

“Dwellings of Enchantment: Writing and Renchanting the Earth”

Writers’ interviews.

BM: What is your favorite place in the world?

RR: The mountains of western North Carolina

BM: What do you like about it?

RR: The beauty and the wildness

BM: What place does nature occupy in your writing?

RR: It plays a major role. As humans we are part of nature and it is part of us. That is a reality, though too often we humans wish to deny it.

BM: Do animals play a great role in your writing?

RR: They do. I’ve always been interested in animals, especially reptiles and raptors. I’m particularly fascinated with animals that are near extinction or recently extinct.

BM: How about plants, minerals, and elements?

RR: Yes, to be true to the world where my work is set, I must show my readers all aspects of that world as vividly as possible, whether animal, plant, rock, even the composition of the soil..

BM: To what extent are your characters related to the environments you create for them?

RR: My characters and their landscapes are inextricable. At times, as in The Cove, landscape and human destiny are one. I am fascinated with how the landscape a person lives in affects him or her psychologically.

BM: To what degree might your writing be based on a scientific understanding of the world?

RR: Do various myths and mythologies inform your writing or inspire you? (Could you quote a couple of examples?)

Yes. I am fascinated with myths, both Eastern and Western. But most of all I am influenced by Carl Jung’s concept of the “collective unconscious,” those archetypes that

transcend particular cultures to become universal. Joseph Campbell's The Hero With a Thousand Faces is a book I've found especially valuable in this regard.

BM: Do other fields from arts and humanities have any impact on the vision of the world you try to (re)create in your writing? (Could you quote a couple of examples?)

RR: Definitely. My father was an art teacher so I have always had a love of painting. My middle name is Vincent, after Van Gogh, so I have been impacted by his work, especially in Above the Waterfall. In that novel I wanted Becky to see the natural world with an intensity similar to Van Gogh's. Edward Hopper and Rembrandt are two other artists I particularly admire. Music has been important to me as well and has been valuable in helping me be aware of the possibilities of sound in my poetry and prose.

BM: Which writers, if any, might have been the most influential on your writing?

RR: There are so many. A few are Dostoyevsky, O'Connor, Faulkner, Giono, Hardy, Shakespeare, Keats

BM: How powerful do you find dystopic fiction, whether literature or cinema?

RR: It's not my favorite genre, but there are writers who do it well.

BM: Would you agree with saying that all nature writers are mystics?

RR: I couldn't say that *all* nature writers are mystics, but it does seem that most find a sense of transcendence and wonder in the natural world.

BM: If there is such a thing as what Mark Tredinnick calls "the land's wild music," how do you think one can learn to hear it, and, and how might this wild music ripple into and give shape to one's writing?

RR: I believe that an attentiveness to nature allows sensations and knowledge that one cannot acquire elsewhere. I know from experience that when I have spent long periods in wild areas that I have an awareness that feels atavistic. I once avoided a snakebite by knowing a poisonous snake was close by even though I did not see or hear it. .

BM: Would you say that there is a direct link between the language of the earth and the creative language in your work?

RR: Perhaps in the rhythms of streams and seasons. I do know that most of my metaphors are steeped in the natural world.

BM: How much of your writing would you say is about re-enchanting the world?

RR: I would say a good portion of my poetry. Above the Waterfall is definitely about the necessity of doing so. For Becky, the world would be unbearable otherwise. Saints at the River also emphasizes the need to re-enchant the world.

BM: Do you think humans have lost their capacity for wonder about the natural world?

RR: Technology has made such a loss inevitable. The world inside a glass screen is not reality, and we ignore the natural world at our peril. I also believe technology makes us less human, though some people may believe that's a positive. I'd rather be a human connected to the real world than a flesh-encumbered machine.

BM: How much ecocritical theory or environmentalist literature do you read?

RR: I don't read much theory but I do read a lot of environmental literature, books such as David Abram's The Spell of the Sensuous and, most recently Carl Safinas' excellent book Beyond Words.

BM: Do you believe that literature can change the way humans think about our relationship to the natural world around and bring about not only awareness, but also political changes?

I would like to believe such writing can have an influence. Certainly there are examples of such, as in the temporary influence of Rachel Carson's Silent Spring when it came out during the 1950's.. More recently, Wendell Berry's work has had some political influence in the United States.

BM: Can you think of a case that you know of where policies may have followed from awareness raised by a great novel, or any other work of art?

RR: Silent Spring

BM: Do you think that most people reading your work are already cognizant of environmental issues, or do you feel like your writing might bring some of your readers to a different kind of understanding and consciousness?

RR: I have readers who are not reading me as an “environmental” novelist. I view my role as an artist to be more a witness than an advocate. I don’t feel the role of my fiction to tell my reader what to think. If I wish to do that, I will write a non-fiction piece, as I recently did about the contaminated ground water in part of Appalachia. Nevertheless, I do bring up environmental issues in my fiction, and my hope is that readers will contemplate such issues...

BM: What changes do you hope might be brought about from reading your books, on an individual level?

RR: In Above the Waterfall, my hope was it might remind the reader of the beauty and mystery of the natural world, especially in an age where so much of life is focused on the technology.

BM: How does your knowledge and care about environmental issues and non-human life affect your own life style and choices?

RR: My home in the mountains is rather isolated, which allows me to live surrounded by forest. I try to be aware of the environmental impact of choices I make in my life, such as a vehicle or food choice. But I am aware that I there is more that I could do, especially in light of the example of someone such as Wendell Berry.

BM: If you could recommend a few ways to improve one’s lifestyle in a way that could also reduce the negative impact of humans’ activities on the planet, which would you suggest?

RR: Food choices, vehicle choices, etc. In my region we do yearly river clean-ups..