GOOD HOUSEKEEPING, GOOD HOMESTEADING: WENDELL BERRY'S DOMESTIC-PASTORAL IDEOLOGY AND LITERARY AESTHETIC

by

PATRICK J. GALLAGHER

(Under the Direction of Major Professor Hubert McAlexander, Jr.)

The adventurous and domestic muses are the warp and woof of the fabric of American culture, and these two worldviews have competed for preeminence from the beginning of American history. Being a family man and a farmer as well as a writer, it is not surprising that Wendell Berry espouses domestic ideology and sees himself as a defender of the domestic tradition in America. As such, his fiction is inspired by the domestic muse and shares similarities with the domestic-pastoral literary tradition. I begin this study by tracing the history of the domestic tradition in America from John Winthrop's sermon "A Modell of Christian Charity" through the nineteenth-century cult of domesticity and into the twentieth century. I show that Berry's fiction is best discussed and understood using the terms and conventions of the domestic-pastoral literary tradition: his plots are driven by concerns related to marriage, home, and farm; his characters are presented as relatively good or bad according to how well they conform to the standards of success as defined by domestic-pastoral ideology; and all of the important themes concern relationships to family members, neighbors, and home.

Chapter Two shows how Berry started to idealize home and farm life in his fiction after moving back to Kentucky in the mid 1960s. The influence of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* on Berry as a writer is also discussed. Berry's entire corpus can be seen as a response to the ideological battle between adventurousness and domesticity being played out in Twain's masterpiece. Chapter Three addresses the ways in which Berry domesticates the humor of the Old Southwest tradition in his short story cycle *Watch with Me*. The manner in which all of Berry's fiction is not only ideologically but also formally domestic is also considered. Chapter Four explains how Berry espouses a domestic economic ideology that is both communitarian and local. Chapter Five addresses the contrary nature of Berry's domesticity and explains how his domestic ideology is paradoxically adventurous and revolutionary. That chapter also places Berry's work in an international context by pointing out the similarities between his fiction and contemporary post-colonial writing.

INDEX WORDS: Wendell Berry, Cult of domesticity, Domestic fiction, Pastoral, Humor of the Old Southwest.

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PATRICK J. GALLAGHER

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PATRICK J. GALLAGHER

Major Professor: Hubert McAlexander, Jr.

Committee: Michael Moran
Hugh Ruppersburg

Electronic Version Approved

Maureen Grasso
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
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DEDICATION

To my parents, Jane and Jim Gallagher, and in memory of my brother Jimmy.

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INTRODUCTION

In *The Adventurous Muse: The Poetics of American Fiction, 1789-1900*, William Spengemann argues that American literature is characterized by the adventurous muse that inspired the New World narratives of exploration and travel and which encourages the "individualistic values of change, discontent, daring, aspiration, curiosity, eccentricity, and self-justification" (69). Unquestionably, America is energized by the adventurous impulse; the United States is, after all, a nation founded by religious rebels who braved a dangerous passage across the Atlantic Ocean to forge a new society in a new land. Within two hundred years, the colonists boldly broke with their parent nation—a metaphoric parricide—and created a new country. Inspired by the impulses of discontent, daring, and self-justification, the signers of the Declaration of Independence were committing an act of treason, and had they lost the war and been captured, they would have been hanged and drawn and quartered.

In the following decades, adventurous Americans pushed the frontier ever westward towards the Pacific Ocean, expanding the national border in the name of Manifest Destiny. Frederick Jackson Turner was the first to argue that the frontier defines America as a nation. In an 1893 essay entitled "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," Turner put forth his frontier hypothesis, which holds that "the novel attitudes and institutions produced by the frontier, especially through its encouragement of democracy, had been more significant than the imported European heritage in shaping American society" (Smith 292).[1] According to his frontier hypothesis, the values required

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[1] See Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth*, pp. 291-305. Smith follows Turner in believing that the frontier both as geographical, historical reality and as myth has shaped and defined American literature. His study shows how the West as an idea inspired politicians' rhetoric and novelists' imaginations in nineteenth-century America. He quotes Turner writing in 1903: the American frontier, Turner maintained, was "free

to explore and settle the frontier—self-reliance, individualism, restless energy, mobility, materialism, and optimism—have become American values. The frontier, Wilson O. Clough writes,

> was the source of the strongest of emotions, and put its mark upon all America. It represented asylum from law, domesticity, bankruptcy, and poverty, from boredom, routine, and parental rigidity. It called to the adventurous, the hardy, the rebellious, the less successful within established communities, the economically ambitious, the entrepreneur, the uprooted, the solitary seeker. (36)

Thus the frontier attracted adventurous Americans and is believed to have engendered a culture of adventurous, self-reliant individuals.

Going hand in hand with the myth of the frontier is the myth of the American Adam, a young innocent without family or social history most at home in the New Eden of the American wilderness. R. W. B. Lewis's *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century* presents the Adamic myth—with its central image of "the authentic American as a figure of heroic innocence and vast potentialities, poised at the start of a new history" (1)—as the paradigmatic American metanarrative. "The American myth," he writes

> saw life and history as just beginning. It described the world as starting up again under fresh initiative, in a divinely granted second chance for the human race, after the first chance had been so disastrously fumbled in the darkening Old World. It introduced a new kind of hero, . . . the hero of the new adventure: an individual emancipated from history, happily bereft of ancestry, untouched and undefiled by the usual inheritances of family and race; an individual

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from the influence of European ideas and institutions. The men of the 'Western World' turned their backs upon the Atlantic Ocean, and with a grim energy and self-reliance, began to build up a society free from the dominance of ancient forms" (304). Later in his career, Turner gave an address in which he claimed that "American democracy was born of no theorist's dream; it was not carried in the Susan Constant to Virginia, nor in the Mayflower to Plymouth. It came stark and strong and full out of the American forest, and it gained new strength each time it touched a new frontier" (qtd. in Smith 295).

> standing alone, self-reliant and self-propelling, ready to confront whatever awaited him with the aid of his own unique and inherent resources. (5)

Lewis's American Adam is the adventurous self of American legend and lore.[2]

There were, understandably, those who feared that individualism and self-reliance could go too far in the United States and threaten the public good. Alexis de Tocqueville warned that radical individualism could "make every man forget his ancestors[;] it hides his descendants and separates his contemporaries from him; it throws him back forever upon himself alone and threatens in the end to confine him entirely within the solitude of his own heart" (Jones 845). But there is a counter-tradition, the domestic tradition; and domestic ideology has been an important aspect of American culture from the start. Metaphoric uses of the domestic ideal of familial concord entered the American intellectual landscape at the very beginning of our New World society. John Winthrop's speech on the *Arbella* in 1630, "A Modell of Christian Charity," is an encomium to the domestic virtues and how they will bring about social and cultural harmony. Using familiar Biblical tropes, Winthrop insisted that the Puritan community in the Massachusetts Bay Colony must be "knit together" as a single body, with love as the ligature; the members must, he claimed, be metaphorically married to one another like Christ to his church: selfless love must prevail over selfish ambition if the experiment were to succeed.

Douglas Anderson's *A House Undivided: Domesticity and Community in American Literature* is a response to Spengemann's *The Adventurous Muse*, in which Spengemann divides American literature into "the competing appeals of opposed muses, those of adventure and domesticity" (Anderson 5). Spengemann claims that that which is genuinely American is inspired by the adventurous muse; domesticity is, according to Spengemann, an imported literary value of secondary importance. In *A House*

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2 Natty Bumppo, of James Fennimore Cooper's Leatherstocking tales, is just such a figure. In his *Studies in Classic American Literature*, D. H. Lawrence describes Hawkeye as the essential American soul, "An isolate, almost selfless, stoic, enduring man" (69). Lawrence also claims that "Somewhere deep in every American heart lies a rebellion against the old parenthood of Europe" (10).

Undivided, Douglas Anderson argues that domesticity is, on the other hand, as important to America as the adventurous muse. While acknowledging the adventurous tradition in America, Anderson highlights the philosophical influence of the domestic tradition.[3] He maintains that Winthrop's sermon on the *Arbella* is the first clear articulation of the domestic ideal as a model for a new society. "The guiding analogy, or model," Anderson maintains, "of American life for Winthrop was to be the family. . . . The commitment to emigrate to Massachusetts Bay took on, in Winthrop's eyes, the shape of a selfless marriage, diffused as an ideal over the entire civil body" (1-2). Winthrop believed the domestic virtues of mercy, justice, selflessness, and love were necessary to the success of the errand in the wilderness.

The domestic muse, then, came over with the first settlers and has remained an important aspect of American culture. During the height of Western migration and exploration of the frontier, from the early 1800s through the Civil War, widely distributed and much read household manuals and evangelical literature inculcated the virtues of obedience and valorized the pleasures of family life. In the middle decades of the nineteenth century, these polemical tracts and sentimental domestic novels contributed to what has become known as the "cult of domesticity."[4] Clearly, not every voice in the land was encouraging people to light out for the territories. In fact, the cult of domesticity became such a widespread cultural phenomenon that language and images of domesticity dominated American discourse throughout the nineteenth century. As George Forgie states in *Patricide in the House Divided*,

> It was a convention of American public language between the 1790s and the Civil War to speak of the Union and the relationships among Americans in familial and domestic terms. Political language borrowed readily from "sweet

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[3] Leaving the analysis of nineteenth-century sentimental domestic fiction to others, Anderson focuses on domestic themes in canonical nineteenth-century American authors.

[4] More about this in Chapter One.

> household talk, and phrases of the hearth," and nothing in rhetoric was more common than the formulation that Americans were "the brethren of one great household." (4)[5]

Forgie investigates how many American politicians and novelists in the nineteenth century used domestic metaphors to express their belief that "it was essential for Americans to extend natural affections, originally directed toward objects close at hand, to the far wider realm of the Republic. In the words of one of them, sentimentalists looked in particular to the 'enlargement of home—the extension of family union beyond the little man-and-wife circle' to society generally" (5).

Clearly in the domestic tradition, Wendell Berry's writings praise connubial fidelity, and like both Winthrop and all the nineteenth-century Americans swept away by the rhetoric of the cult of domesticity, he employs marriage as a metaphor for proper social relations. Perhaps because he grew up in a farming community and came of age during the environmental movement, Berry takes the marriage trope further and uses it as an analogy for right relations between human beings and other species and between human beings and the land itself. Moreover, he venerates the household as a site of economic resistance to the deleterious forces of global capitalism, encouraging all of us to practice what he calls "the domestic arts—the husbandry and wifery of the world" ("In Distrust of Movements" 27).

Berry knows that "the frontier myths of abundance and escape," "our frontier irresponsibility," as he puts it, are the dominant American myths;[6] but he is a strong

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[5] It is worth noting, as Forgie does, that the metaphoric comparisons of a nation to a family and of the body politic to a human body are, as he puts it, "as old as political thought" (16, 98). It is perhaps also worth reminding the reader that domestic metaphors are central to the Judeo-Christian tradition; the most common metaphor describing humans' relationship to God and to one another is familial: God is the father and we, God's children, are brothers and sisters. Moreover, the Christian ideal of brotherly love is at the philosophical core of any domestic government. See Jacques Maritain, *Christianity and Democracy*.

[6] In *Dwelling in the Text: Houses in American Fiction*, Marilyn Chandler acknowledges "the characteristic tension in American culture between the project of building and settlement and the romantic image of the homeless, rootless, nomadic hero whose roof is the sky and whose bed is the open prairie, the meandering river, or the boundless sea. The 'civilizing' process in this country has involved both overt and covert conflict over the tremendous psychic costs of 'civilization' and domestication—a conflict generating the sort of apprehension that leads Huck Finn to resolve to 'light

believer in and defender of the subordinate myths and impulses in the American tradition that he refers to as "the contrary impulse[s] of preservation and responsibility," which have "survived in hundreds of dooryards, kitchen gardens, and small farms in valleys where the coal companies have never come" (*Another Turn of the Crank* 65). Writing of Wallace Stegner, who was Berry's creative writing teacher at Stanford, Berry points out that

> Not all who came to American places came to plunder and ruin. Some came to stay or came with the hope of staying. These Stegner called "stickers" or "nesters." They were moved by an articulate hope, already ancient by the time of Columbus, of a settled, independent, frugal life on a small freehold. We can find this hope in Hesiod, in the fourth of Virgil's *Georgics*, in the 128th Psalm. This was the vision that we finally came to call "Jeffersonian"—a free nation of authentically and securely landed people. Stegner knew that this vision, though it may have been a secondary influence on our history, was nevertheless a considerable one. He knew that it could not be left out of account. (*Another Turn of the Crank* 68-69)

Mr. Berry sees himself as part of this tradition of preservation and responsibility, this tradition of "stickers' or "nesters": the domestic tradition.[7]

Using Berry's essays and fiction, this study will demonstrate how Berry is ideologically committed to domesticity and how it permeates every aspect of his world view: from aesthetics to economics, from his attitude toward the Western literary canon to his opinion of global capitalism. The manner in which his fiction is, consequently, both formally and ideologically domestic will be analyzed in detail. Since Berry's domestic

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out for the territory' before the Widow Douglas succeeds in 'sivilizing' him. Enclosure in a house and in the structures of town or city life runs counter to the inherent romanticism of some of our most deeply held collective values: autonomy, self-determination, mobility" (4).

[7] In this study, the term domestic is used in both of its primary senses: (1) in the sense of concerned with families and the management of households; and (2) in the sense of relating to one's homeland, one's own country or, as is more relevant for a discussion of Wendell Berry, one's more localized home region, home town, and neighborhood.

ideology is expressed in both his essays and his fiction, certain ideas are both explicitly addressed in his essays and indirectly explored as themes in his novels and short stories. But some aspects of Berry's domestic aesthetic are manifest only in his fiction, while others find no fictional treatment and yet are directly addressed in his essays.

Chapter One will present a social and literary history of domesticity in America, tracing the rise of the cult of domesticity and delineating its ideological underpinnings and literary expressions followed by a discussion of the gradual diminishment of the exalted status of domesticity in America. An explanation of the domestic aspect of the georgic-pastoral tradition concludes the chapter. Berry's fiction is the subject of the second and longest chapter, which shows how Berry uses marriage as both a subject and a metaphor to explore the themes of both family literature and pastoral literature: how, that is, he writes about both family and farm, household and homestead, home and homeland. Berry's domestic aesthetic is addressed in the first part of Chapter Three, the second part of which focuses on Berry's short story cycle *Watch with Me* (1994) and its domestication of the Old Southwestern humor tradition. The final part of Chapter Three discusses the influence of Berry's domestic aesthetic on all his fiction and shows how it is not only ideologically but also formally domesticated. Chapter Four explains how Berry espouses a domestic economic ideology that is both communitarian and local. Chapter Five addresses the contrary nature of Berry's domesticity and explains how his domestic ideology is paradoxically adventurous and revolutionary. That chapter also places Berry's work in an international context by pointing out the similarities between his fiction and contemporary post-colonial writing.

CHAPTER 1:
THE DOMESTIC TRADITIONS

Part I: The Rise and Fall of Domesticity in America

Americans inherited the conventions of domestic fiction from England. But domestic fiction, as William Spengemann points out, traces its roots back from eighteenth-century England to early in the Western cultural tradition. Spengemann writes that eighteenth- and nineteenth-century English domestic novels "erected a comprehensive social ethos upon the values surrounding the ancient religious trope of the home," and maintains that the

> essential elements of the domestic ethos are all present in a passage from the *Confessions* of St. Augustine. "Let us return now to you, Lord," Augustine prays, "so that we may not be overturned, because our good is with you, living and without any defect, since you yourself are our good. And we need not be afraid of having no place to which we may return. We of our own accord fell from that place. And our home, which is your eternity, does not fall down when we are away from it." (70)

Spengemann then pithily concludes, "Augustine calls heaven 'home'; the Domestic Romance calls home 'heaven'" (70-71).

The first English novels, published in the middle of the eighteenth century, were domestic novels written in a period of social instability and represented the middle class's "mixed feelings of pride and guilt" for their part in the Puritan Rebellion and the Regicide, "acts of virtual parricide, which had precipitated widespread social disorder" (Spengemann 70). Having achieved their long-sought-after social changes, the middle class embraced the domestic novel's veneration of the home and family and its portrayal

of social stability. Succinctly put, "the domestic ideal had arisen in England mainly as a way to govern the dangerous social forces set in motion by the Rebellion" (Spengemann 77).

The poetics of domesticity developed by the English novelists represented, according to Spengemann, "a form, a plot, a way of depicting character and scene, a conventional symbology, a style and tone," which illustrated and inculcated "the predominantly social and familial values of stable perpetuity, resignation, prudence, modest ambition, acceptance, conformity, and reconciliation" (69). In a domestic novel,

> antidomestic motives are repaired or subdued. . . . The characters either seek home or shun it, and they are either good or bad, right or wrong, accordingly. The problems that drive the protagonist away from home arise from remediable deficiencies in him, in his particular domestic situation, or both. If he is motivated by restlessness or foolish ambition, exile will teach him the vanity of wanderlust and the value of contentment and resignation. If domestic difficulties drive him out unwillingly, something will happen at home during his absence to clear up the misunderstanding and injustices that forced him to leave. (71)[1]

A settled, contented home life is the standard against which happiness and morality are judged in domestic fiction.

Domestic novels were popular in the early years of the American republic not only for the simple reasons that Americans read English novels and that home and family life will nearly always appeal to a person's emotions;[2] they were also popular because they were seen as a way both to improve literacy and to impart domestic virtues to the American readership. In *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America*, Cathy Davidson points out that education is vital in a democracy and that "Literacy is a

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[1] In *All the Happy Endings,* Helen Waite Papashvily defines domestic fiction as presenting "a simple tale of home and family . . . full of sentiment, sacrifice, devotion, and piety . . ." (xiv).

[2] It is worth noting that until the middle of the nineteenth century international copyright law was such that American publishers could earn more money pirating popular English novels than they could by publishing original works by American authors.

value." She explains, "In a democracy especially, literacy becomes almost a matter of principle, a test of the moral fiber of a nation" (58). The educational aspect of reading and the perceived moral instruction it provided silenced "the traditional American animus against fiction, which a residual Puritanism considered immoral and which busy, practical men considered a waste of time at best" (Spengemann 77).

When the first novels by Americans were published in the late eighteenth century—Susanna Rowson's *Charlotte Temple*, Hannah Webster Foster's *The Coquette*, and Charles Brockden Brown's *Clara Howard*, for example—they were sentimental domestic novels that "dealt with such topics as the dangers of seduction, the importance of choosing a reliable marriage partner, the consequences of sexual transgressions, and the need for female education" (Beaty 1104). As Davidson points out, early American sentimental novels focused on young women deciding whom to marry, rather than "on an older wife determining how best to raise her family" (113). The primary concern of these novels was with matching the right woman with the right man, with young heroines being suitably married to deserving young men. The novels also portrayed women being seduced and deserted by reckless rakes and being led astray by false friends. Davidson claims that "by reading about a female character's good or bad decisions in sexual and marital matters, the early American woman could vicariously enact her own courtship and marriage fantasies" (123). Thus she could make a better choice for herself concerning marriage. As Jane Tompkins puts it in *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction 1790-1860*, these novels "teach readers what kind of behavior to emulate or to shun" (xvii). Tompkins' observation is an important one, and she goes on to explain that the fictional scenarios in these novels are "heuristic and didactic rather than mimetic; they do not attempt to transcribe in detail a parabola of events as they 'actually happen' in society" (xvii).

As we move on with our discussion of American domestic fiction, considering the social history of the family in America will provide useful context. The exact nature of

the household and the perception of family and home life varies from generation to generation and from one culture to another, as the history of the family in America demonstrates. The home as a socio-economic entity has, of course, always been an important part of American life, but actual family organization and the perception of the home by the mass of Americans—and the status of the home as a symbol—have gone through various changes. During certain periods in American history the home has been generally discounted and disparaged while in others it has been widely valued and venerated.

In colonial America, families were organized in a patriarchal hierarchy. Mary Beth Norton writes of family structure in pre-Revolutionary America in *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800*: "At the top," she explains, "was the man, the lord of the fireside; next came his mistress, his wife and helpmate; following her, the children, who were expected to assist the parent of their own sex; and finally, any servants or slaves, with the former taking precedence over the latter" (3). Norton shows how colonial women translated their inferior status in the family into low self-esteem. There was no belief that "women contributed to the wider society. . . . Notable housewifery was conceived to be an end in itself, rather than as a means to a greater or more meaningful goal" (38). From reading contemporary letters and diaries, Norton notes that women generally described their difficult and life-sustaining domestic labors in disparaging terms, using such phrases as "my Narrow sphere," my "humble duties," and "my little Domestick affairs" (38). But the exigencies of the Revolution would change that.

At the time of the Revolution in the late 1700s, most American colonists lived on farms and made many of the items necessary for daily living—items that would later be routinely bought in stores. Soap was cooked in a large pot, bread was baked in wood-fueled ovens, and much of the food put on the table was grown on the farm (Matthews 3). Home production was a primary factor of the economy, but the Revolution required more

self-sufficiency because boycotts of English goods necessitated even more home production. The rebellion could not succeed unless Americans were able to provide themselves with the staples they refused to buy from the British. Moreover, while the men were occupied fighting the English, the women were forced to handle the traditionally male responsibilities of financial and family management. Over time, many wives proved themselves able managers of household affairs and thus gained the respect of their husbands for their strength, intelligence, and patriotism. Men began to value female involvement in the revolutionary cause, because the boycotts of British goods would not have succeeded without women tending to the home fires. The home was an important site of revolt. As Glenna Matthews notes in *"Just a Housewife": The Rise and Fall of Domesticity in America*, "the home . . . *had* influenced the outcome of history during the 1770s when patriots had put pressure on the British by altering the pattern of colonial consumption" (6,7). American men appreciated women's efforts and thus in a few short years the status of the housewife was greatly elevated.

The status of the housewife and the home kept ascending after the war, as family life was believed to be essential to the United States' fledgling democracy. Once independence had been achieved, there was great concern over whether or not this new democratic society would thrive. Citizens would have to be socialized in such a way as to make them competent for self-rule; a moral and public-spirited citizenry were believed necessary for the democratic system to work. George Washington's First Inaugural address in 1789 addressed this issue; he predicted an "indissoluble union between virtue and happiness" and noted that the "foundation of our national policy will be laid in the pure and immutable principles of private morality" (qtd. in Forgie 25). Where would citizens learn this private morality but in the home? "Thus the home became crucial to the success of the nation and women . . . gained the role of 'Republican Mother,'" which was based on the belief that the "domestic sphere could influence the outcome of history" (Matthews 7).

The perceived importance of the home kept increasing until the 1830s, when "the home had begun to be sentimentalized to an unprecedented degree" (Matthews 9). This period marks the beginning of what has since been called the "cult of domesticity," which was characterized by a flourishing of writing, both tracts and novels, about the home and family life. In 1823, John Howard Payne wrote "Home Sweet Home," and in 1830, Lydia Maria Child published *The Frugal Housewife*, which was a collection of recipes and advice for efficient housekeeping (Ryan 22). By 1841, Catherine Beecher, daughter of famous minister Lyman Beecher and sister of Harriet Beecher Stowe, would publish *A Treatise on Domestic Economy*, which revealed the weightiness with which housekeeping was then perceived by combining quotations from Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* with instructions on laundry and housekeeping and referring to the mother's room as the "holy of holies."

Social turmoil in the Jacksonian Age of the 1830s also contributed to a focus on the home because it represented the possibility for stability in a tumultuous time. Immigration was creating a heterogeneous population, and many people were leaving homes on the eastern seaboard and migrating westward. In Boston in the 1830s, for example, at least fifty per cent of the inhabitants moved and were replaced within eighteen months (Ryan 15). Industrial capitalism was just hitting the United States with full force and economic competition and individualism held sway. Glenna Matthews explains that "the cash nexus was at the base of an increasing number of human relationships outside the family" (Matthews 10). With such momentous changes afoot, it is not surprising that the home became a symbol of stability and social cohesion. "In fact," as Mary Ryan writes in *The Empire of the Mother: American Writing about Domesticity 1830-1860*, "the central purpose of the cult of domesticity was to provide a familial refuge from the frenetic movement of the American people, to shore up at least one small set of human relations against the forces of change, movement, and discontinuity" (45).

The perception of the home as a refuge from the corrupting influence of society was reinforced by the Biblical notion of the "world" as the devil's domain, and women were seen as soldiers on the front lines of the good fight. The world corrupts, but the home nourishes and saves. In *Claims of the Country,* Margaret Coxe condemned the "morbid excitement" and "dissolute excess" of the 1840's political campaigns and the social unrest caused by reformers and factory workers. Women and family life were seen as positive moral influences that ameliorated the effects of corrupt society and helped men to become better citizens. Many believed the soul of the nation was at stake. Coxe exhorted American women to resist these disruptive forces at the site of the home and thus become "national conservatives in the largest sense." Fearing that "a cataclysm equal to the French Revolution was approaching America, Catherine Beecher asked: 'American women! Will you save your country?'" (qtd. in Ryan 40).

In the first decades of the republic on through the early nineteenth century, social and economic conditions were such that American women became voracious readers. In the midst of the cult of domesticity, Mary Ryan explains, "native-born, middle-class Americans had been galvanized into a mass reading audience prepared to play their part in the construction of popular culture" (14). The majority of this audience consisted of women, and women began writing more and more novels. These novels focused on issues of concern to women, and many of them were wildly successful.[3] Since literature is simultaneously a reflective and formative social force, the cult of domesticity was a self-fueling fire: concern with home life begot volumes of domestic literature, which in turn engendered more interest in domesticity.

Since these novels were written by and for women, it is not surprising that they were about women and that women were the main characters. Since these novels were immensely popular, it is also not surprising, according to Jane Tompkins, that the main

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[3] By the middle of the nineteenth century, the sentimental domestic novel would become so popular that Hawthorne, in anger at the competition and in a pique of jealousy, famously castigated the "damned mob of scribbling women."

characters were often stereotypes. She writes, "stereotyped characters are *essential* to popularly successful narrative" because "they convey enormous amounts of cultural information in an extremely condensed form" (xvi). Tompkins then explains why stereotyped characters played such an important part in the effectiveness and popularity of sentimental fiction: "Figures like Stowe's little Eva, Cooper's Magua, and Warner's Ellen Montgomery," she claims, "operate as a cultural shorthand, and because of their multilayered representative function are the carriers of strong emotional associations" (xvi). These characters moved nineteenth-century readers, it seems, because they were familiar to readers and they elicited an empathic response. Orphan girls whose Christian virtue triumphed in the end; innocent young women seduced and deceived by careless rogues; strong, resourceful married women; and wise old matrons or old maids who serve as mentors: all of these were stock female characters in nineteenth-century sentimental domestic fiction, but which stereotypes were popular changed somewhat with time.

The domestic fiction written during the height of the cult of domesticity—from 1830 until the Civil War—differs from earlier sentimental fiction in that the heroines are not generally young women who have yet to marry; they are "older women working out their lives within their domestic sphere, whether as matron or 'old maid'" (Davidson 135). Moreover, Helen Waite Papashvily points out that whereas the heroines of English sentimental novels and earlier American novels are often sickly and effete, beginning around 1818 the grown-up heroines of American domestic fiction are "radiant, vigorous and active, fresh skinned, clear eyed, gay, daring, and confident . . ." (128).[4] For example, Fleda, the protagonist of Susan Warner's *Queechy* (1852), considered by some to be the quintessential American domestic novel, is preternaturally able and industrious. Papashvily recounts her many talents: "She raised vegetables, made bread, cobbled shoes, boiled maple sugar, sold flowers, and in her uncle's absence managed his farm so

[4] Cathy Davidson also addresses this "shift in women's fiction" during the course of the nineteenth century from novels that "concentrate on a young woman's freedoms prior to wedlock" to novels that feature older married women (134-35).

profitably she converted the whole neighborhood to a whole new method of agriculture" (97). Inspired in part by American women's newfound self-respect, these domestic novels glorified American women and the American home, going so far as to portray the home in a quasi-religious light. In *The Minister's Wooing*, Harriet Beecher Stowe proclaims that the Christian home is the "appointed shrine for women, more holy than cloister, more saintly and pure than church or altar . . . Priestess, wife, and mother, there she ministers daily in the holy works of household peace" (qtd. in Brown 281).

Elaborating on Spengemann's aphoristic explanation that the "the Domestic Romance calls home 'heaven,'" Jane Tompkins writes, "The religion of the home does not situate heaven in the afterlife, but locates it in the here and now, offering its disciples the experience of domestic bliss" (165-66). She goes on to explain that although "homelife was mostly drudgery" for women of the time, adherents to domestic ideology presented family life and housework in a most positive light, emphasizing that it offered "an extraordinary combination of sensual pleasures, emotional fulfillment, spiritual aspirations, and satisfaction in work accomplished" (166-67). As such, domestic novels are replete with descriptions of clean kitchens and sumptuous meals. The preparation of meals is elaborated upon and food is rhapsodized over. In *The Sentimental Novel in America, 1789-1860*, Herbert Ross Brown quotes Caroline Lee Hentz, in an 1851 domestic novel named *Rena,* referring to the "poetry of the kitchen, such as the beating the whites of eggs, till they foamed like the cascade of Sunny Dell" (288). Scrubbed floors, clean windows, neat cupboards, and well-swept hearths not only create physical beauty and establish a comfortable home; Tompkins explains that in domestic novels this women's work also signifies spiritual purity and holiness. The domestic labors of the good housewife—the cooking and cleaning and sewing and laundering—provide her and her family with a pleasant home, and they signify her goodness and her Godliness (168).

But all was not sweetness and light in domestic fiction of the period. Much of the drama in these novels arises from threats to home life and threats to the happy union of

husband and wife, with the most common threats to marital felicity being sickness and death, lazy husbands, and financial difficulties. Since domestic novels came of age along with the beginning of the temperance movement in America, it is not surprising that a husband's drinking was also sometimes the cause of marital disaster.[5] Moreover, since many writers of domestic fiction began writing only because their husbands had failed in business, money troubles often plague marriages in these novels. Bad marriages were portrayed not only because they were a real possibility, of course, but also to highlight good marriages and to make happy endings sweeter. How better to appreciate the joys of an idealized fictional marriage than by its implicit or explicit comparison to an unhappy union or to the fate of star-crossed lovers?

Romantic relationships were not the only family relationships explored, and ultimately, as Herbert Ross Brown explains, it was not "*romantic* or *passionate*, but *domestic* love which was deemed proper for the sentimental heroine" (Brown 131).[6] If marriage was presented as the primary goal of every right-thinking man and woman, then having children and starting a family was the ultimate objective. Brown explains that "Marriage was the goal of every respectable woman; the old maid and the bachelor were without decent status in a society which regarded the raising of a large family as a moral duty" (107). Papashvily adds that "The childless were objects of pity, of veiled contempt . . ." (194). Moreover, children were believed to be spiritually endowed.[7]

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5 The connection between the temperance movement and the cult of domesticity is well known. See esp. pp. 100-10 of Barbara Leslie Epstein's *The Politics of Domesticity: Women, Evangelism, and Temperance in Nineteenth-Century America* (1981). She explains that men's drinking was believed to contribute to impoverishment of the family and to wife beating. T.S. Arthur, the most popular male writer during the cult of domesticity, wrote two very popular books about the baleful effects of alcohol: *Six Nights with the Washingtonians* (1842) and *Ten Nights in a Barroom* (1854).

6 In an 1859 letter to her twin daughters, Harriet Beecher Stowe assures them that there was a greater love than that which existed between a man and a woman, and that was a "parent's love [which] is all giving" (qtd. in Kelley 274). Catherine Maria Sedgwick seconded and furthered Stowe's encomium to parental love when she wrote to her niece that "not only was parental love of a higher order than love between wife and husband, but the former promised to have a necessary and salutary effect upon the latter" (qtd. in Kelley 274).

7 If children were believed to spiritualize the home, a good home life was believed to produce moral, happy children. When a troubled home life produced wayward children, replicating a happy home was believed to have the power of redemption. "[I]n the punishment of juveniles," Marilyn Chandler writes in *Dwelling in the Text: Houses in American*

The domestic novels were concerned with family life in its entirety, and thus parental and filial themes were also addressed. Because of such anxieties about parental control and children leaving the home, generational bonding was of central importance to the domestic writers: "the cult of domesticity identified . . . new methods of tying the generations together with a strength that would withstand even the fractures of migration" (Ryan 45). Motherly love rather than patriarchal authority was to be the glue that bound the generations together. Mary Ryan calls this "tying the maternal knot." In a sermon to boys entitled "Filial Virtues of Washington" (1846), Lydia Sigourney argued that Washington was a great man because the bond between him and his mother was so strong. "From childhood, he repaid her care with the deepest affection and yielded his will to hers without a murmur" (qtd. in Ryan 58). At adolescence, however, Washington had his heart set on an adventurous life as a sailor, but he gave it up in filiopiestic regard to his mother's "gentle protestations." Sigourney's message was, as Ryan puts it, that if "American boys aspired to the stature of the father of their country they need only comply with the loving regulations of their mothers" (58). Whether or not Sigourney's interpretation of Washington's relationship with his mother is accurate—and many historians would argue that it is a partisan rewriting of history—is less important than the fact that it betrays the insidious ubiquity of domestic ideology. It is also an interesting conflation of the nineteenth-century cult of domesticity with the cotemporaneous cult of Washington, as George Forgie points out.

Acknowledging the importance of mothering expanded interest in child-rearing literature, which was predicated on the Biblical injunction to "train up your child in the way he should go" (Ryan 48), and which was becoming increasingly difficult in light of nineteenth-century America's social mobility and geographical expansion. As fewer and

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Literature, "crimes believed to have resulted from a poor home environment were to be rectified by sending the young miscreants to 'houses of refuge' or 'houses of reform,' where they lived not in dormitories but in cottages where a master and mistress presided in family style" (10). Chandler notes that "Poe's dissolute life was explained by some contemporary biographers as a result of his having been orphaned and having had no real home" (10).

fewer children stayed on the farm or took over the workshop, it became more and more important for parents—mothers in particular—not only to love their children but also to instill the domestic virtues of frugality, modest ambition, and prudence into their children before they left home.[8] "Each family," Mary Ryan writes, "was expected to provide a home environment destructive to greedy and adventurous aspirations. In fact, parents would do well to limit their own ambition, to rest in the tranquil world of the 'middling sort,' so as to afford the proper model of moderation to their children" (63). Children, it was hoped, would learn the domestic virtues at home.

Public education offered another opportunity to teach children the domestic virtues. As part of the child-rearing literature, there was a burgeoning interest in schools and public education "as a means of propagating domesticity beyond the middle-class reading audience" and of inculcating the domestic virtues in the children of industrial workers and immigrants (Ryan 101). Based on Locke's theory that the human mind is a *tabula rasa*, the notion that environment formed character was widely accepted by the nineteenth century and greatly influenced attitudes towards education in that it convinced people that education was all the more important. Cathy Davidson notes that the early American novel "repeatedly advocated the general need for 'female education'" (73), and she explains that there was much debate about what sort of education would best prepare a woman for marriage (126).

At least some of and occasionally the majority of the education of children and young adults in these novels takes place outside of the family home and outside of the confines of official public education. As Jane Tompkins notes, sentimental domestic novels "always involve, prominently, a mentor-figure who initiates the pupil into the mysteries of the art, and enunciates the values the narrative is attempting to enforce"

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8 Cathy Davidson writes, "A nineteenth-century rhetoric of 'true womanhood' or a 'cult of domesticity' extolled women as specially gifted for the crucial task of rearing children." She adds that "a new focus on motherhood effectively reversed on older Puritan emphasis on the paramount importance of the father in the intellectual, moral, and social molding of children" (134).

(176). Tompkins explains that the art or the vocation that has to be mastered in sentimental domestic fiction is "Christian salvation, which, translated into social terms, means learning to submit to the authorities society has placed over you" (176-77). These mentors teach their apprentices how to be good Christians and how to be good wives and mothers. Identity formation is accomplished through imitation; the protagonists pattern themselves on their mothers or their mentors who in turn are patterning themselves on Christ.

Since the love shared by the whole family is an important part of the idealization of home life, writers of domestic fiction used threats to filial and parental love in the same manner and for the same reason as they used threats to romantic love—as a plot device to heighten the drama and as a warning. The infant mortality rate was still rather high, and nothing could be more dramatic and cathartic for readers of domestic fiction than a heart-rending account of a child's death.[9] Although not nearly as traumatic as the death of a child, children leaving home is a perennial source of parental anxiety, and in the highly mobile society of mid-nineteenth-century America, children often left home to find work and to seek their fortune. As Mary Ryan points out, "Domestic authors recognized that geographic mobility broke the ties between the generations. The typical migrant during the ante-bellum era, and indeed throughout American history, was under thirty years of age, and usually single or newly wed. Before the Civil War, generational fission, both socially and geographically, had become a routine event in the family cycle" (45). In domestic fiction much anxiety is brought on by the passage of children from the home to the world.

Underlying the whole of the cult domesticity was the belief in the inherent virtue of women, and although a husband and father was necessary to complete the idyllic picture of domestic bliss, men—with their masculine ambitions, adventurousness, drunkenness,

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[9] Little Eva's deathbed scene in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is the most famous example. It is worth noting that dying children were portrayed as Christ-like figures and their selfless deaths often convert witnesses in domestic fiction.

et cetera—were presented as a threat to domesticity. Thus, it follows that those characteristics that were considered masculine were regarded with some suspicion.

> Everywhere it was said that women were gentle, conciliatory, patient, quiescent, and forgiving; and everywhere it was also said that these qualities affected the men who existed in their presence. . . . Whatever their specific goals, sentimentalists were hardly suggesting that women should rule, but rather that what they categorized as feminine virtues and traits should now prevail over masculine ones. In other words, they were saying that if the Union was endangered by aggressive, materialistic, utilitarian *men*, then not women but men imitating women could save the Union simply by ceasing to do what they were doing. (Forgie 182)

As a result, men were often the villains of domestic fiction, and those men who were heroes were often feminized men, men who exhibited the aforementioned virtues associated with women. In *Private Woman, Public Stage: Literary Domesticity in Nineteenth-Century America*, Mary Kelley explains, "The ideal man made by literary domesticity was made in the image of the ideal woman. The transformation constituted the feminization of the male, for the heroes, at least in most respects, exhibit the qualities of the heroines" (274). It is worth noting that Christ is often portrayed as possessing somewhat feminine qualities. Samuel May, a Unitarian minister of the day, wrote, "In Jesus, the dearly beloved of God, we see as much feminine as masculine grace" (qtd. in Matthews 61-62).

The notion that the feminine virtues were essential for the preservation of the Union was so predominate in the ante-bellum period that George Washington, the father of the country, a man who led a military rebellion against England, was feminized to the point of being portrayed as the mother of the country (Forgie 189). As noted earlier, George Forgie points out that the nineteenth-century sentimentalists cleverly conflated the cult of domesticity and the popular cult of George Washington:

> It is a sign of the prevalence of this sentimental way of thinking about Washington that the fact that he was after all a rebel played so small a part in his popular image. . . . The conservative and renunciatory qualities of Washington dominated versions of his character to the point that by the middle of the century his cult had in many ways overlapped that of domesticity. Tuckerman, for example, asserted that the virtues that had produced triumph in the Revolution—virtues such as "unselfish devotion and patient self-respect"—were "the great reconciling principles of . . . domestic life" as well as of historical action. (186-87)

In 1854, an article in *Putnam's Monthly* suggested that Washington looked more and more like a woman as he grew older (Forgie 189). Another writer suggested that it was Washington's love of domesticity that saved Americans from monarchy: "There can be no doubt that a love of home and native soil, and of the shade of retirement was one of the master passions of his mind" (qtd. in Forgie 188).[10] Thus it is that the characteristics most often associated with American manhood—self-reliance, self-justification, independence, unbridled ambition, and wanderlust—were subordinated to the domestic virtues in the mid-nineteenth century.

Another concern addressed in the domestic novels of the period was the conflict between individual desires and familial constraints. This tension between desire and duty arises both between spouses and between parents and children. Since nearly all nineteenth-century domestic novels were written by women—generally wives and mothers—this conflict was often considered from the woman's perspective. How, they asked, was a woman to fulfill her important duties as a wife and mother and still fulfill her own ambitions? But these dilemmas apply to all family members, and these themes are

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10 Forgie makes mention of the fact that the veneration of men possessing the feminine virtues extended to other Founding Fathers as well. A writer contributed a piece to the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1858, which claimed that "Jefferson in some respects resembled a woman. Like woman, he was constant rather than passionate; he had her refinement, disliking rude company and coarse pleasures . . ." (188-89).

explored not only in domestic novels of the day but also in many other important works of American literature. Many a young man or woman has wanted to leave home but felt constrained by family duty. Spouses and parents must sacrifice personal dreams and desires for the good of the marriage and the family. This family dilemma broadens out to society at large in the theme of the conflict between individual desires and social responsibility, which is one of the central questions facing a person living in a democratic society. Reconciling freedom and justice is a perennial challenge for Americans.[11]

Harriet Beecher Stowe came of age as a woman and a writer during the height of the cult of domesticity, and her sister, Catharine Beecher, was one of the first writers of domestic advice in this country. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that Stowe wrote what has become the classic novel of the genre, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The writing of the novel was precipitated by the death of one of Stowe's infant sons and the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850. Still suffering from the loss of her child, Stowe could not abide the thought of slave mothers being separated from their children for life; and she knew the slave trade often did just that. The novel shows the effects of slavery on slave owners as well. Stowe's argument against slavery is thus predicated upon the conviction that the institution of slavery had a pernicious effect on both slave families and slave-owing families, and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is the greatest example of the abolitionist domestic novel. As Mary Ryan puts it, in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Stowe "managed to weave all the themes of family literature—filial, parental, and conjugal anxieties—into one narrative" (132).

The titular hero of the book, the Christian slave Uncle Tom, possesses the feminine qualities of passive acceptance and forgiveness. Although Tom's first owners, Mr. and Mrs. Shelby, teach Tom, his wife Chloe, George, and his wife Eliza "the duties of the family," economic exigencies force Mr. Shelby to sell Tom away from his wife. The influence of slavery has clearly corrupted Tom's next owners, the St. Claire family. The

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[11] See Edmund Morgan's *The Puritan Dilemma* for a discussion of how John Winthrop and the early settlers of the Massachusetts Bay Colony faced this question, which confronted them in the form of the antinomian convictions of Roger Williams and Anne Hutchinson.

husband is ineffectual and lazy; the wife is "indolent and childish, unsystematic and improvident"; and the household is in a state of general disorder. The deathbed wishes of the St. Claires' angelic child Eva do not convince her father to send Tom home to his wife. Instead, he is sold to a third Southern household deeper in the South. The residence of Simon Legree, a bachelor and hard-driving slave owner, is, as Glenna Matthews puts it, "the anti-home." Cruel to his mother in his youth, Legree has grown up to repudiate all the domestic values. Because of Legree's "coarse neglect," the handsome plantation home he purchased has become run down and looks "desolate and uncomfortable" (492). His hearth is "employed only to light [his] cigars and heat his punch, not to warm the domestic circle" (Ryan 135). He forsakes a Christian marriage and instead forces himself on a series of female slaves. Here we witness his "lecherous pursuit of both Emmeline, an innocent young girl newly torn from her mother, and Cassy, an embittered woman long deprived of her children" (Ryan 135). And it is here that Tom dies, thus forever deprived of the possibility of returning to his wife.

There are, however, scenes of domestic felicity in the novel and positive examples of the saving grace of home. When Eliza Harris escapes from the Shelby's farm rather than allow her son to be sold away from her, she crosses the frozen Ohio River and ends up at the home of Senator and Mrs. Bird, where the "light of the cheerful fire shone on the rug and carpet of a cosey [sic] parlor" (141). Although the senator has just returned from Washington where he voted in favor of the Fugitive Slave Act, his wife, who has recently lost a child and for whom her family is "her entire world," convinces her husband to help Eliza escape. He does, and Eliza then makes her way to a Quaker family, the Hallidays, whose home is the apotheosis of domesticity. The Hallidays' home approximates the domestic ideal; the kitchen is clean and orderly and inviting,[12] and Rachel Halliday has "a heart as good and true as ever throbbed in woman's bosom" (215). Eliza's husband

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12 Stowe provides a perfect example of "the poetry of the kitchen" when she describes "A large, roomy, neatly-painted kitchen, its yellow floor glossy and smooth, and without a particle of dust; a neat, well-blacked cooking stove; rows of shining tin, suggestive of unmentionable good things to the appetite . . ." (214).

George arrives, and the Hallidays share their home with fugitive slaves. The domestic haven Eliza and George find at the Hallidays is a moral counterpoint to the disordered immorality of slavery. Upon sitting down to breakfast for the first time with the Hallidays, George has, as Matthews puts it, "an experience of what we might call the domestic sublime":

> It was the first time that ever George had sat down on equal terms at any white man's table; and he sat down, at first, with some constraint and awkwardness; but they all exhaled and went off like a fog, in the genial morning rays of this simple, overflowing kindness.
>
> This, indeed was a home,—*home*,—a word that George had never yet known a meaning for; and a belief in God, and trust in his providence, began to encircle his heart, as, with a golden cloud of perfection and confidence. . . . (223-24)[13]

Warm, pleasant homes are a site of refuge and grace in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. After all their trials and tribulations, Eliza and George finally escape the indignities of slavery and go to Canada, where they enjoy their domestic reward: "A small neat tenement . . . the cheery fire blazes in the hearth; the tea-table covered with a snowy cloth stands prepared for the evening meal" (604).

As Mary Ryan points out, the principles of human freedom expressed in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* are presented in domestic terms, which Stowe describes as "the right of a man to be a man, and not a brute; the right to call the wife of his bosom [his] wife, and to protect her from lawless violence; the right to protect and educate his child; the right to have a home of his own, a religion of his own, a character of his own, unsubject to the will of another" (544-45). Stowe stresses that what slavery takes from people is the freedom to be with their families, to have the right to be married and to have children and to

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[13] Reading this quotation, one is reminded of Spengemann's observation that "Augustine calls heaven 'home'; the Domestic Romance calls home 'heaven'" (70-71). Heaven and the home conflate, because in the calculus of domesticity, the experience of a good home naturally leads to a belief in God.

determine the fate of one's family. In her "Concluding Remarks," Stowe implores the reader to "pity those mothers that are constantly made childless by the American Slave-trade!" (623-24). She does not emphasize, as she could have, that slavery takes away the freedom to travel and the right to reap the benefits of one's own labor.

Stowe's antislavery novel was so popular and influential that slavery apologists decided they would use the conventions of domestic fiction to argue their side of the slavery question. They used domestic fiction to argue that Northern industrialism, not slavery, was the true threat to domesticity. In fact, between the publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the beginning of the Civil War, fourteen or more novels used the conventions of domesticity to defend slavery and attack Abolitionists "by representing the North as saddled with white slavery and groaning under the ills of an unlovely, exploitative industrialism" (Brown 243). In *The Empire of the Mother*, Mary Ryan discusses two such apologist novels. In *The Lofty and the Lowly*, by Marian McIntosh, a wealthy Northern family sacrifices domestic values "to the ambition of the father and the fashionable aspirations of the wife" (136). Ryan also describes *The Cabin and the Parlor*, J. Thornton Randolph's novel about a Southerner who goes north to find work to support his mother and sister. He discovers, however, that his wages as an office boy will not provide him with even the most meager living, let alone allow for him to support his family back home. Horace dies as a result of his mistreatment at the hands of Northern industrial capitalism, and Randolph turns the tables on his Northern readers by commenting, "You make slaves of white children, poor orphans, and work them to death. You promise falsely" (qtd. in Ryan 136). Ryan also notes that Randolph blames Northern industrialism for blunting maternal instincts and causing infanticide: "What must we think of a system which so brutalizes its victim that it destroys the natural instincts of the mother and makes her think more of a few shillings than of her child" (136). Whereas Stowe had argued that slavery was an abomination because it destroyed the families of both slaves and slaveholders, McIntosh and Randolph blame Northern economic and social conditions

for breaking up families. Randolph again addresses Northerners: "The operation of your social system does it continually by compelling families to separate in order that they can live, sending a son to California or the Quinea coast, a daughter West to teach school, or a father to India to die of cholera" (qtd. in Ryan 136). Partisans from both sides used the rhetoric of domesticity to argue the slavery question: the ideal of the home provided the terms and symbols that spoke to the entire nation and defined the values that were considered uncontestable.[14] But it is important to keep in mind that the ideal of domesticity was the starting point not only for the dispute over slavery but also for the broader debate concerning the relative merits and demerits of different economic systems: was Northern industrialism or Southern agrarian slavery most conducive to a healthy home life?

What has become known as the cult of domesticity played itself out by the end of the Civil War. The literary backlash against domestic ideology began soon after the war and created a type of writing that has been referred to as a "bad-boy sub-genre" (Matthews 81).[15] Works in this genre had untoward young protagonists who displayed "anti-woman and anti-domestic attitudes" (Matthews 81). *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn*, although they do not attack home life as vehemently as some of the others of this type, are certainly the best-known examples. In Matthews' view, Twain is suggesting in these novels that home life may require too much sacrifice of freedom, "that home may be a fraud, that the comfort may merely be on the surface" (81). In fact, the Old Southwestern humor tradition that inspired and informed Twain's writing of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* was largely a reaction against the conventions of literary domesticity.[16]

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14 In 1852, Abraham Lincoln used a now-famous domestic metaphor to warn about the threats to the Union posed by the vitriolic politics of slavery.

15 Glenna Matthews notes that after the 1860s, "Only in the area of regional or local-color literature were writers regularly presenting images of domestic competence, and this genre never enjoyed the best-seller status of the domestic novel" (106).

16 Chapter Three addresses this connection in more detail.

According to Glenna Matthews, the diminishment of the status of the home is attributable, at least in part, to industrialization. Between the Civil War and the 1920s, at which time the home can be considered fully industrialized, there were a number of technological advances that forever changed the character of housework and thus the status of housewives. Sewing machines, woodstoves, and iceboxes all came into widespread use before 1900. The food-processing industry established itself in the post-war years; improved railroads and the growth of American cities created a strong urban market for processed food, and by the 1870s commercial canneries appeared. "Before long," Matthews writes, "advertising copywriters would be telling housewives that food in cans was inherently superior to what the housewives could prepare on their own" (105). By the early decades of the twentieth century, most homes received electricity and indoor plumbing and so the applications of household technology expanded even more. As a result, housework became less laborious, but as Matthews points out, a "de-skilling process" had begun, which "would accelerate in the twentieth century" (105-06). As Matthews puts it, by the end of the 1920s, "the housewife's job began to metamorphose into a post-industrial one" (192). The home increasingly became a site of consumption rather than production. As a result, housework became less work and therefore became less respected.

Accordingly, housewives and mothers became less respected. Matthews notes that Stowe had venerated what she referred to as "aunties of high repute" in her fiction and that older women were rightly perceived as repositories of domestic knowledge in the nineteenth century (165). Historically, women from the preceding generation would pass down knowledge about housekeeping: the methods for making soap and quilts, habits and methods of gardening, and so on. As industrial and technological advances made such cultural knowledge less necessary, older women became less useful and less valued. Starting around World War I, disdain for housewives, and post-menopausal women in particular, became explicit. Perceived as not contributing to society, elderly

women became the target of male rage. Near the end of World War II, *Life* ran an editorial on women entitled "Draft Them? Too Bad We Can't Draft Their Grandmothers"; a writer named Philip Wylie attacked "Mom" in a best-seller entitled *A Generation of Vipers*; and the *Journal* published an article asking, "Are American Moms a Menace?" (Matthews 207).

The contempt for housework and disdain for housewives has continued and is a telling contrast to the attitudes prevalent during the cult of domesticity. Like the writers of the domestic fiction, Berry is in the tradition of using domestic fiction to address larger social concerns. But whereas the writers of domestic fiction in the mid-nineteenth century lived in a culture that venerated the home and imparted transcendent values to the sphere of the mother and home life, Berry finds himself writing in a climate hostile to marriage and home life, despite politicians' invocation of family values as a rallying cry for their respective party's policies. Moreover, Berry does not have as large an audience as the literary domestics had. In the nineteenth century, Susan Warner's *The Wide, Wide World*, Maria Cummins's *The Lamplighter*, and Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* were, among others of the genre, the most-read books in America up till the Civil War.

Revealing his interest in households and sounding nearly identical themes to those discussed above, several of Berry's essays directly address the ways industrialization diminishes the status of housewives and households. In *The Unsettling of America*, he notes that although traditionally women have performed the tasks of nurture, such as housekeeping, the care of young children, and cooking, "In the urban-industrial situation the confinement of these traditional tasks divided women more and more from the 'important' activities of the new economy" (113). As the home became more industrialized in the twentieth century, women, Berry writes, became nothing more than "family purchasing agents":

> Kitchens were now run on a cash economy. Women had become customers, a fact not long wasted on the salesmen, who saw that in these women they had

> customers of a new and most promising kind.[17] The modern housewife was isolated from her husband, from her school-age children, and from other women. She was saddled with work from which much of the skill, hence much of the dignity, had been withdrawn, and which she herself was less and less able to consider important. (114)[18]

By lamenting what has become of housewives, Berry calls for a change in the socio-economics of families that would make housework more meaningful and return mothers and housewives to their former exalted status.

If women "have been deformed by the degenerate housewifery that is now called their 'role,'" so too, insists Berry, have men: "In this situation the traditional nurturing role of men—that of provisioning the household, which in an agricultural society had become as constant and as complex as the women's role—became completely abstract; the man's duty to the household came to be simply to provide money" (113). Berry believes men are suffering for the same reason as women because "they are in exile from the communion of men and women, which is their deepest connection with the communion of all creatures" (116).

His contempt for the debasement of the role of housewife and husband goes hand in hand with his disdain for what the institution of marriage has become in contemporary America:

> Marriage, in what is evidently its most popular version, is now on the one hand an intimate "relationship" involving (ideally) two successful careerists in the same bed, and on the other hand a sort of private political system in which

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[17] In the same essay, Berry writes that "Breast-feeding of babies became unfashionable, one suspects, because it was the last form of home production; no way could be found to persuade a woman to purchase her own milk" (115).

[18] Berry continues, "Such a woman was ripe for sales talk: this was the great commercial insight of modern times. Such a woman must be told—or subtly made to understand—that she must not be a drudge, that she must not let her work affect her looks, that she must not become 'unattractive,' that she must always be fresh, cheerful, young, shapely, and pretty. All her sexual and mortal fears would thus be given voice, and she would be made to reach for money. What was implied was always the question that a certain bank finally asked outright in a billboard advertisement: 'Is your husband losing interest?'" (114).

> rights and interests must be constantly asserted and defended. Marriage, in other words, has now taken the form of divorce: a prolonged and impassioned negotiation as to how things shall be divided. During their understandably temporary association, the "married" couple will typically consume a large quantity of merchandise and a large portion of each other. (*What Are People For?* 180)

As "careerists" working away from the home, husbands and wives are separated from each other and their children for the majority of the day and do not share common work and interests. Nuclear families are likewise more and more isolated from other families for they do not share common ground—literally or metaphorically.

For Berry, an ideal marriage is one that is part of a larger social network, a placed community:

> The marriage vow unites not just a woman and a man with each other; it unites each of them with the community in a vow of sexual responsibility toward all others. The whole community is married, realizes its essential unity, in each of its marriages. . . . To live in marriage is a responsible way to live in sexuality, as to live in a household is a responsible way to live in the world. (*Unsettling of America* 122-23)

Elsewhere Berry writes, "a marriage without a place, a household, has nothing to show for itself. Without a history of some length, it does not know what it means. Without a community to exert a shaping pressure around it, it may explode because of the pressure inside it" (*Home Economics* 118). Like Winthrop's metaphoric marriage diffused over all of society, for Berry marriage is the foundation for all our social relations; in its ideal form, it is a microcosm for and heightened version of what all our relationships should be.

Like the adherents to the principles of the cult of domesticity in the nineteenth century, Berry is concerned with child rearing and education. In his essays, he writes at

length about education, commenting on the deficiencies of our current educational system in several of his books. He sees public education as one of many things that draw our attention away from home. Complaining about the length of the school day, which with the added time of both transportation and extracurricular activities can amount to eleven hours, Berry writes, "This is not education, but a form of incarceration. Why should anyone be surprised if, under these circumstances, children should become 'disruptive' or even 'ineducable'?" (*Gift of Good Land* 157).

Berry flatly states that "public education *must* be supplemented by home education" (*Gift of Good Land* 157); and he believes that one important way that public education is supplemented with home education is through work. He writes of the benefits of gardening for families, the ways that "the home production of food can improve the quality of family life." Besides providing better food, Berry emphasizes that "growing and preparing food at home can provide family work—work for everybody. And by thus elaborating household chores and obligations, we hope to strengthen the bonds of interest, loyalty, affection, and cooperation that keep families together" (*Gift of Good Land* 155). When Berry refers to strengthening "the bonds of interest, loyalty, and affection" he is addressing the same issue that the proponents of domesticity were when they referred to "tying the maternal knot," namely, binding children to their parents and, by extension, their entire family through tender feelings and warm regard.

Berry believes that our educational system fails to impart the knowledge and virtues necessary for living well within our homes and homelands. The products of our educational system, especially the "successful" ones, are encouraged to be ambitiously self-serving, to follow their careers wherever they lead in order to make as much money as possible:

> Many of these professionals have been educated, at considerable public expense, in colleges or universities that had originally a clear mandate to serve localities or regions—to receive the daughters and sons of their regions, educate

> them, and send them home again to serve and strengthen their communities. The outcome shows, I think, that they have generally betrayed this mandate, having served instead to uproot the best brains and talents, to direct them away from home into exploitative careers in one or another of the professions, and so to make them predators of communities and homelands, their own as well as other people's. (*Home Economics* 51-52)[19]

Clearly sharing a concern about marriages and child rearing with the nineteenth-century domestic writers, Berry is a sort of one-man, cottage industry cult of domesticity for twentieth-century America, producing, as he does, both essays and novels about domestic themes. But whereas nearly all of the nineteenth-century domestic writers lived in cities, Berry lives on a farm. Like Glenna Matthews, he sees a continuing assault on America's households during the twentieth century, and the above quotations reveal his concern for these developments. But being a farmer, he is also much concerned with the accompanying assault on the family farm. He sees World War II as a watershed that marks a turn for the worse in the condition of this country's households, rural communities, and farms. Born in 1934, he was able to experience farm life before the changes brought on around the end of World War II. Berry laments both the diminished status of the household and the virtual demise of the family farm during the course of the twentieth century, pointing out that "In 1930, the year *I'll Take My Stand* was published, there were about thirty million farmers in this country; at present there are about four million. The farming class is now one of the most despised and most damaged American minorities and has very nearly ceased to exist" ("Still Standing" 67). The changes in housekeeping noted above and the technological advances brought to farm work have rendered the family farm nearly obsolete. Having discussed the history of the family and domestic

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[19] Berry's animus towards our current educational system extends to professors as well, seeing them, as Berry does, as simply part of the rampaging, rootless professional class. Of the itinerant career-orientated professor, Berry writes, "Where he may be geographically is of little interest to him. One's career is a vehicle, not a dwelling; one is concerned less for where it is than where it will go" (*Unsettling of America* 147-48).

fiction in America, let us move on to a brief look at another important tradition of which Berry is a part: the pastoral tradition.

Part II: Domestic Pastoralism

Wendell Berry is often, and correctly, seen as part of the pastoral tradition, which traces its roots to the third century BC and Theocritus's *Idylls* and finds its most famous literary expression in Virgil's *Eclogues*, a collection of ten pastoral poems composed between 42 and 37 BC. Many poets through the ages have employed the conventions of pastoral literature. In fact, some of Berry's favorite poets—Dante, Spenser, Herrick, Marvell, and Milton—often wrote in the pastoral vein. As Michael Putnam notes in his study of Virgil's *Eclogues*, the pastoral vision is a "fantasy: a countryside with singing shepherds and their loves, with heroines like Daphnis (once human, now divine), with epiphanic gods and demi-gods" (3). Most broadly and simply, pastoral literature presents the pleasures of rural life removed from the complexities of civilization and the more unpleasant aspects of nature. It represents "nostalgic yearning for the distant in space and time, for a situation of stable perfection, far removed from anything odd or evil, tragic or transitory, a situation impossible to achieve but inspirational or mesmeric to contemplate" (Putnam 4). Leo Marx sees the traditional pastoral as sentimental and sees this impulse in "our leisure-time activities, in the piety toward the out-of-doors expressed in the wilderness cult, and in our devotion to camping, hunting, fishing, picnicking, gardening, and so on" (5). He maintains that "the yearning for a simpler, more harmonious style of life, an existence 'closer to nature,'" is "the psychic root of all pastoralism" (6). There are many definitions of the pastoral.[20] For the purposes of this study, pastoral literature is that

[20] Michael Squires provides a brief survey of the many and varied definitions of the pastoral: "The term *pastoral*, used loosely, can function as nothing more than a synonym for rural life; it can indicate all forms of idealized country life; it can signify only the conventions of traditional pastoral; it can suggest any literature about shepherds; or it can apply to literature revealing a single dominant feature of pastoral, as it has most frequently in recent critical usage. Modern critics have used the term to signify city-country contrast; complexity viewed as simplicity; criticism of life; an economic idyll; universal experience seen through the medium of the rural world; perspective; or a pattern of escape, illumination, and return" (10).

body of work that presents the pleasures of rural life removed from the complexity and corruption of city life. More specifically, the pastoral presents a contrast between rural life and city life in which rural life is portrayed more sympathetically and rural values are presented as being ideal.

As the socio-economic threats to home and family life that constitute an important part of domestic fiction have inspired heated political debates from the late eighteenth century to the present, the threats to rural life that provide pastoral literature with its dramatic tension have threatened and sometimes destroyed man's clearings on the earth's surface throughout human history. In *The Machine in the Garden*, Leo Marx explains that historically the rural pastoral retreat is a "middle landscape" that exists precariously between the wilderness on the one hand and the city on the other. The pastoral country-side is threatened by encroachments from nature and invasion by civilization: the pastoral landscape can return to forest or prairie or it can be overrun by civilization. Which is the greater threat depends on where the pastoral clearing is in space and time.

One traditional metonymic representation of the threat of civilization is war. War as a product of civilization that threatens rural peace has been a theme in pastoral literature since before Virgil; but it finds its most famous literary expression in the *Eclogues*, where "the peace of country life [is] contrasted with the disturbance of war and civil war and the political chaos of the cities" (Williams, *Country and the City* 17). Several of Virgil's *Eclogues* are in the escapist tradition of Theocritus and are literary excursions to the idyllic pastoral world of Arcadia, but the first and ninth eclogues lament the expulsion of shepherds from their land and were clearly written in response to the state's confiscation of land and transfer of it to victorious commanders of the civil war. In particular, these poems are generally considered allegories for Virgil's loss of his family farm when veteran soldiers were resettled after the Battle of Philippi in 42 BC. And Virgil's next book, the *Georgics*, is a plea for the restoration of the traditional agricultural life of Italy because the civil wars of Virgil's day depopulated rural Italy.

At the beginning of this chapter, I quoted William Spengemann explaining that threats to domesticity can be external or internal; the problems that mar a character's domestic situation or drive him away from home are either external problems that are out of his control or problems with the character's values. The two character flaws mentioned by Spengemann are "restlessness [and] foolish ambition" (71). It is the same with the pastoral. Raymond Williams quotes an anonymous poem from the late seventeenth century which shows that country life is traditionally "an innocent alternative to ambition" (*Country and the City* 24):

> How beautiful the world at first was made
> Ere Mankind by Ambition was betray'd.[21]
> The happy Swain in these enamell'd Fields
> Possesses all the Good that Plenty yields;
> Pure without mixture, as it first did come,
> From the Great Treasury of Nature's Womb.
> Free from Disturbance here he lives at ease
> Contented with a little Flock's encrease,
> And covered with the gentle wings of Peace.
> No Fears, no Storms of War his Thoughts molest,
> Ambition is a stranger to his Breast;
> His Sheep, his Crook, and Pipe, are all his Store,
> He needs not, neither does he covet more. (23-24)

The pleasures of the home and the countryside are available to all those who are wise enough not to shun them in a foolish search for something better.

Recall that the seminal work of pastoral literature is called *Idylls*. Traditionally, the pastoral refers to rural repose, to shepherds singing songs about unrequited love while

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[21] Williams points out that the Classical Golden Age and the Christian paradise Eden often conflate in the pastoral tradition, as they do in this poem.

lounging in the shade; and nature in these poems is generally portrayed as providing its bounty to mankind "From the Great Treasury of Nature's Womb," as the above poem states. "Pastoral nature," writes Harold Tolliver, "is more ceremonial than useful; it has no need of planting, cultivation, or harvest, and its periodic renewal is less economic than symbolic or miraculous" (4). The georgic tradition, on the other hand, which takes its name from Virgil's book of the same name, portrays people working on the land—rural life as farm life. In his dissertation on Wendell Berry, Daniel Cornell writes, "The focus on responsible action in the present moves the georgic beyond the nostalgia of much pastoral writing" (196). Thomas Altherr agrees, and like Cornell, places Berry in this tradition. In "'The Country We Have Married': Wendell Berry and the Georgic Tradition of Agriculture," he states that "Berry's prose and poetry have carried on the Georgic tradition of agrarian literature, that body of classical thought descending from Virgil which stressed the virtues of work over the virtues of ease" (105). Berry argues again and again that good work—meaningful work well done—provides pleasure and joins us to each other and to the past, and he complains that present economy provides few people with meaningful, fulfilling work.[22]

The georgic-pastoral tradition is a part of the domestic tradition, for the two literary traditions share basic assumptions and concerns.[23] A passage from Book Two of the *Georgics* provides a good example of the domestic aspect of the georgic tradition:

> Some vex with oars uncharted waters, some
> Rush on cold steel, some seek to worm their way

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[22] In "Economy and Pleasure," Berry writes fondly of the sharing of work during the tobacco harvest. "The crew to which I belong is the product of kinships and friendships going far back; my own earliest associations with it occurred nearly forty years ago. And so as we work we have before us not only the present crop and the present fields, but other crops and other fields that are remembered. The tobacco cutting is a sort of ritual of remembrance. Old stories are re-told; the dead and the absent are remembered" (*What Are People For?* 142). His contempt for idleness is clear: "In a country that puts an absolute premium on laborsaving measures, short workdays and retirement, why should there be any surprise at permanence of unemployment and welfare dependency? These are only different names for our national ambitions" (*What Are People For?* 125).

[23] The close relationship between the pastoral and domestic is suggested by the two most common metaphors used to describe humans' relationship with God: God as our shepherd; God as our Father.

Into the courts of kings. One is prepared
To plunge a city's homes in misery
All for a jewelled cup and a crimson bedspread;
Another broods on a buried hoard of gold.
This one is awestruck by a platform's thunder;
That one, enraptured, gapes at the waves of applause
From high and low rolling across the theatre.
Men revel steeped in brothers' blood, exchange
The hearth they love for banishment, and seek
A home in lands beneath an alien sun.
The farmer cleaves the earth with his curved plough.
This is his yearlong work, thus he sustains
His homeland, thus his little grandchildren,
His herds and trusty bullocks. (lines 502-516)

Virgil sees wanderlust and the desire for fame and wealth as threats to the home and family much like the proponents of domestic ideology in nineteenth-century America. The pastoral-georgic tradition idealizes country life far removed from the vice and intrigue of the city; the domestic venerates home life as a refuge from the corruption of mercantile society. In domestic fiction, the home imparts virtue to the mother, and in pastoral literature, the countryside confers virtue upon the shepherd.

Like domestic ideology, the pastoral ideal has helped shape American culture. Thomas Jefferson's vision of America as a country dotted with small family farms was engendered by pastoral conventions.[24] As Leo Marx shows in *The Machine in the Garden*, Jefferson was greatly influenced as a young man by pastoral literature, having read and greatly admired both Virgil's *Eclogues* and James Thomson's "The Seasons" (126). In

[24] For simplicity's sake, from this point forward I will conflate the pastoral and georgic traditions in my use of the term *pastoral*. Raymond Williams seems to consider the georgic tradition as a sub-category of the pastoral, and therefore he only uses the term *pastoral*. Leo Marx, likewise, apparently makes no distinction between the two.

fact, what is arguably Jefferson's most famous statement from his *Notes on the State of Virginia* was inspired by his love of pastoral literature: "Those who labor in the earth are the chosen people of God," Jefferson writes, "if ever he had a chosen people, whose breasts he has made his peculiar deposit of substantial and genuine virtue. . . . Corruption of morals in the mass of cultivators is a phaenomenon of which no age nor nation has furnished an example" (164). Jefferson portrays the American farmer as an incarnation of the virtuous swain of pastoral literature. "All of this makes more sense," Marx writes, "once we recognize the noble husbandman's true identity: he is the good shepherd of the old pastoral dressed in American homespun" (127).

Jefferson's encomium to the virtues of the husbandman segues into a statement about national economic policy. Picking up Jefferson's sentiments several sentences further on in his *Notes*, we see that he proclaims,

> generally speaking, the proportion which the aggregate of the other classes of citizens bears in any state to that of its husbandmen, is the proportion of its unsound parts to its healthy parts, and is a good enough barometer whereby to measure its degree of corruption. While we have to labor then, let us never wish to see our citizens occupied at a workbench, or twirling a distaff. . . . let our workshops remain in Europe. (164-165)

As Leo Marx astutely points out, it is clear that the literary pastoral informed Jefferson's ideas concerning political economy. "In the egalitarian social climate of America," Marx writes, "the pastoral ideal, instead of being contained by the literary design, spills over into thinking about real life" (130). He explains that Jefferson believed that "if all America could somehow be transformed into a garden, a permanently rural republic, then its citizens might escape from the terrible sequence of power struggles, wars, and cruel repressions suffered by Europe. This is the logic back of what is known as the Jeffersonian dream—a native version of an ancient hope" (138).

As any reader of Wendell Berry can attest, the pastoral ideal as social, political, and economic program is still alive; he is squarely in the Jeffersonian tradition of allowing domestic-pastoral ideology to inform his politics. He admits that "In my own politics and economics I am a Jeffersonian—or, I might more accurately say, I'm a democrat and an agrarian. I believe that land is to be used and should be divided into small parcels among a lot of small owners" (*Another Turn of the Crank* 49). His pastoral vision colors his attitudes towards all of the social, political, and economic forces that affect his life as a farmer.

Berry differs from the members of the nineteenth-century cult of domesticity in that he brings a consideration of the land into the politics of domesticity. His domestic-pastoral perspective extends the political debate begun by women in the early years of the Republic. In one of his first collections of essays, *A Continuous Harmony* (1972), Berry draws a connection between the treatment of women and the treatment of the land. "[I]t seems to me," Berry writes,

> that there is an historical parallel, in white American history, between the treatment of the land and the treatment of women. The frontier, for instance, was notoriously exploitive of both, and I believe for largely the same reasons. Many of the early farmers seem to have worn out farms and wives with equal regardlessness, interested in both mainly for what they would produce, crops and dollars, labor and sons; they clambered upon their fields and their wives, struggling for an economic foothold, the having and the holding not coming until both fields and wives are properly cherished. And today there seems to me a distinct connection between our nomadism (our "social mobility") and the nearly universal disintegration of our marriages and our families. (162)[25]

[25] For a consideration of these themes, see Annette Kolodny's *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters* (1975). Kolodny's book is now considered the first work of eco-feminism.

As early American feminists dramatized what Cathy Davidson refers to as the "socioeconomics of seduction" (106)—that is, the material inequalities that allowed men to seduce women—Berry explores the socio-economics of erosion, the social forces that lead to the mistreatment of the land.

As a counterpoint to tragic tales of seduction and pathetic accounts of bad marriages, early American novelists often used domestic fiction to portray loving marriages as a model and a guide. Likewise, Berry highlights the affection that can exist between a man and his land, and he presents this sentimental attachment as an ideal relationship between humans and the land. In a good relationship to the land, the domestic virtues of love and affection extend to the land. Berry maintains that "it has not been uncharacteristic for a farmer's connection to a farm to begin in love. . . . [A]lways, no matter what one's agricultural experience may have been, one's connection to a newly bought farm will begin in love that is more or less ignorant. One loves the place because present appearances recommend it, and because they suggest possibilities irresistibly imaginable. One's head, like a lover's, grows full of visions" (*Standing by Words* 69-70). The relationship described here is less logical and proprietary than it is sentimental and sacred.

Berry's domesticity moves outward in concentric circles from his marriage and family to his relationship with his neighbors and to his metaphoric marriage to the land he has chosen to live on. As he writes in "Discipline and Hope,"

> Living in our speech, though no longer in our consciousness, is an ancient system of analogies that clarifies a series of mutually defining and sustaining unities: of farmer and field, of husband and wife, of the world and God. . . .
>
> All the essential relationships are comprehended in this metaphor. A farmer's relation to his land is the basic and central connection in the relation of humanity to the creation; the agricultural *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. . . .

> Thus, if the metaphor of atonement is alive in [a man's] consciousness, he will see that he should love and care for his land as for his wife, that his relation to his place in the world is as solemn and demanding, as blessed, as marriage; he will see that he should respect his marriage as he respects the mysteries and transcendent powers—that is, as a sacrament. (*Continuous Harmony* 159-61)

This marriage metaphor is central to Berry's domestic aesthetic, and it serves as the starting point for his fiction; around it he organizes his themes, plots, and characters. Like the writers of domestic fiction, Berry writes about marriage, but he broadens marriage out to metaphorically include his relationship to the land. In the next chapter I will look at Berry's fiction from the perspective of the domestic-pastoral tradition.

CHAPTER 2:
WENDELL BERRY'S DOMESTIC-PASTORAL FICTION

Wendell Berry comes from a farming family. Going back to great-grandparents of both his mother and his father, Berry's ancestors have farmed land on the Kentucky River, just south of its confluence with the Ohio River, in Henry County, Kentucky, where he lives and farms to this day. Although his father owned a farm and was one of the founders of the Burley Tobacco Growers Cooperative, his main occupation was as a lawyer, and he did farm work on the side. Born in 1934 during the Great Depression and before the mechanization of the farms in the area, Berry is grateful to have witnessed the last generation of farmers who used draft animals. He learned how to handle a team of mules from his grandfather, and he and his brother John often worked for a neighboring farmer, Owen Flood, who was, according to Berry, a man "of exceptional intelligence and abilities" (qtd. in Angyal 3). Once a week, Flood and Berry's father would drive around their farms, often with young Wendell and his brother John in tow, and compare farming methods in what Berry calls "a kind of traveling seminar." Nick Watkins, his grandfather's tenant farmer, also taught him a great deal about farming and hunting. From his Grandmother Berry, with whom he lived for some time following the death of his grandfather, he learned how to milk cows, raise chickens, and can fruits and vegetables (Angyal 5). Of the farming country around his childhood home, he recalls,

> In my boyhood, Henry County, Kentucky, was not just a rural county, as it still is—it was a *farming* county. The farms were generally small. They were farmed by families . . . [and] these families grew gardens. They produced their own meat, milk, and eggs. The farms were highly diversified. The main money crop was tobacco. But the farmers also grew corn, wheat, barley, oats, hay, and

> sorghum. Cattle, hogs, and sheep were all characteristically raised on the same farms. There were small dairies, the milking more often than not done by hand. (*Unsettling of America* 39)[1]

Although he learned much about subsistence farming as a child and had an appreciation for that way of life, Berry's future was uncertain. His own father was a lawyer first and a farmer second. What direction Berry's life would take was an open question.

As an adolescent, Berry went away to a military preparatory school, and he then went to the University of Kentucky in Lexington, where he stayed on for a master's degree in English. He graduated and got married in the spring of 1957, spending the summer after his marriage with his wife at "the Camp," a cabin on the Kentucky River that one of Berry's uncles had built in the 1920s. After working for one year as an instructor at Georgetown College in Kentucky, he went to Stanford as a Stegner Fellow and stayed two years, writing what would become his first novel, *Nathan Coulter* (1960).

This first novel is a coming of age story about a young boy and is told from his first-person point of view. It is Berry's least domestic novel, in fact presenting family issues in an unfavorable light. Nathan's mother dies when he is quite young, and his father, a hardworking farmer named Jarrat Coulter, an already stern and distant father, becomes even colder and more distant afterward. Nathan and his older brother Tom go to live with their grandparents and their Uncle Burley, who live on an adjoining farm. But their grandmother is not able to provide much domestic comfort. Although a much-needed female presence, the grandmother is unable to soften the behavior of her husband, a remote man given to violent outbursts. This novel depicts an extended family without a strong, nurturing female presence. Neither household—Jarrat's nor the grandparents'—is a pleasant home in the tradition of the cult of domesticity. Of his grandparents' house, Nathan reports,

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[1] With the increasing mechanization of farming and the trend toward larger and larger farms, such diversified farms are now hard to find. "I seem to have been born with an aptitude for a way of life that was doomed," Berry writes, "although I did not understand that at the time" (*Long-Legged House* 172).

> Things got pretty jolty there sometimes. Once in a while Grandpa would get mad at Brother and me and swat us with his cane, and then he and Grandma would get mad at each other because she always took up for us. The two of them didn't agree on much. Grandma said you didn't live with a man like Grandpa, you lived around him. And that was pretty much the way things were between them. Grandpa didn't feel at home in the house, and when he wasn't at work he spent most of his time at the barn. When he was in the house they lived around each other. (54)

Here, work is a haven from the home; home is not a haven from work, as it is in traditional domestic fiction. Relations are so strained in the house that Uncle Burley escapes as often as he can to stay at the fishing camp on the river.

Home life in *Nathan Coulter* is dominated by the grandfather's hostility and violent outbursts. When the cat becomes too much under foot, Grandpa hangs it by its neck from a peach tree. When Grandma and Tom are unable to open a jammed kitchen window during supper, he shatters the glass with his cane. In traditional domestic fiction, bright cheerful kitchens and convivial dining rooms provide the setting for scenes highlighting the pleasures of family life. Even the most hopeful idealist could not find cause to rhapsodize over dinner at the Coulter household. After the window breaking just noted, Nathan describes the scene: "Grandma and Brother dodged the splinters, and Brother sat down again. Grandma stood still again looking at Grandpa, her eyes snapping. But he'd turned his back to her and begun eating. She went to the stove and took the biscuits out of the oven. We ate without talking or looking at each other" (108). There is no pleasant dining scene in the novel.

Domestic ideology is predicated upon the notion that loving familial relationships provide comfort and happiness. Whereas the heroes and heroines of domestic fiction establish and nurture such relationships, *Nathan Coulter* foregrounds unhealthy relationships and the disintegration of relationships. Not only do Nathan's grandfather and

grandmother not get along but Uncle Burley and his grandparents also clash because of Burley's drinking and wild ways. Even Nathan and his brother Tom have a falling out. Tom catches Nathan spying on him and his girlfriend, and he will not forgive Nathan. "[W]e'd quit being brothers," Nathan notes, "and it was my fault" (107). In addition, Nathan's father and Tom part ways, and Tom leaves for good. Their competitiveness comes to a head in the fields one day. While racing down a row harvesting tobacco, the father taunts Tom for not being able to match his pace in the work, and Tom hits him. They fight and Tom leaves the grandparents' house, never again to live or work on his family's farm.

Recalling William Spengemann's observation that threats to domesticity can be either internal or external, we see that this novel presents both sorts of threats to familial accord and domestic happiness. The mother's illness and death, which forever destroys Nathan's home life, is an external threat; but the most significant threats to domesticity in the novel arise from within the characters themselves. Nathan's father and grandfather are hard, unyielding men who drive others away from them. During their mother's illness, Nathan and Tom are sent to the fields with their father. "It was hard to have to be with him so much," Nathan comments. "Brother and I were careful not to aggravate him, but scarcely a day passed that we didn't at least get a tongue-lashing from him" (39). And of his grandfather, Nathan says, "Grandpa had been hard on all of us. He'd kept himself stubborn and lonely, not allowing any of us to know him; we saw him and he saw us through his loneliness" (113). After Tom is driven away, Nathan acknowledges the fact that their natures prevented their getting along. "And things that had been so before never would be so again. We were the way we were; nothing could make us any different, and we suffered because of it. Things happened to us the way they did because we were ourselves" (158). The members of Nathan's family lack the requisite domestic virtues for the maintenance of a happy home. They are not forgiving, patient, or gentle enough to maintain the loving relationships that will keep their family together.

In fact, most of the men and boys in *Nathan Coulter* are inclined towards cruelty and violence, and Berry presents a series of violent incidents perpetrated by boys and men. Nathan and Tom blow a friend's tame crow up with a dynamite cap, Burley uses the grandmother's ducklings for a booth at the Fourth of July fair and shoots them after they get too tired to duck the thrown rings, and a group of men and boys in town tie a roman candle to a dog's tail and light it. The feminized men of Berry's later novels would never do such things.

But not all the male characters are cruel. Berry portrays Nathan's Uncle Burley as a case in point. Kinder to Nathan than any of the other male characters, Burley consoles Nathan and gets him out of the house often by taking him hunting and fishing. It is interesting that Burley, a bachelor who dislikes marriage and farming, is the most sympathetic male character in this novel: "He said land was worse than a wife; it tied you down, and he didn't want to be any place he couldn't leave" (108). He voices the strongest criticisms against farmers and farming in the novel. Out in a field one day, he says, "You know . . . when the first fellow that owned this [land] cut the trees off of it and dragged the logs and brush away and grubbed out the stumps and plowed it and planted a crop on it and an Indian came along and shot him, that son of a bitch was better off" (139). Elsewhere, Burley says of farmers, "they'll grieve in this old land until you'd think they were going to live on it forever, and grieve some more because they know damn well they're not going to live on it forever. And nothing will stop them but a six-foot hole" (161). Married to neither woman nor land, Burley offers the most compelling argument against marriage and farming in Berry's entire corpus. Other characters will express similar sentiments in later novels, but they are cardboard cutout characters that the reader neither likes nor respects.

The good farmers in this novel, Jarrat and Grandpa, have, as Andrew Angyal sees it, an "obsessive work ethic that drives them to exhaustion and makes life unpleasant for those around them. . . . Though they are hardworking farmers, the husbandry Grandpa and Jarrat practice is ultimately sterile and unproductive; they are bound up in impatience,

anger, and grief, which they are unable to express in any way but to lash out at their wives and children" (19). They work hard, but they are neither nurturing fathers nor nurturing farmers and are not properly married to their land.

After the publication of *Nathan Coulter*, Berry spent a year in Kentucky farming. He then received a Guggenheim and spent the better part of a year in Europe with his wife and her parents. Having accepted a position at New York University (University Heights campus in the Bronx) before he left for Europe, he returned home to that job and spent two years there as head of the freshman English program. Against the protestations of the department head and his colleagues, who thought New York City was a better home for a writer, he quit and returned home to Kentucky, taking a job as an English professor at his alma mater, the University of Kentucky.

Nathan Coulter portrays the farming community in a harsh and negative light because Berry viewed it that way at that time in his life. Berry was at Stanford as a Stegner Fellow when he finished the novel and he was, by all indications, embarked on a career as a writer and an academic that would lead him away from home. Having completed the novel in 1960, four years before his decision to move back to Kentucky and farm, Berry was at liberty to portray this family of farmers and their small farming community as he perceived them rather than how he wished them to be, which he does in his later novels. His second novel, *A Place on Earth* (1967, 1983 rev.), was written during the period when he moved home and thus is a transitional book. In all his subsequent works of fiction, Berry lets his wishes guide his fictional presentation, but in *Nathan Coulter*, written before he committed himself to living and farming in Port Royal—before he married the land—he allowed himself to portray farmers and farming in a negative light. Perhaps he drew a grim picture to convince himself that he had done the right thing by deciding to leave that life behind.

In his first work of non-fiction, *The Long-Legged House* (1969), Berry uses the autobiographical title essay to describe why he and his wife decided to return for good

and live on the farm. He explains that when he was hired at the University of Kentucky in the fall of 1964,[2] he and his wife planned to live in Lexington and summer at the Camp, but within six months some property adjoining the Camp on the downriver side came up for sale, and he bought the "twelve acres more or less," refurbished the house, and moved in on July 4, 1965.[3] They have lived and farmed there ever since, and he has since acquired over 60 more acres and refers to his land as Lane's Landing Farm. "By coming back to Kentucky and renewing my devotion to the Camp and the river valley," he has written, "I had, in a sense, made a marriage with the place. I had established a trust, and within the assurance of the trust the place had begun to reveal its life to me in moments of deep intimacy and beauty. I had to come here unequivocally, accepting the place as my fate and privilege, before I could see it with clarity" (*Long-Legged House* 166). What began perhaps as an inchoate and tentative attraction had, by the time he wrote the above passage, evolved into a conscious and deliberate commitment. His marriage to the land, like all marriages, represents both a shift in perspective and a deepening of commitment. As Berry's commitment to his farm intensified, his attitude toward his farm and his forbears who had farmed there before was surely modified—unconsciously and by necessity. For a marriage to survive, it is best to idealize one's spouse, to be more inclined to see virtues than faults. As an aspiring good husband and husbandman, Berry provides idealized fictional representations of characters inspired by

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2 Berry taught at the University of Kentucky until 1977, when he resigned to write and farm full time. He returned to the English Department at the University of Kentucky in 1987, although he no longer teaches there. He now makes his living as a farmer and a writer.

3 Having been inspired by Thoreau's *Walden* as a young man, the date of occupancy Berry chose—which he makes a point of mentioning—is surely an homage to Thoreau, who moved in to his cabin on Walden Pond on July 4, 1845. For Thoreau, that date signified his intention to carve out for himself a new kind of life fit for an American; he would slough off old European habits, as they were unsuited for life in the New World. "Like Thoreau at Walden," Berry writes, "we found out what the essentials are" (L-LH 132). In *The Long-Legged House*, the reader sees the essential differences between Thoreau's bachelor existence and temporary stay at Walden Pond—which was owned by Emerson—and Berry's life-long commitment to his wife and the land they live on. Thoreau and Berry each believes his respective life choice represents the paradigmatic American life, and they share many values—self-reliance, for one. But their value systems differ as well; Thoreau, for example, had great contempt for farmers. See Herman Nibbelink's "Thoreau and Wendell Berry: Bachelor and Husband of Nature" for a discussion of the philosophical similarities and differences between Thoreau and Berry.

both his forebears and farmers from his community. In fact, Berry has admitted that the farming community portrayed in his novels is an idealized community, not a realistic representation of the community he lives in.[4]

Coming home to the land for good is not only a watershed in Berry's life; it marks a turning point in his art, changing, as it did, his perception of his relationship with the farming community he had left. Before he decided to return home, he had ambivalent feeling about farmers and farming, as evidenced in *Nathan Coulter*. It is, like all of Berry's fiction, an agrarian novel in that it is about farming, but it is not a pastoral novel because it does not idealize country life. After committing himself to his land, he would write only pastoral novels.[5]

In the mid 1980s, twenty years or so after moving back to Lane's Landing Farm in Port Royal, Berry revised his two earliest novels, *Nathan Coulter* (1960, 1985 rev.) and *A Place on Earth* (1967, 1983 rev.). He revised them surely because he believed he had learned something about novel writing in the intervening years and because he wanted to improve them—and the revised versions are better. But since *Nathan Coulter* was written before Berry committed himself to a life of farming and was revised after, Berry's revision lightens Jarrat's and Grandpa's harshness and minimizes the consequences of their behavior on the family. The revised version of *Nathan Coulter* is twenty-four pages shorter than the original. The bulk of Berry's revision consisted of cutting the last twenty pages of the novel, which described Grandpa's slow death and Nathan's tryst with the young wife of a family friend.[6] Berry's primary purpose in revising *Nathan Coulter*

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4 Personal interview with Wendell Berry, 2 June 1999.

5 Although sometimes referred to as a writer of agrarian literature, Berry is more properly called a pastoral writer because as he highlights the differences between urban life and rural life, he idealizes rural life. As the annotated bibliography at the end of Roy Meyer's *The Middle Western Farm Novel in the Twentieth Century* clearly shows, many farm novels portray farm life negatively. Life on the farm in such novels is often portrayed as nothing more than an endless fight against the indifferent land and inclement weather and shown to be stultifying and dull. As noted in the previous chapter, the pastoral must, by definition, idealize.

6 Berry's revision of *Nathan Coulter* was one of excision rather than addition; in fact, I can find no example where he added to the original text. Most emendations consist of Berry taking out passages articulating how Nathan felt about certain events. These revisions suggest that Berry edited with the writer's dictum of "show don't tell" in the front of his mind. Other emendations seem to have been motivated by a desire to clean things up a bit: he cuts Nathan's father's

seems to have been to cut the part of the novel where Nathan, like his brother, leaves home for good. With its original ending, the novel is a tragedy by the standards of domestic fiction. The revision, on the other hand, ends with Nathan still a member of the family, however dysfunctional and violent, and still a member of the community. After having committed himself to his place, after having consciously married his community and his land, Berry apparently wanted to make his first novel more consistent with his later ideology. He needed to portray the farmers in as positive a light as possible without completely rewriting the novel. In the Author's Note preceding the revised edition of *Nathan Coulter*, Berry writes: "When I finished work on this book at the end of the 1950s, I thought merely that I had made my start as a writer. I did not know that I had begun an interest in these characters that would still be productive twenty-five years later. For this new edition I have made a number of changes with this unforeseen continuity in mind."

This shift in Berry's sensibilities from the writing of *Nathan Coulter* to the writing of his later novels is revealed in the evolution throughout his life of his response to *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, his most important literary influence. In his essay "Writer and Region" (*What Are People For?* 71-92), Berry addresses some of the ways *Huckleberry Finn* influenced him as a child, and he discusses how his perception of the novel has changed over the years. He explains, "I don't remember starting to read *Huckleberry Finn* or how many times I read it; I can only testify that it is a book that is, to me, literally familiar: involved in my family life" (71). Berry says that *Huckleberry Finn* gave him "a comforting sense of precedent" for his childhood desire to escape enclosures (71), his desire to escape into the natural world.[7] Although as a child he sympathized

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comment "Like hell they will," for no apparent reason; and he removes a brief mention of Burley having Nathan "swipe the red frog off the mantelpiece" so he could give it to Annie May. The original text also contained some rather heavy-handed allusions to Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*. In the original novel, Berry had written, "[Grandpa's] eyes were fierce and angry. I remembered how the eyes of the lion I used to dream had been Grandpa's eyes" (179).

[7] Berry writes that as a young man he "was headstrong and did not respond positively to instructions." He adds that "School and Sunday school and church were prisons to me" and that he "loved being out of them" (*What Are People For?* 71).

with Huck, he would later come to sympathize more with the adult characters Aunt Polly and Aunt Sally.

Berry's changing response to *Huckleberry Finn* is especially interesting because Twain's novel dramatizes the ideological and thematic conflict between masculine adventurousness and feminine domesticity that is the focus of this study of Berry's fiction. In *Huckleberry Finn*, feminine domesticity is represented by the nurturing Aunt Polly and Aunt Sally and by the evangelically pious Miss Watson. Masculine adventurousness is represented by Huck and his desire to escape the confines of both the Widow Douglas's home and St. Petersburg, Missouri, with its small-mindedness and conventional morality.[8] Moreover, Huck's important moral decision concerning whether or not to turn Jim in is based on individualistic self-justification rather than on conformity to societal conventions. How Berry's readings of *Huckleberry Finn* evolved throughout his life highlights how his sympathies have changed from adventurousness to domesticity.

It is not surprising that the novel that most influenced Berry as a child should strongly influence his own first novel, and *Nathan Coulter* is clearly indebted to *Huckleberry Finn*. Nathan, like Huck, has no mother and a cruel father. When there are uncomfortable domestic scenes, Burley and Nathan, like Huck, escape to the woods to fish or hunt. As in *Huckleberry Finn*, nature is portrayed as a refuge from human society.[9] The theme of escape is emphasized by the original ending of *Nathan Coulter*, which has Nathan, like Huck, leaving home and lighting out for parts unknown.[10] More generally, both novels present people as violent and cruel. When he wrote *Nathan*

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8 Recall that Glenna Matthews explained that the "bad boy" sub-genre, of which *Huckleberry Finn* is the greatest example, was a reaction against sentimental domestic fiction and its portrayal of able and loving mothers.

9 In *Nathan Coulter,* there is even a description of a sunrise on the Kentucky River that mirrors the sunrise on the Mississippi section of *Huckleberry Finn*. As Huck and Jim watch the sunrise from the riverbank near their raft, Nathan and Burley watch it from a johnboat they spent the night in while running trotlines for catfish.

10 It is perhaps worth noting that most of Berry's older male characters call young men and boys "honey" just like Nigger Jim calls Huck "honey." This seems especially appropriate in Berry's fiction since the older characters are often feminized by the domestic virtues.

Coulter, Berry was still in the thrall of *Huckleberry Finn's* boyish way of looking at the world and thus he was inclined to see family life as confining and disagreeable. At that time in his life, he was lighting out for the territories of an academic career far from home.

Having later committed himself to his family and his farm, somewhere along the way Berry began to read *Huckleberry Finn* differently; and his sympathies shifted from Huck to the nurturing mothers, Aunt Polly and Aunt Sally. These characters would be the heroines of a work of domestic fiction, the ideal to be lived up to; yet Huck is suspicious of them and flees them. Whereas *Nathan Coulter* presents a boyish contempt for women with their nagging mothering, Berry would later come to believe that Aunt Polly and Aunt Sally "are the true grown-ups of the Mississippi novels" because they are "responsible members of the community, faithful to duties, capable of love, trust, and long-suffering, willing to care for orphan children" (76). Aunt Sally is, according to Berry, a "sweet, motherly, entirely affectionate woman, from which there is no need to escape for she has little aptitude for confinement" (75). Berry sees Aunt Sally and Aunt Polly as paragons of domestic virtue and complains that Twain "made no acknowledgement of their worth. He insists on regarding them as dampeners of youthful high spirits, and in the end he refuses to distinguish them at all from the objectionable Miss Watson" (76). Whereas in *Nathan Coulter* Berry has Burley ridicule such women just as Huck would, he portrays such women as good mothers to their own families and nurturing influences on their entire community in his later domestic-pastoral fiction.

Berry's revision of *Nathan Coulter* reveals his changing attitude toward *Huckleberry Finn*. In the original version of *Nathan Coulter*, Berry had written a scene in which Burley Coulter ridicules a pious schoolteacher named Miss Mary Ann Milton,[11] who "was active in the Sunday School and the missionary society and the W.C.T.U." (156). As Miss

[11] By alluding to John Milton with her name, Berry seems to be suggesting that Miss Mary Ann Milton is an overly religious killjoy, which is how Milton is often stereotypically perceived.

Watson lectures Huck, Miss Milton upbraids Burley for laughing because some "men and boys" had tied a roman candle to a dog's tail. Nathan quotes Uncle Burley's remark "that if she'd spent as much time tending to her own business as she had tending to everybody else's she might have found somebody to marry her" (156). Burley adds, "Now there's the reason why every woman should get married and every man shouldn't" (156-57). In "Writer and Region," Berry refers to *Huckleberry Finn*'s Miss Watson's "indoor piety" (74). Miss Milton is meant to represent the same thing, as her organizational affiliations attest.[12] Burley's harsh response to Miss Milton parallels Huck's resentment of Miss Watson's attempts to "sivilize" him. Both Burley and Huck resist religious instruction and moral edification, which are associated with women. Berry writes that Miss Watson represents "an extremity . . . of conventional piety and propriety that needs to be escaped" (75). Although he created Miss Milton in the same mold, Berry's allegiances had changed so much by the time he revised *Nathan Coulter* that he edited out Burley's condemnation of her.[13]

In "Writer and Region," Berry points out that one of the most prominent themes of *Huckleberry Finn* is escape: Huck escapes from Miss Watson's house at night; he escapes his father's clutches; he escapes St. Petersburg. And Jim escapes from slavery. It is an important theme in the original version of *Nathan Coulter* as well, but Berry later comes to judge the impulse to flee in a different light. Berry points out that the theme of escape represents "a flaw in Mark Twain's character that is also a flaw in our national character, a flaw in our history, and a flaw in much of our literature" (75). Berry writes:

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[12] It is perhaps worth noting that the Women's Christian Temperance Union was founded in 1874, the year *Huckleberry Finn* was first published. (*Huckleberry Finn* was published in England in 1874, but the novel's publication was delayed until 1875 in the United States because of a disagreement concerning the illustrations.) The fact that the WCTU was founded the same year *Huckleberry Finn* was published highlights the fact that although Twain wrote the novel after the heyday of the cult of domesticity, domestic values and women's issues still held sway and Twain was reacting to them.

[13] In fact, over thirty years later in Tol Proudfoot stories, Berry will offer a positive portrayal of a character quite similar to Miss Mary Ann Milton: I am referring to Miss Minnie Proudfoot. Miss Minnie, like Miss Mary Ann Milton, is a female schoolteacher, a member of the W.C.T.U., and a supporter of women's suffrage, but Berry portrays Miss Minnie as an angel of the hearth, not as an evangelical demon. See Part Two of Chapter Three for more on Miss Minnie.

> Something is badly awry here. At the end of this great book we are asked to believe—or to believe that Huck believes—that there are no choices between the "civilization" represented by pious slave owners like Miss Watson or lethal 'gentlemen' like Colonel Sherburn and lighting out for the Territory. . . .
>
> It is arguable, I think, that our country's culture is still suspended as if at the end of *Huckleberry Finn*, assuming that its only choices are either a deadly "civilization" of piety and violence or an escape into some "Territory" where we may remain free of adulthood and community obligation. . . . We have imagined the bachelorhoods of nature and genius and power: the contemplative, the artist, the hunter, the cowboy, the general, the president—lives dedicated and solitary in the Territory of individuality. But boyhood and bachelorhood have remained our norms of "liberation," for women as well as men. We have hardly begun the coming responsibility that is the meaning, and the liberation, of growing up. We have hardly begun to imagine community life. . . . (75-76)

The novels that Berry wrote after moving home to Kentucky represent his attempt to portray a healthy community life by portraying an idealized farming community. Berry portrays characters favorably only if they are committed to their land and their families. Characters who "light out for the Territory" literally and metaphorically are presented as fundamentally flawed.

Having resisted the urge to "light out for the Territory" and having lived and farmed in one place for forty years now, Berry has come to a very different understanding of the novel that influenced him the most: "There is, then," he laments, "something stunted in *Huckleberry Finn.* I have hated to think so—for a long time I consciously tried *not* to think so—but it is so. What is stunted is the growth of Huck's character" (76-77).[14] Huck

[14] Berry's analysis of *Huckleberry Finn* and his conclusion that Huck and Americans in general are stunted is clearly inspired by Leslie Fiedler's *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960). Fiedler argues that "our novels seem not primitive, perhaps, but innocent, unfallen in a disturbing way, almost juvenile. The great works of American fiction are notoriously at home in the children's section of the library, their level of sentimentality precisely that of a pre-

is stunted, Berry believes, because of his "evasion of the community responsibility that would have been a natural and expectable next step after his declaration of his loyalty to his friend. Mark Twain's failure or inability to imagine the possibility was a disaster for his finest character, Huck, whom we next see not as a grown man, but as a partner in another boyish evasion, a fantastical balloon excursion to the Pyramids" (77). "I am supposing, then," writes Berry, "that *Huckleberry Finn* fails in failing to imagine a responsible, adult community life. And I am supposing further that this is the failure of Mark Twain's life, and of our life, so far, as a society" (77). Berry's entire corpus can be seen as his response to *Huckleberry Finn*. When writing his original version of *Nathan Coulter*, Berry's sympathies lay with the adventurous, restless Huck Finn; when writing his later novels his sympathies lay with domestic, nurturing women. Berry's later novels represent his attempt to write fiction about "adult community life" rather than adolescent individualism.

Except for *Nathan Coulter* and parts of *A Place on Earth*, Berry has written all of his fiction on his farm near Port Royal, Kentucky, and all of his novels are set in a fictional town named Port William. Five novels follow *Nathan Coulter—A Place on Earth* (1967, 1983 rev.),[15] *The Memory of Old Jack* (1974), *Remembering* (1988), *A World Lost* (1996), and *Jayber Crow* (2001)—and four collections of short stories—*The Wild*

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adolescent" (24). He adds that "the typical male protagonist of our fiction has been a man on the run, harried into the forest and out to sea, down the river or into combat—anywhere to avoid 'civilization,' which is to say, the confrontation of a man and woman which leads to the fall into sex, marriage, and responsibility" (26).

15 As with *Nathan Coulter*, Berry revised *A Place on Earth* by cutting rather than by adding, and he edited out well over two hundred pages, taking the novel from 550 pages down to 317. Berry's primary objective when revising seems to have been to provide more unity and to maintain the focus on Mat Feltner and his struggle to accept his son's death during the last year of World War II. As such, Berry deleted over thirty pages that provided background information both about Mat Feltner's childhood and about his father, Ben Feltner. He cut almost twenty pages of Mat writing in his daybook and writing letters to Virgil. In these passages, Mat explains how he feels about what is happening, and Berry was wise to cut all of them. Berry also excised a number of scenes providing background information on secondary characters such as Whacker Spradlin, Uncle Stanley Gibbs, and Brother Preston. He also whittled down the last section of the novel, Part V, from 41 pages to 10 pages. The bulk of these excisions consist of Mat writing in his daybook and a description of Nathan's return from the war. Besides the revisions directed at maintaining unity, Berry made some revisions that seem to have been done with the same intention as the revisions of *Nathan Coulter*, namely, to domesticate the farmers, to whitewash the history of these characters. For example, he omits a mention of Mat's father Ben's accumulation of quite a bit of land and a description of that land's neglect. Mat is one of the Port William membership, and it would be inappropriate for his father to have been an overly ambitious and careless farmer. Since Berry had started *A Place on Earth* well before he moved back to Port Royal in 1964, it is likely that Berry wrote these less flattering sections before he decided to come back to Kentucky to farm.

Birds (1986), *Fidelity* (1992), *Watch with Me* (1994), and *Two More Stories of the Port William Membership* (1997).[16] After *Nathan Coulter*, the rest of Berry's fiction is more of a piece thematically, representing his idealized vision of hardworking and self-sufficient farm families living in a thriving farming community, much as traditional domestic novels often portray an idealized vision of a Christian family and use an idealized family as the standard against which all families are measured. Whereas Burley Coulter, the most sympathetic character in *Nathan Coulter*, denigrates marriage, Berry's subsequent works of fiction are paeans to marriage, and they take marriage as both their primary subject and their most important metaphor.

As in domestic novels, threats to domesticity drive Berry's fiction; but his domestic-pastoral novels address both family themes and issues concerning farming and farming communities. Thus the narrative thrust in Berry's novels is towards a resolution of both the problems that preclude a happy home life and the problems that impede a productive farm life—whether the threats are external or within the characters themselves. The rest of this chapter discusses the ways in which the conventions of the domestic-pastoral tradition inform Berry's fiction and help shed light on his thematic concerns. No critic has written on Berry's novels and short stories in any depth, and no one has looked at Berry's fiction as domestic fiction. Berry's indebtedness to the pastoral tradition, however, is well known and his poetry is often discussed in those terms. Like domestic fiction, Berry's fiction develops only a limited number of themes, and he addresses most themes in more than one novel.

A Place on Earth, Berry's second novel, is his longest and, along with *Remembering*, arguably his best. Like Virgil's *Georgics*, *A Place on Earth* is set in the rural countryside during a time of war. The setting is Port William, Kentucky, during the last year of World War II. The naming of Mat and Margaret Feltner's son Virgil, who is at the center of the

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[16] These novels and stories will be addressed in the remainder of this chapter, except for *Watch with Me*, which will be considered separately in Chapter Three and *Two More Stories*, which will be discussed in Chapter Five.

novel although he is never a part of the action, is Berry's homage to pastoral tradition. Threats to families and farms in the novel come from both nature and civilization. Recall that Leo Marx refers to the rural pastoral retreat as a "middle landscape," a clearing threatened by either the wilderness or the city—or both. In Berry's *A Place on Earth*, the farming community around Port William is threatened by both the wilderness and the city, by both nature and civilization. In *A Place on Earth*, a disastrous flood is nature's threat, and as in Virgil's *Georgics*, war is a metonym for civilization run amok. The novel addresses the impact that both war and natural disasters have on families, and it shows how various characters live up to—or fail to live up to—the ideal of marriage both to spouse and to community and land.[17]

The main plot is driven by the anxiety of Mat and Margaret Feltner over their only son Virgil, an enlisted man missing in action who, as becomes more clear as the novel progresses, is likely dead. How this loss affects the marriage and how Mat in particular deals with Virgil's death is the novel's main subject. Two subplots concern war's threat to families and farms. Burley and Jarrat Coulter, friends and neighbors of the Feltners whom the reader will remember from *Nathan Coulter*, are struggling with the death of Tom and the absence of Nathan: Tom has already died in the war and Nathan is fighting on the European front. One of Mat's oldest friends, storeowner Frank Lathrop, also has a son in the war. Friends for years, now they have a shared sorrow, and they listen to the news of the war on the radio with concerned attention. Another subplot depicts the threats posed by nature. Gideon and Ida Crop suffer the loss of their daughter Annie when she is swept off a bridge by a flash flood and drowned. These troubled households create the dramatic tension that drives the novel. Sitting in the home of his profligate cousin Roger Merchant, Mat "is aware of other houses: Gideon Crop's, the Coulters', his

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[17] In "Wendell Berry's Husband to the World: *A Place on Earth*," Jack Hicks touches briefly on the importance of marriage as subject and metaphor in *Nathan Coulter* and *The Memory of Old Jack*, but he believes the "Image of the exemplary husband" is expressed most completely "in the fullest and most satisfying fiction to date, *A Place on Earth*" (122). His essay was originally published in 1979, when Berry had published only three novels.

own—and others, at all distances, in all times of day and night, troubled by deaths and absences" (149).[18]

In *A Place on Earth*—and all his subsequent fiction for that matter—the ideal against which all marriages and families are compared is Berry's vision of a good farm family: a pleasant household and an orderly, self-sufficient homestead that is bound to other households through affection and shared work. For Berry, a good farm family also must aspire to permanence through the generations. The hope is that the children will be raised to inherit the farm, that they will appreciate the domestic arts and desire a farming life. Thus, like domestic literature, *A Place on Earth* is concerned with the raising of children. As critic Mary Ryan points out, the anxiety brought on by the passage from home to the world, from childhood to adulthood, is one of the significant themes of family literature. The nineteenth-century literary domestics were concerned with imparting moral instruction to their children so that they would carry the virtue associated with the home out with them into corrupt society. Ryan calls this "tying the maternal knot," explaining that "If her maternal tutelage was wise, continual, and loving, a mother was promised that her hold upon her children would endure, however far her offspring roamed" (46). Berry's fiction pays more attention to relationships between fathers and sons than to mothers and daughters. Since a proper marriage to the land requires, according to Berry, a sense of long-term, multi-generational commitment, Berry's farmers want to see their sons follow in their footsteps. A good husbandman must tie the paternal knot, as it were, to inculcate the pastoral ideal and to ensure that his son inherits both a desire to farm and good farming ethics.

Mat has always wanted Virgil to be a farmer, but he knows that fathers teaching sons is potentially tricky business. So he instructs his son indirectly by relying upon others to

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[18] The focus is on Mat and Margaret Feltner and Ida and Gideon Crop, for they both lose children in the course of the novel. Frank Lathrop's son survives the war, as does Nathan. The reader is never privy to how Frank Lathrop's anxiety affects his marriage, and although Burley's concern for his nephew Nathan is described and Jarrat's is hinted at, there is no husband-and-wife relationship to be affected.

serve as surrogate fathers. One surrogate is Mat's brother-in-law Ernest Finley. While helping Ernest paint the roof of a feed barn, Virgil asks his uncle,

> "why aren't you after me all the time the way [my father] is?" "Because you listen to me better than you do to him." Virgil laughs. "Why?" "Because he's your daddy and I'm not. That's the way it always is, and he knows that too. That's the reason he sends you to work with me as often as he does" (167).

In addition to exposing his son to surrogates, Mat tries not to impose his will on Virgil but to let him make his own decisions. He tells Hannah, Virgil's wife,

> When he came home from college after his last year, I asked him, "What are you planning to do?" Lord Knows, I'd wanted to know a long time before that, and he'd mentioned wanting to farm before, but the time to ask and be told never had come until then. And I was worried a good deal, because I wanted him to come home here and take this up—or wanted him to want to—and was afraid he wouldn't. And was afraid, too, that he'd see what I had on my mind. But I held right steady, watching him, and he said, "I want to stay here and farm with you."
>
> I'll never forget it. I'd have liked to just stop everything right there and celebrate. But I knew we'd only come to the beginning, and you don't celebrate at the beginning—even at the risk of never celebrating at all. (174)

According to the logic of domestic-pastoral ideology, that Mat has passed on his love of farming to Virgil proves that he has succeeded as a father. Having passed his pastoral dream on to his son, the loss of that son is all the more tragic for Mat.

Ultimately, war, an external threat to Mat's parental hopes and pastoral dreams, becomes an internal threat when Mat cannot accept Virgil's presumed death. Although Virgil's pregnant wife Hannah might provide some solace, Mat can only rage against the injustice of Virgil's death and shut himself off from others.

> Margaret watches him, aware of the change in him. She knows that since the morning of the baby's birth, when like lovers they seemed to meet and gather in

> the same joy, something has been breaking between them. This morning she felt it in his silence.
>
> And Mat is aware of it too. He knows that he is in retreat from her. . . . Nothing that happens can touch him now. He is out of reach, set apart by the certainty of death. . . . (229)

Soon Mat declares what has become a forgone conclusion. "Virgil is dead," he says. "He's not going to come back. He's dead, Margaret. Hannah, he's dead. Say so" (231). Hollowed out by loss, Mat is absent from the home in all but body. In a parallel situation, neighbor Gideon Crop has left home and has not been heard from since his daughter was killed in a flood. He leaves to search for his daughter in the floodwater, but it becomes clear that he stays away because he cannot bear the pain of being at home without her. Neither Mat nor Gideon can bear the death of his child, and their inability to cope with their losses pulls them away from their marriages.

Margaret Feltner and Ida Crop, however, stay strong. As the conventions of domesticity dictate, the women keep the marriages and households together in the face of family tragedies. In a strange substitution, having shut out Margaret, Mat begins to depend on Ida Crop's fortitude and resilience to give him the strength to carry on. Like Fleda, one of the mature, competent heroines of American domestic fiction, who, in Susan Warner's *Queechy*, ably managed her uncle's farm in his absence, Ida does all the farm work while Gideon is away. She has planted corn and tobacco, started the vegetable garden, and overseen the rebuilding of the barn and the bridge that had been damaged in the flood. She has kept the household in order for Gideon's return. Her emotional resilience impresses Mat even more than her hard work:

> She amazes Mat, and encourages him, though he comes on the pretense of encouraging her. Beyond her pain and endurance and will, it seems to him that there's a hopefulness in her that is almost calm. It comes, he thinks, from the knowledge, not just that she is young enough yet to have more children, but that

> other women will get with child, other children will be born, it will go on. It seems to Mat that this must be one of the powers of women. He does not have it in him. (193)

Berry suggests that Ida's acceptance of Annie's death comes to her from her nature as a woman, much as Margaret's acceptance of Virgil's death seems to. Margaret tells Mat,

> From the day he was born I knew he would die. That was how I loved him, partly. I'd brought him into the world that would give him things to love, and take them away. You too, Mat. You knew it. I knew it so well that he would die that, when he did disappear from us the way he did, I was familiar with the pain. I'd had it in me all his life. (257)

As domestic ideology purports, a special understanding of life and death, special powers of reconciliation and acceptance, are at the core of a woman's being. Mat is excluded from this understanding because he is a man. He will, however, find a source of hope as he acknowledges the part he plays in the regenerative cycles of nature.

As a good husbandman, Mat approximates the reproductive powers of women by birthing animals and nurturing his livestock and his crops. "[H]e hungers for the births and lives of his animals, as though the life of his place must be held up by him, like something newborn, until the warm days will come again and the pastures begin to grow" (84). Berry describes an instance when Mat successfully delivers a lamb from an exhausted ewe after one had been stillborn; Mat caresses and prods the lamb so that it soon begins nursing. As a good husbandman, Mat is a good midwife. In *The Unsettling of America*, Berry writes, "a man who is in the traditional sense a *good* farmer is husbandman and husband, the begetter and conserver of the earth's bounty, but he is also midwife and motherer. He is a nurturer of life. His work is domestic" (116). By nurturing his crops, mothering his animals, and participating in the regenerative cycles of nature, Mat gains access to the source of solace that sustains Ida and Margaret.

As a good husband, Mat is much gentler than any of the men portrayed in *Nathan Coulter*. In stark contrast to Dave Coulter's impetuous violence and Jarrat's cold reticence and competitive drive, Mat affectionately hugs his grandsons Andy and Henry Catlett. He holds their hands and calls them "honey." He approaches the domestic ideal of a feminized man, a man whose masculinity is softened by the feminine virtues. Although Mat's self-imposed isolation has pained Margaret and created tension in the home, by the novel's end, he turns again to his wife for comfort, and in doing so, comforts her. Just as Gideon returns physically to his wife and his home after months of aimless wandering, Mat finally relents and returns emotionally to Margaret and their life together.

The novel ends with a description of Mat's reconciliation with and acceptance of Virgil's death through an understanding of the regenerative cycles of nature. As a man, he has come to this understanding second hand—through women. As a husbandman, he has come to this understanding through the birthing and nurturing of animals. In the last scene of the novel, he goes into the woods in search of a cow that is soon to calve. Having found the mother and newborn calf well, he continues into the woods:

> There in the presence of the woods, in the sounds of the water and the leaves falling, he does not feel the loss of what is past.
>
> He feels the great restfulness of that place, its casual perfect order. It is the restfulness of a place where the merest or the most improbable accident is made a necessity and a part of a design, where death can only give into life. And Mat feels the difference between that restful order and his own constant struggle to maintain and regulate his clearings. Although the meanings of those clearings and his devotion to them remain firm in mind, he knows without sorrow that they will end, the order he has made and kept in them will be overthrown, the effortless order of the wilderness will return. (317)

War killed his son; wilderness will overrun his farm. Mat, the good husband and good husbandman, now accepts the impermanence of family and farm; they will suffer the

ravages of time and death, but he accepts this inevitable cycle. His acceptance makes him whole again and saves his marriage.

Although the main plot and sub-plots of *A Place on Earth* treat good marriages threatened by the deaths of children, the minor characters provide many examples of bad marriages—bad marriages in both the literal and metaphoric senses: bad marriages, that is, to people and to the land. Conforming to the conventions of the domestic novel, unhappy marriages provide a contrast to the happy and healthy marriages. Uncle Stanley Gibbs and his wife Pauline provide such a contrast. They live "like strangers who happen to have rooms in the same hotel" (67). Their marriage is like an "armistice, likely to break out into hostilities at any moment" (67). He works as a janitor and gravedigger for their church, and whenever the question of giving him an increase in wages or a Christmas bonus comes to a vote before the congregation, his wife consistently votes against him.

Mat's cousin Roger Merchant is the first of Berry's wastrel bachelors, men who have never sustained a marriage to women or to the land. They are anti-husbands in every sense of the term, each having rejected a lifelong commitment to a woman and the good work attending a good marriage, and they are either poor farmers or not farmers at all. Roger Merchant, one of the bad-farmers, lives on his ancestral farm as a debauched gentleman farmer with delusions of grandeur and an addiction to alcohol. His farm, worked by tenants, is overgrown with bushes and trees. The house, built by his grandfather, symbolizes his moral failings:

> The house and outbuildings haven't been painted in half a century. Bees live in the cornices. Maple seeds sprout kneehigh in the gutters. A rambler rose has completely overgrown the steps and posts of the front porch, live runners threading heavy meshes of dead growth. In the garden, briars grow as high as the fence posts. The wall of an outbuilding near the garden fence has burst, spilling an avalanche of tin cans and bottles down the slope. (105)

His house in disrepair and his garden unkempt, Roger is an utter failure by the standards of domestic-pastoral ideology. In fact, Berry describes Roger's house and farm in a manner strikingly similar to Stowe's description of the contemptible Simon Legree's house and grounds in *Uncle Tom's Cabin.*

Not all of Berry's bachelors, however, are unregenerate. Burley Coulter proves himself to be a good housekeeper and a committed farmer. Gone is the hard-drinking hunter who could not bear to be in the same room with his family and who would sneak out to hunt or carouse. We find that after his father died, Burley and his mother lived on together in the old house and Burley "made the first honest attempt in his life to please her. He tried—always fumblingly, often with extravagant miscalculation—to be the kind of son he figured she had wanted him to be. He left off, as nearly as he could bear it, what she thought his most wayward habits, and when he was not at work or in town on some errand he usually stayed at home with her" (39). They pass the time talking; and the "maternal knot" got tied so tight in those last years that after his mother's death we find that "He goes about his [housework] in about the same way his mother would have gone about it" (43). When he turns fifty, he writes Nathan a letter:

> Half a hundred years I've been alive. And it's a mystery where they've gone. I used to think that when I got to be a man I'd do what I pleased. And what I aimed to please to do was hunt and fish, and breed as far and wide as a tomcat. But there's a great many pretty girls that I've gone by, and a lot of good hunting nights, and a lot of fishing weather. It has happened that that wasn't so much what I was called to as I thought. What it has been, I reckon you would say, is love, for Jarrat and you boys. I realize now that if my calling hasn't been that, I haven't had one. (154)

Becoming more gentle, more devoted to his family and friends, Burley has acquired the feminine virtues domestic fiction values. He also becomes more committed to farming and comes closer to realizing the domestic-pastoral ideal.

Jayber Crow, Port William's bachelor barber, is ironically a great proponent of marriage: not of any particular marriage,

> But of marriage itself, of what has come to be, for him, a kind of last-ditch holy of holies: the possibility that two people might care for each other and know each other better than enemies, and better than strangers happening to be alive at the same time in the same town; and that, with a man and a woman, this caring and knowing might be made by intention, and in the consciousness of all it is, and of all it might be, and of all that threatens it. At these times it seems to Jayber that, of all the men in Port William, he's the most married—not in marriage, but to this ideal of marriage. (69)

No one can live up to Jayber's idealized conception of marriage, of course, and Berry's novel dramatizes varying degrees of success in attaining such an ideal marriage. The description of Jayber's speculations on marriage continues:

> The ideal rides ahead of the real, renewing beyond it, perishing in it—unreachable surely, but made new over and over again just by hope and the passage of time; what has not yet failed remains possible. And the ideal, remaining undiminished and perfect, out of reach, makes possible a judgment of failure, and a just grief and sympathy.
>
> In Port William, or beyond it or above it, Jayber imagines a kind of Heavenly City, in which each house would be built in a marriage and around it, and all the houses would be bound together in friendships, and friendliness would move and join among them like an open street. (69)

Perhaps Jayber is like Catherine Maria Sedgewick, who, by her own account, never married because "it is the high opinion of [marriage's] possibilities which has—perhaps kept me from adventuring in it" (qtd. in Kelley 242). In any event, Jayber describes the ideal marriage; and Berry lauds those who attempt to live up to this ideal and make a

perfect marriage to spouse and to community. Their shortcomings and struggles are the primary concern of his fiction.

In the tradition of sentimental domestic fiction, unrequited love and ruined marriages are used both to highlight happy marriages and to elicit an emotional response from readers. Ernest Finley's unrequited love for Ida Crop serves this dual purpose. Gideon's desperate, heartbroken departure after the death of Annie leaves Ida alone. Although one of his legs was badly injured in World War I, Ernest is still able to work as a carpenter,[19] and he is hired to rebuild the Crops' washed-out bridge and truss up their damaged buildings. Throughout the weeks that Ernest works there, Ida generously cooks dinner for him nearly every day and he falls in love with her; the vision of the two of them married and living on that farm becomes his dream. Berry explains that for Ernest "the most passing thought of her . . . wakes the dream of household and farm" (259). The description of his undeclared and rather awkward love for Ida is touchingly done. But she is only being kind and is patiently waiting for her husband to return. When Gideon does in fact return, Ernest loses his chance at domestic bliss and is devastated enough to slit his wrists.

The Memory of Old Jack (1974), Berry's next novel, is set on one day in September 1952, the last day of ninety-two-year-old Jack Beechum's life. Most of the novel consists of Jack's memories of his long life, particularly his unfortunate marriage to Ruth Lightwood, which he refers to as the tragedy of his life. Jack was a good farmer and had had a healthy marriage with his land. But his failure was that "he had not united farm and household and marriage bed, and he could not" (165-66). And his bad marriage to his wife almost destroys his marriage to his farm. Many early sentimental domestic novels—especially ones published before 1818 in the United States—depicted disastrous courtships and served as cautionary tales for their young female readers. These novels

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[19] In his naming of a man who suffered a leg injury in World War I, Berry is certainly alluding to Ernest Hemingway. In a story from *Fidelity* entitled "Making It Home," Berry writes a response to Hemingway's "Soldier's Home." In Berry's story, Art Rowanberry gladly returns home from WWI and there is every indication that he will be satisfied with his work on the farm. In fact, his appearance in other stories as an old man who still lives and farms there attests to that fact. Upon returning home from the war, Harold Krebs, on the other hand, is discontented with his home life.

served an important function because bad marriages were especially devastating for young women when societal conventions were such that women had few opportunities to support themselves. Marrying well is also important in Berry's domestic-pastoral fiction, and for additional different reasons—namely, that a farmer's marriage affects his marriage to his land. Through its presentation of Jack Beechum and Ruth Lightwood's ill-advised courtship and their failed marriage, *The Memory of Old Jack* is a cautionary tale for future husbands and husbandmen.

Born in 1860, just before the outbreak of the Civil War, Jack remembers his two much older brothers riding off to the war. Both were killed and his mother's death soon followed. "And so by the war's end the old house was infected with a sense of loss and diminishment" (23). Starting as a young child, Jack turns away from the house towards the fields of the family farm, "in which he already sensed an endlessly abounding and unfolding promise" (24). From the end of the war until his father's death in 1885, the farm has deteriorated, but Jack buys the farm from his siblings, lives alone in the old house, and begins to put the farm to rights. Having found his solace and calling in farming—and having thus achieved success by the standards of the pastoral tradition—all Jack needs to complete his life is to find a suitable wife.

Jack's eyes meet Ruth's for the first time across a crowded church, much as Troilus's and Criseyde's do at the Apollonian Festival in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*—and with results nearly as tragic. Their courtship, we learn, is a contest as much as anything else:

> He won her with his vices, she accepted him as a sort of "mission field." . . . He was a fool—a simpleton and a fool—to have loved to see the extravagance and grace of his youth reflected in a woman's gray eyes, not by straightforward love or desire, but by what he knows now to have been fear. Fear of what she even then instinctively knew to be her opposite, even her enemy. She accepted him as no doubt Saint Paul would have had her accept him—as a challenge to her hope and to her will. (51)

Thus an ill match dooms their marriage from the beginning. By marrying a man she hoped to change, Ruth makes a common but nonetheless serious mistake. By not seeing that he was Ruth's "opposite, even her enemy," Jack, being a number of years older, shows an even more pronounced lack of foresight.

Their marriage would be "the great disaster of both their lives" (51), for Ruth was raised to have ambitions different from Jack's. Her father had long since left the farming of his land to a succession of tenants and hired hands and had opened a hardware store in Hargrave.[20] Following the path of success as defined by modern American values, her family had moved off of the farm and into town,[21] and they expected her marriage to continue their social ascent. Because of her upbringing, Ruth holds Jack to a standard of success that he does not share and cannot live up to. Before marriage, Jack had been content with his farm of nearly 150 acres. "He was intact," the narrator tells us, "sustained within a tradition that she had renounced, or that had been renounced for her before her birth—the yeoman's tradition of sufficiency to himself, of faithfulness to his place" (57). The farm, however, was not large enough for Ruth's ambitions. She thinks Jack will become a great landowner and they will eventually move to town and perhaps someday travel. Slowly Ruth's dreams became Jack's:

> And so he began to move now, as he thought, in defiance of her judgment, but actually, in unconscious obedience to her judgment's chief implication: that no place may be sufficient to itself, but must lead to another place, and that all places must finally lead to money; that a man's work must lead not to the health of his family and the respect of his neighbors but to the market place, to that deference that strangers might yield to sufficient cash.
>
> What he had in mind now . . . was more land. (65)

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[20] Hargrave, which is situated where the Kentucky River flows into the Ohio River, is larger and more prosperous than Port William. In Berry's fictional universe, it represents the actual town of New Castle, KY.

[21] Faulkner traces this trajectory in the Snopes Trilogy.

To fulfill Ruth's ambitions and to make himself into a wealthy gentleman farmer, Jack has to look beyond his family farm and buy more land. To satisfy his new aspirations, he has to dispense with the domestic-pastoral virtues of health and neighborliness.

The Farrier place, which adjoins Jack's land, comes up for sale about this time. The temptation is overpowering: "Like the 'strange woman' whose delights were so carefully understood by Solomon, this new place claimed an ample space in his mind, which it implanted with its impulse and will, and filled with visions. . . . He wanted to see that place respond to him. He wanted to see it dress itself in green and be fertile and abundant for his sake" (67). The impulse seems in part a noble one, but the temptation of the Farrier place compromises Jack's Jeffersonian vision of a self-sufficient homestead. Now he needs hired help. His failed attempt to farm two farms at once forces him to find a buyer quickly for the Farrier land and to sell it for a significant loss, putting his farm at risk of foreclosure. He has to struggle for years to avoid losing his own farm.

Jack's infidelity as a husbandman leads to his infidelity as a husband. Seeing Jack buy another farm had made Ruth hopeful that her ambitions will be satisfied, so she had softened towards him and had become pregnant with another child. (Symbolically, their first child, a son, has been born dead.) But with the sale of the land and their now reduced circumstances, which she sees as "a profound foreclosure on her life" (85), she pulls away from him again, refusing even to show him his daughter after her birth. They never sleep together again, and Berry compares their marriage to "silent and barren and forbidden ground" (86).

Jack seeks sexual fulfillment elsewhere. His affair with an attractive young widow in town named Rose McGinnis continues for three years, with Jack leaving his downstairs bed at home unnoticed and making his way through the dark to Rose's house. But finally the essential impermanence of the relationship brings a revelation:

> His love for her led to nothing, could lead to nothing. As long as he might come to her he would come, however welcome, as a guest. It was as though he

> bore for these two women the two halves of an irreparably divided love. With Ruth, his work led to no good love. With Rose, his love led to no work. With Rose he had come within the gates of Eden, but had found there no possibility for a worldly faith or labor. With Ruth he had made an earthly troth and travail that bore no delight; they had lost the vision of their paradise. (134)

At home, he had a good marriage to his land but not a good marriage with a woman. With Rose, he had a good relationship with a woman, but it was not bound together by a good relationship to a farm. This was the tragedy of Jack's life.

The tragedy shows its effects in the failure of his daughter Clara to share his ideas of what it means to have a good home and a good homestead. Clara is fundamentally Ruth's child, poisoned by "her mother's thwarted ambition" (172-73). Like her mother, she is raised to leave the farm. In high school, she is sent away to a seminary for young ladies, and then she spends four years at a small church college in central Kentucky. In keeping with her mother's expectations, she soon marries Gladstone Pettit and moves to Louisville, where he establishes himself as a banker.[22] At Ruth's death, Jack suggests that Pettit buy the neighboring farm, hoping to bring his daughter back to her agricultural roots. Glad and Clara never even refuse Jack's proposition; it is simply never spoken of again. Jack's failure to sustain an agrarian lineage brings profound despair: "Because he had no descendent of both mind and blood, his own descent had become wayward; it led him out of his homeland into exile" (187). Recall that exile from home represents banishment from all that is worthwhile and good in a domestic novel; in Berry's domestic-pastoral novels, exile from one's homeland, from one's farm, is similarly a source of sorrow and remorse.

But Jack finds a way out. Although bereft of a blood relative to continue his agrarian legacy, in Elton Penn, his tenant farmer, Jack finds a son in all but name to whom he can pass on his farm. The successful transmission of both farm and farming

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[22] Although not a petit bourgeois, his name seems to allude to his status as a glad-handing bourgeois.

values from Jack to Elton and his wife Mary is an important sub-plot of *The Memory of Old Jack*. Elton becomes "the last keen delight of Old Jack's life—the inheritor of his ways" (41); and Elton's wife Mary keeps the household as neat and orderly as Elton keeps the farm. Jack's domestic tragedy is mitigated through this surrogate son and daughter who will inherit the farm and his ways. Toward the end, Jack

> withdrew, bluntly and finally, from all other relationships that had no meaning to him. He granted no more worth to mere formality or blood tie. . . . He would be faithful to what he belonged to: to his own place in the world and his neighborhood, to the handful of men who shared his faith. He believed that people could have no devotion to each other that they did not give at the same time to the place they had in common. He had taken his final stand. He would accept no comfort that was not true. (184-85)

Jack is faithful to the community of men who share the same outlook on life. Berry refers to this community as the "Port William membership," an idealized vision of a farming community bound together through shared work and affection. As such, Berry's Port William membership is a metaphoric marriage much like John Winthrop's vision of a Christian community joined through love.[23] Throughout the rest of his fiction, Berry presents a community that acts like—and in many cases is—an extended family. This perception of a community of like-minded people who remain faithful to each other and their land is an important part of Berry's domestic ideology. In his subsequent his fiction, Berry will show how various characters live up to the ideal of the Port William membership.

In this membership, there are older men who act as mentors and father figures, as "exemplars and taskmasters" (142). When Jack's father dies, Mat's father Ben becomes a surrogate father to him. And when Ben dies, Jack watches over Mat and provides him

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[23] In fact, Berry's use of the term "membership" may be inspired by the Puritans, for they called those people covenanted to the church "members."

with "the little uneasiness and the pressure that a young man can only get from an older man's knowing eye" (167). Memory provides social cohesion and holds the Port William membership together. Throughout his life, Jack has been faithful to the men with whom he shares the same place and the same ideals, as they are faithful to him, for the title *The Memory of Old Jack* refers not only to Jack's memories, which make up the majority of the novel, but also to the remembrance of Jack by his friends and family. The last scene of the novel is set in December in the stripping room on Jack's old farm, now Elton Penn's place. The men find themselves repeating Jack's favorite expressions: "By God, son, you're a good one! You're all right! You've got a good head on your shoulders, and you'll do!" and "I know what a man can do in a day" and "Settle for the half-assed, and then, by God, *Admire* it!" among others (222-23). "In all their minds," we are told,

> his voice lies beneath a silence. And in the hush of it they are aware of something that passed from them and now returns: his stubborn biding with them to the end, his keeping of faith with them who live after him, and what perhaps none of them has yet thought to call his gentleness toward them and toward this place where they are at work.[24] They know that his memory holds them in common knowledge and common loss. The like of him will not soon live again in this world, and they will not forget him. (223)

By repeating Jack's sayings and telling stories about him, Mat Feltner, the Coulters, Elton Penn, and the others keep his agrarian values alive and sustain the Port William membership through the generations.

One of the sub-plots in *The Memory of Old Jack* concerns Andy Catlett, Mat Feltner's grandson and Jack Beechum's great-nephew.[25] He looks up to Jack and the other

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24 Jack's domestic virtues win out in the end, at least in part, because Jack is another of Berry's good men who have managed to blend masculine and feminine qualities. He is said to have gotten his "sense of forbearing" and "almost tender kindness" from his father (26).

25 Andy Catlett is Wendell Berry's alter ego in the saga of the Port William membership. He was born, we will discover in Berry's next novel, *Remembering*, the same year as Wendell Berry, in 1934; and his father is a country lawyer involved with a marketing cooperative for tobacco growers, as was Berry's father. And Andy, like Berry, goes away to college and a career in the city only to return to the farming community of his youth.

farmers who comprise the Port William membership, but whether or not he will be an inheritor of their ways like Elton is an open question. Getting ready to go away to start college, Andy is dating a girl named Kirby from one of the first families of Hargrave, who "will be going to a fashionable Eastern school, in keeping with her social aspirations" (154). Clearly, there is the possibility for an unfortunate union similar to the tragic marriage between Jack and Ruth, for Andy still has not decided whether he wants to come back and farm or if his aspirations lie in the wide world. Although he has worked with the men in the fields during the summers and enjoys the work and their company, his future is uncertain. Male mentors will play a large part in his decision, certainly, for he looks up to Jack Beechum, Burley and Jarrat Coulter, and both his grandfathers—all the good farmers of the Port William membership, in fact. But the expectations of society at large will inevitably carry weight with a young man. To Jack's question of "What're you aiming to make of yourself?' he can only say, "A farmer, I guess" (152). The narrator informs us that Andy is afraid

> that in order to be what he might become he would have to cease to be what he had been, he would have to turn away from that place to which his flesh and his thoughts and his devotion belonged. For it was the assumption of much of his schooling, it was in the attitudes of most of his teachers and schoolmates, it was in the bearing of history toward such places as Port William, that achievement, success, all worthy hope lay elsewhere, in cities, in places of economic growth and power; it was assumed that a man must put away his origin as a childish thing. (143-44)

Whereas in the mid-nineteenth century, domestic ideology had permeated all aspects of society to the point that educators nation-wide consciously taught the domestic virtues, America's educational system in the late twentieth century is indifferent to or inimical of domestic-pastoral ideals. "The child," Berry writes in one of his essays, "is not educated to return home and be of use to the place and community; he or she is educated to *leave*

home and earn money in a provisional future that has nothing to do with place or community" (*What Are People For?* 163). Andy's friends and family acknowledge that Andy's relationship to Kirby and experiences at college may mean that he never comes back to live and farm in Port William. Through Andy, Berry emphasizes the role contemporary American mores and our educational system have in shaping a young man's attitudes towards farming.

"It Wasn't Me," a story from Berry's next book of fiction, a collection of short stories entitled *The Wild Birds* (1986),[26] provides a coda to *The Memory of Old Jack*. Jack Beechum's farm is inherited by his daughter and her husband, who then sell it to Elton and Mary Penn, whom Jack wanted to have it. The story directly addresses two important themes of domestic fiction found in Berry's fiction: (1) the necessity of having the domestic virtues of love and affection rather than legal and fiscal concerns guiding our behavior towards people and places, and (2) the conflict between individual desires and either family or community responsibility. Since Berry is a domestic-pastoralist and not just a writer of domestic fiction, these themes broadens out to address the land as well.

Set in January 1953, one month after the last scene in *The Memory of Old Jack*, the story opens with Jack's 150-acre farm on the auction block at the courthouse steps. Jack had willed Elton $15,000, which he thought would be half of his farm's purchase price. He wanted Elton and Mary Penn to have it because "he saw his farm going into a kind of widowhood" (54), and Jack has attempted to arrange a marriage of sorts between Elton and Mary Penn and his farm. Wheeler Catlett, Jack's friend and lawyer, tells Jack's daughter Clara:

> It's not a question of what was owed and what was paid, Clara. That wasn't what Uncle Jack had on his mind. There were other questions that he put ahead

[26] I will discuss certain stories from Berry's two collections of short stories, *The Wild Birds* and *Fidelity*, as they add thematically to the novels, but I will try to avoid unnecessary repetition. For example, "Thicker Than Liquor," from *The Wild Birds*, addresses two common themes of domestic fiction: (1) the perils of drinking and (2) identity formation through emulation. But the novel *Watch with Me* is a book-length treatment of these same themes.

> of that one. What would be best for this good pair of young people? What would be best for this good farm? What should be done here for the good of the world? . . . and he concluded that the best thing would be to put the good people and the good farm together—to bind their fates, so to speak (50).

But although Jack had made certain that he willed the $15,000 to Elton, he had forgotten to stipulate in his will that the farm be sold for $200 an acre. His mind was slipping in later years, and although he expressed his desire to set the price of the farm in a notebook he kept in the bib pocket of his overalls, he forgot to inform Wheeler Catlett, his friend, nephew, and lawyer. Wheeler did not see the note until after Jack had died, and although Wheeler tells Clara and Glad about it and explains Jack's wishes, Clara refuses to yield in getting "the fair market value" for her inheritance (50). For Clara and her husband, it is a matter of law, not love: "Old association, family ties, the dead man's wishes were left to blow as the wind listed" (51). The Pettit's live in a different world than Jack did; they speak a different language. Their materialist and capitalist perception of a farm as no more than mere property reveals their estrangement from a domestic-pastoral attitude toward the land, an attitude informed by the virtues of love and affection.

The manner in which Elton is finally able to buy Jack's farm highlights the conflict between individualism and family or community responsibility. At the auction, two men bid up the price, but since Wheeler feels obligated to see the old man's wishes fulfilled, he encourages Elton to keep bidding. Elton buys the farm finally for $300 an acre, which, we are told, will stretch his finances very thin. Having encouraged Elton to buy it, Wheeler offers to provide financial assistance in the future if necessary. But having already bought the farm with the help of Jack's bequeathed money, Elton balks at the notion of being obligated any further to other people and expresses sentiments inspired by the American dream of individualism and self-reliance. "I want to make it on my on," he tells Wheeler. "I don't want a soul to thank" (67). He goes on to say that "The line of

succession I'm in says you've got to make it on your own. I'm in the line of succession of root, hog, or die" (68). "[Y]ou're indebted to a dead man," Wheeler tells him.

> So am I. That's the story of it. Back of you is Jack Beechum. Back of him was Ben Feltner. Back of him was, I think, his own daddy. And back of him somebody else, and on back that way, who knows how far? And I'm back of you because Jack Beechum is, and because he's back of me, along with some others. (67)

Wheeler is saying that the Port William membership is a succession of men who have depended on one another for generations. The American myth of individualism and self-reliance over simplifies the true complexities of human life as it overlooks the ways in which we are indebted to one another, culturally and materially.

To Elton, however, these communal responsibilities and debts limit his freedom. Since Wheeler helped him, in part, out of a sense of obligation to Jack, Elton says, "You're going to be my friend, it sounds pret' near like, because you can't get out of it." To which Wheeler replies, "If I was his friend [i.e., Jack's friend], given what that meant, I can't get out of it." "You're saying," says Elton, "there's not any way to get out of this friendship." Wheeler's reply shows how Berry resolves the apparently irreconcilable conflict between individualism and communitarianism, between individual freedom and duty to family and community: "No," Wheeler says, "you can get out of it. By not accepting it. I'm the one, so far, who can't escape it. You have it because I've given it to you, and you don't have to accept. I gave it to you because it was given to me, and I accepted" (72). The domestic-pastoral values guiding Wheeler's behavior are based on a sense of obligation to people, both living and dead. Though living up to these obligations demands certain behavior, Berry has Wheeler emphasize Elton's choice in the matter, thereby reconciling the conflict between individual liberty and social responsibility.

In the end Elton accepts his indebtedness to others and lives up to his communal responsibilities. Berry believes in the sanctity of the individual, but not in a blinkered

and uninformed individualism. "[B]y ourselves," writes Berry, "we have no meaning and no dignity; by ourselves we are outside the human definition, outside our identity" (*Home Economics* 115). An individual is defined by both his individuality and by his unavoidable connections to the human community and the earth.

As Wheeler suggests with his observation that Elton's belief in his own self-reliance could exist only by ignoring "what it means in the first place just to be a living human" (67), even the most basic understanding of ecology forces one to acknowledge that self-reliance is a myth. Humans are of course indebted to the earth for our sustenance, and from an ecological perspective, the myths of individualism and self-reliance are pure folly. With an understanding of our intimate connections with the earth, Berry's good farmers share a sense of reciprocal obligation and duty between people and the land. Wheeler tells Elton,

> The land expects something from us. . . . We start out expecting things of it. All of us do, I think. And then some of us, if we stay put and pay attention, see that expectations are going the other way too. Demands are being made of us, whether we know it or know what they are or not. The place is crying out to us to do better, to be worthy of it. (68-69)

As with our obligations to other people, Wheeler suggests that we can freely choose to live up to our responsibilities to the earth.

In a story from *Fidelity* (1992) called "A Jonquil for Mary Penn," Berry presents a view of the community that Elton and Mary were part of when they were first married. Elton's mother's small farm is on Cotman Ridge, a close-knit neighborhood where the men and women share work like members of an ideal community. The emphasis in this particular story, however, is upon Mary Penn and the community of women. Since Mary is quite young and newly wed, the older women take her under their tutelage and become her mentor and friend. She becomes "a daughter to every woman in the community" (69). They instruct her in their ways of cooking, cleaning, and sewing; they teach her to

can, pickle, and preserve; even to perform the women's jobs at hog killing. Though Berry often portrays this kind of mentoring relationship between men in his fiction, this story shows that these mentoring relationships should and do exist between women in Berry's Port William membership. In this story Berry reveals his growing fondness for nurturing and able women like Twain's Aunt Polly and Aunt Sally.[27]

Berry's commitment to the conventions of domestic fiction are nowhere more clearly revealed than in this story, especially in a passage when Mary wakes after an illness to find that a neighbor, Josie Tom, has been caring for her and her home:

> When she woke, the room was warm. A teakettle on the heating stove was muttering and steaming. Though the wind was still blowing hard, the room was full of sunlight. The lamp on the narrow mantle behind the stove was filled and clean, its chimney gleaming, and so was the one on the stand by the bed. Josie Tom was sitting in the rocker by the window, sunlight flowing in on the unfinished long embroidery she had draped over her lap. She was bowed over he work, filling in with her needle and a length of yellow thread the bright corolla of a jonquil—or "Easter lily," as she would have called it. She was humming the tune of an old hymn. . . . (81)

This passage exemplifies what Glenna Matthews called "the domestic sublime." In it, Berry has managed to include nearly all the elements necessary for the quintessential domestic tableau: a kind matronly figure in a rocking chair doing embroidery in a clean, sun-lit room with a teakettle steaming nearby. The Christian undertones of domestic ideology, fittingly, are hinted at by the old hymn Josie Tom is humming.

Berry's next novel, *Remembering* (1988), concerns Andy Catlett, a character who was first introduced in *The Memory of Old Jack* as an eighteen-year-old heading off to college. In his early 40s, Andy is now experiencing a mid-life crisis that begins when he

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[27] Recall that the writers associated with the cult of domesticity often portrayed "Aunties of high repute," as Stowe put it, who would help younger heroines along.

loses his hand in a farming accident. While helping harvest a corn crop at Nathan Coulter's, his hand gets stuck in a corn picker and is cut off.[28] As the result of his injury, Andy succumbs to emotional despair: "it was as though his soul had withdrawn from his life," the narrator explains, "refusing any longer to live in it" (33). His injury damages his relationship to his wife, his community, and his farm. The resolution of his conflict is the subject of this domestic-pastoral novel.[29]

Andy's injury affects his marriage on a purely physical level because he can no longer hold his wife Flora. Here Berry employs a metaphor that reflects his whole domestic-pastoral paradigm: Andy "remembered his poise as a two-handed lover, when he reached out to Flora and held and touched her . . . and his hand knew her as a man knows his homeland. Now the hand that joined him to her had been cast away . . ." (28). The injury causes Andy to withdraw from his wife emotionally. "He did not trust her to love him," we read. "He did not trust himself to trust her to love him" (35). His self-pitying distrust causes Andy to lose faith in his marriage.

The novel opens with Andy, having skipped out on a speaking engagement at a nearby university, lying awake in a hotel room San Francisco. He arises before dawn and wanders the city alone for hours imagining other lives he could lead: "He feels the simplicity and lightness of his solitude. Other lives, other possible lives swarm around him" (51). He envisions himself as a bachelor living in San Francisco, a new man free to reinvent himself and pursue his interests:

> Andy is filled with a yearning toward this place. He imagines himself living here. He would have a small apartment up here on the hillside, a cliff dwelling, looking out over the bay. He would live alone, and slowly he would come to know a peacefulness and gentleness in his own character, having nobody to

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[28] That a machine mangles his hand is symbolic of the destruction caused by industry. That which destroyed his hand is destroying farms and farming communities everywhere, as the dream that opens the novel suggests.

[29] Edward Donley Taft writes about *Remembering* in the last chapter of his dissertation, *The Land and Moral Responsibility in the Work of Wendell Berry.* He focuses on the themes of reconciliation and wholeness: how Andy, having lost his hand, is re-membered by remembering.

> quarrel with. He would have a job that he could walk to in the morning and walk home from in the evening. It would be a job that would pay him well and give him nothing to worry about before he went to it or after he left it. In his spare time he would visit the museums. He would dress well and eat well. He would learn Japanese and spend his vacations in Japan. He would become a student of Japanese culture and art. He would bring back pottery and painting. His apartment would be a place of refuge, quiet and orderly, full of beautiful things. (45)

Family and farm now seem burdens. Lost in his reveries in San Francisco, he gets further still from home.

Although by all indications Flora is an understanding woman and a good wife and mother, Andy's restlessness and dissatisfaction bring a longing for a life of sexual freedom; he

> feels his mind tugged this way and that by lovely women. They seem to be everywhere, beautiful women in summer dresses beautifully worn, flesh suggesting itself, as they move, in sweet pressures against cloth. He lets them disembody him, his mind on the loose and rambling, envisioning unexpectable results, impossible culminations. . . . He hears their music, each a siren on her isle, and deep in his own innards cello strings throb and strum in answer. (93-94)

The siren song has wrecked many a marriage and other women begin to tempt Andy, as they have many a married man.[30]

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[30] Berry alludes to *The Odyssey* because in it he sees "an affirmation of the values of domesticity and farming" (*Unsettling of America* 129). Odysseus's choice to leave his lover Kalypso, and the immortal life she offers, to return home to his wife Penelope and a mortal life span is the ultimate act of sacrifice for the domestic ideal. Berry writes, "For Odysseus, then, marriage was not merely a legal bond. . . . It was part of a complex practical circumstance involving, in addition to husband and wife, their family of both descendents and forbears, their household, their community, and the sources of all these lives in memory and tradition, in the countryside, and in the earth. These things, wedded together in his marriage, he thought of as his home, and it held his love and faith so strongly that sleeping with a goddess could not divert or console him in his exile" (127). *The Odyssey* was clearly an inspiration for *Remembering*; in fact, when Andy tells Flora he wants to move back home she is, like Penelope, sitting and sewing. For Berry's discussion of *The Odyssey* see *The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture*, pp 124-130.

Estranged from his wife—his metaphoric homeland—Andy is self-exiled. This dilemma drives the novel's plot. Recall William Spengemann's explanation that plot in a domestic novel is determined by either a problem with the protagonist or a problem at home:

> The problems that drive the protagonist away from home arise from remediable deficiencies in him, in his particular domestic situation, or both. If he is motivated by restlessness or foolish ambition, exile will teach him the vanity of wanderlust and the value of contentment and resignation. If domestic difficulties drive him out unwillingly, something will happen at home during his absence to clear up the misunderstanding and injustices that forced him to leave. (71)

In *Remembering*, the problem, clearly, is with Andy, and as Spengemann's formula for domestic fiction suggests, Andy will learn the error of his ways by the end of the novel and return home literally and metaphorically.

That Andy loses his hand is meaningful because hands have symbolic significance in Berry's fiction. Throughout his works, hands symbolize connection to other people, membership. In novel after novel, Berry's characters meaningfully touch one another, putting their hands on one another's shoulders or arms. But the imprint of one character's hand on the flesh of another is much less important than the imprint on the other character's mind, and the physical contact is much less important than the emotional connection.[31] In losing his hand, Andy has lost his connection to other people. As Berry writes of Andy's loss, "His right hand had been the one with which he reached out to the world and attached himself to it. When he lost his hand he lost his hold" (28). His isolation is compounded by the fact that he is separated not only from his family but also from his community of friends and neighbors. When the time of the alfalfa harvest had

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[31] Hand imagery figures prominently in traditional domestic fiction as well. In her discussion of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Jane Tompkins writes of "the vocabulary of clasping hands and falling tears" (132).

come around, Andy had gotten help from his friends, but he had raged internally against his clumsiness and feebleness. At the end of the day, Andy had told them, "I don't know how I can ever repay you" (39). "Help *us*," Nathan says, as he grabbed Andy's right forearm right above his missing hand. The narrator explains that "The clamp of Nathan's hand, by which Nathan had meant to include him, excluded him. Because he could not answer it, it lived upon his flesh like a burn, the brand of his exile" (39-40). The loss of Andy's hand is a ready symbol for his isolation and it is especially suggestive for readers familiar with Berry's other novels.

His estrangement from his family and friends is paralleled in his attitude toward farming. He feels useless around the farm for he can no longer do the work he previously could. Just as he questions his commitment to being a husband, his injury causes him to question both his ability to farm and his commitment to husbandry. Since for Berry "domestic" refers to home and homeland and being a husband means being married both to a woman and to the land, it is not surprising that Andy's domestic crisis broadens out to a domestic-pastoral crisis.

Andy faces a basic life choice now that he has lost faith in his role as a father and a farmer. The novel goes back in time to trace the stages in Andy's earlier decision to return home and shows what events and which people influence that decision. After college, he had pursued a career as an agricultural journalist in both San Francisco and Chicago. While working for *Scientific Farming* in the early 1960s, his editor sends him to do a story on an ambitious and progressive farmer named Bill Meikelberger, who was, as Andy's editor puts it, "one of the leaders of the shock troops of the scientific revolution in agriculture" (73). Andy finds that Meikelberger is "the fulfillment of the dreams of his more progressive professors. On all the two thousand acres there was not a fence, not an animal, not a woodlot, not a tree, not a garden. The whole place was planted in corn, right up to the walls of the two or three unused barns that were still standing" (73). Andy discovers that the house is empty, because the Meikelberger children have all moved on to

successful careers in various cities and his wife has taken a job in town. Andy also learns that Meikelberger is in debt and has an ulcer from worry. Not quite convinced that Meikelberger is the success his editor believes him to be, Andy leaves and heads east from Meikelberger's farm, south of Columbus, Ohio, towards Pittsburgh. Passing through Amish country, he sees a man plowing a field with a three-horse team. Isaac Troyer's family had farmed this eighty-acre farm for seventy-four years. Using repetitive sentence structures to mimic Andy's childlike recitation of the pleasing things on the Amish farm, Berry writes, "He saw that the buildings were painted and in good repair. He saw the garden, newly worked and partly planted behind the house. He saw the martin boxes by the garden, and the small orchard with beehives under the trees. He saw fifteen guernsey cows and two more black mares in a pasture" (80). Isaac's parents, Isaac, his wife, and the five children live on the farm and all find work to make themselves useful. Most important to Andy, Isaac Troyer's farm "was a home to many lives, tame and wild, of which Isaac's was only one, and was so meant. There was something—Andy was trying for words—something cordial or congenial or convivial about it. Whatever it was, it said that a man could live with trees and animals and a bending little tree-lined stream; he could live with neighbors" (81). Having seen, in two days' time, two farmers with radically different relationships to their farms and radically different notions of success, Andy knows what he wants. Recall that Jane Tompkins explains that domestic novels "teach readers what kind of behavior to emulate or to shun" by showing young female characters making prudent or imprudent choices concerning marriage (*Sensational Designs* xvii). Like a young woman soon to be a bride, Andy is soon to make a lifelong commitment to the land, and with these two farmers, he is presented with an example of both a bad marriage to the land and a good marriage to the land. At Isaac Troyer's farm that day, Andy has an epiphany of sorts, and he decides that he would like to have a farm like Isaac Troyer's. Flora likes the idea and soon after they move back to Kentucky to

farm. Andy's life-altering decision to leave Chicago and return home to Kentucky to farm takes place in 1964.[32]

But in 1976, the year in which *Remembering* is set, Andy has lost hold of his dream of being a farmer, a husband, and a father. Twelve years after that day at Isaac Troyer's farm, after having once chosen home, Andy is now self-exiled from his family and his homeland. Andy must decide again whether or not he wants the life he had envisioned that day. By remembering and re-choosing his dream to be a farmer, Andy discovers that his now-dead father, who passed down his agrarian dream, guides his decision unconsciously. Years before, his father's vision of pastoral paradise was impressed upon Andy with a hand while they looked out at cattle coming to water. "[A]s if to summon Andy's mind back from wherever it may be wandering, for Andy's mind can always be supposed to be wandering, Wheeler takes hold of his shoulder and grips it. 'Look. See what it is, and you'll always remember it'" (69). Years after that moment with his father, Andy remembers that while admiring Isaac Troyer's farm twelve years before, he had felt that "He walked as with his father's hand on his shoulder, and his father's voice in his ear, saying, 'Look! Look!'" (80). Both his father and grandfather had chosen to return home after having gone away as young men. Andy remembers them and is aware that his own return now will be part of a "succession of such returns" (66).

Berry expands the thematic implications of Andy's mid-life choice. Having decided to travel the two thousand miles back home from the west coast, Andy is reminded of all the Americans who went west in the hopes of a better life, pioneering frontiersmen and prospectors—boomers, as Wallace Stegner calls them—people who believed the grass was always greener and a better life lay right over the horizon. When, leaning over a rail and looking out over the Pacific Ocean, Andy reaches the decision to return home a

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[32] It is worth noting that 1964 is also the year that Berry decided to leave New York City and move back to Port Royal. This is not a coincidence. As noted, Andy Catlett is Berry's fictional counterpart in the stories of the Port William membership.

second time, "a history turns around in his mind, as if some old western migrant, who had reached the edge at last and seen the blue uninterruptible water reaching out around the far side of the world, had turned in his tracks and started eastward again" (65). By comparing himself to "some old western migrant," Andy places his decision to return home in a broader context. He is thinking about America and how America needs to re-choose its path. Confronted with many possible lives, poised between a life of self-gratification and a life of familial and communal responsibilities, Andy chooses responsibility. He realizes that his adventurous impulses would have led him in the wrong direction, just as America is headed in the wrong direction. The woman sitting next to Andy on the plane back to Kentucky is reading *Beyond the Hundredth Meridian: John Wesley Powell and the Second Opening of the West,* by Wallace Stegner (100). Seeing the title, Andy thinks, "Of the one-armed Powell and his men on the Colorado, living by intelligence and strength and will alone" (105). Powell was a one-armed adventurer who pushed back the frontier; Andy is a one-handed man trying not to open the west but to find his way home. Seeing a rootless population with little commitment to places or to each other, Andy concludes that frontier values have held sway for long enough. During the flight home, Andy thinks, *"I should walk. I should redo every step. It is all to be learned again"* (105). By returning to his family and his farm, Andy is being led by the domestic-pastoral muse that inspired the Jeffersonian ideal of yeoman farmer.[33] *Remembering* is set on June 21, 1976, both because Andy is in the middle of his life and is having a mid-life crisis and because the options he faces, adventurousness and domesticity, are presented as options for America. Setting the novel during the Bicentennial year, Berry emphasizes that he is addressing an American crisis of values, not just one man's crisis.

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[33] That this is so is suggested by the fact that Andy and his wife first met in a seminar on American history, studying for a test on Thomas Jefferson.

In his next novel, *A World Lost* (1996), Berry uses Andy Catlett as narrator. Now a sixty-year-old man, he is trying to understand the circumstances of his Uncle Andrew's murder over fifty years ago when Andy was a boy of nine. He speculates as to what kind of man his uncle was and what his uncle meant to him as a young boy—and what he continues to mean to him. *A World Lost* is a metaphysical detective story of sorts. In trying to solve the murder, Andy is trying both to solve the mystery of his uncle's character and to better understand himself.[34] "For fifty years and more I have been asking myself," Andy muses, "What was he? What manner of a man? For I have never been sure" (39). Andy's question is important to him because he wanted to grow up to be like his uncle, even in school taking to signing himself "Andrew Catlett, Jr." "Sometimes it seemed unfair to me that I was not his son," he remembers. "I wanted to be a man just like him" (35). But Uncle Andrew becomes a haunting example of the way a man should not live his life.

Just what sort of a man Uncle Andrew was is a difficult question. Uncle Andrew was, from Andy's perspective as a child, just the sort of man boys would enjoy being around. "He talked to us boys," Andy explains, "as he talked to everybody else, and in that way he charmed us. To us, he seemed to exist always as the center of his own uproar, carrying on in a way that was restless, reckless, humorous, and loud" (29). Andy enjoyed nothing more than being with his Uncle Andrew because, as he explains it nearly fifty years later, "when you were loose in the world with Uncle Andrew you did not know what to expect" (31). "And yet," the adult Andy realizes, "there was something dark or troubled in him also, as though he foresaw his fate; I felt it even then" (39). Uncle Andrew, it seems, was a bit too wild: "as wild," Andy explains, "as any human I have ever known. He was a man, I think, who was responsive mainly to impulses: desire, affection, amusement, self-abandonment, sometimes anger" (40). He was, we are told, a man of

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34 For a discussion of metaphysical detective fiction, see Michael Holquist's "Whodunit and Other Questions: Metaphysical Detective Stories in Post-War Fiction," William V. Spanos's "The Detective and the Boundary: Some Notes on the Postmodern Literary Imagination," and Stefano Tani's *The Doomed Detective*.

"extraordinary good looks" who had a way with women (39). He also liked to drink; there were days when he was not his usual joyful self and napped through half a workday. He was also reckless and impulsive and would say anything that came into his mind. As an older and more experienced man, Andy believes that Uncle Andrew's impulsiveness led to his death.

As a role model for finding a vocation, Uncle Andrew was a bad choice because he never really found work about which he was passionate. After having lived in several different cites and having been a traveling salesman for both a hardware company and a distillery, Uncle Andrew had come back to Hargrave in 1940 to oversee two farms that his brother Wheeler has bought. Wheeler had decided that Uncle Andrew should come home and farm, because his drinking had become a problem again. Uncle Andrew and Aunt return, but Andrew is an indifferent farmer. From his perspective half a century later, Andy acknowledges that Uncle Andrew "saw to things [on the farm] . . . and helped out where help was needed. But what he really loved was company, talk, some kind of to-do, something to laugh at" (33). When, as a mere ten-year-old, Andy decides that he would like to buy a mule so he can farm on his own, he comes to understand that Uncle Andrew is a poor model and that his father "had a genuine calling to be a farmer" (64). So, as we know from the previous novel, Andy embraces his father's vision of the good life.

Psychologists going back to Freud have believed that people develop their identities by modeling themselves after people they admire; beginning at a young age, a person assimilates aspects of other people's personalities and thus creates his own identity through a succession of identifications (Culler 115-16). Recalling Jane Tompkins' observation that domestic novels "teach readers what kind of behavior to emulate or to shun" (*Sensational Designs* xvii), we see that *A World Lost* is a domestic novel that portrays Andy's process of choosing what kind of a person he will be by choosing the people after whom he will pattern himself. Since domestic novels are didactic, the ultimate intent is to instruct the reader.

Recall also that traditional domestic fiction models good and bad marriages and was thus meant to help young women make good decisions concerning marriage. Cathy Davidson explains that "by reading about a female character's good or bad decisions in sexual and marital matters, the early American woman could vicariously enact her own courtship and marriage fantasies" (*Revolution and the Word* 123). Significantly, just as Uncle Andrew is a bad role model for a vocation, he is also a bad role model for marriage. Uncle Andrew and Aunt Judith have different temperaments: he is wild, unpretentious, and creates his own fun; she is timid, has social aspirations, and is needy. Andy notes that in marrying one another Aunt Judith and Uncle Andrew "joined snow and fire" (48). They had no children, and according to the conventions of domesticity, Aunt Judith's childlessness makes her an object of pity. The only child of a divorced mother, Aunt Judith lacks any meaningful domestic tradition. Moreover, Aunt Judith has also inherited her mother's distaste for farm life. We learn that her mother, Momma-pie, got her "income from a moderately good farm that she had never seen except from the road" (47). Since Aunt Judith is utterly deficient by the standards of domestic-pastoral ideology, it would be impossible for her, in Berry's fictional world, to be part of a good marriage. Uncle Andrew and Aunt Judith's poor match causes them both much unhappiness and may even contribute to Uncle Andrew's death. Thus their unhappy marriage serves as a warning to young Andy.

Andy's father Wheeler, on the other hand, has a good marriage with his wife Bess; and he allows himself to be guided by her as revealed by one very important incident in *A World Lost*. Carp Harmon, the man who kills Uncle Andrew, is sentenced only to two years in jail because he claims that Uncle Andrew had propositioned his daughter. Wheeler sees Carp Harmon in town one day not long after his release, and deciding to take justice into his own hands, goes home to get his .32 revolver. Bess hears his footsteps in the hall and stops him and tells him that killing Carp Harmon will not bring Andrew back. Wheeler must think beyond Andrew or himself. He has to think of the

children and of her and of the effects on both. In a good marriage such as theirs, feminine restraint counterbalances destructive masculine tendencies. The influence of a wise woman proves to be the rudder of a good marriage.

One can trace the whole course of development of Berry's domestic-pastoral ideology through his treatment of bachelors. Berry's fictional world contains a number of wastrel bachelors—Uncle Peach, Uncle Andrew, and Roger Merchant, to name a few—but two bachelors with redeeming qualities are ultimately esteemed participants in the Port William membership. In fact, Burley Coulter and Jayber Crow, it turns out, are not bachelors at all. As Berry re-writes and develops their characters over the years in various novels and short stories, we see that they finally conform to Berry's notion of a good man. In fact, Berry domesticates them to the point that each of them is married in all but name. Though in *Nathan Coulter* Burley condemns marriage and farming, Berry's domesticating impulse transforms him into a good husband and husbandman by the time he dies. He makes a husband of Jayber too. After coming home to Port Royal to stay for good in 1964, Berry has become so committed to domestic ideology that even the bachelors in his fictional world must be secretly married.

An unregenerate, wild bachelor who denounces marriage and farming in *Nathan Coulter*, Burley is the most likable male character in the novel. But by the time of *A Place on Earth*, Burley is more domesticated; he is apparently more content with his life as a farmer and he is presented as a father figure for Tom and Nathan. Moreover, he proves himself to be a caring and faithful son by taking care of his mother in her declining years. Nearly twenty years later, Berry wrote two short stories—"The Wild Birds" and "Fidelity," each the title story of the collection of stories from which it comes—that deal with Burley more directly and further his domestication. Both stories portray Burley as a changed man, as good family man and a good farmer.

In "The Wild Birds," Burley visits his lawyer Wheeler Catlett for help with his will. Wheeler is surprised when he discovers that Burley intends to will his half of the old

Coulter place to Danny Branch, though over the years he has heard rumors that Burley is Danny Branch's father. In fact, Burley and Kate Helen Branch, Danny's mother, had been secret lovers. Kate Helen has been dead for several years, and even at the time of her death, Burley "had shown himself only as an interested bystander" (142). But now he wants to make things right and claim responsibility for his actions and their consequences. "What Burley is performing, asking him to assist in, too late but none the less necessarily," Wheeler realizes, "is a kind of wedding between himself and Kate Helen Branch" (137). By willing his land to his previously unacknowledged son, Burley proves himself at last to be a good husband and father.

Wheeler thinks that Burley has always been two men, really, that he has always been guided by a "double love": there is, he thinks, "the Burley of the barns and fields of all their lives and of his own loyally kept place and household, and then the Burley of the nighttime woods and the wayward ways through the dark" (127). Burley becomes a more domesticated man as his life progresses, and he becomes more accepting of his family and community responsibilities. Burley tells Wheeler how he changed over the years, how he ceased to be in Port William against his will, and how he finally came to want to live and farm there. "I thought of leaving," he tells Wheeler,

> but the times was hard and Pap needed me—or needed somebody better, to tell the truth—and I stayed. And then Pap died and Mam was old, and I stayed on with her. And when she died I stayed on and done my part with Jarrat; the boys was gone then and he needed me. And somehow or other along the way, I began to stay because I wanted to. . . . I realized that being here was the life I had because I'd never had another one any place else, and I never would. (129-130)

In the end, Burley's love for his family wins out over his adventurous impulses and thus Berry completes Burley's transformation from the ranks of the unregenerate bachelors to the membership of the good fathers and farmers.

"Fidelity" tells the story of Burley's death and burial. Unable to bear the sight of his unconscious father hooked up to so many machines and unwilling to allow him to die in a hospital, Danny Branch kidnaps Burley from the hospital in Louisville and takes him home to die. He hides him in an old unused barn in the woods where they used to seek shelter sometimes when hunting. Burley regains consciousness only once—he knows where he is and jokes with Danny—before he dies. The Branches, Coulters, Catletts, Penns, and Rowanberrys conspire to confound the police investigation and thus reveal their loyalty to Burley, a man who was faithful to them his entire life.

Berry's most recent novel, *Jayber Crow* (2000), completes a domestic conversion of another bachelor. Jayber first appeared in Berry's fiction over thirty years before in *A Place on Earth*, and he appears in several of the subsequent novels. Known to the reader as a rather well-read barber, he is a perpetual bachelor who occasionally drinks with the other men in town. But in *Jayber Crow*, the seventy-two-year-old Jayber gives a first-person account of his life, revealing that he is not just an accidental inhabitant of Port William but rather a devoted member of the community and, like his friend Burley, secretly married.

Although he was orphaned at an early age, Jayber is not, in the end, the typical American Adam out to make his way in the world all alone. Rather than being an adventurer with a centrifugal impulse, Jayber, we find, has strong homing instincts. Born near Port William in Goforth in 1914, Jayber loses both his parents in 1918—presumably to influenza. An old couple that lives on the river nearby at Squires Landing takes him in. By the time he is ten, they die and he is sent to The Good Shepherd church orphanage in central Kentucky. After graduating high school from there, he goes on scholarship to a small denominational college. He ultimately leaves there for Lexington, where he does odd jobs at a horse track and ultimately finds work as a barber. "By the time I got to Lexington," he writes, "I was so convinced of the temporariness of any stay I would ever make in this world that I hadn't formed any ties at all" (72). He enjoys his solitary life in

Lexington for a while; he even takes literature classes at the university there. But his "solitariness turned into loneliness" (72), and despite being an orphan, he is guided by a domestic impulse toward his home, "as surely," as he puts it, "as if [he] had a home" (81). Although the trajectory of his life up to that point has been away from home, something in him calls him home: "in my hopelessness and sorrow," he says, "I began a motion of my heart toward my origins" (73). At twenty-two years old in 1937, he hitches rides and walks from Lexington to Port William during a huge flood of the Kentucky River. The flood is of Biblical proportions for Jayber. He quotes Genesis and is born again into a new life. From the vantage point of his seventy-two years, Jayber tells us that he would never travel again. From that day forward, he would be a man committed to home, "that patch of country" comprised of "Squires Landing and all that fall of country from Port William up on the ridge and the river between Sand Ripple and Willow Run" (36).

Since Berry cannot resist domesticating characters he likes, Jayber will find a wife—of sorts. The main plot concerns Jayber's love affair with Mattie Keith. Two years after he moves back to Port William, the twenty-four-year-old Jayber sees fourteen-year-old Mattie and is smitten. Since the barbershop "was a precinct strictly masculine" and Jayber was therefore "pretty effectively divided from [the town's] womanly life" (122),[35] he admires Mattie from afar for years. In time, she marries her high school sweetheart, Troy Chatham, and has three children.[36] One day in the summer of 1950, Jayber sees her supervising a number of children at the Vacation Bible School. Watching her play "as free as a child, but with a generosity and watchfulness that were anything but childish"

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35 Expressing sentiments similar to those espoused by adherents to domestic ideology, Jayber venerates the women's sphere and believes that women play a special role in keeping society together. He writes, "You don't have to know Port William long before you see that whatever coherence it has is largely owing to certain women" (189).

36 Troy and Mattie's marriage is an important subplot, involving as it does issues concerning good farming practices and good childrearing practices. Since this novel, like the rest of Berry's novels, is a domestic-pastoral novel, there are good farmers who present the model to emulate, and bad farmers, like Troy, who present an example to shun. Mattie's father Athey Keith is one of the good ones, and he passes his good farming practices on to his daughter. Troy is a self-described agribusiness man and is one of the get-big-or-get-out farmers like Meikelberger. He buys too much land and assumes too much debt, and in the end, he has to sell a large patch of old timber off of the Keith Place to stave off bankruptcy. That Mattie and Troy's one surviving child does not grow up to be a farmer is testament to Troy's failure to instill in his child a love for the proper way to farm.

(191), he falls in love with her. Even the bachelor barber, it seems, cannot escape the transformative power of love.

In time, Jayber's love, we find, proves to be of the highest order of purity. Several years later at a Christmas dance up in Hargrave with his longtime girlfriend Clydie, he sees Mattie's husband Troy dancing with another woman. Jayber thinks of "Mattie at home with the children, wondering where Troy had gone off to and who with" (238), and he is disgusted. By providing Jayber with a powerful example of behavior he wants to avoid, Troy helps Jayber decide what kind of man he wants to be. So he calls off his casual relationship with Clydie and commits himself to a secret marriage to Mattie. He walks out on his girlfriend, never to see her again, leaving her only a note—and his car. He transcribes the conversation he had inside his head that night walking home:

> You love her enough to be a faithful husband to her? Think what you're saying, now. You're preparing to be the faithful husband of a woman who is already married to an unfaithful husband?
>
> Yes. That's why. If she has an unfaithful husband, then she needs a faithful one.
>
> A woman already married who must never know that you are her husband? Think. And who will never be your wife?
>
> Yes.
>
> Have you foreseen how this may end? Can you?
>
> No.
>
> Are you ready for this? Think, now.
>
> Yes. I am ready.
>
> Do you, then, in love's mystery and fear, give yourself to this woman to be her faithful husband from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, till death?
>
> I do. Yes! That is my vow. (243)

It would be difficult to find a more romanticized description of love in a sentimental domestic novel or even in a romance novel. Surely this is the apotheosis of love; surely this is the most selfless, ideal love a man could have for a woman. Ironically, Jayber, a lifelong bachelor, has been, like Burley, "married" most of his adult life.

After living in Port William for a number of years, Jayber becomes as committed to the inhabitants of the town as he is committed to Mattie. "I will have to share in the fate of this place," he declares. "Whatever happens to Port William happens to me" (143). Over time he develops a feeling of tenderness and affection toward all the inhabitants of Port William. He has a vision of "the gathered community . . . imperfect and irresolute but held together by the frayed and always fraying, incomplete and yet ever-holding bonds of the various sorts of affection" (205). His job as gravedigger inspires reflection on the lives and deaths of his neighbors. "I began," he writes, "to be moved by a compassion that seemed to come to me from outside. . . . As I buried the dead and walked among them, I wanted to make my heart as big as Heaven to include them all and love them and not be distracted. I couldn't do it, of course, but I wanted to" (158). Thus we find that the bachelor Jayber is not only secretly married to Mattie Keith but also metaphorically married to the entire Port William community, past and present. Jayber's love of community aspires to the ideal of a community bound together by love of which John Winthrop spoke on the *Arbella* in 1630. Winthrop's vision of a community married to one another is the domestic ideal writ large, and Jayber comes as close to this domestic ideal as any character in Berry's corpus.

As this chapter demonstrates, ever since returning to Kentucky and committing himself to raising his family and farming, domestic-pastoral ideology has so permeated Berry's worldview that his fiction is best discussed and understood using the terms and conventions of this hybrid literary tradition. The plots are driven by concerns related to marriage, home, and farm; his characters are presented as relatively good or bad according to how well they conform to standards of success defined by domestic-pastoral

ideology; and all of the important themes concern relationships to family members, neighbors, and home—home in the sense of both household and the "patch of country" one comes from and, ideally, farms (*Jayber Crow* 36). The next chapter discusses Berry's domestic aesthetic and the ways in which one of Berry's collections of short stories domesticates the humor of the Old Southwest tradition.

CHAPTER 3:
BERRY'S DOMESTIC AESTHETIC AND THE TAMING OF THE HUMOR OF THE OLD SOUTHWEST

In Part One of this chapter I will delineate Berry's aesthetic of domesticity and discuss how his domestic sensibility colors his ideas about art, how it affects his relationship, in particular, to literary predecessors, literary forms, audience, and subject matter. Part Two will analyze the ways in which Berry's short story cycle *Watch with Me* (1994) domesticates the tradition of the humor of the Old Southwest. Part Three will address briefly the manner in which all of Berry's fiction is influenced by his domestic sensibility.

Part I: Berry's Domestic Aesthetic

As Harold Bloom has argued in *The Anxiety of Influence*, the relationship of a writer to the literary greats of preceding generations is akin to that of the relationship between a father and a son. Using Freud's theory of the Oedipus complex as his starting point, Bloom ingeniously shows that the relationship between a writer and his literary antecedents is fraught with many of the same problems that beset actual father-son relations: the central problem being the need for the son to metaphorically kill the father, as Oedipus killed Laius, in order to establish his own identity and take for himself that which his father possesses and the son desires, namely, the love of a woman like his mother. Many artists, especially those who value originality, rebel against their literary forefathers both by rejecting outright the literary conventions the previous generation ascribed to and by redefining literature so they can supplant their literary forefathers and become important literary figures in their own right. Thus they can become literary patriarchs to whom all the benefits of such a position will accrue. If the literature written by the literary giants

of the preceding literary movement is the definition of great literature, then there is no way for the writers of the next generation to succeed except through imitation, which is no way to achieve greatness. They must perforce re-write the definition of great literature so they can succeed by these new terms. The Romantics, for instance, who saw the artist as a Promethean figure who courageously steals metaphoric fire from the gods with his burning ambition and incandescent imagination, conspicuously rejected the conventions of the Neo-classical poets, their immediate literary forefathers. This pattern plays itself out throughout the literary traditions of the world.[1]

Rebelling against the father is not, of course, the mark of a domestic sensibility, which is characterized by obedience and filiopiety rather than disobedience and rebellion. Since Berry's aesthetic is informed by his domestic persuasion, he is an obedient son who venerates his literary forefathers and endeavors to follow in their footsteps. In *The Adventurous Muse*, you will recall, William Spengemann explains that the domestic muse is characterized by "the predominantly social and familial values of stable perpetuity, prudence, modest ambition, acceptance, conformity, and reconciliation" (69). The domestic qualities listed by Spengemann describe Berry's attitude toward the literary canon and literary forefathers. Contemptuous of the cult of originality and the blinkered presentism dominating the contemporary literary scene, Berry praises "the literary tradition that joins all the sharers of literature, writers and readers, living and dead," and he laments that

> literary talk now seems remarkable for its lack of interest in tradition. The poets in the interviews [that is, interviews of contemporary poets Berry had

[1] Mark Twain's "Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offences [sic]" is a well-known example of literary rebellion in America. In that essay, Twain attacks the fiction of the most famous American novelist of the generation just preceding his—who was so popular he was the first American novelist to make a living by writing—claiming, for example, that "There are nineteen rules governing literary art in the domain of romantic fiction—some say twenty-two. In *Deerslayer* Cooper violated eighteen of them" (79). There are no such rules, of course; Twain simply pretends there are for humorous effect. Twain cracks wise at Cooper's expense throughout the essay, savaging him in particular for not writing realistically enough. The reader will not be surprised when he recalls that Twain was part of the self-defined literary movement known as Realism, which was, at least in part, a rebellion against the Romanticism of the preceding generation.

> been reading and is here discussing] are preoccupied with the new, with the modern world and modern times. They speak of very few poets who began to publish before World War II, almost none who lived before this century. Some of these poets seem to dismiss the past simply by lack of interest. Others show a sort of vindictiveness against it, typically expressed in generalized condemnations of traditional forms. (*Standing by Words* 10)

The American literary scene and American culture in general reveres originality, newness, and uniqueness. This impulse is certainly not restricted to the arts; capitalism as it manifests itself in the late twentieth, early twenty-first century demands newness; it thrives on new services and new products. Necessity is not only the mother of invention; invention is the mother of necessity. Thus entrepreneurs and authors both strive to create something new. Today, the adventurous impulse—characterized by "change, discontent, daring, aspiration, curiosity, eccentricity, and self-justification" (Spengemann 69)—prevails in both the marketplace and the literary world, and since the practice of patronage ended in the late Renaissance, there has been less and less a distinction between the two, as literature has become more and more beholden to the concerns of the marketplace.

Berry sees contemporary poets' indifference to and even rebellion against the past as a manifestation of an immature romantic rebelliousness, which is characteristic of the modern age:

> Outrage and rebellion against the past are undoubtedly human necessities, but they are limited necessities, and they probably should be limited to youth. Things are obviously wrong with the past; young people have the clarity to see them and the energy to rebel against them. But as a general principle, such rebellion is destructive, for it keeps us from seeing that the past, unsatisfactory as it is, is the source of nearly all our good. Maturity sees that the past is not to be rejected, destroyed or replaced, but rather that it is to be judged and

> corrected, that the work of judgment and correction is endless. . . . (*Standing by Words* 102)

Berry conflates attitudes towards the past with human maturity: youth rejects the past, rejects the fathers, whereas maturity looks to the past for insight and accepts the fathers. Berry sides with mature obedience over youthful disobedience because youthful rebelliousness is disruptive; it is an antidomestic impulse that, in his opinion, leads to personal unhappiness, social decay, and, in the farming community, agricultural problems.

An artist's attitude toward the past affects his attitudes towards literary forms. The Romantic artist is a rebel who makes his own way, who flouts social conventions both in his lifestyle and in his art, making a form he believes is responsive to and appropriate for the subject at hand rather than following an inherited literary formula. Berry believes that many of the misguided ideas towards art prominent today are the result of Romanticism. The Romantic conception of the artist is that he is an original, a genius that need not depend upon inherited forms. "The breaking of forms comes," according to Berry, ". . . from a faith in the individual intelligence, in 'genius,' as opposed to a faith in the community or in culture" (*Standing by Words* 100). As with a poet like Whitman, the typical Romantic poet dispenses with prescribed forms and develops his own unique poetic forms, which he believes are suitable to the occasion and expressive of his personality.

The artist with a Romantic sensibility conceives of form organically, and the persistence of this attitude toward form is evidenced by the fact that Charles Olson's influential manifesto for post-World War II poetry, "Projective Verse" (1950), is squarely in the Romantic poetic tradition;[2] Olson's version of organic form maintains that "FORM IS NEVER MORE THAN AN EXTENSION OF CONTENT," which suggests that each poem's form should be unique because only one form is suitable for the subject under

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[2] I cannot resist pointing out that Olson's manifesto is a rebellion of sorts against the New Critics, the most influential literary movement of the generation previous to Olson. Popular in the United States during the 1930s, '40s, and '50s, the New Criticism valued erudite, allusive poems written in traditional forms.

consideration: "From the moment he [the poet] ventures into FIELD COMPOSITION—puts himself in the open—he can go by no track other than the one the poem under hand declares, for itself" (240). Olson is implying that the poet must have an iconoclastic temper to write poetry; otherwise, he will not be able to dispense with inherited forms.

Berry is generally more sympathetic with the authors of classical antiquity, the Renaissance, and the Neo-Classical period, having a particular fondness for Homer, Dante, Spenser, Marvel, Shakespeare, Milton, Dryden, and Pope. Berry considers common contemporary distrust of and contempt for inherited literary forms as antithetical to the proper understanding of literature as a communal endeavor that exists within a family of writings by authors both living and dead. Writing of forms both literary and otherwise, Berry declares that "Part of the nature of a form seems to be that it is communal—that it can be bequeathed and inherited, that it can be taught, not as an instance (a relic), but as a way still usable" (*Standing by Words* 99). Of Spenser's use of what is now referred to as the Spenserian stanza for *The Faerie Queen*, Berry writes,

> A poet such as Spenser evidently entered upon the form of a poem as solemnly as he entered upon any other cultural form—that of public service, say, or that of marriage. He understood it both as enablement and as constraint, and he meant not to break it, for in keeping the form he did not merely obey an arbitrarily imposed technical requirement but maintained his place in his cultural lineage, as both inheritor and bequeather, which saved him from loneliness. . . . (*Standing by Words* 95)

For Spenser then, and for Berry, the poet must write in the tradition or he will essentially excommunicate himself from the tradition and isolate himself from the community of authors who went before him.[3]

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[3] Since community is central to the question of art for Berry, it is not surprising that when asked in another interview which genre was more important to him as a writer who writes in three genres, he would answer by saying that he considered all of his writings—his essays, poetry, and fiction—as existing "in something more like a neighborhood" than in a competition (*Living in Words* 26). His metaphor reveals his communitarian impulse not only within his own

It is no accident that Berry compares the handing down of traditional poetic forms to marriage, as it is an institution that has been a part of human culture for centuries. "The work of poetic form," Berry explains,

> is coherence, joining things that need to be joined, as a marriage joins them—in words by which a man or a woman can stand, words confirmable in acts. . . . Forms join the diverse things that they contain; they join their contents to their context; they join us to themselves; they join us to each other; they join writers and readers; they join the generations together, the young and the old, the living and the dead. Thus, for a couple, marriage is an entrance into a timeless community. So, for a poet (or a reader), is the mastery of poetic form. Joining the form, we join all that the form has joined. (*Standing by Words* 105)

Adherence to traditional poetic form for the poet and fidelity to the conventions of marriage for the spouse join a person to others in a generations-long continuity. Just as families do not thrive without traditions and a sense of history, Berry suggests that a writer cannot thrive without knowledge of and respect for literary tradition.

That Berry's aesthetic is best described as domestic-pastoral is proven by the fact that he looks to both marriage and farms as guides in literary matters. Seeing, as he does, that his farming and his writing are both part of the same work, it is not surprising that farming is not only a source of subject matter for Berry but also a guide for aesthetic concerns. As Berry points out, a farm, like a marriage, is like an inherited poetic form in that it is both inherited and bequeathed:

> And what . . . the great tradition inherited by these poets [Dante, Shakespeare, Pope, e.g.] also tells us, is that one's farm—like any other place on earth, like one's place in the order of creation—is indeed a form. It is not a literary form,

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corpus but also within the greater literary tradition. As discussed earlier in this chapter, Berry looks to the literary tradition of which he is a part—the Western, Anglo-American, Southern literary tradition—for his guidance and inspiration.

> but it is *like* a literary form, and it cannot properly be ignored or its influence safely excluded by any literary form that is made within it. Like any other form, it requires us to do some things, and forbids us to do others. Some acts are fitting and becoming, and some acts are not. If we fail to do what is required and if we do what is forbidden, we exclude ourselves from the mercy of Nature; we destroy our place, or we are exiled from it. (*Standing by Words* 207)

In both farming the land and forming a poem, then, one has precedents to follow. These precedents should, according to Berry, be disregarded only after much careful deliberation. Berry sees himself, rightly, as part of a tradition of farmers and authors that represents a continuum from the past to the present. The line does not begin with him; he is part of it and a perpetuator of it.

Berry believes that just as people should acknowledge their connection to the community of forefathers—be they literary or agricultural—they should likewise be conscious of their contemporary community. Berry disapproves of confessional poetry that takes the self as its subject. "It is a seeking of self in words," he complains, "the making of a word-world in which the word-self may be at home"; and he expresses contempt when Mark Strand says, "the self is in a sense all we have left" (*Standing by Words* 7,8). Berry is as interested in the real world as he is in what he calls the "word-world," and the truths he seeks to reveal are not his alone. William Spengemann points out that there are "two contradictory but equally fashionable notions of the artist's proper role: the domestic idea that the artist is a spokesman for communal beliefs, and the Romantic idea that the true artist is a lone seeker after revolutionary truths" (151). Berry sees himself in the former role, not the latter. His entire artistic enterprise is meant to celebrate his community and to inculcate the domestic virtues in his readers.

In *Harlan Hubbard: Life and Work* (1990), Berry's biography of a writer and painter with whom he was acquainted, Berry presents Mr. Hubbard as a nearly ideal artist.

Hubbard was a relatively unknown painter and writer who lived with his wife in a log house near the Ohio River not far from Mr. Berry's home in Port Royal, Kentucky. It is clear that Berry sees Hubbard as a kindred spirit, a man with similar convictions concerning aesthetics. When Berry is writing about Mr. Hubbard's art, he is also writing about himself as an artist, or at least the artist he aspires to be.[4] Of Hubbard, Berry writes:

> By freeing his work from the specialization that is the most disintegrative force of his time, Harlan turned away from himself toward his subject and toward the people—the potential community—with whom he shared his subject. These were, initially, the people with whom he shared his part of the Ohio Valley, and then, beyond them, the people with whom he shared the world. We must see his work, not as a monologue, but as a conversation with his subject, with which we too are in conversation. However quietly and solitarily it began, his art thus, ultimately, belongs to a social gathering; it is a communal act. (63)

This is a description of an artist guided by a domestic sensibility, and implicit in it is an understanding that, first, we are all members of our local communities and, second, we are all members of the same earthly community. The statement "the people . . . with whom [Harlan Hubbard] shared his subject" suggests that Berry is thinking of audience in quite specific terms. The people with whom Harlan Hubbard shared his subject were the people who lived around him. These are members of what Berry calls his "Beloved Community," which he defines as those people who share "Common experience and common effort on a common ground to which one willingly belongs" (*What Are People For?* 85). Berry is suggesting that one writes for one's family, friends, and neighbors first, almost like a fiddler playing at a local barn dance. His conception of audience begins with family and friends and broadens out from there. As a Southerner, Berry is

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4 Berry writes, "Instead of the 'originality' of technical or stylistic innovation, Harlan was concerned with fidelity—fidelity to his subject, to his art, and to the love that joined the two" (65). Tellingly, Berry named his next published book *Fidelity* (1992).

part of a great tradition of writers who have concerned themselves with the question of what it means to be a regional writer. Of the regional or local writer, Flannery O'Connor had the following comment: "I wouldn't want to suggest that the Georgia writer has the unanimous collective ear of his community, but only that his true audience, the audience he checks himself by, is at home" ("Regional Writer" 844). Likewise with Berry; his domestic aesthetic informs his attitude toward his audience, and his art concerns itself first with his family, friends, and neighbors in Port Royal, Kentucky.[5]

Revealing his life-long appreciation of Mark Twain and waxing a bit hyperbolic, Berry contends that Twain "taught all American writers to be writers by teaching them to be *regional* writers" (*What Are People For?* 79). That is perhaps an exaggerated claim, but Berry is simply reformulating a generally accepted maxim about literature: namely, that the great artist finds the universal in the local. In this, Berry is no different from many good writers who, like Faulkner, have taken their "little postage stamp of native soil" as their primary subject; but his attitude toward his home region as subject matter reveals his thoroughly domestic sensibility. "In coming home and settling on this place," he writes,

> 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. . . . One's relation to one's subject ceases to be merely emotional or ethical, or even merely critical, and becomes problematical, practical, and responsible as well. Because it must. It is like marrying your sweetheart. ("Making of a Marginal Farm" 337)

As noted, for Berry, moving back to Kentucky changed his attitude toward his place, his subject matter. For him, his commitment to and sense of responsibility for his subject matter is akin to that of his relationship with his wife.

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[5] Although Berry, like most authors, dedicates the majority of his books to family members, it is telling that several of his books are dedicated to neighbors.

For an artist who is metaphorically married to his home region, writing about it makes him even more intimate with his place. Writing of Harlan Hubbard, Berry claims, "The landscapes that Harlan painted did not begin and end in his consciousness as 'subject matter.' He did not think of them as 'raw material' for art. The idea, common in the lore and gossip of modern art, that one treats a subject in order to be 'free' of it, supposedly to go on to another subject, would have been alien to Harlan. His art was meant to carry him ever more deeply and clearly into the presence of his subject . . ." (*Harlan Hubbard* 61). The domestic-pastoral artistic impulse arises from a love of one's home region and makes an artist more intimate with both; by thinking about and writing about his native place, the artist learns even more about it and becomes even more familiar with it.

For Berry, an author's attitude toward his subject matter is an important litmus test. Berry's praise for regional writing, for domestic localism, engenders his contempt for authors who do not love and respect their subject matter. He scorns local colorists, for example, who exploit the idiosyncrasies of a region to amuse urban readers. He condemns such literary provincialism outright: "The provincial is always self-conscious. It is the conscious sentimentalization of or condescension to or apology for a province. . . . At its most acute, it is the fear of provinciality" (*What Are People For?* 79). Writing about Mark Twain, Berry reveals what he believes to be the proper relation of an artist to his subject. He applauds Twain's *Huck Finn*, in particular, because "the book never condescends to its characters or its subject; it never glances over its shoulder at literary opinion; it never fears for its reputation in any 'center of culture'" (*What Are People For?* 74).

As opposed to those literary exploiters who write for an urban audience and mock the habits and customs of the provincial bumpkins they write about, Berry lauds the artists who, like Mark Twain, do not condescend to rural people and who have an intimate knowledge of their lives, artists who know how these people live and work, how they use

the land and make a living. In his own fiction, Berry is not trying to describe merely the surface peculiarities of his home region. Rather, he writes knowingly of these people's lives and how they make a living from the land. Of English poetry, Berry complains that it "strikes me as short on domestic economy" (*Standing by Words* 153), and he explains that

> up to Pope no appreciable English poet gave us anything resembling the *Georgics* or *Works and Days.* That is, though they give us often enough the look and feel of country life—and sometimes, as in Shakespeare, the sound of it too—they give us no grasp of how it works or ought to work. They tell us how love, war, politics, and social life work and ought to work, but they do not tell us how all this fitted or ought to have fitted into nature. They do not offer us much that can *directly* inform or clarify or instruct us in the *use* of nature. (*Standing by Words* 154)

In his fiction, Berry describes how the people of Port William make their living from their farms by growing tobacco and corn, how they put food on the table by gardening, and how they both supplement their diets and entertain themselves by hunting in the woods and fishing in the Kentucky River.

The guiding principle, the underlying motive, of Berry's domestic aesthetic is that art should be done out of love, not ambition. Berry believes that an emphasis on "the standards of love" for good art "enlarge the ground of judgment. [because] The context of love is the world" (*What Are People For?* 90). Berry's standard of love broadens the framework within which art is considered. Berry praises Harlan Hubbard because "Instead of the 'originality' of technical or stylistic innovation, Harlan was concerned with fidelity—fidelity to his subject, to his art, and to the love that joined the two" (*Harlan Hubbard* 65). Elsewhere, Berry has said, "I know that when one works out of love—for family, community, craft—one is strong" ("Art of Place" 31). Love is of course a domestic virtue; for Berry it is an aesthetic virtue as well.

Echoing sentiments expressed by John Winthrop in his sermon on the *Arbella* in 1620, in a 1997 radio interview, Berry said that not only should we create works of art out of a loving impulse. In our everyday lives, we must act as if we love one another; and art can help us do that:

> If we are to love each other, and we obviously are proving every day that we can't live unless we do, not to love each other in the emotional sense but to love each other in . . . the sense of practice, of treating people as if we loved them whether we do or not. But all this depends on the ability to imagine other people, and this our arts, our works of imagination and so on ought to be helping us to do. (*Natural Gifts*)

It is often said that literature can help us empathize with other types of people and better understand their inner lives, which is what being in love with someone is—or should, at least, be—like. The implication of this is that art can make us better family members, better neighbors, better citizens. "I am endlessly in need of the work of poets," writes Berry, "who have been concerned with living in place, the life of a place, long-term attention and devotion to a settled home and its natural household, and hence to the relation between imagination and language and a place" (*Standing by Words* 88). Not surprisingly, Berry attempts to be the kind of artist he says he is looking for. His corpus is testament to his attempt to fuse memory and imagination in honor of the people he has known and the place he is from.

Part II: Taming the Humor of the Old Southwest: *Watch with Me*

Chapter Two showed most of Berry's fiction participating in the tradition of domestic-pastoral fiction in which threats to home—either internal or external—drive the action and characters are judged according to their devotion to their families and their farms; but in one of his works of fiction, *Watch with Me* (1994), Berry writes not in the domestic-pastoral tradition, but in the tradition of the humor of the Old Southwest, a

masculine sub-genre that flourished at the same time as the cult of domesticity and was in many respects a reaction against sentimental domestic novels written largely by and for women. Although Berry borrows from the Old Southwestern humor tradition, he appropriates its forms for his own ends. He tames its masculine and adventurous energies by domesticating its style and using its conventions to express his domestic ideology.

The term "humor of the Old Southwest" describes a type of literature that throve in the United States from approximately 1830 to the start of the Civil War.[6] The comic stories referred to as Old Southwestern humor are related to the frontier tall tale, but they are more grounded in everyday life and generally portray fictional characters created by authors rather than mythic heroes who were the product of folklore. Whereas tall tales feature superhuman characters performing fantastical feats,[7] the protagonists of Old Southwestern humor are life-sized hunters, gamblers, lawyers, fighters, actors, and so on. As Constance Rourke notes in *American Humor: A Study of the National Character* (1930),[8] "The true tall tale with its stress upon the supernatural was laid against others of a prosaic grounding" (67). Although not mountain-sized men capable of riding lightning, these characters are still uncivilized and wild. "Out of this new cycle," Rourke writes, "would stride a man who rose six feet without surplus flesh, pantherlike, with a mouth like a wolf-trap and red-brown hair sticking up like the quills of a porcupine . . ." (67). While these comic characters were sometimes exaggerated, they were, to varying degrees, realistic representations of people living on what was then the southwestern frontier of the United States: South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas, Missouri, Kentucky, and Tennessee.

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6 Note that it is exactly contemporaneous with the cult of domesticity.

7 Paul Bunyan is so tall he can stride over mountains; and eight-year-old Davy Crockett is bigger than a hillside (Dorson 7). In one not atypical story, Davy Crockett and his friend Ben Hardin grab hold of lightning and ride it to safety when a tornado bears down on a Mississippi steamboat they were on (Dorson 13-14).

8 Rourke's book was the first to explore this interesting cultural history; she looks to the American tradition to find what she refers to as a "usable past" for American authors. Beginning in the 1930s, Franklin J. Meine, Bernard DeVoto, and Walter Blair continued the work she began.

Oral storytelling was an important part of the culture out of which these humorous tales arose. Many began as yarns told by travelers on stagecoaches or steamboats, soldiers around campfires, hunters at camps, or lawyers in their circuits (Blair 51-53). In the introduction to their anthology *Humor of the Old Southwest*, Hennig Cohen and William Dillingham write, "The loudtalking, wildly imaginative storytellers provided the origins of Old Southwest humor. By the 1830s the region was saturated with tall tales and comic stories that were laughed at over campfires, aboard rafts floating slowly under the stars, or in villages wherever men gathered" (xvi-xvii). People told and retold stories, adding details and exaggerating as they saw fit. Joseph M. Field begins a long tall tale about Mike Fink by explaining that he got his material from stories told by a gentleman in Cincinnati and from many "yarns" told to him in Louisville, New Orleans, Natchez, and St. Louis. In the third person, he writes, "anecdotes and stories, and, above all, the actual facts which are to form the frame-work of this history have reached [the author] till, between truth and fable, he is amply supplied with material" (94-95).[9]

Lawyers, doctors, and newspapermen who lived on or traveled frequently to the frontier started to write these stories down and submit them to periodicals and local newspapers. Franklin Meine points out that newspapers sprang up around the country in great numbers during the period 1830-60, especially in the South and Southwest (xxvii). Later many of the sketches originally printed in newspapers were collected and published as books.[10] The authors of these stories attempted to record the characters and events of their local regions, at least in part, out of a desire to provide a written record for posterity. Cohen and Dillingham maintain that

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[9] But as Cohen and Dillingham explain in their introduction to *Humor of the Old Southwest* (1964), "As important as the oral tradition was . . . the influence of written sources should not be underestimated" (xx). They point out that many of the Old Southwestern writers were educated men who were clearly inspired by "such eighteenth-century essayists as Addison, Steele, and Goldsmith and who were acquainted with the best of classical and modern literature" (xx). Washington Irving's "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" from *The Sketch Book* (1819) was, they claim, especially influential for these writers (xxi).

[10] The most popular and influential of the humorous journals was William T. Porter's *The Spirit of the Times* from New York; other important outlets were the New Orleans *Picayune*, the St. Louis *Reveille*, and the Louisville *Courier*. The

> The stance of many writers is that of cultural historian. . . . One of their strongest motivations was to preserve. They perceived that a colorful and meaningful way of life had already greatly faded, and they stepped in . . . to capture a cultural phenomenon that interested, often amused, and sometimes even displeased (or, on occasion, disgusted) them. In large measure (though not in all instances), they were looking back in time, recording more what was a few years ago rather than the present. (xxiv-xxv)

With the influx of many immigrants and with increasing industrialization, the mid-nineteenth century was a time of rapid social change in American; because of this, many writers took it upon themselves to memorialize the habits and customs of the frontier. These men were not only inspired to record life on the frontier because of their particular historical situation but also because of the tendency for members of every generation to feel as though they had been born right after a more interesting time.[11]

Since the Old Southwestern humorists began with an impulse to record the life of the frontier, it is not surprising that a list of the topics they wrote about should cover nearly all the experience available to rural Southerners at that time. In his introduction to *Tall Tales of the Southwest* (1930), Franklin J. Meine was the first to list the range of subjects covered by the frontier humorists (xxvi). Cohen and Dillingham have since added to Meine's list and provide the following exhaustive catalogue of the subjects treated in the humor of the Old Southwest:

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first and seminal book of the Old Southwestern Humor tradition was Augustus Baldwin Longstreet's *Georgia Scenes* (1835). Other notable examples are William Tappan Thompson's *Major Jones's Courtship* (1843), Johnson Jones Hooper's *Adventures of Simon Suggs* (1845), Joseph M. Field's *The Drama of Pokerville* (1847), and John S. Robb's *Streaks of Squatter Life* (1847). With its shamelessly hard-drinking and carousing main character telling of his high jinks in the roughest Tennessee dialect, George Washington Harris's *Sut Lovingood* (1867) may be the apotheosis of the genre. Two notable anthologies published by William T. Porter were *The Quarter Race in Kentucky* (1845) and *The Big Bear of Arkansas* (1846), the latter named after the Thomas Bangs Thorpe story.

[11] Cohen and Dillingham add that "In proportion to their fascination for a colorful, freewheeling time slipping away quickly—unusually quickly as it seemed to them—was their resentment of those who wanted to hurry the change, to force on the South immediate and drastic cultural alterations. Small wonder that so many of them became such avid enthusiasts for the Confederate cause" (xxvi).

1. The hunt
2. Fights, mock fights, reluctant fighters, and animal fights
3. Courtship, rejected suitors, weddings, and honeymoons
4. Frolics and dances
5. Games, horse races, and other contests
6. Militia drills
7. Elections and electioneering
8. The legislature, the courtroom, and lawyers
9. Sermons, camp meetings, preachers, and religious experiences
10. The visitor in a humble home, rude accommodations for travelers
11. The naïve country boy in the city
12. The riverboat, life on the river
13. Adventures of a rogue
14. Pranks and tricks of a practical joker, hoaxes
15. Gambling
16. Trades and swindles
17. Cures, sickness and bodily discomfort, medical treatments
18. Drunks and drinking
19. Dandies, foreigners, Yankees, and city slickers
20. Odd characters and local eccentrics
21. Modesty, immodesty, and false modesty
22. Actors, the theater, and theatrics (xxiv)

Because of their desire to depict the full range of life in their native regions, the frontier humorists can be seen as the first local colorists.[12] These stories were written with an eye

[12] However, Cohen and Dillingham point out that one of the ways the Old Southwestern humorists are different from the local colorists who flourished during the Gilded Age was "their lack of respect for delicate sensibilities" (xxvii).

toward the future, as we have seen, but also with an eye toward an urban audience eager for stories about the frontier; and these stories were not only popular in American cities—Europeans curious about the ways of Americans relished them.

In depicting the character and manners of their native regions, the frontier humorists also attempted to portray people's speech patterns. Thus they wrote in dialect to record for posterity the frontiersmen's grammar, syntax, and diction. Mimicry is, moreover, an important part of the story-telling tradition, as Walter Blair points out (57). As such, these stories contain the most conspicuous use of dialect in nascent American literature. Some writers stayed close to proper English while others were less restrained in their attempts to portray the American English of the lower, uneducated class. William Tappan Thompson's Major Jones stories, for example, are more influenced by European essays and are written in a "generalized style" (Blair 57). Sut Lovingood's dialect, on the other hand, is almost unreadable in places, for Harris went as far as he could to depict the speech of an uneducated backwoodsman from Tennessee. For example, in "Hen Bailey's Reformation," Sut says, "Say, fellers, that ar long-handil'd gourd thar, mout cum the temprince dodge over sum ove yu fellers afore yu wer quite ready fur the oaf" (155). Without an editorial gloss, the reader is at a loss to make sense of that sentence. By writing in a coarse dialect and using extravagant figures of speech, the frontier humorists were simply trying to keep up with the linguistic inventiveness of the frontiersmen. Constance Rourke explains that the backwoodsman was so free with language that he created new words such as "'Absquatulate,' 'slantendicular,' 'cahoot,' 'catawampus,' 'spyficated,' 'flabbergasted,' 'tarnacious,' 'rampagious,' 'concussence,' 'supernatiousness,' 'rumsquattle,' and dozens of other ear-splitting syllables . . ." (62).

The first decades of the American republic witnessed repeated calls for the formation of a national literature distinct from English literature, a literature that would express American culture and be commensurate with the greatness of the new nation. Although not considered high literature, frontier humor was written in a distinctly

American patois; and the use of dialect by the frontier humorists in the mid-nineteenth century represents the beginnings of a native literature. Although poets such as Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson had begun writing poetry in a distinctly American style, prose fiction remained constrained by convention. These frontier stories were written during the height of the Romantic period in American literature, and as William Spengemann notes, although "English Romantic theory encouraged linguistic experimentation. . . . the novel, particularly as it fell into the hands of what Hawthorne called 'a pack of scribbling women,' remained subject to traditional stylistic requirements" (227-28). The language used by the frontier humorist, however, represents a shift away from what William Spengemann refers to as "the standardized rhetoric of a cosmopolitan literature that shunned provincial eccentricities" (226). Spengemann explains that

> while Thoreau celebrated the advantages of life in the woods and Whitman sounded his barbarous yawp, the Domestic Romancer struggled to make a properly genteel home in the howling wilderness, to civilize and refine the native rebelliousness and rusticity that made sensitive Americans wince under the gaze of foreign visitors. A colloquial style, particularly in the form of native dialect, had no place in this cultural program—except to identify those rude and lawless persons who would eventually fall before the advance of civilization. While other forms were developing a truly colloquial style—a flexible, expressive language modeled on native speech—the American Domestic Romance continued to employ formal English as its linguistic measure of value and to relegate native speech to low or comic minor characters. (228)

The bold use of rough American dialect by the frontier humorists contrasts markedly with the timid linguistic obedience betrayed by the writers of domestic fiction. As such, these stories represent what many consider to be the first examples of truly American prose in fiction. Whereas Whitman had been inspired by contemporary calls for a distinctly

American literature—and by Emerson in particular—many frontier humorists simply disregarded literary convention and dared to write about the frontier in a frontier style.

Although some men did write domestic fiction and men certainly read it, women did not write tall tales or comic frontier stories and women did not generally read them. In fact, no women are among the ranks of Old Southwestern humorists (Cohen and Dillingham xviii). In *A Very Serious Thing* (1988) Nancy A. Walker explains why women did not write tall tales:

> Women's experience of the frontier had much more to do with cooking, laundry, and caring for the ill than with storytelling around a campfire, and in more settled communities, female competition found expression in accomplishments of dress or cooking rather than in boastful accounts of physical prowess. Second, the requirements of genteel society dictated that women's writing be characterized by a delicacy of language and subject matter to which the tall tale did not conform. The classic American tall tale contains obscene and even scatological elements that also found their way into other forms of masculine humor of the period. In fact, Samuel Cox, an early student of American humor, noted in 1876 that it lacked "refinement," insisting that "three-fourths of our humor will not bear rehearsal in the presence of women." (qtd. in Cohen and Dillingham xviii)

When she refers to "other forms of masculine humor," she is referring to Old Southwestern humor. Mid-nineteenth century Americans understood that these frontier stories were of the male domain.[13] As such, they are the literary antithesis of the sentimental domestic fiction written for women.

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13 Nearly every student of the Humor of the Old Southwest tradition comments on the masculine nature of frontier literature: Cohen and Dillingham write, "Readers and contributors in the North and the South were usually gentlemen of some means with a leisurely interest in masculine pursuits" (xviii). "[S]ubscribers," Walter Blair writes, "included men of many backgrounds and occupations. . . . Reasonably common interests, apparently, were an affection for sports of all kinds—horse-races, cock-fights, hunting, and fishing, as enthusiasm about fine dogs fine horses, and fine cattle, and a love for good comic stories" (60).

Although the frontier stories were written by and for men, women were often portrayed in the stories, but the female characters are generally different than the heroines of the sentimental fiction so popular during the antebellum period. As Cohen and Dillingham explain, "Yet if women did not write frontier humor, they are a presence in it, although they are seldom portrayed as refined, and when they are, their refinement is negatively treated" (xviii). They explain that Mrs. Yardley, for example, "represents domestic order and morality, imperatives of a stable society but inhibitors of the male proclivities that dominate the universe of the Old Southwest. So Sut strikes out against the mean-minded, prissy Mrs. Yardley, mistress of the feminine art of quilting and custodian of her wayward daughter's chastity" (xix). In contrast to Mrs. Yardley, her daughter and many of the other women at the quilting, especially the "widders," are as lusty and willing as the young men.[14] As Cohen and Dillingham note, women in these stories are either prissy or matronly killjoys—or as rambunctious as the men. Either way, women are taken off the pedestal the writers of the cult of domesticity placed them upon. Whereas most women in domestic fiction are portrayed as angels of the hearth and as the moral center of the household, in Old Southwestern humor they are either pretentiously refined or unselfconsciously crude. In "Blown up with Soda," Sicily Burns plays as dirty a trick on Sut as he plays on anyone. In countless tall tales, the wives, sisters, daughters, and grandmothers of the heroes perform feats as bold and outlandish as their more famous male relations. In one story, Davy Crockett's wife, Mrs. Sally Ann Thunder Ann Whirlwind Crockett, nearly cuts off Mike Fink's head with a toothpick and then beats him up for trying to scare her by dressing up in an alligator skin (Dorson 20-21). Mike Fink's daughter Sal, it was said, "used to ride down the Mississippi River on an alligator's back, standing upright, an' dancing 'Yankee Doodle' . . ." (Dorson 49). These are not the delicate heroines of domestic romances.

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[14] Sut says that "Widders am a speshul means, George, fur ripenin green men, killin off weak ones, an makin 'ternally happy the soun ones" (119).

The Old Southwestern humor tradition not only differs from domestic fiction in its portrayal of women; families play a markedly small part in the frontier humor tradition. The male characters in frontier stories often have families, but their family members do not figure prominently in the stories and their ties to their families are not priorities to them. In *Adventures of Simon Suggs,* Simon cheats his own father out of a pony with a card trick. In the next story, Simon immediately leaves home for good on that pony "in high spirits . . . at the idea of unrestrained license in the future" (26).[15] In the story placed first in the book *Sut Lovingood's Yarns*, Sut flees home at the end and says, "Now, boys, I ain't seed Dad since, and I don't have much appetite to see him for some time to come" (13). Leaving home and one's family was, of course, the necessary first step to living an adventurous life on the frontier, and the literature that grew out of the frontier reflected this fact. As Constance Rourke puts it, "In more than one sense the comic trio [the Yankee, the Negro, and the backwoodsman] remained as emblems of the national life, since they appeared always as single figures, or merely double and multiplied, never as one of a natural group, never as part of a complex human situation, always nomadic" (144). The figure of the backwoodsman, who in some ways evolved out of the Yankee from northeastern lore, is, according to Rourke, the prototype for the comic hero of Old Southwestern humor. These characters are the progenitors of Huck Finn, always running from the constraints that society puts on them—constraints represented by women—and lighting out for the territories. Suffice it to say that the hero of frontier comic story does not stay at home tending the home fires.

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[15] When describing his departure, Johnson Jones Hooper plays upon the conventions of the cult of domesticity by portraying Simon's sadness at leaving home. We read, "Out of sight of his old home, Simon became serious—half melancholy. He thought over all the little incidents of his life—of his frolics with Bill and Ben—of the neighbor boys and girls—of the doting love of his mother; and he couldn't deny to himself, that it was sad to leave them all thus, perhaps no more to return to them. How long he may have indulged these sombre reflections is unknown; they were at length interrupted however, by an outburst of laughter, so violent that Bunch [his horse] almost jumped out of his hide in a paroxysm of fright" (26). What is so funny, it turns out, is that before leaving home Simon had loaded his mother's pipe "with a thimble full of gunpowder; neatly covering the 'villainous saltpetre' with tobacco" (27).

The comic hero is generally not a paragon of virtue. As Constance Rourke puts it of the backwoodsmen upon which they are based, "They belonged to a rootless drift that had followed in the wake of the huntsman and scout. . . . Sly instead of strong, they pursued uncharted ways, breaking from traditions, bent on triumph" (69). Thus the majority of the characters in frontier stories are also of questionable moral character, to put it lightly. Rourke refers to the heroes of these stories as "Scalawags, gamblers, ne'er-do-wells, [and] small rapscallions. . . . " (69). Simon Suggs, for example, makes his money by cheating at cards, hoodwinking innocent people, and speculating in real estate through deceitful means. His guiding maxim is "It is good to be shifty in a new country." Although Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier hypothesis focused on the positive effects of life on the frontier, there is clearly a dark side to frontier life, a dark side the frontier humorists explored. The frontier may have encouraged self-reliance and healthy individualism, but it also encouraged moral laxity and selfishness. As Walter Blair bluntly states, "For in the United States the frontier was to a large degree responsible for such a character as Hooper's shifty hero" (63). Blair then quotes a scholar named Lucy Hazard, who writes, "To find the American picaro we must follow the American pioneer; the frontier is the natural habitat of the adventurer. The qualities fostered by the frontier were the qualities indispensable to the picaro: nomadism, insensibility to danger, shrewdness, nonchalance, gaiety" (qtd. in Blair 63). Good family men they are not. They do not stay home and earn an honest living, and they do not live up to the moral standards of the domestic ideal.

On the whole, though, writers of frontier stories relished these rough characters of dubious morals. Walter Blair points out, for example, that frontier stories "idolized Mike Fink for swigging a gallon of whisky without showing effects, for flaunting justice at the St. Louis court house, for stealing from his employer, for maltreating his spouse, and for cheating a gullible farmer . . ." (63). Although most of the comic heroes were lowlifes, the frontier humorists generally betray their fondness for the characters they are writing

about; some even praise them and lament the fact that men such as these are getting rarer and rarer. George Washington Harris's obvious fondness for the character of Sut Lovingood does not abate even as Sut is making light of the burial of Mrs. Yardley, a women he essentially killed. There is some moralizing about these characters' behavior, but Blair and Meine's conclusion that these stories are, in the main, amoral (x), essentially holds true.[16]

Although the frontier humor tradition appears to be a world apart from the cult of domesticity, the truth is more complex. For although "[t]he gap between the genteel literature of the time and the masculine humor that filled the pages of the spirit of the times was immense" (Cohen and Dillingham xix), some of these comic stories are clearly in the domestic vein. It is not as if all domestic novels instill the domestic virtues and all frontier comic stories were celebrating antisocial and immoral behavior. We cannot simply place the literary domestics on one side of a moral and aesthetic divide and the Old Southwestern humorists on the other. The relationship between the two is more complicated than that, although the influence is not reciprocal. The frontier humorists were reacting against the conventions of the cult of domesticity, not the other way around. With their choice of low subject matter and their stylistic freedom, the frontier humorists were clearly writing against sentimental domestic fiction. But they were not so morally bankrupt that they wanted to corrupt their readers and many, no doubt, were proponents of the domestic virtues.[17]

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16 This is true, in part, because, as Cohen and Dillingham put it, the authors "did not have to please the fastidious hairsplitters of moral principle. Their audience was far different from that of *The Coquette* (1797) and *Charlotte Temple* (1791)" (xxvi).

17 Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, for example, was clearly sympathetic to domestic ideology. In "The Charming Creature as Wife," he praises the domestic economy of George's mother in terms essentially identical to those a literary domestic would have used:

> To have heard her converse, you would have supposed she did nothing but read; to have looked through the deportments of her household, you would have supposed she never read. Everything which lay within her little province bore the impress of her hand or acknowledged her supervision. Order, neatness, and cleanliness prevailed everywhere. All provisions were given out with her own hands, and she could tell precisely the quantity of each article that it would require to serve a given number of persons, without stint or wasteful profusion. In the statistics of domestic economy she was perfectly versed. (8-83)

Just as Northern writers during the antebellum period used the conventions of domestic fiction to argue against slavery and Southern writers of that period used those same conventions to show the pitfalls of industrialism, some of the frontier humorists betrayed their political sympathies in their stories. Cohen and Dillingham maintain that "Political undertones are discernible in the work of nearly all the Old Southwestern authors. Many were staunch members of the Whig Party. . . . The writers' amused observations on the outspoken, crude, and often illiterate democratic man reveal a persistent if sometimes only halfconscious feeling that while these ringtailed roarers had their virtues, they could not be trusted to run the country" (xxxix). For instance, since Johnson Jones Hooper was a Whig, it is likely that his depiction of Simon Suggs's corrupt tenure as a captain in the militia is meant to be emblematic of the broader corruption that would ensue if people of his ilk were granted broader political rights. The conventions of this genre can be used, not surprisingly, to express various political and philosophical beliefs, as will be evidenced by Berry's appropriation of the genre to express his domestic ideology.

Twain is often acknowledged to be "the culmination of Old Southwestern humor" (Meine xxx, Blair 73, and Cohen and Dillingham ix). Along with some of his short fiction, *Huckleberry Finn* is the one book of Twain's that is the most influenced by the Old Southwestern humor tradition. The tradition also lives on in the works of William Faulkner, among others. For his part, Faulkner owned a copy of *Sut Lovingood's Yarns* (Cohn and Dillingham xxxiii), and the perfidious horse trade in Faulkner's *The Hamlet*

That George marries a beautiful yet frivolous woman who is the antithesis of his mother brings about his ruin. His legal practice falters, and like many men in domestic fiction, he drinks himself to an early death. Longstreet concludes the story by declaring that this woeful tale should be "a warning to mothers not to bring their daughters up to be "CHARMING CREATURES" (109110). So we have a story in the seminal book of the Old Southwestern humor tradition in which several themes of domestic fiction are found: the importance of finding an honest, industrious, virtuous mate, the importance of raising your children well so they will fill that role. The story is, moreover, addressed to mothers. This story is not an exception. Throughout *Georgia Scenes,* as Walter Blair points out, Longstreet "moralizes about the vices he portrays. Fighting, baby talk, drunkenness, modern dancing, dueling, horse racing, and the undomestic wife [as we have seen] are reprimanded" (55). Blair adds that "several of [Longstreet's] sketches later appeared in a book labeled, not inappropriately, *Stories with a Moral"* (55).

(1940) is clearly inspired by Longstreet's "The Horse Swap," as is Twain's story of a horse swap at the end of *Roughing It* (1871).

Since both Twain and Faulkner are such important influences on Berry,[18] it makes sense that he would be inspired by the Old Southwestern humor tradition as well. Although Berry's indebtedness to Twain and Faulkner is evident throughout his fiction, *Watch with Me: and Six Other Stories of the Yet-Remembered Ptolemy Proudfoot and His Wife, Miss Minnie, Née Quinch* is his homage to their influence, the Old Southwestern humor tradition.[19] Although inspired by the Old Southwestern humor tradition, Berry's stories represent a conscious re-writing of that tradition. In fact, the Tol Proudfoot stories reveal in Berry a corrective impulse rather than a simple desire to pay homage, because in them, Berry domesticates the frontier humor tradition. He is celebrating the tradition while at the same time changing it to express his domestic worldview.

Tol Proudfoot is "as tall and as wide as [a] door" and weighs "in the neighborhood of three hundred pounds" (54, 62). His wild hair sticks up all over the place, and like all good frontiersmen, he likes to wrestle with his equally oversized older brothers.[20] That these stories are consciously in the Old Southwestern humor tradition is clear, but any doubt about Berry's indebtedness is removed when the narrator describes Tol as "half horse himself" (61), for hell-raising frontiersmen were sometimes referred to as "ring-tailed roarers" and said to be half horse, half alligator.[21] Moreover, we are told that he is

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18 As noted, Berry explains that he read *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* countless times as a child. Berry's debt to Faulkner is clear, as he has made Port William and environs his Jefferson and Yoknapatawpha. But Berry and Faulkner have markedly different attitudes towards their native places—and, one hopes, their wives—as the following colorful anecdote about Faulkner reveals. Leslie Fiedler reports that when he invited Faulkner to the University of Montana, Faulkner told a woman sitting next to him at dinner that "To write about a place you have to hate it, like you hate your own wife" (Fiedler "Critic in Winter").

19 The subtitle refers to the stories that are directly in the tradition. Although Tol Proudfoot figures prominently in the title story, it is of a different piece altogether and not relevant to this discussion. The focus here will therefore be on the first six stories.

20 The Proudfoots would wrestle one another, but the reader is assured that "These contests would be accompanied by much grunting, and by more laughter, as the Proudfoots were hard to anger" (4). Also, Berry makes it a point to mention that no one gets hurt. No eyes, for example, are gouged out, as they often are in other frontier stories.

21 These names come from two common frontier brags: "ring-tailed roarer" refers to a raccoon.

the last of the Proudfoots. As mentioned above, frontier humorists generally shared a sense that the outsized, wild characters typical in frontier mythology were a thing of the past; these larger-than-life characters were generally assumed to have disappeared along with the wilderness.

But Tol is not your typical frontier hero. Berry domesticates the Old Southwestern humor tradition and makes Tol an ideal husband—who is appropriately feminized—rather than a reckless rogue. The people around Port William "loved to tell and retell and hear and hear again the tales of his great strength. . . . But never, for a long time, would any of them have suspected that his great bulk might embody tender feelings" (5). The reader is, however, assured that "Tol did embody tender feelings, and very powerful tender feelings they were" (5). He loves, we find, Miss Minnie Quinch, the local schoolmarm; and the first story in the collection, "A Consent," depicts their courtship. Combining two subjects common to stories in the Old Southwestern humor tradition—sketches of local customs and courtships—this story culminates with Tol asking Miss Minnie if he may walk her home from the annual Harvest Festival after he has bid an exorbitant amount of money for her angel food cake at the bake sale. She says yes, and their relationship is begun.

Miss Minnie is, not surprisingly, a domesticating influence on her husband. As her cake symbolizes, she is an angel of the hearth for Tol.[22] As such, Miss Minnie must of course possess the domestic virtues. We know that she does when we read that she "had the gift of neatness. Her house was neat, and she herself was neat" (29). Moreover, we are informed that Tol appreciated her "book learning" and her "correct grammar" (29), which are characteristics of a good, moral person by the standards of domestic fiction. Most important of all, perhaps, she possesses "the great virtue of thriftiness" (40).

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[22] Whereas Minnie with her cake is a metonymic angel, the women in frontier humor are often compared to animals. Of Sicily Burns, Sut tells George, "her skin wer es white es the inside ove a frogstool, an' her cheeks an' lips es rosey es a pearch's gills in dorgwood blossum time . . ." (69-70). These earthly comparisons foreground women's baser natures; these female characters are not the moral paragons of domestic literature. Also, the frontier brags "half horse, half alligator" and "ringtailed roarer" emphasize man's animal nature.

As in many domestic novels, the male character is shown to need the softening of a woman's touch, the ameliorating effects of which tame his raw masculinity and make him a more docile and civilized person. Miss Minnie domesticates Tol, but only half way. Her attempts to dress him neatly and keep his wild hair under control are to no avail (49-50). But we are assured that "Tol was like Minnie in his love of neatness, and his farm was neatly kept. His barn was as neat in its way as Miss Minnie's house" (29-30). The narrator's description of Tol's difference from his grandfather sums up Miss Minnie's domesticating influence on Tol: "In himself and in his life, Tol Proudfoot had come a considerable way from the frontier independence and uproariousness of Old Ant'ny's household. He was a gentler, a more modest, perhaps a smarter man than his grandfather. And he had submitted, at least somewhat, the quieting and ordering influence of Miss Minnie" (116-117). Note that for Berry the more domesticated man, the more feminized man, is the smarter man.

A domesticated version of the typical tall tale hero, Tol is a farmer, not a frontiers-man. Unlike stories about Davy Crockett, for example, which are characterized by their "theme of wandering adventure" (Rourke 65), Tol is content to stay home and tend his small farm of 98 acres. Moreover, Berry makes a point of explaining that Tol very rarely traveled farther than four miles from his house. Thus he is clearly not overly adventurous. Having been raised in a farming family, he is not breaking from tradition; he is not rebelling. He is not a rugged individualist either, we are assured, since we are told on the first page that he regularly swaps work with his siblings and his neighbors. He is a domestic hero inhabiting a tradition usually reserved for pioneers, frontiersmen, adventurers, and, as stated above, "Scalawags, gamblers, ne'er-do-wells, [and] small rapscallions . . ." (Rourke 69).

Tol and Minnie live by the domestic virtues and keep a nice house and farm. Although Tol kept his house nice on the outside during his bachelor days, it was cold and austere on the inside. But then he marries Miss Minnie, and she completes his life and softens his home with her feminine graces (9-10); her housekeeping skills complement

his farming expertise.[23] In matters of domestic economy, their lives exemplify the domestic-pastoral ideal:

> Their daily lives were full of matters that were in the most literal sense lively: gardens and crops and livestock, kitchen and smokehouse and cellar, shed and barn and pen, plantings and births and harvests, washing and ironing and cooking and canning and cleaning, feeding and milking, patching and mending. (25)

Berry describes their good housekeeping and husbandry, in short, by explaining that they "put up most of the stuff they needed" (52). Whereas Simon Suggs's motto was "It is good to be shifty in a new country," the Proudfoots' motto—and Berry's—could be summed up as "It is good to be thrifty in a new country." Whereas most of the frontier humorists relished the anti-domestic, disruptive, and rowdy exploits of the backwoodsman, Berry makes his comic hero an exemplar of the domestic-pastoral virtues.

In the second story, "A Half-Pint of Old Darling," Berry inverts the frontier humor tradition of celebrating excessive whiskey drinking and writes a temperance tale of sorts like those often found in domestic fiction. Davy Crockett weaned himself on whiskey and Sut Lovingood drinks the stuff as prodigiously as he talks, but as for Tol, Berry flatly states that "Liquor . . . was something that he could easily go without" (26). The events recounted in the story take place in 1920, and Berry reminds the reader that that was the year the women's suffrage amendment was ratified and Prohibition went into effect. Miss Minnie, belonging as she does to the Women's Christian Temperance Union and wanting "to have a little bit of say-so" politically, is understandably quite pleased with both amendments. Good feminized husband that he is, Tol agrees with her, saying, "So it's out

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23 In Longstreet's "The 'CHARMING CREATURE' as a Wife," a husband tells his profligate wife, "You have only to use industry and care within doors, and I without, to place us, in a very few years, above the frowns of fortune" (109). Such a sentiment was common in domestic literature. The woman was to take care of the house, and the husband would take care of business in the outside world.

with the whiskey and in with the women" (27). During one of their occasional trips to Hargrave for shopping, Berry makes it a point to explain that they "told each other all that they'd thought of and meant to say as soon as they got the chance" (33).[24] In town, Tol, unbeknownst to Minnie, buys a pint of whiskey, which he used occasionally to help revivify newborn lambs that seemed a little weak. Finding it under the seat of the buggy on the way home, Miss Minnie, "in a curious metamorphosis from the great virtue of thriftiness to the much smaller virtue of romantic self-sacrifice," drinks the whole bottle of whiskey unnoticed to save her apparently "wayward husband" (40). She gets drunk, of course, and makes a bit of a spectacle of herself on the way home by shouting at passers-by about the merits of a local political candidate. Once home, she drunkenly accuses Tol of being a drunkard. He explains, they make up, and he lovingly tucks her into bed. The unnamed narrator informs us, "This was, oddly, a tale that Miss Minnie enjoyed telling" (46). The narrator informs us that she concludes one retelling by expressing her admiration for her husband: she says, "Mr. Proudfoot was horrified. But after it was over, he just had to rear back and laugh. Oh, he was a man of splendid qualities!" (46). Frontier heroes and backwoodsmen were big drinkers; Berry turns this tradition on its head by having a teetotaling woman get drunk to save her husband. He also inverts the conventions of domestic sentimental literature in which drunken men often ruined marriages; here, Miss Minnie gets drunk to save her husband. The theme of the story is straight out of sentimental domestic fiction: a woman must sacrifice herself for the good of her marriage.

The next story, "The Lost Bet," combines two subjects common to the Old South-western humor tradition: the rustic in the big city and practical jokes. Minnie's nephew

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[24] It is worth mentioning that Berry has the narrator explain that in the twelve years Tol and Miss Minnie had been married, "they had found how secret their lives had been before. They had made many small discoveries that were sometimes exciting sometimes not. One of the best," we are told, "had been Tol's discovery that Miss Minnie could whistle" (38). The narrator then informs us that he is "going to tell about the more famous revelation by which Miss Minnie learned Tol's method of revivifying weak lambs" (38). Thus the story is put in the context of Tol and Minnie's relationship as husband and wife and the long process of getting to know one another's quirks and habits. It is a domestic story about their increasing intimacy and their affection for one another.

Sam Hanks goes with Tol on his annual trip to the stockyards in Louisville to sell Tol's steers. After selling his cattle, Tol goes to buy a bushel of navy beans in "a grocery store obviously set up to cater to the city trade" (53). Behind the counter is "a dapper fellow with a round face and round eyeglass, his hair parted down the middle" (53-54). Looking on are some other city slickers: "fellows in suits—drummers" (53). Tol's entrance stops their talking, for

> Tol had been beyond the reach and influence of Miss Minnie long enough to look unusual. He looked as tall and wide as the door. He wore a sheepskin coat, unbuttoned, that flared out at the back and sides, giving the impression of great forward momentum. Half his shirttail was out. The bill of his next-best winter cap hovered between his right eye and his right ear. His britches legs were stuffed into the top of a pair of gum boots plastered with manure. He had bought a bag of hard candy as a gift for Miss Minnie, and the twisted neck of the sack now stuck out as though he carried a setting goose in his pocket. (54)

Winking at the drummers, the proprietor asks, "What can I do for you, Otis?" (54), and during the course of the transaction, proceeds to call Tol a series of insulting names: Timothy, Mr. Wheatley, Mr. Bulltrack, Mr. Briarly, and Spud. After the first insult, Sam, standing by the door, notices that Tol screws his eyes up in anger and is ready for a contest; but Tol does not let on that he is angry and continues to call the man "sir." After paying for the beans, Tol fishes a quarter out of his pocket and says, "Ever see one of them disappear? I can make that disappear" (56). Tol proceeds to purposely drop the quarter twice—losing it once between two baskets of produce and once behind the stove—to the great delight of the onlookers, who "were laughing out loud now" and "holding onto themselves" (57). "Well, that ain't all the tricks I can do," Tol says. "I'll bet you this quarter I can jump into that basket of eggs and not break a one" (57). The proprietor quickly replies, "Well, Spud, old boy, I'll just bet you can't" (57). Just as the proprietor realizes his mistake and says "Wup," Tol jumps into the basket smashing all

the eggs, and "a viscous puddle began to spread slowly around the basket" (57). Mouth agape, all the proprietor can do is take the quarter and put it in his pocket. The narrator tells us that he "heard Sam Hanks tell the story in town one July afternoon, and the next time I stopped by to see Miss Minnie, it occurred to me to ask her if she had ever heard it" (58). "She had, of course," the narrator tells us,

> And she told it much as Sam had told it, but a good deal shorter. She was sitting in her rocker in the kitchen of the little house where she and Tol had passed the time their lives had been joined together. Now, their lives put asunder, Miss Minnie told the story with the mixture of approval and amusement with which she usually remembered Tol. (58-59).

"Mr. Proudfoot was that way," she concludes. "But he was half sorry just as soon as he did it" (59). The heroes of frontier humor, by contrast, do not know the meaning of the word "remorse"; they gloat over the victims of their tricks and swindles, often robbing people of their savings, stealing their horses or wives, and sometimes injuring their victims in the process. Tol's escapade is certainly tame by comparison.

Not in the frontier humor tradition as conspicuously as the other stories, "Nearly to the Fair" shows that Tol and Minnie liked to stay close to home and are not wandering adventurers, as were most of the main characters in the Old Southwestern humor tradition. Though we know from the previous story that "Tol and Miss Minnie lived almost their entire lives within a radius of four miles" (47), in this story, Tol and Minnie uncharacteristically decide to take their new Model A Ford—a car Tol bought because he thought, mistakenly, Miss Minnie wanted it—to the State Fair in Louisville. The trip is described as "their adventure" (78). To drive the car, they recruit twelve-year-old Elton Penn, who, as their neighbor, was "a godsend to Tol and Miss Minnie, who had no children of their own" (72).[25] Sam Hanks had drawn them a map that proved to be

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[25] Although—or because—the comic heroes of frontier stories loved to gamble, the narrator describes how Tol taught Elton not to gamble. He did it by winning a dime from Elton playing heads-or-tails, a dime that Elton had just earned splitting stove wood. Tol gives it back, saying, "Son, don't never gamble" (71).

unintelligible, so they get lost in the city of Louisville, having gone past the stockyards and thus beyond Tol's range of knowledge. "They did not know where home was," the narrator tells us. "Failure and despair came upon them" (82). Then they have a minor fender bender. After getting their bumper unstuck from that of a rather truculent man, Elton asks, "where does that map say to go now?" "Home, son," Tol says. "By thunder, it says to go home." "Yes," Miss Minnie agrees, "let us go home" (87). The narrator tells us he heard the story from Elton Penn and Sam Hanks, and when he brought the subject up with Miss Minnie once, she said: "Oh, yes! We weren't able to get all the way to the Fair. We got nearly all the way. I'm sure it was wonderful. But we did succeed in getting all the way home. And wasn't Mr. Proudfoot happy to be here!" (88). For Berry's domesticated comic hero, the comforts of home clearly trump the excitement of an adventure.

The story "The Solemn Boy" is in the tradition of the type of Old Southwestern humor story that Cohen and Dillingham refer to as "The visitor in the humble home" (xxiv). The events in the story take place during the height of the Depression in 1934 when Tol is 62 years old. On a blustery winter day, he is down in a small creek-bottom field shucking and cribbing corn. As he is driving the loaded wagon home at dinner-time, Tol sees a man and a small boy around nine or ten years old walking up the road. They are dressed in clothes ill suited to the cold wind. Tol offers them a ride up the hill on his horse-drawn wagon. At first the man declines out of what Told suspects must be fear or embarrassment or pride. For his boy's sake, the man finally accepts, although he is not forthcoming about their names, origin, or destination. The narrator says, "Tol wanted to ask more questions, but the man held himself and the boy apart" (100). "But now," we are told, Tol "had the boy on his mind," for he suspected that he "might not have had much breakfast, by the look of him. And who might, Tol thought, not have much to look forward to in the way of dinner of supper" (100-101). After some cajoling, the man finally accepts Tol's invitation to join Miss Minnie and him for dinner. Throughout the

meal, the man remains reserved; the boy, shy and quiet.[26] The man and boy eat much but say little. Tol tries to make the boy laugh or smile by saying, "Why, I wish you would look. Every time that boy's elbow bends, his mouth flies open." But we are told, "the boy did not smile. He was a solemn boy, far too solemn for his age" (106). Tol tries another gambit to amuse the boy, but the boy will not smile or even look up. As the meal ends, "Tol and Miss Minnie yearned toward that nice, skinny, peaked, really pretty little boy, and the old kitchen filled with their yearning . . ." (106). Then Tol tells the boy that when drinking buttermilk, it is best to drink out of the near side of the glass: "For drinking from the far side . . . don't work anything quite so well" (107). Then, as surprised as anyone else, Tol tries to drink from the far side of the glass and pours buttermilk all over himself. At last the boy laughs:

> And then they heard the boy. At first it sounded like he had an obstruction in his throat that he worked at with a sort of strangling. And then he laughed.
>
> He laughed with a free, strong laugh that seemed to open his throat as wide as a stovepipe. It was the laugh of a boy who was completely tickled. It transformed everything. Miss Minnie smiled. And then Tol laughed his big hollering laugh. And then Miss Minnie laughed. And then the boy's father laughed. The man and the boy looked up, they all looked full into one another's eyes, and they laughed. (107-108)

Tol's impulsive prank is of course not done at anyone's expense; he does it out of kindness and a desire to amuse the boy and to create a sense of goodwill amongst them all. It works. They eat more biscuits covered in molasses and they talk. Before the man and the boy leave, Miss Minnie gives them some hand-me-down clothes, including one

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[26] The description of the meal lives up to what Mary Ryan refers to as "the domestic sublime" in her description of the meal George and Eliza have with the Birds in *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* The narrator describes the meal Miss Minnie cooked thus: "There was plenty of everything: a platter of sausage, and more already in the skillet on the stove; biscuits brown and light, and more in the oven; a big bowl of navy beans, and more in the kettle on the stove, a big bowl of applesauce and one of mashed potatoes" (104-05). This is another instance where Berry conflates the features of domestic fiction with those of the Old Southwestern humor tradition.

of Miss Minnie's old winter coats for the boy. Tol says, "You might as well leave that boy with us. . . . We could use a boy like that." "He was joking," the narrator tells us, "and yet he meant it with his whole heart" (111). After the boy leaves, Tol and Miss Minnie, who never had a child of their own, do not look at each other for the rest of the day. Ten years later, after Tol had been dead a year, the narrator is visiting Miss Minnie with his grandmother. Talk turns to the Depression and Miss Minnie is reminded of the story and tells it again, "stopping," the narrator tells us, with Tol's words, "'We could use a boy like that'" (112). The narrator describes "how she sat, looking down at her apron and smoothing it with her hands. 'Mr. Proudfoot always wished we'd had some children,' she said. 'He never said so, but I know he did'" (112). Unlike a story in the Old Southwestern humor tradition, which would build up to a humorous incident for the sake of the joke, Berry's story uses a humorous incident to reveal a painful fact of Tol and Miss Minnie's relationship—their shared regret for not having a child. For a story centered on a humorous prank, it ends on a melancholy note, revealing a widow's loss, the loss of her husband and the loss of a child she never had, a child Tol so desperately wanted. Although the scenario comes from the frontier humor tradition, the values that make the story moving are based on the domestic ethos that suggests that the childless are to be pitied.

Of all the stories in *Watch with Me,* "Turn Back the Bed" borrows most directly from the humor of the Old Southwest tradition. More specifically, it owes an obvious debt to the Sut Lovingood stories of George Washington Harris. In fact, Berry reveals his source and inspiration by naming a character in the story—one of Tol's uncles—George Washington Proudfoot. Like several of Harris's Sut stories, Berry's story depicts a local custom that is disrupted by a mischievous character that uses animals to create havoc. In Harris's "Sicily Burns's Wedding," for example, Sut gets revenge on Sicily for not accepting his advances by ruining her wedding reception with the help of a bull and "five solid bushels" of bees. The bull crashes through a wall of the Burns house with a basket

full of bees over its head and thousands trailing behind. The destruction is such that the food and dishes are "mixed and mashed like it had been thu a threshing machine" (52). The bride, groom, family members, and guests are all badly stung; and Ole Man Burns gets carried away by the bee-mad bull. Harris uses a separate story, "Ole Burns's Bull-Ride," to explain the indignities Burns suffers on the ride and his subsequent madness. The upshot of all this is that Sut has a fifty-dollar bounty on his head and is being pursued by Burns's two "fox-huntin sons."[27]

In Berry's story, the local custom is a family custom, one of the famous Proudfoot family gatherings, which were immense in the time of Tol's grandfather. Old Ant'ny, we are told, had "sired a nation of Proudfoots," and along with their spouses and in-laws and children, they would all come to Old Ant'ny's place several times a year. Old Ant'ny was a bigger man than even Tol would become, and he had a long white beard. A man of few words, Old Ant'ny would generally put an end to the proceedings by saying, "Well, Maw, turn back the bed. These folks want to be gettin' on home" (116). Tol tells the story of what happened at one of these family get-togethers when he was five years old, not long after the Civil War. Lester, one of his slightly older cousins, climbs on the roof of the house and pushes a cat down the chimney. "He didn't go all the way down," Lester tells the younger boys gathered below. "He ain't going to make it back up" (125). As a solution, he has the younger boys hand up Old Ant'ny's dog Toby, and he sends Toby down the chimney after the cat. "[F]alling and fighting," the dog and cat land in the hearth, spewing ashes over the uncles drinking around the unlit fireplace. The animals run amok in the house. Then Lester's mother, Aunt Belle, rightly suspecting that he begat this chaos, chases him with as much energy as the boys had chased the dog and the cat. She catches Lester under a bed in the bedroom above the living room. As she drags him out, an unemptied chamber pot tips over, spilling its contents through the spaces between

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[27] Besides "Sicily Burns's Wedding," two other Sut stories that seem to have influenced Berry's "Turn Back the Bed" are "Parson John Bullen's Lizards" and "Mrs. Yardley's Quilting."

the old floorboards and on to Old Ant'ny below. "Old Ant'ny, who sat unmoving as before, looking straight ahead, as though he had foreseen it all years ago and was resigned," says quite simply, "Maw, turn back the bed. These folks want to be gettin' on home" (129). Compared with Sut Lovingood's antics in Harris's stories, Lester's shenanigans are rather harmless. In "Mrs. Yardley's Quilting," which contains the most extreme violence in any of the Sut stories, Mrs. Yardley gets killed because of Sut's prank, and the young man referred to as the Dominecker is likely a casualty as well, although we never find out if he survives his injuries.

Inspired as they were by the conventions of storytelling, most of the stories in the humor of the Old Southwest tradition employ a framework that describes the occasion for the telling of the story and sometimes provides a description of the storyteller. Thus the events of the story are bracketed by the comments of the author or by those of a narrator. As we have seen, Berry uses an informal frame in his Tol Proudfoot stories; every story but the first one ends with the narrator explaining from whom he heard the story. In every story but the last, he explains that he might have heard the story from various sources, but he also heard it from Miss Minnie; and he tells us what her comments were and perhaps even her manner of telling it. The narrator hears the last story, "Turn Back the Bed," from Tol himself. In Tol's yard as a boy, the narrator hears Tol tell it just a year or two before his death. Speaking of the scene, the narrator says, "I will never forget the ones who were still alive that day and how they looked: old Tol with his hands at rest in his lap, laughing until tears ran down his face, and the others around him laughing with him" (129-130). He describes Tol's laugh "as a good laugh, broad and free and loud, including all of us as generously as the shade we sat in, and not only those of us who were living, but Old Ant'ny and Maw Proudfoot and Uncle O.R. and Uncle Fowler and Aunt Belle and Lester and the rest whose bodies lay in their darkness nearby" (129). Tol's laugh is inclusive and generous, and since the teller and the listeners are all members of the same community, their laughter joins them together as family and friends.

By contrast, in the traditional Old Southwestern sketch, the frame highlights the differences between the original teller of the story and the narrator who is retelling it. "In such stories," Cohen and Dillingham explain, "the author takes the superior vantage point of a cultured gentleman observing and describing the doings of rougher folk. The typical sketch opens and closes with the author's own words, reasoned and dignified" (xxix). They add that

> The Southwest humorist wanted to laugh at the earthly life around him and to enjoy it, but he did not want to be identified with it. Like the Romantics, he recognized the existence of the more humble aspects of life, but he had no desire to cast his lot with the yokels. The framework was thus an effective manner of setting off the narrator, who liked to consider himself a gentleman of self-control, taste, and reason, from the oddities he presented in his story. (xxx)

As Cohen and Dillingham emphasize, "the flawless grammar and flowerly rhetoric of the narrator contrast comically with the vernacular speech used by the backwoodsmen and the country folk of the sketch" (xxx). By framing the story thus, the earlier humorists reveal that they saw themselves as different than—if not superior to—the bumpkins they wrote about. Moreover, the condescension inherent in the frame betrays the fact that they wrote their stories with the urban market in mind.

In Berry's Tol Proudfoot stories, however, the original teller of the tale is not a stranger the narrator met while traveling, never to be seen again. The narrator did not hear these stories on a steamboat or a stagecoach. The unnamed narrator in Berry's stories is a member of the same community as the Proudfoots, and the stories about Tol are part of the folklore of the area around Port William. Whereas the typical frame highlights the differences between the original teller of the story and the narrator—and, by extension, the reader—Berry's Tol Proudfoot stories reveal no distinction between the teller of the tale, the characters the tale is about, and the narrator. There is no difference in the way they talk; the language they speak is the same because they are neighbors.

And there is no condescension on the part of the narrator towards the other characters—only warm feelings. After all, the narrator and the Proudfoots were neighbors and friends, and the narrator's fondness for Tol and Miss Minnie is evident. Miss Minnie and Tol and the narrator are members of what Berry has referred elsewhere as "the Beloved Community," and Miss Minnie and Tol will remain members of the community in the stories told about them. "By the time I came to know him," the narrator says, "Tol was well along in years. He had become an elder in the community, and had recognized his memories, the good ones anyhow, as gifts, to himself and to the rest of us" (117).

These stories are a tidy exemplum of Berry's aesthetics. In them, he is writing in an inherited genre that is part of the history of his native region. But unlike Mark Twain, who not only borrowed the conventions of Old Southwestern humor but also shared its sensibilities, Berry changes its usual themes to highlight the domestic virtues. The Tol Proudfoot stories represent Berry's attempt to rewrite the tradition out of which Twain wrote *Huckleberry Finn*. As such, with the Tol Proudfoot stories Berry has written stories of adult responsibility, not childish escapism. It makes sense that Berry would try to rewrite the tradition out of which *Huckleberry Finn* comes since he is so troubled by what he sees as the errant philosophy behind it. Rather than celebrating brute strength, reckless enthusiasm, shameless cheating, vengeful hatred, and self-serving guile—and all sorts of other anti-social behavior common in the comic stories of the Old Southwest—Berry's Tol Proudfoot stories celebrate a committed, loving relationship between a thrifty housewife and a hard-working farmer who live in a community bound by common affection and shared stories. The stories in the Old Southwestern humor tradition celebrate the individual propelled by a restless adventurous impulse; Berry's Tol Proudfoot stories celebrate a community connected by shared history, cooperative work, common interests, and affection. Moreover, like Harlan Hubbard, whom Berry praises for being "concerned with fidelity—fidelity to his subject, to his art, and to the love that joined the two" (*Harlan Hubbard* 65), in the Tol Proudfoot stories, Berry remains faithful

to his subject—the Port William membership—and to his art. Recall that Berry has said, "I know that when one works out of love—for family, community, craft—one is strong" ("Art of Place" 31). In these stories, which he dedicates to his maternal grandparents, Berry reveals his commitment to his craft, his region's history, his community, and his family; and he does it without glancing "over [his] shoulder at literary opinion" or fearing "for [his] reputation in any 'center of culture'" (*What Are People For?* 74).

Part III: Berry's Domesticated Fiction

Berry's use of the humor of the Old Southwest tradition reveals his domestic sensibility in several positive senses: among other things, it shows his appreciation for traditional forms and his respect for his subjects, as revealed by his narrator's warm regard for Tol and Minnie. The stories also exemplify Berry's domestic sensibility in that they celebrate the mature love that can exist between a man and a woman and the affection that can exist between members of a community. Whereas the frontier humorists were partly trying to provide a realistic account of the rough-and-tumble life of the individual on the frontier, Berry uses the genre to express his idealized vision of a farming community, a community comprised of good marriages between husbands and wives and between husbandmen and farms. However, although Berry's domestication of the frontier humor tradition in *Watch with Me* is successful, his domestic aesthetic, which affects his style and his characterizations, weakens most of his other fiction.

Before providing examples of how Berry's domestic aesthetic weakens his novels stylistically and thematically by flattening out characters' discourse and blurring their uniqueness as individuals, let us consider the ways that different languages can signify more than just different ways of speaking. Russian rhetorician and literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin convincingly explains the ways in which different languages represent different perspectives, different ideologies. "We are taking language," Bakhtin explains, "not as a

system of abstract grammatical categories, but rather language conceived as ideologically saturated, language as a world view . . .” (271).

Central to Bakhtin’s ideas about language is his notion of dialogism: what Bakhtin means by saying that all language is dialogized is that any truth, any belief, any way of perceiving the world, exists within the context of other beliefs, other truths. Bakhtin’s English translator Michael Holquist defines dialogism as the “constant interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential of conditioning others” (426). When discussing extraliterary language, the way that language works among people in the everyday world, Bakhtin emphasizes that

> at any given moment of its historical existence, language is heteroglot from top to bottom: it represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles, and so forth, all given in a bodily form. These “languages” of heteroglossia intersect each other in a variety of ways, forming new socially typifying “languages.” (291)

There have been innumerable ideologies and perspectives on the world throughout human history, and these worldviews compete for social predominance; they compete, that is, for people’s assent. The raw material for a person’s consciousness is the language that that person is exposed to: “The ideological becoming of a human being” Bakhtin explains, “is the process of selectively assimilating the words of others” (341).

Bakhtin’s observations about language are of great importance to the study of novels, because as Bakhtin puts it, “each character’s speech possesses its own belief system” (315);[28] and each character’s convictions are then “subjected in the novel to contest” (333). This struggle takes place between languages—that is, belief systems—in

[28] “The speaking person in the novel is always, to one degree or another, an ideologue,” writes Bakhtin. “A particular language in a novel is always a particular way of viewing the world, one that strives for social significance” (333).

the novel. Characters' voices, narrator's observations, incorporated genres and so on: in a novel, all these languages are "drawn into the battle between points of view, value judgments and emphases . . ." (315-16). This diversity of voices, or "heteroglossia," defines the novel as a genre for Bakhtin (300), because the novelist orchestrates themes through different languages.

As we have seen above, the Old Southwestern humorists used different dialects and varying levels of linguistic formality to distinguish between the social status of the genteel urban narrators and the unschooled frontier storytellers. The urbane narrators—generally the authors themselves—see the world differently and have different values than do the ruffians portrayed in their stories. Thus the frontier humorists use language in the sense that Bakhtin refers to; in Old Southwestern humor, language represents ideology. In the Told Proudfoot stories, on the other hand, Berry has the narrator speak the same language—both in the literal sense of dialect and in the broader Bakhtinian sense of worldview—as the Proudfoots, because the narrator shares their belief system, as do the other members of the community. His flattening out of linguistic differences in these stories is artistically successful because it is done in the context of the conventions of the humor of the Old Southwest: which is to say that the fact that the narrator and the Proudfoots speak the same language—the fact that there is no ideological difference between the narrator's voice in the frame and the characters' voices in the tales themselves—assumes thematic significance when we consider the stories in the context of the conventions of the Old Southwestern humor tradition. As Bakhtin might put it, the language of the Tol Proudfoot stories is dialogized not in the stories themselves but within the context of the frontier humor tradition of which they are a part.

But Berry's domestic aesthetic weakens his other fiction stylistically and thematically. As noted, almost all of the important characters in Berry's fiction—Jack Beechum, Mat Feltner, Burley Coulter, Elton Penn, Wheeler Catlett, Jayber Crow, Danny Branch, Andy Catlett—are members of what he refers to as the Port William membership. That

is, they share the same ideals concerning what a good husband is and what a good farmer is. Although they might not always live up to the ideal, they strive to. This membership embraces men from different families and different generations, but still these characters speak the same way; they do not sound unique and they do not think differently. In novel after novel, Berry emphasizes that the members of the Port William membership share sayings and expressions; they share language and pass it down as they share a common worldview that is handed down from generation to generation. In *Remembering,* for example, Andy Catlett is at an academic conference on agricultural issues. Hearing the listless drone of abstract academic language, which seems to him completely cut off from the realities of farm work, he is reminded of one of Elton Penn's favorite expressions: "If you're going to talk to me, fellow, you'll have to walk." We are informed that Old Jack Beechum had first said that to Andy's grandfather Mat Feltner when Mat "was trying to impress [Jack] with something learned in college" (18). Berry writes that "Mat had never forgotten it, and neither had any of the rest of the company of friends who inherited the memories of Old Jack and Mat." Berry explains that "Elton's mind had been, in part, a convocation of the voices of predecessors saying appropriate things at appropriate times, talk-shortening sentences or phrases that he spoke to turn attention back to the job or the place or the concern at hand or for the pure pleasure he took in some propriety of remembrance" (18). Elton's mind is "a convocation of voices," but all the voices are saying the same thing. Berry portrays all the good farmers and husbands in his novels speaking the same language to emphasize that they share the same domestic values.

Not only does Berry not differentiate the language of the good husbands, he does not allow the characters he does not approve of to voice a position contrary to his own in a compelling fashion—either in words or in deeds. For example, farmers who live by the maxim that bigger is better and buy as much land as possible, farmers who use tenant farmers and hired help, and farmers who use large farm machinery to lighten their work load are not allowed to voice a persuasive defense of their worldview; and they are not

shown to live a life worth emulating. None is shown to be happy with the wealth and the leisure time he has earned for himself and his family. These farmers go broke and get ulcers. Their families are fragmented and their lives hollow, and the land they farm is misused and run down. Sims McGrother, in *The Memory of Old Jack,* is one such farmer. Of him, Berry writes, "His hands would, with equal indifference, ruin a horse's mouth or a hillside" (69), and "His women hung behind him, out of his reach, watchful of his wrath, as anxious and fluttery as killdees [sic]" (70). Married couples who have no children and seem discontented with life in the country are also not portrayed in a positive light. In *A World Lost*, Andy Catlett's Uncle Andrew is a city lover confined to the country. Berry has Uncle Andrew speak a different language, a more urban dialect with jazzy expressions, but he does not allow him to enact an enticing urban life. If Andy's Uncle Andrew and Aunt Judith enjoyed a life in a city, dining at a variety of ethnic restaurants and going to the opera, for example, then Uncle Andrew could be said to voice and enact a worldview and a lifestyle contrary to that of Andy's father in a fashion compelling enough to tempt Andy. But as it is, they live a stultifying life in small rural town and are childless—childlessness being a source of pity and a definition of failure in Berry's domestic value system. In Berry's fiction, then, characters that are not happily married family men who are also enacting a conscious marriage to their land are not allowed to voice or enact a life that would appeal to anyone.

As noted, for Bakhtin, novel writing means allowing characters to voice their own worldview and allowing for their worldview to be challenged by other characters' unique languages. Berry does not do this. Although there is, in fact, an ideological battle going on between characters in his fiction, Berry does not portray characters whose worldviews differ from his own in a compelling fashion; such characters are only cardboard cut outs, straw men meant to reveal the weakness of their belief system and, by extension, the rightness of Berry's. In considering all of the male characters who play a significant role in Berry's corpus—and no female character becomes much more individuated than a

caricature—there is not one respectable male character that does not in the end conform to Berry's ideas of what constitutes a good husband and good farmer. Whereas for Bakhtin the greatest novels enact an ideological battle, the battle between languages, between ways of seeing the world, is rigged from the start in Berry's fictional world.

According to Bakhtin, dialogism is not just happening in the pages of book; it is happening, first of all, in the author's mind.[29] The author uses the artistic structure of the novel to test his ideas against others' by orchestrating a debate among different characters. After all, the novelist's mind, like everyone else's, is a parliament. Bakhtin explains that the writer develops his themes by orchestrating a debate among these voices. Moreover, he emphasizes that the novelist should welcome heteroglot languages into his work (299).[30] "The novel," according to Bakhtin,

> refuses to acknowledge its own language as the sole verbal and semantic center of the ideological world. It is a perception that has been made conscious of the vast plenitude of national and, more to the point, social languages—all of which are equally capable of being "languages of truth." . . . The novel begins by presuming a verbal and semantic decentering of the ideological world, a certain linguistic homelessness of literary consciousness, which no longer possesses a sacrosanct and unitary linguistic medium of containing ideological thought. . . . (366-67)

The sort of linguistic and ideological homelessness that Bakhtin is referring to—and what a felicitous choice of words for the purposes of this study—is exactly what Berry cannot abide when writing a novel; he does not adventurously leave his metaphoric home and

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29 Dialogism is occurring in the reader's mind as well.

30 "[A]ll languages of heteroglossia," Bakhtin explains, "are specific points of view on the world, forms for conceptualizing the world in words, specific world views. . . . As such they all may be juxtaposed to one another, mutually supplement one another, contradict one another and be interrelated ideologically. As such they encounter one another and co-exist in the consciousness of real people—first and foremost, in the creative consciousness of people who write novels. As such, these languages live a real life, they struggle and evolve in an environment of social heteroglossia" (291-92).

allow himself to come to new conclusions about what defines a good farmer or, more broadly, what defines a good life. He allows other ideologically freighted languages to be voiced and enacted in his novels, but not in such a way as to suggest that they might be "languages of truth." He will not allow the process of writing a novel to change what he thinks. He is, in my opinion, correct in much of his thinking—sociologically, philosophically, and economically—but his didactic tendencies make it difficult for him to write artistically successful novels by contemporary literary standards. The battle between ideologies in Berry's mind has already been won; the victorious ideology, the victorious language, writes his novels: which is to say that because Berry will not allow himself to be tempted by other worldviews, because he is so committed to domestic-pastoral ideology, his novels are not truly heteroglot.

Although he uses a different lexicon than Bakhtin, William Spengemann defines successful novel writing in much the same way. The successful novelist, according to Spengemann, writes adventurously. Believing, as Spengemann does, that the American literary tradition came out of travel writing and narratives of exploration, he emphasizes novel writing as an act of self-discovery for the novelist; the adventurous novelist does not know with certainty what he thinks about the subject under consideration until he writes the novel. In *Huckleberry Finn*, for example, Twain sets out, among other things, to explore the morality of slavery, and like Huck, who, as Spengemann puts it, "clearly has no idea where the voyage is headed once it gets underway" (225), Twain apparently did not know what he would think about the slavery question when he finished writing the novel. His dilemma was such that he quit writing *Huckleberry Finn* for the better part of three years before resuming work on it because he did not know how to finish the novel. In the end, Huck defies societal convention, of course, and decides that although the law and the social expectations of St. Petersburg dictate that he return Jim to his rightful owner, he will not. "All right then. I'll go to Hell," Huck declares. Through the course of the novel, Huck changes from a rambunctious but unthinking Southern child to a morally

autonomous individual not defined by the constricted mores of his community. By the end of the novel, Huck comes to regard Jim as a man and a friend, not as a slave. His moral development parallels Twain's. "The act of writing *Huckleberry Finn* had changed Twain," Spengemann argues, "making it impossible for him, as for Huck, to go back and be again the man he was before he traveled" (234).[31] Berry, on the other hand, does not metaphorically travel when he writes novels. He is not going to change his position on a subject because he does not allow his characters either to voice an opposing worldview in a convincing fashion or to enact a contrary lifestyle in an enticing manner.

Writing of language used adventurously, Spengemann quotes Ralph Waldo Emerson's conviction that "Words are also actions, and actions are a kind of words" (qtd. in Spengemann 227). "Because they are actions," Spengemann explains, "words move the speaker's soul into new moral postures; they do not leave him sunk in settled opinion" (227). Emerson again, using a felicitous metaphor: "For all symbols are fluxional, all language is vehicular and transitive, and is good, as horses and ferries are, for convey-ance, not as farms and houses are, for homestead" (qtd. in Spengemann 227). Using Emerson's analogy, it could be said that Berry writes from a metaphoric home, a well-defined position, from which he is disinclined to venture forth in search of new truths. He does not allow his novelistic prose to convey himself to new conclusions, new ideological positions.[32]

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[31] Spengemann adds that "In certain essential respects, Twain's artistic response to *Huckleberry Finn* resembles the reactions of Hawthorne and Melville to their great novels of moral adventure. . . . [B]oth Hawthorne and Melville had reacted against the organic forms of their respective masterpieces by turning immediately to the Domestic Romance in a foredoomed effort to recoup some measure of belief in absolute moral authority. Twain's career follows a remarkably similar course. His perception that free experience will not deliver the individual from history, led him back into history, in *A Connecticut Yankee* and *Joan of Arc*, to rediscover the lost strands of belief that once offered an escape from mortal error. And, like Hawthorne and Melville, Twain pursued his quest for tradition in a domestic form, the historical romance" (234).

[32] It is worth noting that Berry's collection of essays concerning literary aesthetics is entitled *Standing by Words*, and the epigraph he chose for Chapter Two comes from Milton's *Paradise Regained*: "He said, and stood . . . [Berry's ellipsis]."

CHAPTER 4:
BERRY'S DOMESTIC ECONOMIC IDEOLOGY

Berry's domestic worldview affects more than just his aesthetic sensibilities; his economic, political, and ecological beliefs are also informed by his ideological domesticity. His is a domestic vision in two senses: first, it is based on the home, the household, and the homeland; and, second, it is predicated upon the domestic virtues of love, intimacy, modest ambition, and selflessness. As a corrective to industrial capitalism, Berry offers an economic vision governed, as he puts it, by "the two fundamental laws of domestic or community economy: You must be thrifty and you must be generous; or, to put it in a more practical way, you must be (within reason) independent, and you must be neighborly" (*Home Economics* 173).

Like the nineteenth-century American cult of domesticity, Berry's domestic ideology is a response to rapid societal changes in general and industrial capitalism in particular. As the writers associated with the cult of domesticity saw the home as a haven from the corrupting influence of mercantile society, so Berry's domestic economic sensibility points toward a generous and loving attitude toward other people. It points to the ideal way we should conduct our business with one another. The competitiveness inherent in any capitalist system falls far short of the domestic virtue of love, and the greed and selfishness endemic to capitalism as it is generally practiced contrast unfavorably with the domestic virtues of modest ambition and selflessness. Robert J. Samuelson points out that "market capitalism is not just an economic system. It is also a set of cultural values that emphasizes the virtue of competition, the legitimacy of profit, and the value of freedom. These values are not necessarily universally shared. Other countries have organized systems around different values and

politics" (40).[1] As Marianne Williamson puts it, "The enemy is not capitalism, but greed. Capitalism is an economic system that reflects whatever integrity and compassion we choose to express within it. The problem in America is one of values, not of one or another economic system" (122). From the beginning, values opposed to capitalistic values have been a part of American life. As noted, John Winthrop's plea in 1630 that the members of the new society at the Massachusetts Bay Colony act as if they were married to one another is the primary American example of domestic sensibilities being proffered as the ideal impulse behind social relations.

Reflecting this domestic tradition, Berry objects to competition in general. He concedes that "There is no denying that competitiveness is part of the life both of an individual and of a community, or that, within limits, it is a useful and necessary part." But he adds, "it is equally obvious that no individual can lead a good or satisfying life under the rule of competition, and that no community can succeed except by limiting somehow the competitiveness of its members" (*What Are People For?* 134). Human relations are not a zero-sum game. If you defeat your neighbor, you may very well diminish yourself. If a person compromises his integrity by stopping at nothing to win in business, for example, what is the cost to his health, to his psyche, to his relationships? Moreover, what are the negative consequences of competitiveness when we broaden out from the individual to society? For one thing, competitiveness writ large results in the minority ownership of the majority of the capital: which is to say it widens the gap between the rich and the poor. Here is where the American ideals of freedom and equality contradict one another. Enriching oneself at the expense of one's neighbors leads to isolation and fear on one side and jealousy and resentment on the other. There are more and more gated communities where the gates are not just there for aesthetic

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[1] Capitalism as it is generally practiced goes beyond accepting the legitimacy of profits to seeing profit as the primary consideration. And the freedom accorded citizens in our global capitalist economy is constricted in many ways. The freedom to drink clean water, for example, is compromised by the freedom of corporations to minimize costs and maximize profits by polluting the water supply.

purposes; they are meant to keep the victorious and complacent rich safe from the defeated and exploited poor. Berry explains that competition "does not hesitate at the destruction of the life of a family or the life of a community. It pits neighbor against neighbor as readily as it pits buyer against buyer. Every transaction is *meant* to involve a winner and a loser" (*What Are People For?* 131). Berry asks how we can have a ruthlessly competitive economy and consider ourselves "a decent and democratic nation" (*Home Economics* 169).

The domestic virtues, however, can be a corrective to selfish competition. "[W]hat the ideal of competition most flagrantly and disastrously excludes," Berry laments, "is affection" (*What Are People For?* 136). It goes without saying that a person does not try to vanquish someone he loves, and a person will not destroy land that he cares for. A domestic viewpoint demands that one consider people as human beings with inherent rights and unique gifts, not simply as units of labor or as a target market—likewise with land and animals. Affection and love, which are at the heart of Berry's domestic economic ideology, require a consideration of things that are not necessarily quantifiable. They bring ethical and spiritual concerns into the equation.

Intimacy is impossible without particulars; it does not exist in the abstract. A person does not love the idea of a woman or a man; a person loves particular people. A person does not love the idea of a river, say, or a farm; a person loves a particular river and a particular farm. A person—at least a reasonable person—does not love a pile of money. "The evil," Berry writes, "of the industrial economy (capitalist or communist) is the abstractness inherent in its procedures—its inability to distinguish one place or person or creature from another" (*Sex, Economy, Freedom & Community* 23). You cannot love something you are not close to. Domesticity implies intimacy and allows for the growth of affection. A sense of responsibility and care are the results. A farmer who has worked his farm for years has intimate knowledge of the fields and fencerows and ditches and hills on his farm, which will not only give him a proprietary sense of responsibility but

also make him a better farmer of that land. He knows from experience—perhaps from his father's or grandfather's experience as well—what his farm will or will not allow him to do; he might know from experience, for example, how far up he can plow on a certain slope without causing the soil to erode and slump.

Love and *affection* are not words much used by the typical economist, likewise with *honesty*, *community*, *compassion*, and *trust*. "It is impossible," Berry writes, "not to notice how little the proponents of the ideal of competition have to say about honesty, which is the fundamental economic virtue, and how *very* little they have to say about community, compassion, and mutual help" (*Home Economics* 135). Honesty and trust do of course have economic value. Berry points out that when members of a community know and trust each other, they will help one another and do business without the expensive threat of litigation—not to mention the actual costs of litigation (*What Are People For?* 157).[2]

Another consideration left out by the industrial economists is health. Just as a home ideally contributes to the physical and emotional health of its members, a domestic economic perspective considers the health of the people and the environment upon which the economy is based. But health is not easily quantifiable; it is a condition quite unlike unemployment and is not easily measured. Even if it were easy to measure the health of the U.S. work force, the health of workers and the land are not the first priorities for the leaders of industry. Berry writes, "Industrial economists cannot measure the economy by the health of nature, for they regard nature simply as a source for 'raw materials.' They cannot measure it by the health of people, for they regard people as 'labor' (that is, as tools or machine parts) or as 'consumers.' They can measure the health of the economy only in sums of money" (*Home Economics* 168).

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[2] Clearly, the lack of trust investors now have in the accuracy of corporate accounting has profoundly affected the economy of the United States.

A rule of industrial economics that Berry takes issue with is, as he puts it, "the one that says that all hard physical work is 'drudgery' and not worth doing" (*What Are People For?* 141). As an example of work that provides a certain amount of pleasure, Berry writes about the tobacco harvests he has been a part of near his home in Port Royal, Kentucky, since he was a young man. "Many of my dearest memories," he insists, "come from these times of hard work," and he refers to the tobacco harvest as "the most protracted social occasion of the year" (*What Are People For?* 142). He explains how members of his community share the work on each other's farms, how they talk about the weather and the work at hand, and how they also share memories; for, as Berry explains,

> The crew to which I belong is the product of kinships and friendships going far back; my own earliest associations with it occurred over forty years ago. And so as we work we have before us not only the present crop and the present fields, but other crops and other fields that are remembered. The tobacco cutting is a sort of ritual of remembrance. Old stories are retold; the dead and the absent are remembered. Some of the best talk I have ever heard I have heard during these times, and I am especially moved to think of the care that is sometimes taken to speak well—that is, to speak fittingly—of the dead and the absent. (*What Are People For?* 142)

The primary value of this work for Berry is not the financial reward; it is the pleasures it provides and the community life it fosters. The work is done within an affiliation of friendships and a continuum of memories that results from affection for each other, for the community they have inherited, and for the land. That work generally is not valued in contemporary American culture is revealed, Berry believes, by the emphasis placed by most people on the weekend, on vacation, and on retirement. "In a country that puts an absolute premium on laborsaving measures, short workdays, and retirement," Berry asks, "why should there be any surprise at the permanence of unemployment and welfare

dependency? Those are only different names for our national ambitions" (*What Are People For?* 125).

As shared work in the fields joins together the members of a farming community, Berry believes that shared work at home joins a family together. A proper home, in the sense of a domicile, is for Berry a place of rest and work; it is not simply a site of repose and leisure. But "[a]ccording to the industrial formula," writes Berry,

> the ideal human residence (from the Latin *residere*, "to sit back" or "remain sitting") is one in which the residers do not work. The house is built, equipped, decorated, and provisioned by other people, by strangers. In it, the married couple practice as few as possible of the disciplines of household and home-stead. Their domestic labor consists principally of buying things, putting things away, and throwing things away, but it is understood that it is "best" to have even those jobs done by an "inferior" person, and the ultimate industrial ideal is a "home" in which *everything* would be done by pushing buttons. (*Home Economics* 119)

Such a household does not provide the opportunities for cohesion and intimacy that shared work provides. Some of the best times families share together is when they work together.

Berry's domestic ideology is domestic not just in the sense of concerned with the domestic virtues and how they can inform the way a person interacts with other people and the world economically; his convictions concerning economics are domestic also in that he is concerned with the economics of households and homelands. He is, first of all, part of a growing contingent of people who, in our increasingly restless age, are seeking to maintain or regain a sense of place, a sense of home in the broader sense of a person's native place. In *Space, Place, and Gender*, the economic geographer Doreen Massey argues that globalization has resulted in many contemporary persons' looking for a sense of place as "a haven from the global world" (10). The desire is for a familiar and known

place that provides what she refers to as an "unproblematical home" and a stable sense of identity; and this desire is becoming more prevalent while at the same time becoming more difficult to satisfy. Massy explains that today "The most commonly argued position, then, is that the vast current reorganizations of capital, the formation of a new global space, and in particular its use of new technologies of communication, have undermined an older sense of a 'place called home,' and left us placeless and disorientated" (163).

But the home is not simply under assault now because economic exigencies force many people to move from place to place—that sort of economic itinerancy was something that people lamented back in nineteenth-century America. Globalization today is such that places are increasingly being swept away by the forces of modernity: familiar buildings are razed, corner stores are forced out of business, cherished fields are paved over, landmark trees are cut down.[3] Even homes and local places that appear unchanged and insulated from the sweeping changes brought on by the forces of modernity are under assault from the global economy: which is to say that a person might raise his own family in his parents' home and inherit his father's profession and yet still have his life profoundly affected by international economic forces. In our global economy, every place is influenced more directly than ever by events occurring half a world away—from weather to wars to large investments by hedge funds managers. As Anthony Giddens points out in *Consequences of Modernity*:

> Modernity is inherently globalising—this is evident in some of the most basic characteristics of modern institutions. . . . In the modern era, the level of time-space distanciation is much higher than in any previous period, and the relations between local and distant social forms and events become correspondingly

[3] In *All That Is Solid Melts into Air*, Marshall Berman notes that the forces of modernity often radically change places in a short period of time. One example he gives is that a person's childhood neighborhood often ceases to exist by early adulthood, as was the case with his childhood neighborhood in New York City.

> "stretched." Globalisation refers essentially to that stretching process, in so far as the modes of connection between different social contexts or regions become networked across the earth's surface as a whole.
>
> Globalisation can thus be defined as the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa. (63-64)

Almost every place on the globe is affected by the activities of multinational corporations; every place is penetrated by other places.

Taking her cue from Giddens, Massey explains that one of the consequences of the stretching of social relations is homogenization. Massey notes that today

> few areas remain where the majority of industry is locally owned; places seem to become both more similar and lacking in internal coherence; homegrown specificity is invaded—it seems that you can sense the simultaneous presence of everywhere in the place where you are standing. Conceptualized in the terms of the geography of social relations, what is happening is that the social relations which constitute a locality increasingly stretch beyond its borders; less and less [sic] of these relations are contained within the place itself. (162)

The upshot of this is that places become less self-defined; boundaries are blurred. Autonomous homelands and homes are lost through interpenetration and through assimilation.

Contemporary social relations are increasingly stretched because more and more institutions are disembedded. The increasing desire for a sense of place, a sense of rootedness, that Massey refers to and Berry's work embodies is a response to the disembedding of social relations that globalization engenders. Berry extols the virtues of homes and homelands because so many people and families and businesses have become uprooted. Federal governmental agencies affect the lives of citizens thousands of miles

away. International treaties affect the lives of people the world over. The European Union, for example, might put thousands of people from Central America out of work by raising a tariff on bananas. A nation might lower its tariff on pulpwood and thus the southeastern United States is increasingly deforested of its pine trees. George Soros can make an investment decision that destabilizes the entire economy of a country, as happened in Indonesia recently. "In conditions of modernity," observes Giddens, "larger and larger numbers of people live in circumstances in which disembedded institutions, linking local practices with globalised social relations, organise major aspects of day-to-day life" (79). The desire for personal autonomy and a reasonable amount of economic independence are often thwarted by the whims of the global economy. Berry's domestic economic ideology arises in part from the desire to maintain as much autonomy and independence as possible in a global economy.

As a writer concerned with domesticity, Berry is paradoxically compelled to address global concerns. Giddens explains why: "With the accelerating globalisation of the past fifty years or so, the connections between personal life of the most intimate kind and disembedding mechanisms have intensified. As Ulrich Beck has observed, 'The most intimate [actions]—say, nursing a child—and the most distant, most general—say a reactor accident in the Ukraine, energy politics—are now suddenly *directly* connected'" (Giddens 120-21). Because the most intimate acts can be and often are influenced by persons and corporations half the world away, to write about the home and family now is to write about globalization. Although Berry does not use the term "disembedding" or the phrase "the stretching of social relations," he often writes about the phenomena that Massey and Giddens refer to. In an essay about community resistance to the proposed building of a nuclear power plant, Berry recounts the story of a woman asking the bureaucrats defending the plan if any of them lived within fifty miles of the proposed site. Her point is that they will not have to suffer the consequences if something were to go disastrously wrong, but her family would. A domestic economic perspective requires

responsibility for one's own behavior. If economic activity is kept on a small scale—a human scale, if you will—then people are forced to see the consequences of their actions. The disembedded nature of large corporations allows executives to be oblivious to the consequences of their decisions—not to mention shareholders, who generally have no idea what damage the company they own part of is causing. In a collection of essays appropriately entitled *Home Economics*, Berry rails against the rootless executives who are allowed to ignore the consequences of their decisions, to ignore costs that are not registered on their balance sheets:

> Everywhere, every day, local life is being discomforted, disrupted, endangered, or destroyed by powerful people who live, or who are privileged to think that they live, beyond the bad effects of their bad work.
>
> A powerful class of itinerant professional vandals is now pillaging the country and laying it waste. . . . If one wrecks a private home, that is vandalism, but if, to build a nuclear power plant, one destroys good farmland, disrupts a local community, and jeopardizes the lives, homes, and properties within an area of several thousand square miles, *that* is industrial progress.
>
> The members of this prestigious class of rampaging professionals must meet two requirements. The first is that they must be the purest sort of careerists—"upwardly mobile" transients who will permit no stay or place to interrupt their personal advance. They must have no local allegiances; they must not have a local point of view. In order to be able to desecrate, endanger, or destroy a *place*, after all, one must be able to leave it and to forget it. One must never think of any place as one's home; one must never think of any place as anyone else's home. One must believe that no place is as valuable as what it might be changed into or as what might be taken out of it. Unlike a life at home, which makes ever more particular and precious the places and creatures of this world,

> the careerist's life generalizes the world, reducing its abundant and comely diversity to "raw material." (50-51)[4]

By not having a home that is tied to a place or by having a home that is removed from the consequences of their decisions, executives can exploit the homes and homelands of others without suffering the consequences themselves. When Berry uses the term *home economics*, he is playing off of the etymological root of the word *economics*, which means, literally, earth household. It suggests that our economic activity as humans takes place, of necessity, within the context of the earth. A corporation can externalize costs beyond the corporation, but not beyond the earth. A domestic economic perspective understands that economic activity happens within homes of diminishing boundaries: the earth, one's region, one's own household. This acknowledgement brings with it the expectation of fiscal responsibility within that boundary.

Placeless executives work for and represent placeless corporations. As Herman Daly, one of the foremost environmental economists, puts it, "Transnational corporations have escaped the national obligations of community by becoming international, and since there is as yet no international community, they have escaped from community obligations altogether. Globalism does not serve world community—it is just individualism writ large" (148). The self-proclaimed primary objective of corporate executives is to maximize profits for shareholders: that is the generally highest standard they set for their behavior, which means that the health and welfare of the employees, who usually are not shareholders, are secondary. The environment is, likewise, not a priority. Keep in mind that this less-than-ideal scenario is the situation when a corporation is living up to the highest standard it sets for itself, but the reality is even more unappealing. As recent events have shown, corporate executives often decide to maximize profits for no one but

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[4] The economic exploits of the rootless executives that Berry refers to are clearly inspired by the adventurous muse. Allow me to indulge in an etymological tangent and point out that the *venture* in *venture capital* comes from the word *adventure*.

themselves—shareholders be damned. This is "individualism writ large," and the large, amorphous, and impersonal structure of transnational corporations makes it easier for corporate executives to forget their community responsibilities and seek personal gain. Part of the problem is that such corporations are not on a human scale; one person could never know every employee and every shareholder, let alone every person who is affected by that corporation's actions. Transnational corporations engender rampant individualism because they do not force its officers to acknowledge their community responsibilities.

Berry inveighs against the deleterious effects the policies of transnational corporations have on all communities, but being a farmer, he is especially vehement in his denunciation of the disastrous consequences such policies have on rural America. In "A Bad Big Idea," Berry catalogues the ways in which farmers around the world would be exploited and underpaid as a result of the proposals encouraged at the Uruguay round of GATT negotiations.[5] Berry observes that "If the proposed revisions in the GATT are adopted, every farmer in every member nation will be thrown into competitions with every other farmer. . . . The supranational corporations, meanwhile, will be able to slide about at will over the face of the globe to wherever products can be bought cheapest and sold highest" (*Sex, Economy, Freedom & Community* 47). Berry's domestic ideology arises from his belief that responsibility and accountability begin at home. He believes that nations should protect their national interests by protecting their workers and natural resources and that corporations, in the name of market efficiency, should not be allowed to externalize their expenses by exploiting both human and non-human communities.

Berry sees these new transnational corporations as a new phase of colonialism with placeless corporations taking the place of nation-states as the new colonial empires. He

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[5] The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade was first signed in 1947. The purpose of the agreement is to facilitate free trade between member states by regulating tariffs and providing a forum for resolving trade disputes. The Uruguay Round is the eighth negotiating round under the GATT since its inception. Andre Sapir explains that "The seven multilateral negotiating rounds organized under the authority of the GATT, starting with the Geneva Round in 1947 up to the Tokyo Round, which was brought to a close in 1979, led to a major cut in levels of protection and an unprecedented expansion in world trade" (426).

is not alone in seeing global capitalism as an example of neo-colonialism; Anthony Giddens writes,

> Earlier world economies were usually centered upon large imperial states and never covered more than certain regions in which the power of these states was concentrated. The emergence of capitalism, as Wallerstein analyses it, ushers in a quite different type of order, for the first time genuinely global in its span and based more on economic than political power. . . . The modern world system is divided into three components, the core, the semi-periphery, and the periphery, although where these are located regionally shifts over time. . . . In the late twentieth century, where colonialism in its original form has all but disappeared, the world capitalist economy continues to involve massive imbalances between core, semi-periphery, and periphery. (68-69)

Colonialism persists, but it has taken a different form, for nation-states are no longer the imperial centers. In fact, as famed hedge fund manager George Soros explains, the financial center is no longer even a geographical location. He refers to the "financial markets and institutions at the center" of the global capitalist system ("Crisis" 78), and he explains that "The center is wherever the financial markets are. It doesn't necessarily have a location" ("Master" 134). Colonialism persists under a new form; the colonizing nation-state has been replaced by the placeless, colonizing corporation.

The notion that the exploitation of rural regions in America is similar to traditional colonial exploitation is an important part of Berry's domestic ideology. Placeless financial institutions are the seats of power; and rural regions, even in the United States, are exploited like colonies for the enrichment of corporations that have no particular allegiance to any nation. As Wallerstein puts it, "Capitalism was from the beginning an affair of the world economy and not of nation-states. . . . Capital has never allowed its aspirations to be determined by national boundaries" (qtd. in Giddens 68-69). So the nation-state, which was the imperial center in the traditional colonial paradigm, has been

replaced by placeless corporations in the modern era of global capitalism, and the exploited colony is no longer necessarily and exclusively another country. By negotiating the obvious differences between regions' different labor costs and unique natural resources, regions around the world are exploited for their labor and resources wherever the transnational corporations see the opportunity for profit. Among transnational corporations it is a race to the bottom to find those places where they can obtain the cheapest labor and the most inexpensive resources. Companies try to externalize costs to the environment by not paying a fair price for non-sustainable resources and by not paying to clean up their messes. Labor and environmental laws restrict a company's ability to exploit workers and to externalize costs, but Daly notes that "Internationally there are few such laws, and domestic laws, and their degree of enforcement, vary greatly among nations." He adds the obvious conclusion: "The consequence is that a greater share of total world production will move to those countries with the lowest standards . . ." (Daly 147). Thus it is that corporations can exploit countries and regions of the world like imperial empires used to exploit their colonies.

In her iconoclastic *Cities and the Wealth of Nations*, Jane Jacobs makes the case that the basic underlying assumption of Adam Smith's economic theories—namely, that the nation state is the basic economic entity—is misleading and inaccurate. She points out that "In the two centuries since Smith published, most of what he wrote has been questioned and much has been amplified, elaborated and modified. But the one thing not questioned has been the same idea Smith himself failed to question: the old mercantilist tautology that nations are the salient entities for understanding the structure of economic life. Ever since, that same notion has continued to be taken for granted" (31). Articulating what is essentially a domestic economic position, Jacobs argues that what she calls the city region should be the basic economic entity because it is import-replacing cities with their industrial and commercial centers and their rural hinterlands that drive national

economies.[6] Berry has read Jacobs' *Cities and the Wealth of Nations* (he mentions it on page 131 of *Home Economics*) and clearly agrees with her, at least in principle: "We must begin to think," he writes, "of the human use of each of our regions or localities as one economy, both rural and urban, involving all the local products" (ATC 59).[7] Berry's domestic economic ideology is predicated on a commitment to local economies rather than the global or even national economy. He defends rural America against national and international metropolitan forces. Whereas when most people refer to domestic manufacture, they mean the nation; Berry means the household and homeland.[8]

Throughout modern history, Jacobs maintains, strong nations have achieved economic success by exploiting other countries—often actual colonies—as supply regions for manufacturing processes completed back in the imperial nation. "Supply regions," she explains,

> are often said to have colonial economies. The term embodies this piece of truth: Imperial powers have typically shaped conquered territories into supply regions. Often enough, they have also deliberately forestalled conquered territories from engaging in production for their own people and producers, in the interest of keeping the conquered people as captive markets for manufactured goods produced by cities of the imperial powers themselves. (68)

This exploitation happens on the regional level as well, with rural regions being exploited by the metropolitan national economy. The only way for colonized third-world countries

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6 "City regions," Jacobs notes, "are not defined by natural boundaries, because they are wholly the artifacts of the cities at their nuclei; the boundaries move outward—or halt—only as city economic energy dictates" (45).

7 In addition to idiosyncratic thinkers like Jane Jacobs, there are many self-styled bioregionalists who, like Jacobs, believe that the nation-state is outmoded as the primary economic entity. A bioregion, as opposed to a city region, has natural boundaries; it is defined more by ecosystem than by the economy of a city and its area of economic influence. See *Dwellers in the Land*, by Kirkpatrick Sale, and *Home! A Bioregional Reader*, edited by Andruss et al. Gary Snyder, who is an elder statesman of sorts for bioregionalists, is a personal friend of Wendell Berry's, and Berry's *Standing by Words* is dedicated to him.

8 Berry is not alone with his economic regionalism. As Andre Sapir notes in "Regionalism and the New Theory of International Trade: Do the Bells Toll for GATT? A European Outlook," among economists who write about issues concerning free trade "Multilateralism has gone out of fashion. As a buzz-word, it has been replaced, or at least joined, by regionalism" (426).

and colonized rural regions and city regions to achieve economic independence is through what Jacobs refers to as "import-replacing": that is, by manufacturing more goods locally.

The sort of economic independence achieved through import-replacing that Jacobs refers to is just what Berry's domestic ideology proposes, concerned as he is with the economics of households, homesteads, and regions. "It is not enough merely to argue against a renewal of the old colonial economy," Berry writes. "We must have something else competently in mind" (*Another Turn of the Crank* 37). He argues that the best corrective to the present colonial economy "would be a cumulative process by which states, regions, communities, households, or even individuals would begin to work toward economic self-determination and an appropriate measure of local independence" (*Another Turn of the Crank* 35). Economic independence is achieved both by consuming less and by producing more, and although Berry writes about larger local economies in the sense of city regions, the economic entities that most interest him are the family farm and the household. In "The Economics of Subsistence," he points out that home production of food is so discouraged in contemporary American culture that even farmers are discouraged from growing their own food:

> One of the ideas most ruinous to the small farm has been that the farmer "could not afford" to produce his own food; the time and acreage required for the family's subsistence could be better used for market production. And so arrived the most curious manifestation of agricultural progress: farm families buying meat, vegetables, milk, and eggs at the supermarket "just like city people." (*Gift of Good Land* 149)

The irony, as Berry points out, is that "farms in Kentucky," for example,

> are capable of producing an astonishing variety of marketable products: forest products, livestock, row crops, herbs and mushrooms, fruits and vegetables. They can provide these good and necessary things in great abundance

> indefinitely, protecting in the process the commonwealth of air, water, forests, and soils, granted only the one condition: vigorous local economies capable of supporting a stable and capable rural populations, rewarding them appropriately for both their products and their stewardship. The development of such local economies ought to be the primary aim of our conservation effort. Such development is not only desirable; it is increasingly necessary and increasingly urgent. (*Another Turn of the Crank* 62-63)

Berry is not quixotic and utopian in his desire for economic independence. Applying the theory of import-replacing to the family farm in a realistic fashion means acknowledging, as he does, that "there are also correct ratios between dependence and independence and between consumption and production. For a farm family, a certain degree of independence is possible and is desirable, but no farmer and no family can be entirely independent" (*Home Economics* 176).

It is not just farm families who have become less self-sufficient in the course of the twentieth century. Since Berry's domestic economic ideology is based on the economics of households, he bemoans the lack of import-replacing going on in the typical American household. In his essays, Berry often discusses the ways in which home production is discouraged in contemporary American culture. Berry sees this phenomenon and laments our loss of autonomy and self-reliance:

> Though people have not progressed beyond the need to eat food and drink water and wear clothes and live in houses, most people have progressed beyond the domestic arts—the husbandry and wifery of the world—by which those needful things are produced and conserved. In fact, the comparative few who still practice that necessary husbandry and wifery often are inclined to apologize for doing so, having been taught in our education system that those arts are degrading and unworthy of people's talents. Educated minds, in the modern era, are unlikely to know anything about food and drink, clothing and

> shelter. In merely taking these things for granted, the modern educated mind reveals itself to be as superstitious a mind as ever has existed in the world. ("In Distrust of Movements" 27)

Berry's fiction provides a number of positive and negative examples of housekeeping and homesteading, as we have seen. The characters whom he presents as approaching his ideal of proper marriage between themselves and their farms and community are those who are thrifty and frugal and competent producers of much of their own food and entertainment. Mat and Margaret Feltner, Elton and Mary Penn, Nathan and Hannah Coulter, Danny and Lyda Branch, Andy and Flora Catlett: these characters practice good home economics. As we have seen, each of these couples produces much of their food at home and shuns the enticements of the marketplace. Roger Merchant, Mat Feltner's wastrel cousin, with his shelves full of store-bought canned goods, is presented for our contempt. He drinks too much to tend his garden or maintain his farm, and his bad housekeeping and bad homesteading signify his moral turpitude. Lightning and Smoothbore Berlew, likewise, have a bad marriage to place; they cannot be bothered with raising food for themselves and they drive their beat-up car into town every chance they get for the diversions offered there.

After giving lectures on the status of farming in America, Berry recounts that he is often asked, "What can city people do?" Berry informs us that his response is inevitably, "Eat responsibly" (*What Are People For?* 145). He begins his explanation by emphasizing that eating is an agricultural act: "Eaters, that is, must understand that eating takes place inescapably in the world . . . and that how we eat determines, to a considerable extent, how the world is used" (*What Are People For?* 149). We need, he claims, to restore our "consciousness of what is involved in eating" and reclaim responsibility for our part in the food economy (*What Are People For?* 149). Buying shrink-wrapped food from the grocery store and eating pre-cooked meals keep us ignorant of the reality of our position in the food chain and blind us from the reality that we eat other animals and our

eating choices have profound consequences for the environment. In our amnesiac and ignorant state, "Both eater and eaten are thus in exile from biological reality. And the result is a kind of solitude, in which the eater may think of eating as, first, a purely commercial transaction between him and a supplier . . . " (*What Are People For?* 148). Eating is of course an economic act, but the injunctions about eating in every religion of the world foreground the spiritual nature of the act of eating, and many of our mothers tried to make us acknowledge to moral implications of eating by telling us "there are children starving in China." There is a political component of eating as well, as Berry points out:

> We still (sometimes) remember that we cannot be free if our minds and voices are controlled by someone else. But we have neglected to understand that we cannot be free if our food and its sources are controlled by someone else. The condition of the passive consumer of food is not a democratic condition. One reason to eat responsibly is to live free. (*What Are People For?* 147)

What, finally, could be a more domestic act than eating? Meals are the focal point of any family gathering, the kitchen is the heart of the home, and for many people our attitude toward food is bound up with our relationship to our mothers—and food, of course, is an important part of the economy of a household.

Berry suggests that a certain level of economic independence can be achieved through gardening. "The best kind of gardening," he writes, "is a form of home production capable of considerable independence from outside sources. . . . For fertility, plant protection, etc., it relies as far as possible on resources in the locality and in the gardener's mind. Independence can be further enlarged by saving seed and starting your own seedlings" (*Gift of Good Land* 167). Moreover, Berry believes that "gardening has a power that is political and even democratic" (*Gift of Good Land* 168); and he encourages us to "Participate in food production to the extent that [we] can," even if it means nothing more than growing something to eat in 'a porch box or [in] a pot in a sunny window"

(*What Are People For?* 149). One does not have to be a farmer to seek independence through domestic economy. Everyone can consume less and produce more to achieve economic freedom. What Berry is encouraging at the level of the household is the import-replacing Jane Jacobs maintains is necessary for the economic independence of regions. Of course, Berry says the same things of regions as well.

In "Property, Patriotism, and National Defense," Berry comes at the issue of home economics from the perspective of national defense by pointing out the absurdity of spending money on a nuclear "defense system" that would destroy our country in the process of allegedly protecting it. Moreover, he highlights the hypocrisy of those who claim they would defend a land that they are currently destroying through careless and exploitative economic activity. National defense begins with the strong attachments to home that necessarily result from home ownership. "We must ask," insists Berry, "if the present version of nation defense is, in fact, national defense." He goes on to suggest that

> we may answer that a defensible country has a large measure of practical and material independence: that it can live, if it has to, independent of foreign supplies and of long distance transport within its own boundaries. It must also rest on the broadest possible base of economic prosperity, not just in the sense of a money economy, but in the sense of properties, materials, and practical skills. Most important of all, it must be generally loved and competently cared for by its people, who, individually, identify their own interest with the interest of their neighbors and of the country (the land) itself. (*Home Economics* 103)

He elaborates on this idea by contrasting the above domestic values of fealty to and responsibility for home with the attitudes of the unattached and landless majority of Americans: "A highly mobile population is predisposed to retreat; its values propose no sufficient reason for anyone to stay anywhere. The hope of a defensive *stand* had better rest on settled communities, whose ways imply their desire to be permanent" (*Home Economics* 109).

As a U.S. Senator in 1858, Andrew Johnson, inspired no doubt by the rhetoric of the cult of domesticity, had expressed similar ideas concerning home ownership and national defense when he argued in favor of the Homestead Bill. "The country as it is," he said, demands that

> the great mass of the people should be interested [in it] and who are more interested in the welfare of their country than those who have homes? . . . Our true policy is to build up the middle class. . . . When you are involved in war, in insurrection, or rebellion, or danger of any kind, they are the men who are to sustain you. . . . You will have a population of men having homes, having wives and children to care for, who will defend their hearthstones when invaded. What a sacred thing it is to a man to feel that he has a hearthstone to defend. (qtd. in Forgie 181)

The similarity between Johnson's sentiments expressed almost 150 years ago and Berry's musings on national defense is striking, and it is another example of the continuity between the domestic ideology of the last century and Berry's worldview.

But in discussing national defense Berry is not simply referring to armed defense of land in a conventional war. He claims that not only would a population of home owners have good reason to defend their country in a time of war; they are defending it every day: not from foreign enemies so much as from our own government and the national and global economy, which are increasingly becoming the same thing. Thriving local communities, he writes:

> where they exist, are not merely the prerequisites or supports of a sound national defense; they *are* a sound national defense. They defend the country daily and hourly in all their acts by taking care of it, by causing it to thrive, by giving it the health and the satisfactions that make it worth defending, and by teaching these things to the young. This, to my mind, is *real* national defense. . . . (*Home Economics* 109)

The war over our homes is being fought every day and, not surprisingly, Berry thinks families—intergenerational farm families, in particular—rather than isolated individuals make the best defenders of our land.

A permanent relationship between a family and its land results in the best care of the land: for Berry, a relationship between a family and a farm that aspires to generational continuity is ideal:

> If landed properties are democratically divided and properly scaled, and if family security in these properties can be preserved over a number of generations, then we will greatly increase the possibility of authentic cultural adaptation to local homelands. Not only will we make more apparent to successive generations the necessary identity between the health of human communities and the health of local ecosystems but we will also give people the best motives for caretaking and we will call into service the necessary local intelligence and imagination. Such an arrangement would give us the fullest possible assurance that our forests and farmlands would be used by people who know them best and care the most about them. (*Another Turn of the Crank* 49-50)

This sort of metaphoric marriage of family to land, Berry believes, is the ecological justification for private property. There is a political justification for private property as well, but in order to satisfy the democratic principles our nation is founded upon, the property must be evenly distributed in accord with the Jeffersonian vision of a nation of small freeholders. Berry asks, "Shall the usable property of our country be democratically divided, or not? Shall the power of property be a democratic power, or not? If many people do not own the usable property, then they must submit to the few who do own it. They cannot eat or be sheltered or be clothed except in submission" (*Home Economics* 165). A community of individuals and families metaphorically married to each other and their land is of the utmost economic and political importance to Berry.

The question of private property versus publicly owned wilderness is a contentious one. The perception of wilderness is, of course, an important part of this debate, and in America, attitudes towards wilderness have changed dramatically over the centuries, as Roderick Nash describes in *Wilderness and the American Mind*. He shows how Puritan suspicion of wilderness as the devil's domain, as Godless wasteland, gave way by the mid-nineteenth century—at least in some circles—to the Transcendentalist belief that one could find God through nature; and he shows that this belief became more widespread as the century progressed, culminating in the what Nash calls the wilderness cult of the early 1900s. Frederick Jackson Turner declared the frontier closed in 1893, but as Nash notes, "the growing perception that the frontier era was over prompted a re-evaluation of primitive conditions. Many Americans came to understand that wilderness was essential to pioneering: without wild country the concepts of frontier and pioneer were meaningless" (145). Today, wilderness has become even more scarce, and since it is no longer such a conspicuous threat to human civilization as it was during the early decades of our nation, it has become even more greatly valued by many Americans, if for other reasons than Transcendentalist notions of divine immanence. As Nash points out, the modern arguments in favor of wilderness generally are based of the following positions: (1) "its importance as a reservoir of normal ecological processes and of a diversity of genetic raw material" (257); and (2) its importance to anthropology and history. Without wilderness, the question goes, how can we know the manner in which previous cultures lived on the planet before the development of civilization (260).[9] Another (3) modern argument in defense of wilderness is based on the notion that there is a connection between wilderness and the creative process. It is argued that confronting elemental reality in the wilderness, in the manner of Thoreau, for instance, can inspire creativity. "If," Nash writes, "the

[9] Nash adds that "As a historical document wilderness has meaning to any nation, but Americans claimed an especially intimate relationship to the wild. Following Frederick Jackson Turner and Theodore Roosevelt, philosophers of wilderness have contended that American culture bore the imprint of close and prolonged association with wilderness" (260).

springs of artistic and intellectual curiosity depend on penetrations to and interpretations of this elemental reality, so the argument runs, wilderness is vital to fresh thinking" (264). Freud's theories about the myriad ways that civilization represses natural human desires—expressed most thoroughly in *Civilization and Its Discontents*—provided, Nash notes, "another line of argument, namely, (4) that civilized man misses contact with the wild world" (265).[10] A final argument (5) used by preservationists to defend wilderness is "based on nonanthropocentric reasons. They have argued that wilderness has a right to exist for its own sake, independent of whether mankind values it or not" (270).

There are two basic ways, according to Nash, to consider the end of wilderness. One he calls the *wasteland scenario* and it refers to the possibility that all remaining wilderness will be destroyed. Increasing urbanization, excessive population growth, worldwide pollution, and global nuclear disaster are some of the obvious scenarios that could bring—either singly or in a synergistic fashion—this horrifying possibility to pass. As evidence of the deleterious effects of greenhouse gases on the earth's ecosystem increases every year, the possibility of global warming, for example, begetting a wasteland becomes less and less farfetched.

But Nash suggests that "the greatest long-term threat to the interests of people who covet the wild may reside in the *garden scenario*. It too ends wilderness, but, Nash argues, "beneficently rather than destructively" (380). In his book *The Wooing of the Earth*, Rene Dubos explains that a gardenlike earth completely controlled by man is the ideal humans should aspire to; his is a "vision of a bounteous, stable and, to many tastes, beautiful earth that is totally modified. . . . It is an appealing vision whose roots run back through Thomas Jefferson's deification of the yeoman farmer to the Garden of Eden. But wilderness is just as dead in the garden as it is in the concrete wasteland" (qtd. in Nash 380).

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[10] E.O. Wilson's more recent biophilia hypothesis is in a similar vein, although without the emphasis on repression.

Nash places Berry and Dubos in the same ideological camp, claiming that for both decentralization is the key to sustaining life on earth, with most people living on small self-sufficient family farms. Of Dubos, who was a microbiologist by trade, Nash writes, "the idea of a fruitful collaboration between nature (microbes, in this case) and man is the hallmark of his thinking" (241). The same could be said of Berry, who emphasizes that the natural estate and the human estate are not opposed but interdependent. Being a pastoralist at heart, Berry is sympathetic towards the family farm; but Nash is wrong when he asserts that "Wendell Berry argues that everyone should follow his lead and enjoy the blessings of agricultural self-sufficiency. Cities, Berry hopes, can be broken up and replaced with 160 acre family farms" (381). Berry does not believe any such thing—at least not any more. In a book published in 1987, Berry writes, "it becomes obvious that if we cannot preserve our cities, we cannot preserve the wilderness" (*Home Economics* 11).[11] Although Berry is a pastoralist, he is not anti-city or anti-wilderness.

Berry's position on the wilderness question, not surprisingly, reveals his domestic sensibility. Berry wants to see a compromise between the human and natural estates. He sees what he calls nature extremists on one side—members of the wilderness cult—who want to protect unspoiled wilderness at all costs and who maintain that there is no essential difference between humans and other creatures. On the other side he sees so-called nature conquerors, who "divide all reality into two parts: human good, which they define as profit, comfort, and security; and everything else, which they understand as a stockpile of 'natural resources' or 'raw materials,' which will sooner or later be transformed into human good" (*Home Economics* 137-38). Berry occupies a position in the middle and looks for a compromise between the wild and the domestic. "If I had to choose, I would choose the nature extremists against the technology extremists, but this

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[11] Even many fierce advocates of wilderness preservation understandably believe that the development of very large, densely populated cities—especially in light of increasing population growth—is necessary to allow for the continued existence of unpopulated wilderness.

choice seems poor, even assuming that it is possible. I would choose to stay in the middle" (*Home Economics* 138). In explaining his middle position,[12] Berry points out that people do not find "*pure nature*" very comfortable to live in for any significant amount of time. "Any exposure to the elements," he suggests, "that lasts more than a few hours will remind us of the desirability of the basic human amenities: clothing, shelter, cooked food, the company of kinfolk and friends—perhaps even of hot baths and music and books" (*Home Economics* 6). On the other hand, he points out that to be entirely cut off from nature is not only undesirable for human beings; it is impossible.

A compromise between the wild and domestic is, of course, essential for humans to survive. Berry explains that "we cannot have a healthy agriculture apart from the teeming wilderness in the topsoil, in which worms, bacteria, and other wild creatures are carrying on the fundamental work of decomposition, humus making, water storage, and drainage" (*Home Economics* 11). This holds true for plants and trees as well. "A forest or a crop, no matter how intentionally husbanded by human foresters or farmers, will be found to be healthy precisely to the extent that it is wild—able to collaborate with earth, air, light, and water in the way common to plants before humans walked the earth" (*Home Economics* 140). "Breeders of domestic animals, likewise, know that when a breeding program is too much governed by human intention, by economic considerations, or by fashion, uselessness is the result. Size or productivity, for instance, will be gained at the cost of health, vigor, or reproductive ability. In other words, so-called domestic animals must remain half wild, or more than half, because they are creatures of nature" (*Home Economics* 140). The root of the word *agriculture* shows the truth in what Berry says; it is the marriage of nature and culture in that it is comprised of the Latin words for *field* and *cultivation*.

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[12] Recall that Leo Marx defines the pastoral as a "middle landscape" with the wilderness on one side and the city on the other.

One need look no further than the human body to acknowledge that the wild and the domestic are inextricably intertwined. As Berry explains,

> The indivisibility of wildness and domesticity, even within the fabric of human life itself, is easy enough to demonstrate. Our bodily life, to begin at the nearest place, is half wild. Perhaps it is more than half wild, for it is dependent upon reflexes, instincts, and appetites that we do not cause or intend and that we cannot, or had better not, stop. We live, partly, because we are domestic creatures—that is, we participate in our human economy to the extent that we "make a living"; we are able, with variable success, to discipline our appetites and instincts in order to produce this artifact, this human living. And yet it is equally true that we breathe and our hearts beat and we survive as a species because we are wild. (*Home Economics* 140-41)

The human body is itself an emblem of the indivisibility of wildness and domesticity. Our bodies are shaped by genetic codes but also by cultural conventions—the food we eat, the work we do, the conception of physical beauty to which we try to conform.

But Berry emphasizes that "to say that we are not divided and not dividable from nature is not to say that there is no difference between us and the other creatures" (*Home Economics* 141). Although Berry acknowledges that birds and other animals have culture that they pass from one generation to the next, it is culture that distinguishes us from the other animals since human culture is of such a different degree. Our power over other creatures and our ability to influence the ecosystem of the entire earth—even quickly destroy it—also distinguishes humans from other creatures. "And so it is more important than ever," Berry insists, "that we should have cultures capable of making us into humans—creatures capable of prudence, justice, fortitude, temperance, and the other virtues" (*Home Economics* 142). The domestic virtues help us to preserve wilderness. We must paradoxically domesticate ourselves, tame ourselves, to show the restraint necessary to save the wilderness. If we do not set limits on ourselves, wilderness might

not be the only thing lost. If "In wildness is the preservation of the world," as Thoreau's aphorism puts it, Berry claims it is equally true that "in human culture is the preservation of wildness" (*Home Economics* 11). Since the human food economy depends entirely on wildness, if we destroy wildness, we will destroy ourselves; as Berry puts it, "culture deteriorates, and nature retaliates" (*Home Economics* 143). Culture must measure itself by nature, for wilderness preservation is the quest of a sustainable economic system, and a loving economy enforces good use.

Berry's domestic economic ideology is directly connected to his ecological concerns; after all, the root of both *economics* and *ecology* is *oikos*—home. If we are going to care for the earth, if we are going to treat it with respect and love and aspire to care for it until we pass it along to our children, then we must acknowledge that our economic practices are humans' single most important orientation towards and use of the earth. Berry claims that "They [the supporters of GATT] have forced us to realize that politics and economics are in fact as inseparable as are economics and ecology. They have made it clear that if we want to be free, we will have to free ourselves somehow from the purposes of these great supranational concentrations of greed, wealth, and power" (*Sex, Economy, Freedom & Community* 49). Moreover, he maintains that, as conservationists, "We will have to realize finally that our work is economic. We are going to have to come up with competent, practical, at-home answers to the humblest human questions: How should we live? How should we keep house? How should we provide ourselves with food, clothing, shelter, heat, light, learning, amusement, rest? How, in short, ought we to use the world?" (*Another Turn of the Crank* 56).

The domestic virtues that Berry believes should govern our behavior towards other people should, he believes, ideally be extended to the land and animals. The metaphoric marriage John Winthrop envisioned between members of the Massachusetts Bay Colony should embrace a wider community than even Winthrop's radical vision included. We should not only aspire to treat our fellow humans as if we loved them; we should aspire to

love our fellow creatures and even the land itself. In an interview, Berry has said that "I feel more and more strongly that when St. Paul said that 'we are members of one another,' he was using a far more inclusive 'we' than Christian institutions have generally thought. For me, this is the meaning of ecology. Whether we want to be or not, we are members of one another: Humans (ourselves and our enemies), earthworms, whales, snakes, squirrels, trees, topsoil, flowers, weeds, germs, hills, rivers, swifts, and stones—all of 'us.' The work of the imagination, I feel, is to understand this" (*Living in Words* 29).

Berry's vision of America is of a nation where people stay put more than they do now, where people's placedness results in political participation, where people produce more of their own food and clothing and entertainment, where households and local food economies are more self-sufficient, and where regions partake of more import-replacing in the manner that Jane Jacobs describes. He hopes for a country of self-consciously local people who are metaphorically married to each other and their shared homeland and who become as economically self-sufficient as possible by producing what they can at home from local materials. "It is appropriate that this [economic] duty should fall to us," Berry insists, "for good economic behavior is more possible for us than it is for the great corporations with their miseducated managers and their greedy and oblivious stockholders. Because it is possible for us, we must try in every way we can to make good economic sense in our own lives, in our own households and communities. We must do more for ourselves and for our neighbors. We must learn to spend our money with our friends and not with our enemies. But to do this, it is necessary to renew local economies, and revive the domestic arts" ("In Distrust of Movements" 28). Because of their intimacy with the land and its inhabitants—both human and non-human—the hope is that residents will make wiser decisions regarding governance. Berry observes that "politics and economics are in fact as inseparable as are economics and ecology," (*Sex, Economy, Freedom & Community* 49) and reminds us that "If you can control a peoples' economy, you don't need to worry about its politics; its politics have become irrelevant" (*Another*

Turn of the Crank 34). Self-reliance and economic independence are core American values; Berry suggests that practicing the domestic virtues of selflessness, responsibility, and modest ambition will help Americans live up to those ideals.

CHAPTER 5:

ADVENTUROUS DOMESTICITY

Berry's domestic-pastoral ideology, considered in the context of contemporary American mores, is, paradoxically, adventurous. Whereas the domestic novels of the mid-nineteenth century upheld peace and prosperity,[1] Berry's domestic-pastoral novels attack the socio-economic status quo. Whereas in the nineteenth century "mothers were charged with the responsibility of creating a generation of Americans who conformed to basic standards of middle class propriety" (Ryan 144), Berry's good fathers and good farmers resist commonly held notions of success and aspire to remove themselves from the capitalist marketplace, and they hope to raise children who will likewise rebel. Berry's domesticity is adventurous and radical because his domesticity attacks received political and economic standards. For Berry, a good marriage is an act of sedition, and filial obedience is an act of rebellion.

Berry's sense of opposition to contemporary American society is exemplified in a short story entitled "The Inheritors." Wheeler Catlett, who is quite old at the time and starting to lose his faculties, asks Danny Branch to drive him into Louisville so he can see his calves get sold at the stockyards. As farmers who try to cleave to the old ways, both belong to a dying breed themselves. Of Wheeler and Danny, we read, "both were survivors and heirs of a membership going way back, of which more members were dead than living, and of which the living members were fewer than they had been in a hundred and fifty years" (48). Feeling expansive after his calves have been sold and enjoying the

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1 In *Necessary Madness: The Humor of Domesticity in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*, Gregg Camfield writes of "the crucial nexus in domestic ideology between salvation, political stability, economic power, and nuclear family" (23).

old familiar feeling of the harvest time, Wheeler takes the keys and decides to drive home. After losing his way in Louisville, he mistakenly enters the exit ramp of the interstate and begins driving against traffic. When Wheeler realizes what he is doing, he eases into the emergency lane and drives "along as if the wrong side of the interstate was simply one of the ways to go home" (58). Danny realizes Wheeler's intransigence; he knows "that Wheeler was not going to stop until he had to, and he would never turn around" (57). Wheeler relishes the fact that they are driving home to their farms against the traffic heading into the city, stubbornly going against the mainstream. The symbolic import of this is not lost on the reader, the suggestion being that to find home in this day and age one must move counter to the "rootless drift" of Americans. Wheeler and Danny continue on their way home with, tellingly, "all the world bearing down and going by in the opposite direction" (61). As if being given a glimpse of the future—a possible future against which they are taking their stand—they drive past an old farm that is being made into a housing development. Danny considers Wheeler and himself as "two of the last of their kind, strangely elated, living by faith, going the wrong way home. If they got there, he thought, it would be the right way. He knew that he was living one of the clearest hours of his life" (59). Like Wheeler and Danny, Berry is a contrarian, who, by the strength of his convictions, lives in defiant opposition to the values of industrial capitalism. Whereas in the nineteenth century domestic ideology was so widely accepted that Mary Ryan can write of "the centrality of domesticity in the national system of values" (137), Berry stubbornly occupies a minority position in the late twentieth, early twenty-first century.

Though Berry's lifestyle and worldview are clearly at variance with the majority of Americans, it remains to define Berry's relationship with the dominant culture. Marxist literary critic Raymond Williams provides a lexicon for non-dominant cultures that proves useful in situating Berry's domestic-pastoral ideology amongst the cacophony of cultural voices in America. In "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory," Williams

classifies non-dominant cultures, or ideologies, in two ways: alternative and oppositional. He writes, "There is a simple theoretical distinction between alternative and oppositional, that is to say between someone who simply finds a different way to live and wishes to be left alone with it, and someone who finds a different way to live and wants to change the society in its light" (461). Berry's beliefs run counter to the dominant American ideology in that he denigrates consumer culture, materialism, competition, and the valorization of leisure in American society. Using Williams's lexicon we can say that Berry espouses oppositional meanings and practices because he does not simply want to live a self-determined life apart from mainstream America; he wants to change society. From farming to writing, Berry's entire life's work is an attempt to change the world. "I still believe that a change for the better is possible," Berry writes, "but I confess that my belief is partly hope and partly faith" (*What Are People For?* 167). Berry does not believe we should look to the government, universities, or corporations to help effect a change for the better in the economic and ecological state of our country. He believes it will take a revival of rural communities. "But to be authentic, a true encouragement and a true beginning," writes Berry, " this [change] would have to be a revival accomplished mainly by the community itself. It would have to done not from the outside by the instruction of visiting experts, but from the inside by the ancient rule of neighborliness, by the love of precious things, and by the wish to be at home" (169). This change will come about only, Berry maintains, if we return to the ancient domestic virtues.

Williams goes on to make another distinction within his categories of the two kinds of non-dominant cultures—alternative and oppositional cultures—that helps to better define Berry's ideological position vis-à-vis the dominant American culture. Williams makes a distinction between values, ideas, and practices that are traditional and found in the past and those that have no historical precedent and are just coming into being. Williams refers to these two types of non-dominant cultures as residual and emergent cultures. By "residual," he means "that some experiences, meanings and values, which

cannot be verified or cannot be expressed in terms of the dominant culture, are lived and practised on the basis of the residue—cultural as well as social—of some previous social formation" ("Base and Superstructure" 460). By "emergent," he means "that new meanings and values, new practices, new significances and experiences, are continually being created" ("Base and Superstructure" 460). Berry is a residualist, of course, because he believes the age-old domestic virtues, in general, and the values and agricultural practices of farming communities 60 to 70 years ago, in particular, can and should serve as a model for the present.

But Berry's interest in the farming practices of the past is not simply nostalgic. In *The Country and the City*, Williams shows how the golden age of rural life is always perceived to have been in the recent past, usually in the previous age or generation and often in the childhood of the person looking back. Williams looks at this phenomenon as it manifests itself over the centuries in English literature.[2] In the mid-twentieth century, the golden age was the late nineteenth century; in the late nineteenth century, it was the mid- to early nineteenth century; and so on all the way back to the Middle Ages. Williams refers to this sentimental narrative as "the recurrent myth of a happier and more natural past" (40). Although Berry's description of the farming practices prevalent during his youth often seems nostalgic, he does not wish to return to a simpler time. After a brief and positive description of the farming community he grew up in, Berry concedes, "This was by no means a perfect society. Its people had often been violent and wasteful in their use of the land and each other. . . . But I have spoken of its agricultural economy of a generation ago to suggest that there were also good qualities indigenous to it that might have been cultivated and built upon" (40). With a clear headedness that resists merely idealizing the past of his youth, Berry selects certain values and practices from the past

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[2] In *The Country and the City,* Raymond Williams analyzes the pastoral tradition in English poetry from a socio-economic, rather than a purely aesthetic, perspective. Like Berry, he is interested in the ways that material conditions affect both the rural countryside and art about the countryside.

that he believes should guide us in the future as viable correctives to the materialism and uprootedness of contemporary American culture. Thus he espouses residual-oppositional meanings and practices. Williams characterizes this use of the past as a model for the future as "retrospect as aspiration" (42).

The end of the novel *Remembering* shows that domestic-pastoral virtues can lead to a better future. Recall that in *Remembering*, after experiencing an existential crisis in San Francisco, Andy Catlett decides to return to his life as a father and a farmer. When he reaches Port William, he goes into the woods near his house and lies down to rest. He falls asleep. In a dream, Andy sees that "The trees on the hillside are large and old, as if centuries have passed since [he] was last here" (122). A dark figure appears:

> The dark man points ahead of them; Andy looks and sees the town and the fields around it, Port William and its countryside as he never saw or dreamed them, the signs everywhere upon them of the care of a longer love than any who have lived there have ever imagined. The houses are clean and white, and great trees stand among them and spread over them. The fields lie around the town, divided by rows of such trees as stand in the town and in the woods, each field more beautiful than all the rest. . . . And in the fields and the town, walking, standing, or sitting under the trees, resting and talking together in the peace of a sabbath profound and bright, are people of such beauty that he weeps to see them. He sees that these are the membership of one another and of the place and of the song or light in which they move. (123)

In his dream vision, the town is transformed into an ideal farming community; it is almost as if Jefferson's vision of a nation of yeoman farmers has finally been realized after more than two centuries. Andy wants to join these people in their pastoral paradise, but he knows that it is his duty in the present to work toward the possible future he has glimpsed. "Grieved as he may be to leave them, he must leave. He *wants* to leave. He must go back with his help, such as it is, and offer it" (124). By recommitting himself to

his family and his farm, by living up to the domestic-pastoral ideals of his forefathers, Andy will be doing his part to bring about the better future he dreams about. Berry obviously sees himself in a similar role.

The work of building a better future is left not only to farmers; Berry emphasizes that everyone can do his part to work against the dominant global economy. In an essay entitled "Conserving Communities," Berry states that to oppose the global economy we must build "an adversary economy, a system of local or community economies within, and to protect against, the would-be global economy" (24). Then he lays out seventeen practical guidelines for the building of a sustainable local economy that would ideally exist within "a decentralized system of durable local economies" (21).[3] Berry sees this economic endeavor as radical and revolutionary, as unfinished business from the American Revolution, a completion "at last [of] the task of freedom from colonial economics begun by our ancestors more than two hundred years ago" (24).

Education, the means by which culture is passed on to successive generations, is essential in the battle against the economy of the dominant culture, for that culture perpetuates itself through cultural colonization. Raymond Williams points out that "The educational institutions are usually the main agencies of the transmission of an effective dominant culture . . ." ("Base and Superstructure" 459). Berry agrees: "The local schools no longer serve the local community;" he writes, "they serve the government's economy and the economy's government" (*What Are People For?* 164). Berry would like to see children receive an education that instills both the domestic virtues and the principles of domestic economics. Thus this education would train people to resist the global

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[3] In another essay, "Conservation and Local Economy," Berry writes, "I acknowledge to advocate such reforms is to advocate a kind of secession—not a secession of armed violence but a quiet secession by which people find the practical means and the strength of spirit to remove themselves from an economy that is exploiting them and destroying their homeland" (*Sex, Economy, Freedom & Community* 17-18). As a Southerner, Berry's use of the term *secession* emphasizes the similarities between the type of economic rebellion he is encouraging and the economic rebellion of the Southern states that precipitated the Civil War. A desire for economic autonomy, for as much local economic control as possible, is the impulse behind each secession.

economy. Though when educators inculcated domestic ideology in the middle of the nineteenth century they were socializing children to be submissive citizens,[4] exposing children to Berry's type of domestic ideology is subversive and revolutionary.

For Berry, all of his writing is part of a larger educational enterprise. His apparently conventional novels are subversive in that they challenge not only the economic status quo but also the literary status quo. By writing domestic-pastoral novels about a farming community, Berry is adventurously flouting contemporary literary conventions. As Jane Tompkins points out, twentieth-century critics value "symbolic complexity, psychological depth, moral subtlety, and density of composition" (11). Berry's novels, like the sentimental domestic novels popular in the nineteenth century, lack just those qualities that modern critics admire. Berry's symbology is simple and straightforward; his characters are rather one-dimensional since they are judged according to domestic-pastoral standards; and his prose is simple and clear. The fact that Berry is apparently not trying to succeed by the standards of contemporary literary criticism leads one to the same line of inquiry Jane Tompkins arrives at when studying nineteenth-century domestic fiction: "Rather than asking, 'what does this text mean?' or, 'how does it work?,'" she asks, "'what kind of work is this novel trying to do?'" (38). The answer of course is that Berry aspires to change the world by instilling the domestic-pastoral virtues in his readers.[5]

In the contemporary literary climate, where many scholars subscribe to Derrida's famous dictum "There is no outside the text," Wendell Berry is an anomaly, believing as he does that literature has social and environmental consequences. Perhaps Berry's

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[4] Cathy Davidson explains that public education in the United States, going all the way back to the early national period, "was largely motivated by the desire of elites to control an increasingly heterogeneous population and to incorporate the late arrivals on these shores into a submissive American work force, ready to be even more firmly fixed in their place by the advent of wholesale industrialization" (62). She adds that "the Founding Fathers repeatedly stressed the need for an educational system that would reinforce political quiescence and social order" (62).

[5] The following quotation from Jane Tompkins further illuminates the difference between Berry and most contemporary novelists: "In modernist thinking, literature is by definition a form of discourse that has no designs on the world. It does not attempt to change things, but merely to represent them . . ." (125).

emphasis on community, social engagement, and environmental responsibility is the result of his coming of age as a writer in the 1960s, when, as he puts it, "I hoped, and even believed, that the effort of many poets to speak out against public outrages might recover the lost estate of poetry. . . . But the political 'involvement' of poets appears now to have subsided, leaving the 'effective range of influence' [he is quoting Edwin Muir's *The Estate of Poetry*] of poetry no larger than before" (*Standing by Words* 4). According to Berry, traditionally poetry—and literature in general—has engaged with the world and appealed to readers from all walks of life; and it still should. Berry believes literature should raise "forcibly—as a great deal of contemporary poetry does not—the question of the status of poetry as a reference or a response to a subject or a context outside itself" (*Standing by Words* 107). As such, he rejects "the aesthetic principle of 'autonomy' or 'art for art's sake'" (107). What Berry posits as a corrective to literature that neither aspires to change the world nor acknowledges the possibility that it could is an aesthetic based on the understanding that literature can do just that.

The following is as explicit a declaration of his commitment to an adventurous domestic aesthetic as there is in Berry's corpus:

> To assume that the context of literature is 'the literary world' is, I believe, simply wrong. That its real habitat is the household and the community—that it can and does affect, even in practical ways, the life of a place—may not be recognized by most theorists and critics for a while yet. But they will finally come to it, because finally they will have to. And when they do, they will renew the study of literature and restore it to importance. (*What Are People For?* 84)

There is an historical precedent for the literary aesthetic Berry expresses above. Joseph W. Meeker articulated it first nearly two decades ago in *The Comedy of Survival: Studies in Literary Ecology*:

> Human beings are the world's only literary creatures. . . . If the creation of literature is an important characteristic of the human species, it should be examined carefully and honestly to discover its influence upon human behavior and the natural environment—to determine what role, if any, it plays in the welfare and survival of mankind and what insight it offers into human relationships with other species and with the world around us. Is it an activity which adapts us better to the world or one which estranges us from it? From the unforgiving perspective of evolution and natural selection, does literature contribute more or less to our survival than it does to our extinction? (3-4)

Berry's adventurous domestic aesthetic is philosophically aligned with Meeker's; like Meeker, Berry believes literature should entertain and instruct, that it should be moral and health giving (*Standing by Words* 153). Specifically, it should instruct us how to live more healthfully on the planet to survive as a species. Since literature is an important part of human culture, both believe it should preserve that which is beneficial and sustainable in local traditions and therefore be an important part of the complex web of cultural practices that improve a place. In short, Berry and Meeker believe literature should make people better inhabitants of their particular ecosystem.

Berry sees his fiction as part of this cultural survival strategy in that he wants to change readers by presenting characters as role models for them to emulate or to shun. Since identity is formed through identification, Berry's intention is that readers will pattern themselves after the good fathers and good farmers he presents in his novels.[6] Ideally, the reader will be a good son to these fictional fathers and strive to be like them. In a similar fashion, Berry presents good marriages in the hopes that his readers will

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[6] Bakhtin writes about this phenomenon: "the ideological becoming of a human being . . . is the process of selectively assimilating the words of others" (341). He adds that "Another's discourse performs here no longer as information, directions, rules, models and so forth—but strives rather to determine the very bases of our ideological interrelations with the world, the very basis of our behavior; it performs here as *authoritative discourse*, and an *internally persuasive discourse*" (342)

aspire to marry well themselves and practice the domestic arts, resisting the values of the dominant culture and living contrary to the demands of global capitalism. Nathan and Hannah Coulter model a good marriage. In "Fidelity," Hannah believes that every year she and Nathan rely more upon what they can make and grow rather than what they can buy. Their model is Danny Branch, who "never belonged much to the modern world, and every year he appeared to belong to it less. Of them all, Danny most clearly saw that world as his enemy—as *their* enemy—and most forthrightly and cheerfully repudiated it. He reserved his allegiance to his friends and his place" (154). A good marriage allows the couple to secede from the global economy by working together to strengthen their household economy. According to Berry, to have a good marriage is an act of sedition.

Familial metaphors have been used to describe the writing of books from time immemorial.[7] A book is seen as the author's child, begotten with great pain and then risked to the world. An author is likewise a sort of father figure to readers—an older, wiser figure who has gone before us and who is passing on his store of knowledge or just amusing us with a story. This metaphor does not apply equally well to all types of books. But if the book under consideration is a didactic one, then a successful interaction between the author and the reader is indeed much like that that of a healthy relationship between a father and a son in which the son heeds the father's advice and attempts to emulate him. For instance, one of Samuel Richardson's contemporaries referred to him as a "Father, of Millions of Minds . . ." (Eaves and Kimpel 11).[8] Berry aspires to be such a father figure, a person on whom his readers can pattern their lives and thus rebel against the dominant culture. If readers decide to emulate Berry, they must not obey the wishes of the leaders of the Empire of Commerce. The Titans of Industry do not want people to

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[7] In a well-known example from seventeenth-century America, Anne Bradstreet refers to her book of poetry, *The Tenth Muse,* as "Thou ill-formed offspring of my feeble brain, / Who after birth didst by my side remain . . ." (212).

[8] In a letter dated December 17, 1740, Aaron Hill wrote the following of Richardson, "I was thinking, as I returned from a Walk in the Snow, on that Old Roman Policy of Exemptions in Favour of Men, who had given a few, bodily, Children to the Republick.—What superior Distinction ought our Country to find . . . for a Reward of this Father, of Millions of Minds, which are to owe new Formation to the future Effect of his Influence" (11).

live off the grid; advertising executives do not want people to grow their own food and to entertain themselves. Sympathetic readers of Berry's fiction are good sons or daughters who defy the dominant culture. Emerson said, The best way to follow me is to not follow me; Berry implies, If you heed my advice, you will emulate me. But following each will make you unconventional.

Writing of "a historical and cultural split that characterizes us as Americans"—between selfishness and selflessness, exploitation and settlement—Berry explains that "All of us . . . are in some manner torn between caring and not caring, staying and going" (*Another Turn of the Crank* 69). Berry realizes that "Having chosen one way, one is never free of the opposite way. . . . Such choices are not clean cut and final, as when we choose one of two forks in a road, but they involve us in tension, in tendency. We must keep on choosing" (70). Berry obviously feels deeply the dilemma of constantly choosing. The struggle is manifested most notably in his novel *Remembering*, where Andy Catlett, Berry's closest fictional counterpart in the Port William membership, struggles repeatedly with the choice of what kind of person to be. But by remembering the example set by his father and grandfather, he chooses to return home. In a similar fashion, Berry presents his venerable characters as models after which to pattern himself. He writes about these father figures and idealizes them to keep good domestic-pastoral role models in front of himself. Berry is both father and son to his characters in that he both creates them and aspires to emulate them.

Berry's domestic aesthetic is adventurous and revolutionary because he believes that literature about one's homeland should improve one's homeland. But writing about a place or a region does not, of course, necessarily ensure that that place will be the better for it. In fact, Berry condemns certain writers for exploiting particular regions for their own benefit. Many of the frontier humorists condescended to the backwoodsmen they wrote about, as did many writers of the local color movement later in the nineteenth century. Berry refers to such an attitude toward one's subject as "literary provincialism."

Because Berry so strongly believes that words have consequences, that literature can in fact affect how people perceive and use the world, he believes that literary provincialism can lead to industrial exploitation:

> If one is regional only in subject, then there is a temptation—and an abundance of precedent—for becoming a sort of industrialist of letters, mining one's province for whatever can be got out of it in the way of "raw material" for stories and novels. I would argue that it has been possible for such writers to write so exploitively, condescendingly, and contemptuously of their regions and their people as virtually to prepare the way for worse exploitation by their colleagues in other industries: if it's a god-forsaken boondocks full of ignorant hillbillies, or a god-forsaken desert populated by a few culturally deprived ranchers, why *not* strip-mine it? (*What Are People For?* 54-55)

Writers do not contemptuously use people and places if they love them; they use them as fodder for stories and raw material for industry only if their allegiances lie elsewhere—or nowhere.

In Berry's view, the literary artist must become a regional writer in the best sense of the term, a writer who defends that which he loves. He sees Wallace Stegner—and himself, surely—as this kind of writer. Stegner, Berry maintains, is the kind of writer "who not only writes about his region but also does his best to protect it, by writing and in other ways, from its would-be exploiters and destroyers" (*What Are People For?* 55). The writer guided by the domestic impulse is out to preserve that which he loves—much like a mother and father defending their home. Berry has commented to an interviewer that "When I think of art, I think of my home and what I want to live with. Made things can either be degrading or instructive, boring or uplifting. Behind my judgment of art is really a judgment about what kind of community I want to live in" ("Art of Place" 31). Since he esteems the regional artist the most—and believes all art is inherently local—Berry thinks that literature should ultimately improve people's relations with both the

human community and the non-human community of land and animals by counteracting destructive cultural and material forces.

Like post-colonial writers from around the world, Berry is writing against the exploitive colonizer and in defense of his homeland. The United States became a post-colonial country in one sense when it revolted against England and established self-rule. But over two hundred years after breaking free from its colonial oppressor, the United States has become the biggest empire in the world, and its economic interests are aligned with the world's largest corporations. The former marginal colony is now, for all intents and purposes, the imperial center. A post-colonial writer celebrates the culture of and defends the interests of his native country, the colony, at the expense of the imperial nation. But the post-colonial impulse often goes further than nationalism in that the post-colonial writer often ends up celebrating and defending his native region against the nation of which it is a part: this can happen whether that nation is an imperial power in its own right, a colony, or a former colony.[9] Since global capitalism is such that the nation-state, which was the imperial center in the traditional colonial paradigm, has been replaced by placeless corporations in the modern era of global capitalism, the post-colonial writer now writes against not just the imperial nation but against the global Empire of Commerce. Berry's domestic economic ideology is predicated on a commitment to local economies rather than the national or global economy. He defends rural America against national and international metropolitan forces. With his interest in how distant socio-economic forces affect his native place, Berry is a post-colonial American writer.

Like much post-colonial fiction, Berry presents characters that struggle to maintain their identities and sense of home in the face of cultural and material forces that often

[9] The Basque separatist movement in Spain and the Quebec separatist movement in Canada are two obvious examples of contemporary post-colonial resistance on a regional level.

destabilize identity and destroy homelands.[10] Rural regions around the world are suffering from the depredations of transnational corporations; rural India, Canada, Kentucky—each place is under assault from metropolitan economic forces. As such, Berry's themes are those of the post-colonial writer: the search for identity; the struggle toward independence on both an individual and community level (Empire 27); and the theme of exile, "since it is one manifestation of the ubiquitous concern with place and displacement in [post-colonial] societies" (Empire 29). Since identity and home are intertwined for Berry's characters, they must resist global economic and cultural forces to retain their identities, their homes, and their farms.[11] By continuing to farm small-scale diverse farms just as their parents did, Berry's characters maintain economic independence and a sense of who they are, and by remaining a part of the Port William membership, they retain their sense of community and tradition. Like many people in an increasingly global culture, they look to place, family, and community for stability. In Berry's domestic-pastoral fiction, as in post-colonial fiction, exile from home—whether actual or metaphorical, physical or emotional—is a problem to be rectified.

The dynamics of imperialism also influence literary tastes—in the United States as elsewhere. The cultural imperialism within the United States is akin to the sort of cultural imperialism that accompanies the colonization of a foreign land; in both cases, the imperial metropolitan center, be it London or Paris or New York, imposes its standards on the literature of the colony. The writers of the colony are often either members of the metropolitan literary elite who exploit the exotic aspects of the colony to titillate readers in the metropolitan center, or they are members of the colonized region who adopt the standards of the literary center in order to gain acceptance. Either way, Berry writes,

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[10] Post-colonial writers often portray characters with hybrid subjectivity: that is, characters who are caught between two cultures and therefore struggle to maintain a unified sense of ethnic identity.

[11] Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin point out that houses and homes are often used in post-colonial fiction to address the theme of identity: "the construction or demolition of houses . . . is a recurring and evocative figure for the problematic of post-colonial identity" (28).

"The centers have decreed that the voice of the countryside shall be that of Snuffy Smith of L'il Abner, and only that voice have they been willing to hear" (*Sex, Economy, Freedom & Community* 10). According to William H. New, "For a 'centre,' the rest of the country constitutes a set of regions grouped around it, there to serve its needs and listen to its standards" (146). As Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin put it in *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, "One of the most persistent prejudices underlying the production of the texts of the metropolitan canon is that only certain categories of experiences are capable of being rendered as 'literature.' This privileging of particular types of experience denies access to the world for the writer subject to a dominating colonial culture" (88).[12] Berry condemns literature that defines itself by the standards of the colonial metropolitan center, and he believes that all good regional writing defines itself from within, without looking to the center. By writing his novels about small-scale farmers living in small-town rural Kentucky, he is defying metropolitan literary standards and making a political statement.

Berry sees himself as part of a quiet revolution,[13] and he is playing his part in this revolution both as a farmer and as a writer. Just as domestic manufacture helped win the American Revolution and secure independence from England over two hundred years ago, Berry is waging a rebellion against the Empire of Commerce by practicing the domestic arts. Berry's domestic-pastoral aesthetic presents as beautiful and good a simple farm life lived in opposition to contemporary American mores. That he is opposing the status quo not through radical screeds or avant-garde art does not make his cultural critique less effective. In fact, as politicians and moralists in the early years of the American Republic well knew, seemingly conventional novels can be both subversive and revolutionary.

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12 They refer to this process, in short, as "The silencing and marginalizing of the post-colonial voice by the imperial centre" (83).

13 In an essay entitle "In Distrust of Movements," Berry jokingly writes, "I have good reason for declining to name the movement I think I am a part of. I call it The Nameless Movement for Better Ways of doing" or the "Nameless Movement for Better Land Use" (26).

EPILOGUE

The adventurous and domestic muses are the warp and woof of the fabric of American culture. Two interesting historical facts illuminate the complex relationship between adventurousness and domesticity in American history: one is that the Plymouth Plantation Puritans left Leyden and boldly ventured across the Atlantic at least in part because they believed the social pressures of European exile were undermining their families (Anderson 15). The other is that The United States Constitution, a revolutionary document composed during an armed rebellion, was written "to insure domestic tranquility" (Spengemann 79). These anecdotes reveal that Americans have been impelled by contradictory impulses from the beginning. Wanting to be independent without being alone; trying to reconcile freedom and equality; and hoping to unite diverse individuals and live as a nation, we have always been inspired and conflicted by the adventurous and the domestic muses. These impulses are, of course, not unique to Americans. The conflict between selfishness and selflessness, going and staying, daring and prudence, competing and cooperating, exploiting and nurturing exists in every person and in every culture, but it is more pronounced in America. Because of America's unique historical, social, political, economic, and geographical situation, these two impulses have warred in the American soul from the beginning, and the struggle continues in the hearts and minds of every American.

On a ship on the way to the Americas in 1630, John Winthrop had foreseen the importance of the domestic muse for the success of this new society and had warned about the dire consequences that would result if love did not win out over hate. In *A House Undivided*, Douglas Anderson points out that Winthrop offered "his fellow passengers on the *Arbella* a contemporary equivalent of Moses' choice of life or death . . .

affirming that 'life' in American meant embracing the familial, sacramental model that he envisioned" (2). Godlessness and selfishness would lead to death. As Winthrop puts it in his sermon:

> But if our heartes shall turne away soe that wee will not obey, but shall be seduced and worshipp other Gods our pleasures, and proffitts, and serve them; it is propounded unto us this day, wee shall surely perishe out of the good Land whether wee passe over this good land to possesse it:[1]
>
> Therefore lett us choose life,
> that wee, and our Seede,
> may live; by obeying his
> voyce, and cleaving to him,
> for hee is our life, and
> our prosperity. (qtd. in Anderson 9)

The choice Winthrop presents is clear: if we fail to see that we are all God's children and part of the same metaphoric family, if we fail to love one another, we court our own destruction.

Berry, too, knows that the struggle between adventurousness and domesticity is of the utmost importance for us as individuals and as a nation. Berry's life work as a farmer and a writer represents his attempt to correct what he sees as an excess of adventurousness; he believes that Americans have leaned more toward daring self-justification and selfish individualism than modest ambition and selfless communitarianism. Like Winthrop, he sees the battle between domesticity and adventurousness as a battle between life and death. "We now have to choose consciously," he writes, "perhaps for the first time in human history, between doom and something better" (*Another Turn of the Crank* 47). In *A World Lost*, Berry shows what

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[1] Perhaps it is not a coincidence that Berry titled one of his collections of essays *The Gift of Good Land* (1981).

happens to a person given over to adventurous impulses by having Uncle Andrew, who relished outrageousness and self-abandonment, die young. In his most recent novel, Berry addresses the battle between adventurousness and domesticity on a larger communal scale. "This is, as I said and believe, a book about Heaven," Jayber writes,

> but I must say too that it has been a close call. For I have wondered sometimes if it would not finally turn out to be a book about Hell—where we fail to love one another, where we hate and destroy one another for reasons abundantly provided or for righteousness' sake or for pleasure, where we destroy the things we need the most, where we see no hope and have no faith, where we are needy and alone, where things that ought to stay together fall apart, where there is such a groaning travail of selfishness in all its forms . . . where we must lose everything to know what we have had. (354)

Like Winthrop, Berry believes that on a personal and societal level, domesticity creates a kind of Heaven on earth whereas unchecked adventurousness creates a kind of Hell.

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