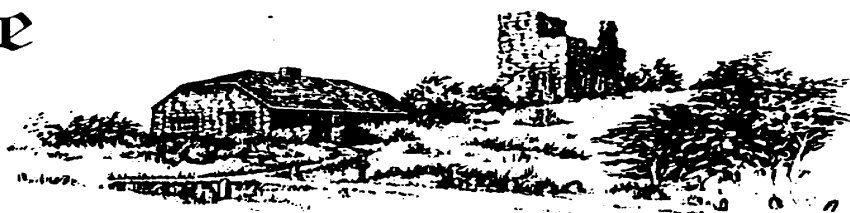


Tor House Newsletter



Winter 2021

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

This year, for the first time, Tor House Foundation is honored to be taking part in the [Monterey County Gives!](#) (MCGives!) year-end fundraising drive. Raising funds for Monterey County non-profit organizations, MCGives! is a special project of the *Monterey County Weekly* working in collaboration with the Community Foundation for Monterey County and the Monterey Peninsula Foundation.

MCGives! was established in 2009. That year, total donations were \$417,000. By 2013, donations were over \$1,000,000. Last year, the total was \$7,886,407 from some 17,500 donors.

Each of the 170 non-profits selected for inclusion in this year's MCGives! provided a Big Idea, a vision statement of how the year-end donations would be used. Our vision statement focuses on rebuilding the programs severely affected by two years of pandemic, on expanding current programs, and on developing new programs:

“Given the pandemic’s devastating effect on our programs, our Big Idea is to restructure those programs and go beyond the poetry and life of Robinson Jeffers—the focus of our tours—to the influence Jeffers’s poetry has had in the arts and in ecology, and to his sensitivity to social justice issues. Our priorities will be to reconstitute our tour docent contingent (down from over 20 to 8); to revive our signature annual events (Garden Party and Fall Festival); to expand our newly instituted Fellow Program, which brings artists from all fields to Tor House for inspiration; to develop tours and booklets which focus on Jeffers’s ecological prescience (“The polar ice-caps are melting,” he wrote in 1960) and his sensitivity to the indigenous peoples on whose land he lived, his friendship with Langston Hughes, and his support of the return of the Japanese-Americans who had been interned during the Second World War.”

The Trustees of the Foundation have established a Challenge Grant of \$20,675. We are hoping that the Tor House community, always generous in supporting our work, will not only meet but exceed that amount. See below for details regarding donations. [You can donate to Tor House at MCGives!](#)

On behalf of the Trustees, I wish you all healthy and joy-filled holidays and new year. At Tor House, we are looking forward, thanks to your generosity, to a year of rebuilding and growth.

Elliot Ruchowitz-Roberts, President

Thank you, in advance, for supporting the work of the Robinson Jeffers Tor House Foundation. On-line donations can be made until Midnight Dec. 31, 2021; donations sent by mail must be postmarked by Dec. 31, 2021.

To make your tax-deductible donation on-line, please go to montereycountygives.com/tor.

To donate by check, please write your tax-deductible contribution to “CFMP/MCGives.” In the memo part of your check, please write “Tor House Foundation,” and mail to MCGives! 2354 Garden Rd, Monterey, 93940.

If you would like to make stock donations and/or IRA charitable rollovers, please contact Brian Thayer, Senior Philanthropic Services Officer, Community Foundation for Monterey County, briant@cfmco.org, 831-375-9712.

Robert Zaller, Professor Emeritus in the Department of History at Drexel University, is a poet, author, critic and eminent Jeffers scholar. His most recent publication is *The Atom to Be Split*. Dr. Zaller addresses the influence of Greece on the work of Jeffers. (“Shine, Republic,” quoted below, can be found in its entirety on page 7.)

Jeffers’ Hellenism

By

Robert Zaller

Robinson Jeffers never visited Greece; Mediterranean climates were not for him. But he was exposed to the classics from an early age, and ancient Greece remained both the symbol and subject of much of his work. This is most evident in one of his most admired and characteristic poems, “Shine, Republic”:

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.

There is a stubborn torch that flames from Marathon to Concord, its dangerous beauty binding three ages
Into one time; the waves of barbarism and civilization have eclipsed but have never quenched it.

For the Greeks the love of beauty, for Rome of ruling; for the present age the passionate love of discovery;
But in one noble passion we are one; and Washington, Luther, Tacitus, Aeschylus, one kind of man.

Freedom, for Jeffers, was the prime human value; it is also one of his most complex concepts. The Greeks are identified with it in the poem’s third line when the Battle of Marathon is cited and then linked to that at Concord, both a desperate struggle against seemingly overwhelming odds, and again in the third stanza when Jeffers reverses chronology to begin with Washington, the American, and end with Aeschylus, not only in Jeffers’ view the greatest of Greek poets but himself a veteran of Marathon. Jeffers does ring a change in the second stanza when the Romans alone are linked to a political function, that of “ruling,” an activity not necessarily connected to freedom and, in the citation of the anti-imperial historian Tacitus, implicitly a criticism of Rome. Here, however, Jeffers is discussing different virtues, and the one he assigns the Greeks—love of beauty—is for him also a supreme virtue, the celebration of beauty being, as he says in a later poem, “the sole business of poetry” as the attestation of divine value itself (“The Beauty of Things”).

Jeffers does not, however, simply identify the Greeks with the idea of beauty; in “Hellenistics” he recalls a copy of the Portland vase given to his father which, in childhood, he “used to devour by the hour”—perhaps his first recollected experience of the aesthetic power of a manmade object. He cites, too, Alexander, Achilles, Sappho, and Nike, the Greek goddess of victory, and says in summary: “I will praise the Greeks for having pared down the shame of three vices / Natural to man and no other animal, cruelty and filth and superstition, grained in man’s making.” Jeffers cites these virtues—negative ones, to be sure, but among the most difficult—because his poem portends the approaching barbarism of his own time, and he wonders of its “future children” which poet will tell them “to hate cruelty and filth?” The Greeks do not come often.

Jeffers’ own view of humanity was quintessentially tragic, and here, too, the Greeks were his paradigm. Tragedy entailed heroism, but a heroism both evoked and undone by vaunting pride. Jeffers’ own tragic tales are mostly of his own California coast, but a striking number of them are set in the ancient Greek world, retelling its myths and legends and reworking its great playwrights—as, indeed, some of the California tragedies, including “Cawdor,” “Thurso’s Landing,” “Give Your Heart to the Hawks,” and “Solstice” also do.

The works set directly in ancient Greece, wholly in verse drama form, include “The Tower Beyond Tragedy,” Jeffers’ free adaptation of the *Oresteia* of Aeschylus; “The Humanist’s Tragedy,” a compressed restatement of Euripides’ *Bacchae*; “At the Fall of an Age,” based on the Pausanias’ version of the legend of Helen of Troy; *Medea*, a stage play based on Euripides written for Judith Anderson; and “The Cretan Woman,” which, like “Cawdor,” adapts Euripides’ *Hippolytus*. Jeffers would also prepare a performing version of “The Tower Beyond Tragedy” late in his career, also at the behest of Anderson. Each full decade of his mature career would thus see at least one major work set in the Hellenic world.

“The Tower Beyond Tragedy” was not only the first of Jeffers’ Hellenic poems but the first of his narratives or dramas to present a male protagonist who not only overcomes tragic circumstances but, almost uniquely, at least partially transcends them. As in earlier works, the tragic issue *par excellence* is incest and its

prohibitions, but whereas in these poems, notably “Tamar,” the theme of incest is dramatized, it is here thematized as the primary problem of human association. In so depicting it, Jeffers radically revises his source in the Aeschylean trilogy, whose hero, Orestes, is pardoned for his matricide by a court that rules his act to have been necessary to protect his city (and its patriarchal order). Jeffers’ Orestes, on the contrary, frees himself by “enter[ing] the brown forest” and escaping human narcissism in a supereminent world of natural process and eternal return. Although tragedy would repeatedly call Jeffers back as the inescapable fact of the human condition, Orestes’ vision, sharpened in his subsequent conception of the world as an expression of the divine, would remain central to his thought. He might have found his way to this theistic vision by other means, but at that critical moment his Greek source—and the challenge it presented him to rethink it—was indispensable to him.

Jeffers’ other Hellenic works all touch on prime human passions. “The Humanist’s Tragedy” involves what the ancient Greeks called hubris, the belief in human mastery of the natural order. In Jeffers’ distillation of Euripides’ play, King Pentheus of Thebes asserts the primacy of reason and control over anything that would challenge it, with the fatal result that ensues in the original. The poem is also a partial corrective to any conclusion that might have been drawn from “The Tower Beyond Tragedy,” namely that human passion can be fully escaped even by the severest renunciation. This, too, would have been a lesson learned from the Greeks, and more applicable than ever in the world of Pentheus’ worldly clones today.

“At the Fall of an Age” describes the eclipse of Mycenaean Greece in terms of the death of Helen of Troy. Jeffers uses Helen as a symbol, and her death as a sacrificial event that portends the end of an era. Beauty itself is the sacrifice—that is, the splendor of an epoch whose embodiment she has been and whose passing is the price of what will succeed it. To some extent, the death of Orestes’ royal mother Clytemnestra in “The Tower Beyond Tragedy” also represents such a passage, but it is Helen who stands at the headway of what we recognize as Western civilization, and whose image, even more than that of Eve and Mary, signifies its inception and the quasi-mythical world that preceded it.

Medea was the principal success of Jeffers’ later career, enjoying a highly successful Broadway run and retaining its esteem to this day. Jeffers makes of his *Medea* a primal force of justice and vengeance, both as defined by and for herself. Her sacrifice—that of the fruit of her own body—is self-willed and triumphal, a rejection of patriarchy at its root. In contrast, his final Hellenic work, “The Cretan Woman,” shows a woman helplessly in the toils of her passion, but above her a goddess, Aphrodite, who reflects the great and indifferent power that Jeffers saw in the Greek notion of divinity, and which in part he made his own. Notable, indeed, is the presence of strong women in the Hellenic works, and, often enough, of women as dramatic antagonists—Clytemnestra and the captive Trojan seeress Cassandra in “The Tower Beyond Tragedy”; “Helen and Polyxo in “At the Fall of an Age”; and even Phaedra and Aphrodite in “The Cretan Woman,” although there the struggle is one-sided and the conclusion foregone. The strength of Jeffers’ women has been emphasized by feminist critics, and those of the Hellenic works (as well as the Hellenic-infused ones) are a particularly powerful company, with *Medea* as perhaps the most singularly powerful of his many protagonists, male or female—“not me,” as she says at the end of her play, do “the weakness-despising stars . . . scorn.”

It was not merely the figures of Greek tragedy and mythology and the playwrights who transfigured them who stood out for Jeffers and profoundly marked his work, however, but the great philosophers and the poet Lucretius, in whom he found the materialist framework of his art. For no American poet other than his contemporary H. D. (Hilda Doolittle) was Hellenic influence as pervasive, and in none more profound. Nor, I think, would he have been unaware of the defiant stand taken by the Greeks against fascist invasion in late 1940. From Marathon to his own day, they would stand for freedom against all odds.



NEW AND RENEWED MEMBERSHIPS (September 2021 - November 2021)

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Audry Lynch	John Poet/Anna Ramirez	
Julie Maher	Cynthia Riebe	

CONTRIBUTIONS (September 2021 – November 2021)

Challenge Gift

Three anonymous Trustee gifts totaling \$2,300

Gifts - \$1000 to \$2000

James & Paula Karmen	Vince Huth
Gere DiZerega	Aengus Jeffers

Gifts – \$500 or under

Amy Essick	Alan Stacy
Melinda C. Armstead	Frances D. Vardamis
Norris Pope	

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Gift – \$500 or under

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Dorren & Laura Embry	Bob & Lynda Sayer	Mary Louise Schneberger
Julie A Frederickson	Elizabeth Stacy	

[Please note: listings reflect only new and renewed memberships and contributions since the Fall Issue of the Newsletter. If your contribution is not listed, please look for it in the Spring Newsletter. Generally, the Spring Issue lists memberships and contributions for December, January, February, and March. There are no listings in the Summer Issue because of space constraints (Poetry Prize winners are published in the Summer Issue). The Fall Issue contains memberships and contributions from April through August of any given year, and the Winter Issue lists September through November memberships and contributions.]

The changing moods of the Central Coast

Poems by Laura Newmark

Heather Blossoms

Feathery lime-green heather
blooms in a garden row.
its abundant tiny blossoms
lie a dusting of pale pink snow.

March 2021

A Garden’s Greens & Gold

Within a garden setting
of green leaves of trees
and verdant shrubs,
a native fremontia’s
bold yellow blooms
reflect the golden sun.

April 2021

Coastal Overcast, Carmel Valley

Above oaks, cypresses, and pines,
deep green in the valley below,
an overcast sky of featureless white
drapes gauzy mist on the highest slopes.

August 2021

Hawks

A lone hawk glides into sight,
now joined by three others
all circling in flight,
then vanishing quickly,
as they arrived,
one flying south –
a speck high in the sky.

September 2021

Laura Newmark and her husband, Don, are Lifetime Members of the Foundation. Laura describes her Tor House experience:

As I approach the milestone of 80, I’ve been reflecting on my rewarding experience as a landscape poet fortunate enough to live here and to have my poems reach the readers of the *Tor House Newsletter*.

Don and I lived in Portola Valley.... Then a visit to Tor House and Hawk Tower led us to move to Monterey in 1994 and to Carmel two years later. The exceptional natural beauty of the Monterey Coast has inspired my poetry ever since.

A Glimpse into the past of Jeffers Studies



The Robinson Jeffers Association Conference at Occidental College, 1985

Left to Right: Maeve Jeffers, James Karmen, Robert Zaller, Robert Brophy, Garth Jeffers and Alex Vardamis
Robert Zaller writes: “Some of us were on a panel about “Tamar.” Garth was in the audience, and when it was over he came up and said to us, ‘Say, that poem you fellows were talking about sounded pretty interesting. I must read it some time.’ Obviously, he had the family sense of humor.”

Photo: Kimon Rethis

The Robinson Jeffers Tor House 2022 Prize for Poetry

*The annual Tor House Prize for Poetry is a living memorial
to American poet Robinson Jeffers (1887-1962)*

\$1,000 for an original, unpublished poem not to exceed three pages in length. \$200 for Honorable Mention.

Final Judge: Forrest Gander

Open to well-crafted poetry in all styles, ranging from experimental work to traditional forms, including short narrative poems. Each poem should be typed on 8 1/2" by 11" paper, and no longer than three pages. On a cover sheet only, include: name, mailing address, telephone number and email; titles of poems; bio optional. Multiple and simultaneous submissions welcome. There is a reading fee of \$10 for the first three poems; \$15 for up to six poems; and \$2.50 for each additional poem. Checks and money orders should be made out to Tor House Foundation.

Postmark deadline for submissions: March 15, 2022

The Prize winner will be announced by May 15. Include an SASE for announcement of the Prize winner. Poems will not be returned.

For more information, visit our web site or contact us by email.

**Mail poems, check or money order, and SASE to:
Poetry Prize Coordinator, Tor House Foundation
Box 223240, Carmel, CA 93922**

**The Robinson Jeffers Tor House Foundation
P.O. Box 2713, Carmel, California 93921
Telephone: (831) 624-1813**

www.torhouse.org Email: thf@torhouse.org

Remembering Robert Bly (December 23, 1926-November 21, 2021)

The most memorable introduction I gave for a poetry reading was one I gave for Robert Bly. Co-sponsored by the Tor House Foundation and Monterey Peninsula College, the reading was held in MPC's Music Hall on a Saturday evening as part of the annual weekend gathering Bly held at the Asilomar Conference Grounds from 1985 to 2010.

At the gathering that year, Bly had asked the drummers in the group to get to the Music Hall at 7 and to drum continuously until the reading started at 8. I was there at 7 to make certain the doors were open, rugs spread in front of the tier seating, and people stationed at the doors to sell tickets. By 7:30, the Hall was filled—all the seats taken, people on the rugs in front of the lectern and on the steps leading up to the balcony doors--and the walls vibrating with the drumming. To say that the hall was charged with energy would be a gross understatement.

When Robert arrived at 7:50, I met with him backstage, the sound of the drumming filling even that area. As I was thinking over my introduction - the usual this publication and that, this award and that--, I suddenly realized what an anticlimax that would be: what could I possibly say that would meet the electric mood in the Hall?

At 8 p.m., I slipped through the stage curtains and stood before the packed house. The drumming stopped. The electricity didn't. I said the only possible thing that I could say: "Ladies and gentlemen, Robert Bly." The audience went crazy, a standing ovation with shouts and screams as Robert came forth from behind the curtains. The reading turned out to be anticlimactic. Nothing Robert read could have equaled the intensity produced by that hour of continuous drumming. He recognized this and never had drummers precede his readings again. That was Robert: sometimes outrageous, pushing the limits, always learning, always pushing those who listened to his poetry to learn as well. We at Tor House mourn his passing and celebrate his life and his contributions to poetry.

~Elliot Ruchowitz-Robert

NEWS AND NOTES

President **Elliot Ruchowitz Roberts** notes that two Trustees who have made invaluable contributions to Tor House Foundation have stepped down from its Board:

Lynn Stralem, trustee since 2003, was involved in maintaining the Foundation's extensive archival collection, including repairing books that belonged to Una and Robinson Jeffers. She has generously supported various Foundation activities, including the maintenance of the gardens and volunteering at various annual events.

Amy Essick, Trustee since 2016, served as Foundation Vice President and a member of the Executive Committee. She is responsible for the creation by local artists of two bronze sculptures and for their installation in the Jeffers Plaza of the Monterey Conference Center, the first public art honoring Jeffers in Monterey County. She also hosted an RJA/THF webinar on portraits of Jeffers.

The Foundation notes with great sadness the passing of **Wayne J. Kelley** at the age of 96. Wayne, a 2007 "Carmel Citizen of the Year," served, along with his departed wife, **Phyllis**, as Tor House Docents for many years. A wonderful gentleman, a grand couple, the passing of such giving people is honored.

Be a Tor House Docent. The Senior Generation, the Greatest Generation, is passing. Time, in addition to the disruptions of these past two Covid years, has left its inevitable scars. We have resumed tours and musical evenings. We still have the poetry contest. We hope to resume our special celebrations. But to return to activities as they were, we are desperately in need of Docent/Volunteers, the backbone of the Tor House experience without which there could be no Garden Parties and Festivals and tours. We plead with you, if you live in the area, full or parttime, to consider enlisting in the Docent Corps. There is no better, or more enriching way to serve the community, to share the lessons and messages of Jeffers, and to enjoy the ambiance and fun of Tor House and Hawk Tower. Lead tours, arrange flowers, edit newsletters, design the website, host the special events, share your talent, whatever it is, get to know the players, and become one yourself. We provide the training – and the fellowship. You provide the time well spent. Be a Wayne and Phyllis Kelley of tomorrow. For further information, call the office, and Melinda will put you in touch with your own special mentor.

Interactive Jeffers: As in other years you are encouraged to enter the **Tor House Prize for Poetry Contest**. Should you decide not to enter the contest, you are most welcome to submit your Jeffers/Central-Coast-of-California themed poetry, or prose, to this Newsletter for publication. Submissions are welcome in hard copy or electronically at fdv528@comcast.net. Hard copy submissions should be directed to "Newsletter Editor."

Happy Holidays everybody! Next year's sure to be a great one.

* * * * *

THE LAST WORD FROM JEFFERS

SHINE, REPUBLIC

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.

There is a stubborn torch that flames from Marathon to Concord, its dangerous beauty binding three ages
Into one time; the waves of barbarism and civilization have eclipsed but have never quenched it.

For the Greeks the love of beauty, for Rome of ruling; for the present age the passionate love of discovery;
But in one noble passion we are one; and Washington, Luther, Tacitus, Eschylus, one kind of man.

And you, America, that passion made you. You were not born to prosperity, you were born to love freedom.
You did not say "en masse," you said "independence." But we cannot have all the luxuries and freedom also.

Freedom is poor and laborious; that torch is not safe but hungry, and often requires blood for its fuel.

You will tame it against it burn too clearly, you will hood it like a kept hawk, you will perch it on the wrist of
Caesar.

But keep the tradition, conserve the forms, the observances, keep the spot sore. Be great, carve deep your
heel-marks.

The states of the next age will no doubt remember you, and edge their love of freedom with contempt of luxury.

from *Solstice* (1935) Hunt II, 417.



**Robinson Jeffers
Tor House Foundation**
P.O. Box 2713 • CARMEL, CA 93921

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Winter 2021

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Please check one:

- Full-time student/TH Docent \$15.00
- Senior 25.00
- Individual 40.00
- Couple 50.00
- Sponsor 100.00
- Patron 250.00
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My payment for \$_____ is enclosed.

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Please make check payable to:
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Consult Website for on-line payment

Your contribution assists in the preservation of the unique home of the poet, Robinson Jeffers, and in community outreach programs.

Membership benefits include:

- ◆ Free tours of Tor House
- ◆ 10% discount on merchandise
- ◆ Advance invitations to coming events
- ◆ Quarterly newsletter

**ROBINSON JEFFERS
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