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THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY, PH.D., 1978

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1978
A SECULAR PILGRIMAGE: NATURE, PLACE, AND MORALITY IN THE POETRY OF WENDELL BERRY

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

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********

The Ohio State University

1978

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To My Parents

"A man always overshadows what he sees, his presence belonging to its mystery. So all his ideas fall short."

-Wendell Berry
No doubt, it was only a coincidence that a young writer, who was to become one of the foremost proponents of the pastoral in America, published his first book of poems in the same year that Leo Marx published *The Machine in the Garden*, a landmark critical work which called into question the cultural validity of the American pastoral ideal.

The year was 1964, the work *The Broken Ground*, the poet Wendell Berry. Since that time, Berry has published a large canon including five collections of essays, two novels in addition to *Nathan Coulter* published in 1960, and five volumes of poetry; and serious readers of contemporary American literature, critic and non-critic alike, have increasingly come to appreciate his work because of the belief it expresses in values "close to the heart of things," as one reviewer has put it.

Undoubtedly, Wendell Berry's growing popularity is partly the result of the growing dissatisfaction in America with our industrial technological society which involved us in the Viet Nam War in the 1960's and caused the current environmental crisis; and, undoubtedly, some of Berry's admirers have turned to him only because of the promise they find (I would say mistakenly) in his work of an ideal, simpler world apart from the pace and pollution of urban life. Indeed, that promise is present in Berry's work, and, up to a point, Berry is a poet of that "middle state" which Leo Marx believes is an evasion of
social, political, and economical realities in America; yet to dismiss Berry as a traditional pastoral poet is to fail to recognize the complexity and real meaning of his work, for he has attempted not only to write about the pastoral life and pastoral values he admires, he has also attempted to live them, a fact which we must consider in trying to understand his work. In the 1960's, Berry left New York City where he had already embarked upon a promising career as a teacher and writer to return to his native Kentucky, to the land on which he and his family now live and organically farm. Berry made that return without any of the illusions of a bucolic life of ease and abundance which have characterized so much pastoral poetry in the past, a step which he recounts in "The Return," one of his finest poems. Furthermore, as one discovers in reading the entire body of his work, the meaning of his life is hardly based upon a simple preference for the country and its values over the city.

My purpose in what follows, however, is not to evaluate the cultural significance of Wendell Berry's work, for understanding must precede evaluation. Indeed, Berry's poetry is truly pastoral, not only because his subject matter is rural and agricultural, but more importantly because, in Marx's words, his "controlling theme is a variant of the conflict between art and nature." My aim, then, in this dissertation is to trace the working out of that theme as it appears primarily in Berry's poetry, while using the novels and essays for further elucidation. Hopefully, what this dissertation will show is that Wendell Berry is truly "a poet of reality," as J. Hillis Miller has
suggested of six twentieth century writers of the generation previous to Berry's in his brilliant work of the same name.

For that reason, Chapter One, "The Art of Darkness," identifies and explores, through a close reading of many of his poems, Berry's starting point as a poet, the descent into darkness so characteristic of the poets whom Miller treats. The chapter begins with a long comparison and contrast of Berry with T. S. Eliot which serves a two-fold purpose. It attempts to place Berry in the mainstream of poetry written in English in the twentieth century by showing how similar Berry's and Eliot's concerns are; and it prepares the way for Chapter Four by suggesting how Berry's solution to the problem of art and nature is extra-literary and thus radically different from Eliot's.

Chapter Two, "A Fatal Contending," consists of an explication of two of Berry's longer poems, "The House" and "Window Poems," in which the central theme is the conflict between art and nature. The chapter also shows how Berry arrives at a temporary solution to the conflict, symbolized by the garden, the embodiment of Leo Marx's middle state between wilderness and civilization, in the former poem, and by the window in the latter.

Chapter Three, "The Farming of a Verse," is an examination of Berry's view of language and poetry as it appears primarily in his poems, but I also draw upon his novels and essays for further clarification. In this chapter, I trace the development of Berry's view of language from the optimism of his earlier work where it is one of his primary means of trying to change the world for the better to the
skepticism of his latest work where he has begun to view language and poetry as obstacles standing between himself and the world, with all the ramifications that notion has regarding the conflict between art and nature.

Chapter Four, "The Enactment of Fulfillment," the climactic chapter, is a discussion of how Berry enacts his vision and attempts to resolve the conflict between art and nature, not in literature, but in his life through his deepening relationship with the land he farms. In this chapter, I broaden the focus to include the novels and essays equally with the poems.

Chapter Five, "The Disciplines of Finitude," is an analysis of the morality which surfaces in Berry's work. Here, I have tried to show, first of all, the values which Berry rejects and second, in the bulk of the chapter, the values which he embraces. Lastly, I have tried to show briefly how much of Wendell Berry's morality is consonant with the values of primitive peoples.

I would like to thank my advisor Professor John Muste and my readers Professors Patrick Mullen and Anthony Libby for their careful reading of each chapter and for their astute suggestions. I would also like to thank my typist Phyllis Ford.

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CHAPTER I: THE ART OF DARKNESS

"The earth is the genius of our life."

Like T. S. Eliot, Wendell Berry has embarked upon a poetic journey whose starting point is the Wasteland. Throughout his poems, novels, and essays, Berry's view that men have made a horrible mess of the world is apparent again and again. In his poetry, more often than not, Berry communicates that view, either directly as he does in his essays, or through an emphasis upon rural life as opposed to urban blight, or through a contrast of human design with natural process. In "The Aristocracy," for example, a poem from Berry's first collection The Broken Ground,1 he reaches a height of cynicism rare in his work when he contrasts the world which might have been with the world that is.

The first section of the poem describes a country estate which the speaker finds almost like paradise:

the fine light
prepared in the taut statuary of the oaks;
venerable churches of muted brick;
Greek porches presiding at the ends
of approaches; delicate fanlights over doorways
delicate and symmetrical as air,... (BG, p. 33).

All the place needs "to be Paradise," Berry writes, "is populace."
The person who appears in the second part of the poem, however, does
not complete the scene transforming it to Paradise, rather she is "a rich, fat, selfish, spavined, ugly, old/bitch, airing her cat." The human presence with all its potential for transforming the earth to a kind of Eden has, as we discover in so many of Wendell Berry's poems, sadly and ironically eliminated that possibility just as Adam and Eve did in the original Garden.

Each of Berry's five subsequent collections of poetry contains poems which express the way in which men, particularly Americans, have turned and continue to turn the world into a wasteland, destroying all possibility of the paradise they might have created through careful husbandry of the land. In "Dark with Power," a poem about the Vietnam War from Openings, his second collection, Berry laments how Americans have been invaders not only of distant soils, but of their own land as well, accomplishing with a vengeance what foreign military forces have yet to do, "leaving/deserts where forests were, scars where there were hills" (O, p. 27). The second stanza of the poem, in lines which hauntingly echo the strains of "America the Beautiful," reveals the extent of man's destruction:

On the mountains, on the rivers,  
on the cities, on the farmlands  
we lay weighted hands, our breath  
potent with the death of all things (O, p. 27).

Though they are not the sole malefactors, Americans have created an extreme situation in which they think they are no longer dependent upon the world for their existence. Rather the world is dependent
upon humans for its existence: "The world dangles from us/while we gaze" (C, p. 27).

In other poems, Berry laments how "The cities have forgot the earth," how "men's negligence and their/fatuous ignorance and abuse/have made a hardship of this earth...," how "The world as men have made it is an ungainly/hardship that comes of forgetting/there is other life than men have made...," how "one must think/-it is the trial of the time-/that the ground may be despoiled/and paved to expedite the vain,/the greedy, and the merely bored." All of Berry's poems in one way or another assume the world laid waste by man.

While Berry identifies numerous reasons for why men have ravaged the earth, their selfishness, greed, ignorance, and intelligence to name a few, ultimately for Berry as for Eliot, the cause lies in what Berry calls the loss of immanence, in the words of J. Hillis Miller the inability "to experience God as both immanent and transcendent." In *A Continuous Harmony*, Berry himself describes that loss of immanence:

I begin, then, with the assumption that perhaps the great disaster of human history is one that happened to or within religion: that is, the conceptual division between the holy and the world, the excerpting of the Creator from the creation (CH, p. 6).

That loss, as David Tarbet has observed, assumes "an initial
alienation and requires that the poet's quest be directed toward recovering an integral link with the world."

The excerpting of the Creator from the creation has produced the spiritual and physical wasteland in which humanity finds itself today for:

If God was not in the world, then obviously the world was a thing of inferior importance, or of no importance at all. Those who were disposed to exploit it were thus free to do so. And this split in public attitudes was inevitably mirrored in the lives of individuals: a man could aspire to heaven with his mind and his heart while destroying the earth, and his fellow men, with his hands (CH, p. 7).

At times, Berry is exceedingly critical of humanity. More and more, the world, especially America, is becoming a wasteland because, motivated by either conquest or greed or unmotivated and therefore indifferent to the world around them, people have made it so:

The rift between soul and body, the Creator and the creation, has admitted the entrance into the world of the machinery of the world's doom. We no longer feel ourselves threatened by the God-made doomsday of Revelation, or by the natural world's-end foreseen by science. We face an apocalypse of our own making - a man-made cosmic terror (CH, p. 8).

Berry's wasteland, however, is no mere literary objectification of a deeply felt spiritual poverty as it is for T. S. Eliot, nor is his way of setting the world aright very much like Eliot's. Hillis Miller believes that Eliot solves the problems of bifurcation,
fragmentation, exclusion, and deprivation "by his discovery that the Incarnation is here and now" (PR, p. 11); yet the way in which Eliot recovers immanence is a product of the conquering mind, of what Miller describes as "the devouring nothingness of consciousness [which] is the will to power over things" (PR, p. 4). Despite his discovery of a spiritual power external to himself, in Eliot's poetry the physical world remains subordinate to the spiritual world, to poetry, and to the self. As Miller has written, "These affirmations (of Four Quartets and the plays) are both a new means of personal salvation and a new definition of the role of poetry" (PR, p. 184).

For his solution, Eliot turns not to the physical world, to the earth as Berry does, but to the heavens and to the self. His solution is personal, and his relationship with the world, if it has changed at all, has weakened as the increasingly abstract nature of his poetry suggests. Even in section three of "Ash Wednesday," a crucial poem in Eliot's march toward Christianity, where he writes favorably about the external world, he has removed himself from it and raised himself above it. Already he has left behind the twisted shapes and faces, the demons of the second stair:

At the first turning of the third stair
Was a slotted window bellied like the fig's fruit
And beyond the hawthorn blossom and a pasture scene
The broadbacked figure drest in blue and green
Enchanted the maytime with an antique flute.
Blown hair is sweet, brown hair over the mouth blown,
Lilac and brown hair;
Distraction, music of the flute, stops and steps of
the mind over the third stair,
Fading, fading; strength beyond hope and despair
Climbing the third stair.10

What is particularly disturbing here is that what the speaker sees
through the slotted window he describes as a scene and the music he
hears is a distraction. While he speaks lovingly of hair, he is still
a long way from appreciating a flesh and blood human being.

What did change was Eliot's conscious way of viewing the world,
and consciousness and art, insofar as they are able to discover the
true pattern, God's order in history, are what unify Eliot's world.
As Joseph Campbell has observed in his discussion of the happy ending
in mythology: "The objective world remains what it was, but, because
of a shift in emphasis within the subject, is beheld as though
transformed."11 As the inner condition changed because of Eliot's
conversion, so did the poems. They became more abstract of necessity
for, while the poet's inner wasteland had bloomed, the external
world remained arid and decadent. In his early career, Eliot could
find suitable objective correlatives corresponding to his inner state
for they were conspicuous everywhere he looked. Later, in order to
objectify the inner condition, he had to resort to fragmented or
worn-out symbols like the rose in Four Quartets, and to abstractions,
for he could not find suitable correlatives corresponding to his
changed inner state.

Thus, the characters in the early poems, objectifications of
Eliot's own consciousness, like Prufrock, the Hollow Men, and the
Magi, who are caught between two worlds, become, with the certainty of consciousness, the result of religious conversion. Becket in *Murder in the Cathedral* who, though caught between sin and sin, is able, by an act of faith, to resolve the polarities; or, more abstractly, they become the still point of the turning world in *Four Quartets*. The certainty of consciousness which enables Becket to die suggests the way in which Eliot abdicates personal responsibility toward the world. Granted Becket places his faith in a reality external to himself, yet that very act absolves him of any responsibility for his death and soothes his conscience, which had been thrown into turmoil, by the fourth tempter especially. What soothes Becket is his recognition of and faith in God's pattern, determined long before his birth. He can have no control over it. He can only discover it and resign himself to its workings. Thus, it is not the martyr who chooses God, but God who chooses the martyr. Having discerned, as Miller writes, that "The true pattern is God's order of history, an objective rather than subjective design organized around the central event of the Incarnation" (*PR*, p. 187), Eliot makes disappear any part man might have had in making the world a wasteland; and, more importantly, he eliminates any possibility of a vision which might begin to correct the damage. The world, when spiritually transformed in consciousness to the point where the material and spiritual intersect, is no longer a wasteland. It is a place of conversion rather than transformation. Before his conversion, there
was little Eliot could do of a practical nature to change the world except, perhaps, to advertise the situation. After his conversion, he saw little need to do anything.

Thus, even after his conversion, Eliot remains alienated from the physical world which remains a wasteland except insofar as he converts it within his own consciousness. As Miller suggests, Nature is never an avenue to God for Eliot (PR, p. 141), and God's pattern in reality is brought into being for humans only through art (PR, p. 144), not through an attention to the processes in nature or the attempt to right the damage man has inflicted upon the physical world. For Eliot, poetry becomes a kind of spiritual divining rod for discovering God's pattern in history. Presumably, once one has discerned the pattern, one either aligns oneself with it or resigns oneself to it, but the important point remains that for Eliot that pattern is primarily a spiritual rather than a natural design.

Like Eliot, Wendell Berry discovers patterns external to the self, objective rather than subjective designs, but he finds them not through art or solely in history as Eliot does, though art and history are important to Berry. Rather he finds them through attention to the natural world and its processes. While his starting point is the loss of immanence and the resulting spiritual and physical wasteland, Berry is always careful to distinguish between man's separation from the world, and the continuing unity of all things. That unity is cause for both hope and despair. Despite his alienation from the natural
world which causes man to perceive the world as fragmented, and which is his own doing as Berry points out in "The Morning News":

It is man, the inventor of cold violence, death as waste, who has made himself lonely among the creatures, and set himself aside from creation, so that he cannot labor in the light of the sun with hope, or sit at peace in the shade of any tree...

(F: HB, p. 19)

man is still related to nature in essential ways which he frequently does not understand—whether he chooses to recognize it or not. As Berry remarks in The Long-Legged House: "Man cannot be independent of nature. In one way or another he must live in relation to it, and there are only two alternatives." Those alternatives are to live like the frontiersmen, careless, dominating, destroying; or like Thoreau, in and with nature as much as possible.

Two poems from Openings illustrate these alternatives. One can relate to nature like the "violent brainless man" in section four of "The Return" who spends his weekend getting away from it all:

tyling his yacht here at the shore,
playing his radio for fear
of deep water and the dark
and the silence of his thoughts,
strewing over the rocks his imperishable
aluminum and plastic garbage?
-more rubbish in one night
than all the Shawnees made (O, p. 23).
That man is certainly alienated from the world as is evidenced by his disregard for nature; yet he still has a relationship with and an impact upon the world, however careless and destructive it may be. Or one can seek a harmony with nature like the fisherman in "The Quiet" who for hours "sits there/in his boat, lines in the water,/ motionless and silent/in the cool wind as a heron..." (C, p. 8) so that finally: "The country has taken on/the quiet of the fisherman/ fishing alone" (C, p. 8). Not by accident does Berry compare the fisherman with the heron. As we shall see later on in this chapter, in poem after poem, Berry holds up plants, animals, and trees as examples of the type of relationship he would like to have with nature.

"The Quiet," however, is not the simple poem it appears to be on the surface. While the end of the poem seems to suggest, in a way similar to Stevens' "Anecdote of the Jar," that the chaotic wilderness orders itself around man and his works, in reality Berry establishes a unity between the fisherman and the country possible only because the fisherman went into the wilderness unobtrusively and sat "motionless and silent" for hours, attentive to and receptive of its processes. He put himself in harmony with nature by adapting to its ways, by becoming like the heron. The modern wasteland, then, is paradoxically the result of alienation and of unity: of man's alienation from creation and of the continuing unity of the creation to whose patterns and processes civilization, the product of human consciousness, has made men oblivious.
Wendell Berry's hope of saving a ruined world lies not in the vast deserts of the self nor in heaven, but in the external world itself and in the possibility that man might begin to live in harmony with it. In poem after poem, Berry affirms the value of the natural world, its independence from the mind of man, and even its superiority to man who is part of it. In section fifteen of "Window Poems," a long series of poems from *Openings*, he declares:

The earth is greater than man.
To speak of it the mind must bend (*O*, p. 50).

These are not the words of a man whose mind transforms the world to suit his own preconceptions of what the world should be, nor are they those of a poet who views the world as nothing more than the place where God's designs, discoverable only through art, unravel; yet the second line quoted above suggests the way a change in consciousness is just as important for Berry as it is for Eliot. For Berry, the world, both physical and spiritual, changes slowly for the better in direct proportion to the extent to which humans bend to live in harmony with it. That is the only kind of wholesome change humanity is capable of making. Thus, while Eliot finds his solution out of a revulsion for the world which is redeemed from chaos only through the intervention of the spiritual, Wendell Berry's solution is based upon an attraction for the world which will be saved only if man quits seeking control over it and brings his consciousness into harmony with its processes. For Berry, it is not consciousness which changes the world, but the
world which changes consciousness, or the process might be best
described as an interplay of the two. They affect and change each
another, although the change in consciousness must come first.

While that change in consciousness which leads to a human vision
as much in harmony with natural processes as possible is vitally
important, for Wendell Berry it is never enough. Berry explains the
importance of not only having but of also enacting vision in his
long essay "Discipline and Hope":

Abstractions move toward completion only in the particu-
larity of enactment or of use. Their completion
is only in that mysterious whole that Sir Albert Ho-
ward and others have called the wheel of life. A
vision or a principle or a discovery or a plan is there-
fore only half a discipline, and, practically speaking,
it is the least important half (CH, p. 126).

Wendell Berry seeks to enact his vision in two intimately related
areas: as a writer and as a farmer. The latter is what distinguishes
Berry from Eliot. Haunted by both the specter and the reality of the
wasteland, Berry does not leave it for the gods on Parnassus to make
the necessary changes. He turns earthward, both in his poetry and his
life, and tries, by slowly conforming himself to the processes of
nature, to begin the labor of healing. Berry does not discover those
processes through his art though he frequently writes about them.
Rather he discovers them in his life. For that reason, he characterizes
his life and his work as a secular pilgrimage:
It is secular because it takes place outside of, or without reference to, the institutions of religion, and it does not seek any institutional shrine or holy place; it is in search of the world. But it is a pilgrimage nevertheless because it is a religious quest. It does not seek the world of inert materiality that is postulated both by the heaven oriented churches and by the exploitive industries; it seeks the world of the creation, the created world in which the Creator, the formative and quickening spirit, is still immanent and at work (CH, p. 6).

The differences between Eliot and Berry then are essentially of direction and responsibility. In his search for God, Eliot turns away from the world to gaze at the heavens. Recognizing that man is chiefly responsible for the abyssmal condition of the world because he has turned his back upon it, Berry begins a pilgrimage in search of it whose ultimate goal is the well-being, the "at-one-ment" of the world and man. We can best summarize the difference between Eliot and Berry by observing which of the four elements, earth, air, fire, and water, each values most. The Eliot of Four Quartets, the converted Eliot, values air and fire. Throughout that poem, as it leaps from Burnt Norton to East Coker to The Dry Salvages to Little Gidding, we feel a sense of spaciousness; and, of course, fire is a central symbol throughout. Berry, on the other hand, values, not what he calls "the reckless elements of air and fire" (F; HB, p. 32), but earth and water which are vital images throughout his work.

The first step of Wendell Berry's secular pilgrimage plunges him into darkness. This exploration of the dark is vitally important because only through an experience and an acceptance of the limitation
inherent in reality which darkness symbolizes, the blotting out of all vision, all design, can men hope to live, and die, fruitfully and meaningfully. In Berry's poetry, the limitation inherent in reality is represented in different ways. Sometimes it is man's inability to know, sometimes his inability to foresee the effects of his actions, sometimes his inability to control his destiny, sometimes his inability to protect those most dear to him, sometimes it is the loss of possibilities; but, far and way, limitation is represented most frequently in Berry's poetry by death, the most terrifying reality man finds in the natural world when he turns to face it.

For Berry, man's alienation from the world, his denial or at least his ignorance of the unity of creation which he has set himself apart from, is a result of his fear of death because to acknowledge that unity forces him to acknowledge death, his own death, as inevitable. The will to power over things, then, in its most extreme form is man's hoped-for conquest of death, the greatest enemy of his absolute will. Since man has been unable to achieve that dominion, he has turned his back on death so that when it comes, as it must, it is meaningless and, therefore, terrifying.

A large number of the poems in Wendell Berry's first collection, The Broken Ground, as well as poems from all of the subsequent collections, attempt to explore the darkness, to accept limitation, and to integrate death as a fitting and meaningful part of the processes of nature. This exploration of darkness and death is Berry's attempt, to
use the language of Hillis Miller, to expose the nihilism latent in our culture so that it might be possible "to go beyond it by understanding it." It is Berry's "escape through darkness" (PR, pp. 5, 7).

Significantly, The Broken Ground begins with "Elegy," a poem in five parts about the death of his father. The view of nature presented throughout much of this poem is ambivalent because not only is death related to nature, nature itself is depicted as destructive. The problem, then, for Berry is to see nature in a positive light. In the first section, the speaker describes the day of his father's demise, a cold, snowy day, a day of absence and silence, a day in which "Over a flood of snow sight came back/Empty to the mind" (BG, p. 1). Here, snow and whiteness, the blotting out of the landscape, the absence of bird song are not merely meant to be images paralleling the dying man's condition. Rather the speaker holds them, and presumably nature, responsible, in some unspecified way, for the death of his father: "It was this storm of silence shook out his ghost." The line is even more significant, however, because it suggests the way in which the speaker refuses to see his father's death as an isolated event, divorced from the external world.

Section two describes the beginning of the night-long ritual of waking the dead, a significant ceremony in each of Berry's first two novels Nathan Coulter and A Place on Earth. The speaker's father, now "unshapen in a night of snow" as a result of his death, "moves the
dark to wholeness," a process which will be complete presumably only when we all are dead. The line hints at Berry's fatalism - that the inevitable end of all is darkness and death - and it also suggests how men while they are alive and conscious stand apart from the unity of all things. But while the suggestion is that nature destroys the speaker's father, it is only that destruction which makes full communion possible. Through his death, the dead man has become more like the land. He is unshapen now, and, therefore, less separated from the earth. The first line of section two further reinforces this idea. There the speaker says that it is the mourners who sleep not the dead man, "he only wakes." In death, he is waking to full communion with the earth.

Section three describes the day of burial, presumably the morning after the wake of section two. As it begins, we learn that the snow of the previous day has turned to rain; but the speaker is careful to observe that it is a winter, not a spring rain. Here, Berry's ambivalent attitude toward nature and death, hinted at in the first two sections, becomes clearer: "Under the mounds, below/The weather's moving, the numb dead know/No fitfulness of wind." This is scant consolation, however, for they are dead as is the speaker's father even though the family has "adorned the shuck of him/With flowers as for a bridal, burned/Lamps about him, held death apart/Until the grave should mound it whole." The dead man is a shuck, like the outer covering of nuts or corn (the word is of Indian origin), but the bridal image is neither bitter nor ironic nor incongruous for he is
going to his final marriage, a union with the world through death which will help bring forth the fruit of another season. Just as the farmer plows under the remnant of the season's crop to enrich the soil, so goes the shuck of the speaker's father into the earth. Something is lost, but something, also, is gained.

Section three concludes with a meditation on the rain which has been falling throughout. Here again Berry's ambivalence is apparent. The speaker suggests again how destructive the elements can be for the rain "breaks the corners/Of our father's house, quickens/On the downslope to noise." But he turns quickly to a suggestion of the positive qualities of the elements, especially the river "that cut/ His fields their shape and stood them dry." And after the absence and silence of the earlier sections of the poem, the noise the rain makes, even though the direction is downward, suggests the constructive rather than the destructive side of nature.

Only in section four, however, does the speaker feel the full impact of his father's death. In it, he perceives a loss of connections, particularly in the elements: "River and earth and sun and wind disjoint,/Over his silence flow apart." Even the perfection the speaker sees in the process his father has just completed has the effect of making him realize to what extent the living stand apart from that perfection, from the unity which the dead man alone shares, to which humans can add nothing. That experience of loss and separation, however, is the speaker's alone. It is his perception.
Finally, in the last section of "Elegy," the speaker is able to accept the death of his father for what it is—a loss to the living, perhaps, but a union with the world. The central image here is the tree in which the speaker sees the mystical unity of all things: of wind, water, earth, darkness, his father, life, and death:

The shape of the wind is a tree  
Bending, spilling its birds.  
From the cloud to the stone  
The rain stands tall,  
Columned into his darkness (BG, p. 3).

The tree is the object in nature in which all things combine. It gives shape to the wind and connects sky and earth. More importantly, it is columned into the dead man's darkness. It has not only made the speaker's father part of the world, it is tangible proof that he and his death are the source of growth, the darkness out of which the rain raises the column of the tree. The death of the speaker's father remains partly a loss because in it the living have lost a connection with the past into a unity which they do not understand and so the speaker is forced to conclude: "Our remembering moves from a different place."

In "Diagon," the poem immediately following "Elegy," nature, darkness, and death are closely linked again. Here, however, Berry has brought the destructive force of nature, figured by the flooding river, more to the fore. In fact, the flood is the pervading image of the poem. Once again, the attempt here is to see death for what it
is and again Berry's conclusions are much like those of "Elegy."
While nature appears at times to be horribly disruptive and destructive
to no real end, that violence is only part of the ongoing life of the
world. Only from the point of view of humans whose lives nature
sometimes threatens is that violence extraordinary. Realizing this,
Wendell Berry is able to come more fully to terms with the reality of
his own death.

Section one of "Diagon" begins with a description of things gone
awry in nature. The channel of the river is riven, sunken trees
swaying below the surface "fledge no light," and "The current/In its
troughed motion moves the foundered dark..." (BG, p. 4); yet the tone
in this part of the poem is quiet and dispassionate rather than violent
or panicky. Despite the fact that the waters are out of bounds, the
language suggests that the situation is far from unusual.

In section two, Berry shows how men are preoccupied with and
fear the rising waters:

In their stilted houses
The river men sleep
Fitful in their sweated beds.
In their dreams fish
Enter the squared windows,
Brown water curls
Over the thresholds (BG, pp. 4 & 5).

Despite what the river men have done to keep the water out, they live
in fear and can have no assurance that they have succeeded either in
reality or in their dreams. The threat that nature will reclaim all
is omnipresent.
In this section, the speaker himself makes a literal descent into the darkness reminiscent of scenes in Conrad's fiction. There he experiences nihilism, is effaced before reality, and returns with a new understanding, having confronted a power external to himself. As the descent begins, the speaker is out on the water, presumably the flooding river of section one, checking his fishing lines as rain falls. Implicit in the description is the divorce between man and nature and the independence of nature from all human design. In fact, not only is nature, here the river, beyond human control, the speaker even assumes one important characteristic of the river, its darkness.

My blunted eyes fail  
At my hands' shape,  
Black water holds no image  
Of my face, I have become  
My shadow leaned above water (BG, p. 5).

What the speaker discovers and what he takes home with him as a result of this descent into darkness is a knowledge of his own limits. While he had thought himself the fisherman doing the catching, actually it is he who has been caught:

To the high-porched house,  
The white room composed by the waiting lamp,  
I return from the hooked night (BG, p. 5).

It is he who has been hooked by the darkness and he learns that death is not only his end, but his origin as well: "this fastening remains,
I am derived from my death, / Marked by the black river" (BG, p. 5). "Derived" is the perfect word here demonstrating the way in which Berry amplifies meaning through a sensitivity to the root meanings of words. While nature appears to be alien, threatening, destructive, a connection with man remains not only because the speaker knows the flooding, dark waters can kill him, but just as importantly because he has his origin *de rivus*, from the stream, in those same waters. Not only does the word suggest the way in which man is part of the world, it also suggests how nature is constructive as well as destructive. Not only does life originate in those waters, but the speaker as well makes a real, a second beginning through his descent into the darkness. He dies and is born again of dark water.

One other example in this section demonstrates the way in which Berry uses the resources of the language to amplify meaning. When the speaker returns from the river and the dark, he finds "The white room composed by the waiting lamp,..." Berry uses the word "composed" here not only in its most obvious sense in this context, that is, to calm, to quiet; but also in its primary sense, to make up, to fashion, to form. Implicitly, the word suggests a contrast between the natural darkness of the river and the light of the room, an artificial, man-made order which keeps out the dark. That contrast, between natural process and human design, is an increasingly important concern in Berry's poetry and fiction.

Sections three, four, and five of "Diagon" are more general affirmations of the insight of section two. By the end of the poem,
the speaker comes to an acceptance about not only himself and death, but more importantly about the life and death of the valley. Armed with the knowledge of death with which he enters morning at the end of section two, the speaker then proceeds to use that knowledge to arrive at a new, more objective view of nature in which death assumes its proper place as a part, but a part no more significant than any other, in the processes of nature.

The first step Berry takes to fit death into its proper place is a heightening, a vivid description of the impact of the flood upon the valley. In section three, after the spring floods, the river men return to their homes only to find that the water like a powerful thief has battered down the doors of their houses, broken the valley, and left in its wake a "chaos of mud/Where no foot track/Cups its shadow" (BG, p. 5). The receding waters have left a land where little trace of man, or of any other life, remains; a land where "In the crippled eyes/Of the river men/No known shape twisted/A word from their tongues" (BG, p. 6). That destruction, however, is the prelude to, or better the source of, a new beginning. As section three concludes, things in the valley are returning to "normal," the waters continue to recede, calmer now, and "the river men/Watch morning shape itself/On the drying valley,..." (BG, p. 6). In Berry's mind and in the minds of the river men, "The river's injury is its shape." The attempt in this last line of section three is to see nature as it really is. The true form of the river is not its quiet flowing inside its banks, but the flooding waters. While in the eyes of the river men, it may
seem that in the flood something extraordinary, even malevolent has occurred, that is really not the case. Nature has merely been carrying on one of its processes to which men must become accustomed.

With section four day returns to the valley forcing "the dark/To tree shapes" around the house of the speaker, and dividing river and hill. All the images here with the exception of the last one suggest a resumption of normalcy, at least from the human point of view. The wind has fallen and the river, no longer the alien, black, destructive force of the earlier sections of the poem, now "casts/A net of light" around two dead, white trees. While in section two, the black water reflected no image of the speaker's face, here:

The sky
Lies flat on the water, blue
On green, their colors together.
In green water two white clouds
Move deeply (BG, p. 7).

But despite the river having resumed its more congenial aspect, the speaker is not about to forget or lose the knowledge gained in section two, the knowledge of death. Despite the return of day, the return of vision, and the less alien nature of the waters, the speaker knows that "The point of the sun/In my eyes/Will become a darkness" (BG, p. 7). The sun has only temporarily forced the dark to the shape of trees. All human vision will ultimately end in darkness.

In the last section of "Diagon," Berry expresses the balanced, organic view of nature he and the speaker have been struggling toward.
The central metaphor he uses to present that view is the likeness he perceives between the valley so recently besieged by the flood and "A broad flower/Lying on its green curving stem." That flower is paradoxically "Complete in no season/But in its moments full-formed/As a bird flying" (BG, p. 7). The valley, the tenor of the metaphor, is no more complete or alive at the height of summer when it is in full bloom than it is in winter which "brings no closing." Even the dead seasons contribute to the growth of the flower as do darkness and death for:

At night the flower is black
Or night is another flower
Blooming on day shape (BG, p. 8).

Berry's view of the valley, and thus of nature, is that it is kinetic, organic, ever changing; and death and darkness are integral parts of that process. Thus, the valley's shape "is the shape/Of all rains" not just of the constructive rains viewed from the human perspective, the rains which bring fertility and abundance, but also of the rains which result in flooding, which destroy all that men have erected, which carry the earth away.

"Boone," one of the more important poems in The Broken Ground, also focuses upon death and nature, but with this important development: here Berry tries to suggest how the dominance of human will and its designs over instinct is a delusion which keeps man from confronting death. The poem is a monologue spoken by the legendary American
pioneer Daniel Boone in the waning years of his life when he has completed the last of his overland journeys. Late in life, he is all too well aware of the gap between what he had dreamed and the realities of his life:

I move in the descent
of days from what was dreamed
to what remains (BG, p. 13).

Though his physical sojournings are over, Boone knows that he is "not free of journeys" for his death still lies ahead of him.

The bulk of the first part of the poem, however, is devoted to Boone's recollections of the early days in virgin America. There Boone expresses how he slowly came to realize the separation between the ideals, dreams, and desires of the settlers as they ventured across a land they did not yet possess and the real goal or end of that journey; between the country they held in their minds and the reality of the country once they had possessed it:

We held a country in our minds
which, unpossessed, allowed
the encroachment of our dreams;
our vision descended like doves
at morning on valleys still blue
in the extremity of hills
until we moved in a prodigy of reckonings,
sustaining in the toil of a journey
the rarity of our desire (BG, p. 13).
What results from that passage, from the attempt to turn the ideal into the real, from the descent from the abstract to the concrete, is Boone's realization that his real goal was not the fulfillment of his dreams, but death; a realization hinted at early in the poem by Boone when:

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after nightfall when the coals of our fire
contained all that was left
of vision, my journey relinquished me
to sleep;... (BG, p. 14).
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As Boone continues his recollections of that journey, his life, his passage growing "into that country/like a vine," he realizes that it has been neither the place to which he has traveled nor the distance he has traveled which made the country known to him, but the direction, that is, toward death. That limitation has been the source of knowledge for him just as darkness was for the speaker in "Diagon." So paltry and insignificant have his accomplishments been compared to the fact of death that he would not even "recognize the way back."

Paradoxically, as the difference between the ideal life he had dreamed and the real life he has lived become more apparent to Boone, as he approaches his death, his death grows more uncertain. That it will come is clear, but now that human vision and will have paled before the world's realities, he can no longer allow himself the luxury of imagining his own death because that is an attempt to have a power over death he knows he cannot have.
I approach my death, descend
toward the last fact; it is
not so clear to me now as it once seemed;
when I hunted in the new lands
alone I could foresee
the skeleton hiding with its wound
after the fear and flesh were gone;
now
it may come as a part of sleep (BG, p. 14).

In the remainder of the poem, Boone devotes himself to viewing death,
and life, realistically. In doing so, he devalues the metaphor of life
as journey toward some goal predetermined by human will. Life is no
more of a journey toward some goal or reward than the river's flowing
is:

In winter the river hides its flowing under the ice
-even then it flows,
bearing interminably down;... (BG, p. 15).

Like the river which hides its flowing under the ice, through their
designs men try to hide the true direction of their lives from them-
selves; but, nevertheless, even then they flow "bearing interminably
down" toward death.

In what follows, Boone further supports the realization that the
direction and end of life are divorced from all human design. "Death,"
he says, "is a conjecture of the seed/and the season bear it out;..."
Here again Berry has used his favorite way of amplifying meaning for
he intends the word "conjecture" to be understood in its modern
meaning as a surmise based upon scanty evidence; in its root meaning
as a throwing together; and also in its obsolete sense as a divination, a prognostication. Once again, not satisfied with abstract statement, Berry provides Boone with a concrete example to illustrate his meaning:

The wild plum achieves its bloom, perfects the yellow center of each flower, submits to violence—extravagance too grievous for praise; there are no culminations, no requitals (BG, p. 15).

The last lines quoted above are especially important for like the last section of "Diagon," they suggest that no part of life is more important than any other. Life is without climax, without reward. The blooming, perfect flower of the wild plum is no more valuable, no more of a pinnacle than its death is. And so it is with men.

In the last three paragraphs of the poem, Boone speaks of the kind of life he would have liked to have lived and the kind of view of death and nature he would have liked to have arrived at much earlier. "Freed of distances/and dreams," that is, free of the designs of the human will, "...the mind turns back to its approaches:/what else have I known?" Boone asks. Once again he is suggesting the extent to which his life has consisted of a knowledge not of the world, but of his own mind. He recognizes that his life has been a delusion because, guided by the dreams and desires of human consciousness, he has believed it to be a journey toward some end other than death. The mind can only come near the world; and that search, prompted by consciousness,
for something other than death, "withholds the joy from what is found,..."

In the last two paragraphs of the poem, Boone opts for a life of instinct over a life of volition. He observes that kind of life in birds which

obey the leviathan flock
that moves them south,
a rhythm of the blood that survives the cold
in pursuit of summer;... (BG, p. 15).

and in the sun which

innocent of time
as the blossom is innocent of ripeness,
faithful to solstice, returns - (BG, p. 15).

Boone ends the poem with a familiar Berry wish although it is one with which neither Berry nor the reader can be entirely comfortable. Boone wants to make himself "submissive/to the weather/as an old tree,
without retrospect/of winter," (BG, p. 16) that is, at one with nature and with the elements, emptied of consciousness. Throughout Berry's poetry, that wish to bring one's life like primitive man into harmony with nature in the same way animals and trees are is a theme of increasing importance. It is a way, as Boone suggests, for him to be "obedient to darkness," and innocent of his dying; yet that desire for the unconscious existence of a tree is disturbing, at least as it is
expressed here. Can this be a viable way for a man, one whose attributes is consciousness, to be in harmony with nature? Berry also recognizes the problem not only in the way he treats with it in other poems, but in the very language of Boone himself, for his desire to bring himself into harmony with nature and death like the tree is preceded by the phrase. "If it were possible now..." Part of the impossibility, of course, is that Boone is an old man for whom any significant change would be terribly difficult, but part is also that he is a man, not a tree. Nevertheless, "Boone" concludes valuing a life of unconsciousness to the almost total negation of a willed life.

Despite the emphasis which Wendell Berry places upon death, what Morgan Speer has called his fatal singing, his intention is always to integrate death rather than to give it undue importance. This is apparent in two poems from The Broken Ground, "A Man Walking and Singing" and "Canticle" in which Berry castigates those who are preoccupied with death and darkness to the exclusion of life. The first section of the former poem expresses the extent to which death dominates the ambiance in which we live:

It is no longer necessary to sleep in order to dream of our destruction.

We take form within our death, the figures emerging like shadows in fire (BG, p. 28).

Here Berry inveighs against the purblind doomsters, those who urge "Die more lightly than live, ... Death is more gay." As we have
already seen, Berry recognizes death as a certainty and he acknowledges the danger of ignoring death, yet unlike Colonel Shaw in Lowell's "For the Union Dead," Berry, if I may change Lowell's phrasing slightly, "rejoices in man's lovely/peculiar power to choose death and live" (my italics).

The second section of the poem describes the man walking and singing, striding merrily as he goes "through the evening street/to buy bread." As he walks, he passes beneath green trees, hears birds singing, and sees a man and a woman in a window embracing. Like the song of the woman in Stevens' "An Idea of Order at Key West," the man's song consists of all he sees and hears as he walks. The man, as the speaker tells us, "walks and sings to his death,//And winter will equal spring." Even for the lovers he sees, the day will end; but the fact that the man can sing given his knowledge of human limitation and death is a kind of triumph. It makes his song heroic in a way that the mockingbird's arrogant song, sung "as though no flight/or dying could equal him" can never be.

Berry reiterates this attitude toward death in "Manifesto: The Man Farmer Liberation Front" where he urges "Be joyful/though you have considered all the facts" (COM, p. 17); and he develops it in "Testament," a poem which might be described as Berry's elegy for himself. Here he again inveighs against those who emphasize death to the exclusion of all life:
Why settle
For some know-it-all's despair
When the dead may dance to the fiddle

Hereafter, for all anybody knows? (COM, p. 41).

Yet here again he expresses as well the perfection that one achieves in death just as he did in "Elegy":

Say that my body cannot now
Be improved upon; it has no fault to show
To the sly cosmetician. Say that my flesh
Has a perfection in compliance with the grass
Truer than any it could have striven for (COM, p. 40).

Berry continues to try to see and accept death for what it is, which rules out neither sorrow nor joy. Thus he asks his relatives and friends to treat him:

even dead
As a man who has a place
To go, and something to do.
Don't muck up my face
With wax and powder and rouge
As one would prettify
An unalterable fact
To give bitterness the lie (COM, p. 42).

In "Canticle," Berry continues to attempt to see death for what it is. John Ditsky asserts that the poem repeats the stance of "Sunday Morning," but, while the poems are similar, they are not identical. Berry is not really so much concerned with the dying gods
of a worn out mythology, or the deification of man. Rather he is dismayed by those who value heavenly salvation at the expense of everything else in life, those who try to use death to justify and explain life. Berry continues to recognize the importance of accepting and integrating death, yet he is adamant that:

What death means is not this—
the spirit, triumphant in the body's fall
praising its absence, feeding on music.
If life can't justify and explain itself,
death can't justify and explain it (BG, p. 38).

Even the terrible reality of death pales before life, "A creed and a grave never did equal the life of anything." Berry attacks the priests, the representatives of institutionalized religion, whose black clothes "are turned against the frail yellow of sunlight and petal"; who "wait in their blackness to earn joy by dying." And he attacks those who follow the priests, "the mind paying its gnawed coins for the safety of ignorance."

Like Williams, Berry is content with the world and the things in it. He places little if any value in a heaven which, if it exists, has little to do with the quality of life here on earth. Berry repeats and elaborates upon this idea in A Continuous Harmony:

Some varieties of Christianity have held that one should despise the things of this world—which made it all but mandatory that they should be neglected as well. In that way men of conscience—or men who
might reasonably have been expected to be men of conscience—have been led to abandon the world, and their own posterity, to the exploiters and ruiners. So exclusively focused on the hereafter, they have been neither here nor there (CH, p. 7).

For Berry, while death is an undeniable fact, life is what he values because "There's nothing here but earth, no matter what it buries." He repeats this idea in "The Wild Geese," a later poem, asserting: "What we need is here" (COM, p. 24).

Berry's model of the holy man is not the abstract priest of institutionalized religion who has one eye on heaven and the other on the collection box. Rather it is the coal miner he describes in section three of "Canticle" who is literally a man of the earth. The miner, too, appears in black, but not the gloomy, symbolic black of the priests, but the real soot of the earth. His has been a literal descent into the darkness. There he finds a joy which he expresses in his song mentioning "the daily and several colors of the world." Like the man walking and singing, his song is of the world, "part of a singing into which the trees/move,..."

"Canticle" concludes with a beautiful declaration of Berry's faith in the world and the value of the things in it:

Now the hyacinths are full born. The rain is in them. They are like nothing ever imagined or written down; I choose and sing these shapes and breathings of the ground. I wear this yellow blossom like an eye (BG, p. 39).
The last line is especially suggestive of the value of the things of the world for the blossom as much as any human eye is Berry's way of seeing, his means to insight. The living hyacinths become his organ of perception. Berry has effaced his power before the power of the world.

Entering the darkness and coming to terms with death are as central in Berry's subsequent volumes of poetry as they are in The Broken Ground. What Berry seems to be suggesting, and it runs counter to Hillis Miller's notion of the way each of the poets he treats enters a new reality, is that one must constantly be going into the darkness and just as constantly coming to terms with death. The struggle is ongoing. There are no culminations, no requitals. Berry does not allow himself the kind of victory Eliot achieves "by his discovery that the Incarnation is here and now" which ends the struggle once and for all. Because Berry's view of nature is cyclical rather than linear, death is a continually returning reality which he must continually try to integrate.

Two very similar poems from Openings, Berry's second collection, express his continuing struggle to integrate death by accepting it as a vital part of the processes of nature. In "The Snake," in mid-autumn, the speaker finds in the woods a snake which has just gorged itself "with a mouse/or a small bird." Signs of death are all about. The snake's back is "patterned with the dark/of the dead leaves he lay on" and the speaker marvels at "the perfection of the dark/markings on his
back" (p. 9). Though death lies within and outside him, the snake in "his living cold" survives "big with a death to nourish him." Like the pattern of dead leaves on the snake's back, the cold of the snake stays in the speaker's hand long after he has departed. Implicit is the suggestion that the markings of death are upon us all, yet that fact does not dismay the speaker because not only does life somehow manage to survive with death on all sides, it is even nourished by death.

The coming to terms with death in this poem, however, is slightly different from what we find in the poems of The Broken Ground. There death, for the most part, was confronted, accepted, integrated. Here, though still capable of terrifying, it is already an integral part of the life of the snake. Not only is it inescapable, its mark is always upon us. Here, in the image of the gorged snake, Berry shows us death at the very heart of life whereas, in "Diagon" for example, he tells us in a language much more obviously literary, but less convincing, that death is an integral part of the life of the valley.

The situation in "The Dead Calf" is very similar to that of "The Snake." Again, the predominating imagery is of light and darkness, but here Berry tries to suggest as well why death is horrifying to humans. As the poem opens, the speaker finds at the edge of a pasture a dead calf whose "head is without eyes, becalmed/on the grass" (p. 34). In the calf, the speaker sees an example of the way in which he would like to accept death. In fact, for the calf, it is not even acceptance:
There was no escaping
the heaviness that came on him,
the darkness that rose
under his belly as though he stood
in a blind sucking pool (Ω, p. 34).

Berry further suggests in the first stanza that this dream from which there is no escape is an organic part of the world, for he describes the calf's death not as the end of a life but as a process of growth:
"Earth's weight grew in him, and he lay down."

No doubt because he had recoiled at the first sight of the decaying animal without eyes, the speaker asks: "Where is the horror in it?" and quickly realizes that the horror is not in the calf itself who came into death "as a shadow into the night. / It was nameless and familiar. / He was fitted to it." The horror, of course, is in the human mind which resists death, and, because it is accustomed to such resistance, it cannot believe that the calf has yielded to death nor that peace has come to it. Here again, the division between mind and world which we saw in "Boone" and will explore in later chapters is apparent. It is human design, the mind turned wholly toward the light wishing itself immortal, which prevents men from seeing death for what it is:

There is a darkness in the soul
that loves the eyes. There is a light
in the mind that sees only the light
and will not enter the darkness (Ω, p. 34).
Present again is Berry's subtle insistence upon a balanced view of the world. We should not make death either more or less than it is, and we cannot have the light without the darkness. They clarify each other.

The last stanza of "The Dead Calf" is a prayer or exhortation in which the speaker asks for a mind as aware, accepting, and part of the dark as it is of the light. He asks that his mind be like not the calf, but the ground: "May all dead things lie down in me/and be at peace, as in the ground" (O, p. 34). The concluding images here are more successful than those of "Boone" because Berry maintains more of a balance between mind and world. He asks, not for the unconscious existence of a tree as Boone does, but for a life in which the mind is tempered by darkness and death, yet remains conscious. He continues to express his dismay over the division between the mind and the world, but he at least hints at the possibility of bringing the mind and its designs into harmony with the world without sacrificing consciousness.

Two other short poems from Openings, worth mentioning only in passing, suggest through key images how death and darkness are integral and organic parts of the processes of nature. Both poems have to do with a change of season; the first "October 10" with the passage from summer to fall; the second "April Woods: Morning" with the passage from winter to spring. In the former, of course, the year is winding down: "Now constantly there is the sound,/quieter than rain,/of the leaves falling" (O, p. 7). Once again the simile Berry has chosen here is richer than it appears on the surface. Though the leaves are
quieter than the rain and while most of us view their falling as a sign of the death of the year, Berry wants us to realize that the falling, dead leaves are ultimately as life-giving as the falling rain. They represent the death and decay out of which new growth will come, and, thus, their falling, that death, is just as important a part of the process.

Berry reinforces that idea in the last two lines of the poem. There he tells us "that the life of summer falls/silent, and the nights grow." Literally, of course, he is referring to the fact that in the fall the days are shorter and the nights longer; yet night here is something more than that. It is something organic. It grows like a plant, or a tree, or a person, or the valley in "Boone," or the darkness in "The Dead Calf." It has its season too. The idea is similar in "April Woods: Morning." Here, however, the transition is from winter and its long nights to spring and the return of the light:

Birth of color
out of the night and the ground.

Luminous the gatherings
of bloodroot

newly risen, green leaf
white flower

in the sun, the dark
grown absent (p. 15).

Again, Berry describes darkness organically. It has not merely disappeared; it has grown absent.
In two poems appearing back to back in *Openings*, "The Want of Peace" and "The Peace of Wild Things," the problem of the separation between mind and world arises again as it invariably does when Berry contemplates death and the mess men have made of the world. "The Want of Peace" is essentially a lament. Having recognized and accepted death, the fact that "All goes back to the earth," (C, p. 29) the speaker tells us that he wants neither riches nor power, but rather "the contentments made by men who have had little..." Still he is discontented for he lacks "the peace of simple things..." is "never wholly in place..." and finds "no peace or grace." Again, the cause of Berry's discontent is that he is dismayed by men's refusal to enter the dark and by their exploitation of the world: "We sell the world to buy fire, our way lighted by burning men,..." That overemphasis of light and exploitation of the world affects the poet's mind so intensely that it makes him "think of darkness and wish for the dumb life of roots." Here again Berry speaks of having his mind bent, but this time it is not bending in order to be able to think of the world. Rather it is bent away from the world by the designs of consciousness. The last lines of the poem express a wish for unconsciousness similar to the one which we found at the end of "Boone," except that here the wish is more strongly felt and more strikingly expressed and the unconsciousness desired more complete. The speaker desires "the dumb life of roots" because of the mess that men and the designs of consciousness have made of the world.
The poem immediately following "The Want of Peace" mitigates the wish expressed in its last lines. In "The Peace of Wild Things," again the speaker is thrown into despair not only because of the condition in which he finds the world, but also, as he says, because of a fear of what his life and the lives of his children might be (p. 30). Here, however, Berry offers the possibility of some peace, however temporary it might be. He finds that peace at night lying in the woods "where the wood drake rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds." The culprit in this poem is not consciousness so much as it is what Berry calls "forethought/of grief." Here, in darkness and close to nature, the speaker finds "the peace of wild things" without annihilating or desiring to annihilate consciousness. This poem, then, manages to maintain a better balance than either "Boone" or "The Want of Peace" does.

In "The Change," again nature is where the speaker turns to find peace and hope in the face of seemingly insurmountable darkness. Again, Berry recognizes, as we have already seen in a number of poems, the danger of overemphasizing the darkness, of allowing it to completely dominate one's vision. In fact, sometimes one is plunged into darkness unaccountably:

I'll never know what causes it
-the sudden going down
into pointless sorrow, great
beyond all causes I can think of,

the almost aimless attempt
to recover out of huge darkness
the too small thought of myself (I, p. 6).

The description of the second section of the poem, rather than anything the speaker says directly, suggests how his relationship with nature is able to save him from annihilation, how it is responsible for the change of the title:

Now after the evening storm
the wind blows fresh off the hills,
the ripples speed against
the current, the air clears,
a kingfisher turns
the rusty hinges of his song.
The rain has left delicate lichens
clearly visible, green
on the wet trunks of the sycamores (I, p. 6).

What he sees in nature is a process of loss and return, of violence, death, and renewal as the world clears after the evening storm. What the poem expresses is a correspondence between the inner life of the speaker and the outer world. The processes the speaker observes in nature are the same ones to which he is subject. The way in which the storm is juxtaposed with the darkness which overwhelms the speaker suggests that even that "pointless sorrow" will have positive results just as the rain leaves "delicate lichens/clearly visible, green/on the wet runks of the sycamores." That correspondence, however, is not merely a parallel between the inner man and the outer world in which the processes are identical but do not touch at any point. Rather the
process in nature causes a change in the speaker. He takes heart from observing the aftermath of the storm.

"A Discipline," one of the last poems in *Openings*, is similar in theme and structure to "The Change," except that it is more apocalyptic in language and imagery. Here Berry connects light rather than dark with death and destruction. He insists that we "Turn toward the holocaust" (Q, p. 65), but then quickly realizes that "there is no other place/to turn." The holocaust is both the extinction of humanity through nuclear war and, more importantly, each individual's personal holocaust, death:

Dawning in your veins
is the light of the blast
that will print your shadow on stone
in a last antic of despair
to survive you in the dark (Q, p. 65).

Here again the imbalance between light and darkness, both of which are potentially destructive if overemphasized, is apparent. In "A Discipline," the emphasis is too much on the light: "Man has put his history to sleep/in the engine of doom. It flies/over his dreams in the night,/a blazing cocoon." Characteristically, Berry does not suggest that we turn away from the light. Rather, in language reminiscent of "Sailing to Byzantium," he insists that we experience the fire just as he insists that we experience the dark so that we may go beyond it:
O gaze into the fire
and be consumed with man's despair,
and be still, and wait (O, p. 65).

Just as in "The Change" what we will see beyond the fire and be heartened by is nature continuing "with the patient work/of seasons,..."
Again, despite the threat of extinction, Berry urges us to take heart because of the vitality of the natural world. He asks us to feel our heart "set out on the morning/like a young traveler, arguing the world/from the kiss of a pretty girl." As the poem concludes, in lines which echo Robert Lowell, Berry emphasizes how, despite the ominous presence of death, he chooses life, and he recommends that choice for everyone: "It is the time's discipline to think/of the death of all living, and yet live."

The descent into the darkness and the confrontation with death continue to be central in each of Berry's subsequent collections, including Findings, his third volume, the consideration of which I have reserved for Chapter Two. Like the man born to farming in the first poem in Farming: A Hand Book, in his poetry Berry "enters into death/yearly, and comes back rejoicing" (F, HB, p. 3). In more than a few poems in this collection, Berry emphasizes the importance of descending into the dark, having relinquished all vision and all desire to project human design upon the natural world. As he writes in the short poem "To Know the Dark":

16
To go in the dark with a light is to know the light.
To know the dark, go dark. Go without sight,
and find that the dark, too, blooms and sings,
and is traveled by dark feet and dark wings
\[\textit{\textbf{F: HB, p. 14.}}\]

Again, Berry views the dark as an organic, integral part of the world. It blooms and sings.

In "Awake at Night," Berry accepts not darkness but death itself as an integral part of life: "But the end, too, is part of the pattern, the last/labor of the heart:..." \[\textit{\textbf{F: HB, p. 55.}}\] What men must learn to do is to be still and at one with the earth, "and let the world go." Men must try to learn from the patterns in nature and quit trying to control the world outside them; and it is consciousness and its designs which keep men from being one with the world.

This problem of consciousness, as we have already seen, arises whenever Berry attempts to integrate darkness and death so we should not be surprised to find it in "The Wish to Be Generous" in \textit{Farming: A Hand Book}. The poem opens with a recognition of death, "All that I serve will die," \[\textit{\textbf{F: HB, p. 31}}\] Berry writes, knowing that death will come one way or another, either as a result of man's evil or the onslaught of old age. The speaker then asks the world to bring on "the sleep of darkness without stars," that is, he asks to know something of death so that he might be humbled and
stand on the earth
like a tree in a field, passing without haste
or regret toward what will be, my life
a patient willing descent into the grass (F: HE, p. 31).

What the experience of darkness enables Berry to do is to integrate himself into the life of the world and maintain a balanced attitude toward death, neither avoiding it nor seeking it. Again, Berry uses a tree as a model for the kind of life he would like to have with the earth. Here, however, he maintains the balance. He does not desire the dumb life of roots, the annihilation of consciousness, but a consciousness tempered by darkness.

"The Old Elm Tree by the River," the first poem in The Country of Marriage, is another poem in which a tree serves as an example of the kind of relationship with the land and of the integration of death which Berry values:

Death is slowly
standing up in its trunk and branches
like a camouflaged hunter (COM, p. 3).

Here, however, by comparing himself to the tree, one of whose branches crashed down in the night, Berry indicates for the first time that he has finally made his relationship with the land like the tree's, but without sacrificing consciousness:
That (the tree) is a life I know the country by.  
Mine is a life I know the country by.  
Willing to live and die, we stand here,  
timely and at home, neighborly as two men.  
Our place is changing in us as we stand,  
and we hold up the weight that will bring us down.  
In us the land enacts its history.

The poem is filled with suggestions of human limitation, but that is  
not cause for despair for Wendell Berry, for life and the daylight  
are "a mighty blessing we cannot bear for long."

In "The Morning News," Berry makes clear what happens when con­  
sciousness goes unchecked, is untempered. Consciousness unchecked  
results in a loss of union with the world, in the separation of man  
and nature, for the designs of consciousness always stand between the  
two. The solution Berry proposes is once again a knowledge of death  
and darkness, an acceptance of human limitation:

I think I must put on  
a deathlier knowledge, and prepare to die  
rather than enter into the design of man's hate  
(F: HB, p. 19).

That deathlier knowledge leads Berry to seek a life close to the earth.  
He throws off the designs, "the airy claims/of church and state," and  
tries to establish the kind of relationship with the earth character­  
istic of primitive peoples "who understood/they labored on the earth  
only to lie down in it/in peace, and were content." Only when he has  
stripped himself of the designs of consciousness, when he has recognized
that his life "is only the earth risen up/a little way into the light,"
is the unity of man and world restored.

Having turned back to the earth, the speaker finds concrete valueswhich he can oppose to the valueless lives of the world of men and tothe morning news which "drives sleep out of the head/at night." "Theearth is news..." he tells us. In the last images of the poem, heexpresses the way in which the earth, concrete and finite, and,therefore, ultimately representative of death, makes his life hopefuland meaningful:

Though the river floods
and the spring is cold, my heart goes on,
faithful to a mystery in a cloud,
and the summer's garden continues its descent
through me toward the ground (F: HB, p. 20).

The last two lines especially express the mystical nature of Berry'srelationship with the land. Again the tension is between the idealand the real, between the ideal garden which in spring exists only inthe speaker's mind and the real garden of summer which he will enactin the earth. That garden is a human design, yet one of which bothgrowth and death are integral parts and it is, therefore, ultimatelylife-giving rather than destructive. That descent of the garden fromthe mind into the concrete and particular, into the finite and,therefore, into death is necessary if there is to be growth. Neverthe-less, the image is ambiguous for it also suggests the transitorynature of all human design, even those designs which attempt to be in
harmony with natural processes. This is Berry's fatalism—that men cannot make themselves immortal even in their best works. As he writes in "The Farmer Speaking of Monuments":

At summer's height he is surrounded by green, his doing, standing for him, awake and orderly. In autumn, all his monuments fall (F: HB, p. 116).

That is as it should be for it is a delusion for men to believe that they can make themselves immortal in what they do; and that delusion has been largely responsible for the way men have abused the earth: "the farmer/knows no work or act can keep him/here."

"Anger Against Beasts" is another poem in which Berry makes clear what the dire results of consciousness unrestrained are:

Man's will
long schooled to kill or have
its way, would drive the beast
against nature, transcend
the impossible in simple fury.
The blow falls like a dead seed (COM, p. 26).

The results are fruitless and meaningless deaths, deaths out of which nothing comes. But ultimately the result of the total and absolute imposition of human will upon nature is a defeat not of nature, but of man himself who has fooled himself into thinking that he has conquered the world: "His triumph is a wound. Spent,/he must wait the slow/unalterable forgiveness of time." A few lines from "Where," a long
poem in Berry's most recent volume best express the results of undisci-
plined consciousness. 17

A mind cast loose
in whim and greed makes
nature its mirror, and the garden
falls with the man (C, p. 14).

From the above, we can infer that Berry's attitude toward human vision is ambivalent. While he recognizes the importance of entering the darkness stripped of all vision, that there is a life, as he writes in "A Homecoming," free from human design, beyond the bounds of human knowledge (COM, p. 33), vision, nevertheless, remains important, even necessary in Berry's scheme of things, even though vision is less important than enactment and even though once enacted vision is ultimately doomed. Vision is important because it enables men to achieve a measure of harmony with nature by providing a discipline which most men cannot do without. Berry, then, espouses a vision which serves the dark, which serves the earth:

It is the mind's service,
for when the will fails so do the hands
and one lives at the expense of life (F: HB, p. 21).

When men die, they serve the earth whether they want to or not because their decaying bodies become part of the soil; but in life only an act of will can make such service possible. The first step in
achieving the kind of vision which Berry values is paradoxically an
abnegation of the human desire to impose its own designs upon the
world. The first step is the descent into the darkness stripped of
all vision, an act of will which denies will. There Berry begins to
discover how to bring his life into harmony with nature so that he
might enrich the earth rather than live at its expense; but the
process is ongoing for the attempt to enact vision continues. As
Berry writes in "The Country of Marriage":

The forest is mostly dark, its ways
to be made anew day after day, the dark
richer than the light and more blessed
provided we stay brave
even though to keep on going in (COM, p. 7).

That enactment results in a constant adjustment of vision in order to
bring the ideal more and more in harmony with the real.

To live with a constant awareness of death makes possible a
vision which is constructive rather than destructive. As Berry writes
in "Zero":

On a day like this we have
the end in sight. This is zero,
the elemental poverty
of all that was ever born,
in which nothing lives by chance
but only by choosing to
and by knowing how- and by
the excess of desire that rises
above the mind surrounding
and hovering like a song (COM, p. 10).
"Song in a Year of Catastrophe" is, perhaps, Berry's most eloquent expression of his notion that the pilgrimage into darkness is never complete during life. As the poem opens, the speaker hears a voice which tells him, among other things, to "'Go look under the leaves,... Put your hands/into the earth. Live close/to the ground. Learn darkness.'" The speaker listens to the voice and obeys it. He puts his hands into the ground and learns the dark, but that is still not enough. The voice stays with him declaring that he had "'not come close enough.'" It urges him to "'Come nearer the ground.'" Finally, the speaker understands what the voice is demanding of him. It is a death. "'Die,'" the voice commands, "'into what the earth requires of you,'" This death is not so much a physical death as it is the effacement of self, of consciousness before the world. The acceptance and integration of death involves the abnegation of consciousness and its designs which separate men from the world. Once consciousness has been negated the speaker comes "fully into the ease/and the joy of that place," but, because consciousness can only be fully negated in the physical death of the speaker, and is, therefore always urging itself upon men and upon the world, Wendell Berry in his life and in his poetry does "not," as he writes in "The Fearfulness of Hands That Have Learned Killing," "go free of the art of death" (O, p. 11).
Notes to Chapter One


CHAPTER II: A FATAL CONTENDING

"The earth is greater than man.
To speak of it the mind must bend."

Both "Window Poems," a long sequence of poems from Wendell Berry's second volume, Openings,¹ and "The House," a long poem from his third collection, Findings,² deal with the problem of consciousness and world, of the clash between human orders and natural orders, which inevitably arises in Berry's poetry, as we have seen in Chapter One, whenever he confronts death. The twenty-seven sections which make up the former poem, though intended to function thematically as a whole, unified as they are by the passage from late fall to early spring which they enact and by their connection with the problem of human versus natural orders, can be read singly. In contrast, the five sections of "The House": "The White and Waking of the House," "The Design of the House: Ideal and Hard Time," "The Habit of Waking," "The Garden" and "An Epilogue," consisting respectively of nine parts, fifteen parts, four parts, one part, and two parts, although thematically discrete, are best considered together because of the dialectical structure of the poem as a whole. In this chapter, we will consider "The House" first because, even though Berry published it after "Window Poems," he wrote it first.

Section one of "The House," "The White and Waking of the House," is primarily concerned with impressing the reader with the transitory
nature of all human design and of all human accomplishment, represented here by the house itself which is the central reality and the central symbol of the poem insofar as it is a human accomplishment, a way of ordering, and is made in the poem to stand for culture as a whole, for all the ways that humans order and attempt to order the world. Like the poems we discussed in Chapter One, this section also stresses the importance of incorporating death as an integral part of any human vision. These, then, are the two ideas which make up the thesis of the dialectic which Berry develops in "The House"; but, insofar as they are ideas which run counter to currently prevalent human attitudes about culture and about death, they turn the first section of the poem inside out, antithetical as it is to ideas outside the poem. This enables Berry to suggest, later on in the culminating sections of the poem and implicitly throughout the poem, ways in which both human and natural orders are important and can be made harmonious.

Berry makes it clear at the very beginning of the first part of "The White and Waking of the House" that he intends the entire section to function both as thesis and antithesis. He calls the landscape a map, a human representation and an abstraction of the surface of the earth or a part of it which suggests the way in which human conceptions of the world have superseded the natural order of things. We are immediately struck by two facts as the poem begins: the process of change in nature as one season passes into another, "autumn sycamores, changing, bronze and white, by the bank edges" (F, p. 11); and, juxtaposed with that fact, the white walls of the house, an apparent stasis
amidst the change in the natural order:

the rooms
swift-dimensioned, lofty, windowed,
hold continuance of waking
in the disjointed instants of autumn (F, p. 11).

The juxtaposition of the house with the changing trees which surround it suggests that there is a continuity in culture which balances the lack of continuity in nature, "the disjointed instants of autumn." Immediately, however, Berry makes us realize just as Dylan Thomas does in "The Force That Through the Green Fuse Drives the Flower" that the house is subject to exactly the same forces as the trees are:

There are wildernesses around it.
Wilderness returns to it endlessly,
the house vanishing daily from waking (F, p. 11).

In fact, by likening days to fires, Berry suggests that each day, the daily round of light and dark threatens the house:

Around it the days mount and blaze,
and have blazed, at orange zenith
like fields of summer-blooming weeds,
banner in the winds like fires,
and go out (F, p. 11).

That all things both human and natural are subject to the same animating and destructive forces is not, however, cause for despair, for like the painting Berry describes toward the end of part one of this section,
presumably a depiction of an autumnal scene, which "dusks on the white wall," the decay of natural and human objects prefigures "deep grasses, oranges, bloom" (F, p. 11), that is it prefigures the possibility of renewal, of new life with the return of spring.

All that remains for Berry to do in part one of section one of "The House" is to provide the link between the two kinds of order. That link is the human presence, here his daughter, who "walks below the house in the sun/before noon, gathering flowers" (F, p. 12). She, too, is subject to the forces which give life and take it away just as the house and the trees are. "She comes, heralded, mourned" (F, p. 12), and she causes the speaker to realize that even the natural processes to which all things are subject are doomed as well, for even the light, as he says, "is perilous."

In part two of section one, Berry further underscores how the continuity which culture provides is both transitory and tenuous. At the beginning of this part, he describes another house, "built of brick, in the same place" (F, p. 12) which stood before the present house. Again, Berry presents two kinds of order: the human order of that previous house, "with an orchard/of pear and apple trees on the south slope along the yard,/symmetrically laid out" (F, p. 12), and the natural order, here represented by the sun which had its own kind of symmetry in the time of that previous house as it spun the shade of the trees in the orchard from "daylight to dark" (F, p. 12). That fatal contending of human order with natural order, in which the former is ultimately doomed, is implicit in the image of the shade, the darkness
cast by the effect of the sun's light upon the trees. Still, Berry also realizes that human design, even though it is doomed, can have value as long as it lasts. The brick walks which led from that previous house's doorways, for example, were "the house's knowledge/of its hill, an orderly geography, handwrought" (F, p. 12). Thus, the fruit of human labor, that house and its surroundings, served as a means to knowledge of the natural world.

All that remains of that house, however, is the poet's description of it, which he realizes is "a fictive visualization/out of hand-me-down memory" (F, p. 12). The orchard, the walkways, the house, and the people who inhabited it all have vanished. Furthermore, what stood in that place before the previous house has also vanished, not only from reality, but from memory as well. Berry can only identify it as "the wilderness of not knowing" (F, p. 13), a metaphor in which knowledge, the human means of ordering the world, is juxtaposed with the wilderness, the natural order of things. The inability to know or even remember is described as a wilderness which inevitably overwhelms knowledge, stressing again the transitory nature of culture, now not only insofar as its existence in reality is concerned, but its existence in history as well. Thus, because of its limitations, the mind, the producer of culture in both the concrete and the abstract, is forced to understand darkness as its source as well as its end, an idea almost identical to that expressed in the second section of "Diagon," a poem which we discussed in Chapter One.
Part three of "The White and Waking of the House" acknowledges that the present house is subject to the same forces and the same fate as that previous house. At the outset, the present house is likened to the phoenix rising "From the ashes and lives/of the past house" (F, p. 13), an image which suggests that culture can provide continuity only when death is incorporated, as it is in nature, as an integral part of any human vision or design. Humans, in the ways they have ordered reality at various times, have tried to ignore death, to resist it, and even to conquer it altogether by making themselves immortal in the artifacts they have produced; but the suggestion here is clear. Human ways of ordering reality must be understood as cyclical like the processes in nature if they are to provide continuity, for, like Stevens' jar, the house is surrounded by wilderness:

Its fields approach it, seasonally,
burdened, and go back;
itss roadways travail among harvests (F, p. 14).

But unlike Stevens' jar, the house does not give order to what surrounds it. Rather it represents a kind of order which is in competition with the more natural order of the wilderness which

returns to it (the house),
the yearly enactment
of briar-bloom, hackberry, hawthorn
at the woods' boundaries,
advance of weeds and thickets
across fencerows, to be driven back (F, p. 14).
This is the fatal contending which provides the tension of the entire poem, the clash between human and natural orders, in which the former is ultimately doomed; but Berry also makes it clear that humans are as much a part of that contention as anything they produce or build, for, like the house, "the house's lives have awakened to it" (F, p. 14). The six remaining parts of "The White and Waking of the House" and the remainder of the entire poem are devoted to discovering a way to make human ways of ordering the world harmonious with the order of nature.

Having acknowledged the contention between human ways of ordering the world and the order in nature, Berry's first step toward discovering a way in which the two can be harmonious involves coming to terms with death, not as a distant abstraction, but as a concrete reality. Thus, in the next two parts of section one of "The House," death and the past are central. Part four concerns the death of an uncle after whom the poet is named. That uncle vanished from the house "out of a time that no longer was/and past all time to come into no time at all" (F, p. 14). In the demise of his uncle, the speaker begins to see the significance of death because it is a disruption of the continuity which the house provides, "When I came again I didn't recognize the house" (F, p. 14), much as the death of the poet's father in the opening poem of The Broken Ground causes the elements to disjoint; and because the death of his uncle has an immediate impact upon him. The poet describes the night of his uncle's death as "child-killing." Like the speaker in Hopkins' poem "Spring and Fall," the poet recognizes in the death of the uncle whose name he bears not only the inevitability of his own death, but
also the way in which the experience of death is a significant step in the passage from childhood to adulthood, just as it is for Margaret in Hopkins' poem. Most importantly, that death is child-killing because it involves not only the loss of innocence, but also the death of the immature ego which sees itself as the center of all creation, an important step toward the discovery of a way of ordering the world which is harmonious with the order existing in nature, toward an ego which seeks to discover order rather than to impose it upon the world.

Part five recounts yet another death. Two years after the death of his uncle in the spring, the poet's grandfather dies. This death makes him realize that the passage from childhood to adulthood which began in part four with the death of his uncle was just that—only a beginning: "Childhood's dying knew no ends" (F, p. 15). Part of that passage involved also the living death of the poet's grandmother who, after the death of her husband, "survived her nights twelve years more, punished and ill with the life of her stubborn flesh" (F, p. 15) until even consciousness deserted her. Each of these deaths leads Berry to contemplate all the deaths which have preceded them and which will follow. All of "These deaths," he tells us, these "conjectures, darknesses and oblivions/make a wilderness" (F, p. 15). It is death which constitutes the chaos, the ultimate threat to humans and the orders they construct to escape it. Implicitly, then, these two parts of section one suggest that if any human way of ordering the world is to be harmonious with the wilderness, it must incorporate death as an integral part.
The importance of taking death into account continues to be the central concern of part six of "The White and Waking of the House." Just as the previous two parts are concerned with the impact of death upon the speaker, so part six is concerned with the effects of the dead, that is with all that remains in an upstairs room of those who have lived and died in the house:

a gallery of portraits
without names, quilt pieces,
bank notes, canceled mortgages,
hymns and oaths, broken books,
odorless dusks and shambles
of ceremonies, processions, flowers,
letters from the dead
to the dead (E, p. 16).

These relics have a special significance for the speaker because they represent the past lives which are responsible for his existence; yet these remnants and the deaths they represent will have little meaning for him unless his mind sheds some light upon them and makes them coherent. To accept the past totally as it has been left to him as a chaos of fragments, quilt pieces and broken books, is to be overwhelmed by death and to fail to incorporate it as a vital part of his own vision. The fragments remain "letters from the dead/to the dead" and have little effect upon his life. His mind must tear through this clutter and shed some light upon parts of it in order for him to establish his own life. He must make the past and its deaths, to which he owes his existence, part of him; but he must not let the past and death overwhelm him.
Thus, while the mind must efface itself before reality so that human and natural orders can be made harmonious, the mind must not annihilate itself.

Despite the seemingly overwhelming presence of death, Berry is not about to let the importance of incorporating it in his vision completely overwhelm his life. Thus, part seven of "The White and Waking of the House" develops what he has been saying in the previous part. In this brief part, the central image is the trumpet vine which blooms "on the stump of the dead grandmother cedar by the plum tree" (F, p. 16). The vines prevail despite "their hundredth nightmare obstacle wilderness" (F, p. 16). The suggestion of the image is threefold. First, even things in nature have obstacles, wildernesses which they must overcome in order to live. Second, despite the ambiance of darkness and death surrounding even the wilderness, life goes on. And third, that very ambiance itself prepares the way for life and makes it possible. The trumpet vine makes death the source of its growth without giving up its life to it entirely.

The final two parts of section one deepen and complicate the images and ideas with which the poem has been concerned up to now. At the beginning of part eight, Berry describes a vane of smoke which the speaker sees in the distance rising on the horizon over a city. In the morning, the vane "is white and hardly visible" (F, p. 17), but at sundown "It becomes dark,/distinct,...when the light/is behind it, a black feather blowing/the way the wind blows" (F, pp. 16-17). That vane of smoke, which Berry tells us the house is aware of, offers
a possibility which is enticing but not real. It offers the possibility of a vision and a life not tempered by death and darkness, that is the kind of vision and life which cities try to embody. In response to that temptation, again Berry emphasizes the transitory nature of all that humans imagine and construct:

> What the house moves toward is a wilderness, confusion of alternatives, possibilities, the mind conceiving darkness at its end (F, p. 17).

Nevertheless, human consciousness is lured by the promise of light and life. It "envisions/brightness, is burdened with the wish of it, dreams, grievously, foreshadowing clarities" (F, p. 17). Such a vision, as we have seen, is unbalanced and false because it does not include death and darkness. That vane of smoke, the metropolis which produces it, and by extension all of culture, are a kind of order which attempts to stand over and against death and darkness. Seen in its proper light, which is the light of the setting sun, the light of nature, the vane is, as the speaker tells us, not white, but black. In its promise of a life without death and darkness, it holds the possibility of a real and final doom because it fails to integrate death which is essential to new life. Thus, it and the metropolis over which it rises, which Berry calls a "gathering of white," are fictions which "the darkness is against" (F, p. 17), and they are "more rending than doom" (F, p. 17), that is they are fictions much less valid than even a vision which is preoccupied with death because, in failing to take death into account,
they assure their own permanent destruction just as the city sends up
the vane of smoke which might ultimately destroy it. The promise which
they offer is actually what destroys them.

In the final part of "The White and Waking of the House," the image
of the fruit jar full of marigold, which is "placed on a table in the
center/of the white dawlit tall room/by a small girl" (F, p. 17),
suggests, for the first time in the poem, a way of bringing human con­
sciousness and the artifacts it produces more in tune with the natural
world. Not only do the marigolds foreshadow the reality and the symbol
which Berry will ultimately offer as a way of harmonizing consciousness
and world, they are also the opposite of Stevens' jar. Where it is a
man-made object, they are the product of nature, even though they are
arranged into a bouquet by the young girl, presumably the speaker's
daughter who was gathering flowers in part one. Whereas it stands "tall
and of a port in air," they are "tentative." Whereas it is gray and
bare, they are bright, "an intelligence of orange and gold." Whereas
"it takes dominion everywhere" ordering "the slovenly wilderness," the
bouquet is "a presence of the house" which, rather than dominating what
surrounds it,

perceives in the room the justness of its windows,
its white doors,
clarifies the house among its remnant deaths
and passages (F, p. 18).

Most importantly, what the image of the marigolds suggests is that the
best way to harmonize consciousness and world is to make human ways of
ordering, or culture, more like natural orders, rather than ordering
the world with human artifacts which do "not give of bird or bush,"
which diminish the life which surrounds them. The bouquet also fore­
shadows the garden of section four of "The House" which for Berry is
both the symbol of and the reality of the harmony of world and con­
sciousness. The bouquet is part of nature, yet it is also a human
arrangement, "an intelligence of orange and gold."

We can briefly summarize the form which the clash between con­
sciousness and world takes in "The White and Waking of the House" by
examining the section's two major symbols, the house and the wilderness,
and the values which attach to each. The house, as we have already seen,
is a kind of human order and is made in this first section to stand for
culture, that is for all the ways in which humans attempt to order the
world. Additionally, the house as a symbol has the values of light and
whiteness attached to it, values which ordinarily represent life, wisdom,
purity, and innocence. The wilderness, on the other hand, is a natural
order and the symbolic value attached to it is darkness which suggests
death as opposed to the light, white, and life of the house, The
opposition which the poem sets up is, however, artificial, for the
wilderness obviously is as alive and vital as anything which lives in or
around the house. What Berry wants us to realize in the opposition is
that human and natural orders take on such exclusive values only when
humans put too much emphasis upon the orders they create, when they try
to impose their designs upon the world. The remainder of "The House"
gradually develops a solution to the conflict of world and consciousness,
which Berry has only hinted at up to this point in the image of the marigolds brought indoors.

Whereas "The White and Waking of the House" is primarily concerned with asserting the transitory nature of culture, section two of "The House" (entitled "The Design of the House: Ideal and Hard Time") expresses the antithesis of the thesis of the first section. Here, Berry expresses the importance of the orders humans create, represented again by the house, as well as the importance of the vision which conceives the house and builds it, despite his continuing recognition that human vision, and all that it creates, is transitory. Having emphasized in section one the importance of incorporating death as an integral part of human vision, here Berry underscores the importance of choosing life over death and love over hate or bitterness even though these are transitory too.

The different emphasis of section two is apparent immediately in the opening lines of its first part where Berry suggests how the house can distinguish its inhabitants if the mind of the owner puts it in order. Berry indicates the importance and value of consciousness and its designs when he exhorts the owner of the house to

let his intelligence deal among memories, among circumstances, crafting inheritance for himself so that he doesn't arrive at his life by accident, or by carelessness come to grief (F, p. 19).
The order which the human mind can maintain amidst the designs it creates is vitally important because "In an ordered house/what is possible might be broken open" (F, p. 19). Putting the house in proper order makes it possible for the minds of its inhabitants to turn away from themselves toward the world outside, another step in the passage from egocentric childhood to adulthood. Within that order, love also is possible and it is the kind of love which rises out of need not out of duty or allegiance. An important result of such an order is that within it "living things" are "responsive to changing lights/as plants in windows" (F, p. 19). This last image, repeating one of the central ideas of the previous section, asserts the importance of making human ways of ordering the world more like things in nature. The inhabitants of the house become as responsive to change as plants.

In part two, Berry underscores again the importance of human vision, but not just of any vision. The designs of consciousness should be as ideal, as perfect as possible even though in the enactment of vision, perfection is unattainable, "there is no hand laid on it" (F, p. 20). Because the reality is inevitably less than its conception, the vision of the house must be one of perfection, for if it is not, the reality of the house, the enactment of the vision, will fall far short of what it could have been:

But the house is a shambles
unless the vision of its perfection
upholds it like stone (F, p. 20).
Because of the transitory nature of all that humans envision and create, Berry realizes that the house's destruction is easier to imagine than a vision of its perfection, a "cloud of fire prefiguring/its disappearance" (F, p. 20); yet Berry chooses life over death and the vision of the house's perfection over destruction and death for no logical reason except that the house exists and love has contributed significantly to its conception. In fact, the house becomes symbolic of the love which conceived it and "brought forth its likeness" (F, p. 20). It becomes "an emblem of desire" which can continue to exist even after the lovers have died.

Using an image similar to the bouquet of marigolds in the last part of the previous section of the poem, part three of section two emphasizes again how Berry chooses life over death. Here, we learn that autumn has given way to winter, yet the speaker's memory of a wild carrot plant which had been brought inside and placed in a goblet keeps "a spare dream of summer....alive in the house" (F, p. 20). The Queen Anne's Lace which blossomed "tufted, upfurling-/unfolding/whiteness" (F, p. 21) continues to suggest the possibility of life and renewal even though the year has fallen from the height of summer. In fact, the possibilities which the memory suggests are even clearer in the speaker's mind because of "cold paring away the excess" (F, p. 21). Excess refers presumably to all of the other growth of summer which has now vanished in the cold. Here again, Berry is emphasizing the importance of mind and memory which have the power, even under severe conditions, to keep hope alive by cleaving among clutter as Berry writes in part
one of this section.

Part four is also concerned with maintaining hope and the possibility of life in the midst of conditions which have the aspect of death. Here, Berry connects winter and the cold with darkness and the other values he has attached to the wilderness previously in the poem. Again, Berry underscores the value of consciousness which, through an act of faith, is able to maintain hope in the renewal of life. As this part begins, Berry describes the house as "a dry seedhead in the snow/falling and fallen" (F., p. 21). Like a seed, the house is the product of the previous season's growth. Now, in winter, it lies dormant in the snow awaiting the return of warmth and light to begin growing again. The inhabitants of the house are the promise of that seed. Their minds are likened to hibernating beasts who burrow deep in the earth of the house during the long, cold winter nights:

trusting dawn, though the sun's
light is a light without precedent, never
proved ahead of its coming, waited for
by the law that hope has made it (F., p. 22).

These last lines emphasize again the way in which Berry chooses life over death despite, paraphrasing W. H. Auden, what all the instruments say and despite the loss of continuity caused by the cold and the darkness. Berry makes us remember what we have forgotten - that the expectation of the return of spring, and even of the return of light, is not merely a matter of habit, but of a yearly, indeed even a daily act of faith because humans can never be certain that spring, or even dawn,
will return.

In part five, Berry acknowledges the futility of humans trying to escape death through what they create or through history. Here, he addresses the old ghosts, presumably the shades of those who once inhabited the house. He asks them to speak, to describe what they intend, but then he realizes that he can learn nothing from them except, perhaps, that death is unavoidable. Their "expenditure" of tears lamenting their deaths "has purchased" them "no reprieve" from death (F, p. 22). Their "failed wisdom shards among the/down-going atoms of the moment" (F, p. 22). Neither culture, here represented by the house, nor history, a knowledge of the past, can save human beings from death.

Berry further emphasizes this idea in the last lines of part five of "The Design of the House: Ideal and Hard Time" where he describes a kind of history quite different from the remnants he has described in part six of "The White and Waking of the House." Here, he speaks of public history, the kind which is a record of tyrants, wars, and catastrophes. It, too, like the private history to which he owes his life, is unintelligible. It "goes blind and in darkness" (F, p. 22), but with this important distinction. This kind of history is a threat to the house and to all that the house stands for and it cannot be made intelligible. In fact, Berry even goes so far as to suggest that this kind of history resembles Yeats' slouching beast in "The Second Coming":
dragging its dead body, living,
yet to be born, it moves heavily
to its glories. It tramples
the little towns, forgets their names (F, p. 22).

Such history is another kind of wilderness of which the mind can
make little sense.

Parts six, seven, and eight of section two of "The House" continue
to contrast the public domain with the private. The public domain
represents a kind of wilderness which the house stands in and against.
Unlike the wilderness in the first section of the poem, which threatens
the house and must ultimately overwhelm it, the public domain is a
chaos, not an order as the real wilderness is, and as such, the house
rightfully resists it. Later in the poem, Berry will suggest that a
harmony can exist between the orders of house and wilderness, but be­
tween the house and the public domain no harmony is possible. In these
parts of the poem, Berry is essentially concerned with emphasizing
private values over public values because the values of the public
world threaten both the house and the wilderness.

Parts six, seven, and eight, for example, contrast two kinds of
anger. The first is public anger which, carried to its extreme,
results in war and the loss of those values and feelings which elevate
the human heart:

The world suffers
the disfigurement
of honored recriminations
that have made hatreds holy, consecrated by the sure coherence of their impulse, advertised by headlines crying peace. Among persons alignments are drawn by the proclivities of which may be argued the righteousness of murder (F, p. 23).

As a result of such anger, "Nothing is made clear./What is human/and at the heart of it/and to be lost/will not be made clear" (F, p. 23). Largely responsible for such anger are the materialism and greed of our culture of which TV is the central symbol so that the Second Coming, rather than being an apocalypse visited from above, becomes "a man-made cosmic terror" (CH, p. 8):

In the land of the free we take to the adoration of TV, assuming the Second Coming is at hand -having fumigated the manger and deodorized the shepherds and sworn in the magi to officiate for the duration of the crisis (F, p. 23).

In this failure, which Berry tells us is essentially a failure of feeling, "houses go dark" (F, p. 24).

In part seven, Berry continues to explore and to condemn the materialism of our culture, particularly of our churches in which "Christ is stillborn once year" (F, p. 24). Our churches have even
turned life into no more than an investment whose return is heaven "payable/to the insured upon his demise" (F, p. 24). Over and against the public values of materialism and death espoused by church and state, Berry lays the private values of life and family and household. "I've worn out all allegiances but these" (F, p. 25), he writes. Despite darkness and death and ruin, "we live," he tells us, "because we have to, and justify/our living with our lives-" (F, p. 25).

In part eight, Berry describes a formative anger, a private as opposed to a public anger, which is determined to make a meaningful life despite the surrounding threat of a world in shambles. This anger cleaves among clutter. It is "passive as a honed blade/to cut what comes against it/-to make the necessary severances" (F, pp. 25-26). The blade metaphor emphasizes again the importance of mind and of the house, because, in order for people to live lives which are truly their own and truly meaningful and valuable, they must divide themselves not only from much of the past, but also from much of the present. Men and women must actively choose to live such lives.

Thus, insofar as the house represents the choice of such a life, of the present over the past and of the private over the public, its whiteness, symbolically negative in the first section of the poem, because of its connection with a vision that denies death, now represents that formative anger, "severity/fending away grossness,/preserving a life in it" (F, p. 26). Human designs, which the house and its whiteness represent, give life meaning and keep one from being preoccupied with darkness and death. The house preserves life literally
by protecting its inhabitants from the cold and the wilderness, if only temporarily; and it preserves life figuratively from a surrounding culture whose ultimate values are political and materialistic and, therefore, destructive.

Part nine of "The Design of the House: Ideal and Hard Time" is primarily concerned, as much of the six remaining parts of this section of the poem are, with the love which gives the house and the life in it its ultimate value. Not reason, nor consciousness, nor human will cause Berry to choose life over death. Rather it is love, which Berry describes here as a mysterious response to the natural order of things, which causes him to choose:

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the seed doesn't swell
in its husk by reason, but loves
itself, obeys light which is
its own thought and argues the leaf
in secret (F, pp. 25-26).
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The house, then, is the result of love between people, and it is the articulation of the choice of life over death. It is the concrete enactment of the abstract vision of love:

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Love foresees a jointure
composing a house, a marriage
of contraries, compendium
of opposites in equilibrium (F, p. 27).
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Part ten is a short love lyric which Berry addresses to his wife, Tanya, and to their daughter, Mary. Its opening line, "This is a love poem for you, Tanya-" (F, p. 27), suggests not only that this small part, but, indeed, that the entire work is a love poem dedicated to his wife and child. Part ten, however, is no mere interlude in the overall movement of the poem. Here, Berry emphasizes again the importance of living and loving despite the climate of darkness and death in which we live; yet, in order for any love to be true, he realizes it must accept death as well:

among wars, among the brutal forfeitures of time, in this house, among its latent fires, among all that honesty must see, I accept your dying and love you: nothing mitigates (F, p. 27).

Berry's acceptance of the death of the one he loves acknowledges the inevitability of the loss of love. It acknowledges as well that love is a human design which can be egocentric and possessive and, therefore, destructive; or it can be harmonious. His ability to accept death and to love indicates that he has begun to relinquish any thought of possessing his wife or of dominating her; as such, it is an important step toward finding a way in which human and natural orders can exist in harmony because it suggests that he has relinquished the will to power over things.

The last five parts of "The Design of the House: Ideal and Hard Time" continue to emphasize the power of the mind to envision better days. Even in the worst of times, here represented by the sleep of
winter, the mind dreams of the renewal of life with the return of spring and the waking of the house. Parts eleven and twelve contrast the unconscious state of the speaker as a child, the vast empty dream which

sometimes contained a chaos, tangled like fishline snarled in hooks—sometimes a hook, whetted, severe, drawing the barbed darkness to a point (F, p. 28).

with the formed consciousness of the adult which envisions the house and which dreams

of the morning coming in like a bird through the window not burdened by a thought, the light a singing (F, p. 28).

Despite the difference of the two states, Berry wants us to realize that a continuity remains between the vast, empty dream of the unconscious child and the more conscious dream, the vision of the adult, for in adulthood "There's still a degree of sleep/recalls/the vast empty dream" of the child; and he recognizes that even within that juvenile mind "The house, also, has taken shape" (F, p. 28).

In part twelve, the dream of the light coming indoors like a bird signifies as well the power of the mind to envision the renewal of life, the waking of the house with the return of spring, even though
the year has fallen cold and dormant. The bird of light also parallels
the marigolds and the Queen Anne's Lace of earlier parts of the poem
which, when brought into the house like the former or held in the
memory like the latter, provided order and maintained the hope of life
through the autumn and winter.

In part thirteen, Berry continues to emphasize the value of mind,
the value of the house as a human way of ordering, and the futility of
being overly preoccupied with death. To dwell on death, for the mind
to conceive of itself as thoughtless, is ultimately useless, that is it
is not practical; yet the mind cannot choose life over death passively:
"The mind must sing/of itself to keep awake" (F, p. 29). The house is
the concrete result of the mind's singing. It is the articulation of
the mind's vision:

Love has visualized a house,
and out of its expenditure
fleshed the design
at the cross ways
of consciousness and time (F, p. 29).

Once again, part fourteen describes the house as a kind of singing.
Like a symphony, it "performs a substantial movement/of interiors-/ each
day a room;/lighted;/where waking is made whole" (F, p. 30).
The value of the house as a way of sustaining life "though day proceed
to day/by accident" (F, p. 30) is further underscored by Berry's
description of it as "the dependent/and support/of our life in it," and as the "-enactment of thought/made substantial in design"
(F, p. 30). By the end of this part of the poem, Berry has transformed the house, its whiteness, and the other values attached to it from the largely negative symbol and reality it was in the first section of the poem to the opposite insofar as it is capable of

affording a little calm:
through time
or the nothing or the
inconceivable into which time
unspools (F, p. 30).

At the end of this section of the poem, in part fifteen, waking, which represents the return of spring and the renewal of life, enters the sleep of winter "like a dream" (F, p. 30). In the last two lines, the snow and the whiteness of the house combine, in an image which fore­shadows the harmony of human and natural orders later in the poem, to "make a white/the black swifts may come back to" (F, p. 30). They join to form a perch to which life may return when its time has come.

Section three of "The House," "The Habit of Waking," begins to make that synthesis of human and natural orders which will culminate in section four, "The Garden." After having asserted respectively the transitory nature of the house threatened by the wilderness in section one and its value as a man-made order threatened by other human orders in section two, here Berry begins to accomplish his synthesis by show­ing parallels between a human order, the house and its surroundings, and a natural order, a blooming, yellow jonquil. He underscores the potential for harmony between man and nature by juxtaposing the house
and the jonquil with two forces, one human and one natural, which are not only threats to the house and the flower, but which are also at odds with each other.

As part one of "The Habit of Waking" begins, that waking, which had only begun to enter sleep toward the end of the previous section of the poem, is now a reality. The snow is melting, the earth is drying, the animals in the barns are beginning to give birth, the foliage and the grass are beginning to return to the woods, and the house is beginning to open after "its seasonal closure" (F, p. 31), while inside the house tulips are blooming on the window sill. Waking which previously had only been like a dream is now not only a reality, but it is becoming a habit, a fact which is as potentially negative as it is positive. Berry uses the word "habit" in the title of this section with all of its possible meanings. The habit of waking is at once a kind of garb, especially like the gown of a religious; a mental or moral constitution; a custom or practice acquired by repetition; and, in its root meaning, an appearance.

Throughout the first part of "The Habit of Waking," Berry parallels human and natural objects as they prepare for the renewal of life. During the winter, the mind's ideal vision has vanished. It has been stripped away so that the mind and the house, its creation, have merely served as defenses of the lives which the house surrounds: "Bulked at troughs, cattle feed/in the provisional enclosure of the farmer's mind" (F, p. 31). These lines suggest simultaneously both the transitory nature and the value of the orders humans create, for
the enclosure of the mind is provisional. It is temporary, yet adapted to conditions as they are. It provides the necessities of life. The house, however, is not only enclosed by the mind which created it. It also encloses, "is continent of the mind" (F, p. 31), that is it contains and protects the mind which envisioned it just as it contains and protects the tulips blooming in one of its windows, as it, like the tulip, ventures "with its desire into the weather's judgment" (F, p. 31).

With the return of spring, however, the mind and the house begin to open up, to turn out toward the world which lies beyond them. We learn that the closing of the house, the vacancy which the house becomes in winter, and the loss of "the old cumulus of dreams" (F, p. 31) are necessary parts of the process of life, for like the cherry tree standing near the house which "is cut back for a hardier blooming, heavier fruit" (F, p. 31), the house and the mind which envisioned it are diminished in winter. That diminishment insures that the lives which the house contains will be all the more hardy when spring returns. Thus, in this part of "The Habit of Waking," Berry parallels the house and the cherry tree. They are part of the same process, protecting in similar fashion the life within them in winter when they are stripped of their foliage; subject to the same forces; and to the same fate.

Nonetheless, Wendell Berry recognizes that the renewal of life in spring can be dangerous, for it can lead humans, as it inevitably does, to envision perfection, to make a habit of waking, emphasizing life to the total exclusion of death, and to think of what they create as more
than transitory:

This waking wakes, advances to a new envisionment, the old renewal of desire. The mind lays claim to its summer, dreams a perfect ripening, weighted harvest (F, p. 32).

The vision of perfection is dangerous, however, only if it remains abstract, for Berry knows that the reality of summer and of the harvest "in the sun's cruel beneficence, foreshadowing/harsher culminations, sterner quittances" (F, p. 32) will be less than the mind's vision of it in spring. That vision of perfection, dangerous as it is, is necessary if the harvest is to be at all successful.

Part two, like the latter stanzas of the previous part of "The Habit of Waking," continues to be concerned with the renewal of life, especially the impulse toward life which can delude humans into ignoring death. Almost all of the images in part two argue for a balanced view of life and death, despite the burgeoning growth of spring which emphasizes only the former. Even the process of growth, here a metaphor for the impulse toward life, is viewed as a kind of severance, a quittance, a breaking which is still part of the dark: "Interleaved, in the heavy shadow, the impulse bends, divides and//breaks upward" (F, p. 32). Spring is both an end and a beginning. The following lines describe just such a severance: "The fanged thorn/utters its small leaves" and "The feral triumphant dirt/forks and flowers in the thickets" (F, p. 32, my emphasis throughout). With the return of spring, growth resumes, but the growth of leaves, which Berry describes
as a kind of speech, is balanced by the fanged thorn out of which they bloom. Similarly, the earth sends up its flowers, but the dirt is untamed, savage, and triumphant. To remind us that we must not overemphasize life, Berry balances each image of life and growth with an image of death, which is both the source and end of that life. Just as in winter when the Queen Anne's Lace kept alive hope in the renewal of life, so now in summer:

Amid the riddling fragrance
of fields growing green
there's the stench of winter
carrion in the killing cold
preserved, light's sudden igniting
of the unabated dead (F, p. 33).

The fragrance of the fields is riddling not only in the sense that its growth is a mystery, but also because it separates humans a little from life, and is a reminder of their mortality. As such, it stands over and against "the sweet fruit" of the cherry tree "that will delude us,/ provisioning the argument of desire" (F, p. 32). Once again, Wendell Berry has turned to the processes deep down in the life of things in nature as a model for human ways of ordering, which are potentially destructive if they are founded upon the kind of partial understanding which leads one in spring to be aware only of life. To acquire the habit of waking is dangerous unless one realizes that that waking consists of "a seasonal blood that shines/and dies" (F, p. 32).

In part three of "The Habit of Waking," Berry juxtaposes orders with forces. The house and the jonquil, a human and a natural order,
are juxtaposed with traffic and the wind, a human and a natural force. The house and the jonquil, in harmony with each other, are threatened by the traffic and the wind which also vie with one another. The jonquils serve as a model for the house. They are the first life to appear after the snows have melted, daring their "bloom above ground/to be lovely, or trampled" (F, p. 34). Their stillness and silence contrasts with the motion and noise of the traffic. Like the jonquils, the house is threatened by both human and natural forces:

the house stands in the cross-grain of wind and the roadway-
in a vision of journeys bearing recognition toward it (F, p. 34).

And, like the jonquils, the house must dare its "bloom above ground/to be lovely, or trampled" in the threat of wind and the "weather of engines." Here, Berry expresses not only his admiration for and his insistence upon life which prevails despite the worst circumstances, but also a parallel between human and natural orders insofar as the house and the jonquils must each withstand the onslaught of the same forces if they are to survive.

In the last two paragraphs of part three, Berry contrasts another human way of ordering with a natural order and suggests the danger of the former when it tries to light the darkness or fly beyond it rather than descending into it. The man-made object is a plane, "a dark craft, vaulting/its possible crash," "a tentative constellation/marking one height of the sky" (F, p. 34). That craft is indicative of
human achievement insofar as it marks one height of the sky, yet it also suggests the folly of that kind of human achievement, for "it measures/one depth of darkness also" (F, p. 35). That darkness is our own and it will increase the higher our planes and satellites fly:

And outward from that flight hunt
the made moons of our darkness
and desire, their circuits
ticking and aware, leaning
to the void. Our listening strains
beyond expectancy, unmeaning
wishing to hear (F, p. 35).

Once again, Berry turns to the ongoing processes in nature in his search for the harmony between human and natural processes he desires. He recognizes that all of the things he has been describing are contained within the same darkness and are, in fact, ways of attempting to light the darkness. In that same dark, "the creeks, after the first rains,/are audible to the hilltop" (F, p. 35), and he hears with the return of spring, "the old singing of the frogs" (F, p. 35). The final images in this part of the poem suggest the cyclical nature of the processes which enable Berry to take hope that what has been lost will return again. Those processes take place in the dark, not in any light which man has created. The images also suggest the harmony, however temporary, which results from the renewal of life in spring: "The dark breeds/dawn, a deeper melting" (F, p. 35).

Part four, the final part of "The Habit of Waking," describes another kind of order, that of "The buckeye's armed parental shell"
(F, p. 35), which shelters the polished seed which it contains until spring when it:

opens
imperceptively, letting out, gently,
what will be: loosing, lightenig,
desiring the tree of itself- (F, p. 35).

Again, Berry intends us to use the buckeye as it brings forth life as a model or paradigm for the house. In winter, the nut serves merely as protection for the life within it while in spring it opens desiring the growth of the life within. Here again, Berry has turned to nature in order to suggest that a harmony between human and natural orders is possible when the former are made more like the latter.

In "The Garden," section four of "The House," the poem achieves that synthesis which is a harmony of consciousness and world, of human and natural orders. The garden Berry describes here is both the symbol and the reality of that harmony, which is not surprising when we consider the importance which Berry attaches to gardening in his essays, especially in A Continuous Harmony. The garden embodies the perfect balance between mind and world, between life and death, between intention or will and mystery. It is partly a human order and partly a natural order. Yearly, it is subject to death and decay, yet its focus is life and growth:

In this wild
growth, we plant by intention
to recover from spent summer
the vestige of our purpose (F, p. 36).
The garden is "of our desire" (E, p. 36), a creation of our impulse toward life and a design of consciousness; yet, at the same time, it is "fenced in the heated white/ledges of the sky" (E, p. 36). These last lines suggest not only the way in which the garden's boundaries are natural, and therefore mysterious rather than human. They also suggest the way in which through the garden the human will has made itself and its designs subject to the limitations of the natural world, which include death.

Furthermore, the garden is the vestige of the vision of life and of perfection. It is what remains to sustain the inhabitants of the house, to help them survive the winter when summer and that vision have vanished again. Through the garden, the house is able to survive. The fruits of the garden enable the inhabitants of the house to survive the winter, and, therefore, to recover "the vestigial house in returning//wilderness" (E, p. 36). The garden is the creation not of the will to conquer over things, but of a will which seeks to learn from the natural world what designs are most suited to it. As such, it represents "the clean enactment of design" (E, p. 37). At the conclusion of this section of the poem, Berry reminds us that the most important thing is that the labor which produces the house and the garden end in a joy greater than whatever the labor produced, for that joy will be all that remains when "Autumn brings the ragged marigolds" (E, p. 38), an image which suggests again the transitory nature of all human creations, even of the garden which is as equally wild as it is human. The final image of the marigolds also brings us full circle, recalling
as it does the marigolds earlier in the poem. With the return of the fall the entire process will begin again.

Like "The House," the twenty-seven sections comprising "Window Poems" recount the passage of the seasons from fall through winter to the beginning of spring; and, like the former poem, they too are concerned with the problem of human versus natural ways of ordering the world and of the difference between the world as it is perceived by humans and the world as it exists outside of any perception of it.

Here, however, Wendell Berry is not so much concerned with working toward a solution to the problem of consciousness and world as he is with suggesting that consciousness has its function and its value despite the superiority of the world to any perception of it. That function and value here lies in the ability of consciousness to maintain an opening upon the world when a fuller communion with it is impossible. The central symbol in "Window Poems" is not a house as it is in the former poem, but, as the title suggests, a window in a house. Nevertheless, it is a symbol which carries many of the same values which Berry attaches to the house in the previous poem, particularly insofar as the window is a product of consciousness, or as Berry calls it here, "a form of consciousness" (O, p. 38). Like "The House," these poems suggest that human orders have value even though the world is superior to them, even though they are ultimately doomed, and even though they are incapable of providing that fuller communion with the world which surpasses understanding.
In the opening sections of "Window Poems," the year is moving toward winter just as it is at the beginning of "The House." "The white sky" is "traveled by snow squalls,/the trees" are "thrashing," and "the corn blades" are being "driven" by the wind "quivering, straight out" (Q, p. 37). In this first section, Berry suggests that the primary function of the window is, above all, a way of seeing. It is, as the root of the word suggests, "The wind's eye/to see into the wind" (Q, p. 37). It stands between the human behind it and the world beyond it, simultaneously separating them and linking them:

The eye in its hollow
looking out
through the black frame
at the waves the wind
drives up the river (Q, p. 37).

As a way of seeing the window is especially appropriate in winter, in Berry's view a season of purification and clarity, when the excess of summer has been stripped away. Through the window in winter, the man in the poem can see nature and the death it contains as they really are now that "the year's greenness" has "gone down from the high/light where it so fairly/defied falling" (Q, p. 37). In winter, "The country opens to the sky" and "the eye" is "purified among hard facts" (Q, p. 37).

In addition, the window is a "black grid" which suggests death, imprisonment, and separation; but, insofar as it contains "forty/panes, forty clarities" (Q, p. 38), it also liberates the man behind it and
links him with the world. Sections seven and nine of "Window Poems" further illustrate how the window both separates and connects. The man behind it is "set apart/ by the black grid of the window/ and, below it, the table/ of contents of his mind" (Q, p. 43), that is by the concerns of consciousness which have "stopped one ear, leaving him/half deaf to the world" (Q, p. 44); yet, as we learn in section seven, the window connects him with the world in ways that would be impossible without it. In that section, the speaker describes how the man in the poem has placed a wooden tray outside the window in order to feed the birds. At first, the birds are frightened by the man's movements and they approach the window skittishly: "They watched/his eyes, and flew/ when he looked" (Q, p. 42). Soon, however, the birds become accustomed to his presence and they approach the window fearlessly:

He keeps
a certain distance and quietness
in tribute to them.
That they ignore him
he takes in tribute to himself (Q, p. 42).

The window, the barrier between the man and the birds, is precisely what makes this connection with nature possible, however slight it might be. Furthermore, as a design of consciousness, the window is touched on one side by the world insofar as it is "variously wrinkled, streaked/ with dried rain, smudged,/dusted" (Q, p. 38). As we observed above, the window is a conduit, an opening upon the world when other contact with it is impossible; but in the poem it also becomes an
opening upon the man who sits behind it. Looking through the window, he learns more about himself as well as about the world. Looking out, he also looks in:

The window becomes a part of his mind's history, the entrance of days into it. And awake now, watching the water flow beyond the glass, his mind is watched by a spectre of itself that is a window on the past (Q, p. 50).

In addition to being a way of seeing and an opening upon the world which both separates and connects, the window also juxtaposes two kinds of order. As a form of consciousness, a "pattern/of formed sense/through which to look/into the wild" (Q, p. 38), the window is juxtaposed with nature "that is a pattern too,/but dark and flowing" (Q, p. 38). Through this juxtaposition, Berry suggests the fragility of the window and, by extension, the transitory nature of human consciousness and all it creates, for the wild "that is a pattern too" bears "along the little/shapes of the mind/as the river bears/a sash of some blinded house" (Q, p. 38). Yet even though the window is fragile, even though it is a black grid, and even though the man in the poem sees a spectre of himself reflected in it, when juxtaposed with the dark and flowing pattern of nature, it also has the values of light and clarity attached to it just as the house does.

Section five of "Window Poems," in addition to repeating some of the same ideas which "The House" expresses, for example that the
wilderness will return and overwhelm the crops and all other human orders, also asserts that the man behind the window is as much a wilderness as the world beyond it. Thus, the window is not only a pattern of consciousness which is juxtaposed with the larger and less comprehensible patterns of nature. It also juxtaposes two kinds of wilderness, two kinds of order which are ultimately mysterious, the human and the natural: "He is/a wilderness looking out/at the wild" (C, p. 41). The notion that the human sitting behind the window is as much a wilderness as the world beyond comes not as a result of the attention the man in the poem pays to nature through the window, but rather as a result of those infrequent and unbidden occasions when he has managed to go beyond the window to a less conscious and fuller communion with nature:

But there are mornings
when his soul emerges
from darkness
as out of a hollow in a tree
high on the crest
and takes flight
with savage joy and harsh
outcry down the long slope
of the leaves (C, p. 40).

At those times, he experiences a happiness "like the stillness on the water/that holds the evening clear/while it subsides" (C, p. 39). The suggestion of this last simile is important, for it describes the human transformed to a kind of transparency like the window, which holds the evening and lets it go. Like the house in its proper order,
the man when so transformed becomes more like the world beyond the window. The natural world impresses itself upon him. He takes on its aspect and its color rather than imposing human qualities or ways of ordering upon the world.

In addition to functioning as a way of seeing, as an opening upon the world, and as a juxtaposition of two kinds of order, the window, like the house, also provides protection, however temporary, from the more threatening aspects of nature. While it rains outside and the river rises threatening flood, the human sits behind the window protected:

How sheltering and clear
the window seems, the dry fir heat
inside, and outside the gray
downpour (O, p. 41).

Berry realizes, however, that the security which the window, or any human creation, provides is temporary and tenuous, for even as the man behind the window works "the weather moves/upon his mind" (O, p. 41) while outside "The river is rising,/approaching in awful nearness" (O, p. 43). The threat of the rising water makes Berry all the more aware of the fragility of what humans create and of the impossibility of humans comprehending the world completely:

The window
looks out, like a word,
upon the wordless, fact
dissolving into mystery, darkness
overtaking light (O, p. 45).
The river and the force it represents, particularly in its more threatening aspects, are "beyond words" (O, p. 44). The man behind the window, however, finds solace in the fact that life is transitory, that there will be "a resurrection of the wild," a "second coming of the trees" (O, p. 47), for the forest is not only waiting to retake the land which his house occupies, it is also "rising up/in the waste places of the cities" (O, p. 47). In Berry's view, cities, unlike the window, are forms of consciousness which are not openings upon the world. They are the terrible result of the will to conquest over things.

Like the house, the window is threatened not only by the natural world. It is threatened as well and more terribly by humans and by many of the things they create:

The window grows fragile
in a time of war.
The man seated beneath it
feels its glass turn deadly.
He feels the nakedness
of his face and throat.
Its shards and splinters balance
in transparency, delicately
seamed. In the violence
of men against men, it will not last (O, p. 52).

But the world of men threatens not only the window. It threatens the natural world as well, which is one reason why the window is so important as a way of seeing: "It is the mind/turned away from the world/that turns against it"(O, p. 53). The shattering of the window here represents the poisoning of consciousness which begins in the will to
conquest and can even affect the man behind the window who has tried
to become a transparency, to efface himself before the world. The
window enables the man behind it to keep his mind turned toward the
world even when conditions are not favorable.

Here again, Wendell Berry prescribes attention to the natural
world as the cure for what ails men. Hope for the future of both
humans and the world lies not in the imposition of human will upon
nature. Rather it lies in the possibility that humans will make
themselves and what they create more like the things of the world:

Let men, who cannot be brothers
to themselves, be brothers
to mulleins and daisies
that have learned to live on the earth,
Let them understand the pride
of sycamores and thrushes
that receive the light gladly, and do not
think to illuminate themselves.
Let them know that the foxes and the owls
are jovous in their lives,
and their gavetv is praise to the heavens,
and they do not raven with their minds (O, p. 53).

With the return of spring toward the end of "Window Poems," the
relationship of the man behind the window with the world beyond it
begins to change. He begins to sense that transformation in his sleep
when he hears a bird call out, he awakes, "and winter passed out of his
mind" (O, p. 56). The cry of the bird awakens him from the long sleep
of winter, that season of purification and clarity, when his relation-
ship with nature was essentially mental. The return of spring slowly
alters his relationship with nature from one of thought to one of
feeling, from an abstract connection to a more concrete, physical connection. Berry realizes that the new relationship with the world will be like that which he has with his wife, and "There is/no window where she is" (Fragment, p. 57). It will be something that he feels rather than understands. As a result of that change, the window, a form of consciousness, "is made strange/by these days he has come to" (Fragment, p. 56).

Despite the value of the window as a way of seeing, what Berry ultimately seeks is a mystical communion with nature in which he is able to see the world "beyond his glances" and "to know it beyond words" (Fragment, p. 50). Beyond the window lies the world which contains dread as well as joy, death as well as life, and in spring he becomes once again more fully a part of the world with which the window has kept him tenuously linked throughout the winter. Now he is no longer the observer. Rather he is "watched/by more than he sees" (Fragment, p. 59). The window has fulfilled its function as a way of seeing and as an opening upon the world in winter when fuller communion was not possible.

Berry also realizes that each of the sections which make up "Window Poems" are openings upon the world. They too are ways of seeing, of maintaining links with the world when fuller communion with nature is not possible, but, like the window, they also separate him from the world. Implicit in "Window Poems," then, is the problem of language, how it can become an obstacle between people and the world, an increasingly important concern in Wendell Berry's poetry which we will consider in the following chapter. What Berry seems to be suggesting
here is that in order to enjoy that full communion with nature he seeks, he must not only go beyond the window, but also beyond words. Thus, each section of "Window Poems," like the window itself, "is a fragment/of the world suspended/in the world, the known/adrift in mystery" (0, p. 59); yet each section of the poem, like the window again, also "has an edge/that is celestial/where the eyes are surpassed" (0, p. 59).
Notes to Chapter Two


CHAPTER III: THE FARMING OF A VERSE

"Nature is what we know-
Yet have no art to sav-
"

Ever since the appearance of The Broken Ground in 1964, Wendell Berry has devoted a considerable portion of his work to a continuing evaluation of language and the function of art, especially poetry. Again and again, Berry emphasizes how important language is, not only for the man of letters, but for every individual living in an increasingly technological world. His essay "In Defense of Literacy" lampoons those American universities which have begun to teach language and literature as specialties. To teach our language and literature as such, according to Berry, is to submit to the assumption "that literacy is no more than an ornament". But for Wendell Berry, literacy, far from being a mere ornament, is a necessity:

We will understand the world, and preserve ourselves and our values in it, only insofar as we have a language that is alert and responsive to it, and careful of it (CH, p. 171).

Literacy is all the more important today because, in our culture, we no longer have a vital and coherent oral tradition as primitive peoples did; yet we are constantly bombarded by a kind of language, what Berry calls "prepared, public language" (CH, p. 171), which is trying to compel us to do something, usually, in his words, "to buy or believe
somebody else's line of goods" (CH, p. 171). In Berry's view, our only defense against such a use of language as power is to know a better language. That is, we must know our literature, for "The only defense against the worst is a knowledge of the best" (CH, p. 172).

For Wendell Berry, the abuse of language is largely responsible for the cultural, physical, and spiritual wasteland in which Americans find themselves living today. In "The Loss of the Future," Berry acknowledges both the importance of language, "Men fight when arguments fail," (LLH, p. 68) and the way in which Americans have abused language. The future is in jeopardy because we have lost our idealism, for ideals are the only real guide to the future. That loss of idealism has resulted in a loss of reality, for "Each is the measure and corrective of the other" (LLH, p. 48). While Berry views the constant migration of Americans from one part of the country to another or from one part of a city to another as partly to blame for our loss of idealism, a cause just as important is the abuse of language:

Much of the blame for the erosion of our idealism must be laid to the government, because the language of ideals has been so grossly misused by the propagandists (LLH, p. 51).

In "Discipline and Hope," Berry laments what happens when "Language ceases to bind head to heart, action to principle, and becomes a weapon in a contention deadly as war, shallow as a game..." (CH, p. 89); he laments how the administration in power, what he calls the extreme
middle, because of its reliance upon television to communicate, "has perhaps naturally come to speak a language that will not bear scrutiny..." (CH, p. 91); and he laments how "Our present political rhetoric is the desperation of argument" which has led "-as such rhetoric must-to the use of power and the use of violence against each other..." (CH, p. 92). Again and again, Berry notes how our language has deteriorated, largely because of the wide gap between what governments, churches, businesses, and individuals say and what they do, what he calls "a radical disconnection between our words and our deeds" (CH, p. 128).

Berry doesn't confine himself, however, to commenting only upon the importance and the abuse of the everyday language we speak and write or upon the prepared, public speech of politicians. He also has a great deal to say about poetry, about its importance and about its abuse. For Berry, at least early in his career, poetry is one of the most important means we have to restore a world laid waste by men and to usher in a new era in the history of humanity in which there would be new contact between men and the earth:

This is only to say that such an era, like all eras, will arrive and remain by the means of a new speech - a speech that will cause the world to live and thrive in men's minds (CH, p. 14).

By a new kind of speech, Berry means, as much as anything, a new kind of poetry, for he borrows one of his definitions of poetry from
Thoreau: "Poetry is nothing but healthy speech" (CH, p. 14). He borrows another of his definitions of poetry from R. H. Blyth: "Poetry is not the words written in a book, but the mode of activity of the mind of the poet" (CH, p. 14). For Berry, then, as for Blyth, in addition to being the sacred tie which binds all things together (CH, p. 15), poetry is a power which can help to change the world insofar as it is "conducive to the health of the speaker, giving him a true and vigorous relation to the world" (CH, p. 14). That Berry's view of poetry and its function is neoplatonic is emphasized by his agreement with Denise Levertov's understanding of organic form. Berry believes that the poet should strive to discover the forms inherent in nature rather than trying to impose his own designs upon it or attempting to conquer it. As Levertov has written:

For me, back of the idea of organic form is the concept that there is a form in all things (and in our experience) which the poet can discover and reveal. Form is never more than the revelation of content (CH, pp. 4 & 5).

While poetry could be one of the most important means of restoring life and health to the world, of making the wasteland bloom, the poetry of this century, according to Berry, has failed to do so. It "has suffered from the schism in the modern consciousness. It has been turned back upon itself, fragmented, obscured in its sense of function....It has often seemed to lack wholeness and wisdom" (CH, p. 15). Berry finds hope, however, in the work of a number of contemporaries,
most notably Levertov, Gary Snyder, and A. R. Ammons, in whose poetry he finds "a sustained attentiveness to nature and to the relation between man and nature" (CH, p. 1). Their poetry is particularly appealing because it is not turned self-consciously back upon itself, but rather toward the external world. "It seeks to give us a sense of our proper place in the scheme of things" (CH, p. 16).

Of all the poets of the twentieth century, however, Berry most appreciates and admires William Carlos Williams, precisely because Williams' poems are concerned so much with the importance of place:

His poems and stories and essays record the life-long practice, the unceasing labor of keeping responsibly conscious of where he was. He knew, as few white Americans have ever known, that a man has not meaningfully arrived in his place in body until he has arrived in spirit as well (CH, pp. 56-7).

Berry also admires Williams for his insistence upon the concrete ("No ideas but in things") and for his insistence upon the necessity and the usefulness of poetry. What Berry finds in Williams as well as in the other poets mentioned above is, again, a power which moves toward the world and toward "a new pertinence of speech" (CH, p. 35).

In "The Long-Legged House," the title piece of his first collection of essays, and in The Hidden Wound, his long essay which attempts to come to terms with the racial problem in the South as he has experienced it, Berry details the importance of place in his own coming of age as a writer. Early, Berry realized that his chief problem as a
writer was the tradition in which he was working, what he has called "Kentucky's tradition of corrupt and crippling local colorism" (LLH, p. 138), which resulted more often than not in literary falsification. "The language of the state's writers," he added, "was dead in their mouths" (LLH, p. 138).

In The Hidden Wound, Berry elaborates upon the problem of language and literature and its connection with racism in the South and in the rest of America. There he relates the story of Bart Jenkins, a slave owner with whom Berry's great grandfather, himself a slave owner, had had dealings, but also "a figure of certain historical prominence, one of the many heroes of a book entitled Kentucky Cavaliers in Dixie by George Dallas Mosgrove" (HW, pp. 9-10). Because of an anecdote passed down from generation to generation in his family about his great grandfather selling a slave he could not handle to Jenkins, Berry knows that Jenkins was a violent man, but the language of Mosgrove's book, though it occasionally confronts the harsh realities of the war between the states, either turns away from them or mythologizes them, written as it was "under the spell of chivalry and medieval romance" (HW, p. 10). Mosgrove never identifies Jenkins as a slave holder nor as the scourge of the local populace which folklore suggests that he and his roving band of marauders happened to be. Rather, Mosgrove glorifies Jenkins as a knight "involved in a pageant of gallantry, tournaments, and jousts" (HW, p. 11).

Berry recognizes that what he knows of Jenkins has come to him via two very different kinds of language:
One, the language of spoken reminiscence, a casual, yet also apparently compulsive pondering over what happened—conveys the facts in what I suppose to be their full harshness, but without judgment. The other, the polite cultivated mythologizing language of Mosgrove—self-consciously public and "historical"—conveys the facts at least somewhat as they were, but always with the implied judgment that they were altogether acceptable, accommodating them within the chivalric prototype of gentleman and soldier (HW, p. 15).

For Berry, both kinds of language fail to convey the events as language should. Mosgrove's account fails to place the war within a social and political context and it totally divorces the war from the place where it occurred; and the private account of family memory, while it conveys the facts truthfully, fails to judge. "Between them they define the lack of a critical self-knowledge that would offer the hope of change" (HW, p. 17).

In The Hidden Wound, Berry also finds cause to criticize the religious language of his native area. Ministers have caused the language of religion to become, in Berry's words, "Detached from real issues and real evils,....abstract, intensely pious, rhetorical, inflated with phony mysticism and jovlass passion" (HW, p. 23) because of their emphasis upon the hereafter rather than the here-and-now. They found it necessary to do this in order to turn the attention of the white portion of their congregations, upon whom they depended for their livelihood, away from the contradictions of slavery, away from the division in the minds of the whites about their belief in the immortality of the souls of people whose bodies they owned and used and sold.
Thus, Christianity, emphasizing the mystical aspects of religion, of belief over morality, became chiefly concerned with how to get to the next world instead of with how to live in this one.

Here, too, Berry asserts again and again the necessity of finding a new kind of speech, "a speech of another and more particular order," (HK, p. 89) in order to begin healing the wound of racism; but, just as with the poetry of this century, the fact remains that:

we have not developed the language by which to recognize the extent or the implications of the division, and we have not developed either the language or the necessary social forms by which to recognize across the division our common interest and our common humanity (HK, p. 124).

In order to overcome the problems of his native tradition and his native tongue, in the summer of 1957, the summer he married, Berry undertook the arduous task of seeing and coming to know the place in which he was born and raised. He and his wife Tanya spent that summer living in a cabin on the Kentucky River where he had often camped as a boy. There his marriage, the Camp, the river, his reading, and his writing all became intimately associated in his mind, and these associations contributed greatly to his success as a writer:

I was so intricately dependent on this place that I did not begin in any meaningful sense to be a writer until I began to see the place clearly and for what it was (LLH, p. 141).
"Diagon," a poem we discussed in Chapter One, resulted largely from Berry's excitement at seeing clearly for the first time the place with which he had been intimately associated for so long without realizing it. What he discovered that summer, and it was a discovery which would eventually lead him back to Kentucky to live permanently where he had been born and where his ancestors had lived and died, was that Kentucky was his fate and also his subject matter. Years later, after he had returned, looking back upon that time, he would write: "My language increased and strengthened, and sent my mind into the place like a live root system" (LLH, p. 178). It was only after Berry had returned to the land to farm that his poems began to grow out of his place and to reflect the soul of a man who was attempting to live in and with nature as much as possible. Berry, then, has tried to find that new speech of which he writes by becoming more and more aware of his place and by writing out of a knowledge of it.

Poetry for Wendell Berry, more than the words written down on the page, is a power which has to do with the way a man lives more than with anything he might write. Throughout most of his work including both the essays and the poems, where he writes about language and poetry, the function of poetry is twofold: it is both vision and the enactment of vision, that is, it is both ends and means with a decided emphasis upon the latter. As means, poetry is one important way of going beyond the wasteland we find ourselves living in today. As an end, poetry, as a form of human design along with farming, is one of the two ways in which
Berry attempts to enact his vision; but writing poetry is more abstract than farming, just as Berry's vision is more abstract than either writing or farming; and so, in the course of his career, Wendell Berry has come to look upon poetry as a less and less viable way of enacting his vision of the world.

As we might expect, the view of language and poetry which we find in Berry's poems is both similar to and different from that which we find in his essays. The fact that he writes so many poems about song, poetry, and language attests to their ongoing importance as subjects in his thinking and in his life; yet, at the same time, we can observe a paradoxical development in his poems away from song and the importance of poetry toward silence, a development which stresses more and more that poetry is not the words written in a book, but "the mode of activity of the mind of the poet."

In The Broken Ground, song is the central motif and/or unifying principle of a considerable number of poems. In "The River Voyagers" and "Observance," Berry mentions song only in passing; yet, in both instances, he connects it with renewal and with the unity of all things in nature, two of his more important themes. In the former poem, he uses song to suggest how death is just as important as life. Not only is there a country to which the living awaken "where the light's bells ring/Morning on the river," (BG, p. 9) but there is also "a country/Green of leaf and river/Within the sleep of the dead voyagers,/Or their death also/Is a river where morning returns/And is welcome" (BG, p. 9). The cardinal "chanting/Its renewal in a tree of shade"
sings to the dead river voyagers, even though they cannot hear, as much as it sings to the living. Again, as we have already observed in Chapter One, the suggestion is that death is a vital and integral part of nature and as important a part of the process of renewal as life is. In "Observance," the song is that of the townsmen who have come down to the river in the morning; and, while Berry is careful to distinguish their song from that of the birds whose singing the men's coming silences, here at least he appears to value human song as much as that of the birds, for the townsmen "sing renewal beyond irreparable/divisions" (BG, p. 10), whether those divisions be the products of life or death.

A number of other poems from this collection demonstrate the way in which Berry, at least early in his career, values song, especially human song. In Chapter One, in our discussion of "A Man Walking and Singing," we saw how he admires the ability of men to sing not in spite of but because of their knowledge of death, that oppressive climate in which we live. In keeping with what he says in his essays about the importance of place to his own writing, we can observe in this poem how the stuff of the world, what the speaker sees and hears, becomes part of his song, his footsteps, in a phrase William Carlos Williams no doubt would have admired, "beating the measure of his song" (BG, p. 29). Berry further underscores the importance of human song here through his contrast of it with "the mockingbird's crooked/arrogant notes" (BG, p. 30). The man in the poem sings not in spite of but almost because of his awareness of death while the bird sings
as though no flight
or dying could equal him
at his momentary song (BG, p. 30).

Thus, not only is there a kind of triumph in human singing, but the poem suggests further that it is also song which separates men from beasts, an idea which has important ramifications in Berry's later work.

In "To Go By Singing," a poem similar to the one we have just discussed, again Berry emphasizes the importance of human song. Here, the singer who walks the streets is "a rag of a man, with his game foot and bum's clothes" (BG, p. 44). Nevertheless, the speaker admires him for he is not the stereotyped panhandling wino. He sings neither for love nor money, "his hands/aren't even held out." This man "sings/by profession," and because of the religious connections song has in other poems in The Broken Ground, most notably in "Canticle," we must understand "profession" not only as the man's calling or his occupation, but also as his declaration or avowal of faith in life.

In the second stanza of the poem, Berry juxtaposes the man's singing with the noise and movement of the city:

To hear him, you'd think the engines
would all stop, and the flower vendor would stand
with his hands full of flowers and not move (BG, p. 44).

The suggestion is that the man's singing goes largely unnoticed even though the speaker finds it extraordinary; yet he also finds something admirable in that the man sings even though no one listens to him, that
"there's no special occasion or place/for his singing-" (BG, p. 44).

The parallels we might draw here between the nature of this man's singing and the function of poetry would seem to be significantly at odds with what Berry says in his essays about poetry. There, as we have seen, he emphasizes the importance of writing out of a deep awareness of place and also the necessity and usefulness of poetry. Here, however, if we allow that when Berry writes about song he also means poetry, the suggestion would seem to be that poetry derives its importance and its strength precisely because there is no special occasion or place for it, that it thrives and is somehow admirable because it lacks an occasion or an audience or a home. Furthermore, even the usefulness of poetry appears to be called into question here, for, aside from its importance to the man as his way of going, his singing has little impact upon the world: "His song doesn't impede the morning/or change it, except by freely adding itself" (BG, p. 44). If only implicitly, the power of poetry to change the world would appear to be in question here.

How can we account for this discrepancy? A number of plausible explanations suggest themselves. First, perhaps we should not draw the connection between song and poetry so readily, a weak explanation, I think, in light of the title of the poem which suggests, more than a walk through city streets, a way of life; and in light of the way Berry views song in other poems in the collection as a kind of human design which makes the parallel with poetry unavoidable. Second, Berry wrote the poem earlier than most of his essays, before he had
returned to settle in Kentucky and, perhaps, before he had consciously formulated his view of the function of poetry, a plausible explanation when we realize as we shall see that Berry's view of the function of language and poetry as he expresses it in his poems, though it has changed and developed, remains ambivalent even as recently as *Clearing*, his latest collection. Third, Berry is talking about the only kind of song possible in the city where it is impossible to sing out of a strong sense of place, a kind of song which he finds admirable, but inferior to poetry rooted in place. Either of these last two explanations or a combination of them helps to account for the view of song this poem expresses.

Two other poems in *The Broken Ground* in which Berry asserts the importance of song are "An Architecture" and "A Music." In each poem, he suggests in different ways that song functions as a kind of design which can provide order and meaning. In the former poem, it is the song of a bird opening "Like a room....among the noises/of motors and breakfasts" (*BC*, p. 36). The obvious suggestion here is that the bird's singing creates the world in which it lives. "Around/him his singing is entire." Again, the parallel between the power of the song of the bird and the power of poetry to create order and meaning, or even a world in which one can live, is all but obvious. Song is an architecture, both a plan or vision and the enactment of that vision. Rather than being created out of an awareness of place, it creates the place in which one lives, although one could argue that the bird's song is certainly of the place in which it is sung.
In the latter poem, the song is that of a blind mandolin player in the subway whom the speaker employs by proffering a coin. The song of the mandolin player, like the song of the man in "To Go By Singing," becomes all the more significant because of the place in which he plays - the subway station where all is transient, nothing permanent. Here again, song is a unifying principle. It connects the speaker with the mandolin player and each of them with the place:

Maybe we're necessary to each other,
and this vacant place has need for us both
it's vacant, I mean, of dwellers,
is populated by passages and absences (BG, p. 43).

Again, perhaps because of the nature of the place or because of Berry's view of song at this point in his career, the music of the mandolin player clearly supercedes the place in importance. "Nothing was here before he came" the speaker tells us, and "The tunnel is the resonance/and meaning of what he plays." The tunnel enriches and intensifies the music, but it is supplementary, not its source. The speaker further emphasizes the value of human song when he tells us in the last line of the fourth stanza: "It's his music, not the place, I go by."

The importance of music as a human design and as a means of perception is emphasized in the last two stanzas where the speaker calls the blind man's mandolin, "the lantern of his world;" where "his fingers make their pattern on the wires" (my italics). Again, Berry suggests, as he does in "A Man Walking and Singing," that the song here is a kind
of triumph for it takes form in an alien clime, in a twofold darkness. In fact, the song lights up the darkness, both for the mandolin player who is blind and for the speaker, a stranger to the city and to the darkness of the subway. The song becomes a means of perception:

This is not the pursuing rhythm
of a blind cane pecking in the sun,
but is a singing in a dark place (BG, p. 43).

That Berry finds human song all the more important in the city is born out by the last phrase of the poem, for the subway and the city are dark places in Berry's scheme of things. It is born out as well by the generally negative view of the city which Berry expresses in The Broken Ground and by the way in which he admires how nature, that is anything living, manages to hang on there despite waste and ruin.

In "The Wild," for example, a poem in which Berry wryly reverses the idea of order expressed in Stevens' "Anecdote of the Jar," the speaker comes upon an empty lot in the city which he declares is "a place/not natural, but wild-among/the trash of human absence,//the slough and shamble/of the city's seasons" (BG, p. 45). Ironically, here it is not the wilderness which orders itself about a man-made object. Rather, the city, a sprawling human artifact, orders itself around the empty lot where "a few/old locusts bloom." The speaker sees and hears a few woods birds there and declares that "they're the habit of this/wasted place." Implicit in the poem is a suggestion of the frailty of the city as a kind of human design, for not the buildings
but the birds are the ground's "remembrance of what is." All human
design is doomed, yet song, like that of the man walking and singing
and the blind mandolin player, can make living bearable and even pro-
vide order and meaning in the city, that worn monument to the failure
of human vision, where no other song is possible.

Wendell Berry does not always view song in such a positive light.
We have already seen in "Canticle" how he distinguishes between the
different kinds of song of which humans are capable. There he values
the concrete song of the coal merchant over the abstract, spiritual
music of the moribund priests precisely because the former consists of
the stuff of this world:

He mentions the daily and several colors of the world.
His song is part of a singing into which the trees
move, and fill themselves with all their living
and their sounds. Dirt and offal assail the dead
with music, and they vanish out of their bodies (BG, p. 39).

In addition to "Canticle," "The Bird Killer" and "Nine Verses of the
Same Song" are two other poems in The Broken Ground in which Berry
distinguishes between different kinds of song.

The situation in "The Bird Killer" contrasts nicely with that in
"A Music." Though darkness predominates in both poems, here the set-
ting is not the metro, but the country and, almost immediately, we are
impressed by the great difference between the character here and the
music he makes as opposed to the mandolin player and the harmony which
his song creates between himself and the place in which he plays:
His enemy, the universe, surrounds him nightly with stars going nowhere over the cold woods that has grown now, with nightfall, totally dark, the stars deeper in the sky than darkness; his thoughts go out alone into the winds of the woods' dark (BG, p. 34).

The character here plays, not the mandolin, but the guitar; and unlike the mandolin player whose "fingers make their pattern on the wires," this man plays badly "so that he plays/his own song, no true copy of a tune." Unlike the mandolin player whose instrument is "the lantern of his world," this man's notes go away from melody, form singly, and die out singly, in the hollow of the instrument, like single small lights in the dark; his music has this passion, that he plays as he can play (BG, p. 34).

His song, unlike the song of the blind man which is "a singing in a dark place," is made up of dark notes.

Why is this man's song so different from that of the mandolin player, so out of harmony with his place and with the world? Berry suggests an answer when he calls the man in "The Bird Killer" a devourer of song. Here, perhaps for the first time in his poetry, Berry distinguishes between human song and the song of the world, the song of nature. Implicitly, the poem suggests that the man's song is out of harmony with the world because he is at odds with nature. He is a murderer of song. Here, in a setting more natural than the city, human song pales before the song of the world which the birds in the
poem represent.

"Nine Verses of the Same Song" is a group of loosely connected poems, of which a number are concerned with song, speech, and the possibility of perfection in a finite world. Here, again, Berry distinguishes between the song of the world and human song, between the world as it is and the world as humans know it. In the first section, Berry presents both of these themes in only seven lines. The ear, he tells us, is finely attuned "to the extravagant music/of yellow pears ripening... as if the world/were perfect" (BG, p. 19). But the ear also hears the sound of the cicada bursting its shell breaking in upon that extravagant music. The distinction is between two kinds of music which humans are capable of hearing: the ideal, perfect music which the ear prefers; and the real, imperfect music which the ear cannot avoid. Berry's suggestion appears to be that in order to have perfection, humans must ignore aspects of reality, but the image of the whirring cicada in the last line suggests that the real will always break in upon and destroy that illusion of perfection.

Section two, which appears to be little more than a loose collection of images, also distinguishes between human music and the music of the world. Here the human music, consisting of trumpets on a phonograph which "hold the globed gold light/belling in the mirror's corridor/time out of time" (BG, p. 20), is juxtaposed with "the morning-red cockerel's/burnished crowing." Whereas the former is a human design which gives the illusion of stopping time, the latter is "counter-measure/to clocktick," that is, to another man-made,
artificial means of measuring time. The crowing is heard by the quiet man of stanza one not merely with the ears, but "loud/in the quick of his wrist" (BG, p. 20). The trumpets, like the yellow pears of section one, produce an extravagant, ideal music which contrasts with the sparier music of the cock, a kind of music which the man is capable of because it flows in his own veins. It is the real stuff of the world and as such it does not seek to impede the flow of time like human music.

One other section of the poem is pertinent here. In section four, Berry juxtaposes two kinds of music in order to show what kind is most appropriate for humans. Here music is clearly analogous with speech. Those two kinds of music are that which is all flesh and that which strives to be all soul. Berry finds both kinds unsatisfactory:

it is a more mingled music
we are fated to

a speech breaking categories
to confront its objects (BG, p. 22).

This poem, along with "The Apple Tree," in addition to suggesting the fundamental importance of music and speech, also provides a definition of poetry which is applicable to Berry's own work. Poetry is, first of all, in a definition Williams would have approved of, "a speech breaking categories/to confront its objects." It is a speech which turns us toward the things of this world. Furthermore, it is, as Berry asserts in "The Apple Tree," a poem which John Ditsky has admired for its
congruence of subject and form, a kind of necessary or an essential prose. As Ditsky has observed:

The tree becomes "poem" - though the word is not used - because of the way it "stands up, emphatic" among "accidents" and establishes its "necessity." Poems, then, like the tree which is "a major Fact or statement of nature," should endeavor to be a major human design, a major statement which stands out against the background of other kinds of utterances. It should be as rooted in its place as the tree in the poem is; and, while its growth or composition should be casual, the form it achieves should be unalterable and necessary.

In Openings and Findings, Berry's subsequent two collections, music, language, and poetry are not important as subject matter, although one of the "Window Poems" from Openings hints at a change in attitude about the importance of language and poetry which becomes increasingly more apparent in Farming: A Handbook, The Country of Marriage, and Clearing. There, in section fifteen, in one of the many poems in which Berry writes admiringly about a tree, he asserts how man's perceptions of the world and his language, his way of expressing and sometimes of making those perceptions, are subordinate to the world, represented here by a sycamore tree.

As the poem opens, the speaker observes the man in the poem as he gazes out the window at the sycamore which is "white/in the glance that looks up to it" (O, p. 49). But the speaker quickly makes us
aware that the tree is independent of his perceptions of it: "But it is not a glance/that it offers itself to./It is no lightning stroke/caught in the eye" (O, p. 49). He also wants to make us aware of the way in which perception can distort and even falsify reality,"its white is not so pure/as a glance would have it" (O, p. 49), and of the way in which language can come between us and the objects which we seek to know. The speaker wants to see the sycamore "beyond his glances," and "to know it beyond words," (O, p. 50) while he denies categorically any part that the imagination, and therefore art and poetry, might play in creating the world in which he lives:

It is not by his imagining
its whiteness comes (O, p. 50).

Berry brings that hint of a diminishment in his estimation of the power of language more to the fore in his next collection, Farming: A Hand Book. In this volume, just as in The Broken Ground, language, most often, takes the form of song, although at times Berry contrasts the mere language men are capable of with the song the world sings. In "The Silence," for example, in answering his central question "What must a man do to be at home in the world?" (F: HB, p. 23) Berry indicates that it is necessary for man to efface himself before the world to be at home there. That effacement involves abandoning all human designs, words as well as thoughts, which stand between him and reality in favor of a mystical communing with nature:
There must be times when he is here
as though absent, gone beyond words into the woven
shadows
of the grass (F: HB, p. 23).

In the silence which follows, he becomes one with the world through
a kind of death in which

his bones fade beyond thought
into the shadows that grow out of the ground
so that the furrow he opens in the earth
opens in his bones (F: HB, p. 23).

Having abandoned all human design, he begins to hear the song of the
earth.

Berry repeats the same idea in slightly different fashion in three
other poems in Farming: A Hand Book: "A Letter," "Meditation in the
a poem written to Ed McClanahan and Gurney Norman about a trip Berry
made to visit them in California, while Berry acknowledges the bond
which language creates between people and between people and the earth
"our bond is speech/grown out of native ground/and laughter grown out
of speech,/surpassing all ends" (F: HB, p. 103) as well as the power
of speech to teach and to correct, at the same time, he emphasizes how
speech pales before the things of this world, here a blue flower in the
woods:
Speech can never fathom
the flower's silence. Enough
to honor it, and to live
in my place beside it. I know
it holds in its throat a sweet
brief moisture of welcome (F: HB, p. 104).

The failure of speech to capture reality or even to free it through knowledge is further emphasized in "Meditation in the Spring Rain."

As the poem begins, the speaker describes how in April in a light rain he climbed up a hill to drink of the water flowing there. There he undergoes an experience similar to that which Wordsworth has in the Snowdon episode toward the end of The Prelude, and he is left with a similar dilemma, although the experience in Berry's poem is much less apocalyptic. Awed by the scene before him, the speaker declares that "The thickets...send up their praise/at dawn" (F: HB, p. 105).

Immediately, however, he feels compelled to examine what he has said. The questions and statements which arise in the poem as a result of that examination are a gloss upon the entire body of Berry's poetry:

Was that what I meant - I meant
my words to have the heft and grace, the flight
and weight of the very hill, its life
rising - or was it some old exultation
that abides with me? (F: HB, p. 105).

The speaker, like Wordsworth on Snowdon, is unsure whether what he is feeling and experiencing results from the external scene or from something within him which leads him eventually to question in its entirety
the value of language. Before he does that, however, he embarks upon what appears to be a long digression to recount the story of crazy old Mrs. Gaines who stood one day "atop a fence in Port Royal, Kentucky, singing: 'One Lord, one Faith, and one/Cornbread'' (F: HB, p. 105). Most of the time Mrs. Gaines was allowed to roam about the town freely; but, occasionally, when she became wild, the townspeople put her in a cage which was nearly as big as her room in which they had constructed it. One day, however, Mrs. Gaines wandered further away than she ordinarily did and the town had a difficult time finding her.

While this anecdote demonstrates the way in which Wendell Berry uses folk materials in his poetry, he seems to dwell upon it out of all proportion to its importance in the work. But what Mrs. Gaines teaches the speaker is the importance of going beyond what is normally accepted and known. That is the one way that people can be truly free: "For her, to be free/was only to be lost" (F: HB, p. 106). Berry sees a similarity between himself and Mrs. Gaines realizing that in order for him to be free, to go beyond what he knows, he must relinquish all human designs including even language itself. For Berry to be free, he must be not crazy, but silent, although he is aware that such a step would surely suggest madness to his publisher, his colleagues, and his contemporaries:

For I too am perhaps a little mad
standing here wet in the drizzle, listening
to the clashing syllables of the water. Surely
there is a great Word being put together here
(F: HB, p. 106).
Unlike Wordsworth who denies apocalypse, Berry denies the self. In "Meditation in the Spring Rain," more emphatically than in any previous poem, he contrasts the language of men with the song of the world to the detriment of the former. In order to hear the assembling of the great Word, he must become silent, and give up his own language which intrudes between him and reality. Paradoxically, that silence and the fact that the speaker begins to hear the great Word restores his confidence in his own ability to speak so that he is able to declare again without the questions and doubts which plagued him earlier: "The thickets, I say, send up their praise/at dawn!" (F: HB, p. 107). The process has been a complicated one. In order to affirm the world and the value of his affirmation of it, Berry has had to question that affirmation, to relinquish the very language in which he made it so that he could be certain that he was speaking truthfully and not imposing upon reality "some old exultation" from within. That process, involving as it does the abnegation of human vision and human design, is similar if not identical to the effacement of self through the descent into darkness which we observed in Chapter One. The abnegation of a language which limits the way in which the speaker might know reality leaves him with a feeling of oneness with the world:

For a time there
I turned away from the words I knew, and was lost.
For a time I was lost and free, speechless
in the multitudinous assembling of his Word (F: HB, p. 107).
In the third poem, "The Farmer Speaking of Monuments," Berry emphasizes another one of the limitations of language. Not only is language an abstraction which stands between men and the world, it is also a way, albeit a false way, in which men try to make themselves immortal in the world. As the poem opens, the speaker tells us that men through their works are always trying to become "immortal in the world" (F: HB, p. 116), the poet no less than anyone else. The farmer, however, is the one kind of man who "knows no work or act can keep him/here" and he knows "He will not be immortal in words" (F: HB, p. 116). Yearly, the farmer seeks to enact his vision and, therefore, "His words all turn/to leaves," the abstract word becomes the concrete leaf insuring its doom, but, again, in a kind of death which assures new life.

The act of planting is viewed as a kind of death which results in a work which bears no resemblance to the planter. Thus, the farmer vanishes in his work and again we can observe the self-effacement and abnegation of earlier poems. Like the speaker in "Meditation in the Spring Rain," the speaker here goes beyond what he knows by acknowledging the failure of all human design including his own, yet he enacts his vision anyway, "becoming what he never was" (F: HB, p. 116).

In his next volume of poetry, Wendell Berry gives a name to that place where humans arrive having relinquished all human design and sailed beyond the utmost bounds of human thought. It is, as he calls the collection, the country of marriage. Just as in Tennyson's poem, that place is fully and permanently reached only in death, but one can occasionally arrive there in life as Berry does through his marriage
to his wife and to the land, relationships which we will examine in greater depth in Chapter Four.

In one poem in this collection, Berry views human song as favorably as he does in the early poetry. In "Zero," despite the severity of the weather, the speaker tells us that "the wren's at home/in the cubic acre of his song" (COM, p. 10). Here, clearly, he intends us to understand song as a kind of human design, for like songs, the farm buildings, each a kind of human design, "stand up around their lives" against the cold, and the speaker tells us that like the wren he has "a persistent music" in him. Here, however, song is not the sturdy structure that it is in "An Architecture." Rather, it is "a flimsy enclosure," little more than a hope in the midst of winter "that says the warmer days/will come." That song remains important, nonetheless, because, just as in "A Man Walking and Singing," it is sung in the face of death. It is a singing "not to dread the end." The speaker in this poem finds the zero degree weather appealing because it brings the end, "the climate we sing in," more to the fore. It creates an environment

in which nothing lives by chance
but only by choosing to
and by knowing how-- (COM, p. 11),

which would appear, paradoxically, to stress the importance of human vision and will.

Virtually every other poem in The Country of Marriage which deals with song as a kind of human design either emphasizes its limitations
or subordinates it to the song of the world. "The Strangers," for example, while it emphasizes the importance of vision in a world where men do act by design and also the value of language which grows out of a deep awareness of place, suggests as well that language, rather than creating a bond between people, divides them. As the poem begins, the speaker hears the voices of lost travelers calling out to him trying to find their way. They are lost because they have ceased to know the country directly. They know it only through language: "For them, places have changed/into their names, and vanished" (COM, p. 37). The speaker further realizes that the travelers will not understand his language because it grows out of a deep relationship with the land which has vanished for them. It is a speech which "is conversant with its trees/and stones" (COM, p. 37). The language he speaks is that of a native of the place. Because their lives and languages are so different, he realizes that they are lost to one another because they will not be able to understand him.

In "Kentucky River Junction," a poem dedicated to Ken Kesey and Ken Babbs, two friends of the poet's from the time he spent at Stanford, not only does Berry emphasize the superiority of the world to any human idea or expression of it, here the world supercedes words as the bond between people. Like "A Letter," this poem is about a visit between Berry and friends after long separation. As the poem begins, Berry recounts the initial awkwardness of the reunion "Clumsy at first, fitting together/the years we have been apart,/and the ways" (COM, p. 14). Slowly they discover that a bond has existed between them even
when they have not communicated. That bond, however, is not speech as it was in "A Letter," but the world:

But as the night passed and the day came, the first fine morning of April,

it came clear:
the world that has tried us
and showed us its joy

was our bond
when we said nothing (CON', p. 14).

Emphasizing again the superiority of the world to language, Berry declares "Free-hearted men/have the world for words" (CON', p. 15).

Three other poems in The Country of Marriage, "The Silence," "Song," and "A Song Sparrow Singing in the Fall," express the superiority of the world to any human expression of it, the limitations of language, the intrusive nature of language, and the necessity of going beyond language in order to be one with the world. More importantly, they suggest for the first time an idea which Berry elaborates upon in Clearing - that in his own life he is about to abandon poetry altogether for the joy and peace of full communion with the world. "The Silence," a different poem from the poem of the same title in Farming: A Hand Book, is reminiscent in theme if not in tone of Williams' "Portrait of a Lady." It expresses the poet's dissatisfaction with his inability to stand silent before the world. As the poem opens, the speaker laments the way in which he prefers his own words to the song of the world
"Though the air is full of singing" (COM, p. 25). More concretely, he is upset by the way he "hungers for the sweet of speech" even though there is real fruit readily available. The distinction between the world and man is brought home all the more emphatically in the contrast between the way in which Berry characterizes the utterance the world makes, that is as song, and that which humans are capable of, mere words or speech. Human utterance, however, is not only inferior to the song of the world, it is a temptation and a distraction which turns human attention away from reality:

Though the beech is golden
I cannot stand beside it
mute, but must say
"It is golden," while the leaves
stir and fall with a sound
that is not a name (COM, p. 25).

The speaker suggests, then, that hope for the world lies not in poetry, not in the creation of a new speech as Berry has suggested earlier, but in silence:

Let me say

And not mourn: the world
lives in the death of speech
and sings there (COM, p. 25).

Berry repeats the same idea in "A Song Sparrow Singing in the Fall" where he declares that he will abandon all other singing and "go/into
the silence/of [his] songs" (COM, p. 20) so that he might hear the song of the world more clearly; and in "Song" where the speaker perceives the finite nature of poetry, that he tells his love "in rhyme/In a sentence that must end" (COM, p. 46). The latter poem, however, while it too emphasizes the inferiority of language to the world, suggests as well that something about the world compels men to speak and that language, and presumably poetry, will be around as long as the world is:

We will speak on until
The flowers fall, and the birds
With their bright songs depart.
Then we will go without art,
Without measure, or words (COM, p. 46).

The value of human song and ultimately of poetry and of all human utterance continues to be a central concern in Clearing, Berry's most recent collection of poems, as the titles of two of the poems suggest, "Work Song" and "Reverdure," the title of the latter having been drawn from the French "reverdier" which means to grow green again, but which is also a kind of old French song signaling the return of spring. In this volume, while Berry's attitude toward human song is more positive in some poems than it has been in the two previous collections, he remains at best ambivalent, for, where he is negative, he is more so than in any previous poem, suggesting for the first time not merely the need to be silent in order to hear the assembling of the great Word, but
the real possibility that he is on the verge of abandoning poetry all together. Furthermore, old fashioned hard work replaces song and the creation of a new kind of speech as Berry's hope and means of restoring a world laid waste by men.

"History," the first poem in the collection, while it underscores the superiority of the world to all human design including song, suggests, nevertheless, that human song can have value as long as it grows out of and remains deeply rooted in a place on earth. In the first section of the poem, in late autumn after the crops have been harvested in the third year of living in that locale, the speaker sets out on a walk which takes him beyond all human design:

Beyond the farthest tracks
of any domestic beast
my walk led me, and into
a place for which I knew
no names. I went by paths
that bespoke intelligence
and memory I did not know (C, p. 3).

Once there, he tries to become familiar with the place, not through language, but by "Learning/the landmarks and the ways/of the land" (C, p. 3). Once again, abandoning all of his own designs enables the speaker to begin to discover the designs of nature. He finds himself close to song precisely because he went into the place "wordless and gay as a deer" (C, p. 3).

In section two of "History," the speaker informs us that he has returned many times and in many different ways to the place he ventured
to in section one until he came "with a sharp eye/and the price of land" (C, p. 4) and purchased it. Once he becomes its "owner," like Boone, he recognizes the wide difference between any ideal vision of the place he might have had on that first day and the real condition of the land whose history has almost ruined it beyond repair:

From the high outlook  
of that first day I have come  
down two hundred years  
across the worked and wasted  
slopes, by eroding tracks  
of the joyless horsepower of greed (C, p. 5).

His journey, then, to be fully and truly in that place is mental as much as it is physical. He must perceive the difference between the ideal and the real, between vision and the enactment of vision; and he must be attentive to the history of the place in order to make that farm which he intends to be his "art of being here" (C, p. 5). Berry concludes section two by declaring that until his song arrives in that place "to learn its words," his art "is but the hope of song" (C, p. 5), which suggests not only the importance of place to song and poetry, but also the importance of song and poetry to the enactment of his vision, that is to farming and ultimately to the place itself, for farming is his art of being there.

Ultimately, what Berry is aiming for, as we discover in section three, is union with the place, but he desires more than a physical union. He recognizes that he is already united with the place
physically:

All the lives this place has had, I have. I eat my history day by day. Bird, butterfly, and flower pass through the seasons of my flesh (C, p. 5).

And, while that union is important, he desires as well as more mystical union, a union of mind as well as body:

Now let me feed my song upon the life that is here that is the life that is gone (C, p. 6).

And he prays that "what is in the flesh, ... be brought to mind."

The process of the poem is a familiar one. Vision not rooted in reality is thrown over by the speaker's act of turning toward reality, here as elsewhere the earth, and that attention to reality produces a new, adjusted vision, one which is more in harmony with things as they are. That new vision is rooted in reality and is constantly readjusted to bring it more and more into harmony with the earth as the speaker learns more about it.

"Where," a long poem in which Berry is primarily concerned with establishing a conventional, factual history of ownership of the place he has bought and made his own, contrasts the conventional facts of ownership with another kind of language, a live oral tradition
which the place for the most part sadly lacks. A live, oral history of the place would have provided it with a truer, more complete, and more meaningful history:

We have valued our stories too little here in the Survey of Thomas and Walker Daniels (C, p. 12).

Those stories are the histories of people who lived on the land. A knowledge of them would have provided a continuity which might have resulted in better husbandry of the soil. The loss of that language has resulted in a loss of continuity while

On the courthouse shelves the facts lie mute between their pages, useless nearly as the old boundary marks - (C, p. 12).

The place's history consists of numbers and of "the silence of documents" which contribute little if anything to the maintenance and improvement of the land. Here, then, Berry appears again to value one kind of human utterance. Toward the end of "Where," he prays that his hands might "find their work/...in what is spoiled," (C, p. 19). So it would seem that at least through the second poem in Clearing, Berry continues to value language and poetry as much as physical labor as a way of restoring the world.
With "Work Song," however, Berry's attitude toward language becomes more ambivalent. In section two, entitled "A Vision," he foresees with delight the real possibility of song which is truly rooted in its place:

Families will be singing in the fields.
In their voices they will hear a music risen out of the ground (C, p. 32).

Yet, in the following section, "Passion," he expresses fears about the genuine nature of his words and suggests, for the first time, the possibility that he is about to cease composing poetry altogether. As the section begins, the speaker tells us that "an ancient passion" singing in his veins beneath speech has brought him to his place, presumably the farm he has been writing about in previous poems. That passion has led him beyond speech and beyond books:

to stand in this hillside field
in October wind, critical
and solitary, like a horse dumbly
approving of the grass (C, p. 33).

He wonders whether that passion is leading him away from books and speech because some days he stands "empty as a tree/whose birds and leaves/have gone" (C, p. 34), lines which are reminiscent of those quoted above from "Song" about the lasting quality of language. He wonders further whether that condition might become permanent so that:
one day my poems may pass
through my mind unwritten,
like the freshening of a stream
in the hills, holding the light
only while they pass, shaping
only what they pass through,
source and destination
the same. I am afraid,
some days, that only vanity
keeps me at my words (C, p. 33).

This would seem to be the natural conclusion for a man who defines poetry as "the mode of activity of the mind of the poet" and for whom poetry has always been more important as a means of discovery and discipline than as an end in itself, especially since in his later work in more than a few places Berry has expressed the idea that language as a human design is more of an obstacle than a conduit. Yet, at the same time, it is curiously at odds with what he says in other places about the importance of language not to mention with his own reliance upon language attested to by the vast amount of written work he has produced in a variety of forms since the appearance of his first book in 1960.

Still, there are suggestions that Wendell Berry is not yet ready to abandon song altogether. In the two sections following "Passion," Berry writes of the way in which different kinds of language have troubled him. The first in "Forsaking All Others" is a private illusory language which attempts to seduce him away from the laborious life he has chosen to live a life of ease; but Berry realizes that he must not believe in such "miraculous deliverances" (C, p. 34) for they are
not to be. The second in "A Beginning" is a public language of lies which "finally drives us/to silence" (C, p. 35). This kind of language has caused him to turn more and more toward the world. "We are," Berry writes, "a people who must decline or perish" (C, p. 35). Here we should understand "decline" not only in its primary sense, to diminish, but also in all of its secondary meanings, to turn or bend aside (presumably from the designs or patterns we seek to impose upon the world), to decay, to reject, and to bend or lean downward. Berry rejects both kinds of illusory language not so much for a language of his own, but for work, that value which is replacing speech in his scheme of things:

I work to renew a ruined place
that no life be hostage of my comfort (C, p. 36).

The song that results from that labor, "a work song/and an earth song," is the kind of singing which grows out of a close connection with a place, but it is hardly a kind of speech which can change the world. It is the work rather than the song which effects the change, although the song like the stream in the passage quoted above is instrumental in shaping the mind which it passes through to prepare it and discipline it for the work at hand.

Berry reiterates the superiority of acting, that is of working, to merely singing in another poem in Clearing, "From the Crest," even though he realizes that his own work and the work of any individual
has meager results. It is only the collective and continuous efforts of countless individuals which can have a significant impact upon the world:

I see how little avail
one man is, and yet I would not
be a man sitting still,
no little song of desire
traveling the mind's dark woods (C, p. 42).

Yet a few sections later in the same poem, Berry writes of language in a way which suggests not only that it creates a bond between people and between people and the earth, but in a way which suggests that language also plays an important part in the formation of human lives and an important part in the creation of that place which he intends to be his "art of being here":

What we have said
becomes an earth we live on
like two trees, whose sheddings
enrich each other, making
both the source of each (C, p. 46).

That song, however, is paltry in contrast with the great song, the song of the world, which Berry only partly hears. Still, he goes on singing, for his song like his farm flying through the Milky Way is small and "the little can hope to sing/only in praise of the great" (C, p. 47).

Finally, in concluding "reverdure," the last poem in Clearing, Berry repeats the idea which he expresses in the second section of
"Work Song," that he may be on the verge of abandoning poetry altogether. Words seems to have become for him little more than a means of getting through the winter when there is little he can do to enact his vision in the actual. With the return of spring, he tells us:

It is time again I made an end to words for a while - for this time, or for all time. Any end may last (C, p. 52).

Once again, the poet views books and words as obstacles. They focus upon the past and the future and distract him from the song of the world which is in the air in spring.

Thus, Wendell Berry's view of language has come to be characterized by conflict. From his deep faith in language, especially poetry, as a way of changing people and the world earlier in his career and his later ambivalence about poetry and language in contrast with the song of the world, he has reached the point where at times he wonders whether he should abandon poetry altogether because of the way in which it has come to be an obstacle between him and the world. This is, perhaps, an unusual and sad destination for a poet, a person who works with words, to reach; yet as we have already seen, for Wendell Berry poetry is not an end in itself, but a means toward communion with the world. If he abandons poetry altogether, that does not necessarily mean that Berry views poetry as valueless. Rather, he would only be acknowledging its limitations. It will have taken him as far in that direction as it possibly could. We can only wait to find out whether
we will hear again from Kendell Berry; but the chances are good. While Berry might now agree with W. H. Auden's assertion in the poem from which the title of this chapter has been taken that "poetry makes nothing happen," he would surely have to agree that it will survive only "in the valley of its saving" as a way of happening, a mouth, for as he asserts in "A Song Sparrow Singing in the Fall," "Somehow it has all/added up to song-."
Notes to Chapter Three


6 Ditsky, p. 9.

7 Ditsky, p. 9.


"It is not by will
I know this,
but by willingness,
by being here."

The second and by far the most important way in which Wendell Berry enacts his vision is in his life, through his deepening relationship with the land which he and his family live on and farm. Each of the previous steps of his secular pilgrimage, the descent into darkness, the attempt to solve the problem of consciousness and world, and the enactment of his vision in his art, is characterized by negation, contention, refusal, and rejection. Berry's return to the land, however, while it too involves sacrifice, the loss of possibilities, and the acceptance of finitude, is characterized as well by an affirmation of possibilities and values available only because of his attempt to find his place on earth and to live in it fruitfully and meaningfully. Berry's devotion to the land is apparent in The Broken Ground as we have seen in previous chapters, yet his appreciation of nature there, conspicuous in his preference for the country over the city and in the diminished possibility of song and life in the city, is a devotion to the earth in general rather than to a specific place. In poems like "Diagon," "Canticle," and "Boone," while Berry's appreciation of nature is apparent, his connection with place is generalized. None of the poems in that first collection deals specifically with place.
With the poems in *Openings*, however, Berry begins to imagine the possibility of actually committing his life to the place where he was born and raised. For example, "The Thought of Something Else," the first poem in *Openings*, begins to recognize that possibility as a real one. As the poem begins, even though the speaker is in the city, he senses the return of spring to the earth, "wind blowing/the smell of the ground/through the intersections of traffic" (*O*, p. 3). The return of spring makes him think of the country and of another kind of life, of the possibility of "another place, simple, less weighted/by what has already been" (*O*, p. 3). That thought, however, is not entirely pleasant or positive, for the speaker is aware that the American habit of pulling up stakes and moving to a new place does not insure that life will be better or more meaningful. He recognizes that he runs the risk of falling prey to that illusion, just as Americans have from the time they arrived here:

Another place!
it's enough to grieve me-
that old dream of going,
of becoming a better man
just by getting up and going
to a better place (*O*, p. 3).

But despite his reservations, the speaker realizes that, beneath the concrete and iron of the city, the land persists and the persistence of that life against such incredible odds makes him believe that another kind of life truly is possible:
The mystery. The old 
unaccountable unfolding. 
The iron trees in the park 
suddenly remember forests. 
It becomes possible to think of going (O, p. 3).

In "The Return," another poem from Openings, Berry explores in 
greater depth the possibility of returning to live in the place where 
he was born and raised as well as his reservations about taking such 
a step. In a way, the poem in his declaration of dependence, his poetic 
account of his decision to return to his native Kentucky to farm and to 
write. In the first section, the speaker relates how that return is 
not to be accomplished without sacrifice, for to return to the place 
where he had his beginnings is "to reenter/the dust of [his] first 
flesh, and to turn/painfully against what is [his] own" (O, p. 21). It 
is:

to despise wholly 
what it would be half-pleasing 
to become (O, p. 21).

Characteristically, the language here is religious in tone, particular-
ly the first lines I have quoted; yet Berry speaks of being born again 
not of water but of dust. The rebirth which the speaker would experi-
ence by returning to his native ground, like the experience of the Magi 
in Eliot's "Journey of the Magi," is ambiguous. It is as much a death 
as it is a birth, for the speaker knows that in returning he will have 
to relinquish not only much of the life he has made for himself since
The sacrifice, however, is worth it because the speaker returns to:

the place of beginning, the place
whose possibilities I am one of,
to return
and resume a continuance
as there could be no other place (O, p. 21).

The idea of resuming a continuance suggests the way in which Berry values the past, a theme closely connected in his poetry with the importance of place, as we shall see later in this chapter. It also suggests the way in which the speaker feels that he has alienated himself from the tradition which is rightfully his own. The sacrifice which the speaker must make is, however, not only worthwhile, it is also inevitable, for Berry realizes that in returning, he would be coming back "to what could not be escaped-" (O, p. 21). The speaker knows that he cannot escape that life because it is part of his past, and, even if he does not return, he knows that past will have an important effect upon his life and that he will not be living the life to which he was fated.

Mat Feltner, the protagonist of Wendell Berry's second novel, A Place on Earth, is faced with a similar choice. Early in the novel, Mat remembers how, after he had finished college, he had to decide whether to return to Port William, the town in which he was born and
raised, to take up a life of farming, the life which his father Ben
had chosen; or to seek another life away from that place. He also
recalls how he came to recognize the sacrifice inherent in that
decision;

During his college years the realization grew on Mat
that there were many things he might do with his life.
Before, there had lain in his mind the assumption that
he'd live much the same life that he'd seen his father
living. He'd assumed that the future would remain
clear to him. It didn't. That one possibility came
to be surrounded and obscured by other possibilities,
other desires. He would have avoided them if he could.
They troubled him deeply. They kept him awake at night,
aching with the sense of the future bearing darkly down.
He saw himself moving irrevocably toward an act of
choosing, singular and agonized among many possibi­
lies. He knew that once he chose, his life would in a
sense become less than it could have been. This is
what troubled him, this move he knew he would have to
make, consciously and forever, from what could be to
what would be.²

Fully aware of his dilemma, Mat's parents suggest that he take some
time to make his decision. His father, while he is unable to conceal
the fact that he wants Mat to take over the farm some day, is also
aware that Mat has many more possibilities before him than he ever had.
He suggests that Mat travel for a year in order to find out what he
wants. As a result, Mat goes to Europe where he travels from city to
city until he finally settles in Florence for the winter. There, he
is drawn to the countryside and he is impressed by:
Mat finds the land around Florence cared for in a way which is radically different from the way land is farmed in his native Kentucky. Like the speaker in "The Thought of Something Else," with the return of spring, Mat's thoughts begin to return to his own place. He realizes that he has become pretty much independent of Kentucky, that he doesn't have to go back, that he doesn't need to; but he recognizes as well that "The freedom to stay away was also the freedom to return" (APOE, p. 161). Thus, after examining all the other possibilities which his life contained, Mat decides to return to Port William to become a farmer. His sacrifice, like the speaker's in "The Return," is precisely his acceptance of limitation, his recognition that in order to live he must choose, and, thus, eliminate from his life "What it would be half-pleasing/to become."

Although the first section of "The Return" hints at answers to the questions about returning which it raises, all of the syntax is conditional and the language abstract. Berry's declaration of dependence, like the American "Declaration of Independence," is merely a statement of intention. The return has yet to be accomplished, and the objections to returning remain foremost in the speaker's mind because he realizes that to take such a step "is to say there never
was a departure" (0, p. 21), that is it is to deny the accomplishments of the life he has been living since he left his native ground. It remains for the following six sections of the poem to convince the speaker, and the reader, that the decision to return is the correct one, made without any illusions.

Berry wastes little time in beginning to confront more concretely the objections of section one. In section two, he confronts the land itself, Kentucky, and realizes that he is inextricably bound to it. He recognizes the ongoing union between himself and the land, but he also knows that that union will be harmful or wholesome depending upon whether he can avoid the will to conquest over things. The fate of Kentucky, the speaker declares, is his own fate: "The worst you have come to/is my worst" (0, p. 21). That union, unrecognized and unaccepted, will result not only in the destruction of the land as it already has begun to do, but also in the death of the speaker, and the speaker knows that the land is not what it should be:

Kentucky, I know the greed and pride
that wear your fields to stone, owners who make
their graves richer than their land (0, p. 21).

That Berry names Kentucky, his home state, as the place to which he would return is not gratuitous, yet at the same time, he is clear that his first allegiance is not to any area as arbitrarily bounded as a state. In "Some Thoughts on Citizenship and Conscience: In Honor of Don Pratt," an essay from The Long-Legged House, Berry asserts that
he is more concerned about America, his native country, than about other countries more about his region of the country than about other regions, and more about his state than about other states within that region; yet, far and away, he believes that his chief concern is with his own household, which is consistent with his belief that the solutions to human problems lie in personal initiative and responsibility rather than in public programs or legislation. The situation, however, is not quite as simple as the above suggests. Berry's concern for the world does not diminish in direct proportion to how far a place is from his home. Rather he feels that he must attempt to care as much for the world as for his household. According to Berry, household and world represent two poles which are opposite yet complementary; yet "because one is contained within the other and the two are interdependent, they propose the same consciousness and labor" (LLH, pp. 77-78). Thus, by caring for his household, he begins also to care for the world. The fact that Berry names Kentucky, then, as the place to which he would return is unimportant except insofar as:

The health and even the continuance of our life in America, in all regions, require that we enact in the most particular terms a responsible relationship to the land (CH, p. 66).

Finally, in section two of "The Return," the speaker also recognizes that his connection with Kentucky and the land, despite how the land
has been abused, is not entirely negative. He knows also that the land possesses "a troubling/threatened loveliness" and that there "also the best has been, and may be" (O, p. 21).

In section three, the most critical part of the poem, Berry describes the confrontation with self, with the temptation to the will to conquest over things, although here that temptation takes an unusual form. As this section begins, the speaker dreams "an inescapable dream" of restoring the country to what it was before men arrived and began to build bridges, roads, and fences, to string wire, raise flocks, and build and use machines. All of these he takes away in the dream, and he restores "the wide-branching trees" (O, p. 22). He remakes a country in which "All its being belongs wholly to it"(O, p. 22), where death is as vital a part of the place as life, instead of mere destruction: "It is the life of its deaths" (O, p. 22); but, as the dream moves toward completion, he finds that he cannot deny the reality of man's entrance into that country. He must restore all that man has accomplished, hoping "to build all that we have built, but destroy nothing" (O, p. 22).

The speaker realizes immediately that he is not even equal to the task of restoration because, like the men whom he criticizes, he is "eager to own the earth and to own men" (O, p. 22). As good a motivation as it might be, even the desire to restore, with a single stroke and without acknowledging the labor involved, the land to a pristine state, to what it was before men arrived, is a manifestation of the will to conquest. The dream is a return, but not a sacrificial one.
It seeks to maintain all possibilities. It seeks to evade what men have done to the land in the past and it rejects limitation. In the dream, the speaker has not fully turned against what is his own, nor has he entirely given up "what it would be half-pleasing/to become." He has failed to efface himself before the world and to resume a continuance with the past, that is he has failed to become a vital part of the place as it is because he has not accepted responsibility for what his predecessors have done to the land, whether for good or for bad. He must return to the land as it is, not on his own terms.

Realizing this, in section four, the speaker describes the confrontation with his fellowmen, asking:

Who has come in the night,  
typing his yacht here at the shore,  
playing his radio for fear  
of deep water and the dark  
and the silence of his thoughts,  
strewing over the rocks his imperishable  
aluminum and plastic garbage?  
-more rubbish in one night  
than all the Shawnees made (Q, p. 23).

He recognizes that he must try to love this "violent brainless man," even though he does not, or else he might become like him.

In section five, the speaker returns even more bitterly to an acknowledgement of the sacrifice which the return to his native land entails. It is "To put on again and wear/the earth of the death/of what could have been/and is not to be" (Q, p. 23). In these lines, he speaks both of himself and of the land, of the possibilities of both.
He is drawn back now not by a dream of perfection, a dream in which all possibilities remain for himself and for the land, but by a shadowed beauty. He must accept the tenuous nature of the place as well as its limits and his own because they are "vision's source and imperative" (O, p. 23). Yet to return with that awareness is not easy because it "is to know what one is damned to" (O, p. 23). Berry's fatalism is apparent here, for even with the best intentions and the best methods for caring for the land, a man can hope to accomplish little. Because consciousness desires order and perfection but does not find them in the world, that awareness creates:

-an anguish of the mind
  turning against itself
  within itself, knowledge
  turning against hope
  in sleeplessness, bodies
  in hateful marriage (O, p. 23).

This central paradox which Berry deeply feels, reflected in the struggle in the poem between the abstract and the concrete, is the tension between his certainty about the necessity of living in harmony with the land, and, because the end of all is death, his uncertainty about the results of that effort.

In the penultimate section of the poem, the struggle ends. Here, Berry realizes that there is a place the mind imagines, an ideal and pristine place as in the dream in section three, a place "immune/from this place" (O, p. 24), that is immune from the real place to
which he is fated to return. By acknowledging the difference between the ideal world, a world more hostile than the one men are in the process of ruining because it can never be reached, and the real world, and by acknowledging that he has "neither left nor come to" (0, p. 24) that ideal place, the speaker like Boone effaces his will before the world. The concrete wins out over the abstract. As Robert Hass has suggested:

Berry does not imagine us back to the first forest and give us a painting because he wishes to insist on an imagination which has room for the whole of human culture: fences, crops, and machines. He wants to reclaim the symbolic landscape of our literature for human use...Like Snyder and Duncan, he knows that our literature specializes in imagining places where we cannot live rather than places where we can....The fenced-off land that is possession without obligation and the fenced-off places of the mind are both efforts to make a world pristine and unchangeable outside of history.

In the seventh and last section of "The Return," Berry uses a sycamore tree as a symbol of the kind of relationship he would like to have with his place. The tree has had fences tied to it, "nails driven into it, hacks and whittles cut in it, the lightning has burned it" (0, p. 24); but the sycamore, though "There is no year it has flourished in/that has not harmed it...., is a wondrous healer of itself" (0, p. 24). Though "There is a hollow in it/that is its death" (0, p. 24), it makes that hollow part of its perfection: "It bears the gnarls of its history/healed over" (0, p. 24). The speaker's love for
the sycamore, his desire to imitate its life, to be in his place just as the tree is, to recover, as David Tarbet has suggested, "an animistic consciousness at one with the world," is a desire for the same kind of relationship with the land that primitive peoples have had with it. The tree is perfectly adapted to its place both in life and death.

While the speaker in this last section of "The Return," in his admiration for the tree, asserts the superiority of the natural world to consciousness, here there is no yearning for the annihilation of consciousness such as we find in the last section of "Boone." In fact, here Berry seems to be calling for not a lessening but a heightening of consciousness. One of the reasons why he admires the tree is because of the way it deals with its past:

Over all its scars has come the seamless white of the bark. It bears the gnarls of its history healed over. It has risen to a strange perfection in the warp and bending of its long growth. It has gathered all accidents into its purpose. It has become the intention and radiance of its dark fate (p. 24).

For humans to use their history, the past, in a similar fashion, they must bring the intellect to bear upon it. The mind, as Berry writes in "The House," must cleave among clutter. Wendell Berry is well aware that it is not only consciousness and the will to power over things which are responsible for the way in which men have ravaged the earth. Man's destructive relationship with nature is as much the result of unconsciousness as it is of consciousness. In writing about a
vacationer on the Kentucky River, a man very similar to the one in section four of "The Return," whose leisure is as destructive as his work, Berry explains how men are unconscious of the ways in which consciousness imposes itself upon the world as the result of a kind of hubris that is not even aware of the magnitude of its acts:

It is not, certainly, a conscious destruction. But in that very unconsciousness it becomes an aspect of one of our worst national feelings: our refusal to admit the need to be conscious. Or to put it more meaningfully: our refusal to admit that unconsciousness, in our time, is almost inevitably destructive (LLH, p. 54).

Finally, the speaker admires the sycamore tree in the last section of "The Return" because of the kinetic and reciprocal relationship it has with the place in which it stands, an idea very similar to that expressed in "The Old Elm Tree by the River," a poem which we discussed in Chapter One. Not only does the sycamore derive its life from the ground in which it is rooted, it also adds to the life of the place, yearly in the loss of its leaves and ultimately through its death and decay: "it stands in its place, and feeds upon it,/and is fed upon, and is native and maker" (O, p. 24).

The sacrifice inherent in finding one's place and living in it does not end with the return, however. Actually, the labor has only begun. Berry realizes that "uprooted" he has been "furious without an aim"; yet he also knows that even having found his place and returned to it, for most of his life he will be laboring not for himself, but
for those who will come after him:

If we will have the wisdom to survive,
to stand like slow-growing trees
on a ruined place, renewing, enriching it,
if we will make our seasons welcome here,
asking not too much of earth or heaven,
then a long time after we are dead
the lives our lives prepare will live
here, their houses strongly placed
upon the valley sides, fields and gardens
rich in the windows.

Still, despite that promise, that vision whose "hardship is its possibility" (C, p. 32), Berry is constantly tempted to deny limitation:

Because desire and will are strong
I have believed in miraculous deliverances.
I have believed that I would never
have to forsake anything (C, p. 34).

He also continues to be tempted to believe that there is a better place
and a better life than the one he has chosen:

I have heard a voice saying
that I shall labor here a while, comfort
denied, and then come to a distant place,
a beautiful city or a gentle garden
preserved by someone else's servitude,
where I would take my ease and meditate
the long incoming surf of days (C, p. 34).
Yet almost as quickly as he is tempted by that false vision, he realizes that "It is not to be" (C, p. 35). He recognizes and accepts the limitations of his life and of the land:

This steep, half-ruined, lovely place,
this graced and wearing labor
longer than life, this marriage,
blessed and difficult - these have
a partial radiance that is all my light (C, p. 35).

Berry describes the difficulties of remaining in place in two other poems, "The Want of Peace," which we discussed in Chapter One, and "Air and Fire" from Farming: A Hand Book. In the former poem, even though the speaker desires only "the contentments made by men who have had little" (Q, p. 29), he realizes that the desire is not enough. He still lacks "the peace of simple things" and he is "never wholly in place" (Q, p. 29). In the latter poem, just as in the passage from "Work Song" quoted above, the speaker feels tempted to deny limitation and he feels tempted away from the life he has made in the place he has chosen.

As "Air and Fire" begins, the speaker is about to leave his family, his home, and his farm that he has "so carefully come to in" his "time" to enter what he calls "the craziness of travel" (F: HB, p. 32). Away from his native ground, he becomes part of "the reckless elements of air and fire" and he is "smiled at by beautiful women" (F: HB, p. 32). The attentions of those strange women make him "long for a whole life/to devote to each one" (F: HB, p. 32), that is they tempt him to deny the limits which bound his life. The speaker even asks himself what
would happen if an angel came and set him free of his past as if he half wishes that it were a real possibility; but just as quickly as he raises that possibility, he realizes that the Eden of infinite possibilities, which America once promised to be, is a garden to which the gates have slammed shut. He realizes too that merely traveling from one place to another cannot free him of his past. He realizes, finally, that what he is "is the way home" (F: HB, p. 32). After that momentary temptation to turn away from a life close to the land, his "old love comes on" him "in midair" (F: HB, p. 32).

Wendell Berry knows that the difficulty he has with remaining in place is not unique. In his view, America is and always has been a country of nomads, but unlike desert nomads who move whole communities in accordance with the harsh demands of the land, Americans move because of money, or career, or boredom, or, as has been the case throughout much of their history, because they have worn out the land by using farming techniques which are ill-suited to this country and more productive of profit than of the welfare of the soil. Berry makes precisely this point in "The Migrants," a short poem from Openings. As the poem begins, the migrants are departing from their homes and fields, "old clearings overgrown/with thicket, farmlands mute/under the breath of grazing machines" (O, p. 19). The speaker makes clear, however, that it is the migrants themselves, and not the land, who are responsible for their departure, for they are leaving "what they have failed/to know-" (O, p. 19). As a result of that failure, which is both theirs and their ancestors, they are "Broken from the land" and "they inherit/
a time without history" (Q, p. 19). Thus, they are fated to wander about until the end of their allotted time on earth without any hope for the future because they have no past.

In "Against the War in Vietnam" and "Dark with Power," two poems which we discussed in Chapter One, Berry makes it clear that the American alienation from place is a result of the pervasive desire for power and wealth, and that the continuing alienation from place has caused Americans to exploit not only their own people and their own land, but other peoples and lands as well:

In the name of ourselves we ride
at the wheels of our engines,
in the name of Plenty devouring all (Q, p. 26).

Not only have greed and the lust for power and the resulting alienation from place contributed to the physical ruin of our land, they have even made the vision of another kind of life impossible. As Berry writes in "East Kentucky, 1967":

What vision or blindness
can live in the sight of children
who inherit the eyes of broken men,
and in the sight of farms torn open
where the rich lock like toads
to the backs of the helpless? (Q, p. 60).
Americans are no longer merely blind to the possibility of a better way of life. That possibility in places like East Kentucky, which have been ravaged by strip mining, no longer exists. "Where," Berry asks, "are the quiet plenteous dwellings/we were coming to, the neighborly holdings?" (O, p. 26). What happened to the vision of Thomas Jefferson which promised that every man would have a little land and that no American would be terribly poor or filthly rich? The answer, of course, is that Jefferson's vision has vanished in the unsettling of America, in the fact that "we remain/the invaders of our land" (O, p. 27).

Wendell Berry further emphasizes the importance of being in place throughout his poetry in the way in which he contrasts stillness and motion. Invariably, motion, other than walking, has negative connotations while stillness, as exemplified by the sycamore in "The Return" or the fisherman in "The Quiet," has positive ones. In The Broken Ground, for example, while no single poem deals explicitly with the value of being in place, the way in which Berry uses images of motion underscores the importance of stillness, of being in place. There, the city is depicted as the place of endless and aimless motion. It is where we find the subway, for example, in "A Music," a place which is really no place at all. Rather the metro is only a stopping-off point for those endlessly in transit.

Without exception, in both his poetry and his fiction, Berry views machines, especially modes of transportation, cars, and trains, and planes, in a bad light. Another poem from The Broken Ground, "May Song," takes just such a view. Here again, Berry laments the way in
which men have ravaged the natural world; yet he takes hope because "For whatever is let go/there's a taker" (BG, p. 46). He finds life indomitable:

The living discovers itself

where no preparation
was made for it,
where its only privilege
is to live if it can (BG, p. 46).

Hope in the life of the natural world becomes even stronger when the speaker realizes that nature sustains its beauty and vitality even in the city, when he realizes that it is "triumphant/even in the waste/of those who possess it" (BG, p. 46). Furthermore, nature "is itself the possessor,...pasturing foliage/on the rubble,/making use of the useless" (BG, p. 47). Berry concludes the poem by remarking that, while humans did not deserve the original beauty of nature unspoiled, the beauty of nature sustaining itself despite what man has done is "a beauty we have less than not/deserved" (BG, p. 47).

Though Berry is critical of man for his excesses and though he finds hope in the hardiness "of the spring weeds/that crowd the improbable/black earth/of the embankment" (BG, p. 46) beside the railroad tracks, the tension in "May Song" remains unresolved. Man is destructive and foolhardy and nature is indomitable; yet man and nature are still at odds with one another at the poem's conclusion. The
separation of and conflict between man and nature is symbolized in the poem by the image of the subway in stanzas three and four:

The window flies from the dark of the subway mouth
into the sunlight stained with the green of the spring weeds (BG, p. 46).

The image of the window, which Berry uses to great effect in "Window Poems" as we have already seen in Chapter Two, suggests a number of things about Berry's attitude toward machines as well as about life in the city, that place where people rely almost entirely upon machines to relate to nature and to one another. First of all, speed is implicit in the image and so is a loss of control on the speaker's part as the train flies from the darkness of the subway into the light. In the train, the speaker is separated from the world beyond not only by the train's velocity but also by the window which he sits behind. The window enables him to look at the world outside, but the machine in which he rides has almost totally effaced him. The image of the train in this poem recalls what Berry says in one of his essays about roads as opposed to paths. The following quotation from that essay is indicative of his attitude toward machines and motion:

A road, on the other hand, even the most primitive road, embodies a resistance against the landscape. Its reason is not simply the necessity
for movement but haste. Its wish is to avoid contact with the landscape; it seeks so far as possible to go over the country, rather than through it.9

"The Fear of Darkness," "Grace," and "On the Hillside Late at Night" are three other poems in which Berry views motion and/or machines negatively. In "The Fear of Darkness," also from The Broken Ground, Berry joins the theme of the necessity of accepting the darkness, which we discussed in Chapter One, with the theme of purposeless motion. In this poem, motion, the speed of a third-hand Chevrolet, is the way in which the male character shows his fear of the dark and the way in which he seeks to escape from that fear. Ultimately, of course, what he seeks to escape is death and the self. The setting in the poem is gloomy and the tone is monotonous:

The tall marigolds darken.
The baby cries
for better reasons than it knows.
The young wife walks
and walks among the shadows
meshed in the rooms (BG, p. 48).

All the while, seemingly unaware of and out of touch with his family, the young man "sits in the doorway, looking toward the woods, long after the stars come out" (BG, p. 48); but the darkness starts to get to him. He feels it "turn toward him, and wait" (BG, p. 48). Finally, the speaker tells us that the young man's birthright "is a third-hand Chevrolet, bought for too much" (BG, p. 48), and, when the darkness becomes
too much, he jumps in his car and roars across the country: "'I/floor-board the son of a bitch,/and let her go'" (BG, p. 48). The speed of the car going over the country rather than through it is this man's, and a whole country's, way of avoiding the darkness and the land in which they live.

Two of the characters in The Memory of Old Jack, Berry's third novel, are much like the couple in "The Fear of Darkness." Lightning Berlew and his wife Sylvania are a young couple whom Mat Feltner hires to work on his farm after Joe Bannion, his hired hand and long-time friend, dies, and Joe's wife Nettie moves to Cincinnati. Lightning and Sylvania arrive at the Feltner place "with all their belongings packed inside of and tied onto an exhausted Chevrolet" (MOJ, p. 13). Mat soon realizes that Lightning is about the worst kind of person he could have hired, but, because of a scarcity of farmhands, Mat had little choice. Lightning refuses the milk Mat offers him, largely because he doesn't want to have to be at the barn at five in the morning to help with the milking. He turns down as well Mat's offer of a hog because he doesn't want to have to butcher it. And he doesn't even bother to reject Mat's offer of a plot of ground and the necessary tools to make a garden for obvious reasons. Lightning's, and his wife's, sole interest is the broken down Chevrolet in which they arrived:

At night, after work, instead of tending a garden or feeding a hog or doing anything that might be
of permanent good to him, instead even of just sitting still, he will have his old Chevrolet pulled into the barn door; he will be lying under it, trying to make it run well enough to get to Hargrave on Saturday night. And while he works on the car, the lady Smoothbore (his wife) will be sitting there on a bucket, encouraging him, for she apparently has her own reasons for wanting to get to Hargrave (MOJ, p. 16).

In their obsession with their car, Lightning and Sylvania are symbolic of the endless motion and lack of connection with place which plagues Americans:

Though the two of them live and work on the place, they have no connection with it, no interest in it, no hope from it. They live and appear content to live, from hand to mouth in the world of merchandise, connected to it by daily money, poorly earned (MOJ, p. 16).

In "Grace," we learn that being still and in places makes another kind of arrival possible, the actualization of one's potential or the fulfillment of one's possibilities. Here, Berry's paradigm of stillness and of the resulting fulfillment is not a tree as it is in so many other poems, but a whole forest. As the poem begins, the season is autumn, "the leaves/lie on the ground, or fall,/or hang full of light in the air still" (Q, p. 31). That it is fall is no accident, for Berry wants us to realize that the forest is perfect in all seasons, not just at the height of summer: "Perfect in its rise and in its fall, it takes/the place it has been coming to forever" (Q, p. 31).
By being in place, the woods, whether it is rising or falling, is fully actualized.

Finally, by juxtaposing stillness and motion, "On the Hillside Late at Night" expresses not only the importance of being in place, but also the importance of farming, which is Berry's way of actualizing his potential in his place. In the poem, as the speaker sits on the side of a hill late at night, below him: "Cars/travel the valley roads.... their lights/finding the dark and racing on" (F: HB, p. 27). Juxtaposed with the motion of the cars is not only the stillness of the speaker, but also the slow growth of the grass:

The ripe grassheads bend in the starlight in the soft wind, beneath them the darkness of the grass, fathomless, the long blades rising out of the well of time (F: HB, p. 27).

Not only does the speaker value his stillness as opposed to the movement of the cars, "I am wholly willing to be here" (F: HB, p. 27), but he also values the silence of the hillside in contrast to the noise of the cars:

Above their roar is a silence I have suddenly heard, and felt the country turn under the stars toward dawn (F: HB, p. 27).
The poem concludes with the speaker's realization of the extent to which he has come to be a part of his place by being silent and still: "The hill has grown to me like a foot./Until I lift the earth I cannot move" (F: HB, p. 27).

"Lift" is the perfect choice of words here. In conjunction with the rest of the last line of the poem, it asserts not only the importance of place, but also the importance of agriculture, of farming the place in which one lives. The impossibility of literally lifting the earth suggests the extent to which the speaker is in place and the unlikelihood of his ever leaving that place; yet, at the same time, farming is the one profession in which people do actually lift the earth, even if they only lift a small portion of it and only for a short distance. The movement which the speaker describes here is not a movement over the landscape, but rather a movement with it; and he makes it clear that he can only move meaningfully when he is farming the land.

As the previous poem suggests, for Wendell Berry, merely finding one's place and living in it is not enough. It is not enough not to want to be bothered:

```
And that
is what has come of it,
"the frontier spirit," lost
in the cities, returning now
to be lost in the country,
obscure desire floating
like a cloud upon vision.
To be free of labor,
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the predicament of other lives,
not to be bothered (C, pp. 22-23).

In addition to living in his place, Wendell Berry believes that he has
a responsibility to leave that place better than he found it, or, at
least, no worse. His way of enacting that vision of a wholesome rela-
tionship with the land, like that of the sycamore tree in "The Return,"
which feeds upon its place and is fed upon by the place, is farming.

As a way of enacting his vision, farming is important to Wendell
Berry for a variety of reasons. First of all, Berry recognizes that
the farmer, by the very nature of his work, confronts darkness and
death yearly, even daily. Second, Berry views farming as a private
way of doing something positive in a world on the verge of cataclysms
which public solutions are not doing much to prevent. Third, the
farmer makes a marriage with his place, and, by doing so, he is con-
nected with the past. Fourth, the farmer makes the abstract concrete.
Finally, for Wendell Berry farming is a way of becoming one with the
world, with human beings, and with their fate.

Farming: A Handbook, Berry's fourth collection of poems, is the
volume in which he most fully details the virtues and difficulties of
farming as a way of life, so we should not be surprised to find a
number of poems in it which concern the importance of farming as a way
of confronting darkness and death. In "The Stones," for example, the
speaker, a farmer, learns something about death as a result of trying
to clear a slope of stones. As the poem begins, the speaker tells us
that the stones lay in the ground "Like buried pianos....an old music mute in them" (F: HB, p. 4). As a result of his labor, his pain and weariness, in bearing them out of the earth, he begins to hear their music: "I heard their old lime/rouse in breath of song that has not left me" (F: HB, p. 4). That music makes the speaker want to know what bond he has made with the earth, and, almost as quickly as he asks, he realizes the bond is death: "It is a fatal singing/I have carried with me out of that day" (F: HB, p. 4). The stones have taught him "the weariness that loves the ground" (F: HB, p. 4), and that he must prepare himself to share their fate; yet the music of the stones also suggests to the speaker the possibility of renewal, for, after their long burial in the earth, they are again raised into the light capable of song.

The ability to see death as a vital part of the process of renewal is one of the farmer's advantages because in the annual process of planting and harvesting, of watching his crop rise and fall and rise again, "He enters into death/yearly, and comes back rejoicing" (F: HB, p. 3). He comes back rejoicing precisely because in his work he has perceived that the structure of reality is circular rather than linear, that the present leads toward renewal, rather than toward the merely new: "He has seen the light lie down/in the dung heap, and rise again in the corn" (F: HB, p. 3). Berry expresses the same idea from a slightly different angle in "The Farmer Among the Tombs." In this poem, the speaker laments the way in which so many deaths are meaningless, that is how they are not directly and vitally a part of the process of renewing the earth. "I am oppressed by all the room taken up by the
dead" (F: HB, p. 8), he tells us; and it is clear that Berry believes that the fact that a decaying body contributes significantly to the life of the soil should be monument enough to the dead. The speaker here is also disturbed by all the devices that humans use in the hope of making themselves or at least their memory immortal, the vaults and coffins and monuments which keep people, who were separated from the earth in life, separate from it even in death. "Plow up the graveyards! Haul off the monuments!" (F: HB, p. 8), he declares:

Pry open the vaults and the coffins
so the dead may nourish their graves
and go free, their acres traversed all summer
by crop rows and cattle and foraging bees (F: HB, p. 8).

By nourishing their graves, the dead become one with the soil and with all other living things, crops, and cattle, and bees, and ultimately other humans. Clearly, for Wendell Berry, redemption lies in the soil.

In addition to helping humans to view darkness and death positively, farming is also a private way of trying to improve a world in which public solutions to human problems, more often than not, fail. It is a way which does not require committees, slogans, or much money, but rather a little land, intelligence, and desire. Berry expresses this idea in the short poem, "February 2, 1968," where he juxtaposes the small but hopeful labor of the farmer with war, death, and cataclysm:

In the dark of the moon, in flying snow, in the dead of winter,
war spreading, families dying, the world in danger,  
I walk the rocky hillsides, sowing clover (F; HB, p. 17).

Especially significant is the fact that the crop which the speaker is sowing is clover. Because it is a crop from which he can expect no immediate gain since it is planted to restore vital nutrients to the soil and, perhaps, to feed livestock, it suggests the hope which the speaker has for the future, despite the sorry condition of the world at large.

In another place, Berry asks, in the face of the overwhelming destruction which threatens the world, in the face of the "Streets, guns, machines," the "quicker fortunes" and "quicker deaths" which threaten his land why "Clear/yet again an old farm/scarred by the lack of sight/that scars our souls?" (C, p. 27). He is quick to reply. He farms because by doing so he takes the side of life in the struggle between life and death:

The struggle is on, no mistake, and I take  
the side of life's history  
against the coming of numbers (C, p. 28).

Berry realizes that if there is any hope for life, it lies not merely in his vision, but just as much, in his attempt to enact that vision. Farming, then, just like gardening in "The House," is both mental and physical, both abstract and concrete, both potency and act, both human and natural:
Here
where the time of rain is kept
take what is half ruined
and make it clear, put it
back in mind (C, p. 28).

Still, while farming is a way of enriching the earth and of making
one's place better than he finds it, the farmer, in Berry's view, can
never be absolutely certain of the effects of what he does, nor can he
ever be certain of what he serves in serving the earth. In that sense,
farming is not a technology despite what agribusiness has tried to make
it. It is an art because the farmer can never be certain of his meth-
ods. He must discover his methods as he works. Thus, the farmer's
life is shrouded in mystery; but, far from being a bane, that mystery
and the contingencies which arise from it lend a wildness and delight
to the farmer's life. For Berry, it is a blessing not to be able to
predict and control everything:

Against the shadow
of veiled possibility my workdays stand
in a most asking light. I am slowly falling
into the fund of things. And yet to serve the earth,
not knowing what I serve, gives a wildness
and delight to the air, and my days
do not wholly pass (F: HB, p. 21).

Finally, farming is the best way Wendell Berry knows of being in
place because the farmer, in planting his crop, makes the abstract con-
crete, and he makes a marriage with his place through which he is
united with the world, with other humans, and with their fate, and with
the past. Through his connection with the past, the farmer prepares for the life to come, for, by committing himself to and by taking responsibility for the land, he at least makes it possible that the land will be handed on undiminished, maybe even augmented to those who come after him. In "The Seeds," for example, Berry describes how the farmer, by making the abstract seed into the concrete crop, by enacting his vision in his place, steps into the future and is set free. "The seeds begin," the poem tells us, "abstract as their species, remote as the name on the sack, they are carried home in" (F: HB, p. 30). Before they are planted, the seeds have the potential for growth, but as long as they remain an abstraction, that is unsown, they remain only half a vision. Only the sower who "going forth to sow sets foot/into time to come, the seeds falling/on his own place" (F: HB, p. 30) can enact the vision and make it whole. By planting the seeds, the farmer makes possible not only their transformation from the abstract to the concrete, but he also enriches his own life: "He has prepared a way/for his life to come to him, if it will" (F: HB, p. 30). Berry concludes the poem with a familiar image. The farmer is "Like a tree" because "he has given roots/to the earth," but unlike a tree the sower "stands free" (F: HB, p. 30), for, by growing his own food, he has become more self-reliant and, therefore, more independent of others for his livelihood. He is freed by the limits he has placed upon his life.

That act of self-reliance unites the farmer in mind and body not only with the four elements, earth, air, water, and light as the Mad Farmer tells us in "Prayers and Savings of the Mad Farmer," it also
unites him with other people. That is a paradox too, for what frees him unites him with the world. In "Sowing," for example, the speaker asserts that he is "mingled in the fate of the world" (F: HB, p. 6) because, in addition to finding his place, he has enacted his vision in it:

I walk heavy
with seed, spreading on the cleared hill the beginnings
of green, clover and grass to be pasture (F: HB, p. 6).

Wendell Berry characterizes that union with the world as a marriage, a favorite metaphor of his:

Having once put his hand into the ground,
seeding what he hopes will out last him,
a man has made a marriage with his place,
and if he leaves it his flesh will ache to go back
(F: HB, p. 41).

Part of that marriage with the land involves the acceptance of limitation, ultimately of his own death; but the hand which gives "up its birdlife in the air" to reach "into the dark like a root" (F: HB, p. 41) is the same hand which unites the farmer with the past. As a result of his labors, the farmer in "The Current" becomes the descendant not only of his own ancestors who once farmed the land, but also of primitive planters: "He is made their descendant, what they left/in the earth rising into him like a seasonal juice" (F: HB, p. 41). That connection with the past also connects the farmer with the future, for he knows
"The current flowing to him through the earth/flows past him" (F: HB, p. 41). Thus, for the farmer, the present ceases to be a mere isolated moment in time. It becomes the place of discovery, of preserving what is valuable, the best farming techniques for example, to be handed down to succeeding generations. The present becomes the place where continuity is enacted.

Wendell Berry values history and the past to which his life as a farmer connects him first of all because he recognizes that the past cannot be escaped. What the world is and what the people who inhabit it are like are to a large extent determined by the past. Berry expresses this idea in "My Great-Grandfather's Slaves," as well as in many other poems where he writes about the past. In this poem, he recognizes that he is heir to the blindness which led his ancestors to own other men and that slavery is as much a part of his life as his family is:

I see them moving in the rooms of my history,  
the day of my birth entering  
the horizon emptied of their days,  
their purchased lives taken back  
into the dust of birthright (O, p. 4).

Berry also realizes that as its heir he is responsible for coming to terms with that past and its injustices. Only then can he begin to heal the wound which slavery has inflicted upon both whites and blacks:
I am owned by the blood of all of them
who ever were owned by my blood.
We cannot be free of each other (O, p. 5).

If it is impossible in Berry's view for individuals to escape their
pasts, it is just as impossible for Americans to evade the impact which
those who have come before them have had upon the land. And, as Berry
points out in "The Wages of History," the history of agriculture in this
country has not been a good one: "Men's negligence and their/fatuous
ignorance and abuse/have made a hardship of this earth" (F: HB, p. 111).
The history of agriculture in this country has been largely destructive
because the primary interest of the first settlers and of those who
followed them was wealth, rather than the health of the land:

As if chance and death
and sorrow were not enough,
we must contend with stones
laid bare by the dream of
ease to be found in money, as if
our forefather's dug in the dark
virgin loam for gold, and found
only the bare stones and the grave's
ease (F: HB, p. 111).

As a result, Americans have not only despoiled the land. They have also
failed to develop and to pass on the farming techniques and the local
traditions which might best insure the health of the land. Americans
today, then, are faced with the responsibility of repaying the wages of
history:
Doomed, bound and doomed
to the repair of history or to death,
we must cover over the stones
with soil for tomorrow's bread
while the present eludes us (F: HB, p. 111).

Our history of destruction will make it impossible for people for generations to come to live even a single day at ease and in harmony with the land. They will find no possibility "of living any day for that day's sake" (F: HB, p. 111). Berry expresses the same idea about the inability of escaping the past in "History," a poem in which he recounts how he came to the land in his native Kentucky which he presently lives on and farms:

Through my history's despite
and ruin, I have come
to its remainder, and here
have made the beginning
of a farm intended to become
my art of being here (C, p. 5).

This is not to say that the only past which Americans inherit is negative or destructive. While Berry knows that he cannot "escape/the history barbed in" his "flesh" (F: HB, p. 26), he knows as well that there have been and are good people who lead good lives, who attempt to pass on not only hope for the future, but also traditions and tried and true farming techniques which will make that future more possible. Old Jack Beechum, a major character in Berry's last two novels, is that kind of person. He is a man who is a link with our vanishing
rural past and with traditions which might otherwise be forgotten. We need only note the reaction of Mat Feltner and the other younger men of Port William in The Memory of Old Jack when Mat informs them of Jack's death in order to understand how the old man had served as a link between past and future:

As he told them he felt the change. He felt it come over them all, as quiet and complete as a night of snow. A landmark that they all had depended upon had fallen, and a strangeness came between them and the country. Their minds had already begun to change, and things would no longer be as they had been. And Mat felt the change upon himself. Now he was the oldest, and the longest memory was his. Now between him and the grave stood no other man. From here on he would find the way for himself (MOJ, p. 195).

Because Jack, as the central character in the novel, is reduced almost entirely to memory and has only the slightest grip on reality in the present, he appears at times pathetic; yet the fact that Jack's mind dwells almost entirely upon memories of his life, reliving both their anguish and their joy, emphasizes the important place which memory holds in Berry's scheme of things. Thus, when Old Jack dies, we understand that more than a man has been lost. Part of a valuable past has vanished as well:

In all their minds his voice lies beneath a silence. And in the hush of it they are aware of something that passed from them and now returns: his stubborn biding with them
to the end, his keeping of faith with them who would live after him, and what perhaps none of them has yet to call his gentleness, his long gentleness toward them and toward his place where they are at work. They know that his memory holds them in common knowledge and common loss. The like of him will not soon live again in this world, and they will not forget him (MOJ, p. 223).

In "At a Country Funeral," Berry emphasizes that many of the old ways, the rural and agricultural traditions and techniques, have been lost; yet he also realizes that sometimes "they are cast clear upon the mind" and that in certain situations, as at a country funeral, "persist the usages of old neighborhood" (COM, p. 27). In the rural past, the friends and kinsmen of the man of the soil came to his funeral out of simple loyalty and then returned to the fields, but too often today when one of them dies it means:

a lifework perished from the land without inheritor, and the field goes wild and the house sits and stares. Or it passes at cash value into the hands of strangers (COM, p. 28).

Today, because the children of farmers have fled the farm for the city, when a farmer dies his children "come home/for one last time, to hear old men....speak memories doomed to die" (COM, p. 28). Wendell Berry, of course, does not think that the disappearance of those memories and the migration to the city is a sign of progress for "our memory of ourselves, hard earned,/is one of the land's seeds" (COM, p. 28).
Like the seeds in the poem of the same title, those memories are abstractions, but they are abstractions with all the potential for growth. They await only the sower to be made concrete. Thus, in Wendell Berry's view, memory is our way of preserving the best that the past has offered and of avoiding the repetition of destructive errors. Americans can no longer think of their country as a new Garden of Eden where a new start is possible without the burden of the past, a theme which has characterized much of our most important literature. "We can only begin," as Berry writes, "with what has happened" (COM, p. 28):

We owe the future
the past, the long knowledge
that is the potency of time to come
That makes of a man's grave a rich furrow (COM, p. 28).

Only by valuing place, and the past and memory which are its guardians, can men hope to make their deaths meaningful and fruitful insofar as they understand living and dying as an ongoing process of taking a little bit from the earth and giving it back. Berry knows too that "a second and more final death" is what results from a loss of continuity between men and the past and, ultimately, the earth.

As we have already seen in both Chapters Two and Three, Wendell Berry discriminates between different kinds of history and their value. In both of these chapters, we saw how Berry distinguishes between public and private history. He also uses that distinction when he writes about history in connection with the place he farms. One kind
of history of that place is what we might call a public knowledge of the land. This is the history of measurements and records and dollars which begins with a survey and ends with a deed. In "Where," his long poem detailing the history of the land he farms, Berry calls it "the silence of documents" (C, p. 15). Those records and measurements are part of the history of the land, yet, because they are abstract, they are the least important part.

Berry accurately understands even surveying as the beginning of the imposition of human design upon the land: "This sighting of lines passed/among the trees and did not/see them-" (C, p. 7). It is a manifestation of the will to conquest over things. In addition, this kind of history reduces and divides the land into abstractions. Before the white man came to this continent that was not the case: "The Indians divided it/only by journeys passing/in silence under the branches" (C, p. 7). Such a history, in addition to bringing the possibility of control, also brought "the possibility of confusion" (C, p. 7). Berry continues throughout the remainder of section one of "Where" to describe the various owners the tract of land had from 1817 until he purchased it on February 7, 1965; and in section two, he notes one peculiarity: "from then until now, no parent/has ever left it to a child" (C, p. 16).

In that loss of continuity from owner to owner, the most important part of his land's history has been lost as well. In addition to its history of deeds and measurements, his land also needs a live oral tradition to balance "the silence of documents"; but, in contemplating
his land and the loss of continuity, Berry knows "Too much/has fallen silent here" (C, p. 11). In addition, the deaths of all those who lived on the land are meaningless because of that lack of continuity, for neither the land, nor the values which might preserve it, nor a history which might describe its use have been passed on:

There are names that rest
as silent on their stone
as fossils in creek ledges.
And there are those who sleep
in graves no one remembers;
there is no language here,
now, to speak their names (C, p. 11).

All of this has happened because "We have valued our stories/too little here in the Survey/of Thomas and Walker Daniels" (C, p. 12). Again, of course, Berry is writing about the importance of remembering not only the best the past has offered, but also the worst; and he knows his land suffers because it does not have the benefit of that history.

For Wendell Berry, there is yet one other kind of private or local history, which is represented by Roger Merchant, cousin to Mat Feltner in A Place on Earth. This is the personal or private kind of history which romanticizes and falsifies. In the novel, Griffith Merchant, Roger's father, is a man whom the narrator describes as "enormously less capable of being anything than of acquiring things" (APOE, p. 166). Griffith sends Roger off to Harvard at the proper time, buying an education for his son "exactly as he would have bought any article of merchandise from any other dealer (APOE, p. 167). Roger returns
from college unlike his father in every respect except that he possesses what the narrator calls "the same bad vision of exclusive self-regard" (APOE, p. 170). As a result of his schooling, Roger develops "an uncritical devotion to what he called his family tradition" (APOE, p. 167), which leads him to "memorialize his father as a cultivated and enlightened gentleman farmer" (APOE, p. 166). Roger's sense of history is on the private family level as false and romantic as the public history of the Civil War South which we discussed in Chapter Three:

By taste and training incapable of living well or happily or usefully in the place he was born in, lacking the force of ambition to go elsewhere, Roger staved at home and read and slept and drank whiskey, adoring the handed down tales of his uncle and the old war, whitewashing without realizing it the memories of his dead forebears, making no distinctions and no judgments. He could sit drinking on the rotting back porch of the family house and believe that he was both the son of a gentleman farmer and one himself (APOE, p. 167).

Despite the importance of agriculture, of the past, and of memory as the means by which one can live in his place fruitfully and meaningfully, for Wendell Berry, agriculture like language is a human design, and, as such, it inhibits full and lasting communion with the earth. Berry also knows that agriculture does not have to be entirely the imposition of human consciousness upon nature, that there is a way of farming which is "not of the body, not of the will....but of delight" (C, p. 43). Year after year, the farmer must adjust his vision and his techniques to bring them more in harmony with the processes of nature.
Because of our lack of a native agricultural tradition in which the farmer buries his mistakes and wastes nothing, farming which has the goal of the life and health of the land is largely a matter of trial and error in America today. Still, as a human design, farming is an activity ultimately doomed to failure. It will not make humans immortal, nor will it alone provide the peace and harmony people search for in this world. Berry realizes that at times humans must go beyond their designs, whether they be linguistic or agricultural, beyond their knowledge, and give up control to be at home in the world:

There must be times when he is here
as though absent, gone beyond words into the woven shadows
of the grass and the flighty darknesses
of leaves shaking in the wind (F: HB, p. 23).

Wendell Berry transforms the apparent disaster of man's inability to measure and control the effects of farming precisely and entirely into a success. Because of the mystery at the very heart of farming, Berry knows that in the very act of sowing, of enacting his vision, he has gone beyond all human design, beyond his vision, and beyond knowledge. He has given up control, and, in doing so, he has achieved a mystical union with the land. That the farmer cannot entirely foresee the effects of what he does means that every step is a risk, a step into the darkness, a step into the wilderness in which the self is lost. Thus, Wendell Berry achieves a wholesome relationship with the earth not by abandoning his vision, but by enacting it and working beyond it.
A number of poems from *Farming: A Handbook* and *The Country of Marriage*, and one poem from *Clearing* all point out the transitory nature of farming as a human design and/or the superiority of the world to human design. In "September 2, 1969," as a result of observing one of nature's designs, a flock of migratory birds, the speaker begins to recognize the transitory nature of his own design, here represented by a garden. As the poem opens, night is falling and the speaker sees "flocks of nighthawks/passing southward over the valley" (F: HB, p. 115). He also sees sunflowers "burning on their stalks/to cold seed, by the river" (F: HB, p. 115). He watches the birds rise high in the sky tossing themselves "like rags, as in/abandonment to the summons their blood knew" (F: HB, p. 115). What the speaker sees in the birds is an obedience to a process of life, growth, death, and decay, a process of arrivals and departures, to which he is also subject, and so in his mind:

where had stood a garden
straining to the light, there grew
an acceptance of decline (F: HB, p. 115).

The change which occurs in the speaker is essentially mental, but it is no less important for that, for, as we have seen in previous chapters, humans must alter their vision of the world and of what they hope to make in it before human culture can be brought into harmony with the natural world. The abstract change must precede the concrete change.
Here, the speaker sees into the life and death of things, and, as a result, he recognizes and accepts the temporality of what he has tried to create.

Sections six and seven of "From the Crest," a poem from Clearing, express pretty much the same idea, only here Berry is writing explicitly about his own farm. In section six, he acknowledges that when he thinks about death, he realizes that his farm is "but a passing thought/poised upon the ground" (C, p. 45), that is it is little more than an abstraction; but again, while acknowledging the transitory nature of all human design, Berry refuses to sell short human effort, for his farm, though little more than an abstraction, is "held in place/by vision, love, and work,/all as passing as a thought" (C, p. 45). In section seven, he describes the farm as a temporary clearing "headed/for the woods" (C, p. 46); yet, at the same time, he emphasizes the importance of making that clearing despite the inevitable decline for:

To love these things one did not intend is to be a friend to the beginning and the end (C, p. 46).

To love what is mysterious and unpredictable, what is not included in human design, is to bring oneself more into harmony with natural processes.

But agriculture is not only a transitory human design. Even the effects of its temporary enactment are uncertain. Berry expresses this idea in "The Asparagus Bed" where planting asparagus is "an entrance
to the ground" (COM, p. 47), a kind of death, in which the speaker takes "poor pleasure" (COM, p. 47). And, despite his care, he doesn't even know if the plants will bear fruit for:

```plaintext
the ground may be despoiled
and paved to expedite the vain,
the greedy, and the merely bored (COM, p. 47).
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Nevertheless, in the face of that risk, he digs the asparagus bed knowing that even if the plants bear fruit, they will not do so that year. Thus, his act is one of faith, which, if it survives in the ground, will link the present and the future. Still, while he takes pride in his work and is worn out by his labor, he does so "for what good nobody knows" (COM, p. 47).

"A Wet Time" expresses not only the transitory nature of agriculture as a human design, but also the way in which the world continues to exist apart from what humans think of it or make it. The poem is about the effects of a flood, an aspect of nature which in its worst manifestations far exceeds human control. Not only are human designs transitory, in a flood even the land itself "goes temporary and soft" and the fields upon which men hope to enact their designs "go free of plans" (F: HB, p. 22). Even a great tree, Berry's favorite paradigm for living in place, is uprooted by the flood and "passes down, the leaves shivering as the roots/drag the bottom" (F: HB, p. 22), which suggests both the tenuous nature of the attempt to live in one's place and the way in which nature's processes work themselves out apart from
human idea or aspiration. "A Wet Time" concludes with the astonished speaker observing: "I was not ready for this/parting, my native land putting out to sea" (F: HB, p. 22).

By contrasting a human design, here a new building, with a natural phenomenon, the light, "Leaving Home" also suggests how the world exists apart from the human mind as well as the temporality of consciousness and its creations. The new building stands "geometric in the air," but the speaker knows that, when he leaves, he "will carry away its dream" (COM, p. 34). The light, however, is another matter:

Were I, like all my kind, to go
and not come back, this light
would return like a faithful woman
until the pent stalk rose
to the shattering of its seed (COM, p. 34).

Again, in "The Lilies," Berry finds in the frail flowers not only a life which thrives apart from human design, but one which also comes from a ground which is superior to his own to which he has devoted so much care: "Does my land have the health/of this, where nothing falls but into life?" (F: HB, p. 33). In admiring the lilies and the ground from which they sprout, the speaker both acknowledges the superiority of uncultivated ground to the earth in which he enacts his vision; and sets up, as the last line of the poem suggests, a paradigm for his farm where everything would contribute to its life and health.

In addition to asserting that there is a life apart from what men have made, "The Heron" suggests how agriculture can distract human
attention away from that part of the world which is independent of human aspirations. It also suggests how it is necessary to go beyond human designs to recover that part of the world. A short way into the poem, the speaker tells us that in laboring over his land he "forgot the river/where it flowed, faithful in its way,/beneath the slope" (F: HB, p. 113). In fact, not only has it vanished from consciousness, he "could not reach it even in dreams" (F: HB, p. 113). At the end of summer, however, after his crop has been made, he remembers the river again, returns to it with his boat, and sets out through the fog. The remainder of the poem is a description of his journey beyond human design into the natural world. He sails along until he comes upon a heron "crouched/on a dead branch sticking out of the water" (F: HB, p. 113). At first, because it is so still, the speaker thinks the heron is "a bit of drift," but then he sees "the articulation of feather/and living form," "a brilliance" which is "beyond" his "power to make" (F: HB, p. 113). He discovers a design in nature which far outstrips any design he might be able to conceive or create.

The process of increased perception which the speaker goes through, (he begins in a fog, sees the heron before he knows what it is he sees, and finally recognizes it for what it is), is symbolic of the way in which human designs, here agriculture, can be obstacles to seeing into the life of things. The ability to really see returns slowly to the speaker as he travels farther and farther from his own world and becomes part of the natural flow of the river. Until he sets out on the water, all summer he has been living in the fog of trying to enact his
vision upon the land. The sight of the heron is not something he earns or deserves. Nature gives it freely when he relinquishes control. As the poem concludes, the speaker realizes that he has been admitted, without even asking, to a world far beyond his power to create: "Suddenly I know I have passed across/to a shore where I do not live" (F: HB, p. 114).

While Wendell Berry emphasizes the importance of the agricultural vision and of its enactment, he realizes that ultimately harmony and fulfillment lie beyond all human design in a place which requires a death as the price of admission. That death may be literal as it is in "The Meadow" where, after lying in the ground a long time, the dead, now free of sorrow, the names on their tombstones faded, "the myrtle of the graves grown wild...become/a meadow,/their alien marble grown native as maple" (Q, p. 25). Or it may be a figurative death, a dying to oneself in life, in which the individual goes beyond all human design and steps barefoot into reality, as it is in "The Heron."

For Wendell Berry, the joy and peace and freedom of wild things are a paradigm of that second kind of dying. In "The Peace of Wild Things," a poem which we discussed in Chapter One, the speaker himself finds that peace, if only temporarily, by going out into the woods and lying down "where the wood drake/rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds" (Q, p. 30). There, he is beyond all human design among beings "who do not tax their lives with forethought/of grief" (Q, p. 30). Wendell Berry never ceases to underscore the importance of being here. "Vanity is absence," as he writes in "Praise":
Be here. Here
is the root and stem
unappraisable
on whose life
your life depends (COM, p. 31).

Whatever fulfillment is possible for humans is here in the world, not
in a world they create or one they might aspire to after this life;
but, in order to have that fulfillment, at times humans must be here as
though absent. They must:

Be here
like the water
of the hill
that fills each
opening it
comes to, to leave
with a sound
that is part
of local speech (COM, p. 31).

Thus, the most admirable figure in all of Berry's fiction is not
Ben or Mat Feltner, or even Old Jack Beechum, men who own the land and
farm it, though they are certainly deserving of our admiration. Rather
it is the comical Burley Coulter who farms the land along with the
others, but doesn't own any land. That fact frees Burley from the
forethought of grief which plagues the men around him. It also enables
Burley to have insight into the afflictions which beset his family and
friends and to be protective of them in the most human kind of way
because his view of the world is broader. Burley Coulter, then, be-
cause he works the land but doesn't have any designs upon it, is more
in harmony with the wilderness than the men around him are; and he enjoys his frequent excursions into it, whether he is camping, fishing, or hunting, in a way the others cannot. Burley is at home in the wilderness all his life in a way that Mat Feltner only begins to be at the conclusion of A Place on Earth, as we shall presently see.

Burley Coulter's way, however, is not Wendell Berry's way. Berry seeks to find atonement with the land, not apart from agriculture, but through it, a way which is more tragic than Burley Coulter's. Berry sees that "cultivation shows/a dark graceful wilderness at its heart" (COM, p. 33); and, in his recognition of that wilderness, that mystery inherent in farming, he knows that he has gone beyond any design he might have upon the land, beyond his ability to control and order, and beyond human knowledge. This is the same insight that Mat Feltner has at the conclusion of A Place on Earth as he struggles to come to terms with the loss of his son Vergil in World War II and with his subsequent realization that all that he has accomplished in a life devoted to the land is transitory.

Toward the end of the novel, despite a desperate struggle to cope with the loss of his son and the subsequent diminishment of his vision of his land, Mat is still fraught with despair as he watches the other men at work in the fields:

Mat feels himself more and more excluded from what he's watching, more and more confined where he is, in his own place, in his own fate. His
vision seems to dwindle from its Olympian breadth, and to grow narrow and pained. He feels come around him again the familiar boundaries of his loss—a blind man doomed to glimpse what he'll never see (APOE, p. 496).

In the concluding chapter of the novel, having completed all of the day's other tasks, Mat sets out into the woods in search of one of his cows which disappeared as she was about to calf. His journey is symbolic of the passage beyond human design toward atonement with the creation. At first, "he turns along the fence and follows it down toward the woods" (APOE, p. 499). Then, leaving the fence, he enters the forest and "he stops and stands still a moment, to get used to being there" (APOE, p. 499). Soon, he finds the cow and discovers that she has calved, but as he approaches her, she bolts. Following the cow, Mat discovers the calf lying in a thicket of sumac:

It lies there perfectly still, obeying like its mother am instinct still wild in it. For the moment it is wild, free of its destiny to be tame, and Mat is aware of that wildness, and aware of himself there, about to be the first man it will see, about to cross yet another time the gap between his kind and its (APOE, p. 500).

After standing the calf up, Mat walks on into the woods enjoying "the good free feeling of having got ahead of his plans....He's going on for the pure pleasure of going" (APOE, p. 501). Mat realizes that he has been transformed by the experience with the cow and its calf. "He has the sense of being deeply among things," that "he sees the
country as a squirrel or a bird may see it" (APOE, p. 501); and soon he has "an apprehension of flying," a feeling "of being ready to take flight" (APOE, p. 501). Mat walks on noting that on some of the slopes where the trees are young and there are piles of rock that there once were crops, fields which he worked in as a boy. Finally, he enters a kind of amphitheater, a grove around which the trees are old. Mat sits down there:

examining one by one all the aspects and attractions of that place. It's one of those places that, many times in his life, he has thought would be a good place to sit down and rest, and to be sitting down and resting there now makes him happy (APOE, p. 503).

Suddenly, Mat begins to see cairns of rock there among the older trees, which means "that the place too was once cleared and broken and planted in crops" (APOE, p. 503). The work that he sees traces of there, now reclaimed by the wilderness, is the work of his ancestors, work "done long before his time" (APOE, p. 503). What Mat realizes is that just as there was a wilderness inherent in this field cultivated by his forebears long ago so is there a wilderness inherent in the land he farms. He also sees and is comforted by the difference between the order of the woods and the order of his fields:

He feels the great restfulness of that place, its casual perfect order. It's the restfulness of a place where the merest or the most improbable accident is made a necessity and a part of a design,
where death can only give into life. And Mat feels the difference between that restful order and his own constant—and constantly failing-struggle to maintain and regulate his clearings. Although the meanings of those clearings and his devotion to them remain firm in his mind, he knows without sorrow that they will end, and the order he has made and kept will be overthrown, and the effortless order of the wilderness will return to them (APOE, pp. 503-504).

Mat realizes that in his devotion to his land, the enactment of his vision, he has also devoted himself, without knowing it, to the wilderness, a mysterious, wild, and perfect order. There, in that grove, once cultivated but now wild, he goes beyond human design, beyond the bounds of knowledge, and arrives at his place on earth:

He has grown thoughtless. He has come into a wakefulness as quiet, as perfectly fulfilled in itself as a deep sleep (APOE, p. 504).

In his poetry, Wendell Berry identifies that place of fulfillment where Mat Feltner arrives at the end of A Place on Earth as the country of marriage. It is, as he describes it in "Inland Passages," "the unknown country" (COM, p. 50), "a country in the dark where/only blind trust could go" (COM, p. 48). As we discover in "The Country of Marriage," the title poem of his fifth collection, for Wendell Berry his relationship with his wife and with his land are metaphors for one another. The three of them are joined in an inseparable union. "The Country of Marriage" is a love poem which Berry addresses to his wife.
It asserts the mystical and mysterious nature of his union with her and, by analogy, with his land. Marriage, for Wendell Berry, is by no means merely a written or verbal contract because the reality of it exceeds human power to define it or restrict it with words or paper:

Was it something I said that bound me to you, some mere promise or worse, the fear of loneliness and death? (COM, p. 6).

By drawing an analogy between the beginning of his marriage with his wife and the return of a wanderer to his native land, Berry suggests in this poem how marriage serves as a metaphor for the union he has achieved with the world:

I was a wanderer
who feels the solace of his native land
under his feet again and moving in his blood.
I went on, blind and faithful. Where I stepped
my track was there to steady me. It was no abyss
that lay before me, but only the level ground (COM, p. 6).

Berry describes his and his wife's life together as "a graceful clearing" which contains:

a house, an orchard and garden
comfortable shade, and flowers
red and yellow in the sun, a pattern
made in the light for the light to return to (COM, p. 7).
Surrounding that clearing and defining its limits is the forest which is also a part of their life, for without that boundary there could be no clearing. Here again, Berry emphasizes the necessity of going beyond human design, beyond the known into the unknown, for that is the only sensible way of finding our limits and extending them:

The forest is mostly dark, its ways to be made anew day after day, the dark richer than the light and more blessed provided we stay brave enough to keep on going in (COM, p. 7).

By slightly changing the metaphor in part four of "The Country of Marriage," Berry suggests that only by first entering the wilderness, by going beyond human design, can he and his wife hope to make their life together a clearing. Here, Berry likens his wife to a forest which in order to approach he has had to give "up the light and all directions" (COM, p. 7). Their union itself is mystical, so that even that clearing, the pattern they make of their life together has a wilderness at its center:

I come to you lost, wholly trusting, as a man who goes into the forest unarmed (COM, p. 7).

Berry makes the further point that marriage, in addition to being no mere exchange of words, is no mere exchange of duties. Their marriage is limited neither by what they think and say, nor by what they do:

Our bond is no little economy based on the exchange of my love and work for yours, so much for so much of an expendable fund (COM, p. 8).

Their union, which is the center of the pattern they have made of their lives, consists of both light and darkness, of the known and unknown, of the clearing and of the forest.

Thus, in his attempt to live in his place and to enact his agricultural vision, Wendell Berry succeeds in going beyond human design and in effacing the will to conquest over things. His attempt to enact his vision by farming the land results in an essential humility before nature because he recognizes that his fate and the fate of the land are one and the same. Their relationship is a marriage in which he must relinquish all desire for possession if the union is to be healthy, for a possessive marriage can only end in exploitation and destruction. That union is ultimately mystical, for there is a wilderness residing in his land waiting to return even as he farms it. That union with the land can only become total with his death when he becomes part of the soil, when the land is set free of him and he is set free from himself, when "Darkened," he is "carried/out of need, deep/in the country" he has "married" (COM, p. 53).
Notes to Chapter Four


CHAPTER FIVE: THE DISCIPLINES OF FINITUDE

"Again, again, the old
is newly come."

Despite the mystical nature of Mat Feltner's relationship with nature at the end of *A Place on Earth*, which is ultimately the kind of relationship Wendell Berry seeks with the land through poetry and agriculture, Wendell Berry is a moralist. His morality, however, is by no means traditional. As we have already noted in Chapter One, Berry characterizes his life and work as a secular pilgrimage in search of the world because it takes place outside of institutionalized religion. His morality too is best characterized as secular, for it is not concerned with the kind of strictures on human behavior which lead to a heavenly reward. Rather Berry's morality is interested in the answer to the question: "What must a man do to be a home in the world?"¹ This is not to say that Berry's quest is more moral than religious. He recognizes that before a morality can be an effective guide to human behavior, humans must first want to be here. They must recognize that what they need is here, that the world is, indeed, important. In Berry's view that will happen when people restore the Creator to the creation, when they view the world as the place in which divinity resides:

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We must recover that sense of holiness in the world, and learn to respect and forebear accordingly. Failing that, we have literally everything to lose.

The religious impulse, then, must precede the moral one. The rediscovery of immanence, however, is only a first step. Only the live and coherent morality which results from that discovery will enable humans to become one with the creation, which became fragmented in the human mind as a result of "the conceptual division between the holy and the world." Only by means of that morality will humans achieve "at-onement" with creation, recognizing that the survival of the earth depends upon the behavior of every individual.

While Berry's morality is the result of a religious impulse, he is stridently critical of institutionalized religion. Invariably, in his work where he refers to it or depicts its representatives and followers, he does so negatively. We have already seen in Chapter One how in "Canticle" Berry contrasts the priests in their black robes with the coal merchant and his black face to the detriment of the former. In each of Berry's novels too, ministers and institutionalized religion fare badly. In Nathan Coulter, Berry's first novel, the romantic view of reality which causes Nathan to imagine that the sound of the wind is a lion roaring and the traditional religious view of reality are two false approaches to the world which Nathan confronts as he makes the difficult passage from childhood to adulthood. The latter view is represented in the novel by Jig Pendleton who, in the course of his life, has become obsessed with heaven and with the day the Lord will come and
beckon Jig to follow him. Nathan's description of Jig's view of heaven indicates the nature of that obsession:

> Then Jig told us about Heaven. He said it was a million miles square and a million miles high, and every street was gold and every house was a mansion. And at night every star was brighter than the sun (NC, p. 154).

Obviously, Jig views heaven as a deliverance from the impoverished life he lives in this world. Heaven is an economic reward, a view of which Wendell Berry clearly disapproves.

Ministers too are always depicted negatively in Berry's fiction. In Nathan Coulter, the minister is a man to whom Nathan and his Uncle Burlev offer a ride when they encounter him on their way to the Fourth of July picnic in town. As soon as the preacher is seated on their wagon, he begins to be haughty and sanctimonious. "'I am one of those it has pleased the Lord to send to the four corners of the world to preach the gospel'" (NC, p. 67), he declares. Then he begins to deliver a sermon on sin and hell until finally he chastises Burlev for smoking a cigarette: "'If the Lord had wanted you to smoke He'd have given you a smokestack, brother'" (NC, p. 67), he preaches. This incident in the novel is brief and unimportant, yet it typifies the way in which the representatives of institutionalized religion in Berry's fiction stand apart from the community for whose spiritual welfare they believe they are responsible. What the minister has done is violated the code of neighborhood and neighborliness. Burlev's response is typically comic
and to the point. He looks at the preacher and says: "If He'd wanted you to ride you'd have wheels... Now you get off!" (NC, p. 68).

In *A Place on Earth*, two clerics, Deacon Hendrick and Brother Preston, fare badly. In the course of clearing out the woodshed behind the Hendrick place where Old Jack Beechum boards now that he is too old to care for himself, Burley and Jack discover "a great lot of whiskey bottles that Deacon Hendrick had hid there under the floor." Burley and Jack are not disturbed so much by the fact that Deacon Hendrick drank. What upsets them is that he was a hypocrite:

> it made us sorry and ashamed for him, and uneasy with ourselves, to have found out that his life, as far as the town knew it, was such a make believe. And all for nothing really (APOE, pp. 299-300).

More than Hendrick's drinking, Burley laments the fact "that a man has lived and died here without any of us knowing him" (APOE, p. 300).

Like the life of Deacon Hendrick, Brother Preston's ministry in Port William underscores the way in which the representatives of institutionalized religion in Berry's fiction are never really a part of the community. Berry's description of what Brother Preston was like when he first came to Port William suggests a number of his fundamental criticisms of Christianity as it is espoused by the various churches:

At that time Brother Preston was a fair-haired gentle-eyed white-skinned man who, the ladies of the congregation are fond of saying, looked
like a saint. But not a fisherman saint like
Saint Peter or a carpenter saint like Saint
Joseph; his mild scrubbed face shone with a kind
of congenital goodness, as though, before birth,
he'd washed his hands of the world. His good-
ness, Jayber Crow had once suggested to Miss
Pauline Gibbs, was a goodness of ineptitude, of
fortified innocence, which couldn't recognize an
honest temptation if it met one in the road. In
his sermons, Sunday after Sunday, the meeker vir-
tues were pitted against the more domesticated
sins in a rhetoric that was a good deal more stren-
uous and splendid than either. But, as Miss Paul-
ine had been quick to reply to Jayber Crow, a per-
son didn't need to know anything to be a Christian
(APOE, p. 33).

Not only is Brother Preston's Christianity unmanly, a dubious criticism
at best, but it also has little to do with the world. It is weak in the
knowledge derived from experience, and its morality emphasizes the more
trivial aspects of human behavior. It prescribes restraints against
sex and drinking and uses the fear of hell-fire and the hope of heavenly
reward to motivate people to act rightly while it has little to say
about the relation of people to one another and to the earth.

Later in A Place on Earth, Berry stresses how Brother Preston lives
apart from the community of Port William when the minister goes to the
Feltner household to comfort Mat, Mat's wife, Margaret, and Hannah,
their daughter-in-law, for the loss of Vergil, missing in action in
World War II. All of the description suggests the way in which Brother
Preston is isolated from the town and its people. He sets out for the
Feltner house not out of neighborliness, but "at the bidding of duty"
(APOE, p. 117). Once inside, it is Margaret Feltner who puts him at
his ease, who comforts him, when he had intended to be the comforter. And, once the family has gathered and Preston begins to speak, he retreats into the safety of his rhetoric: "It's as though in the very offering of comfort to them he departs from them" (APOE, p. 121). Brother Preston finally realizes that he has spoken out of his own need and that he is an intruder:

This is the history of his life in Port William: this failure to touch and communicate, which is the failure of experience and of knowledge. The Word, in his speaking it, fails to be made flesh. It's a failure particularized for him in the palm of every work-stiffened hand held out to him at the church door every Sunday morning, like an announcement of an irreparable division between himself and the townsmen—the hard dark hand taking his pale unworn one in a gesture of politeness without understanding (APOE, p. 124).

Finally, in The Memory of Old Jack, one more cleric has a rough time of it. Here it is Brother Wingfare, who presumably replaced Brother Preston in Port William in the seven years that have passed between the two novels. Brother Wingfare doesn't have quite as bad a time of it as his predecessor, however. He is young, just out of the seminary, "a pale, slightly plump, impeccable young man, very new to his profession, very eager to please both God and man" (MOJ, p. 197). Toward the end of the novel, Brother Wingfare comes to visit Mat Feltner in order to arrange for the funeral of Old Jack. Mat rather likes the young preacher. In fact, he even feels "protective of his eagerness to serve" (MOJ, p. 197); yet, at Old Jack's funeral, Brother
Wingfare, a victim of his religion and of Jack's rich, citified daughter, ignores Mat's directions for a simple service when he delivers a sermon suggesting that Old Jack, who was not a church-going man, was about to turn toward Jesus at the end of his life. Mat turns away from the preacher and faces the fields which Jack labored in and loved, disappointed that Brother Wingfare has made a farce out of the old man's life.

The problem that Wendell Berry has with institutionalized religion is, perhaps, best summarized in his fiction by Jayber Crow, Port William's barber and intellectual. Toward the end of A Place on Earth, on the night of the end of World War II, Jayber has been celebrating with Burley, Big Ellis, and a jug of moonshine. In the course of the evening, he begins in jest to tell the others about a book he has been "projecting for some considerable time to be titled The Esthetics of Sin" (APOE, p. 441). He goes on to point out that the sins he is going to consider are not the larger ones brought down by Moses from Mount Sinai but:

those small ones, made sins perhaps only by being so insistently so called by the clergy, so called perhaps only by virtue of the fact that they are so pleasant, or at least so lively, as to threaten distraction from the Protestant thought of Heaven- (APOE, pp. 441-42).

The main problem with institutionalized religion in both Jayber's and Berry's view is that it is focused too much on the hereafter, rather
than on the here-and-now, too much on the world to come, rather than on this world. Jayber proceeds to make a partial list of the sins under consideration: "drinking, thinking, playing or singing or dancing for no pay and only pleasure, being idle when not sick, loving the world as it is and as it might be, screwing without reticence or shame or the pretense that one never does-" (APOE, p. 442). While Wendell Berry believes in sexual restraint because it makes possible those rare moments when what humans love and what they desire coincide, he is no blue-nosed Puritan. He is concerned with the larger sins rather than those questionable sins which Churches emphasize.

In his essays too, Wendell Berry discusses the way in which institutionalized Christianity is so other-worldly oriented. In The Unforeseen Wilderness, he explains the problem succinctly:

Such religion as we have had has aimed us strictly Heavenward; along with our exploitive economic values, it has prepared us to voyage to the moon and into space, not to be fully and humanly at home in the rocky dells of the Red River Gorge (UW, p. 2).

Institutionalized religion has tended to give what Berry calls a "non-answer" to his central question: How should a man live in this world? According to Christianity as traditionally espoused, "He should live for the next world" (CH, p. 7).

In The Hidden Wound, Berry identifies one cause, at least in the South, for Christianity's preoccupation with the hereafter, slavery
and racism. The Church in the South became preoccupied with heaven because it and its ministers relied on the pocketbooks of racists, the white half of their congregations, for their livelihood. Those congregations were not about to sit and listen to sermons which commanded them to love not only in word, but also in deed, when the other half of the congregations was black:

Thus the moral obligation was cleanly excerpted from the religion. The question of how best to live on the earth, among one's fellow creatures, was permitted to atrophy, and the churches devoted themselves exclusively and obsessively with the question of salvation (HW, p. 21).

Wendell Berry sees a correspondence between the desire for spiritual wealth, or salvation, and the desire for material wealth. Both are based upon a concept of individualism "that is both vicious and absurd" (CH, p. 11), and both lead to the exploitation of the earth.

That Wendell Berry is also skeptical of other institutions like government, its agencies and bureaucracies, and big business should come as no surprise in light of his distaste for institutionalized religion. In Chapter One, in poems like "Against the War in Viet Nam" and "Dark with Power," we have already seen how Berry criticizes "the officials who see without doubt/that peace is assured by war, freedom/by oppression." Berry's criticism of government and business does not begin or end, however, with the Viet Nam War. In "To a Siberian Woodsman," for example, Berry asks his Russian counterpart:
Who has invented our enmity? Who has prescribed us hatred of each other? Who has armed us against each other with the death of the world? (O, p. 62).

The answer implicit in all of these questions is plain in others parts of the poem. Governments are responsible.

In "East Kentucky, 1967," Berry criticizes big business whose sole value is money. In that part of his native state, the coal companies, motivated by greed, have not only destroyed the farm land so that it is a place "where only machines thrive" (O, p. 60). They have also destroyed all possibility of a vision which might begin to correct the damage. They have made East Kentucky a place "where the rich lock like toads/to the backs of the helpless" (O, p. 60).

Wendell Berry's major complaint against institutions like government and business, however, is not that they enact unpopular policies which sometimes result in the meaningless destruction of people's lives. Rather he criticizes them because they are hypocritical. They do the opposite of what they were intended to do. Far from being the aid to people which they purport to be, they are obstructions. In The Long-Legged House, for example, Berry describes what he calls "the tyranny of charity." There Berry relates the story of a Kentucky craftsman who makes furniture. Because he takes more care with his work than factories do and because he cannot afford the proper tools and thus must work slowly, the craftsman not only can't compete with businesses, he can't even make enough money to support himself and his family. The Federal Government, however, rather than providing him
with the tools, which would make his work faster and easier, gives him welfare; and, thus in Berry's view, makes him a slave of the state.

According to Berry, the kind of charity which governments extend to people is charity in the abstract. Not only do such institutions offer charity which makes men more dependent on them. They also free people of their responsibility to their fellow human beings. Institutions usurp private duties, and, in doing so, they fragment our communities because they come between people. For Wendell Berry, morality cannot be divided. No such things as a private-public morality exists. For that reason, Berry has little faith in institutionalized, public solutions to problems as seemingly diverse as pollution and racism. He advocates private initiative in confronting such crises because, far from accomplishing anything, organizations, agencies, and institutions often add to the problems they are supposed to help solve.

In addition to being obstacles between people, institutions like government and business also make people who are dependent upon them forget how ultimately they are dependent upon the earth for their survival. Berry's ultimate criticism of institutions, which the situation of the Kentucky craftsman illustrates, is that without restraints, institutions tend in the direction of their own aggrandizement. In *A Continuous Harmony*, Berry writes: "unless constrained by the moral vision of persons in them, institutional ambitions run in the direction of power and self-preservation, not high principles" (CH, p. 158).
Two of Berry's poems suggest what to do in the face of overwhelming institutions and beaurocracies, which threaten to turn people into slaves of church and state. Both poems emphasize individuality. The first, "Do Not Be Ashamed," is reminiscent of Kafka's The Trial. Much like the protagonist of that novel, the "you" in this poem is suddenly and unexplicably arrested by an anonymous power:

You will be walking some night
in the comfortable dark of your yard
and suddenly a great light will shine
round about you, and behind you
will be a wall you never saw before.
It will be clear to you suddenly
that you were about to escape,
and that you are guilty (O, p. 36).

The power is totalitarian and has been present all the time, snooping into every aspect of life. Ultimately, it wishes to destroy individuality:

Though you have done nothing shameful,
they will want you to be ashamed.
They will want you to kneel and weep
and say you should have been like them (O, p. 36).

Berry tells us that the only defense against "them" is to remain honest and aloof. The speaker warns us to be ready, when their light has picked us out, to declare: "'I am not ashamed.'" The only defense against that power is a reassertion of individuality. If we make that assertion, the speaker tells us, then we will be surrounded
by a "sure horizon," instead of the false boundary which "they" try to impose, the wall which suddenly appears in the first few lines of the poem.

The situation is much the same in "Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front," except that here Berry is much more explicit about the values he is condemning and about what to do to oppose the institutions which propagate those values:

Love the quick profit, the annual raise,
vacation with pay. Want more
of everything ready made. Be afraid
to know your neighbors and to die.

So the Mad Farmer urges in the opening lines of the poem, and, if we follow his directions, he tells us our minds "will be punched in a card/and shut away in a little drawer" (COM, p. 16). Here again, Berry is both anti-government and anti-business. Throughout the remainder of the poem, he recommends a whole series of things which individuals can do to oppose the power of those institutions. He recommends that "everyday" we "do something/that won't compute"; that we "work for nothing"; that we "Give" our "approval to all" that we "cannot/understand"; that "as soon as the generals and the politicos/can predict the motions of" our minds, we lose them; and finally, that we "Practice resurrection" (COM, pp. 16-17). In all of these as well as in the other kinds of things Berry recommends, his emphasis is upon the personal as opposed to the public.
Another one of Berry's major reasons for mistrusting institutions is that they become bureaucratic machines which stand between people and their responsibilities and between people and the world. Thus, we should not be surprised to find that Wendell Berry is skeptical of all machinery and of technology. This is not to say that Berry is an iconoclast who wants to smash all machinery and return to a pre-industrial paradise; yet his novels contain numerous examples of situations in which he views machines in a less than positive light. In Nathan Coulter, for example, Jig Pendleton turns the inside of his house into a kind of machine which is symbolic of his life:

He'd found an old Singer sewing machine, and thrown the sewing part of it away, and fastened the iron frame with the wheel and treadle to the floor. Then he'd wired a lot of spools to the walls and run strings between them, zigzagging and crisscrossing from one end of the shanty to the other. This contraption of strings and pulleys was hooked to the wheel and treadle. It worked like a charm, but Jig never had been able to decide what it was for. He just kept adding spools and string until it was more complicated than a spider web. The whole inside of his house was a machine that couldn't do anything but run (NC, p. 16).

Not only has Jig turned the place in which he lives into a machine which doesn't do anything useful. One night he is almost killed by his creation when he comes home drunk and gets tangled up in it. The incident is comical, but, in conjunction with Jig's Christianity, the symbolism of the machine is clear.
In *A Place on Earth*, for Mat Feltner, the bombers which periodically drone over head suggest not only the way in which men have created machines which make it possible for them to kill whole populations without even seeing them, but also what can happen when technology and machinery are employed without restraints. The planes also symbolize what happens when humans try to live without contact with the earth. They signify a power which is not grounded in reality.

Berry's essays also express skepticism about machinery and technology. In recent years, he has been a fervent opponent of those who are interested in space colonization and one of his primary reasons is that to survive in such an alien environment people will not merely depend upon machines. They will literally have to live inside them, and, thus, run the risk of being tangled up in and destroyed by their own homes, just as Jig Pendleton almost is. In *The Unsettling of America*, his most recent non-fiction work, Berry is critical of another plan which would force people to rely almost entirely upon machines to survive. This time, however, it is not plans for a colony in space with which he takes issue, but rather plans for the farm of the future. Here again, Berry's central criticism is that the plan, designed by college agricultural students and published in *National Geographic Magazine*, tries to turn the entire farm into a machine in which all variables are taken into account and all contingencies prepared for. For example, one part of the plan calls for the fields to be covered with domes which admit sunlight, but which keep out damaging hail, heat, and cold. Under the domes, the optimum growing
temperature would be maintained and the crops would be watered via a carefully controlled irrigation system. It all sounds fine on paper until Berry begins to point out some of the flaws and oversights in the plan. One flaw is that the plan makes no provision for run-off from the domes when it rains heavily which could result in severe erosion. Furthermore, the designers fail to point out where the water for their irrigation system will come from. Another flaw, in Berry's view, is that the most significant variable is altogether absent from the model—human beings. Not only does Berry criticize the plan for failing to take the human element into account. He wonders as well what will happen to all the people who will be forced to leave their farms when the land is consolidated into huge machines. Presumably, these disenfranchised people will end up penniless and starving in the slums of so many American cities as so many before have or else they might end up doing meaningless work in factories. As Berry has written in A Continuous Harmony:

It is in thinking of the whole citizenry as factory workers—as readily interchangeable parts of an entirely mechanistic and economic order—that we have reduced our people to the most abject and aimless of nomads, and displaced and fragmented our communities (CH, p. 134).

Implicit also in the model is a disdain for work, one of the primary values of Berry's morality as we shall see shortly in our discussion of it. The disdain for work is evident in the failure to include
human beings in the model. Presumably, the farm of the future will free people from the drudgery of such hard work, but Wendell Berry is compelled to ask what they are being freed for.

In Wendell Berry's morality, the primary value is the life and health of the land because for Berry maintaining the health of the land is identical with maintaining our own health and insuring our survival. As we saw way back in Chapter One, Berry emphasizes again and again the unity of all things with creation, particularly of man with creation, despite the way in which consciousness has fragmented its world. As he describes it in *Clearing*, the soil passes in and out of people just as humans pass in and out of the soil in the process of birth, growth, death, and decay. Each enriches the other. Thus, a relationship with the earth which builds soil, like that which the careful farmer enacts, is as preserving of human life as it is of the land because the two share a common fate. As Berry writes in *A Continuous Harmony*:

> it is not the life that is fittest (by which we have meant the most violent) that survives, but rather the life that is most decent—the life that is most generous and wise in its relation to the earth (*CH*, p. 70).

The problem is that the land is in bad shape because humans have exploited it for financial gain; and, if the land is in bad shape, we can only conclude that humans are in bad shape as well:
Rather than be ruled by the thought of the world's good, which is identical with our own most meaningful good, we have set up false standards of national interest, power, production, personal comfort or pride or greed—or the desire to get to heaven (CH, p. 9).

These are the false standards which Americans have come to be ruled by and they have resulted in the destruction of the land, not only because of people's neglect or because of the devastation extractive industries such as strip mining have wrought, but also because of modern farming techniques which are slowly turning farming into an extractive industry like coal mining or oil drilling. Farming has become a big business in which the value of maintaining the soil is being superceded by the false values of profit and production.

Wendell Berry recognizes that the problem of the exploitation of the land and its resources is not a new one. From the very beginning, the white Europeans who came to the new world were Conquistadors primarily interested in wealth; and, since then, Americans have continued to get rich "by adding the power of the continent to ourselves in such a way that we cannot give it back" (CH, p. 113). For Wendell Berry, both racism and sexism, the exploitation of blacks and women, are not only mirrored in the white man's exploitation of the land. They are caused by it, for when profit became the only value, it was only a short step from exploiting the land for profit to viewing people as property and exploiting them in the same way. Thus, Berry is not kind with white society. In addition to describing it as artificial in
values and relationships, he calls it flimsy, temporary, ephemeral, fashion ridden, shallow, diseased, and stifling (HW, p. 88).

In order to correct this situation, Berry believes that humans must first recognize how it has been hubris, in his words, "the assumption by men of divine perogatives" (UW, p. 65), which has caused the environmental crisis. Then, a profound change must take place in the American mind which at present doesn't value anything in and of itself, but only for its economic worth. The American economic mentality will have to give way to an ecological mentality (UW, p. 87). As Berry writes in *The Unsettling of America*:

> We must, I think, be prepared to see, and to stand by, the truth: that the land should not be destroyed for any reason, not even for any apparently good reason (UA, p. 10).

All of Wendell Berry's other values from practicality, to work, to individuality, to community, to limitation are in the service of his ultimate value, the life and health of the land. They are his means of disciplining himself toward achieving that aim.

One of the primary disciplines of Wendell Berry's morality is what he terms in various places practicality, pragmatism, or utility. As he writes in *The Unsettling of America*: "A purposeless virtue is a contradiction in terms" (UA, p. 121). By practicality, however, Berry is hardly referring to the traditional American notion of it as "whatever will most predictably and most quickly make a profit" (CH,
p. 169). For most Americans, the practical is synonymous with the immediate; but in Berry's view: "Short-term practicality is long term idiocy" (CH, p. 170). Morality, for Wendell Berry, is long-term practicality. Thus, he has become a one-man lobby against strip mining, for, while it may seem practical insofar as it provides jobs for and injects new life into some of the more economically depressed areas of America, it fails to consider the long-term effects the industry has upon the land and its people once the coal is gone. As Berry has frequently pointed out, no amount of science and technology can make top-soil and no amount of reclamation can restore arable land which has been stripped away. Furthermore, while the people in the area of coal fields might appear to have gained, in the long run only the coal companies have profited, for when the coal is gone and the coal companies have absconded with their profit, the people are left without land or jobs and frequently they are left with the additional expense and labor of trying to restore that land.

Wendell Berry is also opposed to specialization, precisely because it is not long-term practicality. In A Continuous Harmony, he writes:

specialization has tended to draw the specialist toward the discipline that will lead to the discovery of new facts or processes within a narrowly defined area, and it has tended to lead him away from or distract him from those disciplines by which he might consider the effects of his discovery upon human society or upon the world. It has tended to value the disciplines that pertain to
the gathering of knowledge and to its immediate use, and to devalue those that pertain to its ultimate effects (CH, p. 95).

The whole question of use, whether it be use of knowledge, use of resources, or use of the land, is closely related to practicality in Wendell Berry's morality. In _A Continuous Harmony_, Berry carefully distinguishes between knowledge and its uses. The difference between the two is the same as the difference between the abstract and the concrete or between idea and enactment. Today, people have a tendency to take knowledge as complete in itself. According to Berry, humans have a moral responsibility to put knowledge to use and to consider its ultimate effects upon the world. All too frequently, however, people use organizations or agencies to put knowledge to use, but far from being a means of implementation, organizations are "rather a way of clinging to the clear premises and the neat logic of abstractions" (CH, pp. 125-27). Humans seldom put knowledge to use in the real proving ground—the human community and the world.

Berry's attitude about using land and other resources is similar to his attitude about using knowledge. While he points out again and again that ours is a consumer society, a society of waste which does not merely use things but uses them up, Berry believes in land use rather than mere conservation. He believes in the human right to use and share in nature:
The conservationist congratulates himself, on the one hand, for his awareness of the severity of human influence on the natural world. On the other hand, in his own contact with the world, he can think of nothing but to efface himself—leaving it just the way it is (UA, p. 29).

From the above quotation, we can see that Wendell Berry has come a considerable way from the first step of his secular pilgrimage, the descent into darkness, the abnegation of the will, and the effacement of the self before the world. Now, Berry calls for a kindly use of the land which requires not the effacement of consciousness but its expansion, and, as we have seen in the previous chapter, through that kindly use of the land, by enacting his vision, Berry finds a harmony with nature because of the wilderness which lies at the heart of the fields he cultivates. This is not to say that Berry believes the world should be valued only insofar as it can be put to human use; but as long as humans attempt to use the land kindly and to distinguish between necessary and frivolous uses, they have the right, even the obligation, to use, not use up, the land and its resources.

Another of the disciplines which Berry's morality values is work; but he is not an exponent of the Puritan ethic. Far from valuing work only because it keeps one out of Satan's claws or because it is a sign that one is among the elect, Berry shows how the quality of life depends upon meaningful labor. According to Berry, work should serve the earth. Its goal should be the continuance of the life of the world (UW, p. 26). Implicit in "The Tyranny of Charity," the essay
about the Kentucky furniture maker which we discussed above, is the way in which Berry values work because it makes people less dependent upon government and upon other institutions. In Berry's view, the government and the Kentucky craftsman would both be better off if the government provided him with the tools he needs for his work rather than with welfare which makes him a slave of the government's charity. The problem in America, however, is that people believe in an economic redemption linked with an education which will free them from work.

Berry views the separation of labor which began in America as a result of racism and the subsequent notion of "nigger work" as responsible for the pervasive American attitude that there is something degrading in any work that dirties the hands (HW, p. 106). The white man devalued work in the pseudoaristocratic notion:

that one is too good for the fundamental and recurring tasks of domestic order and biological necessity; to dirty one's hands in the soil or to submerge them for very long in soapy water is degrading and brutalizing (CH, p. 115).

Wendell Berry also views the separation of the modern home and work as a moral dilemma. In his view, the modern home's greatest failure is its remoteness from work, especially the work of the farmer:

It divorces us from the sources of our bodily life; as a people, we no longer know the earth we come from, have no respect for it, keep no responsibilities to it (UA, p. 52).
That remoteness from work and from the earth results in the destruction of the earth for "when people do not live where they work, they do not feel the effects of what they do" (UA, p. 52).

Berry identifies two major flaws in the pervasive American attitude toward work. First, what the white man views as "nigger work" is necessary work. Before racism, it was dignified and dignifying:

Our aversion to the necessary work that we call drudgery and our strenuous efforts to avoid it have not diminished it at all, but only degraded its forms. The so-called drudgery has to be done (CH, p. 116).

In Berry's view, a man who is incapable of such work is less than a man. Furthermore, as Berry suggests in his discussion of the modern home in The Unsettling of America, the dream of ease is almost always destructive. Berry explains in "Work Song" one reason why he farms, and he emphasizes the importance of that work even though he will not live to finish it:

I work to renew a ruined place
that no life be hostage of my comfort.
Let my words then begin in labor.
Let me sing a work song
and an earth song. Let the song of light
fall upon me as it may.
The end of this is not in sight (C, p. 36).

He works because, in doing so, he is trying to make sure that he will not enslave other people, living or yet to be born.
Another flaw in the American attitude toward work is the notion that once people are freed from work, they "will presumably take to more 'worthy' pursuits such as 'culture'" (CH, p. 18) in the large amount of leisure time they will have; but it has occurred to Wendell Berry to ask what people who are being saved from work, are being saved for:

The answer can only be that we are being saved from work that is meaningful and ennobling and comely in order to be put to work that is un-meaning and degrading (CH, p. 120).

Furthermore, Berry proceeds to show that leisure can only be meaningful when work is meaningful. He points out how the leisure of factory and office workers is an involvement with salesmen, illusions, and machines, how it is "an expensive imitation of their work-anxious, hurried, unsatisfying" (CH, p. 118). That is the case because their work offers no satisfaction in terms of work. It is always holding before itself freedom from work. Thus, their leisure has no leisurely goals either. It is always seeking satisfaction outside of itself (CH, pp. 118-119). Simply put, for leisure to be meaningful work must be meaningful, or, as Berry expresses it in "The Clearing": "As the vision of labor grows/grows the vision of rest" (C, p. 25). Finally, apparent in the indissoluble connection between leisure and work, is Berry's distinction between meaningful and meaningless labor. According to Berry, some types of work are "isolating, harsh, destructive,
specialized or trivialized into meaninglessness" while another kind is "restorative, convivial, dignified and dignifying, and pleasing" (UA, pp. 138-39):

We are working well when we use ourselves as the fellow creatures of the plants, animals, materials, and other people we are working with. Such work is unifying, healing. It brings us home from pride and despair, and places us responsibly within the human estate. It defines us as we are: Not too good to work with our bodies, but too good to work poorly or joylessly or selfishly or alone (UA, p. 140).

Wendell Berry's morality also values individuality. As we have already seen earlier in this chapter in Berry's skepticism about institutions and institutionalized solutions to problems, his emphasis in assuring the life and health of the land is upon individual effort. According to Berry, a decent spiritual and economic connection with the land can only be made by individuals, families who undertake to live in a place (UW, p. 28). Berry's emphasis is the same for all of the other problems which fall under the auspices of the environmental movement, problems such as waste disposal, air and water pollution, and the depletion of natural resources like oil. In Berry's view, the environmental movement will fail if it remains public. People must undertake it as a private cause.

This is not to say that Berry believes that public protest and public initiative have no value. In the crisis of the survival of the earth, "every one of us has a public responsibility. We must not,"

as Berry suggests, "cease to bother the government and other institutions to see that they never become comfortable with easy promises" (CH, p. 74). Nor does Berry subscribe to that extreme form of individualism, either secular or religious, which suggests that a man's governing obligation is to enrich himself in this world or the next one; yet he stresses emphatically that there is no public crisis that is not also private (CH, p. 73). Because "Nearly every one of us, nearly every day of his life, is contributing directly to the ruin of this planet" (CH, p. 74), public protest is not enough. Because the environmental crisis has its roots in our lives, environmental health will also have to have its roots there (CH, pp. 75-76). In A Continuous Harmony, Berry writes: "We need persons and households that do not have to wait upon organizations, but can make necessary changes in themselves, on their own" (CH, p. 80). The problem is that most people have forgotten how to take care of themselves, and Berry well knows that people are free only insofar as they are equal to their own needs: "The most able are the most free" (CH, p. 130).

For that reason, Berry provides a whole catalogue of private initiatives which individuals can undertake as first steps toward improving the life and health of the land. People who are concerned about pollution should not only write letters to their senators. They should also stop polluting themselves. If they are concerned about wasting energy, they should turn off unnecessary lights, and walk when they don't need to drive. If they want peace in the world, then they must first make their own lives peaceable. Far and away though, Berry
promotes gardening as the best kind of personal undertaking because it is a way of improving a piece of the world, of making individuals independent of the grocer, of preserving rather than exploiting the economy of the soil, of reducing the trash problem, and finally of producing something to eat and thereby of involving individuals in the work of feeding people. To improve the world, Wendell Berry calls not for political revolution, but for rectifying the heart.

Berry's emphasis upon individuality is evident in a number of poems like "February 2, 1968" where, despite all of the world's tribulations, despite the flying snow, the cold of winter, and the carnage of war, the speaker in the poem walks "the rocky hillside, sowing clover" (F: HB, p. 17); or like "A Standing Ground" where the speaker declares that he "will stop and step back/from the crowd of those who may agree/with what" he says "and be apart" (F: HB, p. 37); or like "The Contrariness of the Mad Farmer" where the speaker, the Mad Farmer himself, tells us that "Going against men," he had heard "at times a deep harmony" (F: HB, p. 45). And the Mad Farmer tells us it was he who:

planted by the stars in defiance of the experts
and tilled somewhat by incantation and by singing,
and reaped....by luck and Heaven's favor,
in spite of the best advice (F: HB, p. 44).
Yet despite the emphasis which Wendell Berry places upon individuality in solving the problems which humanity confronts today, he recognizes that "man cannot live alone—he cannot have values alone" (CH, p. 63). To attempt to live as if one were entirely independent of one's fellowman or of nature is to live at the world's expense too. For that reason, another of the primary disciplines of Berry's morality is community. In The Long-Legged House, Berry describes strip mining and its dire effects as one example of what happens when individuals act independent of community. Strip-mining is a selfish use of principles which have little regard for the long-term effects of that kind of mining upon other people and the world. This is not to say that Berry believes that people need be entirely dependent upon community. For Wendell Berry:

A healthy community would free the man to move alone when he needed to, and it would also inform him, though he moved alone, with adequate principles and ways (CH, p. 39).

In situations where community and principles conflict, Berry chooses the former over the latter. In his view, the anguish in our society at present is not due to a conflict of opposing principles, but rather "to the tension between a living community and those principles that are the distillation of its experience" (CH, p. 153). One reason why Berry chooses community over principle is because in doing so he chooses the concrete over the abstract. He recognizes that in
choosing community he must "accept in consequence a diminishment of the community's moral inheritance" (CH, p. 154); yet choosing principle over community is even worse, for "it is to accept the solitude of being right only to destroy the only ground upon which principles can be enacted and renewed" (CH, p. 154). Such was the situation which Robert E. Lee faced when he resigned his commission in the Union Army at the beginning of the Civil War to join the Confederacy. Berry admires Lee because he chose community over principle and because he refused to turn his abilities against his people:

His seems to have been an exemplary American choice, one that placed the precise Jeffersonian vision of a rooted devotion to community and household above the abstract "feeling of loyalty and duty of an American citizen" (CH, pp. 154-55).

We should also point out that Berry's choice of community over principle is consistent with his view of vision and the enactment of vision. The former, like principle, is important, but it too is an abstraction, and, as such, it is less important than the enactment of vision. We should also note that in choosing community over principle, Berry emphasizes the importance of acting together in contrast with the dangers of acting alone:

Without a proper sense of use a discipline declines from community responsibility to personal eccentricity; cut off from the common ground of experience
and need, vision escapes into wishful or self-justifying fantasy, or into greed (CH, p. 152).

Thus the importance, particularly in Berry's fiction but in all of his work as well, of viewing human behavior in the context of community. For example, in his free verse play, "The Bringer of Water," published in *Farming: A Hand Book*, an old man, an old woman, and a young woman who appear at various times early in the work seem at first glance to be merely busy bodies who voice the seemingly irrelevant values of the community of Port William. When Hannah Feltner, widow of Vergil who was killed in the final spring of World War II, appears with Old Jack Beechum for the first time in Scene Two, the old woman is bluntly critical of Hannah who is still mourning Vergil after three years:

Here she comes with her bucket
again, with the little Catlett boy
and that scandalous old man
Jack Beechum, them two
she trusts herself to. I'd say
she's a strange one, with her looks
and all, living like a nun (F: HB, p. 72).

The group, however, serves a choric function in the play, emphasizing the importance of seeing human behavior in the context of the community, for the old woman is right about Hannah. She has been mourning too long; and the old woman accurately describes the conflict of the play when, pointing to Hannah, she says:
That one there is married

to a dead man, there ain't

but mighty little future in that (F: HB, p. 72).

Furthermore, in speaking to Old Jack in a cliched and traditional way
about old age and death, the group makes Jack's adherence to the concrete as opposed to the abstract and to his community of family and
friends as opposed to principle all the more clear, even though Jack is forced to agree with their trite observation that death "don't miss
a one."

One example from Berry's fiction serves to illustrate the dangers, particularly to the individual who tries, of having values alone. In
A Place on Earth, Ernest Finley, Mat Feltner's brother-in-law, is a foil
for Mat. While the wound that Mat suffers in the novel is psychological
or spiritual, Ernest's is physical. He returned from World War I with
a mutilated leg, and, after he had established himself as a carpenter:

he began the systematic construction of his own
world, and just as carefully withdrew into it, into the established certainties and clear limits
of it. He defined his life; and then, gently and
quietly, but certainly, removed it from the lives nearest to it (APOE, p. 51).

As the result of his wound, Ernest relinquishes all thought of ever
marrying and he even withdraws from his own family: "Ernest was part
of the household, but also strangely absent from it" (APOE, p. 52).
Ernest's life becomes one of order, certainty, safety, and loneliness,
circumscribed as it is by the confines of his shop: "Ernest's shop is a walling-in of his desire, a limited and wholly manageable permanence of order" (APOE, p. 52). In Ernest's story and in his fate, Berry emphasizes not only the danger of having values alone, not only the danger of imposing false limits upon one's life, but also, an old familiar theme, the danger of human designs when they become obstacles between people and the world.

Soon after the novel begins, Ernest Finely goes to work repairing buildings for Ida Crop, whose husband Gideon had run away because of the sudden death of their daughter in a flood, an incident which is described early in the work. While working for Ida, (significantly enough the first thing Ernest repairs is a bridge which the flood tore away), Ernest is exposed to a kind of life which he had not imagined for a long time and from which he had shut himself off. Ida Crop begins in Ernest an opening toward the world, but, because of the limits which Ernest had imposed upon his life, it is an opening which is fated to close suddenly. After Ernest begins to be attracted to Ida:

He realizes vaguely that he's trapped, endangered, like an animal that has crept through a narrow opening and fed until it has grown too large to get out—though he's not caught on the inside of any enclosure he has made of his life, but outside (APOE, p. 308).
As a result of his attraction for Ida and for the kind of life she has, the return to work in the enclosure of his shop becomes intolerable for Ernest. Soon Ernest feels set free from all limits. The false limits which he had imposed upon his life give him a false sense of freedom once they have vanished. His limits have been self-imposed rather than imposed by the world. With Gideon Crop's return, Ernest is closed out of the intimacies of Ida's life and he feels the emptiness of his life as contrasted with the intimacy of Ida's marriage. Part of Ernest's mistake is that he has tried to make Ida's place his place, but with Gideon's return that possibility is destroyed for Ernest forever. Life becomes meaningless for him, and Ernest, as Berry describes him, "has come to the last place" (APOE, p. 423).

Ernest Finley shoots himself, and, as a result, Mat Feltner realizes "how separate and solitary" his brother-in-law's life has been (APOE, p. 473).

A final reason for the way in which Wendell Berry values community is his perception of the order of creation and of all living things. For Berry, the world and the things in it make up a complex, vital whole:

I come more and more to look on each creature as living and moving always at the center—one of the infinite number of centers—of an arrangement of processes that reaches through the universe. The interlocking lives of the creatures, like a coat of chain mail, by which the creation saves itself from death (CH, p. 49).
Berry's understanding of the unity of creation is similar to the renaissance notion of the great chain of being. Not only does each living thing have its place in the hierarchy of creation, not only do the lives of all those creatures who are links in the chain affect the whole, but a disruption of one part disrupts the whole until things are set right again: "When we obscure or corrupt our understanding of any one of the basic unities, we begin to misunderstand all of them" (CH, p. 161).

According to Berry, humans have severed some of the vital links in that interlocking chain. We did this initially "by degrading and obscuring our connection to the land, by looking upon the land as merchandise and ourselves as its traveling salesmen" (CH, p. 162). Community is the discipline which helps to maintain the whole and to repair the broken links in the chain:

Community discipline imposes upon our personal behavior an ecological question: What is the effect, on our neighbors and on our place in the world, of what we do? It is aware that all behavior is social. It is aware, as the ecologists are aware, that there is a unity in the creation, and that the behavior and the fate of one creature must therefore affect the whole, though the exact relationships may not be known (CH, p. 156).

Community, and the morality which results from it, helps to provide the necessary restraints which will enable men to take the greatest possible care in their use of the world:
A live and adequate morality is an accurate perception of the order of things, and of humanity's place in it. By clarifying the human limits, morality tells us what we risk when we forsake the human to behave like false gods or animals (CH, p. 166).

The primary discipline of Wendell Berry's morality is limitation or what Berry calls the discipline of finitude. For Berry, limitation means three things. It means emphasizing the essential over the merely decorative. It means putting restraints on human behavior because the world is finite and, therefore, exhaustible. And finally it means recognizing that humans are limited both in intellect and in body, and that ultimately they must die.

Throughout The Broken Ground, Berry values the essential as opposed to the decorative. In fact, one of the central themes of the entire collection emphasizes the essential, what survives. As the title poem of the collection suggests: "What is left/is what is" (BG, p. 56). We have already seen in Chapter One how in "Boone" what the legendary American pioneer must face is that at the end of his life he moves "in the descent/of days from what was dreamed/to what remains" (BG, p. 13). Furthermore, in the poems in this collection which are set in the city, again and again Berry admires the life which survives there like the spring weeds in "Mav song" which are "triumphant/even in the waste" (BG, p. 46). Berry admires that life for the way in which it makes use of the useless. That is one lesson which, throughout his work, Berry hopes that man would learn from nature, which wastes nothing. In Chapter Two, we saw how in "The House," all that
remains, despite the speaker's vision of the ideal house is what is, the concrete building, "the vestigial house in returning/wilderness." Throughout his work, Berry values what survives from season to season, the husk more than the flower.

For Wendell Berry, limiting human behavior is the primary way of assuring the life and health of the land. The problem in America has been that from the first days of his entrance into the new world, the white man has acted as if he were free of all controls:

Lacking any such disciplining and humbling sense of being strangers, wanderers away from home, the European conquerors entered America like so many English sparrows or Japanese beetles, free of controls, cultural or natural, that would have brought their lives into harmony with the land. And they and their descendants have lived here for the most part as strangers, and for the most part out of control, ever since (UN, pp. 76-77).

As Berry suggests in the above quotation, the problem continues right down to the present. "We live," as he writes in _The Long-Legged House_, "in a fallen world by the dangerous assumption that we are unfallen" (LLH, p. 45). Cities, industries like strip mining, and pollution of the air and water as well as the energy shortage are all evidence that modern man has escaped any order that might imply restraints or impose limits. Berry blames that escape upon hubris:

The most characteristic human behavior, or misbehavior, was made possible by a redefinition of
humanity which allowed it to claim, not the sovereignty of its place, neither godly nor beastly, 
in the order of things, but rather an absolute sovereignty, placing the human will in charge of 
itself and the universe (UA, p. 55).

Berry further points out that Americans live in a consumer society 
which has the illusion that it inhabits a world of infinite quantity. 
That society believes that its redemption lies in its vision of more, 
but, as Berry points out, "wisdom is the art of minimums" (HW, p. 101):

As Thoreau so well knew, and so painstakingly 
tried to show us, what a man most needs is not 
a knowledge of how to get more, but a knowledge 
of the most he can do without, and of how to get 
along without it (HW, p. 101).

Berry also observes that in primitive societies a person made the 
difficult passage to adulthood "not by becoming presumptuous and proud 
in the use of human powers"; but rather "by the recognition and 
acceptance of one's human limits" (UW, p. 68). Simply put, to have a 
healthy environment humans must give up things they like instead of 
hoping for the materialistic redemption which technology promises.

One of the major crises of Jack Beechum's life occurs in The 
Memory of Old Jack when he exceeds his limits. To please his wife who 
has aspirations to wealth and a life beyond the farm, Jack buys a farm 
adjacent to his own and begins to envision himself as the gentleman 
farmer his wife pictures him as; but he soon realizes that he has 
taken on more land than he can handle. He has asked his place to
yield not a livelihood, but another place. As a result, he not only loses the second farm, but he almost forfeits his original plot, which ends up mortgaged for years, in the bargain. Jack's insight on the day he pays off the note suggests how exceeding his limits has resulted in the imposition of limits even more binding on his life:

And he looked finally beyond those limits and saw the world still there, potent and abounding as it would be whether he lived or died, worthy of his life and work and faith. He saw that he would be distinguished not by what he was or anything that he might become but by what he served (MOJ, p. 161).

In trying to make up for that past mistake, Jack had almost lost the world.

Americans, however, need to change not only the way they behave, but also the way they think. The discipline of finitude involves thinking little as well as exercising control in our acts. This is necessary because "the present problems of the world are the result, not just of human stupidity, but of human intelligence without adequate controls" (CH, pp. 132-33). For Wendell Berry, practicing the discipline of finitude also means recognizing that what humans can know and do is limited. This is one of Berry's major criticisms of the specialist:

he foreseaks even repudiates the complex, partly mysterious patterns of interdependence and cooperation, controllable only within limits, by which
human culture joins itself to its sources in the natural world (UA, p. 71).

Modern cities are prime examples of the attempt at total human control of the environment, but, while cities have unprecedented organization, because the specialists who run them ignore the mysterious patterns of interdependence and cooperation, they also have unprecedented disorder. Total human control is impossible. Not only is human life bounded by death, the ultimate limitation, and not only is it impossible for humans to know what all the effects of their actions will be, no matter how well intentioned they are, but humans are even limited as to the amount of grace they can stand. As Berry writes in "The Old Elm Tree by the River," life is "a mighty blessing we cannot bear for long" (COM, p. 3). But in Berry's view limitation is a boon rather than a bane:

If all that a man can understand were all there is, if there were no mystery, then the mind would be trapped within its limits; one should rejoice in understanding, but rejoice also in failing to understand, for in that failure the mind is set free (CH, p. 32).

As Berry writes elsewhere in A Continuous Harmony, a man can live decently without knowing all the answers (CH, p. 51).

Largely because human beings and the world are finite, Wendell Berry favors a cyclical view of the nature of human life and experience in the world over a linear view. The linear view promotes the doctrine of progress which suggests that man is marching steadily,
however slowly it may seem at times, toward an earthly paradise. It emphasizes the new and views the past as little more than old skin which it is constantly shedding. It views man "as moving through time in this way, discarding old experience as he encounters new" (CH, p. 139); and, thus, "History....is always a surprise to us" (CH, p. 149). Another flaw in the linear view is that it espouses the doctrine of possession, but not the doctrine of relinquishment. Life is lived without regard or respect for death, and, thus, death is accidental, surprising, and frightening: "The linear vision looks fixedly straight ahead. It never looks back, for its premise is that there is no return" (CH, p. 142).

In contrast, the cyclical view suggests that human life is subject to the same circular patterns as nature and all other life:

The cyclic vision, at once more realistic and more generous, recognizes in the creation the essential principle of return: what is here will leave to come again; if there is to be having there must also be giving up. And it sees death as an integral and indispensable part of life (CH, p. 142).

The cyclical vision, rather than promoting the doctrine of progress, promotes the doctrine of oneness with creation which is its end. In A Continuous Harmony, Berry writes:

We cannot look for happiness to any technological paradise or to any New Earth of outer space, but only to the world as it is, and as we have made it. The only life we may hope to live is here (CH, p. 151).
The cyclical view also emphasizes renewal or return, an important motif in much of Berry's poetry and fiction. In the cyclical view, life is a circular dance "in which basic and necessary patterns are repeated endlessly" (CH, p. 140). In a finite world, renewal is essential because it is the only way of maintaining life: "Against the constant jeopardy of decay there is the necessity of constant renewal." For Wendell Berry, the forest is the best example of renewal because it renews itself without wasting anything: "it has achieved the 'correct' relation between the processes of growth and the processes of decay" (CH, pp. 97-98).

Wendell Berry has been criticized at times for the limited nature of his subject matter and for what some critics perceive as the redundancy of his work; yet many of these critics seem to be assuming that the only kind of poetic development is linear. John Ditsky remarks that in his drive toward simplicity in his poetry "Berry runs the risk of becoming simplistic, formulaic, and thus of approaching the lack of substance of lesser moderns," while Kenneth Fields criticizes Berry for being an obsessed man who has fewer subjects and rhythms than he ought and because much of his poetry is tonally all of a piece. Fields concludes with the observation that the effects of Berry's poems are getting repetitive and that he is going to have to find new things to write about. Speer Morgan, however, pretty much agrees with my assessment: "Wendell Berry's transformation...has been a steady clarification and improvement of essentially the same stuff, his poetry growing more obviously and naturally out of itself,
his own life, and death. 16

What Ditsky and Fields fail to consider is Berry's view of art and language which we discussed in Chapter Three. For Berry, art, especially poetry, is never an end in itself. Farming and writing, as we have seen in the previous two chapters, are Berry's means of enacting his vision of achieving a harmonious relationship with the world. Thus, in his poetry from volume to volume, we can observe not a linear development in which the poet moves parallel to the world, but a cyclical deepening as each collection journeys through the seasons. The central symbols and metaphors of each volume all suggest the deepening nature of Wendell Berry's relationship with the earth. The broken ground of the first volume is appropriate as a title for a first collection, as a symbol for the way in which humanity has ravaged the earth, and as a symbol of limitation and renewal, "the breaking/through which the new/comes." The findings and the openings of the subsequent two collections suggest not only how the poet has fixed his attention upon the world, but also what he has learned as a result. The handbook of the fourth collection suggests how the poet has actually begun to lift the soil while the marriage of the fifth collection suggests how the relationship with the land of the previous volume has developed into an intimate union. Finally, the clearing of the last book is the opening surrounded by wilderness which that marriage makes in the world.

Perhaps the most important reason why Berry favors the cyclical vision is that it values the past and it integrates death as part of
the process of creation:

It is only in the processes of the natural world, and in analogous and related processes of human culture, that the new may grow usefully old, and the old be made new (CH, p. 150).

Additionally, the cyclical view of reality takes into account death as well as life and decay as well as growth. It views death as an inescapable, ecological fact. It is the only way of making life whole. Finally, Berry favors the cyclical vision because rather than being a pattern which he imposes upon nature, it is a design which he discovers there:

It is this pattern and only this—not any that he may conceivably invent—that man must imitate and enter into if he is to live in the world without destroying it (UK, p. 22).

Critics have much noted Wendell Berry's debt to Thoreau, to Thomas Jefferson, to the Agrarians, and even to William Cullen Bryant. Speer Morgan observes a connection between Berry and Thoreau, and John Ditsky also notes a similarity in language between Berry and Thoreau and he further remarks that Berry "does not altogether suffer from the comparison." Ditsky also connects Berry with the Agrarians "and their adherence to a Jeffersonian sense of democracy." Kenneth Fields connects Berry with Bryant "to whom," he says, "Berry may be a little in debt." The critics, however, have overlooked an even more
conservative debt. The mystical and moral relationship which Berry seeks with nature and all creation is very similar to the kind of relationship primitive people have had with the world.

Berry's admiration for trees and his desire to imitate their life, his discovery of immanence in the creation, his experience of animism or oneness with the world, his preference for the cyclical view of creation, and his acceptance of death as an integral part of life are all characteristic of primitive peoples. Conspicuous, as we have already seen in more than a few of Berry's poems, are the primitive reverence of trees as higher beings to whom primitive man believed he owed everything as well as the primitive ambition to gain the goodwill of plants and trees which possess the power of renewing and healing themselves. Like primitive man, Berry seeks to raise himself to the level of the tree not by violent methods, but by veneration; not by superiority or mastery, but by astonishment and admiration. Furthermore, the principle or indwelling which Berry recognizes in trees, in the sycamore in "The Return" for example, is a suggestion of that difficult to define quality the primitive calls imunu, defined by anthropologists as soul, living principle, that which enables every-thing to exist as we know it. 20

Wendell Berry's primitive soul manifests itself in other poems where like primitive man he rejects the idea that land may be an individual and inalienable property. What may be given to an individual and pass from generation to generation is the use of the soil and the fruits of its cultivation. In addition, the land, insofar as it may
be appropriated, belongs for Berry as for the primitive to the social group in its entirety, to the dead as well as to the living. Not only are the dead a vital part of the community and of the land. For Berry as for the primitive, the first place belongs to them, for they provide the harvest. And for Berry as for primitive man, there are two kinds of deaths. There are those which are merely annihilation, the uncreative deaths which lead to no fruition, more often than not connected in Berry's poetry with civilization; and creative deaths, what the primitive calls bakulu, the worthy dead. For Berry, the bakulu, the worthy ancestors, are those who live in harmony with the earth in death because they tried to do so in life.

In his essays, too, again and again, Berry expresses his admiration for primitive peoples. He admires the Japanese peasant and other oriental peoples for their farming techniques which have maintained the life and health of their land for thousands of years (CH, p. 99). He admires the Incas and the Incan concept of the tribe, the aglul, which "was not merely its people and not merely the land, but people and land wedded through a mystical bond" (CH, p. 102). And he admires the Winnebagos and their creation myth, their doctrine of power and order, and their cyclical view of creation:

To Black Elk earthly blessedness did not lie ahead or behind; it was the result of harmony within the circle of the people and between the people and the world (CH, p. 140).
Yet, despite his admiration of primitive peoples, Wendell Berry does not ask that people in the twentieth century be protective of the world because of superstitions. Rather, in the ecological age: "we will be protective of the natural world as our primitive forebears, not out of superstition but for reasons that are knowledgeable and conscious." For Wendell Berry, that quest for a harmonious relationship with creation, his secular pilgrimage, is endless, "for it is going nowhere in terms of space and time, but only drawing deeper into the presence, and into the mystery, of what is underfoot and overhead and all around." (UW, p. 33).
Notes to Chapter Five


17 Morgan, p. 865.

18 Ditsky, pp. 15, 8.

19 Fields, p. 95.

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