

Winner of the *Crazyhorse* Nonfiction Prize

MELODIE EDWARDS

A Lament for My Jacobson's Organ

Walking along the cliffs, I come to the carcass of a coyote. Probably shot last winter by the rancher across the river that leases this land for public use. I can't see a bullet wound, or any wound at all, but it could be on the other side of the body. Up close, what impresses me is how beautiful, how entirely *real*, the animal is, large even for an adult with a white winter coat, wispy, the tail thick and bushy as a costume prop. I've been watching this dead coyote for months. All winter, when I came down to the river on snowshoes, the only visible decay was where some scavenger (probably a raven) had come pecking for the eye, leaving a black socket. But now, with warm spring weather, wild irises blooming along the riverbanks, the decay begins in earnest. The smell of death hangs like a beaded curtain in the air upwind of the carcass.

I've come walking along these cliffs overlooking the river with my dog and my father's new hound-dog puppy. At the parking lot when I arrived, I met a fly fisherman friend whose three dogs tagged along when they saw me headed to higher ground. I note which of the dogs edge in to inspect the smell of the dead coyote and which won't go near. It's their sense of smell, their emotional response to the smell

of death, that I'm interested in. My dog, shy, fearful, skittish under all conditions, has never come within five feet. Not even when the smell of death was a frozen thing, imperceptible to my nose. The hound-dog puppy makes one advance, a marginal inspection, and then retreats behind my legs to watch the other dogs. My fisherman friend's black lab and another young mutt zigzag back and forth around the dead coyote as if graphing its layout. The fisherman's older, self-assured shepherd mix approaches; I can't call her away.

I stand just inside the odor of death, as if standing just inside a stranger's bedroom, trying to gauge my own response to the scent. Death is simple, but the smell of death is another thing, an uncharted frontier. The indecision of the dogs, as a voting constituency or impartial jury, tells me it means something, something that none of them respond to in the same way as the other, a thing outside my range of knowing.

Once, I happened to catch a Discovery Channel documentary discussing the immense power of the elephant's olfactory ability in regard to its emotional importance. All animals with strong senses of smell appear to use olfaction to indicate readiness for mating and to

mark territories. Yet no one knows how much of the emotional landscape of the animal's internal world is also "communicated" through the excretion of hormones. Elephants are matriarchal, following the lead of a grandmother as she scouts out water over vast yellow plains prickly with lightning, relying on her memory alone for the location of water holes. They are the only other animal on earth besides humans known to cry tears. Elephants perform strange Serengeti rituals over the bones of their dead, using their highly sensitive nose appendage to feel the contours of the eye sockets and temple hollows, seeking out every curve and crevice of the beloved skull, simultaneously feeling and smelling the bones in one small act. Then they all turn facing outward with the bones inside the circle and, raising their trunks, make noises at a frequency beyond the hearing of human beings. It's no coincidence (nature doesn't believe in them) that this is an animal who uses her nose as a hand, a voice, a weapon, a tool, a sniffer. And another thing, the documentary's commentator threw in without pause for explanation, elephants can probably smell emotions.

Afterward, I had more questions about smell than answers. If elephants smell emotions, could all animals with strong olfactory abilities do so? Could they create a dialogue of scent, willfully releasing hormones that spoke of fears and destinations? How dexterous was this ability?

Could dogs smell emotion? Could they smell mine? Could *I* smell emotion?

Aldo Leopold names four types of naturalists. Nobody is any one of these types at all times, he explains, but everyone has a certain alacrity or tendency to one or the other. "These categories have nothing to do with sex or age, or accouterments," Leopold being Leopold reassures us. "They represent four diverse habits of the human eye. The deer hunter habitually watches the next bend; the duck hunter watches the skyline; the bird hunter watches the dog; the non-hunter does not watch."

Although I'm not a hunter, do not own a gun and can't remember ever handling one, I would fall under the bird hunter category. I watch my dog.

Her name is Mora because I got her when I had just returned from Spain and was already missing the blackberry jam. She in no way resembles blackberries. She's what they call a cow dog in cow country, a sheep dog in sheep country, half red heeler, half border collie. Most of her coloring is border collie, black all over except for a collar and mask around her face in white. You only notice the red heeler in the rusty speckling on her legs and in the white patches. And in her temperament. Okay, I'll admit it, she's high-strung. I must confess to a smidge of that touchiness that you usually get in parents with naughty children, constantly

justifying their behavior with long diatribes on nutrition and genetics and “that difficult stage.” But she *is* only two years old, rounding on three, which I think explains her distrust of strangers, her peculiar insistence on “bumping” or nipping me in the heels, me or the cat, small children, anyone headed in her idea of the “wrong direction.”

In my case, if I’m not headed directly to put on my hiking boots and retrieve her leash, it’s the wrong direction. Before she was a year old, this dog had ascended the highest peak in the valley of North Park in Colorado, 12,951 feet. Before she was two, she had probably clocked over 200 miles of trail, most of it at or above timberline. I adopted her from the cowboy giving away puppies at the fairgrounds because I needed trail company for the job of writing a hiking guide in northern Colorado since I was conducting most of the research alone. In her first years of life, she spent more time in the wilderness than out of it. She discovered the art of pacing herself, the luxury of a dip in water just melted from snow, the crisp, flowery taste of it, the particular enjoyment of laying down your body after a full day of pure, cleansing, emancipating exertion. She has the most self-satisfied sleep groan I’ve ever heard in human or animal alike. In essence, I created a monster.

Because, now, I’m no longer writing a hiking guide and I don’t think I’ll ever choose to inflict something so life-consuming on myself again in

the foreseeable future. Now, my poor dog must put up with the hum-drum sorts of walks dogs get on TV. At the end of a leash. Once a day. Half hour long. Have I mentioned she’s high-strung? These shrink wrapped walks don’t help. As an example, it happened that my husband accidentally lifted his knee just as Mora made a leap onto the bed and the two connected. Mora emitted a high-pitched squeak like pinching your fingers across the surface of a balloon and scurried away. A minute later, I discovered her in the living room amongst the pillows on the couch. At my eye contact, she turned into a cowering pool of dog, ears laid back, eyes twitching in and out of eye contact, head down. I said the W word. “Wanna go for a walk?” Nothing. Not even going to get the leash worked. Or arriving fully dressed at the door as if leaving. To shake her out of her grudge took going over and sitting down beside her and cooing soft words of condolence in her ear. And not by me; I tried first. It had to be the man now facing permanent residence on her black list. Then, only then, could she launch herself off the couch at the door with every body part going in a different direction, her ears up, mouth wide in what I can only name a grin across her goofy face.

I don’t understand my dog. I don’t understand her at all.

The inner lives of animals is one of the great

mysteries of the world. The more time I spend in their company, or observing them through binoculars, or reading about them in books, or encountering them in the wild, the less I feel I know. J. Frank Dobie, one of the great wildlife thinkers and author of *The Voice of the Coyote*, points at the center of my knot of confusion when he says, "Humans err in trying to assign utilitarian motives to all behavior of other animals." But we assign them such ordinary motives, every act chalked up to instinct or ignorance or fear, because how can we know? If I could simply ask my dog to tell me or write me or telepathy me a clear vision of her daily experience, wouldn't I do it? I've lived with animals all my life, consider a few of my relationships with them to be among my greatest and even most complicated, most wizing. The mature mind becomes more doubting, more suspicious, as you age. People call this the onset of wisdom. As a child, I could love animals without doubting their love for me; what appeared to be love was indeed love.

To see the world from the point of view of a dog, even if the dog has lived in your house, slept at the foot of your bed, eaten your slippers and seen you through three jobs and a cross-country move, is a dicey operation. You find yourself doing one of two things: either you gravely underestimate the amount of emotional interaction an animal can have with her world

or you gravely overestimate it. The truth is not deducible through logic or imagination. The way a visit to the moon can never be. There it is—the moon. But step foot on its surface, feel its powdery windlessness under your moon boots, know its saggy hug of gravity, a different operation altogether.

I collect clues. Here's another one by Dobie: "Every animal, including man, seems to have the potentialities, however latent and feeble, of every other animal." Every living thing is based on a similar blueprint. Uncovering the genomes of our DNA, geneticists discovered that the genetic differences between humans and the common fruit fly are minuscule, almost not worth noting. All living matter in the universe breathes, for instance. And all earthly creatures dabble in the five senses.

To receive information or to know the physical world must be experienced through the senses, all the world's great religions admit, including the religion of science. In other words, to understand another person or animal's experience, don't put yourself in their boots, put yourself behind their eyes, nose, tongue, skin, or ears. Another clue. The Dalai Lama's advice is: always come closer and closer to a completion of empathy. I like all this, but what do you do when you're not talking about a person, you're talking about empathy with, say, a red-tailed hawk, whose binocular vision can make out the rough gouged surface of tree bark and the lobed

shape of an oak leaf from a half mile high? Humans and birds are both considered “sight animals,” yet the “potentialities” of bird vision, where it saw an evolutionary potential and met it, took a long genetic leap in the bird kingdom and, in humans, a shorter, more conservative step.

Now, take the sensory experience of “nose animals,” for instance, your average family dog. The human being has three to five million sensory cells per nostril. The common household dog? 150 million to 220 million per nostril, and some sources say up to a billion total in the case of the blood hound. In reading an article about the nose skills of a drug-sniffing dog I came across in the local newspaper, the animal’s trainer explained that when a human being smells a cake baking in the oven, he smells a cake. When a dog smells a cake baking in the oven, he smells eggs, flour, salt, chocolate, vanilla, baking powder, milk and even that top secret ingredient Grandma refuses to let you in on. Separated into its parts . . . and quantified. And dogs aren’t even the best noses in the nose world, either. The grizzly bear is to dogs what dogs are to humans, some 20 million to 300 million times better smellers than dogs. And the African elephant is the queen sniffer on planet Earth with the most surface area inside the long trunk, literally billions of sensory cells flourishing and deciphering the animal’s world.

In searching for answers, I hit university libraries and pumped wildlife biologist friends, but found very little on the emotion/olfactory link. As Piet Vroon, author of *Smell*, put it, “the scientific world is still not very interested in the olfactory organ.” Even the basic science of smell is misunderstood. For instance, what properties of the chemical substances associated with smell cause the sensation? Which part of the chemicals’ characteristics are responsible? Or is it something undiscovered such as the *shape* of the molecule that leads to sensation? Not only was researching my questions about the psychology of nose animals difficult but the information that was out there seemed to highlight only the human sense of smell. Which, in a roundabout way, led me to my ultimate question.

Humans do not easily fit into the categories of smellers and can’t be definitely defined as *macrosmates* (good smellers) or *microsmates* (poor smellers) or *anosmates* (non-smellers). Human beings long ago evolved out of their Jacobson’s organ, a small cigar-shaped organ that can be found in all nose animals, including rodents, grazing mammals and carnivores. The organ still appears in human embryos early in development but disappears later on. We still have the unused duct behind our front incisors, with a nerve connected through the palate that allows for feeling of the organ, but its function, evolution decided (without putting it to a vote),

was no longer necessary. At least, for the upright human being, too far away from the ground where smells cling. Still, our first sensory experiences, inside the womb, are the smells of coursing life, the unique forgotten smell of that uterine ocean we all wake up in.

Even without the Jacobson's organ, humans are mostly macrosmates, good smellers. We simply overlook what we smell because what we see and what we hear overpowers the world of scent. Vision and hearing are two of the "newest" senses, on the evolutionary scale, and most of their connections are housed in the neocortex, in the language centers of the brain. It is in this part of the brain that most human rationalizing and verbalizing goes on. Human beings are nothing if not thinkers and talkers. We see something, an autumn fall of leaves, say, and the information goes straight to our data collecting centers to classify it and make sense of it. Winter is coming, gotta get that furnace fixed, damn, I hate the cold. The *smell* of the falling leaves gets left out or quickly classified as merely aesthetic, a lovely, even haunting element, but essentially useless.

Smell is the very oldest sense. When life on earth began its first ungraceful oscillations, it was following not a blur, not a groan, not an itch, but a fragrance. Smell taps into the oldest parts of the brain, the limbic system buried deep inside our skulls, in charge of the emotions and motivations. This explains why it is so difficult

to name a smell. What does it smell like is a much more difficult question to answer than what did it sound like or look like. I can recall the color of faded yellow paint on the walls of my old childhood bedroom, can hear the rustle of grit against the window pane on windy nights, can remember plainly putting my ear to the grate to listen to my parents talking at the kitchen table. But can I recall the smell of the room? I cannot re-imagine the smell in the same way I can re-imagine the art and music of this room. And, if I were to come across it, house shopping someday, touring homes that haven't been aired in years, open a door and something provokes me, a memory takes over my body with a whoosh, I wouldn't know its source. It would have the ungraspable quality of a dream.

When a smell-oriented animal comes in contact with the world through scent, it doesn't immediately start making charts or poems of its experience, nor does it turn it into any sort of fuzzy string of smell sentences. The world comes in through the senses and is interpreted, instead, as emotion. Ordinary, all-purpose feelings, the kind we all consider ourselves masters of. I am a writer, which is why I even came to be asking such questions. But being a writer means I naturally over-edit my emotional experiences even as I worship them. I think it is a natural tendency for modern civilized humanity, as we steer farther and farther away

from the shores of the subconscious, we look on the disappearing part of ourselves, the least understood part, with eyes of longing. But do you see, we look with eyes.

So I undertook the project of *feeling* my sense of smell.

First I had to teach myself to smell. I aspired to be therianthropic, half human/half animal. I came upon a snippet of advice in one of my research books that explained that dogs smell by taking short, quick inhalations while turning their heads side to side. They have wet noses to help them tell which way the wind is blowing. I used a wet finger. Unfortunately, I did not have the slits along the sides of my nose the way dogs do and couldn't use them to exhale through, preventing smells from mixing as I inhaled. A Zuni myth provided some good advice: "A hungry hunter scents game against the wind. Never eat in the morning."

At first, I sniffed anything and everything. I put my face to stone, to a roll of toilet paper, to fluorescent green moss after a rain, a fallen piece of wasp nest. I tried to locate the direction from which I smelled carrion or deer muskiness or unknown smells as I walked through the woods, tried to listen to my emotions to tell me what they meant. I remembered Dobie's insistence that, during his cowboy days, riding horseback through rough country in search of roaming cattle, he had learned to actually enjoy the smell

of dead things. The human sense of smell has been reduced to its most primitive use, finding odors either pleasurable or repulsive. I had to get over this, jump this particular evolutionary track somehow, learn to think of smells as information. My dog was my teacher. I began thinking of her stops along the trail as tourist plaques you might read along the rim of the Grand Canyon, only more newsworthy. I quit calling her off every stop, taking note, instead, of the differences in interest of each, how long she lingered over one and not another. To call her off would be like asking someone to turn off the evening news right in the middle of a news bulletin. She led me to dead things and smelly live things happily. And she brought these smells home, gleefully rolling in the worst of the worst. Why do dogs and coyotes roll in odors? "They are sybarites," Dobie says, creatures fond of luxury and pleasure. I compared her to a woman wandering through a department store collecting perfume samples, one behind this ear, one at the wrist, mapping smells with body parts for later scrutiny.

I remember coming across a roosting spot frequented by a great horned owl under a sandstone overhang along a river where the dun-colored rock dripped with white bird poop and several pellets, the regurgitated bones and fur of prey, lay littered about. I stood under the overhang waiting for smells and associated emotions to come. Birds have a limited sense of

smell since the air currents during flight scatter the molecules of scent far and wide. But that didn't mean they didn't exude a particular smell themselves. Even then, my problem was differentiating between the smell I wanted to collect and surrounding smells—the muddy smell of the river nearby, the willow bushes dropping their leaves, my own odors of lingering soap and body sweat from the hike in. Maybe the owls hadn't visited the spot in a while. Maybe I needed fresher scents. I could smell nothing.

During the timespan since I started this undertaking until now as I write these words, I have relocated temporarily from my hometown in Colorado, stuck out in the middle of the sagebrush surrounded by 120 square miles of ranchland and wilderness, to a medium-sized city in Michigan, invisible from the sky for all the leafy trees. I've gone from a rural life ("more than rural," a friend of the family insists, "downright *remote!*") to a city one. The smells associated with these two lives stand in stark contrast.

I wonder what emotional response arises in an animal encountering for the first time the smell of diesel. Or bathtub cleaner. Or burning tires. The human world is full of chemical smells. More than once, I've come across scientists claiming that with the advance of so many more odors in the world, we have more

emotions and feelings and possibly better emotional development. The smell of chemicals probably plays a different emotional role for post-Communist Russians than for the rest of us. Serious numbers of Russians die every day due to chemical pollution and poisoning. When you've lost family members or whole chunks of your community to the poisoning of the water supply by the byproducts released into the river in the manufacturing of chlorine, the smell of bleach becomes instantly a very conscious emotional trigger. When I visited Mexico City, the smell of smog, increasingly a major health threat, killing people who do nothing more than *breathe* it every day, was always on my mind, always on everyone's minds in that city, a central fact of that city's identity.

Yet some of my clearest smell/emotion connections I felt were in response to chemicals. When walking into a shoe store, the smell of new leather hit me in the face, the thrill of buying something new overtook me. The smell of plastic made me think of Barbie dolls under the tree on Christmas morning. The scent of laundry detergent lingering around a laundromat gave me an emotional response I still haven't been able to trace, a gloominess or loneliness, I can't be sure. My mother-in-law told me a story of how, when she was a little girl growing up in a Lithuanian neighborhood of Chicago, soon after her mother had died but before her father had remarried, she remembers

playing with toys on the floor with her little brother in her grandfather's shoe repair shop. To this day, the smell of leather and especially shoe polishes makes her feel happy, safe, carefree.

During my observations of smell, I contracted a head cold that had the effect of bringing on olfactory hallucinations. I would perceive a smell, say of green olives, and then when I tried to locate the smell, it was not there or it was not green olives at all but the smell of something burning on the stove. I have also experienced olfactory hallucinations in reaction to severe headaches, or when my sinus passages become extremely cold, when I'm walking outside on a morning so frosty I can feel crystals forming inside my nostrils and out of nowhere I smell, so clearly I could taste it, vinegar, balsamic to be specific. This mistake of olfaction causes a jolt in the emotional gut as if you are a backseat passenger in a car that comes to a rude halt while you're gawking out the window in another direction. Green olives for me mean Spain, an orangey exotic swirl of culture-shocked ecstasy. Food burning on the stove is something *not* orange, not exotic.

Without the sense of smell, there is no such thing as taste. Six commonly accepted tastes can be perceived by the taste buds and a couple more that Japanese scientists claim to have recently "discovered" as if flavors are the orbiting moons of Jupiter. On the other hand,

something like 400,000 odors are known to science. During my head cold, I learned what it's like to miss my sense of smell. I could taste, but the flavor of food to my tongue was a vague notion, as if I were tasting theoretically, like the difference between listening to music and playing it. Cantaloupe—is there a more gorgeous fruit? The color, the texture, getting your face wet cheek to cheek when you eat a smile-shaped slice. But very little of its flavor is in its taste, I learned, trying to eat some with a stuffy head. Cantaloupe to me is my mother, a cheerful early riser, chopping through the fruit vigorously with a large shiny knife, no care for making the slices uniform. Cantaloupe is all smell. Without it, there's no Ma, no vigor, no shiny knife.

If I have succeeded at all in learning anything about the sense of smell, it's how odor, let me call it fragrance, fits into love. My mother calls it snooting. The word snoot is another word for nose, but interchangeably can be used as face. There is no gerund adaption to the word in the dictionary at all, so I'm not sure if she made up this verb or if anyone else in the world uses it the way I was brought up to use it. Snooting involves putting your face against the body of another person or animal and taking a good deep whiff or two or three. My mother used to snoot me, a really embarrassing experience as a teenager. She'd grab me hard and yank me into

a whiplash of a hug and kiss my cheek, snooting as she went. But we were all snooters in our family, except maybe my father. He doesn't snoot me and I don't snoot him. I'm willing to wager a five dollar bill, though, that he snoots his hound dog.

Snooting is a very personal thing to do to somebody. Your individual smells are some of the most private things about you. The most disturbing thing about Philip Lopate's essay "Portrait of My Body," an examination of the intricacies of one man's body, is not so much the discussions of his superiority complex as a tall man or the singularities of his penis, but of his personal odors. One of the more humbling passages informs us: "My belly button is a modest, embedded slit . . . I like to sniff the odor that comes from jabbing my finger in it: a very ripe, underground smell, impossible to describe, but let us say a combination of old gym socks and stuffed derma." We all realize that we have these private odors, pay perfect attention to them, recognize them as our own with a guilty sort of consciousness, but rarely do we discuss them. In *Rainman*, the movie with Dustin Hoffman as an autistic, we all remember the scene where Raymond and his younger brother, played by Tom Cruise, are stuffed into a telephone booth. Cruise's character is trying to make business phone calls. When his brother passes gas inside the phone booth, Cruise asks, "How can you stand that?" With scathing

honesty, his brother answers, "I don't mind it." For some reason, our own odors are a different thing from other people's. They are one of the only things humans can still leave unclassified, neither pleasurable nor repulsive.

We must learn to love the smells of others; it doesn't happen automatically, except perhaps in the case of babies for their mothers, mothers for their babies. And people for their pets. The smell of my dog behind her ears and along her neck is one of the most familiar, comforting smells I know. Like Lopate, I'm not sure I can put the smell into words. When you think "dog smell," it's usually of something the dog has rolled in, not her personal fragrance. Mora's individual odor is a vaguely oily, earthy smell, like the smell of good black dirt, but more musky or salty, a brown or dark dark green smell with the texture of eyelids closing. I don't know how to capture it, I give up. My childhood dog, Lucy, smelled like corn tortillas. The whole family used to call her Corn Tortilla Head.

Strange animals do not abide being snooted, even if you know the animal fairly well and they are commonly snooted by their people. I always offer my hand to be sniffed before going in for the stroke when first meeting an animal. Some truly skittish animals won't even take *your* smell, let alone exchange it for theirs. It's like an American visiting Europe, all that weird double-cheek kissing, even on first introduction to the person. Too personal for the handshaking

American. The same goes for animals. One's personal fragrance is given only under ceremonial conditions.

I believe that my smell is equally beloved to my dog. Snooting sessions are always a swap meet, both of us locating our snuffling around the ear and neck and scalp regions. She also is inspired to snoot whoever is in the driver's seat of the car when she stands in back, her head between the front seats. It should not be legal to drive under the influence of a high-powered nose conducting an examination with tiny whisker feelers. To have yourself scrutinized by such a nose, 20 to 300 million times better than your own, is like having your aura grazed by feathers. You've got to wonder what your smell is telling the animal. I read a story about how medical science began considering the possibility of training dogs to sniff out cancer. The idea came about after a woman's dog continually examined a blotch on her skin. Her husband convinced her to have it looked at and, indeed, the physician diagnosed melanoma. More tests proved that dogs can also smell cancer *inside* the body. Anytime I find my dog examining me, at the inside of my elbow where the skin is thin and the veins blue, or around moles, I can't help getting hypochondriac.

Being sniffed from afar is an equally religious experience. Another winter day, out walking in the sagebrush with Mora, a coyote came sauntering up from behind us. We may have

been too close to a den or invading rabbit hunting grounds because I frequently saw coyote sign in the area. But the animal wasn't aggressive so much as curious. I turned back and called my dog. She didn't think twice, at my heels with uneasy glances back over her shoulder. Something about the smell of the coyote, even though coyotes look in every way the same as a dog, told her to beware. I met the animal's eye for a minute before it glanced back at my dog. This was a canine thing. Then we sort of hovered there, all of us, while the scentual examination commenced. We weren't fifty feet away. I didn't know what information was taken away when the animal finally decided to turn tail and retreat, footprint by footprint back through the snow exactly the way it came. What did this animal now know about me? I could only speculate: female, afraid, but not *too* afraid, adult, not menstruating, ate two eggs for breakfast, and some kind of fruit not recognizable, has a wood stove at home, three cats, a vegetarian. Maybe this suggests too much, but more probably too little, relying too heavily on generalities. Fear, as a smell, may be a multi-faceted concept and, if categorized into some type of taxonomy and collected in one place, would amount to an encyclopedia and would require field guides. We humans don't know fear. We know what it *looks* like once it has manifested itself into a facial expression. And we subvert it commonly in the form of an

emotion. But I'll never know the smell of fear.

"Scent reveals what is concealed from the other senses," Emerson said. Following my nose in search of empathy with the animals who know their world best through smell, I wonder if I learned anything more than just how much is concealed. If my question was, can I learn to speak the language of smell, the answer must be no. The coyote trappers knew the limits of their human olfactory reception, experimenting blindly like children playing a game of cooking, no sense of what ingredients were required to make something appetizing, unable to fully empathize with their prey. I can feel my potentialities, the murmurous heaves and hoes that quake beneath my surface, but my failure to attain power over my nose is simply a problem of equipment. I can't fly, either. Or breathe underwater. Or see infrared. Or echolocate. Aldo Leopold, telling the story of bird hunting with his dog, says, "[My dog]

persists in tutoring me, with the calm patience of a professor of logic in the art of drawing deductions from an educated nose. I delight in seeing him deduce a conclusion, in the form of a point, from data that are obvious to him, but speculative to my unaided eye. Perhaps he hopes his dull pupil will one day learn to smell Like other dull pupils, I know when the professor is right, even though I don't know why."

My eye is unaided but it's all I've got. That and a deeper sense of the mystery of the earthly life as we can only know it through our senses. Satisfying empathy, reaching a feeling of completion, gorging it, leaving no room for dessert or eggnog, is impossible. What is potential never quite matches what is obtainable. Some people might be discouraged to learn that the trophy is found only in the pursuit. But not me. An hour left of daylight. Time to take the dog for a walk.

