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# THE CARAVAN

Newsletter of The Friends of Loren Eiseley

Vol. 5, No. 3

FALL 1991

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

*"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*

## **PRESIDENT'S LETTER**

Dear Friends of Loren Eiseley,

This letter is a joy to write as I have wonderful news to share!

The Board Members have been busy planning for the Friends to participate in the Nebraska Literature Festival, September 27th and 28th, 1991 at the Milo Bail Student Center (see enclosed brochure). We will have:

1. A Table and Display Boards depicting Eiseley as "A Man For All Reasons",
2. A busy schedule of varied presentations (see brochure and schedule),
3. A luncheon from 12 noon to 2:00 p.m., September 28th, in the clubroom of the UNO Alumni House (see enclosed map), and
4. Our Annual Meeting, which will be held before lunch. Please return the RSVP portion in this newsletter by September 23 to:

Mrs. Dorothy Willis, Friend's Secretary  
Bishop Clarkson College  
333 So. 44th St.  
Omaha, NE 68131-3799

We need a minimum of 50 people. The luncheon will be:

A chicken salad plate with fresh fruit  
Freshly baked muffin/roll  
Beverage  
Simple dessert

The price will be \$7.00 (please send check with reservation).

5. The highlight of our luncheon will be the presence of Peter Heidtmann, Ph.D., author of Loren Eiseley: A Modern Ishmael, the latest biography of Loren Eiseley. He will give a presentation about writing his book at our luncheon. We also have some of the winners of the Eiseley medal given annually by the Bishop Clarkson College to that person who, like Eiseley, is able to combine both the sciences and humanities and write/teach about them.

We will also entertain members of the Humanities Emphasis Workgroup who so faithfully vote for the medal winner from the nominees each year.

What a great day! What a great group!

And what a great synergist to honor: *Loren Eiseley*

Jane S. Smith, President  
105 1/2 North 54th St.  
Omaha, NE 68132  
(402) 558-5911

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### VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

Eloise Herrick, 3400 N Street, Lincoln, NE 68510, (402) 435-3085, will be in charge of the Eiseley exhibit at the Literature Festival on September 28th, 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. There will be note cards for sale, handouts, book signing by Peter Heidtmann and opportunity to talk with interested people about Eiseley and his work and The Friends.

If you would be able to assist, get in touch with Eloise at your earliest convenience.

### EISELEY BIOGRAPHY NOW AVAILABLE IN PAPERBACK

Fox at the Wood's Edge, Gale Christian-son's biography of Loren Eiseley that appeared in 1990 is now available in paperback, courtesy of Henry Holt & Company, New York, who is the publisher of the original paperback.

Now available at bookstores, it is a worthy addition to your library of Eiseley volumes and much easier for reading in bed than the hardback!

### EISELEY SPEAKERS AVAILABLE

It is now possible, through the Nebraska Humanities Council, Humanities Resource Center Speakers Bureau, to engage speakers on Eiseley and his work. Jane Stillwell Smith will be available to talk about "Loren Eiseley: A Man For All Reasons", and Naomi Brill will present "Float Down the River and Dance with the Frogs" (for youth audiences) and "Loren Eiseley: A Fox at the Wood's Edge".

Arrangements for Speakers Bureau presentations can be made through the Nebraska Humanities Council, 215 Centennial Mall South, Lincoln, NE 68508, (402) 474-2131.

THE CARAVAN is published four times a year and your contributions and suggestions are more than welcome. In the interest of space it may be necessary to edit material submitted. We are always interested in your favorite quotations and try to find an appropriate one for each issue in addition to the one from which our title is drawn. Send contributions to Naomi Brill, 4625 South Street, Lincoln, NE 68506.

## LOREN EISELEY, A MODERN ISHMAEL

Loren Eiseley, A Modern Ishmael, by Peter Heidtmann of Ohio University has just been published and the author will be our guest at our Annual Meeting on September 28th. When Gale Christianson talked with us last year about his Eiseley book, Fox at the Wood's Edge, he spoke as a biographer who saw his role as recounting the life of the writer, not presenting literary criticism. Other authors, he said, would deal with this aspect of knowing Eiseley.

Peter Heidtmann is such an author and his book is invaluable for those of us who find special meaning in Eiseley's work. He is not a newcomer to Nebraska, having presented papers at the previous meeting of the Friends, and at the Western Literature Association meetings in Lincoln. Dick Herman, one of the founders of the Friends, has reviewed his new book. The following is his complete review:

### Portrait of Loren Eiseley For Intellectuals by Dick Herman

**Loren Eiseley: A Modern Ishmael.** By Peter Heidtmann. Archon Books; \$25.

This is a serious, small (5-1/2 inches by 9 inches), thin (120 pages) book. Its audience will be at least diminutive. Yet the work has staying power for those who make the sustained effort.

There is accuracy in describing Nebraska-born and imprinted Loren Eiseley as an Ishmael-like figure. He was a soul who deliberately portrayed and emphasized himself as an outcast, a beyond-pity wanderer in the wilderness, one who survives to tell his narratives through a series of disconnected stories. And a captivating storyteller he surely was.

English professor Peter Heidtmann builds his thesis on the whole of Eiseley's poetic, dark essays, moving easily back and forth across chronology. His ability to isolate and thread the precise sentence or paragraph to reinforce a point wins respect. Doubt not Heidtmann's background ability to teach a course on the essential Eiseley, both declared and decoded, at Ohio University, if that's what he does.

Which is to say this is a pretty scholarly, intellectualized work, not for a popular constituency. How about such a sentence: "The theotropic mind often requires an analogue in the external world to help it explore the metaphorically vast inner regions where it hopes to find the immanent god."

Nor is it necessarily correct to call Heidtmann an Eiseley champion. The Plains-twisted figure comes across as an authentic and unique American literary figure of lasting interest and merit, but no second Henry Thoreau.

Still, Thoreau is automatically the more appealing of the two, also feeling about in the outside natural world for positioning the interior human condition. We're told that is because Thoreau reflects the optimism of pre-Civil War America. Eiseley's congenital, autumnal melancholy--born of ice and yellow dust, passing back to same--fits the more honest realism of the late 20th century.

Last year, biographer Gale Christianson removed the Eiseley mask to reveal a less admirable (but no less talented) human being quite as permanently tormented by childhood trauma as we had been sympathetically schooled to know. Eiseley was also manipulative in his personal mythologizing. Heidtmann almost buys the interpretation, but not quite.

(continued)

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**ANNUAL MEETING LUNCHEON RESERVATION**  
**\$7.00 per person**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Reservations: \_\_\_\_\_

Checks payable to: **Friends of Loren Eiseley.** Due September 23, 1991

The first-person encounters central to many Eiseley stories -- the Neanderthal girl, the skull in the Slit, the Star Thrower on the beach, the crippled old man, the playful fox pup, the verdict of the birds, may be metaphors, but Heidtmann chooses to accent them. Others are permitted the skepticism which willingly grants the tortured lyricist his artistic license.

"Not to inform the reader but to transform him" was Eiseley's enduring accomplishment. So the sensitive reader opens to a companion who also knows intimately our own sentences of personal isolation, solitude and loneliness, our continuing wonder at plants and other natural forms, our reckoning of evolutionary time, our seeking of meaning.

We then join Heidtmann's conclusion that "the totality of Eiseley's work may be said to embody the natural history of his soul. The beginning of the story is easy to define . . . the movement from innocence to experience through the agency of the Fall. The long middle part . . . is dominated by the Ishmael figure who wanders through the wilderness of his individual life in search of wisdom. This is a lonely undertaking in which the seeker reads nature's signs in the world outside himself, looking for meanings that have a bearing on his own interior world, the domain that somehow connects him in its depths with the transcendent realm where oneness of being is to be found. That quest is never completed, however . . ."

Not for Loren Eiseley, nor for masses of all other planetary transients.

(From the Lincoln Journal-Star, Sunday, June 23, 1991)

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### LOREN EISELEY MEMORIAL AWARD

### LOREN EISELEY SCHOLARSHIP AWARD

On March 15, 1991 the Loren Eiseley Memorial Award given annually by Bishop Clarkson College was awarded to Dr. William Bournke who teaches in the Biology Department of Nebraska Wesleyan University. In his classes he combines that balance of science and humanism that characterizes his work. He and the givers of this award will be honored at the Annual Meeting of the Friends of Loren Eiseley on September 28th.

The Twelfth Loren Eiseley Scholarship Award, given by the Nebraska Academy of Sciences, will be presented to the winner at the Annual Meeting of the Friends of Loren Eiseley, September 28th, to be held at the University of Nebraska Omaha Alumni House. These scholarships, given annually to the student submitting the best essay on Eiseley and his work, are announced at the spring meeting of the Academy of Sciences and awarded at the Eiseley meeting in September. Join us, meet your new President, and applaud this young student of Loren Eiseley's work.

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