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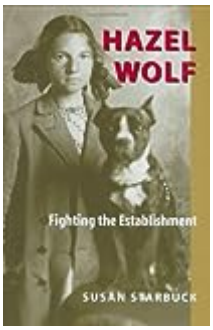

Susan Starbuck. *Hazel Wolf: Fighting the Establishment.* Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2002. xvi + 276 pp. $29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-295-98222-9.

Reviewed by Maril Hazlett (Independent Scholar)

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A Wolf's Tale

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For twenty years, historian Susan Starbuck and activist Hazel Wolf collaborated on this account, an annotated, autobiographical collection of stories about Wolf's life. Distilled from more than two hundred taped hours of conversation, the result is a unique book suited especially well for adoption in women's studies, environmental history, and U.S. history courses. At the time of her death in January 2000, Hazel Wolf (born in 1898 as Hazel Anna Cummings Anderson) was best known for her herculean efforts as a grassroots environmental organizer based out of the Pacific Northwest. During her career as an environmental activist–begun only after her retirement in the early 1960s–Wolf helped influence several major episodes in environmental politics.

However, environmentalist was only the most recent activist incarnation in Wolf's long life. Her mother had worked as a secretary for the radical labor organization International Workers of the World (IWW), and often took young Hazel to its meetings. Between World Wars I and II, Wolf (by then a single, working mother on public assistance) became involved with the Communist Party and labor issues. Eventually, she found a position as a legal secretary for a civil liberties lawyer. As a result of her political activities, during the 1940s and 1950s Wolf fought a fourteen-year battle against deportation. Throughout her entire life, Wolf participated in struggles for social as well as environmental justice.

Starbuck first met Wolf in 1980, as part of a project to record oral histories for the Women's Heritage Project at the University of Washington. As Starbuck put it, "the usual two-hour oral history format hardly scratched the surface of [Wolf's] life" (p. ix). Instead, the project took years. During the long process, Starbuck, in effect, helped Wolf to write the autobiography that Wolf would not slow down long enough to write herself. Not only did Wolf remain the nerve center of an extensive network of environmental activists, but until the age of eighty-seven, she still took her grandchildren on extended camping trips. During the first decade of Starbuck and Wolf's acquaintance, Wolf also made five trips to Nicaragua, where she was a staunch supporter of the Sandanistas. Aghast at Ronald Reagan's environmental policies, Wolf considered a run for president as well. However, amongst her

myriad other activities, Wolf did find time to help edit Starbuck's evolving manuscript.

The result is an unconventional but successful merging of biography and autobiography. Part of its success appears to be due to the non-traditional relationship between author and subject. Wolf and Starbuck appear to have developed a unique, supportive, working relationship, handling issues of objectivity, distance, and memory as they went. Divided into six sections, the book resonates with Wolf's voice and stories–always told to inspire, and usually ending in a punch line. Starbuck's narrative, introductions, and footnotes add structure and depth.

Unmistakably, on the surface, this book focuses on the public Hazel Wolf–her motivations and strategies as a citizen vitally concerned with social and environmental justice. In the variety of stories Starbuck has chosen to include, however, poignant wafts of the private Hazel Wolf emerge as well. Locked into her format of triumphant short stories, Wolf herself often seems unable or unwilling to acknowledge her own personal depths. In drawing the material together into a book, Starbuck does manage to suggest this more intimate dimension.

The book begins with Wolf's early years, a section that contains the most emotional and often ambivalent material in the collection. Wolf was born in Victoria, British Columbia, in March 1898, of an American mother and a Scottish immigrant. At the time, American women were presumed to lose their citizenship if they married a citizen of another country; this point would later become a major issue in Wolf's deportation case. Wolf's father died when she was five, leaving her mother responsible for three small children.

Determined to keep her family together, Wolf's mother cobbled together all sorts of jobs–housekeeping, factory work, secretarial work, and taking in prostitutes as boarders. While her mother worked during the day, Wolf and the neighborhood children ran wild in Victoria, swimming, romping, and playing tricks on the tourists. For the most part they lived in poverty, but when Wolf's mother could afford it, she sent Wolf to a private Catholic school. For years, Wolf moved between St. Anne's and several different public schools. Along the way she learned to become a chameleon, easing in and out of different social classes.

When talking about these memories, and people in her life long dead, Wolf reveals the most about her private self. In particular, the many different stories about her mother add up to an intricate picture of the woman and the painful pressures that poverty placed on women in the early twentieth century. Wolf's own childhood experiences, as well as witnessing her mother's struggles, ingrained a lifelong awareness of how the limitations of bias and gender roles shaped women's lives. Wolf always recognized cultural constraints on women, and constantly chafed under, flouted, ignored, or circumvented them.

Wolf did not directly link gender oppression, however, to the public establishments that she would fight throughout the later years of her life. As she commented, "I'd heard about suffragettes, and I wasn't tremendously interested, but I've fought my little individual battles all my life" (p. 18). These battles included refusing to scream like a girl; holding herself to athletic standards of men, not women; repulsing unwanted sexual advances from the husband of a good friend; and eventually advocating more important roles for women in the environmental movement.

At times, Wolf also found it worthwhile to exploit traditional gender categories. For example, during her long activist and professional career, Wolf almost always acted as secretary, taking minutes and keeping books. "My mother was a secretary," she said. "My granddaughter is a secretary. We make a long line of secretaries" (p. 219). The traditionally female post suited Wolf because–even though it held less status–the very breadth of the job description meant more freedom to maneuver within the group.

In addition, Wolf also often depended on the support of women-centered communities, from the nuns who taught her to the prostitutes who constituted her mother's boarders. When she was a young, single mother in Seattle she and her daughter boarded at a convent. "I don't know why more mothers don't board," she reflected. "They'd have much more time with their children and not be interrupted with all this housekeeping business" (p. 320). Later in the Audubon Society she made many close female friends, people with whom she hiked and went on long wilderness trips. Still, Wolf avoided all-female organizations, even though she was "very proud of NOW and the League of Women's Voters. [But] I like to be in an integrated organization to fight for women's rights" (p. 327).

Marriage was one of the traditional gender roles that Wolf rejected, and she also characterized herself as an unconventional mother. Before deciding marriage was not for her, she tried it twice. Her daughter, Nydia, was

from her first marriage. Leaving Nydia with her mother, Hazel Wolf immigrated to Seattle in 1921, looking for work. In Canada, the Depression had begun in 1919, just after the end of World War I. Wolf later brought Nydia to Seattle, and while on public assistance, finished her own high school degree and went to college. Wolf wanted to become a social worker, but she also studied advanced economics and became familiar with the works of Marx and Engels, an intellectual heritage from which she drew for the rest of her life. When the Depression began in the United States, Wolf became deeply involved with the Communist Party, which, in Seattle, was one of the major champions of workers' rights.

Wolf's life as a Communist is the most fascinating section of the book. Wolf found organizing workers to be an exhilarating form of applied social work. She loved the Communist Party because it was all about "action! ... fighting the establishment!" (p. 82). In addition, Wolf found herself in sympathy with the Communists because of their bias against the middle class. "I never saw [a middle class person], but I didn't like them," she remembered. "I had a kind of mythical idea of what they looked like–big portly people, bankers, with large stomachs, disagreeable-looking people. I never knew I was going to grow up and be one" (p. 83). Influenced by her working-class background and her experiences in the labor movement, Wolf's thinking always revolved around class. As she once commented, "[t]he whole thing is the haves against the have-nots, isn't it?" (p. 118). This perception would also shape her approach to environmental issues.

With the end of World War II, and the fragmentation of the Communist Party and organized labor, Wolf ended up working as a legal secretary for a civil rights attorney. Beginning in 1949, she and her employer also fought a fourteen-year battle against her threatened deportation, because of her political past and the rise of McCarthyism. Her struggle against deportation proved to be a major turning point in Wolf's life. She had always been an organizer–a ringleader of kids in her neighborhood, a force in women's athletics, and an advocate for workers and the Communist party–but her long trials with the INS clarified her ideas on social justice, and the importance of fighting the "establishment." Wolf's ultimate allegiance was not to her nation's institutions, but to its ideals of civil liberty. She also never confused people with the institutions they served; for example, she made friends with many of the immigration judges and agents who handled her case.

The book's title, however, somewhat oversimplifies Wolf's connection to the establishment. Starbuck takes Wolf's definition of the establishment at face value. In fact, Wolf's relations with the political powers were more complex. During these years of countless courtroom appearances, Wolf learned not only how to fight the establishment, but also how to navigate and survive it. Very much a creature of structure and order, Wolf also came to depend on the establishment's rules and procedures for ensuring democratic process. For example, later in her environmentalist years, Wolf was appalled to find that some people found *Robert's Rules of Order* to be oppressive.

The last third of the book focuses on Wolf's environmental activities. After her retirement as a legal secretary, Wolf served as the secretary of the Seattle Audubon chapter for thirty-five years, and organized twenty-one additional chapters. She also led the Federation of Western Outdoors Clubs, a coalition of hiking and outdoor clubs on the West Coast. Always, Wolf focused on building coalitions among various groups with environmental concerns. In particular, she was successful in linking environmental groups with various northwestern Indian tribes. For example, she used this role when advocating for the famous 1974 Boldt decision, which allowed the Indian tribes of Washington State 50 percent of the harvestable salmon running through their traditional waters, in opposing the Northern Tier Pipeline, and in fighting the Grand Coulee Dam.

As a result of her environmental activities, Wolf became involved in the peace and anti-nuclear movements. "What's the use of saving all this wilderness," she asked, "and what's the use of having this clean air, if nuclear bombs are going to be thrown around? National security can no longer be defined in terms of military security, only in terms of environmental security" (p. 214). Wolf's environmental activities also represented a new stage in learning how to interact with the establishment–the world of congressional hearings, testimony, and amicus briefs. Often, she had to negotiate around the environmental establishment as well.

Wolf's forty years of intensive involvement in environmentalism does not distill easily into this condensed format. Wolf directed Starbuck's focus on Wolf's environmental contributions, and the resulting topical approach might be confusing for someone unfamiliar with the general chronology of the environmental movement. The movement and its members did change greatly during Wolf's years of participation. Helpfully, Starbuck em-

phasizes that Wolf's unifying approach was especially important in light of environmentalism's often divided and contentious membership. In many ways, Wolf argued for the environmental justice agenda before it coalesced into a separate movement in the 1980s.

Wolf lived frugally in her old age, as she had throughout her life. "I can't afford medical examinations," she said. "I can't buy pills. I can't get sick, because I have no insurance. I go to the beauty school and get my permanent waves for fifteen dollars with a senior citizen's discount–that includes haircut, wave set, the whole bit" (p. 222). Wolf used all of her savings to travel. During the 1980s, she became very involved with the Sandanistas in Nicaragua. Years before controversies over NAFTA, the IMF, and the World Bank made mainstream environmentalists aware of these issues, Wolf was concerned about the global nature of environmental problems. She always linked social and environmental justice, and was especially critical of the class biases in environmentalism. Since Wolf's story provides a detailed example of environmental involvement that comes out of the working class and labor, rather than the middle class and Progressivism, this account is important for environmental history.

In the last sections of the book, Starbuck carefully illuminates Wolf's thinking about nature, which are valuable. For example, in comparison to many white environmental activists, Wolf held somewhat unconventional views on wilderness. "Hiking is not my number one priority. I'm a kind of heretic. In fact, I wouldn't care if nobody ever went into the wilderness, including myself, much as I like to. There are some places we just don't belong" (p. 215). Like Rachel Carson, Wolf questioned humans' domination of nature. In contrast, Wolf drew on communist thinking for this critique. "Nature is everything," Wolf often explained in her speeches. "Everything is nature–the stars, you and me, mice and everything, including the big bang. A little over a hundred years ago, Frederick Engels wrote that we don't rule nature like a conqueror over foreign people, but with flesh, blood, brain, we belong to nature and exist in its midst. We have the advantage over other living things by being able to understand nature's laws. Otherwise, we're just one of the species" (p. 216).

During her life, Wolf crossed many boundaries between classes and cultures. Likewise, the story of her life crosses the boundaries in historical disciplines. The sheer length of her life and breadth of her political involvement make *Hazel Wolf* an excellent book to assign for the last half of U.S. survey courses; its format of engaging short stories would certainly capture the attention of introductory-level students. In addition, Starbuck's sensitivity to issues of women's history and environmental history in constructing the narrative makes the book a good choice for either of these courses.

It is a mark of the book's success that after finishing it, one can be impressed with its achievements while still yearning for a full-length, in-depth biography of Hazel Wolf. She was a much-loved and respected figure, and Wolf's family and friends will doubtless guard her legacy very closely. However, a biography must (and surely someday will) be written. Only that format could do full justice to exploring what a pivotal figure Wolf was in the context of environmentalism. In addition, the approach of environmental biography–recovering Wolf's intimate connection with nature, one that extended from wilderness to the built, urban environment, where she spent so much of her life–could also help us further understand the richness of the person that Hazel Wolf was. She lived a remarkable life, and we could all learn from more of its analysis.