

The Ecological Comedy

The Case for an Existential Literary Ecology

For everything that happens can become a story and fine discourse, and it may well be that we are caught up in a story.

Thomas Mann, *Joseph and His Brothers* (Joseph to Potiphar's wife, p. 952)

Contents

Narrativity	2
Robinson Jeffers and the Poetry of Place	3
Poetry and the Moral Sense of Place	16
The Poetry of Earth	22
Notes for A Poetics of Earth	32
Song of the Earth	41
In the World of Waldo Williams	46
Samuel Palmer: Mysterious Moonlit Dreams.....	64
Marc Chagall: Art as a State of Soul	65
Ecopoetics, disclosing the Hidden God in Nature.....	67
Finding Meaning Through Metaphor	74
Ecological Restoration as a Restorying.....	80
The Springs of Action - Making Facts Existentially Meaningful	99
Tolkien and the Ethics of Enchantment	113
Natural Anarchy.....	127
The imagination is truly the enemy of bigotry and dogma	135
The Light Within.....	146
For lovers of William Blake – because he kept the divine vision in time of trouble.	159
The Unveiling of a Gravestone to William Blake	166
Dante and Marx.....	169
Contextualizing Marx's Criticism of Commercial Society	172

Fire and Ice: where would Dante place all of us who are borrowing against this Earth...?..	191
Dante's Sweet Symphony of Paradise.....	216
Notre Dame de Paris by Victor Hugo.....	231
Sic Transit Gloria Civilization.....	243
Ruins.....	246
Sigurd F. Olson and the Singing Wilderness.....	250

Narrativity

Human beings are story making animals. Before *homo faber* came *homo symbolicus*. Ecological restoration is a restorying. Transitioning to a new world is always a matter of being between stories. We may call these worldviews, standpoints or paradigms, articulating norms and values. We are moving from one view, the materialist, mechanistic and reductionist understanding of the world as some objective datum to a view which sees the world as creative, participatory, animate, and interconnected. In between stories, however, our lives express a certain schizophrenia. We lurch between contrary positions, recognising the right thing to do whilst continuing with practices that, deep down, we know to be wrong. We have bifurcated identities, split from the world, from others and, ultimately, from our own whole natures. Estranged from the Earth, we struggle to see the world that enfolds and sustains us as a sacred community, carrying on with practices that we know to be harmful and exploitative. The problem is that, socially and structurally, we are locked within those destructive patterns of behaviour. We need a new story, one that integrates the material and spiritual dimensions our lives within new patterns of behaviour. This story will not just enlighten and inform but inspire, enthuse, and enliven, motivating people to change their behaviours and reorient their practices for the new Age of Ecology based upon union between the human and earth communities.

Robinson Jeffers and the Poetry of Place

The environmental crisis we face is an existential crisis that requires much more than institutional reform and technological solutions. We need to recover something of the spirit of old Pan, rekindle the wild within and without as the Eros between our sensing bodies and the sensuous, living, animate world that enfolds and sustains us.

Robinson Jeffers' poetry of place captures this ethos well, pointing to the close identification, the intimacy, with a landscape that a respectful, reverential familiarity can engender. Biologist E.O. Wilson has argued for biophilia as a condition of our survival. Robinson Jeffers expresses this as a 'falling in love outward', something which draws us to the 'divine beauty of the universe'. In this respect, sensuous experience is a mystical experience. In *The Tower Beyond Tragedy*, Jeffers has the character of Orestes explain how his experience in the forests' natural landscape has changed him, giving him a oneness with a place:

I entered the life of the brown forest
And the great life of the ancient peaks, the patience of stone, I felt the changes
in the veins
In the throat of the mountain, a grain in many centuries, we have our own
time, not yours; and I was the stream
Draining the mountain wood; and I the stag drinking; and I was the stars,
Boiling with light, wandering alone, each one the lord of his own summit;
and
I was the darkness
Outside the stars, I included them, they were a part of me.
I was mankind also, a moving lichen
On the cheek of the round stone.
I have fallen in love outward.

Jeffers is not advocating some de-industrialised Arcadia, but incorporates machines into his landscape. 'Great-enough both accepts and subdues; the great frame takes all creatures,' he writes in *Phenomena*. His oneness may well be described as mystical, but in a genuinely spiritual rather than obscurantist sense. His words

express 'the feeling — I will say the certainty — that the universe is one being, a single organism, one great life that includes all life and all things; and is so beautiful that it must be loved and revered.' The view is mystical and real, since who we are, our very nervous systems, coevolves with the sensuous world. This yields a vision of being that is attuned to place.

In *The Answer*, Jeffers spells out the holistic view of life:

"A severed hand
Is an ugly thing
and man dissevered from the earth and stars
 and his history... for contemplation or in fact...
 Often appears atrociously ugly.
Integrity is wholeness, the greatest beauty is
 Organic wholeness, the wholeness of life and things,
 the divine beauty of the universe.
Love that, not man apart from that,
 or else you will share man's pitiful confusions,
 or drown in despair when his days darken."

Jeffers' holism is a response to Ralph Waldo Emerson's plea to be the poet 'who re-attaches things to nature and the Whole,—re-attaching even artificial things, and violations of nature, to nature, by a deeper insight.'

Jeffers' writing is permeated by a holistic understanding of the world. When asked to express his 'religious attitudes,' Jeffers commented:

'I believe that the universe is one being, all its parts are different expressions of the same energy, and they are all in communication with each other, influencing each other, therefore parts of one organic whole. (This is physics, I believe, as well as religion.)'

Jeffers' poem *The Double Axe* presents a certain philosophical attitude, what could be called Inhumanism, 'a shifting of emphasis and significance from man to not-man;

the rejection of human solipsism and recognition of the transhuman magnificence. It seems time that our race began to think as an adult does, rather than like an egocentric baby or insane person. This manner of thought and feeling is neither misanthropic nor pessimist, though two or three people have said so and may again. It involves no falsehoods, and is a means of maintaining sanity in slippery times; it has objective truth and human value. It offers a reasonable detachment as rule of conduct, instead of love, hate and envy. It neutralizes fanaticism and wild hopes; but it provides magnificence for the religious instinct, and satisfies our need to admire greatness and rejoice in beauty.' (Robinson Jeffers from the Preface to *The Double Axe* (1948).

This is dialogue, in the sense I use the term in my own work. In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates declares that he could learn only from the behaviour of 'men in the city'. The stars, the stones, the trees could teach him nothing. That forgetfulness of the city's dependence upon the country expresses the delusion of the civilized man. My understanding of dialogue goes beyond the confines of 'men in the city' and instead sees all beings and bodies in our earthly locales in communion and in conversation with each other, speaking and listening in turn, each creating the other through their encounter and their dynamic interaction.

To know oneself, as Socrates demanded, is to know that we are more than a disembodied mind in a walled-in city. We are parts of and dependent upon the web of ecological relations that connect human life with the humblest and most obscure creatures and organisms, bacteria, viruses, remote sources of energy, which nourish the body, the starry skies above that nourish the mind. That is the message I emphasize in defining the Earth's commonwealth of virtue.

The problem is that human beings are always breaking off communication with other beings and bodies, pulling away from the eternal truths of the natural world and enclosing themselves in the abstractions of the self-made world:

A little too abstract, a little too wise,
It is time for us to kiss the earth again.

Robinson Jeffers, *Return*

True knowledge is a knowledge that comes from inside the world, a carnal knowledge. The problem at the moment is that we approach the world from a position remote from it. The world is external to us, and we are outside and above it. We see this world as objectively valueless, and so project purely human values upon it in order to satisfy our quest for meaning. This quest can never be satisfied in such a way, since satisfaction requires a two-way relationship of mutual learning and growth. We need to develop our values in dialogue with the Earth's community and learn the values it is teaching. We need a proper understanding of the elements of material reality, what Jeffers calls 'things'. 'Things are the God'. Jeffers says in *Sign Post* and he shows us the way to arriving at this understanding: 'Lean on the silent rock until you feel its divinity.' That's where Jeffers found hope and healing.

Robinson Jeffers was horrified by the cruelty that human beings had inflicted on each other and on the world in the course of the twentieth century. He calls his poetry an inhumanism, looking forward to the day when 'the people [are] fewer and the hawks more numerous.'

November Surf

"Some lucky day each November great waves awake and are drawn
Like smoking mountains bright from the west
And come and cover the cliff with white violent cleanness: then suddenly
The old granite forgets half a year's filth:
The orange-peel, eggshells, papers, pieces of clothing, the clots
Of dung in corners of the rock, and used
Sheaths that make light love safe in the evenings: all the droppings of the
summer
Idlers washed off in a winter ecstasy:
I think this cumbered continent envies its cliff then. . . . But all seasons
The earth, in her childlike prophetic sleep,
Keeps dreaming of the bath of a storm that prepares up the long coast
Of the future to scour more than her sea-lines:

The cities gone down, the people fewer and the hawks more numerous,
The rivers mouth to source pure; when the two-footed
Mammal, being someways one of the nobler animals, regains
The dignity of room, the value of rareness.”

In this poem, Jeffers sees human activities and achievements as detritus left on rocks, to be swept away one day, when all things will be made anew, and the world regains its ancient voice. At the heart of this vision is a profound sense of the unity of all things in the world as one:

Natural Music

“The old voice of the ocean, the bird-chatter of little rivers,
(Winter has given them gold for silver
To stain their water and bladed green for brown to line their banks)
From different throats intone one language.
So I believe if we were strong enough to listen without
Divisions of desire and terror
To the storm of the sick nations, the rage of the hunger smitten cities,
Those voices also would be found
Clean as a child's; or like some girl's breathing who dances alone
By the ocean-shore, dreaming of lovers.”

The edge of Western civilization is bounded by the Pacific in “The Torch-Bearers’ Race” (1924).

Here is the world's end. When our fathers forded the first river in Asia we
crossed the world's end;
And when the North Sea throbbed under their keels, the world's end;
And when the Atlantic surge rolled English oak in the sea-trough: always there
was farther to go,
A new world piecing out the old one: but ours, our new world?
Dark and enormous rolls the surf; down on the mystical tide-line under the cliffs
at moonset
Dead tribes move, remembering the scent of their hills, the lost hunters

Our fathers hunted; they driven westward died the sun's death, they dread the
depth and hang at the land's hem,
And are unavenged; frail ghosts, and ghostlike in their lives too,
Having only a simple hunger for all our complication of desires. Dark and
enormous
Rolls the surf of the far storms of the heart of the ocean;
The old granite breaks into white torches the heavy-shouldered children of the
wind ... our ancient wanderings
West from the world's birth what sea-bound breaking shall flame up torchlike?
I am building a thick stone pillar upon this shore, the very turn of the world, the
long migration's
End; the sun goes on but we have come up to an end.
We have climbed at length to a height, to an end, this end: shall we go down
again to Mother Asia?
Some of us will go down, some will abide, but we sought
More than to return to a mother. This huge, inhuman, remote, unruled, this
ocean will show us
The inhuman road, the unruled attempt, the remote lode-star.
The torch-bearers' race: it is run in a dusk; when the emptied racer drops
unseen at the end of his course
A fresh hand snatches the hilt of the light, the torch flies onward
Though the man die. Not a runner knows where the light was lighted, not a
runner knows where it carries fire to,
Hand kisses hand in the dark, the torch passes, the man
Falls, and the torch passes. It gleamed across Euphrates mud, shone on Nile
shore, it lightened
The little homely Ionian water and the sweet Aegean.
O perfect breathing of the runners, those narrow courses, names like the stars'
names, Sappho, Alcaeus,
And Aeschylus a name like the first eagle's; but the torch westering.
The seas widened, the earth's bloom hardened, the stone rose Rome seeding
the earth, but the torch northering
Lightened the Atlantic ... O flame, O beauty and shower of beauty,

There is yet one ocean and then no more, God whom you shine to walks there
naked, on the final Pacific,
Not in a man's form.

The torch answered: Have I kindled a morning?

For again, this old world's end is the gate of a world fire-new, of your wild
future, wild as a hawk's dream,

Ways hung on nothing, like stars, feet shaking earth off; that long way

Was a labor in a dream, will you wake now? The eaglets rustle in the aerie, the
red eyes of dawn stabbing up through the nest-side,

You have walked in a dream, consumed with your fathers and your mothers,
you have loved

Inside the four walls of humanity, passions turned inward, incestuous desires
and a fighting against ghosts, but the clarions

Of light have called morning.

What, not to be tangled any more in the blinding

Rays of reflected desire, the man with the woman, the woman with the child,
the daughter with the father, but freed

Of the web self-woven, the burning and the blistering strands running inward?

Those rays to be lightened aside, to shine up the star-path, subduing the world
outward? Oh chicks in the high nest be fledged now,

Having found out flight in the air to make wing to the height, fierce eye-flames

Of the eaglets be strengthened, to drink of the fountain of the beauty of the sun
of the stars, and to gaze in his face, not a father's,

And motherless and terrible and here.

But I at the gate, I falling

On the gate-sill add this: When the ancient wisdom is folded like a wine-stained
cloth and laid up in darkness,

And the old symbols forgotten, in the glory of that your hawk's dream

Remember that the life of mankind is like the life of a man, a flutter from
darkness to darkness

Across the bright hair of a fire, so much of the ancient

Knowledge will not be annulled. What unimaginable opponent to end you?

There is one fountain

Of power, yours and that last opponent's, and of long peace.

Jeffers is warning the people of an erring civilization to reform their errant ways, which is evidence of a normative humanist concern, I would say. In reminding us that the Pacific Ocean is more enduring than human life and its concerns, Jeffers cautions us to reflect upon the sea's inhuman presence, and avoid misconceiving life as nature's ultimate achievement. In clinging to life and its transitory concerns, we pervert it, and miss its real significance.

Read in this light, the inhumanism of Jeffers' philosophy is not so much anti-human as anti-anthropocentrism, a call for sanity, proportion and balance, restoring the world to its true dimensions. The vastness of earth, sea and sky, and their complete indifference to human concerns calls for human beings to come and see their true place in the natural world. Nature's indifference to the cruelties and horrors of war issues a call for sanity. It is also a call for mercy. In *Calm and Full the Ocean*, Jeffers explains that 'man, his griefs and rages are not what they seem to man, not great and shattering, but really / Too small to produce any disturbance. This is good. This is the sanity, the mercy.'

Small, but not insignificant.

It is too easy to mistake Jeffers' philosophy of inhumanism as misanthropy. In getting human beings to see their true place in the order of things, he is expressing a humanism of a far higher quality than anthropocentrism, the insanities of which are the true anti-humanism. Jeffers may call faith a lie but, I would say, his merit is to 'cling to faith beyond the forms of faith', to quote Tennyson in *The Ancient Sage*. There is healing in coming to lose ourselves God's beauty, Jeffers affirms.

Jeffers here refers to the line in the Greek drama when Orestes says, 'I have fallen in love outward.' Commenting on this, Jeffers says, 'the feeling - I will say the certitude - that the world, the universe, is one being, a single organism, one great life that includes all life and all things, and is so beautiful it must be loved and revered, and in moments of mystical vision we identify ourselves with it.'

Overcoming anthropocentrism is the key to a true humanism, a humanism that allows us to see ourselves as parts of a bigger picture. Social activities, interests and

concern absorb our attentions to such an extent that we make the mistake of thinking that human society constitutes the whole reality. Jeffers appeals to the realists who see themselves as parts of a greater reality. In the poem Carmel Point, Jeffers writes of 'The extraordinary patience of things!' He proceeds to demand that we 'unhumanize' ourselves a little, see our true place in the world, see ourselves truly for the first time.

Carmel Point

The extraordinary patience of things!
This beautiful place defaced with a crop of suburban houses—
How beautiful when we first beheld it,
Unbroken field of poppy and lupin walled with clean cliffs;
No intrusion but two or three horses pasturing,
Or a few milch cows rubbing their flanks on the outcrop rockheads—
Now the spoiler has come: does it care?
Not faintly. It has all time. It knows the people are a tide
That swells and in time will ebb, and all
Their works dissolve. Meanwhile the image of the pristine beauty
Lives in the very grain of the granite,
Safe as the endless ocean that climbs our cliff.—As for us:
We must uncenter our minds from ourselves;
We must unhumanize our views a little, and become confident
As the rock and ocean that we were made from.

Here, we see that answering the question of 'who' we are depends also on our understanding of 'where' we are. And, I would add, where we are going, and why. We can lose ourselves in nature. But nature's indifference is merely the beginning, for me. Jeffers finds hope and healing in this indifference and inhumanism. It fits with Einstein's 'God of Spinoza.' It is the God of physical creation, and is indeed intellectually satisfying. I go further, to affirm the personal God, the God of love and relationships. In this sense, losing oneself in the Beauty of God/Nature is to experience the transcendent, something outside of us, and yet personal in nature, which touches us and moves us deeply within. In such experience is a feeling of the infinite within the finite, and of being in the presence of a kindred spirit. This is a

decentring that takes us beyond anthropocentrism to a true humanism, when we cease to be closed in on our egos and instead are expanding our being in union with something greater than we are. That is when we put our selves behind us and fall in love outwards, and hear the voice of the Greater Love speaking to us from within the ecology of the human heart.

Xenophon wrote that 'Earth is a goddess and teaches justice to those who can learn.' We listen, we hear, we respond to the Earth goddess. But we also serve. 'The better she is served,' Xenophon went on to teach, 'the more good things she gives in return.' I will continue to argue for ethics as a systematic attempt to give good reasons for our choices, actions and behaviour. We have to be able to make sure that any voice we are listening to, and any god or goddess we may be serving, speaks of permanent and trustworthy truths by using our innate rationality and morality, what Kant called our 'common moral reason'.

That said, there is no necessary antithesis between this more conventional understanding of ethics and an ethics of nature. We are in the mess we are in precisely because we have understood our rationality in far too narrow, disembodied and disembedded a sense, conceiving the natural world to be no more than a passive background to the development of our purely human projects. Robinson Jeffers understood 'things' to be the essential elements constituting concrete reality. The problem is that our dominant conception of rationality sees these 'things' as passive, inert, and lifeless 'objects' with no elemental significance of their own, no voice and no value of their own. Since they have no lesson to teach us, we no longer listen to what they have to say. There is no dialogue anyway in this one-way relation to the objective natural world as an external datum. So long as we continue to cut ourselves off from the natural world in this way, we shall continue to close down our senses, depriving ourselves of the natural diversity and vitality we need in order in order to survive and flourish. Out of right relationship with the surrounding earth, we lack sufficient nourishment to be able to do much more than survive. For all of the pretensions of 'men as gods' through technological expansion (read eco-modernizers like Stewart Brand), the human community can never be some heavenly paradise suspended high above the natural community, but is embedded

within the more-than-human community of beings and bodies. Until we understand this, and adjust our social institutions and practices in accordance, then our human world, for all of its technical power, will be thin and brittle, its relationships skewed. Human beings thrive and coevolve within a complex web of relationships, relationships between human beings in society but also between human beings and a diversity of entities of other kinds. We need to pay attention to these entities, the plants, the non-human animals and other elemental presences such as soils, rivers, clouds, we need to attend to them, and honour them for the way they sustain and nourish us in right relationships.

The rationalisation of the world has taken us out of right relationship, drawing us further away from the permanent truths of the natural world and further into a world of abstraction. We live in a world mediated by the 'things' of our own making, institutions, laws, economic systems, business imperatives, moral codes, principles etc., placing a greater value in these than in the 'thing' of the natural world. In this abstracted world, we are blinded to the true nature of our earthly reality, and instead mistake our symbols and concepts for reality. We have lost the sense of the direct, spontaneous, unmediated layer of an intimate and solidary interchange that is always proceeding within sensuous nature, precisely because we have lost touch with the bodily level of our existence. We should be careful. I have a book by anthropologist Jonathan Kingdon called *Self-Made Man and his Undoing* which shows that there is something badly wrong in the relations between the natural world and the social world we have created. This refers particularly the way that the technosphere is encroaching upon the natural systems upon which our biological survival depends. 'Drawn further and further out of our biological matrix we have become more and more dependent on an all-embracing but loveless technology to see us through. Under this impassive influence we have become orphans of our own technology.' (Kingdon 1993). We have ignored our dependence upon nature and become over-reliant on our technical powers. Kingdon is worth quoting at length on this point.

'We cannot make a scapegoat of the technological revolution that has pampered us yet passed by the emaciated victims we see on television. It is an extension of what we are. If we are greedy and selfish technology will be a

faithful mirror. Left to its own dynamics, technological and industrial innovation trashes products, places and people. Technology is at once social shredder, racial churn and political furnace. It is for the children of technology to humanise their parent or, like Saturn, it will consume them. Self-made Man and his society will be undone. If the twenty-first century sets out to build a new sense of family it has powerful tools to help in the task. If it doesn't, its antithesis - increasing conflicts between haves and have-nots - is inevitable.'

Kingdon 1993: 316/317

'Where are you going? And where do you come from?' Socrates asks Phaedrus. These are questions we all need to ask ourselves. Phaedrus is leaving his urban house to take a walk in the country, a dangerous place, a place where the mad god Pan has his shrine.

At the end of the dialogue, Socrates prays to Pan, and to the other gods of this the wild country outside the city walls. He asks for a beautiful inside and for an outside that will be loved by that inside.

The prayer acknowledges the limitations of 'pure' intellect, affirming the positive role of wild divinities associated with passion.

The dialogue ends with the discovery of the mutual love of individuals based upon character. Socrates asks whether 'we' need anything more.

Phaedrus replies: 'People who love each other share everything.'

'Let's go', says Socrates.

Go where? Back to the city of civilised individuals with Socrates? Or back to the wilderness? Or to a world where city and country are joined together? In that way, we could take a walk on the wild side without abandoning the comforts of civilised life.

That would be to a world that joins a beautiful inside and a beautiful outside. A place of our own, where all things are common among friends, a place where friendship is more than philia, it is biophilia. That would be the home we need to build to house the sacred.

Further Reading

Fitzpatrick, Elayne Wareing, *Shepherds of Pan on the Big Sur-Monterey Coast: Nature Wisdom of Robert Louis Stevenson, Gertrude Atherton, Jack London, Robinson Jeffers, John . Others, with a Postscript on William James*

Bill Plotkin, *Soulcraft: Crossing into the Mysteries of Nature and Psyche*

Bill Plotkin, *Mapping the Wild Mind*

Bill Plotkin, *Wild Mind: A Field Guide to the Human Psyche*

[Our human psyches possess astonishing resources that wait within us, but we might not even know they exist until we discover how to access them and cultivate their powers, their untapped potentials and depths. *Wild Mind* identifies these resources — which Bill Plotkin calls the four facets of the Self, or the four dimensions of our innate human wholeness — and also the four sets of fragmented or wounded subpersonalities that form during childhood. Rather than proposing ways to eliminate our subpersonalities (which is not possible) or to beat them into submission, Plotkin describes how to cultivate the four facets of the Self and discover the gifts of our subpersonalities. The key to reclaiming our original wholeness is not merely to suppress psychological symptoms, recover from addictions and trauma, or manage stress but rather to fully embody our multifaceted wild minds, commit ourselves to the largest, soul-infused story we're capable of living, and serve the greater Earth community]

Bill Plotkin, *Nature and the Human Soul: Cultivating Wholeness and Community in a Fragmented World*

[Addressing the pervasive longing for meaning and fulfillment in this time of crisis, *Nature and the Human Soul* introduces a visionary ecopsychology of human development that reveals how fully and creatively we can mature when soul and wild

nature guide us. Depth psychologist and wilderness guide Bill Plotkin presents a model for a human life span rooted in the cycles and qualities of the natural world, a blueprint for individual development that ultimately yields a strategy for cultural transformation. With evocative language and personal stories, including those of elders Thomas Berry and Joanna Macy, this book defines eight stages of human life - Innocent, Explorer, Thespian, Wanderer, Soul Apprentice, Artisan, Master, and Sage - and describes the challenges and benefits of each. Plotkin offers a way of progressing from our current egocentric, aggressively competitive, consumer society to anecentric, soul-based one that is sustainable, cooperative, and compassionate. At once a primer on human development and a manifesto for change, *Nature and the Human Soul* fashions a template for a more mature, fulfilling, and purposeful life - and a better world.]

Poetry and the Moral Sense of Place

The impact of global heating is now visible to the senses. In the name of progress, humankind has committed sacrilege, falling far short of the divine demand to live up to God's Creation. In our own time, humankind has destroyed wooded plains and valleys, polluted the seas and the rivers, poisoned the land and the air, damaged the hydrogeological and atmospheric systems, built on green spaces, and inflicted uncontrolled forms of urbanisation and industrialisation upon the land. To use an image employed by the peerless poet-philosopher Dante Alighieri in *The Divine Comedy*, ('Paradise', XXII, 151), humankind has through 'foul usury' humiliated the Creation, that flower-bed that is our God given dwelling. For Dante, "despising Nature and her goodness" is a violence against God. (Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, trans, by Charles S. Singleton, Bollingen Series LXXX, and *Inferno*, canto XI, lines 46-48 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970). There is nothing in the Bible which entitles human beings to exterminate or destroy or hold in contempt anything on Earth, quite the contrary. We may use the gifts of nature but have no right to ruin or waste them. We have the right to use what we need but have no right to do any more than that. The Bible forbids usury and condemns great accumulations of property. As Dante argues, 'the usurer condemns Nature ... for he puts his hope elsewhere.' (Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, canto XI, lines 109-11.) By taking

more than we are entitled to, we are destroying our place within Creation and, as a result, are destroying our own Being.

Dante shows us the way out, giving us an ideal to pursue and the means to pursue it.

That mountain, at whose side Cassino rests,
Was on its height frequented by a race
Deceived and ill dispos'd: and I it was,
Who thither carried first the name of Him,
Who brought the soul-subliming truth to man.
And such a speeding grace shone over me,
That from their impious worship I reclaim'd
The dwellers round about, who with the world
Were in delusion lost.

The Shakespearean scholar Jonathan Bate made the claim in *The Song of the Earth* that poetry could save the world. He may well be right. For Margherita Muller, the achievement of “sustainability” could be tested through garden-making practices that incorporate poetry’ (Margherita Muller Under what stars to plough the earth? The aesthetics and ethics of three Scottish gardens (2012), (available at <http://independent.academia.edu>). She notes: ‘Poetry, in particular, often uses the ‘garden’ as a metaphor for life, government, and the earth itself, which is the ‘home’ of humanity.’ It’s part of the search for common ground, not just claiming the physical land but investing it with a history and a meaning. It’s what I call a moral sense of place, something which is integral to Being.

Margherita Muller writes that ‘the nostalgic view of a ‘lost’ common land and Karl Marx’s ideas of ‘expropriation’ need not remain part of mythology, and there is no knowing in which form the Earth may become ‘repossessed’. (2012).

I would highlight John Steinbeck’s conception of ‘ownership’ in *The Grapes of Wrath* here:

“Sure, cried the tenant men, but it’s our land.. We measured it and broke it up. We were born on it, and we got killed on it, died on it. Even if it's no good, it's still ours. That's what makes it ours - being born on it, working it, dying on it. That makes ownership, not a paper with numbers on it.”

And that’s what defines a moral sense of place, what makes matter moral and morality matter. Margherita Muller refers to the miners of Carfin in Lanarkshire, who were able ‘to create a garden out of a barren piece of land, a communal effort, a land platform of hope’, an activity that gave the men ‘a high sense of purpose.’ ‘The miners became able to carve out of the earth something else other than coal: their own space, a place where to live by their own moral values, practise their religion, and be at home with like-minded immigrants.’

In *Immanence, Transcendence and Essence*, I discuss William Blake’s expansive understanding of Art as an imaginative mode of life which accesses ultimate reality. Blake’s Jerusalem is thus presented as the building of a moral place presided over by the arts and the imagination.

In his *Defence of Poetry*, Shelley argued that "poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world". Here’s hoping. There are no finer lines to portray a complex, interlinked and multilayered society united by the devotion to the common good than those written by Dante as he describes the order of Paradise in *The Divine Comedy*. Here, Dante portrays a society which achieves harmony by assigning all stations and valuing all activities according to the common end. The parts derive their significance and their character from the place they occupy within the whole, articulating such a unity of purpose in their interimbrication that they form seamlessly within the whole. Against the democracy of subjective opinion and the narcissism of particular interest, Dante articulates a democracy of place and function in which Being is attained through the realisation of a common purpose.

The devotion to the principle of the common end enables diversity to flourish and realise harmony within an overarching unity. The whole is infused with purpose as a standard for determining the relations and functions of the parts and as a scale of

moral values evaluating the character and significance of these parts within the whole. Such a conception restores economic activity its proper place as the means of the good life, not the end.

The crisis of capitalist modernity is not simply, as have thought, private ownership of the means of production and the maldistribution of the social product, nor the fettering of the productive forces below technically feasible levels. Capital as an alienated system of production is based upon the inversion of means and ends, object and subject, with the result that economics has come to acquire a position of overriding significance in relation to other human concerns, a determining position which no single concern has the right to claim, least of all the provision of the material means of existence.

Like the miser who is so absorbed in the processes of making money that he goes to his grave without spending any of it so as to enjoy the fruits of his labours, those in thrall to the accumulative dynamics of capitalist economics are so preoccupied with the means of acquiring material wealth that they neglect the real wealth that life offers. That obsession with economic means blinds us to the realisation of ends that makes life worth while.

English Lord Chancellor and Catholic martyr and saint Thomas More wrote pertinently of those who, although having one foot in the grave, continue to pursue material gain, even though it profits them nothing.

I remember me of a thief once cast at Newgate, that cut a purse at the bar, when he should be hanged on the morrow. And when he was asked why he did so, knowing that he should die so shortly, the desperate wretch said that it did his heart good, to be lord of that purse one night yet. And in good faith, methinketh, as much as we wonder at him, yet see we many that do much like, of whom we nothing wonder at all.

Thomas More *Four Last Things*

We are still doing it. Time has been called on industrial progress. It's leading to ecological catastrophe. And yet we carry on in the grip of an obsession with economic growth. We continue to act contrariwise to what our reason and morality, our two greatest gifts, tell us.

'The unexamined life is not worth living' argued Plato. More's wise words show us how far we have strayed from Plato's call to the examined life. Material gain has become the purpose of life and of living, not human being. We have been living the unexamined life under the compulsion of monetary gain. And not even the prospect of runaway climate change bringing the end of civilisation as we know has been sufficient to waken people into the contemplation of life. Instead, there is a feverish grab to control more resources, extract more value from nature, plunder more of the Earth's resources. An endless pursuit of something for nothing.

We have transferred the existential significance that belongs properly to human being and living to 'things' and their systemic imperatives. We live an unexamined life. Marx referred to religion as the soul of soulless conditions. The soul has been crushed out of our existence, the machine world proceeds 'without regard for persons' (Max Weber). And many adjust to those conditions. As Marx argued, even the lion gets used to the bars on his cage.

For poetry to save us, we need to have poetry in our souls. And to have poetry in your soul, you need to have a soul to begin with. And here we are in trouble. Jung wrote of *Modern Man in Search of a Soul* (2001). If we are to save ourselves from the economic and environmental catastrophes that threaten the world then we need to embed our technics within an imaginative therapy and process aiming at the decolonisation of the soul. The approach I'm developing seeks to transform our perception of ourselves, our culture and our surroundings. We need what I would call a visionary materialism. (Of which I write in *Immanence, Transcendence and Essence* 2013 https://www.academia.edu/3203399/Immanence_Transcendence_and_Essence).

The capital system is based not only on the expropriation of things, objects, but embraces subjectivities. Based on its accumulative dynamic, the capital system amounts to the colonisation of natural resources, of human labour and, most importantly, of perceptions and imaginations. Weber referred to 'the disenchantment

of the world' (*Entzauberung der Welt*). This was a conscious borrowing from the poet and philosopher Friedrich Schiller, who wrote of die *Entgotterung der Nature*, the dis-godding of nature (Herman, 1981: 57).

So the approach I take marshals the full range of human intellect and imagination – philosophy, politics, economics, ecology, history, art, literature, science and religion - in order to develop the innovative means to challenge and subvert the instrumental powers that have deprived nature of its living significance and human beings of their souls.

All things are interconnected. Philosophy leads to art, art leads to religion, religion leads to psychology, psychology leads to mythology, mythology leads to literature, literature leads to poetry, poetry leads to music, music leads to mathematics, mathematics leads to biology, biology leads to physics, physics leads to metaphysics, metaphysics leads to philosophy, philosophy leads to art and round we go again.

I draw upon the full range of cognitive, psychic and imaginative modes in order to develop a moral architectonics of place grounded in the unity of social and environmental justice. Here is a real liberation theology which overcomes the dis-godding inflicted by the processes of capitalist modernity, rediscovering the sense of the sacred in nature, and achieves human emancipation as a complete naturalisation.

So the key to challenging alien power and the systemic imperatives and constraints upon which power's abuse thrives is unchaining our imaginations and freeing our intellects. Isn't this what a great poet does?

William Blake loathed the preachings of the priests and Churches who could see only evil in the flesh and who were obsessed with a moral discipline based on the credo 'thou shalt not' rather than a happiness which was focused upon human potentialities. Their repressive orientation created, sanctioned and policed a world of psychic misery:

I wander thro' each charter'd street, Near where the charter'd Thames does flow,
And mark in every face I meet Marks of weakness, marks of woe.
In every cry of every Man, In every Infants cry of fear, In every voice, in every ban,
The mind-forg'd manacles I hear. (Blake, *London*)

If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite.

For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern. (Blake, *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*)

That psychic misery made the satanic mills possible. The mechanisation of the mind came before the mechanisation of the world. Blake wants us to see through the shadows on the wall and leave Plato's cave behind us.

For everything that lives is holy, life delights in life; Because the soul of sweet delight can never be defil'd. Fires enwrap the earthly globe, yet Man is not consum'd. (Blake, *America*, 1.59.)

By the time he wrote *America* in 1793, Blake was thinking of a revolution that transcended politics and its concerns over the control of material power and which instead released human beings from the chains of false morality, false values, false philosophy. Mental liberation changing perceptions of reality. The fourfold vision beyond the mechanistic materialism of science and economics.

The soul of sweet delight

The Poetry of Earth

On the Grasshopper and Cricket

By John Keats

The Poetry of earth is never dead:
When all the birds are faint with the hot sun,
And hide in cooling trees, a voice will run
From hedge to hedge about the new-mown mead;
That is the Grasshopper's—he takes the lead
In summer luxury,—he has never done
With his delights; for when tired out with fun
He rests at ease beneath some pleasant weed.
The poetry of earth is ceasing never:
On a lone winter evening, when the frost
Has wrought a silence, from the stove there shrills
The Cricket's song, in warmth increasing ever,
And seems to one in drowsiness half lost,
The Grasshopper's among some grassy hills.

The poetry of Earth is never dead, wrote John Keats in 1816. And poetry has not only lived up to the claim, it is more vital to us than it has ever been. Can poetry save the Earth? The Shakespearean scholar Jonathan Bate made the claim in *The Song of the Earth* that poetry could save the world. He may well be right. By Earth, I do not mean the planet, which will go on for as long as the sun continues to shine. I mean the natural world, of which we are both a part of and apart from, dependent and independent beings in ambiguous relation to our earthly home. 'If poems touch our full humanness, can they quicken awareness and bolster respect for this ravaged resilient earth we live on? Can poems help, when the times demand environmental science and history, government leadership, corporate and consumer moderation, non-profit activism, local initiatives? Why call on the pleasures of poetry, when the time has come for an all-out response?'

Poetry is the music in nature. A poem may succeed in tuning your ears and turning your mind's eye toward the music in the garden, the goodness in the world, and lead you to a future that is worth living in. The birds' song is poetry, and when, in the hot summer, the birds 'hide in cooling trees', the grasshoppers take over. We still have Poetry. We still have music. But the times are getting hotter... we need to hear nature's music.

In his *Defence of Poetry*, Shelley argued that 'poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world'. Here's hoping. There are no finer lines to portray a complex, interlinked and multilayered society united by the devotion to the common good than those written by Dante as he describes the order of Paradise in *The Comedy*. Here, Dante portrays a society which achieves harmony by assigning all stations and valuing all activities according to the common end. The parts derive their significance and their character from the place they occupy within the whole, articulating such a unity of purpose in their interimbrication that they form seamlessly within the whole.

The problem is that, in a culture of separation and specialization, 'the old union of beauty, goodness and truth is broken', in the words of poet and critic Wendell Berry.

The world, which seems,
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.

Matthew Arnold, '*Dover Beach*'

In our own time, humankind has destroyed wooded plains and valleys, polluted the seas and the rivers, poisoned the land and the air, damaged the hydrogeological and atmospheric systems, built on green spaces, and inflicted uncontrolled forms of urbanisation and industrialisation upon the land. To use an image employed by the peerless poet-philosopher Dante Alighieri in *The Comedy*, ('Paradise', XXII, 151), humankind has through 'foul usury' humiliated the Creation, that flower-bed that is our God given dwelling. For Dante, 'despising Nature and her goodness' is a violence against God. (Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, trans, by Charles S. Singleton, Bollingen Series LXXX, and Inferno, canto XI, lines 46-48 (Princeton, NJ:

Princeton University Press, 1970). There is nothing in the Bible which entitles human beings to exterminate or destroy or hold in contempt anything on Earth, quite the contrary. We may use the gifts of nature but have no right to ruin or waste them. We have the right to use what we need but have no right to do any more than that. The Bible forbids usury and condemns great accumulations of property. As Dante argues, 'the usurer condemns Nature ... for he puts his hope elsewhere.' (Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, canto XI, lines 109-11.) By taking more than we are entitled to, we are destroying our place within Creation and, as a result, are destroying our own Being.

Books on Dante have titles like *Dante's Path* (Schaub 2003) and *The Soul's Journey* (Jones 1995), highlighting Dante's emphasis on life as a journey, a path we must travel, however uncertain the terrain. 'In the middle of the journey of our life, I found myself in a dark wood'. In these first two lines, Dante speaks in the first person, but speaks to all of us embarked on life's journey. Dante's *Comedy* tells the tale of a pilgrim who, lost in the darkness a wood, journeys forth to see the light of beatitude. The poem charts the ascent of mind, body and soul from the lower regions of egoistic desire to the height of the universal realm. The journey is a personal journey but is also a universal theme. Dante aims to convert those men and women who have strayed from the path and who are lost without hope in the dark woods of despair. So, of course, at a time of encroaching environmental threat, Dante is timely. (Critchley 2013).

'It's time for action!' Will we do it?

The future is always uncertain. I am sceptical of all determinisms, whether biological, environmental, economic and ecological. I affirm the capacity of human beings to act as creative, knowledgeable and moral change agents to act in the historical process and make a difference for the better. Whilst such a view falls short of espousing the radical indeterminacy of the future, it does recognize the extent to which life is a creation.

There are no guarantees. We will make the path to journey's end only by walking. And along the way, we will have to confront inequalities in power and resources, and the structures which generate those inequalities, and the acquisitive self-maximising

individuals, the corporations and the governments who personify those structures. In the process, we replace the pecuniary motives which currently dominate human interaction with more gregarious and generous motives.

The Unfolding Cosmos

Felicity is the goal and natural term of all life. The 'comedy' to which Dante's *Commedia* refers is a happy end. We can see happiness as the end of all living things. The diversity of ways in which this idea has been presented has led to scepticism as to whether happiness is a meaningful term at all. Even worse, happiness can neither be measured nor quantified, the most heinous crime of all a world dominated by rational calculation. I would refer here to Aristotle's *eudaimonia* as flourishing and well-being. Also relevant is Spinoza's joy. For Spinoza, the wise and free person will avoid pain and aim necessarily 'to act well and to rejoice' (*bene agere ac laetari*). To act well is fully to enjoy oneself, and fully to enjoy oneself is to act well: 'there cannot be too much joy: it is always good: but melancholy is always bad' (E Pt IV Prop XLII). The life of the free being is characterized by pleasure as conscious well-being and enjoyed activity, as distinct from particular pleasures in the limited sense of *titillatio*, pleasures which, in excess, disturb the balance and well-being of the whole organism.

Spinoza wrote of the need to develop 'adequate ideas', transcending our passive and unreflective dependence on sensory perception, the fallible workings of memory, imagination, language, and other such contingent, error-prone sources of 'inadequate ideas', in order to contemplate everything *sub specie aeternitatis*. This seems to demand an austere intellectual appreciation of the world that seems more than, or less than, human. It demands too much of human beings, and too little.

The visionary materialism of William Blake by Peter Critchley

https://www.academia.edu/6582196/The_Visionary_Materialism_of_William_Blake

Kathleen Raine takes heart from an awareness that, at last, the assumptions of materialism that have long dominated the modern Western world are being

increasingly questioned and overthrown. According to another view — and we must remember that this is the view the Eastern world, in various forms, has held over millennia — ‘nature’ is a system of appearances whose ground is consciousness itself. Science measures the phenomena which we perceive, and which Indian philosophical systems call *maya*. *Maya* has sometimes been termed illusion, but it is, more exactly, appearances. Blake used the word ‘visions’: this world, he wrote, ‘is one continued vision of fancy or imagination.’ But if the materialist premises are reversed, then ‘reality’ is not material fact but meaning itself. And it follows that in those civilizations grounded on this premise—our own included, up to the Renaissance—the arts, as expressions of the value-systems of a culture, have been held in high regard as expressions of knowledge of the highest order. Is not our human kingdom in its very nature a universe of meanings and values? For these are inherent in life itself, as such, the Vedantic *sat-chit-ananda*, being-consciousness-bliss: being is consciousness, and the third term *ananda* (bliss) is the ultimate value of being and consciousness. We are made for beatitude, as the theologians would say; Freud, indeed, said something not dissimilar when he spoke of the fundamental nature of ‘the pleasure principle’ as the goal all seek. Plotinus wrote of ‘felicity’ as the goal and natural term of all life, and attributed it not only to man and animals but to plants also. Beatitude—felicity—is not an accident of being and consciousness: it is our very nature to seek, and to attain, joy; and it is for the arts to hold before us images of our eternal nature, through which we may awaken to, and grow towards, that reality which is our humanity itself. (Raine in McDonald 2003 173).

Poet, artist and visionary William Blake defended this view of underlying reality in the teeth of the materialism of the scientific and industrial revolutions: ‘all that I see is vision’, he said, ‘to me this world is one continued vision of imagination.’ Blake could be dismissed as an unrealistic poet and artist, except that he was on strong metaphysical ground, writing of the living sun:

‘What,’ it will be Questioned, ‘When the Sun rises, do you not see A round disk of fire somewhat like a Guinea?’ O no, no, I see an Innumerable company of the Heavenly host crying ‘Holy, Holy, Holy Is the Lord God Almighty.’ I question not my Corporeal or Vegetative Eye any more than I would Question a Window concerning A Sight. I look thro’ it and not with it.

Blake, Keynes, ed. 1966 617.

Blake sees the spiritual and aesthetic qualities of plants and objects within Nature's interconnected and seamless web of life. Blake's poems allow clods of mud and pebbles to speak and flowers to feel. Blake's ecological sensibility here stands in complete contrast to those who lack the vision to see any horizon beyond this fallen world of callous cash payment, those who can see only with the eyes of the miser, for whom 'a Guinea is more beautiful than the Sun, & a bag worn with the use of Money has more beautiful proportions than a Vine filled with Grapes. The tree which moves some to tears of joy is in the Eyes of others only a Green thing that stands in the way' (793).

'I look thro' it and not with it.' Blake looks 'through and not with' the eye. Plato also looked through and not with the eye. The innumerable multitude of beings, being themselves rather than objects in a lifeless mechanism, can only do the same. The world is not dead matter but 'an epiphany of life which not only has, but is, being, consciousness and bliss?' The real is, ultimately, not an object but a Person. Raine explains what this means: 'A "Person" in this sense not by a human act of personification of something in its innate reality neither living nor conscious; but rather human "persons" are a manifestation in multitude of the single Person of Being itself, from which consciousness and meaning are inseparable, these being innate qualities of life itself, as such.' (Raine 2011).

This refers to 'life' not as a property of matter, but life as experienced.

In his holistic approach to nature, Blake comes close to the positions of contemporary ecologists and the emphasis upon the interdependence and interconnection of all things, unity in diversity and organic growth. More than this, Blake offers a perspective on the re-enchantment of the world. If we can go beyond our five senses and cleanse the doors of perception, then we will see that 'everything that lives is Holy'. (Blake, *Complete Writings*, pp.777, 379,149,160). This encapsulates Blake's total vision of reality. Everything that lives is holy not because we choose to think it so, but because it is intrinsically holy. The holy cannot be

defined, only experienced as the ultimate knowledge of consciousness. 'Within the scope of human experience there are degrees of knowledge and value, self-authenticating, of which those who have reached the farthest regions tell us, the vision of the holy, and the beatitude of that vision is the highest term.' (Raine 2011). And it is because of this that Blake's stars and grains of sand can say no other than 'Holy, Holy, Holy.'

To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour.

Here, we are beyond a narrowly intellectual appreciation of the world. As Raine concludes, this is not poetic fancy: it is the profoundest knowledge. The vision contained in the mind's eye is realised by freeing the sensuous imagination to play upon reality as a field of potentialities:

. . . the whole creation will be consumed and appear infinite and holy, whereas it now appears finite & corrupt.

This will come to pass by an improvement of sensual enjoyment. But first the notion that man has a body distinct from his soul is to be expunged; this I shall do by printing in the infernal method, by corrosives, which in Hell are salutary and medicinal, melting apparent surfaces away, and displaying the infinite which was hid.

If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite.

For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern. (*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, p. 187).

How deeply we are mired in duality becomes clear in our concerns to restore the connection between 'inner' and 'outer' worlds. Through our disconnection from nature, we have become bifurcated personalities. The externalization of nature is a consequence of what Blake called the 'wrenching apart' of the apparently external world from the unity of the wholeness of being.

And Los, round the dark globe of Urizen,
Kept watch for Eternals to confine

The obscure separation alone ;
For Eternity stood wide apart,
As the stars are apart from the earth.

Los wept, howling around the dark Demon,
And cursing his lot ; for in anguish

Urizen was rent from his side,
And a fathomless void for his feet,
And intense fires for his dwelling.

But Urizen laid in a stony sleep,
Unorganiz'd, rent from Eternity.

The Eternals said : "What is this? Death.
"Urizen is a clod of clay."

Los howl'd in a dismal stupor,
Groaning, gnashing, groaning,
Till the wrenching apart was healed.

But the wrenching of Urizen heal'd not.
Cold, featureless, flesh or clay,

Rifted with direful changes,
He lay in a dreamless night,

Till Los rous'd his fires, affrighted
At the formless, unmeasurable death.

Blake, *The First Book of Urizen* 223

'This has created an unhealed wound in the soul of modern Western man, leaving nature soulless and lifeless, and the inner world abstracted from the natural universe, its proper home.' (Raine 2011).

That wound can be healed. We are now coming to appreciate the fact that we are active members in a ceaselessly creative universe. We can overcome our abstraction from the natural universe and see our true place within it. This is more than the intellectual appreciation of some impersonal necessity. We are active co-creators of this creative universe; the world is always in some way humanly objective, infused with will, purpose, consciousness and choice.

'Our life on earth is, and ought to be, material and carnal. But we have not yet learned to manage our materialism and carnality properly; they are still entangled with the desire for ownership'.

- E. M. Forster

Soil, Soul and Society

We have the capacity to live life to the full, to find like-minded people, to hear the music quicken and to make community. If humankind is to have any hope of changing the world, we must constantly work to strengthen community. We need, first, to make community with the soil, to learn how to revere the Earth. That means walking lightly in the demands we make of life, sufficiency rather than surplus, quality rather than quantity. Second, we need to make community of human society. We need to learn empathy and respect for one another simply so that people get the love they need. That means developing an inclusive sense of belonging, identity and values. And third, we need community of the soul. We need spaces where we can rest, compose and compost our inner stuff and become more deeply present to the aliveness of life. We need to keep one eye to the ground and the other to the stars. We need to remember that when we let loose our wildness in creativity, it is [spirit] that pours forth. It does so from within, as a never-ending river. This tripartite

understanding of community is the root, trunk and branch of right relationship. It is how love becomes incarnate. (Alastair McIntosh, *Soil and Soul*).

Poetry and Ecology

Come away o human child
To the waters and the wild
With a fairy hand-in-hand
For the world's more full of weeping
Than you can understand
W. B. YEATS

Notes for A Poetics of Earth

Symbols and Images: Water, Wind, Moon

Drawing on the history, philosophy and ethics of ecofeminism, we may examine the ways in which post-apocalyptic landscapes in young adult fiction reflect contemporary attitudes towards eco-crisis and human responsibility. Identifying the neoliberal discourses of individualism and self-advancement that 'feminise' categories lying outside the parameters of the dominant voice, exploring the ways in which adult authors may attempt to develop a sustainable ethic of care that can encompass 'feminised' peoples and spatialities, including non-human beings and bodies in the more-than-human environment. With particular reference to the ways in which global processes are mapped onto the local landscape, we come to advocate a poetics of earth to replace the disengaged planetary consciousness often engendered through crisis. Such a study lays forth various transformative responses to eco-crisis at a time of escalating global concern over the environment.

A 'Poetics of Planet': Apocalypse and Our Post-Natural Future

A Poetics of Earth: Ecofeminist Spiritualities

Deep Ecology or Ecofeminism: The Embodied, Embedded Hybrid

The Planetary Turn: Relationality and Geoaesthetics in the 21st Century.

Planetary Poetics

The Possibility of Cyberplacelessness

Planetary, Performativity, Relationality:

Ecocriticism in Rabindranath Tagore's Red Oleanders and Knut Hamsun's Growth of the Soil

Ecocriticism is the study of literature and environment from an interdisciplinary point of view where all sciences come together to analyze the environment and brainstorm possible solutions for the correction of the contemporary environmental situation. It is considered as an intentionally broad approach which is known by other names also like: green (cultural) studies, ecopoetics and environmental literary criticism.

Ecocritics try to investigate those things which have underlying ecological values and concern. They are interested in finding the meaning of the word nature in a precise way and whether the examination of "place" should be a distinctive category, much like class, gender or race. They want the depiction of environmental issues of the current scenario in popular culture and modern literature. So for this they were very much concern and they consider other discipline such as history, philosophy, ethics, and psychology, to be possible contributors to ecocriticism.

In this manner, Rabindranath Tagore and Knut Hamsun in their works have shown a fine example of it. Tagore in *Red Oleander* and Hamsun in *Growth of the Soil* condemns those who would make an end out of the means of wealth accumulation.

Whilst Tagore, in being a philosopher-poet, has expressed a poetic romanticism in *Red Oleander* and Hamsun, in being a leader of neo-romantic revolt, had embraced a georgic rootedness in *Growth of the Soil*. Both the writers are similar in their opinion in regard to the mis-use of the mines by the industrialist. They have used mining to demonstrate the ill-effects of resource exploitation by the human beings. Both are strong critiques of capitalist exploitation. They are more concern for moral consequences than material gains. Being a scholar of literature,

they have tried to fulfil their moral & social responsibility towards the society by showing their concerns for the environment in their works.

Though the development of science and technology has benefited us a lot but it has led man astray from nature. Modern world is devoid of peace, harmony and people lead a self-centred existence by conducting nuclear wars unaware of their identity. Moreover, global terrorism and mental stress especially in European nations are common phenomena. This paper discusses on how Tagore draws values from western romantic poets and eastern ideals to develop his concept of romanticism that calls for human solidarity, spiritual unity, individual freedom and urges to offer vent for passion, imagination and perception. Attempt has also been made to elucidate Tagore's Romanticism by citing his poems, essays, lectures and a collection of other Bengali writing's that focuses on returning men back to their original residence i.e. nature, evoking the spirit of love among individuals, glorification of beauty ,restoring peace and harmony and recognition of truth that an Universal soul exists in each one of us thereby aiming to create equality among mankind, curb violence and hatred and construct unity amidst diversity by breaking demarcations and thwarting discrimination.

The Persistence of Romanticism in Contemporary World Literature

The immense space of the supersensible

. . . is filled for us with dark night.

— Immanuel Kant

The Romantics' love for nature is deeply rooted in their ideology of pantheism; in their firm belief in the 'spirit that impels/ All thinking things' situated at the heart of nature. It is the conviction in the existence of this 'spirit' especially in the moments of elevated consciousness that makes Derozio claim "...we not only saw/But felt the moonlight around us." Arthur Lovejoy in *On the Discrimination of Romanticisms* links the "typical manifestations of the spiritual essence of Romanticism" with "losing oneself in an ecstatic contemplation of nature". It is this very "ecstatic contemplation" that makes Wordsworth write "My heart leaps up/When I behold a rainbow" in the

sky; the very rainbow that underlines a “world rich with colour and sound, redolent with fragrance” as opposed to “a world of mathematically computable motions in mechanical regularity.” This is precisely why imagination becomes so intrinsically important to romanticism to overcome and go beyond the repressive chains of reason.

And then he and Keats agreed that he had destroyed all the poetry of the rainbow by reducing it to prismatic colours.” This idea is clearly manifested through Blake’s protest against his oppressive Urizenic chains. He paints his ‘mind-forg’d manacles’ with exotic spiral patterns and the urizenic. Coleridge perceives nature as the extension or externalization of the symbols of his own mind. Many of Coleridge’s poems follow the circular structure where the mundane and the everyday is overcome by means of a romantic transcendence in the state of an elevated consciousness which is followed by a return to the starting point; the cyclical structure does not mark the erasure of the escapist journey and the return is marked by a changed, rejuvenated self by means of this transcendence.

Such stories record the ever-growing use of machines in human civilization and envisions the day when machines, instead of being governed by human beings, will enslave us instead. The Matrix trilogy upholds this reverted situation. Matrix shows a world ruled by machines where the humans are marginalized. The machines have not annihilated the human race because they serve as good batteries for the machines. In the world of Matrix ‘nature’ is an unheard of concept, the world has become nothing but a huge mechanical being.

The mechanical has completed the divorce between man and nature. The strong attachment to the mechanical has largely eliminated the love for nature from the human mind.

The Romantic obsession with nature got diluted as the rise of industrialisation underlined the importance of machines and shifted the focus from nature to the urbane. Violence towards nature is only a shocking by-product of this shifted focus; it is a distressing phenomenon that lies at the polar extremity of this transition and lets loose the forces of environmental degradation.

Margret Atwood's *Surfacing* (1972) is one of her most widely read works and develops the concept of sense of place. Sense of place is said to be defined as the identity, significance, meaning, and intention of felt value that are given to places by individuals (Pred 1983) as a result of experiencing it over time (Relph 1976; Tuan 1977). Sense of place is said to have two distinctive meanings within the purview of geography. It is sometimes seen from the standpoint of a place "that is memorable or distinctive, having a high image ability" (Lynch 1960, 1972), or it could, therefore, be seen as more commonly, that is viewed as "the consciousness that people themselves have of places, that possess a particular significance for them, either personal or shared" (Gregory 1991: 425).

Dwelling in a place can be said to be a Dwelling in a place can be said to be a prerequisite to really have a good sense of place, though we can admire a place from a distance, but the connection will be well achieved when *International Letters of Social and Humanistic Sciences* 16(1) (2014) 31-38

I would relate this to Heidegger's notion of dwelling in the fourfold:

Martin Heidegger: Ontology and Ecology

https://www.academia.edu/705387/Martin_Heidegger_Ontology_and_Ecology

Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) wrote inspiring papers late in life, while living in Schwarzwald (Black Forest), addressing issues which are central to ecocritical thinking. They involve the question of technology, existential ideas on dwelling in the world, and the role of poets and poetry. Heidegger's ideas are discussed in this chapter and an attempt is made to develop an ecocritical vocabulary in Icelandic corresponding to the German philosopher's creative way of thinking about and using language. The chapter concludes that even if Heidegger's legacy is controversial, his ideas should be taken into consideration when discussing the place of poetry in the world and its importance for our dwelling on the earth.

We dwell in the place where we are connected with. According to Heidegger, "to dwell is to preserve things in their peace, to spare them actively from anything that might disturb them that might make them different from what they are" (qtd. in Hay 2002: 160). It becomes therefore imperative at this junction to state here, in other to

keep a place, you as an individual has a great sense towards, certain criteria that should be fulfilled. One of the responsibilities is sparing, which is “tolerance for places in their own essence a willingness to leave places and not try to exploit them” (Relph, 1976: 39).

It has, therefore, become very glary that the interconnection between place, the individual and society, and goes beyond the interaction with the physical landscape and those who share the physical space as it was. This has, therefore, made geographers to assert that sense of place operation is intertwined within three dimensions:

firstly, The perceptual realm of awareness, attitudes and memories;
secondly, The emotional realm of feelings preferences, and values; and
thirdly, The experiential realm of bodily and sensory contacts, insider/outsider, and journeys It is an individually based, but group informed, localized, personal means of relating to the world, transforming mere space into personal space (Hay 1988: 160).

Home, within this light could be seen as a good example of a conscious place-fullness, which is having a strong sense of being in place. It exemplifies the “internal knowledge – knowledge of emotion, knowledge of the heart – that comprises sense of place” (Raffan 1993: 4). Home place also establishes a source of reference from which judgments may be made. Tuan describes this as: “Security we are attached to [it].” Thus, there is no place like home. What is home? It is the old homestead, the old neighbourhood, and hometown. He further assert that Love of place, or topophilia “can develop at a grand scale as national identity and even as imperial patriotism, but it can also become manifest at a much more local scale as attachment to neighbourhood or home town” (Simpson-Housley and Norcliffe 1992: 5). Our task is to care for places, “through building or cultivation.” It is only through the act of sparing and caretaking, that the notion of home can be properly realised. Relph states, “This is what it means to dwell, which is for Heidegger, “the essence of human existence” (1976: 39). Thus, Heidegger’s most significant contribution to the (environmental) concept of home can be seen through his insistence upon the need to live authentically, to be at home, and to take responsibility for the defence of that

home in all aspects - human, natural, and the intangible particulars that constitute a place's essence. Accordingly, a place about which one feels so deeply must become a field of care - to love and care for a place entails more than mere affectionate regards (or words); it must also come with a sense of responsibility to that place. However, to passively witness the destruction of one's home is to fail in one's duty to take care for one's dwelling place.

Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World

"The wild has no words"

The modern short lyric is a way of approaching the wordless through images.

The book *The Nature of Poetry: The Environment of Icelandic Poets* is the first ecocritical study of Icelandic nature poetry from the 19th century to the present. It claims that the Romantic poets develops the nature imagery and environmental concerns voiced by their 19th century predecessors, taking them into new and often inward directions, showing how nature and the environment can be material and subjective at the same time.

The argument traces the development of nature and environmental poetry up to the present, showing how it addresses contemporary issues, such as the theme of technology, the attachment to places and localities in the country and the city, and environmentalist concerns, which often reflect the Romantic tradition of nature poetry.

Conservatism and the Intergenerational Imagination

The work of conservative philosopher Edmund Burke is well worth investigating. Burke is too often read as the conservative 'bad guy' against Tom Paine's 'good guy.' What is missed in Burke's critique is his association of 'the rights of man' with a machine conception of the universe, politics, and society which served to reduced human beings to self-interested, competing atoms. The organic roots of culture and society came to be supplanted with a mechanistic conception of life. Burke

expresses the ecological ethic as a pact between past, present, and future better than any philosopher before or since.

The radical writer William Hazlitt was an astute reader of Edmund Burke. Hazlitt perceptively identified the radical anti-capitalist social ecology that lay at the heart of Burke's conservatism. Hazlitt thus writes, "To think of reducing all mankind to the same insipid level, seemed to him [Burke] the same absurdity as to destroy the inequalities of surface in a country, for the benefit of agriculture and commerce." As much as he was opposed to the hierarchical and nationalist aspects of Burke's work, Hazlitt identifies the enduring importance of his critique of competitive individualism. Burke's critique reveals the extent to which the scramble and lust for privatization of resources, constant improvement, and profit will irrevocably erode diverse, communal, social ecologies. Hazlitt writes this of Burke's conservatism: "I do not say that his arguments are conclusive; but they are profound and true, as far as they go" (SW 56). Burke's arguments go far enough for us to take note and worry. Burke the conservative is often seen as diametrically opposed to Rousseau, insofar as Rousseau is considered the epitome of rationalism in politics. This is a misreading. As David Cameron shows, Burke and Rousseau are a lot closer in thought and temper than protagonists on either side realize (David Cameron, 1973, *The Social Thought of Rousseau and Burke: A Comparative Study*).

I am interested in the ecological aspects of Burke's thought. Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) is the beginning of a strand of Romantic political conservatism that is committed to environmental conservation.

Romantic conservative critiques of modernity – found in texts as diverse as poetry, novels, political philosophy, natural history, and agricultural periodicals – all manifest conservative-conservationist reactions diametrically opposed to the progressive ideology of capitalist modernity. Like the *Reflections*, these critiques locate communal futurity in the past by championing localized, customary communities and practices that have been, in Burke's words, "formed by habit" (R 315). In other words, in a time period when heated political arguments about land use tacked between an ethos of conservation and the desire for conquest and commodification, the conservative critique insisted that the *telos* of land should be more complex than

merely the production of wealth. (see *The Ecology of British Romantic Conservatism*, 1790–1837).

Jonathan Bate argues, for example, that the Romantic view explores “the relationship between the Love of Nature and the Love of Mankind and, conversely, between the Rights of Man and the Rights of Nature.”

Although Bate claims that this environmental awareness finally “transcends the politics of both Paine and Burke,” his insistence that the liberal, individualistic “Rights of Man” are the basis for Romantic environmental thought affirms a largely unchallenged assumption in both Romanticism and in environmental studies: environmental awareness and advocacy is tethered to liberal progressivism and its expanding concept of individual rights. This is to be challenged and rejected. The conflation of liberalism and environmentalism in Romantic studies is problematic and stands in need of revision. There is value, therefore, in returning to the famous political debate between Edmund Burke and Thomas Paine over the legitimacy of individual rights – in order to explore the environmental ethics implicit in Burke’s conservative position, which is guided by the imagination of intergenerational responsibility when making decisions about culture or land. Whilst radicals gave the victory in that confrontation to Paine, the ecological limitations of liberalism, tied to mechanistic politics, economics and atomistic society, are now more apparent and demand a reevaluation of Burke’s conservatism.

In this, I take my cue from marxist Fredric Jameson, who points out that “the initial critiques of the nascent world of capitalism emerge on the Right: in this sense, Edmund Burke’s seminal assault on Jacobinism can be read, less as a denunciation of social revolution, than as an anticipatory critique of emergent bourgeois social life.”

Rather than understanding Romantic conservatives as either unthinkingly defending the status quo or as staunch proponents of industrial capitalism, my claim is that Romantic conservatives view modernity as a threatening break with the past and instead advocate for an imaginative attachment to both past and future generations. The conservative intergenerational imagination impels a substantial environmental ethic that is overlooked by both Romantic and environmental studies. Instead of

resorting to our contemporary left/right, democratic/republican political paradigms, or to the often utilized radical/loyalist binary in Romantic scholarship, I analyze political positions as falling into liberal individualist and conservative traditionalist stances.

Romantic Conservatism in Burke, Wordsworth, and Wendell Berry

Katey Castellano

Romantic literature manifests a nascent ecological consciousness, according to Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre, “through its questioning of economic and technological progress and through its utopian aspiration to restore the lost harmony between humans and nature”. Foreseeing that the rise and progress of industrial modernity might irreversibly erode both the landscape and local communities, Romantic literature questions humanistic, technological progressivism while emphasizing the interdependence between humans and the non-human world.

In this essay, Castellano returns to the famous political debate that Bate evokes—the debate between Edmund Burke and Thomas Paine over the legitimacy of liberal, individual rights—in order to explore the nascent environmental ethics implicit in the debate. After analyzing the ecological and social implications of Burke’s call for an organic society guided by a sense of intergenerational responsibility, I evaluate the intergenerational imagination of Wordsworth’s poetry in the *Lyrical Ballads* (1798).

Song of the Earth

One of the dominant trends of our time is the multiplication of specialists and the paucity of generalists. With that comes the loss of an overarching big picture and an increasing inability to grasp things within a larger context. By paucity of generalists, I mean people with depth of intelligence and understanding enough to draw on a range of disciplines and engage in a work of synthesis. I don’t mean windy and assertive know-nothings who treat the world to their opinions on everything, of which there is certainly a surfeit.

When we can’t see the forest for the trees we experience a failure in our comprehensive vision; we simply cannot grasp the big picture. Of course, the big

picture is the forest, as well as the trees together and each of the trees held in a unity with the others. Buckminster Fuller wrote, 'If it is true that the bigger the thinking becomes, the more lastingly effective it is, we must ask ourselves "How big can we think?". Short films, poems, songs, paintings and everyday events can enlarge our thinking.

These films are inspiring, mind boggling, expansive, life-affirming initiations into another possible, more desirable, world. We see ourselves as creatures connected to the whole universe, and see that the universe is also within us. We are earth's children responding to the cry, and the poetry, of the earth.

Even at the micro level, we can think broadly and expansively.

Of course, at times it feels too overwhelming. Sometimes the big picture feels too overwhelming. Sometimes the big picture makes us want to dig our heads into the sand like ostriches, or confine our attention to what we feel we can manage.

Still, each day challenges us to be present and responsive to all life, as it is happening to us. Comprehensiveness means that our map of reality, or our context, takes in everything that is relevant, so that nothing is left out. It means that both the forest (the overarching big picture) and the trees (the myriad details that make up the forest) are living parts of our context. Both the overview and the detail influence our decisions.

The systematic nature of reality demands an integral approach.

Thomas Berry wakes us up to earthcare as soulcare in his poem "To all the children".

Vision: To ignite our sense of connectedness with earth and nurture a spirituality of earth care through learning circles

The vision for Programs in Earth Literacies was first developed among a number of colleagues who worked together preparing workshops and retreats that focus on Earth spirituality, Ecotheology, care for Earth, and deep ecology. The primary goal of

Programs in Earth Literacies is to nurture a love for our Earth home and for the Cosmos. The programs will engage participants in hands-on work, workshops, retreats, conversation circles and guided reflection. Our programs are attentive to seeing Earth as sacred and to learning practical ways of shaping our personal lives and forming the human community into a more loving presence on Earth. Thomas Berry speaks poignantly of the great importance of Earth care, education and spirituality programs for the future, for all children. He dedicates his book *The Great Work, Our Way into the Future*, to children:

To the children

To all the children

To the children who swim beneath the waves of the sea,

To those who live in the soils of the Earth,

To the children of the flowers in the meadows and the trees in the forest,

To all those children who roam over the land

And the winged ones who fly with the winds

To the human children too,

That all the children may go together into the future

In the full diversity of their regional communities.

OPENING PANDORA'S BOX: The New Wave of Land Grabbing by the Extractive Industries and the Devastating Impact on Earth

<http://www.gaiafoundation.org/sites/default/files/PandorasBoxReportFinal.pdf>

SONG OF THE EARTH

Martha Tilston- Good World

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2r901J39mrM>

Linda Perhacs - Call of the River

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2r901J39mrM>

Earth Mother – Anuna

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VEgWbob_RL0

Mercy Mercy Me" (The Ecology) - Marvin Gaye

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F5Kr1YB2cs4>

Neil Young & Crazy Horse - Who's Gonna Stand Up and Save the Earth

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XfXVUHhZnHM>

Vashti Bunyan - Diamond day

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B3W4sLS67oI>

Sparks - Never Turn your back on Mother Earth

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MMbtOZDMHOk>

Amata - Water Song

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f3i2Fwd-VC8>

Albert Hammer – Down by the River

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fKIYRP48-Cg>

Where Do The Children Play - Cat Stevens

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7a4DCxAi020>

Nature's Way – Spirit

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0V0Vu_utUZY

We Won't Wait Any Longer Gwydion Pendderwen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PMnYgWcrYtY>

Linda Perhacs - The Soul of All Natural Things

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UwJyiBq_MVg

John Rutter : A Gaelic Blessing

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Las_UnTCf8

Green Peace, Really Green – Roy Bailey

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hL20nQPFz-w>

Secret garden-Silence Speaks

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T4GmSNbMLiA>

The Truth Comes Out - Corb Lund

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EljklvHAfWc>

Bob Marley - Natural Mystic

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PWoDSGfSu6o>

Children Of The Universe John Denver

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j6AvtBBeTuc>

R.E.M. - Fall On Me

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lf6vCjtaV1k>

Melissa Etheridge - I Need To Wake Up

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JUVqUz8m2PQ>

Linda Perhacs – Freely

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3n-nWy6fB00>

GARDEN SONG / PETE SEEGER

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UR5C-JCI-eU>

Jay Mankita Living Planet

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FdjKOOO9iCo>

Motherland - Natalie Merchant

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YIJ1ZPW5_L4

Joan Baez – Rejoice in the Sun

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DiCoGkbIn-0>

Blue Boat Home

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YtZUM0JhLvc>

Pete Seeger - God Bless The Grass

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E-Ly_dXE_2Q

Eddi Reader - "Roses"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2dpQaxUgCGk>

In the World of Waldo Williams

Here is the world entire.

One day, brotherhood will unite the families of Earth

One day, the small will stand tall.

And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of nations.

I'd like to celebrate the beautiful poetry of Waldo Williams, and take some time to reminisce about my time walking in the footsteps of the great Welsh poet of the Preseli mountains.

**"Wall of my boyhood, Moel Drigarn, Carn Gyfrwy, Tal Mynydd,
In my mind's independence ever at my back"**

'Waldo Goronwy Williams is regarded as a mythical figure. No one who knew him bore a grudge towards him. Whoever spent time in his company would embrace him and treasure every meeting. Young children were always fond of him when he taught them.'

Waldo Williams begins his poem **Cofio** with these lines:

“One fleeting moment as the sun is setting,
One gentle moment as the night falls fast,
To bring to mind the things that are forgotten,
Now scattered in the dust of ages past.”

Waldo claimed that the poem ‘came to him’ as the sun set as he was working on the farm of his great friend, Willie Jenkins, at Hoplas, Rhoscrowther, near Pembroke. I’ve seen ‘one fleeting moment’ translated as ‘one fleeting minute.’ The meaning is clear enough, and is beyond the measurement of clock time. Waldo is extolling eternal and everlasting virtues, evoking the truths of ages lost in time, pointing to the true place of man within creation.

Yr Eiliad returns to the fleeting moment, a much smaller unity than measured time – that instant when the world stands still and we have the privilege of seeing and experiencing things as they ‘really’ are. Waldo is a realist of a reality greater than that which can be named and framed. In these lines, Waldo sets our brief lives in time in the context of eternity.

Yr Eiliad

There is no talk of the moment in any scholar’s book
The river’s flow ceases and the rock shouts
That it’s a witness to things not seen by the eye
Nor heard by ear
A breeze between breezes
Sun from beyond the sun
The wonder of our true haunts
Not twisted, nor eroded
Filling the world
We know since the moment comes
That we are born for the Hour."

Walk in Waldo's world. Take the time to just stand or sit, look around, express awe and wonder at the world, absorb and be absorbed in all the senses, and experience

eternity in an Hour. "We know since the moment comes, That we are born for the Hour." (Waldo Williams, *Yr Eiliad*). Here, in the Preseli hills, Waldo saw a community of kinship and kindness between all people and all things, and he saw that such a realization on our part would put an end to war between humans in society and between humans and Earth and its non-human beings and bodies. That communal feeling testifies to the existence of something within us that unites each and all, the realization of which is part of our purpose in living.

"One day, brotherhood will unite the families of Earth."
"Daw bore ni wel ond brawdoliaeth yn casglu teuluoedd y llawr."

I'm with Waldo, in Waldo's world. It's wild and rugged up here - and very beautiful.

Waldo wrote of being "wedded to wind and rain and mist". Of course, this is where he was raised and lived, in the Preseli mountains. The words of Waldo Williams draw us in through this promise of peace. He strikes a chord deep within.

"Above the snow, the sky is red
All of Swansea is ablaze
I walk home in the night."

Waldo saw war and exploitation, and he took a stand against them. "I felt now that we were living by killing and devouring. It was endemic within us, and a poison to us all."

His words express the need for peace, peace with and between ourselves, and peace with the whole world. He believes the world to be inherently good, and people to be inherently good. We flourish when we help one other. And we flourish when we work with, and not against, the Earth. It is this kindness and love within the community of life that will ultimately prevail. Because it speaks of a goodness that will endure the poison of power and material riches and the corruption they bring.

"Daw dydd y bydd mawr y rhai bychain.

Daw dydd ni bydd mwy y rhai mawr.

“The day will come when the small will stand tall.”

The day is coming when the top ones will no longer be.”

Daw bore ni wel ond brawdoliaeth Yn casglu teuluoedd y llawr.”

“One day, brotherhood will unite the families of Earth.”

Waldo Williams

Maenclochog and Rosebush

On the west side of the village is The Waldo Memorial, commemorating Waldo (Goronwy) Williams, one of the leading Welsh language poets of the twentieth century. He was also a notable Christian pacifist, anti-war campaigner and Welsh nationalist. ‘Waldo’s visionary communitarianism was an amalgam of many different sources, including his radical Nonconformist background, his family involvement in the early Socialist and Welsh nationalist movements, his wide reading in Welsh literature, in English literature, in anthropology and in Eastern religions, and his interest in the philosophy of international figures such as Gandhi and of international thinkers such as Buber and Berdayev.’ (Jim Perrin).

‘*Preseli*’ was Waldo's own favourite poem of his, composed in 1946 in a direct response to the threat of turning the Preseli hills into a permanent military exercise range. For Waldo, such use of sacred land was sacrilege.

Preseli

Wall of my boyhood, Moel Drigarn, Carn Gyfrwy, Tal Mynydd,
In my mind’s independence ever at my back;
And my floor, from Witwig to Wern and to the smithy
Where from an essence older than iron, the sparks were struck.

And on the farmyards, on the hearths of my people
Wedded to wind and rain and mist and heathery livrocky land,

They wrestle with the earth and the sky, and they beat them,
And they toss the sun to their children as still they bend.

For me a memory and a symbol – that slope with reaping party
With their neighbours' oats falling four-swathed to their blades.
The act they took for fun at a run, and straightening their bodies,
Flung one four-voiced giant laugh to the sun.

So my Wales shall be brotherhood's womb, her destiny she will dare it.
The sick world's balm shall be brotherhood alone.
It is the pearl pledged by time to eternity
To be the pilgrim's hope in this little crooked lane.

And this was my window – these harvestings and sheep shearings.
I glimpsed the order of a kingly court.
Hark! A roar and ravage through a windowless forest.
To the wall! We must keep our well clear of this beast's dirt.

Waldo Williams's own translation.

The closing line here has been quoted from pulpits and from the docks of law courts as a cry to withstand the defiling and adulterating of Welshness, but it stands as a universal cry to protect the sacred Earth from expropriation, exploitation, enclosure, commodification, commercialisation, annexation ... however you want to phrase the abomination: 'To the wall! We must keep our well clear of this beast's dirt.'

Waldo felt shame, and personal guilt, at war and decided to take a stand against it and against war mongering.

The Peacemakers

"Rose-red sky above the snow
Where bombed Swansea is alight,
Full of my father and mother I go,
I walk home in the night.

They are blest beyond hearing,
Peacemakers, children of God.
Neither, within their home, abuse
Nor slander could be found.
Mam would look for an excuse
For the biggest scoundrels round.
They are blessed beyond hearing,
Peacemakers, children of God.
It was the angel of poor homes
Gave my father two rich pearls:
Brotherhood the mission of man
God's largesse the invisible world.
They are blessed beyond hearing,
Peacemakers, children of God.
Nation good or nation bad
(So they taught) is fantasy.
In Christ's light is freedom had
For any man that would be free.
Blest, the day dawns that will hear them,
Peacemakers, children of God.
What is their estate tonight,
Tonight, with the world ablaze?
Truth is with my father yet,
Mother with forgiveness stays.
The age will be blest that hears them,
Peacemakers, children of God."

We must keep our well clear of this beast's dirt.

In his poem ***Daw'r Wennol Yn Ol I'w Nyth***, Waldo writes:

"To their school, war came
To tear up the field of Crug y Mel."

Waldo's target is Castlemartin, Pembrokeshire, the base for war and soldiering. The army had a plan for building a permanent training base in the Preseli hills. But the locals rallied, in the words of Waldo, "To keep the wall from the monster, to keep the well free of dirt." Waldo's consistent target is war, war in all its forms, and the monstrous way in which some people relate to others and to the Earth.

And Waldo lived his words. He was a Quaker and a pacifist who protested against the Korean war, refused to pay income tax to fund war and, as a result, went to prison in 1960 and 1961. Sent to prison, he was happy to get a gardening job, and he appreciated the comradeship with other prisoners. A good man, and a good example to follow. A man who led by example.

In 1958, he was given an Arts Council award of £100 in recognition of the excellence of his *Dail Pren* (Tree Leaves). He immediately gave the money to UNESCO for the purpose of furthering the education of children around the world. The title is a direct reference Revelations 22, Eden Restored: 'Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse.'

A recent splendid re-issue of *Dail Pren* by Gomer Press is available with a fine introduction by Mererid Hopwood. Many of Waldo's poems can be read in translation. The most comprehensive collection would be Anthony Conran's *The Peacemakers: Selected Poems* published by Gomer Press in 1997.

Between Two Fields' (Mewn Dau Gae) was written by Waldo Williams in 1956 specifically for inclusion in the volume *Dail Pren*.

'The poem had been ruminating ever since Waldo was a teenager as it is based on a mystical experience he felt when wandering around two particular fields close to the family home at Llandysilio. This is the poem, more than any other, which conveys Waldo's majesty and the deep experiences he contemplated.'

Between Two Fields is one of Waldo's most celebrated poems. Here, he expresses an extraordinary, mystical, vision he had as a young boy between two fields in the Preseli hills. Here, it came to him that all the peoples of the world are related as one. More than this, he came to understand that the realization that we are all brothers and sisters is the very purpose of our existence. But the key question he debates is just who it is that decides that purpose? Hence his relentless questioning: "Who? Who was the marksman? The sudden expositor?" Although there was no one around, Waldo saw fields full of people united as one. That was his vision, "rolling the sea of light."

The people he saw in the Preseli were a peaceful people living as one with each other and with the Earth. In Waldo's words, they earned "the earth's help with their skill." A real and enduring peace requires that we treat the Earth that sustains us with respect and not greed. He expresses this very idea in the poem "Preseli." He talks of those who "reached and gave the children the sun." They passed on the best things in life to the next generation.

Life's journey is hard and often full of pain and suffering. Waldo writes about this journey, and how pain and suffering are to be faced and overcome. "The day will come when the small will stand tall." Those who are downtrodden will one day rise and truth and goodness prevail.

Between Two Fields

These two fields a green sea-shore, the tide spilling
radiance across them, and who knows
where such waters rise? And I'd had years
in a dark land, looldng: where did it, where did he
come from then? Only he'd been there

all along. Who though? who
was this marksman loosing off bolts
of sudden light? One and the same the lightning
hunter across the field, the hand to tilt
and spill the sea, who from the vaults
above the bright-voiced whistlers, the keen darting ployers,
brought down on me such quiet, such
Quiet: enough to rouse me. Up to that day
nothing had worked but the hot sun to get me going,
stir up drowsy warm verses: like blossom
on gorse that crackles in the ditches, or
like the army of dozy rushes, dreaming
of clear summer sky. But now: imagination
shakes off the night. Someone is shouting
(who?), Stand up and walk. Dance. Look.
Here is the world entire. And in the middle
of all the words, who is hiding? Like this
is how it was. There on the shores of light
between these fields, under these clouds.
Clouds: big clouds, pilgrims, refugees,
red with the evening sun of a November storm.
Down where the fields divide, and ash and maple
cluster, the wind's sound, the sound of the deep,
is an abyss of silence. So who was it stood
there in the middle of this shameless glory, who
stood holding it all? Of every witness witness,
the memory of every memory, the life
of every life? who with a quiet word
calms the red storms of self, till all
the labours of the whole wide world
fold up into this silence.
And on the silent sea-floor of these fields,
his people stroll. Somewhere between them,
through them, around them, there is a new voice

rising and spilling from its hiding place
to hold them, a new voice, call it the poet's
as it was for some of us, the little group
who'd been all day mounting assault
against the harvest with our forks, dragging
the roof-thatch over the heavy meadow. So near,
we came so near then to each other, the quiet huntsman
spreading his net around us.

Listen! you can

just catch his whistling, hear it?

Whistling, across the centuries of blood

on the grass, and the hard light of pain; whistling

only your heart hears. Who was it then, for God's sake?

mocking our boasts, tracking our every trail and slipping past
all our recruiting sergeants? Don't you know?

says the whistling, Don't you remember?

don't you recognise? it says; until we do.

And then, our ice age over, think of the force

of hearts released, springing together, think

of the fountains brealdng out, reaching up

after the sky, and falling back, showers

of falling leaves, waters of autumn.

Think every day, under the sun,

under these clouds, think every night of this,

with every cell of your mind's branching swelling shoots;

but with the quiet, the same quiet, the steady breath,

the steady gaze across the two fields, holding still

the yision: fair fields full of folk;

for it will come, dawn of his longed-for coming,

and what a dawn to long for. He will arrive, the outlaw,

the huntsman, the lost heir making good his claim

to no-man's land, the exiled king

is coming home one day; the rushes sweep aside

to let him through.

Rowan Williams, From the Welsh of Waldo Williams' *'Mewn Dau Gae'*

Rowan Williams, on translating 'Mewn Dau Gae' (*Between Two Fields*)

'Waldo Williams's world is one that both invites and tests the translator. Because he can create an imaginative world so charged with light and with what I can only call a sense, an unmistakably Christian sense, of 'wisdom' embodied – a world charged with moral as well as visual vigour and radiance, charged with expectation of a personal but also a cosmic epiphany – the impulse to recreate is strong.'

I return to the poem *Cofio*, which has won a place in the heart of the Welsh nation. It's an enchanting poem. It sings. But there is trepidation when he writes of "little words of lost languages." No-one rolls those words on their tongues any more. "Ond tafod neb ni eilw arnynt mwy." Waldo concludes with what seems to be a rhetorical question that offers hope. Deep down, he seems to affirm that someone, somewhere, maybe drawing on something in the innate and universal grammar of life, everything forgotten gets remembered and may be called back in our time of need. Waldo writes of those unremembered things of humankind, but in a way that suggests that, one day, there will be remembrance.

Cofio (Remembrance)

One fleeting moment as the sun is setting,
One gentle moment as the night falls fast,
To bring to mind the things that are forgotten,
Now scattered in the dust of ages past.

Like white-foamed waves that break on lonely beaches,
Like the wind's song where no one hears the wind,
They beckon us, I know, but to no purpose –
The old forgotten things of humankind.

The artistry and skills of early peoples,

Small dwelling-places and enormous halls,
Old well-told tales that have been lost for ages,
The gods that now no mortal could recall.

And little words of languages long-vanished,
Lithe words once lively on the lips of men,
And pretty in the prattle of small children,
No tongue will ever utter them again.

Oh, earth's innumerable generations,
Their sacred dreams and fragile sanctity,
Is the heart silent that was once acquainted
With sadness and with gladness and with glee ?

Often at close of day, when I am lonely,
I long to know you all, bring all to mind;
Is there a heart or memory still to cherish
The old forgotten things of humankind?

Translation by Alan Llwyd

I like other translations of these words:

“The skill and achievements of those early people.
In small abodes and in great halls.
The artful tales lost over centuries
The gods not known to any now
And the little words of lost languages
Happy on the lips of men they were
And sweet on the ear of children's chatter
But no-one rolls them on their tongues by now

Oh, untold generations of the world

With their dreams divine and fragile divinity
Is silence all that remains for those hearts
That once rejoiced and knew despair?

Often, as dusk draws in and I'm alone
A yearning comes to know you every one
Is there one left whose heart and mind recalls
Those old forgotten things of humankind?"

"hen bethau anghofiedig teulu dyn."

Throughout his life, Waldo Williams based his vision of the brotherhood of man upon a belief in the inborn divinity, and goodness, of every individual. Persuaded early of the truth of the inner light, he eventually joined the Quakers, discovering in their socially active faith the kind of mystical attraction Whitman had also felt toward the teaching of the controversial Quaker Elias Hicks. But for Waldo, as for Whitman, the corollary of spiritual immanence was what, with his genius for succinctness, he called "Awen adnabod." (Jim Perrin).

Poetic inspiration, flowing spirit, the muse of creative artists: 'Spirit energy in flow is the essence of life'. (Emma Restall Orr, *Living Druidry*. (2004).

On Friday, March 23, 2012 the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, delivered a lecture entitled 'Poetry and Peacemaking', based on the poems of Waldo Williams, at Pysga Chapel, Llandysilio, Pembrokeshire. The event was organised by Cymdeithas Waldo and Waldo's stature as a poet was enhanced to that of a poet who knew the true meaning of 'awen' or 'life-force'.

'The Archbishop explained that 'awen' is to do with the primitive primordial energy coupled with the imaginative spirit. He ventured further by stating that 'awen' owns the world whereas 'elw' (profit) is nothing but fantasy. This he insisted Waldo knew well and that, he emphasised, is why it is so important to understand the meaning of 'awen' as the quality that connects and completes all things under the surface. 'Awen' works by means of recognition and when this recognition is embodied in

poetry the words possess the force of peacemaking. We were told that true poetry was in its essence an act of peacemaking as it is in itself an attempt at reconciliation at a level above all political agenda. He insisted this was part of Waldo's perceived wisdom.' (Rowan Williams Lecture).

Waldo joined the Quakers in his mid-fifties, relishing the inner stillness he would experience in the Meeting House. More from the account of Rowan Williams' lecture on Waldo Williams:

"The respected theologian referred to how being a Quaker had influenced Waldo's inner life by forcing him to concentrate on the light that offers an instinctive path towards the truth through the emphasis placed on listening to silence and listening to wonder. He convinced us that Waldo was an old hand at waiting for the silence. He referred to Euros Bowen and Steffan Griffith's understanding of how Waldo reached the depths of silence and how he fervently opposed the sound of words in the Friends' meetings as it hindered the process of planting the roots of silence. Rowan Williams emphasised how poetry resists cliché and banal rhymes as the true poet wishes to demonstrate the integrity of words through simplicity of expression. Poetry is an art keen to reconcile and that is why Waldo opposed the greed that creates profit and the tearing of the earth by military vehicles, as he believed the seeds of God should be sown in the earth. He said that Waldo by articulating his experience in Flour Field and Flour Field Marsh, as he does in the poem 'In Two Fields', testifies to the transforming force of 'awen'. He referred to Waldo's own description of being present at the baptism of a young man who was on his way to war and how he wished the young man's allegiance to the state could be transformed to an allegiance to 'awen' which possesses hidden depths capable of changing the world.'

Rowan Williams Lecture

What is Man? By Waldo Williams:

What is living? The broad hall found

between narrow walls.

What is acknowledging? Finding the one root
under the branches' tangle.

What is believing? Watching at home
till the time arrives for welcome.

What is forgiving? Pushing your way through thorns
to stand alongside your old enemy.

What is singing? The ancient gifted breath
drawn in creating.

What is labour but making songs
from the wood and the wheat?

What is it to govern kingdoms? A skill
still crawling on all fours.

And arming kingdoms? A knife placed
in a baby's fist.

What is it to be a people? A gift
lodged in the heart's deep folds.

What is love of country? Keeping house
among a cloud of witnesses.

What is the world to the wealthy and strong? A wheel,
turning and turning.

What is the world to earth's little ones? A cradle,
rocking and rocking.

Waldo Williams' haunting reply to the question "What is it to live?" is this: "to possess a great hall within a cell." Here's the story. One day, Waldo was cycling around Pembrokeshire, as he did. And he came upon a man who was cutting grass outside of a chapel. "What a little chapel you have" said Waldo. The man took umbrage. "It may be small from the outside, but it's big inside!" Waldo understood the meaning perfectly. As he wrote: "Cael Neuadd fawr rhwng cyfyng furiau" – "To possess a great hall within a cell."

Everyone looks for life at its best. That's a quest for living in a great hall. But this

large life must be understood as having narrow walls – being in place.

Carreg Waldo memorial stone to the Welsh poet Waldo Williams Mynachlog Ddu Preseli Hills Pembrokeshire, Wales.

This standing stone in a quiet spot in this beautiful place is a fitting memorial for Waldo Williams, I think. I would just hope that all who pass by take the time to stop and look around, appreciate the wealth of the world, and experience eternity in an Hour. “We know since the moment comes, That we are born for the Hour.” (Waldo Williams, *Yr Eiliad*). Here, in the Preseli hills, Waldo saw a community of kinship and kindness between all people and all things, and he saw that such a realization on our part would not allow war between humans nor between humans and Earth and its various beings and bodies. The kinship between each and all, the common ancestry, the common ground, the common fate, evokes a communal feeling that expresses the life insurgent, and ever resurgent, driving us on to a greater unity.

“One day, brotherhood will unite the families of Earth.”

“Daw bore ni wel ond brawdoliaeth yn casglu teuluoedd y llawr.”

Waldo Williams spent his childhood in the village of Mynachlog-ddu which is just a couple of miles south from Gors fawr. The plaque is ugly on the stone, but is a reminder of where he grew up and what influenced his poetry. His most famous translated poem ‘Two Fields’ echoes the sombre feel of the Welsh landscape. The poem expresses the essence of the timelessness of the landscape:

Two Fields By Waldo Williams

Those fields – I’ve walked across them – they are
Extraordinary fields, though inaccessible to the seeker
After transcendence this is no loss for the page
Holds them in view and they extend into the margins
Between field hedges and the nets of the Hunter
In many places and times where time
Is arrested and held captive by a tether

Of stillness long enough to feel chastened by silence.
Sunlight touches a wall on a summer afternoon,
Shadows enclose a moment which passes from forever
To forever: Such blessings are felt to be precious.
But hearing beyond them voices calling in a common
Tongue of work and worship echoing through centuries,
And knowing that they witness this moment
When all is still, so that being alone
Is to be with them, resonates beyond solitude.
Voices heard in the echoes of whistling lapwings
Tremble to life over empty meadows; each hand,
Each tongue unique in the passing of time yet fused
In a moment making one of many things.'

Waldo's Garden!

The Quaker headquarters in London, located off Euston Road, has developed what can be ostensibly called 'Waldo's Garden'. The space for reflection was designed by Wendy Price, a horticulturalist and design consultant, "as a piece of visual outreach celebrating Quakers".

Price quoted as her inspiration the 'sea of light' reference in Waldo Williams' poem 'Between Two Fields' – "Where did the sea of light roll from/Onto Flower Meadow Field and Flower Field?" His reference to light and fields spoke to her about early Quakers. The choice of plants is informed by the poet's 'sea of light' quotation and, through spring days, as hard landscaping has been softened by planting, existing mature trees, magnolias and olive trees (symbols of peace) have been joined by blossoming *Amelanchier lamarki* (emblematic of Native Americans). Around the entrance to Friends House heavily scented plants like rosemary (for remembrance) will engage visitors' senses. Lavender plants will be particularly attractive to the two thriving colonies of bees that have been kept on the roof of Friends House. Rainwater will be collected to help water the garden. The garden speaks of the ways Quakers put their faith into action. The words 'peace', 'equality', 'simplicity' and 'truth' are inscribed on a central stone set in the pathway. A time capsule has been buried in the garden with its contents illustrating

the kind of world young Quakers wish to see by 2116. These include a peace flag symbolising world peace without nuclear weapons, a solar charger since energy will be produced from renewable sources and a packet of Lunaria (honesty) seeds to encourage the growth of society to become fair and just. Visitors are welcome to spend some time in contemplation in the garden at 173 Euston Road, London.

Friends House garden transformed

'Quakers' newly re-landscaped garden at Friends House is a welcoming space for reflection. With planting and design inspired by a poem by Waldo Williams, it speaks of Quakerism, of peace, equality, simplicity and truth.'

Me, I loved rambling around in Waldo's Garden here in the Preseli Hills, a Green Peace indeed.

The last poem that Waldo composed was *Llandysilio-yn-Nyfed*. In the sonnet, he praises Saint Tysilio for refusing to take up arms as was expected of him, instead choosing the path of peace. That path was Waldo's, too. And the path we should all take, if we want to walk in Waldo's world. It's a good world.

Waldo Williams died on 20 May 1971. His remains were interred in the grave in which his father, mother and wife Linda Llewellyn were buried, in the graveyard of Blaenconin Baptist chapel. It was in this chapel that he was confirmed at the age of seventeen, and in which he later married Linda. He composed a brief cywydd (strict-metre poem) for his wife, and a poem of praise for his mother entitled "Angharad". "Y Tangnefeddwyr" (The Peacemakers) is also a tribute to his parents, written when German planes were bombing Swansea during the Second World War.

More on Waldo Williams

WILLIAMS, WALDO GORONWY (1904-1971), poet and pacifist.

The Waldo Williams Society

Cymdeithas Waldo Society was established in 2010 with the following aims:

- Sustain the memory of the life and work of Waldo Williams who is regarded as one of Wales' most influential poets and a bard of international significance.
- Promote Waldo Williams' contribution to the literature and culture of Wales through interpretation and a deeper understanding of his work.
- Appreciate and promote Waldo Williams' contribution to pacificism.

The committee is aware of Waldo's convictions as a pacifist and Quaker and is keen to draw attention to these facets of his personality without forgetting his passion for cycling.

Samuel Palmer: Mysterious Moonlit Dreams

I think Samuel Palmer is something of a neglected and underrated figure, certainly in critical circles. He has a revelatory visual approach to the countryside that seems like an irrelevance to those who interpret art principally in terms of its social dimensions.

He didn't even merit an entry in the reference section of the comprehensive Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age, a work that prides itself on including 'all the significant figures' of the period.

I read the comment about it being putting art on the web day, so I took the opportunity to give Palmer a much deserved mention.

He's certainly an interesting figure.

As a young man, Palmer knew poet, engraver, artist and visionary William Blake. Whilst Blake's art centred around the inner world, Palmer was a painter of the outer world, of visible nature. But there was the same combination of individual genius giving a new reverential significance to landscape. It was an age of technological change, some seeing progress, others, like Blake and Palmer, seeing a threat to natural scenery and traditional ways of life. Against the idea of material advance through technology and industry, Palmer was a visionary materialist. He is one of

those artists who give us a new way of seeing familiar scenes - trees, sheep, villages, the night sky, fields with ripened crops.

Nostalgic, backward looking. Critics point out that Palmer's imagery is far from the reality of rural communities in Britain in the 1820s. True. But Palmer was a believer in a higher reality - an eternity, a heaven — beyond the world in which we live. Also not a popular view with critics. But his paintings, showing shepherds and sheep and rural communities protected by enfolding hills, have never lost their revelatory visual appeal for those open minded enough to encounter him in his own terms.

The only thing I would add is that Palmer's period of poetic inspiration was short-lived and that after the mid- 1830s, his paintings became conventional. But he deserves a wider audience for what he did when the inspiration was with him.

Mysterious Wisdom: The Life and Work of Samuel Palmer by Rachel Campbell-Johnston - review

The triumphs and trials of the visionary Samuel Palmer

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2011/jul/15/samuel-palmer-rachel-campbell-johnston-review>

Samuel Palmer: Vision and Landscape

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/3647944/Samuel-Palmer-Vision-and-Landscape.html>

Marc Chagall: Art as a State of Soul

'I had only to open my bedroom window and blue air, love and flowers entered with her.' Floating lovers on flying horses, fiddlers on the roof, acrobats, jugglers, cows with parasols, bird women, blue violinists, 'blue air, love and flowers', swirling aerial streams of saturated colour, I love the lyrical and celebratory nature of Mark

Chagall's art. His dreamscape is a world about us and around us, not a world apart from us. The mystical, the fantastic, and the imaginary are grounded in physical and psychic memories, places and people we know but which undergo endless transformations, as indeed do we. Joyous, funny, sad, sentimental, sometimes tragic and reflective, the persecution and suffering of the Jews - of all humanity – turned into collective symbols of hope for a better, and eminently realisable, future. Mark Chagall is a 'poet-painter', a true visionary who gave form to the formless and in so doing exposed and expressed the inward, hitherto secret life of the psyche.

In Chagall's world, cold logic was overturned by magic and transformed by metamorphosis, reality became myth, myth became reality and the word gave way to the image. In Chagall's universe the symbolic and the supernatural were familiar and everyday, but wondrous all the same.

For Chagall, imagination is transformation. Chagall the poet painter gave lyrical expression to a uniquely personal vision that reached out to touch the universal themes in all of us.

'Generally speaking colour directly influences the soul' (Wassily Kandinsky). Mark Chagall believed art to be 'above all a state of soul'. In Kandinsky's musical analogy, Chagall was pre-eminently the 'maestro': 'Colour is the keyboard, the eyes are the hammers, the soul is the piano with many strings. The artist is the hand that plays, touching one key or another purposively, to cause vibrations in the soul.'

'Everything in art ought to reply to every movement in our blood, to all our being, even our unconscious. For my part, I have slept very well without Freud!'

The Elusive Marc Chagall

With his wild and whimsical imagery, the Russian-born artist bucked the trends of 20th-century art.

'Chagall himself said he was a dreamer who never woke up.'

Notes veteran art critic Pierre Schneider, “Chagall absorbed Cubism, Fauvism, Surrealism, Expressionism and other modern art trends incredibly fast when he was starting out. But he used them only to suit his own aesthetic purposes. That makes it hard for art critics and historians to label him. He can’t be pigeonholed.”

When he died in Saint Paul de Vence on March 28, 1985, at 97, Chagall was still working, still the avant-garde artist who refused to be modern. That was the way he said he wanted it: “To stay wild, untamed . . . to shout, weep, pray.”

<http://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/the-elusive-marc-chagall-95114921/?all>

Scott Walker, Angels of Ashes

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Btil_03dNkE

Paintings by Mark Chagall

Song of Songs IV

Cow with Parasol

Time is a River Without Banks

Acrobat

I and the Village

Poet with Birds

Marc Chagall biography

<http://www.biography.com/people/marc-chagall-9243488>

Here’s a dissenting view, from an art critic who has completely missed the point in my humble opinion.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/10103321/Was-Chagall-actually-any-good.html>

Ecopoetics, disclosing the Hidden God in Nature

“Much on earth is concealed from us, but in place of it we have been granted a secret, mysterious sense of our living bond with the other world, with the higher heavenly world, and the roots of our thoughts and feelings are not here but in other worlds. That is why philosophers say it is impossible on earth to conceive the essence of things. Good took seeds from other worlds and sowed them on this earth, and raised up his garden; and everything that could sprout sprouted, but it lives and grows only through its sense of being in touch with other mysterious worlds; if this sense is weakened or destroyed in you, that which has grown up in you dies.”

–Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*

I shall return to Dostoevsky later. This is a post for all of those interested in ecopoetics and literary ecology. To begin, here is a wonderful article by Susan S. Morrison: “*Slow Pilgrimage Ecopoetics*,” for all those who may be interested in a slow eco-critical approach to Dante, Chaucer, or Langland. Special issue on Randomness and Design. *Ecozon@: European Journal of Literature, Culture and Environment* 10.1 (2019): 40-59.

Slow Pilgrimage Ecopoetics

I'm very much one of those who is most interested indeed. I've been pondering Dante's 'sweet symphony' of Paradise as an eco-poetics moved by the Greatest Love for the past couple of years. I do hope to have this finished well before the 700th anniversary of “the great Florentine's” death in 2012. Life has this knack of always interfering with my best laid and very extensive plans. I'm nearly back on track and am encouraged now to finish it. In fact, I have over 500,000 words of text completed on this. I need to edit this down into readable form. I am also wondering whether to add a chapter on the ‘music of the spheres.’ I think Dante stands in line of descent from Pythagorean-Platonic notions of order and harmony, but if you examine *The Comedy* it is most clearly the angels and the blessed whose singing you can hear, not the physical bodies of the spheres themselves. That's work to come.

I've had the odd complaint that such things are idle at a time when the planet is unravelling. That view is blinkered, for reasons E.F. Schumacher gave with respect to the necessity of metaphysical reconstruction to effective action decades ago (*The Economics of Purpose*). I'm interested in a literary ecology modelled on the likes of Dante. I would recommend Joseph Meeker's book *The Comedy of Survival* here. I took the same approach to the Tolkien piece I wrote a couple of years ago.

Tolkien and the Fellowship of all Living Things

https://www.academia.edu/34092963/Tolkien_and_the_Fellowship_of_All_Living_Things

see also below, *Tolkien and the Ethics of Enchantment*.

Dante, with an integral approach that is bound by the Love that moves all, concerns us to the depths of our being and thereby inspires us to touch again the wholeness and wholesomeness of the world, restoring that integral ethic within us.

I shall take the opportunity to make a general comment on music/art/aesthetics – let's say Beauty as one of the three transcendentals.

I repeat this view often, for the very reason it is my core belief, and I cleave to it. Here I praise the wisdom of Plato in identifying beauty as the supreme political category for the way that it lights the path to truth and goodness and invites the heart to follow. Since all have a heart, then all can and will respond to Beauty's call if given appropriate encouragement, bidding an end to our sad divisions. I shall also put a good word in for music, too. Keep your ears open and listen to the inner music of the universe, and how all living creatures add their voices to the choir, and you will keep your hearts open.

In *The Symposium* Plato wrote of the Beauty which is beheld by the eye. That's a very different notion from the subjectivist assertion that "beauty is in the eye of the beholder." It's nothing to do with the projection of meaning and value on a meaningless and valueless universe, nothing to do with perceptions, nothing to do with a Nietzschean perspectivism within power relations. The very opposite, in fact.

The one obligates us to conform our subjective choices to a more than subjective truth, the other asserts wilful self-projection as the arbiter of truth. Music links the inner and the outer words to avoid having to make such a choice between disclosure and imposition.

Beauty is the last bastion of evangelization in the subjectivist culture which prevails today, a culture in which solipsism seems to hold all the trump cards (but doesn't). Beauty is possibly the only thing left that motivates all people from deep within the core of their being. Kant wrote of a "common moral reason" possessed by all. We can refer here to an innate moral grammar as something we share in common. We have to activate that grammar and learn to sing in tune, in harmony, in unison.

A point that I am concerned to make on Dante is that for all of his emphasis on the Greatest Love that moves all things, his last word emphasises plurality - "stars." It's a key point to establish. For all of the chaos and apparent diversity of the Inferno, Hell is a condition of sameness and mechanical repetition. Difference in Hell is a matter of separation, isolation, and disconnection. Dante's Paradise is a multiplicity within the oneness of God, a harmonic and symbolic unity that brings together different elements/meanings/worlds to overcome their separation (the true meaning of the diabolical). Dante gives us a living symbolism or iconography of life. I am very much interested in notions of the disclosure of the Hidden God through the two natures (universal essences) as one differentiated in unity without confusion and separation.

The devil does not have all the best tunes. There is no music in Hell. It is a place of immobility and "mechanized petrification" (to borrow a phrase that Max Weber used to describe modern bureaucratic industrial society. Hell is a place of aggressive selfishness expressed in different ways that snare one and all in sameness. In complete contrast, Paradise is a place of sweet harmony expressing the greatest variety of life. And it is the "diverse voices" in Paradiso that create harmony at its sweetest. There is an inner music, in the universe and in Dante's 'sacred poem.' It is significant that Dante uses a musical image to convey the way that Paradise requires souls of every kind and level. The line he writes is itself the sweetest of music: "Diverse voci fanno dolci note" (Paradiso 6: 124). The literal translation is "Diverse voices make sweet notes."

“Diverse voices make sweet music.”

“As diverse voices make sweet music and blend,
so diverse stations of our life amid
these spheres make sweet accord without an end.”

In my forthcoming book on Dante, I write at length on the internal music in Dante's *Comedy*.

Beauty is something to cleave to beyond the clashes of self- and sectional interest and assertion (I am thinking of Arnold's *Dover Beech* here). Beauty still occupies a central place in people's lives. So long as people continue to strive for beauty, then it is possible for them to be “turned,” (in the sense of Dante's final lines in *The Comedy*), and to “turn” people on to the truth and goodness that inheres in and moves all things. These are the three great transcendentals and, whatever Nietzsche says with respect to their fragmentation (his comment applies to the modern world, not the world as such), they are all connected – they are all qualities of the divine.

Such will be part of my argument in *Dante's Sweet Symphony of Paradise*. There's much more to it, though, including extensive arguments on environmental accord, peace on Earth, reconciliation and justice in politics and society.

I return now to Dostoyevsky. A character in Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot* made this bold statement: “Beauty will save the world.” If that is true, then what is Beauty? Dostoyevsky put those words in the mouth of Prince Myshkin, a simpleton. Terentiev asks Myshkin if he said it, he is asking him to explain the self-explanatory.

The context is enlarged by the fact of Myshkin's love for the abused and then abusing Nastasya Filippovna, whose physical beauty no man could doubt, though whose intelligence he might fear. A portrait of her had conveyed to Myshkin the suffering that underlay a beautiful face. Men love her possessively, even murderously. Myshkin's own interest is taken for infatuation. He has grasped the

suffering and responds to it with a love that is incomprehensible to the shallow – for it is innocent and selfless.'

It is the humble power of Myshkin's selfless, naïve, and “idiot” beauty that will save the world. 'This is a beauty that is not isolated, constrained. This Beauty is finally indistinguishable from the True and the Good. It is embodied in art of the highest order, and it is reflective of that mysterious light of faith – that “saving grace” with which Christ enlightens the world.' This is the truth of Christ's love for us, a truth that transcends death.'

Can Beauty Save the World?

Yes

So long as it is Beauty.

So let me return to Dante on one of the central teachings of *The Comedy* concerning love, intellect, vision and truth. The lesson is taught by Beatrice:

"And thou must know that all have delight in the measure of the depth to which their sight penetrates the truth in which every intellect finds rest; from which it may be seen that the state of blessedness rests on the act of vision, not on that of love, which follows after, and the measure of their vision is merit, which grace begets and right will." (109-113)

It is important to note that love does not lead, it follows. This teaching is delivered with respect to the angels, noted for their keenness of intellectual vision, but it applies to all of the blessed. The “truth in which every intellect finds rest” is God as the First Truth, and it is the highest end of human beings to know this Truth. Love follows rather than leads since it is both incited and directed by the thing that is seen, the Beloved. Were love primary, then it would be cut off from the truth and degenerate into mere feeling rather than being educative. Dante's love is therefore based on the primacy of intellect. In the New Life he calls Beatrice was “the Lady of my mind.”

I write on reason and Dante as an Aristotelian who affirmed the desire to know. I write of Dante as a Thomist who insisted that all things, including love, and maybe love especially, need to be ordered to their true end.

And on those intriguing notions I had better end. I have a massive workload (as usual), and need to really start writing my Dante book properly.

Anyhow, that's me. But please do follow up the links and explore the fields of literary ecology and ecopoetics. Culture with its moral and imaginative components in place is key as civilization enters a bottleneck. Culture has saved us before. It can also drive us to self-destruction. It all depends. Human beings are, quite naturally, immersed in culture. We need to be wise and sophisticated in how we use our signs and symbols. I'm interested the "logos of the Logoi" (Logos=purpose, reason, word, story, discourse, harmony, principle, etc.) The word is alive, sensible, and intelligible, there is music and poetry, and Dante takes us into the ecology of the human heart:

oikos—household

oikumene—earth as dwelling

economy—law of the household

ecology—study of the household, logos of the household, story of the household.

I'll just add a final reference to Dante concerning the power of Love, the respect for boundaries, and the peace of the blessed life "through which our wills become a single will."

"but you'll see no such discord in these spheres;
to live in love is—here—necessity,
if you think on love's nature carefully."

[Paradiso Canto 3: 76-90]

Perfect.

R.H. Tawney comments here:

"The famous lines in which Piccarda explains to Dante the order of Paradise are a description of a complex and multiform society which is united by overmastering devotion to a common end. By that end all stations are assigned and all activities are valued. The parts derive their quality from their place in the system, and are so permeated by the unity which they express that they themselves are glad to be forgotten, as the ribs of an arch carry the eye from the floor from which they spring to the vault in which they meet and interlace."

We will only have agreement on means if we are clear about the ends which we serve.

"Such a combination of unity and diversity is possible only to a society which subordinates its activities to the principle of purpose. For what that principle offers is not merely a standard for determining the relations of different classes and groups of producers, but a scale of moral values. Above all, it assigns to economic activity itself its proper place as the servant, not the master, of society. The burden of our civilization is not merely, as many suppose, that the product of industry is ill-distributed, or its conduct tyrannical, or its operation interrupted by embittered disagreements. It is that industry itself has come to hold a position of exclusive predominance among human interests, which no single interest, and least of all the provision of the material means of existence, is fit to occupy. Like a hypochondriac who is so absorbed in the processes of his own digestion that he goes to his grave before he has begun to live, industrialized communities neglect the very objects for which it is worth while to acquire riches in their feverish preoccupation with the means by which riches can be acquired."

Tawney *The Acquisitive Society* 1982 ch 11

Finding Meaning Through Metaphor

The Power of Metaphoric Thinking

Here is an insightful article on the importance of metaphoric thinking in our lives.

Sweetness and strangeness

In our image-saturated, over-spiced world, we are losing the imaginative power to create and find meaning through metaphor

This is like this is like that is one of the primary ways that we make sense of new entities. We compare them to things with which we are familiar, from our environment, our culture, our identities. Aristotle wrote that metaphor 'has clarity and sweetness and strangeness', adding:

It is a great thing, indeed, to make a proper use of the poetical forms, as also of compounds and strange words. But the greatest thing by far is to be a master of metaphor. It is the one thing that cannot be learnt from others; and it is also a sign of genius, since a good metaphor implies an intuitive perception of the similarity in dissimilars.

From the real to the fanciful, metaphoric comparisons are not only part of the architecture of language and mind but they are elemental to human thought and imagination.

Overlook the lessons here at your peril. Stick to the literal, and you are dead. You remain with the immediate, the tangible, the obvious - you deny yourself the future. Facts and figures have to come with stories and meanings that strike a deep chord. The future has to have a metaphoric quality for us to be able to imagine it and strive to bring it about. To have any kind of a future worth having, we need to nurture and expand our capacity for metaphor every bit as much as we need to grow our empathy for the planet.

"As we see it, metaphor exists – and relies upon – the complex, emotionally resonant, arresting connections we make. These linkages, between ourselves and the world, require a degree of primary experience, as well as sensitivity to the nature and details of that experience. Metaphor is the knot between

language and image, between language and sensory experience, and between language and narrative. Indeed, a growing body of research supports the view that metaphoric thinking could be deeply tied to empathy."

Metaphors grow the mind and feed the soul. Dante insisted on the truth of all he wrote in "*The Comedy*." Whether that truth is literal or metaphorical is one for Dante scholars. (I'm wrestling with the notion of a "metaphorical physics." There's great psychic and moral depth here. But is it true? Yes. But in what way? Facts have to be existentially meaningful. I'm interested in the decline in empathy all round. That's a question of lack and deficiency in various areas. If the unexamined life is not worth living, the over-examined life is unliveable). Beware the missing metaphor. I'm hearing people repeat the phrase that climate crisis is an "existential crisis." Understand how deep that notion of existence goes, and attend to the cultural and moral environment as well as the natural.

Literary philosopher, classics scholar and professor of Humanities, H  l  ne Domon comments: "Very important notion. My own *Livre Imaginaire* was all about metaphors or "  criture" as primary power in our experience of the world."
https://www.academia.edu/5565136/Le_Livre_imaginaire_DOC

Le Livre imaginaire

https://www.academia.edu/5565136/Le_Livre_imaginaire_DOC

There are some incredibly important issues here, and things we miss at our peril. The need to make facts existentially meaningful is something I keep returning to. I'm hearing the phrase "existential crisis" a lot, with respect to climate crisis. I'd urge people to see this as more than a threat to physical existence in its more obvious manifestations. Existential goes deep into the core of being and meaning. I liked this quote from the article:

"Reading, alone, is not sufficient for building empathy; it needs the image, and essential foreground, for us to forge connections, which is why textbooks filled with information but devoid of narrative fail to engage us; why facts and dates and events rarely stick without story."

Story, narrativity, words, all the points I made in The Ethics of Enchantment article, are the key themes of the literary ecology I explore. These are all often treated as ephemeral but are actually central to the motivational economy. We lose this metaphoric quality at our peril.

I am currently wrestling with the balance between metaphorical and literal truth in Dante. I have a feeling he believed his impossibilities, but this is nothing at all like the literalism criticized in this article, the very opposite, in fact. There's a section in this article on the dissection of poetry, comparing it to the dissection of a frog or the separation of platelets in a Petri dish. This made me think of something Dorothy Sayers said about Dante. We are all so clever now as to be able to identify the mechanics at work, pick entire works apart by showing how they were constructed. I would challenge the people who are so expert at identifying the materials, the mechanics, and the construction to do likewise themselves – put their own set of tools and materials together and create a poetic work of similar weight. Then they'll see the nature and value of true creation. Sayers understood this point with respect to Dante's technique:

“In a way I know how it's done. I could take it to pieces and analyse the tricks. Just when you are getting tired, some 'invention' occurs – an alarming hold-up at the gates of the infernal city, a pathetic story by Franscesca or Ugolino, a pleasant aerial excursion on Geryon's back, a grisly laugh over the quarrelling demons, a picturesque apparition of giants, a sudden dab of bright colour when Dis appears in the middle of the grey ice, a smattering of science when they pass the Centre ... but merely naming the tricks doesn't explain the achievement; it only makes one think one's self clever.”

Sayers in Reynolds p20

And she gets why the world has been reading Dante for seven centuries:

"Neither the world, nor the theologians, nor even Charles Williams had told me the one great, obvious, glaring fact about Dante Alighieri of Florence — that he was simply the most incomparable storyteller who ever set pen to paper."

Further Papers on Dante (New York, 1957), p. 2

Of course, being a Dantista, I would agree. But we can certainly agree that he was one of the very greatest storytellers. It is that power as a storyteller that impresses:

"I still don't know how he does it. After all, even without having read it, one know what it's all about, and you wouldn't think there would be any real suspense about it ... In spite of which I found myself panting along with my tongue hanging out, as though it were a serial thriller, careful not to read the argument of each canto beforehand, lest it should spoil what was coming."

Sayers quoted in Barbara Reynolds *The Passionate Intellect: Dorothy L. Sayers' Encounter with Dante* 19

I never liked dissection, and consider the mechanics important, but very far from being all-important. The ends are nothing without the means to realize them; but the means and meaningless without ends. The modern world has seen an expansion of means accompanied by a diminution of meaning. Ray Monk's article concerning Wittgenstein's 'forgotten lesson' makes the point with respect to methodology:

"Scientism takes many forms. In the humanities, it takes the form of pretending that philosophy, literature, history, music and art can be studied as if they were sciences, with "researchers" compelled to spell out their "methodologies"—a pretence which has led to huge quantities of bad academic writing, characterised by bogus theorising, spurious specialisation and the development of pseudo-technical vocabularies. Wittgenstein would have looked upon these developments and wept."

Ray Monk, Wittgenstein's forgotten lesson

<https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/magazine/ray-monk-wittgenstein>

I spent ages trying to spell out my methodology to the academic research committee in Manchester. It was so incredibly frustrating, debilitating even, since I knew exactly what I wanted to say and was keen to set about actually saying it, making modifications as I proceeded to the depths. I'm remembering a quote attributed to Einstein here, "If we knew what we were doing, we wouldn't call it research." I can never find any source for that quote, but it makes a kind of sense with respect to the process of discovery. Of course, I have a very good idea of where I was going and why I wanted to go there in the first place.

I also write a little on Wittgenstein's use of musical metaphors in the *Tractatus*, making a comparison with the inherent musical structure of Dante's *Comedy*. Now that may strike many as quite a leap, but one way or another we all have to leap. The more logic and evidence we have on our side, the less of a leap we will have to make. But I'm feeling in flighty mood.

Dante himself makes that very argument in his letter to Cangrande:

"For we perceive many things by the intellect for which language has no terms – a fact which Plato indicates plainly enough in his books by his employment of metaphors; for he perceived many things by the light of the intellect which his everyday language was inadequate to express." (Dante, *Epistles*, XIII: 84).

Musical metaphors and imagery serve as a way of carrying a truth and a meaning that is unintelligible to the rational mind. That's how it goes in *The Comedy*. I rather like this idea of music as the mode of mystic revelation. Lose metaphoric thinking and you are lost, period. This is a big part of my Dante, I do hope to have it finished long before the 700th anniversary of "the great Florentine's" death in 2021.

See below: Dante's Sweet Symphony of Paradise

There are times when I think I'm on my own taking the approach I do. It's always encouraging to see quality work being produced by thinkers working along similar lines. It's easy to get discouraged writing on someone who wrote so very long ago

like Dante, with people thinking they have nothing of any relevance to say. That's a huge mistake. Truth has naught to do with the date at the top of the newspaper. There's great depth and nuance in these figures. Of course, Dante knows all about walking the lonely, but right, path.

Ecological Restoration as a Restorying

The case for an Existential Literary Ecology

The Road goes ever on and on
Down from the door where it began.
Now far ahead the Road has gone,
And I must follow, if I can,
Pursuing it with eager feet,
Until it joins some larger way
Where many paths and errands meet.
And whither then? I cannot say.

Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Book I, Chapter 1.

'The realm of fairy-story is wide and deep and high and filled with many things: all manner of beasts and birds are found there: shoreless seas and stars uncounted; Beauty that is an enchantment, and an ever-present peril. Both joy and sorrow as sharp as words.'

Tolkien

We need new fairy stories and folk tales to guide us out of today's dark woods

'Folk tales emerge in times of upheaval, and from societies' grimmest moments. They enable us to process and assimilate extreme experience, and deal with our fears. They also, typically, communicate powerful and

uncompromising moral narratives. It's not hard to draw a map of current major global problems with reference to them.'

In these perilous times, progressives must create narratives that shine a light on crises such as climate change.

I agree very much with what Andrew Simms writes in this article. He bemoans the extent to which an emphasis on facts and policies has replaced the art of storytelling. Human beings are story-telling beings; it is in stories that 'objective' facts and realities become humanly significant. I would be cautious of affirming mythologies that are 'impervious to fact and rational argument,' as Simms puts it, but would instead try to bring *Logos* and *Mythos* back together. 'If you want change to happen, you have to change deeply embedded cultural narratives,' writes Simms. If you want real and enduring change, you need to set facts and realities within a frame of existential meaning. 'Progressive politics needs better stories as much as it needs facts and policies. Without them it will flail and flounder.' Communicating environmental concerns has to be about more than informing heads – it has to go deep into the motivational economy of human beings. 'Most tales, at some level, present a rite of passage through difficulty to maturity, awareness or resolution. Now, more than ever, it feels like we need new tales to lead us through our troubling times,' Simms concludes. That's putting it mildly.

'Recovery (which includes return and renewal of health) is a re-gaining—regaining of a clear view. I do not say "seeing things as they are" and involve myself with the philosophers, though I might venture to say "seeing things as we are (or were) meant to see them"—as things apart from ourselves. We need, in any case, to clean our windows; so that the things seen clearly may be freed from the drab blur of triteness or familiarity—from possessiveness. Of course, fairy-stories are not the only means of recovery, or prophylactic against loss. Humility is enough...

Creative fantasy, because it is mainly trying to do something else (make something new), may open your hoard and let all the locked things fly away like cage-birds. The gems all turn into flowers or flames, and you will be warned

that all you had (or knew) was dangerous and potent, not really effectively chained, free and wild; no more yours than they were you.'

Tolkien, *On Fairy Stories*

A lovely image indeed, free and wild, an anarchic excess that opens up and flies away. A world in bloom. That 'excess' is the potential for blossoming that exists in all things

Stories are a way of telling us about what it takes to enable the flower to bloom. In spite of all that may trouble us in life, we are all capable of blossoming. And *I am concerned with the blossom.*

It is good that the voice of the indigent,
Too long stifled, should manage
To make itself heard.
But I cannot consent to listen
To nothing but that voice.
Man does not cease to interest me
When he ceases to be miserable.
Quite the contrary!
That it is important to aid him
In the beginning goes without saying,
Like a plant it is essential
To water at first;
But this is on order to get it to flower
And *I am concerned with the blossom.*

Hugh MacDiarmid

I am concerned with the conditions of enabling the flower to bloom. Human beings are story-telling, meaning seeking beings. We are symbol-making creatures as well as tool-makers. Earlier this year I completed a book on this very theme, *Tolkien and the Fellowship of All Things*, referring to 'Fairy stories and story-telling,' 'the power of

story,' 'the relation of self to setting,' 'Mythopoeia,' 'the truth of story-telling,' 'Keeping transcendent hope and vision alive under rationalisation,' 'Local scale, proximity, the social commons and community resilience.'

Tolkien's words on 'fighting the long defeat' are wonderful and endlessly inspiring – he gives us a 'hope without guarantees.' And a long defeat that, in acts of love and kindness and solidarity, gives 'glimpses of final victory' and possibilities of a long joy. There's a lot of discussion on what it takes to motivate people to act at the moment. Tolkien's environmental concern came years before environmentalism as a movement, and is really a Christian stewardship. Many would consider him nostalgic, reactionary even, anti-technological – but he saw the impacts of industrialisation and urbanisation and didn't like them; he thought the machine and the process of mechanization a tyrannizing coercion reshaping the world and drawing us away from the right way of relating to each other and to the world. That's what the Ring was all about, that power to corrupt, change, compel, dominate, to possess its possessor, a power that could not be diverted to good ends but which needed to be renounced, fought, destroyed. The tyranny of abstraction that Tolkien feared has brought us to a situation in which global problems require global solutions, and I argue strongly for concerted and effective action in that respect. I'm less than sure that Tolkien would have agreed. He feared the use of power and technology that was righteous and filled with good intentions. Gandalf would have been worse than Sauron in this regard. The problem is that I just don't see how, given the mess we've gotten ourselves into, we can avert catastrophe without ambitious large-scale projects. The key is the kind of humility and renunciation of power that Tolkien argued for, and understanding the religious roots of his wisdom here. I deal with this in the book, giving it a full chapter. I shall keep on arguing that large scale ambitious projects need to be grounded in down-to-earth, pragmatic reasoning, communities of practice and love of place – a hobbit like existence in which the ordinary actions of the little people knit communities together and create the warm and affective bonds between us, making us prepared to act to defend the places and persons we love and value. That's where motivation and will to act in common cause comes from. And it is where the source of active hope is ever renewed. I develop these themes at length in my Tolkien piece. It's a personal statement on my part, urban Hobbit as I am, someone who argues for material sufficiency and virtuous action within right

relationships, pottering away in my little community, engaging in solidary exchange, creating bonds and links between 'ordinary' folk. We need the facts and figures and the right policies and policy framework; great problems require substantial action. My deep concern in taking these actions is to avoid opening a democratic deficit that leaves plans and projects all complicated form with little existential content. We need an environmentalism that gives the 'little folk' a material and moral stake. If we are hobbits at heart, and if we come to cultivate hobbit habits of the heart, then we will come to have the motivation to act and therefore won't require too much by way of facts and research in order to be persuaded to do the right thing.

In my book on Tolkien – *Tolkien and the Fellowship of All Living Things* - I show how the protagonists in the *Lord of the Rings* put everything on the line and throw their whole heart and soul into the struggle. They do this because everything they hold dear is at stake, the people and places they love, their past, their future, their folk memories, everything they hold true and know to be right. They long to preserve these things and are prepared to sacrifice themselves for their protection. That's some love.

I develop Tolkien's natural anarchy and pacifism. Tolkien was accused of escapism, and he accepted the charge; he is escapist in the truest sense, he said, in the sense of a man escaping prison. Weber's "iron cage" of a rationalized, routinised, bureaucratised, mechanized world that proceeds "without regard for persons" springs to mind in this respect. We are all in prison in the world of capitalist modernity, confined within a world of anonymous collective force imposed externally to such an extent we lose the personal touch. This "iron cage" captures our very subjectivities so that we don't even see the bars on the cage. We live in a psychic prison. We need to escape mentally and psychically as well as physically. We need to nurture the imagination and feed the soul. We need to call back the soul.

'My political opinions lean more and more to Anarchy (philosophically understood, meaning abolition of control not whiskered men with bombs) ... the most improper job of any man, even saints (who at any rate were at least unwilling to take it on), is bossing other men. Not one in a million is fit for it, and least of all those who seek the opportunity... The mediævals were only too

right in taking *nolo episcopari* [I do not want to be bishop] as the best reason a man could give to others for making him a bishop.'

J.R.R. Tolkien, Letter to his son Christopher, *Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, ed. Humphrey Carpenter

Here's to world without bosses and without bossing!

I'm quite proud of the little book I wrote on Tolkien. I think the case that it makes for literary ecology is clear and cogent. Reading Andrew Simms has confirmed me in that view. Literary ecology takes the physical world and sets us off on a voyage of discovery that looks further than the objective facts to comprehend their existential meaning with respect to human life. Such a world is 'humanly objective,' to use a phrase I remember from Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*. Artistic visions, poetic revelation, musical inspiration, ideas form an imaginal space that expands the physical world into an imaginal landscape that is continually unfolding through the ongoing exploration of human-Earth interconnection. The approach I take highlights the important mediating role that the imagination plays in human-Earth interconnection and interaction. The natural sciences are important in delivering facts and yielding knowledge about the physical environment, the best check our reason has against the natural world. But human life is about the psychic environment too, and that points to living as a quest to satisfy meaning. An ecology conceived in such a way integrates the scientific study of biology, climatology, ecosystems within an existential and experiential domain constituted by relationship and interconnection.

The critique of modern rationalization in the book is emphatic, possibly giving the impression of a cultural pessimism, and maybe of a reactionary and nostalgic yearning for simpler times. I know those times never were, and I believe that whilst the problems we face in the modern world are great, so too are the tools at our disposal for their solution. The old overarching moral framework cannot be reconstituted along the old lines. The problem is not a merely moral or intellectual one, it is social – we need to reconstitute for the form and forms of the common life, create new social relations, identities and solidarities, so that the character formation that is key to virtue ethics proceeds hand in hand with social formation. The solution

to our problems lies not in nostalgic revaluation of past social forms and moral modes but in lines of development which are immanent but repressed within modern social forms.

Developing that argument is work for another day. If my critique of rationalization has been so relentless and repetitive as to give the impression that I think modernity to be an utterly hopeless terrain with no redeeming features, then I say look closer - I identify lines of development and potentialities which are immanent but repressed within current society. I had a particular theme with regard to this particular piece, and stuck to it throughout – the Ring as the one rule, linked to the tyranny of abstraction through the modern process of rationalization. I think it has emptied the world of meaning, value and purpose and turned human relations into instrumental and calculating affairs centred on self-interest. The modern world is constituted by a particular social identity, one that renders the connection between individual self-interest and social interest, short- and long-term indirect and obscure, at best. And that is why we struggle to make common cause as individuals when faced with constant calls to act for the common good. The problem is that the common good we need is unavailable to us in anything but abstract forms. It is against those forces of abstraction and atomization that I have affirmed a politics of proximity and fellowship based on solidary ties and affective bonds. And based upon reconnection with the sources of life and meaning. And I affirm, against disenchanting man and his disinherit, disconnecting mind, that the world is objectively valuable. This Tolkien book is part of my wider attempts to delineate the institutional, social, psychological and ethical conditions for bringing human beings back to their (common) senses.

I will stand very much with what I have written on hope. I know it's right. It's as simple as that. I don't need to debate it with people who load the terms and definitions, and thereby misidentify the very thing they are criticizing. Much of what those who reject 'hope' are criticizing is not hope at all, but despair. Passively waiting upon false promises made by any number of modern idols and external saviours is not hope at all, it is the very definition of despair. I know what hope is. It isn't naïve and deluded at all. It requires guts, faith and courage. And it demands dedicated action and a devotion to true ends, often against what objective trends and tendencies tell us about where we are going. Any such trends and tendencies are, as that phrase I

used earlier says, 'humanly objective.' I affirm the radical indeterminacy of the future, based on the capacity of creative human agency to intervene into 'objective' trends and tendencies and turn them in favourable directions. The facts frequently tell us we are beaten. Reason and realism frequently tell us to give in; hope - and a commitment to values and ends transcending given circumstances - tells us to carry on. I've seen hope work in situations that seemed objectively hopeless. I've been a part of campaigns for justice that had the entire establishment ranged against a small group of people. And I've seen those campaigns win. I'll stand on hope. And I'll stand on justice too. And the 'little people', the 'ordinary' people who, with the root of the matter in them, will reach within themselves and find the extraordinary capacities that take hopeless causes and turn them into final victories. The 'little hands that turn the world,' as Tolkien puts it.

I'll stand, too, on the demand to make objective reality and the facts about it meaningful in a subjective or personal sense by developing an existential focus via art, aesthetics and ethics. Let's call it an imaginal moral ecology. My concern is to give the material facts of the environmental crisis an existential focus within a humanly meaningful frame of reference and action. So I affirm the power of literary ecology, too, in fostering the ecological vision and imagination. I'll certainly stand on the power of words, as in Bachelard's confession to be a dreamer of written words. I draw on Bachelard to a great extent in this book. Bachelard loved writing, and loved seeing how his words would come to life and create worlds of their own, enriching the world we live in. I come from a family of builders. I build with words. And I am happy to stand on Heidegger's linking of thinking and building in dwelling. I loved the time I spent in the Black Forest, and can see why so many fairy-stories originated from there. I can see Heidegger living there, too, engaging in a little Elvish enchantment. I'll stand by Heidegger's 'dwelling in the fourfold,' and by the call for a new spirituality. Only a god can still save us Only we can save ourselves by resisting the dis-godding of the world and coming finally to answer the question as to where value lies. Man may be the measurer of all things, but he is not the measure of all things. I'll go with Heidegger's connection of building, dwelling and thinking.

And I'll stand on the prophetic voice, too - there's a reason I repeat myself endlessly in a time when people are deaf not only to fact but also to value. Climate denial

comes in many forms ... I'm prepared to strike out alone if need be. How real do people want it? I'm a curious mix of ingredients. I like what Becca Segall Tarnas writes on the trickster, and have quoted her work extensively throughout.

I've added a photograph of me in The Dragon Snug at Cae Mabon, Snowdonia. There's a point to it. It's there in the Earth Rites passage. 'Fairy tales do not tell the children the dragons exist. Children already know that dragons exist. Fairy tales tell children the dragons can be killed.' (G.K. Chesterton). Well, I have soft spot for dragons and, with Montaigne, will continue to light a candle for both St Michael and his dragon. But, point taken, fairy tales are true in the deepest psychic and moral sense, telling us not merely that the demons that plague us exist, but that we have the resources within us to beat them.

The key questions are these: is the world objectively valueless? What are the forces of disenchantment that say it is? Where does value lie? Is there such a thing as inherent worth? What is worth, with respect to 'woethership'? What gods or idols do we worship? To empty the world of value, meaning, purpose and goodness and then think that there are technical and engineering workarounds that allow us evade these questions is the plainest delusion. That expresses the disenchanting mindset that has brought us to this, in the name of 'human progress.'

As the title of Keith Breen's excellent book puts it, we live "under Weber's shadow." So I engage with Weber tirelessly. He warned of a humanity confined within the "iron cage" of a rationalized modernity until the last ton of fossilized coal is burnt. He warned of a capitalist economy that determines our lives with "irresistible force." He warned of a world which proceeds "without regard for persons." And he warned: "Not summer's bloom lies ahead of us, but rather a polar night of icy darkness and hardness." An objectively valueless, disenchanting world, with a human world built in its meaningless image, systemic and institutional imperatives overriding the moral law within, planetary boundaries without, a world without soul, without romance, without imagination, 'without regard for persons.' This captures the pathos of means and ends that characterizes the modern world, with the enlargement of means to become ends in themselves serving to bring about the diminution of meaning. The 'disenchantment of the world' indeed, and I have sought to expand the meaning-

space throughout this book, as a condition of ever coming to respond to what the facts of our climate crisis are trying to tell us (clue, the science needs some psychic and moral help.)

The term Weber employed came from Friedrich Schiller and what he called "*die Entgotterung der Nature*" - the de-divinization or dis-godding of nature. It is thoroughly dispiriting and I don't care for it at all. It is a disenchantment that denied Nature its inherent value, meaning and goodness, and made it available to humans to employ their technology to selfish ends with complete indifference to the natural environment and the beings and bodies that populate it. I'm for re-enchantment and re-godding. I have no faith in 'men as gods.' It is thoroughly dehumanizing. From Dante to Blake to Nietzsche to Heidegger, the mechanizing process is utterly infernal. Tolkien loathed it too.

"Yet it is not our part to master all the tides of the world, but to do what is in us for the succour of those years wherein we are set, uprooting the evil in the fields that we know, so that those who live after may have clean earth to till. What weather they shall have is not ours to rule."

Gandalf in *The Return of the King, The Last Debate*

In a lecture on William Blake, Iain McGilchrist compares Blake to Nietzsche in their complexity and in the fact that 'both were rightly of the view that machines were and are infernal. Blake was appalled by the treatment of man as a machine.' Rightly indeed. 'A machine is not a man, or a work of art', Blake wrote, 'it is destructive of humanity and art.' As Erich Fromm writes in *The Sane Society*:

'Furthermore, ethics, whether it is that of monotheistic religion or that of secular humanism, is based on the principle that no institution and no thing is higher than any human individual; that the aim of life is to unfold man's love and reason and that every other human activity has to be subordinated to this aim. How then can ethics be a significant part of a life in which the individual becomes an automaton, in which he serves the big It? Furthermore, how can conscience develop when the principle of life is conformity?'

Fromm, *The Sane Society* 1990 ch 5

We may live under the shadow of an alien rationalization – but there is a Greater Love that enfolds, nourishes and carries us. And it is that Love that can still save us, if we can start to see from behind the physical eyes and engage in the work of re-connection, re-enchantment and ‘recovery’ – and thereby come to regain what Tolkien calls the ‘clear view.’

‘If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, Infinite. For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro’ narrow chinks of his cavern.’

— William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*

‘Myth and fairy story must, as all art, reflect and contain in solution elements of moral and religious truth (or error), but not explicit, not in the known form of the primary “real” world.’

— Tolkien.

Human beings as story-telling beings engaged in life’s journey as a quest ... The word ‘quest’ is appropriate here, with its connotations of myths and legends, the stories which human beings in their various groups and communities tell themselves, making sense of their lives and thereby developing a symbolic consciousness in their search for truth, meaning and justice. The object of the search in such quests is typically elusive, and ultimately its supreme importance comes to be apprehended and even transcended by the lessons that are learned in overcoming the challenges on the way. The journey is at least as important as journey’s end, in that it is in finding the object ‘out there’ that we come to find ourselves.

Alasdair MacIntyre is an important figure in the recovery of narrative in the modern world, along with Charles Taylor. ‘The unity of an individual life’, he writes, ‘is the

unity of a narrative embodied in a single life. To ask “What is the good for me?” is to ask how best I might live out that unity and bring it to completion. . . .’ MacIntyre continues:

‘The unity of a human life is the unity of a narrative quest. Quests sometimes fail, are frustrated, abandoned or dissipated into distractions; and human lives may in all these ways also fail. But the only criteria for success or failure in a human life as a whole are the criteria of success or failure in a narrated or to-be-narrated quest. A quest for what? Two key features of the medieval conception of a quest need to be recalled. The first is that without some at least partly determinate conception of the final *telos* there could not be any beginning to a quest. Some conception of the good for man is required. Whence is such a conception to be drawn? Precisely from those questions which led us to attempt to transcend that limited conception of the virtues which is available in and through practices. It is in looking for a conception of *the* good which will enable us to order other goods, for a conception of *the* good which will enable us to extend our understanding of the purpose and content of the virtues, for a conception of *the* good which will enable us to understand the place of integrity and constancy in life, that we initially define the kind of life which is a quest for the good. But secondly it is clear the medieval conception of a quest is not at all that of a search for something already adequately characterized, as miners search for gold or geologists for oil. It is in the course of the quest and only through encountering and coping with the various particular harms, dangers, temptations and distractions which provide any quest with its episodes and incidents that the goal of the quest is finally to be understood. A quest is always an education both as to the character of that which is sought and in self-knowledge. The virtues therefore are to be understood as those dispositions which will not only sustain practices and enable us to achieve the goods internal to practices, but which will also sustain us in the relevant kind of quest for the good, by enabling us to overcome the harms, dangers, temptations and distractions which we encounter and which will furnish us with increasing self-knowledge and increasing knowledge of the good. The catalogue of the virtues will therefore include the virtues required to sustain the kind of households and the kind of political communities in which

men and women can seek for the good together and the virtues necessary for philosophical enquiry about the character of the good, We have then arrived at a provisional conclusion about the good life for man: the good life for man is the life spent in seeking for the good life for man, and the virtues necessary for the seeking are those which will enable us to understand what more and what else the good life for man is.'

MacIntyre, *After Virtue*

This completes the first and second stage in MacIntyre's account of the virtues, situating them not only in relation to practices but in relation to the good life for human beings. He now goes on to the third stage. 'For I am never able to seek the good or exercise the virtues qua individual.' What it is to live the good life concretely varies according to different circumstances, even when we are dealing with the one and the same conception of the good life and one and the same set of virtues embodied in a human life. Further, we all approach our particular circumstances as bearers of particular social identities. 'What is good for me has to be the good for one who inhabits these roles. As such, I inherit from the past of my family, my city, my tribe, my nation, a variety of debts, inheritances, rightful expectations and obligations. These constitute the given of my life, my moral starting point. This is in part what gives my life its own moral particularity. This thought is likely to appear alien and even surprising from the standpoint of modern individualism. From the standpoint of individualism, I am what I choose to be ...

Such individualism is a contradiction of the social nature of human beings – individuality and sociability are two aspects of the same human nature. The loss or distortion of the one is the loss or distortion of the other, through skewing the integral relationship that exists between both in a truly human life. The quest for the good life thus return us to nature and human nature, to universal standards which transcend their particular incarnation in time and place. The truth of story-telling is rooted in something outside of the social group, identity and community, however those things come to be defined in history.

'While it is true that man can adapt himself to almost any conditions, he is not a blank sheet of paper on which culture writes its text. Needs like the striving for happiness, harmony, love and freedom are inherent in his nature. They are also dynamic factors in the historical process which, if frustrated, tend to arouse psychic reactions, ultimately creating the very conditions suited to the original strivings. As long as the objective conditions of the society and the culture remain stable, the social character has a predominantly stabilizing function. If the external conditions change in such a way that they do not fit any more with the traditional social character, a lag arises which often changes the function of character into an element of disintegration instead of stabilization, into dynamite instead of a social mortar, as it were.'

Fromm, *The Sane Society* 1990 ch 5

The quest, ultimately, is a work of self-knowledge ending in the truly human society of truly human beings.

'Undoubtedly, lack of concern for one's own country is an expression of a lack of social responsibility and of human solidarity, as are the other acts mentioned here, but the reaction to the violation of the flag is fundamentally different from the reaction to the denial of social responsibility in all other aspects. The one object is "sacred," a symbol of clan worship; the others are not. After the great European Revolutions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries failed to transform "freedom from" into "freedom to," nationalism and state worship became the symptoms of a regression to incestuous fixation. Only when man succeeds in developing his reason and love further than he has done so far, only when he can build a world based on human solidarity and justice, only when he can feel rooted in the experience of universal brotherliness, will he have found a new, human form of rootedness, will he have transformed his world into a truly human home.'

Erich Fromm, *The Sane Society* 1990: 60

Reason and love working together in harmony, solidarity and justice in a fellowship grounded in place and relations to others, a rootedness against abstraction, a genuine community as against ersatz, surrogate collectivities, a love of the particularities of place and warm, affective ties, bonds and loyalties as against empty universals ... Tolkien gives us all of these things. He sees human life as a quest for meaning, and a search for love, truth and belonging. And he roots this quest in the realities of nature and goodness and experience. These are the themes I develop at length in *Tolkien and the Fellowship of All Living Things*.

As for the road that goes ever on and on, the 'eager feet' we start off with will grow 'weary' in the pursuit, but we carry on. That's the journey from the first to the second version of the song, *The Road goes ever on and on*, in *The Lord of the Rings*. (Book I, Chapter 1, Book 1, Chapter 3). The third and final version of the song appears in *The Return of the King*, Book VI, Chapter 6, murmured by Bilbo, who is now a sleepy old hobbit

The Road goes ever on and on
Out from the door where it began.
Now far ahead the Road has gone,
Let others follow it who can!

Let them a journey new begin,
But I at last with weary feet
Will turn towards the lighted inn,
My evening-rest and sleep to meet.

Earlier, when leaving the Shire, Frodo tells the other hobbits Bilbo's thoughts on 'The Road': "He used often to say there was only one Road; that it was like a great river: its springs were at every doorstep, and every path was its tributary. 'It's a dangerous business, Frodo, going out of your door,' he used to say. 'You step onto the Road, and if you don't keep your feet, there is no knowing where you might be swept off to.'" But they go out all the same. That's the point, as I make clear in my Tolkien book.

What makes a good story is a purpose and a point, an end. The peerless poet-philosopher Dante Alighieri knew more than anyone the power of story to instruct, inspire, motivate, and direct people. As Barbara Reynolds writes:

"A compelling feature of the *Commedia* is the force of the narrative. But it is not one single narrative: it is studded with minor stories, even stories within stories, in dialogue or told in the first person, some by mythological figures but the majority by the souls of people recently dead and well known."

Barbara Reynolds, *Dante: The Poet, the Political Thinker, the Man* 2006

There are none better than Dante in this regard. Dante understood human beings to be story-telling animals impelled by their highest desire to the good. In his *Comedy*, Dante expressed his unwavering belief in ultimate good. Dante compares the soul on its way back to God to a traveler:

"who takes a road along which he has never gone before and thinks that every house he sees in the distance is an inn and, finding he is mistaken, fixes his eyes trustfully on another and so on from house to house until he arrives at the inn he is seeking."

We travel through life in pursuit of the higher or greater desire, but may be led astray because 'the path is lost in error like the roads on earth' (*questo cammino siperdeper errore come le strade della terra*):

"[I]n human life there are diverse paths, one of which above all is the right road, and another the wrong, and certain other paths which are more or less wrong or right."

Dante, *Il Convivio*, Section IV, Chapter 12.

The image of the right path that we lose, but may yet return to, goes back to the Bible, of course, and is employed to great effect by Boethius. Dante uses the image most memorably in the first canto of *Inferno*:

*Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita mi ritrovai in una selva oscura che la
diritta via era smarrita.*

In the middle of our path in life
I woke to find myself in a dark wood
for the way which leads us straight was lost to sight?

In *Il Convivio*, Dante describes the soul as entering upon new, untrodden terrain in life's journey (*nel nuovo e mat nonfatto cammino di questa vita*). He speaks, too, of the young man 'who enters into the wrong forest of this life and cannot keep to the right path unless it is pointed out to him by his elders.' (*Il Convivio*, Section IV, Chapter 24.) There is, then, a right path, and the power and efficacy of story-telling lies in its moral and instructive purpose, educating desire and guiding it to its true end. In separating the *Mythos* and the *Logos*, discarding the former in thinking the latter alone is sufficient, we have lost the psychic and emotional apparatus by which we could comprehend and regulate the life forces that shape humanity within. We have lost the capacity to inspire and motivate at the level of the psyche. If we inform heads but starve the heart, we lose our way.

"Because the right way was lost." That those words are not merely expressions of Dante's personal crisis but apply to all of us is made clear by Dante's use of the collective plural.

*Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vital
Mi ritrovai per una selva oscuraj
Che la diritta via era smarrita*

Midway along the journey of our life
I found myself within a gloomy wood
For the right pathway had been lost to view.

Note well the shift in pronouns, the combination of the plural possessive – *our* life – and the first person singular - *I* found myself. Dante's predicament is ours too. We

are in life's journey together. We share a common story with Dante, and Dante is sharing his experience with us. Not Dante alone, but all of us together. Human beings are *social beings*. That simple but profound truth from Aristotle cannot be repeated too often (and Dante was a good Aristotelian). We need a public life and a social infrastructure in order to individuate ourselves. We suffer as distinct individuals but we suffer collectively, too, as a society, as a result of departing from the right road:

se'l mondo presente disvia in voi e la cagione;

"If the present world goes off the road — in you (you all) is the cause" (*Purg.* xvi, 82-83).

As I say above, the demons to be beaten arise from within ourselves, and within our societies, from our failure to order love and direct desire to the proper object. It's the failure to put love, knowledge and reason together. The world is good. We need to enjoy it, not consume it out of desire for fame, fortune and mere transitory pleasures.

As Rousseau cautioned in his *Social Contract*:

"The general will is always right, but the judgment which guides it is not always enlightened. It has to be made to see objects as they are, sometimes as they ought to appear to it, to show it the good road it is looking for and to protect it from the seduction of particular wills."

Rousseau understood well the complications of this question, producing the seemingly paradoxical formulation of 'the general will' as a resolution. The pedants of philosophy will point out that will is particular, and ask how it could be general? Rousseau was as analytical and logical as any philosopher, and had a lot more besides. Kant called him 'the Newton of the moral world' for a very good reason indeed. Rousseau understood that the true and the good cannot just be *given*, they have to be *willed* if they are to be acted upon and realized, which is surely the point of story-telling as moral, educative, directive ... That's what stories

are about in Dante and in Tolkien, the apprehension of moral and psychic truth, and the affirmation that such things are truly real, and not merely 'made-up.'

Rousseau intended this as an invitation to an education in civic virtue and fraternal love among citizens. So, too, did Dante for that matter.

When nature finds herself in ill accord
With fortune, her effects are always ill —
Like any other seed sown out of place.
And if the world down there would but take heed
Of the foundation nature has prepared
And follow that it would have goodly folk.
But you will turn to the religious life
One born to bear a sword, and make a king
Of one more fitted to write homilies,
So that your track strays from the proper road.
(*Par VIII*, 139-148)

I am currently putting the finishing touches to my book on Dante and *The Sweet Symphony of Paradise*, a book which shows Dante's relevance in an age of environmental catastrophe and moral confusion (and relevance in every age, frankly). Read closely, Dante's conservative case for right ordering modeled on nature and human nature is remarkably subversive, not only of the medieval institutions of Church and Empire, but of the capitalist order. If Dante denied that virtue and nobility was heredity, he also denied that such things were dependent on wealth. That's work to come. I will be writing on Rousseau, too, in the coming year or so. In the meantime, I offer my book on Tolkien and the power of story-telling. It all fits together ... get on the good road!

And get on the good foot. Music. When people in their desperation and cluelessness ask what strategy I have, I reply: 'Get in tune.' It's the right answer to the wrong question

The Springs of Action - Making Facts Existentially Meaningful

'Matt Waddup states (Report, theguardian.com, 30 May) that a healthy society needs arts and humanities, and that these are "critical to our democracy." This is an understatement. It is becoming increasingly obvious that the climate and environmental crises of our time cannot be addressed solely, or even principally, through science and technology. The situation requires a much broader range of expertise.

Arts and humanities graduates are essential to the necessary processes of thinking our way from the present system into sustainable ways of living for the future. This thinking cannot be achieved without a complex understanding of past societies, the stories that we tell about ourselves, and how we arrived in our present dangerous situation. It needs people who can engage critically and productively with the deeply embedded ideas that make change extremely difficult to envisage. The arts and humanities have never been more fundamental to imagining and creating a liveable future for humanity.'

- Dr Amanda Power, University of Oxford, *Letters, The Guardian*, 1 June 2019

I don't know who Dr Amanda Power is, but I feel like sending her a prize or singing her a song, or merely issuing a few words of praise for her grasping of a truth that seems to be utterly beyond some of the cleverest – but not thereby liveliest – minds of the age. I have spent an intellectual lifetime not merely trying to induce those who equate all true knowledge with science and all practical art with technology and design to take this point on board, and broaden environmentalism out genuinely and actively within the field of practical reason (ethics and politics), but have also written extensively, imaginatively, and creatively, with all the depth of scholarship and learning at my command for over two decades now. Post after post on here and elsewhere, article after article, book after book, making precisely this point and developing it further. I doubt that anyone could develop it further.

I'm not quite sure what my reward for all that work has been. I have sacrificed health and wealth and very probably true fulfilment and happiness, and a lot more besides,

working from my little hobbit hole in detachment from people and the world. It's a cruel isolation. I used to love watching the football, but gave up my season ticket at my beloved Liverpool in order to keep working, even as funds ran short. I have been read by many and it is reward enough to know that I have influenced and inspired others to act on the ideas.

But I have to report that my engagement with science- and technology-based environmentalists over the years has not been encouraging, quite the reverse, actually. I've noticed that far too many of them – atheists every one, I shall point out – soon start to talk about overpopulation and the need to 'cull the herd,' describing the human beings as a species that live in tribes that get bigger and bigger unless numbers are kept down by wars. Dreary, misanthropic drivel that tells me precisely what happens to humanity when it sheds transcendent hope and starts to rely on its own meagre psychology.

I have to report, too, that the sniffy disdain for arts and humanities is as alive and as unwell and uninspiring as ever. I've been told directly that I know nothing of nature and nature's laws, that 'social sciences' are not true sciences, that ethics is irrelevant, that all six-year olds know the difference between right and wrong and that people like me merely complicate ethics so as to make pseudo-intellectuals like ourselves look clever when we are not, and that all my writing is mere 'idle intellectualizing.' I used to keep a document full of the abuse – and this from 'friends' and colleagues and associates in environmental causes, mark you. I've just lost it as a result of my main computer crashing. I am pondering whether data recovery is a worthwhile investment. My attitude to all of this now is good riddance. It's time to face the music or make your peace with the planet (or, better still, God), whichever way you want to look at it. I had long since stopped accumulating the abusive comments, mind. I remember enough of them. I don't care for the abuse and, on occasions, have responded in kind. In fact, I won't hesitate to state clearly that such people, thinking themselves the smartest and most activist people around, are actually dull-witted and utterly impractical, hammering away at the same things, little understanding why they are so ineffective and provoke so little response from the public. They are political naifs, although given their contemptuous attitude towards politics they would consider that praise: they think they can use science as an

authority to dictate truths to politics – and people. They are mistaken, and profoundly so, and that mistaken attitude will continue to hobble environmentalism.

I've spelt out my reasoning on this many times over the years, if anyone would care to take the time to read and reflect. There are any number of posts below on this theme. My books state my views more positively.

I'll state it simply one more time: scientific knowledge and technological know-how do not have the true character of a virtue since they lack the appetitive component; they give us the ability to act but not the will or desire. If we are serious about 'changing the world' or acting effectively on the slogan 'system change rather than climate change,' then we need to make the transition from theoretical reason (our knowledge of the external world, the world of fact and physical explanation) to practical reason (the field of ethics and politics within which human beings come together to decide how they will live together and govern their common affairs, a field which includes economics as a branch, in my view). So long as environmentalists continue to press science into service as ethics and politics, our technics will continue to misfire and the state of civilization will go from bad to worse, further and further removed not just from our biological and ecological matrix, but from the source and end which gives human beings a sense of belonging, identity, purpose, and meaning.

But thank you Dr Amanda Power, it is indeed 'becoming increasingly obvious that the climate and environmental crises of our time cannot be addressed solely, or even principally, through science and technology. The situation requires a much broader range of expertise.'

I've not only been saying it for years, I've been doing it, putting it all together. It all depends on what you think of people, I suppose. If you really do think there are too many people on the planet, and human beings are greedy, stupid, selfish, easily distracted and diverted by football and pop music (yes, that's me, Liverpool and Elvis then – I've had that abuse from folk), then, yes, you won't really be inclined to get involved in the motivational economy and engage individuals as active, informed citizens – you'll just tell them what to do. Like you've been doing for decades now.

To little effect. So you'll continue to blame human indifference, instead of looking for the reasons why you, with your anti-politics (science as politics) have failed to elicit a response. This issue is not about informing passive empty minds but about forming characters in community.

I must have written millions of words on this. What is becoming 'increasingly obvious' now was plain to me decades ago. I have spent years trying to get this through to people and am pretty much exhausted now. I've given it my best shot. I'm wondering what I could have done with all that time. I'm looking at old family photographs: so much happiness, so much promise as the future beckoned. 'You used to be so happy,' my mother told me as I held forth, yet again, on some issue or other, having become very well educated and certified. But some are getting it.

As for making facts existentially meaningful – it's there in my Tolkien book, a fine piece of literary ecology. In fact, it's there in my other books. It's a common theme in my moral ecology of the good.

We live in both a political world and a physical world. In any clash between politics and physics, physics will win. Our challenge is to avoid splitting the world up, removing civilization further and further from its biological and ecological matrix (and from the transcendent origin and end of all things) so that we come to be confronted with a choice between politics and 'the real world.' We need to give ourselves a 'reality check.' Science is the best reality check we have. That is true, in so far as we remain at the level of the explanation of physical processes, sticking to the facts and no more. I see the whole science vs religion antagonism misguided and self-defeating, originating in the split between fact and value that opened up in the modern world. I seek always to bring the realms of fact and value back together. This would avoid us having to make a choice between politics and 'the real world.'

But here's my take on science and religion. I shall simplify greatly to express myself clearly. (Plus it is late, and I am very tired and have better things to be doing – like sleeping). I see science and religion as actually doing the same thing from different angles to the world. They both insist there is a real world that is outside human subjective will, projection, and preference, a reality that it is in our best interests to

know, understand, and conform ourselves to. To the scientist, this reality is the Earth and its physical laws and planetary boundaries. Fail to respect those and you are on the path to (self)destruction. To the religious, this reality is God and God's plan for Justice for the world. In God's will is our peace, to that reality all things return. (I am quoting from St Augustine and Dante Alighieri here). Both sides affirm a reality to which we must conform our wills, establishing a 'free necessity.' There is a big difference in this respect. The scientist, sticking to empirical fact, will say there is no evidence whatsoever for the existence of God, and that we have to give the verdict in any intellectual dispute to the more parsimonious explanation – the explanation which fits the facts with least assumptions. In which case there is no God. In response, on behalf of the religious view, I will say that the scientist here is right insofar as he goes. But science can only go so far as the facts and no further. Once we bring in questions of value, meaning, and significance the situation changes. For we are not just explaining the physical universe, we are entering the motivational economy of human life, trying not merely to make sense of all that makes human life meaningful, but trying to motivate human beings into right action. Here, the scientific view which sees our existence on Earth – and Earth itself – as accidental, and the universe as objectively valueless, meaningless, purposeless, a barren rock that came from nowhere and is going nowhere, for no reason, is no help whatsoever when it comes to inducing human beings to act. What is the point of mere survival in the long run when we are told that life as such is meaningless? Someone coming from a religious viewpoint can answer these questions. I affirm God as the transcendent origin and end of all things, from which all things come and to which all things move, giving us the transcendent hope to go beyond the empirical facts that say we are doomed to press further to the true reality beyond them.

Either way, science or religion, both are agreed that there is a reality, and that it is our responsibility to respect that reality and put our self-created world in positive relation to it.

It's important to establish this point for at least a couple of reasons.

In the first place, it is important to expose the contradictory dynamics of the prevailing social system, in both our political and intellectual work. Here, we are

charged with undermining the rationalizations which are presented as false fixities at the institutional and ideological level so as to facilitate the changes we need.

In the second place, we need not merely to deliver truth to the world – presenting it as some abstract truth to which the people must bow down to and serve. That will never ever work in politics. The temper of politics is judicious, it involves the people themselves coming together to determine the terms by which they govern their common affairs, having a hand themselves in the laws to which their wills will be subject. If politics is just about truth pure and simple, then philosopher-kings will do fine. But where, I ask, can we find such disinterested beings in a political and socially divided human universe? You might think climate change is the overriding good to be served, other philosopher-kings might think it the economy, others still may put a good word in for God. We lack the authoritative overarching framework that is able to settle such a question of objective foundations in such a way as to command common assent. Power will decide that one – as it decides the sophist politics of our day. There is precious little point in stating scientific truths here and warning that we will go to Hell if we ignore them. Religious folk have been saying the same thing for years in warning the world as it turns it back on God. Stating truths in this way has no effect, because it presumes a moral imperative that lacks the means of moral action. We need the virtues and the practices to make it work.

There is a need, then, to get the individuals composing the *demos* to see and understand these social and environmental contradictions themselves, in the process of constituting themselves as an active, informed citizen body capable of mobilizing themselves as a genuine public, reclaiming government as their own common power from the death-dealing 'realpolitik' into which it has fallen under the sway of dominant economic interests and forces (and consequences arising therefrom).

Hence my interest in the view of Rousseau as the greatest of the modern Platonists that is presented by David Lay Williams in his book *Rousseau's Platonic Enlightenment*. Rousseau is a figure who interests me greatly in the way that he succeeds in uniting the two dominant wings of western political philosophy: the notion of objective reality and truth and subjective will. Rousseau's apparently paradoxical notion of "the general will" (a will can only be particular and never

general, say philosophical critics) makes the point that the true and the good cannot just be passively given or stated: in a democratic age, these things have to be willed by the people, people have to know them intimately. In other words, the cognitive has also to be affective in order to be practically effective in changing the world for the better.

The point may seem arcane or academic – and the lack of response I have had on this in environmental circles suggests it may be (or that environmentalists are, as I believe, ill-equipped to inspire, sustain, and effect change) – but in my view the key in resolving the environmental crisis all along has been how to bridge the gaps between theoretical reason (our knowledge of the external world) and the field of practical reason (ethics and politics, of which economics was once a branch and, to my mind, still is - however much capital disembedded economics from government, society, ethics, and ecology). Knowledge - and I would put technological know-how as the product of science alongside knowledge - only give us the ability to act; neither of these things make us want to act, since they lack an appetitive component. That world of appetites is the one that interests me. That's where I work, at risk of drawing insults with respect to lacking anything by way of true knowledge and having my 'head in the clouds.' It is becoming 'increasingly obvious' that our scientifically informed practical men and women are proving singularly ineffective in mobilising the action we need to avert climate catastrophe. We can blame any number of other forces for this – politicians, capitalists, people etc etc. You are the ones who know what the problem is, it is for you to create the means and mechanisms of effective collective action and command the active consent, better still, win the mass support, of the people.

Creating the will for change takes us into the motivational economy of the human world, the springs of action, however murky and sulphurous and even biased the human world is compared to the reality of the physical universe. At risk of offending my scientist friends, but you really do the easy stuff here – classifying things and counting different coloured beans and putting them in the appropriate boxes (OK, we can lose the polemics, but I'm long beyond being patient with people who refuse to budge on this, because they are the real deniers who are the problem). We have to get serious about the seriously difficult material that humanity is. We cannot do the

easy thing and lament greed and stupidity, and complain there are too many people on the planet to boot. That also gets us nowhere. And I would also comment in passing how quickly people, in our clever secular post-Enlightenment times, have forgotten why the seven deadly sins were called deadly. And I would also say that in calling the soul back – as we need to do – we will have to have the nerve to see, identify, and name human maleficence for what it is – sin. I would also insist on differentiating between those specific social relations that foster and licence sinful behaviour, turning vices into virtues, and those which inhibit it and bring us back to virtuous living.

This issue is really a fight to constitute a politics that is worthy of the name – creating a citizen body of "*polites*," meaning those who are interested in public affairs, as against its antonym "*idiotes*," referring to those interested only in private affairs. There is nothing wrong with subjective choice as such, but alone it is an incomplete freedom. Milton Friedman's *Free to Choose* leaves 'free' choosing individuals isolated and powerless in the face of external collective forces: market, accumulative imperatives, climate change etc. That is no freedom at all, but a case of incremental, uncoordinated individual rationality and freedom generating a collective irrationality and unfreedom that embraces all. Instead of a common law which we voluntarily give ourselves, we become subject to an involuntary necessity in the shape of the unintended consequences of our actions. In this instance we are facing the collective challenge of climate change, without appropriate and effective collective media and mechanisms. Creating those is a question of politics.

I would encourage everyone who wants to cut straight to the chase to stop reading the words and go to the figures provided by Aubrey Meyer. The work he does at the Global Commons Institute provides figures that serve to focus the mind – and ought to focus our politics.

People may be inclined to carry on drifting in the political world of divided societies. This political world is certainly a real world, with a power of its own – hence the looming ecological catastrophe. But I quote Max Weber's statement from one hundred years ago a lot and for a good reason: "Where there is nothing, both the Kaiser and the proletarian have lost their rights." By nothing, Weber was referring to

the collapse of the authoritative moral framework in the aftermath of Nietzsche's "death of God." With the disenchantment of the world, the world was revealed by modern mechanistic science to be objectively valueless and meaningless. We've been living in a world of purposeless materialism, and a worldview that reflects such a truth about the world can never succeed in motivating action. There is a world to win, said Marx, but not when that world is conceived by our science as a "nothing." There is "something," I say, and people feel it. The nature of that true reality has been debated by metaphysicians and theologians for centuries. In the very least, we can be sure that a "something" we have is the Earth. The planetary ecology isn't quite the same thing as an authoritative moral framework, mind, and we still need such a framework, in my view. We may well come to lose the planetary health upon which civilization depends on account of our moral failure to see what we have in common and make a stand on that ethic. In other words, we need to see that the arguments over the terms on which the possession of the Earth is divided up is unimportant without any overarching ethic and unity. In fact, we need to see reject this squabbling over terms of possession entirely, seeing it as a mere power struggle without any point or purpose beyond an immediate possession and sophist expediency that is itself pointless. How to pull politics out of this sophist struggle into an appreciation of non-possession, is precisely the task we face.

I've just been told of some politician - I think it was John Selwyn Gummer - claiming all these targets are too ambitious, demanding changes that are too big to achieve in too short a time. That's what politicians have been telling us all along, with the result that the problems we are charged with resolving have become even bigger, as the time to solve them has become shorter. I don't know how to stop or delay the clock, but it won't stop ticking because of political inertia (Heavens above, the years we have wasted in Brexit doesn't augur well at all when it comes to forming unity from within this fractured terrain on which we live).

If we remain stuck within the realm of political expediency - defining politics as the art of the possible - then we may as well miss by a billion miles as by an inch. What is possible within untransformed institutions and relations is actually ecologically impossible in the long (and short) run. Here's the problem, though - which is why we have to develop an effective politics - human beings live in the here and now, not in

the future. The only time human beings have ever been motivated by a vision beyond the here and now was when society was united in a common devotion to God. In the absence of a mass conversion – and you cannot conjure up belief as a matter of engineering - we need a social identity in which short term individual good and long term social good coincide. This addresses the tricky problem of reconciling collective action and individual choice.

Hence my concern to avoid the clash between politics and physics (where there can be only the one winner) by changing the institutions, assumptions and relations within which politics are set. That has to be done, but it can only be done from within the political and social realm. Science is not politics, and politics is not science: neither the one can dictate to the other - that antithetical relation will doom civilization.

I've never been keen on demonstrations and protests, and I see a danger of making a fetish of the politics of permanent opposition which comes to stand in the way of being genuinely radical in embedding and institutionalising social power in material form. At some point, climate rebellion has to constitute an active and informed citizen body capable of voluntarily legislating the right way to live to itself – as opposed to having a vicious necessity involuntarily imposed on it. That, for me, is the only way we will get out of this crisis. It's a big ask, but it's a big problem, the biggest civilization has faced. If evolution is challenge and response, then the challenge of the accumulation of human actions generating abstract power and consequences governing society as external force is huge. The response also has to be big - by which I mean taking all the great ideals of political philosophy and ethics going back to the ancients, and coming to realize the ideal of a rational freedom that is rooted in the common moral sense of each and all so as to deliver true government as the agency of the common good. We've had a couple of millennia trying to achieve that one. The fact that we have tried for so long and failed is not encouraging. And not actually a fact. We have achieved plenty. We need to continue the achievements.

These are times that test men's souls, Tom Paine said, in face of a problem that was local in comparison to the one we face. I'm expending a lot of words (yet again) but it is all part of my concern to emphasize building a climate legitimacy through the

constitution of a public for action - building the will for the transformation we need by drawing individuals out of the private realm of idiocy into becoming active moral and political beings. That's the active and creative engagement we need, as against to merely speaking truths to power, politics, and people too. Those truths have to come in from the inside, take root and grow. Should we succeed in achieving that, then the concerted action on the part of governments within a comprehensive framework will come to be buttressed by popular will in the context of widespread social transformation. Anything that falls short of that, and the best we have is government as an environmental rescue squad, doing too little, too late, responding to events that will always be racing ahead of them.

If system change it is - and I keep looking at this and drawing that conclusion (hence my interest in Kevin Anderson saying the age of greening the current system is over) - then we need to analyze the nature of the prevailing system, be clear about alternate institutions and structures, and engage the citizen body in order to build a mass agency actively involved in social transformation - putting the above and the below together. It's ... a very big ask in a very short time frame.

The problem is that we lack a meaningful political and institutional 'we,' in the sense of a collective body with political and legal force. But there is a 'we' at the level of humanity – and this we, in the political institutions at our disposal, have become less and less convergent with planetary realities as the decades have passed, emitting some 900 Billion Tonnes of CO₂ in the last three decades, half of which has been added to the atmosphere, serving to drive temperatures up further. The alarms are being sounded. Once more. But we live within social and political arrangements that are institutionally deaf. As for the politicians sticking to the art of the possible – this is a case of doing too little too late, leaving us facing the problem of having to attempt too much too soon the closer we get to our date with catastrophe.

The demands are and have been measured all along, they only seem too much in relation to institutional inertia and political compromise. Check the work of Aubrey Meyer at the Global Commons Institute out.

How real do people want it? How much reality can people cope with? I always find the accusations of alarmism over the years ironic - we've been dealing with politically expedient and convenient evasions and underestimations at the institutional level for a long, long time now. We can possibly be lenient here and say this has been for reasons of pragmatic politics - to get some movement, to get something done – but it has drained the time away, wasted talent and energy too. I do hope people understand the numbers. Just saying "time for action" is not enough. I was once told to "stop thinking, act!" To which I replied, "don't act, think!" Of course, the two go together in an interactive and mutually informing process, but I'm an old dialectician.

Aubrey Meyer gave me this in response:

If we're serious, doing the numbers means this
the Carbon Countdown Clock

“ . . the first thing you learn when learning to play the violin is that you learn it, as it sure as hell doesn't learn you . . . yes - playing-learning-by-doing, playing better-learning-by-doing - but fundamentally it's not a perceptions issue, it's a one-way street, cut-and-dried . . . dead parrot”

There are important words here on how to convert the climate lottery back into “the stable, solid, timeless structure,” which is the language of music.

“It is innately structured, it is innately proportioned, it is an interesting point that in the politics of this, Contraction and Convergence (C&C) is not fair, it is just. In music, correct tuning is called just tuning , because it is just right. It is not fair, it is just right: it's not too high, it's not too low, it's not too fast, it's not too slow. You have to work hard as a musician to achieve that.”

It is just right. Right. Just. Tempered. It avoids vague language about fairness. What is fair? That's a question designed to stump all those demanding justice. (As Marx knew, and hence avoided the language of fairness, but I digress slightly).

It's all about eliminating error from the climate debate to achieve something that is equitable, viable, and deliverable.

You learn the violin, it doesn't learn you. There's a great question to be addressed here concerning imposition and disclosure. Imposition is the modern idea that truth, goodness, and meaning are human projections upon an objectively valueless universe. That seems liberatory, in appealing to the notion of human beings as authors of their own futures, 'men as gods.' But it is a delusion, leading to humans as masters of nowhere. Disclosure is ancient, more in keeping with Leibniz's notion of a preordained harmony. The world is objectively valuable, good, and purposeful. And it is participatory. We are co-creators in the sense of acting within an endlessly creative universe. That's the notion I go with. (Although I try to put imposition and disclosure together, as in ancient Chinese thought (I need to add this to my ancient Greek sources). But the notion of a "stable, solid, timeless structure" takes us right back to the notion of an objectively valuable world, as against the modern disenchantment which stripped the universe of inherent worth.

On the musical model over against the prevailing ecosuicidal economic model, I can remember Nicholas Stern (*A Blueprint for a Safer Planet* 2006) saying that the 'two great challenges of the twenty-first century' are fighting poverty and combating climate change. Since the environmental crisis is global in its origins and its impacts, it requires a global deal concluded at the supra-national level. Stern sets out the terms of this deal. 'That global deal must be effective, in that it cuts back emissions on the scale required; it must be efficient, in keeping costs down; and it must be equitable in relation to abilities and responsibilities, taking into account both the origins and impact of climate change' (Stern 2010).

A Blueprint, a Plan, a man with a plan – we need a plan, and we need a mobilisation of men and women behind it. Act, yes, but know what you are doing and where you are going and why.

There is a lot of information exchanged in the world. A lot of it is restating the problems we already know about (other than noting they are getting worse). I tend not to do much of that. There's a danger of endlessly writing our own obituaries on this. We need to analyze the problem, identify the solution, seek agreement, establish the conditions of concerted action within a comprehensive framework, build

a democratic will and legitimacy through the participation of a public which respects citizen agency. Do all of that and we may start to get to where we ought to be.

I'd say that within the prevailing economic model, citizen agency is totally undercut and overridden by the imposition of accumulative imperatives, with government reduced to having to facilitate that expansionary, and ecosuicidal, process. In challenging that, we can recover the notion of an active, informed citizenship, breathing new life into the old principal of self-assumed obligation, only with this crucial rider – this is not a self-legislating power, seeing the world as a human creation – imposition or the projection of truth and goodness on an objectively valueless world – it is co-agency in the ceaselessly creative, musical, world – disclosure. The great partnership – men and women with a plan.

Here is Plato. It's an ancient wisdom, of course, from a time long before our own. But people are people, and reality is reality. With respect to timeless structures, the date at the top of the newspaper is irrelevant. Plato set out the terms of the solution long ago, linking the parts together to form a 'well-tempered harmony'. The word that Plato uses is 'just,' not 'fair.' It's important to understand this:

"The just man does not allow the several elements in his soul to usurp one another's functions; he is indeed one who sets his house in order, by self-mastery and discipline coming to be at peace with himself, and bringing into tune those three parts, like the terms in the proportion of a musical scale, the highest and lowest notes and the mean between them, with all the intermediate intervals. Only when he has linked these parts together in well-tempered harmony and has made himself one man instead of many, will he be ready to go about whatever he may have to do, whether it be making money and satisfying bodily wants, or business transactions, or the affairs of state. In all these fields when he speaks of just and honorable conduct, he will mean the behaviour that helps to produce and preserve this habit of mind; and by wisdom he will mean the knowledge which presides over such conduct. Any action which tends to break down this habit will be for him unjust; and the notions governing it he will call ignorance and folly."

Plato, *Republic* 444d, Cornford translation, 141-2

"Philosophy, I said, tempered with music, who comes and takes up her abode in a man, and is the only saviour of his virtue throughout life."

Plato, *The Republic*

I received a nice comment from Aubrey Meyer in response:

Dear Peter - when you write that, I feel the lift and am so glad and grateful that you do . . . it brings peace back towards one.

Thank you to you and our friends and guides and to Dante and to Plato and to Pythagoras and to Patanjali and to providence . . .

I do hope people read all this and follow up the links. We have a problem, we know. We need to address it. If we ever get a future that is worth having, then it will have been down to the efforts of good folk such as Aubrey Meyer. I've given it a go myself, to the best of my abilities. Not having the numbers, only the words, there is always the danger that I may have confused rather than clarified.

Tolkien and the Ethics of Enchantment

"The realm of fairy-story is wide and deep and high and filled with many things: all manner of beasts and birds are found there; shoreless seas and stars uncounted; beauty that is an enchantment, and an ever-present peril; both joy and sorrow as sharp as swords."

J.R.R. Tolkien

My thoughts here were incited by a new book entitled *The Ethics of Enchantment*, which contains a chapter on fairy stories by a friend from Academia and FB Liz McKinnell. This chapter argues that fairy tales are neither instruments of moral instruction, to instil a number of precepts and codes, nor mere entertaining

diversions, to generate wonder and excitement. I agree. Fairy tales most certainly do perform an ethical function in inciting and inculcating a moral sensibility, but they perform this function by stimulating the imagination rather than delivering a concerted system of disguised moral commands. This is a strong theme in my work on J.R.R. Tolkien, and the way that his words help foster a subtle understanding of moral complexity and courage, the intersection of imagination and lived experience, embodiment and empathy. The lesson is that in showing rather than spelling out, storytellers are more influential than homilists.

These have been key themes in my own work in the field of literary ecology. There's a chapter in my Tolkien book on fairy stories and story-telling on the lines of the above. In this book, I emphasize story-telling as stimulating truth-seeking. It is easy enough to state that 'truth matters' or 'morality matters,' and then present dense texts on philosophy and ethics establishing the claim. Such works will inspire only those who already hold that truth and morality 'matter.' The first and most important steps come with inspiring that belief in the first place. And there is wisdom in knowing it to be a belief or a norm, a faith. All 'truth' rests ultimately on assumptions that few realize are assumptions. We assume that matter exists, although this cannot be proven, since we have no way to conceptualize it otherwise. Scholastics such as St Thomas Aquinas were explicit in premising their systems on axioms which cannot be proven but without which nothing can work. The point being, such systems do indeed work; remove them and there is paralysis or endless negation. We are standing with our feet firmly planted in the air. But if we know the ground we are standing on, then we will never be in fear of falling.

Tolkien knew well what he was doing with respect to storytelling. He knew the formidable power of stories to inspire, motivate, cultivate the moral sensibility and the willingness to act and take responsibility, overcome fear, join with others in common cause. He wanted to tell stories that would bring about 'the satisfaction of certain primordial human desires,' that embodied a certain 'quality of strangeness and wonder,' that would 'survey the depths of space and time' and that would 'hold communion with other living things.' (J.R.R. Tolkien, *On Fairy-Stories*, ed. Verlyn Flieger and Douglas A. Anderson (London, England: Harper Collins Publishers, 2014), 4.) In the process, he created a mythology of Middle-Earth that embodies and

articulates the moral and psychic truth of our own world, incites that truth within us, and brings forth the moral sensibility. He does it through fostering moral courage and moral imagination.

There is, then, a reality to fairy-stories, one that makes facts existentially meaningful:

‘The importance of stories and the existence of human beings as story-telling beings has long been recognized, but the fact has not been given the central weight it deserves. Stories have the power to persuade and move people from within, they express moral and psychic truths that make them appealing to people. Story puts us in touch with the root of the matter.’

Tolkien’s words on ‘fighting the long defeat’ are endlessly inspiring, giving us a ‘hope without guarantees,’ and a ‘long defeat’ that, in acts of love, kindness, and solidarity, gives ‘glimpses of final victory.’ Here is a link to my book on Tolkien, developing literary ecology as a moral ecology.

Tolkien and the Fellowship of all Living Things

https://www.academia.edu/34092963/Tolkien_and_the_Fellowship_of_All_Living_Things

This article is well worth finding and reading:

All Stories Are the Same

From Avatar to The Wizard of Oz, Aristotle to Shakespeare, there’s one clear form that dramatic storytelling has followed since its inception.

‘Storytelling is an indispensable human preoccupation, as important to us all—almost—as breathing. From the mythical campfire tale to its explosion in the post-television age, it dominates our lives. It behooves us then to try and understand it.’

I would set these remarks on Tolkien and the truth of story-telling against the conception of the human species arising from evolutionary biology and psychology. In recent work I have been examining the self-image of human beings as truth-seekers, noting the growing shock of some of many in the contemporary age that a

lot of humans don't actually seek truth at all. I'm interested in this shock, based as it is on the assumption that 'truth matters,' truth trumps all things, and that human beings are truth-seekers – or ought to be truth-seekers. That 'ought-to-be' should immediately tell us that there is a moral truth as well as a factual and logical one, a truth that is conjoined with (and even prior to) scientific truth. Simply put, there is a clash here between theological and evolutionary notions. God created the world to be intelligible to intelligent beings, but evolutionary psychology suggests *that our minds might have evolved more to manipulate others and ourselves than to perceive the truth*. If the latter is true, then survival and nothing more than that is the name of the game, and claims of objective reality and the truth about it are no more than stories we tell to survive. Those who argue that fact and logic establish the boundaries of truth and knowledge will dismiss everything lying outside of those parameters as 'fairy stories.' Such pejorative comment reveals a complete ignorance, born of contempt, on their part for the real meaning of fairy stories and the real importance of narrativity. Their views are reductive, debilitating, and self-destructive, sterilizing the environment until it is impossible to breath. They deny 'the meaning of life' as a meaningful question. The only meaning in the game of life is to stay in the game, and truth-telling is a story we tell to confirm ourselves and our actions as we go on our merry way. Or unmerry. Because there is a reality and there is a truth. And survival is not the same thing as meaning and does not satisfy the cosmic longing for meaning. Stifle that longing through intellectual austerity and hygiene, and people with either fall prey to any kind of death-dealing delusion as a surrogate or will wilt and die for want of anything to believe in, any reason to live. Detaching fact from value and exalting the realm of the former whilst fracturing the realm of the latter into solipsism, the modern age is full of surrogates. It was for this reason that Max Weber characterized the modern age as an age of 'polytheism,' an endless war of incommensurate values: 'old gods arise from their graves, disenchanted and in the form of impersonal forces; they strive to gain power over our lives and resume again their eternal struggle with one another' (Weber 1991: 147/8). Weber sees the fate of the age in the rise of a new polytheism taking the depersonified, objectified form of an irreconcilable antagonism among irreducible orders of value and life. As a result, the rationalised world has become meaningless (Habermas 1991:246).

The fate of our times is characterised by rationalisation and intellectualisation and, above all, by the "disenchantment of the world."

Weber 1991:155

I am interested in re-enchantment, in restoring value, meaning, purpose, and goodness to the world. Modern disenchanting science holds the world to be objectively valueless and meaningless. Intelligent beings characterising by a deep, cosmic yearning for meaning will find such a world unintelligible. Give up your illusions! the disenchanters cry. Humans continue to cry for meaning, all fact and logic seemingly against them. That they do so, and will continue to cry so long as they are on nodding terms with their deepest humanity, should tell us something about what it is to be human. The commitment to truth-seeking depends upon and cannot survive without its theological underpinnings – God made the world intelligible to human beings as intelligent moral beings seeking to satisfy the quest for meaning. Maybe that's my story. And maybe the truth is that the world is all stories. Stories can be good, stories can be bad. I would suggest that the world is in the grip of a bad story, or lots of stories which tell merely solipsistic truths to ensure humans are separated from one another and hence living in the cruel isolation of self-nullification. Here's something I wrote in response to an article in *The Times* by Ed Conway which was headed "Facts are not sacred."

I shall return to the idea that story-telling is more about showing than telling, about encouraging people to see and live the truth deep within their being than instructing them in the truth. This is most apparent in *The Lord of the Rings*. Many Tolkien scholars and lovers debate who the hero of the book is. All of them, even Gandalf, even Bilbo and Frodo, drop the baton at some point, and succumb to the temptation of the Ring. It seems to be a book without a hero. There's 'invisible magic' at work, Bilbo says at one point. The hero is God, even though there is not a single reference to God in the entire work. It is God's invisible grace that works the magic. Here are the true ethics of enchantment – it is not the intervening that matters, but the interweaving of all the elements – the reconciliation of multiplicity in the oneness of God, different elements converging in harmony and concordance.

This article on Tolkien by Rowan Williams establishes this point well. Williams notes how Tolkien's work has been dismissed as reactionary fantasy and even labelled fascist. This is errant nonsense that I gave short-shrift to in my book. Rather than spend too much time defending Tolkien against these charges, I would be more concerned at the dull predictability of those who can only read through the filters of their divisive, self-aggrandising political causes. Such a politics will never constitute unity and community. Instead, they reproduce the very fractures we ought to be overcoming – they are power claims. Tolkien's books issue concerted warnings on the corrupting temptation and effect of power. It effects would-be liberators every bit as much as authoritarian oppressors, even more in that the emancipators act with such self-righteousness. Tolkien's warnings on power and his insistence on ethical humility within a carefully veiled doctrine of grace need to be taken seriously, now more than ever in a world fracturing into hostile camps between and within nations. Tolkien gives us an ethics of enchantment which is capable of healing the world, so long as we respond to its message, as we are supposed to.

"The work is ultimately a fiction about how desire for power – the kind of power that will make us safe, reverse injustices and avenge defeats – is a dream that can devour even the most decent. But it is also a fiction about how a bizarre tangle of confused human motivation, prosaic realism and unexpected solidarity and compassion can somehow contribute to fending off final disaster. Not quite a myth, but something of a mythic structure, and one that – in our current climate of political insanities and the resurgence of varieties of fascistic fantasy – we could do worse than think about."

Master of his universe: the warnings in JRR Tolkien's novels

<https://www.newstatesman.com/culture/books/2018/08/master-his-universe-warnings-jrr-tolkien-s-novels>

I'm seeing nothing but false idols and tottering thrones in the world, of all kinds and at all levels. A world dividing into leaders and follows without any kind of depth. I write on Lewis Mumford and reclaiming organic life against the mechanarchy of the Megamachine below. People are growing accustomed to living a push-button screen reality, with nothing below the surface. Such atoms are ripe for collectivisation, for

collective fictions and fantasies, precisely because they lack what it takes to join with others and constitute real community.

To put the point simply:

All concentrations of power are baneful, whether we look at this in political, economic, religious terms. Power, by its nature, does tend to concentrate. As Tolkien told us long ago: destroy the Ring! For fellowship's sake, refuse the temptations of power and learn the way of ethical humility. The hobbits used technology to support their way of life, not to change it. The hobbits considered their way of life to be so good that it didn't stand in need of changing. The hobbits didn't need 'progress,' since they didn't need to be going anywhere other than where they already were. The problem is that this is not where we are at the moment. We have been thrown out of our hobbit existence, our commons have been expropriated and enclosed. Our way of life is not good but disconnected; we are ill-at-ease and hence feel the need to change. We are misruled by the power of abstraction, our lives broken up by the tyranny and violence of abstract forces, concentrations of power that constitute external communities over against us, in the absence of our own. So where are we, then, in the balance between intervening and interweaving?

It is neither 'man' nor 'not man' that is the problem, Tolkien argues, but the 'man-made.' 'The machine' is a solution, one that we are most prone to opt for in the age of the Megamachine. But it is the wrong solution. 'The machine' entails the coercion of other minds and wills, domination, the tyrannous reformation of the Earth and of our place in it.

I laboured this point in my Marx studies of 2018 with respect to the triadic relation of humanity-labour/production-nature. It is not 'humanity' vs 'nature' (or vice versa as in some forms of deep ecology) that is the important question but the specific character of the mediating term. The alienating and abstracting tendencies and forces arise within the second order mediations in the realm of labour/production, that's where the temptations and concentrations of power arise, in both visible and invisible forms, as both institutional and systemic constraint extraneous to the human community. That's where we need to focus our practical moral efforts in recreating community.

Social Restitution and Metabolic Restoration in the Thought of Karl Marx

https://www.academia.edu/36925164/Social_Restitution_and_Metabolic_Restoration_in_the_Thought_of_Karl_Marx

An Introduction to the Thought of Istvan Meszaros

https://www.academia.edu/37197658/AN_INTRODUCTION_TO_THE_THOUGHT_OF_ISTVAN_MESZAROS_final.doc

These are explicitly socialist works. Tolkien is deeply conservative and devoutly Catholic. I respond to common themes and attempt to link them together in a consistent and coherent form. I may cite varied sources in my work, and this may confuse those who like straight lines, labels, and boxes. But the world is multi-layered and multi-faceted, and I try to link it all together. It all connects in the interweaving.

Tolkien engages in a little Elvish enchantment, the kind of enchantment that the world needs. The ultimate aim of the elves is not power but art. The Ring, the ultimate machine, was made for coercion. The only solution to the problem of power and the struggle for power is the destruction of the Ring. In the long run, it doesn't matter who gained the Ring - to coerce the world and others righteously, to good ends, is tyranny and is evil.

Tolkien is a wise man and I have a great admiration for his work. I know fine well that he said he wasn't a socialist of any kind - and I am a socialist, of a particular kind. I owe allegiance not to a symbol or a label, but to the living principle; I don't make a fetish of forms and I read Marx as a critic of the violence and tyranny of abstraction. I consistently attempt to root out abstraction, the idealization of things, insofar as these involve the etherealization of mind and matter bringing about the mechanization of human beings.

I like the notion of combining change and continuity through an interweaving, in contradistinction to an external institutional and moral interventionism. I see real

change as a matter of joining different elements together on the basis of commonality. Weaving is thus a matter of bridging the gaps to ensure that the different sites and sectors of society converge in concord around a common point. I like the idea of different elements revolving around that point. Interweaving is the art of connecting different threads, individuals, and organizations hitherto in discordant and antagonistic relation through isolation. I would set this interweaving within a commonwealth of life affirming the community and kinship of all things within a deeply interconnected ecosystem.

Only connect! urged T.S. Eliot. He may well have learned that lesson from the great Dante Alighieri, whose *Comedy* charts the progression from disconnection, soulless separation, and brutal cacophony in the Inferno to the reconciliation of all multiplicity in the oneness of God in the sweet symphony of Paradise.

I affirm the unity of the dream and the deed - here's to the deeds of the dreamweavers!

A recent article makes clear the extent to which Tolkien was opposed to racism and religious bigotry. Tolkien has been subject to criticisms over the years, certainly as a conservative, also as a reactionary. He had an evident dislike of technology. It is his moral views, specifically the fact that he embraced an overarching ethic in contradistinction to the liberal dissolution of values into mere value judgements. That renders Tolkien vulnerable to criticism. He is 'old-fashioned,' some claim. That is merely a benign way of dismissing his ethics. Other critics are far more aggressive. I addressed these in my book. I find views that Tolkien was racist and fascistic not merely wrong and misguided, but offensive, and most of all deeply disappointing. Disappointing because it reveals the extent to which how many bask in a moral shallowness. That will leave the world morally adrift, unable to successfully address the stresses and strains that are sure to come. There is a softness and corruption in the moral fabric.

But if it should need saying, then I'll say it: Tolkien was not a racist, he was a critic of racism. His criticism comes from a moral standpoint that is not the one of the modern world, and it is this that is the real source of critics' ire and antagonism.

In demonising orcs, the ugly, monstrous enemy of the elves, did JRR Tolkien betray a belief that “some races are worse than others”? That’s the debate that has been at the heart of claims in the British press recently accusing the Lord of the Rings author of harbouring racist views.

Was Tolkien really racist?

Short answer, no. But you will have to do the reading yourself here. I find the issue tedious and time-wasting, giving a permanent platform to people with agendas other than the truth of the matter to advance.

Tolkien, Race and Cultural History: From Fairies to Hobbits (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, November 2008)

Dr Dimitra Fini is worth reading at length on this:

“There are authors who write with a social or political agenda. And there are authors who don’t, but their worldview, beliefs and values are implicit in the texts they produce. I believe Tolkien’s racial prejudices are implicit in Middle-Earth, but his values – friendship, fellowship, altruism, courage, among many others – are explicit, which makes for a complex, more interesting world.

In *The Lord of the Rings*, Middle-Earth is a place where different “races” and peoples need to come together and cooperate to triumph over what is predominantly a moral foe. The scene where Sam Gamgee is looking at a dead foe, wondering whether he was truly evil, or just a fellow being coerced into war, is far from demonising the enemy or dehumanising the “other”. Such complexities are the reason some literary works continue to be read and have different meanings for new generations.”

The values of friendship, fellowship, altruism, courage are the ones stand out clearly in Tolkien, and I call it a fellowship of all living things. I think I know where the problems come here. Many others who affirm those values also see the ‘us and them’ associated with morality plays of good and evil as an anachronism. Here is where the key division lies. Tolkien sees the reality of evil, and he sees that there are

forces, recruiting among the living things of the world, that concentrate around power and coercion. I argue for co-operation. But it matters a great deal with whom we co-operate and to what end or ends. Tolkien's work is based on an ecology of good and evil. That may divide into 'good and evil,' but good and evil are realities that will not be addressed, let alone resolved, by bland affirmations of unity, interconnection, and fellowship. The problem with avoiding issues of 'us and them' is that you leave the power of the 'them' unchecked, and the unity of the 'us' constantly exposed to the reality of evil, coercion, division.

I have learned to be highly suspicious of the extent to which the narrative of interconnection has tended to be accompanied by a political and moral evasion. I understand the reasons for this 'third way' narrative, seeking to avoid the temptations of power and coercion. But there is a political naivety to this view that plays into the hands of the 'them' who govern the world.

John Dewey described the state as "a powerful instrumentality for ends as valuable as they are far-reaching," but warned of the need to avoid using this power in such a way that "the instrumentality becomes itself an end." This problem is not solved through the avoidance of politics, as though the necessary reorientation of values around interconnection and cooperation could take place without political action and organisation. Hence my concern to integrate interweaving and intervention. Dewey was not persuaded that this avoidance of political and instrumental considerations solved the problem, remarking that "not all who say Ideals, Ideals, shall enter the kingdom of the ideal, but those who know and who respect the roads that conduct to the kingdom."

Dewey is right, hence my emphasis on nurturing communities of character and communities of practice, clusters of virtuous communities that can secure the conditions for doing politics well, proceeding to scale upwards and outwards to ensure the virtuous transformation of 'the political.'

"There is no longer a virtuous nation, and the best of us live by candlelight."

-William Butler Yeats

A virtuous nation is composed of virtuous individuals living in place and proximity with purpose. I am committed to a democracy of place, personhood, and purpose as against the atomistic conception of the democracy of subjective opinion.

“Reinhabitation means learning to live-in-place in an area that has been disrupted and injured through past exploitation. It involves becoming native to a place through becoming aware of the particular ecological relationships that operate within and around it. It means understanding activities and evolving social behavior that will enrich the life of that place, restore its life-supporting systems, and establish an ecologically and socially sustainable pattern of existence within it.”

- Peter Berg and Raymond Dasmann

Rehabilitation is based upon relations and practices that are deeply rooted in community, custom, tradition. These are never fixed for all time, handed down and reproduced, but need always to be reimagined in the manner I have adumbrated above with respect to Tolkien. Rehabilitation is something that grows from a solidaristic practice that is rooted in life-giving, life-sustaining qualities of place.

But now dis-placement seems to be the height of technocratic wisdom. ‘Progress.’ Past ‘progress’ is always so bad that we are always in the process of having to go somewhere else. Tolkien referred to the “infernal combustion engine.” (He took the quote from Winston Churchill). He didn’t like the way that trains cut through the countryside, considering that people would be better remaining where they were or finding better ways of moving around, if move they must. It’s not so much the movement that is the problem – the obsession with speed – but the displacement. Displacement is the loss of the moral sense of place, a detachment from others, from social bonds, from culture as precious organic resources that have grown in proximal relations over time. The psychological and ecological impact of speed and disconnectedness, the assertion of pace over place, multiplied many times over by technology, industry, and population, has generated a nightmare scenario. Until 2014 I hardly moved around at all. I hadn’t had a holiday since the early 1980s. I don’t drive. I have rarely left my home town of St Helens. I was always intrigued by

the fact Immanuel Kant, a philosopher I studied in depth, never once left his home town of Konigsberg. Philosophers explore the inner landscapes, and can range widely in that terrain. But immediate surrounds can contain worlds within worlds within worlds, if you know how to look. But maybe philosopher is the ultimate introspection, for those for whom the inner landscapes are far more interesting than the outer. I do not travel much. And have found contentment in place. I like the familiar. I would suggest that humanity needs to figure out ways to reduce the need/want/external compulsion to move around in such large, and exponentially increasing, quantities. Instead of facilitating and extending means of transportation, the key challenge before us is to reduce the necessity to move as much as we do. I'd be happy as a hobbit. But therein lies the problem. Human beings are creatures who set themselves gratuitous problems, pressing beyond immediate needs, seeking and hypothesizing patterns of significance. We are makers as well as minders. We can deny or attempt to repress that all we like, on account of the problems it causes, but those problems won't go away as a result. We need to address problems rather than evade them with the promise of a workaround. Those promises are false and will break down in the interface of human reality. The quest for surplus meaning is the very thing that characterizes the human species. The hobbits lack imagination, Tolkien once said. Humans don't. The mental excess which afford human beings an evolutionary advantage over non-human animals also exposes the human species to danger. The "immense psychic overflow from man's cerebral reservoir" is the condition of his creativity, Lewis Mumford wrote, but it is also a source of non-adaptive and indeed irrational impulses. That's the human reality to address, and scientific knowledge and technological know-how is only a small part of the solution and, through a one-sided focus on them as the main part of the solution, involve us is the continuing descent into delusion.

Hence I return to my main theme: story-telling as truth-telling. We are not being asked to prove our knowledge and power through the technical manipulation of the external world (and of people). We have long since proven ourselves that way. We have shown ourselves to be a species with intelligence enough to develop systems and technologies capable of changing the world, but not the wisdom to use them to sustain ourselves healthily and happily in balance with the world. We are being

asked: What story are we to live by? What myth are we to live by? Or die by? Are we human beings? Or mere would-be Lord Saurons?

"One Ring to rule them all, One Ring to find them, One Ring to bring them all and in the darkness bind them."

The technological men of megamechanical/maniacal modernity – the one narrative to bind us all – are merely "ghosts clad in iron" (Lewis Mumford). We walk like ghosts in the mechanarchy.

For Mumford, the "myth of the machine" is and always has been the essential support of the megamachine. From the first, the modern mechanistic world-view was a faith which outran the empirical evidence, remaking the world in its own image. As against technique defined in terms of "the one best way," Mumford celebrates proliferous plenitude and multi-dimensionality. And he emphasises minding over making.

I must admit, in the oral defence of my thesis, I remember opening up with the line that "it is not power that corrupts, but the lack of power," before proceeding to argue for Marx's practical restitution of power from the alien forms to which it has been alienated (state and capital) and its reorganisation as a self-mediated social power - no alien concentrations there. It made Kantian philosopher Gary Banham laugh, "I'll have to remember that one." Power is a tricky thing. What is it? Some physical force? Some external thing to possess and use? An energy, a relation, a process? A natural growth - some Aristotelian flourishing based on essences ... I keep saying it, Marx was an essentialist, as we all are. There is an organic growth that is healthy and leads to flourishing well. Lose that - and we keep losing it - and we go headlong into the purposeless materialism of the Megamachine.

As a commentator in the video I posted above says, Tolkien struck a chord through certain themes repudiated by the livelier minds of the age. I'll argue against cynical reason, for the source and hope that Tolkien affirms.

The Maker of the Maker of Middle-earth

“Tolkien knew suffering intimately: losing his father as a young child and his mother as a boy, growing up in poverty. As a young man, his world was shattered by the First World War; he served on the front lines, and most of his close friends were killed. Yet he did not become embittered but rather embodied a joy that was all the more real for knowing its opposite. His writings bring delight to countless readers, and they do so in no small part because they spring from a thoroughly healthy and genuinely virtuous soul. In our weary, postmodern age, we are skeptical of heroes. We are chary of praising a man’s character and expect to be disappointed. Tolkien is a rebuke to our cynicism.”

He is no “saint” if by “saint” we mean someone who is perfect, but Tolkien’s life was one of quiet, yet heroic, virtue. A truly humble man with exceptional intellectual and artistic talents, he recognized that his own creativity was a gift from the Creator God, the ultimate Author and Artist. Only if we recognize Tolkien’s deep Christian faith can we hope to understand the life and work of the “Maker of Middle-earth.”

Traditionalist that he was, it seems Tolkien turned down the chance of The Beatles making *The Lord of the Rings*. He described the music of the beat groups as “indescribable.” Sounds like the tuneless mechanical noise of Dante's Inferno.

“in a house three doors away dwells a member of a group of young men who are evidently aiming to turn themselves into a Beatle Group. On days when it falls to his turn to have a practice session the noise is indescribable.”

He should have got the Monkees instead.

Why Tolkien Nixed a Beatles Lord of the Rings

Natural Anarchy

One of the great themes in my old political theory and political sociology classes at university was the clash between elite theory and democratic theory. Elite theory holds that politics is nothing but the circulation of elites, with history as the graveyard of aristocracies. The so-called plural democracies of the modern age are described by the likes of Schumpeter as regimes of competitive elitism in which organized minorities with particular agendas put themselves up for office and are chosen by an electorate whose role, once they have made their choices, is over. Democracy in this sense involves no more than the right on the part of the individuals composing the *demos* to choose which elites are to rule over them.

I've never cared for the doctrine. Politics does, however, seem to have been the realm of elites competing against each other for power, with the people as little more than passive by-standers. Against this I have made a consistent commitment to the democratisation of power, knowledge, and politics. It is by far the much harder option to take. Victory in politics does seem to continually go to active, organised, informed minorities. The view turned Marx's principle of self-emancipation on its head with the Leninist view of the revolutionary vanguard. Here, elitism replaced Marx's democratization. For elitists, Lenin is the realist and Marx the utopian here. It is a view that is smuggling its way into the environmental movement, with researchers in social movement theory arguing that only a 3.5% critical mass of the public allied to an organized political movement is required to effect great shifts. I don't have the studies to hand. I don't investigate any further for the simple reason I don't care at all for it. I am a trained historian. I studied history for years and years, did my first degree in it. The people who reason thus above strike me as strategists and engineers, the kind of people who, having finally understood that the emotions are important in interesting and moving people, engineer a strategy on the presumption that stimulating emotions is as easy as pushing buttons. I treat it all with contempt. And hostility. I see no genuine concern with the emotions, only the same manipulative intent.

I do argue for the concentration of power as opposed to trying to convert everyone to a cause, so to that extent my argument for building a mass constituency and mass movement is an argument for 'critical mass.' But I'll argue for 'mass' here along the

lines developed in my introduction to the thought of Istvan Meszaros. Such a notion is very different from the elites who prevail in elite theory.

I will stand by my view, even though my knowledge of history and politics tells me that active, organized vanguards are the ones that tend to prevail. I know they do. And I know also that the people continue to complain, continue to be on the receiving end of a bad politics, and continue to demand a new politics. I've never been one of the elites and have no interest at all in being one. I wince whenever at a political or social event I see the usual faces armed with their party cards issuing invitations to 'build the revolutionary party,' because I see the counter-revolution doing its work, choking off democratisation and canalising its energies into the old sterile forms. I've seen it sterilize left-wing politics my entire life, and I loathe it. Elitists make me bristle. What attracted me to Green politics were the principles of ecology, particularly the interconnection of all things. I was interested in the conception of interactive cooperation within integrated systems, the realization of a politics that was in tune with the way that nature actually functions. Such a politics is the very antithesis of competitive individualism and elitism, the thirst that some have for power over and against others. I argue for power with others. I believe that ecology still has the potential to live in accordance with these principles. I believe the error being made here is a result of being drawn into the bear-pit of politics and being transformed by its power struggles rather than transforming them. The key, as ever, is building that ancient bridge between contemplation and action, incarnating the transcendent truth of the ancients or the climate truth of the moderns in the practices of time and place. It's a delicate operation and one I have spent a lifetime trying to delineate.

The democracy I argue for is much more difficult to achieve than elitism, and has been a long time coming. But it is far better, and far more stable and enduring, and more worthwhile than the constant battles of elites which is leading civilization to a self-annihilation.

Is politics just about the bossing of the many by the few? Or is there yet some truth in the ancient notion of politics as creative human self-realization – all humans?

My views are increasingly those of Tolkien:

“My political opinions lean more and more to Anarchy (philosophically understood, meaning abolition of control not whiskered men with bombs) ... the most improper job of any man, even saints (who at any rate were at least unwilling to take it on), is bossing other men. Not one in a million is fit for it, and least of all those who seek the opportunity.”

- Tolkien, Letter to his son Christopher Tolkien (29 November, 1943)

There are other statements to this effect by others:

"To summarize: it is a well-known fact that those people who must want to rule people are, *ipso facto*, those least suited to do it. To summarize the summary: anyone who is capable of getting themselves made President should on no account be allowed to do the job.”

- Douglas Adams

“The whole problem with the world is that fools and fanatics are always so certain of themselves, and wiser people so full of doubts.”

-- Bertrand Russell

“The best lack all conviction, while the worst / Are full of passionate intensity.”

- W.B Yeats - The Second Coming

Which has been experimentally tested and demonstrated in the Dunning-Kruger effect. The first paragraph of that page says it all:

‘The Dunning–Kruger effect is a cognitive bias wherein unskilled individuals suffer from illusory superiority, mistakenly assessing their ability to be much higher than is accurate. This bias is attributed to a metacognitive inability of the unskilled to recognize their ineptitude. Conversely, highly skilled individuals tend to underestimate their relative competence, erroneously assuming that tasks which are easy for them are also easy for others.’

The cognitive bias of illusory superiority results from an internal illusion in people of low ability and from an external misperception in people of high ability; that is, "the miscalibration of the incompetent stems from an error about the self, whereas the miscalibration of the highly competent stems from an error about others."

Kruger, Justin; Dunning, David (1999). "Unskilled and Unaware of It: How Difficulties in Recognizing One's Own Incompetence Lead to Inflated Self-Assessments". *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. 77 (6): 1121–1134.

The problem is that no elite which is humble in thought and action, openly considering that it may be mistaken, is likely to survive long against its less-than-humble rivals for power. No wonder we always seem to be governed by sociopaths.

I will continue to try and break the constraints of all theoretico-elitist models in knowledge, power, and politics.

It is one thing just to use the earth: it is quite another thing to receive the blessing of the earth and to become at home in the law of this reception, in order to shepherd the mystery of being and to pay attention to the inviolability of the possible.

- Martin Heidegger

I'm reading this article on the real Benedict Option

'As I returned to work, I was faced with a question: what will my students benefit more from? Me trying to "make a difference" in their lives by coming up with the perfect lesson, the perfect solution to their problems, or me obeying reality—paying attention to them and putting more effort into the little details of planning my lessons.

I decided to follow the latter option, knowing it's the one Benedict would've chosen. I hesitated at first, knowing that this option would imply a risk. If I give

up my idea of the perfect lesson or solution, I have to abandon myself to the will of Someone other than me...Someone who is mysterious and unpredictable. I was letting go of control...little did I know the freedom I would gain from this risk.'

The need for control is a neurotic response to a lack of power in a world governed by concentrations of power. Freedom in any meaningful, fulfilling sense consists in surrender, a letting go in order to embrace something greater than the ego in a world of interdependence.

'I came to the conclusion that my "big ideas," as exciting as they may seem in the moment, never stand the test of time. Following Benedict's method of obedience to the little details God placed in front of him was much more effective and satisfying. Perhaps this is why his charism continues to impact the world 1500 years after the fact. His method was rooted in his trust in God, and not in his schemes of "changing the world."'

The Real Benedict Option by Stephen G. Aduvato

I agree very much. The problem is that such an attitude comes with the considerable demerit of leaving the world in the hands of the neurotic power worshippers and controllers.

'The news today about "Atomic bombs" is so horrifying one is stunned. The utter folly of these lunatic physicists to consent to do such work for war-purposes: calmly plotting the destruction of the world! Such explosives in men's hands, while their moral and intellectual status is declining, is about as useful as giving out firearms to all inmates of a gaol and then saying that you hope "this will ensure peace". But one good thing may arise out of it, I suppose, if the write-ups are not overheated: Japan ought to cave in. Well we're in God's hands. But He does not look kindly on Babel-builders.'

- Tolkien, No. 102: From a letter to his son Christopher Tolkien (9 August, 1945)

And neither do I. and I'm not the only one. That leaves us with the challenge of stopping the Babel-builders as they carry on with their mad schemes to take and keep control for themselves, destroying the world in the process.

'Power' is an ominous and sinister word in all these tales, except as applied to the gods.

- Tolkien, No. 131: letter to Milton Waldman (c. 1951)

How to contest power with humility; how to retribute power to its sources without becoming power idolaters ourselves.

I shall end here with a few more words continuing the theme of literary ecology developed in my most recent posts.

“Blessed are the legend-makers with their rhyme of things not found within recorded time.”

“A story must be told or there'll be no story, yet it is the untold stories that are most moving.”

- Tolkien, Letter to his son Christopher (30 January 1945) — in *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien* (1981), p. 110

We need to learn what Tolkien meant by the right of subcreation within Creation. Tolkien held that “all tales may come true” on account of the subcreative link between human and divine making. For Tolkien, the highest function of human art lies in the creation of convincing secondary worlds; this is a subcreation in which the human maker imagines God's world in and after the act of making, just as Johannes Kepler considered that he was thinking God's thoughts after him in his astronomical endeavours. In a poem addressed to C. S. Lewis, Tolkien wrote of the human power to imagine both good and evil:

“Though all the crannies of the world we filled with Elves and Goblins, though we dared to build Gods and their houses out of dark and light and sowed the seed of dragons, ‘twas our right (used or misused). The right has not decayed. We make still by the law in which we’re made.”

It’s all a fairy story, will come the dismissive voice of those raised in the positivist age. That that age stands on the eve of destruction suggests to me it needs to be a lot less proud with respect to what it claims to know (and can be known) and a lot more humble with respect to what it doesn’t.

The act of subcreation incites the moral imagination and draws readily on both the subconscious and conscious resources of the mind. Tolkien considered this to be particularly true with respect to language. Language, he argues, is something that embraces and infuses the whole person; language is intimately connected to the being of a person as a whole, something much greater than the mind.

Powerful archetypes and universal themes are incarnated in the human art and making that constitutes the act of subcreation; the transcendent truths that exist at a level of abstraction in thought thus take concrete, particular and definite form in the invented world. And there they live, and there they need to live. In being analysed, they die. Positivism is the age of death:

“Myth is alive at once and in all its parts, and dies before it can be dissected.”

“The significance of a myth is not easily to be pinned on paper by analytical reasoning.”

Universal truths take form as myth whilst nevertheless preserving their qualities as truths. In their material incarnation they retain their independence as transcendent truth. Successful story-telling thus generates joy in the tasting of a grace that is given from a realm beyond the subcreated world. Tolkien considered the craft of the storyteller not only to be a gift and a blessing, but to be a skilled “making” when used for good. Frodo’s words to the hobbit Sam Gamgee make it clear that Tolkien valued Sam’s ability as a gardener and a forester as well as a storyteller:

“Your hands and your wits will be needed everywhere. You will be the Mayor, of course, as long as you want to be, and the most famous gardener in history; and you will read things out of the Red Book, and keep alive the memory of the age that is gone, so that people will remember the Great Danger and so love their beloved land all the more. And that will keep you as busy and as happy as anyone can be, as long as your part of the Story goes on.”

The imagination is truly the enemy of bigotry and dogma

In Praise of Ursula Le Guin

“I think hard times are coming, when we will be wanting the voices of writers who can see alternatives to how we live now, and can see through our fear-stricken society and its obsessive technologies, to other ways of being. And even imagine some real grounds for hope. We will need writers who can remember freedom: poets, visionaries — the realists of a larger reality. Right now, I think we need writers who know the difference between production of a market commodity and the practice of an art.

The profit motive is often in conflict with the aims of art. We live in capitalism. Its power seems inescapable; so did the divine right of kings. ... Power can be resisted and changed by human beings; resistance and change often begin in art, and very often in our art—the art of words. I’ve had a long career and a good one, in good company, and here, at the end of it, I really don’t want to watch American literature get sold down the river. ... The name of our beautiful reward is not profit. Its name is freedom.”

Ursula K. Le Guin, famed science fiction author, dead at 88

Ursula Le Guin’s Viral Video: “We Will Need Writers Who Can Remember Freedom”

<https://billmoyers.com/2014/12/27/ursula-le-guin-will-need-writers-can-remember-freedom/>

It's worth remembering, too, the critical resources we have for envisaging the future society. Ursula Le Guin sings the praises for the social ecology of Murray Bookchin. Bookchin got caught up in a lot of controversies and polemics in the 1980s and his reputation suffered as a result. That's unfortunate. He saw the dangers of a certain kind of ecology becoming the new dismal science, sapping the will and diverting minds into obscurantism and worse. He held firm to reason, public life and democracy, redeeming the radical potential of the Enlightenment (in the tradition of the left republicanism of a Spinoza, so much more substantial than the tepid liberal 'defence' of the desolidarised atomism of the present day). (I'd just say, leave something over for anarchic excess, a little something that escapes a totalizing Reason, something core that evades enclosure ... that bit that Wittgenstein was silent on, the bit he thought the most meaningful. The 'active life process' is more than a 'collection of dead facts', as Marx put it in *The German Ideology*, and a whole lot more than the 'realism' that Le Guin castigated.

In a 2012 polemic, "*Lying It All Away*," Le Guin wrote scathingly of "growth capitalism" returning to its origins and "providing security for none but the strongest profiteers." She notes that "I have watched my country accept, mostly quite complacently, along with a lower living standard for more and more people, a lower moral standard. A moral standard based on advertising." Can America, she wonders, continue "living on spin and illusion, hot air and hogwash, and still be my country?" "I don't know," she replies. After all, our country is now run by corporations "of which Congress is an almost wholly owned subsidiary."

Are we up for the socio-ecological transformation of the political so as to constitute a public sphere worthy of the name? Ursula Le Guin thought highly of Murray Bookchin. And so do I. He was onto the ecological as well as the social contradictions of the capital system from the very start of the 1960s (and reading Marx at the moment, so too was he, in his notion of metabolic rift. If you are serious about system change and a future beyond not merely the institutions of the capital system but the very logic of capital ...).

Writer, science fiction icon and radical thinker Ursula K. Le Guin endorses Murray Bookchin's latest collection of essays, *The Next Revolution: Popular Assemblies and the Promise of Direct Democracy*.

'Murray Bookchin spent a lifetime opposing the rapacious ethos of grow-or-die capitalism. The nine essays in *The Next Revolution* represent the culmination of that labor: the theoretical underpinning for an egalitarian and directly democratic ecological society, with a practical approach for how to build it. Murray Bookchin was a true son of the Enlightenment in his respect for clear thought and moral responsibility and in his honest, uncompromising search for a realistic hope.'

Murray Bookchin "was a true son of the Enlightenment" - Ursula K. Le Guin reflects on *The Next Revolution*

Yet, Le Guin argues, young people continue to look for "intelligent, realistic, long-term thinking: not another ranting ideology, but a practical working hypothesis, a methodology of how to regain control of where we're going." She notes that Bookchin does indeed address this question of "where we're going":

"Impatient, idealistic readers may find him uncomfortably tough-minded. He's unwilling to leap over reality to dreams of happy endings, unsympathetic to mere transgression pretending to be political action: "A 'politics' of disorder or 'creative chaos,' or a naïve practice of 'taking over the streets' (usually little more than a street festival), regresses participants to the behavior of a juvenile herd." That applies more to the Summer of Love, certainly, than to the Occupy movement, yet it is a permanently cogent warning."

Le Guin turns this warning towards the subject of ecological degradation:

"What all political and social thinking has finally been forced to face is, of course, the irreversible degradation of the environment by unrestrained industrial capitalism: the enormous fact of which science has been trying for

fifty years to convince us, while technology provided us ever greater distractions from it. Every benefit industrialism and capitalism have brought us, every wonderful advance in knowledge and health and communication and comfort, casts the same fatal shadow. All we have, we have taken from the earth; and, taking with ever-increasing speed and greed, we now return little but what is sterile or poisoned.

Ursula LeGuin on Murray Bookchin

Ursula K. Le Guin on the Future of the Left

'Either we will establish an ecological society or society will go under for everyone, irrespective of his or her status.'

Deep and enduring transitions and transformations require an actively democratic and social content.

"Capitalism's grow-or-die imperative stands radically at odds with ecology's imperative of interdependence and limit. The two imperatives can no longer coexist with each other; nor can any society founded on the myth that they can be reconciled hope to survive. Either we will establish an ecological society or society will go under for everyone, irrespective of his or her status."

—Murray Bookchin

"What all political and social thinking has finally been forced to face is, of course, the irreversible degradation of the environment by unrestrained industrial capitalism: the enormous fact of which science has been trying for fifty years to convince us, while technology provided us ever greater distractions from it. Every benefit industrialism and capitalism have brought us, every wonderful advance in knowledge and health and communication and comfort, casts the same fatal shadow. All we have, we have taken from the earth; and, taking with ever-increasing speed and greed, we now return little but what is sterile or poisoned."

"Murray Bookchin spent a lifetime opposing the rapacious ethos of grow-or-die capitalism. The nine essays in "The Next Revolution" represent the culmination

of that labor: the theoretical underpinning for an egalitarian and directly democratic ecological society, with a practical approach for how to build it. He critiques the failures of past movements for social change, resurrects the promise of direct democracy and, in the last essay in the book, sketches his hope of how we might turn the environmental crisis into a moment of true choice—a chance to transcend the paralyzing hierarchies of gender, race, class, nation, a chance to find a radical cure for the radical evil of our social system."

It's sad to have lost someone so eloquent, someone with vision, but we still have her words, and they are very pertinent to the world we live in. In her writing she has raised questions concerning capitalism, the environment and gender that are interlinked and will grow more and more pressing in the years to come.

China Miéville described her as "one of American literature's most radical voices". We need that voice. 'I've always been something of a socialist in politics,' she said, 'that's extremely radical over here.' She got to the roots of things. And she was right about the imagination: 'My books have been banned simply because they are imaginative - science-fiction, fantasy, what have you. The imagination is considered dangerous and of course, it is. These people are right. The imagination is truly the enemy of bigotry and dogma.'

I love how she affirmed imaginative literature as the oldest kind of storytelling. She challenged the domination of a certain kind of 'realism.' 'If it was realistic it was inherently better than anything imaginative and therefore the silliest realist was better than Tolkien. Well, it just, it won't wash, as we say.' Exactly!

At the 2014 National Book Awards, Le Guin was given the Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters. I like that she accepted the medal on behalf of her fellow writers of fantasy and science fiction, all those who had been "excluded from literature for so long" whilst the literary honours went to the "so-called realists."

From her speech:

‘Thank you Neil, and to the givers of this beautiful reward, my thanks from the heart. My family, my agent, editors, know that my being here is their doing as well as mine, and that the beautiful reward is theirs as much as mine. And I rejoice at accepting it for, and sharing it with, all the writers who were excluded from literature for so long, my fellow authors of fantasy and science fiction—writers of the imagination, who for the last 50 years watched the beautiful rewards go to the so-called realists.’

Talking of Tolkien, I love Tolkien, and have written at length on his work, even though I am a socialist and he makes a point of saying that he, as a conservative, is not. Ursula was influenced by Tolkien, most clearly in the *Earthsea* cycle. But if I had to point to a difference here, I’d say it is this: whereas Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* presents us with a geography of good and evil, the world as a battleground between contending forces who have to go to war and fight the issue out, Ursula Le Guin’s stories concern a search for an internal “balance” among competing forces that, when balance is found, complement each other, a view she took from her lifelong study of Taoism. I like that view. Her writing embodies that search for balance alongside a need for compassion.

Much of Ursula’s writing and wisdom derives from her long standing study of Taoism. She was responsible for a new translation of the *Tao Te Ching*.

Tao Te Ching by Lao Tzu - new English version by Ursula Le Guin, Shambhala Publications, 1997.

In the footnotes, Le Guin uses 'anarchists' twice to identify the correlation between Taoism and Anarchism.

“Lao Tzu, a mystic, demystifies political power. Autocracy and oligarchy foster the beliefs that power is gained magically and retained by sacrifice, and that powerful people are genuinely superior to the powerless. Lao Tzu does not see political power as magic. He sees rightful power as earned and wrongful power as usurped. He does not see power as virtue, but as the result of virtue. The democracies are founded on that view. He sees sacrifice of self or others as a

corruption of power, and power as available to anybody who follows the Way. This is a radically subversive attitude. No wonder anarchists and Taoists make good friends.”

Footnote to Chap 13 (pages 16-17):

“About Lao Tzu ...I don't think he is exactly anti-intellectual, but he considers most uses of the intellect to be pernicious, and all plans for improving things to be disastrous. Yet he's not a pessimist. No pessimist would say that people are able to look after themselves, be just, and prosper on their own. No anarchist can be a pessimist.”

Footnote to Chap 57 (pages 74-75):

She goes into the depths. Without the dark, there is no light: and it is the fact of mortality that allows all that is alive to be. She goes into fear, pride and envy, our shadow selves, concealed, which ever threaten to devour us from within. Lives that are messy, often broken, but very real, and capable of fullness.

On a personal note, I've always loved books. When asked about my favourite book or which book/s have influenced me most, I struggle to answer. All of them! I'm inclined to say. Ursula makes precisely that point: 'They say 'Tell us about the book that influenced you most'. Everything I ever read! It all goes into me, it's like food. Tell me about the meal that nourished you most? I can't do it! I eat books and so of course they become part of me.' I know exactly what she means, that's such a great comment from her.

She draws us into what she called the 'inner lands' of the imagination, making a powerful statement for words and writing serving as a moral force in the world. I agree very much. “If you cannot or will not imagine the results of your actions, there's no way you can act morally or responsibly. Little kids can't do it; babies are morally monsters — completely greedy. Their imagination has to be trained into foresight

and empathy.” She saw her “pleasant duty” as a writer being to ply the reader’s imagination with “the best and purest nourishment that it can absorb.”

“The sound of the language is where it all begins. The test of a sentence is, Does it sound right?” “Machoman is afraid of our terms, which are not all rational, positive, competitive, etc. And so he has taught us to despise and deny them. In our society, women have lived, and have been despised for living, the whole side of life that includes and takes responsibility for helplessness, weakness, and illness, for the irrational and the irreparable, for all that is obscure, passive, uncontrolled, animal, unclean — the valley of the shadow, the deep, the depths of life.” “The way to make something good is to make it well.” “Go on and do your work. Do it well. It is all you can do.”

—from *A Wizard of Earthsea*.”

URSULA K. LE GUIN’S BEST LIFE ADVICE

“Imagination, working at full strength, can shake us out of our fatal, adoring self-absorption,” she has written, “and make us look up and see—with terror or with relief—that the world does not in fact belong to us at all.” Imaginative literature, she has written, asks us “to allow that our perception of reality may be incomplete, our interpretation of it arbitrary or mistaken.” In her fiction, she has tried to balance the analytical and the intuitive. “Both directions strike me as becoming more and more sterile the farther you follow them,” she says. “It’s when they can combine that you get something fertile and living and leading forward. Mysticism—which is a word my father held in contempt, basically—and scientific factualism, need for evidence, and so on . . . I do try to juggle them, quite consciously.”

The Fantastic Ursula K. Le Guin

The literary mainstream once relegated her work to the margins. Then she transformed the mainstream.

Odo wrote:

'A child free from the guilt of ownership and the burden of economic competition will grow up with the will to do what needs doing and the capacity for joy in doing it. It is useless work that darkens the heart. The delight of the nursing mother, of the scholar, of the successful hunter, of the good cook, of the skilful maker, of anyone doing needed work and doing it well, - this durable joy is perhaps the deepest source of human affection and of sociality as a whole.

From Ursula Le Guin's *The Dispossessed*, Page 207

Unbuilding Walls

"Those who build walls are their own prisoners. I'm going to go fulfil my proper function in the social organism. I'm going to go and unbuild walls."

Shevek from Ursula Le Guin's *The Dispossessed*

This is what Ursula Le Guin said with respect to *The Dispossessed* in the introduction to *The Day Before the Revolution*, a short story written in memoriam to the anarchist, Paul Goodman:

"My novel 'The Dispossessed' is about a small world full of people who call themselves Odonians. The name is taken from the founder of their society, Odo, who lived several generations before the time of the novel, and who therefore doesn't get into the action - except implicitly, in that all the action started with her.

Odonianism is anarchism. Not the bomb-in-the-pocket stuff, which is terrorism, whatever name it tries to dignify itself with, not the social Darwinist economic 'libertarianism' of the far right, but anarchism as pre- figured in early Taoist thought, and expounded by Shelley and Kropotkin, Goldman and Goodman. Anarchism's principal target is the authoritarian state (capitalist or socialist); its principal moral-practical theme is cooperation (solidarity, mutual aid). It is the most idealistic, and to me the most interesting, of all political theories."

The Day Before the Revolution is a story about the reflections of an old revolutionary, and how she copes with her ideas on freedom and responsibility now being realized. It describes lost expectations and hopes, the despair of old age and the bond between herself and the people from the streets she is one with. The story itself acts as a definition of a communitarian or socialist anarchism, defining the anarchist one who freely chooses and who accepts the responsibility of choice.

“Who is an anarchist? One who, choosing, accepts the responsibility of choice.”

The Dispossessed offers an analysis of individuals living under different political systems, going on to give a detailed description of life in an anarchist society and the ways in which problems are addressed. A few quotes give an idea of the philosophy, life, and organization of society on Anarres:

“Decentralization had been an essential element in Odo's plans for the society she did not live to see founded. She had no intention of trying to de-urbanize civilization. Though she suggested that the natural limit to the size of a community lay in its dependence on its own immediate region for essential food and power, she intended that all communities be connected by communication and transport networks, so that goods and ideas could get where they were wanted, and the administration of things might work with speed and ease and no community should be cut off from change and interchange. But the network was not to be run from the top down. There was to be no controlling centre, no capital, no establishment for the self-perpetuating machinery of bureaucracy and the dominance-drive of individuals seeking to become captains, bosses, chief's of state.”

But this ideal view of an anarchist society was not to be the reality in practice.

“There had to be a centre. The computers that coordinated the administration of things, the division of labour and the distribution of goods, and the central federatives of most of the work syndicates, were in Abbenay, right from the start. And from the start the settlers were aware that the unavoidable centralization was a lasting threat, to be countered by lasting vigilance.”

A lack of vigilance causing the steady growth of a bureaucratic elite forms the background to this story on Anarres. Toward the end of the story, Shevek, the principal character, sums up his experiences of capitalism on Urras:

“... there is nothing here but States and their weapons, the rich and their lies, and the poor and their misery. There is no way to act rightly, with a clear heart, on Urras. There is nothing you can do that profit does not enter in, and fear of loss, and the wish for power. You cannot say good morning without knowing which of you is 'superior' to the other, or trying to prove it. You cannot act like a brother to other people, you must manipulate them, or command them, or obey them, or trick them. You cannot touch another person - yet they will not leave you alone. There is no freedom. It is a box - Urras is a box, a package, with all the beautiful wrappings of blue sky and meadows and forests and great cities. And you open the box, and, what is inside it? A black cellar full of dust, and a dead man. A man whose hand was shot off because he held it out to others. I have been in Hell at last.”

When Shevek returns to Anarres he brings with him a Hainishman (from the planet Hain) and emphasizes the responsibilities of an anarchist. We are responsible to you and you to us, you become an Anarresti - with the same options as all the others. But they are not safe options. Freedom is never very safe. But it is possible, through a proper understanding of 'choice' and 'responsibility', and how these things that are necessary to a truly human life are given content and meaning only through the practical reappropriation of social power from the alienated forms and systems in which they have been incarnated.

“Le Guin writes in quiet, straightforward sentences about people who feel they are being torn apart by massive forces in society— technological, political, economic— and who fight courageously to remain whole.” —The New York Times Book Review

“Like all great writers of fiction, Ursula K. Le Guin creates imaginary worlds that restore us, hearts eased, to our own.” —The Boston Globe

Once you have learned to do your dreaming wide awake, to balance your sanity not on the razor's edge of reason but on the double support, the fine balance, of reason and dream; once you have learned that, you cannot unlearn it any more than you can unlearn to think.

Ursula Le Guin, *The Word for World is Forest*

A realist is a man who knows both the world and his own dreams.

Ursula Le Guin, *The Word for World is Forest*

The Light Within

To see things as they really are, the eye must catch fire. In fact, there needs to be a full sensuous awakening.

‘Unless the eye catch fire, The God will not be seen
Unless the ear catch fire, The God will not be heard
Unless the tongue catch fire, The God will not be named
Unless the heart catch fire, The God will not be loved
Unless the mind catch fire, The God will not be known.’

William Blake, *Pentecost*

The practicality, the awakening, of the life of the soul on fire. Blake ‘got it’. The awakening to the aliveness of life.

‘If poems touch our full humanness, can they quicken awareness and bolster respect for this ravaged resilient earth we live on? Can poems help, when the times demand environmental science and history, government leadership, corporate and consumer moderation, non-profit activism, local initiatives?’

Yes!

The pleasures of literature and poetry are integral parts of the all-out response we need.

In *The Song of the Earth*, writer and Shakespearean scholar Jonathan Bate made the eye-catching claim that poetry could save the world. Our world, that is, the human world. Of no concern to nature itself. But of interest to us, I think. The planet will go on for as long as the sun continues to shine. We, on the other hand, are in need of some inspiration to keep us going.

And there is inspiration aplenty in the work of William Blake. Blake wrote this about his poetic visions:

‘I rest not from my great task! To open the Eternal Worlds, to open the immortal Eyes Of Man inwards into the Worlds of Thought: into Eternity Ever expanding in the Bosom of God, the Human Imagination.’

Blake is rejecting the flatlands of a one-dimensional rationality, incorporating the single vision within the fourfold whole, embracing the naturalistic within the sacred, the world as a spiritual whole.

In his *Defence of Poetry*, Shelley argued that ‘poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.’

Which reminds me of a story about Ludwig Wittgenstein. The logical positivists, who made the bits and pieces atomism of the mechanistic age the height of philosophical virtue, claimed Wittgenstein as one of their own. His *Tractatus* became the textbook of the Vienna Circle. Wittgenstein’s own reaction to them was cool. Moritz Schlick, their leader, sort contact with Wittgenstein. ‘To persuade Wittgenstein to attend these meetings Schlick had to assure him that the discussion would not have to be philosophical; he could discuss whatever he liked. Sometimes, to the surprise of his audience, Wittgenstein would turn his back on them and read poetry. In particular –

as if to emphasize to them, as he had earlier explained to von Ficker, that what he had not said in the *Tractatus* was more important than what he had – he read them the poems of Rabindranath Tagore ... whose poems express a mystical outlook diametrically opposed to that of the members of Schlick's circle' (Monk 1990: 243).

The poetry of Earth is never dead ... - John Keats.

Another great figure from literature, E.M. Forster, saw the encroachment of the machine and of mechanical modes of thought, and feared the consequences in terms of an increasing deracination, displacement, ugliness, the 'red rust' of the industrial wasteland creeping into the countryside. (*Howard's End* p 355). For Forster, this ugliness denoted the loss of love and affection from place, the investing of hopes in a purposeless materialism abstracted from place.

Forster's *Howards End* is a powerful statement against materialist reductionism and the megamachine that it builds, supports and rationalizes:

'It is the vice of a vulgar mind to be thrilled by bigness, to think that a thousand square miles are a thousand times more wonderful than one square mile . . . That is not imagination. No, it kills it. . . . Your universities? Oh, yes, you have learned men who collect . . . facts, and facts, and empires of facts. But which of them will rekindle the light within?'

Forster *Howard's End* p 30

That light within, I take to be affection, intuition, the inner light of spiritual liberty. Human beings are not just reasoning beings but sensing, feeling, and intuiting beings who come alive in response to the sensuous world that enfolds and sustains them. Turn the world into an objective, external datum to be dissected, analysed and theorised, and we get the megamachine – a world enclosed in instrumental reason. A world that extinguishes the inner light. We could possibly survive in that external landscape, but we would assuredly die in the inner landscape.

In *The Machine Stops*, E.M. Forster took the technocratic utopia and turned it inside out. In this book Forster describes a future world state in which the surface of the earth has been abandoned and humanity lives underground. Individuals live alone in identical rooms, each in connection with all through television contact. 'The Machine' supplies every need at the push of a button. It is a world of synthetic food, synthetic clothing, synthetic culture ... of synthetic human beings who do no work. On the odd occasion when individuals leave their rooms, they are conveyed on moving platforms and airships. The minds of these individuals have become passive and receptive, their bodies have become torpid and feeble. It is a world which is all quantity and which is wholly lacking in the qualitative dimension supplied by the human factor. The earth unified by 'the Machine', which has long escaped human control and comprehension and has come to be venerated as a supra-human force:

"The Machine," they exclaimed, "feeds us and clothes us and houses us; through it we speak to one another, through it we see one another, in it we have our being. The Machine is the friend of ideas and the enemy of superstition: the Machine is omnipotent, eternal; blessed is the Machine."

It is time to heed the warning that many writers have delivered since the nineteenth century. The suffocation of human beings by the structures they have built derives from an alienated system of production which turns human creations against human creators and invests them with existential significance. That suffocating alienation is *incorporated* into the things of the built environment.

"Cannot you see, cannot all you lecturers see, that it is we that are dying, and that down here the only thing that really lives is the Machine? We created the Machine, to do our will, but we cannot make it do our will now. It has robbed us of the sense of space and of the sense of touch, it has blurred every human relation and narrowed down love to a carnal act, it has paralyzed our bodies and our wills, and now it compels us to worship it. The Machine develops – but not on our lives. The Machine proceeds – but not to our goal. We only exist as the blood corpuscles that course through its arteries, and if it could work without us, it would let us die."

E.M. Forster, *The Machine Stops*

We risk becoming orphans of our technology, being made homeless in a world of our own making. In fact, we already have been disinherited and displaced, the disembodied mind cut off from the sensuous world creating a machine would cut off from the sources of life.

The green belt in my own industrial town of St Helens is now being opened up for 'development' – 'jobs, growth and investment' (the very priorities that created the industrial wasteland in the first place).

'Now is the time' to use green belt for development, says senior councillor

Cllr Fulham added: "This is the first time that Green Belt land has been released in St Helens, and now is the time. If we do not capture and shape the growth open to us then the investment, jobs and homes will go elsewhere and in these volatile times that's not a price worth paying."

http://www.sthelensstar.co.uk/news/14918374.____Now_is_the_time____to_use_green_belt_for_development__says_senior_councillor/

A couple of years ago now, St Helens returned to its old motto of 'Out of the Earth came Light'. This return had nothing to do with rekindling 'the light within'; it was a celebration of the town's coal mining heritage born of desperation for the return of industrial jobs long since gone. 'It gives us hope for the future', one person said. Out of the earth came a whole lot of global warming, was my response.

The sorry tale is here: *Flourish Well or Abandon Hope*

<http://pcritchley2.wixsite.com/beingandplace/single-post/2013/01/24/Flourish-Well-or-Abandon-Hope>

And I'll stand by every word of scorn and contempt I uttered there, and pity the desperate people clinging to false hopes, so impoverished in their imagination that they have no better vision of the future than working at the coal-face, regardless of social and ecological consequences.

D.H. Lawrence, son of a miner, saw not 'progress' in industrialisation, only ugliness.

'The real tragedy of England, as I see it, is the tragedy of ugliness. The country is so lovely: the man-made England is so vile— It was ugliness which betrayed the spirit of man, in the nineteenth century. The great crime which the moneyed classes and promoters of industry committed in the palmy Victorian days was the condemning of the workers to ugliness, ugliness, ugliness: meanness and formless and ugly surroundings, ugly ideals, ugly religion, ugly hope, ugly love, ugly clothes, ugly furniture, ugly houses, ugly relationship between workers and employers. The human soul needs actual beauty even more than bread.'

D.H. Lawrence, Nottinghamshire and the Mining Countryside, *Late Essays and Articles*, vol 2

'The blackened brick dwellings, the black slate roofs glistening their sharp edges, the mud black with coal-dust, the pavements wet and black. It was as if dismalness had soaked through and through everything. The utter negation of natural beauty, the utter negation of the gladness of life, the utter absence of the instinct for shapely beauty which every bird and beast has, the utter death of the human intuitive faculty was appalling. What could possibly become of such a people, a people in whom the living intuitive faculty was dead as nails, and only queer mechanical yells and uncanny will power remained?'

'Merrie England! Shakespeare's England! No, but the England of today ... It was producing a new race of mankind, over-conscious in the money and social and political side, on the spontaneous, intuitive side dead – but dead! Half-corpses, all of them: but with a terrible insistent consciousness in the other half ... Ah, God, what has man done to man? What have the leaders of men been doing to their fellow men? They have reduced them to less than humanness; and now there can be no fellowship anymore! It is just a nightmare.'

D.H. Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*

An authentic freedom requires a recognition of limits and boundaries, the bonds we

have with others and with nature. To the extent that human beings are natural beings, we function and flourish in accordance with the laws of nature, one such law being that the health of anything depends upon an appreciation of limits, others involving recognising recognition of purpose, interdependence ... Modern men and women have bought into the seductive lie that freedom involves a life without restraint, that a life of freely determined choices and satisfaction of desires is good, and that there can be no negative consequences from such a freedom. Addicted to the pursuit of a freedom defined in such libertarian terms, 'free' individuals have come to be enslaved by the negative consequences of the actions, becoming mere cogworkers in a purposeless mechanical order.

'Men are free when they belong to a living, organic, believing community, active in fulfilling some unfulfilled, perhaps unrealized purpose.'

That word 'purpose' again, the word that keeps cropping up in all my favourite writers. We have been living in an age of purposeless materialism, and it shows.

Forster wrote well on Lawrence:

'His dislike of civilisation was not a pose ... He hated it fundamentally, because it has made human beings conscious, and society mechanical. Like Blake and the other mystics, he condemns the intellect with its barren chains of reasoning and its dead weights of information; he even hates self-sacrifice and love. What does he approve of? What does he approve of? Well, the very word 'approve' would make him hiss with rage, it is so smooth and smug, but he is certainly seeking the forgotten wisdom, as he has called it; he would like instinct to re-arise and connect men by ways now disused ...'

From Wilfred Stone, *The Cave and the Mountain: A Study of E. M. Forster*

Isn't it obvious that we will never get change, real change for the better, unless we rekindle 'the light within?' That social movements seeking to transform the human world need a vision that inspires effort, motivates actions, unites and obligates people in a common cause? Scientific knowledge of the factual world allied to the

technical know-how for manipulating matter on or about the world's surface gives people the ability to do things; it doesn't make them *want* to do things. That is a matter of addressing motivations and creating the will, inspiring, turning on the inner light. That's the great insight of peerless poet-philosopher Dante Alighieri, when he describes how his 'desire and will' were 'turned' and 'moved' 'by the Love that moves the sun and the other stars.' (Dante, *The Comedy, Paradiso* 33.143-45). We had better understand just what it is that has the power to do that. I'll tell you what doesn't - the new idols of capital, money, commodities, nation states, bureaucratic power, external regulation, legislation - all born of despair, the despair of half-corpses who see no option but to take the bribe and go further down the road of 'progress' and its false prospectus.

There is hope, in true Love, in coming to touch the earth as new again. Dante again:

'By such a curse as theirs none is so lost that the eternal Love cannot return as long as hope maintains a thread of green.

Dante *Purgatorio* III 133-135

We need to put the worlds of fact and value, quantity and quality back together, generate a world view that integrates reason with our other faculties so that thinking, sensing, feeling, and intuiting work in tandem in the one responsive body. Come out of the despair of the economics of endless accumulation of material quantity, and start working within the motivational economy, the moral economy. With these ways of being and knowing working in harness, we become sensitive to the qualitative aspects of the world around us.

"There is a new vision emerging demonstrating how we can solve problems and at the same time create a better world, and it all depends on collaboration, love, respect, beauty, and fairness."

Constance Falk, *In Cultivating an Ecological Conscience*, 2011, pages 329–330.

That's the view of ecological virtue I hold, integrating reasoning, sensing, feeling and intuiting within an ecologically sensible character. To act well requires the creation of the right kind of character within the right kind of social relations. Without that, we will continue to resort to external compulsion, institutional restraint and a sense of moral duty and obligation. But we know that these things have not been sufficient in bringing about the required transformation, merely regulating the problem from the outside. To be effective, reason, ethics, law and institutional action require that human agents develop the character that enables them to respond to evidence, facts, and moral appeals, doing the right thing as a matter of essential being rather than outer persuasion and external force. I see an ecological society of volunteers rather than conscripts compelled to 'save the world.' A genuinely ecological approach proceeds from a materially envisioned future, projecting an ideal that is immanent in the real sensorial present. It is an approach that awakens to the sentience and sensibility of other beings and bodies in the sensuous world that enfolds, nourishes and sustains us.

In arguing against a world totally enclosed and encompassed by institutions, systems and technologies, in appreciation of the sounds, tastes and visions other than those we have created, the intention is to enrich reason rather than repudiate it. The challenge is to recover the purported connection between reason and freedom by connecting the rational faculty with the faculties of sensing, feeling and intuiting and restoring the mind to the land. My intention is to revalue reason as an earthly intelligence, allowing reason to be responsive to the manifold voices of the sensuous world.

Our sensing bodies integrate thinking, sensing, feeling and intuiting. These faculties have coevolved in communion, communication and cooperation with other organisms within the biosphere as a living entity. Since this is so, it is the Earth that remains the end point of our most abstract reasonings, the living Earth looking back at us in the mediated form of our concepts and calculations.

Our reason, encased in the form of technique, control and manipulation through institutions and systems, has alienated us from the sensory world whilst removing us from our own senses, even whilst giving us power, technique and knowledge of

seemingly greater range and potency. The idea of Gaia as a living, self-regulating biosphere indicates the inadequacy of such conceptual, technical and institutional abstractions. We are both 'of' and 'in' the Earth as a living entity. Gaia is no scientific abstraction or cybernetic model, it is our own sensing body. Knowing Gaia from within, we see the world as greater than anything we can hope to comprehend and control through our reason.

But here we still are, knowing we need the 'degrowth' economy if we are to have any kind of a future worth having, yet still being seduced in our dependency upon external processes by promises of 'jobs' growth and investment' - things worshipped all the more in their absence. It's a world of dependency, a world of despair, a world of needy people in need of saviours - jobs, money, technology...

I compare progress to a car ride, the kids in the back asking endlessly, 'are we there yet?' Yes, we are there. We've been there a long time. This is what 'progress' looks like. And if you don't like it, it's time to go some place else. Because this is it.

Lewis Mumford titled his book *The Myth of the Machine* for this reason, the power of the Megamachine is not merely physical, an external imposition, it is mental – it is based on a bribe and a seduction, the promise of all manner of good things should you serve the machine. And in that service, human beings have been reduced to cogworkers, their productive and creative qualities stultified. But, as the machine starts to fail, the bribe is losing its power. With the promises of 'jobs, growth and investment' come warnings of an austere straightjacket for years to come. The future becomes no more than a dismal present enlarged for all times.

Capitalism is based not merely on material scarcity, but on a psychic scarcity. The Megamachine as the disembodied mind at the end of its tether. A psychic prison that embraces the very subjectivities of the captives that they no longer see the bars on the cage. This is how it ends.

But the myth that Mumford referred to was the belief that the Megamachine which dominates our lives is all powerful and cannot be resisted. We can refuse the bribe, and stand up as citizens instead of submitting to the status of cogworkers.

But where are the citizens in all of this? They are in despair, reduced to dependency upon impersonal economic mechanisms and processes of trade, employment and investment. 'Half-corpses, all of them', wrote D.H. Lawrence. That view at least has the optimistic implication that they may, still, be half-alive. They need to awaken, come alive.

"So we must realize this: the suicidal framing story that dominates our world today has no power except the power we give it by believing it. Similarly, believing an alternative and transforming framing story may turn out to be the most radical thing any of us can ever do."

Brian D. McLaren

'Now is the time' for development of the green belt, say St Helens' councillors. 'Jobs' growth and investment' is the promise. 'Economic growth' remains the anti-politics of governments around the world. 'Accumulate! Accumulate! That is Moses and all the Prophets', wrote Marx. That's our god. That's where the wasteland begins. 'Now is the time' for Theodore Roszak's *Where the Wasteland Ends* (1972). Now is the time for building William Blake's Jerusalem in our green and pleasant land.

Who are the builders? Where are the builders? Where is the home you will build for me? Where will my resting place be?

Lines from Roszak (1972 ch 9) Roszak draws on Blake, but the 'wasteland' of his book comes from T.S. Eliott, who took it straight from Dante ... (my favourites are all as one).

Under the despotism of Urizen, the life of the senses decays, "vegetates." We fall to the empirical lie.

We are led to Believe a Lie When we see with, not through the Eye Which was Born in a Night to perish in a Night When the Soul Slept in Beams of Light.

"Our infinite senses" shrink and grow opaque. The extreme limit of this opacity, this materialization and objectification of sense life, Blake calls "Satan." Psychically and morally, the shrinkage is experienced as "Selfhood": the alienated identity "shut in narrow doleful form." Philosophically, the shrinkage is experienced as the "truth" of the scientific worldview: the world as seen by a dead man's eyes.

The Visions of Eternity, by reason of narrowed perceptions, Are become weak Visions of Time & Space, fix'd into furrows of death . .

The Eye of Man, a little narrow orb, clos'd up & dark, Scarcely beholding the Great Light, conversing with the ground:

The Ear, a little shell, in small volutions shutting out True Harmonies & comprehending great as very small. . .

To such diminished consciousness, nature becomes Blake's Vala, the "Shadowy Female" (the veil: the delusion: physically Out There but lacking moral and poetic significance: Maya, who deludes by claiming to be the totality).

No breaking Urizen's tyranny, then, but by cleansing "the doors of perception": Let the Human Organs be kept in their perfect integrity, At will Contracting into Worms or Expanding into Gods, And then, behold! what are these Ulro Visions ..

"If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite."

But, . . Urizen is also the Zoa of physical power. That is his trump card. Urizen is builder of the "dark Satanic mills," architect of vast geometric structures, imperial cities: master of the "Mundane Shell," genius of the machines: "the

Loom of Locke ... the Waterwheels of Newton . . . cruel Works of many
Wheels, wheel without wheel, with cogs tyrannic . . ."

This is Urizen-Satan's spell over mankind: "To Mortals thy Mills seem
everything."

Alienated Reason brings vast technical power—even though" alienated
Reason is

An Abstract objecting power that Negatives everything.

This is the Spectre of Man, the Holy Reason,

And in its Holiness is closed the Abomination of Desolation.

And yet Urizen dares to teach, can only teach that the Spectre ("the
Reasoning Power") is the whole person:

"Lo, I am God," says Urizen. "The Spectre is the Man. The rest is only
delusion & fancy."

But of course, "the Spectre is in every Man insane, brutish, deform'd . . ." That
is why (here is Blake's great insight) Urizen's will to power is grounded wholly
in despair! He sits among his vast works "folded in dark despair," knowing
nothing of purpose, value, meaning . . . except to build more, subdue more;
knowing nothing of Eternity, but only of time's bondage and the absurdity of
mortality.

... he stood in the Human Brain,

And all its golden porches grew pale with his sickening light, No more
Exulting, for he saw Eternal Death beneath. Pale, he beheld futurity: pale, he
beheld the Abyss . . . ,

Stern Urizen beheld . . .

if perchance with iron power

He might avert his own despair.

No living motivation here: only the frenzy of desperation, the fever pitch of
anxiety: the panicky flight from meaninglessness: keeping busy, conquering,
achieving ... on the brink of the void. As in Beckett's *Godot*: the only purpose
left is to pass the time . . . any mad project will do ... keep your mind off it ...

think up a game . . . make up a task . . . something spectacular . . . rockets to the moon. Camus missed a nice irony: Sisyphus finishes by inventing himself ingenious machines to roll the rock. "Progress": the mechanization of absurdity.

The regime of Urizen-Satan is despair, despair, despair. Where Urizen appears in Blake's work, the word is on every page. Single vision is despair: clever-minded despair. Blake has the matter by the throat: what Marx and all the later ideologues failed to see: once endorse scientific-industrial values, and the struggle for justice is pitched on the edge of Urizen's wasteland.

Roszak, *Where the Wasteland Ends* 1972

Development, they say. I see only despair.

For lovers of William Blake – because he kept the divine vision in time of trouble.

IF THE WORLD HATES YOU, KNOW THAT IT HATED ME FIRST

'Reading the 7 shortlisted entries for this year's Tithe Grant Award was a great pleasure, and also an eye-opener, reminding me once again that Blake was a man out of time who would have had much to say to any era. From terrorism to social media, Segways to Trump, consumerism to overmedication, slavery to mechanisation, the 7 letter writers skilfully dissected today's woes both general and particular, imitating Blake's unique voice.

However, one entry in particular read as if Blake himself were speaking. It was that wonderful marriage of an exuberant, almost jazz-like rhythm and tone with righteous indignation that yet maintains a child's-eye view of the world. For channelling the visionary Blake and giving us a letter the man himself would have approved of, the 2017 Tithe Grant Award goes to Will Franken.'

Our congratulations to Will Franken, a person who escapes description: actor, comedian, satirist, film-maker and scholar of 18th Century literature.

Will Franken reads the winning letter from the 2017 Tithe Grant Award : awe-full to read, extraordinary to hear.

Will Franken reads Blake's letter to Palmer in an extraordinary performance

<https://t.co/evsAJouVrh>

Here is Will Franken's Award winning letter as text:

To S. Palmer and The Ancients

<http://www.blakesociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Tithe-Grant-Award-2017-Will-Franken.pdf>

CONCORDANCE

The Blake Archive aims to become the scholarly resource for all of Blake's works including every word and image. Here is a brief tutorial on how to search the concordance to identify a phrase you suspect might have been written by Blake.

DIVINE MADNESS : THE VISIONS OF WILLIAM BLAKE

Wednesday 21 February 2018 at 6 pm

Waterstones Bookshop, 82 Gower Street, London WC1E 6EQ

Composer Graham Treacher will be joined by Professor Jason Whittaker, Head of English and Journalism at the University of Lincoln, to unpick Blake's visionary texts Milton and Jerusalem and the process through which Treacher has translated these into music.

The evening will include a screening of the new multi-media work Divine Madness : The Visions of William Blake, first performed at King's Place in the heart of Blake's London in November 2016. Scored for Tenor solo (Charles Daniels), actor (Oliver Ford Davies) and six viols (Fretwork) with a background visual score by Robert Golden, the work tackles the complexities of Jerusalem using texts from Milton to make sense of Blake's final and intriguing poem. It culminates in a new setting of 'And did those Feet in Ancient Time'.

William Blake's Impossibly Breathtaking Drawings for Dante's Comedy, Over Which He Labored Until His Dying Day

<https://www.brainpickings.org/2014/01/17/william-blake-dante-divine-comedy/>

The sinister and sublime, in transcendent watercolors.

Blake's Illustrations of Dante's Hell

Among William Blake's last works was a series of illustrations to Dante's Divine Comedy. It was an ambitious project for a man of 67 to begin, and he didn't live to complete it. Even in its unfinished state, however, the series is a rich and fascinating work of art that can add to our understanding of Blake's philosophy and artistic goals, and be enjoyed for its strange beauty.

'My analysis will focus largely on aspects of Blake's theology that are at odds with Dante's, and that moved Blake to illustrate the Comedy as a way of correcting or completing its message. We will see that Dante, true to his age, conceives of God as existing in a separate realm, far above our fallen world. Blake does not accept the idea of a God that is apart from mankind. Indeed, for Blake it is the false perception of separateness from God that it is at the heart of so many of our woes.

I also discuss Blake's views on the goals and possibilities of art, an aesthetic theory that derives in large part from his theological principle that God and man are not divided. Whereas Dante accepts the traditional Christian view that limited human reason is inadequate to understand God, and that human language lacks the power to describe Heaven, Blake sees such an admission as an unnecessary falling-short. The true prophet, for Blake, is a poet who makes God manifest, either in words or in pictures. Blake rejects Dante's repeated claims that human art is inadequate to show God's full majesty, and works to realise in fullness the message that the Italian poet found impossible to convey.'

Explore seven of Blake's illustrations to Dante's classic work in detail

Here you'll find seven illustrations from Hell, Purgatory and Paradise. Each picture is accompanied by an explanation and an original audio recording from the 1812 translation of Dante that Blake himself used when making his designs. So this is your chance to learn not just about Blake, but also about the Florentine poet Dante Alighieri (1265–1321).

'An "Atheist," for Blake, is someone guilty of "worshipping the natural world." Blake believed that the natural world we perceive is only a tiny fraction of the real universe, and the rules of logic and demonstration are mere abstractions derived from it. Therefore any poet hoping to explain God's ways who employs logical argument rather than direct revelation is using the wrong method. The truth of religion is shown through embodying God – incarnation – and not through reason.'

Blake remarked, "Dante saw devils where I see none. I see only good."

Me? I shall carry on listening to the debate Blake and Dante are continually engaged in on the very top shelf of books in the living room.

Here's my own work on William Blake:

The Visionary Materialism of William Blake

https://www.academia.edu/6582196/The_Visionary_Materialism_of_William_Blake

I've never been too happy with that title, given Blake's emphasis on Imagination and Spirit. Reality: It's Immaterial.

Fine presentation here from Helene Domon

"And Joy Without Ceasing:" Literature as Vibrance Principle for the Humanities

https://www.academia.edu/30065297/_And_Joy_Without_Ceasing_Literature_as_Vibrance_Principle_for_the_Humanities

The Genius of Blake, by Philip Pullman

'There was no one like William Blake. There had been no one like him before and there has been no one like him since. He's unique not only among English poets but among writers and artists from anywhere in the world. Poets and critics of his own time were unsure whether he was mad; Wordsworth thought he undoubtedly was but said there was something in Blake's madness that interested him more than the sanity of Lord Byron and Walter Scott.'

English poet who strove to keep divine vision in times of trouble Kathleen Raine

Kathleen Raine, who has died aged 95, was a poet who believed in the sacred nature of all life, all true art and wisdom, and her own calling. She knew as a child that poetry was her vocation.

William Blake was her master, and she shared his belief that "one power alone makes a poet - imagination, the divine vision".

When asked how she wished people to remember her, Kathleen Raine said she would rather they didn't. Or that Blake's words be said of her: "That in time of trouble, I kept the divine vision".

All is not lost. We may yet leave the flatland of single vision behind.

Blake is difficult but very much worth the effort; he is endlessly inspiring.

E.P. Thompson's conclusion to *Witness Against the Beast* is worth thinking about.

"The busy perfectionists and benevolent rationalists of 1791-6 nearly all ended up ... as disenchanting men. Human nature, they decided, had let them down and proved stubborn in resistance to enlightenment. But William Blake, by denying even in the *Songs of Experience* a supreme societal value to rationality, did not suffer from the same kind of disenchantment. His vision had been not into the rational government of man but into the liberation of an unrealised potential, an alternative nature, within man: a nature masked by circumstance, repressed by the Moral Law, concealed by Mystery and self-defeated by the other nature of 'self-love'. It was the intensity of this vision, which derived from sources far older than the Enlightenment, which made it impossible for Blake to fall into the courses of apostasy. When he drew apart from the deists and when the revolutionary fires burned low in the early 1800s, Blake had his own way of 'keeping the divine vision in time of trouble'. This way had been prepared long before by the Ranters and the Diggers in their defeat, who had retired from activist strife to Gerrard Winstanley's 'kingdom within, which moth and rust does not corrupt'. And so Blake also took the characteristic antinomian retreat into more esoteric ways, handing on to the initiates 'The Everlasting Gospel'. There is obscurity and perhaps even some oddity in this. But there is never the least sign of submission to 'Satan's

Kingdom'. Never, on any page of Blake, is there the least complicity with the kingdom of the Beast."

Also worth contemplating is this from Terry Eagleton on Blake:

'Blake is England's greatest revolutionary artist, and it is therefore not wholly mischievous to ask why he has met with such widespread acclaim from a critical orthodoxy hardly revolutionary in its interests. Several answers suggest themselves, beyond the obvious fact that dead revolutionaries are a good deal more acceptable than living ones. It is not always easy to know exactly what he is saying; his political vision often assumes the shape of a timeless drama of energy and repression, which is rather more palatable to liberal humanist taste than talk of popular insurrection; and the critical acclaim has in any case been far from universal, relegating as it has sometimes done the more overtly revolutionary writings as turgid obscurantism, and retrieving a few songs more susceptible of New Critical treatment. Blake's richness of ambiguity, in short, has tended to redeem his poetry for those who find any more didactic political intent incompatible with the 'literary'.

Part of the originality of Edward Larrissy's study lies in its subtle awareness of the relationship between Blake's symbolic ambiguity and his strenuous political engagement, aspects of his work sometimes seen as antithetical. To be effective, revolutionary desire for Blake must achieve its appropriate artistic and institutional forms; but in order to remain faithful to itself it must also cast a distancing ironic eye upon all such forms, which will always be something less than the energies they contain. So it is, as Larrissy demonstrates, that form in Blake is always at once limiting and liberatory —just as energy and enslavement, law and desire, come to figure in his work as mutual conditions of one another. A way of putting this point, then, is to claim that Blake's poetry throws into question the false distinction, common to our own time, between a monolithic political commitment on the one hand, and an endless ironic open-mindedness (whether New Critical or de-constructive) on the other.

Without in the least denigrating the mystical or esoteric Blake — who is not, after all, easily separable from the political one - Larrissy shows just what an astonishingly thoroughgoing radical Blake is, alert to the interlockings of class

and sexual oppression, steeped in the radical Protestant tradition, surprisingly modern in his subtle view of ideology and deeply at one with the viewpoint of the emergent working class of nineteenth-century England. In "all of this, there is no doubt that he is of the devil's party, and knows it. Yet without relinquishing anything of the force of such a politics, Blake is painfully conscious of how it must be articulated in the idioms and conventions of a given, limited history - and it is from this double vision, Larrissy claims, that his famous duplicities and ambiguities arise. Prizing the 'original', he is forced to be an inveterate parodist of others' works; valuing a pure, primordial voice, he 'grafts' and splices different discourses together; deeply serious about innocence and Utopian joy, he draws sardonic attention to the limited forms or enclosures within which alone such innocence can thrive. Denouncing injustice and oppression, he veers ironically around to scrutinize the credentials of the very voices which deliver such denunciations.

In all of these ways, Blake's poetry undermines the authoritarianism of a single meaning, and so begins to transfigure our habits of reading. Larrissy offers us a Blake who, like Brecht in our own time, is beyond both political dogmatism and liberal scepticism, and through whose work we may therefore begin to explore the significance of that far less familiar, more unsettling stance we may term revolutionary ambiguity.'

Terry Eagleton, Preface to Edward Larrissy, *William Blake* (1985 Basil Blackwell)

In fine, Blake is a challenging figure indeed. We may yet leave the flatland of single vision behind.

The Blake Society

The Blake Society honours and celebrates William Blake (1757-1827), engraver, poet, painter & prophet. We are a serious but not a stuffy group. We bring together scholars and enthusiasts, amateurs and professionals on equal terms; and have been meeting regularly in London since 1985. Our speaker series includes scholars, artists, writers, radicals, and mystics.

We look for opportunities to continue the work that Blake began: exploring new modes of expression, and awakening the artist and prophet in each individual.

I love the company of non-stuffy scholars, artists, writers, radicals, and mystics. My kind of people.

The hours of folly are measur'd by the clock: but of wisdom, no clock can measure (William Blake).

On Blake's harvest and vintage of the nations that he feels will happen in the fullness of time and that wars will cease.

May he be proved right.

William Blake's spiritual visions - for the difficult and dissident people.

Let's get out of the flatlands and appreciate the four-fold vision.

Jerusalem - the palace of the imagination.

Please check this musical work out:

The Vision of Albion: Fretwork and William Blake

By Graham Treacher

The Unveiling of a Gravestone to William Blake

APOCALYPSE

The Unveiling of a Gravestone to William Blake

Sunday 12 August 2018 at 3 pm

Bunhill Fields, 38 City Road London EC1Y 1AU

(Old Street Tube Station)

"One power alone makes a poet - imagination, the divine vision."

We welcome all our members, friends or passers-by to pause and share in this belated wake for Blake.

Apocalypse – Unveiling of the Gravestone

Dear Members and Friends of The Blake Society,

We are unveiling the stone to mark the exact place of burial of William Blake in Bunhill Fields at 3pm on the afternoon of Sunday 12 August. All are welcome!

There were said to be two thousand people present in Bunhill Fields in 1927 when the first stone (which was later moved) was unveiled. So please come!

A memorial card of the event will be given out at the entrance gates.

There will be artists and writers present to speak to the significance of Blake in their lives today including Philip Pullman, Lucy Winkett, Jah Wobble, Lida Cardozo, Malcolm Guite, Stephen Micallef and Will Franken.

Music will be provided by the choir Sansara who will perform A Golden String by the Australian composer Chris Williams. Nicki Wells will sing a set of songs acappella and the vocal trio Blake will perform Jerusalem.

There will be a laying of flowers and the afternoon will end with the lighting of 191 candles representing each of the years since the death of WB on 12 August 1827.

Twelfthphilia !

Tim Heath

Chair

And all the Arts of Life they changd into the Arts of Death in Albion.
The hour-glass contemnd because its simple workmanship
Was like the workmanship of the plowman, & the water-wheel,
That raises water into cisterns: broken & burnd with fire:
Because its workmanship was like the workmanship of the shepherd.
And in their stead, intricate wheels invented, wheel without wheel:
To perplex youth in their outgoings, & to bind to labours in Albion
Of day & night the myriads of eternity that they may grind
And polish brass & iron hour after hour laborious task!
Kept ignorant of its use, that they might spend the days of wisdom
In sorrowful drudgery, to obtain a scanty pittance of bread:
In ignorance to view a small portion & think that All.
—William Blake, Jerusalem

William Blake died in 1827, having suffered poverty and lack of recognition in his lifetime. But, in an age of reaction, he died as he had lived, his own man, and a visionary, and that was some achievement in those times. 'He was and he remained robust, matter-of-fact, and a rebel. He is as downright a rebel in the later religious writings as in his early Radical ones' (Bronowski 1958: 11).

Nearly three decades after Blake's death, the painter Samuel Palmer recalled him, 'his aim single, his path straightforwards, and his wants few; so he was free, noble, and happy'. 'He was a man without a mask'. Indeed, yes. As Jacob Bronowski writes, Blake had 'a truth and a generosity which confound an age' (Bronowski 1944: 192). But Bronowski goes on to write: 'This at last is to understand Blake: when we see as one, the vision of indignation in the prophetic mask, and Pity the Human Face of the Songs of Innocence'.

Because in time of trouble, he kept the divine vision. Poet Kathleen Raine 'got it.'
<https://www.irishtimes.com/news/english-poet-who-strove-to-keep-divine-vision-in-times-of-trouble-kathleen-raine-1.365966>

I GIVE you the end of a golden string;
Only wind it into a ball,
It will lead you in at Heaven's gate,
Built in Jerusalem's wall....

England! awake! awake! awake!
Jerusalem thy sister calls!
Why wilt thou sleep the sleep of death,
And close her from thy ancient walls?

Thy hills and valleys felt her feet
Gently upon their bosoms move
Thy gates beheld sweet Zion's ways;
Then was a time of joy and love.

And now the time returns again:
Our souls exult, and London's towers
Receive the Lamb of God to dwell
In England's green and pleasant bowers.

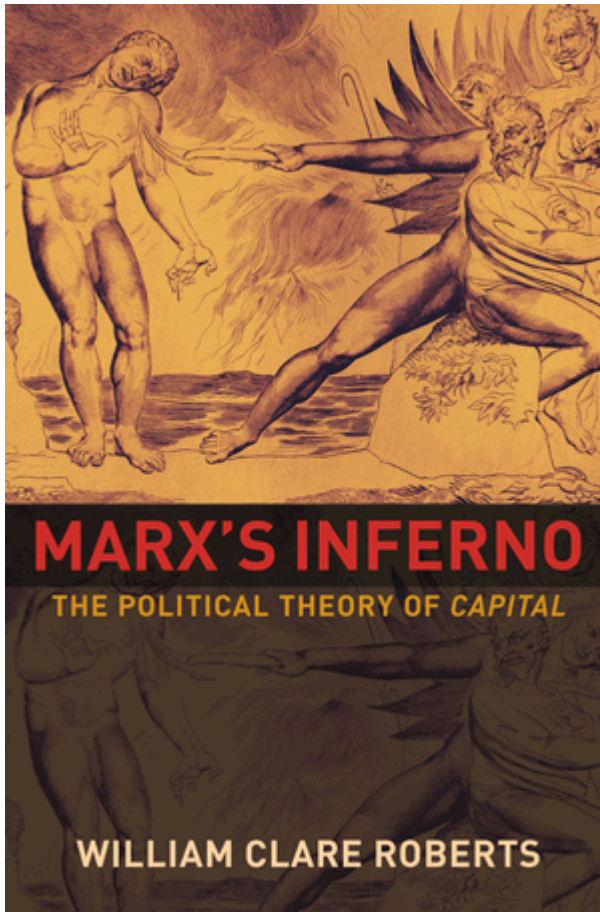
William Blake, Jerusalem

Bronowski, J. *Blake A Man Without a Mask*, Penguin, 1944

Bronowski, J. ed., *William Blake: A Selection of Poems and Letters*, Penguin, 1958

Thompson, E.P., *Witness Against the Beast*, The New Press, 1993

Dante and Marx



Marx's Inferno: The Political Theory of Capital by William Clare Roberts.

Forthcoming book from Princeton University Press

<http://press.princeton.edu/titles/10892.html>

'Forthcoming at the end of this year, *Marx's Inferno* by William Clare Roberts undertakes an entirely new reading of Marx's magnum opus *Capital*. Roberts argues that Marx modeled *Capital* on Dante's *Inferno*, playing the role of a Virgil guiding the worker through the social Hell engendered by insatiable capitalism. Rather than focusing exclusively on *Capital* as a work of political economy, Roberts returns us to the debates within nineteenth century socialism from which *Capital* emerged, while demonstrating their relevance to political life today. There can be no greater tribute to a thinker than that his ideas continue to generate such new readings and new thinking long after his death. *Herzlichen Glückwunsch zum Geburtstag, Herr Marx.*'

Karl Marx—Into the Inferno

"*Marx's Inferno* reconstructs the major arguments of Karl Marx's *Capital* and inaugurates a completely new reading of a seminal classic. Rather than simply a critique of classical political economy, William Roberts argues that *Capital* was primarily a careful engagement with the motives and aims of the workers' movement. Understood in this light, *Capital* emerges as a profound work of political theory. Placing Marx against the background of nineteenth-century socialism, Roberts shows how *Capital* was ingeniously modelled on Dante's *Inferno*, and how Marx, playing the role of Virgil for the proletariat, introduced partisans of workers' emancipation to the secret depths of the modern 'social Hell.' In this manner, Marx revised republican ideas of freedom in response to the rise of capitalism.

"Combining research on Marx's interlocutors, textual scholarship, and forays into recent debates, Roberts traces the continuities linking Marx's theory of capitalism to the tradition of republican political thought. He immerses the reader in socialist debates about the nature of commerce, the experience of labor, the power of bosses and managers, and the possibilities of political organization. Roberts rescues those debates from the past, and shows how they speak to ever-renewed concerns about political life in today's world."

Marx's Inferno: The Political Theory of Capital

Endorsements:

"*Marx's Inferno* is the best book of political theory I've read that has been written in the last five years. Interpreting *Capital* as an integrated whole, it takes a canonical text we all thought we knew and makes us realize we never knew it at all. This is reading on a grand scale, reading as it was meant to be."

- Corey Robin, Brooklyn College and CUNY Graduate Center.

"*Marx's Inferno* provides an innovative reading of Karl Marx's *Capital* as a work of political theory. The unifying thread of this book is the author's conviction that Marx's work is heavily indebted to a set of broadly republican commitments about the nature

of freedom. This original idea not only illuminates Marx's writings, but also contributes to an important area of contemporary research in intellectual history."

--David Leopold, University of Oxford

Contextualizing Marx's Criticism of Commercial Society

'The purpose of this paper is to read Part I of *Capital* – the chapters on the commodity, exchange, and money – in conjunction with Dante's account of the sins of incontinence. Incontinence is a lack of self-control, a weakness that afflicts one's deliberate choices, and makes one prone to doing what one wishes one wouldn't. An incontinent is a slave to her or his passions. In Marx's account of commercial society, I discern a socialized version of incontinence, a condition in which the producers of commodities suffer from a very peculiar lack of self-control: a propensity to do what they would rather not in the face of price-signals. Marx thinks there is something deeply wrong with this feature of commercial society. Because value is determined by abstract, socially necessary labour-time, no producer can know until after the fact whether or not their labour was productive at the socially necessary level. This exposes producers to all manner of forces outside her control, forces that take the form of the prices of goods. But, because these forces are merely the aggregated preferences of other people, the susceptibility of producers to act otherwise than they would like in the face of price-signals is simultaneously their enslavement to the actions of others, made without any consultation or debate. The preferences of others impose themselves on each producer without any need to justify themselves, and without any possibility of being contested. There is no way to ask whether the activities that set the terms of sale are themselves worthwhile. Being subjected to forces outside one's control is the unalterable condition of every finite being. While this can be very frustrating, there is nothing wrong with it. But when these forces originate in the incontestable and unjustified desires of other people, there is something wrong. This wrong is the wrong of domination. The socialized incontinence of commercial society is also, on Marx's account, the impersonal domination of each of its members.'

Contextualizing Marx's Criticism of Commercial Society

Yes indeed. That was how I read Marx in my PhD research (1995-2001), setting his critique of the capitalist economy and the instrumental relations of modern individualistic society in the moral and philosophical frame of 'rational freedom.' I have since 2001 continued to work with this concept. Marx understood well that individual freedom through liberating desire could well amount to becoming enslaved to empirical necessity and subject to the external coercive force of alien power. In moving from feudal to capitalist society, we exchange ties of personal dependence for the objective dependency of all upon alien power. I stand by that reading. In time, I have come to appreciate the extent to which my favourite modern philosophers working in this tradition of 'rational freedom' - Spinoza, Leibniz, Rousseau, Kant, Hegel and Marx up to Habermas in the contemporary world - are attempting to reclaim the common good on socially and morally fractured ground. Marx went furthest in examining that fracturing of social relations and in outlining what needs to be done to reconstitute commonality through new solidarities and new forms of the common life binding individuals together. I now consider the claims for 'rational freedom' to be an attempt to recover the overarching ethical framework of the Judaeo-Christian tradition dissolved by the monetary ties and secular impulses of capitalist relations. I also consider that the central themes of 'rational freedom', affirming the canalising of desires, appetites and inclinations and the reconciliation of particular interests through reason to ensure the long term common good, to require the foundation of the natural law buttressed by virtues ethics and what Alasdair MacIntyre calls communities of practice. In short, there is a large element of the Judaeo-Christian ethic embedded in Marx, as it was in Rousseau, Hegel and Kant, there is a hint of Leibniz's preordained harmony, which leads Marx to be critical of conflict and diremption. So I was never surprised by the extent to which I found parallels between Marx's work and that of St. Thomas Aquinas and the peerless poet-philosopher Dante Alighieri as I came to study them at length. There is, of course, a clear difference between the metaphysics. Marx's viewpoint is very much earth-bound. That said, I still detect a transcendental ethic and hope in Marx that in the very least implies a commitment to truths and values that are independent of time and place.

William Clare Roberts' claim is that the many Judaeo-Christian allusions in Marx's work, his citations of Dante in the "1859 Preface" and the preface to the first edition of *Capital* demonstrate that Marx borrowed key features of Dante's *Inferno* for his critique of political economy, 'and that Marx thereby situated his critical journey through economics as the heir to the Western tradition of the *katabasis*, the formative descent into the underworld. This undermines the dichotomization of religion and science prevalent in Marxology, and suggests that Marx must be read outside both of these traditional categories.'

The connection between Dante and Marx is not fanciful at all.

'Marx and Engels considered Dante as a Renaissance hero. As per them Dante was a genius poet and thinker and who was able to inspire the party with inflexible warriors spirit. Dante's '*Divina Commedia*' had incomparable influence on Marx. It is said that Marx had learned by heart every line of it. The introduction to *Capital* testifies his deep influence of Dante. Engels called Dante a person of 'unequaled classic perfection' and a 'colossal figure'.'

Marxist Aesthetics : Summary of "Preface to Marx and Engels on Literature and Art"

Marx placed Dante amongst his most beloved poets.

Marx and Engels On Literature and Art

Francis Wheen writes on the influence of Dante upon Marx, describing Marx as the poet of dialectics:

"What does it matter to you what people whisper here?' Virgil asks Dante in Canto 5 of the *Purgatorio*. "Follow me and let the people talk." Lacking a Virgil to guide him, Marx amends the line in his preface for the first volume of *Das Kapital* to warn that he will make no concession to the prejudices of others:

"Now, as ever, my maxim is that of the great Florentine: *Segui il tuo corso, e lascia dir le genti*. [Go your own way, and let the people talk]."

From the outset, then, the book is conceived as a descent towards the nether regions, and even in the midst of complex theoretical abstractions he conveys a vivid sense of place and motion: Let us, therefore, leave this noisy region of the market, where all that goes on is done in full view of everyone's eyes, where everything seems open and above board. We will follow the owner of the money and the owner of labour-power into the hidden foci of production, crossing the threshold of the portal above which is written, "No admittance except on business". Here we shall discover, not only how capital produces, but also how it is itself produced. We shall at last discover the secret of making surplus value. The literary antecedents for such a journey are often recalled as he proceeds on his way. Describing English match factories, where half the workers are juveniles (some as young as six) and conditions are so appalling that "only the most miserable part of the working class, half-starved widows and so forth, deliver up their children to it", he writes:

"With a working day ranging from 12 to 14 or 15 hours, night labour, irregular meal-times, and meals mostly taken in the workrooms themselves, pestilent with phosphorus, Dante would have found the worst horrors in his *Inferno* surpassed in this industry."

The poet of dialectics

S.S. Praver (1976: 268) writes :

'In Marx's most serious vein, Dante's *Inferno* is called upon to yield the nearest possible parallel to the sufferings of the poor, illustrated by a heart-breaking case of deprivation reported from the West Riding of Yorkshire:'

"The tragedy played out by Ugolino and his sons repeated itself, though without its cannibalism, in the Padmondan cottage."

(Marx, MEW, 546; cf. Dante, *Inferno*, Canto XXXIII).

From Praver 1976: 339

'Finally, of course, the hell of Dante's *Inferno* holds horrors analogous to those in the modern world – if anything they fall too short. Victorian match-factories, for instance, with the terrible diseases unguarded handling of phosphorous could bring, go beyond anything the medieval writer pictured to himself and his readers:

"Dante will find the cruellest imaginings of his *Inferno* surpassed in this manufacture."

(Marx, MEW, XXIII, 261).

Karl Marx, "*Das Kapital*" (1867)

Ending his preface to the first edition of *Das Kapital*, Marx states the following:

"I welcome every opinion based on scientific criticism. As to the prejudices of so-called public opinion, to which I have never made concessions, now, as ever, my maxim is that of the great Florentine: '*Segui il tuo corso, e lascia dire le genti.*'"

– Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Ben Fowkes, ed. David Fernbach, Fowkes, and Ernest Mandel (New York: Penguin Classics, 1976), p. 93.

'Go your own way, and let the people talk.'

As the editors note, Marx actually altered Dante's words for his own purposes. The original line, *Purgatorio* V 13, is as follows: "*Vien dietro a me, a lasica dir le genti.*" This translates as 'Come, follow me, and let these people talk.' I would have thought that Marx, as a political leader, was concerned to induce people to follow him in the cause of social transformation. But his commitment here is clearly to truth, to something more than the surface level of appearances and the prejudices of public opinion as well as the dominant notions of the age. That points to Marx employing a critical standard by which to evaluate society. He mentions scientific criticism here, and in the 1859 Preface he refers to the 'entrance to science.' I'd just add that Marx affirms moral truth as well as scientific truth, he just buries his normative

commitment deeply behind scientific critique, but that ethic is there all the same, driving that critique of dominant social institutions and practices.

I'm looking forward to William Clare Roberts' book. It brings out the moral character of Marx's *Capital*. I see Marx as working in the ancient tradition which combines politics and ethics in the field of practical reason. Reading Marx as a Dantista is not as fanciful as it may sound. (Although it is more accurate to write that Dante is being read as a Marxist, which is also not as fanciful as it sounds, although more problematic in that it loses Dante's supernatural ethics and metaphysics. More is lost this way than the other.) There is a peculiar flavour to Marx's writings. One of the best books I've ever read is S.S. Praver's '*Karl Marx and World Literature*', a book which is an education in itself. Marx was well-read, immersed in and a lover of literature. And he was very creative in his use of materials from this field.

But the point goes deeper than a literary influence. In my own work I read Marx in terms of a tradition and concept of 'rational freedom'. I trace this concept back to ancient Greece, focusing on Plato and Aristotle in particular. But also to the Judaeo-Christian ethic. My point is that Marx can be understood as standing in a line of descent from a particular way of understanding the world as a whole order, a rational order, an objectively valuable world, a world we have in common - a right order that has been torn asunder by monetary imperatives. So it doesn't surprise me at all that a Dantesque reading of Marx is possible. (Acknowledging that what is going on here with this book, of course, is a Marxist appropriation of Dante, something which emphasises Marx's secularising use of Dante's *Inferno*, which is quite different). For my own part, I've found it very easy to read Dante and Marx together, the capital system as an alienated and dehumanised world that petrifies human powers is very similar to inertia that characterises Dante's vision of the *Inferno*.

It is significant that Marx's famous 1859 Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* concludes with a quotation from Dante's *Inferno*:

'This sketch of the course of my studies in the domain of political economy is intended merely to show that my views - no matter how they may be judged and how little they conform to the interested prejudices of the ruling classes -

are the outcome of conscientious research carried on over many years. At the entrance to science, as at the entrance to hell, the demand must be made:

Qui si convien lasciare ogni sospetto Ogni viltà convien che qui sia morta.'

Karl Marx

London, January 1859

From Marx, *Early Writings*, 1974

The quote from Dante translates as:

'Here all distrust must be abandoned;
here all cowardice must die.'

Dante, *Divina Commedia, Inferno*, Canto III, lines 14-15.

Here you must abandon all division of spirit,
And here all cowardice must perish.

MEW XIII 114-115

Praver comments:

'How characteristic of Marx that he should find what he felt to be the most adequate formulation of his own unwillingness to compromise *in the work of a medieval poet* – a poet with whom he shared the fate of exile, but whose social experience and worldview were as far removed from his own as any that can be imagined.'

Praver 1976 300-01

There are a few important things to note here, beyond the further proof of how immersed Marx was in the words and meanings of Dante.

It is interesting that Marx takes his stand on science, yet cites in his justification the words of one who is a religious poet. Dante's refusal to compromise was based upon a knowledge that was more than what we had come to understand as science in the nineteenth century. Dante calls his poem '*lo sacro poema*' and '*l poema sacro*', the sacred poem (*Paradiso* XXIII 62; *Paradiso* XXV 1). Marx quotes from it to justify his stance and its departure from common understanding – and dominant assumptions – as the entrance of science.

I would make the point here that Marx is concerned not merely with knowledge in the scientific sense of factual statements and explanations but with a human self-knowledge, something that integrates the worlds of fact and value, and is thus beyond the dichotomization of science and religion, the split between material concerns and morals/metaphysics. Marx's unwillingness to compromise is based upon both scientific and moral truth, affirming an inclusive science that entails more than statements of fact.

I wouldn't want to push this point too far, and thus conflate Dante and Marx and risk confusing and losing the distinctive qualities of the particular contributions of each. Marx's use of Dante's *Comedy*, I would argue, is secularising, he employs Dante to express his outrage at and condemnation of iniquity and exploitation, in order to establish some point of rectification through punishments that fit the crime, demand justice and urge appropriate modification of behaviours. Marx enters the 'dismal science' of economics in the same way that Dante enters Hell, to face the truth without flinching, to know the truth, to know how bad things can be as a result of the wrong actions of individuals. Dante and Marx are operating in accordance with a standard of the true, the good and the beautiful, but with a different metaphysics. Dante's Christian metaphysics locate Heaven beyond Earth, Marx's metaphysics are naturalist. I'll leave it open here which makes most sense, only to say that a standard of what 'ought-to-be' is by definition transcendental, beyond time and place, affirming a standard of evaluation that is independent of the 'is' and which holds it to account (as a good Aristotelian and Hegelian, Marx locates this 'is' within the reality he criticises). Marx's supposed historicism is not the same as saying that principles are those that prevail in time and place. As the above passage makes clear, Marx is concerned with establishing principles in accordance with their truth and rightness,

no matter 'how little they conform to the interested prejudices of the ruling classes' or to public opinion, that is, to the dominant interests and norms of time and place. Dante takes a supernatural standard to do the same thing; Marx offers a purely naturalistic explanation.

This brings me to the next point: Marx's identification with Dante as a fellow exile.

Marx expresses the pains and indignities of a life of exile in response to a leader in *The Times*. He writes:

'In the 'heaven of Mars' Dante meets with his ancestor, Cacciaguida de Elisei, who predicts to him his approaching exile from Florence in these words:

Thou shalt prove how salt the savour is
Of others' bread, how hard the passage
To descend and climb by others' stairs.

Happy Dante, another being of that wretched class called 'political refugees', whom his enemies could not threaten with the misery of a *Times* leader! Happier *Times* that escaped a 'reserved seat' in his *Inferno*.'

NYDT 4 April 1853 – L 174-5

This again is an example of Marx's secularizing use of Dante's *Inferno*, threatening sinners against humanity in the earthly human world with a place in a Dantean *Inferno*. I can already hear objections from devoted Dantista here as to what may appear to be a somewhat limited use of Dante's rich meaning. Dante is full of warnings concerning *hybris* and the delusions of building a paradise through purely human knowledge and power. Surely, the Dantista would say, the lesson is that it is such self-will and conceit in attempting to build Heaven on Earth by entirely human powers that is resulting in the Earth being made an *Inferno*. The much vaunted productive powers of human beings being utilised in order to deliver 'progress' or paradise on Earth through endless 'economic growth' – that deliberately anemic euphemism for the accumulation of capital – has created an economic system that is

a heating machine, warming the planet and promising to consume the Earth in an Inferno.

In other words, we need the supernatural ethic that Marx discards in order to avoid enclosing the world in a Reason that takes the place of God. We may be able to achieve the practical restitution of alienated powers back to society only to become subject to an idolatry that is just as delusional and oppressive.

Dante writes that humankind has through 'foul usury' humiliated the Creation, ('*Paradiso*', XXII, 151), that flower-bed that has been gifted to us. This "despising Nature and her goodness" is a violence against God and Creation and against ourselves. (Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. by Charles S. Singleton, Bollingen Series LXXX, and *Inferno*, canto XI, lines 46-48. We have the right to use what we need but have no right to do any more than that. It's clear that Dante condemns usury and great accumulations of property: "the usurer condemns Nature ... for he puts his hope elsewhere." (Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, canto XI, lines 109-11.) By taking more than we are entitled to, destroying our place within Creation, seeing ourselves as gods through our actions and powers in creating the self-made social world, we are destroying our own Being. The modern economic system, we know, is a heating machine, as a result of which we are not creating a Heaven on Earth as turning Earth into an *Inferno*. And there are some who bear much more responsibility than others. The virtues are now considered sins against the GNP.

I've addressed that question in many places. (Explore the Books section and Papers section for more detailed analyses). Here, I want to pick up on this theme of Dante and Marx as exiles. That, I would argue, gives them an independence from the societies in which they find themselves, and a moral and epistemological capacity to see through the dominant assumptions and norms of an age. It clears their sight and their moral and intellectual vision, they can see more clearly, more 'objectively', than those with a stake in the prevailing society.

Which begs the question of what standard visionaries employ in order to see through and see further than the prevailing notions of time and place. This, for me, is the most interesting and most important question of all. Marx is frequently portrayed as a

historicist, a view which holds that truths and values are relative to time and place. As noted above, this crude view cannot be assigned to Marx. He clearly employs a critical standard that enables him to evaluate dominant conceptions and find them wanting, demanding transformation. Thus Marx can criticise the capital system as a dehumanisation, even though its treatment of human beings as exploitable labour is consistent with prevailing capitalist relations. Marx affirms a truth and a value beyond prevailing relations. By what standard can Marx do this? My view is that Marx's praxis is infused with principles that draw upon notions of the true, the good and the beautiful, he just sees these principles as having a history in the way they are creatively unfolded through human agency.

When it comes to praxis, Marx is plainly someone who valued creative human agency, affirming the epistemological and structural capacities of (self)knowledgeable and moral human agents to see through and break through constraining relations and circumstances. The interesting point to debate here, however, is the extent to which exile gives a figure like a Dante or a Marx an external vantage point from which to observe reality at a certain distance from it, as the spectator of all time and existence in the words of Plato. I think that goes against Marx's praxis oriented approach, one based upon the changing of circumstances as a condition of knowing reality and of knowing oneself. But that commitment to science as Marx describes it, that unwillingness to compromise on truth, clearly points to an objective standard that is in some way independent of time and place.

Could there be a relation between Marx and Dante?

Dante Alighieri was an Aristotelian and a Thomist. And Marx?

'Marx ... was the Aristotle of the modern age' (Terry Eagleton, *After Theory*, 2003, ch 6).

'The true descendant of the doctrines of Aquinas is the labour theory of value. The last of the Schoolmen was Karl Marx.' (R.H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* 1987 ch 1).

We know that Marx rated Dante's *Comedy* very highly indeed, being able to recite it by heart it is said. I have always seen a parallel between the two of them, in that both believed that there is a right order and a right way of doing things, that this earth could be a Heaven or a Hell according to the choices we make and the actions we take. (That is a contentious claim with respect to Marx's supposed historicism, I know, but one that can be defended. Marx criticised social relations with a view of a right order, not according to fixed and timeless ideals, maybe, but with respect to an 'objective' standard of rightness all the same, one immanent in existing lines of development.)

Dante's *Inferno* is the hell of the capital system as a thoroughly dehumanized world. The *Paradiso* is the future society, what for Marx is the 'truly human society', the world we can have, the better world that is immanent in human nature and its social expression but repressed within prevailing social relations. Dante's *Purgatorio* refers to the transitional world, a world in which individuals are in movement, learning to make the right choices, appreciating that actions have consequences, good and bad, and thus coming to act wisely, bridging the gap between the 'is' and the 'ought-to-be'.

A world of reality-changing praxis in Marx's terms:

'The materialist doctrine concerning the changing of circumstances and upbringing forgets that circumstances are changed by men and that it is essential to educate the educator himself. This doctrine must, therefore, divide society into two parts, one of which is superior to society.

The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-changing can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionary practice.'

Marx, *Thesis III on Feuerbach*

That reads against top-down, external vanguards of philosopher kings who have exclusive insight into the nature of reality. The responsibility is ours as individual

knowledgeable and moral agents, however much we join together in collective projects to gain conscious control over the collective forces that govern our world.

But, I would emphasise strongly, Dante and Marx are united in their adherence to a critical 'objective' standard of evaluation, call it the Platonic trinity of the true, the good and the beauty (Dante's *Paradiso* beyond Earth, Marx's truly human society here on Earth). In other words, the rightness of a social order is determined by standards other than those that apply and are imposed in time and place. Any imposition involved in reality-constituting praxis proceeds in accordance with certain values and truths.

That's a contentious claim with respect to Marx, but it can be defended. In the *Theories of Surplus Value*, Marx criticizes David Ricardo's book for its 'faulty architectonics' (TSV, vol. II, 169). For Marx, the discovery of truth is a matter of a correct method of investigation leading to a well-structured and well-presented theory. The 'faulty architectonics' of a theory is 'not accidental, rather it is the result of... and . . . expresses the scientific deficiencies of the method of investigation itself'. This conception of architectonics indicates that, for Marx, a true theory is compelled on account of its 'deep insight' to develop an elegant conceptual structure. It seems that Marx, then, adhered to the Platonic trinity of the true, the good and the beautiful and affirmed the rationalist belief in the harmony of truth, goodness (as human freedom) and beauty.

A few general comments are in order here to give some kind of background with respect to the intellectual and moral context in which Dante's *Comedy* is to be understood, the assumptions in which the themes of Dante's work come to life and thrive. The *Comedy* tells the tale of a quest for meaning, a journey in which the traveler comes face-to-face with God and then returns to tell the tale and begin the journey again anew on Earth. But it involves more than a mystic tradition. The work is visionary and the traveler is indeed overwhelmed by the experience. But is also a learning experience. It is about writing and education and knowledge, not just a wordless visionary experience. The *Comedy* is an encyclopedia, it combines all the genres such as autobiography, romance and epic. It is autobiography in the sense of

being the sum total of human experience. And it is an encyclopedia in the classical sense of being a circle of knowledge.

I referred above to a conception of architectonics in Marx's critical philosophy. What I wrote there is commensurate with the idea of the encyclopedia here. The idea goes back to the architect Vitruvius. In this understanding, the encyclopedia refers to the circle of knowledge, beginning with a point of departure that takes us through the various disciplines which constitute the liberal arts, before taking us back to the start again. The beginning and the end coincide in this education. But you return to the beginning with a different viewpoint or different standpoint. In discovering things in the learning process, your view of the world and your place in it changes. The researches of Ursula Franklin, physicist, author and educator at the University of Toronto, set technology within a political and social context. For Franklin, technology is a comprehensive system that includes not merely machines but also methods, procedures, organization, 'and most of all, a mindset'. (Franklin 1992: 12). Her work makes clear the extent to which the most important social transformations in history are those which are grounded by the presence of a 'standpoint', an ethical framework that informs a person's life and work, and brings a sense of purpose and obligation. It is in this sense that I refer to the architectonics that lie at the centre of the idea of the encyclopaedia. We determine the right thing to do not in acting in response to the external and imperatives set by systems and organisations but by reference to an independent standard or moral compass which is the expression of one's character, and which forms an integral part of one's identity.

This is the architectonics that I say is implicit in Marx's work, the idea of the encyclopedia which is central to Dante's *Comedy*. Such notions entail the ordering of the world according to certain truths and values. With respect to Dante's *Comedy*, the encyclopedia is about human self-knowledge, coming to know ourselves and our world and to act in accordance with this knowledge. Dante respects the old medieval distinction between the liberal arts and the mechanical arts. The liberal arts are so-called in that they affirm the power of knowledge to free us from various forms of tyranny, particularly the tyranny of action, of that kind of action that distracts us from the great aims revealed by theory, contemplation and thinking. This raises important questions concerning the connection between contemplation and action, between

disclosure and imposition when it comes to discerning the truth, whether we attain true knowledge of reality through contemplation or whether truth is something produced by praxis. I take these questions up elsewhere in my work and can't do more here than raise them. I have just written a nice piece on the difference between Leibniz and Kant on this question, which will come out in some form in the near future, Leibniz as arguing for disclosure of truth through contemplation, Kant as arguing for the production of truth through praxis. And Marx? I argue elsewhere that Marx, in contradistinction to Plato, who holds the realm of political action to be inferior to the realm of philosophical contemplation, maintaining a wrenching distance between them, holds that a superior view of reality lies in bridging the gap between theory and practice.

The question comes down to what kind of knowledge we are referring to when we talk about self-knowledge, whether we discover or generate such knowledge, and just what is the nature of 'reality.'

Dante's *Comedy* as an encyclopedia takes its stand on the liberal arts and the way they order the world intellectually and morally. It is worth spelling out what lies behind Dante's conception here. The liberal arts refer to the arts of words and the arts of number. The arts of words are grammar, encompassing also poetry and history. This includes rhetoric, the art of persuasion, and dialectics, the art of deciding the truth of a statement. The arts of numbers are arithmetic, geometry, music, astronomy.

The aim of these liberal arts would be ethics, metaphysics and theology. Dante states that ethics is the Queen of the sciences, bringing meaning and order to all other forms of knowledge.

'The Crystalline Heaven, which has previously been designated as the Primum Mobile, has a very clear resemblance to Moral Philosophy; for Moral Philosophy, as Thomas says in commenting on the second book of the Ethics, disposes us properly to the other sciences.' [*Convivio* (II, xiv, 14)]

He also affirms Philosophy to be the Queen of the sciences.

'Then when it says: you will see The beauty of such lofty miracles, it declares that through her shall the beauty of these miracles be perceived; and it speaks truly, for the beauty of wonders is the perception of their causes which she demonstrates, as the Philosopher seems to assert at the beginning of the *Metaphysics* when he says that by the sight of these beauties men began to fall in love with this lady. We will speak more fully of this word "wonder" in the following book.' [*Convivio* (II, xv, 11)]

This, then, shows the architectonic of the *Comedy*. I have spent some time on this to suggest that when Marx criticises the 'faulty architectonics' of economic theory in *Theories of Surplus Value* (TSV, vol. II, 169), he is drawing on this encyclopedic conception of learning and education, of human self-knowledge, the idea of the *Comedy* as human autobiography. And at the same time, I draw the parallel between Dante and Marx here to underline that when Marx insists on the refusal to compromise on truth as 'the entrance to science', he draws on this older tradition of the liberal arts as structuring human learning and knowledge of the world. In other words, the claims he makes are for 'science' in the broad sense of the liberal arts – it is a claim for the dignity and worth of ethics. Marx's self-knowledge is a fundamentally moral project.

In his book *Essentialism in the Thought of Karl Marx*, Scott Meikle writes that 'With Marx, human self-understanding reached a point of attainment yet to be surpassed.' That's a bold claim which Meikle shows to be grounded in Hegel's understanding of human self-creation as a process. That's a praxis-oriented view in which we generate knowledge and produce truth in creating ourselves and our world. Meikle thus calls *Capital* 'our greatest work of human self-understanding.' (Meikle 1985 ch 4). I would argue that what separates Dante and Marx most is this issue of whether truth and value is disclosed, that is, is already immanent in the world, or is imposed, that is, is produced by human praxis. But maybe, in those stark terms, the distinction is false. Whilst Dante affirms an objective order whose truths and values are independent of time and place, he is nevertheless clear that we must come to know these truths and values and act in accordance with them for them to become

existential realities. Similarly, with respect to Marx, truths and values are not simply produced by human praxis, they are made manifest by that praxis.

In both Dante and Marx, the concern is with education and a coming to self-knowledge in relation to the world. The work of both pertains to the autobiography of the human species, the process by which we come to know ourselves and the world around us. And so both Dante and Marx address all the key issues of human life, the nature of the real world and how we may come to know it, questions of theoretical reason, and who we are and how we are to act and live well together, questions of practical reason, of ethics and politics. What is justice and how are we to achieve it? How can we reconcile the claims of justice with the realities of conflicting interests and passions in the world? Both Dante and Marx address directly the questions of relating reason and desire, reconciling conflicting interests, and turning the collision of conflicting demands to political peace. It is in this sense that I am clear that for all of his references to science, Marx's project is inherently ethical and political, and invokes the ancient understanding of the intertwining of ethics and politics. Also key to both Dante and Marx is what we call moral character, personal (and collective) responsibility and agency. Both address the question of the relation of knowledge and will. What social relations are involved in generating the will to act? What kind of knowledge gives us not merely the ability to act, but positively makes us *want* to act? We all know we should be just, but that knowledge alone is not enough to make us virtuous or incline us to engage in virtuous action. The good, as Martha Nussbaum wrote, is fragile. We do things we know we shouldn't do and which are not in our better interests. Why? A failing of character? A failing of the social relations that lock us into destructive patterns of behaviour? My view is that, in their different ways, Dante and Marx take on these fundamental questions of philosophy and ethics and do so in deep and trenchant ways.

As for the *Inferno*, that's the nightmarish vision of a world without hope, without choice, without agency, a world where nothing makes a difference, a world in which the consequences of past actions catch up on the agents and imprison them in an inescapable fate. I leave to others to decide whether Hell really exists as this underworld beyond redemption. The way I read Dante and Marx is this, that actions have consequences, and so long as the bad actions of some are inflicting bad

consequences on others, these actions will carry on being taken until in the end the consequences embrace all by creating a Hell on Earth. The key point established by Dante and Marx is that human beings are moral and knowledgeable agents capable of acting with a view to right reasons, with a view to the true, the good and the beautiful. We need to set action within the right architectonics, get out of self-destructive patterns of social behaviour, and rearrange our actions in accordance with a vision of the world and of ourselves. And this is a fundamentally moral project because at its heart is the question 'who am I?' In answering that question, we come to relate ourselves to others and to the world around ourselves and seek to order our activities in line with these realities.

As an end of history, the marxist vision amounts to the realization of the philosophical ideal within the real. It is not so much Plato's Philosopher Ruler as the rule of philosophy, Spinoza's free humanity governing itself with adequate ideas, or Descartes' 'clear and distinct ideas'. That is a philosophical vision and will be realised when humanity finally does evolve the long term strategic thinking capacity that joins all together for the common good. It is not politics and to engage in politics on these assumptions is to invite not human emancipation in general but its total enslavement as institutions, laws and bureaucracies intervene to compensate for a failing moral conversion.

We make of this world a Heaven or Hell according to our praxis - the choices we make, the decisions we take, and how we exercise freedom and responsibility in relation to each other. But this 'practice' doesn't point to some mere 'made-up' world. We don't simply create our own world. Locating Marx in an older tradition adumbrated above, I read him as arguing not just for the 'self-made' world of human creation, but for the right world and the just world and the true world of which humans are a part. Without an understanding of the right order of things, there is no basis for a distinction between Hell and Heaven, between *Inferno* and *Paradiso*, between the capital system as a dehumanisation and communism as the 'truly human society'.

Marx's *Capital* presents a nightmarish vision of the Hell on Earth that has come

about through the inversion of subject and object, the alienation of power so that human creations come to acquire a life of their own, the world of objects robbing the human subjects of their own vitality and spontaneity and autonomy. Marx's capital system as a dehumanisation and an alienation of powers is personified by Dante's Lucifer as the greatest of the angels frozen and immobile in the pits of the *Inferno*. Dante believed we could, through right choices and actions, take moral responsibility for all that we do, and enter *Paradise*. Marx thought that the practical restitution of the power we have alienated to the state and capital and its reorganisation as social power would enable us to bring about communism as the 'truly human society', the realized society of realized individuals. Which sounds like Paradise enough.

Actions have consequences. Dante wishes to strengthen personal responsibility when it comes to choices made and actions taken. If human beings do the wrong thing, indulge the wrong behaviours, they will succeed in making a Hell on Earth. Purgatorio is a place of movement, a place where sinners are on the move, taking the opportunity to right wrongs and, in the process, work their way back to the Paradise that is within our reach, if we just live right.

Does anyone dare to think Paradise is possible? Do we have the moral courage and imagination, let alone the political and organisational wit and determination, to bring such a society about? And is our role one of disclosure or imposition? Is our job one of contemplating and giving thanks to God for the preordained harmony of the universe, with a view to going beyond earthly flourishing to a heavenly beatitude? Or are we charged with making a Heaven for ourselves on Earth?

Either way, there are many without hope for either. We live in Godless times, and the conditions for Marx's truly human society are diminishing all the time.

So here is my approach.

I make no predictions and no promises, I offer no guarantees at all. Whether we speak of Dante's Paradise or Marx's Communism or Plato's true, good and beautiful, here is a world that certainly exists. That world possesses a reality, whether or not we, the creative human agents acting within specific social relations, succeed in developing the intellectual, institutional, moral and psychological capacity to make it

an existential reality. If the worst comes to the worst, and runaway climate change destroys all the hopes, dreams and ideals of philosophy, poetry, literature, then this world will still exist. It will be the world we could have had. And for those who opt for Dante over Marx, it is the world that could still be ours – just not on Earth. We abolished God and thought, through our powers, we had become gods ourselves. We have brought about not Heaven but Hell on Earth.

As I say, I'm looking forward to William Clare Roberts' book. Its themes are very pertinent.

In the meantime, here are links to my own writing on Dante and on Marx.

Dante's Enamoured Mind

https://www.academia.edu/4771579/Dantes_Enamoured_Mind

Dante, The Living Hope

https://www.academia.edu/4685765/Dante_-_The_Living_Hope

Critical Studies in Rational Freedom

https://www.academia.edu/657125/CRITICAL_STUDIES_IN_RATIONAL_FREEDOM

Marx, Reason and Freedom: Communism, Rational Freedom and Socialised Humanity

https://www.academia.edu/10006922/Marx_Reason_and_Freedom_Communism_Rational_Freedom_and_Socialised_Humanity

Marx, Praxis and Socialism from Below

https://www.academia.edu/10118948/Marx_Praxis_and_Socialism_from_Below

Fire and Ice: where would Dante place all of us who are borrowing against this Earth...?

Fire and Ice by Robert Frost

Some say the world will end in fire,
Some say in ice.
From what I've tasted of desire
I hold with those who favor fire.
But if it had to perish twice,
I think I know enough of hate
To say that for destruction ice
Is also great
And would suffice.

In a "*Science and the Arts*" presentation from 1960, astronomer Harlow Shapley claims to have inspired Frost's "Fire and Ice" poem. Shapley had met Frost a year before the poem was published, and Frost had asked him, an astronomer of some repute, how he thought the world would end. Shapley replied that either the sun will explode and the Earth will be incinerated, or, should the Earth escape this fate, it will end up slowly freezing in deep space. So the Earth will end either by fire, consumed by the Sun, or by ice, carrying on as a cold and lifeless rock. Shapley considers the poem to be an example of how science can influence the creation of art, or clarify its meaning. He may well be right. But I'd like to present another interpretation, one that goes much deeper than physical causality. In this view, Frost is using the physical threats of fire and ice to comment on the quality of human relationships rather than on the end of the physical world. Frost's references to desire and hate suggest that some such meaning is intended here.

Frost may be alluding to the *Inferno* in Dante's Comedy, where both fire and ice are punishments. Dante also writes of will and desire being "turned by the Love that moves the Sun and the other stars." (*Commedia, Paradiso XXXIII* 142-146). I think this gives us the clue. Fire and ice are opposites in the same way that desire, as lust, born of fire, and hate, born out of ice, denoting a coldness, a lack of feeling or care, are opposites. Desire and hate are not just opposite emotions in this context, they are extremes, extremes of love, of physical and spiritual love, of the love of human beings, of humanity, of the Earth, of life ... Life ceases at either extreme. Both extremes destroy the soul of the individual, of humanity, of the world, and the

metaphors of fire and ice fit that end perfectly. The simple beauty of Frost's poem is revealed when we see the two opposites of fire and ice as forming a unity, the end which comes to the world on the outside when it dies on the inside. And the world dies when its central core of love is denied and is sent to the margins. We live in a relational world. Get those relations wrong, and we are going to Hell.

The latest issue of *Science* features a short, but forceful editorial by the journal's editor in chief, the geophysicist Marcia K. McNutt. She calls for humanity to end decades of procrastination and get serious about cutting greenhouse-gas emissions linked to global warming. "The time for debate has ended," she writes. "Action is urgently needed."

<http://www.sciencemag.org/content/349/6243/7.full>

Well, questioning and criticising will carry on for as long as science (or philosophy or any other human contemplative activity) continues to be worthy of the name. This part of McNutt's article has been subject to vociferous criticism, the accusation that this is politics and advocacy and assertion rather than real science. Point taken. But we live in a public world, a practical world and a social world. The world is not an external, objective datum fit only for pure passive scientific contemplation. However much science will carry on, the time has come for serious climate action in the field of politics and public policy. What is most interesting about McNutt's article is the way that she frames the argument for climate action around morality as much as scientific evidence, alluding to Dante's allegorical journey through Hell to set the tone of her piece:

'In Dante's *Inferno*, he describes the nine circles of Hell, each dedicated to different sorts of sinners, with the outermost being occupied by those who didn't know any better, and the innermost reserved for the most treacherous offenders. I wonder where in the nine circles Dante would place all of us who are borrowing against this Earth in the name of economic growth, accumulating an environmental debt by burning fossil fuels, the consequences of which will be left for our children and grandchildren to bear?'

I'll just say here that I dislike the concept of Hell and would prefer to avoid it. The danger with such a notion is that it divides the world between the forces of infallible good and of irredeemable evil, so that your side – friends - can do no wrong and those with opposing views – enemies – can do no right. It's the end of politics and it diminishes us all. The approach involves a dangerous mindset. The problem with fighting wars against evil is that you turn into the very evil you are fighting. Hell is embroidery, a poetry or a mythology that serves to elaborate certain points about right living and wrong living. It can be useful in showing how bad choices have bad consequences, and how we are always free and responsible in acting the way we do. That is how I read and value Dante. At the same time, it's a human invention and, like all such inventions, it is one that can rebound on us, giving us the power and justification for human beings to do terrible things to each other. But isn't that precisely the point about human power, culture, technology, knowledge? So whilst I have a great deal of sympathy with those who would prefer to close Hell down and send the devil packing, I do think this is an evasion of the big issue at stake here – good and bad and the human ability to choose one or the other, and the human responsibility to make that choice. This is precisely the issue raised by industrialisation and the extension of human technological power over the world. But just be aware of the danger that, in fighting the forces of Hell, you may become a devil yourself.

I like Dante's work in general. And I like Dante's *Comedy* in particular, for this reason, it is a *summa*, an encyclopaedia that covers all knowledge, all of life and its living, and Dante makes it clear throughout that human beings are free moral agents whose actions have consequences, good and bad, intended and unintended. We are social beings; what we do impacts on others and on the world around us. We are charged with the duty to use our intellect, our rationality to know what is true and right, and to choose and act accordingly. He doesn't duck the difficult issues of sin and punishment, and it makes me very uncomfortable to read the way characters are placed in Hell. I make it clear that such an approach can easily backfire. But we need to be clear the way that Dante structures this argument, what he is getting at – what it is to be a fulfilled human being, and the ways in which we fall short, and how totally we may fail. I always try to qualify the emphasis on personal responsibility with an

emphasis on institutional responsibility, the way that individuals are locked within socially structured patterns and habits of behaviour that can only be turned to good against bad by joining with others in common endeavour. Again, though, Dante writes beautifully on the city and on politics as public spheres in which active, informed citizens may come together and determine together affairs of common concern.

Catherine Keen, *Dante and the City*

Joan M. Ferrante, *The Political Vision of the Divine Comedy*

We were promised industrial 'progress' as Heaven on Earth. Instead, we have brought about a crisis in the climate system threatening the basis of civilised life and threatening to make the world a Hell. The poets had seen this from the start.

Passing the Carron Iron Works in 1787, the poet Robert Burns scratched these lines on a window-pane:

"We cam na here to view your warks,
In hopes to be mair wise,
But only, lest we gang to Hell,
It may be nae surprise."

Warning of a 6C global warming, scientist Stephen Emmott warns that the world will become "a complete hellhole" riven by conflict, famine, flood and drought. There is little hope for the future here. "Abandon hope all ye who enter here", reads the inscription to the entrance of Hell in Dante's Inferno.

<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/aug/03/ian-jack-overpopulation-ten-billion>

I'll balance this gloomy view up with Chris Goodall's critique of Emmott's 10 Billion book as 'unscientific and misanthropic'.

<http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2013/jul/09/stephen-emmott-population-book-misanthropic>

This Hell on Earth is a self-made Hell.

'Life is frightened out of its highly enlightened wits by the return of ancient nightmares: the tales of the sorcerer's apprentice, of dwarfs with magic powers. The promise of Heaven for the poor in spirit is understood to mean that, on earth at least, they should be educated into clever people able to manipulate and let loose the technical installations of Hell. And in art, there are sounds most skilfully organized, furies expressed in the most virtuoso fashion, and proud of signifying nothing. Whole systems of aesthetics are evolved to justify this state of affairs. A world emptied of meaning seeks to escape from the infinite boredom of its meaninglessness by the magic of words without flesh, and forms without content. And, indeed, the attempt to distil poetry from the things or ideas that form our 'real' world would be in vain.' (Erich Heller, *The Disinherited Mind*).

But it's a self-made Hell that can be unmade.

A couple of decades ago, the zoologist Jonathan Kingdon wrote the book "*Self-Made Man and His Undoing*" (1993). He writes: 'Drawn further and further out of our biological matrix we have become more and more dependent on an all-embracing but loveless technology to see us through. Under this impassive influence we have become orphans of our own technology.'

'We cannot make a scapegoat of the technological revolution that has pampered us yet passed by the emaciated victims we see on television. It is an extension of what we are. If we are greedy and selfish technology will be a faithful mirror. Left to its own dynamics technological and industrial innovation trashes products, places and people. Technology is at once social shredder, racial churn and political furnace. It is for the children of technology to humanise their parent or, like Saturn, it will consume them. Self-made Man and his society will be undone. If the twenty-first century sets out to build a new sense of family it has powerful tools to help in the task. If it

doesn't, its antithesis - increasing conflicts between haves and have-nots - is inevitable.'

'The study of natural processes, so long confined to the laboratory, has now moved on to the broad stage of international politics and raises issues that must engage us in new struggles.'

'This cannot be a mere technical fix but will involve a social and spiritual revolution.'
(Kingdon 1993: 316-317).

And that entails right actions for right reasons within right relationships.

In the third ring of the seventh circle of Hell, the worst ring of that circle, are those who have committed the greater crime, that of violence against Nature and hence against God. Dante presents a picture of lost and wondering souls assailed by a perpetual rain of fire in an arid desert wasteland ...

Familiar? I'll quote computational scientist Stephen Emmott again here:

'recent research shows that we look certain to be heading for a larger rise in global average temperatures than 2C – a far larger rise. It is now very likely that we are looking at a future global average rise of 4C – and we can't rule out a rise of 6C. This will be absolutely catastrophic. It will lead to runaway climate change, capable of tipping the planet into an entirely different state, rapidly. Earth will become a hellhole.'

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2013/jun/30/stephen-emmott-ten-billion>

Dante has some words as to why we have ended up here. Through 'foul usury', humankind violates the Creation, our God given dwelling, committing a violence against God by 'despising Nature and her goodness' (Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, trans, by Charles S. Singleton, Bollingen Series LXXX, *Paradiso*, XXII, 151 and *Inferno*, canto XI, lines 46-48 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970). There is nothing in the Bible which entitles human beings to exterminate or destroy or hold in contempt anything on Earth, the stewardship it affirms holds precisely the contrary. We may use the gifts of nature but have no right to ruin or waste them.

That is not what 'dominion' entails. We have the right to use what we need, but no more than that. The Bible forbids usury and condemns great accumulations of property. As Dante argues, 'the usurer condemns Nature ... for he puts his hope elsewhere.' (Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, canto XI, lines 109-11.) By taking more than we are entitled to, we are destroying our place within Creation and, as a result, are destroying our own Being.

In ordering the sins against Nature and God, Dante distinguishes between sins of incontinence and sins of malice. Sins of incontinence are lesser sins, passions which got the better of individuals, which they were not able to contain – lust, gluttony, avarice, anger and prodigality. (Hey, we've all been there, we are only human after all. But I've learned my lesson and will never do it again. Not as often anyway). Sins of malice are the worst of all, since they involve a perversion of human reason or intellect, the deliberate use of intelligence for the wrong ends, for private gain or advantage, at the expense of others, causing injury to others. Many people sin unwittingly, 'they know not what they do'. But we have a moral duty to know. Worst of all, though, are those who sin wittingly, who put their private gain or advantage before the good of all, to the detriment of all.

There are some pertinent words from Luzzi in light of contemporary environmental problems: "the deeper one goes into Dante's hell, the smarter the sinners", Luzzi observes. And "the damned always refuse to accept responsibility for their actions and embrace the greatest gift of all, free will".

In *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis writes: "It is remarkable how weak international political responses have been. The failure of global summits on the environment make it plain that our politics are subject to technology and finance. There are too many special interests, and economic interests easily end up trumping the common good and manipulating information so that their own plans will not be affected" (54).

Dante would pose the question, how many of those acting in a self-interested way to the detriment of the common good, do so knowingly? To be more precise, in the context of this article on climate change, are there self-interested parties who are so committed to prevailing social and economic arrangements that benefit them in the

immediate and short-term, whatever the social and ecological cost as a whole, that they actively and knowingly deny either or both the problem of climate change and the proposed solutions to it?

I'd say 'yes', such is the political world of competing social interests, groups and classes we live in. And Dante reserves some of the deepest places in Hell for them. The problem, in an age of non-belief, is this, such people may well not get their just deserts in the afterlife, just as the good folk who do the right thing may well not get to Heaven as their reward. Here's my appeal, if we act as though Hell and Heaven are realities, and take our second chances to choose and act wisely and responsibly in the middle ground, we may well yet succeed in taking our place on earth as our 'common home', a Paradiso indeed. That's a deliberately modest claim I make there, minimal assumptions for maximum agreement. We can all do this. If we don't, if we choose and act badly, if we fail to come together and constitute ourselves as a 'we' in politics, generate the form and forms of the common life enabling us to conduct our common affairs in light of the long-term common good, if we continue to let free-riders control our futures, then one day bad actions generating bad consequences will indeed turn the earth into a hellhole. Dante's imagery might be stark, unpleasant even, but he is encouraging us to think deeply on the key existential questions of who we are, where we are, how we live our lives and how we ought to live our lives, what mental, moral and institutional capacities and tools we need to live well, how we order our relationships between ourselves and with the world, how we arrange our affairs not merely to live but to live well.

In the eighth circle of Hell, we are confronted with the sin of fraud. The fraudulent are thieves who deprive other people of their rightful share of earthly goods. Bear in mind that for Dante *fortuna* is something we all have to deal with in life, life is how we act in face of fortune, the things that befall us. The fraudulent use their intellect to cheat fortune and are therefore ministers of ill fortune. Further on in the descent into Hell, we meet the counsellors of fraud, the sowers of discord and the falsifiers. Yes, the falsifiers, the people who deny truth and turn it into its opposite for their own gain. Their punishment is to suffer in the valley of the diseased for all the disease they have spread in society. For the secular amongst us, there is no consolation in any of this, for it is the men and women of good will, as well as the more-than-human world,

that suffers in the meantime from this dis-ease, punishment through social dislocation and ecological despoliation for the sins of others.

When we enter the lowest depths of Hell, the very bottom circle, we leave behind the fire and enter a barren icy wasteland. Here we enter the circle of the treacherous, where the sinners are immersed in ice. Here we find the traitors, traitors to their kindred and to their country. Here Dante meets Lucifer, in the very centre of the earth, trapped in ice. A parody of the trinity, a parody of true Christian love. Hell is the anti-Paradise.

Patriotism? What does that word denote? To whom or what do we owe loyalty? I can perhaps make Dante's point here more understandable by reference to an eco-patriotism, an oikophilia, a love of place, a biophilia, a love of life. In a chapter in *Here on Earth* calling for human beings to embrace biophilia as a condition of their own survival, ecologist Tim Flannery quotes the Bible: 'A new commandment I give unto you. That ye love one another.' (John 13). Flannery wants us to love life as a whole as well as each other.

'I am certain of one thing—if we do not strive to love one another, and to love our planet as much as we love ourselves, then no further human progress is possible here on Earth.'

Flannery 2010 ch 23

Flannery writes of 'just letting heavens' performance run on and on' (Flannery 2010 ch 5). I don't much care whether we call this Creation Care with Pope Francis or Earthcare with Carolyn Merchant, it just seems obvious to me that if you believe in a Creator God you are going to respect and look after the Creation, just as it is obvious that if you want to live healthy and flourishing lives, you are going to respect and look after the sources of life, our biological and ecological matrix. As Flannery writes:

'But those ancient practices just might teach us something more—that people blessed with healthy, diverse ecosystems are likely to endure and prosper. I

say this because environments with intact keystone species are more productive, and therefore better habitats for humans.'

Flannery 2010: ch 8

Flannery argues that human beings should adopt the concept of biophilia so as to appreciate biodiversity as a condition of flourishing. To destroy those ecosystems, pollute the sources of life, engage in practices that render species extinct, ruin habitats and burn up the earth – that's what I would call treachery, a treachery against our kin, a treachery that is an affront to our kinship not just with other human beings but with other species. Our common home is built upon the common ground in which we share universal kinships and co-operations. Biologists point to the genetic unity of life. Ethicists point to the moral unity. All organisms are descended from the same life form. We are bonded to the living environment by the genetic unity of all life, kinship and ancient history. Good economics, they say in commodifying and exploiting 'natural resources', 'progress', 'jobs, growth and investment'. Treachery, I call it, 'foul usury' in Dante's words, a violation of God and Nature.

Many people associate the term 'biophilia' with the biologist E.O. Wilson. I know it from its earlier use in the work of social psychologist/critical theorist Erich Fromm. He writes:

'I believe that the man choosing progress can find a new unity through the development of all his human forces, which are produced in three orientations. These can be presented separately or together: biophilia, love for humanity and nature, and independence and freedom.'

Fromm, E. *The Heart of Man: Its Genius for Good and Evil*, Harper & Row, San Francisco, 1965

That seems right and reasonable. I tend to write of 'happiness' as flourishing these days rather than freedom, mind. And virtuous action and a sufficiency of material goods within right relationships.

A parallel can be drawn between the idea of a self-made Hell with Max Weber's view of capitalist modernity as an 'iron cage' that determines the lives of those confined within it with 'irresistible force'.

'The Puritan wanted to work in a calling; we are forced to do so. For when asceticism was carried out of monastic cells into everyday life, and began to dominate worldly morality, it did its part in building the tremendous cosmos of the modern economic order. This order is now bound to the technical and economic conditions of machine production which today determine the lives of all the individuals who are born into this mechanism, not only those directly concerned with economic acquisition, with irresistible force. Perhaps it will so determine them until the last ton of fossilized coal is burnt. In Baxter's view the care for external goods should only lie on the shoulders of the "saint like a light cloak, which can be thrown aside at any moment". But fate decreed that the cloak should become an iron cage.'

Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 1985: 181

A parallel can also be drawn between Max Weber's view of the mechanised modern world as an 'iron cage' confining its human creators and Dante's figure of Lucifer frozen and immobilised in Hell.

Oh in eterno faticoso manto! 'O weary mantle for eternity!', 'Oh what a toilsome cloak to wear forever!' [*Inferno* XXIII 58-69]

The way that Lucifer, the most beautiful and noble of all the angels, has been reduced to mechanical form indicates the immobilizing of personality which results from sin. Lucifer, as the greatest sinner, is utterly immobilised, doomed to spend eternity petrified in the ice of his own creation. And here he suffers the ultimate pain of isolation. (Ryan 2003). This is petrification as excommunication, severing the connection to others. Dante knew exile from others as a death sentence itself, the destruction of the social nature of a human being.

It is no accident that the bottom of Dante's hell is cold. The core of eternal punishment in the *Commedia* is not a furnace of fire but a lake of ice where sinners are frozen hard and fast forever. This image still startles new readers of the poem - it is so far from what any of us would call the "traditional" picture of hell. Yet in another way it is deeply traditional, growing out of a complex of inter-related Augustinian language, conceptuality and metaphor that had already shaped the thinking of the West for nearly a thousand years. Within this traditional complex fire is predominantly a heavenly rather than hellish metaphor. For flame by nature rises, heading (as ancient physics would have it) toward its home among the fiery stars of heaven. Charity in Augustine is spiritual fire, an ardent desire raising the soul toward God. The movements of Dante's souls are governed by this metaphor of fiery charity. The lake of solid ice at the bottom of the universe just works out its negative implications: the descent into hell means leaving warmth and light behind. Its positive implications can be seen in the happiness of Piccarda, at peace even in the lowest sphere of heaven because all her desires come to rest in the highest Light of all, like fire finding its natural place in the stars (Par 3:70-87). And the movement depicted by the metaphor can be seen in the wonderful rule of ascent on Mount Purgatory, where the climb gets easier as you go (Purg. 4:88-94)--for the closer you get to heaven the less earthly is your weight and the more like fire, ascending naturally and without effort. Ice and fire, immobility and ascent, weight and rest, make visible the trajectories of love in Dante's world. We need sensible metaphors for this, because love is a movement not in space but in the will, a psychological rather than corporeal dimension which we can experience and understand but cannot literally imagine. For imagination requires sensible images drawn from the world of bodily things, while the soul is a dimension of its own, altogether beyond the grasp of the senses. So Dante, following Augustine, represents the one dimension by the other, using the bodily ascent of fire as a metaphor to represent the love which moves souls toward God. (Cary 2006: 5-36).

Reading Dante's description of Hell as a lake of ice where sinners are frozen hard and fast for all eternity, I cannot help draw a parallel with sociologist Max Weber's conception of a rationalized, bureaucratized modernity. Weber shows how the objective discharge of roles and tasks within the modern bureaucratic world proceeds according to calculable rules, 'without regard for persons' (Weber 1991:

215). In the *Inferno*, Dante describes the moat of thieves, where members find that not even their bodies are their own, but may be taken from them at any time by a fellow thief, leaving them to steal a body from someone else, and on and on for all eternity. (A selfish world which proceeds without 'regard for persons', the phrase by which Weber described the modern world.) Dante describes the exchanges which take place in graphic detail. In one instance, a thief in the body of a reptile bites a thief in a human body on the neck.

Weber conceives modern bureaucratic organisation as a 'mechanized petrification, embellished with a convulsive self-importance', with human beings being confined in mind, body and soul within a steel hard cage, a physical and psychic prison that continues until 'the last ton of fossilized fuel is burnt'. (Weber 1985:181/2). Petrification means the conversion of organic material into a fossilized form. Regulated from cradle to grave in a network of disciplines, we have fossilized ourselves. Our 'mechanized petrification' is of our own doing, through our self-importance, our selfishness.

Weber portrays modernity as a form of Hell: 'Not summer's bloom lies ahead of us, but rather a polar night of icy darkness and hardness, no matter which group may triumph externally now. Where there is nothing, not only the Kaiser but the proletarian has lost his rights' (Weber 1970: 128). Weber thus prophesies an icy darkness and hardness for all eternity – it's Dante's Hell on Earth, a self-made paradise as an iron cage.

Our external triumph has been bought at the expense of an internal diminution. And that hardening of the psyche, immobilizing human sensibilities, is part and parcel of a steel hard machine civilization whose addiction to fossil fuels is burning up the planet.

For Weber, we have lost the overarching moral framework by which we lived our lives. We were doomed to live in a morally divided world (Lassman and Velody 1989:22). Weber poses the question, 'Which of the warring gods shall we serve?' (Weber 1970:155). Dante Alighieri gives us the answer by asking another question entirely.

Weber writes:

'No one knows who will live in this cage in the future, or whether at the end of this tremendous development entirely new prophets will arise, or there will be a great rebirth of old ideas and ideals, or, if neither, mechanized petrification, embellished with a sort of convulsive self-importance. For of the last stage of this cultural development, it might well be truly said: "Specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart; this nullity imagines that it has attained a level of civilization never before achieved."

Weber 1985:182

Until the inversion of means and ends is addressed, and life re-enchanted, the accumulation of quantity through the exploitation of the planet will continue to misfire, delivering material riches at the expense of human happiness.

Which begs the question of whether it is possible to explore our ecological self while imprisoned in the steel hard cage of a rationalized modern necropolis powered by ancient wastes which Mother Nature, in her wisdom, has kept buried beneath her skin.

Dante's Hell and Weber's modernity as mechanised petrification is the end of the living world through both ice and fire, through the loss of true human relations, the loss of love of life, the loss of warm, affective ties and bonds. For all of the burning of fossil fuels, it's all ice out there. For Dante, such an end is born of idolatry, the veneration of human power as a false idol which serves to separate human beings from the true reality and from their true nature. Weber would refer to the pathos of means and ends, of means enlarged to displace genuine ends, ends we set ourselves through free will, ends which relate in some way to the meaning inherent in the world in which we live.

Weber's description of the modern world as a 'mechanized petrification, embellished with a sort of convulsive self-importance' is apt. The modern individual is subject to a

material determinism without and an egoistic compulsion within, droning his or her life away within a material mechanism that proceeds 'without regard for persons', yet nevertheless inflating the importance of the most trivial things in order to make the point that, despite all evidence to the contrary, 'I' matter. That assertion on the part of individuals reveals something much more profound than narcissism and egoism – it reveals that the human quest for meaning endures, however impaired and distorted.

In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber was concerned to challenge the view that history is determined by economic interests. For Weber, the most powerful driver of change in history emerges from the synergy of combined metaphysical motives and material interests. Neither element alone is enough to bring substantial change, what matters is their combined interaction. What Kingdon calls a 'social and spiritual revolution' is to be considered part of the metaphysical reconstruction that E.F. Schumacher demanded in his *Small is Beautiful*. Dante writes of the love that moves the sun and the other stars. Our relations to the planet are shaped by our relations to each other. This is why I would argue that the environmental movement is both material and metaphysical, why, for all of the emphasis on alternate technology, on science, on the crisis in the climate system, protecting the health of ecosystems, preserving biodiversity, environmentalism is part of the human quest for meaning. To be successful in delivering the ecological transformation of human relations and politics, the environmental movement has to transcend single-issue campaigning and adopt an integral approach embracing ecology, economics, metaphysics and morals. Because, at the deepest level, environmentalism is not merely about this or that issue, atmospheric pollution, extinction of species, ocean acidification, desertification etc, but about something much more profound. From this perspective, environmentalism is not merely a protest against the emptying of the world of its natural resources, but against the emptying of the world of its meaning. Environmentalism is about the recovery and affirmation of inherent value, in the sense of worth as deriving from the Old English word 'woerthship', from which we get 'worship.' What values do we worship, which gods do we serve? I am therefore arguing for environmentalism as a movement that integrates material and metaphysical or spiritual motives in the quest for meaning in life. In fine, environmentalists act in defence of the cosmos as a whole, not its scenic parts. Environmentalism therefore re-unites politics and spirituality, refusing to

separate out values from the public and material world in the way that has characterised our political and economic life in an age of atomistic, reductionist, scientific materialism. I think we can discern in environmentalism a profound need for a meaning and fulfilment that can only be described as spiritual, a need which transcends the materialist frame of ecology as science.

“where [would]...Dante...place all of us who are borrowing against this Earth...?”

<http://www.truth-out.org/news/item/28702-mourning-our-planet-climate-scientists-share-their-grieving-process#>

<http://www.mymodernmet.com/profiles/blogs/kamchatka-russia-snow-caves?context=tag-ice>

<http://dailycaller.com/2015/07/06/first-woman-to-head-the-national-academy-of-sciences-compared-global-warming-to-the-nine-circles-of-hell/>

<http://judithcurry.com/2015/07/05/the-beyond-two-degree-inferno/>

There are many who think that the environmental crisis is now out of our control. We have sat by and watched and waited, allowing an untrammelled economic system, lacking in thought, foresight and morality, kick the biosphere over the edge of the cliff. We are beyond the point of no return. We are past 400ppm, and at least 4C of temperature increase is baked in. The world will become a hellhole.

Such predictions have a wealth of scientific research and understanding behind them. So who am I to contest the vision of a nightmarish future to come? Maybe the paradox is this, that as a result of human self-creation being invested in social and economic forms and powers which have proved destructive of planetary ecosystems, we are facing the scope for human agency dwindling away to naught. I still affirm the indeterminacy of the future and the role of human agency and responsibility. Dante is damning of fortune tellers. He thinks they deny us of a future by denying human choice, responsibility and agency. He gives them a fitting punishment, twisting their

heads around so that they look backwards, and walk backwards too. The future is more than the present enlarged, so long as we intervene in supposedly 'objective' processes and act to turn trends and tendencies in favourable directions. Each action brings a reaction. Actions have consequences.

Where does responsibility lie? We each have the capacity for choice. Dante looks at the heart of the white rose and says I saw within its depths how it conceives all things in a single volume bound by love, of which the universe is the scattered leaves. This is the answer, from the depths of Hell through the delights of earth to the centre of all knowing and the mind of God - In each place humanity exists. And the underlying force that creates and unites humanity is the love that moves the sun and the other stars.

The real world? Paradiso? The world we could have had, the world we were gifted. The world that exists beyond time and space, no matter what we do to the earth we have been gifted? Dante remains my inspiration. He writes of the guidance that gives hope and shows us the way (*Purgatorio* IV 29/30), '*di viva speme*,' 'the living hope' that enthuses and inspires us, that we need to act upon (*Paradiso* XX 109), the love that turns the sun and the other stars, the eternal love that moves us and carries us through.

We are hearing the word 'disaster' a lot in these days of climate change and global warming. Now then, the word 'disaster' derives from the Latin '*dis*-', meaning 'away', 'without', and '*astro*', meaning 'star', hence 'disaster' means to be 'without a star'. Dante ends every canto of the Comedy with the stars. But the final verse of the *Paradiso* shows his real concern, the force behind it all.

'like a wheel in perfect balance turning,
I felt my will and my desire turned
by the Love that moves the Sun and the other stars.'
(*Paradiso* XXXIII 142-146)

"By such a curse as theirs none is so lost, that the eternal Love cannot return,
as long as hope maintains a thread of green." (*Purgatorio* III 133-135).

Love may be hanging on by a slender thread these days, but there's more than a few of us holding on to it, and I'm staying green.

And staying real. This wonderful piece of work by Teodolinda Barolini shows the distinction Dante makes between realism and reality, showing that we mistake the *Inferno* as the most realistic and the *Paradiso* the least - Dante's realism reaches its pinnacle in the *Paradiso*, exposes a deficiency in human understanding in seeing the most immediate realism rather than true reality.

Anyhow, Teodolinda explains it better than I can here. I love this passage:

'For Dante the question of reality or being leads inevitably to the question of creation, which carries with it two indispensable features: creation requires difference, and creation requires love. The creation of the Many from the One – “*distinctio et multitudo rerum est a Deo*” wrote St. Thomas [“the difference and multiplicity of things come from God” In the act that we call creation, God made difference, in Thomas’s words, “so that His goodness might be communicated to creatures and re-enacted through them” (ibid; Blackfriars 1967, 8:95)] (ST 1a.47.1) – is described by Dante as an erotically-tinged Big Bang, an explosion of ardor that bursts forth into flaming sparks of being: *La divina bontà, che da sé sperne ogne livore, ardendo in sé, sfavilla sì che dispiega le bellezze etterne.* (Par. 7.64-66)

'Spurning any kind of envy, Divine Goodness, burning within, so sparkles, that it unfolds Eternal Beauty.'

The “*bellezze etterne*” are unfolded in an act of love, an act in which the Eternal opens itself in order to create the New: “*s’aperse in nuovi amor l’eterno amore*”, 'in these new loves, Eternal Love unfolded.' (Par. 29.18). This act of primordial opening is a radical affirmation of being. The Transcendent chooses to enter the flux of time and affirms itself as the ground of all that is in the declaration *Subsisto* (the use of direct discourse is perhaps

the most ancient of Dante's techniques of verisimilitude, already present in the *rime giovanili*).'

Now that's what I call real. Unbelievable?

'Is the discomfort that many readers experience confronting Dante's *Paradiso* the discomfort that many of us feel in front of a resolute and unblinking attention to reality?'

https://www.academia.edu/4083607/Dante_and_Reality_Dante_and_Realism_Paradiso_

The 750th anniversary of Dante's birth in 1265 will be celebrated by the Center for Italian Studies at the University of Pennsylvania with an international conference on "Dante and Music" to be held in Philadelphia November 5-6, 2015.

<https://www.sas.upenn.edu/italians/event/2015/11/dante-and-music>

It's all music - get in tune! Dante's poetry is music to my ears, both the words and the meaning they convey.

La mente innamorata, che donna..

"My enamoured mind, which always lingers lovingly."

[*Paradiso* XXVII 88]

Ne l'ordine ch'io dico sono accline

tutte nature, per diverse sorti,

più al principio loro e men vicine;

onde si muovono a diversi porti

per lo gran mar de l'essere, e ciascuna

con istinto a lei dato che la porti.

Questi ne porta il foco inver' la luna;

*questi ne' cor mortali è permotore;
questi la terra in sé stringe e aduna;*

'In that order, all natures have their bent
according to their different destinies,
whether nearer to their source or farther from it.

'They move, therefore, toward different harbors
upon the vastness of the sea of being,
each imbued with instinct that impels it on its course.

'This instinct carries fire toward the moon,
this is the moving force in mortal hearts,
this binds the earth to earth and makes it one.

[*Paradiso* I 109-117]

“like a wheel in perfect balance turning, I felt my will and my desire turned
by the Love that moves the Sun and the other stars.”

[*Paradiso* XXXIII 142-146]

Here is physicist Margaret Wertheim explaining why her favourite book is Dante's
Comedy.

TRANSCRIPT FOR MARGARET WERTHEIM — THE GRANDEUR AND LIMITS OF
SCIENCE

<http://www.onbeing.org/program/transcript/7505><http://www.brainpickings.org/2015/05/06/margaret-wertheim-on-being-science-religion/>

In a Dark Wood: What Dante Taught Me About Grief, Healing and the Mysteries of
Love, by Joseph Luzzi

How Dante saved my life when I became a widower and a father on the same day

Joseph Luzzi's wife was killed two weeks before their baby was due. The little girl was saved after a C-section.

A Dante scholar, the *Divine Comedy* helped him through his grief so he could be the father he wanted to be

<http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2015/jun/13/how-dante-saved-my-life-when-i-became-a-widower-and-a-father-on-the-same-day>

“He was a guy who had everything: he was a leading poet, a politician, he was living in one of the most exciting cities in the world and then suddenly he was kicked out and defamed. For the last 20 years of his life, he wandered around Italy, banished from his beloved Florence.”

How do we deal with loss, with separation, with a life in exile? How do we find our way back home? Where is our resting place?

Joseph Luzzi on Dante, Grief and His New Book

“I read Dante at my lowest point,” he says. “It’s the role of great literature to be transformative. Dante in his darkest moments of exile created a work of transcendent beauty. It’s a very rich piece of literature.”

<http://wwd.com/eye/people/joseph-luzzi-dante-dark-wood-book-10142224/>

And that’s why Dante’s *Divine Comedy* is the greatest human comedy – all life is in there, it touches every aspect of our lives, the pages burn. And it is inherently political – as social beings, we need others to be ourselves, we need a good politics to have a good society and a good life.

Princeton Dante Project

<http://etcweb.princeton.edu/dante/index.html>

Amazing site here put together with care, attention to detail, expertise, and love by Teodolinda Barolini, Lorenzo da Ponte Professor of Italian at Columbia University and all-round good person who makes it clear why Dante is alive and matters. I

would particularly draw attention to the 'Commentary and Context' section for the extensive, detailed and insightful comments on every part of the Comedy. It's all in here, and I can only express heartfelt thanks, appreciation and admiration for this entire endeavour.

<http://digitaldante.columbia.edu/>

Still unpersuaded? Try this article in the *Independent*.

'Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy* endures as one of the essential books of mankind
Why is Dante still relevant? Because all life burns in the pages of the Divine Comedy, argues Ian Thomson

'All life is written in its burning pages.'

'In scenes of adrenaline-quickenning horror as well as great lyric beauty, the *Divine Comedy* fused Roman Catholic doctrine with Classical philosophy and contemporary politics. Dante's influence in Catholic Italy has never waned. In the mid-1960s the poet and film director Pier Paolo Pasolini rewrote Dante's austere medieval poem to form a critique of Italy's consumer society. Published in the year of his murder by a neo-Fascist rent boy – 1975 – *The Divine Mimesis* bristles with Pasolini's abhorrence of American-style materialism and Christian Democrat-tainted political opportunism. Like Dante, Pasolini fulminated against politicians, grafters and humbugs who he believed had ruined postwar Italy.'

<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/dante-alighieris-divine-comedy-endures-as-one-of-the-essential-books-of-mankind-10267136.html>

How about Dante and music! Of course! *The Divine Comedy* is an epic meditation on the human condition. But can it ever be successfully turned into music? Tim Ashley on the composers who have dared

"Most would argue that Dante achieved in a single work what most writers failed to achieve in an entire output - a complete, comprehensive statement on the human condition and on mankind's history, both political and religious. There is, quite simply, too much in the *Comedy* for it ever to be adapted in its

entirety into another medium. Most creative artists contented themselves with basing works on episodes or fragments."

"Dante purists have long maintained that composers have failed to do him justice, subverted his moral vision and buried his work under the accretions of Romantic excess. Each age, however, re-invents great artists in its own image, and the Romantics found their own concerns, both personal and metaphysical, reflected in the anguish of the *Inferno* and the tortured grace of the *Purgatorio*. Few would doubt that the works they produced are, by and large, anything other than masterpieces, and a fitting celebration of the poet whom many regard as the greatest writer of all time."

<http://www.theguardian.com/music/2005/jan/08/classicalmusicandopera>

'It has been well said that the study of Dante is a liberal education. There is, in truth, scarcely any subject of interest left untouched by the transfiguring power of that master-hand. Theologian, philosopher, poet, statesman, historian, man of science, painter, sculptor, musician, may all alike find an answering and inspiring note in the lines of the "*Divine Comedy*".

These are words that sing to me.

To walk again with the sun, moon and stars.

To the Mystic Ocean of Being

In which we live

"It is to that sea all things move." [Paradiso, III, 85-7]

'Nothing escapes Dante's notice; and, among other things, the student is struck by the poet's sensitiveness to sound in general ... Dante had evidently studied music, and was accustomed to hearing it well performed.'

(Music in Dante's "*Divine Comedy*")

The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular

Vol. 36, No. 629 (Jul. 1, 1895), pp. 446-448).

Politics as music, music as politics – getting the One and the Many to sing in tune.

“Thus does the Living Justice make so sweet
the sentiments in us, that we are free
of any turning toward iniquity.

Differing voices join to sound sweet music;
so do the different orders in our life
render sweet harmony among these spheres.”

Commedia, Paradiso 6: 121-126

I' would just add that you really need to read Dante in the Italian, to truly convey the internal music of the man and his message and its expression.

Here's my own homage to Dante.

DANTE'S ENAMOURED MIND: Knowing and Being in the Life and Thought of Dante Alighieri

https://www.academia.edu/4771579/Dantes_Enamoured_Mind

Happy 750th birthday Dante Alighieri.

Dante has finally become what Guido Cavalcanti, his friend and mentor, said he was from the first: "*Dante, un sospiro messagger del core*"—"Dante, you are a sigh, like a messenger of the heart."

Decent documentary which emphasises Dante's universal appeal, both popular and learned.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tUYXGB8Uk4M>

Dante's Inferno (1911) - World's Oldest Surviving Feature-Length Film - Alighieri
L'inferno

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iS4We4MDheg>

The Dante Society of America, members list

<https://dantesociety.org/node/12>

Dante's Sweet Symphony of Paradise

I have been working on this book since February 2017. It started as an article on Dante and music as I embarked on my rehabilitation classes after a spell in hospital following a massive heart attack. I was lucky to have survived. Dante has always been an unfailing guide for me, so I read and wrote for pleasure. And as I continued, Dante's music started to suggest other things. I started to develop the theme a little further. There is a point and a purpose to the inner music in Dante's 'sacred poem.' I've written a lot of words since the 1990s, maybe far too many words. The greatest books are never the ones that are finished and have the final say. There is no final say, and the best books are unfinishable; they leave something over for you to do. I have never thought that Dante gives us a complete book. He takes us to Paradise in order to return us to Earth again, and begin the journey anew. For years now I have expressed the desire to one day write a beautiful book. This may be the one.

Contents:

The Internal Music of The Comedy and of All Things
Dante's Sweet Symphony of Paradise

The Internal Music of The Comedy and of All Things

Introduction: the right order of things

((Introduction)) 3

((Dante and music)) 6

((Music measures the relation to God)) 8

((Objective reality and objective morality)) 10

((The musical structure of The Comedy)) 18

((The well-tempered harmony)) 19

((The influence of music in exercising soulcare)) 24

((Commercial Music and Soul Music - mechanical repetition as infernal)) 26
((familiarity and vision – beyond realism)) 34

Philosophical and Religious influences on Dante 37

((Plato)) 38
((Aristotle)) 39
((St. Augustine)) 42
((Boethius)) 45
((Ancient and Religious theories of music - a discussion)) 47

Dante's love of music 58

((The structure of the musical transition in *The Comedy*)) 59
((The musical anthropology of *The Comedy*))
((music and moral psychology)) 60
((The music of the universe - the centrality of music to all things)) 61

The Centrality of Numbers 61

((ratio and proportion)) 62
((Pythagoras)) 64
((Plato)) 65
((the Pythagorean tradition)) 66
((numerology – St Augustine)) 68
((Boethius)) 70
((the virtues of numbers)) 71
((Bonaventure)) 73
((numerology in Dante)) 76
((numerological thinking)) 78
((The dangers of arid rationalism - physicist and Dantista Margaret Wertheim's case against abstract Platonism)) 80
((Dante beyond numerology – innate love)) 88

The Comedy

((The *Inferno* – the world of anti-music)) 105
((Purgatory)) 108

((The limits of words)) 109
((Casella's song - the dangers of becoming absorbed in the sound of music to the neglect of its ends)) 112
((the role of hymns in *The Comedy*)) 117
((The mystic procession)) 123
((The challenge of the Paradiso - vision beyond the immediate senses)) 125
((The possibility of vision transcending senses)) 129
((The sweet symphony of Paradise)) 131
((The song and dance of Creation)) 133
((The music that is beyond rational comprehension - the anarchic excess that evades enclosure by totalizing Reason)) 137
((Beyond the limits of speech)) 140
((Conclusion – the musical journey)) 158
((Music as liquid light)) 160
((The end of the poem – into the light – the failure of geometry)) 167
((The spiritual centre of the universe – the end of Paradise)) 172

PARADISE AND LOVE 186

((Dante's heartleap - Love as the unifying force in the universe)) 186
((Dante's conclusion: Love as the answer)) 196
((The question: if love is the answer – then what is love?)) 197
((conclusion)) 198

THE SACRED POEM – THE REAL AND THE RATIONAL 200

((*The Comedy* as a sacred poem beyond fiction – the real and the rational)) 200
((The sacred poem – the real over the fictional)) 205
((the impossibilities of the Paradiso)) 210
((Wilde vs Beckett - touching the source of Dante's transcendent hope)) 223
((Dante's invention)) 225
((Dante's devotion to impossibility)) 227
((Paradise beyond Reason)) 229

The Danteum – Medievalism, the Hierarchical order and Fascism 231

((The Danteum)) 236

((The petrification of Paradise)) 241

((The freezing of the music)) 244

((Frozen music as the immobility of the *Inferno* – Paradise as music, light and love – critique of the Danteum as a world of form without love)) 246

((Integrating rather than separating the two concepts of God)) 247

((The critique of Einstein's God of Spinoza)) 247

((Putting the realms of fact and value together)) 248

A Creator God and/or Natural Creativity? 267

((The secret and the sacred – the impossibility of reinventing the sacred)) 287

((The fulfilment of the soul's desire – an eccentricity that is beyond control)) 347

((The illusions of being in control and of being in charge – letting go of neurosis)) 360

((Be still and know)) 383

((The dancer and the dance as one – getting in tune)) 385

Unity and Diversity 394

((Unity and diversity)) 395

((P.B. Shelley as a rewrite of Dante on unity and diversity)) 397

((Unity through diversity)) 402

((unity in diversity – the politics of the common good)) 404

((functional order – differentiated power)) 408

((functional order – the just society and love divine)) 416

((Personal and collective responsibility)) 419

Rational Freedom 430

((Dante and Marx)) 430

((Rational Freedom, Right Relationships, alienation and idolatry)) 467

((Reason, Culture and Transcendent Truths)) 479

((Culture, Power, and Truth)) 486

Freedom Rationalized and Mechanized 503

((Dante and the disenchanting world of Max Weber)) 503

((The End of the World by Fire and Ice – the parallels between Dante's *Inferno* and Max Weber's 'iron cage' of capitalist modernity)) 507

((Dante - recovering purpose and meaning in the disenchanting world)) 529

((Dante and Climate Accord)) 543

((Beyond the empire of fact)) 555

Happy Ending 571

((The human comedy – overcoming existential crisis)) 571

((Happiness depends on the choices we make, the ends we serve)) 574

Appendix – evidence of Dante’s internal music 575

References to Music 575

((musical instruments)) 576

((musical terms)) 577

((hymns and psalms)) 577

((appendix on numerology)) 579

((appendix on music and poetry)) 580

((appendix – Dante websites)) 584

And these chapters below are among another couple of hundred pages to be added to the above, then edited, rewritten and integrated:

Peace on Earth

Law, the State and the International Community

Perpetual Peace and government

Osip Mandelstam on Dante and true authority

Dante on One Government

Blake and Dante

Dante and Averroes – the uncanonical Dante

Dante and Mahler – the internal music

And there are plenty of other passages, texts, and essays I have hanging around on Dante. I have a beautiful piece on Chinese views of music, bells, and harmonious order which has to be fitted in somewhere.

I am encouraged by the extent to which further reading on this has confirmed my

views. I have recently taken extensive notes from Francesco Ciabattoni's erudite *Dante's Journey to Polyphony* (2010). Whilst I was somewhat disappointed to come across this incredibly scholarly and detailed book after I had largely written my Dante book, I remain heartily encouraged by the fact that many of the key points made in this learned and critically acclaimed book were ones that I had already made. I've made a lot more points besides. I haven't missed much at all, haven't taken a wrong turn, and am developing a key theme in Dante studies. Given that I started my Dante book merely to entertain and amuse myself, to lift my spirits whilst going through the uncertainties of cardiac rehabilitation, I think I am entitled to be a little pleased with my efforts. Dante, of course, is both an awkward read and an unfailing guide. I will examine whether it is testimony to the truth of Dante's faith or to his genius as a poet that he has us believing his impossibilities by the end. In the very least, there is such a thing as poetic invention and redemption. I need to piece the Dante sections and chapters together, edit, and integrate key notes from the very fine Ciabattoni book.

Dante is an incredibly powerful and wide ranging thinker as well as a peerless poet. People can't cope with his deep questioning and where it leads. Brave soldiers of the age of Positivism, their own prejudices concerning non-sense betray them.

Dante believed in a code of ethics as something much more substantial than subjective choice and irreducible preference and opinion. I'll stand by that view. It's accepted with respect to science, and people insist that nature is what it is, regardless of human projections and pretensions. They struggle with that same notion with respect to ethics. I have no trouble in moving from Nature to God here, for the reasons I give in this book. But the idea of Dante as a reactionary fundamentalist is mistaken, and profoundly so. Dante is actually very subversive, radical, and very far from being an elitist. Petrarch is a true elitist, dismissing Dante for soliciting "the windy applause of the masses." I have an extensive chapter which emphasises the extent to which Dante wrote with conscious political and ethical intent, to *move* people, *all* people. I also qualify sharply the notion that Dante is part of a 'Western' canon. I write of the uncanonical Dante who weaves themes drawn from Averroes in his texts. I bring out these points and more in my book.

I like Dante because he is so damned tough and challenging. He's not for the

timorous. He gets to the messy heart of the human world, and maybe gets too absorbed himself in politics and in settling scores. He harbored grudges and went mad in Hell. I argue that the *Inferno* shows the reality of an all-too-human politics and justice, a justice far removed from divine justice. That's the world of a human morality bereft of God's infinite and redeeming mercy and forgiveness. Dante takes us out of a self-made Hell and takes us to true realities. I offer neither proof nor evidence here. There are none. I offer Dante's 'impossibilities.' I show that Dante believes his impossibilities. I show that they make the most sense of the richness of human life as a quest for belonging, meaning, and love. And I show them not to be impossibilities at all, but a faith that is lived in relation to others in cities and communities. Dante lights the way. He is always searching, always challenging, offers no easy options. Dante takes on the toughest moral issues and brings them to a head. He's not for the oafish who stick to the obvious - the people enchained to the empirical necessity of existing institutions and practices and to immediate inclinations of the sense. His vision extends beyond this, buttressed always by a moral praxis that is socially embedded.

This article has an important part of the truth:

Dante's Psychological Comedy

The author is a psychologist and clearly appreciates the moral psychology at the heart of *The Comedy*. Dante's insight into human motivations is genius. I also refer to Dante's mystical psychology. Dante is a rationalist in the Aristotelian mode, his love follows the intellect. But I have no doubt that Dante is a mystic, his reunion with God transcending limited forms of expression is mystical. But Dante is down-to-earth and embedded in politics and social life for all that.

For all of the mystical aspects of *The Comedy* with respect to the return to and reunion with God, Dante himself expresses this vision not as a flight from the world, but as inspiring hope and effort within the world. Dante is at pains to stress the direct bearing of his 'sacred poem' upon everyday human life, action, and conduct:

non ad speculandum, sed ad opus incoeptum est totum

"not for speculation, but for practical effect was the whole work undertaken"

Dante openly states his practical intention as being that of leading human beings from their present state of misery in a divided society to a state of happiness:

"the end of the whole and of the part is to remove those living in this life from the state of misery, and to lead them to the state of felicity."

The aim of Dante's mystical psychology is to facilitate a spiritual experience that is capable of being a force for the reformation of humankind. Dante's *Comedy* is the supreme attempt to express the eternal through a necessarily limited symbolism and imagery, portraying the union of the soul with the suprasensible. The mysticism of the 'sacred poem' is inherently practical and consciously altruistic. Basing himself on Aristotle's view of human beings as social beings, Dante is in complete agreement with St. Catherine of Siena's view that in boosting spiritual virility, the mystical life has a powerful impact on social life: "there can be no perfect virtue, none that bears fruit, unless it be exercised by means of our neighbour." Dante has a direct political intent in not only bringing eternal truths with regard to humanity and nature to the people, but communicating them in the language of the people, translating those truths into practical concerns, making them not only comprehensible, but pertinent. He brings these truths to human beings subjected to the things of time on "the threshing-floor that maketh us so fierce," raising their sights to a vision of Eternity, which Boethius presented as "the complete and perfect simultaneous possession of unlimited life."

In the article above, Black writes that '*The Comedy* can be viewed as a sort of gigantic encyclopedia of human motives, classified according to understandable ethical criteria.' That is not merely immensely important, it is crucial to inspiring, motivating, and obligating human beings. Lose that aspect of human existence, and you are lost, at the mercy of external forces and events.

The moral psychology as well as the civic and sociological aspect of Dante is hugely important. I'm interested in the way that Dante gets into appetites and desires, into the motivational economy of human beings, the longings that lead or mislead,

depending on the knowledge, acquisition, and exercise of the virtues and modes of conduct. Dante's world is an inherently ethical world, very different to a world in which fact and value have been separated, the former raised over the latter, the latter reduced to mere value judgement. This world is not one of objects to be studied dispassionately, with knowledge yielded by way of fact and logic and nothing more, but a world of subjects with free-will, which they may use wisely, or not; each has a distinctive point of view, each seeks the satisfaction of desires, seeks happiness, and join with others in society in furtherance of particular ends. Society succeeds or fails according to whether love, the greatest motivational force of all, is properly ordered or is disordered, whether human beings are properly connected or disconnected. The challenge is to form a union of wills in conformity with a greater will, with ultimate reality outside of subjective choice. Dante presents us with a "free necessity," or a "necessary freedom," something which educates free-will to choose the right thing.

Dante describes a world of subjects, a world of wills, which find peace in harmony with a greater will. (*In bona voluntate, pax nobis est* (St Augustine)/ 'In His will is our peace' (Dante). I could even relate the notion to Rousseau's 'general will,' in that any objective truth cannot just be given it has to be actively willed, internalized, lived – knowledge is not just cognitive, it is affective, in the sense of the 'moving' and 'turning' Dante writes of). Dante is not just presenting the objective truth of some hypothesis; he is discovering, with sympathy, distress, joy, or outrage, how life works out for actual, various individuals. Change is a self-change, education is a self-education, knowledge is experiential and experimental. As Dante learns, he changes. 'This is another difference from science as we usually think of it, where the scientist remains detached and above the battle. Dante is absolutely not above the battle.' Dante, like the rest of us, is in the thick of social and political life; he is, as we are, interested beings. We have stakes in societies, actions, and outcomes. 'He learns about the appetites and longings that mislead the human heart, often catastrophically, and have misled his own.' 'So this is no cool, objective appraisal of human motives; it is a passionately concerned recognition of the terrible or wonderful consequences that flow from our emotional choices, and from our ability or our failure to retain or recover our integrity.' Lose that, and your demands for action are dead, your knowledge is severed from the springs of action.

I'm interested in the clash of politics, the bridge between theoretical and practical reason, and the discovering/unfolding of truth through dialectic. Politics can cloud truth, it can also through argument and discursive interaction and communication shed light on it. It all depends on how we conceive 'the political,' it all depends on how we establish the conditions of the political. Dante argues for good politics, a politics of friendship and love. He also saw the politics of faction and division. 'Dante for a while was a major figure in the political life of Florence, at a time of civil war and vicious partisan infighting: he had seen firsthand how the consequences of individual psychology include such huge matters as war and peace, social chaos or social harmony, as well as personal grief or happiness. The psychological, the personal, the political, and the religious were not, for him, separate categories: they were closely interrelated, and "sin" was the corrupting element in all of them.'

If you want to change the world, you can't legislate or dictate truth from the outside like the fabled lawgiver, but have to engage people on the inside and cultivate the inner motives. Dante is engaged and involved, he works on and with character – he doesn't simply 'inform' heads, he seeks to 'form' characters. The truth cannot just be passively given, it has to be actively willed. Dante is all about cultivating the right will through the setting of love in order. Virtue is the proper ordering of love to its true ends, as against a disordering which attaches human beings to goods which separate them from each other, from the ultimate good, and from their own selves (or, in a theological idiom, their own souls).

Even if you struggle with numbers, you will understand the internal music. It's innate and universal, a common language we share, making the world as one.

Only connect.

In this book I develop Dante's *Comedy* as an eco-poetics that is moved by the Greatest Love of all. I've been on the receiving end of complaints that such interests are 'idle' at a time when the planet is unravelling. I used to suffer such complaints as well-meaning, coming from activists seeking to address real problems besetting the world. I don't tolerate it now. I consider such criticism to be blinkered, for reasons

E.F. Schumacher gave with respect to the necessity of metaphysical reconstruction to effective action decades ago. Our technics will fail for want of clarity on ends.

I'm interested in a literary ecology modelled on the likes of Dante. I would recommend Joseph Meeker's book *The Comedy of Survival* here. I took the same approach to the Tolkien piece I wrote a couple of years ago: Tolkien and the Fellowship of all Living Things: The Politics of Proximity, Person and Place. Dante, with his integral approach bounded by the Love that moves all, concerns us and moves us to touch again the wholeness and wholesomeness of the world, seeking to restore that integral ethic within us.

I shall make a general comment here on music/art/aesthetics – let's say Beauty as one of the three transcendentals.

I proceed from the wisdom of Plato in affirming Beauty to be the supreme political category for the way that it lights the path to Truth and Goodness and invites the heart to follow. Since all have a heart, then all can and will respond to Beauty's call to bid an end to our sad divisions. I repeat this view often, because it is my core belief, and I cleave to it. And I shall put a word in for music here, too. Keep your ears open and be ready to hear, and listen to, the inner music of the universe, and how all living creatures express this music in their diverse and particular forms, and you will keep your hearts open.

In *The Symposium*, Plato wrote of the Divine Beauty which is beheld by the eye. That is a very different notion from the subjectivist assertion that "beauty is in the eye of the beholder." Plato's beauty is something that inheres within a thing, and within the universe, as an objective quality; it has nothing to do with the projection of meaning and value on a meaningless and valueless universe, nothing to do with perceptions, and nothing to do with a Nietzschean perspectivism within power relations. The very opposite, in fact. The one obligates us to conform our subjective choices to a more than subjective truth, the other asserts wilful self-projection as the arbiter of truth. Music links the inner and the outer words in order to avoid having to make such a choice between disclosure and imposition.

Beauty is the last bastion of evangelization in the subjectivist culture of today, a culture in which solipsism seems to hold all the trump cards (but doesn't). Beauty is possibly the only thing left that motivates all people from deep within the core of their being. Kant wrote of a "common moral reason." We can refer to an innate moral grammar as something we share in common. We have to activate that grammar and learn to sing in tune, in harmony, in unison. Ethically, this is proving elusive. But beauty, aesthetics and music does offer a way of cutting through to commonality when words either fail or divide.

A point I am concerned to make on Dante is that for all of his emphasis on the Greatest Love that moves all things, his last word actually emphasises plurality - "stars." This is a key point to establish. For all of the chaos and apparent diversity of the *Inferno*, Hell is a condition of sameness and mechanical repetition. The devil does not have all the best tunes at all. There is no music in Hell: it is a place of immobility and "mechanized petrification" (to borrow a phrase that Max Weber used to describe modern bureaucratic industrial society). Hell is a place of aggressive selfishness expressed in different ways that serve to snare one and all in a dehumanizing sameness. In complete contrast, Paradise is a place of sweet harmony expressing the greatest variety of life. And it is the "diverse voices" in *Paradiso* that create harmony at its sweetest. There is an inner music, in the universe and in Dante's 'sacred poem.' It is significant that Dante uses a musical image to convey the way that Paradise requires souls of every kind and level. The line he writes is itself the sweetest of music: "*Diverse voci fanno dolci note*" (*Paradiso* 6: 124). The literal translation is "Diverse voices make sweet notes." Or, poetically rendered: "Diverse voices make sweet music."

"As diverse voices make sweet music and blend,
so diverse stations of our life amid
these spheres make sweet accord without an end."

So I shall be writing of the internal music in Dante's *Comedy*.

Beauty is something to cleave to beyond the clashes of self- and sectional interest and assertion (think of Arnold's *Dover Beach* here, where the "sea of faith" has withdrawn and "ignorant armies clash by night"), and it still occupies a central place in people's lives. So long as people continue to strive for beauty, then it is possible for them to be "turned," (in the sense of Dante's turning in the final lines in *The Comedy*), and to "turn" people on to the truth and goodness that inheres in and moves all things. These are the three great transcendentals and, whatever Nietzsche says with respect to their fragmentation, they are all connected – they are all qualities of the divine. Nietzsche's critical comments apply to the modern world, not the world as such.

Such will be part of my argument in *Dante's Sweet Symphony of Paradise*.

There's much more to the argument.

A character in Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot* made this bold statement: "Beauty will save the world." If that is true, then the obvious question is: "what is Beauty?" Dostoyevsky put those words in the mouth of Prince Myshkin, who is a simpleton. Terentiev asks Myshkin if he said it, he is asking him to explain the self-explanatory.

'The context is enlarged by the fact of Myshkin's love for the abused and then abusing Nastasya Filippovna, whose physical beauty no man could doubt, though whose intelligence he might fear. A portrait of her had conveyed to Myshkin the suffering that underlay a beautiful face. Men love her possessively, even murderously. Myshkin's own interest is taken for infatuation. He has grasped the suffering and responds to it with a love that is incomprehensible to the shallow – for it is innocent and selfless.'

It is the humble power of Myshkin's selfless, naïve, and "idiot" beauty that will save the world. 'This is a beauty that is not isolated, constrained. This Beauty is finally indistinguishable from the True and the Good. It is embodied in art of the highest order, and it is reflective of that mysterious light of faith – that "saving grace" with which Christ enlightens the world.' This is the truth of Christ's love for us, a truth that transcends death.

Can Beauty Save the World? by David Warren

Yes.

So let me return to Dante on one of the central teachings of *The Comedy* concerning love, intellect, vision and truth. The lesson is taught by Beatrice:

"And thou must know that all have delight in the measure of the depth to which their sight penetrates the truth in which every intellect finds rest; from which it may be seen that the state of blessedness rests on the act of vision, not on that of love, which follows after, and the measure of their vision is merit, which grace begets and right will." (109-113)

It is important to note here that love does not lead, it follows. The teaching is delivered with respect to the angels, noted for their keenness of intellectual vision, but it applies to all the blessed. The "truth in which every intellect finds rest" is God as the First Truth, and it is the highest end of human beings to know this Truth. Love follows rather than leads since it is both incited and directed by the thing that is seen, the Beloved. Were love primary, it would be cut off from the truth; rather than being educative it would degenerate into mere feeling. Dante's love is therefore based on the primacy of intellect. In the *New Life* he calls Beatrice was "the Lady of my mind."

In this book, I write on reason and Dante as an Aristotelian affirming the desire to know.

I had better end here. I have a massive workload on, and really should stop idling away with commentaries on current progress (which become 'lack of' progress in consequence.

I have written above on Dante and Marx. This is not so unusual a combination as it may seem. Marx didn't share Dante's moral and metaphysical commitments, but was an ardent admirer of the man he called "the great Florentine." In the book *Marx's Inferno*, William Clare Roberts explains Marx's *Capital* as exhibiting a structure

drawn from Dante. Here, I argue that we should set Dante's undoubted insights into Hell as a self-made Inferno within the moral and metaphysical architectonic of *The Divine Comedy* as a whole.

I'll just add a final reference to Dante concerning the power of Love, respect for boundaries, and the peace of the blessed life "through which our wills become a single will."

"but you'll see no such discord in these spheres;
to live in love is—here—necessity,
if you think on love's nature carefully."
[*Paradiso* Canto 3: 76-90]

Christian Socialist R. H. Tawney comments here:

"The famous lines in which Piccarda explains to Dante the order of Paradise are a description of a complex and multiform society which is united by overmastering devotion to a common end. By that end all stations are assigned and all activities are valued. The parts derive their quality from their place in the system, and are so permeated by the unity which they express that they themselves are glad to be forgotten, as the ribs of an arch carry the eye from the floor from which they spring to the vault in which they meet and interlace."
(Tawney 1982 ch 11).

We will only have agreement on means if we are clear about the ends which we serve.

"Such a combination of unity and diversity is possible only to a society which subordinates its activities to the principle of purpose. For what that principle offers is not merely a standard for determining the relations of different classes and groups of producers, but a scale of moral values. Above all, it assigns to economic activity itself its proper place as the servant, not the master, of society. The burden of our civilization is not merely, as many suppose, that the product of industry is ill-distributed, or its conduct tyrannical, or its operation

interrupted by embittered disagreements. It is that industry itself has come to hold a position of exclusive predominance among human interests, which no single interest, and least of all the provision of the material means of existence, is fit to occupy. Like a hypochondriac who is so absorbed in the processes of his own digestion that he goes to his grave before he has begun to live, industrialized communities neglect the very objects for which it is worth while to acquire riches in their feverish preoccupation with the means by which riches can be acquired." (Tawney *The Acquisitive Society* 1982 ch 11).

There are times when I think I'm on my own taking the approach I do. I could make things much easier for myself. I could be much more popular that way. But I can do no other. I sometimes think I am merely talking to myself. I'm engaged in dialogue with my better half, the half that knows certain things and insists on certain standards. I do my best to maintain them. I cannot serve extraneous ends.

"What does it matter to you what people whisper here?' Virgil asks Dante in Canto 5 of the *Purgatorio*. "Follow me and let the people talk." I've always been intrigued by the fact that Karl Marx quotes Dante here in the Preface to the first volume of *Das Kapital*:

"Now, as ever, my maxim is that of the great Florentine: *Segui il tuo corso, e lascia dir le genti*.

[Go your own way, and let the people talk]."

Marx alters the line to suit his own purpose: he will make no concessions to make his arguments palatable to the prejudices of others.

Notre Dame de Paris by Victor Hugo

Victor Hugo's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*

This is a talk I gave in the libraries of Merseyside, UK, 2007. My brief was to bring the world of books to life to a general audience, young and old, by speaking in praise of my favourite book. My favourite book is *Notre Dame de Paris* by Victor Hugo. I broke the talk up into a number of sections. Stopping and elaborating as I went.

1. THE TITLE

Victor Hugo's original title "What there is in a bottle of ink" is most appropriate from the perspective of my brief here, that of promoting the world of books. Hugo shut himself away in a room with only a bottle of ink for company and didn't emerge until he had used the last drop to finish the book. The product of his efforts proved that there is plenty in a bottle of ink, a whole world of complex human doings in fact.

The more well-known title "*The Hunchback of Notre Dame*" originated with the second translation of 1833. People would be surprised to learn that the hunchback Quasimodo is not the central character of the book but is one of a number of characters whose tales symbolize the dualism of beauty and ugliness.

The actual title *Notre Dame de Paris* is the most appropriate title of all in that the physical beauty of the cathedral and high moral purpose expressed within its walls establishes the context for exploring the moral ambiguity of human nature. There is a real Jekyll and Hyde character to the book.

The book concerns the conflict that each must fight out between the lofty aspirations of morality – symbolised by the cathedral – and the compromises of everyday life. It works its magic in the meeting of dreams and reality, and the way that makes us face, resign ourselves to, hard truths, or seduces us into delusion and madness.

"If he had had all Peru in his pocket, he would certainly have given it to this dancer; but Gringoire had not Peru in his pocket; and besides, America was not yet discovered. (p. 66)"

"Unable to rid myself of it, since I heard your song humming ever in my head, beheld your feet dancing always on my breviary, felt even at night, in my dreams, your form in contact with my own, I desired to see you again, to touch you, to know who you were, to see whether I should really find you like the

ideal image which I had retained of you, to shatter my dream, perchance with reality. At all events, I hoped that a new impression would efface the first, and the first had become insupportable. I sought you. I saw you once more. Calamity! When I had seen you twice, I wanted to see you a thousand times, I wanted to see you always. Then - how stop myself on that slope of hell? - then I no longer belonged to myself."

2. THE BOOK

Hugo compares the book form to architecture, 'stories in stones'.

"There exists in this era, for thoughts written in stone, a privilege absolutely comparable to our current freedom of the press. It is the freedom of architecture."

— Book V, Chapter 2

"Great edifices, like great mountains, are the work of the ages." But it is now the time of the book. "A book is so soon made, costs so little, and may go so far! Why should we surprised that all human thought flows that way?"

"This will destroy that. The book will kill the edifice."

"In proportion as architecture degenerated, printing throve and flourished. The capital of forces which human thought had expended in building, it henceforth expended in books."

3. THE BOOK IS A 'GOOD READ'.

Whatever the title, the complexity of the plot, the distinctiveness of the characters, the story itself, the book is simply a damned good read, a real rollercoaster of emotions:

it has drama, excitement, romance, sex, lust, passion, perverted desire, period realism, beautiful architectural detail and the grotesque human emotions – intrigue,

duplicity, murder, torture, death by hanging, barbaric punishment, superstition, prejudice, intolerance, tragedy and probably the saddest ending in the history of literature.

The book is a long read, sometimes a difficult read, but one which rewards patience. I'd say that the book is so beautifully written that it practically reads itself. I first read it in the summer of 1989 and found that once I'd picked it up, I couldn't put it back down.

The famous scene after Quasimodo rescues Esmeralda from being hanged.

"A minute afterwards he appeared upon the upper platform, still bearing the gipsy [sic] in his arms, still running wildly along, still shouting 'Sanctuary!' and the crowd still applauding. At last he made a third appearance on the summit of the tower of the great bell. From thence he seemed to show exultingly to the whole city the fair creature he had saved; and his thundering voice, that voice which was heard so seldom, and which he never heard at all, thrice repeated with frantic vehemence, even in the very clouds, 'Sanctuary! Sanctuary! Sanctuary!'" (p. 477-8)

4. THE FILM

There should be no surprise that the book has attracted filmmakers and animators. The book reads like a film with its narrative flow and pacing, vivid descriptions of the multifarious, and often nefarious, activities within the city of Paris. Hugo's writing breathes life into the characters.

Many people may well know the 1939 classic film version of the book, starring Charles Laughton. Going further back there is the silent version starring Lon Chaney. Younger people will know the Disney movie. But if a bibliophile wished to prove the superiority of the book over film, then this is the book. Not that the films are bad. They are good. But the book is so much better. Film and animation lose some of the fine textures and nuances which make the text compelling.

5. FATE

If there is one word that sums up the book, then that word is 'fate'. The cathedral of Notre Dame emerges as the graveyard of human hopes. Hugo claimed that the story was suggested to him by the Greek word "ANANKH" which he discovered carved deeply in Gothic characters in one of the towers of the cathedral. The word can refer to:

1. necessity, imposed either by the circumstances, or by law of duty regarding to one's advantage, custom, argument
2. calamity, distress, straits

"These Greek capitals, black with age, and quite deeply graven in the stone, with I know not what signs peculiar to calligraphy imprinted upon their forms and upon their attitudes, as though with the purpose of revealing that it had been a hand of the Middle Ages which had inscribed them there, and especially the fatal and melancholy meaning contained in them, struck the author deeply". In chapter IV it is revealed that the word means "Fate".

That the inscription had been removed as he was writing the book symbolised Hugo's fear that the Gothic splendour represented by Notre Dame was in danger of being lost as a result of the contemporary trend for tearing down old buildings.

Hugo's book was understood by many as a plea for the preservation of the architectural heritage of Paris. Renovation work began in 1845, Notre Dame re-emerging as what it had been in Hugo's novel – as one of the great monuments.

"Thus, with the exception of the fragile memory which the author of this book here consecrates to it, there remains to-day nothing whatever of the mysterious word engraved within the gloomy tower of Notre-Dame,--nothing of the destiny which it so sadly summed up. The man who wrote that word upon the wall disappeared from the midst of the generations of man many centuries ago; the word, in its turn, has been effaced from the wall of the church; the church will, perhaps, itself soon disappear from the face of the earth. It is upon this word that this book is founded."

6. REGENERATION

But more than physical preservation, Hugo's deeper purpose is the moral regeneration and spiritual reawakening within a social revival. Any architectural revival is based on a moral and social purpose. Architecture represents the spirit of the age, and if the age is lacking in spirit, then there is nothing to reflect. The character of individuals, of a people and a society, matters. Hugo was concerned with the beauty – or otherwise – of the contents as much as the container.

“The greatest products of architecture are less the works of individuals than of society; rather the offspring of a nation's effort, than the inspired flash of a man of genius...”

Where does growth come from?

“Love is like a tree: it grows by itself, roots itself deeply in our being and continues to flourish over a heart in ruin. The inexplicable fact is that the blinder it is, the more tenacious it is. It is never stronger than when it is completely unreasonable.”

7. THE STORY

The book's story is set in the medieval Paris of 1482.

The context is the conflict between the high morality of the Church and State on the one hand and the lived experience of the people, on the other hand.

The city has celebrated the Feast of Fools, with the bellringer and hunchback Quasimodo, a figure of fear and ridicule on account of his deformity, chosen to be the reigning Pope for the celebration. The book goes on to show that deformity is not so much physical as psychological, as well as social and cultural, something that lies in the prejudices, fears and hatreds of 'the people' as well as in the desires and depravities of the individual. Deformity lies within as much as it shows itself without. A person's character or psyche may be ugly whilst their body may be beautiful, and vice versa.

On the character of Quasimodo.

"The women laughed and wept; the crowd stamped their feet enthusiastically, for at that moment Quasimodo was really beautiful. He was handsome — this orphan, this foundling, this outcast."

Then he grew, and the people saw his physical ugliness, his deformity, and their cheers turned to insult and abuse.

"Besides, to be fair to him, his viciousness was perhaps not innate. From his earliest steps among men he had felt, then seen himself the object of jeers, condemnation, rejection. Human speech for him always meant mockery and curses. As he grew older he had found nothing but hatred around him. He had caught it. He had acquired the general viciousness. He had picked up the weapon with which he had been wounded."

"He therefore turned to mankind only with regret. His cathedral was enough for him. It was peopled with marble figures of kings, saints and bishops who at least did not laugh in his face and looked at him with only tranquillity and benevolence. The other statues, those of monsters and demons, had no hatred for him – he resembled them too closely for that. It was rather the rest of mankind that they jeered at. The saints were his friends and blessed him; the monsters were his friends and kept watch over him. He would sometimes spend whole hours crouched before one of the statues in solitary conversation with it. If anyone came upon him then he would run away like a lover surprised during a serenade."

8. LEVELS

The book can be read and appreciated at a number of levels. The book is beautifully layered, and is as simple or as complex as one likes.

As a historical novel and romance, the book is unrivalled. It is both sad and uplifting. A superbly paced story with certain details and twists which contradict and enhance the story we know from the film.

The book is a political tract, expressing a clear plea for a more liberal and tolerant society (The gypsy girl Esmeralda as foreigner and 'outsider', you came yesterday, we come today ...)

It is also a social commentary on prejudice and injustice. Hugo's clear sympathy is with the poor and the marginalised and the downtrodden. Here, amongst the 'lowlife', the social outcasts, he finds the 'high' moral purpose of the church being practised as an ethos, a way of life embodied in the relationships between flesh and blood individuals.

9. MORAL SIGNIFICANCE

The book has a moral significance that transcends politics. The way Hugo identifies universal themes and gives them a personal significance is one reason for the book's enduring popularity.

The book explores social dualism through the physical and moral dualism of beauty and ugliness.

Characters and contexts are interwoven through the interconnection of beauty and ugliness on the inside and the outside. The book shows how this dualism in human nature translates into an urban and civil fabric that is split between the powerful and the downtrodden, the establishment and the outcasts. Even that is too simple a division, there are good people among the establishment, rogues and villains amongst the outcasts. This is not a world of black and white, but of different shades of grey. Yet there is a moral order, by which individual actions and events are judged.

"Do you know what friendship is?' he asked.

'Yes,' replied the gypsy; 'it is to be brother and sister; two souls which touch without mingling, two fingers on one hand.'

'And love?' pursued Gringoire.

'Oh! love!' said she, and her voice trembled, and her eye beamed. 'That is to be two and to be but one. A man and a woman mingled into one angel. It is heaven.'

10. DUALISM

The book explores the social dualism of class through the dualism of beauty and ugliness as within the urban and civic fabric and within human nature itself.

Quasimodo is physically ugly but is capable of appreciating and expressing beauty. As bell ringer at the cathedral he is on the inside of society but is an outsider on account of his deformity. From his unique vantage point, he sees that the beautiful on the outside is often ugly on the inside.

This dualism is worked in a number of ways in the book. Characters and contexts are interwoven through the interplay of beauty and ugliness on the inside and the outside.

The gypsy dancer Esmeralda is physically and emotionally beautiful but is condemned on account of her race to live in the harsh underworld of crime and poverty, an ugly subterranean world within the beautiful shell of the city of Paris. The freedom and spontaneity that attracts the priest and the soldier to her is something she possesses only by virtue of her being a member of the outcast society. Her free spirit and natural piety is available to her on account of her living on the outside of conventional society and morality. Accordingly, the guardians of 'higher' morality move to suppress her.

11. THE MORALITY OF 'INSIDERS' AND 'OUTSIDERS'

The most attractive figures in the novel emerge from the ranks of the marginalised and oppressed (Quasimodo, Esmeralda, Clopin the King of Beggars). These are the people who apply and live morality more as a social practice or ethos regulating relations between individuals rather than as a repressive code maintaining an unjust

society. The representatives of official society emerge as murderous liars and hypocrites. Hugo's sympathy is with the poor and the oppressed, the outcasts.

Esmeralda choosing death over the priest

"And with a hurried step-making her hurry too, for he never let go of her arm- he went straight up to the gibbet, and pointing to it, 'Choose between us,' he said coolly. She tore herself from his grasp, fell at the foot of the gibbett, and clasped that dismal supporter; then she half turned her beautiful head, and looked at the priest over her shoulder. She had the air of a Madonna at the foot of the cross. The priest had remained quite still, his finger still raised to the gibbet, and his gesture unchanged, like a statue. At length the gipsy girl said to him, 'It is less horrible to me than you are.'" (p. 639)

12. DESIRE

Quasimodo is the adopted son of Frollo, the evil, jealous priest of Notre Dame, who nevertheless has good enough in him to take the hunchback in and protect him. Personifying the state is Captain Phoebus, handsome but vain, a womanizer, self-righteous and brutal. Quasimodo, Frollo and Phoebus are possessed with a desire for Esmeralda. Quasimodo seeks to protect her. Both Frollo and Phoebus seek to possess her. Esmeralda and Phoebus arrange to meet, and Phoebus, despite being engaged to the socialite Fleur-de-Lys de Gondelaurier, declares his love for the gypsy girl. Moreover, he has given Frollo permission to spy on his furtive engagement with Esmeralda. Frollo, frustrated, repressed, jealous, knowing he can never have the gypsy girl, seizes the opportunity. As the couple prepare to make love, Frollo stabs Phoebus in the back and makes his get-away. Phoebus is presumed dead by homicide and Esmeralda is accused of being the murderer. Phoebus, however, is not dead and makes a recovery. Yet Esmeralda is still tried and sentenced to death for his murder. Rather than speak up and testify to her innocence, Phoebus remains silent. He watches Esmeralda's execution without remorse. Frollo remains silent too.

Frollo, after fleeing into the countryside to avoid Esmeralda's execution

"He stirred up from the bottom of his heart all his hatred, all his wickedness; and he discovered, with the cool eye of a physician examining a patient, that this hatred, this wickedness, were but vitiated love-that love, the source of every virtue in man, turned to things horrible in the heart of a priest-and that a man constituted as he was, by making himself a priest made himself a demon." (p. 482)

And Quasimodo?

After Esmeralda's execution

"Quasimodo then lifted his eye to look upon the gypsy girl, whose body, suspended from the gibbet, he beheld quivering afar, under its white robes, in the last struggles of death; then again he dropped it upon the archdeacon, stretched a shapeless mass at the foot of the tower, and he said with a sob that heaved his deep breast to the bottom, 'Oh-all that I've ever loved!'" (p. 678)

13. PASSAGES

The book is teeming with spellbinding passages concerning human ties, petty hate, noble actions and sickening prejudice in an everyday context we can recognise as our own. And the book is how love can conquer hate and redeem the most lost of souls.

Quasimodo's reaction to Esmeralda's gift of a drink of water while he is being heckled on the pillory:

Then from that eye, hitherto so dry and b, was seen to roll a big tear, which fell slowly down that deformed visage so long contracted by despair. Perhaps it was the first that the unfortunate creature had ever shed." (p. 322)

"You asked me why I saved you. You have forgotten a villain who tried to carry you off one night,- a villain to whom the very next day you brought relief upon their infamous pillory. A drop of water and a little pity are more than my whole life can ever repay. You have forgotten that villain; but he remembers."
~Quasimodo to Esmeralda~"

14. UNIVERSAL FATE

Ultimately, the book is about the universal fate that encloses all, regardless of time and place, character and class – the good, the bad, the beautiful and the ugly all go the same way. And yet that complex little web of human doings, and who does what with and to whom, all matters when it is underway.

What became of Quasimodo?

The Charles Laughton film has a happy/sad ending, as Esmeralda, who was rescued and did not die in the fantasy film world, rides away to be married, with Quasimodo watching, back in his world of stone.

“To a gargoyle on the ramparts of Notre Dame as Esmeralda rides off with Gringoire Quasimodo says. “Why was I not made of stone like thee?”

In the book, well here is what the crypt of the cathedral revealed many centuries later.

“..in better company, they found among all those hideous carcasses two skeletons, one of which held the other in its embrace. One of these skeletons, which was that of a woman, still had a few strips of a garment which had once been white, and around her neck was to be seen a string of adrezarach beads with a little silk bag ornamented with green glass, which was open and empty. These objects were of so little value that the executioner had probably not cared for them. The other, which held this one in a close embrace, was the skeleton of a man. It was noticed that his spinal column was crooked, his head seated on his shoulder blades, and that one leg was shorter than the other. Moreover, there was no fracture of the vertebrae at the nape of the neck, and it was evident that he had not been hanged. Hence, the man to whom it had belonged had come thither and had died there. When they tried to detach the skeleton which he held in his embrace, he fell to dust.”

15. HOPE

“So you're giving up? That's it? Okay, okay. We'll leave you alone, Quasimodo. We just thought, maybe you're made up of something much stronger.”

No, the spirit of Quasimodo lives on and, like the book itself, is endless.

“For love is like a tree; it grows of itself; it send its roots deep into our being, and often continues to grow green over a heart in ruins.”

“Excess of grief, like excess of joy is a violent thing which lasts but a short time. The heart of man cannot remain long in one extremity.”

“Spira, spera.
(breathe, hope)”

Sic Transit Gloria Civilization

The Louvre's closure proves art cannot survive climate change

The article has this passage: "The flooding in Paris is a stark warning of the danger posed by climate change to everything human civilisation has achieved – no matter how priceless."

And priceless is precisely how I would describe ecosystems, oceans, forests, species, the atmosphere, the lot. The destruction of civilization will come as the inevitable consequence of ecological degradation.

But let's look at civilization here. Art and culture. We are more than biological imperatives.

"If any museum sums up the best of human creativity through millennia, it is the Louvre. Now that it has been forced to close its doors, to take emergency measures against another of those weather events in which only the most foolhardy or corrupt

refuse to see human-induced climate change, we can glimpse how our destructive side will wreck our best hopes if we don't change.

Some environmentalists, of course, would say the fate of nature matters more than the fate of civilisation: that we humans have proved a pretty nasty little species. That is wrong. The great art that fills the Louvre proves it is wrong.

The most apocalyptic masterpiece in the Louvre is Géricault's *The Raft of the Medusa*. As they cling to a raft on a savage sea, the last survivors of catastrophe have apparently been driven to cannibalism. Civilisation has died. Bare survival is all they have. Is that enough?"

https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/jonathanjonesblog/2016/jun/06/louvre-closure-flooding-paris-climate-change?CMP=share_btn_fb

The history of art is full of lost masterpieces. Works by Picasso were burned by the Nazis, and frescoes by Leonardo da Vinci were painted over. But the most intriguing lost work of all is Michelangelo's 'ice sculpture'. It's the greatest snowman ever.

In January 1494, Piero de' Medici sent Michelangelo into the snow-covered courtyard with instructions to make him a snowman. And Michelangelo did a fine job too. According to the 15th-century art historian Giorgio Vasari, the snowman Michelangelo was the greatest snow sculpture in the history of the world. *The New York Times* claims it was a dry run for his sculpture of David.

His biographer Vasari says only this:

"It is said that Piero de' Medici, who had been left heir to his father Lorenzo, often used to send for Michelangelo, with whom he had been intimate for many years, when he wanted to buy antiques such as cameos and other engraved stones. And one winter, when a great deal of snow fell in Florence, he had him make in his courtyard a statue of snow, which was very beautiful..."

(*Life of Michelangelo*, p. 332 in the Penguin Classics translation by George Bull.)

But the sculpture couldn't survive for long. A couple of days later, and one of Michelangelo's earliest masterpieces disappeared, the greatest snowman in human history.

We've all made snowmen. A couple of years ago, someone down the road from me made a snowwoman. I've made four snowmen over the years. The first three were good, but the last one was abominable.

OK, But here's a serious question: why would Michelangelo pour all his genius into making a beautiful snowman? Let's call it an ice sculpture to make it sound like real art. Here is a great artist prepared to accept impermanence and submit his genius to inevitable destruction and disappearance. Why?

"We too were men joyful and weary like you, and now we are lifeless, we are only earth, as you see. All that is created must end. All, all around us, must perish."
(Michelangelo).

Michelangelo made an immense contribution to civilisation. But he knew that all that is created must end.

Sic Transit Gloria civilisation?

It just makes me wonder why we carry on, in face of a seemingly inevitable ruin. We do what we have to do in order to be, as part of our healthy flourishing. I can go with that. Anything else?

Sic transit gloria mundi is a Latin phrase that means "Thus passes the glory of the world." "Worldly things are fleeting."

"*O quam cito transit gloria mundi*" ("How quickly the glory of the world passes away")
(Thomas à Kempis).

Yet that 'glory' seems to matter to us. We carry on building. In ruin of hope, to hope all things. We are transcendental beings.

Ruins

Ozymandias by Percy Bysshe Shelley

I met a traveller from an antique land
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed:
And on the pedestal these words appear:
'My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!
'Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.

This is a superb poem. One for those who wish to put life in perspective.

Ozymandias was an alternative name for the Egyptian pharaoh Ramesses II. Once very grand and important, Ozymandias is no more than an echo. Unlamented, out of time and place, he is not even a ghost or a memory. He is simply forgotten. There is a physical structure left, in ruins, but there is no purpose and no meaning left. He has left no trace, nothing of enduring importance. His claim to omnipotence has been exposed as a delusion.

The point is that even the most powerful of civilizations pass. Rulers have all the trappings of power. But in the broken down figure of Ozymandias, we can see our own rulers and the shallow basis of their power. It is the illusion of power and the power of illusion.

I love the Shelley poem for the perspective it brings to life. We are all of us a synthesis of the finite and the infinite. We are one part finite, one part infinite. The finite part is the one that most concerns us in an immediate sense, our physical self and its expression in possessions, things, money, employment. We can obsess about these things, coming to neglect the bigger purpose through which we build a complete life. The finite part concerns our minimal self. The finite is the part of us which is transitory, passing. The infinite part concerns the maximal self. The infinite is that part which is of permanent value, our very essence, the core of our being.

The things that we obsess about in our lives are the things which are transient. And in our obsession, we miss what is most important. Absorbed in the mundane and the everyday, we lose sense of perspective, sense of balance. We lose the greater possibilities associated with our maximal self.

And no-one gets this perspective out of balance more than those who pursue, attain and monopolize physical power, whether in politics or business. Shelley's Ozymandias demonstrates that the most grandiose of physical achievements do not last, not even in the physical sense, let alone in the larger sense. The ruin testifies to the folly of giving up our peace of mind for the transitory rewards of material power. All such things are fated to disappear. The big problem is reaching this understanding when physical power rules the world we live in, constraining us and determining our actions in the most immediate of senses.

It is in the permanence of nature, in the skies above and the sand below, that one sees eternity. And it is in seeing our material ambitions and struggles and achievements in their true perspective, in unity with but subordinate to the bigger picture, that we attain that synthesis of the finite and the infinite. We need to set our lives to be more in tune with what is of permanent value. Judged against that, the obsessions of money and power are of little consequence (other than in the not

inconsiderable sense that they dominate our lives in the immediate sphere of existence).

Looking at ruins, our anxieties about our achievements - or lack of them - fade. The wise never seek fame and worldly success, for these are but shallow things that crumble to dust in time.

Ruins bid us to cease striving for an illusory perfection and fulfilment and remind us that we cannot beat time by material force.

The greater part of our anxieties stem from an exaggerated sense of the importance of our power and our concerns. If this idea brings consolation, it is because something within us instinctively recognizes how closely our miseries are bound up with the grandiosity of our ambitions. To set our worries in the perspective of a thousand years is to grant ourselves a tranquillizing glimpse of our own small but not unimportant place in the scale of things.

What happened to a world in which we can sit with the people we love so much and have slow conversations about the state of our heart and soul, conversations that slowly unfold, conversations with pregnant pauses and silences that we are in no rush to fill?

How did we create a world in which we have more and more and more to do with less time for leisure, less time for reflection, less time for community, less time to just... be?

As one who has been accused of being one of those who 'merely ponders,' I shall declare myself happy to be a ponderer. I shall state further that there is nothing 'mere' about pondering, either. It denotes the ability to live a truly human life. And whatever needs to be done, gets done, naturally, without stress or striving.

How is the state of your heart today? I like the answer that Omid Safi gives in this article:

"In many Muslim cultures, when you want to ask them how they're doing, you ask: in Arabic, Kayf haal-ik? or, in Persian, Haal-e shomaa chetoreh? How is your haal?

What is this haal that you inquire about? It is the transient state of one's heart. In reality, we ask, "How is your heart doing at this very moment, at this breath?" When I ask, "How are you?" that is really what I want to know.

I am not asking how many items are on your to-do list, nor asking how many items are in your inbox. I want to know how your heart is doing, at this very moment. Tell me. Tell me your heart is joyous, tell me your heart is aching, tell me your heart is sad, tell me your heart craves a human touch. Examine your own heart, explore your soul, and then tell me something about your heart and your soul.

Tell me you remember you are still a human being, not just a human doing. Tell me you're more than just a machine, checking off items from your to-do list. Have that conversation, that glance, that touch. Be a healing conversation, one filled with grace and presence."

Omid Safi, *The Disease of Being Busy*

https://onbeing.org/blog/the-disease-of-being-busy/?fbclid=IwAR1u4Nx6FlthIrhEVH87gb-_k4v-K0ve1l1pddFOtQr_erHWQ7KDy1240jA

So how will our own stories end? Will our civilization be, in a term that Dante took from Aristotle, a comedy — a story with a happy ending? Freedom, choice, political will, action, knowledge, responsibility ... it's all in the *Commedia*. And we have these qualities. A happy ending is possible, if we take the opportunity to use the freedom we have been given on Earth, make the right choices, join together and make common cause. I too believe there is a love that moves the sun and the other stars. Never lose hope and have courage. Dante, the man who lost everything and spent the rest of his life in exile, knew despair, and he knew it to be a cheat, the easy way out.

For:

"none is so lost
that the eternal Love cannot return
as long as hope maintains a thread of green."

Dante, *Commedia*, *Purgatorio* III 133-135

Sigurd F. Olson and the Singing Wilderness

Watch, read, be inspired, and awaken within to the beauty of the world and to the beauty of words.

To listen with inward ears and see with inward eyes, to feel and be aware with our entire being.

Excellent blog here on Sigurd Olson, "The Singing Wilderness."

https://www.facebook.com/singingwildernessblog/?__tn__=%2CdK-R-R&eid=ARCCuVtgGHkB0vzDuzR3J_rCEz-VMS2-x3vhE0BZCcy8R8DWyIZi5A1IGsGGzN1CFKT_tRX7Mc91csUv&fref=mentions

This is a blog about nature and the human spirit, and a perspective and way of life that can bring healing and hope to a disconnected, joyless civilization. I encourage all lovers of life and nature to acquaint themselves with the work and words of Sigurd Olson. And lovers of words, too! Sigurd Olson writes beautifully. The way Sigurd Olson's beautiful, poetic and inspirational words express our deepest feelings and richest experiences with respect to the world that enfolds and nourishes us validates the greatest claims that have been made for writing.

Love nature! Love words!

I was introduced to the work and words of Sigurd Olson by his biographer, David Backes. I shall take the opportunity here to express my eternal gratitude. Sigurd Olson is a constant inspiration.

Founded on April 4, 2019, the 120th birthday of Sigurd F. Olson by David Backes.

David comments:

"Sigurd F. Olson was one of America's most beloved nature writers and most influential conservationists of the 20th century. I'm launching this website today in part because as his biographer and as his estate's literary representative I want to preserve and promote his legacy. But I also want to adapt his philosophy and way of seeing things to our times today, through my own experience as someone who has spent a lifetime learning from outdoor experiences, and who spent a career writing and teaching about nature and the human spirit."

<https://www.facebook.com/singingwildernessblog/>

'Ethical and moral questions and how we answer them may determine whether primal scenes will continue to be a source of joy and comfort to future generations. The decisions are ours and we have to search our minds and souls for the right answers... We must be eternally vigilant, embrace the broad concept of an environmental ethic to survive.'

'And so when we talk about intangible values remember that they cannot be separated from the others. The conservation of waters, forests, soils, and wildlife are all involved with the conservation of the human spirit. The goal we all strive toward is happiness, contentment, the dignity of the individual, and the good life. This goal will elude us forever if we forget the importance of the intangibles.'

I discovered the work and writing of Sigurd Olson through David. I'd encourage those who do not know Sigurd Olson to get to know him, his words nourish the soul.

If you love nature and you love words, then you'll love Sigurd Olson. His beautiful and inspirational words express our deepest feelings and richest experiences with respect to the nature that enfolds and nourishes us, and vindicate the greatest claims that have been made for writing. John Keats wrote that 'the poetry of Earth is

never dead.’ In Sigurd Olson, world and words combine to express that innate poetry and music, showing the meaning of harmony as attunement.

‘We are missing the big picture.’ Here’s the reconnection.

“Sigurd Olson believed that deep within us all are traces of the primordial elements from which we were formed, and the DNA we share with fishes and bugs and wolves. For most of us these seeds lie dormant, smothered beneath layers of culture, custom, civilization, and technology, and it is only in contact with wilderness – in silence, solitude, and communion with nature – that we can reconnect with that primitive core of our being, our spiritual essence.”

Sigurd Olson espoused his beliefs at a time when he felt that modern society was undermining our connection with our evolutionary memory and obscuring an essential self-understanding. And that was fifty years ago. With the burgeoning of the information age and our increasingly reckless plundering of the environment, his message assumes an even greater urgency today. By examining Olson’s life – the struggles and achievements which led him to his beliefs – and by evoking the wilderness experience as he did so eloquently in his writing, we come to appreciate the importance of wilderness for both our spiritual and our physical survival.

"No greater challenge faces us than to preserve some places of quiet and beauty for the sanity of mankind."

For those who like to listen, those who like the trees and animals to talk to them quietly ... Sigurd Olson’s Singing Wilderness.

If you love nature and you love words, then you’ll love Sigurd Olson. His beautiful and inspirational words express our deepest feelings and richest experiences with respect to the nature that enfolds and nourishes us, and vindicate the greatest claims that have been made for writing. John Keats wrote that ‘the poetry of Earth is never dead.’ In Sigurd Olson, world and words combine to express that innate poetry and music, showing the meaning of harmony as attunement.

<https://vimeo.com/3708217>

Watch the videos, read the words, be inspired, get outdoors, listen, get in tune, and awaken to the beauty of the world and to the beauty of words.

Why Wilderness? Sigurd Olson nailed it in 1938

“Why wilderness? Ask the men and women who have known it and who have made it part of their lives. They might not be able to explain, but your very questions will kindle a light in eyes that have reflected the campfires of a continent, eyes that have known the glory of dawns and sunsets and nights under the stars. Wilderness to them is real and this they know: when the pressure becomes more than they can stand, somewhere back of beyond, where roads and steel and towns are still forgotten, they will find release.”

<https://www.wildernessinquiry.org/current-news/news-notes/wilderness-sigurd-olson-1938/?fbclid=IwAR1f7Esi4wbSSVnwk09je9mzuTcqjahsga8Q4AB20LyxyhaHc3OsXzuvRzM>

“Life is good to those who know how to live. I do not ever hope to accumulate great funds of worldly wealth, but I shall accumulate something far more valuable, a store of wonderful memories. When I reach the twilight of life I shall look back and say I'm glad I lived as I did, life has been good to me.”

“Awareness is becoming acquainted with the environment, no matter where one happens to be. Man does not suddenly become aware or infused with wonder; it is something we are born with.” (Sigurd F. Olson).

We just need to use what we have. To listen with inward ears and see with inward eyes, to feel and be aware with our entire being.

“If we can change our priorities, achieve balance and understanding in our roles as human beings in a complex world, the coming era can well be that of a richer civilization, not its end.” (Sigurd F. Olson)

Turn down the noise of the built environment and learn the value of listening in nature.

“It was the time of quiet ... This was the time for silence, for being in pace with the ancient rhythms of timelessness. The breathing of the lake, the slow growth of living things. Here the cosmos could be felt, and the true meaning of attunement.... That sense of oneness ..”

“In wilderness people can find the silence and the solitude and the noncivilized surroundings that can connect them once again to their evolutionary heritage, and through an experience of the eternal mystery, can give them a sense of the sacredness of all creation.”

- Sigurd F. Olson

The Singing Wilderness – Sigurd Olson documentary excerpt

‘We are missing the big picture.’ Here’s the reconnection.

“This is it, this is what I felt, but I’ve never been able to put it into words!”

<https://vimeo.com/3708217>

Away from the distractions of civilised life, where you be yourself, where you could be – and this is important – quiet, and listen ... and get in touch with true reality, the reality that we have lost touch with, but which remains deep within us. We reconnect with the big picture.

Sigurd’s Olson’s Listening Point

Wilderness advocate and author Sigurd Olson gathered inspiration for his books from quiet moments spent at Listening Point, his cabin on Burntside Lake near Ely. Listening Point Foundation executive director Alanna Dore talks about this special place and what Olson might think about conservation today.

Sigurd's Olson's writings and his philosophy mean a lot to a lot of people, connected to the wilderness and the spiritual effect it has on us as humans. 'It's a wonderful story on how to live a human life.'

Writing Shack

Renowned conservationist and author Sigurd Olson wrote his books while ensconced in a small 'writing shack' behind his house.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YR4qaeBfbqg>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4S67S4UlyZM>

He came here for inspiration and renewal. "Wilderness ... is a spiritual necessity, an antidote to the high pressure of modern life, a means of regaining serenity and equilibrium."

The legacy of Sigurd F. Olson

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HS1qrfieKaw>

The Boundary Waters -

A look at the beautiful Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, set to a narration of excerpts from Sigurd Olson's 'The Singing Wilderness.'

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3kr1M6V_kxk

The Singing Wilderness

Olson as someone who struggled and who never gave up in the search for meaning. A look at the life of Sigurd Olson (1899-1982) – nature writer, conservationist, and canoe guide – and his conviction that humans have a biological, evolutionary connection with wilderness, and that our spiritual well-being is compromised when we are separated from it. The film re-examines his ideas for a new age, in which every advance in technology seems to further isolate us from our natural origins.

“Sigurd Olson believed that deep within us all are traces of the primordial elements from which we were formed, and the DNA we share with fishes and bugs and wolves. For most of us these seeds lie dormant, smothered beneath layers of culture, custom, civilization, and technology, and it is only in contact

with wilderness – in silence, solitude, and communion with nature – that we can reconnect with that primitive core of our being, our spiritual essence.”

Sigurd Olson espoused his beliefs at a time when he felt that modern society was undermining our connection with our evolutionary memory and obscuring an essential self-understanding. And that was fifty years ago. With the burgeoning of the information age and our increasingly reckless plundering of the environment, his message assumes an even greater urgency today. By examining Olson’s life – the struggles and achievements which led him to his beliefs – and by evoking the wilderness experience as he did so eloquently in his writing, this film argues for the importance of wilderness for both our spiritual and our physical survival. It is a biography, a celebration of Sigurd’s life and work, a cinematic interpretation of his writing, and a quest for his relevance – and that of wilderness – in today’s world. It is also a call to reawaken within ourselves that primordial yearning, that burning deep within each of us which few even recognize and which has been all but snuffed out by modern civilization, by technological innovation, by iPhones and uplinks... a call that can only be answered in wilderness. We need Sigurd Olson’s voice to fan the latent glow we all carry inside.

Sigurd Olson biographer David Backes writes, "Olson was, in many respects, a second John Muir, the famous turn-of-the-century writer and conservationist who founded the Sierra Club. The similarities are striking.... Muir's theology, like Olson's, arose out of direct, joy- and wonder-filled experiences in nature, with subsequent reflection and reading giving form and adding nuances to those experiences. And Muir's evangelism, like Olson's, was devoted to helping people discover the sacredness of creation and their own connectedness to it."

The Listening Point Foundation is dedicated to furthering Sigurd Olson’s legacy of wilderness education by publishing wilderness education materials and sponsoring wilderness educational programs.

“I named this place Listening Point because only when one comes to listen, only when one is aware and still, can things be seen and heard. Everyone has a listening point somewhere. It does not have to be in the north or close to the

wilderness, but someplace of quiet where the universe can be contemplated with awe.”

- Sigurd F. Olson

<http://listeningpointfoundation.org/>

The legacy – biography, words and writing

<https://www.northland.edu/sustain/soei/sigurd-legacy/>

Lots of wonderful words here:

From “Worth of a Tree”

“I went away saddened by what I had heard, but knew that there were many others who felt as I, who valued a tree not by what it might bring on the market, or what its effect might be on surrounding growth, but rather by their feelings toward it and the associations they had made; that certain trees have an emotional value far in excess of any other consideration.

And knowing that I was not alone I was glad, because I knew that some day and soon, people who loved trees and understood them would make themselves heard, that someday a great shout would go across the land to save forever these ancient landmarks which through many generations have woven themselves into the life of a countryside and into the hearts of those who have known them.”

From the Speeches, I particularly enjoy “The Spiritual Need,” affirming the spiritual value of wilderness. Here, Sigurd cites one of my favourite writers, Lewis Mumford, and draws also upon St Thomas Aquinas, showing also the influence of Thomist philosopher Josef Pieper. The conclusion of the speech is an echo of Piper’s words: “Unless we regain the art of silence and insight, the ability for nonactivity, unless we substitute true leisure for our hectic amusements, we will destroy our culture and ourselves.” Again, the need for quiet in order to listen and get in touch with true reality, the reality we tend to drown out and override and build over.

“Man’s great problem today is to make the transition, to bridge the gap between the old world and the new, to understand the reason for his

discontent with things as they are, and to recognize the solution. His old world of superstition, evil spirits, and fear is gone. Gone too his dependence on the wilderness and his sense of close relationship, belonging, and animal oneness with the earth and the life around him. He must recognize now that while some of his spiritual roots have been severed, he still has his gods, and that his attitude toward wilderness has entered a new phase in which for the first time in his evolution as a thinking, perceptive creature, he can look at it with understanding and appreciation of its deeper meanings, knowing that within its borders may be the answer to his longing for naturalness. He needs to know that the spiritual values that once sustained him are still there in the timelessness and majestic rhythms of those parts of the world he has not ravished.

With this realization, wilderness assumes new and great significance. It concerns all of humanity and has philosophical implications that give breadth to the mind and nourish the spirit. Because man's subconscious is steeped in the primitive, looking to the wilderness actually means a coming home to him, a moving into ancient grooves of human and prehuman experience. So powerful is the impact of returning that whether a man realizes it or not, reactions are automatically set in motion that bring in their train an uplift of the spirit. It is as though, tormented by some inner and seemingly unsolvable problem, he is suddenly released from frustration and perplexity and sees his way."

"If, as Harrison Brown said, "The spiritual resources of man are the critical resources," then wilderness, which fosters such values, must be preserved. If we can believe what the wise have said for thousands of years, then there is hope for wildness and beauty in our environment. If spirit is a power and a force that spells the difference between richness of living and sterility, then we know what we must do. It may well be that with our swiftly expanding population, the movement away from nature into vast city complexes and the decimation facing much of the land, that the wilderness we can hold now will become the final bastions of the spirit of man. Unless we can preserve places

where the endless spiritual needs of man can be fulfilled and nourished, we will destroy our culture and ourselves.”

Sigurd F. Olson by David Backes

‘As an author and speaker, Olson was unsurpassed in capturing the sense of awe and wonder and connectedness that close contact with nature can bring to people. Beyond that, his ideas about the meaning of wilderness had a power and uniqueness that are not only relevant in the twenty-first century, but needed. The biological underpinning to his philosophy comes from a theory he developed and called “racial memory”—the idea that humans have a biological attachment to nature that arises from our long evolutionary heritage. This theory, which has ties to the romantics and primitivists and to the “collective unconscious” described by psychologist Carl Jung, did not receive much scholarly attention or support during his lifetime, but in recent years it has become the cornerstone of the emerging scholarly discipline of evolutionary psychology.

Olson’s special gift was his ability to express his deep message about the spiritual values of nature by writing about simple things—the sound of wings over a marsh, the smell of a bog, the memories stirred by a campfire, the movement of a canoe—in a way that captured the emotions they stirred. Sigurd Olson may not have become the Baptist missionary his father once hoped for, but a missionary he was, a wilderness evangelist with legions of followers. He was an apostle of awe, a witness for wonder, and an icon of the modern wilderness movement whose words will continue to stir hearts and souls for generations to come.

Olson tells us of the hardships of these past voyageurs: the portages, the long paddles, the equipment used, the elements, the ghost camps. Beautiful observations: the wildlife, the drawing toward the wilderness, the humor, the scattered Indian tribes, the nuances we miss or never thought of in quite that way.’

Some Sigurd F. Olson quotes:

“Joys come from simple and natural things: mists over meadows, sunlight on leaves, the path of the moon over water.”

“Simplicity in all things is the secret of the wilderness and one of its most valuable lessons.”

"No country can ever be bleak or forbidding if it has once been a part of the love and warmth of those who have shared it with you."

“While we are born with curiosity and wonder and our early years full of the adventure they bring, I know such inherent joys are often lost. I also know that, being deep within us, their latent glow can be fanned to flame again by awareness and an open mind.”

“Without love of the land, conservation lacks meaning or purpose, for only in a deep and inherent feeling for the land can there be dedication in preserving it.”

“Beauty is composed of many things and never stands alone. It is part of horizons, blue in the distance, great primeval silences, knowledge of all things of the earth. It embodies the hopes and dreams of those who have gone before, including the spirit world; it is so fragile it can be destroyed by a sound or thought. It may be infinitesimally small or encompass the universe itself. It comes in a swift conception wherever nature has not been disturbed.”

“I have discovered in a lifetime of traveling in primitive regions, a lifetime of seeing people living in the wilderness and using it, that there is a hard core of wilderness need in everyone, a core that makes its spiritual values a basic human necessity. There is no hiding it....Unless we can preserve places where the endless spiritual needs of man can be fulfilled and nourished, we will destroy our culture and ourselves.”

“Ethical and moral questions and how we answer them may determine whether primal scenes will continue to be a source of joy and comfort to future generations. The decisions are ours and we have to search our minds and

souls for the right answers... We must be eternally vigilant, embrace the broad concept of an environmental ethic to survive.”

“And so when we talk about intangible values remember that they cannot be separated from the others. The conservation of waters, forests, soils, and wildlife are all involved with the conservation of the human spirit. The goal we all strive toward is happiness, contentment, the dignity of the individual, and the good life. This goal will elude us forever if we forget the importance of the intangibles.”

A wonderful book which is well worth tracking down, beautifully written.

David Backes, *A Wilderness Within: The Life Of Sigurd F. Olson*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.

Spirit of the North: The Quotable Sigurd F. Olson, 2004, David Backes, editor

The Singing Wilderness

A look at the life of Sigurd Olson (1899-1982) – nature writer, conservationist, and canoe guide – and his conviction that humans have a biological, evolutionary connection with wilderness, and that our spiritual well-being is compromised when we are separated from it. The film re-examines his ideas for a new age, in which every advance in technology seems to further isolate us from our natural origins.

<https://fiscal.ifp.org/project.cfm/274/The-Singing-Wilderness/?fbclid=IwAR1FnNnXunxmyvP7i0OvRtnKi8hMOV3ZUNtUOIPL9aPfTXA9Wc1xONN1vk>

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SIGURD F. OLSON by DAVID BACKES

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Sigurd F. Olson

<http://listeningpointfoundation.org/>

Explore and enjoy, the world within and without, the natural world and the world of words.

If you watch the video "Writing Shack" above, then you will see the typewriter on which Sigurd Olson wrote his books. You will also see the piece of paper still in the typewriter, containing the very last words that he wrote: "A New Adventure is coming up and I'm sure it will be a good one."

“If we can change our priorities, achieve balance and understanding in our roles as human beings in a complex world, the coming era can well be that of a richer civilization, not its end.”

Sigurd F. Olson