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Robinson Jeffers Newsletter

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NEWS AND NOTES

The Gleeson Library Associates (University of San Francisco) prepared an "Exhibition of Manuscripts" for the Manuscript Society, September 27, 1969. The library's AUTUMN PROGRAM lists item #13 in the "Exhibition" as Robinson Jeffers' "Ms. draft of letter to Sister Mary James." (Basis for Sister's essay on Jeffers in Poets at Prayer, Sheed and Ward, 1938.)

New Directions has sent a notice of the publication of Cawdor and Medea with an introduction by Brother Antoninus (William Everson)--slated for the fall of 1970.

Radio Station KPFK (94.1 FM in the San Francisco Bay Area) on Saturday, January 3, 1970, featured "A Tribute to Robinson Jeffers: An Evening Dedicated to Robinson Jeffers recorded at Monterey Peninsula College in July of 1969."

Big Sur Recordings notes in its 1969-70 Tape List: item M 502-1 (1 hour): "Robert Brophy: on Robinson Jeffers." "A scholar and critic of Jeffers tells of the poet and his work, in appreciation of this unusual man." This would seem to be substantially the same program as broadcast by KPFK. (BSR P. O. Box 303, Mill Valley, California 94941).

Jeffers in Italy:

Mary de Rachewiltz has published Jeffers la Bipenne de altre Poesie at Guarda of Parma. Mr. Donnan Jeffers writes: "It is a very beautifully produced and printed book of 281 pages with an introduction by Mary, 'The Double Axe' and 'Hungerfield,' as well as many short poems in English on one page and Mary's translation into Italian on the facing page."

Jeffers in Czechoslovakia:

Czechoslovakian Broadcast, Praha, presented on Sunday, December 14, a program on Kamil Bednář's translation and selection: The Life in Letters of Robinson Jeffers based on Ann Ridgeway's Selected Letters. The Broadcast's weekly paper published a short note: "The Life in the Letters of Robinson Jeffers." remarking on Bednář's work and featuring photos of Robinson and Una.

The review Obroda (Revival) published in No. 24, November 19, 1969: a reproduction of the cover of Antoninus' (William Everson's) book of Jeffers criticism, Fragments of an Older Fury; Mr. Bednář's note about Jeffers' thoughts on God and a note on Antoninus as Jeffers' "pupil"; and Mr. Bednář's translation of the section of Antoninus' essay dealing with his relation to Jeffers' poetry (a sybarite to his guru).

Dr. Robert Ian Scott (University of Saskatchewan) has a review of Not Man Apart in West Coast Review (Simon Fraser University).

Catherine Knudson at the Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, has done a paper on the complementary insights of Robinson Jeffers and Teilhard de Chardin (principally The Divine Milieu) for Professor Walter Loban's class and promises a summary for the Newsletter.

A contributor from Berkeley, P. Harvey, refers us to the frequent reference to Jeffers' "Tower Beyond Tragedy" by Rollo May in his book, Man's Search for Himself.

Robert Brophy (Cal State, Long Beach) has had an article, "'Tamar,' 'The Cenci,' and Incest" accepted for American Literature, to be published about May.

Elayne Fitzpatrick, who initiated the Jeffers Festival program at Monterey Peninsula College last summer, asks for suggestions regarding the feasibility of another tribute program this summer: especially items re participants, content, format and location.

The University of Wisconsin Press announces publication of The Anatomy of Inhumanism: Ideological Patterns in the Work of Robinson Jeffers by Arthur B. Coffin, Assistant Professor in the Department of English at Washington State University, Pullman. This is a version of Dr. Coffin's doctoral dissertation (U. of Wisconsin, 1965), written under W. B. Rideout, which was abstracted in No. 24 of the Newsletter. Publication is set for November 30, 1970. The title will appear in the University of Wisconsin Press Fall Catalog to be issued in May.

Dr. Coffin has written the "Robinson Jeffers" entry for Encyclopedia of World Literature in the Twentieth Century, (NY: Ungar, 1969, Vol. II, p. 177-8).

Channel 9 (KQED), San Francisco, featured a program "THE CREATIVE PERSON: ROBINSON JEFFERS" on Wednesday, February 11, 1970 (10 p.m.) More information on the program's origins is being sought.

Mr. Donnan Jeffers brings to our attention: The Poet and the Flea--On Beat, Image and Milieu in Poetry by G. W. Sherman (San Jose, 1969) which uses numerous quotations from and references to Robinson Jeffers.

Donnan Jeffers also writes that work is currently being done on adapting "Tamar" as an opera, the libretto by Dr. William J. Adams, Associate Director of the San Diego Opera, music by David Ward-Steinman.

Research in progress reported in American Literature for January 1970 includes "The Critical Reputation of Robinson Jeffers: A Bibliographical Study," by Alex A. Vardanis (Columbia). . . . Reference is also made to a recent article by Robert Boyers, "A Sovereign Voice: The Poetry of Robinson Jeffers" in Sewanee Review, LXXVII (July-September 1969), 487-507.

NOT MAN APART: A REVIEW BY WILLIAM WHITE AND ROBERT BROPHY.

Not Man Apart: Lines from Robinson Jeffers [with] Photographs of the Big Sur Coast, by Ansel Adams, Morley Baer, Wynn Bullock, and others (San Francisco Sierra Club / Ballantine Books, 1969, 160 pp., \$3.95, paperback reprint of the \$25.00 Sierra Club edition, 1965) is a different kind of book. In the thirty-two pages before the table of contents, one finds a prefatory poem, a Foreword by Loren Eisley, a Preface and Acknowledgements by David Brower, an Introduction by Margaret Wentworth Owings, and "The Sur Country," written by Robinson Jeffers for an earlier proposed book of poems and photographs, joined with an excerpt from Jeffers' Foreword to Selected Poetry--all of them fascinating, one (the poet's previously unpublished introduction to Horace Lyon's Jeffers Country) a vital new document for Jeffers scholars.

Of the Horace Lyon photographs Jeffers wrote (as he might have written of the Sierra Club selection): "This is the very coast that I love, the forms and the moods and something of the life Thus each of my too-many stories has grown up like a plant from some particular canyon or promontory, some particular relationship of rock and water, wood grass, and mountain. Here were photographs of their seed-plots." One vivid example of these seed-plots is given by Jeffers: "On a magnificent hillside opposite a mountain-peak stood a comparatively prosperous farmhouse, apple trees behind it, and the man who lived there had killed his father with rat-poison and married his step-mother."

Originally this book of photographs was proposed to illustrate and complement Jeffers' poetry. The Sierra Club's conservationist interest, however, shifted this orientation (with a change of editors) to that of a beautiful book of Big Sur photographs accompanied by Jeffers quotations. However the Jeffers enthusiast or purist might regret the shift, he cannot but be grateful that the book was done at all. Jeffers' poems come alive no matter what the packaging, but the pictures here are in themselves superb. One might debate whether the gorgeous colored photos or the starkly sculptured black and white best capture the poet's spirit and vision of reality, but there is enough here for either

persuasion. Whoever suited the lines to the photographs must have known Jeffers, the Big Sur Coast, photography, and poetry. It all adds up to a triumph.

JEFFERS RESEARCH : MASTERS' THESES : OCCIDENTAL COLLEGE LIBRARY

The following short abstracts are of twenty-three theses on Jeffers' poetry completed between 1930 and 1966 and to be found in the Clapp Library. The abstracts are based on examination of the microfilms and/or on summaries in Elena Panajotovic's "Annotated Bibliography." Decidely limited in comprehension, fragmentary in coverage, and telegraphic in style, they intend no articulate or balanced presentation but are "suggestive of contents." The full texts can be found catalogued and available at the Occidental library. These represent, of course, only a fraction of the theses written on Jeffers' work.¹ The arrangement is chronological in an attempt to show developments in critical assessment.

- 1930 Herbert A. Klein. "A Study of the Prosody of R.J." (Occidental) Film 145.
The serious need for analysis of Jeffers' metrics: R. J. a pioneer in accentual prosody. Narrative poems: 10 stress and 5 stress lines plus interludes. Run-on lines: pauses varied: stresses may alternate: 4 & 5, 5 & 3, 10 & 5, 10 & 6. Punctuation eccentric: to allow sense of line to make own rhythm uninhibited by grammatical structure.
- 1932 Robert N. Hughes. "Poetic Technique in the Verse of Edna St. Vincent Millay, Robinson Jeffers, and Edwin Arlington Robinson." (Ohio State) Film 5.
On Jeffers (75-113): characters individual but not psychologically revealed. Natural scenery: source of metaphors and moods: emphasis on

¹As mentioned in a previous Newsletter, there is a quarterly publication, Masters Abstracts (University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, 1962 -), roughly equivalent to Dissertation Abstracts, which presents selected M.A. theses through a classified arrangement.

The South Atlantic Modern Language Association sponsors a Modern Language Series which features "Kentucky Microcards" of selected theses. The following are two examples:

- Briggs, Olin. "Four Major Symbols in the Poetry of R.J." University of South Carolina, n.d. Bibliog p. 114. Kentucky Microcards, Series A, No. 168.
- Langford, Roberta. "The Influence of Science on the Poetry of Robinson Jeffers." Duke University, 1963. Kentucky Microcards, Series A, No. 205.

Most universities and Colleges keep their own files on Masters' Theses but, as far as I know, there has been no comprehensive attempt to collect and index these theses. An example, taken at random, would be the following:

- Cox, Mary Margaret. "The Role of Women in the Narrative Poetry of R. J." University of North Carolina, 1964.

Mercedes Monijian's R. Jeffers: A Study in Inhumanism (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1958) is, as far as I know, the only Jeffers thesis to be published as a book.

wild, savage, beautiful. Thoughts (themes, vision): far ranging, depth and breadth.

Poem types: 1) of conventional metrics, 2) no apparent scheme, 3) mixed (irregular). Emphasis on strength of theme and unusual effects rather than on form.

- 1933 Lenore Thurston. "The Tragic Spirit of Eugene O'Neill, R. Jeffers, and T. Dreiser." (University of Utah) Film 40.
- 1934 Walter Van Tilburg Clark. "A Study in R. Jeffers." (University of Vermont) Film 56.
Comparison with Wordsworth: disillusion re humans, contact with nature, isolation, peace, and pantheism.
Cosmology from modern science, evolutionary, cyclical, humanity -- doomed. Influence of Swinburne: in imagery ("Fauna"), in tragic significance of human life, in value of beauty, in finality of death, in sexual abnormality. Greek: in serenity, value of the old, permanent, terrible, fierce action.
- 1935 Kate D. Strauss. "R.J., Poet of the Decline of the West." (Mills) Film 107.
Influences: coast, wife, stone house, war, science. From Petrie and Spengler: civilization a recurrent phenomenon like all of nature. Jeffers assimilates all "borrowings" into his own creation.
Examples: RS, TBT, DJ, LS, T, C, WPS, TL, GYH. Main sources: nature and science. Original in diction, dramatic power, and feeling for larger rhythms.
- 1938 Margaret Ashelman. "Ethical Fiber of R.J.'s Poetry." (Swarthmore) Film 95.
Contents: Decay of Humanity: Rocks and Hawks: Out of the Poems What God? Human life good but not permanent or glorious. Values in love of non-human, endurance of pain, strength, purity. Death not feared, a savior, a bridge to the inhuman world. Outer world: magnificence, escape from cruelties of life, God.
Contains letter of Una to Mr. Peter (March 7, 1938) on Jeffers' religious odyssey.
- Benjamin T. Miller. "A Study in Aesthetic Naturalism." (Pacific School of Religion) Occidental Library 113 M647s.
Nature of religion explored through Meland, Santayana, and Jeffers. Re. respective metaphysics, mystic naturalism, idea of religious consciousness. Jeffers' metaphysics: strain, counterforces, flux, eternal closed system (cycle). Determinism: necessary conclusion from nature and science. Theology: God is one being, forever, power-constituted, non-conscious, non-moral. Mysticism: sensuous, nature-oriented, rooted in eternal, non-human, indifferent.

- 1939 David Wrubel. "Primitivism and R.J.: A Survey and A Study." (Columbia) Film 106.
Primitivism: concern with man's place in cosmos and end of the world, rejection of Christianity, violence as a value, eternal recurrence, death-will. Attitude toward sun, animals, and violent beauty (basic symbols) revealing.
- 1940 Virgil Elizabeth Hopkins. "A Comparison of the Poetry of Whitman and Jeffers." (University of Washington) Film 9.
- 1942 Novella E. Duboise. "A Study of Some Parallel Ideas Found in the Literary Works of E. A. Poe and R. Jeffers in Light of Scientific Progress." (University of Kentucky) Film 105.
Both fear science as power in man's hands. Both see all things as parts of Original One (God): Poe uses Newton; Jeffers uses laws of matter and energy, psychology. Both use theme of introversion and split-will. Both distrust democracy's future. Both see folly of war; Jeffers puts limits on love, sees little beauty in civilization. Both based religious philosophies on science; death is metamorphosis, reabsorption.
- 1947 William T. Levy. "Notes on the Prophetic Element in the Poetry of R. Jeffers." (Columbia) Film 13.
Contents: Is There a God? : Anything After We Die? : How Should Men Live? Jeffers' virtues: singleness of purpose, devotion, constructive contributions. God: not to pray to but be continually sought and praised. Nature: beauty in eternally recurring patterns. Joy ends in pain (closer to truth). Fear of death: motivates R.J.'s rejection of life. Peace: renouncing human values, union with God, avoiding corrupting cities.
- William Wasserstrom. "A Discussion of the Criticism of R.J." (Columbia) Film 14.
Cultist Critics (Van Doren and Powell): impressionistic, enthused, insightful. Conservative Critics: demand much of R.J.'s aesthetics: clarity, logic, moral uplift. Critics of "Sublime" school: appreciate treatment of deep, primitive forces, etc. Modern tastes seek other things than what Jeffers offers (nihilism, verse dramas, universe-intoxicated poetry).
- 1948 Kathleen T. Dolan. "R.J., Virile Poet of a Philosophy of Decay." (Columbia) Film 10.
Influence of war: conviction of civilized decadence. Social problems: wastes no sympathy, man a passing phenomenon, inglorious. Seeks true sense of values; man's fate determined, fate impersonal, tragic. God is self-sufficient process: men cut off by introversion, must transcend. Consciousness man's distinction, hardly his advantage. Death a savior, a fulfillment. Not annihilation but passing into another form of energy.

1950 Arlene R. Swift. "R.J.: 'The Tower Beyond Tragedy': A Critical Study of the Philosophy of R.J. and his Validity as a Modern Tragedian." (Columbia) Film 15.

Contents: Question of R. J. : Philosophy of Non-humanism : Jeffers' Tragedies : Validity of Tragedies of Non-humanism : Epilogue.

Robert H. Walker. "The Lyric Poetry of Robinson Jeffers." (Columbia) Film 11.

Early poems: less power and originality: beginnings of inhumanism. Transition to unrhymed verse: new striking qualities: vocabulary, command of science, nature imagery and symbol, lyrics not as sensual as narratives. Structure becomes subtle and original: punctuation frees expression. Three basic concepts: God, Nature and Man. Mitigated determinism. Not theist: Nature (cosmos) is cyclic: animals instinctively adjusted. Lyrics: clearer, more direct, more communicative, adapted to Jeffers' style.

1951 William D. Hart. "R.J.: A Study of 'Tower Beyond Tragedy'." (Columbia) Film 1062.

Similarity to Aeschylus: Subject, language, structure, symbols, general attitudes. Changes: greater unity, symbolic and psychologic bases for violence, choric elements. Tone: grandeur, strength, simple language, strong emotion, visual power, grave rhythm. Unity of Place and Action. More explicit philosophy. Various criteria for tragic drama and their interpretation re TBT.

Benjamin H. Lipson. "R. J. and the Paradox of Humanism." (Columbia) Film 12.

Humanism: R. J. explores human spirit's tragic possibilities: looks for values. Nietzsche's insights on isolation, decadence, inescapable suffering, eternal recurrence, pantheism. Tragedy: reveals man's baseness, oneness of all nature. Sexual motif: spreads consciousness, corrupts strength, debases. Origin of religion: saviors. Problems: death, human consciousness, freedom. Jeffers' work finally obsessed with stereotypes of neurosis and violence.

Sidney P. Moss. "R.J. as a Narrative Poet." (University of Illinois) Film 8.

Jeffers' narratives vary only in complexity not in substance (structure and theme). Themes: man's blindness, insignificance, meaningless value system. Damages artistry by repetition, sameness of characters and plot, sensationalism. Greatness: rhetoric, range of vision, grandeur of characters. Poetics: extreme violence, centered on families, in region contemporary but timeless. Reformed poetic drama, lyric and narrative modes. Used Greek grand style, massiveness, moral tone, large purpose, tragic medium. Peculiarities: vocabulary, irony without humor, punctuation, invocations, metaphor.

1957 Ann M. Ridgeway. "A Study of Inhumanism: Action Symbols in Shorter Poems of R. J." (Bowling Green State University) Film 136.

Symbols of mankind: violence, introversion, and cruelty; man defaces

nature. Symbols of animal: stallion (productivity) and hawk (pride and cruelty). Animal symbols used either to reflect behavior of man or to contrast with it. Symbols of inanimate nature: destructive power, dynamic tension (actively resisting man): rock, cliff, and mountain.

- 1958 Mercedes Monjian. "R.J.: A Study in Inhumanism." (University of Pittsburgh) Film 35.
 Contents: Introduction: definition, truthfulness, artistic responsibility. Philosopher-Poet: symbolism, negation and affirmation, detachment and preoccupation, fatalism and free will. Poet-Philosopher: permanent images, primitive emotions, distinguishing style (influence, power devices, rhythm, etc.) The Achievement: balance between Philosopher and Poet: Narrative and Short Poems.
- 1959 Karl A. Keller. "'R.J. and 'The Beauty of Things': A Concept of Nature." (University of Utah) Occidental Library 811.5 J45 zke.
 Paradox: materialist and idealist; naturalist and mystic; 20th Century Puritan and sensualist. Poet of nature: retreat into, awakening to beauty, union with pantheistic god, need for cyclic purging through pain and violence (quake, fire, seasonal cycle). Sense of nature: in landscape imagery, intimate, magnificent. Total nature (attractive and ugly): prime analogue, life-force, earnest, noble, serene, strong, passive, simple, permanent, primitive (non-Rousseau).
- 1964 Nancy Reeve. "R.J.: Three Poems of Humanity." (Sacramento State) 811.5 J45 zre.
 Plea and warning for humanity: from introversion to transhuman magnificence. Critics misinterpret; Schwartz, Rexroth, Waggoner, etc. Poems (Cawdor, Thurso's Landing, Margrave): mans introversion and possibilities. Inhumanism a strategy for coping with death and life's hardships.
- 1966 Judith S. Weisstein. "The Greek Plays of Robinson Jeffers." (Indiana University).
 Adapted to own ends: often to loss of public sympathy: failed at times to relate horror to final release; makes characters monomaniacs. Used Greek: quantative techniques, myth patterns, sense of permanence and reality, sense of life as violent, passion-driven, mysterious (more than science suggests).

"THE SIGNIFICANCE OF POINT LOBOS IN TAMAR"

by Andrew K. Mauthe

Like Egdon Heath in Thomas Hardy's Return of the Native, Point Lobos in Jeffers' Tamar functions as more than merely a fitting place to set a story already conceived. In the Foreword to his Selected Poetry Jeffers credits this particular place with being one of the main inspirations for the poem: "Tamar grew up from the biblical story, mixed with a reminiscence of Shelley's Cenci,

and from the strange, introverted and storm-twisted beauty of Point Lobos." Beyond this, the peculiar beauty thus characteristically described pervades rather hauntingly the entire poem, and, further, influences the action and the characters, particularly that of Tamar. Moreover, the Point functions symbolically as the permanence against which the insignificance and transience of human affairs may be contrasted, though, in a larger sense, even this permanence is somewhat diminished by comparison to the ultimate cycle of the universe that it symbolizes.

The actual physical sense of Point Lobos that we get from Tamar is one of precisely that "strange, introverted and storm-twisted beauty" that Jeffers describes. At one point, the place is described as a "wild rock coast" with "the reckless wind/In the beaten trees." (9) Further on, Tamar asks Helen/Stella if she can remember:

The beauty and strangeness of this place? Old cypresses
The sailor wind works into deep-sea knots
A thousand years; age-reddened granite
That was the world's cradle and crumbles apieces
Now that we're all grown up, breaks out at the roots;
And underneath is the old gray-granite strength
Is neither glad nor sorry to take the seas
Of all the storms forever and stand as firmly
As when the red hawk wings of the first dawn
Streamed up the sky over it: (49)

The gray, twisted, storm-carved beauty of Point Lobos is powerfully depicted in these lines, and, as such, is an important element in the poem, both passively and actively. That is, as the setting alone, thus beautifully presented, the Point is passive in terms of the action of the poem. However, as an influence, or a force, Point Lobos fulfills an active role, first, by influencing Tamar, and therefore the entire action of the poem, and, second, by functioning as a symbol. In the first instance, as an influence on Tamar, the narrator, though asking a question, in fact attributes Tamar's desire and original decision to seduce her brother to the wildness of her environment:

. . . . Was it the wild rock coast
Of her breeding, and the reckless wind
In the beaten trees and the gaunt booming crashes
Of breakers under the rocks, or rather the amplitude
And wing-subduing immense earth-ending water
That moves all the west taught her this freedom?
Ah Tamar,
It was not good, not wise, not safe, not provident. (9)

The wildness of Tamar, then, is the wildness of Point Lobos, and, perhaps, the wildness of the wolves for which the point is named.

¹Robinson Jeffers. The Selected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers (New York, 1938), p. xvi. All subsequent citations will be to this work, and page numbers only will be given in parentheses.

The function of the Point as a symbol, however, is more complex. That it is literally permanent is unquestionable. As long as the earth survives, it will always survive with indifference the storms, and will "stand as firmly" as it did when it first formed. The symbolic permanence of this weirdly beautiful place takes on its meaning from Jeffers' concept of the function of poetry that he expresses in "Point Joe":

Permanent things are what is needful in a poem, things temporally
Of great dimension, things continually renewed or always present. (78)

To Jeffers, the central permanence is the unending cycle of the universe; and the corresponding central permanence in Tamar is Point Lobos. Though Tamar acts out her part in the human aspect of the greater process, the cycle that she represents is not the whole. Point Lobos, on the other hand, represents a larger permanence, of which, in the story, Tamar's action is but a part, and thus serves to emphasize the relative insignificance of the human action. Finally, of course, the Point itself becomes relatively insignificant and impermanent in terms of the cosmic cycle.

If the point, then, is itself the central permanence and is "temporally /Of great dimension," then the vegetal growth upon it represents those "things continually renewed." In this regard, it is significant that the ranchers burned the growth from the land to ensure fertility for the coming year, much as Tamar and the others must be destroyed before the new race of which Tamar dreams can begin.

Finally, the literal and the symbolic manifestations of permanence are brought together following the fiery destruction of the Cauldwells:

Grass grows where the flame flowered;
A hollowed lawn strewn with a few black stones
And the brick of broken chimneys; all about there
The old trees, some of them scarred with fire, endure the sea wind.
(64)

Though the humans have run their cycle, and have destroyed themselves, the Point is still more or less unchanged, and regeneration continues--"the sun also rises."
