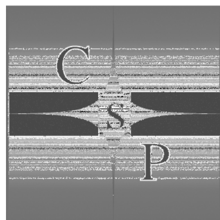
a Wilderness of Signs

a Wilderness of Signs
Ethics, Beauty, & Environment after Postmodernism

Edited by

Joe Jordan



CAMBRIDGE SCHOLARS PUBLISHING

a Wilderness of Signs: Ethics, Beauty, & Environment after Postmodernism, edited by Joe Jordan

This book first published 2006 by

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

15 Angerton Gardens, Newcastle, NE5 2JA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2006 by Joe Jordan and contributors

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.
ISBN 1-84718-032-9; ISBN 13: 9781847180322

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements vii

Foreword

Joe Jordan ix

I. The Literary Landscape: Surveying the Eco/critical Margins

Robinson Jeffers's "The Purse-Seine": Poetic Ecology

Kara Fontenot 3

Environmental Awakening: A Critique of Western Discourse and Ideology in Richard Nelson's *The Island Within*

Fay Beebee 13

Alaska, "Outside" Value

Danielle DiNovelli-Lang 29

Environmental Valuation in the "Owned" West: A Question of Stewardship

Denice Turner 43

Misplaced Places: Re-reading the Literary Landscapes of Regionalism

Andrea Sant Hartig 63

Into Thick Air: Metaphors that Matter

Katherine Ericson 85

II. The Language of Literature: Reclamations at the Dusk of Postmodernism

Chasing the Glimmer: Technology and the Sublime

Jana Ozturgut 97

The Silence of Trees: Environmental Agency and the Politics of Power in J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Simarillion*

Ike Reeder 107

Articulating Community: Speaking and Silence in George Oppen's "Of Being Numerous"

Paul A. Jaussen 117

Constellations of Origin: Jan Zwicky and Representation in Lyric Nature Poetry

Norah Bowman 133

Negotiating Identity: Forging a "Self" out of the Internal and External Identities of Joe Christmas in Faulkner's *Light in August*

Andrew Michael Garbe 145

"Experience is all we have": Post-Positivist Realist Ethics in Terry Tempest Williams' *Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place*

Jill E. Gatlin 173

Contributors 189

Index 193

Acknowledgements

Special thanks go to Dr. C. Jan Swearingen, Dr. Scott Slovic, Nancy Lord, Chancellor Elaine Maimon, Rachel Epstein, Dr. Kate O'Dell, Dr. Suzanne Forster, Dr. Genie Babb, Dr. Jackie Cason, Dr. Jeff White, Dr. Kenneth Price, Dr. Judith Moore, Dr. Toby Widdicombe, Dr. Patty Linton, Dr. Trish Jenkins, Gabrielle Raffuse, Dr. Kerri Morris, Dr. Charles Beirnard, Dr. Robert Crosman, Dr. Phyllis Fast, Liisa Morrison, Kristina Keays-Gant Rhoda Brown, Chris Mattingley, Kathleen Shepro, Brock Kremer, Liz Bradfield, Miki Howald, Jonathan Bower, Harry B. Dodge III, Brigid Dodge, Trygve Sandvik, Marybeth Holleman, Christine Byl, Lynette Peplow, Dr. Libby Roderick, Dr. Terri Pauls, Trig Trigiano, Calvin Sweeney, Carrie Millick, Susan Harper, Lois Hall, Terry Muehlenbach, Robin Crittenden, Fairfield Inn & Suites, Jenny McMahan, the Anchorage Convention and Visitors Bureau, the Alpha Epsilon Nu chapter of Sigma Tau Delta, UAA Copy Center, UAA Club Council, UAA Department of English, the Alaska Humanities Forum, the National Endowment for the Arts, and Dorin and Argentina Parasca.

Thanks also to Dr. Dan Kline, whose pointed feedback helped me to avoid the pitfalls of "fightin' words".

Special thanks also to Kara Fontenot, Katherine Ericson, Andrea Sant Hartig, Keita Hatooka, Jana Ozturgut, Dr. Lee Rozelle, Fay Beebee, Eric Heyne, Dr. Charles E. Licka, Paul A. Jaussen, Matt Fox, John Garcia, Daniel Peterman, Michael Stubbs, Denice Turner, Danielle DiNovelli-Lang, Jill E. Gatlin, Carrie Setian, Andy Garbe, Douglass Bourne, Meg Cooke, Phil Mullins, Emily Triplett, John Rogers, Krista Bot, Ike Reeder, Norah Bowman, and Sean Ryan, without whom this conference would not have succeeded.

Very special thanks to Chris Gunderson and Jessica Ramsey Golden, whose untiring commitment and enthusiasm made this project possible.

Very *very* special thanks go to Wendy Withrow and Paula Feldhacker, whose assistance—and patience—has proven invaluable.

Finally, a personal "thank you" to my husband, David Wagner, without whom I would long since have abandoned both sanity and intelligibility.

Foreword

Joe Jordan

In the words of Satya Mohanty, postmodernism

> may be defined most basically as the idea that all those epistemological norms which were so dear to the Enlightenment—rationality, objectivity, and truth—are no more than social conventions, historically variable and hence without claim to universality

and that "all knowledge is seen as tied to the necessary miscognition of human subjects caught in a network of forces they cannot evade or comprehend".[1] If it was not clear from earlier bodies of criticism—say, from Marxist analyses, psychoanalytic theories, or post-structuralist techniques—the lessons of postmodernism have taught us to consider ourselves as inscribed by a network of signification, that our perceptions of "reality" are mediated without exception, and that "objective" knowledge claims must be viewed ultimately as bogus. But postmodernism—and even this umbrella term is wrought with incongruities—has proven evasive on elements integral to the condition(s) of being human: ethics, beauty, value, and judgment. Inasmuch as postmodernism so often relies upon post-structuralist insights about the inherent instability of language, postmodernist cues provide myriad avenues to doubt the premises upon which any of these concepts might be built.

Signifying practice inescapably defines the human world, but postmodernism leaves its own uncertainty over aspects that lie—at least in part—outside human signification. Of chief concern is the environment and the natural world. Here we find a dangerous conundrum: while the natural world around us has an existence independent of its human conceptions, these conceptions hold grave consequences for human disposition toward the natural world—perhaps its very existence as such. We could argue, as some postmodernists do, that any part of nature that might be called "real" (the part beyond our representations) is permanently inaccessible. For "nature"—in our conception, anyway—inhabits that curious niche between our systems, between use-value and exchange-value, where its value *to humans* is too often its only value; and, like all other commodities, can be traded and sold based on market forecasts, and our means of measuring its intrinsic worth is

gone. Even before it assumed a name, “ecocriticism” as a set of diverse but affiliated ideas had blossomed from its roots in pastorals and nature writing; and with respect to the epistemological and theoretical underpinnings of postmodernism, ecocriticism is apt to challenge the “epistemological hypochondria”[2] that has dominated the academy for more than 20 years.

The 10th Annual Pacific Rim Conference on Literature & Rhetoric invited critical attention to issues of ethics, aesthetics, and the environment beyond the shadow of doubt cast by postmodernism. Scholars from across Alaska, the United States, and Canada—most of whom still finishing their graduate programs—came to Anchorage intent on sharing their own interpretations of our global condition(s).

This collection is comprised of two parts. Part I, titled “The Literary Landscape: Surveying the Eco/critical Margins,” focuses primarily on critiques of the signified; that is, the authors use the lens of Literature to interrogate humanity’s engagement with the “real” world: our environment. Kara Fontenot frames Robinson Jeffers’ poem “The Purse-Seine” as a moral struggle between humans and the environment, a prescient warning of the fate awaiting mankind. Fay Beebee and Danielle DiNovelli-Lang situate their critiques in Alaska, arguing that the fundamentally Western disposition that assigns “value” only in economic terms inhibits long-term sustainability at the expense of our shared environment. Value is also taken up by Denice Turner, who observes the sharp divide between human attitudes of ownership and stewardship of a place. “Place” also drives Andrea Sant Hartig’s critique; she argues how geography can enable marginalized groups to challenge the political and social discourses that constrain them. Finally, Katherine Ericson demonstrates how metaphors evince a character of the environment that transcends language constructions to foster “real” human respect.

The authors in Part II, “The Language of Literature: Reclamations at the Dusk of Postmodernism,” examine the signifiers themselves to advance criticism beyond the postmodern frontier. Jana Ozturgut argues for an experience of the sublime through the medium of technology, while Ike Reeder locates an environmental agency in the ostensible “fantasy” of Tolkien. Paul A. Jaussen demonstrates how speech and silence are the precursors for community, for only there can they coexist. But language may also engage the Other ethically, according to Norah Bowman, without resorting to a possession of the other, nature especially. Andrew Michael Garbe explores how the post-positivist realist perspective is brought to bear on the subject in a defense of the epistemology of identity. Finally, Jill E. Gatlin argues for post-positivist realism as an avenue for ethical connection

to non-human world, arguing that subjective experiences can form an epistemological basis for objectivity and reliable knowledge.

It's too early to tell if the horizon breaks with the next critical turn, but there are signs that the dominance of a "strictly postmodern" thought may be on the wane. At the dusk of postmodernism, now is the time to visit careful attention upon these issues critical not only for humanity, but for the non-human world as well.

Notes

[1] Satya Mohanty, *Literary Theory and the Claims of History: Postmodernism, Objectivity, Multicultural Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1997), 11.

[2] Marshall Sahlins, qtd. in George Levine, "Saving Disinterest: Aesthetics, Contingency, and Mixed Conditions", *New Literary History* 32, no. 4 (2001): 907-931.

I. The Literary Landscape: Surveying the Eco/critical Margins

Robinson Jeffers's "The Purse-Seine": Poetic Ecology

Kara Fontenot

As environmental literature and ecocriticism have become current topics of interest in the literary community, we once again expand the canon, looking at old ideas in new ways and resurrecting writers whose contributions were underappreciated until their work was viewed in the context of our recent times. Robinson Jeffers is one of those ghosts who have come back to inspire us as we study and teach literature that reflects on ecology and the environment. Jeffers was a prolific American poet who wrote from early in the twentieth century until his death in 1962, a poet who wrote poetry because he fell in love, in love with nature. In his biography of the poet, Robert Brophy describes Jeffers's love affair with nature and the poet's criticism of humanity's relationship with it:

> He has "fallen in love outward," swept away by the beauty of the universe, which he sees as divine. This is one side of his poetics, a psalmist for his pantheistic god; the other side is critic of this time, a relentless voice, pronouncing doom to mankind's egocentric hopes, a prophet like Isaiah, demanding holiness and wholeness, and renunciation of false gods.[1]

Jeffers's apocalyptic visions and proclamation of the philosophy of Inhumanism—subordination of the interests of human beings to those of non-human nature—made his ideas revolutionary and controversial during his own lifetime. Mercedes Monjian notes, "The poet's lavish regard for nature and his undercutting of man, together, work to produce the basic principles on which his philosophy is founded".[2] Many of Jeffers's contemporaries in the literary community of the 1920s and 1930s held a very poor opinion of his work, including Yvor Winters, who claimed Jeffers's writing was completely devoid of value, yet the vitriolic comments by his critics were deterred by the praise of powerful reviewers, such as Mark Van Doren, who asserted that Jeffers's work was the craft of a "genius".[3]

Jeffers was largely ignored from the 1940s until the later part of the twentieth century. However, as the literary community increasingly explores environmental and ecological themes, his work is read and studied once

more. In his biography of Jeffers, Brophy discusses the relevance of Jeffers's ideas to today's ecological crises:

> His "inhumanism" is no longer a synonym for misanthropy but a newfound and wonderfully apt word. Through it the ecologist goes beyond a progressive but still selfish sense of mere stewardship toward an awed realization that mankind is only one species among myriad others which have purposes of their own, not human-related, and are a part of, as Jeffers would say, "one organism." To a world where wilderness is fast being clear-cut, invaded by off-the-road vehicles, and is more stringently asphalt-ringed, his awe for total Otherness, as in his lyric "The Place for No Story," finds healing resonance. His incessant warnings of a population overwhelming the biosphere are no longer rantings. And his verse, stark, uncompromising, terse, incisive is eminently accessible and memorable. Jeffers seems, as it were, born out of his time. He may prove to be the prophet/seer/pathfinder for the twenty-first Century.[4]

Despite Jeffers's assertions that humanity is insignificant in the context of nature, his powerful, rhetorical style demonstrates a conscious effort to cultivate ecological awareness in his reader and a concern for the fate of humanity. This essay's project is to examine Jeffers's powerful application of rhetoric to ecological themes in a close reading of "The Purse-Seine", a poem that reflects on the symbiotic relationship between nature and humanity and emphasizes humanity's increasing alienation from the source of life.[5] The clarity and logic inherent in the poem's four-stanza form, the steady flow of the lengthy lines, and Jeffers's approachable language lend a sense of stability and credibility to the troubled, unnerving and prescient message that describes the horror of the fate that humanity is creating for itself.

The poem's title invokes the powerful metaphor that Jeffers manipulates to reveal his vision of humanity's impending doom. The purse-seine is a type of fishing net that is used in fishing operations conducted off the coast of California, the setting for most of Jeffers's poetry. The purse-seine fishing net is drawn around a school of fish by two boats; the bottom of the net is then closed to trap the fish within a purse-like pouch. These actions of drawing the net around the school of fish and closing the bottom of the "purse" are completed in darkness because the phosphorescence given off by the phytoplankton upon which the fish feed can be used to ascertain the location of the school of fish. However, once the fish have been trapped within the purse-seine, the fishermen turn on lights and harvest the enmeshed fish. Jeffers compares the unsuspecting fish—feeding in the darkness, unaware of

the net until it is too late to escape—to apathetic humanity, unaware of the impending danger of environmental disaster.

The poem begins with two stanzas of the speaker's description of purse-seining operations conducted along the California coast. The speaker uses the imagery of nature's beauty, emphasizing visual appeal: the shoals of fish are described as "lakes of milk-color light on the sea's night-purple". However, the image of the fishing net encapsulating the shining fish immediately introduces a conflict that draws the reader into the drama by contrasting "how beautiful the scene is" with the observation that it is simultaneously "a little terrible". The powerful parallel to the image of the shining fish struggling in the net appears in the third stanza, where the speaker describes a splendid night-time mountain-top view of the lights of a large city. The speaker repeats the adjectives "beautiful" and "terrible" in the description of this second scene: "I cannot tell you how beautiful the city appeared, and a little terrible". Jeffers juxtaposes the fate of the city residents with that of the netted fish as the speaker reflects: ". . . how could I help but recall the seine-net / Gathering the luminous fish?" Brophy describes this conflict as characteristic of Jeffers's imagery throughout his work, stating, "Jeffers' image motifs tend to emphasize a violence to be resolved"[6]. In this poem, the conflict between the beauty and terror of each scene and the power of the two parallel images make this metaphor the poem's keystone; the violent contrasts create an awareness that humanity may be in grave danger of losing something precious.

Robert Zaller discusses Jeffers's didactic use of the net as a visual image to illustrate humanity's ecological dilemma:

> The tightening web of community created isolation within dependence, enlarging the sense of self while destroying the scope of free activity, as narcissism and anomie reinforced each other in a self-perpetuating cycle.[7]

This use of the fishing net as a didactic symbol is echoed in another Jeffers poem, "The Tower Beyond Tragedy", when Orestes describes his vision of the downfall of people who search for fulfillment in humanity:

> . . . each one of the lost people
> Sought the eyes of another that another should praise him; sought never his own but another's; the net of desire
> Had every nerve drawn to the center, so that they writhed like a full draught of fishes, all matted
> In the one mesh . . .[8]

The fishing net as an image of entrapment and irreversible fate is a very appropriate metaphor for illustrating Jeffers's apprehensions about the fate of humanity.

The final stanza of "The Purse-Seine" shifts from the narrative introspection of the first three stanzas to an outward, dialogic focus that invites the reader's response to the alarming content and tone of the first three stanzas. First, Jeffers brings the reader's attention to the deficiencies of the current state of the relationship between the human and nonhuman elements of nature when he attributes the state of disaster to "Progress" with a capital "P", indicting societies that rely heavily on mechanization and industrialization, subverting the definition of "progress" and questioning what humanity is "progressing" toward.

The speaker asks, "Do you marvel that the verse is troubled or frowning, while it keeps its reason?" and continues by observing that humanity's impending doom should be no surprise because "one always knew that cultures decay, and life's end is death". Ironically, the speaker who advises matter-of-fact acceptance of death is obviously deeply troubled about the ecological situation. This concern is evidenced by the tone of despair in the third and fourth stanzas as the speaker describes the impending apocalypse:

> . . . The inevitable mass-disasters
> Will not come in our time nor in our children's, but we and our children
> Must watch the net draw narrower, government take all powers, —or revolution, and the new government
> Take more than all, add to kept bodies kept souls,—or anarchy, the mass-disasters.

This horrendous vision, which is presented in the third stanza, provides the catalyst for an emotional response from the reader, which the poem manipulates in the fourth stanza.

The fourth stanza's reflection on the reader's reaction to the speaker's catastrophic revelation serves to designate every reader a participant in the ecological dialogue, abolishing apathy by eliciting some response, whether the reader's reaction is fear, disbelief, sorrow or anger. Jeffers's attempt to capture his audience is reflected in the way he shifts to the second-person point of view, addressing a "you" that is the reader, asking, "Do you marvel that our verse is troubled or frowning, while it keeps its reason?" Tim Hunt observes that although Jeffers was criticized for his use of rhetoric by

modernist contemporaries, the poet was able to effectively establish a relationship between speaker and reader:

> While we need to acknowledge the value of the modernist campaign against rhetoric and the stylistic possibilities the modernists pioneered, we also need to recognize that the modernist experiment, the tactics for minimizing or even eliminating rhetoric, can lead to an atrophied sense of discourse and an atrophied sense of the poem as an actual exchange with the reader.[9]

This effort to connect with the reader reveals a concern for humanity that contradicts Jeffers's Inhumanist philosophy, which dismisses humanity as insignificant.

In addition to his use of direct address, Jeffers subtly engages the reader by manipulating the concrete concept of place as a springboard for discussion of abstract and universal ideas. Jeffers is rightfully known as a California poet since the setting for most of his poetry is the rugged California coastal area that overlooks the Pacific Ocean. "The Purse-Seine" is no exception. Jeffers implies that the speaker is Californian by referring to "Our sardine fishermen" in the first line of the poem and establishing the speaker's familiarity with the locations in which regional fishing industries are conducted, specifically naming Monterey, Santa Cruz, New Year's Point and Pigeon Point. However, once Jeffers has established a sense of place, the context of his message clearly transcends local concerns and focuses on the universal theme of human survival, beginning in the third stanza when the emphasis shifts from the activities of California fishermen to the mountaintop view of a large city. By departing from a recognizable time and place and shifting to a universal idea, Jeffers moves from the specific to the general, leaving no reader exempt from the implications of his message. In the fourth stanza, Jeffers returns to the specific from the general discussion of ecological crises, this time abandoning the emphasis on place to interrogate the reader about his or her personal response to the poem.

Jeffers's ability to shift perspectives, transporting the reader along with his speaker, is a significant part of what makes this poem so powerful. The speaker in Jeffers's poem initially comments on the unhappy circumstances from a distant perspective, always as an observer and never as a direct participant in the drama. The speaker discusses the labors of the fishermen and plight of the sardines through the eyes of an attentive outsider who is not a member of the fishing community and observes the condemned city from the distance of a nearby mountaintop. The speaker inquires about the reader's

emotional response to the approaching disaster but does not reveal his own emotions, instead choosing a stoic response. William Pratt suggests:

> The moral for Jeffers was simply that American and Western civilization was dying from its own rapacity, and that the right action to take in the midst of such decadence is to stand apart from it, like a southern Fugitive, or like one of Robinson's citizens of Tilbury Town or one of Frost's New England farmers.[10]

Perhaps the speaker's perspective reflects the poet's need for separation from the rest of humanity to attain the objectivity required for performance of his role of poet and prophet.

This initial distancing also makes the horrifying message more palatable to the reader because, initially, the reader is allowed to join the speaker in considering the ecological quandary from a safe distance. However, Jeffers clearly recognizes that he (the poet), his poem's speaker, and the reader share humanity's fate. Thus, his relegation of the speaker to outsider status in the first two stanzas is contradicted by the consternation of the speaker's tone in the third stanza when he discusses the disintegration of the human condition. By making the speaker and the reader initially witnesses to and only later part of the disaster that is described, Jeffers gradually invokes a sense of personal involvement in his reader, a sense of involvement which may incite changes in the reader's perspective on the relationship between humanity and nature.

Despite the speaker's obvious concern for humanity's fate, Jeffers is very successful at depicting the indifference of inhuman nature toward humanity's existence. In the second stanza, he suggests that nature is not only uncaring but also aware of the destruction taking place when the speaker describes how "the great sea lions come up to watch" helpless fish being hauled in with the net. Peter Quigley compares Jeffers's characterization of nature to that of Herman Melville in *Moby Dick* because both poets portray nature as uncaring and anti-humanist:

> . . . its self-shattering dissonance, its impossible size and grandeur, its indifference, its bizarre energies, its whiteness, and from the perspective of human need, its nothingness.[11]

The detached self-awareness of nature is echoed in other Jeffers poems, such as "The Eye", in which he describes "the staring unsleeping Eye of the earth"[12] and "The Place for No Story", where he describes the earth's "self-watchful passion".[13] The presentation of this eerie concept and imagery is yet

another effective technique for simultaneously fascinating and repelling the reader by creating unsettling ideas about ecological realities that are impossible to ignore.

Jeffers's reiteration of the theme of an impending doom, which is triggered by humanity's narcissist inward focus and lack of connectedness to the earth, appears again in the speaker's recitation of man's transgressions. He uses parallel structure and the repetition of verb clauses introduced with "we have . . . we have . . . we have" to emphasize his point that humanity's self-imposed separation from "the strong earth" results in "each person in himself helpless", like the individual fish trapped in the purse-seine net. Steven Chapman comments on Jeffers' concern with this relationship between humanity and nature: "Jeffers began to realize that humanity was becoming a macrophase power, capable of destroying the basic life-sustaining systems of the planet".[14] It is impossible to ignore Jeffers's tone of dismay at the tenuousness of human lives teetering on the brink of destruction.

Clearly, Jeffers believed that twentieth-century behaviors and ways of thinking would lead to the end of the human race. Jeffers's poetic examination forces readers who "hardly feel the cords drawing" into an awareness that they must change their worldview or pay the price in human sacrifice. Jeffers wrote this poem as a prophet who believed that his voice would probably not be heard in time to redeem the people, but whose humanity renders him unable to remain silent. Despite his philosophy of Inhumanism, the overall tone of the poem is one of apprehension and concern about the fate of the human race. This sentiment is also reflected in Jeffers's later works, such as "De Rerum Virtute", when Jeffers expresses his hope that "something perhaps may come of him [mankind]" and acknowledges that "man too is beautiful".[15] Chapman notes that despite his often pessimistic tone, Jeffers is not without some optimism in his attempt to develop humanity's awareness of the importance of a symbiotic relationship with nature:

> The answer(s), which Jeffers seems to be edging his way toward, is that human beings need to break out of their anthropocentric autism and reinvent themselves at the species level as part of the larger biotic community.[16]

Jeffers is ultimately unable to maintain the indifference appropriate to a true Inhumanist in "The Purse Seine". This poem's successful rhetorical strategies aid the reader in transcending an anthropocentric perspective on life

in order to achieve a worldview that includes the concerns of the environment. Beers discusses the message of ecological awareness contained within Jeffers's rhetorical poetry:

> Jeffers's poetry brims with another kind of desire, too, a desire to teach, to convince, to move an audience to accept that kind of perspective that Jeffers himself regards as healthy, as adult: the point of view that human beings, whose acts are indeed ephemeral from the cosmic perspective of infinite space and time, may yet "shine through their endurance, through their acts of courage, and through their loyalty to and appreciation for the natural world."[17]

Notes

[1] Robert Brophy, "Robinson Jeffers: Poet for the New Century", *Jeffers Studies*, ed. George Hart, 2005, California State University, Long Beach, 25 Feb 2005 http://www.jeffers.org

[2] Mercedes Cunningham Monjian, *Robinson Jeffers: A Study in Inhumanism* (Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 1958), 1.

[3] Terry Beers, *". . . a thousand graceful subtleties" Rhetoric in the Poetry of Robinson Jeffers* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995), 2.

[4] Brophy, "Poet for the New Century".

[5] Robinson Jeffers, "The Purse-Seine", *The Collected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers,* ed. Tim Hunt, vol. 2 (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1989), 517.

[6] Robert Brophy, *Robinson Jeffers: Myth, Ritual, and Symbol in His Narrative Poems* (Cleveland: Case Western Reserve UP, 1973), 301.

[7] Robert Zaller, *The Cliffs of Solitude: A Reading of Robinson Jeffers* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1983), 207.

[8] Robinson Jeffers, "The Tower Beyond Tragedy*", The Collected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers,* ed. Tim Hunt, vol. 1 (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1989), 176.

[9] Tim Hunt, "The Work of the Edition: Some Possible Lessons and Directions", *Jeffers Studies* 6.4 (2002 Fall): 36-45.

[10] William Pratt, *Singing the Chaos: Madness and Wisdom in Modern Poetry* (Columbia: U of Missouri P, 1996), 125.

[11] Peter Quigley, "Carrying The Weight: Jeffers's Role in Preparing the Way for Ecocriticism", *Jeffers Studies* 6.4 (2002 Fall): 58.

[12] Robinson Jeffers, "The Eye", *The Collected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers*, ed. Tim Hunt, vol. 3 (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1989), 123.

[13] Robinson Jeffers, "The Place for No Story", *The Collected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers,* ed. Tim Hunt, vol. 2 (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1989), 157.

[14] Steven Chapman, "'De Rerum Virtute': A Critical Anatomy", *Jeffers Studies* 6.4 (2002 Fall): 29.

[15] Robinson Jeffers, "De Rerum Virtute", *The Collected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers*, ed. Tim Hunt, vol. 3 (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1989), 402.

[16] Chapman 30.

[17] Beers xii.

Bibliography

Beers, Terry. *". . . a thousand graceful subtleties" Rhetoric in the Poetry of Robinson Jeffers*. New York: Peter Lang, 1995.

Brophy, Robert. *Robinson Jeffers: Myth, Ritual, and Symbol in His Narrative Poems.* Cleveland: Case Western Reserve UP, 1973.

—. “Robinson Jeffers: Poet for the New Century”. In *Jeffers Studies*, edited by George Hart. Long Beach, CA: California State UP, 2005. 25 Feb 2005 http://www.jeffers.org

Chapman, Steven. “‘De Rerum Virtute’: A Critical Anatomy”. *Jeffers Studies* 6, no. 4 (2002 Fall).

Hunt, Tim, ed. *The Collected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers.* Vol. 3. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1989.

—. “The Work of the Edition: Some Possible Lessons and Directions”. *Jeffers Studies* 6, no. 4 (2002 Fall).

Jeffers, Robinson. “De Rerum Virtute”. In Hunt, *Collected* 402.

—. “The Eye”. In Hunt, *Collected* 123.

—. “The Place for No Story”. In Hunt, *Collected* 157.

—. “The Purse-Seine”. In Hunt, *Collected* 517.

—. “The Tower Beyond Tragedy”. In Hunt, *Collected* 176.

Monjian, Mercedes Cunningham. *Robinson Jeffers: A Study in Inhumanism.* Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 1958.

Pratt, William. *Singing the Chaos: Madness and Wisdom in Modern Poetry.* Columbia: U of Missouri P, 1996.

Quigley, Peter. “Carrying The Weight: Jeffers’s Role in Preparing the Way for Ecocriticism”. *Jeffers Studies* 6, no. 4 (2002 Fall).

Zaller, Robert. *The Cliffs of Solitude: A Reading of Robinson Jeffers.* Cambridge, MA: Cambridge UP, 1983.

Environmental Awakening: A Critique of Western Discourse and Ideology in Richard Nelson's *The Island Within*

Fay Beebee

> The perspective and philosophies of indigenous peoples—our [native] traditional rules and laws—would never allow this stripping of recourses from our traditional homelands on this planet at the net cost to future generations and to life itself. The very thinking of the indigenous peoples runs counter to the course of rampant, unsustainable development…. The global environment crisis has more than adequately demonstrated that business as usual will not and cannot ensure global survival. What is needed is a fundamental shift in consciousness.
>
> —Ruby Dunstan, "Communicating a Sense of the Sacred"[1]

This epigraph is part of the speech presented by Ruby Dunstan, the former administrative chief of the Lytton Indian Band from British Columbia, at the Globe 90 Conference on Business and the Environment in Vancouver, March 1990. These few words of wisdom subvert the very fabric of Western society, including the belief and value systems that Western people continue to live by. Likewise, Richard Nelson's *The Island Within* is not merely a portrayal of Nelson's competence and prowess as a hunter; instead Nelson, like Dunstan, makes a direct challenge to Western discourse and ideologies through his juxtaposition of Koyukon teachings and Western environmental exploitation. For example, in *The Island Within*, Nelson portrays how timber and fish are regarded as commodities and only valued in economic terms. We currently live in a world of depleted natural resources, yet Nelson reveals how long-term environmental anxieties have little or no importance in a capitalist mindset. In illustrating the pitfalls of technological advancement Nelson reveals how vast areas of woodland are being mechanically logged, leaving behind virtual holocaust habitats. Similarly, within the fishing industry Nelson demonstrates how certain types of science create precision hunting vessels that are actually harming the environment rather than helping in the recovery of the fragile ecosystems. Sometimes, Richard Nelson seeks to provide alternatives to Western views, while on other occasions he is primarily critiquing the Western discourse directly. However, for Nelson both

methods exemplify how people in today's society, as Dunstan articulates, need a "fundamental shift in consciousness" toward appreciating the natural world.

The capitalist mentality is embedded in Western cultural ideologies. For Nelson, it is this belief system that influences how individuals in society value the natural world. Nelson articulates how he has been born "into a culture which keeps the worlds of humanity and nature apart".[2] He understands how he has been raised in a society that views natural resources as commodities for consumption. It is these Western discourses and ideologies that have closed the hearts and minds of individuals, preventing humanity from experiencing a personal relationship with the natural world: "I've been only half conscious, half alive. Though my eyes have seen the beauty around me, I've felt blind inside".[3] This imagery illustrates how Nelson as an individual has been born and raised in Western discourse, in Madison, Wisconsin, with a worldview that has previously only enabled him to achieve an aesthetic appreciation of nature, being only "half conscious" of the natural would around him.

Andrew McLaughlin's chapter titled "Nature as Privately Owned: Capitalism", from his book *Regarding Nature: Industrialism and Deep Ecology*, explores how capitalism is an economic system in which commodities are produced and distributed through competitive markets. Capitalism emerged out of European cultural and economic imperialism during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, at the onset of the industrial revolution. Over the years, this capitalist mentality has created social tensions, generating a selfish pattern of behaviour that discourages cooperation. For McLaughlin, capitalism was and still is the "engine that has propelled a truly radical transformation of humanity's relations with the rest of nature".[4] In linking "capitalism" directly with "humanity's" relationship with "nature", McLaughlin is illustrating how an individual's desire for ownership of animals, land, and profit outweighs any notion of helping to sustain balanced ecosystems.

Equally, in *The Island Within*, Nelson explores how scientific and technological innovations have reinforced capitalist values of selfishness and unsupportive behaviour towards nature. For Nelson, the logging industry excessively exploits timber as a natural resource. He describes how a clearcut valley in Alaska

> rumbled like an industrial city through a full decade of summers, as the island's living flesh was stripped away…. Within a few months, the trees that

> took four centuries to grow were transformed into newspapers … and tossed away.[5]

Graphic imagery of "living flesh" being "stripped away" from the island reveals how Nelson is outraged at the continuous, yearly attack on the forest. Yet, the poignant image of the "newspaper" being "tossed away" illustrates how timber as a commodity is only valued for a short time before being discarded. Nelson believes that Western cultural ethics are to blame for this blasé attitude towards our limited natural resources, challenging humanity's capitalist worldview when he writes "the forest is here for taking, in whatever way humanity sees fit".[6]

Nelson juxtaposes his existing Western cultural ideologies against the teachings of the Koyukon people in order to cast doubt on Western discourses and on the value system of our global community. Nelson illustrates through stories and images how hegemonic capitalist discourse and ideologies are being reinforced into society through the church. Nelson depicts how the Christian religion encourages a separation from nature by demonstrating the parallels and distinctions between Christian and Koyukon traditions. In recollecting the story of the white-crowned sparrow, Nelson explains how the Christian Bible is the equivalent to the Koyukon teachings since both recommend an ethical code of behaviour to emulate. However, Sarah Stevens, one of Nelson's Koyukon teachers, makes a direct challenge to Christian theology saying: "Christian teachings offer little guidance on how to live with the whole of creation—the plants and animals the physical earth depends on for existence".[7] By contrast, Stevens explains how her Koyukon tradition promotes a personal relationship with the natural world:

> They tell us how the world got the way it is, how we're supposed to live with everything around us…. These stories contain fundamental truths and principles that have guided Koyukon life.[8]

This juxtaposition of the two traditions illustrates how Nelson is subverting Western discourse to reveal how Christian practices and beliefs have failed to encourage and develop humanity's relationship with the natural world.

For Nelson, our ordered, structured society has an imbalanced positioning on science and technology that allows the exploitation of natural resources. Again, Nelson holds cultural discourse and ideologies responsible for the Western belief and value system, as he writes:

> There is a curious inconsistency in the things I find threatening…. Perhaps it's having grown up in a culture that regards even the most dangerous machines as friends and nurtures a comforting illusion of human control over technology.[9]

It is true that humans value their cars and all forms of motorized transport as a friendly machine while being under the "illusion" the driver is in control. But how many times is that "dangerous machine" involved in fatal accidents, and how much pollution is being pumped into the atmosphere from exhaust emissions? For the modern, Western person, the effects of environmental pollution may seem secondary when compared to arriving at the destination without exerting too much effort. This is the cultural discourse that society has encouraged and continues to communicate because we continually fuel our capitalist markets through the consumption of vehicles, gas, and a multitude of other "essential" commodities.

In *The Island Within*, Nelson subverts Western discourse to reveal how mass consumerism generates a lack of respect for the environment. When he enters the clearcut valley Nelson describes how he is astonished by the quantity of wood that has been left in the valley to decay:

> whole trees, hundreds of them in this one clearcut alone. Some flaw must have made them unusable even for pulp, but they were felled nonetheless, apparently so the others would be easier to drag out. Not a single living tree above sapling size stands in the thirty or forty acres around me.[10]

Powerful imagery of a desolated landscape, full of dead and decaying trees, reveals Nelson's outrage at this excessive, wasteful exploitation of timber. It takes him "almost an hour to cross a few hundred yards of this crippled land. I've heard no sound except my own unhappy voice since we entered the clearcut".[11] The logging machines have left behind a "crippled land", a holocaust habitat devoid of animal life. Nelson does not blame the loggers, the industry or the government for this attack on the already fragile ecosystem, but the "entire society", which he writes, "one in which I take active membership", we are all responsible "for laying this valley bare".[12]

According to Nelson, Western society's modes of discourse and ideologies are accountable for the crimes against the environment. Similar to the church, the language of the law reinforces the value and belief systems in Western society. In an article by Charles Wilkinson entitled, "Language, Law, and the Eagle Bird", from his book *The Eagle Bird: Mapping a New West*, Wilkinson explores how the "law is the place, above all others, where

our nation has chosen to lodge many of our highest ideals, our best dreams, our deepest passions".[13] However, Wilkinson explains how the language used in legal writing and laws are usually "bloodless", "flat", "lifeless", and "dull". As a result, issues relating to environmental agency and species preservation often find that lawyers remove all the "emotion, passion, love and grief out of every single sentence".[14] This illustrates how legal language eradicates the sympathy and wonders of protecting the natural world, therefore revealing how the law often fails to change existing laws to protect the environment.

In *The Island Within*, Nelson parodies legal terminology to challenge society's value system in order to illustrate how the clearcut is really a crime against the environment. He uses passionate, vigorous narrative and authoritative courtroom language to reveal how society's "ideal" should be to demonstrate "compassion" toward natural resources as opposed to wiping out entire forests. Nelson writes:

> The decaying stump is now a witness stand, where I pass judgment on myself…a profound transgression was committed here, by devastating an entire forest rather than taking from it selectively and in moderation. Yet whatever judgment I might make against those who cut it down I must also make against myself. I belong to the same nation, speak the same language, vote in the same elections, share many of the same values, avail myself to the same technology, and owe much of my existence to the same vast system of global exchange.[15]

This courtroom imagery highlights the significance of changing humanity's view towards clearcutting. The tree "stump" is no longer a commodity but a witness that will "speak out" against society's crime. Humanity's value systems are on trial and humanity has been proven guilty of the massacre. Nelson has appointed himself the judge, the jury, and also the accused. This powerful, emotional writing subverts standard legal language by placing Western discourse and ideologies on trial. By adopting the language of the law, Nelson, is questioning our right to destroy animal habitat and further endanger our fragile ecosystems.

It appears that the world's global economic system of exchange and the rhetoric of supply and demand outweigh the environmentalist's voice of reason and moderation. In order to achieve a successful market economy many organizations believe that they must acquire the necessary natural resources while operating in an efficient and effective manner that allows them to produce and sell goods and resources to consumers. Murray

Bookchin argues that capitalism is "the absolute incarnation of social evil", because of its competitiveness and egoism, since humans view the planet as "a lump of minerals".[16] Likewise, McLaughlin claims that industrialism[17] regards nonhuman nature as a "conglomerate of resources", in which "forests are thought of as so many board feet of lumber", while "lakes, rivers and oceans are viewed as fisheries or sources of water or dumps".[18] Here, the mechanics of capitalism function to shift society's values on a number of natural resources such as timber.

For example, in *The Island Within*, the forest Nelson walks through was once just a mass of trees and valued as "board feet of lumber", waiting to be felled and prized for what that timber might become, such as paper. In this case, the alternative worldview would be to appreciate the forest because it is part of multiple ecosystems that sustain a multitude of plant and animal life. Likewise, humans value the world's lakes, rivers and oceans for their content, ignorant to the ecosystems that function below the surface, instead regarding the oceans as vast vessels that contain an abundant source of food. Many humans around the world are aware that timber and fish are depleted natural resources, yet consumer demand continues to fuel the market for these products. Therefore, increased demand for natural products such as timber and fish provides the justification for companies to search out untapped resources, damaging even more ecosystems.

However, many government officials are finally accepting that the earth will be incapable of supporting continuous excessive exploitation; hence, in order to combat decades of consumption, the majority of governments around the world have passed laws to regulate and limit further harvesting of specific natural resources. There is hope that these guidelines will help develop a sustainable global economy so that businesses only take from natural resources in moderation, thus reducing the risk of destroying the ecological balance of a particular area. The fishing industry is one such business that follows government regulations on when and how much product is harvested. In *The Island Within*, Nelson portrays herring fishing as a competition where the trawlers compete for the best location on the water and the largest possible herring catch in the fastest time. Their actions are based on greed and economic wealth where profit is more important than the damage being inflicted on aquatic ecosystems by the mass harvesting of herring. Nelson explains that the fishing industry has to follow tight international regulations that are intended to safeguard already depleted fish stocks, limiting the weight of herring that may be caught in a single fishing season. But Nelson questions whether these restrictions are really enough to safeguard depleted