

ROBINSON JEFFERS NEWSLETTER

Number 10

Robinson Jeffers Committee  
Occidental College  
April, 1965

Dear Members and Subscribers:

The response to our last letter was very gratifying, and we thank you. We have mailed copies of Eva Hesse's Dramen to all those who requested it. There are several which, I feel, would best be distributed to the German Language departments of colleges and universities. Could anyone send me an appropriate list?

Arthur Klein sent us copies of seven of R. J.'s poems he had translated into German about 1931. Also two translations by Udo Rall. Could anyone help him in identifying the latter? The Occidental College collection of Robinson Jeffers will be the richer for Mr. Klein's donation of two post cards from Una and a letter from R. J., written in October 1935. Mr. Klein's book Bioluminescence (with R. J. quotes) has just been published by Lippincott.

According to Fraser Drew, James Brophy, Jr.'s elementary classes in Buffalo are being successfully introduced to Jeffers' poetry through "The House Dog's Grave." Professor Drew, at the State University College of Buffalo, is planning a summer graduate class in the poetry of Jeffers and of E. A. Robinson, if he is successful in securing the necessary copies of Selected Poetry for the class.

Donnan and Lee Jeffers plan to remain in Ireland until the end of the year, but Lindsay, their oldest son, returns to enter Occidental College in September. Donnan writes that the first paper-back of R. J.'s poems will be released by Random House in August. It will include Roan Stallion, Hungerfield, and a large selection of shorter poems. Good news for students and teachers!

Due to other work in progress Dr. Powell asked for a postponement of his contribution for this issue of the Newsletter. We are fortunate that we had received the following delightful sketch on R. J. from Frederic I. Carpenter. Dr. Carpenter is the author of the book, Robinson Jeffers, published in Twayne's U. S. Authors edition of "American Literature," and of "Death Comes for Robinson Jeffers," published in the University of Kansas Review, Dec. 1940. Dr. Carpenter, who has taught at the University of Chicago and at Harvard University, is now a research associate at the University of California at Berkeley.

--M.B.B.

Robinson Jeffers and "Humanity" -- Some Anecdotes

Frederic I. Carpenter

Sometimes I have been asked how I--an academic person, living in Massachusetts in 1931, with no friends in common with Robinson Jeffers--became acquainted with him, and began a correspondence concerning which Mrs. Jeffers wrote, in 1939: "Perhaps you do not know you have the longest collection of R. J. letters in existence." The answer, together with some anecdotes of an afternoon's conversation in Tor House in 1935, may be of general interest, especially in the light it throws on Jeffers' attitudes toward "humanity"--individually, rather than collectively.

In 1931 I had published an article on "The Radicalism of Jonathan Edwards" in a literary quarterly, and in the last paragraph had mentioned Jeffers as a contemporary poet who shared many of the ideas and attitudes which had characterized Edwards. I sent him a copy of the article, and he responded, characteristically: "I am a bad letter-writer, and should have thanked you more promptly for sending me your pamphlet on Jonathan Edwards. I read it with much interest and some profit, learning things that were new to me, and feeling a new sympathy toward your subject." This began a correspondence which continued irregularly, for twelve years.

In 1935 I visited California, and called on the Jefferses at Tor House. But not knowing them except by letter, and feeling the natural uncertainty of a reader who has taken literally Jeffers' many poetic exclamations against "the people"--and especially the people who intruded upon his solitude--I was hesitant. I happened to arrive in Carmel in the morning, and drove to Tor House. I walked up the path paved with sea shells to read the notice on the front gate: NO VISITORS UNTIL AFTER 4 O'CLOCK. So I walked away, and returned at 4 P.M., when Jeffers welcomed me cordially. Later in our conversation I admitted that I had been deterred by the sign, and he exclaimed, "That sign! Why did you pay any attention to that?" The sign was intended only for strangers--for people in general.

Following this he told me of a similar incident which had recently occurred. A young Irish poet, it seems, had been visiting Carmel, and strolling along the beach, had looked up at Tor House with appreciation, but had not wanted to disturb Jeffers. Later Jeffers had heard the incident from a friend, and had been genuinely disappointed that the Irishman had not called on him. Turning to me he asked, with an expression almost of bewilderment: "I wonder why he would not stop to see me?"

These incidents suggest that Jeffers the poet, and Jeffers the man, were almost two different people, at times. He had created the literary "persona" who scorned "humanity" and hated intrusion by "the people" upon his solitude. But he welcomed, often almost longed for communication with individuals interested in poetry and in ideas. Or, to put it differently, he scorned humanity in the abstract--humanity as men-in-the-mass--rather than humanity as individuals. And although he truly valued solitude, he also valued individual friendships, and suffered from the deprivation of such friendly meetings as that with the Irish poet who, in 1935, did not dare to call on him.

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