

THE CARAVAN

NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF LOREN EISELEY

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Loren Corey Eiseley
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*"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

"We must never accept Utility as the sole reason for education," Loren Eiseley wrote in his essay, "How Human Is Man?" In an age where practicability and the bottom line seem to rule the decision making process, Eiseley's words are nearly incomprehensible. If not utility, then what?

For three years now, a member of the Friends of Loren Eiseley has taught an honors course at the University of Nebraska Lincoln on Loren Eiseley's essays and poetry. The course was originated by Dr. Bing Chen, from the College of Engineering and Technology, and continued by Dr. Mary Liz Jameson from the entomology department. Guiding bright young students through the admittedly difficult works of Eiseley is one of the most important things we can do, both for this group and for the students.

Eiseley himself must have been an imposing college teacher. In Gale Christianson's *Fox at the Wood's Edge*, Eiseley's student Jake Gruber recalled his demeanor: he would "come in just on the dot ten minutes after the hour, pick up from where he had left off the period before, talk for fifty minutes (there were never any questions), then just as the hour ended, he would finish it off, turn around, and walk out." In reading Eiseley's books, we are like his newest class of student; subject to his intellectual barrage but unable to raise our hands and ask, "Why, Dr. Eiseley?"

The UNL honors students have been lucky because they have guides through the sometimes dense jungles of Eiseley's essays. They can ask questions and deepen their understanding -- and we hope that they may surpass their teachers and reach new heights in appreciating Eiseley's work. Eiseley wrote in "The Mind as Nature" that "the educator can be the withholder as well as the giver of life." Surely maximizing life is more important than maximizing utility.

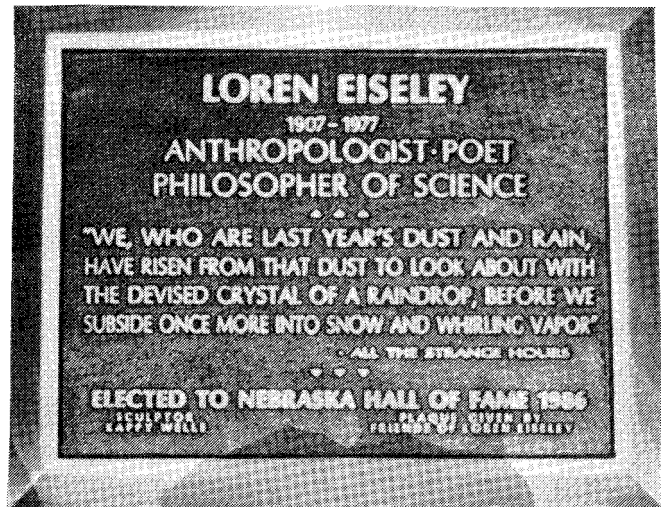
Christine Pappas, President



Shown at a program to celebrate its reprinting, Christine Pappas holds the new UNP edition of *The Firmament of Time* standing with the day's speaker Gary Holthaus and Barbara Sommer. His address is presented on the following page.



Special guests Dimitri and Zina Breschinsky stand with Christine Pappas (center) in Elephant Hall during our October Meeting banquet. Dr. Breschinsky was the speaker for the evening telling of his work to translate Eiseley essays into Russian.



The bust of Dr. Eiseley in the Nebraska Hall of Fame has been moved and rests on a new pedestal and a beautiful block of marble as a part of a wider program which has seen many changes to improve the display of all the Hall of Fame busts. In addition fine new plaques have been placed so that all figures are identified. While it has helped the whole display, the change in our case is especially welcome. We are grateful for the help we had in this process especially from Larry Sommer who is the Director of the Nebraska State Historical Society and is also on the Hall of Fame Commission. Then too Dick Herman has shown most helpful interest in this project over the years it has been in process.

The bust seems to be especially well placed for we have noticed that this area is a favored place for the legislators and state officials to come to be interviewed by the TV reporters. We are delighted to see our bust showing so often on the evening news.

UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA
PRESS REPRINTS
A FIRMAMENT OF TIME

Last Spring the University of Nebraska Press issued its reprint of a third Eiseley book, *The Firmament of Time*. This past June 27th the Friends of Loren Eiseley celebrated this event at a meeting in the Bennett Martin Library in Lincoln and with a program featuring a presentation by Gary Holthaus, who has written the new introduction for this edition. He is the author of many books including his recent *Wide Skies: Finding a Home in the West*, which Booklist said "is a Cascade of vivid memories that brings to life his own view of the Mythic west." We are very pleased to have had him speak to us, and to be able to present his remarks to you:

**A Simple-Minded Guide
To Literary Criticism**

By Gary Holthaus

My thanks to Barb Sommer, with whom I talked and corresponded about this event, and to the University of Nebraska Press for reprinting Eiseley's work as a Bison Book, and to all of you for coming here this afternoon. You are the Friends of Loren Eiseley, and some of you may actually have been. I'm envious, for I wish I could have known him personally. Some others of you are Eiseley scholars, and I have to confess immediately that I am not an Eiseley scholar -- or any other kind, for that matter.

So I am not here to explicate, elucidate, or reveal new insights no one has ever thought of before -- all that is far beyond any capacity of mine. Neither am I here to share new papers recently discovered in a library no one ever heard of, or found in the attic of an abandoned house that is being razed. Hasn't happened, and probably won't. Rather I am here to think about, celebrate, linger over, enjoy the poems and prose of a civilized man -- and sometime curmudgeon.

Horace, the old Roman educator, said that the aim of education is "to learn the rhythms and melodies

of a true life." I'll mention Horace again -- once -- fleetingly.

But just now I want to sort of drift into this discussion like a paleontologist skirting a rock outcrop, sidling along the hill, looking for a bone or a flint knife, any artifact that will mark the presence of something older and perhaps greater.

I'll start that sidling into our topic by saying that I'm a great admirer of the preposition. The preposition in English is a superb signifier, a discriminator of great importance, yet these little words are often ignored or slighted in our thinking about language, and rarely given their proper due. Strong verbs get much attention, especially from poets and novelists; naming things is recognized as a crucial function of both language and thought. Often when linguists develop a first dictionary for a language they have been studying, it is comprised of a list of nouns and verbs. Prepositions are seldom counted among our most important words.

In class, prepositions can help us distinguish what it is we want to learn, how we go about our work, the end or purpose we have in mind for our learning. For instance, in a literature class one of the crucial questions for both student and professor is, "Do we want to learn about this literature, or do we want to see what we can learn from it?"

What we learn about literature remains in the realm of fact or information. Facts may be interesting but not be very important in understanding the meaning of the text -- or of one's life. What we learn from literature is how to live, and that is ripe with immediate meaning, even if we have to keep returning to the text the rest of our lives in order to discover the meanings that are possible there. "Learning about" deals with facts and usually draws upon secondary sources. "Learning from" deals with meaning and ideas and relies upon the text.

What we learn about a poem, for instance, most often rises from sources outside the poem: from the author's biography, the geography of the region, the historical events or ideas referred to, or

from discovering the source of certain allusions and expanding on the reference.

What we learn from the poem is contained within the poem itself; we learn how to live not from the facts about the poem, but from what the poem says. This needs thought, brooding, careful analysis; but it does not necessarily require secondary sources, nor the work of critics and reviewers.

The implications for the teacher that are embedded in these two prepositions work out something like this: To prepare for a class that wants to learn about literature, a teacher might begin with a nicely crafted lecture about Loren Eiseley, tracing his life and career, and where a particular poem like "The Rope" fits in the body of his work.

A class that wants to learn from literature might begin with questions about "The Rope": What is this rope Eiseley wants us to climb? What is the miracle here? What is the rope we must climb inside ourselves? Are we willing to climb? What does it tell us about our ordinary lives, and those of our neighbors?

The preparation required to address these issues in class is much different than that required to gather the facts on which to base our approach to the former.

"Learning about" requires research and scholarship, an academic approach; what is learned is most often learned from, or verified by, other texts.

"Learning from" requires reflection, analysis not only of the words of the text and their order and shape on the page, but of their meaning. It requires reflection on our human experience, and probably benefits from conversation with students, colleagues, family, other friends. The meanings discovered are apt to remain unverified forever, may be impossible to verify.

The difference between "about" and "from," in this case, marks the fulcrum where the differences between scholarship and the practice of the humanities teeter and come to balance.

I would insist that one characteristic of a good poem is that a good poem, a really good poem, contains everything you need to know to find its meaning -- it all lies within the poem itself, and in your own life.

Here's "The Rope":

I used to carry a frayed rope in my hand
upon the speaker's rostrum,
try to tell
my students this:
that there was a similar rope
as loosely frayed
that bound them to the past,
a rope that somewhere ran
to an old salt-oozing eye
in the deep sea,
and that strange eye
still stared from underneath their brows
full at me,
just as interlocked vertebrae of their dextrous spines
was long ago
a fish's gift,
just as
their lungs had labored gasping in a swamp
to serve a fish's needs,
and these frayed strands
of the rope I held
ran back and back
to individual and diverse times
in sea and swamp and forest,
twisted finally
into our living substance, hidden in ourselves
that code of DNA,
that secret spiral ladder
made up of bits and pieces of
the past that never dies
but lives entwined in us,
our spines uptilted in a forest attic;
our foot, so tendon-bound
and twisted over,
a re-engineered bent
climbing pad
renewed to walk on grass;
our fingers quick with stones;
our brains
dreaming lost ancient dreams
as well as throwing
ropes in the air as though to catch
what is uncatchable --
the future.

We can ask only the question
 nor can we be
 answered save through signs.
 By many primitive fires around the world
 man has
 employed the rope trick of the Indian fakirs,
 striven to climb
 out of himself to heaven,
 forever scaled
 the giant beanstalk of himself,
 been cast
 forever down,
 arose and climbed again.
 Here holding
 before a scientific audience
 a plain, unmagical ordinary rope of hemp
 I suddenly find
 that, having made ascent, by weeping eye, salt-crusted fin,
 and wriggings learned
 piercing the downpour of a continent
 to reach this trembling platform,
 it is my intent
 to stay and cast
 the wondrous rope still farther.
 Fakir, mystic I may be, but this,
 this is the way we came, the way
 of the invisible rope
 in the beginning cast
 somewhere in the Devonian darkness
 or below.
 This what instructed seers enact,
 unknowing the precise sense
 in which they cast but casting rope or thread
 always above them
 by dimly smoking fires
 or using
 an old, old symbolism
 and climbing
 before an audience
 the ever-growing tree
 up which there run
 animals in pursuit.
 This is a heavy time to cast my rope.
 I stand unmagical
 knowing only
 the trick was done far back and must be done again.
 I let the cord fall and I climb on words,
 swaying, ascending,
 desperate as man
 in the black dark has always swung and climbed
 toward some far sky lord he has never seen,
 assembling along the ever-lengthening rope
 his own dismantled self, the eye that weeps

salt tears
 reborn,
 the mind
 cleansed of its treason and foul unbelief.
 Believe, oh do believe;
 look up,
 the rope is there
 lent by that devious double agent, night
 Oh now we know
 the rope is hidden in ourselves to climb.

You see? Everything you need to know about this poem is in the poem -- or in your own life. As it does for Eiseley, the meaning of the poem comes from your own brooding and reflection. Like any good poem, it does not submit to paraphrase, and its meaning is accessible but not readily apparent. But the image of the rope is striking, and the context shift -- is this fakery, or is it mysticism -- or is it simply the mind of a good paleontologist reminding us that we have a tie to a past that goes far, far back in time, that we are the product not only of families and societies and their complex histories, nor even of DNA, but of ancestors we can hardly dream of, that somewhere inside us is a yearning lizard that we have to recognize and learn to love to become our fullest selves?

What I know about myself is that there is inside me a rope that I must climb. I have been trying to climb it all my life. It is my life, a life I am trying to realize, and I have to keep climbing to realize it. And about when I think I am going to arrive at something, I slip back, the rope goes slack at the top and begins to collapse on itself, and I have to throw it up again, and climb some more. Talking about that with students may be far more important than telling them that Eiseley was born in Nebraska in 1907. But I never would have had that image for my life without Eiseley's poem.

Two other characteristics of a good poem, for me, are that it avoids the easy name, the cliché, the glibness that marks so much of contemporary culture and is fostered primarily, I think, by the dictates of the media clock; the other characteristic is that a good poem is not didactic, it does not hammer home its point or preach at us. Eiseley does not give the rope a clichéd name -- "our lifeline" for instance -- and despite the classroom

setting he does not even try to teach us what he thinks we need to know. He tells us about a rope, its attachment to the past, and its being flung out into the future, and then leaves us to figure it all out.

I could go on and extend the metaphor here -- point out what you may remember from a high school gym class -- that good rope climbing is a matter of rhythm, and -- what you may not remember from high school gym -- that acquiring a true life is our purpose on the earth; that is a life that is true not only to ourselves, but to that ancient ancestor mired in the mud, and true to the health of the earth and our society in our time, and true to the hope of the future as well. Eiseley, then, achieves the aims of the best education that we have known from our earliest days, and he joins Horace in showing us the way. But I won't do that...

Instead I would call your attention to a mistake I made in the introduction to *The Firmament of Time*. I said, "Eiseley seems more than one person." Perhaps, but it is "seems" only, not reality. For whatever complexities he may show us, what comes through in the poems is a man who is all of a piece, who acknowledges all his different aspects, his fears and loneliness and darkness, and yet remains self-contained. Out of his many disparate parts he makes a whole person, not several. Notice the parallel between the prose of 1960 and the poem of 1972. In the essay titled "How Death Became Natural," he wrote, as he did in other ways in other places, that there is no inexorable movement in the earth's evolution, as if everything grew deliberately out of creation toward humankind. Yet it seems that a necessary condition for our coming, and one that dogs us always, is loss. Then in one paragraph he writes a complete history of sadness in which he knits together his own sadness, his interest in paleontology, his science and his philosophy. Listen to this:

Since the first human eye saw a leaf in Devonian sandstone and a puzzled finger reached to touch it, sadness has lain over the heart of man. By this tenuous thread of living protoplasm, stretching backward

into time, we are linked forever to lost beaches whose sands have long since hardened into stone. The stars that caught our blind amphibian stare have shifted far or vanished in their courses, but still that naked, glistening thread winds onward. No one knows the secret of its beginning or its end. Its forms are phantoms. The thread alone is real; the thread is life.

That's the prose of 1960.

Remember? In the poem published in 1972 Eiseley says,

this is the way we came, the way
of the invisible rope
in the beginning cast
somewhere in the Devonian darkness
or below.
Notice the echoing "rope" and "Devonian." And again,
This is what instructed seers enact,
unknowing the precise sense
in which they cast but casting rope or thread
always above them.

The thread, the thread of life. How much more explicit he is in his prose; he never names the thread in the poem. And note the sadness:

This is a heavy time to cast my rope.
I stand unmagical
knowing only
the trick was done far back and must be done again....
"Believe," he implores his students,
oh do believe;
look up,
the rope is there
lent by that devious double agent, night.
Oh now we know
the rope is hidden in ourselves to climb.

The sadness, and the urgency here are not for himself, but for those young faces, so sophisticated and knowledgeable, and so totally innocent before the world they face. Whatever his own sadness, it enriches him, and he brings it as an unspoken offering to his students, the pessimist always hoping (praying!) they will understand. "Believe, oh do believe."

Eiseley wrote essays and poems, that's true, but whatever the genre, what he wrote was literature. The difference between literature and other writing lies not in the quality of its writing style, but in the questions it raises. The quality of any literature can be judged in part by the quality of its questions. The more difficult the questions are to answer, the greater the text that asks them. That is one reason why it is so hard to say what a good poem or a good book means, why there is no one meaning in a great book. You read the poem with your life, and the poem responds by raising questions about your life. Good literature elicits recognitions of your life's terrain, the dimensions of a life that must be explored. And that is exactly why I love Eiseley. He is a scientist who rarely asks the scientific question; he always asks the larger question that makes one look anew at one's own life, and the life of the culture, and our ties to the life of the larger nature.

This is not to say that fine writing is not important, but the best writing, in the service of a poor story, or polemic or instruction, will not create great literature. Fine writing, like Eiseley's, which often has a Handel-like majesty, becomes literature not because of the nobility of its language, but because it raises questions it cannot answer, asks questions that have no answers except those we work out for ourselves over the course of a lifetime. How should we live? Why do the innocent suffer? Who is the just person? How do we cope with our human circumstances? How do we deal with death? Does life have meaning? These are not philosophical questions to be answered by an intellectual elite; these are the questions faced by both the dryland farmer and the postmodern critic, the dweller in a dank tenement basement and the penthouse owner whose monthly mortgage is fifty times another's annual income, the illiterate and the literati.

Literature raises these disturbing questions again and again. Rather than answer its own questions, literature most often offers a story of people trapped, enmeshed, floundering, triumphing or perhaps succumbing, because they must face such questions. Eiseley's work raises those unanswerable questions with alarming regularity. I would

agree with Eiseley that these are what he called, at the end of *The Unexpected Universe*, "the dreadful questions." And I agree with him that "Out of the self-knowledge gained by putting dreadful questions man achieves his final dignity." We want to know what it is we face, and we want to face whatever it is with whatever we can muster of dignity or grace. Asking the dreadful questions is the task of any literature worthy of the name, and that makes Eiseley one of the masters.

We turn to literature for the same reasons we turn to religion or philosophy; that is, we go to our stories to find a means to explore the perplexing issues that face us. The questions noted above fit within the rubric of theological speculation about the nature of man, the nature of God, the nature of the world, and of the relationships between them. Philosophy asks many of the same questions, but also adds one: the question of knowing. But most often the philosopher and the theologian do not begin to write until they have at least tentative answers, and often they speak with the utmost certainty. Great literature embraces all those questions, but with this difference: it does not supply the answers; it cannot speak with certainty; it leaves the thinking to the reader.

There are many books, important and popular ones, in which the quality of the writing is very high indeed. But rather than raise questions for us to ponder, they offer us answers to our questions. They may deal with important social concerns, but rather than raise questions they are apt to offer programs, solutions, answers. This does not mean that they are without important values, but most often they are closer to polemic, apt to be didactic, or offer a cultural analysis that purports to provide solutions to our immediate problems. As such, for me, they are not literature. We may learn from such books because they teach us well. We may learn from literature as well, but rarely because it set out to teach us what we learned.

As I read him, Eiseley fits every one of those criteria for great literature. His questions lead us to examine our thinking, and look at the events of our lives with a certain wonder. In both essays and poems he offers us a kind of opening up to life,

and provides a means and the motivation to reflect on what it means to be human. Those are characteristics of a literature of quality, worthy of serious pursuit and re-reading -- books, like Eiseley's, we will want to keep on the shelf and go back to when the human events of our days perplex us.

I'm going to close by reading two other Eiseley poems, and making a final comment.

THE HORSE IN COLLEGE HALL

There used to be a small stable once
in the vault beneath the south tower
of College Hall.

An old horse lived there who was led up
on certain days
along a curved brick runway
to drag
an antique lawnmower
over the grass
of the Quadrangle.

He enjoyed the sun

and the bright spring
I suppose
smell of things,
and managed a few
mouthfuls of green
before they led him

below ground

till he was needed again.

In that dungeon

for such it was
he spent most of his days
uncomplaining
and perhaps lonely,

I ought to know.

I was a scholar in that time,
I occupied a cell
diagonally above him.

It may be we both
had our thoughts.

It may be we were both
lonely for years on end.

Finally they bricked up his passage
and a machine which ran itself
and sputtered

took his familiar place.

It was less cruel no doubt
and no one told me
what happened to him,

his pauses and head tossings
and his little banquets
of green grass.

Now in the library

I can see the machines;
they tick and buzz
computing very rapidly
and ejecting on order

bibliographies it took me

months to compile.

Like the horse I will presently

be led away.

I can see it in the eyes of those who know best
about such things.

It will result in less waste;

it will be

as in the case of the horse
less cruel

since there will be merely metal and lights
which are never lonely

and in the end

there will be nothing living

to smell the spring grass.

Nothing, you understand,
we will

have replaced ourselves.

I confess I am a little old,

possibly confused,

but I think it is our object

not to be cruel,

and to achieve this

many things have first to be done.

Among them

old horses

and scholars

and then perhaps other

and again others

down to and including

the young

will have to be

led away.

I am sorry I never enquired

the fate of that old horse

or even

where they hung his harness

for the last time.

Perhaps even then I was actually

a little afraid to ask.

I should not say this.

It is definitely our object

not to be cruel.

They smoothed out the grass and filled in the earth

I remember

over his little walkway.
Only I can remember where it was.
No one, I suspect, will do this for man,
certainly not the machines.
Our kindness will have been to ourselves
I think now
what is often called
total.

Ah, the self pity of famous men! General
McArthur could have written a few of those lines,
or perhaps Richard Nixon. Yet, here too Eiseley's
final concern is not for himself, but for our human
kind.

AN OWL'S DAY

Crouched in a rock shelter on this high escarpment
I watch rain curtain the valley, concealing it
like another century, but up here under the overhang
all is dry dust. A bone needle and a flint knife
turned up by pack rats
lie on the surface with a few owl pellets that,
minutely dissected,
reveal the white bones of rodents and a twist of fur
spat out as an afterthought, just as the bits and rejects
of the mind must more invisibly
return to earth.

It is strange to find
the bones of the great bird himself in a similar tangle,
the luminous eyes that always
spelled wisdom in lost cultures,
the ear that heard
every whisper on the night wind,
all sunk into fragments then as the eggshell
from which they arose.
Down there beneath the rain cloud
is another century
not surely mine.

I sit up here in the dust
among the pellets and bones
trying the haft of the flint knife in my hand
trying
to sort what is dust in my mind
from what is dust
in this abandoned shelter.
My effort is not very successful,
not after the bird's wisdom has failed,
not after
rain has blinded my vision,
not after
all our days are dried pellets of bone,
but listen, I

am not new here.
I have seen an owl follow a hawk's flight
so far
I took what he saw on faith because of his eyes;
now all darkens, yes, but
I am not new here.
The century in the green valley
does not matter.
I have my own way of staring into the sun.
The stone knife is not new.
I am a man, with a man's sight for such things,
A million centuries can go or come here,
I will see them momentarily, reading beyond
past and future,
not caring in which century lies the rain cloud
or if I drop
descending the rock slide
a flint knife
or a cartridge case.
I am a man with my own way of seeing
just as the owl saw
but he in his way
as I in mine.
Even though we darken
even though we sleep
we have ranged far
and left these little pellets for the wind to gather,
he, the far bits of an owl's day,
I, something more nebulous seen across a storm cloud,
better not to be left here
lest the pack rats carry it out of its context
like this stone knife in the dust.

It's all here: the tie to the past; the beauty of
ancient things; their power to teach us -- if we are
open; the way Eiseley has of taking things into
himself, becoming turtle or owl or snake; the
enormous empathy and compassion.

Finally, the poems and the essays reveal to us a
loner who cares profoundly about the community;
a lover of the deep past who worries about a future
he can see all too clearly; a profound pessimist
who never gives up hope; a darkly brooding spirit
who sheds light not only on our human frailty, but
our human possibilities -- if we do not let our
cleverness outweigh our wisdom. He must have
been self-conscious about the charges of those who
called him alienated or melancholy. In the
introduction to *Innocent Assassins*, he says, "... an
alienated creature does not laugh, but a midnight

optimist, even a fugitive, might; nor does a complete melancholic say, 'the earth pleases me.' This, too, is part of the record."

From looking at the photos we would have to say, "He was a handsome man -- a bit on the somber side -- but handsome." From reading the poems and essays we would have to say, "He was gifted -- a little on the dark side, perhaps -- but gifted."

He was also a giver of gifts. The gift he gives to us is what he gives to us in his work: that is, himself, fully. He created for himself, and for us, a true life. Though there are no warts in the pictures, he shows us in his poems and essays his whole life, warts and all -- a gift to us even more beautiful than a flint knife. How could we ask more?

The three poems quoted herein are all taken from Loren Eiseley's collection of poems, *Notes of an Alchemist* published by Charles Scribners and Sons, New York, 1972.

THE FIRMAMENT OF TIME

Reviewed by Christine Pappas

(The new University of Nebraska Press Bison Book edition of *The Firmament of Time* is available postage paid from us for \$14.00. We can also supply their editions of *The Invisible Pyramid* for the same amount and *The Night Country* for \$16.00.)

The *Firmament of Time* is a collection of speeches Loren Eiseley delivered in 1959 and first published in 1960. The initial edition garnered the John Burroughs Medal for best nature writing and this reprint, complete with new introduction by writer Gary Holthaus, is equally worthy of attention. Loren Eiseley was born in Lincoln in 1907, graduated from the University of Nebraska, and was a Professor of Anthropology at Pennsylvania University. Before his death in 1977, he authored many books, including *The Night Country* and *The Invisible Pyramid*, which have also been reprinted under the University of Nebraska Press' Bison Books imprint.

The unifying theme in the brilliantly written *The Firmament of Time* is man's quest for certainty and meaning in a world becoming ever more chaotic. Eiseley claims that the technological revolution has spurred an ever changing social environment in which humans struggle to find their places. Because modern humans direct their attention outwardly, by watching television, for instance, instead of inwardly, the result is a conscienceless shell of a person who is unable to take personal responsibility for his or her actions. The only way this "asphalt man" can find his way back to human virtue is by looking deep within the human heart instead of looking to science: "Man's quest for certainty is, in the last analysis, a quest for meaning. But the meaning lies buried within himself rather than in the void he has vainly searched for portents since antiquity" (p. 179). Although Eiseley cedes that the scientific method has allowed near miracles to occur in human knowledge, he is equally aware of the potential damage science wreaks on the Earth, especially because he wrote in the Cold War nuclear paranoia of the 1960s.

In typical Eiseley style, each essay begins with a biographical anecdote which is then wrapped in philosophical musings. Amazingly, Eiseley both asks and answers the question, "What is the meaning of life?" Basically, we must create a place in society where the words "natural" and "supernatural" are indistinguishable. Eiseley says this could be done if there was more interest in the creation of noble minds instead of blind scientific "progress" simply for the sake of progress. He writes, "We are sophisticated men. We call it vaguely, 'progress,' because that word in itself implies the endless movement of pursuit. We have abandoned the past without realizing that without the past the pursued future has no meaning, that it leads . . . to the world of artless, dehumanized man" (p. 130). In an era where there are so few clear voices offering safe passage though the whirlpools of life, Eiseley's thirty-year-old advice is quite welcome. It is up to us to follow his sage prescriptions.

UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA PRESS PLANS MORE EISELEY VOLUMES

The University of Nebraska Press has now reprinted three of Dr. Eiseley's books and they have plans in May 2000 to issue a new edition of the autobiographical *All the Strange Hours*. Kathleen Boardman has written a new introduction for this edition. Dr. Boardman is familiar to *Caravan* readers, for her essays have appeared on our pages twice before, in Fall 1997 and Winter 1991.

The Press is also preparing a new edition of Jack London's *Before Adam*, which was republished in 1962 with an extensive epilog by Loren Eiseley. The new edition is a reprint of that 1962 edition, and will be most welcome by Eiseley Friends, for this extensive epilog is an essay not collected elsewhere and is therefore something with which most Eiseley readers are not familiar. *Before Adam* will be released in March of 2000.

And there is even more. Just as we were going to press we learned arrangements are now complete for the Press to reprint Gale Christianson's popular biography of Dr. Eiseley, *A Fox at the Wood's Edge*, with publication expected sometime in the fall of 2000.

It is all wonderful news and the Press is seeking opportunities to reprint other Eiseley work. We are very grateful for their devotion to this work. The Friends expect to hold events to celebrate these new books as they appear, so be watching for announcements.

DIMITRI BRESCHINSKY FEATURED AT FRIENDS GATHERING IN OCTOBER

Our annual Eiseley program and dinner was held in late October and it was a very fine day. During the afternoon Mary Liz Jameson lead a dozen people on a pilgrimage, touring the sites in Lincoln associated with Loren Eiseley. Then in the evening we gathered in Morrill Hall on campus for our reception and dinner amongst the great parade of fossils in the University State Museum's Elephant Hall. This was followed by our program. Our special guests were Dimitri and Zina Breschinsky. Dimitri, our speaker for the evening, titled his lecture "From the Great Plains to the Steppes of Russia: Loren Eiseley Transplanted." A professor at Purdue University teaching Russian Literature, he has

been translating Dr. Eiseley's work into Russian, as he told us in his *Caravan* article in our Spring 1995 issue:

. . . I have for some time now been translating my favorite short stories and essays of Loren Eiseley into Russian: he had been completely overlooked by the Soviet literary establishment, and the lacuna, it seemed to me, needed to be filled. Since 1988, nine of my translations have appeared in Russian periodicals (a Purdue University Center for Artistic Endeavors fellowship, which I was awarded several years ago, helped considerably to advance the project). Though Eiseley is not likely to become a household name in Russia anytime soon, the reading public has at least been exposed to him. He is on record and available.

My ultimate goal, however, had always been to produce something more permanent -- a representative collection of Eiseley pieces in Russian translation. That collection, annotated and with a critical introduction, has recently been brought out by Moscow University Press. . . .

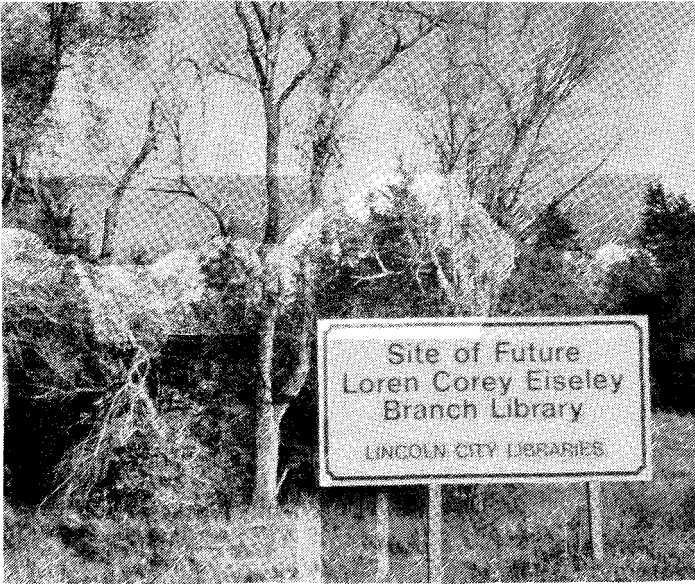
That book entitled *Wingbeat*, appeared in the Fall of 1995, and a second collection of Eiseley essays is currently in publication and is expected to come from the Russian press at any time. And in recent years his translations have continued appearing in Russian journals.

Dimitri has appeared in our *Caravan* several times to tell the story of his work as it was in progress. "Loren Eiseley's Russian Debut" appeared in Spring 1993; "How Russian Reforms Changed Loren Eiseley" in Winter 1994; and finally "Loren Eiseley's Russian Debut: The Sequel" in Spring 1995. Copies of these articles are available on request from us.

If you would like to have a copy of his first essay collection, it is available from Victor Kamkin, Inc., 4946 Boiling Brook Parkway, Rockville, MD 20852 (kamkin@igc.apc.com or (301) 881-5973). It sells for \$8.25 plus mailing costs. You will also be able to get the new book, and we will tell you how to do that when the information becomes available.

It was wonderful to have the Breschinskys with us after corresponding with them for so many years, and we hope they will come back to us again soon.

EXCELLENT PROGRESS BEING MADE ON NEW EISELEY BRANCH LIBRARY



In late August and again in January the Lincoln City Libraries' staff held public information meetings to describe the planning and progress for two new libraries to be named for Loren Eiseley and Bess Walt. The two facilities will be developed at the same time to make the best use of contractors and realize construction efficiencies. The land is being readied at both sites which are marked by signboards to announce the new buildings. Models of the library were presented at the January session. Groundbreaking ceremonies before the construction begins are expected in May. Representatives of the library will meet with our Friends Board in March to discuss their progress and plans.

Each library will be something like 30,000 square feet, and will hold 131,000 items and have 40 computers, the plans for the two being as much alike as possible. The library staff has done a great deal to gather public input and went through a very extensive planning process to define the use and objectives for the facilities. The initial conceptual layout was available for us to see last spring. The Clarke-Enerson Partners began the detailed architectural planning last May and finished this last fall so they could be ready to accept

construction bids in February 2000. We are especially pleased to be able to tell the Eiseley Friends that Lowell Berg, son of former Friends Board member Darrel Berg, is the firm's chief architect for both libraries. Construction is to be completed by October of 2001 so that the staff will be able to ready the buildings for an opening in February 2002. The park areas around the buildings will be developed as the buildings are constructed so that each entire complex will become a unified whole.

This is all very exciting and we will be watching their progress with the greatest interest.

NEBRASKA LITERATURE FESTIVAL

By Christine Pappas

The Nebraska Literature Festival was held in September at Chadron State College, out in the western sand hills of Nebraska. Although we did not have a booth of our own, Gerry Cox, with the Nebraska Literary Heritage Association graciously agreed to distribute our materials. The drive to Chadron from Lincoln was a long one and it took us through areas that had been explored by Eiseley and the Old South Party.

The Festival itself was very well attended. In the audience during the Loren Eiseley - Wright Morris - John Neihardt Panel were 40 to 50 people. I delivered my paper, "The Singers of Life: The Literary Relationship Between Loren Eiseley and Dorothy Thomas." The crux of the paper is that, although Loren and Dorothy enjoyed a substantial relationship in 1930's Lincoln, their different needs as writers caused their friendship to wither. Dorothy craved a writing community and welcomed input into her fictional stories. What we know about Eiseley's writing regimen, on the other hand, is that he needed solitude and peace -- not the bustle of a writing community. Typically Eiseley worked at night, transcribing notes to Mabel as they sat at the kitchen table.

The audience was very receptive to my paper, particularly to Dorothy Thomas' description of the panhandle towns. After a particularly bleak description -- Dorothy wrote her mother regarding Tryon, Nebraska, that "I didn't know any place could be half as horrible as this" -- one woman had to tell me that she would agree.

WEBSITE NEWS

By Deb Derrick

Our web site is becoming more popular, judging from the e-mail I've been receiving lately. Several people have signed up for the newsletter mailing list. Some have commented favorably on the format and content of the site. A few have specific questions on Eiseley and/or his works. (Thanks to Christine, Morrie and others for helping find some of the answers!)

I hope to learn HTML and Front Page this spring so that I can maintain the site myself without student help. Please check out our website at:

<http://www.cet-omaha.unomaha.edu/eiseley>

EDITORIAL EXCAVATIONS

By Morrie Tuttle

We have to apologize for the delay in getting this issue to you. It was supposed to go last November, but over the fall we faced health problems within our family which resulted in surgery just before Christmas. While the patient is doing very well now, the fall simply got away from us, becoming devoted to more immediate matters so nothing else got done during that time.

We learned of the October passing of our friend Dorothy Forward, widow of Kenneth Forward. Kenneth was a university instructor and good friend of Loren Eiseley in those undergraduate days. He was one who along with Wilbur Gaffney, Loren and others took long walks out of Lincoln when poetry and other such important things were shared and discussed. They would think nothing of a 20-plus mile walk out to Denton and back.

Dorothy moved from Lincoln some years after

Kenneth's death to be closer to her family. We were sorry to have her leave us, but continued correspondence with her as long as she was able to do so. Remembering Dorothy now also brings back many thoughts on the relationship of Kenneth and Loren. An unpublished manuscript of Rudolph Umland in the Heritage Room of Lincoln's Bennett Martin Library, "Looking Back at the Wimberly Years," tells of Kenneth Forward's class in the nineteenth-century English essay:

Of the group of Lincoln writers who emerged out of the Wimberly years, Loren was unquestionably the most intellectual, the most profound. Some of his essays, like "The Unexpected Universe" and "The Cosmic Prison," I suspect, belong among the great essays of literature. I wonder though whether Loren would have become the essayist he did had he not once been a student in Kenneth Forward's course on the English essayists during his undergraduate years. He got considerable practice in essay-writing in those classes. Forward's lecture on Thomas Henry Huxley's "A Piece of Chalk" must have sent him musing and pondering under the stars after he listened. Thirty years later Loren became the Huxley of his time, but a Huxley with more poetry in his soul.

Eiseley's submission of a poem in lieu of an assignment for this class is a good story which we told in the Summer 1988 edition of *The Caravan* following its presentation to a meeting the Eiseley Friends at the home of Bert and Marian Schultz on May 30, 1988. The following is adapted from that presentation:

I would like to share something very special with you this afternoon, something from the papers of the late Wilbur Gaffney. Our good friend Ted Kooser was selected by Wilbur to be his literary executor, and as such, Ted has had the job of surveying the vast amount of material Wilbur had gathered to decide on its disposition. With the gracious permission of Elizabeth Gaffney, Ted has loaned me this folder which contains an item for us to share with you on this special occasion. We expect that this file and its contents will eventually find a home in the Heritage Room at the Lincoln Public Library.

This is not your first exposure to the story I will tell, for Wilbur told it to us when he spoke at this gathering a few springs ago, and Gale Christianson retells it in his essay "Loren Eiseley in Lincoln" appearing in the Fall 1987 issue of the *Prairie Schooner*.

It happens Eiseley, when taking Kenneth Forward's course on the 19th century essay, had an assignment to write an essay in the manner of Walter Savage Landor. So much of Landor's writing being in the form of imaginary conversations between historical figures, perhaps this essay was to have been written in that style. However, instead of receiving an essay as assigned, Kenneth was surprised to receive instead a poem, "Lizard's Eye." While this is a familiar story, let me give it as it appears in some correspondence between Wilbur and Mabel Eiseley. On July 29, 1982 Wilbur writes to Mabel:

Incidentally, while cleaning out Kenneth Forward's papers Dorothy Forward found a manuscript poem of Loren's and said, "Would you want this?" And of course I did. It is called "Lizard's Eye" and begins:

The dust devils spinning in the alkaline basins
of the drought north of Mohave
And the desert Jackasses' curious pleasure in
thorns
Are a pillow of comfort after a wasted lifetime.

I don't have all of Loren's works, so may I ask you if this one was ever published. It is dated January 28, 1932, and bears a note to Kenneth: "I had something crawling up and down in me last night -- and this is the result. I thought you might not mind it in place of the Landor essay. -- Loren"

(Incidentally. please note that Wilbur misquotes the poem, which actually refers to "desert Joshuas," not "Jackasses.")

Mabel responds to Gaffney on August 7:

The quotation from the poem Loren gave to Kenneth Forward in place of the assigned essay is of much interest to me. I believe it was not published, though I can not be certain since he wrote so much and published in so many out-of-the-way places. When Paul Sears visited Philadelphia as a speaker at the memorial service shortly after Loren's death, he told me an amusing anecdote which must concern the poem you have quoted. He said Kenneth (his brother-in-law, you may remember) told him how Loren left a poem in place of an assigned essay which he probably conceived a distaste for writing at the last moment. I believe the essay was to be the final exam. . . . Kenneth said he struggled with the problem of giving an F for the unwritten essay or an A for the poem. He gave the A and said he was never sorry.

Wilbur responded to Mabel on August 11th:

That's the poem, no question of it. The date would indicate either a final paper or a paper in lieu of an exam. The course was Kenneth's "19th Century Essay," a course which I had taken only a few years before and remember fairly well to this day. I found Kenneth's favorites, De Quincy and Hazlett, fascinating, but I never worked up much enthusiasm for Newman, Pater and Landor. I was fond of Landor's poetry . . . but I found his essays rather unreadable; and I can see readily enough why Loren would have preferred not to write an essay on him.

Thus ends the correspondence. Dorothy Forward who now was in Virginia was delighted with Gale Christianson's retelling of this story. When it came out last fall, I sent her the *Prairie Schooner* and she responded with a very nice letter which I gave to Gale when he was here.

So now we can show you that special manuscript which the young student, Loren Eiseley, submitted more than 56 years ago and which Kenneth Forward kept among his papers for so many years. On the back side of the manuscript shown here is the "A" which Forward awarded for the effort.

That concluded our original article, but let us now add a modern postscript. All of Wilbur's papers, including these things, did come into the Heritage Room collection. The poem was reprinted in *The Lost Notebooks* which appeared some five years after Wilbur's first letter shown above. Dorothy Forward also gave many things to the Heritage Room including a copy of *The Immense Journey* which bears an especially touching inscription from Loren to Kenneth. And may we also say that when Dorothy closed her home and moved to the east, she sold Kenneth's books and we bought a great many of those. Thus we have Kenneth's beloved sets of both Landor and of De Quincy along with a great many other things we know were especially important to him. We had much the same interests. While these are now prized volumes in our collection, we never forget where they came from.

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Former Eiseley Board member Bing Chen presented his paper "Loren Eiseley: A Shaman for our Times" at the spring meeting of the Nebraska Academy of Sciences last April. This fine paper was also printed in the Winter 1997 issue of the *Caravan* and is available on request.

Lizard's Eye

The dust devils spinning in the alkaline basins of drought north of Moline
and the desert Joshua's curious pleasure in thorns
are a pillow of comfort after a wasted lifetime.

I could come back here and be content with my friends the lizards
to burn in the lime-glass and have fierce wild thoughts like an animal,
no much remember

your face, nor the tressed black head of you,
nor security's penny, nor the lie which has left

you beautiful, me, ash and blow - fire.

Not the stained agony, pain, nor the casual whore at the street corner,
nor the whorled emptiness of death

looked into

soils peace when one's grown accustomed to burning

and seen life with the lizard's eye

not blinded by sun.

L.C.E. Jan 28, 1932

I had something crawling up and down in me last night - and
this is the result. I thought you might not mind it in place of the
Lauder-essay.

Lynn

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We were pleased to see in the November 22 Sunday *Omaha World-Herald* a fine feature story about our former university art museum director Dwight Kirsch. In this article Kyle MacMillan states that "this year marks the 100th anniversary of the birth of Dwight Kirsch who set the art museums in Des Moines and Lincoln solidly on the course of collecting contemporary art, a practice which has continued to this day." The article goes on to tell how Kirsch's genius for collection building formed the bedrock of both these collections. Kirsch was an artist, art professor and ultimately chairman of the art department at the University of Nebraska in days when Mabel Langdon, later to become Eiseley, was serving as curator of the Nebraska Art Collection which then displayed its art on the walls of the second floor of Morrill Hall. MacMillan does not mention Mabel nor tell her part of the story, but when Kirsch assumed the directorship of the Nebraska Art Collection, he had no prior knowledge of museum or collection management, but later he was to graciously state that Mabel had taught him all he knew about it. As they worked together she became close friends of both Kirsch and his wife and you will find many references to them in Gale Christianson's biography, *Fox at the Wood's Edge*. Kirsch firmly set the course the museum was to follow with its collection, and after the war he moved to Des Moines to start anew, doing the same for them as their collection was then just starting up. This article was a nice opportunity to remember Kirsch as well as providing a chance to also remember that special relationship with Mabel Eiseley.

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In October, dedication ceremonies were held for a 218 acre patch of prairie hillside set along the banks of the Niobrara River in the north central portion of the state near Bassett. This special place is to be known as the Fred Thomas State Wildlife Management Area. We are very pleased to see this recognition come to our former Eiseley Friends Board member. Fred was well known as one who wrote for the *Omaha World-Herald* over so many years on natural history and environmental issues. In his dedicatory remarks

Harold Anderson, retired editor of the paper, told that "the Niobrara was one of (Fred's) favorite spots to come and get away from everything." Dave Sands, Executive Director of Audubon Nebraska, said, "To a large degree the Niobrara River, that so many love, is a gift from Fred. Had the facts not come to light through his reporting, the Norden Dam might have been one of the last Western water projects to be built. Instead, it was one of the first to be killed. . . . While Fred loved to write about our natural treasures, the truth is, Fred was a natural treasure himself."

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A tabloid-sized special section of the November 28th Sunday *Omaha World-Herald* presented the "100 Extraordinary People of Nebraska: Celebrating a Century." Loren Eiseley was included among this group, being presented through a short biographical sketch by David Hendee.

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We picked up the last edition of the *Caravan* from the printers very late one evening and brought it home to ready for the mails, working on the floor in front of the TV. Suddenly we sensed some movement overhead and looked up to think we were seeing a bird flying about the living room. Then we realized birds have tails and this thing had no tail. It wasn't a bird. It was a bat. All the commotion brought Amy into the living room and together we watched it fly about the house, having no idea where it came from nor what we were going to do about it. We decided to open the front door to the porch, turn on the porch light and turn off all lights in the house. And this worked. He continued to circle, but soon got the idea and flew out through the open door to become lost in the great darkness. Only when it over did we realize how sad it was to see his departure achieved so easily. Dr. Eiseley would have made friends with the creature and from the relationship would have found a story to tell, a lesson to learn. All we could say is that we had just let it go. What can you make out of that? We had simply missed all the magic. But at least you may know that we worked on your mailing in the company of a bat and Dr. Eiseley would have liked that.

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