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SACRED TRUSTS: ESSAYS ON STEWARDSHIP AND RESPONSIBILITY. Edited by Michael Katakis. San Francisco: Mercury House, 1991. 283 pp. paper ISBN: 1-56279-056-0.

I am neither a fisher nor a hiker. But do not get me wrong, I like the presence of the wild; I savor the canyons and the desert. Their presence allows my children to sense the weight of time. Like Dan Gerber in SACRED TRUSTS, "I need to know there is a wildness in the world, even if I were to never see it... It isn't essential to my enjoyment of fishing that I catch fish, only that I know there are fish in the water..." (p.70).

I travel a lot. Prior to a recent flight, I agreed to review SACRED TRUSTS. After the in-flight news, after the in-flight drinks, and after the in-flight meal, I sought diversion. Now, I thought, is the time to start reading SACRED TRUSTS.

And read I did. With growing involvement, and eventually total absorption. I was so excited by what I read that I e-mailed some good friends who have a summer cabin on the Gallatin River in Montana, to tell them of this book celebrating Montana's natural heritage. But -- they knew it all already. That's why they have their summer cabin there. Maybe I wanted them to know that they are right, that they live in a small part of heaven.

SACRED TRUSTS eulogizes the wild. The *Electronic Green Journal* also speaks to those who eulogize the wild. So why preach to the converted? This book should be read by all, but most especially by those who are not yet in love with life outside the four walls of their home. The book is a collection of essays about fly fishing, about saving bears, about life alone in the countryside, about ardor and the encroachment of "civilization", and it is about awareness, stewardship, and responsibility. The collection has no apparent structure.

An essay on death opens the book. Odd, one may think, in a work about the wonders of life, but not really odd at all. As I was reading it I remembered a meeting with my obstetrician. The maternity hospital was about to be re-located, and the township was up in arms. "But," cried the town people "you can't do this! The hospital is for the sick; that is where people die! We don't want our babies born where there is death!" It was under his tutelage that I came to realize that death is as much a part of life as is birth.

Mary Catherine Bateson echoes this in her essay, "Into the Trees." Our manicuring, our clearing, felling, "civilizing" are attempts to reject the natural. These are assertions of power over life, but not only humans have a cycle of life; John Nichols, in a later essay, says that he rarely weeps for the dead but instead, he blesses them, "for how intrinsically they focus... all life"(p.130).

Dan O'Brien writes on page twelve of an intrusive "single electric light" in the Black Hills of South Dakota -- a light signalling human encroachment into the mountains which are the central feature of his life. He also writes of the Lakota Sioux. In O'Brien's mind, it is the Hills which have been wronged more severely than the Sioux. "You don't have to be Sioux or live in North Rapid City to feel impotent in the face of the

anthropocentricity that is maiming the Black Hills... For years, a lot of people have felt helpless over what is happening in the Hills and all over the West"(p.18). People are concerned and confused, not just about the Hills, but about the whole of the environment. SACRED TRUSTS doesn't offer answers to these concerns; it raises awareness.

Kris Hardin writes about "Symbols". Just as we, the generally aware but naively-concerned public, feel that maybe we are arriving at answers by recycling plastic bags or walking rather than driving, we become disturbed by Hardin's description of these actions as little more than symbolic. We must partially agree. But is "putting energy into smaller battles" (p.22) better than not putting any energy in at all? Hardin fears that by so doing, we may not have enough energy for the larger survival battles. Maybe. But I respond by suggesting that in entering small frays, we are achieving a mind-set of survival. Hardin also speaks of image; we act because it proffers the right image. But remember, Kris Hardin, image can become reality. And, to quote from Stephen Bodio, also in SACRED TRUSTS, "real passion grows alongside growing expertise" (p.58). To develop a passion for preservation, we need to practice it. Yet, I also accept Hardin's challenge to think bigger. Both Bodio and Hardin offer thought-provoking reading - their writing is enlightening, enlivening, and enthralling.

In his essay, Dan Gerber asks many important questions. How can we can maintain "our balance so that we can address the question of this progressively diminished earth with at least some clarity, compassion and intelligence?" (p.66). And, paraphrasing, he also asks about the meaning of 'stewardship'? Are we trying to keep the environment static, or are we trying to re-shape it to some idealized version of what it once was? (p. 67). His leading question asks, "Is there some sacred state of The Way Things Are Now we should try to maintain, or rather, should we keep a component of flexibility in our stewardship of the world's continual process of becoming?" (p.67). Just what are we trying to attain? Yvon Chouinard offers a reply: "Going back to a simpler life based on living by sufficiency rather than excess is not a step backward; rather, returning to a simpler way allows us to retain our dignity, puts us in touch with the land..." (p.121).

Gerber's essay, an angry one, likens the human population to a cancer. He addresses the impact of the ever-growing human population, and the fact that no matter "how subtly" his presence "alters the environment he enters" (p.70), it alters it none the less. But then read Robert F.Jones, and laugh - at his amazing suggestions for the control of the human population and at his wonderful last line: "Is there anyone here I have not offended?" (p.140). Gerber reminds us, too, that stewardship is ultimately for ourselves: "Nature is the great emptiness, the source out of which our culture and all its flowering comes, and in order not to lose sight of this... it is vital that wildness be preserved for its own sake, which is to say, for our sake" (p. 73).

Many of the essays are about fly fishing. I was particularly delighted by Joan Salvato Wulff's, in which she describes being finally allowed to take part in the Paterson Casting Club's activities. She reminds us that it is our nature to "rescue something only at the last minute" (p.78). The reader is painfully aware that Wulff's remarks refer to fish as well as the the wider environment. She thinks that as more women enter the outdoors life, and as they "bring their nurturing natures with them" (p.78), they are well suited to being tireless workers for conservation.

Wulff provides a solid answer to some of the concerns she raises. She asks her husband why he thought he had better solutions than others to problems associated with fish stock management. He replies, "it is simple,

I always look at it from the fish's point of view" (p. 79). But can we assume the mantle and mind of a bear, or a fish, or a pelican? I doubt it, but the idea does, at least, invite another perspective. Have you tried thinking like a bear?

Jack Turner comments that 35 million years of "constant feedback and fine-tuned design make a difference" (p.87). I noted in the margin of this essay that if this were so, then humans should also know more about stewardship after 35 million years of experience. Will we have 35 million more years if we keep on destroying the environment as we now do? Such destruction leads to anger, and to William Hjortsberg's powerfully-written angry essay. To give you a sense of his anger: "'Barbed-wire won the West', or so the saying goes. Death by strangulation, I think, whenever I find another spiny strand coiled like some lethal serpent beneath the junipers. Old fences come down, and the wire, like as not, ends up tossed aside, out of sight, out of mind... If you are ever seen a wire-cut quarter horse, trembling with terror as the flies gather around a bloody foreleg nearly severed at the pastern, you would relegate all barbed wire, along with its inventor, to the far reaches of Dante's hell" (p. 93).

Even though Rachel Carson's SILENT SPRING was written thirty years ago, he cries on page 97, "Is nobody listening?" We are told that stewardship can involve making and accepting hard decisions. Stewardship is about life. But on the way to ultimate preservation, some lives have to be taken. Patrick Hemingway describes both the planned and the unplanned destruction of both elephants and vegetation on the vast African plains. He also describes the destruction of the one, the vegetation, by the other, which ultimately and in turn led to the destruction of the destroyer. Hemingway, echoing Gerber, points the finger of blame on the human population: "The elephants that were killed by the team... had already been condemned to death because the lands they had occupied in the past were being taken over for human use" (p.108).

C.L.Rawlins asks if Earth is our property, or does it belong elsewhere? Alston Chase, who condemns environmental activism as sometimes being misguided, argues that it is ill-informed activists following fashion (along with economics and demographics) who are killing stewardship. Stewardship relies on commitment and experience: "Today, ranchers are under attack from environmentalists and animal rights activists. It has become fashionable to view stockmen as ecological sinners, guilty of overgrazing, killing predators, misusing water, and generally laying waste to the landscape. Activists... would take the land from these people" (p. 183).

Ted Kooser offers a different perspective on activists. His description of Arnie and Earl doing their weed-spraying is both frightening and excellent...and indicative of the strong need for environmentally-sensitive activists who will clean up ecological sinners like Arnie and Earl. We have all seen them in action, destroying the environment in glorious, ignorant abandon.

So why the apparent emphasis on fly-fishing in SACRED TRUSTS? George Anderson puts it succinctly. "Fly-fishing is a litmus test, if you will, for our environment. If we cannot protect our rivers and fisheries...our commitment to stewardship has failed" (p.202).

The last word I will save for Guy de la Valdene who asks on p. 213 "What do you want, and What are you willing to give up? No management program can serve all needs, much less all species."

So just what do we want? Read SACRED TRUSTS and learn, enjoy and consider. I did.

