

FROM THE EDITOR

WELCOME BACK

Some people never knew that the poet Robinson Jeffers had ascended to spectacular literary prominence, and that he also had departed from acclaim. Some never knew he was featured on *Time* magazine's cover or viewed by his contemporaries as the nation's leading and path-breaking poet, structuring formidable and imposing lyrical and narrative poems. Some would point to a particular irony: though many of Jeffers' poems were inspired by ancient mythology and biblical lessons, the poet's surroundings on the central California coast, close to his home, provided the settings and content for much of his verse.

And to some people, the mellifluous name Robinson Jeffers was familiar, but nothing more than that. Famously, fame is fleeting, but in Jeffers' case, it seems a shame that appreciation of his work, his passion, his erudition, and his daring was lost or unknown to us for many years.

"Your returnings," Jeffers wrote about the resurgence of nature, "are even more precious than your first presence." The line of verse, which concludes his poem "Bixby's Landing," seems prophetic, for in the past decade, a new admiration for Jeffers has flowered. In celebration of that regeneration, we devote this issue to reintroducing Jeffers to our readers by placing the poet in literary, historical, and cultural perspectives.

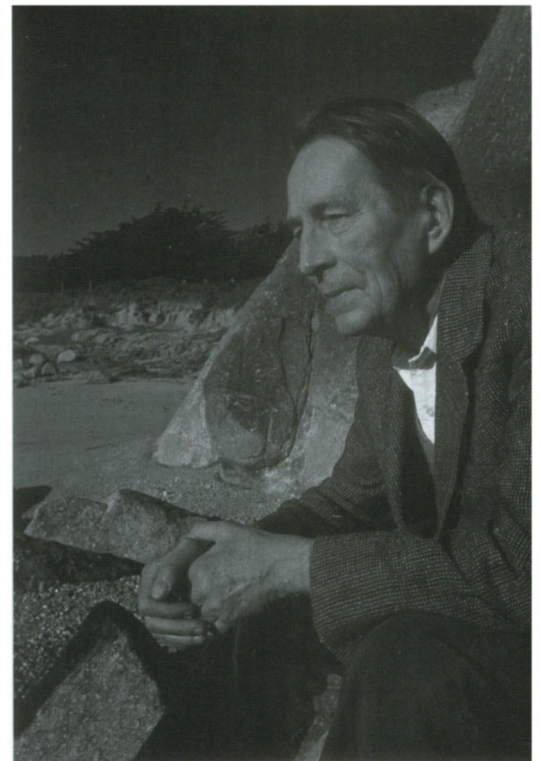
The development, ascendance, and turnaround of Jeffers' literary fortunes are unmasked by James Karman in "An Uncommon Voice." A brief biography, a photo essay based on Jeffers' days at Occidental College, and his poem "Gray Weather" unveil "the stormy conditions of time and change."

John Walton's essay, "The Poet as Ethnographer: Robinson Jeffers in Big Sur," selections from Pat Hathaway's archival photographic collection, a photo essay on building the coast highway and the U.S. Coast & Geodetic Survey, and Jeffers' poem "Bixby Landing" divulge a strong sense of the poet as a place-based environmentalist and the context of his devotion to the natural world.

In "Telling Jeffers' Story," Dana Gioia addresses Jeffers' cultural heritage through preservation of both the poet's hand-hewn stone structures—Tor House and Hawk Tower—and his poetry. In exhibitions inspired by Jeffers' verse, California artists demonstrate a slice of the poet's diverse influence. Jeffers' poem "Ghost," in which he predicted a future moment like this one, completes our homage to the complicated Robinson Jeffers, who is much more accessible than you might think.

Welcome back, RJ.

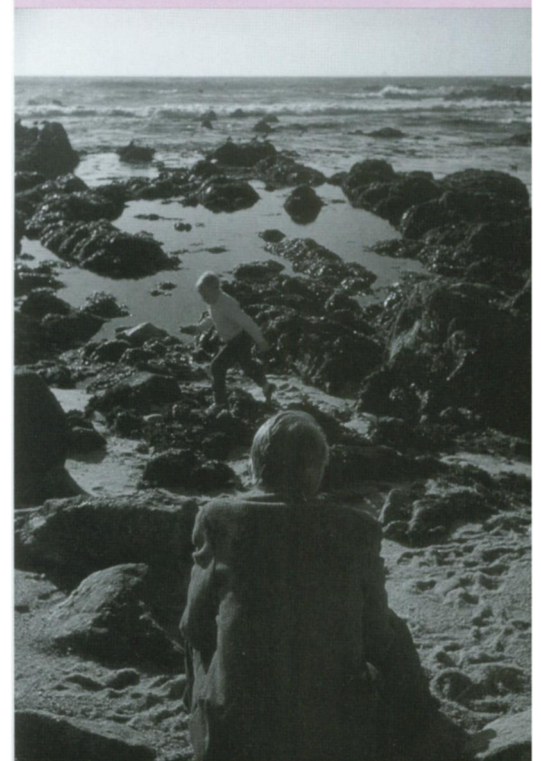
JANET FIREMAN



ON THE COVER

In 1932, at the height of his fame, John Robinson Jeffers (1887–1962) was heralded as "the most impressive poet the U.S. has yet produced." By 1956, when the photographer Leigh Wiener visited the poet at his home in Carmel, Jeffers had published thirteen major volumes and additional, shorter works. Wiener's intimate images memorialize the closing stage of a literary career characterized by admiration, controversy, rejection, neglect, and, in the last decade, renewed appreciation of California's "premier bard" and "brilliant master of verse."

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Caption Sources: **FROM THE EDITOR:** quoted in “Books: Harrowed Marrow,” *Time* magazine, Apr. 4, 1932; Cynthia Haven, “A Black Sheep Joins the Fold: Stanford Press Champions a Poet Once Shunned in Academe,” *Stanford Magazine* (November/December 2001); David Rains Wallace, “What Ever Happened to Robinson Jeffers?” *Los Angeles Times*, Nov. 12, 2000. **AN UNCOMMON VOICE, 6–11:** James Karman, *Robinson Jeffers: Poet of California*, rev. ed. (Brownsville, OR: Story Line Press, 1995), 24, 30–32; Tim Hunt, ed., *The Collected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers*, vol. 1 (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988), 239. **ROBINSON JEFFERS: A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY, 12–16:** Robinson Jeffers, Foreword, in Lawrence Clark Powell, *Robinson Jeffers: The Man & His Work* (Los Angeles, The Primavera Press, 1934), xvii; Karman, *Robinson Jeffers: Poet of California*, rev. ed., 19; Powell, *Robinson Jeffers*, quote on 28; Una Jeffers to Lawrence Clark Powell, Apr. 15, 1932, in Ann Ridgeway, ed., *The Selected Letters of Robinson Jeffers* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1968), 200; Melba Berry Bennett, *The Stone Mason of Tor House: The Life and Work of Robinson Jeffers* (Los Angeles: The Ward Ritchie Press, 1966), 86; Karman, *Robinson Jeffers: Poet of California*, rev. ed., 47–48; Robert J. Brophy, “Robinson Jeffers in Centennial,” in *Robinson Jeffers, Poet: 1887–1987, A Centennial Exhibition* (Los Angeles: Occidental College, 1987), 9; Robinson Jeffers to T. R. Smith [editor-in-chief of Liveright Inc.], Nov. 18, 1931, in Ridgeway, *The Selected Letters*, 185. **POET ALUMNUS OF OCCIDENTAL COLLEGE, 17–20:** Tim Hunt, ed., *The Collected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers*, vol. 4 (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 74; unpublished selected materials, “The Big Read: Robinson Jeffers and the Ecologies of Poetry” exhibition, Los Angeles: Occidental College, 2009; “Robinson Jeffers, Poet: 1887–1987, A Centennial Exhibition” (Los Angeles: Occidental College, 1987), 7, 9–10. **THE POET AS ETHNOGRAPHER: ROBINSON JEFFERS IN BIG SUR, 22–41:** Richard Kohlman Hughey and Boon Hughey, “Jeffers Country Revisited: Beauty without Price,” *Robinson Jeffers Newsletter* 98 and 99 (Spring and Summer, 1996): 1–84; Karman, *Robinson Jeffers: Poet of California*, rev. ed., 44. **BIG SUR: ON THE PRECIPICE OF CHANGE, PP 44–48:** Annual Report of the Director of the Coast and Geodetic Survey to the Secretary of Commerce for the Fiscal Year Ended June 20, 1932 and for the Fiscal year Ended June (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1932), and Annual Report of the

Secretary of Commerce, 1933 (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1932); Robert J. Brophy, ed., *Robinson Jeffers, Dimensions of a Poet* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1995); John Cloud, “George Davidson and the Point of the Beginning,” *California Coast and Ocean* 23, no. 2 (2007); William F. King, “George Davidson and the Marine Survey in the Pacific Northwest,” *The Western Historical Quarterly* 10, no. 3 (July 1979): 285–301; NOAA Web sites: Central Library (<http://www.lib.noaa.gov>), the Preserve America Initiative (<http://preservamerica.noaa.gov>), and the Office of Coast Survey Historical Map & Chart Collection (<http://historicalcharts.noaa.gov>); Robert C. Pavlik, “Historical Overview of the Carmel to San Simeon Highway,” in *Historic Resources Evaluation Report on the Rock Retaining Walls, Parapets, Culvert Headwalls and Drinking Fountains along the Carmel to San Simeon Highway*, California Department of Transportation, November 1966; Sean Vitousek, “On the Bridge,” <http://www.pelincannetwork.net>. **TELLING JEFFERS’ STORY, PP 50–53:** Karman, *Robinson Jeffers: Poet of California*, rev. ed., 48–49; Reader’s Guide, *The Poetry of Robinson Jeffers* (Washington, DC: National Endowment for the Arts, 2008). **“GHOST,” BY ROBINSON JEFFERS, P 64:** Leigh Wiener, *How Do You Photograph People?* (New York: The Viking Press, 1982), 82.

THE POET AS ETHNOGRAPHER: ROBINSON JEFFERS IN BIG SUR, BY JOHN WALTON, PP 22–41

The author is grateful to the late Jeff Norman for his wisdom and the many conversations we shared about Big Sur. He could have written the definitive history of the region and, although he did not, all who follow will feel his influence. He was the memory of Big Sur.

¹ Henry Miller, *Big Sur and the Oranges of Hieronymus Bosch* (New York: New Directions Paperbook, 1957), 145.

² “The Coast Road” © 1938 by Garth and Donnan Jeffers, renewed 1966, in Tim Hunt, ed., *The Collected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers*, vol. 2 (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1989), 522–23.

³ Twelfth United States Census, 1900, Manuscript Census, Monterey County, California; Ellen Jane Swetnam, unpublished diary, 1897–1904, Big Sur Historical Society, n.d.; Sam Trotter memoir, Big Sur Historical Society, 1937; Rosalind Sharpe Wall, *A Wild*

Coast and Lonely (San Carlos, CA: World Wide Publishing/Tetra, 1989).

⁴ See Edward Weston, *The Daybooks of Edward Weston* (New York: Aperture Foundation, Inc., 1981); Miller, *Big Sur and the Oranges of Hieronymus Bosch*; Richard Hughey and Boon Hughey, “Jeffers Country Revisited: Beauty without Price,” *Robinson Jeffers Newsletter* 98 and 99 (Spring and Summer 1996).

⁵ Keith Hopkins, “Novel Evidence for Roman Slavery,” *Past and Present* 138 (February 1993): 3.

⁶ See Gary S. Breschini and Trudy Haversat, *The Esselen Indians of the Big Sur Country: The Land and the People* (Salinas, CA: Coyote Press, 2004).

⁷ See Jeff Norman, *Images of America: Big Sur* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia, 2004).

⁸ Robinson Jeffers, *Flagons and Apples* (Los Angeles, Grafton Publishing Company, 1912).

⁹ Robinson Jeffers, *The Selected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers* (New York: Random House, 1938), xv–xvii.

¹⁰ Quoted in Melba Berry Bennett, *The Stone Mason of Tor House: The Life and Work of Robinson Jeffers* (Los Angeles: The Ward Ritchie Press, 1966), 71.

¹¹ Hughey and Hughey, “Jeffers Country Revisited,” 13, 14.

¹² Una Jeffers to Lawrence Clark Powell, Apr. 15, 1932, in Ann N. Ridgeway, *The Selected Letters of Robinson Jeffers, 1897–1962* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1962), 199.

¹³ Lawrence Clark Powell, *Robinson Jeffers: The Man & His Work* (Pasadena, CA: San Pasqual Press, 1940), 83.

¹⁴ Jeffers, *The Selected Poetry*, xvi.

¹⁵ Tim Hunt, *The Collected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers*, vol. 1 (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988), 409–521.

¹⁶ Jeffers, *The Selected Poetry*, xvii.

¹⁷ Miller, *Big Sur and the Oranges of Hieronymus Bosch*, 145.

¹⁸ Robinson Jeffers, *Californians*, Introduction by William Everson (Cayucos, CA: Cayucos Books, 1971), 69.

¹⁹ James Karman, *Robinson Jeffers: Poet of California*, rev. ed. (Brownsville, OR: Story Line Press, 1995), 65–66.