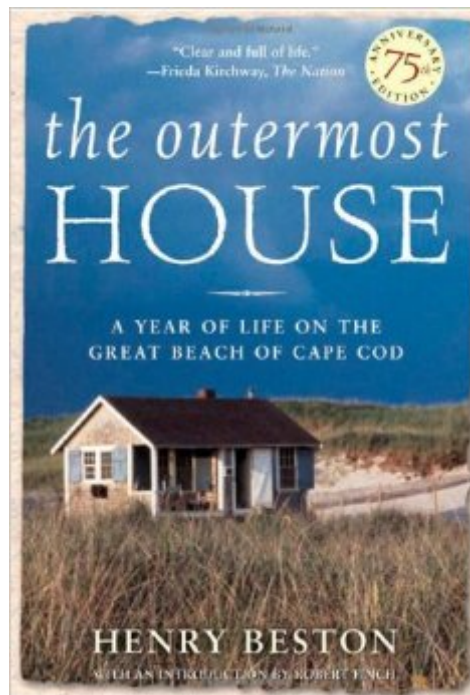


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The Outermost House: A Year Of Life On The Great Beach Of Cape Cod



Synopsis

The seventy-fifth anniversary edition of the classic book about Cape Cod, "written with simplicity, sympathy, and beauty" (New York Herald Tribune) A chronicle of a solitary year spent on a Cape Cod beach, *The Outermost House* has long been recognized as a classic of American nature writing. Henry Beston had originally planned to spend just two weeks in his seaside home, but was so possessed by the mysterious beauty of his surroundings that he found he "could not go." Instead, he sat down to try and capture in words the wonders of the magical landscape he found himself in thrall to: the migrations of seabirds, the rhythms of the tide, the windblown dunes, and the scatter of stars in the changing summer sky. Beston argued that, "The world today is sick to its thin blood for the lack of elemental things, for fire before the hands, for water, for air, for the dear earth itself underfoot." Seventy-five years after they were first published, Beston's words are more true than ever.

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Customer Reviews

The Outermost House is a classic, not just of natural history literature, but of American literature. If you love the outdoors, or the sea, or prose that flows like poetry, you should keep this small book always nearby. The harried introvert will especially appreciate it: reading even a page or two will transport you to a quiet place where the wind through the dune grass is the only sound that strikes your ear. In addition to being a great writer, Beston is an acute observer biological phenomena, and not a bad theorist either. His discourse on the relationship other animals bear to us ("They are not brethren, they are not underlings; they are other nations...") does more to unlink the Great Chain of

Being than any philosophical essay. And Beston's influence has been wide-ranging, not only among natural history writers, but among writers in general: unless I am mistaken, *The Outermost House* is one of the sources for the "Dry Salvages" section of T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*. (If no one else has noticed that before, I want coauthorship on the paper!) Some books are so memorable that parts of them become internalized on first reading. The first time I read *The Outermost House*, its final sentence -- as graceful an example of polysyndeton as you will find in English -- became mine. Now, I pass it on to you: "For the gifts of life are the earth's, and they are given to all, and they are the songs of birds at daybreak, Orion and the Bear, and dawn seen over ocean from the beach."

The Outermost House is one of my favorite books. Henry Beston has a wonderful writing style that produces vivid images of his year spent living in a small house on the dunes of the beach on Cape Cod in 1926. We see through his eyes a year of seasons passing, birds in migration, storms, shipwrecks, and peaceful solitude. I've read this book several times. Beston's imagery is excellent, making it easy to picture the Cape Cod setting, see what he saw, walk where he walked, and at the same time feel the sea breeze on your face and relax. Another tribute to this book is that you can literally open it to any page, any paragraph and find fresh and descriptive writing. Here, I'll pick a truly random page now: "...Streaming over the dunes, the storm howled on west over the moors. The islands of the marsh were brownish black, the channels leaden and whipped up by the wind; and along the shores of the desolate islands, channel waves broke angrily, chiding, tossing heavy ringlets of lifeless white. A scene of incredible desolation and cold. All day long I kept to my house, building up the fire and keeping watch from the windows..." I highly recommend this book, I know I will read yet again someday.

I had never heard of Henry Beston until a friend lent me--or, more accurately, pressed on me--his copy of *The Outermost House*. After reading this book, I understand his sense of urgency: this is a work of unique and lasting beauty, surely one of the greatest nature books ever written. In detailing his year in his cottage at Eastham Beach (now Coast Guard Beach) on the Atlantic side of Cape Cod, Beston combines a Thoreauvian zeal for nature and the examined life with a Proustian ability to record exactly the sight, sound, feel and scent of the world around him. Page after page is filled with unforgettable passages; his descriptions of the markings and songs of the shore birds alone are enough to move you to tears. His story of the plight of a doe caught in an icy flood is almost as suspenseful as a Hitchcock movie; his tribute to the courage of the Coast Guard "surfmen" who rescue shipwrecked sailors is particularly resonant to us who--after Sept. 11, 2001--have learned

something about the value of those who safeguard the public. Beston is so quotable a writer that I'm shocked he's not better known. A few quotes should demonstrate: "Nature is a part of our humanity, and without some awareness and experience of that divine mystery man ceases to be man." "Man can be either less than man or more than man, and both are monsters, the last more dread." "Poor body, time and the long years were the first tailors to teach you the merciful use of clothes! Though some scold today because you are too much seen, to my mind, you are not seen fully enough or often enough when you are beautiful." "Poetry is as necessary to comprehension as science. It is as impossible to live without reverence as it is without joy." Henry Beston found urban life insupportable in the mid-1920s; who could know the dismay he would feel in 2002, when computers, television and jet planes make the world pass in a blur! Beston is out to teach us how to slow down, to learn to live again according to the patterns and rhythms of nature. For those who are willing to read and understand, *The Outermost House* remains a haven of peace and beauty.

When I was about 10 years old, My father took me on a hike down Coast Guard Beach to see the Outermost House. It seemed tiny, and I wasn't sure why we walked all that way to see it. Years later, the house is gone (washed away in a nor'easter), but I understand why we took that walk. In the Outermost House, Henry Beston vividly describes the beauty of the outer beach that still exists over 70 years later. The harshness of winter storms, the magic of the wildlife and the sounds of the shorebirds are thoughtfully reflected in this classic chronicle of life on old Cape Cod.

Henry Beston on the trail of Thoreau's great hike along the cape stays to capture if he can "the very psyche of animals" and rises to metaphysical levels with the greatest command of the English language. Nature exists, he finds, and "creation is here and now." Everything acts, and acts characteristically, and in detailing their interactions he discovers that he is in them also. Outermost house leads inevitably to innermost house.

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