



# Robinson Jeffers Newsletter

ISSN: 0300-7936

Number 79

June 1991

## CONTENTS

NEWS AND NOTES	Page 2
IN MEMORIAM: Fred Carpenter, Steve Corey, James Hopper, Jr., Eric Vaughn	Page 6
BRIEF REVIEWS: James Karman, William Everson, and Tim Hunt	Page 8
ROBINSON JEFFERS: A REMEMBRANCE By Jean Kellogg Dickie	Page 14
IN THE POET'S PATH by Jean E. Williams	Page 16
KIN AND KIN By Denise Levertov	Page 17
"THE GREAT WOUND" AND THE PROBLEM OF <u>READING THE BEGINNING AND THE END</u> By Tim Hunt	Page 18

---

Subscription: \$10.00 per year. Charge for Backfile: \$175.00  
Address subscriptions to: Tyrus G. Harmsen  
Occidental College  
1600 Campus Road, Los Angeles, CA 90041

---

Copyright 1991 by Occidental College

**NEWS AND NOTES**

**THE ROBINSON JEFFERS OCTOBER FESTIVAL.** This year the festival will be held the weekend of October 11, 12, & 13th in the Sunset Center. There will be the usual events: book-signing on Friday night, panels on Saturday followed by a banquet at which the speaker will be Robert Hass. Sunday will feature the ever-popular poetry walk and reading of Jeffers' poetry. The panel will honor William Everson and reflect on his contribution to Jeffers scholarship and understanding. A bus trip down the coast to Big Sur is also being arranged.

**THE TOR HOUSE FOUNDATION** was awarded a \$1000 grant by the Monterey County Cultural Council for readings of poetry and other cultural programs ongoing during the year. The Foundation has sponsored readings at the Sunset Center by Paul O. Williams (April 5), Galway Kinnell (April 26), Joseph Langland (reading Robert Frost, June 14).

**A GARDEN PARTY** was held May 5 to raise money for Tor House projects.

**A GRANT** from the Frank and Eva Buck Foundation has been made to cover the remaining balance due on the Tor House mortgage. From this point, funds will be able to be directed at maintenance of structures and their contents.

**PURELY EPHEMERA:** "Its Buds Too" restaurant of Carmel is offering the following dinners: Jack LONDON'S BROIL, Mary Austin's FILET MIGNON, Robinson Jeffers' LAMB CHOPS, Lincoln Steffens' STEAK & PRAWN MIXED BROIL, and George Sterling's FRESH SALMON. Question: Why lamb chops? The Loving Shepherdess and the Big Sur Coast?

**PUBLICATIONS AND CONFERENCES**

The Winter 1990 issue of *Western American Literature* lists 22 bibliographical entries (journal articles and book chapters on Jeffers) in its Annual Bibliography. The Winter 1991 issue lists 29.

Robert Zaller writes he has read page proofs of *Centennial Essays for Robinson Jeffers* (see RJN 78) at the University of Delaware Press and expects publication in early fall, hopefully in time for the festival.

With his wife Judith, Bill Hotchkiss (*The Sivaistic Vision*, 1974) is editing a "William Everson Festschrift" in a Castle Peak Edition. Everson, of course, the outstanding critic and editor of Jeffers, is author of *The Excesses of God* (Stanford 1988), and has had his moving elegy *The Poet is Dead* revised and reprinted in a special edition (noted elsewhere in this issue).

Judith Hotchkiss is editing an anthology, *From These Hills*, with selections from Jeffers, Everson, Keithley, Lengyel, Snyder, Abbey, and numerous others.

Robert Zaller has an article, "Land and Value: The Ecology of Robinson Jeffers," in *Western American Literature*, 26:1 (May 1991), 9-20.

*The Threepenny Review*, Fall 1990, ran a two-page spread--a four column review by Louise Glück of Robert Hass' *Rock and Hawk*, along with poems by Hass ("The Return of Robinson Jeffers") and Milosz "To Robinson Jeffers").

The American Literature Association held its second annual meeting at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington, D.C. A Jeffers panel, chaired by Tim Hunt, on May 26 featured noted American Literature scholars James Miller, Albert Gelpi, Terence Diggory, and Charles Altieri. It is hoped that the proceedings can be edited and published.

The Robinson Jeffers Association (RJN 78, p5) is currently offering memberships. Its aim is to promote and support Jeffers studies, network scholars interested in Jeffers research, and provide a forum for Jeffers scholarship at annual meetings. Contact Executive Director, Professor Terry Beers, English Department, Santa Clara University, Santa Clara, CA 95053.

*The Book Lovers' Calendar 1991* by Elizabeth W. Hill and Martha H. Starr uses a photo of Hawk Tower for its cover. Illustrative photos within offer views of the Sherlock Holmes Room of The Metropolitan Toronto Reference Library, the Florida Everglades of Zora Neal Hurston, T. E. Lawrence's cottage in Dorset, Anne Morrow Lindbergh's family house, Englewood, N. J., T. S. Eliot's early home in St. Louis, Truman Capote's childhood County Courthouse, Marguerite Yourcenar's Petite Plaisance, the parlor of Dickens' home, Greenwich Village, and a college lecture hall from Joyce's *The Dubliners*. Starbill Press, P. O. Box 32342, Washington, D.C. 20007. (202) 686-6703.

**QUERIES:** Ms. Padraigin McGillicuddy (P. O. Box 1109, Occidental, California 95465) is seeking letters from Ella Young to Robinson or Una Jeffers and to others.

The editors of "The Collected Letters of Robinson and Una Jeffers" (Stanford University Press) continue to seek all and any letters not yet collected. Please send information to Professor James Karman, Department of English, California State University, Chico, CA 95929.

*Books in Print* reports the following titles as available from publishers:

By Jeffers: *The Alpine Christ, Brides of the South Wind, Cawdor & Medea, Collected Poetry, vols. I, II, III, Dear Judas, The Double Axe, Flagons & Apples, The Last Conservative, Rock and Hawk, Selected Poems, Selected Poetry, Songs & Heroes, What Odd Expedients, The Women at Point Sur.*

About Jeffers: Alberts' *Bibliography*, Antoninus' *Fragments of an Older Fury*, Boswell's *Robinson Jeffers & the Critics*, Brophy's *Myth, Ritual, and Symbol*, Carpenter's *Robinson Jeffers*, Coffin's *Poet of Inhumanism*, Everson's *The Excesses of God*, Gilbert's *Shine, Perishing Republic* (Haskell), Karman's *Critical Essays*, Klein's *Jeffers Observed*, Nolte's *Rock & Hawk*, Powell's *Robinson Jeffers: The Man & His Work* (1940 reprint Gordon Press, 1934 reprint Haskell), Vardamis's *The Critical Reputation of R. J.* Also available: *RJN: A Jubilee Gathering*, Occidental.

**FROM THE EDITOR:**

It is hoped that the readership of the *RJN* is gifted with patience--I refer to the delivery of NEWSLETTER NO. 79. Some have inquired whether the mails mislaid their issue. The pedestrian facts are two: the editor encountered various delays from his own schedule conflicts and there was an unanticipated cost-overrun in issue 77 with its 72 pages, dedicated mostly to the Una-Mabel Dodge Luhan letters. The 55-page *RJN* 78 then compounded the problem. Cost of printing the newsletter has run \$.045 per page since the work has had to be done off-campus. Secretarial time and postage rates must be added. The Newsletter has always proposed to be a quarterly, sometimes attaining that goal, sometimes not. We do our best.

With this issue we are saying goodbye to the caring, knowledgeable, monumental help of Tyrus Harmsen of Occidental's Book Arts Program, formerly the College Librarian. Ty has guided the RJN since its first issue in 1962. His efforts in the final editing, production, and timely mailing of the periodical will be sorely missed.

There will be no significant changes in the Newsletter. The reality of our new fiscal constraints would seem to limit us to from 80 to 100 pages a year, preferably divided into 4 issues of 20 pages each. Within the 8½" x 11" loose-leaf format which we have always kept, there seems room for experiment. Photocopy reduction could provide almost twice the number of words per page, perhaps in two columns instead of one. Lap-top printing enables both streamlining and innovation within limits. We ask your understanding, your suggestions, and your continued support.

\* \* \* \* \*

**IN MEMORIAM**

Frederic Ives Carpenter, March 16, age 88, at Walnut Creek, California. Scholar and author, Dr. Carpenter was an authority on Jeffers (*Robinson Jeffers*, Twayne, 1962), O'Neill (*Eugene O'Neill*, Twayne, 1964), and Ralph Waldo Emerson (*Emerson and Asia*, Harvard, 1930 and *Emerson Handbook*, Hendricks, 1953) as also *American Literature and the Dream* (Philosophical Library, 1956). Born February 1, 1903, in Chicago, he attended Thatcher School, Ojai, earned his bachelor's and master's degree at Harvard and his doctorate at University of Chicago. He taught at the University of Chicago, Harvard University, and the University of California at Berkeley. In 1953 he resigned his teaching position at Berkeley to protest the requirement of loyalty oaths from the faculty. He was a research associate at Berkeley until 1971. A frequent reviewer of Jeffers books, in recent years he lectured and was honored at the Tor House Foundation October Jeffers Festival. His correspondence with Jeffers and O'Neill, covering more than four decades, is at the Bancroft Library, U. C. Berkeley.

D. Steven Corey, February 2, age 44, in San Francisco. Steve was well known as Head of Special Collections at the Gleeson Library, University of San Francisco, a position he held since 1974. Born in Havre, Montana, March 27, 1947, he attended public schools in Pacific Grove, graduating from Monterey Peninsula College in 1967. He served with the Army in Vietnam, and was decorated for rescuing wounded from the battlefield. In 1973 he earned a Masters of Library Science from U. C. Berkeley's School of Library and Information Science and shortly thereafter came to USF. Steve was very knowledgeable in Jeffers bibliography and book collecting. Building on the existing Jeffers holdings, he brought the Gleeson Jeffers collection to world stature. He was especially successful in capturing key portions of the manuscripts and extremely rare books of Sydney S. Alberts, Jeffers bibliographer.

James Hopper, Jr., a former resident of Carmel and professor emeritus at the University of California at San Francisco, died at his home in Sausalito on November 22. He was 80. Born in Paris, France, February 22, 1910, Dr. Hopper was the son of Jimmie Hopper, renowned American short story writer and friend of the Robinson Jefferses in Carmel. After earning degrees in zoology and anatomy, he received his M. D. from the University of California at San Francisco in 1939. Following an association with the University of Paris specializing in kidney transplantation in the early 1960s, he returned to UCSF as chief of the renal clinic.

The *Monterey Herald* obituary, December 1, recalled Dr. Hopper's reminiscences of early days in Carmel focusing on his story of the great car bargain he got from Robinson and Una Jeffers. The car was still solid and served Hopper for years but he said he knew why the Jefferses wanted to get rid of it. "They had an English bulldog who rode on the running board," he was quoted as saying during the celebration of Carmel's 70th birthday in 1986, "The dog would slobber in the wind and the whole side of the car was corroded."

Eric Vaughn, March 4, 1990, age 65, at Salt Lake City, Utah. Born of professional theater parents, he lived in upstate Massachusetts until he was eight, then moved to Salt Lake City. At twenty-one he went to Los Angeles to attend the University of Southern California, thereafter serving as an engineering draftsman for the War Department. Although interested in architecture, he became involved in music, dance, theater, and film, and in 1947 moved again to Berkeley to attend the University of California as a music student, and worked as an actor and director in community theater in Oakland, where he began a production of Jeffers' *Dear Judas* in 1948. Unfortunately, his Jesus, Judas, and Lazarus all were Catholic and the local church authorities threatened excommunication; staging had to be abandoned. In 1952 he became a member of the San Francisco Interplayers, acting, designing costumes, sets, lighting, and music; there he directed *Dear Judas* in early 1953.

From 1952 to 1969 he was a regular contributor to KPFA-FM in Berkeley as a reviewer of film with Pauline Kael and was a reader of poetry and director of plays including *Dear Judas*. In 1957 he founded Labyrinth Theater Club with a group of fellow artists, producing for the next twelve years a great variety of concerts, poetry readings, and play productions including *Dear Judas* and *At the Birth of An Age* at the University of San Francisco in 1967. In 1979 he brought a troupe of players from the University of Utah to stage *Dear Judas* and *Bowl of Blood* at the Robinson Jeffers Festival, California State University, Long Beach. Up to his death he was engaged in editing for theatrical production *The Complete Plays of Robinson Jeffers*, having finished versions of *The Tower Beyond Tragedy*, *At the Fall of an Age*, *Dear Judas*, *The Bowl of Blood*, and the unfinished *Elizabeth and Mary*.

\* \* \* \* \*

**BRIEF REVIEWS**

*Critical Essays on Robinson Jeffers*. Edited by James Karman. Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1990.

Karman's collection is an immense step forward in making Jeffers critical studies available to the general public. Jeffers scholars and aficionados for years have found themselves hulking through musty storage stacks of libraries, hunting for back volumes of sometimes esoteric and very rare periodicals for key articles.

This volume is the next crucial step beyond Alex Vardamis' *The Critical Reputation of Robinson Jeffers* (Hamden: Archon Books, 1972) which provided four to six line synopses attempting to characterize the article for review, and Jeanetta Boswell's *Robinson Jeffers and the Critics: 1912-1983* (Metuchen: Scarecrow, 1986). These put us in touch with the wide spectrum of critical commentary, scholarly and not so. Now we are served judiciously selected criticism, a balanced array of essays in one volume: Harriet Monroe, Mark Van Doren, Conrad Aiken, Morton Zabel, Yvor Winters, Robert Penn Warren, Louise Bogan, Floyd Dell, Gilbert Highet, etc.

Karman provides an extensive (32 page) introduction with an overview of Jeffers' career and an attempt to trace the various responses to the volumes as they appeared. The articles are arranged under two sections. "Book Reviews" takes eighteen volumes of Jeffers in chronological order from *Flagons & Apples* to *The Beginning and the End*, and provides three to five critical responses by noted reviewers (including Jeffers' own review of *Flagons & Apples* under the name of Willard Huntington Wright). There are mostly recognizable names: Rorty, Van Doren, Hutchison, Taggard, Humphries, Dupee, Benet, Hicks, Untermeyer, Canby, Fletcher, Bogan, Rukeyser, Fits, Schwartz, Kunitz, Atkinson, Rodman, Spender, etc.

The second section, "Articles and Essays," offers broader analyses of Jeffers: Floyd Dell's Marxist "Shell-Shock & the Poetry of R J," ecologist Eiseley's "Music of the Mountain," Highet's "An American Poet," Rexroth's ironically ambiguous "In Defense of Jeffers," Powell's "Double Marriage of R J," Carpenter's "Values of R J," Nolte's "R J as Didactic Poet," Everson's "Introduction" to *Cawdor and Medea*, Brophy's myth-ritual "Jeffers' 'Cawdor' and the Hippolytus Story," and more.



Two new essays are appended: one by Tim Hunt on "The Modernist Poet as Antimodernist," and the other by Robert Zaller on "Time, Form, and meaning in Robinson Jeffers." A two page list, "Supplementary Selections," offers thirty alternate readings. One can imagine that among these are the essays Karman had to eliminate for lack of space. Of course, inevitably for this kind of exercise in selection, one wonders in particular cases--why these and not others. And the reviewer wonders--why not a few lines of annotation to this two-page bibliography--to entice and direct the reader on.

. . . . .

William Everson. *The Poet is Dead: A Memorial for Robinson Jeffers*, 1987 [1988]. The Good Book Press, 260 Fifteenth Avenue, Santa Cruz, CA 95062. Two linocut illustrations by Tom Killion, one on the title page and the other on the opening page. 34 x 24 cm. 27 pages. Bound in full black leather, gray board slipcase printed with a linocut. 140 copies. \$265.

This centenary edition of *The Poet is Dead* was printed letterpress on a Vandercook Proof Press, using handset Weiss Roman and Weiss Initials series II types. The illustrations were cut in linoleum by Tom Killion. The All Rag paper was handmade, and the edition was fullbound in leather by the printers Peter and Donna Thomas.

The poem is a verse tribute written at the death of Robinson Jeffers, who was, William Everson attests, "a man whom I knew deeply in spirit but never in life, one who was too near to me, too dear to me, too terrifying to me, and too necessary for me, back at that finding of the self which makes the pivot of a life, ever to face in this flesh."

For this second appearance of the poem in book form (the first was by Auerhahn Press, San Francisco, 1964), Everson has written an additional strophe of nine lines and corrected errors in the text from the previous issue. There is a foreword and an afterword of three pages each, the foreword being revised from the Auerhahn text and including Everson's thoughts on the Jeffers centenary. The afterword describes the poem's genesis, composition, publishing history, and revisions.

Peter Thomas, the printer, was a student of Everson's at the Lime Kiln Press, University of California, Santa Cruz, from 1977-1981.

The poem has forty-one strophes ranging from a single line to twelve, each strophe being separated from the next by a full stop indicated by an indented asterisk.

Killion's third block, a vision of the coast in snow, the unusual phenomenon of Jeffers' death night, appears only on the gray slipcase.

. . . . .

*The Collected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers.* Edited by Tim Hunt. Volume 111, 1938-1962. Stanford University Press, 1991. 485 pages. 19 cm x 25-1/2 cm (10" x 7-1/2").

In some ways this estimable four-volume work is completed here. The final volume is to be early poems, poems which never reached publication for various reasons and an explanation of all the sometimes acute editorial decisions. What first strikes one here and in the whole edition is the love and care of editor and publisher. The format is simple, the table of contents laid out symmetrically, the division under published titles and other categories clear. Tim Hunt's "Editorial Note" is a masterpiece of making textual complexity and format challenges seem surmountable. Hunt's prose is austere, calm, assuring.

Even the heft of the volume is perfect: one does not want to imagine it lighter or heavier. The rich cream paper tone, the substantial binding suggest permanence. These volumes are for a lifetime's use and enjoyment. From the Leigh Weiner frontispiece, Jeffers looks out at us in one of those totally rare photos in which we have eye contact. The poet seems to be asking us something or listening for our response. Here is a man we might actually have had a few words with (emphasis, of course, on "few").

What strikes the reviewer most with the volume, however, are the poems themselves as they meet the eye with each turning of the page. Uncrowded. In fact, the space allowed by a wider page gives us a new look at Jeffers. Elsewhere in volumes his long lines are often chopped one or even two times to fit the procrustean space. Here they can stretch. Short-lined lyrics (3 or 4-beat lines) lie tucked by the left margin; longer-lined, longer-cadenced lyrics extend themselves to the full. And we say: "Oh, that's how Jeffers imagined it!"

Even the impossibly long ten or twelve-beat lines of some narrative sections look new. One says: "Oh yes, something had to be tucked under (another three inches would be needed to extend Jeffers' line here perfectly), but I must learn to save my breath for the full-flung cadence."

The print is startlingly clean. To look at my *Selected Poetry* under a magnifying glass is to see flat-inked letters, sometimes ragged and blurred. Here the letters bite into the page. Admittedly an amateur at this, I find no flaw. The text stretches before me crisply with a satisfying assurance. And the type-size together with the line-spacing bespeak generosity and care for the reader. There is no shadow from the page verso as there is in my *Selected Poetry*.

For the narratives, each page foot offers number, volume title, and poem title. It is helpful.

The "Colophon" tells us that this third of our volumes was designed by Adrian Wilson at the Press in Tuscany Alley, San Francisco. Type was set by Wilsted and Taylor in Centaur and Arrighi. The text was printed by Malloy Lithographing, Ann Arbor, on acid-free Glatfelter paper. Dustjacket and duotone frontispiece was printed by New England Book Components. Binding was by John J. Dekker & Sons.

\*\*\*

The volume's contents reflect a singular crisis in Jeffers' career and poetic vision; they echo controversy and portend some rejection by publishers and public. There is an insistent background poignancy here. The opening of the first poem, "Faith," reflects Jeffers' involvement:

Ants, or wise bees, or a gang of wolves,  
Work together by instinct, but man needs lies,  
Man his admired and more complex mind  
Needs lies to bind the body of his people together,  
Make peace In the state and maintain power.  
These lies are called a faith and their formulation  
We call a creed, and the faithful flourish . . .

Jeffers was dealing with Marxism and fascism and all the other isms that moved the propaganda of the times into the frenzy of World War II and beyond and led the United States to presume to be policeman of the world. The poem, as opener, fits our age admirably. Perhaps with the latter wars and miniwars we can finally understand Jeffers' consternation with managed news, rationalized deception, disinformation, political posing, burgeoning chauvinism, hidden agenda, and the appeal of the seeming simplicity and conclusiveness of violence.

The poet who heretofore, in the mature poems from 1920 onward, had to deal only from a distance with war and politics and other violences (as in "Natural Music" or even in the anticipatory "Rearmament"), had now to deal with the lies as they unfolded in imminent deaths of populations. Jeffers, who always suffered the schizophrenia of seer versus prophet, passivist versus activist, unconditional life-affirmer versus nay-sayer is in these years immersed in a Second World War which stretched into Nuclear Age and Cold War of threatened global annihilation. The Buddha smile necessarily, under pressure of the immediate, turned either ironic or strident. No wonder he had to rewrite and restructure *The Double Axe* volume and create a Preface of inhumanist counter-statement to the Publisher's Note of political dissociation!

Hunt's seventeen-page "Editorial Note" touches much of this. In "Selection and Arrangement" he sets forth the overarching scope of the three volumes and the purpose of the fourth yet to come. With masterly simplicity he explains the switch from the historical sequence reflecting publishers' pragmatism to straight chronology: we get the poems in the order that they were written and readied for publication. In "Texts" he exposes the non-problem of punctuation: Jeffers creatively suppressing or simplifying semi-colons and commas whenever possible, the editors and proofmasters punctiliously "correcting" and presumably clicking their tongues.

"Presentation" justifies the appearance of the verse on the page: even here the sometimes necessary tucking under of long lines, the paragraphing and section spacing. "Special Textual Problems" deals with two substantial authorial-editorial logjams. The first problem was the interchange in *The Double Axe* over politically correct attitudes; Hunt only glancingly suggests how Jeffers maintained his integrity amidst such anxious patriotism and presumed public hypersensitivity here. The second problem was entirely different: the confusion left by Jeffers' inability to finish the verse collection which came to be titled *The Beginning and The End*, leaving many decisions (posthumously) to his self-styled editor, the well-meaning Melba Bennett. Some poems in this volume, it seems, are non-poems: some are unfinished, some are from several versions, some are created by snip-and-paste.

The third volume's contents emerge, therefore, as a Sherlock Holmes treat. We have here Hunt's Holmesean verdict; in the final volume IV, we will see the evidence rolled out to our not-yet-enunciated Watsonian queries.

Because of its global hour, volume III does not contain as much great Jeffers poetry as the first two, nor is it as finished and authoritatively cut. But it has its own excitement and authenticity. In it a great mind and a considerable lover writes his testament to the times and comes close to writing the times' obituary.

This reviewer recommends *The Collected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers* unreservedly. It is a treasure to own, a pleasure to open and read. Some have hesitated over the \$60 price. With spineless biodegradable paperbacks going for \$25, the price seems equal. Alongside other collected works it triumphs.

Robert J. Brophy

\* \* \* \* \*

**ROBINSON JEFFERS: A REMEMBRANCE**

**By Jean Kellogg Dickie**

It is the fall of 1958, some years after Una Jeffers' death. I recently had the idea of giving Robin a small etching I have made--the profile of a red-tail. I am taking a chance on finding my friend at home, and I arrive at the gate of Tor House at 4 p.m.

Encouraged by the sign, "At Home After Four," I lift the latch and start across the patio planted with English lavender and a few native bushes hardy enough to resist the seawind. Halfway to the front door, I stop to look past the house at the near ocean and southward to Point Lobos. I suddenly become aware of the sound of an axe biting hard into wood. Turning right toward the garage, I catch a glimpse of Jeffers working on a rough pile of pine and cypress, cutting it for his living room fireplace. Fire usually lights the hearth at Tor House; for summer seafog can be as chill as any winter morning.

A good moment, I think, to see Robin at his ease, doing a little physical work. I call hello. Jeffers slowly puts down his axe and turns around. He walks past a clump of asphodel and stands to face me. His movements seem automatic, without conscious purpose.

There is no sign of recognition.

I look up at his tall, gaunt figure in the short-sleeved white shirt Una had made, cord trousers and rough shoes; then at his head, made famous in Edward Weston's photographs, against the background of the granite boulders of the house. But where is his gaze?

One of the poet's eyes--damaged at birth--has developed a cataract; yet there is always intensity in their blueness, a passage from within that is characteristic.

I feel that Robin is making a painful effort to focus outward. His eyes seem to be protected by something like the nictitating membrane of his favorite bird. He has been alone at the wood pile, in a state, I guess, rather like that of the old prophets meditating on a remote reality--and I am witnessing just such a creative moment.

Another minute passes. I cannot speak. I, too, am caught up in what I cannot see. Then he says, "Hello, Jean. How are you? Wouldn't you like to come indoors?"

Declining the invitation, I go over to a greyed redwood bench in front of Tor House, where we both sit down.

Conscious that I have intruded on Jeffers' privacy, I hurry to present my gift. He looks at the print almost absent-mindedly, but thanks me warmly. He inquires about my mother's health, and walks with me to my car parked in the eucalyptus grove. I say goodbye and watch as Jeffers returns to where he had left the axe.

A letter that Robin had written me later about the etching had been put away for years. Now, after my discovery of the portfolio print, I went to look for it.

Here is part of that letter:

October 13, 1958

Dear Jean:

It is so hard for me to write a letter that I thought that nothing less than that could express my gratitude for your gift . . .

It is a magnificent hawk's head, with all the stoicism and stored-up fury that are in their blood. I am truly grateful to you.

Thank you, Jean, very much; I treasure the picture.

Sincerely,

Robin

\* \* \* \* \*

**IN THE POET'S PATH**  
**By Jean E. Williams**

When my parents moved to Carmel-by-the-Sea in the spring of 1937, my mother and I soon found that hunting for choice pebbles--particularly moonstones--was an absorbing hobby when tides were low in late afternoons. I recall one particular day when a record low tide tempted dozens of folk to stroll the length of the curved beach and continue on the areas of sand rarely uncovered beneath the cliffs by the Pebble Beach Golf Course. I had done my high school homework and was free to join in the hunt for prizes which included perfect shells as well as stones.

As we made our way across the glistening sand my concentration was intense, until a long dark shadow fell across my path. Startled, I turned and glanced up at a dark-haired man looking down at me. His face was deeply lined and instantly recognizable as that of the poet Robinson Jeffers, whose house on Carmel Point with its stone tower was known to us all. Accompanying him was his petite wife Una and their bulldog Haig--and as others recognized the party, all froze and watched in deferential awe as they made their way along the glistening sand. We gave them the right of way, and they passed undisturbed, like royalty on a promenade. As they disappeared around a bend beneath the cliffs, there was a growing murmur of appreciation, for we all knew our good fortune to have been in the path of the poet.

\* \* \* \* \*



KIN AND KIN

For William Everson

Perhaps Jeffers was right, our species  
best unborn, and once born  
better soon gone, a criminal kind,  
the planet's nightmare. Our going  
would leave no hauntings at all, unless  
to the last of those we've taxed or caged;  
after those, a world  
fierce in the hunt but free from malice  
and free from remembrance.

Yet there have been the wise, the earthen elders  
Humble before the grass.  
When from the torturers, picking their teeth  
after a full meal, relaxed  
after a full day of their routine job, we turn  
to regard such others, remote as they are, yet kin--  
as wheat and weed are kin, each  
having root, stem, seed--or when  
we hear some note of kindness  
innocent of its own courage amid  
the clamor of lies, it seems after all

there might be open to us, even now,  
a chance to evolve, a swerve we could take,  
a destiny still held out (if we would look)  
in the Spirit's palm.

Denise Levertov

From *A Door In the Hive*. Copyright (c) 1989 Denise Levertov.  
Reprinted by permission of New Directions Pub. Corp.

**"THE GREAT WOUND"  
AND THE PROBLEM OF READING  
*THE BEGINNING AND THE END***

**By Tim Hunt**

Robinson Jeffers' later manuscripts show that he hoped to publish a final collection from the poems he was writing in the years after *Hungerfield* (1954), but he died, January 20, 1962, before doing so. In spite of this, a final collection did appear in 1963, *The Beginning and the End*. It, according to a note on the dust-jacket, was assembled by Jeffers' "sons and secretary." We have, then, always known that the book is to some extent a collaboration between the Jeffers who wrote the poems and the people who later published them ' but we have not, I'd suggest, typically considered what this process might have entailed or what it might mean for how we read this book and the poems in it. We have not, most simply, considered that *The Beginning and the End* might be a quite different collection from the one Jeffers himself might have assembled had he lived longer.

In large part it was Melba Berry Bennett, Jeffers' "secretary," who prepared the late poems for publication. When the poet died, the family loaned her the manuscripts, and she selected which poems to use, chose the order for them, and prepared the transcriptions that Random House used for its setting copy.<sup>1</sup> No one can doubt Bennett's commitment to Jeffers' work; she'd already written *Robinson Jeffers and the Sea* (1936), and she visited Jeffers periodically his last years to research her biography of him, *The Stone Mason of Tor House* (1966). Unfortunately, the late manuscripts pose more questions than answers about how he might have handled this same material, and this means that Bennett's task involved much more than simply presenting in print the material found on Jeffers' desk. She had to, that is, interpret and shape contradictory, often fragmentary material, and in the process *The Beginning and the End* inevitably became partly her vision of Jeffers' work, not simply his own.

The nature of the manuscripts indicates the problems Bennett faced and the character of her solutions. Although Jeffers did type a few late poems (likely those written shortly after *Hungerfield*), he left most of his late work in handwritten working drafts. These, at the least, lack the final revisions he typically made when he typed poems for publication. Many are also untitled, and the way Jeffers often mixed notes and passages from seemingly different poems on a single sheet (or spread a single poem across several sheets) makes it difficult to determine which units are "poems" and which are fragments. Neither do the manuscripts indicate which poems Jeffers would have chosen to publish. He did mark several with the notation "KEEP," but most are not annotated.

To confuse matters further, Jeffers seems to have considered at least two quite different structures for his collection-to-be without ever settling on either. One was to organize it as he had earlier collections--a long narrative accompanied by shorter poems. In these last years he tried repeatedly to draft a final narrative but managed little more than various notes and fragments. The other was to organize his various lyric, meditative, and narrative pieces (and possibly some autobiographical prose as well) into a kind of collage. The notes rough out several preliminary, partial designs, and Jeffers may even have begun revising some lyric bits to stitch them into the sequence (see below). He apparently, though, set this option aside to continue searching for a workable narrative situation, and one must conclude, I think, that he simply had not yet determined how he'd structure his final collection when he died.

Unless Bennett had additional evidence, the shape of *The Beginning and the End* must be regarded in light of these limits, and she did not likely have additional evidence. Her primary concern when she visited Jeffers was the biography, and he, given his temperament and practice, was unlikely to have discussed his plans for the book even if she'd questioned him about them. Nor did Bennett likely have much basis for asking questions, since she apparently had access to the late manuscripts only after Jeffers died. Moreover, the differences between the manuscripts and *The Beginning and the End* suggest Bennett's hand, not Jeffers'. Her categories for grouping poems differ noticeably from those Jeffers considered. The titles of many poems are ones she added, and the title of the book itself exists nowhere in the manuscripts, not even as part of the poem she titled "The Beginning and the End."

Bennett's willingness to title poems and invent categories for them (and titles for the categories) indicates her willingness to interpret the material. In part the manuscripts gave her no choice (though she could have chosen to be more neutral by, for instance, leaving untitled poems untitled or arranging the work chronologically). Still, *The Beginning and the End* is less Jeffers' "book" than it is a kind of exhibit of his late work with Bennett as curator. And although some may conclude that the exhibit she constructed does not (at least not seriously) affect how we read individual poems, we also need to recognize that the nature of the manuscripts required Bennett to do more than choose and sequence poems. She had to decide, as well, what should be in individual "poems," and these decisions do affect how we read individual "poems."

What appears in *The Beginning and the End* as "The Great Wound" illustrates the impact of Bennett's decisions on individual poems, not just the book as a whole. Bennett assembled "The Great Wound" from material on six manuscript sheets that likely date from 1957. As she published it, the poem has three verse paragraphs.<sup>2</sup> The first describes the moon being "torn / Out of the Pacific basin" (the manuscripts show two versions of this unit). The second and third paragraphs form a second unit that posits an identity (or at least similarity) between the "myths" of "mathematicians and physics men" on the one hand and "The poet" on the other (this unit derives from three pages of workings that may or may not represent a finished draft).<sup>3</sup>

Unfortunately the various manuscript pieces neither prove nor disprove that this material should be viewed as a single poem. Bennett likely based her decision to combine the material on the manuscript sheet that has the complete draft of what she used for her first paragraph. Above the passage and separated from it by a line are a series of notes. One ("The moon torn out of the Pacific basin--how much greater event than the human race") anticipates the paragraph itself. The other three anticipate the concluding unit, which is drafted on other sheets. The conjunction of notes for the latter unit with a draft of the first does not, though, prove that Jeffers planned to link these two impulses (origin of the moon and "myths" that work in spite of being untrue) into a single poem. The notes simply exist side by side along with others on the bottom of the sheet that point to other poems and fragments (and perhaps the plan for organizing the book as a collage). The sheet, that is, points in enough different directions that one can't tell, finally, what Jeffers might have done with the various units of work.

The draft of the alternate version of the first unit (a two page manuscript) also offers no proof that the two different units of "The Great Wound" are a single poem. The bottom of the second sheet does show the phrase "Myth and Truth" (blocked off in a bottom corner below some crossed out notes), and this may have been meant as a title. If so it may be a title for this unit in combination with the other (the unit that deals explicitly with myth), but placement of the phrase does not actually link it to the draft of the first unit which concludes above it. The phrase is as likely (or more) to be either a provisional title for the second unit by itself, a provisional title for a section of the book-to-be (a unit of the never assembled collage), or a title for the book itself.

The single manuscript for the concluding two paragraphs offers even less reason to combine these units of work. The three pages are a complex and problematic set of sketches and reworkings that may or may not result in a somewhat finished draft. The way the draft seems to unfold suggests it was conceived as a poem in and of itself. Nor does the draft suggest it is to lead anywhere else (certainly not back to an additional unit to be added as an introduction). This is not to say that Jeffers might not have considered a kind of link between the unit about the moon and the unit about myth, but if so, it was likely after each had been drafted as separate pieces and with the idea that the two would be combined into a single and independent poem.

Not only do the manuscripts not indicate whether the two units of Bennett's "The Great Wound" should be combined into a single poem, they do not really indicate which of the two versions of the first unit or paragraph is the finished one (if either is actually "finished"). The unused version is longer and more elaborate than the one Bennett used, and the manuscript for it shows the crossed out phrase "Gouged out of the Pacific basin" immediately below the body of the draft in a position that could indicate either that it's the note that generated the poem, which would then suggest it's the earlier draft or that it's a discarded title, which would suggest it's the later one, since Jeffers usually only added titles when poems were completed or nearly completed. Conversely the length of the two versions suggests that the one Bennett used is the later one, since Jeffers usually shortened poems and introduced greater distance between himself and his material as he revised. To further complicate the matter, it's possible that the longer version is actually Jeffers' reworking of the shorter when he was thinking about utilizing it as part of one of his collage designs for the book. In that case, it's quite possible that the longer version would be the later one but actually the less finished and less independent unit, since it was perhaps only partially reworked and not really meant to stand alone outside of the unconstructed collage.

The manuscripts Bennett used for "The Great Wound" may well be more problematic than many of the late manuscripts, but they are by no means unique (nor is "The Great Wound" the only case where Bennett has apparently mixed and matched different manuscripts to "complete" texts). And in any case, decisions such as the ones Bennett made in constructing the poem do affect our sense of the poem. It is, of course, possible that her interpretation of "The Great Wound" is essentially the poem Jeffers would eventually have drafted, but all the manuscript evidence allows us to conclude is that Jeffers worked on these several, perhaps related, units of material at about the same time. If Bennett has it "right," it's essentially luck of the draw. (One of the

few certainties is that the manuscripts offer no evidence for titling this material "The Great Wound." Bennett derived the title from line six of the unit she used as the opening paragraph. In manuscript the line reads "the great ditch" with "wound" written above as an alternate.)

In any case, the rightness or wrongness of Bennett's construction of "The Great Wound" is only partly the issue. More importantly, these manuscripts demonstrate that any way of presenting these late poems (except, perhaps, in facsimile) involves interpreting them and casts any editor as a kind of unauthorized collaborator. This does not make it wrong to edit and print this material. Much, perhaps even most, of what's in *The Beginning and the End* are units Jeffers would have completed, collected, and published had his health allowed. Rather I want to suggest that the unfinished nature of these poems means we cannot read them as we read poems that Jeffers saw through press. We must, instead, read them in their unfinished state by struggling with the manuscripts themselves (an at times exciting but often tedious, confusing, and frustrating process), or we must read them in some printed form, knowing that what we are reading is partly the interpretation of an editor.

And this leads to my main criticism of *The Beginning and the End*. One should not criticize Bennett for assembling and interpreting the late work. One shouldn't, that is, complain that she mounted the exhibit. One can, though, wish she'd chosen to acknowledge her agenda as curator and her procedures for the exhibit by adding a brief note characterizing the material she faced and her procedures when putting it in publishable form. Her decision not to do this may well have been motivated by a kind of modesty, but her decision has obscured the provisional and fragmentary nature of much of this late work and encouraged readers to assume that her texts represent Jeffers' decisions and intentions. In part they reflect his intentions; they record his words. But readers of *The Beginning and the End* should also understand that Bennett's texts reflect as well what either seems to have been her desire (quite possibly admirable but by no means neutral) to construct, whenever possible, coherent and whole poems from the pieces she faced or her faith that the work was somehow more finished than the evidence suggests it was.

...NOTES...

1. Lee Jeffers, the poet's daughter-in-law, confirms (in a phone conversation with the author, May 1, 1991) this arrangement.

Bennett's typescript for Random House shows that she chose and transcribed forty-five poems, arranged in four sections. As published, the book has an additional three poem section, labeled "Uncollected." These were likely supplied by the poet's son, Donnan, while the book was in press. One of them, "Birds and Fishes," had been used as part of a Steuben Glass exhibit, and the terms of the exhibit initially precluded re-publication. The other two were typed on the Tor House typewriter, likely by the poet's son, Donnan, from manuscripts that may have turned up after the family had originally given Bennett the manuscripts from Jeffers' desk.

The manuscripts for Jeffers' late poems, Bennett's working transcriptions, and the typescripts Random House used to set the volume are all part of the Jeffers collection at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center of the University of Texas.

2. *The Beginning and the End* (New York: Random House, 1963), pp. 11-12.
2. Transcriptions of these three passages are printed below. These appear in Robinson Jeffers, *The Collected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers, Volume Three: 1939-62*, ed. Tim Hunt (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991), pp. 457-59.

[The two versions of the first verse paragraph of "The Great Wound"]

At the near approach of a star ... huge tides  
Agitated the molten surface of the earth.  
Th tides grew higher as it passed. It tore from the earth  
The top of one great wave:--the moon was torn  
Out of the Pacific basin: the cold white stone that lights us at night  
Left that great ditch in the earth, the Pacific ocean  
With all its islands and navies. I can stand on the cliff here  
And hear the half-molten basalt and granite tearing apart that huge bird  
Leaping up to her star. But the star passed,  
The moon remained, circling her ancient home.  
Dragging the sea-tides after her, haggard with loneliness.

I walk on my cliff above the Pacific Ocean and feel the tides  
Moon-led call in the waters, or drive them west  
And the shore's bare: I think of the prodigious tides  
An alien star raised when it shot by our orbits,  
Challenged the sun and passed. The earth was young then,  
Her seas were not blue water but molten rock  
And a huge wave of fire followed the star.  
Higher the wave rose and higher like a bat's wing fluttering,  
Trembling with love, against the cataract sky,  
Until it broke away from the planet. I stand on the cliff here  
And hear the flesh of the earth tearing apart, and watch that huge bird  
Lofting up toward her star. The enormous gouge  
She tore from the earth smoulders below at my feet, the fire-torn,  
    moon-forsaken  
Basin of the Pacific. But the star had passed, that wild wave was left,  
Hanging between earth and heaven. She globed herself and became the moon,  
Howled at by wolves, mistress of women and maniacs,--  
Weeping in heaven, circling her ancient home, dragging the sea-tides after her,  
    haggard with loneliness.



[The material Bennett used for the second and third verse paragraphs of "The Great Wound"]

The mathematicians and physics men  
Have their mythology; they work alongside the truth,  
Never touching it; their equations are false  
But the things *work*. Or, when gross error appears  
They invent new ones; they drop the theory of waves  
In universal ether and imagine curved space.  
Nevertheless their equation bombed Hiroshima.  
The terrible thing *worked*.

The post also

Has his mythology. He tells you the moon arose  
Out of the Pacific basin. He tells you that Troy was burnt for a vagrant  
Beautiful woman, her face launched a thousand ships.  
It is unlikely: it might be true: but church and state  
Depend on more peculiarly impossible myths:  
That all men are born free and equal: consider that!  
And that a wandering Hebrew poet named Jesus  
Is the God of the universe. Consider that!

\* \* \* \* \*