This essay recommends a focus supplementary to those upon imposed or chosen conditions and implications in America of solitude generally, that is, solitude as a continuing physical and mental state of being (e.g., hermeticism or reclusiveness). Rather, I direct attention to a particular subjective feeling state, in principle varying in description among those who claim to be visited by it under the heading, "lonesomeness." Americans are formed by their culture to recognize its basic appeal, perhaps because it open-endedly defies fast definition. I approach it provisionally as generally referring to longer or shorter moments of unbidden, pleasurable feelings/perceptions/moods as they occur unshared with others in their specific particulars. This "lonesome" feeling may overtake one in solitude broadly understood or in the presence of others heeded or unheeded in the passing moment. My essay addresses the issue of its difficult definition, and its interpretation.

Especially critical for the essay is the distinction between "lonesome" and "lonely". Lonely is here understood as commonly meant: a depressive state of varying degrees of intensity. By contrast – this is a particularly North American historical cultural understanding – "lonesome" combines to a significant, predominating degree pleasurable feeling and perception from gratifying, inward-looking solitude, with smaller measures of lonely distress momentarily balanced or overcome. But the memorably positive, the enjoyable, triumphs over the negative in the moment.

This is indeed a perception/feeling/mood unique to North America (or, more properly, to "America"). Lonesomeness of this sort has been a product of evolving American life and lives for nearly two centuries. It is not to be found in other English-speaking cultures, except as a conscious import from America. (It may have a somewhat equivalent term in the Japanese word *sabi*, "beautiful melancholy"). My essay traces examples in poetry: Whitman, Dickinson (e.g., "There is a another Loneliness, …" [Lyric #1116, c. 1868], and others. I trace examples in fiction: Twain (Huck's perception of "solid lonesomeness"), Anderson, Kerouac, Wilder, and others. Edward Hopper's paintings illustrate this theme, especially those of his later career. And, of course, I cite examples from the "lonesome" tradition evoked continually throughout the heritage of country music, e.g., notably by Hank Williams, and the continuing covers of "Lonesome Valley" (author in the nineteenth century unknown), up to "Lonesome Standard Time" in the 1990s. Examples abound.
In passing, in closing, I will note the possibility of interpreting American "lonesomeness" as an example of untraditional or implicit "religious" or "spiritual" expression, reflecting generally a people encouraged by our history promoting individual freedom to question, to augment, or even to replace credalized traditional religion. American lonesomeness transfigures our loneliness with unbidden moments of illuminating epiphany, liberating us at least temporarily from the rigid formal character of inherited religious tradition – without replacing it with new rigidities. Or so the imaginative arts and individual experience over the years would seem to testify.

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