IMPRESSIONS OF BOHEMIA

Portraits by JACK COUGHLIN

Commentary by RICHARD DILLON

PACIFIC RIM GALLERIES
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PREFACE

ONE sultry summer evening a couple of years ago, Jack Coughlin and I were sitting on the front porch of my Victorian summer residence-art gallery on Cape Cod bemoaning the lack of business. Visitors to our galleries had been many, but they were looking for souvenirs and not works of art. It was getting on towards the end of an uncomfortably hot and muggy summer and we were looking forward to Labor Day when we could close our galleries and turn to other pursuits. Jack was especially interested in getting back to his teaching of printmaking at the University of Massachusetts.

Our conversation turned to Jack's etchings of famous persons and particularly to his boxed folio, *Thirteen Irish Writers*. I had received encouragement from the Robinson Jeffers Tor House Foundation and inquired if he would be interested in making an etching of Jeffers. He indicated that he would and the idea soon blossomed into another boxed folio project featuring photographers and literary figures that, at one time or another in their careers, resided in the Big Sur-Carmel-Monterey, California area.

Thanks are due to Charles Haas and Harry Valentine for their encouragement and for their arranging an introduction to Don Fleming of the Press of the Golden Key who in turn introduced Richard Dillon, the late Don Greame Kelley, and Susan Acker of the Feathered Serpent Press to the project. I am also indebted to Don Fleming for his editorial and coordinating assistance.

Others who were much supportive with the completion of this project include Virginia Adams, Mary Alinder, Lee Jeffers, Nancy Miller, Barbara Patchell, Helen Spangenberg, Richard Tevis, May Waldroup, Beth Wright, and James D. Hart who, along with Peter Hanff and the staff of the Bancroft Library of the University of California, were especially helpful.

It was my wife Barbara who continuously encouraged me, and it was she who registered only mild objections when we appropriated her studio for the printing of some of the etchings, thus depriving her of working space.

James Johnson
CARMEL 1986

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COMMENTARY

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON discovered Monterey in 1879, 275 years after Sebastián Vizcaíno's landfall. Many writers and artists followed Stevenson as residents, sojourners or visitors and, over the years, a Seacoast of Bohemia began to stretch from Monterey and Pacific Grove to Carmel and Big Sur.

The circumstances of the Stevenson arrival were bohemian enough. He was pursuing a sweetheart ten years his senior, married, and the mother of two children. He had little luggage, less money. He said that he had left Edinburgh with only fond farewells. By his love for a so-called American adventuress, he had forfeited the affection of his strait-laced parents, even the support of his literary colleagues, who tried to dissuade the romantic runaway from his foolhardy adventure.

The tired traveler was enchanted by the atmosphere of Alta California's old capital, where time had stood still since the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo. It was a somnolent, if not comatose, corner of *Californios* (Mexican-Californians) with a sprinkling of sympathetic *Anglos* or *Gringos*, Americans and Europeans, plus Indians and Chinese. The town's few streets were paved only with sea sand. Their tributary lanes and alleyways were turned by winter rains into deeply-fissured arroyos. Rattletrap wooden sidewalks only added to the hazards of pedestrians. They began and ended erratically and were capable of launching unwary nocturnal strollers off into unlit and flooded thoroughfares.

After being deserted by his paramour, Stevenson escaped the coast's wet, melancholy—and potentially dangerous—fogs. He wanted to save three weeks of rent, so he set off on a camping trip into what he called "the quaint and unfinished" hills hemming in Carmel Valley on the south. In these foothills of the Santa Lucia Mountains, he was chilled one night by a cold fog that penetrated far inland. His cough returned. He became sicker and weaker as he hunched over his small creekside campfire, dosing himself with hot coffee. He let his horse go, before it should die of thirst, and lay in a delirium for two days and nights. In his stupor, he thought that he heard the sound of bells.

The bells were real enough, on the necks of foraging angora goats. He was rescued by goat ranchers and returned to health by them and other concerned citizens of the Monterey area, one of whom, Crevole Bronson, editor of the weekly *Monterey Californian*, hired him to write a few items for $2.00 a week.

Because of his cough, Stevenson preferred starry nights, perfumed by chaparral, wildflowers and the sighing, resinous pines, to the chilling fogs that bullied their way inshore as the weakened sun set. But he was artist enough to recognize the exquisite beauty of the sea mists, and he wrote a piece which pre-figured his Mount St. Helena tour de force, "Sea Fogs" in *Silverado Squatters*.

After his recovery, Stevenson set a local pattern for future bohemians. He rode horseback to Point Lobos, picnicked at the beach, and joined swimming parties. But, above all, he walked—to Point Pinos lighthouse; the Indian *ranchería* in Carmel Valley; to prim and proper Pacific Grove, which styled itself The Christian Seaside Resort. He liked

to stroll the old Monterey cemetery. These graveyard *paseos*, for some reason, cheered him, but his steps and thoughts always returned to the dominating sea. He strolled the white sands of Carmel Bay, admired the *ensenada* or bight that was broad Monterey Bay, and studied the long, rolling, green breakers of the open sea that collapsed in creaming surf, scouring secluded coves, or exploded into spray and foam on rocky promontories. He came to know the deer and quail of upland chaparral, the ducks in the quiet and brackish sloughs and lagoons, swooping seagulls as raucous and greedy for carrion as ravens, and the nervous sandpipers artfully dodging the invading and retreating waves on the wet beach. He studied the local flora, from sea moss, sea palms and great whips of kelp (he called all seaweed "sea tangles") to the shading live oaks, cypresses and closed-cone Monterey pines.

Everywhere, even far inland, he was aware of the sea bombarding the coastline. "The silence that immediately surrounds you where you stand is not so much broken as it is haunted by this distant, circling, rumor. It sets your senses on edge; you strain your attention; you are clearly and unusually conscious of small sounds near at hand; you walk listening like an Indian hunter . . ."

When Stevenson left Monterey he never returned. Yet the peninsula continued to hold a special place in his heart and never left his consciousness; in a sense, the short-term Californian became an adopted native son. The poetry which he wrote during his stay is dated and unread today. But, besides the local color of essays like *The Old Pacific Capital*, he put great topographic chunks of Point Lobos into the setting of his mythical Treasure Island.

The first notable writer to follow Stevenson was prolific Gertrude Atherton, born (1857) a would-be patrician on San Francisco's posh Rincon Hill. As a writer, she became a pioneering liberated female in what was a man's world, indeed, the Ice Age of the Women's Movement. At 19, she was a spoiled brat who got even with her quarrelsome and thrice-wed mother by marrying the latter's new boyfriend.

Merrily widowed in 1887, Gertrude at first scorned the idea of writing about California. She sought fame and fortune in glamorous London, but wrote "Los Cerritos" there, a story set in the lonely Jolón Valley just over the Sierra from Big Sur. With this fresh in mind, she read a magazine article exhorting some bright genius (sic) to "mine" California's neglected Spanish-Mexican past, the most romantic and picturesque period in American history. Gertrude naturally assumed that the challenge was addressed to her. Ignoring Helen Hunt Jackson's best-selling *Ramona*, she determined to stake out old Alta California as her personal literary province. "Its nuggets are mine!," she exclaimed to herself.

Mrs. Atherton hurried home, quickly renounced her repudiation of California's Hispanic past, and convinced herself of the aristocratic heritage of its *paisanos*. She had never read a history of the state, and had never visited Monterey, but she got her *Chilena* mother-in-law, grudgingly, to make a few contacts among respectable "Spanish" (Mexican) families to whom, as a *Criolla* or Spanish Creole, the old lady, haughty as the Dowager Empress of China, felt much superior.

Gertrude Atherton's attempt to re-create local color (described in *Adventures of a Novelist*) with half a dozen aging *doñas* was a fiasco, an unplanned charade, but weeks of background research in Monterey enabled her to write a series of short

stories based on authentic history and legend which she sold to English periodicals. She then collected the tales as *Before the Gringo Came*, which was revised as *The Splendid Idle Forties*. *Patience Sparhawk And Her Times* combined a Carmel Valley locale with her novelistic stock in trade, an unconventional, daring feminist story populated with thinly disguised relatives, friends and enemies of the author. The book featured her usual troubled, rebellious heroine and was considered lurid, sensational and shocking by readers accustomed to properly submissive young ladies.

Gertrude Atherton's fictive California, like the earlier *Ramona* and Mary Austin's later *Isidro*, was a romanticized picture of a vanished (and partly mythical) pastoral era. Saving graces were the grains of truth at the heart of each tale and some vivid descriptive writing. But the stories were careless in composition, and theatrical in characterization.

Modesty was not Mrs. Atherton's long suit, especially after a few critics compared her to George Eliot, Stendahl and Charlotte Bronte. She pitched her fiction at intellectual snobs and considered herself to be Henry James in skirts.

Ambrose Bierce visited Carmel only once, Jack London but twice. However, the former set the literary style of the leader of the outpost of San Francisco bohemia, and the latter determined his lifestyle. Their postulant was George Sterling, born (1869) in Sag Harbor, New York. The bookish, tall and lean-muscled Sterling worked in his uncle Frank T. Havens' real estate office. Although Sterling hated his desk job and may have seen himself as a Bob Cratchit, Havens was an "angel" rather than a Scrooge. He paid his nephew $100 a week, a fortune in pre-World War I years, gave him a $12,000 house as a wedding present, and handed him the profits from the sale of $9,000 in stocks.

While commuting to work in San Francisco from the East Bay by ferryboat, Sterling began to write poetry. It caught the eye of the Pacific Coast's self-appointed literary arbiter, Ambrose Bierce, who promptly adopted George as his Number One protege and disciple. Bierce loved flattery and Sterling offered him dazzle-eyed adoration. The dominating Bierce demanded his own impeccable taste, "the highest literary standards," in his pupil and his exacting tutelage locked the malleable, almost genuflective, young man into a rigid and self-conscious aestheticism. He was never able to escape from this precious and snobbish trap, even when he began to lead a double life as a randy, raunchy, bohemian. In his puffery, Bierce proclaimed that his discovery would become "the poet of the skies, the prophet of the suns."

In his literary hypnosis, Sterling became the most abject and slavish of apprentices, submitting every line to "The Master" for blue-penciling. He never deviated, experimented or took literary risks. He admitted his servitude in his verse– "Glad to thy decree I bow . . ." and always carried on his person, like a talisman, a recent letter from his mentor. The mesmerized Sterling remained ignorant of the self-indulgent "lit'ry" quality of his delicate, "exquisite"—high-faluting—work. Its sublime (i.e., ornate) classic revival style never changed, although it was already archaic as Frost, Sandburg and Masters revolutionized poetry with straightforward, vernacular, realism.

Tired of distractions, temptations to dissipation, and clashing egoes of North Beach, the half-bourgeois, half-bohemian Sterling decided to emulate Stevenson. He snapped at the bait when Carmel-by-the-Sea developers chummed literary

waters with discount prices on property there. The speculators hoped that the attendant publicity would appeal to the aesthetic tendencies of an educated and well-heeled elite, and attract them as residents to picturesque Carmel.

In 1902, the City's Browning-and-Keats, rolled into one, met Jack London. London was successful and self-centered. Sterling, vain because of his good looks, was surprisingly generous in spirit. He hated violence and war, although he did a volte face during World War I, while London liked the idea of bloodshed and thought that it was a biological necessity, the very essence of survival. London was also the ex-soapbox "Boy Socialist"; he still rubber-stamped his letters "Yours for the Revolution!" Sterling was apolitical though he became a nominal, tag-along, socialist to avoid angering his pal. Soon, the popular novelist and rising poet were the closest of friends. London was "Wolf" from the totem of a wolf's head on his bookplate, and George was "Greek" from his classic, cameo-like profile.

London was hard-working and outgoing, ambitious, and always having to be the center of attraction. Sterling was no threat; though the nominal "leader" of bohemian Carmel, he was really a natural follower. So the more worldly novelist, a hostage of the Victorian double standard of morals, proceeded to convert his sober and conventional commuter pal to a life of hedonism on the Oakland waterfront and the San Francisco Barbary Coast.

The excuse for Jack's outrageous behavior was his illegitimacy and a hungry and exhausting childhood. He was forced to become a breadwinner when only 10 or 11 years old and remained bitter all of his life about his bastardy and loss of boyhood. Although he made substantial sums of money, he never could overcome his sense of insecurity and his need to overcompensate, with bravado, for an inferiority complex. He was capable of only a few close friendships, as with Sterling, and he dropped friends easily.

Sterling had no excuse for turning into a drunk, an accomplished adulterer, and probably a drug user. He enjoyed a happy childhood, was warm and friendly and was liked by everyone he met. His hospitality and generosity became proverbial and prodigal. He had a modest poetic talent which won him the local reputation of being another Browning, Keats or Dante, but he suffered from one major flaw—a lack of character. Loyalty, at least in the matrimonial sense, meant nothing to the converted bohemian.

George Sterling tried to reform when he moved to Carmel in 1905. San Francisco's Bacchus, the King of Bohemia, became ecstatic about the simple country life. He had another go at monogamy and traded carousing for hiking, chopping wood, kindling fires of pitch pine logs, vegetable gardening, hunting, searching for bee trees and prying mussels and abalones from rocks to cook over driftwood fires on the beach. He urged both Bierce and London to move to his paradise, which inspired him to write poems about the crystalline waters of Carmel Bay (contrasting with the split-pea soup of San Francisco Bay) and the sea wind tuning the tall pines.

Like Stevenson, Sterling was fascinated by the sundown shore. But unlike Stevenson and Jeffers, the romantic Sterling hid in the sea mists, the mysterious archipelago of the Hesperides, the Isles of the Blest. And even the best verse by Carmel's poet laureate, *faute de mieux*, like "Spring in Carmel," "Beyond the Breakers," "Evening," "Sails and Mirage," and "Autumn in Carmel," suffer in

comparison with Jeffers' powerful lines. Unable to escape from the "Lo!" school of Longfellow-and-Whittier poetry, he could only reiterate the sterile word "Beauty" over and over again, substituting extravagances of phrasing for genuine emotion.

Sterling's highly formal and lofty (but narrow) poetry is unread today. He is remembered, ironically, if at all, as the main composer of a "Purple Cow"-like bit of doggerel, "The Abalone Song." Nevertheless, the vitality and imagination of his verse temporarily overcame its glittering imagery and metaphor (empty of power or profundity), and his poems became popular. Curiosity-seekers besieged his home in the pines and souvenir hunters carried off such treasured literary mementos as the chips lying around his chopping block. Still, his fame was entirely local, Californian, as almost all of his poetry was published in San Francisco, not New York, and apparently subsidized.

The 1906 earthquake and fire exodus from San Francisco increased the number of artists and literati arriving in Carmel. In 1908 the New York *Times* sent a columnist to survey the arcadian Greenwich Village of the West. He was followed in 1910 by Willard Huntington Wright (S. S. Van Dine) of the Los Angeles *Times*, who whipped out a Sunday supplement sort of expose, "Hot bed of Soulful Culture, Vortex of Erotic Erudition . . ." But even in its halcyon days, 1905–15, Carmel was never a utopian experiment as some critics said, nor just a collection of langorous lotus eaters, becalmed beachcombers, with minds running down like unwound clocks as Van Wyck Brooks (mistakenly) insisted. Among the many hard-working professionals were Jimmy Hopper, Fred Bechdolt, the MacGowan sisters, Harry Leon Wilson, and a few gifted writers like Wright's "Mad Mullah," Mary Austin, who knew all too well the pangs, the agony, of true literary creativity. She later recalled the simplicity and charm of Carmel life. Familiar with San Francisco, Greenwich Village, the Left Bank, Soho and Florence, she found that none compared with Sterling's Carmel.

The best of the Carmel prose writers, Mary Austin was born in Carlinville, Illinois, in 1868. She was already the author of a desert classic, the impressionistic, insightful *Land of Little Rain*, when she visited Carmel with Sterling as her guide. Like Gertrude Atherton, she was in search of Mexican-California background for her writing. Mary resembled Mrs. Atherton in being a liberated woman of boundless ambition as a writer. She was also trapped in an unhappy marriage which ended in separation, divorce, and the institutionalization of her retarded daughter.

The woman who settled in Carmel in 1906 to write with a vengeance was a mystic, a naturist rather than just a naturalist and environmentalist. She looked to the universe, including its unseen presences, for personal guidance. She attached herself to the kindly Sterling and soon became infatuated with the high priest of "austere exoticism." Unsmiling, humorless, Mary Austin was idiosyncratic and difficult, but was tagged unfairly with a reputation for eccentricity simply because she donned an Indian buckskin dress, decorated with beadwork, wore her hair in Indian princess braids, and worked on her writing in her *wickiup*, or Indian hut. This was actually a treehouse sort of a platform high in a pine tree.

Mary Austin was the only writer between Stevenson and Jeffers-Steinbeck to study seriously the local rural folk. She liked the mountaineers from Tassajara's ridges. They brought bear meat and honey to town from the lilac-colored crests. The

tinkling bells of teamsters signalled that wagons were en route from the rough road's-end of the Big Sur coast, hauling mountain lion pelts to trade for supplies. Unfortunately, Mary found time and room for only a little local color in her books.

Mrs. Austin absented herself from Carmel in the mistaken belief that she was dying of cancer. Jimmy Hopper ran into her in England where she had been cured of her malady, real or imagined, and was the toast of London. She complained to him that The Bunch—save for the kind Sterling, of course—had *driven* her from Carmel with their lack of understanding of the particular phase she had been in during her *wickiup* days. Mary was traveling with a companion whom she delicately referred to as "my young man," but, in her usual mysterious way, she whispered to Hopper that she was involved in a stormy love affair.

Mary Austin returned to Carmel, and then, in 1924, took her talents and swollen ego to Santa Fe where she lived out the rest of her productive literary life, to 1934. Her later books were often infused with feminism, social protest, religion and spiritualism. Overall, her prose was better than her poetry, her non-fiction superior to her novels and short stories.

Jack London visited Carmel only once before and once after his ill-starred cruise in the *Snark* (1907). Because of his genuine interest in intensive farming, he ignored Sterling's urging to settle in Carmel. Perhaps he sensed that the al fresco bohemia might become a trap. In any case, he chose Sonoma County's Valley of the Moon where he transformed himself from would-be revolutionary into gentleman farmer, scientific agriculturalist and Squire of Glen Ellen. But Jack did not forget the peninsula and "peacock blue" Carmel Bay. He set five chapters of his 1913 novel, *The Valley of the Moon*, there and peopled its pages with lightly disguised members of Sterling's Carmel Bunch.

London might have ended up as a dockside gang leader were it not for the efforts of Oakland librarians Ina Coolbrith and Frederick Bamford. They turned him into a voracious reader, then a prolific writer. The likeable libertine, bewildered by his eventual success, threw money around like the drunken sailor who was his role model. He married in hopes of fathering legitimate children, boys, of course, but had only two daughters. The energetic, manic-depressive London turned out what were considered to be "rattling good stories" in their day. Some are still read, but more because of his Hemingwayesque personality than for their intrinsic value.

Arnold Genthe, himself a bon vivant and ladies' man, judged London to be a mix of super-masculinity (his "image") and almost feminine sensitivity. This wistfulness was betrayed by the fine blue eyes of a dreamer. Mary Austin was less kind. She noted the rather high voice for such a big frame; his sagging paunch, the reward and price of success; the bravura maleness. She pooh-pooed as wishful thinking, twaddle, the *droit de seigneur* theory of the "crude Casanova" (Joseph Noel's term) who just loved the free love of certain sectors of bohemia. The forceful "Great Pontificator," as Elsie Martínez called Jack, liked to lecture on the decline of monogamy. He held that women, out of biological necessity, were duty bound to mate ascendingly with men of genius—like himself, of course—in order to unleash their creative consciousness. Mary was equally hard on the adoring females who threw themselves at Jack and George, calling them indolent and parasitic women who deluded themselves that their affairs, in

some way, inspired the work of literary men.

Sinclair Lewis, born in 1885 in Sauk Center, Minnesota, came to Carmel ostensibly as secretary to the writing MacGowans, but did not lift a finger in their behalf. He stayed with Sterling's "hobohemians" about six months, the most sensible period of his life in later recall, and returned to the area over the years. Hal or "Red" Lewis was then a far cry from the Nobel Price Winner (1930). He was described by Elsie Martínez and Grace Cooke as crass, ill behaviored, generally disliked: "impossible." He took notes, worked up plots, and mooned over his lady love, Helen Cooke. (Helen later married the successful Carmel Highlands writer, Harry Leon Wilson, whose daughter, Charis, married Edward Weston.)

Lewis took a perverse pride in his blockage and the singular lack of writing success of his Carmel days. He liked to boast that he had sold just a single joke to either *Judge* or *Punch*, but his meticulous records show no such sale to a humor magazine. On the other hand, he did sell two articles and, like Sterling, provided London with ready-made plots. (He charged Jack $5.00 apiece.) London was grateful for such literary help, never patronizing. Lewis ended up writing virtually nothing on Carmel for publication, only notes for future use. He saved his slings and arrows of satire for the hypocrisy that he found in his native Midwest.

A crisis for Carmel came in the person of Nora May French, an extra-sensitive, golden-haired pixie with "blue and pleading eyes" (Sterling). Mary Austin believed her to be a talented writer, but the judgmental Carrie Sterling put the flighty poet down as a "freak." Nora was vivacious and had many a suitor in Carmel, but her jollity hid a suppurating insecurity and depression. Her chatter about suicide—a *cri de cœur*, a mute cry for help—was shrugged off by her bohemian pals as either hysteria or self-dramatization. In 1907, broke and worn-out by the fast bohemian life, she took cyanide in Sterling's home.

The pathetic poetess's suicide cast a pall over The Bunch, though they made a wake-like party of scattering her ashes at Point Lobos, sure that she would have approved. Sterling and Hopper were plunged into deep guilt. Psychologically shattered, they blamed themselves for not having helped Nora out of her despondency. Both repentants had to leave Carmel for a time because so many places there were haunted by her presence. Sterling not only addressed several personal sonnets to the lost nymph, as elegies, he put her ghost into several other poems and, still bewitched by her memory, as if in penance, made pilgrimages to Point Lobos on the anniversaries of her death. He wrote of Point Lobos as Nora's altar and tomb.

In 1913 Carrie Sterling finally tired of her wayward husband's philandering. She left him, and the next year, got a divorce. That was the year that Bierce vanished, suicidally, into revolutionary Mexico after cruelly breaking off his father–son relationship with George. He wrote a last letter in a towering tantrum, addressing it "Great Poet—and Damned Scoundrel." He was not joking; a shocked Sterling said that its tone was that of God talking to a guttersnipe. In his emotional distress, the poet drifted off to New York, but failed to make the literary big time; in fact he did not get a New York publisher until 1923, by which time his *Selected Poems* were old hat. He joked that the title should have been *Neglected Poems*.

The bottom began to fall out of Sterling's Dionysian life circa 1916–18. Perhaps Nora French had been a vector, a carrier, of disaster. With Bierce dead, "Wolf" now took his life in 1916 and

the death was reported as from natural causes, uremia. Sterling said that the suicide was caused by Jack's unrequited love for a *haole* woman in Hawaii who later died of the flu. Two years later, Carrie Sterling carefully fixed her hair, dressed in a pretty gown, put a record, Chopin's "Funeral March," on the gramophone—and took cyanide.

San Francisco's pet Epicurean now became a lost soul. The Keats of Carmel declined into a sort of sad charity case at the Bohemian Club where his board and room were paid by anonymous fellow-members. A Villonesque relic, a kind of literary throw-back in residence, the world-weary Sterling became miffed in 1926 when H. L. Mencken delayed a get-together. In his pique, he burned a few of his poems as a last sacrificial gesture. When his annoyance slipped into despair, he swallowed the cyanide that he always carried, just as he had once toted Bierce's letters. He turned his face to the wall and merciful oblivion.

Some of the residual gloom in the Carmel literary circles was dispelled by the arrival of two celebrity-socialists and muckrakers. The tiresome teetotaler, Upton Sinclair, did not tarry long. A priggish crusader, a hallelujah vegetarian, he soon wore out his welcome with his dietary proselytizing and strident lecturing of anyone within earshot on the evils of alcohol.

Goateed, bespectacled and gentle Lincoln Steffens retired from his Italian villas, and took up residence in a Carmel home, "The Getaway," where he resided until his death in 1936. The San Francisco-born (1866) journalist wrote two best-sellers, almost thirty years apart. *The Shame of the Cities* was followed by his *Autobiography*, whose best chapters, on his boyhood, were re-issued as *Boy On Horseback*. But their setting was the Sacramento Valley, and "Steff" wrote nothing on the Peninsula except for contributions to the *Carmelite* and *Pacific Weekly*. Conservatives called Steffens and his more radical wife, Ella Winter, Bolsheviks. Skeptical that reform could change such a badly flawed system as capitalistic democracy, the self-confessed "broken" liberal turned a blind eye on the Soviet Union of Stalin's *Cheka* and bloody purges to naively enthuse—"I have seen the future, and it works!" Awed by Robinson Jeffers, however, he did not chide his Republican friend for his conservatism, nor that of Robin's Tory wife, Una.

The Monterey coast's literary dynasty did not die out with Sterling's suicide, for Robinson Jeffers had chosen Carmel as his "inevitable place" in 1914. Austere, aloof and stoic, Jeffers was jealous of his privacy, almost as reclusive as a hermit. Although he volunteered for the Army's Balloon Corps in World War I, that conflict made Jeffers a pacifist, almost a Parsee. Sterling turned rapidly anti-German and as a super-patriot wrote jingoist propaganda poetry for the war effort. All of his verse was the piping of reeds by woodland fauns—Jeffers's poetry was the thunder of storms and surf. Still, the two writers became instant and fast friends.

Carmel was now well tamed by commerce, tourism and the urban lifestyle that the spartan Jeffers detested. He looked to the South Coast for inspiration from his bouldery Tor House (1919) and Hawk Tower on Carmel Point. Jeffers made the rugged coastal *cordillera* his own literary province, the setting for most of his dramatic narratives. Like his short lyric poems, his long narratives in blank verse are beautifully written in powerful and evocative language that is full of metaphor and geographical richness. But *his* Big Sur is an imaginary place, a dark paradise. There is

little beauty in his plots, themes, or protagonists. Jeffers loved the "clean rock" of the Santa Lucias, the buffeting sea, hawks and other raptors; but he appeared to dislike his own kind by worshipping a Nature exclusive of man.

Jeffers's lack of converts to his philosophy did not lead him into a siege mentality. He was as indifferent to the public's rejection of his philosophy of Inhumanism as to its neglect of his poetry, or the hostility of professional critics toward his verse. He had written in the New York *Times* in 1939 that a poet should never be distracted by the present. His business was being heard in the future. Mere celebrity was a time and energy-wasting nuisance that destroyed spontaneity; posthumous reputations were the only ones worth counting. With his cosmic view, Jeffers saw the present as only a fleeting instant, when measured in geological time. He could scorn humanity, along with its will, reason and imagination because he saw poetry as more than a human activity. It was in no sense a moralizing or civilizing influence but, rather, the reverse—an appeal to man's primitive instincts. And finally, just like an eagle or a sunset, it was in itself a beautiful work of Nature, not of man.

Jeffers was born in Pittsburgh in 1887. He traveled and studied extensively in Europe as a precocious lad. He was very well tutored and educated by an aging minister father who pounded Latin and Greek into his head at an early age. (Small wonder that, later, Jeffers drew on the Bible and classic Greek tragedy for themes.) The boy rebelled against such stringent compulsory education, but the revolt was quickly put down. His rebellion against his dominating father's conventional theology was more successful, if long a secret. Robin simply exchanged an Old and New Testament God for Nature, and became a very "religious" poet, the most puritanical of pantheists or naturists.

By the time that he was a student at Occidental College, Jeffers had three permanent loves—poetry, the land (Nature), and Una Call Kuster, who became his wife. After a book of ordinary love lyrics and a transitional volume of verse, he found his real voice in *Tamar*. This first long narrative poem set in Big Sur was followed by *Roan Stallion, The Women At Point Sur, Thurso's Landing, Cawdor* and *Give Your Heart to the Hawks*. They represented Jeffers at his greatest power. Edward Weston called the poems "gripping"; to Lawrence Clark Powell they were "exalting." However, because of their vein of violence, many readers found them less appealing in spite of the beauty of the poet's language.

Interest in Jeffers' work soared in the 1920's but lapsed in the following several decades. Now there appears to be a significant resurgence of interest, not only in his work, but in Jeffers, the man, which at the time of this writing, is resulting in a reprinting of the entire Jeffers' canon. Furthermore, the Tor House Foundation is organizing an elaborate program to be carried out in Carmel in 1987, to celebrate the 100th anniversary of his birth.

John Steinbeck, who was born in Salinas in 1902, became the prose laureate of The Long Valley, the Salinas Valley. But Steinbeck Country extends over the Gabilán Range to the San Joaquin Valley of *Grapes of Wrath*, the isolated Jolón Valley of *To A God Unknown*, and to the Corral de Tierra of *The Pastures of Heaven*. Steinbeck gave Jeffers Country a wide berth except for placing his short story "Flight," in the Santa Lucias. Whereas Gabilán Peak topped a friendly range of the same name, the mountains walling in the Big Sur Coast had

always seemed forbidding to him as a youngster. But Steinbeck Country did touch the sea at Pacific Grove, where the writer lived for a spell (*ca.* 1929–30) and wrote in semi-poverty, and at Monterey where he lived a while after World War II. More importantly, he set his *Tortilla Flat*, *Cannery Row* and *Sweet Thursday* on that pilchard coast.

The rough roustabout exterior, which Steinbeck carefully cultivated in order to preserve his privacy, hid a heart of pure *flan*. He was a sentimental romantic who wrote either warm, tender-hearted love stories (of marine biologists, and whores with gold-plated hearts) or novels which deplored the sufferings of underdogs, usually farm laborers. In his play-novelette, *Of Mice and Men*, set on a ranch near Chualar, Steinbeck combined the dominating themes of his work.

The future Nobel Laureate enjoyed a pleasant Tom Sawyer-like childhood. His hikes, visits to swimming holes and bike rides led to an undying love for the countryside that was as strong as that of Jeffers. However, it was gentle, not fierce like the poet's passion for Nature. Odd jobs, some as a manual laborer or ranch hand, not only introduced the youthful Steinbeck to the working class with which he sided in later years, but also provided background for his writing. He picked up story ideas from Mexican fellow-workers in a sugar mill in Spreckels and became, like Jack London, something of a drinker and carouser. But he shared with Jack an intense literary drive.

Steinbeck's first books sold poorly, but his *Tortilla Flat* caught the public's fancy and launched his success. Its fictionalized characters, like Danny and Pilón, became permanent parts of Monterey folklore. As Jeffers' star sank during the Depression, Steinbeck's rose. Even before *Grapes of Wrath* became a runaway best-seller, won him a Pulitzer (1940) and paved the way for a Nobel Prize (1962), Steinbeck was so plagued by fans that he fled from Pacific Grove to two hideouts in the Los Gatos Hills. A private person, he would have nothing to do with tours, appearances, lectures or press conferences. Instead, he hid, eventually moving to a Manhattan apartment and Sag Harbor, his summer home. In doing so, he accidentally cut his roots and stopped the flow of vital literary juices that had nourished his work. His subsequent books declined markedly in quality.

The expatriate later returned to the scene of his triumphs, observing in *Travels With Charley* that the bohemian founders of Carmel, could they come home, would not only find themselves unable to afford the place, but would be picked up by the cops and run out of town as undesirable characters. As for himself, he was still partially persona non grata in his hometown. Disliked by some for insulting and maligning them and their friends with his "vile and indecent" books, they also misjudged him as a Leftist, as did some eventually puzzled radicals. But he was a very rugged individualist (conservative in later years) who had little confidence in causes and none whatsoever in comrades and commissars.

By the time of his death in 1968, most Salinas townsfolk were converted to a pride in Steinbeck. As if to prove that You Can Go Home Again, they made his birthplace a historical memorial, named the new public library after him, and began an annual Steinbeck Festival. Not to be outdone, Monterey erected Carol Brown's bronze bust of the author at Cannery Row. The library at San Jose State University then created a Steinbeck Research Center to house special collections of his books, manuscripts and memorabilia.

John Steinbeck's ashes were buried in a Salinas

cemetery, but not before a last visit to the seacoast of Steinbeck Country where a private family memorial service was held on Point Lobos, on the cliff above Whaler's Cove.

Not till long after highway 1 was finally opened (1937) along the 60 miles of steep seaward slopes of the Santa Lucias, did another major writer settle in the heart of Jeffers' Big Sur. Henry Miller was a lowbrow polymath and Rabelaisian expatriate who titillated and shocked America from Paris with his bawdy, scatological (and banned) books, which were dutifully smuggled home in the duffelbags of returning World War II G.I.'s. He tired of fame and notoriety and in 1944 sought (in vain, as it turned out) a secure hideaway from countercultural pilgrims in the peaceful solitude of Anderson Creek and Partington Ridge, about 15 miles south of Big Sur Post Office.

The beautiful setting and pleasant rustic lifestyle inspired Miller to overcome a seemingly terminal case of writer's block. His *Big Sur And The Oranges Of Hieronymus Bosch*, dedicated to his longtime friend Emil White, is an underrated book. There is less of Miller's Tropical ribaldry in this mellow volume and instead, occasional thoughtfulness and insights along with his *joi de vivre*. Miller was familiar with Stevenson's Monterey (he inscribed a Christmas gift-book "From the Master of Ballantrae"), but it was Sausalito-Monterey painter Jean Varda who introduced him to Big Sur and it was Emil White and Harrydick Ross who provided him with the local history of Big Sur.

For the first time in his wandering life, the raffish free spirit felt genuinely at home. He enjoyed the aloneness (*not* loneliness) possible there. It permitted him to "connect" with Nature. Like Jeffers, Weston, and Adams, he discovered that rocks were no longer inanimate objects, but mysterious beings with hypnotic, seductive, presences. He fell in love with the South Coast and described it with painter's contemplative eye in *Big Sur*. However, when privacy-stealing tourists, underground and otherwise, turned from a mere nuisance to a plague, Miller left the Santa Lucian slopes for Los Angeles' *haute bourgeoise* shore, Pacific Palisades.

If any Monterey Peninsula artists deserve to be called geniuses they are Edward Weston (1886–1958) and Ansel Adams (1902–1984). Weston made photography into a fine art by miraculously transforming such prosaic objects as sea-sculpted boulders, bullwhips of kelp, and ancient cypress trunks, with their connotations of eternity, into magical images. He found no abstract forms original to the imaginations of painters and sculptors; all were derived from Nature. So he provided emotional abstractions via direct representation. He was not just a master craftsman; he was a poet with lens and film. No one—photographer, printmaker, painter or writer—has so successfully captured the essence of the Monterey Coast as Ed Weston with his old 8 x 10 view camera. He revealed to others the world around them, which their untrained, unseeing eyes had missed sometimes, due to the hazy Pictorialism which bemused most photographers of his day.

Weston was an artist of vision and feeling, sure instinct, and flashes of powerful insight or revelation. All of these attributes are revealed, indeed documented, by the vitality of his photos—what he called the "flame of recognition." The result is not just emotional pleasure, but an understanding, an intuition, passed from artist to viewer. He was the mysterious link between the known and the unknown of a subject. As Lawrence Clark Powell has said, Weston's sight—perception—was a kind of clairvoyance by which he was able to transcend

reality. His mission in life, as he saw it, was to express his feelings on life by photographic beauty without evasions or subterfuges in either technique or spirit.

What Ansel Adams termed simply "vision" was more complicated in Weston's vocabulary. Working without pre-conceived ideas, he happened upon subjects and then sought to record their quintessential character, not an impression or interpretation of the object, nor a transitory phase or mood. (Adams, of course, was a master of the capture of a fleeting moment of change in Nature, even its inanimate objects). To Weston, a rock had to look like a rock in a photograph, and something *more*; not something different. To make his point, he called his work "significant presentation" in order to avoid the inexact word "interpretation." First, there was the excitement of discovery, then rediscovery or pre-visualization (the heart of Adams' "vision") through the ground glass of his lens. This revised, final form of presentation became the print, complete in every necessary detail of texture and composition. Once he had tripped his shutter, the deed was done. He would not tolerate any manipulation of negative or print in the darkroom.

Weston was born in Highland Park, Illinois, and took his first snapshot at 16. He opened a studio in Glendale, California (1911) which specialized in spontaneous portraits, unretouched and shot in natural light, outdoors. Soon, he was making award-winning "artistic" or salon prints on the side. They were in the prevailing Pictorialist tradition. It was exposure to modern art at the Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco (1915), not his first visit to Point Lobos that year, which led him to re-think his avocation. He began to turn from the shimmering light and fuzzy shadows of soft-focus Pictorialism to a more honest photography.

In 1923 Weston, although he was the father of four young sons, bolted from his wife (and confining middle class respectability) to run off to Mexico with an Italian model. She was but the first of a *tsunami* of females who found the self-effacing Weston absolutely irresistible. He was a balding deadpan who rarely laughed aloud, though he had a sense of humor. Weston handled the role of Don Juan better than Sterling. He continued to support his children and his wife, though he separated permanently from her; his *novias* (sweethearts) remained his friends for life; he did not let pleasure interfere with his dedication to work. He remained curiously "innocent," puzzled but pleased by his bewitchment of beautiful women, *seriatum*, especially his ardent nude models.

Edward Weston returned to a San Francisco studio and then visited Carmel and Point Lobos in 1925 and 1928. He detested cities, particularly those of materialistic, philistine, Southern California, which his second wife, Charis, called Southern Cafeteria. Even San Francisco, the best of the lot, was unendurable. He subscribed to William Blake's words—"Great things are done when men and mountains meet. They are not done by jostling in the street." So he hung up a shingle for his portrait studio on Ocean Avenue, Carmel, in 1929, promptly discovered Big Sur, and re-discovered Point Lobos.

In 1937 Weston was awarded the first Guggenheim grant ever given a photographer. It was renewed in '38, and resulted in 35,000 miles of travel, 1,500 negatives, and a book of plates, *California and the West*, with a text by his companion, Charis Wilson. She became his wife when he finally got a divorce after a decade and a half of separation.

New York's Museum of Modern Art hung a retrospective exhibition of Weston's work in 1946. But only two years later, stricken with Parkinson's disease, he took his last shot of Point Lobos. In 1952 and 1955, helped by his son, Brett, a fine photographer in his own right, Weston published portfolios of his best prints. He died on New Year's Day, 1958. Today, Cole Weston continues Edward's tradition by making a strictly limited number of prints from his father's vintage negatives.

Perhaps Ansel Adams should have the last word on Ed Weston. He saw his old friend as one of the few truly great artists of his time, a photographer who could re-create eloquently both the forms and the forces of Nature and, at the same time, illuminate man's journey toward perfection of the spirit. Weston saw, reacted, created and then shared his art, his vision. A great artist, even when he shook so badly with the spasms of Parkinson's disease that he could not even hold a photograph, Weston was, in Ansel's words, "a moving spirit, as always."

It was the Monterey Peninsula's great misfortune not to have Ansel Adams in permanent residence at Carmel Highlands until 1962. But it was the locality's good luck to have him as a citizen from that date till his death in 1984. Yosemite was always first in Ansel's heart, but the Carmel coast was tied for second place and eventually won out over the Southwest when he and his wife, Virginia, decided to move from San Francisco.

Adams, born in San Francisco in 1902, visited the Monterey coast as early as 1926 when Albert Bender introduced him to Jeffers and other locals. Over the years, he and Virginia explored the coastline either with Ed Weston or the Sierra Club's William Colby, who had a home below Pfeiffer-Big Sur State Park. Adams' Yosemite views are caknowledged classics, but he also made splendid coastal pictures, such as (1950) "Point Sur, Storm" and (ca. 1951) "Rock and Surf, Big Sur Coast."

The man who became the Dean of America's nature photographers and the seeming reincarnation of John Muir as conservationist and protector of the Sierra Nevada enjoyed an idyllic childhood near the Golden Gate, prowling the cliffs of Lands End and the sand dunes beyond the Western Addition. Just as was the case with Weston, his exposure to the Armory Show exhibit of modern abstract art at the Panama-Pacific Exposition (1915) in San Francisco had a profound effect upon him. A year later, he discovered Yosemite and would return there every summer. At first, his photography was a hobby or avocation, largely a visual diary. He was training to become a concert pianist; but it was his examination (ca. 1930) of some of Paul Strand's negatives (not even prints!) that caused him to switch from music to photography as a career. Already, wild landscapes were thrilling him with a more aesthetic experience than even his music.

At an October 1932 party, Adams, Willard Van Dyke, Weston, Imogen Cunningham and a few others formed the informal Group f/64. The De Young Museum soon exhibited these so-called California Modernists, whose pictures were in sharp focus and crisp composition. They had none of the pathos and banality of artificial—contrived—pictorialism, which tried to make photos look like etchings or impressionist paintings. (Weston called the Pictorialists' soft-focus prints "fuzzy-wuzzies.") Group f/64 kicked off a quiet revolution in which "straight" (straightforward, honest) photography, with no gimmicks, routed Pictorialism.

Adams and Weston saw each other as peers, never rivals. They got along very well since they had the greatest respect for each other's work. They first met in 1928 and from 1932 on became great friends. Weston was older, longer in the profession, better-known. But in technical matters he came to Adams for help since he was a "visceral" photographer, an intuitive artist who paid little heed to the complexities of photographic technology. He worked almost entirely from his inner vision.

A lively, bearded, bald and broken-nosed mountaineer, Ansel Adams was a warm and open person with no mysteries or closely guarded craft secrets. He shared his knowledge with everyone. Wisely, he declined to analyze what his photos "meant"—as if they had but one meaning for all viewers! Although he was intolerant of compromise with excellence in taste and purpose, he found endless discussions of creativity a bit trying and pointless. He insisted that only his finished prints could really speak for him as an artist. He was more than willing to recount the peculiar circumstances of an individual picture, but these details, for all of his enormous technical expertise, were usually couched in terms of emotional response, not scientific technique.

Adams achieved, magically, in black and white images, what writers and painters had long labored to produce—the essence of the California landscape. His prints hardly need captions; they speak for themselves, and eloquently. An expert in technique (he applied to photography the same precision he lavished on music), he believed that all art grew from the same bases of discipline and aesthetics. But his photography was much more than technique, it was a true expression of what he felt about life in its entirety. He was a poet in a world of exposures and emulsions. He did not merely see Nature; he possessed Thoreau's "wisdom of the eye." This was a combination of sight, perception, insight and empathy. Like Weston, he caught the life rhythms of objects, even inanimate ones. Ansel saw them as symbols of the whole of Nature, and landscapes as the broad continuum of Nature's unending drama.

So splendid are Adams' landscapes that his portraits, still lifes and documentary prints are neglected. But his wilderness views bring beauty to thousands and thousands of people at the same time that they preach his message of conservation. Ansel Adams believed that photography, indeed all art, is an affirmation of life. He did not *take* pictures, but made them in a kind of spiritual "deal" with his subjects. His photographs are matters of craft and concept, not accident, luck, or the law of averages. His landscapes relate the viewer to both an animate and inanimate world. They are his finalized statements, and they serve to refresh the human spirit.

Richard Dillon
MILL VALLEY 1986

Impressions of Bohemia

125 Copies have been designed and
printed by Susan Acker and Donald R. Fleming.
The text type is Monotype Bembo by Mackenzie-Harris
of San Francisco. All display type is handset Castellar. The
paper is Rives BFK; the wrappers are Fabriano. The etchings
were printed by the artist, Jack Coughlin, Gordon Ilchuk and
Emiliano Sorini. Each has been numbered and signed by the
artist. In addition, twenty-five uncased artist's proof sets, with
the accompanying broadsides were pulled, after which
the plates were cancelled. The portfolio cases were
made by Arnold Martinez.