
Episodes and Visions

Ranger, where is Arches National Monument?

I don't know, mister. But I can tell you where it was.

Labor Day. Flux and influx, the final visitation of the season, they come in herds, like buffalo, down from The City. A veil of dust floats above the sneaky snaky old road from here to the highway, drifting gently downwind to settle upon the blades of the yucca, the mustard-yellow rabbitbrush, the petals of the asters and autumn sunflowers, the umbrella-shaped clumps of blooming wild buckwheat.

What can I tell them? Sealed in their metallic shells like molluscs on wheels, how can I pry the people free? The auto as tin can, the park ranger as opener. Look here, I want to say, for godsake folks get out of them there machines, take off those dumb sunglasses and unpeel both eyeballs, look around; throw away those goddamned idiotic cameras. For chrissake folks what is this life if full of care we have no time to stand and stare? eh? Take off your shoes for a while, unzip your fly, piss hearty, dig your toes in the hot sand, feel that raw and rugged earth, split a couple of big toenails, draw blood! Why not? Jesus Christ, lady, roll that window down! You can't see the desert if you can't smell it.

Dusty? Of course it's dusty—this is Utah! But it's good dust, good red Utah dust, rich in iron, rich in irony. Turn that motor off. Get out of that piece of iron and stretch your varicose veins, take off your brassiere and get some hot sun on your old wrinkled dugs! You sir, squinting at the map with your radiator boiling over and your fuel pump vapor-locked, crawl out of that shiny hunk of GM junk and take a walk—yes, leave the old lady and those squawling brats behind for a while, turn your back on them and take a long quiet walk straight into the canyons, get lost for a while, come back when you damn well feel like it, it'll do you and her and them a world of good. Give the kids a break too, let them out of the car, let them go scrambling over the rocks hunting for rattlesnakes and scorpions and anthills—yes sir, let them out, turn them loose; how dare you imprison little children in your goddamned upholstered horseless hearse? Yes sir, yes madam, I entreat you, get out of those motorized wheelchairs, get off your foam rubber backsides, stand up straight like men! like women! like human beings! and walk—walk—WALK upon our sweet and blessed land!

"Where's the Coke machine?"

"Sorry, lady, we have no Coke machine out here. Would you like a drink of water?" (She's not sure.)

"Say ranger, that's a godawful road you got in here, when the hell they gonna pave it?" (They gather round, listening.)

"The day before I leave." (I say it with a smile; they laugh.)

"Well how the hell do we get out of here?"

"You just got here, sir."

"I know but how do we get out?"

"Same way you came in. It's a dead-end road."

"So we see the same scenery twice?"

"It looks better going out."

"Oh ranger, do you live in that little housetrailer down there?"

"Yes madam, part of the time. Mostly I live out of it."

"Are you married?"

"Not seriously."

"You must get awfully lonesome way out here."

"No, I have good company."

"Your wife?"

"No, myself." (They laugh; they all think I'm kidding.)

"Well what do you do for amusement?"

"Talk with the tourists."

"Don't you even have a TV?"

"TV? Listen lady . . . if I saw a TV out here I'd get out my cannon and shoot it like I would a mad dog, right in the eye."

"Goodness! Why do you say that?"

"What's the principle of the TV, madam?"

"Goodness, I don't know."

"The vacuum tube, madam. And do you know what happens if you stick your head in a vacuum tube?"

"If you stick your head . . . ?"

"I'll tell you: *you get your brains sucked out.*" (Laughter!)

"Hey ole buddy, how far from here to Lubbock?"

"Where's Lubbock, sir?"

"Texas, ole buddy. Lubbock, Texas."

"Well sir, I don't know exactly how far that is but I'd guess it's not nearly far enough."

"Any dangerous animals out here, ranger?"

"Just tourists." (Laughter; tell the truth, they never believe you.)

"Where you keep these here Arches anyway?"

"What arches? All I see around here are fallen arches."

"Does it ever rain in this country, ranger?"

"I don't know, sir, I've only been here eleven years."

"Well you said yesterday it wasn't going to rain and it did rain."

"Did I? Well, that shows you can't ever trust the weather."

"You work out here all year round?"

"No sir, just for the summer."

"What do you do in the winter?"

"I rest."

"How much do you get paid for this kind of work?"

"Too much. But I give part of it back April 15th."

And then, after a brief and deadly dull lecture on the geology of the Arches, I send them on to the campgrounds and picnic grounds—"Be sure to let me know if you get lost"—relieved, happy and laughing. It's a great country: you can say whatever you like so long as it is strictly true—nobody will take you seriously.

In the evening, about suppertime, feeling somewhat guilty and contrite—for they are, most of them, really good people and not actually as simple-minded as they pretend to encourage me to pretend us all to be—I visit them again around the fires and picnic tables, help them eat their pickles and drink their beer, and make perhaps a trace of contact by revealing that I, too, like most of them, come from that lost village back in the hills, am also exiled, a displaced person, an internal emigrant in this new America of concrete and iron which none of us can quite understand or accept or wholly love. I may also, if I am lucky, find one or two or three with whom I can share a little more—those rumors from the underground where whatever hope we still have must be found.

Among the visitors on this last big weekend are many Moabites

and other native Utahns: the Mormons, the Latter-Day Saints. Some of my liberalized friends regard the LDS with disdain; they see in the Church only a bastion of sectarian foolishness and political reaction and in its adherents a voting bloc of Know-Nothings, racially prejudiced, religiously bigoted, opposed alike to the graduated income tax, the United Nations, urban renewal, foreign aid, legislative reapportionment, public welfare, Medicare and even free lunches for schoolchildren—actually or potentially a rabble of John Birchers.

What can you expect, they ask, of a sect which gave Utah a governor like J. Bracken Lee and Eisenhower a secretary of agriculture like Ezra T. Benson? Which denies full church membership to Negroes because they are believed to be the outcast sons of Ham? Whose patron saint was an angel called Moroni? Whose founding father Joseph Smith claimed to have carried about under his arms solid gold tablets which, if they were the size he said they were (no one else ever saw them), would have weighed about half a ton? (Gold is a very heavy metal, specific gravity 19.3.) Whose official newspaper *The Deseret News* solemnly proclaims on its masthead “We believe that the Constitution of the United States was Divinely Inspired” but fails to explain why the Almighty changed His mind on the Eighteenth Amendment?

One can grant the accuracy of these charges without conceding that the Mormon religion is any more whimsical on points of doctrine than most other sects—the Baptists, for example, with their insistence on total immersion as a prerequisite to the salvation of the soul: all Christians must be totally immersed. (In what or for how long not being clearly specified.) Or the Jews, with their prepuce-collecting Yahweh, who created light on the first day and several days later, apparently as an afterthought, created the sun: “Six days He labored; on the seventh He was arrested.” Or the Roman Catholics, with their dogmatic assertion of the physical Assumption of the Virgin Mary—launching her on a flat trajectory into outer space, like a shot off a shovel, without even a crash helmet or a pressure suit. Or the Hindus, with their sanctified ritual for nasal emunction: only one nostril may be discharged at a time, etc. Or the small-town atheist for that matter, with his Little Blue Books and sneering jokes against ancient and venerable institutions.

Leaving aside the comical aspects of their creed, one can argue that the Mormons in practice achieved a way of life in which there was much to admire, much worth saving. In addition to their pioneering migrations, full of unusual heroism and examples of fortitude (e.g., Brigham Young and his twenty-eight wives), the Mormons deserve respect for settling the most rugged, difficult as well as spectacular, terrain in the West. What was unusual, however, was their communitarian approach to the problems of settlement in an inhospitable environment.

Their emphasis on mutual aid, cooperation and sharing was not unknown among other American communities—and indeed such qualities are vital to survival in a frontier situation—but the Mormons went about it in a far more deliberate, conscious manner, with more successful results. For example, in settling a given area they did not scatter themselves abroad over the landscape in isolated farms and ranches, each man for himself and the devil take the hindmost, but rather built small, rational, beautiful and durable towns in which all could live together, centered about the Church, which served not only as a religious center but also as a social and political focal point for the community (in this respect harking back to the model of New England). Irrigation systems were then built with the cooperative labor of all, the irrigable land divided fairly among the member families, and the back country—canyon and mesa—left open to all who might wish to engage in cattle raising as well as farming. And nearly all did. (This formed the “open range” until the advent of large-scale fencing and the Taylor Grazing Act closed it off to all but an established few.) Each community, through the Church, also set up what we may call a public welfare service to provide sufficient and generous aid to those brought down by accident, illness, bad luck or other misfortune. In sum, the Mormons built coherent, self-sustaining communities with a vigorous common life in which all could participate, free of any great disparities in wealth, small enough to make each member important. There was even room for the dissenter and non-conformist—every town had a few jack-Mormons, those who smoked tobacco, drank tea or coffee or hard liquor, and perhaps even joined the Democratic Party.

Subsequently, swamped by the new American mode, by industrialism, commercialism, urbanism, rugged and ragged individualism, the old Mormon communities are now disappearing. But in such small towns as Moab, Kanab, Boulder and Escalante we can still see the handsome homes of hand-carved sandstone blocks, the quiet streets lined with irrigation ditches and giant cottonwoods, the gardens and irrigated pastures, the children riding their horses, which remind us on the downhill side of the twentieth century what life must have been like back in the nineteenth. On its gentle side, that is.

As for the people themselves, at least those whom I have come to know in and around Moab, they are generally very conservative in their political opinions, yes, and old-fashioned in their morality, but despite this or because of it have the usual virtues of country people: are friendly, hospitable, honest, self-reliant and self-confident. Not very interesting, perhaps, but good to know, good to have as friends and neighbors. Capable of taking care of themselves, and with the means to do it, it is not surprising that they question the justice of being taxed by the Federal

Government in order to help support the teeming proletariat (literally and etymologically "the reproducers") of cities which to some of these independent people seem as remote and foreign as Calcutta or Cairo.

All of this is now under change, of course, and in the accelerating process of urbanization the Mormons of Utah are already discovering their interdependence with the rest of the nation and with the world. Certainly in Salt Lake City itself there is no lack of intriguing social problems—air pollution, traffic jams, angry adolescents, babies born from sinlock and all the rest of it—and very soon the Latter-Day Saints will be forced to confront directly the symptoms of discontent and desperation with which most Americans are now familiar: from LDS to LSD. Even unto the Land of Moab.

In the meanwhile the desert people persist in some of their quaint and antiquated ways. Leslie McKee's wife, a sweet and kindly woman and a pillar of the Church, tells me that she has unilaterally *bound* my soul to hers, in accordance with the teaching of her faith, which has provided this unusual technique for the salvation of souls which otherwise would obviously be lost and shoveled into Hell. This *binding* means, if I understand her rightly, that when she goes to Heaven my soul likewise will be dragged along like the tail of a kite, with or without my consent. And suppose she goes to Hell? She assures me that this cannot happen, that she has already been saved and the place reserved—for both of us. But I am not entirely set at ease; something might go wrong. Furthermore she is a generation older than I—what about the time factor? Is my soul to be prematurely and summarily unhouseled in its prime, if as seems likely her demise precedes mine by some twenty or thirty years? On this point she is uncomfortably vague. Perhaps it is all a sinister scheme to rid the world of the pagan Gentile without incurring suspicion.

However, it's too late now. Like it or not I am on my way:

*We're marching to Zion,
To beautiful beautiful Zion,
We're marching upward to Zion,
The beautiful city of love.*

It does not, after all, sound unpromising. God knows I have little to lose. But . . . let's not hurry. What's the rush?

Fresh snow on Tukuñivats and the other high peaks. They gleam like—like alabaster towers—under the noon sun and glow at evening in a soft, subtle shade of rosy pink, like mighty cones of strawberry ice cream. Very attractive. I prefer the desert.

Why? Because—there's something about the desert. Not much of an answer. There are mountain men, there are men of the sea, and there are desert rats. I am a desert rat. But why? And why, in precisely what way, is the desert more alluring, more baffling, more fascinating than either the mountains or the oceans?

The majority of the world's great spirits, from Homer to Melville and Conrad, have felt the call of the sea and responded to its power and mystery, its rhythm, antiquity and apparent changelessness. And the mountains, at least since Rousseau (anticipated by Petrarch) and that great expansion of human consciousness called the Romantic Movement, which opened up for men a whole new world of truth, have been explored and celebrated, strenuously if not adequately, by swarms of poets, novelists, scientists and frost-bitten inarticulate ("because it's there") mountain climbers. The desert, however, has been relatively neglected.

Not entirely, of course. There was T. E. Lawrence who liked the desert because, as he said, "it is clean," and another mad Englishman, C. M. Doughty—*Travels in Arabia Deserta*—who almost never came back. A few Americans have tried to understand the desert: Mary Austin in her book *Land of Little Rain*, John C. Van Dyke in an unjustly forgotten book *The Desert*, Joseph Wood Krutch with *The Voice of the Desert*, the contemporary novelists Paul Bowles and William Eastlake in part of their work (but only in an incidental way), and such obscure figures as the lad Everett Ruess, author of *On Desert Trails*, who disappeared at the age of twenty-one into the canyon country of southern Utah, never to return. This happened back in the mid-Thirties; his burros were found, part of his gear, but the young man himself, never. For all we know he is still down in there somewhere, living on prickly pear and wild onions, communing with the gods of river, canyon and cliff. Also deserving of mention, in this mere preliminary sketch of a desert bibliography, are the historical studies by Wallace Stegner—*Beyond the 100th Meridian* and *Mormon Country*—and of course the classic *Exploration of the Colorado River and Its Canyons* by Powell.

None of the works I have named attack directly the problem to which I wish to address myself here: what is the peculiar quality or character of the desert that distinguishes it, in spiritual appeal, from other forms of landscape? In trying to isolate this peculiarity, if it exists at all and is not simply an illusion, we must beware of a danger well known to explorers of both the micro- and the macrocosmic—that of confusing the thing observed with the mind of the observer, of constructing not a picture of external reality but simply a mirror of the thinker. Can this danger be avoided without falling into an opposite but related error, that of separating too deeply the observer and the thing observed, subject and object, and again falsifying our view of the world?

There is no way out of these difficulties—you might as well try running Cataract Canyon without hitting a rock. Best to launch forth boldly, with or without life jackets, keep your matches dry and pray for the best.

The restless sea, the towering mountains, the silent desert—what do they have in common? and what are the essential differences? Grandeur, color, spaciousness, the power of the ancient and elemental, that which lies beyond the ability of man to wholly grasp or utilize, these qualities all three share. In each there is the sense of something ultimate, with mountains exemplifying the brute force of natural processes, the sea concealing the richness, complexity and fecundity of life beneath a surface of huge monotony, and the desert—what does the desert say?

The desert says nothing. Completely passive, acted upon but never acting, the desert lies there like the bare skeleton of Being, spare, sparse, austere, utterly worthless, inviting not love but contemplation. In its simplicity and order it suggests the classical, except that the desert is a realm beyond the human and in the classicist view only the human is regarded as significant or even recognized as real.

Despite its clarity and simplicity, however, the desert wears at the same time, paradoxically, a veil of mystery. Motionless and silent it evokes in us an elusive hint of something unknown, unknowable, about to be revealed. Since the desert does not act it seems to be waiting—but waiting for what?

In sailing the ocean we reach the other shore and find, as we should have expected, everything much the same on either side. During the voyage we see only the unvarying expanse of heaving green or gray, and an empty sky, and not very much of either—the horizon at sea is only twelve miles away. In other words the journey is the central thing, the expectation of what is to come; the ocean itself is merely a medium of travel. (Only a trip by air or space is more abstract, more synthetic, from the passenger's point of view. When and if our astronauts are actually launched off to Mars and beyond through the cold black and white of space they will, I predict, be expertly drugged beforehand—how else could they endure the coffinlike confinement, the static surroundings, of such a venture?) The most appealing part of the sea, in fact, is its meeting with the land; it is the *seashore* which men love and not the ocean itself. (We are not writing here of the seafarer's trade, or of the underwater world.)

In climbing a mountain, if we persevere, we reach the summit; we get, you might say, to the point. Once on the mountaintop there is nothing to do but come down again; the weather up there is usually too hostile for delay; the situation is not suitable for reflection and meditation. Descending the mountain we enter by degrees into a friend-

lier, more comfortable, more human environment—forest, rushing streams, sunny meadows—and soon hear the cowbells, see the villages and roads, all that is familiar and reassuring.

The desert is different. Not so hostile as the snowy peaks, nor so broad and bland as the ocean's surface, it lies open—given adequate preparation—to leisurely exploration, to extended periods of habitation. Yet it can hardly be called a humane environment; what little human life there is will be clustered about the oases, natural or man-made. The desert waits outside, desolate and still and strange, unfamiliar and often grotesque in its forms and colors, inhabited by rare, furtive creatures of incredible hardiness and cunning, sparingly colonized by weird mutants from the plant kingdom, most of them as spiny, thorny, stunted and twisted as they are tenacious.

There is something about the desert that the human sensibility cannot assimilate, or has not so far been able to assimilate. Perhaps that is why it has scarcely been approached in poetry or fiction, music or painting; every region of the United States except the arid West has produced distinguished artists or has been represented in works of art which have agreed-upon general significance. Only the hacks rush in where genius hesitates to tread, and the baffling reality is lost behind the dust clouds thrown up by herds of Zane Greys and Ferde Grofé's, by the anonymous painters of sugar-sweet landscapes and Roman-Indian portraits that clutter up certain galleries, and by those tough old humorous retired cowladies whose memoirs are so lovingly reprinted by the regional university presses—*No Life for a Lady*, *No High Adobe*, *No Time for Tea*, *No Sin in the Saddle*, etc. Behind the dust, meanwhile, under the vulture-haunted sky, the desert waits—mesa, butte, canyon, reef, sink, escarpment, pinnacle, maze, dry lake, sand dune and barren mountain—untouched by the human mind.

Even after years of intimate contact and search this quality of strangeness in the desert remains undiminished. Transparent and intangible as sunlight, yet always and everywhere present, it lures a man on and on, from the red-walled canyons to the smoke-blue ranges beyond, in a futile but fascinating quest for the great, unimaginable treasure which the desert seems to promise. Once caught by this golden lure you become a prospector for life, condemned, doomed, exalted. One begins to understand why Everett Ruess kept going deeper and deeper into the canyon country, until one day he lost the thread of the labyrinth; why the oldtime prospectors, when they did find the common sort of gold, gambled, drank and whored it away as quickly as possible and returned to the burnt hills and the search. The search for what? They could not have said; neither can I; and would have muttered something about silver, gold, copper—anything as a pretext. And how

could they hope to find this treasure which has no name and has never been seen? Hard to say—and yet, when they found it, they could not fail to recognize it. Ask Everett Ruess.

Where is the heart of the desert? I used to think that somewhere in the American Southwest, impossible to say exactly where, all of these wonders which intrigue the spirit would converge upon a climax—and resolution. Perhaps in the vicinity of Weaver's Needle in the Superstition Range; in the Funeral Mountains above Death Valley; in the Black Rock Desert of Nevada; among the astonishing monoliths of Monument Valley; in the depths of Grand Canyon; somewhere along the White Rim under Grandview Point; in the heart of the Land of Standing Rocks. Not so. I am convinced now that the desert has no heart, that it presents a riddle which has no answer, and that the riddle itself is an illusion created by some limitation or exaggeration of the displaced human consciousness.

This at least is what I tell myself when I fix my attention on what is rational, sensible and realistic, believing that I have overcome at last that gallant infirmity of the soul called romance—that illness, that disease, that insidious malignancy which must be chopped out of the heart once and for all, ground up, cooked, burnt to ashes . . . consumed. And for so long as I stay away from the desert, keep to the mountains or the sea or the city, it is possible to think myself cured. Not easy: one whiff of juniper smoke, a few careless words, one reckless and foolish poem—*The Wasteland*, for instance—and I become as restive, irritable, brooding and dangerous as a wolf in a cage.

In answer to the original question, then, I find myself in the end returning to the beginning, and can only say, as I said in the first place: There is *something* about the desert. . . . There is *something there* which the mountains, no matter how grand and beautiful, lack; which the sea, no matter how shining and vast and old, does not have.

Minor points on the same issue: I like horses. There is no place for horses on the ocean; and in the mountains you will learn that mules, generally speaking, are more useful. Also, of course, the people: though rare as radium you find, if you can find them, a superior breed in the deserts—consider the Bedouin, the Kazaks and Kurds, the Mongols, the Apaches, the Kalahari, the Aborigines of Australia. Mountain people tend to become inbred and degenerate and no one for a long time has lived in the sea. As for those others, the wretched inhabitants of city and plain, can we even think of them, to be perfectly candid, as members of the same race?

Revealing my desert thoughts to a visitor one evening, I was accused of being against civilization, against science, against humanity.



Naturally I was flattered and at the same time surprised, hurt, a little shocked. He repeated the charge. But how, I replied, being myself a member of humanity (albeit involuntarily, without prior consultation), could I be against humanity without being against myself, whom I love—though not very much; how can I be against science, when I gratefully admire, as much as any man, Thales, Democritus, Aristarchus, Faustus, Paracelsus, Copernicus, Galileo, Kepler, Newton, Darwin and Einstein; and finally, how could I be against civilization when all which I most willingly defend and venerate—including the love of wilderness—is comprehended by the term?

We were not communicating very well. All night long we thrashed the matter out, burning up half a pinyon pine in the process, transforming its mass into energy, warmth, light, and toward morning worked out a rough agreement. With his help I discovered that I was not opposed to mankind but only to man-centeredness, anthropocentricity, the opinion that the world exists solely for the sake of man; not to science, which means simply knowledge, but to science misapplied, to the worship of technique and technology, and to that perversion of science properly called scientism; and not to civilization but to culture.

As an example of scientism he suggested the current superstition that science has lengthened the human life-span. One might as well argue that science, meaning technology, has actually reduced the average man's life expectancy to about fifteen minutes—the time it takes an ICBM to cover the distance between the U.S.S.R. and the U.S.A. The superstition, my visitor pointed out, is based on a piece of trickery, statistical sleight-of-hand: e.g., in a primitive culture without modern medical techniques, perhaps half of all the babies born die within the first year of infancy; the remainder survive and live for the normal, usual seventy years; taking the total born and dividing by the number of full-lived survivors, the statistician announces that the average life expectancy at birth for the members of this hypothetical society is thirty-five years. Confusing life expectancy with life-span, the gullible begin to believe that medical science has accomplished a miracle—lengthened human life! And persist in believing it, even though the Old Testament, written more than three thousand years ago, refers to “three score and ten” as being the typical number of years allotted to mortal man. The heroes, naturally, lived far longer, and not in that condition of medicated survival found in a modern hospital where the patient, technically still alive, cannot easily be distinguished from the various machines to which he is connected. But this is now familiar stuff, common knowledge—why kick around a dead horse? Far more interesting is the distinction to be made between civilization and culture.

Culture, we agreed, means the way of life of any given human society considered as a whole. It is an anthropological term referring always to specific, identifiable societies localized in history and place, and includes all aspects of such organizations—their economy, their art, their religion. The U.S.A., for example, is not a civilization but a culture, as is the U.S.S.R., and both are essentially *industrial* cultures, the former in the mode of state capitalism, the latter in the mode of state socialism; if they seem to be competing against each other it is not because they are different but because they are basically so much alike; and the more they compete the more alike they become: MERGING TRAFFIC AHEAD.

Civilization on the other hand, while undoubtedly a product of various historical cultures, and as a category one which overlaps what we label culture, is by no means identical with culture. Cultures can exist with little or no trace of civilization; and usually do; but civilization while dependent upon culture for its sustenance, as the mind depends upon the body, is a semi-independent entity, precious and fragile, drawn through history by the finest threads of art and idea, a process or series of events without formal structure or clear location in time and space. It is the conscious forefront of evolution, the brotherhood of great souls and the comradeship of intellect, a *corpus mysticum*, The Invisible Re-

public open to all who wish to participate, a democratic aristocracy based not on power or institutions but on isolated men—Lao-Tse, Chuang-Tse, Guatama, Diogenes, Euripides, Socrates, Jesus, Wat Tyler and Jack Cade, Paine and Jefferson, Blake and Burns and Beethoven, John Brown and Henry Thoreau, Whitman, Tolstoy, Emerson, Mark Twain, Rabelais and Villon, Spinoza, Voltaire, Spartacus, Nietzsche and Thomas Mann, Lucretius and Pope John XXIII, and ten thousand other poets, revolutionaries and independent spirits, both famous and forgotten, alive and dead, whose heroism gives to human life on earth its adventure, glory and significance.

To make the distinction unmistakably clear:

Civilization is the vital force in human history; culture is that inert mass of institutions and organizations which tend to drag down the advance of life;

Civilization is Giordano Bruno facing death by fire; culture is the Cardinal Bellarmino, after ten years of inquisition, sending Bruno to the stake in the Campo di Fiori;

Civilization is Sartre; culture Cocteau;

Civilization is Steinbeck in his youth and prime; culture is an old, soft man with the same name;

Civilization is mutual aid and self-defense; culture is the judge, the lawbook and the forces of Law & Ordure;

Civilization is uprising, insurrection, revolution; culture is the war of state against state, or of machines against people, as in Hungary and Vietnam;

Civilization is tolerance, detachment and humor, or passion, anger, revenge; culture is the entrance examination, the gas chamber, the doctoral dissertation and the electric chair;

Civilization is the Ukrainian peasant Nestor Makhno fighting the Germans, then the Reds, then the Whites, then the Reds again; culture is Stalin and the Fatherland;

Civilization is Jesus turning water into wine; culture is Christ walking on the waves;

Civilization is a youth with a Molotov cocktail in his hand; culture is the Soviet tank or the L.A. cop that guns him down;

Civilization is the wild river; culture, 592,000 tons of cement;

Civilization flows; culture thickens and coagulates, like tired, sick, stifled blood.

In the morning my visitor, whose name I didn't quite catch, crawled into his sack and went to sleep. I had to go to work. I went back to see him in the evening but he was gone, leaving behind only a forged signature in the registration book which wouldn't have fooled anybody—J. Prometheus Birdsong. He won't be back.

But don't get discouraged, comrades—Christ failed too.

Now here comes another clown with a scheme for the utopian national park: Central Park National Park, Disneyland National Park. Look here, he says, what's the matter with you guys?—let's get cracking with this dump. Your road is bad; pave it. Better yet, build a paved road to every corner of the park; better yet, pave the whole damned place so any damn fool can drive anything anywhere—is this a democracy or ain't it? Next, charge a good stiff admission fee; you can't let people in free; that leads to socialism and regimentation. Next, get rid of all these homely rangers in their Smokey the Bear suits. Hire a crew of pretty girls, call them rangerettes, let them sell the tickets and give the campfire talks. And advertise, for godsake, advertise! How do you expect to get people in here if you don't advertise? Next, these here Arches—light them up. Floodlight them, turn on colored, revolving lights—jazz it up, man, it's dead. Light up the whole place, all night long, get on a 24-hour shift, keep them coming, keep them moving, you got two hundred million people out there waiting to buy your product—is this a free country or what the hell is it? Next your campgrounds, you gotta do something about your campgrounds, they're a mess. People can't tell where to park their cars or which spot is whose—you gotta paint lines, numbers, mark out the campsites nice and neat. And they're still building fires on the ground, with wood! Very messy, filthy, wasteful. Set up little grills on stilts, sell charcoal briquettes, better yet hook up with the gas line, install jets and burners. Better yet do away with the campgrounds altogether, they only cause delay and congestion and administrative problems—these people want to see America, they're not going to see it sitting around a goddamned campfire; take their money, give them the show, send them on their way—that's the way to run a business. . . .

I exaggerate. Slightly. Was he real or only a bad dream? Am I awake or sleeping? Will Tuesday never come? No wonder they call it Labor Day.

The holiday is over and a strange sweet stillness, better than any music, soars above the Arches. Gratefully I empty the overflowing garbage cans, read the soggy old newspapers—we believe that the Constitution of the United States has finally expired—collect the scattered beer cans and soda pop cans and burn them, along with the garbage, in the dump. (Hastens oxidation.)

The magpies and jays squawk among the pinyon pines, which are heavy-laden with clusters of light-green, rosin-sticky, fresh, fat cones—we'll have a good crop of pine nuts this year. A variety of asters are

blooming along the road and among the dunes; with yellow centers and vivid purple petals, the flowers stand out against their background of rock and coral-red sand with what I can only describe as an existential assertion of life; they are almost audible. Heidegger was wrong, as usual; man is *not* the only living thing that *exists*. He might well have taken a tip from a fellow countryman: *Wovon man nicht sprachen Kann, darueber muss man schweigen*.

Also the chamisa, bright and stinking as rancid butter; and the mule-eared sunflowers, enjoying a great autumnal renaissance; and the wild buckwheat, the matchweed, the yellow borage, and on the mountain slopes a league away, the preliminary golden dying of the aspens. Like a fire ignited in the spring, smoldering through the terrible summer, my desert world flares up briefly and brilliantly before the coming of cold and snow, the ashy winter, for the last time this season.

Even the night has changed. Over a late campfire, kept going now for heat as well as liturgical requirements, I see new constellations dominating the sky. Instead of Draco, Lyra, Sagittarius and vast Scorpio, a different group is moving in and taking over:

Cassiopeia, the big "W," symbolizing—what? Who? In the year 1572 a temporary star appeared near this constellation bright enough to be seen in full sunshine, throwing all the Christians of Europe into uproar. With good reason; they had much to be fearful of, the swine. Only seventeen years earlier they had burned alive Bishops Ridley and Latimer at Oxenford; a year later Archbishop Cranmer and 277 other religious leaders were also burned, also in Merrie England; only twelve years earlier they had hanged twelve hundred Huguenots at Amboise; ten years earlier an unrecorded number were massacred at Vassy, followed by more religious wars culminating in the St. Bartholomew's Massacre of August 24, 1572. Something about trans-substantiation, con-substantiation and whether or not infants are damned at birth or not until later. *Gloria in Excelsis Deo*. . . . Now the high priests of nuclear physics dispute the number of electrons that can rotate on the point of a pin—where will this lead? But their disputes are peaceful; only the bystanders get burned nowadays.

Not far from Cassiopeia is Pegasus, for the Greeks a winged horse, to the Phoenicians the emblem of a ship. According to some astronomers the major stars of this constellation are approaching us at an inconceivable speed. According to other astronomers, however, these same stars are receding from us at an inconceivable speed. Opinions on the matter are revised, exchanged, forgotten and revived through the course of the centuries. Science too, like poetry, is only a human construct.

Linked to Pegasus by one star is Andromeda, the chained lady, low in the eastern sky. Within this constellation, visible to the naked

eye, is a great nebula, the first to be discovered. Seen through my 7 by 50 binoculars it is a splendid sight—a cloud of glory.

And there is the Water Carrier, the Sea Goat, the Ram, the Whale and last, least and most obscure Musca the Fly, about halfway between Aries and the Pleiades, hard to see, scorned by the astrologers, neglected by all but me, a tiny group so far away that they may be already extinct, dead, extinguished, reminding us only by these last dim signals of their former existence.

So much for the stars. Why, a man could lose his mind in those incomprehensible distances. Is there intelligent life on other worlds? Ask rather, is there intelligent life on earth? There are mysteries enough right here in America, in Utah, in the canyons.

Had a letter today. Bob Waterman is coming from Aspen with his beard, his Land Rover and one hundred and fifty feet of new nylon rope. We are finally going to have a look into The Maze.