University of Nebraska - Lincoln
DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Faculty Publications -- Department of English | English, Department of

1-1-2012

# Introduction to *Artifacts & Illuminations: Critical Essays on Loren Eisley*

Thomas Lynch
*University of Nebraska - Lincoln*, tlynch2@unl.edu

Susan M. Maher
*University of Minnesota - Duluth*, smaher@d.umn.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/englishfacpubs

Part of the English Language and Literature Commons

Lynch, Thomas and Maher, Susan M., "Introduction to *Artifacts & Illuminations: Critical Essays on Loren Eisley*" (2012). *Faculty Publications -- Department of English.* Paper 90.
http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/englishfacpubs/90

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the English, Department of at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications -- Department of English by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Published in ARTIFACTS & ILLUMINATIONS: CRITICAL ESSAYS ON LOREN EISLEY, ed. Tom Lynch & Susan N. Maher (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012), pp. 1-14.
Copyright 2012 Board of Regents of the University of Nebraska.

# Introduction

TOM LYNCH AND SUSAN N. MAHER

Acknowledged as one of the most important twentieth-century American nature writers, Loren Eiseley was a widely admired practitioner of creative nonfiction, a genre that, in part due to his example, has flourished in recent decades. Contemporary nature writers regularly cite Eiseley as an inspiration and model. General readers, as well, appreciate Eiseley's eloquent, complex, and informative essays; devoted readers have helped keep Eiseley continuously in print since his books first began appearing more than a half century ago. Clearly, Eiseley is a writer who matters.

As many observers lament, current environmental and other problems require a public and media that are conversant with both scientific and humanistic knowledge and values; however, we live in an age when such synthesis is hard to find, and our institutions of learning tend to discourage such synthesis. Fortunately, there are renewed efforts to transcend these artificial boundaries of knowledge. Recent articles in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* and other publications dedicated to trends in academe, for example, have called for new emphases on interdisciplinary research and pedagogy. E. O. Wilson's *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge* is only the most notable of many recent books attempting to reconcile the split. As a writer who bridged the sciences and the humanities perhaps as well as any modern figure, Eiseley clearly has an important role to play in this trend.

In the past, however, Eiseley has proven a challenge for literary scholars often locked in those very disciplinary boundaries he sought to erase and so many lament. Indeed Eiseley is often cited as a figure whose creative importance is not matched by an equivalent body of scholarly analyses of his work. Anthony Lioi (featured in this collection) has argued that "only a few scholars have paid sustained attention to him." Lioi notes this irony: "[Eiseley] is, perhaps, the victim of the very split between science

and humanism that he sought to mend, a situation which indicates again the need for his peculiar skills" ("Coasts" 42). While the journal *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* has featured scholarly articles on Eiseley with some frequency, the overall publication rate of Eiseley-centered essays is unexpectedly thin for a writer of Eiseley's stature and influence. We believe this situation is unwarranted, and this collection is a small effort to rectify it.

In lamenting the dearth of previous Eiseley scholarship, we do not mean to imply that no such scholarship exists. Indeed many of the essays in this collection are indebted to these earlier efforts and, in some cases, are in fact written by scholars who have contributed to that earlier body of work.

Eiseley scholarship in peer-reviewed journals tends to fall into discrete schools of thought: a focus on time and space (Robert G. Franke; and Dimitri N. Breschinsky, "Reaching Beyond"); a focus on rhetoric (Joseph J. Comprone); a focus on myth and symbolism (David E. Gamble, Lawrence I. Berkove, and Kathleen Woodward, among others); and a dominant focus on biography (Joseph J. Wydeven; Jack Bushnell; Gale H. Carrithers, "Loren"; and Hilda Raz, among others). Extending and complicating this tradition, William H. Wisner's analysis of Eiseley and the genre of autobiography demonstrates Eiseley's vexed stance toward self-disclosure in *All the Strange Hours*. Wisner's careful reading of this late work provides an equally interesting discussion of nonfiction life writing, as his title articulates: "The Perilous Self: Loren Eiseley and the Reticence of Autobiography." Recently, scholars such as Lioi and Michael A. Bryson (also featured in this collection) have examined the philosophical and ethical dimensions of Eiseley's writing, with a particular interest in Eiseley's environmental philosophy. Moreover, Jeffrey Wagner, using economic theory, compares the writings of Eiseley, Henry David Thoreau, and Václav Havel and suggests their contributions to a new economic model that proposes global commons and allows for a "public sanction of free-riding" (103).

While journals as varied as *ISLE*, *Technical Communication Quarterly*, and *Sewanee Review* have been expanding Eiseley studies in rich, suggestive ways, book-length studies of Eiseley have been more rare. Several mono-

graphs and general overviews of Eiseley have been written, but most have been out of print for many years. The majority of them focus on Eiseley's biography. As Lioi argues in this collection, "The strength of Eiseley's self-conception has almost guaranteed that several generations of critics would feel obliged to approach his work primarily through the charism of autobiography." In 1983 three books were published on Eiseley: Andrew J. Angyal's *Loren Eiseley*; Leslie E. Gerber and Margaret McFadden's *Loren Eiseley*; and E. Fred Carlisle's *Loren Eiseley: The Development of a Writer*. The books by Angyal and by Gerber and McFadden, with identical titles, are similar in their chronological overviews and summaries of Eiseley's work, with an emphasis on biography and with minimal literary analysis. Carlisle's book is likewise an overview of Eiseley's oeuvre, but it differs in being a psychological biography, paying special attention to Eiseley's early life and writings. These biographical approaches to Eiseley culminated in the 1990 publication of Gale E. Christianson's *Fox at the Wood's Edge*, which provides the definitive biographical context for Eiseley's writing. But Christianson's book is not a literary study (he is a historian) and does not attempt a critical examination of Eiseley's writing. In 1991 Peter Heidtmann published *Loren Eiseley: A Modern Ishmael*. Heidtmann approaches Eiseley as a memoirist, an approach that again foregrounds biography. Most recently, in 1995 Mary Ellen Pitts published *Toward a Dialogue of Understandings: Loren Eiseley and the Critique of Science*. This book breaks away from the emphasis on biography so well demonstrated in the previous books and is essentially an examination of Eiseley's efforts to reconcile scientific and humanistic epistemologies. It begins to inform Eiseley scholarship with more recent critical approaches (see Pitts's new essay in this collection). Of these monographs, only two remain in print: Christianson's biography and Pitts's study.

Now that more scholars are seriously exploring knowledge at the intersections of disciplines, Eiseley studies, as we trust this collection demonstrates, are positioned to flourish in a way that they have not up to now. The past few decades have witnessed a burgeoning of scholarly interest in a variety of fields especially amenable to the interpretation of Eiseley, including both the serious consideration of creative nonfiction as

an important genre of American literature, as well as the related scholarly analysis of science and nature writing. The study and teaching of writers such as Eiseley is a growing trend in academic institutions in the United States and around the world.

The fourteen essays in this collection represent a balance of established Eiseley scholars, such as Breschinsky, Bryson, Lioi, and Pitts, and a number of scholarly voices new to Eiseley studies. While some of these essays expand on familiar ground, many take Eiseley studies in fresh directions, particularly in the areas of place-conscious and ecocritical interpretations.

As arranged here, the essays spiral out through ever-wider contexts: biographical analysis leads to place studies, which turn toward more theoretical approaches, especially ecocriticism and rhetorical analysis. Finally, literary contexts and comparisons reveal some surprising historical and global significance. However, the essays do not create a strict linear progression. Certain themes recur, though altered by changing context, as they cycle outward.

In the first essay, "'The Bay of Broken Things': The Experience of Loss in the Work of Loren Eiseley," Susan Hanson focuses on the plethora of loss in Eiseley's life and reveals the spiritual dimensions to be found in his work. From his childhood on, Eiseley faced trauma and isolation, a sense of fragmentation across scales of existence, from the most personal to the global. Hanson, interested in Eiseley's spiritual responses to this landscape of loss, sees a parallel between the writer and apophatic mystics, witnesses to "the transience of things." While the mystics find God in their travails, Hanson argues that Eiseley "finds repose." Both are seeking "what Thomas Merton calls 'a hidden wholeness.'" Hanson connects Eiseley to a lineage of spiritual writing, including the theologian Martin Buber. In facing transience and brokenness, Eiseley learns to tap into the permutations of loss, to achieve, in the mystic's language, the "purgative way." His literary journeys into the dark, empty, lonely reaches of existence, in Hanson's assessment, serve to create "both psychological and spiritual catharsis." Bridging biography and literary analysis, Hanson reveals the influential spiritual leanings of Eiseley the author, a theme developed later in the collection as well.

M. Catherine Downs's lively, historical framing of Eiseley and hoboing, in "'Never Going to Cease My Wandering': Loren Eiseley and the American Hobo," demonstrates the inspiration that more profane experiences gave to Eiseley. Throughout his writing career, Eiseley regularly alludes to his formative wandering years, hopping freight trains to seek escape and illumination. The California freights allowed men (almost never women) a cheap way to travel — and for a curious and restless working-class young man like Eiseley, the lure was irresistible. "In his later years," Downs tells us, as Eiseley "ceased riding trains illicitly, and the experiences receded from his immediate life, they were turned to myth in the lines of essays and autobiographical writings." Digging deeply into hobo history and lore, Downs explores new connections for Eiseley readers. Her thorough examination of class and race prejudice, the hard-knocks world of riding the rails, also limns the mythic outlines of vagrancy. Homeless men, placeless characters, abound in Eiseley's writings, and his experience among them surely affected his sense of compassion. As Downs writes, "Eiseley is concerned with civilization's refuse, its neglected and overlooked. His tone of quiet despair is the burden carried by those who are free from surveillance, cherishing that freedom while hating how some use it." Movement and itinerancy, the motion of rail travel, helped shape one of Eiseley's prominent structures, the journey, and one of his most prominent archetypes for the human condition, the hobo.

From these explorations of Eiseley's life, the collection moves to an analysis of Eiseley's complex connections to both natural and urban places. In "'The Places Below': Mapping the Invisible Universe in Loren Eiseley's Plains Essays," Susan N. Maher places the environmental writer at the forefront of what William Least Heat-Moon has called deep-map writing. The horizontality of the Great Plains encouraged Eiseley, in his essays, to seek vertical knowledge, to delve deeply into the history, indeed the prehistory, of the places he studies. Examining essays from the beginning of his career (*The Immense Journey*) to the end (*The Night Country*), Maher explores the lure of what Eiseley calls in one signature essay "The Places Below." Such places are never wholly comprehensible: something enigmatic always remains, grounding Eiseley's literary cartography in unstable terrain.

In contrast, Bryson, while acknowledging the importance of the Great Plains to Eiseley's oeuvre, explores that other terrain that captures Eiseley's imagination: urban spaces. Eiseley is a formative urban environmental writer, Bryson notes in "Unearthing Urban Nature: Loren Eiseley's Explorations of City and Suburb," predating the current interest in urban nature by decades. Eiseley's "everyday encounters with natural entities — birds, mammals, insects, even wind-borne seeds" establish a rich, biological matrix within the city. Though Eiseley can also depict the "dark, fearful wasteland" of the city, his encounters with the natural within the built environment "validat[e] the ecological worth of the urban landscape and the organisms therein." This recognition is essential in the modern, increasingly urban world; as Bryson argues, "Cities and suburbs are all part of a complex urban ecosystem, a dynamic mosaic in which imperiled nature interacts with humans and their built environment." Whether walking to a commuter station, musing in an apartment building, or peering from a hotel window, Eiseley, the "literary naturalist," seeks illumination from the ancient ways of nature. The city, then, becomes a place of "environmental critique" in Eiseley's essays. The cityscape becomes a "vehicle for articulating an environmental ethic."

These place-conscious readings are followed by two ecocritical analyses by Kathleen Boardman and by Tom Lynch. In "Anthropomorphizing the Essay: Loren Eiseley's Representations of Animals," Boardman takes on those critics who have accused Eiseley of anthropomorphizing in his writings, for presenting what are alleged to be sentimental and unscientific representations of animal life. In Boardman's opinion, Eiseley "took seriously his identity as a scientist, historian, and critic of science: while his essays were not scientific writing, he *was* a scientist writing." Recent studies by primatologists and cognitive ethologists provide empirical data that support appropriate anthropomorphic strategies, and Boardman summarizes Eiseley's argument for "human-animal contact and openness to the possibility of shared characteristics." Moreover, the human body is not severed from the animal world; DNA analyses repeatedly demonstrate the genetic closeness of humans and many mammals. Boardman reads Eiseley's retort to his critics "as a defiant manifesto." Interpreting Eiseley's

anthropomorphizing "in the context of scientific attitudes of his time and in terms of more recent controversies," Boardman provides a cogent, persuasive analysis of Eiseley's animal portraits, demonstrating that he was well ahead of his time in recognizing the limitations and dangers of objectifying animals.

Few scholars have explored Eiseley's poetic output. Indeed, some have called his poetry deplorable.[1] Lynch, in "'The Borders between Us': Loren Eiseley's Ecopoetics," believes that Eiseley's poetic reputation suffered because at the time he was publishing "neither the lingering New Criticism nor the emerging postmodern hermeneutics of skepticism had much sympathy for Eiseley's earnest engagement with serious questions regarding a world that lay very much outside the text." The emergence of ecocriticism, and by extension ecopoetics, has given new impetus to studying Eiseley's poetry. Summarizing recent definitions, Lynch sees in Eiseley "an early practitioner of what we now call ecopoetry." Eiseley's poetry brings scientific language and concepts into lyric form, presents what Boardman would call an appropriate anthropomorphizing, attempts to connect readers to the natural world, encourages a compassion for "and identity with a natural order that fewer and fewer readers have any direct contact with," and attempts to depict deep time and space "in the limited medium of language." Lynch underscores the importance of evolutionary theory: "an appreciation for the evolutionary matrix of all living things" is fundamental for Eiseley, in all his poems and essays. Importantly, Eiseley does not separate the human realm from this matrix; for this reason, his poems emphasize a biocentric, not an "anthropocentric," worldview. For Eiseley, this recognition of an evolutionary process is not simply an intellectual gambit. Lynch argues that Eiseley grasped this reality somatically, as "tactile sensation." Carefully reading a number of Eiseley's most noteworthy poems from his late volumes of poetry, Lynch opens up a productive dialogue on Eiseley as poet, claiming neither an elevated position of genius for these poems nor dismissing them outright as earlier critics have. Folding Eiseley into the pantheon of ecopoets, Lynch reclaims the artistry and substance of these lyrics.

As much as intellectual opinion makers argue that interdisciplinary

study must restructure the academy, university life remains stubbornly discipline focused. C. P. Snow's description of two cultures remains an unresolved dichotomy in many university communities. Pamela Gossin has found that teaching Eiseley at the University of Texas at Dallas, an institution founded primarily as a science and technology campus, presents opportunities for challenging the two-cultures paradigm. Gossin intentionally tries to collapse the two-cultures training in her classroom, which she calls "an interdisciplinary field laboratory of sorts." Her "Lessons of an Interdisciplinary Life: Loren Eiseley's Rhetoric of Profundity in Popular Science Writing and 'Two Cultures' Pedagogy" first establishes a concept of a "rhetoric of profundity" and then focuses on her attempts to introduce this concept to a classroom that mingles students of science, technology, and the humanities. She has developed a classroom practice to undermine two-cultures bifurcated thinking, which places Eiseley's essay "The Judgment of the Birds" at the beginning of her course on "Reading and Writing Texts." Seeking a transformative experience for her students, Gossin believes that Eiseley promotes and explores layers of profundity, forcing his readers to ask, "What can I learn about the meaning of life from this?" Such shared exploration provokes interdisciplinary thinking. Gossin argues that "Eiseley's interdisciplinary life and work successfully model his synthesis of the humanities and sciences and provide students with a personal exemplum."

In her essay "Artifact and Idea: Loren Eiseley's Poetic Undermining of C. P. Snow," Pitts both continues the reexamination of Eiseley's poetry exemplified in Lynch's essay, while further exploring the two-cultures problem examined by Gossin. Starting with Snow's argument that science and the humanities have become "two cultures," Pitts revisits Eiseley's response in "The Illusion of Two Cultures" and connects this essay's argument to his later volumes of poetry. In arguing against a division "between utility and beauty, between *techne* and *poiesis*," Eiseley holds up an exemplary artifact: a well-wrought arrowhead. Clearly, he argues, this artifact displays both utility and aesthetics. Pitts calls this essay "a *tour de force* for Eiseley, urging reexamination of both science and art as 'constructs' of human beings, subject 'to human pressures and inescap-

able distortions.'" Then, selecting four poems from *Notes of an Alchemist*, Pitts posits that Eiseley is arguing against Snow's position, using "Snow's own exemplar, the Second Law of Thermodynamics" (which Snow had claimed most humanists could not identify) as a significant trope in his poetic volume. Pitts proposes that the poems "Notes of an Alchemist," "The Striders," "The Beaver," and "Arrowhead" demonstrate "Eiseley's master stroke" in the "undermining of C. P. Snow."

In an astute display of interdisciplinary analysis, Jacqueline Cason's "The Spirit of Synecdoche: Order and Chaos Contend in the Metaphors of Loren Eiseley" argues that Eiseley intuitively recognized the perpetual reiteration of order and chaos in the drama of evolution. Drawing on Kenneth Burke's "The Four Master Tropes" and Hayden White's *Metahistory*, Cason presents a tropological analysis of Eiseley's nature essays and history of science texts. Eiseley, she claims, prefigures the world of nature and human experience through the figure known as synecdoche, that figure of speech that recognizes a metaphysical connection between microcosm and macrocosm. "The synecdochic mode," Cason argues, "by prefiguring an inherent universalism, enables Eiseley to dramatize the individual as a microcosm who shares the spirit of the whole without sacrificing individual identity." His essay, "The Last Neanderthal," she suggests, with the imagery of blue plums and smoke, serves as an emblematic representation of the interplay between organization and entropy and the capacity for human memory to store, transmit, and preserve energy as complex wholes, in spite of individual mortality and inevitable dissolution. She further examines how synecdoche informs Eiseley's writing not only thematically but also structurally. The "concealed essay" enables Eiseley to explore nonlinear relationships among several events in time by juxtaposing analogical memories and embedding them within explanations of sequential and causally related events. The essay genre thereby functions as a form of ironic synecdoche that retains the humility of partial vision alongside the enlarged spirit of the whole.

Though Eiseley insisted strongly on his distinctive originality, scholars have long noted his habit of reading widely, eclectically, and comprehensively. Eiseley himself highlighted a number of these authors in his writ-

ings, for allusiveness is part of his characteristic style. Moreover, he had a particular pantheon of writers and thinkers that included Francis Bacon, Henry David Thoreau, and Charles Darwin. The next few essays explore new literary contexts for Eiseley's oeuvre.

Lioi makes an intriguing connection between Dante Alighieri and Eiseley, in "In a Dark Wood: Dante, Eiseley, and the Ecology of Redemption," noting that each "transgressed against the cabal of criticism by defining his own lineage and specifying the principles for the interpretation of his work." Significantly, in marking European influences on Eiseley, and by insisting on "a transatlantic conversation about science, literature, and myth," Lioi places Eiseley in a more "cosmopolitan," worldly, and "intergenerational" lineage than has been the case in American-centric Eiseley scholarship. Citing W. H. Auden, one of Eiseley's transatlantic connections and friends, Lioi returns to Dante's *Comedy* as a foundational text for Eiseley. In a reading of "The Star Thrower," arguably Eiseley's greatest essay, Lioi delimits its structure and purpose, proposing a medieval model that adapts "Dantean patterns of redemption." Eiseley revises this pattern to address "our own environmental crisis," Lioi proposes, "renewing the medieval sense that the whole world, not just the individual, is in danger." Eiseley's recovery and appropriation of Dante's comedic organization in "The Star Thrower" extends redemption to all living things. As such, Eiseley offers an "ecology of redemption" to his readers, weaving together the "scientific . . . existential and theological meanings of ecology." Finding joy, ultimately, in a bleak setting, Eiseley, like Dante, embraces love, compassion, and connection.

Eiseley's admiration of Henry David Thoreau has long been recognized in Eiseley scholarship. Eiseley's interest in this transcendentalist is obvious in his own writing, including an essay specifically on Thoreau, "Walden: Thoreau's Unfinished Business." Still, Jonathan Weidenbaum, in "Emerson and Eiseley: Two Religious Visions," highlights the older transcendentalist's significance to Eiseley's development as an essayist. Like Hanson earlier, Weidenbaum emphasizes Eiseley's spiritual interests, stating that "when placed next to Emerson . . . the uniqueness of Eiseley's religious thought is most vividly apparent." Indeed, Weidenbaum plainly attests, "If

there is any larger purpose of this essay, it is to highlight Eiseley's genuine contribution to an authentically American spirituality." Like Emerson, Eiseley rejected organized religion. Emerson claimed in his journals, "I need hardly say to any one acquainted with my thoughts that I have no System" (*Selected* 87). In Emerson, the empirical knowledge of science blends with the spiritual knowledge of poetry, disconnecting his unsystematic belief process from his era's contemporary orthodoxy. Eiseley, Weidenbaum asserts, also "defies easy categorization." In his assessment, "Eiseley has contributed some of the most compelling and readable science writing in contemporary literature." At the same time, Eiseley, as "the author of *Darwin's Century* and a book on Francis Bacon[,] can state 'that the venture into space is meaningless unless it coincides with a certain interior expansion, an ever-growing universe within'" (*Star* 298). Together, Emerson and Eiseley help define what Sydney Ahlstrom and Harold Bloom have called the "American Religion," which Weidenbaum describes as "a creed of interiority, one centered within the deep recesses of the psyche."

In his comparison of Eiseley to a different author, the American naturalist and writer John Burroughs, Stephen Mercier places Eiseley in a different context, the tradition of the natural history essay, in particular the tradition of writing about evolution for a public audience. In his essay "Epic Narratives of Evolution: John Burroughs and Loren Eiseley" Mercier examines some of the astonishing similarities between Eiseley's *The Immense Journey* from 1957 and Burroughs's "The Long Road," published in *Time and Change* in 1912. Both writers employ similar rhetorical techniques, tropes, and imaginative prose to aid readers' understanding of evolution. They rely on the metaphor of the journey or road. Furthermore, both literary naturalists consider the processes of evolution as ongoing and creative. Similarly, Eiseley and Burroughs conceive of evolution in the first person, imagining their own bodies undergoing huge physiological transformations over aeons of geologic time. In these intimate portrayals, human beings are inextricably fused to their environments in essential ways. In the hands of Burroughs and Eiseley, Mercier argues, literary natural history stimulates wider conceptions of evolution and leads to a broader understanding of humans' place in the cosmos. These accounts, Mercier concludes, are

inspiring and crafted to invoke wonder and awe. In the end, both writers ultimately insist on mystery.

In attempting to understand the evolution and mystery of the human psyche, Eiseley found himself, later in life, interested in the writings of Carl Jung. John Nizalowski, in "Eiseley and Jung: Structuralism's Invisible Pyramid," explores Eiseley's introduction to and absorption of Jungian archetypes and theories, most prominently that of the collective unconscious. Before he had read Jung carefully, Eiseley was internalizing Jung's ideas in his readings of other scientists and social scientists, such as Emile Durkheim, Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, and Claude Lévi-Strauss. Nizalowski argues that "whether Eiseley gained his Jungian ideas directly or indirectly through his readings of Lévi-Strauss and other structural thinkers, Jungian systems of thought consciously shape his essays." They were in the ether. Jung presents his key theory in an essay titled "The Concept of the Collective Unconscious," in which he distinguishes the collective unconscious from individual consciousness. The collective unconscious "is the realm of the archetypes," a matrix of knowledge that "owe[s] [its] existence exclusively to heredity." Eiseley, in numerous essays and poems, articulates patterns and archetypes that allow him to discern older, more ancient instincts, behaviors, and cognitive responses in living beings. "The Last Neanderthal" is a case in point. Moreover, Eiseley explores ideas of sacred time, "which rises above and beyond the historical and parallels Jung's ideas of timelessness in the collective unconscious." Moments of ordinary experience can suddenly open up, fall into, this timeless, expansive dimension beyond the normative boundaries of time and space. In this expansive mode, Nizalowski argues, humans can suddenly find themselves connecting deeply to the animal kingdom, as happens in Eiseley's short story "The Dance of the Frogs." Totem animals, a recurrence in Eiseley's essays, serve as spirit guides, expressions of a deeper connective reality not yet evident in the conscious mind. Dreams and visions, too, "are a major source of creative and scientific inspiration" in Eiseley. Taken together, these expressions of a unifying, communal unconsciousness demonstrate the significance of Jung's theories in Eiseley's writings.

In "From the American Great Plains to the Steppes of Russia: Loren Eiseley

Transplanted," Breschinsky provides a notably different context for Eiseley. A prolific and poetic translator of Eiseley's work into Russian, Breschinsky has spent more than two decades trying to "transplant" Eiseley's writings into modern Russian culture. His engaging discussion of this ongoing project, producing a "representative collection of Eiseley's essays and short stories," explains many of the challenges of a translator's job, including dealing with increasingly expensive copyright negotiations and with publishers who do not honor agreements. Publishing translations in Russian literary journals and in book form, Breschinsky works exactingly "to make the work sound as though Eiseley's native tongue were Russian." Word-to-word translation is only one concern; Breschinsky also hopes to capture "the sound of the words, the cadence of the lines, the particular associations that are peculiarly Russian." Translation becomes transmutation, transplantation: "Slowly, painfully, joyously Eiseley, who was born in Nebraska of pioneer German stock, *becomes* Russian." Breschinsky's project, which is gaining readers for Eiseley both in his printed versions and in copied, digitized (and often pirated) online versions of his translations, may help promote nature writing in Russia. Noting many of the formative Russian authors, such as Sergey Aksakov, Ivan Turgenev, Mikhail Prishvin, and Konstantin Paustovsky, who "reveal a deep appreciation of the natural world," Breschinsky ponders the dearth of nonfiction nature writing in the Russian tradition. "Nature writing as practiced in the United States," he explains, "never materialized in Russia." Without an established tradition, promoting Eiseley's writings has been challenging. Moreover, Breschinsky argues, Russians have never embraced Darwin's "unrelenting positivism and materialism." Marxist materialists had little patience with Darwin as well. Today, "creationism has captured the popular imagination"—not an encouraging development for Eiseley. Undeterred, Breschinsky sees his translation project as a developing bridge: "one of many," he concludes, "that will be needed if Russia is ever to fully embrace the best of Western civilization."

Whether approaching the essays in *Artifacts and Illuminations* selectively or collectively, readers will discover new interpretive avenues for their understanding of Loren Eiseley's endlessly rewarding body of work. As

such, the chapters seek both to introduce his brilliant, memorable writings to a new generation who has yet to encounter them and to reintroduce him to those who feel they have known him perhaps all too well. As this overview has sought to make plain, this book displays a range of mostly new approaches to the study of Eiseley's writing. But it is by no means exhaustive. We are acutely aware that this collection does not cover all profitable approaches (surely, for example, a gendered reading of Eiseley is long overdue). It is meant to suggest rather than to delimit the possibilities. In that spirit, we present these essays not so much as artifacts of what has been accomplished but as illuminations of what is yet to be done.

## NOTES

1. See, for instance, William H. Wisner's comment that Eiseley wrote "several extremely bad books of poetry (including *Notes of an Alchemist*, 1972, and *The Innocent Assassins*, 1973)" (88).