**The Judgment of the Birds**

Loren Eiseley’s “The Judgment of the Birds” (*The Immense Journey,* 1957) demarcates a trio of archaic encounters, each of which justifies the epitome of mankind’s allegorical connections with nature. In his essay, Eisley unearths a tuple of subservient vertebrates before marveling a “heroic” (Page 522) orb-weaving spider. Eiseley perturbs mankind’s daily dispositions as being lackluster and dull, further adumbrating the metaphorical, emblematic essence that he claims “only one in a million” (Page 522) men, or emissaries may ever be destined to forsee. As the story progresses Eiseley continues to commercialize evidence that conscientiously defines the meaning of these woebegone moments with his feckful interpretations. Doing so irreconcilably defines an idiosyncratic interpretation of an experience that intentionally appears all too personal. Towards the end of Eiseley’s essay the reader is enlightened by Eiseley’s ironic method to transcribe an encounter he has with an orb-weaving spider. Rather than stoically defining the symbolical meaning of his experience and what it’s representing to him, he chose an equitable, more egalitarianistic method to record the event. Eiseley suggests that “[I]t is better for the emissaries returning from the wilderness to record their marvels, rather than define their meaning” (Page 522) not because their definitive meaning of the marvel is unsound, but because the symbolical elements of the marvel must be preserved in their utmost articulant and purest form.

In the first scene Eiseley dolefully falls short of jumping into the “deep void” (Page 522) of his fog-ridden Manhattan apartment window. Figuratively speaking, Eiseley pusillanimously awoke in the darkest hour of the crow. He takes a gander three stories out into the New York skyline and catches a glimpse above and beyond what few men can perceive. He stood there motionless as if he were frozen in time. Neither a blink of an eye nor an unwavering of his chest he stood there. He remained unmoved physically, yet emotionally his shadow danced a dance of courage into world beneath him. For his shadow cannot be touched, it will always be in the world beneath his indefatigable countenance. There was not a nerve in his soul comprised of fear as he leans out staring into the shadowy distance. He catches glimpse of glistening wings in the darkness of the fog. Pigeons. As an onlooker we envisage Eiseley leaning out a window into the chill of a cold October wind. Eiseley was amidst their world and on the edge of ours. It would only be one last leap of faith. Just one last leap of faith that was destined an un-formidable success. Every molecular composition in his middle-aged body wanted to join in a final crusade to be a newborn bird in preparation for their highly anticipated first leap of faith. *“Pweshh!”* Out of nowhere an unexpected visitor flies within inches of his head and blows his hair back, pure pandemonium erupts out of a horrific screech emitted by an unearthly creature. This is not the sound in which an ordinary crow is capable of making, but it does serve as a good transition where Eiseley changes from recording the scene, to a more emblematic explanation as to why the crow caused the uproar.

If you hadn’t read the story, what might you consider to be the cause of the crows screech? Generally, most answers will deviate from Eiseley’s explanation, but the description of the scene remains intact. You can’t argue that the story didn’t take place in New York. As it gives clear evidence in the writing. When given a group of several random people, the explanations for the crows erroneous behavior will vary compared to Eiseley’s. One person might think the Crow was trying to save his life, while the other could agree with Eiseley that “Reason crow made noise” (Page 522) This does not change the fact that the scene took place in New York; this is an example of a truly pure form of evidence. By increasing the amount of evidence in a record, we increase the potential quantity of symbols or explanations in which people might find for a given event. A record is a function that takes as input an experience or series of events and outputs a well-documented, concrete description, or record of the experience. When given the output, or the record, we must be able find the inverse of the function. While this is defined only theoretically, the inverse can be more commonly referred to as “a reenactment of the event of a particular event given the evidence”. If the reenactment is an exact replica of the actual event, then we cannot refute the claim with the given evidence. However that doesn’t mean that our reenactment was an exact replica, but to the best of our knowledge, with limited evidence we can’t disprove the theory, or state that the reenactment was false. Provided more evidence however, imagine as if Eiseley had a cell phone at the time of the event with the crow and he decided to send a text message at the time of the crows screech. If we discover now that the message was at 1:00pm. We must conclude that the evidence that tells us the time of day would be incorrect, since we know it must be in the middle of the night. Generally in order for the record to proven, it must be understood as a statement of fact by all parties involved, or more commonly found within writing; is the writer must be assured that no reader(s) can refute a given statement. Symbolic definitions are derived from inconsistences of the record, theoretically speaking; they could be represented as the derivative of the record function. In the first paragraph I described the scene in which the event took place. That description cannot be disproved given our current amount of evidence. This is just one of many ways in which Eiseley purposefully introduces refutable logic into the beginning of the story.

Take careful note to try to re-discover the elaborate message hidden within these particular lines: “In that way it would go echoing on through the minds of men, each grasping at that beyond out of which the miracles emerge and which, once defined, ceases to satisfy the human need for symbols.” (533)Specifically hidden within this excerpt is advice to those whom had experienced a miracle and wish to share it with others. From the initial starting point in the story we see signs that suggest Eiseley is in search of a symbol of courage. It is most visible within the first episode Eiseley has with the crow. Towards the end however, he realized that it is very likely that someone else in the world is in search of a different sign or symbol of hope, purpose, or peace. Why should we limit a definition of a miracle strictly to “courage” thus prohibiting other people from associating their own symbol or meaning to a particular event? If you were in Eiseley’s shoes, would you not agree that it would be wrong to define that this spider is a symbol of courage and a symbol of courage only. Eisley attributes the word “heroism” with courage in this particular experience he has with the orb-weaving spider. “Nevertheless it brought the birds back into my mind, and that faraway song which had traveled with growing strength around a forest clearing years ago - a kind of heroism, a world where even a spider refuses to lie down and die if a rope can still be spun on to a star.” (532)However, who’s to say what a particular reader might associate or symbolize heroism with? Can it only be associated with courage, or is it possible that there may be somebody that attributes the word heroism with an alternative? Eiseley declares that the human mind is a very remarkable thing: “The mind, it came to me as I slowly descended the ladder, is a very remarkable thing; it has gotten itself a kind of courage by looking at a spider in a street lamp (...) But as I hesitated, it became plain that something was wrong, the marvel was escaping”(533) What was the marvel escaping?“[T] he human need for symbols” (533). I feel as if this answers our initial question as to why Eiseley bothered to inform readers about his second choice, which inexplicitly associates courage with the orb-weaver: “In the days of the frost seek a minor sun” (533).

Eiseley’s reasoning for his method of choice to document his experience with the orb-weaver and my discovery of Eiseley’s strikingly coincidental explanation that marks him as a hypocrite, but it appears as if this was his intent. If it were not for the hypocritical methods used to document these events we may not have been able to fully understand the interpolation of this event with all over events in the story. Consider when Eiseley is describing his experience with the crow: “Around and around went the wings. It needed only a little courage, only a little shove from the window ledge to enter that city of light.” (Page 527) Does this not correspond with Eiseley’s courageous symbolical interpretation of the orb-weaver? Consider his admiration of the human mind once more: “The mind, it came to me as I slowly descended to the ladder, is a very remarkable thing; it has gotten itself a kind of courage by looking at a spider in a street lamp. Here was something that ought to be passed on to those who will fight our final freezing battle with the void.”(522) This directly corresponds with himself, I mean after all, Eiseley seems to not only be talking about the human mind, but Eiseley is talking about **his** mind. Eiseley describes how his mind has gotten a form of courage, which in the quote from the excerpt describing his experience with the crow: “Around and around went the wings. It needed only a little courage, only a little shove from the window ledge to enter that city of light.”(527)He admittedly informs the reader that he was in need of a sign of courage, and with that symbol, he could enter that city of light. Afterwards, he coincides to get dressed and proceed with his day. This explains that Eiseley apparently was in need of a little courage that morning, thus the crow provided.

Does this also correspond with Eiseley’s experience in the Badlands? I leave this for the reader to decide, for I cannot allow myself to define what one should associate with a particular event. It is also possible that I’ve made a mistake, and I’ve been misguided in my search for an answer as to why Eiseley contradicted himself. Then again, maybe I’m contradicting myself merely just by agreeing with Eiseley. The moral of the story is that I am just a man, and all that is of mankind requires symbols.

**Works Cited**

Eiseley, Loren "The Judgment of the Birds." *The Norton Book of Nature Writing*.

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