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Robinson Jeffers Newsletter

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NEWS AND NOTES

Lawrence Clark Powell writes "Give Your Heart to the Hawks" in Westways, November, 1968 (pp. 18-21,58) as part of his series, "California Classics Reread."

The Poetry Society of America's Official Bulletin for February, 1969, reports "A Sunday Afternoon With Robinson Jeffers" pp. 25-31):

The vanguard of American poetry moved into Columbus Circle in New York on February 16th when James Rorty, a long-time friend of the poet, opened the Poetry Society of America's series on the American poetic heritage with his fascinating talk on Robinson Jeffers. He and the Reader were introduced by Charles Angoff, P S A President. William Strauss of the New York Times Station W Q X R powerfully and meaningfully read selections from the rich Jeffers output.

The Bulletin goes on to note:

In introducing the excellent Selected Letters of Robinson Jeffers, Mark Van Doren tried to unravel the complexity of Jeffers' mind and outlook. He concludes, "Jeffers was never wiser than when he insisted that the proper function of poetry was not to express but to present . . . these are the only messages that Homer and Shakespeare have for us,"

In his talk Rorty took occasion to comment on Melba Bennett's biography of Jeffers, on Una Jeffers' personality and strength, on the impact of Jeffers' father on the poet, on the "discovery" of Tamar by the New York critics in 1924-25, on Jeffers' poetic ecology, his political involvement at the onset of World War II, and on his intense concern for freedom.

Ann Ridgeway's Selected Letters is reviewed by James D. Hart in American Literature (May, 1969, pp. 302-303).

Estelle Rebec of the Bancroft library, Berkeley, writes a short summary and appreciation "Letters from Robinson Jeffers," in Bancroftiana, November, 1968, on the occasion of Frederic I. Carpenter's leaving his Jeffers correspondence to that Library's manuscript collection.

The "1968 Modern Language Association International Bibliography" (June, 1969) records only five publications related to Jeffers studies: John H. Adams' "The Poetry of R. J.: A Reinterpretation and Re-evaluation" (dissertation at Denver, 1967), Brother Antoninus' Robinson Jeffers: Fragments of an Older Fury (Berkeley: Oyez, 1968), Ann N. Ridgeway's (ed), The Selected Letters of Robinson Jeffers (Johns Hopkins, 1968), Everett Weedin's "Robinson Jeffers: The Achievement of His Narrative Verse" (dissertation at Cornell, 1967), and James C. Rivers' "Astronomy and Physics in British and American Poetry, 1920-1960" (dissertation at South Carolina, 1967). Dissertations in American Literature (1968) reports a dissertation by Jonathon Fairbanks: "The Impact of the Wild on H. D. Thoreau, Jack London, and Robinson Jeffers" (Otago, New Zealand). Dissertation Abstracts notes Johnny Benton's "An Interpretative Analysis of Robinson Jeffers' The Women at Point Sur" (University of Oklahoma, 1967).

The Sierra Club book Not Man Apart: Lines from Robinson Jeffers, is now available in soft cover (\$3.95) as a Sierra-Ballantine book.

Rudolph Gilbert's Shine, Perishing Republic: R. J. and the Tragic Sense in Modern Poetry (Boston, 1936) has been reprinted by Haskell House (New York, 1965), quoted in Books in Print at \$7.85.

Big Sur Recordings (P. O. 6633, Carmel, California 93921), successor to Esalen Recordings, has announced an interest in recordings on Jeffers (They have taped lectures and interviews by Carl Rogers, Alan Watts, Abraham Maslow, Colin Wilson, etc.). Under the heading "Ethnic Music and Folklore of the Sur" Series, their 1968 catalog promises: "To be listed in 1969: Recordings of Henry Miller; Readings from Robinson Jeffers; Irish Folk-tales by Susan Porter; Poetry of Eric Barker."

The editor of American Literature Abstracts, writes: "Will you arrange to place us on your mailing list? We will include the NEWSLETTER in our "Finding List" beginning Vol. III in December and will request abstracts on regular articles appearing with and subsequent to the April, 1969 number. "Tor House Library" will run in the December number of A L A. We do not normally cover memorabilia, errata, tributes, etc., so what I term 'regular' articles would include pieces as this and any others of a similar nature."

Monterey Peninsula College hosted a "Tribute to Robinson Jeffers: Peninsula Poet" on July 25, 7030 p.m., in the Music Hall on, the MPC campus. Featured were three short films on Jeffers "Rhapsody and Requiem" by Caryl Coleman (KPIX Documentary, 1967), "Give Your Heart to the Hawks" by David Meyers (NET, 1968), and "An American Poet," recently produced at KUED (Utah public TV). This last features readings by Dr. Rex Campbell, beautiful photography,

and narration by members of a University of Utah Oral Interpretation Workshop. Dr. Robert Brophy of Long Beach State acted as M.C. and delivered three short critiques. "The Hazards of Integrity," "Perspectives from the Stars," and "Poetry as a Religious Experience." In the face of a concurrent Monterey music festival, the turnout was gratifyingly large and enthusiastic.

Professor Robert Ian Scott, University of Saskatchewan, spent several days in July at the Occidental College Library consulting the Jeffers Collection; Dr. Scott's dissertation, completed in 1964 at the State University of New York at Buffalo, was entitled "Robinson Jeffers' Poetic Use of Post-Copernican Science."

Mr. Marlan Beilke writes that he plans to publish (for copyright) a concordance of Jeffers' early work.

WORK IN PROGRESS

Mr. Al Redinger is finishing a dissertation on the dramas of Robinson Jeffers at the University of Southern California under the direction of Professor Olga W. Vickery. He projects five chapters: the first on the unproduced dramas ("At the Fall of An Age," "At the Birth of An Age," "The Bowl of Blood," and "Mary and Elizabeth"), the others on "Tower Beyond Tragedy," "Dear Judas," "Medea," and "The Cretan Woman." His work has been advanced significantly through the cooperation of Dame Judith Anderson.

Please remind us of items we have missed, new announcements, corrections, etc. The Newsletter relies on you for its contributions.

ROBINSON JEFFERS IN FOREIGN TRANSLATION

Supplement to November 1967 (Number 19)

"Translations of Jeffers" (3 pp.), from Donnan Jeffers

- 1958 Anthology of American Poetry, published in Arabic in Beirut by Al Khal Brothers -- excerpts from "Roan Stallion" and "Double Axe."
- 1959 Ameriká Poézia 20 Storočia, an anthology in Slovak, published by Slovenske Vydavatelstvo Krasnej Literatúry in Bratislava -- four short poems.
- 1963 Fifty Poems from Contemporary American Poetry, translated into Arabic and edited by Tawfiq Sayegh and published by Dar El-Yaqza in Beirut -- two short poems.

- 1966 English-speaking text book containing poems by various authors published by Shinozaki Shorin, Ltd. for Mr. Sichinosuke Anzai in Tokyo -- three short poems in Japanese translation.
- 1967 Prirodzená Hudbra, translations into Slovak of poems from "Selected Poetry" and "The Beginning and the End" translated by Vojtech Mihálik and Jan Vilikovský, published by Slovensky Spisovatel in Bratislava.
- 1968 Sbohem, Moře, translations into Czech of poems from "Selected Poetry" and "The Beginning and the End" translated by Kamil Bednář and published by Mladá Fronta in Prague.
- 1968 Amerikanske Stemmer, an anthology of American poems translated into Danish by Jens Nyholm and published by Arne Frost-Hansens Forlag in Copenhagen -- three short poems and an excerpt from "Tamar."
- 1969 John Robinson Jeffers Wiersze, a book of short poems translated into Polish by Zygmunt Lawrynowicz and published by Panstwowy Instytut Wydawniczy in Warsaw.

JEFFERS RESEARCH DISSERTATIONS: A SUMMARY AND REFLECTION

The following are short resumes of the thirteen doctoral dissertations done between 1932 and 1967 on the poetry of Robinson Jeffers.¹ The summaries are based on abstracts (11 am indebted to Elena Panajotovic's "Annotated Bibliography of the Theses on Robinson Jeffers at the Occidental College Library" and to Dissertation Abstracts) and on a cursory examination of microfilms; they, therefore, are meant only to indicate work done at the doctoral level;² they make no claim to be articulate and balanced studies. Almost all of the originals can be found catalogued and available for reading in the Occidental College Library: Jeffers Collection. Many of them are also available through University Microfilms (Box 1307, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106) both as microfilms (average \$3.00) and as Xerography copies (more expensive, averaging \$12.00), requested by author and order number (which follows each summary). Various

¹Finished research can be located through the monthly Dissertation Abstracts, American Literary Scholarships: An Annual (Duke Univ.), or Dissertations in American Literature, 1891-1966 (latest edition, 1968). Research in progress can usually be located either in American Literature (quarterly, Duke Univ.) or American Quarterly (Univ. of Penn.)

²Hopefully, this summary of doctoral work will be followed in a subsequent RJN by a summary of masters theses available in typed copy or on film at Occidental College or on micro-cards from distributors. There is a quarterly publication, Masters Abstracts (University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, 1962-), which abstracts selected M.A. theses in a classified arrangement.

universities began to submit their dissertations to Dissertation Abstracts (monthly publication of University Microfilms and successor to Microfilm Abstracts, 1935-51) in one year or another, according to no comprehensive plan or order; whence the field of scholarship is rather irregularly covered by DA and microfilms before the mid-fifties. Therefore, texts of the studies by Breen, Powell, Squires, and Stephens are almost impossible to obtain outside Occidental or their Alma Maters. (We are, however, fortunate to have books by two of these, incorporating their research). The others (nine) can be had by any college library so desiring or by any individual who is willing to use his local library's micro-reading facilities.

1. John H. Adams' "The Poetry of R. J.: A Reinterpretation. and Re-evaluation" (U. Denver, 1967) notes the tensions in Jeffers' tragic art: between idealistic 19th Century humanism and World War I disillusionment, between desire to see beauty in all things and the poet's actual perception of violence and human ugliness, between his desire that man turn outward and the certainty that he will not. To update the work of Arthur Klein, Mr. Adams notes Jeffers' specific uses of 5 and 10 stress lines, alliteration, and "rhythms of perpetual recurrences." He then analyzes Jeffers' power: descriptive (through rhetoric, diction, imagery, and "double focus"), dramatic (themes, ability to structure scenes, to build and release tensions), lyric (compression, emotional strength, blending of setting and theme), and narrative (significant image patterns, elemental psychology and myth, analysis of the ironies and tragedies of existence). Mr. Adams' conclusions: Jeffers' contributions lie in making the long poem vital again, introducing a new prosody, using language to powerful effects. (Order No. 67-10,329)

2. Johnny Benton's "An interpretative Analysis of Robinson Jeffers' The Women at Point Sur" (U. Oklahoma, 1967) assesses the "singularity" of Jeffers' poetry through an analysis of WPS, finding it an example of the "sublime tradition" as seen in Longinus, the Gothic, and the "Grand Style." He examines the narrating "I" voice, identifying it, especially in the "Prelude" as, on one level, the voice of Jeffers' god. He concludes that Jeffers is of extraordinarily wide erudition, a god-and-truth-seeker primarily, and a passionately sincere voice, prophetic and oracular. (Order No. 67-12,560)

3. Robert Brophy's "Structure, Symbol, and Myth in Selected Narratives of Robinson Jeffers" (UNC, 1966) applies the myth-ritual approach to five works (T, RS, C, B of A, and TBT), finding, beneath a traditional quasi-five-act dramatic structure, a more primitive movement defined by ritual gesture, cyclic imagery, and "puppet"-like action--approximating the contest-death-lament-discovery-apotheosis-pattern, characteristic of the primitive's religious celebration of the year-god's seasonal cycle. Brophy interprets Jeffers' sacrificial and sacramental universe, his use of archetypes such as scapegoat, Attis wound, stigmata and crucifixion, mountain top as axis mundi, and cosmogonic myths (horse, bull, eagle, giant), and his invocation of

apocalyptic imagery (deluge, quake, whirlwind, and holocaust). He concludes with a study of "Apology for Bad Dreams" as Jeffers' ars poetica (therapeutic, educative, and ritual strains), being the poet's strategy for participation in the world's beautiful agony without blind immersion. The study suggests a reassessment regarding Jeffers' reputed fatalism, misanthropy, morbidity, repetitiousness, and sensationalism.

(Order No. 67-970)

4. Robert S. Breen's "Symbolic Action in the Oral Interpretation of R. J.'s 'Roan Stallion'" (Northwestern, 1950) relates the phonetic and intonational patterns of RS to the meaning-noting sound repetitions (alliteration, assonance, and consonance), sound patterns (interrelation of cognates, acrostic scrambling, chiasmus, augmentation and diminution), and oral patterns according to behavior (adaptive, emotional, emphatic, and conventional).

(Typed copy at Occidental)

5. Arthur B. Coffin's "Ideological Patterns in the work of R.J." (U. Wisconsin, 1965) attempts to identify the chief ideas of Jeffers and explain how they are embodied in the poems through the 1920's, 1930's, and 1940's in particular by comparison and contrast with Schopenhauer (on the will, nature, death, and art), with Nietzsche (on the will to power, Overman, Dionysian-Apollonian antinomies, revaluation of values, and the anti-Christ), with Vico, Spengler, Petrie, and Ellis (on their Nietzschean views), with Euripides (on the Hippolytus myth and other classic models), and finally with Lucretius (on creation, the world as organism, and the nature of being). He suggests Also Sprach Zarathustra and De Rerum Natura as crucial background for reading Jeffers' poetry.

(Order No. 65-10,591)

6. George B. Kiley's "R.J.: The Short Poems" (U. Pittsburgh, 1957) notes the tension in Jeffers' poems between the belief in the beauty of the whole universe and the counter-belief, the contemptibility of man. The study comprehends the poet's methods (apologues, short narration, coastal views, rhetorical comment on scenes and situations, and soliloquies), his prosody, his diction (preference for "permanent" words, his combination of concrete and abstract), his mind (polarities to be reconciled by paradox, ambiguities, irony, and explicit statement), and his conflicts (man's place in the universe, personal, longing for death but commitment to life). Kiley concludes with the universality of Jeffers' themes, and with a study of the poem "Night."

(Publication No. 24,746; Mic 58-329)

7. Lawrence Clark Powell's "An Introduction to Robinson Jeffers" (Dijon, 1932) attempts in broad scope to relate the facts of the poet's life, heritage, education, and environment. He then assesses Jeffers' sources (classics, Bible, history, science, current events), characteristics of his narratives (characters tormented by desire and pain, set against natural beauty, coming to violent ends), his lyric concerns (people, death, landscape, natural phenomena, etc.), his style (elements of classical, Anglo-Saxon, mixed with modern idiom and rhythms), and, finally, his philosophy (man as product of fortuitous evolutionary processes, totally mortal, caught in pain and self-destruction, of a civilization decadent and doomed, without salvation except the immediate one found in turning from self-worship to comprehend the greater, inhuman universe). (Copies at Occidental; see also his book)

8. Ann N. Ridgeway's "The Letters of R. J.: A Record of Four Friendships: Correspondence with George Sterling, Albert Bender, Benjamin De Casseres, Mark Van Doren" (Bowling Green State U., 1966) assesses the characteristics of Jeffers' format, tone, style and content as they reveal the man (mild and gentle, concerned with sensitivities, aware of debts, ready to show respect and affection). The letters have limited usefulness for the critic and aesthetic theoretician though the Poet does occasionally touch on such matters as incest as symbol, the Aristotelian concepts of tragedy, poetic rhythms, elements of diction, and the choice of permanent things as his subjects.

(Order No. 66-10,946)

9. Ian Scott's "R. J.'s Poetic Use of Post-Copernican Science" (SUNY at Buffalo, 1964) finds Winters' and Waggoner's judgments regarding Jeffers' science-informed poetic vision to be in error (of fact, assumption, and faulty sampling) and goes on to analyze forty-six of Jeffers' eighty-one poems which explicitly include post-Copernican concepts. He finds three basic scientific areas manifest: astronomic (the expanding universe), evolutionary (the chemical origins of life), and atomistic (nuclear microcosms and entropy). Scott then looks to Jeffers' science-related similes (contrast of man, to stars and to atoms, e.g.) and his metaphors (for the interrelated universe: the net and self-tortured god).

(Order No. 65-1309)

10. Richard D. Spiese's "R. J.'s Aesthetic Theory and Practice" (U. N. Mex., 1966) notes that Jeffers' aesthetic views include a distrust of the intrinsic value of art, a preoccupation with the beauty of things, emphasis on statement and intellectual content, preference for the long line, emphasis on natural settings, an intent to reclaim for poetry the power of reality, and an inhumanism, especially effective in RS, H, and TL. He finds weakness in too much direct emphasis on intellectual content and obvious symbolism, in less than full characterization,

and in a lack of believable incident (WPS, C, DA). Jeffers, he thinks, rejected tragedy as a moral force or means of catharsis, emphasized shock effect over compassion, and presented his ideas bluntly (DJ, B of A). To Spiese, Jeffers' greatest mastery and balance is to be found in the best of the short poems (nature, cosmic view, and somber tone).

(Order No. 66-11,729)

11. James Radcliffe Squires' "R. J. and the Doctrine of Inhumanism" (Harvard, 1952) relates Jeffers' philosophy of "breaking away from humanity" and "turning toward God" to (1) his intellectual background (self-contempt as found in mankind's behavior in World War I, Nietzschean desire to discover a new morality, Schopenhauer's self-negation and concept of life as pain, Spengler's inevitable culture patterns joined with Calvinistic fatalism, Freud's system of psychological determinism), (2) Religious intensity: Calvinist prejudice (life as pain, emphasis on self-negation and self-crucifixion, the desirability of punishment here), and (3) Scientific Materialism (man's insignificance, the vision of Lucretius, yet this vision strangely compromised by an idealism). Squires finds Jeffers' inhumanism a disguised humanism which preaches a life of reason and mitigates Spenglerian fatalism with a formula of escape from the pattern. The last two chapters find Jeffers' narratives not traditional tragedies but partly satirical, partly allegorical projections of Jeffers' own warring sensibilities. (Film 108 at Occidental; see also his book)

12. George D. Stephens' "The narrative and dramatic poetry of R. J.: A Critical Study" (USC, 1953) examines Jeffers' disillusioned idealism, his scientific determinism (affected by Freud, Jung, the English Romantics, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Spengler), his god (scientific naturalism compounded with mysticism), his mystique of pain (as the essence of life, to be endured), his themes (human introversion, inhumanism, rejection of religion and civilization, divided personality, stoic endurance, and death), his plots (family triangles, women as agents of disaster), his characters (victims of emotion, without humor), his organic concept of setting, and his prosody. Stephens documents the short history of critical opinion on Jeffers, work by work. He finds Jeffers' value in the imagination and intensity which lift the stories above violent sensationalism.

(Film 17 at Occidental)

13. Everett K. Weedon's "R. J.: The Achievement of His Narrative Verse" (Cornell, 1967) studies Jeffers' qualities and accomplishments as realist (GYH), tragedian (TBT), epic writer (B of A), and mytho-poet (RS), finding, however, that he characteristically compounds his poems of all four, submitting realistic, tragic, and epic elements to the control of myth's structure, technique, and intent. Critics err, Weedon contends, in judging Jeffers' work by genres to which they do not belong and then deploring how far short he comes. (Order No. 67-13,933)

A REFLECTION

When one ponders the overworked areas in doctoral research (Hemingway, Frost, Hawthorne, Faulkner, Melville, etc.), he can only be confounded by how little serious research has been done on Robinson Jeffers. It is truly incredible how few articles and fewer pamphlets and books are available for students. One is hardly less amazed at the fate of Jeffers' works themselves, three of them (SP, SPms, B & E) being in print in 1969.

Once, confronted by a graduate seminar's first uncertainty about available topics, I sat down to list those immediately at the front of my mind--and counted eighty or more. True, a few articles and a scattering of masters theses had researched a handful of these topics but most remain untouched by serious and competent scholars' minds.

The situation has its ironies. One problem with the writing and placing of Jeffers articles may be that so little has been done in blocking out and defining the larger areas that writers and editors are hard-pressed to find a relevance and context for particularized studies; these are like footnotes to a comprehensive body of work that is not yet written. And then there is this irony, exhilarating but not particularly helpful: Jeffers' graduate students become "instant authorities" because so little scholarly discernment can be found against which to test their opinions.

These are mere observations. It is fruitless to deplore. And anyone with a sense of Jeffers' power, vision, and greatness simply watches in imminent expectancy. The ranks will swell; talent and insight will yield rich appreciation and understanding; a representative body of poems will become available; the poet will yet have his say to a world for whom he ironically poured out his "birth dues."