

Environmental Injustices in Robinson Jeffers's and Denise
Levertov's Ecopoetry

by

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Abstract:

This thesis explores critiques of environmental injustices in the poetry of Robinson Jeffers (1887-1962) and Denise Levertov (1923-1997). The anthropocentrism typical of American culture constantly imposes hierarchical division and underestimation of otherness which cause injustices to people and nonhumans. In urban, war, and natural environments, the poets investigate the impact of modernity, imperialism, and environmental degradation on changing environmental conditions and ecological wholeness. Jeffers and Levertov establish in their poetry a shared trajectory where they start with a description of injustices and their destructive impacts, progress towards a condemnation of the politics behind these injustices, and propose alternative ecological values. In their trajectories of critique across these three contexts, their poetry attempts to bridge the divide between the city and nature, between the Americans and the Vietnamese, and between humans and nonhumans. It provides a model for the reconstruction of anthropocentrism toward ecological relations of integrity. Their poetry reveals situations of the environmental 'unconscious' and attempts to draw a vision of environmental imagination and justice.

Chapter 1 of the thesis registers Jeffers's response to modernity. It explores his presentation of the city as a centre for accumulating change and corruption that separates man from nature. He presents the struggle of presence within the confinement of urbanization, mechanization, and rapid changes against human instinctual freedom and cultural values, a crisis he resists with his philosophy of Inhumanism. Instead, he urges a withdrawal to nature where he affirms in the landscape timeless and holistic values as contrasting models to human values. Chapter 2 investigates Levertov's account of the Vietnam War as breeding violence and destruction to people's safety and emotional wellness. She presents victimization, loss, and emotional stasis which she supports with her political poetry of resistance. She encourages empathy, solidarity, and the need to maintain safety for others. Chapter 3 traces the poets' presentations of exploitation, destruction, and cruelty to land and animals in their poetry. In the poems, both poets point out nonhuman forces that wrestle with humanity's injustices which they represent through myth and figuration. In their presentation of nonhumans, they highlight existing ideologies that underestimate nonhumans and seek in their poetry to affirm nonhuman agency and consciousness.

In my investigation of their critique of injustices, my thesis draws on recent developments and turns of ecocriticism. It reframes the poets' critiques through Environmental Justice theory, looking at human alienation in the city, the victimization of people in the Vietnam War, the exploitation of lands, and the cruelty to animals as environmental injustices. Under these thematic discussions, my thesis analyses the affective forces that emerge in response to injustices across these contexts. Jeffers's presentation of the hopelessness of people in the city, Levertov's depiction of the victimized emotions in Vietnam, and their presentation of nonhuman struggle in the degraded environments underscore the poets' awareness of the notion of interdependency in the universe. The thesis also demonstrates the material forces of nonhumans that wrestle with human denial of them and affirm their existence instead. These recent developments in ecocriticism, which resonate with the poets' critiques, elucidate the fundamental dynamics of existence and challenge the anthropocentric ideology that fosters such injustices.

Dedication:

To all whose love, support and encouragement have fueled my passion for learning and research.

Acknowledgement:

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the individuals who have played a pivotal role in the completion of my PhD thesis.

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Huge thanks and deepest appreciation to my supervisors Dr. Jarad Zimbler and Dr. Sara Wood for their unwavering guidance, invaluable insights, and constant encouragement throughout this journey. Their expertise, patience, and dedication have been instrumental in shaping my research and helping me overcome the challenges I faced and to refine and strengthen my work. I could not have accomplished this thesis without them.

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ABBREVIATIONS

All works by Robinson Jeffers and Denise Levertov are cited parenthetically using the following abbreviations:

CL1 Jeffers, Robinson, *The Collected Letters of Robinson Jeffers, with Selected Letters of Una Jeffers, Volume One: 1890-1930*, ed. by James Karman (Stanford University Press, 2009).

CL2 Jeffers, Robinson, *The Collected Letters of Robinson Jeffers, with Selected Letters of Una Jeffers, Volume Two: 1931-1939*, ed. by James Karman (Stanford University Press, 2011).

CP1 Jeffers, Robinson, *The Collected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers: Volume One: 1920-1928*, ed. by Tim Hunt (Stanford University Press, 1988).

CP2 Jeffers, Robinson, *The Collected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers: Volume Two: 1928-1938*, ed. by Tim Hunt (Stanford University Press, 1989).

CP3 Jeffers, Robinson, *The Collected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers: Volume Three: 1939-1962*, ed. by Tim Hunt (Stanford University Press, 1991).

CP4 Jeffers, Robinson, *The Collected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers: Volume Four: Poetry 1903-1920, Prose, and Unpublished Writings*, ed. by Tim Hunt (Stanford University Press, 2000).

CP Levertov, Denise, *The Collected Poems of Denise Levertov* (New Directions Books, 2013).

Introduction:

Robinson Jeffers and Denise Levertov are two distinctive voices in the twentieth century that offer a fascinating critique of injustices that resulted from America's pursuit of power and anthropocentrism. They use poetry as a medium to draw attention to injustices and to invoke alternative concepts of integrity, peace, and preservation of ethics. An essential reason for looking at these poets together is their shared sense of estrangement from their culture. Raised in Europe, they were outsiders to American culture, giving them a critical distance that underscores their attentive perception of injustice and their motivation to stand against cultural and racial discrimination, tyranny, greed, and the subjugation of nonhumans. Their critique of injustice is presented through a trajectory that consists of three responses. Their early poetry starts with the perception and description of instances of injustices in urban and war environments. Both share a reflection on injustices that threaten an integrated vision of the universe, impacting ethical and social values in urban, war, and nonhuman environments. Their sensory description develops into an articulation of an independent position against injustice. For Jeffers, his withdrawal from the city in 1914 inaugurates a reflection on a timeless model of nature against the changes of modernity. Levertov, since *To Stay Alive* (1971), starts to propose political activism and revolution in response to victimization during the Vietnam War. These transitions into physical and political stances reflect the poets' independent voices in rejecting both modernity and violence at war. These positions culminate, notably in their late poetry, with a discussion of injustices towards the nonhuman and an assertion of ecological consciousness that seeks justice, recognition, safety, and integration.

On a literary level, these poets resist rigid categories. This literary freedom fosters a perceptive critical eye that looks at the injustices from an independent ecological

perspective rather than from within an established genre. This enabled Jeffers and Levertov to write from their inner sense of responsibility and to freely articulate an independent voice. The trajectory in their poetry over time reveals their recognition of how far human anthropocentrism impacts the quality of life and their courage to stand against it. Since Buell explains that ‘environmentalism of any sort cannot hope to achieve even modest reforms unless some take extreme positions advocating genuinely alternative paths: rejection of consumer society, communitarian antimodernism, animal liberation,’ I claim that Jeffers’s and Levertov’s poetry share both a rejection of anthropocentrism and an advocacy of justice as well as a critique of environmental degradation.¹

Recognizing this shared environmental consciousness in their poetry, new waves of ecocriticism such as environmental injustice, animal studies, and material and affective ecocriticism offer an opportunity to reexamine Jeffers’s and Levertov’s poetry through a new lens.² These new discussions will help to reshape their poetry into a more sustained environmental reading, investigating interdisciplinary topics and the dynamics of human relationships with others in various settings. In a landmark article on the relationship

1 Lawrence Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture, and Environment in the U.S. And Beyond* (Harvard University Press, 2001), p. 7.

2 Ecocritical discussions have been categorized into four waves of ecocriticism, a categorization which Lawrence Buell introduced in his book *The Future of Environmental Criticism* (2005). Buell delineates the evolution of the field into two distinct waves. The first wave primarily privileges rural spaces, whereas the second wave also incorporates urban environments into the discourse of ecocriticism. The second wave examines issues of environmental justice, emphasizing how anthropocentric perspectives, coupled with tyranny and greed, adversely affect individuals and communities, despite their environment. Buell highlights the tendency for the overlap between the first and second waves. Recent studies extend Buell’s discussion of the field to third and fourth waves such as Scott Slovic, 'The Third Wave of Ecocriticism: North American Reflections on the Current Phase of the Discipline', *Ecozon*, 1.1 (2010), pp. 4-10, Scott Slovic, 'Editor's Note', *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, 19.4 (2012), pp. 619-21, Pippa Marland, 'Ecocriticism', *Literature Compass*, 10.11 (2013), pp. 846-68, and Mohammed Attula Nuri, 'Three Waves of Ecocriticism: An Overview', *Horizon*, 5 (2020), pp. 253-68. While the third wave includes interdisciplinary discussions on ecofeminism, animal studies, and eco-postcolonialism, the fourth wave of ecocriticism builds on previous discussions and investigates the materiality and the agency of nonhumans.

between environmental justice theory and literature, Julie Sze explains that environmental justice defines the environment as ‘a site where people live, work, and play,’ rejecting a ‘mainstream representation of environment—as green empty space.’³ On the contrary, it places people, Sze points out, ‘especially racialized communities and urban spaces, at the center of what constitutes environment and nature.’⁴ This inclusive perspective on the environment encourages more comprehensive discussions of relational power dynamics in these sites, between different groups of humans and in their relationship to nonhumans.

In the twentieth century, a spectrum of environmental threats existed across varied places that impacted ecosystems and their integrity. These topics have been addressed by American ecopoets who take a radical stance on environmentalism, advocating for significant change, as Timothy Clark explains, in which ‘one should see oneself not as an atomistic individual engaged in the world as a resource for consumption and self-assertion, but as part of greater living identity.’⁵ Ecocriticism's emphasis on the self as embedded in a wider ecosystem invites us to think about environmental justice, which investigates discriminatory and harmful anthropocentric relations in varied natural and created environments. This theory is crucial for my thesis as I will address how a critique of anthropocentrism develops in the works of Robinson Jeffers and Denise Levertov. Anthropocentrism and its relationship to social justice is a recent area of investigation for ecocriticism where it sees ‘the human violence against the natural world’ as ‘a product of

3 Julie Sze, 'From Environmental Justice Literature to the Literature of Environmental Justice ', in *The Environmental Justice Reader: Politics, Poetics, and Pedagogy*, ed. by Mei Mei Evans Joni Adamson, and Rachel Stein (The University of Arizona Press, 2002), pp. 163-80, p. 165.

4 Julie Sze, 'From Environmental Justice Literature to the Literature of Environmental Justice ', p. 163.

5 Timothy Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment* (Cambridge University Press 2011), p. 2.

oppressive structures of hierarchy among human beings.’⁶ Thus, environmental justice advocates for an autonomous universe without a human ego that divides, exploits, and commits acts of threat and harm to others and the universe.

Poetry in the early twentieth century addressed the American pursuit of power and its impact on people and the land, in natural or human-built environments. Many poets critiqued the role of the United States in global conflict and the exploitation of resources alongside the rapid expansion of cities and the rise of consumerism. Poetry at the beginning of the century registers what John Elder calls ‘a hostility towards Western civilization.’⁷ Poetic language becomes ‘a therapeutic response to certain types of widely felt political outrage.’⁸ Some early twentieth-century poets such as T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and Robert Frost responded to the politics and cultural upheaval in their work, but Robinson Jeffers responded to these crises with a more inclusive ecological vision that pinpointed injustices and provided a redemptive vision of justice.⁹ He offers a good example of a poet with ecological concepts that preceded the formation of environmentalism as a political movement in the late half of the 20th century. His writing defied early 20th-century poetic norms as he is neither modernist like Eliot or Pound nor approachably conversational like Frost. Jeffers’s personal isolation and literary individualism facilitates the development of

6 Timothy Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment* (Cambridge University Press 2011), p. 89.

7 John Elder, *Imagining the Earth: Poetry and the Vision of Nature* (University of Georgia Press, 1985), p. 1.

8 Peter Nicholls, ‘Wars I Have Seen’, in *A Concise Companion to Twentieth-Century American Poetry*, ed. by Stephen Fredman (Blackwell Publisher, 2005), pp. 11-32, p. 12

9 Poems such as T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* (1922) and the early sections of Ezra Pound’s *The Cantos* capture the cultural and political upheaval at the beginning of the century. Robert Frost also responded to America’s capitalism in collections such as *Mountain Interval* (1916-21), *New Hampshire* (1923), and *A Further Range* (1936) in which he embraces the rural life as a retreat into unconsciousness. Despite their different poetic schools and styles, these poets, and others, responded to American Capitalism and human immersion in greed and power. In their poetry, they present the cultural apocalypse, madness, and hopelessness of the age and describe how people are enclosed in apathy and paralysis. Such poetry has a moral purpose: to free literary texts from national themes of power and independence and to provoke a public ‘awareness’ similar to that advocated by Thoreau and other earlier American writers.

his philosophy of Inhumanism against anthropocentric relations to other people, places, and species.

There are other American poets in the later part of the century from whom a sense of environmental consciousness arises. These poets see the persistent anthropocentrism sharply as the scope and nature of social and environmental degradation become better known. Ongoing Cold War conflicts and nuclear threats, alongside an increasing awareness of environmental degradation, helped to galvanize environmental protest. A later generation of poets carried an awareness of ecological issues reflecting ‘a growing spirit of protest’ that appeared in the mid-twentieth century and the freedom of poetic subject matter after the emergence of the Beat poets.¹⁰ Poets such as Gary Snyder, Denise Levertov, Allen Ginsberg, Wendell Berry and others present a perspective on the human-nonhuman relationship and contemporary environmental issues. The flourishing discussion of environmental issues in poetry culminates in the establishment of ecopoetry as a genre.¹¹ Among the ecopoetry in this period is Denise Levertov’s poetry on political and natural environments, where she presents, in a similar way to Jeffers’s sustained critique, a trajectory that condemns American violence in the Vietnam War and advocates for safety and justice for both people and the land. She discusses the impact of nuclear weapons on bodies and land, the victimization of Indigenous people, violence against animals, and the destruction of plants and trees for urban construction.

10 J. Scott Bryson, 'Introduction', in *Ecopoetry: A Critical Introduction*, ed. by J. Scott Bryson (The University of Utah Press, 2002), pp. 1-13, p. 3.

11 Leonard Scigaj’s *Sustainable Poetry: Four Ecopoets* (1999) and Bernard W. Quetchenbach’s *Back from the Far Field: American Nature Poets in the Late Twentieth Century* (2000) are two early critical sources that take ecopoetry as their main focus and contribute to the sense of an emerging canon of twentieth-century male poets including Gary Snyder, Wendell Berry and Robinson Jeffers.

Although there are a lot of critical works written on both poets, they are not framed as ecopoets. Most of the works conducted on Jeffers engage with his philosophy of Inhumanism, while works on Levertov tend to discuss her Vietnam War poetry and religion. While these are essential areas of investigation, they can be shaped into a new reading through the lens of ecopoetry. Their poetry meets J Scott Bryson's three criteria of ecopoetry as 'a subset of nature poetry that, while adhering to certain conventions of romanticism, also advances beyond that tradition and takes on distinctly contemporary problems and issues, thus resulting in a version of nature poetry generally marked by three primary characteristics.'¹² The first of these characteristics is maintaining an 'ecocentric perspective' that emphasizes the interdependent nature of the world. The second characteristic of ecopoetry is 'an imperative toward humility in relationships with both human and nonhuman nature' against the aggrandized human ego. The third is 'an intense skepticism concerning hyperrationality, a scepticism that usually leads to an indictment of an overtechnologized modern world and a warning concerning the very real potential for ecological catastrophe.'¹³ Thus, these three characteristics represent a broad definition of ecopoetry with a flux of socio-political, relational, and environmental aspects that reflect Felix Guattari's concept of ecology in his *Three Ecologies* as a triangulation of 'social,' 'mental,' and 'environmental.'¹⁴ These characteristics are central to my reading of Jeffers's and Levertov's work as ecopoetry in this thesis. They invite a reading from an

12 J. Scott Bryson, 'Introduction', in *Ecopoetry: A Critical Introduction*, ed. by J. Scott Bryson (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2002), p. 1-13, p. 5

13 J. Scott Bryson, 'Introduction', p. 6.

14 Felix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies* (Athlone: 2000).

environmental justice perspective, highlighting injustices that threaten the ecosystem and proposing sustainable solutions.

For ecopoets, language is perceived as ‘a positive instrument that can promote authentic social and environmental relations between humans and their environment—relations that can lead to emancipatory social change.’¹⁵ Jeffers’s and Levertov’s poetry attempts to raise this social awareness. Ecopoetry, in fact, makes poets into ‘ecocritics’ who make the poem a ‘location of argument for social change and environmental awareness.’¹⁶ The poem is both ‘a site for reflecting on our limits’ and ‘a space in which we might learn to construct alternative ways of thinking and acting in the world’ as Mark Long emphasizes.¹⁷ Their poetry is driven by political and environmental concerns, articulating an ethical vision of redemption and integration against existing power relations. They present environmental injustices that threaten the human psychic and autonomous self and also offer poetry as ‘a therapeutic antidote to psychic alienation and division’, a feature of ecopoetry emphasized by Clark. Their work demonstrates that poetic language is both ‘compensatory and restorative, harking back perhaps towards a lost or yet to be integrated “wholeness” of human nature.’¹⁸ Their mythic and personifying modes ‘make more sense to hear in the non-human a speaking voice.’¹⁹

15 Leonard M. Scigaj, *Sustainable Poetry: Four American Poets* (The University Press of Kentucky: 1999), p. 33.

16 Roger Thompson, ‘Emerson, Divinity, and Rhetoric in Transcendentalist Nature Writing and Twentieth-Century Ecopoetry’, in *Ecopoetry: A Critical Introduction* ed. by J. Scott Bryson (The University of Utah Press: 2002), p. 29-38, p. 36.

17 Mark Long, ‘William Carlos Williams, Ecocriticism and Contemporary American Poetry’, in *Ecopoetry: A Critical Introduction*, ed. by J. Scott Bryson (The University of Utah Press, 2002), pp. 58-74, p. 59.

18 Timothy Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment* (Cambridge University Press 2011), p. 20.

19 Timothy Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction*, p. 48.

My thesis argues that Robinson Jeffers's and Denise Levertov's poetry reveals a critique of American anthropocentrism and the destruction it has created in different urban, political, and environmental contexts over the span of the early to late twentieth century. Both poets grapple with anthropocentric relations in which the pursuit of power, manifested in tyranny, greed, and environmental degradation, lacks ethical and ecological considerations and causes injustices to marginalized people and nonhumans. Their critique is presented in a trajectory that observes, describes, opposes injustices, and proposes the potential of ecological thinking. Recognizing the hierarchical relationship that fuels injustices, both poets investigate examples that disrupt an ecologically sustainable way of life and cause unjust acts towards both humans and nonhumans. This is evident in Jeffers's critique of modernity manifested in the atomized urban experience in the 1930s, Levertov's antiwar poetry in the 1960s, and their environmental critique of exploitation and cruelty to nonhumans throughout their poetry. Their poetry carries a vision of environmental justice, which they intensively evoke and call for by highlighting existing imbalances in ecological relations and offering sustainable alternatives of justice, safety, and wholeness. They were driven by individual ecological awareness, rather than a mainstream attitude, of the impact of these injustices, which they shared with a broader audience through their poetry.

As they work through the trajectory from exposing injustice to ecological balance, both poets reveal the internal struggle by which people and nonhumans live, backing up their social and environmental consciousness with affective and material recognition. Jeffers's and Levertov's poetry gradually unpacks the impacts of injustice within the human relationship to the environment. There is a dedication in their poetry to expose the physical and even the intricate affective manifestation of injustices in people's struggle, lost sense

of identification with the culture that is growing fast, and the quick sense of change that threatens their ability to adapt. This dedication is blended with their sensory presentation, showing how vision, sounds, smell, and touch helped provide an accurate picture of a lived experience of injustice. These multi-faced aspects in their poetry make it apocalyptic, dynamic, energetic, psychic, and ecological; a power that wrestles with silence, speaks for the victimized, and educates.

Both poets reach their mature critique by following a similar trajectory that reveals a change of responses, starting with distant and reflective approaches to a gradual political involvement. Their early poetry conveys a sense of astonishment, estrangement, condemnation, and the need to escape corruption. Silence and perception are two mediums through which the poets can embark on their opposition to injustice. However, as they engage more with the political events around them, they start to reflect upon their passive descriptive position and the nature of their physical or psychic escape. They realize that a detached critique is not enough and recognize the necessity to articulate an active political voice in response to growing injustices. For Jeffers, his authoritative position and detachment from the city as a symbol of American culture instigates a regret that his political isolation did not prevent America from participating in war violence. On the other hand, Levertov's intimate emotional connection with the experience of the Vietnamese impacts her poetic vision, resulting in a long struggle to overcome the blurring of her vision and, therefore, articulate a political revolutionary voice against war and its impact. Despite the changes in their poetic voice and perspective, both poets use their poetry to convey an accelerating crisis, to reflect on possible grounds to stop violence, and to provide an ecological perspective.

The thesis aims to read the critique of injustices in Jeffers's and Levertov's poetry in light of recent developments in ecocriticism, investigating environmental justice and the affective and material turns of ecocriticism. This reframing of the work of these poets through new areas of ecocriticism brings a new perspective to criticism and underscores the relevance of their environmental consciousness to our own time. Other objectives stem from this central aim. Taking a focused approach in my ecocritical reading, my first objective is to present in each chapter the poets' perception of injustices in a specific environment. The first section of each chapter unpacks their descriptions of injustices and their impact on people and nonhumans, revealing the threats of anthropocentric relations in urban, political, and environmental contexts. Their critiques are presented through dualistic constructs like city and nature, noise and silence, progress and decay, tragedy and beauty, unconsciousness and consciousness, war and peace, and detachment and attachment. I will analyze the nature of each poet's sensory perception and its relation to their philosophy or conception of poetry. Jeffers's isolation and Levertov's imagination and poetry of experience determine the scope of their sensory presentation that reflects choices of remoteness and intimacy. My second objective is to trace the poets' gradually growing responses to injustices, revealing how both poets undergo a similar journey despite their different contexts. Examining this journey is to assess processes of ambivalence, emotional stasis, self-reflection, the regret of political positions, emerging political concerns, determined engagement, and proposals of integration and peace in relation to their poetic conception.

My third objective is to explore the affective and material forces in their poetry which reveal the poets' ecological views. On the one hand, I will analyze the materiality and

significance of certain natural objects such as rocks, mountains, oceans, animals, and trees that challenge human anthropocentric significance. I will trace the objects' symbolism as touchstones for the poets to illustrate humans' constantly changing world and the discrepancy between past and present. I will unravel the affective dimensions that emerge during urban, political, and environmental degradation. The depiction of these material and affective dimensions underlies the poets' ecological values that recognize the agency of all beings which wrestle with human power. Taking the new turns of ecocriticism, I will show how both poets, in their trajectory of perception and responses, highlight not only the material and visible impacts of injustices but also the affective and the hidden in both the vulnerable and nonhumans. My fourth objective is to analyze the poets' use of figurative language and myth to describe the affective experience in response to injustice and to demonstrate new ecological possibilities against constructed relations and ideologies. These techniques carry the potential of art to meditate between separated aspects and merge them into a vision of recognition and ecological wholeness, bringing into poetry their voice and materiality.

Literature Review:

Having stated the argument and the objectives, it is crucial to explain the essential literature that has informed this thesis. Many critical studies on Jeffers examine different topics such as his philosophy of Inhumanism, his concept of time, beauty, and tragedy.²⁰

²⁰ Examples include Mercedes Monjian, *Robinson Jeffers: A Study in Inhumanism* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1958); Arthur B. Coffin, *Poet of Inhumanism* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1971); William N. Nolte, *Rock and Hawk: Robinson Jeffers and the Romantic Agony* (University of Georgia Press, 1982); Tadeusz Salawek, *The Dark Glory: Robinson Jeffers and His Philosophy of Earth, Time, and Things, History of Foreign Literatures* (Uniwersytet Śląski, 1990); Alan Malnar, 'Words of Prey: Inhumanism and the Hawk Imagery of Robinson Jeffers', (unpublished master's thesis, California State University Dominguez Hills, 1996); Catherine R. Owen, 'Poet of Stone and Planets: Counter-Pastoralism, Inhumanism, and Literary Ecology in the Work of Robinson Jeffers' (unpublished master's

Despite this rich scholarship on his poetry, it is only through recent studies starting from 2001 that scholars started to examine ecological topics such as Jeffers's influence on deep ecology, ecofeminism in his poetry, and ecological revisions of the romantic nature lyric in his poetry alongside other poets.²¹ Tim Hunt and Robert Zaller have made significant contributions to Jeffers's criticism and were particularly helpful for this thesis. Hunt published five volumes of *The Collected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers* (1989-2000) and edits the journal *Jeffers Studies* with an extensive body of articles written by himself and other scholars. Three significant articles by Hunt, from 1990 and afterwards, are helpful in the examination of Jeffers's politics which I will discuss in chapter 1.²² Looking at the bibliography of books written solely on Jeffers, one notices a gap of critical engagement from 2005 to 2012 though there are some engagement with his poetry across some critical works and short articles.²³ With the increasing interest in environmental approaches to literature over the past decade, scholars have again begun to analyze Jeffers from an

thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1999); Amy Reiswig, 'Robinson Jeffers, Hermit of Carmel: Recontextualizing Inhumanism', (unpublished master's thesis, McGill University, 2000); Carmen E. Lowe, 'The Inhumanist Imagination in Twentieth Century Poetry: From Robinson Jeffers and D. H. Lawrence to Ted Hughes and Sylvia Plath', (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Tufts University, 2003); Joshua D. Bartee, 'Reality and Nature in Robinson Jeffers' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Nevada, 2017); and Matthew Calarco, *How Not to Be Human: The Inhumanist Philosophy of Robinson Jeffers* (Anthem Press 2024).

21 Tracy Lynn Sangster 'An Invitation to the Dance: A Study of the Influence of the Works of Robinson Jeffers and D. H. Lawrence on Deep Ecology', (unpublished master's thesis, California State University, 2001); Nicole E. Glick, 'Transformational Poetry: Ecofeminism in Jeffers, Snyder, Rich and Coleman', (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of California Riverside, 2004); Robert Temple Cole Cone, 'Ecological Revisions of the Romantic Nature Lyric: Robinson Jeffers, Ted Hughes, and W. S. Merwin', (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2005).

22 Tim Hunt, 'Robinson Jeffers: The Modern Poet as Antimodernist', in *Critical Essays on Robinson Jeffers*, ed. by James Karman (Boston G. K. Hall, 1990), pp. 245-52, Tim Hunt, 'Constructed Witness: The Drama of Presence in Jeffers's Lyric Voice', in *The Wild That Attracts Us: New Critical Essays on Robinson Jeffers*, ed. by ShaunAnne Tangney (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2015), pp.41-64, and Tim Hunt, 'Why Did Jeffers Omit "Shine Perishing Republic" from *Tamar and Other Poems* and How Might It Matter?', *Jeffers Studies*, 22 (2021-2022), pp. 5-26.

23 For example, in his examination of the impact of Darwinian ideas on American and British poets, John Holmes in *Darwin's Bards: British and American Poetry in the Age of Evolution* (Edinburgh University Press, 2009) discusses in Jeffers's poetry humanity's place in nature and human's relation with nonhuman animals.

ecocritical standpoint since 2015. Two significant collections of articles make substantial contributions to the analysis of Jeffers's poetry in chapters one and three of the thesis, providing a discussion of topics such as history, land, and animals for Jeffers, which inform his critique of the dynamic relations between humanity and others. ShaunAnne Tangney incorporates articles on Jeffers and the environment in *The Wild That Attract Us: New Critical Essays on Robinson Jeffers* (2015). Robert Zaller's *The Atom to Be Split* (2019) includes articles by Zaller across varied contexts, including ecological topics about Jeffers's relationship with the land and cruelty to animals. However, there is potential for more critical investigation as ecocriticism is developing, encouraging a rereading of Jeffers's poetry in light of new ecological concepts such as material ecocriticism, affective ecocriticism, and environmental justice.

Like Jeffers, a diverse body of critical studies have been conducted on Levertov's poetics. Most of these studies engage with her poetry of the Vietnam War and its impact on poetic vision and play a significant role in shaping my discussion of political injustices and their affective impact in chapter 2.²⁴ In *Denise Levertov: The Poetry of Engagement* (1993), Audrey T. Rodgers comprehensively examines Levertov's political poetry throughout her entire career and contributes significantly to the discourse on *To Stay Alive*

24 Harry Marten, *Understanding Denise Levertov*. ed. by Matthew J. Brucoli, *Understanding Contemporary American Literature* (University of South Carolina Press, 1988); Audrey T. Rodgers, *Denise Levertov: The Poetry of Engagement* (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1993); Cary Nelson, 'Whitman in Vietnam: Poetry and History in Contemporary America', *The Massachusetts Review*, 16.1 (1975), pp. 55-71; Anne Dewey, 'The Art of the Octopus: The Maturation of Denise Levertov's Political Vision', *Renascence*, 50.1-2 (1997), pp. 65-81; Ed Block, 'Poet, Word, and World: Reality and Transcendence in the Work of Denise Levertov', *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture*, 4.3 (2001), pp. 159-84; Lisa Narbeshuber, 'Relearning Denise Levertov's Alphabet: War, Flesh, and the Intimacy of Otherness', *Canadian Review of American Studies*, 36.2 (2006), pp. 131-47; Małgorzata Poks, 'The Poet's "Caressive Sight": Denise Levertov's Transactions with Nature', *Text Matters*, 1.1 (2011), pp. 145-52; Cristina M. Gámez-Fernández, 'Beyond Vision: The Role of Perception in Denise Levertov's Examination of Blindness', *Renascence*, 63.4 (2011), pp. 287-306; John Wrighton, 'Fear of the Blind': Political Vision and Postwar Ethics in the Poetry of Denise Levertov', *Literature and History*, 30.2 (2021), pp. 138-54.

in chapter 2. Levertov's book *The Poet in the World* (1973) contains her essays in which she explains her poetic and political concepts, which are the core of my analysis of her Vietnam War poetry. Other studies read her poetry from an ecological perspective examining ecofeminism, ecological advocacy, and the encounter of the other.²⁵ However, unlike Jeffers, there are fewer ecocritical studies on her poetry. The criticism of her poetry focuses more on politics than on ecology. Reconceptualizing her political and environmental poetry through recent topics of ecocriticism offers a fresh perspective on the significance of her work. Furthermore, biographical works on Levertov, such as Jewel Spears Brooker's *Conversations with Denise Levertov* (1998) and Donna Hollenberg's *A Poet's Revolution: The Life of Denise Levertov* (2013) provide valuable insights into her life and poetic concepts, and serve to justify her political and social awareness.

Despite this rich and multifaced examination of their poetry, with the diverse body of journal articles I will quote throughout my thesis, there is no work that investigates the potential connection between Jeffers's and Levertov's poetry. Although there is an indirectly shared ground in which Nicole E. Glick (2004) examines Jeffers and Snyder and Dorothy M. Nielsen (2001) examined Levertov and Snyder, my thesis is the first study that combines both poets from an ecological perspective.²⁶ Even in the ecocritical studies on

25 Peter Middleton, *Revelation & Revolution in the Poetry of Denise Levertov* (Binnacle Press, 1981); Dorothy M. Nielsen, 'Prosopopoeia and the Ethics of Ecological Advocacy in the Poetry of Denise Levertov and Gary Snyder', *Contemporary Literature*, 34.4 (1993), pp.691-713; Albert Gelpi, and Robert J. Bertholf, eds., *Robert Duncan and Denise Levertov: The Poetry of Politics, the Politics of Poetry* (Stanford University Press, 2006); Katherine A. Hanson, 'Denise Levertov: Through An Ecofeminist Lens', (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Marquette University, 2007); Christopher Kelen, and Chegcheng You, 'Liminal Encounters: Ethics of Anthropomorphism in the Poetry of Levertov, Szymborska, and Fulton', *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal*, 52.2 (2019), pp. 147-65.

26 Nicole E. Glick, 'Transformational Poetry: Ecofeminism in Jeffers, Snyder, Rich and Coleman', (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of California Riverside, 2004); and Dorothy M. Nielsen, 'Prosopopoeia and the Ethics of Ecological Advocacy in the Poetry of Denise Levertov and Gary Snyder', *Contemporary Literature*, 34.4 (1993), pp. 691-713.

both poets, there is a gap in tracing the perception of and responses to injustices. Since both poets share in their poetry a similar trajectory of political consciousness, a gradual response to injustice, and ecological determinism, my thesis is going to depart from these studies and reframe Jeffers's and Levertov's poetics through a contemporary concern with environmental justice by presenting their perception of and responses to injustices perpetrated by humans against people and the land. The thesis will build up to a substantial new reading of their works by reframing topics in their poetry such as modernity and urbanization, the oppression of indigenous peoples, and environmental degradation from an ecological angle. I will examine the complex human relationship with the environment through new ecocriticism approaches, highlighting the emotions which arise from either ecological degradation or integration and the nature of interdependence of all living entities.

Theoretical Framework:

Environmental justice theory and the material and affective turns of ecocriticism are three recent approaches that resonate for a new reading of Jeffers's and Levertov's environmental critiques of injustices. Multiple books on environmental justice lay the foundation of the political discourse of environmentalism by bringing together interdisciplinary discussions of sustainable development.²⁷ Such books discuss not only a fair distribution of environmental resources but also the creation of a historical and social paradigm of justice. *Environmental Justice: Key Issues* (2020) explores concepts,

²⁷ See, for example, Brendan Coolsaet, ed., *Environmental Justice: Key Issues, Key Issues in Environment and Sustainability* (Routledge, 2020); Sumudu A. Atapattu, Carmen G. Gonzalez, and Sara L. Seck, eds., *The Cambridge Handbook of Environmental Justice and Sustainable Development, Cambridge Law Handbooks* (Cambridge University Press, 2021).

definitions, issues, and objects of environmental justice. *The Cambridge Handbook of Environmental Justice* (2021) discusses justice and sustainability and analyze, in varied case studies, recent environmental issues such as climate change, hazardous waste, energy, and resource extractions in different places across the world. Despite this holistic and recent discussion of the field, there are other books starting from 2002 that discuss environmental justice in relation to ecocritical practice. *The Environmental Justice Reader* (2002) is the first book that links politics and literature in a variety of articles. These articles examine environmental justice ecocriticism and literature as a practice and analyze these environmental issues in literary texts. Julie Sze points out that the environmental justice movement is ‘not only a political movement’ but also ‘a cultural movement interested in issues of ideology and representation.’²⁸ Furthermore, in his categorization of the waves of ecocriticism, Buell introduced environmental justice theory as an interdisciplinary field in ecocritical studies in his book *The Future of Environmental Criticism* (2005).

As environmental justice discussions become central to ecocritical studies, Jeffers’s and Levertov’s portrayals of the dualism between city and nature, Americans and Vietnamese, and humans and nonhumans highlight broader issues of power, privilege, and social inequality. Environmental justice provides a valuable framework for understanding key relations in Jeffers’s and Levertov’s critique of America, addressing significant themes such as modernity and urbanization, the Vietnam War and its destruction, and environmental degradation. Jeffers’s critique of the culture, manifested in the urban environment, exposes the anthropocentric ideology of people who prioritizes his

28 Julie Sze, ‘From Environmental Justice Literature to the Literature of Environmental Justice’, in *The Environmental Justice Reader: Politics, Poetics, and Pedagogy*, ed. by Mei Mei Evans Joni Adamson, and Rachel Stein (University of Arizona Press, 2002), pp. 163-180, p. 163.

significance and needs over others. From an environmental justice perspective, Jeffers's work can be seen as highlighting how unchecked urban expansion and industrialization can disproportionately impact people's integrity and ecological wholeness by confining them and degrading the natural resources and environments upon which they depend for well-being. This critique investigates anthropocentrism's impact on nonhumans who are destroyed, tormented, and degraded for urbanization, industrialization, science, economics, and labor. His poetry underscores the need for a more holistic relation that recognizes the intrinsic worth of all people, species, and races against privileges and harms. He emphasizes the imperative to protect the natural environment for the sake of all communities, not just those in positions of power and privilege.

Leverlov's environmental poetics align with the principles of environmental justice theory, which emphasizes the disproportionate impact of American military power and tyranny on other nations. Her poems call attention to the environmental injustices in Vietnam as people's territory is invaded, their lives threatened, their lands poisoned and destroyed, and their bodies mutilated, causing both physical and emotional harm. Her awareness extends beyond expressly political contexts. She discusses as well environmental threats caused by agriculture, science, and urbanization, such as the use of pesticides, animal cruelty in nuclear experiments, and destruction of land. Leverlov's work thus serves as a powerful counterpoint to the dehumanizing forces of conflict, urging readers to recognize the interconnectedness of all life and the vital need to protect the environment and its people, in the face of human violence. People's lives and well-being are intimately connected to the safety of their environment and peace.

Although Jeffers's and Levertov's critiques of environmental injustice preceded the formation of environmental justice theory in the 1980s, environmental justice scholars such as Esme G. Murdock emphasize its scope:

The history of environmental injustice is one that exceeds both chronologically and ideologically the timescale and temporal origin of the term itself. Consequently, I encourage readers to be expansive in their considerations of who, when, where, and what can be encompassed within the history and concept of environmental justice.²⁹

Murdock explains, therefore, that 'we can apply the concept of environmental justice to contexts that precede and exceed the term as it emerged in the 1980s.'³⁰ One of the contexts in which environmental justice issues become pertinent is literature. The intersection of environmental justice and literature is significant as it brings a new and deeper perspective to the study of injustices. Sze explains that, though the methodology used in environmental justice politics is to quantify and measure injustices, she underscores the potential of other methods of measurement, such as 'analysis of cultural texts' as unveiling the roots of struggles.³¹ Thus, the juxtaposition of environmental justice studies and critical discourses 'can deepen our understanding' of the roots as Sze argues.³² For Sze, literature is significant in investigating environmental justice through 'images and metaphors' rather

29 Esme G. Murdock, 'A History of Environmental Justice: Foundations, Narratives, and Perspectives', in *Environmental Justice: Key Issues*, ed. by Brendan Coolsaet (Routledge, 2020), pp. 6-17, p. 10.

30 Esme G. Murdock, 'A History of Environmental Justice', p. 10. Combining poets from various periods of the twentieth century highlights how discussions of environmental justice theory can include texts that predate its emergence in the 1980s.

31 Julie Sze, 'From Environmental Justice Literature to the Literature of Environmental Justice', in *The Environmental Justice Reader: Politics, Poetics, and Pedagogy*, ed. by Mei Mei Evans Joni Adamson, and Rachel Stein (The University of Arizona Press, 2002), pp. 163-80, p. 165.

32 Julie Sze, 'From Environmental Justice Literature to the Literature of Environmental Justice', p.166.

than ‘prism of statistics.’³³ This literary presentation brings a new perspective on environmental struggles in society and a more profound illustration of affective and material experience. Jeffers’s and Levertov’s poetry reveals an anthropocentrism that allows a spectrum of claims of power, freedom, wealth, and reason, ultimately resulting in various forms of injustice.

Within this over-arching theory, new interdisciplinary approaches of ecocriticism like affective and material ecocriticism enrich the analysis of ecological themes in Jeffers’s and Levertov’s poetry. While the affective turn helps to understand the emerging emotions and forces between people and the environment, the material turn helps to highlight the agency of nonhumans against existing anthropocentric perspectives that deny it. These approaches enhance and broaden our comprehension of environmental justice, particularly in areas related to perception and emotions. Taking these approaches, I depart from the ideological discussion of injustices as in their critique of humanity’s tyranny and greed to their tangible and visible manifestation in Jeffers’s and Levertov’s poetry to a broader recognition of the agency of all ecological entities.

The affective turn of ecocriticism underscores the need for humanities research in understanding the impacts of environmental injustice on humans and land. It is based on the affect theory attributed to Silvan Tomkins in his book *Affect Imagery Consciousness* (1962), which categorizes affects into positive and negative kinds. Some scholars explain the nature of affect and its transmission. Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg point out

33 Julie Sze, 'From Environmental Justice Literature to the Literature of Environmental Justice ', in *The Environmental Justice Reader: Politics, Poetics, and Pedagogy*, ed. by Mei Mei Evans Joni Adamson, and Rachel Stein (The University of Arizona Press, 2002), pp. 163-80, p. 163.

that affect ‘arises in the midst of in-between-ness: in the capacities to act and be acted upon.’³⁴ It is ‘kind of potential’ and ‘an “ability to affect or be affected.”’³⁵ It is a ‘relation’ and a ‘passage’ of what they call ‘forces of intensities’ that pass ‘body to body (human, nonhuman, part-body, and otherwise).’³⁶ Affect theory ‘illuminates the intertwined realms’ of both the political and ethical as they ‘play across bodies (human and nonhumans), creating an awareness of affect.’³⁷ These affects are always, as Tonya Davidson, Ondine Park, and Rob Shields explain, ‘in a state of emergence, hovering on the verge of unpredictability.’³⁸ In this unpredictability, the intensified affects carry as Ryan Hediger emphasizes ‘a stronger sense of embeddedness in the larger field of life’.³⁹ This turn of ecocriticism investigates the transmission of emotions in the interaction between humans and nonhumans. This, in part, highlights the relationship between injustices and negative affects and between ecological relations and positive affects.

Some ecocritical literary studies, such as the works of Rinda West, Heather Houser, and Alexa Mossner, engage with environmental injustices and their affective and psychological impact in fiction.⁴⁰ Furthermore, edited collections bring affect theory and ecocriticism into conversation and examine the dynamics of affect in the environment across a rich body

34 Gregory J. Seigworth & Melissa Gregg, 'An Inventory of Shimmers', in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. by Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 1-25, p. 1.

35 Brian Massumi, *Politics of Affect* (Polity 2015), p. 11, 48.

36 Gregory J. Seigworth & Melissa Gregg, 'An Inventory of Shimmers', in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. by Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 1-25, p. 1.

37 Melissa Gregg, and Gregory J. Seigworth, eds., *The Affect Theory Reader* (Duke University Press, 2010).

38 Tonya K. Davidson, Ondine Park, and Rob Shield, eds., *Ecologies of Affect: Placing Nostalgia, Desire, and Hope* (Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2011), p. 6.

39 Ryan Hediger, 'Uncanny Homesickness and War', in *Affective Ecocriticism* ed. by Kyle Bladow and Jennifer Ladino (The University of Nebraska, 2018), pp. 155-74, p. 158.

40 Rinda West, *Out of the Shadow: Ecopsychology, Story, and Encounter with the Land* (University of Virginia Press, 2007).; Heather Houser, *Ecocriticism Contemporary U.S. Fiction: Environment and Affect Literature Now* (Columbia University Press, 2014).; Alexa Weik von Mossner, *Affective Ecologies: Empathy, Emotion, and Environmental Narrative* (The Ohio State University Press, 2017).

of literary texts.⁴¹ These essays provide a sustained engagement across genres and highlight the potential of affect theory in our literary critical practice, shaping our understanding of the environment and our interaction with it. Patrick Hogan argues for ‘three modalities of emotion elicitation’ in life and literary analysis: ‘current perception, recollection, and imagination.’⁴² These three modalities provoke emotions in Jeffers’s and Levertov’s poetry. The complex mixture of emotions in their poetry depicts their perception of current injustices that provoke eco-anxiety and distress, past nostalgia for love and joy, and future imagination of ecological relations as presented in their poetry. This intricate grapple with emotions invites a close reading through the lens of affective ecocriticism.

In his critique of the urban environment, as discussed in Chapter 1, Jeffers describes the hopelessness of people who are enclosed in cities and detached from the vastness of nature. His poems depict his complex mixture of responses to scenes of human expansion of power, such as astonishment and apathy, smiles and sadness, and recognition of beauty and tragedy. Contrary to these largely negative impacts, in other poems in this chapter, Jeffers finds pleasure in his proximity to natural objects or at least neutrality of emotions. Ahmed relates that ‘to be affected “in a good way” involves an orientation towards something as being good.’⁴³ Jeffers’s positivity towards landscape is oriented with his concept of

41 Tonya K. Davidson, Ondine Park, and Rob Shield, eds., *Ecologies of Affect: Placing Nostalgia, Desire, and Hope* (Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2011).; Christine Berberich, Neil Campbell, and Robert Hudson, eds., *Affective Landscapes in Literature, Art and Everyday Life: Memory, Place and the Senses* (Routledge 2015).; Joyce Davidson, Liz Bondi, and Mick Smith, eds., *Emotional Geographies* (Routledge, 2016).; Lisa Ottum, and Seth T. Reno, eds., *Wordsworth and the Green Romantics: Affect and Ecology in the Nineteenth Century Becoming Modern: New Nineteenth-Century Studies* (University Press of New England, 2016).; Kyle Bladow, and Jennifer Ladino, eds., *Affective Ecocriticism: Emotion, Embodiment, Environment* (University of Nebraska, 2018).; Stephen Ahern, ed., *Affect Theory and Literary Critical Practice Palgrave Studies in Affect Theory and Literary Criticism* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

42 Patrick Colm Hogan, *Affective Narratology: The Emotional Structure of Stories* (University of Nebraska Press, 2011), p. 4

43 Sara Ahmed, 'Happy Objects', in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. by Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 29-51, p. 32.

timelessness that shapes his relationship with landscape. ‘Awayness’ as Ahmed emphasizes ‘might help establish the edges of our horizon: in rejecting the proximity of certain objects.’⁴⁴ Moreover, in her political discourse on the Vietnam War discussed in Chapter 2, Levertov depicts the negative emotions that emerge in times of violence, such as terror, fear, mourning, emotional stasis, and growing anger. Her poetry helps map both the internal responses of the Vietnamese to political violence and the transmitted affective impact on Levertov and Americans at home. Putting the two poets alongside one another, Chapter 3 investigates the affective impact of injustices on nonhumans, highlighting animals’ and land’s affective resistance to oppression and environmental degradation. Carrying this awareness of the negative impacts of injustices across these cultural, political, and environmental contexts, both poets attempt to emphasize instead the possible positive affects that emerge from environmental sustainability and ecological relations.

Other developments of ecocriticism present the material agency of nonhumans on their own and in response to humanity’s interaction with the environment. The material turn in ecocriticism, emerging from New Materialism, highlights the agency of matter and is a key paradigm in environmental humanities, focusing on material relations in texts. In *Material Ecocriticism* (2014), Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann offer new ways of reading literature and language by analyzing the agency of things and their meaning in the world.⁴⁵ They emphasize the significance of the idea that ‘matter possesses agency’ as central to new materialism.⁴⁶ Material ecocriticism, Iovino maintains, proposes two ways of

44 Sara Ahmed, ‘Happy Objects’, in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. by Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 29-51, p. 32.

45 Serenella Iovino, and Serpil Oppermann, eds., *Material Ecocriticism* (Indiana University Press, 2014).

46 Serenella Iovino, and Serpil Oppermann, eds., *Material Ecocriticism*, p. 77.

interpreting the agency of matter.⁴⁷ The first way is by finding the ways in which nature's or nonhumans' 'agentic capacities' are presented in the artistic and cultural narrative of human construction. In this way, we take poems as a method to understand nonhuman agency from the perspective of an ecological mindset. The second way relates the matter's 'narrative power of creating configurations of meanings and substances' that interact with human life in the cases of sea, stone, water, metal, bacteria, toxins, atoms, and all cells.⁴⁸ Therefore, matter, in the second way, becomes a text in itself that expresses its agency without the human construction of narrativity.

Jeffers and Levertov present this materialism in their description of the responsive agency and consciousness of natural objects like mountains, oceans, trees, and animals that manifest through interaction. I will analyze this agency in light of material ecocriticism in various poems across my thesis, highlighting its motion and presence with visual and motor imagery. In Chapter 1, Jeffers's detachment from the city implies an intentional decision to be surrounded by the dynamics of nature. In contrasting the city with natural objects like the mountain, rock, and ocean, he underscores nature's conscious presence and astonishing power. In the integrated argument of Chapter 3, Jeffers's 'Apology for Bad Dreams' depicts the responsivity of animals and ocean to violence while Levertov's 'A Tree Telling of Orpheus' conveys the trees' responsiveness to Orpheus's song during a period of stasis, thus, bending, wrenching their roots, and moving. These poems are presented as counterparts to incidents of subjugation, exploitation and destruction as exemplified by Jeffers's and Levertov's poems in chapter 3. The poets' calls for environmental justice

47 Serenella Iovino, and Serpil Oppermann, eds., *Material Ecocriticism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), p. 79.

48 Serenella Iovino, and Serpil Oppermann, eds., *Material Ecocriticism*, p. 79.

necessitate an ecological paradigm that challenges the existing denial of nonhuman agency. Various land and animal images in their poetry highlight this agency in its conscious presence and responsiveness to human oppression and exploitation through rhythmic and repetitive descriptions. Their insistence in presenting this agency demonstrates their holistic ecological approach that recognizes the significance and consciousness of all living entities against humanity's anthropocentrism.

These contexts where environmental injustice and critiques appear in their poetry can never be shown without the power of ecological perception. Ecological perception, Lawrence Buell maintains, is necessary for the interaction between organisms and their environments. In his book *Writing for an Endangered World*, Buell coins the term 'environmental unconscious' which describes the impossibility of humans to have a fuller perception of the environment.⁴⁹ However, he views this negative aspect as having the 'potential' to awaken humans, writers, and communities to reach a fuller 'apprehension' of the environment and their interdependence with it.⁵⁰ Literature presents this environmental unconscious and attempts to reconstruct, rewrite, and establish ideological concepts through a counterpart perception. Environmental imagination, thus, is a way to reconnect humans to their environment.⁵¹ Jeffers's and Levertov's discussion of injustices seeks to break down the binary between culture and nature, highlighting the environmental unconscious and spreading the environmental imagination instead. They use poetry as a medium to reflect on urgent matters and articulate an imagination of sustainability.

49 Lawrence Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture, and Environment in the U.S. And Beyond* (Harvard University Press, 2001), p. 22.

50 Lawrence Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World*, p. 22.

51 Lawrence Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World*, p. 22.

The Poets:

A couple of reasons provoked my choice to pair Jeffers and Levertov together. Firstly, both poets were outsiders to American culture as they were raised in Europe. Jeffers moved to America when he was 15, and Levertov moved in her 20s. Their rootedness outside the culture stimulates a direct and independent perspective. Though their poetry takes up American individualism, they use it to stand against violence rather than advocating nationalism. Their detached viewpoint allows a sustained engagement with anthropocentrism and the resulting injustices. Furthermore, since environmentalism necessitates a courageous stance to articulate ideas of justice, Jeffers's and Levertov's poetry illustrates, together, this courage. Both responded in a direct way that sets them in contrast to other American poets, like T. S. Eliot, Wallace Stevens, etc, who were obliquely political. Even though this courage caused them literary opposition, they held on to their stance. Through their distinctive perspectives, the thesis presents both the detached and the timeless perception of anthropocentrism, as in Jeffers's, and the present and intimate approach as in Levertov's.

In addition, having an environmental consciousness means seeing the self as embedded both in the temporal and physical world. Both poets demonstrate a poetic connection with the world, a connection that is maintained continuously without the intervention of nonfictional writing like Snyder's or personal autobiographical writing like Ginsberg's. Jeffers connects to the past, linking American modernity to ancient values. In this, he demonstrates how far humanity has changed. His poetry also demonstrates a connection with the landscape, allowing a practical illustration of integrity with the nonhumans. Levertov also depicts her intimacy and rootedness with others' experiences, seeing herself

aligned with the victimized Vietnamese. Furthermore, although other environmental poets such as Mary Oliver, Marianne Moore, and W. S. Merwin or Vietnam war poets such as George Oppen and W. D. Ehrhart, have responded to this dualism, Jeffers and Levertov wrote over a large body of works, allowing a fuller consideration of these connections to emerge, develop, and mature into a vision of justice.⁵² The thesis finds a complete thread of injustice and justice, crisis and resolution, denial and recognition, silence and political voice, running through their work. Furthermore, their poetry represents a dynamism in their connections with the world. They see themselves embedded within a universe that contains other interacting forces of liveliness and agency. Their poetry reveals the intricacies around them that respond to human violence. There is a constant sense of journey, transition, tension, and development in both Jeffers's and Levertov's poetry. This sense of movement appears in their ideas of the world, their concepts of poetry, their responses to injustices, and their representation of nonhumans' agency. The dynamism in their poetry is investigated in my thesis with Affective & material theories that allow a close reading and a keen eye on the emerging changes.

Before going into a detailed reading of Jeffers's and Levertov's ecopoetry on urban, war, and nonhuman environments, it is important to establish Jeffers's and Levertov's distinctive literary position and perspectives on the role of the poet in relation to nature and

⁵² Two essential books help read other environmental poets and formulate a contrast with Jeffers and Levertov, like J. Scott Bryson, *Ecopoetry: A Critical Introduction* (University of Utah Press, 2002) and Christopher MacGowan, *Twentieth-Century American Poetry* (John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2004). Furthermore, James F. Mersmann, *Out of the Vietnam Vortex: Study of Poets and Poetry Against the War* (University Press of Kansas, 1974) encompasses Vietnam War poets and is an essential source while making my choice for Levertov's political poetry.

society. These views are necessary to embark on an environmental reading of their poetry which they wrote as experiential, realistic, and informed by poetic responsibility, rejecting power relations and insisting on ecological values instead. Thus, Jeffers's and Levertov's determination to criticize injustices that shape human relationship with the environment cannot be understood without explaining the poetic doctrines that define their relation to others and the world that shape their poetry. Certain concepts have been discussed by Jeffers himself in the prefaces to his poetry and by critics such as his literary distinctiveness, his isolationism, Inhumanism, permanent poetry, and his contribution to what later became the ecological movement.⁵³ The summary of these concepts is necessary as it informs my reading of his critique of modernity and environmental degradation. Similarly, Levertov extensively explains her political consciousness in *The Poet in the World* and defines her concept of poetry, the significance of voyage and discovery, and the nature of her sensory engagement. These concepts form a framework for understanding their trajectory of perception and responses to human injustices, and justifying their distinctive approaches.

Jeffers's distinctiveness is crucial to explaining how his critique of urban and nonhuman environments is ecologically informed. Deborah Fleming maintains that Jeffers 'evades category—he is not transcendentalist, romantic, or naturalist.'⁵⁴ Although he shared with the transcendentalists such as Thoreau, Emerson, and Whitman the significance of nature, he departed from this Romantic paradigm by asserting the agency and consciousness of

⁵³ Some sources dwell on Jeffers's impact on environmental thinking and movement. Peter Quigley's article 'Carrying the Weight: Jeffers's Role in Preparing the Way for Ecocriticism' explains how Jeffers establishes a middle position between Thoreau and environmentally oriented literature. More recently, *Key Thinkers on the Environments* (2018), edited by Joy A. Palmer Cooper, David E. Cooper listed Jeffers as one of the poets who carries an environmental perspective in his poetry.

⁵⁴ Deborah Fleming, 'Robinson Jeffers, W. B. Yeats, and Ecoprophecy', *Jeffers Studies*, 16.1-2 (2012), pp. 65-86, p. 65.

nature. As Peter Quigley explains, ‘Jeffers didn’t fit within the easy and comforting version of the Romantic Movement; his vision went further. He reversed the equation: the beauty, the reality principle, is out there, not inside the human.’⁵⁵ For example, while Frost views nature as an escape from human consciousness, Jeffers recognizes its active consciousness by itself.⁵⁶ In *Inventing the Language to Tell It*, George Hart explains that Jeffers’s ‘development of a sacramental poetics that expresses a holistic vision of a divine cosmos’ and ‘expression of a nonanthropocentric environmental ethic’ sets him apart from other poets of his age.⁵⁷ This ecological ethics against human supremacy is perceived by Fleming who sees Jeffers as ‘the first major poet to articulate the idea of nature as supreme and human beings as part of rather than master and rightful owner of the biosphere.’⁵⁸ Karman emphasizes that ‘Jeffers’s experience of deep time added a vatic amplitude to his verse and a sharp moral edge.’⁵⁹ His critique of humanity grows from his awareness of history, culture, and land, as well as his courage to resist rapid changes that impact them.

Despite his distinctiveness and the recognition which he gained in the 1920s and 1930s and that reached the highest point in March 1941, his literary reputation declined in December 1941. After his publication of *Be Angry at the Sun* (December 1941), people denounced Jeffers’s poetry as he coupled Roosevelt and Hitler in his poem ‘Great Men’ ‘as

55 Peter Quigley, ‘Carrying the Weight: Jeffers’s Role in Preparing the Way for Ecocriticism’, *Jeffers Studies*, 6.4 (2002), p. 58

56 John Cunningham, ‘Human Presence in Frost’s Universe’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Robert Frost* ed. by Robert Faggen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 261-272.

57 George Hart, *Inventing the Language to Tell It: Robinson Jeffers and the Biology of Consciousness* (Fordham University Press, 2013), p. 2-3.

58 Deborah Fleming, ‘Robinson Jeffers, W. B. Yeats, and Ecoprophecy’, *Jeffers Studies*, 16.1-2 (2012), pp. 65-86, p. 65.

59 James Karman, *Robinson Jeffers: Poet and Prophet* (Stanford University Press, 2015), p. 4.

equal instigators of the new world war' as Frederic Carpenter relates.⁶⁰ From 1941 until his death in 1962, 'Jeffers's reputation suffered eclipse,' he continues. Besides his political views, Jeffers's isolation and his Inhumanism prolonged this decline. Jeffers's breaking away from people and literary circles results in a breaking away from critical circles. His isolation on the West Coast makes him 'not recognized' as Zaller points out.⁶¹ In 1953 Horace Gregory noted in his review of Robinson Jeffers's *Hungerfield*, 'A man from Mars, or less remotely, a visitor from Europe might well ask those who talk of poets and poetry in the United States a pertinent question: "Why does so much deep silence surround the name of Robinson Jeffers?"' ⁶² Hunt concludes that Jeffers is a writer 'without a literary context.'⁶³ In his article, Zaller surveys Jeffers's critical reception and points out that Jeffers is the last major poet in his period to 'have had a scholarly Collected Poems devoted to him.'⁶⁴ Modern and postmodern attempts to situate Jeffers within ecocritical studies are essential in establishing such critical context. Shaun Anne Tangney emphasizes that 'bringing Jeffers to prominence is especially important because while Jeffers has always been popular, his critical reputation has not been solidly established.'⁶⁵

60 Frederic Carpenter, 'Robinson Jeffers Today: Beyond Good and beneath Evil', *American Literature*, 49.1 (1977), pp. 86-96, p. 86. In the poem 'Great Men,' Jeffers relates 'Roosevelt by grandiose good intentions, cajolery / And public funds, . . . Hitler by fanatic / Patriotism, frank lies, genius and terror.' (*CP3* : 23).

61 Robert Zaller, 'Robinson Jeffers, American Poetry, and a Thousand Years', in *The Atom to Be Split: New and Selected Essays on Robinson Jeffers* (Tor House Press, 2019), pp. 1-16, p. 1.

62 Quoted in James Karman, *Critical Essays on Robinson Jeffers* (G. K. Hall 1990), p. 19.

63 Tim Hunt, 'Robinson Jeffers: The Modern Poet as Antimodernist.', in *Critical Essays on Robinson Jeffers*, ed. by James Karman (G.K Hall, 1990), pp. 245

64 Robert Zaller, 'Robinson Jeffers, American Poetry, and a Thousand Years', in *The Atom to Be Split: New and Selected Essays on Robinson Jeffers* (Tor House Press, 2019), pp. 1-16, p. 2.

65 ShaunAnne Tangney, *The Wild That Attracts Us: New Critical Essays on Robinson Jeffers* (University of New Mexico Press, 2015), p. xv.

Jeffers maintains literary isolation in his withdrawal. Drake explains that other writers who had an anti-fascist gathering at Congress in San Francisco considered him ‘to be hopeless politically.’⁶⁶ In a letter explaining why he would not attend, Jeffers declared that such a meeting seemed quite useless to him, “for writers cannot be organized—except newspaper or film writers—and ought to associate with any or all classes in the community rather than with each other; and if they wish to express opinions they can write them.” He added, “And I do not think that culture can be maintained or handed down through conventions and committees” (CL2:600). Thus, for Jeffers, poetry is the medium for communicating ideas, for reflecting on them, and for allowing an emergence into new perspectives. Unlike Levertov’s engagement in demonstrations, which I will discuss in chapter 2, Jeffers maintains both literary and political isolation.

This literary isolation also instigates and is reinforced by spatial isolation on the west coast of California. In his resistance to American Capitalism and articulation of ‘ecological determinism,’ Jeffers chose conscious isolation over hopeless presence. Although he shares with contemporary poets their poetic engagement with politics, he chose ‘impersonal observations’ over personal poetry, and timeless contexts over contemporary themes.⁶⁷ He built Tor House in Carmel Point, which he moved to in 1914, as an emblem of his isolation and rejection of the urban environment. His isolation marks an intentional distance from humanity and a rejection of its ideologies of self-centeredness that pursue growth and power at the expense of the human autonomous self and instinctual integration with nature. Instead, he engages with the landscape which is manifested in his description of the

66 Richard Drake, ‘The Uses of History in the Anti-War Writing of Robinson Jeffers and Ezra Pound’, *Jeffers Studies*, 20 (2017-2018), 16-38, p. 28.

67 James Karman, *Robinson Jeffers: Poet and Prophet* (Stanford University Press, 2015), p. 4.

mountains, stones, and ocean as emblems of permanence and as points of contrast with human urban places. He celebrates a process of integration with nature upon his denouncement of humanity as he indicates in his poem 'Inscription for a Gravestone': 'While I was human, now I am part of the beauty. / I wander in the air, / Being mostly gas and water, and flow in the ocean' (*CP2* : 125). Jeffers's isolation determines a visual perception of the city as the centre of a culture which he describes, detests and critiques and the landscape which he views, admires and contrasts. This detachment denies any emotional connection but rather allows him to claim authority through distance.

Jeffers takes the landscape not only as a place for detachment from culture but also as a place for the establishment of his poetic identity and the articulation of timeless poetry in contrast to humanity's changing world. The Hawk Tower is a dwelling place for the 'creation of the symbolism of landscape.'⁶⁸ Unlike Yeats who built Tor Ballylee as an affirmation of Irish cultural past, Jeffers's Hawk Tower is an expression of 'a geological history that human beings habitually ignore' as Fleming argues.⁶⁹ For Jeffers, the value of history and culture has to be perceived within humanity's relationship to nature. Culture or tradition is a human construct while land possesses a natural quality that transcends human ideologies. This intimate relationship with the land and desire to be part of it grows from his recognition of the dichotomy and separation between man and the natural world. Rejecting modernism's use of symbolism that was typically urban and abstract, Jeffers chose to place his poetry within the landscape and concluded, as Zaller explains, that the beauty of poetry is only 'derived from natural beauty, grounded in it, comprehended by

⁶⁸ Deborah Fleming, 'Landscape and the Self in W. B. Yeats and Robinson Jeffers', in *Ecopoetry: A Critical Introduction* ed. by J. Scott Bryson (The University of Utah Press, 2002), pp. 39-57, p. 39.

⁶⁹ Deborah Fleming, 'Landscape and the Self in W. B. Yeats and Robinson Jeffers', p. 39.

it.⁷⁰ Fleming explains this relationship between poetry and landscape: ‘The poetry and the landscape are involved in a dialectic: the land speaks through the poems, and the poems speak through the land.’⁷¹

For this reciprocal relation, Jeffers chose the permanence of nature to be the subject of his poetry from which he establishes his poetic vision rather than transitory values of culture. He explains his concept of permanent themes in poetry in the Preface to *Tamar* (1923): ‘Permanence is only another aspect of reality; a railroad, for example, is not real as a mountain is; it is actual, in its fantastic way, for a century or two; but it is not real; in most of the human past and most of the human future it is not existent’ (CP4 : 380). Jeffers’s continuous critique of modernity and the city sharpened his concept of permanent poetry. Later, in his Forward to *The Selected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers* (1938), he continues to hold his view of permanent poetry and sharpens his condemnation of the city which he views as a corrupted and temporary place devoid of truth. His condemnation of progress, change, machines...etc. underscores a deeper conception of poetry, which he is dedicated to carrying on and which motivates his critique of Inhumanism. He explains:

Poetry must deal with things that a reader two thousand years away could understand and be moved by. This excludes much of the circumstance of modern life, especially in the cities. Fashions, forms of machinery, the more complex social, financial political adjustments, and so forth, are all ephemeral, exceptional; they exist but never exist again. Poetry must concern itself with (relatively) permanent things. These have permanent value; the ephemeral have only news-value. (CP4 : 391)

70 Robert Zaller, 'Robinson Jeffers, American Poetry, and a Thousand Years', in *The Atom to Be Split: New and Selected Essays on Robinson Jeffers* (Tor House Press, 2019), pp. 1-16, p. 8.

71 Deborah Fleming, 'Landscape and the Self in W. B. Yeats and Robinson Jeffers', in *Ecopoetry: A Critical Introduction* ed. by J.Scott Bryson (The University of Utah Press, 2002), pp. 39-57, p. 41.

For Jeffers, natural processes are the permanent things that remain, containing a value that Zaller describes as ‘perdurable’ rather than merely ‘imply[ing] stasis.’⁷² For Zaller, the perdurable is ‘continuous, whether through persistence or renewal’ as the grass ‘equals’ the mountain in Jeffers’s ‘Point Joe.’⁷³ He articulated his poetic practice in his poem ‘Point Joe’ that ‘Permanent things are what is needful in a poem, things temporally/ Of great dimension, things continually renewed or always present’ (CP1 : 90) and in his Preface to *The Double Axe and Other Poems* (1948) that ‘Permanent things, or things forever renewed, like the grass and human passions, are the material for poetry; and whoever speaks across the gap of a thousand years will understand that he has to speak of permanent things’ (CP4 : 427).⁷⁴ Jeffers takes birds, mountains, and rocks as important symbols for that permanence.

Furthermore, Jeffers’s rejection of the culture and his relationship with the land became the basis for his philosophy of Inhumanism which he introduced in the original version of the Preface to *The Double Axe* (1947). Jeffers explains Inhumanism as ‘a new attitude, a new manner of thought and feeling’ and defines it as ‘based on the recognition of the astonishing beauty of things and their living wholeness, and on a rational acceptance of the fact that mankind is neither central nor important in the universe’ (CP4 : 418). Although Jeffers thinks in the Preface that this attitude is ‘neither misanthropic nor pessimist nor irreligious,’ many examples in his poetry call this into question: ‘I’d sooner, except the

72 Robert Zaller, 'Robinson Jeffers and the Uses of History', in *The Atom to Be Split: New and Selected Essays on Robinson Jeffers* (Tor House Press, 2019), pp. 83-100, p. 85.

73 Robert Zaller, 'Robinson Jeffers and the Uses of History', in *The Atom to Be Split: New and Selected Essays on Robinson Jeffers* (Tor House Press, 2019), pp. 83-100, p. 85.

74 He holds this view also in his essay ‘Poetry, Gongorism, and a Thousand Years’ where he explains: ‘but great poetry is pointed at the future. Its author, whether consciously or not, intends to be understood a thousand years from now; therefore, he chooses the more permanent aspects of things, and subjects that remain valid’ (CP4 : 423).

penalties, kill a man than a hawk' (CP1 : 377); 'You would be wise, you far stars, / To flee with the speed of light this infection' (CP2 : 166); 'As for me, I would rather / Be a worm in a wild apple than a son of man' (CP3 : 203-4). In his published version of the Preface to *The Double Axe* (1948), he defines Inhumanism as 'a shifting of emphasis and significance from man to not-man... and recognition of the transhuman magnificence,' demoting human beings relative to nonhumans (CP4 : 428). He dedicates most of his poetry to criticizing humanity and mental processes that instigate dualistic separation and anthropocentrism. Jeffers's Inhumanism acts as 'a prescription,' as Zaller puts it, 'for living as best we can with what he describes as the unresolved discords of human nature.'⁷⁵ Though Jeffers's Inhumanism derives from pessimism, Jeffers 'offers consolation instead: the love of beauty; the disinterested quest for knowledge.'⁷⁶ It is the cure for the deceased culture. It is constructive rather than destructive in its continuous urge for balance and integration. Although his philosophy led to a negative reception of his poetry when he rejected US involvement in World War II, his isolation gives him the authoritative voice of a philosopher and an outsider who approaches the scene from a distant top and describes it clearly. His detachment creates a contrast between the landscape and the modern city, emphasizing his resistance to humanity and the timelessness of nature.

Jeffers's philosophy of Inhumanism is blended with ecological consciousness. In his Preface to *The Double Axe* (1947), he critiques humanity's privilege and power that cause all sorts of injustice and cruelty:

⁷⁵ Robert Zaller, 'Jeffers, Pessimism, and Time', in *The Wild That Attracts Us: New Critical Essays on Robinson Jeffers*, ed. by ShaunAnne Tangney (University of New Mexico Press, 2015), pp. 65-116, p. 110.

⁷⁶ Robert Zaller, 'Jeffers, Pessimism, and Time', p. 110.

But human race is similarly insane. More than half its energy, and at the present civilized level nine-tenths of its energy, are devoted to self-interference, self-frustration, self-incitement, self-tickling, self-worship. The waste is enormous; we are able to commit and endure it because we are so firmly established on the planet; life is actually so easy, that it requires only a slight fraction of our common energies. The rest we discharge onto each other—in conflict and charity, love, jealousy, hatred, competition, government, vanity, and cruelty, and that puerile passion the will to power, -- or for amusement. (CP4 : 419).

Jeffers sees human excess energy as the cause for all the intrusion in the universe. He explains: ‘But we have all this excess energy: what should we do with it? We could take a walk, for instance, and admire landscape: that is better than killing one’s brother in war or trying to be superior to one’s neighbor in time of peace... We could be quiet occasionally. We must always be prepared to resist intrusion; we might be quiet in the intervals’ (CP4 : 419). Jeffers’s Inhumanism, thus, combines a critique of American anthropocentrism, a recognition of the significance of land, and sustainable propositions to prevent acts of injustice to people and land, a trajectory that I will present in my discussion of his poetry of urban and natural environments.

Jeffers’s philosophy of Inhumanism, ShaunAnne Tangney explains, ‘does indeed prefigure the establishment of ecocriticism, but the establishment of ecocriticism is largely responsible for the resurgence of Jeffers’s popularity, within academia, and in the general public as well.’⁷⁷ Jeffers explains in his Preface to *The Double Axe and Other Poems* in 1947 that his Inhumanism ‘does not appear that previous one of the ten thousand religions and philosophies has realized it’ (CP4 : 418). Although Jeffers preceded the environmental

⁷⁷ ShaunAnne Tangney, *The Wild That Attracts Us: New Critical Essays on Robinson Jeffers* (University of New Mexico Press, 2015), p. xxi.

movement of the 1970s, his philosophy and poetry helped to pave the way toward environmentalism.⁷⁸ As Peter Quigley sees it, ‘Without the poetic efforts of Jeffers, there would be no vision, no courage, and no imaginative thrust taking us toward nature and beyond the range of human bias, beyond human self-serving delusion’⁷⁹ Comparing him to other writers, Quigley writes of Jeffers ‘My claim is that no one writing poetry or literature rearranged the preferred order of the hierarchy of being with the force and precision of Jeffers. In addition, he did it in a way that matched, anticipated, and perhaps helped bring about modern environmental consciousness.’⁸⁰

Like Jeffers’s response to America’s anthropocentrism, which I will analyze in chapters 1 and 3, Denise Levertov’s political and ecological voice is comparably distinctive. Audrey T. Rodgers points out that ‘Denise Levertov is well within the Romantic tradition, but grew beyond it when she came to America and assumed a new voice, an American voice, and a "critical" perspective that led to her writing "engaged poetry.”’⁸¹ The first years when Levertov moved from England to America were transitional and her readings of Williams influenced her poetry. As she noted herself, she ‘took as influence from Williams nothing of the profound mythic element we find in *Paterson*, but rather the sharp eye for the material world and the keen ear for the vernacular.’⁸² Although Levertov’s poetry shows a

78 Peter Quigley examines Jeffers’s significance for literary environmentalism in his article ‘Carrying the Weight: Jeffers’s Role in Preparing the Way for Ecocriticism’. He examines Jeffers’s relation to Thoreau and influences for Gary Snyder, and Edward Abbey. Robert Zaller examines also Jeffers’s influences on other poets in his article ‘Robinson Jeffers, American Poetry, and a Thousand Years’ recognizing some thematic affinity between Jeffers and James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, Robert Musil, William Faulkner, and Eugene O’Neill.

79 Peter Quigley, ‘Carrying the Weight: Jeffers’s Role in Preparing the Way for Ecocriticism’, *Jeffers Studies*, 6.4 (2002), pp. 46-68. p. 59.

80 Peter Quigley, ‘Carrying the Weight’, p. 48.

81 Audrey T. Rodgers, *Denise Levertov: The Poetry of Engagement* (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1993), p. 58.

82 Denise Levertov, ‘The Sense of Pilgrimage’, in *The Poet in the World* (New Directions Books, 1973), pp. 62-86, p. 67.

blend of influences of Olson's Projectivism, Pound's Imagism, and Williams's Objectivism, she refuses categorization in all things, insisting 'I cannot simply enter a ready-made structure; I have to find components and construct my own.'⁸³ She declares the sense of estrangement and her journey through the world in 'A Poet's View,': 'I am by nature, heritage, and as an artist, forever a stranger and a pilgrim.'⁸⁴ However, she is associated with the Black Mountain Poets from which she seems influenced by exploratory, organic, and dynamic poetry that mediates between experience and reader.⁸⁵ Levertov's poetry is not in the manner of Ginsberg's confessionalism in 'Howl' or *The Fall of America* (1973). Although political poetry shares with confessionalism its keenness to represent struggle and merge the internal with the aesthetic, for Levertov, it is not the personal agony that needs aesthetic representation but rather the communal agony of the Vietnamese.

Levertov's distinctive political engagement necessitates a concept of poetry that is authentic to the experience and mediates between the self and others. She had always insisted on the connection between experience and poetry as Olson sees the poem as 'energy transferred from where the poet got it... to, all the way over to, the reader.'⁸⁶ From this connection, she articulates her concept of poetry which is based on the body of experience rather than on rhetoric, stating 'I believe in writing about what lies at hand . . . poetry arises out of a need, out of really having something to say about something that we

83 Quoted in Harry Marten, *Understanding Denise Levertov*. ed. by Matthew J. Bruccoli, *Understanding Contemporary American Literature* (University of South Carolina Press, 1988), p. 24.

84 Quoted in Harry Marten, *Understanding Denise Levertov*. ed. by Matthew J. Bruccoli, *Understanding Contemporary American Literature* (University of South Carolina Press, 1988), p. 24.

85 Andrew Epstein, 'The Black Mountain Poets', in *The Cambridge Introduction to American Poetry since 1945* (Cambridge University Press, 2023), pp. 28-42, p. 29.

86 Charles Olson, *Selected Writings of Charles Olson* (New Directions, 1966). p. 16.

— that the poet — that I— have actually felt or experienced.’⁸⁷ While Jeffers seems timeless in his poetry of withdrawal, Levertov grounds herself in the moment she is depicting. William Slaughter notes that ‘Levertov knows that poetry has nothing to do with escape. It has to do with involvement, engagement.’⁸⁸ She was motivated with a sense of urgency to be part of the quest towards awareness and ‘being in touch,’ that defies poetic isolation or a separation between the poet and experience, as she explains in her essay ‘Origins of a Poem.’⁸⁹

As I will show in Chapter 2, the reflection of experience which she emphasizes in *The Poet in the World* is apparent in her Vietnam War poetry where she blends her ecological and political responsibility, the intimacy of the experience, and the role of the poet in creating the imagination of peace and integration. Levertov explains this reciprocal relation between politics and poetry in response to a question about how she can reconcile poetry and political action. She answers ‘I am a poet, I know, and those other poets who do likewise know, that we must fulfill the poet’s total involvement in life.’⁹⁰ Writing political poetry is not an end in itself for Levertov but rather an aspect of integration with human experience. It is an urgency to abandon mysticism as she discovered that ‘aesthetic mysticism,’ as Cary Nelson explains, is ‘untenable in an age of bloodshed whose idealism was unashamedly hypocritical.’⁹¹ Responding to politics of the age is central to her

87 David Ossman, 'An Interview with D. Levertov', in *The Sullen Art* (Corinth Books, 1963), p. 78-79.

88 William Slaughter, 'The Imagination's Tongue: Denise Levertov's Poetic', in *Library Catalogue* (Aquila Publishing, 1981), p. 3.

89 Denise Levertov, 'Origins of a Poem', in *The Poet in the World* (New Directions Books, 1973), pp. 43-56, p. 54.

90 Denise Levertov, 'The Poet in the World', in *The Poet in the World* (New Directions Books, 1973), pp. 107-116, p. 114.

91 Cary Nelson, 'Whitman in Vietnam: Poetry and History in Contemporary America', *The Massachusetts Review*, 16.1 (1975), pp. 55-71, p. 67.

concept of organic poetry that merges the aesthetic and the experiential. She explains this in 'The Poet In the World':

the obligation of the poet . . . is not necessarily to write 'political' poems . . . the obligation of the writer is: to take personal and active responsibility for his words, whatever they are, and to acknowledge their potential influence on the lives of others.⁹²

Despite critics' diverse discussion about Levertov's poetry, her book *The Poet in the World*, as Susan Hoerchner explains, 'fills the gap that too many writers leave open, the chinks between their poetic, personal, and political ideas [as] Levertov presents a holistic vision of the poet in her surroundings.'⁹³ This vision fulfils the two dimensions of American poetry as Cary Nelson sees; the dream it carries thus never proposes 'finality' and the 'projects' given to future people to complete.⁹⁴ For Nelson, Levertov's poetry follows a Whitmanesque inclusiveness of the nation and poetry.

Levertov's poetry is fueled by her concept of a poet as a transmitter of the experience. In her article 'Great Possessions,' she emphasizes the poet's role as a mediator between experience and the world: 'We need a new realization of *the artist as translator*. I am not talking about translation from one language to another, but of the translation of experience, and the translation of the reader into other worlds.'⁹⁵ She continues to relate the reciprocal relation of bringing the world to the reader and the reader to the world: 'We must have an art that translates, conveys us to the heaven of that deepest reality which otherwise "we may die without ever having known"; that *transmits* us there, not in the sense of bringing

92 Denise Levertov, 'The Poet in the World', in *The Poet in the World* (New Directions Books, 1973), pp. 107-16, p. 114.

93 Susan Hoerchner, 'Review: Denise Levertov', *Contemporary Literature*, 15.3 (1974), pp. 435-37, p. 437.

94 Cary Nelson, 'Whitman in Vietnam: Poetry and History in Contemporary America', *The Massachusetts Review*, 16.1 (1975), pp. 55-71, p. 66

95 Denise Levertov, 'Great Possessions', in *The Poet in the World* (New Directions Books, 1973), pp. 89-106, p. 93-94.

the information to the receiver but of putting the receiver in the place of the event—alive.’

⁹⁶ Her concept of the poet shares with Jeffers his refusal of lies as he emphasized. However, while Jeffers swings between two positions of political involvement and isolation, she always holds this position of political and social responsibility.⁹⁷ Poets are not only transmitting experience but creators of a wider poetic imagination. In 'A Testament and Postscript 1959-1973,' she explains: 'I believe poets are instruments on which the power of poetry plays. But they are also makers, craftsmen: it is given to the seer to see, but it is then his responsibility to communicate what he sees, that they who cannot see may see, since we are "members one of another".'⁹⁸ Their failure to display that authenticity disconnects them as poets. Instead, she sees in politics poetic material: 'our period in history is violent and filled with horrors, and I never for a moment considered it was "not poetic," not the concern of poetry, to speak of them.'⁹⁹

Being true to the real experience in life constitutes a sense of a constant voyage and discovery, which sets her in contrast with Jeffers's poetry written in isolation, though she shares his freedom of articulation. In a lecture at the University of Michigan in 1968, Levertov explains that 'writing poetry is a process of discovery. Not an isolation of intellectual awareness but an awareness involving the whole self, a knowing... a "being in touch".'¹⁰⁰ Levertov explains the material that makes up her poetry:

in order to write a single poem, one must see many cities,
and people, and things; one must get to know animals and

⁹⁶ Denise Levertov, 'Great Possessions', in *The Poet in the World*, p. 94.

⁹⁷ Although Jeffers states in the Forward to *The Selected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers* (1938) his view that poetry should not tell lies, he becomes aware in *Be Angry at the Sun* that he should not write politically but seek the company of a drunk man. In the Note to *Be Angry at the Sun* (1941) his concept of poetry highlights that it should not be a private monologue nor urging for a public action.

⁹⁸ Denise Levertov, 'A Testament and Postscript 1959-1973', in *The Poet in the World* (New Directions Books, 1973), pp. 3-6, p. 3.

⁹⁹ Denise Levertov, 'A Testament and Postscript 1959-1973', p. 4.

¹⁰⁰ Denise Levertov, 'Origins of a Poem', in *The Poet in the World* (New Directions Books, 1973), pp. 43-56, p. 54.

the flight of birds, and the gestures that flowers make when they open to the morning. One must be able to return to roads in unknown regions, to unexpected encounters, to partings long foreseen; to days of childhood that are still unexplained.¹⁰¹

This richness of encounter with life and otherness defies physical remoteness. Despite geographical separation, for instance between her and the Vietnamese, Levertov employs imagination as an essential tool for connection. As she explains in 'Origins of a Poem': 'No recognition of others is possible without the imagination... The imagination of what it is to be those other forms of life that want to live is the only way to recognition; and it is that imaginative recognition that brings compassion to birth.'¹⁰²

In addition to imagination, Levertov's political poetry offers a multi-sensory perception that contrasts Jeffers's distant visual perception of humanity. In *Landscape: Pattern, Perception, and Process*, Simon Bell highlights the interconnectedness of the senses as providing a complete picture of the environment that cannot be achieved by a perception of one sense in isolation.¹⁰³ Her poetry requires this connection of all senses in her perception of violence and emotional description for its authenticity. Cristina Gámez-Fernández emphasizes this connection between perception and poetry for Levertov:

Perception understood as a resource of poetic creation has been a constant in Levertov's credo: perception of the Other(s), of animals, of plants - of surrounding reality in general - and of inner experience and art itself.¹⁰⁴

101 Denise Levertov, 'The Poet in the World', in *The Poet in the World* (New Directions Books, 1973), pp. 107-116, p. 109-110.

102 Denise Levertov, 'Origins of a Poem', in *The Poet in the World* (New Directions Books, 1973), pp. 43-56, p. 53.

103 Simon Bell, *Landscape: Pattern, Perception, and Process* (Routledge 2012).

104 Cristina M. Gámez-Fernández, 'Beyond Vision: The Role of Perception in Denise Levertov's Examination of Blindness', *Renascence*, 63.4 (2011), pp. 287-306, p. 287.

The multi-sensory engagement is a requisite to her poetic vision of intimacy in contrast to Jeffers's ecoprophecy and historical connection that fuels his poetry of Inhumanism.

Her engagement with injustices in Vietnam and recognition of victimized otherness also bring ecological discussion in her poetry in response to anthropocentrism. Besides her political consciousness, Levertov develops an environmental consciousness that examines the impact of American injustices on land as well. She underscores the necessity of responding to contemporary issues with urgency:

A sense of history must involve a sense of the present, a vivid awareness of change, a response to crisis, a realization that what was appropriate in this or that situation in the past is inadequate to the demands of the present, that we are living our whole lives *in a state of emergency* which is—for reasons I'm sure I don't have to spell out for you by discussing nuclear and chemical weapons or ecological disasters and threats—unparalleled in all history.¹⁰⁵

Her poetry provides a diagnosis of injustices and an exploration of what John Wrighton calls 'the ethical relations between self and other.' Her poetry 'breaks down a complex set of dualities: light/dark, vision/blindness, carnal/spiritual, material/semantic.'¹⁰⁶ The investigation of dualities and her attempt to bridge them comes from her constant recognition of others – minorities, the vulnerable, nonhumans – that I will analyze in in Chapter 3.

Jeffers and Levertov in Dialogue as Ecopoets:

Bringing Jeffers and Levertov into dialogue does not essentially indicate a contrastive examination but rather provides an investigation of a shared ground in response to

¹⁰⁵ Denise Levertov, 'The Poet in the World', in *The Poet in the World* (New Directions Books, 1973), pp. 107-116, p. 115.

¹⁰⁶ John Wrighton, 'Fear of the Blind': Political Vision and Postwar Ethics in the Poetry of Denise Levertov', *Literature and History*, 30.2 (2021), pp. 138-54, p. 139.

American injustices. Although Jeffers and Levertov wrote in different periods of the twentieth century, they share processes of response towards contemporary crisis in their age. In response to human injustices, their poetry is both ethical and dynamic. They were never blind to existing injustices. They wrote from an innate activism in response to perceived events rather than from participation in existing political circles. Their critiques are authentic, original, sensory, and multi-contextual across cultural, political, and environmental contexts. Their ecopoetry combines the threefold main areas of ecopoetry which I discuss at the beginning of the chapter. They critique human anthropocentrism with an examination of the physical and affective impacts of injustices, recognize ecological interdependence and the value of the environment, and call for environmental ethics and social change.

The similarity allows me to put these two poets in dialogue with each other to make the first ecocritical study that connects them together. Six points in particular encourage a dialogue between the two poets. First, their poetry records a detailed environmental perception of injustices which are not captured in depth in, for example, Ginsberg's or Snyder's poetry. Second, though the spatial proximity of Jeffers and Levertov to injustices differs, they could capture with sensory description how these injustices impact them, people, and nonhumans. Jeffers's topographical distance from the city and Levertov's geographical distance from the Vietnam War dissolve with their sensory description and reflection. With this sensory engagement of injustices, both contrast human-created environments such as cityscapes and wartime with natural symbols like the mountain, stone, and tree to critique how far human anthropocentrism is heading. Third, through this perception and description, the two poets capture the affective and material implications

that emerge in that human and nonhuman relationship, emphasizing the ecological dimension against the anthropocentric view of separation and exploitation. They are motivated by an ecocentric approach that recognizes the agency of others and the interconnectedness between all living things. Both poets have very substantial corpuses within which these implications form a consistent thread. Despite this poetic space for expression, the poets share a mature balance between the political and the emotional. Their critique never shows a prejudice towards only politics at the expense of showing the emotional side of injustices.

Fourth, this sustained poetic examination of human injustices across multiple collections allows for a clear and similar trajectory of responses to emerge that carry implications of the affective impacts in their initial withdrawal, the role of poetry in their revolutionary poetics, and the recognition of nonhumans' significance in the presentation of material and ecological relations. Jeffers and Levertov bring in their poetry a full presentation of existing anthropocentric thinking, its impact on people and the environment, ecological reality, and possibilities for environmental justice. This trajectory takes us to the fifth point: both poets recognize the interconnectedness between poetry and the environment. They see poetry as a reflection of the beauty of nature in displaying what is ugly and what is beautiful. Thus, the poem is a gate through which the reader has a glimpse into both existing injustices and the agency of the natural world. Sixth, for both poets, poetry does more than present injustices; it is an act of power that motivates others towards change and the reconstruction of relational values. Their poetry contributes to human survival with their poetry of social action, demanding the preservation of ethical values, and maintaining the interconnectedness in humans' relation to the environment.

Their long dedication to poetry stems from their environmental mindset which moves them to responsive activism rather than passive perception. Both possess the courage to protest and oppose power through poetry. They used poetry as a medium to connect with an otherness that is discarded, denied and rejected, and to bridge the separation between humans and the environment. Jeffers and Levertov critique this dichotomy and are aware of the role of poetry in reconstructing environmental consciousness.

However, within these points that bring Jeffers and Levertov into ecocritical dialogue, they have different approaches in their critique of humanity. While Jeffers appears misanthropic in his *Inhumanism*, resisting the culture without an initial intention for public speech, Levertov writes against injustices driven by social responsibility rather than antagonism for the culture. Jeffers sees American culture as a phase of a historical sequence that he is determined to both accept and reject while Levertov looks at the present, rejecting instances of injustices rather than a phase of history or the culture as a whole. Second, besides this contextual contrast between a phase in history that Jeffers awaits to fade and an incident in the present that Levertov awaits to resolve, there is a spatial difference between the poets. In their sensory description of injustices, Jeffers always maintains a detachment and perceives the scene from a distant top while Levertov physically places herself within the scene, allowing ‘emotional contagion’, which Amy Coplan discusses in contrast to empathy.¹⁰⁷ For Jeffers, this detachment creates an

107 Amy Coplan, ‘Empathic Engagement with Narrative Fictions’, *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 62.2 (2004), pp. 141-52, p. 144. In this article Coplan discusses the distinction between empathy, sympathy, and emotional contagion. For emotional contagion, she quotes a definition from Elaine Hatfield, John T. Cacioppo, and Richard L. Rapso, ‘Emotional Contagion’, in *Review of Personality and Social Psychology: Emotion and Social Behavior*, ed. by Margaret S. Clar (Sage, 1992), pp. 153-54. They define emotional contagion as ‘The tendency to automatically mimic and synchronize expressions, vocalizations, postures, and movements with those of another person and, consequently to converge emotionally.’

objective description that contrasts with Levertov's emotional intimacy with the scene. Third, Jeffers privileges visual imagery to describe this detached scene while Levertov uses a multi-sensory description that engages more senses albeit focusing on the visual. The nature of his detachment limits him only to the visual dimensions while Levertov's intimacy strengthens other senses. Fourth, while Jeffers's detachment makes him authoritative and determined in his critique, Levertov's intimacy causes an initial erosion of political voice and reluctance toward revolution. Jeffers's separation from the culture intensifies his critique as he sees the contrast between the city and nature. Unlike Jeffers, placing herself within the turbulent scene of injustices acts as a psychic pressure for Levertov, causing a reluctance before starting revolution. Despite this reluctance, Levertov ends up more committed to a revolution than Jeffers is, because she is less pessimistic about humanity. Fifth, Jeffers's critique is more intellectual and meditative while Levertov is physically active and engages in self-reflection and collective dialogue with people within the scenes of injustice. An intellectual concept such as Jeffers's timelessness that supports his Inhumanism is contrasted with Levertov's solidarity which is a backbone for her protests against violence.

Jeffers and Levertov, thus, wrote their poetry during times of growing American power and subsequent cultural, socio-political, and environmental injustices the poets perceived. Since my thesis is concerned with environmental injustice, Jeffers's and Levertov's poetry helps to map various aspects of American injustices that grow from a human-centred approach. Despite different approaches in nature writing between the two halves of the century, the two poets can be placed in dialogue to provide examples of various critiques of environmental injustices that are motivated by perceptions of injustice,

active consciousness, and poetic responsibility. This rich poetic engagement, though distinguishably different, aims to break the dualistic thinking that initiates injustice toward others. Both poets attempt to spread a holistic awareness and ideology of peace rather than just present the cultural apocalypse of the age as in the work of other poets of the twentieth century such as T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and Robert Frost. Although they were not the only poets who addressed these issues during their critical time, their poetry brings a stable, in-depth, multi-contextual, multi-sensory, and gradual trajectory towards conscious awareness that prevails. They possess an in-depth dedication rather than literary hesitation. Their poetry possesses that ethical endeavour to reconstruct rather than just to express.

Overview of the Chapters:

Chapter One of the thesis presents Jeffers's critique of modernity, manifested in the urban environment, and his condemnation of America's relational dynamic of hierarchy and the tyranny and greed it breeds. His poetry explores the theme of urbanization and its potential to disrupt the delicate balance between humanity and the landscape. Jeffers believed that the growth of cities and the spread of industrialization eroded the individual's sense of connection to the natural environment. As Jeffers saw it, American pursuit of power left people in the cities alienated, conformed to authority, lacking a sense of autonomous self and imaginative faculty, and separated from truth and the freedom of the natural world. His poetry reveals a trajectory in response to human anthropocentrism, starting from a description of injustice during his withdrawal to nature, a celebration of nature's timelessness during which he reflects on his political engagement, and an advocacy of justice. In the poems in this chapter, he describes the city and presents how humans hopelessly live in the confinement of urbanization and mechanization. From this

situation, he calls for withdrawal and freedom from human authority to the vastness and blessings of the natural world. His poetry frequently contrasts the grandeur and timelessness of the natural world with the transient and often destructive nature of human civilization. For Jeffers, the city becomes a catalyst for his opposition to humanity, manifested in his Inhumanism, and a point of departure towards the timelessness and significance of nature, from which humanity has been separated. Presenting the city and Carmel Point as two opposite settings, Jeffers aims to expose American dualism as a rejection of otherness and to redress the existing detachment from the natural world. His poetic vision ultimately calls for a deeper understanding and appreciation of the inherent value of the natural landscape, even as it faces the relentless march of urbanization. Recognizing this value, he advocates for ecological integration, encouraging humans to connect with nature rather than remain in isolation.

Chapter Two presents Levertov's critique of American anthropocentrism and the racial discrimination and injustices it causes in the environment of war. American imperialism during the Vietnam War bred violence that caused continuous destruction of Indigenous land, mutilation of bodies, and a wide experience of victimization. Like Jeffers, her poetry reveals a trajectory which starts with her description of injustices in the war she perceived through media, progresses towards political activism that condemns Americans' disregard for others, and culminates with her advocacy for solidarity, recognition, and safety. She shows dedication in describing what it looks like to experience injustice that mutilates the lives of people and their souls and causes destruction to the place and ecological anxiety. Like Jeffers, who depicts a pattern of anthropocentrism that elevates people at the expense of nonhumans, Levertov recognizes a pattern that elevates Western ideals at the expense of

other races who do not share the same anthropocentric view. She criticizes American policy and the use of napalm in the Vietnam War. Levertov believes that the destruction of war is closely connected to the degradation of the environment. In her poetry, she emphasizes how the materialistic and militaristic tendencies of human societies can lead to the demolition of the land, the pollution of air and water, and the disruption of delicate ecological balances. Since her poetry is rooted in experience, she tries to bridge the distance between Americans and Vietnamese, between physical experience and inner feelings. Levertov gives voice to the suffering of both human and non-human victims of war, encouraging empathy for others in experiences that are not ours. She advocates for a more holistic approach to resolving political and social tensions, underscoring the vital need for interdependence with the Vietnamese, protecting thus their lives and their land.

After the poets' critique across these urban and political contexts, Chapter 3 concentrates on their critique of environmental injustices towards nonhumans. In the poems of this chapter the poets condemn human exploitation of resources for consumption, destruction of land due to construction, agriculture, and war, and cruelty to animals due to confinement and scientific research. These acts reveal a more profound anthropocentric ideology that perceives humanity as superior and significant, underestimating anything outside itself as insignificantly passive. In a substantial body of their poetry, they discuss existing environmental threats caused by human tyranny and greed towards plants, lands, animals, and the minorities attached to the land. Chapter 3 investigates the material and affective forces that interplay with humanity. Poems by both poets affirm, through anthropomorphosis, nonhuman consciousness, agency, and the dynamic power that sometimes wrestles with oppression and environmental degradation. As in their

commentaries on urban and war environments, the poets attempt to share their environmental awareness, urging for a collapse of the distinction and distance between humans and nonhumans, recognizing them both as part of a holistic ecosystem necessitating sustainability and preservation.

Chapter One:
Ecological Alienation in Robinson Jeffers's Poetry of Urbanization

Mourning the broken balance, the hopeless prostration of the earth
Under men's hands and their minds,
The beautiful places killed like rabbits to make a city

‘The Broken Balance’ (*CP1* : 375).

Jeffers's critique of modernity manifested in urbanization and the estrangement it causes, is a recurrent theme in much of Jeffers's poetry. These poems on urbanization critique humanity's pursuit of economic and cultural power, leading to injustices against people and the land, as well as harm to ecological integrity. His early poetry from *Tamar and other poems* (1923) moving through his poetry of the 30s and 40s respond to the anxiety and labour in the urban context manifested in industrialization, material production, rapid modernization, and 'denser urban populations.'¹ Modernity intensifies and accelerates humanity's capacity for consumption, subordination of people and nonhumans, destruction, and cruelty for the sake of growth. Poems in the first section of this chapter such as 'Shine, Perishing Republic' (1923), 'Still the Mind Smiles'(1933) 'The Purse-Seine' (1938), and 'Prescription of Painful Ends'(1944) capture this intensity which Jeffer rejects In 'Triad,' Jeffers explains this process: 'Science, that makes wheels turn, cities grow, / Moribund people live on, playthings increase, / But has fallen from hope to confusion at her own business / Of understanding the nature of things . . .' (CP2 : 309). Jeffers depicts a prevailing sense of victimization in response to human authority and unavoidable desperation in the city as a center for civilization. This sense of victimization, which is also vital in Levertov's discussion of the Vietnam War in the next chapter, arises from human pursuit of power and the injustices it brings. The city reveals a loss of ecological relations and ethical values as the culture is going through a historical cycle of decay. Mercedes Monjian explains that 'cyclical change underlies Jeffers' thinking and

¹ James Karman, *Robinson Jeffers: Poet and Prophet* (Stanford University Press, 2015), p. 40.

writing from his concept of history and civilizations to the flux of life and matter in an up-and-down movement.’²

California plays an important role in Jeffers’s rejection of modernity. Through his isolation, his rejection is intensified by his contemplation of human culture on a distant landscape. His critique of modernity and its growing injustices, as explained earlier, brings a new relationship with the landscape. Chapman explains that, for Jeffers, the dropping of the bomb in Hiroshima ‘marked not just a new epoch in the history of humanity’s capacity for self-destruction’ but also a new epoch in our overall relationship with the natural world. The crisis of World War II instigates for Jeffers a return to his opposition to man’s destructive acts, coalescing into a proposed philosophy that would help in the denouncement of destruction. His Inhumanism grows from a socio-political consciousness. Chapman explains that in ‘The Inhumanist,’ Jeffers ‘uses the exaggerated and theatrical figure of the old man as a vehicle to express his most critical assessment of the human condition.’ Jeffers’s Inhumanism is an attempt to go beyond anthropocentrism using nature as a metaphor to both understand the human condition and highlight the existing separation between humans and their environment. In place of human boundaries comes the ecological view which Jeffers urges others to embrace. Chapman explains that:

Jeffers’s teaching of Inhumanism thus contains both a critical and a utopian dimension. The critical edge is represented by the old man’s double-bladed axe, used explicitly in the sense of a symbol “to cut truth from lies”; but behind all his axe-wielding and axe-grinding is an underlying hope—self-consciously utopian—that some future civilization may indeed free itself from the enthrallments of the human selfworld and “endure peace.”³

2 Mercedes Monjian, *Robinson Jeffers: A Study in Inhumanism* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1958), p. 15.

3 Steven Chapman, 'On the Question of Science in "the Inhumanist"', *Jeffers Studies*, 8.2 (2004), pp. 31-60, p32.34.

For Chapman, Inhumanism is liberatory and utopian in that Jeffers wants to protest injustices and attempts to retain peace and the ecological relations that sustain it. His isolation enables reflection on a broader political system that instigates injustices of alienation and subordination. It is informed by an ecological relation he takes the responsibility to reflect on, contrast with the city, and sustain in a broader context.

This chapter's discussion of the urban environment is divided into three sections. The first section registers Jeffers's observation of humanity's pursuit of power in the city and its implications for ethical values and ecological integrity. In 'Shine, Perishing Republic,' 'Still the Mind Smiles,' 'The Purse-Seine,' and 'Sign-Post,' he uses the symbols of cycles, rhythmic patterns, corruption, decay, and vulgarities to illustrate how far humanity has changed in its move towards modernity. These changes are reflected in the city, which he represents in the image of an enclosed cycle and thickening center, describing acts of rapid urbanization and separation from natural resources. This representation highlights a significant disruption in the human relationship with nature. Jeffers underscores the effects of this rupture on people and the land, allowing subjugation, exploitation and destruction which I will discuss more fully in chapter 3. In these poems, he demonstrates an acceptance of the cultural changes occurring in the city as an integral part of historical cycles, while simultaneously opting for social withdrawal and thus taking the role of a distant observer. Across different collections starting from *Tamar and Other Poems*, his poems capture his critique of the city from which Jeffers urges withdrawal. Jeffers responds to rapid urbanization and the loss of ecological values with a sense of detachment he views as wise, encouraging others to adopt a similar response as he states in 'Shine, Perishing Republic': 'But for my children, I would have them keep their distance from the thickening center;

corruption' (CP1 : 15). In this urge for withdrawal from the city, Jeffers demonstrates his critique of the culture and his rejection of its impact on people, emphasizing that a state of wellbeing and ethical judgment emerge through a distance from corruption.

The second section of this chapter presents a contrastive view of the anthropocentric relations that threaten ecological integrity. Jeffers highlights in other poems the contrast between the urban and natural environments where humanity's changing values are contrasted with nature's timelessness. He engages with enduring symbols of nature like mountains, stone, and rock in poems such as 'Inscription for a Gravestone,' 'Point Joe,' 'Gary Weather,' 'Oh Lovely Rock,' 'Rock and Hawk' and 'Red Mountain.' For him, the natural landscape and its objects present an independence that transcends temporal and spatial changes. His withdrawal marks the inauguration of a close observation of ecological values on which he based his concept of poetry and opposition to humanity. Thus, the city is a symbol of introversion which necessitates a contrasting attitude of extroversion to meet that richness. His principle of poetry as permanent is informed by his condemnation of urbanization. This critique stems, in fact, from the recognition that the city is a built environment that lacks authenticity, truth, and permanence. He explains in the Preface to *Tamar*: 'Most of our inventions are mere expedients, or the possible essential in them remains hidden; and here is what makes the life of modern cities barren of poetry; it is not a lasting life; and it is lived among unrealities' (CP4 : 380). The accumulation of 'unrealities' does not create a safe and reliable place to live instinctively, that represents life, beauty, and truth. Jeffers equates 'reality' to 'real things' that are not abstract or so 'temporary and exceptional that they are not to be counted among realities' (CP4 : 381).

Thus, in poems of permanence in this section of the chapter, Jeffers declares both his rejection of the temporary realities and the appreciation of all that is timeless.

The third section of the chapter presents Jeffers's development from literary isolation to political critique. His withdrawal from the city as a center for human corruption allows him to reflect on a wider context of political power and tyranny in the context of the Second World War. He comes to realize the limits of his isolation and withdrawal and recognizes that he could have prevented America from participating in violence. In 'Contemplation of the Sword,' 'The Blood Guilt,' and 'Flight of Swan,' he declares his opposition to the politics of war and his accusation of American greed and injustices. These poems disclose Jeffers's journey from isolation, in which he advocates American Isolationism, to the recognition of the need to speak and prevent America from getting involved in the violence of war itself. Jeffers shares his political engagement with a voice that seeks balance and integration after a period of deliberate isolation from the culture. The chapter ends the critique with two poems from Jeffers's late poetry on timelessness to show his persistence in these models. In both 'Carmel Point' and 'De Rerum Virtute,' Jeffers calls for peace and integration rather than separation. His trajectory from literary isolation to involvement reveals the imperative of poetic voice for the literary presentation of human injustice. This presentation gives voice to the victimized, sheds light on the destroyed values, and negotiates a sustainable model for integration.

Perception of Injustices and Withdrawal from the City:

Jeffers declares his resistance to contemporary culture through both spatial and emotional detachment, thereby revealing his prophetic vision and theoretical distinctiveness. The culture's expansion manifested in the city instigated his withdrawal

from the city to Carmel Point, California, in 1914. Although he denies his role as a prophet, declaring in the headnote to 'At the Birth of an Age' from *Solstice and Other Poems* (1935) 'I am not speaking as one of the prophets,' he does speak in his poems as a prophet 'forecasting the decline of the age.'⁴ Jeffers's attitude is that of a person who gives up worldly development and desires and holds a prophetic view of a man that was recurrently alluded to in his position from 'the mountain-top' (*CP2* : 517). His early poetry, which is informed by processes of critique and withdrawal from American urban culture, reveals the existing relational dynamics between people and the authority and between the city and nature. Recognizing this growing separation, his detachment facilitates a visual perception of the city, illustrating its complexity through images of galaxies of lights, enclosed circles, traps, and a thickening center. His poems convey the weight of living in an enclosed circle, as misery, savagery, and hopelessness exist. There is a wider sense of victimization as a response to a decayed Christianity, human greed, and loss of traditional values.

California plays a crucial role in Jeffers's withdrawal from the city and his Inhumanism. Pierre Lagayette highlights the significance of California in that it 'epitomizes a whole movement/displacement that incessantly drove people westward with the hope of personal or collective improvements.' The place provides a symbolism of 'detachment' and is both a 'final place' and the 'locus of a new beginning.'⁵ Jeffers had inherited the vision of California as 'the perfect epic and the culmination of the American sublime.' His withdrawal marks a refusal of human displacement from nature into urban construction. In turning away from cities, Jeffers aims to place humanity back within nature

4 Mercedes Monjian, *Robinson Jeffers: A Study in Inhumanism* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1958), p. 32.

5 Pierre Lagayette, 'Robinson Jeffers's Californian Landscape and the Rhetoric of Displacement', *Jeffers Studies*, 3.4 (1999), 2-9, p. 2-3.

and to shift the emphasis from human supremacy to ecological relation.⁶ After his withdrawal to Carmel Point, he went on to construct Tor House and Hawk Tower. This site becomes a touchstone for his distant reflection on the culture and the establishment of his philosophy of Inhumanism that advocates recognition for otherness and ecological wholeness.

Jeffers's rejection of the culture and his detachment is signaled through two spatial dimensions: one between the inside and the outside and another between the high and the low. At the first level, Jeffers contrasts between the city and nature in the image of the city as an enclosed circle that signals human accelerating power and 'insulated' from ecological integrity. This enclosed circle divides humanity from otherness as the circle distinguishes the inside and outside in spatial terms. This image of the enclosure is recurrent in many of Jeffers's poems, as we shall see in 'Shine, Perishing Republic,' where the city is enclosed in a circle, and 'The Purse-Seine,' where the enclosure of fish in a net describes the separation. It is a symbol of built boundaries and ecological division. Thus, the withdrawal that Jeffers seeks, signals a movement from existing division into an ecological integration. At the second level, another spatial relation that recurs in Jeffers's poetry of withdrawal is the distance between the high and the low. Some of Jeffers's speakers offer a detached view of culture from a high place, such as a mountain in 'The Purse-Seine' and later 'Apology for Bad Dreams', which I will discuss in Chapter 3. This upward ascent thus emphasizes a parallel internal journey from unconsciousness to consciousness where the person reaches a realization and attempts to escape an existing overwhelming experience. Other poems urge people towards ascent as a coping response to gain a clear perspective

6 Pierre Lagayette, 'Robinson Jeffers's Californian Landscape', p. 2-3.

on the environment such as ‘Sign-Post’ and ‘Still the Mind Smiles’ which will be analyzed later in this chapter. This urge for a higher perspective also implies by a point of vantage Jeffers’s authoritative voice and prophetic vision which will be contrasted later with Levertov’s intimate voice of poetic vision.

Jeffers’s ‘Shine, Perishing Republic’ was originally included in *Tamar and Other Poems*. However, he republished it two years later in *Roan Stallion, Tamar, and Other Poems* (1925). Placing the poem after ‘The Beginning of Decadence’ in the first collection indicates that it ‘derives from and responds’ to that poem’s criticism of war and accelerating political power.⁷ In the same collection, ‘Shine, Perishing Republic’ is followed by a series of poems that starts with ‘The Cycle’ which ‘foregrounds nature as process’ and ‘celebrates its beauty’.⁸ Tim Hunt explains that ‘where “Shine, Perishing Republic” subsumes and recasts “The Beginning of Decadence,” “The Cycle,” instead, reinforces and extends “Shine, Perishing Republic” by subsuming the more limited scale of human history and societies into the vast (and seemingly unending) time span of nature’s cyclical process.’⁹ However, placing the poem within *Roan Stallion, Tamar, and Other Poems*, he positions the poem between ‘Autumn Evening’ and ‘The Treasure’ which celebrate nature and its beauty. The first context frames the poem as a response to war and peace, while the second emphasizes a rejection of social issues in favour of nature.

Combining these two contexts, my argument foregrounds not only the political or historical context but also the natural and ecological, emphasizing thus both historical and

7 Tim Hunt, ‘Why Did Jeffers Omit “Shine Perishing Republic” from *Tamar and Other Poems* and How Might It Matter’, *Jeffers Studies*, 22 (2021-2022), pp. 5-26, p. 9.

8 Tim Hunt, ‘Why Did Jeffers Omit “Shine Perishing Republic”’, p. 10.

9 Tim Hunt, ‘Why Did Jeffers Omit “Shine Perishing Republic”’, p. 10-11.

ecological significance. 'Shine, Perishing Republic' is one of the poems that describes the increasing accumulation of cultural corruption in the image of the city that alters the holistic integrity of nature. Jeffers views this corruption from the perspective of historical cycles in which history repeats itself in cycles of rising and falling, prosperity and decay. Hunt explains that these cycles of decay cannot be reversed but rather embraced as part of the natural processes and the 'unending cycle of being in which blooming gives way to fading and fading in turn gives way to bloomings.'¹⁰ This conceptual framework of time informs much of Jeffers's poetry making him simultaneously accept and resist change . With this acceptance of historical cycles as part of natural cycles, he paradoxically relates the necessity of physical withdrawal as a retreat from a corrupted American cultural center that alienates people from their environment. Through dialogue with the younger generation, he highlights the potential impacts and urges them towards withdrawal.

Jeffers starts the poem with a description of a transitional state which he claims to witness:

While this America settles in the mould of its vulgarity,
heavily thickening to empire,
And protest, only a bubble in the molten mass, pops and
sighs out, and the mass hardens. (CP1 : 15)

'While,' in the first line, indicates a transitory cycle of 'vulgarity' that America undergoes. The close observation of the speaker suggests the perspective of a person who has the perceptive power to witness this growing change. The imagery of the mould in the opening line suggests negative cultural growth into an empire, which Jeffers uses to illustrate a

10 Tim Hunt, 'Why Did Jeffers Omit "Shine Perishing Republic" from *Tamar and Other Poems* and How Might It Matter"', *Jeffers Studies*, 22 (2021-2022), pp. 5-26, p. 10.

process of casting molten metal into a solid form within a mould. Although the title refers to the republic as 'perishing,' this republic is replaced by an empire which indicates a state of accumulation and graduality of consecutive acts that build it. It has implications of expansion and violence that impact the core values of a culture as suggested by the image of 'mould' and 'vulgarities.' Jeffers sees the fall of ethical and ecological values as a part of the process of human expansion as humans foreground their cultural and economic importance over ethical or ecological considerations. Jeffers's classical education could be seen here in the implied reference to the fall of the Roman Republic and its replacement with the Roman Empire.

Parallel to these acts of accumulation of vulgarities, there are attempts at protests, which Jeffers pictures as bubbles that expand and finally burst. This image is significant in its dual implications. It indicates that the protests are of a temporary nature that cannot persist. Furthermore, it implies an expansion of protest against a vulgar culture. However, this 'protest ... pops and sighs out' indicating a weaker power in the face of America's 'vulgarities.' The detachment that Jeffers prefers grows from his observation of ineffectual protest. The protest thus does not prevent its congealment into a solid mass as the 'mass hardens.' The change, thus, from a liquid form to a solid form implies America's rigidity in which all attempts dissolve and accumulate to harden its vulgarities. These cycles of history bring back the same perception of history in Jeffers's poem 'Practical People' from *Roan Stallion*:

And all these tidal gatherings, growth and decay,
Shining and darkening, are forever
Renewed; and the whole cycle impenitently
Revolves, and all the past is future:

Make it a difficult world ... for practical people (*CP1* : 112).

This poem shares with 'Shine, Perishing Republic' not only the conception of cycles but also the relationship between 'growth' and 'decay' and between prosperity and ethical darkness. From these associations, it is clear that, for Jeffers, growth does not equal easiness for the world but a burden and difficulty. However, being present within this scene does not indicate an involvement within this cycle or participation in the actions done at that time. Jeffers recognizes that one can be present and at the same time maintain a passive role in the vulgar acts. However, with this passivity, one cannot escape its affective impacts. He preferred a physical detachment over a passive presence. For him, withdrawal is a way for stopping both this presence and being affected by the culture.

In the second and third couplets of 'Shine, Perishing Republic,' the speaker expresses a psychological ambivalence towards these cycles and attempts to maintain an emotional distance as a defence mechanism by just observing them:

I sadly smiling remember that the flower fades to make fruit,
the fruit rots to make earth.

Out of the mother; and through the spring exultances, ripeness
and decadence; and home to the mother.

You making haste haste on decay: not blameworthy; life is
good, be it stubbornly long or suddenly

A mortal spender: meteors are not needed less than mountains:
shine, perishing republic. (*CP1* : 15)

This detachment within presence involves affective ambivalence towards this historical cycle, 'sadly smiling' at aspects of decay and prosperity. It is a juxtaposition of two contrary emotions. While the decay of the culture provides a base for his sadness, his detachment evokes his happiness. These processes and cycles of 'ripeness' and 'decadence' ensure that

the flower 'fades' to make 'fruit' and the fruit 'rots' to participate in the earth's fertility. Jeffers's smile does not indicate a replacing joy but instead a struggling acceptance of these cycles and an attempt to detach himself emotionally from the growing affective impact. These processes of general observation and emotional detachment shift to a critique of humanity and its cycles of decay, mocking America's hastening towards 'decay.' The emphasis is shifted to a state of ambivalence where life becomes 'good' and ironically, the speaker rejoices 'shine, perishing republic.' The lines bear a temporal contrast between the hastening speed of the 'meteors' that symbolize human changes versus the stillness of the mountains. For Jeffers, this contrast to natural objects is recurrent in his poetry to show humanity's rapid changes and mortal existence.

The fourth couplet bears Jeffers's ecological vision in the speaker's urge for the next generation to withdraw from the city to evade its impacts. The poem stands as a prophetic warning of this corruption's inevitable consequences, which necessitate withdrawal. Jeffers describes the direction of withdrawal in spatial terms from the enclosed center of culture to the open space of nature:

But for my children, I would have them keep their distance
from the thickening center; corruption

Never has been compulsory, when the cities lie at the
monster's feet there are left the mountains. (*CP1* : 15)

Shifting the emphasis in the poem from indifference to condemnation informs again a state of ambivalence in which Jeffers expresses his understanding of the change and the urges to escape it. Jeffers's recognition of the futility of existing cycles of decay takes him to consider future cycles. 'But' in the first line of the couplet signals the speaker's shift of attention from a personal acceptance to a collective consideration of the younger

generation. This foregrounds Jeffers's authoritative voice that wrestles with the authority of human power. Thus, the focus shifts in the fourth couplet from America as the authority to the perspective he is advising a new generation of 'children' to embrace. For Jeffers, avoidance necessitates a spatial separation from the 'thickening center' which is the source of 'corruption' and a return to 'mountains.'

Jeffers's image of an enclosed 'center' as recurrent in his other poems indicates division and binary oppositions between center and periphery, human and nonhumans, and city and mountain, which results from an anthropocentric mindset. This binary thinking is a recurrent feature of Jeffers's poetry which he describes in 'Still the Mind Smiles' as 'the paired wings of a flying bird' and which will be investigated in his response to human injustice in this chapter and later in Chapter 3 (*CP2* : 310). This image of the enclosed circle applies on a spatial level to imply a division rather than depth. By contrast, in his poem 'The Treasure' from *Tamar*, Jeffers refers to the old values as a depth and the human modern life as a surface. He condemns the absence of the old values in the presence of human new values: 'Surely you never have dreamed the incredible depths were prologue and epilogue merely/To the surface play in the sun, the instant of life, what is called life?' (*CP1* : 102) What is being perceived in modern life is a play that is played 'in the sun' and what is deep is marginalized and shortly included in the 'prologue and epilogue.' Jeffers's metaphorical contrast between modern changing values and timeless values grows into a sustained discussion of timelessness in his poems in the second section of this chapter. The same concept of depth is emphasized also in his poem 'Woodrow Wilson' from *Roan Stallion* where one of the speakers expresses his regret at choosing to walk away from this

depth saying ““That I was drawn out of this depth to establish the earth on peace. My labor/Dies with me, why was I drawn out of this depth?”” (CP1 : 107)

Not only does ‘Shine Perishing Republic’ urge social withdrawal to escape the ‘corruption,’ but the poem’s final couplet warns against excessive emotional attachment to people. This is not the ambivalence of ‘sadly smiling’ but a deliberate recognition of one’s feelings towards other humans:

And boys, be in nothing so moderate as in love of man, a
clever servant, insufferable master.

There is the trap that catches noblest spirits, that caught—
they say—God, when he walked on earth. (CP1 : 15)

Even in the positive emotion of ‘love,’ Jeffers urges moderation to avoid glorifying humanity’s cruelty and corruption. In that, Jeffers implies that the majority fall into the trap of admiration and love of a superior authority of humanity. The concept of loving men implies a misconception of the nature of their acts. This is emphasized in the paradoxical dual role of ‘a clever servant’ and ‘insufferable master.’ However, this act of care which humanity assumes and which is recognized by the ‘noblest spirits’ turns out to be an act of exploitation. They use this authority to enact corruption which affects other people beneath them in power. Instead of identifying with these human values on an emotional level, Jeffers in his poem ‘To the House’ from *Tamar*, suggests a reunion with the ‘old mother’ with its ‘sea and the secret earth’ (CP1 : 5).

Other poems examine Jeffers’s critique of modernity and historical cycles. The ambivalent state of accepting the cyclical nature of history and at the same time withdrawing socially is apparent in ‘Still the Mind Smiles’ from *Give Your Heart to the*

Hawks (1933). Jeffers presents this ambivalence in his perception of humanity's growth of civilization and consequent evils:

Still the mind smiles at its own rebellions,
Knowing all the while that civilization and the other evils
That make humanity ridiculous, remain
Beautiful in the whole fabric, excesses that balance each other
Like the paired wings of a flying bird.
Misery and riches, civilization and squalid savagery,
Mass war and the odor of unmanly peace:
Tragic flourishes above and below the normal of life. (CP2 :
310)

The phrase 'Still the mind smiles' at the beginning of the poem, expresses a continuation of the state of acceptance of cultural changes and human 'evils.' That 'the mind smiles' indicates three meanings: that the mind continues to smile, that it smiles despite what happened, or that it smiles in stillness. In this situation, Jeffers could mean these three meanings. The poem seems to continue the ambivalent state of smiling in 'Shine, Perishing Republic' but with a tone of acceptance. It is not a smile of admiration, but rather it emerges from an in-between state of peaceful reconciliation and a grim irony. Instead of reacting to these 'evils' with negative affects such as anger or distress, the speaker views them within a cyclic view of history, which he admires partially with amusement.

The poem registers a tension between an unamusing situation and a feeling of amusement at the sight of changes. Part of the complexity arises from the fact that his mind's smile is a response to ridiculousness and beauty at the same time. The evils Jeffers refers to constitute the 'excesses that balance each other' and thus provide a source of beauty which Jeffers smiles at. Jeffers juxtaposes in this poem contraries as being real and

essential to ‘balance each other’ which he compares to ‘the paired wings of a flying bird.’ He exemplifies some of these contraries like ‘Misery and riches, civilization and squalid savagery, /Mass war and the odor of unmanly peace.’ When one of these qualities emerges, it is counterbalanced by another. Balanced contraries appear in many of Jeffers’s poems, justifying civilization’s beauty and ugliness as explored in ‘Apology for Bad Dreams’ in Chapter 3. Jeffers’s reference to ‘Mass war and the odor of unmanly peace’ indicates another aspect of injustice on a political level. Regardless of his acceptance of these contraries, he seems to denigrate savagery and peace in particular and amplify ‘civilization’ and ‘war’, ironically indicating a prevalent situation that he observes rather than embraces. What may constitute a civilization for others does not hold the same meaning for Jeffers. The alliteration of ‘Misery’ and ‘Mass war’ brings an implication of connection in which the continuous destructive acts of violence at war constitute misery. Opposite in nature to these acts is the ‘unmanly peace’ which he opts for himself in the context of war and wants to persist. Jeffers, in the poem, presents these not as mere excesses but as consequences from their opposite state. Thus, misery results from the accumulation of riches, savagery from civilization, and the unmanly pursuit of peace enables mass war.

The initial acceptance of these balanced “excesses” in the preceding lines transforms into recognizing their problematic presence that demands action. Jeffers uses a prophetic identity that possesses an ecological vision and goes beyond human-changing ethics:

In order to value this fretful time
It is necessary to remember our norm, the unaltered passions,
The same-colored wings of imagination,
That the crowd clips, in lonely places new-grown; the unchanged
Lives of herdsmen and mountain farms,

Where men are few, and few tools, a few weapons, and their dawns are
beautiful.

From here for normal one sees both ways,
And listens to the splendor of God, the exact poet, the sonorous
Antistrophe of desolation to the strophe multitude. (CP2 : 310)

To evade the pressure of humanity's 'evils' and this 'fretful time,' the speaker highlights a contrasting situation characterized by depth and permanence. This contrast is evident in the speaker's nostalgic withdrawal to the past to contemplate a period of purity and joy while denying the fragmentation of time. The speaker gives a way to 'value' this 'fretful time' by contrasting it to the past of the 'herdsmen' that continue in the present to indicate their preservation of values. By the phrase 'value this fretful time,' he criticizes humanity's corruption and looks for value elsewhere other than in modern civilization. Being aware of the affective impact of corruption on people, he suggests a necessity for a defensive escape with 'imagination' to a state of 'norm' to regain the self-integrity that is lost within this change.

The shift to a 'norm' suggests a contrast between two varieties of temporal experience: between the immediate present and past. The 'fretful time' is contrasted with a period of purity, innocence, and attachment to nature in which there is 'the unaltered passions' of a 'crowd' which lives 'in lonely places new-grown.' Those 'few men' who chose to unchanged bring reference to one of Jeffers's early poems, 'The Beach' from *The Women at Point Sur* (1927), when he describes the beauty of the natural environment and its people as 'few and not playful' (CP1 : 202). Jeffers critiques in 'Still the Mind Smiles' the complexity of the modern era through the reference to the simplicity of the past manifested in 'the unchanged' men and farms and the 'few tools' and 'weapons.' Although his

reference to 'savagery' early in the poem suggests denigration, he praises the 'herdsmen' who seem to represent the uncivilized group. Savagery thus is not the opposite of civilization but rather the product of its presence as all those marginalized by civilization are forced into it to escape the implications of the destructive civilization.

Furthermore, in that description of the herdsmen's environment, Jeffers praises the concept of scarcity in their 'few tools, few weapons' which sets an implied contrast to the abundance of the modern people. In a similar way, Jeffers praises this poverty and links it to freedom in his poem 'The Coast-Road' from *Such Counsels You Gave to Me* (1938) (CP2 : 522). The discrepancy between the material possessions of the two scenes allows for a deeper observation. On a profounder level, there is an ecological abundance within the life of herdsmen and desolation within the presumed multitude of civilization. Thus, the 'multitude' of 'herdsmen' within their environment in 'lonely places' precedes the 'desolation' of humanity in their crowded 'civilization.' Shelley Brooks observes that 'Jeffers' praise for these early inhabitants' modes of living derives from his approval of a life lived within the constraints imposed by nature.'¹¹ Desolation is a stage or a place through which one could listen to this 'sonorous' deep sound of wisdom. The contrast between these two groups of people brings also a reference to Jeffers's early poem 'Wise Men in their Bad Hour' from *Tamar* where he sarcastically describes modern people as 'wise men' who envy 'The little people making merry like grasshoppers' (CP1 : 10). The simplicity which Jeffers admires in this poem is manifested in these people 'hardly thinking

11 Shelley Alden Brooks, 'Preserving Jeffers Country', *Jeffers Studies*, 20 (2017-2018), pp. 1-15, p. 2.

Backward but never forward' which makes them different from modern people who engage thoroughly with the future (*CP1* : 10).

The contrast between past and present in Jeffers's critique of historical cycles and its implications of injustices is emphasized in 'Prescription of Painful Ends' from *Be Angry at the Sun*. Across different collections in the 1930s and 1940s Jeffers looks back at the past as a time for illumination and a nostalgic return to a better time. In the overview of the historical cycles, Jeffers contrasts the inevitability of change and quotes changes in Lucretius' and Plato's times. Instead of urging, as in the previous poem, for a withdrawal from the city to nature in spatial terms, Jeffers advocates a nostalgic retreat to classical times. From this return, he underscores the excessiveness of modern changes and the need for art to document modern cycles:

The future in a misted landscape, no man sees
clearly, but at cyclic turns
There is a change felt in the rhythm of events as when an exhausted horse
Falters and recovers, then the rhythm of the running hoof-beats is
changed: he will run miles yet,
But he must fall: we have felt it again in our own life-time, slip, shift and
speed-up
In the gallop of the world. (*CP3* : 14)

Jeffers compares history to 'an exhausted horse' who, despite rhythmic acts of faltering and recovering manifested in the auditory sound of 'hoof-beats,' with time 'must fall.' Thus, although some events within that change move in a rhythmic pattern, there are times when the rhythm changes into a fall where there is a 'slip, shift and speed-up/ In the gallop of the world.' The horse is a nostalgic image and a sign of attachment to premodern civilization. Jeffers is attentive to premodern America before the industrial changes and

through this image, he puts modernity and tradition in contrast. Furthermore, the alliteration in these lines implies the implications of repetitiveness and decline. Jeffers's use of 'rhythm,' 'running,' and 'run' indicates a recurrent repetition of historical cycles. Also, the alliteration in 'slip' and 'speed-up' brings attention to the abruptness of the change from a downward slip or halt to a swift movement. This general observation of felt decline brings Jeffers to a comparable feeling of the present moment where cultural changes will finally end in an utter 'fall' like the horse. The 'must' in the line indicates an expected outcome of long exhausting actions. Contrary to the changes of the past that went into processes of normal rise and fall, the changes in Jeffers's time move 'downward' in a long process of deterioration despite 'peace or war.'

Jeffers recognizes the potential of poetry as a prescription for cycles of decline. Similar to the classical works of art like Plato's *The Republic* and Lucretius' *On the Nature of Things* that traced cycles of prosperity and decline, he demands that poets write about the current time. Thus, writing poetry documents the current age: 'one builds poems for treasuries' which are 'time-conscious poems' that are set 'against the narrowing mind and the tyrants, / The pedants, the mystagogues, the barbarians' (CP3 : 14). It is the 'prescription' of the title for those 'painful ends' that are anticipated through Jeffers's perspective. Jeffers prescribes poetry to ease the painful end of Western civilization. 'Ends' also has a double meaning as it indicates 'ends' or outcomes as opposed to 'means.' By combining the adjective 'painful' to this meaning, it is suggested that the power and modern prosperity are gained by violent and unethical means.

However, the second and concluding verse paragraph of 'Prescription of Painful Ends' contrasts the previous themes of writing with what might be the content for writing

poetry in 'Our own time.' The pause before the opening of the last verse paragraph prepares for a discrepancy in the topics of poetry between past and present. This pause indicates the distance in time and implies a load that the speaker struggles to express fully in this part:

Our own time, much
greater and far less fortunate,
Has acids for honey, and for fine dreams
The immense vulgarities of misapplied science and decaying Christianity:
therefore one christens each poem, in dutiful
Hope of burning off at least the top layer of the time's uncleanness, from
the acid-bottles. (*CP3* : 14)

In this poem, Jeffers extends the image of vulgarity by which he describes America in 'Shine, Perishing Republic.' He links the vulgarities to human excesses of misusing science and being influenced by a vulgar, decadent form of Christianity. It is an aspect of modernity that brings injustices in its name which I will discuss later with reference to 'Memoir' in Chapter 3. Thus, a poem presents the moral and aesthetic inadequacies and how these with the 'vulgarities' impact the world physically and psychologically. For this lack of moral and spiritual impact and the growing presence of science, it becomes necessary 'in dutiful / Hope' for the poetry to stop the chain of change and reshape. Hence, a poet 'christens each poem' for the 'burning off at least the top layer of the time's uncleanness, from the acid-bottles.' This act of burning enacts both the misapplied science and the decaying Christianity.

This image of 'burning off' is powerful in that it presents an accumulative expression and representation of culture in poetry. Jeffers wishes for deep cleaning of the vulgarities of the culture using 'acid.' The poem for Jeffers acts as purification not of speech but rather

deeds. However, the act of removing the 'top layer' implies an attempt to ameliorate the external aesthetic pictures of poems. It implies as well an inability for depth cleaning as it cannot be reached except through accumulative efforts of engagement. 'Burning off' the 'top layer' consequently will be followed by other attempts to melt that ugliness and those vulgarities into a more aesthetic expression of beauty. These acts indicate a painful process undertaken against another present pain experienced by ethical decay and failure of poetry to respond to vulgarities of the age. A contrasting feeling of purity and innocence will emerge by bringing together two painful feelings. Thus, a poem not only depicts but also expresses and thereby cures. Poetry acts as a temporary expression of these changes after which the poet tries to return the poem to its beautiful purity and expression of basic human values. The image of 'burning off' indicates a return to a valuable original state. By removing 'uncleanness,' enduring values can be brought back into this world of 'decaying' morals. It is a prescription that comes after all these experienced painful ends.

Furthermore, Jeffers's 'The Purse-Seine' from *Such Counsels You Gave to Me* advances Jeffers's critique of the culture from whom he urges for withdrawal. Jeffers locates his critique in the act of fishermen catching fish as one of the manifestations of human power and greed through consumption. In the poem, the exploitative act of fishermen catching fish is compared to the act of the exploitative culture from which the speaker withdraws. The title word 'purse' has a double meaning that suggests that catching fish is an act of profit rather than subsistence. Jeffers's detached perspective allows the speaker to objectively see the cultural and affective implications of anthropocentric relations that instigate division and greed. Jeffers's authoritative perspective urges for recognition of historical cycles while at the same time distancing oneself from their

affective and ethical impacts. For him, withdrawal marks a distinctive individuality and a healthy setting of boundaries. He starts the poem with a description of the incident:

Our sardine fishermen work at night in the dark of the moon; daylight
or moonlight
They could not tell where to spread the net, unable to see the
phosphorescence of the shoals of fish.
They work northward from Monterey, coasting Santa Cruz; off New Year's
Point or off Pigeon Point
The look-out man will see some lakes of milk-color light on the sea's
night-purple; he points, and the helmsman
Turns the dark prow, the motorboat circles the gleaming shoal and drifts
out her seine-net. They close the circle
And purse the bottom of the net, then with great labor haul it in. (CP2 :
517)

The plural possessive pronoun 'our' makes a clear indication that the 'fishermen' in their act of trapping hold power and represent a more general act of the whole civilization in which presumably the speaker and the addressee are implicated. This determination to work 'in the dark of the moon' results from the fact that the 'phosphorescence' cannot be perceived except by complete darkness. Thus, any 'moonlight' renders their inability to perceive things. The fish emit light only in the darkness while the phosphorescence becomes invisible in the light. This scene reinforces Jeffers's concept of the beauty that emerges from the existence of binaries and opposites. At the same time, darkness implies that exploitation emerges from the depth of human darkness that instigates ecological separation and subsequent exploitation.

The poem signals two contrasting powers, a division that is reinforced by two different spatial dimensions: the fish underwater and the fishermen above water. This division

presents the power of human authority as a multitude that is wrestling against another multitude of fish. This implies a collective ‘work’ of humans against the other in an attempt to find and catch ‘shoals of fish.’ Thus, one ‘points’ towards ‘some lakes’ and ‘the helmsman turns’ and controls the ‘motor-boat’ that ‘circles the gleaming shoal’ and ‘drifts out her seine-net.’ Through these individual continuous acts, together ‘they’ succeed in controlling them into an enclosure of a circle as they ‘close the circle/ And purse the bottom of the net’ and ‘haul it in.’ This act is not only achieved by ‘great labor,’ but by persistence and haste. The separation between the upper and the lower signifies a varied level of power and control. The hierarchal power also continues after fish are enclosed by the net, indicating a division between the inside and the outside and a loss of individual power and freedom. This scene reinforces Jeffers’s repeated urge for personal freedom through intentional separation from excesses of power.

In the second verse paragraph, Jeffers presents the affective implications of exploitation on both the speaker and the fish. This interconnectedness is what informs Jeffers’s poetics against injustice. The first line opens with a moment of short silence symbolized by the blank space to realize the perceived scene of fishermen catching a ‘shoal’ of fish:

I cannot

tell you

How beautiful the scene is, and a little terrible, then, when the crowded

fish

Know they are caught, and wildly beat from one wall to the other of their

closing destiny the phosphorescent

Water to a pool of flame, each beautiful slender body sheeted with flame,

like a live rocket
A comet's tail wake of clear yellow flame; while outside the narrowing
Floats and cordage of the net great sea-lions come up to watch, sighing
in the dark; the vast walls of night
Stand erect to the stars. (CP2 : 517)

This silence is presented in the prolonged expression of the speaker's reaction in the first line. At the end of the line, the speaker, in negation, starts to express his perplexity 'I cannot tell you.' The pronoun 'you' indicates a conversational intimacy with the addressee with whom he shares his experience. In that moment of perplexity, Jeffers describes two different registers of the aesthetic experience of watching the fish 'I cannot tell.../ How beautiful the scene is, and a little terrible.' As in many of Jeffers's poems, the speaker perceives beauty and awfulness at the same time in the fishermen's acts. Although it presents beauty and a normal activity like those of 'herdsmen' in 'Shine Perishing Republic,' Jeffers's description of the intensity of the act of trapping fish carries an ugliness that symbolizes the whole act of humanity trapping others in its assumed civilization and progress. Despite its beauty, it turns into a moment of empathy with the fishes' own terror.

Not only does the poem describe the speaker's startling moment. It dwells on the fishes' realization when they 'Know they are caught' and describes their affective reaction as they 'widely beat from one wall to the other of their closing destiny.' Beating indicates another opposite collective force and a multitude against the power of fishermen, highlighting their agency, though futile in this context, against claims of subordination. Their resistance is symbolized in the radiation of 'flame' from 'each beautiful slender body' like 'a live rocket.' The same simile also indicates the transition they aim for in the upward movement. This moment of intense affective reaction and upward movement of beauty

stimulates other auditory responses within the scene as ‘great sea-lions’ in the scene ‘come up to watch, sighing in the dark.’ Their vocalization which is described oddly by Jeffers as ‘sighing’ could suggest relaxation or gloominess. It echoes the ineffectual sigh of protest in ‘Shine, Perishing Republic’ that grows from the perception of human growth and pops out. However, the flame also indicates the phosphorescence of the fish: it is a light declaring power and a sign of fleeting brilliance similar to the ‘shine’ of the perishing republic in the earlier poem. The liveliness and dynamics of nonhumans is a recurrent element in many of Jeffers’s poems that I will discuss in Chapter 3 such as the horses in ‘Apology of Bad Dreams’ where the horse embodies a defensive force against humans.

Following the intense scene of perception and affective impact, the third verse paragraph departs from the critique of the fishing scene to the city from the perspective of a detached speaker. Despite his withdrawal from the scene, the speaker can give an in-depth description of the city:

Lately, I was looking from a night mountain-top
On a wide city, the colored splendor, galaxies of light: how could I help
but recall the seine-net
Gathering the luminous fish? I cannot tell you how beautiful the city
appeared, and a little terrible. (*CP2* : 517)

The incident that the speaker seems to critique through the wrestling forces in the first and second verse paragraphs is a mere recollection of an example of human acts. These acts by the power of accumulation over time produce ‘the colored splendor, galaxies of light’ which indicates electric light. Such light perceived from a distance is ironically what Jeffers also admires in ‘Shine, Perishing Republic.’ As a characteristic viewpoint of Jeffers’s poems, the speaker’s detachment indicates his inability to identify with the culture and

freedom of perspective. Campbell points out that Jeffers 'theorizes the west' which is symbolized by the mountains and desolate places as 'the new national center toward which all things tend.'¹² His overwhelmedness upon glimpsing the city from a distance – 'I cannot tell you how beautiful the city appeared, and a little terrible' – is implied in the juxtaposition of two contrary responses of 'beauty' and awfulness. The distance allows the speaker to perceive things clearly that he cannot perceive when 'locked' in the center of that city.

Although his withdrawal makes him external in spatial dimensions, he was able to provide an internal description of the ecological separation that the city's enclosure causes due to modernity.

I thought, We have geared the machines and locked all together into
inter-dependence; we have built the great cities; now
There is no escape. We have gathered vast populations incapable of free
survival, insulated
From the strong earth, each person in himself helpless, on all dependent.
The circle is closed, and the net
Is being hauled in. They hardly feel the cords drawing, yet they shine
already. (*CP2* : 518)

At a physical level, he critiques the accumulation of power and exploitation that 'locked all together into interdependence' where there is 'no escape.' It is a moment when humans experience the fate of the fish not just the fishermen. It is a reciprocal act that turns against humans themselves. Jeffers again employs the concept of civilization as a circle in which people are 'locked.' Generally, 'Open' and 'enclosed' are two spatial values that have topophilic and psychological-symbolic meanings as indicated by the American geographer

12 J. Bradford Campbell, "Ex Occidente Frux" Jeffers, Thoreau, and the Strange Fruit of the West', *Robinson Jeffers*, 13.1-2 (2009), pp. 1-14, p. 7.

Yi-Fu Tuan.¹³ The ‘enclosed space’ that results from agoraphobia signifies ‘privacy, darkness,’¹⁴ and by analogy to the poem the enclosure in the poem affirms humanity’s ecophobic values against otherness that instigates separation. This metaphorical image of enclosure, which implies the binary division between the city and nature, impacts the whole culture by lessening people’s power, making the ‘vast populations incapable of free survival, insulated/ From the strong earth.’ At an affective level, the speaker shifts to a critique of the individual impact this progress has left as ‘each person in himself helpless, on all dependent.’ The sense of helplessness experienced by individuals, which renders them entirely dependent on others, is a result of mechanization and the hierarchical structure of society. This system positions human authority at the apex of a social pyramid, consequently subordinating all others to its influence and control.

Jeffers envisions two alternative futures for the culture: either dictatorship or anarchy.

The inevitable mass-disasters

Will not come in our time nor in our children's, but we and our children
Must watch the net draw narrower, government take all powers--or
revolution, and the new government
Take more than all, add to kept bodies kept souls--or anarchy, the mass-
disasters (CP2 : 518)

As he presents it in this poem, the culture is heading toward dictatorship in the extension of government power and toward anarchy in the social and psychological impact it left on people. J. Bradford Campbell identifies a ‘neurasthenic discourse’ in Jeffers’s poetry of the

¹³ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perceptions, Attitudes, and Values* (Columbia University Press, 1990), p. 27.

¹⁴ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia*, p. 27.

city.¹⁵ Jeffers's 'aversion to the city' is not a continuation of the Romantic inheritance but a 'realization that the city is a threat to personal and poetic vitality' as 'it robs the poet and the man of precious, limited energy, leaving him the victim of what Jeffers and his contemporaries would have recognized as a kind of neurasthenia.'¹⁶ Thus, his critique of the city is perceived as 'a poetic revenge'¹⁷ that denounces human civilization, symbolized in the city, and its impact on the mass population. These two alternatives suggest Jeffers's opposition to extremes of order and disorder. He rejects order and growth that lack ethical considerations and carry cultural and affective implications.

Furthermore, the poem draws on the relationship between the growth of civilization and its impacts on nonhumans. This hierarchal system has an indirect impact on the cultural relationship to nonhumans in the biosystem. The boundaries created by such a system of power, which places other creatures of the biosystem underneath humanity, makes humans detached from others: 'The circle is closed, and the net/ is being hauled in.' Being startled from watching the circle enclosed justifies the speaker's decision previously to withdraw which gives him relief. He is startled by his own perception of the affinity between the fish in the net and the way the city looks. It also gives a glimpse of thought for others to be cautious and act as early as possible to escape any affective or cultural impact. The invisibility of the 'net' from which people 'hardly feel the cords drawing' has its impact as 'they shine already.' Shining describes a state of gleaming prosperity and a sign of decay

15 J. Bradford Campbell, 'The Neurasthenic Logic of Robinson Jeffers's Antiurbanism', in *The Wild That Attracts Us: New Critical Essays on Robinson Jeffers*, ed. by ShaunAnne Tangney (University of New Mexico Press, 2015), pp. 25-40, p. 29.

16 J. Bradford Campbell, 'The Neurasthenic Logic of Robinson Jeffers's Antiurbanism', p. 27.

17 J. Bradford Campbell, 'The Neurasthenic Logic of Robinson Jeffers's Antiurbanism', in *The Wild That Attracts Us: New Critical Essays on Robinson Jeffers*, ed. by ShaunAnne Tangney (University of New Mexico Press, 2015), pp. 25-40, p. 26.

as indicated in the idea of a death light as seen in ‘Shine, Perishing Republic’ and phosphorescence which is caused by decay. However, the speaker explains that they can escape ‘the inevitable mass-disasters’ which may result from power only with collective active consciousness of the cultural by cultivating literal and psychological distance from them. Second, they can create a responsive activism of ‘revolution.’ The division of government into ‘new’ and presumably ‘old’ indicates an expansion of power and consequently a negative impact. The line ‘add to kept bodies kept souls’ indicates not only a victimization of bodies in ‘mass-disasters’ but also an internal victimization of ‘souls’ that affects people’s mental and affective state. ‘Kept souls’ also hints at the ideological totalitarianism of Nazism, fascism, and communism in 1937 during the Great Terror. The repetition of ‘mass disasters’ implies that their passive collectivity makes them vulnerable in front of this encroaching power.

The difficulty of maintaining a physical withdrawal from the culture for some necessitates other coping responses. Another mechanism that can be employed for people involved within the circle is an act of endurance. In the fourth verse paragraph, the speaker concludes with a description of the affective impact ‘Progress’ has left on people and reaffirms the necessity of a moderate reaction and an acceptance from his wise perspective. This response is modeled through the poets’ reaction to these cultural changes:

These things are Progress;
Do you marvel our verse is troubled or frowning, while it keeps its reason?
Or it lets go, lets the mood flow
In the manner of the recent young men into mere hysteria, splintered
gleams, crackled laughter. But they are quite wrong.
There is no reason for amazement: surely one always knew that cultures

decay, and life's end is death. (CP2 : 518)

Jeffers relates that in the situation of these cultural changes, it is not surprising that verse has responded in two different ways. One reaction to these changes is a balanced compromise of affective expression and reason. The second is an intense affective expression as 'it lets go, lets the mood flow.' Jeffers critiques modernism and particularly T.S. Eliot's poems of the late 1910s and early 1920s, amplifying his self-presentation as a mature poet. The internal rhyme in 'go' and 'flow' also signals the exaggerated flow of expression. Judging the two extremes, the speaker renders people as 'quite wrong.' To avoid extreme affective impact, he suggests recognizing the cyclical nature of history and accepting the inevitability of 'decay' and 'death.' The poem tries to cultivate in the reader the kind of emotional withdrawal modeled on Jeffers's own physical withdrawal. It echoes the moderation of love in 'Shine, Perishing Republic' where a person is aware of his emotions towards man and in response to his injustice. As a poet and a wise man who precedes these 'populations' in age and experience, he observes these acts from a detached perspective and gives an objective point of view to deal psychologically with them. Critiquing these acts as being of great impact does not necessitate an intensive collapse of emotions while writing poetry. However, Jeffers emphasizes the need for 'reason' and conscious awareness of the temporariness of these changes.

Other poems give a new dimension to Jeffers's critique of modernity and the city. His 'Sign-Post' from his collection *Solstice* is a short poem that presents a moment of intense distress and an urgency for withdrawal from humanity. However, the poem departs from the argument of the previous poems as it turns from the perception of culture to the perception of an opposing power of nature. Despite that it was published before 'The Purse-

Sein,' I place it at the end of this section as it encompasses both the concept of withdrawal from the city and the description of the landscape, which connects to the discussion of poems in the next section that were written parallel to Jeffers's critique of the culture. The poem itself, rather than the speaker, becomes the source of authority in contrast to the earlier poems. The 'I' in the previous poems turns into 'you' which includes both the speaker and the reader. At the start of the poem, the speaker is not constructed as an individual but rather as part of the scene the poem describes. The poem addresses other people who feel alienated from their natural selves and want to reconnect with their humanity. Instead of soothing people's emotions as he does in 'Prescription of Painful Ends' and 'The Purse-Seine,' 'Sign-Post' begins with the poem's authority that urges for what Hunt calls 'self-burial' and an immersion with the 'oneness' of nature.¹⁸ There seems to be a renunciation of the civilized self and an embrace of the timeless self which is part of a whole:

Civilized, crying: how to be human again; this will tell you how.
Turn outward, love things, not men, turn right away from humanity,
Let that doll lie. Consider if you like how the lilies grow,
Lean on the silent rock until you feel its divinity
Make your veins cold; look at the silent stars, let your eyes
Climb the great ladder out of the pit of yourself and man. (CP2 : 418)

The poem demonstrates his ecological awareness in the active engagement with the natural world and the distinction between civilization and humanity. For people to overcome the current emotional difficulties, the speaker suggests that the first step is to look beyond

18 Tim Hunt, 'Constructed Witness: The Drama of Presence in Jeffers's Lyric Voice', in *The Wild That Attracts Us: New Critical Essays on Robinson Jeffers*, ed. by ShaunAnne Tangney (University of New Mexico Press, 2015), pp. 41-64, p. 45.

themselves 'turn outward' and to abandon their human connections. In that outward movement from the inside to the outside, the speaker alludes to the enclosed circle of predominantly urban culture in which humanity is imprisoned and which Jeffers refers to in the poems discussed earlier in the chapter. However, this movement does not indicate a desperate resort but rather an intentional desire to go beyond the boundaries and experience the vastness of the natural world.

Thus, stepping outside the circle brings a transition from isolation with only 'men' to a multitude with others in which a person can 'love things, not men.' The poem demonstrates this transition in two movements: horizontal and vertical directions. The horizontal movement begins from the restricted circle of 'men' to the width of the environment that includes 'lilies,' 'rock,' and 'stars.' It indicates expansion, richness and harmony. This spatial conception of openness, which generally signifies, for Tuan, 'freedom, the promise of adventure, light, the public realm, formal and unchanging beauty,'¹⁹ can imply similar concepts in this outward movement in the poem. Jeffers openness is an endorsement of mental and physical freedom. He does not ask for restraint of love as in the act of loving man in 'Shine, Perishing Republic,' but to loving 'things, not men.' His insistence signifies a repudiation of dependency in favor of the independence of thought and action whether cultural or even poetic. The poem describes the act of leaving humanity to 'let that doll lie' in which he criticizes them as being artificial, and devoid of empathy and life. The spatial dimension of this letting go brings Tuan's explanation of the significance of the 'horizontal dimension' which indicates 'immanence' and 'the ideal of

19 Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perceptions, Attitudes, and Values* (Columbia University Press, 1990), p. 27-28.

earth-bound identification.’²⁰ Similarly, in the poem, this movement opens for a richness of sources of beauty and fusion with nature which humanity tries to marginalize.

This openness towards others advances into a connection with the universe above. Within this presence of nature’s multitude, the poem urges people to have both ‘a contemplative detachment’ and a close sensory interaction with natural objects.²¹ This proximity activates not only the sensual and physical experiences but also the philosophical. Furthermore, the poem invites them visually to ‘look’ at ‘the silent stars.’ The act of looking at the stars bears two implications: healing and divinity. Anthony Lioi hypothesizes that stellar imagery in Jeffers’s poetry reveals his ‘stoic project to remedy human violence by bringing human nature into harmony with universal nature,’ and that ‘the stellar imagery suggests a *scala naturae* through which humans reconnect with the divine reason of the universe by ascending up the levels of being to the parts of the universe almost as large as the whole, the stars and galaxies.’²² Contrary to the horizontal movement in turning away from humanity, the contemplation of stars allows the ‘eyes’ to ‘climb’ upward. The poem compares surrounding oneself with humanity to being in a ‘pit’ and surrounding oneself with nature as ‘the great ladder’ out of the ‘pit’ into the universe’s divinity. Tuan explains the relationship between ascending and divinity in the symbolism

20 Yi-Fu Tuan, p.28.

21 Robert Zaller, 'Jeffers, Pessimism, and Time', in *The Wild That Attracts Us: New Critical Essays on Robinson Jeffers*, ed. by ShaunAnne Tangney (University of New Mexico Press, 2015), pp. 65-116, p. 99.

22 Anthony Lioi, 'Knocking Our Heads to Pieces against the Night: Going Cosmic with Robinson Jeffers', in *The Wild That Attracts Us: New Critical Essays on Robinson Jeffers*, ed. by ShaunAnne Tangney (University of New Mexico Press, 2015), pp. 117-140, p. 124.

of natural concepts. He emphasizes that the vertical dimension as a spatial characteristic indicates 'transcendence' and 'a skyward spirituality.'²³

These imperatives towards a sensual experience invite people, including readers, to escape any physical or spiritual restrictions that grow from human powers. This meditative freedom that a person has within nature allows for the perception of beauty. The poem counts the range of positive experiences as well that follow by the exposure to the divine beauty of the universe as 'love will follow your eyes':

Things are so beautiful, your love will follow your eyes;
Things are the God; you will love God and not in vain,
For what we love, we grow to it, we share its nature. At length
You will look back along the star's rays and see that even
The poor doll humanity has a place under heaven.
Its qualities repair their mosaic around you, the chips of strength
And sickness; but now you are free, even to be human,
But born of the rock and the air, not of a woman. (CP2 : 418)

These lines suggest two types of interconnections; one is between nature and divinity and the other is between nature and humanity. For the first connection, the poem highlights that the beauty of things emerges from the divinity of God: 'Things are the God, you will love God.' Jeffers emphasizes that in that act of loving God and things, a person will share aspects of that pure divine universe as 'What we love, we grow to it, we share its nature.' By contrast, by living within the human world, one is impacted by its corruption. These processes of outward and upward attachment with the environment and the universe elevate humans and grant them divinity. This divinity when it is perceived 'back along the stars'

23 Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perceptions, Attitudes, and Values* (Columbia University Press, 1990), p. 28.

rays,' a person will realize that the 'poor doll humanity' has a secondary place 'under heaven.'

For the second connection, humans' presence within the environment opens a recognition of the interconnectedness between nature and actual humanity. Thus, through divinity, a person will be granted a range of 'qualities' that would 'repair' the 'sickness,' give 'strength' to the weakness of desire, and replace worldliness with divinity. The realization of the contrast between the past infliction of humanity and the repairing qualities of the environment thus will come only after this exposure and direct experience. Jeffers, in these lines, insists on a paradox. For him, the way to regain one's humanity is to turn away from humanity. This will eventually, he suggests, enable him to value and pity humanity itself (the 'poor doll'). The same sense of withdrawal to blend with real humaneness is perceived in the poem as well in his poem 'Excesses of God' from *Tamar* where the speaker sees that 'There is the great humaneness at the heart of things,' (CP:4). The 'great humaneness' that Jeffers explains is only perceived in the intrinsic beauty and value of things. The kind of human Jeffers suggests is not a product of human biology or maternal tenderness but rather a mineral or geological product. The richness of beauty, divinity, and humanity comes to those who embrace individuality and freedom and connect with nature.

The last two lines of 'Sign-Post' conclude with the freedom to embrace this humaneness 'now you are free, even to become human, / But born of the rock and the air, not of woman.' Jeffers's description of the relationship between humans and the rock emphasizes a decentering of humanity. However, as Lagayette emphasizes, this displacement is artificial: 'Displacing, de-centering humanity to project it onto the landscape will always be a

rhetorical artifice.’²⁴ Despite this artificiality, this connection bears significance. Jeffers’s image of humans born of a rock does not imply a literal birth, but it implies a return to the basic elements of earth in which humanity is a sort of geological or mineral product. Doing this indicates that ecological relation, for Jeffers, is far more important than a biological relation that accumulates into vulgarities and injustices, thereby emphasizing a holistic approach to life. The negation of relating to ‘a woman’ contradicts the view of the earth as a mother in ‘Shine, Perishing Republic.’ Jeffers is displaying motherhood onto geology. Humans should not only interact with living creatures of the earth but also with the natural objects. Jeffers’s choice of ‘rock,’ ‘air,’ and ‘stars’ relates to his concept of permanence as he alludes to the wish to preserve human values and make them permanent like these aspects of nature. Furthermore, Jeffers seems to abandon here the parental relationship in ‘Shine, Perishing Republic’ where he considers boys as his ‘children’ (CP1 : 15). This is because Jeffers wants to repudiate feelings associated with women as the biological connection due to his intentional separation from humanity. ‘Sign-Post’ focuses on the individual role to abandon any human relation and to immerse oneself with a more ecological relationship. As Hunt explains, for one to reach ‘salvation,’ he must be ‘letting go of consciousness and becoming one with nature’s body.’²⁵ Placing this poem at the end of this section prepares for a transition from poems of critique to poems where Jeffers offers an alternative timeless model to human changing values.

24 Pierre Lagayette, 'Robinson Jeffers's Californian Landscape and the Rhetoric of Displacement', *Jeffers Studies*, 3.4 (1999), pp. 2-9, p. 8.

25 Tim Hunt, 'Constructed Witness: The Drama of Presence in Jeffers's Lyric Voice', in *The Wild That Attracts Us: New Critical Essays on Robinson Jeffers*, ed. by ShaunAnne Tangney (University of New Mexico Press, 2015), pp. 41-64, p. 48.

All the poems analyzed thus far present the perspective of a detached outsider whose physical isolation allows him to attain a clear, objective view of human culture and modernity, which is symbolized by the city. In his perception of urbanization, he tries to blend a critique of human corruption and a recognition of it as a phase within the natural cycles of history. However, despite this recognition, he sees the necessity to maintain both emotional and physical distance from humanity and the city as a center for humanity. Instead, one can surround oneself with the openness, richness, and harmony of nature and its objects. The immersion within this vastness cuts the relationship with humanity and, at the same time, creates a substitute in an ecological relationship with nature. This relationship allows for contemplation of timeless ethical values embodied in nature that continue despite continuous modern changes. The surrender of the self within nature carries spatial richness, spiritual divinity, and retention of ethics. Although Jeffers's voice in these poems is wise, he tries to cultivate in people the individuality that recognizes cultural and political corruptions and responds to them not with protest but with calm isolationism. He attempts to carry this independence to the young generation, as he demands in 'Shine, Perishing Republic' who are confined within human artificial place which Jeffers emphasizes in the 'doll' image. Thus, the people whom the experienced speaker addresses in the previous poems seem to be oppressed, dependent on a greater power, or people who lack ecological awareness.

The Permanence of Nature:

Jeffers's withdrawal from the city gives way to a recognition of nature's permanent qualities that contrast with humanity's cyclical changes. Although he perceives human cycles to be part of the natural cycles, natural objects possess a deeper level of permanence

that stands despite changes and processes of regeneration. This section will discuss Jeffers's shift from the perception of modernity to the concept of nature's permanence, from separation to integration, and from corruption to ethical values. 'Sign-Post' seems to prepare for this shift of perspective that advances Jeffers's trajectory from the external examination of the changing culture to the deep contemplation of the permanence of nature. This renunciation of human culture is part of his philosophy of Inhumanism, which seeks what Chapman calls an 'empathetic directive' from anthropocentrism to the vastness of basic and universal elements of nature.²⁶ Jeffers provides a contrasting model of the culture through his immersion in the natural world as a movement beyond anthropocentrism.

He captures the integration with nature and describes nature's timelessness in a group of poems where it is manifested through natural objects. In 'Inscription for A Gravestone,' his immersion within the depth of the natural world does not indicate a mere withdrawal but rather a model for ecological integration and an effort to reconstruct changing human values into permanent ecological ones. In other poems, he dwells on the value and features of natural aspects such as the grass, the mountain, the Pacific surf, the rock, and the hawk. For Jeffers, the permanence of nature emits a beauty that contrasts with humanity's vulgarities. However, for my argument, which traces the spatial contrast between the city and nature, I will focus on Jeffers's poems of the landscape rather than animals. In 'Point Joe,' 'Gray Weather,' 'O Lovely Rock,' 'Rock & Hawk' and 'Red Mountain,' Jeffers dwells on these aspects which symbolize in general timelessness and carry as well different meanings of neutral reaction, lively presence, and enduring power. In addition to setting up

26 Steven Chapman, "'De Rerum Virtute': A Critical Anatomy", *Jeffers's Studies*, 6.4 (2002), pp. 22-35, p. 22, p. 31.

a model against culture, they also provide a poetic model. Nature instigates his interest in timeless subject matter and permanent topics instead of topics of timely significance.

‘Inscription for a Gravestone’ from *Descent to the Dead* (1931) was written when Jeffers was in Britain. It is an example of what Isobel Armstrong calls a ‘double poem’ with dual meanings that describe the speaker’s departure from humanity. Armstrong explains that this ‘mid-nineteenth-century form [...] offers two simultaneous readings by allowing the expressive utterance of a limited subjectivity to become the material for analysis.’²⁷ Jeffers signals through the image of the inscription two points of departure from the physical world; one is real and the second is imaginative. First, the poem presents a dialogue from a dead person that is inscribed on his gravestone to people passing by relating his real detachment from life. This interpretation indicates a journey of decomposition and transformation into natural materials. Carmen Lowe explains that ‘Many of Jeffers’s poems celebrate death as a reunion with the earth and its biological life; death is the way in which Jeffers’s characters exceed their humanness and overcome the boundary of consciousness that had separated them from the life of the earth.’²⁸ Second, as stated earlier, the poem relates a deliberate separation from humanity and a model of integrity with nature. Jeffers aims to reshape ecological relationships and redefine human identity as a new, independent self, similar to the emergence from rock in ‘Sign-Post’. This self transcends human values and cultural boundaries by deliberately changing identity. Both interpretations present an insight into the speaker’s transcendence through his

27 Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1996), p. 475-476.

28 Carmen Lowe, ‘Where the Country of Lost Borders Meets Jeffers’s Country: The Walking Women of Robinson Jeffers and Mary Austin’, *Jeffers’s Studies*, 4.4 (2000), pp. 21-46, p. 32.

integration with the natural world whether through literal decomposition or intentional contact.

For the first interpretation, the poem presents the experience of a dead person negating at the beginning of the poem his death as an end by declaring 'I am not dead':

I am not dead, I have only become inhuman:
That is to say,
Undressed myself of laughable prides and infirmities,
But not as a man
Undresses to creep into bed, but like an athlete
Stripping for the race.
The delicate ravel of nerves that made me a measurer
Of certain fictions
Called good and evil; that made me contract with pain
And expand with pleasure;
Fussily adjusted like a little electroscope:
That's gone, it is true;
(I never miss it; if the universe does,
How easily replaced!) (*CP2* : 125)

His declaration 'I am not dead' comes before affirming instead his change of identity through his death as 'I have only become inhuman.' Jeffers again equates liveliness to the renunciation of humanity. Death thus provides a gate into another world of richness and abundance contrary to the world of humanity's confinement and corruption. The speaker metaphorically compares this act of moving into another world to a person who 'undressed' himself 'of laughable prides and infirmities,' a courageous move towards nature and a renunciation of human measures of good and evil. The lines which follow exemplify the

change of perspective from the poems in the previous section. The speaker is not a detached observer of both city and nature but an integrated part of nature:

But all the rest is heightened, widened, set free.
I admired the beauty
While I was human, now I am part of the beauty.
I wander in the air,
Being mostly gas and water, and flow in the ocean;
Touch you and Asia
At the same moment; have a hand in the sunrises
And the glow of this grass.
I left the light precipitate of ashes to earth
For a love-token. (*CP2* : 125)

‘But’ signals a shift from the speaker’s death into the abundance of the world into which he is transformed. This transformation is of multi-spatial dimensions that make everything ‘heightened, widened, set free.’ Besides their spatial significance, the height and width also have personal implications for the elevation of thinking, perspective, and freedom of choice. His past admiration of the natural ‘beauty’ implies a kind of detachment from nature as he was observing from a distance. However, his death transforms him from this detachment into a state of integrity with nature and openness so that he becomes ‘part of the beauty.’ His body disintegrates into smaller invisible components that allow for fluid movement ‘Being mostly gas and water.’ Invisibility and fluidity offer freedom from cultural boundaries. The sea symbolizes diversity, abundance, and immersion in unconsciousness. By being part of the water, Jeffers challenges the human nature of division and consciousness and obtains rather the qualities of the sea. Through the speaker’s journey in the ocean, he implies that immersion and death are vital for

revitalization and achieving wholeness. Besides these spatial and cognitive dimensions, there is a transcendence of both geographical and cosmological dimensions. The speaker discloses his magnificent ability to 'touch' distant places at once in the availability of his fragmented self in every aspect of nature in every place in America or 'Asia.' Furthermore, there is a transcendence beyond earth where he can control 'the sunrise' and the 'grass' at once. Thus, death allows for spatial, cultural, geographical, and cosmological liberation despite political and cultural boundaries.

The second interpretation of the poem presents a metaphorical death by which the speaker aims to picture his intentional detachment from humanity. His negation 'I am not dead' thus reinforces this interpretation and justifies his absence from the culture. Instead, he affirms his destiny of becoming 'inhuman' through which he strips off 'laughable prides and infirmities.' Jeffers likens stripping humanity to removing clothes, implying that humanity consists of imposed values from political and economic perspectives, rather than being intrinsic to the self. These external values obscure our true nature and separate humans from other species. The stripping of humanity in the poem is an inevitable choice for the speaker in response to corruption, not a part of the daily flexible routine as 'a man / undresses to creep into bed' for rest. On the contrary, his act is like 'an athlete / Stripping for the race,' indicating a purposeful choice for preparing oneself for a particular event and a willingness to act. In the context of modernity, the speaker's strength emerges in his independent choice of responding to the modern concept of humanity's excessive values of consumption and materialism. Furthermore, this act ends a lasting struggle with sensitivity and cultural measures towards the good and the bad. The speaker describes his sensitivity and attentiveness to the culture as 'the delicate ravel of nerves' that stimulates in him

cultural values of 'good and evil' and thus creates 'pain' and 'pleasure.' These measures act like 'a little electroscope' to which he has been restricting himself. Being in the realm of humanity makes him act up to its cultural measures of values and thus be receptive of its affective impacts. His stripping from humanity is, hence, a stripping of all its values and measures. The 'little electroscope' is now 'gone' and the speaker rejoices in the easiness of transcending these measures: 'I never miss it; if the universe does, / How easily replaced!'

Abandoning these measures allows freedom from and transcendence of these restrictions. This freedom opens for him an abundance of wealth in the space of nature and makes him integrated within it as 'now I am part of the beauty.' This movement reinforces a recurrent image in Jeffers's poems which is the upward and outward movements to escape the restrictions of the enclosed culture. The speaker in the poem moves spontaneously upward and outward, captured in the image 'I wander in the air.' The air itself has a spontaneous movement and is free from any dimensional restrictions. Furthermore, to picture this spontaneity, Jeffers compares the speaker also to 'gas and water' that have the fluidity to 'flow in the ocean.' This metaphorical movement is used by Jeffers to describe the speaker's integrity with the ecosystem where there are no ecological boundaries.

Thus, 'Inscription for a Gravestone' has a double meaning in interpreting the speaker's death. Regardless of whether the speaker moves into a stage of decomposition through actual death or narrates a metaphorical death, his disconnection from life signals a separation from human culture and its norms. It also indicates an independent embrace of a new identity that transcends cultural and human-assigned roles. Unlike the prophet or hermit roles that Jeffers adopts in the first section, this identity reflects a unity with nature. The same celebration of nature's identity is seen in Jeffers's 'Metempsychosis' where the

speaker rejoices ‘Sweet you are immortality enough, identity enough.’ (CP3 : 417) Also, the experience provides the speaker with freedom and emotional benefits through a connection to nature. It fosters personal transcendence and awareness of otherness as the liberation from cultural values provides a model for ecological integrity and deep immersion in the universe. Despite these dual meanings, the poem steps out from Jeffers’s pessimism in the previous poems that grow from observation of the culture to the positivism of nature. In this relationship, the speaker celebrates a new identity and finds joy in the spontaneity, fluidity, and openness that comes from cultural disconnection.

As ‘Inscription for a Gravestone’ sets a departure point from cultural constraints, other poems by Jeffers examine his concept of nature’s permanence through its objects. Jeffers highlights nature's permanence in his poems, suggesting that stepping away from humanity fosters appreciation for its timelessness and independence. His poetry presents a spectrum of poetic admiration of timelessness in many symbols like strong predatory animals, the solidity of rocky objects, and the fluid waters, as well as timeless places and objects that contrast specifically with Jeffers’s critique of the city. Poems such as ‘Point Joe’ celebrate the permanence of the natural world and the beauty of this permanence. ‘Point Joe’ from *Tamar* stresses how the permanent beauty of the natural world is an essential component in aesthetic poetic production. Symbols like mountains and grass embody a permanence that transcends time and culture through their continual renewal. Tim Hunt has written a substantial commentary on ‘Point Joe,’ contrasting it to other poems. He discusses the nature of Jeffers’s authoritative voice and its relation to his withdrawal. Contrary to the authority of the poem in ‘Sign-Post,’ Hunt explains that the poem presents the ‘I’ as the

‘authoritative witness of the scene.’²⁹ Jeffers ‘perceives’ and ‘validates’ for the reader ‘the coherence’ and ‘wholeness’ of the scene.³⁰ Hunt explains this validation: ‘Jeffers (as ‘I’) speaks to us (as ‘you’) from and through the poem, not simply sharing his responses but presenting his insights—his access to the truth—for our edification.’³¹ The self-burial of the self within nature in ‘Sign-Post’ and the celebration of the new ecological identity in ‘Inscription for a Gravestone’ come in part as a result of the immersion within nature’s significant meanings and symbolisms. The didacticism in the poems in section one is less apparent in this poem as it marks a shift from the city as a center for corruption to the richness of nature, from the action of withdrawal to the contemplation of permanence, and from the authoritative observer to ‘a dramatic figure within the process of the poem.’³²

Jeffers urges, from the beginning of the poem, for sensual contact and the perception of natural beauty for poetic inspiration. Only through surrendering to the materiality of nature can a person transcend physical and poetic restrictions and assimilate with nature. Hunt, in the same article, also discusses the blurring of boundaries between Jeffers and the natural scene. Jeffers bridges this separation between the I and Point Joe through animation as Hunt explains: ‘the distance between the human world (the speaker’s consciousness) and the natural world (the materiality of Point Joe and the Pacific Ocean) seems minimized by giving the point a kind of animation (it has ‘teeth’ and can ‘tear’ ships)’.³³

Point Joe has teeth and has torn ships; it has fierce and solitary beauty;

29 Tim Hunt, ‘Constructed Witness: The Drama of Presence in Jeffers’s Lyric Voice’, in *The Wild That Attracts Us: New Critical Essays on Robinson Jeffers*, ed. by ShaunAnne Tangney (University of New Mexico Press, 2015), pp. 41-64, p. 42.

30 Tim Hunt, ‘Constructed Witness’, p. 43.

31 Tim Hunt, ‘Constructed Witness’, p. 43.

32 Tim Hunt, ‘Constructed Witness: The Drama of Presence in Jeffers’s Lyric Voice’, in *The Wild That Attracts Us: New Critical Essays on Robinson Jeffers*, ed. by ShaunAnne Tangney (University of New Mexico Press, 2015), pp. 41-64, p. 48.

33 Tim Hunt, ‘Constructed Witness’, p. 42-43.

Walk there all day you shall see nothing that will not make part of a poem.
(*CP1* : 90)

He recognizes, as in many of his poems, the contradictory features of fierceness and beauty, suggesting that fierceness gives rise to beauty, which should be the topic of a poem. He often highlights the interconnectedness between the permanent themes of poetry and the natural objects that inspire him.³⁴ In the sixth and seventh couplets, he introduces his philosophy of poetic topics:

Permanent things are what is needful in a poem, things temporally
Of great dimension, things continually renewed or always present.

Grass that is made each year equals the mountains in her past and future;
Fashionable and momentary things we need not see nor speak of. (*CP1* : 90)

For Jeffers, permanent topics have a ‘great dimension’ in their capacity for renewal or timeless presence. Jeffers exemplifies the renewal capacity with the grass ‘that is made each year’ and the timeless presence of ‘the mountains.’ These two capacities observed in nature are ‘equal’ in their power and impact as they share perpetuity. They transcend the temporal dimensions of time. To indicate this permanent liveliness, Jeffers, in the seventh couplet, personifies the grass as a living woman with a past and future. In contrast to this liveliness and permanence, Jeffers criticizes the temporariness in the cultural and artistic realms which he warns against seeing or speaking of. Thus, the poem dissuades against the inclusion of ‘fashionable and momentary things’ in culture and poetry. On a cultural level, humans must avoid temporary changes that dissolve over time. And on a poetic level, a poet should avoid themes of temporary significance.

³⁴ This relationship has been discussed from Jeffers’s prefaces and forwards to his collections earlier in the introduction.

The last two couplets of the poem highlight the great permanent presence of the 'mountains' that are equal to the timeless presences of 'Man gleaning food' and 'better men' who 'have shipwrecked':

Man gleaning food between the solemn presences of land and ocean,
On shores where better men have shipwrecked, under fog and among
flowers,

Equals the mountains in his past and future; that glow from the earth was
Only

A trick of nature's, one must forgive nature a thousand graceful subtleties.
(CP1 : 90-91)

Jeffers equals the timelessness of the mountains to the man who lives through 'his' past and future presences. This, like the earlier reference to nature's vibrancy, emphasizes their shared liveliness rather than suggesting human eternity. These figures anticipate the herdsmen whom Jeffers celebrates in 'Still the Mind Smiles.' What proves to have permanent qualities is the natural world with its capacity for renewal and solid presence. Contrary to changes in architecture that are possible in cities, reflecting changes in economy and technology, the mountains are aspects of nature that 'defy easy human control.'³⁵ That which is vulnerable to human destruction and construction opposes the power of the mountains which transcends this vulnerability. These qualities of nature emit grandeur and beauty that should be included in poetry. This poem encapsulates Jeffers's concept of permanence through the symbols of 'grass' and 'mountains,' which is later

35 Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perceptions, Attitudes, and Values* (Columbia University Press, 1990), p. 70.

revisited in 'Red Mountain.' The poem explains to the readers why they must, in Jeffers's terms, abandon the cultural sites for natural ones.

Furthermore, in his poem 'Gray Weather' from *Solstice*, Jeffers admires this timelessness and celebrates the deep time when life is led by natural and traditional values. This concept of deepness thus transcends humanity entirely and sets a contrast with shallowness and the changes of modernity. In addition to the symbols in the previous poem, the 'Pacific surf' in this poem symbolizes timelessness as it is 'older than man and ages to outlast him' (CP1 : 485). It also symbolizes the continuity of acting normally as it 'Still cheerfully pounds the worn granite drum.' The continuity refers also to the continuity of endorsing basic values by the herdsmen in Jeffers's 'Still the Mind Smiles,' and the 'things continually renewed' in 'Point Joe.' This timelessness and continuity transmit aesthetic values that presumably have been lost in modernity. However, these qualities of the natural world neither indicate a state of extreme joy nor suffering. For Jeffers, timelessness equals a neutral state in which 'Nothing that shines, nothing is dark.' In this timeless realm, there are signs of liveliness without extreme as 'the birds are still, no song; no kind of excess.'

This neutrality is reflected also on the emotions felt in the landscape. In this context of a beautiful place, there is an absence of excessiveness and extremes of values:

There is neither joy nor grief nor a person, the sun's tooth sheathed in
cloud,
And life has no more desires than a stone.
The stormy conditions of time and change are all abrogated, the essential
Violences of survival, pleasure,
Love, wrath and pain, and the curious desire of knowing, all perfectly
suspended.

In the cloudy light, in the timeless quietness,
One explores deeper than the nerves or heart of nature, the womb or soul,
To the bone, the careless white bone, the excellence. (*CP1* : 485)

The poem echoes Jeffers's conception of the moderation of 'love' in 'Still the Mind Smiles' in which he prepares people for the moderation of nature against the excessiveness that he perceives in the city. In this absence of human and cultural connection indicated in the phrase 'nor a person,' the natural environment proves devoid of desire. All the aspects of the cultural world which keep humans in constant changes and pursuit are 'abrogated.' In contrast to the human's constantly changing world, this realm is suggested to be a utopian place of neutral feelings, balanced time, and absence of worldly struggles.

The poem not only explores the concepts of timelessness and originality but also underscores the significance of excellence within the landscape. Jeffers compares this penetration of excellence to the act of physical exploration of nature's body that is personified as a human body with 'nerves,' 'heart,' 'womb,' 'soul,' and 'bone.' This personification echoes the earth as a mother in 'Shine, Perishing Republic.' The concept of depth, in which Jeffers rejoices in the poem, is pictured as the deepness that extends a human's heart and nerves to the depth of 'the bone.' Even in this state of stoicism and eternity, there is a neutral affective state lived by nature. Jeffers describes the bone as 'the careless white bone' which symbolizes its constant features rather than the temporary state upon which one rejoices. It is a state of 'excellence' unchanged over the 'stormy conditions of time' nor the human 'Violences of survival.' As in 'Inscription for a Gravestone,' Jeffers equates his utopia with death where he finds quietness and peace.

Other poems by Jeffers discuss the power of this permanence and timelessness in the face of the passage of time and geographical changes like 'Rock and Hawk' from *Solstice*

and ‘Oh Lovely Rock’ from *Such Counsels You Gave to Me*. In addition to the fluid symbols of the ocean and the Pacific surf, these two poems present this power through the solid symbol of the rock. The rock symbolizes ‘detachment, endurance, strength, and the absence of passion’ as Mercedes Monjian relates.³⁶ For Jeffers, it bears timeless, material, and powerful significance. It outlasts human life and transcends human emotions, illustrating ‘a state opposed to passion, a contrast to the fury of human emotions.’³⁷ Although this rock proves endurance and resistance and transcends emotional turbulence, Jeffers stresses the non-passivity of the rock and affirms rather its liveliness.

Jeffers’s ‘Rock and Hawk’ is one of the poems that was written during the construction of his house in Carmel Point and the building of Hawk Tower. During this period, Jeffers engages directly with the granite rock and is transformed by the ‘Mysticism’ of the stone (*CP2* : 416). Gelpi explains that ‘the gestalt of stone gave him the voice and words, the form and images to explore his pantheistic view of nature and his inhumanist view of human nature in an explosive outburst of narratives and lyrics.’³⁸ This relationship to construction manifests the relationship with language and words, as also experienced by Carl Jung’s Bollingen building and Yeats’s Thoor Ballyllee building. All these towers symbolize the relationship between life and work or life and words. Jeffers’s ‘Rock and Hawk’ is a poem that explains the enduring power of the ‘rock’ in the face of other violent threats, its symbolism, and its mysticism.

Here is a symbol in which
Many high tragic thoughts

36 Mercedes Monjian, *Robinson Jeffers: A Study in Inhumanism* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1958), p. 17.

37 Mercedes Monjian, *Robinson Jeffers: A Study in Inhumanism*, p. 17.

38 Albert Gelpi, ‘Introduction’, in *An Anthology of Robinson Jeffers: The Wild God of the World* ed. by Albert Gelpi (Stanford University Press, 2003), pp. 1-19, p. 6.

Watch their own eyes. (*CP2* : 416)

These distinguishing features attract the visual perception of 'Many high tragic thoughts.' Thus, this partiality of the ability to perceive the rock's symbolic power indicates a partial involvement of society with the natural world. Jeffers's description of those people who can perceive the rock as having 'tragic thoughts' indicates a state of affective infliction. This tragedy comes in part in response to the search for truth, as Jeffers indicates in his poem 'Theory of Truth' in which he affirms this notion: 'Why does insanity always twist the great answers? / Because only/tormented persons want truth' (*CP2* : 608).

The second and third tercets of 'Rock and Hawk' present the outstanding enduring power of the 'grey rock.' This position of the rock, which is 'standing tall / On the headland,' indicates its excellence and a distinct rarity in contrast to other symbols of the environment (*CP2* : 416). First, this power proves its strength in confronting 'the sea-wind' which has a destructive impact on the trees as it 'Lets no tree grow.' This impact fails to destroy the solidity and power of the rock. Second, this powerful ability of the rock also proves its strength in front of the 'Earthquake' and is 'signed' by 'ages of storms.' Jeffers's use of words such as 'proved' and 'signed' connotes authenticity and an authoritative final attribution of strength. His reference to ages of storms supports his concept of rock timelessness. The same admiration is perceived in Jeffers's early poems of the 1920s as in 'To the Stone-Cutters' where he contrasts the lifespan of the 'man,' 'earth,' and the 'sun' to the timelessness of the stone which has 'stood for a thousand years' (*CP1* : 5). This concept is further emphasized in 'Rock and Hawk' by another symbol of eternity: on the top of this rock, 'A falcon' that 'has perched' motivated by a firm reliance on a strong power and a cherishing victory.

In the fourth and fifth tercets, Jeffers presents his view of the necessity of regarding this timelessness and outstanding power as an 'emblem/ To hang in the future sky':

I think, here is your emblem
To hang in the future sky;
Not the cross, not the hive,

But this; bright power, dark peace;
Fierce consciousness joined with final
Disinterestedness. (*CP2* : 416)

It is perceived by him as a modeling example to rely on in the rapid changes of the world instead of 'the cross' or 'the hive.' The rock has instead contrary features to the cultural features. Jeffers juxtaposes in his description contradictory features like 'bright power,' 'dark peace,' and 'fierce consciousness.' By 'bright power,' he indicates the brilliance of the falcon that implicitly contrasts with humanity's reasoning. Furthermore, by 'dark peace,' he indicates a lonely environment where 'peace' is perceived in the dark realm of the natural world. By contrast, this peace is assumed to be lost in the bright realm of humanity and it is only the property of nature. Moreover, by 'fierce consciousness,' Jeffers asserts the lively consciousness of the natural world and alludes to the human's conception of the natural fierceness from which they have been forming an ecophobic relationship. All these three important features of the natural world are 'joined with final / Disinterestedness' indicating an absence of centrism and pursuit of desire. It is a life that maintains normal function and a realistic perception of things. Through the fusion of these three characteristics, Gelpi maintains, Jeffers presents an ideal object through language 'to exceed the limits of ego and thus achieve the disposition in which he can embody his

experience in the poem with something of the sublimity of nature.’³⁹ In the last two tercets, Jeffers juxtaposes in his description of this environment two contradictory states. One is that life is intermingled with ‘calm death’ by which Jeffers describes the quietness and peace of life in the natural environment (*CP2* : 416). Second is the marriage of two contradictory symbols: the falcon’s ‘realist eyes’ and the ‘Mysticism of stone.’ This connection of opposing features produces an integral power that stands unshaken in front of any state of extremeness. This bond of the components of the ecosystem, thus, is a power undefined and unaffected by an external condition ‘Which failure cannot cast down/ Nor success make proud’ (*CP2* : 416).

‘Oh Lovely Rock’ intensifies Jeffers’s relationship with the rock. The poem, which is about the power of the timelessness of the ‘lovely rock’ amid the changing cycles of life and death and prosperity and decay, documents an intense reaction by the speaker to the perception of the rock’s strength (*CP2* : 546). The detached authoritative voice of Jeffers in the poem recognizes this abstract power as being real in its full presence. Through not being perceived for the first time, the ‘rock wall’ has a powerful impact on his philosophical vision and stimulates the poet’s astonishment, speculation, and admiration. George Hart explains that ‘Oh Lovely Rock,’ follows a typical pattern for Jeffers’s lyrics: ‘a two-part structure, often signaled by a verse paragraph break, of detailed, naturalistic description and moral or philosophical observation.’⁴⁰ This two-part structure is emphasized by ‘the parallelism between the opening sentences of each verse paragraph, “We stayed” and “We

39 Albert Gelpi, ‘Introduction’, in *An Anthology of Robinson Jeffers: The Wild God of the World* ed. by Albert Gelpi (Stanford University Press, 2003), pp. 1-19, p.17.

40 George Hart, ‘Seeing Rock for the First Time: Varieties of Geological Experience in Jeffers, Rexroth, and Snyder’, *Jeffers’s Studies*, 8.1 (2004), pp. 17-30, p. 19.

lay.””⁴¹ In the middle of the poem, Jeffers describes the first instances of his encounter with the rock:

it was the rock wall
That fascinated my eyes and mind. Nothing strange: light-gray diorite with
two or three slanting seams in it,
Smooth-polished by the endless attrition of slides and floods; no fern nor
lichen, pure naked rock...as if I were
Seeing rock for the first time. As if I were seeing through the flame-lit
surface into the real and bodily
And living rock. Nothing strange...I cannot
Tell you how strange: the silent passion, the deep nobility and childlike
loveliness: (*CP2* : 546)

Through ‘the flame-lit surface’ of the rock, Jeffers penetrates the depth of its reality and liveliness through a deep examination of its symbolic power. He describes this moment of astonishing perception of this depth in his shift from negation to the affirmation of strangeness: ‘Nothing Strange... I cannot / Tell you how strange...’ The pause in the middle of the line connotes a moment of speculation and a rephrasing of his response to the depth. This meditation on the power and depth of the rock leads to the realization of its ‘silent passion, the deep nobility, and childlike loveliness.’ This indicates a description of serenity, ethical values, and untouched innocence. Jeffers views this timelessness, ‘this fate going on / Outside our fates,’ as exterior to the modern changing world. Thus, in this spatial image, he signals the dividing boundaries of time between the timeless natural world and the human world which is subject to cyclic changes.

⁴¹ George Hart, ‘Seeing Rock for the First Time’, p. 19.

The same sense of amazement at the power of the rock is perceived early in Jeffers's 'To the Rock that will Be a Cornerstone of the House' from *Tamar* which registers his first encounter with the rock during the building of his Tor House.

Scars of primal fire, and the stone
Endurance that is waiting millions of years to carry
A corner of the house, this also destined.
Lend me the stone strength of the past and I will lend you
The wings of the future, for I have them. (CP1 : 11)

The image of 'Scars of primal fire' takes on a double meaning. Not only does it indicate the igneous processes that led to the formation of the granite in the first place but also the scorching left by the fires after the destructive death of the indigenous people. The speaker, who is amazed by the rock's strength and endurance, implies as well the impact destruction has left on the external level of the rock. The 'flame-lit surface' of Jeffers's 'Oh Lovely Rock' comes later after a revival of its liveliness after the 'Scars of primal fire' in his poem 'To the Rock that will Be a Cornerstone of the House.' In these two poems, 'surface' and 'scars' indicate a minor impact rather than a deep one. They also refer to the violent beauty that emits from inside the rock. The flame-lit surface, thus, invites for a contemplation of its liveliness.

After rejoicing in this immanent power of the place surrounding him and its features in 'Oh Lovely Rock,' he decides to live the nature of the human cycle of life and death within this timelessness:

this fate going on
Outside our fates. It is here in the mountain like a grave smiling child. I
shall die, and my boys
Will live and die, our world will go on through its rapid agonies of change

and discovery; this age will die,
And wolves have howled in the snow around a new Bethlehem: this rock
will be here, grave, earnest, not passive: the energies
That are its atoms will still be bearing the whole mountain above: and I,
many packed centuries ago,
Felt its intense reality with love and wonder, this lonely rock. (CP2 : 546-547)

In the human world, there is a continuation of cyclic changes and a rapidity of progress. Jeffers realizes the inevitability of cultural death is twofold. First, he knows there is a successive cycle of decay after a period of prosperity. The second is that within that cycle of prosperity, there is a decay of ethical values that instigates 'agonies of change.' Regardless of the admiring reception of human victory symbolized by Jeffers in 'a new Bethlehem' around which the 'wolves have howled in the snow,' Jeffers reinforces again the victory of the 'rock' standing 'here, grave, earnest, not passive.' His description highlights the affirmative power of the rock as live and energetic which is rejected by the authoritative reason of humanity in their acts of progress and exploitation. These hidden 'energies' define a consciousness that has the power to confront the changes of time and endure, 'bearing the whole mountain above.' Jeffers can feel the 'intense reality' of its presence and defining consciousness. He is also able to feel a mixture of 'love and wonder' at the outstanding power amid the weakness of human desire for change. His admiration grows in part from his realization of the rarity of timeless figures in modernity as symbolized in his description of the rock as 'lonely.'

This same rocky power, which stands unaffected by geographical and cultural changes, is further emphasized in Jeffers's poem 'Red Mountain' from *Solstice*. This poem is about the persistent power of the 'mountain' amid the changes of time and the seasons (CP2 :

486). The first lines of the poem describe the speaker's admiration for and topophilic attachment to the mountain due to its persistent power and beauty:

Beyond the Sierras, and sage-brush Nevada ranges, and Vast
Vulture-utopias of Utah desert,
That mountain we admired last year on our summer journey, the same
Rose-red pyramid glows over Silverton.
Whoever takes the rock pass from Quray sees foaming waterfalls (CP2 :
486)

This mountain which is admired by the speaker in 'last year... summer journey' is still holding its power and beauty over time. Besides this admiration, akin to Muir's of Sierra Nevada in *The Mountains of California*, Jeffers's metaphor of the mountain as a 'Rose-red pyramid' indicates a solidity and an outstanding beauty among other aspects around it such as 'the sierras, and sage-brush Nevada ranges, and vast/ Vulture-utopias of Utah desert.' This distinguishing violent picturesque of the mountain is further emphasized by the visual image 'blood-color' in contrast to the 'flaming' greenness of the trees or the serene whiteness of the snow (CP2 : 486). The references to blood, 'violent-peak' and 'Rose-red pyramid' intensify the violence of the scene which Jeffers admires.

At the end of the poem, the speakers' past doubt of the mountain's durable power is changed by an assertion of the mountain's 'excellence' and persistence amid changing conditions such as people's 'absence':

We thought it was too theatrical to last;
But if we ship to Cape Horn, or were buying
Camels in Urga, Red Mountain would not turn pale for our absence.
We like dark skies and lead-color heights,
But the excellence of things is really unscrupulous, it will dare anything.
(CP2 : 486).

This 'excellence' of violent beauty has a power that 'will dare anything.' Thus, the 'rock wall' in Jeffers's 'Oh Lovely Rock,' the 'gray rock' in Jeffers's 'Rock and Hawk' and the 'Red Mountain' in his poem 'Red Mountain' all possess similar qualities of timelessness, neutrality, and persistent excellence in the face of changes. With these qualities, they prove their originality and distinctiveness amid perceived historical and socio-political changes of time. Jeffers's poetry of natural symbolism, thus, acts as a passive critique of the human cyclic nature by introducing a contrastive power that proves regenerative, solid, and excellent. The liveliness of the grass in 'Point Joe,' the fluidity of waters in 'Gary Weather,' and the solidity of the rocks and mountains in 'Oh Lovely Rock,' 'Rock and Hawk,' and 'Red Mountains' are all supportive models for those who decide to retreat from the 'rapid agonies of change' in modernity and reconstruct a sustainable relation with nature (CP2 : 547).

Political Involvement:

In the previous two sections, I have examined Jeffers's perception of two opposing environments: the urban and the wilderness. In these contexts, he establishes his critique of humanity and presents a contrastive model of timelessness. However, Jeffers's literary isolation did not last for long as America was heading towards participating in World War II. His discourse on the injustice in the city extends to political injustices, emphasizing human anthropocentrism that breeds tyranny and greed. His poetry documents the struggle between maintaining his literary isolation and political engagement. This section moves from the spatial and temporal examination of the city and landscape to war politics. Jeffers's critique of capitalism and cultural expansion in World War II includes poems such as 'Contemplation of the Sword' from *Such Counsels You Gave to Me* written a few years

earlier. By the time 'Contemplation of the Sword' was written in 1938, Germany had conquered Austria, and by 1940, it had conquered much of Europe while America had sunk into its isolationism. The poem attempts to depict Jeffers's engagement with War and a personal expression that emerges from the need to speak. Furthermore, 'The Blood-Guilt' from *The Double Axe* (1947) with its references to 'Flight of Swans' from *Solstice* presents Jeffers's move from a state of stoicism to a critique of human injustices. 'The Blood-Guilt,' which was written in 1944, is motivated by the urge to transcend personal engagement into a more political one to prevent human violence. It also marks a transition from poems of direct or indirect withdrawal to poems that engage actively in politics of non-engagement. What Jeffers regrets is not having tried harder to persuade America to disengage from global conflicts, which he believes may have prevented the nation from becoming involved in the war.

This trajectory reveals Jeffers's struggle between detachment and political expression. These two attitudes are highlighted in the two voices speaking in 'The Blood-Guilt' between the detached prophet and the main speaker. From this gradual development to political engagement, Jeffers recognizes violence as a human condition that stems from what Gelpi calls 'the aggressive ego aggrandized into national ego.'⁴² Thus, the various manifestations of violence in urban and political contexts stem from this 'aggressive ego' and the dualism between 'we' and 'they' which Jeffers tries to critique. Gelpi emphasizes that Jeffers's poetry attempts to communicate a voice and find a ground 'for speaking in a civilization headed for catastrophe without the religious, moral, or political convictions to

⁴² Albert Gelpi, 'Introduction', in *An Anthology of Robinson Jeffers: The Wild God of the World* ed. by Albert Gelpi (Stanford University Press, 2003), pp. 1-19, p. 7.

avert disaster, much less to envision a better world.’⁴³ In these poems, some symbols are recurrent such as cycles and the sword that have temporal significance. The sword, which is a medium of violence, results in cultural deterioration and decay that moves the cycle in another contrasting phase.

Jeffers’s poem ‘Contemplation of the Sword’ was written before international World War II when America was still pursuing a policy of isolationism which Jeffers himself approved of. Robert Zaller explains that Jeffers’s isolationism is a rejection of American imperialism generally and an opposition to the participation in World War II specifically.⁴⁴ Jeffers was not alone in his isolationism, as Zaller emphasized, but had a view which most Americans shared with him.⁴⁵ For him, ‘isolationism did not mean indifference or lack of preference,’ but indicates engagement as ‘isolationists came in all packages—pro-German, pro-Allied, pro-Soviet; what united them was only the common ground of rejecting American military intervention.’⁴⁶ He recognized the collapse of the British Empire and saw the need for America to hold itself aloof rather than participate in that war and speed up its own decline. Zaller emphasizes that in such times, ‘Silence was the only option—a silence that deepened Jeffers’s penchant for self-dialogue, but gave it a far sharper edge.’⁴⁷ The poem discusses humanity’s spontaneous need for expansion exercised by a superior power and motivated by socio-political reasons. Jeffers wrote it as a response to the rising fascist powers in Europe and the more established European imperial powers. It is also a

43 Albert Gelpi, ‘Introduction’, in *An Anthology of Robinson Jeffers*, p. 2.

44 Robert Zaller, ‘Jeffers’s Isolationism’, *Jeffers’s Studies*, 12.1-2 (2008), pp. 27-42, p. 27. This article appears later in Zaller’s book *The Atom to Be Split* (2019).

45 Robert Zaller, ‘Jeffers’s Isolationism’, p. 31.

46 Robert Zaller, ‘Jeffers’s Isolationism’, p. 32.

47 Robert Zaller, ‘Jeffers’s Isolationism’, p. 34.

response to the global rise of the sword which is associated with tyranny that will come to encompass America too. In the poem, it is God who symbolizes this urge to exercise power at the expense of torturing himself and others. The increased desire for territorial expansion and the increased exercise of power have both physical and affective impacts.

In the opening lines of the poem, Jeffers uses in his critique of power the ‘symbol’ of the sword as a physical ‘instrument’ to symbolize both courage and tyranny:

Reason will not decide at last; the sword will decide.

The sword: an obsolete instrument of bronze or steel, formerly used to kill
men, but here

In the sense of a symbol. The sword: that is: the storms and counter
storms of general destruction; killing of men,

Destruction of all goods and materials; massacre, more or
less intentional, of children and women;

Destruction poured down from wings, the air made accomplice,
the innocent air

Perverted into assassin and poisoner. (*CP2* : 544)

He establishes from the first line, the tension between reason and power in which power is privileged to decide. Thus, the sword, which is a symbol of this power, is foregrounded by humanity instead of reason, thereby emphasizing the decisiveness of the sword than reason in the political context of war. This implication gives validity to Jeffers’s philosophy of Inhumanism in which he critiques the mind of humans. The use of power, symbolized by the sword, has formed a sequence of injustices like ‘killing,’ ‘destruction,’ and ‘massacre’ that challenged the safety of vulnerable people like women and children. Furthermore, in addition to the sword which is used in battles, Jeffers extends to describe the aerial military tools. Jeffers explains how this power is inflicting also the ‘innocent air’ which makes the

whole atmosphere destructive. The phrase ‘destruction poured down from wings’ alludes to aerial bombardment, specifically the bombing of Guernica in 1937. The sword and the air indicate full control of both earth and sky which makes his philosophy of withdrawal ineffectual.

This desire affects not just the physical aspects of people or places, but also holds ethical and emotional implications, as outlined in the second verse paragraph. These changes that the sword brings imply a heading towards excessiveness as Jeffers recurrently emphasizes:

The sword: that is: treachery and cowardice, incredible baseness, incredible
courage, loyalties, insanities.
The sword: weeping and despair, mass-enslavement, mass-torture,
frustration of all hopes
That starred man's forehead. Tyranny for freedom, horror for happiness,
famine for bread, carrion for children.

Reason will not decide at last, the sword will decide. (*CP2* : 544)

The use of power resembles the two-fold use of ‘the sword’ that can be somehow morally constructive and mainly destructive. Culturally, it can represent both ‘cowardice’ and ‘courage,’ and ‘treachery’ and ‘loyalties.’ Affectively, it can impact people by causing ‘weeping and despair, mass-enslavement, mass-torture, frustration of all the hopes.’ Although moral qualities can emerge in the context of war and the exercise of power, the impacts of power and war themselves are presented in unremittingly negative ways. It causes ‘frustration of all the hopes’ that ‘starred man’s forehead,’ implying an intense moment of bitter realization. Jeffers, however, understands that through these impacts, people live through a series of horrific substitutions ‘Tyranny for freedom, horror for

happiness, famine for bread, carrion for children.’ These substitutions are not chosen but rather imposed by humanity’s misuse of power.

Within these two-sided implications of power, Jeffers finds both shine and ugliness which he approaches with religious skepticism, telling God ‘I am finding it hard/ To praise you with a whole heart.’ Jeffers seems to accept pain and death, but not cruelty and violence:

I know what pain is, but pain can
shine. I know what death is, I have sometimes
Longed for it. But cruelty and slavery and degradation, pestilence, filth,
the pitifulness... (CP2 : 544-545)

Discovery, which triggers socio-political changes on one side and anguish on another, are thus mutually related as he affirms that God is ‘the one that tortures himself to discover himself.’ This concept of related torture and discovery is what is also presented in his poem ‘At the Birth of an Age’ from *Solstice* where the self-hanged God says: ‘I torture myself/ To discover myself’ (CP2 : 482). This idea implies a double identity of God where he symbolizes both beauty and torture as stated in Jeffers’s early poem ‘Consciousness’:

As if there were two Gods: the first had made
All visible things, waves, mountains, stars and men,
The sweet forms dancing on through flame and shade,
The swift messenger nerves that sting the brain, (CP1 : 7).

The second God instead is the one who manifests the excesses which make a recurrent philosophy in Jeffers’s poetry: ‘Then the other God comes suddenly and says/ “I crown or damn, I have different fire to add. / These forms shall feel, ache, love, grieve and be glad.”’

(CP1 : 8) Jeffers is always skeptical, and spiritually independent regarding religion.⁴⁸

However, his religion is not the pantheism of Romanticism but an approach that always sees the contradictory nature of being.⁴⁹ Torture, thus, is presented as an essential quality for discovery and, consequently, production and expansion.

Jeffers explains this reciprocal relationship in his metaphor of the sword as ‘locked lips’ that have pride which prevents a scream. This metaphorical scream implies the tyranny and destructiveness of the actions that are louder even in the absence of verbal utterances. There is a continuity of the aggressive power that is not ruled by reason but rather by the desire to expand as Jeffers emphasizes this in the final refrain ‘Reason will not decide at last: the sword will decide’ (CP2 : 545). Despite this affinity in God and human being, the humans who pursue war and tyranny are not motivated by any desire to discover, even if their actions are taken to be a sign of God’s self-exploration through self-torture. They are rather motivated by self-centredness to expand and dominate.

Jeffers, in this poem, starts to engage with human expansion of power from a political critique rather than from a cultural and economic one. The poem thus anticipates the moral and physical destruction of the nation that the speaker warns against later in ‘The Blood-Guilt.’ Jeffers’s argument in the poem moves between three stages: the symbolism of the sword; the dialogue with God; and the implication for Jeffers’s own family that his sons will be disfigured or killed as they are called upon or choose to fight in the impending war.

48 James Karman, *Robinson Jeffers: Poet and Prophet* (Stanford University Press, 2015), p. 20.

49 In ‘Another theme that has much engaged my verses,’ Jeffers writes about pantheism, which he sees as ‘the expression of a religious feeling, that perhaps must be called pantheism, though I hate to type it with a name. it is the feeling . . . I will say the certainty. . . that the universe is one being, a single organism, one great life that includes all life and all things; and is so beautiful that it must be loved and revered; and in moments of mystical vision we identify with it.’ Quoted in James Karman, *Robinson Jeffers: Poet and Prophet* (Stanford University Press, 2015), p. 134.

In this movement from political to personal dialogue, Jeffers seems to exercise his political engagement on a basic level. The poem contributes to inaugurating his poetic critique of human expansion of power and violence. Despite Jeffers's apparent pacifism, in this poem, he remains fatalistic, which is what he critiques himself for later in 'The Blood-Guilt.' 'The Blood-Guilt' comes with these basic views on the concepts of war, power, and destruction. With the realization of their seriousness, Jeffers's alter-ego emerges. Furthermore, writing 'The Blood-Guilt' after this poem suggests a desire to move from a state of withdrawal to a real didactic response against the socio-political crisis. It shows that this kind of poetry is inadequate to express or critique the moral trauma of war or human violence in general. Thus, Jeffers in his critique moves gradually from a mental individual observation and oblique treatment of the conflict as in 'Contemplation of the Sword,' to a more didactic and grounded one through the instigation of the dialogue in 'The Blood-Guilt.' However, this treatment is never to be what Jeffers points out in the introduction of *Be Angry at the Sun* an 'obsession with contemporary history that pins many of these pieces to the calendar, like butterflies to cardboard' but rather a response to a crisis with timeless significance (CP4 : 417).

'The Blood-Guilt' discusses the necessity for endurance rather than escape. Although the poem reinforces the concept of endurance through quoting lines from 'Flight of Swans' from *Solstice*, the dialogue with the prophet who represents Jeffers's alter-ego highlights the negative impact of endurance as it indicates passive participation in human violence. The endurance in 'Flight of Swans' develops in 'The Blood-Guilt' into an internal struggle between endurance and direct political engagement. Jeffers, in this poem, starts to disclose a gradual backward journey into expression and engagement with humanity that contrasts

the moving away in his early poems. His literary isolation thus turns into thinking of what he could have prevented through his poetry. The opening lines of the poem describe both the physical and affective impact of violence on the culture:

So long having foreseen these convulsions, forecast the hemorrhagic
Fevers of civilization past prime striving to die, and having through verse,
image and fable
For more than twenty years tried to condition the mind to this bloody
climate:-- do you like it,
Justified prophet? (*CP3* : 128)

After a 'long' period of perceiving the cultural 'convulsions,' Jeffers metaphorically compares the cultural change to a fever that inflicts the body leaving it 'striving to die.' This situation of upheaval the poet perceives also foreshadows a future strike which is described as a 'hemorrhagic' that results from excessive tension and accumulation of violence. Violence and upheaval change the identity of the culture as Jeffers refers to the scene that has been changing 'for more than twenty years' as a 'bloody climate.' Over this long period, he has been trying to 'condition the mind' to this climate and release some of the tension 'through verse.' Thus, Jeffers highlights the power and role of poetry to express these upheavals through verse during this act of endurance. Hence, writing and endurance are implemented as two responses to these changes and their consequent affective impact. It seems that the isolation in nature and the immersion within its timelessness do not suffice in the long run. There must be a more active engagement with politics which Jeffers attempts through his poems in the 1940s.

The struggle between endurance and political involvement is disclosed through a dialogue between the speaker and a 'Justified prophet' asking for his opinion of change and foregrounding his own '*I would rather have died twenty years ago.*'

"Sad sons of the
stormy fall,"

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

I said, "*No escape.*" (CP3 : 128)

This dialogue occurs between two voices of Jeffers. One is a prophetic voice that asks for detachment and endurance which echoes his voice in 'Flight of Swans.' In a series of imperatives in 'Flight of Swans,' Jeffers's wise voice warns against responding to this distress with withdrawal. There is, he says, 'No escape' (CP2 : 419). Rather, the poem urges the necessity 'to inflict and endure' and to attempt 'thinning' their humanity 'a little' to avoid the vulnerability to human destructive power. This warning recalls the moderation of love that Jeffers urges previously in 'Shine, Perishing Republic.' The image 'thinning' with the specific indication of effort 'a little' is a means by Jeffers to describe the difficulty of stripping off humanity at once. Instead, detachment from humanity requires a gradual effort as also emphasized in his poem 'Carmel Point' when he advises to 'unhumanize our views a little' (CP3 : 399). The indication in these images seems to contradict the dreamy stripping of humanity in 'Inscription for a Gravestone.' The transition in views indicates that Jeffers in this period moves from the dreamy view of an outsider to the practical view of an insider in culture.

The other voice in 'The Blood-Guilt' is Jeffers's voice interrogating and conversing with that earlier persona and motivating him to actively stand against violence. This speaker reminds the prophet or his own alter-ego of his view of the necessity to endure. His speech confirms Jeffers's concept of historical cycles that move in circles of rising and falling. Furthermore, the primary speaker of the poem explains the necessity of having responded to this situation by confrontation through having 'spoken louder and perhaps been heard' that would have 'prevented something.' The adjective 'louder' which Jeffers urges his alter-ego to gain implies a direct expression that is contrasted with attempts at suppression or mere endurance.

Although the prophet has been replying to all the speaker's suggestions by affirmation of his view of endurance, repeating '*I said "No Escape,"*' the speaker starts to draw the prophet's attention to the severity of the situation. Jeffers's description of a country 'destined' to be guided by its 'fools' carries a negative implication. Although moving in rapid changes, the country seems for the speaker to be 'lugged in' to the War which indicates a heavy weight that is being dragged and accumulations of corruption:

You knew also that your
own country, though ocean-guarded, nothing to gain, by its destined
fools
Would be lugged in.

I said, "*No escape.*"

If you had not been beaten
beforehand, hopelessly fatalist,
You might have spoken louder and perhaps been heard, and prevented
something.

I? Have you never heard

That who 'd lead must not see?

You Saw it, you despaired of preventing it, you
share the blood-Guilt.

Yes. (CP3 : 128)

The speaker sees the prophet's rigid emphasis on endurance as part of a fatalism where events are subjugated to fate or destiny. The prophet is perceived thus as a 'hopeless [...] fatalist' who witnesses cultural events and has not 'spoken louder' which would have 'prevented something.' Hence Jeffers starts to see that the prevention of violence will only come if a collective voice emerges instead of a mere fatalist philosophy. He feels responsible for not having argued louder for the US to stay out of the war. However, the reproachful tone is intensified at the end of the poem. Implementing the philosophy of endurance is equal to the sharing of 'the blood-guilt.' The meaning of 'blood' is two-fold: it refers to the bloody consequences of violence, and at the same time, it refers to the guilt shared by humanity in their blood. The speaker's urge against a prolonged endurance emphasizes that it impacts a situation more negatively by the inability to 'prevent' it. Although the prophet's voice presents an authoritative voice of sublime knowledge and a detached religious perspective, his voice calls only for escape rather than justice. On the other hand, the speaker's voice aims to transcend the human apathetic responses to violence and calls for safety. Through the speaker, Jeffers admits to his own moral failure through excessive fatalism. By wrestling with two contrary attitudes toward the culture, he recognizes his passive role and thus feels guilty.

Thus, this section includes a direct personal critique of humanity and its socio-political power in World War II as in 'Contemplation of the Sword.' This poem registers a move from acceptance and apathy to anger and confrontation bursting spontaneously from the

urge to speak. It was written before Jeffers's 'The Blood-Guilt' as an attempt to tackle and engage with the critique. Though personal, the critique in this poem aims to deconstruct and reconstruct the authoritarian hierarchy that is responsible for this ecological division and unconstrained expansion. The reconstruction will retain cultural ethical values, maintain an ecological balance, and a reciprocal relationship between humans and nonhumans. 'The Blood-Guilt' which is written after them puts an end to personal critique and urges for actual political involvement against American participation in war. The speaker's advice in 'The Blood-Guilt' to abandon the passive role in response to cultural changes and human violence marks a decisive end of Jeffers's thoughts of withdrawal and endurance.

This reproach however does not change the nature of his view of poetry that is neither a 'private monologue' nor 'public speech' (CP4 : 417). Jeffers seems always to refuse timely subjects and political affairs as he explains in the Note to *Be Angry at the Sun* in the implied analogy between himself and:

a drunken fisherman, who lives solitary in his hut under a cliff, and has no radio, no newspaper, no intelligent friends, nothing but fish and whiskey; drugged hermit, his mind should have been as dateless as the ocean. But he too began to babble about public affairs, and I stopped him off. (CP4 : 417)

Despite periods of self-reflection, his poetry seems to be ambivalent towards writing about the moment. Even after his discussion of involvement, he is still personal. Everson acknowledges in a forward to 1977 edition of *The Double Axe* that Jeffers's *The Double Axe* had been an 'exercise to incense rather than convince.'⁵⁰ Everson sees 'his descent into the political arena' an 'unmitigated disaster.'⁵¹ The inconstancy of holding that

⁵⁰ Robinson Jeffers, *The Double Axe and Others Poems* (Liveright 1977), p. XIV.

⁵¹ Robinson Jeffers, *The Double Axe and Others Poems* (Liveright 1977), p. X.

position denotes that Jeffers always holds the prophet's vision on the mountain, connecting modern time to a chain of historical cycles. Zaller explains that in Jeffers's opposition to war, he is a 'fatalist rather than a pacifist.'⁵² Zaller continues that Jeffers's position 'is unique' as he 'fulfilled 'the self-prophecy he had made ten years earlier' in 'The Great Sunset': 'To be truth-bound, the neutral/detested by all the dreaming factions, is my errand here' (*CP2* : 535). He never aims to chronicle history but to restore a vision that is timeless, ethical, and just. This is what makes his poetry compelling and unique. His failure to immerse in politics and provide answers makes his poetry valuable to our time. If he had provided answers, his poetry would be outdated. Critique, by contrast, retains the power to engage with other times.

Permanence Revisited:

Jeffers's denunciation of his own isolation and move towards a political engagement against human expansion of power and tyranny alters his conception of timelessness which he revisited in later poems such as 'Carmel Point' and 'De Rerum Virtute' from *Hungerfield and Other Poems* (1954). After poems prompted by the Second World War, Jeffers revisits poems of permanence and timelessness of the natural world as a consolation similar to his earlier poems. He resorts again to poems of permanence not as withdrawal or failure but rather as a solid model to rely on again throughout his poetic career. However, in these later poems, his voice gets softer and his tone of critique becomes gentler. This tone marks a transition from the early poems on permanence which convey Jeffers's prophetic distant voice. The war for Jeffers intensifies the need to speak out about human tyranny and

⁵² Robert Zaller, 'The End of Prophecy: "The Double Axe" and the Nuclear Sublime', *Jeffers Studies*, 4.4 (2000), pp. 47-58, p. 53.

violence, which exhausts him in his later collections. Jeffers's poetry of critique makes him realize that a moderate position towards humanity is needed and that he should lessen his critique against humanity into an examination of possible relational reconstruction. His new approach rather focuses on the human relationship to nature and how nature emits endless beauty and peace. He urges humans to construct an ecological bond with nature and to take it as a model for moral stability.

Jeffers's poem 'Carmel Point' from *Hungerfield* (1953) presents a contrast between change and permanence in the description of the beautiful Carmel Point in which Jeffers retreats. The same location, which serves as a recurring context in many of Jeffers's poems, exemplifies his gradual exploration of the depth and various dimensions of this place. In 'To the House' for example, the 'primitive rock' is first introduced when he first moves to the place and starts 'heaping the bones of the old mother' to build 'a hold against the host of the air' (CP1 : 5). A later poem by Jeffers, 'Ocean,' registers the moment he has finished the construction of the Tor house, tower and courtyard from 'stone' and therefore rejoicing the strength and tolerance of nature (CP1 : 212). The 'Carmel woods' become a place of not only natural timelessness but also aesthetic timelessness. Furthermore, in Jeffers's 'Tor House' he contemplates at his Tor house after 'a handful of lifetimes':

But if you should look in your idleness after ten thousand years:
It is the granite knoll on the granite
And lava tongue in the midst of the bay, by the mouth of the Carmel
River-valley, these four will remain
In the change of names. (CP1 : 408)

Jeffers suggests that the natural environment in which he built Tor House transcends temporary rules of existence. The tower, in this poem, is solid 'Here, but a dark one, deep

in the granite, not dancing on wind/ With the mad wings and the day moon' (*CP1* : 408). This realization seems to come after years of establishing and becoming part of this place. 'Carmel Point' which comes later in his career seems to establish his philosophy of permanence through the Carmel Point landscape after years of engagement and long observation amid the changes of time.

In his discussion of the temporariness of human changes versus the permanence of natural beauty in 'Carmel Point,' Jeffers urges for the reconstruction of ecological relations from anthropocentrism to ecocentrism which has been accumulatively threatened and diminished by human expansion. This reconstruction comes as a necessity to avoid extreme acts of injustices or even mundane ones that ruin an ecological relation between humans and their environment. Despite these changes, Carmel Point does not care about these developments as it will outlast them. In his discussion of permanence at the beginning of the poem, Jeffers admires the strength of the place in tolerating cycles of change and destruction:

The extraordinary patience of things!
This beautiful place defaced with a 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 rockheads—
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. (*CP3* : 399)

The place with its ‘extraordinary patience’ has a beauty that attracts the beholder’s eye from a first glance and is safe from human ‘intrusion.’ The perseverance which Jeffers emphasizes in the poem is not dependent on human intrusion but on the indifference of the natural place and its solidity in response to cyclic changes in history. Jeffers rejoices in its indifference that stems from an awareness of historical cycles. This temporariness of each cycle extends also to include human production as with time ‘Their works dissolve.’

This solid permanence has intrinsic beauty from within as Jeffers puts it in his description in the following lines:

Meanwhile the image of the pristine beauty
Lives in the very grain of the granite,
Safe as the endless ocean that climbs our cliff.— (*CP3* : 399)

Beauty thus emerges in the repetitive acts of nature, which Jeffers has always admired in his philosophy of natural beauty. This image brings back the dialogue between the speaker and God in ‘Contemplation of the Sword’ in which the speaker blames God for observing repetitive acts of violence of humanity as ‘waves beating rock.’ The discussion of beauty that emerges from acts of violence is stated also in his poem ‘Apology for Bad Dreams’ when he describes ‘the coast crying out for tragedy like all beautiful places’ (*CP1* : 209). In ‘Carmel Point,’ this internal original beauty that emerges from a state of violence proves undefeated in front of the created changes of history and the violence of humanity. Human violence is purposeful and, therefore, cruel, whereas natural violence is simply part of the state of things.

This general observation of the landscape led to the articulation of Jeffers's vision of peace and integration. At the end of the poem, Jeffers shifts the attention from the place as symbolic of the otherness to the collective humanity:

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. (*CP3* : 399)

This sudden shift highlights the need to address the existing boundaries between humans and the environment. Jeffers urges humanity to expand its perspective by moving beyond a self-centered approach, which is often rooted in the prevailing assumptions of humanism and reason. If humanity, in its false conception of reason and progress, leads to these unguided cycles of changes, then Jeffers urges humans, including himself, to 'unhumanize' their 'views.' It is clear, hence, that unhumanizing does not indicate a rupture of the relationship with humanity as he explains in 'Sign-Post' in the birth out of the stone but a return to moderation. This act of unhumanizing oneself marks the center of his Inhumanism which is referred to in the beginning of the chapter, while 'little' clearly indicates an excessiveness that needs to be reined in. These consecutive acts are the result of human loss of confidence and consequent compensation through destructive violence and unguided progress. Their ecophobic relationship to nature thus is manifested in their intrusion and exploitation that would participate in the human progress. Jeffers attributes this confidence as a pure quality to the 'rock' and 'ocean' in their originality and permanent qualities. Furthermore, Jeffers's declaration of being made from 'rock' and 'ocean' expresses a wish for ecological integrity rather than the literal reality, or perhaps both. Jeffers understood the universe as 'one being, a single organism, one great life that includes

all life and all things; and is so beautiful that it must be loved and revered' (CL 1: 77). The quality of confidence or lack of confidence is a particular quality of humans though projected onto rock by Jeffers. What he aims to achieve through this projection is that humanity is created from the depth of nature and that nature pre-dates human existence. Thus, in Jeffers's philosophy of the natural world, he believes that what is past to human recognition indicates originality and permanence and that what comes later is subject to change.

This pre-dated presence of natural beauty thus indicates its solidity not only in the face of the passage of time but also in the face of changes to human ethical values. Jeffers's poem 'De Rerum Virtute' from *Hungerfield* (1953) offers an ethical presentation of the sublime nature and its beauty. It bears a retrospective quality by deliberately returning to many of his recurrent themes including war and his conception of God. He reflects on his career, questioning whether he has done what he should have done. In this, he provides a critique of poets and the role their poetry performs in such turbulent time. The poem highlights the role of poetic participation he indicates in 'Prescription of Painful Ends,' and acts thus as an attempt to remove the vulgarities of the age. The poem rewrites Lucretius's 'De Rerum Natura' ('On the Nature of Things') into 'De Rerum Virtute' ('On the Virtue of Things').⁵³ Jeffers extends the title of Lucretius's poem apparently because in Lucretius's time, Rome was riding to the height as he alludes in 'Prescription of Painful Ends.' However, the change in Jeffers's time is moving downward as ethical values are deteriorating. Thus, this poem acts as rather an observation of the virtue of things. The

53 Albert Gelpi, 'Introduction', in *An Anthology of Robinson Jeffers: The Wild God of the World* ed. by Albert Gelpi (Stanford University Press, 2003), pp. 1-19, p. 17.

observation of ethical values implies an assessment of them and an attempt to offer reconstructed ones. He critiques in its first four parts human gradual changes of human values and emerging violence that deprive humanity of its beauty: 'Indeed it is hard to see beauty / In any of the acts of man: but that means the acts of a sick microbe' (*CP3* : 402). This conclusion, drawn by the speaker, is informed by a distant perspective, akin to the perspective found in other poems by Jeffers. Although he tries to accept these values and finds beauty in them, he loses his 'patience' and confesses, 'I believe that man too is beautiful, / But it is hard to see, and wrapped up in falsehoods' (*CP3* : 402-3).

The fifth and last part of the poem describes the source of the lasting and remaining beauty of the natural world. This particular beauty, thus, is part of the natural world and not related to 'the human world' (*CP3* : 403). Chapman explains that while the poem 'De Rerum Virtute' 'deliberately references some of the philosophical positions expressed in "The Inhumanist"', it reveals him moving beyond the negative stance of the earlier work toward a more positive articulation of the value of that more-than-human reality, and of the human capacity to bring that reality into focus.⁵⁴ The speaker in this section of the poem invites the readers to contemplate different aspects of nature like 'the mountains,' 'rocks,' 'sea,' 'gulls,' 'hawks,' 'desert,' 'rain-forest,' 'high thrones of ice' and 'great skies' and to see their 'immense beauty.' Jeffers attributes this beauty to the permanence of intrinsic values unshaken by the sickness of the world and man. The beauty thus cannot be evaluated by the values of the changing world but by the individual perspective:

The beauty of things means virtue and value in them.
It is in the beholder's eye, not the world? Certainly.

54 Steven Chapman, "'De Rerum Virtute': A Critical Anatomy", *Jeffers's Studies*, 6.4 (2002), pp. 22-35, p. 22.

It is the human mind's translation of the transhuman

Intrinsic glory. It means that the world is sound,

Whatever the sick microbe does. But he too is part of it. (*CP3* : 403)

This 'intrinsic glory' is thus perceived through the 'human mind's translation of the transhuman' and necessitates an ecological perspective that values nature's eminence and beauty. Jeffers stresses that the beauty, thus, is present and 'sound, / Whatever the sick microbe does.' Although he has been denying the beauty of 'the human world,' contrary to his admitting in 'The Purse-Seine' about the beauty of the city, however, Jeffers acknowledges that human is part of that beauty 'he too is part of it.' This fluctuation between denial and acknowledgement of human beauty indicates the influence of human contact with nature on reaching a mature perspective. The continuous visual observation of the aspects of nature allows for a balanced perspective that accepts and finds beauty in human changes. This compromise and objectivity indicate a reduction of the speaker's critique and a more focused approach to ecology. Thus, Jeffers's revisiting of the concept of permanence seems to be an urge to moderate his perspective on humanity and to call for a balanced ecological relation. On the other hand, all his previous engagement with human violence deepens his conception of beauty which now cannot be perceived until we can maintain such an ecological perspective.

Conclusion:

Thus, the first three sections of the chapter correspond to Jeffers's trajectory in response to human anthropocentrism in the urban context and the injustices that threaten the ecological relation. This trajectory highlights both his critique of humanity and an emphasis on ethical and ecological values toward nonhumans. Reading urbanization as an environment where human injustices are enacted allows for a fresh ecocritical perspective

to Jeffers's poetry. The trajectory in Jeffers's poetry from his literary isolation to political involvement has implications. On a physical level, his isolation establishes a physical setting of ecological values, which he employs to highlight how far cultural growth has exceeded and impacted ecological wholeness. On a temporal level, it creates a timeless affinity with the past, intensifying Jeffers's critique of America's growth as belonging to a decaying cycle of history. These two physical and temporal settings allow Jeffers to reflect on modernization and cultural growth and announce his literary distinctiveness. However, meditative and abstract responses to a crisis do not suffice. Although Jeffers's withdrawal to the Californian landscape is symbolic of personal and poetic individuality against communal values, it is never a practical solution to address existing changes. His physical and literary isolation and separation from humanity is only a temporary solution that cannot last.

Jeffers's realization of the political and ethical inadequacy of his own earlier withdrawal makes the trajectory relevant to current environmental politics in its investigation of injustices and solutions. Ethical reformation cannot be achieved through abandonment of the culture but rather through political and poetic involvement. Humans' excessive modernization and expansion do not require an equally excessive abandonment of the culture. Rather, they necessitate an engagement that aims towards ecological values. The critique of urbanization and growth that bring cultural, political, affective, and environmental injustices takes us to examine a similar trajectory in Denise Levertov's poetry of the Vietnam War. In response to her sensory perception of political injustices, her poetry critiques the violence of war and its impact on minorities and the environment. The next chapter will analyze a similar trajectory to Jeffers in which Levertov observes,

describes, desperately holds her voice, and finally engages and proposes. While Jeffers's trajectory presents a struggle between presence and absence within injustices, Levertov's trajectory reveals an internal struggle between silence and expression.

Chapter Two:

War and Destruction in Denise Levertov's Poetry of the Vietnam War

‘there comes a time when only anger
is love.’

‘I Thirst’ (*CP*, 375).

As Jeffers sees it, humanity's constantly changing values, heading towards corruption, vulgarities and destruction, had alienated people from themselves, their tradition, their values and their landscape. The previous chapter documented Jeffers's journey through physical and literary isolation in his Tor House, observation and critique of cultural deterioration, and a reflection of the timelessness of nature in contrast to modernity. Profoundly affected by World War II, Jeffers's journey against modernity instigates a reflection of his literary position and political stance, reproaching himself for not being part of stopping the violence. In the second half of the century, Denise Levertov's critique of the Vietnam War reveals as well a spectrum of injustices towards people and their land. American participation in the Vietnam War caused physical and affective harm to the indigenous people and changed the Vietnamese landscape. Her critique of American violence in the Vietnam War always holds a stance of poetic engagement with the experience and a readiness for political activism against injustices that stem from the American sense of privilege and power. However, being intimate and experiential in her critique and description of the war causes an erosion of her poetic vision and voice. She goes through a period of description, and gradual reflection of her stance to step over a traumatized experience that hinders her more revolutionary poetics. Unlike Jeffers's struggle between political isolation, which he is advocating, and political involvement, Levertov's struggle in resistance to American violence is between humanitarian poetics and political activism.

Levertov's anti-war critique is woven with her sensory description of victimization and atrocities that fuel her resistance to aggression. Since the Vietnam War was the first televised war, the media shaped Levertov's perception of injustice and informed her

critique of the war even prior to her visit to Hanoi in November 1972. Levertov's visit to Vietnam was driven by her opposition to the war and her desire to bear witness to its impact. Although there is always an intimacy of experience in her war poetry prior to her visit to Vietnam, being in Vietnam connects her with the experience of the Vietnamese and locates herself in the other's place. Just before Richard Nixon's reelection, Levertov travelled to Hanoi with Muriel Rukeyser, a fellow poet, and Jane Hart, war resister and wife of U.S. senator Philip Hart (D-Mich.)¹ During her visit, she was deeply moved by the Vietnamese's gentleness, stoicism, and peace despite their struggle and their cherishing life despite death. Upon her return from Hanoi, Levertov gave a press conference at the Arlington Street Church in Boston, where she and the reporter gave an account of life in Vietnam and the conditions of the prisoner-of-war compound (POWS).²

Her political stance develops into a recognition of the impact of violence in disrupting the ecological integrity of the place. Her Vietnam War poetry was informed by her social and ecological consciousness that denies the separation between us and them, between the near and the far, and between place and its identity. Levertov declares her opposition to war and explains her awareness of a spectrum of impacts associated with it:

I am absolutely opposed to the U.S. war of aggression in Vietnam. Not only is it an unjustifiable interference hypocritically carried on in the name of "freedom" while in fact its purpose is to further the strategic ends of a government whose power has destroyed the morality of its members; but it is being waged by means of atrocities. This is a war in which more children are being killed and maimed than fighting men. Napalm, white phosphorous,

1 Donna Hollenberg, "'The Freeing of the Dust' the Revolution Hits Home (1970– 1974)", in *A Poet's Revolution: The Life of Denise Levertov* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), pp. 307-336, p. 324.

2 Hollenberg, "'The Freeing of the Dust'", p. 325. Levertov reflects on this experience of meeting the POWS in her poem 'The Pilots' which I will analyze later in the third section of this chapter.

fragmentation bombs, all used deliberately on a civilian population; poisoning of crops, defoliation of forests; not to speak of the horrendous blight of disease and famine that follows, the corruption, prostitution, and every kind of physical and moral suffering – nothing whatsoever could possibly justify these crimes.³

This quotation represents the destruction war creates and provides a holistic vision of her political and environmental concerns. Her vision casts doubt on America's justifications that the war will bring freedom and investigates, instead, the social, psychological, and environmental impacts that follow.

Levertov's antiwar argument is grounded in her concern with the power-relations that lead to injustices. In her poetry, she criticized America's expansion of power at the expense of human and nonhuman lives. Like Jeffers's critique of the division between the city and nature, she also criticized this division in the imbalance in power relations between oppressors and the victimized. These power relations, as depicted in her antiwar poetry, results in destructive deeds and violence toward humans and nonhumans. Małgorzata Pok indicates Levertov's advocacy for recognition of others:

Her poetry testifies over and over again that what the eye discovers is relationship rather than alienation. The leitmotif of her work is the recognition (and re-cognition) of a deep affinity between all things. Humans, animals, plants, even inanimate nature... all belong to a network of relationships, an organic whole that cannot be reduced to a simple sum of parts.⁴

This call for the recognition of organic whole in her poetry fuels her critique of violence toward others and the environment as well. Narbeshuber emphasizes this holistic approach

3 Denise Levertov, 'From 'Writers Take Sides on Vietnam,' 1966', in *The Poet in the World* (New Directions Books, 1973), pp. 119-20, p. 119.

4 Małgorzata Poks, 'The Poet's "Caressive Sight": Denise Levertov's Transactions with Nature', *Text Matters*, 1.1 (2011), pp. 145-52, p. 146.

in Levertov's 'desire both to recover the body and to explore the connections of the world blindly (blindly, that is, from the ego's viewpoint), without experiencing only the tracks laid down by any given set of classifications, definitions, categories, and so on.'⁵ Levertov's poetry illuminates that which is destructive to both human and environment, a consequence of dichotomous power dynamics. The quest for political dominion not only precipitates widespread mortality but also ravages the natural world. To stop such violence, she tries to motivate people to take a stand on the political and ecological issues of the age, advocating for unity and an end to divisive conflicts. This motivation is supported by her sensual perception of and close relationship to the environment where she is able to articulate a voice that calls for justice.

In this chapter, I intend to examine Levertov's Vietnam War poetry from the perspective of environmental justice, seeing violence in war as an example of racial injustice akin to the hierarchical view of species in anthropocentrism. Her poetry seeks to critique and protest the violence that causes casualties, destruction, and disregard for others' land and identity. Her critique of violence is most apparent in her collections *The Sorrow Dance* (1967), *Relearning the Alphabet* (1970), *To Stay Alive* (1971), *The Freeing of the Dust* (1975), and, to an extent, *Candles in Babylon* (1982). In these collections, there is a gradual trajectory towards an articulation of her political and ecological vision. Across her political poetry, she depicts her initial observation of violence and the emotional stasis that erodes her poetic voice, leading to an endeavour to articulate a political stance which culminates in a more precise pursuit of peace and safety. Rodgers explains the multifaceted

5 Lisa Narbeshuber, 'Relearning Denise Levertov's Alphabet: War, Flesh, and the Intimacy of Otherness', *Canadian Review of American Studies*, 36.2 (2006), pp. 131-47, p. 136.

aspects of Levertov's aesthetic pilgrimage: 'at times, her poetry is reflective, at times ecstatic, or despairing, or hopeful, or angry, or awestruck.'⁶ Despite these different moods, she consistently maintains a link between the inner and the outer, between them and we, between experience and art. Like Jeffers's rejection of modernity, marked by his physical isolation from the city and articulation of the timelessness model, Levertov's rejection of war is marked by her articulation of a political stance. Both poets' responses establish a counter-resistance to American pursuit of anthropocentric ideology.

Like the previous chapter, this chapter is organized into three sections that present the trajectory of Levertov's progressive responses against injustice. The first section of the chapter will examine her early poems from *The Sorrow Dance*, where she conveys her perception of injustices through media coverage and a close view of photographs. In poems such as 'Weeping Woman,' 'Two Variations,' 'Biafra,' and 'Life at War,' she depicts shock, mourning, and emotional stasis, which are shared by the witnesses of the war. In her essay 'Testament and a Postscript,' Levertov explains her intention in describing scenes of the Vietnam War:

There are lines in poems of my own – for instance, a poem called "Life at War"—which have caused people to say to me, "That's a shocker!"; and they said that the poem served to awaken them in some degree from apathy... Though I did not think it or write it with enough clarity, I was deploring shock as an end in itself, while espousing the act of "awakening sleepers" as a goal (not the goal) proper to poetry.⁷

6 Audrey T. Rodgers, *Denise Levertov: The Poetry of Engagement* (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1993), p. 38.

7 Denise Levertov, 'A Testament and Postscript 1959-1973', in *The Poet in the World* (New Directions Books, 1973), pp. 3-6, p. 5.

‘Life at War,’ according to Levertov, is her first poem that was written with an antiwar perspective, as Donna Hollenberg relates in Levertov’s biography.⁸ Levertov sought to awaken sleeping audiences through poetry such as ‘Tenebrae,’ and ‘Advent 1966.’ It is a prerequisite stage for critique and reconstruction of what she refers to as ‘the ugly games of ideology.’⁹ She captures the brutality she encounters through various media forms—news, photographs, movies, and her own experiences in Vietnam—in her poetry.

Media plays an important role in the engagement with the Vietnam War. As Michael Mandelbaum points out, the Vietnam War was the first ‘televised’ war, explaining the impact of television on the U.S. public’s perception of it.¹⁰ These images ‘produced a particular set of reactions in those who saw them: dismay, disgust, and horror, all of which fed the desire to stop the war, or at least to stop American participation in it.’¹¹ In writing particularly about the napalm girl, a Vietnamese girl whose body was burned in 1972, Nancy K. Miller argues that photos have a strong impact on people quoting Susan Sontag’s much-quoted 1973 article ‘On Photography.’ Sontag explains that television is a ‘stream of underselected images, each of which cancels its predecessor.’ Unlike television, a “still photograph is a ‘privileged moment,’ turned into a slim object that one can keep and look at again.”¹² As Miller emphasized, the photo of the girl becomes ‘a symbol of the human capacity for atrocity.’¹³ Levertov’s poetry brings what is in both T.V. and photography, the

8 Donna Hollenberg, ‘“Revolution or Death” Living in the Movement (1966-1970)’, in *A Poet’s Revolution: The Life of Denise Levertov* (University of California Press, 2013), pp. 260-306.

9 Lisa Narbeshuber, ‘Relearning Denise Levertov’s Alphabet: War, Flesh, and the Intimacy of Otherness’, *Canadian Review of American Studies*, 36.2 (2006), pp. 131-47, p. 134.

10 Michael Mandelbaum, ‘Vietnam: The Television War’, *Daedalus*, 111.4 (1982), pp. 157-69, p. 157.

11 Michael Mandelbaum, ‘Vietnam: The Television War’, p. 161.

12 Quoted in Nancy K. Miller, ‘The Girl in the Photograph: The Vietnam War and the Making of National Memory’, *Trauma and Rhetoric*, 24.2 (2004), pp. 261-190, p. 262.

13 Miller, ‘The Girl in the Photograph’, p. 261.

reflected reality and the prolonged affective experience, and the therefore feelings of solidarity and sympathy. Her poetry is inclusive, empathetic, and revealing. The close examination of photos particularly fuels the poet's knowledge of the scene. In her essay "Looking at Photographs," Levertov delves into the significance of photographs in enhancing the poetry-writing process. 'I can often turn to fine photographs to help myself discover next steps in a poem I am writing: almost it's as if I can respond to such photographs *because* I'm a working poet.'¹⁴ Levertov also emphasizes that photographs serve as a valuable tool for refining a poet's perception: 'Photographs teach the poet to see better, or renew his seeing, in ways closer to the kind of seeing he needs to do for his work'.¹⁵

With this transmission of experience, her poetry brings an emotional dimension to her critique of political events. Narbeshuber argues that print and televisual media failed to show the emotional dimension of the violence and bloodshed during the war, remarking that 'The images are certainly brought near, but the philosophical and emotional distance is crippling.'¹⁶ Although Levertov recognizes the collapse of physical distance through media, she realizes that people maintain emotional distance. As a mediator of experience, Levertov sees the necessity of bridging the geographical and emotional distance between domestic Americans and Vietnamese to bring them to a kind of contact. Sybil Oldfield emphasizes that geographical distance made the war seem 'distant, and unreal' to the American public, and demanded of the American 'anti-militarists [...] greater reserves of

14 Denise Levertov, 'Looking at Photographs', in *The Poet in the World* (New Directions Books, 1973), p. 87-88.

15 Denise Levertov, 'Looking at Photographs', p. 88.

16 Lisa Narbeshuber, 'Relearning Denise Levertov's Alphabet: War, Flesh, and the Intimacy of Otherness', *Canadian Review of American Studies*, 36.2 (2006), pp. 131-47, p. 134.

moral energy and imaginative vision, in order to reach their public.’¹⁷ This sensory immersion allows her to bridge the gap between the reader and the distant conflict, rendering the war’s realities more tangible. While her work emphasizes visual elements, it’s her vivid description and the depiction of internal and external impacts of injustice that foster a deep, intimate connection with the events depicted unlike Jeffers’s objective detached perspective.

However, the second section of the chapter presents a contrastive response to the emotional struggle and the prevailing sense of victimization. In "Staying Alive," Levertov articulates the transition from an impaired poetic vision, caused by her perception of violence in Vietnam War, to the gradual emergence of a political voice. The emergence is enhanced by solidarity with other antiwar protestors such as Muriel Rukeyser, leading to direct critique of politics and suggestions of counter-actions of peace and integration. Levertov’s political stance is grounded in dialogue. In ‘The Poet In the World,’ she emphasizes the need for dialogue for collective awareness: ‘The poet develops the basic human need for dialogue in concretions that are audible to others; in listening, others are stimulated into awareness of their own needs and capacities, stirred into taking up their own dialogues, which are so often neglected.’¹⁸ The exchange of ideas between her and other protestors help in the emergence of a public voice that not only depicts but also critiques and investigates the depth of human violence.

17 Sybil Oldfield, 'American Visionaries: Helen Keller, and the Poets Muriel Rukeyser, Denise Levertov and Sharon Olds', in *Thinking against the Current: Literature and Political Resistance*, ed. by Sybil Oldfield (Sussex Academic Press, 2015), pp. 233-56, p. 234.

18 Denise Levertov, 'Origins of a Poem', in *The Poet in the World* (New Directions Books, 1973), pp. 43-56, p. 49.

The third section of the chapter traces Levertov's shift from the political revolution to a reflection on broader causes for injustices and the role of poetry in establishing an ecological vision of peace and integrity. In later poems from *The Freeing of the Dust*, years after the end of the Vietnam War and her visit to Vietnam, Levertov starts to critique humans' intellectual failure in 'The Pilots' and 'May our Hand Lose their Cunning,' and 'Goodbye to Tolerance.' Her critique is not bound to only the experience of Vietnam but a comment on a wider potential for injustice due to misapplication of reason. Recognizing this failure and the role of poetry in bringing hope, she declares her use of poetry as a medium for reconstructing political relations. These poems are the counterparts to the poems in the first section, in which there is silence, stasis, and struggle. The imperative to speak is both therapeutic and didactic.

'The Shadow' as an Early Critique of Injustice and division:

To discern the link between Jeffers's and Levertov's disapproval of imperial expansion rooted in binary reasoning, it is helpful to begin with Levertov's 'The Shadow' from *The Double Image* (1946). The poem provides a basis for my discussion of the theme of war in her poetry, from which she departs later into Vietnam War poetry.¹⁹ The poem condemns political injustices that disturb the peace in people's lives. It conveys a longing for a landscape that can alleviate the existential dread and sense of futility that pervades human life. In the beginning, the speaker attempts to escape the destructive scene of war. However, the moment is interrupted by the violence of war where history negates the 'structure of

¹⁹ Audrey T. Rodgers in *Denise Levertov: The Poetry of Engagement* has traced Levertov's political consciousness extensively from the beginning of her career when she served as a nurse in WWII.

delight.’ The poem starts with the speaker’s apparent urgent need for words to describe the immersion within a place of beauty:

I need a green and undulating line
the hill’s long contours in my words, to tell
how by unwarranted grace I found this place.

I need the green astonishment of spring,
Stillness of music in the mind, to give
the lie to darkness and release the lark.

The green of day assumes in dreams the shade
Of eloquence I need, to tell how love
Can lay the ghosts of childhood with a smile (*CP*, 33).

The green undulating lines of hills hint at a specifically English landscape, idealized and simplified in the memory of childhood. This landscape is suggested by the repetition of ‘green’ in the first line of each of the first three verses. The poem suggests that this immersion comes in the hope of retaining something that is apparently lost which the coming lines could reveal. Edward Casey explains that ‘nostalgia’ is not a merely ‘a matter of regret for lost times; it is also a pining for lost places, for places we have once been in yet can no longer reenter.’²⁰ These lines express the longing for spatial return and a therapeutic need to release anxiety through green spaces. It also highlights the need for certain elements of language and prosody, ‘line’ and ‘words’ to produce a certain kind of poetry, which is, in turn, capable of capturing a certain kind of experience. The wish to live this experience and describe it is apparent in the repetition of ‘I need’ and ‘green.’ Other

20 Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World* (Indiana University Press, 2009), p. 37.

positive references imply the impact of green spaces such as ‘stillness,’ light, ‘love,’ ‘lark,’ and ‘smile.’ These references also imply balance, within a place of beauty and joy. Kay Milton suggests that primary emotions such as love and affection ‘operate primarily (though not exclusively) in ecological relations.’²¹ These images, however, are contrasted with references to reality, which the speaker wants to escape from, such as ‘darkness’ and ‘ghosts of childhood.’ The speaker seems to be captivated by the unpleasant place and time she seeks to escape through the green spaces, music, and love which she celebrates before the turning point at the beginning of the fourth stanza.

This personal space with which the speaker wants to interact shifts from the fourth stanza to include a wider scene. She refers to bombing raids and their devastations. This violence denies the speaker privacy in its invasion of her personal space:

But the ancient lines of mountains break in craters,
Destructive skies crack like decaying plaster;
The individual grace is out of place,

And history denies the structure of delight,
Contemptuous of its tender vanity;
music refuses to ignore the black confusion of war.

For love must keep silence, remembering poverty’s silence;
recalling the ghosts still living and enslaved,
must hide eternity away, and learn
that time engraves upon the prison wall
‘spring’ as the symbol of a bitter hope. (*CP*, 33)

²¹ Kay Milton, *Loving Nature: Towards an Ecology of Emotions* (Routledge, 2002), p. 4.

In these lines, Levertov describes how natural and human environments are destroyed. Different images are used to support this collapse such as breaking, cracking, and decaying. The emblematic landscapes seem to lose their identity. Even the 'mountains,' a symbol of eternity, are not able to tolerate reality. The loss of the identity of the place also results in the loss of individual identity and 'grace' which the speaker attempts to embrace in the first three stanzas. Not only does Levertov capture the destruction of the environment, but she sheds light on history itself. History is a callous process that has no concern for human delight nor for the vanity of their acts that assume tenderness and affection.

Levertov returns to some of the words used in the opening stanzas of the poem to refer to them in the wider context of history. 'Music,' which previously gives stillness to the mind in the green spaces, 'refuses' now to 'ignore the black confusion of war.' The negative affective impact manifested in the 'confusion' cannot be suppressed. Also, 'love,' which used to draw a smile on a person, is now silenced. 'Love' cannot express itself openly and joyously while others are enduring experiences of 'poverty,' fear and enslavement. Levertov suggests the difficulty of writing poetry of love in such circumstances. There seems to be an element of shame here, as though to enjoy love at a time of such suffering is more than tactless. In the poem, she suggests the insignificance of private love and intimacy in the context of war, destruction, and existential dread. In fact, she recognizes the inability of the celebration of love in poetry during the collective struggle.

The verbs in the last stanza imply that these negative experiences of war have lasted for a period during which people live in a state of stoicism. Words such as 'Remembering' and 'recalling' suggest a crisis that has not been resolved during which positive emotions are suppressed 'for love must keep silence.' With this suppression of love, eternity as well

should be hidden. Levertov sees the necessity for love to be silent as there are many silent enduring people. The poem is written during the war, before the invasion of Normandy, and suggests that the allied victory had not suddenly resolved all its problems. It projects this concern that persists even after victory. She compares those poor people to ‘ghosts’ who are ‘still living but enslaved.’ What role love can take is only to ‘learn’ that ‘time’ anticipates ‘a bitter hope.’ This anticipated hope is engraved on ‘the prison walls.’ The landscape of boundaries in this image is a metaphor for war and destruction as a prison that holds victimized souls in suffering. ‘Spring’ which connotes positivity and a new season of liveliness, is perceived by time as a symbol of ‘bitter’ hope. Jennifer Ladino emphasizes in *Reclaiming Nostalgia* that nostalgic longing ‘can be a mechanism for social change, a model for ethical relationships, and a motivating force for social and environmental justice.’²² Levertov, in this juxtaposition, implies the impossibility of time to revive amid the perceived decay. Hope, which time anticipates, is only ‘bitter’ and cannot be positively lived in the future. The view of time could imply the collective desperation experienced by people in the context of war. This engraving provides authoritative anticipation as it is seen by the wider perspective of ‘time.’ Thus, she attempts to motivate people for endurance and anticipation rather than an expression of love. She bases her advice on the anticipation of hope engraved by time.

‘The Shadow’ thus connects Jeffers to Levertov in its presentation of the separation of I and nature, memories and the present scene, and nature and the scene of war. This division reflects shifts in time and morality, which in turn fuels human aggression that prevails later in other contexts, such as the Vietnam War. In her poetry, Levertov highlights

22 Jennifer K. Ladino, *Reclaiming Nostalgia: Longing for Nature in American Literature* (University of Virginia Press, 2012), p. 8.

this concept of dualism, exploring possibilities of blurring it. John Wrighton emphasizes Levertov's engagement with the concept of division in her poetry, noting how it explores 'the ethical relations between self and other, breaks down a complex set of dualities: light/dark, vision/blindness, carnal/spiritual, material/semantic.'²³ While Jeffers illustrates this separation in the cultural context of modernity, Levertov presents in this poem how dualism and its impact is creating violence in the context of war. 'The Shadow' thus establishes early on in Levertov's corpus a link between human dualism, war, and how this impacts ecological integrity. Despite the separation and injustice that the poem suggests, she refuses to be confined by that reality and seeks an encounter with nature, a protection of the authentic self. If Jeffers's withdrawal is a kind of separation from humanity and a connection with a timeless presence, Levertov's escape is a rejection of violence and a connection with love, joy, and hope with which she wants to identify.

Emotional Description & Failure to Respond to Violence:

Levertov transitions from a broad understanding of history and time captured in her early poems from *The Double Image* (1946) to a focused portrayal of aggression in the Vietnam War. Her later poems of the 1960s document direct experiences with actual scenes of violence towards humans and the environment. Unlike Jeffers's distant critique, she offers an intimate perspective that captures the impact of injustices in war on humanity and nature. Her poems from *The Sorrow Dance* to poems in *To Stay Alive* enact different forms of sensory perception blended with emotional weight through the close perception of photos and media filming of war scenes. Levertov describes various emotions of people

23 John Wrighton, 'Fear of the Blind': Political Vision and Postwar Ethics in the Poetry of Denise Levertov', *Literature and History*, 30.2 (2021), pp. 138-54, p. 139.

affected by napalm in Vietnam. Due to burning and loss, people in Vietnam, likewise empathetic observers, live in mourning, astonishment, opacity, emotional numbness, and psychic withdrawal. These poems present a diagnosis of destructive violence through multiple senses and a failure to engage in expression. Her account of violence in Vietnam carries ‘sentiments of sympathy and love’ which Martha Nussbaum sees in *Political Emotions* as crucial in overcoming injustice and exploitation by connecting us with the pain of more distant human and nonhuman others.²⁴ Through empathy, Levertov bridges the separation between herself and the Vietnamese people and highlights the dynamics between injustice and emotions.

Throughout these poems, recurring imagery illustrates the coping strategies employed to evade the turmoil of emotions, such as closure, substitution, or suppression. Levertov’s vivid description probes a range of these strategies, showing the hopelessness and the perplexity caused by the constant exposure to cruelty. The first cluster of poems in this section includes poems that register the disfigurement and disability of women in Vietnam after being bombed in war. Taken together, these poems present the perspective of these women amid the loss of children and body organs and their affective experience. These women attempt to escape the scene of war through images of darkness and blockage of sight as in ‘Weeping Woman,’ ‘Enquiry,’ and ‘The Seeing’ from ‘Two Variations.’ The second cluster of poems relates the intensity of violence and how it obstructs the joy of normal life as in ‘Tenebrae’ and ‘Biafra.’ The third cluster of poems discusses how this intensity psychologically impacts the victims of violence and thus denies them clarity of

24 Martha Nussbaum, *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice* (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2015), p. 3.

expression as in ‘Advent 1966’ and ‘Life at War.’ In these poems, there is a failure in the ability of victims and witnesses to articulate the traumas of violence.

‘Weeping Woman,’ is a late poem from *The Freeing of the Dust* that maps the trajectory Levertov takes in her poetry from the humane examination of suffering to the reevaluation of political stance. It is a culmination poem that encompasses the beginning and the end of the story that I will tell in this chapter and the position Levertov reached. The poem conveys a motif of a woman suffering which Levertov presents in her early poetry of the 1960s from *The Sorrow Dance*. ‘Weeping Woman’ depicts a woman’s grief and mourning over her disability, a casualty she attributes to her nation’s actions amid the brutality of war. The six stanzas, with their third-person narration and short lines, depict the speaker’s confusion in response to her loss of the arm, illustrating at the end of the poem her resilient response. Levertov moves in the poem from the personal and local level of the woman to the more universal and wider national level. This shift juxtaposes the woman’s private grief with the larger, pervasive violence that demands attention. Upon this movement, Levertov recognizes that America’s violence towards the Vietnamese is violence committed towards land, people, and the country. She starts the poem describing the woman’s loss:

She is weeping for her lost right arm.
She cannot write the alphabet any more
on the kindergarten blackboard.

She is weeping for her lost right arm.
She cannot hold her baby and caress it at the same time
ever again.

She is weeping for her lost right arm.

The stump aches, and her side.

She is weeping for her lost right arm.

The left alone cannot use a rifle

to help shoot down the attacking plane. (*CP* , 461)

The loss that Levertov depicts impacts the woman's daily activities that have educational, parental, and defensive benefits. Her role as a teacher for the young generation, teaching them 'the alphabet' is compromised. Writing symbolizes expression, communication, and production in life. It is an emblem of the continuity of learning and growth.

The woman in the poem is deprived even of the intimacy of holding and caressing 'her baby at the same time.' This inability implies the performance of basic roles only rather than emotional ones. Levertov also suggests that the woman's loss has deprived her of the ability to protect herself against approaching threats. Levertov's choice of the 'rifle' is striking as it sets a more precise description of the loss that is not presented in the earlier examples. The writing on the 'blackboard' and holding the 'baby' can be partially done with one arm though not perfectly. However, the rifle symbolizes the need for two arms to hold the rifle and 'shoot' which cannot be performed with only one arm. Using a rifle against a plane also points to the mismatch in military technologies. The rifle also suggests that the woman is a soldier, challenging the view of her as a victim. Combining these three roles as a mother, teacher, and a soldier does not indicate a permanent role but a sense of urgency during crisis where the vulnerable have to defend themselves.

In the last two stanzas, Levertov expands more in her description of the loss to include a wider picture that extends the local roles.

In the wide skies over the Delta

her right hand that is not there
writes indelibly,
 ‘Cruel America,
when you mutilate our land and bodies,
it is your own soul you destroy,
not ours’. (*CP*, 461)

Levertov emphasizes that even with the woman’s inability to write, the loss itself speaks on its own and extends its audience from only students in a class to people across the Mekong Delta. In this absence of writing, the attacking aircraft seems to engage in an expressive act of violence. The skies are otherwise occupied by the attack during which the woman is astonished, which contributes to her inability to write. Even if her hand is not mutilated, she is emotionally shaken, denying her ability to write. The woman designates this violence with cruelty through which she aims to blame and critique. Levertov describes how this cruelty does not only mutilate people’s ‘land and bodies’ in Vietnam but reaches to destroy the depth of the America’s ‘soul.’ The violence inflicted by the US army on the Vietnamese will cause psychological or spiritual damage to Americans. The last line ‘not ours’ suggests a shift of victimization from a passive image towards resilience as the perception of who the victim is changes from the Vietnamese woman to America, from a body to the soul, suggesting a reciprocal impact of injustice. For Levertov a poem is a mental process in which expression heads towards liberation. The woman’s weeping turns into writing despite the mutilation of the hand.

This sets a contrast to the damaged ethics of America that is followed by a destroyed soul. Her right hand seems to be a gesture of generous giving to others that stems from a patriotic connection or personal ties. The poem suggests that the cruelty of America during

the war did not end with gaining but rather deprivation of ‘land and bodies.’ Levertov highlights the connection between body and soul as the violence has a reciprocal connection with the oppressors destroying their ‘own souls.’ Furthermore, Levertov seems to deliberately postpone the revelation of the identity of the women as Vietnamese to the end to create an affinity between American and Vietnamese woman. The word ‘Delta,’ which typically refers to the American Mississippi and the Mekong Delta in Vietnam, and the word ‘Kindergarten’ which is typically used in the US to refer to nursery school, establish the equivalence between the Vietnamese woman and an American teacher before revealing who she is. Through this assumption of the connected identity, Levertov shows the willingness to place herself close to the perspective of others. The poem is provocative, highlighting the tension between victimization and resilience, between the acceptance of death and the continuous attempt to resist through her ‘right hand’ which ‘writes indelibly.’

‘Enquiry’ from ‘Two Variations’ from *The Sorrow Dance* is an early depiction of violence inflicted by American soldiers and processes of loss and mourning in the Vietnam War. Addressing the soldiers who perform the killing, Levertov highlights the role of vision in witnessing the violence committed against people during war. The whole poem acts as a sarcastic ‘enquiry’ into the soldiers’ awareness of violence and a critique of humanity’s indulgence in consumption:

You who go out on schedule
to kill, do you know
there are eyes that watch you,
eyes whose lids you burned off,
that see you eat your steak
and buy your girlflesh

And sell your PX goods
And sleep? (*CP*, 267-268)

The 'eyes,' as organs of perception, serve as a channel through which individuals witness scenes of aggression. For the poet, they symbolize awareness and the embodiment of reality. Levertov uses the 'eyes' to depict the chronicling of atrocities committed by the oppressors. The absence of 'lids' on these eyes alludes to the horrific effects of napalm in Vietnam, leading to drastic mutilation and the loss of bodily parts. The burning off of the lids indicates an eradication of freedom and the normal right to shut their vision when needed. Amid devastation and the loss of lives, the perpetrators are portrayed as indulging in their routines such as eating, paying for sex, trading military goods, and sleeping with women, echoing a similar condemnation of material consumption in Jeffers's 'Theory of Truth': 'Man is an animal like other animals, wants food and success and women, not truth' (*CP2* : 608). Those watchful eyes witness as well the country's pursuit of desire behind all these activities, indifferent to the death of innocent souls. The affective implications during war impact the victims rather than the violent oppressors.

The lines that follow shift the poem from addressing the oppressors to the description of the woman as a victim. Levertov presents the visual description of a woman who has lost her children:

She is not old,
she whose eyes
know you.
she will outlast you.
she saw
her five young children
writhe and die;

in that hour
she began to watch you,
she whose eyes are open forever. (*CP* , 268)

The reference to the age of the woman ('she is not old') indicates a life that is not lived, a dream of motherhood that is not fulfilled, and a peace that is obstructed. Her eyes are depicted as a medium of knowledge and awareness. The emotional weight seems so profound as she witnessed the death of her five young children. Levertov describes this event of the writhing and dying of the children as happening in a very condensed 'hour' of violence and terror. Not only this intensity of the experience lives with her forever, but also the loss accompanies her forever as the last two lines of the poem describe her eyes as 'open forever.' The open eyes, burned without lids, serve as a lasting reminder of violence and confrontation with destiny. In addressing the soldiers, Levertov condemns the ethical failure and discrepancy between the woman's struggle and the soldiers' lifestyle. Although struggle jostles within the woman, Levertov seems to speak up for what the Vietnamese woman fails to say.

'The Seeing' is the second part of 'Two Variations' which includes 'Enquiry' as the first. While 'Enquiry' sets the scene of loss, mourning, and eternal perception, 'The Seeing' introduces physical attempts to avoid negative emotions. The poem also conveys a confrontation with the aftermath of an intensive cruelty at war through a deep examination of faces, breasts, and flesh. In response to the loss of eyes' lids, the woman seeks other alternatives for visual obstruction. The lids that are burned in 'Enquiry' prevent the speaker from the ability to close her eyes, suggesting that people now see everything, perceive, and judge. 'The Seeing' presents the inevitability of watching the violence whose affective impact the speaker tries to evade through the interference of muscle movement in 'Hands

over my eyes.’ However, this avoidance develops gradually into a powerful confrontation with the scene. The enclosure of eyes is indicative of the role of war poetry, which symbolizes the exposure of cruelty and attempts similarly to obstruct ongoing violence. The poetics of war not only serve as a therapeutic expression but also a political duty. In her 1972 essay ‘The Poet In the World,’ Levertov explains ‘The poet does not *use* poetry, but is at the service of poetry. To *use* it is to *misuse* it.’²⁵ In the time of avoidance at the beginning of the poem, Levertov describes the little that can be perceived amid the scene of war: ‘I see / blood and the little bones; / or when a blanket covers / the sockets I see the / weave’ (*CP*, 268). These lines register the first instances of perceiving a violent scene of the killing during the war. Even if these violent images are hidden or covered under ‘a blanket,’ the speaker’s vision seems to transcend the barriers consciously constructed for avoidance.

The poem also registers a temporal transition from the intensity of the war to the calmness to the aftermath of her injury during the night when her vision gets weaker as ‘the glare softens’ (*CP*, 268). The transition of perception from within the scene to the aftermath of the war that impacts the place’s identity gives the speaker time for the affective reaction to emerge and consequently more ‘power’ to perceive the scene (*CP*, 268). It is a stepping out from inside to outside, in the manner of Jeffers’s contact with nature, which allows for a reflection on past and present, and on city and landscape:

But I have power now
to see there is only gray
on gray, the sleepers, the

25 Denise Levertov, ‘The Poet in the World’, in *The Poet in the World* (New Directions Books, 1973), pp. 107-116, p. 115.

alter. I see the living
and the dead; the dead are
as if alive, the mouth of
my youngest son pulls my
breast, but there is no milk, he
is a ghost; through his flesh
I see the dying of those
said to be alive, they
eat rice and speak to me but
I see dull death in them. (*CP*, 268)

In this unavoidable perception by the speaker, her vision turns to a more objective view of scattered physical manifestations of decay. 'But' signals a transition from visual avoidance to a visual examination of the scene. 'Now,' she can view the scene in clear terms despite the post-war scene greyness. Levertov juxtaposes death and life as she perceives signs of life manifested in their open eyes. Their silence thus has liveliness and power to speak through their frozen faces as 'the dead are / as if alive.' Furthermore, she witnesses the subtle signs of life's gradual decay of as 'there is no milk' in her 'breast.' Her vision extends beyond physical examination, delving into their affective state. She scrutinizes the evidence of decline in the child's 'flesh.' Levertov's portrayal of nutritional deficiency and bodily deterioration is further emphasized by the notion of 'dull death.' Despite witnessing others partake in life-sustaining activities, she discerns death within them. In the juxtaposition of death and life in the same person, she does not trace the physical conditions but rather the mental and affective states.

In this scene of mixed chaos and avoidance and struggle, a clearer perception of violence emerges. The end of the poem registers a renewal of violence and destruction

amid the scene of unresolved affective expression and decaying hope ‘in the unclouded sky, / a human hand, release / wet fire.’ The ‘fire’ which is metaphorically compared to ‘rain’ implies that although it has a destructive power, it possesses the power of awakening ‘the rain that gave / my eyes their vigilance.’ The ‘wet fire’ thus transcends the speaker’s perception from various attempts of avoidance of affective breakdown by herself and by others to an acknowledgment of the reality of the scene. This moment of awakening embodies her concept of war poetry as shocking in its power to awaken. The vision through which Levertov perceives these different layers echoes the poetic vision that she refers to in ‘Advent 1966.’ It is this strong, sharp, and internal vision that transcends blindness, sensory perception, and temporal limits.

These two poems ‘Enquiry’ and ‘The Seeing’ can be read together as double poems of the same kind as Jeffers’s ‘Inscription on a Gravestone.’ In ‘Enquiry,’ the woman who has been affected by the napalm is still alive and suffering the burning off of her eye-lids. On the other hand, the woman in ‘The Seeing’ is witnessing the scene of war through stages of avoidance and confrontation. Although the poem examines a perplexity of life and death, it suggests the ghostly presence of the dead that persistently reminds us of cruelty. It is the shadow that is being reflected in Levertov’s poetry for a persistent duty of political awareness against human injustices. These two poems of ‘Two Variations’ document incidents of loss, struggle, and death. With ‘Weeping Woman,’ these two poems present the disfigurement of women caused by napalm in Vietnam and subsequent emotional astonishment, avoidance, and then unavoidable confrontation. Although ‘Weeping Woman’ was published later in 1975, it still vividly captures the enduring and unforgettable impact

of war. Together they explain processes of avoidance and create a possible unified picture of women's disfigurement in war.

Injustices in war not only cause losses that have physical and affective impacts on women which they struggle to avoid through closure. Levertov conveys how people in the aftermath of war carry the weight even in their attempt to substitute their pain through engaging in social ceremonies and everyday acts as in 'Tenebrae' or in losing the ability to feel for others as in 'Biafra.' War has deprived people of the ability to live and enjoy a normal life. 'Tenebrae' from *To Stay Alive* describes people proceeding with daily activities to substitute and numb the memory of war. 'Biafra' from *Relearning the Alphabet* (1970) registers the horror and loss observed through photographs of Vietnamese that exhausts people's compassion to connect with the suffering in Biafra. In substituting previous memories and evading new ones, both poems suggest that there is no room to carry more scenes of violence in the mind.

Levertov's 'Tenebrae' describes a scene distant from a war that nevertheless has a persistent impact on people, indicating the connectedness between people from different places. It also registers the act of material consumption and social activities that have both psychic significance and moral indication which are central to Levertov's critique of dominion and injustices. In this busy and distant place, Levertov juxtaposes the discrepancy between appearance and reality, and between the physical and the emotional. The poem starts with a declaration of the intensity of a scene of war which people in a distant place could not absorb physically and emotionally. Rather, it has left them in solemnity or in a situation of lost joy or innocence. The poem indicates the impossibility of breaking the connection with the experience of war:

Heavy, heavy, heavy, hand and heart.
We are at war.
bitterly, bitterly at war.

And the buying and selling
buzzes at our heads. a swarm
of busy flies. a kind of innocence.

Gowns of gold sequins are fitted,
sharp-glinting. What harsh rustlings
of silver moiré there are,
to remind me of shrapnel splinters. (*CP* , 343-44)

The intensity is further emphasized through different poetic features. The repetition of the words ‘heavy’ and ‘bitterly’ implies an emotional weight on the first-person narrator ‘we’ or the collective perception. The alliteration of /h/ sound in the first line represents laboured breathing upon the things they supposedly seem to observe. Amid this description of the general atmosphere of war, the poem also reveals the persona’s condemnation of people’s material consumption and pursuit of life activities as a substitutional endeavor. However, it is suggested throughout the poem that this pursuit is never lived truly as they carry the burden with them in all activities. Or it could be that they are living their life but it is the speaker who is projecting her feelings onto the people and cannot help being reminded of war. The poem mediates between we and an implied you as an empathetic solidarity with otherness.

The poem acts as a reminder of the seemingly forgotten experience of war and an enclosure of the hidden emotional dynamics. It describes how the intensity of war reconfigures normal sensory perception and relational functions. The second stanza closely

probes the role of sensory engagement that attempts to shatter war memories. An additional auditory noise seems to add to the noise caused by war. It is a 'kind of innocence' that attempts to suppress listening to what Marten calls 'murmurs of conscience.'²⁶ The act of buying and selling is compared to 'a swarm / of busy flies.' This image extends by implication to the people involved in the buying and selling. However, the image takes a deeper dimension to hint at the war by calling to the mind flies buzzing around corpses. Although people being like 'busy flies' present 'a kind of innocence,' they add a mental accumulation to the lived war impact (*CP* , 343). Even the other sensory images like the visual beauty of clothes and metals – 'Gowns of gold sequins' – cannot fit the speaker's mental processes as they remind her of 'shrapnel splinters' (*CP* , 344). 'Harsh' and 'sharp' bear also negative connotations suggesting a mixture of joy and struggle. The impact of war is still alive within the speaker and perhaps other people who seem connected to war. War denies the individual and the collective experience of beauty and a rehearsal of liveliness with which they attempt to engage.

The fourth stanza also adds an emotional dimension to the events which the people engage with. Although they try to celebrate the joy in marriage celebrations, the poem presents the negative implications experienced:

And weddings are held in full solemnity
not of desire but of etiquette.
the nuptial pomp of starched lace;
a grim innocence.

²⁶ Harry Marten, *Understanding Denise Levertov*. ed. by Matthew J. Bruccoli, *Understanding Contemporary American Literature* (University of South Carolina Press, 1988), p. 115.

And picnic parties return from the beaches
burning with stored sun in the dusk;
children promised a TV show when they get home
fall asleep in the backs of a million station wagons,
sand in their hair, the sound of waves
quietly persistent at their ears.

They are not listening. (*CP*, 344)

Desire does not instigate these ceremonies but rather ‘etiquette.’ Like the description of the second stanza’s activities, the weddings are described as ‘a grim innocence.’ This grimness is already implied in the image of buzzing flies but is stated here as it is less obvious in the ‘starched lace.’ The recurrence of the word ‘innocence’ in the poem is significant. The act of buying and selling in the first stanza is perceived as a ‘kind of innocence’ as it suggests normality. However, the lace suggests the beginning of new married life that implies grim innocence. In this image, Levertov highlights the injustice of experiencing joy and love while others live in struggle and destruction. This idea echoes the love which keeps silence in her poem ‘The Shadow.’ Although there is a reference to a new life, the poem highlights the forced attempts by the people to surpass the affective consequences of war and the environmental impact of noise. These actions are undertaken by design to substitute their expression of sadness despite the suggested failure to enact real joy. In Levertov’s words, these attempts are mere ‘solemnity’ and ‘grim innocence.’

Moreover, the fifth stanza describes people’s tiredness upon the ‘return’ from ‘picnic parties.’ Thus, the children who are ‘promised a TV show when they get home,’ lose their energy while journeying home and ‘fall asleep’ with ‘sand in their hair.’ They also lose their ability to hear well due to ‘the sound of waves / quietly persistent at their ears.’ These images, which are set in ‘picnic parties’ of supposed joy, echo in the speaker’s mind a post-

war scene of tiredness and loss of sensory perception. Although these activities seem to engage them away from the overwhelming experience of war that is buzzing in their senses, excessive employment of activities wears them out and drains their senses. The 'waves' that fill their ears create a noise that drowns out the war. The poem suggests that the sound of waves acts as a lullaby that calms them down into sleep as 'They are not listening.' Although the adults carry the war experience and try to hold the sound of war at bay, children are unaware of it.

The mental images of war which are being carried through their daily activities also require mental defence mechanisms during the night. Night acts as a time of quietness and emotional exposure which they try to shatter through dream and work instead:

 Their parents at night
 dream and forget their dreams.
 They wake in the dark
 and make plans. Their sequin plans
 glitter into tomorrow.
 They buy, they sell.

 They fill freezers with food.
 Neon signs flash their intentions
 into the years ahead.

 And at their ears the sound
 of the war. They are
 not listening, not listening. (*CP* , 344)

Levertov employs dreams to depict how she perceives people mentally escaping from reality. Although these parties ended at dusk, their dreams are employed by them as

defense mechanisms to evade the reality of war. The night which holds the serenity and quietness for rest and rejuvenation turns into a confrontation as they ‘forget their dreams.’ The weight seems to overpower their dreams and engage in the cognitive activity of making ‘plans’ that ‘glitter into tomorrow.’ The poem also suggests that the subconscious burden of the war may surface in their dreams only to be forgotten. Levertov describes a cyclic pattern of life going on at questionable speed akin to that in Jeffers’s poems of the city. They try to renew daily life with activities that imply process and development that move the cycle of life ‘they buy, they sell. / They fill freezers with food.’ Their persistence in engagement is indicated in the desperate hope as ‘Neon signs flash their intentions / into the years ahead.’

Thus, all these various social activities and celebrations are attempts of distracting thoughts of war left on them. Their behavior seems obsessive, even frenetic, in their urge to spend and consume and to display that consumption which distracts America from the moral significance of war. Although the whole context is dark as suggested in the title, people try to enforce light through ‘sequins’ which are ‘glittering’ and ‘Neon signs.’ However, despite these efforts, the poem emphasizes at the end the still-lived impact on the senses. People are perceived as devoid of normal sensory perception despite their various attempts of substituting their emotional weight with other activities ‘And at their ears the sound / of the war. They are / not listening, not listening.’ The sound of ‘waves’ that is ‘persistent at their ears’ fails to overcome the sound of war where ‘They are / not listening, not listening.’ This refrain highlights the speaker’s despair observing the emotional numbness they wish to maintain.

Similar to this observation of the scenes of despair in 'Tenebrae,' 'Biafra' examines the connectedness between two different scenes through photographs. Biafra was a civil war fought in Nigeria from 1967 to 1970 between Nigeria and the breakaway Republic of Biafra. Through this visual examination of 'napalmed children' who are dying, Levertov indicates that, as outsiders to Vietnamese society, Americans have only a 'small stock of compassion' on which to draw when thinking of and recognizing the victimized in Biafra. The poem investigates the emotional dynamics felt by observers of these photos, contrasting the protestors' reaction to the violence in both Biafra and Vietnam. The Vietnam War has numbed people from engaging in further compassion. Levertov alludes to America's imperialism and the continuous struggle it causes to people:

Biafra. Biafra. Biafra.
Small stock of compassion
grown in us by the imagination
(when we would let it) and by
photos of napalmed children and by
the voice of Thich Nhat Hanh
has expended itself, saying
Vietnam, Vietnam: trying
to end that war. (*CP*, 282)

The repetition of 'Biafra' indicates confusion and an urgency towards expression. The first medium through which people sympathize with Vietnamese is through the mental connection of imagination. The poem suggests that this compassion grows only in those who allow the flow of imagination to participate in recognizing the violence. Looking at the photos as well instigates a feeling of compassion for those people. Furthermore, people's compassion also grows with the voice of 'Thich Nhat Hanh' who is a spiritual

leader and peace activist. His words are significant as a leader highlighting that Americans lack compassion towards Biafra due to their own involvement in Vietnam. The persona and people associated with Nhat attempt to end the war uttering ‘Vietnam, Vietnam’ as a warning.

In the last few lines of part one of the poem, Levertov starts to examine closely the representation of violence through these photos and their impacts on spectators, highlighting the connectedness between two different cultural groups. Unlike previous poems that examine Vietnamese emotions, ‘Biafra’ probes into the emotions of observers of distant Vietnam. This creates an affinity between them and a solidarity that defies geographical and political divides:

Now we look sluggishly
at photos of children dying in Biafra: dully
accumulate overdue statistics: Massacre
of the Ibos: Do nothing: The poisoning
called ‘getting used to’
has taken place: we are
the deads: no room
for love in us: what’s left over
changes to bile, brims over: stain on the cushion:
And the news from Biafra (doesn’t make the headlines,
not in today’s paper at all)
doesn’t even get in past our eyes. (CP , 282-283)

She highlights several war injustices that are depleting the spectators of the photos. Allen Marshall explains that the political events such as the Vietnam War, seemed to ‘drain the

world of its aura of rich immanence.’²⁷ The continuous exposure to photos of Vietnamese instigates dullness, hopelessness, and apathy when looking ‘at photos of children dying in Biafra.’ The ‘overdue statistics’ of dead children and the inevitable passivity change the observers into ‘deads’ akin to the ‘dull death’ in ‘The Seeing’ (*CP*, 268). She declares the absence of liveliness and the inability to feel love due to the exposure to war scenes. However, this does not indicate a desire for detachment from the scene but rather an unresolved affective response.

Lisa Narbeshuber’s analysis helps us understand the structure of the poem. She explains that in Levertov’s ‘poetry, phenomenological analysis of boredom, dullness, stasis, isolation, and so on helps locate the origins of the poet’s psychic state, feeling out the reverberations.’²⁸ This apathy is a means of identification and connection with the victimized in war. Her response to this observation in the poem seems to be written in scattered phrases divided by a colon. This impairment is mediated through Levertov’s fragmented lines. Narbeshuber explains that ‘the fragmented lines in Levertov’s poetry indicate an abjure to idealism.’²⁹ She asks:

‘What is the nature of the alogical pauses the linebreak records? If readers will think of their own speech, or their silent inner monologue, when describing thoughts, feelings, perceptions, scenes or events, they will recognize, I think, that they frequently hesitate—albeit very briefly—as if with an unspoken question,—a “what?” or a “who?” or a “how?”’³⁰

27 Alan Marshall, ‘“Different Trains”: Denise Levertov, Adolf Eichmann and Moral Blindness’, *Cambridge Quarterly*, 46.4 (2017), pp. 344-63, p. 345.

28 Lisa Narbeshuber, ‘Relearning Denise Levertov’s Alphabet: War, Flesh, and the Intimacy of Otherness’, *Canadian Review of American Studies*, 36.2 (2006), pp. 131-47, p. 145.

29 Lisa Narbeshuber, ‘Relearning Denise Levertov’s Alphabet’, p. 138.

30 Lisa Narbeshuber, ‘Relearning Denise Levertov’s Alphabet’, p. 138.

In this, Levertov's poetry as Narbeshuber explains, 'listens to the surfaces but also demands a form capable of hearing the unspoken, whether the silence of the body or of the unconscious or of the conscious but withheld voice.'³¹ The fragmented structure indicates an inner unspoken monologue in describing events.³² Marshall sees the transitions and the gaps as an imitation of 'the jaded reader's restless eye.'³³ What they can see is only through the newspaper.

The poem journeys through the outer examination of the photos and the inner description of the connection that grows between Americans and the victimized. The photos instigate a continuous compassion and apathy that flickers in their memory years after. Though there is compassion, the 'poisoning / called "getting used to"' denies the power of their compassion to move them to action. This paradox informs Levertov's critique of the intensity of war. The emotional connection with the Vietnamese emphasizes Levertov's social and political consciousness against injustices. As the photo mediates between Levertov and the Vietnamese, the poem mediates to the readers the life at war. James Dougherty explains that in Levertov's poetry 'what was present was an audience in sympathy with her anger and her sense of helplessness, and responsive to her words; in print, this audience is present only through its apparent absence. The reader attends not as a participant but only as a spectator.'³⁴ Levertov's sensory presentation of media in her

31 Lisa Narbeshuber, 'Relearning Denise Levertov's Alphabet: War, Flesh, and the Intimacy of Otherness', *Canadian Review of American Studies*, 36.2 (2006), pp.131-47, p. 138.

32 Lisa Narbeshuber, 'Relearning Denise Levertov's Alphabet', p. 138.

33 Alan Marshall, 'Different Trains': Denise Levertov, Adolf Eichmann and Moral Blindness', *Cambridge Quarterly*, 46.4 (2017), pp. 344-63, p. 346.

34 James Dougherty, 'Presence, Silence, and the Holy in Denise Levertov's Poems', *Renascence*, 58.4 (2006), pp. 305-27, p. 315-316.

poetry helps to engage the reader in the scene. It is a medium of the presence of the readers in their absence.

Other poems describe how overwhelming violence not only causes psychological numbness for the victimized or people connected to them through substitution or lack of compassion but extends to poetic and verbal numbness as in 'Advent 1966' and 'Life at War' from *To Stay Alive*. Levertov's 'Advent 1966' is an indictment of the dynamics between violence and poetic expression. It echoes Southwell's religious poem 'The Burning Babe,' presenting the excessiveness of violence. The speaker's visual perception of violence during the Vietnam War impacts her vision which is essential to her poetic production. The recurrence of killings in the war has weighted the poet, triggered unconscious attempts at repression, and acceded to her poetic vision. This impact is presented in the form of a cause-and-effect relationship as the poem starts with 'Because' to directly signify the cause of her vision loss (*CP*, 342).

Because in Vietnam the vision of a Burning Babe
is multiplied, multiplied,

the flesh on fire
not Christ's, as Southwell saw it, prefiguring
the passion upon the Eve of Christmas,

but wholly human and repeated, repeated,
infant after infant, their names forgotten,
their sex unknown in the ashes,
set alight, flaming but not vanishing,
not vanishing as his vision lingering,

cinders upon the earth or living on
moaning and stinking in hospitals three abed. (*CP* , 342-343)

The poem describes the war atrocities that are manifested in ‘the vision of a Burning Babe.’ The image of burning is recurrent in Levertov’s poetry of the war as in ‘Two Variations.’ Levertov criticizes this process of burning as not being religious but rather ‘wholly human.’ Unlike Southwell’s poem, these babies do not vanish as the eye lingers. Her reference to Southwell’s poem ‘The Burning Babe’ is to contrast the theological conception of divine love in death to the worldly excessive violence in the Vietnam war. There is no divine or religious purpose in these killings.

This excessiveness towards expansion and victory is emphasized in the persistence of human repetition of the killings. The poem reinforces this persistence in the repetition of ‘multiplied,’ ‘repeated,’ and ‘infant.’ This violence combines innocent infants together and erases their identity and gender differences as ‘their names forgotten, their sex unknown in the ashes.’ Violence at war has changed the identity of the place and its people from a familiar to an alien. Fredric Jameson argues in ‘War and Representation,’ that war has the potential of causing ‘an utter transmogrification of the familiar into the alien, the *Heimlich* into the *unheimlich*, in which the home village—the known world, the real, and everyday—is transformed into a place of unimaginable horror.’³⁵ The violence is further emphasized when Levertov describes this process of dying as a very prolonged process. It escalates as the victims are ‘flaming but not vanishing, / not vanishing as his vision’ (*CP* , 343). Thus, this violent victimization does not end their lives but rather leaves them ‘lingering’ in the flames. Their presence becomes visually apparent in the ‘cinders upon the earth,’ indicating

³⁵ Fredric Jameson, ‘War and Representation’, *PMLA*, 124.5 (2009), p. 1538.

their gradual painful death. It is also apparent in their partial living as they are ‘living on / moaning and stinking in hospitals three abed’ which indicates their struggle to survive. This image also emphasizes the struggle to resuscitate their life amid few medical possibilities implying a scene of emergency and bewilderment.

After the visual perception of human violence that the poem presents in the first five stanzas signaling the cause of what will come, Levertov presents from the sixth stanza the impact of this ‘vision’ on her ‘strong sight’ (*CP*, 343). Though she does not belong within the scenes, the horror creates ‘a dizzying sense that the familiar is gone’ that reaches her poetic vision.³⁶ This in part indicates what Coplan calls an ‘emotive contagion’:³⁷

because of this my strong sight,
my clear caressive sight, my poet’s sight I was given
that it might stir me to song,
is blurred. (*CP*, 343)

Levertov refers to her poetic ability in the poem by three descriptions, ‘strong sight,’ ‘clear caressive sight,’ and ‘poet’s sight,’ which imply a sharp and close vision directed to both external and internal aspects. Małgorzata Poks emphasizes that ‘the caressive sight’ is ‘a tool of poetic exploration and has the power to penetrate to the inner form, or inner truth of all objects.’³⁸ However, the poem indicates in ‘the caressive sight’ a touching quality in the poet’s sight through which Levertov registers her interaction with the world and attempts to requalify poetry to connect the external and the internal. Levertov’s poetry is a

36 Ryan Hediger, ‘Uncanny Homesickness and War’, in *Affective Ecocriticism* ed. by Kyle Bladow and Jennifer Ladino (The University of Nebraska, 2018), pp. 155-74, p. 156.

37 Amy Coplan, ‘Empathic Engagement with Narrative Fictions’, *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 62 (2004), pp. 141-52, p. 144.

38 Małgorzata Poks, ‘The Poet’s “Caressive Sight”: Denise Levertov’s Transactions with Nature’, *Text Matters*, 1 (2011), pp. 145-52, p. 145-46.

result of the relationship between the self, language, and the world. Ed Block explains that ‘The result of that complex union is poetry, a congeries that constitutes a certain kind of reality and intimate transcendence.’³⁹ Although supposedly her vision gives inspiration and poetic expression as it ‘might stir’ her to ‘song,’ however, it becomes ‘blurred’ and lacks clarity.

Leverlov thus emphasizes the great impact human violence has left on not only ‘babes’ but also on her poetic vision. This impact is apparent in the discrepancy between the past vision that ‘was given’ and the present vision which ‘is blurred.’ Marshall emphasizes how Leverlov ‘attempts to counterbalance the blurring of her sight with the insistence of her voice’ through repetition (‘sight’), alliteration (‘Clear caressive;’ ‘stir... song’) or assonance (‘My’ / ‘sight.’)⁴⁰ The description is significant as it justifies her deep reflection later on her political voice in ‘Staying Alive.’ To signal this change in poetic vision, she describes ‘a cataract filming’ in her inner eyes that causes this obscurity and indistinctiveness. This description which refers to the internal processes connotes a bodily infliction that causes a progressive opaqueness to the vision:

There is a cataract filming over
my inner eyes. Or else a monstrous insect
has entered my head, and looks out
from my sockets with multiple vision,

seeing not the unique Holy Infant
burning sublimely, an imagination of redemption,
furnace in which souls are wrought into new life,
but, as off a beltline, more, more senseless figures aflame. (CP , 343)

39 Ed Block, ‘Poet, Word, and World: Reality and Transcendence in the Work of Denise Leverlov’, *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture*, 4.3 (2001), pp. 159-84, p. 159.

40 Alan Marshall, ‘Different Trains’: Denise Leverlov, Adolf Eichmann and Moral Blindness’, *Cambridge Quarterly*, 46.4 (2017), pp. 344-63, p. 346.

The repetition of the same image of the burning child leads to the formation of an insect-like eye. Not only are the killings multiplied but so are the visions which can perceive these killings. This multiplicity of vision is not employed to reconstruct the scene into a positive 'imagination of redemption' but rather to absorb the weight of violence as 'more, more senseless figures aflame.' Thus, the 'souls' that 'are wrought into new life' in Southwell's poem are contrasted with the flaming figures in Levertov's poem whose death is not a resurrection but rather the end of their lives. Although these two poems have the same Christmastime context, the cause and meaning of death is different.

This special visionary aid does not exist in reality – 'this insect (who is not there' – but it is a metaphor of the speaker's sharp vision, as is suggested by the line 'it is my own eyes do my seeing' (*CP* , 343). Here, the speaker denies the presence of another vision but her own which seems to be divided into multiple visions to seek balance. The violence the speaker recognizes through her vision 'will not permit' her 'to look elsewhere' emphasizing its excessive ethical weight on the speaker (*CP* , 343). This scene registers a moment of being appalled and a wrestling with human failure to change a senseless and catastrophic situation. Levertov seems to describe in the image of a 'beltline' a long industrial process, a production line of burning children. This process starts with the burning children who are 'not vanishing' and ends with 'more senseless figures aflame.' The increasing injustices are akin to the renewal of the intoxicating 'wet fire' in 'The Seeing' (*CP* , 268). The first description captures the intensity of the collective massacre that has been active in the process. The second description of the babes as 'senseless,' however, implies an extinguished hope and absolute death. It hints too at the senseless violence involved.

However, even if the speaker tries to distract her vision elsewhere, she sees a similar scene of struggle and awaiting violence.

or if I look, to see except dulled and unfocused
the delicate, firm, whole flesh of the still unburned. (*CP*, 343)

Thus, the apparent two scenes in front of her depict the impact of violence; one in which there is complete death and the other where there is dullness. In the first scene, there is active killing while in the second there is an inevitable surrender and anticipation of getting burnt. Levertov's use of the word 'delicate' is indicative of the innocence and the mutilation of life.

The poem contrasts interconnected spatial dimensions: the near versus the far, depicted through two scenes of violence, and the inner versus the outer, exploring visual perception and poetic vision. The first flaming in the first setting results in the 'dulled and unfocused' of 'the still unburned.' Similarly, visual perception results in the blurring of Levertov's poetic vision. The poem emphasizes that regardless of these multiple dimensions, there is a kind of unified connectedness that can sensibly comprehend the massive impact of violence on the collective experience. It is the same connectedness in 'Tenebrae' and 'Biafra' that unites the near and the far, the current and the past. The vision through which Levertov perceives the world is the poetic vision that is motivated by her deep empathetic sense of the world around her. In her essay 'The Poet in the World,' Levertov affirms this poetic vision:

The poet is being born. Blind, he nevertheless is aware of a new world around him, the walls of the womb are gone, something harsh enters his nose and mouth and lungs, and he uses it to call out to the world with what he finds is his voice, in a cry of anger, pathos, or is it pure announcement? - he has no tears as yet, much less laughter. And some other

harshness teases his eyes, premonition of sight, a promise
that begins at once to be fulfilled.⁴¹

Though born blind, it is the poet's sensory perception of the world that inspires his voice. However, although Levertov has 'strong sight,' 'clear caressive sight' and 'poet's sight,' these become lost with the intensity of violence. What remains for her is only the sense of sight to look at the world: 'it is my own eyes do my seeing.' This realistic vision is so disturbing like the 'insect' whose weight cannot be tolerated.

Levertov continues to connect between the inner and the outer worlds. The references to 'the insect' or entities that encode this existential weight on Levertov, as in 'Advent 1966,' are further emphasized in poems that capture the perceiver's internal mental and psychological processes. Levertov's 'Life at War' registers the internal impact of violence on the psyche and expression of people in the war scene. They endure this affective weight without any attempts to modify it through acts of suppression or substitution as in 'Tenebrae' or stasis as in 'Biafra' and 'Advent 1966.' 'Life at War' transcends the stasis and numbness into attempts to express the emotional weight through a kind of expression that seems to come after years of endurance. Levertov throughout the poem describes the struggling emotions as they turn into a rigid form by suppression 'caught in the chest' (*CP*, 340). There is a numbness of senses in them with the growing intensity of violence. The speaker starts the poem with the declaration that excessive violence desensitizes people who witness war as:

The disasters numb within us
caught in the chest, rolling
in the brain like pebbles. The feeling

41 Denise Levertov, 'The Poet in the World', in *The Poet in the World* (New Directions Books, 1973), pp. 107-116, p. 107

resembles lumps of raw dough

weighing down a child's stomach on baking day.

Or Rilke said it, 'My heart. . .

Could I say of it, it overflows

with bitterness . . . but no, as though

its contents were simply balled into

formless lumps, thus

do I carry it about.' (*CP*, 340)

Leverlov highlights the connection between the 'disasters' of the outside world and the inside world of the human body. What fosters this connection is the multi-sensory perception of war and her attention to detailed description which gives an in-depth examination of both internal and external aspects of the experience.

Leverlov's account of the connection implies an accumulation similar to Jeffers's thickening center of the city in 'Shine Perishing, Republic.' This, in part, indicates a persistent injustice that is growing into thickness, whether into a physical body or a psychological one. The speaker pictures the human body as an accumulation of these disasters. They are 'numb' within people, 'caught in the chest,' and 'rolling / in the brain' suggesting an affective experience that is not released. Instead, it is transformed into a more rigid form that grows in weight and pain. Leverlov metaphorically compares this endured 'feeling' to 'lumps of raw dough / weighing down a child's stomach on baking day.' The metaphor indicates human voraciousness, that is exemplified by 'raw dough,' is swallowed by the innocent child. The 'dough' is overwhelming to the child's sensitive stomach and is difficult to digest. Similarly, this inflicted weight is overwhelming to both the indigenous victims and the observer of violence. There is an innocence in the victimized in their

inability to carry the weight like the innocent child. Levertov vividly describes the inner manifestation of violence on people's psyche.

In the second stanza, Levertov reinforces this idea of the internal impact of disasters in quoting Rainer Maria Rilke's description of the intensity of his emotions that speak not through verbal expression but rather through a visible weight: 'My heart ... / Could I say of it, it overflows / with bitterness...' The poet, who typically expresses her emotions through words, is forced into shapelessness and formlessness within the body. The 'heart' whose contents are usually manifested in words or poems are now 'balled into / formless lumps' that the speaker carries. Levertov employs these metaphors of 'pebbles,' 'lumps of raw dough,' and 'formless lumps' to describe the impact of accumulated injustice on people's inner balance of emotions and expression. The extended exposure to violence injures people's minds and their physical health. Levertov addresses the toxicity of war that threatens people's health, stating: 'We have breathed the grits of it in, all our lives.' She emphasizes the pervasive nature of injustice 'as our lungs are pocked with it' (*CP*, 340). 'The same war' is seen as a perpetual state that Levertov relates early in 'The Shadow.' Its impact also extends to people's dreams and imagination which are two important components for the future progression as 'the mucous membrane of our dreams / [is] coated with it, the imagination filmed over with the gray filth of it' (*CP*, 340). Not only are the organs filled with the toxicity of war, but also the delicate aspects of the human mind, like memories and imagination, are 'filmed' with it.

Echoing Jeffers's 'Prescription of Painful Ends,' the poem replaces the experience of violence with the act of writing, 'burned human flesh / is smelling in Viet Nam as I write' (*CP*, 341). The poet seeks to transfer the burden of these realities through the medium of

poetry. It is not until the poem's conclusion that Levertov acknowledges her own writing process. The whole poem reflects the continuing injustices during war, bridging the gap between past and present. The poem captures the transition from enduring a prolonged struggle, which over time becomes like 'lumps of raw dough,' to finally finding a voice (*CP*, 340). This progression from a state of inarticulate endurance to articulate expression leads to a stark confrontation with the brutality of human conflict and a recognition of its true nature:

Yes, this is the knowledge that jostles for space
in our bodies along with all we
go on knowing of joy, of love;

our nerve filaments twitch with its presence
day and night,
nothing we say has not the husky phlegm of it in the saying,
nothing we do has the quickness, the sureness,
the deep intelligence living at peace would have. (*CP*, 341)

This internal conflict 'jostles for space' within individuals, challenging their inherent capacity for 'joy' and 'love.' The poem reflects on the discomfort that mirrors earlier sentiments of shame in 'The Shadow,' illustrating the challenge of harmonizing two contradictory ideas into the same 'space.' The acknowledgement of pervasive violence disrupts the natural human inclination to adapt, causing a constant agitation of the 'nerve filaments.' Moreover, this critical violent upheaval alters people's typical sensory responses as everything they say has 'the husky phlegm... in the saying.' This suggests that writing does not do the job to release the inner struggle. The expression is still withdrawn

and obstructed within people's throats. Levertov contrasts the impact of change with 'the quickness, the sureness, / the deep intelligence living at peace would have.'

Thus, the poem provides for the speaker a partial release of repressed affects after a long period of mental struggle perceiving violence and its impact on others. Levertov's discussion of the discrepancy between human words and deeds helps in this release. She encloses in the tenth stanza a hidden reality: 'Yes, this is the knowledge.' This acknowledgment underscores Levertov's deep connection not just with sight but with a broader spectrum of senses and emotions. The extended layer she investigates echoes her intimacy with the public. In Levertov's poetry, we do not encounter the visual description of the 'helpless' as in Jeffers's 'Shine, Perishing Republic' but we witness the multi-sensory description of the external scene and the internal self. This double investigation into the inner and outer manifestation of violence is crucial not only to describe the negative manifestation of violence but also to provide a model for integration between a person and her environment. It is through the medium of poetry that the speaker endeavors to bridge this divide between us and them. Unlike Jeffers who distances himself from the scene of human manipulation, Levertov positions herself close to the scene of violence.

Poems in this section reflect how war intensifies Levertov's discussion of injustice. She presents loss and physical disfigurement and describes the posthumous emotional connection with war injustices. The impact of war seems to be carried within the speaker and observers and results in numbness of their senses, which extends to Levertov's poetic vision. In all these poems, Levertov juxtaposes, in the manner of Jeffers, the connection between here and there, and between past and present. The long period of emotional failure as perceivers of violence was normal and necessary for Levertov to make sense of what

was going on. The internal dynamics of closure, substitution, and numbness are essential for the emotional weight to make an inner connection between the Vietnamese and Levertov. It is a powerful commentary on the need for mindful communication that bridges the gap between 'we' and 'they' and between absence and presence. This struggle paves the way towards a clear articulation of a political voice which is well grounded in experience fueled by her consciousness and concept of poetry.

Political Voice and Political Revolution:

Levertov's discussion of the devastating impacts of the Vietnam War on both the Vietnamese and the Americans develops from mere description into poetic confrontation and revolution. Her affective connection with the Vietnamese will hardly do 'justice' as William Major points out 'sympathy hardly does justice to the presence of the other within a self (or within the moral imagination).'⁴² Rather, she moves from the emotional description of war to political activism and revolution where she documents speech, dialogue, and conversations between characters through whom a collective political voice emerges. *To Stay Alive*, which belongs to Levertov's mid and later career, marks the start of her political activism and reflects her attitude to political violence. 'Staying Alive' from the collection shows the gradual emergence of her revolutionary voice and reflection on revolution as a concept. America's failure to respond to and redress its own violence instigates Levertov's revolution. This transition is depicted through many images that depict a flowing energy like pulse and rivers, which indicate a flow of obstructed emotions. During this transition, many dialogues and speeches indicate unity and expression,

42 William Major, 'Wendell Berry and the Affective Turn', in *Affective Ecocriticism: Emotion, Embodiment, Environment*, ed. by Kyle Bladow and Jennifer Ladino (The Board of Regents of The University of Nebraska, 2018). pp. 117-54, p. 121.

motivating others to participate in revolutionary action. Thus, unlike Jeffers's authoritative individual voice, which symbolizes a detached and prophetic vision, Levertov exemplifies the voice of a compassionate poet who engages directly with victimized people in America and Vietnam and documents their multiple voices. Where both poets use their poetry as a medium for social-political calls, Levertov's poetry represents different voices that share the same dilemma and affective experience.

'Staying Alive' is a poetic sequence of four parts, each preceded by an Entr'acte. Each part is also divided into multiple numbered poems that add to the overall idea of the poem. The sequence reflects the intensified action towards revolution. Its juxtaposition of both dramatic scenes and tranquil ones creates an effect of 'a collage— snapshots of action alternating with meditation, dream, and recollected tranquility.'⁴³ The poem registers her shift from the perception of death, as in earlier poems, to wrestling with death through revolution. It is different from poems of the sixties as she shifts as well from the scenes of violence in Vietnam to the protests in America against violence. Rodgers explains: 'There is a vitality in "To Stay Alive" that is intrinsic to Levertov's most successful poems. She is in the act of " doing, " and then of transmuting that energy into a dramatic work of art.'⁴⁴ The passive nature of her previous war poems shifts to active acts, showing independence and physical solidarity. It tracks the emergence of her anti-war voice with its reflection on America's violence. This voice comes after recognizing the impact of war on her poetic language and a period of struggle to articulate a political vision. Skeptical about the futile impact of passivity, beginning with part one, she starts to meditate on revolution as a

43 Audrey T. Rodgers, *Denise Levertov: The Poetry of Engagement* (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1993), p. 104.

44 Audrey T. Rodgers, *Denise Levertov: The Poetry of Engagement*, p. 104.

concept and reflect on its process. This attempt comes in part as a crucial need to reconstruct ethical and political values into ecological values of justice and solidarity. In this part of the chapter, I have chosen Part I, and Part II of the poem to present the emergence of her revolutionary voice. Furthermore, in poems such as ‘Revolutionary’ and ‘I Thirst,’ which make up section viii and section ix of Part II, Levertov presents an exchange of narratives across communities in which the collective voice motivates others.

Similar to the enforced silence and inability to speak in ‘Advent 1966,’ Levertov retains the impact of violence on language in the prologue to ‘Staying Alive.’ Several lines from the prologue of ‘Staying Alive’ describe the impact of human violence on language. The speaker laments its erosion ‘O language, virtue / of man, touchstone / worn down by what / gross friction . . .’ (*CP*, 345). Levertov, in these lines, reflects on the impact of war on the erosion of language and its intrinsic qualities of speech and expression. Levertov’s metaphor of language being ‘worn down’ like a stone surface speaks to the gradual loss of meaning and depth of communication when it is overshadowed by violence and conflict. She directly links the erosion to war violence ‘you are eroded as war erodes us’ (*CP*, 346). Both poems, ‘Advent 1966’ and this part from ‘Staying Alive’ mediate between the outer world of destruction and the inner world of expression. The erosion of poetic vision and language indicates a disruption between the outside and the inside.

From this erosion of language, Levertov starts to think of taking a political stance that departs from the depiction of violence and intimacy with the victimized to political activism. As stated earlier, the first and second parts of ‘Staying Alive’ register Levertov’s confusion about whether to accept death or start a revolution. It is one of the early poems that shows this inner hesitancy. The poem’s title suggests as Cary Nelson explains a

‘deliberately a more process-oriented version of the book's title, as if to warn us that no conclusive poetic victory can follow.’⁴⁵ The poem explores what Lorrie Smith describes as ‘the implications and complexities of this choice, deconstructing what first seems to be another absolute dichotomy.’⁴⁶ However, this hesitation does not mean reluctance but rather a transitory anxiety one feels in stepping from one position to another. Rodgers explains that ‘The confident assertion that characterized her earlier work is missing in *To Stay Alive* and is replaced by profound doubt and questioning.’⁴⁷ Part I of the poem starts with the question in which the speaker reflects on two options: revolution or death. In that reflection, she indicates that revolution is crucial in evading death:

Part I

(October '68-May '69)

i

Revolution or death. Revolution or death.

Wheels would sing it

but railroads are obsolete,

we are among the clouds, gliding, the roar

a toneless constant.

Which side are you on?

Revolution, of course. Death is Mayor Daley. (CP, 351)

Levertov compares the heading towards revolution to wheels that sing it and should revolve for continuation. She compares death to the toneless constant roaring of the airplane engine. The separation between clouds and the railroads indicates a contrast and a hesitation

45 Cary Nelson, 'Whitman in Vietnam: Poetry and History in Contemporary America', *The Massachusetts Review*, 16.1 (1975), pp. 55-71, p. 65.

46 Lorrie Smith, 'Songs of Experience: Denise Levertov's Political Poetry', *Contemporary Literature*, 27.2 (1986), pp. 213-32, p. 223.

47 Audrey T. Rodgers, *Denise Levertov: The Poetry of Engagement* (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1993), p. 49.

between revolution and death, while the ongoing reluctance between singing and roaring mirrors the inner struggle towards expression and revolution. Furthermore, she compared the hesitation to sailing the clouds which indicates an in-between position between the sky and the earth. In response to the inner voice which asks again what position she embraces, she chooses 'revolution', whereas death would be being like Mayor Daley, mayor of Chicago, who stands against the civil rights movement. Daley's hosting of the democratic National convention in 1968 was marred by violence between anti-war protestors and Chicago police despite his wish to end the war. Levertov alludes in this to the need for alignment in belief and action.

In explaining 'Staying Alive,' Smith explains that Levertov's 'meditations on death first seduce Levertov back to Whitman, Swinburne, and Keats, where dissolution and forgetfulness offer tempting relief and imitations of mystical transcendence to the agonized poet: "Death lovely, / whispering, / a drowsy numbness"'⁴⁸ However, the context of destruction in the Vietnam war necessitates a revolution, a choice that positively impacts life. On the 'night' in which she decides to choose revolution, aspects of 'laughter and pleasure' are not enclosed anymore (*CP*, 352). They are present in a wider context of 'life' that has the intention 'to live.' Levertov depicts in this dialogue the thirst of living as what existed before is only the 'unlived life / of which one can die' (*CP*, 352). This last line thus refers to the expectance of death as a norm and the absence of a lived life. However, what happens during the war is the unlived life where some are alive. It is a tormented life that persists as war and violence persist. Quoting the theologian Albert Schweitzer, Levertov

48 Lorrie Smith, 'Songs of Experience: Denise Levertov's Political Poetry', *Contemporary Literature*, 27.2 (1986), pp. 213-32, p. 224.

aims through revolution to highlight the need for a 'Life that / Wants to live' instead of a life that is not lived.

Moving from this reluctance, the speaker shifts in the following lines to convey her new innocent wishes of a tranquil life: 'I want the world to go on / unfolding' (*CP* , 352). Her passion for exploring life and revealing its splendor validates her transformative decision. It is a choice that will not only expose her to life but also make her mind clear. It is the need to experience a life that would replace the grayness with greenness, like her wish in 'The Shadow.' Furthermore, she engages visually with a picture of people that emits liveliness that the speaker wants to live in a world that reflects their values. She examines in the photo protesters Dennis Riordon, de Courcy Squire, David Worstell, and Chuck Matthei. She looks at them with admiration as models for liveliness: 'I want their world—in which they already live' (*CP* , 352). This lived life comes as a result of peace where 'they're not waiting for demolition and reconstruction' (*CP* , 352). All these images of a peaceful life and freedom of choice are what instigate her choice of revolution which she emphasizes: 'Of course I choose / revolution' (*CP* , 352). Photographs again are a medium for Levertov to examine scenes of both struggle and solidarity, of passivity and emerging hope, of injustice and counterpart vision of justice.

Despite this choice of revolution in the first section of part I, the speaker introduces in the sixth section the wrestling between her choice of revolution and the expression of that revolution:

I choose
revolution but my words
often already don't reach forward

into it—

...

My Diction marks me
untrue to my time;
change it, I'd be
untrue to myself.

I study
a face intently.

Learning

Beginning to learn. (*CP*, 356-357)

The transition from acceptance of destruction and death to revolution also necessitates a transition from personal poetry to poetry of political activism that comes after an act of 'passionate attention.' This transition affirms the 'pedagogical function' that Paul Lacey sees in Levertov's poetry.⁴⁹ This change will make her able to be both true to her feelings and true to her time. With this change, she is 'beginning to learn' after her diction and talent seem eroded by war. This new emergence of her poetic identity nourishes her as she passionately becomes attentive in learning. In witnessing this excitement, her inner self whispers this joy in the quoted lines from Keats's 'Ode to a Nightingale': *'Too happy in thy happiness/ love of living. That wants to live. Unlived life.'*

Despite this determination for revolution and acts of learning, the second part of 'Staying Alive' probes the difficulty of flowing smoothly in that direction. The first lines of part two illustrate this challenge:

Can't go further.
If there's to be a

49 Paul A. Lacey, 'Denise Levertov as a Teacher', *Renascence*, 58.1 (2005), pp. 90-107, p. 91.

second part, it's not
a going beyond, I'm
still here.

To dig down,
to re-examine. (*CP*, 360)

The speaker articulates this difficulty in spatial terms as 'it's not / a going beyond, I'm / still here.' In the above lines, she seems to be still contemplating the trajectory of her emerging identity. What she perceives in the past is still weighing her down. She needs time to reflect to ease the numbness that she refers to before in 'Life at War.' Time is essential to investigate the diminished depth of self and expression, which will lead her to examine the otherness, 'to dig down' in order 'to re-examine' all its aspects. The initial perception of war destruction, as in the poems of the first section of the chapter, leads to the astonishment and suppression to evade the struggle. However, within the context of her new decision of political activism, the experience of war is brought back with critique, and intention to transform. Since this reexamination will change the poetic identity, she also implies a reexamination of the power relations that will change the war environment into a sustainable relation of safety and recognition.

The lines that follow take a step further and investigate 'revolution' as a concept, defining its meaning and symbolic associations:

What is the revolution I'm driven
to name, to live in?—that now roars,
A toneless constant, now
sings itself?

It's in the air: no air
to breathe without
scent of it,
pervasive:
odor of snow,
Freshwater. (*CP*, 360)

The speaker engages with the nature of the revolution she aims at: 'now' signals a transition of states from apparent silence to both a roar of 'toneless constant' and singing. This image returns us to the in-betweenness she alludes to at the beginning of part I. However, the singing of the wheels and roaring of the airplane come to be here different expressions of the revolution, indicating that it becomes not a choice but a state that Levertov inhabits. Levertov compares revolution to an invisible 'scent' that spreads in the air.' Without it, life is denied as 'no air' can be breathed. Revolution is conducive to life and is linked to refreshing natural imagery. This scent does not exist in literal terms but seems to be a peculiar quality of this transitory place through which she is emerging. Despite this expansion in its nature, the engagement with revolution as a concept still implies the difficulty she encounters in the transition from silent passivity to loud activism. This indicates that revolution is not her active choice but rather the only alternative to death. The speaker seems to live in this in-between state between imagination and reality.

Levertov document a dialogue with Robert Duncan who 'reminds' her of revolution. The concept in these lines brings an explanation of revolution and how it goes:

Robert reminds me *revolution*
implies the circular: an exchange
of position, the high
brought low, the low

ascending, a revolving,
an endless rolling of the wheel. The wrong word.
We use the wrong word. A new life
isn't the old life in reverse, negative of the same photo.
But it's the only
word we have . . . (CP , 361).

The italicized word '*revolution*' acts in the dialogue as a call to awaken her from regression and to reinforce the concept in her mind. The poem indicates that revolution acts in a 'circular' movement in which there is an 'exchange / of positions.' This exchange echoes the historical cycles in Jeffers's poems and the torn hours of history in Levertov's 'Extravagant Time' in which she explains the excessiveness of historical change when 'The poles of silence tear this hour apart / from all the other hours in history' (CP , 29). Thus, cycles of decay need to be replaced by new cycles of prosperity through a revolution in which the 'low' ascends to a higher position. In that exchange, Levertov hints at the cyclic nature of history which turns into a circular movement as a 'wheel.' She aims to initiate new roles with which past roles are not reversed but rather created as 'a new life.' She acknowledges revolution as being a 'wrong word' in general terms as it connotes a cyclical nature. However, it is 'the only / word' they possess in this context. The metaphor of revolution as a word emphasizes that it needs to be uttered before it is enacted. Levertov aims to redefine the term 'revolution' beyond its etymological roots throughout the poem. Although the poem is prompted by the activism of others, it highlights the necessity of discussing the concept of revolution before acting. The necessity of formulating an abstract manifesto of a concept before acting is also emphasized later in her poem 'Making Peace' where poets need to create the imagination of peace before constructing it. Not only do these lines define it as a concept, but they register the process which needs to be undertaken.

In addition to this redefinition, Levertov incorporates accounts of the activities of some anti-war activists. The following lines of part two capture also this process of discussion and dialogue before the acting revolution. Chuck Matthei was one of the activists who resisted violence in the Vietnam War and was arrested for draft resistance in February 1969. Levertov alludes to words which Matthei wrote on the back of her poem for inspiration of non-violent protests to which Emmet Jarrett testifies.⁵⁰ In the following lines, she quotes Matthei's powerful words on the significance of unity and solidity for change and peace:

Then Chuck has written:

This is your only life—live it well!

No one man can bring about a social change—

But each man's life is a whole and necessary part of his society,

A necessary step in any change,

And a powerful example of the possibility of life

for others.

*Let all of our words and our actions speak the possibility of peace and
cooperation between men.*

Too long have we used the excuse:

*'I believe in peace, but that other man does not—when
he lays down his arms, then I will follow.'*

*Which of us deserves to wait to be the last good man
on earth; how long will we wait if all of us wait?*

⁵⁰ Emmett Jarrett, 'Remembering Chuck Matthei', *Witness Magazine* 2003, pp. 1-31, p. 14.

*Let each man begin a one-man revolution of peace and mutual aid—
so that there is at least that much peace . . . a beginning . . . (CP , 362-363)*

Levertov emphasizes in 'Origins of a Poem' that:

Man's vital need for communion, his humanity's being rooted in 'conversation,' is due to the fact that since living things, and parts of living things, atrophy if not exercised in their proper functions and since man does contain, among his living parts, the complementary dualities of Needer and Maker, he must engage them if they are not to deteriorate.⁵¹

In this explanation, she redefines that the exchange of speech is a prerequisite to the exchange of cycles from deterioration to prosperity. Despite this dialogue and exchange, the feeling of loss is clear in response to Chuck's urge for 'a beginning':

A beginning.
Where shall we
begin?
Can't go
Further. (CP , 363)

The speaker is still expressing her loss and the ambiguity of the road she is taking. She seems to be trapped in temporal boundaries. However, she quotes a line from Saurat's *Death and the Dreamer* which emphasizes the radiation of time rather than its sequence 'Time.../ is not a sequence, / as man's simplicity thinks, but radiates / out from a center' (CP , 363). Similarly, what is essential in revolution is not the beginning but rather the intrinsic radiation of purpose that 'radiates / out from a center' in every direction. This description of liveliness is compared to the 'living cells' which are likewise 'radiant' (CP , 363). Hence the second part engages with what constitutes revolution and the ambiguity of

51 Denise Levertov, 'Origins of a Poem', in *The Poet in the World* (New Directions Books, 1973), pp. 43-56, p. 49-50.

direction. This stage of abstract and oral discussion of the concept seems to lay the foundation and confidence of a new journey for examining and excavating identity. As Smith indicates, Levertov ‘transforms the choice between “Revolution or death” to the conjunction of two life-giving forces: “revolution” and “poetry”’.⁵²

These previous parts of ‘Staying Alive’ engage with Levertov’s internal dialogue about revolution. However, the ‘Entr’acte’ before Part III of ‘Staying Alive’ includes nine poems, two of which capture the transition of the concept of revolution from the individual to the collective experience. In ‘Revolutionary,’ Levertov illustrates the potential power of dialogue in collective empathy after an apparent period of lonely struggle and suppression of feelings. It is the first step to confronting reality instead of dissociation and emotional rupture. This power of dialogue is inspired by her student Richard Edelman, whom she acknowledges learning from and whose dialogues sharpen her concept of revolution.⁵³ She starts the poem with the impact of Edelman’s speech that opens new vistas for her:

When he said
‘Your struggle is my struggle’
a curtain was pushed away.

A curtain was pushed away revealing
an open window
and beyond that
an open country.
For the first time I knew it was actual. (CP , 373)

52 Lorrie Smith, 'Songs of Experience: Denise Levertov's Political Poetry', *Contemporary Literature*, 27.2 (1986), pp. 213-32, p. 225.

53 Donna Hollenberg, 'Revolution or Death' Living in the Movement (1966-1970)', in *A Poet's Revolution: The Life of Denise Levertov* (University of California Press, 2013), pp. 260-306.

The introductory statement ‘your struggle is my struggle’ expresses solidarity and psychic disclosure. Levertov compares suppression to a curtain behind which lies the enclosed self. However, with the person’s statement, the speaker describes that ‘a curtain was pushed away.’ On a personal level, there is a confrontation with reality and an expression of truth. The war experiences that are accumulated in the mind and denied by some through suppression are retained through expression. Smith points out that ‘collective activism releases the static polarization brought on by her earlier traumas.’⁵⁴ On a collective level, there is a sense of solidarity, empathy, and a recognition of the other’s struggle. What is perceived after this disclosure is a scene of ‘open country’ that the speaker seems to encounter for the first time.

The ‘open window’ is symbolic of a wider openness, the removal of boundaries, and a kind of integration with the outer world. In its juxtaposition of inner and outer worlds, this image attempts to integrate the individual self within a wider context of the outside world. Levertov’s images of positive life are drawn from the natural world, implying a need for integration with nature for healthy individuals and a healthy society. This integrity recalls the speaker’s need for greenness in Levertov’s ‘The Shadow.’ This mental landscape seems to bear traces to England where Levertov lived in her early life. The speech implies an initial step towards a revolution that will cross spatial boundaries and reconnect. However, the poem still registers a personal ambiguity for the speaker upon the encounter:

I was indoors still
but the air from fields
beyond me touched my face.

54 Lorrie Smith, ‘Songs of Experience: Denise Levertov’s Political Poetry’, *Contemporary Literature*, 27.2 (1986), pp. 213-32, p. 224.

It was a country
of hilly fields, of many
shadows and rivers.

The thick heavy dark
curtain had hidden
a world from me. (*CP*, 374)

The speaker remains confined to her space, indicating a division between her internal self and the external world. However, the 'air from fields' acts as a bridge between these contrasts. The touching element of the air seems to connect the speaker with openness, otherness, and freshness. The curtain, emblematic of separation, 'had hidden a world' from the speaker in which she now visually rejoices. The 'curtain of sorrow' encloses the speaker and also other people who are 'struggling to move' (*CP*, 374). The poem suggests that people with mutual struggles are crippled inside a room. It is a room of their inner fears, struggle, pain, and limitations. It is a room of darkness and shadow that denies light and clarity. The pushed curtain allows a change of direction from the inner to the outer world, from stillness to movement, and from darkness to light. This mutual movement motivates the speaker to have confidence in her decision 'where I too / will be moving, / not alone' as she achieves strength from solidarity (*CP*, 374).

Similar to 'Revolutionary' which extends revolution to a wider audience, 'I Thirst' relates the solidarity of revolutionary figures against silence. The poem highlights the strong determination of protesters against claims of silence. It presents a statement by the folk singer Judy Collins directed to revolutionary figures. Collins advocates a hippie sentiment which was a dominant cultural voice until this political moment. After her

statement, the poem captures their apparent disagreement with her view manifested in their silence. Levertov highlights also the outdatedness of Collins's view as politics becomes more radical. This moment of dialogue between these views shows the apparent struggle of attitudes they embrace in response to violence:

'We must *not* be angry, we must
L-O-O-O-V-E!' Judy Collins
bleats loud and long into the P.A. System,

but hardly anyone claps, and no one
shouts *Right On*.

That silence cheers me.

Judy, understand:
there comes a time when only anger
is love. (*CP*, 375)

Judy's advice to embrace love instead of revolution is futile. Despite her stress which appears in her pronunciation of the word and her loud voice, the motionless silence of the audience signals their disagreement. However, that moment emphasizes for the speaker a collaboration in which their silence indicates their refusal of Judy's claims of love and the need to continue in their angry revolution. Levertov's previous illustration of war in 'Biafra,' and 'Life at War' highlights the disconnection between war experience and the experience of love. Thus, the mutual agreement in 'Revolutionary' is contrasted with the disagreement in 'I Thirst.' The expression in 'Revolutionary' indicates openness, confidence, and disclosure of the gap while the silence in 'I Thirst' suggests distrust, refusal, and disagreement with the idea that love requires a disavowal of anger. These poems engage with revolution as a concept and present either dialogue that connects people

or the refusal of dialogue that divides them. The poem indicates that language is the medium for solidarity and change. Through dialogue and expression, liveliness emerges. It is an action for the dead 'who thirst to speak' in Levertov's 'Didactic Poem.' (CP, 266).

However, many of the acts of courage described in 'Staying Alive' are acts of passive resistance in the manner of self-reflections. After engaging with these concepts of pain versus pleasure, endurance versus intolerance, and passivity versus courage, other poems from other collections extend this revolutionary voice into action. 'The Distance' from *The Freeing of the Dust* emphasizes that life is manifested in expression and death in silence. It presents a narrative of collective revolutionary acts led by Levertov or people in the community. 'The Distance' departs from direct political critique with a more definite move beyond critique into activism, whereas 'Staying Alive' enacted a process of self-reflection that Levertov needed to go through to commit to a more revolutionary politics. The poem draws on Levertov's imprisonment in May 1971 due to her participation 'in the attempt by a coalition of antiwar groups to shut down the federal government.'⁵⁵ However, instead of emphasizing the discomfort of the prisoners, she 'focuses on the distance between their temporary inconvenience and the untenable situation of the Vietnamese, who manage to keep their spirits alive amid carnage and death' as Hollenberg relates.⁵⁶ The poem juxtaposes Vietnamese resistance and American anti-war activism. It highlights the transition they fulfill with persistence from passivity to activism, from which the concept of 'love' emerges (CP, 374). Once their experience is recognized by others, their revolution

55 Donna Hollenberg, "The Freeing of the Dust" the Revolution Hits Home (1970– 1974)', in *A Poet's Revolution: The Life of Denise Levertov* (University of California Press, 2013), pp. 307-336, p. 316.

56 Donna Hollenberg, "The Freeing of the Dust", p. 316.

turns struggles into singing and rejoicing. The previously unattainable feelings of happiness and love in a 'Life at War' now find room to be fully experienced.

The poem connects two different places: one 'in the road' where the revolutionary figures are resisting violence and another within the context of the aftermath of violence (*CP*, 460). Though the poem draws a physical division between these two places, it affirms at the end the emotional connection that unites them. Thus, the poem presents a contrast between 'we' and 'they,' and between 'here' and 'there.' It documents a series of different actions or events that happen and occur to the first-person narrator 'we.' Blocking the 'traffic,' being carried to 'jail,' waiting and singing, resisting 'the standard prison liverwurst sandwiches,' and fearing are chronological events that show a linear movement and progression toward a goal done by revolutionary figures (*CP*, 460). At the same time, there are references to Vietnam where others 'are strewn in the roads,' 'the torn-off legs and arms of the living,' 'stifle... their cries of agony,' and 'eat a few grains of rice' (*CP*, 460). This contrast shows the free will versus the deprived will of the victimized in Vietnam.

Thus, while people of the first group are passing through different places and doing different things, the victimized are crippled in the same place where the action is acted upon them. This contrast underscores the discrepancy between the life of the counter-culture and life in Vietnam. It is a scene of sheer injustice, astonishment, and struggle. The subsequent lines also reflect the divergence in these societies, not just in their deeds but in their emotions:

And while we fear
for the end of earth-life, even though we sing
and rejoice in each other's beauty and comradeship,

over there they mourn
the dead and mutilated each has seen. (*CP* , 460)

The revolution which is carried out with a mixture of happiness for union and fear of the destruction of earth is contrasted with the grief of people who are mourning ‘the dead and mutilated.’ They do not possess the luxury to sing or to rejoice amid their misery. However, their desperate static situation has a turning point when they perceive others resisting violence and demanding peace for the victims. Levertov envisions the relationship between the two scenes through a sensory connection:

They have seen and seen and heard and heard
all that we will ourselves with such effort to imagine,
to summon into the understanding...

And they too sing.

They too rejoice
in each other’s beauty and comradeship:

they sing and fight. I see their spirits
visible, crowns of fire-thorn
flicker over their heads. (*CP* , 460-461)

Through remote visual and auditory perception, Levertov imagines the Vietnamese’ recognition of the activists’ solidarity with them. They recognize that others engage with them and have an understanding of their situation. The repetition of ‘seen’ and ‘heard’ emphasizes their keen interest and need for solidarity. The Vietnamese are experiencing revolution through armed struggle, a revolution which the activists are willing to imagine. As they ‘sing,’ ‘rejoice,’ and ‘fight,’ together, they reveal an enflaming spirit. Their collective solidarity enflames their spirits, which Levertov compares to ‘crowns of fire-thorn’ that ‘flicker over their head.’ This metaphor suggests bravery and purpose. It also

alludes to the Crown of Thorns worn by Jesus during the Crucifixion, indicating sacrifice and courage for a collective purpose.

Leverlov highlights in the poem the collective force of the alliance of antiwar groups that not only moves but inspires others even from a distance. Singing and rejoicing the resistance changes the grief into happiness. Furthermore, by drawing parallels between revolution and poetry, the poem underscores the instructive quality of poetry that educates and uplifts others. Despite the effective portrayal of revolution and inspiration, the speaker conveys towards the poem's conclusion that it is a new experience:

Our steps toward struggle
are like the first tottering of infant feet.
Could we,
 if life lasts
 find in ourselves
that steady courage, win
such flame-crowns? (*CP*, 461)

Leverlov draws an analogy between the new experience of revolution and an 'infant' who is 'first tottering.' 'Tottering' denotes the unbalanced and novice attempts to walk. Leverlov not only dedicates time to grasping the concept of revolution in her earlier works, but she also recognizes that it's not an isolated event. She proposes a link between persistence and revolution. With multiple acts of revolution, the infant-like tottering of resistance will develop into the more experienced acts of 'steady courage' of the Vietnamese. Persistent acts of resisting fueled by 'courage' will pay off, and they will 'win such flame-crowns.' This flame acts as a counter-resistance to the burning of the vulnerable in her early poetry.

Lacking the ‘flame-crowns’ suggests that the victimized far preceded them in courage and moral victory. However, they are just heading toward this road of courage and morality.

The journey Levertov undertakes from the inner struggle with violent scenes and diminishing of poetic vision to the at once self- and collective reflection of revolution is never depicted as an easy experience. The first instances of ‘Staying Alive’ is questioning of revolution or death declare the justification of the battle she chose to fight for. If Levertov’s political poetry is not an aim in itself, her political revolution against imperialism is not a choice either. Her revolution is a response to an existing injustice that cannot be evaded by suppression, acceptance of death, or the silence of the activist’s voice. It aims to shrink the spreading of violence elsewhere:

Violence breeds more violence and is never a solution even when it temporarily seems to be. Violence of this magnitude, even if the ultimate holocaust it is swiftly leading to is averted—i.e., if we at least stop in time to avoid a still larger war—promises of a dreadful future for America, full of people tortured and distorted with the knowledge (conscious or unconscious) of what we have done.⁵⁷

‘Staying Alive’ depicts this urgency for a political voice amid the dilemma of injustice, struggle, and disconnection. Smith emphasizes the link between revolution and liberation: ‘Revolutionary transformation involves trial by fire and violence, but these are seen as temporary, cathartic stages of progressive political action, and Levertov welcomes them as active counterforces to numb immobility.’⁵⁸ Levertov’s political voice is fueled by her

57 Denise Levertov, ‘From ‘Writers Take Sides on Vietnam,’ 1966’, in *The Poet in the World* (New Directions Books, 1973), pp. 119-20, p. 119.

58 Lorrie Smith, ‘Songs of Experience: Denise Levertov’s Political Poetry’, *Contemporary Literature*, 27.2 (1986), pp. 213-32, p. 225.

ecological consciousness that aims to connect two different geographical locations and by her poetic concept that requires a similar connection between the poet and experience.

Skepticism, Critique, and the Proposition of Peace

Leverlov's reflection on revolution as a concept in 'Staying Alive' prepares her voice to articulate a deeper confident analysis and diagnosis of human injustices against which she protests. The evolution of her political consciousness after a period of self-reflection seems to turn the war experience from description to critique, and from passivity to activism. Leverlov shifts from her engagement with revolution to engaging with a broader skepticism and critique of human violence. The discussion of the tangible impacts of war in the previous poems turns into a larger contemplation of the abstract causes of violence. This section will probe the notion of dualism, which I addressed at the start of the chapter as a catalyst for violence. The dichotomy, which assumes the significance of reason and man over other existing entities, is critiqued by Leverlov in different poems during her career. She underscores the link between human misapplication of rationality and destructive violent acts. In these poems, which were written after America's withdrawal from Vietnam in 1973, she critiques human reason and proposes alternatives for revolution. 'The Pilots' and 'May Our Hands Lose their Cunning' from *The Freeing of the Dust* attribute destructive violence to human intelligence. Leverlov instead advocates moderation for human reasoning as a gateway toward peace.

'The Pilots' reflects on the nature of pilots' obedience to authorities and understanding of their violence. This reflection comes after Leverlov's visit to the POWS compound in Hanoi where she meets the prisoners whom she emphasizes their health, the cleanliness

and utility of their camps, and the kindness by which they were treated. Seeing them as ‘victims of America,’ the poem centers on the pilots and juxtaposes two contrary concepts: knowledge and ignorance (*CP* , 462). At the beginning of the poem, Levertov depicts the pilots who are in charge of ‘bombs’ as ‘prisoners’ and lists justifications for the pilots’ own ignorance:

Because they were prisoners,
because they were polite and friendly and lonesome and homesick,
because they said Yes, they knew
 the names of the bombs they dropped
but didn’t say whether they understood what these bombs are
 designed to do
 to human flesh, and because
I didn’t ask them, being unable to decide
whether to ask would serve

any purpose other than cruelty. (*CP* , 462)

While the poem refers to the physical imprisonment they have endured, it also suggests a figurative mental confinement, as they are stripped of their individuality. They instead offer obedience to and implementation of superior orders. However, the poem assumes that the consequent violence implies ignorance of the nature of ‘bombs.’ It is true that they recognize the ‘names of the bombs’ but seem to lack further knowledge of their destructive impact on human lives and bodies. For all these reasons, she did not ask them the cruel question about their awareness of violence. Levertov thus presents the possibility of the pilots’ absence of reasoning as they seem to be rather distant from the warfare they engage in. Thus, the poem suggests either of two possibilities, knowledge and ignorance of the reasoning of warfare, and hopes the latter is right. Although the poem describes a visit to

prisoners of war, the concept of prison alludes to the fact of their entrapment within a broader anthropocentric society that wields power.

The following lines describe the mother of one of the ‘fellow prisoners’ who is likened to ‘Vietnamese women’ in their kindness. The poem implies that Levertov’s instinctive trust in Mrs. Brown tries to reject the pilots’ inheritance of violence from the previous generation, indicating their conscious misuse of reason or simply ignorance. These lines thus contrast the nature of humanity for Americans and others, and between the old generation and the young one. Due to this stunning implication, Levertov hopes that what motivates the pilots is ignorance rather than intention:

because of all these reasons I hope
they were truly as ignorant,
 as unawakened,
 as they seemed,

I hope their chances in life up to this point
have been poor,
I hope they can truly be considered
victims of the middle America they come from,
their American Legionnaire fathers, their macho high schools,
their dull skimmed Freshman English courses, (*CP*, 462)

These lines imply the need to see the soldiers as victims and the search for reasons why people act violently. They follow the reasoning of their American parental and institutional systems. Levertov's preference for their ignorance reflects her own desire for ignorance, too, wanting to see Mrs. Brown and the pilots are ignorant and, therefore, innocent. Levertov's repetition of 'I hope' these men are 'ignorant,' 'unawakened,' and 'victims' indicates that being ignorant would make them less morally culpable. Additionally, there

is an underlying acknowledgement of their deliberate knowledge and intent of violence which she tries to dismiss.

Despite her denial of their intention in violence, she starts to reflect on its possibility. The following lines reveal their intent more clearly and its potential impact on the speaker's relationship to Mrs. Brown. The speaker reflects on the alternative scenario where these men 'understand precisely' their actions and 'would do it again':

for if they did understand precisely
what they were doing, and did it anyway, and would do it again,

then I must learn to distrust

my own preference for trusting people,

then I must learn to question
my own preference for liking people,

then I must learn to keep
my hostility chained to me
so it won't leave me when I need it.

And if it is proved to me
that these men understood their acts,

how shall I ever again
be able to meet the eyes of Mrs. Brown? (*CP* , 462-463)

The speaker's anticipation of their awareness of violence marks a pivotal moment in her self-realization. Her former tendency to offer them justifications and confidence will transition to 'hostility' and distrust. Her initial response represents the naivety of what

pilots assume about themselves while, in truth, they understand their intentions. This indicates a kind of self-deception or denial of actual intentions that mirrors their own attitude not to know or ask the cruel question. The speaker seems to question her knowledge and requires a further confirmation and proof of their understanding. If this becomes true, her inability to look into Mrs. Brown's 'eyes' presents the avoidance of shattering hope she has for her son. The whole poem reflects on the pilots' awareness of the nature of their violence. However, she seems to allow a gradual realization of reality until she grasps the hostility. The delay in the direct critique suggests a denial of reality and a chance to grasp the idea of intention. Levertov's discussion of concepts such as revolution and critique unfolds gradually, in a manner that diverges from Jeffers's approach. Her hesitation and lack of clarity imply the fogginess in her personal and poetic vision as she is immersed in the political scenes. In contrast, Jeffers's absolute vision gains acuity through his detachment and prophecy. Thus, while it is essential for Levertov to undergo a process of self-reflection and moral choices, Jeffers seems to speak from a position of settled perception even if he sometimes troubles his own confidence.

The reluctance to recognize the pilots' actual intention and knowledge is taken further by Levertov in 'May Our Right Hands Lose Their Cunning' from the same collection. The poem reinforces the link between human smartness and aggression. Echoing 'The Pilots,' this connection draws attention to the misapplication of intellect or cleverness that leads to destruction instead of creation, as 'Smart bombs replace / dumb bombs' (*CP*, 464). Through a narrative of a man who is '40 years old,' Levertov highlights the contrast between two extremes: the 'dumb fellow' and the smart soldiers:

He
Knows nothing of man's devices,
may die without discovering that
he's dumb, and they
are smart, the killers. (*CP* , 464)

Through this juxtaposition, Levertov underscores the association between violence and knowledge, and innocence and dumbness. The poem captures Levertov's contemplation of the dichotomy between two notions: smartness, which she links to violence, and dumbness, which she observes in individuals dedicated to justice. Her illustration of the relationship is as an extreme that should be abandoned rather than embraced. This dichotomy is further accentuated by the allusion to a man's delayed literacy contrasted with the soldiers' rapid acquisition of it, as he 'slowly learned / what many learn fast.' The reference to the man also implies a refusal of this lack of knowledge although it is in his case unavoidable. Nonetheless, this is not an advocacy for using intelligence for destruction but rather a plea to comprehend the motives behind human behaviors and to foster a genuine understanding of the existing situation as a precursor to political engagement. Levertov condemns the inability to perceive violence suggesting a kind of impairment in the mind of the 'dumb fellow.'

The subsequent lines critique the soldiers' compliance with a higher authority. Their adherence to regulations appears to be a habit they grow with at school. Thus, this habit rationalizes their readiness to operate military equipment even without prior experience. The lines vividly depict how extreme violence seeks out realms of completeness, integrity, and vitality, only 'to fragment' them (*CP* , 465):

The smartest boys, obedient to all the rules, who never
aimed any flying objects across the classroom,

now are busy with finely calibrated equipment
fashioning spit-balls with needles in them,
that fly at the speed of light multiplied
around corners and into tunnels to arrive
directly at the dumb perfection of living targets,
icily into warm wholeness to fragment it. (*CP*, 465)

Leverlov's use of words such as 'boys' and 'classroom' indicates a sudden stepping into the context of war. While they never exhibited aggression in the classroom, they now manipulate complex 'equipment' designed for ruin and death. These 'spit-balls' are directed at both innocent living and wholeness. Leverlov's description of the equipment deliberately indicates the impossibility and, therefore, its fantasy to demonstrate the quick violence that ends people's lives. Leverlov describes the living as having a 'dumb perfection' as they are living peacefully and not attempting to misuse reason. Furthermore, she compares a life without violence to wholeness and by contrast a life of violence to a disintegrated life. The 'smartest boys' aim to fragment this 'warm wholeness' to a cold disintegration.

The poem's concluding lines transition from the boys to those who genuinely grasp the realities of war. This shift from unawareness to an awareness of the truth appears to force the speaker towards the smartness that she dreads. The poem seems to extend the argument of the previous poem in which the speaker is negotiating the pilots' knowledge of their crime. If the previous poem considers the possibilities, this poem clearly states their intentional understanding:

We who
know this
tremble
at our own comprehension.
Are we infected,

Viciously, being smart enough
to write down these matters,
scribes of the unspeakable?
We pray to retain
something round, blunt, soft, slow,
dull in us,
not to sharpen, not to be smart. (*CP* , 465)

Levertov seems to fear previously the recognition of knowledge of war. However, ‘the knowledge that jostles for space’ in ‘Life at War’ is now confronted with writing and expression (*CP* , 341). This abrupt epiphany causes her and others who possess this knowledge to ‘tremble.’ The confrontation with the brutality of war casts a kind of infection and viciousness. They start to wonder about their own complicity and relation to smartness. Their knowledge that smartness has led to the creation of weapons is smartness in itself as they start to trace its connection to violence. The transition from innocence to the vicious impact of smartness is highlighted in two examples: one in the smartest boys and the other in the speaker. However, their reaction is different. The ‘smartest boys’ give full obedience and do not question this viciousness. On the other hand, the people who write about reality are afraid that understanding takes them to the extreme.

Levertov pictures in the last four lines their fear and wish ‘not to sharpen, not to be smart.’ The poem contrasts between the sharp, pointed, straight and hard which they want to abandon in favor of the ‘round, blunt, soft, slow.’ This contrast distinctively describes the destructive and harmful impact of smartness. The speaker’s decision to remain ‘dull’ subtly conveys Levertov’s stance that the misapplication of intellect is a deliberate decision. However, the smartest boys refuse to act on their individuality and yield to conformity. The title of the poem is a biblical invocation against the exploitation of human talent for the devastation of Jerusalem. Similarly, the poem is a plea to abandon human

smartness in pursuit of life, integration, and wholeness. The poem expresses the wish to remain uninformed and not smart, yet it insists on documenting the unspeakable even as it claims to want to disavow that knowledge. In the process, it leaves the reader informed and unable, like the speaker, to relinquish that knowledge. This contradiction between not knowing and knowing lies at the heart of Levertov's responsible political role and attention to details that seek peace, integration, and people's safety.

The initial attempts towards political argument in the previous poems question revolution, ponder on actual acts, document dialogues, and critique human intellect. Being smart enough 'to write down these matters' illustrates Levertov's trajectory towards integrating poetry and political revolution. 'Goodbye to Tolerance' from *The Freeing of the Dust* advances the political argument and discusses Levertov's skepticism of the actual role of poetry during this time. Recognizing the failure of human reason and the power of revolution and language that turns struggle into happiness as in 'The Distance,' Levertov in 'Goodbye to Tolerance' emphasizes the role of poetry in acting this revolution by condemning poets for their silence. Her biographer Hollenberg explains that the terror-bombing in North Vietnam in 1972 'led Levertov to sever ties with some poets she had long considered friends.'⁵⁹ Since 1970, Hollenberg emphasize that Levertov 'had adopted a policy of refusing to participate in readings because she felt that something more than reading poetry as a form of protest needed to be done.'⁶⁰ In this period of her writing, Levertov extends revolution from an idea into a practice that should start with poets.

59 Donna Hollenberg, "'The Freeing of the Dust' the Revolution Hits Home (1970– 1974)", in *A Poet's Revolution: The Life of Denise Levertov* (University of California Press, 2013), pp. 307-336, p. 326-327.

60 The intensity of the Vietnam War continues to impact Levertov's views and relationship to other poets. Donna Hollenberg relates that in 1973, Levertov became critical of the Russian poet Joseph Brodsky's coming to America during a time of war and saw it as a political act.

Critiquing the content of poetry during her time, she finds poets in her time sacrificed authenticity for aesthetic poetry. The poem starts by addressing the poets:

Genial poets, pink-faced
earnest wits—
you have given the world
some choice morsels,
gobbets of language presented
as one presents T-bone steak
and Cherries Jubilee.
Goodbye, goodbye,
I don't care
if I never taste your fine food again,
neutral fellows, seers of every side.
Tolerance, what crimes
are committed in your name. (*CP*, 468)

Levertov metaphorically compares the poetry written by 'Genial poets' to food. This association emphasizes the pleasurable intake they provide for others and the nature of their poetry. The poem contrasts the language elements 'some choice morsels' and 'gobbets of language' with lavish dishes like 'T-bone steak' and 'Cherries Jubilee,' suggesting that the words are disconnected from reality. The subsequent lines reveal the poet's intention to challenge the convention of poets who fail to respond to political matters, choosing instead to break away from their silence. The rebellion depicted in the poem is dual: it is a stand against both the tangible violence inflicted by humans and the more insidious violence perpetuated through the poets' silence, neutrality, and upholding of privilege. The explicit intention in 'Goodbye, goodbye' captures the anger after an apparent period of endurance. Her apathy fuels this separation of interests: 'I don't care / if I never taste your fine food

again.’ She describes their indecisiveness to take a definite stand: ‘neutral fellows, seers of every side.’ This ambivalent stance allows for potential crimes to be ‘committed’ in the name of tolerance.

In the second stanza, the criticism is broadened to include not just poets but also ‘good women,’ whose act of donating blood is perceived by the narrator as a form of passive cowardice:

And you, good women, bakers of nicest bread,
blood donors. Your crumbs
choke me, I would not want
a drop of your blood in me, it is pumped
by weak hearts, perfect pulses that never
falter: irresponsible
to nightmare reality.

It is my brothers, my sisters,
whose blood spurts out and stops
forever
because you choose to believe it is not your business. (*CP*, 468-469)

Leverlov compares the drops of blood to food ‘crumbs’ that instead of nourishing the body with liveliness, ‘choke’ her. The speaker sees the drops of blood not as saving the injured but rather as obstacles in the ‘veins.’ A line later justifies this refusal to implement their help. This refusal is attached to the reality that the blood is ‘pumped / by weak hearts’ whose cowardice hinders them from responding to ‘nightmare reality.’ Thus, poets and donors exemplify human irresponsiveness to human violence and dying victims. This poem acts as a manifesto stating Leverlov’s rebellion against passive attitudes toward violence. Although the poem conveys bloody references during the war, Leverlov in this later attitude engages directly with a critique rather than a description of emotional or physical impacts. Leverlov attributes the spurting of blood and subsequent death to the poets’ and donors’

belief that 'it is not' their 'business.' The speaker takes their attitudes as a departure point repeating her determination to leave:

Goodbye, goodbye,
your poems
shut their little mouths,
your loaves grow moldy,
a gulf has split
 the ground between us,
and you won't wave, you're looking
another way.
We shan't meet again— (*CP*, 469)

The apparent difference in perspective between her and other poets is compared to 'a gulf' that has 'split / the ground' between them. Although there is an apparent separation, the poets are determined to proceed in their passivity 'looking / another way.' There is also a counter-determination by the speaker of not meeting their attitude: 'We shan't meet again.' This determination grows from Levertov's belief that poetry has a role in political action.

Despite the poetic separation, the speaker gives an exception suggesting a possible reunion:

Unless you leap it, leaving
behind you the cherished
worms of your dispassion,
your pallid ironies
your jovial, murderous,
wry-humored balanced judgment,
leap over, un-
balance? . . . then
how our fanatic tears
would flow and mingle
for joy . . .

January 1973 (CP, 469)

On the condition that these poets leave this attitude of 'dispassion,' manifested in their 'pallid ironies' and 'balanced judgment,' there will be an integration between them. The

poem registers the link between the unbalanced judgment and joy, indicating that peace in the context of war necessitates a reversal of expected poetic roles. The poem calls for a collective responsibility that everyone should act. Aesthetic and physical acts should all collaborate to condemn violence. The meeting point between existing poets and the political situation is through a letting go of aesthetic beauty and engagement with politics. In this reunion of goals, the speaker anticipates the overwhelming moment: ‘how our fanatic tears / would flow and mingle / for joy.’ The pauses within the last lines have a poetic significance to Levertov’s concept of experience. In her explanation of organic poetry which means recognition of what we perceive, Levertov explains the nature of pauses in poetry:

In organic poetry the metric movement, the measure, is the direct expression of the movement of perception. And the sounds, acting together with the measure, are a kind of extended onomatopoeia—i.e., they imitate not the sounds of an experience (which may well be soundless, or to which sounds contribute only accidentally)—but the feeling of an experience, its emotional tone, its texture.⁶¹

Sounds in Levertov’s poetry thus have the potential to convey both the experience and the emotions it carries. The movement of the lines is apparently clear in ‘Staying Alive’ as the poem registers a transition from witnessing injustice in war to political activism. This metric movement illustrates the concept of revolution as intensifying within Levertov, expressing itself as she sees it as a roar and ‘a toneless constant’ and manifesting in the metric freedom and movement between lines (*CP*, 360).

Levertov’s departure from other poets carries a contrary belief in the role of poetry in current events. Instead of her favor of ignorance and a state of forgetfulness as in ‘Pilots’

61 Denise Levertov, ‘Some Notes on Organic Form’, in *The Poet in the World* (New Directions Books, 1973), pp. 7-13, p. 11.

and ‘May Our Hand Lose Their Cunning,’ other poems highlight the necessity of confronting one’s consciousness through which a change will follow. Poems such as ‘Writing in the Dark,’ and ‘Making Peace’ from Levertov’s late collections of the 1980s highlight the power of a determined poetic responsibility that will bring hope and peace. ‘Writing in the Dark’ from *Candles from Babylon* (1982) captures the speaker’s dreams and night thoughts which she tries to write in the dark. The poem shifts from the critique of human brutality enacted by soldiers and excused by poets to advocating for writing as a means of instigating change. The poem insists on the necessity of documenting the existential weight that weighs heavily upon the poet. It explores the transformative power of emerging from darkness to light, from silence to writing, and from ‘unknowing’ to realization. The poem describes the process of writing itself and how it is essential to move into a situation of expressive openness. The speaker aims at expressing one’s personal feelings with careful attention to details. The process of writing demands a revelation of one’s deepest thoughts and feelings:

Never mind about crossing your t’s, dotting your i’s—
but take care not to cover
one word with the next. Practice will reveal
how one hand instinctively comes to the aid of the other
clear of the next.

Keep writing in the dark:
a record of the night, or
words that pulled you from depths of unknowing,
words that flew through your mind, strange birds
crying their urgency with human voices,

or opened
as flowers of a tree that blooms
only once in a lifetime:

words that may have the power

to make the sun rise again. (*CP*, 667-68)

Although this might take time, 'practice' will help the two hands in the crafting of the text. Levertov underscores the power of this practice which has the potential to illuminate private thoughts into the light and foster hope. It is a curtain that is pushed between a person's inner and outer worlds. There will not be an overlapping in expression but rather a clear output of existential reality. With practice, no accumulation of words could happen but rather an organized flow with 'each line / clear of the next.' In the poem, darkness, night, and unknowing symbolize the emotions and scenes which a person silently accumulates within himself.

The act of continuous writing helps in pulling the words from the 'depths of the unknowing' or unconsciousness to the light of knowing and consciousness. Those words or experiences which engage a space in the 'mind' are compared to 'strange birds' which cry for release. They are also compared to 'flowers of a tree' that are openly blooming 'once in a lifetime.' This scarcity of experience intensifies the need to exploit the opportunity for openness. Levertov underscores the potential of writing 'to make the sun rise again.' Writing serves as a transformative force that not only presents what is hidden but also gives hope and changes reality. She highlights the power of poetry in allowing the flow of the dark, hidden, and opaque affective experience into a brighter reality of openness, clarity, and hope. The absence of the sun and the presence of that light through writing implies that the thoughts that weary the speaker are of political relation. For the speaker, writing thus is the emblem of revolutionary change into a better future of justice and peace. Thus, the poem hints at the possible role of poetry and dreams in bringing about change.

Leverlov declares in her critique her independence from other poets who chose not to treat existing issues of the age. Her writing instead is the first step towards fostering hope for political transformation. If 'Writing in the Dark' elucidates the function of writing in documenting darkness, 'Making Peace' from *Breathing the Water* (1987) depicts the emergence of a sound from darkness declaring that the poets' role is the creating of the imagination of peace. Leverlov persisted in bearing the burden of her Vietnam War experiences, even after the conflict had ended, and remained dedicated to exploring possible means for achieving peace and maintaining her concept of organic poetry. Through poetry as a metaphor, it is necessary thus to reconstruct values of war and peace as one reconstructs 'the sentences of our lives' (*CP*, 757). Similar to Jeffers's 'Prescription of Painful Ends' in the previous chapter, Leverlov employs poetry not only as an expression but also as a healing power that changes the 'imagination of disaster' to give the 'imagination of peace.' The poem embarks on the speaker's perception of a voice from darkness that urges poets to write:

A voice from the dark called out,
 'The poets must give us
imagination of peace, to oust the intense, familiar
imagination of disaster. Peace, not only
the absence of war.' (*CP*, 757)

As in many of Leverlov's poems about darkness, darkness symbolizes a context of struggle, destruction, and death. One must construct peace as a way to bridge this historical darkness into a new context of reason, peace, and life. The poets are responsible for the creation of the imagination of peace to counterbalance the imagination of disaster as she states this in part two of 'Staying Alive' quoting the clergyman and activist A.J. Muste's words: 'THERE IS ONLY AS MUCH PEACE AS THERE ARE PEACEFUL PEOPLE' (*CP*, 362). The

poem echoes Levertov's attempt to create a journey of transformation in 'Relearn in the Alphabets' by moving from one letter to another as signposts of her journey to articulate change.

Levertov refers to this poetic responsibility in many of her poems and her essays. In her essay 'A Testament and Postscript 1959-1973', she expresses the wish for harmonious poetry 'I long for poems of an inner harmony in utter contrast to the chaos in which they exist.'⁶² This recognition of the need of harmony alludes to the Prologue of 'Staying Alive' where she explains the need for peace in time of war: 'peace as grandeur. Energy / serene and noble' (*CP*, 346) For the speaker, peace is not equal to 'absence of war' but rather has a philosophy of construction:

But peace, like a poem,
Is not there ahead of itself,
can't be imagined before it is made,
can't be known except
in the words of its making,
grammar of justice,
syntax of mutual aid. (*CP*, 757)

Thus, 'But' indicates a shift from abstract to practical creation of peace. Peace is not created only through imagination but it needs an extension of this imagination into a process of making. The process needs sensitivity of perception, a pause and denial of opposing values, and a restructuring of human actions until the emergence of the change. Levertov compares peace to the writing of a poem to show the mutual need for time and elements in its construction. The creation of a poem necessitates a construction of 'words,'

62 Denise Levertov, 'A Testament and Postscript 1959-1973', in *The Poet in the World* (New Directions Books, 1973), pp. 3-6, p. 3.

‘grammar,’ and ‘syntax.’ Similarly, the creating of peace needs a continuous practice of ‘justice’ and ‘mutual aid’ instead of injustice and separation.

Furthermore, Levertov expands in this extended metaphor of peace as a poem. Peace needs a sensitivity to sense a ‘rhythm’ in it. In this extended metaphor, she describes the gradual process of recognizing peace before acting it. Similar to the poet who needs to recognize the rhythm before beginning to construct the poem’s ‘metaphors,’ a person needs to sense peace before acting it:

A line of peace might appear
if we restructured the sentence our lives are making,
revoked its reaffirmation of profit and power,
questioned our needs, allowed
long pauses . . .
A cadence of peace might balance its weight
On that different fulcrum; peace, a presence,
An energy field more intense than war,
Might pulse then,
Stanza by stanza into the world,
Each act of living
One of its words, each word
A vibration of light—facets
Of the forming crystal. (*CP* , 757-758)

Levertov links the proper presentation of peace to the liability for a reconstruction of the actions they ‘are making’ by analogy to the restructuring of a sentence. The making of peace needs as well an annulment of human clinging to ‘profit and power.’ Levertov emphasizes the need for ‘long pauses’ similar to the poetic ‘cadence’ that can balance the weight of war. The pause will allow for a counter energy more intense than war to emerge. This contrasts with the inability of the speaker ‘sealed inside the anemone’ to resist darkness and sing in Levertov’s poem ‘The Pulse’ from *The Sorrow Dance* (*CP* , 265). As this energy can appear in stanzas, it will appear in the good acts of living in which what

people utter is ‘a vibration of light’ as the surfaces of the forming crystal. What is endorsed internally is gradually emerging into light as peace changes the darkness into light. Levertov proposes in this poem the process of making peace that requires awareness, patience, and determination.

Conclusion:

Levertov’s political critique of human aggression during the Vietnam War charts a trajectory from perception through affective and physical struggles to an emerging political voice. The chapter analyzes the trajectory through probing into the physical and affective impacts of war witnessed through Levertov’s vision. It presents the transition in her poetry from silence, darkness, and struggle, to expression, imagined light, and peace. The passivity that is fueled by overwhelming scenes and struggles grows within her into discussions of revolution and political activism. The disfigurement of bodies, the deprivation of joy, and the failure to respond to violence are themes Levertov discusses in her early poetry of the war. With this early description, she tries to convey the affective experience that ‘jostles for space’ within her and people in Vietnam. By connecting the inner with the outer world, which is central to her theory of organic poetry, she helps to move readers from their own otherness to recognizing other people’s struggles and pain.

However, Levertov’s use of vision and visual perception fuels her trajectory toward a political vision. If her role in the early poems is a witness of violence, she supports her visual perception with the authority of the voice. As Marshall explains, she shifts ‘from the act of seeing to the act of giving voice: from what is witnessed to the witness.’⁶³ In her

63 Alan Marshall, ‘Different Trains’: Denise Levertov, Adolf Eichmann and Moral Blindness’, *Cambridge Quarterly*, 46.4 (2017), pp. 344-63, p. 346.

poetry, vision is not merely a sensual medium but also an ethical medium for recognition, integration, and solidarity. Although many critics see a disconnection between Levertov's early personal poetry and later public poetry, she explains in a later interview with Spears Brooker in 1996 that her public poetry is motivated by an inner audience that touches the public: 'one locates that in oneself which needs a certain poem, and writes for that inner listener. Then it goes out into the world—and I rejoice if it corresponds to what others also need.'⁶⁴ It is a journey from inside to outside. She has never abandoned the self in public poetry. It is embodied in her description, reflection, dialogues, and spaces. Levertov's political poetry instigates a broader reflection on the role of poetry in crisis and in creating justice replacing what Marshall calls 'moral blindness' and darkness with a vision of awareness and recognition.⁶⁵ In Levertov's view, poets are responsible for the creation of peace through writing poetry. This poetic construction of peace is a preliminary to the actual implementation of peace into actual actions. It necessitates a language that joins people together in solidarity for the creation of a better future. Levertov's persistence in discussing poets' role in the peace that followed the Vietnam War conveys her consistency in integrating poetry and experience and maintaining the social consciousness.

64 Jewel Spears Brooker, and Denise Levertov, 'A Conversation with Denise Levertov', *Christianity and Literature*, 45.2 (1996), pp. 217-24, p. 218.

65 Alan Marshall, 'Different Trains': Denise Levertov, Adolf Eichmann and Moral Blindness', *Cambridge Quarterly*, 46.4 (2017), pp. 344-63, p. 359.

Chapter Three:
Environmental Degradation in Robinson Jeffers's and Denise Levertov's Poetry

The roses tremble; oh, the sunflower's eye
Is opened wide in sad expectancy.

Levertov's 'Listening to Distant Guns' (*CP*, 3)

Jeffers's critique of modernity and Levertov's critique of the Vietnam War share a rejection of the cultural and political pursuit of power that inflicts harm and unjust acts on people and their environments. They demonstrate instances of cultural and racial injustice that alienate people from tradition, safety, and identity. With the poet's authentic representation and sense of responsibility, these critiques develop into an ecological consciousness that seeks justice for land and other species. Though there is an early presence of ecological ethics in Jeffers's early poetry, his philosophy of Inhumanism expands these ideas into a clear manifesto. His philosophy advocates integration, recognition, and preservation of nature amid the destruction and ecological alienation which modernity has brought. Levertov's war poetry, in its examination of the intimate experience, grapples with the ecological impacts which war has left on the land, animals, and people's homelands. This chapter extends the previous critiques of injustices in urban and war environments and addresses injustices in a nonhuman environment, focusing on instances of injustice from land exploitation and animal cruelty while encompassing also damage to or transformation of people's homelands. These injustices towards nonhumans, intensified by modernity and war, provide a profound representation of human domination, anthropocentric ideologies of separation, and disregard for minorities in created and natural environments.

Alongside the cultural and political consciousness discussed in the previous chapters, this chapter reinforces the poets' ecological perspective and determination towards justice and social change. The poets underscore the material and affective forces that emerge in human and nonhuman relationships, pointing out the existing detachment and possible dialogues for integration. The poets' affirmation of this agency is informed by their

ecological consciousness which I have explained in the introduction. Similar to the sensory presentation of human violence in the previous chapter, both poets present the complex flux of human and nonhuman relationships through figurative and sensual descriptions of nonhuman affective forces and material agency. Thus, they highlight the consciousness and vitality of nonhuman nature against human assumptions to the contrary.

In this chapter, I will examine the poets' critique of human violence towards nonhumans in three sections. Poems clustered in section one provide an overall observation and examination of multifaceted violence toward land and animals. Both poets investigate the nature of the relationship between humans and nonhumans that informs injustices. Human domination of nonhumans is intensified by modernization, urban development, war, economics, and science. Jeffers examines the impact of human tyranny and greed through several injustices in his poems 'A Redeemer,' 'The Broken Balance,' 'The Inhumanist,' 'Subjected Earth,' and 'Memoir.' Other poems in this section by Levertov also describe environmental injustices towards the land in an urban context, such as in 'In California: Morning, Evening, Late January.' Her 'Watching *Dark Circle*' and 'Gathered at the River' particularly convey the impact of war on nonhumans. Section two moves the argument from the manifestation of human violence on the environment to an assertion of the vitality of nonhumans as in Jeffers's 'Apology for Bad Dreams' and Levertov's 'A Tree Telling of Orpheus,' advancing the discussion of nature's material agency in Jeffers's poems of permanence in Chapter 1. Thus, these poems engage with the dynamics of living entities that exist despite human underestimation. Finally, in the last section of this chapter, I will include poems that incorporate calls for Ecological balance and peaceful coexistence such as Jeffers's 'The Answer' and Levertov's 'Beginners.' This balance aims to create a

sustainable relationship against the anthropocentric divide that instigates injustices. In this section, I will examine also incidents of campaigns against human exploitation of land, as in Levertov's 'Re-Rooting.' Presenting the land as a victim of human rashness, this poem reveals Levertov's political voice and collective environmental activism in response to human violence against the land.

Human Violence Towards Nonhumans:

An ecocritical reading of nonhuman representation in Jeffers's and Levertov's poetry has to examine the power dynamics that operate in human-nonhuman relationships. The prevailing power dynamics that assert human superiority also validate the use of nonhuman beings to achieve their goals. Jeffers's depiction of men's lives 'incapable of free survival, insulated / From the strong earth' as he describes them in 'The Purse-Seine' indicates for Zaller that 'the mass of men, though individually impotent and collectively doomed, was nonetheless a terrifying force. Cut from the earth, it could not value it; not valuing, it could only destroy it.'¹ Their poetic presentation of land, trees, and plants reveals the human view of land as slave and subordinate to human use. They critique practices such as exploitation, extractivism, and destruction due to the urban expansion of cities and tyranny in wars. Similarly, their poetry points out the dynamics of power that sees animals as subordinate to human use and allows animal cruelty for utilitarian or scientific purposes.

In these poetic presentations of the divide humans set between themselves and nonhumans, the poets underscore the threat to ecological integrity, to a sustainable existence of animals and nature, and to the preservation of nature. Instead, they provide

¹ Robert Zaller, 'Land and Value: The Ecology of Robinson Jeffers', in *The Atom to Be Split: New and Selected Essays on Robinson Jeffers* (Tor House Press, 2019), pp. 41-52, p. 54.

an environmental imagination in response to environmental injustices. Their poems become a medium to imagine and create sustainable solutions that will shape human relationships with the land, as I will show in the third and final section of this chapter.

Like the earlier chapters, which examine cultural and political dilemmas through perception and observation, this chapter will start with references to poems that present the perception of environmental injustices. In 'A Redeemer,' 'The Broken Balance,' and 'The Inhumanist,' Jeffers discusses the impact of these advancements on land and, therefore, on humans. In 'Subjected Earth,' Jeffers examines the human subjugation of land in England, a setting that evokes memories of the Californian wilderness that he prefers. The absence of the rock in 'Subjected Earth' symbolizes the increasing reach of urban places that denies the presence of even timeless objects. The juxtaposition of England and California links his environmental critique with his conception of timelessness, which he consistently argues for in the poems discussed in Chapter 1. Jeffers continues his strong stance against violence, extending his condemnation of injustices towards the land to include animals. 'Memoir' presents an overall examination of various aspects of cruelty towards animals. Through the imagery of the animals, Jeffers presents his determination to expose incidents of injustices resulting from scientific experiments and the consumption of meat.

In his environmental discussion, Jeffers has always presented human progress as taking place at the expense of the land in images of profits, destruction and toxins. In 'A Redeemer' from *Cawdor* (1928), he elucidates this relation in his condemnation of industrial agriculture: 'heartless machines; house of steel: using and despising the patient earth ... / Oh as a man eats a forest for profit and a field for vanity, so you came west and raped / The continent and brushed its people to death' (CP1 : 406-7). There is an ethical

failure where man's greed is pictured in his ability to 'eat forests' and rape a whole continent. Another bitter condemnation of destruction appears in 'The Broken Balance' from *Cawdor*:

Mourning the broken balance, the hopeless prostration of the earth
Under men's hands and 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 ... (CP1 : 372)

Thus, the country, the machines, and the city that humans develop are potential causes for the destruction of 'the beautiful places' and the formation of 'fungus' and 'spores.' World War II also intensifies his critique of environmental destruction in his references to the nuclear holocaust and its impact on cities with 'whiffs of poisoned smoke' in 'The Inhumanist' from *The Double Axe* (1948) (CP3 : 310). Despite such decay, Jeffers believes that environmental degradation affects humans rather than land. He continues in 'The Inhumanist': 'it is more than comfort: it is deep peace and final joy /To know that the great world lives, whether man dies or not' (CP3 : 311). Jeffers underscores man's failure to obtain such ethical and relational balance with the land and links it to immaturity. He also calls for an ecological responsibility in his preface to *The Double Axe* where a person 'began to think as an adult does, rather than like an egocentric baby or insane person' (CP4 : 428-429). These economic, political, and environmental contexts reveal his attention to environmental threats that instigate his ecological discussion.

Besides examples of the threats caused by economic profit and politics, other poems highlight the injustices caused by anthropocentric relations to the land. Jeffers conveys

environmental degradation through images such as slaves, cages, and torture, exposing the nature of the divide between humans and nonhumans. Jeffers's 'Subjected Earth' from *Dear Judas* (1929) describes a slave-master relationship between earth and humans. The poem is both a condemnation of arrogant human subjugation of the landscape and a celebration of the life of unsubjected lands. The earth in rural Oxfordshire in England may have been enslaved, but at the same time, it was 'flourishing.' The paradox in this enslaved richness explains Jeffers's preference for California's 'bronze mountain' in contrast to the evidence of life in Oxfordshire countryside. He prefers untouched landscape rather than created agricultural rural places. The envisioned historical scenery of England features forests and swamps, likely teeming with more unrestrained life than the rural fields. In contrast, his recollections of California and his values indicate that he prioritizes wilderness over biodiversity. The poem opens with the scarcity of ecological life amid humans' 'exorbitant power' (CP2 : 128). There is a diminishment in the descriptions of 'flints,' 'lapwings,' 'pheasants,' and 'mountain.' The images of plants in the poem are associated with passivity, which is contrasted with human power and progress. Upon walking in the fields, the speaker notices 'no rock' that can provide 'rest' for him. By the rock, the speaker either literally means a rock or symbolizes through the rock the absence of nature. There seem to be only 'little flints' and 'the million-berried hedges.' The description of 'lapwings' flight and the 'pheasants' cries indicate a sense of doom that is approaching which is also emphasized later in the 'dogs howling' in the second stanza.

Jeffers seems to be projecting his critique of humanity onto nature. His mental vision of human exorbitant power seems to alter his perception of even the 'twilight':

The soft alien twilight
Worn and weak with too much humanity hooded my mind.

Poor flourishing earth, meek-smiling slave,
If sometime the swamps return and the heavy forest, black beech and
oak-roots
Break up the paving of London streets;
And only, as long before, on the lifted ridgeways
Few people shivering by little fires
Watch the night of the forest cover the land
And shiver to hear the wild dogs howling where the cities were,
Would you be glad to be free? I think you will never
Be glad again, so kneaded with human flesh, so humbled and changed
(CP2 : 128).

Jeffers uses paradoxes in his description of the landscape that is affected by humans. The natural things carry both negative and positive associations. Though the twilight is presented as 'alien,' it is 'Worn' and 'weak.' Similarly, the earth is both 'poor' and 'flourishing.' It is pictured with images of slavery and hopelessness as 'earth' is personified as a 'slave.' The sense of victimization and distorted ecological relations prevail here, akin to the humans who are incapable of free survival in cities. In his description of the earth and the slave, he juxtaposes both positive and negative images of the 'poor flourishing' and 'meek-smiling.' There is a sense of beauty and ugliness juxtaposed at the same time as in many of his poems. With this presence of nature, the poem suggests a sense of slavery and submission to a higher power. The speaker in the following lines imagines a scenario in which the city, represented by London, disappears, and nature reasserts itself through the return of 'the swamps' and a break up of 'the heavy forest, black beech and oak-roots.' This imagined reassertion describes the existing separation between humans and nonhumans and the continuous human urban expansion. The breaking up of the plants underneath the pavement of streets suggests a separation between the exterior city life and the suppressed trees' roots. By referring to London here, Jeffers implicitly connects farming to urban life, juxtaposing both with a vision of what England was like before mass agriculture and what he anticipates it will be like again once the modernity and the cities have passed. The

human expansion of cities causes the destruction of rural Oxfordshire. There is an existing expansion of modern city life at the expense of rural life. In both rural Oxfordshire and urban London, humans subjugate the land. The tree is oppressed beneath the pavement.

After pondering that fantasy of the demise of humanity and nature's gradual liberation, the speaker questions nature as a slave about the possibility of its freedom in which it could rejoice. However, the mental weight of humanity in Jeffers's mind cuts all possibility of this freedom as the earth is 'kneaded,' 'humbled,' and 'changed.' Jeffers embodies in this the hopelessness of attempts to change the human nature that renders the earth submissive to human exploitation. In the following lines, Jeffers describes the decay of the passive nature that goes to the 'grave.' The meekness of the earth denies any further action and allows for its own death. What used to live on the land turns inward in a 'grave':

Here all's down hill and passively goes to the grave,
Asks only a pinch of pleasure between the darkneses,
Contented to think that everything has been done
That's in the scope of the race: so should I also perhaps
Dream, under the empty angel of this twilight,
But the great memory of that unhumanized world,
With all its wave of good and evil to climb yet,
Its exorbitant power to match, its heartless passion to equal,
And all its music to make, beats on the grave-mound. (CP2 : 128-129)

In this description of the death of the land, Jeffers reinforces the subjugation by which he describes Earth throughout the poem. The land is doomed to death which Jeffers wants to escape through dreaming of 'the great memory of that unhumanized world.' The recognition that 'everything has been done to the land' instigates a mental escape to the 'unhumanized world'. Unhumanized is an act of imagination which crosses the distance between the human landscape in England and the unhuman landscape in Californian Carmel Point or a prehuman landscape across the deep past that has the human future of

good and evil ahead of it, 'exorbitant power,' and 'heartless passion.' What the subjected earth appears to tolerate is not a destiny but an incident of human interference with the land. The decay described in the poem is the result of an imbalance of power relations that denies the liveliness of earth life.

Thus, 'A Redeemer' and 'Subjected Earth' examine human exploitation of land and the imbalance of power relations, subjugating the land to human use. Jeffers shows, in other poems, this imbalance in human cruelty toward animals, a topic that has been recently examined by animal rights activists and scholars. Animal imagery has been recurrent in Jeffers's poetry and is associated with his wider critique of human tyranny evident in the subordination of animals. Although this ethical issue was not a central issue in early ecocriticism, such as *The Ecocriticism Reader*, more recent books in the field include discussions of animal rights and human-animal relationship, such as Timothy Clark's *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment* (2011) and Mario Ortiz-Robles *Literature and Animal Studies* (2016). Sarah E. McFarland emphasizes the implication of these studies within ecocriticism as 'critical animal studies interrogate the human/animal aspects of the self/other binary and the arising consequences to subjectivity and species definitions.'² These studies comes in response to the 'strict division between humans and animals' that 'enabled the manipulation of animals.'³ Ortiz-Robles explains that humans' use of animals 'has most often been premised on our willingness to assert our domination over nature.'⁴ In *Created From Animals*, James Rachels highlights cruelty towards

2 Sarah E. McFarland, 'Animal Studies, Literary Animals, and Yann Martel's Life of Pi', in *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Environment*, ed. by Louise Westling (Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 152-65, p. 153.

3 Mario Ortiz-Robles, *Literature and Animal Studies*, (Taylor & Francis Group, 2016), p. 14.

4 Mario Ortiz-Robles, *Literature and Animal Studies*, p. 4.

animals: ‘We kill animals for food; we use them as experimental subjects in laboratories; we exploit them as sources of raw materials such as leather and wool; we keep them as work animals.’⁵

Literary presentation of oppressed, exploited animals pinpoints an anthropocentric relation and attempts to offer an alternative vision of ecological relations instead where every being is seen, as Donna J. Haraway argues, as ‘an actor and agent’ rather than ‘a screen or a ground or a resource, never finally as slave to the master.’⁶ This agency is emphasized by Ortiz-Robles: ‘Animals exist in nature, to be sure, independently of human agency, but human agency deigns itself capable of apprehending all of nature.’⁷ Jeffers and Levertov provide a literary representation of cruelty that underscores the dynamics at work in human-animal relationships. Their poetry condemns human cruelty and suggests an ecological perspective that recognizes the interdependency of all creatures.

‘Mémor,’ from *Such Counsels You Gave To Me*, presents a universal and multifaceted examination of human tyranny in regard to animals. The poem reflects on examples of human cruelty in using animals for laboratory experiments and dehorning cattle, connecting them to instances of cruelty towards other humans. Jeffers encompasses in this poem examples of abuse towards animals, land, and humans in the name of science. While perceiving real incidents throughout the poem, he tries to stop thoughts of violence committed towards various species. However, these mental images seem to occupy him immensely as they occupy him in ‘Subjected Earth.’ The consecutive listing of examples

5 James Rachels, *Created from Animals* (Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 129.

6 Donna J Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (Routledge, 1991), p. 198.

7 Mario Ortiz-Robles, *Literature and Animal Studies*, (Taylor & Francis Group, 2016), p. 8.

of violence and its physical and affective impacts cannot be ignored. The desire to stop thinking seems to be a sarcastic attempt that highlights instead the impossibility of ignoring such acts. The sacrifices of animals, the bloodshed, the bare lands, and the helpless death and hunger in camps are all visibly bright as a 'star' (*CP2* : 525).

In the first stanza of the poem, Jeffers presents his visual perception of the hierarchy of powers manifested in humans' relationship with animals:

I saw the laboratory animals: throat-bandaged dogs cowering in cages, still
obsessed with the pitiful
Love that dogs feel, longing to lick the hand of their devil; and the sick
monkeys, dying rats, all scarified
To human inquisitiveness, pedantry and vanity, or at best the hope
Of helping hopeless invalids live long and helplessly. (*CP2* : 524-25)

He draws the existing line between the subject and the objects, between humans and animals, a divide that he refers to in 'The Purse-Seine' between humans above and fish below. The divide presents the hierarchal relationship between humans and caged submissive animals. The animals share with the subjected earth in the previous poem their acceptance of slavery. The animals are used for laboratory work. The dogs who are 'throat-bandaged' show an obsessive relationship with 'their devil.' This extreme and explicit treatment reinforces a long anthropocentric relation that conceives animals as insignificant. Zaller explains that in 'Memoir,' 'humans inflict yet slower and more excruciating deaths in the name of science' than whipping horses or crucifying hawks.⁸ It is a slow death that Jeffers refers to also in 'The King of Beasts': 'Cattle in the slaughter-pens, laboratory dogs / Slowly tortured to death, flogged horses, trapped fur-bearers' (*CP3* : 138). Despite slow

8 Robert Zaller, 'Punishing Horses', in *The Atom to Be Split* (Tor House Press, 2019), pp. 178-91, p. 187.

torture in laboratories, they still possess a positive feeling of ‘love’ and pity toward this devil. By the ‘devil,’ Jeffers refers to the malign and deceptive intentions of humanity.

Not only do animals have positive feelings towards humans, but they also remain trusting and loyal despite the ill-treatment. Licking the hand embodies the submissive nature of the relationship and the sacrifices given. The juxtaposition of positive and negative feelings clearly indicates an imbalance of relations. Other animals are also ‘sacrificed’ to human ‘inquisitiveness, pedantry and vanity.’ Thus, the humble nature of the dog in the act of licking is contrasted with the vanity of humans. Jeffers sarcastically reckons that ‘at best,’ sacrificing animals could be for the ‘hope/ Of helping hopeless invalids live long and hopelessly.’ This alliterative line and the repetition of hopelessness emphasize the false claims behind such a reason. The poem implies that the invalids’ chance for hope is dismissed, which also suggests a lack of ambition to assist them through new drugs or procedures that have been tested on animals. Even if the claim is realistic, the repetitions imply the torture and pain in that hopelessness. Despite claims of power and progress, there is a sense of hopelessness in that pursuit of power. Jeffers criticizes the intentions of experimental medicine to help humans live while they are helplessly subjugated in life. This helplessness is not a peculiar situation lived by subjugated animals or humans as emphasized earlier in ‘The Purse-Seine’ in the ‘helpless, on all dependent’ individuals (*CP2* : 518). The growing sense of hopelessness also impacts humans who are performing violence. Furthermore, the repetition of /h/ carries the weight and exhaustion these animals feel. This existential weight that animals perceive makes them fearful. The ‘howling’ in ‘Subjected Earth’ seems to turn to a mixture of silent hopelessness and submissiveness in this poem.

Leaving this laboratory room to evade the torture, he witnesses another incident of cruelty in dehorning cattle. It is not an incident that grows from 'human inquisitiveness, pedantry and vanity' but from growing demand for meat:

I left that great light room where pain was the air
And found my friends dehorning cattle in the field above Rio Piedras
Canyon. (The buyers require it now,
So many horned beasts have injured each other in the gorged trucks
And crowded cattle-cars up to Calvary.) I watched the two Vasquez boys,
great riders, drive the scared steers
Into the frame that clamps them and holds them helpless. Bill Flodden
with a long-handled tool like pruning-shears
Crushed off the horns and the blood spouted. (CP2 :
524)

The cruelty in dehorning the cattle to fit in the truck and prevent injury to each other is an indication of growing meat consumption within a consumerist economy. Similar to the animals caged in the laboratory, the cattle are helpless showing a submissive relation to humans. Jeffers criticizes all sorts of intentions, whether scientific or economic, that justifies such animal use and torture.

Jeffers's condemnation of human cruelty towards animals anticipates Levertov's critique in 'Watching *Dark Circle*' from *Oblique Prayers* (1984). This poem responds to a documentary film about nuclear experimentation, providing thus, as Nielsen explains, 'a nuclear protest' and 'advocacy for animal rights, specifically, the rights of the pigs that were being used in a Pentagon-sponsored experiment concerning nuclear war.'⁹ In the second stanza, Levertov critiques human treatment of animals as objects that, enabling scientists to disregard their experience of pain:

Men are willing
to call the roasting of live pigs

⁹ Dorothy M. Nielsen, 'Prosopopoeia and the Ethics of Ecological Advocacy in the Poetry of Denise Levertov and Gary Snyder', *Contemporary Literature*, 34.4 (1993), pp. 691-713, p. 702.

a simulation of certain conditions. It is
not a simulation. The pigs (with their high-rated intelligence,
their uncanny precognition of disaster) are real,
their agony real agony ...(CP , 703-704)

What humans perceive as a 'simulation' of what humans might feel is indeed a 'real agony' for animals. Both Jeffers's 'Memoir' and Levertov's 'Watching *Dark Circle*' discuss the use of animals in scientific experiments in order to avoid inflicting pain or risks on humans. Using animals as 'substitutes' for humans does not change the fact that they feel pain.¹⁰ While Jeffers negotiates the hierarchal relation that treats animals as subordinate to human use, Levertov places her critique of animal cruelty in a war context, emphasizing thus two environments (scientific and political) that encourage human abuse of animals.

Besides this hierarchal relationship with animals, the third stanza of 'Memoir' examines the anthropocentric relationship with both land and human minorities. Jeffers asserts in his description of the landscape near 'Mountain Pico Blanco' that nature provides him the 'sanctuary' against the mental and sensory perception of human violence across various geographical settings. This feeling is what he recurrently describes in many of his poems of withdrawal. The landscape offers him a refuge from thinking about human injustices:

Here in the sanctuary
I need not think beyond the west water, that a million persons
Are presently dying of hunger in the provinces of China. I need not think
of the Russian labor-camps, the Germans
Prison-camps, nor any of those other centers
That make the earth shine like a star with cruelty for light. I need not think
of the tyrannies, that make the tyrants
Ignoble and their victims contemptible. I need not think of the probable
wars, tyranny and pain
Made world-wide; I need not . . . know that this is our world, where only
fool or drunkard makes happy songs. (CP2 : 525)

10 Dorothy M. Nielsen, 'Prosopopoeia and the Ethics of Ecological Advocacy in the Poetry of Denise Levertov and Gary Snyder', *Contemporary Literature*, 34.4 (1993), pp. 691-713, p. 703.

He repeatedly underscores his imperative to evade dwelling on violence in the recurrent phrase 'I need not think of.' His thoughts take him beyond the American context to a wider view of human injustice. 'Beyond the west water' signals a dividing geographical line between the pacific coast of America and the countries beyond. What can be perceived beyond that line are aspects of 'hunger,' 'cruelty,' 'wars,' 'tyranny,' and 'pain.' Jeffers wants to stop the trace of his imagination beyond that line in order to escape the existential weight. The attempt to avoid thinking about suffering implies a moral failure and a kind of social withdrawal similar to Jeffers's earlier poems. However, despite this repeated need 'not' to 'think,' the listing of violence committed against people in China, Russia, and Germany suggests that the weight cannot be escaped. He is still reflecting on and reinforcing the memory of injustices. The poem is ironic about the unreasonable attempt to escape what is powerfully visible. Jeffers compares these scenes of oppression to 'a star' that 'shines with cruelty.' This metaphor suggests that human cruelty is so powerful that it can light up a planet to shine like a star.

The last line is crucial in highlighting the failure of existing poetry to respond to or depict reality. Jeffers, in the last line, extends his desire not to engage in mental thoughts to the desire to be ignorant of his humanity. He wants to discard even the knowledge of any human relationship to this world. He aims at not only a mental escape but also a separation from this world. This separation is twofold. At one level it separates him from the perception of those scenes. On the other, it separates him from the existing poets who fail to respond to or depict reality. Jeffers is unable to relate to or have a meeting point with the 'fool or drunkard' who makes only 'happy songs.' In 'fool or drunkard,' Jeffers links the production of joyful poetry to the absence of mental or social consciousness. This suggests

that the writing of existing struggle and pain grows from the poet's responsibility and consciousness. Though Jeffers condemns the poets' role as drunken, he chooses later a moderate position between private and public matters. Jeffers wrote later in the Note to *Be Angry at the Sun* that his concept of poetry should not be a private monologue nor an urge for public action. He states in the note that he should not write politically but seek the company of a drunk man who is unaware of politics. The repeated phrase 'I need not' invites us to think of the speaker as an ironic self-portrait who tries to double himself. He is struggling between both self-deception and self-knowledge. However, replacing 'I need not to think' with 'I need not know' emphasizes the difficulty of disavowing knowledge once admitted. The poem juxtaposes contraries such as master and slave manifested in the canine-human relationship. It also juxtaposes pain and happiness in the contrast between what art presents and what existing reality is. These contrasts are what highlight Jeffers's critique of both humanity and poets in his poems. Thus, while Jeffers's 'Subjected Earth' and 'A Redeemer' highlight his perception of injustices to the land for profit and expansion of power, his 'Memoir' incorporates his perception of injustices towards animals and lands across different countries. Particularly his 'Memoir' reveals his condemnation of existing poetry that does not reflect ongoing injustices and alludes to his vision of ecological poetry that would respond to human injustices.

Like Jeffers, Levertov presents in her environmental poetry human injustices to the land. She situated her environmental discussion within a larger critique of American tyranny and greed. Her poem 'In California: Morning, Evening, Late January' from *A Door in the Hive* (1989), provides a commentary and a survey of wider acts of anthropocentrism such as unnecessary cropping of grass, excavation of land, the use of pesticides, and harm to

workers in the land. Levertov underscores the transformative impact of agriculture, construction, and industrialization, noting their capacity to make the land ‘threatened, invaded, expended’ (CP , 813). In the poem, Levertov sarcastically criticizes the overuse of these practices beyond the need. The ‘mowers’ are ‘cropping the already short / grass of lawns,’ indicating unnecessary interference (CP , 812). In agricultural farms, helicopters ‘spray / vineyards where *braceros* try / to hold their breath’(CP , 813). This incident suggests the impulsiveness with which they harm both the land and the workers on the farm, lacking protection. Similarly, the bulldozers and excavators are performing what she calls ‘destructive construction,’ emphasizing a counterpart view of that construction (CP , 813). These settings where human intervention shows are contrasted with land as yet untouched by humans. Thus, the miner’s lettuce’ is ‘tender, untasted’ and ‘other grass, unmown, / luxuriant, / no green more brilliant’(CP , 813). This greenness is brilliant and signals the ‘fragile paradise’ that borders the land where human control is. The poem ends with questioning the need for language to speak for land and to ‘utter’ either ‘the praise of such generosity /or the shame’(CP , 813). If humans threaten the land, it is poetry that should confront environmental injustices.

Besides her critique of environmental threats caused by industry, agriculture, and construction, she often presents the impact of war on land which I will focus on as related to her political discussion in the previous chapter. In her political critique, she employs the image of the tree recurrently in her poetry to represent both violence towards trees and subjugation to humanity. Like Jeffers’s representations of nonhuman subjugation to humans through the tree roots bursting through the London pavement in ‘Subjected Earth,’ Levertov’s representation of trees carries implications of human disavowal of them. In her

poetry, the tree symbolizes an ancestral relation demolished by human violence, indicating a denial of the tree's significance and highlighting the loss of tradition. Various poems by Levertov revolve around the trees such as 'A Tree Telling of Orpheus,' 'An Ancient Tree,' 'Sound of the Axe,' and 'Gathered at the River.' While 'A Tree Telling of Orpheus' from *Relearning the Alphabet* (1970) presents trees' transition from stasis to freedom, 'Gathered at the River' from *Oblique Prayers* (1984) depicts Levertov's overall argument about the impact of war on the land. Through the perception of the human persona, the poem describes the affective impact of war on the trees and, at the same time, acknowledges their liveliness. Thus, 'A Tree Telling of Orpheus' presents land's reaction to the individual inspiration of Orpheus's song that ends with a failure. On the other hand, 'Gathered at the River' presents a communal reaction while the trees are passively anticipating the outcome of people's reaction against violence that is suggested to end with failure. Hence, the active revolutionary emergence of trees, which turns to failure in 'A Tree Telling of Orpheus,' shifts to silent anticipation of the human collective role in 'Gathered at the River.' The failure of the trees alone to change their future seems to delegate the role to a wider context to include humanity.

Levertov's 'Gathered at the River' directly situates the trees within the context of war and illustrates the threat of nuclear weapons. The poem encompasses Levertov's environmental argument about human violence to the land, natural vitality, and the need for an ecological sensibility. As Dorothy Nielsen explains, the poem describes 'a memorial service for the victims of Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings' and 'speaks for the trees that surrounded the service in order to emphasize their stake in the antinuclear cause; if there is

another nuclear war, they too will be victims.’¹¹ I will analyze this poem before ‘A Tree Telling of Orpheus’, which I will include in the second section of the chapter, as the latter particularly fits into the discussion of material ecocriticism and nonhuman agency symbolized by the trees’ responsiveness to music and its transience.

The first line of ‘Gathered at the River’ initiates the poem and its readers into a reflection of trees and invites us to open our minds to the possibility of things being other than they appear:

As if the trees were not indifferent . . .

A breeze flutters the candles but the trees give off
a sense of listening, of hush.

The dust of August on their leaves.
But it grows dark. Their dark green
is something known about, not seen.

But summer twilight takes away
only color, not form. The tree-forms,
massive trunks and the great domed heads,
leaning in towards us, are visible,

a half-circle of attention. (*CP*, 704)

‘As if’ in the first line establishes the figurative and hypothetical presentation of the trees. However, as the poem progresses in the description, the speaker reverses its initial emphasis on the trees’ figurative status and asserts at the end of the poem ‘the trees are not indifferent.’ The poem journeys between two binary assumptions: one is what humans assume of nonhumans, and another is an ecological view that affirms nonhuman agency. The trees experience a state of attentiveness amid the change of seasons. This attentiveness

11 Dorothy M. Nielsen, ‘Prosopopoeia and the Ethics of Ecological Advocacy in the Poetry of Denise Levertov and Gary Snyder’, *Contemporary Literature*, 34.4 (1993), pp. 691-713, p. 700.

does not indicate only their agency but also a sense of anticipation of something fearful, as suggested in the word ‘hush.’ The trees’ silent anticipation echoes the argument of Levertov’s ‘Sound of the Axe’ where ‘the birds,’ ‘the trees,’ ‘the river,’ and the ‘grey rocks’ anticipate the end of the world manifested in the sound of the wise man’s ‘axe’ (*CP*, 649-650). Levertov depicts a moment of encounter between the trees and humans. She personifies the trees as humans to fulfil that encounter. The adjectives ‘massive’ and ‘great’ that Levertov uses to describe the ‘trunks’ and the ‘domed heads’ imply equal creature in significance. Levertov asserts the liveliness that resembles humanity’s liveliness in the possession of ‘heads’ like humans. This comparison of the trees’ parts to human organs is recurrent in her poetry and in poems which I will analyze in section two of the chapter. These human-like trees lean towards humans, challenging the initial assumption at the beginning of the poem that they are ‘indifferent.’ Levertov’s assertion of the word ‘visible’ underscores their presence and implies, at the same time, an opposing existing anthropocentric attitude that renders nonhumans invisible and insignificant.

The following lines shift from the assertion of this general timeless presence to engage directly with the scene of war. Levertov locates her description of the trees within the context of war. In these lines, she discloses directly the reason behind their anticipation and ‘hush’:

They listen because the war
we speak of, the human war with ourselves,

the war against earth,
against nature,
is a war against them.

The words are spoken
of those who survived a while,
living shadowgraphs, eyes fixed forever

on witnessed horror,
who survived to give
testimony, that no-one
may plead ignorance.
Contra naturam. The trees,
the trees are not indifferent. (*CP* , 704-705)

The trees are described as passive listeners who witness the human talk of war whose impact grows against not only humans but also 'earth,' 'nature' and the trees themselves. These multifaced victims of war indicate a constancy of human violence. The narrative of war is spoken by victims of human violence who 'survived' the death but carried within them all memories and 'horror' (*CP* , 705). The same sensory perception of war in 'eyes fixed forever' echoes Levertov's poems in the previous chapter, where people are forced to witness the constant violence of war. When it comes to violence, there is always an emotional and responsive stasis, a paralysis that expresses the emotional trauma. The survival role is thus to 'give/ testimony' of war that cannot be ignored, and that is also against nature. *Contra naturam* is a Latin phrase that means against nature in Medieval texts. The use of this word is significant as it implies an established long enmity with nature. Levertov implies that the nuclear bomb is a violation of the natural order as well as being something that poses a massive threat to humans and all other living things. She seems to hint at the role of the trees as observers like the survivors. Like in Jeffers's 'star' in 'Memoir,' human acts of violence are clearly visible, and many survivors can witness them.

The first line of the poem is revisited in this part but with a repetition that emphasizes not a likeliness of the trees' consciousness but rather a confirmed negation of their indifference. The speaker in the following lines narrates a collective solidarity in remembrance of 'the dead' in 'Hiroshima' and 'Nagasaki.' The circle signifies unity and

integration while ‘candles’ symbolize a cultural integration with the tradition of Hiroshima as an expression of respect for the dead. These acts of ‘singing, speaking’ and ‘making vows’ are held in the name of ‘justice and peace’ and attempt to invoke other ‘saints and prophets’ and ‘heroes and heroines’ to participate in this unity. This singing is unlike the ‘happy songs’ of the fools in Jeffers’s ‘Memoir’ but rather a song that would inspire the community to act. Singing is what also Orpheus inspires the trees to recognize first their dilemma and respond in Levertov’s ‘A Tree Telling of Orpheus.’ Despite differences in their context and critiques, Jeffers and Levertov highlight the role of poetry and art in enriching the soul to perceive the reality of things and instigating change. Current environmental threats exemplify a prevalent environmental unconscious, as Buell articulates, which poets both critique and reject. Their engagement with these threats reflects an endeavor to cultivate a sustainable environmental imagination.

This individual integrity, conviction, and action across religious and secular spheres emphasize the universal dilemma that impacts everyone and needs that collaboration. Amid these practices, people witness ‘Windthreatened flames.’ However, the fire does not disturb the candles. Through this incident, the poem reemphasizes the conscious logic of the trees as they ‘ponder’ and are ‘aware’:

And still the trees ponder our strange doings, as if
well aware that if we fail,
we fail also for them:
if our resolves and prayers are weak and fail
there will be nothing left of their slow and innocent wisdom,
no roots,
no bole nor branch,

no memory
of shade,
of leaf,
no pollen. (*CP*, 705-706)

Although the trees are passive in that collective quest, Levertov highlights their ecological connection with them. The fate of the trees depends on the fate of humans. It echoes Jeffers's reaction in 'Subjected Earth' to the British landscape by contrast with his tendency to see the Californian landscape as bound to outlast humanity. This awareness of the ecological connection and empathy towards trees grows within Levertov. This intimacy is apparent also in the trees. In 'Living While It May,' Levertov describes the stillness of the 'elm' tree after it signals the urgency of being cut as 'its roots push at the house wall' (*CP*, 248-249). The moment the speaker looks 'round at it,' after it 'taps and scrapes' the window, the tree 'remains still.' The stillness of trees results from the feeling of comfort that the speaker recognizes its resistance. In 'An Ancient Tree' from *The Freeing of the Dust*, Levertov emphasizes not only emotional connection but also that mental connection:

'Can't get that tune
out of my head,'
can't get that tree
out of

some places in me.
And don't want to: (*CP*, 451-452)

This integrity echoes earlier the speaker in 'Two Voices' '*the tree is mine, and grows about my heart*' (*CP*, 29). This relationship grows with time as the ancient tree grows with time 'patient' and 'rooted.' The collective acts in 'Gathered at the River' come in part after this individual relationship and empathy weighs upon Levertov and necessitates communitive efforts. The spiritual failure to summon justice and peace will lead to the destruction of the ancestral past manifested in the 'roots' accumulative 'wisdom' and their overall presence of 'branch,' 'memory,' 'shade,' 'leaf,' and 'pollen' (*CP*, 706).

The poem ends with anticipation and fear for the future. Despite the poem's affirmation of nature's vitality and human unity, there is still ongoing violence that interrupts human efforts for justice and peace. The failure echoes the rupture in 'A Tree Telling of Orpheus' after efforts of resistance. The trees in this poem seem to rely on human efforts for action. The ecological difference cannot be achieved by single separated efforts; it needs a reformation of the whole human awareness of otherness. Jeffers and Levertov, thus, discuss the interplay between humans and the nonhuman. The domination of nature in 'Subjected Earth,' the cruelty caused by curiosity, greed, and tyranny in 'Memoir,' and the nuclear bomb in 'Gathered at the River' can potentially destroy the land and threaten ecological integrity. These acts reinforce the anthropocentric divide between humans and nonhumans that renders the latter insignificant and submissive to a higher power. Highlighting these environmental injustices done to the land is essential in their poetry to advocate for environmental protection.

Nonhuman Agency and Reaction to Violence:

In addition to examining human violence towards lands and animals, the poets also attempt to depict a nonhuman reaction to this violence. Mirroring the second sections in the previous chapters, I select poems that present a counter view that wrestles with human injustices from the perspective of the nonhuman subject. Through nonhumans' active response to violence, the poets attempt to assert nonhuman agency and vitality, emphasizing their part in the ecosystem that requires justice and preservation. Poems by both poets register the wrestling of powers between humans and nonhumans. They depict the emergence of nonhumans from the passivity that anthropocentric views impose on them to activity in response to human injustices. The nonhuman liveliness and consciousness

which the poems underscore in this section are meant to reconstruct existing ecological values that deny nonhuman significance. Jeffers's 'Apology for Bad Dreams' and Levertov's 'A Tree Telling of Orpheus' present the dynamics of nonhumans in response to existing power relations that try to oppress them. Both poets highlight the presence of nonhuman consciousness and its manifestation, whether physical, as in the horse and ocean in Jeffers's poem, or metaphorical, as in the trees in Levertov's poem.

What the poets try to do in these poems affirms the perspective of Material Ecocriticism which views reality as emerging from the 'intertwined flux of material and discursive forces' as explained by Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann, rather than a 'complex of hierarchically organized individual players.'¹² The world we live in, they explain, is 'filled instead with intermingling agencies and forces that persist and change over eons, producing new forms, bodies, and natures,' and through the interaction of these forces we become 'alive.'¹³ These entities are not mediated through linguistic structure as they do not express themselves in language but rather through semiotic presentation of natural signs. Thus, humans and non-human are 'interlocked in networks that produce undeniable signifying forces.'¹⁴

Jeffers's 'Apology for Bad Dreams' from *The Women at Point Sur* (1927) is a meditative poem that critiques anthropocentric cruelty and points out the interplay between the good and the tragic in life. Jeffers apologizes for the violence presented in the world and attempts through the juxtaposition of binary oppositions in the poem—beauty versus violence, high

12 Serenella Iovino, and Serpil Oppermann, 'Introduction: Stories Come to Matter', in *Material Ecocriticism* ed. by Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann (Indiana University Press, 2014), pp. 1-17, p. 3.

13 Iovino and Oppermann, 'Introduction: Stories Come to Matter', p. 1.

14 Iovino and Oppermann, 'Introduction: Stories Come to Matter', p. 2.

versus low, past versus present, unconsciousness versus consciousness, light versus darkness, nonhumans versus humans – to highlight and condemn anthropocentrism. The poem illustrates three key distinctions: between humans and nonhumans represented by the tormenting of a horse; a racial hierarchy among humans, particularly affecting subordination of indigenous individuals who are depicted as harmonious with nature; and between the divine and humankind.

The poem represents the material, aesthetic, mythical, and religious responses to cruelty. The natural acts, poetic characters, community gatherings, and God's punishment wrestle with injustices. Jeffers attempts to reach a state of redemption and reconciliation through the concept of sacrifice, which means, in the poem, giving up something valuable for the sake of something of a higher importance. The concept of sacrifice is rooted earlier in religion and implies that certain animals should be offered for a higher divinity. These responses are presented as means of sacrifice to a higher power and authority to transcend human anthropocentrism and to reach a state of purification and reconciliation. From this redemptive sacrifice, beauty emerges. Through this concept of beauty, Jeffers suggests the potential of art not only to motivate and teach but also to provide redemption for extreme human values and hierarchies of power, and proposes a reconstruction of an integrated ecological system. Violence in the poem is a means for what Lowe refers to as the metaphorical sacrifice.¹⁵ For the purpose of my research, I have analyzed the first two parts

15 Carmen E. Lowe, 'The Inhumanist Imagination in Twentieth Century Poetry: From Robinson Jeffers and D. H. Lawrence to Ted Hughes and Sylvia Plath', (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Tufts University, 2003), p. 82. In the third chapter of his PhD thesis, Lowe analyzes fully the concept of sacrifice in Jeffers's 'Apology for Bad Dreams.' However, he reads Jeffers's poetry from a poststructuralist and psychoanalytical approach. He sees the cruelty to the horse as a sacrificial act to a higher divine power. In my recent ecocritical reading of the poem, I look for the dynamics at play from a material ecocritical and affective perspective in response to animal cruelty.

of the poem as they present incidents of violence against nonhumans.¹⁶ Although the violence committed against indigenous people in the third section is perceived as a continuation of human violence on land as in Levertov's depiction of the violence towards Vietnamese, I intend to focus only on the dynamic interaction between humans and nonhumans as it is a current incident in Jeffers's life.

While the poem reflects on cruelty to nonhumans, to indigenous people, and religious cruelty, it is the treatment of the horse that provokes a reflection on past and spiritual contexts of cruelty and sacrifice. Jeffers writes about the poem in the Foreword to *The Selected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers* in 1938:

“Apology for Bad Dreams” originated from the episode of the woman and her sons torturing a horse, a thing which happened on our coast. Cruelty is a part of nature, at least of human nature, but it is the one thing that seems unnatural to us; the tension of the mind trying to recognize cruelty and evil as part of the sum of things is what made the poem. (This woman a few years later was killed by another horse: an unusual piece of justice.) (CP4 : 394)

As the title suggests, the poem is written as an apology from Jeffers for all the tragedy and violence presented. It is written as a poetic manifesto of Jeffers's concept of art and poetry as redemptive of human injustices through offering characters as victims. Zaller emphasizes that the poem is ‘ars poetica that defends his choice of narrative as the chief vehicle of his poetic expression.’¹⁷ Robert Brophy, as well, points out that the title ‘translates as “The reason why I write what I must write—turbulent, violent, bloody, horror

¹⁶ Robert Zaller in his article ‘Landscape as Divination: Reading ‘Apology for Bad Dreams’ provides a full reading of the poem seeing the natural processes in the poem in a form of divinity. My thesis attempts to reread the poem through material ecocriticism.

¹⁷ Robert Jeffers, ‘A Terrible Genius’, in *The Atom to Be Split: New and Selected Essays* (Tor House Press, 2019), pp. 341-58, p. 343.

stories.”¹⁸ In writing the poem, Jeffers reflects on the interplay of human injustice and natural justice and meditates upon what Brophy calls ‘The woman’s sadism toward the horse’ that ‘parallels the landscape’s dynamism.’¹⁹ In confronting human violence towards nonhumans, Jeffers illustrates nonhuman agency that wrestles with injustice in the tragedy of the Ocean. This agency is one of the important concepts in his philosophy of Inhumanism which challenges the dualism created by humans and denies the importance and dominance of man, as Jeffers describes in the Preface to *The Double Axe* (1947), who ‘is neither central nor important in the universe’ and affirming instead the inherited vitality of the natural world (CP4 : 418). Drawing on the work of material ecocritics, I will present how Jeffers’s poem narrates the complex interrelation of humans and the natural world that manifests itself through human and nonhuman physical and affective acts.

The poem opens with an omniscient narrator’s apathetic perception of the beauty of the natural world, which will be later contrasted with a scene of human cruelty. Zaller describes this as ‘the prototypic Jeffers scene: a wild, Edenic landscape at the edge of the world; a dwarfed habitation; a brutal episode.’²⁰

I
 In the purple light, heavy with redwood, the slopes drop seaward,
 Headlong convexities of forest, drawn in together to the steep
 ravine. Below, on the sea-cliff,
 A lonely clearing; a little field of corn by the streamside; a roof under
 spared
 trees. Then the ocean
 Like a great stone someone has cut to a sharp edge and polished to shining.
 Beyond it, the fountain
 And furnace of incredible light flowing up from the sunk sun. (CP1 : 208)

18 Robert Brophy, 'Jeffers's "Apology for Bad Dreams" Revisited', *Jeffers Studies*, 8.2 (2004), pp. 3-20, p. 4.

19 Robert Brophy, 'Jeffers's "Apology for Bad Dreams" Revisited', *Jeffers Studies*, 8.2 (2004), pp. 3-20, p. 4.

20 Robert Zaller, 'Land and Value', in *The Atom to Be Split: New and Selected Essays on Robinson Jeffers* (Tor House Press, 2019), pp.31-52, p. 42.

In the first lines of the poem, the speaker presents the immense beauty of the world and calmness in the description of the ‘slopes,’ ‘ravine,’ ‘clearing,’ and ‘ocean.’ Within this description of beauty, he implies a state of neutrality. After the reference to the brutality later in this part, this beauty and calmness come to allude to the supposed unconsciousness of the nonhumans, which is juxtaposed with the consciousness of humans. The beauty of the natural world is further emphasized by the figurative language. The stillness and the beauty of the ocean are captured in the metaphor that figures the ocean as ‘a great stone someone has cut to a sharp edge.’ This metaphor is powerful because, firstly, it implies the unconsciousness of the ocean, as the stone itself is generally symbolic of ‘calm disinterestedness,’ as emphasized by Mercedes Monjian.²¹ Secondly, the metaphor implies that nature is being manipulated by a superior power in the ‘sharp edge’ of the ocean, which suggests that a tool or weapon has been created to enact this anthropocentrism. Upon this ocean, the speaker describes the sunset light ‘flowing up from the sunk sun’ as a ‘fountain/ And furnace of incredible light’ by which he juxtaposes contradictory forces: water with its implication of unconsciousness and cold, and fire with its symbolic meaning of consciousness and warmth as described by Yi-Fu Tuan in *Topophilia*.²² This state of consciousness in the image of a ‘furnace’ can be read in light of tool-making which reinforces the anthropocentrism that Jeffers attempts to critique. Even in attempting to critique anthropocentrism, he is drawn to use anthropocentric metaphors. These implications that render natural aspects in a state of submissiveness reinforce the central

21 Mercedes Monjian, *Robinson Jeffers: A Study in Inhumanism* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1958), p. 31.

22 Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perceptions, Attitudes, and Values* (Columbia University Press, 1990), p. 23.

critique of binaries in the poem. The contrast between the mountain, upon which the speaker stands, and the sea 'Below' intensifies the hierarchic implications in the poem and the existing distance between humans and nonhumans.

As Part One develops across these lines, the beauty of nature is juxtaposed with humans' assumed superiority, their evil exploitation, and the ugliness of desire embodied by the woman's barbarism and brutality in tormenting the horse. Through this contrast, Jeffers aims to present the imbalance in power relations which he points out in 'Subjected Earth' and 'Memoir':

In the little clearing a woman
Is punishing a horse; she had tied the halter to a sapling at the
edge of the wood, but when the great whip
Clung to the flanks the creature kicked so hard she feared he
would snap the halter; she called from the house
The young man her son; who fetched a chain tie-rope, they working
together
Noosed the small rusty links round the horse's tongue
And tied him by the swollen tongue to the tree.
Seen from this height they are shrunk to insect size.
Out of all human relation. You cannot distinguish
The blood dripping from where the chain is fastened,
The beast shuddering; but the thrust neck and the legs
Far apart. You can see the whip fall on the flanks . . .
The gesture of the arm. You cannot see the face of the woman.
The enormous light beats up out of the west across the cloud-bars
of the trade-wind. (CP1 : 208)

The woman's cruelty to the animal is practiced amid the unconsciousness of nature during the approaching night, indicating an affinity between cruelty and darkness. Because of her ecophobic relation with the other, her brutality increases with the horse's resistance as 'she feared he would snap the halter.' Although the poem does not reveal why she is punishing the horse, the lines suggest that the woman has a long-standing desire to control the other. She is punishing whatever the horse stands for, perhaps irrationality, the human inner

animality that she tries to repress, or the existence of independent living things not under human control.

This hierarchic control underpinned by violence is transmitted to the younger generation as ‘she called from the house/ The young man her son.’ The human unity against the other is seen through the attempt of the mother and her son ‘working together’ to manipulate the movement of the horse brutally and to suppress its emotional response by noosing the horse’s tongue and tying him to the tree. However, Jeffers’s critique in the poem is against power in general, not only gendered power. Jeffers undermines the idea that women are not usually implicated in violence. Humans are as depraved as one another when it comes to the treatment of the non-human world. When the woman feels her authority is threatened, she fetches her son. The human characters in the poem are female and male and they are participating together in their scheme. Thus, the detached speaker objectively witnesses binary oppositions in the world: the beauty of nature versus the ugliness of human cruelty. The horse ‘appears’ as Zaller explains, as ‘a natural sacrifice ordained in preparation for receiving the larger human one.’²³

Sensory imagery further emphasizes these cultural dualisms manifested in the act of the woman. Contrary to the visual beauty of nature in the beginning of the poem is the kinesthetic cruelty of the woman punishing a horse. While the visual description connotes stillness and passivity, the kinesthetic description connotes power and mastery. The poem pictures the horse as it is ‘tied’ and ‘kicked’ by the two humans ‘working together’ and the impact of cruelty on the horse who ends up ‘shuddering’ with its ‘blood dripping.’ The

23 Robert Zaller, ‘Land and Value’, in *The Atom to Be Split: New and Selected Essays on Robinson Jeffers* (Tor House Press, 2019), pp. 31-52, p. 43.

haste with which the woman attempts to control the horse suggests a state of irrationality and chaotic impulses that reveal her pre-existing ecophobia. Whether her act is in response to something the horse has done or to her ecophobic feelings, her act, as Zaller describes, ‘has no moral basis and inflicts unjustified suffering.’²⁴ This ecophobic detachment, superiority, and group unity against otherness are challenged by a visual description of their insignificance and equality to other creatures as ‘seen from his height they are shrunk to insect size’ so ‘you cannot see the face of the woman.’ This equality between humans and nonhumans in significance is emphasized regardless of all human unity against the other ‘Out of all human relation.’

The objective perception of the detached speaker from the ‘height’ enables him to perceive the existing power-relations. The implication of the speaker’s detachment is powerful to the poem’s central argument. The speaker’s refusal to distinguish humans from nonhumans in size and significance (‘You cannot distinguish / The blood dripping’; ‘You cannot see the face of the woman’) shrinks humans out of importance and power. Jeffers employs a technique William Everson calls “reduction” that invokes ‘a cosmic scale against the human one’ creating both ‘moral as well as physical’ reduction.²⁵ At one level, it puts them in an equal position with nonhumans to indicate human equality to other creatures within the ecosystem. At another, the shrinking suggests a reconciliation of any proposed opposition between them. In this critique and perception, the speaker erases the supposed human and nonhuman divide for a more ecological perspective. As in ‘Memoir,’

24 Robert Zaller, ‘Punishing Horses’, in *The Atom to Be Split: New and Selected Essays on Robinson Jeffers* (Tor House Press, 2019), pp. 178-91, p. 184.

25 Robert Zaller, ‘The Giant Hand’, in *The Atom to Be Split: New and Selected Essays on Robinson Jeffers* (Tor House Press, 2019), pp. 53-82, p. 74.

Jeffers seems to project his view of the equality on existing scene. Zaller points out that ‘the landscape at once reduces and reflects the woman’s act, the little horror focusing its latent purposiveness and violence.’²⁶ The woman’s cruelty is, as Zaller continues, ‘an infinitesimal but at the same time critical expression of this primal force; she both sullies the landscape and releases it.’²⁷

Affective theory plays an important role in analyzing pain and resistance as expressions of nonhuman agency transmitted to human exploitation and oppression. As a reaction to the woman’s cruelty in part one, Jeffers relates the land’s affective response through visual imagery, which bears different interpretations that attempt to challenge human anthropocentrism and assert nonhuman consciousness:

The ocean
Darkens, the high clouds brighten, the hills darken together. Unbridled and
unbelievable beauty
Covers the evening world . . . not covers, grows apparent out of it, as Venus
down there grows out
From the lit sky. What said the prophet? 'I create good: and I create evil: I
am the Lord.' (CP1 : 208-9)

It is true that Jeffers’s description of the landscape reflects natural processes. However, he places this scene after the woman's cruelty to project his view of nonhuman agency. The cruelty is contrasted with the ‘unbridled and unbelievable beauty.’ Carmen Lowe maintains that, as an inhumanist, Jeffers embraces what the culture suppresses, that is, ‘nature, femaleness, chaos, emotions and instincts’ and the destructiveness of natural power.²⁸ What

²⁶ Robert Zaller, 'Land and Value: The Ecology of Robinson Jeffers', in *The Atom to Be Split: New and Selected Essays on Robinson Jeffers* (Tor House Press, 2019), pp. 41-52, p. 42.

²⁷ Robert Zaller, 'Land and Value', p. 42.

²⁸ Carmen E. Lowe, 'The Inhumanist Imagination in Twentieth Century Poetry: From Robinson Jeffers and D. H. Lawrence to Ted Hughes and Sylvia Plath', (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Tufts University, 2003), p. 14. Although Jeffers challenges the gender hierarchy in other poems, in this poem gender is marginalized and Jeffers condemns human abuse of nature.

is suppressed in nature is presented through its physical responsive acts that reveal its agency, equal power to humans, and its consciousness. The poem depicts the tragedy as an echo of divine power and a consciousness that connects it to divinity. It is powerfully redemptive, therapeutic, and divine.

Furthermore, Max Oelschlaeger explains the nature of change within his presentation of natural processes in Jeffers's poetry in *The Idea of Wilderness*. He sees his poetry as informed by change and the transitory concept of time that is central to his Inhumanism. Oelschlaeger emphasizes that Jeffers's poetry is informed by the 'evolutionary paradigm' in contrast to the 'static paradigm.'²⁹ Jeffers juxtaposes both destruction and creation, seeing change in the natural system as a process of self-creation through which 'order out of chaos' emerges.³⁰ Oelschlaeger also explains the religious and aesthetic significance of this natural flux where violence and order coincide:

Being is a dynamism, a building-up and a breaking-down of forms. This means violence, no form yielding itself without resistance, which in turn implies pain for sentient beings. For Jeffers this violence makes beauty—an effulgence and radiation of being in its straining, excruciating course—and this beauty is so deeply itself and so totally permeating as to be transcendental—to be God.³¹

Although Jeffers critiques anthropocentric relations and binaries, he sees both historical and natural cycles as a necessary part of life. Thus, the inhumanist perspective entails 'the necessity of pain, the beauty of things, the pervasiveness of the flux, and the reality of God.'³² However, his acceptance does not indicate an ethical approval of injustices but a

29 Max Oelschlaeger, *The Idea of Wilderness: From Prehistory to the Age of Ecology* (Yale University Press, 1991), p. 250.

30 Max Oelschlaeger, *The Idea of Wilderness*, p. 290.

31 Max Oelschlaeger, *The Idea of Wilderness*, p. 259.

32 Max Oelschlaeger, *The Idea of Wilderness: From Prehistory to the Age of Ecology* (Yale University Press, 1991), p. 258.

recognition of the dynamics that interplay in the ecosystem. He views history and nature as repeating themselves in cycles of suffering: life/death, progress/decline, heaven/earth and beauty/violence.

This awareness of the natural cycles informs his critique of anthropocentrism, inviting a reflection on nature's materiality and responsiveness to human cruelty. The dynamic power of the ocean comes after the woman's cruelty to assert its vitality and refusal to accept injustice as 'the ocean/ Darkens, the high clouds brighten, the hills darken together.' Zaller points out the significance of this dynamic in response to human acts in which Jeffers 'subordinated the human to the cosmic whole' in his presentation of the world as a 'process.'³³ Human cruelty seems to cast its darkness on nature, causing 'the ocean' and 'the hills' to darken and the clouds to brighten in response to perceived brutality. The interplay of light and darkness, though indicating a normal natural scene, invites us in the poem to view it alongside the relationship between good and evil. We can look at light and darkness in relation to the moral symbolism discussed by Tuan. As he suggests in his book, light indicates positive symbolism of purity, spirituality, and the divine and darkness symbolizes a curse or evilness.³⁴ The darkened ocean and the brightened clouds highlight through opposition the deterioration of human ethical values and an existing injustice.

Thus, the divide between the brightened 'clouds' and the darkened 'ocean' and 'hills' implies a division between high and low, between the divine and the material, and between the ethical and the evil which Jeffers reflects on. The poem suggests that with the growing

33 Robert Zaller, 'Jeffers, Stevens, and the Decreative Sublime', in *The Atom to Be Split: New and Selected Essays on Robinson Jeffers* (Tor House Press, 2019), pp. 205-15, p. 213.

34 Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perceptions, Attitudes, and Values* (Columbia University Press, 1990), p. 25.

brutality, humans move from the divine state of ethics that is unfallen to the darkness of earthly desire, which is deteriorating, that is echoed by the response of the ocean. The tragedy in this response highlights instead the necessity to disturb this division through ethical practice and ecological justice. This process of blurring binary oppositions occurs metaphorically by the ocean assimilating to human violence for the emergence of beauty in the world. From this tragic process of victimization ‘Unbridled and unbelievable beauty’ emerges that grows ‘apparent out of the evening world’ (CP1 : 208-9). The word ‘unbridled’ makes the contrast more explicit in a way that also intensifies our pity for the horse by making us think about what its life could be if it were unbridled. This landscape reaction contrasts the elemental power of the ocean, clouds, and hills with the subjugation of the horse.

Jeffers alludes to the fact that binaries are natural parts of life. The evilness and tragedy are for the speaker ‘essential’ as the prophet says ‘I create good: and I create evil: I am the Lord.’ This phrasing echoes Isaiah 45.7 when the Lord recounts his power and endless creations. Affirming the Lord as creating both good and evil emphasizes that binaries are qualities of God’s creation rather than man and that man is enacting God’s violence. The concept of tragedy evoked by the dark ocean connects the earthly with the divine. Zaller explains that ‘tragedy’ is ‘a natural function that grows not merely from human passion but from some profound though inexplicable root in creation.’³⁵ For him, ‘Tragedy completes the natural landscape even as it distorts it; it is a kind of exaltation.’³⁶ This tragedy emits

35 Robert Zaller, ‘Land and Value: The Ecology of Robinson Jeffers’, in *The Atom to Be Split: New and Selected Essays on Robinson Jeffers* (Tor House Press, 2019), pp. 41-52, p. 44.

36 Robert Zaller, ‘Land and Value: The Ecology of Robinson Jeffers’, in *The Atom to Be Split: New and Selected Essays on Robinson Jeffers* (Tor House Press, 2019), pp. 41-52, p. 44

consciousness which Zaller views in a later essay as enacting ‘a parody of the divine agon, thereby mirroring but also estranging itself from it. It is tortured paradox that seeks escape from itself in dogma and ritual, or more simply in pleasure and intoxication.’³⁷ It is also ‘a principle of return from the created world towards its creator.’³⁸ However, Jeffers does not stop at perceiving this in religious terms; he proceeds from this fact with a rejection akin to his rejection of the corruption in ‘Shine, Perishing Republic’ after asserting the cyclic nature of history. Humans’ insistence on acting evil does not make them equal to God in power but rather shows an imbalanced ethics. Although the speaker states in the poem that God creates good and evil, Jeffers’s secular moral imperative requires that humans must strive hard to balance this reality and minimize cruelty. Teresa Brennan relates in *The Transmission of Affect* that the split with others can be ‘healed’ through ‘the recognition that there never was a bad beast; there was only the aggression within oneself, and it is this that made the breast “bad.”’³⁹ This minimization of cruelty, which Jeffers in the poem attempts to reach, can be achieved by the act of detachment from subjectivity to a more objective recognition and respect of all other components of the biosystem.

Part Two expands on the idea of nonhuman responsiveness and assimilation to human violence. The ocean's responsiveness is not only indicative of its materiality, but it reveals Jeffers’s concept of victimization. Jeffers projects his critique of humanity on the natural

37 Robert Zaller, 'Robinson Jeffers and the Uses of History', in *The Atom to Be Split: New and Selected Essays on Robinson Jeffers* (Tor House Press, 2019), pp. 85-100, p. 85.

38 Robert Zaller, 'Spherical Eternity', in *The Atom to Be Split: New and Selected Essays on Robinson Jeffers* (Tor House Press, 2019), pp. 23-40, p. 29.

39 Teresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect* (Cornell University Press, 2004), p. 64.

processes inviting us to see the intricate details that interplay in the universe as sacrifices from which he builds his conception of poetry as a redemption of human anthropocentrism:

II

This coast crying out for tragedy like all beautiful places,
(The quiet ones ask for quieter suffering: but here the granite cliff
the gaunt cypresses crown
Demands what victim? The dykes of red lava and black what
Titan? The hills like pointed flames
Beyond Soberanes, the terrible peaks of the bare hills under the
sun, what immolation?)
This coast crying out for tragedy like all beautiful places: and
like the passionate spirit of humanity
Pain for its bread: God's, many victims', the painful deaths, the
horrible transfigurements. (*CP1* : 209)

It is suggested that the world cries for the victims of cruelty in the form of land reactions to confront fear and as an objection to this cruelty. The tragedy of the ocean is both an assimilation of human cruelty and a victimization for the cruelty. Whether it is an affective state of crying or demanding a tragedy, Jeffers suggests the need for victimization. This process of assimilation to cruelty is essential to seek balance between these distinctions. From the balance of similarities, peace and redemption emerge, marking an attempt to cleanse and purify human values. From the cruel suffering emerges a cruel beauty as the 'quiet' places 'ask for quieter suffering.' Jeffers's juxtaposition of tragedy and beauty informs a process of victimization in which suffering is an essential part of beauty and, thereby, redemption. The speaker questions what immolation or sacrifices other landscapes like the 'dykes of red lava' or 'the hills like pointed flames' or 'the terrible peaks of the bare hills under the sun' demand for redeeming human anthropocentrism or whether they could be themselves required as a sacrifice (*CP1* : 209).

This model of sacrifice occurs later in the poem in the genocide of the native Americans as a sacrificial act for the whole culture – 'These have paid something for the future / Luck

of the country' – and in God's victimization of humanity for the redemption of their sins as 'He brays humanity in a mortar to bring the savor' (*CP1* : 210). These dynamics of suffering and sacrifices are caused by the human pursuit of desire in their future and in their own spirituality. The simile of the coast to 'the passionate spirit of humanity' affirms their materiality and agency and alludes to their sacrifice to a higher power for redemption. The interplay in these lines explains the yearning towards tragedy in all creatures as Zaller points out that violence is 'inherent in all existence, natural and human, each reflected in and yearning toward the other.'⁴⁰ Thus, in response to anthropomorphism in the poem, Jeffers represents this transition as a process of self-creation and as God's victimization of land for the achievement of sublime beauty.

This natural divine process of victimization gives way to the literary one. Quoting the poem itself, Zaller sees the poem as an 'offering, part therapeutic and part propitiatory, that "magic[s] / Horror away from the house."' ⁴¹ Jeffers bases his conception of art as a redemption on the dynamic interplay of victimization in the poem. His art is a 'sacrificial, a ritualistic mimicry of the natural world's processes of creation and destruction' as Lowe explains. ⁴²As Brophy explains about Jeffers's artistic victims:

He insists that we humans are more liable and sooner vulnerable and cruel than other creatures, that we are especially susceptible in the areas of sustenance, shelter, safety, and self-control, that pain and terror are essential parts of being, that insanities of desire are our, as it were, Original Sin, proneness to evil that we are born with, that these things crowd up from the core of human condition and

⁴⁰ Robert Zaller, 'The Giant Hand', in *The Atom to Be Split: New and Selected Essays on Robinson Jeffers* (Tor House Press, 2019), pp. 53-82, p. 70.

⁴¹ Robert Zaller, 'Robinson Jeffers, Narrative, and the Freudian Family Romance', (Tor House Press, 2019), pp. 121-34, p. 125

⁴² Carmen Elaine Lowe, 'The Inhumanist Imagination in Twentieth Century Poetry: From Robinson Jeffers and D. H. Lawrence to Ted Hughes and Sylvia Plath', (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Tufts University, 2003), p. 67.

from the human psyche, that there are “wolves” on the prowl
for him and his, but he can create diversions by imagining
victims.⁴³

Art attempts to confront the injustice through a process of creating victims. The poem highlights the necessity of recognizing the other, and the potential of art to redeem the insanity of desires instead of victimizing nature or nonhumans: “‘Better invent than suffer: imagine victims / Lest your own flesh be chosen the agonist, or you / Martyr some creature to the beauty of the place’” (*CP1* : 209). ‘Parallel to this exterior universe,’ Alan Soldofsky explains ‘is the poet’s interior one.’⁴⁴ The victimization of art also redeems for Jeffers personal history and internal struggles. Soldofsky points out that ‘Jeffers seems to suggest that by “imagining victims” he would placate the fates, immunizing himself and his household from the tragedies—the violent emotions—which, given his personal history, might threaten to erupt and once more destabilize his life.’⁴⁵ The process of self-creation gives Jeffers a larger consciousness of God’s own creations and destructions.

Jeffers explains his choice of tragic creations more explicitly in a later poem he refused to publish, which was selected by Melba Bennett for the posthumous *The Beginning and the End*. In ‘I have Been Warned,’ Jeffers explains this process of victimization misquoting the lines from ‘Apology’ where ‘Burn sacrifices’ becomes ‘Make Sacrifices.’ This misquotation suggests an intensity of injustice in ‘Apology’ and a state of reflection in this poem:

43 Robert Brophy, ‘Jeffers’s “Apology for Bad Dreams” Revisited’, *Jeffers Studies*, 8.2 (2004), pp. 3-20, p. 5.

44 Alan Soldofsky, ‘The Prophet as Confessionalist: The Place of the Personal in the Poetry of Robinson Jeffers’, *Jeffers Studies*, 5.4 (2001), pp. 43-56, p. 44.

45 Alan Soldofsky, ‘The Prophet as Confessionalist’, p. 44. Soldofsky explains further in this article that ‘Though Jeffers wrote many poems that do live up to his inhumanist credo, it seems to me that his most interesting lyric and narrative works are also deeply personal. That he was moved to write poems rooted in autobiographical experience, poems that failed to transcend the author’s self-consciousness, was a problem that impelled Jeffers to do much poetic rationalizing.’

Thinking of the narrative poems I made, which always
Ended in blood and pain, though beautiful enough—my pain, my blood,
They were my creatures—I understood, and wrote to myself:
“Make sacrifices once a year to magic
Horror away from the house”—for that hangs imminent
Over all men and all houses— (*CP3* : 447)

This sacrifice stems from a wrestling dialogue inside Jeffers about his role as a poet. He writes in the same poem: ‘So I listened / To my Demon warning me that evil would come / If my work ceased, if I did not make sacrifice / Of storied and imagined lives’ (*CP3* : 447). In ‘Apology,’ Jeffers does not indicate that beauty only emerges from tragedy, but the poem registers Jeffers’s view of ways to achieve beauty in the time of tragedy. Tragic sacrificing and victimization of nature and art are essential in times of ethical failure and abuse of ecological relations. Although Jeffers’s education is informed by science, Brophy sees the poem as his pursuit ‘of some exemption from science’s realities, urging fate-leaping interventions.’⁴⁶ It is an escape from brutal humanity, as he states later about his narrative ‘Hungerfield’: ‘For these reasons / I wish to make verses again, to drug memory, / To make it sleep for a moment’ (*CP3* : 378). As science is created by humans and is informed by their ethics of privilege and power, Jeffers emphasizes the renunciation of humanity and what is created by it. Whether to escape from humanity or the memory of Una, poetry for Jeffers is a medium for resolution, for finding an in-betweenness between good and evil or past and present.

The poem ‘offers a ruthless metaphysics,’ Brophy explains, ‘one that for convenience can be reduced to the formula emphasizing an interactive equality in which terms are interchangeable: Being = Dynamism = Change = Violence = Pain = Tragedy = Beauty =

46 Robert Brophy, ‘Jeffers’s “Apology for Bad Dreams” Revisited’, *Jeffers Studies*, 8.2 (2004), pp. 3-20, p. 10.

God— in which God is violence and pain and loss and agony as much as God is being and beauty and all dynamism.’⁴⁷ Isolation plays a role as ‘the largest ingredient’ as Brophy emphasizes for this interplay of philosophy, religion, metaphysics, ecology, psychology.⁴⁸ The poet’s task in the poem is to achieve a holistic appreciation in perceiving the binary oppositions of beauty and cruelty as natural and as components of the same system. By this appreciation, he implies an inclusion of the other and an acknowledgement of their consciousness and resistance to oppression that is emphasized by the emotive response of the land. The poem is an apology for the existence of cruelty and evil and the difficulty of accepting their existence. In his poem, human anthropocentrism is a sin that results in ethical failure that can achieve redemption through the interplay of cruelty and tragedy. This ethical erasing of the divide through assimilation and purification through victimization are the two only ways to maintain an ecological position.

Jeffers’s poem epitomizes, through the narrative of nature’s responsiveness, a complexity of relations that affirms both the vitality of nonhumans and the role of art in the restructuring of existing ecological values. Levertov engages with these same concepts in ‘A Tree Telling of Orpheus.’ Through the symbol of the tree, she presents nonhuman agency and the role of art in inspiring change. The trees in this poem combine both the description of decay and vitality. The nonhuman world possesses liveliness and active consciousness that not only silently perceives human violence and existential weight but also has the will to respond and act against it. Many poems throughout Levertov’s early collections assert this vitality including ‘Listen’ and ‘Living While it May.’ However, ‘A

47 Robert Brophy, ‘Jeffers’s “Apology for Bad Dreams” Revisited’, *Jeffers Studies*, 8.2 (2004), pp. 3-20, p. 11.

48 Robert Brophy, ‘Jeffers’s “Apology for Bad Dreams” Revisited’, p. 15.

Tree Telling of Orpheus' from *Relearning the Alphabet* (1970) is a powerful poem that narrates the dynamics of nature that interplay against existing separation from humanity. This poem carries Levertov's critique of human dualism and the injustices it creates for nonhumans. Through myth, art, and figuration in the poem, Levertov presents the trees' agency that emerged with the inspiration of Orpheus's song against their decay. The poem demonstrates Levertov's concept of the poet as representing the world; not the human world but the trees' world. Dorothy M. Nielsen explains that Levertov 'fashion[s] the poet as visionary, as one who can hear and transcribe the "voices" of nature.'⁴⁹ For Nielsen, it is a visionary poem with 'ecological advocacy.' Levertov's created anthropomorphism for the trees is blended with her environmental consciousness, producing an ecological narrative of change and advocacy. The poem documents the trees' journey of change and describes their consciousness and feelings, thus advocating a counterpart view of man's underestimation of nonhumans. Levertov's poetry, as Nielsen notes, 'posits that nonhuman other has value and rights we usually accord only to human beings. For Levertov, these include the right to exist and be shielded from pain.'⁵⁰

The poem is derived from both mythical and ecological contexts. On the one hand, it retells an episode of Orpheus and Eurydice in Book X of *Metamorphoses* by the Roman poet Ovid, published in a manuscript in 8CE. This episode narrates when Orpheus assembles a grove of trees by playing music to them. 'Metamorphoses' means in Greek transformations. Orpheus is a legendary musician, poet, and prophet in ancient Greek religion. In the poem, he is an inspirational singer whose song charms all living things and

49 Dorothy M. Nielsen, 'Prosopopoeia and the Ethics of Ecological Advocacy in the Poetry of Denise Levertov and Gary Snyder', *Contemporary Literature*, 34.4 (1993), pp. 691-713, p. 691.

50 Dorothy M. Nielsen, 'Prosopopoeia and the Ethics of Ecological Advocacy', p. 694.

even stones. Orpheus's song simulates a turning point and a change of consciousness of nonhumans and their life. The story in Book X revolves around the fateful love of Orpheus and Eurydice and the mission of Orpheus to sing his sorrow and change his fate. Orpheus's death in Ovid's poem is also alluded to in Levertov's poem which derives this incident from Ovid's. The events are reversed in Levertov's poem as the trees hear rumours about Orpheus's death while in Ovid's the trees weep for him in the grove which he is killed in. The reader, in Levertov's poem, is predicated on recognizing the elements of the myth. Despite this reversing of events, the transition in the story in both poems has a shared significance. As Orpheus takes on a mission to change the fate of Eurydice's death in the legend, Orpheus, in the poem, inspires the trees to change their reality. Similarly, Levertov's 'A Tree Telling of Orpheus' narrates the existential reality of the trees which is echoed in Orpheus's song and their attempt to change their environmental fate. The trees' awareness symbolizes the empathetic impact of Levertov's political poetry on the awareness of the revolutionary youth during the Vietnam war. The failure to win Eurydice back from the underworld and the death of Orpheus at the beginning of Book XI in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* are echoed in the failure of Orpheus in Levertov's poem to continue inspiring the trees.

On the other hand, the poem is based on an environmental incident that happened a year before the poem was written. The last year before the publication of *Relearning the Alphabet* in 1969 there was a battle which was motivated by the historian Terry Anderson to plant People's Park in Berkeley, CA, that was left undeveloped. A group of university students, hippies, community activists, and radicals collaborated in planting the land that

had become symbolic of the community's hope for the future.⁵¹ Levertov and her students also participated in the planting once they received the notice. As the fate of the trees and the peace activists are imagined as intertwined in 'Gathered at the River,' this battle earlier demonstrates an integrated mindset and a response towards this fate. The land becomes a symbol of life and awakening instead of death and ruin. The poem was written during the years of change and upheaval of the Vietnam War and Levertov's political activism. The narrative of Orpheus and the Trees is symbolic of Levertov's political poetry that aims to inspire others against ecological violence. Levertov's reluctance in 'Staying Alive,' which I explained in the previous chapter, is blended in this narrative of myth and art, emphasizing the need for ecological poetry to resist existing anthropocentric relations.

Through figurations, the poem erases the divide between humans and nonhumans, where the trees' transience indicates both agency and political action against all that is dualistic. This poem embodies Levertov's perception of environmental degradation and her political and aesthetic revolutionary engagement that motivates others to respond by a parallel act of awakening. In both Levertov's poem and Ovid's, there is a sorrowful experience that necessitates transformation. Art, which is symbolized in the music of Orpheus, is a means to identify with Orpheus's sorrow and recognize the existential weight carried by the trees. The role of Orpheus is to free them and transform their consciousness. Similarly, Levertov's poetry and her environmental voice are means to awaken the collective consciousness. If Jeffers uses art as a victim for the tragedy in the universe,

51 Donna Hollenberg, 'A Poet's Revolution: The Life of Denise Levertov', (University of California Press, 2013), p. 291.

Leverlov employs Orpheus's to release the accumulating agony and injustice perceived by the trees.

Like Jeffers in 'Apology for Bad Dreams,' Leverlov highlights binary oppositions and distinctions as stages in a journey from stasis to the active awakening of its perception and revolution. These stages reveal the trees' agency and imply a necessity for collective ecological engagement to reconcile these oppositions. In the poem, Leverlov depicts the trees' revolutionary awakening in response to the inspiration of Orpheus's song. There is an interdependency between Orpheus and the trees. If Jeffers's ocean's darkening indicates a divine power that seeks a process of victimization and redemption, Leverlov's trees reveal a mythical and artistic power that seeks a process of identification with the agony in Orpheus's song to change their fate. Thus, between the tragic reality and the responsive acts evolve Jeffers's and Leverlov's critique of injustice, the conception of integration, and the role of their art in dissolving anthropocentric relations. Like Jeffers, Leverlov asserts the potential of art to inspire and minimize culturally assigned distinctions that result in nonhuman decay and struggle.

Leverlov employs means of figurations such as anthropomorphism and dendromorphism in order to blur the opposition between humans and nonhumans. She uses anthropomorphism which attributes human qualities to nonhuman entities in the metaphor of the speaking and dynamic trees. It is the same process of figuration that presents the crying of the 'ocean' in Jeffers's 'Apology.' This attribution gives the tree reason and consciousness that enables her to perceive the situation, decide, and eventually react. Katherine A. Hanson explains that the poem 'reminds us that nature "sees" what humans do. A tree is the witness and speaker in this poem. Anthropomorphized, it is able to see and

to speak of what is happening.’⁵² The affinity of the trees to humans is emphasized later in Levertov’s ‘Life Around Us’ where she declares that ‘There is a consciousness/ undefined’ (445). Although the trees are described as ‘sightless trees/ without braincells,’ they engage in the outer experience and ‘wholly knew it’ (*CP*, 446). In ‘Living While It May,’ Levertov sees the leaves as ‘eyes’ and leaves and ‘twigs’ as ‘a face flattening/ its nose’ (*CP*, 249). Despite the differences between human organs and trees’ parts, there is a shared consciousness which Levertov asserts recurrently throughout her poems.

The poem opens with an apathetic and cold tone that describes a picturesque scene of ‘stillness’ and the approaching decay of trees from the point of view of a tree ‘white dawn. Stillness. / ... But the white fog/ didn’t stir; the leaves of my brothers remained outstretched, / unmoving’ (*CP*, 314). This motionless scene, whiteness, and the personification of the outstretching trees connote a state of unconsciousness similar to the description of nature in Jeffers’s ‘Apology for Bad Dreams.’ Amid this stillness, the tree feels a ‘rippling’ that it mistakes for a ‘sea-wind’ but is of Orpheus’s music. The tree’s perception at the beginning of the narration is an objective visual perception that indicates a detachment from Orpheus’ song. However, as the poem progresses, it describes the gradual growing attachment between the tree and Orpheus through the medium of the song. The initial stillness is interrupted by the ‘singing’ of Orpheus, his voice, and the ‘journeys’ he relates. This foregrounded sound of music is juxtaposed with the ‘silence’ that is felt ‘at the heart’ of the tree (*CP*, 315). Upon listening to Orpheus’s song, the tree which was first still and not moving begins to revive:

52 Katherine A. Hanson, ‘Denise Levertov: Through An Ecofeminist Lens’, (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Marquette University, 2007), p. 127-28.

Yet the rippling drew nearer—and then
my own outermost branches began to tingle, almost as if
fire had been lit below them, too close, and their twig-tips
were dying and curling. (*CP* , 314)

Levertov presents the affective manifestation of listening to Orpheus' music. Although the tree starts to feel an enflamed energy 'as if' burned and a chaotic movement launch, yet the tree 'was not afraid, only/ deeply alert' which signifies a readiness and an awareness of the urge to change an existing situation (*CP* , 314). The tree seems to transcend the emotional reaction for its awareness of the necessity to change.

The following lines in the poems narrate the encounter between the tree and Orpheus. Not only does Levertov employ the anthropomorphism of the tree to indicate ecological connection, but she employs dendromorphism in the tree's description of Orpheus as having qualities of a tree. Levertov dendromorphizes Orpheus as a tree to signal the rapprochement and unity she aims for with the nonhuman to collapse the distinctions. She describes his body organs as parts of a tree: 'He was a man, it seemed: the two/ moving stems, the short trunk, the two/ arm-branches, flexible, each with five leafless/ twigs at their ends, / and the head that's crowned by brown or gold grass' (*CP* , 314). There is also a pun in 'trunk' as it is a word for the human torso in English. This rapprochement and immersion between Orpheus and the trees make them both march in the same line and have the same aim. Although this description is from the perspective of the trees, Orpheus contributes through his song to merge humans and nonhumans together through art. The poem conveys the role of art, symbolized by Orpheus, to mediate between one's self and otherness. The stories he transmitted through his music have an affinity with the past lived experience of trees' exploitation. The metaphorical description of his experiences as though 'he carried a burden' as 'some cut branch bent while it was green' suggests a profound

immersion in the natural world and juxtaposes the abstract with the material. His integration in a nonhuman context allows him to spread awareness of realistic and emotional topics as ‘he told of the dreams of man, wars, passions, griefs’ (*CP* , 315). His song is a gateway for nonhumans to have a mutual awareness of these topics, confront reality, and aim for change. Metaphors thus help Levertov to reinforce imaginative unity and reconciliation against existing dualistic constraints.

Upon the encounter with Orpheus, the tone of the poem shifts to ecstatic, energetic, and joyful to enforce this emerging liveliness. The impact of Orpheus’s song on the tree is perceived gradually. Levertov intensifies the use of kinesthetic images in these lines, underscoring movement and transition. The transition depicts the stepping away from a static to a clear and energetic state. The first instances of the encounter register again a ‘rippling’ that turns to a tingling and trembling as Orpheus leans on the ‘trunk’ of the tree. Levertov compares the sensation felt by the tree when she listened to Orpheus to ‘a wave’ that ‘bathed’ her like ‘rain/ rose from below and around’ her ‘instead of falling’ (*CP* , 314). The references to a wave and rain have symbolic meanings. This opposite flow of rain from below and around reinforces the reconstruction of existing reality and attempts to challenge existing expectations. The change seems to start from the roots as an essential part of change. This encounter results in an abundance of life after death and wetness after dryness ‘and what I felt was no longer a dry tingling:/ I seemed to be singing as he sang, I seemed to know/ what the lark knows.’ Through this wave, Levertov implies a state of immersion where both Orpheus and the trees share a unified consciousness that represents the universe at large. It is a stepping away from one’s selfhood into a realm of death, revitalization, and, therefore, wholeness.

Another image that emphasizes this emerging connection and energy is the rising sun. The visual description of the 'white fog' and the 'treeless horizons' is interrupted by 'the sun that by now/ had risen' after Orpheus approaches and the tree listens to his music clearly (*CP* , 314-15). The tree also starts to experience light after darkness. This visual clarity adds to the vividness of the emotional impact of the music on the tree. The music, therefore, stimulates a clarity of perception and consciousness against the layers of imposed cultural barriers. However, the reception of this intense transition is never an easy experience. Levertov describes that the collective parts of the tree experience these sensations with emotional perplexity: 'There was no twig of me not/ trembling with joy and fear.' The music is described as a language that has a mental and auditory impact. This metaphor implies a connection between art and change thus indicating that poetry works on the collective body. Poetry has the potential to nourish not only the external senses of man but also his ideological roots. The language thus indicates a literacy that is understood by the deep internal parts of the tree which form a unified presence as:

Then as he sang
it was no longer sounds only that made the music:
he spoke, and as no tree listens I listened, and language
 came into my roots
 out of the earth,
 into my bark
 out of the air,
 into the pores of my greenest shoots
 gently as dew
and there was no word he sang but I knew its meaning. (*CP* , 315)

The integration of all parts of the tree while listening emphasizes its attentiveness and a willing exposure to another language. The poem pictures the reciprocal impact of language on the inner and outer worlds. The language of music is universal and understood by the possession of consciousness of others. The universality of the pain is presented through the

ability of the tree to understand the music and the language. The ability of the tree to know the meanings of every 'word' enforces the perceptive readiness for change.

This individual connection with Orpheus's song not only penetrates the depth of the tree in spatial terms but it also takes the tree through temporal travel to connect with the past of others:

He told of journeys,
 of where sun and moon go while we stand in dark,
 of an earth-journey he dreamed he would take some day
deeper than roots...
He told of the dreams of man, wars, passions, griefs,
 and I, a tree, understood words—ah, it seemed
my thick bark would split like a sapling's that
 grew too fast in the spring
when a late frost wounds it. (*CP* , 315)

He relates the 'earth-journey' he is going to take to the Underworld to attempt to rescue Eurydice from death as in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The intermingling of imagination and reality in Orpheus's song and the emotional experience he relates of 'man, wars, passions, griefs' leads the tree's bark to feel as though it might 'split.' Thus, the music not only has affective manifestations in and for the tree but also physical impact. Levertov compares also the harsh reality of Orpheus's song to fire that the tree confronts with consciousness and joy 'Fire he sang, / that trees fear, and I, a tree, rejoiced in its flames' (*CP* , 315). Moreover, this harshness of reality is compared to 'frost' that have the capacity to 'wound' and harm 'As though his lyre.../ were both frost and fire' (*CP* , 315). The juxtaposition of these two elements, fire and frost, carries pain and harshness for the tree. Levertov emphasizes the fact that in order to reach change, one must accept these feelings as essential processes. These processes echo the ways for Jeffers's tormenting God, who creates through destruction. These feelings revive the tree from death to rebirth and from decay to

basic units of life and fertility, related in the lines ‘I was seed again. / I was fern in the swamp. / I was coal.’ Levertov metaphorically compares the tree’s rebirth and awakening to ‘seed,’ ‘fern’ and ‘coal’ that carry aspects of fertility, productivity and energy. Thus, the solo reaction of the tree demonstrates its initiative in its response to the dilemma narrated in the song with a confrontation of pain and readiness for rebirth and vitality. The revolutionary internal change brings back the tree to its original form and basic unit implying a rebirth and original liveliness. Levertov’s use of words like ‘buds’ and ‘seed’ connotes a fresh beginning and a newly reborn experience. She uses them to describe the tree’s reaction to the song although, at the heart of the tree, there is ‘a kind of silence, a kind of sickness, / something akin to what men call boredom, ...’

Despite this liveliness in which the tree rejoices, the transition of the tree is never described as an easy experience. As ‘the singer began / to leave’ the tree, the poem registers the first instances of physical change. The poem describes how long and challenging the process of transition is for the trees. Levertov juxtaposes in this process both positive and negative affects indicating that the change is welcomed though it causes pain:

words leaping and dancing over his shoulders
back to me
 rivery sweep of lyre-tones becoming
slowly again
 ripple.
And I
 in terror
 but not in doubt of
 what I must do
in anguish, in haste,
 wrenched from the earth root after root,
the soil heaving and cracking, the moss tearing asunder— (*CP*, 316)

The words of Orpheus's song provoke a physical movement. Hanson explains that 'This re-mything of the story of Orpheus turns the focus of the myth from the heroic deeds of Orpheus to the power of his song and of the song's effect on those who listen, just as Levertov is concerned about the effect of her poetry on her readers.'⁵³ The transition which the trees aim at seems to echo the freedom of Orpheus's words. The freedom that is linked to the act of pulling is emphasized earlier in Levertov's 'Listen' as the 'trees pulling away from earth, desiring/ to possess the fluent body of the wind' (*CP*, 38). For Levertov, the image of pulling from inside to outside is emblematic of freedom of consciousness and moving energy. This pain does not stem from a forced transition but rather from an intentional encounter with the ancestral past which reinforces the tree's deep consciousness. Pain seems to be an essential stage in the making of a decision toward change for a better future. Thus, besides the emotional confrontation, there is a painful encounter with the past in the moment of an intentional relinquishing of tradition, 'the soil heaving and cracking, the moss tearing asunder—' (*CP*, 316).

The transition which necessitates extraction of the roots is accompanied by sounds like 'heaving' and 'cracking' to indicate this upheaval. In the moment of realization and awakening, the repetition of nouns and verbs adds intensity to this transition 'in terror ... in doubt... in anguish... in haste,' 'root after root,' and 'heaving... cracking... tearing... pulling... rolling... breaking' (*CP*, 316). The verbs highlight the kinesthetic manifestation of the growing consciousness of the trees that counters the stillness at the beginning of the poem. This slow impact of the song, which comes with a layered exposure, is manifested

53 Katherine A. Hanson, 'Denise Levertov: Through An Ecofeminist Lens', (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Marquette University, 2007), p. 130.

in the short-fragmented lines, which carry within them a sense of anticipation and weight. The fragmented lines which appear on the page in sequence emphasize the importance of the individual steps the trees take in their journey. Thus, the big changes come with consecutive small acts. These lines contrast with Jeffers's long lines as in 'Apology for Bad Dreams' which reinforce a sense of continuity that makes change harder. There is a flexibility in Levertov's verse and sometimes abrupt shifts in the lineation which permit for changes of tempo and the sense that change is possible. The tragedy that Jeffers admires as a source of beauty and the victimization as a process to redemption are echoed in the trees' rejoicing in pain, in its rendering to agony and suffering, and in the wrenching of its past. What both poets try to emphasize is that change and blurring the divide between two entities requires a long process for losing one's self, past, ego, and peace for the creation of beauty, integration, and a sense of wholeness. The poem refers to the substantial changes humans need to make to transcend anthropocentric prejudices.

The individual experience inspires a collective experience through the trees' engagement with the song. In that mixed moment of pain and inspiration, the loud transition inspires other trees who are also anthropomorphized to move:

and behind me the others: my brothers
forgotten since dawn. In the forest
they too had heard,
and were pulling their roots in pain
out of a thousand years' layers of dead leaves,
 rolling the rocks away,
 breaking themselves
 out of
 their depths. (*CP*, 316)

The 'brothers' also let go of their connection to their ancestral past in the 'thousand years' layers' that they abandoned. There is a breakage from their ancestral relation but also from

their own 'depths' indicating a renunciation of an individual and collective past. Different kinesthetic images help to indicate the collective growing transition into consciousness. Verbs such as 'pulling,' 'rolling,' and 'breaking' emphasize both vertical and horizontal transitions of the trees and rocks from inside to outside. This exposure indicates a confrontation with existential decay. This breaking is also emphasized by the fragmented lines that are gradually compressed into short lines. The last two lines of two words carry a sense of astonishment and fading energy. Levertov compares the 'rush' of the 'branches moving' and the trunks 'breasting the air' to a 'dreadful storm-sounds.' This revolution works on two levels. First, it changes their static silence into movement. Second, it changes their relational connection to their past and origin. This mythic transformation that Levertov employs moves against tradition and highlights the necessity for a hierarchic transformation against traditional roles. Although still, the trees remain in human control as it is only Orpheus's song that gives them this freedom through the power of his music, Levertov, in the poem, erases the species' divide as Orpheus is pictured as a tree. The implication is profound as it suggests the interdependency of species and also the power of collective action.

Once this vertical transition is completed, the poem describes the development of a horizontal transition. Thus, Orpheus's song motivates the trees to follow 'up hill and down' and his words taught them 'to leap and to wind in and out/ around one another in figures the lyre's measure designed' (*CP*, 317). It is true that the song instigates the trees' journey of reflection, movement, and awareness, but these qualities are always present in their consciousness as the tree is sentient before Orpheus arrives. What the poem tries to emphasize is that aspects of decay and exploitation have befallen the environmental context

and that art will reconstruct the narrative. It is what Buell calls 'environmental conscious.' These lines emphasize Orpheus's role as a teacher who 'taught' them to 'dance' and 'leap.' Their submission to his teaching is crucial in changing their negative steadiness to lively positive movements. The role of the teacher is further highlighted in his joyful reaction to witnessing the change emphasizing his keenness and dedication. However, upon their arrival at their destination, the connection with Orpheus is lost. The music which holds the two together 'became/ farewell'. Orpheus in 'the moonless dark,' sang 'the sun-dried roots back into earth' and watered them with 'rain of music' that they could not hear implying a loss of inspiration. The poem suggests that there is a link between inspiration and light 'In the last light of that day his song became/farewell'. The trees' journey of transition stops at sunset which marks a departure of the trees' awareness and consciousness. Both in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and in Levertov, there is an emphasis on the power of poetry. In Ovid's poem, Orpheus was able to convince Hades, the god of the underworld, to meet Eurydice and take her back to life by arousing compassion through his singing. Levertov presents Orpheus's song which is composed of 'language' as having the impact to inspire and move not only an individual spirit but a collective mind. Levertov gestures early in this poem to the power of poetry as an essential platform for inspiring change.

Furthermore, the new 'dawn' signals a new beginning when Orpheus has gone and the trees 'have stood since' in their 'new life' (*CP*, 317). They waited for him to return and his absence suggests different possibilities. People expect that he lost his quest: 'it is said he made his earth-journey, and lost/ what he sought.' The second possibility implies an anthropocentric exploitation of him as a tree 'it is said they felled him/ and cut up his limbs for firewood.' These possibilities indicate a rupture of the change. Attempts to change fate

and reconstruct ecological relations turn to failure. Although Orpheus has left the place at the end of the poem, Levertov describes the continuance of inspiration even after his death: 'his head still sang and was swept out to sea singing.' The continuity of the singing head is a reminder of the intensity of all the sorrows that he carries and a departure from a situation of incomplete fulfillment. In both poems, there is an emphasis on the power of art to eternally recount human experiences. Despite this act of awakening and transition of place and time, the trees start to feel again the emotional pain as 'what we have lived/ comes back to us. / we see more. / we feel, as our rings increase.' All sounds of nature like 'the wind' and 'the birds' recall the agony of the past and the dance of the transition. There is a reversion to a static existence and a rupture of transition. What appears at the end of the poem is a narration from the memory of the tree's experience. The experience, which is wholly motivated by art, is cut off by its absence. Despite Levertov's presentation of the political action that is informed by her poetry through the collective transition of the trees, there is a rupture to this environmental imagination. For Levertov and for us today, the poem shows the potential of art to motivate, to take the first steps, to inspire and change. It indicates that the resolution to the environmental crisis manifested by the subjugation and stasis of the trees can never be solved through personal efforts. It necessitates a change of perspective of the whole cultural system.

Thus, the transition in the poem moves through stages from 'dawn' to 'moonless dark,' from past to present, from 'stillness' to 'heaving and cracking,' from the 'dry tingling' to 'a wave' that 'bathed' the tree, from the coldness to the warmth as 'fire he sang, / ... and I, a tree, rejoiced in its flames,' and from singularity of the perception – 'I was the first to see him' – to the plurality of the revolution as the tree realizes that 'in the forest/ they too had

heard, / and were pulling their roots in pain... We moved, we followed. / All day we followed.' Various lines emphasize the slow nature of this transitory journey which is accompanied by feelings of anticipation, terror, and pain. The fragmented lines which appear on the page in different spacing symbolize the layers of the trees which they wrench. However, at the end of this transition, there is a return to feelings of agony as the music moves the perception from imagination to reality, from present to past, and from joy to agony. Their mission is interrupted or fails with the absence of Orpheus's music. This implies that the inspiration depends on an external source and does not stem from an intrinsic source. Levertov seems to highlight both the necessity of art and collective acts to change the environmental reality. The inspiration fades but is still remembered, and the trees have been changed for the better, though they retain their fixity. Hence, a collective nonhuman awareness can never suffice without the role of human integration and peace. This disruption of experience implies that a collective change of cultural and hierarchal paradigm is vital.

Jeffers's emphasis on binaries in 'Apology for Bad Dreams' is an attempt to undermine them through the concept of victimization and redemption. Similarly, Levertov in 'A Tree Telling of Orpheus' examines in the transition of trees the distant binaries which she undermines through figurations. Levertov includes these binary oppositions as stages of a journey or transition from passivity to activity not separated or distinct from each other. She uses Orpheus's song to motivate a change and thus polarize these oppositions. Similarly, Jeffers highlights the potential of art as a sacrifice for balancing human violence. Both poets recognize an environmental reality that needs ethical and ecological reconstruction. Their assertion of nonhuman agency in the tragedy and the transience

presents the poets' valuation of pain and struggle as parts of the process of awakening consciousness. However, despite this struggle, both poems describe the beauty and joy of individual consciousness.

Both poems share a sense of responsibility in response to human anthropocentrism and its manifestation in the human and nonhuman relationship. Jeffers's portrayal of collective acts to engage with human errors in 'Apology for Bad Dreams' bears a sense of responsibility. The nostalgia for the lives of indigenous people in part three implies a shared responsibility for existing violence. Furthermore, God's torture for humanity in part four 'He brays humanity in a mortar to bring the savor / From the bruised root' indicates a divine model for responsibility (*CP1* : 210). Acts of human violence necessitate acts of responsibility and redemption. In 'A Tree Telling of Orpheus,' Levertov seems to root deep in the collective consciousness the shared responsibility to recognize nonhuman agency and act in response to ecological degradation. The poem acts as a reminder of the agency that the trees possess.

Ecological Model of Integration:

In the previous section, both poets present mythical, aesthetic, and imaginative alternative views of nonhuman agency and the vitality that rules the nonhuman world. This recognition of existing forces behind the stillness wrestles with human anthropocentric views which they critique, condemn, and attempt to reconstruct. The presence of the continuous wrestling forces discerned by both poets implies, in parallel, a continuous injustice against which they react. In this final section, I take this environmental thread a step further. Poems by both poets highlight the potential efforts that can take human and

nonhuman relationships from anthropocentrism to ecological relations that bear ethical considerations of others, preservation of nonhuman resources and a sense of wholeness with otherness. While Jeffers's 'The Answer' proposes integration as an answer after a long perception of injustice, Levertov's 'Beginners' explains the process of integration with nature and the unfolding rewards. Furthermore, Levertov's 'Re-rooting' demonstrates a collective political act of replanting, rejecting any harm to plants or lands.

Jeffers's 'The Answer' from *Such Counsels You Gave To Me* is powerful in provoking a question and proposing an answer to the environmental dilemma. It sums up Jeffers's trajectory from discussing injustices to the proposition of ecological relations. Although Jeffers presents an ethical evaluation or cultural diagnosis in early poems, he sums up in this poem a moderate view of what constitutes an ecological mindset. He is aware that previous attempts in his poetry were limited by psychological defenses such as withdrawal or by aesthetic and metaphoric attempts such as art and dreams. The poem is written during the rise of fascism and human tyranny and militarism. It confronts the long, futile attempt to criticize human tyranny over people and land. The first line of the poem opens with a sense of frustration from the long engagement with the problem and the crucial need for an actual answer:

Then what is the answer? – Not to be deluded by dreams.
To know that great civilizations have broken down into violence, and their
tyrants come, many times before.
When open violence appears, to avoid it with honor or choose the least
ugly faction; these evils are essential.
To keep one's own integrity, be merciful and uncorrupted and not wish for
evil; and not be duped
By dreams of universal justice or happiness. These dreams will not be
fulfilled. (CP2 : 536)

Jeffers recognizes, as in many poems, the continuous violence and the creation of tyrants that have brought the successive civilizations to deterioration. This cycle of tyranny is recurrent through different cycles of history. However, he recognizes as well the necessity of these evils during a cycle of tyranny. In times of fascism, one must confront the lesser evils of either avoiding the violence or choosing the least harmful one. Irrespective of the choice made, it is imperative to act in a manner that upholds personal integrity, demonstrating mercy and remaining steadfast against false claims of justice and happiness. Jeffers asserts that evil is a choice, not a destiny. A human possesses the will to 'avoid it with honor' or 'choose' that evil. The assertion of the existence of good and evil by God Isaiah 45.7 in and in Jeffers's 'Apology for Bad Dreams' is a recognition of God's power in creating all contraries from which humans can choose. It is not an acknowledgement of an inevitable situation.

Jeffers in the following lines returns to the concept of beauty in ugliness. Regardless of the weight of ugly 'parts,' for him 'the whole remains beautiful':

To know this, and know that however ugly the parts appear the whole
remains beautiful. A severed hand
Is an ugly thing and man dissevered from the earth and stars and his
history... for contemplation or in fact...
Often appears atrociously ugly. Integrity is wholeness,
the greatest beauty is
Organic wholeness, the wholeness of life and things, the divine beauty
of the universe. Love that, not man
Apart from that, or else you will share man's pitiful confusions,
or drown in despair when his days darken. (*CP2* : 536)

He criticizes the man who is intentionally 'dissevered' from the 'earth,' 'stars,' and 'his/ history.' The 'severed hand' is a synecdoche for human exploitation and violence against the environment as in many of his poems. The excessive pursuit of power in 'The Answer'

detaches 'man' from his history and from integration with the ecosystem. Jeffers describes the dividing line that humans adopt in their quest for power as 'atrociously ugly.' Regardless of all these conflicting views of violence, ugliness, and beauty in that ugliness, Jeffers takes the readers to what the title suggests. Amid the perception of all tyranny and violence in human acts, Jeffers proposes 'Organic wholeness' as the 'Answer.' This wholeness encompasses not only the living but also 'things.' For Jeffers, wholeness is the 'divine beauty' which is different from the tragic beauty that emits from ugliness. Thus, the answer to existing ecological violence is to embody that organic wholeness in one's acts. Behind these acts, there should be a positive affective relation with that wholeness instead of anthropocentric relation toward living things. For Jeffers, one should pay that emotional connection and 'love' to wholeness instead of 'man' only. Thus, man is loved as a part not as a whole. The last line indicates that the failure to embody this wholeness in one's acts and emotions will put a person in a shared state of 'man's pitiful confusions' and 'despair' in dark days. Although what Jeffers might mean during anticipation of another world war differs from the worldwide environmental crisis we anticipate in the 2020s, the poem highlights that the failure of maintaining wholeness will leave man in confusion in times of crisis. His emphasis on the earth and organic wholeness is more vividly relevant in the current context than in the 1930s. Jeffers's poetry aims to help the collective mind to be aware of the impact of their actions in future times.

Like many of Jeffers's poems, 'The Answer' highlights conflicting ethical values and describes how assumed power and progress deprive humanity of happiness and peace. However, the poem does not dwell on the problem and its physical and psychological manifestation on man and the environment. Rather, it sums up what humans need to

transcend from mere beauty to ‘divine’ beauty. Jeffers highlights in the poem the historical cycles that move in phases of rising and falling. He links ‘despair’ to the dark days which come in the falling phase. He emphasizes that regardless of bright and powerful phases when human joy is accelerated, human acts of violence are like a debt that they will pay later. Jeffers recognizes this pattern as a historical inevitability to the collapse of civilizations into tyranny. This comes in part because of human growth or the process of humanity detaching from its root in the earth through anthropocentrism or both. In this view, Jeffers implies the relationship between ethics and affects. Humans’ evils will turn to despair even if masked by economic or ideological values. Humans cannot be detached from a bigger ethical system or a parallel ecological paradigm. For him, the only way to endure such a collapse is to reconnect humanity with the rest of the universe.

Levertov similarly engages with this integrity in ‘Beginners’ from *Candles in Babylon* (1982). Levertov unfolds her concept of ecological experience that is rooted in love, fullness, and solidarity with the nonhuman world. The poem dialogues with lines from ‘The Garden of Proserpine’ by Algernon Charles Swinburne, published in 1866, and negotiates instead of death and perishing a sense of sustained ecological relation. In response to Swinburne’s poem, ‘Beginners’ juxtaposes an existing unjust relation to nonhumans and a new embrace of ecological relation to the world that defies death. Levertov introduces the argument from an experienced perspective after years of witnessing humans’ relationship to the land. It opens with lines from Swinburne’s poem:

*‘From too much love of living,
Hope and desire set free,
Even the weariest river
Winds somewhere to the sea—’ (CP, 653)*

This poem, which is based on a Greek Pagan Goddess Proserpine, presents conflicting views of life and death that show that they are inseparable. Contrary to the Christian belief in the afterlife, this poem emphasizes eternal death as a natural process. In response to the misquoted lines from Swinburne's poem, Levertov in 'Beginners' presents her own view of life and death that move into cycles of decay and revival.⁵⁴

The poem aims to reverse Swinburne's emphasis on the purposelessness of life and the idea that death is nonexistence. Instead, it asserts the liveliness that is present. The poem aims to challenge the alienation of humanity from nature and asserts the intention of people with ecological concerns to reconstruct the human relationship with the land:

But we have only begun
To love the earth.

We have only begun
To imagine the fullness of life.

How could we tire of hope?
-- so much is in bud. (*CP*, 653)

Their beginning 'to love the earth' implies a previous hostile relationship and a growing positive perspective. Christopher Kelen and Chengcheng You emphasize that Levertov's poems 'articulate an ethical voice, a voice that speaks to the bond with the Earth.'⁵⁵ Images

54 This verse from Swinburne's poem reads like:

From too much love of living,
From hope and fear set free,
We thank with brief thanksgiving
Whatever gods may be
That no life lives for ever;
That dead men rise up never;
That even the weariest river
Winds somewhere safe to sea.

55 Christopher Kelen, and Chengcheng You, 'Liminal Encounters: Ethics of Anthropomorphism in the Poetry of Levertov, Szyborska, and Fulton', *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal*, 52.2 (2019), pp. 147-65, p. 148.

of beginnings, hope, and love are central to the poem, presenting a perspective that contrasts with Swinburne's poem. The speaker expresses the new growing relationship of loving the earth and imagining integrity in 'the fullness of life.' She also questions the possibility of failure and tiredness in life's quest, emphasizing the intrinsic potential of liveliness in the 'buds' despite the suggested decay of plants. 'Bud' is a symbol of a new beginning, of an entity that is unaware of its past. Even if the plant carries a past of decay, struggle, and death, the new buds are standing out to affirm a new start.

This dividing line between the dead and the newly born indicates a hope that should be embraced rather than rejected or feared, a sign that should be looked at with optimism rather than pessimism:

How can desire fail?
-- we have only begun

to imagine justice and mercy,
only begun to envision

how it might be
to live as siblings with beast and flower,
not as oppressors. (*CP*, 653-654)

'Justice' and 'Mercy' are two components for Levertov's theory of a sustained relation between humans and nonhumans against injustices. Imagination also is an integral part of the change, emphasizing that it is essential to 'imagine' and 'envision' a perspective before enacting it. The pattern of questions in the poem presents the speaker as a person who seems newly awoken from a traumatic experience of oppression and death into an experience of 'imagined justice and mercy.' She indicates that the hierarchal relationship with nonhumans that allows for violence and oppression is beginning to change to an equal integrity that views humans as 'siblings' with nonhumans rather than 'oppressors.' There

is an encounter that puts humans and nonhumans in equal biological relation that defies division and separation. In response to the pagan inevitability of death in Swinburne's poem, 'Beginners' registers the growing environmental hope that wants to amend and restructure existing anthropocentric divisions. Levertov highlights that 'hastening/ into the sea of nonbeing' is a choice rather than a destiny (*CP* , 654). This, in part, anticipates Levertov's conversion to Christianity a couple of years later in its rejection of 'the sea of nonbeing.' Instead of meditating on the abstract concept of death, the poem registers the first steps toward a practical act of living. This liveliness is manifested in the buds which are considered as basic units of plants. It is also manifested in the integration which humans start to 'envision' and the breakage which they intend to mend. Although there is a new ecological relation to be created, Levertov emphasizes that psychological 'hurt' cannot 'be forgiven.'

In this journey towards healing and integrity, Levertov juxtaposes two powers: the power of past oppression against the environment towards 'beast' and 'flowers' and the newly emerged power of joining 'solitudes' in 'the communion of struggle.' The collective power against struggle is 'unfolding' and Levertov recognizes the necessity to proceed with it. There is a sense of pushing against hierarchical dividing lines that view nonhumans as insignificant. The power of this solidarity exceeds the sense of despair or mere acceptance of death. In that apparent hope and beginning, the people are starting to heal from a traumatic ecological struggle. There is a redirection and an intentional reconstruction. It is a drama of resurrection, of continuity.

Jeffers's 'The Answer' and Levertov's 'Beginners' register the poets' reconstructed ecological view against anthropocentric relations. Jeffers and Levertov witnessed

throughout their career acts of imbalance with, and injustice to, the land. Although their responses change throughout their perceptive environmental journey, they reach a point of balanced ecological perspective that abandons extremes of withdrawal or revolutionary anger. These poems register a moderate view of what existing human relationship with the land necessitates. The poets' position is one that recognizes the long period of traumatized experience and the wrong construction of human ideologies. The argument of these poems, as suggested earlier, focuses on the answer to a new beginning rather than on the critique of humanity. Their proposed concepts of integration are not imperative but rather presented in a vision that wishes to conclude a dilemma and write a new hope. What seems to be imagined in abstract terms are presented in these poems as a practical experience that can be fulfilled.

Furthermore, Levertov's 'Re-Rooting' advances her argument in 'Beginners' to an actual and practical act of integrity and communitive acts to help the environment. As the previous poems suggest in the previous two sections, ecological fate needs a collective responsibility rather than individual acts. Levertov moves from aesthetic or abstract engagement to actual acts of saving the land. It is not the inspiration of art that motivates people to act but rather their social and political consciousness that grows from their ecological perspective. 'Re-Rooting' from *Candles in Babylon* (1982) presents an incident of the thriving restoration of plants that are dying and the necessity for people to respond to the uprooting of plants. 'The poem supports the revolutionary political voice of 'Staying Alive,' but in an environmental context. Throughout the poem, Levertov depicts a sense of emergency, a state between life and death. There is an intersection between humans and

land, an ecological relation where a group of people try to rescue plants. The poem opens with a tone of urgency in the first-person narrator's attempts to save the roots:

We were trying to put the roots back.
wild and erratic straying root-limbs,
trying to fit them into the hole that was
cleancut in clay, deep but not
wide enough; or wide but too square—trying
to get the roots back into earth
before they dried out and died. (*CP*, 668)

The roots symbolize the fundamental unit of life that needs to be preserved. The introductory lines of the poems do not explicitly elucidate what happened to the plants. However, the pervasive sense of urgency suggests an unexpected crisis of life and death that people work together to alter. The speaker repeatedly explains people 'trying' to 'put,' 'fit,' and 'get' the roots back in their place. This refrain implies a state of mixed panic and fear. The movement from the outside to the inside 'into,' 'into the hole,' 'back into earth' suggests a past uprooting. This instance of environmental injustice is mentioned later in the poem as the roots that humans "had rashly torn away," which remain damp. There is a description of striving life amid destined death. Time is a crucial factor in the collective attempts toward plantation where people wrestle with the consequences of human violence that seems accumulating.

The following lines examine the claims of material ecocriticism that assert the vitality and agency of plants. The discussion of plant agency in the following lines brings this poem into dialogue with 'A Tree Telling of Orpheus.' Though in the latter, Levertov presents the anthropomorphized trees wrenching their roots and declaring their independence, the uprooting in the later poem is emblematic of the human rush to harm the land. The speaker

explains the interaction between people and the trees' roots, examining closely the plants' intrinsic parts and the dynamics of liveliness:

Ineptly we pulled and pushed
striving to encompass so many rivers
Of wood and fiber in one confinement without
Snapping the arteries of sap, the force
Of life springing in them that made them
Spring away from our hands—(*CP* , 668)

The juxtaposition of acts of pulling and pushing reinforces the haste and urgency that the first lines indicate. The pulling echoes the acts in 'A Tree Telling of Orpheus' with the same sense of urgency. However, in this poem, these acts are performed by people rather than by the trees. The image of pulling as in 'Listen' and 'A Tree Telling of Orpheus' is emblematic of emerging consciousness. However, in 'Re-Rooting,' the juxtaposition of pulling and pushing not only indicates urgency but also an affirmation of ecological territory. With these acts, Levertov explains the encounter of various materials of trees that beat with liveliness. She compares these to 'many rivers' that encompass 'wood,' 'fiber,' and 'arteries of sap.' People try to plant the roots back without 'snapping' the 'arteries' which hold the 'force/ Of life.' There is a definite force that affirms its existence even in moments of decay and death. These are the last hope to preserve the trees' existence. The speaker fears losing the last hope of life which marks a connection between humans and nonhumans. These specific incidents account for wider human anthropocentric acts of injustice towards territories that are not theirs. The collective voice in the poem represents a contrasting power against injustice, affirming instead that nonhuman agency is a collective feature for all living entities. Embracing that position is a sign of an ecological perspective.

The lines that follow carry a mixture of nostalgia for a past connection with nonhumans and the fear of losing that connection. These lines discuss a wider context of human relationship with the land and the energy that acts between them:

we knew our own life was
tied to that strength, that strength we knew would
ebb away if we could not find within us
the blessed guile to tempt
its energy back into earth,
into the quiet depths from which we had
rashly torn it, and now clumsily
struggled to thrust it back not into sinuous corridors
fit for its subtleties, but obstinately
into an excavation dug by machine, (*CP* , 668)

With these acts, there is a continuous fear of losing the ‘strength’ with their neglect. Levertov compares this energy to a wave that may ‘ebb away’ or approach in the shape of a movement. Although nature possesses this energy, Levertov emphasizes that it needs humans to save them. Unlike human ‘energy’ which is compared to ‘a spider thread’ in Levertov’s ‘Beyond the End,’ in nature ‘there is no choice’ (*CP* , 43). The speaker, in ‘Re-Rooting,’ declares the human responsibility for these acts as they had ‘rashly torn it’ from ‘the quiet depths.’ What they are trying to do is atone for their initial rashness. This can be understood as a broader atonement by those who care for nature in response to humanity’s reckless exploitation and extractivism. The speaker explains that their re-rooting is never an easy task. There is a sense of ‘subtleties’ that are harmed and cannot be regained in a simpler act into their ‘sinuous corridors.’ The hole is ‘cleancut’, ‘too square’, ‘dug by a machine’ — it is precisely this neatness that makes it so difficult to accommodate the roots. The deep natural relation requires rather an ideology of preservation.

People are driven in their acts by emotions and the fear of losing the last hope. The speaker describes the end of these quick acts as waking from a dream ‘And I wake, / as if

from dream,' emphasizing in the nature of the speed their turbulent feelings. It also cleverly sums up the tone of the whole poem which encompasses both fear and confusion. Being in a dreamlike situation indicates a transitional phase and unexpected events to the perceiver. This mixture of scenes, perceptions, and acts leaves people in constant hyperactivity and subsequent exhaustion as if just awake from a bad dream akin to Jeffers's bad dreams. However, despite this awakening, there is a twist in the end as the speaker discovers that the 'digging' actually 'has not yet begun.' The poem, in 'as if from a dream,' suggests that it is not an actual dream but an imagined situation. It is only in the final lines that the act of uprooting takes on a wider significance, when it is suggested that the replanting has not yet happened and that even the mechanical digging of holes which is a precondition for it hasn't. The closing lines open the poem out to prompt reflection on human failure to redress, even inadequately, harms rashly done, to nature but also more generally. The poem takes the reader into a scene of thriving ecological responsibility. Despite being this scene an imagined wish, it helps the reader to share that responsibility with people, instigating in the reader the need to start what 'has not yet begun.' The poem acts as a digging into the reader's ecological consciousness. It bears a double meaning of the need for people to be re-rooted in nature. Poems in the last two sections of the chapter emphasize the role of imagination and art in engaging the reader with injustices and meditating instead ecological perspectives.

Conclusion:

This chapter, thus, surveys Jeffers's and Levertov's trajectories against human anthropocentric exploitation of land, cruelty to animals, and misuse of plants. The first

section of the chapter highlights, in a similar manner to previous chapters, the poets' diagnosis of injustices in nonhuman environment. The human sense of privilege over other species creates a divide that constantly fosters their domination, oppression, and exploitation of nonhumans. What Jeffers and Levertov try to emphasize are alternative dynamics that exist in parallel with human power. In the poems of section two, Jeffers and Levertov affirm the intrinsic agency, power, and consciousness of the natural world that wrestles with humanity's injustices. The darkening of the ocean, the wrenching of the tree's roots, the emotional perplexity by which Jeffers describes the ocean and Levertov describes the trees together affirm the material and affective qualities which ecocriticism has recently begun to investigate. Though they journey through these dynamics through figuration, myth, poetic writing, and dreams, they help to blur the divide between humans and nonhumans and assert a contrasting point of view to human assumptions. This blended engagement with human injustices and nature resistance and agency help into the arrival at an ecological position. Their later poems, examined in section three, demonstrate a balanced perspective in which they propose sustainable values, preservation of nonhuman resources, and expanding our awareness to others whom we underestimate, fear, or exploit.

Conclusion:

The ecopoetry of Robinson Jeffers and Denise Levertov stands out for its powerful critiques of American anthropocentrism and its impacts on ecological relations. Jeffers's urban critique and Levertov's political poetry and their environmental poetry reveal the ways in which anthropocentric acts of injustices and environmental degradation are inextricably linked. Jeffers's poetry of urbanization offers an indictment of modern urban life, depicting the city as a site of environmental destruction and social alienation. His contrast with nature conveys how far the dehumanizing conditions of modern life have impacted ecological integrity, instigating a connection with nature. Levertov, on the other hand, approaches environmental concerns through the lens of political activism, using her poetry to give voice to the victims of war and challenge the systems of power that perpetuate environmental injustice. The intimacy which fuels her description of the victimized offers a presentation of the intricate affective details that emerge in response to violence, connecting the Americans with the distant Vietnamese. Within these urban and war environments, the poets' critiques are inclusive of political ideologies that encourage the subjugation of nonhumans, cruelty to animals, and exploitation of resources.

Both Jeffers and Levertov recognize that the environmental crisis is not merely a matter of ecological degradation, but a reflection of deeper ideologies that rule political, social, and environmental relations. As the environmental justice movement has shown, the burden of environmental harm falls on vulnerable people, communities, and species who often lack the resources and political power to resist the destruction of their local environments. Both poets use their unique viewpoints to engage with injustices that are at once expansive and intimate. These inspirations define their attitude and approaches in

their poetry. While Jeffers is detached, prophetic, and philosophical, Levertov is intimate and empathetic. However, there are different inspirations behind their poetry. Jeffers's poetry is informed by his cyclical view of history, offering a perspective that is enriched by the broader context of civilization and its past. On the other hand, Levertov's poetry is deeply rooted in her social and political consciousness, allowing her to create a vivid, multi-sensory experience of the war scene.

Motivated by their poetic and political responsibilities, they use their poetry to offer literary presentations of anthropocentric relations and authentic experiences to a broader audience. Through images of contrasts and separations, they draw the dynamics of the human relationship ruled discrimination and hierarchy. Both poets investigate injustices caused by these ideologies across urban, political, and nonhuman environments. These presentations amplify the voices of the submissive masses within Jeffers's poetry, highlight the victimized in the Vietnam War in Levertov's work, and address the subjugated nonhumans in both of their poetry. Jeffers's concern for the 'children' in the city in 'Shine, Perishing Republic' and Levertov's empathy for the outer group of the Vietnamese across another continent, and their concern with nonhuman safety create a deeper sense of 'moral responsibility.'¹ Jeffers's poetics of wilderness, to which he resorts, is a site for a critique of human culture and an advocacy of timeless values. Similarly, Levertov's poetics is a site for both a destructed vision and an emerging political one. The dynamic agency of nonhumans in poems of Chapter 3 allows both poets to establish new ideologies of

1 William Major, 'Wendell Berry and the Affective Turn', in *Affective Ecocriticism: Emotion, Embodiment, Environment*, ed. by Kyle Bladow and Jennifer Ladino (The Board of Regents of The University of Nebraska, 2018), pp. 117-54, p. 121.

presentation against established ones. These responses emerge as counterparts to existing injustices that attempt to advocate a vision of integration, peace, and recognition.

Jeffers and Levertov are devoted to honesty and truthfulness in their poems, rejecting that which does not represent experience. Their poetry establishes a poetic responsibility that aims to convey, reflect on, and offer ways of redemption, peace, and ecological integration. Jeffers's rejection of all that is not real and imaginative emerges from his reading of a phrase by Nietzsche: 'The poets? The poets lie too much.' He explains the decision he took since his reading of this phrase in the Forward to *The Selected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers*:

I was nineteen when the phrase stuck in my mind; a dozen years passed before it worked effectively, and I decided not to tell lies in verse. Not to feign any emotion that I did not feel; not to pretend to believe "optimism" or "pessimism," or irreversible "progress"; not to say anything because it was popular, or generally accepted, or fashionable in intellectual circles, unless I myself believed it; and not to believe easily. (CP4 : 391-92)

Similarly, in her essay 'Glimpses from Vietnam,' Levertov explains how her presence in Vietnam enriches her poetry with a factual perspective on war and its emotional weight:

I have spent the last few days typing page after page of factual material accumulated during my stay. I was beginning to feel I would never get it all down and to despair of conveying a feeling of the place, even with all my facts, or perhaps just because I had too many facts. So I began over, reliving impressions.²

Levertov's are not the happy feelings that are recollected in tranquility by Wordsworth but a physical cruelty that is relived over again. This factual material that informs Jeffers's and Levertov's poetry makes it a documentation of a collective memory of injustice instead of a national memory of power and progress.

2 Denise Levertov, 'Glimpses of Vietnam Life', in *The Poet in the World* (New Directions Books, 1973), pp. 129-45, p. 129.

This honesty and directness make their poetry relevant to our own time, allowing a diagnosis and reflection of similar issues of ideology and environmental relations. Their responsiveness to the emergencies that threaten the integration of the environment makes models for ecological activism and determination towards justice. They draw a counterpart environmental imagination of integration and justice in their poetry against social and environmental injustices. Both reflect and allow readers to reflect upon the potential of ecopoetry to present anthropocentric relations and to deconstruct and replace them with ecological imagination. Their poetry remains a testament to the enduring power of art in addressing environmental issues, urging us to see, reflect and act in pursuit of a more just and sustainable world.

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