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Robinson Jeffers Newsletter

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MELBA BERRY BENNETT

The death last fall of Melba Berry Bennett means that Occidental College must re-examine, its program of Jeffers studies, for it was she who gave it the life it has had over the past decade. Others of us helped, but it was Mrs. Bennett who was the driving and guiding force. It was she who founded and edited the Newsletter. With new editorship and an advisory board, the Newsletter will seek to continue and enlarge the direction and scope she gave it.

In the Foreword I was privileged to contribute to The Stone Mason of Tor House, I observed the debt all Jeffers students owe to her for having ensured the collection and preservation of unique biographical material on the poet. Knowing and admiring the dynamic and forthright Una Jeffers as I did, I marvel again that Melba Bennett succeeded in gaining Una's confidence and cooperation. During their lifetime and after their death, and up until the time of her own, alas, so premature, she rendered faithful and invaluable service to Robin and Una and to all who love his poetry.

I knew Mrs. Bennett mostly through our mutual dedication to Jeffers, going back to the early 1930's, and I was never aware of how many devoted activities she carried on in other fields, until recently when I went to Palm Springs for research on the writer, J. Smeaton Chase. At the Palm Springs Historical Society, of which she was the president, and in the Welwood Murray Memorial Library, to which many of her books were bequeathed, I encountered abundant evidence of the major cultural role she played in that community.

I can write also of the remarkable series of profiles she produced of famous European libraries and then had privately printed to give to friends and libraries. Unpretentious and free of pedantry, these accounts testify to the careful research and first-hand knowledge that went into their making.

Melba Bennett gave more than lip service to all she undertook. She gave unstintingly of time, energy, faithful belief, and, with her stalwart husband, Frank, frequent material support. She was a rare person, a truly gallant woman. She will be sorely missed in many places, none more so than at Occidental College. If for no other reason than to honor her memory, the Jeffers program should continue. Fortunately there are among the friends of the college a number of dedicated persons, inspired by what Melba Bennett did, to carry it on into an era of even greater usefulness to scholarship.

----Lawrence Clark Powell

Jeffers Newsletter to Continue Publication

Arrangements have now been made to continue publication of the Robinson Jeffers Newsletter under the editorship of Dr. Robert J. Brophy. Publication will be quarterly, and a new subscription rate of \$2.00 per year established to defray the cost of production and distribution. All persons currently receiving the Newsletter are invited to contribute.

Please also indicate any corrections or changes of mailing address. News of interest or manuscripts should be directed to Dr. Robert J. Brophy, Department of English, California State College at Long Beach, Long Beach, Calif. 90801. Contributions and subscriptions, address changes, etc., should be directed to Tyrus G. Harmsen, Secretary-Treasurer, Robinson Jeffers Committee, Occidental College Library, 1600 Campus Road, Los Angeles, Calif. 90041.

It is a pleasure to announce the appointment of an Editorial Board as follows: Mr. Donnan Jeffers, Mrs. Ann N. Ridgeway, Dr. Lawrence Clark Powell and Mr. H. Arthur Klein.

---- Tyrus G. Harmsen

FROM THE EDITOR

I was gratified and honored at the invitation to serve as editor of the Newsletter. Its continuation, it seems to me, is a crucial element for the return of Jeffers' poetry to popular appreciation and especially for the accessibility of information regarding work-in-progress, new materials (found or made available) public readings and exhibitions, films, slides, and recordings, domestic and international publications, reprints, library bulletin material, and TV special programs. It has also become a welcome repository for tributes, memorabilia, explications, notes & queries, and articles.

It has been my continuous experience in the classroom and in public readings and lectures that the poet inevitably "turns on" audiences, especially youthful ones. Lack of proper texts still inhibits Jeffers' currency (we are sorely in need of inexpensive editions); we hope the Newsletter can be a force in changing that situation, a proof to publishers that there is much activity, interest, and demand--- that the risk is small and worth taking.

I welcome your comments, suggestions, corrections, and contributions. Correspondence will be answered as quickly as humanly possible.

---- Robert J. Brophy

TWO REVIEWS

The Selected Letters of Robinson Jeffers. Edited by Ann N. Ridgeway. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1968. \$10.95

Perhaps only students of Robinson Jeffers who formerly have gotten access to such manuscripts (those publicly available) the hard way--through detective hunts, compounded permissions, labyrinthine follow-throughs, restrictions on copying, and deciphering enigmas, can fully appreciate the incalculable service Ann Ridgeway has done in compiling and editing this collection of letters. The title word "selected" might prove misleading: this is a very thoroughly researched and substantially complete gathering. Three pages of acknowledgements tell a story of search, travel, scholarly resourcefulness, and indefatigable perseverance.

The letters are arranged chronologically from 1897 to 1962, with periodic introductions (to each five or ten year period) locating the changing context and anticipating themes or patterns of events. The collection is closed by a fourteen page appendix which summarizes and schematizes the over five hundred letters in columns according to date, addressee, and location. The text is annotated with a beautiful sensitivity: sparingly, accurately, without pedantry. A thirteen page index, thorough and well articulated, will be a richly useful tool for scholars.

Mark Van Doren, one of Jeffers' first literary friends and at a crucial time his patron, provides a sensitive portrait of the artist in a foreword. The editor's preface is a short meditation on the completed task -- a summary of impressions reflecting Jeffers the lover, the tender father, the artist, the friend, the reluctant critic, the philosopher, the inhumanist, the mystic, the polite non-committal respondent to inquiries.

The resources here are equal to any researcher's appetite. Although Jeffers characteristically avoided commentary on his verse whenever he could and only in the beginning of his career became expansive, there is much here cumulatively to clarify and elucidate the poet's life work, his thoughts & judgments regarding aesthetics, psychology, history, politics, religion, cultural anthropology, the physical sciences. Letters to Friede, Sterling, DeCasseres, Rorty, Van Doren, and Carpenter are especially rewarding.

Johns Hopkins Press must be congratulated for the care and taste with which they have complemented Ann Ridgeway's scholarly efforts--the page size, print, spacing, etc., make the book an aesthetic experience. The generous use of photographs by Leigh Wiener and others make it a pictorial adventure--an unlooked for, and sometimes poignant extra.

Robinson Jeffers: Fragments of an Older Fury by Brother Antoninus. Berkeley: Oyez Press, 1968. \$7.50

As a contribution to the renaissance in Jeffers studies and as an impassioned call to critical reassessment, Antoninus collects six essays and a verse tribute.

His title reflects both the storm from which Jeffers' poetry, early in the thirties, drew Antoninus toward peace and poetic identity and the archetypal fonts from which he sees the poet's power to rise.

Forcefully noting the Carmel poet's rugged force and cosmic vision, Antoninus contrasts Jeffers' ways with those of his contemporaries and examines the appropriateness of his diction and the careful articulation of his design. After forays against those who accuse Jeffers of tendentiousness and (incredibly) of Fascism, in the final and longest of the essays, he probes deeply into the psychic matrix and poetic strategy of Jeffers' most difficult work, The Women at Point Sur.

Some will find Antoninus as a critic overly polemic in scoring Jeffers' detractors and somewhat too involved personally in the critical effort. The value to the book is in its central insights, especially its in-depth analysis of the psychological mechanisms within Jeffers' works: archetype and myth, the poem as therapeutic process, the poet's anima in search of answers, and, finally, the tension in Jeffers between traditionalism and charismatic iconoclasm (Apollo and Dionysus), between his characteristic detachment and the necessary painful involvement in his age's collective consciousness.

Antoninus quotes significantly from Jung and Freud, from Kerenyi and Campbell. He entices Jeffers' critics to a broader base, i.e., to allow for kinds of poetry other than the familiar and popular. He gives the sympathetic but puzzled reader of Jeffers' poetry valuable keys to the poet's strategies, urging especially that they hear the poet's questions before they boggle at his answers.

----- Robert J. Brophy

THE TOR HOUSE LIBRARY: JEFFERS' BOOKS

What was the poet reading at this or that moment in his career? What books were available to him? How much did he use them and in what way? Questions like these are liable to haunt literary critic or biographer in his search for an understanding of the artist. Whether answers can be found depends very much on circumstance. In the case of Robinson Jeffers one such promising circumstance is his private library. In November, 1967, the writer found occasion to visit the Jeffers home and tentatively to catalog the books still there. This study is an attempt to assess the findings.

The first surprise in store for the investigator was the number of books--over two thousand. They occupy shelves, floor to ceiling, along most of the walls of the original Tor House, leaving only the bedroom and the fireplace walls clear.

There are novels, dictionaries, works of classical drama, ghost stories, poetry, biography, criticism, genealogies and books of heraldry, travel books, works on architecture, psychology, philosophy, books on religious experience, Bibles, histories, periodicals, art books, anthologies of literature, compilations of synonyms, iconography, and quotations, detective stories, encyclopedias, copies of Who's Who, handbooks on plant life, birds, music, opera, wines, games and automobiles, nursing and first aid, California missions, dogs and unicorns.

Salt air, age, and wear have taken a toll; bindings are dimmed and frayed, pages, musty and yellowing. The books are of all sizes and shapes and of varying quality. There are sets of Maupassant, of Greek plays and travel books. Some works are slight pamphlets; others, up to eight inches thick.

Their arrangement is mostly miscellaneous. Those west of the front door tend to concentrate on 19th and 20th century authors: Hardy, Thackeray, Lawrence, O'Neill, Dumas, Wells, Dostoevsky, Lady Gregory, George Moore, and James Stephens. The glass cases along the east wall from the door are poetry, travel, architecture, music, and Irish authors. The shelves by the front window contain mostly art, English households, castles, manors, farms and colleges, works by and about the English romantics, and old victrola recordings. In the alcove outside the downstairs bedroom are histories, art books, occult studies, presentation copies from poet friends, devotional literature, Shakespeare and assorted classics. In the single set of shelves in the dining room are to be found Greek classics, heraldry and genealogy, large dictionaries, and a few books on psychology.

Aside from ephemera, the books can be broken down as follows: literary works of substance (by some one hundred and sixty authors: novels, poetry, drama, biography), approximately 500; works of psychology and philosophy, 16; books on mythology, 9; Bibles, 25; works on religious experience, 17; music and ballads, 40; histories, 20; letters and biographies, 50; tourist guides (local histories, landscapes, particular towns and cities, customs and sports), 90; works on architecture (houses, towers, castles, halls, and manors), 50; studies of the occult, 25; lexicons (Greek, Latin, German, French, Italian, Spanish, Irish, English), 21; Greek and Latin classics (epic, lyric, dramatic), 30; other classics of world literature (Dante, Boccaccio, Malory, Goethe, Rousseau, Milton, Chaucer, Spenser, Bunyan), 30; Children's books (Tom Sawyer, Mother Goose, Oliver Twist, etc.) 10; studies of war and the two "world" conflicts, 10; and handbooks, on a wide variety of subjects, 50.

There is a special cluster of books by friends, noted poets like Langston Hughes, Sandburg, Van Doren, and Antoninus, lesser known authors like Ficke, Gilbert, and Sterling, and friends like Carolyn Tyson, Ella Young, and Noel Sullivan. These are always inscribed for Jeffers, often lovingly; these number perhaps forty.

Limits of Evidence

Before naming particular items and probing a few of their implications, it is important from the very outset to note the limits to the significance of this collection. The library is surprisingly large for the small building that houses it; it has astonishing breadth. Yet it does not represent the extent of the poet's reading by any means, nor does it entirely reflect his tastes.

Not all Jeffers' library is here. Since the poet's death in 1962 some rare and valuable books have been put away, some sold, some given to special collections or to friends. Jeffers' own set of first editions is now the proud possession of the University of Texas.¹ Critical works about the poet to which he and Una occasionally refer in letters (Squires, Powell, Sterling), are conspicuously absent.² (In fact, preliminary check of his letters reveals that many of the books which were his intellectual stimulation and social conversation pieces, are nowhere to be found. Particular works, for instance, by O'Casey, Lawrence, E. A. Robinson, Spender, Galsworthy, Dickinson, Melville, Faulkner, O'Neill, and Frost, to name but a few. According to her son's testimony, Una was a determined housekeeper and many books were periodically "cleaned out." As neighbors lent generously to them, so Robin and Una lent books out in turn; best sellers and volumes of common interest were kept in circulation.³

Other books were just too expensive or too cumbersome to collect. Jeffers' early reading at Carmel, an important period of gestation from 1914 to 1924, was limited mostly to library books either loaned from the Carmel branch or mailed from greater distances. The couple was poor, had a growing family and no appreciable source of income. As late as 1933 one discovers Una writing to Mary Austin: "We had to cut down on buying books and rely on library copies."⁴ Among these library books would be works important because of their relation to Jeffers' poetic strategies and mystic vision of life (such as the cyclic theories of Spengler, Petrie, and Vico whom he mentions in Themes in My Poems) and to his penchant for sacrificial rituals and sacrament (such as the cultural anthropologists, Frazer, Harrison, and Cornford).

On the other hand, there are many books in the Jeffers library which do not at all reflect his reading or his tastes and interests. The volumes belong to the whole family, early and late. Some of his father's library is here: Bibles and devotional works; here are his wife's books which she brought into her marriage: travel books, and lexicons signed and dated by Una Call or Una Kuster. The works of heraldry and genealogy, murder & crime, ghosts & poltergeists reflect his son Donnan's interest; books of music belong to Una. The rather complete collections of George Moore and W. B. Yeats reflect the combined interests of husband and wife, but more especially Una's.

Other items are clearly from a time after the poet's death (for instance, one about Kennedy's assassin) or after he was no longer able to do sustained or serious reading; books published or acquired during the last ten years fit this category.

There are some volumes here that the poet probably always was indifferent to but which were kept out of deference to the donors. They came easily as gifts from his publishers Liveright and Cerf, presentation copies from friends who desired the poet's critical judgment, and as review copies from hopefuls who perhaps remembered Jeffers the reviewer (Alberts, items 41, 56, 66).

Literary Works

The extraordinary number of works by romantic and victorian poets can best be put down to the tradition out of which Jeffers came. He acknowledged his early debt to Swinburne, Shelley, and Wordsworth. The scattering of modern poets such as Amy Lowell, Deutsch, Van Doren, Millay, Fletcher, Hughes, Gregory, Adams, MacLeish, Sandburg, De La Mare, Masefield, and Sitwell reveal more an accidental acquaintance and occasional interest than dedicated appreciation or influence.

The number of poets, playwrights, and novelists whose works appear in the original French or German on Jeffers' shelves demonstrate his easy universality. Volumes by Mallarin, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Verlaine, and Rilke indicate his interest in the directions of modern poetry; volumes by Dumas, Daudet, Maupassant, Balzac, Zola, and Proust show his respect for the master storytellers. Novalis, Nietzsche, and Schiller volumes reveal a sense for the larger aesthetic and philosophical questions; Dürrenmatt, Wederkind, and Maeterlinck, an openness to unusual forms.

His volumes of American writers of the last century -- Clemens, Hawthorne, Irving, Emerson, Longfellow, Melville, Poe, Whitman, Bierce, Cable, Hearn, Page, Wharton, give evidence of a little noted concern for his own American heritage. The preponderance of Irish Renaissance authors -- Synge, Yeats, A E, Stephens, Dunsany, Lady Gregory, Colum, Dowson, Wilde, Moore, and Gogarty -- attest to his and (especially) Una's sense of their ancestry, an attention to national origins which is reflected in a different manner in Descent to the Dead.

Psychology

Among the non-literary categories, individual works are occasionally noteworthy. Nietzsche's Zarathustra and Beyond Good and Evil remind us of Women at Point Sur and other poems concerned with breaking out of humanity. Havelock Ellis's Studies in the Psychology of Sex and Freud's Basic Works (in the Modern Library edition) alert us to Jeffers' interest in sexual themes as a matrix for dramatic tensions. Titles like Our Changing Human Nature, Psychical Research, The Puzzle of Personality, Exploration of Awareness, Pathology of the Emotions, and The Law of Psychic Phenomena illustrate Jeffers' real concern with the psychic mechanisms which con-

stitute at least one level on which his dramas operate and hold up under the canons of realism. (He criticized others, Lawrence for The Plumed Serpent, Rohinson for Tristram, that their characters' agonies lacked credibility. Jung's Two Essays on Analytical Psychology, (still harboring three pages of notes by Una) provides thought-provoking chapters on the "collective unconscious" (tribal dreams and ghostly presences in "Tamar," "Roan Stallion," and "Apology for Bad Dreams"), the "mana personality" (Ferguson's Mara and The Inhumanist's Doppelgänger), and "the sexual theory of psychoanalysis" (the dreams and sexual dynamics of "Tamar," "Tower Beyond Tragedy," and many others).

Philosophy, Aesthetics, and Myth

Jeffers kept few philosophical works: Plato's Republic, Gilbert Murray's Stoic Philosophers, The Essence of Plotinus, the Nietzsche volumes, and a Handbook of Poetics. More carefully read and assimilated were philosophers not represented: Epicurus and Lucretius. His collection of mythology is also disappointingly fragmentary. Late in his career he wrote introductory remarks to Horace Gregory's version of Ovid's Metamorphosis, galleys of which lie in one of his cabinets. He kept the Greek myths in their dramatic form, the plays dealing with Hippolytus, Orestes, Medea, Oedipus, and the rest. Other titles are widely diverse: Dance of Death, Morte D'Arthur, Astarte, The Stonehenge, The Tarot Pack, Classic Myths in English History, The King Must Die, Goat Song, and Yeats's A Vision.

Handbooks and Miscellaneous

The handbooks cover a wide variety of interests which indicate the poet's enthusiasms and his care for further knowledge and accuracy. Works on flowers and birds belong to this category as do those on astronomy and iconography. The few volumes on war mirror Jeffers' own stoic evolution: chronologically they begin with One Hundred Questions and Answers about War and end with an ROTC Infantry Manual (probably belonging to a son), and some historical perspectives of wars past--proceeding from philosophical questioning into stoic acceptance of the inevitably destructive processes of cyclic dynamism which he came to see as the price of existence.

Conclusion

Sometimes conclusions must be negative. This does not mean that the study was not worth doing but merely that a possible source of enlightenment has been probed with only a limited yield of light. Every piece, whether light or dark, fills out the mosaic. The Jeffers library, at least as it now stands, affords no startling discoveries: neither key handbooks of symbolism or mythology, nor annotated texts (I have in mind Yeats's marginalia on Nietzsche's Birth of Tragedy). It was to be expected that evidences of literary preferences would be slight; he avoided literary cliques and the politics of popularity; he refused to cooperate in the idolatries

of academia. He was impressed by others' talent; but was moved only by his blessed "Beauty of things." His letters sharply affirm that his insights were his own. Spengler, he says in Themes, popularized the cyclic theory of civilization but it had been part of his thinking long before that. The themes and insights of others he found corroborative or catalytic. Squires gives us a thoughtful assessment of these: Freud, Jung, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and the others.

The most significant books in this collection are probably these: his avowed favorites, Hardy (for his vision of the world) and Dostoevsky, Greek dramas (for their fatal dimension and tragic intensity), the Bible (which he read in his own way), Scott's Minstrelsy and Percy's Reliques (his interest in the highly charged, melodramatic world of the ballad), Moore's Brook of Kerith (perhaps the inspiration for "Dear Judas" and "The Loving Shepherdess"), Nietzsche's Zarathustra and Beyond Good and Evil (reflecting, as was said, his concern with breaking out of humanity and with recognizing the Appolonian-Dionysian nature of things).

There are matters relating to the books in his life which are still hidden in his private papers which await deciphering. There are others to be found in his and Una's wide correspondence which is still being collected. Squires and Carpenter, Powell and Melba Bennett have alluded to them also. There are still other sources; letters of friends, memories of the family. There are questions which can be answered: what magazines and journals did he receive?⁵ Are there any significant absences among the authors mentioned? What of Hemingway? Pound? Is it strange that no work by Eliot is to be found in the collection?

There were notes taken from books at the time of his death--to be kept safely with his manuscripts; were these significant? how many were there? from what books?

There are questions which reach just beyond curiosity: when and how did the poet and his wife do their reading when only in the final years was there electricity in the house? Did the poet's reading habits decrease or fluctuate with the years? Did he read intently and avidly or only indifferently, to keep up with the concerns of his time and circle of friends?

Whatever their potential for Jeffers scholarship, the books of this house give a sense of a life lived, of the continuity of families, of roots and branches, of myriad temporary interests and long-term fascinations which belong to a man and wife and their sons, of conspiracies to travel, of two generations of college years, of difficult hours through two great wars.

They are relics of a very warm and human life; they make the poet believable, palpable. They are the casual personal effects of a man who never was rich except in the values which cannot be bought, a man who was also a great poet.

Far less important are they than his work. Perhaps they are even a distraction. Yet they constitute, slight though they be, a source for understanding.

Postscript and Invitation

Forty-five pages of notes, a catalog by author and title (sometimes date and publisher) according to shelf-location, will be made available to anyone seriously seeking further possibilities in the study. They are hand written, often from a cramped position; as yet there is little justification for having them deciphered and typed.

----- Robert J. Brophy

¹ These were handled through David Magee, antiquarian bookseller of San Francisco, in 1964, on the eve of the Donnan Jeffers family's remove to residence in Ireland. The early first editions had touching inscriptions from the poet to his beloved Una. Other works numbered, according to Donnan, from twelve to twenty volumes.

² Some of these may have been in safe-keeping in a separate part of the house, a custom with the Jeffers family when away.

³ Jeffers' son Donnan notes in response to this: "A point that cannot be too much emphasized is that when my mother was alive she constantly gave books away. I should imagine that the Carmel Library alone must have, or have had, some hundreds of books which were my mother's gifts. In addition hundreds more went to other institutions or to friends. My parents were constantly acquiring books both as gifts and as review copies, etc., and by purchase. As shelving space was limited in the house, books were given away at approximately the same rate as others were acquired."

⁴ Donnan comments: "When my mother was alive, she went at least once weekly to the library and brought home large amounts of books for the family. I am afraid I cannot possibly tell you specifically what any of these books were. After mother's death, Lee (Donnan's wife) continued this practice, but by this time practically all the books she got from the library were detective and mystery stories which both she and father read in great number. My parents were constantly both borrowing and lending books from and to friends."

⁵ Again Donnan Jeffers has been helpful: "There was only one periodical that he subscribed to and read constantly: Time. I should have qualified

that, of course, by saying that he also always got and read the daily Monterey newspaper and part of the time the San Francisco Chronicle. In addition, he sometimes subscribed to other magazines such as Life, The National Geographic, etc., but not consistently. Finally, he received for many years the Catholic magazine, Commonweal, but this was a gift of a friend, and I do not think he read it very often."