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Robinson Jeffers Newsletter

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NEWS AND NOTES: THE CENTENNIAL

This special brief issue of the newsletter is to cover the immediate celebrations of our Jeffers Centennial. Several fuller issues are to follow soon, with the usual fare of articles and reviews, memoirs and letters.

TOR HOUSE FESTIVAL, October 4th and 5th, Carmel. This year's festival followed a very successful discussion format with seminars structured on brief statements of theme from panelists, followed by workshop groups. Seminar #1 featured Dr. Alex Vardamis on "Jeffers' reputation Among His Peers," Dr. David Morris on "Jeffers' Concept of the Wilderness and Environment," and Dr. James Karman with Mrs. Mary Hedin on "Important People, Places and Things in Jeffers' Life." Mrs. Jean Grace gave a summary of the discussions. In Seminar #2, Mr. Robb Kafka spoke of "The Young Jeffers and His Poetry " Dr. Robert Zaller commented on "Literary Roots and Jeffers" and Robert Brophy spoke of "Teaching Jeffers." Mrs. Robert Murray summarized the discussions. Much more participation was possible under this format; papers were limited to "seed thoughts" and questions. Small groups allowed contribution from all in a relaxed, sharing context. The only drawback seemed to be one's inability to tri-locate. Commander Allan Mears most ably gave introductions and presided over transitions.

The late afternoon reception at Tor House was again very enriching. Beautiful weather gave a warm bright afternoon, fading into evening. The presence of the Jeffers family made it doubly pleasant . . . Lee Jeffers and Garth, Lindsay and Maeve Jeffers. Judith Anderson read from Jeffers' letters at the evening banquet and Dr. Albert Gelpi spoke on "Themes in Modern Poetry."

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The festival was bolstered by the traditional three para-events. Tor House tours provided hourly detailed exploration of the Jeffers home, its history, its furnishings and its vistas. The Poetry Walk, led by Beth Wright and John Dotson, took its route from the historic Forest Theater (setting for the 1941 Judith Anderson "Tower Beyond Tragedy") along the Mission Trail to Stewart Beach, with readings along the way from Jeffers poems. A beach picnic was held at noon Sunday at the south side of Camel Point with more readings from Jeffers.

OCCIDENTAL COLLEGE CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION. Occidental celebrates doubly this year: 1986-87 is the centenary of its founding; 1987 marks the 100th birthday of its most famous graduate. Jeffers events began with a Fall Lecture Series on successive Thursday evenings in October and November: "Robinson Jeffers: The Life of A Poet" by Fred Ott (October 9), "The Robinson Jeffers Collection And Its Use by Scholars" by Tyrus Harmsen and Robert Brophy (October 16), "Discovering the Poet Robinson Jeffers: A Panel" with Herbert Klein, Lawrence Clark Powell and Ward Ritchie (October 23), "Jeffers Serendipity" by Robb Kafka (November 6), and "Robinson Jeffers' Sacramental View of the Universe" by Robert Brophy (November 13). Under the direction of Tyrus Harmsen, the Library launched a traveling exhibit of Jeffers first editions and memorabilia, visiting Loyola Marymount, UC San Diego, Loma Linda University, Cal Poly/San Luis Obispo, Cal State Hayward, Santa Rosa Junior College, University of Tulsa, UC Irvine, Long Beach Public Library, Whittier College and Honnold Library, Claremont.

During the summer and fall a Jeffers essay contest was sponsored by President Gilman's office on the topic "The Relevance of Robinson Jeffers in 1987." The contest open to all undergraduates of California colleges and universities. Prizes: \$500, \$300 and \$100.

A Jeffers Poetry Seminar was offered for the first time at Occidental as part of the regular English Department fall curriculum. Students were led through Jeffers' poetics, world view, voices and themes. They discussed his narratives and lyrics, studied the production "Medea" and took part in a November camping field trip to Carmel/Big Sur.

SYMPOSIUM. The week of Jeffers' birthday will be commemorated by a scholars symposium, January 8-10, 1-4 pm in Herrick Hall, Occidental College. The first day's topics will be from general themes: "The Man and the Poet" by James Kaman, "The Los Angeles Years" by Robb Kafka, "Jeffers and the Theater" by Eric Vaughn, "Radical Conservative: The Politics of Robinson Jeffers" by Edward Nickerson.

January 9th will bring various critical approaches -- historical, biographical, myth-ritual, psychoanalytic, etc. -- to Jeffers' masterpiece "Tamar". Listed titles are: "The Critical Reputation of Robinson Jeffers" by Alex Vardamis, "Ghosts on Lobos: Tamar's Philosophical Antecedents" by Arthur B. Coffin, "Tamar's Dance of Life and Death: Myth-Ritual Elements" by Robert Brophy, and "Tamar's Oedipal Transcendence" by Robert Zaller.

The evenings will feature Readers Theater presentation of "Give Your Heart to the Hawks" directed by Omar Paxson and read by distinguished Occidental Theater Arts alumni Michael Demaree, Mitchell Giannunzio, Lucia Virginia Lee, Irene Brandenburg and Andrew C. Baker.

Jeffers' birthday, January 10th, will be commemorated by an evening program, "Poets Read Jeffers" - a panel consisting of William Everson, Gary Snyder and Czeslaw Milosz, reading selected works and commenting on Jeffers' genius, his place in American and world literature and his impact on the poets themselves.

"The Cretan Woman," Jeffers' adaptation of the Hippolytus/Phaedra story by Euripides, was originally scheduled for January 30-31, but had to be cancelled. Hopefully, it can be staged at a later date.

February 21st, from 3 to 5 pm, the 1982 Kennedy Center production of "Medea" will be screened. Judith Anderson will be present to comment and will be center of a reception which follows. That evening at 7:30 in Alumni Gymnasium, choreographer and dancer Jane Brown from the Oakland Theater of Dance, will perform "Medea" and "Abstracts From The World Around Us."

Two Jeffers centennial exhibitions will run almost concurrently. The Mary Norton Clapp Library, Occidental College, will exhibit Jeffers first editions, manuscripts, letters, photographs and critical work from its Robinson Jeffers collection, January 5th to March 20th. The Coons Administrative Center, January 5th to February 12th, will feature "Robinson Jeffers Country: Monterey Landscapes" -- an exhibition of photographs, prints, drawings and paintings illustrative of "Jeffers Country." A reception is scheduled for January 9th from 7:30 to 9 pm.

PANEGYRIC FOR ROBINSON JEFFERS: CARMEL, JANUARY 10. TOR HOUSE FOUNDATION. A Greek festival of praise and eulogy, the evening will include reminiscences and short readings from the poet's works. Some of the featured contributors will be Dame Judith Anderson, Mr. Leigh Wiener who will present photographs he has taken of Robinson Jeffers in the late 50's and who will talk about his impressions of Jeffers.

Mr. Robert Hass, distinguished poet and well known translator of Nobel Prize winner Dr. Czeslaw Milosz, will read some of Jeffers' poetry. Mr. Hass is the new editor of the Random House "Selected Poems."

This will be the initial "kick-off" for the year-long celebration for 1987 which will culminate with the annual Festival October 3, 4 and 5.

There will be time for some responses from the audience, a favorite selection of Jeffers' work or an anecdote from one of the tours of Tor House or personal reflections on Jeffers. Casa Fiesta Room, Hacienda Carmel, Carmel Valley Road. (408) 624-1813.