

Wekiva: a Democratic Vista

7/27/00

I am going to disappear. When I write, this is what I do. I block myself off from my life and adopt the meditative state, move into the logosphere, the world full of words. I continue to breathe and my phrases are built in gusts of wind for you to hear. My body is not dead. I hear and see and feel more than these words; but I am trying to engage you and my subject at once with these words. Both are variable and adrift, like the molecules of water and muck in the flow.

You are not here; but you are human, I am human, and we therefore share this conspiracy about life that is the English language. What I have disappeared from is my wife, children, grandchildren, colleagues, students, government, employment, responsibility, and health concerns. Any and all of these worlds can be called up in the virtual reality of words, as I have just done; but we are engaged, really, in virtual reality matching. We are fellow travelers in the noosphere, specifically in the global network of the English language. English is a multicultural megameme, growing and developing on its own, a set of all the words and expressions to bespeak our cultures and our individuality. It is an extraordinarily creative medium. In many ways, our language is our peculiarly human navigation system.

Animal navigation is a mysterious thing. The thousand and one modes of flight and swim and walk in the animal kingdom are testimony to the fact that we take our paths by a series of subtle approximations. We animals use a variety of baselines for our reckonings: from stars and sun, to currents and winds, to magnetic poles and line of sight, to reverberations and radiations, to signals electronic and chemical. Almost always we go in the state of community, certainly so when we use language as our compass. The matching of our virtual reality in these words approximates us not so much to the truth, as to each other. We migrate together through words.

Walt Whitman recognized better than any other writer I know and said it explicitly in a hundred ways that writing, especially literature is community-building on a timeless scale. Across the milky galaxy of words, America's poets and naturalists have written the Song of the American Land and its Democracy. Flawed as it is, our constitution and its Bill of Writes represents the approximation by which, in a timeless mode, we can navigate into the uncertain future of the new millennium with its promises of cyberspace, genetic engineering, mind mapping, space travel, and biosphere regeneration.

Not looking at the potentials for destruction, disease, sabotage, war, environmental degradation, political disintegration, racism, fascism, mind control, and genocide (except to make this

abbreviated catalog), we can take a positive stance together for the future. And when we talk to others about how we order our life toward a growing sense of community, they too may join the ongoing conversation and continue to explore in greater detail and practical application the ideas we have about democracy. For me, democracy is or should be natural and organic.

Something is organic when it comes out of nature and conforms enough to the biological or evolutionary programs that it can be said to be our animal inheritance. Look at human art, music, theater, and poetry to see what makes us different from the other highly expressive and neurologically sophisticated creatures. My words are sounds, my handwriting figures and forms,



my syntax a rhythm or dance to beguile your map-making reader's mind. Meanwhile the animals sing, construct messages, mark territories, leave droppings, and secrete chemicals. They react in impromptu fashion to reality and no one can be sure how "fur" in the past and the future they can contemplate. Stimulated by the right smells or sounds or sights, they recognize their way, finding ancient only once-experienced pathways for food, prey, predators, mates, and angles of escape.

Stay tuned, because the news today is that scientists are studying their maps of the human and animal brain, discovering spindle-shaped mega-cells unique to human development (and some higher primates), the orchestrators it would seem of our self-consciousness. Meanwhile, the democratic view of the river will continue to grow among those spindles so as to include and provide for our native flora and fauna, the common as well as the rare.