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Paul Shepard: A Tribute

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I met you only once, at a conference on wilderness held at some obscure, mid-western university. I spoke on wilderness, you on primitivism, and Murray Bookchin spoke on how he helped to found the environmental movement.

I regret that I never walked with you in the forests and mountains of my bioregion, or conversed with you around a campfire while eating wild game.

You taught me basic principles of the deep ecology movement long before I discovered the phrase "deep ecology."

You taught me that ecology is a subversive science and that humans are tender carnivores playing a sacred game.

You taught me that even in the midst of industrial civilization, we can recover the ontological moment with primal human experiences.

I missed the adolescent initiation and only as an adult engaged the heart-structure of the world by playing the game to rules that reveal ourselves.

You gave me faith that even an academically trained intellectual can get "...intimations from the archetypes arising in our dreams or given in visionary moments."

You taught me the mysteries of the sacred paw and awakened my primordial connection with the great bear. I share my closet with many bears now, all constrained by our domestication and servitude, yearning for ripe berries and ripe salmon, yearning to amble where scents will lead us.

You envisioned a wild North America whereby fifty percent of the lands and waters of the continent recover their wildness after the withdrawal of industrial civilization. You envisioned such bold wildness a quarter of a century before conservation biologists and The Wildlands Project came to the same vision.

You showed me that the deep, long-range ecology movement is a deeply conservative movement. When we conserve wildness in ourselves, conserve wild genes, wild places, wild beings we are liberating ourselves from the Myth of Progress. Conservation is rooted in our consciousness and out of ecological consciousness emerges conscience toward our fellow travellers on this Earth.

You called us to form a fire circle as thinking animals in the sacred presence, escape from domestication, escape from "...the tyranny of the created blobs and fuzzy goo of emotional - and epoxic glue of ethical - humanism."

Bearing witness to an archetypal ecology, a Paleolithic counter-revolution, you lit a sacred fire in the midst of this madness called modernity.

May the great bear carry your spirit to meet the sky bear. On the trail, high in the mountains, I greet your spirit. May your stomach be filled with ripe blackberries, may fat salmon find their way to your sacred paw.

Quotes are from Paul Shepard's seminal essay "Post-Modern Primitivism."

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