

VIRGIL'S CORYCIAN, WENDELL BERRY, AND THE ECOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

Jane E. Millar and R. Alden Smith

Baylor University – Waco, Texas

Jane_Millar@baylor.edu, Alden_Smith@baylor.edu

Virgil, *Georgics* 4.125-148

namque sub Oebaliae memini me turribus arcis qua niger umectat flauentia culta Galaesus , Corycium uidisse senem, cui pauca relictis iugera ruris erant, nec fertilis illa iuuenis nec pecori opportuna seges nec commoda Baccho. hic rarum tamen in dumis olus albaque circum lilia uerbenasque premens uescumque papauer regum aequabat opes animis, seraque reuertens nocte domum dapibus mensas onerabat inemptis . primus uere rosam atque autumnu carpere poma, et cum tristis hiems etiamnum frigore saxa rumperet et glacie cursus frenaret aquarum, ille comam mollis iam tondebat hyacinthi aestatem increpitans seram Zephyrosque morantis. ergo apibus fetis idem atque examine multo primus abundare et spumantia cogere pressis mella fauis; illi tiliae atque uberrima tinus, quotque in flore nouo pomis se fertilis arbos induerat, totidem autumnu matura tenebat. ille etiam seras in uersum distulit ulmos eduramque pirum et spinos iam pruna ferentis iamque ministrantem platanum potantibus umbras . uerum haec ipse equidem spatiis exclusus iniquis praetereo atque aliis post me memoranda relinquo .	For I remember , beneath the towers of the Oebalician citadel, where black Galaesus makes wet the tawny fields , I saw an old Corycian, for whom there were a few acres of land left over , its fields neither fit for oxen nor suitable for herds, nor favorable for the vine. Here nevertheless, planting meager herbs among the thickets and white lilies all around, verbena, and slender poppy, he used to match the wealth of kings in spirit , and returning home late at night used to load his table with feasts unbought . He was first to pluck the rose in spring and in autumn the apple, and when gloomy winter was still bursting the rocks with cold and braking the water courses with ice, the same man was shearing the foliage of the soft hyacinth, chiding the late summer and lagging west wind. Therefore he was also, with fertile bees and a great swarm, first to abound and gather foaming honey from the pressed comb. His were lime-trees and plentiful pines, As many fruits as the tree assumed in new bloom, So many did it hold ripened in autumn. He even planted mature elms in rows and hardened pear and blackthorns already bearing plums and the plane-tree now ministering shade for drinking men . But I myself, constrained for my part by unfair limits , pass by and leave the remembering for others after me.	125 130 135 140 145
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Wendell Berry, "The Agrarian Standard" in *The Essential Agrarian Reader*, p. 28.

Virgil's old squatter... is a literary outcropping of an agrarian theme that has been carried from earliest times until now mostly in family or folk tradition, not in writing... Wherever found, they don't vary by much from Virgil's prototype. They don't have or require a lot of land, and the land they have is often marginal. They practice subsistence agriculture, which has been much derided by agricultural economists and other learned people of the industrial age, and they always associate frugality with abundance... small farmers who have prospered, not by "getting big," but by practicing the ancient rules of thrift and subsistence, by accepting the limits of their small farms, and by knowing well the value of having a little land.

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