

## Rock and Hawk

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

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

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

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

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

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