

Tor House Newsletter



Summer 2017

POETRY

In our world where all things are beautiful it is the poet's business to choose what is abiding. Fashions no doubt are beautiful but they cannot be poetical; sports, freaks, exceptions, no doubt are beautiful but they cannot be poetical. Let us agree that wine seems more poetical than soda-water because it has literary associations the other lacks; but there is a more fundamental reason, wine is so old a thing it has become symbolic, so everlasting it owns a share of the whole human future. There will be all sorts of drinks but wine is one as water is one. . . . It is not literary association that makes these two words magical, these two things symbols. It is permanence.

Robinson Jeffers **PREFACE**, *Continent's End (?)*, 1922 [Hunt, IV, 374]

2017 Robinson Jeffers Tor House Prize for Poetry, an honorarium of \$1,000, is awarded to:

Donald Levering

Santa Fe, New Mexico

for his poem

“The Notebook”

Honorable Mentions, each with an honorarium of \$200, are awarded to:

Justin Hunt

Charlotte, North Carolina

for his poem “Somewhere South of Coldwater”

Mary Pinard

Roslindale, Massachusetts

for her poem “Late in the Season, Widow Gardening”

Cynthia C. Snow

Shelburne, Massachusetts

for her poem “To Maria, the Naturalist/From Esther, the Arawak Servant”

Chelsea Wagenaar

Valparaiso, Indiana

for her poem “Batrachomancy”

Finalist judge for the 2017 Prize was poet Eavan Boland.

The annual Robinson Jeffers Tor House Prize for Poetry is established as a living memorial in honor of American poet Robinson Jeffers (1887-1962). The Prize is underwritten by Tor House Foundation Board member John Varady with additional support from Honorary Board member Allen Mears and Board member Lacy Buck. This year we received some 1,150 poems from 37 states and five foreign countries.

SAVE THE DATES – Friday, October 13 thru Sunday, October 15, 2017.

Don't miss the *Robinson Jeffers Fall Festival 2017*

Friday join the Sunset Celebration at Tor House

Saturday, at the Carmel Woman's Club, join a most extraordinary line-up of Jeffers scholars and enthusiasts

“Robinson Jeffers and the Anthropocene”

Defined by:

Aaron Yoshinobu – Jeffers and Deep Geology

David Ohanesian – A Phoenix among the Unicorns

James Karman – Robinson Jeffers and the Poetry of Deep Time

Dana Gioia – Robinson Jeffers and the Western Imagination

Robert Zaller – Jeffers and the Anthropocene

ShaunAnne Tangney – Why Beauty Matters: Inhumanism and Justice

Joyce Henderson – A Dramatic Reading of Jeffers

Sunday joined the free poetry walk along Carmel River State Beach

Sign-up forms will be available in the next Newsletter.

For additional information, or to get your order in early, consult the website at www.torhouse.org.

The Tor House Spring Garden Party on May 7, 2017



There was music



There was laughter



There were gourmet goodies



And the Highland Bagpipes were all right

!! DON'T MISS NEXT YEAR'S CELEBRATION !!

2017 Prize for Poetry Award Winner

The Notebook by Donald Levering

Abda, Hungary, 1944

Miklós Radnóti's poem inches along
his forbidden notebook.
He can't see his words
as he writes of his wife, Fanni,
and of a *wiser death* waiting back home.

In the dark he doesn't imagine
today's torched houses and haystacks,
but home with its plum trees and honeybees.
He almost tastes the sweet preserves
instead of the moldy potatoes.

His writing scarcely mentions the long march
on ruined feet, the beatings.
He wants us to picture him younger,
swimming in the little stream,
its ripples and jeweled dragonflies.

The poem discloses blood in the drool
of oxen hauling artillery,
but not his own crimson piss.
Miklós tells himself not to listen
to the hellish ravings of prisoners

gone insane. We must downplay
their miserable shame. He wishes instead
we would see him welcoming the dawn
that counts him *one day closer*
to sleep untroubled by fleas.

We'll linger with him on the drug of dreaming,
on the vision of his devoted Fanni.
We'll open the notebook tucked into
his exhumed body's overcoat
with his final fevered verses.

In Radnóti's work our ears won't throb
from point-blank gunshots. He left us
no lines on tumbling into a pit
with fellow captives. No poems
on seeping rain and cold

he could no longer feel.

Donald Levering's most recent book, *Coltrane's God*, published by Red Mountain Press, was Runner-Up for the New England Book Festival contest. His previous book, *The Water Leveling with Us*, placed second in the National Federation of Press Women Creative Verse Book Competition in 2015. He is a former NEA Fellow, a finalist for the 2016 Dana Awards, Runner-Up for the 2016 Ruth Stone Poetry Prize, Finalist for the 2016 New Letters Award, and First Runner-Up in the 2015 Mark Fischer Prize. He has been a Willapa Bay Artist-in-Residence, a judge for the New Mexico state finals of the Poetry Out Loud competition, and a volunteer with Earthwatch. He lives in Santa Fe with his wife, the painter and poet Jane Shoenfeld.

HONORABLE MENTION

Somewhere South of Coldwater

by Justin Hunt

for Reid

As night thickens, we slip
into lawn chairs, pour
a glass of merlot. Wichita's
dim glow reminds
us where we are, though
you and I both know
we're nowhere
but the edge of empty—
the hollow where our sons'
last steps, their self-inflicted
deaths tap and spatter.

Childless now, leaden
with legacies unbestowed,
we stumble into final
years and hereafters
we distrust, kingdom-comes
come and gone already,
nothing left
but all those miles
we still drive—dirt roads
and wind our solace,
silence our guide.

We uncork the bottle,
pour again. A breeze
sweeps August into dark
fields. The catalpa
by your ditch rustles
above a throb of crickets,
and I'm grateful
for this moment, the quiet
sense this is all
there is and ever will be.

But in the morning,
my friend, we'll steer
again to Comanche
County, somewhere
south of Coldwater—
into dust and treeless sky,
the long horizon
of what we cannot speak.

Justin Hunt grew up in rural Kansas and lives in Charlotte, NC. In 2012, he retired from a long international business career to write poetry and memoir. His work has won several awards and been published in a number of journals and anthologies, including *The Atlanta Review*, *Spoon River Poetry Review*, *Comstock Review*, *Dogwood*, *Crossroads Poetry Journal*, *Freshwater Review*, *Pooled Ink*, *Kakalak* and *What Matters*, among others. Hunt is currently writing a full-length memoir about his relationship with his father, who was born in 1897 to Kansas pioneers.

HONORABLE MENTION

Late in the Season, Widow Gardening

by Mary Pinard

First, though, to determine what must go—
fading dianthus, silvering thistle, and the end of a bee
balm bloom, the ragged crown's last glow.

Pruning, next, a taking that knows
pressure, where the blade should kiss, cleave,
to undo what was, make way for the slow, low

new growth. How does it always know
about opening there, where nothing is, despite grief
fuller than all those fragments of Sappho?

*

Fuller than all those fragments of Sappho
about opening there, where nothing is despite grief,
new growth. How does it always know

to undo what was, make way for the slow, low
pressure, where the blade should kiss, cleave?
Pruning, next, a taking that knows

balm, bloom, the ragged crown's last glow—
a fading dianthus, silvering thistle, and the end of a bee.
First, though, to determine what must go.

Mary Pinard teaches in the Arts and Humanities Division at Babson College in the Boston area. She has published poems in a variety of literary journals, and she has written critical essays on poets, including Lorine Niedecker and Alice Oswald. *Portal*, her collection of poems, was published by Salmon Press. Her poems have also been featured in collaborative performances and exhibits with Boston-area musicians, painters, and sculptors. She was born and raised in Seattle.

To Maria, the Naturalist

From Esther, the Arawak Servant

by Cynthia C. Snow

You ask me to bring you a humpbacked cricket.
I march in with a tetrico sphinx moth, a huntsman
spider, and fourteen leaf cutter ants.

You send me out again. "Humpbacked cricket,"
you say. I saunter back with a mesquite bug, a longhorn
beetle, and a South American palm weevil.

A third time, you plead, "Please, a humpbacked cricket."
The jungle, a green hoard, reaches,
gropes at the hem of my skirt.

You fail to know, humpbacked crickets favor
the bellyache bush, a bush I visited after that man,
after my belly, after my aunt made me

chew those leaves until black as tobacco, then
swallow, then more, again, until doubled over squat
by that ditch, it was done.

Cynthia Snow's writing has appeared in the *Massachusetts Review*, *Peace Review*, *Crannóg*, and elsewhere. She has been a writing fellow at Cill Rialaig, Ireland, a Platte Clove Artist in Residence, and the recipient of a Vermont Studio Center Writing Residency. Her poetry has been nominated for a Pushcart. Cindy holds an MFA in Poetry from Drew University, where her poetry focused on the 17th Century naturalist and botanical artist, Maria Sibylla Merian. Slate Roof Press recently published her chapbook, *Small Ceremonies*. Cindy works at Greenfield Community College and lives in Shelburne Falls, MA, with her family.

HONORABLE MENTION

Batrachomancy

--divination by frogs

by Chelsea Wagenaar

Somewhere they leap on soft wet banks,
crouch in clear waters, their mottled skin
as dew brilliant as the spiderwebs were the spring
my father saved them. They don't know how
they were spared, of course, the wrist-thin skin
of their throats pale and pulsing to sound out
the hours, each other. Perhaps only a few
still survive that spring twelve years ago,
when their mother trekked up from the wooded stream
that bordered our yard and emptied her belly
in our swimming pool—nebulous cluster
of milky globules suspended there, each an eye
with its black, pinpricked center. There,
to our spellbound disgust, they hatched—
the pool a frantic bevy of heads and tails,
the luck or curse that placed them there.
If I follow them back through their afterlives,
bellowing and skin-darkened to herald
a coming rain, voluble with warning
when storms approached, some lost,
perhaps tweezed apart in junior high labs,
or caught again by my father, cupped too tightly
in the hands of his new daughter—if I follow them
back through their chorused, forested lives,
I can trace them up the garden hose
that poured them in synchronized frenzy
into their rightful waters, the hose
a sinuous lifeline climbing the yard to our pool,
where its other end siphoned the tadpoles
from a water thrilled with their darting chaos.
Look harder, farther: I see my father
by the stream, kneeling in damp clay,
his lungs full, his mouth around the hose
inhaling a deep, slow gasp, then another,
until the summoned water met his mouth.
The bodies pouring out into the life
they had not known to imagine.
And his watching them arrowed away
in the current like undoused green flames.
And the bitter, secret taste on his tongue.

Chelsea Wagenaar is the author of *Mercy Spurs the Bone*, winner of the 2013 Philip Levine Prize. She holds a PhD from the University of North Texas, and she is currently a postdoctoral Lilly Fellow at Valparaiso University. Her poems appear recently or are forthcoming in *The Southern Review*, *32 Poems*, *The Normal School*, and *Poetry Northwest*.

Please note: Reader input is always welcome. For publication consideration, please address Jeffers-related submissions of poetry, criticism, and commentary to the “Newsletter Editor.” Because of space limitations in this issue, contributor and membership acknowledgements will appear in the Fall 2017 issue of the Newsletter (available in late August 2017).

The Tor House Newsletter is available on our website as well as in hard copy. If you would prefer to receive the Newsletter only in electronic form, please e-mail your preference to the Newsletter editor at fdv528@comcast.net. We will then notify you as soon as any future issue is available on the web.

RESERVE THE DATE!

As a careful reader might have noticed, the 2017 Fall Festival will take place during the weekend of October 13-15. The subject of the presentations will be “Robinson Jeffers and the Anthropocene.” Along with your editor you might have been out of touch with the latest terminology in Geological Science. According to the website “Free Dictionary,” **Anthropocene**, a term coined by Dutch chemist Paul Crutzen in 1933, is defined as “the present geological epoch (from the time of the Industrial Revolution onwards), during which humanity has begun to have a significant impact on the environment,” or, in an alternate definition, “The period of time during which human activities are thought to have had a significant impact on the global environment, regarded as having begun sometime between eight thousand years ago with the spread of agriculture and two hundred years ago with the advent of industrialization. The Anthropocene has been proposed as a new epoch of geologic time, following the Holocene.” Note: According to *Wikipedia* the term, as of 2016, had not yet been officially approved as a recognized subdivision of **geological time** by those organizations that deal with such matters.

Are you thoroughly confused? The Fall Festival will mostly deal with man-made environmental change. You will be enlightened, inspired, and excited. As in most things, you’ll discover that Jeffers was there, long before 2016 or even 1933. Sign-up details can be found on the web or in the next issue of your Newsletter.

The Tor House website has changed. The Board of Trustees, and the greater Tor House Community, want to thank Alice Englander for her remarkable service as Tor House Webmaster. For 12 years, on a volunteer basis, she brought her professional experience and expertise to crafting and maintaining the Tor House website. We are, indeed, grateful for her creative and loyal service.

If you haven’t already, check out the new Tor House website at the same old address, www.torhouse.org. You’ll be impressed and, we hope, delighted. Your feedback would be greatly appreciated.

The Last Word from Jeffers

"The polar ice-caps are melting"

The polar ice-caps are melting, the mountain glaciers
Drip into rivers; all feed the ocean;
Tides ebb and flow, but every year a little bit higher.
They will drown New York, they will drown London.
And this place, where I have planted trees and built a stone house,
Will be under sea. The poor trees will perish,
And little fish will flicker in and out the windows. I built it well,
Thick walls and Portland cement and gray granite,
The tower at least will hold against the sea's buffeting, it will become
Geological, fossil and permanent.
What a pleasure it is to mix one's mind with geological
Time, or with astronomical relax it.
There is nothing like astronomy to pull the stuff out of man,
His stupid dreams and red-rooster importance: let him count the star-swirls.

first published as “Star Swirls” in *The Beginning and the End* (1963) [Hunt IV, 476]



**Robinson Jeffers
Tor House Foundation**
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Or join on-line at www.torhouse.org

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

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