Chapter VII

From Homo sapiens to the Ecosphere: A Shift in Focus

The revival of interest in the poetry of Robinson Jeffers has tended to coincide with the interest in ecology and the environment in the United States in the 1960s, 70s and 80s. Jeffers has reiterated that the origins of the environmental crisis lie deep in human cultural traditions. Even when faced with threats to his very survival, man continues in the proud tradition of humanism. He has yet to realize that the time is long overdue for a redefinition of what is significant on earth. Jeffers's attempt to present a philosophical alternative to humanism has placed him in a salient position within the contemporary environmental movement. His philosophy of inhumanism can be interpreted as an alternative philosophy that enables man to mature past the puerile efforts to subdue nature and attain a state of greater awareness of and concern for the physical environment. Living in troubled times, Jeffers throws off the temptation to be preoccupied with purely personal musings, and makes the effort to think about the fate of the planet and the role man has played in its degradation. He offers in place of outworn values, a new ethic that would be less injurious to man and his environment. Jeffers chose the term 'inhumanism' for a compelling vision which projects a state of mind necessary, though not sufficient, to resolve the environmental crisis.

In the article "American Institutions and Ecological Ideals," tracing the causes of the destructive behaviour that has led to the environmental crisis, Leo Marx concludes that the "philosophic root of this dangerous behavior is an arrogant conception of man, and above all, of human consciousness, as wholly unique—as an entity distinct from, and potentially independent of, the rest of nature" (qtd. in Morris
In Crisis in Eden, Frederick Elder too stresses the dangers inherent in seeing man as separate from nature. He sees Western thinking as divided into two camps: close-up “inclusionists,” whose thinking corresponds to inhumanism, emphasize humanity’s connection to the physical world, while “exclusionists” stress humanity’s alienation and distance. Historically, the second has been dominant in the West. Contemplating the environmental crisis brought on by societal action derived from exclusionist thought, Elder puts forward the following solution: “I contend that what is needed is the substitution of minor Western traditions for what are currently the major ones” (qtd. in Morris Centennial Essays). Drawing from several sources, four basic assumptions of the dominant Western worldview are summarized by sociologists William Catton, Jr. and Riley Dunlap:

1. People are fundamentally different from all other creatures on Earth, over which they have dominion (defined as domination).
2. People are masters of their own destiny; they can choose their goals and learn to do whatever is necessary to achieve them.
3. The world is vast, and thus provides unlimited opportunities for humans.
4. The history of humanity is one of progress; for every problem there is a solution, and thus progress need never cease. (qtd. in Devall 43)

Such humanistic presumptions are in need of reassessment in the light of the present environmental crisis.

Contemporary humanism, according to Concise Oxford English Dictionary, is “a rationalistic outlook or system of thought attaching prime importance to human rather than divine or supernatural matters.” The corresponding definition provided by Webster's Third New International Dictionary is:
a doctrine, set of attitudes, or way of life centered upon human
interests or values: as a: a philosophy that rejects supernaturalism,
regards man as a natural object, and asserts the essential dignity and
worth of man and his capacity to achieve self-realization through the
use of reason and the scientific method ... b often cap: a religion
subscribing to these beliefs.

In *The Arrogance of Humanism*, David Ehrenfeld points out that the core of the
religion of humanism is "a supreme faith in human reason—its ability to confront and
solve the many problems that humans face, its ability to rearrange both the world of
Nature and the affairs of men and women so that human life will prosper" (5). In such
an optimistic scenario, divine as well as supernatural forces become redundant.
Although not always expressed, there is also a strong anti-nature element in
humanism, for it assumes that the natural world exists primarily for the benefit of
humanity.

Humanism thus combines a belief in the nobility of the human race, a supreme
confidence in human intelligence and capabilities, a blind faith in science and
technology and an overwhelming urge to tame and subdue nature. Ehrenfeld
concludes that humanism has created a dangerous dichotomy between man and
nature. Though technology's dehumanization of people and its destruction of the
natural world are often seen as a departure from humanism, these tendencies
themselves have been generated by humanism. It is humanism that has spawned the
apotheosis and worship of the machine. Though many humanists would like to feel a
closeness and kinship with Nature, based on both aesthetic appreciation and on man's
knowledge of the evolutionary places and relationships of living things, this closeness
is repeatedly thwarted by the condescension implicit in the humanistic assumptions.
Opposing the unwholesome assumptions of humanism would help to diminish the arrogant tendency that exults in man's ability to manipulate the earth, and help us to adopt a more flexible and sensible attitude at a critical juncture (21).

Criticisms of humanism are not new. Ehrenfeld takes a look at the anti-humanistic tendencies of the past. In Renaissance Italy, prior to the Reformation, the Florentine monk Girolamo Savonarola (1452-98) led the anti-humanism crusade. The anti-humanists attacked the degeneration of the Church and the State. They preached against science and against excessive numbers of books and too much learning.

Ehrenfeld points to a psychological pattern that emerges and repeats itself among the leaders of the anti-humanist movements: a deep dissatisfaction, together with elements of disgust and anger, an apparent misanthropy, and prophecies of doom. Anti-humanism "stigmatizes society, criticizes inventions that many cherish, reduces the power of humanity in our own eyes, forecasts great social upheavals and devastation, and implies that certain sacrifices and social changes might help us to avoid the consummation of some of the worst of the dooms that have been predicted" (217).

A similar reaction against the arrogant humanism and jingoism of the 20th century can be seen in the poetry of Robinson Jeffers. His inhumanism opposes the traditional idealistic philosophies and religions that have imagined mankind to be the central concern of an anthropomorphic God. In the 1930s Jeffers told a world that was moving towards war:

I wish you could find the secure value,

The all-heal I found when a former time hurt me to the heart,

The splendor of inhuman things: you would not be looking at each others' throats with your knives. (2: 516)
This “all-heal” eventually came to be called “inhumanism.” He himself describes, in the preface to *The Double Axe and Other Poems*, the burden of his work as an attempt to “present a certain philosophical attitude, which might be called Inhumanism, a shifting of emphasis and significance from man to not-man; the rejection of human solipsism and a recognition of the transhuman magnificence” (xxi).

The term “inhumanism” has generated much controversy and invited vicious criticism. The ambiguity of the term has left it open to charges of pessimism and misanthropy. The *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* defines inhuman as “1. lacking positive human qualities: cruel and barbaric. 2. Not human in nature or character.” But when Jeffers coined the “ism,” he obviously did not intend these meanings. The inner contradictions of the term have continued to trouble readers through the years. Frederic J. Carpenter, in “The Inhumanism of Robinson Jeffers,” suggests certain guidelines that would perhaps help to resolve these contradictions. Considered as a philosophical attitude, it describes an “in-” or “anti-” humanism, in opposition to the humanisms of the past. As a poetic idea, it celebrates a personal “inhumanism” which implies a new and positive meaning of “inhuman,” defined as “non-human,” or “natural” (*WAL* 16, 20).

Carpenter examines Jeffers’s idea in contrast to the “humanisms” of the past. Renaissance humanism celebrated the “humanities” of the classical past; it also created new masterpieces, which glorified man and his works. So Michelangelo’s “David” portrayed the beauty of man and his “Moses” the power. Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* described the humanistic ideal in eloquent words. “What a piece of work is a man! how noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals!” (*Hamlet* 2. 2. 306). As Jeffers exclaims
ruefully: “Michael Angelo and the Greek sculptors / How they flattered the race! 
Homer and Shakespeare— / How they flattered the race!” (3: 403). But soon 
Renaissance humanism became outworn. There was a progressive degradation of all 
the meanings of “human.” in general. In 1859 Darwin’s theory of evolution 
effectively controverted the old Biblical story of creation. Man realized that far from 
being created in god’s own image, he had evolved from the apes and had proceeded to 
become the most successful of all beasts of prey. Man tried to construct new systems 
of ethics and morality to replace the divine sanctions, which were now discredited. 
What distinguished him from the other animals was his human ability to reason and to 
direct his actions by conscious choice. Thus two new varieties of humanism 
developed in the twentieth century to replace the old. 

The first humanism was religious and sought to replace all the old religions 
with some new, all-inclusive religion of humanity. The second sought to replace the 
old humanism of the classics with a new all-inclusive idealization of the 
“humanities.” Both these new humanisms affected the early thinking of Jeffers. But 
he rejected the final authority of all religions in favour of a larger worship of nature. 
Beyond humanism lay a new religious naturalism. In its most extreme form the new 
humanism proclaimed the religion of humanity. It deified the idea of man into an 
ideal religion. But this new humanism repelled Jeffers (WAL 20-23). 

After publishing his poetic drama, “The Inhumanist” Jeffers was asked by the 
“American Humanist Association,” to define his own relation to the different types of 
humanism of the time. In his reply, he not only declared his negative attitude toward 
religious humanism, but also emphasized his primary concern with secular, or literary 
humanism and his desire to attain a perspective that would be beyond humanism:
The word Humanism refers primarily to the Renaissance interest in art and literature rather than in theological doctrine; and personally I am content to leave it there. "Naturalistic Humanism"—in the modern sense—is no doubt a better philosophical attitude than many others; but the emphasis seems wrong; "human naturalism" would seem to me more satisfactory, with but little accent on the "human." (SL 342)

Able to see man as a part of nature, Jeffers can at the same time see his insignificance. As the poet clarifies in the same letter, man's egocentric obsession must be minimized. The immense beauty of the earth and the outer universe appears to Jeffers to be a more fitting object for contemplation and worship than the human race.

In his afterword to *The Double Axe and Other Poems*, Bill Hotchkiss explains that inhumanism proposes two codes. Through the contemplation of the transhuman magnificence of natural beauty, one may uncentre one's vision and thereby achieve an essentially non-human perspective. Since the human condition absolutely implies human contacts and loyalties, human fidelities as well as participation in those drives which are inherent to the race, one must learn the lesson of stoic endurance, with its resultant possibility of moral victory. In order to free the mind for the contemplation of natural beauty and for the contemplation of divinity, which has created that beauty, it is imperative that one learn first to endure (185-86). Jeffers himself has elaborated on his concept in the preface to *The Double Axe*:

It seems time that our race began to think as an adult does, rather than like an egocentric baby or insane person. This manner of thought is neither misanthropic nor pessimist, though two or three people have said so and may again. It involves no falsehoods, and is a means of maintaining sanity in slippery times: it has objective truth and human
valor. It offers a reasonable detachment as rule of conduct, instead of love, hate and envy. It neutralizes fanaticism and wild hopes, but it provides magnificence for the religious instinct, and satisfies our need to admire greatness and rejoice in beauty. (xxi)

It is in “The Double Axe” that Jeffers makes his most explicit statement of inhumanism developed as a criticism of Western culture. The long poem is divided into two distinct parts. The first “The Love and The Hate” is a macabre fantasy in which a young soldier returns from the dead to his California farm to take revenge on those who are responsible for his death. Jeffers’s denunciation of war is a criticism of modern Western society as well as a criticism of religious and secular humanism. Hoult believes that his father who forced him to go to war with his patriotic talk about courage and honour, is responsible for his death. It is not just the tragedy of a family that Jeffers presents but a cultural tragedy. In “Beyond Humanism: Mythic Fantasy and Inhumanist Philosophy in the Long Poems of Robinson Jeffers and Gary Snyder,” Patrick Murphy writes that Jeffers “makes it very clear that while the sons may have to pay for the sins of the fathers in terms of cultural decay, warfare and environmental destruction, the fathers will not go unpunished” (American Studies 56). The major theme of the poem is a political attack on warfare conducted for political and economic gain. Larsen is the symbol of men who remain behind to reap the financial benefits of a wartime economy:

Be sorry for the decent and loyal people of America,
Caught by their own loyalty, fouled, gouged and bled
To feed the power-hunger of politicians and make trick fortunes
For swindlers and collaborators. (3: 234)
Jeffers repeatedly advocates a withdrawal from the affairs of the world. The old man in "The Inhumanist" is a recluse who worships a transhuman god and epitomizes a kind of stone tolerance and endurance, which helps him survive even as the human race seems to be on the verge of extinction. William Everson describes him in the foreword to The Double Axe as a saviour figure who constitutes some kind of model for human conduct, an intellectual and moral attitude appropriate to mankind in the dilemma of existence that now confronts it (xvii). The old man is introduced as the caretaker of the fire-raised Gore place. He lives in solitude, in harmony with nature, which has covered the scars of human violence. "the pain, the hate and the love / Have let no ghost" (3: 256).

The poem begins with a contemplation of the existence and nature of God. The old man declares the interconnectedness of the universe:

"There is not an atom in all the universes

But feels every other atom; gravitation, electromagnetism, light, heat,

and the other

Flamings, the nerves in the night's black flesh, flow them together; the

stars, the winds and the people: one energy,

One existence, one music, one organism, one life, one God: star-fire

and rock-strength, the sea's cold flow

And man's dark soul." (3: 256-57)

He is a God-seeker in a time of impending catastrophe, but he will have nothing to do with religious ideas that present anthropocentric conceptions of God and nature: "Not a tribal nor an anthropoid God. / Not a ridiculous projection of human fears, needs, dreams, justice and love-lust" (3: 257). The old man's quest is an apparent attempt to
re-establish the fundamental religious relationship between humanity and the universe that had preceded the anthropomorphism of modern Christian humanism.

The double axe is a symbol of regeneration and destruction. The old man considers the double-bladed axe:

"In Crete it was a god, and they named the labyrinth for it. That’s long before the Greeks came; the lofty Greeks were still bushmen. It was a symbol of generation: the two lobes and the stiff helve: so was the Cross before they christened it. But this one can clip heads too.

Grimly, grimly. A blade for the flesh, a blade for the spirit: and truth from lies." (3: 258)

The axe, a tool for cutting away, serves as a symbol of Jeffers’s belief that humanity matures by cutting away illusions and superficialities. With it the old man cuts away the errors and obligations of the past, and slices away pity and fear to attain a kind of philosophical acceptance and stoicism.

The old man’s attempts to stay aloof from the affairs of the world are not successful. Reminders of the senseless destruction and “endless treacheries, the cold dirty-clawed cruelty” of men can only evoke disgusted resignation. “He groaned and said heavily. ‘If it were mine to elect an animal to rule the earth/ I’d choose tiger or cobra but nothing cruel, or skunk. / But nothing foul’ ”(3: 259). He also criticizes man’s proprietary attitude towards the earth, which has led to the degradation of the environment. " ‘The human race is bound to defile, I’ve often noticed it, / Whatever they can reach or name, they’d shit on the morning star / If they could reach’ ”(3: 260).

Jeffers reiterates that the detachment he espouses from the affairs of the world is difficult to sustain. The appearance of a famished dog, of his daughter, of
trespassers, all encroach upon the inhumanist apartness of the old man. Jeffers bestows his old man with a number of seemingly misanthropic utterances, as when, in his discussion with the bespectacled man, he confirms that the human race is unnecessary on this earth. He would rather build a monument to Darwin and "to Copernicus: Nicky Kupernick: who first pushed man / Out of his insane self-importance and the world's navel, and taught him his place" (3: 274). This statement reinforces Jeffers's inhumanistic point of view. Avoiding anthropocentrism does not in any way entail avoiding men altogether. But man who overreaches his limits and disrupts the delicate balance of nature fails to understand that he is only an insignificant part. "a clown," in "the vast and rushing drama of the universe, seas, rocks, condor-winged storms, ice-fiery galaxies" (3: 274).

Jeffers portrays the decadence of the age, as he relates how the dog takes a wild mate, a coyote. "'The world reverts. / Dogs and men tire of a slow decline’" (3: 281). Jeffers here emphasizes the need to inject new life into a civilization that has lost its vitality. The old man looks at the beauty of the landscape and strengthens his resolve for endurance.

'In this pale light

All the little tricks are played out and finished. Retreat is no good,
treachery no good, goodness no good.

But still remains the endless inhuman beauty of things; even of
humanity and human history

The inhuman beauty—and there is endurance, endurance, death's
nobler cousin. Endurance.' (3: 281)

That night Seagull hears her father grinding his axe. He would grind out the
humanness in him, the incestuous introversion:
'I am sick tonight, I am human:

There is only one animal that hates himself. Truly the sweating toad
and the poison-gorged pit-viper
Are content with their natures. I'll be a stone at the bottom of the sea,
or any bush on the mountain,
But not this ghost-ridden blood and bone thing, civil war on two legs
and the stars' contempt, this walking farce,
This ape, this—denatured ape.' (3: 282)

To be human is, for Jeffers, to be lower than the most despicable animal. His effort here is to pull man down from his arrogant humanistic pedestal. The repeated reference to man as an ape goes against humanistic assumptions of superiority. The next morning, however, the old man is once more at peace, recognizing not just the beauty of the world, but also its relation to man and the other organisms: "'It bred man, and surrounds him and will reabsorb him.' " And he decides that he "'will be turned again to the outer magnificence, the all but inhuman God. / I will grind no more axes' '' (3: 283).

The old man's surrealistic vision of animals going the one way and the races of humanity the other can be symbolic of man's separation from the other diverse life forms of the earth. He will not go either with mankind into the human future or with the beasts withdrawing into the past, having relinquished their place in the world in the face of human progress. But he envisions a time of ecological harmony and equilibrium when these two alienated forms come together. He is glad when Seagull leaves him. As he tells his dog.

'We shall have less distraction now.'
Death and departure are not evil things. I tell you sadly, every person that leaves

A place. improves it: the mourners at every funeral know that

In their shamed hearts: and when the sociable races of man and dog are
done with, what a shining wonder

This world will be.’ (3: 287)

Jeffers recurrently uses the alter ego as a device to put across his philosophy.
The old man’s alter ego, the man of terrors, comes to torment him. Twice he manages
to save the life of the man of fears, knowing fully well that he has acted against reason
and instinct, for ‘ ‘One man in ten miles is more / Than the earth wants: and clearly
this man’s life is worthless, being full of fears [. . . ].’ ” The man of fears ironically
warns him against the temptation of being a saviour.

Jeffers highlights one aspect of the inhumanist stance by objectifying the
eschewal of pity and fear. He does this by means of a number of surrealistic images—
the old man severing Vere Harnish’s head from her decaying body, the man of fears
infecting the refugees with fear, the axe killing the two robbers, the old man killing
his other self. Having overcome his other self, he realizes, “ ‘No man has ever known
himself nor surpassed himself until he has killed / Half of himself’ ” (3: 301). He sets
the boat with the corpses on fire and pushes it into the sea. And as he watches his self-murdered half-self between two thieves being carried out into the sea in flames, he is
finally able to say. “ ‘Thank you, Vere Harnish’.”

Having overcome pity and terror, the old man is now able to turn outward to
the world. The old man realizes that the egocentric self strives primarily for hedonistic
gratification or for a narrow individual salvation. Spiritual growth begins only when one
tries for an identification that goes beyond the self, beyond humanity to include the
nonhuman world. The old man has to murder his ego self in order to attain a larger ecological vision that places him in a harmonious relation with the ecosphere. When self-interest is dissolved and the egocentric self is annihilated, the old man achieves atonement—or as Joseph Campbell emphasizes it in *A Hero with a Thousand Faces*, "at-one-ment" (qtd. in Poland)—with the world around him. There are striking parallels to Warwick Fox's concept of transpersonal ecology, which he describes as "the realization of a sense of self that extends beyond one's egoic, biographical, or personal sense of self" (197). The transpersonal approach to ecology does not deny the existence of the self; rather, the prefix *trans-* means 'beyond,' and it is in the sense of 'extending beyond' the egoic self that Jeffers also uses the word 'transhuman'; Jeffers's inhumanism thus includes humanity while extending beyond it.

Section 45 carries the most explicit exposition of Jeffers's inhumanism. The old man reiterates Jeffers's belief in the divinity of the physical world and extols virtues like reticence, moderate kindness and mutual help. He foresees a day when the earth will "rub off humanity" and exhorts future children to worship the beauty of things, which is the face of God. He reminds them of the cyclic nature of existence. Life is short and on death they go back to their "'better nature, the noble elements, earth, air and water'."

'O future children:

Cruelty is dirt, and ignorance, a muddy peasant

Beating his horse. Ambition and power-lust

Are for adolescents and defective persons. Moderate kindness

Is oil on a crying wheel: use it. Mutual help

Is necessary: use it when it is necessary.

And as to love: make love when need drives.
And as to love: love God. He is rock, earth and water, and the beasts and stars; and the night that contains them.

And as to love: whoever loves or hates man is fooled in a mirror.’ (304)

The human story may devolve to tragedy; but nature teaches that death and life are part of the pattern, and that the human story goes side by side with many others. To decenter humanity is to see this truth. It is to achieve the basic intuition that all organisms and entities in the ecosphere, as parts of the interrelated whole, are equal in intrinsic worth.

Jeffers uses apparitions and apocalyptic images to convey a feeling of impending disaster. The poet seems to consider an apocalyptic end to the world a necessity. The old man prays to the god of the universe to exterminate man, for cruelty and evil are inherent in the race; but he also acknowledges that man and the ugliness he perpetrates are also part of the pattern:

‘The unique ugliness of man and his works,’ the old man said,

Seen astronomically, little and whole, in relation with time and vastness, the star-world,

And the bitter end waiting for modern man,

Disappears; it falls into pattern with the perpetual Beauty of things.’ (3: 307)

Thus in spite of his seemingly misanthropic utterances and his detachment from the world, neither Jeffers nor his inhumanist persona can be called anti-human. One who recognizes the inherent worth of all beings, including humans, can never be anti-human. But a respect for the intrinsic values of richness and diversity does lead to a criticism of the modern industrial society.
The old man throws the axe into the sea and wishes for peace, but the axe strikes a monster of the deep, which rises to the surface, all hacked and mangled by sharks. The axe comes back to the old man's hand for the time for peace has not come. Human desires and fears still torment him and do not allow him to attain a state of equilibrium. When his dog leaves him, the old man is happy. "At last / The delight of old age: I am alone." But presently great disasters begin to occur. A young man accuses him of having betrayed humanity. "You are one of those that killed hope and faith. And sneered at Progress; you have killed the lies that men live by, and the earth / Is one huge tomb" (3: 310). But the old man finds at last a deep peace and final joy.

'To know that the great world lives, whether man dies or not. The beauty of things is not harnessed to human eyes and the little active minds: it is absolute.

It is not for human titillation, though it serves that. It is the life of things.

And the nature of God. But those unhappy creatures will have to shrug off

Their human God and their human godlessness

To endure this time.' (3: 311)

In the holocaust that follows, a fugitive tells the old man that mankind has "rammed their bull-heads / Into the fire-death." But the old man disagrees. This may seem to be the end, but the world will survive: even humanity will survive:

'The mountains appear to be on their feet still. And down there the dark ocean nosing his bays and the tide-breaks
Like a bear in a pit. As for the human race, we could do without it; but it won't die.

Oh, slightly scorched. It will slough its skin and crawl forth

Like a serpent in spring.” (3:311)

He finally finds that there are two remedies to men’s fouled lives and miserable deaths. One is death and the other is the old man’s stoic endurance and aloofness, his turning away from humanity. "About midnight he slept, and arose refreshed / In the red dawn.” It is significant that the poem does not end with the holocaust but with the old man’s awakening to a red dawn—a dawn that offers man one more chance for a more prudent course of conduct. “The Inhumanist” is thus an affirmation of life.

Standing between death and humanity, the old man chooses life. To do this, he has to abandon his faith in his anthropoid god and also the anthropocentric values that are a legacy of that faith. For the sake of survival, he has to give up the lies that men live by—the faith in progress and human superiority. The old man is Jeffers’s ideal inhumanist, who is able to overcome his human weaknesses and at the same time see the limits of the inhumanist position. He has pursued his quest through life, overcome the latent "obscure human fidelities" and has learnt to live separated from the flux of humanity.

The only other character, in Jeffers’s long poems, who is able to overcome humanity, is Orestes in “The Tower Beyond Tragedy.” Orestes, after much self-examination, concludes that his killing of his mother Clytemnestra is not “the crime, the wakening,” after which he resolves that he “will not waste inward / Upon humanity, having found a fairer object” (1:175). He returns to the subject of his dream. “the last labor / To spend on humanity”: 
I saw a vision of us move in the dark: all that we did or
dreamed of

Regarded each other, the man pursued the woman, the woman clung to
the man, warriors and kings

Strained at each other in the darkness, all loved or fought inward, 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 centre, so that they writhed like a full
draught of fishes, all matted

in the one mesh; when they look backward they see only a man

standing at the beginning,

Or forward, a man at the end; or if upward, men in the shining bitter
sky striding and feasting,

Whom you call Gods . . . . (1: 176)

Orestes recognizes that human nature is contemptible for its own petty preoccupations
with itself and concludes: “It is all turned inward, all your desires incestuous, the
woman the serpent, the man the rose-red cavern, / Both human, worship forever […]”
(1:176). He has overcome these incestuous inclinations, this human obsession with
the self. His rejection of his sister’s incestuous offer, the symbolic extreme of human
love, adding that he has “found a fairer object,” also serves to highlight Jeffers’s
inhumanist inclinations. He claims to have rejected solipsism, the destructive form of
self-love and accepted the greater love that frees man from the sickness of the self.
Electra turns from Orestes to enter “the ancient house.” She remains a humanist, “I
here remember the honor of the house, and Agamemnon’s” (1: 178), incapable of
envisioning the inhumanism of Orestes who was saved by a recognition of the outer world. After his awakening, his visionary experience enables him to see man in relation to the world. Rather than attempt to move beyond good and evil, Orestes moves beyond humanity. He rejects tragedy and learns to exist in harmony with an order of nature. To pass beyond humanity is to pass beyond the need for tragedy:

I remembered

The knife in the stalk of my humanity; I drew and it broke; I entered

the life of the brown forest

And the great life of the ancient peaks, the patience of stone, I felt the change in the veins

In the throat of the mountain, a grain in many centuries, we have our time, not yours; and I was the stream

Draining the mountain wood; and I was the stag drinking; and I was the stars

Boiling with light, wandering alone, each one the lord of his own summit; and I was the darkness

Outside the stars, I included them, they were a part of me. I was mankind also, a moving lichen

On the cheek of the round stone. (1: 177)

Extending awareness and receptivity with other animals and mountains and rivers and stars encourages identification and engenders respect for and solidarity with the field of identification. Orestes displays such an awareness of identification and interpenetration of self with the ecosphere.

Jeffers comments on the poem while dramatizing it for production much later. Orestes "escapes the curse," he writes, of "the house of Agamemnon [. . .] a wicked
house, corrupted by power, heavy with ancestral crime and madness.” He goes on to explain the hero of the poem:

Orestes, in the poem, identifies himself with the whole divine nature of things: earth, man, and stars, the mountain forest and the running streams; they are all one existence, one organism. He perceives this, and that himself is included in it, identical with it. This perception is his tower beyond the reach of tragedy; because, whatever may happen, the great organism will remain forever immortal and immortally beautiful. Orestes has “fallen in love outward” not with a human creature, nor a limited cause, but with the universal God. This is the meaning in my poem. (qtd. in Devall 102)

In “Discovering Transpersonal Identity,” Frances Vaughan describes the self in a way that is fully compatible with Jeffers’s conception. “Conceptualizing the self as an ecosystem existing within a larger ecosystem can therefore facilitate the shift from thinking of the self as a separate, independent entity to recognizing its complete interdependence in the totality. . . . [This] view of the self challenges the assumption that we exist only as alienated, isolated individuals in a hostile, or at best, indifferent, environment” (qtd. in Fox 203).

Jeffers’s poetry identifies man with the cosmic order of nature by means of a mystical experience transcending reason. All inhumanist heroes describe a “union with God” or the cosmic order of things. The inhumanistic aspect of Jeffers’s mysticism calls for a merely passive withdrawal from the world to a “tower beyond tragedy.”

The human delusion of self-importance is nowhere so poignantly described as in “The Humanist’s Tragedy.” Describing the conflict between the rational king who
scorns emotional abandon and the irrational worshippers of Dionysus who scorn inhibition. The poem is an illustration of the dangers involved in human megalomania. Pentheus is a typical humanist who becomes the victim of an inflexible outlook. The poet's repeated emphasis is on a rational and self-composed Pentheus. "Not like a beast borne on the flood of passion, boat without oars, but mindful of all his dignity / As human being, a king and a Greek" (1: 379). Pentheus takes pride in the thought of human progress. "The generations [. . .] aspire. They better; they climb; as I / Am better than this weak suggestible woman my mother," and affirms that man should aspire to be "A more collected and dignified / Creature." For Pentheus, "the end of being" should be to "increase the power, collectedness and dignity of man" (1: 381). Dionysus, however, urges his followers to break from the prisons of the self, "to break human collectedness." and to enter the nature of things. Among the followers is his mother Agave, who leads the frenzied attack upon the intruder, whom she fails to recognize as her son. The cult of Dionysus, which reflects to some degree the views of Jeffers, is portrayed as excessive, "indeed somewhat wild, somewhat too drunken." Jeffers seems to affirm that either element, alone, is dangerous or inadequate. Jeffers presents the tragedy objectively as the inevitable result of the conflict of overweening man with the forces of nature.

This inhumanist denial of the "excessive" value attached to consciousness by humanism also implies the positive value of those emotions of man's "felt nature" which modern civilization has most denied. Against "all the dignity of man, the pride of the only self-commanding animal, / That captains his own soul and controls even / Fate, for a space" (1: 380), Jeffers praises the instincts of the unconscious mind, which identify man with nature: "I tell you unconsciousness is the treasure, the tower the fortress: Referred to that one may live anything (1: 395). But, as Frederick
Carpenter comments in *Robinson Jeffers*, the inhumanistic values of nature and of the unconscious derive from levels of life traditionally ranked below the human: they relate man to the beasts and to primitive earlier cultures. However, another set of values celebrated by inhumanism relates man to the higher levels of life: to the transhuman universe of astronomy and to a God not conceived in the image of man (130).

In "Margrave," the poet first sets the scene, and from the detachment of his "marble-paved platform / On the turret on the head of the tower," interprets the perspective which the scene illustrates. The long view enables him to see man being brought down from a position of centrality to a diminished stature in the pattern of the modern world. The time when the earth was the world and man was its measure has given way to a more cosmic awareness of the earth as a particle of dust lost in the immensities of a stellar universe. The poem argues against the excessive importance attributed to human consciousness and pictures the stars "at incredible speeds fleeing outward from ours. [. . .] fleeing the contagion of consciousness that infects this corner of space." Even the rocks are shown to be reluctant to be associated with humanity.

For often I have heard the hard rocks I handled

Groan, because lichen and time and water dissolve them,

And they have to travel down the strange falling scale

Of soil and plants and the flesh of beasts to become

The bodies of men; they murmur at their fate

In the hollows of windless nights, they'd rather be anything

Than human flesh played on by pain and sorrow. (2: 161)
Jeffers narrates the fable of Walter Margrave to illustrate the tragic results of man's pride in his rationality. The poet himself is guilty of having helped to spread the contagion of human consciousness, but consoles himself with the argument that man also is an integral part of nature: "It is likely the enormous / Beauty of the world requires for completion our ghostly increment, / It has to dream, and dream badly, a moment of its night" (2: 167). Jeffers brings in an analogy between the fish being caught and man being hooked by the lures of civilization. Only an aloof detachment or death can free man from his own folly. The cosmic vision of the modern scientific worldview and the compensating values implied by it are suggested by the final lines of "Margrave":

On the little stone-girdled platform
Over the earth and the ocean
I seem to have stood a long time and watched the stars pass.
They also shall perish I believe.
Here today, gone tomorrow, desperate wee galaxies
Scattering themselves and shining their substance away
Like a passionate thought. It is very well ordered. (2: 171)

The poet comes to realize that though man may perish, even in death he shares the fate of all created things, including the stars, which shall also perish. And in life he shares the beauty of the stars, which also "shine their substance away like a passionate thought." Man should be reconciled to his fate by the realization that he shares in the cosmic order and beauty of the universe.

The genuine concern for the environment has led to a reassessment of human values and a re-examination of the question of human nature and possible ways of reprogramming that nature.
Humanity is the start of the race; I say

Humanity is the mould to break away from, the crust to break through,
the coal to break into fire,
The atom to be split. (1: 181)

As Frederick Carpenter explains, this metaphor of the atom—suggesting the identity of man with nature on the one hand, and of man with God who creates and destroys nature on the other hand—denies the central humanistic value of man. Humanity is the atom to be split and the ape of god, the tragic poet is the agent who may accomplish this splitting like a scientist. Man must transcend his own human nature and imagine the destruction of humanity, and perhaps learn power and wisdom thereby. Humanity resembles the physical atom; seemingly unified and stable, man is composed of many unstable elements. When these elements are subjected to sudden and violent pressures, they may disintegrate in sudden explosions. By isolating the unstable elements in humanity and subjecting human individuals to violent pressures, the tragic poet may bring about such human explosions. These explosions may cause the disintegration or death of the individuals concerned; but they will also cause the release of immense reserves of human energy, accompanied by flashes of illumination (137-38).

In "Roan Stallion" immediately after this passage, California rides the stallion to the top of the hill—"the great arch and pride of the hill, the silent calvary."

California is like modern man who has moved just far enough away from nature to be out of his depth. No longer a creature of instincts, man has to resort to intelligence to offer him guidance. His intellectual growth and his loss of instinct have created his tragic condition. Jeffers insists that man must break through the crust of humanity to a new awareness based upon intuition. The visions, desires, unnatural crimes, inhuman
science, wild loves—these are the leading attributes of humanity, no matter how much man may wish to deny their existence. California dreams of breaking out of humanity. She sees in the stallion an object worthy of adoration. A passage in Roan Stallion helps reveal the ever-widening gulf between human visions and desires and the natural world against which those visions and desires are contrasted and belittled:

Tragedy that breaks man’s face and a white fire flies out of it: vision that fools him
Out of his limits, desire that fools him out of his limits, unnatural crime, inhuman science,
Shut eyes in the mask; wild loves that leap over the walls of nature, the wild fence-vaulter science,
Useless intelligence of far stars, dim knowledge of the spinning demons that make an atom,
These break, these pierce, these deify, praising their God shrilly with fierce voices: not in a man’s shape
He approves the praise, he that walks lightning-naked on the Pacific, that faces the suns with planets,
The heart of the atom with electrons: what is humanity in this cosmos?
For him, the last
Least taint of a trace in the dregs of the solution; for itself, the mould to break away from, the coal
To break into fire, the atom to be split. (1: 189-90)

Breaking away from humanity is tantamount to cleansing oneself of unnatural desires—the most monstrous of which is the desire to transcend one’s biological nature to attain godlike dimensions. It is this all-too-human desire to become
superhuman that Jeffers attacks. He portrays such a character in “The Women at Point
Sur.” Reverend Barclay embodies the greatest human perversion, the belief that he is
God. Here Jeffers tries to show what happens to those who refuse to uncentre their
minds from humanity:

I say that if the mind centers on humanity
And is not dulled, but remains powerful enough to feel its own and the
others, the mind will go mad.
It is needful to remember the stone and the ocean, without the hills
over the house no endurance.
Without the domed hills and the night. (1: 308)

Jeffers uses the technique of exaggerating the disgusting antics of people in
order to emphasize an aim of prudent conduct—a technique reminiscent of that of
Jonathan Swift. Many of his poems project the human race as instinctively perverse
and corrupted by self-love. There is something botched about the race. The poet sees
an evolutionary aberration in the history of the species, a genetic flaw. In “Original
Sin” man is the “most repulsive of all hot-blooded animals / Up to that time of the
world.” a creature that uses significant cunning not just for survival but also for the
torturing to death of a mammoth. In “The King of Beasts,” the poet sees a kind of
primitive justice in the “battle-squalor, the bombings, / The screaming fire-deaths,” the
endless hunger, the cold, the moaning, the hopelessness” that man has to endure. For
he who has elevated himself to be the king of beasts, that inflicts “terror, the cage,
enslavement, torment and death on all other animals / Should eat the dough that he
mixes and drink the death-cup (3: 138). Confronting human pride with the facts of
human abjectness, he exhorts man to turn from himself to nature where he would find
God. He strives with the blight of evil caused by blind egotism and human
perversions and degradations. But man too has his proper place in the scheme of things. To find and maintain that natural equilibrium, Jeffers feels, require a control of the emotions and the resistance of the urge to stray away from the earth and be engrossed in the self:

Man's world is a tragic music and is not played for man's happiness.

Its discords are not resolved but by other discords.

But for each man

There is a real solution, let him turn from himself and man to love God.

He is out of the trap then. He will remain

Part of the music, but will hear it as the player hears it.

He will be superior to death and fortune, unmoved by success or failure.

Pity can make him weep still,

Or pain convulse him, but not to the center, and he can conquer them. . . .

(2: 543)

The poet admits that it is difficult to impart this knowledge to others. All men instinctively rebel against it. But they will realize it at last. "Then man will have come of age; he will still suffer and still die, but like a God, not a tortured animal" (2: 543).

As Jeffers writes in "Sign-Post":

Civilized, crying to be human again: this will tell you how.

Turn outward, love things, not men, turn right away from humanity.

Let that doll lie. Consider if you like how the lilies grow,

Lean on the silent rock until you feel its divinity

Make your veins cold, look at the silent stars, let your eyes

Climb the great ladder out of the pit of yourself and man.
Things are so beautiful your love will follow your eyes;

Things are the God you will love God and not in vain.

For what we love we grow to it we share its nature. At length

You will look back along the stars' rays and see that even

The poor doll humanity has a place under heaven.

Its qualities repair their mosaic around you the chips of strength

And sickness but now you are free even to become human.

But born of the rock and the air not of a woman. (2: 418)

The positive aspects of inhumanism are emphasized by the poet. When he repudiates the excessive emphasis that humanism puts on rationalism decorum and self-restraint he implicitly praises the values of instinctive life, of simplicity and natural action. And Jeffers specifically praises those values of nature which are not exclusively characteristic of man. "Rock and Hawk" pictures two of his favourite natural objects in one image the falcon perched upon the rock and exalts them as symbols of that natural life which is "inhuman":

bright power dark peace:

Fierce consciousness joined with final

Disinterestedness

Life with calm death the falcon's

Realist eyes and act

Married to the massive

Mysticism of stone

Which failure cannot cast down

Nor success make proud. (2: 416)
The most characteristically "human" quality of man has always been his rationality, or consciousness. Humanism itself has been based upon the idea that man is what he is, and different from the beasts, because he thinks: and this ability to think logically has given civilized man his power over nature. But it has also set him apart from nature. Jeffers's inhumanism attacks this most characteristically human aspect of man exactly because it has set him apart from nature. In "The Broken Balance, he praises the animals because they "live their felt natures: they know their norm / And live it to the brim: they understand life. / While men molding themselves to the anthill have choked / Their natures until the souls die in them" (1: 373). Man's consciousness both divorces him from the rest of nature and divides him from his own felt nature or his inner self. Jeffers does not consider human consciousness as the sole source of value or as separate and superior: "I don't feel consciousness alien to the rest. The animals are aware of external things and inner sensation; no doubt, all life is, in some degree: and as life shades down into chemical and physical process, so it seems to me that consciousness shades down into something not alien to it." (SL 286n). Jeffers gives both consciousness and the nonhuman world their due: "The feeling of deep earnestness and nobility in natural objects and in the universe—the human qualities, not mineral or vegetable, but it seems to me I would not impute them into natural objects unless there were something in not-man that corresponds to these qualities in man. This may be called delusion, or it may be called mystical certainty, there is no external proof either way." (SL 262). At times Jeffers also portrays the essential nobility of life—life that is scarcely free from pain. He celebrates a natural life characterized not only by perils and sadness but also by tenacity and purpose.

Jeffers writes of fishing boats caught in a fog and trying to maintain "a difficult path between the peril of the sea-fog / And the foam on the shore granite." Those patient
and cautious boats give him an awareness of the essential reality "Of creatures going
about their business among the equally / Earnest elements of nature" (1: 110).

In "Fawn's Foster-Mother" he describes an old woman who had nursed a day-
old fawn. "I put its mouth to the breast/ Rather than let it starve." Though her face
is now deformed with age and mean cares and decay, the poet observes that "once in
her spring she lived in the streaming arteries, / The stir of the world, the music of the
mountain" (1: 387). Another figure who evokes the admiration of the poet is an artist
who lives in a remote canyon carving stone giants out of the rigid precipice. The artist
describes himself as one who has been able to see the beauty of things:

"Those children of my hands are tortured because they feel," he said,
the storm of the outer magnificence.
They are giants in agony. They have seen from my eyes
The man-destroying beauty of the dawns over their notch yonder, and
all the obliterating stars.
But in their eyes they have peace." (1: 392)

He concludes that "peace marrying pain" alone can breed excellence in man
and peace derives from the awareness of belonging to a dignified order of things.

Jeffers repeatedly describes pain and celebrates man's endurance of it. The conception
of all human history as one tragic drama, illuminated by the human endurance of pain,
serves as a kind of framework for all of Jeffers's dramatic poems. He describes
human nature as "rather ignoble in its quiet times, mean in its pleasures, / Slavish in
the mass; but at stricken moments it can shine terribly against the dark magnificence
of things." (2: 278).

Jeffers's apparent rejection of humanity is thus essentially a shifting of
emphasis from the self to the world, from the part to the whole. It involves a new
scale of values when it substitutes an appreciation of and delight in the outer world for the yearning for power and the exaltation of the self. In “Themes in My Poems,” Jeffers speaks of the “certitude [. . .] that the world, the universe, is one being, a single organism, one great life that includes all life and all things; and is so beautiful that it must be loved and reverenced; and in moments of mystical vision we identify ourselves with it” (23). Thus Jeffers rejects self-love, which warps and perverts the greater and necessary love for the world in which man is a small part. Jeffers is not so much contemptuous of man as he is perceptive of the ways of men. That the mass of men are led by lies to self-destruction may be pitiful but nonetheless a matter of eternal recurrence and therefore necessary to accept. He places man in the proper perspective with the more important non-human aspect of nature, lectures men on their egoistic behaviour and points his finger in the direction they must take to avoid catastrophe.

In an age of acute anxiety over environmental degradation and spoliation, such an approach shows striking parallels to ecophilosophy which also stresses a return to the non-human aspects of the universe and stresses ecological harmony and equilibrium. Inhumanism, like ecophilosophy, aims at exploring different perspectives on human-nature contexts and interrelationships and fosters deeper and more harmonious relationships between place, self, and the natural world. In as much as Jeffers’s Inhumanism is a shift from an egocentric to an ecocentric viewpoint, it can be described as post humanism or an ecological humanism, which would restore appropriate ecological humility, thereby reconsidering and acknowledging the complex interconnections between the human and non-human aspects of nature.

To conclude, Jeffers attempts to cultivate ecological consciousness, which stresses the development from the narrow egotistical self to an identification with the
natural world. His inhumanism can be seen as an earth-centred philosophy, for it transfers the spotlight from humanity to the ecosphere, from the part to the whole. This outside-the-human focus criticizes human value systems, which have traditionally been inward-looking, preoccupied with the immediate concerns of the individual, and by extension, of society and culture. It calls for a broader, outward-looking viewpoint that realizes that however ugly the parts appear the whole remains beautiful. A severed hand is an ugly thing, and man dismembered from the earth and stars and his history . . . for contemplation or in fact . . . Often appears atrociously ugly. Integrity is wholeness, the greatest beauty is organic wholeness, the wholeness of life and things, the divine beauty of the universe. Love that, not man Apart from that, or else you will share man's pitiful confusions, or drown in despair when his days darken. (2: 536)

Notes


Jeffers attempts to explain what he means by “breaking out of humanity” in a letter written in 1929:

1. We have learned within the past century or so that humanity is only a temporary and infinitesimal phenomenon in a large universe. The knowledge involves a readjustment of values that can only be managed by looking at humanity objectively, from the outside.

2. The phrase refers to also those moments of visionary enlightenment that I should hate to call “cosmic consciousness” because so much foolishness has been written about them under that name.

3. It seems to me wasteful that almost the whole of human energy is expended inward, on itself, in loving, hating, governing, cajoling, amusing, its own members. It is like a new born babe conscious almost exclusively of its own processes and where its food comes from. As the child grows up its attention must be drawn from itself to the more important world outside it.

4. In a civilization like ours, metropolitanism intensified by machinery, human nature (which was developed under very different conditions) becomes an anachronism. We can’t turn back the civilization, not at least until it collapses, and our descendents will have to develop a new sort of nature—will have to “break out of humanity”—or suffer considerably—probably both. (SL 159)
Works Cited


The knowledge that he is heading towards a self-perpetrated disaster, has forced man to acknowledge that the time is imminent for a redefinition and reconsideration of the hitherto held notions of human superiority and stewardship of the earth. When the dominant cultural hierarchies—Christianity, humanism, technology—are found inadequate, in the face of grave threats to the environment and to human survival on earth, a viable environmental ethic as alternative is needed for man to hold on to. While the latter twentieth century has seen a burgeoning of environmental activism, all such damage control measures will have to be based on philosophical foundations that offer possibilities of a better relationship between human and non-human nature. While ecophilosophical ideas like deep ecology, ecofeminism, and transpersonal ecology now try to re-envision man’s relation to nature, the poetry of Robinson Jeffers and his philosophy of inhumanism in the early twentieth century, attempt to present an alternative to humanism. His was an effort, at a time when ecology was a newfangled term, to put across an ecocentric vision, to increasingly force our attention towards recognition of our precarious place upon a blighted planet. While the works of ecologists have assumed significance, various disciplines have also become increasingly green in tune with the need of the times. A lot of attention has been given to literary representations of nature that have through the years tried in vain to inculcate an environmental awareness and suggest ways to reinterpret the relationship between man and his environment.

In American literature, the environment exerts a tremendous influence. Having seen within the space of a few decades, a wilderness being turned to an industrial society, American literature has evinced a poignant awareness of man’s rapacious
attitude towards the environment. Twentieth century literature's disregard of the environment in the wake of the modernist wave has given way to a post modern ecological awareness, and paved the way for a rereading of those literary works that put man in his proper place in the ecosystem and point towards a post humanistic climax of a balanced relation to the earth.

Robinson Jeffers, for long a pariah in the academic critical circle, has slowly emerged from obscurity as a poet with a pertinent ecological vision. Able to write, a century ago, in philosophical and poetical terms, what ecologists are talking about now, Jeffers can be considered a poet with an awareness of the environment and an ecological consciousness, who could write about it forcefully at a time when the environmental crisis was not yet recognized as a major social concern. His poetry, which cannot be called nature writing in the true sense of the term, as one would describe the writings of Thoreau, succeeds not only in mediating upon the relationship of nature and human culture, but also in dramatizing that relationship. Throughout his poems is the awareness that mankind's ingenuity has outpaced its wisdom; he attempts to unmask man's universalist claims and points to ecoconsciousness as a corrective to egoconsciousness.

No reader of Jeffers would fail to be impressed by the tremendous influence that place plays in his work. Voluntarily withdrawing to a rural setting, leading a simple and frugal life in communion with nature, turning his back on material progress in an attempt to restore the attenuated bond with nature, Jeffers exemplifies by his own life the withdrawal from the affairs of the world that he advocates in his poems. This relinquishment implies a suspension of the ego, to the point of feeling the environment as being worthy of attention as oneself and of experiencing oneself as situated among many interacting presences. Celebrating the prolific life and the rich
diversity on the coast. His poems draw the readers' attention to the rich flora and fauna of pristine landscapes that man is busily trying to obliterate. The awareness of human history as embedded in the region also serves to project the land as more than an inanimate entity that can be exploited at will. The haunting awareness of the different races that have lived on the coast in the past emphasizes the transitoriness of humans as against the permanence of the coast that has witnessed this cavalcade to extinction.

The extremely long poems, which reflect the immensity of the coast, are held together by the central motif of the landscape. The landscape plays an active role, influencing the characters. The violence of the coast seems to call for tragic suffering and a corresponding degree of violent emotions. The technique of contrasting the pettiness of man with the magnificence of nature helps to marginalize man. In the short poems too, the human beings hover on the edges of the landscape. The land with its twisted and knotted trees is an objective correlative for the incestuous inhabitants of the coast and becomes, by extension, the microcosm for the entire human race. The land contributes to the apocalyptic intensity of his poems. Described as "migration's end," it is an image for the world's end and the end of the human race. The coast is thus presented as a chronotope where the past, present and future meet, where the dualities of man and nature are blurred, and the human and the non-human are seen as the integral parts of the whole. The final frontier where man must eventually face the consequences of his senseless subjugation of the earth.

The metaphor of apocalypse serves to emphasize Jeffers's social and cultural criticism. Jeffers uses the cataclysmic imagery of the end of the world to project his feeling of impending disaster. He also assumes the narrative stance of the apocalypticist. Though the catastrophe Jeffers envisions is never specifically an environmental disaster, the strong strand of environmental concern that runs through
his poems and the insistence that human hubris is hastening the catastrophe is in
keeping with his anti-homocentric stance. Apocalypse is revelation and the discovery
that the cosmic whole is the ultimate reality lends to Jeffers’s vision an ecological
dimension. The recognition that the cosmic totality is God runs through the poems. A
glimpse of this totality is often achieved by Jeffers by distancing himself, by
removing himself from the scene of action. Perspective serves not just to diminish
man’s stature, but also to lend a dignity to the human drama as part of the cosmic
whole. He blends the poetic and the scientific to expand the readers’ consciousness of
physical interrelationships and attempts to integrate into his poetry the restructuring of
Western cosmology brought about by modern physics and astronomy.

The techniques employed by Jeffers to convey his ecocentric message include
the myth of eternal return to convey the cyclical view of time. He uses it to dramatize
the process of change, the evolutionary struggle that is part of nature. The death-
regeneration motif that is integral to primitive myths becomes in Jeffers’s hands, a
device to critique the introversion of the egocentric human race and to celebrate the
integral wholeness of the cosmos. The ranch houses where the families enact their
tragic lives become microcosms, which reflect the macrocosm. The choric interludes,
which enable the poet to comment objectively on the action of the characters, give
him the detached observer’s perspective; the long view that brings the scene into
comprehensible focus enables him to see not individual parts but the totality of the
whole. This is the ecologist’s vision, where nothing can exist by itself, and everything
is interdependent, interrelated and has its proper position in the ecological cycle. The
overweening ambitions, delusions, and arrogance of the human element bring about
tragedy and result in destruction, as does the ecosystem collapse when one component
upsets the equilibrium or becomes too dominant. Many of his characters in the
narratives become devices to epitomize this presumptuousness that severs the man-
nature relationship. One notices that in all the narratives, the poet seems to
sympathize with his Dionysian heroines as opposed to the Apollonian men. While the
male characters are men of integrity, dominant and strong, they seem to be marked for
misfortune, often being manipulated by the more scheming women. The women are
shown to have a view that is more in keeping with the poet's view and this is all the
more significant, as the dominant patriarchal views being inadequate, feminine voices
assume power and authority at least for a major section of the long poems. Even Old
Martial, a veritable failure in human terms, is treated with respect, that seem to lend
him a special significance, as if to say that material prosperity in this world is not
what counts in the end. It is worth noting that the polyphonic interplay of voices, as at
the death of Old Martial, can be considered as an attempt on the poet's part to give
voice to multiple points of view without authorial intervention, giving importance to
even the most unimportant character. This is in keeping with the ecological notion
that all elements in the great web of life have a voice. Even the dead, the most
suppressed and distorted of voices, are given a chance to articulate their opinions and
question the dominant aspects of society, as in The Double Axe. The intertextual
references in many narratives make those poems extensions of earlier stories and
seem to facilitate chances of interrelationships and interdependence, as former
landscapes and places are reused for yet another narrative.

Giving the non-human element its due importance, and relegating the human-
element from a position of centrality are ecocentric efforts that the poet makes.
Insisting that all life has value in itself, quite independent of its usefulness to man,
Jeffers gives the non-human precedence over human beings. This technique of putting
mankind as just one form of life among many others deflates human importance. The
delusion of progress has resulted in the broken balance between man and his environment. The poet points to the increasing human population and urbanization as factors that upset the equilibrium of nature's web. The present day ecologists are concerned with these problems and Jeffers's poetic philosophy—which requires identification with the physical world, whereby a deep appreciation of interdependence is acquired—can be related to deep ecological principles and to the Systems theory of life. Like deep ecology, Jeffers's poetry questions the dominant beliefs that have led to environmental destruction and turns to an ecocentric view from an anthropocentric one.

Jeffers's inhumanism can be interpreted as a reaction against Western humanism, which celebrates human capabilities and has created a dichotomy between man and nature. It displaces man from his central position in the universe and advocates a recognition and reverence of non-human aspects of the world. The inhumanist emerges as Jeffers's ideal hero who is able to attain the reasonable detachment that the poet envisages as a code of conduct, to recognize transhuman magnificence, and to endure with stoicism the travails of life. Though his concept of inhumanism has been called misanthropic, its recognition of the inherent worth of all things, even as it repudiates the lies that men live by, and the faith in progress and human superiority, make it a view that has ecological implications. His characters who have attained an inhumanist vision are finally able to "fall in love outward," and reject the incestuous inclinations of the human race and attain a pantheistic vision that enables them to place man in relation to nature. Inhumanism thus leads to a mystical experience. It can be related to concepts of ecophilosophy in which man is only a part of the whole, and which attributes equal value to the non-human parts. Inhumanism is thus a shift from an egocentric to an ecocentric viewpoint. Jeffers's poetry attempts to
recover ecological humility and acknowledge the complex interconnections between the human and non-human aspects of nature. Far from being a negative philosophy which rejects humanity, it is an earth-centred philosophy which can be substituted for the arrogant humanistic beliefs and can prove to be the basis for an environmental ethic that transfers the spotlight from humanity to the ecosphere.

Jeffers’s ecology entails a humility that is difficult for humans to accept for it challenges man’s basic hubris. Man assumes that he can manipulate nature to suit his purpose. Even environmental activism through which man tries to recover the lost balance may be a kind of delusion, for the assumption that he can save nature is in itself a presumption. The poet does not call for action, but for a change in attitude that should precede significant action. Jeffers’s ecological awareness involves a process of developing a sense of place, redefining the human being from being the conqueror of the land to a person fully experiencing the natural world and cultivating the virtues of modesty and humility. To conclude, the ecological dimensions present in Jeffers’s poetry include his devotion to place, his insistence on relationships and interdependence, his reverence for the cosmic totality, his legitimising of the non-human, his marginalizing of the human element, his concept of an all-pervasive energy, his need to go beyond humanity to a spiritual identification in nature, his view of man as part of a web being destroyed by anthropocentric aggression, his recognition of nature as a process, his cyclical apprehension of life, and his expectation of an ecological backlash.