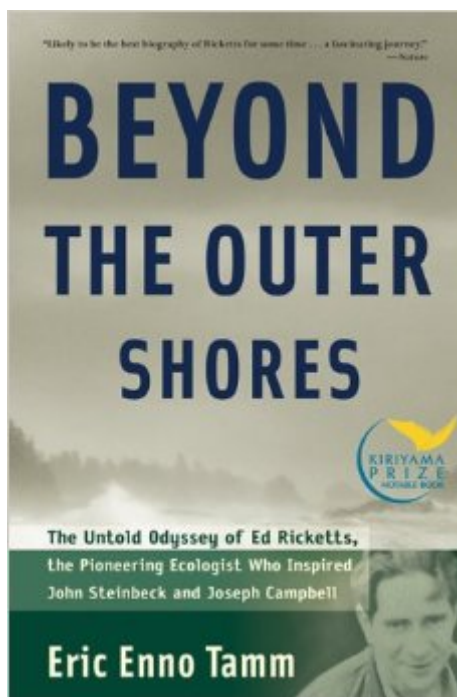


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Beyond The Outer Shores: The Untold Odyssey Of Ed Ricketts, The Pioneering Ecologist Who Inspired John Steinbeck And Joseph Campbell



Synopsis

In the 1930s, while the Dust Bowl and the Great Depression sent most of America into the doldrums, a lively intellectual and artistic community formed in the West, revolving around three legendary friends: Ed Ricketts, John Steinbeck, and Joseph Campbell. Steinbeck immortalized Monterey's bohemian spirit in *Cannery Row*, but the area's true lifeblood was his best friend and mentor, Ed Ricketts. Today Ed Ricketts is usually remembered as "Doc"; the beer-drinking philosopher-scientist who presided over Monterey's population of "whores, pimps, gamblers, and sons of bitches" in *Cannery Row*; but Ricketts was actually a trailblazing ecologist who did seminal work in the emerging field on the Pacific Coast. His ideas were decades before their time, and his two books, *Between Pacific Tides* and *Sea of Cortez* (coauthored with Steinbeck), are still considered classics. Now, some sixty years after his untimely death, Ricketts' ecological approach and ethic seem more relevant than ever.

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Customer Reviews

I got to know "Doc" Ricketts when I was about 15. In 10th-grade English, we had read "The Grapes of Wrath" and "Of Mice and Men," and I greatly enjoyed both. My English teacher knew not only of my enthusiasm for Steinbeck, but also my penchant for standing knee-deep in ponds collecting invertebrate animals. She suggested I might like to read "Cannery Row" on my own. I did, and became a convicted Steinbeck fan. I could not have known then, of course, that one day I'd not only get a doctorate in zoology but also have a daughter who'd earn a degree in marine science. Nor

could I have imagined that she and I would make a pilgrimage to Monterey and Cannery Row together, and perform together in a college production of "The Grapes of Wrath." "Doc" was never far from my mind in the years since 1965. But aside from what little we learned on our brief visit to Monterey, I still knew Ed Ricketts as little more than Doc: a collector, proprietor of a biological supply company, and wanna-be scientist. (Remember Doc's futile effort to write a scientific treatise on an octopus.) Until now. I read a review of "Beyond the Outer Shores" in "Nature," promptly booted up .com, and ordered it to give to my daughter this Christmas -- along with Steinbeck and Ricketts' "Sea of Cortez" and Ricketts' "Between Pacific Tides." I couldn't resist dipping into "Outer Shores" the moment it arrived, and once I did, I couldn't stop until I reached the back cover. Now I've ordered another set of this Ricketts-Steinbeck-Tamm trilogy for my own library. Tamm elevates Ed Ricketts far beyond the Steinbeck caricature.

A couple of years ago, I posted a review of the Ricketts letters collected by Katharine Rodger. In that review, I wished for a more comprehensive biography of Ricketts. I guess this is the book. It is well written, well researched and well documented by references to sources. I think its main benefit is that it separates Ed Ricketts from the characters in John Steinbeck's novels and *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*. Evidently, Steinbeck was first and foremost a novelist, even when writing "nonfiction." Tamm helps explain Ricketts's relationship with Toni Jackson and presents some new (to me, anyway) information on his trips to Vancouver Island. There is quite a lot of material here about Joseph Campbell's influence on Ricketts (and vice-versa) that isn't in Steinbeck's various writings on Ricketts. There isn't much new about Ricketts's life before his lab (including notes and correspondence) burned down in 1936. Tamm has a tendency to use Ricketts's, Steinbeck's, and Joseph Campbell's writing as jumping-off points to his own ethical and environmental perspective and even to preach a little. I largely agree with his views, but I don't think this biography is the place for them. Tamm emphasizes Ricketts's philosophy, as Steinbeck and others have. Ricketts took this work seriously, but only one of his three large essays was ever published. His "Non-Telological Thinking" appears as the Easter Sunday entry in the narrative half of *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*, which Ricketts coauthored with Steinbeck. On Ricketts's philosophy, Tamm writes: "He was pioneering a new mode of thinking that contained all the elements of what would become 'deep ecology' in the 1970s." (p. 239).

Within five years of the death of Ed Ricketts marine biology changed forever. The first was the widespread use of wet suits and self contained underwater breathing devices. The observer no

longer was tethered to the shore and could hang motionless in the water at almost any depth observing what was actually happening in the submerged cosmos. Underwater photography allowed dynamic and objective views. Gone were the days of waders and buckets and dry heads. John Steinbeck in the introduction to *Between Pacific Tides* of 1948 also sensed a different change, an Enlightenment, "The world is being broken down to be built up again, and eventually the sense of the new worlds will come out of the laboratory and penetrate into the smallest living techniques and habits of the whole people". And of course in 1953 Watson and Crick announced the functional structure of DNA. Ricketts, one the greatest naturalists of all time, was astounded at the array of creatures, mostly animals he found along the shore. He wrote of what he saw and was ostracized by the "legitimate" academic Poo Bahs of his day. But he was clean and pure and loved true things. How would he feel if he could see all of his sea animals displayed in comparative genomics arrays and consider the genes that make them holy? But about the book. Tamm has captured the light hidden behind the towering figure of Steinbeck and "Doc". He shows Ricketts, complex, gifted and maybe all mixed up as an existensial figure laboring under the stigma of never having taken a degree. Thank God! If Ricketts had become the academic soft science ecologist like David Phillips who revised the fifth edition of *Tides*, my life would have been far poorer. This is a wonderful book, but don't stop there.

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