

Islands in the stream

The triumph of city over town and nature explains our cultural malaise

MICHAEL BUHAGIAR

O liver Wendell Holmes Jr said 'I would not give a fig for simplicity before complexity, but for simplicity after complexity I would give my life'.

The takeover from within of institutions by the political Left, the anti-Jewish and anti-Catholic biases of the media, the hyper-fragility of university students, the persecution of Christians by large corporations, and so on *ad nauseam*, all might seem to the insightful observer to be wheels turning within the larger wheel of the destruction of our culture. Is all of this a conjunction of unrelated phenomena, or might there be a pattern to its complexity, the limning of which could simplify our thinking about it?

Two simple but powerful propositions of Oswald Spengler's in his book *The Decline of the West* (1918-1922) will be the reference points of this analysis. These are, first, that the late, terminal phase of a culture is marked by the victory of city over town; and, second, that the city represents victory over nature. Already there is a sense of fragility here: for nature will have the last laugh, and many a chuckle along the way besides, and this amusement is constitutive to the human organism.

If Woman is identified with nature, then feminism may charitably be interpreted as a reaction to the tyranny of the city. If this is correct, then feminism's insistence that the individual woman embody city values has a massive contradiction at its heart.

Feminism's hostility toward motherhood may be understood as antipathy to The Great Mother archetype, which is nature herself. Safe Schools activists have settled the nature-nurture debate to their own satisfaction, though not that of mothers. Doctors' promotion of breastfeeding is accused of being an act of patriarchal oppression. Camille Paglia faced vicious hostility when she raised the subject of hormones in a feminist gathering. Jung believed that issues with the Great Mother are a potent cause of psychosis. Much

of feminism may then be viewed as a sickness rather than a cure.

The contemporary lionisation of LGBTI individuals is, likewise, a symptom of the delusion of the final victory over nature, where 'male' and 'female', as well as their marriage in the *coniunctio mystica*, belong to the benighted past. Consistently with this, the city behemoths such as accounting firm PwC are at the forefront of the gay marriage push.

Thomas Hardy observed that the sense of mystery is lost when a populace moves from the country to the city. Compare and contrast *Far from the Madding Crowd* and, say, Martin Amis' *London Fields*.

This was the age of miracles, when men could scarcely believe their eyes'. Muslim scientists could have joined them, had Islam not chosen the path of God-the-Father puritanism.

The greatest mystery is of course God; hence PwC's disdain for the religious convictions of its employee Mark Allaby, and the persecution of Cardinal George Pell by the city-centred media. In Pell's case I would argue that this has been potentiated by the centrality of Mary, as a symbol of nature, in particular limitless space, to the Catholic religion. Italy is pre-eminently the home of the Goddess. The proposed extradition of Pell from the Vatican has in this light a deeply symbolic import. There is something mysterious about Catholicism which disturbs the city *fellahin* (Spengler's term).

The sanctification of all things Muslim by the *fellahin* is not inconsistent with this. The philosopher F.C.S. Schiller argued that materialism demands the reflex conception of a God the Father; what is lost here being the sense of God the Son, Who embodies, as William Blake celebrated, the imagination, and the spiritualisation of matter.

All religions are finally not the same. The worship of God the Son, which is uniquely a feature of authentic Christianity, imbues it with a sense of mercy and love of the human family. And yet the theocratic nature of Islam, for all its God-the-Father fundamentalism, must make it attractive to the victims of city materialism.

Following Heraclitus, Spengler describes the 'become' nature of the city, in contrast to the 'becoming' nature of a culture as it grows towards its full maturity.

And, here's the rub, all things 'become' are mortal. I would argue that this mortality is deeply if obscurely felt by the *fellahin*; and that a return to a 'becoming' state is for them, as unknowing victims of the city, only to be achieved, the internal development of the culture having reached its end, by the dissolution of the West in the global pond.

It is a question, as Spengler argues, of embracing the destruction of the West or having no life at all. Hence, I suggest, the fanaticism of so many activists of the Left. Identity is a 'become' state, and the rapid rise of identity politics with its attendant hyper-sensitivity could have been predicted.

Yet there may be another way forward. The West was for centuries the only world-improving culture. Other cultures are now standing on our shoulders to make their contributions. With its roots in, some would say Christianity, others the mediaeval magical tradition, Western science began its development in the early seventeenth century. Later, the great mathematicians such as Newton, Lagrange, Laplace and Fourier, would lay the foundations of the modern world. This was the age of miracles when, as Spengler observed, 'men could scarcely believe their eyes.' Muslim scientists could have joined them, had Islam not chosen the path of God-the-Father puritanism after Averroes.

The alternative way I propose is that the modern Westerner should immerse him or herself in Western culture, a tiny fraction of which now peeps iceberg-like above the materialist flood, and mine that vast neglected richness for the good of all humanity. Culture would then remain a living and productive thing in the hearts and minds of individuals. The Ramsay Centre for Western Civilisation is in principle a step in the right direction; however, it is highly likely to be betrayed by the Leftist milieu of the modern universities wherein it will operate.

The undermining of the Western tradition by the Left indeed remains the biggest threat to the possibility of renewal. It is easier to be a lackey of the tide than an island in the stream after all.