

The Husbandry of the Wild · *Sherman Paul*

FOREWORDS ARE USUALLY last words, commentary on the work done. In respect to what has been accomplished they are placed first in order to open the text, to provide a way in. It seems appropriate, then, in talking about *A Sand County Almanac*, to begin with Aldo Leopold's introductory sentences, to hear how he says what he has to say.

There are some who can live without wild things, and some who cannot. These essays are the delights and dilemmas of one who cannot.

Like winds and sunsets, wild things were taken for granted until progress began to do away with them. Now we face the question whether a still higher "standard of living" is worth its cost in things natural, wild, and free. For us of the minority, the opportunity to see geese is more important than television, and the chance to find a pasque-flower is a right as inalienable as free speech.

These wild things, I admit, had little human value until mechanization assured us of a good breakfast, and until science disclosed the drama of where they came from and how they live. The whole conflict boils down to a question of degree. We of the minority see a law of diminishing returns in progress; our opponents do not.

These sentences exemplify one of Leopold's best styles, an easy, open, straight-on, vernacular, spoken style. Every declaration is measured and firm but not contentious; ingratiating, rather, as prefatory statements should be, even though from first to last what is set out, characteristically, is polarized, a matter of opposition and conflict. This is a personal style, not the objective style of scientific work, for example, Leopold's *Game Management*, which begins with a definition against which his achievement in *A Sand County Almanac* may be measured: "Game management is the art of making land produce sustained annual crops of wild game for recreational use." Leopold's personal style belongs to what, in his large archive—how did one who sat so long at a desk have time for fieldwork?—it belongs to what are called "philosophic and literary writings." This is a separate category in keeping with two critical distinctions, *leisure* (as

against *work*) and *country* (as against *land*), both, in turn, related by a sense of adventure and “defiance of the contemporary.”

Almost all of Leopold’s philosophic and literary writings required revision. The easy style didn’t come easy; its artfulness was earned by attending to style as attentively as he attended to all serious matters. Leopold was always a writer, but this doesn’t mean, as we sometimes say, that he was a natural writer. He had to learn to write, and in doing so travelled a long way from the occasional humorous scribbling of such early publications as *The Pine Cone* and the forceful and certain field despatches of the enthusiastic forester. It does not detract from his achievement, then, to note in the first sentence—“There are some who can live without wild things, and some who cannot”—to note here, as elsewhere, that he mingles with his own voice the voice of E. B. White. The voices, say, of Thoreau and Muir, great writers whom he acknowledges, were not contemporary; there were profound historical reasons that prohibited their direct appropriation, one of them the diminishment of the singular that much besides ecology fostered, the awareness, as with White, that all a writer who speaks *in propria persona* can serve up is one man’s meat. White, incidentally, brought out his essays under that name in 1942, essays written during his retreat to a salt water farm in Maine. About this time Leopold proposed a Christmas book of essays that did not include many “shack essays,” as those in the almanac section were called, or take its title from the round of things he did on the sand county farm he purchased in 1935.

Especially resonant of White in this opener are the way of speaking and what is said. There is, for example, the political terminology, the insistence on freedom and inalienable rights that belonged to a time of domestic and global strife—the Great Depression and World War II. An unobtrusive terminology (“cost,” “progress,” “‘standard of living’”) introduces an important economic perspective. A scientific perspective also enters, with the word *science*, unquestioned here, a discloser of evolutionary and ecological knowledge, and not, as Leopold knew, an agent of economic forces, the “mechanization” he refers to, the “diminishing returns” he recognizes. Leopold, himself a scientist, pits *ecos/ecology* against *econ/economy*, and by way of the former, which he hoped would teach us to love the land and have community with it, rallies to his side the

power of *eros*. He answers a question that seems to me to be implicit in some of the questions (“*How do you grow a lover?*” ; “*How do you grow a poet?*”) asked by Robert Kroetsch in *Seed Catalogue: How do you grow a lover of the land?*

Leopold pits a subversive science—ecological understanding is both subversive and moral, subversive because moral, which is why Paul Goodman considered it the fitting science for writers—against the dismal science of getting and spending, knowing that subversives like himself are a minority, belong to the margins, as Wendell Berry again reminds us. Hence, with little chance of victory, he settles for amelioration (“a question of degree”) and writes in the spirit of accommodation. More than anything, this connects him with White—as in this instance it also connects him with Lincoln at Gettysburg. This is evoked by “now we face the question whether . . .” and “whole conflict.” The ecological crisis—*crisis* in a medical sense, the pathology evident to anyone willing to see it and especially to someone trained to see it and, in addition, the owner of a worn-out farm—the ecological crisis, as he knew from the asperity of his work on the Wisconsin Conservation Commission, might very well find an analogue in civil war. At the outset of the *Almanac* Leopold makes this connection and reads in terms of *the* Civil War the present irreconcilable (irreconciled) conflict of man and land.

White’s accommodation is spelled out in the title of his book: it grants that one man’s meat is another man’s poison, that my satisfactions need not be yours. You are not deprived of television (just beginning to transform our lives when Leopold cited it) because I hanker after geese. But is this live-and-let-live resolution of the conflict the case in the crucial opening sentence? *There are some who can live without wild things, and some who cannot.* This may be read as saying that it is possible to live without wild things, that one may choose to live a meager life of this kind even though living with wild things is richer. The antithesis of the sentence is also compromised by the fact that its restricted meaning plays against our knowledge that, ultimately, we cannot live without wild things—without the wild, to which, we inevitably recall Thoreau saying, we owe the preservation of the world.

To introduce *wild* in the first sentence and insist on it in the first sentences of the subsequent paragraphs confirms Leopold's genius. The minority for whom he speaks now includes Thoreau ("Life consists with wildness") and Muir (whose remark, "In God's wildness lies the hope of the world," echoes Thoreau) and many others, chiefly the "radical amateurs," as Stephen Fox calls them, who comprise the militant moral tradition of conservation or, in Donald Worster's phrase, "the party of conscience." White's accommodation is characteristic, Leopold's is not. Like Thoreau in "Walking," an essay in significance to be paired with "Civil Disobedience," Leopold wishes to make an extreme statement. "I wish to speak a word for Nature," Thoreau says, "for absolute freedom and wildness . . . to regard man as an inhabitant, or part and parcel of Nature. . . ." Such concern for the wild allows no compromise.

The accommodation of the foreword is rhetorical, the good sense of a writer who, having lost immediate battles, wants to be heard, even, as he suggested, in the *Reader's Digest*, the magazine equivalent of any number of popular forums—garden clubs and PTAs, for example—that he addressed. The difficulty of placing his book and an editor's skeptical reception of his "philosophical reflections"—nature-writing was welcome but not challenging ecological thought, which one publisher's reader found "fatuous"—all this, as well as the counsel of a former student, may have prompted Leopold to discard an earlier foreword notable for the polemical force of its autobiographical witness.

This foreword, in the revision of 31 July 1947, is a major document, and new editions of *A Sand County Almanac*, the first edition wisely enlarged to include some complementary essays from *Round River*, should add it. Nothing of Leopold's that I have read is so summary, filled as it is with salient thoughts that he says were "the end-result of a life-journey." There is something conclusive here, and in the reiterated *during my lifetime*, that evokes a journey's end and asks us to consider his book as testamentary. These thoughts—"These essays," he now begins, "deal with the ethics and esthetics of land"—these thoughts are final. This may explain his willingness to express once more his "discontent with the ecological *status quo*"—that is, with the economic uses of science and the impotence of the conservation movement—and it may explain the unusual presence of the personal, even the need to confess his sin.

Leopold's enthusiasm for hunting—he had hunted from boyhood in Iowa, coming to nature-study in this way, and the shack was purchased for a base-camp—this enthusiasm, and the very enterprise of game management, have always disturbed me. I share Muir's view of both, that hunting is “murder business” and that protective measures such as game management arise because “the pleasure of killing is in danger of being lost from there being little or nothing left to kill. . . .” Leopold's defense of hunting as an ethical discipline as against the wantonness of sport doesn't convince me. So I was happy to find that Leopold, after twenty years, admits that the predator control he fostered was “ecological murder.” He participated, he says, in “the extinguishment of the grizzly bear,” in his mind the wilderness itself; he was “accessory to the extermination of the lobo wolf” and rationalized it “by calling it deer management.” Having done this he contributed to the “erasing [of] the wilderness” practiced in the name of range conservation, for once a wilderness area has been proclaimed and the predators killed to increase the game, logic (of a bureaucratic kind) requires roads to enable the hunters to “harvest” the game, and access destroys the wilderness.

I mention this folly because he does in the narrative of his career and because the education of Aldo Leopold may be said to begin here, in his official capacity as a forest ranger and chief of operations in the Forest Service in Arizona and New Mexico. Leopold makes the point of noting that he is a “research ecologist” and that in appraising his work we should remember that his predecessors, Thoreau, Muir, Burroughs, Hudson, and Seton, “wrote before ecology had a name, before the science of animal behavior had been born, and before the survival of faunas and floras had become a desperate problem.” Few writers, he says, “have dealt with the drama of wild things since our principal instruments of understanding them have come into being.” He is one of them, a scientist by training, and, of course, a professional, an expert, in the service of government and university—the University of Wisconsin, which had fitted Muir for his joyous exploration of nature and had created a professorship of wildlife management for Leopold.

Leopold's education, at least in this summation, was disenchanting largely because of its institutional character. The crucial lesson belongs to the

1920s, when he worked for the Forest Products Laboratory in Madison, and found “the industrial *motif* of this otherwise admirable institution . . . little to [his] liking.” At this time, he would have us believe, he took the trips to the Sierra Madre Mountains that taught him that “land is an organism” and that hitherto he “had seen only sick land”—trips he actually took a decade later. As a result of his *work* at the Laboratory, he claims that he wrote, among other philosophic essays, “The Land Ethic,” a composite work incorporating earlier attempts to set out an ecological ethic that was actually written in 1947 or 1948; and as a result of his *leisure* in the mountains, he wrote “Song of the Gavilan” and “Guacamaja,” sketches in *A Sand County Almanac* that he placed with his trip to the unspoiled delta of the Colorado, thereby associating healthy land (wilderness) with his youth. The reasons for these departures from chronology are profoundly autobiographical and tactical. He asks us to see these writings in relation that we may better realize the complexity and unity of his thought, its grounding in experience—how the man who appreciated *country* (“the personality of the land, the collective harmony of its soil, life, and weather”) troubled over *land* (“the place where corn, gullies, and mortgages grow”), how *leisure* entailed habits of *work*.

The shack journals that he kept at the farm, for example, do not contain thoughts so much as records of work done and things seen. There are few initial compositions of the kind that allow you to read the journals of Thoreau and Muir, simply records, neat, schematic, and indexed, the data-keeping of a scientist, such brief daily entries as the Forest Service requires. Yet, even as the journals make us wonder how such data was transformed into essays, they tell us how much there is to see, how rich the field of attentions—that this record is one of familiarization, the requisite participation that enables one to inhabit a place. Leopold methodically employed science to this end, in order, in Heidegger’s term, to *dwell*. This is why he says of the last episode of his narrative, the purchase of the farm, that his “education in land ecology was deflected. . . .”

Deflected at first seems curious, but the import of Leopold’s story turns on it. We may understand its use by recalling his initial dismay at the destruction of the land and the doubts he early had about “man in the role of conqueror.” The ethics and esthetics of land have become his concern because,

as he says in the juxtaposed sentence, "During my lifetime, more land has been destroyed or damaged than ever before in recorded history." Science, he finds, has encouraged rather than halted this destruction (of land bureaus, agricultural colleges, and extension services, he notes that "no ethical obligation toward land is taught in these institutions"), and his own scientific education, making him aware of what is invisible to others, has penalized him by isolating him, forcing him to live alone in "a world of wounds." "An ecologist," he says, "must either harden his shell and make believe that the consequences of science are none of his business, or he must be the doctor who sees the marks of death in a community that believes itself well, and does not want to be told otherwise." Leopold's education, accordingly, involved the concurrent growth of perception and conscience, a crisis, moreover, of scientific conscience, and prompted him, like the good doctor in Ibsen's play, to become an enemy of the people.

Ethics and *esthetics* enter his vocabulary where hitherto agronomic terms had been prominent. *Esthetics* identifies his thought with the preservationist concern for something more important than profit and marks his subscription to the tradition of nature-writing in which we find Thoreau and Muir—the "arcadian" tradition as against the "imperial" tradition, to borrow Donald Worster's way of distinguishing the opposing strands of ecological thought. The beauty Leopold saw in the natural world exercised esthetic judgment, the subjective certainty of right and wrong, and demanded ethical action. For him, beauty in nature was not a genteel satisfaction, never estheticized or ideal; it was a summons, a reminder of obligation. So having bought the farm, a week-end place fifty miles from Madison, a place of leisure not of work, he fulfilled a wish more clamorous than the desire to hunt: the wish to own land, not to have it as a possession or resource but to have it as a responsibility, to become a participant in its life, a citizen "in a community of which soils and waters, plants and animals are fellow members, each dependent on others, and each entitled to his [and her] place in the sun." The democracy of this community probably owes something to the Wisconsin Idea, which arose in opposition to the ruthless pioneering exploitation of which the abandoned farm was a testimony. Still, the point of Leopold's practice of the "land ethic" is that individuals, citizens, a last resort in bureau-ridden society, must enact it, and, equally important, that restoration must become their work. This

goal is wonderfully put by what was actually done at the farm: "the husbandry of wild things on our own land." Such husbandry, as Wendell Berry to some extent exemplifies it on his farm, has "feminine" connotations of nurture and care; it is not the work of man the conqueror, and it stands against the unsettling of America. The husbandry of wild things is a valuable radical idea and should not be confused with the gentrification more frequently hoped for by week-enders who have purchased abandoned farms. This idea provides the unity that seemed questionable in Leopold's book. "These essays," he says, "are one man's striving to live by and with, rather than on [or off] the American land." This idea is their meat, answering to the dismay Muir expressed when he said that "most people are *on* the world, not in it—have no conscious sympathy or relationship to anything about them. . . ." Because of this idea, *A Sand County Almanac* is Leopold's most important and deservedly prized work.

II

A Sand County Almanac did not immediately find a shape for this conviction. The small volume that Leopold proposed in 1941 did not have the three-part structure of the book that was accepted in 1948, and published posthumously in the following year. Some shack essays, as we saw, were included, but there was no almanac, and there were none of the didactic essays that comprise the last section. The book lacked its present framework of significance; its argument was not yet structural.

Most of the essays belonged to what is now Part II ("Sketches Here and There") and the volume took its title from one or another of them: *Marshland Elegy and Other Essays* or *Thinking Like a Mountain and Other Essays*. These are fitting titles because the essays celebrate the several biota Leopold had known, some historically of a frontier time, others primordial, of the Pleistocene, in almost every case to end in threnody, with a sense of loss, even of doom, equalled, I think, only by Faulkner in "The Bear," the central ecological fable of *Go Down, Moses*, published in 1942. *Once lost, forever lost* is what these essays tell us—that, as Leopold knew, "the creation of a new wilderness in the full sense is impossible."

What was possible, the rearguard action he had taken, was not sufficiently represented in this version of the book, although "Great Possessions," the

working title of *A Sand County Almanac* suggests it. In this shack essay he says of his farm, "I am the sole owner of all the acres I can walk over," and in this Thoreauvian spirit adds, "not only boundaries . . . disappear, but the thought of being bounded." Place has given him cosmos. There is no indoors in *A Sand County Almanac*: he is outside, *in* the world, at home in intimate space, dwelling with all that is "in a house," as Muir said of similar experience, "of one room." When I think of Leopold two images of him always come to mind, neither of the horseman, hunter, or canoeist, nor for that matter of the scholarly professor. The first image is of the early riser sitting outdoors on a rough-hewn bench heating coffee over the fire, with every sense taking in the morning world; the second is of the watcher who, having cleared a swath, sits near the shack awaiting the sight of deer—the deer that for him, as for George Oppen whose words I cite, cry faith *in this in which*.

The idea of an almanac, or at least the need to concentrate on it, was suggested by an editor. It may have been congenial because some early installments had been directed to farmers and published in a booklet, *Wild Life Conservation on the Farm*, in 1941. At this time, Leopold made an unusual entry in the shack journal:

What we hear of conservation is mostly what transpires in the parlor of land-use. This is a factual account of what happens in the kitchen. The particular kitchen of which I speak is one of the sand counties of Wisconsin. . . .

He had used the parlor-kitchen figure to a different end in *Game Management*. Now it accords with the remarks on land-use at the conclusion of "Cheat Takes Over," also completed in 1941:

I found the hopeless attitude [of ranchers] almost universal. There is, as yet, no sense of pride in the husbandry of wild plants and animals. . . . We tilt windmills in behalf of conservation in convention halls and editorial offices, but on the back forty we disclaim even owning a lance.

The reviews of the published book were neither as attentive nor as stringent as the reader's report of Alfred Etter, a professor at Washington University. This report, coming two months after Leopold's death, was not significantly acted on except for the change of title. "Sauk County" became "Sand County": a little known place yielded to a familiar biota. But *almanac* did not, as Etter suggested, yield to *seasons*, a more agreeable disposition of the material because he felt in several instances "the obligation of a calendar [to be] unfortunate." This is just: the materials are disproportionately distributed and sometimes lack calendrical necessity. Had Leopold lived to revise the manuscript, he might, Etter thought, have replaced the "weak links" and managed a tour de force. But in its present form he found the almanac diffuse and its essays "considerably less potent than those of the second and third Parts." He meant by this that they lacked "keen intellect," and what he called their "vague impression" was associated with the most frequent comment on the writing in this part—that it was "a little too sweet." Etter believed that this detracted from "the Professor's personality"—diminished the force of the man who was known professionally for his forthright integrity, a man, we might add, in many ways representative of an ideal type of his time. Thus, to reiterate, as Etter does, "The total effect of the Professor's personality [and presumably of the book as well] would be increased by the elimination of flowery or delicate words which inevitably find their way into writings on these subjects." Reviewers were not troubled by this; several were nature-writers and were not as sensitive as Etter to the ways in which sentimentality may compromise scientific ecology.

What Etter saw is there but of little consequence in light of what he didn't see: the three-part dialectical play of the book. Leopold himself explains this in the foreword as a movement from an account of seeking "refuge from too much modernity" and trying to reclaim "what we are losing elsewhere," to an account of previous experiences that taught him "the company is out of step" (a way of speaking he sometimes used to characterize himself), to an exposition of the ideas that would enable the company to "get back in step"—where *back*, surely, is a crucial word. Each part, he might have pointed out, has its own compositional unity and function and presents a different aspect of the author. Beginning in the present, the book treats simple, undemanding rural pleasures, the week-

end activities of the husbandman of wild things. Then it recovers the past when, as adventurer, Leopold had known wild biota—recovers this in present recollection and therefore with a sense of loss. The conclusion, again in the present, belongs to the professor for whose different demanding discourse Leopold (the artist) has set the stage. The three parts might also be designated *Thoreau*, *Muir*, and *Leopold*, for the participatory seasonal record, if not the family activity, recalls *Walden*, the double ply of adventure and conservation recalls any number of Muir's books (written in recollection), and Leopold, their successor, brings both forward in the uncompromising upshot of the conclusion where his divergence from the managerial conservation of Gifford Pinchot, in which he had been trained, also shows the extent of his education.

The dialectic of this structure serves the deepest instructional purpose of the book. "See or go blind," Gary Snyder's injunction in *Myths & Texts*, names it—see things and their relations. Luna Leopold, in the preface to *Round River*, speaks of his father's "lifetime of developing perception" and this is what is artfully set out in such a way as to foster ours. And not only perception but the action it entails. Consciousness, as the French know in having one word for both, awakens conscience. To see and refuse to act is to go blind, is not to follow the way perception opens. The professor and the husbandman are active men. Like Thoreau and Muir before him and Snyder after him, Leopold speaks for an unacknowledged constituency, for the wild, the silent world (Ponge's phrase). Like them, he is a figure, the exemplar of his own thought, and this gives it authenticity.

The almanac need not be complete nor detailed in order to be useful. We do not need to know what to observe but only to observe, to be the hunter in "The Deer Swath," the last shack essay, written in 1948 and published in *Round River*—the hunter who has learned that "the world teems with creatures, processes, and events," that every ground, whether city street, vacant lot, or illimitable woods, is hunting ground. An almanac reminds us to keep our eyes open to the seasonal, annual, and annular aspect of things; it fosters the idea of cycles, the recurrences that are the wonder and delight of the seasons, the "cycles of beginnings and ceasings" Leopold notes at the outset, that representation of reality, the round river, "the never-ending circuit of life." Much of the data in the shack journals per-

tains to phenology, the science, according to Webster's dictionary, of the relations between climate and periodic biological phenomena, such as the migrations and breeding of birds, the fruiting of plants, and so on. *Phenology* is a contraction of *phenomenology*, the observation of just those phenomena, as in Thoreau's "Kalendar," that enable us to anticipate nature. But the rootword is also worth remembering because perceptual experience roots us in the world.

In a study of the rhetoric of *A Sand County Almanac*, Peter Fritzell says that the almanac is composed of "perceptual situations." These situations might also be called "events," a term from Whitehead's philosophy of organism in keeping with Leopold's awareness of process. Susan Flader, the preeminent student of Leopold, speaks of "the person and the place," a phrase evoking the postmodern poetics of the poet-in-the-field, and nothing covers the poetics of the almanac so well as William Carlos Williams' dictum, "No ideas but in things." Thoreau begins the year with the thawing clay of the railroad cut, with the melting ice of the pond and the return of geese, and Leopold marks March with the last. But perhaps in eagerness to begin, to set things in motion, he attends a January thaw, tracking a skunk in the snow much in the way Thoreau tracked a fox. There are several morals to be drawn from this simple act of going outdoors to look (his motion of beginning, simple because winter has abstracted the landscape): that little is as good as big because what matters is relation; that participating in nature, economic as he reports it in the case of mouse, hawk, rabbit, and owl, is by virtue of this very act of mind more than economic; that the "pathetic fallacy" of taking the perspective of each creature is not in fact sentimental unless granting biotic equality to all things is sentimental; that observation and meditation are inextricable because, as Heisenberg teaches, observation alters what is observed, and because, as Emerson says, "man is an analogist, and studies relations in all objects."

The analogies Leopold draws work both ways, but most often the "animal analogues" serve, as in Amer-indian medicine, as instructive "analogies to our own problems." The mouse, for example, who has everything "neatly organized" to satisfy its needs, finds that "the thawing sun has mocked the basic premises of the microtine economic system." For the mouse the

thaw is a catastrophe of the kind that destroys civilization—a catastrophe as much of natural happening (nature is violent, and the communal life of organisms is prompted by climatic change) as of tunnel vision and reluctance to change. The mouse may be said to illustrate an evolutionary lesson out of Veblen.

Leopold is speculatively present but not omniscient. He would accept Emerson's definition of the poet as the integrator of all the parts if it did not seem willful, if it acknowledged the mystery of harmony ("the great orchestra") and represented the ego as necessary only to seeing (hearing) the integration. That he heard the great orchestra is not literary fancy, and distinguishes him, as it did Thoreau, from those who only see the world. The form Leopold used to compose his observations is itself instructive of this: an ideogram of six fragments presenting a complex event called "thaw," a multiphasic occurrence that bespeaks community because whatever exists in the same space belongs there and plays its functional part, however unwillingly, whether for good or ill, with everything else. An ideogram does not impose form so much as assume that the reality it represents is united in ways beyond our understanding; it asks us to look for relationships. It is the mode, in this instance, of someone who has learned humility.

The almanac may be diffuse, but in taking us over the ground, much as Thoreau and Muir do, Leopold allows us to share his experience. We come to know the place, and learn some of its ecological lessons. One of the most important concerns evolutionary and historical time. The latter is truly *time*, the furious linear assault of progress that Levi-Strauss says, in *Tristes Tropiques*, betrayed the paradisaical promise of America. In one of the most cunning essays, Leopold tells time in terms of sawing down a shattered oak. He reads back from the present, as we must do in order to know our places; reads cultural or human geography in Carl Sauer's way to show us how man in the landscape disturbs its ecological stability, diminishes its power of self-renewal, and visibly alters it. The immigrant road that passes the shack made the Westward Movement possible. It is the archetypal road, the great destroyer of wilderness, precursor of the railroad whose iron, Hart Crane said, "always . . . dealt cleavage." Thus, to read back is to realize that settlement was also an unsettling of a climax culture, that

the economic waste of wild life, forest, and marsh was prodigal, that only 80 years stands between the sawyer at the shack and Muir, who in 1865, wished to establish nearby a sanctuary for wild flowers and even then exemplified the “mercy for things natural, wild, and free” that Leopold believes we must now acquire.

There are many glimpses of paradisa (wild) America in Part II, “Sketches Here and There.” Most notable are those of the Delta of the Colorado, explored by Leopold and his brother before its abundant wild life was supplanted by cantaloupes, the Sierra Madre Mountains, a haven of singing river and birds, and the mountain world of the Southwest, the place of “heroic” manhood where he was “on top” and “every living thing sang, chirped, and burgeoned.” Here, in the mountains, the initials he finds carved in the aspen tell of romance (as much an aspect of ecology as the peenting of the woodcock in Part I)—tell of “the glory of [his] mountain spring.” For at this time he married Estella Bergere. Nothing perhaps marks his difference in temperament from Thoreau and Muir so much as this—as, say, the loving flourish of the dedication of the *Almanac* “to my Estella,” where *my* does more than distinguish wife from daughter.

The exuberance of the writing belongs to youthful adventure and is measured by an elegiac counterpoint. It is also measured by the landscape of the enclosing frame, the marshland, initially of Wisconsin, long-since drained, and finally of Clandeboye in Manitoba, now threatened with extinction. “The marshlands that once sprawled over the prairie from Illinois to the Athabasca,” Leopold concludes, “are now shrinking northward.” And when they are gone we will no longer coexist with the Pleistocene, live “in the wider reaches of evolutionary time,” and hear, as he also did in the green lagoons of the Colorado, the bugling of the cranes, “the wildest [because oldest] of living fowl.” The fate of marsh and bird, of course, is as good an example of land-use and conservation as any. “A roadless marsh is seemingly as worthless to the alphabetical conservationist,” he remarks, “as an undrained one to the empire-builders.”

The section on Wisconsin links Parts I and II, and among other things provides an earth-history of the sand counties and a political history of the governmental efforts to remedy their poverty. The failure to improve the

counties contrasts with Leopold's self-elected work of restoration in Part I— his effort “to rebuild,” as he says in the foreword, “what we are losing elsewhere” in the way our land-use contributes to the downward wash to the sea of atoms once locked in stone and subsequently almost endlessly recycled in food-chains. We extinguish biota as well as species—the passenger pigeon is an example of the latter—and we cannot even keep a small portion of a river wild.

As an ecologist Leopold follows Whitman's advice to study out the land, its idioms and its men. “Illinois Bus Ride” is the best and briefest instance—and of the mordant-ironic style he reserves for the economic-minded and ecologically-mindless: farmers, agriculture and conservation experts, sportsmen and other nature-consumers. This is indeed the style of “keen intellect” and registers dismay. Recollection evokes it because Leopold is moved by what Bachelard calls reverie toward childhood, the very reverie of childhood that suggests to him that “growing up” is “growing down.” He tells us in “Red Legs Kicking” that “my earliest impressions of wildlife and its pursuit retain a vivid sharpness of form, color, and atmosphere that half a century of professional wildlife experience has failed to obliterate or to improve upon.” This—and much of the writing—confirms Edith Cobb's view of the ecological imagination of childhood, of the perceptual wealth that vouchsafes genius. This ecological imagination, in his account, is complemented by an equally vivid sense of the ethical restraint imposed by the act of killing. And later, when he shoots a wolf and watches the “fierce green fire dying in her eyes,” he learns an ethical lesson of even greater ecological importance. He learns, as Buber had in answering the gaze of animals, that animals have being (are *Thou* not *It*) and have every right to biotic equality. Leopold acquires the foundation of his thought; for thinking like a wolf is as requisite as thinking like a mountain.

To think like a mountain is to think ecologically, in terms of relationships and land health, in ways, that is, that do not promote “dustbowls, and rivers washing the future to the sea.” Reminded of *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), we recall the natural and social consequences of what Steinbeck called “the system.” Shortly after, in the phrase “peace in our time,” we are asked to remember the price of appeasement and are not allowed to set-

tle for that. Leopold shows us how he changed his ways—conversion is the archetypal pattern of his book—and he writes in order to change our ways, to build “receptivity into the still unlovely [unloving] human mind.” His book itself may be said to be ecological because it is generous and generative, written in the spirit of gift exchange, the social analogue of the cyclical transfer of energy; a fertile book, having “the ability of the soil to receive, store, and release energy.” Nearly 40 years after its publication, because we have so little heeded it, its value may be said to have increased. Leopold says that “the outstanding scientific discovery of the twentieth century is . . . the complexity of the land organism” and, as much as anyone, he made us appreciate its life. In doing so he spoke of impending doom. He knew, as he says in the discarded foreword, that “our foothold is precarious, not because it may slip, but because we may kill the land before we learn to use it with love and respect.” *Kill the land*, as he had once killed predators! Destroy the very ground under our feet!

The ethical bearing of Leopold’s work is notable but what is not mentioned is his resistance to his own entropic vision. Jeremiad might have served him, but he chose other literary forms and addressed us as citizens, taking advantage perhaps of our predilection to think well of ourselves. Neither *A Sand County Almanac* nor *Round River* is addressed to fellow experts but to men and women of good will, the kind of people who, in another time, began the conservation movement by forming the Sierra Club. In “A Man’s Leisure Time,” the prefatory essay of *Round River*, Leopold expatiates on hobbies (among them, his and his wife’s hobby of archery, which connects this essay to leisure at the farm)—expatiates on a notion I found suspect until I recalled that the conservation movement, so well described by Stephen Fox, had begun as a hobby and—this is Leopold’s strategy—must again become one, farther down the line than vigilant protest, now in the leisure-time practice of the husbandry of wild things. It may be quixotic to think, as he did, that the battle will be won on the back forty, but some of us here apparently agree. In any case, like some of his predecessors, he “created cultural value by being aware of it, and by creating a pattern of growth.” A cultural value because the problem involved *culture*, not only an errant agriculture but “how to bring about a striving for harmony with the land among a people many of whom have forgotten there is any such thing as land, among whom education and culture have become almost synonymous with landlessness.”

When Leopold sent off the earliest version of the book he told the editor that he didn't want to write "mere natural history," and that "field skill and ability to write [such as his] seldom occur in the same person." In saying this, he repudiated "amateur natural history . . . of the dicky-bird variety," the result of "ladies and gentlemen wander[ing] afield not so much to learn how the world is put together as to gather subject matter for tea-time conversation." To be sure, this is not what Thoreau did at Walden Pond, though in a sentimental age it was an outcome of the transcendentalists' correspondential vision of self and world that authorized a symbolical appropriation of nature in the interest of self. Natural history in Thoreau is also a mode of autobiography. Thoreau went to the woods to find *himself* in relation to nature, to the end of self-culture, soul-making. More than a century later, Leopold went to the farm as a trained scientist in order to recover a relationship to the land and further its health. The spiritual legacy of Thoreau and Muir belongs to his social idealism; he does not share their Idealist philosophy, and was better able to look at nature without looking at himself. He shares this stance toward reality with many contemporary poets and thinkers and finds his place with them because he believed that "the detection of harmony is the domain of poets" and because he gave some of them the legacy of *inhabiting*, of living in place. He stands with them also because the reference of his work is Western Civilization itself, its world alienation and landlessness, the necessity it is under to transform ego-thought into eco-thought. "To change ideas about what land is for," he wrote just prior to undertaking *A Sand County Almanac*, "is to change ideas about what anything is for." In doing this he did what Muir thought almost impossible: he obtained a hearing in behalf of nature from a standpoint other than that of human use. Moreover, he proposed a correlative action, not only the preservation of the wilderness but the husbandry of the wild, the *wildering*, John Stilgoe's resonant term for the irrepressible return of the wild, that any of us might foster on abandoned land. In Leopold's work the attitude toward what was once fearful—the presence and encroachment of the wilderness—has changed; his is not a howling but a singing wilderness, and a measure of health. Its ecological importance is recognized and it is encouraged. The wild returns as the predators do, in the interest of climax, of a complex, diverse, stable biota. Such wildering, I find, goes with *worlding*, another resonant term, this one Richard Pevear's, because the husbandry of the wild is a discipline of familiarization that enables us to live in the world.

I honor Leopold for these reasons. In studying him, I have come to recognize one of the few professors whose leisure-work (I join his polar words) — whose leisure-work, in the words of another great professor, has exemplary validity.