Chapter 6

Conclusion

Mythology is the picture language of metaphysics
... the womb of mankind's initiation to life and death.

Campbell, "Bios and Mythos" 19-20

The tides are in our veins, we still mirror the stars, life is your child, but there is in me

Older and harder than life and more impartial, the eye that Watched before there was an ocean.

Jeffers, "Continent's End" T C 179

Jeffers, who "attempts to find in the phenomenal world what has vanished from his moral universe: a centre for the soul" (Campbell, Mythic Worlds vii), seeks with T.S. Eliot and the other writers of his time to give "a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history." His 'mythopoeicism,' which integrates primitive religious practices, aligns "past and present, ... reality and myth" (Maxwell 118) in an attempt to initiate mankind into the mysteries of life and death. Endeavouring to keep man in accord with the age-old rhythms of the universe, he draws him outwards to discover the timeless peace and bliss of paradise in the womb of Mother Nature.

His myths, which operate on many levels, take stock, on the one hand, of the evil in the world, projecting in 'sensuous, symbolic language,' the "wolf in men's hearts" ("Ascent to the Sierras" OB 789): while on
the other, they seek to “synthesize the world into one organic whole,” visualizing “all the earth and all upon this planet as one” (Day 285). Jeffers's brand of 'pantheism,' projects the universe as “one being, a single organism, one great life that includes all life and all things . . . that must be loved and reverenced” (qtd. in Bennet 182). Leaping over the boundaries of the temporal, he goes “beyond hours and ages” to embrace the eternal “motionless and timeless centre” (“Tower beyond Tragedy” SP 139), the axis mundi, “the pivotal point around which all things turn” (Campbell, Occidental Mythology 12).

‘Man know thyself’ being the precept of myth on the psychological level, his myths delve into the depths of the human psyche to uncover the fears and delusions of the whole human race. On the metaphysical level, however, they try to fathom the nature of existence, the mysteries of the universe, the paradox of life and death. If his characters are, on the one hand, embodiments of evil, magnified versions of elemental fears and passions, representations of the amoral ‘Id,’ on the other hand, they are personifications of natural forces, vegetation gods and goddesses, sacrificing priestesses, sacred prostitutes, who ensure the propagation of the species, of life itself. Tamar and California are both incarnations of Evil and fertility goddesses, while David, Lee and Johnny are not only narcissistic individuals, protagonists of the contemporary wasteland, but also the ailing fisher-kings, the gods in their winter phases, the Jungian Sun-Gods who refuse to descend into their graves. They are the old kings
who must be ritually slain to fructify the earth.

Incest, which in Jeffersian symbology, functions as a metaphor for narcissism, for materialism and unbridled passion, also points to the primitive world, where sexuality is equated with fertility and life. Fire is not only the fire of destructive passion, but also the fertilising principle of the sun, while the serpent which is "repulsive, treacherous," is, in its phallic appearance, also "a symbol of life and renewal" (Jeffers qtd. in Bennet 157). "Red, traditionally associated with blood and fire," suggests not only conflicting desires and ambitions but also the life energy, and is contrasted with "Black, traditionally associated with death . . ." (Hart 221). Arson, violence and bloodshed are not only the end result of destructive drives, but also sacrifices, ritual killings in keeping with the fertility rites of yore. In an attempt to reconcile himself with the mindless massacres of the times he reduces even the wars to rites in line with the life-ritual of birth and death, evident in nature. The tides of bloodshed, that bathe Mother Earth at regular intervals, are nothing but "The tides of brute womb, the excess / and weight of life spilled out like water . . ." ("Haunted Country" OB 782).

Set against the background of raging nature, "the dramas in the hearts of his men and women are meshed with the slow revolving panorama of the Californian year" (de Casseres 64). Raging passions are identified in his scheme of things with the raging elements of nature, human passions acting as catalysts necessary for cyclical change.
A study of the mythic narratives, "Tamar" and "Roan Stallion," thus explicates my basic premise that Jeffers's personal mythology is an affirmation of life, a eulogy to the dying and resurrecting god of the universe. Jeffers, who believes that "poetry cannot speak without remembering the turns of the sun and the moon and the rhythm of the ocean and the recurrences of human generations, the returning waves of life and death (qtd. in Bennet 108), is no nihilist, no votary of the 'cult of cruelty,' but one who is vociferous in his avowal of life. Death is inevitable, yet, it is no evil, for the mysterious life-force surges on invincible even in the face of death, "death [being] for the species what sleep is for the individual" (Schopenhauer qtd. in Durant 321). Moreover, "... the highest summit of life can be expressed [only] through the symbolism of death... for any growing beyond oneself means death" (Jung qtd. in Harrison 235). His philosophy of 'Inhumanism,' which cautions man against "wast[ing] inward upon humanity" ("Tower Beyond Tragedy," *SP* 137), is a call for ecological balance, a call to turn from man to 'not-man,' to the fierce, undivided spirit of the cosmos. Jeffers, who seeks to awaken the ecological consciousness of mankind, realising that only a radical change in outlook can save the world from total devastation, essays to re-establish man's relationship with "the momentous power" (Jennifer and Roger Woolger qtd. in van de Castle 390) that sways the universe. To Jeffers, who claims kinship with the stars and the tides, with the different elements of nature, death is only a release:
. . . Make me grass, Death, make me stone
Make me air to wander free between the stars and the peaks,
but cut humanity
Out of my being that is the wound that festers in me . . .

("Tower Beyond Tragedy," SP 115).

Humanity is to him "the mould to break away from, the crust
to break through, the coal to break into fire, / The atom to be split"
("Roan Stallion," SP 149). Humanity, which is neurotically bent upon
itself must break out of itself and fuse with the other elements of na-
ture. The coal must be consumed and the atom split, to discharge light,
heat and energy. Energy conserved within the system is unprofitable.
In the process of giving, it is reduced to ashes, but death is also a part
of the reality called life, sacrifice being ingrained into the nature of the
universe. Nature which is sacrificed continually is renewed again in the
cyclic nature of all existence (Brophy 75).

Jeffers, who values the stoic endurance symbolized in stone, in the
age-old, wind-twisted trees of the Carmel region, advises frustrated man
to uncentre himself and fall in love outwardly, losing himself in the beauty
of nature. His myths, which "keep mankind in accord with the natural
world" (Campbell, Inner Reaches 39), merge the timeless dimension with
the time-bound dimension, the universal nature of the myth, merging with
the particular zeitgeist of the times, "to break windows through the walls
of culture to eternity" (144).