



SCI
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Conservation
Corner

Hunting and the Duality of Man

BY SHANE P. MAHONEY

There lies within the soul of every man, two men – one who labors, and one who dreams. While for primitive man this duality was an every day experience, a realism that need not be sequestered to the world of poets, for modern man there is a forced separation of selves. For the vast majority of our harried lives, we are now beasts of burden. The great potential of our mystical selves lies entombed, shackled by a world of excess, drowning in a sea of change. Too long away from the world of thunder and wind, we are becoming denatured man. Seeking all truths in rational thought, we adore the mind and forsake the soul. Yet surely we recognize that both men live within us, and that both are essential to our well-being.

We must also recognize that both are essential to the conservation of nature, and thus to the well-being of the world. Love and appreciation reside in the soul, action in the blood and sinew. But we will only rise to defend that which we love. Mystical man, the man of magic and visions, is essential to the fight for wild nature. This man is free to lose himself in the parables of the universe, and from such wanderings to see his road clearly, and with humility. He ponders the philosophical and learns to cherish the mysteries of nature, and to marvel quietly while his soul screams. Animals are to him an endless source of fascination, landscapes are the well from which all beauty is drawn. Peace and freedom are the gifts of mountains and setting suns. In the cathedrals of nature, he may rest in fullness; but upon rising for

the hunt, he enters completeness. Then, and only then, mystical man and the man of action become one – with one another and with the world around them. The soul reenters the sea.

When human populations lived as hunter-gatherers, direct connection with physical nature was assured. Under these circumstances, takings from the wild were viewed as both necessity and gift. The man of action might release the arrow, but the man of dreams would follow its flight to another realm, one where the elk and wolf were seen as brothers. This did not suspend the hunt nor lead man to frail conceptions that he could live without death. Rather, it engendered the great complexity that still haunts the human mind – how could the aware man simultaneously cherish the living others around him, and yet pursue their death with purpose and zeal? For the vast majority of mankind's existence, this question was but a silent prayer to the night sky. No human oracle was expected to reveal an answer, for only the gods could fathom such depths. Indeed, was this not the natural place of man, simultaneously immersed in the cycle of life and death, but tormented by his capacity to reason and reflect? Why should this tension be viewed as a dilemma? It is embedded in the atoms of our being and should be celebrated, not condemned, for its mystery. Our move to rural 'agriculturalism' maintained much of this. We continued to acknowledge the interrelatedness of all life, and man's dependence on the very dirt beneath our feet.

In the cornfields that swayed in an



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evening wind, we heard the call of nature and the deer that fell for our table was indeed a gift of the land. As the seal hunters of Newfoundland still remark with amazement, "it is something! We don't feed them or raise them, but every year, with the ice they come, millions strong. We simply push off and take them."

Simply is not a word I would use to describe the most dangerous hunt in the world. All of this humble beauty and mystic awareness changed with our flight to urbanity. In the shadows of office towers and along the bleak pavement deserts, nature is extinct – or worse, mutilated and distorted. Realism has been replaced by artificiality. Flower pots and parks are evidence of our need for contact with non-human creatures; urgency and conflict are evidence of our inability to live unnaturally. We stumble through this surreal existence and retreat to the country for rejuvenation of body and soul. There, we briefly connect once more with the womb, and drink briefly from shallow streams, once the mighty rivers of our old lives. Returning from our listing of birds, and our travels through protected wildernesses, we reenter the world where our duality has been crucified. The laborer returns to full stride and the dreamer retreats to the deepest shadows.

Fearfully for the world, we develop from such museum visits to our past, shallow notions of how nature is to be conserved. Our efforts are well intentioned, but in the loss of our duality, we enshrine cheap logic and surrender man's rightful place as full participant in nature to one of voyeur and warden. In an act of supreme arrogance, we assume the role of God – the first and only true non-hunter. In so doing, man's natural path is viewed by some as sordid, unnecessary and excessive. What a tragedy for mankind and what a sublime deception for society. Indeed, what a death sentence for nature! Voyeurism is a surreal experience that weans us from our true passions and engagements. It leads to nature in a box.

All human societies remain dependent upon the biological world, however, and our human lives proceed only at the cost of other life forms. It has always been so, and so it will remain. Every day, millions of creatures die so that others might live,

and mankind cannot be removed from this equation. While shrimp may perish in their millions unlamented, harvested by great impassive machines, their deaths are no less part of this chain of life than the elk or deer felled by the hunter's aim. The difference is that the machine cares not for the creature slain – undeniably, the hunter does. In taking possession of the animal, the hunter also takes responsibility for its death, and recognizes in the process his own frailty. The commercial slaughter of sentient animals seldom leads to musings about the purpose of life, or enthrallment with the wondrous capacities of nature; but hunting surely does. Hunting is an affectation, commercial slaughter merely the breaking of stones. Only the hunted animal dies within sight of man's duality. Do we not understand that as we encourage artificial, one dimensional man, the man who cannot simultaneously marvel at nature and seek her sustenance through his own hand, that we cripple the greatest force for conservation imaginable? It was after all, the hunter-philosopher who first voiced the creation myths, who first sculpted animal and human form, and who first laid pigment upon rock walls to remind us of our duality. We are all descended from such successful hunters, and like them, our efforts to reconcile our animal and human selves need not include a loss of the hunting tradition. Indeed it must not. Doing so is a denial of past and self, a denial of heredity and lineage, a false deception that beguiles the pedestrian man into believing he no longer depends upon the flow of blood and the warming of flesh.

Henry David Thoreau said that "in wildness is the preservation of the world." I would add that in man's wildness lies the only chance for sustaining nature. If we step too far from our origins and fail to reconnect with our primitive selves, then we will also forget the wild others that walk the same path as we do. In so doing, we will fail to recognize that their fate is our fate. We will believe that we are apart, an illusion whose postscript is disaster and extinction – for them and us. Man does indeed have responsibility for the natural world, but so too does he have a responsibility to recognize his abject dependence

SCI Hunter's Code of Ethics

Recognizing my responsibilities to wildlife, habitat and future generations, I pledge.

To conduct myself in the field so as to make a positive contribution to wildlife and ecosystems.

To improve my skills as a woodsman and marksman to ensure humane harvesting of wildlife.

To comply with all game laws, in the spirit of Fair Chase, and to influence my companions accordingly.

To accept my responsibility to provide all possible assistance to game law enforcement officers.

To waste no opportunity to teach young people the full meaning of this code of ethics.

To reflect in word and behavior only credit upon the fraternity of sportsmen, and to demonstrate abiding respect for game, habitat and property where I am privileged to hunt.

upon it. To do so, he must immerse himself in the processes that have forever controlled his fate.

Hunting accomplishes this as no other activity can, for it forces us to the very limits of natural engagement. Voyeurism is one thing; taking a life and consuming flesh is quite another. Hunting, by honestly reconnecting us with our beginnings, condemns artificiality, and leaves us to ponder our past and our future, without illusion or false. Somehow the humanity that has wreaked havoc on nature is the same humanity that works ceaselessly for her survival.

Like hunting itself this societal contradiction reflects man's unending duality. It also, I believe, provides assurance that our best hopes for nature rise on the currents of our hunting past. It was there after all that our nature was forged. To preserve a world of fullness and beauty, we will need to marshal the very best in ourselves. We must work assiduously to safeguard both the man of action and the man of dreams, for to labour without dreams is to become a machine and to dream without purpose is a senseless life.

Is it not clear that each time we hunt the animal, we also hunt ourselves?

**Hunt
Forever**