rent unsustainable development toward a sustainable future. The *World Energy Assessment* itself provides a powerful tool to persuade the public and policy-makers around the world that the changes are both feasible and desirable.

References

1. J. Goldemberg, T. B. Johansson, A. K. N. Reddy, R. H. Williams, *Annu. Rev. Energy Environ.* **10**, 613 (1985).
2. J. Goldemberg, T. B. Johansson, A. K. N. Reddy, R. H. Williams, *Energy for a Sustainable World* (Wiley, New York, 1988).
3. T. B. Johansson, B. Bodlund, R. H. Williams, Eds., *Electricity: Efficient End Use and New Generation Technologies and Their Planning Implications* (Lund Univ. Press, Lund, Sweden, 1989).
4. T. B. Johansson, *et al.*, Eds., *Renewable Energy: Sources for Fuels and Electricity* (Island Press, Washington, DC, 1993).
5. N. Nakicenovic, A. Grübler, A. McDonald, Eds., *Global Energy Perspectives* (Cambridge Univ. Press, Cambridge, 1998).

BOOKS: POETRY

Images of Inhumanism

Christopher Cokinos

The American poet Robinson Jeffers once wrote that "[...] to feel/Greatly, and understand greatly, and express greatly, the natural/Beauty, is the sole business of poetry." This singularity of purpose ensured Jeffers a place outside the modernist mainstream of 20th-century poetry, with its interest in fragmented urban reality, and helped prompt readers to praise as well as to excoriate Jeffers in often shocking terms. Comparative mythologist Joseph Campbell considered Jeffers one of the greatest literary figures of all time; critic Yvor Winters wrote that if Jeffers really believed all he put in his poems then the California poet should kill himself. With the publication of this new, beautifully produced *Selected Poetry*, readers can reassess this work for themselves. Their reassessment must consider whether Jeffers's often stunning lyric-poems on nature may eventually outshine his long, plodding narratives of human excess and vanity. It is the Jeffers of the lyric poems that matters most, especially to those with ecological and scientific passions. And it is from this Jeffers that some of our most important contemporary eco-poets stem—poets such as Pattiann Rogers and W. S. Merwin.

Born in 1887, Jeffers did not find his poetic voice until the 1920s, when his work became wildly popular (he appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine in 1932). His long story-poems, rife with violence and sexuality, made his reputation as a major poet. But strident anti-war poetry turned his audience against him during and after the Second World War. The last volume Jeffers published in his lifetime, *Hungerfield* (1954), was little-appreciated. He died in 1962.

Much of the difficulty in assessing Jeffers—especially in relation to how his work bridges what C. P. Snow called the two cultures—is that his most devoted scholars have championed his many narrative poems, such as *Tamar* and *Cawdor*. A large portion of the editor Tim Hunt's otherwise excellent selection is given over to entire narratives or their excerpts, though one might argue that these overwrought and portentous poems are in fact Jeffers's worst. Indeed, the forced plots, arch dialogue, and one-dimensional characters so typical of Jeffers's narratives make him seem far less like a California Aeschylus or Homer (as some have thought of him) and far more like an unfortunate combination of balladeer Robert Service and angst-ridden filmmaker Ingmar Bergman. The narratives have their occasional moments of descriptive power, but it is in the lyric form that Jeffers best synthesizes his grand perspective on transhuman reality, his nature imagery, and his views on science.

The Selected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers
Tim Hunt, Ed.

Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA, 2001. 774 pp. $75. ISBN 0-8047-3890-4. Paper, $24.95. ISBN 0-8047-4108-5.

Although Jeffers's oft-repeated certitudes about the majesty of nature and the relative insignificance of humankind sometimes blunted his perceptions (he badly misunderstands Taoism, for example), it is this prophetic bent that lends to his shorter poems a deep rhetorical power rooted in clear observation. As Hunt, a professor of English at Washington State University, writes in his useful introduction, "...Jeffers sought to intensify perception and thereby deepen our awareness of and participation in the natural world." With a wide-ranging education that included the classics, foreign languages, forestry, and medicine, it is perhaps not surprising that Jeffers crystallized a kind of cosmic point-of-view with descriptions of local places and cultural meditations that often included material drawn from as well as critical of science.

Jeffers called his stance "inhumanism," which, for him, meant putting humanity in the widest possible frame of nonhuman nature and deep time. In his poem *Nova*, he writes, "[...] we know that the enormous invulnerable beauty of things/Is the face of God, to live gladly in its presence, and die without grief or fear knowing it survives us." In *Pelicans*, Jeffers praises the birds by connecting them in a wide network of things and passings: "And the wings torn with old storms remember/The cone that the oldest redwood dropped from, the tilting of continents,/The dinosaur's day, the lift of new sea-lines." For Jeffers, an understanding of language's rhythms and biological rhythms opens to a belief in historical and cosmological cycles. In the final scene of *The Tower Beyond Tragedy*, Jeffers has Orestes speak of these cycles in an almost Whitmanian diction and cadence: "[...] 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...they have not made words for it, to go behind things, beyond hours and ages,/And be all things in all time, in their returns and passages, in the motionless and timeless centre,/In the white of the fire [...]." Jeffers's praise of this grand beauty and endurance not infrequently led him to speak ill of humanity, like a prophet disappointed with his people. So although in one poem he calls us "moderately admirable," in another he says we are "a botched experiment that has run wild and ought to be stopped." He writes in *Love-Children*, "I'm never sorry to think that here's a planet/Will go on like this glen, perfectly whole and content, after mankind is scummed from the kettle./No ghost will walk under the latter starlight."

Such misanthropy does not necessarily detract from an appreciation of Jeffers's descriptions of the natural world, descriptions that often quietly present readers with moments of clear beauty, as in such poems as *Solstice*, *Flight of Swans*, and *Carmel Point*. However, Jeffers's penchant for telling us what to think about all this lovely reality can become tiresome and his images can sometimes be clichéd. Others have noted how Jeffers can indulge in local and unnecessary moments of personification—as in that lichen-covered rock having a "cheek." Still, this is a poet who notices how gulls hawk for insects turned up by the plow, how exotic species can affect ecological balance, and how the diameter of Antares can place our own world in humbling scale. In his great and often-anthologized lyric *The Purse-Seine*, Jeffers brings together net-gathered phosphorescent sardines, the lights of a city, and the glow of galaxies. His ability to notice connections across wide distances is remarkable. "We stayed the night in the pathless gorge of Ventana Creek, up the east fork," he writes in the opening stanza of *Oh*

The author is in the Department of English, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506–0701, USA. E-mail: cokinos@ksu.edu

Lovely Rock. He continues, "The rock walls and the mountain ridges hung forest on forest above our heads, maple and redwood,/Laurel, oak, madrone, up to the high and slender Santa Lucian firs that stare up the cataracts/Of slide-rock to the star-color precipices."

But, for Jeffers, nature is not some mindless agent strictly to be observed. Nature has a kind of intentionality—not unlike James Lovelock's controversial hypothesized Gaia. In *Animals*, which describes the flames of the sun as living creatures, the poet states that "[...] There are many other chemistries of animal life/Besides the slow oxidation of carbohydrates and amino-acids." Though such a view seems excessively romantic, Jeffers, not surprisingly, fleshes it out elsewhere. In his longer, meditative *De Rerum Virtute*, he declares, "[...] I believe this globed earth/Not all by chance and fortune brings forth her broods,/But feels and chooses. And the Galaxy, the firewheel/On which we are pinned, the whirlwind of stars in which our sun is one dust-grain, one electron, this giant atom of the universe/Is not blind force, but fulfils its life and intends it courses [...]." There is no God to this universe; the universe itself is God.

To help make sense of this material divinity, Jeffers at times draws on the insights of science. He puts rationality in the service of a kind of pan-mysticism. In his posthumously published *The unformed volcanic earth*, a kind of lyric epic of scientific narrative, Jeffers sets forth the origin of the solar system, the planet, cellular life, and the human species. If he errs in facts, it matters less than the overall sweep and vision of the poem. (Jeffers incorrectly places the seat of human evolution in "the great northern forests." He hedges this assertion by calling it a "guess.") Few poets have the courage or knowledge to attempt a poem of such beginnings. Science matters to Jeffers as one of the means through which we can understand reality, and poetry must not shrink from the actual. More than for any other poet in the first half of the 20th century, science to Jeffers can be as much a substance in poetry as, say, prosody itself. In one of the prose pieces Hunt helpfully includes in this volume, Jeffers even goes so far as to see a profound link between science and art. Both, he says, have at their core a "love of the beauty that each discloses."

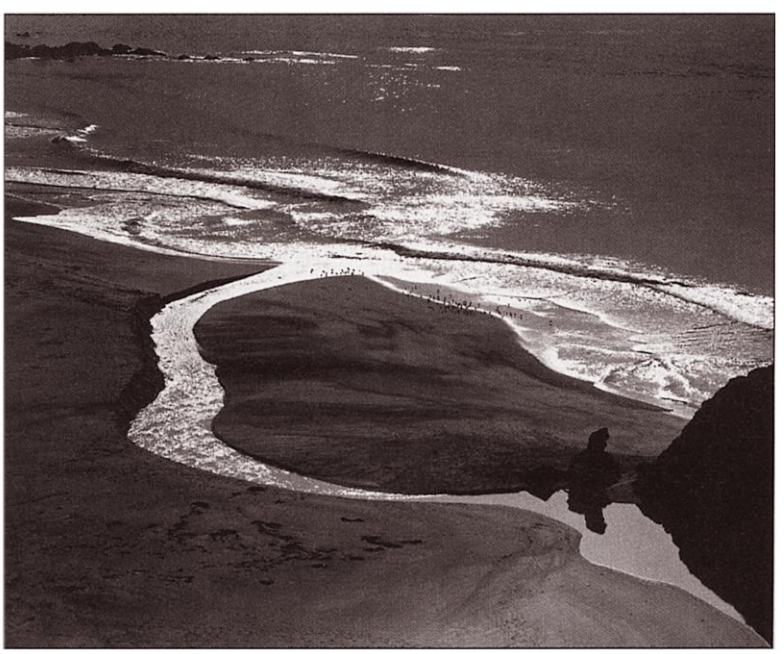
Poetry can disclose ugliness too, and Jeffers begins his disturbing *Memoir* with images of caged lab animals that seek comfort from the very keepers who inflict pain on them as a matter of study. Though he sees in science "the passionate love of discovery," science, like any human enterprise, becomes corrupted by excessive power and humanity's blindness to divine nature. He loathes "the immense vulgarities of misapplied science." Much of this bitterness derives from Jeffers's seeing science, which he once called a "wild fence-vaulter," as complicit in pointless war and decadent consumerism. Such critiques, while discomfiting, are part and parcel of Robinson Jeffers's astringent view of human culture. This view at times becomes overwhelming; indeed, Jeffers is best read in small doses.

No other American poet has so emphatically preached the saving graces of nature, from galaxies to granite. Jeffers is more than the consummate poet of California and the Pacific Ocean, as many East Coast literati have called him with condescension. He is a poet of transhuman beauty, of disturbing prophecy. Freed from the shackle of his narrative poems, he stands as the preeminent American poet of nature, ecology, and science. Those trained to view the world from scientific perspectives know that human endeavors are short-lived, at least when measured against the scales of geological and cosmological time. It can be argued that such perspectives are necessary to the survival and sanity of our species. Seen in this way, Robinson Jeffers is not a regional poet of uneven achievement; he is one of our most important writers.

BROWSINGS

Stones of the Sur. *Poetry by Robinson Jeffers, photographs by Morley Baer, selected and introduced by James Karman.* Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA, 2001. 176 pp. $60. ISBN 0-8047-3942-0.

The rugged Big Sur coast of central California provided Jeffers with settings and inspiration for much of his poetry. The landscape has also attracted the lenses of noted photographers. Before his death, Baer planned a volume pairing selections from his work with excerpts and poems that reflect Jeffers's response to rocks and stones. Karman has completed the project with this collection of 52 black-and-white photographs, including the image *Little Sur, Mouth of River* (1969), shown here.



CREDIT: COURTESY STANFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

The Tapir's Morning Bath. Mysteries of the Tropical Rain Forest and the Scientists Who Are Trying to Solve Them. *Elizabeth Royte.* Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 2001. 336 pp. $25. ISBN 0-395-97997-8.

Collecting monkey dung, sorting arthropods, counting seedlings, and radio-tracking fruit bats. These are some of the activities Royte chronicles from a year she spent, on and off, observing and assisting scientists at the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute's field station on Barro Colorado Island, Panama. Research conducted at the station over the past 80 years has made the island's 1564 hectares the most studied tropical rainforest in the world. The book conveys the uncertainties, frustrations, and joys of such field work. Although her approach is often light-hearted, Royte also communicates the value of trying to understand the workings of this complicated and threatened ecosystem.