

Wendell Berry, "Waste"

MULTIPLE CHOICE

Wendell Berry, *Waste*

As a country person, I often feel that I am on the bottom end of the waste problem. I live on the Kentucky River about ten miles from its entrance into the Ohio. The Kentucky, in many ways a lovely river, receives an abundance of pollution from the eastern Kentucky coal mines and the central Kentucky cities. When the river rises, it carries a continuous raft of cans, bottles, plastic jugs, chunks of styrofoam, and other imperishable trash. After the floods subside, I, like many other farmers, must pick up the trash before I can use my bottomland fields. I have seen the Ohio, whose name (*Oyo* in Iroquois) means "beautiful river," so choked with this manufactured filth that an ant could crawl dry-footed from Kentucky to Indiana. The air of both river valleys is seriously polluted. Our roadsides and roadside fields lie under a constant precipitation of cans, bottles, the plastic-ware of fast food joints, soiled plastic diapers, and sometimes whole bags of garbage. In our county we now have a "sanitary landfill" which daily receives, in addition to our local production, fifty to sixty large truckloads of garbage from Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and New York.

Moreover, a close inspection of our countryside would reveal, strewn over it from one end to the other, thousands of derelict and worthless automobiles, house trailers, refrigerators, stoves, freezers, washing machines, and dryers; as well as thousands of unregulated dumps in hollows and sink holes, on streambanks and roadsides, filled not only with "disposable" containers but also with broken toasters, television sets, toys of all kinds, furniture, lamps, stereos, radios, scales, coffee makers, mixers, blenders, corn poppers, hair dryers, and microwave ovens. Much of our waste problem is to be accounted for by the intentional flimsiness and unreparability of the labor-savers and gadgets that we have become addicted to.

Of course, my sometime impression that I live on the receiving end of this problem is false, for country people contribute their full share. The truth is that we Americans, all of us, have become a kind of human trash, living our lives in the midst of a ubiquitous damned mess of which we are at once the victims and the perpetrators. We are all unwilling victims, perhaps; and some of us even are unwilling perpetrators, but we must count ourselves among the guilty nonetheless. In my household we produce much of our own food and try to do without as many frivolous "necessities" as possible — and yet, like everyone else, we must shop, and when we shop we must bring home a load of plastic, aluminum, and glass containers designed to be thrown away, and "appliances" designed to wear out quickly and be thrown away.

I confess that I am angry at the manufacturers who make these things. There are days when I would be delighted if certain corporation executives could somehow be obliged to eat their products. I know of no good reason why these containers and all other forms of manufactured "waste" — solid, liquid, toxic, or whatever — should not be outlawed. There is no sense and no sanity in objecting to the desecration of the flag while tolerating and justifying and encouraging as a daily business the desecration of the country for which it stands.

But our waste problem is not the fault only of producers. It is the fault of an economy that is wasteful from top to bottom — a symbiosis of an unlimited greed at the top and a lazy, passive, and self-indulgent consumptiveness at the bottom — and all of us are involved in it. If we wish to correct this economy, we must be careful to understand and to demonstrate how much waste of human life is involved in our waste of the material goods of Creation. For example, much of the litter that now defaces our country is fairly directly caused by the massive secession or exclusion of most of our people from active participation in the food economy. We have made a social ideal of minimal involvement in the growing and cooking of food. This is one of the dearest "liberations" of our affluence. Nevertheless, the more dependent we

become on the *industries* of eating and drinking, the more waste we are going to produce. The mess that surrounds us, then, must be understood not just as a problem in itself but as a symptom of a greater and graver problem: the centralization of our economy, the gathering of the productive property and power into fewer and fewer hands, and the consequent destruction, everywhere, of the local economies of household, neighborhood, and community.

This is the source of our unemployment problem, and I am not talking just about

the unemployment of eligible members of the “labor force.” I mean also the unemployment of children and old people, who, in viable household and local economies, would have work to do by which they would be useful to themselves and to others. The ecological damage of centralization and waste is thus inextricably involved with human damage. For we have, as a result, not only a desecrated, ugly, and dangerous country in which to live until we are in some manner poisoned by it, and a constant and now generally accepted problem of unemployed or unemployable workers, but also classrooms full of children who lack the experience and discipline of fundamental human tasks, and various institutions full of still capable old people who are useless and lonely.

I think that we must learn to see the trash on our streets and roadsides, in our rivers, and in our woods and fields, not as the side effects of “more jobs” as its manufacturers invariably insist that it is, but as evidence of good work *not* done by people able to do it.

1. The author’s tone in this passage is best described as
 - a. condemnatory and ardent
 - b. deductive and official
 - c. equitable and meandering
 - d. ineffable and despairing
 - e. graphic and nostalgic

2. The author’s reference to the Iroquois name for the Ohio River, *Oyo* (lines 7–8), serves primarily to
 - a. juxtapose the past and present conditions of the Ohio River
 - b. examine the indigenous traditions associated with the Ohio River
 - c. assert the enduring significance of the Iroquois in the area
 - d. allude to the historical importance of the Ohio River
 - e. emphasize the importance of manufacturing to the region

3. The author uses all of the following rhetorical devices in paragraph 2 (lines 15–24) EXCEPT
 - a. listing
 - b. irony
 - c. concrete imagery
 - d. personification
 - e. passive voice

4. In context, the word “derelict” (line 16) is best interpreted to mean
 - a. holistic
 - b. anemic
 - c. atypical
 - d. forsaken
 - e. apostate

5. In context, the word “ubiquitous” (line 27) is best interpreted to mean
- a. saturating
 - b. pervasive
 - c. annulled
 - d. unintelligible
 - e. ambiguous
6. The author alludes to the “desecration of the flag” in lines 38–40 in order to create a contrast between
- a. patriotism and activism
 - b. environmentalism and patriotism
 - c. past and present
 - d. reality and fantasy
 - e. consumerism and environmentalism
7. In context, the word “symbiosis” (line 42) is best interpreted to mean
- a. interdependence
 - b. conflict
 - c. aloofness
 - d. camaraderie
 - e. autonomy
8. The author’s attitude toward “children and old people” (line 59) is primarily one of
- a. disdain
 - b. empathy
 - c. mockery
 - d. indifference
 - e. concern
9. Which of the following is grammatically and thematically parallel to “country” (line 63)?
- a. “desecrated” (line 62)
 - b. “constant” (line 63)
 - c. “classrooms” (line 65)
 - d. “workers” (line 64)
 - e. “institutions” (line 66)
10. In lines 65-66, “fundamental human tasks” refers to which of the following?
- I. Increased “involvement in the growing and cooking of food” (line 49)
 - II. Increased “dependen[ce] . . . on the *industries* of eating and drinking” (lines 50-51)
 - III. Increased participation in “classrooms” (line 65)
- a. I only
 - b. II only
 - c. I and II only
 - d. I and III only
 - e. I, II, and III
11. The passage as a whole is best described as
- a. an impassioned reproach
 - b. a dramatic monologue
 - c. an allegory
 - d. an objective historical commentary
 - e. an evocation of place
12. In context, “good” (line 70) is best interpreted to mean
- a. ecologically deleterious
 - b. consumer friendly
 - c. politically ineffective
 - d. politically ineffective
 - e. none of the above

c. economically viable