

A [sample entry](#) from the

Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature

(London & New York: Continuum, 2005)

Edited by

[Bron Taylor](#)

© 2005
All Rights Reserved

The Diggers' Song

Commonly known in radical environmental subcultures in the United Kingdom and America as "The Diggers' Song," a song written by Leon Rosselson that is actually entitled "World Turned Upside Down," has been recorded by a number of artists. Probably the best-known version was recorded by Dick Gaughan on *Handful of Earth* (Green Linnet, 1993; full lyrics in Taylor 2002: 51–2). The song, inspired by the Diggers and influenced by Gerrard Winstanley's writings, expresses a radical critique of religious power and the way it sanctions private property and poverty, while offering an alternative vision where the land is shared equitably by all. Excerpts provide a sense of the song:

In 1649, To St. George's Hill

A ragged band they called the Diggers
Came to show the people's will
They defied the landlords
They defied the laws
They were the dispossessed
Reclaiming what was theirs

"We come in peace" they said
"To dig and sow
We come to work the land in common
And to make the waste land grow
This earth divided
We will make whole
So it can be a common treasury for all
"The sin of property, we do disdain
No one has any right to buy and sell
The earth for private gain

By theft and murder
They took the land
Now everywhere the walls
Rise up at their command

"They make the laws
To chain us well
The clergy dazzle us with heaven
Or they damn us into hell
We will not worship
The God they serve
The God of greed who feeds the rich
While poor men starve . . .

"You poor take courage
You rich take care
The earth was made a common treasury
For everyone to share
All things in common
All people one
We come in peace" –
The order came to cut them down

Bron Taylor

Further Reading

Taylor, Bron. "Diggers, Wolves, Ents, Elves and Expanding Universes: Bricolage, Religion, and Violence From Earth First! and the Earth Liberation Front to the Antiglobalization Resistance." In Jeffrey Kaplan and Heléne Lööw, eds. *The Cultic Milieu: Oppositional Subcultures in an Age of Globalization*. Lanham, Maryland: Altamira/Rowman and Littlefield, 2002, 26–74.

Further Reading

Brockway, Fenner. *Britain's First Socialists: The Levellers, Agitators and Diggers of the English Revolution*. London: Quartet Books, 1980.

Hill, Christopher. *Winstanley: The Law of Freedom and Other Writings*. Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1973.

Taylor, Bron. "Diggers, Wolves, Ents, Elves and Expanding Universes: Bricolage, Religion, and Violence From Earth First! and the Earth Liberation Front to the Antiglobalization Resistance." In Jeffrey Kaplan and Heléne Lööw, eds. *The Cultic Milieu: Oppositional Subcultures in an Age of Globalization*. Lanham, MD: Altamira/Rowman and Littlefield, 2002, 26–74.

Thompson, E.P. *Witness against the Beast: William Blake and the Moral Law*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

See also: Music and Eco-activism in America; Music of Resistance; Radical Environmentalism.

Dillard, Annie (1945–)

Annie Dillard is known for her attentiveness to the dramatic details of the natural world and for linking those minute details to divine mystery. She made a double impact with her 1974 Pulitzer-Prize winner, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, which has influenced contemporary musing on both nature and the sacred. In that first book she says, "Our life is a faint tracing on the surface of mystery, like the idle, curved tunnels of leaf miners on the face of a leaf" (1974: 16).

A quarter of a century later, in *For the Time Being*, she still looks unflinchingly at cruel minutiae, weaving natural horror along with delight on finely spun prose, perusing a manual of children's birth defects. She muses on the flaw of all human life, "Ours is a planet sown in beings. Our generations overlap like shingles. We don't fall in rows like hay, but we fall" (1999: 202).

In addition to her contemplative and introspective non-fiction (*Teaching a Stone to Talk*), she is a novelist (*The Living: A Novel*), poet (*Mornings Like This: Found Poems*), a self-reflective writer (*The Writing Life*), and memoirist (*An American Childhood*). Dillard has rejuvenated the old idea of nature as revelation or sacred book, has revived Emersonian nature mysticism, has quickened the sense of beauty at the heart of mortal experience. She is an exuberant witness of beauty in the minuscule and the macabre.

At Hollins College she wrote her master's thesis on Thoreau and many readers and critics have been quick to compare her to him; Tinker Creek is a short literary distance from Walden Pond in terms of pensive nature writing. Dillard inherits from and replenishes that strand of the American tradition claiming nature as divine revelation and key to the awakening individual.

A distinguished name in American letters, she is often classified as a mystic or an environmentalist. Yet, one might be cautious about calling the work of this inquiring convert to Catholicism a pantheist or mystic. She has called herself a "Hasidic Christian" and casts her inquiry through ethical terrain to confront the role of a theologically Christian God: "Do we need blind men stumbling about, and little flamefaced children, to remind us what God can – and will – do?" (1977: 61). The burned child she names "Julie Norwich," for Julian of Norwich, the fourteenth-century Christian mystic who experienced the passion of Christ. Dillard also makes lyrical statements detached from theism or its ethical dilemmas, more in line with the description of the mystical according to William James's "ineffable" or Rudolf Otto's *mysterium tremendum*:

It has always been a happy thought to me that the creek runs on all night, new every minute, whether I wish it or know it or care, as a closed book on a shelf continues to whisper to itself its own inexhaustible tale. So many things have been shown me on these banks, so much light has illuminated me by reflection here where the water comes down, that I can hardly believe that this grace never flags (1974: 68).

She seems to express a pantheism struggling with the theological problems of monotheism; she seems to express an immanent God in contradiction with a transcendent reality. Her writing is studded with paradox, but theologically she entertains multiple and contradictory perspectives.

One might be cautious, too, in classifying Dillard as an environmentalist. Her work is not a call to action, even though she has inspired environmentalists of her generation. Yet she has said,

There is no one but us . . . a generation comforting ourselves with the notion that we have come at an

awkward time, that our innocent fathers are all dead – as if innocence had ever been . . . But there is no one but us. There never has been (1977: 56).

She celebrates relentless nature,

A golden female moth, a biggish one with a two-inch wingspan, flapped into the fire, dropped her abdomen into the wet wax, stuck, flamed, frazzled and fried in a second. Her moving wings ignited like tissue paper, enlarging the circle of light in the clearing . . . (1977: 15).

But her interest in nature finally focuses inward, on the human observer. She makes parables of those details of weasels and eagles, and draws correspondences between human experience and the natural world, and between nature and an elusive, mysterious, divine. She had years ago opened her specimen box and saw that a carrion beetle had been for days "swimming on its pin" and Dillard transformed into incandescent prose the puzzle of suffering.

Finally her beautifully constructed language silences conclusions: "But the air hardens your skin; you stand; you leave the lighted shore to explore some dim headland, and soon you're lost in the leafy interior, intent, remembering nothing" (1974: 2).

Lynda Sexson

Further Reading

- Dillard, Annie. *For the Time Being*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999.
- Dillard, Annie. *Teaching a Stone to Talk: Expeditions and Encounters*. New York: Harper & Row, 1982.
- Dillard, Annie. *Holy the Firm*. New York: Harper & Row, 1977.
- Dillard, Annie. *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*. New York: Bantam, 1974.
- Smith, Pamela A. "The Ecotheology of Annie Dillard: A Study in Ambivalence." *Cross Currents* 45:3 (1995), 341–58.
- See also: *Autobiography; Memoir and Nature Writing; Thoreau, Henry David.*

Diola (West Africa)

The Diola of Senegal, Gambia, and Guinea-Bissau number about 500,000 people and include the largest number of adherents to an African traditional religion in the Senegambia region. Living in well-watered coastal areas, the Diola inhabit the northern limits of the Guinean forest. This area has a dry season stretching from late October until late May and a shorter rainy season during the remainder of the year. Annual rainfall averages between