always held out that the nonhuman world would survive beyond humanity and humanity needed to see its way out of the nonhuman. A few of his last poems reflect this, albeit in a far darker tone than his earlier works.

In "Passenger Pigeons" (1963), published posthumously and one of Jeffers' lengthier lyric poems, the narrator asks Death to "turn your great rolling eyes away from / humanity" (Hunt 435; 14-15). The narrator, presumably a representative of humanity, is aware that Death watches for population explosions that are in many respects overburdening the rest of the natural world. Early in the poem he points to the passenger pigeon that once "Eclipsed the dawns" due to their great numbers (4). They were so many they would "flatten ten miles of forest" and Death took them (2). The same, the narrator points out, happened with the American bison whose "hordes / Would hide a prairie from horizon to horizon" (7). The narrator knows that "These explosions of

life” and the destruction they cause to their own habitat is Death’s “food, / They make your feasts” (12-13).

However, the narrator tells Death that humanity, though numbering “three billion,” is more powerful than either the pigeon or the American bison; Death then should “Respect humanity,” which still has “history to make” (23; 38; 36; 41). Boasting all the more in humanity’s greatness, the narrator boasts about nuclear weapons and energy, treating it as snatching “the live thunderbolt / Out of God’s hands (44-5). Here, however, Death speaks a condescending, “‘Very clever,’ he answered in his thin piping voice, / Cruel and a eunuch” (51-2). The narrator, however, continues the boast even declaring that humanity does not fear Death for “We have invented the jet-plane and the death bomb and the cross of / Christ” (73-4). The entirety of this poem leads to this moment when Death, wearing a Cheshire grin, responds “‘Oh,’ he said, ‘surely / You’ll live forever’ – grinning like a skull, covering his mouth with his / hand – ‘What could exterminate you?’” (74-6).

“Passenger Pigeons” reflects Jeffers’ belief that humanity’s great numbers, the development of nuclear weapons, and proclivity for war will ultimately lead to its final destruction. However, one way to understand this poem is that he saw the rise and fall of different species as simply part of the natural flow of things. When a species became too large and too destructive, they died out. This, according to the poem, is the case of the passenger pigeon, the American bison, dinosaurs, and the sabre-tooth tiger (1; 6; 53; 60). Despite the narrator’s protests, Death affirms that humanity will come to an end. However, the reader is left to consider that the natural world will continue. The poem leaves that possibility open.

Another one of Jeffers’ final poems affirms the notion of humanity’s passing but the natural worlds’ flourishing even further. In the poem “End of the World,” Jeffers – for the poem seems

autobiographical – speaks of his childhood in Switzerland. He was a schoolboy there during the time of the Boer War. While there he came to believe that the “human race / Would last the earth out, not dying till the planet died” (3-4). Over time, however, his views changed – which is quite clear from his views regarding inhumanism – and he came to be that humanity will “die faceless in flocks,” a rather morbid thought (8). However, despite humanity’s absence the “earth [will] flourish long after mankind is out” (9). This poem leaves little doubt that Jeffers considered humanity’s fate a foregone conclusion but the earth would flourish.

Nevertheless, there are those who push back on Jeffers’ idea of humanity’s abuse of the natural world and the nonhuman’s ability to survive it, nearly unaffected. Don Scheese in his work *Nature Writing: The Pastoral Impulse in America* (1996) takes issue with Jeffers on this point. He believes Jeffers got it wrong. He wrote, “As much as I admire and respect Jeffers’ poetry and passion, I think he got it wrong in this case [...] nature writers generally participate in a mental movement from an ego-centered to an eco-centered perspective. But Stegner reminds us – and Annie Dillard confirms – that we can never wholly escape ourselves. Nor should we try [...] The deep ecologists warn us not to be anthropocentric, but I know no way to look at the world, settled or wild, except through my own human eyes” (Scheese 134). Even Marx admitted that “American writers seldom, if ever, have designed satisfactory results for their pastoral fables” (364).

While Jeffers’ belief that the natural world would survive humanity’s intrusion remains open for debate, his willingness to “[State] his uncomfortable ideas strongly and lucidly” and “[risk] being wrong” are nothing short of admirable if not arguably heroic (Gioia 46). During his lifetime, he went from being at the pinnacle of popularity in both the academy and in popular culture to being relegated to obscurity. Yet, he was not willing to change the forcefulness of his

poetic voice to accommodate those who disagreed with him. The risk he took cost him. It led some to accuse him of simply being a misanthrope.

A close reading of Jeffers' work does not truly support the idea that he hated humanity. Rather, he saw the ultimate end of what human activity was doing to the nonhuman world. If anything, he was resigned to the belief that human nature was formed and unchangeable. Human beings are consumers and lovers of war. Both of which would lead to the end of human civilization. What is clear is that throughout his work he consistently speaks into the way in which the machine, often in the form of humanity or in something that humanity is using (i.e. planes, trucks, war), is impacting the nonhuman. It was not so much out of a hatred for humanity as perhaps out of a depth of understanding for people and a love for the beauty of things.

While his epic poetry contains much of these insights, it is within the lyric that a reader can most clearly see Jeffers' attempts to draw humanity toward a logical conclusion of their actions and beliefs. William Nolte suggests that within his lyric poetry "Jeffers dramatizes the terrible beauty of human agony as it darkly shines against the nonhuman world" and while the reader may not appreciate the didactic nature of his poetry they nevertheless could not simply dismiss it (Nolte 57). Jeffers' poems then "are testaments to his power, passion, and craft [...] and his themes then are ancient ones" and yet they continue to speak into issues that fill the papers and newscasts and the halls of the academy even to this very day. Jeffers lived at a time of "incredible change" yet he "sought always to focus on those things that abide [...] he looked for those shapers – call them principles, if you will – that lie behind the visible mask of nature" (Nolte 57; 25). As James Karman suggests, it is indeed time for a renewal of interest in the poetry of Robinson Jeffers. After all, given the state of things at this moment humanity may yet discover a way to reconcile itself to the natural world, recognizing the interconnectedness that it

shares with the hawks, the salmon, the sea, indeed all that exists. If humanity does not, if it continues to invoke and invite wars and nuclear holocausts, there may come a day when the sun rises but only the earth remains.

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