

[return to updates](#)

Wendell Berry

is being used



by Miles Mathis

Wendell Berry has been one of my favorite living authors since I first read his 1977 social critique *The Unsettling of America*. I read it for the first time in about 1985 and I have bought at least a dozen copies over the years, giving them out to friends. It influenced me greatly. I still include it on recommended reading lists, and it is about the only thing on that list by a living author.

In fact, that is what brought me to this paper. I hadn't read anything by Berry in years, so I thought I would look him up. I knew he was "getting up there" (he is now 79), so I wanted to see if he was still at it. He is. Turns out he is finally being recognized by the mainstream, having won several major awards in the past couple of years. Unfortunately, those awards threw up a series of red flags, scaring me for a few moments. To show you what I mean, let us look at those awards. He was the Jefferson Lecturer in 2012. That is a National Endowment for the Humanities honor. Problem is, Lionel Trilling was the first Jefferson Lecturer in 1972, which I now know to read as a red flag. Trilling's connections to the CIA were outed long ago through his involvement in the American Committee for Cultural Freedom in the 1950's.* Also on the list of Jefferson Lecturers is Sidney Hook (1984): Hook was the first chairman of the ACCF in 1951. He was basically a contract consultant for the CIA.* Another on the list is Robert Penn Warren, the 1974 Jefferson Lecturer, who was a Fellow of the Institute of Contemporary Arts, also a CIA front.* Another Lecturer was Saul Bellow (1977), also connected to the CIA through his editorship of *The Noble Savage* with agent Keith Botsford. Bellow, like many of these "independent authors," was subsidized by the notorious Congress for Cultural Freedom.*

This year (2013), Wendell Berry won the Richard C. Holbrooke Distinguished Achievement Award. That is a newer award, given out only since 2006, and it is tied to the Dayton Literary Peace Prize awards. Again, the list is full of red flags. The worst may be Andrew Solomon, who also won this

year in the non-fiction category. Clicking on his name at Wikipedia throws up a whole forest of red flags, beginning with the magazines he writes for: *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, *Artforum*, and *Travel and Leisure*. All run by the spooks. He attended Horace Mann, Yale, and Jesus College, Cambridge, all and always red flags. He studied with the Lacanian feminist Juliet Mitchell at Cambridge, a huge red flag. Mitchell was on the editorial committee of the *New Left Review* in the 1960's, so she is either a British Intelligence agent or asset, or a dupe. We have seen in my previous papers that all these fake progressive journals were started or taken over by American or British Intelligence either before or after the war, and their main function was to divert young progressives away from Republicanism. In fact, Marxism has been used for that purpose since before the *Civil War*, as we saw [in my analysis](#) of the old *New York Tribune* and its editor/agent Charles Dana.

But back to Andrew Solomon. All my evidence against Solomon so far could be dismissed as circumstantial, but watch: Solomon's best-known book is *The Noonday Demon: an Atlas of Depression*. It was named a notable book by both the *New York Times* and the American Library Association. It won the National Book Award for nonfiction, and many other awards. It was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize. What is the book about? It is about Solomon's battle with depression, and his solution using psychotherapy and antidepressants. So what? you say. The so what is that Solomon's billionaire father is the chairman of Forest Laboratories, a major pharmaceutical manufacturer who just happens to market Celexa, one of the top antidepressant medications. So Solomon's book is mainly an extended ad for Celexa dressed up as non-fiction. That should be so offensive on the face of it no one could look at the book without gagging, but notice that all the major institutions tripped over one another in the rush to give it an award. From this and many other examples, we see that literature has long been completely co-opted by commerce. If you want a top literary award, find out what drug or demon the Ford Foundation is selling this year and write a book or a poem about it.

Another red flag is that the federal government itself [has claimed Celexa doesn't work](#). Forest Labs has been the target of many justice department probes and subpoenas, and the directors, including Howard Solomon, have been accused of promoting bribery of doctors to sell the drug. This is true not only of Celexa, but of the drugs Lexapro, Benicar, Azor, and Levothroid. See [this CBS news article](#) to view many of the ongoing investigations of Howard Solomon (and other drug pushers). Not only do these drugs not work, they are very dangerous, having a long list of side effects as well as being linked to many deaths and birth defects in lawsuits. So this is not just a literary transgression we are talking about. It is part of the widespread harming of people for profit we now call the pharmaceutical industry.

I think you can already see why I got scared with regard to Wendell Berry. Seeing him on these lists was like a warning I was about to lose him—as I had all the other heroes of my youth. I feared he was about to become another casualty of my taking the red pill. What added to this fright was studying his more recent publications, where I found *The Poetry of William Carlos Williams of Rutherford* (2011). Yikes. William Carlos Williams was recently outed for me when [I found him linked to the writers](#) of Gertrude Stein's Paris Salon, including Ezra Pound and Ford Madox Ford. He is also linked to Marianne Moore and Marcel Duchamp via “The Others.” Williams received the Bollingen Prize in 1953. Moore was also a recipient of the Bollingen Prize, another prize started by the CIA. Its first honoree was Ezra Pound. Duchamp we know about. Later Williams would be linked to Allen Ginsberg, as a mentor. All these people have ties to Intelligence. Beyond that, Williams went to Horace Mann and University of Pennsylvania. Pound also went to U of P, as did Noam Chomsky.

But even without being a spook, Williams was a terrible poet. No, let me rephrase that: if Williams hadn't been a spook, you would never have heard of him as a poet. Only by the mad promotion of the

agencies could people like this be sold as poets, poems like this be sold as fine. Williams only poem with any charm is his red wheelbarrow poem, and that was clearly an accident. Limited to sixteen words, he finally hit on something sort of poetic in a small way. Just as any fool with a camera will eventually hit on an artistic photo, if he snaps enough, any fool with a pen will hit on a poetic 16-word sequence, if he writes enough. Remember, Basho didn't get famous for writing one good haiku, he got famous for writing thousands.

That reads as nothing more than raw opinion, and if Berry is reading this he will require more than that. So I will take a moment to flesh out that admittedly non-mainstream opinion. I don't want to quote dozens of poems—since that would just bog down this paper—so I will only copy in full one of his most famous poems, *Spring and All*:

By the road to the contagious hospital
under the surge of the blue
mottled clouds driven from the
northeast -- a cold wind. Beyond, the
waste of broad, muddy fields
brown with dried weeds, standing and fallen

patches of standing water
the scattering of tall trees

All along the road the reddish
purplish, forked, upstanding, twiggy
stuff of bushes and small trees
with dead, brown leaves under them
leafless vines --

Lifeless in appearance, sluggish
dazed spring approaches --

They enter the new world naked,
cold, uncertain of all
save that they enter. All about them
the cold, familiar wind --

Now the grass, tomorrow
the stiff curl of wildcarrot leaf

One by one objects are defined --
It quickens: clarity, outline of leaf

But now the stark dignity of
entrance -- Still, the profound change
has come upon them: rooted they
grip down and begin to awaken

That is fully representative of his work, as I think anyone would admit. But honestly, I see nothing to recommend it as poetry. It looks to my eye like flabby prose cut up willy-nilly into lines and stanzas. It has no flow, either in idea or word. It doesn't look interesting on the page, doesn't sound interesting when spoken, and goes nowhere. Williams is trying desperately to evoke some Spring imagery, but barely succeeds in evoking anything. The only line that even begins to look remotely like poetry is

“the stiff curl of wildcarrot leaf.” I like that. But the rest of the lines are throw-aways.

“Reddish, purplish”? That is the definition of flabby writing. As a visual artist, I can tell you that kind of description just looks silly posing as poetry, especially famous poetry. That's a valley-girl description of color, not a poet's description of color. “Twiggy stuff”? You have to be kidding me! “Upstanding”? Does “upstanding” tell us anything of value about bushes or trees? I would think it is implicit that trees are upstanding. “Small trees with dead brown leaves under them, leafless vines.” If you wrote that in a highschool English class, the teacher would (or should) mark through it with a red pencil and write underneath, “try harder, Bill.” All the rest of the description is equally flat and uninspired. This is simply very bad poetry. And the last stanza is the worst: it is just a restatement of boring things already said in previous stanzas. Williams has already criminally repeated himself, starting stanzas one and three with “by the road” and “all along the road.” He has used the word “cold” three times, twice in one short stanza. But in the last stanza he repeats what he already said in stanzas four and five: the plants are “entering” the world. He also uses variations of the same word to describe it: “entering” in stanza five and “entrance” in the last stanza.

When Williams isn't being repetitive, he is contradicting himself. In stanza five, the plants enter the “new” world. I thought, “what is new about it?” Well, maybe it seems new to the plants, since they haven't seen it before. Maybe they are annuals instead of perennials. But this is already a problem, since most wild bushes and trees are perennials. The world is no more new to them than it is to you. It is an even bigger problem when Williams gets to the “cold, familiar wind.” Hum. If the world is *new*, why is the wind *familiar*? Contradiction. This is what I mean by flabby. The ideas are just as flabby as the words.

In stanza six, we are told “it quickens.” What quickens? And look closely at the progression of lines at this point:

One by one objects are defined --
It quickens: clarity, outline of leaf

But now the stark dignity of
entrance--

First, objects are defined, then in the next line something quickens, then in the next line that quickening thing is dropped for the stark dignity of something else. What objects? What is quickening? What has stark dignity? This is the scattershot assignment of verbs to blobs, not poetry. A good highschool teacher should be able to tell this is garbage. Why is it so famous?

Even the title is flabby: *Spring and All*. Why not *Spring, etc.?* Or how about *Springy Stuff?* Or maybe, *Spring. . .Whatever.*

Tying all this to my current thesis, why does Wendell Berry think Williams is worth writing about? I would guess Berry likes Williams' red wheelbarrow poem, not only because it is admittedly charming, but because it has a wheelbarrow and white chickens in it. Just the sort of thing to appeal to a farmer. That's why it appeals to me, and I am not a farmer, so for Berry it was probably like chocolate. In other poems like *To Elsie*, Williams mentions Kentucky, which Berry also writes about.

It is hard to say why another man likes what he does. It may have something to do with the fact that Berry also isn't much of a poet. He is a great essayist, but his poems are not really poems. They are

mostly prose cut up into lines for no real reason. So he may not see what Williams is lacking. Berry is actually a better “poet” than Williams, since at least Berry has some ideas worth relating, no matter how he is cutting his lines. Williams always seems to me to be faking his ideas as well as his forms. Berry also has more discipline at all times, and we don't catch him contradicting himself or writing flabby, formless non-sentences.

Of course the logical thing to do is to go to Berry's book for the answer to why he likes Williams. I did that, and found no answer. You can read a 12-page [excerpt at Johns Hopkins](#) to see what I mean. Berry says that Williams wrote all his poems from the same place. Of course Berry is able to spin that into a long, abstract, and mostly convincing confirmation of his Concordian thesis on the importance of place, and of staying put; but regarding the quality of a poet, it is beside the point. Plenty of great poets have traveled and plenty of terrible poets have stayed in one place. Being attached to the land doesn't necessarily make you a great poet, any more than traveling makes you a poor one. The irony is that despite Berry's praise of attachment and place, he requires no attachment to reality in order to advance his true and beautiful thesis. Berry's theses are always true and beautiful, even when his prose (or prose/poetry) becomes airy, detached, and abstract. He can build his lovely castle completely in the air, and he is forced to do that here since he seems completely unaware his foundation rests on a poet manufactured by the Intelligence community. Berry simply accepts at face value the mainstream hagiography of Williams, and builds his argument from there. As I say, it is a fair and even true argument most of the time, but it has nothing at all to do with Williams or his poetry. Berry could have just as easily built his argument up from the better example of his own poetry, or from nothing, and I wish he had.

Remember, Berry is famous for not owning a computer. One of his greatest essays is called “Why I am not going to buy a Computer.” I think it was first published in *Harper's*, but you can read it [here](#). Be sure to read his replies to letters from those who disagreed with him. They are also classics. But this is important here, because it means Berry is dependent on books he owns or library books for his information about Williams. It is far more difficult to quickly research a broad base of data on any given topic at the library than online. Although I cheered Berry's essay when it came out, and still defend his choice not to have a computer, I have to admit that the internet allows for an amazingly efficient research of any subject. Let's take Williams as our example. If you are like Berry and you already think you like Williams, you may not bother to search very hard for negative opinion. Even if you do, what you are likely to find at the library is negative academic criticism, some of which Berry alludes to in his book. But even these academics who don't like Williams aren't likely to out him as an agent, or publish his ties to Intelligence. This entire field of research—which some are dismissing as “conspiracy theory”—is relatively new. Although it exists in previous decades, it is buried. In fact, it is *still* buried, and I didn't trip across it myself until recently. Another thing to consider is that older people are more resistant to these ideas than younger people. They simply don't want to believe the world is that corrupt. They have seen evidence of that corruption their whole lives, but when the full and horrible facts finally land on their desks, they still tend to balk. Although these things have now been declassified, the CIA has admitted them, they are hidden in plain view at Wikipedia, and mainstream books have been published containing the information, most people still prefer to look away. I fully expect Berry will look away if this paper ever makes it to his eyes. He won't want to believe it, so he will wave me away as a fringe character.

The point of all this is that not having a computer has allowed Berry to remain in this pre-internet fairyland, where everyone was forced to get their information from the mainstream. All these things I now discover with a few hours' research were simply not available until recently. The only way I would have found Saunders' book* in the old world, for instance, is by word of mouth. Someone I

knew personally would have had to loan me a copy or send me to the library. And most of the libraries and bookstores would not have had the book. Most *still* don't have the book. These books get published, but they don't get widely distributed, for reasons that are not hard to understand. If this kind of research is frowned upon now, just think how frowned upon it was thirty years ago. Without a computer, Berry is still living in the old world. In that old world, what you knew about artists and poets and novelists—pro and con—came from academics, and those academics were often under the thumb of one government agency or another, or one private foundation or another. In other words, the entire world of Modern art, literature, and criticism was manufactured and often simply false. Some under 50 are starting to understand that, but those who grew up in the fake golden age of Modernism simply can't swallow the red pill, even if they want to.

Berry probably doesn't even know what the red pill is. He doesn't seem like the kind of guy that would pay ten bucks to see *The Matrix*, does he? I don't hold it against him, but I could wish he would build his lovely castles on rock, instead of on the jello of Modern literature.

In short, the older folks simply aren't keeping up. History has been accelerating all along, and after 2001 it went into overdrive. Most of them haven't been able to wrap their heads around 911, and without understanding that, they can't understand any of the rest. Without a computer, there is no way Berry can be up-to-date on 911 or any of the major tragedies since. If he were really interested, he could have read David Ray Griffin's book and some others, but most of the major research hasn't even been published in book form: no one outside Oprah's house or Langley can find a publisher. So Berry is still swallowing the blue pill, consciously or unconsciously, and hasn't had to face the tragedy of losing his old heroes, as I and so many others have. In some ways I envy him, and I almost hate to be the one to bring him the bad tidings, but I think he should understand how he is being used. His name is being used as cover on these award lists, as a sort of air freshener for the stink of these other people like Sidney Hook and Andrew Solomon. Those who give these awards know that most people won't have done the research I have. They will see Wendell Berry's name on these lists and think everything is fine. Berry's clean reputation is being used to whitewash the entire lists.

I know this is what is happening because I have been used in the same way in the past. Many of the galleries I have worked with over the years have used me to appear “classier” to their clients, and a couple of them even admitted this later. I asked them why they continued to hang my works even though my subject matter didn't seem to appeal to their clientele, and they said the gallery just looked better with some “high-end” art to give it ballast. Apparently low-end vulgar art is more salable, but a gallery with all low-end art embarrasses even its own owners and clients. In the same way, these awards lists have to bow to the salable names, but without one or two Wendell Berrys now and then, the whole charade becomes embarrassing even to its creators. If they give one award every decade or so to a guy who can actually write, they can fool themselves into believing they haven't utterly destroyed literature.

That is my current reading of this affair, though I admit I may be wrong either way. Wendell Berry may be an even better man than I think, or he may be far worse. Lots of things can still disappoint me, but nothing can surprise me. If you have a picture of Berry in his basement in front of a wall of computers and TV's and Illuminati posters and Freemason symbolism, wearing a Nazi beltbuckle and chewing on a GMO sandwich, I can't say I will be glad to see it; but I will be honored to study the evidence.

*See Saunders, Frances Stonor. *The Cultural Cold War*, p. 157. You will find both Trilling and Hook outed on that page. The outing of Warren is on p. 142. The outing of Bellow is on p. 410.