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Robinson Jeffers Newsletter

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NEWS AND NOTES

RETROSPECT: THE ROBINSON JEFFERS CENTENNIAL COLLOQUIUM and THE NINTH ANNUAL TOR HOUSE FESTIVAL, September-October 1987. The festival programs, outlined in RJN No. 70, were stunningly successful this year with outstanding readings of Jeffers' poetry by a panel of poets (Everson, Hass, Hunt, Minty, Stafford, Wakoski, Williamson, and Zaller), presentations on Jeffers' critical reputation, his place in the literature curriculum, the response of other poets to him, and oral history reflecting new facts and insights. The program at San Jose State University closed with a Thursday night major address by Czeslaw Milosz and a Friday morning lecture by Albert Gelpi, to whom the poets responded with their final word.

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The Tor House Festival in Carmel began with a Founders Day reception at Tor House, followed by an evening reading of Jeffers' poetry and his own by Gary Snyder at Santa Catalina School. Saturday morning brought a stimulating seminar at Hacienda Carmel with Hunt, Snyder, Stafford, Wakoski, Williamson, and Zaller. In the afternoon, Jason Miller gave a very moving dramatic reading. The festival closed with a banquet at which Judith Anderson read from Jeffers' poems and letters.

OTHER CENTENNIAL EVENTS:

The spring 1987 issue of THE QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF THE BOOK CLUB OF CALIFORNIA, Vol. 52, No. 2, dedicated "In Honor of the Robinson Jeffers Centennial," presented a memoir, "Some Recollections of Robinson Jeffers," by Ward Ritchie, pages 33-46. 312 Sutter Street, San Francisco, CA 94108.

The fall number of AMERICAN POETRY MAGAZINE, a special issue on Robinson Jeffers, has been described in RJN No. 70. Single issue \$8.00. P.O. Box 611, Jefferson, North Carolina 28640.

THE AMERICAN POETRY REVIEW, Vol. 16, No. 6 (November-December 1987) carries a cover photo by Leigh Wiener of Jeffers in his later years facing the sea. The issue includes: "Robinson Jeffers' 'Home,' A Recently Uncovered Poem" (pages 25-31), a 336 line narrative, originally intended for THE WOMEN AT POINT SUR, which was among the manuscripts recently made available at Occidental College. The introduction and notes are by Tim Hunt, editor of THE COLLECTED POETRY OF ROBINSON JEFFERS (Vol. 1, 1988). The issue also has an essay, "On Jeffers's Life and Work," by Robert Hass. Single copies \$2.25. Temple University City Center, 1616 Walnut Street, Room 405, Philadelphia, PA 19103.

THE LIBRARY CHRONICLE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN, Number 40, 1987, is dedicated to Robinson Jeffers. Cover portrait of the poet (Carmel, 1939) is by Michael Werboff. Articles include: "Robinson Jeffers at Texas" by Decherd Turner, director of the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, "Unpublished Manuscripts in the Robinson Jeffers Collection at the HRHC" by Robert M. Kafka, and "Freedom, Democracy, and Poetry: What Robinson Jeffers Really Said at the Library of Congress," by Edward A. Nickerson. This issue presents photographs of Robinson (ca 1910 and 1941), early sketches of Tor House by Jeffers, a Genthe photo of Una (1911)-and another of her by Hagemeyer (ca 1930), Hawk Tower in the mid 20s, the twins with bulldog Haig, and Una and Robinson with Judith Anderson (1941). Copies of this issue can be obtained at \$10 each plus \$.69 postage. P.O. Box 7219, Austin, TX 78713.

SHINE, PERISHING REPUBLIC, a limited edition portfolio (San Francisco: James Linden, 1987), features text by Robinson Jeffers ' four photographs by Michael Mundy, and an essay, "Quintessential Jeffers," by Robert Brophy. This portfolio edition was designed and printed by one of the San Francisco Bay Area's foremost printers Wesley B. Tanner, using Centaur and Bembo types on Italian mouldmade Magnani Incisioni paper. The poem is presented on a

single broadside measuring 14 inches high by 11 inches wide. Calligraphy is by John Prestianni. Each portfolio case was handcrafted by Klaus-Ullrich Rotzscher, measuring approximately 15 inches high by 12 inches wide and is covered in Bamburger Iris linen, with parchment on the spine. 100 copies for sale. \$375.00 postpaid. 1803 Golden Gate Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94115.

ROBINSON JEFFERS: POETRY AND RESPONSE: A CENTENNIAL TRIBUTE (Los Angeles: Occidental College, 1987) is a 30 page booklet (NEH sponsored and funded) with ten Jeffers poems interfaced with as many responses (short explications). The essays are by members of a centennial Jeffers seminar held in the fall of 1986 at Occidental College. An introduction and a selected, annotated bibliography by Robert J. Brophy. A copy will be sent to each Newsletter subscriber. Others may request a copy by writing to Tyrus G. Harmsen, Occidental College, Los Angeles, CA 90041.

Quintessence Publications of Amador City, California (356 Bunker Hill Mine Road, 95601) is offering a Robinson Jeffers-Blanche Matthias 100th Birthday broadside in six colors, measuring 20 x 35 inches, in an edition of 100 copies, eighty of which are for sale. \$12.00, plus \$2.00 shipping. (Blanche Matthias was a close friend of Jeffers who shared his birthday and with whom Una had an extensive correspondence. See RJN Nos. 49, 50, 51, 53, 55.)

The Tor House Foundation (Box 1887, Carmel, 93921) offers a five-slide souvenir in its docents room. Photography by William G. Miles. Slides of Tor House, Hawk Tower, Seascapes, and Point Lobos.

On October 2, 1987, the Carmel Post Office had a special cancellation commemorating the Centennial Birthday Celebration of Robinson Jeffers. A special fold-over cachet which bears a sketch of Jeffers on the front was developed for the occasion. On the inside of the cachet is an excerpt from his poem "Carmel Point" and the special cancellation with Hawk Tower on the imprint. Available from the Postmaster, Carmel, CA 93923. \$2.00.

* * * * *

RECAPITULATION: PUBLICATIONS TOWARD A CENTENNIAL YEAR BY ROBINSON JEFFERS:

APOLOGY FOR BAD DREAMS. San Francisco: Peter Rutledge Koch for James Linden, 1986. 50 copies. \$275.

CAWDOR. California Writers of the Land Series. Afterword by James Houston. Covelo: Yolla Bolly Press, 1985. 240 copies. \$225.

THE COLLECTED POETRY OF ROBINSON JEFFERS. Volume 1, 1920-1928. Edited by Tim Hunt. Stanford University Press, 1988. 600 pages. \$60.00.

CONTINENT'S END. A cantata of Jeffers poems: Tor House, The Bloody Sire, Joy, Birds, Continent's End. Music by Richard Grayson. Premiere performance May 16, 1987. Thorne Hall, Occidental College, Los Angeles.

DRAFTS Of: Humanity is the Start of the Race (Roan Stallion), Boats in a Fog, The Hills Beyond the River, excerpts from Point Alma Venus. In AMERICAN POETRY, 5,1 (Fall 1987), 59-72.

HOME. In AMERICAN POETRY REVIEW, 16,6 (Nov/Dec 1987), 25-31, a 336 line narrative poem intended for THE WOMEN AT POINT SUR.

JEFFERS POEMS IN TRANSLATION. Japanese by Tom Miura. Tokyo: Kokubun-Sha Publishing Company, 1986. \$18.75.

POINT LOBOS. A PORTFOLIO OF FIFTEEN POEMS BY ROBINSON JEFFERS. Includes: Point Pinos & Point Lobos, Granite & Cypress, Apology for Bad Dreams, Meditation on Saviors, The Cycle, Rock & Hawk, De Rerum Virtute, Birds, The Old Stonemason, Clouds of Evening, Not Our Good Luck, Birds & Fishes, The Beauty of Things, Night, Continent's End. Oakland: Peter Rutledge Koch, 1987. 125 portfolios. \$3000.

ROBINSON JEFFERS, INTERJOCHTE ERDE: GEDICHTE (ROBINSON JEFFERS, SUBJECTED EARTH: POEMS). 54 poems translated by Eva Hesse. Munich: Piper, 1987. \$16.50. Includes "Randbenerkungen Von Robinson Jeffers," notes by Jeffers on the Big Sur Coast, politics, culture cycles, religion, and the function of poetry. Pages 88-92.

ROBINSON JEFFERS: SELECTED POEMS, The Centenary Edition. Manchester, England: Carcanet, 1987.

ROCK AND HAWK: A Selection of Shorter Poems by Robinson Jeffers. Edited by Robert Hass; New York: Random House, 1987.

SHINE, PERISHING REPUBLIC. San Francisco: James Linden, 1987. Portfolio. 100 copies for sale. \$375.

WHERE SHALL I TAKE YOU TO: The Love Letters of Una and Robinson Jeffers. Covelo: Yolla Bolly Press, 1987. Collector's edition \$245; deluxe edition \$585.

BOOKS ON ROBINSON JEFFERS:

Boswell, Jeanetta. ROBINSON JEFFERS AND THE CRITICS, 1912-1983: A Bibliography of Secondary Sources with Selective Annotations. Metuchen, New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, 1986.

Dotson, John. THE ENDURING VOICE: A TOR HOUSE JOURNAL. San Luis Obispo, CA: Mariposa Press, 1987. 136 pages. \$12.00.

Everson, William. THE EXCESSES OF GOD: ROBINSON JEFFERS AS A RELIGIOUS FIGURE. Stanford University Press, 1988. 224 pages. \$29.50.

Hayman, Lee Richard. COLLECTING JEFFERS. Bradenton, FL: Opuscula Press. Forthcoming.

Karman, James. ROBINSON JEFFERS: POET OF CALIFORNIA. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1987. Literary West Series. 160 pages.

Klein, Mina Cooper and Herbert Arthur. JEFFERS OBSERVED. Amador City, CA: Quintessence Publications, 1986. 54 pages. \$25.00.

Ritter-Murray, Jean. A TOUR OF TOR HOUSE. Carmel: Tor House Press, 1987. Photos by William Miles. 15 pages. \$6.00.

ROBINSON JEFFERS: POETRY AND RESPONSE, A CENTENNIAL TRIBUTE. Los Angeles: Occidental College, 1987. 30 pages. On request.

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_____. "Robinson Jeffers: Man & Poet" (Interview). In OCCIDENTAL, 11,1 (Winter 1986/87), 14, 16, 37, 61.

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Dinsmore, Nancy. "Shakespeare's Grave: An Explication." ROBINSON JEFFERS NEWSLETTER, No. 69 (April 1987), 15-17.

Eaton, David. "Observations on Meeting Robinson Jeffers." ROBINSON JEFFERS NEWSLETTER, No. 69 (April 1987), 5-7.

Elder, John. "The Covenant of Loss," Chapter 1 in IMAGINING THE EARTH: POETRY AND THE VISION OF NATURE. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985, p. 7-23.

Everson, William. "Letters on Jeffers." AMERICAN POETRY, 5,1 (Fall 1987), 73-80.

Falk, Colin. "Robinson Jeffers: American Romantic." In ROBINSON JEFFERS: SELECTED POEMS: THE CENTENARY EDITION. Manchester, England: Carcanet, 1987, p. 7-13.

Gelpi, Albert. "Coda" comparing Yvor Winters' & Jeffers' Anti-Modernism. In A COHERENT SPLENDOR: THE AMERICAN POETIC RENAISSANCE 1910-1950. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983. Forthcoming.

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Haines, John. "Reading Jeffers." AMERICAN POETRY, 5,1 (Fall 1987), 88-90.

Haslam, Gerald. "Reading Jeffers." AMERICAN POETRY, 5,1 (Fall 1987), 91.

Hass, Robert. "Introduction." ROCK AND HAWK: A SELECTION OF SHORTER POEMS BY ROBINSON JEFFERS. New York: Random House, 1987, p. xv-xliii.

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Hesse, Eva. "Die Exzesse Von Robinson Jeffers (The Excesses of Robinson Jeffers)." In UNTERJOCHTE ERDE: GEDICHTE. Munich: Piper, 1987, p. 107-150.

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- _____. "Robinson Jeffers' 'Home.'" AMERICAN POETRY REVIEW 16,6 (Nov/Dec 1987), 25.
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Zaller, Robert. "Robinson Jeffers: Literary Influences." ROBINSON JEFFERS NEWSLETTER, No. 69 (April 1987), 7-11.

Zeitlin, Jacob I. "Mina Cooper Klein, 1906-1979." In JEFFERS OBSERVED by Mina Cooper and Herbert Arthur Klein. Amador City, CA: Quintessence Publications, 1986, p. 49-53.

* * * * *

DISSERTATION ABSTRACTS: Beers, Morris, Yozzo

INTERPRETIVE SCHEMATA AND LITERARY RESPONSE

Beers, Terry Lynn, Ph.D. University of Southern California, 1986 Chair: Marilyn M. Cooper

Literary theorists who emphasize the constitutive role readers play through the activity of reading explain agreement among particular readings of a literary work by claiming that readers are constrained by their knowledge of conventions and normative interpretive behaviors. But these explanations have remained controversial since they either fail to describe these social regularities in specific ways, or they assume them to be relatively stable, despite the fact that they are subjectively realized by individual readers. In this

dissertation, I consider this problematic aspect of reader-centered criticism in light of research by theorists working in the province of schema theory, a theory of how knowledge is represented to consciousness.

The first two chapters establish the need for a more specific theoretical account of a priori reading constraints in the work of reader-centered literary theorists. The following chapter shows how schema theory offers such an account in an extra-literary context, arguing, moreover, that schema theory must be emended by forsaking the rigid machine metaphor upon which it is based in favor of a more dynamic metaphor, human design. In the fourth chapter I propose a reader-centered, schema-theoretic model of criticism that benefits from the work of literary theorists, who focus on the aesthetics and social contexts of reading, and the work of reading theorists, who focus on how schemata are represented to consciousness.

Finally, I evaluate the resultant theory in the context of a problematic literary text, "Thurso's Landing" by Robinson Jeffers. To now, most Jeffers criticism has been flawed insofar as it does not acknowledge the constitutive role of readers and the schemata that guide their interpretive judgments. Moreover, many of these critics have vehemently disagreed about the quality of the language and the philosophic expression of Jeffers' narrative poems. Thus, a theory sensitive to the constitutive roles of reader/critics offers a common theoretical frame in order to evaluate and judge among the competing critical assumptions through which Jeffers critics have read "Thurso's Landing." (Copies available exclusively from Micrographics Department, Doheny Library, USC, Los Angeles, CA 90089-0182.)

Dissertation Abstracts International. Vol. 47, No. 6, December 1986, p. 2157A.

LITERATURE AND ENVIRONMENT: THE INHUMANIST PERSPECTIVE AND THE POETRY OF ROBINSON JEFFERS

Morris, David Copland, Ph.D. University of Washington, 1984. 275pp. Chairperson: Leroy Searle

In this work I identify and describe a perspective which can help us re-orient ourselves toward a major cultural problem. The cultural problem goes by the name of "environmental crisis." The perspective I call "inhumanist," using a term originated by the American poet Robinson Jeffers, in whose work this perspective finds its most powerful expression. Jeffers defines inhumanism as "a shifting of emphasis and significance from man to not-man; the rejection of human solipsism and recognition of the transhuman magnificence." This perspective reverses the dangerous anthropocentrism which has been a primary cause of the environmental crisis.

In this dissertation I have a dual purpose: to demonstrate the social importance of the inhumanist perspective, and to demonstrate a way in which the poetry of Robinson Jeffers can be seen as the major achievement I believe it to be. In the first five chapters I develop the full significance of the differences between anthropocentrism (humanism) and inhumanism, especially in terms of environmental crisis. In these chapters Jeffers functions as a background figure, though my exploration of the humanism-inhumanism distinction is founded, I believe, on my interpretation of, and absorption in, the inhumanist vision which permeates his work. In chapter six, I examine post-structuralism, a self-proclaimed contemporary critique of humanism, and find that the new movement retains a strong residual anthropocentrism. In chapter seven, I discuss deconstructive approaches to the reading of poetry and suggest alternatives which I believe serve Jeffers better. In chapter eight, I take up briefly the history of Jeffers criticism, and then discuss in detail the contradictory nature of the influential "New Critical" objections to his work. In chapter nine, I discuss in detail Jeffers' poetry, and attempt to demonstrate its value. In the last chapter I explain why, for me, Jeffers is a great poet almost exclusively in his short poems rather than in his lengthy narratives. These narratives, which comprise the bulk of his work, have received by far the dominant share of critical-attention.

Dissertation Abstracts International. Vol. 49, No. 9, March 1986, p. 2694A.

IN ILLO TEMPORE, AB ORIGINE: VIOLENCE AND REINTEGRATION IN THE POEMS OF ROBINSON JEFFERS

Yuzzo, John Michael, Ph.D. The University of Tulsa, 1985. 179pp.
Director: Darcy O'Brien

The poetry of Robinson Jeffers (1887-1962) poses a particular twentieth-century mythography. In his narrative dramas and in his shorter lyrics alike, Jeffers cites human excess of passion as the catalyst for annihilation necessary for cyclical change. This study focuses upon Jeffers' celebration of fragmentation and disintegration and the part these play in the cosmological myth of reintegration.

Chapter 1 establishes a modern tradition of the study of myth and its functions and focuses upon the ideas of Joseph Campbell, Mircea Eliade, and Alain (Emile-Auguste Chartier). In "Original Sin" Jeffers establishes man's primitive consciousness as a factor in modern fragmentation. The poem dramatizes man's primal cruelty as the sin which death will cleanse. Chapter 2 identifies Jeffers' major topics of discourse as he listed them in THEMES IN MY POEMS. The chapter examines TAMAR and ROAN STALLION for their emblems of failed power and finds in THE TOWER BEYOND TRAGEDY a method of separation by which man

might endure the atrocities brought on by his own excesses. Chapter 3 analyzes numerous shorter poems to exemplify the poet's consistency of voice and method informing all his works and defining his enduring poetic idiom. Whether he speaks from the choric interludes of his dramas or through the narration of his shorter pieces, Jeffers argues forcefully against solipsism and celebrates the terrific and beautiful insouciance of nature. Chapter 4 explores in CAWDOR the fatal consequences of vanity and the failure of asceticism and examines in DEAR JUDAS and THE LOVING SHEPHERDESS Jeffers' convictions about the futility of saviors. The chapter affirms Jeffers' world view as his ultimate belief in nature, from which man has distanced himself and with which he must finally be reconciled.

Dissertation Abstracts International. Vol. 46, No. 12,
June 1986, p. 317A.

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JEFFERS SELECTED WORKS: THE POEMS

It was thought useful to provide here the table of contents (poems and page numbers) of the two new gatherings of Jeffers poetry. Ed.

ROCK AND HAWK: A SELECTION OF SHORTER POEMS by Robinson Jeffers
New York: Random House, 1987. Edited by Robert Hass.

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ROBINSON JEFFERS: SELECTED POEMS: THE CENTENARY EDITION
Manchester, England: Carcanet, 1987. £16.95. 202 Great Suffolk Street,
London SE1 1PR

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THE BEAUTY OF VULTURES:
THE RELEVANCE OF ROBINSON JEFFERS' POETRY IN
THE MODERN AGE

by Paula Huston

One feels him rather than sees him: the dark ghost of Tor House, deep in the granite. No dancing on the wind for this spirit; that he ever danced or laughed is unimaginable, yet he loved the world with a somber completeness that will haunt for generations. "If you should look for this place after a handful of lifetimes," he begins in the poem "Tor House," "If you should look . . . after ten thousand years . . ." Robinson Jeffers spoke with a prophet's voice and his words were meant to echo down the centuries.

Photographs of the man could be pictures of the poetry: hard bones and harsh angles, with the fierce eyes of hawk or hermit. Yet for all his intensity, for all of the deep seriousness he brought to his work, Jeffers never overestimated the power or place of poetry. As he says in "The Beauty of Things,"

And water and sky are constant -- to feel
Greatly, and understand greatly, and express greatly,
the natural
Beauty, is the sole business of poetry.
The rest's diversion . . .

For Jeffers, a true comprehension of the stark and terrible beauty of life was the only salvation; poetry was merely one way of seeing. This somber and penetrating vision of existence so clearly articulated in his poetry is even more relevant now, in this dark age foretold by Malthus and Huxley, than it was fifty years ago.

"Hand kisses hand in the dark, the torch passes, the man/falls, and the torch passes," Jeffers prophesies in "The Torch-Bearers' Race."

. . . the life of mankind is like the life of a man, a flutter
from darkness to darkness
Across the bright hair of a fire, so much of the ancient
Knowledge will not be annulled.

In a day when the deadly white dust of nuclear winter clouds all vision of the future, the strong voice of a prophetic poet offers solace to humanity. The gradual passing away of faith, both in the ancient gods and the modern god of science, has left mankind naked and bereft, alone at the edges of the building storm. Jeffers, high in his Hawk Tower aerie, surveyed the world and said,

. . . here is your emblem
To hang in the future sky;
Not the cross, not the hive,

But this . . .
.

. . . the falcon's
Realist eyes and act
Married to the massive

Mysticism of stone,
Which failure cannot cast down
Nor success make proud.

Telling the future is a sorcerer's act, and Jeffers, like all men who dare to illuminate the road ahead, felt keenly the isolation inherent in the prophet's role. In the sadly resigned "Soliloquy" he says, speaking of himself:

. . . you have invoked the slime in the skull,
The lymph in the vessels . . .
.
You shall be called heartless and blind;
And watch new time answer old thought, not a face strange
or a pain astonishing.

His bleak visions of the future, purchased at such a price, have in a sense become a gift of hope in this age of no future.

Whether he was dealing with hawks or humans, death and suffering were the common touchstones in Jeffers' vision of life. As famine stalks the ancient tribes of the Sudan or Ethiopia, as the flesh of little children wastes to the bone in India, as the body count rises daily in El Salvador, so dies the hawk. For Jeffers, life's meaning was a glowing halo around the central fact of death. He felt that without a visceral comprehension of the inevitable ending

of life there was no possibility of real love or joy. In the poem "Hurt Hawks" he speaks of death as "redeemer" and says of the crippled and starving redtail, with its wing trailing like a "banner in defeat:"

We had fed him six weeks, I gave him freedom,
He wandered over the foreland hill and returned in the
evening, asking for death,
Not like a beggar, still eyed with the old
Implacable arrogance. I gave him the lead gift in the
twilight.

The death, however, as wrenching as it is, becomes the open gate to freedom for the fierce and beautiful bird:

. . . What fell was relaxed,
Owl-downy, soft feminine feathers; but what
Soared: the fierce rush: the night-herons by the
flooded river cried fear at its rising
Before it was quite unsheathed from reality.

Jeffers' confrontation with the facts of death are curiously strengthening in a day when we are overwhelmed by world suffering.

In a time when medical technology can sustain life far beyond the efforts of the body, the beds of the dying have become battlegrounds for new and unforeseen moral decisions. The responsibilities of society have expanded to include territory that once belonged solely to the gods. The immense anxiety generated by such decisions is gently laid to rest over and over again in Jeffers' clear-eyed vision of death as inevitable, unchangeable, and finally welcome. In his poem "The Deer Lay Down Their Bones," he speaks of a hidden glen, a refuge for wounded deer, where they have "water for the awful thirst and peace to die in." At this time, Jeffers himself is old and grieving for his wife and tempted by the "magic of grass, water and precipice" to give up and lie down with the bones of the deer. He stops himself with his own thirty-year-old decision that he

. . . who drinks the wine
Should take the dregs; even in the bitter lees and sediment
New discovery may lie.

The vision of a final peace sustains him, however, as it can sustain modern man when his frantic efforts to conquer death inevitably fail.

Jeffers' long look at the tragedy of life eventually led him to a serene sense of perspective. In "Apology for Bad Dreams," for example, he stands on a cliff watching "the fountain and furnace of incredible light flowing up from the sunk sun" as it sets over the sea. Below him, in a small clearing, a woman is punishing a horse. She calls for help from her son who fetches a chain tie-rope and they "noosed the small rusty links round the horse's tongue/and tied by the swollen tongue to the tree." As the reader recoils in horror, Jeffers calmly remarks: "Seen from this height they are shrunk to insect size." As one struggles to reconcile the juxtaposed images of

magnificent sunset and human evil, he returns to the "enormous light (that) beats up out of the west across the cloud-bars of the trade-wind."

For Jeffers, there was no division between the horrors of men and the ravages of nature. All were part of the whole and therefore belonged to the natural rather than the moral sphere. Though he grieved deeply for the maimed and suffering creatures of the earth, he was able to see that he had no control over nature; his grief was perhaps a purer grief, untinged by the egocentric guilt of Western philosophy.

Jeffers felt that the immense wounds to humanity inflicted by men such as Hitler and Stalin were not to be forgotten, but rather marked as symptoms of an inevitably crumbling culture. In his political poem, "The Purse-Seine" he describes the methods of the sardine fishermen and the terrible beauty of the crowded fish when they

Know they are caught, and wildly beat from one wall to the
other of their closing destiny the phosphorescent
Water to a pool of flame, each beautiful slender body
sheeted with flame, like a live rocket. . .

Later he looks down from a mountaintop at a great city, with its "galaxies of light" and compares it to the purse-seine where the thousands of men below "hardly feel the cords drawing, yet they shine already." While the chilling metaphor is still ringing in the ears, he concludes: "There is no reason for amazement: surely one always knew that cultures decay, and life's end is death."

Jeffers held his light steadily on the decadence of society, yet refused to panic at what he saw. The struggles of any individual, any culture, any era, were no more than a facet of nature itself. Seen from his cliff-top, personal tragedy, societal collapse, even nuclear holocaust are lost in the glorious and eternal light of the setting sun.

Jeffers' fearless contemplation of the darkness might have become relentless without the balancing force of simple beauty. Poem after poem celebrated the sheer loveliness of nature. In "The Excesses of God" he speaks of a creator who acts in superfluous ways, flinging

Rainbows over the rain
And beauty above the moon, and secret rainbows
On the domes of deep sea-shells,
And making the necessary embrace of breeding
Beautiful also as fire,
Not even the weeds to multiply without blossom
Nor the birds without music:
There is the great humaneness at the heart of things . . .

In the poem "Boats in a Fog," six fishing-boats, hugging the cliff for guidance, slip in and out of the shifting mist, muffled engines throbbing. "The flight of the planets is nothing nobler," he says.

. . . all the arts lose virtue
Against the essential reality
Of creatures going about their business among the equally
Earnest elements of nature.

Jeffers taught a kind of reverence for natural beauty that is both the basis of ecological consciousness and a source of personal inspiration. Contact with the natural world replenished Jeffers, as it had the great Romantic poets. In our vast and sprawling metropolitan empires, where even the sky is hidden, blackened by traffic and industry and the pollutants generated by millions of human lives, the poetry of Jeffers is a reminder that individual contact with the simple beauty of nature has the power to transform.

Finally, and perhaps most necessary to an age haunted by the vision of apocalypse, Jeffers found peace in the concept of creative destruction. "Beauty is not always lovely," he says in "Fire on the Hills."

. . . the fire was beautiful, the terror
Of the deer was beautiful; and when I returned
Down the black slopes after the fire had gone by an eagle
Was perched on the jag of a burnt pine,
Insolent and gorged, cloaked in the folded storms of his
shoulders.
He had come from far off for the good hunting
With fire for his beater to drive the game . . .

The two images in the poem are inseparable; the great bird feeds on the disaster. Jeffers believed that beauty can arise from the ashes of the old ways. In an age of disbelief, where the "center cannot hold" any longer, his words are a reminder that the fire can cleanse and renew. As he says in the last lines of the poem:

I thought painfully, but the whole mind,
The destruction that brings an eagle from heaven is
better than mercy.

Robinson Jeffers' prophetic poetry was a gift to future generations and offered solace and a way to understand the inevitable tragedies of life. His words are as relevant now as they would have been a thousand years ago. The issues he raised are universal and will be with us as long as the race survives. The peculiar, harsh beauty of Jeffers' poetry will continue to haunt for as long as art has a place in the culture.

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"The Beauty of Vultures" won First Prize in the Robinson Jeffers Centennial Essay Competition open to undergraduates of California Colleges and Universities.

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ROBINSON JEFFERS AND THE QUALITY OF THINGS
by Jean Kellogg Dickie

By way of introduction, I am a painter-etcher. Although my mother was a poet and my scientific father an excellent speaker and prose writer, I never understood the literary craft except on grounds of meaning and -- perhaps -- style. Therefore I cannot comment on the purely literary qualities of the work of Robinson Jeffers -- work which, nevertheless, had a profound effect on my life and thought.

I should like to begin by calling attention to four lines from the poem "Shine, Republic" which made a deep impression upon me when I was about to begin my own study of Nature:

The quality of these trees, green height; of the sky,
shining, of water, a clear flow; of the rock, hardness
And reticence: each is noble in its quality. The love of
freedom has been the quality of Western man.

It is interesting to relate Jeffers' regard for the intrinsic qualities of things -- that is -- the real -- to his awareness of the metaphysical and abstract qualities of these same things. To help me with this task, I have invoked the presence of two painters and one other poet, all contemporary with Jeffers.

But to go back to "Jeffers Country" as the late Horace Lyon called Carmel and Big Sur, I remember the remark made by the late great French critic, Henri Focillon, that the geography of France had been created by her artists, pictorial or literary. On my painting trips I was constantly reminded of Jeffers' penetrating observation of the purely physical aspects -- the structure -- that is -- of the landscape itself. This, quite apart from the more abstract and even metaphysical overtones that same structure may have suggested to the poet's mind.

Unlike the French Surrealists who seem unable to overcome their resistance to the insufficiency of objective reality as poetic material, Jeffers through sheer power of language and rigorous thought, takes many of the neglected aspects of modern life, and gives us a picture of our true condition -- at once reality and revelation.

Let us travel to France. The painter, Fernand Léger, was born in Argentan, Normandy in 1881. He early associated himself with a group of artists responsible for the development of Cubism in France. Included were the painters, Picasso and Braque, a number of important poets and critics, and Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, who became Léger's dealer. In 1920, Léger met the architect Le Corbusier, who commissioned the painter's first murals. Then, with the Ballet Mécanique, Léger pioneered work in experimental Cinema. He is generally considered an abstract artist.

When he came to California in 1941, Léger had already made three trips to the United States. Hearing that he planned to give a few lectures at Mills College in Oakland, where he was visiting his old friend, the composer Darius Milhaud, I went to Oakland to meet Léger, and was one of those who persuaded the painter to come to Carmel that summer to teach a small class of interested artists for two weeks. We put him up at the Elkins adobe, now the Old Capitol Club in Monterey, a town he much preferred to Carmel, which he considered "arty." Léger was really a Norman peasant, and he preferred fishing as a livelihood to running tea rooms and gift shops. He understood very well the masculine pursuits of fishing and raising cattle and vegetables. Just so, Jeffers had admired the life of the Big Sur coast when he first encountered it -- "purged," as he states in his foreword to Selected Poetry, "of its ephemeral accretions." Before returning to New York, Léger told me that he would like to see the Big Sur coast. So, I arranged an afternoon's drive and then tea with my old friend Susan Porter, a brilliant woman and teller of Irish myths.

Climbing out of the Sur canyon, I drove west along Coastland's Ridge from where we had a spectacular view of the Santa Lucian Range which forms a veritable sea-wall against the vast extension of the Pacific. "Un pays romantique et contemplative," remarked the painter." A romantic and contemplative country -- literary rather than pictorial because of the huge scale."

As we approached Susan's redwood house which stood on the north end of the ridge overlooking the ocean, a tall angular woman with lifted brows came out to meet us. Mrs. Porter was used to receiving foreign visitors; and her large brown eyes seemed to select a distant point of sight even as she greeted us with a low warm laugh. Léger, himself, was very direct and had a frank and easy manner. After examining Susan's extensive library of English and Irish poetry and drama, we settled down to talk with myself as translator when needed.

Léger: "There is great contrast in this landscape. Each object seems to have its own characteristic quality."

Susan: "I have heard that you are an abstract artist, Monsieur, but you say that you are a realist?"

Léger: "I seek a new realism of the object and of fragments of the object. It is possible to establish plastic values of an object by contrasting it with other objects. One needs to be clear about the qualities of an object. The human body, of all objects, is most resistant to distortion because of its meaning."

Susan: "How do you see the abstract in art? Is it not some form of mental seduction that cuts itself off from reality -- from the earth with its power of renewal?"

Léger: "It is a kind of formal logic that detaches itself from the explicit level in favor of the general and universal. Sometimes it moves too far toward the decorative. Then one needs to return to the real."

Susan: "Sometimes an object can recall other forms to the mind. The photographer Edward Weston calls these Mother-Forms. I call them archetypes."

Léger: "That is interesting."

I rose and lifted the boiling kettle from the stove to pour fresh tea. Léger, helping himself to cheese and biscuits, laughed and said: "Comme c'est bon. Real, not metaphysical."

"Try one of my home-baked ginger cookies, Monsieur. Look at the colors of the sea. Look how they have changed since we have been talking here. Even our faces have changed with the light."

Léger: "Madame, you have the painter's eye!"

Léger refused to bend or tilt certain objects too far; he preferred to maintain a sense of nature within the inventions of the artistic temperament. Although he belonged to a generation of painters who practiced distortion for the sake of design, he maintained a healthy respect for the qualities of things. He was after the real as distinct from the realistic.

After Léger returned to New York, I sent him a copy of a Jeffers volume. Léger, who spoke little English, wrote me in French that a friend was translating for him and that he was deeply impressed. I am not sure just which volume it was, but I think it was Thurso's Landing.

Somewhere in New England, a friend remarked to the poet, Robert Frost, that a realist is said to be a man who really knows what he is talking about. Frost objected to so easy a disposal. "There are," he once said, "two types of realist. There is the one who offers a good deal of dirt with his potato to show that it is a real potato. And there is the one who is satisfied with the potato brushed clean. I am inclined to be the second kind. To me, the thing that art does for life is to clean it, to strip it to form." He told Untermeyer, "If my poetry has to have a name, I'd prefer to call it Emblemism. It would be the viable emblem of the things I'm after. It's all right to move words about, to shift them by emotion slightly out of place, or even to a new base, but they ought to be able to snap back to their original place. To get the valid and the sensational all at once ---" a problem for painters as well as poets.

At twenty-five, Frost had begun farming in earnest. Out of a ten year struggle with stubborn soil and rocky pastures came poems and an "Emblem." The single-edged cutting blade of the scythe became an extension of the farmer and the poet:

I went to turn the grass once after one
Who mowed it in the dew before the sun,

The dew was gone that made his blade so keen
Before I came to view the levelled scene.

I looked for him behind an isle of trees;
I listened for his whetstone on the breeze.

But he had gone his way, the grass all mown,
And I must be, as he had been, -- alone, . . .

Here, the impact of the verse comes from the quality and reality of the simple objects and forms described -- the grass -- the dew -- the sun -- the blade -- the trees and the whetstone.

It is to be noted that in the fourth stanza of his poem Rock and Hawk, Jeffers makes use of the word "emblem" to stand for the qualities of "bright power, dark peace;" both then linked to the concrete images of the falcon and the stone.

The painter, John Marin, perhaps the greatest American watercolorist since Winslow Homer, was born in Rutherford, New Jersey and spent his summers painting on the coast of Maine. He was a protege of the famous photographer-dealer Alfred Stieglitz, who introduced the modern French art movement to the United States. Stieglitz gathered a group of young Americans together and showed their work in his Gallery 291 on Fifth Avenue. This nucleus of the most advanced American painting included Marin, Charles Demuth, Max Weber, Marsden Hartley, Charles Sheeler and Georgia O'Keeffe, whom Stieglitz later married.

Since Marin and his wife were always hard put to it for funds, Stieglitz underwrote the artist by taking all of his work except for a few important things that went to the Washington, D.C. collector Duncan Phillips, and to Agnes Ernst Meyer, patron of the arts and wife of Eugene Meyer, owner of the Washington Post.

In return for Stieglitz's belief in his work, John Marin wrote the dealer a series of remarkable letters that rank with the letters of Delacroix, Van Gogh and Cezanne as revelatory of an artist's deepest convictions about his own work and the great expression of others.

In Marin's case, the truth results from the same basic understanding of and control over the organic laws of nature and of art. "In arriving at them Marin seldom loses touch with the intensity and specific quality of his original creative experience. In other words, for Marin a mountain is not only a stereometric symbol for mountain, but also a specific mountain, that does specific things, is seen at a specific time of day, and is covered with specific trees, rocks, shrubbery and flowers."

Whatever wisdom he has, he has drawn directly from the non-theoretical anatomy of nature, from stones and trees, ships, skies, islands and seas. Naturally, it is not of his art that he boasts -- though he has good reason to -- but of his ability to sail a boat, to catch a tortog with rod and reel, to skin a flounder, to beat a trail up a mountainside. "Every boat of every description," Marin wrote Stieglitz from Stonington, Maine, "has its nose pointed into, the wind and it seems as if all the houses of the village are likewise pointed windward."

It is from nature potentials of this kind that Marin generally takes his creative cues. They not only provide him with the initial impetus to do a thing, but his piercing seeing of that thing projects him into the formal solution of it. To the formal solution, add the philosophical, and some of Jeffers' short poems would fall into this category. For example, "Gray Weather," "The Purse-Seine," "Oh, Lovely Rock," "The Great Sunset," "Distant Rainfall," and certain poems from "Descent to the Dead," especially "The Low Sky" and "The Place For No Story," "Evening Ebb," "Autumn Evening" and many others.

All these poems would represent what Ezra Pound called the symbolic and spiritually significant in American art as opposed to the merely technically proficient. And the symbols rest firmly on the rock.

In a famous letter from Stonington to Stieglitz in October of 1919, Marin states his case:

"Let's try now to illustrate a point. This is a prow of a ship. I draw abstractly. It's cut up, yet not cut up. It does things, it assumes directions and leanings yet is really not cut up. In all its movements it remains a whole. It doesn't lose track. Mr. Fisherman, he don't maybe understand, yet he's made to feel something like he feels -- as he knows prows of ships. I make a second drawing like this. Abstract? Why of course. Superior intelligence? Why of course."

Mr. Fisherman: "O Hell man, your prow is digging down into the waves it's too late -- being bent aside."

"He's really worried now. He has cause to be. You've made a fool concrete thing unworkable when you assumed in your wonderful intelligence that it was a felt abstraction."

Your friend after the last cow has come home.

Marin

The prow of Marin's boat had become a pattern without meaning, losing the spirit and characteristic quality of the object itself -- what Léger meant by the decorative. The boat must be made to function according to the logic of the artist's materials, retaining at the same time its essential organic logic, which is nature reasserting itself, but as a pungent memory reasserts itself, the pervasive fragment of an experience that seems more real than the experience itself:

"I went to turn the grass once after one
Who mowed it in the dew before the sun . . ."

If I seem to have insisted on -- or even belabored the importance of the awareness of the qualities of things in Jeffers' poetry, it is because of the overwhelming attention given by most to the poet's vast imaginative powers and exalted range of thought covering universal themes -- themes Leonardo was used to referring to as "Man and the hopes of his soul."

Lawrence Powell, in the chapter "Critical Conclusions" at the end of his book, ROBINSON JEFFERS - THE MAN AND HIS WORK, states the matter simply. "All his poetry is serious and thoughtful, and is distinguished by a soaring, history-traversing, cosmic imagination which however, rarely loses contact with the reality of the sensuous world."

So let us remember the poet's tender care for the least of life, a squirrel caught, the wounded wing of a hawk, or the agonies of physical and mental suffering endured by his fellows. I should like to close our reflections by returning to a specific poem: "Oh, Lovely Rock."

While spending the night with his sons in a deep gorge of the Santa Lucian Mountains, Jeffers lay sleepless, watching in the light of the campfire, the gorge wall across the stream:

. . . Nothing strange: light-gray
diorite with two or three slanting seams in it,
Smooth-polished by the endless attrition of slides and floods; no
fern nor lichen, pure naked rock . . . as if I were
Seeing rock for the first time. As if I were seeing through the
flame-lit surface into the real and bodily
And living rock. Nothing strange . . . I cannot
Tell you how strange: the silent passion, the deep nobility and
childlike loveliness: this fate going on
Outside our fates. It is here in the mountain like a grave smiling
child. I shall die, and my boys
Will live and die, our world will go on through its rapid agonies of
change and discover: this age will die,
And wolves have howled in the snow around a new Bethlehem: this rock
will be here, grave, earnest, not passive: the energies
That are its atoms will still be bearing the whole mountain above:
and I, many packed centuries ago,
Felt its intense reality with love and wonder, this lonely rock.

Face to face with the ultimate reality of nature, Jeffers was gazing directly into what Einstein had called "the mysterious." He said, "The mysterious is the source of all true art and science, and is the most beautiful thing in the Universe."

It is here, at this point, that the greatest artists have always found through the humblest of symbols -- the highest illumination of which they are capable.

Editor's note:

The foregoing lecture was given to the Robinson Jeffers Tor House Foundation docents, November 19, 1986. Jean Kellogg Dickie studied at the Yale University School of Fine Art. Her work is in important permanent collections including those of the New York Museum of Modern Art, the Norfolk Museum of Art, the Phillips Memorial Collection, Washington, D.C., and the San Francisco Museum of Art. She and her mother, the late Charlotte Kellogg, herself a poet, were friends of Robinson and Una Jeffers. In 1956 Jean illustrated the special edition of THE LOVING SHEPHERDESS, designed by Merle Armitage, with a beautifully distinctive series of etchings (see RJN 66:8-14). Her late husband, James Dickie, was a well known cartoonist. Their book, DESIGN THE NATURAL WAY, written by Jean and illustrated by her husband, will be published later this year.

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