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| Jeffers, (John) Robinson (1887-1962) |
| **[Enter any *variant forms* of your headword – OPTIONAL]** |
| Renowned as the *poet of Carmel-Sur*, Robinson Jeffers held a place of prominence in American literature from the mid-1920s through to the 1930s. He lived in seclusion with his family at Tor House, which he built from sea-worn granite on a promontory in Carmel, California. In Carmel he developed his signature style of graphically tragic narrative poems and verse dramas, typically set in the surrounding landscape and accompanied by meditative lyric poems exploring related themes. Jeffers eschewed high modernism’s post-symbolist aesthetics for what he saw as its withdrawal from reality, crafting instead a free verse style that employed long, rhythmically stressed lines and a solemn tone. His prosody and themes are coloured by his non-anthropocentric philosophy, which he named *inhumanism*. Jeffers’ critical acclaim turned to disfavour during the Depression and the Second World War; his popularity fluctuated, and finally dwindled. Critical interest in Jeffers’ works was renewed in the 1970s and 1980s, and readership has since increased, particularly due to the timeliness of his acute environmental aesthetics. |
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Critical interest in Jeffers’ works was renewed in the 1970s and 1980s, and readership has since increased, particularly due to the timeliness of his acute environmental aesthetics.  Image: Jeffers.jpg  Figure Portrait of Robinson Jeffers  http://cdn.calisphere.org/data/13030/tn/ft9s2009tn/files/ft9s2009tn-FID4.jpg  Born 10 January 1887, John Robinson Jeffers was the eldest son of Annie Robinson (Tuttle) and Dr. William Hamilton Jeffers, a Presbyterian minister and seminary professor in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Jeffers’ younger brother, Hamilton, became an astronomer at the Lick Observatory. After the family relocated to California in 1903, Jeffers entered Occidental College where his earlier education in Judeo-Christian and classical tradition was extended while also supplemented by sciences such as geology and astronomy. He was drawn to Pre-Raphaelite and Romantic poets in his youth, and his first self-published collection of poems, *Flagons and Apples* (1912), features conventional lyrics informed by these early influences.  From 1905 through to 1913, Jeffers pursued graduate studies in the humanities, medicine, and forestry. During those years, Jeffers had an intimate affair with classmate Una Call Kuster, which culminated with her divorce and subsequent marriage to Jeffers in 1913. The couple moved to Carmel the following year, where there was a flourishing artist colony including photographer Edward Weston and poet George Sterling (Jeffers’s future intimate and advocate). A result of various stimuli and world events — particularly the Pacific coast and the outbreak of the First World War — Jeffers’ distinctive literary style emerged between *Californians* (1916) and the privately published Tamar and Other Poems (1924). When the latter received critical acclaim, it was reissued with new compositions as Roan Stallion, Tamar, and Other Poems (1925) by the publisher Boni and Liveright, bringing Jeffers national fame. Eight subsequent major collections were published over the next two decades. At the apex of his career, the cover of *Time* magazine (on 4 April 1932) featured a Weston portrait of Jeffers — the first American poet to do so.  Image: jeffersuna.jpg  Figure Jeffers, Una and their bulldog, Billie, Oct. 1913.  http://www.robinsonjeffersassociation.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/twoplusdog-e1281224983511.jpg  Early in 1941, Jeffers conducted a successful reading tour centred on his delivery of the inaugural address of the Library of Congress’ ‘The Poet and Democracy’ series. From 1947 to 1948, his adaptation of Euripides’s *Medea* was a success on Broadway and elsewhere, with actress and friend Dame Judith Anderson performing the lead role. However, his increasingly morose expression of antipathy toward features of modern civilisation and the American involvement in the Second World War severely eroded his popularity, and *The Double Axe* (1948) was met with scathing criticism. In the decade after Una’s death in 1950, the decline in his health and spirits was matched by the output of his verse. He published one final volume, *Hungerfield and Other Poems* (1954). A posthumous collection, *The Beginning and the End and Other Poems* (1963), was edited and published a year after his death on 20 January 1962.  Like his modernist contemporaries, Jeffers drew on myth, anthropology, and theoretical psychology to develop his poetry. His writing is uniquely informed, however, by his scientific background and inhumanist philosophy — a pantheistic naturalism viewing humanity as a troubled and ultimately insignificant part of the divine universe. This distinguishing quality along with his attention to place has drawn the interest of deep ecologists and environmental critics across the humanities. His practice of stonemasonry, sustained from 1919 until his latter years, was also a considerable correlative of his poetics and regionalism. Tor House and its forty-foot Hawk Tower are preserved under the Tor House Foundation as an enduring monument to Jeffers and his bond with the wild Pacific coast.  Image: tor.jpg  Figure Hawk Tower and Tor House  http://www.robinsonjeffersassociation.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/torhouse1.jpg |
| Further reading:  (Adamic)  (Bennett)  (Brophy)  (Carpenter)  (Greenan)  (Karman)  (Karman, The Life and Work of Robinson Jeffers [Introduction])  (Karman, Robinson Jeffers: Poet of California)  (Luhan)  (Powell)  (Sterling)  (Thesing)  (Zaller) |