Wendell Berry’s Cyclic Vision: Traditional Farming as Metaphor

Morris Allen Grubbs

Western Kentucky University

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WENDELL BERRY'S CYCLIC VISION:
TRADITIONAL FARMING AS METAPHOR

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of the Department of English
Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Morris Allen Grubbs
July 1990
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WENDELL BERRY'S CYCLIC VISION:
TRADITIONAL FARMING AS METAPHOR

Recommended  July 10, 1990
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Approved  July 12, 1990
(Dean of Graduate College
To my mother and father,
for their hard work, their examples,
their agricultural heritage
Let us never forget that the cultivation of the earth is the most important labor of man. When tillage begins, more arts follow. The farmers, therefore, are the founders of civilization.

-- Daniel Webster

Some cycles revolve frequently enough to be well known in a man's lifetime. Some are complete only in the memory of several generations. And others are so vast that their motion can only be assumed... We are kept in touch with these cycles, not by technology or politics or any other strictly human device, but by our necessary biological relation to the world. 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.

-- Wendell Berry
A Continuous Harmony

The memory is a living thing--it too is in transit. But during its moment, all that is remembered joins, and lives--the old and the young, the past and the present, the living and the dead.

-- Eudora Welty
One Writer's Beginnings
Acknowledgments

Because a master's thesis is in a sense a culmination of one's graduate education, any attempt to thank everyone involved would be only partially complete. A few individuals, however, can be singled out for their direct influence on its development, particularly the members of my committee, Dr. Joseph Suvant (my director), Dr. Joseph Millichap, and Dr. George McCelvey, who have shown endless reassurance and wisdom. Their guidance, patience, and friendship, as well as their understanding of a teaching assistant's demands, have assured the pleasure of this marathon.

I also thank Dr. Lee Little and Dr. James Flynn for their willingness and direction as Graduate Advisors, and Dr. Joseph Glaser for sharing his standards of excellence as a Composition Director. A special "thank you" goes to Dr. Millichap for being a source of encouragement and inspiration throughout my two years at Western. These professors, along with so many other members of the faculty and staff of the English Department at Western, are exemplary, not only as scholars and teachers, but as individuals as well, and I am glad our paths have crossed.

My indebtedness to my parents, who embody Wendell Berry's agrarian values, is expressed in this work's Dedication; they are my best teachers. But another person, Anissa Radford, deserves familial gratitude as well, for throughout the prolonged research
and writing of this project, she has been a steadfast source of inspiration and encouragement, love and understanding. Our conversations have helped to bring this project into focus, and her voice has been the voice of comfort, keeping me sane and happy and motivated in times of distress.

Although I began my graduate work at the University of Kentucky, where I first learned of Wendell Berry, it was at Western in a Southern Literature class that my interest in his works was cultivated and began to grow. Dr. Charmaine Mosby's inclusion of Berry in her list of possible term paper subjects led me to write a short paper titled "Death as a Means of Renewal in Wendell Berry's Poetry," the germ of this thesis' third chapter. But my deep interest in what Berry stands for is rooted in a graduate English class at U.K. called "Readings in Agriculture." As the title suggests, the class was comprised both of English and agriculture students, sharing ideas, arguing, and learning from each other. We sat in a circle, in a small un-airconditioned room in one of the oldest buildings on campus, and read Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Pope, Wordsworth, Thomas Jefferson, and all the other agricultural writers mentioned in this thesis. Indirectly, Berry's agrarian ideas were discussed, but his literary works were not; they didn't have to be: he was our professor, there for open conversation and personal guidance. Our class discussions of literature, of Nature, and of America's cultural and agricultural crises inform this work. And so I extend my deepest gratitude to Wendell Berry--the writer, the teacher.
In an age of great technological prowess, America has in a sense come to view hubris—the flaw which felled so many tragic heroes—as a modern-day virtue. Machines and computers have made our possibilities seem infinite, our lives endlessly luxurious, our ambitions boundless. Our competitive industrial society is fueled by pride and generates overconfidence. Indeed, such excessiveness has made and keeps America a "superpower," economically, militarily, and technologically. And yet, as we only now have begun to learn, the acquisition and maintenance of such power bear tragic repercussions culturally and environmentally. Through our hubris we have damaged Nature; and we now see that by damaging Nature, we have endangered ourselves.

Perhaps because some of the ecological and cultural consequences of our actions are now surfacing, some neo-romantic and agrarian writers have evolved an increasingly practical view of humanity's relationship with Nature. Kentucky's Wendell Berry is one of these concerned writers; his philosophy is a blend of romanticism, classicism, and realism—ennobling Nature and stressing natural and social order, balancing emotion and reason, art and practicality. America needs such a writer: a realist and social critic showing us our rapid cultural decay; a neo-classicist exerting didacticism; a traditionalist at once calling for a return to agrarian values.
and acknowledging the evils inherent in our nation's past; a romantic championing simplicity in living and promoting love and understanding of Nature; a staunch environmentalist unveiling our relentless abuse of natural gifts and our ultimately self-defeating proclivities; and, finally, a teacher and prophet showing us the way toward restoration and wholeness.

To date, Berry's canon includes over thirty books of poetry, essays, and fiction, and scores of other uncollected essays and poems published in periodicals. This study, by necessity, lacks definitiveness, for Berry's canon continues to evolve, and his writing continues to rise in popularity and critical acclaim. What it does offer, though, is a helpful introduction to his cultural and agricultural philosophy vital to the central themes found in his essays and poetry (and his fiction, which merits a separate study beyond the scope of this paper). And it provides, I hope, some groundwork for future studies.
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Although Wendell Berry's first book, a novel, appeared in 1960, he did not gain significant national attention until the publication of his nonfiction manifesto, *The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture*, in 1977. Since its publication, Berry has moved increasingly toward the prose of persuasion as he continues to sharpen his argument in support of a practical, continuous harmony between the human economy and Nature. His canon as a whole—the poems, essays, and novels—is an ongoing and thorough exploration of man's use of and relationship to the land.

Arguing that the health of a culture is linked to the health of its land, Berry focuses on agriculture, particularly the growing conflict between traditional farming (which espouses a harmonious cyclic vision) and modern agribusiness (which espouses a discordant linear vision). As a traditional farmer wedded to the land, Berry derives his ideas and images largely from his practical experiences and from his devotion to careful and responsible land stewardship. He also, in his nonfiction, turns to several agricultural (as well as a few literary) writers of the past and present to lend support to his arguments.

Traditional farming has taught Berry the concepts which inform his poems and essays (as well as his novels and short stories, which merit a separate study beyond the scope of this paper). For example, he has learned, and continues to learn, the importance of under-
standing and acknowledging the primal, and ruling, character of a "place": of looking to Nature for guidance, instruction, and justice; and of alloying farming practices to Nature's "Wheel" of birth, growth, maturity, death, and decay. This cycle and related motifs unify and connect his central themes, particularly death as a means of renewal. In Berry's view, one of the cruxes in the agricultural crisis is that, whereas traditional farming seeks a natural balance between growth and decay, industrial farming, because of its pull toward mass production, stresses growth only (a linear inclination), which wears out the land and leads inevitably to infertility. Tracing our modern crisis to our past and to our present character and culture, Berry shows the ramifications of our abuse of Nature's "gifts."

Berry's strong sense of Nature's cycle is the basis for his imagery of departures and returns. As a crucial part of the cycle, death is prerequisite to life, and Berry shows the importance of understanding "that the land we live on and the lives we live are the gifts of death" (Home Economics 62). The power of Nature's cycle is at once destructive and restorative; Berry teaches that by alloying our human economy more with natural cyclic processes rather than with man-made linear--and ultimately destructive--ones, we and future generations can live with hope and assurance through the possibility of renewal.
Chapter One

The Milieu, Canon, and Controlling Conflict: An Introduction

Born into the milieu of Southern Agrarianism in 1934, Wendell Berry matured as one world continued to supplant another: under the guise of "progress," urbanization and industrialization were usurping what had been for some time a doomed southern culture. As prophesied in *I'll Take My Stand*, such modernization was destroying the traditional rural way of life. Berry, standing at what was potentially the end of his family's agrarian lineage, was in a sense an incarnation, as were all contemporary agrarians, of the South's greatest conflict: whether to hold on to traditional values, especially its close, often spiritual tie with the land, or to surrender to modern "progress." After writing and teaching in New York and California, Berry eventually was able to reconcile what must have been an immense personal tension and return to his native home. His decision to sustain his rural Kentucky heritage evolved out of his strong sense of responsibility to his familial land, his ancestors, and his heirs.
A self-acknowledged anachronism, Berry has dedicated his life to the stewardship of his Henry County farm and to the perpetuation, through his writings, of a singular but highly ramifying argument: that America's declining cultural health is directly linked to the declining health of its land. In Berry's view, the root cause of many of our cultural and environmental maladies is our attitude toward the land, particularly as manifested in our modern agricultural system. He maintains that as agriculture transformed into "agribusiness," we began to view the land as a sort of factory, producing without regard to Nature's law of replenishment; agribusinessmen, Berry asserts in *The Unsettling of America* (UA), began to perceive their farm's success in terms of the "sophistication of its equipment, the size of its income, or even the statistics of its productivity" and forgot that "the true measure of agriculture" is "the good health of the land" (188). Berry argues that such a linear vision is a fatal one because it focuses primarily on the present and fails to consider a particular farm's past and to make provisions for its future. Consideration of past and future to help guide and limit the present requires a cyclic vision of the land as subject to Nature's rather than man's dictates—especially Nature's ruling cycle, which Sir Albert Howard, an agricultural writer
Berry often cites,\(^2\) calls "the Wheel of Life": "the successive and repeated processes of birth, growth, maturity, death, and decay" (Soil and Health 18).

Out of the backdrop of tension between modernization and tradition—to Berry between the linear and cyclic visions—emerged the catalyst for Berry's poetry, fiction, and essays, all of which serve to complement each other in setting and theme. Though the lessons he teaches are universal, his primary setting is the physical and social world of his native region. Because he writes about the interrelationship of land and people in an era of urbanization, the majority of his essays are by obligation polemic; his fiction and poetry, didactic. A prerequisite to an informed understanding and appreciation of Berry's art and arguments is knowing that he views himself foremost as a traditional farmer wedded to his natural "place." His themes and images evolve primarily out of his and his ancestors' agricultural experiences rather than from occasional observation, on which so many other nature poets have often relied. He knows by heart the intricate cycle of Nature, the value of understanding the uniqueness of place, the role of Nature as teacher and judge, and the complexity of man's relationship to and proper use of the land.

Berry has become one of our preeminent and most
articulate defenders of the best of our traditional American principles. As a poet, novelist, and essayist he is able to offer a remarkably accurate, often poignant reflection of where our culture has been, where it is now, and where it may be headed. He is the latest in a series of American writers who have emerged periodically to check our relationship with the natural world. In the last century, for example, Thoreau, through his prophetic Walden, questioned America's obsession with materialism and criticized its continuation of a ruthless invasion and mishandling of Nature, a temperament inherited from our ravenous pioneers. Thoreau was one of the first in this series to call for "simplicity" in living and to warn of the arrogant and dangerous assumptions that natural resources are limitless and that man can live independent of Nature without dire consequences. But America ignored Thoreau's wisdom in order to nurture the seeds of civil war and industrialization. Later, in the first half of the 20th century, the Southern Agrarians of I'll Take My Stand fought hard to preserve their culture's agrarian values (some of the best along with some of the worst). But in the arena of modern "progress" their back-to-the-land movement waned in the face of intense Southern industrialization and urbanization.

The post World War II era of technology, particularly
the intense mechanization of agriculture, roused another prophetic voice of caution. Viewing America as a land of "conquistadors" armed with a "mixture of fantasy and avarice" (UA 3), Berry emerged full bloom three decades after the war with an extensive, passionate argument probing our accelerating abuse of "natural gifts" and our betrayal of Thomas Jefferson's agrarian precepts. Recognizing America's crisis and need for a voice, the Sierra Club of San Francisco, founded in 1892 by John Muir for "the study and protection of the nation's scenic and ecological resources" (UA copyright page), published The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture in 1977. This nine-chapter exploration of how the modern industrial economy is a predator of land and people established Berry's prominence as a national writer and proved him a powerful force as social critic and environmentalist. Like the agrarian writers before him, Berry in this book, as poet Gary Snyder comments on the second edition's back cover, "shows what we lost of our real human American potential when we lost our commitment to living well, in place, on the land." By turning to his experience as a small land owner and traditional farmer to lend focus and substance to his arguments, Berry convincingly ties America's moral and cultural decline to man's expansive dissociation from the land, especially via
the rapid disappearance of traditional farms. Like all the works in his canon, *The Unsettling of America*, "the capstone of Berry's nonfiction prose, the most outspoken and the most controversial of his books" (Ward 206), reflects his contention that land and people are deeply interwoven, and that to tamper with one is to tamper with them both. Berry argues that we have given up the understanding—dropped it out of our language and so out of our thought—that we and our country create one another, depend on one another, are literally part of one another; that our land passes in and out of our bodies just as our bodies pass in and out of our land; that as we and our land are part of one another, so all who are living as neighbors here, human and plant and animal, are part of one another, and so cannot possibly flourish alone; that, therefore, our culture must be our response to our place, our culture and our place are images of each other and inseparable from each other, and so neither can be better than the other. (UA 22)

Like *Walden* and *I'll Take My Stand*, *The Unsettling of America* has emerged as one in a series of American manifestoes calling for a retuning of America's fading cultural/natural harmony. This work may be viewed as a thematic culmination of Berry's works before and a source for works after its publication; William Ward in *A Literary History of Kentucky* calls the work "a point to which, as a reformer, his essays, novels, and poems had been leading him and for which they had been preliminary studies" (206). Berry's growing
indignation toward the bureaucratic "orthodox" agriculture, as he explains in the book's Preface, called the work into being and probably accounts for its comprehensiveness and its author's outspokenness: "I realized that my values were not only out of fashion, but under powerful attack. I saw that I was a member of a threatened minority" (UA vi). And he had good reason to feel this way: By the time he was 46, Berry had seen his own state's farm population decrease by 76 percent and the total number of Kentucky farms by 53 percent between 1945 and 1980 (Universal Almanac 150). Across America, the total farm population plummeted from 24.9 percent in 1930 to 2.2 percent in 1986; accordingly, the nation's 6.2 million farms of the 1930's dwindled to 2.1 million farms in the late 1980's. To maintain production demands, this loss in numbers was offset by an increase in agricultural scale, with the average acreage of farmland nearly tripling between 1930 and 1987, from 157 to 461 acres per farm (Universal Almanac 32). Traditional farming, along with the small land owners' faithful care for the land, nearly vanished in the wake of industrial agriculture.

Berry's increasing need to salvage traditional farming and to impede industrial agriculture is reflected in the evolution of his canon. Until the publication of The Unsettling of America, Berry was acclaimed more
for his poetry and fiction than for his nonfiction. But a decade later his reputation as an essayist caught up with, perhaps even passed, his reputation as a poet and novelist. This rise in popularity as an essayist, as expected, parallels his increased production of nonfiction over the following decade. Before 1978, his published canon (in book form) was composed of nearly 60 percent poetry (13 books), 27 percent nonfiction (6 books), and 13 percent fiction (3 books). But as the new decade approached and his message gained more urgency, Berry chose as his primary medium his most direct, polemic, and didactic voice—the essay. The twelve years following The Unsettling of America, 1978-1990, saw four new volumes of essays along with Recollected Essays 1965-1980 (RE) and new editions of The Unsettling of America and The Hidden Wound. In the same span he published three volumes of new poems along with Collected Poems 1957-82 (CP), (whereas in the previous twelve years—1964 to 1976—he published over a dozen books of poetry). And during the 1980's he produced a short novel, a collection of six short stories, and a highly revised edition of an earlier novel. His pull toward nonfiction in the 1980's suggests that as America became more environmentally concerned, Berry began to focus less on teaching by poetic and fictional example and more on straightforward argument.
and persuasion.

Perhaps because Berry's message began to rise both in urgency and popularity, the Sierra Club published a paperback second edition of The Unsettling of America in 1986. In the new Preface to this edition, Berry reflects on the nine-year interim, finding some inklings of hope but asserting that "every problem I dealt with in this book, in fact, has grown worse since the book was written" (viii):

That the situation was not good--for farms or farmers or rural communities or nature or the general public--was even then evident to the experienced observer who would turn aside from the preconceptions of "agribusiness" and look at the marks of deterioration that were plainly visible. And now, almost a decade later, it is evident to everyone that, at least for farmers and rural communities, the situation is catastrophic. (vii)

And he emphasizes this crisis' ramifications by adding,

But this is not just a financial crisis for country people. Critical questions are being asked of our whole society: Are we, or are we not, going to take proper care of our land, our country? And do we, or do we not, believe in a democratic distribution of usable property? At present, these questions are being answered in the negative. Our soil erosion rates are worse now than during the years of the Dust Bowl. In the arid lands of the West, we are overusing and wasting the supplies of water. Toxic pollution from agricultural chemicals is a growing problem. We are closer every day to the final destruction of private ownership not only of small family farms, but of small usable properties of all kinds. (viii)
Berry's arguments and those of the writers he cites suggest that we should turn away from many of our conventional standards of judgment. He argues that we rely too blindly and habitually on our nation's "centers of power" and "centers of academics" to provide our standards of living, thinking, and working. The result has been that our many cultural and environmental crises have worsened. Berry's solution prescribes that we as individuals and as families must determine what is right in relation to our "place." Effective change, he argues, can begin only on the practical scale of home and community. He explains in "The Futility of Global Thinking" that

we have failed to produce new examples of good home and community economies, and we have nearly completed the destruction of the examples we once had. Without examples, we are left with theory and the bureaucracy and the meddling that come with theory. We change our principles, our thoughts, and our words, but these are changes made in the air. Our lives go on unchanged. (17)

And he continues by offering a practical solution:

"Our understandable wish to preserve the planet must somehow be reduced to the scale of our competence--that is, to the wish to preserve all of its humble households and neighborhoods" (18).

Berry's poetry and fiction suggest and his nonfiction implores an urgent return to time-proven, traditional
standards of living and working. Like some of his contemporaries and so many other English and American poets before him, Berry turns to Nature as a standard and a guide—not to a generalized, abstract Nature, but to the Nature of his particular "place." In "Taking Nature's Measure" Berry explains this idea in the context of agriculture:

In light of the necessity that the farmland and the farm people should thrive while producing, we can see that relying on the single standard of productivity has led to failure.

Now we must learn to replace that standard with one that is more comprehensive: the standard of nature. . . . By returning to "the nature of the place" as the standard, we acknowledge the necessary limits of our own intentions. Farming cannot take place except in nature; therefore, if nature does not thrive, farming cannot thrive. But we know, too, that nature includes us. . . . If it does not thrive, we cannot thrive. The appropriate measure of farming, then, is the world's health and our health, and these are inescapably one measure. (21)

With Nature as his guide, Berry seeks to lead his readers back to the traditional agrarian values that have been lost in America's desperate shuffle for "progress."

In this way, as Donald Hall asserts in a review of The Unsettling of America, Berry has become "a prophet of our healing, a utopian poet-legislator like William Blake. . . . [with a] passion for social change" (24).

At the heart of almost all of Berry's work is the conflict between what he calls the modern-world
"linear vision" and the older-world "cyclic vision."

He explains this conflict in "Discipline and Hope," an essay in *A Continuous Harmony* (CH):

There are, I believe, two fundamentally opposed views of the nature of human life and experience in the world: one holds that though natural processes may be cyclic, there is within nature a human domain the processes of which are linear; the other, much older, holds that human life is subject to the same cyclic patterns as all other life. (139)

He sees our modern "doctrine of progress" as a manifestation of the linear vision, which "looks fixedly straight ahead. It never looks back, for its premise is that there is no return. The doctrine of possession is complemented by no doctrine of relinquishment" (CH 142). By contrast, the cyclic vision "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" (CH 142). In *The Unsettling of America* Berry explains this conflict in the context of industrial agriculture, arguing that the linear vision entered farming when the specialized shapers or makers of agricultural thought simplified their understanding of energy and began to treat current, living, biological energy as if it were a store of energy extractable by machinery. At that point the living part of technology began to be overpowered by the mechanical. The machine was on its own, to follow its own logic of elaboration.
and growth apart from life, the standard that had previously defined its purposes and hence its limits. Let loose from any moral standard or limit, the machine was also let loose in another way: it replaced the Wheel of Life as the governing cultural metaphor. Life came to be seen as a road, to be traveled as fast as possible, never to return. Or, to put it another way, the Wheel of Life became an industrial metaphor; rather than turning in place, revolving in order to dwell, it began to roll on the "highway of progress" toward an ever-receding horizon. The idea, the responsibility, of return weakened and disappeared from agricultural discipline. Henceforth, any resource would be regarded as an ore. (89)

In "Discipline and Hope," Berry gives what he calls the "opposing characteristics of the linear and cyclic visions." His chart is worth considering in full because it provides a helpful portrait of what he often attacks and what he always promotes. This linear/cyclic disparity unifies Berry's canon by serving implicitly, if not explicitly, as the controlling conflict in his poems, novels, and essays:

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<th>Cyclic</th>
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<td>Progress. The conquest of Nature.</td>
<td>Atonement with the creation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Promised Land motif in the Westward Movement.</td>
<td>Black Elk's sacred hoop, the community of creation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Heavenly aspiration without earthly reconciliation or stewardship. The creation as</td>
<td>Reconciliation of heaven and earth in aspiration toward responsible</td>
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commodity. life. The creation as source and end.


Possession. Usufruct, relinquishment.

Quantity. Quality.

Newness. The unique and the "original."

Renewal. The recurring.

Life Life and Death (CH 143)

Berry's canon is remarkably coherent, and although each genre stands well on its own merit, "to fragment Berry and treat books like The Long-Legged House [Berry's first essay collection, the last section of which contains three important autobiographical essays] as separate from his poetry would do him--and the work--a disservice . . ." (Driskell 64). One of the powers of Berry's creative genius, after all, is his remarkable talent to integrate, with nearly equal temper, his central ideas into three genres. Because he infuses the same themes throughout his diverse forms of expression, a careful critic of Berry's poetry or fiction must also consider his nonfiction; his essays fuse with his poems and novels to form a powerful, indissoluble partnership, supporting, strengthening, and clarifying each other. Some of his poems, as Donald Hall suggests,
could even be harmoniously "interleaved among the chapters" of his nonfiction (26). Berry in this way is similar, for example, to Milton (one of Berry's acknowledged literary kinsmen): some ideas in Paradise Lost may be better understood in relation to Milton's prose tracts; his Areopagitica, for instance, serves to elucidate his views of good and evil and free will. Any author's poems and essays may also, when compared, contain contradictions and ambiguities, and so a serious study of the poetry may gain from a serious consideration of the poet's essays, and vice versa. Because Berry's canon is so thematically interconnected, and because he is primarily a didactic writer, his essays are requisite reading for a thorough understanding of his poetry. Such a union of his essays and his poetry will enhance a reader's comprehension of the depth of his cyclic vision and the degree of his farm's influence on his writing.
Chapter Two

"Man cannot be independent of nature": A Look at Berry's Cultural and Agricultural Philosophy

In a commencement address delivered in June 1989 at the College of the Atlantic in Bar Harbor, Maine, Berry posed some advice which must have contradicted his audience's views of modern success and progress. His remarks could just as well have been those of Henry David Thoreau speaking to his Harvard graduating class a century and a half earlier. Indeed, Berry's advice is timeless, but his timing seems apocalyptic in view of the world's current environmental crisis and, as Berry sees it, America's cultural crisis. In a profound sense, Berry's deliverance of such a critical message parallels Moses' deliverance of the Ten Commandments: Berry's advice is, after all, a prescription for world healing through the imposition of a set of laws—Nature's laws. Berry closes his address (later published as "The Futility of Global Thinking") with a sequence of prophetic advice divided into ten commands, which, he says, "is simply my hope for us all" ("Futility" 22). These bits of advice are at the heart of Berry's
personal and literary world, and collectively they represent a compact thesis of his work (numbers mine):

1. Beware the justice of Nature.
2. Understand that there can be no successful human economy apart from Nature or in defiance of Nature.
3. Understand that no amount of education can overcome the innate limits of human intelligence and responsibility. We are not smart enough or conscious enough or alert enough to work responsibly on a gigantic scale.
4. In making things always bigger and more centralized, we make them both more vulnerable in themselves and more dangerous to everything else. Learn, therefore, to prefer small-scale elegance and generosity to large-scale greed, crudity, and glamour.
5. Make a home. Help to make a community. Be loyal to what you have made.
6. Put the interest of the community first.
7. Love your neighbors—not the neighbors you pick out, but the ones you have.
8. Love this miraculous world that we did not make, that is a gift to us.
9. As far as you are able make your lives dependent upon your local place, neighborhood, and household—which thrive by care and generosity—and independent of the industrial economy, which thrives by damage.
10. Find work, if you can, that does no damage. Enjoy your work. Work well. ("Futility" 22)

Taken in the context of Berry's canon, this sequence represents far more than a neo-romantic or agrarian
appeal to return to "simplicity." To think of his advice solely in this way is to misinterpret it, for it is more of an oracular warning: either rethink our attitudes toward each other and the natural world or continue on a path toward natural-, cultural-, and self-annihilation. Although Berry's tenets echo those of Thoreau and the Southern Agrarians, his advice is more critical than that of his literary predecessors, for we now more than ever threaten our existence with destructive potentials unimaginable only a few decades ago. Berry explains our critical condition in "The Loss of the Future," an essay in The Long-Legged House (LLH):

We have reached a point at which we must either consciously desire and choose and determine the future of the earth or submit to such an involvement in our destructiveness that the earth, and ourselves with it, must certainly be destroyed. And we have come to this at a time when it is hard, if not impossible, to foresee a future that is not terrifying. (46)

Berry's work, while an exploration of man's use of and relationship to the land, is a "continuing search for avenues of reentry into a proper state of harmony with the natural world. . . ." (Tolliver 13). To anyone bent on modern progress, his ideas must seem old-fashioned, unrealistic, indeed radical. But no advice could be more needed, more real, and more practical
than Berry's. In fact, as Berry argues, it is the modern idea of progress that is unrealistic. He explains in his commencement address that

our most serious problem, perhaps, is that we have become a nation of fantasists. We believe, apparently, in the infinite availability of finite resources. We persist in land-use methods that reduce the potentially infinite power of soil fertility to a finite quantity, which we then proceed to waste as if it were an infinite quantity. . . . We believe that democratic freedom can be preserved by people ignorant of the history of democracy and indifferent to the responsibilities of freedom.

("Futility" 19, 22)

Throughout his work, Berry seeks to challenge several "modern" attitudes—which he sees as based largely on hubris—^2—and to offer healthier alternatives by way of practical solutions. Leon Driskell accurately observes that Berry's "arguments are rarely speculative or theoretical; they are the commonsense deliberations of a person looking at the realities of his world" (63-64). Each bit of advice Berry gives is backed by working examples. If he is writing to recommend a farming technique, for instance, he will prove his argument with sound examples of when, where, and how the technique has worked. At one point in The Unsettling of America, for example, after discussing how a once badly-abused hillside farm eventually regained its fertility through careful stewardship, Berry says,
"I know that this is so because I have seen it done and have done it myself" (185). Such assurance is at least implied in almost every point he makes. His elaborate contention in The Unsettling of America that the nation’s cultural crisis is closely linked to its agricultural crisis is exemplary of his dedication to proving each of his assertions and suggestions completely believable and practical with evidence ranging from history to national statistics to personal experience.

The graduates listening to Berry's speech must have had little, if any, trouble acknowledging the need for his closing recommendations, for he was careful to provide copious examples to assure a need for his advice. He asked them, for example, "Were the catastrophes of Love Canal, Bhopal, Chernobyl, and the Exxon Valdez episodes of war or of peace?" And he boldly answered,

They were, in fact, peacetime acts of aggression, intentional to the extent that the risks were known and ignored.

We are involved unremittingly in a war not against "foreign enemies" but against the world, against our freedom, and indeed against our existence. Our so-called industrial accidents should be looked upon as revenges of Nature. We forget that Nature is necessarily party to all our enterprises and that she imposes conditions of her own.

("Futility" 22)

Perhaps the attentive graduates recognized that the
only alternative to these catastrophes and so many more like them is to accept Berry's advice to live by Nature's timeless commandments rather than our own timely manmade ones.

As a knowledgeable and outspoken conservationist, a university English professor, and a traditional farmer wedded to the land, Berry has a keener and more accurate insight into the human/Nature relationship than some writers and social critics who seek alienation from the world, or who are only "weekend farmers" or sight-seers. Berry lived and worked in New York, California, and Europe before returning, by desire, to his native Kentucky home. And he continues to travel to farms and farming communities on the continent and abroad. So his philosophies are based much more on the familiar than the abstract. Driskell explains that Berry draws on the particular circumstances of his life that give substance to his arguments. Never does he present himself as an abstract philosopher; what wisdom he dispenses comes from a specific awareness of his life in a particular world. (63)

His life, his farm work, his writing and teaching, his home and family, and all that each involves are extraordinarily integrated. He understands his writing as an attempt to elucidate certain connections, primarily the interrelationships and interdependences of man and the natural world. One of his premises in The
Unsettling of America at once evinces his notion of cultural and natural interdependancy: "Everything in the Creation is related to everything else and dependent on everything else" (46). The Unsettling of America, then, is as much about connections as it is about ramifications. Arnold Erlich, watchful of connections, calls his book

a cool, reasoned, lucid and at times poetic explanation of what agribusiness and the mechanization of farming are doing to destroy the American fabric, the community, the household, even the sexual love that is at the basis of communitas. (10)

In Berry's own words, this "book is about survival, and survival is to care about the welfare of all people, urban and rural" (Ehrlich 10). And in the Forward to The Gift of Good Land (GGL) he explains the book in the context of connections, saying that it

sought to comprehend the causes and consequences of industrial agriculture within the bounds of a single argument: that agriculture is an integral part of the structure, both biological and cultural, that sustains human life, and that you cannot disturb one part of that structure without disturbing all of it . . . . (ix)

Berry's paradigm of connections is the traditional family farm, in which land, crops, animals, family, and community thrive through a highly integrated and symbiotic relationship. Gene Logston, one of several
essayists in Meeting the Expectations of the Land, of which Berry is a coeditor, defines "traditional" farming as

those practices of mixed livestock, crop, garden, and orchard farming brought over from Europe and adapted to middle-American climates and soils while being passed down from father to son. (4)

Whereas the ruling force in these farms is biological, the controlling force in industrial farms is primarily mechanical. Some farms, though, are what Logston calls "partially traditional," but even these, he explains, "suffer from a principle basic to any biological system: leave out one strand of the fabric of traditional farming and the whole system falters" (8). And he continues by saying that a farmer must "either recognize all the intertwining webs" or evolve "gradually into assembly line economics" (8).

Because the traditional farm is so intricate and complex, a good farmer must have an unspecialized mentality; that is, he must have developed, through apprenticeship or years of experience (or both), a comprehensive working knowledge of the farm as a whole, not just a mastery of its individual parts or aspects. And he must serve in such multiple and diverse capacities as horticulturist, veterinarian, mechanic, electrician, businessman, conservationist, and so on. Berry extends
this idea beyond farming by arguing that our cultural and ecological crises stem from our modern propensity toward specialization:

The disease of the modern character is specialization. . . .

The first, and best known, hazard of the specialist system is that it produces specialists—people who are elaborately and expensively trained to do one thing. We get into absurdity very quickly here. There are, for instance, educators who have nothing to teach, communicators who have nothing to say, medical doctors skilled at expensive cures for diseases that they have no skill, and no interest, in preventing. . . .

Specialization is thus seen to be a way of institutionalizing, justifying, and paying highly for a calamitous disintegration and scattering-out of the various functions of character: workmanship, care, conscience, responsibility. (UA 20)

And he continues by saying,

Even worse, a system of specialization requires the abdication to specialists of various competences and responsibilities that were once personal and universal. Thus, the average—one is tempted to say, the ideal—American citizen now consigns the problem of food production to agriculturists and "agribusinessmen," the problems of education to school teachers and educators, the problems of conservation to conservationists, and so on. (UA 20)

One of the major differences between a traditional farm and an "agribusiness" farm is the degree of the farm's diversity: traditional farms thrive by polyculture; modern farms are often characterized by monoculture—that is, producing one main crop or livestock for subsistence.
But "nowhere" in Nature, as Sir Albert Howard explains in *An Agricultural Testament*, "does one find monoculture" (4). Calling Nature "the supreme farmer," he argues that in "Nature's agriculture," "mixed farming is the rule: plants are always found with animals: many species of plants and animals all live together" (1). And Berry's friend and collaborator Wes Jackson in his book *New Roots for Agriculture* maintains the same view: "The agricultural human's pull historically has been toward the monoculture of annuals. Nature's pull is toward a polyculture of perennials" (93). Modern orthodox agriculture, then, is driven by a linear vision; traditional farming, by a cyclic vision, which, as Howard says in *The Soil and Health*, "bear[s] in mind Nature's dictates" by blending "animal and vegetable existence" and returning all natural "wastes to the land" (12), ensuring that the "processes of growth and the processes of decay balance one another" (*Agricultural Testament* 4). Berry encourages this emphasis on cyclicism as a practical remedy for the modern agricultural crisis. He writes, for example, in *The Unsettling of America* that

if agriculture is founded upon life, upon the use of living energy to serve human life, and if its primary purpose must therefore be to preserve the integrity of the life cycle, then agricultural technology must be bound under the rule of life. It must conform to natural processes and limits rather than
to mechanical or economic models. The culture that sustains agriculture and that it sustains must form its consciousness and its aspiration upon the correct metaphor of the Wheel of Life. The appropriate agricultural technology would therefore be diverse; it would aspire to diversity; it would enable the diversification of economies, methods, and species to conform to the diverse kinds of land. It would always use plants and animals together. It would be as attentive to decay as to growth, to maintenance as to production. It would return all wastes to the soil, control erosion, and conserve water. To enable care and devotion and to safeguard the local communities and cultures of agriculture, it would use the land in small holdings. (89)

The modern agricultural crisis, then, as Berry, Jackson, Logston, and others see it, is a consequence of widening the gap between man's farming practices and Nature's own practices. Such a disparity not only severs the relationship of man and Nature, but also often pits them against each other: the farmer becomes an imposition to Nature; Nature becomes a nuisance to the farmer. Discord ensues when he begins to disrupt her cyclic patterns in order to establish his own linear ones. Moreover, many modern agricultural theories and practices presuppose universal applications. But such attitudes and practices constitute an affront to Nature--that is, the particular Nature of a particular farm. Traditional farmers are sensitive to the particular needs of their farms; through the years and generations they have looked to the Nature of their place to judge which practices, plants, and animals work and thrive
the best, given the farm's conditions: "A man ought to study the wilderness of a place," Berry has written, "before applying to it the ways he learned in another place" (LLH 206). He explains in The Unsettling of America that the land is too various in its kinds, climates, conditions, declivities, aspects, and histories to conform to any generalized understanding or to prosper under generalized treatment. . . . To treat every field, or every part of every field, with the same consideration is not farming but industry. Kindly use depends upon intimate knowledge, the most sensitive responsiveness and responsibility. As knowledge (hence, use) is generalized, essential values are destroyed. As the householder evolves into a consumer, the farm evolves into a factory—with results that are potentially calamitous for both. (31)

Berry shares Alexander Pope's view that a "place" has its own ruling Nature. Pope suggests in his "Epistle to Burlington: Of the Use of Riches" that gardeners must "In all, let Nature never be forgot" (In. 50): they must always consider and conform to Nature's dictates governing a particular place, or in Pope's words, they must "Consult the Genius of the Place in all" (In. 57). Additionally, J. Russell Smith in Tree Crops: A Permanent Agriculture argues that "farming must fit the land" (260); agricultural researcher Wes Jackson demonstrates that a farmer must consider a place's primitive form—in his case the native prairie—in
to farm it successfully; and John Todd in "Tomorrow is Our Permanent Address" succinctly notes that "elegant solutions will be predicated upon the uniqueness of place" (116). Like these writers, all of whom Berry occasionally cites for support, Berry stresses that a traditional farmer will always consider and adapt his practices to the needs of the land's primal character. Successful and sustainable agriculture, then, as Berry understands it, is possible only by maintaining a cyclic vision, one attuned to Nature, rather than a linear vision, one seeking conquest of Nature. Jackson in New Roots for Agriculture shares Berry's view when he writes,

Nature is at once uncompromising and forgiving, but we do not precisely know the degree of her compromise nor the extent of her forgiveness. I frankly doubt that we ever will. But we can say with a rather high degree of certainty that if we are to heal the split, it is the human agricultural system which must grow more toward the ways of nature rather than the other way around. (93-4)

Another critical disparity between traditional and orthodox agriculture is the degree of the farmer's involvement and care. A traditional farmer knows the importance of always balancing proper use with proper care, because, as Berry says in The Long-Legged House, "Nature has never permitted freedom from responsibility" (42). Proper use and proper care, in equal proportions,
assure the land's fertility, which in turn assures the family's and the community's sustenance. Throughout his canon, Berry often sets traditional farming against the expanding backdrop of modern agribusiness, which depends on a far greater proportion of use than care: use is easily and swiftly accomplished by machines, but care is more difficult, more time-consuming and requires more human interaction and responsibility. The farther man is removed from the substance of his work, Berry argues, the greater is his tendency to neglect or ignore it. He says that "a family farmer, for instance, will walk his fields out of interest; the industrial farmer or manager only out of necessity" (UA 188). Traditional care requires a comprehensive, intimate, often passionate knowledge of the nature of one's place. Berry writes, for example, in *The Unsettling of America*,

> A healthy farm culture can be based only upon familiarity and can grow only among a people soundly established upon the land; it nourishes and safeguards a human intelligence of the earth that no amount of technology can satisfactorily replace. (43)

And he adds that

> the best farming requires a farmer—a husbandman, a nurturer—not a technician or businessman. A technician or a businessman, given the necessary abilities and ambitions, can be made in a little while, by training. A good farmer, on the other hand, is a cultural
product; he is made by a sort of training, certainly, in what his time imposes or demands, but he is also made of generations of experience. This essential experience can only be accumulated, tested, preserved, handed down in settled households, friendships, and communities that are deliberately and carefully native to their own ground, in which the past has prepared the present and the present safeguards the future. (45)

Berry and his family live on a traditional farm in a traditional community where, as he explains in an interview, "we grow virtually everything we eat--milk, meat, vegetables, eggs--and we sell some of our cattle. . . . and we exchange labor with some of our neighbors when needed" (Ehrlich 10). Bryan Woolley, in another interview, stresses that Berry's farm is a real farm, not a writer-professor's country estate. Its chores include milking cows and currying horses and mulking out stalls and mending fences and mowing hay and all the other time-consuming, sometimes back-breaking, labor that family agriculture requires. (10)

Berry's advice to "Beware the justice of Nature," and to "Understand that there can be no successful human economy apart from or in defiance of Nature," his first and second "commands," has a bit more validity given that "Berry is the fifth generation of his father's family and the sixth generation of his mother's to farm in Henry County in the neighborhood of Port Royal" (Woolley 8). Loyal to the cyclic vision, he knows the history of his ancestors and their land, and he
understands how each has affected the other. He also has studied other farms and lived with several farming families in America and abroad, and he knows that some generations, even in his own family, abused or neglected their land: their heirs suffered, and the land's scars remain visible even after several generations of careful stewardship. Others worked more in harmony with the needs of the land, and they and their heirs were rewarded with the assurance of soil fertility. Berry acknowledges that he is a product of his heritage--both the good and the bad--and he applies his ancestral knowledge to maintain his native land's good health.

His arguments, then, do have incredible substance. After all, he, unlike the Southern Agrarians, actually moved back to the land after making a niche in the literary world. His motive was not so much to become an observer of Nature as it was to become a partner with Nature through the oldest and noblest means--farming. In "The Making of a Marginal Farm," Berry explains his pull toward husbandry and how it shaped, and continues to shape, his art:

As a child I always intended to be a farmer. As a young man, I gave up that intention, assuming that I could not farm and do the other things I wanted to do. And then I became a farmer almost unintentionally and by a kind of necessity. . . . There was a time, after I had left home and before I came back, when this place was my "subject matter." . . .
In coming home and settling on this place, I began to live in my subject, and to learn that living in one's subject is not at all the same as "having" a subject. To live in the place that is one's subject is to pass through the surface. The simplifications of distance and mere observation are thus destroyed. (RE 336-37)

Berry assures his readers that farming, to him, is not drudgery, but pleasure. In his view, traditional farming is an art, and farming the land requires the same discipline as writing a poem. John Ditsky calls farming Berry's "paradigm of art" (13). And Driskell says frankly that Berry "is the same person when writing as when plowing" (63). Traditional farmers, like artists, learn their art through a kind of cultural process, the cyclic view of education, rather than through training or programming, the linear view. Berry explains that the best farming grows not only out of factual knowledge but out of cultural tradition; it is learned not only by precept but by example, by apprenticeship; and it requires not merely a competent knowledge of its facts and processes, but also a complex set of attitudes, a certain culturally evolved stance, in the face of the unexpected and the unknown. That is to say, it requires style in the highest and richest sense of that term. (CH 98)

And he maintains this view in The Unsettling of America:

Because the soil is alive, various, intricate, and because its processes yield more readily
to imitation than to analysis, more readily to care than to coercion, agriculture can never be an exact science. There is an inescapable kinship between farming and art, for farming depends as much on character, devotion, imagination, and the sense of structure, as on knowledge. It is a practical art. (87)

To Berry, then, his farm and his poetry share the same form. Wyatt Prunty observes that "the order Berry makes of nature through the practice of farming he also makes of human experience through the practice of poetry" (960). "This place has become the form of my work, its discipline," Berry has written, "in the same way the sonnet has been the form and discipline of the work of other poets: if it doesn't fit, it's not true" (CH 52). Berry allies his farm to his cyclic vision of art in "From the Crest," a poem in Clearing. For example, in the third section of the poem he writes,

The farm must be made a form, endlessly bringing together heaven and earth, light and rain building, dissolving, building back again the shapes and actions of the ground. (CP 191)

Like the farmer, the poet must stay in tune with the natural processes of his world, because "the rhythms of the land are an analogue by which we understand ourselves" (Prunty 958). In "A Defense of the Family Farm," an essay in Home Economics (HE), Berry further supports the link between land, its people, and art
by citing Eric Gill's *A Holy Tradition of Working* in which Gill links traditional work to art: "Every man is called to give love to the work of his hands. Every man is called to be an artist" (HE 166). To this, Berry adds,

> The small family farm is one of the last places--they are getting rarer every day--where men and women (and girls and boys, too) can answer that call to be an artist, to learn to give love to the work of their hands. It is one of the last places where the maker--and some farmers still do talk about "making the crops"--is responsible, from start to finish, for the thing made. (166)

His artistic vision of agricultural work, then, is diametrically opposed to the industrial vision which maximizes agricultural mechanization in order to minimalize human interaction with and care of the land, separating humans as far as possible from Nature in pursuit of economic efficiency. To Berry, this modernization of view and practice has created a character-killing and "community-killing agriculture, with its monomania of bigness" (UA 41). He explains that the modern view holds that agriculture is not primarily the work of farmers, though it has burgeoned on their weaknesses. It is the work of institutions of agriculture: the university experts, the bureaucrats, and the "agribusinessmen," who have promoted so-called efficiency at the expense of community (and of real efficiency), and quantity at the expense of quality. (UA 42)
Industrial agriculture, then, as Berry understands it, not only rejects the cyclic vision's quality over quantity, education over training and programming, but likewise violates most of Berry's ten "commands" as set forth in his commencement address.

The modern linear view of progress not only has destroyed many of America's farmlands; it also has been the driving force behind strip mining, deforestation, pollution, and so on, and has widened the gap between humanity and the land. Because the current natural resource crisis, in Berry's view, is a direct consequence of our character, the only real hope lies in the change of attitudes and lifestyles. But for such a change to be effective, Berry argues, it must begin on the personal level, not merely under the guise of national "movements." Berry says in "The Futility of Global Thinking," for example, that

the civil rights movement has not given us better communities. The women's movement has not given us better marriages or better households. The environment movement has not changed our parasitic relationship to nature. (17)

As Americans, we must first acknowledge our complicity as "conquistadors," that we are inheritors of a past which saw the land as a great obstacle to be conquered. Momentous change, Berry asserts, can occur only by recognizing our continuance of that evil. Woolley
explains Berry's view of how our modern crisis is linked to our history:

We are the heirs of frontiersmen who held the whoremaster's view of the land. They moved onto virgin soil, denuded it, used it until it was exhausted, then moved on to more virgin territory—unlike their Old World forebears, who lived on the same ground for thousands of years, and through care, kept it productive. The virgin land is gone now, but we still behave like our forefathers, and we compound their sins, seeking bigger and quicker profits than they, moving on faster than they, ignoring the long-term consequences of our actions. (12)

Aside from our suicidal depletion of natural resources, one of Berry's concerns is that our attitude toward the land necessitates our estrangement from it. Woolley shares Berry's stand when he writes,

Many of our conflicts and problems would be more manageable . . . if so many people had not been removed from the countryside, if they and their animals had not been replaced by corporations and machines. We would be better off if so many of the wild places had not been destroyed. For in such places—from the Old Testament prophets to the days of Thoreau and up to the present—man's truest insights into his own nature and his place in the universal scheme have been found. (10)

Berry has said that "my sense of values comes from what I'm rooted in, what I believe in" (Ehrlich 11). To him, Nature, more specifically the Nature of his
particular place, serves as a moral teacher. In "The Nature Consumers," an essay in The Long-Legged House, Berry explains one of the dangers inherent in our longing to separate ourselves from the land:

Man cannot be independent of nature. In one way or another he must live in relation to it, and there are only two alternatives: the way of the frontiersman, whose response to nature was to dominate it, to assert his presence in it by destroying it; or the way of Thoreau, who went to natural places to become quiet in them, to learn from them, to be restored by them. To know these places, because to know them is to need them and respect them and be humble before them, is to preserve them. To fail to know them, because ignorance can only be greedy of them, is to destroy them. (41-42)

Berry's canon constitutes an urgent call to reevaluate both our use of Nature's "gifts" and our view of ourselves. And it is a plea to redirect our environmental concerns from the abstract notion of our "planet" to the more grounded, familiar notion of our "place"—our homes and our communities. In his address, Berry asked the Bar Harbor graduates, "How, after all, can anybody—any particular body—do anything to heal a planet?" And he answered,

Nobody can do anything to heal a planet. The suggestion that anybody could do so is preposterous. The heroes of abstraction keep galloping in on their white horses to save the planet—and they keep falling off in front of the grandstand. ("Futility" 16)
We must, therefore, "put the interest of the community first," Berry's sixth "command." Gary Tolliver observes that, "though America has had and continues to have its spokesmen for wilderness," Berry's great emphasis on community makes him "distinctive for his formidable and unyielding literature of settlement" (9). Berry's premise implicit, often explicit, in almost all of his work is that we must have a particular place, must identify with it, must love it, must care for it. And only by staying in this place long enough (in one generation or through the memory of several generations) will we fully realize the consequences of our presence there: "We may deeply affect a place we own for good or ill," Berry has written, "but our lives are nevertheless included in its life; it will survive us, bearing the results" (LLH 143).

The Berry family's use of an outhouse, or more precisely a "composting privy," is a telling example of their exemplary care for their place. Berry says,

There's something very healing in the idea of that privy, that a broken circle has been mended there, that what came out of the land is being put back into it by means of that privy. It means that a certain part of our life that was potentially damaging to the world has been made useful to the world. (Woolley 11)

Woolley elucidates the meaning of "useful to the world" in the context of Berry's cyclic vision and his emphasis
To understand the meaning of the privy, one would have to remain on the farm long enough to see the compost on the ground, the plants blossom and bear, their fruit eaten, the cycle of nature completed. (11)

To Berry, the privy is one way of doing no damage to the world (his tenth "command") by way of participating harmoniously rather than discordantly in Nature's cycle of birth, growth, maturity, death, decay—and rebirth. By finding and settling into a place, we can more precisely comprehend this ruling cycle and our role in it. Donald Hall notes that

Berry speaks from a vision of work, the hard work of the cyclical farm, where the farmer uses animal and human waste to grow crops for animals and humans, where the wheel of seasons rolls its rounds, human and animal muscles behind it. On the other hand, contemporary agribusiness, always specializing, uses animals or plants as protein-sheaths, as molecular-processors—and turns good manure into a pollutant, creates poison, rather than conserves energy. (24)

The best way to understand ourselves in the context of Creation, then, is to find and settle into a particular place. And by intimately knowing a place (for Berry, his traditional farm), we may more clearly observe, through a cyclic vision, our long-term effects—good and bad—on the land. Only then, in Berry's view, are we able to accurately ally our attitudes and
lifestyles to Nature to assure a sort of continuous harmony between the human economy and Nature's economy, not only for the present, but for the future as well: the place will help bond family and community; the memory, a safeguard of the future, will stay intact through the mind's constant association with the place; and we will more wholly understand cyclic patterns--that mutability is Nature's means of permanence. For "it is only in the processes of the natural world, and in analogous and related processes of human culture, Berry writes in "Discipline and Hope, "that the new may grow usefully old, and the old be made new" (CH 150).
Chapter Three

Departures and Returns: The Earth as "source and destiny"

Since I was here last the leaves have fallen. The forest has been at work, dying to renew itself, covering the tracks of those of us who were here, burying the paths and the old campsites and the refuse. It is showing us what to hope for. And that we can hope. And how to hope. It will always be a new world, if we will let it be.

The place as it was is gone, and we are gone as we were. We will never be in that place again. Rejoice that it is dead, for having received that death, the place of next year, a new place, is lying potent in the ground like a deep dream.

"The Journey's End"

A focal point in Berry's canon, one which makes him, as Donald Hall has said, "a prophet of our healing" (24), is that natural "processes are invariably cyclic, rising and falling, taking and giving back, living and dying" (CH 144). The possibility of such harmony between Nature and humanity is the essence of Berry's cyclic vision, for almost all of his prevalent themes
and images are geared toward a balance of some sort—of use and care, of growth and decay, of life and death, of departures and returns. But although Nature's economy is geared toward stability through the revolutions of her "Wheel," the human economy is not, and Nature's cycle can be interrupted or altered by man's intervention. One consequence, of course, is that decay can begin to outbalance renewal—a terrifying prospect unless Nature is allowed to naturally reclaim what she has created.

One of the cruxes in the conflict between traditional agriculture and modern agribusiness is that the modern linear view focuses "almost exclusively on the productive phase of the natural cycle" (CH 145), sending the soil into a kind of cyclic imbalance. Berry maintains that agricultural, environmental, and cultural healing cannot occur until we fully understand how to adapt our "technology" to natural processes. He explains in "Discipline and Hope" that

the means of production become more elaborate all the time, but the means of return—the building of health and fertility in the soil—are reduced more and more to the shorthand of chemicals. According to the industrial vision of it, the life of the farm does not rise and fall in the turning cycle of the year; it goes on in a straight line from one harvest to another. (CH 145)

He adds that the modern agribusinessman's tunnel vision,
"in the long run, may well be more productive of waste than of anything else" because "it wastes the soil" and "frequently fails to return" the "manures and other organic residues" (CH 145). Without such return, the land cannot adequately renew itself, and so modern agriculture is not a sustainable agriculture at all, but a self-destructive one. The only solution is to learn "the disciplines that take account of death as well as life, decay as well as growth, return as well as production" (CH 147). Berry maintains that,

without a complex knowledge of one's place, and without the faithfulness to one's place on which such knowledge depends, it is inevitable that the place will be used carelessly, and eventually destroyed. (CH 68-69)

In the fourth section of "Where," a poem in Clearing (1977), Berry tells of a generation of farmers who did not properly balance use with care, who did not love or fully understand their land. They ignored the nature of their place, and failed to consider the experience of the farm's past owners:

The land bears the scars of minds whose history was imprinted by no example of a forbearing mind, . . .

One lifetime of our history ruined it. The slopes of the watershed were stripped of trees. The black topsoil washed away in the tracks
of logger and plowman.  
The creeks, that once ran clear  
after the heaviest rains,  
rang muddy, dried in summer.  
From year to year watching  
from his porch, my grandfather  
saw a barn roof slowly  
come into sight above  
a neighboring ridge as plows  
and rains wore down the hill.  

(CP 178-79)

But in a later poem, "Work Song," in the same volume,  
the poet, in his effort to keep a natural balance between  
death and life, celebrates the possibility of renewal.  
He envisions a place whose inhabitants "will take /  
nothing from the ground they will not return, / whatever  
the grief at parting." Informing this poem is a cyclic  
vision of hope, for such a reverence by one generation  
will help perpetuate reverence for the land in succeeding  
generations. The poet continues,

Memory,  
native to this valley, will spread over it  
like a grove, and memory will grow  
into legend, legend into song, song  
into sacrament. The abundance of this place,  
the songs of its people and its birds,  
will be health and wisdom and indwelling  
light. This is no paradisal dream.  
Its hardship is its possibility. (CP 188)

The linear practice of too much use accompanied  
by too little care is not, of course, exclusive to  
agriculture. But Berry singles it out because the  
earth, more precisely the topsoil, is the life generating  
force; if it falters, all else will fail:
The soil is the great connector of lives, the source and destination of all. It is the healer and restorer and resurrector, by which disease passes into health, age into youth, death into life. Without proper care for it we can have no community, because without proper care for it we can have no life. (UA 86)

This idea is the basic premise for Berry's thematic emphasis on agriculture—a word which, in its root sense, a sense that agribusiness ignores, means to promote the growth of the land.

That the dead must pass into the earth to give rise to new life is both a primary law of Nature and a fundamental Biblical doctrine, which, in Berry's view, are closely linked. Berry writes in "A Native Hill, an essay in The Long-Legged House," that the most exemplary nature is that of the topsoil. It is very Christ-like in its passivity and beneficence, and in the penetrating energy that issues out of its peaceableness. It increases by experience, by the passage of seasons over it, growth rising out of it and returning to it, not by ambition or aggressiveness. It is enriched by all things that die and enter into it. It keeps the past, not as history or as memory, but as richness, new possibility. Its fertility is always building up out of death into new promise. Death is the bridge or the tunnel by which its past enters its future. (204)

And in The Unsettling of America he explains how the earth is a giver of life, and he parallels the life of the soil to the life of the spirit:
It [the earth] is alive itself. It is a grave, too, of course. Or a healthy soil is. It is full of dead animals and plants, bodies that have passed through other bodies. For except for some humans—with their sealed coffins and vaults, their pathological fear of the earth—the only way into the soil is through other bodies. But no matter how finely the dead are broken down, or how many times they are eaten, they yet give into other life. If a healthy soil is full of death it is also full of life: worms, fungi, microorganisms of all kinds, for which, as for us humans, the dead bodies of the once living are a feast. Eventually this dead matter becomes soluble, available as food for plants, and life begins to rise up again, out of the soil into the light. Given only the health of the soil, nothing that dies is dead for very long. Within this powerful economy, it seems that death occurs only for the good of life. And having followed the cycle around, we see that we have not only a description of the fundamental biological process, but a metaphor of great beauty and power. It is impossible to contemplate the life of the soil for very long without seeing it as analogous to the life of the spirit. No less than the faithful of religion is the good farmer mindful of the persistence of life through death, the passage of energy through changing forms. (86)

The "cyclic vision," then, "sees death as an integral and indispensable part of life" (CH 142). And it views life as a succession of departures and returns: past lives integrated into present lives; past and present integrated into future. As John Lang points out, to Berry and to all who share the cyclic vision—those attuned to Nature—death represents hope, and only by fearlessly accepting death can life's wholeness be achieved (261). Berry writes in "Discipline and
Hope" that, "because death is inescapable, a biological and ecological necessity, its acceptance becomes a spiritual obligation, the only means of making life whole" (CH 143). "Death for Berry," Lang notes,
is less a termination than a transformation. Thus, to embrace death as fruition and as a prelude to new life is to entrust oneself to what Berry calls "the sustaining mysteries and powers of the creation." (261)

And Speer Morgan observes that

discovering and saying yes to what he has been given--life that lives in the shadow of death--is the theme that Berry sometimes proclaims, sometimes struggles with, . . . [and sometimes] celebrates. (876)

Such an auspicious view of death, as Berry admits in "Two Economies," an essay in Home Economics, is rather foreign to the modern sensibility: "In a time when death is looked upon with almost universal enmity, it is hard to believe that the land we live on and the lives we live are the gifts of death" (62).

As a farmer tuned to natural processes, and as a poet tuned to natural forms, Berry turns to Nature's cycle as a central artistic motif. Images of departures and of returns abound throughout his work; death as a prerequisite to life is an especially prevalent theme. Morgan notes that, in Berry's poetry, the cyclic view of death is first announced in "Diagon," a poem later
published in Berry's first volume, *The Broken Ground* (1964): the poet writes, "I am derived from my death, / Marked by the black river. / With this knowledge I will enter morning" (BG 5). Morgan defends the poet's emphasis on death:

Death is the power to be reckoned with; it is the primary fact for the man who has submitted himself to living on the earth, with it, according to its terms. By dealing with death the man achieves—if he is to achieve them at all—wholeness and light. (872)

Images of death enabling and signaling the start of new life pervade Berry's first poetry collection. The poet writes in "Boone," for example, "Death is a conjecture of the seed / and the seasons bear it out" (CP 9). And in another poem, "A Man Walking and Singing," the poet speaks of the essential union of a man's life with his acceptance of his fate. The poet says, "We take form within our death, the figures / emerging like shadows in fire," and then he asks, "Who is it? speaking to me of death's beauty." The poet continues,

I think it is my own black angel, as near me as my flesh. I am never divided from his darkness, his face the black mask of my face. My eyes live in his black eye-holes. On his black wings I rise to sing.

His mouthing presences attend my singing:

Die more lightly than live, they say. Death is more gay.
There's no argument against its certainty, at least, they say.

I know they know as surely as I live my death exists, and has my shape. (CP 11-12)

Berry pushes this theme further in the same poem by telling of a man striding "merrily" as "He walks and sings to his death" with the assurance that "winter will equal spring." The poet continues, "But to the sound of his passing / he sings. It is a kind of triumph / that he grieves . . ." (13).

Berry's workaday farming experiences serve to enhance and continually validate his traditional, literary, and religious influences and beliefs, or, as he says at the end of "Below," a poem in A Part (1980), "What I stand for / is what I stand on" (CP 207). As both husbandman and poet, he sees himself as bound to his place and to the soil, and through this union he is able to reconcile his own eventual death. He writes in "A Native Hill" that, after returning home from living in New York, he came to see himself as "growing out of the earth like the other native animals and plants" (LLH 178). And from this revelation he came to understand his mortality—that he, as does everything in Nature, inevitably must again become part of the earth: "I saw my body and my daily motions as brief coherences and articulations of the energy of the place, which would fall back into the earth
like leaves in the autumn" (LLH 178). And so by this identification he came to accept his own death as part of a fundamental pattern common to animals, plants, man, soil, even community.

Although man has increasingly sought to separate himself physically from Nature, Berry believes that man still has a powerful inherent longing for the earth. The poet says in "Where," a poem in Clearing (1977), that "the mind still hungers / for its earth, its bounded / open space, the term / of its final assent" (CP 177). Such a poet inevitably, as Lang points out, "must confront the problem of change and the body's dissolution. .. Loving the earth, the individual can be reconciled with death" (260-61).

To truly love something, one must know it intimately, must understand it as fully as possible, must care for it, and feel a part of it. Such intimacy is the premise for Berry's emphasis on place, particularly one's "natural" place. To Berry, the understanding of oneself and the comprehension of one's death is clarified upon settling into and learning one's chosen "place"—because, as Wyatt Prunty explains, the land is "an analogue by which we understand ourselves" (958). In "A Native Hill," Berry explains, in the context of his cyclic vision, this idea of self-knowledge in relation to one's death:
Until we understand what the land is, we are at odds with everything we touch. And to come to that understanding it is necessary, even now, to leave the regions of our conquest—the cleared fields, the towns and cities, the highways—and re-enter the woods. For only there can a man encounter the silence and the darkness of his own absence. Only in this silence and darkness can he recover the sense of the world's longevity, of its ability to thrive without him, of his inferiority to it and his dependence on it. Perhaps then, having heard the silence and seen that darkness, he will grow humble before the place and begin to take it in—to learn from it what it is. As its sounds come into his hearing, and its lights and colors come into his vision, and its odors come into his nostrils, then he may come into its presence as he never has before, and he will arrive in his place and will want to remain. His life will grow out of the ground like the other lives of the place, and take its place among them. He will be with them—neither ignorant of them, nor indifferent to them, nor against them—and so at last he will grow to be native-born. That is, he must re-enter the silence and the darkness, and be born again. (LLH 207)

And later in the same essay he speaks more personally, connecting his own farm to his sense of immortality:

As I slowly fill with the knowledge of this place, and sink into it, I come to the sense that my life here is inexhaustible, that its possibilities lie rich behind and ahead of me, that when I am dead it will not be used up. (LLH 210)

Berry's deep understanding of his own place, his own love of the earth of which he is a part, is the basis for his view of death not as something to be eluded or feared, but as a sort of reassuring companion—
clarifying reflection of oneself made possible only
by knowing one's place:

Every man is followed by a shadow which
is his death—dark, featureless, and mute.
And for every man there is a place where
his shadow is clarified and is made his
reflection, where his face is mirrored in
the ground. He sees his source and his destiny,
and they are acceptable to him. He becomes
the follower of what pursued him. What hounded
his track becomes his companion.

This is the myth of my search and my return. (LLH 212-13)

In "The Handing Down," a long poem in fourteen
parts published in Findings (1969), Berry describes
an old farmer's obsessive awareness of his impending
death (the controlling theme of Berry's third novel,
The Memory of Old Jack). The dying farmer "trusts
the changes of the sun and air: / dung and carrion
made earth, / richness that forgets what it was," and
he is comforted, "his body dragging a shadow, / half
hidden in it" (CP 43). The poet continues,

He has become one of the familiars
of the place, like a landmark
The birds no longer fear.

Among the greens of the full summer,
among shadows like monuments,
he makes his way down,
loving the earth he will become.

(CP 48)

In the same volume, Berry further clarifies this idea
in the final section of "Three Elegiac Poems" by asserting
that death is the point of entry into eternity:

He goes free of the earth. 
The sun of his last day sets 
clear in the sweetness of his liberty.

The earth recovers from his dying, 
the hallow of his life remaining 
in all his death leaves.

Radiances know him. Grown lighter 
than breath, he is set free 
in our remembering. Grown brighter 
than vision, he goes dark 
into the life of the hill 
that holds his peace.

He's hidden among all that is, 
and cannot be lost. (CP 51)

The idea of "the Wheel of Life" is the controlling 
theme in The Wheel (1982), a collection of poems ordered 
into six sections (an appropriate number: add rebirth 
to Sir Albert Howard's description of Nature's cycle—
birth, growth, maturity, death, decay). The volume 
begins with the poet lamenting the deaths of old friends 
and progresses to the promise of new life through 
marriages and children. In the first three poems, 
"Requiem," "Elegy," and "Rising," the poet ponders 
the deaths of his friends, one of which is long-time 
farming companion Owen Flood. In a dream, the poet 
envisioned a reunion with Owen and several others, some 
of whom he calls "my teachers" and a few others who, 
"beloved of face and name, . . . once bore / the substance 
of our common ground" (CP 235). The poet begins,
To be at home on its native ground
the mind must go down below its horizon,
descend below the lightfall
on ridge and steep and valley floor
to receive the lives of the dead. It must wake
in their sleep, who wake in its dreams.
I passed through the lens of darkness
as through a furrow, and the dead
gathered to meet me. They knew me,
but looked in wonder at the lines in my face,
the white hairs sprinkled on my head.

(Owen, whose eyes are "bewildered yet with the newness
/ of his death" (CP 235), helps the poet envision himself
and Owen as they "once were: a young man mowing, /
a boy grubbing with an axe." The poet longs to "be
back in that good time again," and Owen reassures him
that that time and all their mutual times live in the
poet's memory:

"We are back there again, today
and always. Where else would we be?"
He smiled, looked at me, and I knew
it was my mind he led me through.
He spoke of some infinitude
of thought. (CP 236)

In true cyclic tone, Owen then speaks of
how the education of farmers is a cultural process,
a culmination of the knowledge that has been
perpetuated through time and place:

He spoke of our history passing through us,
the way our families' generations
overlap, the great teaching
coming down by deed of companionship:
characters of fields and times and men,
qualities of devotion and of work--endless fascinations, passions old as mind, new as light.  (CP 237)

The poet then tells of how Owen understood his impending death as a way of giving rise to the younger generation:

Again, in the sun of his last harvest, I heard him say: "Do you want to take this row, and let me get out of your way?" I saw the world ahead of him then for the first time, and I saw it as he already had seen it, himself gone from it.  (CP 238)

The poet continues,

In the very hour he died, I told him, before I knew his death, the thought of years to come had moved me like a call. I thought of healing, health, friendship going on, the generations gathering, our good times reaching one best time of all.  (CP 239)

For their departure, Owen and the poet return to their meeting place, where "Again the host of the dead / encircled us, as in a dance. / And I was aware now of the unborn / moving among them." The poet continues:

"Our way is endless," my teacher said. "The Creator is divided in Creation for the joys of recognition. We knew that Spirit in each other once; it brings us here. By its divisions and returns, the world lives. Both mind and earth are made of what its light gives and uses up. So joy contains, survives its cost. The dead abide, as grief knows. We are what we have lost."  (CP 240)
In The Wheel's third poem, "Rising," the poet tells of Owen's love and care for the land, of his great "desire" to farm, and of how Owen's example influenced the poet:

He led me through long rows of misery, moving like a dancer ahead of me, so elated he was, and able, filled with desire for the ground's growth. (CP 241)

The poet continues,

The boy must learn the man whose life does not travel along any road, toward any other place, but is a journey back and forth in rows, and in the rounds of years. His journey's end is no place of ease, but the farm itself, the place day labor starts from, journeys in, returns to: the fields whose past and potency are one. (CP 242)

The poet then speaks of "ancient knowledge seeking / its new minds" through generations of farmers in a traditional community. He tells of how "this is not the story of a life. / It is the story of lives, knit together, / overlapping in succession, rising / again from grave after grave" (CP 243). And he concludes, "There is a kinship of the fields / that gives to the living the breath / of the dead. . . . Nameless, ancient, many-lived, we reach / through ages
with the seed" (CP 244).

The traditional community is one of Berry's central metaphors for cultural/natural harmony. Such a community is a highly intricate alliance in which individuals function as "parts" of a membership, each depending on and affecting all the others (the controlling theme of Berry's collection of short fiction, *The Wild Birds: Six Stories of the Port William Membership*). The traditional community, like the traditional farms within it, is a model of interdependency. Berry explains,

A community is the mental and spiritual condition of knowing that the place is shared, and that the people who share the place define and limit the possibilities of each other's lives. (LLH 61)

Such an intertwining of lives is a way of describing a traditional community dance, which is often circular and cyclic and involves several couples, each partner relying on the other, each couple relying on other couples. The result of this interdependence among the dancers, if the dancers have learned their motions, is harmony; but if one dancer acts independently or moves in an unfamiliar motion, the result is discord. These dancers follow the music and song, or "call," and as each sequence is completed, the cycle begins again. In "People, Land, and Community," an essay in *Standing By Words*, Berry explains the connection
between this type of interweaving dance and the ideal community. While elucidating this metaphor for cultural and natural harmony, he brings together his cyclic ideas of traditional work, apprenticeship, and the dead as an intricate part of the living:

People at work in communities three generations old would know that their bodies renewed, time and again, the movements of other bodies, living and dead, known and loved, remembered and loved, in the same shops, houses, and fields. That, of course, is a description of a kind of community dance. And such a dance is perhaps, the best way we have to describe harmony. (SBW 79)

Berry uses this dance metaphor throughout his poetry to describe harmony between humanity and Nature, between the living and the dead, and between the living. The music accompanying the dances is sometimes the music of the spheres (the notes of which are so drawn out they can be heard by humanity only over years, decades, even centuries), farmers working or whistling a work song in a field, people working together harmoniously in communities, water running in a stream, rain, a bird, and so on.

Berry's ideas of music, dance, community, and the dead joining the living converge in several of his poems, particularly his highly compressed "The Wheel," in the volume by the same title. In the opening lines, the poet demonstrates the great benefit of
harmony—that only through a structured unification of parts can dancers, and by extension a community, move toward wholeness. The poem begins,

At the first strokes of the fiddle bow the dancers rise from their seats. The dance begins to shape itself in the crowd, as couples join, and couples join couples, their movement together lightening their feet. (CP 261)

Their dance is the dance of their heritage, a continuance of a familiar motion, much like a farmer working in a familiar field year after year. The poet then describes a harmonious joining of the living with their forebears:

They move in the ancient circle of the dance. The dance and the song call each other into being. Soon they are one—rapt in a single rapture, so that even the night has its clarity, and time is the wheel that brings it round. In this rapture the dead return. Sorrow is gone from them. They are light. (CP 261-62)

Their rapture ensures continuous harmony: the living accepting their mortality; the dead comforted with the assurance that their successors will perpetuate the dance. The poet concludes with a vision of cyclic harmony incarnate:

They step into the steps of the living and turn with them in the dance in the sweet enclosure of the song, and timeless
Berry argues throughout his nonfiction, especially \textit{The Unsettling of America} and \textit{Home Economics}, that humans are continuing to lose sight of the concept of interdependence, the idea "that things connect--that we are wholly dependent on a pattern, an all inclusive form, that we partly understand" (\textit{HE} ix).

In "Discipline and Hope," Berry connects agriculture, marriage, culture, and God:

A farmer's relation to his land is the basic and central connection in the relation of humanity to the creation; the agricultural relation \textit{stands for} the larger relation. Similarly, marriage is the basic and central community tie; it begins and stands for the relation we have to family and to the larger circles of human association. And these relationships to the creation and to the human community are in turn basic to, and may stand for, our relationship to God--or to the sustaining mysteries and powers of the creation. (\textit{CH} 160)

He continues, parenthetically, by tying these connections to his cyclic vision of life and death:

These relationships are dependent--and even intent--upon renewals of various sorts: of season, of fertility, of sexual energy, of love, of faith. And these concepts of renewal are always accompanied by concepts of death; in order for the renewal to take place, the old must not be forgotten but relinquished; in order to become what we may, we must cease to be as we are; in order to live life we must lose it. . . . (\textit{CH} 160)
In "An Anniversary," the final poem in The Country of Marriage (1973), the poet explores, as Morgan notes, "the marriage between a man and woman and between them and the land" (875). Several of Berry's cyclic themes culminate in this poem: marriage as a metaphor for natural and cultural harmony, mutability as Nature's means of permanence, death as a means of renewal, reconciliation of death through loving the earth and one's place on it, continuance of past motions through community association, and the past as an intricate part of the present:

What we have been becomes
The country where we are.
Spring goes, summer comes,
And in the heat, as one year
Or a thousand years before,
The fields and woods prepare
The burden of their seed
Out of time's wound, the old
Richness of the fall. Their deed
Is renewal. In the household
Of the woods the past
Is always healing in the light,
The high shiftings of the air.
It stands upon its yield
And thrives. Nothing is lost.
What yields, though in despair,
Opens and rises in the night.
Love binds us to this term
With its yes that is crying
In our marrow to confirm
Life that only lives by dying.
Lovers live by the moon
Whose dark and light are one,
Changing without rest.
The root struts from the seed
In the earth's dark--harvest
And feast at the edge of sleep.
Darkened, we are carried
Out of need, deep
In the country we have married.
(CP 168-69)

To Berry, then, we and the land of which we are a part are composed of past lives; and because we are closely linked to the dead both through our bodies--by way of the earth and our place on it--and through our memories, we can take hope in the possibility that we too will live in the lives of future generations.

In The Wheel's final poem, "In Rain," the poet, while relishing his union with Nature, celebrates the earth, the body, and the mind, as regions of great confluence--places where the dead and the living merge in harmony:

I go in under foliage light with rain-light in the hill's cleft, and climb, my steps silent as flight on the wet leaves. Where I go, stones are wearing away under the sky's flow.

The path I follow I can hardly see it is so faintly trod and overgrown. At times, looking, I fail to find it among dark trunks, leaves living and dead. And then I am alone, the woods shapeless around me. I look away, my gaze at rest among leaves, and then I see the path again, a dark way going on through the light.

In a mist of light
falling with the rain
I walk this ground
of which dead men
and women I have loved
are part, as they
are a part of me. In earth,
in blood, in mind,
the dead and living
into each other pass,
as the living pass
in and out of loves
as stepping to a song.
The way I go is
marriage to this place,
 grace beyond chance,
love's braided dance
covering the world.

Marriage to marriages
are joined, husband and wife
are plighted to all
husbands and wives,
any life has all lives
for its delight.
Let the rain come,
the sun, and then the dark,
for I will rest
in an easy bed tonight.

(CP 267-68)
Notes

Chapter One

1 In his essay "A Native Hill," Berry writes,

"I began my life as the old times and the last of the old-time people were dying out. . . . I seem to have been born with an aptitude for a way of life that was doomed, although I did not understand it at the time. Free of any intuition of its doom, I delighted in it, and learned all I could about it. . . . If I had been born five years later I would have begun in a different world, and would no doubt have become a different man.

Those five years made a critical difference in my life, and it is a historical difference. One of the results is that in my generation I am something of an anachronism. I am less a child of my time than the people of my age who grew up in the cities, or than the people who grew up here in my own place five years after I did. (LLH 171-72)

2 Howard's An Agricultural Testament (1956) and The Soil and Health: A Study of Organic Agriculture (1972) are two important sources Berry uses to support his practical concepts of traditional farming and cyclicism. Calling Howard a "great agricultural scientist," Berry writes in "Poetry and Place" that Howard founded his work on the perception that a healthy agriculture could not be oriented to any human economy, but had to be oriented to nature, to "the Wheel of Life," as he called it. . . . (SBW 145)

Berry appropriately cites a passage from The Soil and Health as the epigraph for his poetry collection The Wheel. References to Howard in Berry's works include, for example, CH 161; UA 30, 46, 142; and What are People For? 106-7.
3 The source for Berry's pre-1978 canon is Jack Hicks' "A Wendell Berry Checklist," which also contains a helpful listing of uncollected prose and poems as well as secondary sources through April 1978.

4 Volumes of essays (excluding RE) published between 1978 and May 1990 include The Gift of Good Land (1981), Standing By Words (1983), Home Economics (1987), and What are People For? (1990). The Hidden Wound (1970), an informal and highly personal exploration of racism in Berry's region, was republished in 1989 with a new and lengthy Afterword. Volumes of essays and poetry are abbreviated in parenthetical references; a list of standard abbreviations precedes the list of Works Consulted.


7 In "A Secular Pilgrimage" (CH 3-35), Berry traces nature poetry through English and American poets from Chaucer to Gary Snyder. Berry's inclusion and exclusion of poets in this discussion is helpful in elucidating his ideas of Nature and nature poetry. In another essay, "A Practical Harmony," he discusses the descent of the idea of Nature as teacher, "that we can live only in and from nature, and that we have, therefore, an inescapable obligation to be nature's students and stewards and to live in harmony with her" (What Are People For? 104). He explains that "this is a theme of both the classical and the biblical traditions," but adds that after Alexander Pope, "so far as I know, this theme departs from English poetry." He continues, Later poets were inclined to see nature and humankind as radically divided and were no longer much interested in the issues of a practical harmony between the land and its human inhabitants. The romantic poets, who
subscribed to the modern doctrine of the preeminence of the human mind, tended to look upon nature not as anything they might ever have practical dealings with, but as a reservoir of symbols. (What Are People For? 104-5)

Speer Morgan in "Wendell Berry: A Fatal Singing" accurately points out that Berry's "style is that of a farmer who plants and tends straight rows, not a Romantic who wanders temporarily in the luxuriance of a wild and infinite nature. . . . To him, the love affair of the Romantic agrarian becomes a permanent marriage, so that when the easy sweetness of novelty wears off, the relationship may continue and deepen" (870-71).

Berry cites Black Elk, an Oglala Sioux holy man, in "Discipline and Hope." In his exploration of the linear and cyclic visions, Berry explains that 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. A man was happy or sad, he thought, in proportion as he moved toward or away from "the sacred hoop of [his] people [which] was one of many hoops that made one circle, wide as daylight and as starlight. . . ." (CH 140)

Berry also cites a portion of the "narrative of Black Elk," worth considering here:

"Everything the Power of the World does is done in a circle. The sky is round, and I have heard that the earth is round as a ball, and so are all the stars. The wind, in its greatest power, whirls. Birds make their nests in circles, for theirs is the same religion as ours. The sun comes forth and goes down again in a circle. The moon does the same, and both are round. Even the seasons form a great circle in their changing, and always come back again to where they were. The life of a man is a circle from childhood to childhood, and so is everything where the power moves. Our tepees were round like the nests of birds, and these were always set in a circle, the nation's hoop, a nest of many nests, where the Great Spirit meant for us to hatch our children." (CH 140)

In his English 570 class, subtitled "Readings in Agriculture" (spring 1988), at the University of Kentucky in Lexington, Berry cited Milton's Comus as an exploration
of the proper human use of "natural gifts"—that
temperance, not overuse, helps assure natural abundance;
that chastity, not promiscuity, assures fertility.
And he pointed out Milton as a good example of a writer
who skillfully mixes Classical and Biblical imagery,
which Berry often does in his own work. Berry discusses
Comus and Paradise Lost in "Poetry and Place" (SBW 112-16).

Chapter Two

1 In "The Profit in Work's Pleasure," Berry cites
Thoreau's advice to his "graduating class at Harvard
in 1837": "This curious world we inhabit is more wonderful
than convenient; more beautiful than it is useful; it
is more to be admired and enjoyed than used" (20).

2 Gary Tolliver notes, parenthetically, that hubris
"in Berry's view has been the principal nemesis in man's
relationship with nature" (13). In The Gift of Good
Land, for example, Berry writes that the land
is a gift because the people who are to possess
it did not create it. It is accompanied by
careful warnings and demonstrations of the
folly of saying that "My power and the might
of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth"
(Deuteronomy 8:17). Thus, deeply implicated
in the very definition of this gift is a specific
warning against hubris which is the great
ecological sin, just as it is the great sin
of politics. People are not gods. They must
not act like gods or assume godly authority.
If they do, terrible retributions are in store.
In this warning we have the root of the idea
of propriety, of proper human purposes and
ends. We must not use the world as though
we created it ourselves. (270)

3 In "A Practical Harmony," an essay in What Are
People For?, Berry discusses several writers, both literary
and agricultural, who have perpetuated the belief in
the supremacy of "Nature's farming." Berry writes,
for example, that Howard's
message was essentially the same as . . .
that of the Book of Job, Virgil, Spenser,
Shakespeare, Milton, Pope, and Liberty Hyde
Bailey. Nature, he said, is "the supreme
farmer." If one wants to know how to farm well, one must study the forest. (106)

4 Berry discussed the works of Logston, Jackson, Todd, Smith, and Howard in his "Readings in Agriculture" class at U.K. (spring 1988). He frequently cites these writers, among many others, in his essays; witness, for example, "Poetry and Place" (SBW 92-193) and "A Practical Harmony" (What Are People For? 103-108). Aside from his occasional references, Berry's indebtedness to these agricultural writers is acknowledged in some of his books' dedications: for instance, The Gift of Good Land is dedicated to Logston; Home Economics, to Jackson.

5 See Sir Albert Howard's The Soil and Health in which Howard writes,

It needs a more refined perception to recognize throughout this stupendous wealth of varying shapes and forms the principle of stability. Yet this principle dominates. It dominates by means of an ever-recurring cycle, a cycle which, repeating itself silently and ceaselessly ensures the continuation of living matter. This cycle is constituted of the successive and repeated processes of birth, growth, maturity, death, and decay. (18)

In his "Readings in Agriculture" class, Berry also pointed out Edmund Spenser's Canto VI and VII of The Faerie Queene (also called Two Cantos of Mutabilitie). Stanza xviii of Canto VII is particularly relevant:

For, all that from her springs, and is ybredde,
How-euer fayre it flourish for a time,
Yet see we soone decay; and, being dead,
To turne again vnto their earthly slime:
Yet, out of their decay and mortall crime,
We daily see new creatures to arize; . . .

Also in his class he discussed The Faerie Queene along with Shakespeare's As You Like It as two literary sources for the idea of Nature as teacher and judge.

Chapter Three

Berry writes in The Unsettling of America's Acknowledgments of his indebtedness to Owen Flood:

Anything that I will ever have to say on the subject of agriculture can be little more
than a continuation of talk begun in childhood with my father and with my late friend Owen Flood. Their conversation, first listened to and then joined, was my first and longest and finest instruction. From them, before I knew I was being taught, I learned to think of the meanings, the responsibilities, and the pleasures of farming. (ix)
Abbreviations

BG  The Broken Ground

CH  A Continuous Harmony: Essays Cultural and Agricultural

CP  Collected Poems 1957-1982

GGL The Gift of Good Land: Further Essays Cultural and Agricultural

HE  Home Economics: Fourteen Essays

LLH  The Long-Legged House

RE  Recollected Essays 1965-1980

SBW  Standing By Words: Essays

UA  The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture
Works Consulted

Primary Sources

Essays and Essay Collections


---. *What Are People For?*. San Francisco: North Point, 1990
Poetry Collections


Novels and Short Fiction


Secondary Sources


