

ROBINSON JEFFERS NEWSLETTER

Number 15

Robinson Jeffers Committee
Occidental College
Los Angeles, California 90041

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Dear Members and Friends:

Thank you for your suggestions for the continuation of the Newsletters. It should be good news for our contributors who take the time to write articles to know that they are read.

Mr. Donald Klopfer, of Random House, gives us the good news that they have sold 7,400 of the 9,000 copies of the paperback Vintage book and are going to press with another 5,000. Certainly these Vintage books will help to circulate Jeffers' poetry. It might interest you to know that of the 56 poems suggested by members of our committee, 50 were used in the book, which contains 58 poems.

Cultural History Research (6 Purchase Street, Rye, New York) has published a reprint of the S. S. Alberts Bibliography of the Works of Robinson Jeffers. It sells for \$25.00 per copy.

Our December issue will include an essay by William Nolte, and in the March issue we hope to give you a collection of poems written about Jeffers. Our special contributor this month is Dr. Frederic A. Carpenter, whose Robinson Jeffers, published in the Twayne Book series, and "Robinson Jeffers and the Torches of Violence" in The Twenties, Poetry and Prose, are no doubt familiar to you. "Values of Robinson Jeffers" in June, 1940 edition of American Literature, and "Death Comes for Robinson Jeffers" in the University of Kansas City Review (December, 1960) are two other valuable contributions that Dr. Carpenter has made for the collector. He is at present in the English Department of the University of California, Berkeley.

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 door: "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 any intrusion by "the people" upon his solitude. But he welcomed, and 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 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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