

# **A Beacon Of Its Forms**

**A Manifesto Drawn From  
The Deeds Of Bob Marshall**

**Leonard Gigliobianco**

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# Argument



**R**obert ( Bob ) Marshall died on a train en route from Washington, D.C., to New York City early in the morning of November 11, 1939. He was thirty-eight-years-old. Despite his relative youth, Marshall had left a will that expressed his desire to use his estate to fund three causes: the establishment of an economic system whose means of production was to be based on use value rather than private profit; the advancement of civil liberties and civil rights; and the preservation through public holdings of wilderness.

As a United States Forest Service manager during the 1920s and 1930s, Bob Marshall worked to establish and demarcate primitive areas within the National Forest System. These primitive areas, forerunners of his nation's National Wilderness Preservation System, were landscapes withdrawn from economic utility. Any use, from silviculture to road building to mining to the construction of tourist facilities, became forbidden in these zones. And, to involve the public in the oversight of and additions to these areas, Marshall helped found in 1935 a citizens' group called, The Wilderness Society.

According to Marshall, wildernesses were more than repositories for biological diversity, they were art forms, aesthetic entities that equaled the best human creations in painting and music and literature. For the public to possess the time and means and mindset to enjoy and cherish these art works, the economic order of the times had to be changed radically. Marshall felt that capitalism, with its ruthless imposition of wage slavery needed to be undone. Allied to this belief in economic democracy was his commitment to racial equality. As a forest service manager, for instance, Marshall battled to end the practice of racial exclusion that had existed in the national forests of the southern United States.

Bob Marshall is known as an early proponent of wilderness preservation but his legacy should be read through the whole of his political commitment, a commitment that could be defined, given real world conditions, as utopian. So it is that this book uses Bob Marshall's biography, replete with instances of his ideas and achievements as well as the history of his time, as a prism to construct an ecological and collectivist utopia or manifesto. This endeavor is protean in both content and form as it seeks to join disparate aspects of the human experience into a blueprint – realized through the use of a prosimetrum, a combination of verse and prose – that proffers an alternative to the political and economic and social realities of the common era's twenty-first century. Utopia or manifesto, this book seeks to express the thoughts and hopes of its author, who can be described as being nothing more than one unheralded and pedestrian tinker.

One more explanatory note: The italicized words and phrases in the poems are meant to direct the reader to corresponding passages located in the prose portions that follow each installment of the poetry.

# PROLUSIONS



## GONE

Something remains. What? In the closing  
distance a wilderness. In the rewinding present  
a train whistle. *A book adds*  
to the destiny of a desktop. But these  
presences won't hold for me, they sweep  
past my frames. A platform stops  
a train but the one I await is  
*a body made of words*. These  
can't erase wishes the dust-sealed curios.

BELIEFS

There must be train whistles that run  
backward and forward – *History* !- because  
what must be vanquished are the *muses*.

I'd pluck them from the ether, those  
sacerdotal sprites who'd creed into  
myth; and look, they squirm on my palm,  
cracked desiccated figments  
relegated to the space of a word

Poetics

spoken in a forgotten lie. Here poems  
gestate in soil and air  
like trees. Here words are cut  
from bark. Branching trochees. Root  
alliterations. Budding chiasmi cleaving  
earth to sky. Leafy veins daring  
lightening sparked by *scholarship*. Here  
are things more real than their stories:

THE ONE

A man. What man? A man  
who with his government  
sneakers drew boundaries for others  
to flourish. A man who stood  
between loggers and trees  
but was plebian in *dress and deed*.  
Through him past and future share  
contours. Through him ideas would  
collapse the distinction between work  
and play. And today there are places  
covering the map of our globe  
where what shines through the  
pieces of him are *blank spaces*.

WHOM I AWAIT

Pages slide back and forth with  
no walls. Air hardens. The wind stands  
as two-by-fours and gypsum board.

Books brace shelves upright. As  
I read, a pinch of sunlight unsheathes  
the world in whispered bird calls and  
sotto voce bear bellows and sliding  
glaciers creaking that filter from  
my heater vents. What  
alphabet traces the ant's passage  
bounding the carpet threads below  
with the possibility to surmount all  
possible peaks from *3AM to noon*  
spelled as the one I await in  
the present as a sliver of the  
Hudson River silvers my  
windowsill beyond the tree line  
beneath the countless  
music: crescendo of waterfalls  
drowning all the air conditioners  
that had ever cooled me, out  
into the inlaid dawns that filter  
to me the course of *future flows?*