

Preface

One day while browsing in the American Library in Athens, an obscure impulse moved my hand toward *The Selected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers*, a book, like most of Jeffers' work, then out of print. I opened the book, and fell right in.

At the time I knew no one conversant with Jeffers, and so no one with whom to share my sense of him as a great poet and my puzzlement at his critical neglect. I found a kindred spirit at last in William Everson, to whom I reached out when I began to write about Jeffers. His generosity and support—far beyond the merits of my work—inducted me into the community of scholars, poets, and lay readers being organized around the Robinson Jeffers Tor House Foundation and its resourceful president, George L. White. It is my privilege and good fortune to have enjoyed that happy company, and that of the scholarly society which grew out of it, the Robinson Jeffers Association. Great writers exert a tidal pull on their students, and that shared experience has made many warm friendships for me. I am particularly indebted in the present work to Robert Brophy, Tim Hunt, Rob Kafka, and James Karman, but also to the many other colleagues who have shared their insights with me, and who will forgive me if I do not mention them by name in what, to do them proper justice, would be a list of unmanageable length. I again thank Dean Donna Murasko of the College of Arts and Sciences of Drexel University for the subvention that has helped make this book possible, and my editor, Norris Pope, for his support of a project quite different from my initial collaboration with the Stanford Press. I am grateful to the readers of the Press for their attentive and thoughtful appraisal of my manuscript. All remaining demerits are mine.

My previous study of Jeffers, *The Cliffs of Solitude*, examined his major narratives from a Freudian standpoint. This seemed a natural perspective, since Jeffers was the first American writer to consciously utilize Freudian themes and stratagems in his work. I believe this interpretive model remains fruitful, and it informs the fifth chapter of the present book. Nonetheless, this book is, as its

Preface

title indicates, principally organized around the hermeneutic of the sublime. Through this, I have attempted to consider Jeffers' work in the larger context of American literary and cultural history, and to situate him at what I believe to be one of its central crossroads. Jeffers occupied that crossroad with his contemporaries of the Modernist generation, but, although sharing many of the Modernists' concerns and some of their stylistic innovations, he went his own way. His relation to the Modernists thus runs partly parallel to them, but is also in crucial respects adversarial. To draw this out fully is the work of another book. My intention here is to situate Jeffers in the tradition as he received it, transformed it, and, in my view, significantly enriched it.

My chief debt, as in everything I have written and everything I have done, is to my life companion, Lili Bitá. As Jeffers said of his own mate, Una, she has given me eyes, but heart and resolve too. To her and to my loving family, this book is gratefully dedicated.