

CENTER FOR REFLECTION ON THE SECOND LAW

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The following is copied from Death Comes From the Archbishop by Willa Cather.

When they left the rock or sand dune that had sheltered them for the night, the Navajo was careful to obliterate every trace of their temporary occupation. He buried the embers of the fire and the remnants of food, unplied any stones he had piled together, filled up the holes he had scooped in the sand. Since this was exactly Jacinto's behaviour, Father Latour judged that, just as it was the white man's way to assert himself in any landscape, to change it, make it over a little (at least to leave some mark or memorial of his sojourn), it was the Indian's way to pass through a country without disturbing anything; to pass and leave no trace, like fish through the water, or birds through the air.

It was the Indian manner to vanish into the landscape, not to stand out against it. The Hopi villages that were set upon rock mesas were made to look like the rock on which they sat, were imperceptible at a distance. The Navajo hogans, among the sand and willows, were made of sand and willows. None of the pueblos would at that time admit glass windows into their dwellings. The reflection of the sun on the glazing was to them ugly and unnatural - even dangerous. Moreover, these Indians disliked novelty and change. They came and went by the old paths worn into the rock by the feet of their fathers, used the old natural stairway of stone to climb to their mesa towns, carried water from the old springs even after white men had dug wells. . . . . They seemed to have none of the European's desire to "master" nature, to arrange and recreate. They spent their ingenuity in the other direction; in accommodating themselves to the scene in which they found themselves. This was not so much from indolence, the Bishop thought, as from an inherited caution and respect. It was as if the great country were asleep, and they wished to carry on their lives without awakening it; or as if the spirits of the air and water were things not to antagonize and arouse. . . . They ravaged neither the rivers nor the forest, and if they irrigated they took as little water as would serve their needs. The land and all that it bore they treated with consideration; not attempting to improve it, they never desecrated it.

And the following two poems I copied from a McGraw Hill tape of Cousin Wendell Berry reading some of his poetry. (We became cousins the other night at Charles Jenner's house in Chapel Hill). I hope I have not violated too severely the proper arrangement of the lines. I put it down as I thought it might be from the sound of the reading.

WHO HAS COME IN THE NIGHT

Who has come in the night,  
Tying 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 plastic and aluminum garbage?  
More rubbish in one night  
Than all the Shawnees made.

Who has come and gone,  
Leaving scattered here  
The little litter?  
That was all he meant,  
My neighbor and brother:  
A violent brainless man  
Whom I must intelligently love,  
(Though I do not)  
Or become him as he is.

## I DREAM AN INESCAPABLE DREAM

I dream an inescapable dream  
In which I take away from the country  
The bridges and roads, the fences, the strung wires  
Ourselves and all we have built and dug and hollowed out  
Our flocks and herds and droves of machines.

I restore then the wide branching trees.  
I see growing over the land and shading it  
The great trunks and crowns of the first forest.  
I am aware of the gathering up of fibres,  
Into the rattling of the branches,  
The lichen channels of their ancient bark,  
The saps of the ground flowing upward into  
The tossing of their leaves  
Birdsong, their shimmering roofs, their darkness,  
Like the afterimage of a light  
That only by not looking, can be seen.

I glimpse the country as it was.  
It is a country where all beginnings stay.  
All the beings belong wholly to it.  
They flourish in dying as in being born.  
It is the life of its deaths.

I must end always by replacing our beginning there,  
Ourselves and our blades,  
The flowing in of history,  
Putting back what I took away,  
Trying always with the same pain of foreknowledge  
To build all that we had to build but destroy nothing.

My hand is weakening.  
I feel on all sides blindness growing in the land  
On its peering bulbous stalks.  
I see that my mind is not good enough.  
I see that I am eager to own the earth and to own men.  
I find in my mouth the bitter taste of money.  
A gaping syllable I can neither swallow nor spit out.  
I see all that we have ruined in order to have,  
All that was owned for a lifetime to be destroyed forever.

Where are the sleeps that escape such dreams? by Wendell Berry

These writings are full of the deep, deep sorrow that also can be found in Fredrick Turner's book, Beyond Geography. What have we done to this magnificent continent? and to a people who found their identity as creatures of the earth? What about our own identity? Is it not also to be found in the willows and the sand? Must we not conclude that our perceptions have been wrong and begin to pay attention to the prophets of our time? Can we not stop the destroying and begin the healing?

October 25  
7:30 PM

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Professor Richard Sylla will lead a discussion of Jane Jacob's book Cities and the Wealth of Nations. "She calls for an earthly economics, where all decisions are in harmony with local ecologies and cultures" says the Tarrytown Letter. You are invited. Please come!