

Mind Expanding Journeys
By: Megan Wright

“Since boyhood I have been charmed by the unexpected and the beautiful. This is what had led me originally into science, but now I felt instinctively that what I needed verged on a miracle. As a scientist, I did not believe in miracles, though I willingly granted the word broad latitudes of definition.”

Loren Eiseley’s beginning must have had an impact on his views of nature, as it says in the previous quote from *The Innocent Fox*. He grew up in Nebraska and was said to be curious and adventurous in his rural surroundings. His curiosity, as many children have, stuck with him. Although his questions and philosophies on life were more intricate and while he had a greater understanding of how things came to exist, I believe his technical intelligence was just an added bonus for Dr. Eiseley. I believe his true passion was still observing, as a child would explore, to touch and examine rather than to read an article or report. Throughout his many essays he expressed having a trained eye or “experience”, as he called it, in finding the many natural miracles on earth.

Loren wrote as if in a discussion with a group of fellow archaeologists and scientists, and was able to think of other points of view including answers to the questions they might have had. In his writing he built on what he had said before and reviewed other meanings of this after he subjected us to different connotations or origins of these building blocks. Your mind has to be fast paced to catch on to all his little stories within a story. He believed the world is overwhelmingly complicated, but it works. Each species is a piece, like a notch on turning wheels, making the next turn possible. In one of his works *How Flowers Changed the World*, he described how seed production and pollination of flowering plants made warm blooded species possible. Eiseley wrote: “The weight of a petal has changed the face of the world and made it ours.” In his writing I believe he wanted to show us the entire world and its splendor as he saw it. Wouldn’t you get swept up in it too? No one story has one moral or main idea. It is all connected like life, with his vast out look of the earth and its creations.

Eiseley’s writings show evidence of a sort of free spirit, one that is not tied down with social or stereotypical views. His ‘spirit’, so to speak, is tied only to the beauty and workings of the natural world around him, to the urge to understand life’s mysteries only because there is so much mystery in it. We each have our vices, and his is the thrill of the chase. He lingered, addicted to the mysteries of intelligence and primitive thought, of the first seed plant and with it changes of species. He starts off with questions simple in nature and explores the possibilities. He does not answer these questions for himself but dives into an intricate web of specifics and more widened, detailed questions. “Those who make this journey will, like the author, return with no fashionable answers, but an enlargement of those questions that nourish and expand the secret of life.” – Wright Morris (1956 winner of the National Book Award). I agree, but this doesn’t mean it has no gratification or no feelings of fulfillment. Just reading along I get the sense I am exploring and revealing some natural secrets along with Dr. Eiseley. “Insects in the first frosts of autumn all run down like little clocks. Yet if you pick one up and breathe warmly upon it, it will begin to move about once more.” – *How Flowers Changed the World*.

In *Man of the Future* Dr. Eiseley explores human brain size and physical characteristics of the features of the face with comparisons of the prominent muscular and angry features of an ape as well as a species of early and modern man. He exhibits distaste for man and trying to live in the future while also admiring the making of our species, describing imaginative examples of

what might have happened in the lives of our ancestors before their minds were more than curiosity and ingenuity. Showing in one way he agrees with Darwin's findings and accepts them as truth. He finds spirituality in the evolving of man, animal, and even in plants. "If our whole lives had not been spent in the midst of it, it would astound us." – *How Flowers Changed the World*. He had thoughts about the human race and was somewhat disappointed to see people ignoring their surroundings and waging war. He also had so much hope in what we could accomplish; like the discoveries of Darwin and other scientists. He was upset with some scientists for not spending much time on finding out what caused the cooperation of and amidst species, a beautiful bond where they help each other, giving and benefiting, in a balance of equally dependant life. The focus at that time was natural selection and how life forced competition. Eiseley's thought was that cooperation, not competition helps a society. Take ants for example, all working together to benefit the colony. Many scientists today are looking into this mini miracle which Eiseley would be proud to discuss and maybe agree with their findings. Eiseley points out that he agreed with Darwin that all life is related and deserving in our compassion. In *Darwin's Century*, Eiseley quotes from Darwin's 1837 notebook "...animals, our fellow brethren in pain, disease, suffering an famine — our slaves in the most laborious work, our companions in our amusements — they may partake of our origin in one common ancestor — we may all be melted together".

I was both surprised and elated to find his works to have such skill and detailed descriptions of his feelings throughout his mind expanding journeys. Thinking and writing for hours about the world around us and its creations is a passion I possess and just reading his stories I can feel that same passion rising out of those pages through his words. Only man can think surreally, but to Loren Eiseley life and its major accomplishments is surreal and fascinating.