

## **“Flying the Flag of Rough Branch”: Rethinking Post-September 11 Patriotism through the Writings of Wendell Berry**

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*“I mean patriotism—love for your country and your neighbors. There’s a difference...between the state, or any other organization, and the country.”*  
Henry Catlett, from “Fidelity” (Berry 1992, 164-165)

I

From the ubiquitous American flag to “United we stand” bumper stickers on cars and “God bless America” signs in windows, the emblems of American patriotism are plentiful in the aftermath of September 11, 2001. Patriotism also reasserted itself in American politics as elected officials at various levels moved to support public recitations of the “Pledge of Allegiance”, the singing of patriotic songs at public venues, and the display of patriotic signs in public buildings (O’Leary and Platt 2001). So plentiful are these expressions of American unity and allegiance that Robert Putnam was compelled to revisit his oft-cited thesis that American civic life is waning. In a recent study, Putnam

found that Americans now express an increased trust in government and a renewed interest in public affairs, leading him to conclude that American civil society may be on the upswing (2002). But, does this newfound patriotism really offer much to American political life? Amy Burke contends that our patriotic responses to September 11 have been merely symbolic—and persistently individualistic at that (2002). We are, she states, “willing to wave flags but not hold hands” (2002, 45). Putnam himself found that an increased interest in public affairs did not actually translate into increased participation in public life. If feelings of unity and allegiance develop in tandem with increasing levels of trust in government to the extent that citizens merely trust, rather than participate, then contemporary patriotism might wind up doing more damage to democracy than good. Consequently, contemporary patriotism may offer little to reinvigorate American democracy.

Central to this discussion is the notion of patriotism itself. Are the aforementioned expressions of unity and allegiance the sum and substance of “patriotism”? Drawing from Montesquieu, C. Douglas Lummis states that patriotism must be understood as political virtue (1996). At the core of a democratic polity is the political virtue of her people—i.e., the *patriotism* of her people. In a democracy, Lummis argues, patriotism must be understood as “the love that binds a people together, not the misplaced love of the institutions that dominate the people” (1996, 37). Here democracy is definitively distinguished from the institutions created to effect it. This paper explores this conception of patriotism through the writings of Wendell Berry. Berry has written much regarding patriotism and democracy in essays, yet his richly textured portrayal of a community of people bound by their common affection—i.e., the fictional community

of Port William—is particularly suited for exploring the nuances of affection that Berry sees as central to democratic patriotism. Drawing upon Berry’s fiction, the story “Fidelity” in particular, this paper seeks to flesh out that idea of patriotism as the love that binds a people together—a love that is often at odds, in both sentiment and action, with the political institutions with which it interacts (1992).

We begin with an overview of Berry’s notion of patriotism as it is articulated in his essays, and then move on to a more detailed account as presented in his fiction. The latter section deals almost exclusively with Berry’s story “Fidelity”. We then take a brief look at a contemporary discussion of patriotism within the social science literature and attempt to draw connections between that ongoing academic conversation and Berry’s literary perspective. We argue that Berry’s view of patriotism outlined in his essays and more fully explicated in the story “Fidelity” offers a helpful corrective to popular patriotism, which, while it generates a sentimental unity, it also has the potential to stymie the substantive dissent so crucial to democratic polities.

## II

Patriotism is, for Wendell Berry, about love—not love of the state or its institutions, but love of one’s place and those who dwell there. In his essays, Berry contrasts two sorts of patriotism each defined by the object of its affection: “abstract nationalist patriotism” (1987a, 108), and patriotism that is more locally oriented. In Berry’s view affection for, and fidelity to, one’s own place and neighbor is what characterizes genuine patriotism—it is fidelity that is local and particular. This notion of patriotism, which we call local particular patriotism, is distinct from the hollow affection for one’s nation and its

ephemeral symbols that Berry reckons constitutes abstract national patriotism. For Berry, to love one's *country* is to love the land under one's feet and those who live upon it. This sort of particular affection naturally tempers one's allegiance to one's nation, oftentimes requiring one to question, or even oppose, state policies that threaten to harm the place and people one loves. "An inescapable requirement of true patriotism, love of one's land," Berry states, "is a vigilant distrust of any determinative power, elected or unelected, that may preside over it" (2003, 20). A critical stance toward the institutions of the democratic state—rooted in one's affection for one's land and neighbors—lies at the heart of local particular patriotism.

Conversely, abstract nationalist patriotism is not characterized by "the particularizing passion with which settled people have always loved, not their nation, but their *homes*, their daily lives and bread", but by that abstract and abstracting political passion that loves and is loyal to the idea of the nation, potentially betraying the ideals of it (1987a, 108). Such affection is necessarily abstract because the nation can only be known abstractly: While we can know our neighbors and community, we cannot know—in any legitimate sense—our nation. Thus, Berry contends:

For a nation to be, in the truest sense, patriotic, its citizens must love their land with a knowing, intelligent, sustaining, and protective love...And they must not allow their patriotism to be degraded to a mere loyalty to symbols or any present set of officials. (2003, 23)

Abstract nationalist patriotism, because it lacks affection for any place or person in particular, has the potential to degenerate into an unquestioning deference to the objects of its affection—namely, the formal institutions, representatives or symbols of the democratic state. Such patriotism thus may erode the foundation of democracy itself. Contrary to this, local particular patriotism has as its hallmark a recognition that

the institutions, representatives and symbols are merely means to an end—actual democratic governance. Where democratic governance is the goal, all true patriotism must be understood as being fundamentally local. If governance is to be democratic, then it requires meaningful participation. Such participation is only possible at the local level—i.e., in a particular place (cf. Goldsmith, 1996).

Democracy thus seems to require patriotism of the sort Berry describes. It is the political virtue of members of a democratic community. People live, move, and have their being in a place and among neighbors and friends, the proper manifestation of this reality being fidelity to this place and those people in one's actions. Only in such a setting can deliberative discourse regarding the contours and content of democratic governance flourish. This sort of patriotism stands, in many ways, in opposition to that abstract nationalist patriotism that would merely wave flags and don bumper stickers.

This vision of local particular patriotism plays a central role in Wendell Berry's thought as a whole. His understanding of community, local economy, and ecological health rests upon, and at the same time underwrites, this sort of patriotism. When Berry describes true patriotism as "the complex, never-completed affection for our land and neighbors" (2002b, 24), it is clear that such patriotism cannot exist without the strong ties that characterize community as such. Furthermore, Berry's vision of community—the locus of patriotic fidelity—is not an unrealistic or romantic one. Rather, it is one in which citizens bear tremendous responsibility for their livelihoods, their eco-systems, and ultimately, for one another. By "community" Berry means

the common wealth and common interests, commonly understood, of people living together in a place and wishing to continue to do so. To put it another way, community is a locally understood interdependence of local people, local culture, local economy, and local nature. (1993a, 120)

He goes on to qualify the term by stating that *community* is a concept, “that can extend itself beyond the local, but it only does so metaphorically. The idea of a national or global community is meaningless apart from the realization of local communities” (1993a, 120). Without a substantive understanding and experience of community at the local level, the concept is impotent to inform moral action beyond itself. If, as Berry argues, “a nation’s charity must come from the heart and imagination of its people” (2003, 23), its people must be members of a *community*, in Berry’s sense, or they will lack the heart and imagination necessary to prompt care for others in communities beyond their own. In this way, the local affections that constitute community form a foundation for any meaningful affection for the nation or the world. Fundamental to this perspective is a thick notion of pluralism, the nation being merely an assemblage of diverse communities of peoples and places (cf., Berry 1993a).

Further, Berry’s understanding of community and local economy are inextricably linked. The practical bonds of economy promote mutual interdependence, which serves to foster the emotional bonds of affection that characterize community. In the essay, “Sex, economy, freedom, and community”, Berry argues that the ties that bind people together as a community—the ties that distinguish patriotic fidelity—are destroyed both by disaffection from within, and exploitation from without (1993a). On Berry’s view, economic globalization—as indicated by increasing trade liberalization and the attendant supportive political and corporate structures—fosters both. It fosters disaffection within communities by directing individual’s economic interests beyond their neighbors and their geographic space. In this way, Berry contends that globalization undermines the mutual interdependence that builds community and is thus central to

patriotism. Berry asks: “Can people be neighbors...if they do not need each other or help each other?” (1987b, 180) When people do not rely upon their neighbors or the place where they live for sustenance and livelihood, there are fewer economic incentives associated with caring for either. The result is disaffection—i.e., weakened patriotism—within the community.

Economic globalization not only erodes the care neighbors have for one another by destroying the mutual interdependence characteristic of vibrant local economies, it also exploits communities by its intention to lessen the significance of place in matters of economic exchange and production. The threat to communities cannot, in Berry's estimation, be overplayed. Accordingly, he states

The global economy does not exist to help the communities and localities of the globe. It exists to siphon the wealth of those communities and places into a few bank accounts. To this economy, democracy and the values of the religious traditions mean absolutely nothing. And those who wish to help communities to survive had better understand that a merely political freedom means little within a totalitarian economy. (1993a, 129)

The global economy, in short, creates dependence of the wrong sort. It is not mutual interdependence among known persons who likely share similar time horizons and similar concerns regarding their place on earth; rather, it is dependence upon unknown and abstract entities such as transnational corporations and global trade dispute bodies. This is a type of dependence over which individual citizens have very little democratic control. Citizens dependent in this way lose, to a great extent, the freedom democratic governance is intended to provide. Or, as Berry puts it: “If you are dependent on people who do not know you, who control the value of your necessities, you are not free, and you are not safe” (1993a, 128). This dependency ultimately prompts a crisis of political

liberty because, in Berry's estimation, it diminishes the very foundation and insurance of said liberty—namely, the democratic community (1993a).

The increasingly global economy is thus dangerously indifferent—or downright malevolent—to local communities on Berry's view. This is so because any specific local community is an abstraction to it. By its very largess the global economy cannot take into account the innumerable places and people that constitute it. Thus, Berry disparages the bumper sticker slogan, "Think Globally; Act Locally":

Global thinking can only be statistical. Its shallowness is exposed by the least intention to do something. Unless one is willing to be destructive on a very large scale, one cannot do something except locally, in a small place. Global thinking can only do to the globe what a space satellite does to it: reduce it, make a bauble of it. Look at one of those photographs, and see if you recognize your neighborhood. If you want to see where you are, you will have to get out of your spaceship, out of your car, off your horse, and walk over the ground. On foot you will find that the earth is still satisfyingly large and full of beguiling nooks and crannies. (1993b, 20)

Knowing as it does only statistically and from a distance, "Global" thinking makes care for a particular place difficult, if not impossible. Abstract nationalist patriotism is similarly vague and superficial because it is generically focused on the idea of the nation, and therefore unable to comprehend and value the many, varied communities that actually constitute the nation. Such patriotism is not lacking in affection; rather it is affectionate toward the nation in the abstract, and not to any place in particular. This makes it potentially worrisome: When people and places are reduced to mere abstractions, it is easier to treat them as objects—as means to some greater, national end.

For Berry, then, true patriotism is locally oriented, and such an orientation fosters a certain affection for one's geographic place and its inhabitants. In turn, this affection prompts a critical stance toward the state, the economy, and the policies and practices



of both. Patriotic affection serves as the standard by which each is critiqued. Patriotism so constituted requires citizens to take responsibility for their communities by actively opposing policies or resisting practices that dismantle the local economy or destroy the local environment. It is the abdication of this responsibility by members of particular communities that has prompted and fueled the “environmental crisis”. In an essay on the topic Berry argues that

If people begin the effort to take back into their own power a significant portion of their economic responsibility, then their inevitable first discovery is that the “environmental crisis” is no such thing; it is not a crisis of our environs or surroundings; it is a crisis of our lives as individuals, as family members, as community members, and as citizens. We have an “environmental crisis” because we have consented to an economy in which by eating, drinking, working, resting, traveling, and enjoying ourselves we are destroying the natural, the God-given world. (2002a, 14)

It might be said that it is the absence of patriotic fidelity—the particular affection and care for one’s place—that has damaged our land, air, water, and wildlife. The economic and ecological health of communities is thus tied to the presence of local particular patriotism. While this type of patriotic fidelity often requires active political dissent, it must be noted that the fundamental manifestation of local particular patriotism is not overt political dissent, but rather, the innumerable affectionate acts that preserve and sustain local places and their inhabitants on a daily basis.

### III

This understanding of patriotism as affection for, and fidelity to, one’s place and neighbor is the animating passion of Wendell Berry’s work. Accordingly, one might argue that all of Berry’s writing—whether nonfiction or fiction—is ultimately about patriotism. His nonfiction writings often function as a form of patriotic dissent stemming

from love of his own land and neighbors—namely, the place and people of Port Royal, Kentucky. Berry's fiction, on the other hand, performs a function that his essays cannot—it serves to embody and exemplify the ideas to which his essays refer. The fictional world of Port William—a world likened by some to Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha—is the "Place on Earth" whose boundaries do not pose limitation, but rather proffer depth and dimension to Berry's literary project and political thought (2001a, title). Berry's depiction of Port William and its members, by virtue of its particularity, serves as both an argument against, and an alternative to, abstract and reductive ways of thinking. Berry's resistance to abstraction and reduction are closely connected, for both are in their own way rejections of the particular: the one by rising above it, the other by sinking below it. Berry's fiction, on the other hand, embraces the particular by creating a concrete world that shows his vision of community in all of its specificity. His fiction works as an argument for this vision by allowing us imaginatively to test the ideas and ideals that Berry defends in his essays. His fiction, then, by its very form, carries a content his essays cannot. In other words, Berry's fiction invites us to get out of our car, off our horse, and walk over the ground.

While all of Berry's fiction might be understood as articulating his vision of community and the patriotism that sustains it, we restrict our focus here to Berry's short story "Fidelity" (1992). This story is particularly apt at fleshing out Berry's notion of local particular patriotism and distinguishing it from the abstract nationalist patriotism that he describes in his essays. "Fidelity" is the story of the death and burial of Burley Coulter, a long-standing member of Port William. In the story, Burley is eighty-two and his health is rapidly deteriorating. Finding him unconscious and unable to rouse him, his

son, Danny Branch, and nephew, Nathan Coulter, reluctantly decide to take him to the hospital—a place they know he would not himself willingly go. Shortly after he is admitted, Burley awakens unable to recognize his own whereabouts and speaking only nonsense:

He was no longer in his right mind, they thought, because he was no longer in his right place. When they could bring him home again, he would be himself. (112)

As Burley is removed from his place, life itself removed from him. Burley slips into a coma and is kept “minimally alive” by an array of medical devices “breathing and feeding and voiding” for him (113). The sight of his lifeless self physically maintained by machines, working at counter purposes with the forces of his own biology, is too much for his loved ones to brook. With the hope of regaining him gone, the prospect of losing him in such foreign surroundings becomes unbearable. His family feel that they have committed a “kind of treason” letting his life end in such a way in that unknown and strange place (113). His son, Danny, decides to rescue him from the hospital and take him back to the place he knew and loved in life, so that he might die there. He does so, and once they have returned to the place of his knowing and loving, the two—Danny and the no longer conscious Burley—spend the night in a barn Burley’s father built. Burley does briefly regain consciousness there in that place that Danny recovered him to. When Danny asks whether he knows where he is,

[S]miling, Burley [speaks], his voice so halting and weak as to seem not uttered by bodily strength but by some pure presence of recollection and will: “Right here.” (136)

After this acknowledgement, Burley’s breathing slows and he dies peacefully in the place on earth where he had lived.

Upon the discovery of Burley's disappearance the police commence an investigation. It is here that the values and perspectives of patriotic fidelity, as Berry understands them, confront those of rationally organized governance structures. Kyle Bode, a young detective with the state police, is assigned to the case. Bode's disdain for country people and their values plays a prominent role in his dealings with Burley's friends and relatives. Bode, who grew up in a town similar to Port William—Nowhere, Ky.—“was under pressure from birth to ‘get out of [there] and make something of [himself],’” as his father had said (145). Bode represents “the organizations and the state”—that is, he personifies the indiscriminate rationality of the law and its institutions (166). It is the confrontation of that cold rationality and the warm affection of Burley's neighbors that is at the heart of the story.

Detective Bode suspects that Danny has kidnapped Burley. Consequently, he questions Danny's wife Lyda regarding Danny's whereabouts. Lyda evasively says only that Danny had said something about Indiana, but not where. She adds that he depends upon some Amish folks there for harness fittings and other such things. When he presses her for more, Lyda refers Bode to family friend and lawyer, Henry Catlett. In the course of questioning Henry, Bode attempts to manipulate him into allowing more information by suggesting that the state has evidence of Danny's guilt that it does, in fact, not have. After he has questioned Henry with little success, Bode then attempts to gain assurance of Henry's cooperation in finding Danny, hoping somehow that their “brotherhood in the law” will make Henry act more reasonably (164). But to Bode's surprise, Henry flatly refuses to help:

“You mean that you, a lawyer, won't cooperate with the law of the state in the solution of a crime?”

“Well, you see, it’s a matter of patriotism.”

“Patriotism? You can’t mean that.”

“I mean patriotism—love for your country and your neighbors. There’s a difference Mr. Bode, between the state, or any other organization, and the country. I’m not going to cooperate with you in this case because I don’t like what you represent in this case.”

“What I represent? What do you think I represent?”

“The organization of the world.”

“And what does that mean?”...

“It means...that you want whatever you know to serve power. You want knowledge to *be* power. And you’ll make your ignorance count too, if you can be deceitful and clever enough. You think everything has to be explained to your superiors, and concealed from your inferiors. For instance, you just lied to me with a clear conscience, as a way of serving justice. What I stand for can’t survive in the world you’re helping to make, Mr. Bode.” Henry was grinning, enjoying himself, and now he allowed the detective to see that he was.

“What are you some kind of anarchist?” the detective said. “Just what the hell are you, anyway?”

“I’m a patriot, like I said. I’m a man who’s not going to cooperate with you on this case. You’re here to represent the right of the state and other large organizations to decide for us and come between us...” (164-165)

Henry’s considers his actions patriotic, because he believes he is being faithful to those to whom he belongs and who belong to him. He describes his actions in terms of patriotic fidelity, whereas Bode describes his in terms of his obligation to enforce the laws of the state. Tellingly, Bode is almost apologetic when, acknowledging his powerlessness, he says “I’m not in charge of the state...I’m just doing my duty” (166). He recognizes that even if he wanted *not* to enforce the law, duty demands it of him. Henry’s non-cooperation, on the other hand, stems not so much from duty as from affection. Henry prioritizes the knowledge and love of his place and its people and this ordering fuels his resistance to a law he understands will not serve that affection.

**Elsewhere Berry vividly points to the difference between abstract institutions—such as the state, the nation, or the laws of either—and particular places such as Port William. Musing through one of his characters, Berry concludes:**

**No more can I think of Port William and the United States in the same thought. A nation is an idea, and Port William is not. Maybe there is no live connection between a little place and a big idea. I think there is not. (2000, 143)**

**As an abstract, unliving entity, a state or a nation is incapable of the sort of care that motivates Henry.**

The distinction between Bode's perspective and Henry's is cast in terms of property versus belonging. Henry argues that Bode understands persons as "ultimately the property of organizations and the state", whereas he holds that "people belong to each other and to God" (166). This *belonging* is characterized by shared membership in the Port William community. Burley himself notes in the story "Wild Birds":

The way we are, we are members of each other. All of us. Everything. The difference ain't who is a member and who is not, but in who knows it and who don't. (1986, 136-137)

The membership of Port William, in Berry's fiction, extends to everyone, living and dead, binding them one to another by affection. Membership is a product of proximity, and the mutual interdependence that is a factor of shared geography and economy. The affection and fidelity that is central to Berry's patriotism is the nucleus of this fictional town.

Moreover, this community and its membership, bound by affection and fidelity, is not a romanticized, nostalgic version of a real-world town. Rather, it is a community continually struggling with, and against, itself. Jayber Crow, the title character in a recent novel, explains:

What I saw now was the community imperfect and irresolute but held together by the frayed and always fraying, incomplete and yet ever-holding bonds of the various sorts of affection. There had maybe never been anybody who had not been loved by somebody, who had been loved by somebody else, and so on and on...It was a community always disappointing itself, disappointing its members,

always trying to contain its divisions and gentle its meanness, always failing and yet always preserving a sort of will toward goodwill. I know that, in the midst of all the ignorance and error, this was a membership; it was the membership of Port William and of no other place on earth. My vision gathered the community as it never has been and never will be gathered in this world of time, for the community must always be marred by members who are indifferent to it or against it, who are nonetheless its members and maybe nonetheless essential to it. (2000, 205)

The affection that holds Port William community together is not blind; it binds despite the divisions caused by ignorance and error. It is not a sentimental affection; it is a practical affection founded in mutual interdependence. To the charges that Berry's vision is hopelessly utopian, this passage responds: Any community will be an imperfect one, marred by its own members. Patriotism, as Wendell Berry understands it, stems from faithful membership to such an imperfect community.

As the exchange with Henry suggests, Detective Bode fails to recognize the nature of this membership. He sees his own primary identification with that of a higher, more official—and less provincial, in his opinion—political body to which he is duty-bound. His discussion with Henry's Father, Wheeler Catlett, further clarifies the implications of his failure to grasp this other sort of membership. When Bode suggests that as Danny is Burley's heir, greed might have motivated his action, Wheeler responds:

I venture to say to you that you are wrong about [Danny], insofar as you suspect him of acting out of greed. I'll give you two reasons that you had better consider. In the first place, he loves Burley. In the second place, he's not alone, and he knows it. You're thinking of a world in which legatee stands all alone, facing legator who has now become a mere obstruction between legatee and legacy. But you have thought up the wrong world. There are several of us here who belong to Danny and to whom he belongs, and we will stand by him, whatever happens. Whatever happens, he and his family will have a place, and he knows it. After money, you know, we are talking about the question of ownership of people. To whom does Burley Coulter belong? (174)

Bode views the situation in terms of the violation of the law; Wheeler, like Henry, views the situation in terms of the affection that binds them one to another. Both Danny's action and the inaction of his community are explained by love—Danny's for Burley; the community's for Danny.

When Wheeler suggests that in this case he would oppose any law that made what Danny did a crime, Bode responds by saying, "all I know is that the law has been broken, and I am here to serve the law" (175). This statement prompts Wheeler to admonish the younger man:

"But, my dear boy, you don't eat or drink the law, or sit in the shade of it or warm yourself by it, or wear it, or have your being in it. The law exists only to serve."

"Serve what?"

"Why, all the many things that are above it. Love." (175)

The law is an instrument used for the good of particular persons. Elsewhere Berry writes of Wheeler that he "served [his friends] as their defenders against the law itself" ("Wild Birds" 115). In Wheeler's estimation, when the law ceases to serve folks need defending against it. As the above passage suggests, the law is abstract—it cannot quench one's thirst or shade one's brow. It must therefore be constrained by love. Here we see the stark contrast between abstract patriotism and particular patriotism: The former manifests itself in a devotion to the institutions meant to serve its ideals, while the latter manifests itself in a devotion to the ideals themselves—in this case, the love and protection of one's neighbors.

It is important to recognize that Wheeler and Henry are speaking here about a particular case. They are committed to the idea that the "law is meant to serve". The institutions of democracy, in other words, are meant to serve the higher principles of it.



And, in many cases, they do just that. The point that Berry is making via the Catletts is that institutions—legal or bureaucratic—do not have the ability to be self-reflective or self-critical. Nor are they able to ensure that their realization is in keeping with the intention(s) underlying them. It is the requirement of the democratic citizen to perform these functions. The question is thus, whether or not the law that would prohibit Danny from recovering Burley does in fact serve the good it was intended to, namely, Burley's protection and well being. Clearly, it would be a dubious logic that supposes that protecting someone bent on killing—for example, aiding and abetting Eric Robert Rudolph—serves patriotic affection and fidelity. Jim Crow laws, on the other hand, were legal statutes that patriotism, on Berry's view, would have required one to resist and oppose.

Wheeler, concluding his conversation with Bode and thus the Detective's business, guides the young detective into the waiting room outside his office where he introduces a dozen of Burley's close friends and relations who have gathered there both to mourn Burley and to lend their support to Danny. Bode begins to question them, but his questions merely prompt extemporaneous eulogies to the deceased. The young Detective finds himself strangely in the midst of a conversation that is not his own, one that by his lights he sees he hardly has a right to be in, since it is the conversation of those to whom Burley belonged and who belonged to him.

The story culminates with Danny stepping into the waiting room. Bode comes to his feet and starts interrogating Danny regarding his whereabouts over the last twenty-four hours, and Henry quietly but firmly tells Bode to take his seat since, lacking any substantive evidence, he has no right to question Danny. His defeat clear, Bode "felt

small and lost, somewhere beyond the law” (189). In the story, “Fidelity”, this place beyond the law is the place where affection for one’s people and community is preeminent. The detective’s “small clear world of the law and its explanations” is not uncertain or mysterious like Port William’s “larger, darker world” of human affection (1992, 179). Rather, it is rational, efficient, and consequently often indifferent to what it is meant to serve. Conversely, the membership of Port William is a world where the law and the institutions of the democratic state are understood to be in need of scrutiny by those they are intended to serve, in light of affection and knowledge.

#### IV

The story, “Fidelity”, provides a rich context for thinking about patriotism as Berry understands it. The issue at the heart of Berry’s categorization and narrative exposition of the varying types of patriotism—identification with abstract institutions or symbols; versus identification with a particular people, place and culture; versus identification with ideals such as democracy, justice and liberty—parallels an ongoing conversation regarding patriotism in the social science literature. The academic conversation has been directed toward the need to reconcile, as one author put it, “the conflicting imperatives of political legitimacy and cultural inclusiveness” (Laborde 2002, 591).<sup>1</sup> How can the fierce attachments provoked by the particulars of one’s political culture serve overarching principles such as justice, liberty and democracy? Put another way,

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<sup>1</sup> Elsewhere the academic discussion has taken a variety of competing forms and semantic exchanges. For instance, it has been characterized as a matter of: patriotism versus cosmopolitanism (Nussbaum, 2002); nationalism versus cosmopolitanism (Yack, 1998); ethnic versus civic nationalism (cf., Xenos, 1996, 1998); nationalism versus civic republicanism/republican patriotism (Viroli, 1995; 1998); and, blind versus constructive patriotism (Schatz *et al.*, 1999).

how can affect be made “safe” for democracy (Markell 2000, title)? At the center of much of this discussion is Habermas’ development of the concept of constitutional patriotism, and his treatment of political affect accordingly. This conceptualization of patriotism grew out of Habermas’ participation in public conversations in Germany in the 1980s over how to reconcile contemporary German political identity with German history. Habermas perceived neoconservatives as attempting to soft-pedal German history in order to “normalize German identity” (Markell 2000, 42). In view of both German history and the more general history of nation-state development and the race and ethnic intolerance and brutality that is often a product of such development, Habermas concluded that the only normatively palatable route to political integration is to direct political affect toward a set of abstract, universal principles that can unite diverse peoples and serve the interests of liberal democracy (Markell 2000). According to Markell, Habermas’ constitutional patriotism, “unlike earlier forms of patriotism and nationalism, valorizes a set of universal norms rather than a concrete historical community” (2000, 44).

Because the universal principles intended to redirect political affect spring from particular historical contexts, however, there is an unavoidable and tensed relationship between the two (Markell 2000). Subsequent theorists of constitutional patriotism often overlook this dependence on particular political context and history altogether. They contend that patriotism, in order to be legitimate in the context of liberal democracy, must be removed from cultural particulars entirely, and solely oriented toward universal principles such as those put forth in constitutional form (Laborde 2002, 592). There must be, in brief, an “uncoupling” of “political loyalty and cultural affinity” (Laborde 2002,

593). Laborde contends that such an uncoupling begs the question of how abstract principles will invoke the sense of solidarity, mutual interdependence, and trust that are the foundations of liberal democratic governance (2002). Accordingly, Laborde offers an alternative conceptualization—namely, civic patriotism. This civic patriotism, Laborde purports, is more “situated” than the various renderings of Habermas’ constitutional patriotism (2002, 592). Civic patriotism maintains that it is neither possible nor advantageous to reject political culture in an effort to bolster commitment to universal ideals. Civic patriotism

urges that existing political cultures be democratically scrutinized and re-shaped in an inclusive direction. It promotes a *mainly political identity*, whose political content makes it compatible with a variety of practices and beliefs, but whose thin particularistic form justifies citizens’ commitment to specific institutions and practices. (2002, 612)

Civic patriotism, Laborde argues, is intended to right the failure of constitutional patriotism to “take seriously the need for cultural mediations between citizens and their institutions” (2002, 592).

Rather than proposing an alternative conceptualization, Markell poses a significant challenge to Habermas’ constitutional patriotism, and offers a reading of Habermas that reconciles the matter (2000). For Markell, the effort to redirect political affect to general abstract principles runs afoul of its dependence upon particulars—in other words, because of its dependence on particular political cultures, constitutional patriotism is thus subject to the same worrisome wiles as older, less sanguine versions of patriotism. Moreover, universal principles cannot be perfectly articulated such that they are unchanged in the process of articulation. Markell concludes:

If normative principles always depend on supplements of particularity that enable them to become objects of attachment and identification but that also never are

quite equivalent to the principles they purport to embody, then perhaps constitutional patriotism is best understood not as a safe and reliable identification with some pure set of always already available *universals* but rather as a fragile political culture that habitually insists on and makes manifest this failure of equivalence for the sake of the ongoing, always incomplete, and often unpredictable *project of universalization*. (2000, 57-58)

Could the “supplements of particularity” to which Markell refers serve a more positive, rather than a merely unavoidable role in the project of universalization? In other words, might the particular attachments to, and identification with, one’s compatriots proffer a right posture toward shared institutions? Habermas’ notion of patriotism presumes that “vertical” attachments among citizens to universal principles take precedence over “horizontal” attachments between citizens (Markell 2000, 55) Markell suggests a reversal of this ordering.

Rather than only allowing our relation to the central imaginary object [shared institutions] to guide our relations to individual others, might we... *also* allow love, sympathy, indebtedness, or gratitude toward particular others to generate new and different affects toward the state, the constitution, or the political culture? Affects, perhaps, such as fear, anger, and shame? (2000, 55)

Markell uses an example, taken from Habermas, of a protest following the murders of three women in Mölln by neo-Nazis. In large part, the protests were directed at the German government in order to dispute its unwillingness to respond promptly and vigorously to earlier violence. It is the compassion of German citizens for the victims and their families that fuels an outrage over, and ultimately correction of, state policy. The protest is a pertinent example because it suggests an unwillingness on the part of citizens to accept “the claim of the state to be a true or an adequate instantiation of the will of the German people” (Markell, 2000, 57). It is a particular identification that generates the critique of state policy and actions. The actions of the characters in

“Fidelity” could be read in much the same way. Their resistance to a law that would not serve its intent—i.e., the protection and well-being of its subjects—is fueled by their love of Burley. It is that primary identification with Burley that affords this critique of the law. Particularistic attachments, in both cases, serve as a corrective to uncritical deference to formal political institutions. Markell thus proposes not a shunning of particularistic attachments, but rather a way of seeing them as a potential inroad to a more earnest commitment to the ideals of liberal democracy—as opposed to a mere commitment to the constitution, institutions, procedures or dictates of liberal democracy. The latter could be understood as manifestations of liberal democracy to which an uncritical loyalty would be the basis of Berry’s abstract national patriotism.

In an article written in the months following September 11, Martha Nussbaum argues that such particularistic attachments are the basis of more generalized moral concern (2001). While her purpose in the article, “Can patriotism be compassionate?”, is to consider how moral concern might be extended beyond immediate others, she nevertheless suggests that without those local attachments we are not capable of a broader compassion for humankind. Care for others is learned first in small, immediate circles. Only with that foundation can human beings learn to extend such care to others beyond that circle. Attempts at developing an abstract, generic care for humankind without originating such care in concern for particular, known others will degenerate into care for no one. The question is how to ensure that such local care does indeed develop into a more general, universal care for humankind:

If we want our life with others to contain strong passions—for justice in a world of injustice, for aid in a world where many go without what they need—we would do well to begin, at least, with our familiar strong emotions toward family city and country...Compassion begins with the local. But if our moral natures and our

emotional natures are to live in any sort of harmony, we must find devices through which to extend our strong emotions—and our ability to imagine the situations of others—to the world of human life as a whole. (Nussbaum 2001, 12)

Affect may not only be an inroad to the continuing development of universal principles of justice, mercy and care—it may be the foundation. Berry makes a similar argument: Charity abroad, he contends, begins with charity at home (cf., 2001b).

Drawing her arguments from Stoic writings, Nussbaum states that the cosmopolitanism that she advocates does not deny local attachments or their importance, rather it suggests that we understand those attachments as the center of a series of ever-widening “concentric circles” (2002, 9). The largest, outermost circle would represent the whole of humanity. Local particular attachments and the special care and attention that they encourage can thus be understood as “justifiable in universalist terms” (2002, 13). She explains:

Politics, like child care, will be poorly done if each thinks herself equally responsible for all, rather than giving the immediate surroundings special attention and care...To take one example, we do not really think our own children are morally more important than other people’s children, even though almost all of us who have children would give our own children far more love and care than we give others. It is good for children, on the whole, that things work this way... (2002, 13)

The task then, Michael Walzer adds, is not to deny the importance of local identifications, but to find means to open the inner circles of affection and attachment outward, extending our “sense of moral fellowship and neighborliness” to ever increasing groups of people, and ultimately, to all humankind (Walzer 2002, 126).

Particularistic attachments can thus be understood as a necessary—but not sufficient—condition for the moral concern of which Nussbaum speaks. Two key questions remain: First, what’s to ensure that such particularistic attachments promote

care of those situated beyond the reach of such attachments? And, second, what's to ensure that even those particularistic relationships are charitable? Taking up the second question: Is there, in other words, a darker less palatable side to local particular patriotism? In that this conceptualization of patriotism has its basis in the notion of community and the strong ties that exist within it, it is vulnerable to the same sorts of criticisms that the communitarian case for community have prompted. Amy Gutman is noted to have charged that the communitarians "want us to live in Salem" (as cited in Etzioni 1996, 308). The strong communal ties that are foundational to Berry's understanding of patriotism might also characterize mafia networks, youth gangs, militia organizations and nationalistic groups (cf., Portes and Landolt 1996). As Berman argues, "If Germans had been bowling alone the Nazi party might not have become a mass movement" (Berman 1997, title). The community to which Berry refers—i.e., the community in which local particular patriotism thrives—is able to meet many of the critics' charges. As discussed earlier, it is not a nostalgic and romantic version of a real-world community to which Berry refers; rather, it is a community bent on democratic ideals. It is not, moreover, a community based in affection that is purely sentimental; rather, it is based in the lived affection that grows out of mutual interdependence. Again, the importance of local economy and the economic interdependence it generates must be noted. Such a community, Berry argues, "if it hopes to continue long...it will wish to—and will have to—encourage respect for all of its members, human and natural" (1993a, 120).

What should the object of patriotic affection be? This question is at the center of the current discussion. The institutions and symbols of the nation-state are the objects



of affection in Berry's conceptualization of *abstract nationalist patriotism*, whereas a particular people and place are the objects of affection in his description of *local particular patriotism*. The concern in the academic discussion of *constitutional patriotism* is the development of a commitment to universal principles. The first question posed above remains: What's to ensure that particularistic attachments promote commitment to universal moral and democratic principles? Berry's argument is not that local particular patriotism will necessarily prompt such a commitment. Again, particularistic attachments are a necessary—but not sufficient—condition for generalized moral concern and commitment to universal principles. Berry's concern is that the institutions and symbols of the democratic state not be mistaken for those universal principles. Accordingly, he admonishes that love must constrain the law. Patriotism, that is, must constrain the law. Abstract national patriotism misplaces its affection—i.e., it mistakes the institutions and symbols of the democratic state, and the sentimental unity they afford, for the ideals of it. It substitutes, in short, the form for the principles themselves. Moreover, such misplaced affection can do more damage to democracy than good by promoting an “us” versus “them” mentality that ultimately thwarts the outward extension of those inner circles of particularistic attachment. In other words, such misplaced affection can ultimately thwart the development of a generalized moral concern.

The overarching concern in the academic literature, and we would argue in Berry as well, is how to move from particulars to universals—that is, how do we protect ourselves and others from the danger particular attachments pose to universal principles such as democracy, justice and liberty? The temptation is to eschew the

significance of particulars, or to deny them altogether in an effort to temper potentially dangerous passions. The problem with this response, as has been argued extensively elsewhere, is that universals cannot produce the kind of affect necessary to power commitment to those principles. It is only via identification with particular others that such strong emotions and attachments are developed. Thus, the starting point remains with those particularistic attachments.

## V

How useful is contemporary American patriotism for the realization of democratic ideals? Post September 11 patriotism, in popular American culture, appears to include such actions as renaming “French” fries, “freedom” fries; but to exclude voicing opposition to the wars on terror and in Iraq. Accordingly, these contemporary manifestations of patriotism in the United States seem to be more in keeping with Berry’s notion of abstract national patriotism. Such patriotism is unlikely to reinvigorate American democracy. In a recent study, Schatz *et al.* found that uncritical patriotic allegiance to one’s nation is actually associated with “political disengagement” (1999, 151). In short, abstract national patriotism may be understood to result in less democratic behavior. Berry’s argument is that such patriotism is simultaneously too shallow to promote real empathy and genuine concern for others, as well as too shallow to promote affection for the universal principles of democracy such as justice and liberty. Where patriotism loses sight of democratic ideals and actually works to stymie dissent and public criticism of institutional decisions and decision-makers, it will do far more damage to democracy than good. Berry offers a substantive corrective by setting

out to show how particularistic attachments can invigorate democratic governance in its truest sense.

It seems appropriate here to return to where we began this paper. The title, “Flying the flag of rough branch” is taken from a poem in Berry’s “Mad Farmer” series. We conclude with a passage from that poem. In this particular poem, the Mad Farmer—the paradigmatic patriot—secedes from the union:

There is only one of him, but he goes.  
He returns to the small country he calls home,  
his own nation small enough to walk across.  
He goes shadowy into the local woods,  
and brightly into the local meadows and croplands.  
He goes to the care of neighbors,  
he goes into the care of neighbors.  
He goes to the potluck supper, a dish  
from each house for the hunger of every house...

Calling his neighbors together into the sanctity  
of their lives separate and together  
in the one life of their commonwealth and home,  
in their own nation small enough for a story  
or song to travel across in an hour...  
(1998, 162)

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