

## PROSE POEM AND TWO POEMS



*John Haines*

### THE BLACK AND THE RED

The Black army came in from the west, leaving behind them their country of sawdust and rotting timber. They came on through the grasses, over the dry stems, trampling, pushing aside the green growth.

The Red army came in from the east. They were smaller in size, but numerous and aggressive, and they too crossed a space of dead, dry grass, relentless in their search.

The two armies met in a small, ragged clearing. And soon the armored ranks were grappling, seizing the enemy by any means... Here lay a severed leg, and there a hopelessly injured soldier was making his way in retreat, hardly able to climb through the grasses.

And soon the field was littered with the dead, the maimed and the dying. Corpses lay one by the other. Here and there an individual Black struggled to carry off one of the Reds. And still the armies came on, mingling, colliding, intent on destruction.

Who was to be victor in that field I could not tell. The purpose of the combat I also could not tell. Was there some obscure policy motivating them, a leader to be obeyed? I saw no objective, no goal to be won. And yet they bit and fought, others took their places, and the dead lay still in the grass. All was eerily silent, save for the faint crackling of a limb or a dried and brittle stem.

I might have watched this warfare from afar, from the height of a remote mountain, or the window of a satellite roaming the atmosphere of a distant planet, gazing in wonder on a battlefield of strangers, beings I could not name.

But no... I was standing in my own yard, between house and workshop, in the early summer of 1962; bending over a patch of grassy turf, looking down, watching a war of ants, the Black and the Red.

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## THE AMERICAN DREAM

It would have to be something dark,  
glazed as in a painting. A corridor  
leading back to a forgotten neighborhood  
where a ball is bounced from street  
to street, and we hear from a far corner  
the vendor's cry in a city light.

It would have to be dusk, long after  
sunlight has failed. A shrouded figure  
at the prow of a ship, staring  
and pointing—as if one might see  
into that new land still unventured,  
vapors of an impenetrable distance.

Too many heroes, perhaps: a MacArthur  
striding the Philippine shallows; a sports  
celebrity smeared with period color.  
A voice in the air: a Roman orator  
declaiming to an absentee Forum  
the mood of their failing republic.

It would have to be night. No theater  
lights, a dated performance shut down.  
And in one's fretful mind a ghost  
in a rented cassock pacing the stage,  
reciting to himself a history:

“Here were the elected Elders, chaired  
and bewigged. And placed before them  
the Charter: they read it aloud,  
pass it with reverence from hand to hand.

“Back there in the curtained shadows  
the people's chorus waited, shifting  
and uncertain; but sometimes among them  
a gesture, a murmur of unrest.

“And somewhere here, mislaid, almost  
forgotten, the meaning of our play,  
its theme and blunted purpose...”

# INHUMANISM, ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS, AND THE CANON OF AMERICAN LITERATURE



*David Copeland Morris*

The canon of American literature matters, especially so now in a time of environmental crisis. I would claim that a certain American literary tradition which I will call “inhumanist” (borrowing a term from the American poet Robinson Jeffers) contains a vital critique of the prevailing humanism (i.e., chauvinistic anthropocentrism) which has contributed greatly to the crisis.

Yet in the dominant literature textbooks, this tradition has been rendered almost invisible. In the current edition of the *Norton Anthology of American Literature* (Baym, et al.), the leader in the field, and even of the highly revisionist *Heath Anthology of American Literature* (Lauter, et al.), the Norton’s main competitor, there are no selections at all from the following writers: John Muir, Aldo Leopold, Loren Eiseley, Barry Lopez, Annie Dillard, and Edward Abbey. There are small selections from Robinson Jeffers and Gary Snyder. To anyone with even a modicum of sensitivity to the environmental crisis in which we find ourselves, and a modicum of appreciation of literary skill, these omissions are almost dumbfounding.

The absence of the above writers from the Heath is particularly disturbing since its editors were explicitly motivated by a desire to be as inclusive and radical as possible in their selections. Obscurity is no excuse, as the Heath contains many heretofore unknown writers, and Muir et al. are readily available in paperback editions which sell very well. Perhaps the explanation is that they still carry the label “nature writers”, a term with slightly musty and quietist connotations. These connotations are highly inaccurate. Indeed, I would assert that these “nature writers” provide a radical cultural critique which can best be summed up by Robinson Jeffers’s deliberately provocative term, “inhumanism.”

Robinson Jeffers, with his unique combination of passion and detachment, observed: “It seems time our race began to think as an adult does, rather than like an egocentric baby or insane person.” In attempting to think like an adult, to think with what he called “the whole mind”, Jeffers

developed his characteristic world-view, his provocatively named “inhumanism.” He defines inhumanism as “a shifting of emphasis and significance from man to not-man; the rejection of human solipsism and recognition of the transhuman magnificence” (*The Double Axe and Other Poems*, 1948).

Jeffers’s inhumanist vision generates authority for a new, significant stance toward nature—a stance that may be necessary if we are to resolve the environmental crisis in which we currently find ourselves. Jeffers’ project shifts our focus from the human mind itself to the external world the mind recognizes and feeds upon. From the inhumanist perspective, the nihilism and destructiveness of compulsive technological expansion can only be overcome by recognizing that ultimate value resides in nature, not in the human will. The proper goal of the will should not be to dominate nature, but to organize human life in such a way that individuals can fully experience what Jeffers calls the transhuman magnificence. Any willful activity which limits access to this transhuman source of value is self-defeating.

Inhumanism is not, of course, opposed to humaneness, but rather to that pervasive form of humanism or human chauvinism which arrogantly exaggerates human uniqueness and importance, and which finds human fulfillment in the domination of nature; humanism’s emphasis on the moral responsibility of the individual is extremely admirable, but its compulsive and ruthless anthropocentrism is not.

Inhumanism has long been a repressed, contrapuntal theme in the fugue of Western history. Ancient texts, such as God’s speech from the whirlwind in Job, contain expressions of inhumanism, though such examples are rare. For geographical and historical reasons, the inhumanist perspective is most fully developed in a certain strain of American literature, unfortunately that strain so underrepresented in the anthologies.

That Jeffers was not an isolated figure can be seen in his profound influence on Edward Abbey, a writer now far more widely read than Jeffers himself. In his most popular nonfiction work, *Desert Solitaire*, Abbey describes a conversation he has with an imaginary campfire companion who was partly an imagining of Jeffers. Abbey says:

With his help I discovered that I was not opposed to mankind only to man-centeredness, anthropocentricity, the opinion that the world exists solely for the sake of man; not to science, which means simply knowledge, but to science misapplied, to the worship of technique and technology, and to that perversion of science properly called scientism.

Standing behind Jeffers, as Jeffers stands behind Abbey, is the figure of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Let us now do some unconventional literary history. In his seminal essay "Nature", Emerson points back to the natural world as the original source of value and away from the human-generated, calcified forms of culture which were threatening to choke off the development of an authentically indigenous society. In a sense he was calling for the construction of a new culture, or, if you prefer, the new construction of a culture. However, Emerson is only the beginning of the inhumanist tradition, for he retains an overriding sense of the human as separate from and superior to nature; he also retains an image of existence as a hierarchical chain of being, with the human at the top, and an idea of the will as the supreme human faculty.

The distinction between Emerson and the inhumanist writers who follow is nicely illustrated in some marginal notations which John Muir makes in his copy of Emerson's writings. This passage is taken from Edwin Way Teale's introduction to *The Wilderness World of John Muir*.

In *Spiritual Laws*, Emerson declares: "The Vale of Tempse, Trivoli, and Rome are earth and water, rocks and sky. There are as good earth and water in a thousand places, yet how unaffecting." Beside these words, Muir has written, "They are not unaffecting." Again in "Nature" Emerson observes: "There is in woods and water a certain enticement and flattery, together with a failure to yield a present satisfaction. This disappointment is felt in every landscape." Muir dissents: "No—always we find more than we expect."

Despite Emerson's high regard for nature, he feels a sense of distance and alienation from the world, a sense that the world is not enough. He, unlike Muir, retains the feeling of separation from nature which inhabits English Romanticism. Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote an ode to dejection which complained: "I may not hope from outward forms to win / The passion and the life, whose fountains are within." Jeffers's complaint is precisely the opposite; he says of poems, "Oh cracked and twilight mirrors ever to catch / One color, one glinting flash, of the splendor of things." Annie Dillard shares with Muir and Jeffers this feeling that the world is inexhaustible:

In other words, even on the perfectly ordinary and visible level, creation carries on with an intricacy unfathomable and apparently uncalled-for. The lone ping into being of the first hydro-

gen atom ex nihilo was so unthinkably violently radical, that surely it ought to have been enough, more than enough. But look what happens. You open the door and all heaven and hell break loose (*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*).

But Emerson, too, definitely has his inhumanist side, as illustrated by the following:

At the gates of the forest, the surprised man of the world is forced to leave his city estimates of great and small, wise and foolish. The knapsack of custom falls off his back with the first step he makes into these precincts. Here is sanctity which shames our religions, and reality which discredits our heroes. Here we find nature to be the circumstance which dwarfs every other circumstance, and judges like a god all men that come to her.

I realize that there could be skepticism toward Emerson's suggestion of a "natural" source of value, but I think one may, without extreme difficulty see his statement as a call for a reconstruction of customary attitudes.

It is, however, Emerson's "humanist" strain which leads straight to the environmental crisis we find ourselves in today, as when he says, "Nature is thoroughly mediate. It's made to serve... One after another his victorious thought comes up with and redresses all things, until the world becomes at last only a realized will—the double of the man". The world realized as human will has proven to be a somewhat problematic place from the standpoint not only of other species but also of our own. Recent history has shown that transforming the world without a guideline other than dim short-term human desire can lead to ecological destruction and human degradation. This insight is central to an inhumanist tradition in American literature.

When humanity sees itself as the only source of values, it removes the ground for value. It no longer has any basis on which to make decisions about ends (as opposed to means), for it has ruptured the interplay between consciousness and nature which produces values in the first place. It leaves itself alone in a meaningless universe. Gary Snyder explains:

I don't like Western culture because I think it has much in it that is inherently wrong and at the root of the environmental crisis that is not recent; it is very ancient, it has been building up for a millennium. There are many things in Western culture that are admirable. But a culture that alienates itself from the very ground of its own being—from the wilderness outside (that is to

say, wild nature, the wild, self-contained, self-informing ecosystems) and from that other wilderness, the wilderness within—is doomed to a very destructive behavior, ultimately perhaps self-destructive behavior (*Turtle Island*, 1974).

The answer to this dilemma lies in a mode of relating to nature which allows us to feel that the world is capable of satisfying the mind. It is only then that the compulsive, self-destructive project of total domination will be abandoned. Just as we need a theory of a steady-state economy if we are to survive physically, we need a steady-state theory of the mind. We need a theory which shows the mind how to be satisfied, and this is exactly what Jeffers claims for inhumanism. Inhumanism, he says, “satisfies our need to admire greatness and rejoice in beauty” (*The Double Axe*). It does this by “uncentering the mind from itself.” Jeffers’s crucial advice is: “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.” Inhumanism, he says in another place,

is based... on a rational acceptance of the fact that mankind is neither central nor important in the universe... An infant feels himself to be central and of primary importance; an adult knows better; it seems time that the human race attained to an adult habit of thought in this regard (*The Double Axe*).

What takes inhumanism out of the realm of mysticism and gives it its power is what I will call an “impassioned empiricism.” This term was used by George Santayana in reference to William James, but it applies as well to the writers in question here. Empiricism in any form is anathema to some in this age of post-structuralism, but I think Santayana’s term does a nice job of bridging the gap between extreme social constructionism on the one hand and extreme positivism on the other.

The writers in the inhumanist tradition develop analogies of the state of being represented by Emerson’s famous figure of the transparent eyeball: “Crossing a bare common, in snow puddles, at twilight, under a clouded sky, without having in my thoughts any occurrence of special good fortune, I have enjoyed a perfect exhilaration. I am glad to the brink of fear... all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eye-ball; I am nothing; I see all.” Jeffers’s inhumanism stresses the efficacy of the Emersonian posture of openness and outwardness:

Make your veins run 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...

By implication, such an outward focus can mitigate the “mean egotism” of the human race as well.

Impassioned empiricism includes the process of both learning and prayer. What W. H. Auden says of Loren Eiseley applies as well to all of the inhumanist writers:

[Eiseley] reveals himself as a man unusually well trained in the habit of prayer, by which I mean the habit of listening... The serious part of prayer begins when we have got our begging over with and listen for the Voice of what I would call the Holy Spirit though if others prefer to say the voice of Oz or the Dreamer or Conscience, I shouldn't quarrel, so long as they don't call it the voice of the superego, for that “entity” can only tell us what we already know, whereas the Voice I am talking about always says something new and unpredictable—an unexpected demand, obedience to which involves a change of self, however painful (Introduction to Eiseley's *The Star Thrower*).

The attitude Auden is describing is not one of innocent passiveness. Neither he nor Eiseley condemns the exercise of will; but will is seen as only one half of a dialectical process which includes listening and prayer. There must be listening and prayer before it can be known how the will should be exercised, and before the project of cultural reconstruction can begin.

Biologist and philosopher Gregory Bateson provides some grounds for believing that the kind of impassioned empiricism I have been describing is necessary for the discovery of new values. He says: “In contrast with epigenesis and tautology, which constitute the worlds of replication, there is the whole realm of creativity, art, learning and evolution in which the ongoing processes feed on the random” (*Mind and Nature*, 1979). Also: “Readiness can select components of the random which thereby become new information”. I think this quality of readiness is what Santayana had in mind when coining the term “impassioned empiricist.” It is this passion, this quality of readiness, that makes inhumanism a hopeful attitude, and a source of transcendence of contemporary nihilism. The inhumanist tradition is a valuable one because it presents modes of relation to experience, a kind of feeding on the random, which can lead away from dangerous, inherited cultural constructions and toward reconstruction.

This readiness is exemplified in a passage from Annie Dillard on the art of observing muskrats:

Can I stay still? How still? It is astonishing how many people cannot, or will not, hold still. I could not, or would not, hold still for thirty minutes inside, but at the creek I slow down, I center down, empty. I am not excited; my breathing is slow and regular. In my brain I am not saying, Muskrat! Muskrat! There! I am saying nothing. If I must hold a position, I do not freeze. If I freeze, locking my muscles, I will tire and break. Instead of going rigid, I go calm. I center down wherever I am; I find a balance and repose. I retreat—not inside myself, but outside myself, so that I am a tissue of senses. Whatever I see is plenty, abundance. (*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*)

It is from states of being such as this, and their representation in texts, that cultural reconstruction will come. Social construction itself is powerless to account for new ways of seeing.

Inhumanist rhetoric reflects a powerful understanding of historically-generated linguistic codes. The inhumanists are as aware as the post-structuralists of the traditional codes which influence thought; one of the major aims of the whole inhumanist project is to make the arbitrary qualities of the dominant humanist code visible. Jeffers, in particular, unrelentingly attacks all those figures of speech which place humanity at the center of the universe or emphasize its difference from other animal species and its supposed inherent superiority. The very term “inhumanism” is deliberately provocative.

The inhumanist tradition is rich with attempts to rewrite the dominant modes of cultural perception. Here is Thoreau, whose own entry into the canon was slow, and strongly resisted. In this quotation he is trying that most difficult of American tasks: rewriting the book on private property. How this passage resonates with the current battles in the West between private and public interests in land! He is evaluating the act of naming a pond after a neighboring landowner who has denuded its shores of forest:

Flint's pond! Such is the poverty of our nomenclature. What right had the unclean and stupid farmer, whose farm abutted on this sky water, whose shores he has ruthlessly laid bare, to give his name to it? Some skin-flint, who loved better the reflecting surface of a dollar, or a bright cent, in which he could see his own brazen face... (*Walden*)

The goal of inhumanist writing is to overcome just this poverty of nomen-

clature of which Thoreau speaks, so that we can find a language which reflects more than our own brazen faces.

However, inhumanism is not a nostalgic metaphysics of presence. Its concern is with developing a new nomenclature which allows for new perception and new forms of action. Inhumanism does not claim an absolute truth; it does not deny that in any discourse a certain set of terms is privileged. It is rather an attempt to privilege a new set of terms, those which arise in the mind when it takes on the qualities of Emerson's transparent eyeball. These terms enlarge the field of action, and, as the inhumanists well knew, the ultimate meaning of writing lies in a circle of action and language which is never completed.

The emphasis of inhumanism is on a new posture of the mind. If it is true, as J. L. Austin has somewhere theorized, that the distinctions of ordinary language correspond to the distinctions in the world that humankind has found it necessary to make in response to the whole range of human needs, then the inhumanists are a rich vein of wisdom in making those new distinctions. That wisdom should be accorded a place at the center of the canon of American literature.

Humanism and inhumanism can be looked at in light of certain polarities of feelings, such as reverence and exploitation, but it is not because one extreme has more intrinsic value than the other. Rather it is because the polarities have developed historically in language to express a range of values within which consciousness exists. For example, if we say that humanism stresses "control" and inhumanism stresses "wonder", or humanism "will" and inhumanism "grace", this is not to say that grace is a more desirable value than will, but that there is a state of being which ranges from grace to will, and people live within it—a society whose center of consciousness lies to one extreme will experience pain and will begin to generate images of itself as grotesque. There is no justification in saying that will is evil, but there is justification in saying that certain patterns of manifestations of will have become grotesque in a given historical situation.

By way of illustration let us look at a conversation which took place in 1927 between Sherwood Anderson, then a news reporter, and Herbert Hoover, then Secretary of Commerce. Anderson narrates:

He began to talk now, first of the Mississippi problem. It was a huge problem, he said, but it could be met. There was a way out.

There was the river cutting down through the heart of the country, twisting and winding. Had I not spent days and weeks on the great river? I told him I had. "It is uncontrollable", I said. "The Mississippi is a thing in nature. It is nature." But did not Joshua make the sun stand still? I remembered a summer when

I took the Mississippi as a god, became a river-worshiper.

I was in a boat fishing on the Mississippi when a flood came. I felt its power, it put the fear of God into my heart.

But Mr. Hoover had been down there and was not afraid. He spoke of spillways. There was to be a new river bed creeping down westward of the Mississippi—all through the lower country.

Then when great floods came rampaging and tearing down and Mother Mississippi was on a spree, she was to be split in two. Two Mother Mississippis, gentled now, going down to the sea. "What a man", I said to myself (*The Portable Sherwood Anderson*, 1948).

It seems clear that here is an actual instance of two minds (or souls, to enlarge the field as much as possible) in the grip of different paradigms. How shall a society exist which can embrace them both or which both of them can embrace? How shall they persuade each other of the value of their visions? Thomas Kuhn suggests that people in this position must become translators of each other's language. The function of criticism is, it seems to me, to provide somehow, at least in part, the language in which both theories or visions can be seen as part of a continuum of possible stances toward the world. How should Anderson's religiosity, wonder, reverence, and passivity fit with Hoover's desire for control, order, and safety? How should a society or a consciousness balance these qualities?

Before this question can be approached, some benchmarks, some terms of analysis, must be provisionally given. Inhumanist writings can be seen in light of some fundamental dichotomies, which represent a range of the quality of behavior or belief, rather than fixed poles. The relations between the dichotomies themselves are not stable, but they provide a framework in which to begin. Such divisions include dominance and adaptation, will and grace, pride and humility, tragedy and comedy, logic and intuition, repression and pleasure, linearity and circularity, knowledge and wonder, human and animal, mind and body, result and game, civilization and wilderness, striving and satisfaction, knowing and being. The inhumanist writers try to reawaken us to the qualities connoted by the latter term in each pair. They want to convince us or remind us of the reality of that end of the continuum.

There is something perverse in the structure of language which seems to divide qualities into polarities in order to designate them. For example, puritanism and sensuality seem to be opposite terms describing clear human qualities, but what is the name of the quality that lies between them? The inhumanists, for the most part, stress the importance of sen-

suousness for happiness and survival, but they do not condemn entirely a puritan emphasis on discipline. Such discipline has its place. All life must in a sense be disciplined, must select and reject; thus, the quality of puritanism can be seen as an inhumanist principle as well as a humanist one. John Passmore nicely illustrates the idea of balance that I am attempting to describe:

Only if men can first learn to look sensuously at the world will they learn to care for it. Not only to look at it, but to touch it, smell it, taste it. Plato—like every other authoritarian—severely condemns the sensuous man, the lover of sights and sounds. And one must grant to him that a purely sensuous life, in which sensuousness is never kindled into love, love with the responsibility and care it brings in its train, is impoverished, sub-human and incapable by itself of solving ecological, or any other, problems. But, on the other side, the attempt to be “super-human” by rising totally above sensuousness issues is a way of life no less impoverished, no less sub-human, and is utterly destructive, into the bargain, of man-nature relationships. (*Encounter* 42, 1974)

Although Passmore here successfully stabilizes a pair of opposed terms, and by doing so points in the direction of an entity between them, it must be remembered that the terms are slippery, and necessarily so, in order to do any justice at all to the complexity of human feeling.

The conflict between humanism and inhumanism does not lie exclusively in the arena of logical argument. When the followers of two paradigms clash, says Kuhn, there is no “neutral algorithm” or “systematic decision procedure” which can be appealed to (*The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*). The conflict must be fought out in the unbounded world of ordinary language, where tone is crucial. But this is not a situation to be decried. Rather it is a cause for hope. Only in a universe of ordinary language, with its ambiguity and fluidity, can we “change our minds”; if we saw the world through the medium of thoroughly logical and bounded language such as Fortran we could never achieve a new perspective. We might say that a speaker of Fortran could never convince a speaker of Basic of anything; they would both be locked forever into their rigidly determined perspectives on the world. As George Steiner writes in *After Babel*:

The difference between an artificial language such as Fortran, programmed by information and computer theorists, and natural language is one of vital ambiguities, or potentiality and undecidability.

Both humanism and inhumanism are embedded in those vital ambiguities of natural language.

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I would like to end this piece with an account of how the paradigms of humanist and inhumanist thought have worked them themselves out in my own experience both as a land-use planner and a student and teacher of literature.

When I was fifteen, I was taken on a canoe trip into the Boundary Waters Canoe Area on the Minnesota-Ontario border. Although the area had been logged in the nineteenth century, the part of it contained in Quetico Provincial Park had reverted to a true wilderness condition. I started out on this trip with no particular environmentalist ideas—this was 1962, before the term had come into vogue—and I certainly had no conscious views that might be called inhumanist. But certain events occurred which altered my thinking irreversibly. What I found on that trip was a landscape untouched by humankind and yet from a certain perspective, was beautiful; its form could not be improved upon. It was impressed upon me that this landscape existed in this condition completely apart from any human effort, except that required to keep it unaltered. The trees grew, the animals lived, the water glittered, completely outside human life.

I think I was most shocked that I could simply dip my cup into the lakes and drink; the water was not only safe, but delicious. This experience confounded my preconceptions; having grown up in Illinois, blocks from Lake Michigan, I had ingrained in me the idea that the lake was inherently dirty. Purity was something achieved only by effort; money must be spent on highly complex, scientific filtration plants before one could drink the water, natural water being filthy and dangerous.

I am not saying that only humans befoul the environment and that nature, left alone, provides for all human needs. This is truly a nostalgic insupportable view. But what did change for me was the idea value was a term generated by the human will and mind; value, I saw, could exist entirely separate from humankind. The Quetico land is, in fact, a harsh one; the winters are brutal, but that does not alter the fact that it has value on its own terms, some of which we are able to perceive. Purity, for example, is not a human invention. I read some years later, in Jeffers:

Whatever it is catches my heart in its hands... the Greeks  
were not its inventors. The Greeks were not the inventors  
Of shining clarity and jewel-sharp form and the beauty of  
God. He was free with men before the Greeks came:

He is here naked on the shining water. Every eye that has a man's nerves behind it has known him.

Jeffer's was describing an experience that I had had.

I think such an experience, whether in person or through literature, is at the root of an environmentalist vision. The attitude stemming from this experience is not a sufficient but a necessary condition for an enlightened environmental policy. Paul Shepard has stated: "The polarity of the given and the made will not go away. It is the duality at the heart of knowledge, the central enigma of our private and collective identities" (*North American Review* 262, 1977). This recognition that there is a "given" is fundamental to an environmentalist perspective.

The role that the given plays in our lives has been most deeply probed, not by scientists but, ironically, by those who have been allied with what are traditionally called the humanities: "The humanities—particularly philosophy and literature—can provide measures of depth which have so far been lacking in public discussion of the environment", says Joseph Meeker (*The Comedy of Survival*, 1980). Having attended a school of regional planning which was dominated by positivistically-oriented social sciences, I can agree. It is imaginative writers in the inhumanist tradition who explore most profoundly the central relation between the given and the made.

The second personal experience I wish to describe, the one concerned with humanism, derives from my work for a county land use planning agency in Washington State. Specifically, I had occasion to attend meetings aimed at promoting the then-new national flood insurance program. The program was an attempt, to rationalize the government's role in protection of people from the effects of floods. Previously, the government's efforts had gone into expensive and environmentally destructive dams (as preventive measures) and into costly reimbursements of private owners (as restorative measures). As a result, taxpayers as a whole subsidized the person who lived in the flood plain and also underwrote the environmental degradation of rivers, fish, and wildlife. It was the case that a person could build a new house in the flood plain, then petition the government to build a dam to protect him. Or if no dam were built and he were damaged by the inevitable flood, he could petition the government to reimburse him and help him build again in the same spot. The system was profoundly irrational. The flood insurance program, on the other hand, would quite rationally require all builders of new construction to protect themselves by paying premiums at a rate which reflected their scientifically-determined potential vulnerability to floods.

Rather than meeting with acceptance, the program was strongly

resisted by most people testifying at locally held hearings. There was an overwhelming sense that people should not adapt to the river, people should control it. It was somehow morally wrong not to do so. The same people who loathed the federal government for its supposed meddling in private affairs and its giveaway programs to the poor thought it the human duty of that government to subsidize the soul brave enough to live in the flood plain and, if wiped out, to build there again.

I realized as I watched the proceedings that I was seeing a religious struggle; humanism was being defended with all the fervor of a fundamentalist creed. I was watching the effects of a profound dualist philosophy which, according to Ian McHarg, assumes the following:

Man is exclusively divine, all other creatures and things occupy lower and generally inconsequential stature; man is given dominion over all creatures and things; he is enjoined to subdue the earth... that the cosmos is a pyramid erected to support man on its pinnacle, that reality exists only because man can perceive it, that God is made in the image of man, and that the world consists solely in a dialogue between men (*Design with Nature*, 1969).

The people testifying would not have formulated it this way, but they would have agreed. More important, they would not so much have agreed, as wondered how there could even be an argument. Those testifying would in their hearts have echoed Hegel if they had known his words:

a person has as his substantive end the right of putting his will into any and every thing, thereby making it his, because it has no such end in itself and derives its destiny and soul from his will. This is the absolute right of appropriation which man has over all "things" (quoted in Christopher Stone's *Should Trees Have Standing*, 1974).

Hegel here is defending private property, and his statements are questionable enough, but today the right he expounds has become almost a duty and forms the main collective principle of American society. This is the primary glue which holds this conglomeration of utilitarians called America together—or so I believe in my most pessimistic moods.

The conclusion was forced on me that only a new kind of education could alter the events I had been witnessing. And I also learned that rationalism and humanism, though sharing much in theory, share little in practice. The true grounds of rationality seemed to me more closely asso-

ciated with inhumanism than with humanism, for the latter excluded the given from its value scheme, and thereby limited, for ideological reasons, the picture of reality available to decision-makers. The anthropocentric braggadocio which pervades chauvinistic humanism reflects this narrow ideology—humanism in this form is not a good base for rational action.

Here we come upon the role which literature can play in promoting the inhumanist perspective, and with it rational action. Emerson says: “Literature is a point outside of our hodiernal circle through which a new one may be described. The use of literature is to afford us a platform where we may command a view of our present life, a purchase by which we may move it.” This thinking is implicit in William Everson’s comments on one aspect of Jeffers’s importance:

The ecological crisis has driven home with great force the pertinence of Jeffers’s insistence that man divorced from nature is a monstrosity. By wrenching attention from man to cosmos he has served as a powerful counterbalance to perennial human egocentricity, and his witness in this regard is only beginning. No matter what civilizations survive this one, the pertinence of his vision will go on... (Foreword to *The Double Axe*)

How does Jeffers instigate this revolution in perspective? Jerome Bump, a literary critic with environmental interests, suggests that literature can play a powerful role in “the solution of the immediate environmental crisis”, for the following reasons:

Creative literature can make us conscious of the arbitrary limits of language and stretch them to encompass more of experienced reality; it can expose our categorical dualisms as fictions which we have taken literally, and replace them with new fictions more congruent with a larger reality (*Georgia Review* 28, 1974).

This larger reality is what Jeffers gives us, and to perceive a larger reality expands the grounds for rational decision-making; it also expands the possibilities for love, the antidote to nihilism. I recently came across the phrase “the brute exteriority of nature” used quite casually in an influential philosophical treatise. It was as if the words “brute” and “nature” automatically went together, as if nature’s exterior were always brutal. Certainly people thirsting in the desert experience the brute exteriority of nature. But what aspect of nature, then, do they experience when they reach the oasis and feel the cool water run down their throats? It is to a vision large enough to hold both experiences within its ken that we must

turn if we are to act rationally, and it is such a vision which Jeffers's inhumanism provides.

Finally, we return to the issue of the canon. The inhumanist vision is crucial to the national debate over environmental issues, yet the dominant American literature anthologies woefully underrepresent it in their selections. This is an omission which by all rights needs to be corrected in future editions. In my opinion, there is now no more important body of work to put before a new generation of readers.

But things are not necessarily going in the right direction. For example, editors of the less popular, but nevertheless widely used anthology called *The Harper American Literature* (which is also grossly deficient in environmental writing), actually eliminated from the latest edition (1994) an inhumanist-oriented John McPhee piece which had somehow made it into the previous edition (1987). Such pruning is usually reserved only for the likes of the Fireside poets. In a related incident, Norman Maclean once described how an editor rejected the now classic volume *A River Runs Through It*, because (the editor complained), "These stories have trees in them". Perhaps that editor later went to work for Harper, and, scandalized to find the McPhee piece with both trees and grizzly bears in it, indignantly and proudly excised it.

The subject is too serious for humor, however. One might just as soon laugh at the short-sightedness of a government which cuts funds for national parks at the same time that their use skyrockets. Or which cuts protection when the pressure on the environment steadily and ominously increases. The editors of the leading American literature anthologies, so sensitive to the power of the canon in shaping public perceptions and values need to open the newly broadened canon even further, and they need to do it soon.

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