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I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Betty Ann Brynoff entitled "Plowing the Land: Images of the Human Bond With the Earth." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in English.

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PLOWING THE LAND: IMAGES OF THE HUMAN BOND WITH THE EARTH

A Dissertation

Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Betty Ann Brynoff

May 1992

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DEDICATION

for Nels, my beloved plowman

ABSTRACT

This study explores the ideas and qualities associated with the literary use of the image of the plow, of plowing, and of the plowman. When a writer presents the plow image, he or she suggests to the reader a cluster of ideas derived from the historical associations that have been made with the plow as an implement binding mankind to the earth. This study attempts to discover the primary associations that are inherent in plow-related images and to determine the extent to which the associations persist over time.

Since such an investigation cannot be exhaustive, works included were selected on this basis: first, the plow-related images play a significant role in creating the overall meaning of the work; second, the work has been given wide enough critical acceptance to be influential in shaping attitudes toward cultivating the land; and third, the works cover a broad time frame, giving an opportunity to detect change in the meaning of the images. With these criteria, the Bible and the *Georgics* were selected from the ancient world; *Piers Plowman* from medieval England; short excerpts from writers who represent English attitudes from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century; Crevecoeur and Jefferson from eighteenth-century America; Cooper as the first significant American novelist concerned with use of the land; Emerson and Thoreau as philosophers interested in mankind's relationship with nature; the heart of the study, four American novelists--Glasgow, Rolvaag, Cather, and Garland--who frequently use plowman-farmers as main characters; and finally, the Nashville Agrarians as modern theorists.

The result of this survey shows historical consistency in the use of the image of the plow and of plowing. The plowman image is less stable. Four things most

consistently associated with the plow image are civilization, hope, labor, and change. Images of the actual plowing suggest viewing that activity as ritual, as renewal, as record, and as orientation. As for the plowman, the most persistent qualities are subsumed in diligence, morality, humility, and competence.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
	INTRODUCTION	1
I.	BIBLICAL ALLUSIONS	16
II.	THE GEORGICS	24
III.	PIERS PLOWMAN	41
IV.	GEOFFREY CHAUCER TO ADAM SMITH	60
V.	HECTOR ST. JOHN CREVECOEUR	83
VI.	THOMAS JEFFERSON	105
VII.	JAMES FENIMORE COOPER	114
VIII.	EMERSON AND THOREAU	132
IX.	ELLEN GLASGOW	150
X.	OLE ROLVAAG	196
XI.	WILLA CATHER	220
XII.	HAMLIN GARLAND	269
XIII.	THE NASHVILLE AGRARIANS	287
	CONCLUSION	295
BIBLIOGRAPHY		305
VITA		315

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

March calendar illustration by Limbourg viii

Speed the Plow" (musical score) 8

The Ploughman 15

Illustration XLIV, Book 2 by Wither 23

Oxen Ploughing 40

The Fall of Icarus 59

Extending the Frontier Northwest Territory 82

Breaking the Prairie 104

Landscape: Ploughing Scene in Suffolk (A Summerland) 113

Erosion No. 2--Mother Earth Laid Bare 131

American Country Life: May Morning 149

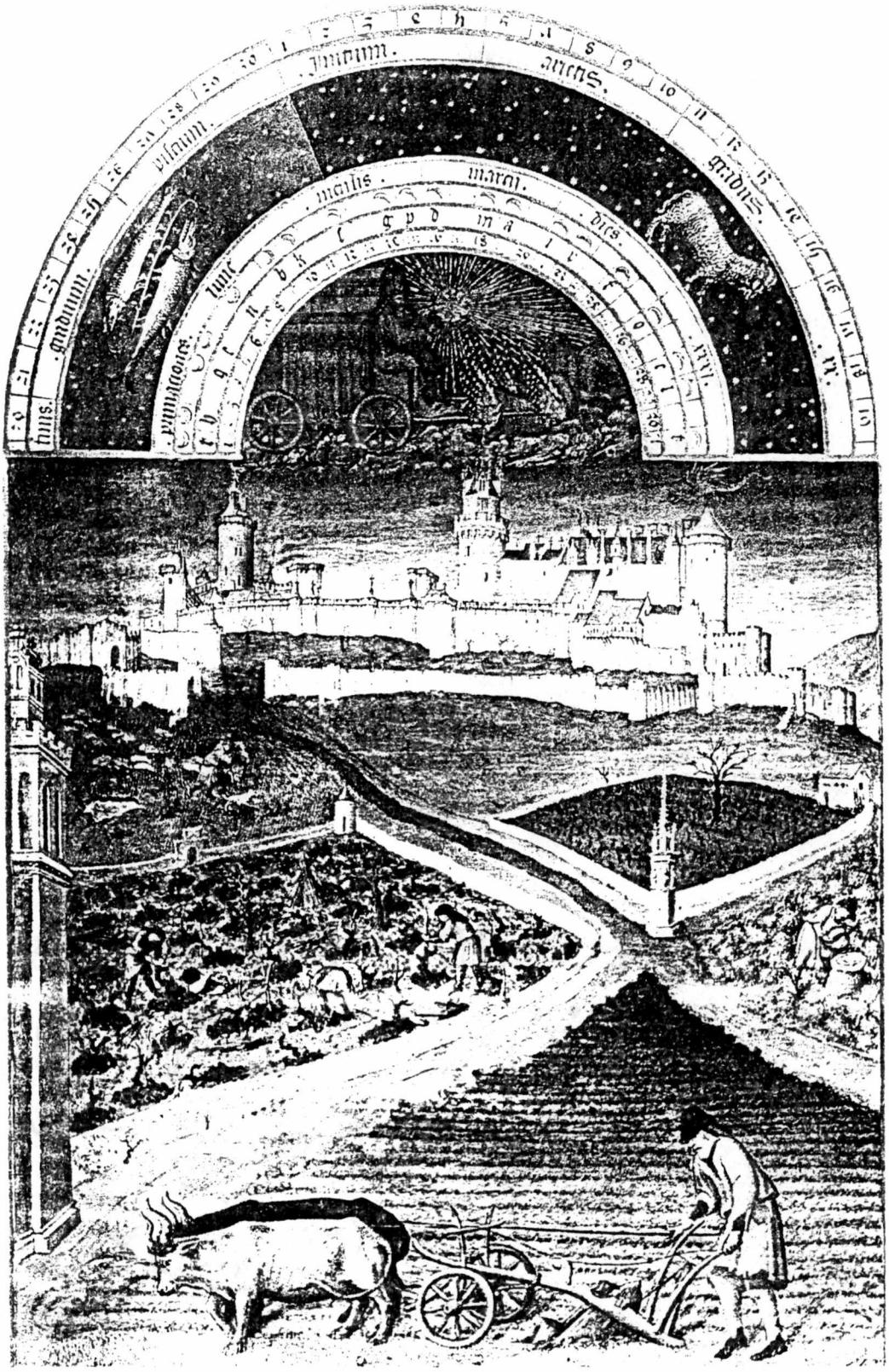
The Hailstorm 195

Untitled (plate 5) by W. T. Benda 219

Planting or *Spring Plowing* 268

The Cornell Farm (detail) 286

Fall Plowing 294



Paul Limbourg and brothers. March calendar illustration in Jean, Duke of Berry's *Les Tres Riches Heures.* c. 1410.

Introduction

> [E]very man has an exceptional respect for tillage, and a feeling that this is the original calling of his race, that he himself is only excused from it by some circumstance which made him delegate it for a time to other hands.
>
> Emerson in "Farming"

The farmer plowing his land is an image deeply etched in human consciousness. Detachment from the land made possible by wealth and industrialization has not diminished the elemental vitality in literature of the agrarian myth embodied in images of plowing. The value of the image does not reside in its full correspondence to twentieth-century actuality, but in its expression of truths about human nature and existence. The primary purpose of this study is to examine literary images related to plowing the land and to try to discern the meanings and ideas associated with those images.

Readers expect to find archetypal images in the experiences communicated to them in literature, and they expect those images to help define their culture and to embody its values. Beyond that, contemplating an object or event in the natural world has always been considered one means of penetrating eternal mysteries. When one sees the plow as a hieroglyphic against the setting sun in *My Antonia,* one recognizes some hint of the ultimate relationship between man's work and the cosmos. Even though the plow seems most fundamentally to be a sacred life image, it suggests truths that are moral, religious, philosophic, social and political as well as physical. The plow is, in fact, not only a common symbol of agriculture but also one of the oldest and most enduring symbols of civilization itself. Images of the plow and the plowman are of a dual, ambiguous nature. The cutting action

of the plow is both killing and life-giving. The plow is an image of hope as well as an image of despair. It brings together realism and mysticism. No doubt the fluidity of its double nature creates the tension which sustains one's interest.

In spite of the ambivalences, the hard labor of tilling the land offers a powerful attraction to the human imagination, from Virgil to the American farmer. That attraction appears to be more fundamental than just an idealized dream of ownership and independence. The pull of the earth underscores man's origin as a creature made of the dust of the earth and his final destiny of resting in the soil. Man's earth-keeping tools--plows, hoes, rakes, harrows and so forth--bond him to the natural world of which he is a part.

The significance of the plowman image seems to be universal, the plowman being a kind of Everyman. Man's original trust from God in the Garden of Eden was to dress the earth and keep it. After expulsion from the Garden, man became a tiller of the soil. The plowing farmer belongs to a post-Edenic vision of life, one that is marred with all manner of difficulties and injustices. Cultivation of the soil, man's first vocation, is thoroughly rooted in his primal needs. The spiritual, sexual and social nature of man's most fundamental relationships is embedded in the image.

Even though only about sixty percent of the farm operators in the United States today fully own the land they cultivate, plowing as a literary convention most frequently focuses on the man or woman who is bonded to the earth through the rituals of working the soil that he or she owns. Since one person or one family can cultivate only a limited amount of land, the emphasis in this study will be on the earth-keeping activities practiced on small farms. The exploitation of farm laborers, which generally accompanies absentee ownership of large tracts of farmland, poses questions that cannot be given primary attention here. The intent

of this study is to investigate the cluster of meanings that have been associated with plowing, not to idolize or disparage the plowman and his work. This should lead to the discovery of how such a simple yet complex activity becomes a gestalt that encompasses fundamental human nature and needs and can mend much of the fragmentation of life. The multifaceted aspects of plowing create a symbol that allows one to explore the meaning of human life in relation not only to the earth but also in relation to the invisible influences on a person's existence.

The plow itself is one image in a cluster of interdependent images that must be considered as a whole. For the plow is a tool, inert of itself and lacking significance until some human being puts it to its intended use in the cultivation of the soil. Therefore the activity of plowing and the person who guides the plow must be included in the image cluster. Furthermore, the plowman is generally dependent upon other animal or mechanical power to pull the plow through the soil. So this aspect must also be considered. Although much that is said of the plow may also apply to other tools for working the soil, it is the plow that has become most emblematic and is the literary convention under investigation. The plow also appears in visual arts through the centuries, but this study must be limited to the incidental acknowledgement of that fact.

The archetypal plowing figure is linked by analogy with various aspects of human experience. And it is directly linked to three of the four elements--earth, air and water. If the plow is made of forged metal, it is associated with fire as well. Plowing reflects unchanging primitive themes in which contemporary jaded palates seek to discover meaning in spite of the fact that the Industrial Revolution has dramatically changed the activities of the modern plowman in the Western world. When the plow or plowmen or plowing appear in literature, the reader experiences some reverberations from those primitive themes with little need for

scholarly explanation. Jung believes that such primordial images or archetypes are the accumulated psychic residue of similar experiences that one's ancestors have had and that the inherited results are *a priori* to individual experience. They are collective rather than the product of an individual mind. It seems that the image of man plowing the soil belongs to what Jung calls the "collective unconscious" and that it is a universal archetype inherent in the imagination of the race. If one acknowledges the archetypal stature of man plowing his land, he or she can more readily see how that primordial image functions in American literature.

Jung clarifies his use of *archetype* in this way:

> The term "archetype" is often misunderstood as meaning certain definite mythological images or motifs. But these are nothing more than conscious representations; it would be absurd to assume that such variable representations could be inherited.
>
> The archetype is a tendency to form such representations of a motif--representations that can vary a great deal in detail without losing their basic pattern. (57-58)

This view of the concept of an archetype allows for various methods of cultivating the soil to be subsumed in the plowing image. So the image may incorporate hoeing and harrowing, for example, as well as actual plowing.

"Every society has its idea of the archetypal paradise or golden age that, it is believed, once existed and will exist again" (Jung 77). In America the literary pastoral paradise merged with the literal image of man tilling his own acres and enjoying the fruit of his labor. The pastoral ideal has enormous power to structure perception of the American farmer's experience--even though it is part fantasy. One reason the institution of farming took on a new life is the symbolic value of the image of the farmer. But these images and symbols cannot be taken as accurate renderings of physical facts.

Jung's definition of *symbol* is also helpful at this point: "What we call a symbol is a term, a name, or even a picture that may be familiar in daily life, yet that possesses specific connotations in addition to its conventional and obvious meaning. It implies something vague, unknown, or hidden from us" (3). Symbols are generally simplifications; their power to stimulate action requires that. Emerson stresses the importance of symbols when he says, "We learn nothing rightly until we learn the symbolical character of life."

A study of plowing images should illuminate some of the inner mystery of life and work. Images tend to touch the depth of one's being before one searches for rational analyses. Allowing the image to "speak" to one puts him or her in contact with the Thing. It is through the shock of recognition at inner levels that readers are best able to take in the doubleness of such elemental images as that of plowing. For plowing is fraught with the ironies of doubleness--as are many, if not most, archetypal images. Images come alive as contraries emerge. Images seldom clothe static ideas, for the human imagination constantly enriches the initial image as it is synthesized with others. One plucks the flower from the crannied wall and knows if he could understand what he holds "root and all," and all in all, he "should know what God and man is." Gaston Bachelard says that images cannot be experienced directly and that our personal past colors those images. For this reason he says, "it is not until late in life that we really revere an image, when we discover that its roots plunge well beyond the history that is fixed in our memories" (33).

The term "image" will be used in this study to refer to the word pictures a writer uses to encapsulate and illuminate his or her thought. The image may be literal or figurative. It may come to the writer through the intellect or the emotions as well as through the senses. One's imagination can "body forth"

images that are beyond the recall of personal experience. Images embody the writer's particular perspective and thus can "unveil for others the sort of world which mirrors itself in his individual glass." Images present analogies or realities that give shape to truths otherwise almost inexpressible. Through the associations the image arouses, multiple meanings are transmitted to the reader. The concern of this study is the content of the associations made with plowing images--not the form of the images. Representations of the plow, for example, vary in form--from the classical *sole-ard* to the modern six-bottom middlebuster--without altering the basic function and meaning of the plow.

Images are a kind of life-giving heartbeat in any literary work. Whether it is the image of the heart in Hawthorne, the sand and rocks in Eliot, or the plow in Cather, the image calls forth story; it engages the imagination and involves the reader in ways that abstract statement cannot do. Images bring the reader into the fiction-making process. They facilitate the sensuous presence of the object in the imagination, thereby unlocking the reservoir of past experiences and awakening the emotions. The record of the race and the secrets of the heart are told in images which gather fresh significance from the pen of an able writer. Images are not only "worth a thousand words," but they are what stay with the reader when the details of a fine story are long forgotten. They frame the story.

The plow has pictured certain ideas since the beginning of human history. Sir James Frazer describes the use of the plow in various ancient rituals. In each case the plow is an image of hope, used in anticipation of a plentiful harvest. Frazer says the funeral rites of Osiris, one of the great Egyptian deities, are detailed in an inscription of the Ptolemaic period:

> The festival opened on the twelfth day of Khoiak with a ceremony of ploughing and sowing. Two black cows were yoked to the plough, which was made of tamarisk wood, while the

> share was of black copper. A boy scattered the seed. One end of the field was sown with barley, the other with spelt, and the middle with flax. During the operation the chief celebrant recited the ritual chapter of "the sowing of the fields." (375)

Though it does not concern a religious ritual with the plow, Frazer finds some indication that

> Dionysus was conceived as a deity of agriculture and the corn. He is spoken of as himself doing the work of a husbandman; he is reported to have been the first to yoke oxen to the plough, which before had been dragged by hand alone; and some people found in this tradition the clue to the bovine shape in which . . . the god was often supposed to present himself to his worshippers. Thus guiding the ploughshare and scattering the seed as he went, Dionysus is said to have eased the labour of the husbandman. (387-88)

Ceres is considered the main Roman corn-goddess, commonly identified in antiquity with Demeter. Demeter is often shown in classical art carrying a scepter, ears of corn or torches, and it is sometimes difficult to distinguish her from Persephone.

In time of drought, women of the Caucasus had a "ploughing the rain" ceremony in which girls yoked themselves to a plow and dragged it into a river. In some parts of India, naked women dragged a plow across a field at night to entice the rain. Frazer also records a Prussian ceremony:

> At the spring ploughing in Prussia, when the ploughmen and sowers returned in the evening from their work in the fields, the farmer's wife and the servants used to splash water over them. The ploughmen and the sowers retorted by seizing every one, throwing them into the pond, and ducking them under the water. . . . By observing this custom they hoped to ensure a due supply of rain for the seed. (342)

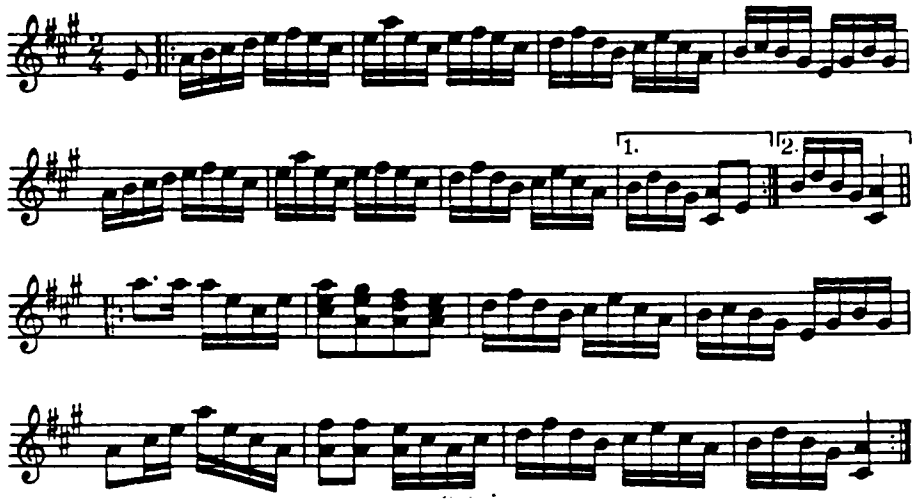
The task of making the crops grow, sometimes given to temporary kings, is one of the functions supposedly discharged by kings in primitive society. In Siam a temporary king is appointed near the end of April. "He goes to a field in the

middle of the city, whither they bring a gilded plough drawn by gaily-decked oxen. After the plough has been anointed and the oxen rubbed with incense, the mock king traces nine furrows with the plow, followed by the aged dames of the palace scattering the first seed of the season" (284). The ceremony is enacted in hope of an abundant harvest.

In one situation cited by Frazer, people have the notion that incorporating a piece of the Yule log in the plow will make the seed thrive (645).

Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable and folk song collector Eloise Linscott both describe an old holiday celebration called Plough Monday. It took place on the first Monday after Twelfth Day, marking the end of Christmas holidays when men return to their plows or daily work. "Speed the plough" is the name of the light-hearted dance from this ancient ritual. No source for the tune is known. (The tune given here is from Linscott. It has been recorded by Willie Woodward, Bristol, New Hampshire.)

Speed the Plow



Plough Monday is said to be part of a festival honoring agriculture when prayers for a good harvest were made to the household gods. Farm laborers drew a plow from door to door to solicit "plough-money" to spend in a frolic. The plow was called the White Plow or the Fond Plow; *White* because the mummers dressed in white; *Fond* because the procession was fond or foolish, not serious. "[B]read and cheese were set into the plough, and like offering scattered to the fields for the crows" (Linscott 111). The first offering was for a blessing on the harvest and the other, to appease the elements.

Even the constellation Ursa Major was a reminder of the plow to ancient people. Popular names for seven of the bright stars in the constellation were "Charles' Wain" and "The Plough." The seven stars form a rough outline of something like a wheelbarrow or wagon or plow (or dipper). The Romans sometimes called the seven stars Septentriones (the seven plow-oxen).

Since plowing images appear early in the history of Western literature, looking briefly at some early representative works will illuminate more clearly the function of the image in the hands of American writers. From this background survey should emerge a range of associations with plowing which the American writers develop according to their individual insight and talent. Certain relationships are enlarged or stressed in American fiction, but the plow image itself is relatively unaffected by urbanization and technology.

Three tests form the criteria for selecting works to be included in this study: first, the plow-related images play a significant role in creating the overall meaning of the work; second, the work has been given wide enough critical acceptance to be influential in shaping attitudes toward cultivating the land; and third, the works cover a broad time frame, providing an opportunity to detect change in the meaning of the images.

It seems appropriate to follow the lead of those medieval historians who always begin with creation. Consideration will be given first to allusions of plowing in the Bible and then in Virgil's *Georgics*. The long-term influence of both the Bible and the *Georgics* has been extensive in imaging country life, and that influence has been felt on philosophic, moral, and religious levels. During the Middle Ages numerous religious writings presented husbandry as allegorical to the tending of the Christian soul. These were sometimes called "spiritual Georgics" and provided analogies and illustrations for the clergymen of that time. The eighteenth century was a heyday of popularity for the *Georgics* in English, ushered in by Dryden's translation in heroic couplets in 1697. Descriptive poetry on georgic subjects became the vogue, exemplified in James Thomson's *The Seasons*. This was also the era of Gainsborough's landscape painting and of music called *The Seasons* by Haydn. Works with the same title were composed by Vivaldi and Beethoven.

The English work that will be considered in this paper as representative of medieval use of the plowman image is William Langland's *Piers Plowman*. The poem will be given somewhat extensive treatment because so much of the common religious thought of the Middle Ages that relates to plowing appears there. Following this will be an abbreviated survey from Chaucer to Adam Smith of selected English writers whose comments more fully refine and shape the significance of the plow image.

Then across the Atlantic, the work of Crevecoeur, Jefferson and others who transplanted the plowman image to American soil will be considered. Cooper is the first major American novelist to be included. He is concerned with the use of the land, but his use of the plowman image itself is limited and its full range of ambiguity is never really resolved. Following Cooper is a chapter dealing with

Emerson's and Thoreau's ideas of mankind's kinship with nature. The heart of the study comes with consideration of four American novelists whose works reflect significant involvement with the meanings of the plow--Ellen Glasgow, Willa Cather, Ole Rolvaag and Hamlin Garland. Other less-known American writers are not included though some have used plowing images with traditional associations that confirm meanings given to the plowman over the centuries. The Nashville Agrarians will discussed because they represent a twentieth-century attempt to champion values commonly associated with farming and plowing imagery. This study must necessarily be selective and not exhaustive.

The chapters on Glasgow, Cather, Rolvaag and Garland do not follow chronologically their dates of birth nor the publication dates of their major land novels, for doing so would put Garland first, followed by Cather, Glasgow and finally Rolvaag. Glasgow, Rolvaag and Cather were born within three years of each other, and their best-known land novels were all published within a nine-year period. Glasgow, writing of her native Virginia in the aftermath of the Civil War, is the only one not concerned with the frontier. Since the chronological sequence is broken by my arbitrarily placing her first, it seemed natural to deal next with the two whose works demonstrate a marked love for the land--Rolvaag and Cather--and place Garland last in spite of his earlier dates. Rolvaag and Cather express a very different mood and outlook from Garland's. Their realism is shaped more by psychological concerns than by Garland's sociological ones. For a couple of decades following the panic of 1873, writers like Garland tended to explore a kind of environmental determinism. His early fiction strikes a note of tragedy on the frontier. In order to treat Glasgow first, to keep Rolvaag and Cather together, and to place Garland's more tragic vision last, both Glasgow and Garland are out of strict chronological sequence.

Modern studies related to the pastoral and georgic traditions have enriched the understanding contemporary readers have of mankind's relationship to the earth. Two works are of particular interest as background to this study. One is Anthony Low's *The Georgic Revolution* (1985) in which Low contrasts the georgic and pastoral viewpoints and traces the fate of the georgic ethic in England during the Renaissance. The other is Annette Kolodny's *The Lay of the Land* (1975). Kolodny illustrates "the repetition of the land-as-woman symbolization" in American literature, compiling fresh evidence of the usefulness of a metaphor which dates back to classical and biblical times. She shows how man's experiences with the earth are expressed through images which detail the elements of that experience, "including eroticism, penetration, raping, embrace, enclosure, and nurture" (150). Kolodny, therefore, views the plow as a phallic image engaged in penetrating the female earth. Her well-supported thesis should enrich a reader's experience with land-related metaphors, but it should not limit one's conceptual relationship to the land to sexuality, especially to the selfish, ravaging expression of sexuality. It is true, of course, that the vocabulary of the earth is essentially feminine: "mother earth," "virgin land," "rape of the landscape," and so forth. But Kolodny's sexual framework seems to provide only a limited recognition of the plowman's gentle care of the land and his pleasure in it and almost no recognition of the land inspiring religious and philosophical meditation even though these aspects would also fit her framework. Since plowing has been used as a metaphor for sexual activity for so long, I will not attempt to add to this interpretation. My interest is centered in the moral and ethical and philosophical values and ideas that are also inherent in plowing images. Why, for instance, does the image of the plowman seem to be useful to writers as some kind

of ethical norm? Is it possible to discover why writers portray the plowman as humble and hopeful and diligent in his labor?

The *Oxford English Dictionary* indicates that *plough* has been the accepted spelling in England since 1700 and that *plow* is the usual American spelling. The first signification in the *O.E.D.* for *plough* is: "An agricultural implement, used to prepare the soil for sowing or planting, by cutting furrows in it, and turning it up, so as to expose a fresh surface to the action of the air. Often used as the symbol of agriculture, especially in such expressions as *to be at the plow, to follow* or *hold the plough*." Two common figurative applications are given: "(a) as the instrument or means of earning one's livelihood (*obs.*); (b) in reference to its breaking up hard ground." Plowing may also be used figuratively of a ship or a swimming animal that cleaves the surface of the water. Another figurative transfer is to *furrow* (e.g., the face) with wrinkles. Several common figurative expressions using the plow are cited. One is *"To put one's hand to the plough,"* meaning "to undertake a task; to enter upon a course of life or conduct." Another common expression is *"To put the plough before the oxen*, to reverse the natural or proper order." Still another is to refer to land as being *"under the plough*, in cultivation." "Plough" is also used as slang for the rejection of a candidate in examination (as for a bar exam).

Our English word *agriculture* is derived from the Latin *agricultura*, "tillage of the land" or literally "field culture." The word *culture* in the *O.E.D.* reflects the fact that some of the oldest usage is associated with worship or "reverential homage." Hence there is an etymological tie even in the word *agriculture* that relates land cultivation to paying homage to deity. The second meaning given for *culture* is "the action or practice of cultivating the soil; tillage, husbandry; cultivation." By figurative extension, culture is used of the development of mind, faculties and manners or the refinement of these by

education and training. Hence readers may infer that tilling the earth involves a process in some ways analogous to--if not essential to--the development of man's highest abilities. *Culture* is also listed as an obsolete form of *coulter*, pointing directly back to the plow. The word *cultivation*, used literally for the care of the land to facilitate the raising of crops, is also used by figurative extension to include the improvement of one's abilities. This extension associates cultivation, therefore, with civilization. To civilize, according to the *O.E.D.*, is "To make civil; to bring out of a state of barbarism, to instruct in the arts of life, and thus elevate in the scale of humanity." In the development of the American West, the extent of "civilization" was generally said to end at the frontier of cultivated land.

The Latin *cultura* refers to the husbandman but also in general to a friend, supporter or worshipper. The term *husbandman* refers to the man who cultivates the soil. The second and third meanings in the *O.E.D.* are also illuminating: the husbandman is the head of a household or a married man, and he is a thrifty and prudent economist.

Reminders of these etymological associations will emerge as images of the plow and plowing and plowmen are considered in the literature under discussion.



Edward Calvert (1789-1883). *The Ploughman*. Victoria and Albert Museum.

Chapter 1

Biblical Allusions

> The sacred Plow
> Employ'd the Kings and Fathers of Mankind,
> In ancient Times. And Some, with whom compar'd
> You're but the Beings of a Summer's Day,
> Have held the Scale of Justice, shook the Launce
> Of mighty War, then with descending Hand,
> Unus'd to little Delicacies, seiz'd
> The Plow, and greatly independent liv'd.
> Ye generous Britons, cultivate the Plow!
> James Thomson in "Spring" from *The Seasons* (1.57-65)

Man's first tasks assigned in the Garden of Eden were those of a farmer or husbandman. The Genesis record suggests the primacy of tilling the soil in the statement that before man was created, "there was not a man to till the ground" (Genesis 2.5).[1] Here at the fountainhead of human history is the biblical account that God "created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them" (1.27). And to Adam and Eve and their posterity was given dominion over all the earth. This "image" and "likeness" of God has generally been understood to involve man's moral nature and the tri-part unity of body, soul, and spirit. Assuming mankind's moral nature reflects his likeness to God, it follows that if man follows the injunctions given by his creator, his obedience will make him more godlike. This idea makes the "curse" of labor, to which man is assigned after the Fall, not a wholly dismal activity. In fact, there is elevating strength in fulfilling the mandate to care for the earth.

---

[1] Biblical references are from the King James Version.

After Adam and Eve were created, "The Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it" (2.15). The ease of man's initial harmony with the earth ended with the covenant God made with Adam after the disobedience of Adam and Eve: "Therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken" (3.23). But the cultivation of the earth was made to be a difficult task:

> [C]ursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return into the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return. (3.17-19)

Mankind faced the task of toiling for his food from the cursed ground. And his kinship with the soil was firmly established. He was formed of the very dust, and when life left his earthly body, it would eventually return to the soil. Meanwhile earth-keeping was his special trust from the creator. From the very beginning of time, this trust established a metaphysical dimension in man's relationship to the earth.

When Adam's offspring, Cain and Abel, were of age to make offerings to the Lord, Cain is recognized as "a tiller of the ground" (4.2). His unacceptable sacrifice of the fruit of the ground led to his murdering Abel and becoming "a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth." The first man born to the life of a plowman lost his temper, committed murder, and became an outcast.

Biblical accounts establish the patterns of livelihood for the Hebrews. They lived mainly by agriculture and animal husbandry. Because these activities were thoroughly familiar to the Hebrews, the biblical allusions to tilling the soil--both literal and figurative--are to be expected and would have been easily understood. Agricultural imagery lends itself to multiple spiritual applications. Scriptural

images of husbandry paved the way for biblical interpreters to extend the metaphoric possibilities inherent in tilling the soil.

The most familiar biblical plow image is the metaphor of swords being beaten into plowshares, war giving way to peace. Its strength derives in part from the profound contrast between war and peace. It is a life-death image. In times of peace the orderliness and prosperity of agriculture is possible, but war disrupts the natural cycles of plowing and harvest, tears men from their settled lives, and thrusts them into a climate of hatred and fear. In war, plowmen must become soldiers. Those who normally nurture life become killers. The tools a man wields indicate his role in relation to the earth and to his fellowmen. The fact that either role is possible emphasizes mankind's precarious state.

In addition to these reasons that are grounded in man's moral nature, the fact that the image is stated three times in the Scriptures heightens the reader's awareness of its significance. The first mention is Isaiah 2.4: "[A]nd they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." The Isaiah statement is quoted verbatim in Micah 4.3 with this addition in verse 4: "But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid." The image is reversed for a different occasion in Joel 3.10: "Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruninghooks into spears."

In the King James translation of the Bible, there are 21 additional references to the plow in some form of the word. This does not include references in which some form of the word *digging* or *tilling* or *working* is used in the translation. Of these 21 references, 19 are in the Old Testament. At least 12 are primarily metaphoric. The Hebrew word *(charash),* which is the primary root for most occurrences of a form of *plow* in English, carries the meaning of "to scratch"

or, by implication, "to engrave." In one case a different Hebrew word *(niyr)* is translated as *plowing* (Proverbs 21.4). This word carries the idea of the gleam of a fresh furrow; Hebrew cognates suggest a lamp or light.

What associations or ideas are inherent in these biblical passages that can help to establish the early significance of the plow or the plowman in literature?

One reference is a command that suggests physical orderliness and justice: "Thou shalt not plow with an ox and an ass together" (Deuteronomy 22.10). A statement in I Samuel 14.14 confirms that idea of orderliness and implies reasonableness in expectations by referring to a half acre of land "which a yoke of oxen might plow." Proverbs 20.4 forecasts poverty for "The sluggard [who] will not plow by reason of the cold." Plowing implies honest work and diligence in the face of discomfort. Another indication of the labor associated with the plow and of the humble position of the plowman is found in Luke 17.7. In this case when a servant doing the plowing comes in from the field, he has not finished his labor but must then prepare food for the master before he himself can eat.

Jeremiah 14.4 suggests the vulnerability of the plowman and his identification with the land: "Because the ground is chapt, for there was no rain in the earth, the plowmen were ashamed, they covered their heads." The Hebrew word translated "ashamed" can also mean disappointed or confounded. The idea that plowing pictures peace and normality is reinforced in I Kings 19.19 and Job 1.14-15. While men were plowing, sudden change came upon the plowmen. In one case, war; in the other, a change of occupation. Two other literal references are prophetic. The activity of the plowmen indicates a future time of prosperity (Isaiah 61.5 and Amos 9.3). The association of peace, normality, and prosperity with plowing is strong and builds on the postlapsarian assumption of toil for all mankind.

The plow is used twice metaphorically to picture destruction when a city "shall be plowed as a field" (Jeremiah 26.18 and Micah 3.12). A different meaning emerges from Luke 9.62: "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of God." Clearly putting one's hand to the plow involves commitment, in fact, a sacred commitment. Just as the plowman must look ahead to his goal in order to plow an acceptably straight furrow, so the person who is fit for the Kingdom must look ahead with stronger desires for spiritual attainments than for the temporal things he or she leaves behind.

Another strong biblical association with plowing is hope. "[H]e that ploweth should plow in hope" (I Corinthians 9.10). The context relates this hope to spiritual reward, analogous to the physical reward expected from plowing the land. The plowing here pictures the preaching of the Word of God--a metaphor that was developed in the Scriptures and much used through the Middle Ages and even during the Renaissance.

In Judges 14.18 Samson says, "If ye had not plowed with my heifer, ye had not found out my riddle." The plowing here is generally thought to refer to sexual exploits and, by association, to the discovery or unearthing of secrets. So the plow as a phallic symbol dates back to Old Testament writings. Samson's enemies had discovered the source of his strength from his wife. In another prophetic passage, the work of the plow is used in a rhetorical question: "Doth the plowman plow all day to sow? doth he open and break the clods of his ground?" (Isaiah 28.29). Both the action of opening and the action of breaking are implicit in the plowing image.

A different metaphoric use is found in Psalm 129.3: "The plowers plowed upon my back: they made long their furrows." The context helps illuminate the metaphor which seems to refer to some sort of troubling or harassment the speaker has suffered from his enemies. Yet another rhetorical question is asked

in Amos 6.12: "[W]ill one plow there [upon the rock] with oxen?" Just as it is impossible for the plow to change the face of the rock, there are natural limitations in what can be accomplished by plowing. The purpose of plowing cannot be realized upon the rock. The plowman must exercise good judgment in selecting surfaces suitable for plowing.

The primary prophetic meaning of Hosea 10.11 concerns a future time of peace and prosperity for the Hebrews: "I will make Ephraim to ride; Judah shall plow, and Jacob shall break his clods." When "Judah shall plow," normal activities will be resumed and to each group tasks will be assigned according to some sort of orderly arrangement which includes differences in status.

The other references to the plowing image all use plowing to represent one's work or the activity to which one gives himself. In some references the activity is evil. For instance, "Even as I have seen, they that plow iniquity and sow wickedness reap the same" (Job 4.8). See also Proverbs 21.4 and Hosea 10.12-13. The morality of any action is bound up with such things as motive and justice, so this does not necessarily associate all plowing with evil. One's plowing--or the work to which one gives oneself--may be for good or for evil. This can be understood from earlier references as well as from the way the image of plowing was used by clergy during the Middle Ages. The discussion of *Piers Plowman* will deal with this more fully.

Certain fundamental ideas associated with these plowing images in the Scriptures help to establish plowing as an archetypal image. Foremost is a concept of the peace which is needed in order to engage in life-sustaining activities. Other strong associations include normality, hope, prosperity, commitment, diligent labor, order, the opening/breaking process, and an undergirding spiritual affinity between the plowman and the giver of life.

In addition to using literal references to the plow or to plowing, the Scriptures frequently personify the earth. Thinking of the earth and natural phenomena in terms of personhood heightens mankind's feeling of kinship with the earth. For example, the hills are said to rejoice at rain and "The pastures are clothed with flocks; the valleys also are covered over with corn; they shout for joy, they also sing" (Psalm 65.12-13). Frequent references are made to "the face of the earth" (e.g., Genesis 8.9). Sometimes the earth is personified as man's teacher: "Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard" (Psalm 19.2-3). A similar idea is expressed in Job 12.8: "Speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee." Jeremiah 33.25 refers to God's covenant with day and night. These instances of humanizing nature and of looking to nature as teacher indicate mankind's strong natural attachment to the earth even apart from the idea of working the land. The personified aspects of the natural world both express and extend man's bonding to the earth. They reflect man's deep feeling for nature and facilitate his relationship to the land. The extensive personification of earth gives fuller significance to the plow as a phallic symbol as well as to all of man's earth-related activities.

In a poetic passage in Hosea 2.21-22, not only is personification used, but the metaphor reflects something of the web of life: "I [God] will hear the heaven, and they shall hear the earth; And the earth shall hear the corn, and the wine, and the oil." Personification affirms our kinship with both the natural and the cosmic world. The more closely one's work is identified with the soil, the more aware a person should be of that kinship which bonds him to the earth.

The Husbandman, *doth ſow the Seeds* ;
And, then, on Hope, *till* Harveſt, *feeds.*



THe painfull *Husbandman*, with ſweaty browes,
Conſumes in labour many a weary day:
To breake the ſtubborne earth, he *digs* and *ploughes*,

George Wither. Illustration XLIV, Book 2. In *A Collection of Emblems, Ancient and Moderne.* 1635.

Chapter 2

The Georgics

Thou that singest wheat and woodland,
  Tilth and vineyard, hive and horse and herd;
All the charm of all the Muses
  Often flowering in a lonely word.
    Tennyson in "To Virgil," stanza 3

The literature of the Western world probably owes its greatest debt to Virgil (70-19 B.C.). In the progression of his poetic career--from pastoral *Eclogues* to the *Georgics* and finally to the epic *Aeneid*--early commentators found a paradigm for aspiring poets. The fact that Virgil himself was conscious of the pastoral-georgic-epic movement is confirmed by a discarded introduction to the *Aeneid* which may be translated: "I am he who once tuned my song on a tender reed; then, leaving the woods, I forced the nearby fields to obey the ever-greedy tiller of the soil, a work pleasing to farmers; but now for the roughness of Mars" (Low 3). Several tri-part views of life in the Middle Ages were based in part on this "wheel of Virgil." Of greatest importance is the fact that these three modes of poetry encompass most human actions: pastoral deals with leisure, georgic with work, and the epic with war. Furthermore, the three modes conform to the three styles: low, middle, and high. They also deal specifically with three occupations: shepherd, farmer, and soldier--each representing a different social class. The settings are different too: pasture, field, and castle (Low 4). The three works were also treated as symbolic of mankind's developmental stages--pastoral, agricultural, martial--and his modes of life: contemplative, sensual, and active (Wilkinson 274). The parting words of

Gallus in Virgil's last *Eclogue* are *"omnia vincit Amor."* In the *Georgics* Virgil writes *"labor omnia vincit."* And it is war that conquers in the *Aeneid.*

Virgil's *Georgics* paints what is perhaps the most beautiful and philosophic picture of the plowman's bonding to the earth in all of literature, especially as that bonding is found in Book 1. In the words of Michael Putnam, "[to] expound agrarianism is, for Virgil, to ponder some of the major recurrent themes in literature" (7). Emerging from the image of the farmer at work are principles for the conduct of life that are highly moral and spiritual. The moral/spiritual values are inseparable from the total character and behavior of the plowman. They determine his social, political, and economic values as well. In the metaphoric cloak of soils, plants, livestock, and bees, readers discover their own mental attitudes. Virgil's plowman is a whole, unfragmented person. And though that picture is sometimes idealized, it is fundamentally realistic and replete with the ironies and paradoxes that are inherent in all vital images.

Virgil elevates the farmer's real world of plow and clod into a universal world view. We glimpse through the precepts on farming a larger understanding of man's bonding to the earth and his place in the universe. The poem explores the relationship of the world of man to the world of nature. In it the plowman is engaged in heroic activity, a kind of militant warfare that is patiently carried on in the background of world affairs. It is a poem about the morality and necessity and dignity of work. It is about life and death and rebirth. And it is about plowing and farming as the foundation of national greatness, for plowing is a civilizing activity in the poem.

To move from the scattered allusions to plowing in the Bible to the four books of Virgil's *Georgics* is to leave sketchy references and find the plowman-farmer

image in the foreground as representative man. In Virgil the plowing and other farm chores are given dignity and placed in a strong ethical and moral context. In the *Eclogues* it is poetry that is man's fulfillment, and through poetry nature is most fully realized. But in the *Georgics*, Virgil proclaims a harmony with nature to be achieved through work and religious observance, based on faith in the morality of the universe. Book 1 deals with field crops and is of primary interest for this investigation of the plow. Book 2 concerns the culture of trees and vines and concludes with Virgil's well-known eulogy of country life. Book 3 focuses on animal husbandry and Book 4, on bee culture.

As a classical poet, Virgil would assume that appearances are rooted in reality. In his search to apprehend the inner secrets of things or their transcendence, he does not lose his attentive awareness of the visual, tangible realities. The poem describes farm life but is linked closely to a particular quality of life and soul. Precepts related to agriculture and husbandry may have been Virgil's ostensible subject, but they are certainly not designed to provide technical or complete instruction. Few plowmen would have been readers of Virgil, and more serviceable prose manuals were readily available, including Varro's *De Re Rustica*, written for his wife who was to manage the farm he had given her. Seneca puts the poem in perspective when he said Virgil did not intend to instruct farmers, but to delight his readers (cited in Intro. to *Georgics* 11). In the dedicatory preface of his translation of the *Georgics*, Dryden calls this "The best poem of the best poet."

For a century before the *Georgics* was written, the Roman world had been torn by civil and foreign wars that depleted the country's resources and led to nagging political, social, and economic problems. Virgil saw the devastating

effects of these problems on farming and on rural life in general. The Empire declined as the rural inhabitants became demoralized and abandoned their plows to seek the culture of schools and entertainment in the cities. Music and art, politics and leisure were to be found in the city, not the countryside. Virgil's vision of the necessity of a land-based culture for a stable society was one strong impetus for the *Georgics*. For him desertion of the countryside was an insurmountable obstacle to the revitalization of Italy. At the heart of the problem of the abandonment of rural life, Virgil saw that the plow did not have the contemporary respect it deserved: "No due honour attends the plough" (1.507).[1] The poem is an attempt to vindicate the plowman's way of life and to affirm the values associated with it. The very fact that Virgil chose to treat the ordinary tasks of the plowman in heroic hexameters endows those activities with dignity. Agricultural materials are also exalted by Virgil's incorporation of myth.

Because the plow had lost respect, two subsequent evils devasted Italy: "The fields, bereft of tillers, are all unkempt, / And in the forge the pruning-hook / Is made a straight hard sword" (1.508-510). Failure to honor the plow and the way of life it represented led to abandoning the work of orderly, productive fields and ultimately to the devastation of war. A life-sustaining image gives way to a death-dealing image. So, whether from Virgil's own love of the land or as a service to his country, he evokes a picture of rural Italian life that recalls national tradition and emphasizes the virtues of a land-based philosophy of life. Pliny once observed that corn was never so plentiful in Rome as when the same men tilled the land that ruled the commonwealth (cited in Flavel 6). John Flavel cites the historians who record the fact that Altitius Serarious was planting corn in his field "when Q.

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[1] Quotations from the *Georgics* are Wilkinson's translation.

Cincinnatus came to him bare-headed with letters from the senate, signifying, that he was chosen to the dictatorship" (15). According to tradition Cincinnatus was appointed dictator in 458 B.C. but returned to his plow as soon as he had rescued the Roman army from Aequians.

Because the ancients thought of matter as the opposite of spirit or God, they tended to regard physical work as degrading. Virgil's perspective is that nature needs man to bring it to fulfillment. Therefore God and man are partners in plowing, and the divine touches men's lives through matter, as well as through contemplation. Physical work with material things should not then be a cause of spiritual degradation but a means of achieving harmony with divine order. One must work in harmony with the seasons and the weather to nourish life in the soil, just as one does metaphorically to nourish life in the soul. The theme of man's toil, aptly imaged in the plow, is most strongly stressed in Book I. These lines follow the invocation and set the tone of orderly, diligent plowing:

> In early spring, when the ice on the snowy mountains
> Melts and the west wind loosens and crumbles the clods,
> Then it's high time for my bull at the deep-driven plough
> To groan, and the share to gleam with the furrow's
> polishing. (1.43-46)

The plowed field marks the farmer's proving ground. But to become the skillful farmer envisioned by Virgil, other tasks will accompany the actual plowing. This investigation of Virgil's use of the plow encompasses some of those related activities as well.

To try to change the tarnished image of the plow, the plow without "due honor," Virgil does not diminish the labor associated with it. Instead, he recognizes the difficult, capricious and degenerate aspects of nature with which the plowman-farmer must cope. And he attempts to "justify the ways of God to

man" by proposing that "The Father himself / willed that the path of tillage be not smooth" (1.121-22). This is the second strong line of reasoning in his attempt to raise the dignity of laboring at the plow. First was the fact that the plowman-farmer labors in spiritual collaboration with God through nature. Second, it appears that the labor and difficulties of tilling the earth are willed by Jove for the explicit purpose of developing man's potential, to make him most fully a human being imaging divinity. Virgil maintains that out of benevolence, Jove prescribed toil for man, particularly the toil of the farmer. There is, however, some temporal compensation for man's hard work in the variety of experiences gained from his technical progress. These ideas are expanded as the "Jupiter theodicy" in 1.119-46). Here plowing is linked with divine providence and with civilization itself.

Caring for the land actually sharpens "the wits of mortals." With commitment and responsibility, mankind becomes more able; caring is enabling. This appears to presume one can care significantly only for land that he owns. Virgil quotes the proverb, "Praise large estates but cultivate a small one" (2.412). Man learns skills through "practice and taking thought" (1.133). To be able to gain knowledge of the causes of things is one benefit of plowing the land (2.490). Both the physical and mental must be brought into play if the plowman "should seek from furrows / The blade of corn" (1.134-35). In the end it is need ("pinching poverty") and "relentless toil" that master everything. The path leads through toil to mastery. And that mastery appears to be over oneself as much as it is over one's environment. This is underscored in the repeated rhetorical question, "What of him?" which is sung in praise of the diligent artisan-farmer. As one critic puts it, "Man's inner nature has a kinship with the external landscape into which he has been placed by circumstances. Each has an element of wildness to it that

must ultimately suffer control or disintegrate into a primitivism of mien or behavior" (Putnam 13).

The plow then becomes an instrument for teaching mankind lessons that are essentially moral and spiritual. It is through toil with material objects and in caring for them that he learns to distinguish right from wrong and to develop his intelligence and imagination. Therefore, as man learns physical lessons--the necessity for nurturing young plants, for example--he matures morally and spiritually. And when that is true, he becomes more responsible socially, politically, and economically. The only path to this development is the way of toil, especially stressed in Books 1 and 3.

In spite of the farmer's unrelenting toil, joy can be found in the labor itself. This is more evident in Virgil in the care of trees and vines than in the field crops of Book 1. In 2.38-40 one reads: "O what joy to plant with vines / All Ismarus and clothe the great Taburnus / With olives!" (2.38-40). And to the farmers also belong the pleasures of the hearth and times of leisure to enjoy the natural world:

> Yet peace they have and a life of innocence.
> Rich in variety; they have for leisure
> Their ample acres, caverns, living lakes,
> Cool Tempes; cattle low, and sleep is soft
> Under a tree. (2.467-71)

These essential associations that give meaning to the toil of Virgil's plowman echo the Genesis concept of a benevolent God who determined that man should sweat for his food and who cursed the ground *for Adam's sake*. Virgil writes:

> But soon the cornfields
> Themselves became a labour: blighting mildew
> Devoured the haulm; slothfully in the ploughland
> The thistle reared its prickles. (1.150-53)

The spirit in which the ploughman labors is both that of military master and lover. There is a special kind of stewardship at work in both images. The tools with which the farmer accomplishes his tasks are sometimes pictured in the *Georgics* in military metaphor: "Now for the weapons the hardy farmer needs, / Essential for the sowing and raising of crops" (1.161). And after he has "first upheaved the surface / In ridges, [he] breaks them down with angled ploughshare, / And disciplines the acres he commands" (1.97-99). In Book 2 one reads, "Yet still you must harass the earth and stir the dust" (2.419). "[A]ll must be / Forced into furrows, tamed at any cost" (2.61-62). Even the orchard is described as if in military formation (2.278-90). The use of military metaphor is especially intriguing and paradoxical because the idea of peace is so strongly associated with the plow. Regret is expressed at the end of Book 1 that the pruning-hook "Is made a straight hard sword" (510). Nonetheless, the struggle to win food from the soil is presented in terms of warfare and discipline and mastery.

In contrast to the military master, the plowman-farmer feels deeply about the objects of his toil, much as a lover would. One of the marks of compassion for the land and its creatures is Virgil's attribution of human feelings and characteristics to nature. This respect for life and for the things that sustain life underscores the plowman's manhood and sets his work apart from mechanical actions. Fields have to be disciplined, but their crops can lift a person's spirits. Clods are sometimes sluggish, and bracken are hated by the curving plow. Vines can learn to scorn the wind; rivers feel boats on their backs; the sun feels pity and hides its head. The fieldmouse "[w]ill set up house and build his granaries"; the ant fears a lean old age. In Virgil's description of the ox that dies of the plague in harness, he imagines the pleasure the ox must have enjoyed in life and imagines

the grief of his fellow ox (3.515-30). Even the amusing incident of the heifer and her two lovesick bulls is told in human terms (3.219-41). The description of caring for young vines also demonstrates the husbandman's respect for growing things:

> When they are just beginning to grow up,
> Their leaves still fresh, be gentle to the young;
> And when the sprig is racing merrily
> Unbridled through the air do not as yet
> Submit it to cold steel, but cull the leaves
> Selectively, using your fingernails. (2.362-67)

The face of nature may wear the guise of either friend or foe in the *Georgics*. The ambivalent aspects of nature are presented without attempt to reconcile them. "The moral is / That every tree needs labour, all must be / Forced into furrows, tamed at any cost" (2.63-65). The helpfulness of nature to man is seen more in Book 2 and 4 than in Book 1. It is especially stressed in the eulogy of country life which is the climax of Book 2: "the earth herself, / Most fair in dealing, freely lavishes / An easy livelihood" (2.460-62). Earlier passages also suggest an almost Edenic nature, as in 2.330-31: "The nurturing earth is pregnant; warmed by breezes / Of Zephyrus the fields unloose their bosoms." See also 4.51-66.

Contrasts are an acknowledged feature of the *Georgics* and support the ambivalences inherent in the plowman image. In the eulogy three main contrasts are developed. The luxury of the city is contrasted with the simple pleasures and sufficiency of the country as has already been noted in 2.467-71. Rational investigation is contrasted with knowing the gods of the countryside (2.494-96). And worldly ambition is contrasted with the innocent country activities (2.513-40). There is less stress on the toil of the laborer and the struggle with nature's dark side in Book 2 although labor seems to be presumed (2.61-62). The poet refers to "a breed of youth inured to labour / And undemanding" (2.471-72). This passage on labor comes in Book 2:

> [E]very year
> Three times or four the soil must be reopened,
> Clods broken everlastingly with the back
> Of two-pronged hoes, and the whole plantation freed
> Of leaves. The farmer's labour is a treadmill:
> All round the year he treads in his own tracks. (2.398-403)

But labor does not belong to man alone. The farmer labors at the plow, but so does the beast that draws the plow; "the straining oxen" work in cooperation with the plowman to accomplish the cultivation. The plowman is to respect the life of his animal helpers. In fact, the primal sin that Virgil presents is committed by that "impious age / Of men" who feasted on the slaughtered plow oxen (2.536-37). The ultimate wrong was to make plowing impossible. Book 3 pictures the sad state of affairs when oxen are scarce, and "It was left for men to scratch the earth with mattocks, / Scrape with their nails for planting, and pull waggons / Creaking o'er hill and dale with straining shoulders (3.535-37). Unlike the animals, man is capable of transcending his environment and of dealing with disaster. In the instructions for rearing oxen, the husbandman is to decide which should be set aside for breeding, which for sacrifice, which for food, and which for "breaking clods and cleaving shaggy ploughland" (3.158-162). Repeatedly, we see the plowman as observant and therefore knowledgeable. The plow oxen must "begin their discipline / While still their spirits are at the docile age" (3.164-65). In his labor at the plow this might also apply to the plowman himself. The plow is discipline for both man and beast.

Planning and orderliness are everywhere apparent in the *Georgics*. There seems to be a moral lesson in the necessity of order. The stars obey their laws and the winds, their seasons. Man too must accept the burden of necessities that drive him--"pinching poverty," for example. Conformity to the order of the world, to one's place in the world, is incumbent upon the one who plows the land in

harmony with the warmth of spring. In the Prologue Virgil announces that one of the themes of his song is "under which star / To turn the soil," an acknowledgement of a pre-established order, a time-frame to which plowing must conform. Order is a prerequisite for fecundity. Many reminders of the plowman's orderly planning are evident in the poem. There is for everything its own time and season (1.256, ff.). Certain dangers to crops are seasonal (1.311-34). The final book on bee culture presents the epitome of order in the life of the bees.

Plowing is always a forward-looking activity that engages the imagination. The plow itself points forward. One plows in order to sow the crop (1.210, ff.). And "The lively husbandman projects his thoughts / Into the coming year" (2.405-06). When Virgil praises "the rough new land below" that "[b]egins to gleam in the wake of the driven plough" (2.211-12), he is commending the farmer for planning ahead, clearing the land of timber, and opening it up to field crops. Thinking and planning take time, and plowing is slow work. One must plow and sow and cultivate and wait for harvest. The plowman's work is a continuum of cosmic time, not mechanical time.

The action of the plow itself is seen not only as breaking up or crumbling the soil, but also as opening it up (2.422-24) and as cleaving it (2.513). Numerous passages suggest the necessity of plowing and other cultivation to loosen the earth (e.g., 2.353; 398-407). We are told that crumbly soil is the aim of ploughing (2.204). Good land yields to the ploughshare. It is land that "breathes" and is enriched by the crops it produces (2.217-23). But sour, heavy soil may be unamenable to ploughing (2.236).

The idea of working with an imaginatively animated earth is reflected in Virgil's statement in relation to young trees: "For power is in the soil" (2.48). Later

he writes of the earth's bestowing "an equal potency / On all" (2.286-87). He recognizes the life-giving power of the earth that he tills. Again he is a collaborator with life, as well as a dealer in death. The land itself is given the role of mother and nursery (2.265-70). The metaphor of the land as woman has been explored in American literature, as previously indicated, by Annette Kolodny in *The Lay of the Land*. Kolodny's sybmolism of sexuality accords well with Virgil's ideas of life-giving power in the earth.

Alongside the life-giving image, we must set Virgil's idea that the earth itself tends also to degeneration. This recognition intensifies the picture of the difficulties the farmer faces:

> And I have seen selected seed, with care
> Long tested, yet degenerate, unless
> Man's effort picked the largest year by year.
> So it is: for everything by nature's law
> Tends to the worse, slips ever backward, backward. (1.197-201)

The degeneration concept is found in connection with trees (2.56-61) and in connection with livestock (3.69-71). Not only is a natural degeneration admitted, but Virgil also looks realistically at the transience of all life:

> Life's earliest years for wretched mortal creatures
> Are best, and fly most quickly: soon come on
> Diseases, suffering and gloomy age,
> Till Death's unpitying harshness carries them off. (3.65-68)

The plowman must ever be mindful that he is a partner with natural forces. He does not control those forces but must learn to cooperate with them (2.259-65). Toil alone will not suffice, for the plowman must also "pray to the gods for rain" (1.158). He must be a skillful, thoughtful laborer, but he is still dependent upon powers beyond himself. Humility is incumbent upon the plowman who recognizes this limitation. The plowman once again is seen as collaborator with

God through material nature. In order to cope with capricious elements in nature, the farmer is told to "observe the months and stars" and to "Let all your farmhands duly worship Ceres" (1.335; 343). In other words, pay attention to those things that can be known and understood; beyond that, prayer and worship are still necessary. The idea of divine providence undergirds the poem and is made explicit on occasion: "the Father himself / Ordained the monthly wanings of the moon, / The sign of south winds dropping" (1.353-55).

Didactic, literal instructions for plowing are given in the *Georgics* too, all strongly reflecting the need to cooperate with nature:

> Up then, and if your soil is rich,
> From the first months of the year let your stout bulls
> Turn it over, and led the clods lie there
> For dusty summer to bake with ripening suns;
> But if your soil is poor, it will be enough
> To furrow it lightly just as Arcturus is rising. (1.63-68)

Four precepts on plowing come early in Book 1 (43-68): plow rich soil early and deeply, plow it more than once, study soil and climate before deciding how to use new land, and turn over poor soil lightly in autumn. Here, as elsewhere in the *Georgics*, the plowman-farmer pictures the artisan-poet and plowing instructions may be taken metaphorically as well as literally.

The plowman is not only a manual laborer; he must also be a knowledgeable decision maker if his plowing is to produce a full crop. He must take into account even the "moods" of the untried land in order to know what it will produce:

> [B]efore we cleave it with iron,
> We must con its varying moods of wind and sky
> With care--the place's native style and habit,
> What crops the region will bear and what refuse. (1.50-53)

> Nature imposed these everlasting covenants

> From the first on certain regions, right from the time
> When Deucalion over the empty spaces of earth
> Cast those stones that produced the race of man--
> A hard race. (1.60-64)

Here with such practical advice, we see the necessity for intelligent observation on the part of the plowman. The "everlasting covenants" refer to the ability of the earth to produce specific things in different locations. Virgil also writes of crop rotation, of letting land lie fallow, of fertilizing with manure and ashes and even on occasion of burning the stubble (1.71 ff.). He even gives instructions for making a "curving plough-beam" from an elm tree (1.167-76). Putnam comments on the significance of Virgil's instructions:

> This plow is not only the great mediator between man and the land, its construction is a syneceoche for the artistry of farming. The art of making the plow foreshadows the skill and purpose of its use. First one must venture into the woods (*in silvis*), that enemy of georgic existence and last recourse of the (figuratively) degenerate. There an elm is tamed and bent to assume the shape (*forma*) of the curved plow and become in turn a tamer of the earth. (36-37)

But the plowman's life is not an end in itself any more than he is a mechanical device for tilling the soil. Plowmen who perform their tasks in a worthy manner will enhance and lend stability to their country and to the generations that follow them (2.513-16). Personal happiness is given a moral dimension as when the eulogy of Book 2 concludes with praise of moral qualities (2.458, ff.). In Book 2 Virgil praises Italy for its virtues when it was free from war, and he points to peace as the reason for the agricultural abundance of the land:

> Here have no bulls with nostrils breathing fire
> Ploughed at the sowing of a dragon's teeth
> For a human harvest bristling rank on rank
> With spear and helmets. But the land is full
> Of teeming fruits and Bacchus' Massic liquor. (2.140-45)

Later in Book 2 Virgil says that farmers are "Far from the clash of arms" (2.459-60). Near the end of Book 1 in the account of the fall of Caesar and the ensuing civil strife, he expresses hope that the farmer and his plow will be strong when all this sordid history of war is put to rest:

> Surely a time will come when in those regions
> The farmer heaving the soil with his curved plough
> Will come on spears all eaten up with rust
> Or strike with his heavy hoe on hollow helmets,
> And gape at the huge ones in the upturned graves. (1.494-97)

One of the intriguing, on-going associations Virgil makes with the plowman has already been mentioned and appears again in the metaphor with which he concludes Book 2. In it he links the plowman and the poet: "But now we have traversed a course of many leagues: / High time to unyoke the steaming necks of our horses" (4.541-42). This association of poet-maker with plowman-maker will be echoed later by Spenser and others. It is one more way to attribute worth and dignity to the plowman's labors, since generally poets are respected as the seers of the race. Both impose order upon chaos; both practice their art for the benefit of mankind.

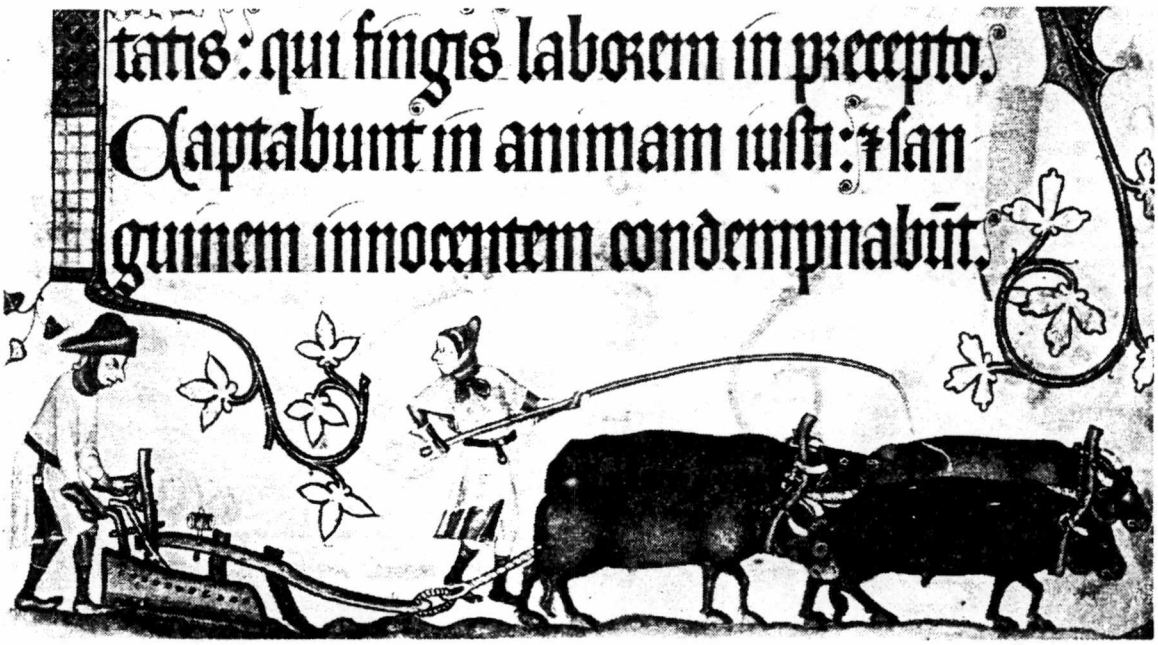
What then is incorporated into the plowing image from Virgil? Virtually everything encompassing man's being, it seems. First, consider the ambivalences associated with plowing in the *Georgics:* the fundamental dualities of dignity and dishonor in the plow, toil that is onerous but uplifting, nature that is both friend and foe, the necessary drive of both lover and disciplinarian, the dependence and independence of the plowman. Then there is the on-going association of peace and stability and order--built on obedience to natural laws. This, in turn, makes possible national well-being and personal prosperity. Hope is present in the farmer's plowing and humility in his praying. And the opening/breaking aspect

is present in the image of the plowing process itself. In addition to these associations with the plowing image, there is the overarching connection with labor. Tilling the soil requires patience, for tedious tasks must be done faithfully to facilitate rebirth in the soil. And the subsequent growth is a slow, nonspectacular process. In Virgil's view, that is also the manner in which nations are revitalized. The *Georgics* provides a pattern for Italy as well as for the plowman. "Work brings property, and property brings self-respect and respect for others" (Wilkinson 59).

Four intertwined aspects of the georgic mode, as defined by Anthony Low, reappear throughout the history of Western literature. Because those aspects are inseparable from the plowman image, they will recur frequently in this study. Low writes:

> [W]e may say that georgic is a mode that stresses the value of intensive and persistent labor against hardships and difficulties; that it differs from pastoral because it emphasizes work instead of ease; that it differs from epic because it emphasizes planting and building instead of killing and destruction; and that it is preeminently the mode suited to the establishment of civilization and the founding of nations" (12).

The word *georgic* itself derives from the idea of earth and root work (*O.E.D.*).



Anonymous. *Oxen Ploughing.* Luttrell Psalter, England 14th c. British Library, London.

Chapter 3

Piers Plowman

'I wol worshupe ther-with Treuthe in my lyue,
And ben his pilgrym atte plough for pore mennes sake.
Mi plouh-pote schal be my pyk and posshen atte rootes,
And helpe my coltre to kerue and close the vorwes.' (B.6.103-106)
William Langland in *Piers Plowman*

"I shall honor Truth to the end of my life,
as his pilgrim at the plow, for poor men's sake.
My plowfoot is my pike-staff, to pull roots apart
and thus help my colter to cut clean furrows." (Williams)

From the crucible of Christian thought in the Middle Ages comes a long poem presented as a series of allegorical visions, generally attributed to William Langland (c. 1330-c. 1400). The visions introduce Piers the Plowman as he is seen by Will. By casting his poem as a series of visions, the poet can move easily from the external to the internal world, and he need not be bound by historical or logical time. The poem addresses practical social, political, and economic problems of the fourteenth century, but it also addresses the theological problem of finding salvation for one's soul. The interweaving of the earthly and the metaphysical dimensions is accomplished in part by using earthly images--especially agricultural ones--to present transcendental truth. In reality, there is only a little agriculture as such in *Piers Plowman*. The enigmatic character of Piers the Plowman is central to understanding the poem.

With the image of Piers the Plowman, it may be impossible to distinguish precisely what qualities are associated with him as Piers and what qualities belong to him as a plowman. Because he is Piers the Plowman, he is at least a

thoroughly humanized plowman, not an unfeeling machine. He is a person in whom we see some of the finest qualities of human nature.

Why did the poet choose to make his titular character a plowman? Why not a carpenter or baker or smith? What ideas are associated with the plowing/plowman images in the poem? Are they associations that can be considered more or less universal, or are they distinctive to *Piers Plowman* ?

The *Visio* opens with a picture of the "faire felde ful of folke" in which all sorts of human beings, rich and poor, are working and wandering about on their business. This part of the poem concerns the life of the laity, of ordinary people, and the emphasis is on honest, faithful labor. In the world of the poem, the way to obtain the grace of heaven is through good labor:

> 'That one, god of his grace graunteth, in his blisse
> To tho that wel worchen whil thei ben here.' (B.3.231-32)[1]
>
> *"The first God grants is the grace of heaven*
> *to those who work well while they live below."* (Wms.)

The plow is duty for Piers. He must plow his half acre before he is ready to go on a pilgrimage (B.6.4-6; 65-66). Labor is the touchstone of character. It is into this setting that the first specific laborers are introduced. And they are plowmen:

> Summe putten hem to the plough and pleiden hem ful seldene,
> In eringe and in sowynge swonken ful harde,
> That monie of theos wasturs in glotonye distruen. (B.Pro. 20-22)
>
> *Some kept to their plows with no time to play,*
> *toiling on steadily at their sowing and planting*
> *to gain what spendthrifts would waste in gluttony.* (Wms.)

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[1] Quotations from the B-text are from Skeats' parallel texts except for a quotation from the Prologue and one from the Introduction. Those two are from Skeats' 1874 edition of the first part of the B-text. I have omitted the mid-line dot with which Skeats marks the caesuras. The Middle English yogh has been rendered as *gh* or *y*. Quotations from the C-text are from Pearsall's 1978 edition.

Not only is diligent dedication to their work associated with the plowmen who are held up for examples, but they work for others--even for those who will waste their products. A similar idea occurs in the final celebration of plowing in the poem where Piers' fairness to both the deserving and the undeserving is seen (B.19.432-36). For Langland the noblest type of manhood is represented by plowmen doing manual labor, personified in Piers. In the Prologue (Skeat, 1874: 118-122) as tasks are being delegated, we find that those appointed to till the earth do so "as trewe lyf asketh" (*meeting life's true needs*). The image of the plow is associated with needs that are elemental, not frivolous. In the ordering of the field of folk, it is imperative for everyone to work and for those who till the soil for food to make that available to those who work in other ways. In Passus 6 when the women ask what they can do while they are waiting for Piers to finish his plowing (so he can guide them on their pilgrimage to Truth), Piers responds by delegating various jobs to all the ablebodied. As for himself, he says,

> 'For I shal lene hem lyflode but yif the londe faille,
> Flesshe and bred bothe to riche and to pore,
> As longe as I lyue for the lordes loue of heuene.' (B.6.17-19)
>
> *"I shall give them food, unless my crop fail,*
> *meat and bread for rich and poor both,*
> *as long as I live, for our heavenly Lord's sake."* (Wms.)

The difficulties of managing the folk who are to help Piers with his half acre are so great that neither Piers nor the knight can motivate the workers. When Hunger comes to help Piers, he makes it clear to Piers that in sweat and toil mankind must till the earth for his bread and he must labor for his livelihood (B.6.235-236). He quotes Proverbs 20.4 about the sluggard who does not plow his field because of the cold and therefore must go begging. Hunger states explicitly that Christ wants men to work (B.6.240-251). Hunger moves the wasters and idlers

to work, but the change is temporary. The only solution is a transcendental one: love that creates trust and affection.

This emphasis on faithful labor strikes a strong political and economic and social note for the author's contemporaries, since a main source of the difficulties England faced in the fourteenth century involved labor problems and the relations of laborers to the state. The message conveyed by Piers, especially in Passus 6, is that salvation from evil can only be attained through work. Everyone must do the task allotted to him, motivated by love. The poet looks forward to a perfected society when "Ac kynde loue shal come yut and Consience togyderes / And maky of lawe a laborer" (C.3.451-52). *(But Natural Love shall come, linked with Conscience, / and make law a laborer.)* This may be the solution to social problems, but it is an ideal unachievable even in the poem. It is impossible that everyone would shoulder his own responsibilities, but that is the ideal order: *"Each man shall ply spade, pickaxe or plow, / spin or spread dung--or else die of laziness"* (B.3.308-09 Wms.).

In the scheme of the poem, Piers the Plowman is able to guide the pilgrims in their search for Truth because he has found the way to Truth through honest, faithful labor. The advice the plowman gives is practical advice, a sort of commonsense road map to Truth. The plowman personifies the solution to the labor problem, but he also is an allegorical teacher and guide to Truth. He exists for the good of all the people; his function is not limited, for example, as is the function of the clerks. Piers serves Truth, his master, faithfully by tilling his half acre (B.5.544 ff.). The search for Truth consists of setting the pilgrims to work on his land. The whole *Visio* focuses on affairs in the natural world. It is not surprising, therefore, that even Piers' pardon seems limited to man's responsibility--to do good and not evil. Since fulfilling that condition for salvation is humanly impossible, the Plowman--representative of mankind--needs grace.

Just as the ideal society is beyond man's reach because man cannot naturally love his neighbor, so salvation is out of reach without God's grace in the poem.

In the latter part of Passus 5 and in 6, Piers the Plowman assumes many roles and does many different tasks. His function is not limited to plowing as such. This must inevitably be true of any plowman-farmer. If he only plows, there can be no crop. But the plowing is a prerequisite for other farm tasks. Plowing precedes sowing as a means to an end. Plowing is the primary, preliminary work, work done in order to accomplish the next step in raising a crop. The image of plowing, therefore, is hopeful and forward-looking. It is an expectant image. This is demonstrated in the metaphoric plowing and sowing section in Passus 19:

> Thise foure sedes Pieres sewe, and sitthe he did hem harwe
> Wiyh olde lawe and newe lawe that loue myghte wexe
> Amonge the foure vertues and vices destruye. (B.19.306-08)
>
> *Piers sowed these four virtues, then sent forth his harrow,*
> *the Law Old and New, that love might grow strong*
> *among the four virtues, and destroy vices. (Wms.)*

The impact of the idea of the faithful, honest labor of the plowman may best be seen in perspective by surveying Piers' appearances in the poem to determine what kind of character emerges. Piers the Plowman enters the poem three times in the B-text though his presence is not limited to those appearances. He is mentioned in nine of the twenty passus. Piers assumes the role of a character in the second vision (B.5.8 ff), the sixth (C-text only; C.16), the seventh (B.16), and the tenth (B.19). In his first appearance near the end of the *Visio* (B.5.544), readers learn that he has been the servant of Truth (God the Father) for 50 years. Conscience and Natural Knowledge ("Kynde Witte") recommend him to Truth. As Truth's servant, Piers instructs the repentent pilgrims about the way to Truth; he oversees the plowing of the half acre, and he receives a pardon for himself and his helpers. The pardon extends to all honest laborers (B.7.65. See also B.7.1-8.)

During this first appearance, Piers functions in an allegorical world. At the beginning of Passus 6, he moves into the world of fourteenth-century England.

As a character in Passus 6, Piers describes an ideal society, dividing it into the three traditional categories of the Middle Ages: knights, clergy and common folk. This is a society ruled mainly by natural law. Piers' advice is pragmatic. Each class has its own specific task. This reflects the medieval idea that the stations in life must be maintained to preserve an orderly, peaceful society. The plowing by Piers and his helpers is to be taken as literal physical work. In this society, work is both a social and a religious duty. It is the natural law of social order; it is also the result of Adam's sin, and it is Christ's will.

> Kynde witt wolde that eche a wyght wroughte
> Or in dykynge or in deluynge or trauaillynge in preyeres,
> Contemplatyf lyf or actyf lyf Cryst wolde men wroughte.
> (B.6.249-51)

> *Common Sense claims that all can work,*
> *digging ditches or praying diligently;*
> *active or contemplative, Christ wants men to work.* (Wms.)

The conditions of the pardon are also related to the duties of the various classes of society. Truth says the workers should tend their tasks at home rather than go on a pilgrimage. The search for Truth can take place in the normal tasks of life. The way to Truth is described by Piers in words that are definitely allegorical.

In his second appearance in the poem, Piers is to cultivate and protect the Tree of Charity (B.16.21 ff.). This tree grows in man's heart and its care is related to the inner life. To protect the fruit from being stolen by the Devil, Piers snatches a prop of the tree and strikes against the Devil. This action brings about the Incarnation. Both Adam and Christ are represented here by Piers, for Piers is Man.

In the third appearance in the B-text (B.19), Piers is again involved in farming activities. Here he becomes God's procurator and plows, sows, harrows, and builds a barn of Unity in which to put his corn. His responsibility to the just society of the church in this section is similar to his responsibility to the community tending his half acre. In the *Visio* he provided material bread for the workmen; here it is the spiritual bread of the eucharist. Barbara Raw says, "In the two ploughing scenes Piers represents authority operating in secular society and in the church" (146).

The character emerging from these passages is a tiller of the soil who is able to instruct and oversee his fellows. He is a literal plowman whose vocation lends itself to rich allegorical interpretation. As to the character of Piers himself, Walter Skeat writes:

> In the A-text, he is merely the highest type of the honest small farmer, whose practical justice and Christianity are so approved of by truth (who is the same with God the Father), that he is entrusted with a bull of pardon of more value than even the Pope's. But towards the conclusion of the B-text, the poet strikes a higher note, and makes him the type of the human nature in its highest form of excellence, the human flesh within whom dwelt the divine soul of Christ our Savior. (1874 Intro. xxviii)

Piers is the humanity in which Christ clothes himself at the Incarnation. Troyer writes:

> In his [Christ's] human essence he was a blood brother to the laborer, the plowman, the king, and the pope, and alike reducible to the common denominator of man. The unity of the Piers symbol lies then, we may say, in the humanness of all its variants. Piers is man. (371)

For ideal man, representative man, Langland chose the symbol of Piers the Plowman. He becomes allegorically the human race in its divergent forms.

The broad outlines of the larger intent of the poem can best be established by considering the manner in which medieval clerics gave allegorical interpretation

to biblical material. A key Old Testament presentation of agriculture as a symbolic activity is found in Isaiah's parable of the vineyard (Isaiah 5.17) and in the companion New Testament parable (Matt. 21.33-44; Mark 12.1-9; Luke 20.9-19). Stephen Barney has documented the medieval symbolization of agricultural imagery and Langland's use of that familiar symbolic tradition. He finds the origin of the association between farm labor and the work of the clergy in the biblical interpretation of other scriptural passages, as in I Corinthians 9:8-10. "The connection," he says, "is in the idea of plowing and sowing: the English words 'cultivator' and 'dissemination' preserve the metaphor" (262). The symbolic or allegorical meanings are developed so thoroughly in the Bible that medieval exegetes did not significantly extend the symbols. In the Old Testament, God or Christ is the planter; Israel or the world or the individual is the field or that which is to be cultivated. Barney cites three related metaphors used in the Bible: "the word as seed or germinating water, the soul as field, and the act of penance as cultivation" (264). He explains the commonly allegorized metaphors of farming:

> No one doubts the widespread currency of these agricultural metaphors: that God (or Christ) is a planter, and man the plantation, or a field or garden to be planted; that sowing and cultivation are the spreading of the word and the penitential preparation of the heart to receive it; that a man should be fruitful, and by his fruit he will be judged; and that the final harvest of men will separate the wheat to be stored from the chaff to be burned. (265)

Biblical commentary from the early church fathers to the Renaissance is marked by the tendency to elaborate and analyze biblical images. The act of cultivation, particularly of plowing, is firmly associated with preaching or administering Christian truth. See I Corinthians 3.6-9 and John 15. The association of penance with cultivation derives at least in part from the parable of the fig tree (Matthew 24.32-51).

The medieval allegorical encyclopedias and dictionaries should theoretically enrich the commentaries on the scriptures. But for centuries during the Middle Ages, there was scarcely any fundamental change in interpretative comments. So certain metaphoric associations became thoroughly established and were common stock for the medieval poet. It seems beyond question that this long tradition of interpreting the agricultural metaphors in religious terms caused Langland to make Piers a plowman. His everyday occupations offered rich and established analogies for Langland's dream visions.

In the reader's initial acquaintance with the plowmen in the *Visio*, plowmen are contrasted with those whose work appears less essential to man's well-being (B.1.20-39). Those who till the soil to meet life's true needs are commended (B.1.120). The earth will provide the plowman with his needs, but his work will not necessarily make him wealthy. In the first passus, the lovely Lady tells Will, the dreamer, that the Father commanded the earth to help every man and to make man at ease, providing his needed livelihood in a moderate manner (B.1.117-19). Moderation is stressed and Right Reason and Common Sense are to be the helpers of good husbandry (B.1.27-57). The virtues of moderation and common sense are allied to those who plow the land. The reward here for faithful labor is one's livelihood, one's food.

Langland would have assumed his readers were familiar with the Old Testament teaching that man was created in the image of God (B.9.33-47; 9.4 ff.) and that the final restoration of the image of God in man is accomplished by grace through redemption. That restoration in Piers the Plowman progresses through various levels in the poem. To recognize the *Dei Imago* in the plowman's image will be to accept a fundamental dimension in the cluster of plowman-related ideas.

In the poem manual labor is given the dignity of being a means toward restoration of God's image in man. Lady Study tells all the things she has done for Learning (B.10.142-179). Her list includes the fact that she contrived the tools for all kinds of manual skills, thereby recognizing that the manual laborers who use the tools are men of intelligence and ability. In one of Anima's speeches she makes clear how sin has disabled mankind: *"but the metal of man's soul is alloyed by sin"* (B.15.346 Wms.). She looks back to a more golden age:

> Tilieres that tiled the erthe tolden her maistres,
> By the sede that thei sewe what thei selle mighte.
> And what to lene and what to lyue by the londe was so trewe.
> (B.15.357-59)
>
> *Tillers who plowed the earth told their masters*
> *what they could sell from the seed they sowed,*
> *what to lend, what to live on, the land was so trustworthy.* (Wms.)

This tiller of the earth is not only a laborer but a wise one who understands economics based on the dependability of the land itself. He has learned what to expect because he is an intelligent, observant human being. In Thought's directions to Do-Well, he tells Will:

> 'Who-so is trewe of his tonge and of his two handes,
> And thorugh his laboure or thorugh his londe his lyflode wynneth,
> And is trusti of his tailende taketh but his owne,
> And is nought dronkenlew ne dedeignous Dowel hym folweth.'
> (B.8.80-83)
>
> *"A man of true tongue and of trusty hands*
> *who earns his living through his labor or lands,*
> *who tallies accounts and takes only his due,*
> *who neither drinks nor scorns other, is close to Do-Well."* (Wms.)

Piers faithfully plowing his half acre and honestly fulfilling temporal obligations is living, it seems, the life of Do-Well in the natural world. Intelligence tells Will where to find Do-Well in these words:

> 'Sir Dowel dwelleth,' quod Witte 'nought a day hennes,

> In a castel that Kynde made of foure Kynnes thinges;
> Of erthe and eyre is it made medled togideres,
> With wynde and with water witterly enioyned.' (B.9.1-4)
>
> *"Sir Do-Well," said Intelligence, "lives a day's walk from here,*
> *in a castle that Nature formed of four kinds of things;*
> *it's made of earth and air mingled together*
> *with wind and water, wondrously blended."* (Wms.)

Certainly that is the farmer's natural world. Intelligence goes on to explain that Nature has closed up Soul inside that castle, suggesting that the soul thrives best in close contact with the natural elements.

Among the gifts that Grace gives to men are the ability to labor, hoe the soil, and *"earn their living by learning from him"* (B.19.231 Wms.). Faithful labor is clearly a means to God's grace:

> To alle trew tidy men that trauaille desyren,
> Owre lorde loueth hem and lent loude other stille,
> Grace to go to hem and agon her lyflode. (B.9.104-06)
>
> *Our Lord loves decent men who like steady work;*
> *coming and going he will always give them*
> *grace for themselves and for gaining a livelihood.* (Wms.)

From these passages it seems reasonable to connect knowledge of manual labor--and tilling the soil in particular--with restoration of the image of God in man. By using his reason and ability, man is able to reach his finest expression of the image of God. The plowman who labors with the soil is, therefore, engaged in a process whereby he can become more God-like. In *Piers Plowman and the Image of God,* Daniel Murtaugh writes:

> Man's status as the image and likeness of God is given its most poignant expression in the Incarnation. Here, in Christ's assumption of humanity and His performance of human good works, man's nature and works gain a value they do not have in themselves. Hence, simply to "Do-Well" has consequences that reach into the realm of mystery. (3)

Barbara Raw sees the restoration of the image of God in man in three stages, both in mankind as a whole and in the individual soul. The first stage is of particular significance for the plowman image because it functions in the realm of the natural. In the case of the individual, he must use his natural faculties, gifts of God the Father, and conform his will to God's. This is the experience of Will in Do-well. Mankind as a whole must use its natural aptitude for knowing and loving God to create a just society here on earth, as pictured at the end of the *Visio* (155). These are tasks accomplished by the plowman and the community through using reason and laboring honestly to accomplish what is just. The two following passages indicate that salvation comes through honest labor, suggesting both the dignity of labor and its necessity as a kind of penance:

> Go to Genesis the gyaunt, the engendroure of vs alle;
> '*In sudore* and swynke thow shalt thi mete tilye,
> And laboure for thi lyflode'; and so owre lorde hyghte. (B.6.234-36)

> *Ask the Giant Genesis who engendered us all.*
> *"In sweat and in toil till the earth for bread,*
> *and labor for livelihood," so Our Lord bids us.* (Wms)

> The sauter seyth in the psalme of *beati omnes,*
> The freke that fedeth hym-self with his feythful laboure,
> He is blessed by the boke in body and in soule. (B.6.252-254)

> *It is said in the Psalm* Blessed are they:
> *he who feeds himself by faithful labor*
> *is blessed by the Bible, body and soul.* (Wms.)

The plowing and harvesting are literally good and proper activities; they are also a figure for the morally good life "under Adam" which remains ultimately unsatisfying to man's soul.

Part of Piers' transformation is that he successively embodies ideas of Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest, and the changes in Piers are relevant to the four main divisions of the poem. The poet considers the virtues that should accompany the

active life (Passus 8-14), then the virtues accompanying the contemplative life (15-18), and finally those that undergird the life of spiritual authority (19-20). All of these levels involve lives of active doing. The levels of contemplation and authority are redirections of the active physical life, not a departure from it. So Piers as he is manifest in the plowman, in Peter, and finally in Christ, illustrates an organic kind of development. Piers' tearing up the pardon at the end of the *Visio* and announcing *"Prayers and penance are my plow from now on"* (B.7.119 Wms.) marks a transition to another level of life for him. It is the plow image that lends continuity and wholeness to his development.

The figure of Piers Plowman personifies the salvation to be found in honest, faithful labor. Setting the would-be pilgrims to work plowing the half acre shows allegorically part of the search for Truth/Salvation. Piers' plowing of his field comes in Passus 6 as a climax to the first part of the poem, the part that stresses right conduct as the way to salvation.

This has been a drawn-out affirmation of the dignity that is embodied in the image of the plowman in the poem. His is a dignity of the highest order because honest labor is linked with the restoration of the image of God in man. Other ideas overlay the concept of dignity. As the plowman plows, he helps maintain a stable social-political-economic order, an order that is assumed to be good by virtue of the fact that grace has allocated the different skills to be used for the good of all. The plowman is a benefactor of society. He is peaceful and merciful and rational. He is a nurturer, associated with life and growth and with ridding the fields of undesirable old roots and such.

Haukyn, *Activa Vita*, bears a significant relationship to Piers. He is introduced only once, but the account concerning him takes up the second half of

Passus 8 and all of 9. Called Piers' apprentice, Haukyn seems to embody the hard-working Active Life which is preparatory to a higher life. Active Life says,

> 'And that am I, Actyf that ydelnesse hatye,
> For alle trewe trauaillours and tilieres of the erthe.' (B.13.238-39)
>
> *"I'm one of these; I'm active, I hate all idleness*
> *among true laborers and tillers of the soil."* (Wms.)

It is likely that Haukyn is introduced as the deliberately "imperfect exemplar of the active life" (Godden 141). He belongs to and represents the tangible, temporal world of the *Visio* . He, like Piers in the *Visio,* is occupied with getting food for the community. Haukyn also claims the roles of waferer or pedlar and minstrel. Stella Maguire sees Haukyn's position as more limited than the full Active Life of Piers; she calls Haukyn's the "Practical Life" and finds his counterpart in the good folk in the Field of Folk, in those who readily assist Piers in the plowing of his half acre (198). Maguire contrasts Piers' pardon with the one Haukyn would like to write to show the essential difference between the two men. Haukyn focuses on temporal, bodily comforts rather than on the eternal welfare of the soul. Later, when he confesses his sins, he admits to unfairly taking advantage of others, even in his manner of plowing:

> Yif I yede to the plow I pynched so narwe,
> That a fote-londe or a forwe fecchen I wolde,
> Of my nexte neighbore nymen of his earthe. (B.13.371-73)
>
> *If I guided the plow, I pinched things so close*
> *That I sheared off a foot or a furrow's breadth*
> *Of the nearest plot on my neighbor's land.* (Wms.)

Malcolm Godden discusses Haukyn's role in relation to the interplay between plowmen and hermits in the poem (129-163). In the Prologue, both labor for others--one at tilling, one at penance and teaching. Both dress in russet, the simple garb of humble folk. The plowman knows the earth, material matters; the

hermit knows ideas, books, and saints. Godden finds austerity, simplicity and dedication in both the plowmen and the hermits in the Prologue. He then traces the relocation of these qualities and assigns them to the hermits. Godden uses the Haukyn episode to demonstrate Langland's repudiation of the ideal originally represented by Piers and to move to a fuller treatment of the idea of *penaunce* and grace, a movement from temporal affairs to concerns of the soul (149). Even though Haukyn is sometimes thought of as a kind of inferior Piers, the differences in their positions in the allegory are so great that Haukyn's presence does not affect the plowman images found in *Piers*. It does, however, create a distinct contrast.

The opening lines of Passus 16 describe how the tree of Patience bears the fruit of Charity. Each person may choose to cultivate the graces of Charity:

> 'And *Liberum Arbitrium* hath the londe to ferme,
> Vnder Piers the Plowman to pyken it and weden it.' (B.16.16-17)
>
> *"Free will has the lease of that land, to farm it*
> *under Piers the Plowman, to hoe, pick and weed it."* (Wms.)

Since this is done under Piers, the way of the plowman appears to be the way to additional grace:

> 'Ne none sooner saued, ne sadder of bileue,
> Than plowmen and pastoures and pore comune laborers.'
> (B.10.458-59)
>
> *"None are saved more easily for their steady belief*
> *than plowmen, herdsmen and poor common laborers."* (Wms.)

In Passus 19 Piers comes in with a cross before the people, *"like in every limb to our Lord Jesus"* (B.19.8 Wms.). Grace then gives special graces to enable both temporal and spiritual workers, including those who will hoe the soil (B.19.232 ff.). It is also Grace that makes Piers the Plowman to be his reeve and procurator.

'My prower and my plouhman Peers shal beo on erthe;
And for to tulye truthe a teome shal he haue.' (B.19.255-56)

*"My provider, my plowman on this earth Piers shall be,
and to till Truth's soil he must have a team."* (Wms.)

The four evangelists--Matthew, Mark, Luke and John--are Piers' four great oxen. Then he is given four bullocks: Augustine, Ambrose, Gregory, and Jerome. They will harrow the places that his oxen plow (B.19.263). The metaphor is extended: the harrows are the Old and New Testaments, the barn is Unity, the cart is Christendom and so forth.

What else can be deduced from the poem that will enrich the image of the plow or plowing or the plowman?

First, what ideas can be linked to the plow itself? It is both work and reward--labor and food (B.6.67-68). The plow is always associated with forward-looking activity, with imagination and hope (B.6.288-293). One's plow is one's vocation, as illustrated by Langland's linking of the images of plow and pilgrim's staff in C.8.64: "My plouh pote shal be my pyk-staff" (*"My plow stick shall be my pike-staff"*). A metaphoric use of "plow" indicates an instrument or enabling agent.

Ac a portours that shulde be his plow, *placebo* to segge,
Hadde he neure seruyse to saue syluer ther-to seith it with
yvel wille! (B.15.122-23)

*But a breviary (his plow for singing Placebo)
he won't use for services unless it brings silver.* (Wms.)

The plow images a lowly vocation. In fact, even in this poem that celebrates Piers the Plowman, one finds notes of denigration for the plow. Waster held Piers and his plow not worth two peas (B.6.171). And braggardly Breton tells Piers to go piss with his plow (B.6.156-57, Wms.).

Another association with its roots in antiquity is the positive alliance of the plow with peace and therefore with prosperity. The biblical image of swords beaten into plowshares (Isaiah 2.4) is reinforced as those who bear weapons will be sentenced to death unless the smith makes their weapons into plowshares or other agricultural tools (B.3.303-307, Wms.).

The strongest associations with the active image of plowing are linked to all that has been said relevant to the restoration of the image of God in man. By faithful performance of one's vocation--in this case, plowing--one is enabled to become more like his creator. So plowing is ennobling when it is one's duty. Again there is the ironic doubleness encountered so often in the image. Will says in C.5.53-54: "'And also moreouer me thynketh, syre Resoun, / Me sholde constrayne no clerc to no knaues werkes.'" (*"'Moreover it seems to me, Sir Reason, /clerics shouldn't be made to do manual work.'"* Wms.) Manual labor, though honored in the plowman figure, is assigned to men of low degree--bondsmen, bastards, and beggars' sons (C.5.65-66). Throughout history manual work has had this double image of nobleness and degradation. But in the poem, cultivated land is associated with civilization; therefore tilling the land is a positive activity:

> Hethene is to mene after heth and vntiled erthe;
> As in wilde wildernesse wexeth wilde bestes,
> Rude and vnresonable, rennenge with-out. (B.15.451-53)
>
> *'Heathen' comes from 'heath,' land not cultivated,*
> *like the wilderness where wild beasts grow up,*
> *rude and unreasoning, roaming unsaddled.* (Wms.)

Finally, what more should be said of the plowman himself? Most fundamentally he is Mankind in whom the moral issues of the poem converge. He has knowledge and authority; he is guide and overseer; he is provider and planner. He is also dynamic; he changes as he understands his tasks. He is disciplinarian

too. His compassion is seen in what happens after Piers decides in desperation to "houp after Hunger" in order to curb the activities of Waster and the Breton (B.6.174). Hunger so devastates the two (the Breton looked like a lantern) that Piers begs for mercy on them. Even though they had previously caused such trouble in the community of the half acre, Piers is too kindhearted to see them suffer so drastically. Integrity is also associated with the plowman image: Piers won't take pay for giving the pilgrims directions to Truth (B.5.565-66). Piers is also credited with keener preception than even the clergy possess. He is able to perceive people's real airs and motives. This is, of course, in his transformation to being Peter and Christ.

The last comments about Piers in Passus 19 give him great praise. With his old plow and his new plow, he should be the world's emperor (B.19.423-24). His identity is merged with divine authority:

> And wel worth Piers the Plowman that pursueth god in
> doynge,
> *Qui pluit super instos et iniustas* at ones,
> And sent the sonne to saue a cursed mannes tilthe,
> As bryghte as to the best man and to the beste woman.
> (B.19.428-31)
>
> *Long live Piers the Plowman who acts like God,*
> who makes the rain fall on the just and the unjust
> *and sets the sun shining on a cursed man's soil*
> *as brightly as on the best man or best woman.* (Wms.)



Pieter Bruegel the Elder. *The Fall of Icarus.* (c. 1558). Oil. Musees Royaux des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, Belguim.

Chapter 4

Geoffrey Chaucer to Adam Smith

> We may talke what we please of Lilies, and Lions Rampant, and Spread-Eagles in Fields d' Or, or d' Argent; but if Heraldry were guided by Reason, a Plough in a Field Arable, would be the most Noble and antient Armes.
>
> Cowley in *Several Discourses by way of Essays*

It is not my intention to trace the plowing images through all the body of English literature from pre-Renaissance to the settling of America. But a brief sketch of Chaucer, Spenser and a few others will help to establish the continuity of the ideas that have been associated with the plow. Anthony Low's fine study, *The Georgic Revolution,* discusses the English resistance to the georgic ideals and shows the English treatment of those ideals from the beginning of the sixteenth century through Milton. Most poets during the early and middle Renaissance preferred to write of idyllic pastoral scenes full of music from oaten pipes and the love of sweet-smelling shepherdesses. That picture of leisure suited the courtier mentality. Poets generally either ignored or belittled the plowman, along with other manual laborers. The English gentleman could manage an estate, but he did not picture himself as a plowman, preferring to see the natual world in the golden glow of the pastoral. In real life he might go fishing or even cultivate a garden, but not plow his own field. Fishing and gardening provided a pastoral setting for mediation; ostensibly plowing did not. The true georgic aimed at realism in the plowman's world and was generally instructive as to some particular skill. In his "Essay on the Georgic," Joseph Addison distinguishes georgic from pastoral poetry. Labor is stressed in georgic poetry, as is simple

country life. Sometimes "pastoral" is used broadly to designate any treatment of rural life, but more frequently it points to life in an imaginary Golden Age, the idyllic setting for the carefree love of shepherds and shepherdesses. When georgic subjects appeared in English Renaissance poetry, they were often given a modified pastoral treatment. Later the reforming impulse from scientists and religious leaders aided in furthering the idea that mankind could, by hard work and cooperation, build a better world. Georgic ideals give dignity to labor and look toward the future, in contrast to the pastoral's backward look to a Golden Age of innocence and leisure.

Regardless of his low social status, the plowman can be a person who is vital and respected--as is the case with Chaucer's plowman. In his introduction to the works of Geoffrey Chaucer (c. 1343-1400), John Fisher calls attention to the "chain of being" hierarchy of values implicit in the Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales*. In the opening 18 lines, "April showers vitalize inanimate nature; flowers and tender leaves signalize the rebirth of vegetable life; mating birds express the life urge in animals; people longing to go on pilgrimages reveal the divine aspirations that distinguish humanity" (6). The plowman occupies a position in this great chain of being through which he has direct contact with all the levels of existence. He is affected by activity on all levels and he, in turn, affects in some way the other levels. He is thoroughly involved with both the material and the immaterial world.

Why Chaucer chose to include a plowman among the pilgrims going to Canterbury one can only guess. The plowman appears, among this mixed lot of mankind, as the only one who cultivates the soil for his livelihood. A roll call in the Prologue seems reminiscent of Langland's "fair field full of folk." The plowman's position in the sequence--between the parson and the scalawags--

attracts one's attention, especially because he is introduced as the parson's brother. Only the cook's introduction is shorter than the plowman's, and both are laborers. If the plowman had a tale to tell, it doesn't appear in the collection. But the image of the plowman is one that demands respect. There is no negative comment; only praise is given for his unselfish life. He works hard, is peaceful, charitable and honest, and loves God and neighbor:

> With hym ther was a PLOWMAN, was his brother,
> That hadde ylad of dong ful many a fother,
> A trewe swynkere and a good was he,
> Lyvynge in pees and parfit charitee.
> God loved he best with al his hoole herte
> At alle tymes, thogh him gamed or smerte,
> And thanne his neighebore right as hymselve.
> He wolde thresshe, and therto dyke and delve,
> For Cristes sake, for every poure wight,
> Withouten hire, if it lay in his myght.
> His tithes payde he ful faire and wel,
> Bothe of his propre swynk and his catel.
> In a tabard he rood upon a mere. (19)

> *With him there was a PLOWMAN, his brother,*
> *Who had carted many a load of dung,*
> *A true worker and good was he,*
> *Living in peace and perfect charity.*
> *God loved he best with all his whole heart*
> *At all times, whether he prospered or suffered,*
> *And then his neighbour exactly as himself.*
> *He would thrash, and likewise ditch and dig,*
> *For Christ's sake, for every poor person,*
> *Without pay, if it lay in his might.*
> *His tithes paid he fairly and squarely,*
> *Both on his own work and his property.*
> *In working clothes he rode upon a mare.*
> (trans. Vincent F. Hopper, 34-35)

Perhaps the strongest commendation is the plowman's willingness to work hard to help the poor "for Christ's sake" and not for pay. He serves God through his labor. He is not concerned for riches. He loves God whether he prospers or

suffers and he pays his tithes not only on his property but also on his work. And he pays them "fairly and squarely."

It is difficult to realize that up to Milton's time the majority of books published in England were concerned with religion. In the mid-sixteenth century, Hugh Latimer's "Sermon of the Plow" went through three editions during the year following its delivery. Preaching in the vernacular, Latimer was one of the early popular Protestant preachers. As to the sermon itself, it is a fully developed analogy with the activities related to plowing being given a Christian application. The framework is familiar: the field is the congregation; the seed is God's word; the preacher is both plowman and sower. This sermon exposes the devastation caused in the church when the prelates or ministers are idle and unfaithful. Key points of Latimer's analogy between the preacher and the plowman are that both labor all seasons of the year; both have a hard task; there is diversity in the work they must do; the activity is necessary for the sustenance of the body, and they should be rewarded appropriately (Latimer 54-71). Apparently some church officials had been made lords and then ceased to perform their church duties. "Ye lords, I say, that live like loiterers, look well to your office; the plow is your office and charge. If you live idle and loiter, you do not your duty, you follow not your vocation" (59). Earlier in the sermon when Latimer reviews his three previous sermons, he says, "I have assayed to set forth my plow, to prove what I could do" (54). This idea that one's work is one's plow is a fairly common one. Another noteworthy idea stated in the sermon is the fact that frequently those of high station in life disassociate themselves from plowing:

> For they that be lords will ill go to plow; it is no meet office for theim; it is not seeming for their estate. . . . And no mervel, for if plowmen that now be were made lords, they would clean geve over plowing; they would leave off their labor, and fall to lording outright, and let the plow stand.

> And then, both plows not walking, nothing should be in the commonweal but hunger. For ever sence the prelates were made lords and nobles, the plow standeth; there is no work done; the people sterve. (60)

These ideas occur in sermons and treatises from the early church fathers up through the Renaissance and beyond. Suffice it to say that the association between plowman and preacher gives the plowman an aura of authority and responsibility. He labors under divine direction and is essential to the well-being of society.

Attitudes toward the plowman's work and toward all manual labor during the Renaissance generally reflect the dual views of curse or blessing. Is it beneath the dignity of a gentleman, or is it the most accepted means of becoming a true gentleman? One group--the Benedictines-- maintained the view that labor is both necessary and valuable to man as a spiritual being. In the ancient Benedictine formula, prayer is to be balanced by work. Thus are labor and the tools of labor sanctified.

Practical advice about agriculture and domestic affairs created a best-seller for Thomas Tusser in *A Hundreth Good Points of Husbandry* (1557). He arranged thousands of common maxims in the form of an almanac in galloping anapests. His maxims included advice for plowing and planting and harvesting, as well as advice on morality and the Protestant faith. Generations of common folk read his first-hand knowledge of daily farm routines. But his view of plowing seems attenuated after Virgil's and Langland's. Tusser is a pragmatist who sees plowing primarily as a means to personal material gain. The georgic stress on the dignity and benefit of labor is almost absent except in a riddle, the answer to which is husbandry:

I Seeme but a drudge, yet I passe any King
To such as can use me, great wealth I do bring.
Since Adam first lived, I never did die,
When Noe was shipman, there also was I.
The earth to susteine me, the sea for my fish:
Be readie to pleasure me, as I would wish.
What hath any loife, but I help to preserve,
What wight without me, but is ready to sterve.

In woodland, in Champion, Citie, or towne
If long I be absent, what falleth not downe?
If long I be present, what goodnes can want
Though things at my comming were never so scant.
So many as loove me, and use me aright,
With treasure and pleasure, I richly acquite.
Great kings I doe succour, else wrong it would go,
The King of al kings hath appointed it so. (qtd. in Low 33)

The paradox of the first verse sets the tone for the praise of husbandry which follows. The unassuming nature of husbandry should not blind one to its incomparable value nor to its divine sanction.

John Flavel (1628-1691) was a popular Puritan minister whose collected works were issued five times in the eighteenth century and at least three times in the nineteenth. Although he wrote during the Restoration, he is fairly representative of the Renaissance chergymen who echo and extend the much-used spiritual analogies for agricultural activities. Volume 5 in his collected works opens with "Husbandry Spiritualized: The Heavenly Use of Earthly Things." One subsection deals with "The Plowing of the Corn Land" (61-67).

Flavel endorses the common assumption of moral philosophers and theologians that the contemplation of common objects leads to spiritual and moral illumination, since man belongs both to the physical and metaphysical world. It is for this reason that truth deduced from nature or common objects will more fully affect the listeners or readers than abstractions of truth. Flavel cites the example of Christ who taught by parables and of the Old Testament prophets who also used

"similitudes" (e.g., Hosea 12.10). People may retain only a little of the sermon, but they "ordinarily retain an apt similitude." Common objects, he says, may then give illumination if we reason from them or if we view the resemblance between them and spiritual truth (4).

He accepts the idea that husbandmen of old "were generally presumed to be honest and good men" and cites Menander's lines as support for that assumption: "Profess thyself an husbandman, / And wicked too! believe't that can!" (114). While the term *husbandman* does not apply exclusively to plowmen, it does include them, for its older meaning was *farmer*. To *husband* was specifically to cultivate soil or plants. It has always carried the additional idea of thrifty management.

Before launching into his agricultural similitudes, Flavel quotes poems from friends in praise of his sermon, "Husbandry Spiritualized." The first is from Nicholas Watts and says in part:

> The law to him no *pulpit* doth allow,
> And now he cannot *preach*, he means to *plow*,
> Though preaching were a crime, yet he foresaw
> Against the plowman there could be no law.
> Nor stays he on resolves, but out-of-hand
> He yokes his teem, plows up the stubborn land;
> Sows it with precious seed, harrows again
> The tougher clods, takes pleasure in his pain.
> Whilst, Orpheus-like, (which doth his art advance)
> Rocks, fields, and woods, *after his pipe do dance.*
> . . . . . .
> Go, reader, turn the leaves; and me allow
> To pray (whilst at work) *God speed the plow.* (11. lines 25-34; 41-42)

The beginning of the poem refers, no doubt, to the Roundhead-Royalist conflicts and sounds the note that every government needs its plowmen. The preacher-turned-plowman does not just dream of the task; he goes to work and discovers pleasure in the painful, hard labor. The imaginative picture of his plow

as a pipe that causes the rocks and fields and woods to dance with joy is a beautiful idealization of the plowman's lot. The association of music or poetry with the labor of the plowman is used by several poets (to be discussed later) who identify their making of poetry with plowing. Frequently a plowman is said to be whistling or listening to the song of birds. The conclusion of the quoted passage merges work and prayer, reinforcing the idea that the plowman must labor in conjunction with divine providence.

Daniel Condy honors Flavel in the following excerpt from a poem in which he stresses the idea that man is taught by the object lessons inherent in plowing the earth. Flavel is seen as one who "[m]akes the rude ground turn tutor unto men" (11. line 6). Furthermore, Condy says Flavel

> Teacheth the *plowmen,* from their work, to know
> What duties unto God and man they owe.
> Rare artist! who, when many tongues are mute,
> Mak'st things that are inanimate confute
> The age's sins; by preaching unto eyes,
> Truths which in other modes their ears despise. (12. lines 9-14)

Plowing, even though it appears to be an isolated activity, should help a person be responsible both to God and to his fellowman. The plowman's crop, as Flavel explains elsewhere, is dependent upon God's sun and rain and so forth. But, in turn, the plowman is to provide food for others besides himself. If Condy's great social and spiritual claim is justifiable, no wonder he so praises the artist who is able verbally to picture inanimate things in such a way that they preach truths to eyes even though the ears are dull. In a nutshell, that is the justification for the extensive development of metaphoric applications of farming activities.

Flavel develops his analogies in the form of a series of twenty propositions and applications. Again the tasks of the plowman are pictured as laborious; therefore, the plowman must be industrious. The second of three matters that

receive special emphasis is that the plowman is honorable. He cares for his land and does not grudge the cost of proper tillage. His thriftiness keeps him solvent and extends to caring for the health of his body and of his moral state. This makes his rest sweet and his labor truly profitable. The third emphasis is on cheerfulness. Secondary associations are almost too numerous to give account of, but two that frequently receive attention are the hope and the skill involved in the actual plowing. Hope for a harvest motivates the plowman to use his best judgment and develop his plowing skill so that he can guide the plow not too deep or too shallow or crooked or skipping. He keeps his eyes forward in order to plow a straight furrow; keeping an eye on his goal enables him to maintain a straight moral course.

Flavel analyzes the action of the plowing itself and makes appropriate spiritual applications in the section already mentioned, "Upon the plowing of the Corn-land" (61-67). His first seven points of analysis are especially helpful because they reinforce common associations with the image of plowing:

> 1) "It is a hard and difficult work to plow."
> 2) "The plow pierces deep into the bosom of the earth, makes, as it were, a deep gash or wound in the heart of it."
> 3) "The plow rends the earth in parts and pieces, which before was united, and makes those parts hang loose, which formerly lay close."
> 4) "The plow turns up and discovers such things as lay hid in the bosom of the earth before, and were covered under a fair green surface, from the eyes of men."
> 5) "The work of the plow is *opus ordinabile*, a preparative work in order to fruit."
> 6) "It is best plowing when the earth is prepared and mollified by the showers of rain . . . ."
> 7) "The plow kills those rank weeds which grow in the field, turns them up by the roots, buries and rots them." (62-64)

Spenser follows Virgil's lead in his attempt to emphasize the dignity of the plowman's labor, an emphasis on toil which Milton later reinforces. Spenser is

probably more influential than any other English poet after Langland in dignifying the plow. One means of elevating the plowman's status is to associate him metaphorically with the poet as others--including Virgil and Chaucer--had done before him. Halfway through the *Georgics* Virgil identifies himself as a plowman-poet laboring with his steaming beasts (2.541-42). Chaucer could have had Virgil in mind when near the beginning of the "Knight's Tale" he writes: "I have, God woot, a large feeld to ere, / And wayke been the oxen in my plough" (1.886-87). Whether or not he thought of Virgil, he does picture himself as a plowman-poet, and ironically, he does so in the "Knight's Tale," which exemplifies the high style in which poets write of chivalry and courtly love and the behavior of noble persons. Spenser uses similar metaphors in *The Faerie Queene* and identifies himself as plowman-poet at least three times. The first two instances come at the end of cantos: "But here my wearie teeme nigh ouerspent / Shall breath it self awhile, after so long a went!" (4.5.46.8-9). In the second he writes: "And turne me here to this faire furrowes end / Our wearie yokes, to gather fresher sprights" (5.3.40.6-7). A much fuller elaboration of the plowman-as-poet metaphor comes in the opening stanza of Canto 9 in Book 6:

> Now turne againe my teme thou jolly swayne,
> Back to the furrow which I lately left;
> I lately left a furrow, one or twayne
> Vnplough'd, the which my coulter hath not cleft:
> Yet seem'd the soyle both fayre and frutefull eft,
> As I it past, that were too great a shame,
> That so rich frute should be from vs bereft;'
> Besides the great dishonour and defame,
> Which should befall to *Calidores* immortal name.

Here the plowman-poet is not weary, as at the ends of the cantos; here he is a "jolly swayne" looking forward with hope to what his labor will produce. To talk of plowing in the heroic language of this stanza (e.g., the concern for shame and

honor), gives the act itself heroic stature. In *The Faerie Queene* heroes must often persevere and toil. Goals are achieved through struggle, not through the moment of a military encounter.

Two others who adopt the plowman-poet image are Michael Drayton and Ben Jonson. The first song of *Poly-Olbion* (1612) concludes: "Heere I'le unyoke awhile, and turne my steeds to meat: / The land growes large and wide: my Teame begins to sweat" (15). Ben Jonson's mock-epic "On the Famous Voyage" ends with this couplet: "And I could wish for their eterniz'd sakes, / My Muse had ploughed with his, that sung A-JAX" (92).

It is of special significance that Redcross, Spenser's embodiment of ideal knighthood, should have been found symbolically in a furrow and been raised in the home of the plowman. What a picture of true chivalry being embedded in and taken from the earth itself! The furrow becomes the cradle of virtues:

> Thence she thee brought into this Faerie lond,
> And in an heaped furrow did thee hyde,
> Where thee a Ploughman all vnweeting fond,
> As he his toyleslome teme that way did guyde,
> And brought thee vp in ploughmans state to byde,
> Whereof *Georgos* he thee gaue to name;
> Till prickt with courage, and thy forces pryde,
> To Faery court thou cam'st to seeke for fame,
> And proue thy puissaunt armes, as seemes thee best became.
> (1.10.66)

This remarkable event interrupts the plowman's routine as he faithfully plows his field. His plowing leads to discovery of a life in the furrow. There is human decency, if not genuine goodness, in the plowman's bringing up the foundling as if he were one of his own. He gives the child a name, an identity, *Georgos*, derived from the Greek word for *husbandman*. Readers are not told here that the plowman is toiling hard, but at least the team is a "toylesome teme." Since

the plowman is their guide, he has authority over the team and responsibility for getting the plowing done.

In the *Mutability Cantos*, June, October, and February arrive with a plow to signify the work that is to be done (7.35.4; 7.39.9; 7.43.6). Spenser thus incorporates the plow in the Zodiac of months. June is light-hearted but "he wrought as well as playd, / That by his plough-yrons mote right well appear." Others can tell that he is a worker by his plow, the symbol of his work. A similar association is made with October: "by his side / He had his ploughing share, and coulter ready tyde." October is also "full of merry glee." He brings his plow to signify his work and his readiness to work as well. February is decrepit, "yet had he by his side / His plough and harnesse fit to till the ground." The plow indicates the work that binds him to the soil. His plow, like October's, is ready for use. Plows that are "ready tyde" and "fit to till the ground" reflect planning and preparation and responsibility on the plowman's part.

Three allusions strongly associate the plow with civilization and law and social order. Spenser gives a description of a thieving and savage people who live by other people's labor:

> In these wylde deserts, where she now abode,
> There dwelt a saluage nation, which did liue
> Of stealth and spoile, and making nightly rode
> Into their neighbours borders; ne did giue
> Them selues to any trade, as for to driue
> The painefull plough, or cattell for to breed,
> Or by aduentrous marchandize to thriue;
> But on the labours of poore men to feed,
> And serue their owne necessities with others need. (6.8.35)

The savages steal because they will not perform such labor as "to driue / The painefull plough." The manual labor of plowing is physically demanding, even downright painful. Calling the plow itself painful may also suggest the pain of

destruction that the plow brings to whatever it cuts into. Those who refuse to work but live on the labor of others are lawless savages. By implication the plowmen are part of the poor men on whom the lawless feed. Two cantos later a similar picture is given of "A lawlesse people . . . / That neuer vsde to liue by plough nor spade" (6.10.39.4). Although it is not explicitly stated, these allusions associate the plow with peace once again. Elsewhere Spenser tells of those who sleep on the bare ground and eat the "frutes of the forrest" because "their bad Stuard neither plough'd nor sowed" (6.4.14). The plowing is duty--in this case, neglected duty. It is a duty so often paired with sowing that even though they are separate activities, they are indissolubly linked. One plows in order to sow that which one expects to become sustenance for life.

To describe the manner in which the knight and his opponents were fighting on one occasion, Spenser draws again from images of the plowman's actions:

> As when a sturdy ploughman with his hynde
> By strength haue ouerthrowne a stubborne steare,
> They downe him hold, and fast with cords do bynde,
> Till they him force the buxome yoke to beare:
> So did these two this Knight oft tug and teare. (6.8.12.1-5)

That vivid picture indicates that the oxen do not naturally take to the burden of the plow. They must be "broken" to the yoke. The ambivalent dimensions of laboring at the plow extend to the animals that must pull the plow. A yoke bespeaks a burden. So while labor may have its benefits, it is also a burden to be borne.

One brief allusion describes a bridge: "Streight was the passage like a ploughed ridge, / That if two met, the one mote needes fall ouer the lidge" (5.6.36.8-9). The ideal furrow is straight by virtue of skill and determination. "Straight" has positive moral overtones as well as a suggestion of narrowness.

One more reference from *The Faerie Queene* will suffice to indicate Spenser's strong associations with the plow image. This links "The churches part, and Ploughmans portion" (2.10.39.4). The new king made "sacred lawes" by which travel on the road would be free, thereby "Restraining stealth, and strong extortion." The king freed the road of tax to the church and to the plowman, i.e., the commoners. Both the plowmen and the clergy should have free access to the highway, presumably because their travel is ultimately helpful to other people. It is a small thing, but it is one more link between the plowman and the clergy.

In these scattered allusions the plow and plowmen are strongly associated with uprightness and work. When those two concepts merge, they release a network of ideas and questions as to the relationship between virtue and labor. The plow makes possible a civilization based on law and orderliness because each one toils to earn his own livelihood. Is respect for labor, therefore, essential for cultural progress? The plowman's station in life is lowly but at the same time, full of honor. If society fails to honor the plow and the labor it represents--the inditement in the *Georgics*--is the nation truly endangered? The plowman's labor is the life-sustaining "groundwork" of a social system.

A small but penetrating light on the place of labor is found in George Herbert (1593-1633). In *The Country Parson*, he writes:

> But then he admonisheth them of two things; first, that they dive not too deep into worldly affairs, plunging themselves over head and eares into carking, and caring; but that they so labour, as neither to labour anxiously, nor distrustfully, nor profanely. Then they labour anxiously, when they overdo it, to the loss of their quiet, and health: then distrustfully, when they doubt God's providence, thinking that their own labour is the cause of their thriving, as if it were in their own hands to thrive, or not to thrive. *Then they labour profanely, when they set themselves to work like brute beasts, never raising their thoughts to God.* . . . Secondly, he adviseth them so to labour for wealth and maintenance, as that they make not that the end of their labour, but that they may have wherewithall to serve God the better, and to do good deeds. (247-48)

This note of moderation in labor may be the key to addressing the on-going debate as to whether the labor of the plowman is ennobling or degrading.

Francis Bacon (1561-1626) helped to dignify labor by maintaining that painful and arduous work was the way to human betterment and prosperity. This sharp contrast with courtly notions about a gentleman's role is really an echo of Virgil as well as of Langland and Spenser. The seventeenth century marked a sort of transition between religious faith and materialistic skepticism that was somewhat similar to Virgil's time. During this time John Milton (1608-1674) and Andrew Marvell (1621-1678) also contributed to a growing awareness of the georgic spirit by their emphasis on the value of honest labor. Bacon's idea of labor, as well as Milton's and Marvell's, includes manual work such as plowing but is not limited to manual work.

From James Thomson (1700-1748) through the English Romantic movement, poets celebrated the natural world and man's kinship with that world. Many Romantics sought transcendental truth by meditating on objects in the natural world. They found expressions in nature of "higher minds" that bear kinship to their own (e.g., Wordsworth's *Prelude*, 14.63-90). But such sweaty activities as plowing were not the chosen fare of the Romantic poets. Their vision of nature was not that of winning food by cultivation of the earth. Theirs was a bonding to the earth through meditation on streams and flowers and mountains. A few, such as Thomas Gray (1716-1771), mention plowing but treat it in limited ways. Gray's familiar line, "The plowman homeward plods his weary way," introduces the plowman as Gray's first representative in his celebration of humble lives in "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard." Readers feel the arduous toil in "plods" and "weary way." That recognition is reinforced in the line: "Their furrow

oft the stubborn glebe has broke" (line 26). The clods are "stubborn" and the plowman's labor is therefore toilsome.

From the early seventeenth century, the effects of the New Science were felt; and in the eighteenth, the slow changes in English agricultural practices culminated in the Agricultural Revolution. The Royal Society, founded in 1662, contributed its part to the Agricultural Revolution, partly through its Georgical Committee. But a much greater impetus to agricultural reform was the Civil War in England. By the 1650s there was a strong sense that agriculture could benefit the nations and mankind--a conviction similar to Virgil's. The importance of the plow in upholding the nation is recognized in Robert Herrick's words, "The Kingdoms portion *is the plow*" (Herrick 230). In keeping with the new agricultural awareness, Arthur Young became Secretary to the Board of Agriculture in 1793. In his published essays on rural economy is a tract by a Swiss agriculturalist who proposes "a Georgical Society of men of character, whose inflexible integrity, and complete knowledge of every thing relative to husbandry, might secure universal confidence and approbation." Among other tasks, the members would choose the peasants who have done the most to bring agriculture to a state of perfection and present them with a prize described in this manner: "I would choose to have it a medal, representing a labourer driving his plow; in the air the genius of agriculture, placing a crown on his head, composed of ears of corn and vine leaves interwoven, with this motto, 'For the best cultivator'" (qtd. in Low 122).

Praise of the cultivator of the soil and of rural life in general is as old as the history of literature. A reminder of that literary tradition may be helpful in understanding the almost unquestioned early praise of the agrarian way of life and the plowman's position in the New World. And it will be helpful in confirming the traditional virtues and values associated with the yeoman farmer.

Since the heyday of Greek and Roman literature, the highest acclaim has been accorded the owner of the small farm who cultivates his own land. Classical agrarian literature presents the cultivation of the land as the only employment essential to meet man's needs for food and a sense of well-being, for it creatively engages the whole person. Agriculture is hailed as the most noble art and the nurse of all the other arts known to mankind.

Two articles by Paul H. Johnstone provide a well-documented survey of the tradition of eulogistic agrarian literature. "In Praise of Husbandry" traces agrarian literature from Hesiod into the eighteenth century in England. He points to Cicero's declaration in *De Senectute* (44 B.C.) that "all the great early Romans had been tillers of the soil" (80). Furthermore, he repeatedly finds in works like Columella's *De re rustica* and the elder Pliny's *Historia Naturalis* claims that only agricultural pursuits are worthy of a freeman, that agriculture is the only essential employment, that agrarian life leads to wisdom, and that most vices are the product of life in the city instead of the country. Roman writers were fond of recalling that Ulysses was plowing when he was called away to Troy and that Cincinnatus was plowing when he was called to lead his country.

After scanty treatment of agriculture during the intervening centuries, the writers of the Renaissance turned to the ancient classics and borrowed from them the long-established praise of rural life. Johnstone quotes this statement from the dedication to *Theatre d'agriculture* by Olivier de Serres (1600):

> [I]t is agriculture on which all classes of men set their aim. For to what purpose do men labor so passionately at arms, at letters, at finance, at trade, but to have money? And for what do they want this money but, having got it, to buy land? And to what end do they buy land, but to live off the fruits of it? And how else may these fruits be got, than by cultivation? Thus it appears that, whatever road man takes in this world, he comes finally to agriculture, the most universal occupation of men, the most holy

> and natural, and the only one to which our first fathers were commanded by the mouth of God ("In Praise" 84).

It would be difficult to distinguish between Greek and Roman praise of agriculture and the praise written during the Renaissance by Frenchmen like de Serres and Robert Estienne and by the Englishman John Worlidge.

The quantity of agricultural writing diminishes somewhat in the seventeenth century and tends to treat rural themes in an idyllic pastoral mode. But the eighteenth century brought a new wave of interest in agriculture itself. Dryden's translation of the beginning of the second epode of Horace captures the traditional spirt of common praise for country life:

> How happy in his low degree,
> How rich in humble poverty, is he,
> Who leads a quiet country life;
> Discharg'd of business, void of strife,
> And from the griping scrivener free!
> (Thus, ere the seeds of vice were sown,
> Liv'd men in better ages born,
> Who plow'd with oxen of their own
> Their small paternal field of corn.) (Dryden 400)

Francois Quesnay (1694-1774) and other Physiocrats in France drew new attention to agriculture. And, as new methods of farming developed in England, the Agricultural Revolution was underway. Not only did this bring agriculture to the foreground of thought, but the beginnings of the Romantic movement in literature also reflected aspects of agrarian philosophy when it focused on rural themes and stereotypes. Undoubtedly the work of Rousseau (1712-1778) contributed to a widespread interest in "simple" rural life and helped to disseminate a Romantic philosophy. In English literature of the second half of the eighteenth century, rural themes are extremely popular.

The Puritan movement in England was yet another source of affirming the favored position of the husbandman or the yeoman farmer. Because God shows

His power in the workings of nature and because He commanded man to cultivate the earth, the farmer was thought to be the object of God's particular favor. Hence eighteenth-century philosophy and literature and the classical tradition all exalted the farmer and his way of life. This is not to say there were no dissenting or qualifying voices (Sir William Temple, for example), but the mainstream was praise. History records the increase in agricultural journals that began in the mid-eighteenth century, the agricultural societies that were organized, the books on agriculture that were printed, and the increase in topographical poetry. Agricultural concerns had caught the attention of upper levels of the social order.

Classical agrarian writings most often praised the cultivator of the small, self-sufficient farm. During medieval times, the land owner was likely to be a proprietor who attended his civic duties and left the cultivation of the land to his tenants. But as the feudal system broke down and land was divided (still among the relatively wealthy), more and more land owners developed a commercial outlook on farming and were drawn toward capitalism. These farmers sought national policies to protect agricultural interests as the merchantilist tariffs protected manufacturing and trade. Hence a stronger link was forged between agriculturalists and the government. The small farmers benefited from the political clout of the larger landowners.

Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) was a powerful influence on those who shaped the economic principles of the New World. His picture of the farmer doubtless has had a long-term impact in helping to give the farmer credit for the keen perception required to farm well. The following passage contrasts the understanding and skill needed by a farmer with those qualities needed in most mechanic trades:

No apprenticeship has ever been thought necessary to qualify for husbandry, the great trade of the country. After what are called the fine arts, and the liberal professions, however, there is perhaps no trade which requires so great a variety of knowledge and experience. The innumerable volumes which have been written upon it in all languages, may satisfy us, that among the wisest and most learned nations, it has never been regarded as a matter very easily understood. And from all those volumes we shall in vain attempt to collect that knowledge of its various and complicated operations, which is commonly possessed even by the common farmer; how contemptuously soever the very contemptible authors of some of them may sometimes affect to speak of him. . . . The direction of operations, besides, which must be varied with every change of the weather, as well as with many other accidents, requires much more judgment and discretion, that that of those which are always the same or very nearly the same.

Not only the art of the farmer, the general direction of the operations of husbandry, but many inferior branches of country labour, require much more skill and experience than the greater part of mechanic trades. The man who works upon brass and iron, works with instruments and upon materials of which the temper is always the same, or very nearly the same. But the man who ploughs the ground with a team of horses or oxen, works with instruments of which the health, strength, and temper, are very different upon different occasions. The condition of the materials which he works upon too is as variable as that of the instruments which he works with, and both require to be managed with much judgment and discretion. The common ploughman, though generally regarded as the pattern of stupidity and ignorance, is seldom defective in this judgment and discretion. He is less accustomed, indeed, to social intercourse than the mechanic who lives in a town. His voice and language are more uncouth and more difficult to be understood by those who are not used to them. His understanding, however, being accustomed to consider a greater variety of objects, is generally much superior to that of the other, whose whole attention from morning till night is commonly occupied in performing one or two very simple operations. How much the lower ranks of people in the country are really superior to those of the town, is well known to every man whom either business or curiosity has led to converse much with both. In China and Indostan accordingly both the rank and the wages of country labourers are said to be superior to those of the greater part of artificers and manufacturers. They would probably be so everywhere, if corporation laws and the corporation spirit did not prevent it. (126-127)

This constitutes a powerful claim for the multiple abilities requisite to farming. The common plowman's deficiencies in social intercourse are understood to spring from lack of exercise, not from dullness of mind. Unfortunately, his social ineptitude often leads others to the erroneous judgment that he is stupid and ignorant.

Two other passages from Adam Smith on the farmer merit inclusion. One section explains how the farmer's capital is multiplied in a sense by working with nature, the oxen, and the other laborers. The farmer's task is to direct and regulate nature for the production of desired crops; he works in partnership with nature. The capital employed in agriculture "is by far the most advantageous to the society" (345).

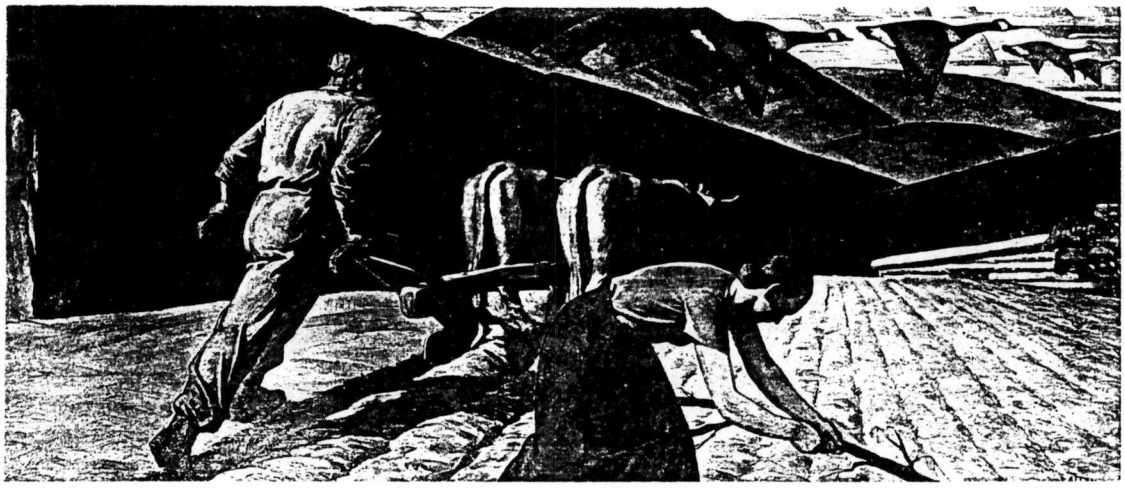
> No equal capital puts into motion a greater quantity of productive labour than that of the farmer. Not only his labouring servants, but his labouring cattle, are productive labourers. In agriculture too nature labours along with man; and though her labour costs no expence, its produce has its value, as well as that of the most expensive workmen. The most important operations of agriculture seem intended, not so much to increase, though they do that too, as to direct the fertility of nature towards the production of the plants most profitable to man. A field overgrown with briars and brambles may frequently produce as great a quantity of vegetables as the best cultivated vineyard or corn field. Planting and tillage frequently regulate more than they animate the active fertility of nature; and after all their labour, a great part of the work always remains to be done by her. The labourers and labouring cattle, therefore, employed in agriculture, not only occasion, like the workmen in manufactures, the reproduction of a value equal to their own consumption, or to the capital which employs them, together with its owners profits; but of a much greater value. (344)

The third major word of praise to farmers comes in the discussion of restraints on imports and the hazards inherent in the spirit of monopoly:

> Country gentlemen and farmers are, to their great honour, of all people, the least subject to the wretched spirit of monopoly. The undertaker of a great manufactory is sometimes alarmed if

> another work of the same kind is established within twenty miles of him. The Dutch undertaker of the woollen manufacture at Abbeville stipulated, that no work of the same kind should be established within thirty leagues of that city. Farmers and country gentlemen, on the contrary, are generally disposed rather to promote than to obstruct the cultivation and improvement of their neighbours farms and estates. They have no secrets, such as those of the greater part of manufacturers, but are generally rather fond of communicating to their neighbours, and of extending as far as possible any new practice which they have found to be advantageous. (428-429)

These insights into the merits of the plowman--his keen understanding, his profitable partnership with nature, his helpfulness to his neighbor--are not original with Adam Smith. But because they appear in *The Wealth of Nations*, they circulated widely and maintained a high level of visibility. These "images of value" helped to shape the destiny of America. Echoes of all three ideas can be heard in Crevecoeur and the first two, in Jefferson. These two men were as influential as any writers in establishing the farmer as the model of man in the New World.



Allen Thomas. *Extending the Frontier Northwest Territory.* Crystal Falls, Michigan, Post Office mural. From *WPA Art in Michigan.* Photo by Dirk Bakker.

Chapter 5

Hector St. John Crevecoeur

Hence comes it, that our meanest farmer's boy
Aspires to taste the proud and manly joy
That springs from holding in his own dear right
The land he plows, the home he seeks at night;
And hence it comes, he leaves his friends and home,
Mid distant wilds and dangers drear to roam,
To seek a competence, or find a grave,
Rather than live a hireling or a slave.
James K. Paulding in *The Backwoodsman*

Ideas from the Enlightenment and its spirit of rationalism were reflected in early American thought. The influence of Jean Jacques Rousseau, John Locke, and Francois Quesnay was especially strong. Rousseau's social contract implied a harmony between the laws of nature and society. Locke's formulation of the idea of natural rights shaped American land policies. The Physiocrat Quesnay advocated an economic theory that the land and its products are the only source of true wealth and therefore the only logical basis of a nation's economy. Freedom of opportunity and trade and the security of persons and property are essential to prosperity according to the physiocrats.

Many ideas rooted in Puritanism or Romanticism were also permanently impressed on American thought. The significance of the individual and the consequent value of educating him were important to the Puritans. And because of the worth of the individual, he needs freedom from political oppression. It may be slightly ironic that these Puritan ideas are matters of concern for this life, not the next. Interest in the common man and in agrarian life is, of course,

inseparable from the Romantic movement. The Renaissance and the Reformation had already added a new emphasis on individualism.

In the eighteenth century immigration was almost totally motivated by economics, according to Vernon Parrington (1.135). The hope of ultimately bettering themselves led masses of impoverished Old-World laborers to risk the uncertainties of immigration to the New World. Parrington cites a newspaper advertisement from the *American Weekly Mercury*, May 22, 1729: "There is just arrived from Scotland, a parcel of choice *Scotch Servants;* Taylors, Weavers, Shoemakers, and ploughmen, some for five and others for seven years" (1.136). (Note the condescending lower case used for "ploughmen.")

This study must, of necessity, be selective. Some of the early American writing--records of John Cotton, William Bradford, Cotton Mather, and John Winthrop, for example--picture America as a kind of New World Canaan, a Promised Land to be subdued by the efforts of early settlers. Parallels were drawn between the colonists and the experience of the Israelites of the Old Testament who survived the wilderness experience and established themselves in a fruitful land. No doubt the early histories and descriptions, the journals and religious writings, were influential in attracting settlers to the new land. But it was probably Hector St. John Crevecoeur (1735-1813), writing in the late eighteenth century, who most directly fired the imagination of Old World residents and led them to expect a kind of Paradise-on-Earth in the New World. Charles Sanford writes, "I venture the view that human history, converging in the perspective of time on America, is best understood in relation to the pursuit of paradise--that is, as an imaginative undertaking" (3).

The idyllic picture that Crevecoeur created in his *Letters from an American Farmer* is essentially a farmer's paradise. When the European

plowman was transplanted to the New World, the appellation of *farmer* almost wholly replaced that of *plowman*. The change bears out the fact of the farmer's new freedom and independence. A farmer is one who not only earns his living by farming, but especially he is one who manages or operates a farm. In many cases he is the owner, but if not, he is at least the manager. Since a plowman could be either a hired laborer or the owner, the designation of *farmer* steps away from the servility that could be associated with *plowman*. *Farmer* encompasses all tasks related to cultivation and husbandry, not just the tilling of the soil. In reality that was true of the plowman as well, in spite of the specific task in the designation.

Crevecoeur, along with Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson, held the physiocratic view that the land and its products were the only source of true wealth. Agriculture, they maintained, was the basis of the new American economy. Crevecoeur writes, "[I]t is from the surface of the ground which we till, that we have gathered the wealth we possess" (*Letters* 9). These three men were probably the most influential writers in colonial America around the time of the Revolutionary War. To a large extent, they were the shapers of The American Dream, a dream which carries strong echoes from Virgil's *Georgics*. Crevecoeur's *Letters*, most of which were probably written in the decade prior to the war, were directed to Europeans more exclusively than were most of Franklin's and Jefferson's works. Crevecoeur, therefore, looms largest in the late eighteenth century in creating an image of the idealized American farmer--an image tarnished by harsh realities in later American literature but never fully lost. If, however, all of Crevecoeur's letters had been published during his lifetime, perhaps he would not be accused of idealizing the American scene. Approximately two-thirds of the letters were finally published in 1925 as *Sketches of Eighteenth Century America*. That collection deals more with the difficulties

and injustices faced by the American farmers than do the *Letters*. The mystery involved in the selection of letters for publication in 1782 remains unsolved. The farmer's bonding to the earth as found in the *Letters* has ramifications that are social, economic, moral, and political.

Crevecoeur traveled extensively in the colonies and developed his own Pine Hill farm not far from New York City. One of the paradoxes of his images of plowing is the fact that, though he gives some of the highest praise in literature to the plowman-farmer, he himself was undoubtedly an overseer of the manual labor on his farm rather than a plowman. In spite of Crevecoeur's high regard for the humble farmers, his viewpoint remains somewhat aristocratic. The same can be said of Jefferson and Cooper. Crevecoeur's vivid scenes of rural life in the *Letters* have been etched in the American consciousness in such a way as to reinforce one's yearning for an earthly paradise. Yet Crevecoeur does present himself as a farmer. In making light of his own writing, he says in the persona of Farmer James, "There is something truly ridiculous in a farmer quitting his plough or his axe, and then flying to his pen" (*Sketches* 84-85). The writer of the letters of both volumes was as much naturalist and politician as farmer. He was a wise observer and a philosopher in his own right, a man of action who was also a writer. Perhaps no other document shaped the European view of life in colonial America as did Crevecoeur's *Letters*, especially his essay, "What is an American," published as the third letter. He wrote for a generation longing for the peace and plenty he pictured in the American Eden. His focus is primarily on the farmer's role, his independence and privileges in the New World, and not so much on the labor itself.

Crevecoeur is preoccupied with establishing his persona for the *Letters* in the dedication and the first letter. Both are informative as to his view of the

abilities of the plowman-farmer in America. He presents himself to Abbe Raynal as "an humble American Planter, a simple cultivator of the earth" (xxxi). And he concludes the dedication by saying he is a person "who never rose above the humble role of a farmer" (xxxiii). The designations of "simple farmer" and "cultivator of the earth" are repeated at the end of the introductory letter. Crevecoeur is paying polite respects to the Abbe, not disparaging his own position. He claims a "mental affinity" and a "similitude of sentiments" with the educated Abbe Raynal. Crevecoeur, from a noble French family, chose to cast his lot for a time as an American farmer. This puts him in a position quite different from the person who plows the land without the economic-educational-social resources of Crevecoeur. This should be kept in mind when he does not deal realistically with some of the harsher aspects of the plowman-farmer's life in the *Letters*. After all, they must surely have been written, at least in part, to serve as advertisement or propaganda. Idealizations of the farmer and rural life have always existed in literature--an indication of the persistence of those Edenic images which Charles Sanford explores so well in *The Quest for Paradise*.

Early in the introductory letter, Crevecoeur establishes the fact that even the intelligentsia of the New World are farmers. His Farmer James solicits the minister for assistance in describing American life, but the minister cannot spare the time, for in addition to preparing sermons and visiting parishoners, he "like the rest of us must till his farm" (*Letters* 3). As the minister ostensibly tries to persuade the "humble farmer" that he (Farmer James) is capable of describing life in America for the Abbe, he cites his own intellectual activity while plowing as evidence that a manual laborer can also use his mind. What the minister says is important in raising the reader's regard for the plowman as a thinking person:

> After all, why should not a farmer be allowed to make use of his mental faculties as well as others; because a man works, is not he to think, and if he thinks usefully, why should not he in his leisure hours set down his thoughts? I have composed many a good sermon as I followed my plough. The eyes not being then engaged on any particular object, leaves the mind free for the introduction of many useful ideas. It is not in the noisy shop of a blacksmith or of a carpenter, that these studious moments can be enjoyed; it is as we silently till the ground, and muse along the odoriferous furrows of our low lands, uninterrupted either by stones or stumps; it is there that the salubrious effluvia of the earth animate our spirits and serve to inspire us; every other avocation of our farms are severe labours compared to this pleasing occupation: of all the tasks which mine imposes on me ploughing is the most agreeable, because I can think as I work; my mind is at leisure; my labour flows from instinct, as well as that of my horses; there is no kind of difference between us in our different shares of that operation; one of them keeps the furrow, the other avoids it; at the end of my field they turn either to the right or left as they are bid, whilst I thoughtlessly hold and guide the plough to which they are harnessed. (15-16)

A new emphasis presents itself in this image of the plowman on American soil. Plowing is used elsewhere as a metaphor for the writing of poetry, but the literal plowing is in the foreground here. It can provide the quiet time needed for the gestation of useful ideas. The plowman here is a thinker. And the plowing itself is an agreeable task because the mind is at leisure as the person plows his land. Furthermore, the very smell of the newly turned lowlands inspires the thinker and animates his spirit. Stress is laid on the freedom of the soul and spirit, not on the physical labor of plowing. Here the plowman is one who occupies his mind with enriching ideas while his body does the mechanical work. He is a whole person--body, mind, and spirit. He is not a toiling machine that is made dull in mind by physical labor. Crevecoeur's plowman stands in sharp contrast to the image of the laborer made popular a century later in Edwin Markham's "The Man With the Hoe." Crevecoeur's plowman, industrious and thoughtful, couples action and thought, as frequently occurs through the *Letters*. (See 24 and 45.)

He is also a family man with enough leisure time for creativity, a man concerned for the respect of his children:

> Would you painfully till your stony up-land and neglect the fine rich bottom which lies before your door? Had you never tried, you never had learned how to mend and make your ploughs. It will be no small pleasure to your children to tell hereafter, that their father was not only one of the most industrious farmers in the country, but one of the best writers. When you have once begun, do as when you begin breaking up your summer fallow, you never consider what remains to be done, you view only what you have ploughed. (16)

The last sentence in the quoted passage indicates that the plowman is a person who knows how to maintain his self-confidence and an upbeat spirit: he looks at his accomplishment, not at the remaining task--a valuable habit for writer and plowman alike.

Crevecoeur's wife worries a bit as to what others will think of a scribbling farmer and whether the farm work will get done properly if her husband decides to be a writer. The value of farm work is uppermost in her somewhat humorous protestations of his writing:

> Thy father before thee was a plain dealing honest man, punctual in all things; he was one of yea and nay, of few words, all he minded was his farm and his work. I wonder from whence thee hast got this love of the pen? Had he spent his time in sending epistles to and fro, he never would have left thee this goodly plantation, free from debt. All I say is in good meaning; great people over seas may write to our town's folks, because they have nothing else to do. These Englishmen are strange people; because they can live upon what they call bank notes, without working, they think that all the world can do the same. This goodly country never would have been tilled and cleared with these notes. (18)

Contrasts between the Old World and the New are rife in these letters that set out to show the causes which "render so many people happy" in the New World. Those causes appear to be most frequently founded upon man's access to and

control of the land. To explain this happiness, Crevecoeur shows how the farmers "convert huge forests into pleasing fields, and exhibit through these thirteen provinces so singular a display of easy subsistence and political felicity" (7). In America Crevecoeur envisions a kind of pristine innocence associated with the beginnings of human society. Instead of looking backward in time--as would visitors to Italy, imaginations "spring forward to the anticipated fields of future cultivations and improvement, to the future extent of those generations which are to replenish and embellish this boundless continent" (8). "Here," writes Crevecoeur, "we have no war to desolate our fields: our religion does not oppress the cultivators: we are strangers to those feudal institutions which have enslaved so many" (7). Furthermore, "we are a race of cultivators, our cultivation is unrestrained, and therefore every thing is prosperous and flourishing" (9). Ralph Gabriel, among others, estimates that at the time of Crevecoeur's writing, at least ninety percent of Americans lived on the soil, many of whom were small farmers (*Sketches* 5).

The idea that a nation's wealth is based on its agriculture has already been discussed. It is a recurring idea in the *Letters* and helps form the contrasts betweeen America and the Old World. Occasionally the contrasts are carried forward with some sense of humor. For example: "I had rather record the progressive steps of this industrious farmer, throughout all the stages of his labours and other operations, than examine how modern Italian convents can be supported without doing any thing but singing and praying" (9). The idea that America is a land of tillers of the soil recurs in the letters. That fact, Crevecoeur believes, accounts for the more equitable distribution of wealth in American (49). With "[s]ome few towns excepted," he writes, "we are all tillers of the earth, from Nova Scotia to West Florida. We are a people of cultivators" (49). Lawyers and

merchants may be titles one finds in the towns, but "that of a farmer is the only appellation of the rural inhabitants of our country" (50). Crevecoeur describes what a visitor will see in church:

> There, on a Sunday, he sees a congregation of respectable farmers and their wives, all clad in neat homespun, well mounted, or riding in their own humble waggons. There is not among them an esquire, saving the unlettered magistrate. There he sees a parson as simple as his flock, a farmer who does not riot on the labour of others. We have no princes, for whom we toil, starve, and bleed: we are the most perfect society now existing in the world. Here man is free as he ought to be. (50)

The differences in rank are less significant among the settlers in the New World. The parson is also a "simple" farmer. Crevecoeur considers this farmer society to be respectable and neat, the most perfect in existence. "The rich and the poor are not so far removed from each other as they are in Europe," he writes elsewhere (49). At the end of the letter describing Nantucket, Crevecoeur admits that differences in rank do exist, but he finds the distinctions less marked among the farmers:

> As in all societies except that of the native, some difference must necessarily exist between individual and individual, for there must be some more exalted than the rest either by their riches or their talents; so in *this*, there are what you might call the high, the middling, and the low; and this difference will always be more remarkable among people who live by sea excursions than among those who live by the cultivation of their land. (154)

Crevecoeur sees the greater difference among seafaring people because of the risks that lead to greater profit or loss. But he says that "equal divisions of the land offers no short road to superior riches" (154). Farmers' differences are generally due to degree of industry or quality of the soil they cultivate. Although he doesn't say this directly, he has actually tied rank to riches. But rank is not tied to the family name.

Even Bertram, the botanist of Letter 11, calls himself a plowman when he explains how he became a botanist:

> One day I was very busy in holding my plough (for thee seest that I am but a ploughman) and being weary I ran under the shade of a tree to repose myself. I cast my eyes on a *daisy*, I plucked it mechanically and viewed it with more curiosity than common country farmers are wont to do; and observed therein very many distinct parts, some perpendicular, some horizontal. What a shame, said my mind, or something that inspired my mind, that thee shouldest have employed so many years tilling the earth and destroying so many flowers and plants, without being acquainted with their structures and their uses. (271)

The wearisome toil and the destruction to wild plants are familiar aspects of the plowing image. But here the plowman observes, not the practical affairs of his task, but the peripheral affairs--the structure of a daisy. Since diligent cultivation of the soil is the "only wealth of the American farmer" (272), if Bertram pursues the study of such things as daisies, he departs from the expectations inherent in the American image of the plowman. He must hire someone else to plow for him so that he can go to Philadelphia (272). Bertram is measured against a norm for the plowman image that is pragmatic and utilitarian, even though some leisure has been conceded to the American plowman-farmer. That leisure allows for attendance at church and community functions and for some time with one's family, but the plowman has very limited time for pursuing personal interests that do not directly improve his farm.

Crevecoeur associates his thoughts of selling the farm with youthfulness when he began to wonder about "a dull repetition of the same labours and pleasures" (23). But when he considered leaving the farm, he somehow feared "there would be no room" elsewhere for him. He calls this to the reader's attention because with plowing one's land, there develops a sense of place and of belonging to the land that is part of the mystery of the plowman's bonding to the earth. One

of the events that helped him be satisfied with his lot as a farmer was marrying. Then he experienced the encouragement of feeling that he did not work for himself alone (24). Tilling the land is strongly connected with the continuity of generations within the family (23-28). As a farmer, Crevecoeur writes that he wants "to be happy and a good man" like his father (25). And his imagination runs forward to anticipate the life of his own child (26). He wants his children to follow his philosophy and become "good substantial independent American farmers" (46-47). The sense of belonging to the soil one tills is seen when he describes his return home from an involuntary absence:

> The instant I enter on my own land, the bright idea of property, of exclusive right, of independence exalts my mind. Precious soil, I say to myself, by what singular custom of law is it that thou wast made to constitute the riches of the freeholder? What should we American farmers be without the distinct possession of that soil? (27)

The family orientation of the farmer is further extended as Crevecoeur describes plowing with his own small son:

> Often when I plough my low ground, I place my little boy on a chair which screws to the beam of the plough--its motion and that of the horses please him, he is perfectly happy and begins to chat. As I lean over the handle, various are the thoughts which crowd into my mind. I am now doing for him, I say, what my father formerly did for me, may God enable him to live that he may perform the same operations for the same purposes when I am worn out and old! . . . [T]he odoriferous furrow exhilarates his spirits, and seems to do the child a great deal of good, for he looks more blooming since I have adopted that practice; can more pleasure, more dignity be added to that primary occupation? The father thus ploughing with his child, and to feed his family, is inferior only to the emperor of China ploughing as an example to his kingdom. (28)

The plowman here is not only a thinking man, but he is deliberately engaged in an activity which is bonding his small son to the earth because he envisions the life of a farmer as the ideal for his child. Thus by his son's riding on the plow, he

introduces him to a love for the land and its care. Crevecoeur tells more of what he wants for his children:

> [T]hey will imbibe, I hope, a confirmed taste for that simplicity, which so well becomes the cultivators of the land. If I cannot teach them any of those professions which sometimes embellish and support our society, I will shew them how to hew wood, how to construct their own ploughs; and with a few tools how to supply themselves with every necessary implement, both in the house and in the field. (324)

Simplicity and self-reliance are uppermost as befitting the next generation of farmers. It is clear that Crevecoeur puts priority on the practical matters of farming when he thinks of his children:

> As I intend my children neither for the law nor the church, but for the cultivation of the land; I wish them no literary accomplishments; I pray heaven that they may be one day nothing more than expert scholars in husbandry: this is the science which made our continent to flourish more rapidly than any other. (326)

The freedom and independence of the plowman-farmer is another note sounded forcefully by Crevecoeur, but it is not one that had been so strongly stressed prior to the development of literature in America. Gabriel writes in his introduction to *Sketches*: "The independent family on a self-sufficient farm came close to his [Crevecoeur's] ideal of perfect social conditions" (6). One statement in connection with caring for bees makes a good summary of Crevecoeur's ideal: "[I]t is in freedom that they work: were I to confine them, they would dwindle away and quit their labour" (35). Along with the independence of the farmer is the persistent reminder that his life also has some leisure and relaxation. That allows for the development of abilities of the whole person and for the simple enjoyment of the pleasures of life--essential to mankind's well-being. Crevecoeur's farmer talks of roaming through his fields and enjoying whatever tasks he performs (40). This pleasure-in-work is a recognition of the farmer as a whole person: "I never should

have done were I to recount the many objects which involuntarily strike my imagination in the midst of my work, and spontaneously afford me the most pleasing relief" (45).

The toil of the American farmer has a different character in Crevecoeur's eye than the labor the European farmer expends. Here in American men toil "without that servility of labour" which he thinks prevails in Europe (178). Crevecoeur says this country is settled by freeholders, "the possessors of the soil they cultivate" (72). This difference of which he speaks is primarily in the fact that the American farmer is "rewarded by ample subsistence" and is, in fact, toiling for his own benefit, not the benefit of his landlord (55-56). "As farmers they will be careful and anxious to get as much as they can, because what they get is their own" (58). Furthermore, "It is astonishing how quick men will learn when they work for themselves" (114). Crevecoeur cites Andrew the Hebridean as an example. In two months Andrew was "holding a two horse-plough and tracing his furrows quite straight" (114). The main incentive for the plowman's labor is that he will be given the full rewards of his industry (126).

In both the *Letters* and the *Sketches*, the profit motive is strong, stronger than it was in the literature from the other side of the Atlantic. For better or worse, the desire for land and wealth enticed many settlers to America. Crevecoeur says that in the colonies "the poor became rich; but by riches I do not mean gold and silver, we have but little of those metals; I mean a better sort of wealth, cleared lands, cattle, good houses, good cloaths, and an increase of people to enjoy them" (73). Because the American plowman is strongly motivated by the possibility of increasing his wealth, he quickly masters the practical matters of cultivation (78).

Industriousness has always been linked to the image of the plowman or the cultivator of the soil, and Crevecoeur affirms that association. He says, in fact, that industry, "to me who am but a farmer, is the criterion of everything" (52). In the third letter Crevecoeur writes: "We are all animated by the spirit of an industry which is unfettered or unrestrained, because each person works for himself" (50). Yet Crevecoeur also recognizes man's natural selfishness (*Sketches* 145) and says industry needs to be "sanctified by the efficacy of a few moral rules" (60). Modest laws and the development of human community are essentail to mankind's well-being (282). Industry, according to Crevecoeur, leads to the development of towns (74) and to a countryside of orderly fields, fences, and trees (259). Other virtues are frequently cited in the successful farmer. Sometimes these three--industry, honesty, sobriety--are mentioned in tandem; other times only two are mentioned, but these three virtues appear to be uppermost in Crevecoeur's plowmen (e.g., 64, 80, 89, 94, 102, 113-14, 120, 167, 314). Crevecoeur links industry to freedom and independence (72) and idleness and subsequent poverty to crime (153).

There is a moral uprightness which Crevecoeur assigns to the farmers and which he finds lacking in those who hunt, trap, and live beyond the cultivated frontier. He says, "the simple cultivation of the earth purifies them [those in the middle settlement]" (57). Later in the same letter he repeats that idea:

> If manners are not refined, at least they are rendered simple and inoffensive by tilling the earth; all our wants are supplied by it, our time is divided between labour and rest, and leaves none for the commission of great misdeeds. (69)

Crevecoeur adheres to the idea that cultivating the land is a civilizing occupation. The farther one goes from the sea, he says, the less civilized are men's manners (58-59). Those barbarous pioneers who do not cultivate the land but live from

hunting and trapping move on to the wilder frontier when farmers come to establish themselves on the land (60). Crevecoeur says, "As long as we keep ourselves busy tilling the earth, there is no fear of any of us becoming wild; it is the chase and the food it procures, that have this strange effect" (316). He sees hunting and plowing as incompatibles: "this is the progress: once hunters, farewell to the plough" (67). In fact, those who live by their wits in the woods even cease to be disciples of religion, according to Crevecoeur (70). He sees those who move into a new area and fell the trees as "vicious," but they open the way for the cultivators, the "better class, the true American freeholders" (72). He associates barbarianism with the woods and cultivation with the plains. But he makes an exception for the Indians. They are nature's "immediate children, the inhabitants of the woods are her undefiled offspring: those of the plains are her degenerated breed, far, very far removed from her primitive laws, from her original design" (308).

In those areas where "immense labour is required to make room for the plough" (188), men are more hardy and capable than in places like New-Gardens and Charleston where industry is not required, and men tend to degenerate because they are idle (188-89). In the *Sketches* Crevecoeur develops the idea of idlers living like wretches in Eden (150-51).

In "What is an American," Crevecoeur makes a distinction between the one who is able to purchase land and become an American farmer and the one who is a laborer to be hired. Given a few years, Crevecoeur thinks the industrious laborer can become a landowner, a prospect that could be realized by some in Crevecoeur's time but one that has become an increasingly remote possibility. The potential American plowmen were mostly from the middle and lower classes in

Crevecoeur's time. "The rich stay in Europe," he said; "it is only the middling and the poor that emigrate" (75-76).

The American farmer sums up his life accomplishments thus:

> I am but a feller of trees, a cultivator of land, the most honourable title an American can have. I have no exploits, no discoveries, no inventions to boast of; I have cleared about 370 acres of land, some for the plough, some for the scythe; and this has occupied many years of my life. I never possessed, or wish to possess any thing more than what could be earned or produced by the united industry of my family. I wanted nothing more than to live at home independent and tranquil, and to teach my children how to provide the means of a future ample subsistence, founded on labour, like that of their father. (302)

Certainly the plowman has been bonded to the earth through his labors on his own land. Crevecoeur recognizes that bond to the earth when he writes:

> If in Europe it is praise-worthy to be attached to paternal inheritances, how much more natural, how much more powerful must the tie be with us, who, if I may be permitted the expression, are the founders, the creators of our own farms! (310).

The final injunction before the story of Andrew the Hebridean sums up the spirit of Crevecoeur's work: "Go thou and work and till; thou shalt prosper, provided thou be just, grateful and industrious" (91).

What, if anything, is different in the image of the plowman-farmer in Crevecoeur's *Sketches*? In spite of greater emphasis on the difficulties the farmer faces, the *Sketches* associates similar ideas with the farmer, and he is again treated as farmer-as-citizen and landowner (potential or actual). The farmer's multiple roles and diverse abilities are given special attention in the *Sketches* (71-73). The farmers are "now ploughmen, now mechanics, sometimes even physicians" (70). "He is a universal fabricator like Crusoe" (73). The farmer is a self-reliant person: "Does either his plough or his cart break, he runs to his tools; he repairs them as well as he can" (71). Furthermore, he is "[h]usband, father,

priest, principal governor,--he fills up all these stations, though in the humble vale of life" (70). Crevecoeur sums up his version of the philosophy of the American farmer:

> I have often told you that the philosophy of an American farmer consisted in doing much with few hands, in manufacturing in his own family whatever he may want. This is true in every possible respect. If he is obliged to purchase many articles, then he works for others and not for himself; he is but a fool and a slave. His profits are so inconsiderable that if they are uselessly expended, there remains nothing of his year's industry. (128)

Farmers are praised as being a useful and dignified class of men (47-48). And they are seen as happy people (e.g., 71). Both of Crevecoeur's works talk of the cheerful songs of the plowman at work. As the plowman converts the "rough ridge into a fine field," observers are able "to hear the chearful whistling, the rural song" (*Letters* 86). And the *Sketches* refer to the pleasant sounds of cultivations and civilization, including "the cheerful songs of the ploughman" (181). In fact, the farmer's toils are such that he must have personal happiness in order to cope with difficulties: "The American farmer has his peculiar degree of happiness without which he could not subsist" (89). In areas of difficult cultivation, Crevecoeur thinks it requires this spirit of freemen in order to "till the asperous soil" (80). He maintains that the northern black laborers share not only the farmers' toil but also their "mirth and good cheer" (148). He also maintains that farms in the northern province are suitable "only for people who are capable of working; the southern ones [farms] for those who have capital and can purchase negroes" (84). This distinction between southern planters and northern farmers existed up to the Civil War.

Again in the *Sketches* the writer stresses the pragmatic orientation of the farmers: "We are born to labour and not to study," he says (169). The farmer gives

a strong admonition to the self-appointed preacher to talk to the farmers of practical, not theoretical matters (167-70). Yet it is not a matter of weak understanding on the farmers' part, for earlier when Crevecoeur writes of the minister's inferior sermon, he says: "Ploughman as I am, I really blushed at it. It was as incoherent, senseless jargon as ever I had heard before" (163). The farmer in the *Sketches* has wisdom and dignity, but apparently has not indulged himself in theoretical matters that are much removed from farming. Farmers, for example, are ill-equipped to become magistrates: "Where should the man who daily follows his plough find that spontaneous knowledge which is requisite?" (148). The writer said early in the *Letters* that plowing left the mind free to pursue one's own ideas, but the wisdom thus distilled is different from the kind of knowledge one might gain from formal education. Often the associations made with the person of the plowman-farmer are not as clear-cut as the associations made with the plow itself or the action of plowing. The human factor makes unrealistic all attempts at tight categorization. When the writer tires "of the company of generals, rulers, imperial delegates, modern governors," he turns to the plowman-farmers: "My predilected province at present is more humble but perhaps not less interesting. I choose now to converse with those vulgar hands, to whom the drudgery of ploughing and scattering the good seed has been committed" (253).

Though the farmer oversees and provides for others as a responsible person (43), he himself needs the restraint of law (47). The basic selfishness of mankind already mentioned, makes law a necessity (145). In spite of the purifying effect of cultivation, mankind harbors the seed of civil discord within himself:

> Could I have ever thought that a people of cultivators, who know nothing but their ploughs and the management of their rural economies, should be found to possess, like the more ancient

> nations of Europe, the embryos of these propensities which now stain our society?" (178)

So the plowmen-farmers, in spite of their bonding to the earth through tilling the land, are simply part of the human race with all its propensities for good and evil. All the moral lessons they can draw from the natural order of sowing and reaping do not exempt them from wrong doing.

The farmer in the *Sketches*, as well as in the *Letters*, has a family orientation, as has been mentioned. Farmers hold the plow and the axe "for their wives and children" (204). The ultimate satisfaction of the farmer comes in preparing his children to follow his steps as a plowman-farmer:

> If it please God that I should live long enough, this will be one day my great happiness, and if I can see [my children] possessed of the proper qualifications requisite to make them good farmers, I shall close my eyes in peace. They won't be apt to say that I have not trained them up to the plough, for I fix them on it, even from the breast. (93).

Crevecoeur cites contrasts between city life and country life that should be mentioned because of the tension associated with that contrast in later American literature. He sees the crowded cities as the "confined theatre of cupidity" (54), whereas the country "feeds contemplation; which delights, improves, and often assuages the pains of an afflicted mind" (56).

In only one place in either of Crevecoeur's works does he actually look closely at the plow itself as an implement of the farmer. After discussing the two-horse wagon, he turns to the plow in the following description. Though the passage is lengthy, its singular appearance calls for quotation:

> Our next most useful implement is the plough. Of these we have various sorts, according to the soil which we have to till. First, [there is] the large two-handled plough with an English lock and coulter locked in its point. This is drawn by either four or six oxen and serves for rooty, stony land. This is drawn sometimes by two oxen and three horses. The one-handled

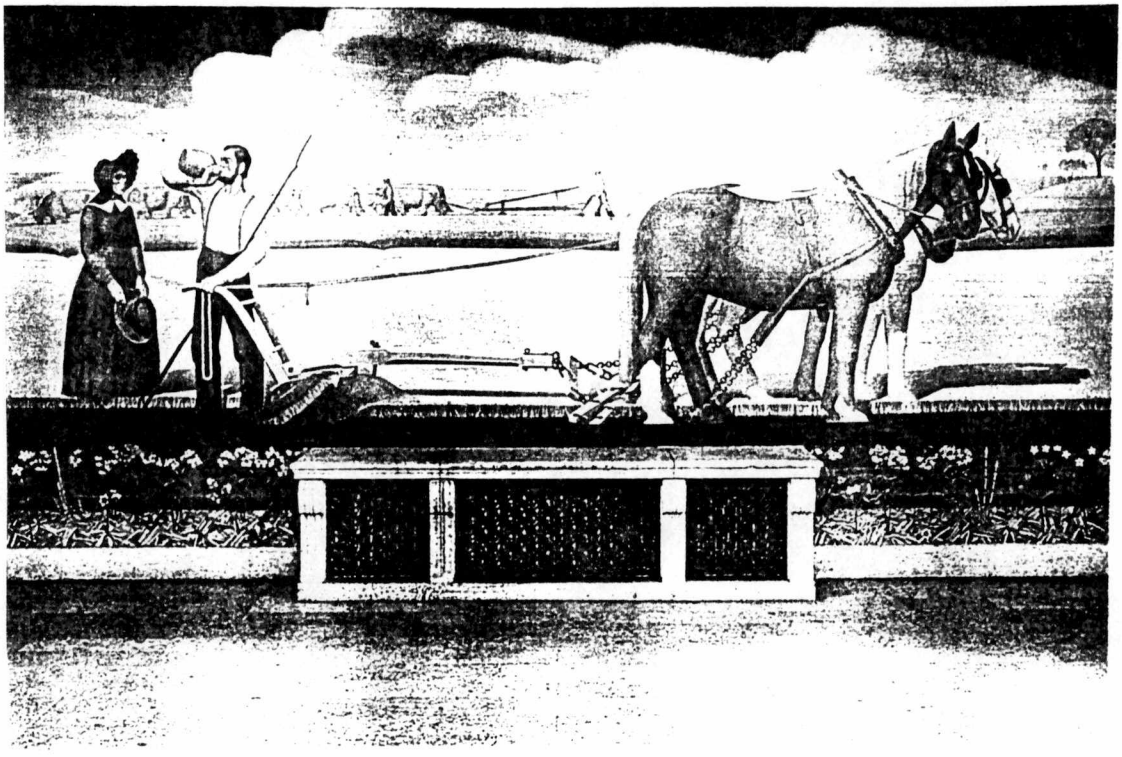
> plough is the most common in all level soils. It is drawn either by two or by three horses abreast, and when the ground is both level and swarded we commonly put upon these a Dutch lock, by far the best for turning up, and the easiest draft for the horses. A team of four oxen is conducted by a lad. If it consists of two horses and two oxen, the boy rides one of the horses, and another lad drives the oxen. Our two or three-horse teams are guided by the man who holds the plough. Lines are properly fixed to the horses' bridles on each side and passed around the plough-handle. The ploughman keeps them straight with his left hand while he guides his plough with his right. Three horses abreast are the most expeditious as well as the strongest team we know of for common land. We cross-plough with two horses, commonly one and a half acres a day. We have, besides, a smaller sort, called the corn-plough with which we till through the furrows, and a harrow proportioned to the distance at which our corn is planted. (139-40)

Crevecoeur also mentions the breaking up of summer fallow or buckwheat ground so that the pesky blackbirds can "prey on the worms and caterpillars which the plough raises" and not on the new corn (117). This allusion completes the survey of those found in the *Sketches*.

What then can be said of the plow-related images as they appear in Crevecoeur? First, the focus is on the plowman or farmer himself. Crevecoeur's work is in essay form, not fiction, and his concern is what happens to the farmer in America. Except for mention of his wife's admiring his straight furrows and the occasion of placing his small son on the plow, very little attention is given to the physical process of plowing. Two associations related to the process are the fact that *plowing* is used interchangeably with *farming* and the claim that plowing civilizes and purifies the plowman. And from the one description of plows in the *Sketches*, one would not be likely to derive any new symbolic suggestions beyond the fact that the plow has primacy as an implement of farming. So almost all of the associations seen in Crececoeur concern the image of the plowman-farmer himself. These are the associations that have been discussed in the image of the

American farmer: He is of humble origin; he undergoes a kind of rebirth with new dignity and energy because of the opportunity of owning his own land; he is motivated by self-interest; he is self-reliant and practical; he meditates at the plow and is thereby refined; he wants his children to inherit the land; he experiences a kind of primal happiness from his work; he is independent and sometimes selfish; he is religiously indifferent; he operates in roomy spaces; he toils in hope. Not all of these associations are distinctively American. The last five items in this list appear to be true in a greater degree in the American farmer than in his European counterpart. The stimulus of land ownership for a poor man is considered an American phenomenon.

When one reviews the image of the plowman in Crevecoeur, he can readily conclude that many of the characteristic traits attributed to Americans result in part from the fact that the majority of the population followed an agrarian way of life in the formative decades of the nation. This idea has been argued effectively by Arthur M. Schlesinger (225-244).



Grant Wood. *Breaking the Prairie*. 1937. Oil on canvas, center mural panel, 11 x 23 1/4'. The Iowa State University Library, Ames.

Chapter 6

Thomas Jefferson

> The farmer lives in rustic plenty, remote from the contagion of popular vices, and enjoys, in their greatest fruition, the blessings of health and contentment. . . . The pleasures and virtues of rural life have been the theme of poets and philosophers in all ages. The tillage of the soil was the primeval employment of man. Of all arts, it is the most useful and necessary. It has justly been styled the nursing father of the State; for in civilized countries all are equally dependent upon it for the means of subsistence.
>
> George W. Julian in a speech, Jan. 29, 1851

The American farmer's bonding to the soil takes on a decidedly political aspect in the years following the American Revolution as political leaders sought to form a government that would be approved by the various factions in the colonies. It was the farmers who left their plows and "fired the shot heard 'round the world"; and the time had come when they must decide how to govern themselves in the New World. The fact that about ninety percent of the population lived on farms meant that agrarian interests were the dominant factor to be reckoned with in the new government. Farmers were valued citizens. Thomas Jefferson wrote to John Jay: "Cultivators of the earth are the most valuable citizens. They are the most vigorous, the most independent, the most virtuous, and they are tied to their country, and wedded to its liberty and interests by the most lasting bonds" (Aug. 23, 1785, *Papers* 8.426-28).

Even though Jefferson does not provide fictional images of the American plowman, his work creates a philosophical and political context that enriches the meaning of plowing the soil in the New World. His generalizations about the

farmer need to be viewed within the framework of his own time--a time when land was readily available, industrialism had not fully monopolized the economy, and the new nation was seeking to shape a satisfactory democracy.

Jefferson is inseparably linked with the history of agrarianism in America. Chester E. Eisinger's definition of agrarianism suggests three interrelated concepts: 1) If a country acknowledges private property, then every person has a "natural right" to own land. 2) "[A]griculture is the mother of organized society; the recognition of private property is necessary only when men begin to practice agriculture. . . . Thus, in order to protect the individual's investment in private property, made in terms of agricultural labors, the state was created." 3) Agriculture must, therefore, be the "primary concern of the state" ("Natural Rights" 13).

The theory of natural rights, borrowed primarily from Locke, was important not only to revolutionary idealism, but also in the formulation of the new government. Both Federalists and Republicans found it useful in justifying their claim that every person had a natural right to own land. Political independence was based on social equality and economic security; that necessitated land ownership. Thus the concept of private property was a crucial link between democracy and agrarianism.

In "An Essay Concerning the True Original Extent and End of Civil Government," Locke begins by quoting Psalm 115:16: "but the earth hath he given to the children of men." According to Locke, this common property can become private property as the result of laboring on a piece of land to improve it; labor gives ownership. Locke's criteria for ownership are use and occupancy. One has a right to only as much land as he needs to use. And, if there is to be private property, there must be a government to protect that right of ownership. Therefore

agriculture creates an organized society which, in turn, protects private property. In a very real sense, agriculture then is the reason for government. And private ownership of land is the basis of agrarianism. Jefferson drew heavily on Locke's work in articulating the ideals of agrarian democracy. The French Physiocrats also drew upon Locke's ideas and, eclectic thinker that he was, Jefferson was thoroughly aware of his kinship with some of their principles. He rejected their idea, however, of a tax on land and their idea that landowners should rule the nation. The Physiocrats also advocated large estates, another idea rejected by Jefferson--in spite of his own plantation. But Jefferson agreed that agriculture is the only source of true wealth and the only productive employment. It is largely due to Jefferson that the theories of agrarianism and democracy are so thoroughly intertwined in the latter part of the eighteenth century. Jefferson's ideal was a nation of small freeholders, unencumbered by outworn practices of primogeniture or entail. In fact, the freehold concept is the foundation of all agrarian movements in the United States. Jefferson believed these freeholders would exemplify the virtues a free government required of its citizens. Both Jefferson and Crevecoeur idealized a middle way of life between the primitive on one hand and corrupt sophistication on the other and without the vices of either.

If Jefferson's model seems like an entirely lost ideal, one might look at what similar sentiments are expressed in the report from the committee appointed by Secretary of Agriculture Wickard in 1941, representing all federal agencies concerned with farming:

> The U. S. Department of Agriculture believes that the welfare of agriculture and of the Nation will be promoted by an agricultural land tenure pattern characterized by efficient family-size owner-operated farms, and one of the continuing major objectives of the Department will be the establishment and maintenance of such farms as the predominating operating

> farm unit in the United States. (qtd. in Griswold's "Agrarian Democracy" 661)

Jefferson has the distinction of placing a higher value on farming than just as a means of acquiring wealth. "To him," Griswold writes in the same article, "agriculture was not primarily a source of wealth, but of human virtues and traits most congenial to popular government" (667). Jefferson is also a pragmatic realist and able to bend to popular opinion, as he did in the controversy over foreign manufacturing. When he wrote to James Madison in 1787, he said he thought governments could remain virtuous as long as they were "chiefly agricultural; and this will be as long as there shall be vacant lands in any part of America" (Dec 20, 1787, *Papers* 12.438-42). He knew his dream of a nation of small freeholders had a diminishing point, that vacant land was not in inexhausible supply. But as long as vast tracts of land were available in the West, Jefferson's land-based philosophy, rooted in the environment of the New World, could be a model of freeholding for the rest of the world.

Opposed to Alexander Hamilton's policies of strong central government, Jefferson was the accepted leader of agrarian America. Throughout his long career, he maintained unwavering faith in the ability of the common man to govern himself and to improve his lot in life. His confidence in the unlimited possibilities of the human mind was very much in the spirit of the Enlightenment. Jeffersonian thought has done more to shape distinctly American ideas than the thought of any other national leader. And the fact that his political and economic ideas have a strong agrarian bias is undisputed. The best-known of Jefferson's declarations of praise for the cultivators of the soil appears in *Notes on the State of Virginia* in response to Query XIX:

> Those who labour in the earth are the chosen people of God, if ever he had a chosen people, whose breasts he had made his

> peculiar deposit for substantial and genuine virtue. It is the focus in which he keeps alive that sacred fire, which otherwise might escape from the face of the earth. Corruption of morals in the mass of cultivators is a phenomenon of which no age nor nation has furnished an example. It is the mark set on those, who not looking up to heaven, to their own soil and industry, as does the husbandman, for their subsistance, depend for it on the casualties and caprice of customers. Dependance begets subservience and venality, suffocates the germ of virtue, and prepares fit tools for the designs of ambition. This, the natural progress and consequence of the arts, has sometimes perhaps been retarded by accidental circumstances: but, generally speaking, the proportion which the aggregate of the other classes of citizens bears in any state to that of its husbandmen, is the proportion of its unsound to its healthy parts, and is a good-enough barometer whereby to measure its degree of corruption. While we have land to labour then, let us never wish to see our citizens occupied at a work-bench, or twirling a distaff. . . . The mobs of great cities add just so much to the support of pure government, as sores do to the strength of the human body. It is the manners and spirit of a people which preserve a republic in vigour. A degeneracy in these is a canker which soon eats to the heart of its laws and constitution. (*Portable* 217)

Throughout Jefferson's writings, one finds confirmation of the ideas summarized in his response to Query XIX and confirmation of his personal pleasure in rural affairs. For example, his enthusiasm for farming is underscored in a letter to John Adams:

> I return to farming with an ardor which I scarcely knew in my youth, and which has got the better entirely of my love of study. Instead of writing 10 or 12 letters a day, which I have been in the habit of doing as a thing of course, I put off answering my letters now, farmer-like, till a rainy day, and then find it sometimes postpones my other necessary occupations. (April 25, 1794, *Garden* 219)

In a letter to James Madison, Jefferson tells of the unequal distribution of property and the resulting poverty he sees in France. If uncultivated lands exist in a country, that country should not have unemployed poor, according to Jefferson's ideals. If unemployment exists, the natural rights of its citizens have been violated. "The earth is given," he writes, "as a common stock for man to labour and

live on." He wants to be sure that in America all possible means will be used to guarantee that the unemployed are able to obtain land. "The small landholders are the most precious part of a state" (Oct. 28, 1785, *Papers* 8.681-83).

A letter to Crevecoeur again points up Jefferson's high estimate of the American farmer. He writes about the credit being given to the English for a wheel made of a single piece of wood. But the New Jersey farmers had long before bent a green sapling into a circle for wheels. Jefferson writes:

> The writer in the paper supposes the English workman got his idea from Homer. But it is more likely that the Jersey farmer got the idea from thence, because ours are the only farmers who can read Homer: because too the Jersey practice is precisely that stated by Homer; the English practice very different. (Jan. 15, 1787, *Papers* 11.43-44)

Thomas Jefferson's Farm Book, a memorandum book for 1774 to 1826, shows Jefferson as a plantation manager recording farming operations and planning ahead to clothe and feed his slaves. In it plows figure in several items of interest. One is in his record of the number of "ploughing days" from March through December in 1795. In spite of the wet season, the average is more than five plowing days per week (47). The one item entered in Jefferson's hand under "VI. Preparation of ground" concerns the relationship of grain crop increase to the number of plowings. (More than five per year did not add to grain increase.) And it concerns depth of plowing and trench plowing (79). He gives a caution about using the "great plough" too late in the season (62). Other references are inventory-type and are of interest because plows are listed first and because different types of plows are listed (47, 61).

Jefferson's interest in experimenting with ways to improve crops and husbandry and with the application of science to crop rotation, cultivation, and other aspects of farming is well known. He considered it the duty of those who

were able to do so to try to establish new varieties of plants and animals that could be profitable for the farmers in the New World (*Garden* 437). His experiments with olive trees and dry rice were both doomed to failure. But he was more successful with his moldboard plow, with which his name is linked in agricultural history. The moldboard itself is attached to a regular plowshare. Its function is to turn over the soil. "The ploughing," Jefferson wrote to Charles Willson Peale, "is to the farmer what the wand is to the sorcerer. Its effect is really like sorcery" (Apr. 17, 1813, *Garden* 509).

In editing *Thomas Jefferson's Farm Book*, E. M. Betts assembled excerpts from some forty-three letters that discuss "the mouldboard plough of least resistance," designed and brought into use by Jefferson. He describes its construction and use in a letter of six printed pages addressed to Sir John Sinclair (March 23, 1798, *Garden* 649-654). Jefferson's son-in-law, Thomas Mann Randolph, invented a hillside plow (1808) and introduced contour plowing. This plow is described in two letters included in the *Garden Book* (to Charles Willson Peale, Apr. 17, 1813, 509; to George M. Jeffreys, Mar. 3, 1817, 567-68). A letter to James Madison suggests that Americans have the best plow in the world (June 9, 1793, *Garden* 189).

In Jefferson's "Scheme for a System of Agricultural Societies," he proposes twelve "particulars" that he finds worthy of the attention of the proposed societies. The plow is the fifth particular: "Implements of husbandry and operations with them, among which the plough and all its kindred instruments for dividing the soil, holds the first place" (*Garden* 641).

The foregoing pursuit of Jefferson's thoughts about farming may seem like a rabbit trail in light of the main concern of this paper, to find and examine the associations made with the images of plowing and to see how mankind is bonded

to the earth through working the soil. Since the image/symbol in American fiction alone seemed too rootless an affair, it appeared helpful to see how plowing images bonded cultivators to the earth in biblical and classical times and later in medieval and Renaissance England. In the New World it is Jefferson who most fully articulates the philosophic orientation of the farmer. Not just the farmer stereotype, but also the American stereotype is deeply indebted to Jeffersonian ideals. Regardless of whether or not this image squares with reality, it remains fixed in the American imagination. What emerges from Jefferson's social, political, and economic thought is the ideal of the independent American farmer who owns and tills his small farm, an image that does not deviate in any significant way from Crevecoeur's ideal. In ownership the plowman finds dignity and new motivation to labor. His cultivation results in sufficient wealth, health, and happiness. Farming is perceived, therefore, as a morally wholesome life.



John Constable. *Landscape: Ploughing Scene in Suffolk (A Summerland)* (cropped). After 1815. Oil on canvas, 16 3/4 x 30". Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, New Haven, Connecticut.

Chapter 7

James Fenimore Cooper

> The Cottage which was named THE EVENING STAR
> Is gone--the ploughshare has been through the ground
> On which it stood; great changes have been wrought
> In all the neighbourhood.
> Wordsworth in "Michael"

From James Fenimore Cooper (1789-1851) to Hamlin Garland (1860-1940), American writers struggled to find a way to make frontier farmers into fictionally acceptable heroes (Smith 211-249). The "Wild West" lent itself naturally to fiction, but the "agricultural West" did not. Cooper is the first American writer to give significant treatment to what may be loosely called the pastoral impulse. But in the early nineteenth century the fictional plowman was a member of a low social class and therefore not a suitable hero in Cooper's eyes. Since he was apparently unable to resolve this problem and since he generally used the love story of the sentimental novel to help structure his narrative, plowmen do not figure prominently in Cooper's fiction. But he was deeply involved in issues related to use of the land, and it is primarily because of his wrestling with these issues in the Leatherstocking series and the Littlepage trilogy that he deserves attention here. His concern for the conservation of nature's bounty, as well as for property rights, creates tension between nature and civilization, an ambivalence found in many later American novelists who deal with the land. He stands at the beginning of several distinctly American traditions in literature that are beyond the scope of this paper. Cooper preferred a social order founded on agriculture, believing that people who live on the land lead more wholesome lives than those in

manufacturing and trade. The principles he saw as undergirding the development of American democracy were subjected to scrutiny in his writing.

In the New World idealism and materialism existed side by side. Social and economic conflicts as old as the history of man appeared in the New World. But in spite of the presence of all the old evils of human nature, the dream of a new start, of democracy and individual freedom, persisted. Tensions between the educated aristocracy and the commoners, between the Federalists and the Democrats, between "the pursuit of happiness" and the law are evident in the works of Cooper. Increasing respect is evident today for his views concerning the pitfalls of the democratic system and the dangers inherent in independence. Could the hope and idealism that had drawn settlers to the New World accommodate the compromises necessary to the establishment of a workable social order? Or is it possible that American democracy would fail to create a place of true freedom and order? Cooper is not only critical of the new-born democracy, but is also a staunch defender of what he calls "American principles." Robert Spiller reduces Cooper's American principles to four: 1) "a belief in liberty as a moral force," 2) "a social structure with small property ownership at its base," 3) "an aristocracy of worth," and 4) "a strong sense of nationality" (xiv). The defense of these principles is most fully stated in *The American Democrat*, but much of Cooper's fiction is closely linked with social commentary. It is from American principles such as these that American literature would evolve.

Cooper would like the best of both worlds: he admires the man of nature, Natty Bumppo, and the noble Indian, Chingachgook; but he also finds the "natural aristocracy" in a civilized settlement to be indispensable for creating social order. The traits Cooper admires in Leatherstocking and the good Indians are, in reality, reflections of "civilized" Christian values. Try as he might, Cooper could never

overlook the crudities of the uneducated commoners in their misdirected demands for equality. He believed that American democracy provided equality before the law, but that is not to be confused with equality of situation which simply does not exist anywhere. And he refused the accept the sullying of American idealism. The simple fact of life, in Cooper's thinking, gives every man a "stake in society": "The pretence has been that none but the rich have a stake in society. Every man who has wants, feelings, affections and character, has a stake in society" (*Democrat* 130). In the contest for land between the Indians and the white settlers, Cooper seems to favor the side that proves itself most morally upright and orderly, and that is not always the same side. Cooper's Indians are both good and bad (Sioux and Pawnee, Dakota and Mingo), analogous to the entire human race. Cooper may idealize the good Indians, but there must also be the bad Indians to somehow justify the westward expansion that took their land and destroyed their way of life.

All of this bears indirectly on the image of the American farmer cultivating his land. Cooper seldom directly pictures the farmer at work, but the Littlepage trilogy (the anti-rent novels), the Leatherstocking tales, *Afloat and Ashore, Home as Found, Wyandotte,* and *The Oak-Openings* all deal in some measure with land-related problems. The Leatherstocking tales juxtapose the wilderness and civilization--as all of these novels do to some degree, but little fictional interest is attached to the actual process of land cultivation. Cooper's personal experience was primarily with large land owners like himself who leased or sold small farms to tenants. In his fictional treatment of the Anti-Rent War (1839-1846), which virtually brought the patroon system of land tenure to an end, Cooper took the side of the landowners. Tenants had grown discontent under a system of long-term leases and leases in perpetuity and considered the system to be anti-American.

Tenants were unwilling to continue to pay rents to their landlords and to pay the normal one-fourth to the patroon upon sale of a lease. They wanted ownership in fee simple, not tenancy. In the Littlepage novels Cooper attempts to show that private property was protected by law, and to ignore the rights of ownership would be to undermine democracy.

In a sense, much of Cooper's fiction addresses the same question Crevecoeur addressed in his third letter, "What is an American." At the heart of Cooper's attempts to depict the new Americans is a fundamentally ambiguous attitude toward American civilization. Cooper's Leatherstocking moves between civilization and the wilderness and represents the best in ethics and character from both, the Christian virtures associated with civilization and the "natural" virtues of a life lived close to nature. The person of Natty Bumppo comes as close as anything in Cooper to reconciling his love for civilization and for the undisturbed wilderness. Doubtless Cooper is sometimes guilty of accepting supposed virtues of a nature-based life in the past as unquestioned fact, just as he may accept a rather white-washed image of the virtues of a landed aristocracy. The antithesis between these two worlds maintains the fictional tension, especially in the Leatherstocking series.

Cooper's ideal of a stable society is based on agrarian principles. In his vision, the landed gentleman directs social and political affairs, being qualified to give direction by right of wealth, virtue, and education. Especially in the Littlepage novels and the Leatherstocking tales, Cooper endeavors to put "the complex into the simple" as he dramatizes the complex desires of mankind against a background of early settlement and westward expansion. He maintains an on-going tension between savagery and civilization that helps to define the early American experience. He fears the consequences of the rampant individualism

that makes the settlers wasteful and coercive. His grotesque frontier characters are associated with either civilization or the wilderness.

Fundamental to understanding Cooper's novels that have been mentioned is his use of the land, as property and as landscape. He agrees with Jefferson that land ownership is the very foundation of civilized socity: "As property is the base of all civilization, its existence and security are indispensable to social improvement" (*Democrat* 127). In the Littlepage trilogy and the Leatherstocking novels, Cooper pictures a full cycle of the development of the frontier from exploration to the development of towns. The coming of towns eliminates the forest and the virgin land, as outlined in *The Pioneers*. After Natty Bumppo moves west, he says in *The Prairie*, "I have come into these plains to escape the sound of the axe; for here, surely, the chopper can never follow!" (*Prairie* 116). The wanton plunder of nature, illustrated in the shooting of the pigeons in *The Pioneers*, is one of the curses of civilization, representing not just individual caprice, but collective callousness.

Parrington recognizes that what sets Cooper apart from his fellows is his "fond lingering" between the culture of the old world and the democratic ideals of the new: "[H]e would have the young democracy learn the decorum of a staid aristocracy" (2. 215). Ultimately he believed that a life close to the soil was more morally and economically wholesome than a life of commerce or manufacturing. In preferring an agrarian social order, he was also close to the Physiocrats and to several leading voices in America, including Jefferson and Franklin. Cooper is at home imaginatively in the purity of the wilderness, and he is realistically at home in a developed civilization. But the in-between state of the frontier--where one might expect him to trace the new furrows of the plow--fails to hold a high degree of attraction for him as a writer or as a person. He scarcely does justice to the

early cultivators of the land though he appreciates the beauty of the plowed field. He is more likely, as Parrington points out, to render the frontier itself as "an unhappy state of society where the virtues of nature are gone and the refinements of civilization not yet come" (2. 224). In *The Oak-Openings* Cooper writes: "If a white man found his way into it [wilderness], it was as an Indian trader, a hunter, or an adventurer in some other of the pursuits connected with border life and the habits of savages" (3). It is into border territories on the skirts of civilization that he introduces such distasteful characters as Ishmael Bush in *The Prairie* or Jason Newcome and Aaron Thousandacres in the Littlepage trilogy. The rendering of the frontier community in *The Pioneers* may at first be thought an exception to this, but the destructive forces of early settlements are at work in the fish kill, the pigeon shoot, Kirby's wood chopping, the mining attempt, and the fire. Here, if anywhere in Cooper, one would expect to read of the plows at work, but in spite of considerable attention to day-to-day life, one does not sweat with laborers in the field.

Readers may recognize three stages of civilization in Cooper's fiction. First comes the "clearing" stage, described in Chapter XXII in *Home as Found.* This appears to be the happiest stage for Cooper and the fullest blend of the pastoral ideal with reality. There is some social leveling as seen in *The Pioneers*, but it produces a heart-warming cooperation against common hazards. The second stage is the least pleasant because of the antagonism between classes and individuals. Settlers become involved in struggles for more wealth, power, and status. This is the kind of situation that evolves in *Home as Found* and *The Redskins.* The third stage is that in which people submit to the authority of regular civil laws. At this point Cooper fixes class distinctions even more fully.

The vastness of the forest creates a sublimity that is consistently contrasted with the orderly enclosures of civilized living. Some of Cooper's most powerful landscape descriptions are found in his depiction of the natural "openings" or clearings in the forest, bringing together again the best of both worlds. Although the openings offer wonderfully fertile and friable soil, he does not picture farmers exploiting this prize land. The openings simply provide a natural, healing, aesthetic experience, an interiorization of that which is morally sound in nature. The landscape descriptions in *The Oak-Openings* are the most idyllic in all of Cooper. And they present yet another of Cooper's circles, generally taken to be the basic figure in his fictional structures. He describes Prairie Round as a well-kept park (290). Paul Shepard reminds his readers that the concept of paradise in Old Saxon was translated as *meadow* (77). The openings in Cooper are associated with pastoral idealism and innocence; they are *meadows* in the Old Saxon sense of the word.

The tension between wilderness and civilization during the settlement stage is minimized in *Wyandotte*, as well as in the description of the Puritan settlement in a Connecticut valley in the second chapter of *The Wept of Wish-ton-Wish*. This is also true in the description of Ravensnest in *The Chainbearer*. These agrarian images are positive ones, but they tend to be highly generalized, taking in the whole landscape at a sweep. Again, no particular interest is shown in the actual tools or the immediate labor of the farmer.

Pastoral images are generally related to the past, and in Cooper they probably reflect the impulse to return to a simple, untainted childhood of one's imagination. That sort of vision is undisturbed by tedious labor and therefore does not readily admit such an image as that of plowing. Cooper's landscape is an image of vastness that inevitably diminishes the human element. And the

pastoral image carries with it the sense of change and loss; it is the golden dream of an uncorrupted natural paradise. The sense of tragedy so often felt in Cooper is closely allied to the awareness of what Americans were losing in order to develop a structured social order. And even though he sometimes creates landscapes that unite agrarian images with those of the wilderness, he virtually overlooks the yeoman farmer as a possible source of synthesis. There is Natty Bumppo, of course, but he is always treated as a unique person. In spite of Cooper's advocacy of an agrarian lifestyle, he appears artistically unable to develop sympathy with or to deal fully with the American farmer--the missing link. It is the farmer who first clothes the landscape and gives it the civilized appearance which Cooper admires. Crops attach the farmer to the earth and make possible a permanent order of settlement and a measure of independence. And because the farmer must work in harmony with nature, he does not lose the salutary benefits of nature. Most of the negative qualities Cooper assigns to the borderers are those that best belong to the pioneers or frontiersmen, not to the settlers. In *Home as Found* the frontier represents the early stage of movement toward what is best in life. When the frontier has pushed farther west, that which was once frontier can develop the amenities of civilized society. The frontiersman holds an anomalous place in American life and letters, especially in the late eighteenth century and the early nineteenth. The frontier, with all its wonder and attraction, was a temporary condition; it was something away from which the country would grow. Meanwhile most of the credit for introducing the westward-moving American frontier into literature belongs to Cooper.

Herman Mordaunt, who establishes a settlement at Ravensnest, is probably the best example of a maker of civilization to be found in Cooper. Yet he is not a

settler whose life is consumed in manual labor; he is a paternalistic landowner, highly reflective of Cooper's own position.

Wyandotte, or the Hutted Knoll seems to be the only Cooper novel that makes any significant reference to the actual tools of the farmer. Many of the novels, especially the Leatherstocking tales and the Littlepage novels, present beautiful landscapes--both of the wilderness and of the settled, cultivated areas--but as previously stated, they do not focus on the actual process of cultivation. In *Wyandotte* the setting in the valley of Butternut Creek is a charming but not a grand scene. It is an area where land grants from the English crown have been given to soldiers as pay for service. Captain Willoughby is one who, after serving for many years, sells his commission and gets a grant of land. He "determined to retire to his new possessions in order to pass the close of his life in the tranquil pursuits of agriculture, and in the bosom of his family" (8).

"There is a pleasure," Cooper writes in *Wyandotte*, "in diving into a virgin forest, and commencing the labors of civilization that has no exact parallel in any other human occupation." He goes on to explain that the pleasure one experiences is related to "the feeling of creating, and is . . . pregnant with anticipations and hopes" (29). Willoughby's farmland is primarily a drained pond that had formed behind a beaver dam. Therefore the land was quickly and easily readied for the plow. The few stumps had been burned before Mrs. Willoughby sees the land in Chapter 3. "This left the entire surface of four hundred acres smooth and fit for the plough" (30). As she surveys the scene before her, she sees that "Other portions of the flat showed signs of improvement, the plough having actually been at work for quite a fortnight" (30).

Immediately these references to the plow reinforce familiar associations. Plowing is accompanied with plans for the crop, and the soil must be "readied" for

the plow. The preparation of the land for plowing brings the pleasure and hope of creative endeavor; it is a forward-looking activity in which the imagination plays a significant role. The very sight of plowed land signals the "improvement" the plow had made. This is a hopeful, forward-looking image that suggests yet further benefit to come.

Mrs. Willoughby also observes the fences, "an indispensable accessory to civilization" (30). Fences indicate ownership, and land ownership in Cooper--as in Crevecoeur and Jefferson--is fundamental to social order.

Cooper's description of Captain Willoughby's estate at the beginning of Chapter IV gives visual pleasure as he characterizes the "agricultural finish" of the fields. He says of the cultivated part of Beaver Manor: "The meadows were green and matted with grasses, the wheat and rye resembled rich velvets, and the ploughed fields had the fresh and mellowed appearance of good husbandry and a rich soil" (*Wyandotte* 44). Part of the pleasure here lies in the textures, the texture of the plowed field being idealized in bringing together nature's gifts and man's intelligent labor. On several occasions in the novel Cooper pauses to delineate a scene of rural beauty and happiness. For example:

> Most of the people of the settlement were in the open air, the men closing their day's work in the fields, and the women and children busied beneath shades, with their wheels and needles; the whole presenting such a peaceful picture of rural life, as a poet might delight to describe, or an artist to delineate with his pencil. (145)

There are no images in *Wyandotte* of the actual labor of guiding the plow in the field, but there are allusions to those who do the plowing. The most telling reference is the author's division of the three main categories of people at the Hutted Knoll. The categories are considered to be moral as well as physical. They are Anglo-Saxon, Dutch, and African. The Dutch group is chiefly the laborers,

and the African group is household servants except for "one of the Plinies, who was a ploughman though permitted to live with his kinsfolk" (84). The only one who crossed categorical lines was the black plowman. Yet those who would "toil together, joke together, and pass their days in familiar intercourse, would not sit down at the same board" (113). In spite of this, there is a strong camaraderie among those who labor together in the fields: "Joel stood in front of his old comrades at the hoe and plough, if not in arms" (231).

The land overseer Joel Strides becomes anxious about the crops when the captain wants to take time to fortify the Knoll. "'There's half our plantin' to be done yet, and some of the ground has n't got the last ploughin'" He continues to argue with Willoughby that if the laborers do all the fortification work, the whole farming schedule will be thrown off base: "'That would occupy all hands until after first hoein'. That is, hoein' would come afore the plantin'" (90). This serves as a reminder of the necessity of appropriate timing and order for plowing and raising a crop.

Another reference to the plow is found in the description of the first horse that leaves the stable "with great deliberation, being an old animal well cooled with toil at the plough" (*Wyandotte* 182). If toil at the plow cools an animal's spirits, it must also calm the rashness of the human spirit.

Sergeant Joyce explains to the men under his command that if a truce is made, "we'll lay aside our muskets, and seize the plough-shares" (*Wyandotte* 215-216), reflecting the ancient dichotomy of war and peace. The way of the plough is always the symbolic way of peace. When the Hutted Knoll is no longer in danger of attack, the workmen return to their respective labors:

> A field was already half ploughed, in preparation for a crop of winter grain; thither Joel, himself, proceeded, with the necessary cattle, accompanied by the laborers who usually aided him in

> that particular branch of husbandry. The ploughs were soon at work, with as much regularity and order, as if nothing had occurred to disturb the tranquility of the valley. . . . In a word, all the suspended toil was renewed with perfect system and order. (277)

Watching the diligence of the laborers who had deserted him in the recent skirmish, the captain said he had half a mind to scare them with a volley of shot: "Bullets would take effect among those ploughmen, could they only be made to hit'" (*Wyandotte* 278). Later when the captain wants to be sure no one is aware of activities at the Knoll, Pliny announces that "'Joel hammer away at plough handle, tinkerin' just like heself'" (299). Working at the plow indicates not only peace but also normality. When the captain questions Nick about the workers who deserted him, Nick says things are like old times: "'Some chop--some plough--some weed--some dig ditch'" (308). Again the plow represents normal life.

As previously mentioned, Cooper is concerned with the land as both property and landscape. In that landscape the human presence tends to be diminished. Natty Bumppo's presence is always felt in the Leatherstocking tales and sometimes that of a few admirable Indians, but their very respect for the natural world keeps the reader keenly aware of the precarious bounty of that world. Natty and his Indian friends seem to be more a part of the landscape than apart from it, whereas the landowners like Willoughby and Templeton and the Littlepages and Mordaunts may be found admiring the landscape and their "improvements," but they are generally not part of the landscape itself. Perhaps this diminishing of man in relation to the grand landscape is one reason Cooper so seldom looks closely enough at the land cultivation to observe men at the plow. To Cooper, the landowner, the interesting things are the "improved" vistas of civilized communities and the pristine wholeness of the wilderness. Although he endorses the Jeffersonian ideal of a nation of small farmers, Cooper doesn't

appear interested in detailing the lives of those who till the soil. On the other hand, he does not indulge in caustic treatment of the stable settlers that he is so ready to give to the "choppers" and squatters and frontier adventurers. Cooper detests the lawlessness of the frontier, as does Crevecoeur, and *The Prairie* is one place he makes clear the need for some system of social justice. The lawlessness that receives such critical treatment from Cooper involves not only man's relationship to his fellow man, but also his relationship to the natural world:

> Ay, that is partly true, too, I fear; and it will not be long afore an accursed band of chopppers and loggers will be following on their heels to humble the wilderness which lies so broad and rich on the western banks of the Mississippi, and then the land will be a peopled desert from the shores of the Maine sea to the foot of the Rocky Mountains, fill'd with all the abominations and craft of man and stript of the comfort and loveliness it received from the hand of the Lord! (*Prairie* 187-88)

Frequently in other pastoral writers the farmer is accorded a higher degree of moral uprightness than his fellows because he, the farmer, lives closer to nature. This is not as obvious in Cooper primarily because the small farmer as a person is never in the spotlight. Furthermore, Cooper's convictions regarding the depravity of human nature cover all classes and vocations. So the farmer could stoop to greed and self-aggrandizement as well as the merchant. The morally efficacious effect of nature appears in Cooper mostly in characters like Leatherstocking, who does not seriously disturb the natural world for his own livelihood. When Leatherstocking talks with Dr. Battius about the moral collapse of nations, he says:

> "You're right--it is their morals; their wickedness and their pride, and chiefly their waste, that has done it all! . . . And I have seen much of the folly of man; for his natur' is the same, be he born in the wilderness, or be he born in the towns. To my weak judgment it hath ever seemed that his gifts are not equal to his wishes. That he would mount into the heavens with all his deformities about him, if he only knew the road, no one will

> gainsay, that witnesses his bitter strivings upon 'arth. If his power is not equal to his will, it is because the wisdom of the Lord hath set bounds to his evil workings." (*Prairie* 240)

When the squatter Ishmael Bush lectures his brother-in-law Abiram on morality, two ideas about farming are presented. One is that a good crop requires hard labor, "even on the richest bottom." The other is that a good crop requires the proper seed. Metaphorically Abiram is not a part of the good corn the earth produces; in fact, he is "no better than a thistle or a mullein" (*Prairie* 87).

Because the Bush family maintained "the rule that 'arth is common property" (*Prairie* 93), the law drove them from their former location and started them on the westward trek in search of land and freedom from the law. Bush does not come to terms with the civil laws of property ownership until near the end of the novel--and even then his assent is only hinted at. When Leatherstocking tries to explain to him that the Sioux attacked his train because they considered themselves owners of the prairie, Bush is unable to understand:

> "Owners!" echoed the squatter, "I am as rightful an owner of the land I stand on, as any governor in the States! Can you tell me, stranger, where the law or the reason, is to be found, which says, that one man shall have a section, or a town, or perhaps a county to his use, and another have to beg for earth to make his grave in? This is not nature, and I deny that it is law. That is, your legal law."
>
> "I cannot say that you are wrong," returned the trapper, whose opinions on this important topic, though drawn from very different premises, were in singular accordance with those of his companion, "and I have often thought and said as much, when and where I believed my voice could be heard." (*Prairie* 61)

But after all his experiences and losses on the prairie, Ishmael Bush finally turns his back to the sun and begins the long trek east where the reader assumes he will live under the laws of community and country.

Problems of property rights are in evidence in the majority of the Cooper novels here considered. In *Satanstoe* Corny hopes that his record of Jason

Newcome's hunger for property and his propensity to take whatever the quirks of the law allow will be a warning to Corny's own descendants: "[I]t will be seen that this disposition to regard the whole human family as so many tenants in common of the estate left by Adam, will lead in the end, to something extraordinary" and, by implication, undesirable (*Satanstoe* 288).

In *The Wept of Wish-ton-Wish*, the three appearances of the plow add only a little to its significance in Cooper. The first use of the plow is in a landscape description when Captain Mark Heathcote views his settlement from a "small eminence": "and they [fertile flats] now lay in placid meadows, or in fields from which the grain of the season had lately disappeared, and over which the plough had already left the marks of recent tillage" (13). The second use is to name the plow among the articles left carelessly lying about the farmstead in contrast to the way in which the family cares for living things:

> The homely fabrics of the looms of Ruth lay on their bleaching-ground, to drink in the night-dew; and ploughs, harrows, carts, saddles, and other similar articles were left in situations so exposed as to prove that the hand of man had occupations so numerous and so urgent as to render it inconvenient to bestow labor where it was not considered absolutely necessary. (23)

The third reference is a statement from the young chief Conanchet, who compares his accomplishments to those of the white men. He says, "But the men of the pale-faces hold the plough" (315). In this novel readers see the marking of the land by the plow. The plow always changes the face of the land, leaves it marked, and increases its value. It requires minimal care in the second reference. And in the third it is one of the things that distinguishes the white settler from the Indian; it indicates the white man's permanence on the land. The context suggests that superiority belongs to the white man because he cultivates

the land instead of hunting to sustain his life. His permanence on the land makes possible civilization and culture.

What, finally, does Cooper's fiction add to the cluster of meanings associated with the American cultivator of the soil and his plow? Foremost is perhaps the very vastness of the context, the landscape that seems to dwarf all the plowman's efforts to subdue it for agriculture. In the New World plowing is the means by which to "conquer" the wilderness. The farmer and his plow--almost lost in nature's vastness--appear as the slow, weak spearhead of civilization, setting themselves up as enemies of the wilderness. The plow and the woods--or later, the prairies--are antagonists. Because of man's intelligence and his greed, he will eventually bring the wilderness under cultivation, regardless of what harmony with nature is lost in the process. The plow is the farmer's weapon in this battle against the wilderness. The farmer and the plow are harbingers of civilization with its "wasty" ways. Considering the good that is lost and the good that is gained in developing cultivated lands, it is no small wonder that Cooper's attitude toward cultivation of the land is so ambivalent. For every gain, there is some kind of loss. As already mentioned, Cooper's fiction is marked by the absence of any really significant treatment of the actual process of plowing. He does not give his reader images of the plowman at work. One can only speculate as to the reason for this. Is it lack of interest in the day-to-day affairs of the laboring class? Or the conviction that their lives lack dramatic interest? Or indecision as to whether the cultivators are friends or foes of what Cooper thinks is the best life? Or is it simply the result of his own aristocratic upbringing? Whatever the reason, images of the plowman at work are virtually absent from Cooper's work. But what one does find is an assessment of what is lost and what

is gained through the changes wrought by civilization, of which the plow is a symbol.



Alexandre Hogue. *Erosion No. 2--Mother Earth Laid Bare*. 1936. Oil on canvas, 40 x 56". Philbrook Art Center, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Chapter 8

Emerson and Thoreau

Then up wi' my ploughman lad,
And hey my merry ploughman!
Of a' the trades that I do ken,
Commend me to the ploughman.
Robert Burns in "The Ploughman"

Although Cooper gives little attention to the effect of the natural world on the plowman himself, that relationship between man and nature is of central concern to Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882). Emerson's philosophy has had such far-reaching impact on American literature that whatever he has to say about the farmer, the plow, and the business of cultivation merits consideration. It is almost as if his ideas have been "plowed into American literature." As he once said of the impression of Jesus upon mankind: his "name is not so much written as ploughed into the history of the world" (*Selections* 104).

Because the farmer's work necessitates his living close to nature and his understanding nature, the cultivator of the soil is of particular interest to Emerson. In "Nature" he writes: "What is a farm but a mute gospel? The chaff and the wheat, weeds and plants, blight, rain, insects, sun--it is a sacred emblem from the first furrow of spring to the last stock which the snow of winter overtakes in the fields" (*Essays* 23). Since Emerson found nature to present images in which one can perceive the divine, every natural process reveals a moral or spiritual truth. Therefore the farm is a "mute gospel"; a correspondence exists between the natural and the spiritual world. The farm is the teacher, the moral instructor of the one who contemplates the farming process. Emerson suggests that spiritual

meaning is to be sought and found in the apparently insignificant, common things of life: "the shop, the plough, and the ledger" (*Essays* 61). The language of one who lives close to nature becomes more picturesque, Emerson says, because he perceives the spiritual as it is represented by concrete, natural symbols: "It is this which gives that piquancy to the conversation of a strong-natured farmer or backwoodsman, which all men relish" (*Essays* 16). The less sophisticated peoples of the world tend to communicate more in concrete images rather than in abstractions.

In the conclusion of his essay on farming, Emerson reminds his readers of how the activities of farming affect the farmer himself: "Meantime we cannot enumerate the incidents and agents of the farm without reverting to their influence on the farmer. . . . The great elements with which he deals cannot leave him unaffected, or unconscious of his *ministry* " (*Essays* 757. Italics mine.) He contrasts the farmer, plain in manners and dress, with the drawing room heroes of the city who, he says, "would shrivel in his [the farmer's] presence" (*Essays* 758). "He [the farmer] is a person whom a poet of any clime . . . would appreciate as being really a piece of the old Nature, comparable to sun and moon, rainbow and flood; because he is, as all natural persons are, representative of nature as much as these" (*Essays* 758).

Emerson's "Farming" essay was originally called "The Man with the Hoe" (1858) and was delivered when Concord was still mainly a community of farmers. In it he discusses ideas that reaffirm the high status of farming found in much of the earlier georgic literature as well as optimistic ideas drawn from his own interest in transcendental idealism, science, democracy, and theology. "St. Ralph, the Optimist" begins by affirming the primacy of the farmer's role:

> The glory of the farmer is that, in the division of labors, it is his part to create. All trade rests at last on his primitive activity. He stands close to Nature; he obtains from the earth the bread and the meat. The food which was not, he causes to be. The first farmer was the first man, and all historic nobility rests on possession and use of land. Men do not like hard work, but every man has an exceptional respect for tillage, and a feeling that this is the original calling of his race, that he himself is only excused from it by some circumstance which made him delegate it for a time to other hands. . . . And the profession has in all eyes its ancient charm, as standing nearest to God, the first cause. (*Essays* 749)

Here again cultivating the land is the first and indispensable foundation of society. "Standing nearer to God," the farmer finds his task is "to create," to bring to fruition that which will nourish his life and which would not exist without his efforts.

Emerson contrasts what he sees as the morally wholesome quality of life on the land with the "poison" of town life. He says that men think of the farm as an asylum to which they can retreat for healing if they are victimized by city life. The townsperson says, "'Well, my children, whom I have injured, shall go back to the land, to be recruited and cured by that which should have been my nursery, and now shall be their hospital'" (*Essays* 749). In the final paragraph of "Farming," Emerson repeats the idea of the moral excellence of life lived close to nature in contrast to the fact that cities make men artificial. He says that "uncorrupted behavior . . . belongs to him . . . who lives in the presence of Nature" (*Essays* 758). Writing of the essential quality of virtue in nature, Emerson quotes Sallust: "'All those things for which men plough, build, or sail, obey virtue'" (*Essays* 11-12).

Twice in the essay on farming, Emerson reminds his readers that the picture of the farmer should not be painted in rose color, thereby acknowledging the temptation to do so. He pictures the farmer himself as one who "times himself to Nature, and acquires that lifelong patience which belongs to her" (*Essays* 750).

He "bends to the order of the seasons," and has learned to move in accord with natural processes; he is not to be timed by "city watches." His spending and entertainments are on a small scale, and his habits tend to give him a permanence on the land. He "clings to his land as the rocks do" (*Essays* 750).

Not only is the farmer more unhurried, but a life of tilling the land develops moral and intellectual qualities that equip him to rise above his city-bred counterparts. "The farmer is a hoarded capital of health, as the farm is the capital of wealth; it is from him that the health and power, moral and intellectual, of the cities come. The city is always recruited from the country" (*Essays* 751). Emerson says the outstanding men and women in the cities "are the children or grandchildren of farmers and are spending the energies which their fathers' hardy, silent life accumulated in frosty furrows, in poverty, necessity and darkness" (*Essays* 751).

The farmer is a "continuous benefactor" because he improves the land in ways that will benefit generations after him. "He knows every secret of labor; he changes the face of the landscape" (*Essays* 757). The farmer's ability to change the face of the landscape through cultivation reflects his ability to create, which Emerson praises in the beginning of the essay on farming. Emerson also calls the farmer a "minder," one who watches the natural cycles of the season in order to "mind" or tend the business of raising food--sowing, watering, weeding, harvesting, curing, and storing. If he is to be alert to the signals from nature and able to apply scientific methods to his farming, he must be a person of understanding and intelligence. He must use his mind in order to "mind" his work. Emerson writes in "Nature": "His relation to nature, his power over it, is through the understanding" (*Essays* 40).

The farmer's role as a "minder" and his patient ability to cooperate with the seasons underscore Emerson's idea that the natural elements--earth, air, fire, water--all work for him. He is a part of the great web of natural life in which each part is an integral aspect of the whole. Nothing in the natural world is superfluous, one of the fundamental lessons contemporary ecologists are still learning today. Furthermore, "the earth works faster for him than he can work for himself--works for him when he is asleep, when it rains, when heat overcomes him" (*Essays* 757). Twice in "Farming," the farmer is referred to as a *minister* of the elements (*Essays* 750, 757. Italics mine). Emerson's poem with which he prefaces "Farming" deals especially with the farmer's cooperation with the elements. It concludes with this quatrain:

> He planted where the deluge ploughed,
> His hired hands were wind and cloud;
> His eyes detect the Gods concealed
> In the hummock of the field. (*Essays* 748)

Though Emerson has special praise for the more natural life of the farmer, he sees him primarly as Man. In "The American Scholar," he writes: "Man is not a farmer, or a professor, or an engineer, but he is all" (*Essays* 46). Man's particular labor should not make him less a whole person, and each person needs the others. In "Nature" he writes: "A bell and a plough have each their use, and neither can do the office of the other" (*Essays* 21). But if a farmer--or a person of any other vocation--loses the sense of dignity in his work, "He sees his bushel and his cart, and nothing beyond, and sinks into the farmer, instead of Man on the farm" (*Essays* 46). The hazard of any vocation is to become a mechanical performer of certain tasks and lose a sense of wholeness and identity apart from the job.

To realize man's potential, Emerson believes in "the dignity and necessity of labor to every citizen. There is virtue yet," he writes, "in the hoe and the spade, for learned as well as for unlearned hands" (*Essays* 55). Emerson admires the "sturdy lad" who is self-reliant and versatile enough that he can move from one task to another. He says this lad "who teams it, farms it, peddles, keeps a school, preaches, edits a newspaper" and so forth "is worth a hundred of these city dolls" (*Essays* 162). This observation, as well as the comment cited earlier about the city recruiting from the country, points up the ever-present antagonism between town and country life.

Emerson's ideas concerning labor and versatility, as well as his ideas on self-reliance, are absolutely fundamental to the farmer's character and ultimately to the stereotype of the American character. Arthur M. Schlesinger has explored the making of national charactertistics in "What Then Is the American, This New Man?" He recounts influences that placed a high value on labor in the minds of American settlers--the values of the laboring classes from which most settlers came, Calvinism, and the temperament of those who emigrated. Farming was, of course, the primary occupation during the formative years of the country. In fact, Schlesinger says "The Revolution was fought by a people of whom nineteen out of twenty were farmers" (229). With land readily available, agriculture continued to dominate American life and thought for a century after the war. The new environment rendered unusable or unavailable the Old World methods of agriculture and forced the settlers to seek methods and tools better suited to the New World. The new American farmer became competent in many different tasks; he was largely self-reliant, whether by choice or necessity. These habits of mind--willingness to work, mechanical innovation, and individualism--mark the life of the early American farmer as well as that of the early national character.

These traits became firmly established during the extended era when American was primarly a nation of small farms.

In addition to these three qualities, several other associations stand out in Emerson's comments on farming: 1) the primal quality of farming as the foundation of social order, 2) the farmer's morally wholesome relationship with the elements from which he derives spiritual understanding as well as physical sustenance, 3) the personal benefits to health and character, and 4) the farmer as Man who is a benefactor to his fellow men.

In the five essays considered, *plough* is used metaphorically three times: the name of Jesus being "ploughed into the history of the world," the "plough of the frost," and the plough as metonymy for farming (*Selections* 104; *Essays* 752, 61). Once the hoe and the spade are used to represent physical labor; once the plow suggests productive labor, and once it indicates a division of labor (*Essays* 55, 11, 21). Another reference is made to the plow when Emerson discusses the stages of "subduing" the land for cultivation. The earliest settler "cannot plough" because he lacks the implements to clear the land and turn the soil. Instead he "scratches [the land] with a sharp stick" (*Essays* 757). Those who come after him will clear and cultivate the best land. Once again these images affirm the basic importance of the plow and the labor--performed in hope. The metaphoric uses suggest the action of the plow--profoundly mixing the materials being plowed, making the ground more able to sustain the life it nourishes.

Some of Henry David Thoreau's (1817-1862) most direct comments on cultivation are in "The Bean-Field," Chapter 7 in *Walden*. His philosophic remarks as to what he learns from raising beans should enlarge the reader's understanding of the images of cultivation. Because Thoreau treats his Walden experience as a metaphor of human experience, the bean field assumes

significance beyond the literal processes of cultivating and tending the crop. Here Thoreau works on a small scale so his main cultivating tool is the hoe instead of the plow. He sets out to discover what he can learn of life by cultivating beans.

A dominant theme in this essay is Thoreau's bonding to the earth--and therefore to human history--through his toil and his love for the plants he cultivates (154). His toil is inseparable from his caring for the beans: "I cherish them, I hoe them, early and late I have an eye to them; and this is my day's work" (*Walden* 155). George MacDonald says in *At the Back of the North Wind* that love is the only *my-ness* (Italics mine.). The only way to know beans is to love them and Thoreau "was determined to know beans" (161). Since he did most of the work himself with a hoe, he became much more intimate with his beans than he might otherwise have been. The intimacy of the relationship Thoreau established is demonstrated in part by his personification of the things he sees in the bean field. For example: "Daily the beans saw me come to their rescue armed with a hoe, and thin the ranks of their enemies, filling up the trenches with the weedy dead" (161). Describing his toil in this manner thoroughly humanizes his relationship with the beans. Another example further describes his work:

> Removing the weeds, putting fresh soil about the bean stems, and encouraging this weed which I had sown, making the yellow soil express its summer thought in bean leaves and blossoms rather than in wormwood and piper and millet grass, making the earth say beans instead of grass,--this was my daily work. (157)

Earlier he wrote "I began to level the ranks of haughty weeds in my bean-field and throw dust upon their heads" (156).

As the planter and cultivator, he engineers what the land will produce. He can make "the earth say beans instead of grass." He is master of the scene; the power of choice and intelligence is his. He often refers to "his" beans though he is not the least bit selfish with them.

The grand image that best expresses his special relationship with the earth comes in the first paragraph of the essay. He writes: "They [beans] attached me to the earth, and so I got strength like Antaeus" (155). A remarkable reciprocity is at work. Thoreau hoes the beans out of love: "I came to love my rows, my beans" (105). They, in turn, "attached" him to the earth, for he was committed to caring for them. And from that bonding, he gained magnificent strength--like the strength of the giant Antaeus, who was invincible as long as he touched the earth. Since the spiritual is revealed through the natural in transcendental thought, the strength to which he refers here must encompass the moral and spiritual as well as the physical. The rest of the essay on the bean field relates in one way or another to this fundamental bonding to the earth.

Thoreau's bonding to the earth and to mankind's history is enhanced by the arrowheads (156) and other tokens of earlier civilizations that he turns up while hoeing:

> As I drew a still fresher soil about the rows with my hoe, I disturbed the ashes of unchronicled nations who in primeval years lived under these heavens, and their small implements of war and hunting were brought to the light of this modern day. They lay mingled with other natural stones, some of which bore the marks of having been burned by Indian fires, and some by the sun, and also bits of pottery and glass brought hither by the recent cultivators of the soil. When my hoe tinkled against the stones, that music echoed to the woods and the sky, and was an accompaniment to my labor which yielded an instant and immeasurable crop. (158-59)

Later he writes that his hoe "turned up a sluggish portentous and outlandish spotted salamander, a trace of Egypt and the Nile, yet our contemporary" (159). The relics are a reminder that each generation is a temporary tenant on the land. The land had belonged to others and would someday yield its fruit to future

generations. Working the land connects him with the history of mankind as he uncovers evidence of older civilizations.

Understanding the temporary nature of one's generation on the land should help promote the kind of non-exploitive, sharing spirit found in Thoreau. He is aware not only of the tenure of generations on the land but also of the fact that the land supports life other than his own--the woodchucks, the johnswort, even the worms.

He writes of his garden crops as clothing the landscape (156). He sees his tillage not primarily as a means to earn money, but as a means of establishing a stronger communion with nature and as a means of beautifying the landscape with pleasant and civilized "clothing." This will require labor, but that is not undesirable to Thoreau. "[L]abor of the hands, even when pursued to the verge of drudgery," has in his eyes, "a constant and imperishable moral" (157).

He recalls that "husbandry was once a sacred art," and it was accompanied by festivals and ceremonies to remind the husbandman of his sacred trust. But Thoreau finds that sense of reverence is lost for many of his contemporaries because of their desire for quick wealth. They work with "irreverent haste," caring only for the cash value of the crop, not for the process. He accuses them of sacrificing to "the infernal Plutus." Farming is seldom experienced as Thoreau experiences it--although that is possible. He condemns the majority who, through their greed, degrade themselves and the landscape: "By avarice and selfishness, and a grovelling habit, from which none of us is free, of regarding the soil as property, or the means of acquiring property chiefly, the landscape is deformed, husbandry is degraded with us, and the farmer leads the meanest of lives" (165).

One of the marks of greed is the haste with which men work. Haste is the enemy of communication and friendliness. He says, "Most men I do not meet at

all, for they seem not to have time; they are busy about their beans" (165). The contrast of this hasty, degraded experience of farming appears near the end of the essay, where the common, realistic facts stand in stark contrast to the ideal. Thoreau sees the ideal farmer as working cooperatively with the elements of nature; he cannot do the job alone and he will not be the only one to benefit from the crop:

> This broad field which I have looked at so long looks not to me as the principal cultivator, but away from me to influences more genial to it, which water and make it green. These beans have results which are not harvested by me. Do they not grow for woodchucks partly? (166)

One of the things that draws the reader to Thoreau is his ability to open one's eyes to the moral and spiritual values inherent in the natural world. He offers an opportunity to meditate with him on the meaning of the simple elements in nature. His unhurried pace of work in the bean field promotes that sort of reflection. And by implication, this isolated quiet time of reflection should be natural for the farmer or the plowman. Thoreau writes of resting in the shade at the end of the row, of watching travelers go by and listening to their comments and imagining connections with other affairs, of hearing the brown thrasher calling words to him. Of that bird's exuberant song he writes, "It was a cheap sort of top dressing in which I had entire faith" (158). He found the pleasures and entertainment from his surroundings to be better than an artificial symphony. "When I paused to lean on my hoe," he writes, "these sounds and sights I heard and saw anywhere in the row, a part of the inexhaustible entertainment which the country offers" (159-60).

The care of the crop of bean seeds is ultimately likened to caring for "a new generation of men," reminding the reader once again that Thoreau's bean field is the world. "Why concern ourselves so much about our beans for seed, and not be

concerned at all about a new generation of men?" (164). Thoreau, the bean farmer, is a moralist. The cultivator is "attached" to the earth and to human history by virtue of his labor of caring for green and growing things. By this activity he provides food not only for himself and others, but he "clothes" the landscape. He takes time to reflect on the entertainment nature offers and to reflect on man's moral need for "sincerity, truth, simplicty, faith, innocence, and the like" (164). This farmer is ideally philosophic and able to read meaning for his own life in the processes of nature. But being a farmer does not guarantee these good things; some fall prey to greed and hurry--enemies of the life well lived.

As for the hoeing itself, Thoreau seems to have two common, primary functions in mind: to destroy the weeds and to stir the soil around the beans. He quotes Evelyn who says there is "'no compost or laetation whatsoever comparable to this continual motion, repastination, and turning of the mould with the spade'" (162). He cuts off the weeds and cuts into the soil--an action that is both destructive and constructive. Guided by an intelligent hand, the hoe seeks out and cuts off the weeds as enemies of the beans. The cutting into the soil stirs it and consequently turns the soil, conditioning it to sustain the growth of the beans. Keeping in mind the bean field as metaphor, the hoeing action then involves moral choice: what weeds are to be hoed off and what "weeds" are to be cultivated? That which is cultivated is a product of and useful to civilized society. Thoreau draws this fresh (freshened by the aeration of stirring) soil around the bean stems (157). Even as the stirring refreshes the soil, it also turns up the tokens of past civilizations. So the cultivation reveals that which was previously hidden. Stirring the soil is a health-giving action--for the soil and for the tiller. It allows the one who hoes to see things hidden beneath the surface appearance. Recognition of beneath-the-surface realities connects an individual with the human race. Cultivation is a

slow process; there is time for understanding to develop. Love for the crop and for the setting in which it grows attach the cultivator to the earth, bonding him to the land and making his life at one with the life of the earth.

Thoreau makes numerous comments scattered through his journals on the experience of farming. Several of these lend additional insight to Thoreau's view of man's relationship to the soil. Under March 1, 1852, he writes of having read how certain husbandmen have brought former acres of bog into productivity. After reading of that accomplishment, Thoreau writes:

> [A]nd I feel as if I had got my foot down on to the solid and sunny earth, the basis of all philosophy, and poetry, and religion even. I have faith that the man who redeemed some acres of land the past summer redeemed also some parts of his character. I shall not expect to find him ever in the almshouse or the prison. (*Journals* 80)

Thoreau credits the earth itself with being the source of thought, of aesthetic possibilities, of transcendental awareness. It is here the mother of man's soul. When he states the ideal of redeeming some parts of one's own character by having "redeemed" some land and brought it into productivity, the willingness to perform honest labor is at the heart of this redemption. Positive acts toward the land have positive benefits to one's character. Redeeming the land is more than an analogous figure; it becomes an internalized pattern of behavior.

Other journal entries give a less lofty picture of the farmer, and there is no attempt to reconcile his divergent impressions. One reads this under December 22, 1853:

> All I find is old boundmarks, and the slowness and dullness of farmer reconfirmed. They even complain that I walk too fast for them. Their legs have become stiff from toil. . . . It is remarkable how unprofitable it is for the most part to talk with farmers. They commonly stand on their good behavior and

> attempt to moralize or philosophize in a serious conversation. Sportsmen and loafers are better company. (125)

These farmers who have grown dull and stiff in mind and body do not make interesting conversation nor lively companionship. This dullness appears to be the danger encountered through overmuch toil coupled with insufficient diversion. When farmers fall into this all-work-and-no-play category, the resultant dullness often accompanies their image in literatue.

Three years later (December 1, 1856) one finds another positive image of the farmer in Thoreau's journal:

> I see the old pale-faced farmer out again on his sled now for the five-thousandth time--Cyrus Hubbard, a man of a certain New England probity and worth, immortal and natural, like a natural product, like the sweetness of a nut, like the toughness of hickory. He, too, is a redeemer for me. . . . It is a great encouragement that an honest man makes this world his abode. . . . Moderate, natural, true, as if he were made of earth, stone, wood, snow. I thus meet in this universe kindred of mine, composed of these elements. (166)

The very elements themselves are credited with tempering the pale-faced farmer's life. He is essentially good because he is "like a natural product." The fact of his existence is redemptive for those who observe his life.

The most extensive journal reflection on farming comes the following spring, March 28, 1857. The entry begins thus:

> When I witness the first plowing and planting, I acquire a long-lost confidence in the earth--that it will nourish the seed that is committed to its bosom. I am surprised to be reminded that there is warmth in it. We have not only warmer skies, then, but a warmer earth. The frost is out of it, and we may safely commit these seeds to it in some places. Yesterday I walked with Farmer beside his team and saw one furrow turned quite round
>
> his field. What noble work is plowing, with the broad and solid earth for material, the ox for fellow-laborer, and the simple but efficient plow for tool! Work that is not done in any shop, in a cramped position, work that tells, that concerns all men, which the sun shines and the rain falls on, and the birds sing over!

> You turn over the whole vegetable mould, expose how many grubs, and put a new aspect on the face of the earth. It comes pretty near to making a world. Redeeming a swamp does, at any rate. A good plowman is a *terrae filius*. The plowman, we all know, whistles as he drives his team afield. (175)

One gains confidence in the earth by working the soil, by putting a new face on the earth through plowing. As the farmer gives himself to the task of "making a world," his harmony with the land shows itself in his whistling as he works. The rather lengthy comment that follows this selection deals with the dangers of men "toiling too hard and becoming mere machines in order to acquire wealth." Thoreau finds earth-related activities to be wholesome and profitable when not driven by greed:

> Farming and building and manufacturing and sailing are the greatest and wholesomest amusements that were ever invented (for God invented them), and I suppose that the farmers and mechanics know it, only I think they indulge to excess generally, and so what was meant for a joy becomes the sweat of the brow. (187)

When he had been doing outdoor chores, Thoreau says "My being seems to have put forth new roots and to be more strongly planted. This is the true way to crack the nut of happiness." In fact, "No amusement has worn better than farming. It tempts men just as strongly today as in the day of Cincinnatus." If one maintains a close tie with the land, Thoreau expects him to experience confidence and pleasure.

In *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers,* Thoreau records his thoughts about the coming of the white man into Indian territory. "He buys the Indian's moccasins and baskets, then buys his hunting grounds, and at length forgets where he is buried, and plows up his bones" (59). Here again the plow is an image of change and connects the plowman with the history of the earth he plows. On Sunday the brothers observe the fields that had "a soft and cultivated English

aspect" where it "seemed that men lived a quiet and very civil life." Thoreau writes of the connection between cultivation and civilization and education:

> The inhabitants were plainly cultivators of the earth, and lived under an organized political government. The school-house stood with a meek aspect, entreating a long truce to war and savage life. Every one finds by his own experience, as well as in history, that the era in which men cultivate the apple, and the amenities of the garden, is essentially different from that of the hunter and forest life, and neither can displace the other without loss. We have all had our day-dreams, as well as more prophetic nocturnal visions; but as for farming, I am convinced that my genius dates from an older era than the agricultural. . . . What have I to do with ploughs? I cut another furrow than you can see. Where the off ox treads, there is it not, it is further off; where the nigh ox walks, it will not be, it is nigher still. If corn fails, my crop fails not, and what are drought and rain to me? (45)

The literal plowing of which Thoreau writes is but a picture of a plowing of mind and spirit which cuts a furrow others cannot see. The literal plowing is in harmony with the furrows plowed by the activity of his own mind and spirit:

> It is true, there are the innocent pleasures of country life, and it is sometimes pleasant to make the earth yield her increase, and gather the fruits in their season, but the heroic spirit will not fail to dream of remoter retirements and more rugged paths. It will have its garden-plots and its *parterres* elsewhere than on earth. (46)

What the plowman observes and experiences in his agricultural endeavors provides an extended metaphor for the activities of his mind and spirit. Indications of this are more evident in Emerson and Thoreau than in some of the other writers. The farmer's proximity to nature gives him spiritual insight and, in consequence, a noble spirit respected by others.

Emerson sees imagination and creativity in the activities required to make the land productive. Plowing, therefore, engages the mind and spirit as well as the body. Living in harmony with nature is assumed to lead to moral and intellectual

excellence. In Emerson the plow is associated with necessary labor, labor clothed with dignity and leading to self-reliance. Plowing or farming is the foundation of social order and the plowman, a benefactor to the race.

Thoreau's cultivation of his bean field is, by his own acknowledgement, a labor of love. He comes to knowledge and to understanding through the love that bonds him to the land. Care for the land and its crop is for him a sacred trust. His hoe (not a plow in his small bean patch) discovers fragments of the on-going history of the land. The labor associated with the hoe and connecting him to the earth is a morally good thing. His ideal for the farmer is unhurried labor that allows time for reflection and for conversation. Plowing/farming changes the face of the earth. Cutting and stirring are the primary functions of the hoe. Thoreau's cultivation of his bean field is analogous to the cultivation of the mind and spirit.



N. Currier and Ives. *American Country Life: May Morning* (cropped). c. 1855. Lithograph. Reproduced in *Currier and Ives' America*. Ed. Colin Simkin. New York: Crown, 1952.

Chapter 9

Ellen Glasgow

You may grind their souls in the selfsame mill,
    You may bind them heart and brow;
But the poet will follow the rainbow still,
    And his brother will follow the plow.
                J.B. O'Reilly in "The Rainbow's Treasure"

Three novels written by Ellen Glasgow (1874-1945) deal significantly with man's relationship to the land: *The Voice of the People* (1900), *The Deliverance* (1904), and *Barren Ground* (1925). A fourth novel, *The Miller of Old Church* (1911), presents only a few images of man working the land, but it does show Abel Revercomb, a young yeoman farmer trying to improve his lot in life. Taken together, these novels give a complex and ambivalent picture of mankind's bonding to the earth through tilling the land.

At Glasgow's own suggestion, her novels are generally taken as forming a kind of social history of Virginia from the Civil War to World War II. The theme of change gives an almost mythic quality to her treatment of the loss of a genteel, aristocratic tradition and the coming to power--especially politically and economically--of members of the middle class. Glasgow does not, however, have a sentimentalized view of the Old South. She accepts the inevitable changes even though her acceptance is tempered by her cherishing the value of what is being lost and by her protest against changing circumstances which seem to violate the American dream. She makes a distinction between "good people" (generally lineal descendants of the English yeoman farmers) and "good families," the old aristocratic order of the South. Her heroes and heroines can come from any social

class. They must be strong individuals, men and women with a "vein of iron," with moral courage to persist in the face of enormous discouragements and labor in order to fulfill their duties or their dreams.

A considerable amount of class conflict appears in her novels, and through the struggles of individual characters in that conflict, she tells of the hopes and tragedies, the dreams and memories, of postbellum Virginia. Glasgow's novels dealing with the rise of the middle class as a dominant force in Southern political life generally use rural settings (e.g., *The Voice of the People, The Deliverance, The Miller of Old Church).* The social milieu is important in these land novels, but the inner life of the characters controls the plot. Glasgow paints the tragedy of lives that are rendered isolated and barren and unfulfilled by the exigencies of life. She wrote that the greatest need of the South was blood and irony. "Blood," she said, "because Southern culture had strained too far from its roots in the earth"; and irony because she considered it to be the "safest antidote to sentimental decay" (*Measure* 28). Glasgow is a significant writer in the so-called Southern Renascence, but she is not identified with the views of the Nashville Agrarians. As much as any novelist of her time, she bridges the gap between romanticism and realism. Realistic descriptions of the monotony and brutality of farm life as she rendered them are not generally to be found in novels by Southern women. In many respects, she is the first really modern Southern novelist.

In *Seventy Years of Best Sellers,* Alice Payne Hackett finds Ellen Glasgow in second place in 1904 with *The Deliverance*, in tenth place in 1906 with *The Wheel of Life,* in fifth place in 1932 with *The Sheltered Life,* and in second place again in 1935 with *Vein of Iron.* In its first year of publication, *The Deliverance* sold more than a hundred thousand copies (Thiebaux 61). Glasgow received the Pulitzer Prize in 1923 for *In This Our Life.*

The Voice of the People portrays life in Virginia from 1870 to 1898. Nicholas Burr, son of a poor-white peanut farmer, lives near Kingsborough (Williams burg). As a young boy he detests the poverty and labor of the farm and vows that he would rather be a judge than a farmer (6). His father describes him to the judge as "'leetle, but he's plum full of grit. He can beat any nigger I ever seed at the plough. He'd outplough me if he war a head taller'" (5). Ability to plow is, in Amos Burr's eyes, a measure of a young man's worth. But young Nicholas says to the judge, "'There ain't nothin' in peanut-raisin'. It's jest farmin' fur crows'" (7). He vowed not to be like his father "who was always working with nothing to show for it--whose planting was never on time, and whose implements were never in place" (41). Later the author says that the father's failures were faults in his son's eyes:

> To the desperate determination of the boy, weakness became as contemptible as crime. What was a man worth who worked from morning until night and yet achieved nothing? Of what account was the farmer whom the crows outwitted and the weather made a mockery? Did not the very crops cry out as they rotted that his father was a fool, and the unploughed land proclaim him a coward? (96)

Young Nicholas wants what he perceives to be a better life; he resists being defeated by the land as his father was. The narrative does not say whether it is primarily the monotony of the toil or the coarseness of their lives that he wants to escape. Or perhaps it is their ignorance or their indolence or their low class. Whatever it is, he sees getting an education as the way to change his lot in life. The old judge advised him: "Stick to the soil, my boy. Stick to the soil. It is the best thing to do. But if you choose the second best, and I can help you, I will" (7).

When Judge Bassett invited him to join his own son Tom and a few others studying under Tom's tutor, Nicholas was determined to take advantage of the offer in spite of his father's opposition. To appease his father, Nicholas said he

would work in the fields in the early morning and in the afternoon hours. Amos Burr says: "'I got that thar piece of land broke to-day, an' I reckon you can take the one-horse harrow and go over it to-morrow'" (34). Nicholas responds: "'I can get up 'fore day and do a piece of the land, and I can help you 'bout the sowin' when I get back in the evening'" (35). When his stepmother scolds him in the early morning hours for "tip-toein'," he tells her he is "'goin' to drag the land some 'fore pa gets up'" (37). The terminology of "breaking" the land is generally reserved for plowing uncultivated lands, so the land Amos Burr "broke" was probably new and therefore much in need of the harrowing or "dragging" to break up the sod. The choice of terms is literal and picturesque. To "harrow" has several meanings including "to torment," which gives an additional dimension to the idea of harrowing the clods of earth.

True to his promise, Nicholas is in the field in the early morning hours:

> He [Nicholas] led out the old sorrel mare and followed her into the large ploughed field beyond the cow-pen, where the harrow was lying on one side of the brown ridges. . . . When he had attached the clanking chains of the plough harness to the single-tree, he caught up the ropes which served for reins and set out laboriously over the crumbling earth, which yielded beneath his feet and made walking difficult. (39)

For the boy who wants to go to school, the "clanking chains" must have more than literal significance. The reader gets a glimpse here of the "vein of iron" in the boy; he will do his duty to his father and family, but he will do it in such a way as to also make possible his going to school. The laboriousness of the task and the early hours it demands remind the reader of his father's earlier assessment of the lad: "he's plum full of grit."

Glasgow describes Nicholas as he sets out to harrow the ploughed land: he is "strong," "lithe as a sapling," "fearless of elemental changes," and he walks

"mediatively across the bare field" (40). He follows "the track of the harrow with much the same concentration of purpose as that displayed by his four-footed friend" (40). This young farmer is both physically and mentally fit; he has the capacity to meditate as he works. Yet he is also said to resemble the animal that he follows. Physical vigor and mental alertness, however, do not appear to belong to his farmer father. Given the author's emphasis on individual differences, the reader must assume that the father lacks the son's "vein of iron." Glasgow describes the field as Nicholas sees it:

> The land before him had been upturned by shallow ploughing some days since, and it lay now pale and arid, the large clods of earth showing the detached roots of grass and herbs, and presenting a hint of menacing destruction rather than the prospect of the peaceful art of cultivation. It was the boy's duty to drag the soil free from grass, after which it would be laid out into rows some three feet apart. When this was done two furrows would be thrown together to give what the farmers called a "rise," the point of which would be finally levelled, when the ground would be ready for the peanut-sowing, which was performed entirely by hand. (39-40)

The shallow plowing has "upturned" the soil in large clods and cut off the plant life--a picture of "destruction" rather than peace. The realities just don't match the idyllic images of rural activity. The violence of the language persists in the description of the two furrows that "would be thrown together."

As the sun comes up, light falls on the field:

> Last of all the ploughed field, which had preserved a neutral cast, blushed faintly in the sunrise, glowing to pale purple tones where the soil was newly turned. From the fugitive richness of the soil a warm breath rose suddenly, filling the air with the genial odour of earth and sunshine. The shining, dark coils of worms were visible like threads in the bright brown clods. (41)

This is one of Glasgow's infrequent personifications of the land. She tends more toward using the land to reflect the inner life of her characters rather than

personifying it as Thoreau does. But here literal language seems to fall short of being able to fully characterize the plowed field. The "genial odour of earth and sunshine" is released when the soil is turned, as are the "dark coils of worms"--friends to the soil but reminding readers of the larger serpent in the garden.

Nicholas receives a cold reception at the judge's school. Graves, the young tutor, says to Nicholas: "'So you won't be a farmer, eh? And you won't stay in your class'" (43). It could not be made clearer that the farmers were of an entirely separate and lower class from the old aristocratic families. When the boys tease him about his looks and his identity, Bernard Battle describes him by saying, "'I saw him hoeing potatoes day before yesterday'" (45). The tormenting was almost too much for Nicholas, and he thought of the place where he felt most comfortable and secure: "He wished with all his heart that he were safely in the field with his father, driving the one-horse harrow across upturned furrows'" (46). Sometime later when Eugenia asks him to go fishing with her, he answers: "'If I ain't got to work in the field'" (71).

The most extensive and intensive passage that deals with plowing in *The Voice of the People* comes near the beginning of Chapter IV. Nicholas Burr has temporarily come to terms with working in Jerry Pollard's store instead of studying law with Judge Bassett. He goes out early one morning after the spring rains to plow a couple of hours before going to the store. It is a scene of the renewal of life as "the spring passed into Nicholas also." Glasgow writes:

> With the spring planting came a chance of outdoor work, and Nicholas would sometimes rise at dawn and do a piece of ploughing before breakfast. He had driven the team out one morning across the brown, bare earth, which the plough had ripped open in a jagged track, when something in the silence and the scents of nature smote him suddenly as with a vital force. Dropping the reins to the ground, he threw back his head and breathed a keen, quick sense of exaltation. A warm mist, sweet

> and fresh as the breath of a cow, overhung hill and field, road and meadow. In a black-browed cedar tree a mocking-bird was singing.
>
> With a sudden shout Nicholas voiced the glorification of toil--of honest work well done. He felt with the force of a revelation that to throw up the clods of earth manfully is as beneficent as to revolutionise the world. It was not the matter of the work, but the mind that went into it, that counted--and the man who was not content to do small things well would leave great things undone. The beasts before him did not shirk their labour because it was clay and not gold dust that trailed behind the plough; why should he? And where was happiness if it sprung not from the soil? Where contentment if it dwelt not near to Nature? For what was better than these things--the clear air of sunrise, the keen, sweet smell of the fertile earth, the relaxation of tired muscles? Why should he, who had been born to the soil, struggle forth to alien ends as a sightless earthworm to the harrow's teeth? (151-152)

What is present in this celebration of being "born to the soil" and of being able to say "And where was happiness if it sprung not from the soil?"? Looking first at the plow itself, the reader sees that it has left behind "the brown, bare earth" after having "ripped open" the earth "in a jagged track." The bareness of the earth suggests that a kind of cleansing of the surface has been performed by the plow; undesirable growth has been killed and probably burned. The brownness suggests health and fertility as the soil is being prepared for planting by the action of the plow. But the process by which it is prepared is described in terms of violence--"ripped" and "jagged." In light of Nicholas' frustrations in love and in vocation, it is appropriate that his plowing of the land would release some of the pent-up, youthful energy within him. The ripping action suggests doing away with something no longer useful; the old growth must be ripped away to make place for the new. The ground is left "jagged" and must have further cultivation before it is ready for planting. The novel doesn't mention Nicholas' doing any field work besides plowing. It is as if other farm chores could be done by his father, but the plowing calls for the strength and determination of his youth. When Glasgow

writes that "it was clay and not gold dust that trailed behind the plough," the contrast emphasizes the commonness and perhaps the ugliness of the actual plowing. Gold, of course, is more permanent and more valuable than clay. When people refer to an individual as having feet of clay, they think of his being subject to human failures. In a sense, man as clay "trails behind the plough."

The scene is set in the field before breakfast. To be plowing before breakfast shows ambition on Nicholas' part, and to him it was a "chance" to work outdoors. Even though plowing is physically demanding labor, Nicholas sees it as an opportunity to do something that pleases him more than minding the store in town.

The physical experience of plowing in the early morning hours brings to Nicholas both sensual pleasure and intellectual satisfaction. It appears to engage his body--with all its senses--as well as his mind. The "silence and the scents of nature" strike him "as with a vital force." In the muscular-sensual-intellectual activity of the moment, he is bonded to the earth. He hears the mocking birds and smells "the keen, sweet smell of the fertile earth." It is as if he draws new life and happiness from standing on the plowed land. Intellectually he revels in the "glorification of toil--of honest work well done." What follows is almost a paean of joy at the "revelation" of the worth of his plowing. He acknowledges the benefits of his work to society. Even though his tasks may seem small, his attitude toward quality work dignifies it. His bond with the soil and with nature is the source of happiness and contentment. The section of praise for honest labor on the land ends with the question: "Why should he, who had been born to the soil, struggle forth to alien ends as a sightless earthworm to the harrow's teeth?" He is at home with the soil and leaves it at his own risk.

Against this exultation in the work of the plowman, Glasgow places the barren landscape around Kingsborough and blames the farmers for its infertility:

> It was barren soil, whose strength had been exhausted long since by years of production without returns, tilled by hands that had forced without fertilising. There was now grim pathos in its absolute sterility, telling as it did of long-gone yields of grain and historic harvests. (32)

Land that has been exploited, not nourished and cherished, will foster the dismal picture of farming that Glasgow presents in the impoverished and ignorant Amos Burr.

Eventually the others in Judge Bassett's school go off to the university, and Nicholas is torn between wanting to read law with the judge and feeling he ought to earn money for the family by taking the job at Pollard's store. He tells his stepmother that someday he will take the farm and make it pay. She speaks her mind about that prospect:

> "I don't see what you want to go steppin' in yo' pa's shoes for," put in Marthy Burr. "When toes have got p'inted down'hill they ain't goin' no other way. Don't you come back to raisin' things on this land. I ain't never seen nothin' thrive on it yet, cep'n weeds, an' the Lord knows they warn't planted."
>
> Nicholas shook his head.
>
> "Why, look at Turner," he said. "His land is as poor as this, and he makes an easy living."
>
> "A Turner ain't a Burr," returned his stepmother with uncompromising logic, "an' a Burr ain't a Turner. Whar the blood runs the man follows, an' yours ain't runnin' towards the farm. Jeb Turner can fling a handful of corn in poor groun', an' thar'll come up a corfield, an' yo' pa may plant with the sweat of his brow an' the groanin' of his spirit, an' the crows git it. A farmer's got to be born, same as a fool. You can't make a corn pone out of flour dough by the twistin' of it." (154)

In her "uncompromising logic" farmers are born, not made, and Burrs shouldn't be farmers if they can help it. Upon learning that Nicholas was to become a lawyer, General Battle said to Eugenia that "only gentlemen belong to the

bar, but there's nobody too high or too low to be a farmer" (201). Nicholas is pushed out of one class by his dislikes and aspirations and refused admittance to another class because he wasn't born into it.

Nicholas' hands carry the marks of his work in the soil, which attaches him to the earth through his hard physical labor. He is fearful that his low class will keep him from ever being able to marry Eugenia Battle:

> He laughed with a touch of bitterness, and held out his hand, fresh from the soil, hardened by the plough. It was a powerful hand, brown and sinewy, with distorted knuckles and broken nails. "Oh, not that," he said. "I don't mean that. That shows work, but I know you--Genia--you will tell me work is manly. So it is, but is ignorance and poverty and--and all the rest--"
>
> She leaned over and touched his hand lightly with her own. "All the rest is courage and patience and pride," she said; "as for the hand, it is a good hand, and I like it."
>
> He shook his head.
>
> "Good enough in its place, I grant you," he answered; "good enough in the fields, at the plough, or in the barnyard--good enough even to keep this poor farm from collapse and to lift a few of its burdens--but not good enough to--" (212)

It's not only his Burr blood that is not aristocratic; it is his lack of good looks and even his working hands. The virtues and deficiencies of the life of labor are both here: honest work is manly and leads to "courage and patience and pride," but presumably it is accompanied by "ignorance and poverty." Glasgow encapsulates here in one scene her double vision of the plowman who works the land.

As Eugenia and Nicholas pass the Burr farm, Amos looks at Nicholas and says, "'If you ain't got nothin' better to do I reckon you might lend a hand at the plough'" (215). The call for Nicholas' laboring hands is relentless. So "Nicholas crossed to the adjoining field and ploughed deep furrows in the soil, going into breakfast with the smell of the warm earth about him and the glow of exercise in his blood" (215-216). There is a feeling here and elsewhere that there is always plowing to do--as if it were the perpetual chore of the farmer. It may be postponed

because of weather or it may be neglected, but sooner or later the farmer must plow. After Nicholas has listened to his father's complaints that the government is not helping the farmer, he says, "In the meantime, I'd finish that piece of plowing if I were you" (216). The farmer must keep at his plowing piece by piece.

Nicholas imagines how different his situation might have been if he had lived in the days of the Revolutionary War:

> A century ago he might have left his plough to fight, and, having fought, might have returned thereto; but the battle would have tingled in his blood and the furrows have gone crooked. He would have ploughed, not for love of the plough, but because the time for the sowing of the grain had come. (217-218).

Nicholas is more in love with ideas and ideals than with farming. His furrows would surely "have gone crooked" because he was farming from a sense of duty, "not for love of the plough."

His stepmother tells Nicholas one day about his Uncle Nick for whom he was named. With pride she says his uncle was "All book larnin' an' mighty little sense--just like you. . . . He used to sit up all night at his books--an' fall asleep the next day at the plough. He was the wisest fool I ever see" (263). Nicholas imagines his uncle and senses his kinship: "A strange, pathetic figure rose suddenly in his vision--a man with a great brow and a twisted back, with brawny, knotted hands--an unlearned student driving the plough, an ignorant philosopher dragging the mire" (263-264). Nicholas cannot easily dismiss the image of this kinsman who had tried to be both scholar and farmer. Later in his own room,

> [o]n the unearthly whiteness of the wall he beheld the pictured vision of that other student of his race--the kinsman who had lived toiling and had died learning. He came to him a tragic figure in mire-clotted garments--a youth with aspiring eyes and mud-stained feet. He wondered what had been his history--that unknown labourer who had sought knowledge--that philosopher of the plough who had died in ignorance. (265)

When the delegates from the congressional districts meet in Richmond--Nicholas among them--Glasgow describes what she calls a "composite photograph" of the faces. She says, "One would have recognized instinctively the tiller of the soil. . . . The farmer would have stamped his impress indelibly upon the plate--retaining that enduring aspect which comes from contact with natural forces" (299).

As the train slacks for a wayside station on a trip back to Kingsborough from Richmond, Nicholas watches a man plowing:

> Outside a man was driving a plough across a field where grain had been harvested. Nicholas followed with his eyes the walk of the horses, the purple-brown trail of the plough, the sturdy, independent figure of the driver as he passed, whistling an air.
>
> . . . . .
>
> The man at the plough aroused in Nicholas Burr a sudden exhilaration as of physical exertion. It brought back his boyhood which had brightened as he had passed farther from it, and he felt that it would be good on such an afternoon to follow the horses across the fields that were odorous of the upturned earth. (312-313)

Once Nicholas has established his life in the city, his memory is able to recapture this idyllic side of plowing and block out the unpleasant aspects. On his final return to Kingsborough, he muses on the familiar landscape: "It was like the remembered features of a friend, when the change that startles the unaccustomed eye seems to exist less in the well-known face than in the image we have carried in our thoughts" (431).

It was all there as it had been in his youth--the same and yet not the same. The old fields were tilled, the old lands ran waste in broomsedge, but he himself had left his boyhood far behind--it was his own vision that was altered, not the face of nature. The commons were not so wide as he had thought them, the hills not so high, the hollows not so deep. Even the blue horizon had drawn a closer circle

(431). Exaggeration takes place in the memory--whether of landscapes, labor, or people. But while perceptions change and trivial changes take place, Glasgow reminds her readers of the permanence of the farmer in the landscape: "[T]he farmers and the cows would not be missed from their accustomed haunts" (14).

Three times the novel mentions "unploughed commons" (6, 83, 431). The first two references describe a place of natural, undisturbed beauty where the wild flowers blossom in profusion. Plowing may give the land a certain domesticated, orderly beauty, but the natural beauties will be disturbed.

Nicholas' determination to succeed in whatever he does is summed up by Glasgow: "If it were the ploughing of rocky soil, so much the worse; if the uprooting of dead men's thoughts, so much the better. He slighted neither the one nor the other" (122). It is in the character of men to succeed or to fail; it is not necessarily in their choice of vocation. When Turner, a farmer whose outlook is similar to Amos Burr's, learns that Nicholas is studying law, he demands, "'Why don't you stick to the land and make yo' bread honest?'" Nicholas' reply is simply "'The law's honest'" (126). Even though it is not vocation but character that makes a man honest or dishonest, the idea persists that only physical labor is honest work.

The remaining allusions to plowing in *The Voice of the People* add little to the significance Glasgow has given to cultivation. One reference stresses the hard labor of plowing (121). Another simply indicates Nicholas' significant activity on the farm is plowing (201). Eugenia says her father wants the garden plowed because it is too large to hoe (204). And Amos Burr attaches a "peanut share" to the plow to help in the process of separating the peanuts from the plants (199). Once Amos' wife pesters him about being so contrary and staying out in the rain.

She says if she had told him to go look at the plowing, he never would have gone and so he would have remained dry (134).

Glasgow creates a strong central focus on plowing. Plowing represents the occupation of farming. The dual image of plowing is interpreted both as all-consuming, monotonous, potentially degrading labor and as an affirmation of life and kinship with the land. The negative aspect of the image seems to derive from the fact that the long hours of labor at the plow can diminish the farmer's motivation to be a whole person. He may be deprived of energy and time to pursue social or intellectual or aesthetic satisfaction. His labor may so enervate him that he is unable to break the shackles of perpetual poverty. Often the discouragement of crop loss and slow gains weakens his determination. Glasgow again implies that without the "vein of iron," one cannot triumph over circumstances--whatever they are. But the positive side of the image is also present in the sense of life and vitality derived from working the land. The difference demonstrated in this novel lies primarily within the one who cultivates the soil, not in the tasks he does. Plowing the land can feed desirable moral and spiritual qualities in the plowman, but it does not automatically plant those qualities in him. Images associated with the action of the plow in this novel tend to be rough and violent. The plow itself represents the call of duty.

How do the images of the peanut farmer in *The Voice of the People* compare with the images of the tobacco farmer in *The Deliverance*?

The Deliverance tells the story of two main families, the aristocratic Blakes and the lowborn Fletchers, about ten years after Bill Fletcher has managed to secure the Blake ancestral home and plantation for himself. The time frame is 1878-1890. The Blakes, once rich planters, lost everything to their former overseer who Christopher believes drained the Blake fortune during his father's long

illness and acquired the money to buy Blake Hall and the plantation when they were suddenly sold at auction. The Blakes live in the former overseer's cottage and eke out a livelihood growing tobacco. Christopher, the main character, is a "giant of the soil," splendid in physique but barely literate. After the war he became the sole support of his blind mother and two sisters and had to plow instead of study. His elemental qualities seem to derive from his life on the soil though the Blake ancestral line had been somewhat weakened by the dissipation of affluence and reckless pleasure. Convinced that Fletcher obtained the plantation by extortion, Christopher is almost consumed by a burning desire for revenge. That desire is held in tension by his own intelligence and sensitivity and his naturally capacious spirit. What makes the farmer Christopher so vital and interesting is this war within his own nature. To complicate matters, he falls in love with Maria, granddaughter of Bill Fletcher.

Glasgow frequently uses rural landscapes to reflect the feelings of her characters in *The Deliverance,* especially of those closest to the soil. Landscape here, as in *The Voice of the People,* is a domesticated, georgic landscape. While idyllic qualities may be given to it, it does not have the sublime grandeur and sweep of Cooper's landscapes. The size and wildness have been scaled down for purposes of civilization. The author makes a number of casual references to newly ploughed fields, heightening the reader's consciousness that the lives of her characters are closely bound to the soil (5, 9, 35, 288, 290, 310). The freshly ploughed fields are a natural and satisfying place upon which to gaze. The fact that the land is plowed injects a forward-looking note of optimism and a sense of well being, for plowed land promises to sustain the life of a new crop and of the farmer himself. The lawyer Carraway observes: "The road they followed crawled like a leisurely river between the freshly ploughed ridges, where the earth was settling slowly

round the transplanted crop" (5). A few pages later he reflects again on the scene before him: "Farther away swept the freshly ploughed ground, over which moved the dark figures of the labourers transplanting the young crop" (9). Several times a character is said to be walking over the plowed land. Walking on plowed ground gives a person a direct tactile connection with the feel of the land. "[H]e [Christopher] swung vigorously in the twilight across the newly ploughed fields" (35). Once Maria sets out "across the newly ploughed fields toward the Blake cottage. . . . As she reached the fence that divided the two farms, she saw him [Christopher] walking slowly down a newly turned furrow" (288). "Together they went slowly up the low, brown hill over the clods of upturned earth" (290). In another instance Maria points "across the ploughed fields to the old gray chimneys" (310). These repetitions oblige the reader to *see* the plowed landscape that shapes the lives of those who live on the land.

Christopher's inner conflict is the central focus of the novel. Recurring throughout the narrative is the idea that his early life at the plough--instead of at the books--formed his habits of mind and body and deprived him of the education and opportunities that might otherwise have been his. Christopher's own attitude toward sacrificing his education in order to support his family is ambivalent, but he has made a somewhat resentful, fatalistic acceptance of the situation. Having to sacrifice his own education is one more thing that rankles him against Fletcher. The passages dealing with this might not seem such an overall derogation of the life of the farmer if Christopher had not been born into an old family of planter aristocrats. Glasgow's treatment of the usurping overseer Fletcher reinforces the idea that the rising middle class is guilty of a crude, grasping insensitivity. Greed is the enemy of what is wholesome and good in the farmer's life. By virtue of its status, the planter class is expected to be large-

spirited and instinctively dutiful toward others. The dichotomy of the plough versus the books is really symbolic of the on-going class conflict. The demands placed upon the plowman appear to make this an either-or choice in Glasgow.

The development of these ideas begins early in the novel when Peterkin, "poor-white trash," acts as a sort of commentator:

> Peterkin snorted. "Who, Mr. Christopher? Well, he warn't more'n ten years old when his pa went doty an' died, an' I don't reckon he's had much larnin' sence. I've leant on the gate myself an' watched the nigger children traipsin' by to the Yankee woman's school, an' he drivin' the plough when he didn't reach much higher than the handle. He used to be the darndest leetle brat, too, till his sperits got all freezed out o' him. (6)

Even Peterkin sees that Christopher's early deprivation "freezed" something out of him.

Christopher tells his sister that he is "Precious fit for anything but the stable or the tobacco field!" (38). In a moment of weariness and self-pity, Christopher imagines his own figure moving among familiar scenes:

> "That is I yonder," he might have said had he been able to disentangle thought from sensation, "plodding along there through the red mud in the road. Look at the coarse clothes, smelling of axle-grease, the hands knotted by toil and stained with tobacco juice, the face soiled with sweat and clay. That is I, who was born with the love of ease and the weakness to temptation in my blood, with the love, too, of delicate food, of rare wines, and of beautiful women. Once I craved these things; now the thought of them troubles me no longer, for I work in the sun all day and go home to enjoy my coarse food. Is it because I have been broken to my life as a young horse is broken to the plough, or have all the desires I have known been swallowed up in a single hatred--a hatred as jealous and as strong as love?" (115-16)

His thought of being "broken" to his life as a "young horse is broken to the plough" suggests a conscious loss of his own natural high spirits; his spirit of adventure has submitted to the yoke of hard labor. Sitting alone in his room one

night he feels ashamed of "his ignorance, his awkwardness, his brutality--and with the shame there awoke the slow anger of a sullen beast" (151). Several times Glasgow chooses to compare his actions to those of a beast, thereby emphasizing his dehumanization. "Fate had driven him like a whipped hound to the kennel, but he could still snarl back his defiance" (151). He is haunted by ideas of what he might have been. Glasgow reminds her readers that "The soul, distorted, bruised, defeated, still lived within him" (152). He remembers his early ambition to be a gentlemanly scholar. "Then his studies had ended abruptly with the Greek alphabet, and from the library he had passed out into the plough" (152). The author accomplishes a fitting touch with the "passing out"--a suggestion of losing consciousness. Not all of this distortion of his soul should be blamed on his life as a tobacco farmer, however, for the cancer of hatred for Fletcher also obsesses him and diminishes his moral fiber.

When Christopher talks to Maria, his resentment that he has lowered himself to become a farmer emerges again--this time in imagery of domestic animals. Yet even in this picture, he maintains a quality of soul--the ability to think and dream:

> "But I wasn't always a tobacco-planter, and there were poets before Homer, who is about the only one I've ever read. It's true I've tried to lose the little education I ever had--that I've done my best to come down to the level of my own cattle; but I'm not an ox, after all, except in strength, and one has plenty of time to think when one works in the field all day. Why, the fancies I've had would turn your head." (283)

Similar ideas of his degradation recur when he protests to Maria that he has become unfit for Blake Hall:

> "Put me back in the Hall, and I should be as ignorant and as coarse as I am out here. A labourer is all I am and all I am fit to be. I once wanted to read Greek and translate 'The Iliad'--and yet to-day I doubt if I could write a decent letter to save my soul.

> It's partly my fault, of course, but you can't know--you could never know--the bitterness and despair of those years when I tried to sink myself to the level of the brutes--tried to forget that I was any better than the oxen I drove." (312)

A final note to this grim scenario of how the demands of earning a livelihood on the poor land can rob a man's soul and spirit comes after his first reading lesson from Maria. He feels "as if he had, with a miraculous effort, burst the bonds that had once held him to the earth" (320). Even though the immediate elation vanishes, he is eventually regenerated not so much by the reading lessons as by Maria's love for him. Christopher has worked the land, not out of a heart of love, but out of a spirit of revenge and duty. That makes all the difference in the effect upon him of the hard labor. That is the reason he felt degraded by the labor. He lost some qualities of soul and spirit in the process though those qualities were redeemable through Maria's love. His bonding to the land had been a bitter necessity, not a matter of choice.

Christopher's identification with the soil is stressed by Glasgow in such a way as to make it impossible for the reader to miss his bonding to the earth. But the attachment is complicated by the fact that Christopher's high birth gives him the privileges of the plantation owner, not the field hand. So his is a love-hate relationship with the soil, distorted at times by his desire for revenge against Fletcher for possessing the Blake land. Glasgow pictures Christopher planting tobacco:

> As he moved slowly along between the even rows, dropping from time to time a plant into one of the small holes dug before him, and pausing with the basket on his arm to settle the earth carefully with his foot, he seemed, indeed, as much the product of the soil upon which he stood as did the great white chestnut growing beside the road. In his pose, in his walk, in the careless carriage of his head, there was the incommunicable freedom of earth and sky. (9)

To compare Christopher to the great white chestnut is to suggest the strength and durability that is his because he is a "product of the soil." The connection with freedom of the elements indicates an expansiveness of mind as well as free movement. This idea recurs in the following statement on his kinship with the soil: "Living, as he did, so close to the earth, himself akin to the stubborn forces of the soil, he had grown gradually from his childhood into accord with the vital freedom of nature" (93).

Closeness to the earth is emphasized by tactile and olfactory and auditory senses as well as by sight. The smells are described as "keen odours released by the sunshine from the broken soil," called "the naked ground" later in the sentence (64). Elsewhere "[t]he air was fresh with the scent of the upturned earth" (35. The action of the plow again is seen in violent terms of breaking. It leaves the ground bare and releases the smells of the soil.

In a time of loneliness, Christopher feels his responses to the natural world have dulled. Here again the perception of the landscape is filtered through the emotions of the onlooker:

> The time had been when the mere physical contact with the air would have filled him with a quiet satisfaction, but during the last four years he had lost gradually his sensitiveness to external things--to the changes of the seasons as to the beauties of an autumn sunrise. A clear morning had ceased to arouse in him the old buoyant energy, and he had lost the zest of muscular exertion which had done so much to sweeten his labour in the fields. It was as if a clog fettered his simplest emotion. Even his enjoyment of nature had grown dull and spiritless, like his affection for his family. (190)

His response to the natural world reflects his human relationships. When his spirits revive, he can again draw sustenance from his closeness to the land. But at this point, full of anxiety about his relationship with Maria, Christopher realizes

that even the land itself cannot revive his spirits. Or at least he is unable to draw on its rejuvenating power.

A contrasting picture opens Book 4, "The Awakening." Here he is alive to the feel of the wind and to the sights, the sounds, and the scents of the spring day:

> A blue sky shone brightly through the leafless boughs above him, and along the little wayside path tufts of dandelion were blooming in the red dust. The wind, which blew straight toward him from the opening beyond the strip of wood in which he walked, brought the fresh scent of the upturned fields and of the swelling in the warm sunshine. In his own veins he felt also that the blood had stirred, and that strange, quickening impulse, which comes with the rising sap alike to a man and a tree, worked restlessly in his limbs at the touch of spring. (251)

In Glasgow's 1904 edition, the passage goes on to say this: "Nature was alive again, and he felt vaguely that in the resurrection surrounding him he must have his part--that in him as well as in the earth the spirit of life must move and put forth in gladness." It is indeed a kind of resurrection to life for Christopher, but the resurrection could not be accomplished without a responsiveness on his part. He generally reflects the moods of the changing seasons: "So closely akin were his moods to those of the changing seasons that, at the instant, he seemed to feel the current of his being flow from the earth beneath his feet, as if his physical nature drew vitality from that genial and abundant source" (321-22). Bonding to the earth cannot be given much stronger emphasis than to picture Christopher drawing his strength and nourishment from the abundance of the earth.

Not only is there a physical kinship with the earth, but affinity with nature also lends to Christopher a "strange mystic insight which comes to those who lead brooding and isolated lives close to nature" (355). This leads him to ask himself if the things that happen to him "had not their beginning in the dawn of his

existence so many million years ago" (355). To realize more fully the spiritual, sensitive side of Christopher's nature, the reader must come in from the fields long enough to see Christopher dress for dinner to please his mother and then see him tenderly carry the old lady to her bed:

> "It is your bedtime, mother--shall I carry you across?" he asked; and as the old lady nodded, he lifted her as if she were a child and held her closely against his breast, feeling his tenderness revive at the clasp of her fragile hands. When he placed her upon her bed, he kissed her good-night and went up the narrow staircase, stooping carefully to avoid the whitewashed ceiling above. (151)

Identification with the soil is not limited to Christopher though his attachment is naturally given more attention than that of other characters. As his sister Cynthia walks back from delivering medicine to Aunt Dinah, she feels the fresh June breeze and finds "her spirit was released from the day's burden of unrest." In spite of the fact that she will patiently return to the work inside the house, she knows that taking time for contact with the earth will renew her "vital forces": "What she wanted just then was to lie for an hour close upon the ground, to renew the vital forces within her by contact with the invigorating earth, to feel Nature at friendly touch with her lips and hands" (77).

Maria also is susceptible to the attraction of the natural world:

> For the first time in her life, as her eyes swept over the landscape, she was conscious of a peculiar charm in the wildness of the country and the absence of all civilizing influences; in the open sky, the red roads, the luxuriant tobacco, the coarse sprays of yarrow blooming against the fence; in the homely tasks, drawing one close to the soil, the harvesting of the crops, the milking of the mild-eyed cows; and in the long still days, followed so tranquilly by the long still nights. (128)

The discipline of Maria's unhappy marriage taught her to love the natural things she once hated: "Oh this wind is good when it blows over the ploughed fields, and

yet between city streets it would bring only dust and discomfort" (253). The rural winds bring air that is pure and invigorating and bears the aroma of the soil.

The penultimate paragraph in the novel describes Christopher's final reaction to the familiar landscape after he returns from prison. As he takes in the sights and smells, "he began to breathe anew the spirit of life. Then with a single bound of the heart the sense of freedom came to him." The scene unites the landscape with Christopher's own soul and his renewed love for Maria: "Much yet remained to him--the earth with its untold miracles, the sky with its infinity of space, his own soul--and Maria!" (398).

Discussions of land as property are most often related to the grasping Fletcher. Early in the novel the lawyer Carraway tries to explain to Bill Fletcher why Blake's old black Boaz would justify digging in Fletcher's asparagus bed by saying he was "looking for some shoots for ole miss's dinner":

> "The property idea is very strong in these rural counties, you see," remarked the lawyer gravely. "They feel that every year adds a value to the hereditary possession of land, and that when an estate has borne a single name for a century there has been a veritable impress placed upon it. Your asparagus bed is merely an item. You find, I fancy, other instances." (19)

When Fletcher tries to get the lawyer to assist him in buying the land that the Blakes farm, he tells Carraway that their land cuts "straight into the heart of my tobacco fields" (36). In fact, "It takes the heart right out of my land, I tell you" (31). Giving the land a heart suggests the deep and vital feelings people have for their land as well as the function of the heart in sustaining life and being the center of life.

Plowing metaphors are rare in Glasgow's work. She seldom thinks in such terms, but once she refers to Tucker Corbin's fine face as "ploughed with the marks of suffering" (42). The association with pain and endurance is obvious.

The emphasis on the laborious nature of plowing is repeated in various ways. Even the horses are expected to grow weary at the plow. Cynthia says, "I hope the horses aren't tired. Have they been at the plough?" (88). In an irritable mood, Christopher storms at his sister for expecting too much of him:

> "After a day's work like mine you can hardly expect me to dance a hornpipe. Since sunrise I've done a turn at fall ploughing, felled and chopped a tree, mended the pasture fence, brought the water for the washing, tied up some tobacco leaves, and looked after the cattle and the horses--and now you find fault because I haven't cut any extra capers!" (166)

The reader gets a picture of the toll of energy that plowing takes when he reads:

> Christopher took up the ropes, and with a quick jerk of the buried ploughshare, began his plodding walk over the turned-up sod. The furrow was short; but when he reached the end of it, he paused from sheer exhaustion and stood wiping the heavy moisture from his brow. . . . All at once he became aware that the afternoon was too oppressive for field work, and, releasing the horses from the plough, he led them slowly back to the stable beyond the house. As he went, it seemed to him that he had grown middle-aged within the hour; his youth had departed as mysteriously as his strength. (314)

But the labor isn't always burdensome; sometimes when Christopher's spirits are high, it is exhilarating: "Gradually, as he applied himself to the work, the old zest of healthful labour returned to him, and he passed buoyantly through the narrow aisle, leaving a devastated furrow on either side" (123). Here the labor stimulates both body and spirit. Figuratively, he can pass "buoyantly through the narrow aisle" that is his life even though devastation lies about him.

Christopher often plows from a sense of duty, however, not from the joy of life on the land. This dutiful "vein of iron" makes him one of Glasgow's heroes. When Cynthia offers to teach him to read, he retorts, "And let mother [blind] and Uncle Tucker [crippled in the war] plough the field, and plant the crop, and cut the

wood" (39). He alone is able, and the farm work is his inescapable duty if his family is to survive. He never shirks this duty. Cynthia feels the call of duty as strongly as her brother, and when Uncle Tucker asks her to look at a particular field and tell him what she finds, she is blind to the beauty of life he had in mind: "'There's first the road, and then a piece of fallow land that ought to be ploughed,' she said" (77-78). When Will Fletcher begs Christopher to go hunting on a different day so he can go along, Christopher responds: "Oh, well, but it's the only day I've free. There's a lot of fall ploughing to do; then the apples are ready to be gathered; and I must take some corn to the mill before the week's up. I've wasted too much time with you as it is. It's the only wealth I have, you see" (208). Christopher is always conscious of the work to be done, for he is the only one to do it. Maria mocks Christopher's work ethic when he tells her he has waited a whole half hour for her to come. "What a shame," she said, "--that's a whole furrow unploughed, isn't it?" (319). The value of time is measured in terms of furrows plowed, something that can be physically measured. In favorable weather with a full moon, Christopher expects every farmer in the county to be "in the fields till daybreak" planting tobacco (357).

When Maria tries to tell Christopher want really counts in life, he responds sarcastically as if she were too idealistic and failed to comprehend the realities of farm life:

> "I think it is the things one learns," she said; "the places in which we take root and grow, and the people who teach us what is really worth while; patience, and charity, and the beauty there is in the simplest and most common lives when they are lived close to Nature."
>
> "In driving the plough or in picking the suckers from a tobacco plant," he added scornfully.
>
> "In those things, yes; and in any life that is good, and true, and natural."

> "Well, I have lived near enough to Nature to hate it with all my might," he answered, not without bitterness. "Why, there are times when I'd like to kick every ploughed field I see out into eternity. Tobacco-growing is one of the natural things, I suppose, but if you want to see any beauty in it you must watch it from a shady road. When you get in the midst of it you'll find it coarse and sticky, and given over generally to worms." (256-57)

Christopher has had his capacity for other things dwarfed so many times by his incessant labor that he isn't ready to acknowledge the virtues of living close to nature. Not that the virtues aren't there, but in order to appreciate them he is probably correct that one must watch farming "from a shady road."

Ploughing is treated as the norm and as the most common farm activity. When Maria comes to the Blake cottage, she finds "Christopher ploughing in the field" (308). Ploughing domesticates the land. The one reference to unplowed land calls it "unploughed wasteland" (145). And in the Blakes' impoverished circumstances, nothing can be wasted.

Another quality of Christopher's that Glasgow calls attention to is his strength at the plow. Jim Weatherby says jokingly to him, "'Give a plough a single push, Christopher, and I believe it would run as long as there was level ground'" (200). Behind the laughter is recognition of his remarkable physical strength. He has already been compared to the horses and the oxen. Will, by contrast, whines when his grandfather puts him to the plough. "[B]ut I can't stand it," he says. "I haven't the strength" (229). When his sister sees him trying to plow, she doesn't even recognize him at first: "A man in blue jean clothes was ploughing the field on the left of the road, and not until something vaguely familiar in his dejected attitude caused her to turn" did she realize it was Will (274). Most of the ploughing assigned to Will, however, was done by Christopher. "'I'll help you with the ploughing, of course,' Christopher said. . . . Then, as he fell back into his own

road, he found something like satisfaction in the prospect of driving Will Fletcher's plough" (280). The satisfaction comes not so much from the ploughing itself as from the triumph over Bill Fletcher that it represents. When Maria tries to make conversation with Will, she says, "So your spring ploughing is all done, and you have been working harder than I knew" (343). Will is quick to credit Christopher with plowing his field before he [Christopher] went to prison.

The figure of Christopher bonded to the earth by his dependence on the land is impressive, but he is not a mindless fixture. Carraway sees him "walking idly among the heavy furrows, watching, with the interest of a born agriculturist" (48). When Christopher ploughs Will's field, "Will's eyes lighted, in his first glance from the window, on Christopher's blue-clad figure commanding the ploughed field on the left of the house" (368). Intelligent dignity is seen in both images, and the military metaphor assumes Christopher's authority. If Christopher is "commanding the ploughed field," then the land is under his control as he plows.

Seldom does Glasgow personify the land or the crops in *The Deliverance*. Perhaps that comes naturally only to those whose minds have absorbed first-hand lessons from observing natural processes. Actually Christopher himself may not have sufficient love for nature to make such personification particularly appropriate. But on the occasion when Glasgow indulges in personification of nature, she makes a brutal analogy: "At his feet there were little green piles of tobacco, and around him from the sunbaked earth rose a headless army of bruised and bleeding stubble" (135). The farmer here is a ruthless conqueror.

The crippled Uncle Tucker, by his cheerful outlook and optimistic philosophy, provides relief from some of the bleakness of life with the Blakes. He is much more ready to see good in other people, including the farming classes, than are Christopher, Cynthia, and their mother. Tucker comes to the defense of the

Weatherbys: "'Why, Jacob Weatherby's grandfather was an honest, self-respecting tiller of the soil when mine used to fish his necktie out of the punch-bowl every Saturday night, people said'" (82). On another occasion he tries to help Cynthia see that "happiness is not so much in what comes as in the way you take it." He tells her "'The time was when I didn't think so, but I know now that there's as much life out there in that old field as in the tightest-packed city street I ever saw--purer life, praise God, and sweeter to the taste'" (78). Tucker's words bring to light an underlying truth demonstrated in the novel: It is not the circumstances themselves, but how people adjust to them that determines the quality of their lives. And the plowman's life is potentially a desirable one.

Like *The Deliverance* and *The Voice of the People, The Miller of Old Church* uses a rural setting for a novel of manners. The story takes place in southside Virginia from 1898 to 1902. The plot brings together the fates of three families of different social levels, a frequent strategy in Glasgow's fiction. The aristocratic Gays, the poor-white Merryweathers, and the yeoman Revercombs play leading roles. Abel Revercomb, one of the author's plain people of the soil, is the titular character and distinguishes himself by his ability to improve his lot in life. The novel stresses the distinguishing characteristics of each class and offers an analysis of the lives of those who live close to the soil. It does not, however, tend to give direct images of working the land; there are, instead, just a few rather bland allusions to plowing. But several passages of exposition shed light on the position of the farmer in the postbellum structure of Virginia society. Two of these come early in the novel. First is a description of the poor-white Reuben Merryweather:

> Past seventy now, his youth had been trained to a different civilization, and there was a touching gentleness in his face, as if he expressed still the mental attitude of a class which had existed merely as a support or a foil to the order above it. Without spirit to resent, he, with his fellows, had endured the greatest

> evils of slavery. With the curse of free labour on the land, there had been no incentive for toil, no hire for the labourer. Like an incubus the system had lain over them, stifling all energy, checking all progress, retarding all prosperity, save the prosperity of the great land-owners. Then the soil had changed hands, and where the plough had broken the earth, the seeds of a democracy had germinated and put forth from the very blood of the battlefields. (34)

In the original 1911 edition, this paragraph goes on to say this: "In the upward pressure of class, he had seen the stability of custom yield at last to the impetus of an energy that was not racial but individual." Not until the ownership of land was in the hands of the small farmers, not until ownership was democratized, did the enterprising individuals emerge. It is an old lesson and essential to understanding human productivity: having a vested interest in the outcome motivates the worker. An invitation to labor for someone else does not. Ownership of the land is a prerequisite for realizing the potential dignity and sense of well being that comes from cultivation and that bonds the farmer to his land.

The second passage begins by describing Abel Revercomb. Then it uses him to point to class characteristics and their social-political-economic implication. This rather lengthy passage presents many of Glasgow's relevant views:

> A certain tenacity, a suggestion of stubbornness in the jaw revealed that temperamental intolerance of others which constitutes the strength, as well as the weakness, of the rustic who has risen out of his class. An opinion once embraced acquired the authority of a revelation; a passion once yielded to was transformed into a principle. Impulsive, generous, undisciplined, he represented the recoil from that spirit of racial submission which was embodied in Reuben Merryweather. Tradition had bound Reuben in thongs of steel; Abel was aware only of his liberated intelligence, of a passionate desire to test that liberation to the fullest. As the elder had suffered beneath the weight of the established order, so the younger showed the

> disturbing effects of a freedom which had resulted from too rapid a change in economic conditions rather than from the more gradual evolution of class. The land which had belonged to the few became after the war within reach of the many. At first the lower classes had held back, paralyzed by the burden of slavery. The soil, impoverished, wasted, untilled, rested under the shadow of the old names, the old customs. This mole-like blindness of the poorer whites persisted still for a quarter of a century; and the awakening was possible only after the newer generation had come to its growth. To them the past authority was a shadow; the past reverence a delusion. When the black labourer worked, not freely, but for hire, the wages of the white labourer went up as by magic. To rise under the old system had been so impossible that Abel's ancestors lost the habit of trying. The beneficent charity of the great landowners had extinguished the small incentive that might have remained; and to give had been so much the prerogative of a single class, that to receive had become a part of the privilege of another. In that pleasant idyllic period the one act which went unhonoured and unrewarded was the act of toil. (36-37)

This provides ample insight into Glasgow's analysis of the situation in which the New South finds itself in her novel. (She does not, however, deal directly with issues of industrialization.) The final note of the passage bears directly on the image of the farmer. The author denies any dignity or reward to laborers under the plantation system. Lack of respect for one who toils in the fields appears to be rooted more deeply and to be slower to change in Southern literature than in other American literature. Perhaps because often the plantations were large in the South, it was easy to model their management on old feudal systems. Whatever the reason for the South's denigration of labor, the smaller farms of the homesteaders in the Midwest and the Great Plains gave rise to a more kindly view toward labor. Those who were able to make their homesteads prosper gained the respect of their neighbors. But we no longer live in the homestead era, and attitudes toward the laborer--whether in the field or in the city--remain ambivalent. More of this later.

Abel's success in being able to save enough to buy the mill is the topic of conversation at Bottoms Ordinary, the local public house. Solomon Hatch says to Jonathan Gay:

> "Abel went to school somehow by hook or crook an' got a good bit of book larnin', they say, an' then he came back here an' went to turnin' up every stone an' stick on the place. He ploughed an' he sowed an' he reaped till he'd saved up enough to buy that piece of low ground betwixt his house and the grist-mill." (13)

For Abel "book larnin'" and plowing are compatible, not almost mutually exclusive as they seem to be in *The Voice of the People* and *The Deliverance.* In fact, the author implies that Abel is a superior farmer not only because he has motivation but because he knows more than his fellow farmers. He is appropriately named.

Abel is frequently the center of neighborhood talk. Ninety-year-old Adam Doolittle says of him: "[b]ut Abel Revercomb was al'ays the sort that could measure nothin' less than a bushel. The pity with big-natured folk is that they plough up a mountain and trip at last over a pea-vine" (9). Doolittle's colorful "plough up a mountain and trip at last over a pea-vine" is an insightful appraisal. Abel is equal to tasks of enormous size that demand almost superhuman labor. The picture suggests the risk and vigor with which Abel throws himself into his work. But the pea-vine trips him up, presumably his long-unrewarded love for Molly Merryweather.

Abel's own appraisal of himself sounds quite different, but both he and Doolittle use the ploughing as a measure of manhood. Abel says to Judy: "I'm not anybody, Judy; I'm a poor devil that was born without sense enough to plough his furrow straight" (201). The straight furrow in farm literature is generally indicative both of skill and of moral uprightness. But in this context Abel is downgrading himself in an attempt to comfort his wife, and his words cannot be taken at face value.

When Abel's brother comes home from Reuben's funeral, he makes an allusion to plowing that suggests plowing is the comfortable, ordinary routine for him, free of disturbing emotion. And it is always waiting to be done. "I've got the church fidgets in my legs,' he said. 'I reckon I'll get into my everday suit an' finish that piece of ploughing'" (193).

One allusion to plowed ground is made when Molly walks on the luxurious carpet in a hotel lobby, and it gave her the feeling that "she was walking on ploughed ground," a pleasing sensation (250).

These are sketchy allusions, for in spite of the rural setting, Glasgow's interest is focused on the interrelationships of the people, and their daily work is not given prominence in *The Miller of Old Church*.

Pictures of farm life are enlarged when the reader turns to *Barren Ground*, set in the Piedmont region from 1894 to 1924. In this novel Glasgow uses the land to reflect the inner lives of the characters, especially of Dorinda Oakley. Dorinda is the child of opposites. Her land-poor father is good natured and hard working, smelling of the land itself, but he is wholly ineffectual as a farmer. Her mother, of Scotch Presbyterian ancestry, possesses a religious mania reminiscent of her youthful missionary dreams of the Congo. The pastoral name "Dorinda" implies a kind of romanticism. And "Oakley" suggests the strength and endurance of the oak. She is a female version of the yeoman farmer. The novel is the story of her life from youth to middle age. Glasgow is not writing about farming per se, but Dorinda's life is so close to the soil in which she finds restoration that her life and the land are inseparable. *Barren Ground* is the story of betrayed love, consequent hatred, and determination to make a poor farm prosper. Dorinda often associates her emotions with the landscape, describing her early life once as "merely a hidden field in the landscape, neglected, monotonous, abandoned to solitude, and

yet with a smothered fire, like the wild grass, running through it" (10-11). Her ultimate mastery of the land reflects her mastery of herself. Old Matthew, providing a sort of Greek chorus commentary, warns Dorinda: "Thar's one thing sartain sure, you've got to conquer the land in the beginning, or it'll conquer you before you're through with it" (14).

Jason Greylock is also described in terms of his relationship with the land: "Though he had sprung from the soil, he had returned to it a stranger, and there could be no sympathetic communion between him and the solitude. Neither as a lover nor as a conqueror could he hope to possess it in spirit" (28). This early philosophic comment from the author prepares the reader to expect two approaches to winning the land--as lover or conqueror. Dorinda may be able to conquer the old unproductive land, but it is more a battle of wits and skill than of love. Success is satisfying to her but scarcely heart-warming.

The Scotch Irish farmers around Pedlar's Mill had come from the upper valley of Virginia, and "they had rooted afresh in the warmer soil of the low country, where they had conquered the land not by force, but by virtue of the emphatic argument that lies in fortitude" (5). Here the land-poor Joshua Oakley owns "a thousand acres of scrub pine, scrub oak, and broomsedge, where a single cultivated corner was like a solitary island in some chaotic sea" (6). The one thing that seemed "immutable and everlasting" to Dorinda was the poverty of the soil (10).

Joshua, the failed farmer, is nonetheless fully identified with the land:

> Though he was not yet sixty-five, his features, browned and reddened and seamed by sun and wind, appeared as old as a rock embedded in earth. All his life he had been a slave to the land, harnessed to the elemental forces, struggling inarticulately against the blight of poverty and the barrenness of the soil. Yet Dorinda had never heard him rebel. His resignation was the

> earth's passive acceptance of sun or rain. When his crop failed, or his tobacco was destroyed by frost, he would drive his plough into the field and begin all over again. . . . But whenever she thought of him now, his hands, gnarled, twisted, and earth-stained like the vigorous roots of a tree, and that penetrating briny smell, were the first things she remembered. His image was embalmed in that stale odour of the farm as in a preserving fluid. (35)

Even though Joshua's efforts appear to be almost fruitless, he still perseveres in his weary battle with the soil. He rejects any new methods of farming and cultivates his crops in the same way his ancestors did. Several passages picture him with a note of pathos, for the farm had absorbed his life's energies and given virtually nothing in return. When Dorinda goes to him in the tobacco field, Glasgow describes him this way:

> Before she reached him the steaming odour of his body, like that of an overheated ox, floated to her. His face, the colour of red clay, was dripping with sweat, and his shirt of blue jeans, which was open on his broad, hairy chest, was as wet as if he had been swimming. There was nothing human about him except his fine prophet's head and the humble dignity of one who has kept in close communion with earth and sky. He had known nothing but toil; he had no language but the language of toil. (99)

Joshua stands as an example of the plowman whose life is consumed with labor without respite.

While Dorinda is in New York she receives a letter from her mother telling of her father's stoke. Her mother writes: "I hate to have to send you bad news, but your father had a stroke last Saturday while he was ploughing the tobacco-field" (214). When she returns to Old Farm her brother repeats the same information, adding the fact that their father had decided not to plant tobacco in the field that year but would try corn instead (224). Ironically, this seems to be Joshua's first experiment with crop rotation.

The fatigue from the hard field work was a constant fact of life, leaving no energy for other pursuits: "Drugged with fatigue, they nodded in a vegetable somnolence. Even in their hours of freedom they could not escape the relentless tyranny of the soil" (41). Joshua's son Rufus rebels at the prospect of endless toil: "'I'd let the farm rot before it would be my master.'" His father responds, "'Somebody's got to be a slave'" (47). Jason and Nathan Pedlar and James Ellgood bring more enlightened ideas of farming to the neighborhood, but the farmers are slow to listen. Jason says, "'I thought when I first came back that I might be able to wake up the farmers, but it is uphill ploughing to try to get them out of their rut'" (53).

In the first section of the book, "Broomsedge," it is the bleakness of life on the land that is most impressive. The farmers' crops are vulnerable to bad weather, disease, and pests even when the farmers have done all they can do (105). Dorinda's father says, "'The truth is I've got the land on my back, an' it's drivin' me. Land is a hard driver'" (105). In New York Dorinda tells Doctor Faraday: "'Almost everybody is poor at Pedlar's Mill. . . . [W]e have had to wring whatever we've had out of barren ground. It was a struggle to make anything grow'" (200). Her brother Rufus calls the farm work "'the meanest work ever made. You slave till you drop, and there's never anything to show for it'" (220). After her father's death Dorinda felt "his death made as little difference as if a tree had fallen and rotted back into the soil" (255). Perhaps the bleakest metaphor of life on the land in Dorinda's youth is used of the farm house: "it had seemed to the child that the farm-house crouched like a beaten hound, in the midst of the brown fields, beneath the menacing solitude" (33).

Some 30 references are made to plowing in the novel but only once is any significant development given to a plowing scene, and that is in Dorinda's dream.

The concert she attended just before the dream "had released some imprisoned force in the depths of her being. . . . [S]he had come to life again" (208). The music stirred her so deeply and brought back so many memories that she told her companion, "'I feel as if I had ploughed a field'" (205). It was a deep and disturbing experience. Later in the conversation she tells him that she feels "'as if the farm were calling me to come back and help'" (208). She dreams she is back home at Old Farm plowing an abandoned field. Dan and Beersheba, her two favorite horses, are harnessed to the plow. When they have finished one row, they turn and talk to her:

> "You'll never get this done if you plough a hundred years," they said, "because there is nothing here but thistles, and you can't plough thistles under." Then she looked round her and saw that they were right. As far as she could see, on every side, the field was filled with prickly purple thistles, and every thistle was wearing the face of Jason. A million thistles, and every thistle looked up at her with the eyes of Jason! She turned the plough where they grew thickest, trampling them down, uprooting them, ploughing them under with all her strength; but always when they went into the soil, they cropped up again. Millions of purple flaunting heads! Millions of faces! They sprang up everywhere; in the deep furrow that the plough had cut; in the dun-coloured clods of the upturned earth; under the feet of the horses; under her own feet, springing back, as if they were set on wire stems, as soon as she had crushed them into the ground. "I am going to plough them under, if it kills me," she said aloud; and then she awoke. (208)

The dream dramatically brings together her desire to redeem Old Farm from its fallen state and her determination not to let Jason's betrayal ruin her life. It suggests that even though she will try to lose herself in making the farm productive, she will never free herself from the memory of Jason. Her anger against him will energize her work. She realizes this even more fully after she returns to Old Farm: "Even if she worked her unhappiness into the soil; even if she cut it down and burned it off with the broomsedge, it would spring up again in

the place where it had been" (223). She knows that she has "drilled her energy down into the soil instead of training it upward" (303. See also 349.). Larger than the thistles, the plow Dorinda uses reminds the reader that she will take a man's role to revenge herself. The fact that the thistles are masculine and rooted in the earth presents a psychological parallel to her tearing out the broomsedge on the farm to make way for crops. Jason had made her life barren, but she--with her "vein of iron" (156)--will triumph in spite of that. The farm will demonstrate her victory. She equates her triumph over the abandoned fields to triumphing over life (359). The plow in her dream cuts and buries and uproots. She turns the plow and uses "all her strength." Further psychological interpretation of the dream should be left to others, notably Julius Raper (84-88).

Dorinda's attachment to the land comes from her living close to the soil and having invested her life in the success of Old Farm. It does not necessarily come from her personal labor as a cultivator; if she assists with the plowing, the narrative does not state that fact. It does say, however, that "all the hours that she could spare were spent on the freshly ploughed acres" (349). The author makes it clear that she has to hire laborers for some of the field work. If she doesn't do the plowing, that puts a slightly different light on her as a farmer, yet she is vitally involved in the operation and development of every aspect of the farm and no task is beneath her. The responsibility is on her shoulders alone. There are additional reasons why Dorinda may not be intended as thoroughly typical. After Jason's betrayal, her emotions are dulled by virtue of her own choice never again to give free rein to her feelings. After years spent in farm work, the author says of Dorinda: "Though her hands were roughened by work and the nails were stained and broken, she wasted no regret upon the disfigurement of her body as long as her senses remained benumbed by toil" (246). Old Farm becomes a safe place of

potential healing and forgetting. She forgets--or tries to--by allowing the farm to engage her emotions and her intelligence. When Jason compliments her and says her farm shows what she can do when she puts her heart into something, she corrects him by retorting, "'Not the heart, but the head'" (398). "To the land, she had given her mind and heart with the abandonment that she found disastrous in any human relation" (401). By temperament and experience, Dorinda may not be capable of exuberant joy in her relationship with the soil; she is probably too emotionally empty for that. But she does find great satisfaction and security, and she says that she is happy. She has much in common with the stereotype of the farmer even though her motivation may not spring from typical sources.

Numerous passages focus on Dorinda's attachment to the farm. Generally these allow the omniscient author to tell what Dorinda thinks and feels. Dorinda seldom expresses these thoughts to another person. From her youth she had felt this attachment to the land; it begins long before she takes over the farm.

> [S]he was visited by a swift perception, which was less a thought than a feeling, and less a feeling than an intuitive recognition, that she and her parents were products of the soil as surely as were the scant crops and the exuberant broomsedge. Had not the land entered into their souls and shaped their moods into permanent or impermanent forms? Less a thought than a feeling. (108)

One also reads that she has a "feeling of intimate kinship with the country," that "her inner life was a part of the country" (97). It is not surprising, then, that she leaves New York after two years. "'Whenever I smell the country,'" she says, "'I want to go home'" (205). "'I can't stay away any longer. I'm part of it. I belong to the abandoned fields'" (213).

Two passages sum up her bonding to the earth. The first comes just after Dorinda returns to the country; the second comes the day after she, as a fifty-year-old prosperous owner of Old Farm, has attended Jason's burial:

> As she followed the beaten track by the orchard, her gaze swept the ploughed fields, where the upturned earth was changing from chocolate to purple as the light faded. Around her the farm spread out like an open fan, ploughed ground melting into waste land, fields sinking into neglected pasture, pasture rising gradually into the dark belt of the pines. She knew that the place was more to her than soil to be cultivated; that it was the birthplace and burial ground of hopes, desire, and disappointments. The old feeling that the land thought and felt, that it possessed a secret personal life of its own, brushed her mood as it sped lightly by. (232-33)

Surely no closer attachment is possible than that the land be birthplace and burial ground of all one feels. She found the land to be permanent; people come and go. "Over the immutable landscape human lives drifted and vanished like shadows" (294).

The second passage is Dorinda's final reflection on the land and comes after a sleepless night. Glasgow describes the morning smells and sights. Then she writes:

> The storm and the hag-ridden dreams of the night were over, and the land which she had forgotten was waiting to take her back to its heart. Endurance. Fortitude. The spirit of the land was flowing into her, and her own spirit, strengthened and refreshed, was flowing out again toward life. This was the permanent self, she knew. This was what remained to her after the years had taken their bloom. . . . "Put your heart in the land," old Matthew had said to her. "The land is the only thing that will stay by you." Yes, the land would stay by her. Her eyes wandered from far horizon to horizon. Again she felt the quickening of that sympathy which was deeper than all other emotions of her heart, which love had overcome only for an hour and life had been powerless to conquer in the end,--the living communion with the earth under her feet. While the soil endured, while the seasons bloomed and dropped, while the ancient, beneficent ritual of sowing and reaping moved in the

> fields, she knew that she could never despair of contentment. (449-50)

Her thoughts of endurance and fortitude here at the conclusion echo thoughts that the author expressed earlier when Dorinda was going through the first hard years back at Old Farm:

> With her drooping energy weariness had crept over her; but out of weariness, she passed presently, like the country, into a mood of endurance. She realized, without despair, that the general aspect of her life would be one of unbroken monotony. Enthusiasm would not last. Energy would not last. Cheerfulness, buoyance, interest, not one of these qualities would last as long as she needed it. Nothing would last through to the end except courage. (252)

What can be gleaned as to the nature of the plow or the plowing from the allusions Glasgow uses in *Barren Ground?* Several references simply suggest that plowing is the familiar, normal, always-to-be-done farm chore (229, 425, 432, 433). These allusions also carry the idea that ambition is required for plowing. When the author says, "The same labourers were at work in the fields, bent in the same gestures of ploughing" (432), several associations come to mind. One must bend to the plow; that sounds like a humble stance and/or a weary one. It is also a task for which one must concentrate his energy. In addition the reader senses the permanence of the task of plowing. The figures are bent in the same gestures, bending to the same life-sustaining task that has been handed down through the centuries. As Dorinda drives by, the men at the plows "stopped in their ploughing . . . and turned to stare curiously like slow-witted animals" (425). This simile paints one of the two most degrading pictures of the plowmen in the novel. The other doesn't picture plowing but another farm chore: "Back and forth in the furrows Joshua and Josiah were moving slowly, like giant insects, while they searched for the hidden 'suckers' along the thick juicy stalks" (93). What can be

said of such images? Once again they reflect the ambivalence so often found in farm-related literature. If Dorinda found farm labor to be so degrading as these images suggest, surely she never could have buried herself--body, mind, and spirit--in Old Farm. In order to lessen the sting of the images, perhaps one can agree that such similes might come to the author's mind simply by association. The plowmen are following the animals that pull the plows. They are all in the scene together. Of course, plowing can be a rather mindless activity, but the curiosity mentioned in that sentence indicates intelligence. And the tobacco is often plagued with insect pests, hence these "giant insects."

The plowed ground appeals to one's senses. It may be color: "the upturned earth was changing from chocolate to purple as the light faded" (232). *Chocolate* suggests smell and taste as well as sight. In a dream Dorinda smells "the rich, vital scents of the ploughed ground" (82). "[F]reshly ploughed acres" have this special sensuous appeal (349).

Plowing is sometimes used to represent duty in contrast to pleasure or wealth. Rufus' mother, for example, expects him to finish plowing the tobacco field, but he takes off with a friend to rob a bee hive (240). Men who had gotten higher pay from the government were reluctant to return to plowing. "In the end it was Fluvanna who . . . drove the inveterate pleasure-seekers back to the plough" (400). Plowing may represent duty or honest work, but it never represents easy wealth.

Walking over plowed ground is mentioned in a context of mindless and sometimes pleasurable walking and, in one instance, as probably the most convenient shortcut. Because the plowing has stirred new vigor into the soil, the farmer is likely to experience some rejuvenation to his spirit in walking over ploughed ground even though the walking itself is slow and laborious. When

Jason is buried, two flat stones are brought from the edge of the plowed field to mark his grave. Since Jason did not thrive on the land, it is appropriate that the stones come from the edge of the field where farmers pile rocks and stumps and whatever hinders cultivation.

As Dorinda watches the countryside from the train window, she counts the patches of plowed ground as if they were measures of progress and prosperity and indicative of the industry of the owner (217). One of the improvements she introduces on Old Farm is the tractor plow (364, 394, 399). But the author says that machinery "could not work alone, and even tractor-ploughs were obliged to be guided" (399). When Dorinda thinks of her progressive status among the farmers in the state, she remembers that "her father had ploughed only six inches deep" (406).

As a young woman in Pedlar's store, she spoke of the full line of goods as everything "from a ploughshare to a darning needle" (15), as if that represented the range from the roughest tool to the most delicate.

Once the author uses the plow metaphorically when she remembers trying to read her great-grandfather's books on a rainy day in her childhood: "she had ploughed desperately in the dry and stubborn acres of theology" (360). Her Scotch Presbyterian background always presents insurmountable difficulties in her own beliefs.

A description of the farmers gathered in Pedlar's store gives a satisfying picture of the inner and outer life of those who work the land:

> There was little talk among the white farmers, and that little was confined to the crops or the weather. Rugged, gnarled, earth-stained, these men were as impersonal as trees or as transcendental philosophers. In their rustic pride they accepted silence as they accepted poverty or bad weather, without embarrassment and without humility. If they had nothing to

> say, they were capable of sitting for hours, dumb and unabashed, over their pipes or their "plugs" of tobacco. They could tell a tale, provided there was one worth the telling, with caustic wit and robust realism; but the broad jest or the vulgar implications of the small town was an alien product among them. Not a man of them would have dared recite an anecdote in Pedlar's store that Dorinda should not have heard. The transcendental point of view, the habit of thought bred by communion with earth and sky, had refined the grain while it had roughened the husk. (63-64)

In this very positive picture of the plowmen, they are intelligent, sensitive, moral people, enjoying their fellow men without self-consciousness. A later statement about Dorinda indicates that she shared the qualities of these farmers: "There was the dignity in her demeanour that is inherent in all simple, profound, and elemental forces" (117).

Dorinda gives a key to survival on the land when she says to her mother: "'If I didn't live in the future, I couldn't stand things as they are'" (264). The plow is a forward-pointing implement. And plowing is done in anticipation of a crop. The plowman's imagination envisions his future crops before they are a reality.

In these four novels by Glasgow, what is likely to strike the reader most forcefully is the ambivalence inherent in her images of the yeoman farmer at his plowing. Plowing is equated with farming; it is the central farming image. The activity is worthwhile in and of itself. Plowing is a future-facing activity, and it is also a practice as old as any known to mankind. The action of the plow nourishes and kills. The farm is the scene of poverty for many and of prosperity for some. The labor of plowing is associated with both dignity and ignorance. "[C]ommunion with earth and sky had refined the grain while it had roughened the husk" suggests coarse habits and transcendental thoughts. That seems to be Glasgow's assessment of the typical man or woman of the soil--if, indeed, there is such as thing as a typical plowman. But some exaggeration is natural in fiction; so it is

not surprising that Glasgow's farmers create extremely positive or negative images.

Glasgow uses the plow as an image of change and violence as well as of stability and peace. Plowing suggests honest toil that measures the worth of the plowman. It is normally a pleasant toil that satisfies the senses and engages the whole person. But if one's labor at the plow is too unremitting, that labor diminishes the likelihood of the plowman's developing other interests requisite for a full, balanced, satisfying life. Plowing represents one's ever-present work to be done. Glasgow's plowman-farmer is a large-spirited person possessing dignity and intelligence. At the same time he is, because of his occupation, a person of inferior social rank. Without the education he sacrifices by remaining at the plow, he is unlikely to be able to change his social status. In spite of this fact, the author most frequently creates a positive picture of the plowman-farmer: he whistles at his work, meditates in the field, and possesses the ability to think and dream. When a negative image is created, it is most often because the plowman has given in to greed.

In Glasgow's novels cultivation of the soil is done by people whose values and ambitions are vastly different. She frequently uses the farmer to illustrate class distinctions. Her farmers are generally working with soil exhausted by ignorant or indifferent treatment. In her fictional worlds, men and women of middle or lower class with a "vein of iron" will master the soil--through plowing and planning. She recognizes the superior individuals possessed of dignity and worth regardless of their class. Those without that endurance and moral courage will be slaves to the soil. Both are bonded to the land through their plowing and work with the land. But the bonding for the failed farmers may be in the form of shackles. Poverty and ignorance and sometimes indolence keep them attached to

the land for mere survival. Conquerors of the land--whether by love or force--have tapped the "vital force" of the land. In Glasgow's works the land has permanence, and in caring for the land the farmer accomplishes something that lives beyond his short tenure on the land. The land is the major sustaining factor in these novels, and it is the land that nourishes the so-called Southern tradition in literature.



Thomas Hart Benton. *The Hail Storm*. 1940. Tempera on panel, 33 x 40". Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, Nebraska. Gift of the James A. Douglas Memorial Foundation.

Chapter 10

Ole Rolvaag

> I feel as if I had got my foot down on to the solid and sunny earth, the basis of all philosophy, and poetry, and religion even. I have faith that the man who redeemed some acres of land the past summer redeemed also some parts of his character.
>
> Thoreau in his Journal, March 1, 1852

Ole Rolvaag (1876-1931) wrote a trilogy of the Norwegian settlement on the Dakota prairie--*Giants in the Earth, Peder Victorious,* and *Their Fathers' God.* The trilogy is set in a time frame similar to the land novels of Glasgow. Her land novels stretch from about 1870 to 1924; Rolvaag's trilogy begins in 1873 and goes to about 1900. But the differences are vast. Glasgow works with well-established land-owning families and the struggles of lower class individuals to find their place in the sun. Rolvaag acknowledges the antagonism between the Norwegian and Irish settlers, but his real concern in the trilogy, especially in the first novel, is to demonstrate the high cost of leaving one's fatherland behind and becoming a rootless stranger in an unknown land. His is an early version of the contemporary alienation theme. Whereas Crevecoeur rather happily describes the new American as "leaving behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners," Rolvaag looks at the psychological damage created by the immigrant's loss of tradition, especially religious tradition. As Harold Simonson demonstrates, Rolvaag's vision "throws into question the whole frontier myth of the American melting pot, the epic renewal of personality, and the American Eden" (viii).

Frederick Jackson Turner, Rolvaag's contemporary, provides a familiar, all-encompassing perspective on the nineteenth-century American experience of westward expansion. His is a perspective that also contrasts remarkably with Rolvaag's preoccupation with the darker side of westward expansion. The westering in *Giants in the Earth* is primarily a psychological, not an economic phenomenon. Turner's idea of movement and growth to settle the westward moving frontier serves his historical sense of order. But, as Simonson points out, the historical view "subordinates persons to progress" (11) and is not concerned with the individual tragedies of those who were not readily assimilated into the myth of progress. What about those individuals who found "nothing to hide behind" on the prairie frontier and grew homesick for the traditions of their homeland? Per Hansa in *Giants* fits quite well Turner's image of the westward moving questor in search of prosperity. But Per Hansa's wife Beret provides the counterpoint. And it is she who is central to all three novels and carries the burden of Rolvaag's vision of the loss incurred by the westering immigrants. The late nineteenth-century Scandinavian mmigrants were without significant attachment to America's past, had left their own past far behind, and were often bewildered by an alien language and alien ways. They found themselves in a wilderness, not a garden, cut off from familiar sights and sounds, from their church, from family burial sites, from the people and trees and houses of their homeland.

Simonson cites Prescott Hall's statistics to show that something in the immigrant experience frequently led to tragedy for foreign-born immigrants:

> It is not without significance that the census of 1890, to which Turner attached great importance in his announcement that the frontier was closed, also revealed that 33.2 percent of the insane in the United States were of foreign birth whereas the foreign-born accounted for only 14.77 percent of the total population.

> Specifically, in 1886 the Scandinavians in Minnesota constituted 16.5 percent of the population, and 28.3 percent of the insane, a figure that jumped to 30.7 percent by 1890. (13)

The myth of the frontier sings the praises of the independent, self-sufficient person, one who is supposedly strong enough to sever attachment with the past. As already stated, Rolvaag creates a character fairly typical of the myth in Per Hansa Holm. Per Hansa is taken up with the present and the future and bases most of his decisions on material values. But his wife Beret "not only recognizes the false claim of self-sufficiency but knows that true strength and wholeness eventuate within relationships, not apart from them" (Simonson 20). She represents the cultural and spiritual values of the past and the old world from which they emigrated.

Rolvaag's trilogy of the Norwegian settlement in the Dakota Territory was originally written and published in Norwegian. But Rolvaag himself, a professor of Norwegian at St. Olaf College in Minnesota (1906-1931), worked closely with the English translators before approving the English editions. The first novel of the trilogy, *Giants in the Earth* (English 1927), is of primary interest in tracing the image of plowing and the farmer. The sequel, *Peder Victorious* (English 1929) traces the fortunes of the Holm family after the death of Per Hansa. Beret manages the farm and raises their four children. The youngest son Peder Victorious, born before Per Hansa's death, highlights the conflicts between Norwegian and American ways. And in Peder is traced the development of religious faith and doubt. In *Their Fathers' God* (English 1931) Peder marries an Irish Catholic, a marriage that goes sour largely because of cultural and religious differences. Beret continues to live with Peder until her death. This third novel focuses on the problems of second generation immigrants.

The English title, *Giants in the Earth,* is taken from Genesis 6.4: "There were giants in the earth in those days." The giants of the title may be variously interpreted. They may recall the trolls of Norse mythology and represent the evil influences Beret senses on the prairie, things such as grasshoppers, the drought, the blizzards, and the loneliness. The giants may also refer to the bigger-than-life heroic settlers who tame the frontier. Or the giants could refer not only to the heroic dimension of the settlers but also to their "potential for evil" (Moseley 29).

Although allusions to plowing are numerous in *Giants,* the most fully detailed picture comes early in the novel. The very next day after registering his homestead claim, Per Hansa borrows his neighbor's plow and begins breaking the sod on his claim. This rather extensive passage sets the tone for Per Hansa's work:

> He jumped into his clothes, and found some cold porridge to quiet his hunger for the time being; then he hurried out, put the yoke on the oxen, and went across to Hans Olsa's to fetch the plow. . . . Over there no life was stirring yet. Well, maybe they could afford to sleep late in the morning; but he had arrived five days behind the others, and had just been delayed for two days more; they had a big start over him already. His heart sang as he thought how he would have to hurry! . . . He led the oxen carefully, trying to make as little noise around the tent as possible.
>
> Dragging the plow, he drove out for some distance toward the hillock, then stopped and looked around. This was as good a place as anywhere to start breaking. . . . He straightened up the plow, planted the share firmly in the ground, and spoke to the oxen: "Come now, move along, you lazy rascals!" He had meant to speak gruffly, but the thrill of joy that surged over him as he sank the plow in his own land for the first time, threw such an unexpected tone of gentleness into his voice that the oxen paid no attention to it; he found that he would have to resort to more powerful encouragement; but even with the goad it was hard to make them bend to the yoke so early in the morning. After a little, however, they began to stretch their muscles. Then they were off; the plow moved . . . sank deeper . . . the first furrow was breaking. . . .

It would have gone much easier now if Ole had only been there to drive the oxen, so that he could have given his whole attention to the plow. But never mind that! . . . The boy ought to sleep for at least another hour; the day would be plenty long enough for him, before it was through. . . . Young bulls have tender sinews--though for one of his age, Ole was an exceptionally able youngster.

That first furrow turned out very crooked for Per Hansa; he made a long one of it, too. When he thought he had gone far enough and halted the oxen, the furrow came winding up behind him like a snake. He turned around, drove the oxen back in the opposite direction, and laid another furrow up against the one he had already struck. . . . At the starting point again, he surveyed his work ruefully. Well, the second furrow wasn't any *crookeder* than the first, at all events! . . . When he had made another round he let the oxen stand awhile; taking the spade which he had brought out, he began to cut the sod on one side of the breaking into strips that could be handled. This was to be his building material. . . . Field for planting on the one hand, sods for a house on the other--that was the way to plow! . . . Leave it to Per Hansa--he was the fellow to have everything figured out beforehand!

By breakfast time he had made a fine start. No sooner had he swallowed the last morsel than he ordered both the boys to turn to, hitched the oxen to the old homemade wagon, and off they all went together toward the field, Per Hansa leading the way. . . . "You'd better cook the kettles full to-day!" he shouted back, as they were leaving. "We're going to punish a lot of food when we come in!"

Now Per Hansa began working in real earnest. He and Store-Hans, with plow and oxen, broke up the land; Ole used the hoe, but the poor fellow was having a hard time of it. The sod, which had been slumbering there undisturbed for countless ages, was tough of fibre and would not give up its hold on the earth without a struggle. It almost had to be turned by main strength, piece by piece; it was a dark brownish colour on the under side--a rich, black mould that gave promise of wonderful fertility; it actually gleamed and glistened under the rays of the morning sun, where the plow had carved and polished its upturned face. . . . Ole toiled on, settling and straightening the furrows as best he could, now and then cutting out the clods that fell unevenly. When Per Hansa had made a couple of rounds, he let the oxen stand awhile to catch their breath, and came over to Ole to instruct him. "This is the way to do it!" he said, seizing the hoe. "Watch me, now--*like this!*" He hewed away till the clods were flying around him. . . . When they quit work at noon a good many furrows lay stretched out on the slope, smiling up at the sun; they were also able to

> bring home with them a full wagonload of building material; at coffee time they brought another; at supper another. But when, arriving home at the end of the day, they found that supper was not quite ready, Per Hansa felt that he must go after still another load; they had better make use of every minute of time! (47-49)

Perhaps it is the aura enveloping this scene that is most impressive--the joy, the thrill, the urgency of the labor. Even the new furrows appear to participate in that the plow has "carved and polished" the "upturned face" of the sod and the furrows lay "smiling up at the sun." The jubilant spirit of plowing one's own land for the first time echoes the American dream as delineated in Crevecoeur. Per Hansa's heart sings as he undertakes the task of breaking the land for cultivation. The breaking metaphor, invariably used for plowing up the sod, always implies the breaking up of old soil patterns in order to establish new ones. It is not that the land would necessarily produce more growth, but that the growth would be controlled by the plowman and be more beneficial to the plowman and through him to others. When Ole, Per Hansa's oldest son, tries to break up the hunks of sod with a hoe, he discovers the tenacity of the prairie grasses. The sod seems reluctant to awake to new functions under cultivation, hence the strength of the breaking metaphor: "the sod, which had been slumbering there undisturbed for countless ages, was tough of fibre and would not give up its hold on the earth without a struggle." Per Hansa's inexperience and the toughness of the sod lead to a crooked furrow "winding up behind him like a snake." Not only is a straight furrow a source of pride for the plowman, but the ominous snake simile may be taken as an early hint of the sinister aspects of the land which Per Hansa has not yet seen. The plowman's trail may be filled with abundance, and his activity may also stir up evils as old as the land itself. Per Hansa's pride in his accomplishments and in his apparent invulnerability lead eventually to his death.

Certain actions in the plowing process are specified: "straightening up the plow," and planting "the share firmly in the ground." Then "the plow moved . . . sank deeper." Besides guiding the oxen to make a straight furrow, the plowman guides and "plants" his plow. The plow is useful only with proper guidance and proper planting. Again the metaphor is rich: planted things should produce fruit. Here the fruit of cultivation is made possible because the plow has first been planted in the sod. The planting is the initial act that should evenuate in harvest. It implies underground activity, primal root activity. The plowing goes on as a cooperative effort between man and beast. Per Hansa finds the oxen reluctant to "bend to the yoke" so early in the morning, for they do not share his thrill at plowing the first furrow on his own land. The upturned soil is seen here in terms of color that suggests fertility--"a rich black mould." Per Hansa's vision of his task is joy-filled and pragmatic. He feels equal to whatever Herculean labor and ingenuity is demanded of him on the frontier. He is a thinking plowman, not a mechanical laborer. On one side of the furrows, he cuts the sod into strips for building a sod house. The plowing and building will go on simultaneously, meeting the two most primal needs of food and shelter. Plowing is always related to elemental, not superfluous needs.

Expressions of *breaking the land* abound in the novel. "[H]e had houses to build and fields to break" (15). Again the two primal activities are given equal urgency. Per Hansa says he will borrow a plow from Hans Olsa "and to-morrow morning I shall start breaking my ground!" (43). The plowing is so urgent that one must have a plow even if it is borrowed or--as happens later--purchased on credit. As Per Hansa thinks over what he needs, he is especially concerned to get farm implements. "If he only had horses and the necessary implements, the whole quarter-section would soon blossom like a garden" (45). His dreams of

making life pleasant for Beret on the prairie are dependent upon his successful farming and the material comforts that will eventually provide: "The whole farm lay there before him, broken and under cultivation, yielding its fruitful harvests" (46). The results of Per Hansa's ingenuity and hard work amaze his neighbors. To them "it appeared as if nothing short of witchcraft must be at work on Per Hansa's quarter-section; in spite of the fact that he and his entire family were breaking ground in the fields the whole day long, a great sod house shot up beside the wagon, like an enormous mushroom" (50).

> However it was accomplished, on Per Hansa's estate they had a field all broken and harrowed and seeded down, and a large house ready for thatching, by the time that Hans Olsa and the Solum boys had barely finished thatching their houses and started the plowing. Tonseten, though, was ahead of him with the breaking. (51)

As Per Hansa finishes his thatching, he can see that Tonseten "was breaking some new land, with Sam as helper" (92).

After discovering boundary stakes with Irish names on them on the homesteads of two of his Norwegian neighbors, Per Hansa "felt that the only thing that would relieve him just now would be to hitch the oxen to the plow and break a stretch of new land" (117). Per Hansa takes his sons with him to pace out the west line of their land. "[I]t had to be done soon, anyway; perhaps they would break a stretch of ground out there" (118). After Per Hansa destroys the boundary stakes, he "seemed driven by a restless energy, an indomitable will that knew but one course--to break as much new land as possible each day" (125). "He had broken a large part of it [his quarter-section] already . . . but still he found no rest, nor would the joyous peace of the early summer return to him" (125). Henry Slocum tells the immigrants who return to look for the destroyed property stakes that he

and his neighbors "had been living here all summer, breaking and planting, and hadn't the least thought of moving away" (144-145).

Later when Tonseten tries to persuade some Norwegian immigrants to homestead nearby, he points to the fact that because there are no trees "in these few months since we arrived, we've broken more land than one could break in ten years in a cut-over country; in two years I'll have my whole quarter-section under the plow" (163). The expression "under the plow" suggests the disciplining action of the plow.

Additional references to plowing help draw together ideas associated with the image of the plow. One occurs when Per Hansa is floundering with his oxen and sleigh in a blinding blizzard. He thinks of killing an ox and wrapping himself in the hide to keep from freezing, but he cannot bring himself to do that. "Old Soren and Perkel [the oxen] had brought him and his family all the way across the plains; they had broken every inch of his fields; if he were ever to have a lordly estate, it would come about through the labor of these beasts" (270). He credits the oxen, not the plow nor himself, with the breaking. His dependence upon them is obvious. The plowman must work in harmony with the animals and implements.

When fine weather comes in the spring, Per Hansa can scarcely wait for the fields to dry. "He ought to have had the seeding all done by now; it was high time to begin breaking new ground" (297). The breaking is always to be done to new ground, ground not yet under cultivation. As he seeds his wheat, he sees that the Solum boys had "already started breaking" (298). Torkel Tallaksen arrives with the new settlers that spring and has grand plans for their success as homesteaders. "He set up a tent, hitched his four horses to the breaking plow, worked like a beaver, and soon had broken a big field, considering the fact that he had just arrived" (309). He is so aggressive in his plans that his neighbors refuse

to help him. He had expected to hire lots of help and get everything "done in a jiffy." "See? I've come out here to *break prairie*. . . . I don't see any nameable reason why a smart man couldn't farm a whole section of land like this--or even more. Why you've only got to put the plow into the level prairie!'" (310). The resentment of Per Hansa to all of Tallaksen's plans drives Per to the field: "That day he kept on breaking as long as he could see" (313). Per Hansa will never be content just to make a living on the land. He is a proud, competitive spirit; he wants to be the best farmer around.

After the men had been unable to find the grave of Paul, the young son of the wandering Norwegian immigrants, Kari and her husband, the wanderers, set their course due west and "crept off into the great, mysterious silence always hovering above the plain" (329). Beret is unable to cry to sooth her troubled spirit, but she sets about cooking a special supper to bring happiness "to some living thing." "Per Hansa and the boys were breaking prairie; to judge from the language they used in talking to the oxen, they must be hard at it" (329). Everyone tries to lose his anxiety in labor — whether at the plow or in the kitchen.

The repetition of the breaking image may to some extent be inconsequential, but it does stress, as nothing else could do, the primary nature of the plowing and the breaking up of the old to make way for the new. Whenever there is time, the pioneer farmer breaks up more land to enlarge his fields. The thrill of progress and optimism is inherent in the land breaking, and it is the kind of hard labor that can ease a person's mind of troublesome thoughts.

The metaphorical uses of plowing all occur in the description of the blizzard. When Per Hansa tries to urge the oxen to move more rapidly, "they began to saunter slowly with the wind, moving forward at exactly the same speed as when they were drawing the plow on a hot summer day" (272). The "drawing" of

the plow suggest the hieroglyphics of the plow's marking of the land. The drawing of the plow engraves a message on the land--perhaps a message of man's presence and efforts to change the land or a message of promised fruitfulness. Per Hansa stumbles along beside the oxen in the blizzard. "The lines were jammed tightly around his arm; the oxen plowed onward without a pause" (274). Because his mittens were frozen stiff, he could not loosen the lines. "Steadily onward the oxen plowed, dragging Per Hansa by the arm" (274). Finally the team rammed against the log wall of a house. He wonders, "Had he plowed and plunged clear through to Fillmore County?" (275). These references to *plowing ahead* suggest relentless effort regardless of obstacles. The object is to move ahead in whatever fashion is possible.

When Hans Olsa tells Per Hansa about the quarter-section they have reserved for him, he says, "it's as good a piece of land as you could find anywhere around--every square foot of it plowland, except the hill over there" (33). Land ready for the plow is relatively level, not rocky, and not forested. His neighbors have selected ideal land for him. "[W]hen they had looked all the plowland over," Per Hansa comments on the fine view he should have from the top of the hill. It is on the hilltop where he finds the unmarked grave--another ominous reminder of the threats to life on the prairie frontier.

Per Hansa has almost inexhaustible energy and zest for his work. He "plowed and harrowed, delved and dug; he built away at the house, and he planted the potatoes. . . . It was Beret who finally put a check on him" by reminding him that he was "only a human being" (50). When the neighbors go on a trip to town and leave him in charge of the settlement, he is thoroughly out of sorts for missing out on the adventure. As mentioned earlier, Per Hansa sometimes took to the plow to help relieve himself of troubling thoughts:

> When the party left on Monday morning Per Hansa was in a towering ill humour; he rose with the others at dawn, woke Ole, and hitched the oxen to the plow. On that day he broke up an acre and a half of prairie, with only the crude implements at hand--a record that stood for many years in that part of the country.
>
> But at quitting time that night, when he paced around the field and discovered what an enormous day's work he had done, he felt so elated that he began to whistle the tune of an old ballad. . . . Just look at that! If they didn't hurry back, he'd have the whole farm broken up before they arrived. . . . . By God! he'd show them! He'd give them a chance to see for themselves who was the better man! (65-66)

This again marks the pride and self-sufficiency that becomes Per's downfall. Plowing is used as a measure of a person's success. Per's pride in his own acccomplishments--whether at the plow or elsewhere--is his distinguishing mark. A number of times in the novel particular things are associated with fairy tale adventures. Often these have to do with his accomplishments. These undercurrents of fantasy make readers aware of an insubstantial quality associated with his almost superhuman feats:

> That summer Per Hansa was transported, was carried farther and ever farther away on the wings of a wondrous fairy tale--a romance in which he was both prince and king, the sole possessor of countless treasures. In this, as in all other fairy tales, the story grew ever more fascinating and dear to the heart, the farther it advanced. Per Hansa drank it in; he was like the child who constantly cries: "More--more!" (110)

(Note other allusions to fairy tales: 59, 154, 170, 175, 296, 303.) From time to time Per Hansa also refers to the "kingdom" he is building on the prairie. When he arrives on his homestead and thinks about the beautiful land before him being his very own, an "emotion he had never felt before filled him and made him walk erect. . . . 'Good God!' he panted. 'This kingdom is going to be *mine!*'" (36. See also 44). The second half of the novel is titled "Founding the Kingdom."

Owning his own plow and rake is so important to Per Hansa that Hans Olsa is willing to go surety for him. When Hans Olsa returns from town, he goes first to Per Hansa's house to unload. There were many bags and boxes, "but best of all were the plow and the rake" (86). Per Hansa wants to know if the dealer in town was "a fair-minded man, this fellow they had bargained with--the one who had trusted them for the plow and the rake?" (86). The men explain that at first the dealer would not hear of extending credit, "but Syvert had argued with him so long and sensibly that he had finally yielded, on condition that they both sign their names as security for the plow and the rake" (87). When Per Hansa himself goes to town the next year to trade, "he had to make an agreement about the plow and the rake, which stood on the books against him" (176). Even though he had to postpone full payment until fall at fifteen percent interest, the implements were an absolute necessity.

The thrill of working his own land is so strong for Per Hansa that it dwarfs all the accompanying difficulties. Several passages reflect this triumphant spirit of being bonded to one's own land. One such passage describes his zest for work during his first summer on the prairie:

> How could he steal the time to rest, these days? Was he not owner of a hundred and sixty acres of the best land in the world? Wasn't his title to it becoming more firmly established with every day that passed and every new-broken furrow that turned? . . . He gazed at his estate and laughed happily, as if at some pleasant and amusing spectacle. . . . Such soil! Only to sink the plow into it, to turn over the sod--and there was a field ready for seeding. . . . And this was not just ordinary soil, fit for barley, and oats, and potatoes, and hay, and that sort of thing; indeed, it had been meant for much finer and daintier uses; it was the soil for *wheat*, the king of all grains! Such soil had been especially created by the good Lord to bear this noble seed; and here was Per Hansa, walking around on a hundred and sixty acres of it, all his very own! (110)

His cultivation of the land was bonding him to it, making it his own. Per Hansa appears to be the exemplar of Crevecoeur's new American. The thrill of ownership is enhanced by the realization that the land he owns is rich, his own potential source of wealth and freedom. When the plow turns over the sod here, this soil is ready for seeding--even in wheat! The action of turning over the sod is the burial of the old to prepare for the new. The activity belongs to forward-looking plowmen whose hopes kindle their ability to imagine a prosperous future.

As soon as the ground is sufficiently dry, Per Hansa begins to plant his wheat. He paces off the field into one-acre plots. "One and one-half bushels of seed to the acre was the regular measure; but Simon Baarstad had told him that on really first-class breaking, provided the soil was unusually excellent, one and one-quarter bushels might do; and Per Hansa had decided to try the latter amount" (297). He considers his breaking to be first-class and his soil to be excellent. As he prepares to sow the first kernels, his excitement is like that with which he had begun breaking his own ground. But as he clutches a handful of grain, he finds it slips out between his fingers--an impressive glimpse of the elusive aspects of the kingdom of his dreams:

> Again Per Hansa thrust his hand into the bag and his fingers closed on the grain. He felt profoundly that the greatest moment of his life had come. Now he was about to sow wheat on his own ground! His hand tightened in the bag; he was on the point of lifting it out, when something queer happened--the kernels were running out between his fingers! He gave another grab, closing his hand still tighter; again the yellow kernels slipped through his fingers like squirming eels. Then Per Hansa threw back his head and laughed. These fellows aren't very anxious to go into the ground after riches for me! . . . He ran his hand around in the bag, stroking the grain caressingly, taking great handfuls and giving them a gentle squeeze. (298-299)

Per's bonding to the earth makes him assign personality to the very grain he plants. In this vignette he senses that he must handle even the grain with

gentleness, not with his first impulsive, possessive grasp. The land is to him a mine of riches, riches to be garnered if he, as a wise plowman, works in harmony with nature's pace and timing.

Per Hansa is deeply troubled, as previously noted, when he finds the property stakes of the Irish immigrants, and Beret knows something is amiss. One morning he left the house before she was awake. When she went to look for him, she saw "the plow was still there . . . and the oxen lay a short distance from the house" (120). If he had gone to his normal work, the plow and oxen would be gone. When he returned "in his face shone something hard and menacing. . . . To-day they were going to plow, he told the boys--yes, *plow!* Both they and the oxen would get their bellyful. . . . His voice had the same unnatural metallic hardness as his face" (122). Later when the Norwegian neighbors confront the Irishmen whose stakes have been removed, an ugly scene develops. One of the Irishmen tells the Norwegians to follow him, and he will show them the property stakes. He "was in a devil of a hurry; he had both plowing and building to do before the snow flew" (145). When Per Hansa tells his Norwegian friends and Beret what he had done, Beret leaves the room. "Outside it was pitch dark; she knew not where to turn nor what she did; then she stumbled over the plow standing in the yard, and sank inertly on the plow beam" (155). Here the presence of the plow seems to suggest Per Hansa's determination to build his kingdom, no matter what obstacles arise and no matter what principles he ignores in the process. Beret is crushed by his action and afraid of the consequence. She quotes scripture to the group: "'Cursed be he that removeth his neighbour's landmarks! . . . In my opinion, we'd better take care lest we all turn into beasts and savages out here!'" (155). Beret stumbles over the plow in a double sense. This sharp implement that cuts away the old to make room for the new embodies the immigration experience.

Though some may sever old moorings more easily because of the bright promise of the future, Beret clings to the proved traditions of the past. Without them she fears they will lose that which makes them truly human beings.

Beret sometimes muses on the experiences that led to their coming to America (223-231) and comes to think of her desertion of her parents and homeland as a sin. But her love for Per Hansa was such that she would gladly have followed him anywhere. "So they had sold off everything that they had won with so much toil, had left it all like a pair of worn-out shoes--parents, home, fatherland, and people. . . . And she had done it gladly, even rejoicingly! . . . Was there ever a sin like hers?" (226). But the country did not measure up to her expectations. "More than ever did she realize that 'man liveth not by bread alone!'" (226). Yet they were caught up in the bewildering visions of going west:

> Ever westward led the course, to where the sun glowed in matchless glory as it sank at night; people drifted about in a sort of delirium, like sea birds in mating time; then they flew toward the sunset, in small flocks and large--always toward Sunset Land. . . . Now she saw it clearly: here on the trackless plains, the thousand-year-old hunger of the poor after human happiness had been unloosed! (227)

Beret saw that the frontier could not satisfy that quest for happiness, for mankind needs more than material prosperity. He needs community and a past, traditions and religion. Beret found that the rootless frontier shriviled men's souls because there was no rich past to draw upon.

One of the fine summary passages (424-425) refers to the tales the grandfathers tell of the early days on the prairie when it was yet untamed. Among the first things to be mentioned is the dire effect of the vast solitude:

> But more to be dreaded than this [Indian] tribulation was the strange spell of sadness which the unbroken solitude cast upon the minds of some. Many took their own lives; asylum after asylum was filled with disordered beings who had once been

> human. It is hard for the eye to wander from sky line to sky line, year in and year out, without finding a resting place! (424)

In spite of the price, the frontier would be settled by those who ignore the cost:

> And it was as if nothing affected people in those days. They threw themselves blindly into the Impossible, and accomplished the Unbelievable. If anyone succumbed in the struggle--and that happened often--another would come and take his place. Youth was in the race; the unknown, the untried, the unheard-of, was in the air; people caught it, were intoxicated by it, threw themselves away, and laughed at the cost. Of course it was possible--everything was possible out here. There was no such thing as the Impossible any more. The human race has not known such faith and such self-confidence since history began. . . . And so had been the Spirit since the day the first settlers landed on the eastern shores; it would rise and fall at intervals, would swell and surge on again with every new wave of settlers that rolled westward into the unbroken solitude. (425)

It took the reckless self-confidence of youth in a new land where anything was thought possible in order to settle the Great Plains. But the farmers who broke the plains can scarcely be considered typical plowmen.

On one of Per Hansa's week-long trips to town he sees a man and wife "hard at work, breaking prairie."

> What first arrested the eyes of the travellers was the team that pulled the plow; an ox with shining brass sockets on the ends of his huge horns had been yoked together with a skinny poll-cow. The woman walked alongside the team, driving; the man, whose patriarchal beard swept his chest, steered the plow, pushing from behind with all his might. (170)

The man and wife are Norwegians who are virtually destitute. The man says the cow still gives milk if they "don't drive her too hard." Per Hansa supplies them with potatoes on liberal credit. The bleak picture of the mismatched team speaks for the courage and determination of the pioneers in the face of overwhelming adversity. But the team is mismatched; one is suited to the pioneer plow but the other is not. The picture suggests the greater need for the weaker of the two

beasts--the poll-cow that is able to walk alongside the stronger beast and still provide nourishment to sustain the lives of those who depend on her. Some aspects of the relationship between Per Hansa and Beret are mirrored here. Brute strength may not be sufficient to meet the frontier challenge; the survivors must be nourishers of the human spirit as well as laborers in unfamiliar furrows.

The plague of grasshoppers (342-353) brought devastation in the Dakota Territory. "During the summer of their first visitation, the demons left behind them evil enough to pollute a whole continent. In the plowed fields they laid tiny, frail eggs, having the appearance of fine dry sawdust" (351). The plowed fields actually provided a hospitable bed for the eggs. The next season these hatched out to cause even greater devastation than the new grasshoppers that flew in from the west. Rolvaag describes the plague and pioneer reactions to it:

> And now had begun a seemingly endless struggle between man's fortitude in adversity, on the one hand, and the powers of evil in high places, on the other. There were signs of the scourge in the summer of '73, but not before the following year did it assume the proportions of a plague; after that it raged with unabated fury throughout the years '74, '75, '76, '77, and part of '78; then it disappeared as suddenly and mysteriously as it had come. The devastation it wrought was terrible; it made beggars of some, and drove others insane; still others it sent wandering back to the forest lands, though they found conditions little better there, either. . . . But the greater number simply hung on where they were. They stayed because of poverty, that most supreme of masters, had deprived them of the liberty to rise up and go away. And where would they have gone? In the name of Heaven, whither would they have fled? (349-350)

This is part of the dark underside of the American dream of prosperity in the West. Many weathered the adversities simply because they had no viable options; they were literally trapped by poverty and adverse conditions on the frontier. "Fortitude in adversity" is admirable in the pioneer farmer, but when he feels as if the adversity he faces is really an expression of "the powers of evil in

high places," his endurance is more a matter of spiritual and psychological survival than of merely physical survival. Beret's struggle is primarily for spiritual survival while her husband's is for physical survival.

The plague eventually subsides and prairie schooners again sail across the prairie in quest of an earthly paradise. The Sognings were adept at persuading prospective settlers to stay nearby. Part of their persuasion was to tell the prospective settlers that here they "can get help for both plowing and building" (397)--the same essentials of food and shelter as have been mentioned earlier.

A final allusion to plowing comes the fall before Per Hansa's death and indicates the on-going necessity of labor on the farm. He and his sons had worked hard, and he had hired a number of men besides. "He needed all the help he could get; for there was the new house to be built, the crops to be harvested, the fall plowing that must be done, and in addition, all the other work about the farm" (451).

What comes across most strongly in the image of the plow in *Giants* is that the plow is the key to unlock the riches of the prairie. The plow is the implement which breaks up the prairie sod and opens the treasures of the earth. It connects the plowman to the earth and therefore to human history. It is a sharp instrument used to cut away the old and make possible the new. As always, the plow is a forward-looking image. It creates change. Labor is associated with it, but in *Giants* the labor does not seem oppressive because of the great eagerness of the frontier farmers to cultivate their own land. It is the most essential implement, one that must be obtained no matter what the cost. It demands guidance from the plowman and energy from the beasts that draw it. The plow disturbs the slumbering sod and leaves behind the mark of its passage. Soil that is plowed is prepared to nourish new life and growth.

Per Hansa as the representative plowman in *Giants* seems to epitomize Crevecoeur's new American farmer. His dimensions are those of a folktale hero. He expresses the thrill of being bonded to his very own land and cultivating it as a means of acquiring wealth and respect in the community. His hard labor is a challenge but not drudgery. He is optimistic, innovative, and skillful, using both his mind and body to accomplish his tasks. Since Rolvaag's farmer is a frontier settler, his interests are necessarily confined to management of the homestead. He is exceedingly self-sufficient. This becomes less true for the second generation farmers in the other two novels in the trilogy. But it is his self-sufficiency and his pride that lead Per Hansa to undertake the fatal trip for a minister in the face of a prairie blizzard, thereby turning this frontier epic into tragedy. The fact that Per Hansa--who has amazed others by the way he had taken risks and seemingly outwitted nature--dies in a physical match with the elements is, of course, ironic. He is most at home in the physical, material world. Rolvaag demonstrates that long-term survival on the prairie requires more than wits and physical prowess. Per Hansa can break the sod and build a fine house, but he cannot build a satisfactory life because he has jettisoned too much of his past, the traditions and religion of his fatherland.

Beret rises to her family's need after Per Hansa's death and does not again lapse into insanity. She who feels so ill-equipped to face the emptiness of the vast prairie actually proves to be the one who is able to make a life there for herself and her family. She who feels she "had passed beyond the outposts of civilization" (38) in their journey across the plains, she who thought "this wasn't a place for human beings to dwell in" (101), she is the one who is able to carry on because she has not severed her roots. Parrington suggests that the contrast between Per Hansa and Beret "penetrates to the deeper reality of life as it was lived for three hundred years

on the American frontier" (3. 387). The less dramatic story of frontier life and of building a settlement occupies the second and third parts of the trilogy. Here the task is psychological adaptation rather than physical survival. The inner experiences of Beret in the trilogy are developed in contrast to the external actions of pioneering.

The action in *Giants* takes place on the frontier between 1873 and 1881, but the setting of the sequel, *Peder Victorious*, is an established community around 1885 to 1895. The kind Norwegian minister helps Beret get over her feelings of guilt for sending Per Hansa into the blizzard and helps her get on with her life. He says, "your worst sin does not consist in what you did to your husband that day; rather it lies in your discontent with God's special creatures, your fellow men" (185). He tells her to carry on her husband's work. "But one thing you must keep in mind--if you are to prosper and all is to go well with you, you must learn to find the good in your fellow man" (185). She takes the minister's advice, and it enables her to share Per Hansa's pioneer vision to an extent she found impossible while he was still alive. "It was often heard said of Beret Holm that she was the ablest farmer in the town of Spring Creek" (174). Peder, the Holms' youngest son and the titular character of the second novel, grows up seeking his own identity in the frontier community. Beret and Peder illustrate Rolvaag's insights into the inner struggles of first and second generation pioneers.

Allusions to plowing are scarce in the second novel, for the initial breaking of the land has already been accomplished, and the story is more fully focused on the inner lives of characters. Certain aspects of frontier life existed only for a short duration: the sod huts, for example. They "crumbled and merged again with the earth out of which they had come" (115). Even though the natural elements seemed to oppose settlement, "the elements were to learn that the power of man

had to be respected, especially when energized by a great joy" (115). Westward expansion continued. More settlers came to replace or to join the first pioneers. "One new settler after the other put his plow into the ground, until there waved fields from skyline to skyline" (116). All during the eighties, banner years followed one another. The plows were preludes to the waving fields of grain, as surely as summer follows spring.

Plowing is mentioned once in connection with Beret's methodical planning. Building had to wait until the field work had been done. "[A]s soon as the plowing and seeding were done, she had gone to work. The windmill she had built first, the dairy next, and now the barn was ready for shingling" (239).

One of the two other allusions to plowing comes when the minister quotes scripture to Peder: "'No man, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God'" (279). The minister uses the scriptural analogy to try to persuade Peder to go to school to study for the ministry. The plow metaphor pictures staying with whatever task one undertakes.

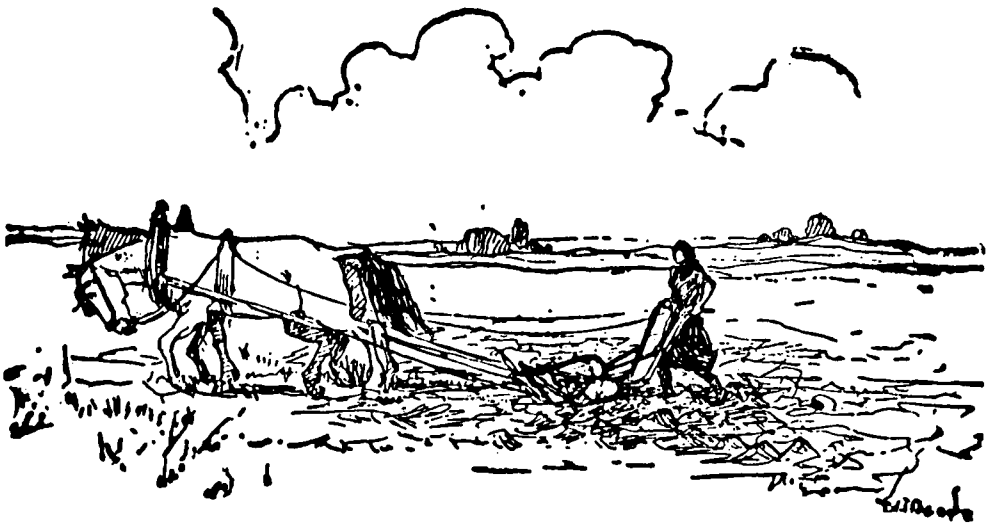
In a fit of disgust at Miriam's behavior, Peder began cultivating the corn shortly after five o'clock in the morning and worked as if there were no tomorrow. To Beret, his behavior was senseless and "she offered to take the other plow and help him" (290). Peder wouldn't hear of her helping. He simply wanted to lose his troubled thoughts in his work. Later he tells Beret "[T]hey ought to be breaking more land" (291). He has proud, expansive dreams of success that are similar to his father's: "He'd hire that newcomer and break a lot of land, and make a great haul in flax next summer . . . he'd show 'em a boy that could farm!" (292).

The fairy tale element reappears in this second novel, but here it is associated not with the deeds of a folktale hero but with various elements of fantasy divorced from reality. Sometimes stories of gold to be had for the taking lured

settlers into leaving their prairie farms. "Farming was after all only farming; it would take a long time to get rich that way" (117). The get-rich-quick mentality did not normally find farming to be a suitable activity.

Peder Victorious ends with Beret and Peder on their way to the Irish Catholic Dohenys to make wedding arrangements for Peder and Susie. The story of their ill-fated and incompatible marrigae is continued in *Their Fathers' God*. But the religious and ideological conflicts of the final novel go too far afield from plowing and farming to pursue at this point. The Norwegian Nikoline is one means Rolvaag uses to show Peder the heritage he has lost in the cultural amalgamation of the frontier. She tells him about the lotus-eaters who "'ate and ate, and just slept and ate until they forgot they were human beings. After that they lived in bliss and contentment all their days. But it was a sad sort of happiness, because they could never bcome human again!'" (158). Peder laughs and misses the irony. He thinks "That's heaven." She responds: "'Yes, . . . for those that want that kind of a heaven'" (158). Harold Simonson observes that Nikoline's

> [o]ld World wisdom had taught her that no Eden exists--not in Norway, not in America. To an uncomprehending Peder she describes the paradise proffered in America as a "terrible" place, presumably because its deluded inhabitants think themselves American Adams and Eves, a new race of conquerors, discoverers, human beings. From such a delusion comes pride, lethal to those both inside and outside the gates. (81)



W. T. Benda. Untitled (plate 5). c. 1917. Pen and ink. From the Houghton Mifflin edition of *My Antonia*.

Chapter 11

Willa Cather

> On some upland farm, a plow had been left standing in the field. The sun was sinking just behind it. Magnified across the distance by the horizontal light, it stood out against the sun, was exactly contained within the circle of the disk; the handles, the tongue, the share--black against the molten red. There it was, heroic in size, a picture writing on the sun.
>
> Cather in *My Antonia*

In a frequently quoted interview, Willa Cather (1873-1947) said that the Nebraska landscape was "the happiness and the curse" of her life. That personal ambivalence is transmuted in her fiction as part of the tension that makes her portrayal of life on the prairie so poignant and so realistic. In *Not Under Forty* she writes: "A reporter can write equally well about everything that is presented to his view, but a creative writer can do his best only with what lies within the range and character of his deepest sympathies" (81). The immigrant farmers of the Great Plains qualify for her finest treatment. Not all of Cather's fiction uses the land as a touchstone, but much of her best work does. One finds the land plays a significant role in *O Pioneers! The Song of the Lark, My Antonia, One of Ours, The Professor's House, Death Comes for the Archbishop*, and "Neighbor Rosicky," as well as in the early short stories. Lucy Schneider divides Cather's work into three stages representing her changing treatment of the land: 1) In the early stories (1892-1912) Cather shows the faults of the land and refuses to be closely associated with it. 2) In the fiction of the middle period, especially in *O Pioneers!* (1913) and *My Antonia* (1918), Cather generally shows acceptance and harmony with the

land. 3) After *One of Ours* (1922, Pulitzer Prize winner), she creates a more complex, seasoned relationship with the land and intensifies concern for the past (61). The works examined here will be limited to *O Pioneers! My Antonia, One of Ours*, and "Neighbor Rosicky."

Although Cather was writing a century after Cooper, she does, as John Murphy points out ("Cooper, Cather" 168-184), echo similar concerns for the land. And she is fascinated, as Cooper was, by the way the interplay between the wild land and civilization shape the American frontier experience. The hardiness of the first generation of immigrants, those first settlers who tried to bring new, stubborn land under cultivation, is soon replaced by a less heroic and more materialistic generation. Cather sees materialism as the worst enemy both of the land and of civilized culture. She appears to place about equal value on commitment to the land and to the arts. In the arts--music, literature, painting--she found a heritage from the Old World that is as necessary to the human spirit as harmony with the land in the New World. Because she cherishes both, her treatment of the pioneer farmers is marked with poignant ambivalences. The immigrants of whom she writes are mostly Europeans, carrying with them in varying degrees the civilized sensibility of the Old World. Cather frequently uses the absence of those civilized arts on the prairie to emphasize the loneliness and bleakness of the settlers' lives. The farms on which she places her characters in *O Pioneers!* and *My Antonia* are microcosms of the larger world; within the confines of the farm her protagnonists must learn to live in harmony with their own souls. There is an epic wholeness to Cather's fictional world; the natural cycles of life-death-rebirth move ahead as they have since the beginning of time. The farmer is a tenant on the land for a short time. If the land he plows is not tended by the next generation, it will return to its wild state.

In the later editions Cather introduces *O Pioneers!* with a poem, "Prairie Spring," in which are blended the two themes of the land and youth, both so pertinent to frontier settlement:

> Evening and the flat land,
> Rich and sombre and always silent;
> The miles of fresh-plowed soil,
> Heavy and black, full of strength and harshness;
> The growing wheat, the growing weeds,
> The toiling horses, the tired men;
> The long empty roads,
> Sullen fires of sunset, fading,
> The eternal, unresponsive sky.
> Against all this, Youth,
> Flaming like the wild roses,
> Singing like the larks over the plowed fields,
> Flashing like a star out of the twilight;
> Youth with its insupportable sweetness,
> Its fierce necessity,
> Its sharp desire,
> Singing and singing,
> Out of the lips of silence,
> Out of the earthy dusk.

John Randall has pointed to a two-fold nature of the author's view of the prairie by citing the paired descriptives: "rich and sombre," "full of strength and harshness," "growing wheat [and] . . . growing weeds." The first part of the novel explores the opposition between the destructive and the creative aspects of the soil and the lives which are based on it (65).

Against a backdrop of ages past and ages to come and against the vast openness of the Great Plains, the stature of the plowman seems diminished. In the first attempt at settlement many were ill prepared to match their strength and wits against the elements. For it seemed in the latter part of the nineteenth century that nature was opposed to cultivation and civilization on the Great Plains. In Part I, "The Wild Land," in *O Pioneers!* the narrator tells of the bewildering effect upon the settlers of the fact that the prairie lacked human landmarks (12).

Even most of the houses were "build of the sod itself, and were only the unescapable ground in another form" (12). Here on the wild prairie "[t]he record of the plow was insignificant, like the feeble scratches on stone left by prehistoric races, so indeterminate that they may, after all, be only the markings of glaciers, and not a record of human strivings" (12). The plow, generally regarded as the implement with which to master the land, meets a formidable opponent in the hard prairie sod. The idea that the plow leaves a record gives a dimension of human history to the image. The plow normally leaves a visible record of human accomplishment, mankind's victory over the land, acres under cultivation. But here its scratches are so feeble that one cannot be sure whether they are the record of human strivings or of natural phenomenon. The "scratches" belittle man's ability; he has not been able to adequately prepare the soil to receive new seed. Mankind knows very little of the prehistoric races whose record is told in the "scratches on stone." Their impermanence on the earth indicates some kind of lost battle--were those races wiped off the face of the earth by crop failures, war, disease, elemental catastrophes? The settler whose plow leaves only scratches must wonder what disasters await him in his struggle to subdue the land.

The dying John Bergson in *O Pioneers!* has the "Old-World belief that land, in itself, was desirable. But this land was an enigma" (13). He feels somehow that no one--including himself--understood how to farm the land. Many of his neighbors had never even worked on a farm until they homesteaded. He thinks of the eleven years he has worked his farm and of the small impression he has made on the soil. He had once thought he could tame it, but finally decides that it possesses a genius that is "unfriendly to man." Unfriendly animal metaphors (e.g., 70) personify the land at the beginning of the novel. When the land has been subdued, the personification continues, but it then shows human qualities of

generous and even loving response to the cultivator. The land can arouse human feelings in the farmer as if it were a person. The plowman knows "every ridge and draw and gully" on his land. As he looks out of the window, he sees "[t]o the south his plowed fields" (13). He has made a beginning, but there is so much more to do. And will natural disasters eventually wipe out all traces of his efforts? Musing over the difficulties and losses he has faced on the homestead, he recalls that "one of his plow horses broke its leg in a prairie-dog hole and had to be shot" (13). The plow was useless without animal strength to sink it into the sod. At the end of his recounting his misfortunes, he acknowledges that he is at least out of debt, but he is a dying man of forty-six and had "counted on more time." Given more time and his intelligence, he might have been able to so what his daughter Alexandra eventually did--enlarge the homestead and, with more modern methods, make it productive. But his time ran out before he had conquered the land. To win the land from the wilderness or the prairie is a long, slow, toilsome task. The plow is the farmer's primary weapon in this battle against the wildness in nature.

Three years of prosperity after Bergson's death were followed by three years of drought and crop failure. Cather calls those bleak years "the last struggle of a wild soil against the encroaching plowshare" (28). As the plow "encroaches" on the landscape, the wildness will disappear; the land will become domesticated. But the land does not easily relinquish its immemorial wildness, its natural state. The plow belongs to civilization and cannot compromise with wildness. Animal metaphors used of the land reinforce the idea of its personified struggle to resist taming by the civilizing plow. In a moment of discouragement over her father's illness, Alexandra tells Carl that if her father has to die, she wishes they all could go with him "and let the grass grow back over everything" (9).

Before Bergson's death, his children promise him they "will never lose the land" (16). He calls them together and gives five specific bits of advice about the farm; three concern plowing. "Try to break a little more land every year." "Keep turning the land." And "Don't grudge your mother a little time for plowing her garden and setting out fruit trees" (16). Plowing is uppermost in his advice. It is the only way they can bring the land into submission and productivity. The "breaking" image for plowing up the prairie sod is vivid--the force of the plow must literally break up and destroy the old in order to make way for something new. The broken pieces then need to be turned and re-broken to make them friable. "Keep turning the land," Bergson said. He also warns his sons not to be so chary of their field plowing or so enamored with their prowess that they neglect the smaller, less demanding plowing jobs like preparing their mother's garden plot. The small garden enclosure is a microcosm of the domesticated Edenic ideal, a model of the fruitfulness of land that is fully disciplined.

As John Bergson faces death, he looks at his white hands "with all the work gone out of them." "He did not know how it had come about, but he was quite willing to go deep under his fields and rest, where the plow could not find him" (15). Two ideas are suggested in the personification. One is that the plow normally uncovers or "finds" things. The other is that the call of the plow is the call to labor, and he is too weak and tired to answer that call any longer. It is as if the plow had demanded more of him, more of his life's energy, than he was prepared to give.

When Carl returns after sixteen years, he talks of going over to see his family's old homestead. Alexandra's brother Lou tells him, "You won't hardly know it. But there's a few chunks of your old sod house left. Alexandra wouldn't never let Frank Shabata plough over it" (65). The plow obliterates whatever it plows under, and Alexandra respects the memory of their place too much to allow

Frank to wipe out this reminder of their sad lives on the land. This is one of the places in the novel where Cather uses the old spelling for "plough." This allusion and one other ("the ground was too wet to plough" 88) use the "plough" form and are the only two times the word "plough" is to indicate action. But the third "plough" is adjectival: "The ground is frozen so hard that it bruises the foot to walk in the road or in the ploughed fields" (109). Perhaps one could make a case for the fact that the "plough" spelling suggests something with ancient roots.

The fullest description of actual plowing is a brief one. The narrator describes the Divide sixteen years after Bergson's death:

> The rich soil yields heavy harvests; the dry, bracing climate and the smoothness of the land make labor easy for men and beasts. There are few scenes more gratifying than a spring plowing in that country, where the furrows of a single field often lie a mile in length, and the brown earth, with such a strong, clean smell, and such a power of growth and fertility in it, yields itself eagerly to the plow; rolls away from the shear, not even dimming the brightness of the metal, with a soft, deep sigh of happiness. . . .
>
> There is something frank and joyous and young in the open face of the country. It gives itself ungrudgingly to the moods of the season, holding nothing back. Like the plains of Lombardy, it seems to rise a little to meet the sun. The air and the earth are curiously mated and intermingled, as if the one were the breath of the other. You feel in the atmosphere the same tonic, puissant quality that is in the tilth, the same strength and resoluteness. (45-46)

The land had been subdued to cultivation and no longer resists the plow. In fact, the fertile earth "yields itself eagerly to the plow" as if to one who has wooed and won its heart. The earth sighs with happiness as if it were a fulfilled person. The phallic association with the plow is especially strong in the language used here. This picture of happy harmony between the plow and the earth belongs to the second generation of settlers who benefit from the back-breaking labor of the first. The picture here is of land that has been tamed and gives its abundance freely to those who cultivate it well.

Besides casual references to the busy season of corn plowing (74) and to the fact that Crazy Ivar doesn't work his land enough (27), Cather has just one other passage in *O Pioneers!* that directly alludes to the plow. Emil, Alexandra's youngest brother and her favorite, comes home after college and she is pleased with how he has turned out. "Out of her father's children there was one who was fit to cope with the world, who had not been tied to the plow, and who had a personality apart from the soil. And that, she reflected, was what she had worked for" (124). Though she loves the farm, Alexandra wants her favorite brother to be free of the tyranny of the plow. The clear implication is that being "tied to the plow" limits the possibilities of other pursuits which may be just as valuable as farming or even more so. The plow indeed provides a bonding to the land, but that may not be desirable for everyone. Both security and limitation are inherent in the image. Above all, Alexandra wants Emil to make his own choice; she wants him to have a choice. In spite of Cather's celebration of the land, it is not for her the end-all and be-all of life.

The novel makes a distinction between those who can succeed on the land and those who fail. The heroes rise to the challenge because they are strong people with imagination. They are able to give themselves, even lose themselves, to the land. In the land they find their personal identity. Carl observes to Alexandra near the end of the novel, "You belong to the land" (179). Cather writes, "A pioneer should have imagination, should be able to enjoy the idea of things more than the things themselves" (28). Later she says, "There are always dreamers on the frontier" (175). Alexandra's father had imagination but his strength failed. Her brothers have strength but no imagination (32). They resist buying more land; they joke about Alexandra's new silo and other innovations. "Lou and Oscar were industrious, but he [their father] could never teach them to use their heads about

their work" (14). "Like most of their neighbors, they were meant to follow in paths already marked out for them, not to break trails in a new country" (28). When her brothers tell Alexandra that most of their neighbors are giving up and going East, she responds: "'But all these fellows who are running off are bad farmers'" (34). In Alexandra strength and imagination come together and she gains heroic stature. What Cather sees as needed for successful homesteaders is needed for the success of any farmer or plowman. In fact, what is true for the farm microcosm has universal application. The strong and imaginative succeed; others fail. But there is always a high price for success. When Emil is home from college helping with the corn plowing, his weariness makes it impossible for him to enjoy his normal activities. "Emil . . . did not stand up under farm work very well, and by night he was too tired to talk or even to practise on his cornet" (74). Sometimes Alexandra herself went to bed at night "with her body actually aching with fatigue" (120).

The bleak images of the homesteader's life early in the novel--"the people all lived just like coyotes" (35), for example--change dramatically with the beginning of Part II, "Neighboring Fields." For a limited time Alexandra is able to create an almost idyllic existence through her loving care of the land. She tells Carl, however, that the farmers actually did not have much to do with the paradise they enjoyed: "'The land did it. It had its little joke. It pretended to be poor because nobody knew how to work it right; and then, all at once, it worked itself. It woke up out of its sleep and stretched itself, and it was so big, so rich, that we suddenly found we were rich, just from sitting still'" (69). The result of the farmers' cultivation was a productive Divide between the Platte and Republican Rivers. Henry Nash Smith refers to this as transforming the heartland of America into a garden. "The master symbol of the garden embraced a cluster of metaphors

expressing fecundity, growth, increase, and blissful labor in the earth, all centering around the heroic figure of the idealized frontier farmer armed with that supreme agarian weapon, the sacred plow" (123). As Smith reminds his readers, with the passage of time and the inroads of commerce and industry, the garden symbol became less and less an accurate picture of the region west of the Mississippi. But it lives on in literature if not in reality.

Cather's old religious hermit, Crazy Ivar, lives close to the land, tries to protect wild creatures, and flees from close neighbors--much as Cooper's Leatherstocking did. Sometimes he is a spokesman for the benefits of living close to the land. His relationship with nature is that of a loving guardian, one who is able to feel the mood of the land as Alexandra herself is able to do. This gives them both a sort of religious, mystical quality in relationship to nature. When Alexandra is driving back to the Divide after looking at the river farms, Cather writes:

> For the first time, perhaps, since that land emerged from the waters of geologic ages, a human face was set toward it with love and yearning. It seemed beautiful to her, rich and strong and glorious. Her eyes drank in the breadth of it, until her tears blinded her. Then the Genius of the Divide, the great, free spirit which breathes across it, must have bent lower than it ever bent to a human will before. The history of every country begins in the heart of a man or a woman. (37-38)

After Alexandra has a hard talk with her brothers, trying to open their imaginations to the future of the land, these lines describe more fully her bonding to the soil:

> It fortified her to reflect upon the great operations of nature, and when she thought of the law that lay behind them [the vast, orderly march of the stars], she felt a sense of personal security. That night she had a new consciousness of the country, felt almost a new relation to it. Even her talk with the boys had not taken away the feeling that had overwhelmed her when she drove back to the Divide that afternoon. She had never known

> before how much the country meant to her. The chirping of the insects down in the long grass had been like the sweetest music. She had felt as if her heart were hiding down there, somewhere, with the quail and the plover and all the little wild things that crooned or buzzed in the sun. Under the long shaggy ridges, she felt the future stirring. (40-41)

Considering Alexandra's intimate association with the land, Carl says simply, "You belong to the land" (179). Cather comments that one feels properly "Alexandra's house is the big out-of-doors, and that it is in the soil that she expresses herself best" (50). Plowing and cultivation as a means of expressing oneself has been implicit in the image of the plow.

Alexandra's identification with the land is without reserve; it absorbs her emotional as well as her physical energies:

> Her personal life, her own realization of herself, was almost a subconscious existence; like an underground river that came to the surface only here and there, at intervals months apart, and then sank again to flow on under her own fields. Nevertheless, the underground stream was there, and it was because she had so much personality to put into her enterprises and succeeded in putting it into them so completely, that her affairs prospered better than those of her neighbors.
>
> There were certain days in her life, outwardly uneventful, which Alexandra remembered as peculiarly happy; days when she was close to the flat, fallow world about her, and felt, as it were, in her own body the joyous germination in the soil. (118)

But Alexandra herself is aware of how this investment of herself though the cultivation of her fields has limited her life in other ways. She says to Carl, "Our lives are like the years, all made up of weather and crops and cows" (78). Referring to herself in a later conversation with her brother, Alexandra says, "If you take even a vine and cut it back again and again, it grows hard, like a tree" (99). Again to Carl she says she would rather have Emil grow up like him than like his two older brothers.

> We pay a high rent, too, though we pay differently. We grow hard and heavy here. We don't move lightly and easily as you do, and our minds get stiff. If the world were no wider than my cornfields, if there were not something beside this, I wouldn't feel that it was much worth while to work. (72-73)

She is not so proud that she has a fine corn crop on the south forty as she is that she had made her brother "a personality apart from the soil." It is the wider world that gives significance to the seasonal cycles of work on the farm.

The discussions between Carl and Alexandra provide a means of playing off the benefits of the farmer's life with the benefits of life in the city where one isn't "tied to the plow." As a young woman she said to him, "You are able to do much better things [than farming]" (30). Years later she tells him, "I'd rather have had your freedom than my land" (72)--a remarkable confession for Alexandra. Perhaps that is the reason she is so determined for Emil to choose whatever he wants to do; she never really had a choice even though she did well with what fell her lot. Carl is quick to understand the deficiencies of freedom, just as she understands the limitations of her life. He responds, "Freedom so often means that one isn't needed anywhere" (72). No danger of that dilemma for the farmer, for the soil always needs his care. And for the plowman who loves his land, that need is a powerful motivation.

There is a quality of timelessness in the land that makes the farmer aware that the land will continue long after he is buried. Cather refers to the "shaggy coat of the prairie, which they had lifted to make him a bed" (45), referring to John Bergson's burial. Years later his son clears away the grass from the tombstones, but "He was not thinking about the tired pioneer over which his blade glittered" (46). Alexandra remembers with Carl the days when the graveyard was just wild prairie. "'Isn't it queer,'" Carl says, "'there are only two or three human stories, and they go on repeating themselves as fiercely as if they had never happened

before; like the larks in this country, that have been singing the same five notes over for thousands of years'" (70). Yes, the land belongs to the past, but it also belongs to the future (179). "'We come and go, but the land is always here,'" Alexandra says to Carl. "'And the people who love it and understand it are the people who own it--for a little while'" (179) "Fortunate country, that is one day to receive hearts like Alexandra's into its bosom, to give them out again in the yellow wheat, in the rustling corn, in the shining eyes of youth!" (180). Bonding to the land is a bonding to human history as well as to the future.

Turning to Cather's next prairie novel, one finds in *My Antonia* an even firmer allegiance to the land than in *O Pioneers!* It is more thoroughly a celebration of the excellence of rural life values and their superiority over those found in town and city. But even these Nebraska novels are not "about" the land as such, but about the people on the land and their relationship to it. The material of *My Antonia* purports to be what Jim Burden remembers about Antonia. "I simply wrote down pretty much all that her name recalls to me." In the Introduction the author tells how she was given the porfolio of notes much in the way Hawthorne tells his readers he found the material for *The Scarlet Letter* in the Customs House. But the novel is not just about Antonia either; it is also about Jim and about their relationship to the land and to each other. Jim changes the title on the material he ostensibly gives to Cather from "Antonia" to "*My* Antonia." The novel presents their parallel lives on neighboring homesteads at the beginning, then as neighbors in Black Hawk before they go their separate ways. Jim returns for a visit after a twenty-year hiatus to find Antonia married to Anton Cuzak and happily settled on the land with her husband and eleven children.

The images of labor and poverty and sod breaking come early in both novels, giving the reader a sense of the precariousness of life for the earliest settlers. It is

a precariousness that exists whenever one leaves old, established ways behind and tries to match his strength and imagination against the unknown. Whereas the wildness of the land is prominent in *O Pioneers!*, it is the settled agricultural society, disciplined by civilization, that one finds idealized in *My Antonia*. Repeated references to the "wild" land are missing in *My Antonia*. Instead, one reads frequently of the roads that "run like wild things" over the countryside, searching for the easiest route to town or to the neighbors (19, 118, 371). The contrast between rural and city life is much more important in *My Antonia* than in *O Pioneers!* Even though less emphasis is placed on pioneering adventures in *My Antonia,* more is placed on human relationships and the quality of life on the prairie. The author demonstrates in the early settlers those qualities of life she most admires, but she finds able, independent, creative spirits in other walks of life as well, especially in artists and saints and lovers.

John Randall sums up the meaning of *My Antonia* by pointing out the dominant image in each of the three main sections of the novel. In the first part it is the unbroken colt, representing "vitality ready to be harnessed by order" (in the person of Antonia). The main image in the second part is the plow. "Both Antonia and the land are now ready to be creative and fertile; to produce children and crops." Antonia learns from both town and country. The third dominant image is the earth-goddess, Antonia in her garden surrounded by children and fruit trees (144-145).

For most readers the frequent landscape descriptions in *My Antonia* are probably the most alive, pulse-stirring descriptions ever found of the prairie farms. Often they are seasonal and reflect the light and the weather. "On the farm," Cather writes, "the weather was great fact, and men's affairs went on underneath it, as the streams creep under the ice" (180). At the end of Book I, Jim and Antonia

watch a magnificent electrical storm when the thunder is "loud and metallic" (139). The beautiful sensuousness of her descriptions emphasizes the impact of the landscape on the lives of the homesteaders, for they etch unforgettable pictures in one's memory. The plowman-farmer's life is thus seen as surrounded by sights and sounds which heighten his aesthetic awareness and feed his imagination. Two examples will suffice:

> All those fall afternoons were the same, but I never got used to them. As far as we could see, the miles of copper-red grass were drenched in sunlight that was stronger and fiercer than at any other time of the day. The blond cornfields were red gold, the haystacks turned rosy and threw long shadows. The whole prairie was like the bush that burned with fire and was not consumed. That hour always had the exultation of victory, of triumphant ending, like a hero's death--heroes who died young and gloriously. It was a sudden transfiguration, a lifting-up of day. (40)

> I took a long walk north of the town, out into the pastures where the land was so rough that it had never been ploughed up, and the long red grass of early times still grew shaggy over the draws and hillocks. Out there I felt at home again. Overhead the sky was that indescribable blue of autumn; bright and shadowless, hard as enamel. To the south I could see the dun-shaded river bluffs that used to look so big to me, and all about stretched drying cornfields, of the pale-gold colour, I remembered so well. Russian thistles were blowing across the uplands and piling against the wire fences like barricades. Along the cattle-paths the plumes of goldenrod were already fading into sun-warmed velvet, grey with gold threads in it. (369-370)

Before examing the highlighted plow image in the second part of the novel, it may be helpful to look at some instances of Cather's use of visual images in general. The significance of her use of pictures in the novel has been explored by Jean Schwind in an article that focuses on the Benda illustrations (51-67). The novel is episodic, each episode generally furnishing a lasting visual impression. Even Jim's record is really a succession of pictorial memories. Cather stresses

the pictorial quality of memories of Antonia in the 1918 introduction quoted by Schwind: "To speak her name was to call up pictures of people and places, to set a quiet drama going in one's brain" (52). Although this statement does not appear in the revised introduction, the idea is given overtly in Jim's thoughts after his short visit with Antonia and her family:

> Antonia had always been one to leave images in the mind that did not fade--that grew stronger with time. In my memory there was a succession of such pictures, fixed there like the old woodcuts of one's first primer: Antonia kicking her bare legs against the sides of my pony when we came home in triumph with our snake; Antonia in her black shawl and fur cap, as she stood by her father's grave in the snowstorm; Antonia coming in with her work-team along the evening sky-line. She lent herself to immemorial human attitudes which we recognize by instinct as universal and true. (352-353)

The most overt use of literal pictures is, of course, the box of photographs Antonia brings out to show Jim during his long-postponed visit. The pictures are records of their shared youth. On his first Christmas in Nebraska, Jim makes a picture book for little Yulka out of pictures from "good old family magazines," Sunday school cards and advertising cards from Virginia (81). Then there is the disconsolate telegraph operator Jim used to visit to pass the time on long evenings in town. He "was sure to bring out his pictures of actresses and dancers. He got them with cigarette coupons, and nearly smoked himself to death to possess these desired forms and faces" (218). On one of Jim's trips abroad, he sent Antonia pictures of her old country, of Vienna and Prague. These Antonia carefully framed, and they hang in the parlor where Jim and Antonio go through the box of old photographs. After returning from college Jim persuades his grandparents to have their photograph taken. While waiting for the photographer, he examines the likenesses on the walls of the shop. There in a heavy frame he sees a "round-eyed baby in short dresses." The photographer explains that it is Antonia's baby.

"Another girl would have kept her baby out of sight [the father has abandoned Antonia], but Tony, of course, must have its picture on exhibition at the town photographer's, in a great gilt frame" (303).

In addition to the use of these literal pictures, repeated instances could be cited of how visual memories come back to characters in the novel. For instance, Lena tells Jim she will never marry. The reason? "She remembered home as a place where there were always too many children, a cross man and work piling up around a sick woman" (291). Schwind's article on the Benda illustrations helps one to appreciate more fully their significance to the text and helps the reader to be more conscious of Cather's visual imagery.

My Antonia is the product of a writer not only influenced by the visual arts but also by her reading of the Bible and the classics. In this novel Cather gives a modern interpretation to themes from the *Georgics* such as hard work, seasonal change, self-discipline, family togetherness, sex, death and so forth. She makes specific borrowings as well as working with similar general themes. For example, Book 3 of the *Georgics* is the source of her epigraph, "*Optima dies . . . prima fugit.*" John Murphy cites numerous correspondences between the two works, including the use of set pieces, the interweaving of parallel or contrasting themes, the use of mythology to heighten the dignity of agricultural materials, inclusion of epyllion-like episodes, and the use of pictorial imagery (40-45). Concerning the imagery he says: "The *Georgics* provides the image of the plow, the plowed-up sword, the fruitful earth, the summer storm, the snake, the sick horse, winter interiors, and the final picture of Antonia as the idealized country person" (55). Virgil's influence on the novel is also felt through Gaston Cleric, Jim's Latin teacher at the university. Cleric's explanation of "patria" in Book 3 of

the *Georgics* adds value in Jim's eyes to the small rural neighborhood where he and Antonia grew up.

By far the most dramatic image in the novel is that of the plow silhouetted against the sun at the end of Chapter 14 in Book 2. Cather's description makes the image magnificent, and the context adds even greater depth to the meaning of the plow. The sight comes at the end of a day off for the hired girls. Accompanied by Jim, they have spent the day in the country. Antonia asks Jim to tell the other girls the story he had told her about "how the Spanish came here first." Jim tells the story of Coronado and his search for the Seven Golden Cities. At school Jim was told that Coronado never got to Nebraska but gave up his quest and turned back somewhere in Kansas. But Jim thinks Coronado's party may have explored along the very river in front of them. "A farmer in the county north of ours, when he was breaking sod, had turned up a metal stirrup of fine workmanship, and a sword with a Spanish inscription on the blade" (243). Father Kelly found on the sword an abbreviation that stood for the city of Cordova and the name of the Spanish maker. When the girls wonder why the Spaniards had come so far and why Coronado never returned to his riches in Spain, Jim is unable to give any more information: "I only know the school books said he 'died in the wilderness, of a broken heart'" (244). After this stirring of their imaginations, the group looks off across the country to watch the sun go down. It is necessary to quote the entire passage in order to sense the impact the sight made on the group:

> We sat looking off across the country, watching the sun go down. The curly grass about us was on fire now. The bark of the oaks turned red as copper. There was a shimmer of gold on the brown river. Out in the stream the sandbars glittered like glass, and the light trembled in the willow thickets as if little flames were leaping among them. The breeze sank to stillness. In the ravine a ringdove mourned plaintively, and somewhere off in the

> bushes an owl hooted. The girls sat listless, leaning against each other. The long fingers of the sun touched their foreheads.
>
> Presently we saw a curious thing: There were no clouds, the sun was going down in a limpid, gold-washed sky. Just as the lower edge of the red disk rested on the high fields against the horizon, a great black figure suddenly appeared on the face of the sun. We sprang to our feet, straining our eyes toward it. In a moment we realized what it was. On some upland farm, a plough had been left standing in the field. The sun was sinking just behind it. Magnified across the distance by the horizontal light, it stood out against the sun, was exactly contained within the circle of the disk; the handles, the tongue, the share--black against the molten red. There it was, heroic in size, a picture writing on the sun.
>
> Even while we whispered about it, our vision disappeared; the ball dropped and dropped until the red tip went beneath the earth. The fields below us were dark, the sky was growing pale, and that forgotten plough had sunk back to its own littleness somewhere on the prairie. (244-245)

The image of the plow generates a reservoir of meaning. The plow that broke the plains is magnified against the cosmic background of the sun, dramatically highlighted in contrast to the story of the old buried Spanish sword. The pedantic mind finds the prairie "too mundane ever to have been part of the realms of romance" (Randall 135). But the young people know better. The romantic quest of the Spaniards with horses and swords was primarily for adventure and for gold. The questors "died in the wilderness, of a broken heart." But though the spirit of the romance had visitied the prairie, it was the spirit of civilization--symbolized in the plow against the sun--that had endured. Romanticism cannot survive the vigors of prairie life unless it merges with a realistic outlook. Imagination was not sufficient for Mr. Shimerda nor for Antonia in her affair with Larry Donovan. But the enduring plow image unites the romantic and realistic impluses. The colossal dark image is seen for only a short time, suggesting perhaps that the heroic pioneer period on the prairie was relatively brief. Then "that forgotten plough had sunk back to its own littleness

somewhere on the prairie." The plow remains, diminished in prominence but symbolic of a whole way of life. All the parts of the plough--handle, tongue, share--are contained within the circle. Placing it within the frame of the sun's brilliance gives it universal impact. This is the implement that represents civilization and all the benefits of life on the land. The unaided romantic spirit of adventure--represented by the Spanish sword--disappeared from the plains, but it lay buried there until the plow rediscovered it. The plow represents both the realistic spirit of hard, determined labor in turning the soil and the Wordsworthian romantic spirit--attachment to nature/the land, interest in what can be turned up from the past, and celebration of the independent person of superior ability. The plow's "picture writing on the sun" is the silent affirmation that it is the plow which inscribes the record of civilization. The plow, a dark, colorless thing in itself, may appear huge and glorious in light of the history of mankind.

Jim makes an allusion to the plow against the sun when he contrasts the way his teacher Gaston Cleric becomes absorbed in an idea with the way his own mind works. "Mental excitement was apt to send me with a rush back to my own naked land and the figures scattered upon it. . . . They stood out strengthened and simplified now, like the image of the plough against the sun" (262). One March evening in his sophomore year at the university, he is staring "listlessly at the pages of the 'Georgics.'" "It opened with the melancholy reflection that, in the lives of mortals, the best days are the first to flee" (263). As Jim muses on this he recalls Cleric's exposition of *patria*, that it referred to Virgil's own rural neighborhood, not to the country at large. Virgil hoped to be the first to bring the muse to his own *patria*, his father's fields, "'sloping down to the river and to the old beech trees with broken tops'" (264). Cleric thinks that when Virgil was dying "his mind must have gone back to the perfect utterance of the 'Georgics,' when the

pen was fitted to the matter as the plough is to the furrow" (264). It is Lena--an image from Jim's own *patria*--who breaks in upon these musings. After she leaves, having brought back the laughter and sight of the hired girls, Jim suddenly realizes that if there were no girls to leave pictures in the memory, there would be no poetry. Images such as she revived are the poetry of life.

But the most vivid images to Jim are those youthful ones of Antonia. Not all are pleasant ones, and those of Antonia "doing a man's work" of plowing are among those that are painful but unforgettable. The spring after her father's suicide, fifteen-year-old Antonia works under the direction of her surly brother Ambrosch. The neighbors had helped the Shimerdas build a log house in the spring, and they "were now fairly equipped to begin their struggle with the soil" (120). At the end of Antonia'a day of plowing, Jim runs out to meet her when she brings her horses to the windmill to water them.

> She wore the boots her father had so thoughtfully taken off before he shot himself, and his old fur cap. Her outgrown cotton dress switched about her calves, over the boot-tops. She kept her sleeves rolled up all day, and her arms and throat were burned as brown as a sailor's. Her neck came up strongly out of her shoulders, like the bole of a tree out of the turf. One sees that draught-horse neck among the peasant women in all old countries.
>
> She greeted me gaily, and began at once to tell me how much ploughing she had done that day. Ambrosch, she said, was on the north quarter, breaking sod with the oxen.
>
> "Jim, you ask Jake how much he ploughed to-day. I don't want that Jake get more done in one day then me. I want we have very much corn this fall." (122)

Even the descriptive similie, "like the bole of a tree out of the turf," attaches her to the land. Her physical contact with the earth in plowing appears to stimulate her vitality. Antonia comes across as energetic and strong and proud of her physical ability. The idea of being able to keep up with the men makes it appear that good plowing is the really important measure of worth. When Jim

begs her to go to school the next week, she shrugs and says, "'I ain't got time to learn. I can work like mans now. . . . School is all right for little boys. I help make this land one good farm'" (123). Jim feels angry and wonders if she will grow up to be boastful like her mother until he glances up and sees that she is crying. Cultivating the land and bringing it into productivity is an all-consuming task for the early settlers. The either-or choice that Antonia makes is not necessarily demanded of later farmers even though it is clear in the prairie novels that the physical energy demanded from the person who plows the land drastically limits involvement in other activities. Jim is sorry he accepted Mrs. Shimerda's inviation to stay for supper because Antonia and Ambrosch argue in Bohemian about which of them has done more plowing that day. Ambrosch has been breaking sod with the oxen, and he retorts sullenly "'You take them ox to-morrow and try to sod plough. Then you not be so smart.'" Antonia laughs. "'Don't be mad. I know it's awful hard work for break sod'" (124-125).

Jim feels as he rides home that he has not seen much of Antonia since spring field work began:

> She was out in the fields from sunup until sundown. If I rode over to see her where she was ploughing, she stopped at the end of a row to chat for a moment, then gripped her plough-handles, clucked to her team, and waded on down the furrow, making me feel that she was now grown up and had no time for me. (125-126)

It is true that she has assumed an adult's responsibility and that the plowing did not allow time for fun with her young friend Jim. An important aspect of the image of the plough is the fact that it is so demanding. The plowing must be done, and it must be done on time in order to keep in harmony with the cycles of the seasons. Dedication to the demands of the plow automatically limits intellectual and social development. This description comes during the first season's work:

> Nowadays Tony could talk of nothing but the prices of things, or how much she could lift and endure. She was too proud of her strength. I knew, too, that Ambrosch put upon her some chores a girl ought not to do, and that the farm-hands around the country joked in a nasty way about it. Whenever I saw her come up the furrow, shouting to her beasts, sunburned, sweaty, her dress open at the neck, and her throat and chest dust-plastered, I used to think of the tone in which poor Mr. Shimerda, who could say so little, yet managed to say so much when he exclaimed, "My Antonia!" (126)

Jim's grandmother is aware that something important will be lost for Antonia if she continues to work in the field: "Heavy field work'll spoil that girl. She'll lose all her nice ways and get rough ones." Jim thinks she has lost them already (125). Perhaps he is right: "Antonia ate so noisily now, like a man, and she yawned often at the table and kept stretching her arms over her head, as if they ached" (125). When Grandmother makes arrangements with the Harlings to take Antonia into service in their home in town, she says to Harley's grown daughter: "'When she first came to this country, Frances, and had that genteel old man to watch over her, she was as pretty a girl as ever I saw. But, dear me, what a life she's led, out in the fields with those rough threshers!'" (153-154).

Jim's grandparents are somewhat shadowy figures, but they are repositories of wisdom. Grandmother wants to see Antonia placed with a family where she can learn things more helpful to enriching and broadening her life than just crops and weather. She also wants to get her out from under the thumb of her brother and mother, both of whom are unpleasant characters. Antonia is more like her cultured, sensitive father who couldn't face the desolation of the animal-like existence in the dugout.

The choice of the Harlings is just right for Antonia, for they had been farming people too. "[T]heir place was like a little farm, with a big barn and a garden, and an orchard and grazing lots--even a windmill. The Harlings were

Norwegians, and Mrs. Harling had lived in Christiania until she was ten years old" (147-148). Here the farm is scaled down to garden size.

> There was a basic harmony between Antonia and her mistress. They had strong, independent natures, both of them. They knew what they liked, and were not always trying to imitate other people. They loved children and animals and music, and rough play and digging in the earth. They liked to prepare rich, hearty food and to see people eat it; to make up soft white beds and to see youngsters asleep in them. They ridiculed conceited people and were quick to help unfortunate ones. Deep down in each of them there was a kind of hearty joviality, a relish of life, not over-delicate, but very invigorating. (180)

This description gives insight into those qualities that Cather admires and that she finds most often in the lives of those who live close to the land. These people have independent, loving, nourishing natures. They are affirmative realists who love life and disdain pretense.

In bringing the country girls into town as hired girls, Cather combines the spirit and robustness of country life with the greater personal development of the city. The change in environment affects the girls differently. But for most, their time in the city will not spoil their country virtues because they have not come to stay but to earn money to help their impoverished families on the farm:

> Determined to help in the struggle to clear the homestead from debt, they had no alternative but to go into service. Some of them, after they came to town, remained as serious and as discreet in behaviour as they had been when they ploughed and herded on their father's farms. Other, like the three Bohemian Marys, tried to make up for the years of youth they had lost. But every one of them did what she had set out to do, and sent home those hard-earned dollars. The girls I knew were always helping to pay for ploughs and reapers, brood-sows, or steers to fatten. (200)

Lena, one of the more spirited hired girls, says, "I wish father didn't have such bad luck with his farm machinery; then I could buy more things for my sisters. I'm going to get Mary a new coat this fall, if the sulky plough's never paid for!" (240)

Cather recognizes that this farm family solidarity enabled the foreign farmers to be the first to become prosperous (200). Family solidarity is one of the rural virtues Cather praises. It is demonstrated repeatedly in the novel, the most heart-warming picture being that of Antonia and all her children. Jim is impressed with the children's obvious pride in and care for their mother and for each other. As the group looks at the old photographs, he says:

> Nina and Jan, after trying to see round the taller ones, quietly brought a chair, climbed up on it, and stood close together, looking. The little boy forgot his shyness and grinned delightedly when familiar faces came into view. In the group about Antonia I was conscious of a kind of physical harmony. They leaned this way and that, and were not afraid to touch each other. (349)

Family solidarity is the foundation of community solidarity which, in spite of exceptions, was generally found among the homesteaders. The building of a log cabin for the Shimerdas, the burial of Mr. Shimerda, and the surveying lines that swerved in respect of his grave serve to illustrate this.

The older farm girls gained a great deal from their combined farm and town background, as well as from their European heritage:

> Those girls had grown up in the first bitter-hard times, and had got little schooling themselves. But the younger brothers and sisters, for whom they made such sacrifices and who have had "advantages," never seem to me, when I meet them now, half as interesting or as well educated. The older girls, who helped to break up the wild sod, learned so much from life, from poverty, from their mothers and grandmothers; they had all, like Antonia, been early awakened and made observant by coming at a tender age from an old country to a new. . . . Physically they were almost a race apart, and out-of-door work had given them a vigour which, when they got over their first shyness on coming to town, developed into a positive carriage and freedom of movement, and made them conspicuous among Blanck Hawk women. (198)

Their sacrifice and moral fortitude gave them not only a nobility but the ability to prosper as well: "To-day the best that a harassed Black Hawk merchant

can hope for is to sell provisions and farm machinery and automobiles to the rich farms where that first crop of stalwart Bohemian and Scandinavian girls are now the mistresses" (201). Those hired girls had set out to enjoy life and make the best of their lot. It took men and women of that caliber to bring about the prospect hinted at in *O Pioneers!* and expressly stated in *My Antonia:*

> It took a clear, meditative eye like my grandfather's to foresee that they [cornfields] would enlarge and multiply until they would be, not the Shinmerdas' cornfields, or Mr. Bush's, but the world's cornfields; that their yield would be one of the economic facts, like the wheat crop of Russia, which underlie all the activities of men, in peace or war. (137)

Henry Nash Smith, as mentioned earlier, saw that "The image of this vast and constantly growing agricultural society in the interior of the continent became one of the dominant symbols of the nineteenth-century American society--a collective representation, a poetic idea that defined the promise of American life" (123). Smith saw that the forces shaping the future of American life originated in the agricultural frontier, not in the "picturesque Wild West." As the frontier pushed westward, new settled communities developed, communities devoted to cultivating the earth. "They plowed the virgin land and put in crops, and the great Interior Valley was transformed into a garden: for the imagination, the Garden of the World" (123).

The town-country contrast is a motif that runs strongest through Book II, "The Hired Girls." The young men in town felt the strong attraction of the hired girls who where much more alive and interesting than the city-bred girls. "The country girls were considered a menace to the social order. Their beauty shone out too boldly against a conventional background. But anxious mothers need not have felt alarm. . . . The respect for respectability was stronger than any desire in Black Hawk youth" (201-202). As a young boy from the country, Jim finds he has "a

great to learn" from his companions in town: "Before the spring term of school was over, I could fight, play 'keeps,' tease the little girls, and use forbidden words as well as any boy in my class" (145). But in a more serious vein, Cather seems to suggest throughout the novel that the city is concerned for appearances and the country, for reality. Activities and people of real intrinsic worth are rooted in the land and are in harmony with its values of honest work, simplicity, and care for others. By contrast the city spawns its greedy Cutters (361-363) and its Larry Donovans who, "if requested to perform such a menial service [as opening the window in the train], silently point to the button that calls the porter" (304).

Most of the other allusions to plowing--always given the older "plough" spelling in *My Antonia*--add few new insights to the image of the plow or of the farmer. Fire breaks are plowed around the homesteads on the prairie (14). A human analogy can be related to the fact that the plowed ground can stop a prairie fire: considerable labor at the plow can quench the fires of lust, ambition, greed and so forth. The difference between the prairie and the plowed ground is that the prairie retains its natural growth, and in the plowed ground, that which can be kindled so easily is buried. If it is buried deeply enough, the plowed ground may stop the prairie fire. In the garden there is plowed ground, and ground cherries grow along the furrows (18). Gardens, as sort of miniaturized farms, supply a limited but satisfying experience of man's attachment to the land. When rural folk move into town, one expects to find them cultivating gardens as do the Harlings. Red grass still grows years later wherever the land is so rough that it has "never been ploughed up" (369). The red grass also grows in "that unploughed patch at the crossing of the roads" where Mr. Shimerda is buried (319). Another description of the grave site gives this picture:

> Years afterward, when the open-grazing days were over, and the red grass had been ploughed under and under until it had almost disappeared from the prairie; when all the fields were under fence, and the roads no longer ran about like wild things, but followed the surveyed section-lines, Mr. Shimerda's grave was still there (118).

The repeated plowings needed to exterminate the red grass indicate the persistence of wild life and the obstacles to taming the land. For various reasons, some ground should not be plowed up but left in its natural state. Furthermore, the sod "heals" the land that has been torn up and then left to natural agents (371). One negative image of cultivating concerns Marek, the Shimerda's retarded son. "The one idea that had ever got through poor Marek's thick head was that all exertion was meritorious. He always bore down on the handles of the cultivator and drove the blades so deep into the earth that the horses were soon exhausted" (132). The farmer must have more than brute strength; he must have skill and sensitivity to the soil and to his draft animals.

Antonia and Jim walk across the field together just before he goes away for twenty years. "The very clods and furrows in the fields seemed to stand up sharply. I felt the old pull of the earth, the solemn magic that comes out of those fields at nightfall" (322). "The old pull of the earth"--he feels it even though he is headed to New York for a business career. But he grew up on that land, and the magnet attaching him to the earth is always active.

The breaking image is used several times, as previously discussed, for plowing up or plowing under the sod (19, 132, 193, 306, 365). Especially poignant is the discouragement Anton Cuzak experiences in his isolated experiences of breaking the land: "'Sometimes I git awful sore on this place and want to quit but my wife she always say we better stick it out'" (365). "'Sometimes when I read the papers from the old country, I pretty near run away,'" he tells Jim (366). Later

Anton says, "'At first I near go crazy with lonesomeness'" (367). The discipline of the plow and lonesomeness go together. When he is not only raising crops, but children as well, his lonesomeness is less intense.

Antonia redeems herself from criticism by her neighbors for coming home abandoned and pregnant by being faithful to the land--and to her child. The Widow Steavens tells Jim that before Antonia went away, "'she was always so strong--and always singing them queer Bohemian songs, like she was the happiest thing in the world'" (308). When Antonia returned she went to work plowing the land, and through that activity she began to regain harmony within herself, with the land and with her neighbors. Grandmother explains the process to Jim:

> "The next time I saw Antonia, she was out in the fields ploughing corn. All that spring and summer she did the work of a man on the farm; it seemed to be an understood thing. . . . She was quiet and steady. Folks respected her industry and tried to treat her as if nothing had happened. They talked, to be sure; but not like they would if she'd put on airs. She was so crushed and quiet that nobody seemed to want to humble her. . . . I went over there when I could, but the times when she was in from the fields were the times when I was busiest here. She talked about the grain and the weather as if she'd never had another interest, and if I went over at night she always looked dead weary." (314)

It is the plow she has taken up once again, as if she is determined to fulfill her destiny in helping to bring civilization to the land and to her own life.

Twice the novel mentions preparing the garden soil--once "breaking" and once "loosening" the soil (193, 305). The garden becomes significant, especially in the final book of the novel where Antonia is pictured as a sort of earth goddess in her orchard (339-341). It is at the heart of the farm and is "surrounded by a triple enclosure; the wire fence, then the hedge of thorny locusts, then the mulberry hedge" (341). In the center of that is a grape arbor with seats and a table--like

Antonia had in the old country as a child. Years earlier she had told Jim that "beautiful talk, like what I never hear in this country" took place "under the bushes" between her father and his friend. They talked "[a]bout music, and the woods, and about God, and when they were young" (236). Now she has made a New World version of that cultural center. She tells Jim about the individual trees in the orchard. "'I love them as if they were people,'" she says and rubs her hand over the bark. She tells how in the dry times she carried water to them after a day's work in the fields. "'They were on my mind like children,'" she said (340). At the conclusion of the Edenic interlude in the garden, she says, "'I belong on a farm. I'm never lonesome here like I used to be in town. You remember what sad spells I used to have, when I didn't know what was the matter with me. I've never had them out here. And I don't mind the work a bit, if I don't have to put up with sadness'" (343). Instead of being lonely, she is surrounded by life as imaged by the children bursting out of the dark womb of the cave: "a veritable exploding of life out of the dark cave into the sunlight" (339). Antonia has become "a rich mine of life, like the founders of early races" (353). The life-giving ability of the land needs the efforts of a cultivator or nourisher of life. From that relationship should come life that rewards the cultivator and eases the emptiness of that person's life. One of the reasons the cultivator may overcome loneliness in his isolated life is that he has an on-going responsibility to the crop for which he has plowed and harrowed and planted. Even for those who do not give their hearts to the land as impulsively as Antonia, the land is still a safe object of affection, for it is something which, in a sense, time itself has made safe to love.

Cather appears to see the benefits in the rituals of a life that is ordered by the seasons and the cycles of light and dark. The weather, which plays a significant part in the novel, helps create variety within that order. The order and

stability, modified by the weather, still carry the potential of dulling, mindless routine. But the author's heroes and heroines have sufficient imagination and strength to follow routines without loss of identity. The quality of the plowman-farmer's life is partly determined by his ability to balance routine responsibility and personally recreative interests.

Enough has been suggested, but perhaps not explicitly stated, to indicate that Cather's ideal frontier farmer brings his European heritage with him. Her homesteaders often appear to be of a more educated, cultured class than the frontier settlers in the works of Crevecoeur or Cooper. Cather is interested in the influence of the hard prairie life on European immigrants. She expects the struggle to subdue the land to reveal the inner strength and imagination of the homesteader. It is a lonely, single-minded task. The land will either make or break the settler. The weak disappear from the frontier. The strong prosper. Her heroes and heroines, like Glasgow's, triumph because of their "vein of iron." The frontier experience in Cather represents the universal, demanding tasks which fall one's lot. The farm microcosm is a proving ground of character. To see how the landscape has changed by cultivation is to Jim "like watching the growth of a great man or of a great idea" (306). Human happiness and prosperity are intertwined with the productivity of the soil. Jim sees "all the human effort that had gone into it [the land] was coming back in long, sweeping lines of fertility" (306). For Cather the struggle with the soil serves as an analog for moral and artistic integrity as well. The frontier setting helped clarify universal concerns. There the tawdriness of materialism could be seen in the clear light of her rural values that place moral and spiritual ends above material ones.

Cather is directly in the romantic tradition, which emphasizes man's living in harmony with nature, a tradition which comes down through Cooper to

the Civil War. Her pioneers seem to draw strength and moral fidelity from the soil itself. Whether this lines up with history or not, her pioneers came to establish a civilization, not just to get rich. But with the passing of their generation, the old virtues depart as well.

Life on the prairie has a tragic dimension. For those who fail, the farm experiment is a terrible waste of potential. Those who succeed discover they have done so at a price paid in excluding other things from their lives. Cather sees her pioneers as whole people--body and spirit--and they thrive or suffer as whole people. Their very wholeness reflects their affinity with the land; they too are fertile and capable and shaped by cultivation.

This discussion has touched on a number of things not directly tied to the plow or the plowman image. But in Cather's work that central image seems to have a web of connections with her fundamental insights about how best to live one's life.

Antonia wonders whether Jim has learned to like the big cities. For herself she says, "I like to be where I know every stack and tree, and where all the ground is friendly. I want to live and die here'" (320).

> [S]he . . . could still stop one's breath for a moment by a look or gesture that somehow revealed the meaning in common things. She had only to stand in the orchard, to put her hand on a little crab tree and look up at the apples, to make you feel the goodness of planting and tending and harvesting at last. . . . She was a rich mine of life, like the founders of early races. (353)

Although Jim leaves the land, it does not leave him: "I remembered the conformation of the land as one remembers the modelling of human faces" (306).

Instead of taking *One of Ours* (1922) and "Neighbour Rosicky" (1928) in the order written, it seems best to leave the bleakest picture of farming (in *One of Ours*) until last. Cather's "Neighbour Rosicky" appears to be one of her ideal pioneer

farmers, bonded to the land and hoping almost desperately that his sons will not leave the land. Nobody in his European family had ever owned any land, but after his mother died, Rosicky was sent into the country to live with maternal grandparents on their rented farm until he was twelve years old. There he "formed those ties with the earth and the farm animals and growing things which are never made at all unless they are made early" (32). After his poverty-ridden years in London, his life as a tailor in New York seemed pleasant for several years. But when all the years began to seem alike, he grew restless, especially in the spring. One Fourth of July he realized the source of his restlessness. He wanted "to see the sun rise and set and to plant things and watch them grow. . . . He was like a tree that has not many roots, but one tap-root and that goes down deep" (32).

The contrasts between rural life and city life keep recurring through the story. Based on Rosicky's unsatisfactory experiences in the big cities, the contrast is poignant and dramatic. Upon his first recognition of the source of his restlessness in New York City, Cather writes:

> It struck young Rosicky that this was the trouble with big cities; they built you in from the earth itself, cemented you away from any contact with the ground. You lived in a natural world, like the fish in an aquarium, who were probably much more comfortable than they ever were in the sea. (31)

Rosicky sees city life as unnatural because it lacks sufficient contact with the earth itself--the source of growing things.

He wants the benefits of country life not only for his immediate family but for Rudolph's family as well. Rudolph, his only married son, is Rosicky's special concern in the story, for he has married an American town girl. Rosicky is afraid she will grow so discontented that Rudolph might quit the farm and take a factory job in Omaha. "To be a landless man," Rosicky thinks, "was to be a wage-earner, a slave, all your life; to have nothing, to be nothing" (40). Scenes of Rosicky's

miserable life in London flash through his mind and intensify his fears for Rudolph and Polly. It isn't just a heritage on the land that Rosicky wants for his sons; it is also an attitude toward life like his own. Perhaps Doctor Burleigh summed up that attitude best when he reflected that "people as generous and warm-hearted and affectionate as the Rosickys never got ahead much; maybe you couldn't enjoy life and put it into the bank too" (15). This idea is demonstrated in the story his wife Mary tells for the benefit of Rudolph and Polly. Rosicky was out cultivating corn on the Fourth of July when a hot wind finished off that year's crop. He came in from the field, asked Mary for a nice supper, and played with the boys in the horse tank. At their picnic in the orchard, he explained that there would be no crop that year. "'That's why we're havin' a picnic. We might as well enjoy what we got'" (49). Mary concludes her story by contrasting Rosicky's response to hard times to that of the neighbors:

> "An' that's how your father behaved, when all the neighbours was so discouraged they couldn't look you in the face. An' we enjoyed ourselves that year, poor as we was, an' our neighbours wasn't a bit better off for bein' miserable. Some of 'em grieved till they got poor digestions and couldn't relish what they did have." (49)

The following winter there was no moisture to sprout the wheat and the seed froze in the ground. "All that land would have to be ploughed up and planted over again, planted into corn" (57). While this was in process, Rosicky sat by the window and reflected on the virtues of farm life in contrast to city life:

> They [his sons] would have to work hard on the farm, and probably they would never do much more than make a living. But if he could think of them as staying here on the land, he wouldn't have to fear any great unkindness for them. Hardships, certainly; it was a hardship to have the wheat freeze in the ground when seed was so high; and to have to sell your stock because you had no feed. But there would be other years when everything came along right, and you caught up. And what you had was your own. You didn't have to choose between

> bosses and strikers, and go wrong either way. You didn't have to do with dishonest and cruel people. They were the only things in his experience he had found terrifying and horrible; the look in the eyes of a dishonest and crafty man, of a scheming and rapacious woman.
>
> In the country, if you had a mean neighbour, you could keep off his land and make him keep off yours. But in the city, all the foulness and misery and brutality of your neighbours was part of your life. The worst things he had come upon in his journey through the world were human,--depraved and poisonous specimens of man. To this day he could recall certain terrible faces in the London streets. There were mean people everywhere, to be sure, even in their own country town here. But they weren't tempered, hardened, sharpened, like the treacherous people in cities who live by grinding or cheating or poisoning their fellow-men. . . . If he'd had a mean boy, now, one who was crooked and sharp and tried to put anything over on his brothers, then town would be the place for him. But he had no such boy. As for Rudolph, the discontented one, he would give the shirt off his back to anyone who touched his heart. What Rosicky really hoped for his boys was that they could get through the world without ever knowing much about the cruelty of human beings. "Their mother and me ain't prepared them for that," he sometimes said to himself. (58-60)

Rosicky's own experiences in both city and country help to authenticate his views, as does his recognition that there are "mean people everywhere." Maybe farm life has made his sons somewhat naive when it comes to recognizing human duplicity and evil, but Rosicky would prefer that to their having to face "the treacherous people in cities who live by grinding or cheating or poisoning their fellow-man." This harks back to philosophies restated by Crevecoeur and Jefferson that the only thoroughly wholesome livelihood is to earn one's living from the soil. All other ways of earning money are exploitive of one's fellow man in some degree.

One of the qualities associated with Cather's pioneer farmers is their perserverance in the face of whatever difficulties come along. In spite of the drought, the boys begin to plow up the wheat to prepare for another crop: "Rosicky

would stand at the fence corner and watch them, and the earth was so dry it blew up in clouds of brown dust that hid the horses and the sulky plough and the driver. It was a bad outlook" (61).

Of course, Rosicky is not presented as a typical farmer, but he is treated as an ideal. He is one who has gathered wisdom both from working the land and from living and working in the Old World. He shares with other Cather characters like Anton Cuzak and Jim Burden's grandfather the uppermost desire of making a life on the farm, not just a living. None of these men set out primarily to get rich; none of them allows labor to be so all-consuming that they become drudges; all of them are readers and interested in life beyond the farm. It is the larger vision that gives significance to the labor of plowing the land. There are, of course, misfits who try to be pioneer farmers. Most disappear from the scene. Those misfits tend either to narrow their lives and drudge their way to a degree of wealth or to find their satisfaction in non-farming activities. Alexandra's brothers and Antonia's brother serve as examples. Cather's ideal pioneer farmer gains a fundamental satisfaction from the land which mellows his disposition and helps him to be wise in relation to the broader world. It seems that the seasons temper his mind and body and enable him to be patient and caring with people as well as with crops. But one also finds in Cather an awareness that not every one who sets out to be a pioneer farmer is made out of appropriate material. Some can never bond to the land. Cather's frontier farmer provides an image that serves well as *the* farmer in American literature. That picture is, however, a complex one. At least her farmers share their ability to sink roots into the land.

She presents quite a different picture of the farmer's life in *One of Ours*. Here the sensitive twenty-one-year-old Claude Wheeler hungers for intellectual, cultural, and heroic experiences that he is unable to discover on the family farm.

Claude's dissatisfaction contrasts with the contentedness of most of his high school friends who have settled down to their respective farms and jobs in the Frankfort area. His family owns more land than they can farm so Claude is taken out of school and put in charge of the home place. The story begins on the eve of World War I and ends with Claude's death in military service in France. His generation is the one following the pioneer farmers when materialism and greed have already begun to warp the old frontier values. The farmers who were Claude's contemporaries took to market the best grain and livestock in the world, "things with an intrinsic value." In return he got merchandise of poor quality: "showy furniture that went to pieces, carpets and draperies that faded, clothes that made a handsome man look like a clown. Most of his money was paid out for machinery,--and that, too, went to pieces. A steam thrasher didn't last long; a horse outlived three automobiles" (88). Claude cannot come to terms with such a self-centered, rootless generation. His own father and brother see farming as a means of making money, not of making a life that demonstrates intrinsic worth in individuality and in "the old things." Financial profit has become more important than the friendship of one's neighbors. For Cather, the passing of the frontier marks the passing of an era set apart by superior human values.

Claude's friends try to persuade him that farming is really a fine way of life. Even Mrs. Erlich seems to think the farm is the place for him; it brings security (89). But he cannot see any benefit in just working to earn money "when money bought nothing one wanted" (89). Ernest Havel, his high school friend, said "it's the best life in the world, Claude" (89). But Claude sees the security of three meals a day and plenty of sleep in about the same category as "being assured of a decent burial." "Sometimes he thought this security was what was the matter with everybody; that only perfect safety was required to kill all the best qualities in

people and develop the mean ones" (89). Claude needs risk and adventure and human daring. He also hungers for books and ideals from a rooted culture--something that can give a continuity of meaning beyond routine labor. He is a young idealist without a satisfactory purpose for which to live.

John J. Murphy points to the incident of Claude's run-away mules as depicting the fact that machines bring a way of life incompatible with the old pioneer values ("Cooper, Cather" 182). Cather tells the story through Claude's friend Leonard:

> "He was out with the team of mules and a heavy plough, working the road in that deep cut between their place and mine. The gasoline motor-truck came along, making more noise than usual, maybe. But those mules know a motor truck, and what they did was pure cussedness. They begun to rear and plunge in that deep cut. I was working my corn over in the field and shouted to the gasoline man to stop, but he didn't hear me. Claude jumped for the critters' heads and got 'em by the bits, but by that time he was all tangled up in the lines. Those damned mules lifted him off his feet and started to run. Down the draw and up the bank and across the fields they went, with that big plough-blade jumping three or four feet in the air every clip. I was sure it would cut one of the mules open, or go clean through Claude. It would have got him, too, if he hadn't kept his hold on the bits. They carried him right along, swinging in the air, and finally ran him into the barb-wire fence and cut his face and neck up." (120)

The plow and the mules picture the old, stable methods associated with more full and immediate contact with the land. In Cather's fiction modern machines limit that contact and diminish the values that go with it. The plow must be kept under man's control even though animals or machines provide the pulling power. Here the blade of the out-of-control plow becomes a weapon and a threat to the very life of the one who normally controls it. It belongs in the earth. And it is the gasoline-driven vehicle that wrecks havoc with the customary routine.

The pleasant images of plowing in *One of Ours* tend to be those planted in the memory in early years. One such image is from Ernest Havel:

> Ernest Havel was cultivating his bright, glistening young cornfield one summer morning, whistling to himself an old German song which was somehow connected with a picture that rose in his memory. It was a picture of the earliest ploughing he could remember.
>
> He saw a half-circle of green hills, with snow still lingering in the clefts of the higher ridges; behind the hills rose a wall of sharp mountains, covered with dark pine forests. In the meadows at the foot of that sweep of hills there was a winding creek, with polled willows in their first yellow-green, and brown fields. He himself was a little boy, playing by the creek and watching his father and mother plough with two great oxen, that had rope traces fastened to their heads and their long horns. His mother walked barefoot beside the oxen and led them; his father walked behind, guiding the plough. His father always looked down. His mother's face was almost as brown and furrowed as the fields, and her eyes were pale blue, like the skies of early spring. The two would go up and down thus all morning without speaking, except to the oxen. Ernest was the last of a long family, and as he played by the creek he used to wonder why his parents looked so old. (119)

Again the whistling and the plowing are brought together as if the plowing begets a happiness that must be given melodic expression. The association seems to be as old as stories of plowing. Why the association is made leads to speculation since, of course, an answer to the riddle is beyond proof. Is it born of a response to the life-giving powers of the soil? Is it because hope in the future is sustained by plowing and expecting harvest? Is it some mystical connection to mankind's kinship with the soil? Is it a response to activating one's five senses? Is it partly a joy from working alone yet together with the animal that draws the plow, with the natural world, and with all men and women of honest toil? Who is to say why whistling and plowing are so firmly associated? Singing can be sad or pensive, but whistling expresses a certain happiness and contentment. In addition to the

plowmen whistling, the larks often sing in literature as if in celebration of the farmer's activities.

When Ernest remembers his parents working together at plowing, he recalls the beauty of the surrounding landscape, but the description of the actual plowing is without emotion. All morning his father and mother repeated their motions at the plow, speaking to the animals but not to each other. Ernest's one reflection was to wonder why his parents looked so old. One may find that to be Cather's hint at the dehumanizing result of monotonous toil, or it may be a suggestion that this activity belongs to time immemorial. Both appear appropriate.

As Claude walks home from the train station, the landscape is again described by Cather in a manner that communicates happiness through personification and sensuous language:

> All over the dusty, tan-coloured wheatfields there was a tender mist of green,--millions of little fingers reaching up and waving lightly in the sun. To the north and south Claude could see the corn-planters, moving in straight lines over the brown acres where the earth had been harrowed so fine that it blew off in clouds of dust to the roadside. When a gust of wind rose, gay little twisters came across the open fields, corkscrews of powdered earth that whirled through the air and suddenly fell again. It seemed as if there were a lark on every fence post, singing for everything that was dumb; for the great ploughed lands, and the heavy horses in the rows, and the men guiding the horses. (105)

The silent ploughed land, the horses, the men--the lark sings for them all and for what appears to be the joy inherent in cultivation of the land.

The last of some twenty-one references in the novel to plows or plowing (always with the older "plough" spelling) comes in a dream Claude has after he has gained a sense of well being during the war in France.

> One night he dreamed that he was at home; out in the ploughed fields, where he could see nothing but the furrowed

> brown earth, stretching from horizon to horizon. Up and down it moved a boy, with a plough and two horses. At first he thought it was his brother Ralph; but on coming nearer, he saw it was himself,--and he was full of fear for this boy. Poor Claude, he would never, never get away; he was going to miss everything! While he was struggling to speak to Claude, and warn him, he awoke. (349-350)

The brief vignette of the endlessness of plowing makes a magificent psychological commentary. The sleeping Claude fears for the boy because he would "miss everything" in life if his horizons are filled with nothing but the "furrowed brown earth." Cather's happiest farmers are not so saddled with endless toil that they become drudges. Her ideal farmers have a life beyond the furrows, a life enriched by and not excluded by their attachment to the land. Part of Claude's sense of monotonous toil is caught in such statements as "The fall ploughing had begun *as usual*" (147. Italics mine.). Even as the clouds of European war gathered, the plowing must go on, for no matter what upsets war might bring, "they would need bread" (147). Plowing is the stable activity required to feed the world, an activity that flourishes in peace time but is just as essential in time of war.

Claude finds the stimulation at Erlichs and in his university classes that he hungers for but does not find in his work on the farm. When he visits the Erlichs again after some months on the farm, he tries to analyze his own feelings:

> The thing that hurt was the feeling of being out of it, of being lost in another kind of life in which ideas played but little part. He was a stranger who walked in and sat down here; but he belonged out in the big, lonely country, where people worked hard with their backs and got tired like the horses, and were too sleepy at night to think of anything to say. (73)

The depletion of energy because of the heavy farm labor left him impoverished mentally. The body worked but the mind and soul stagnated. At least that is the effect on Claude. He feels his life lacks the enrichment and ability others have acquired. When he listens to David play the violin, he muses:

> What would it mean to be able to do anything as well as that, to have a hand capable of delicacy and precision and power? If he had been taught to do anything at all, he would not be sitting here tonight a wooden things amongst living people. He felt that a man might have been made of him, but nobody had taken the trouble to do it; tongue-tied, foot-tied, hand-tied. (355-356)

This is not to say that Claude is detached from the land. But he wants both farm values and city culture. Once in Denver "he had that feeling of loneliness which often overtakes country boys in a city; the feeling of being unrelated to anything, of not mattering to anybody" (103). He sees a greater likelihood of bringing the two sets of values together in France than in his own country, and he dreams of buying a little farm in France after the war and staying there the rest of his life.

> There was no chance for the kind of life he wanted at home where people were always buying and selling, building and pulling down. He had begun to believe that the Americans were a people of shallow emotions. That was the way Gerhardt had put it once; and if it was true, there was no cure for it. Life was so short that it meant nothing at all unless it were continually reinforced by something that endured; unless the shadows of individual existence came and went against a background that held together. (345)

In America he did not sense the continuity that he found in the Old World. People were too rootless and valued the new at the cost of the old. But even in France, it is the idea of a farm that draws him, not a butcher shop nor a carpenter shop.

In spite of Claude's early restlessness with being left in charge of the family farm, the sense of belonging is strong for him. When he returned from military training, "he had the pleasant feeling of being at home, on his father's land. Why was it so gratifying to be able to say 'our hill,' and 'our creek down yonder'? to feel the crunch of this particular dried mud under his boots?" (215). The following day on his way to the Yoeders he mulls over his feelings toward the countryside:

> As he walked on alone, Claude was thinking how this country that had once seemed little and dull to him, now seemed large and rich in variety. During the months in camp he had been wholly absorbed in new work and new friendships, and now his own neighbourhood came to him with the freshness of things that have been forgotten for a long while,--came together before his eyes as a harmonious whole. He was going away, and he would carry the whole countryside in his mind, meaning more to him than it ever had before. (218-219)

His short absence has already changed his perception of his own *patria*. For the first time he is able to sense the harmony and the wholeness and to internalize it as his own.

Claude's feeling for the land fluctuates, for he has never actually given his heart to it. Early in the novel, his hired man Dan tells him that the fields Claude farms "will always lay betwixt you and trouble" (70). Claude mused a good while on what Dan said, for he had already begun to feel it was not right that his family should own so much land. "It was strange that in all the centuries the world had been going, the question of property had not been better adjusted. The people who had it were slaves to it, and the people who didn't have it were slaves to them" (71). Crevecoeur and Jefferson and Cooper do not work with ideas like these. But Cather, with her special ability to combine realistic views with romantic ideals, does. People will be slaves either with or without property. Some may be able, however, to choose their taskmaster.

Claude discovered in the war what he had never found for himself on the farm. And that is the feeling of having a purpose for his life (266). Ideas had more power to move him and give him a sense of purpose than the *things* in a farmer's life even though it is clear from his dream of owning his own farm in France, he would like to combine the abstract world of thought and ideals he associates with the Old World with the tangible, practical, earth-bound life on the land. The sound

of the guns in battle seem to say to him "that men could still die for an idea; and would burn all they had made to keep their dreams. . . . Ideals were not archaic things, beautiful and impotent; they were the real sources of power among men" (357).

A few other allusions to plowing complete the picture in *One of Ours*. Mrs. Voigt, who runs a restaurant in Frankfort, recalls the cows in Germany that "'drew a plough all day and yet gave as much milk at night as if they had been browsing in a pasture'" (211-212). The metaphoric dimension of "drew" gives the suggestion that the furrows of the plow possess an artistic dimension. If a plow is drawn across the land, the effect should be beauty, not ugliness. Cultivation of the land as an art reflects ideas as old as Virgil's *Georgics*.

Three other times the verb *plow* or *plowing* is used metaphorically, twice in connection with driving a car through muddy roads: "ploughing through puddles" and "ploughing up the other side of the hill" (116, 117). The idea of plowing through something indicates the difficulty of getting through and a manner of getting through that is without finesse or delicacy. The accomplishment lies in the fact of getting *through* a thing, not getting stuck. A third metaphoric use is in reference to Mr. Royce's watching "the wind plough soft, flowery roads in the field" (130). The wind's plowing lies in its ability to push aside the surface of the soil and leave a trace as evidence of its passage. The marking ability of the plow is the tenor of the metaphor.

Two passages in the novel make it clear that after Claude takes over the management of the farm, he tries to lose his discontent by plowing and laboring in the fields:

> The new field he ploughed and drilled himself. He put a great deal of young energy into it, and buried a great deal of discontent in its dark furrows. Day after day he flung himself upon the land

> and planted it with what was fermenting in him, glad to be so tired at night that he could not think. (69)

This is a familiar pattern in Cather's fiction. As Claude recovers from his accident with the run-away mules, he muses on how his inner life is different when he is able to lose himself in his work. Then he is master. But when he has time to dwell on his thoughts, he is "overtaken by himself." The physical exertion gives him mastery over things, but when there is no work, he is the victim of his feelings. In fact, Claude dreads "the inactivity of winter, to which the farmer usually looks forward with pleasure" (71).

Because of the drought, a failed crop of winter wheat is plowed up in order to plant corn (203). Claude notices the abundance of corn when he comes home from military training on the train. In spite of his rebellion against what he felt to be the stagnation of a farmer's life, he comes back to the countryside with obvious feelings of tenderness for the land and the farmers:

> The country that rushed by him on each side of the track was more interesting to his trained eye than the pages of any book. He was glad to be going through it at harvest,--the season when it is most itself. He noted that there was more corn than usual,--much of the winter wheat had been weather-killed, and the fields were ploughed up in the spring and replanted in maize. The pastures were already burned brown, the alfalfa was coming green again after its first cutting. Binders and harvesters were abroad in the wheat and oats, gathering the soft-breathing billows of grain into wide, subduing arms. When the train slowed down for a trestle in a wheat field, harvesters in blue shirts and overalls and wide straw hats stopped working to wave at the passengers.
>
> Claude turned to the old man in the opposite seat. "When I see those fellows, I feel as if I'd waked up in the wrong clothes."
>
> His neighbour looked pleased and smiled. "That the kind of uniform you're accustomed to?"
>
> "I surely never wore anything else in the month of July," Claude admitted. "When I find myself riding along in a train, in the middle of harvest, trying to learn French verbs, then I know the world is turned upside down, for a fact!" (209)

The "wrong clothes"--his uniform--seem so out of place in July harvest time that Claude knows "the world is turned upside down." The seasons that regulate plowing and harvesting have nothing in common with the seasons of war. When Claude comes home from school for the holidays on an earlier occasion, the reader can sense a similar pleasure simply in the renewed sight of the farmsteads:

> After his freight train got under steam he did not open his books again, but sat looking out at the grey homesteads as they unrolled before him, with their stripped, dry cornfields, and the great ploughed stretches where the winter wheat was asleep. A starry sprinkling of snow lay like hoar-frost along the crumbly ridges between the furrows. (33)

Personifying the plowed fields as beds where the winter wheat sleeps creates an image of softness and protection and silence. The dormant, "sleeping" wheat will sprout into life in due season.

Anytime something interferes with the naturalness of seasonal things, some degree of violence seems to be present. One day five-year-old Claude went to the orchard with his mother to pick cherries--after she had complained to Mr. Wheeler that the fruit was too high to reach. "The ground had been ploughed that spring to make it hold moisture, and Claude was running happily along in one of the furrows, when he looked up and beheld a sight he could never forget." His father had sawed off the beautiful tree full of fruit. "It lay on the ground beside its bleeding stump" (26). This is also one of the few allusions to plowing in Cather's work when the benefit to the soil is explicitly stated: "to make it hold moisture." One of the mysteries of the soil is that cultivated land conserves moisture better than uncultivated land--a truth familiar to every backyard gardener.

Claude's "first innovation" in the seasonal routine of crops met with disapproval. As soon as the corn was harvested, "he would plough up the ground" and plant it into wheat (68). The plowing is normally done in a seasonal context

which his family and neighbors felt he violated. The farmers tend to regard innovation in such matters as deviation from long-approved practice, practice that has been accepted as being the *right* time to plow. Sometimes, of course, this leads to mindless routine and unwise practices.

Cather repeatedly recognizes the need for both industry and intelligent imagination in order to become a "successful" farmer (205). The "ploughing for winter wheat" is recognized as "a hard day's work" (67). Intelligence and knowledge are required to know when to plow and even what plow to use. The author says that Bayliss has a "plough catalogue" in his general store (10). When imagination is not coupled with a practical industriousness, the result is far from what men consider success. "There were people, even in Frankfort, who had imaginative and generous impulses, but they were all, she had to admit, inefficient--failures" (135).

Cultivation of the soil is a means of self-discovery in Cather's work. As the plow uncovers and breaks into the secrets of the earth, so men and women discover some of the springs of their own actions through honest labor wrought in harmony with nature. From the natural world the plowman learns lessons of simplicity, integrity, stability and the like. He must come to terms with the cycles of life, death and rebirth. Janus-faced nature is both friend and foe. One is able to find himself in the discovery of his relationships--his bonds to the earth and to nature as well as his bonds to family and friends and to the larger world. Bonding to the earth through care of the soil can be a source of strength and fulfillment or it can be the reason for narrowing one's horizons to physical accomplishments. The work of plowing must go on--in war or peace, in prosperity or poverty, in health or illness.

The tension of ambivalence strengthens the impact of the plow images in Cather. Romantic idealization of the plowman-farmer's life is reserved for moments of nostalgia in the lives of her characters. It never obscures the overall realism. The plow is an image of change. It breaks and cuts and kills and buries. Plowed land can never again be virgin soil. And for every gain that plowing brings, some loss is suffered. Ambivalence is, therefore, inevitable when the author values both what is gained and what is lost. The plow is the instrument or weapon that subdues the "wild" prairie. It is an image of mastery as well as an image of change. The plow suggests order, dominion, and control whereas the natural state of the land incorporates both the order and the chaos of nature.

The plow in Cather's novels connects mankind to the earth and thereby to the history of the race as well as to the future. It is an image of civilization and of culture. And it is an image of labor. Plowing again is used as a means of measuring a person's worth. It is lonesome work, for the plowman generally labors silently and alone.

Cather's successful plowman must possess both physical strength for the labor and imagination. She makes more of the necessity for the plowman to be a dreamer than most other writers do. As the plow is a forward-pointing instrument, so the plowman needs the ability to envision the future, to imagine the changes that cultivation of the soil can bring about. That same imagination can make the plowman-farmer a happier person as he lives in anticipation of the future and as he learns to enjoy the idea of things, not just the things themselves. It is this quality of mind that leads to the frequent association of plowman and poet.



Thomas Hart Benton. *Planting* Also titled *Spring Plowing* (cropped). 1939. Lithograph, 12 1/2 x 10". Circulated by Associated American Artists, New York City.

Chapter 12

Hamlin Garland

A lovely task it is to plow!
All day the black and shining soil
Rolls like a ribbon from the mold-board's
Glistening curve. All day the horses toil,
Battling with savage flies, and strain
Their creaking single-trees. All day
The crickets peer from wind-blown stacks of grain.
Garland in *A Son of the Middle Border,* 153

The passage of the Homestead Act in 1862 opened the Great Plains to settlement by the industrially oppressed and the agriculturally dissatisfied. The act allowed any adult citizen (or alien who had filed his initial papers for citizenship) upon payment of a ten-dollar fee, to claim 160 acres of public land. He could secure the final title to it after five years of residence and cultivation. In spite of the fact that much of the land fell into the hands of speculators or the railroads, "[i]n the thirty years from 1870 to 1900 the westering American settled and improved more land than had his predecessors in the two and one-half centuries since the founding of Jamestown" (Steensma 31).

From this tide of western migration, one might expect a large body of frontier fiction or fiction in which the settling of the land is paramount. But only a limited amount of enduring frontier fiction has emerged. Early photographic realism is found in several of the Middle West farm writers. This surface realism can be seen in Edward Eggleston (1837-1902) of Indiana, Joseph Kirkland (1830-94) of Illinois, E. W. Howe (1853-1937) of Kansas, Harold Frederic (1856-98) of New York, and others. It remained for writers such as Hamlin Garland (1860-1940) of

Wisconsin to develop a higher realism in his treatment of the homesteader. Without sacrificing the authencity of the particular, his realism touched universal chords. Pessimism and bitterness became a dominant note in much of the realistic frontier fiction of the late nineteenth century. Garland is one of the pioneers in the shift from a romantic to a realistic view of the homesteader. It is his realistic works that have lasted. His reputation as a realist is based on his treatment of frontier life on the Middle Border (the Midwestern states of Wisconsin, Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, and the Dakotas). Although in mid-career Garland turned to more romantic materials drawn from exploration of the West, he returned in his autobiographical work to the Middle Border pictures of brutalizing life on the farm. He is one of the early debunkers of the idea of rural utopia and, as such, is a forerunner of Sherwood Anderson and Edgar Lee Masters. Garland's work is contemporary with that of Cather and Rolvaag, but they maintained a more optimistic spirit--though well-seasoned with realism--than can be found in Garland.

In his literary manifesto, *Crumbling Idols* (1894), Garland refines his ideas on realism and presents his theory as "veritism"--the faithful recording of *truth* rather than mere fact. The recording of truth encompasses the writer's subjective response to a set of apparent facts. This theory of literary impressionism set the stage for his treatment of the Middle Border.

Garland's work falls into three fairly distinct periods. Leaving the oppressive labor of farm life in Iowa and South Dakota, he went to Boston to study. Upon his return to the farmland of the Middle Border, he chose to draw on his own first-hand experience and to write of the hardships of the farmer. His collection of eleven short stories in *Main-Travelled Roads* (1891) is representative of his best work in the 90s. Two lesser-known works deal with similar themes: *Prairie Folks*

(1893), another collection of short stories, and *Rose of Dutcher's Coolly* (1895), a novel. In the next phase of his career in the early twentieth century, Garland turned away from the realism of farm life and drew inspiration from the Colorado Rockies and the Far West. His romanticized pictures of the West use the conventions of popular western fiction--sentimental situations and stereotyped characters. After about seventeen years of writing western romance, Garland returned to realism with his autobiographical Middle Border tetralogy. In 1922 the second in the series, *A Daughter of the Middle Border*, won the Pulitzer Prize for Biography and Autobiography.

Garland is remembered more for what he accomplished as a writer of short stories and autobiography than as a novelist, and his best-known works are located on the farming frontier. References to the plow and plowing are almost totally limited to *Main-Travelled Roads* and *A Son of the Middle Border*. To what extent is Garland's disillusionment with life of the Middle Border reflected in his images of the plow? Is his pessimism an isolated, personal reaction or is it representative of his time and place? To try to answer these and related questions, consider first the short fiction in *Main-Travelled Roads*.

Only two references to the plow occur in the first story, "A Branch Road." An allusion to the wagons of "the ploughmen or threshers" (7) implies the versatility of the farmers and their involvement in the whole crop cycle from plowing to threshing. The other reference is to the little deserted farm Dingman had owned. The description, including the fact that the garden was plowed up (30), portrays loss, ruin, and sadness. The destructive aspect of the plow's work is foremost.

An early mention of plowing in "Up the Coolly" gives the idea of plowing as a kind of norm--if Grant is doing the plowing, he must be all right (48). As Howard

and McTurg see plowmen at work in the fields, it confirms the sense of prosperity and normalcy. The plowmen are equated with "the workmen in the fields" (49).

Frustrated by his brother's coldness, Howard retires to his room and imagines a landscape painting "by a master greater than Millet, a melancholy subject treated with pitiless fidelity" (58). In it a ragged plowman struggles against the weather. Later in the story Howard thinks of a sentence Millet once wrote:

> "I see very well the aureole of the dandelions, and the sun also, far down there behind the hills, flinging his glory upon the clouds. But not alone that--I see in the plains the smoke of the tired horses at the plough, or, on a stony-hearted spot of ground, a back-broken man trying to raise himself upright for a moment to breathe. The tragedy is surrounded by glories--that is no invention of mine." (80-81)

These two rather unusual references to Millet capture the main thrust of the story. In the first one the idea of "following a plough" suggests a dogged sort of perserverance in the face of great personal discomfort. To follow the plow is to put one's own comfort aside. In the quotation from Millet, the back-breaking toil of plowing the stony-hearted ground is tragic because the plowman can scarcely raise himself upright to breathe. But this human loss takes place in the midst of the glories of nature. The glory of the natural world does not diminish the human tragedy. In Garland's work these co-exist, unreconciled. He is ever mindful of the charm of the natural world and its power to hold the allegiance of a person's heart as well as being mindful of the bleakness of the lives of many who attempt to earn their livelihood from the soil.

One other dimension of the plow image is emphasized in "Up the Coolly," and that has to do with the relative cost of the clothes Grant and Howard wear (62, 85-86). The plowman brother mocks the idea of wearing expensive clothes for corn plowing. Clothes suggest a way of life to Grant who sees himself and his fellow

farmers in their two-dollar outfits while people like Howard "lay around New York and smoke and wear good clothes and toady to millionaires" (62). Howard sees that he "was going to town to school while you [Grant] were ploughing and husking corn" (85). He says he thought of Grant when he put on his own best suit on Mondays while Grant "in overalls and an old 'wammus' was going out into the field to plough, or husk corn in the mud" (86). The one who plows is not only deprived of school but is also expected to engage in hard, lonely physical labor without even the comfort of pleasant clothing. Coarse clothing is part of the plowman image.

"Among the Corn-Rows" opens with Seagraves watching Rob make biscuits. Rob's concern is to be a successful homesteader, and he tells Seagraves that he couldn't do the work of breaking if he didn't eat well. He says the "bulls pull the plough through two acres a day" (88). Rob is struck with the beauty of the afternoon scene on this day in late June instead of being taken up with the concerns of being a homesteader. For him the sights and sounds have the insubstantial quality of a vision:

> [T]he level plain was green and yellow, and infinite in reach as the sea; the lowering sun was casting over its distant swells a faint impalpable mist, through which the breaking teams on the neighboring claims ploughed noiselessly, as figures in a dream. (89)

The plowing is such a common activity that it is suited to Rob's dream-like perception. The sights and sounds of idealized rural life would be imcomplete without the plows at work.

Hints of conflict between the real work of plowing and the idealized landscape are present. When Rob calls Seagraves in to eat, Seagraves wants one more look at the landscape, but Rob objects: "'Landscape be blessed! If you'd been

breakin' all day--'" (90). In their conversation Rob confesses that "'It ain't much fun to break all day, and then go to work an' cook y'r own supper'" (91).

Rob takes personal pride in sizing up the situation of the homesteader: "'The fact is, we fellers holdin' down claims out here ain't fools clear to the *rine*'" (91). He goes on to explain the economic situation that caused him to leave Waupac County. A man had to have capital to invest to get started there, and the common laborers were looked down on. He said "'we fellers workin' out back there got more 'n' more like *hands*, an' less like human beings'" (92). Seagraves thinks Rob has voiced a modern idea of the overthrow of "nobility and special privilege born of the feudal past." If the homesteader can break his own ground, he will not be reduced to "hands"--just an economic force. So the independent plowman creates an image of a whole, thinking person, a realist not crowded out by economic forces he doesn't control.

Julia, the object of Rob's search for a wife, is described at work plowing corn on a sultry day in July: "Julia Peterson, faint with hunger, was toiling back and forth between the corn-rows, holding the handles of the double-shovel corn-plough, while her little brother Otto rode the steaming horse" (97). Further description of her discomfort follows. The reason for her labor in the fields is her father's unwillingness to hire help.

> Across the field, in another patch of corn, she could see her father--a big, gruff-voiced, wide-bearded Norwegian--at work also with a plough. The corn must be ploughed, and so she toiled on, the tears dropping from the shadow of the ugly sunbonnet she wore. (98)

Several passages fix firmly in mind Julia's discomfort and her dislike of field work. For Julia, Rob's marriage proposal is an escape from the misery of labor in the fields. She risks marriage because she has found plowing the fields to be intolerable. Nothing relieves the grim bleakness of forced labor at the plow in

this story. But Rob's strength and his independent, hopeful, buoyant spirit make the plowing tolerable for him. He can envision some rewards for his labor; she can't.

Tilling the soil is presented in terms of war metaphor in "The Return of the Private." Edward Smith threw down his earth-keeping tools and volunteered to become "a blue-coated cog in a vast machine for killing men, not thistles" (120). When the war is over Garland writes that Smith's "fight with nature and the injustice of his fellowmen, was begun again" (129). To raise profitable crops demands that the enemies of the crops be killed off, and the plow is one of the weapons used to this end.

"Under the Lion's Paw" opens with images of determined plowmen whistling at their work, undetered by the weather. The opening paragraphs blend bleak realism with a sense of pleasure in the sights and sounds and with a spirit of hopefulness in the activity of plowing itself:

> It was the last of autumn and the first day of winter coming together. All day long the ploughmen on their prairie farms had moved to and fro in their wide level fields through the falling snow, which melted as it fell, wetting them to the skin--all day notwithstanding the frequent squalls of snow, the dripping, desolate clouds, and the muck of the furrows, black and tenacious as tar.
>
> Under their dripping harness the horses swung to and fro silently, with that marvellous uncomplaining patience wich marks the horse. All day the wild geese, honking wildly, as they sprawled sidewise down the wind, seemed to be fleeing from an enemy behind, and with neck outthrust and wings extended, sailed down the wind, soon lost to sight.
>
> Yet the ploughman behind his plough, though the snow lay on his ragged great-coat, and the cold clinging mud rose on his heavy boots, fettering him like gyves, whistled in the very beard of the gale. As day passed, the snow, ceasing to melt, lay along the ploughed land, and lodged in the depth of the stubble, till on each slow round the last furrow stood out black and shining as jet between the ploughed land and the gray stubble.

> When night began to fall, and the geese, flying low, began to alight invisibly in the near corn-field, Stephen Council was still at work "finishing a land." He rode on his sulky plough when going with the wind, but walked when facing it. Sitting bent and cold but cheery under his slouch hat, he talked encouragingly to his four-in-hand. (130)

The cheerfulness of the plowman at work on his own land lays the foundation for this story in which the man who feels he is working to improve his own lot and that of his family can endure enormous labor. "No slave in Roman galleys could have toiled so frightfully and lived, for this man thought himself a free man, and that he was working for his wife and babes" (140). When Butler demands double the original price of the farm, images of the "terrible toil" of the last year pass through Haskins' mind. He sees himself "walking again in the rain and the mud behind his plough" (143). The plowing image bespeaks the "terrible toil."

Not only is the image in this story one of labor and labor made endurable by hope of prosperity and ownership, but the plowing seems to be an ever-present task and a measure of keeping up with the demands of farming (135). When Council responds to Butler's question as to how things are going, he says, "'Tight squeak if I get m' ploughin' done'" (136). Butler says his own plowing isn't half done (136). The fact that Haskins gets his garden plowed and planted indicates that things are going well for him.

The last story in *Main-Travelled Roads* that makes any significant reference to plowing is "God's Ravens," and here the image is overlaid with nostalgia to begin with. "To these people [like Robert Bloom] the wind comes from the wide unending spaces of the pairie west. They can smell the strange thrilling odor of newly uncovered sod and moist brown ploughed lands" (197). No wonder it is to them "like the opening door of a prison" (197). The story traces Bloom's

changing relationship to the farm country where he was raised. First his nostalgia is shattered as he comes to grips with the narrowness of the lives of the village folk. "They've saved and pinched and toiled till their souls are pinched and ground away" (207). Then that disappointment is transformed into trust and respect upon Bloom's recognition of his neighbors' care for him.

None of these associations with the image of plowing in *Main-Travelled Roads* is strikingly new. The strongest emphasis seems to be on the labor of the plowing. The risk of dehumanizing effects from that labor are minimized when one owns his own land and prospers on it. But hard work and honesty do not guarantee prosperity--as seen in Grant's case in "Up the Coolly."

References to the plow occur with remarkable frequency in *A Son of the Middle Border,* the autobiographical account of Garland's youth. Here he adopts the "plow' spelling instead of the "plough" of the short stories. The most persistent association with the plow image in this book seems to be that of change. The land is never the same after the "breaking." The plow is the instrument that makes possible the settlement of frontier lands. And it is the destroyer of the wildness of the prairies. So although much is gained economically and socially in man's subduing the land to his needs by means of the plow, much naturalness is lost forever. The plow is the primary instrument of that change.

When Garland reminisces about his youthful experiences and impressions, he acknowledges that those times can never come again "till the coulee meadows bloom again unscarred of spade or plow" 967). The naturalness of the prairie has been irrevocably scarred by the plow. Scarring results from a wound and is a visual reminder of damage. Upon the family's arrival on the Iowa homestead, Garland writes of feeling "the poetry of the unplowed spaces" (82). He is conscious of the wild things that either die or hurry away from the inroads of

the plow, and he refers to this as a regrettable tragedy (105). Civilization comes with the plow and entails the development of a social and economic order. The gain and loss of the change that the plow brings is summed up in chapter ten:

> I confess that as I saw the tender plants and shining flowers bow beneath the remorseless beam, civilization seemed a sad business, and yet there was something epic, something large-gestured and splendid in the "breaking" season. Smooth, glossy, almost unwrinkled the thick ribbon of jet-black sod rose upon the share and rolled away from the mold-board's glistening curve to tuck itself upside down into the furrow behind the horse's heels, and the picture which my uncle made, gave me pleasure in spite of the sad changes he was making. (104)

Garland writes of the "plow's inexorable progress" toward the badger's den (104). "[R]od by rod, the steady steel rolled the grass and hazel brush under" (105). The changes the plow brings, both good and bad, cannot be avoided or diverted. The plow is a forward-looking image. It shapes the future of the land and life of the plowman. Garland continues to describe the change:

> At last the wide "quarter section" lay upturned, black to the sun and the garden that had bloomed and fruited for millions of years, waiting for man, lay torn and ravaged. The tender plants, the sweet flowers, the fragrant fruits, the busy insects, all the swarming lives which had been native here for untold centuries were utterly destroyed. It was sad and yet it was not all loss, even to my thinking, for I realized that over this desolation the green wheat would wave and the corn silks shed their pollen. It was not precisely the romantic valley of our song, but it was a rich and promiseful plot and my father seemed entirely content. (105)

In this chapter the action of the plow is described as tearing, as "remorseless," and as "ripping and snarling." These are words that describe the spirit of action toward one's enemies. The plow is the enemy of the natural life of the prairie. The civilization made possible by the plow is tinged with sadness because of what is irretrievably lost in the process of changing the face of the land.

The effort required to break the sod is likened to the effort of combating one's enemies, and the image of the plow is that of the weapon used in the struggle:

> The land was not all clear prairie and every ounce of David's great strength was required to guide that eighteen-inch plow as it went ripping and snarling through the matted roots of the hazel thickets, and sometimes my father came and sat on the beam in order to hold the coulter to its work, while the giant driver braced himself to the shock and the four horses strained desperately at their traces. These contests had the quality of a wrestling match but the men always won. (104)

Something of the grandeur of this epic struggle with the land satisfies the stout-hearted plowman. Courage and optimism are essential. And as the settlement increases, so does the plowing. "Day by day the settlement thickened. Section by section the prairie was blackened by the plow" (144). A second reference to the plow as "inexorable" is found in Chapter 25. It again alludes to the sadness associated with the changes the plow brings:

> It seemed a true invasion, this taking possession of the virgin sod, but as I considered, there was a haunting sadness in it, for these shining pine pennons represented the inexorable plow. They prophesied the death of all wild creatures and assured the devastation of the beautiful, and destruction of all the signs and seasons of the sod. (303)

Throughout the book the term "breaking" is used frequently in reference to the first plowing of virgin land. A whole established web of life is being broken up by the plow. It is a harsh term, suited to combative action. Destroying the "signs and seasons of the sod" implies that the crops which replace the sod are, in a sense, unnatural and therefore will be dependent upon the care of the one who has planted them.

Another association with plowing in *A Son of the Middle Border* is the use of plowing as a measure of manhood. When Garland's father told him he would

have to run the plow-team one fall, Garland's initial response was to feel grown up:

> This seemed a fine commission for a lad of ten, and I drove my horses into the field that first morning with a manly pride which added an inch to my stature. I took my initial "round" at a "land" which stretched from one side of the quarter section to the other, in confident mood. I was grown up! (86)

When a neighbor told Garland's father that the boy was too young to run a plow, Garland was "pleased and flattered" (86). Later he is pleased that the new boots his father bought for him did not have copper toes which "belonged to little boys." "A youth who had plowed seventy acres could not reasonably be expected to dress like a child" (92). Garland writes of having walked behind his plow for seventy days on the new farm and reminds his readers that it was lonely work for a boy of eleven (109). He goes on to picture the difficulty of a young boy kicking the turf free from the coulter when he cross-cuts with the plow. The implication in these accounts is that plowing is really a man's job. When Garland goes to work as a corn-husker, his younger brother "was promoted to the plow," suggesting that he had moved up to a man's job (153).

Garland's description of the plowing process reinforces the association of manly strength and endurance with plowing:

> To guide a team for a few minutes as an experiment was one thing--to plow all day like a hired hand was another. It was not a chore, it was a job. It meant . . . trudging eight or nine miles in the forenoon and as many more in the afternoon, with less than an hour off at noon. It meant dragging the heavy implement around the corners, and it meant also many shipwrecks, for the thick, wet stubble matted with wild buckwheat often rolled up between the coulter and the standard and threw the share completely out of the ground, making it necessary for me to halt the team and jerk the heavy plow backward for a new start.
>
> Although strong and active I was rather short, even for a ten-year-old, and to reach the plow handles I was obliged to lift my hands above my shoulders; and so with the guiding lines

> crossed over my back and my worn straw hat bobbing just above the cross-brace I must have made a comical figure. (86)

Garland writes of the tedium and of difficulties with the horses before summing up the experience in these words:

> The soil was the kind my father had been seeking, a smooth dark sandy loam, which made it possible for a lad to do the work of a man. Often the share would go the entire "round" without striking a root or a pebble as big as a walnut, the steel running steadily with a crisp craunching ripping sound which I rather liked to hear. In truth work would have been quite tolerable had it not been so long drawn out. Ten hours of it even on a fine day made about twice too many for a boy. (87)

Always the plow is an image of labor and loneliness. Garland's father grew to resent "the stumps and ridges which interrupted his plow" (42), and the reader is told that he toiled with "unremitting severity" in his "horse-killing fields." Plowing is referred to as "the dreaded task" (153) in which they drove their teams into the field, "there to plod round and round in solitary course" (153). To plow is to move "to and fro hour after hour, day after day, with no one to talk to but the horses" (86). In Chapter 16 tilling the soil is called a back-breaking job (173).

The enjoyment of nature is also part of the plowman's experience and is sometimes a compensation for the monotonous, laborious routine. Referring to the poetry of plowing hints at the rhythm and beauty of the whole experience and acknowledges an aesthetic dimension in the plowing.

> Each spring when the smell of fresh, uncovered earth returned to fret my nostrils I thought of the wide fields of Iowa, of the level plains of Dakota, and a desire to hear once more the prairie chicken calling from the ridges filled my heart. In the autumn when the wind swept through the bare branches of the elm, I thought of the lonely days of plowing on the prairie, and the poetry and significance of those wild gray days came over me with such power that I instinctively seized my pen to write of them. (350)

A similar idea is expressed at the end of Chapter15. Not only is the enjoyment of nature associated with the plow image, but the plowman is portrayed as aesthetically alive and capable of appreciating the sensuously satisfying experiences associated with the plowing. The hard toil has not robbed the plowman of these capabilities that belong to the whole person:

> Nature was our compensation. As I look back upon it, I perceive transcendent sunsets, and a mighty sweep of golden grain beneath a sea of crimson clouds. The light and song and motion of the prairie return to me. I hear again the shrill, myriad-voiced choir of leaping insects whose wings flash fire amid the glorified stubble. The wind wanders by, lifting my torn hat-rim. The locusts rise in clouds before my weary feet. The prairie hen soars out of the unreaped barley and drops into the sheltering deeps of the tangled oats, green as emerald. The lone quail pipes in the hazel thicket, and far up the road the cowbell's steady clang tells of the home-coming herd.
>
> Even in our hours of toil, and through the sultry skies, the sacred light of beauty broke; worn and grimed as we were, we still could fall a-dream before the marvel of a golden earth beneath a crimson sky. (172)

Several passages reinforce the idea that the act of plowing brings an intimacy with the land. Garland writes: "I knew every foot of this farm. I had traversed it scores of times in every direction, following the plow, the harrow, or the seeder. With a great lumber wagon at my side I had husked corn from every acre of it" (239).

The suggestion that plowing gives one a chance to exercise his mind and feelings and senses is significant in Garland's portrayal of the plowman. He refers to the prairie fires when he writes "I had a good deal of time to meditate upon this for I was again the plow-boy" (108). He also writes of going about with a copy of Shakespeare in his pocket and ranting "the immortal soliloquies of *Hamlet* and *Richard*" as he holds the plow, feeling certain that he "was following in the footprints of Lincoln and Demosthenes" (207). Near the end of the book Garland

makes the conclusive statement that the "pen had proved itself to be mightier than the plow" (464). Even though the plow allowed for mental activity, he could not give first allegiance to both physical and mental toil. But the physical toil did not destroy his mental and aesthetic hunger. In fact, it would seem to have sharpened it.

In Garland's use of the plowing image, it is not the labor or loneliness that breaks the human spirit so much as the exploitation practiced by the landlords and the rich. It is that which leads to the poverty and ugliness of life on the Middle Border (367). Garland writes often of the bleakness of life on the frontier, but the bleakness is not necessarily tied to the plowing image. Ownership ameliorates the hardship of plowing. Garland writes on one occasion that they "worked in a glow of satisfied ownership" (105).

The plow is representative of the whole business of farming. In the ballad about western emigration, the husband's unrest is seen in the fact that he had neglected his plow (44).

The incompatability of war and farming is reinforced with the statement that Garland's father "marched and fought while his plow rusted in the shed" (7). The plow suggests peace and a settled stability.

The tedium associated with plowing has been mentioned already, especially as experienced by a young boy. "[T]he slow progress of the fall's plowing" (50) is a recurring element in Garland's work. Plowing is one phase in the orderly cycle of annual farming tasks that must be repeated year after year (162).

Plowing leads to fencing the land--a mark of ownership and property rights that accompanies permanent settlement. Plowing is associated with on-going care of the land as well as with initially subduing it to the plowman's design. It

implies a commitment on the part of the plowman. Plowing establishes a relationship and a commitment to the land.

The plow demands cooperation between man and beast, as has been see elsewhere. Garland includes an incident when that cooperation is missing and the team becomes frightened of him. As a result, they "ran away with the plow, leaving an erratic furrow to be explained" (187). Cooperation is assumed in the image.

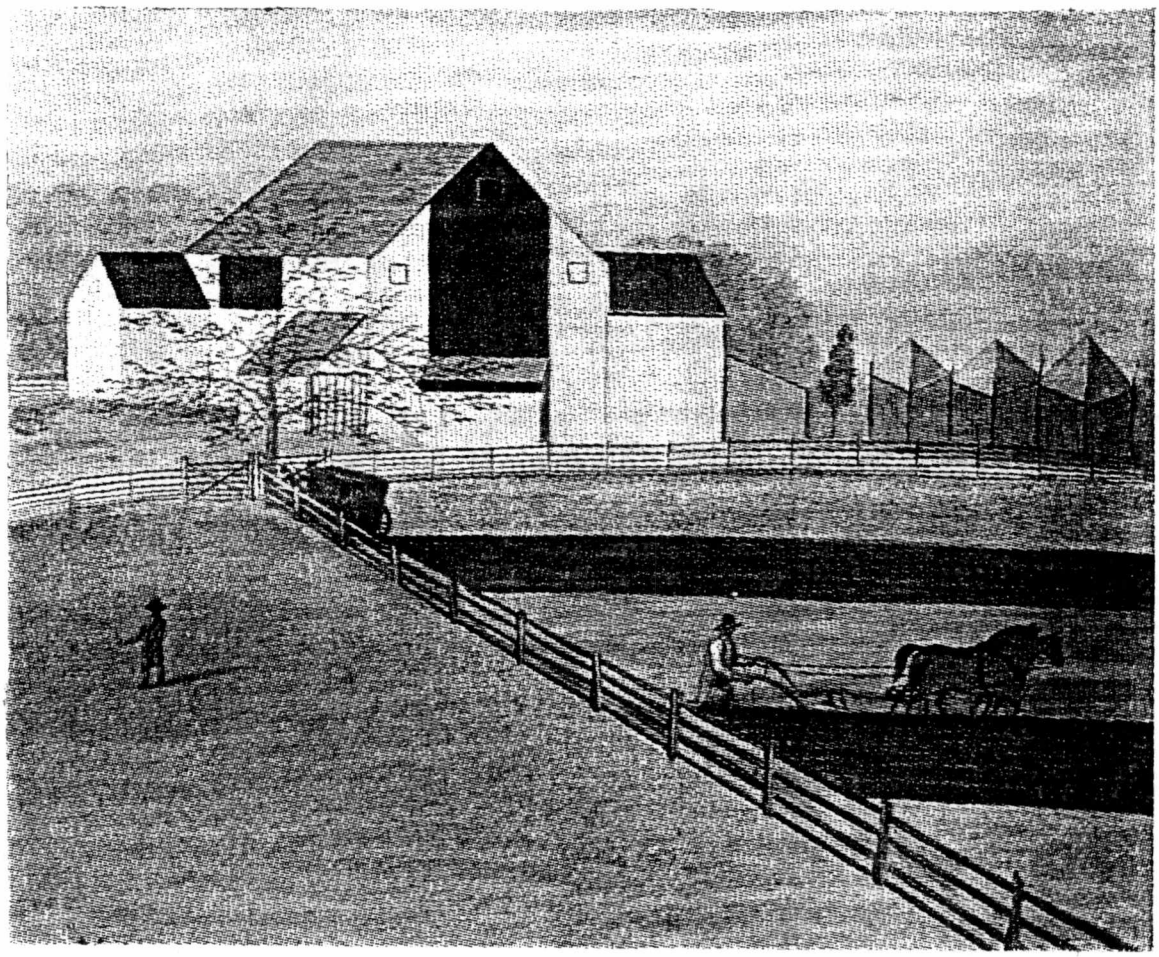
Garland acknowledges the security the plowman feels in the familiarity of plowed lands. When he says he dares not go to Chicago, he gives as his reason the fact that he "felt safe only when in sight of a plowed field" (261).

Numerous other casual references to the plow appear on the pages of *A Son of the Middle Border,* but they do not seem significant in defining the image of the plow or the plowman. The fact of change remains the most significant association with the plow in this book.

The sequel, *A Daughter of the Middle Border,* traces Garland's life from early manhood into middle age. During these years he is more removed from the Middle Border, and consequently relatively few allusions are made to the plow.

One allusion to the fact that a trail led them "beyond the plow and the wagon wheel" (37) suggests the plow as a symbol of civilization, a familiar association. A similar connection is made when Garland writes: "All was magnificently primeval. No mark of plow or spade, no planted stake or post assailed our eyes. We were deep in the land of the bison at last" (40-41). He calls attention to the charm of "a land untouched by the white man's plow" (149). And he writes of one who leads his band "in settlement among the plowmen" (150). Plowing is inseparably joined to a settled way of life. While in conference with a group of Indians, Garland says he "forgot the plow" (166). That is, he momentarily

forgot about the settled way of agricultural life that brought conflict with the Indians. Two references to the "rifleman behind the plow" (214, 215) suggest that the plowman will kill if necessary to preserve his way of life. Garland is keenly aware that the customs of the mountaineer are about to pass, "precisely as the blossoming prairies had long since been broken and fenced and made commonplace by the plow" (288). Virtually all these references support the plow as a symbol of civilization and a settled way of life.



Edward Hicks. *The Cornell Farm* (detail). 1848. Oil on canvas, 36 3/4 x 49". National Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C. Gift of Edgar William and Bernice Chrysler Garbisch.

Chapter 13

The Nashville Agrarians

When I go out to plow these fields again
I love to sit down on the beam of plow
And think: "When shall I plow this land again
And will it turn as fine as it does now!
Cool, soft, it turns and moist like after rain--
What will it matter if I plow again
Or sit here dreaming on my bull-tongue plow!"
J. Stuart in *Man With a Bull-Tongue Plow*, 128

Of the sixteen members of the group that published *The Fugitive* (1922-25), only four were associated with the Agrarian movement of the 1930s: John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, Donald Davidson, and Robert Penn Warren. In many ways the Agrarians were a translation of the Fugitives into a more public social and political form of activity. Most of the "Twelve Southerners" who contributed essays to the Agrarian Manifesto, *I'll Take My Stand* (1930), were connected with Vanderbilt University in some way. In addition to the four former Fugitives, others who were in on the discussions leading to the publishing of the manifesto included Lyle Lanier, Herman Clarence Nixon, Frank L. Owsley, John Donald Wade, and Andrew Lytle. Three other contributors were a bit farther removed from the early discussions: Stark Young, John Gould Fletcher, and Henry Blue Kline.

In spite of the diversity of the group, all were Southerners and supportive of what they thought of as a "Southern way of life" as opposed to the American way or the prevailing way. They looked to the past and considered the Southern way of life to be an agrarian way of life that was being threatened by industrialism and all its accompanying evils. They were critical of the trend "away from humane

values in the direction of technocratic, urban-industrial society organized on a mass basis around a cash nexus, producer-consumer relation" (Havard 5). The Nashville Agrarians who were former Fugitives had already considered extensively the conditions that create an environment in which the arts flourish. Essays in *I'll Take My Stand* examine the social, political and economic values that lead to the "good life" and its expression in art.

Many early critics considered the book irrelevant, especially because it did not set forth a pragmatic program for bringing into existence the ideal agrarian society. But the book has been a focal point of ideological discussion since its publication. It has served to keep alive an idyllic rural myth of pre-modern culture, as well as being a forward-looking, almost prophetic book that warns readers of the hazards to human values that are inherent in over-industrialization. Writers of the manifesto looked to the South as having retained more of the values of a traditional culture than other more fully industrialized parts of the country. They wanted a way of life which would permit more leisure and more individual dignity and control than a centralized industrial state allows. The attachment to family and place and the sense of history and of religious commitment were values associated with the South that the "Twelve Southerners" wanted to preserve.

The Nashville Agrarians were not so naive as to attempt to turn back the clock and live literally in a pre-industrial rural culture, but they did want to find a way to preserve the human values that have been historically associated with agrarian culture. Their aim was to revitalize the agrarian myth and tradition. They saw the wholeness of life being threatened by the "dissociation of sensibility" accompanying modern urban-industrial society, but they did not set out to formulate a literal back-to-the-land movement. The values they associate with

agrarian culture are essentially the same values that have clustered around the plow image in literature. For example, one element in the plow image is that of labor. Ransom writes in the introductory statement of principles that "The act of labor as one of the happy functions of human life has been in effect abandoned, and is practiced solely for its rewards" (xli). The assumption that labor is an evil is not compatible with agrarian values, for the process of plowing or caring for the earth has been shown to manifest human dignity and to have a positive, character-building effect on the plowman. In his 1962 introduction to *I'll Take My Stand*, Louis Rubin writes of the image of the agrarian tradition and of the impact of that image on the imagination, especially the Southern imagination:

> The image of the old agrarian South in *I'll Take My Stand* was the image of a society that perhaps never existed, though it resembled the Old South in certain important ways. But it was a society that *should* have existed--one in which men could live as individuals and not as automatons, aware of their finiteness and their dependence upon God and nature, devoted to the enhancement of the moral life in its aesthetic and spiritual dimensions, possessed of a sense of the deep inscrutability of the natural world. (xxxi)

The actuality of an agrarian society belongs primarily to the past and exists today--in somewhat attenuated form--only in those areas of the world not controlled by an industrialized economy. Elements of the agrarian tradition are to be found, however, in any farming community where they create a leavening influence in controlling the evils of dehumanization that accompany an industrialized society. Ransom describes an agrarian society this way:

> Technically, perhaps, an agrarian society is one in which agriculture is the leading vocation, whether for wealth, for pleasure, or for prestige--a form of labor that is pursued with intelligence and leisure, and that becomes the model to which the other forms approach as well as they may. But an agrarian regime will be secured readily enough where the superfluous industries are not allowed to rise against it. The theory of agrarianism is that the culture of the soil is the best

> and most sensitive of vocations, and that therefore it should have the economic preference and enlist the maximum number of workers. (xlvii)

Alongside the agrarian concept of labor with dignity is, paradoxically, the concept of agrarian leisure. This is purposeful leisure as it is treated in the essays in *I'll Take My Stand*. Men and women must have some leisure in order to develop social graces, to acquire an education, and to nourish their highest spiritual capacities--the aesthetic sensibilities and religious life. The fundamental tension between labor and leisure has been inherent in the literary image of the plow, the idea of labor generally overshadowing that of leisure. In order for the laborer to maintain human dignity, labor must be moderated by sufficient leisure to nourish man's spirit. Otherwise labor becomes brutalizing and dehumanizing. But in the agrarian ideal, labor is balanced with leisure. Donald Davidson writes "only in an agrarian society does there remain much hope of a balanced life, where the arts are not luxuries to be purchased but belong as a matter of course in the routine of his living" (51-52). The writers of the twelve essays maintain that agrarian society nourishes religion and the arts, but an industrial society does not allow for a right attitude toward nature which is essential for religious and aesthetic experience.

The plow image and the agrarian image in *I'll Take My Stand* both suggest a stable, traditional way of life. The emphasis is on the art of living life rather than on just earning a livelihood. Both picture a holistic, unfragmented life focused on home and family. Again, this is an idealized myth, but one which sets a standard in the imagination and furnishes a means of measuring one's own life. Frank Owsley describes the virtues of agrarian life in his essay, "The Irrepressible Conflict":

> The life of the South was leisurely and unhurried for the planter, the yeoman, or the landless tenant. It was a way of life, not a routine of planting and reaping merely for gain. Washington, who rode daily over his farms and counted his horses, cattle, plows, and bushels of corn as carefully as a merchant takes stock of his supplies, inhaled the smell of ripe corn after a rain, nursed his bluegrass sod and shade trees with his own hands, and, when in the field as a soldier or in the city as President of the United States, was homesick at the smell of fresh-plowed earth. He kept vigil with his sick horses and dogs, not as a capitalist who guards his investments, but as one who watches over his friends. (71)

Another parallel between the Nashville Agrarians' picture of idealized agrarian life and that which has been associated with the plow image is the sense of place, the identification of the farmer with a particular spot of ground. Ransom writes in his essay "Reconstructed by Unregenerate":

> He [the farmer] identifies himself with a spot of ground, and this ground carries a good deal of meaning; it defines itself for him as nature. He would till it not too hurriedly and not too mechanically to observe in it the contingency and the infinitude of nature; and so his life acquires its philosophical and even its cosmic consciousness. A man can contemplate and explore, respect and love, an object as substantial as a farm or a native province. But he cannot contemplate nor explore, respect nor love, a mere turnover, such as an assemblage of "natural resources," a pile of money, a volume of produce, a market, or a credit system. It is into precisely these intangibles that industrialism would translate the farmer's farm. It means the dehumanization of his life. (19-20)

The farmer's love for his land and his consequent attachment to it help to create a stable society. The plow has suggested a degree of permanence, a settled relationship to the land. And the plowman's attachment to place gives rise to a whole network of relationships that enhance his sense of belonging. This contrasts dramatically with industrialism, the sequel of which Lyle Lanier says is "personal isolation, and a fractionation of life functions into an ever-expanding and differentiating system of formalized institutions" (148). In his essay "Not in

Memoriam, but in Defense," Stark Young writes "I am not sure that one of the deep mysteries, one of the great, as it were, natural beauties of the heart, does not lie in one's love for his own land" (345). He stresses the interconnections between one's feeling for the land and his feeling for family:

> And a sense of family followed our connection with the land, a gracious domain where the events of the day began with the sky and light, the bread you ate came from the fields around you, your father's, your own; and life has been led; where you have known man's great desire, that generation of himself in the body of life, of which the earth is the eternal and natural symbol; and where there was, of all occupations, the form of labor in which the mystery and drama of life--the seed, the flower and harvest, the darkness, the renewal--is most represented to us. (347)

Andrew Lytle in "The Hind Tit" stresses essential respect for the strategic role the farmer plays in society:

> It is in fact impossible for any culture to be sound and healthy without a proper respect and proper regard for the soil, no matter how many urban dwellers think that their victuals come from groceries and delicatessens and their milk from tin cans. This ignorance does not release them from a final dependence upon the farm and that most incorrigible of beings, the farmer. (203-04)

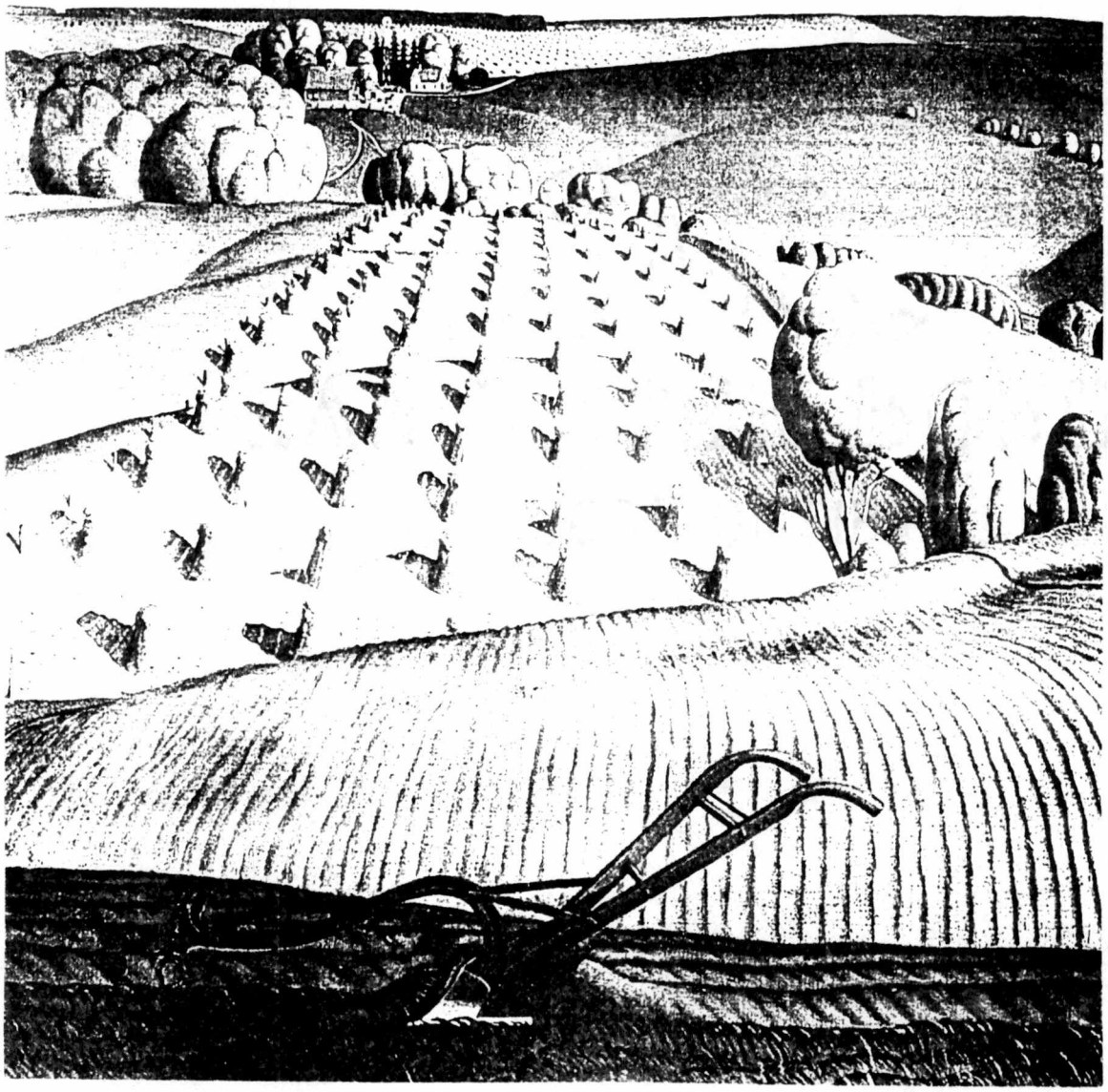
The conflict between agrarianism and industrialization which underlies the essays in *I'll Take My Stand* is emphasized in Herman Nixon's warning to Southern leaders to beware of the evils of rapid industrialization:

> They can profit by recalling that the decline of the Roman Empire was accompanied by the neglect of agriculture and the growth of an idle urban proletariat of unwieldy proportions. They can profit by comparing the depression of England, now a country of big industries and big armies of unemployed, with the economic soundness of France, a country of moderate industries, much agriculture, and little unemployment. They can profit by observing the happiness and stability of Denmark, where the farmer's will prevails in public policy. They can profit by noting that agriculture in the United States has furnished the chief escape from socialism, which in some form

> or degree inevitably follows an excessive industrialization, as in England and Germany. (195-96)

Agrarianism and industrialism spring from very different philosophies. One mark of this is the different values placed on process. The product is all-important in industrialism whereas in agrarianism the process possesses intrinsic value and is significant in itself. Industrialism favors those processes that require the least possible time and effort, but agrarianism adds other considerations because of the value placed on non-materialistic aims.

The manifesto of the Nashville Agrarians underscores the twentieth-century vitality of the georgic ideal. A timeless yearning for those elements of the "good life" associated with living close to the soil makes modern man cherish the principles articulated in the manifesto. The plow image embedded in the dream of agrarian freedom is not likely to disappear even though its outline is blurred by modern innovations.



Grant Wood. *Fall Plowing* (cropped). 1931. Oil on canvas, 30 x 40 3/4". The John Deere Collection, Moline, Illinois.

Conclusion

> This book has endeavored to sketch sympathetic portraits of two men who, God grant, we shall always have with us, one at the base of civilization, the other at its highest peak; two honest and greatly creative men all but forgotten in the bumptious adolescence of industrial technology, one at the root, the other the flower of all enduring human effort--the farmer and the man of letters.
>
> E. T. Booth in *God Made the Country*

This study has focused primarily on the plow-related images, and only slight attention has been given to the writers themselves. But one cannot help wondering what--if anything--these writers have in common. If the answer lies in the values they associate with plowing, are there common hopes or fears that prompt them to uphold the plowing values above others? All the main writers in this study had close enough ties with the land that plowing images were part of the common furniture of their minds. Only two were literal farmers for a short time, but all had perspectives that come from knowing well both farming and the wider world. Of greater significance is the fact that these writers recognize the wholesome human fulfillment that people find in the experience of working the soil. Although this may defy scientific proof, contact with the miracle of the land is perceived as morally strengthening. The plowman gains a greater awareness of his own earthiness as he affirms his bond to the soil through the creative rituals of cultivation. He gains a greater sense of place and belonging in the whole scheme of the cosmos. This seems to result from his participating in the life-death-rebirth cycles through labor with the elements of the earth. Creative employment with the soil appears more likely to produce an integrated, cheerful, reverent spirit than

almost any other kind of work. Of greatest importance, it seems, are the moral overtones associated with the life and activity of the plowman. Writers using plowing images share a desire to exemplify the dignity of a life of labor in harmony with natural laws--something essentially stable. Although he is not perfect, the good plowman leads a life of integrity and wholeness, adaptable to the seasons. Therefore, during historical periods of cultural upheaval and change, the hopes and fears of certain writers are expressed in the revival of the myth of the model-citizen plowman.

The literature selected for this study of the plow-plowing-plowman images reflects ambivalent attitudes toward the earth and earth-keeping implements. Plowing is a means of orienting the plowman to nature while at the same time revealing him as separate from nature, especially in the control--limited though it may be--that he exerts over the natural world. Human beings hunger for the security to be found in ratifying their connection with the earth, but they also hunger to escape the pull of the earth and the limitations it imposes. Literary confirmation of these truths is often presented in an image instead of an abstract statement. Polarized attitudes toward the earth and the implements that attach mankind to the soil are in keeping with mankind's dual nature, the fact that he is both body and spirit. And the spirit cannot be earth-bound. Plow-related images are marked by the poetic and religious irony and paradox characteristic of the claims to truth inherent in images.

This study was developed on the assumption that it would be possible to identify fundamental properties inherent in the image of the plow, the plowing, and the plowman by a chronological survey of selected uses of plow-related images. One of the questions to be answered concerns the historical consistency of

those properties: can any distinction be made between the use of the image in the literature of the Old World and the New?

Emigrants from Europe were not really seeking a new relationship to plowing the land in the New World. Instead, they tried to copy the face of their own native landscapes on to the soil of the New World. Distinction between the Old World and the New was sometimes made sharper by the emigrants' need to rationalize their relocation. But in reality, literary allusions to the plow maintain a remarkable consistency from the Old World to the New. The most discernible change is not in the properties clustered around the image of the plow or of plowing, but those associated with the plowman himself. Here the democratic ambiance of America is relevant. A person was more likely to own the land he plowed in the New World, and property gives social status to the owner. In the early settlement of America, a person could do the manual labor of plowing without being regarded as a second-class citizen. But the higher social status accorded to the pioneer settlers does not necessarily carry over to the following generations of plowman-farmers. The successful pioneer settler who first breaks the land is credited with the ability to be relatively self-sufficient and to be knowledgeable enough to plan for his own prosperity. Acknowledgement that the plowman-farmer must possess a wide range of skills and abilities goes at least as far back as Virgil's *Georgics*, but that fact is more strongly emphasized in the literary references to the pioneer plowman-farmers than to later generation.

As for the fundamental properties that have been consistently attached to the literary image of the plow, four stand out. The plow is an image that suggests civilization, hope, labor, and change.

The plow as a picture of civilization seems most basic. When the plow is put to work, a settled society becomes possible. When people are anchored to one

place on the earth, the arts of civilization can develop. They include the political arts of government, other practical arts such as those expressed in architecture, the aesthetic arts of music, painting and so forth. Development of the arts and of culture requires some leisure, and one assumes that the plowing-planting-harvesting cycle of agricultural crops will allow the necessary free time. Dedication to the land leads to issues of property that require governmental control. Belonging to a place normally causes one to care for and beautify that place. The plow as a picture of civilization also suggests peace, and peace allows family life to flourish. The orderliness of other social structures is implied. Civilization requires that destructive actions be subordinated for the good of the community. Supplying food by cultivation makes possible the growth through civilization of all the arts that express mankind's highest nature. As an image of civilization, the plow connects its user with the on-going history of the race.

The plow is also an image of hope. Even as the plow points forward, so it is used in expectation of a future crop. The plow is primary; it is used before planting and long before harvest. The hope associated with the plow incorporates some kind of faith that seeds will sprout and that the soil and weather and cycles of nature will sustain a crop. A mystical or religious element is involved with the physical. The hope of new life from the soil fits well with viewing the plow as a phallic image even though that aspect of the plow image has not been explored in this study. Nonetheless hope is associated with life and with the expectation of resurrection inherent in the crop cycle. The hope suggested by the plow image includes the expectation of sustaining human life with food provided by the crop. Hope is nearly inseparable from the idea of civilization in the image. In a sense, civilization is built on hope, that is, on the expectation of certain behaviors.

Besides suggesting civilization and hope, the plow is also an image associated with labor. Some person is needed to guide the plow, and that task is recognized as a laborious one. The degree to which one is engaged in physical labor generally determines that person's status in society. So the one who guides the plow is most likely of lower social rank. But that does not make the laboring plowman inferior in mind to his brother who may be a lawyer or banker. In fact, perhaps Virgil is correct when he maintains in the *Georgics* that labor sharpens the wits of mortals and is therefore a means toward the development of that which is most God-like in mankind. Being able and willing to labor at the plow is frequently a measure of manhood and maturity. Although the plow suggests difficult and cyclic labor, it is not necessarily oppressive unless there is inadequate reprieve from the labor.

A fourth and final major idea represented in the image of the plow is that of change. Wherever the plow goes, it changes the face of the land. The change involves cutting and killing and burying things considered undesirable; it brings hidden secrets of the earth to the surface. The plow disturbs whatever is on the surface of the land, crumbles the soil and brings light and air, thereby changing the quality of the soil itself. It suggests a new beginning. The change the plow brings involves destruction of the old in preparation for the new. That change is generally considered a good thing, but in certain circumstances it could be negative.

Those four things--civilization, hope, labor, change--appear to be consistently associated with the plow image in literature regardless of who the author is or when that person is writing. Turning from the plow itself to the activity of plowing brings a somewhat different set of associations. In this case,

the four that seem fairly distinct and consistent present the image of plowing as a ritual, a renewal, a record, and an orientation.

As a ritual, plowing is an activity that is repeated periodically to ensure the next crop. It is an activity performed in the expectant hope that the ritual will benefit the land. Rituals are generally thought of as religious rites. Although plowing is not exactly a religious exercise, there is some humility and some religious reverence in the plowman's dependence for a crop upon elements beyond his control and some faith in his expectation of a crop. The repeated ritual of plowing is a bonding activity in which the plowman's fate is linked with that of the soil he plows. The ritual establishes relationship. The plowman assumes a responsibility for on-going care of the land. In a sense, this ritual assures the continuity of the race, for as long as the plowman fulfills the cycles of plowing and planting and so forth, he can be reasonably sure of food to sustain his family and his fellow man.

To some extent renewal may be an outgrowth of ritual, but its significance merits separate consideration. Plowing renews the soil by turning up a fresh surface and bringing light and air to that which had been buried. The renewal of the life-sustaining qualities of the soil brings with it a renewal of hope in the heart of the plowman. No doubt the stereotype of the plowman whistling or singing grows directly from the joy of renewal. Renewal assumes the repetition of a life cycle; it demands reliability in the natural seasons. Renewal occurs in a stable world. It looks ahead; it brings new opportunity, a fresh start, a chance to avoid previous mistakes. Renewal is implicit in the image of plowing the land.

The activity of plowing also suggests a record. The face of the land--with all the changes mankind has imposed upon it--is a kind of historical text from which one can learn the story of the people who have lived there. The marks of the plow

can be seen as a writing on the land, a record of the plowman's accomplishments. Plowing changes the land; therefore the record is clearly discernible. But it is a record that can eventually be obliterated like a sand castle when the tide rises.

In addition to these associations, plowing can also be a means of orientation. Plowing orients the plowman to nature. Plowing must be adapted to the weather, the soil, the seasons and such. The plowman must learn to plow in harmony with nature. He is forced to become a close observer of nature. The plowman's awareness of natural laws makes it possible for him to adjust his own life to those laws and to experience the fulfillment of living in harmony with nature.

When it comes to the plowman himself, trying to pinpoint qualities consistently associated with that image poses difficulties. The people who guide the plow are human beings and therefore ultimately defy analysis or significant classification. What may be true of the plowman in one literary work may not be true in the next. And to a limited extent, the image may be culturally and historically bound. The ideas presented here can probably all be refuted by at least one example, but based on fairly common assumptions, these four qualities seem most consistently present in the image of the plowman: diligence, morality, humility, and competence.

Diligence is one of the primary qualities inherent in the literary image of the plowman. The plowman is inseparable from the idea of labor, and that labor must be practiced diligently without regard to personal whim. If the plowman-farmer is not diligent in his labors, his crops are likely to fail and he even risks losing his land. The diligence suggested in the image is especially crucial because the plowman must persevere through long periods of waiting for the crop, and he must be able to tolerate the uncertainty of rewards for his labor. He must patiently

continue his labor of plowing and cultivation regardless of discouragements. He must have strength--physical and mental--to persevere. Of course diligent labor needs to be moderated with some leisure to avoid the degradation that threatens mankind whenever the nurture of his spirit is neglected.

Even though there is a kind of morality in the plowman's diligence, morality can be distinguished as a separate characteristic of the plowman's image. Morality is grounded on religious principles, making the plowman himself a somewhat religious person. One often hears the expression "honest labor" in reference to agricultural work. It is possible that the expression is derived from the philosophical assumption previously discussed that agriculture is the only source of true wealth and the only productive employment. But for whatever reason, the life of the plowman-farmer is generally characterized as a wholesome life. His living close to nature and adapting his life to nature's laws are generally thought to foster sound moral ethics. His role as caretaker of the earth and nurturer of the crops gives him moral status and suggests that he may be less self-centered than his city cousins. The crops provide sustenance for others besides himself. The plowman must practice self-control and patience. Imagination is also a component of morality, for moral choices demand imagination. The plowman is generally pictured as being morally sound.

The humility associated with the image of the plowman may be fostered by a sane appraisal of his own role in producing crops. No matter how well he plows and sows and cares for his fields, the plowman-farmer is still dependent for his crop upon circumstances and events over which he has no control. That is a humbling fact. But humility is not weakness or cowardice; rather it recognizes human limitations and mankind's ultimate dependence upon the Higher Powers that control the universe. The plowman is essentially a religious person. He

generally appears in literature as a person of lower class social status, discussed earlier, but this is not to be confused with humility. The humble plowman is content to be a caretaker and nourisher. He respects the integrity of life--plant, animal, or human--and refrains from manipulation to aggrandize himself. Humility makes a person teachable. This fits with the fact that the plowman-farmer is considered a thoughtful observer of nature. Wholesome living fosters the fulfilled and cheerful spirit that leads to the common picture of the plowman whistling as he works.

Adding competence to diligence, morality, and humility completes the list of qualities found most consistently in the image of the plowman. In spite of a few exceptions, the plowman is generally pictured as a capable person who has acquired a variety of skills. He is able to plan ahead with knowledge gained through observation and experience. The land is an effective teacher. Adam Smith's doctrine that cultivation of the soil promotes keenness of mind echoes ideas from Virgil. The plowman is credited with a "Yankee ingenuity" that enables him to be fairly self-sufficient in making repairs and innovations. His competence is doubtless related to need and to enough leisure time to think and dream of improvement. The plowman is an able person whose self-confidence is born of the wisdom derived from living close to the soil. His competence contributes to the light heart associated with the whistling or singing plowman.

Mankind penetrates eternal mysteries through the contemplation of objects and persons and processes. The crust of the earth, refined by the ages, is one of the grand elements of nature that cannot leave the plowman unaffected. In the plow one finds a relationship between mankind's work and the cosmos. As a plowman learns the face of the earth and its wisdom and rhythm, he develops qualities of the poet-priest-philosopher. The plow is a mystical image as well as a

literal, realistic one. The pull of the earth underscores both the origin and the destiny of mankind. Earth-keeping tools such as the plow connect the plowman to the history of the race. Mankind's first vocation, the cultivation of the land, is rooted in his primal needs. The process of plowing is a ritual that bonds the plowman to the natural world of which he is a part. The bond provides stability and enrichment as well as setting certain limits on his life. The image of the plow in literature speaks of that bonding even to readers whose hands will never touch a plow.

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