

THE CARAVAN

NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF LOREN EISELEY

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SPRING 1991



Loren Corey Eiseley
September 3, 1907 - July 9, 1977

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Different people find different things in Loren Eiseley's work. For many it has a religious significance and with this in mind we brought 1990 to a close with a presentation by Dr. Harvey Potthoff, Mattingly Distinguished Professor of Religion from Nebraska Wesleyan University on "Loren Eiseley's Religious Journey." Dr. Potthoff wrote "It is my judgment that (in Eiseley's work) there is indeed a spirituality, a religious quality of outlook and style marked by a sense of sanctity in existence, a reverence for life, a yearning to know, a sense of awe and wonder in the presence of nature's mysteries. We might well perceive his life and work as a religious pilgrimage."

Another highlight of the year came when Gale Christianson's biography of Loren Eiseley was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize in biography. When he appeared at our

"We have joined the caravan, you might say, at a certain point; we will travel as far as we can, but we cannot in one lifetime see all that we would like to see or learn all that we hunger to know."

-- The Immense Journey

SAVE THESE DATES!!!

Spring Meeting - Saturday, May 4th

Fall Meeting - Sunday, September 8th

Time, place, and program to be announced later.

September meeting, he talked of the process of writing this.

At a special Board meeting held in Lincoln on February 2nd, we set dates for the 1991 meetings, developed a slate of new officers and inducted six new Board Members. The Officer's slate will be presented and voted on at the Spring meeting.

Special thanks go to Pat Nefsger, brand new Board Member, who, in the absence of our regular secretary, Sherrill Daniel, did a masterly job of taking minutes

This will be my final President's Letter although I will continue to work with the Friends. It's been an interesting and rewarding job much of which is due to the very special nature of people who read Eiseley. Thanks for giving me the opportunity to know you.

Naomi Brill

THE 8TH AND 9TH LOREN EISELEY MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP ESSAY WINNERS - SEPTEMBER 1989

(These awards were announced at the Annual Program of the "Friends of Loren Eiseley Celebration" at Marian and Bertrand Schultz's home, Lincoln, Nebraska)

ON THE INTERPRETATION OF MAN'S RELATION TO THE ENVIRONMENT

Michael D. Christoffersen, Hastings Senior High School, Hastings, Nebraska (Now attending Hastings College)

The environment's relation to man is that the environment on the planet Earth created man, having allowed him to evolve from the subhuman species that have inhabited the planet for millions of years. But this relationship is not reflexive: through man's evolution he has learned technologically to use and to manipulate many factors of the environment to suit them to his liking and need. To a point, man has learned to control the environment, thus avoiding the previous biological need of further specialization for further adaptation that the environment gratuitously provides for all animals during their evolutions. Man has made the environment his captive slave.

Man has used and abused his environment selfishly to suit his need. Like every other living organism, man has the instinct to fight for survival. But because of man's higher intelligence and of the existence of the civilization of mankind, man as well competes in his own variety of vicious battles, not merely for survival, but for prestigious position among the ladders of the various social, economic, political, spiritual, and technological institutions he has created. Man's ambition leads him into a struggle to be king of the mountain, not only over the generally unthreatening subhuman animals, but even more so over his own species. Man strives for success among the various institutions of his existence, sometimes diligently, sometimes recklessly, and sometimes outright violently. To attain these goals of success, man has had to progress quite far in his never-slackening quest to gain the advantage over his fellow man--to progress not only as far as, but at least one step further than the next man. This rate at which man has progressed can itself be viewed as evolution, although not physiological evolution. And, consequently, the environment has changed as humans have learned to control it more to suit their interests, desires, and growing needs.

As explained in "The Lethal Factor" by Loren Eiseley, the special function of the human brain's having specialized over the dozens of centuries of man's existence is to avoid further specialization: instead of man biologically adapting to the environment, man has changed the environment, adapting it to him. Great forests are cut down. Swamps are covered. Thick vegetation of tropical jungles is cleared away. Dry lands are made fertile by expensive irrigation. But these are

mere changes in nature that man has made to help himself survive (resultingly killing off other species that inhibited these areas otherwise useless to man).

Man has the intelligence to invent and to create beyond belief. It seems anymore that man's creations are made for purposes of convenience and comfort. Thus, man is not at all progressing biologically to a more advanced state of adaptation. Nearsighted, apathetic humans across the world litter and pollute the sky, the water, and the soil (and as hopelessly impossible as it appears, it is true: the ones doing most of the damage are the ones in the richly developed, industrialized nations who have access to all the resources while the poor peasants in the disease-infested third-world countries starve and suffer without luxury or even slight comfort until they die and become premature mortality statistics in a history book).

Despite the arrogantly acclaimed superiority of human civilization, man is just another species that fits into the biological scheme of all existing Earth life. No matter how hard conservationists, ecologists, and environmentalists fight to save the environment from further destruction, the reality that they are millionly outnumbered by the apathetic, selfish, dangerously institutional ambitious others proves that the progression of the human race is a destruction evolutionary process. And if it weren't humans doing the damage, it would sometime be some other species that had progressed beyond containment, as humans have already done now. There can be no control of the damage humans do to the environment when the demand to maintain the existence of such an advanced populous species, in actual reality, requires the profligately excessive depletion of limited resources and the immense pollution pumped into the environment by the processing of those resources. Man has the ability to tame every animal but himself as he lets his ambition for progression spill over the dike of sandbags that he is continually heightening and flood the world to an unsiphonable depth.

The environment is completely in the hands of man. Man can do whatever he wants with or to his environment. But in the advanced civilization and by the costful technology of today, in the greedy, hungry hearts of men, to remain alive shall require the continuation of, and perhaps an increase in, the neck-breaking speed of destruction which humans are exerting on the environment at the present time.

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

Lynn Day Lu, East High School, Lincoln, Nebraska (Now attending Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.)

Humankind acknowledges the beauty and fury of nature through art. What man cannot create, he imitates. Whispers of white vapor, clouds of cotton candy spun from some ethereal sugar, are frozen forever on film; a dray, fleeting hailstorm permanently pelts the

earth on canvas; a mustang stallion, sinews writhing, balances precariously on tiny hooves, defying gravity for an eternity in marble.

Humans are forever appraising their surroundings and carving them in stone. Though the mysteries of earth are ultimately beyond our comprehension, some inner working in the mind of mankind obligates and allows us to capture glimpses of nature's work, and to appreciate it. To discover beauty is to expect it everywhere, I have found it on sunny days lingering in the shadows of leafy elms, in the spirits of a timid rabbit and the noble hawk that seeks to devour it, in ants that carry menacing, crunchy beetles on their backs for food. I have even found it in the looming concrete structures that suppress the sun's will to shine in large cities.

The depiction of beauty is a shared understanding among humans. Cave dwellers from long ago engraved sketches of their escapades on the walls of stone structures to satisfy a need to express themselves. Through the ages, this common goal has been refined. A mentally retarded man, an autistic savant, fashions out of wax and bronze remarkable pieces of sculpture which challenge nature in their reality of form. He does not create these miniature models of animals for money or fame, but simply because he possesses the talent to capture the essence of life within a flick of a fingernail or a stroke of his palm.

But man is not the only animal with creative talent. A spider carefully laces her fragile, silken net of doom between green stems as meticulously and true to plan as a weaver. The wooden dam of a beaver with its tightly packed components must be as perfectly constructed as an architect's creation. These are masterpieces. The art of humans differs from animal art, however, because man is the only creature who creates art for art's sake. The difference between man and beast has been calculated to be the power to reason. A caterpillar hides himself within a cocoon by instinct. In another branch of the animal kingdom, man can choose whether or not to paint. Yet even the exercise of this choice is inevitably performed as a part of human nature--instinct.

The art created by animals is the art of practicality. The perfection of a shell is a necessity to the conch. The symmetry of a hive is required for the bee to survive. For these creatures, art is the result of living. Nature creates art as a by-product when she places on the earth breathing beasts, each of which is a masterpiece in itself.

I find more beauty in the plainly pragmatic than in the extravagantly admired. I once witnessed a short, humble rainfall that was the most beautiful shower I can recall. Nature unbridled in wrath in the form of a violent thunderstorm can be exciting--I normally watch thunderstorms with eagerness and fascination. For the sound of thunder declaring itself to the earth as

lightning blazes royally is a memorable sight. Yet more beautiful than a showy shower is a delicate sprinkling of gentle rain. The sound of silence behind a glassy veil of silver raindrops jingling to the drowning ground refreshes; the knowledge that newly formed flower buds are drinking in that soft rain to bloom comforts and enlivens. For a rain that brings life is the most beautiful.

Such an image in my mind is far clearer than any photograph or film. A man can make a movie that accurately portrays life, but it is nature that controls when the real film begins and ends. Art does not create memories, it merely records them. Other creatures have no need for what humans generally classify as art. In actuality, every natural action performed by a four-footed beast or feathered creature can be viewed as art. And while humans see a need to make art an extra endeavor separate from their natural functions, it is still part of human nature to record what we see, and human nature to appreciate the beauty in life.

That beauty of life as perceived by man or beast is the same. Though man may praise himself for being talented and insightful enough to create works of art, he must still defer to nature for his materials. Nature is the master artist of the world. She has given men and beasts alike the tools and the desire, whether disguised as instinct or free will, to create. Yet neither the greatest human artists nor unwitting animal builders can match her hand. These divine fingers brush the sky's cheek and make her blush with pink modesty at dawn. This brush paints the thinnest veins on tiny leaves. This chisel fashions mountains and canyons of unmatched texture. This palette mixes the hues of life.

Men will go about their business, and creatures will go about theirs. Aspiring Michelangelos will continue to seek truth in art. But what is beautiful is not for man nor beast to judge. We can only speculate that in nature, only the beautiful survive, and what survives must be beautiful.

LITERARY SOCIETY JOINS THE FRIENDS ENMASSE

Among our newest members are three people from Osmond, Nebraska who for the past year have constituted an informal literary society that met on Fridays for breakfast at the Osmond Cafe. Over coffee they read Eiseley's essays and poetry. "The cafe people were very tolerant. They let us drink coffee and talk for as long as we want." The membership consisted of Alaska Reed, retired high school English teacher; Jack Dorwart, Pastor of the United Church of Christ at Pierce, and Pierce School Superintendent, Phil Falik. Welcome to the Friends!

NEBRASKA LITERATURE FESTIVAL

Plans are underway for the First Nebraska Literature Festival to be held in Omaha at the UNO Campus September 27th to 29th, with the second scheduled for Kearney in 1992. These will feature the works of six Nebraska authors, Bess Streeter Aldrich, Willa Cather, Loren Eiseley, John Neihardt, Mari Sandoz, and Wright Morris.

We will be responsible for the presentation of Eiseley with workshops, speakers and a booth. Keep these September dates free and volunteer to help---it promises to be a rewarding experience for all concerned.

NEBRASKA ACADEMY OF SCIENCES ANNOUNCES THE \$500 LOREN EISELEY MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP

Awarded annually to any Nebraska High School Senior for an 800-1,000 word paper on the interpretation of man's relationship to the environment.

Requirements:

- ◀ Paper must show an Eiseley-like literary style.
- ◀ Must include list of Eiseley work read by student.
- ◀ Must include recommendations from 2-3 teachers.
- ◀ Must list scholastic references and grade report.
- ◀ Must show evidences of student's being accepted in an accredited university or college.
- ◀ Should include name of school, parents name, address and phone number. Typing preferred although legible writing accepted.

Application deadline: July 30th, 1991. Award will be presented at the September meeting of the Friends of Loren Eiseley. Winners will be honored at the annual banquet of the Nebraska Academy of Sciences in April, 1992.

The two 1989 award winning papers are presented on page two. The 1990 winning paper will be published in the April 1990 proceedings of the Nebraska Academy of Sciences.

DR. LEWIS THOMAS RECEIVES DISTINGUISHED LIFETIME LOREN EISELEY AWARD

New York, N.Y. (December 18, 1990) -- Dr. Lewis Thomas, internationally recognized scientist, author and humanist, and currently Scholar-in-Residence at The New York Hospital-Cornell Medical Center, has received the Distinguished Lifetime Loren Eiseley Award for his contributions to both the sciences and the humanities.

The award was personally presented today by Dr. David Shrader, dean of the College of Fine Arts of the University of Nebraska at Omaha, at a small ceremony attended by Dr. G. Tom Shires, dean of Cornell University Medical College. Dr. Shrader had nominated Dr. Thomas for the honorary award.

The award is given to the person who best exemplifies the balance between the sciences and humanities that was personified by the late Loren Eiseley, who was scientist, essayist and humanist.

The Loren Eiseley prize is sponsored by the Humanities Emphasis Workgroup of the Educational Advisory Board of Bishop Clarkson College in Omaha, Nebraska.

In his letter nominating Dr. Thomas for the award, Dr. Shrader states: "Collections of Dr. Thomas's essays, such as *The Lives of a Cell*, *The Medusa and the Snail*, *The Youngest Profession*, and *Late Night Thoughts on Listening to Mahler's Ninth*, have established him as one of the few writers of this century who have been able to provide a synthesis of the sciences, arts, and philosophy in a format that is approachable by a very wide audience of readers."

As scientist, Dr. Thomas is known for his contributions to the biology of immune response, including his original concept that one of the major functions of the immune system is to patrol the body for malignant cells and destroy them.

PLEASE NOTE . . .

We welcome comments, criticisms, material for inclusion in The Caravan, new members. If you have not yet paid your dues, send them along. \$5.00 will keep you on the mailing list for a year and include a subscription to the Newsletter.

You can become a Contributing Member for \$25.00; a Supporting member for \$50.00; and a Patron for \$100.00. Send checks to: Friends of Loren Eiseley, P.O. Box 80934, Lincoln, NE 68501-0934.

DUES NOTICE

It's time again, as at the beginning of each fiscal year, for our annual dues appeal. Your response last year enabled us to carry out a fairly ambitious program of bringing Gale Christianson here for our Fall meeting, publishing four Newsletters, and participating in the Nebraska Groundwater Festival.

Many of you have already sent your money in for this year. Remember that we consider all money received since September 1990 as credited to 1991 dues.

In 1991 we will have our regular Spring and Fall meetings, participate in the Nebraska Literature Festival, and hope to publish the paper on Loren Eiseley's Religious Pilgrimage given by Dr. Harvey Potthoff in November of 1990.

Regular Membership - \$5.00

Contributing Member - \$24.00

Supporting Member - \$50.00

Patron - \$100.00

Send checks to: Friends of Loren Eiseley

P.O. Box 80934

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