

Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

TCLC 310

Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

**Criticism of the
Works of Novelists, Poets, Playwrights,
Short-Story Writers, and Other Creative Writers
Who Lived between 1900 and 1999,
from the First Published Critical
Appraisals to Current Evaluations**



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Preface

Since its inception *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* (TCLC) has been purchased and used by some 10,000 school, public, and college or university libraries. TCLC has covered more than 1000 authors, representing over 60 nationalities and nearly 50,000 titles. No other reference source has surveyed the critical response to twentieth-century authors and literature as thoroughly as TCLC. In the words of one reviewer, “there is nothing comparable available.” TCLC “is a gold mine of information—dates, pseudonyms, biographical information, and criticism from books and periodicals—which many librarians would have difficulty assembling on their own.”

Scope of the Series

TCLC is designed to serve as an introduction to authors who died between 1900 and 1999 and to the most significant interpretations of these author's works. The great poets, novelists, short-story writers, playwrights, and philosophers of the period are frequently studied in high school and college literature courses. In organizing and reprinting the vast amount of critical material written on these authors, TCLC helps students develop valuable insight into literary history, promotes a better understanding of the texts, and sparks ideas for papers and assignments. Each entry in TCLC presents a comprehensive survey of an author's career or an individual work of literature and provides the user with a multiplicity of interpretations and assessments. Such variety allows students to pursue their own interests; furthermore, it fosters an awareness that literature is dynamic and responsive to many different opinions.

Volumes 1 through 87 of TCLC featured authors who died between 1900 and 1959; beginning with Volume 88, the series expanded to include authors who died between 1900 and 1999. Beginning with Volume 26, every fourth volume of TCLC was devoted to literary topics. These topics widen the focus of the series from the individual authors to such broader subjects as literary movements, prominent themes in twentieth-century literature, literary reaction to political and historical events, significant eras in literary history, prominent literary anniversaries, and the literatures of cultures that are often overlooked by English-speaking readers. With TCLC 285, the series returned to a standard author approach, with some entries devoted to a single important work of world literature and others devoted to literary topics.

TCLC is part of the survey of criticism and world literature that is contained in Gale's *Contemporary Literary Criticism* (CLC), *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism* (NCLC), *Literature Criticism from 1400 to 1800* (LC), *Shakespearean Criticism* (SC), and *Classical and Medieval Literature Criticism* (CMLC).

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A TCLC entry consists of the following elements:

- The **Author Heading** cites the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. If the author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym will be listed in the author heading and the author's actual name given in parentheses on the first line of the biographical and critical introduction. Also located here are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose native languages use nonroman alphabets. Uncertain birth or death dates are indicated by question marks. Single-work entries are preceded by a heading that consists of the most common form of the title in English translation (if applicable) and the author's name (if applicable).
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication information of each work is given. In the case of works not published in English, a translation of the title is provided as an aid to the reader; the translation is a published translated title or a

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- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism. Citations conform to recommendations set forth in the Modern Language Association of America's *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 7th ed. (2009).
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** describing each piece.
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Citing Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

When citing criticism reprinted in the Literary Criticism Series, students should provide complete bibliographic information so that the cited essay can be located in the original print or electronic source. Students who quote directly from reprinted criticism may use any accepted bibliographic format, such as Modern Language Association (MLA) style or University of Chicago Press style. Both the MLA and the University of Chicago formats are acceptable and recognized as being the current standards for citations. It is important, however, to choose one format for all citations; do not mix the two formats within a list of citations.

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Loren Corey Eiseley

1907-1977

American essayist and poet.

The following entry provides criticism of Eiseley's life and works. For additional information about Eiseley, see *CLC*, Volume 7.

INTRODUCTION

Anthropologist Loren Corey Eiseley is best known for his highly poetic essays on evolution and human interaction with the natural world. In essays enriched by metaphor, personal anecdote, and what Eiseley called the "concealed essay," an evocative prose piece that transcends the boundaries of a scientific report, Eiseley used carefully crafted descriptions of landscapes to illustrate how modern technology encroaches on nature and how nature survives despite those intrusions. Especially in his later collections, Eiseley presented a bleak sense of humankind's inattention to the natural world. Nevertheless, his sensitive depiction of insect, bird, and mammal communities, as well as his ability to articulate the complicated relationship between civilization and nature, influenced a new generation of science writers, including Stephen Jay Gould, Richard Selzer, and Carl Sagan.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Eiseley was born on 3 September 1907 in Lincoln, Nebraska, the only child of Clyde and Daisy Corey Eiseley. Eiseley's childhood home was a place of contrasts. A salesman who had been an itinerant Shakespearean actor, Clyde was often away from home. He instilled in his son a sense of dramatic language and a love for the sound of words, and Eiseley felt a close bond with him. Daisy, deaf since childhood, was given to violent outbursts and quarrelled with her husband frequently. Gale E. Christianson (1990) noted that Daisy's indecipherable ramblings and waving of arms created, in Eiseley's own words, "a household of the stone age, a house of gesture." Eiseley spent much of his youth in solitude, reading at the local library and exploring life in nearby ponds, fields, and hedgerows. He recalled later that the atmosphere of silence and isolation profoundly affected his development as an independent thinker.

When Eiseley was young, his father and uncle took him to view fossils at the University of Nebraska State Museum in Lincoln, sparking his interest in science. With his uncle's encouragement, Eiseley attended Teachers College High School on the University of Nebraska campus. He graduated

in 1925, the first of his family to earn a high-school diploma, and enrolled at the university, attending classes sporadically over the next eight years as he struggled with personal difficulties. His father died of cancer in 1928, causing Eiseley grief and insomnia. That same year, he was diagnosed with tuberculosis and left school for a time to travel throughout the West as a drifter. Eiseley's passion for the natural world fueled his imagination when he returned to the university in 1930, and he wrote essays and poetry that were published in the *Prairie Schooner*, the campus literary magazine. In 1931, he participated in the Morrill Paleontological Expedition in western Nebraska, eastern Colorado, and Wyoming. In 1933, Eiseley graduated from the University of Nebraska with a bachelor's degree in English and geology/anthropology. He moved to the University of Pennsylvania, where he earned a master's degree in 1935 and a doctorate in anthropology in 1937. That year, he accepted a faculty position in the department of sociology and anthropology at the University of Kansas, and the following year he married Mabel Langdon. Between 1940 and 1941, Eiseley pursued postdoctoral studies at Columbia University and the American Museum of Natural History in physical anthropology. His academic career took the couple to Oberlin College in 1944 and then to the University of Pennsylvania in 1947, where he spent the rest of his career serving as chair of the anthropology department, Curator of Early Man at the university museum, and provost.

In 1942, Eiseley had begun to experience modest successes as a writer, publishing the first of several articles in the magazine *Scientific American*. Having discovered his talent for incorporating literary prose into science-based writing, he submitted pieces to other magazines, including *Harper's Monthly*. He collected his early essays as *The Immense Journey* (1957), a lyrical discussion of human evolution that was among the first science books to appeal to a mass audience. Eiseley subsequently published several other respected essay collections on similar topics, including *Darwin's Century* (1958), *The Unexpected Universe* (1969), *The Invisible Pyramid* (1970), and *The Night Country* (1971). From 1966 to 1968, Eiseley was host-narrator of *Animal Secrets*, an NBC television series that won the Thomas Alva Edison Foundation National Mass Media Award. His compilation of autobiographical essays, *All the Strange Hours*, was published in 1975. During his career, Eiseley was awarded thirty-six honorary degrees. He died of cancer on 9 July 1977. Several volumes of his poetry appeared posthumously, as did *The Star Thrower* (1978), a collection of previously published essays and poems.

MAJOR WORKS

The Immense Journey introduces Eiseley's warnings about the exploitation of nature and encourages a respect for the natural world. The text argues that, although contemplating the natural world may produce feelings of isolation, human beings can be spiritually rejuvenated in their communion with it. "The Judgment of the Birds," one of the collection's most popular essays, describes pigeons in New York City and warblers in the badland formations of Nebraska for the edification of "those who have retained a true taste for the marvelous, and who are capable of discerning in the flow of ordinary events the point at which the mundane world gives way to quite another dimension." Eiseley expands his focus in *The Invisible Pyramid*, surveying the current state of humanity and exploring the richness of the evolutionary past and of other forms of life. The narrator in "The Star Dragon" is prompted by the memory of seeing Halley's Comet with his father to contemplate the cyclical revisitation of the phenomenon and the "long, slow turn of world-time" bringing evolutionary change. As in other collections, contemplation of generative phenomena affords an escape from the technologically driven present. *The Night Country* uses Eiseley's experience as a solitary child as an impetus for the contemplation of nature, which in turn supplies wisdom and a new spiritual perspective. In this vein, "Obituary of a Bone Hunter" cautions against viewing nature as merely a source for obtaining data. Through personal anecdote, metaphor, and dream sequences, these essay collections offer an alternative to conventional science writing and an eloquent critique of scientific theory.

All the Strange Hours, published two years before Eiseley's death, depicts a grim childhood only hinted at in his earlier collections. Again using metaphor, dream sequences, and other literary devices, these essays reinforce the romantic image of the author as a fragile loner, often contradicted in later biographies, which document Eiseley's friendships and supportive professional relationships. Whereas some readers and critics have viewed the discrepancy as a deception perpetrated by Eiseley, Christianson characterized the work as an artistic vision of the author's life, and in his discussion of "The Running Man," John Clifford (1989) called the essay "a compelling portrait of a troubled mind hoping through writing to achieve personal peace."

"The Star Thrower," first published in *The Unexpected Universe* and later collected in the 1978 collection of the same name, presents one of Eiseley's most sophisticated critiques of modern science. The narrator describes himself as stripped down to a skeleton, suggesting that he has been decomposed by life, boiled down to a barely human form by the vision of nature as unfeeling and predatory. He subsequently encounters a man throwing beached starfish back into the ocean, but he rejects the man's claim that humans can help nature survive, seeing only death and bleakness around him. After a glimpse of the unpredictable and sometimes beneficial elements in nature, howev-

er, the narrator ultimately expresses a reverence for the natural world. When he meets the starfish thrower again, he joins in the activity of returning the creatures to the sea. The conclusion suggests that the narrator has rejected a blindly mechanistic portrait of nature, expressing in its stead a love for other forms of life.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

Critics have lauded Eiseley's prototypical interlacing of science and literature. According to Mary Ellen Pitts (1995), Eiseley's essays demonstrate that science, like literature, relies on metaphor and that scientific theories can therefore be interpreted in different ways. Dimitri N. Breschinsky (2002; see Further Reading) drew attention to Eiseley's fascination with the flow of time, pointing out the ways in which his essays discuss time both in a scientific manner and to creative effect. Breschinsky ascribed the "melancholic, brooding tone" of much of Eiseley's writing to this interest in time, which, for Breschinsky, represents the author's "battle with death." Conversely, Kathleen Boardman (2004) argued that "Eiseley resists the species egotism that separates human beings from other life on the planet," and she contended that he holds out hope, if not optimism, that humans can reconnect with other living things.

As other critics have shown, through his writings, Eiseley works to join the humanities and the sciences in order to point out blind spots in the history of scientific theory and create awareness that science is not an absolute system of knowledge. In Pitts's view, Eiseley wanted to explore alternatives to theories that assume the world can be measured and calculated according to mathematical principles. In addition, Pitts noted, in his essays, Eiseley uses fresh metaphors and questions long-standing ones, such as the view espoused by René Descartes that the world is an enormous machine that operates in accordance with stable laws. In *Darwin's Century* and other books, Pitts added, Eiseley effectively demonstrates that Charles Darwin did not restrict himself to metaphors of warfare, such as the struggle for existence, but frequently used descriptors indicating cooperation, as in his application of the word "adaptation." In the opinion of Anthony Lioi (1999; see Further Reading), Eiseley transcends the "alienation inflicted by Western rationalism" not by rejecting inherited scientific theories but by transforming them.

Adam Lawrence

PRINCIPAL WORKS

**The Immense Journey*. New York: Random House, 1957. (Essays)

Darwin's Century: Evolution and the Men Who Discovered It. Garden City: Doubleday, 1958. (Nonfiction)

The Firmament of Time. New York: Atheneum, 1960. (Essays)

Francis Bacon and the Modern Dilemma. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1962. Rev. and enl. ed. *The Man Who Saw through Time*. New York: Scribner, 1973. (Nonfiction)

The Mind as Nature. New York: Harper and Row, 1962. (Nonfiction)

Man, Time, and Prophecy. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1966. (Essay)

The Brown Wasps: A Collection of Three Essays in Autobiography. Mount Horeb: Perishable, 1969. (Memoirs)

†*The Unexpected Universe*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1969. (Essays)

‡*The Invisible Pyramid*. New York: Scribner, 1970. (Essays)

§*The Night Country*. New York: Scribner, 1971. Pub. as *The Night Country: Reflections of a Bone-Hunting Man*. London: Garnstone, 1974. (Essays)

Notes of an Alchemist. New York: Scribner, 1972. (Poetry)

The Innocent Assassins. New York: Scribner, 1973. (Poetry)

||*All the Strange Hours: The Excavation of a Life*. New York: Scribner, 1975. (Essays)

Another Kind of Autumn. New York: Scribner, 1977. (Poetry)

The Star Thrower. Ed. Kenneth Heuer. New York: Times, 1978. (Essays and poetry)

Darwin and the Mysterious Mr. X: New Light on the Evolutionists. New York: Dutton, 1979. (Nonfiction)

All the Night Wings. New York: Times, 1980. (Poetry)

The Lost Notebooks of Loren Eiseley. Ed. Heuer. Boston: Little, Brown, 1987. (Essays, journal fragments, poetry, and short stories)

*Includes the essay "The Judgment of the Birds."

†Includes the essay "The Star Thrower."

‡Includes the essay "The Star Dragon."

§Includes the essay "Obituary of a Bone Hunter."

||Includes the essay "The Running Man."

CRITICISM

John Buettner-Janusch (review date 1963)

SOURCE: Buettner-Janusch, John. Rev. of *The Firmament of Time*, by Loren Corey Eiseley. *American Anthropologist* ns 65.3 (1963): 693-94. Print.

[In the following review, Buettner-Janusch offers a generally negative examination of Eiseley's 1960 collection *The Firmament of Time*, providing a short summary of his interpretation and reception of each essay. Though much of Eiseley's work is "a very literary interpretation" of science, Buettner-Janusch finds his writing "sentimental and trite," noting that "the apparent ideas do not seem to be in focus."]

This slim volume is hailed as an iridescent study, strongly recommended to all who enjoy thinking about fundamental problems by *Newsweek* magazine and two well known litterateurs. A mere physical anthropologist opened it with trepidation, even awe. This physical anthropologist, unfortunately, after reading it, closed the book with disappointment and a poor impression of the judgement of *Newsweek* magazine.

The six chapters of this book are lectures delivered at the University of Cincinnati in 1959. The style, the studied cadences of dramatic emphasis, the plays upon words, the conjuring up of picturesque images, suit the hortatory mode of the semi-popular lecture.

Chapter one—**How the World Became Natural**—is a highly poeticized metaphorical account of the development of a natural view of the universe out of catastrophism, first causes, prime movers. Chapter two—**How Death Became Natural**—begins with a reasonable argument that the concept of extinction was a necessary precursor for an evolutionary theory. The writing then becomes intensely lyric and the thread of thought becomes unraveled amongst the verbal brambles. Chapter three—**How Life Became Natural**—is an interesting discussion of the way the theory of organic evolution became acceptable to the larger group of scientists. The extent of individual variation among plants and animals and its significance for evolutionary change is stressed as one of the important bases for evolutionary theory. This fundamental point is often skipped over by writers on the genesis of evolutionary theory. The account of what the demonstration of extinction of animal species did to the scientific world-view of the 19th century is dramatic and interesting. Unfortunately the chapter closes with a sermonized image about arthropods which implies a Platonic world-view that is quite in discord with the rest of the chapter.

Chapter four—**How Man Became Natural**—is a very literary interpretation of the record of hominid fossils. Unfortunately, the writing is sentimental and trite, and the apparent ideas do not seem to be in focus. It is not easy, because of the figurative and emotional language, to determine if the interpretations presented are sound.

Chapter five—**How Human is Man?**—is a series of moral parables on a somewhat higher level than those found in the repertory of a fundamentalist preacher. Their relevance to the discussion of an important part of the history of modern science eludes the reviewer.

Chapter six—**How Natural is Natural?**—appears to be another set of parables and expanded metaphors which seem to imply that there is some world that is outside or beyond the universe of matter and energy into which *H. sapiens* may someday enter.

As is already obvious, the reviewer is disappointed by this book. It purports to have something to do with the history of science, with the genesis of evolutionary thought. Despite this assertion, we feel this book is a work of obscurantism. Science *is* exciting and absorbing because of what it is, and, even for undergraduates, we need not inject mystery, fevered prose, overblown metaphors, and sentimental twaddle into our subject. It is all the more disappointing when we find a writer of such splendid reputation as Eiseley producing such a book.

John Clifford (essay date 1989)

SOURCE: Clifford, John. "The Reader's Text: Responding to Loren Eiseley's 'The Running Man.'" *Literary Nonfiction: Theory, Criticism, Pedagogy*. Ed. Chris Anderson. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1989. 247-61. Print.

[In the following essay, Clifford considers Eiseley's autobiographical essay "The Running Man," included in *All the Strange Hours*, "a compelling portrait of a troubled mind hoping through writing to achieve personal peace." Following a summary of the essay, Clifford outlines how he chose to teach it in his own classroom and discusses the differing responses his students had to the text, noting that "the struggle among groups in the class for dominance over the meaning of certain passages was paralleled by Eiseley's befuddlement over the struggle in his own divided narrative."]

There is a growing urgency in English studies to develop more theoretically coherent ways for reading and writing to inform each other. Still, many writing teachers, perhaps in a lingering aversion to the long-standing misuse of literature in writing classes, remain suspicious of the value of using any literature, even literary nonfiction with their own students. For many of them, the reading they would wed to writing is more likely to include lucid models of good historical or sociological discourse than the polished prose of Joan Didion, Annie Dillard, or Loren Eiseley. The traditional strategy of assigning literary essays, discussing their themes and structure in class and then writing critiques, seems to many to constitute a flawed pedagogy. Dissenting instructors suggest that a mature literary style not only does not parallel the practical academic writing students will be required to produce, but also intimidates less accomplished writers, perhaps even undermining their understanding of the complex recursiveness of the composing process. Using literary nonfiction with a traditional pedagogy, their argument goes, focuses too insistently on the crafted linearity of discourse and thereby fails to dem-

onstrate, for those who need to know, the inevitable and necessary behind-the-scene messiness and confusion of writing.

These are cogent arguments, especially given the pervasive influence formalist theories of reading and writing have had in composition classrooms for a generation. Nevertheless, I believe they are less objections to the idea of using literary nonfiction in writing classes than to the limitations of a specific reading technique and its resulting pedagogy. In our post-structuralist climate, however, there are alternatives to those incompatible strategies developed during the hegemony of the New Criticism several decades ago. Several of these would be more congenial in a classroom environment that stresses process than an analytical close reading that situates meaning, form, persona, and coherence only in stable and unified texts. Students who, on the one hand, are encouraged to discover evolving meaning during the composing process, might rightfully inquire why, during the reading process, the locus of meaning suddenly shifts to the text. Why, they might wonder, does the pedagogical emphasis uncomfortably move from the synchronic in composing to an atemporal, objective analysis in reading? Why do we urge them to create meaning in writing and then merely uncover it in reading? Putting aside the ways writing might be encouraged and enhanced through reading, I want to suggest that such theoretical contradictions do not have to exist at all, that an active, process-oriented approach to studying texts is valid for both writing and reading, that the perceptions of readers matter greatly, that the making of meaning is as much a phenomenological and creative process in reading as it is in composing. The response-oriented theories of Stanley Fish and Louise Rosenblatt, augmented with some insights from cultural criticism, can provide a flexible heuristic for reading nonfiction that is both theoretically and pedagogically coherent in either literature or composition classes.

In the brand of reader-response I am advocating, the focus of attention is not, as in Norman Holland's psychological variant, exclusively on the nature of the reader's identity. Instead, the spotlight is on the nature of the interaction between reader and text, or more precisely, on the complex ways the reader's ideological baggage affects interpretive judgments. Early on, students are encouraged to write response statements that can prompt intellectual and emotional reactions to their reading experience. When students disagree with or are troubled by an idea in an essay, for example, I want them first to be clear about their position and then to try to interrogate the reasons for that response, that is, to "help them analyze the many influences—cultural, social, moral, historical, psychological" (Waller 17) that form the ground from which all readers understand texts. This critical sequence is a variation on Rosenblatt's long standing contention that since students bring to their reading "different personalities, different syntactical and semantic habits, different values and knowledge," they will fashion different syntheses, different texts under the

text's "guidance and control" (122). Although that is true, and of seminal importance, I am also interested in the "interface" between the various texts produced by students and the cultural assumptions and expectations which generate these multiple readings.

Although I have for a long time been intellectually and emotionally committed to a range of contemporary nonfiction from Anne Dillard to Stephen Jay Gould, for a variety of personal reasons, reading Loren Eiseley's "**The Running Man**" is an especially rich experience for me. Apparently my experiences and values were engaged by Eiseley's text. Although I was half Eiseley's age when I first read the piece in 1977 and not nearly as melancholy or as haunted by the past, I was still strongly affected by Eiseley's anxiety over his identity, his strong sense of responsibility, and his rather circuitous but passionate need to confront repressed truths. His essay is for me a compelling portrait of a troubled mind hoping through writing to achieve personal peace. I wondered how my students, dramatically different from this famous scientist and writer, would respond to this chapter from Eiseley's haunting autobiography, *All the Strange Hours*.

My strategy was simple. After explaining and discussing the kind of active, personal, and cultural interaction I was after, I asked them to read the essay and to stop at key intervals to write a response statement. This move is influenced by Fish's belief that the mind needs to investigate its own activities, that critical attention is most profitably riveted on the sequence and flow of the reader's temporal experience. He wants to "slow down" the actualization of the text so the mind of the reader is more clearly revealed to itself. I then asked them to read the essay again and answer four or five focused questions geared to jar them, perhaps to force them, into a confrontation with their own tacit cultural apparatus. After classroom discussions of their written and oral responses, I eventually assigned a more focused essay in which they developed one reaction to "**The Running Man**," trying to unpack their reasons for this particular reading. The rest of this paper is a comment on the earlier part of this assignment, an elaboration of what Rosenblatt calls a "coming-together, a compenetration of reader and a text" (12).

Here a summary of Eiseley's autobiographical essay is especially risky since my point is that there can be no substitute for the reading experience, not even vicariously; yet, it does seem necessary. Eiseley begins "**The Running Man**" with a surprisingly frank and bitter denunciation of his "paranoid, neurotic and unstable" (24) mother who had a gift, Eiseley sarcastically remarks, to make others suffer. However, he seems to quickly dismiss her significance by claiming "all the pain, all the anguish" were for nothing, adding that "It has taken me all my life to grasp this one fact" (25). At this point in the essay it appears as if we have no reason to doubt him. Such an assertion from a mature writer seems quite plausible. Eiseley's persona here, in fact,

has been subtly created to seem spontaneously sincere and forthright, as if the truth were now suddenly pellucid after a long darkness. But after some meandering, the reader must wonder where Eiseley's essay is going. Then, realizing this need for a sense of direction and a tentative framework, he admits his narrative is faltering, "wandering out of time and place." But he tries to assure the reader with both a literary and a psychological explanation: "To tell the story of a life one is bound to linger about gravestones where memory blurs and doors can be pushed ajar, but never opened." He then tells us that because he is "every man and no man" he must "tell the story as I may . . . not for the nameless name upon the page," but because of "the loneliness of not knowing, not knowing at all." After our first reading of this passage, we are still groping for what Rosenblatt calls a "guiding principle of organization" (54), and this enigmatic sentence does not initially clarify matters.

Apparently, after some five paragraphs, Eiseley is going to try to define who he is through a logical sequence, first locating himself in time and place, beginning with, "I was a child of the early century, American man. . . ." Then, after a brief reference to some traumatic midnight fights between his parents, Eiseley tries to define himself geographically, wondering how he could possibly have absorbed an ethical code to live by. But he abruptly concludes this fragmented attempt at locating his psychic roots: "So much for my mother, the mad Shepards, and the land," and then he mysteriously adds, "but this is not all, certainly not" (27).

Eschewing conventional transitions, Eiseley suddenly switches to a dinner at which W. H. Auden asks him quite innocently what was the first public event he can remember. Eiseley answers with three odd but seemingly plausible events. Then he fractures the narrative flow again with the unexpected confession that after the Auden dinner he had been glumly despondent for days: "For nights I lay sleepless in a New York hotel room and all my memories in one gigantic catharsis were bad, spewed out of hell's mouth, invoked by that one dinner, that one question" (29).

Apparently he has been repressing some deeply personal and painful truth. As readers we are bewildered once again, wondering if the anecdotes he has been telling us are true and if not, what is going on? But this time Eiseley appears to provide an answer, narrating once again several possible responses to the Auden inquiry, from playing dice against the universe in a deserted farm house to a fight with a neighborhood bully in which Eiseley admits he "went utterly mad." Surprisingly, after this event the reader is led back to Eiseley's mother, who was watching him wash his bloodied face. Finally, he writes a most revealing transitional sentence: "There was another thing I would not name to Auden" (33). At long last Eiseley tells the repressed tale: Once, when he was ten and playing with friends in a pasture at the edge of town, he was pursued by his mother, "behaving in the manner of a witch. She could not hear, she was violently gesticulating without

dignity." Eiseley confesses that he laughed at her with his companions, then with his mother stumbling after, he ran, "Escape, escape, the first stirrings of the running man. Miles of escape." Using language reminiscent of ritual purification, he admits he was "bitterly ashamed . . . ashamed at what he had done to his stone-deaf mother . . . ashamed at his own weakness. Ashamed, ashamed." The essay concludes: "That is what I could not tell Auden. Only an unutterable savagery, my savagery at myself, scrawls it once and once only on this page" (34).

This summary is static, an after-the-experience distillation. As such, it distorts and reifies the temporal phenomena, the lived-through experience of reading. As Fish notes in "Literature in the Reader," the real meaning of a text lies in the moment-to-moment experience of the reader attempting to organize and synthesize the simultaneous and multiple cognitive and emotional pulls involved in reading (36-37). From this perspective a summary of "**The Running Man**" seems especially anemic. The events narrated above surely tell what happens in Eiseley's work but only in the most superficially factual way. For what seems to me most dramatically significant about this essay, beyond the rich cultural suggestiveness of Eiseley's values and our response to them, is not what happens, but the reader's sense of mystery, curiosity, and heightened expectations about Eiseley's psychological evasiveness. The resulting sense of bewilderment that envelopes readers when they are encouraged to focus on the unfolding drama of their own reading experience is as much the meaning of the essay as the various interpretations of what Eiseley is running away from.

My students approached Eiseley's autobiographical essay with a rather narrow range of literary assumptions. Based largely on the experience of writing formal exposition, they conceived of the essay as a straightforward genre: propositions were made and developed, arguments put forth and defended. They trusted personas that seemed reasonable and sincere, and did not expect to be manipulated or tricked. Because of their limited literary training, they were simply not prepared to process fully an essay replete with false leads, fractured sequence, various levels of images, symbols, and gaps. Add a persona laden with anxiety, repressed guilt, complex motives, and masked ideological values, and the reading experience becomes a richly challenging inquiry. In short, after experiencing such dislocations, they were ready to confront what Roland Barthes calls a crisis in their relation with language.

I doubt that this crisis was accidental or gratuitous. Although surely not completely aware of all his intentions, Eiseley has crafted a text that does defamiliarize the ordinary reader's sense of truth and identity. But it is more than that: the very experience of reading the essay illuminates and reinforces the implications of his running metaphor, allowing the reader to feel the fragility and elusiveness of reality and in discussion to experience the diverse situatedness of readers in our culture.

In response to my inquiry about what students noted most in their responses to "**The Running Man**," the predominant motif that emerged was Eiseley's tortured attitude toward his mother. A catalogue of their diverse reactions includes both surprise that an adult would still be concerned about what they largely saw as a distant incident and bewilderment over the point of this seemingly rambling narrative that begins with a maternal denunciation yet ends with a cry of agony and shame for his treatment of her. I specifically asked my students first what they thought of Eiseley's preoccupation with his mother, and then why they thought the incident had this particular effect on them. In response, some felt sympathy with Eiseley's frustration and resentment toward his mother; some felt he was excessively neurotic; others that such insensitivity to the plight of a outcast female called for the pain and guilt he suffered. But more important than these judgments of the narrator's sanity or lack of it were the reasons behind these assessments. I am as concerned here with *why* as with *what*, as interested in what they think as in why Eiseley's attitude would elicit both supportive and hostile reactions from readers raised in the same culture.

As a way to concretize the sources of their beliefs and attitudes in a "cultural text," I asked my students first to write narratives of comparable experiences they actually had with their own parents. We looked at these texts carefully and found predictably diverse family situations: mothers who were supportive and valued, fathers who intimated and wounded and whose value was thereby diminished. I thought of my class as a reasonable cross-section of American culture, admittedly overbalanced with positive experiences; nevertheless, there was enough rejection and bitterness for the class to approach the status of a collective representative anecdote. With their narratives now in the public domain, it was easy and natural to inquire about the meaning of these new texts. Do they reveal some truth about our culture that could help us understand Eiseley's dilemma? If we were anthropologists scrutinizing these personal accounts for wider significance about the culture that would produce such narratives, what might they reveal?

This then became the focus of our inquiry. And it is a crucial move in the kind of response-oriented reading that I am advocating. For in interpreting and discussing in a public forum their own narratives of family life, students can effortlessly be encouraged to make generalizations about their lives and thus be encouraged to uncover the cultural values, assumptions, and expectations that constitute all of us and are therefore tacitly understood by everyone in the room. These beliefs and attitudes form the cultural ideology that permeates their behavior, that informs and propels their thinking about families, mothers, and social identity. And by ideology I am thinking of a more general and less technical definition than, say, Louis Althusser's notion of an imaginary relationship to the real conditions of one's existence. That is an insight that is often useful, but for now I