

1970

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Dear Ted:

ISLAND YEAR is a fine book, in some ways even better than ISLAND IN THE SOUND. It is not as human, or as varied, but it is marvellously concrete and deals with an important theme. It will become an important informal guide. There are marvellous passages of description and anecdote, and wise observations, all set down in Hazel Heckman's distinctive voice, and with clarity.

There are, however, some things I think Hazel may want to change after she has had an opportunity to stand back from the work and look at it. In the first place, there's the beginning. For me the airplane device doesn't work, and I think I bring a special sympathy and knowledge to the subject. I was put off by the opening and it delayed my reading of the rest of the book. I've thought about the problem a lot (It's one of the reasons I've been so long in getting this report to you) and I hope I see what went wrong. I believe that Hazel wrote the first part last, after becoming aware of the sub-theme of conservation which threads through the book. I suspect she wrote the opener as a means of explaining and justifying the anti-development passages. Such an apologia isn't necessary, or even helpful. It seems to me bad art -- the only real flaw in the book.

I suggest that the book would be better if the opening pages were a simple and lyric statement of the Island condition: where it is, what it looks like, physical details. Just as a reporter shouldn't assume his reader knows who the mayor or president is, Hazel shouldn't assume all readers of YEAR had read, or remember if they did, the details of ISLAND IN THE SOUND. They need the stage setting.

