

land. It always has and it always will. The fallacy the economic determinists have tied around our collective neck, and which we now need to cast off, is the belief that economics determines *all* land-use. This is simply not true. An innumerable host of actions and attitudes, comprising perhaps the bulk of all land relations, is determined by the land-users' tastes and predilections, rather than by his purse. The bulk of all land relations hinges on investments of time, forethought, skill and faith rather than on investments of cash. As a land-user thinketh, so is he.

I have purposely presented the land ethic as a product of social evolution because nothing so important as an ethic is ever "written." Only the most superficial student of history supposes that Moses 'wrote' the Decalogue; it evolved in the minds of a thinking community, and, and Moses wrote a tentative summary of it for a "seminar." I say tentative because evolution never stops.

The evolution of a land ethic is an intellectual as well as emotional process. . . . Conservation is paved with good intentions which prove to be futile, or even dangerous, because they are devoid of critical understanding either of the land or of economic land-use. I think it is a truism that as the ethical frontier advances from the individual to the community, its intellectual content increases. The mechanism of operation is the same for any ethic: social approbation for right actions: social disapproval for wrong actions.

## EXCERPT FROM THE REDISCOVERY OF NORTH AMERICA

By Barry Lopez

A few hours after midnight on the morning of October twelfth in the Julian calendar of the West — or October twenty-second, according to the modern Gregorian calendar — Juan Rodriguez Bermeo, a lookout aboard the caravel *Pinta*, spotted the coast of either San Salvador Island or Samana Cay in the Bahamas and shouted his exclamation into the darkness. It was the eighteenth year of the reign of Ferdinand and Isabella of Castile, and these mariners were their emissaries.



It has been my privilege to travel, to see a lot of country, and in those travels I have learned of several ways to become intimate with the land, ways I try to practice. I remember a Nunamiut man at Anaktuvuk Pass in the Brooks Range in Alaska named Justus Mekiana. I was there working on a book and I asked him what he did when he went into a foreign landscape. He said, "I listen."

And a man named Levine Williams, a Koyukon Athapaskan, who spoke sternly to a friend, after he had made an innocent remark about how intelligent people were,

saying to him, "Every animal knows way more than you do."

And another man, an Inuk, watching a group of polar bear biologists on Baffin Island comparing notes on the migration paths of polar bears, in an effort to predict where they might go. "Quajijaujungangitut," he said softly, "it can't be learned."

I remember a Kamba man in Kenya, Kamoya Kimeu, a companion in the stone desert west of Lake Turkana — and a dozen other men — telling me, you know how to see, learn

how to mark the country. And he and others teaching me to sit down in one place for two or three hours and look.

When we enter the landscape to learn something, we are obligated, I think, to pay attention rather than constantly to pose questions. To approach the land as we would a person, by opening an intelligent conversation. And to stay in one place, to make of that one, long observation a fully dilated experience. We will always be rewarded if we give the land credit for more than we imagine, and if we imagine it as being more complex even than language. In these ways we begin, I think, to find a home, to sense how to fit a place.

In Spanish, *la querencia* refers to a place on the ground where one feels secure, a place from which one's strength of character is drawn. It comes from the verb *querer*, to desire, but this verb also carries the sense of accepting a challenge, as in a game.

In Spain, *querencia* is most often used to describe the spot in a bullring where a wounded bull goes to gather himself, the place he returns to after his painful encounters with the picadors and the banderilleros. It is unfortunate that the word is compromised in this way, for the idea itself is quite beautiful — a place in which we know exactly who we are. The place from which we speak our deepest beliefs. *Querencia* conveys more than "hearth." And it carries this sense of being challenged — in the case of a bullfight, by something lethal, which one may want no part of.

I would like to take this word *querencia* beyond its ordinary meaning and suggest that it applies to our challenge in the modern world, that our search for a *querencia* is both

a response to threat and a desire to find out who we are. And the discovery of a *querencia*, I believe, hinges on the perfection of a sense of place.

A sense of place must include, at the very least, knowledge of what is inviolate about the relationship between people and the place they occupy, and certainly, too, how the destruction of this relationship, or the failure to attend to it, wounds people. Living in North America and trying to develop a philosophy of place — a recognition of the spiritual and psychological dimensions of geography — inevitably brings us back to our beginnings here, to the Spanish incursion.

The Spanish experience was to amass wealth and go home. Those of us who have stayed, who delight in the litanies of this landscape and who can imagine no deeper pleasure than the fullness of our residency here, look with horror on the survival of that imperial framework in North America — the physical destruction of a local landscape to increase the wealth of people who don't live there, or to supply materials to buyers in distant places who will never know the destruction that process leaves behind. If, in a philosophy of place, we examine our love of the land — I do not mean romantic love, but the love Edward Wilson calls *biophilia*, love of what is alive, and the physical context in which it lives, which we call “the hollow” or “the canebrake” or “the woody draw” or “the canyon” — if, in measuring our love, we feel anger, I think we have a further obligation. It is to develop a hard and focused anger at what continues to be done to the land not so that people can survive, but so that a relatively few people can amass wealth.

I'm aware that these words, or words like them, have historically invoked revolution. But I ask myself, where is the man or woman, standing before lifeless porpoises strangled and bloated in a beach-cast driftnet, or standing on farmland ankle deep in soil gone to flour dust, or flying over the Cascade Mountains and seeing the clear cuts stretching for forty miles, the sunbaked earth, the streams running with mud, who does not want to say, “Forgive me, thou bleeding earth, that I am meek and gentle with these butchers”?

If we ask ourselves what has heightened our sense of loss in North America, what has made us feel around in the dark for a place where we might take a stand, we would have to answer that it is the particulars of what is now called the environmental crisis. Acid rain. Soil erosion. Times Beach. Falling populations of wild animals. Clearcutting. Three Mile Island. But what we really face, I think, is something much larger, something that goes back to Guanahani and what Columbus decided to do, that series of acts — theft, rape, and murder — of which the environmental crisis is symptomatic. What we face is a crisis of culture, a crisis of character. Five hundred years after the *Nina*, the *Pinta*, and the *Santa Maria* sailed into the Bahamas, we are asking ourselves what has been the price of the assumptions those ships carried, particularly about the primacy of material

wealth.

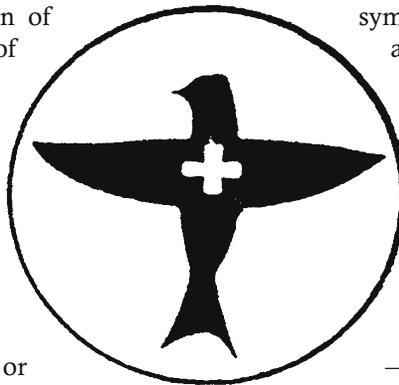
One of our deepest frustrations as a culture, I think, must be that we have made so extreme an investment in mining the continent, created such an infrastructure of nearly endless jobs predicated on the removal and distribution of trees, water, minerals, fish, plants, and oil, that we cannot imagine stopping. In the part of the country where I live, thousands of men are now asking themselves what jobs they will have — for they can see the handwriting on the wall — when they are told they cannot cut down the last few trees and that what little replanting they've done — if it actually works — will not produce enough timber soon enough to ensure their jobs.

The frustration of these men, who are my neighbors, is a frustration I am not deeply sympathetic to — their employers have behaved like wastrels, and they have known for years that this was coming. But in another way I am sympathetic, for these men are trying to live out an American nightmare which our system of schools and our voices of government never told them was ill-founded. There is not the raw material in the woods, or beyond, to make all of us rich. And in striving for it, we will only make ourselves, all of us, poor.

When people have railed against environmentalism for the restrictions it has sought to impose, they have charged — I'm thinking of loggers in Oregon, and shrimp fishermen in the Gulf, and oil drillers on the North Slope — that environmentalists are out to destroy the independent spirit of the American entrepreneur. They've meant to invoke an image of self-reliance and personal responsibility. They've meant by their words to convey this: If something is truly wrong here, we'll see it and fix it. We don't need anyone to tell us what to do.

The deep and tragic confusion here is that this pose of responsibility, this harkening to a heritage of ennobled independence, has no historical foundation in America. Outside of single individuals and a few small groups that attended to the responsibilities of living on the land, attended to the reciprocities involved, the history of the use of the American landscape has been lawless exploitation. When an industry asks to police itself, we must have the courage to note that there is no precedent, that the entrenched precedent, from the time of the Spanish, is lawlessness in the quest for wealth, with the extension of enough local generosity to keep from being run out of town, enough respect for institutions to keep from being hauled before the bar, and enough patriotism to be given the benefit of the doubt by society.

We cannot, with Huck Finn and Mark Twain, light out for the territory any more, to a place where we might continue to live without parental restraint. We need to find our home. We need to find a place where we take on the responsibilities of adults to the human community. Having seen what is going on around us, we need to find, each person, his or her *querencia*, and to believe it is not a matador in a bullring we face, a rigged game, but an assailable beast,



another in our history like Tamerlane or the Black Death.

What we need is to discover the continent again. We need to see the land with a less acquisitive frame of mind. We need to sojourn in it again, to discover the lineaments of cooperation with it. We need to discover the difference between the kind of independence that is a desire to be responsible to no one but the self — the independence of the adolescent — and the independence that means the assumption of responsibility in society, the independence of people who no longer need to be supervised. We need to be more discerning about the sources of wealth. And we need to find within ourselves, and nurture, a profound courtesy, an unalloyed honesty.

Some hold that this task is hopeless, that the desire for power and wealth is too strong. Without denying in any way the dark flaws in human nature, I wish politely to disagree. I would like to put forth what may pass for sources of hope but which are in fact only examples that we can follow, situations that we can take advantage of, and people who I think might inspire us.

If we are looking for some better way to farm, we need look no further than the Amish and Mennonite communities of the country for that kind of intelligence. And we should remind ourselves that it is not necessary to *be* a people in order to avail ourselves of their intelligence — that in fact such a tack is unwise.

If we are to find examples on which to model our courage, we need look no further than Bartholomé de las Casas, who wrote 450 years ago what is relevant to us today. And if we are afraid of human angels, we need only remind ourselves that Las Casas was, to some extent, also a man of his day. He paid little attention to the plight of black slaves in the New World.

If we would search for a contemporary hero, fighting still this beast the Spanish loosed on these shores, we need only turn our eyes to El Salvador and the murdered archbishop Oscar Romero.

If we require heroes closer to home, people who in their writing, in their essays and meditations, have given us good prescriptions for behavior, we need as a country look no further than the work of Wendell Berry or Thomas Merton.

If we feel wisdom itself is lost, we need only enter a library. We will find there the records of hundreds of men and women who believed in a world larger than the one defined in each generation by human failing. We will find literature, which teaches us again and again how to imagine.

If we become the prisoners of our own minds, if we think ourselves into despair, we can step onto wounded ground with a shovel and begin to plant trees. They will grow. They will hold the soil, provide shelter for birds, warm someone's home after we are gone.

If we lose faith in ourselves, we can in those moments forget ourselves and dwell on the future of the larger community, on the blessing of neighbors. Your neighbors are those you can see when you look out your window, but today

these are not our only neighbors, if we mean by that word a common burden, a common joy in an abstract terrain.

If I think back on that long night when the caravels rolled in heavy seas off the coast of Guanahani, the waning moon setting, the wind blowing hard beneath a clear sky, I can easily imagine men of conscience lying there awaiting the dawn. They could not have known — for they were the first there — what was ahead of them, neither the wonder of it nor how their mettle would be tested.

In a sense we lie there with them. It is our privilege to know what the landscape is actually like — its people, its animals. But we are like them, I think, because we too feel ourselves on the verge of something vague but extraordinary. Something big is in the wind, and we feel it. And we feel, with them, the weight of Columbus's authority, his compelling political and ecclesiastical power. And we sense our own reluctance, our lack of objection, before it. His vision, however mad or immoral, is forceful. Even if we see him as a man flawed like other men — his megalomania and delusion, his uncommon longing for noble titles — we are inclined to see that he got us across the literally uncharted ocean, and that that takes a kind of genius.

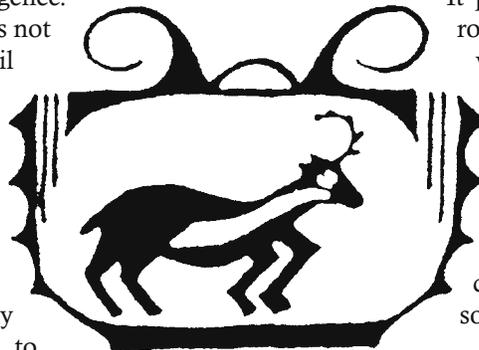
It puts us, somehow, in his debt. It leaves room to forgive him, even to believe in his worthiness. If this search of his for gold should produce a holocaust, we say to ourselves, well, then, we might take only a little, something for our children, a poor wife waiting at home. And be done with the man. Who can fight the conviction that is in Columbus? Who can deny his destiny? Life is short. Let someone in authority take him to task.

We lie in the ships with those men, I think, because we are ambivalent about what to do. We do not know whether to confront this sea of troubles or to stand away, care for our own, and take comfort in the belief that the power to act lies elsewhere.

It is this paralysis in the face of disaster, this fear before the beast, that would cause someone looking from the outside to say that we face a crisis of character. It is not a crisis of policy or of law or of administration. We cannot turn to institutions, to environmental groups, or to government. If we rise in the night, sleepless, to stand at the ship's rail and gaze at the New World under the setting moon, we know we are thousands of miles from home, and that if we mean to make this a true home, we have a monumental adjustment to make, and only our companions on the ship to look to.

We must turn to each other, and sense that this is possible.

— *Barry Lopez is the author of Arctic Dreams, and other works of natural history and fiction. He recently co-edited Home Ground: Language for an American Landscape, with Debra Gwartney.*



## HOMEPLACE

By Scott Russel Sanders