

Whispers and Shadows: A Naturalist's Memoir

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Her collection of essays blends cultural mythology with hard science in an expansive ethic of place following the perspectives of iconic ecologists such as Wendell Berry and Wes Jackson. Babine outlines an ecological methodology for recording personal and communal experiences and meanings to help us understand that our landscapes are not just physical places but mental and emotional as well. She gets our attention with experiences as emotionally deep as encountering apples, blizzards, and 500-year floods—all part of the ecological and psychological balances that are both life-giving and life-taking. As she retells the stories of weather disasters and their emotional effects on local histories and identities, she reveals an intricate narrative of landscapes we cannot control. Babine says we aren't telling our whole history if we leave out such events and only include what humans do to master their environments. Babine asks existential and spiritual questions about the value and knowledge found in local ecologies, calling human residents to more in-depth sustainable relationships with land, water, and, most of all, the weather. Through story after story, Babine reveals that it is the power of nature to shape culture that we need to comprehend. Her critical contribution is that we need to learn to think of the natural and the cultural as inseparable in order to expand our ecological consciousness and knowledge to face our futures.

Whispers and Shadows: A Naturalist's Memoir, by Jerry Apps. Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2015. xiv, 145 pp. Bibliography. \$22.95 hardcover.

Reviewer James A. Pritchard teaches in the Department of Natural Resource Ecology & Management at Iowa State University. He is coauthor of *A Green and Permanent Land* (2001).

With *Whispers and Shadows*, rural historian Jerry Apps offers an insightful memoir, inviting bibliophiles to visit the trails on Roshara, his 120-acre family farm in central Wisconsin, as well as places farther afield. A keen observer, Apps notes historical changes in the landscape, comprehensively interpreting a diverse natural history in pond, prairie, woodlot, and wildlife, including the endangered Karner blue butterfly.

Through actions, the author's father expressed a deep appreciation of nature. His greatest gift was an admonition to look in the shadows and listen for the whispers—to sit quietly and wait patiently, witnessing nature's subtle fascinations. The land, writes Apps, is "something that can be loved," yet it "wants to be respected, honored, and valued" (116, 130).

Apps advises that nature is found all around us: in rural landscapes, indeed, "in your own backyard" (104). People live in relationship with nature, he notes, as well as with one another. Among a lifetime of memories, his boyhood introduction to Morty Oliphant, a recluse who had "a special way with wild animals," stands out (83). Apps's eyes opened to human and animal neighbors, bringing him an empathy for all life.

In discussing nature writers, the author's literary sources of inspiration become apparent. Many are grounded in the Midwest, including Loren Eiseley, Gaylord Nelson, and Sigurd Olson. Apps also discusses disconnecting from a hurried life and enhancing one's connection with nature through journaling. Readers will watch for signs of nature with heightened awareness after engaging with this thoughtful and handsomely produced book.