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THE FARMER IN AMERICAN LITERATURE, 1608-1864

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By
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******

The Ohio State University
1976

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Who can desire more content, that hath small meanes; or but only his merit to advance his fortune, then to tread, and plant that ground hee hath purchased by the hazard of his life? If he haue but the taste of virtue and magnanimitie, what to such a minde can bee more pleasant, than planting and building a foundation for his Posteritie, gotte from the rude earth, by Gods blessing and his owne industrie, without prejudice to any?

John Smith, A Description of New England

Our AMERICAN FARMERS are VIRTUOUS, not in name but in REALITY. Vice has not been able to entice them from the standard of VIRTUE, INDEPENDENCE, and FREEDOM. To them we look -- they are our bulwark, the guardians of our rights, the supporters of our dignity, and the pillars of our CONSTITUTION.

Philip Freneau, Letters of Robert Slender

Could I have ever thought that a people of cultivators who knew 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 strain our society? ... But why should I wonder at this political phenomenon? Men are the same in all ages and in all countries.

J. Hector St. John Crèvecoeur, Sketches of Eighteenth Century America

The notion that every husbandman is to be a free-holder is as Utopian in practice, as it would be to expect that all men were to be on the same level in fortune, condition, education, and habits. As such a state of things as the last never yet did exist, it was probably never designed by divine wisdom that it should exist.

James Fenimore Cooper, "Preface," The Redskins
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.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, Farming

It is said to be the task of the American to work the virgin soil and that agriculture here already assumes proportions unknown everywhere else. I think that the farmer displaces the Indian even because he redeems the meadow, and so makes himself stronger and in some respects more natural.

Henry David Thoreau, "Walking"

No, refuse to be Seduced back to the land by any claim The land may seem to have on man to use it. Let none assume to till the land but farmers. I only speak to you as one of them.

Robert Frost, "Build Soil--A Political Pastoral"

As the preceding quotations suggest, the figure of the American farmer has captivated the imagination of American authors from the inception of this country to the present day. Beginning in the first quarter of the seventeenth century, the beauty and bounty of the New World landscape merged with the colonists' experience of husbandry to elevate the farmer into a symbol of the new life which could be led in America. The actual conditions of farm life were never as comfortable as some literary versions suggest. Yet, at least through the middle of the nineteenth century, the widely extolled opportunity to purchase land cheaply in the New World retained validity. The availability of cheap land underlined the fruitful promise of America. To celebrate the labor of the farmer for much of our history was to practice a means of self-glorification.
Conventional praise of husbandry, the European georgic tradition, had originated in the pages of Hesiod and Virgil, and had continued quietly throughout the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and into the Modern era. However, when the rural husbandman of the New World was invested with the alleged moral, religious, economic, and social superiority of agrarian tradition, the possibilities for realization suddenly assumed unprecedented proportions. In America, reality and the literary expression of rural life merged in profound ways. Over a period of time, through repeated celebration, the American agrarian ideal was transformed from a literary convention into an engrossing mode of belief. American farmers came to be viewed as the moral repositories of the New World's greatness -- as the rural caretakers and guardians of America's divinely sanctioned mission to inspire and redeem humanity. That it still holds some credibility for us today is perhaps a measure of how strongly the myth of the farmer is embedded in American ideology.

The preceding selection of quotations includes passages which reveal that at times during our literary history both the prominent stature of the husbandman and the merit of his celebration were openly questioned. This suggests that when American writers offered homage to the farmer, their praise was more than unthinking lip service. Most agrarian literary portraits did not attempt to force human experience into glib, superficial patterns. The ability of American artists to modify and transform the farmer figure in order to meet the serious challenges made upon him, especially during periods of uncertain standards and shifting values, testifies to the strength, power, and vitality of a resilient literary tradition. Throughout most of our history, the
The farmer has continued to symbolize if not the common reality, then, at least, the rich potential and promise which America offers.

The task of this dissertation is to examine the figure of the farmer as he is represented in selected American literature from the early seventeenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries. The terms "agrarian" and "agrarianism," as they are used in this study, do not refer to any specific social or political movement designed to bring about land reform or improvement in the economic status of farmers. Instead, they function merely as synonyms for words generally characteristic of the farmer and rural life. Most previous work on the American agrarian myth has been done by social scientists and historians, researchers who have probed the writings for data on agricultural economy, but, for the most part, have not interested themselves in the literary merit of American rural compositions. This study will approach early American writings on the farmer as serious literature and will focus on the themes, images, and symbols, the literary devices American authors use to create imaginative and compelling art. That the American husbandman so readily came to be identified as the symbolic representative of the American experience was the result not merely of authors' factual descriptions. Rather, the farmer's prominent position evinced the powerful effect of his poetically conceived literary portraits.

A number of literary critics have suggested, at least implicitly, that the agrarian ideal in early American writings would provide a fruitful field for research. For whatever reasons, critics have neglected to pursue this systematic literary study. The most successful attempts to deal with the farmer in American literature to date have
been sporadic and piecemeal, concerned largely with a single composition of an individual author. A brief survey of the most important and relevant comprehensive secondary works will reveal the current, relatively undefined status of the farmer in American critical writings.

Survey of Literature

Although Frederick Jackson Turner was not the first American writer to articulate the importance of the West and of the frontier in American cultural history, the impact of his "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" (1893) initiated a school of twentieth-century historiography and insured that the influence of agriculture, or at least "free land," on the developing American character would be readily acknowledged. In his essay, Turner locates the "frontier" on the middle landscape characteristic of agrarian society; it is "the meeting point between savagery and civilization." Viewing the frontier as an "elastic" term, Turner uses it poetically to encompass the entire process of settlement by which Americans transformed the untamed wilderness into a cultivated garden and were themselves transformed into a new breed of democratic people. For Turner, the frontier functions as a symbolic representative of America's greatness and majesty. The major hero celebrated in Turner's essay, the man who physically conquers nature with the tools of civilization, is none other than the American farmer.

In Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth (1950), Henry Nash Smith views Turner as more poet than historian and traces the origins of his frontier thesis back through earlier American literary expressions of the West. Unhappy with Turner's "elastic" use of the western frontier, Smith attempts to clearly distinguish between the
"Wild West" and the "domesticated or agricultural West." To the latter he ascribes "the master symbol of the garden" which focuses on the frontier farmer. Smith tells us that while the Wild West could be easily interpreted in literature, the agricultural West "proved quite intractable as literary material." Elaborating upon his meaning Smith later comments, "Whatever the orators might say in glittering abstractions about the virtues of the yeoman," nevertheless, "early efforts to deal with the agricultural West in literature prove that the frontier farmer could not be made into an acceptable hero." The crux of the problem, according to Smith, lay in the farmer's degraded social rank. He explains this inferiority as the result of an urban suspicion of emigrants who fled from civilized life to the savagery of the frontier. Smith summarizes this attitude as "the theocratic case against the backwoodsman," or as "the Eastern belief in frontier depravity."

In defending his thesis that farmers were intractable as literary material, Smith, it seems to me, blurs his own distinction between the two Wests, and creates an overly simplistic division between rural and city life. The agricultural farmer was not a backwoodsman guilty of frontier depravity, and he was not perceived as such. Rather than escaping from organized society, he created a new one in the wilderness. Etymologically, the term agriculture results from the Latin combination of "agri," or fields, with culture, and it is exactly this fusion that the American farmer achieved. In the chapters which follow we will read many early American authors who found the husbandman to be both a civilized hero and a worthy man to emulate. The agricultural frontier, as Smith suggests in his own master symbol of the garden, represented a landscape of reconciliation between rural and city life.
Leo Marx, in *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (1964), expounds on the significance of the Garden metaphor, and calls it the "cardinal image of American aspirations." Marx views the Garden, or agricultural frontier, as a traditional pastoral symbol: "This is the countryside of the old Republic, a chaste uncomplicated land of rural virtue." Concerning himself with the symbol's transportation into the American experience, Marx concludes that the American farmer is merely "... the good shepherd of the old pastoral dressed in American homespun." Because the exploration of North America coincided with the great age of Elizabethan pastoral poetry, and because "the age was fascinated by the idea that the New World was or might become Arcadia" and so projected paradisiacal images upon her, Marx concludes that Elizabethan pastoral poetry provided American literature with "a paradigm for the agrarian celebration." He sees the "farmer's plausible argument for an American rural scheme" as essentially pastoral; its impulse is "static" or "antihistorical." According to Marx, the American farmer views his home in conventional bucolic terms as a "... place apart, secluded from the world - a peaceful, lovely, classless, bountiful pasture."

When he applies his theory of an American pastoral to a specific work, Crevecoeur's *Letters from an American Farmer*, Marx is forced to admit that "There is no mention of Arcadia, no good shepherd, no stock of poeticisms derived from Virgil, no trite antithesis of country and town, no abstract discord between Nature and Art." Nevertheless, he determines that despite "deceptive details" the main features of an Arcadian landscape are present. Although Marx concedes that the
Garden is a symbol for the reconciliation of nature and civilization, his defense of an American pastoral tradition encourages him to emphasize a simplistic distinction between rural escape and the counterforce of urban technology. In Marx's view, the farmer was merely a New World shepherd or swain who continued to embody "that timeless impulse to cut loose from the constraints of a complex society." 19

I would like to suggest that the farmer, as he is portrayed in early American literature, represented something more than another version of pastoralism. One cannot blissfully "substitute" the figure of the American farmer for the European shepherd without considering the larger implications of the change. 20 Crevecœur and other early American authors did not employ images of Arcadian shepherds basking in a bucolic pasture to describe their farmers because they did not conceive of the farmer in those terms. The ease, painlessness, and leisure of Arcadian existence, or as Marx puts it, the existence where "nature does virtually all of the work," 21 was not part of the authors' actual experience in the New World. Consequently, at least from the time of settlement, pastoral conventions were generally not used in the literary expression of that experience. Instead it is the georgic tradition -- that literary view which acknowledged the labor and industry of the farmer as he created a peaceful, secure and prosperous life -- which supplied American authors with a meaningful paradigm for agrarian celebration.

Although Leo Marx claims that America's pastoral literary tradition began during the age of European exploration, he chooses to extensively examine neither the sixteenth-century reports of explorers nor the
seventeenth-century American promotional tracts. Instead, in The Machine in the Garden, Marx focuses on later American works, arguing that "a freely articulated pastoral idea of America did not emerge until the end of the eighteenth century."\textsuperscript{22}

Subsequent to the publication of Marx's study two dissertations have appeared which trace the origins of the American pastoral impulse through sixteenth and seventeenth-century publications describing the New World. These scholarly studies are Peter Fritzell's Landscapes of Anglo-America During Exploration and Early Settlement (Stanford, 1966) and Annette Kolodny's The Pastoral Impulse in American Writing, 1590-1850: A Psychological Approach (Berkeley, 1969). Neither critic is explicitly concerned with the image of the farmer or with georgic tradition. Yet, both works merit mention in this survey because both suggest that although America was originally envisioned in paradisiacal images, once the initial process of settlement began, American writers found pastoral conventions inadequate to describe their experience.\textsuperscript{23}

As Fritzell and Kolodny at least implicitly suggest, the dream of the golden-age of leisure and plenty was radically altered when the first settlers embarked upon the land and recognized the laborious tasks which lay before them. An unprecedented potential for a peaceful, secure, and prosperous life was still available in the New World, but unstinting labor would be required to realize this new life. It was at this point that American writers began to draw upon georgic tradition, to praise the husbandman and his efforts on behalf of civilization. It was at this point that the literary tradition of the American farmer began.
Before concluding this survey, two additional book-length studies which touch tangentially on the yeoman figure in early American literature should be acknowledged. Bonnie Thoman Engdahl's dissertation, *Paradise in the New World: A Study of the Image of the Garden in the Literature of Colonial America* (UCLA, 1967), explores writers' "use of the garden as a representation of the American experience." Engdahl argues that while authors originally conceived of America in paradisiacal terms, they soon acknowledged that the "Edenic garden" of the New World would require "cultivation." Engdahl does not intensively investigate the portrayal of this "cultivation" or of the American husbandman. When she does discuss the farmer, confining herself largely to eighteenth-century representations, she is interested in how "the writers' ideas and their descriptive conventions" relate "to Eden, Arcadia and the Golden Age." About the foremost agrarian portrayal, Crèvecoeur's Farmer James, Engdahl admits "Crèvecoeur is not drawing a conventional picture of a simple shepherd or a virtuous peasant." Yet, like Leo Marx, she concludes that Crèvecoeur's vision "is an old ideal of pastoral innocence, simplicity, and benevolence, given a modern explanation and setting."

Richard Slotkin in *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (1973) takes an entirely different track. Slotkin views the yeoman figure as one version of the new American hero "whose role was that of mediating between civilization and savagery." Like Henry Nash Smith and numerous other critics of American literature, Slotkin finds the solitary Indian-like hunter to be "the most significant, most emotionally compelling myth-hero of the early republic." Slotkin probes colonial American literature for
prefigurations of the traditional Boone-like hero of the Wild West. Because he views the husbandman as a variation of the basic frontier-type hero, Slotkin includes a discussion of the literary farmers of Crèvecoeur and Dwight. However, Slotkin at least implies that he finds literary portraits of husbandmen to be subordinate to the "achievement" of the Daniel Boone myth. 

Thus, as the survey reveals, despite the various studies of early American literature which have noted the significance of the farmer, no one has systematically attempted to investigate the yeoman's literary representation. The distinguishing qualities associated with him, the literary conventions artists use, the very language in which the farmer is honored, all of these characteristics remain undefined. As a result, as we have seen, when the American farmer figure is discussed, he is often confused with the sophisticated, leisurely shepherd of an Arcadian pastoral on the one hand, or with the uncouth, solitary backwoodsman of the untamed wilderness on the other. While the symbol of the farmer has the potential to encompass variety, it is important to clearly delineate the yeoman's literary portrait and his place in American letters for several reasons.

First, there is a significant body of American literature mythicizing the farmer which is presently neglected. Many of these works are worthy of serious critical consideration and can best be approached through a literary exploration of the yeoman myth. In addition, the mythicizing of the farmer initiated a tradition within the pages of the earliest colonial writings and established a pattern which persisted throughout later American literature. Thus, although
most critics do not begin to talk about a distinctive American literature until after the Revolution. Study of the farmer figure allows us to see at least the rudiments of a native tradition quite early in our history. In the chapters which follow we will probe the husbandman's ability to give literary expression to ways of life and values of American society throughout two hundred and fifty years.

Finally, as a representative of the "middle landscape" the farmer was not an "isolato" figure, but rather reflected a "communal" American literary tradition. American literary criticism is virtually inundated with articles and books that identify the stereotypical or archetypal hero of our art as a gloomy, unsociable pioneer who labored in brooding isolation, or as a "New Adam" innocent who existed outside space and time, and was essentially removed from the greater society. The farmer figure offers an important alternative to these readings and is significant if only to restore a small semblance of balance. As the man who harnessed nature with the tools of civilization, the farmer attempted to create a new society in the wilderness. Writers portrayed the American husbandman as the spokesman for a community, as a man with a stake in society and its laws. Enjoying fellowship with his neighbors, the farmer was seen to lay a foundation for his posterity. In American agrarian writings, the success of the individual was synonymous with the success of society.

As mentioned, the celebration of the husbandman as the moral spokesman for a society was not a unique creation of seventeenth-century America, but rather the New World version was appropriated from a long-standing literary tradition originating in the classical
world. To fully understand the agrarian writings we will study in the following chapters it is necessary to acquaint ourselves with the prior ancient, European, and in particular British models early American writers could draw upon. Before we can appreciate the distinctive qualities of the literary portrayal of the American farmer we must be cognizant of the rich and vital heritage works praising country life had enjoyed in Europe.\textsuperscript{33}

**Review of European Georgic Tradition**

Our search for the genesis of agrarian literary tradition takes us back to the ninth century before Christ and the work of the Greek poet Hesiod for its earliest articulation. In *Works and Days*, the first poem in praise of country life celebrating the farmer as its representative, Hesiod specifically locates the golden age of leisure and easeful life -- the time when nectar flowed freely from the trees and man lived only to enjoy -- in the past.\textsuperscript{34} That time is over. What man must do to cope with experience as he finds it is the subject of Hesiod's poem. The theme of *Works and Days* is man's heroic struggle for dignity, not on the glorious field of battle but rather in the incessant activities of everyday life. Offering his readers a calendar of farm tasks, the poet discusses such agrarian concerns as the proper methods for tending vineyards, for plowing, and for harvesting during the changing seasons. Fundamental to the poem is its encomium of the small independent farmer and its testimony in support of the moral value of hard work.\textsuperscript{35} For Hesiod at the beginning of country tradition, as for the numerous American authors we will study in subsequent chapters, the laborious toil of the husbandman resulted in both dignity and moral prosperity.
Of course, Hesiod was not the only ancient Greek to praise agricultural life. Husbandry was extolled over all other human occupations by even so worthy a spokesman as Aristotle. In addition, in the pages of Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* the following rhetorical flourish is attributed to Socrates:

Husbandry is the mother and nurse of the other arts. For when husbandry flourishes, all the other arts are in good fettle, but whenever the land is compelled to lie waste, the other arts ... well-nigh perish.

Believing agriculture to be the essential occupation of man, Socrates liberally praised its practitioners. Thus, the glorification of the farmer was part of the literary legacy which the ancient Greeks left to posterity. And, as we shall see, among the Romans too, the prestige of the farmer was high.

Cato's *De Agricultura* (160 B.C.), the oldest remaining prose work in Latin, is an agricultural manual, a comprehensive, no-nonsense treatment of agrarian concerns. Although, Cato's discussion of the techniques of farming and management tends to stress the profit motive, he does express the conviction that sound agriculture is the foundation of a strong Republic. In his preface Cato disparages purely commercial and financial enterprises while endorsing the endeavors of the husbandman. To support his argument that farmers represent some of the most worthy citizens of the Republic Cato invokes the blessing of Rome's noble ancestors. As he tells his readers:

When they [the ancestors] were trying to praise a good man they called him a good farmer and a good tiller of the soil, and the one who received this compliment was considered to have received the highest praise.
Cato was not the only Roman citizen to write an agrarian manual. Varro's *Res Rusticae* (37/36 B.C.), a practical handbook on agricultural methods, names some fifty Greek authors upon whom Roman agronomists could draw. Like his predecessors, Varro too praises agriculture as the earliest and most noble of man's employments. In 60 A.D. Columella, a Spaniard who migrated to Rome, wrote a full and systematic agrarian treatise *De Re Rustica*, which nostalgically praises the past golden age of Rome when the country was peopled by small independent and worthy farmers. Palladius composed one of the last important agricultural treatises of the ancient world in 400 A.D.

Many noted Roman authors who never attempted technical agricultural treatises managed to extol the virtues of the farmer in their literary works. Pliny and Horace are among these, as is the renowned orator Cicero. In *De Senectute* (44 B.C.) Cicero (while writing on the subject of old age) articulates the great pleasures and profits to be found in farming. Noting that many early Romans were farmers, Cicero celebrates the benefits found in rural life. Moreover, in his work on the moral duties of Rome's citizens, *De Officiis*, Cicero assures his readers that:

> Of all the occupations by which gain is secured, none is better than agriculture, none more profitable, none more delightful, none more becoming to a free man.

Despite the rich and varied celebrations of the farmer discussed so far, it is in the *Georgics* of Virgil (29 B.C.) that literary praise for the husbandman reaches its pinnacle in the ancient world. Virgil's poem created the genre of descriptive poetry and gave its name to the entire European literary tradition concerned with the husbandman and agrarian labor. Within the *Georgics* Virgil both describes and honors
the farmer; he poetically details the meaning of rural life. Although the poem has a didactic substructure which conveys useful agricultural information, Virgil's work is not a poeticized farmer's handbook. More than a description of cultivation the Georgics is, as one critic has put it, "an exhortation to cultivate the land." Writing at a time of agricultural unrest in ancient Rome, Virgil attempts to stir the minds and hearts of his countrymen to return to the land. The life of the husbandman is ennobled by association with the Roman virtues of dignity, independence, and patriotism.

Like Hesiod before him, Virgil sets his portrayal of the farmer in a world after the fall -- in a time when the golden age of leisure and ease is gone. Ceres teaches men husbandry that they make succeed through their own industry and build their own moral fiber. Although Virgil idealizes the farmer's life, especially in the famous "O fortunatos nimium" ("O happy husbandman") passage, he does not lose touch with the husbandman's world of labor and toil. Work has moral value in Virgil's poem. Through labor the farmer not only enjoys moral posterity but he also achieves harmony with the universe. The changing seasons provide a backdrop for the vignettes of country life which Virgil offers.

Thus, in summary, ancient writers created a full and rich vision of country life within the pages of their literature. From the beginning, the farmer was associated with the virtues of honest labor, integrity, dignity, and patriotism. Although some classical writers (Varro, Horace) referred to large slaveholding landlords when they praised the farmer, others extolled the small, independent landowner
Considering the attachment ancient writers demonstrated for the arts, politics, and literature, it should be evident that however much they exalted simple country life, they were not interested in praising boorish, uneducated peasants. What is perhaps most significant about the classical glorification of the farmer, at least for American literature, is that the model was a free, independent citizen possessing the great civic qualities needed for life in a democratic republic.

During the Middle Ages agriculture was largely a self-sufficient enterprise. When medieval literature depicted the farmer, Christian philosophy was often used to supplement pagan authority. Church fathers like St. Augustine were believed to have advised that husbandry offered a sure route to heaven. Although we shall discuss details of Biblical agrarian exegesis in Chapter 2 when we consider the sermons of American Puritans, it may be mentioned that medieval writers found scriptural evidence that the farmer and his labors were divinely blessed. God's first created man, Adam, was a plowman and the medieval view of the farmer followed consistently from that. Men were justified in rising above manual labor in the field, in medieval life, only if they were members of the warrior aristocracy defending society against its worldly enemies, or members of the clergy defending men's souls against their spiritual enemies.

The fourteenth century English alliterative poem "Wynner and Wastoure" (1352) affirms the agrarian role of the common man in "winning" man's food. In "The General Prologue" to The Canterbury Tales Geoffrey Chaucer offers an idealized portrait of a saintly
plowman who was "lyvynge in pees and parfit charitee." In addition, it is significant that Langland's fourteenth-century Middle English poem, The Vision of Piers Plowman, has an agrarian hero who reveals Christ-like qualities.

The primacy of the farmer in medieval life was affirmed in the Latin works of monkish poets as well. In the first half of the ninth century a monk, Walafrid Strabo, composed De Cultu Hortorum, known as Hortulus, a Latin poem inspired by Virgil's Georgics. Within the poem a monkish gardener does his own agrarian labor. In addition, Wandalbert, a monk born in 813, composed De Mensium XII Nominibus, Signis, Culturis Aerisque Qualitatibus, which is set on the Rhineland and effectively details the typical agrarian occupations of the peasants throughout the months of the year. (We may note that descriptions of the months and seasons stretch back in Classical literature not only in the works of Hesiod and Virgil but also in the Monosticha de Mensibus and Disticha de Mensibus attributed to Ausonius.)

On occasion, writers composed allegorical interpretations of Virgil's Georgics. In the previously mentioned poem Hortulus the garden flowers, the lily and the rose, are treated as symbols of faith. John of Garland's Georgica Spiritualia is believed to have been an early thirteenth-century precursor of Thomas Kirchmayer's Agricultura Sacra (1550). In the later poem the author instructs man as a spiritual husbandman in the care of his soul, his husbandry. Michel Guillaume de Tours translated Virgil's Georgics in 1519 supplementing the text with his own pious explanations and interpretations.
During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries farming became more profitable. The old manorial economy showed evidence of decay as villein services were commuted in exchange for money. With an expanded money economy came a renewed interest in agriculture. Although the first peak of enclosure did not come until the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the process began in England as early as the thirteenth century. Land had always been a measure of wealth, but now owners were forced to recognize its value as a base for capitalistic endeavors. In short, proprietors once again began to consider themselves agriculturists.

This renewed interest in profitable husbandry resulted in the proliferation of agricultural treatises both ancient and modern. Albertus Magnus (1193-1280) composed *De Animalibus* and *De Vegetabilibus*. A translation of the fourteen books of Palladius into Middle English verse was commissioned by Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, and completed by a monk in 1420. Petrus Crescentius' thirteenth century treatise on husbandry drew upon the works of Varro, Columella, Palladius and Virgil. Entitled *Opus Ruralism Commodorum sive de Agricultura*, it was the first printed agricultural book (Augsburg, 1471), and its importance was noted in the fifteenth century as it was translated into Italian, French, and German.

Throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries European agricultural writers composed dedications, prefaces, and chapters to their technical treatises which, in imitation of the ancients, praised the glory, honor, and moral prosperity of farmers. With increased knowledge of husbandry came renewed interest in the poetry of
country life. In his *Rusticus* (1483) Politian wrote a Latin poem as an introduction to a series of lectures on Hesiod and Virgil's *Georgics*. Dedicating his work to Lorenzo de Medici, Politian's description of the working year of the Tuscan peasant initiated an Italian literary vogue. In 1539 Luigi Alamanni composed *La Coltivazione* in Italian, a poem considered to be the first true *georgic* of the Renaissance period.

For practical purposes we can confine the remainder of our survey of agrarian literary history to developments in England. Renaissance agricultural literature began in England with John Fitzherbert's *Boke of Hosbondrye* in 1523. Unlike circumstances on the continent, where production generally declined throughout the seventeenth century, new books on husbandry continued to be published without interruption in England until well into the eighteenth century -- the greatest age of agricultural reform. Mildred Campbell and Albert J. Schmidt have enumerated the scores of agrarian treatises published during the Tudor and early Stuart Periods. One particularly influential work was Thomas Tusser's "Five Hundred Points of Good Husbandry" (1573), a poeticized tract designed to teach farmers about a wide range of husbandry topics from manuring to harvesting.

The great debate of sixteenth-century England was concerned with enclosure versus "champion" fields. In addition to agricultural treatises, bellettristic compositions contributed to the controversy through their portrayal of the yeoman and his use of the land. Descriptions of the English farmer as an independent, uncorrupted peasant pervade the literature in works such as William Harrison's *Description of England* (1577), William Lambarde's *Perambulation of*
Kent (1576), and Sir Thomas Overbury's New and Choice Characters (1615). In other more adverse compositions, the farmer is depicted as an ignorant bumpkin as in John Earle's Microcosmographie (1628) or as an avaricious and selfish opportunist as in the anonymous A Knack to Know a Knave (1594) and John Taylor's Brood of Cormorants (1622). Historians Campbell and Schmidt have noted that the sixteenth century was a critical time for the English yeoman. Through their profitable development of the soil many agricultural practitioners were able to raise themselves into the British gentry class. This social mobility too was reflected in agrarian literature as authors occasionally granted their literary yeoman a gentlemanly status.

In the seventeenth century new knowledge of the natural sciences combined with men's desire to entertain a more intimate response to nature to produce increasing numbers of works in praise of country life. These writings were not georgics, because agrarian labor with one's own hands was not the subject. The feudal social distinctions between lord of the manor and peasant were probably still too familiar to affect this. Instead, the literature extolled the comfortable life of a retired British gentleman at his country seat.

The seventeenth century also saw the development of a sub-group of descriptive poetry -- the topographical set piece. These poems were more often reflective than truly descriptive, but genre scenes of country life were at least occasionally depicted. In works such as Michael Drayton's The Poly-Olbion (1622), Sir John Denham's "Cooper Hill" (1642), Alexander Pope's "Windsor Forest" (1713), and John Dyer's "Gronger Hill" (1726), praise for a specific location leads to
meditations on history, to moral reflections and to patriotic panegyric. A classical model for topographical poetry, the *Mosella* of Ausonius has been identified, and within this ancient poem the author admirably praises the life of the husbandman. As we shall see in subsequent chapters, early American writers found topographical poetry to be a particularly suitable vehicle for literary expression. Its use allowed them to deal with "American" themes and subjects while remaining loyal to British poetic conventions.

Virgil's *Georgics* and a distinctive descriptive poetry genre came into fashion in England at the end of the seventeenth century with Dryden's translation of 1697. Dryden's attitude toward the poem is summarized when he calls it "the best Poem of the best Poet." Addison shared Dryden's estimate; in a preface published with the translation he complains about the previous neglect shown the *Georgics*. In praising Virgil's work Addison attempts to carefully distinguish between the pastoral and georgic mode. Thus, between them, Dryden and Addison set the stage for the tremendous critical acclaim the *Georgics* received throughout the eighteenth century. Critics such as Tickell, Trapp, Warton, and Blair soon added their voices to the universal assent.

One of the greatest tributes one author can pay another is imitation, and it is in this way that the majority of eighteenth-century British poets offered their praise to Virgil's *Georgics*. John Philips' "Cyder" (1706) utilizes Miltonic blank verse as the poet celebrates both agrarian life and labor. According to Durling, in his study of English georgic tradition, the success of Philips' poem "fixed the
English georgic as a type and determined its form." Despite this success it is for James Thomson that Durling reserves the titular salute, "the English Virgil." In the phenomenally popular poem The Seasons (1726-30), (a work enjoying seventy-two editions between 1730-1800 and forty-four more editions 1800-1820) Thomson transforms ancient tradition by exalting the farmer and nature in terms appropriate to his own age and country. For Thomson the farmer becomes a "natural man" and, when the seasons are personified, the "sublime" aspects of nature reveal themselves. Fully celebrating the life of the husbandman, The Seasons, like the Georgics before it, combines agricultural advice with narrative episodes, moral and philosophical meditation, and patriotic panegyric. While twentieth-century readers usually view Thomson's agrarian portrait as poetic idealization, it is important to note that contemporaries found the poem a most realistic depiction of the farmer and country life.

The years following The Seasons were filled with a seemingly endless production of descriptive poems about rural life. The sheer quantity of such poems forbids individual mention. Dr. Samuel Johnson succinctly summarized the literary situation in England in 1751 when he remarked, "There is, indeed, scarcely any writer who has not celebrated the happiness of rural privacy." During the last quarter of the eighteenth century many poets began to express the fear that due to enclosure England was losing her virtuous rural citizenry. Goldsmith's "The Deserted Village" (1770), Crabbe's "The Village" (1783), and Cowper's "The Task" (1785) represent some of the more successful and distinctly British versions of this genre. In the
chapters which follow we will find several American poets such as Freneau and Dwight directly responding to these British poems and, in the process, forging their own native tradition.

That the proliferation and aggrandizement of agrarian literary tradition took place in the eighteenth century should create no surprises when we remember that this was the great age of agricultural reform. The technical improvements resulting from the efforts of men like Arthur Young, Jethro Tull and Lord Townshend helped, at this time, to transform the very nature of the farming enterprise. The eighteenth century was the epoch in which mercantile economist Adam Smith would agree with French Physiocrats that husbandry was the most natural, tranquil, and favorite occupation of man, even if he would not concede that it was the only productive source of wealth. To understand the background for the eighteenth-century agrarian literary celebration it is important to note that, at this time, royalty too, strutted with a rural gait. George III enjoyed hearing himself called "Farmer George;" the French Dauphin and the Emperor Joseph proudly plowed furrows; and Marie Antoinette played dairy maid in a palatial barn. As Arthur Young remarked about the attitude of his contemporaries, "We might, without any great impropriety, call farming the reigning taste of the present times."

Despite the honorific praise and flattering tributes paid to independent agriculturalists, statistics reveal that by the eighteenth century nearly half of the cultivated land in England was owned by some five-thousand families. Indeed, in a country populated by some seven or eight million people, four-hundred families owned nearly a
quarter of the cultivated land. Although great landowners managed to interpret praise for simple tillers of the soil as applying to themselves, the common husbandman was probably a tenant farmer or laborer. These circumstances were reflected in British agrarian literature when authors frequently assumed the perspective of a humanitarian defending the oppressed poor, or alternately, addressed themselves quite explicitly to the aims and desires of the very wealthy landed classes.

It remained for American literature to adopt the ancient georgic model and celebrate the moral prosperity of the small, independent freeholder. Studies have identified large numbers of America's seventeenth-century settlers as emerging from the ranks of Britain's yeoman class. Industrious and frugal, these men equated social and political prestige with ownership of land. As they attempted to give literary expression to the opportunities they enjoyed in America, the figure of the farmer served as a readily accessible symbolic representative. In their paeans to the husbandman, these early American writers, unlike their British counterparts, focused on the art of cultivation, on the farmer's triumphant victory over untamed nature. The honest but humble yeoman (British authors usually portrayed him on the lower end of the social scale) was, within the pages of American literature, transformed into the staunch founder and supporter of the values of civilization.

A primary purpose of this admittedly cursory sketch of agrarian literary tradition has been to acknowledge the extended history that the celebration of the farmer enjoyed in Europe. American writers long considered themselves part of an Anglo-American community and took
England's heritage as their own. Thus America's georgic tradition was the result not only of the early inhabitants' encounter with the land, of the physical fact of settlement, but it was also the logical development and natural alteration of an important literary tradition which emerged in England contemporaneously with the initial founding and growth of the colonies.

Terms, Method and Approach

Before I discuss the scope and method of the chapters which follow, it is important to consider the larger implications of what happened to the celebration of the farmer when European conventions were applied to the husbandman's life in the New World. We must at least attempt to address the questions -- how? when? why? -- a long standing literary tradition, merely appropriated by native writers, was subsequently transformed into an American cultural myth. When I use the term "myth" I am not referring to the OED definition of "a purely fictitious narrative." Instead, I am concerned with the concept succinctly defined by Harry Levin "not as a downright falsehood, but as a collective fantasy embodying ideals and memories."91 As we shall see in subsequent chapters, over a period of time, the repeated literary exaltation of the farmer and his life by innumerable American writers resulted in a collective consensus that the agrarian model represented "a unique and compelling vision of the total American experience -- an American myth."92 To label American literary portraits of the farmer as "myth" or "fantasy" is not to summarily dismiss them. For their genuine belief in the myth affected many Americans' ways of seeing the world and ultimately their activity.
Most myths narrate a story, and the story which the myth of the farmer narrates is the primal tale of man's conquest over nature. On the subliterary level the myth has archetypal resonance. As Mircea Eliade has noted, "Settlement in a new, unknown, uncultivated country is equivalent to an act of Creation." When agrarian settlers attempt to cultivate the soil they are participating in "the repetition of a primordial act: the transformation of the chaos into cosmos by the divine act of Creation." Thus on some deep, unconscious level the American farmer assumes a god-like stance and performs a deific act when he engages in agriculture.

On a more mundane level, the myth of the American farmer narrates the popular fable of the self-made man. Through industrious labor and with heroic effort the American husbandman conquers the soil. By making the land fruitful he consequently achieves a moral prosperity for himself, his family, his country, and his god. In seventeenth-century versions of the farmer's rise from rags to riches we see early conceptualizations of the American Dream. Locating the farmer on the middle landscape of the agrarian frontier, authors depicted him as enjoying a spiritually, physically, and materially satisfying life. The American farmer, as he was idealized in the literature, was supposed to combine the values of the city with the virtues of the country. Free, independent, educated, prosperous, and civic-minded, he nevertheless remains simple, honest, friendly, and in tune with nature. Recitation of this idealized portrait in a country where ninety percent of the population were farmers offered, as Richard Hofstadter suggests, a means of self-glorification. And there was just enough hint of truth in the
opportunity to purchase land cheaply in America as to render the entire
fable believable. For as the great student of myth, E. Cassirer, has
suggested, it "is not the material content of mythology" which is most
important, but rather "the intensity with which it is experienced, with
which it is believed."95

A fully articulated myth of the American farmer did not initially
emerge full blown in one literary work. Instead, it evolved over the
course of the seventeenth century from a synthesis of three major
versions each of which corresponded, in a general way, to a specific
geographical area. While this process will be extensively explored in
the next chapter, a brief suggestion of its broad outlines is helpful.
Although all colonies began as predominately agricultural ventures, their
early literary productions were markedly different. Authors in the
Middle Colonies tended to treat the farmer in a realistic fashion. The
economic prosperity of their agrarian freeholders quickly made New
Jersey "the garden state" and Pennsylvania "the breadbasket of the
colonies." Thus the literary celebration of the farmer's prosperity
was a close approximation to reality in the Mid-Atlantic colonies.

Although Southern writers also depicted a realistic development of
the soil, they envisioned the farmer's labor as a moral experience.
Consequently, early Southern writings assume the character of fabula-
tions as they depict the farmer becoming regenerate through a redemp-
tive relationship with the land. In seventeenth-century New England,
the rocky soil and modest results of the husbandman's labor combined
with the religious predisposition of the settlers to insure that the
farmer's literary portrait would be essentially emblematic. The New
England colonies were depicted as god's "husbandry" and each man was charged with the "cultivation" of his own soul. Sometime before the start of the Revolutionary era these three views coalesced into the American agrarian myth. The rhythmic repetition of the farmer's story resulted in a vision which compelled belief.96

Innumerable critics have suggested that "myths are not freely 'made,' but represent a folk product expressing the collective labors, emotions and genius of peoples."97 With the myth of the American farmer, however, developed as it was in the age of the printing press, much of the direction for the celebration was deliberately and self-consciously imposed by literary artists. Nevertheless, the resultant fable fulfilled many functions of traditional myth.98 For the symbolic story of the American farmer allowed individual men to relate to their historical environment; it provided them with a supportive framework of values which endorsed their common activities. For the group, too, the myth of the farmer helped to make experience meaningful. It supplied the group with unity in purpose and cohesiveness in attitude. The farmer's transformation of the wilderness into a cultivated garden provided a structuring metaphor for experience, and once the initial experience was over, the recitation of the story granted later generations a mythic measure of continuity with the past.

There is one particular attribute of the myth of the American farmer which makes it an especially rich literary construct and should be duly noted. The fable lends itself fairly easily to creative literary analogies. As the farmer cultivates the land, as he imposes order on untamed nature, so the artist deals with reality. He too
exerts his energy so that meaningful patterns may result from experience. This analogy is an important thematic motif in the literature for the entire period under study. The myth of the farmer continually bridges the gap between reality and the world of the imagination.

This dissertation examines the farmer as he is represented in selected American writings from 1608 to 1862, from John Smith's *A True Relation of Virginia* through H. D. Thoreau's "Walking." The dates chosen are not arbitrary. Beginning in the first quarter of the seventeenth century, American writers celebrated the farmer as a virtuous husbandman to both land and family. Viewing America as a homeland these authors affirmed the industry and hard work needed to create civilization in the New World. Unlike earlier explorers interested only in a quick exploitation of the American scene, writers who equated the New World with a leisurely paradise, Smith praises the dignity, status, and material prosperity of American cultivators. In the first English book written in America, Smith acknowledges that settlers must face conditions as they find them, and he suggests that the future destiny of the New World lies in the labors of the husbandman. Thus *A True Relation of Virginia* marks a good starting point.

By the middle of the nineteenth century both American society and the literary role of the farmer changed significantly. Thoreau was a major American artist who self-consciously exploited the yeoman myth. In *Walden* he takes the agrarian role upon himself in order to infuse it with proper practical and symbolic meaning. Although Thoreau eventually comes to change the direction of the farmer myth by acknowledging that
economic reality and America's most compelling literary expression of rural life could no longer be fused, he still assumes that the farmer could be a viable symbol for representing the noblest goals, aspirations, and values of American society. He could provide men with credible fictions by which to live. In the posthumously published essay "Walking," Thoreau acknowledges the agrarian myth as an American "mythology," but consciously embraces it for the inspiration it continues to provide for his life and literature. As a result, "Walking" provides us with an acceptable point to halt the study and draw some conclusions.

Thus in Chapter 2, "The New World Settled: Literary Recognition of the Farmer's Role," we will explore agrarian images in the literature of seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century America. In the works of Hammond, Alsop, Lewis, Bradford, Johnson, Wigglesworth, Bradstreet, Byrd, and Franklin we will trace the regionally distinct agrarian portraits as they move toward a national consensus, and we will study some of the most important literary products of America's best early writers.

In Chapter 3, "The Creation of a New Republic: The American Farmer Apotheosized," we will investigate the role of the farmer in the works of the Revolutionary writers. The common experiences of husbandry and the symbol of the farmer helped to bring the colonies together at the time of the Revolution. At the war's conclusion, the husbandman quickly emerged as a symbol of American ideology and took his place as the first citizen of the New Republic. In the writings of Dickinson, Humphreys, Dwight, Jefferson, Freneau, and Crévecœur we will see that
the symbol of the farmer underlined the creation of some of the best literature of the day.

Chapter 4, "The Quest for American Literary Independence: The Farmer as Democracy's Hero," reveals that once political independence was achieved American authors began to self-consciously grope for a distinctive, native literary tradition. The new generation of authors, Paulding, Irving, and Cooper, soon recognized the process of settlement as the dominant characteristic of American life. In the figure of the farmer they found a cultural hero whom they could celebrate.

In Chapter 5, "The American Farmer and the Transcendentalist Vision," we will see some of America's most idealistic writers continue the literary tradition of the farmer. In an age of increasing prosperity and blinding materialism, Emerson, the participants of Brook Farm, and Thoreau, employ the husbandman in their writings in a self-conscious attempt to inspire a national rededication to the original principles of America. They manage to both preserve and transform American agrarian tradition in the process. This chapter concludes with an afterword.

Despite its scope, covering some two hundred and fifty years, this dissertation represents an attempt to be suggestive, not exhaustive. Many more authors and works could have been consulted, and those studied examined in more depth, if time permitted. Henry A. Murry in "The Possible Nature of a 'Mythology' to Come" argues that "one measure of the value of a myth ... is the quality of the imaginative symbolism and of the works of art which it inspires."99 If this study is able to suggest the rich variety and vitality, indeed the
literary merit of American works inspired by the myth of the farmer, it will have accomplished its major purpose.
ENDNOTES


8. Ibid., p. 123.

9. Ibid., p. 213.

10. Ibid., p. 215.

11. Ibid., p. 216.


13. Ibid., p. 141.


15. Ibid., pp. 38-39, 98.

16. Ibid., pp. 116-17.

17. Ibid., pp. 113-14.


19. Ibid., pp. 42-43.

20. Marx suggests such a substitution on p. 98. While in the two earliest pastoral poems, in Theocritus' Tenth Idyll and Virgil's First Eclogue, the authors employ a background of farming, their main poetic subjects are shepherds. During the subsequent development of the pastoral genre the conventional portrait of the Arcadian shepherd was rigidified. As Harold E. Toliver has noted in Pastoral: Forms and Attitudes (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971) the shepherd's life differs radically from the husbandman's life because the former has only to celebrate nature--he does not need to laboriously improve it. Pastoral literature envisions a world of leisure and song; its occupants engage in singing matches, compose love songs, complaints, and even dirges--but they do not vigorously struggle to make the earth fruitful. Pastoral literature is the product of sophisticated cultures; its philosophical ideas are related to the larger world through allusion and allegory. Using rural life as the raw material for their poetic vision, many pastoral writers actually held little esteem for authentic country labor or for the farmer. Peter V. Marinelli in Pastoral (London: Metheum & Co., 1971) suggests that English pastoral poetry was effectively "silenced" by a genuine return to the land in the eighteenth century. When the land is envisioned as a means to
capitalist investment, pastoral conventions prove inadequate. I believe that this was true in America from the earliest stage of settlement. For my conception of "pastoral" I am indebted to Toliver; Marinelli; Marx; John Heath-Stubbs, The Pastoral (London: Oxford University Press, 1969); and Eleanor Terry Lincoln, ed., Pastoral and Romance: Modern Essays in Criticism (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1969).


22. Ibid., p. 73; Marx does briefly look at pre-eighteenth-century American works by John Smith, William Bradford, and Robert Beverley.

23. Peter Fritzell argues that pastoral images were imposed on America beginning in 1498 when "one Cristoforo Colombo ... thought he saw along the coast of Venezuela, signs of the Earthly Paradise" (p. 9). For the next few centuries, according to Fritzell, European geographers, historians, and engravers, "very few of whom ... ever set foot on the American soil" reworked the reports of the discoverers and created visions of a "pastoral America" (pp. 43, 22). Fritzell insists that America was initially pictured as a "paradise of plenitude" because such pastoral literary conventions were the only descriptive techniques available to authors at the time (pp. 16, 22, 42-43). Although he does not fully explore the consequences, Fritzell does mention in the conclusion of his study that the settlers' "initial confrontation with the environment made it abundantly clear that the images of America being cherished in Europe were woefully inadequate either to describe the land or to sustain colonization" (p. 195). While Fritzell seems unaware of its existence, once actual settlement began, American writers were able to draw upon the long-standing georgic literary tradition to describe their experience. They praised the farmer and his laborious struggles to establish civilization. Like Leo Marx, Annette Kolodny sees the original promise of America in pastoral terms: it was a place which "promised material ease without labor or hardship" (p. 17). Early settlers brought a "yearning for paradise" with them to the New World. Since Kolodny defines the "pastoral impulse" in psychological terms as an "implicit internal longing for harmony and gratification in the natural world" (p. 11), she does not concern herself with the transmutation of pastoral conventions into New World imagery. While Kolodny examines a number of the same works that I do, her study focuses on the psychological implications of writers' verbal patterns. Believing that early American authors experienced the land as female, she is more interested in categories of sensuous response than in agrarian paradigms (i.e., She tells us that "at the deepest psychological level, the move to America was experienced as a kind of infantile regression from the cares of adult life and a return to the primal warmth of womb or mother breast," p. 17). Like Fritzell, Kolodny indicates that "experience of colonization brought with it, almost immediately, the traumatic realization that full and painless gratification of human needs on the American continent was really not possible" (p. 18).

25. Ibid., p. 374.

26. Ibid., p. 376.

27. Ibid., pp. 353, 364.


29. Ibid.

30. See Slotkin's discussion of Crèvecoeur's and Dwight's heroes in relation to his discussion of John Filson's Daniel Boone figure, pp. 259-65; 335-42; 268-312.


32. While any general bibliography of American literature will yield countless examples, the most influential studies are probably R. W. B. Lewis, The American Adam (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955) and Smith's Virgin Land (see above).


34. See Williams, p. 14; Wilkinson, p. 39.


37. Oeconomicus, Loeb trans., p. 405, as quoted in Griswold, p. 19.


42. Wilkinson, p. 223.


44. De Officiis, I, xlii, Loeb trans., p. 155, as quoted in Griswold, p. 20; see also Johnstone, "In Praise of Husbandry," p. 80 and Downs, p. 163.

45. Two important studies of georgic tradition are, of course, Durling and Wilkinson.


47. For background see Wilkinson, pp. 49-60; see also Durling, p. 46.


49. See in particular Wilkinson, pp. 51, 53, 59, 60.

50. Perret points out that the ancient values are characteristically urban, p. 37.

51. See Johnstone, "In Praise of Husbandry," pp. 82, 85.


56. Ibid., pp. 280-82.

57. Ibid., p. 279.


59. Ibid., p. 284.

60. Ibid., pp. 284-85.


63. Ibid.

64. Ibid.

65. Ibid., p. 292; see also Johnstone, "In Praise of Husbandry," pp. 82-83.


67. Ibid., p. 305; Schmidt, p. 12.


70. See Schmidt, pp. 6, 1-2.

71. Ibid., pp. 3-4, 8-9.

72. See Campbell; Schmidt, pp. 9-11.
73. Wilkinson, pp. 296-97.


75. Aubin, p. 7; Durling, p. 194.

76. Wilkinson, p. 299.


78. Wilkinson, p. 299; Durling, p. 23.

79. Durling, p. 35.

80. Ibid., p. 43.

81. Ibid., p. 49.

82. Ibid., pp. 51-52, 207.


84. See Johnstone, "Turnips and Romanticism," pp. 231-33; Griswold, pp. 21-22; Williams, p. 66.


86. Ibid., pp. 232-33.

87. Rural Economy, p. 173, as quoted in Griswold, p. 21.

88. Williams, p. 60.

89. For discussion see Durling, pp. 69-70, 101-102.


95. The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, II, 5, as quoted in Marcus, p. 222.

96. For interesting discussions of the role of belief in myth see Murray and Douglas.


98. The following categories of function are suggested by Marcus, p. 223 and Slotkin, pp. 8-9.

CHAPTER II

THE NEW WORLD SETTLED:
LITERARY RECOGNITION OF THE FARMER'S ROLE

Thus in the beginning
all the World was America"
John Locke

While early explorers conceived of America as an El Dorado, and interested themselves only in a quick exploitation of the American scene, beginning in the first quarter of the seventeenth century many writers began to look upon the New World as an actual or potential homeland. The dream of a paradise of leisure and plenty was radically altered when the first settlers embarked upon the land and recognized the laborious tasks which lay before them. An unprecedented potential for a peaceful, secure, and prosperous life was still available in the New World, but authors suggested that unstinting labor would be required to realize this new life.

America's earliest writers were excited by the opportunities to purchase land cheaply in the New World and to secure the dignity, status, and material prosperity commensurate with land ownership. The availability of cheap land underlined the rich promise of America. Beginning with the initial process of settlement in the first quarter of the seventeenth century, the beauty and bounty of the American landscape merged with the colonists' experience of husbandry to elevate the
farmer into a symbol of the new life which could be led in America. As the representative of agriculture, as the man who harnessed nature with the tools of civilization, the farmer figure helped American authors to conceptualize the potential ways of life and values of an emerging, new society.

In European georgic tradition, the farmer's occupation had long been invested with a moral, religious, economic, and political significance. America's early propagandists drew upon georgic tradition portraying the husbandman as a happy, virtuous, and free man who toiled for his God, his country, his family and himself. In their celebrations of the husbandman and his diligent efforts to erect a new civilization in the wilderness, America's earliest authors discovered a profound, concrete basis for European convention. They initiated the literary tradition of the American farmer.

As we begin our examination of the American farmer's portrait in representative seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century works, it is well to remember the enormous diversity of America's first colonies. Different motivating factors encouraged the growth of the various colonies. In general, it is probably fair to say that Southern and Mid-Atlantic settlers were predominantly interested in the extensive development of natural resources. With the exception of the Quakers in Pennsylvania and the Catholics in Maryland, their motivations for colonization were fundamentally economic and secular. As a result, the writers of these colonies carefully studied the land. They were quick to focus on the abundant fertility of the soil, on the vast opportunities for American agriculturalists. Some of the earliest formulations
of the American farmer as an archetypal self-made man were developed by these colonists.

Although the settlers of New England chiefly concerned themselves with the opportunities the New World offered to rectify existing religious and political institutions by enabling them to serve as a moral and religious example for the rest of mankind, they obviously could not ignore the mundane tasks of planting and sowing. Survival demanded agrarian labor, and the Puritans of New England could find comfort in their toil by comparing their agrarian pursuits with Biblical farmers in the Scripture. New England's early writers conceived of their colonies as God's chosen vineyards or gardens in the wilderness of the world. They imposed on reality an agrarian design adopted from the Bible. In using the farmer and his labors as a metaphor for their religious concerns, New England's early authors made significant contributions to the literary treatment of the farmer myth.

Seventeenth-century Southern, Mid-Atlantic and New England colonies all began as predominantly agricultural ventures. The farmer played a key role both in the actual life of the new colonies and in the literary works produced by their colonists. Yet the works reveal that authors quickly formulated diverse conceptualizations about the American landscape and their relationship to it depending largely upon the particular colony they inhabited. Consequently the best method for approaching the literary treatment of the farmer in seventeenth-century American works appears to be a consideration on the basis of geographical area. We will start our examination with the Southern perspective, and with the literary treatment of the earliest permanent
settlement established in America.

The South

John Smith's A True Relation of such occurrences and accidents of noate as hath hapned in Virginia since the first planting of that Collony (1608) was the first English book written in America. Not intended as a formal account for posterity, the work was composed as a personal letter. Although informal, as Everett Emerson points out in a study of Smith, A True Relation is more than a mere chronicle. The work is organized into thematic blocks. Smith details the struggle for survival of the Virginia colonists during the first thirteen months of the venture. The early months at Jamestown are described in A True Relation as disastrous primarily because many of the colonists were not prepared to submit to the painful labors required to establish a successful colony. They dreamed of gold and easy wealth. Smith comments that the men were in "despair" that they would "rather starue and rot with idlenes, then be perswaded to do any thing for their owne reliefe without constraint."

With vivid details Smith chronicles the settlers initial confrontation with America's wilderness and with her native inhabitants, the Indians. The colonists eventually learn that they must deal with conditions as they find them and not as they wish them to be. After realizing that their "course was to turne husbandmen to fell Trees and set Corne" (p. 35), Virginia's settlers successfully adapt to life in the New World.
Despite the problems he enumerates, Smith concludes *A True Relation* on a thoroughly optimistic note. He reports that Virginia was "not onely exceeding pleasant for habitation, but also very profitable for commerce in generall" (p. 40). Crops had been planted, food supplies were adequate, and the colonists were able to send a shipload of raw materials back to England (pp. 33, 39-40).\(^{10}\)

John Smith's *A True Relation of Virginia* marks the first attempt at an imaginative reconstruction of the meaning of American experience from the perspective of an actual settler. The future direction for prosperity in the New World is set in Smith's book. America's earliest settlers find success through industrious agrarian labor, and this country's destiny is seen to lie in the fruitful labors of her husbandmen.

Smith's next publication was *A Map of Virginia with a Description of the Countrey* (1612). This work was divided into two parts. Smith wrote the first part himself. He also contributed to the second part, which is an attempt by several authors to vindicate Smith's descriptions of the struggles of the Virginia Company.\(^{11}\) Much of the first part of *A Map of Virginia* fits the conventions of promotion literature.\(^{12}\) Smith includes a detailed description of the land, the resources, and the native inhabitants of Virginia and makes a strong propagandistic bid for new immigrants. He tells his readers: "heaven and earth never agreed better to frame a place for mans habitation ... were it fully manured and inhabited by industrious people."\(^{13}\)
As he did in *A True Relation*, Smith indicates that Virginia was not the place for those who desired quick and easy wealth. He is optimistic about opportunities for personal advancement in America, yet he is eminently practical in his proposals. "Plenty" may be obtained in the New World, but only "by the industry of men" (p. 2).  

In promoting Virginia's land and resources Smith includes the following description:

The country is not mountaneous nor yet low but such pleasant plaine hils and fertile valleys, one prettily crossing another, and watered so conveniently with their sweete brookes and christal springs, as if art it selfe had devised them. By the rivers are many plaine marishes containing some 20 some 100 some 200 Acres, some more, some lesse. Other plaines there are fewe, but only where the Savages inhabit; but all overgrowne with trees and weedes being a plaine wildernes as God first made it (p. 3).  

The two similes I have underlined reveal some interesting attitudes toward the New World landscape. It is seen to encompass both the beauty of an artistic creation and the bounty of the prodigal garden. In this passage Smith begins to suggest a fundamental Southern conceptualization of America's landscape, one that became extensively developed in Southern literature throughout the seventeenth century. In the South, America comes to be viewed as a cornucopia, as a virtually inexhaustible supplier of natural resources. Seventeenth-century Southerners journeyed to the New World primarily to acquire land. In the literary works produced by these settlers their journey comes to be seen not only as a materially prosperous undertaking, but also as a moral mission in which the cultivators of the earth become regenerate through a kind
of redemptive relationship with the artistically beautiful and pristinely innocent natural landscape.15

Robert Johnson published *The New Life of Virginia* (1612), and told his readers on the title page that his account was "published by the authoritie of his Maisties Counsell of Virginea."16 While Johnson may not have actually settled in America, his work reveals that he was intimately concerned with the success of the colonial venture. *The New Life of Virginia* exemplifies the typical promotion tract as Johnson persuasively argues the tremendous opportunities for a "new life" in the New World.

Johnson initially compares the colonial venture to the Mosaic exodus (B3r) telling his readers that Virginia was a "pleasant land," one which "wanted nothing but industrie and art to adde to nature" (B3v). As he describes the houses, churches, and hospitals constructed in the new land Johnson emphasizes the civilized quality of the undertaking (B3r; D2v). Rather than fleeing civilization, these men were attempting to create a new, flourishing society in the wilderness. They wished to "liue as free Englishmen, vnder the gouernment of iust and equall lawes" (E2v). The primary benefit Johnson promises potential settlers was that "the land" will be "dispos’d to euerie man for his house and ground, wherein to employ himselfe for his owne benefit" (E3v).

Articulating the concept of freehold tenure, Johnson expresses the most important colonial motivation for agrarian development. Ownership of land to seventeenth-century Englishmen meant more than material prosperity; it assured dignity, status, and political autonomy.17
As Johnson praises the agrarian life style in the New World, he attempts to dignify the "commendable labours" of America's farmers. He tells his readers that the colonists were engaged in that most wholesome, profitable and pleasant work of planting, in which it pleased God himselfe to set the first man and most excellent creature Adam in his innocencie, to which the best Kings of Israel were most addicted, and by which so many kingdoms are much enriche, and for which the noble King Cirus that great monarch is so much commended, whose glorie was to all Ambassadors and forraigne states (not withstanding his being a Souldier and a Conquerour of great employment) in shewing the comelie order of his owne handie worke (E2r-E2v).

While proclaiming that the American farmer enjoyed the opportunity to pursue a godly and prosperous "new" life style in the New World, Johnson assures his readers that agrarian living had a noble and ancient heritage.

Unlike Smith and Johnson, John Hammond composed Leah and Rachel; or The Two Fruitful Sisters Virginia and Mary-Land (1656) from the perspective of a man who had lived and worked in the New World for many years. His style is blunt, to the point, and generally more literary than the works we have previously examined. Hammond begins his account with a forceful claim of authority. He will write from experience "not hearsay." Unlike "other lying writters ... who at randome or for their own private lucre have rendered their Books rediculous and themselves infamous lyars," Hammond promises to tell the truth (p. 284). He will not "over extoll the places, as if they were rather Paradices than earthly habitations" (p. 284). Desiring to inform his readers "what they the colonies are, and how the people
there live" Hammond hopes to "clear up those Foggy Mists, that hath to their own ruin blinded and kept off many from going thither, whose miseries and misfortunes by staying in England are much to be lamented, and much to be pittied" (p. 284).

Leah and Rachel functions as part history and part promotion tract. Hammond acknowledges the validity of aspersions cast on Virginia's early settlers. Many were "rogues, whores, disolute and rooking persons" (p. 284) who lived improvident lives and as a result were often in want (p. 286). Yet, Hammond claims, Virginia was not "without divers honest and virtuous inhabitants" (p. 286). These colonists called assemblies, made strict laws and in general reformed the "licentiousnesses" of the colony (p. 286). As Hammond tells his readers:

The inhabitants now finding the benefit of their industries, began to look with delight on their increasing stacks (as nothing more pleasurable than profit), to take pride in their plentifully furnished Tables, to grow not only civil, but great observers of the Sabbath, to stand upon their reputations, and to be ashamed of that notorious manner of life they had formerly lived and wallowed in (p. 286).

As Ministers and teachers were imported, and stately buildings constructed, Virginia became a pleasant, civilized place in which to live (pp. 286-87).

Hammond concludes the historical portion of his account by reflecting upon Virginia's "present Condition and Happiness" (p. 287). He states: "I affirme the country to be wholesome, healthy and fruitful; and a modell on which industry may as much improve itself in, as in any habitable part of the world; yet not such a Lubberland as the Fiction of the land of Ease is reported to be, nor such as
Utopian as Sr. Thomas Moore hath related to be found out" (p. 287).

According to Hammond the New World was not paradise, but it was an abundantly fruitful land where men could lead moral lives and prosper through their own industry. Hammond finds the meaning of the American experience in the toil of the husbandmen (p. 292).

As Leo Lemay has noted, the central theme of John Hammond's *Leah and Rachel* is the archetypal American Dream. According to Hammond, many settlers had already risen from poverty and obscurity to a position of wealth and prominence in the world. If diligence and hard work could not improve a man's fortunes in America, then it is unlikely that they could ever be improved. Hammond tells his readers:

> It is knowne (such preferment hath this country rewarded the industrious with) that some from being woolhoppers and of as mean and meaner imployment in England have there grown great merchants, and attained to the most eminent advancements the country afforded. If men cannot gaine (by diligence) status in those parts (I speake not only mine own opinion, but divers others, and something by experience) it will hardly be done, unlesse by mere lucke as gamsters thrive, and other accidentals in any other part whatsoever (p. 299).

Although Hammond claims there were "several ways of advancement there," he suggests the most easily accessible route was through agrarian labor (p. 299). Cheap land made freehold tenure widely available. As Hammond narrates: "The manner of living and trading there is thus; each man almost lives a freeholder, nothing but the value of 12d. a year to be paid as rent, for every 50 Acrees of land ... every man plants his own corne" (p. 298). Aware that many immigrants did not arrive equipped to immediately purchase land, Hammond meticulously details the methods by which "industrious"
indentured servants "may in their time of service gain a competent estate before their Freedomes" (pp. 292, 289-92). Servants were permitted to "clear ground" and "husband" a parcel of land during their spare time (p. 292). Accumulated profits enabled them to purchase cattle, hogs, and the tools of agrarian life. In addition, the learned agricultural expertise proved valuable when the indentured servants were freed and began to cultivate their own property.

As Hammond suggests and contemporary historians have documented, colonial society was not classless. Clear distinctions separated the gentleman from the servant. At the same time, however, society was fluid. Social mobility enabled the indentured servant to quite easily become the gentleman farmer.21

Hammond's identification with America and with the American way of life was total. The forceful language of the following simile amply demonstrates his loyalty:

And therefore those that shall blemish Virginia any more, do but like the Dog bark against the Moon, untill they be blind and weary; and Virginia is now in that secure growing condition, that like the Moon so barked at, she will passe on her course, maugre all detractors, and a few years will bring it to that glorious happinesse, that many of her calumniators will intercede to procure admittance thither, when it will be hard to be attained to; for in smal time, little land will be to be taken up (p. 296).

When Hammond makes his strongest promotional bid for emigration, he does not, as do many seventeenth-century American writers, plead with the poor to leave England. Instead, he condemns the "stupidity" of anyone who would choose to stay in that overpopulated land. The vitality and energy of his prose is apparent in his following
description of England's poor:

And therefore I cannot but admire, and indeed much pitty the dull stupidity of people necessitated in England, who rather then they will remove themselves, live here a base, slavish penurious life; as if there were a necessity to live and live so, choosing rather then they will forsake England to stuff New-Gate, Brídewell, and other Jayles with their carekessies, nay cleave to tyburne it selfe, and so bring confusion to their souls, horror and infamie to their kindred or posteritie, others itch out their wearisom lives in reliance of other mens charities, an uncertaine and unmanly expectation; some more abhorring such courses betake themselve to almost perpetuall and restlesse toyle and druggeries out of which (whilst their strength lasteth) they (observing hard diets, earlie and late houres) make hard shift to subsist from hand to mouth, untill age or sicknesse takes them off from labour and directs them the way to beggeries, and such indeed are to be pittied, relieved and provided for (pp. 296-97)."22

Hammond tells his readers that this "manner of living was degenerate and base" (p. 297). When viewed against the prospects for success in America, this portrait of English poverty becomes pathetically wasteful. Hammond suggests that England's poor have a moral obligation to improve themselves, to become the best they can be by embarking upon a journey to the New World and grasping the handle of the farmer's plough.

In 1666, George Alsop published A Character of the Province of Maryland which is a promotion tract that has been characterized by Leo Lemay as "one of the most witty and scurrilous books of colonial America."23 Writing in the tradition of a learned wit, Alsop employs an elaborately rhetorical low style. The author combines sexual allusions with comic word play and extravagant figures of speech to make A Character of the Province of Maryland an amusing literary
effort.\textsuperscript{24} It is interesting to note that Southern writers in the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries often used satire and wit in their treatments of American agrarian experience, while authors in the more Northern colonies generally avoided the detached perspective of humor in their literary works on the farmer.

Obviously aware of, and perhaps bored by the traditional structure and contents of promotional literature, George Alsop offers an alternative.\textsuperscript{25} He tells his readers:

\begin{quote}
I shall forbear to particularize those several sorts of vegetables that flourishingly grows here, by reason of the vast tediousness that will attend upon the description, which therefore makes them much more fit for an Herbal, than a small Manuscript or History.\textsuperscript{26}
\end{quote}

Alsop does not, however, "forbear" to describe the landscape itself. He tells us that it is "the Landskip of the Creation drawn to life" (p. 32). He adds: "Neither do I think there is any place under the Heavenly altitude, or that has footing or room upon the circular Globe of this world, that can parallel this fertile and pleasant piece of ground in its multiplicity, or rather Natures extravagancy of a superabounding plenty" (p. 32). The author's praise of America as a limitless cornucopia reveals his position within the Southern literary tradition. Alsop concludes his purple passage of praise with the wry observation that Maryland was even adequate to "supply the reaching stomach of man" (p. 33).

Throughout \textit{A Character of the Province of Maryland} Alsop emphasizes the pristine quality of the American landscape. He observes: "The Trees, Plants, Fruits, Flowers and Roots that grow here in
Mary-Land, are the only Emblems or Hieroglyphicks of our Adamitical or Primitive situation" (p. 33). As do his contemporary American authors, Alsop praises the land, which he calls a "fertile womb" (p. 41) for the great profits it affords its inhabitants (p. 70). He also praises the highly civilized quality of life in this colony: "For here every man lives quietly, and follows his labour and employment desiredly" under "the protection of the Laws" (p. 45). Maryland is described as the "Miracle of this Age" since she allows "Roman Catholick" and "Protestant" to live at peace with one another (p. 43).

In describing the peaceful and prosperous life in the New World, Alsop, like Hammond before him, clearly and forcefully contrasts America with England. His literary sophistication and sense of humor are both evident in the following comparison. Alsop asserts:

Here if the Lawyer had nothing else to maintain him but his bawling, he might button up his Chops, and burn his Buckrom Bag, or else hang it upon a pin until its Antiquity had eaten it up with dust and dust: Then with a Spade, like his Grandsire Adam, turn up the face of the Creation, purchasing his bread by the sweat of his brows, that before was got by the motionated Water-works of his jaws (p. 48).

The conniving lawyer symbolically represents the English life style while Alsop chooses the symbol of the archetypal farmer to represent experience in America. Although Alsop employs humor and wit in his description of life in Maryland's early colonies, his underlying attitude reveals sustained praise for America's tremendous agrarian prospects.
After the successful establishment of the Southern colonies few Southern writers considered a detailed account of their activities worth the writing. Unlike New Englanders, these settlers did not attempt to justify the ways of God to man, nor did they feel compelled to meticulously detail God's blessings or punishments as manifested within their daily lives. The earliest Southern work which attempts a comprehensive description of a colony's history, natural resources, Indian natives, and contemporary political and social conditions is Robert Beverley's *The History and Present State of Virginia* (1705).

Like other authors we have examined, Beverley begins his work with a claim of authority and veracity (p. 9). He demonstrates the urbanity of his literary perspective by self-consciously commenting upon his own style. Beverley writes:

> If I might be so happy, as to settle my Credit with the Reader, the next Favour I wou'd ask of him, sho'd be, not to Criticize too unmercifully upon my Stile. I am an Indian, and don't pretend to be exact in my Language: But I hope the Plainness of my Dress, will give him the kinder Impressions of my Honesty, which is what I pretend to (p. 9).

Beverley's mock posture of a distinctly American provincial, an Indian, reveals his New World perspective.

When reviewing the early settlement Beverley acknowledges that the colony was initially inhabited by "Persons of low circumstances." He claims however: "Nor was it hardly possible it should be otherwise; for 'tis not likely that any Man of a plentiful Estate, should voluntarily abandon a happy certainty to roam after imaginary advantages, in a New World." They must be discouraged by "the infinite
Difficulties and Dangers, that attend a New Settlement" (p. 286). Carefully surveying his homeland and its inhabitants, Beverley presents an accurate appraisal. He goes on to distinguish the present state of Virginia from its past:

But this way of Peopling the Colony was only at first; for after the advantages of the Climate, and the fruitfulness of the Soil were well known, and all the dangers incident to Infant Settlements were over, People of better Condition retir'd thither with their Families, either to increase the Estates they had before, or else to avoid being persecuted for their Principles of Religion, or Government (p. 287).

Virginia is now a pleasant, prosperous and civilized place. What grants Virginia its successful stature remains for Beverley the fertility and abundance of its soil. He compares the soil of the colony with that of the promised land:

The Country is in a very happy Situation, between the extrems of Heat and Cold, but inclining rather to the first. Certainly it must be a happy Climate, since it is very near of the same Latitude with the Land of Promise. Besides, As Judea was full of Rivers, and Branches of Rivers; So is Virginia: As that was seated upon a great Bay and Sea, wherein were all the conveniences for Shipping and Trade; So is Virginia. Had that fertility of Soil? So has Virginia, equal to any Land in the known World. In fine, if any one impartially considers all the Advantages of this Country, as Nature made it; he must allow it to be as fine a Place, as any in the Universe (p. 296).

Beverley's praise of the New World's abundant earth takes an interesting turn in his account. He claims the land is perhaps too fertile. Criticizing his "Country-men" for their "unpardonable laziness," Beverley states: "If there be any excuse for them in this Matter, 'tis
the exceeding plenty of good things, with which Nature has blest them; for where God Almighty is so Merciful as to work for People, they never work for themselves" (p. 196). Detailing the rich variety of crops the soil is capable of producing, Beverley criticizes the "isolated" nature of Virginia settlement. If the colonists would settle together in communal towns they could more easily help one another and secure profitable markets for their labors (pp. 316-319). What Beverley concludes about Virginia's agriculturalists is that "they depend altogether upon the Liberality of Nature, without endeavoring to improve its Gifts, by Art or Industry. They spunge upon the Blessings of a warm Sun, and a fruitful Soil, and almost grutch the Pains of gathering in the Bounties of the Earth" (p. 319).

Beverley's history is particularly significant because it reveals an early, thorough identification with the New World. This settler was secular, practical and self-consciously American. He criticized his fellow "countrymen" (and the implication is that he meant other Virginians, not inhabitants of the Old World) because he hoped to "rouse them out of their Lethargy, and excite them to make the most of all those happy Advantages which Nature has given them" (p. 319). Beverley saw glorious future prospects for America's farmers if they would only recommit themselves to an industrious relationship with her abundant land.

While most literature produced by early Southern writers took the form of promotion tracts and histories, the area was not without more belleurtristic compositions. Many colonists were learned and educated men who possessed large libraries and remained familiar with
contemporary literature produced on the other side of the Atlantic. As the writers of these colonies attempted to represent ways of life and values of American society they employed the formal patterns of contemporary British literature.

In 1708 Ebenezer Cooke published "The Sot-Weed Factor," a satire of America's agrarian life style. Leo Lemay has termed Cooke's composition "the best Hudibrastic poem of colonial America." The ostensible purpose of the poem was to warn potential emigrants of the hazards of life in the New World. On its surface level, "The Sot-Weed Factor" is addressed to a sophisticated, urbane London audience.

The body of the poem chronicles the adventures of a tobacco merchant in the Maryland colony. Like other hopeful emigrants the narrator "from Great-Britain did arrive/ In hopes the better there might thrive" (p. 284). The following quotation contains the narrator's initial description of American agriculturalists:

These Sot-weed Planters Crowd the Shoar,  
In Hue as tawny as a Moor:  
Figures so strange, no God design'd,  
To be a part of Humane Kind: (p. 283).

American planters are represented as lazy, drunken, slothful and illiterate men. The painstaking efforts of earlier Southern writers to create a "civilized" image of American farmers are humorously challenged as Cooke details the "rough edges" of life in the New World.

As with all satire, what is being attacked is exaggerated and purposely overstated. The description of American vice itself becomes a literary construct. New World planters are not merely hard drinkers, rather they revel in limitless drunken orgies (p. 292). Digesting such indelicate dishes as "infant Bear" (p. 288), they share their sleeping
quarters with barnyard animals (pp. 287-88). Since the planters' wives are depicted as both sluttish and sloppy, it is no wonder their rooms "seldom felt the Weight of Broom" (p. 267). In the fiction of the poem America is shown to be no place for civilized Englishmen. This point is made quite clear when Cooke's narrator, rather than "prospering" in the New World, loses all his money, his clothes, and finds himself immensely relieved to take the first boat back to Britain (pp. 294, 299, 301). Thus "The Sot-Weed Factor" functions as a sophisticated parody of the much lauded American Success Story.

Cooke's ludicrous rhymes and iambic tetrameter rhythm complement the exaggerated and outlandishly funny portrait he paints of the New World's agricultural society. While a description of boorish pioneers will become a stereotype of later American literature, Maryland society in 1708 boasted more sophistication. Playing with English assumptions that all of America remained a completely uncivilized wilderness, Cooke exposes English gullibility and credulity to ridicule. Unlike "provincial" Londoners, American readers would know that "The Sot-Weed Factor" was a comic exaggeration of New World agrarian conditions.

Two poems written by Southerners and published in the eighteenth century testify to the continued importance of the farmer as a symbol of both America's past accomplishments and her future potentialities. Richard Lewis' "Carmen Seculare" (1732) and an anonymous poem, "VERSES Occasioned by the SUCCESS of the BRITISH ARMS in the Year 1759" (1760), both celebrate versions of the American progress theme. Within the poems, the relentless toils of America's planters in clearing, planting, and harvesting the land are extolled as the foundation of
the New World's triumphant civilization.

Lewis' "Carmen Seculare" was an occasional piece written to
commemorate the festivities at Lord Baltimore's arrival in 1732. Lewis, of course, praises Lord Baltimore and his ancestors for their role in Maryland's development. Their encouragement of religious
tolerance is particularly applauded as Lewis asserts:

WHAT Praise, Oh PATRIOT, shall be paid to Thee!
Within thy Province CONSCIENCE first was free!
And gained in MARYLAND its native Liberty (p. 308).

Maryland's humble planters, however, are no less worthy. Their "Toils" and "Industry," the labors they "sustain'd/ To plant and cultivate the
dreary strand" have helped the colony become a pleasant dwelling place (p. 307). When discussing the planters' efforts, Lewis takes time to condemn an unprofitable reliance on the single crop tobacco. He calls for a diversification of Maryland's agriculture (p. 311).

Like many writers before him, Lewis praises the fruitful earth that allows men to attain a moral prosperity. Prophesying future progress for his homeland, Lewis continues the American theme that great happiness and contentment result from an industrious, and morally redemptive relationship with the land. He states:

THESE Blessings Nature to this Land imparts;
She only asks the Aid of useful Arts;
To make Her with the happiest Regions vye,
That spread beneath the all-surrounding sky (p. 312).

While the title of the poem "VERSES occasioned by the SUCCESS of
the BRITISH ARMS in the Year 1759" suggests that its subject is military
conquests, as Leo Lemay points out, the true subject is the thoughts
inspired by this success, that is, the glorious progress of English
civilization in the New World. Written in effective heroic couplets, the poem chronicles the life and work of a single planter, an agriculturalist, whose steady toil has helped erect a worthy American civilization. With "Art and Labour" this American husbandman has cleared the land and enjoyed bountiful harvests (pp. 341-42). He remains "Free and contented in his own Estate" (p. 342). Praising the bounty and fertility of America, the author of "VERSES" concludes his poem with the tentative hope that millennial expectations, that is, a final end to war, poverty, destruction, and unmerited death, may one day be realized in the agrarian society of the New World (pp. 343-44).

In order to summarize the Southern perspective on the farmer as it had evolved by the early eighteenth century, we may briefly examine the literary works of William Byrd. As a large scale planter, Byrd was representative of the ruling elite in Southern society. Although small independent farmers continued to flourish in backwater areas, the general method and crops of agricultural production in the South encouraged the growth of vast landed estates, and insured that the model for agrarian celebration would, at least occasionally, be the wealthy planter. The more prosperous Southern agriculturalists enjoyed close ties with English society, and many, like Byrd himself, were educated in England. These agrarians succeeded in developing what has been termed "the most cultivated society on the North American continent prior to the Revolution." As we have seen, many early Southern writers articulated their literary vision of the American experience with urbane sophistication and with humor and wit. William Byrd continues this self-conscious literary tradition.
Like earlier Southern writers, Byrd often voices personal interest in the development of the land and in the cultivation of America's natural resources. His diaries and other works reveal the author's intimate concern with the agricultural production of his holdings. For example, in "A Progress to the Mines" (1733) Byrd joyfully includes a digression on the proper method for keeping "weevils out of wheat and other grain" (p. 349). It is in his more publicly oriented compositions, however, that Byrd truly discloses his deep-rooted agrarian bias and his familiarity with agricultural literary heritage. "The History of the Dividing Line" (1728) and "A Journey To the Land of Eden" (1732) were formulated as travel accounts but function quite forcefully as promotional propaganda. Within his texts Byrd attempts to encourage immigration by focusing on the fertility of the soil and by enumerating the vast opportunities available to American agriculturalists. As John Smith had done more than a hundred years before him, Byrd praises Virginia as a cornucopia, extols the prosperity available to her new settlers, and insists that unstinting labor and industry will be required to realize this new wealth.

Despite his affluence and prominent social position, William Byrd does not glorify a life of idle leisure or ease in America. Not in search of a pleasurable paradise for himself, he reveals contempt for those with an "aversion to labor" (p. 205). In "The History of the Dividing Line" he derides the "slothfulness" of the people of North Carolina who live in a "Lubberland" subsisting "without any pains" (p. 204). To convey the lazy indolence of the North Carolineans,
Byrd creates the comical picture of a group who "when the weather is mild, ... stand leaning with both their arms upon the cornfield fence and gravely consider whether they had best go and take a small heat at the hoe but generally find reasons to put it off till another time" (p. 204). The author's witty understatement aids the effectiveness of the passage.

Byrd's most memorable portrait of an idle settler in "The History" depicts the character sketch of the "marooner" who cohabits a bower with a "wanton female" (pp. 179-80). Comparing this isolated backwoodsman to a raven, Byrd insists that "he neither plowed nor sowed" but survived by scavenging oysters (p. 180). The author's commitment to civilization -- to cultivated land and nature improved -- is disclosed when he informs his readers, "Thus did these wretches [the marooner and his woman] live in a dirty state of nature and were mere Adamites, innocence only excepted" (p. 180) [emphasis added.]

In "A Journey To the Land of Eden" Byrd repeats his derision of lazy, indolent settlers. He describes "a poor dirty house, with hardly anything in it but children that wallowed about like so many pigs" (p. 409). Like Beverley before him, Byrd goes on to suggest that the problem may be caused by the very fruitfulness and productivity of the American soil. He asserts, "It is a common case in this part of the country that people live worst upon good land, and the more they are befriended by the soil and the climate the less they will do for themselves" (p. 409). The owner of the house with his pig-like children is an example for Byrd: "This man was an instance of it, for though his plantation would make plentiful returns for a little industry, yet he,
wanting that, wanted everything" (p. 409). Not to lead an industrious and frugal life, not to cultivate the civilized virtues is, according to Byrd, to debase oneself, and to become little more than an animal.

Opposed to the slothful, poverty-stricken backwoodsman, Byrd places the laboring farmers who enjoy a moral prosperity. In "The History of the Dividing Line" he insists "the two cardinal virtues that make a place thrive" are "industry and frugality" (p. 173). Depicting a concrete example of his agrarian ideal, Byrd narrates a portrait of the people at "Timothy Ivy's Plantation." As he tells his readers, "We perceived the happy effects of industry in this family, in which everyone looked tidy and clean and carried in their countenances the cheerful marks of plenty" (p. 192).

Throughout most of his works, Byrd incessantly praises the fertility of the American soil and remarks upon its quality as good arable farm land. When, within "The History," he initially views acreage which he subsequently purchases, Byrd envisions the future destiny of the region in agrarian terms. In his mind's eye he sees a prosperous settlement established on the spot: "so that a colony of one thousand families might, with the help of moderate industry, pass their time very happily there" (p. 290). "Grazing and tillage" would "abundantly compensate their labor" as would other agrarian pursuits which Byrd describes (p. 290). Byrd summarizes his attitude with the witty, balanced, epigrammatic statement, "In short, everything will grow plentifully here to supply either the wants or the wantonness of man" (p. 290).
William Byrd's literary portraits of the farmer and his labors manifest the essential Southern view. The practical development of the land and resources was tremendously important to Southerners. In acquiring land and in physically tilling the soil, the husbandman insured his own material prosperity. But, in the South, the farmer's commitment to cultivate the land was more than economic. It represented a socially directed, moral mission. By laboring in the earth, the farmer earned the fruits of virtue as well as prosperity. In making the land fruitful he performed a ministerial function for himself and for the rest of society. William Byrd and other Southern writers did not celebrate nature alone, but rather what man made of nature and himself through vigorous cultivation.

**New England**

American literary efforts in New England began, once again, with the work of John Smith. A *Description of New England* (1616) is an impressive and enthusiastically written promotion tract. Expressing motivations for colonization common to most promotion tracts, Smith argues that Englishmen's efforts to plant a settlement in the wilderness will bring honor to God, country, and themselves. Smith manages to mix his propaganda with specific suggestions concerning colonization and with philosophical commentary. Rhetorical flourishes aid the author in his attempt to stir the imagination of potential emigrants.

According to Smith, New England is, first of all, "a most excellent place" (p. 193). Smith tells his readers "the ground is so fertill, that questionless it is capable of producing any Grain, Fruits, or Seeds you will sow or plant" (p. 198). To be brought to
perfection, the land needs only to be "cultured, planted and manured by men of industrie, judgement, and experience" (p. 197). What makes New England so immensely attractive, Smith suggests, is the availability of freehold tenure: "So freely hath God and his Maiesty bestowed those blessings on them that will attempt to obtaine them, as here every man may be master and owner of his owne labour and land; or the greatest part in a small time. If hee haue nothing but his hands, he may set vp his trade; and by industire quickly grow rich" (p. 196).

Smith's enthusiastic belief in the great prospects for success in America stimulates him to compose some of his best writing. He has a primarily bourgeois conception of New World advantages. America is the place for the self-made man. Smith rhetorically asks his readers:

Who can desire more content, that hath small meanes; or but only his merit to aduance his fortune, then to tread, and plant that ground hee hath purchased by the hazard of his life? If he haue but the taste of virtue and magnanimitie, what to such a minde can bee more pleasant, than planting and building a foundation for his Posteritie, gotte from the rude earth, by Gods blessing and his owne industrie, without prejudice to any? (p. 208).

The implicit answers to Smith's questions are that, of course, there is nothing more pleasant than working God's land and building a prosperous home for oneself and one's children. This early testimony to the prospects for agriculture in America extols the virtues of diligence and industry and affirms a material reward. Through hard work the farmer will be able to erect a commonwealth and share with his neighbors "libertie, profit, honor, and prosperitie" (p. 216).
While Smith acknowledges several satisfactions American settlers might gain in the New World, such as pride in a patriotic expansion of England's dominions, and honor in helping to convert the Indians, his perspective in *A Description of New England* remains that of a bourgeois pragmatist. He tells his readers: "For, I am not so simple to thinke, that ever any other motiue then wealth, will ever erect there a commonweale; or draw companie from their ease and humours at home, to stay in *New England* to effect my purposes" (p. 212). In this promotion tract Smith institutes an explicit marriage of money and agriculture that will have a long tradition in American literature. Many authors will praise the union and happily enumerate its benefits. Eventually, however, over a period of time, the American farmer's love affair with the dollar will be condemned. The farmer will stand accused of a grievous betrayal, of ignoring the essence of nature's beauty and bounty for a myopic pursuit of wealth. As H. D. Thoreau will come to say, the American farmer's "fields bear no crops," his "meadows no flowers," and his "trees no fruits, but dollars." The history of this change in perspective marks an interesting dimension in the development of the farmer myth in American literature. We will return to this theme several times in subsequent chapters.

The last sixteen years of John Smith's life were largely devoted to promoting the colonization of New England. He composed two other important promotional pieces, *New England Trials* (1620) and *Advertisements for the Unexperienced Planters of New England* (1631). Many of the same themes are repeated in these two works as Smith details the components needed for successful colonization. In *New Englands Trials* he
reaffirms the idea that "it is not work for every one to plant a
Colonie ... This requireth all the best parts of art, judgement,
courage, honestie, constancy, diligence and experience to doe but neare
well."51 In Advertisements for the Unexperienced Planters of New England
Smith favorably contrasts the men who were settling in the North with
their earlier counterparts in Virginia. These New Englanders will un-
doubtedly succeed because "they are overseers of their owne estates and
so well bred in labour and good husbandry."52

What is most distinctive about Smith's Advertisements is his
increasing emphasis on religion. Earlier he had given religious concerns
only a cursory mention but now he saw them as an indispensable ingredient
of successful colonization. Strong religious ties provided an instrument
of order, something needed in the early stages of development.53 Smith
tells his readers: "God did make the world to be inhabited with man-kind
and to have his name knowne to all Nations, from generation to generation"
(p. 10). He also provides the following selective genealogy to establish
the religious importance of the settlers' move into the wilderness:

Now the reasons for plantations are many; Adam and
Eve did first begin this innocent worke to plant
the earth to remaine to posterity, but not without
labour, trouble and industry: Noah and his family
began againe the second plantation, and their seed
as it still increased, hath still planted new
Countries, and one Country another, and so the
world to that estate it is; but not without much
hazard, travell, mortalities, discontents, and
many disasters: had those worthy Fathers and their
memorable offspring not beene more diligent for us
now in those ages, ... had the seed of Abraham, our
saviour Christ Jesus and his Apostles, exposed
themselves to no more danger to plant the Gospel
wee so much professe, then we, even we ourselves
had at this present beene as salvages, and as
miserable as the most barbarous salvage yet
uncivilized (pp. 10-11).54
Not to attempt to plant a colony in New England appears, in Smith's Advertisements, to be a moral and religious betrayal of God's sacred covenant. While John Smith may have found Christ in his later years, what appears more likely is that he discovered the over-abiding religious motivations of those men who chose to settle in New England, and plant the colony he dreamed of.

The three earliest accounts of the New England plantations written by the participants themselves are Mourt's Relation (1622), Edward Winslow's Good News From New England (1624), and Francis Higginson's New Englands Plantation (1630). All three chronicle the initial stages of settlement, and are promotional pieces of a kind. They advance the common arguments for colonization, that is, that America was an abundant and vacant land, and that settlers would bring honor to God, Country, and themselves if they would plant a colony in this wilderness.

After describing the initial struggles for survival, the scarcity of food, and the confrontations with the Indians, all three works meticulously detail the colonists' first clearing, planting, and harvesting of crops. They each offer similar religious justifications for the settlers' endeavors with the land. Winslow, in Good News From New England, comments: "God hath a purpose to give that land, as an inheritance, to our nation. And great pity it were, that it should long lie in so desolate a state" (p. 581). The authors of Mourt's Relation elaborate upon this "desolate state" of New England and suggest its previous owners, the Indians, have not proved themselves worthy of God's benevolence:
This then is a sufficient reason to prove our going thither to live lawful: their land is spacious and void, and there are few and do but run over the grass, as do also the foxes and wild beasts. They are not industrious, neither have art, science, skill or faculty to use either the land or the commodities of it, but all spoils, rots, and is marred for want of manuring, gathering, ordering, etc. As the ancient patriarchs therefore removed from straiter places into more roomy, where the land lay idle and waste, and none used it, though there dwelt inhabitants by them, (as Gen. 13:6, 11, 12, and 34:21, and 41:20), so is it lawful to take a land which none useth, and make use of it (pp. 91-92).

Francis Higginson concurs with this view in New Englands Plantation, adding: "great pittie it is to see so much good ground for corne and for grasse as any vnder the Heauens, to lye altogether vnoccupied when so many honest Men and their Families in old England through the populousness thereof, do make very hard shift to liue one by the other" (C3v). Higginson is convinced: "God blesseth husbandry in this Land" (B2). The strenght of his conviction is apparent as he closes his account with the assertion: "And thus we doubt not but God will be with vs and if God be with vs who can be against vs?" (D).

As revealed in these quotations, the Pilgrims and Puritans hoped to succeed in agricultural ventures in the New World, as did their counterparts in the South. The difference was that for New Englanders the acquisition of land with its concomitant material prosperity was not the major concern. A comment by Winslow in Good News From New England best summarizes the New England perspective:

I confess [that] we have come so far short of the means to raise such returns, as, with great difficulty, we have preserved out lives: insomuch as when I look back upon our condition, and our weak means to preserve the same, I rather admire [wonder] at
GOD'S mercy and Providence in our preservation, than that no greater things have been effected by us. But though our beginning hath been thus raw and inexperienced, small, and difficult; as thou hast seen: yet the same GOD, that hath hitherto led us through the former, I hope will raise means to accomplish the latter. Not that we altogether, or principally, propound profit to be the main end of that we have undertaken; but the glory of GOD, and the honour of our country ... (p. 596).

Men settled in New England with the desire to recapture the pristine quality of the early church. America offered the opportunity to erect a new society, to rectify within its borders existing religious and political institutions. New Englanders keenly felt the eyes of the world upon them, and they endeavored to serve as a moral and religious example to the rest of mankind. The "civilized" nature of their colonies cannot be overestimated. As highly educated men, they were inheritors of a humanist tradition and they espoused the educated opinion of the day. New England settlers did not flee civilization in the Old World so much as they came to erect a new and better society in the New World wilderness. While these attitudes are perhaps more apparent in the histories we will presently examine, they are evident in the promotion tracts as well. The three early accounts carefully document all progress made toward the erection of "Townes." New Englanders did not question "but men might live as contented here as in any part of the world" (MR p. 84). They did all they could to make their colonies as "civilized" as possible.

While Mourt's Relation, Good News From New England, and New Englands Plantation all make promotional bids, and attempt to persuade their contemporaries to emigrate, they are quite explicit about the
type of settlers who were welcome. The "honest, godly, and industrious men" would be happily admitted while the "dissolute and profane" were invited to stay home (MR p. 96). The right kind of men could "do good" in America and make use of "that knowledge, wisdom, humanity, reason, strength, skill, faculty, etc. which God hath given them for the service of others and his own glory" (MR p. 90). On the other hand, the authors of these pamphlets tried, as Winslow puts it, "to discourage such as, with too great lightness, undertake such courses" (GNFNE p. 597). The discontent of such settlers who, upon debarking, see "their foolish imagination made void" (p. 597), would only be a burden to serious colonists. Winslow paints the following concrete portrait of the "foolish" ideas some men bring with them:

And can any be so simple, as to conceive that the fountains should stream forth wine or beer; or the woods and rivers be like butchers' shops and fish-mongers' stalls where they might have things taken to their hands? If thou canst not live without such things; and hast no means to procure the one, and wilt not take pains for the other; nor hast ability money to employ others for thee, rest where thou art (p. 598)!

Winslow affirms that industry and diligence are needed to prosper in the New World. An arduous task lay before men in America, and the trip across the Atlantic should not be taken lightly.

Before concluding our examination of New England's promotional literature, one more important feature needs to be noted. In the introduction or "Dedication" of Mourt's Relation, the first account written by men who had made New England their homeland, Robert Cushman offers the following apology:
As for this poor relation, I pray you to accept it, as being writ by the several actors themselves, after their plain and rude manner: therefore doubt nothing of the truth thereof. If it be defective in anything, it is their ignorance that they are better acquainted with planting than writing (p. 4).

While similar apologies and testimonies of veracity were common in the literature of the period, Cushman's is particularly interesting. He reveals that by this early date (1622) America's settlers had already assumed an agrarian identity and that her writers could use the husbandman as a symbol of American experience. In addition, Cushman suggests an important modification of the husbandman symbol. He writes assuming the mock posture of a provincial. America's New England settlers were not "ignorant," nor were they unacquainted with contemporary literary practices. The very presence of the apology itself testifies to a familiarity with conventions of seventeenth-century literature.

As the farmer continues to be used to represent ways of life and values of American society he will often assume the mock posture of a provincial. Crévecoeur's farmer James, in Letters From an American Farmer, is probably the most famous example. (This work will be discussed in the next chapter). In the larger view, it is well to remember that a "provincial" perspective has been an important characteristic of many American literary classics even to the present day.

The two earliest comprehensive histories of New England composed by the first generation participants are William Bradford's Of Plymouth Plantation (written between 1630 and 1650; published 1856) and Edward Johnson's Wonder-Working Providence of Sions Saviour in New England.
(1654). In many ways the two histories are remarkably different. Johnson's work is a classic example of seventeenth-century baroque prose. Johnson conceived of his task as that of composing a grand apologia for the New England way. He attempted to impart grandeur to his theme through the use of bold rhetorical devices and extravagant images. Employing a mode of embellishment, Johnson has his complex, periodic sentences pivot on bookish allusions. Wonder-Working Providence of Sions Saviour in New England is one of the most self-consciously literary works produced in early New England.

Bradford's Of Plymouth Plantation, on the other hand, amply illustrates the "plain style" characteristic of much of seventeenth-century Puritan writing. Since he employs biblical allusions more for illumination than decoration, Bradford's prose images tend to be far more orderly than Johnson's. Vitality and accessibility of meaning result from Bradford's use of fresh, vigorous, homely imagery. The use of a "plain style" in Of Plymouth Plantation in no way diminishes the grand scope of New England's Pilgrim mission. Rather, its simplicity allows Bradford to convey the dramatic quality of the New England experience with clarity and immediacy.

What the two histories have in common, however, is far more significant than their differences. As Puritans, both historians conceived of human history as a kind of divine revelation. They both attempted, as far as evidence would permit, to discover God's conscious and deliberate direction in men's lives. The description of the prosperous activities of God's faithful servants in the New World ultimately reflected God's glory and greatness, since it was He who granted the
settlers the powers and virtues needed to succeed. Both writers viewed
New England's colonization as a significant stage in the working out of
God's Providential design for world history. Particular events had a
resonance of meaning which stretched backward to Creation and forward to
the Second-coming. (Through the use of typology Puritans found propheti-
cal adumbrations of Christ and the doctrines of the Christian Church
in the people and events of the Old Testament. They also extended the
parallels to find types of Christ in the contemporary Saints resident
in New England.) Like artists imposing order on reality, both Bradford
and Johnson created histories which offer an integrated approach to the
past.

In Of Plymouth Plantation Bradford claims that the New England
settlers had "a great hope and inward zeal ... of laying some good
foundation, or at least to make some way thereunto, for the propagating
and advancing the gospel of the kingdom of Christ." As a result,
"their condition was not ordinary, their ends were good and honour-
able, their calling lawful and urgent; and therefore they might expect
the blessing of God in their proceeding" (p. 27). In Wonder-Working
Providence Johnson advances a similar argument, but he allows no
equivocation whatsoever. He tells his readers that "Christ creates a
New England to muster up the first of his Forces in" and that "this is
the place where the Lord will create a new Heaven, and a new Earth in,
new Churches, and a new Common-wealth together" (pp. 1, 3). Johnson
asks his fellow men to "attend" to their "Commission" (p. 3).
Believing that New England was to be the site of the New Jerusalem, Bradford and Johnson constructed essentially millennial works. They viewed themselves as the "chosen people" to accomplish this millennial mission and America as the chosen place in which the divine struggle would be enacted. Such ideas suggest an early geographical and ideological identification with the New World. America was seen to be distinct from and in some ways superior to old England. This Puritan contribution to the development of a national identity reveals that the conceptualization of America as a "redeemer nation," one that would illuminate the "chosen path" for all mankind, did not originate in the secular politics of the Revolutionary period. Rather, an originally religious prescription was transformed by later American writers into a predominantly secular and political vision. We will return to this millennial theme and its relation to the farmer myth in subsequent chapters.

In both Of Plymouth Plantation and Wonder-Working Providence the prosperity of American husbandman is viewed as a testimony of God's blessings. Johnson includes compact descriptions of each of the thirty churches (and therefore towns) established in Massachusetts before 1651. The following depiction of the settlement at Charles Towne in 1631 is representative:

This, as the other Churches of Christ, began with a small number in a desolate and barren wilderness which the Lord in his wonderfull mercy hath turned to fruitful Fields. Wherefore behold the present condition of these Churches compared with their beginnings; as they sowed in teares, so also have they Reaped in joy (p. 40).

In each case Johnson includes a statistical survey of the number of
acres brought under tillage, the variety of crops planted and the kinds of domestic animals raised. Proud of the civilized nature of the undertaking, he describes the number of houses, gardens, and orchards erected, the types of market-places developed, and, of course, the presence of fine Sabbath Meeting Houses (p. 41). The meager beginnings of each town are recorded in order to emphasize the progress made in transforming the wilderness into God's noble vineyard. Johnson notes "the toile of a new Plantation" is "like the labours of Hercules never at an end" (p. 83). According to Johnson the New England village manner of settlement is particularly advantageous because "with a new Plantation they ordinarily gather into Church-fellowship, so that Pastors and people suffer the inconveniences together, which is a great means to season the sore labours they undergo" (p. 83).

In Of Plymouth Plantation Bradford limits his discussion of Pilgrim prosperity to the single colony of Plymouth. Throughout the history Bradford focuses on endeavors to keep the settlers together in one compact grouping. Motivations for communal dwelling were as much religious as they were for defense against the Indians. Pilgrim leaders sought to maintain Church fellowship. However, as Bradford meticulously details in the history, the material advantages of moving off to the frontier and developing new lands, eventually proved irresistible. In the following passage Bradford forcefully describes the beginning of the end of communal ownership of the land. The stage is set for the institution of freehold tenure:
All this while no supply was heard of, neither know they when they might expect any. So they began to think how they might raise as much corn as they could, and obtain a better crop than they had done, that they might not still languish in misery. At length, after much debate of things, the Governor (with the advice of the chiefest amongst them) gave way that they should set corn every man for his own particular, and in that regard trust to themselves; in all other things to go on in the general way as before. And so assigned to every family a parcel of land, according to the proportion of their number, for that end, only for the present use (but made no division for inheritance) and ranged all boys and youth under some hands very industrious, so as much more corn was planted than otherwise would have been by any means the Governor or any other could use, and saved him a great deal of trouble, and gave far better content. The women now went willingly to the field, and took their allege weakness and inability; whom to have compelled would have been thought great tyranny and oppression. The experience that was had in this common course and condition, tried sundry years and that amongst godly and sober men, may well evince the vanity of that conceit of Plato's and other ancients applauded by some of later times; that the taking away of property and bringing in conanunity into a commonwealth would make them happy and flourishing; as if they were wiser than God. For this community (so far as it was) was found to breed much confusion and discontent and retard much employment that would have been to their benefit and comfort ... And would have been worse if they had been men of another condition. Let none object this is men's corruption, and nothing to the course itself. I answer, seeing all men have this corruption in them, God in His wisdom saw another course fitter for them (pp. 120-21).

Eventually the New England husbandmen prosper and "prize corn as more precious than silver" (p. 144). Bradford tells us: "That they might therefore increase their tillage to better advantage, they made suit to the Governor to have some portion of land given them for
continuence, and not by yearly lot" (p. 145). This too was granted.

As the people continued to prosper the demands for new land grew more vociferous. Bradford's disapproval of the increasing economic motivations of American husbandmen is evident in the following commentary:

And yet in other regards this benefit turned to their hurt, and this accession of strength to their weakness. For now as their stocks increased and the increase vendible, there was no longer any holding them together, but now they must of necessity go to their great lots. They could not otherwise keep their cattle, and having oxen grown they must have land for plowing and tillage. And no man now thought he could live except he had cattle and a great deal of ground to keep them, all striving to increase their stocks. By which means they were scattered all over the Bay quickly and the town in which they lived compactly till now was left very thin and in a short time almost desolate (p. 253).

Bradford feared the relatively easy prosperity available in the New World was making men forget their divine mission.

In Wonder-Working Providence, Johnson also condemns the apparent greed of American farmers. His attack is somewhat more vehement as he tells his readers:

the husbandman, whose over eager pursuit of the fruits of the earth, made some of them many times run out so far in this wilderness, even out of the sweet sound of the silver Trumpets blown by the laborious Ministers of Christ, forsaking the assembly of the Lords people, to celebrate their Sabbaths in the chimney-corner, horse, kine, sheep, goats, and swine; being their most endeared companions to travel with them to the end of their pilgrimage (p. 214).

Johnson suggests the farmers' barnyard animals will be of little service on the day of reckoning.
While there was a place for prosperity in the Puritan vision of agrarian life in America, spiritual leaders fought a hard struggle to keep the Godly mission in the forefront of the New England venture. In the closing pages of *Wonder-Working Providence* Johnson remains certain that the Second Coming was at hand and the Anti-Christ would soon be defeated. Bradford, who has been accused of transforming his epic into a jeremiad, is somewhat more equivocal. He does, however, continue to trust God's direction and to hope that everything would turn out for the best.

In his scholarly studies on the subject, Perry Miller described American Puritanism as an outgrowth of the advanced culture of the day. He suggested that the texture and range of Puritan learning reflected the educated opinion of the time. Miller's discussion allows us to place Puritanism within the wider context of Christian humanism. Puritans, like other humanists, accepted the belief that knowledge of virtue would help to make a good man. Of course, Puritans acknowledged that God's grace was the deciding factor. However, knowledge gained from an explication of the Bible and from sermons could help men prepare for justification, could aid men in finding Christ. The key to truth in the humanist tradition lay in the advancement of learning.

Since the same God who gave man revelation also gave him reason, Puritans believed that divine meaning was at least partially comprehensible to man. The genre of the sermon was a practical application of a godly pursuit of knowledge. Its composition illustrated man's exercise of his faculty of reason and his ability to meaningfully interpret God's message. In short, the Puritan sermon affirmed the
rational dignity of man.

Second in significance only to the Bible, the sermon was perhaps the most important literary form the Puritans composed. As a highly developed genre, sermons were structured in a recognizable homiletic pattern. Ministers selected a choice subject from the Biblical text, explicated its principles and meanings, and went on to apply those principles and meanings to contemporary life. I have selected four appropriate sermons to serve as representative examples of the genre. Composed by John Cotton, the two Samuel Danforths, and Cotton Mather, these four sermons each illustrate the fundamental Puritan conceptualization of their colonies as God's chosen vineyard or garden in the wilderness of the New World. Consequently, the four sermons aptly demonstrate the emblematic use of the farmer figure in the literature of colonial New England.

The New World landscape impinged on the imagination of these four authors and helped to give rise to their art. When, within their sermons, they discuss the laborious attempts made to conquer the American "wilderness" and transform it into God's "plentiful garden," these ministers are speaking metaphorically. They are primarily concerned with the struggle to end man's estrangement from God and bring him back to Christ. Yet there can be little doubt that the very use of the word "wilderness" conjured up images of the surrounding American landscape and their relationship to it. Within their sermons, Cotton, the two Danforths, and Mather each construct elaborate conceits in which God is portrayed as a gardener or husbandman, and his church as his husbandry or vineyard. Like the mortal farmer, God could either tend his garden and
thus cause it to flourish, or abandon it, and cause it to be overgrown with noxious weeds. With these images, the ministers transformed theological doctrines, ideas about the relationship between man and God, into common, homely language which would be readily accessible to the primarily agrarian congregations.

In addition, as these four ministers pored over the Biblical text, they could discover numerous situations in both the Old and New Testaments in which God's servants had moved into a wilderness to plant his word. This Biblical authority provided an enormous sense of satisfaction, and served to remind them that God's blessings and benedictions were freely bestowed on such holy "planters." In each of the four sermons we will presently discuss, scriptual passages serve as a gloss on the Puritan experiences in seventeenth-century America.

John Cotton begins his sermon, Gods Promise to His Plantation (1630), with the following scriptural passage: "Moreover I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and I will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own and move no more 2 Sam. 7:10" (p. 4). The body of the sermon is an explanation and elaboration of this passage. Cotton concerns himself with the attempt to plant the word of God in all its ramifications. He discusses why God desires a plantation, how he prepares his servants for the task, what men should expect when they enter a new wilderness, how God will preserve them against their enemies, and the importance of maintaining the glory of God's plantation for future generations.
Cotton tells his congregation: "The placing of a people in this or that Country is from the appointment of the Lord" (p. 5), that they may "plainly see a providence of God leading them from one Country to another. Since "as in Psal. 24.1. The earth is the Lords, and the fulnesse thereof" (p. 7), the settlers in New England should be confident as "in Psal. 89.21, 22 The enemie shall not exact upon them any more. And in Psal. 92.13 Those that shall be planted in the house of the Lord, shall flourish in the Courts of our God. Gods plantation is a flourishing plantation, Amos 9.15" (p. 11). The people of New England are reminded by Cotton of "the office God takes upon him, when he is our planter hee becomes our husbandman; and if he plant us, who shall plucke us up? Isay. 27.1, 2. Job. 34.29" (p. 12).

There are literally scores of Biblical quotations in Cotton's Gods Promise to His Plantation. They serve as an immediate Biblical gloss on the experience of the New England colonies. Cotton dwells on the religious, moral, and also economic benefits men gain as they "dwell there like Free-holders in a place of their owne" (p. 5). As should be expected, Cotton acknowledges the "grand charter given to Adam and his posterity in Paradise, Gen. 1.28. Multiply and replenish the earth, and subdue it" and "renewed to Noah Gen. 9.1 Fulfill the earth and multiply" (p. 6). Interestingly enough, Cotton also finds support in the scripture for a type of natural rights philosophy. He gives the following description of Abraham's "rightful possession of land: "Gen. 21.25. For his right whereto he pleaded not his immediate calling from God, (for that would have seemed frivolous amongst the
Heathen) but his owne industry and culture ... it is a Principle in Nature, That in a vacant soyle, hee that taketh possession of it, and bestowth culture and husbandry upon it, his Right it is" (p. 6).

The applicability of Cotton's biblical pronouncements for life in Puritan New England is obvious. Not only od the settlers have a pre-ordained godly right to possession of the land, but so long as they labored diligently to bring the earth under tillage, they could claim ownership as a principle of Nature's law as well.

Samuel Danforth's *A Brief Recognition of New England's Errand into the Wilderness* (1690) and Cotton Mather's *The Present State of New England* (1690) were written somewhat later. Both sermons reveal characteristics of the Puritan jeremiad as the two authors berate their congregation for laxity in fulfilling their divine mission.

John the Baptist is the hero of Danforth's sermon, *A Brief Recognition of New England's Errand into the Wilderness*, and the minister dwells on the significance of the wilderness situation. Danforth rhetorically asks his parishioners: "To what purpose then came we into the wilderness and what expectation drew us hither? Was it not the expectation of the pure and faithful dispensation of the Gospel and the kingdom of God?" (p. 73). Danforth compares the colonies to Christ's vineyard or garden in the world and uses many of the same scriptural citations as Cotton to support his analogies (pp. 62-64, 68, 71-73).

Asking his congregation "What is it that distinguisheth New England from other colonies and plantations in America?" (p. 73), Danforth informs them that it was "Not our transportation over the Atlantic Ocean, but the ministry of God's faithful prophets and the fruition of his holy
ordinances" (p. 73).

In *The Present State of New England* Cotton Mather elaborates upon the conceptualization of New England as Christ's vineyard or garden in the wilderness of the New World. Mather describes New England as "The almost only Garden which our Lord Jesus has in the vast continent of America" (p. 37). Telling his congregation "our God has been heretofore cutting and Pruning of us, but either I'll Fruit or No Fruit is the Best Fruit which we have hitherto yielded unto that glorious Husbandman," Mather claims New England is in a precarious state (p. 34). He fears the colony "has the wild Boars of the wilderness trying to get into it" (p. 37). Suggesting "If Heaven will Rejoice at the Destruction of Anti Christ, it will also Rejoice at the Deliverance of New England" (p. 37), Mather argues that the colonists salvation will depend largely on the "venture of our all" (p. 37). He pleads with his congregation to "be plowing and planting every Day" to be working laboriously "for the Fruit of prayer" (p. 46).

The conceptualization of New England as God's vineyard or garden in the wilderness of the world evident in the previous three sermons receives its fullest literary treatment in Samuel Danforth's *An Exhortation to All* (1714).82 (This Danforth was the son of the previous minister by the same name.) Plumstead calls Danforth's work the "finest example of an expanded metaphor in an election sermon up to the time of the Revolution, demonstrating the Puritans' capacity for ingenious analogies and emblems."83

Danforth builds the body of his sermon around the following Biblical passage" "Return, we beseech thee, O God of hosts: look down from
heaven, and behold, and visit this vine. Psal. 80.14" (p. 151).

Transforming the abstractions of theological doctrine into meaningful and sensuous imagery, Danforth builds an extended conceit. He writes:

The church is God's vineyard which his own right hand hath planted (ver. 8, 15). It is a garden inclosed (Cant. 4.12), planted, and formed for himself to show forth his praise (Isa. 43.21), set apart for his own peculiar use, service, and delight. The church owns no other master but Christ, reserves all her fruit for him, and keeps faithful to him. Those planted into this vineyard, tho' by nature they are wild plants and of the wild olive, yet are made noble vines and a right seed by effectual calling and their implantation into Christ. The creating power of God's right hand is put forth in infusing grace into them; man's nature brings not forth the fruits of the Spirit without the skill and husbandry of him that made it -- we are therefore called "God's husbandry" (I Cor. 3.9). The seeds of the fruits of righteousness must be sown in us by God's Spirit and grow in us by his blessing (p. 153).

Danforth later adds: "it is God who brings all to pass which is done for the good of his vine; Paul may plant and Apollo may water, but God alone gives the increase (Acts 3.12)" (p. 167). The theological complexities of man's relation to God are thus made readily accessible to the congregation.

In explaining the source of the present ills in New England, Danforth again returns to the agricultural analogy:

It is the absence and withdrawing of God from his vineyard that is the reason why all things are out of order therein. When the master and owner of a garden is long absent, fences and hedges soon decay and the garden and orchard yields little fruit for want of digging, pruning, weeding and other good husbandry which the master's eye and presence would from time to time carefully bestow upon it (p. 168).
The message of An Exhortation to All is the need for prayer by all New Englanders that God should once again return to this vineyard.

An examination of these representative sermons thus reveals the impact of the American landscape, and men's relationship to it, on the minds of the authors. While ministers could find abundant theological and biblical precedents for their extended use of agrarian imagery, surely the commonly experienced tasks of clearing, planting, and harvesting the earth played a significant role in their selection of metaphorical language. As writers who freely praised "God the Father, the Husbandman, Vinedresser, and owner of the vineyard" (Danforth, EA, p. 157), they helped to augment the stature of their own, mortal husbandmen. As they metaphorically attributed agrarian features to their God and his church, they sought to better comprehend their God and their relationship to him through their experience of husbandry in this, His world. New England settlers came to America to found a homeland. In their sermons they suggested that agrarian prosperity honored God and demonstrated His blessings upon their venture.

In addition to composing promotion tracts, histories, and sermons, New England Puritans were great admirers of verse. Largely because of its importance in the Old Testament, Puritans viewed poetry as a superior form of discourse and often used it to arouse the reader's emotional conviction of sound doctrine. Familiar with British verse and critical theory of the time, American Puritans designed their poems to teach as well as delight. When they poeticized their experience in the New World, these writers celebrated the farmer in largely symbolic terms. They used him as a structuring metaphor to convey
religious concerns.

Many Puritan poets who came to America wrote about their experiences at length. As may be only too clear by now, the fundamental Puritan conceptualization of America was that of a wilderness laboriously transformed by God's servants into an enclosed garden. In the works of Puritan poets we see America extolled as an eminently satisfactory homeland. Applying an agrarian design adopted from the Bible to their life in the New World, these writers depicted the farmer as a spiritual and physical husbandman to both his land and his family. After the initial stages of settlement, many Puritan poets celebrated the New England household and farm with warm affection.

In an early poem, "Awake Yee Westerne Nymps, Arise and Sing" (1647?) by Samuel Danforth, we can see the American experience treated in ways similar to its portrayal in the Puritan sermons. In the following quotation Danforth symbolizes New England colonization through the conceit of a plant:

Behold a choyce, a rare and pleasant plant,  
Which nothing but its' parallel doth want.  
T'was but a tender slip a while agoe,  
About twice ten years or a little moe,  
But now 'tis grown unto such a comely state  
That one would think't an Olive tree or Date.

A skilfull Husband-man he was, who brought  
This matchles plant fron far, and here hath sought  
A place to set it in: and for it's sake,  
The wilderness a pleasant land doth make,  
And with a tender care it setts and dresses,  
Digs round about it, waters, dungs and blesses,  
And, that it may fruit forth in season bring,  
Doth lop and cut and prune it every spring (p. 417).

Within the body of the poem Danforth asserts that this metaphorical plant, the New England colony, has grown fruitful in America. It has blossomed
forth the virtues of "Justice," "Liberty," "Peace," "Truth," and "Plenty" (pp. 418-19). It has made the New World a pleasant place in which to live. Danforth adds:

But lest this Olive plant in time should wither,
And so its fruit and glory end together,
The prudent Husband-men are pleas'd to spare
No work or pains, no labour, cost or care (p. 419).

Danforth's conceit works on several levels. While agrarian husbandmen have laboriously toiled to keep New England agriculturally productive, her spiritual husbandman, God's ministers, have sought to preserve her admirable moral and religious purity.

William Bradford composed a poem, "A Descriptive and Historical Account of New England in Verse" which remained in manuscript form for well over one hundred years. Within the poem Bradford offers a selective chronology of the growth of colonization in the New World:

Almost ten years we lived here alone.
In other places there were few or none;
For Salem was the next of any fame,
That began to augment New England's name;

... And truly it was admirable to know,
How greatly all thing here began to grow.
New plantations were in each place begun
And with inhabitants were filled soon.
All sorts of grain which our land doth yield,
Was hither brought, and sown in every field (p. 77).

Bradford continues his discussion by meticulously detailing the rich variety of New England's crops (p. 78). Documenting the increasing agrarian prosperity of the settlers, Bradford states:

Here store of cows, which milk and butter yield
And also oxen, for to till the field;
Of which great profit many now do make,
If they have a fit place and able pains do take (p. 78).

What Bradford particularly stresses in this poem is the civilized, godly
nature of New England settlement. He says:

God in his word with us he here did dwell;  
Well ordered Churches in each place there were  
And a learn'd ministry was planted here

...  
To the north, or south, or which way you'll wind,  
Churches now are spread, and you'll pasture find.  
Many men of worth, for learning and great fame,  
Grave and godly, into these parts here came:  
As HOOKER, COTTON, DANFORTH, and the rest (p. 79).

After devoting the body of his poem to the moral and economic prosperity enjoyed in the new homeland, Bradford concludes his work with the fear that New England may be losing her way, and with the prayer that God will once again bring his people back to the fold (pp. 82-84).

Michael Wigglesworth's verse jeremiad, "God's Controversy with New England" (1662) has the subtitle "Written in the time of the great drought Anno 1662. By a lover of New England's Prosperity." Wigglesworth's identification with the New World in this poem is complete. As he traces the course of "New England planted, prospered, declining, threatened, punished" (p. 43), the author pleads with his countrymen to turn back to God. Before God brought his servants to New England, Wigglesworth asserts, America was "A waste and howling wilderness" (p. 43). After much labor, and with God's blessing, the husbandmen have brought the country to prosperity. But now, Wigglesworth claims:

Our fruitful season have been turned  
Of late to barrenness,  
Sometimes through great and parching drought,  
Sometimes through rain's excess.  
Yea now the pastures and corn fields  
For want of rain do languish:  
The cattell mourn, and hearts of men  
Are fill'd with fear and anguish (p. 53).
Wigglesworth views the drought as God's punishment for "our great unworthiness" (p. 53). If New England is to be fruitful and prosperous again, her settlers must return to God. Wigglesworth tells his countrymen:

Ah dear New England! dearest land to me;
Which unto God hast hitherto been dear,
And mayst be still more dear than formerlie,
If to his voice thou wilt incline thine ear
(italics mine) (p. 54).

In "God's Controversy with New England" Michael Wigglesworth reveals himself to be not only an orthodox Puritan, but also a committed lover of a prosperous new homeland.

Almanac verse enjoyed a tremendous vogue in seventeenth-century New England. What could be more natural or appropriate for poets celebrating the twelve months of the year, than a seasonal depiction of the husbandman's labors? As we have seen in the last chapter, the poetic celebration of the seasons was a long standing literary tradition with roots in the ancient world. American poets were following convention when they detailed the clearing, planting and harvesting of crops during the seasonal cycle. Daniel Russell's poem in An Almanack of the Coelestiall Motions for the year of the Christian Aera, 1671 employs classical allusions and can serve as a representative example. Russell offers the following verse for the month of April:

Now big with hopes, the toyling Country Swain
Buries in th' Earth his multiplying Grain,
On which the Heavens do fertile Showers distill
Which th' Earth with fruits, the Swain with joy doth fill
(p. 633).

July is portrayed in the poem through a vigorous depiction of the husbandman's harvest:
Now Ceres Offspring's numerous every where,
And mighty Armies of Tall Blades appear
In many fields, all Rank'd and Fil'd they stand
Ready for Battel: With whom hand to hand
Fierce Husbandmen with crooked Cutlash meet,
And being Victors lay them at their feet.
This don't suffice; together th' Blades are bound,
Transported home, and soundly thresh'd on th' ground
(p. 634).

Russell's vital battle imagery in this passage emotionally conveys the sense of enormous struggle. In this almanac poem, American husbandman enjoy prosperity in the New World, but, as always, their success is shown to be the result of laborious toil.

Anne Bradstreet, one of early America's best poets, published the quaternion poem "The Four Seasons of the Year" in 1650. This work resembles common almanac verse in that it traces the activities of America's settlers through the monthly cycles. Bradstreet is, of course, working within previously established European tradition. In addition, the warmth and intensity of Bradstreet's portrayal demonstrates strong affinities with later nature poems such as Thomson's The Seasons. In celebrating life in agrarian New England, Bradstreet confirms the farmer's perseverance in cultivating the new land and tells her readers that in Spring:

Now goes the plowman to his merry toil,
He might unloose his winter locked soil:
The seedsman, too, doth lavish out his grain
In hope the more he casts, the more to gain;
The gard'ner now superfluous branches lops
And poles erects for his young clamb'ring hops;
Now digs, then sows his herbs, his flowers and roots,
And carefully manures his trees of fruits (p. 65).

When summer comes the farmer's crops must be harvested and this process too demands laborious toil. It is "with weary strokes" and "bearing the
burning heat of the long day" that the farmer accomplishes his task:

He plowed with pain, but reaping doth rejoice,
His sweat, his toil, his careful, wakeful nights,
His fruitful crop abundantly requites (p. 69).

The farmer does not work alone at his task; his family helps to make agrarian life in the New World as comfortable as possible. The farmer's wife must preserve the harvested crops in anticipation of the rigors of winter. As Bradstreet states: "The cleanly housewife's dairy now in th' prime/ Her shelves and firkins filled for winter time" (p. 67). The steady personal habits needed for labor in the field and labor in the farmhouse encourage America's settlers to lead moral lives.

When Bradstreet comes to describe the abundant beauty of the autumnal landscape in "The Four Seasons of the Year," she is reminded of Eden and suggests that this is the season "Our grandsire was of paradise made king" (p. 70). As a Puritan Bradstreet viewed nature as the handiwork of God. An autumnal scene in another poem, "Contemplations" (1650), had moved her to say:

If so much excellence abide below
How excellent is He that dwells on high
Whose power and beauty by his works we know? (p. 205)

Bradstreet read God's benevolence and greatness in the beauty of the American landscape. Since the farmer worked in close contact with this godly "revelation," he drew religious inspiration from the soil. Bradstreet's "The Four Seasons of the Year" warmly celebrates the simple American farmer's moral and religious prosperity in the New World.

Anne Bradstreet reveals her identification with an agrarian homeland in several other works as well. Two other quaternion poems, "The Four Elements" and "The Four Ages of Man" both utilize agrarian
imagery and themes. In "The Four Elements" (1650) Bradstreet dramatizes the ancient idea of the composition of the universe in the form of a debate: "Fire, Air, Earth and Water ... contest/ Which was the strongest, noblest, and the best" (p. 18). Each element defends her pre-eminence, at least in part, in relation to the husbandman. Each claims that the husbandman's prosperity is dependent on her.

Fire initiates the contest by asserting that she provides the farmer with his necessary tools:

Ye husband-men, your coulters made by me
Your hoes, your mattocks and what e'er you see
Subdue the earth, and fit it for your grain
That so it might in time requite your pain:
Though strong limbed Vulcan forged it by his skill
I made it flexible unto his will (p. 19).

Earth counters with the argument:

In wealth and use I do surpass you all,
And Mother Earth of old did me call:
Such is my fruitfulness ... To tell what sundry fruits my fat soil yields
In vineyards, gardens, orchards, and cornfields,
Their kinds, their tastes, their colors, and their smells
Would so pass time I could say nothing else (p. 22).

According to Earth, it is her abundance and fruitfulness which assures the farmer that his laborious toils will not be in vain.

Water interrupts Earth, and argues that her power causes the land's fruitfulness: "If I withhold, what art thou? dead dry lump/ Thou bear'st no grass nor plant nor tree, nor stump" (p. 26). In addition, if Water so chooses she may "cause a dearth." At this time:

The farmer and the grazier do complain
Of rotten sheep, lean kine, and mildewed grain,
And with my wasting floods and roaring torrent,
Their cattle, hay, and corn I sweep down the current (p. 28).
Air testifies last and argues that all living things require her breath. Neither the husbandman nor his crops could long survive without her blessings (p. 29). In "The Four Elements" Bradstreet dramatizes the ancient idea of the composition of the universe through a debate. The four participants, Fire, Earth, Water and Air, are vividly personified through the homely language and agrarian imagery of the American experience.

Bradstreet's quaternion poem "The Four Ages of Man" (1650) has for its theme the vanity of human life. Men's desires and accomplishments on earth are depicted as sordid and vain. In keeping with Christian doctrine, Bradstreet argues that it is only after death that the Christian Elect may triumph in any meaningful way (p. 64). Bradstreet represents the typical human vanities of a middle-aged man through the symbol of the farmer. With "great labours" he struggles for "painful gain."

As the farmer himself states:

If happiness my sordidness hath found,  
"Twas in the crop of my manured ground,  
My thriving cattle and my new-milch-cow,  
My fleeced sheep, and fruitful farrowing sow:  
To greater things I never did aspire,  
My dunghill thoughts or hopes could reach no higher
(p. 59).

In "The Four Ages of Man" Bradstreet uses a realistic portrait of farm life to convincingly convey orthodox Christian doctrine. While American husbandmen are seen to prosper materially in their new homeland, they are asked to remember the larger Christian view in which such earthly prosperity can only be temporary.
We may conclude our examination of the role of the farmer in seventeenth-century New England literature with the earliest ballad composed in America, sometime between 1630 and 1640.96 The ballad's author remains anonymous and the work has the published title, "An Old Song, wrote by one of our first New England Planters on their Management in those good Old Times."97 The toils of the husbandman in transforming America's wilderness into a satisfactory homeland provides the central theme of the ballad. It begins with the assertion:

New England's annoyances you that would know them,  
Pray ponder these verses which briefly do show them.  
The place where we live is a wilderness wood,  
Where grass is much wanting that's fruitful and good (p. 503).

In the winter, the ballad reveals: "the northwest wind with violence blows/ Then every man pulls his cap over his nose" (p. 504). Spring is the time to prepare the land for cultivation. The author of this ballad details the hardships husbandmen undergo as they attempt to make the land prosperous:

But when the spring opens, we then take the hoe  
And make the ground ready to plant and to sow;  
Our corn being planted and seed being sown,  
The worms destroy much before it is grown.

And while it is growing some spoil there is made  
By birds and by squirrels that pluck up the blade.  
And when it is come to full corn in the ear,  
It is often destroyed by racoon and by deer (p. 504).

The meter of the ballad stanza and the exaggerated rhymes add a degree of levity to the pictured struggles of America's agrarian workmen. As the verse continues, we are told:
Our money's soon counted, for we have just none,
All that we brought with us is wasted and gone.
We buy and sell nothing but upon exchange,
Which makes all our dealings uncertain and strange
(p. 505).

In spite of the pictured struggles and hardships, the ballad concludes
with an optimistic view of life in this new American homeland:

But you whom the Lord intends hither to bring
Forsake not the honey for fear of a sting:
But bring both a quiet and contented mind,
And all needful blessings you surely shall find
(p. 505).

Thus by the beginning of the eighteenth century, the New England
literary celebration of the farmer was firmly established. Although
initial promotion tracts praised New England's agricultural prospects,
settlers soon recognized that with few exceptions, the Northern soil
was thin and poor, and that the husbandman could expect only modest
returns from his labor. This did not deter settlement in New England,
however, since the colonists were primarily concerned with fostering
moral and religious ideals rather than with acquiring productive acreage.
While the small, independent Northern farmer was often forced to supple­
ment his income with profits from fishing and trade, the agrarian occupa­
tion remained the representative life style in New England society.

The result of the Northern agrarian experience was reflected in
the author's use of the farmer figure. Lacking real agrarian abundance
to celebrate -- the South and the Middle Colonies were the sight of
America's true cornucopia -- writers in the North extolled their husband­
men in largely symbolic and conventional literary terms. Depending on
few real underpinnings, these authors initially described their expe­
rience within established European literary patterns. Thus the poetical
agrarian celebrations of Anne Bradstreet and other Puritan writers were largely imitative of British practices. Even after Puritanism receded and religious concerns no longer provided the chief motivating force of the colonists, writers in New England continued to represent their agricultural experience in conventional poetic imagery. For example, in Roger Wolcott's historical poem, "A Brief Account of the Agency of the Honourable John Winthrop" (1725), the portrait of the farmer appears to be more closely derived from previous literature than from life. Wolcott depicts the agrarian landscape as follows:

These Meadows serve not only for the sight,
To charm the Eye with wonder and delight,
But for their Excellent Fertility,
Transcends each spot that ere beheld Sol's Eye
Here Lady Flora's richest Treasure grows,
And here she bounteously her Gifts bestows,
The Husband-Man for all his Diligence,
Receives an ample Liberal Recompence
And Feasting on the Kidneys of Wheat,
Doth soon his Labour and his Toil forget (p. 232).

In the late eighteenth century, New England's Connecticut Wits continued to rely heavily on European literary sources for their American agrarian portraits. (These authors will be discussed in the next chapter.)

Aside from their limited attempts to imaginatively deal with actual American agrarian experience, early New England writers used the farmer and his labors as a metaphor for religious concerns. As we have seen, the literary portraits of the husbandmen in this region were predominantly emblematic. Authors imposed on reality an agrarian design adopted from the Bible. Depicting the New England colonies as God's "husbandry" in the wilderness of the New World, these writers charged individual men with the "cultivation" of their souls. It is this
symbolic use of the farmer, this rich resonance of meaning and emblematic significance that writers attributed to the husbandman, which marked the most important New England contribution to the evolving American agrarian myth. Over a period of time an initially religious concept would be transformed into the basis of mythopoetic art. The farmer figure was able to grant many later American artists, and the New England Transcendentalists in particular, a structuring metaphor which bridged the gap between the world of men's actions and the world of the imagination.

The Middle Colonies

Seventeenth-century New Englanders demonstrated the most interest in chronicling the story of their early colonization. The writers of this area had strong religious and ideological motivations for describing God's providential dealings with their "wilderness" settlements. Southern writers, particularly those of Virginia, were the next most vociferous chroniclers of their dealings with the new land. Conceiving of themselves as engaging in a potentially redemptive relationship with a richly abundant earth, these authors often castigated their countrymen for failing to fully exploit the almost limitless opportunities open in the New World. In contrast, literary accounts of the seventeenth-century Middle Colonial settlements were far less numerous. There were several reasons for the literary sparseness.

English colonies were not founded in New York, the Jerseys, and Pennsylvania until the second half of the seventeenth century. By this time, literary descriptions of the settlers' attempts to
cultivate the new land were no longer novel. Since the process had been successfully completed by scores of men before them, much of the heroism and dramatic intensity was gone. With the possible exception of Pennsylvania, the founders of these colonies lacked "thumping ideological purposes." The initial English colonization of this area could almost be viewed as commonplace and therefore not worthy of extended literary effort. Those authors who did attempt an imaginative reconstruction of the American experience continued to explore many of the themes and ideas we have discussed.

Like their counterparts in the South, settlers in the Middle Colonies came to America primarily to acquire land and the concomitant status that came with land ownership. The predominant literary mode of the early writers of this area was the promotion tract. Sometimes the colonization was promoted in verse, most often the form was prose. In either case, seventeenth-century literary accounts of the Middle Colonies reveal initial stages in the development of an American national consciousness. As in the literary productions of New England and the South, the figure authors of the Middle Colonies most often chose to represent potential ways of life and values of an emerging society in the New World was the American farmer.

A settler, planter, and public servant, Daniel Denton published *A Brief Description of New-York* in 1670. Writing as an eyewitness, Denton details the land and natural resources of New York. He includes an account of the steps by which a colonial town may be patented and recommends the precise goods and "Instruments for Husbandry and Building" new emigrants should bring with them to quickly accomplish these tasks.
Denton claims that "terrestrial happiness" especially for people of "inferior rank" whom "fortune hath frown'd upon" may be had in America (p. 18). In the New World Denton promises that abundant land may be procured for oneself and one's children. Here, men "betake themselves to Husbandry, get Land of their own, and live exceeding well" (p. 17). Vigorously elaborating upon the quality of rich, available land Denton says, "here anyone may furnish himself with land, and live rent-free, yea, with such a quantity of land, that he may weary himself with walking over his fields of Corn, and all sorts of Grain" (p. 18). In addition to enjoying "the benefit" of their land and possessions "whilst they live," America's farmers may "leave them to the benefit of their children when they die" (p. 18). Aware that Englishmen traditionally equate status and political power with ownership of land, Denton offers a chance for social mobility in America.

While Denton acknowledges that God's blessings have been freely bestowed on America (he calls it a "terrestrial Canaan" and a land of "milk and honey" (p. 19)), he nevertheless affirms that painful labors are needed to work the land: "The inhabitants are blest with Peace and plenty, blessed in their Fields ... In a word, blessed in whatsoever they take in hand, or go about, the Earth yielding plentiful increase to all their painful labours" (p. 19). With the help of God, and "their own industry" men may "live as happily" in America "as any people in the world" (p. 21). According to Denton, the American husbandman achieves material prosperity, dignity and social status by planting and sowing a new commonwealth of God.
Gabriel Thomas composed promotion tracts for both "Pensilvania" and "West-New-Jersey" and published them together as An Historical and Geographical Account of the Province and Country of Pensilvania and of West-New-Jersey in America in 1698. In his introduction to the New Jersey piece, Thomas offers a typical motivation for his account: "My Chief Design in writing this short account of West-New-Jersey, is to inform all (but especially the Poor) what ample and Happy Livelihoods People may gain in those Parts" (F4r). America, according to Thomas, offers the poor "a fair prospect of getting considerable Estates, at least of living very Plentifully and Happily, which Medium of Life is far better than lingering out their Days so miserably Poor and half starved" (n.p.). The body of the work consists of specific descriptions of New Jersey's land and resources.

In his Pennsylvania piece, Gabriel writes with more vigor and excitement about America's prospects. He speaks of "the Industrious (nay Indefatigable) Inhabitants" who have built this colony (p. 5). In addition to richly abundant land for husbandry, Pennsylvania boasts "a Noble and Beautiful city," Philadelphia, "which contains above two thousand Houses, all Inhabited" (p. 5). It is no uncivilized wilderness that Thomas beckons new emigrants to in Pennsylvania. Land near Philadelphia has already become markedly more expensive since "the country is now well inhabited by the Christians" (p. 25).

Thomas assures his readers that plenty more good land remains available at cheap prices. Detailing the actual price of land, the equipment and labor needed to cultivate it, and the rich variety of crops produced, Thomas reveals why Pennsylvania will soon come to be
known as the "bread basket of America" (pp. 7-9, 20-25). Great opportunities await the "poor People both men and women" who venture to come to this new land and make it their home (p. 9).

Richard Frame published "A Short Description of Pennsylvania" (1692) and this work too is a promotion tract. Frame claims veracity for his rhythmical effort. As he tells his readers: "The Truth in Rhyme which I do here compose/ It may be spoken thus, as well as Prose" (p. 301). Frame calls Pennsylvania "A plentiful Land, O plentiful indeed." Speaking as a native inhabitant he assures us that "the Fields" are "most fruitful," and "In peace we plow, we sow, and reap again" (p. 301). The distance the colony has come in transforming a wilderness into a number of prosperous communities is apparent as Frame describes the colonists' modern "brick and stone" houses (p. 304). Pennsylvania has become a pleasant place in which to live.

John Holme's "A True Relation of the Flourishing State of Pennsylvania" (1690's?) is another rhythmical promotion tract. Having lived in the colony for ten years Holme promises to portray a truthful relation (p. 19). Like many American authors before and after him, Holme locates the key to the New World's success in the easy accessibility of freehold tenure:

This land is large and cheap, as is well known,
So that each poor man may make some his own,
Enjoy it whilst he lives, and at the end
Bestow it on his children or his friend (p. 20).

Men may labor for themselves and their posterity in the civilized communities of America.
In "A True Relation of the Flourishing State of Pennsylvania" Holme reveals the beginnings of a distinctive American national identity in several ways. First of all he claims America's land is superior to England's: "Yea here are many things grow for our use/ Which we know English ground will not produce" (p. 20). Secondly, unlike England which keeps the poor enslaved, America encourages the prosperity of the self-made man: "The poor man he soon understands/ That he, by working with his hands/ Gets money faster here" (p. 22). In addition, Holme demonstrates pride in the civilized quality of life in America, in the distinctive laws and government which encourage all people to lead thriving lives. He tells his readers that while the "foundation" of Pennsylvania law "Is the laws o' th' English nation" there are "Some few added to serve this place" (p. 24). These new laws are immensely beneficial:

Because our laws allow no tithe  
Each man here freely serves his God  
Free from the persecutor's rod ...  
That none within our government  
Hurt any people, weak or strong (pp. 24-25).

Pennsylvania has prospered since her first founding. Woods have been cleared, farms developed, houses, schools and churches built (pp. 22-23). As Holme looks about him at America's growing society, he is optimistic about her future. He tells his readers: "The working hand in this good land/ can never want supply" (p. 26). Agrarian America affords men the opportunity to make the most of themselves, to accomplish their highest aspirations and goals.
In the Middle Colonies, as we have seen, literary men quickly adopted a pragmatic attitude toward agriculture. They treated the farmer and his labors in a realistic fashion. After all, it was in the Mid-Atlantic colonies, in the "garden estate" of New Jersey, and in the "breadbasket" of Pennsylvania, where serious, profitable agricultural production was conducted. With the exception of the Quakers, the fundamental motivations of the settlers in this area were economic and secular. They came to acquire land. Pennsylvania offered freedom, liberty, and toleration to new immigrants, and what was perhaps even more significant was that it offered an unprecedented opportunity for agrarian prosperity. When early writers dramatized the central role of the farmer in the life of the Middle Colonies they were portraying something approaching reality. The literary conventions of georgic tradition and the mythic resonance of the symbolic farmer were, in the writings of the Mid-Atlantic colonies, subordinate to a realistic portrayal of the husbandman and his enormously profitable labor.

To determine the stature the American farmer achieved in the literature of the Mid-Atlantic colonies during the early eighteenth century, we may briefly examine selected works of Benjamin Franklin. In general, Franklin's writings reveal an uninterrupted continuation of the major themes and images of seventeenth century literary productions. Aside from his function as a regional representative, Franklin serves as a transitional figure in his ability to move our study of the farmer from accounts written at the end of the seventeenth century to those composed contemporaneously with the American Revolution. (The farmer's literary image during the Revolutionary period will be
Benjamin Franklin's first great success and most profitable literary undertaking was Poor Richard's Almanack begun in 1733. Almanacs were an immensely popular literary form at the time, and generally addressed themselves to America's agrarian audience. As in the works of his competitors, Franklin's Poor Richard often combined practical agricultural advice with conventional verse celebrating rural life. Thus in the Poor Richard of 1744 the author includes a poem on "The Country Man." Praising the independence and prosperity of a man "Whose Wish and Care/ A few paternal Acres bound," a man "Content to breathe his native Air/ In his own ground" (p. 394), Franklin goes on to suggest that this rural citizen enjoys the idealized life on the middle landscape of the agricultural frontier. Combining agricultural activities with "Study and Ease" and with "Sweet Recreation" (p. 395), Franklin's "country man" achieves dignity, status and material well-being. Poor Richard Improved for 1755 returns to this agrarian celebration as the author includes a poem entitled "The Farmer" which praises "Oh happy he. happiest of mortal men." In the 1752 issue of Poor Richard Improved Franklin expands his view and predicts a glorious future destiny for all of America in predominantly agricultural terms. Continuing to envision America's promise in the development of her fertile land, he insists that numerous settlers will come to cultivate it: "Allotted Acres (no reluctant soil)/ Shall prompt their Industry and pay their Toil." Assuring the husbandman of his valuable role in society and of his good fortune to be an American, Franklin's eighteenth-century Almanac verse continues
to affirm the literary tradition of the American farmer.

The persona of Richard Saunders, Franklin's homespun hero of his Almanac, usually speaks to his fellow citizens in colloquial terms using common sense and simplicity. The witty maxims which the author culls from varied sources and attributes to Richard generally express fundamental truths in appropriate, homely language. Often Poor Richard's aphoristic wisdom is formulated in agrarian metaphors, a device obviously designed to appeal to the prejudices of the predominantly agricultural audience. For example, Poor Richard is said to inform his readers that: "He that by the Plough would thrive/ Himself must either hold or drive" and that "a Ploughman on his Legs is higher than a gentleman on his Knees." In Poor Richard's and thus in Franklin's view, the self-reliance, industry, and frugality of the farmer enables this common American citizen to achieve a worthy, moral and financial independence.

Poor Richard's Almanack was not the only literary form in which Franklin expressed his views on American farmers. He dealt with agrarianism and the husbandman's role in American society in a number of philosophical essays as well. These works were largely directed at a more sophisticated, international audience. In Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind (1751), Franklin contrasts the availability of land in America with conditions in Europe. Unlike Europe which is "full settled," so vast is the Territory of North America, that it will require many Ages to settle it fully" (p. 228). The opportunity to purchase land cheaply in the New World continues, according to this author, to provide agriculturalists with tremendous
opportunities. Prospering themselves, they are able to lay a solid foundation for their posterity. Consequently, America enjoys a prolific population growth. Reaffirming an agrarian vision of America first announced in the pages of Captain John Smith, Franklin states:

Land being thus plenty in America, and so cheap as that a labouring Man, that understands Husbandry, can in a short Time save Money enough to purchase a piece of new Land sufficient for a Plantation, whereon he may subsist a Family (p. 228).

For Franklin in the eighteenth century as for Smith a century before him, there is nothing more pleasant than working God's land and building a prosperous home for oneself and one's children.

In a brief paper, "Positions To Be Examined" (1769), Franklin explores the relation between labor, agriculture, manufacturing and commerce. The chief importance of this work to our study is that its author concludes the piece with his most affirmative endorsement of agriculture and the agrarian way of life. As Franklin asserts:

Finally, there seem to be but three Ways for a Nation to acquire Wealth. The first is by War as the Romans did in plundering their conquered Neighbours. This is Robbery. The second by Commerce which is generally Cheating. The third by Agriculture the only honest Way; wherein Man receives a real Increase of the Seed thrown into the Ground, in a kind of continual Miracle wrought by the Hand of God in his Favour, as a Reward for his innocent Life and virtuous Industry (p. 109).

Within this passage Franklin honors the moral and religious benefits of agrarian prosperity. He affirms a relationship between material improvement and spiritual growth.
In "The Internal State of America; Being a True Description of the Interest and Policy of that Vast Continent" (1782?) the author displays an intense spirit of agrarian nationalism. Observing that "the great business of the continent is agriculture" (p. 462), he glorifies its achievement in "the happy mediocrity, that so generally prevails throughout these states, where the cultivator works for himself, and supports his family in decent plenty" (p. 465). American farmers, according to Franklin, have "abundant reason to bless Divine Providence," for, as the author concludes, "no nation known to us enjoys a greater share of human felicity" (p. 465).

Recognizing the process of settlement as the dominant characteristic of American life, Franklin compares the American farmer's relationship to the soil with the myth of Antaeus. "We are the sons of the earth," he tells us, and our contact with the soil yields "fresh strength and vigor" (p. 467). In addition, the author reveals that the celebration of the farmer and his labors provides eighteenth-century Americans with a mythic measure of continuity with their past. Within "The Internal State of America" he narrates an anecdote about his country's ancestors which purports to trace the origins of the Thanksgiving holiday. When a "piously disposed" congregation of Puritans complained of their "difficulties and hardships, as is generally the case when a civilized people attempt establishing themselves in a wilderness country" (p. 461), Franklin insists that it was "a farmer of plain sense" who suggested the colonists instead offer "public felicity" to thank God that their labors with the soil had been so generally rewarded (p. 467). Franklin's fable deals with a "usable
past" and had relevance to the complaints of his contemporary agricul­
turalists as well.

A brief look at "Information to Those Who Would Remove to America" (1782?) allows us to conclude this chapter as we had begun it with the examination of a promotion tract. As previous American propagandists had done, Franklin addresses himself to the questions, "Who then are the kind of persons to whom an emigration to America may be advantageous? And what are the advantages they may reasonably expect?" (p. 471). In responding to these concerns Franklin continues the theme that America's potential and promise lay in the fruitful development of the land. "The husbandman is in honor there," he tells potential emigrants, because his employment is "useful" (p. 470). While affirming that America was indeed the place where, as he had said in his Autobiography, a man could emerge "from Poverty and Obscurity ... to a State of Affluence and some Degree of Reputation in the World," Franklin insists that this American dream could be fulfilled only through industry and diligence. As he succinctly summarizes his position in "Information to Those Who Would Remove to America:" "In short, America is the land of labor and by no means what the English call Lubberland" (p. 471).

Benjamin Franklin's literary portraits of the farmer contain the essential Mid-Atlantic view. Testifying to the glorious prospects for agriculture available in America he continually extols the virtues of diligence and industry and affirms a material reward. The much lauded freedom, independence and prosperity of the husbandman in this region were based upon a solid groundwork of fact. Indeed, the very veracity of their portrayals was the major contribution Mid-Atlantic writers
made to the evolving literary tradition of the American farmer. This quantity of truth proved sufficient to render credible the more mythic contributions of New England and the South. When, by the time of the Revolution, American writers reached a national consensus on the farmer figure and mythologized him into "a vision which compelled belief," it was predominantly the realistic representation accomplished by authors of the Mid-Atlantic Colonies which insured that such belief was possible.

Conclusion

In the seventeenth century America came to be viewed as a homeland rich with potential and promise. Reviewing the early literary accounts from the South, New England, and the Middle Colonies, we can see that the settlers' relationship with the land, their shared interests and common experiences of husbandry, encouraged colonial writers to elevate the farmer into a symbol of the new life which could be led in America. Before the beginning of the eighteenth century, the American farmer emerged as a representative figure. Authors used the symbol of the husbandman to give literary expression to ways of life and values of the new American society.

Within the pages of our earliest literature the American husbandman's occupation was invested with an alleged religious, moral, economic, and political superiority. Authors depicted him as plowing the soil of God's revelation and as personally experiencing his religion. Laboring diligently in the field, the literary farmer developed the steady personal habits needed for a life of moral virtue. Profits reaped from his agrarian occupation granted him economic security.
Freely owning the soil on which he toiled, the farmer attained dignity, status and political autonomy.

The American farmer was portrayed as a representative of the "middle landscape," a man who labored to govern wild nature with the agrarian tools of civilization. Wherever men wrote about the American farmer, whether in the South, the North, or the Middle Colonies, he was portrayed as a spokesman for a community, a man with a stake in society and its laws. Enjoying fellowship with his neighbors, he laid a strong foundation for his posterity. In these early literary accounts, the success of the individual farmer was viewed as synonymous with the success of society as a whole.

Our examination of the farmer in seventeenth-century American literature has allowed us to see the influence of the colonial experience in establishing a mythic pattern which persists throughout later American writing. In the works we have studied, the farmer was seen to subsume the identity of the archetypal self-made man. The story of his prosperity, his rise from poverty and obscurity to a position of wealth and prominence in the world, a position attained solely by merit and hard work, was an early conceptualization of the American Dream. In addition, the seventeenth-century literary treatments of the farmer examined in this chapter reveal early formulations of an emerging national identity. Principally in New England, but in other colonies as well, the literary farmer played a key role in millennial expectations for America's future destiny. Over a period of years this initially religious concept was slowly transformed into the cornerstone of American political ideology as well as the central
theme of America's mythopoetic art. Finally, we have seen some of America's earliest writers assume the mock posture of the provincial in their literary portraits of American farmers. The portrayal of simple rural folks who have something to say about right action is a fundamental characteristic of American literature. The literary ancestors of Silence Do Good, Huck Finn, and Faulkner's Dilsey first emerged in the works of these seventeenth-century American writers.

While a few of the works we have examined in this chapter are obscure, and perhaps most significant as historical documents, many represent the most important literary productions of America's best early writers. Authors such as Hammond, Alsop, Cooke, Lewis, Byrd, Bradford, Johnson, Wigglesworth, Bradstreet, and Franklin employed vigorous imagery and powerful symbols to transform the meaning of the American experience into enduring works of art. The literary tradition of the farmer was not buried in unpublished and unread manuscripts. Rather it was developed by authors working within the mainstream of early American writing, in works many of which were colonial best sellers.

What happens to the farmer and his ability to synthesize rural and urban life in the works of later American writers will be the subject of subsequent chapters. We have concluded our examination of the initial stage in the development of the American farmer myth with evidence that regional patterns of celebration were moving toward a national consensus. The rhythmic repetition of the farmer's story in the South, New England, and the Middle Colonies throughout the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries eventually resulted in vision which compelled
belief, in an agrarian model which helped to render American experience meaningful.

We will begin our next chapter with the works of the Revolutionary period. It was in this age that the farmer attained the pinnacle of his stature in American society and American letters. Common experiences of husbandry and the symbol of the farmer were instrumental in bringing the diverse colonies together at the time of the Revolution. In Chapter 3, we will see the American farmer emerge as the symbolic first citizen of a new American Republic.
ENDNOTES


4. Ibid.


7. Ibid., p. 52.


10. See also Emerson, Captain John Smith, p. 51.

11. Ibid., p. 54.


14. See also Emerson, *Captain John Smith*, p. 58.

15. See also Fritzell, p. 17; Simpson, p. 15.


20. Ibid., p. 42.


22. See also Lemay, p. 41.

23. Ibid., p. 48.

24. For a discussion of Alsop's literary style, see Lemay, pp. 48-69.

25. Ibid., p. 55.

27. See also Lemay, p. 57.


33. Lemay, p. 92.

34. Ibid. See also Lemay, pp. 77-110, for a discussion of Cooke's literary style.

35. Ibid., pp. 78, 87.


38. Lemay, p. 166.

40. For both background biography of Byrd and intelligent
discussion of his literary ability see: Louis B. Wright, "Introduction:
of Westover: Narrative of a Colonial Virginian, ed. Louis B. Wright
Marabaud, "William Byrd of Westover: Cavalier, Diarist, and Chronicler,"
Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, 78 (1970), 144-83; Richard
Beale Davis, "William Byrd," in Major Writers of Early American Litera­
ture, ed. Everett Emerson (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1972),
pp. 151-78; for discussion of Southern agricultural practices see
Everett E. Edwards, "American Agriculture -- The First 300 Years," in
United States Government Printing Office, 1940), pp. 171-276; see also
Paul W. Gates, Agriculture and the Civil War (New York: Alfred A. Knopf,
1965).

41. Louis B. Wright, The Atlantic Frontier: Colonial American
Civilization, 1607-1763 (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1947), p. 70; see
also Richard Beale Davis, "The Intellectual Golden Age in the Colonial
Chesapeake Bay Country," The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography,

42. William Byrd, "A Progress To The Mines," in The Prose
Works of William Byrd of Westover: Narratives of a Colonial Virginian,
pp. 339-80. Subsequent textual citations are to this edition. (This
work was first published by Edmund Ruffin, Petersburg, Va., 1841).

of William Byrd of Westover, ed. Wright, pp. 157-338. Subsequent textual
 citations are to this edition. (This work was first published by Edmund
Ruffin, Petersburg, Va., 1841).

44. "A Journey To The Land of Eden," in The Prose Works
of William Byrd of Westover, ed. Wright, pp. 381-416. Subsequent textual
citations are to this edition. (This work was first published by Edmund
Ruffin, Petersburg, Va., 1841).

45. Both Bonnie T. Engdahl, "Paradise in the New World: A
Study of the Image of the Garden in the Literature of Colonial America,"
Diss. UCLA, 1967, pp. 201-04, and Annette Kolodny, "The Pastoral Impulse
in American Writing, 1590-1850: A Psychological Approach, Diss., Berkeley,
1969, pp. 48-49 mention Byrd's interest in cultivated nature.

46. See Marabaud, p. 172.

47. John Smith, "A Description of New England; or, Observations
and Discoveries in North America," Travels and Works of Captain John
Smith, ed. Edward Arber (1616; rpt. Edinburgh: John Grant, 1910; new
ed. with a Biographical and Critical introduction by A. G. Bradley), I,
175-229. Subsequent textual citations will be to this edition.
48. For a discussion of Smith's literary style, see Emerson, Captain John Smith.


50. Emerson, Captain John Smith, p. 163.


53. See Emerson, Captain John Smith, p. 115.

54. Although Smith includes an almost exact passage at the conclusion of A Description of New England, p. 228, the earlier pamphlet does not develop religious concerns to the same extent.


68. Dunn, p. 205.


70. See also Gallagher, p. 37.

71. See Samuel Eliot Morison, footnote to Bradford's Of Plymouth Plantation, p. 188.


75. For a discussion of the formal patterns of sermons, see Plumstead, pp. 31-37.

76. See Plumstead; Heimert; and Fritzell.

77. See Plumstead, p. 51; Heimert, p. 361; Fritzell suggests that Puritans did not begin to use the conceptualization of a "wilderness" until such a description was no longer appropriate, p. 22.


81. See also Plumstead, p. 51.


83. Plumstead, p. 147.


85. Ibid., pp. 32-35.

86. Ibid., p. 37.


93. Ibid., p. 38.

94. Ibid., p. 40.

95. In "Meditations Divine and Moral" Bradstreet uses agrarian imagery to conceptualize both religious and personal concerns. She observes that God grinds his servants with "grief and pain," just as the farmer grinds his corn (#9, p. 275). In another example, Bradstreet composes an elaborate conceit: "The treasures of this world may well be compared to husks, for they have no kernal in them ... " (#49, p. 287). Bradstreet also notes that: "Some children (like sour land) are of so tough and morose a disposition that the plough of correction must make long furrows on their back and the harrow of discipline go often over them before they be fit soil to sow the seed of morality ... " (#61, p. 285). See The Works of Anne Bradstreet.


100. Dunn, p. 196.

101. Ibid.

102. Ibid.

103. Ibid.


109. See Wright, The Atlantic Frontier, p. 212; see also Fletcher.


115. "Poor Richard Improved," 1758, later known as "Father Abraham's Speech," or "The Way to Wealth," in The Papers of Benjamin Franklin, eds. Labaree and Ralph L. Ketcham, VII, 344, 346, 1963. These maxims were originally voiced by Poor Richard in December 1747 and May 1746 respectively.


CHAPTER III

THE CREATION OF A NEW REPUBLIC:
THE AMERICAN FARMER APOTHEOSIZED

During the Revolutionary period, the farmer attained the pinnacle of his stature both in American society and American letters. One hundred and fifty years of settlement, of intimate contact with the immense American landscape, provided a social and cultural backdrop that impinged on the imagination of America's writers and gave rise to their art. The farmer's laborious cultivation of the soil had granted earlier authors an identifiable native theme. Since the opportunity to purchase land cheaply in the New World prevailed throughout this period, Americans continued, fairly easily, to gain access to freehold tenure and to the manifold benefits conferred by it -- dignity, status and political autonomy. In short, the achievement of the farmer continued to define America's rich potential and promise.

With the creation of the New Republic and the subsequent celebration of American nationalism, the farmer emerged as a ready symbol for American ideology. Authors in the North, South, and the Middle States, easily reached a national consensus on the importance of the farmer figure. At a time when nine out of ten Americans were agriculturalists, as Chester Eisinger has noted, "the farm and the farmer were among the readiest stimulants to patriotism available to American writers."

In their writings, American authors transformed the originally religious prescription of the nation's unique identity -- into a predominantly
secular, political vision. Millennial expectations for America's future destiny had caused earlier writers to depict this land as the site of the New Jerusalem. While affirming that America remained a "redeemer nation" with a divinely sanctioned mission to illuminate the "chosen path" for all mankind, writers of the Revolutionary era no longer dramatized the millennium in purely supernatural terms. Instead, they envisioned a future when America would lead all humanity to the achievement of liberty, justice, and economic prosperity. The farmer, by providing American authors with an exemplary literary model for a free, independent and virtuous citizenry, played a key role in America's secularized millennial aspirations.

Before beginning our examination of the role of the farmer in American literary works of this period, it is helpful to briefly review the contemporary agricultural background both in Europe and America. In the late eighteenth century, America functioned as part of an Anglo-American community and her writers remained deeply entrenched in Enlightenment thought. As was mentioned in Chapter one, the eighteenth century was the great age of agrarian reform. Indeed, the entire century was marked by an ascendancy of interest in agriculture and agriculturalists throughout Enlightened Europe. The farmer and his way of life had important implications for literary efforts in Europe, and these in turn influenced American portrayals. In some respects, the literary tradition of the American farmer during the Revolutionary period was the logical development and alteration of, as well as an autochthonous response to, literary tradition in Europe, and more particularly, in England.
European Influences on the Farmer Figure

Perhaps the chief distinguishing characteristic of eighteenth-century England was the power and wealth of the large, landowning classes. Never before, when the King, courts, and clerics maintained control, and never after, when influence shifted to industry, commerce, and the common man, would the landed interest so firmly control the balance of political power in Britain. In addition to what they retained in the Restoration settlement, the large-scale property owners augmented their influence when agriculture and textiles assumed center stage in Britain's economic development. Expanded domestic and foreign markets stimulated prodigious attempts to increase agricultural production. English peers and large-scale land owners took a serious interest in their estates and vigorously encouraged improvements in farming techniques. They were the leaders of Britain's agricultural revolution primarily because enclosure, new methods of cultivation, and labor-saving inventions all required vast capital. Both the improvements and profits of scientific estate farming were generally not within the means of the small freeholder.

What was most important about the English situation, for our purposes, was that the eighteenth century marked "the golden age of the gentleman farmer" in British literature as well as life. Authors celebrated man's control over his environment in a seemingly endless variety of agricultural portraits. Quite early in the century, for example, Jonathan Swift has the King of Brobdingnag praise attempts at increased productivity. As Gulliver tells his readers:
And he gave it for his opinion, that whoever could make two ears of corn, or two blades of grass to grow upon a spot of ground where only one grew before, would deserve better of mankind, and do more essential service to his country, than the whole race of politicians put together.  

In addition, as we have noted previously, the creation of British georgic literature flourished at this time.

Occasionally, in works like Goldsmith's "The Deserted Village" (1770), authors offered a nostalgic glimpse of a simple rural life that was perceived as becoming increasingly lost. More often, perhaps as a result of the clear class distinctions separating landowners from tenant farmers and agricultural laborers, British authors tended to address themselves to the wealthy landed interest and to portray farm life in a stately, elegant fashion. Geoffrey Tillotson in "Augustan Poetic Diction" criticizes this British propensity with the following observation: "The poets of the eighteenth-century georgics are too much like the absentee gentleman farmer who comes down from town and does his controlling with a straight back and a walking-stick. What Virgil won with pain, they take with a bow."  

As we shall see in subsequent discussion, American writers countered the British view by emphasizing their physical knowledge of agriculture and by affirming the vigorous industry needed to conquer nature. Many American poems were written with an eye to British models. For example, Goldsmith's "The Deserted Village" spawned at least two highly successful direct literary responses: Freneau's "The American Village" (1772) and Dwight's "The Flourishing Village" in Greenfield Hill (1794). Both of the latter poems proclaim American
rural society to be the inheritor and embodiment of what was best in Old World tradition. In responding to British rural literature, American writers celebrated the small, independent freeholder and the agrarian society he created as the most prized objects on the American literary landscape.

Agriculture assumed importance in eighteenth-century France as well. Reacting to the special privileges manufacturing received under the leadership of mercantilist regimes, French philosophers formulated the Physiocratic doctrine in support of agriculture. Writers such as François Quesnay, Mirabeau, Mercier de la Rivière, Le Trosne, and Du Pont de Nemours "taught that all human affairs were governed by a divinely ordained natural order, l'ordre naturel, in which agriculture was the only productive occupation, the only true source of wealth." Advocating large scale farming of great estates, they modeled their views on the practice of the English aristocracy. Physiocrats constructed an elaborate economic theory which required a "single tax," and ensured comfortable profits to the practitioners of scientific estate farming. Although some Southern writers such as John Taylor sympathized with the Physiocrats, most American authors rejected the aristocratic bias of the French. American writers were, however, familiar with Physiocratic thought and often employed its arguments for the primacy of agriculture.

In general, we can conclude that European agrarian writers exerted a direct influence in eighteenth-century America, but that their ideas were modified to suit New World conditions. American editors and writers were eclectic in their use of foreign sources. However, it is
probably fair to say that imported ideas were nearly always refracted through the prism of democracy, and singularly applied to the American model of the small, independent freeholder. Living in an overwhelmingly agricultural society with an abundant source of land, American authors assumed that everyone had a right to own property and that agriculture was of primary importance to the State. In this context it is quite easy to see how American writers could selectively employ the ideas of Locke or Quesnay to buttress their arguments. Perhaps the best way to understand America's importation/adaptation of foreign agrarian ideas is to observe the American interpretation of Lockean Natural Rights theory as applied to land tenure.

In Two Treatises of Government (1690) John Locke gave philosophical definition to a theory of property which had evolved in Western civilization from sources in pre-Christian custom, Roman law, and medieval doctrine. By boldly articulating the general sanction civilized society placed on private property, Locke in turn transmitted this theory of property to most political philosophers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. American ideas about property were essentially derived from Locke. In his Two Treatises of Government the philosopher argued that private property existed in a state of nature which preceded formal government. While the earth and its fruits were given to mankind in common, individual men were entitled to own property as the result of their labor: "Whatsoever then he removes out of the state that Nature hath provided, and left it in, he hath mixed his Labour with, and joyned to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his Property."
While Locke was more interested in defending man's natural right to property than in assuring an equitable distribution of that property (and so was viewed as a spokesman for the wealthy in England and France), he did suggest that men should not take more than they could use. In Two Treatises, he asserted: "as much land as a Man Tills, Plants, Improves, Cultivates, and can use the product of, so much is his Property." Locke added: "Whatever is beyond this, is more than his share and belongs to others" (p. 308). After defining and qualifying man's natural right to property, Locke went on to affirm that government must recognize and protect this right as the basic condition of the social contract. He stated that "Government has no other end but the preservation of Property" (p. 347).

As they were interpreted on this side of the Atlantic, Lockean ideas about property provided the cornerstone for American ideology. They helped authors such as Jefferson formulate a philosophical basis for the rights of the common American husbandman and they were seen as justifying the pattern of small landowners. In suggesting that the State was created to protect private property, and that the individual's right to own property was based on a combination of occupancy and labor, Locke assured the small American farmer of his right to have and to hold property. Thus while Locke did not create the institution of freehold tenure -- American abundance accomplished that -- he did offer philosophical and theoretical support for existing conditions. America so generally accepted Locke's ideas that they were regarded as self-evident truths requiring little or no explanation. John Dickinson's Letters From A Farmer in Pennsylvania (1767-68) illustrates the American
appropriation of natural rights theory. While arguing the colonial position on the Townshend Acts, Dickinson does not bother to construct, or even elaborate upon a natural rights philosophy. He merely states:

Let these truths be indelibly impressed on our minds - that we cannot be HAPPY, without being FREE - that we cannot be free, without being secure in our property - that we cannot be secure in our property, if, without our consent, others may, as by right, take it away.

The American Backdrop

In general terms, it is fair to say that property was valued in eighteenth-century America more as a means to freedom and independence than as an end in itself. The American farmer was apotheosized in the literature because ownership of land instilled in him the virtues of democratic rural life. Traits developed in agrarian living were seen as the foundation of Republican government. Not only were the farmer's experiences with freedom, independence, and self-reliance admired, but the reputed moral benefits derived from a life of hard work, from economic security, and from educational competence were all seen as being instrumental in transforming the colonial farmer into the first citizen of the Republic.

That the most elaborate and extensive panegyrics to the American husbandman were composed at this time in American history should create no surprises when we remember that the overwhelming majority of the populace (and society's leaders) were farmers. Somewhat analogous to the situation in England where the gentleman farmer held the political and economic reigns of power and was glorified in the literature, so the small American freeholder (especially when unified in a political
coalition) exerted influence in America and was subsequently the 
cause célèbre of literary artists. Richard Henry Lee in his Letters 
From a Federal Farmer (1787-88) outlined the power of the American 
husbandman and bluntly articulated an important political reality of 
the Revolutionary period when he observed:

It is true, the yeomanry of the country possess the lands, the weight of property, possess arms, and are too strong a body of men to be openly offended - and, therefore, it is urged, they will take care of themselves, that men who shall govern will not dare pay any disrespect to their opinions.23

In glorifying the farmer, American writers endorsed the common activities of their fellow citizens and helped to make experience meaningful. At the same time, however, they also paid homage to those with power. Mankind has a long history of mythicizing the mighty and the powerful. The particular American contribution was a democratization of this universal panegyric. When American authors honored the farmer, replete in his rural guise, many of them were self-consciously celebrating the common man.

The unchallenged pre-eminence of the husbandman, as the symbolic American, becomes clear when we read widely divergent political theorists of the period singing his praises in unison. During the war, both loyalists and revolutionaries argued agrarian concerns and employed the persona of a yeoman in their writings.24 In the later conflict between Jeffersonian Republicans and Federalists both sides again vied for the attention of the political majority by offering literary tributes to the noble American husbandman.25
Jefferson and his party are well known for their exaltation of the small freeholder and the agrarian way of life. Reflecting the ideas of his contemporaries and his classical readings, Jefferson viewed the farmer's self-sufficient life style as the repository of the virtues and traits needed for Republican government. Although he eventually reconciled agriculture with commerce and industry, Jefferson often expressed fears about the effect propertyless classes and moneyed commercial interests would have on American democracy. With implicit trust in an educated common man, Jefferson eloquently praised farmers in the following lines from *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1782):

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

John Taylor of Caroline, a Jeffersonian who took a more dogmatic position in support of agriculture, insisted that the American government should exist of, by, and for farmers. Although a slave-holding plantation owner himself, Taylor was firmly committed to agrarian labor. Like other leaders of the Republican party, he saw no inconsistency in owning slaves while identifying with and rhetorically praising small, independent farmers. Historian John C. Miller helps to explain Taylor's position by suggesting that in his view "all white free landowners were equal," that "the mystic bond created by the ownership of land and the agricultural way of life erased distinctions and leveled inequalities." Thus in *The Arator* (1813) John Taylor unequivocally tells his readers that "the divine intelligence which selected an agricultural style as
a paradise for its favourites, has here again prescribed the agricultural virtues as the means for the admission of their posterity to heaven." Not to support the supremacy of agriculture, in Taylor's view, was positively sinful.

While America's Federalists are usually associated with capitalists and with trade and manufacturing interests, their ranks also included large-scale, wealthy agriculturalists and more modest farmers who grew cash crops for exportation. Like the Jeffersonians, Federalist writers depicted farmers as "cautious and reflecting men." Their ownership of property granted farmers a substantial "stake in society" and, in the Federalist view, made them eligible to participate in government. Given the electorate at the time, the Federalists could not have attained power if they had not offered some appeal to the common freeholder. What the Federalists promised the American farmer was that sound fiscal policies and a stable economy would help him maintain political independence and economic security. Thus when Hamilton introduced his economic program, a plan which he claimed would benefit both agriculture and business, he carefully acknowledge the "unquestioned" primacy of agriculture. In *The Report on the Subject of Manufactures* (1791) Hamilton writes:

> It ought readily to be conceded, that the cultivation of the earth -- as the primary and most certain source of national supply -- ... a state most favourable to the freedom and independence of the human mind ... has intrinsically a strong claim to pre-eminence over every other kind of industry.

Hamilton's praise of agriculture was merely a prelude to his policy of governmental protection for industry. While many Federalist writers
continued to exalt America's husbandmen, in truth, the Federalist party did not give priority to farmers and, as some historians have suggested, this was an important factor in its demise.38

The politics of the Revolutionary period will re-emerge in subsequent discussion. In a fundamentally political age, even the most belles-lettres compositions are influenced by the political persuasion of their authors. Before concluding our brief introduction to the agricultural background of the period, it is important to note that most major American writers, whatever their politics, shared some intimate contact with agrarian pursuits. Farming was, after all, the major industry of the epoch. John Taylor was deeply involved in agrarian reform; Arator is, in large measure, an agrarian handbook; Humphreys was President of the Society for Promoting Agriculture in Connecticut; Jefferson invented the mold-plough; Dwight worked his own garden, and viewed the soil of New England with what has been called "a farmer's eye;" Freneau lived on a farm in New Jersey; and Crèvecœur was, indeed, a successful American farmer.39

This intimate acquaintance with agrarianism resulted in what the authors considered to be a "realistic" view of farm life. In their works, they repeatedly emphasize the industry and hard work needed to civilize a wilderness. For the most part, they draw no shepherds lolling about with Arcadian ease on the American literary landscape. Indeed, there is an explicit anti-pastoral motif throughout most of their writings. These authors felt the need to affirm, and to affirm again, that they were dealing with the factual life of real men, and not with poetic idealizations. The following passage
by a Crèvecoeurian farmer succinctly demonstrates the American rural perspective:

Nothing, indeed is more tempting than the pastoral life, when one does not know its daily cares, the labor it requires, when one sees it from afar, or in the works of poets; but if these literary men were weighed down by their plows for several days, exposed to the rain and wind; if they had reaped and tossed the hay of their fields, under the heat of the burning sun, devoured by mosquitoes, tormented by flies; if they had cut their harvests, back exposed to the sun's rays, face earthward, swimming in sweat as we do, they would realize that if sometimes we gather roses, it is only 'mid thorns and that this father of nature, this star whose glory and splendor they sing, is sometimes a tyrant of it all.40

I have opened this chapter with a consideration of the agrarian background of the age because the political and economic supremacy of the farmer during the Revolutionary period helped to actuate many authors' visions and to inspire their art. Even a cursory review of the writings of the age reveals that practically anyone who took pen in hand had something to say about the American husbandman. I have chosen works of several major authors to represent the period. We will begin with a consideration of Dickinson's pre-war agrarian portrait, Letters From a Farmer in Pennsylvania. Next we study the Federalist homage paid to the husbandman in the compositions of Timothy Dwight and David Humphreys. Subsequently, an exploration of Philip Freneau's literary works on the farmer serves to introduce us to the more thoughtful Jeffersonian impressions of rural life. This chapter concludes with an extended examination of the prose works of Crèvecoeur, a writer whose treatment of the farmer eloquently managed
not only to transcend politics, but also to summarize and contain all of the important literary currents of his age.

A Pre-War Portrait of the Farmer: Dickinson

From the time they first began appearing in the Pennsylvania Chronicle in December, 1767, John Dickinson's Letters From a Farmer in Pennsylvania were considered to be a well argued, learned, and full statement of the colonial position. Benjamin Franklin immediately appreciated their propagandistic value and recommended them to English readers as "the general Sentiments of the Inhabitants" of America. After the war, with hindsight, Freneau dedicated a poem to Dickinson, "Epistle to the Patriotic Farmer," in which he celebrated the man who had "marked the way to conquest and renown," and asserted: "Thou Dickinson! the patriot and sage/ How much we owed to your convincing page." Today we can fully appreciate the Letters aesthetically, for the commanding virtuoso performance it is. Dickinson, in Letters From a Farmer in Pennsylvania, proves himself to be masterfully adept in the art of rhetorical persuasion.

Aristotle had suggested that in matters of doubt we tend to trust the good man, that he wins our confidence. Most classical orations begin with an exordium in which the credibility of the narrator is established. Employing this rhetorical convention in the Letters, Dickinson makes a revealing choice and creates a liberally educated farmer as his model persona. The following passage contains Dickinson's introduction to his spokesman:
My dear Countrymen, I am a Farmer, settled, after a variety of fortunes, near the banks of the river Delaware, in the province of Pennsylvania. I received a liberal education, and have been engaged in the busy scenes of life; but am now convinced, that a man may be as happy without bustle, as with it. My farm is small, my servants few, and good; I have little money at interest; I wish for no more; my employment in my own affairs is easy; and with a contented grateful mind, (undisturbed by worldly hope or fears, relating to myself,) I am completing the number of days allotted to me by divine goodness.

The Acts passed by Parliament and their American reception mark the immediate occasion for the composition and publication of the Letters. With appropriate humility, the farmer explains that he had waited for someone "better qualified" to call the public attention to the problem (1.24); but when no one was forthcoming, he felt compelled to take pen in hand. He could not allow silence to be construed as assent (II.35). While the farmer begins his discussion with the immediate problem of unjust taxation, he goes on to enlarge his argument and explore the broader implications of the British actions. In essence, the farmer interprets compliance with British laws to mark the beginning of the end for freedom and independence in the colonies.

Dickinson's farmer uses a conventional persuasive pattern in presenting his argument. This includes an analysis of the problem, a proposed solution, a disproof of the opposition, and evidence in support of his own interpretation. The use of the precise, deliberative language of state diplomacy, combined with great skill in the construction of parallel and balanced sentences, helps to convey the impression that the farmer's arguments have been presented fairly, and
that the farmer is a trained, literate person. An appearance of reason and deliberation is evident throughout. Yet *Letters From a Farmer in Pennsylvania* was not composed as a legal brief. Its primary motivation was to stir public opinion in support of the struggle for liberty, and to arouse people to action. A close reading demonstrates that the farmer was more interested in his reader's having a complete emotional conviction that he was right than in presenting a strictly logical argument.

Thus the farmer is not above appealing to the emotional prejudices of his audience. He describes in vivid, concrete, perhaps maudlin terms, what unjust taxation will mean to the common man:

> And then, what little gold and silver they have, must be torn from their hands, or they will not be able, in a short time, to get an axe, for cutting their firewood, nor a plough, for raising their food (III.44).

Often, Dickinson loads his argument by oversimplifying complex problems through powerful rhetorical patterns. Observe the following example of syllogistic reasoning:

> These duties, which will inevitably be levied upon us - which are now levying upon us - are expressly laid for the sole purposes of taking money. This is the true definition of "taxes." They are therefore taxed. Those who are taxed without their consent, expressed by themselves or their representatives, are slaves. We are taxed without our own consent, expressed by ourselves or our representatives. We are therefore -- SLAVES (VII.60).

On the first reading, at least, it may be difficult to see how any other conclusion can be reached. If Americans, who prided themselves on their freedom and independence, assent to British laws, they will be condemning themselves to the chains of slavery.
Like many other agrarian proponents, Dickinson's farmer offers a cogent defense of freehold tenure:

For as long as the products of our labor, and the rewards of our care, can properly be called our own, so long it will be worth our while to be industrious and frugal. But if when we plow -- sow -- reap -- gather -- and thresh -- we find that we plow -- sow -- reap -- gather -- and thresh for others, whose pleasure is to be the sole limitation how much they shall take; and how much they shall leave, why should we repeat the unprofitable toil? (XII.93).

The rhetorical effectiveness of the farmer's position is, of course, aided by the rhythmic repetition of the details of farm life. The passage continues:

Horses and oxen are content with that portion of the fruits of their work, which their owners assign them, in order to keep them strong enough to raise successive crops; but even these beasts will not submit to draw for their masters, until they are subdued by whips and goads ... Let us take care of our rights, and we therein take care of our prosperity (XII.93).

The rhetorical use of analogy, the comparison of "reasonable" men to beasts of burden, is an effective propagandistic device, not to be taken lightly especially in eighteenth-century America. Will "whips" and "goads" be needed to enforce British laws?

In addition, Dickinson's farmer impugns the character of the men who had devised the laws in Parliament (VIII.61). The example of Ireland directs sheer terror into the hearts of Americans who still did not wish to see British motives in their darkest light. British power had brought that country to its knees, and the implication of the farmer's argument is that America could be next (X.74).
That Dickinson would buttress his arguments for the freedom and independence of the colonies with details drawn from agrarian life is not surprising in the light of the political strength of the yeomanry. That he would utilize the persona of an American farmer to make a learned rhetorical oration is testimony to the stature and dignity farmers had achieved as symbolic representatives of the American way of life.

In the decades following the publication of Dickinson's highly rhetorical *Letters From a Farmer in Pennsylvania*, both American society and its authors underwent profound changes. It was not merely that political separation from Britain was affected. More importantly, a virtual transformation of American intellectual thought took place. Gordon S. Wood has studied the process in detail and succinctly labels it a "democratization of mind." According to Wood, the American Revolutionary War accelerated and intensified egalitarian impulses first set in motion with the Declaration of Independence. A new, more democratic society evolved and American authors, as well as politicians, found themselves responding to the expanded opportunities for ordinary men. American literary works on the farmer reflected this increased democratic emphasis as many authors abandoned a learned, gentlemanly status for their agriculturalists (it was too elitist or aristocratic) and instead portrayed American husbandmen as simple, rural folk. In this modified but equally rhetorical posture, the literary farmer continued to embody the goals, aspirations and values of American society.
This democratization of the farmer figure generally went forward in American writings with the notable exception of Federalist works. Wood has suggested that Federalist writers and politicians were positively "bewildered" by the changes going on around them. In their view the mobs of democracy were bringing "all respectability, all learning, all character ... under assault." Connecticut Wits like Dwight and Humphreys continued to envision themselves as Federalist gentlemen and to take their leadership role seriously. Fiercely patriotic, these authors maintained an Enlightenment view of the American "good society." It was an hierarchically structured society in which all men respected established order and performed their individual duties with industry and diligence. In the Federalist view, the farmer's ownership of property granted him a sizable "stake in society" and made him eligible for responsible participation in Republican government. In so far as the American farmer was the man who tamed the wilderness and established enlightened civilization where only savagery had existed before, Federalist authors like Dwight and Humphreys could joyously celebrate his agrarian labors.

The Federalist View: Dwight and Humphreys

As we begin our examination of Dwight's literary tributes to the American farmer in both prose and poetry, it is helpful to note the complex personal motivations which affected his work. In addition to his role as an author, Timothy Dwight was a Congregational pastor with a strong Calvinist bent, an educator (President of Yale College from 1795-1817), and a dominant figure in the established order of Connecticut. All of these characteristics influenced Dwight's
perception of the American agrarian experience and his formulation of the yeoman ideal.  

Dwight's *Travels in New England and New York* was first published posthumously in 1821-22. Derived from a series of informal notes he began keeping in 1790, as he spent his vacations traveling through New England and New York, Dwight's work contains ruminations on geography, history, philosophy, agriculture, economics, politics, and the general manners and mores of the people. The author organizes his ideas in a sequence of letters addressed to "an English gentleman" which loosely focus around fourteen major journeys. The dates of the trips are not chronological and so the primary unifying device for Dwight's two-thousand pages of information is thematic. The central theme of the *Travels* is the transformation of the American wilderness into a harmoniously civilized, agrarian society. As Dwight moves about the country describing village after village many of the same points are repeated.

Always conscious of his readers, Dwight seeks to educate them to an understanding of America's promise as tied up with her abundant resources of land. To emphasize the reality of America's potential, Dwight focuses on the details of agricultural life. He describes the average number of bushels harvested per acre, the types of manure utilized, and the common wages of laborers (I.76-77; IV.250). In addition, he meticulously details the number of schools, libraries, and churches existing in the various villages, and the diverse kinds of entertainment the common people enjoy (IV.251). In turn, these facts carry a heavy burden of interpretation. Dwight saw largely what
his Calvinist and Federalist biases prepared him to see. Predisposed to believe that Americans were an industrious and hard working people who had laboriously transformed a wilderness and, as a result, enjoyed a moral prosperity never before equalled in the history of mankind, that is exactly what he found in his travels (I.7).

Like American writers before and after him, Dwight focuses on the wide availability of freehold tenure. In Travels in New England and New York he tells his readers: "In these countries lands are universally held in fee simple. Every farmer, with too few exceptions to deserve notice labors on his own ground and for the benefit of himself and his family merely" (I.7). According to Dwight, it is the knowledge that they are laboring for themselves and their families that inspires farmers to perform the heroic tasks involved in subduing a forest or causing desert to bloom (I.122; II.158). Dwight devotes an entire letter to the step by step process by which men create a settlement, and he is quite detailed in his description (II.325-29). Dwight's advocacy of freehold tenure rested fundamentally on his Federalist attitude toward property. At one point he remarks, "The love of property to a certain degree seems indispensable to the existence of sound morals" (II.324). Ownership reconciles men to law, government, and to the other institutions of civilized society. It is a harmoniously civilized society that primarily interests Dwight.

When Dwight describes the numerous villages he visits, he emphasizes the point that "the colonization of a wilderness" is being carried out by "civilized men" and that "regular government, mild manners, arts, learning, science and Christianity have been interwoven in its progress
from the beginning" (I.6). The author of the Travels sees the fulfill-
ment of the agrarian ideal in America as the consequence of the New
England style of settlement. As he tells us:

All the ancient and a great part of the modern
townships were settled in what may be called
the village manner" the inhabitants having
originally planted themselves in small towns
(I.244).

As a result of this communal orientation the quality of life was greatly
improved. Schools, churches, and libraries could be supported; daily
intercourse with others helped strengthen human bonds as men learned
"mutually to feel and relieve" (I.244-46; II.328).

An educator himself, Dwight stresses the educational opportunities
available to American freeholders. School houses were built while men
continued to live in log cabins, and the common farmer subsequently
acquired "an expansion of mind and a rationality of character not often
found in any other country" (IV.206, 244). Working with one's hands did
not preclude development of one's mind. Rather, rural life encouraged
mental stimulation and enabled men to achieve a satisfying wholeness.

In contrast to the moral prosperity enjoyed by settlers of the
agrarian villages, Dwight delineates the life of those who settle in
frontier isolation. He suggests that these men "cannot live in regular
society," that "they are impatient of the restraints of law, religion
and morality" (II.321). As a result, not only does their intellectual
range become narrowly bounded, but in all respects these men become
less and less civilized. Men who settle in frontier isolation are
"rough, forbidding, gross, solitary, and universally disagreeable"
(II.322). Dwight's arguments are essentially anti-primitivistic and,
here again, he suggests an important theme of agrarian writers. The sources for a diatribe Dwight makes against Godwinian primitivism stem from his Calvinist belief that "human depravity, or in other words sin, has no tendency to make a happy society" (III.16). Within a few years, these "foresters or pioneers" become reconciled to civilization through their ownership of land, or they move on and allow the more cultured farmers to pursue their sober and industrious life style (II.321).

In his preface, Dwight tells his readers that the Travels was motivated by a desire to capture a sense of his country at that moment and preserve it for posterity:

A country changing as rapidly as New England, must, if truly exhibited, be described in a manner resembling that in which a painter would depict a cloud. The form and colors of the moment must be seized, or the picture will be erroneous (I.1).

It is the dynamic quality of an America fraught with inherent change that Dwight so convincingly portrays. For the author of the Travels the truth of America encompassed both a past overcome and a future potential yet to be realized. As he looked about him at the process of transformation Dwight could see, as other men had seen, fallen stumps, scattered rocks, undrained marshes -- "nature stripped of her fringe and her foliage ... naked and deformed" (II.95). But to see America in this way was not to see her at all. As Dwight explains:

These defects I easily overlook, and am, of course, transported in imagination to that period in which, at little distance, the hills, and plains, and valleys around me will be stripped of the forests which now majestically and even gloomily over-shadow them, and be measured out into farms enlivened with all the beauties of cultivation (II.94).
Thus it is an active imagination that Dwight calls for in response to the American scene. Accuracy of vision was finally not a product of the quantity of one's factual details. Rather it demanded an imaginative encounter with experience -- a kind of epiphany. Dwight saturates the Travels with the characteristic imagery of American agrarian life but he ultimately moves beyond mere details to compellingly illuminate the rich, inherently dramatic quality of that life.57

As we move from an examination of Dwight's prose travel account to his poetic treatment of the husbandman, it becomes apparent that the celebration of the American landscape, and its most successful inhabitant, the farmer, provided him with an eminently satisfactory theme. Dwight, like other American artists, struggled to create an American national literature that would be sensitive to the accepted modes and style, to the literary tradition of eighteenth-century British literature. No American writer of the period was prepared to forge an entirely new tradition. A literary treatment of the farmer allowed American poets to model indigenous works on the "local" or descriptive poetry tradition of their English counterparts. In this way a poet such as Dwight could assure himself that he had achieved both "literary independence" and "proper decorum."

Some critics have argued that the attempt to adapt the American environment to the rigid pattern of English poetry stifled the poets' expression, that native materials were essentially unsuited to British literary forms.58 If one considers the American experience as a product of the undisciplined wilderness, perhaps this is so. But if one views the significance of America as Dwight did -- that is,
as residing in a highly civilized, structured agrarian community -- then formal patterns such as heroic couplets become convenient and effective vehicles of expression.59

Dwight's best poem, Greenfield Hill (1794), unabashedly celebrates the American farm and farmer. The poem is divided into seven parts which deal with America's past, with her present, and with her future. The major narrator of the poem stands atop Greenfield Hill, surveys the rural landscape, and finds inspiration for his vision. Commenting on the success of the American village ideal in "The Prospect" and "The Flourishing Village," he turns back in time to discuss past struggles and conflicts overcome in "The Burning of Fairfield" and "The Destruction of the Pequods." The sections, "The Clergyman's Advice to the Villagers" and "The Farmer's Advice to the Villagers" concern themselves with how the present happiness can be preserved. America's millennial future is the subject of the last section, "The Vision."60 What essentially unifies the poem is the deep satisfaction with American agrarian life that Dwight expresses.

Originally, as Dwight tells us in his introduction, he had planned to imitate the manner of several British poets in the various sections (p. 374). While he eventually gave up the plan, marked similarities with the works of British poets remain. Dwight drew upon Pope's Satires and Goldsmith's 'The Deserted Village' as sources of information.61 He utilized Thomsonian blank verse, heroic couplets, and other English forms. In spite of his reliance on British models, as Leon Howard points out, Greenfield Hill is not an imitative poem.62 When allusions appear in the work, they are deliberately drawn to heighten
the contrast between Britain and America. Dwight is primarily concerned with transposing American experience into literary form. As with most American versions, the reality of the agrarian landscape is affirmed. Greenfield Hill is located exactly "three miles from Long Island Sound" (p. 371). In composing his agricultural portrait, Dwight reveals a predominantly social function. He tells us that he hoped "to contribute to the innocent amusement of his countrymen, and to their improvement in manners, and in oeconomical, political and moral sentiments" (p. 372).

In the first part of Greenfield Hill the major narrator surveys the prospects for happiness on the American scene. The success of the individual is viewed as synonymous with the success of society. Freedom is presented not as an attribute of the single man alone, but rather as it is exercised within a community. The larger group provides the setting in which men most completely fulfill their potential:

Hence every swain, free, happy, his own lord
With useful knowledge fraught, of business, laws
Morals, religion, life, unaw'd by man
And doing all, but ill, his heart can wish
Looks round, and finds strange happiness his own
And sees that happiness on laws depend (p. 381).

Again, as in Travels in New England and New York, it is a highly civilized communal society which is celebrated. Agrarian life seems to sanction a world of permanence, stability, beneficence, and order. With "reason's sway" and "wisdom their guide" the original settlers had structured an enlightened village style of settlement (p. 381). Important institutions were present from the beginning. Contemporary farmers are the joyful recipients of this noble inheritance. As Dwight's narrator says about American settlers:
... Beneath their eye,
And forming hand, in every hamlet, rose
The nurturing school; in every village smil'd
The heav'n-inviting church, and every town
A world within itself, with order, peace,
And harmony, adjusted all its weal (p. 381).

To emphasize the glorious benefits American husbandmen enjoy, they are explicitly contrasted with their European counterparts. Educational advantages receive specific praise as the prime source of the American yeoman's dignity and status. While,

... In other lands,
The mass of men, scarce rais'd above the brutes
Drags dull the horsemill round of sluggish life
Nought known, beyond their daily toil; all else
By ignorance' dark curtain hid from sight (pp. 382-83).

In America "the bold yeomanry" possess "views more expanded, generous, just, refined" (p. 382). As Dwight asserts:

Here glorious contrast! every mind, inspir'd
With active inquisition, restless wings
Its flight to every flower, and setting, drinks
Largely the sweets of knowledge (p. 383).

As he looks about him on the Connecticut landscape, the narrator on the hill affirms the reality of his vision. He wishes for some "faithful, wise, laborious mind" to articulate the meaning of America's agrarian experience, so that she could serve as a fully realizable inspiration to the world (p. 383). If this were done:

Soon would politic visions fleet away,
Before awakening truth, Utopias then
Ancient and new, high fraught with fairy good,
Would catch no more the heart. Philosophy
Would bow to common-sense; and man, from facts,
And real life, politic wisdom learn (p. 383).

In the second section, "The Flourishing Village," the narrator continues his discussion of rural settlement in the village manner. Many traditional agrarian themes are repeated as the narrator portrays the
contented life of industrious labor. The joys of fellowship with neighbors and domestic felicity are meticulously delineated. Harmony in human relationships remains the key theme in this section as Dwight proclaims that the western world was "by heaven design'd/ Th' example bright, to renovate mankind" (p. 418).

The most interesting section of Greenfield Hill contains "The Farmer's Advice to the Villagers." Introduced as a sage and wise man, the farmer is a particularly engaging figure. He offers a homely perspective to the Federalist literature of agrarianism. The farmer himself, the maxims he reiterates, and the frame in which his oration is contained are all reminiscent of Franklin's Father Abraham in "The Way to Wealth." The following passage introduces Dwight's homespun philosopher:

Not long since liv'd a Farmer plain,
Intent to gather honest gain,
Laborious, prudent, thrifty, neat
Of judgments strong, experience great
In solid homespun clad, and tidy,
And with no coxcomb learning giddy.
Daily, to hear his maxims found,
Th' approaching neighbours flock'd around;
Daily they saw his counsels prove
The source of union, peace and love,
The means of prudence, and of wealth,
Of comfort, cheerfulness, and health,
And all, who follow'd his advice,
Appear'd more prosperous, as more wise (pp. 481-82).

In his role as a simple farmer, he preaches the road to agrarian competence. Offering advice on "how to live," order, method, frugality and prudence are the key virtues the humble yeoman advocates. More specifically, this section of the poem has been described as "a practical octosyllabic handbook of enlightened agricultural methods and
parental behavior. The farmer makes concrete recommendations concerning conservation and the improvement of farm property. The progressive quality of his tips is apparent in the following passage. At a time when American agricultural yield was low, the farmer suggests

That mould, the leaves, for ages spread
Is, long since, with the forests, fled;
That slender ploughing, trifling care,
No longer will your fields prepare
Some new manure must now be found;
Some better culture fit the ground.
Oft turn the soil to feel the weather;
Manure from every quarter gather,
Weeds, ashes, Paris-plaister, lime
Marle, sea-weed, and the harbour slime (p. 485).

After offering suggestions on everything from credit to taxes, the homespun philosopher finally comments: "Of all your toil and care/
Your children claim the largest share" (p. 489). His attitudes toward education are also progressive. Encouraging teaching by "example," he stresses the importance of developing good habits. The farmer advocates discipline, but reminds parents it is the faults which must be condemned, and not the children. He asks parents to quickly applaud all worthy acts. In an appropriate analogy, the wise farmer compares children's faults to "weeds" which must be rooted out so that virtues, "plants of a nobler kind," may flourish (pp. 489-90). With his culturing, gardener's hands, the American farmer acts as a husbandman to both his land and his family. The two enterprises are equally important in Dwight's vision.

In Greenfield Hill Dwight suggests that he believed America had truly accomplished her divine mission of bringing moral prosperity to the common man. His vision is tempered ever so slightly. After the farmer completes his secular sermon, his audience ponders his words,
but true to human nature, the citizens resolve to improve themselves "To-morrow" (p. 504). In addition, the poem includes two short narratives about farmers who do not unmitigatedly prosper. The tale of the slothful farmer in section II is reminiscent of Byrd's account in "A Journey to the Land of Eden" and foreshadows Irving's "Rip Van Winkle." This farmer, too, leaves his house and fields in decay and neglects his family. We are told that although he had no time for agrarian pursuits,

Yet this so lazy man I've often seen
Hurrying, and bustling, round the busy green;
The loudest prater, in a blacksmith's shop;
The wisest statesman, o'er a drunken cup;
(His sharp-bon'd horse, the street that nightly fed,
Tied, many an hour, in yonder tavern-shed) (p. 410).

The second tale, included in the farmer's account, concerns the story of an archetypal family who, within three generations, manages to rise and become prosperous in the land, but then, loosing touch with moral virtues, and through "riot and rake," dies broken. Hope is held out for the family, nevertheless. The fourth generation becomes apprenticed to stern masters, and once again learns how to lead useful agrarian lives (pp. 498-501).

The tempering of Dwight's vision is not very strong. Implicit in his poem is the belief that as long as men stayed close to their soil and worked it, they would receive a type of moral sustenance. They would be inspired to reform and redeem themselves. While all may not be perfect in Dwight's portrait of agrarian America, it was surely the closest sin-tainted men would come to perfection in this world. Dwight, unlike Freneau and Crèvecoeur whom we will subsequently discuss, remained untroubled by any unresolved tensions disturbing calm agrarian life. Perhaps because he was a minister, Dwight was able to find
comfort in the belief that America was following a divine plan. It was one which apparently predicted a millennial future for America, and for her symbolic representative, the American farmer.

Like Timothy Dwight, David Humphreys also held a largely un­
qualified view of the American farmer. A Connecticut wit and a
staunch Federalist, Humphreys is probably best known for what has been
called his "ardent and rather unthinking patriotism." Intensely
chauvinistic, Humphreys finds the American farmer to be a meaningful
symbol for the New Republic, and he uses the husbandman in several of
his poems. Attempting to impart grandeur to his national themes,
Humphreys employs a florid style which makes his poetry seem stiff,
artificial, and monotonous. Indulging in extremes of mannerism,
Humphreys inundates his poetry with rhetorical figures and tropes --
apostrophes, exclamations, interrogations, and invocations abound.

Gordon E. Bigelow, in his study of early American poetry, accuses poets
such as Humphreys of confusing rhetoric with poetry, of writing dull,
lifeless lines which may have spoken to a particular audience on a
specific occasion, but which lack the universal resonance of the "best"
poetry. Indeed, the highest praise Humphreys' most recent editor
affords him is contained in the following comment:

His works do not compose an entirely dull chapter
in the history of American letters, but form
instead a document of considerable interest to
Americans who would know our heritage in detail ... they rise for us at least to the status of "useful"
documents.

It is on the level of "useful documents" that Humphreys' poetry will be
studied. Not only does he deal with several important agrarian themes,
but he also demonstrates an interesting development in his literary
treatment of the farmer myth.

In 1780 Humphreys first published "Address to the Armies of the United States of America." His explicit purpose for composing the poem, as he states in his preface, was to "inspire" the Revolutionary soldiers to continue the battle. As a result, the poem is highly rhetorical. Leon Howard has identified the general framework to be that of a "deliberative oration," containing two "demonstrative discourses." One discourse praises the American war effort and dispraises the British; the second celebrates the glorious rewards American soldiers will reap in the Ohio Valley after the war has been successfully won.

What is perhaps most interesting about the poem is the sense Humphreys conveys of America in a state of equilibrium. Like other artists we have studied, Humphreys suggests that the significance of America can only be understood with an eye to both her past and her future. American experience at any one moment inexpressively encapsulates a past overcome and a future potential yet to be realized.

In his preface, Humphreys asserts that in inspiring his countrymen, "no considerations could be more effectual than the recollection of the past and the anticipation of the future" (pp. 3-4). His imagery merges past, present, and future into one harmonious vision. When he celebrates the future glory of America he can think of no higher praise than to see it as a continuation of the past. Future generations will be:

But like the heirs our great forefathers bred,
By freedom nurtur'd, and by temp'rance fed (p. 17).

America's ancestors had been noble husbandmen:

Healthful and strong, they turn'd the virgin soil,
The untam'd forest bow'd beneath their toil (p. 17).
And her posterity will continue in the same vein:

To all the vigour of that pristine race,
New charms are added, and superior grace (p. 17).

Humphreys paints a millennial future that will be brought about primarily through the continued efforts of America's husbandmen:

Then Cultivation shall extend his pow'r,
Rear the green blade, and nurse the tender flow'r
Make the fair villa in full splendours smile
And robe with verdure all the genial soil

... Then oh, blest land! with genius unconfin'd
With polish'd manners, and th' illumin'd mind,
Thy future race on daring wing shall soar,
Each science trace, and all the arts explore (p. 18).

As we can see, Humphreys' conceptualization of blissful agrarian life continued to be that of an eminently civilized, harmonious society. Like most of his contemporaries, Humphreys does not find the rude frontiersmen of an isolated wilderness to be a subject for celebration. He virtually ignores their existence.

A unique aspect to this particular poem, "Address to the Armies," is the truly pastoral vision Humphreys promises American soldiers they will inherit at the close of the war. It is without question a picture of a new Arcadia, a land of milk and honey, where the "toils of war" will be crowned "with rural ease" (p. 16). No tyrants, no blasts, no storms, and no diseases will temper the perfection of this Elysium field. Rather:

But golden years, anew, begin their reigns
And cloudless sunshine gild salubrious plains
Herbs, fruits and flo'rs shall clothe th' uncultur'd field,
Nectareous juice the vine and orchard yield;
Rich dulcet creams the copious goblets fill,
Delicious honey from the trees distill (p. 16).
Here American rustics will enjoy a life "free from envy, cank'ring care and strife" (p. 16).

In his preface to the poem Humphreys states that he wished to create a blissful vision of the Ohio Valley which would serve as "a glorious compensation for all our toils and sufferings, and a monument of the most unparalleled bravery and patriotism to the remotest posterity" (p. 5). He thus suggests that he is composing fantasy; that he has embellished reality to reflect what these noble American soldiers "deserve." Perhaps he never intended the hyperbole to be taken literally. In any case, Humphreys was not finally content with the picture of an American Arcadia he had drawn. He felt the need to return to this theme several times again in later poems.

"A Poem on the Happiness of America: Address to the Citizens of the United States" was published in 1786. Once again, Humphreys' purpose is overtly rhetorical. He seeks to demonstrate America's "prospects" for happiness, as he states it, "the happiness of the Americans considered as a free and agricultural people" (p. 26). Within the poem is an explicit apostrophe to agriculture itself:

Hail, agriculture! by whose parent aid
The deep foundations of our states are laid
The seeds of greatness by thy hand are sown;
These shall mature with thee and time alone;
But still conduct us on thy sober plan,
Great source of wealth, and earliest friend of man (p. 39).

In "A Poem on the Happiness of America" Humphreys again returns to his vision of American Arcadia, and tells us:
For here exists, once more, th' Arcadian scene
Those simple manners, and that golden mean!
Here holds society its middle stage
Between too rude and too refin'd an age (p. 37).

This time, he deals with the fruition of Arcadian bliss in detail.
Exploring the lives of American husbandmen through the four seasons
of the year, he now emphasizes their "stubborn toil" (p. 31). According
to Humphreys, American farmers do, in reality, enjoy the benefits of
a "golden age." They are politically free and morally prosperous. It
is not "rural ease," however, that finally makes possible such content­
ment. American farmers enjoy a new "Arcadia" because they have unrelent­
ingly labored to bring it forth:

The dreary wastes, by mighty toils reclaim'd,
Deep marshes drain'd, wild woods and thickets tam'd:
...
Here planters find a ceaseless source of charms
In clearing fields, and adding farms to farms:
'Tis independence prompts their daily toil,
And calls forth beauties from the desert soil (p. 38).

Humphreys returns to his "Arcadian" vision a third, and final
time in "A Poem on the Industry of the United States of America" (1794).
In his introduction, Humphreys includes an extended discussion of the
benefits of freehold tenure on America's agricultural society. The
following passage suggests the detailed information he sought to convey:

It is at present generally understood, that
unequalled share of happiness is enjoyed by the
inhabitants of this newly discovered continent.
This is, perhaps, chiefly attributable (under
the benediction of Providence) to their
singularly favourable situation for cultivating
the soil. May we not fairly calculate that
this effect will continue co-existent with
the cause; namely, the abundance and cheap­
ness of land? An almost unlimited space
of excellent territory remains to be settled.
Freehold estates may be purchased upon
moderate terms. Agriculture will probably for a succession of ages, be the chief employment of the citizens of the United States (p. 94).

Humphreys' consideration of the social, political, and economic implications of freehold tenure impinges on his imagination virtually causing him to come full circle in his depiction of agrarian bliss. In "A Poem on the Industry of the U.S." Humphreys explicitly denies the possibility of an American Arcadian vision, a vision that he himself had promulgated earlier. He finds consolation, however, in the belief that the "real" happiness of agrarian America is superior to any imagined pastoral fantasies:

What though for us no fields Arcadian bloom
Nor tropic shrubs diffuse a glad perfume
No fairy regions picturesque with flow'rs,
Elysian groves, or Amarathine bow'rs
Breathe sweet enchantment -- but still fairer smile,
Once savage wilds now tam'd by tut'ring toil (p. 108).

"Toil" is perhaps the key word of this poem; it begins with a virtual hymn to the unrelenting toil of America's husbandmen (p. 97). By this time, Humphreys had come to see the farmer's laborious toil as the source and inspiration of America's greatness.

As we read Humphreys' poetry it becomes evident that he held millennial expectations for the future glory of America and that he saw her glory in predominantly agricultural terms. The symbol of the farmer retained its moral, religious, political and economic resonance for him. Humphreys' reverence for the husbandman, his absolute apotheosis of the agrarian ideal is perhaps best revealed when, in "A Poem on the Happiness of America," the poet envisions America as the site of the accomplished millennium. He states:
Swords turn'd to shares, and war to rural toil,  
The men who sav'd, now cultivate the soil.  
In no heroic age, since time began,  
Appear'd so great, the majesty of man (p. 29).

In asking his fellow countrymen to "proudly dare to venerate the plough" (p. 98), the poet confirms his quasi-religious devotion to American agrarianism. Patriot David Humphreys ardently believed in American farmers just as he ardently believed in America and he saw the two as intimately linked elements.

A Jeffersonian Perspective: Freneau

The farmer as a mythic figure plays an important thematic role in Philip Freneau's poetry as well. Freneau presents a particularly good figure with which to conclude our consideration of the poetry of the Revolutionary period because of the complexity of his vision. Unlike Dwight and Humphreys, Freneau was a Jeffersonian in his politics. (Indeed, in writing for the National Gazette Freneau functioned as Jefferson's paid lackey and dedicated himself to vilifying the policies of Hamilton and the Federalist party.) Freneau's political persuasion affected his literary portraits of the farmer in several ways. A firm advocate of the self-sufficient, family-size farm, Freneau voiced a "Republican" suspicion of the corrupting influences commercial interests exercised on American agriculture and agriculturalists. While praising the farmer's opportunity to purchase land cheaply in the New World, Freneau challenged the High Federalist notion that wealth, position, and property were the prelude to sound morals. In his thoughtful examinations of American agrarian life, Freneau discovered that the farmer's rural virtues were not impervious to assault by moneyed interests.
Thus while Freneau exuberantly celebrated the prospects for millennial happiness open to the agrarian community, while he glorified the freedom, justice and moral prosperity available to American husbandmen, the poet also bitterly denounced the hypocrisy, cupidity and moral obtuseness of some American tillers of the soil. Freneau's larger perspective has been called one of "cosmic ambivalence" and there is no question, particularly in some of the later poetry, that he became disillusioned with American agrarianism. As we read Freneau's poetry, specifically his literary portraits of American farmers, we encounter not only the fruition of the American dream, but its souring as well.

Let us begin with Freneau's joyful exuberance. "The Rising Glory of America" was composed in 1772. The poem opens with Leander's claim that Greece, Rome, and even Britain will no longer be the objects to inspire poets. Rather, they will be replaced by a vision of America:

A Theme more new, tho' not less noble, claims
Our ev'ry thought on this auspicious day;
The rising glory of this western world ...73

America's greatness is seen to rest largely on the accomplishments of her first settlers who labored vigorously to clear the forest and till the soil. Their endeavors with the land brought forth riches "more noble" than gold or silver (p. 430). America's founders created contented agricultural communities which allow men to enjoy humble pleasures. As we are told, these first farmers:

Who, warm in liberty and freedom's cause,
Sought out uncultivated tracts and wilds,
And fram'd new plans of cities, governments
And spacious provinces (p. 430).

They bequeathed a noble heritage for their posterity.
In expressing his deep satisfaction with American rural life, Leander acknowledges that the praise of husbandry had a long and glorious tradition in antiquity. He suggests that America has become the new repository of that ancient joy. Eugenio concurs with Leander and adds that "agriculture crowns our happy land" (pp. 433-34).

While highly praising American agrarianism, the three narrators of the poem do not celebrate agriculture alone. Commerce, science, and the arts are seen to have an equally glorious future in the New World. Freneau is working with the ancient convention of translatio studii. The central theme of "The Rising Glory of America" is, that the inevitable westward course of civilization from Greece, to Rome, to Western Europe, was to have its next, and most magnificent flowering in America. Freneau's poem ends with an epic celebration of the coming millennium -- an American future when "the lion and the lamb/ In mutual friendship link'd shall browse the shrub" and when "Paradise a new/ Shall flourish, by no second Adam lost" (p. 442).

"The American Village" (1772) continues Freneau's affirmation. Epic conventions are replaced with those of descriptive poetry and Freneau's poem functions as a literary response to Goldsmith's "The Deserted Village." In his poem, Goldsmith had wept "in melancholy strains" for "deserted Auburn." Freneau explicitly answers him by proclaiming American rural society to be the inheritor and embodiment of Old World traditions. In America the wilderness has been conquered and the village ideal fully achieved. Freneau asserts:
Where yonder stream divides the fertile plain,
Made fertile by the labours of the swain;
And hills and woods high tow'ring o'er the rest,
Behold a village with fair plenty blest:
Each year tall harvests crown the happy field;
Each year the meads their stores of fragrance yield,
And ev'ry joy and ev'ry bliss is there,
And healthful labour crowns the flowing year (III.381).

In describing the activities of rural life, Freneau creates delightful genre pictures. "Groaning waggons" carry crops to market. Ploughs tear through the new made field "ordaining" a harvest. The rising barn "spreads its arms to take the plenteous store" and provides enough for both rich and poor (III.383). American agrarian society is characterized by simplicity and natural goodness. People content themselves in "mud' wall'd" houses and their hard work reaps a moral prosperity:

And each one lab'ring in his own employ
Comes weary home at night, but comes with joy (III.382).

At the conclusion of "The American Village" Freneau introduces a personal note by suggesting that these very rural scenes were what first inspired him to write poetry:

Now fairest village of the fertile plain,
Made fertile by the labours of the swain;
Who first my drowsy spirit did inspire,
To sing of woods, and strike the rural lyre (III.392).

Although Freneau qualifies his view of American rural possibilities slightly in this poem, by including the tale of the ill-fated Indians, his admiration for American farmers generally inspires a contented state of mind.

Freneau's rural celebration continues in several more poems. In "On the Emigration to America" (1785) the poet asserts that men have left "Europe's proud, despotic shores," and come to America, "To
western woods, and lonely plains," in order to "tame the soil and plant the arts" (II.280). American village life has attained a perfection; order has arisen out of chaos. Not only in the past, but in the present also, America continues to be the place where men's highest potentials can be realized. "No realm so free, so blest as this," the poet tells us (II.281).

"The Happy Prospect" (1795), written after the Revolutionary War, has been called Freneau's "hymn of thanksgiving." In the poem, there is an immense sense of relief that peace has finally come. Men can once again return to their primary vocation and "till the grateful field" (II.242). America's newly won freedom and independence assures them that their toil will be repaid (II.242).

There is no question that Freneau is the most primitivistic of the American writers we have been studying. His vision of agrarian society celebrates the farmer as a "natural man." Possessing a Jeffersonian belief in man's natural goodness, Freneau sees evil as the product of urban institutions. He is thus reluctant to praise a highly civilized, agrarian society. In his poem, "Reflections," Freneau argues that if men were left to themselves, they would work "in peace to till the soil" (III.219). He does not fear, as do Dwight and Crevecoeur for example, that without society's encumbrances men would become ferocious, gloomy and half-civilized.

"The Bergen Planter," also called "The Pennsylvania Planter" (1790), clearly illustrates Freneau's primitivistic ideal. The larger world does not intrude on the simple farmer's harmonious bliss: "He on no party hangs his hopes or fears ... The same, to him, if Congress go
or stay" (III.45). Freneau lyrically celebrates the farmer as a simple rustic in tune with nature and natural life:

Attach'd to lands that ne'er deceiv'd his hopes,
This rustic sees the seasons come and go,
His autumn's toils return'd in summer's crops
While limpid streams, to cool his herbage, flow;
And, if some cares intrude upon his mind,
They are such cares as heaven for man design'd (III.45).

In his poem "Commerce" (1815), Freneau expresses some concern over an increasing American propensity for trade. Although he had earlier praised commerce (see "The Rising Glory of America"), Freneau now suggests that by engaging in trade and rejecting the divinely sanctioned role of farmers, some Americans were "becoming strangers to themselves." Worshipping material prosperity as an end in itself, these men were losing the satisfying wholeness that was their agrarian birthright. Freneau rhetorically asks:

Americans, why half neglect
The culture of your soil?
From distant traffic why expect
The harvest of your toil? (III.221)

Freneau's joyful celebration of the prospects for American agrarian bliss began with "The Rising Glory of America." He all but buried his vision in the poem "The Rising Empire" (1790). A savagely satiric look at the American countryside, Freneau's poem represents a bitter indictment of what American farmers had become. The poem is structured as a travel account. Visiting seven states, the narrator broadly surveys the agrarian landscape; he generally condemns the view he sees.

As he enters Rhode Island, Freneau's narrator boasts that there is "no fairer Eden in the west" (III.7). He joyfully tells us:
A grateful soil the fair Rhode Island boasts
The admiring eye no happier fields can trace (III.7).

Unfortunately, however, the farmers of Rhode Island, "their souls enslav'd to gain," have lost their moral roots. Sickening at the view, the narrator claims:

Fraud walks at large, -- each selfish passion reigns,
And cheats enforce what honesty disdains (III.8).

Believing he must leave Rhode Island, the narrator goes on to Connecticut, the state he calls "Terra Vulpina, or The Land of Foxes" (III.8). Here, the scene worsens. There is an almost nightmarish quality to the picture Freneau paints of Connecticut:

The impoverished fields the labourer's pains disgrace
And hawks and vultures scream through all the place
The broken soil a nervous breed requires ... (III.8).

As in Rhode Island, so in Connecticut, "All bow to lucre, all are bent on gain" (III.9). The narrator focuses on the particular problem of hypocrisy in Connecticut, telling us:

In spite of all the priest and squire can say,
This world - this wicked world - will have its way;
Honest through fear, religious by constraint,
How hard to tell the sharper from the saint! (III.9).

As the narrator continues his journey throughout the states similar scenes are repeated. In Massachusetts, "smiling plenty crowns the labourer's pain," but to no avail, since "avarice drives the natives to the sea" (III.10). New York boasts an industrious Dutch population, but they are portrayed as small-minded and "foreign" (III.12-13). Maryland and Virginia, having created slave societies which allow aristocratic "fops" to flourish, are viewed as totally decadent (III.15-17). Virginia, in particular, is seen as a place of betrayal
since it was she who: "Built the first town, and first subdued the plain" (III.17).

The only state to escape the scourge of Freneau's pen is Pennsylvania. He tells us:

Fair Pennsylvania holds her golden rein  
In fertile fields her wheaten harvest grows (III.13).

Freedom and moral prosperity flourish in Pennsylvania largely through the efforts of Penn, who had encouraged settlement but "planned no schemes that virtue disapproves" (III.13). Apparently, according to Freneau, contemporary Pennsylvania farmers had been able to preserve Penn's moral vision.

In "The Rising Empire" Freneau makes a frontal assault on simplistic Federalist praise of America's farmers. His literary treatment of the agricultural landscape of New England, of the same land and people that Humphreys and Dwight exalted in paradisiacal terms, illuminates a corrupt reality underlying the idealized, superficial view. In portraying the farmer in his poetry, Freneau comes to grips with the whole of experience, and not merely with agrarian ideals. He dramatizes yeomen who have lost their moral compasses. Freneau was one of the earliest writers to articulate fears about what would happen to society when the farmer's property became an end in itself, instead of the means to freedom and independence it was so heartily reputed to be. When self-interest degenerated into selfishness, both social cohesion and a moral, common decency among men were threatened.

In his prose portraits of the American farmer Philip Freneau displays a similarly ambivalent attitude. As in his poetic
compositions, an overview of Freneau's prose works reveals that the author continues to approach the husbandman with a combination of praise, blame, and qualification. Most of Freneau's agrarian prose works take the form of letters to the press and editorials. During the eighteenth century, these journalistic genres enjoyed enormous prestige as literary forms. A socially oriented age viewed them as convenient vehicles for appealing to men's minds and improving the public welfare. In so far as Freneau's letters to the press were imaginative and artistic, rather than scientific, philosophical, or intellectual, they enter into the realm of belles lettres and may be treated as such.

Within his journalistic essays Freneau created a series of rural personae who consistently responded to and were changed by encounters with described experience. Lewis Leary has commented on the "autochthonal progression in Freneau's prose personae," and in the examination which follows we can clearly see the transformation of his rural spokesmen from learned, European intellectual to pure American homespun.

In November of 1781 Freneau's essays by the reputed "Philosopher of the Forest" began appearing in The Freeman's Journal. The first number, "The Philosopher's Autobiography," elaborates the life story of a learned and articulate man who had traveled the world, and made his present abode in the depths of the Pennsylvania forest. He had come to America, he tells us, motivated by "an ardent desire to see, and converse with those far famed patriots and soldiers, who, by the assistance of a virtuous yeomanry have established the reign of freedom and equity ..." (p. 200). While Freneau's philosopher embodies a Rousseauian love of wild nature and simplicity, he remains sympathetic
to agrarian life. Indeed, he views it as a satisfactory version of primitive living.

In Number X of the series, the philosopher ruminates on "The Greatness of America." Agrarian life assumes prominence, and the contemporary scene is viewed with an eye both to its past and its future. As an advocate of primitivism, the philosopher voices dismay about America's past. His sympathies with the Indian are apparent in the following comment:

As the Europeans had the means, they of course conceived they had also the right to extirpate the innocent natives or drive them from the sea coasts to the interior parts of the country. The most specious pretext for this procedure seems to have been, that the aborigines, or old inhabitants of America, did not sufficiently exert themselves to cultivate and improve the lands nature had so liberally bestowed upon them: they were content with the productions of the simple genius of the earth, and therefore were scarcely to be considered according to these casuists, as legal proprietors of the immense territories that were now discovered (pp. 225-26).

At the same time, the philosopher views these Europeans "casuists" as the victims of oppression in the Old World. They had come to America seeking asylum, and once they arrived, they accomplished great things. These settlers "by the mere force of industry rendered a large proportion of this new country rich and flourishing" (p. 226).

Although the philosopher is ambivalent about the moral nature of America's past, he has no such ambivalence about her future. He triumphantly prophesies a millennial vision the roots of which are firmly planted in agrarian life:
It is not easy to conceive what will be the greatness and importance of North America in a century or two to come. Agriculture, the basis of a nation's greatness, will here, most probably, be advanced to its summit of perfection. Nations, by a free intercourse with this vast and fertile continent, and this continent with the whole world, will again become brothers after so many centuries of hatred and jealousy, and no longer treat each other as savages and monsters (pp. 227-28).

In a second series of letters to the press written after the war, Freneau creates the character of Robert Slender, O.S.M. Not a farmer himself by trade, Slender's sympathies with the common man become apparent in the tongue-in-cheek title he gives himself; O.S.M. -- one of the swinish multitude. This persona, far less educated and less intellectual than the philosopher of the forest, is pure American home-spun (p. 395). The popularity of Slender's letters to the editor in the Aurora encouraged Freneau to publish them in book form in 1799.78

A fiercely patriotic Slender dedicated his book to "the Freemen, the lovers of Liberty, the Asserters, Maintainers and Supporters of Independence throughout the United States" (p. 396). He concluded his dedication with the thought, "the good of his country must undoubtedly be the good of Robert Slender" (p. 397). Slender's patriotism, however, did not prevent him from becoming confused by the shifting political, social and economic realities of the post-war period. An increasing acquaintance with the infamy of reputedly virtuous men leads him toward despair, until a friend once gives him something to believe in:
It is our great comfort, said my friend, that although here some things are wrong, I must confess, among the rich and the great, the honourable and very worthy, our AMERICAN FARMERS are VIRTUOUS, not in name but in REALITY. Vice has not been able to entice them from the standard of VIRTUE, INDEPENDENCE, and FREEDOM. To them we look -- they are our bulwark, the guardians of our rights, the supporters of our dignity, and the pillars of our CONSTITUTION (p. 401).

These are some of the strongest sentiments in praise of rural life published during the Revolutionary period. Farmers are transformed into secular priests who preserve the fabric of society and allow men to preserve their solitary lives with peace and contentment.

"Interesting Thoughts, Designed for the Public Good" is the title of another letter to the press written by Freneau. Christopher Clodhopper, Yeoman, is the country yokel who acts as Freneau's spokesman and offers some homespun, simple wisdom to the more sophisticated city dwellers. The yeoman suggests that city folk would be better able to meet their tax obligation if they stopped throwing their money away on "fopperies" such as high-heeled shoes, head-dresses, tye wigs, and double rows of gilt buttons (pp. 181-82). Advocating an exaggerated industry and frugality reminiscent of Franklin's Father Abraham, Clodhopper tells his readers:

As to myself, I am a plain countryman possessed of about two hundred acres of but tolerable land in the state of Pennsylvania, and do aver and assert, that by proper economy, industry and not suffering a single superfluous article, really so, to come within my doors, I have hitherto been enabled to pay my taxes cheerfully in specie, and could have done it, notwithstanding the small demand there generally is for the produce of the lands, had they been half as high again as they are (p. 180).
The simple yeoman includes an anecdote about the reception his son Jerry received when he returned home from the city one day, dressed as "a mere baboon" (p. 183). Freneau uses the farmer as a spokesman for simple values and common sense. The posture of the provincial is a key element in numerous American agrarian works and helps to place them within a larger identifiable native tradition. From Silence Do Good through Huck Finn to Faulkner's Dilsey, American literature is filled with simple rural folks who have something to say about right action.

True to his thoughtful, perceptive examination of rural life, Freneau does not allow his honorific prose portraits of morally prosperous American farmers to go unchallenged. "Dialogue between a Citizen of Philadelphia and a Jersey Farmer" (1793) takes the form of a dramatic dialogue. The work is not particularly well written; its language is uncomfortably inflated. The primary importance of the piece in Freneau's prose canon is that it deals with the theme of a corrupt farmer.

Frenenau's "Dialogue" suggests a moral fable or tale with biblical resonance. A citizen of Philadelphia during the yellow fever epidemic walks through the Jersey countryside attempting to find "one good man." He stops a farmer, the supposed pillar of society, and offers to pay for a place to rest; the barn would be sufficient (p. 317). The farmer denies request after request of the citizen, until he even refuses him a piece of bread to be handed over "on the point of a pitch-fork" (p. 317). Concerned with the possibility of the citizen infecting his horses or his hay, the farmer satanically threatens: "Avast! avast, sir! advance not ... or by the three prongs of my dung fork, I will make ghost's meat
of you! -- I will instantly finish what the yellow fever has begun!"
(p. 317). The citizen finally leaves, but not before telling the farmer: "The common duties of humanity between man and man, should have as much weight with a rational creature as the great duty of self preservation itself, and be equally observed" (p. 317).

Thus in Freneau's final vision, the American farm, once viewed as the promised land, proves to be no haven from universal corruption. American farmers, once viewed as the chosen people, prove to have no exemptions from the follies and sins of mankind at large. Unlike Dwight and Humphreys, Freneau could not continue to idealize American farmers with unquestioning millennial tributes. His originally romanticized view of the farmer is qualified by a realistic understanding of the effect of growing commercial values on agriculture and the people who practiced it. Further literary implications of the American farmer's "fall" into experience will be explored in the next, and last section of this chapter.

The Prose Works of Crèvecoeur

In Letters From an American Farmer (1782) Crèvecoeur employs an epistolary form similar to those we have previously seen used both in Dwight's Travels and in the journalistic pieces of Freneau and Dickinson. Crèvecoeur's ordering principle, however, is far more imaginative. James, the reputed letter writer, is given the depth and complexity of a fully conceived literary character. His particularized personality, his point of view, and his responses to the experiences he encounters are as essential to the work as the ideas he articulates. One of the best critics of Crèvecoeur, Thomas Philbrick, compares the
persona of James to the "central intelligence" of a traditional novel.®®
James' mind is the primary medium through which we come to know the world
of the book.

As an American husbandman James is personally and meaningfully
involved with the agrarian world he transmits. Authority for the Letters
rests on James' position as a native farmer and on his promise to
relate an authentic account of the actual experiences of real people.
Numerous critics have pointed out that the natural form of mimetic
narrative is eye-witness and first-person.81 It is this primary function
James so successfully accomplishes.

As a result of James' development within the work, one may speak
of Letters From an American Farmer as an incipient novel. The pattern
of the book moves from the establishment of James' character and life,
through his description and interpretation of rural activities, to the
point when, with the coming of the Revolution, James faces the loss of
everything he has spent a lifetime attaining.82 When the Letters is
viewed in its entirety, it presents an approach to unity and coherence
of action and suggests sufficient characterization and motivation to
actuate the whole. These are, at least, the rudiments of a well-
conceived novel. As we read Crèvecœur's Letters From an American Farmer,
we cannot help but be impressed by the way the author shapes and refines
the experiences of American agrarianism into an enduring work of art.

Perhaps the first quality one notices about Crèvecœur's book is
that it is an extremely self-conscious literary production. The author's
"Advertisement" for the Letters claims authenticity:
That these letters are the actual result of a private correspondence, may fairly be inferred (exclusive of other evidence) from the stile and manner in which they are conceived; for though plain and familiar, and sometimes animated, they are by no means exempt from such inaccuracies as must unavoidably occur in the rapid effusions of a confessedly inexperienced writer.  

The farmer's own "Dedication" is "To the Abbe Raynal, F.R.S." whose works on America served as an inspiration and a guide (pp. 7-8). In addition, a large portion of the first letter concerns itself with the question of James' ability to write about his experiences and with the implications involved in his taking up the pen.

Mr. F.B., James' potential correspondent, has suggested, "the art of writing is just like unto every other art of man; that it is acquired by habit and by perseverance" (p. 20). James' minister concurs in this view, and encourages the husbandman by composing an analogy between farming and writing:

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 (p. 23).

The minister goes on to suggest that James' provincialism, his "simple American garb," may very well prove an asset (p. 21). At the same time he vehemently defends the intellectual capacity of American yeoman:

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? (p. 22)
The pragmatic nature of James' wife is conveyed through her responses to the proposed literary undertaking. She fears her husband will become too enamored of the pen, and neglect his agrarian duties. Had James' father loved the pen so well, and "spent his time in sending epistles to and fro," she suggests, they would not presently own their farm free and clear (p. 24).

James, himself, finally agrees to correspond with Mr. F.B., and in what may be termed the posture of the provincial, apologizes for an "incorrect stile" and "unexpert methods" (p. 25). James concludes his first letter by stating that he was not "a philosopher, politician, divine, nor naturalist, but a simple farmer" (p. 25). A reading of Crèvecœur's book suggests that James' stature as an American farmer encompassed all of these occupations and more. This farmer was as qualified with the pen as he was with the plough.

As an American farmer, James is intent on distinguishing American agrarians from their European counterparts. Writing within a well established tradition, James addresses himself to a number of themes we have previously seen discussed. These include advocacy of freehold tenure; vigorous support for the realizable fulfillment of the American Dream; praise for the communal nature of civilized, agrarian society with a corollary condemnation of frontier isolation; and finally, a veritable eulogy to the domestic felicity of American husbandmen. The charm of the Letters resides largely in James' ability to vivify these somewhat abstract ideas through his delineation of a personal involvement with them, through his depiction of personal experiences.
The following example illustrates the methods James uses to personalize his experiences with agrarian life. When discussing the benefits of freehold tenure, he sets a scene. He is a man alone, walking across the land, communing with nature and smoking a pipe, when the significance of the soil reveals itself to him. As James enters his own land he thinks to himself: "What should we American farmers be without the distinct possession of that soil?" (p. 31). Continuing his meditation in the following manner, he states:

This formerly rude soil has been converted by my father into a pleasant farm, and in return it has established all our rights; on it is founded our rank, our freedom, our power as citizens, our importance as inhabitants of such a district (p. 31).

James summarizes his personal feelings about his own property as "the true and only philosophy of an American farmer" (p. 31).

When he looks around him at the larger society, James sees his own happiness repeated ad infinitum. America is the asylum of the world. The very earth tends to regenerate men (pp. 47-48). The idle, useless, and poor of Europe take root here and become industrious, useful, and rich -- not in gold and silver, but with the moral prosperity of agrarian possessions (p. 61). James joyfully proclaims: "We are a people of cultivators," and "we are the most perfect society now existing in this world" (pp. 46-47). To support his joyful vision, James narrates the "History of Andrew," the Hebridean, "one man who could serve "as an epitome of the rest" (p. 64). As James tells us, what he wished to capture in his narration was:
... the progressive steps of a poor man, advancing from indigence to ease; from oppression to freedom and some degree of consequence -- not by virtue of any freaks of fortune, but by the gradual operation of sobriety, honesty, and emigration (p. 74).

Farmer James personally meets Andrew at the Philadelphia dock. Impressed with his industry and honesty, he helps the new emigrant gain a toehold in American society. Andrew frugally saves his money, and finally, again with James' assistance, becomes an American freeholder. Andrew is well-liked by numerous friends and neighbors: some forty of them pitch-in to help erect his house (pp. 88-89). There are shades of a tall-tale in James' anecdote about Andrew, the Hebridean. For example, the Scotchman acts like an archetypal greenhorn in his reaction to the size of Pennsylvania horses and in his encounter with peaceful Indians (pp. 79, 83-85). But James insists on the reality of his story, going so far as to include a detailed list of Andrew's property. (The list includes six cows valued at $78, pp. 90-91).

The significance of a civilized, harmonious agrarian society is apparent in the story of Andrew's successful fulfillment of the American Dream. As a farmer, Andrew does not accomplish his goals alone. Many friends and neighbors contribute to his success. Farmer James assures us that when Andrew "found himself in a few years in the middle of a numerous society," he too "helped others as generously as others had helped him" (p. 90).

As soon as Andrew becomes a legitimate freeholder, he fulfills the obligations expected of a free citizenry and serves on juries (p. 90). James is quite adamant about the rights, privileges, and obligations of
America's citizens. American farmers do not labor alone in frontier isolation; they are men with a stake in society and its laws. Attempting to civilize a wilderness, they must do all they can to preserve society's institutions. James states:

As citizens it is easy to imagine, that they will carefully read the newspapers, enter into every political disquisition, freely blame or censure governors or others. As farmers they will be careful and anxious to get as much as they can, because what they get is their own (p. 51).

In addition, James tells us that varied religions and cultures do not play a divisive role in American agrarian society. Men concern themselves more with Christian deeds than with theological disquisitions (pp. 49-52). James' minister had proposed that the dimensions of a successful farmer's ample barn were preferable to those of a decadent temple, that God could be better praised through industrious labor than by singing and praying (p. 18).

Like other agrarian writers, the author of Letters From an American Farmer endorses the view that men could recapture their ancient dignity as members of an agricultural community. James and several other characters in the book testify to the mental stimulation they found while working with their hands. James' minister composes sermons at the plough (p. 22). John Bertram, {sic} who is described in Letter XI as the first botanist in the new hemisphere, as a scientist with an international reputation, finds incentives for his thought in his agrarian occupation (pp. 187-201). Farmer James himself "delight[s] in inventing and executing machines which simplify this wife's labor" (p. 43). Toil in the field does not preclude development of the mind.
Integrating Man Thinking with Man Working, the occupation of farmer allows man to enjoy a satisfying wholeness.

Men on the frontier are vividly contrasted with the happy and peaceful farmers. No longer members of an established community, "they are often in a perfect state of war; that of man against man, sometimes decided by blows" (p. 52). James' inherent anti-primitivism is apparent when he tells us, these men "are wholly left dependent on their native tempers," and as a result "appear to be no better than carnivorous animals of a superior rank" (p. 52). "Ferocious, gloomy, and unsociable," the frontier men "exhibit the most hideous parts of our society" (p. 57). The institutions of civilized, agrarian society are needed if men are to achieve their best selves.

Domestic felicity plays a key role in social harmony. A strong family is the bulwark of a strong society. James suggests that the American farmer acts as husbandman both to his land and to his family. Focusing on primary human relationships, James depicts himself as a simple man, going about the everyday business of living. One of the prime benefits he derives from agrarian life resides in the closeness of his family unit. James tells us that in his youth, he had considered leaving the farm to explore the world. As he matured, he realized that the benefits of agrarian life were much too precious to be easily cast aside. James continues: "When my first son was born ... I ceased to ramble in imagination through the wide world" (p. 29).

Within the Letters, James elaborates on the pleasures he feels in watching "the gradual unfolding of [his] children's reason" (p. 43). In addition, he enjoys sitting by the fireside, contemplating his wife,
"while she either spins, knits, darns, or suckles [their] child"
(p. 30). Farmer James' account achieves a splendid poignancy as he
describes his plowing of the fields with his little boy seated in a
chair screwed to the beam of his plough (p. 31). From the earliest
literary accounts, the farmer's chief source of happiness has been his
freedom and independence to build a foundation for his posterity. James,
like his agrarian co-patriots, hopes to instill the same moral values
in his children:

I bless God for all the good he has given me; I
envy no man's prosperity, and wish no other portion
of happiness than that I may live to teach the
same philosophy to my children; and give each of
them a farm, shew them how to cultivate it, and
be like their father, good substantial inde­
pendent American farmers -- an appellation which
will be the most fortunate one, a man of my
class can possess, so long as our civil
government continues to shed blessings on our
husbandry (p. 43).

At least one critic has argued that the "unrelieved scene of
peaceful, rural, contented abundance" painted in Letters From an American
Farmer is "cloying" and "soporific," and that it exists "with no
resemblance to any conceivable reality." Yet Crèvecœur, through his
spokesman James, went to great pains to affirm the reality of this
American experience. "But believe me," James tells us, "what I write
is all true and real" (p. 40). James includes details to support his
vision. The precise number of acres he inherited and what part of that
land was meadow, the amount of pork and beef he kills each year, the
methods he uses to convert the forest into a prosperous farm, these
facts are all meticulously enumerated (p. 29). In addition, the exact
list of Andrew's property already mentioned (a list which demonstrates
an affinity with classic American works such as Benjamin Franklin's Autobiography and Thoreau's Walden) exists primarily to insure ver­similitude and circumstantiality. James draws his details from his own experience. He does not discuss a new Eden or a poetic utopia, but rather a farm he once owned in Carlisle, Pennsylvania.

Thus the major portion of Crèvecoeur's book seeks to establish America as the real place where men's highest ideals could finally be achieved. Freedom, independence, peace, security, and contentment, these are the reputed attributes of an existing American agrarian society. And yet, in the total perspective of Letters From an American Farmer, this idyllic vision becomes ironic. Confrontation with the Revolution shatters and destroys everything.

The world described in the early letters no longer exists at the very time the work is published. Foreshadowing appears in the "Advertisement" for the Letters when the author suggests that the war has "deformed the face of America," and holds out the faint hope that, now that the war was drawing to a close, perhaps, man could, once again, return to their primary vocation as tillers of the earth (p. 5). An ominous note is introduced in James' excursion to the South as well. The famous negro-in-a-cage incident suggests that perhaps the American is not a new man, that perhaps the New World cannot work miracles (pp. 176-78). Evil actions, man's inhumanity to man, may exist in all societies at all times.

The disillusionment with America is, of course, most apparent in the final letter. Thomas Philbrick underscores the sophisticated literary quality of Crèvecoeur's writing when he categorizes the
final letter as a dramatic monologue. Philbrick suggests that the author conveys the tensions James felt through an enactment of his state of mind rather than by overt statement. There is a "mirroring in the violence of its language and the convolutions of its thought, the state of psychic shock to which James is reduced by the collapse of his world."86

James tells us:

I have 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, to teach my children how to provide the means of a future ample subsist­ence, founded on labour, like that of their father (p. 217).

However, since the family is disturbed by nightly alarms, since they live in terror of their own physical safety, James concludes they must abandon the farm (pp. 203-05). Essentially apolitical about the goals of the Revolution, all James "knows" is that he was happy before the war, and that he is no longer so (p. 207). The simple farmer gropes to express his feelings about being forced to leave a house that he has built with his own hands, a land he has laboriously cleared, and even the trees that he has personally planted in the soil. That he may never see his farm again is a terribly painful reckoning (p. 222).

At the conclusion, James elects to move to an Indian camp on the frontier as the lesser of two evils. The hope is held out that, there, he may be able to salvage some of his agrarian values. No such hope is possible in a move to the decadent, disintegrating city. As the book ends, the final fate of James, the American farmer, and his
family, remains unresolved.

Richard Chase, in his study, The American Novel and Its Tradition, suggests that: "The American imagination has been stirred ... by the aesthetic possibilities of radical forms of alienation, contradiction, and disorder." Unlike the English novel which employs "harmony, reconciliation, catharsis, and transfiguration" in a valiant effort to order the chaos of experience, "the American novel has usually seemed content to explore, rather than to appropriate and civilize, the remarkable and in some ways unexampled territories of life in the New World and to reflect its anomalies and dilemmas."

Crèvecoeur's Letters From an American Farmer epitomizes this American literary tradition. Crèvecoeur explores the themes of alienation, contradiction, and disorder without attempting to resolve them. For a long moment, when James describes the beauties and perfection of a harmoniously civilized, agrarian society, the possibility for resolution of the typical disorder of human experience is held-out as a realizable achievement. The moment does not, cannot, last. Crèvecoeur's ending serves to make a mockery of the harmony and reconciliation that preceded it. One critic has characterized the American experience as a state of mind, as a "willingness to carry forward the ideals of civilization in the face of almost certain disillusionment." This appears to be a valid interpretation of Crèvecoeur's final dramatization of the farmer myth. While the symbol of the farmer may continue to embody the noblest aspirations, goals, and values of American society, his power to actuate and contain a blissful literary vision has been seriously diminished.
Before discussing Crèvecoeur's Sketches of Eighteenth Century America, a second work written in English concomitantly with Letters From an American Farmer, but not published until 1925, a brief word needs to be said about the French writings. In 1784 Crèvecoeur, settled in France, published two volumes of Lettres d'un Cultivateur Americain. A third volume was added to the series in 1787. In addition, Crèvecoeur published Voyage dans la Haute Pensylvanie et dans l'etat de New York in 1801. The author abandoned the convenient epistolary form in this work, substituting in its place the structural convention of the imaginary journey.

Although Crèvecoeur's French works continue to deal with American agrarian experience, there are many changes in the writer's style as he moved from America to France and from English to French. Critics have suggested that Crèvecoeur tailored his language, materials and approach to suit the conventions of the Parisian salon. While Letters From an American Farmer may not have been specifically addressed to an American audience, this earlier work nevertheless demonstrates a kinship with American literary tradition that is not evident in the French writings. Although Crèvecoeur's Lettres and Voyage are unquestionably helpful in understanding and appreciating the author's agrarian vision in its entirety, these works do not make any new or startling contributions to the development of the mythic figure of the farmer in American letters. All of the agrarian themes that Crèvecoeur explores in his French writings were previously dealt with in his English works, and frequently with a more satisfactory artistic execution.
The bulk of Crèvecoeur's *Sketches of Eighteenth Century America* was composed concomitantly with *Letters From an American Farmer*. While many of the individual "sketches" served as original source material for both the English *Letters* and the French *Lettres*, the manuscript itself remained unpublished until 1925. In that year, Bourdin, Gabriel, and Williams selected eleven of nineteen sketches that Crèvecoeur composed, for inclusion in their edition. Since the manuscript lacked a discernable organizational pattern, Crèvecoeur left his sketches in the form of rough drafts, the editors essentially shaped and ordered the published work themselves.

Modeling their finished product on the original *Letters From an American Farmer*, the editors divided the book into twelve chapters which, similar to the structure of the *Letters*, move from a description of personal rural harmony, through a consideration of the larger implications of civilized farm life, to the moment when American agrarian society is virtually destroyed by the onslaught of the Revolution. Although the themes of destruction and disillusionment assume a prominence in the *Sketches* not granted them in the earlier published account, the larger vision of Crèvecoeur's *Sketches* continues to support the doctrine that agriculture is man's noblest occupation and truest source of happiness.

As structured by the editors, *Sketches of Eighteenth Century America* forms an anthology of set pieces. No single voice or coherent point of view unifies the entire work. Rather, a rich and interesting variety of points of view and literary genres is assembled. The materials of the *Sketches* include epistolary narratives, dramatic monologues, a
drama complete with scene divisions and set instructions, and a self-contained prose poem in praise of husbandry. Crevecoeur applies a variety of tones and postures to the subject matter of rural life; his attempts at formal experimentation represent one of the most interesting qualities of the book.

"Thoughts of an American Farmer on Various Rural Subjects," constituting about one-fourth of the total book, continues Crevecoeur's use of the epistolary form. Little attempt is made to clearly individualize the farmer-persona; he functions primarily as a convenient vehicle for expressing some basic tenets of agrarianism. This farmer, like others we have seen, enumerates the benefits of a communal, civilized, agrarian society, enjoys domestic tranquility with his family, and hopes for nothing more than to live long enough to see his children "possessed of the proper qualifications requisite to make them good farmers."94

Emphasis on the unrelenting labor and industry of yeomen is, of course, not a new theme in American agrarian writing. The narrator of "Rural Thoughts," however, enumerates the details of farm work with unequaled authority. His highly informative account includes a discussion of topics such as: the battle with pests like the weevil; the proper method for securing maple from the trees; the necessity for "salting cattle;" the construction of scarecrows; the best methods for ploughing the fields; the operations by which apples may be dried and preserved; and the best way to deal with domestic predators like the fox (pp. 87, 102-03, 112-15, 150). Crevecoeur's agrarian spokesman meticulously describes the buildings and implements needed to constitute
Continuing to drive the point home, the yeoman's presentation emerges as he tells us: "From this imperfect sketch you'll easily conceive that if we enjoy some happiness, we are made to pay for it" (p. 109).

The question of "pay" is particularly important in "Rural Thoughts," as Crévecoeur's farmer apparently felt the need to defensively justify agricultural prosperity, and conversely, to focus on the problem of rural indebtedness. Belying the common assumption that most farmers are prosperous, Crévecoeur's farmer takes a long hard look at the economic reality of agrarian life. As he tells us: "... the lot of the American farmer is very often unjustly envied by many Europeans who wish to see us taxed, and think that we live too well" (p. 88). The yeoman assures us that those who labor to civilize a wilderness are generally poor, and must borrow heavily to raise sufficient capital. "Lands are not purchased for nothing," he tells us (p. 89). When disaster strikes and mortgage payments cannot be met, the farmer loses both his land and his labor. Many cannot repay debts even within their life-times. With biblical resonance the American husbandman informs us: "These encumbrances, therefore, descend with the land, aye, even to the third generation" (p. 91). Concluding his defense, the farmer asserts:

Whoever, therefore, cursorily judges of our riches by the appearance of our farms, of our houses, of our fields, without descending to deeper particulars, judges imperfectly. He should feel the pulse of every farmer, and know whether he is perfectly free (p. 91).
Although the farmer's arguments were probably motivated by a desire to ward-off further colonial taxation, they do warn that the commonly extolled prosperity of American husbandmen may be a façade. Crèvecoeur, of course, does not paint the bleak pictures of rural poverty which characterize the works of later agrarian naturalist writers such as Garland. But he does, at least, suggest that the cankerworm of debt may be eating away beneath even the most bucolic American landscapes.

The Sketches contains an additional epistolary narrative entitled "Reflections on the Manners of the Americans," which is also reputedly written by a farmer. Like many examples we have previously seen, this farmer contrasts the settlement of the isolated frontier with civilized, agrarian society. His account is particularly interesting when seen in relation to the tale of Andrew, the Hebridean in Letters From an American Farmer. As in the earlier published account, the narrator chooses one man to serve as an "epitome" of the rest, and records his progress from "indigence to ease," and from "obscurity" to a place of prominence in agrarian society.

As with most sections of the Sketches, the man's progress is meticulously detailed. Hoping to improve his fortune and provide for his family, the settler's motives are honorable. The would-be farmer learns all he can about the land before making his decision. Studying maps, interviewing travelers, eyeing the soil himself -- these activities all precede the actual purchase (pp. 66-69).
Once the farmer and his family actually settle on the land, their industry and hard work are eminently praiseworthy. Everything must be done by themselves, and their success depends largely on their courage, perseverance, and skill (pp. 70-71). The farmer himself acts as husband, father, priest, doctor, repairman, carpenter, and shoemaker. Crévecoeur summarizes his activities with a literary allusion: "He is a universal fabricator like Crusoe" (pp. 72-73).

All appears to go well, and yet something destructive happens to this man on the frontier. Living outside the bounds of society for an extended period of time, he becomes anti-social. His every idea centers on his own welfare (p. 75). As agricultural society begins to grow up around him, he deals "hardly" with his new neighbors. Self-interest degenerates into selfishness and shrewdness into cunning. This man "sells for good that which perhaps he knows to be indifferent." He has "the recollection of ancient principles either civil or religious, that can raise the blush of conscious shame" (p. 77). To put the scene on the agricultural frontier quite bluntly, "strict integrity is not much wanted" and the settlers are content if their dealing "does not degenerate into fraud against fraud" (pp. 77-78).

The story of the rise of man on the frontier fulfills the archetypal pattern of the American dream. He becomes rich and prosperous; "he builds a good substantial stone or frame house" (p. 77). His success, however, can finally not be applauded, at least, by civilized, moral men. The external trappings of agrarian success are apparent, but the myopic pursuit of wealth destroys the very bonds which preserve social harmony. The farmer's prosperity is degraded, and the implicit suggestion
emerges that the American dream itself may be hollow at the core.

Bitterness and disillusionment with American society continue throughout the last six chapters of the Sketches as Crèvecœur dramatizes the impact of the Revolutionary War on the lives of America's farmers. "The Man of Sorrows," "The Wyoming Massacre," "History of Mrs. B.," "The Frontier Woman," "The American Belisarius," and "Landscapes" all convey a sense of universal guilt and doom in American life. A web of complicity unites betrayer and betrayed. The enemy is neither Rebel nor Tory, but the violence and moral aberration of war itself. Simple men who desired nothing more than to go about the business of living a contented agrarian existence find themselves both the victims and the perpetrators of inhumane acts of violence. The agrarian world has essentially gone mad.

While most of the concluding chapters are simple narratives, one, "Landscapes," is a drama. Crèvecœur sets stage directions and asserts that "An American Perspective" has been "divided into six landscapes" (p. 254). The play focuses on hypocrisy, cupidity, inhumanity, and abuse of power (p. 254). It is so unrelentingly bitter an indictment that it has been called an eighteenth century version of the "slice of life" drama. The central character, Deacon Beatus, uses religion to mask worship of mammon and exploits his power as a village leader to destroy his enemies. In one particularly ghoulish scene, the Deacon praises his son for "a-Tory-hunting," and subsequently torturing an old man (p. 255). The Deacon not only argues for the benefits American farmers will receive when the war has been won, but he also appropriates the farms and material possessions of "suspected" Tory sympathizers,
presumably to aid in the struggle.

Crevecoeur structures at least one of the concluding chapters to the Sketches as a dramatic monologue. With compactness and intensity, he captures the underlying hysteria of the war period, and demonstrates literary sophistication in his handling of the dramatic monologue form. One particularly fascinating piece, "The Frontier Woman," portrays a Tory terrorist's confession, to a farmer, of heinous misdeeds. Having followed orders to "waste" the countryside, the terrorist has subsequently lost all peace of mind. As he struggles to comprehend his past complicity with evil, his one consolation, and the moment he obsessively returns to, is that he spared the life of a single "frontier woman" (p. 224).

A sense of unrelieved misery and sorrow predominates in the last six chapters of the Sketches. Several chapters depict long and drawn out tales of unmerited suffering. While some of the narratives are well done, many are maudlin and painfully sentimental. What is perhaps most significant in the last section of the Sketches is the conclusion a farmer-narrator reaches about the blighted spectacle before him. In the single most famous lines from Letters From an American Farmer, James boasts: "The American is a new man, who acts upon new principles; he must therefore entertain new ideas and form new opinions" (p. 50). James also proclaims that Americans are "a people of cultivators," and "the most perfect society now existing in the world" (pp. 46-47). The farmer-narrator of the Sketches' chapter, "The Man of Sorrows," totally negates this joyful vision. Expressing amazement with the blighted world around him, he asks himself:
Could I have ever thought that a people of cultivators who knew 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 strain our society? (p. 178).

And he sorrowfully concludes:

But why should I wonder at this political phenomenon? Men are the same in all ages and in all countries. A few prejudices and customs excepted, the same passions lurk in our hearts at all times (p. 179).

These "same passions" are clearly not honorable, nor do they bring man to his highest dignity.

The concluding words of Crèvecoeur's *Sketches of Eighteenth Century America* are bitter. There is no question that they indict American agrarian society for failing to meet its potential. And yet, before we compose a final evaluation of Crèvecoeur's vision, before we place him in the camp of the doubters, the nay-sayers, the destroyers of the American Dream and the myth of the farmer, we must go back and read the opening chapters of the *Sketches* again.

"A Snow Storm as it Affects the American Farmer" is an engagingly idyllic chapter. It so captures the theme and treatment of a Thomsonian descriptive poem that it has been classified, by at least one critic, as a "prose poem." Fusing the celebration of the farmer's life with moral and philosophical rumination, with narrative episodes, and with agricultural advice, the piece easily adapts the conventions of descriptive poetry to prose. The structure of the chapter is keyed to the season of winter and to the anticipations and consequences of a snow storm. There is painterly quality about the scene, as the
narrator draws the farmer and his family responding to the impending storm.

The husbandman and his family have carefully prepared for this season. Indeed, they have eagerly looked forward to it. "The fatigues of the preceding summer require now some relaxation" (p. 49). Winter is "the season of merriment and mutual visiting" (p. 49). All of the pleasures of a harmonious, agrarian community are dutifully enumerated. In a moment of pride, the agrarian narrator looks around him and proclaims:

> Who on contemplating the great and important field of action performed every year by a large farmer, can refrain from valuing and praising as they ought this useful, this dignified class of men? These are the people who, scattered on the edge of this great continent, have made it to flourish and have ... gathered, by the sweat of their honest brows and by the help of their ploughs, ... a harvest ...

> These are the men who in future will replenish this huge continent even to its utmost unknown limits, and render this new found part of the world by far the happiest ... of any. Happy people! May the poor the wretched of Europe, animated by our example, invited by our laws, avoid the letters of their country, and come in shoals to partake of our toils as well as of our happiness (pp. 47-48).

There are, of course, similar laudatory passages scattered throughout the work.

When we read the Sketches in its entirety we may still conclude that Crèvecoeur was finally bitter about America's failure to fulfill the potential of her agrarian destiny. At the same time, however, we must also admit that perhaps no other American writer so powerfully conveyed the capacity of agrarian life to define a world of harmony,
peace, graciousness and beauty. While most readers will not be able
to fully support John Brooks Moore's glowing praise of Crèvecœur's
Sketches not only as the best of his English books, "but also the most
effective work of the imagination that we possess written in America by
an American during that century," 100 we cannot help but be impressed by
Crèvecœur's formal experimentation and by the variety of tones and
subject matter he employs to capture an enigmatic American experience.
In Sketches of Eighteenth Century America as well as in Letters From
an American Farmer Crèvecœur transforms what he perceives to be the
powerfully unresolved tensions of agrarian life into works of art.

Conclusion

In this chapter on the Revolutionary period we have seen the farmer
attain the pinnacle of his stature in both American society and American
letters. As a result of the larger cultural background, the farmer
emerged as a ready symbol for American ideology. In both the literature
of the political persuasion and in acknowledged belles lettres, the
virtues of democratic rural life -- political autonomy and economic
security, as well as simplicity and dignity -- were identified with
the American husbandman. The symbol of the farmer underlies the
creation of some of the best literature of the Revolutionary period.
Writers who celebrated the American yeoman found themselves transform-
ing political, social, and economic realities into mythopoetic art.

In the works we have examined, reality and the literary expression
of rural life merged in profound ways. For most of the writers, the
agrarian ideal was more than a literary convention; it was an
engrossing mode of belief. These authors viewed American farmers as
the moral repositories of the New World's greatness. Jefferson, Taylor, Humphreys, Dwight, and Dickinson all employ a series of compelling metaphors and images in their works, which depict this country's farmers as the rural caretakers and guardians of America's divinely sanctioned mission to inspire and redeem humanity.

Freneau and Crévecoeur, two artists who challenged the widespread literary portraits of America's husbandmen, did not question the farmer's ability to represent the noblest goals, values, and aspirations of American society. They, too, painted delightful rural scenes in which the farmer helped to define an agrarian world of moral prosperity, graciousness, and beauty. What Freneau and Crévecoeur feared, and what they strongly expressed in their works, was that the potential of the agrarian occupation was becoming increasingly divorced from the common reality. Freneau and Crévecoeur composed works in which the farmer's power to actuate and contain a vision of rural harmony and bliss was seriously diminished by his confrontation with the disruptive forces of the American experience. As these artists convey unresolved tensions splintering the calm world of agrarian life, the literary supremacy of the farmer begins to be undermined.
ENDNOTES


5. Watt, pp. 21-22.


18. Ibid.


20. For extensive discussion of Locke's influence in Eighteenth-Century America see Eisinger, "The Influence of Natural Rights;" see also Griswold, Farming and Democracy, pp. 37-46.


25. Ibid.


27. For extensive discussion of Jefferson's evolving political and economic ideas see Grampp.


29. Miller, p. 106.

30. Baritz, p. 174; see also Craven.

31. Miller, p. 108.


34. As quoted in Miller, p. 120.
35. Miller, p. 108; Chambers, p. 120.


38. Chambers, p. 204; Miller, p. 121.


46. See Jacobson, pp. 58-59.

48. Ibid., pp. 73, 76-77.

49. Ibid., p. 77.

50. Ibid.; see also, the discussion of Federalist ideas in Chambers and Miller.


54. Solomon points this out, p. x.

55. Dwight's interest in correcting erroneous images of America presented in the works of Comte de Volney, Isaac Weld, and the Duc de la Rochefoucault is noted by Silverman, p. 116.

56. Silverman, p. 118.

57. For a discussion of Dwight's artistic "vision" in the Travels see Silverman, pp. 118-19.


62. Ibid., p. 229.

63. Both works employ a frame that insures the advice is not directly aimed at the reader, but rather is addressed to a fictive audience of assembled villagers. Both speakers are characterized as good men, who speak with common sense and simplicity. They both utilize colloquial American speech. Advocating thrift, order, economy, righteousness, and industry, both the homespun farmer and Father Abraham tie a string of aphorisms together to make their point. See The Papers of Benjamin Franklin, eds. Leonard W. Labaree and Ralph L. Ketcham, VII (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), pp. 326-50.

64. Howard, p. 226.


66. For a good general discussion of Humphreys' poetics see Howard, pp. 130-31.


70. Howard, p. 120.


78. Ibid., p. 567.


80. Ibid., p. 79.


82. Philbrick, pp. 80-88, suggests a broad plot line for Crévecoeur's work.


84. Philbrick, p. 92, mentions the fact that Enos Hitchcock appropriated the story of Andrew's encounter with the friendly Indians in his novel, The Farmer's Friend (1795).

86. Philbrick, p. 85.


89. Approximately half the materials of the Lettres comes from the original English version of the Letters and from the manuscripts of the Sketches. The materials are, of course, shifted, revised, and translated into a new format. The changes however, do not always constitute an improvement. While the French Lettres preserve the formal epistolary pattern of the earlier work, the persona of James disappears to be replaced by a kind of collator named St. John. St. John also writes letters to a friend, but the materials he discusses are derived from newspaper clippings, magazine articles, and reprints of public addresses, as well as from personal experience. The French Lettres have been noted for their anti-British bias, for their inclusion of incidents which cater directly to a French audience, and for their overriding sentimentalism. (See Philbrick, pp. 136-42; he cites the material on Washington and Lafayette as catering to French enthusiasm for the celebrities of the American Revolution.)

The Voyage purports to be a translation of a battered manuscript that had been miraculously preserved when it washed ashore within sight of Heligoland (p. xv). S.J.D.C. are the initials of a man who became acquainted with the manuscript, and without knowing its history, was persuaded to translate it into French (p. xiv). (Textual citations are to Michel-Guillaume St. Jean de Crèvecoeur, Journey into Northern Pennsylvania and the State of New York, trans. Clarissa Spencer Bostelmann (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1964)). A reading of the Voyage reveals that the narrator of the journey, and the reputed author of the book, was an American, who, in the company of a German friend, Gustave Herman, wandered back and forth across America examining the fabric of society. During the course of their journey, these two travelers meet scores of Americans whom they introduce to the reader. While Crèvecoeur presents a detailed panoramic view, much of the material of the book is lifted from pages of previously published travel and descriptive accounts by authors such as Jefferson and Bartram. As in many of the works we have previously examined, the transformation of the wilderness is a key theme. Its vivid depiction, combined with the interaction of the two travelers represents the most interesting quality of the book. See Percy G. Adams, "The Historical Value of Crèvecoeur's Voyage dans la Haute Pensylvanie et dans New York," American Literature, 25 (1953-54), 167-68, and Percy G. Adams, "Crèvecoeur and Franklin," Pennsylvania History, 14 (1947), 273-74.

91. Ibid.

92. Ibid.


95. Philbrick, p. 111, suggests a comparison to the earlier work.

96. Ibid.

97. Ibid., p. 127.

98. Ibid., pp. 128-30. Philbrick includes an extended discussion of the "poetic" qualities of this section.

99. Ibid.

CHAPTER IV
THE QUEST FOR AMERICAN LITERARY INDEPENDENCE:
THE FARMER AS DEMOCRACY'S HERO

America may have won her political independence at the time of
the Revolution, but many contemporary writers and critics believed
that an American national character and a distinctive native litera­
ture waited to be defined. The literary quest, as it was articulated
in the pages of America's leading literary magazines and journals,
encouraged American writers to find a way to use the resources of
America's landscape, America's history, and America's people to produce
an art which would not only meet the universal standards of truth and
beauty, but one which would reflect the indigenous, which would be
"expressive of American ideals and representative of the American
spirit."¹

While many writers self-consciously groped for a national epic
through the use of stylized and grandiose themes, those who employed
an informal treatment of native events, customs, and people proved to
be most successful. In their endeavors to create a distinctly American
literature, the new generation of authors, including Paulding, Irving,
and Cooper, recognized the process of settlement as the dominant
characteristic of American life.² Viewing the gradual transformation
of the wilderness into a cultivated garden as a fit subject for
serious literature, these writers conceptualized American experience
through a depiction of life on the agrarian frontier. In this age, which has been termed a self-conscious "period of national myth-making," the farmer continued to provide authors with an easily accessible symbol of American life. As a result, the yeoman figure continued to play a significant role in the creation of American literary classics.

In the last chapter, on the Revolutionary period, we saw the farmer attain the pinnacle of his stature in American society and American letters. Federalist and Republican authors deferred in unison to the farmer as the embodiment of the values, goals, and aspirations of American society. Many Revolutionary writers believed in the farmer as they believed in the promise of America, and saw the two as intimately intertwined. If the suggestion of the husbandmen's unrealized potential was offered in the works of Freneau and Crévecoeur, his ideal form was unquestionably presented as the model democratic man should emulate.

As America moved into the political age of Jackson and grew increasingly democratic, the farmer maintained his heroic stature. Embodying the democratic virtues of simplicity, self-reliance, political autonomy, and economic security, the farmer was seen as an authentic American hero. He was depicted as "the one who brings order out of chaos by conquering nature" and as "the boon-giver of civilization who ventures forth to bring back the power that re-invigorates the world." Historian J. W. Ward has said of the farmer during Jackson's age that "the plow was his symbol and his weapon, the farm his realm, and the property deed his title to legitimacy." In this chapter, we will examine the literary portrait of the American
farmer in the works of three major writers -- James Kirke Paulding, Washington Irving, and James Fenimore Cooper. We will study the yeoman figure as these authors self-consciously employ him to meet the challenge of American literary independence.

James Kirke Paulding

James Kirke Paulding published The Backwoodsman in 1818. Paulding, like many of his contemporaries, had long been campaigning for a distinctive national literature and for the literary use of indigenous American themes. The poetic effort of The Backwoodsman represented his first major attempt to put his theories into practice. In his preface, "To the Reader," Paulding offers a concise statement of his artistic purpose in composing the poem:

"The author's object was to indicate to the youthful writers of his native country, the rich poetic resources with which it abounds, as well as to call their attention home, for the means of attaining to novelty of subject, if not to originality in style or sentiment (n.p.)."

Affirming his allegiance to the doctrine of American themes for American authors, Paulding begins his poem with an invocation to the "Neglected Muse! of this our western clime" (p. 8). He rhetorically asks, "How long imitative rhyme" will "stifle" the energies of American writers. The familiar theme of translatio studii, or the westward movement of the arts, is suggested as Paulding looks forward to the time when the "splendours" of Europe "Shall die away, to be relighted here" (p. 8).
Paulding wanted American writers to be inspired by homebred themes. That he was not advocating a radical departure from the form or conventions of British poetry is evident in Paulding's use of a traditional invocation, as well as in his metrical choice of heroic couplets. Most contemporary literary men believed that an independent American literature could not ignore the standards of proper decorum, and that these standards could only be met by adherence to the accepted modes and style of British poetry. What would make the literature distinctly American, Paulding and others believed, was the indigenous subject matter.⁸

Although Paulding claims in the preface to The Backwoodsman that "the story was merely assumed as affording an easy and natural way of introducing a greater variety of scenery" (n.p.), the time, energy, and care he lavishes on his portrait of an American agrarian belies his protest. The story of farmer Basil's moral and material rise in the social setting of the agrarian frontier captures the mythic resonance of the American Dream. In trying to contain the essence of the American experience, Paulding, like countless writers before him, selects the conversion of the wilderness to the purposes of civilization as his major theme, and the farmer as his key symbol.

The Backwoodsman begins in the Hudson Valley with a description of the common man, Basil, "toiling, through all the livelong tedious day/ To chase the scarecrow Poverty away" (p. 9). Unfortunately for Basil, his relentless toil, from sunrise to sunset, does not diminish his grinding poverty. His want, "to many an hour of bitterness gave birth/ And smote his mounting spirit to the earth" (p. 10). We soon
learn the major cause for Basil's predicament. He was "labouring on another's land" (p. 10). Indeed, "the rich products which he toil'd to rear/ To others' boards gave plenty through the year" (p. 10). Because Basil was not employed as an American freeholder, he was apparently condemned to a life of sorrowful want.

Paulding's portrait of Basil is particularly interesting because the poet characterizes life in the Hudson Valley in such bleak terms. Basil's initial portrayal is darkened to contrast starkly with his eventual prosperity. The sparse picture of rural life which Paulding draws had usually been reserved for European peasants. Such hopelessness had not characterized descriptions of American free men working in the abundant plenty of the New World since it was generally conceded that the agrarian laborer could easily acquire the means to move on to his own land and farm for himself.

Indeed, Paulding quickly proceeds to make an extended contrast between American farm laborers and their European equivalents. In Europe, the peasants unquestioningly accept their lot. They "more dull and servile grow/ Until at last they nothing feel or know" (p. 11). Americans, on the other hand, are inspired by a spirit of "Independence" (p. 10). As Paulding goes on to explain:

    Hence comes it, that our meanest farmer's boy
    Aspires to taste the proud and manly joy
    That springs from holding in his dear right
    The land he plows, the home he seeks at night (p. 11).

In order to become a freeholder and attain the dignity and status commensurate with land ownership, the American farmer of the early Republic was willing to risk life and limb on a westward odyssey to
the new land of agrarian prosperity, the Ohio Valley. Here, Paulding insists, the agrarian version of the American Dream retained its validity. As Paulding tells us:

'Twas said that o'er the hills, and far away,  
Towards the setting sun, a land there lay,  
Whose unexhausted energies of soil  
Nobly repaid the hardy lab'rs toil;  
Where men were worth full twice their weight in gold,  
And goodly farms for almost nought were sold (p. 19).

Basil, as Paulding's representative farmer, dreads the struggles and hardships that lie before him in his trek into the wilderness (pp. 20-23). The prospect of economic independence and political autonomy, however, inspires him to proceed. Basil believed: "Bright Independence could the loss repay/ And make him rich amends some other day" (p. 19).

Paulding includes extended descriptions of the natural scenery Basil and his family discover on their trip west (pp. 36-37, 42-43). It is a "landscape wildly gay" and beautifully abundant (p. 30). The poet's emphasis on the undisturbed qualities of silence, stillness, and quietude in the natural landscape prepares us for the contrasting bustle that will come with the sounds of civilization. Paulding summarizes what Basil and his family found in the wilderness: "Nothing appear'd, but Nature unsubdu'd/ One endless, noiseless, woodland solitude" (p. 66).

Like previous American authors writing in the literary tradition of the farmer, Paulding takes an anti-primitivist stance in The Backwoodsman. Farmer Basil is an eminently social man. He and his family are said to be deeply distressed at the prospect of leaving the "dear haunts of social men" (p. 63). In their journey west they will
miss "the village church and tolling bell" as well as "the smoke of rural hamlet curling high" (p. 63). To stress the farmer's social perspective, Paulding depicts Basil's deepest fears as he commences his voyage:

His fancy pictur'd years of solitude,
Far from the haunts of men in regions rude;
That shut from all the sweets of social life,
Himself, his growing boys, and faithful wife,
With howling beasts would congregate the while,
And never see another being smile (p. 61).

These agrarian emigrants did not wish to live in brooding isolation far removed from the greater society. Rather than escaping from civilized society, they were determined to make their trek into the wilderness as civilized as possible. They would "plant refinement in the forest rude" (p. 62).

According to Paulding, Basil and his family encountered other travelers on "the self same errand bound" and the settlers banded together (p. 61). Their determination is compared to that of "our ancestors" who founded America, and Paulding implies that these settlers will be just as successful (p. 62). When the emigrants reach Ohio, they begin the process of settlement in unison. As Paulding says:

Then, for the first, the woodman's echoing stroke,
The holy silence of the forest broke;

Now first was heard the crash of falling trees,
Yielding to toher than howling breeze;
And now the first time did the furrow tear
The virgin Earth, and lay her bosom bare
All now was bustle in that calm retreat (pp. 69-70).

As a result of the settlers' industrious labor, we are told: "And soon, like magic, in the late lone wild/ A little rustic village rose and smil'd" (p. 70).
The farmers' struggles are rewarded. Paulding claims: "more prosp'rous grew each good man's lot/ Till each in time a goodly farm he got" (p. 80). The success of the single man is synonymous with the success of society and the village continues to grow:

The curling smoke amid the wilds was seen,
The village church now whiten'd on the green,
And by its side arose the little school,
Where rod and reason, lusty urchins rule (pp. 80-81).

Paulding creates delightful genre pictures as he describes the "social hours" the husbandmen enjoy during the long winter nights (pp. 73-74). These farmers are men with a stake in society and its laws. Enjoying fellowship with their neighbors, they attempt to provide for their posterity.

Paulding stresses the perfection of the agrarian life style through a series of juxtapositions. He contrasts the village ideal with the uncivilized wilderness and "the wild-men of the wood" who live there (pp. 90-118, 143). (While sympathetic to the Indians who have lost their land, Paulding extensively praises the "brave yeomen" who destroy the savages, pp. 90, 140-72). In addition, Paulding contrasts moral agrarian settlers with the citizens of a decadent culture, one in which the Prince would "beggar half a state" to buy a vase (p. 82). In Paulding's view, the agrarian, middle landscape combined the best of both worlds with the evils of neither. Merging the energy of nature with the intellect of civilization, agrarian life allowed its settlers to enjoy a satisfying wholeness.

Paulding concludes The Backwoodsman with a brief description of "Old BASIL - for his head is now grown gray" (p. 174). This previously
poverty-stricken laborer now "waxes in wealth and honours every day" (p. 174). Acknowledging the citizen's responsibility in a representative democracy, Basil has acted as "judge, general, congressman, and half a score/ Of goodly offices, and titles more" (p. 174). The American Dream is affirmed as Basil is shown to enjoy a moral and honorable prosperity. America is the place "where gen'rous Plenty, with a lavish hand/ Pays honest Labour, from her boundless store" (140). Describing America as "the poor man's long-sought, new-found, promis'd land," Paulding closes his poem with a vision of America leading the way to an earthly millennium (pp. 140, 176).

Modern day critics have been uniformly negative in their reaction to Paulding's poem. Some, like Thomas Philbrick, have legitimately faulted Paulding for his abstract imagery and his organizational problems which make The Backwoodsman somewhat difficult to follow.9 Other critics have unfairly attacked Paulding for such supposed mistakes as dealing with Basil "in the wrong manner."10 By this they mean that Paulding failed to mythologize his hero into a frontiersman, or a Daniel Boone type "symbol of a new buckskin democracy."11 Paulding was, of course, working within another tradition, that of the American farmer.

In Virgin Land, Henry Nash Smith recognizes that Paulding was intentionally dramatizing a farmer and not a frontiersman. Smith's critical thesis, however, is that farmers "proved quite intractable as literary material."12 In Virgin Land he argues that Paulding's handling of Basil's rise supports his thesis since the poet promotes the farmer "out of his class" at the end of the story.13 As we have
seen in earlier chapters, regardless of its social validity, American authors did not find the literary depiction of highly education, enlightened tillers of the soil to be a contradiction in terms. Rather, it was this precise fusion of rural simplicity and intellectual achievement the symbolic farmer was designed to encapsulate. Smith also faults Paulding's use of the heroic couplet in *The Backwoodsman*, claiming that it was timid and inappropriate, that "his choice of measure committed him to linguistic and social conventions thoroughly unsuited to his theme." When we remember that Paulding's theme was not the uncivilized savagery of the frontier, but rather, that he explored the meanings of the highly ordered and structured agrarian community, his medium and his message merge nicely.

If James Kirke Paulding is vulnerable to attack in *The Backwoodsman* it is most probably because of the simplistic affirmation he offers. Proclaiming that an ideal of virtue, benevolence, and moral prosperity resided in country life, the poet demonstrates no awareness of the impinging challenges to this agrarian ideal. Paulding seems unconscious that such factors as the increasing complexities of industrial life and material interests were threatening the self-contained independence of the American yeomanry. Given the intense examination that the farmer figure endured in the works of Paulding's predecessors, Freneau and Crèvecoeur, and given the intense probing he would undergo in the literature of Paulding's contemporaries, Irving, and in particular, Cooper, Paulding's unquestioning affirmation of the farmer in *The Backwoodsman* appears to be mere romantic idealization.
Washington Irving

Washington Irving, a friend and relative of James Kirke Paulding, shared the latter's commitment to an ordered agrarian setting. Sometimes classified as a Federalist, Irving was a firm believer in landed property. As the first American writer to achieve international stature, Irving was particularly concerned with the need to define an American national character. In "English Writers of America" (1819-20) Irving argues that while the American national character was in a "state of fermentation," specific characteristics could be observed (p. 57). According to this author, America had already "given proofs of powerful and generous qualities" (p. 57). He predicts that "the whole promises to settle down into something substantially excellent" (p. 57). In defending his homeland, Irving maintains that English writers on America had quite missed the point.

Irving initially attempts to explain America by establishing what she is not. America is not "an El Dorado where gold and silver abound" (p. 58). Furthermore, people there do not "become strangely and suddenly rich in some unforeseen but easy manner" (p. 58). Irving categorizes these beliefs as "absurd expectations" and suggests that people who come to America expecting such prosperity must "become embittered against the country" (p. 58). At the same time that he denies these false ideas, the author of "English Writers on America" manages to imply that America is indeed the place for men to realize their dreams. His essential point is, however, that these ideals will only be realized by laborious effort. Irving draws upon the language of the American husbandman to define life in America. He
tells us: "there, as everywhere else, a man must sow before he can reap; must win wealth by industry and talent" (p. 58).

Advancing the notions that America was in "a singular state of moral and physical development," and that it was "one of the greatest political experiments in the history of the world," Irving affirms the high quality of life his country was capable of engendering (p. 57). What Washington Irving saw as "political liberty" and a general "prevalence of sound moral and religious principles" encourage him to prophesy a moral prosperity for the citizens of the New World (p. 59).

While most of Irving's The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent. (1819-20) is concerned with an American persona's reaction to English people and English life, its two most popular selections, "Rip Van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," are reputedly written by Frederick Knickerbocker and focus on the American experience. In portraying American life, Irving chooses to set both of these tales on the middle landscape of the agricultural frontier. Like many stories we have previously examined, both "Rip Van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" invest farm life with peace and security.19

In "Rip Van Winkle" the rightness of American village life is testified to by the harmonious way the farm houses blend into the landscape. We are told that a voyager to the area would see "the light smoke curling up from a village, whose shingle roofs gleam among the trees, just where the blue tints of the upland melt away into the fresh green of the nearer landscape" (p. 38). Rip Van Winkle's village is a long established community, "having been founded by some
of the Dutch colonists in the early times of the province" (p. 38).
It reflects the rich tradition of a stable agrarian society.

Rip Van Winkle himself is introduced to the reader as an interesting eccentric and he quickly engages our sympathy. "A simple, good-natured man" and "a kind neighbor," Rip endears himself to the wives and children of the village. We are told that he was always ready to assist a neighbor even in the roughest toil" and was "a foremost man at all country frolics" (p. 40). Irving summarizes Rip's behavior with the observation: "In a word, Rip was ready to attend to anybody's business but his own" (p. 40). Unfortunately, what Rip would not perform was his "family duty." He found it impossible to keep his farm in order (p. 40).

According to Rip it was of "no use to work on his farm" because "it was the most pestilent little piece of ground in the whole country" (p. 40). Irving paints a humorously detailed picture of the sorrowful state of Rip Van Winkle's farm from its owner's perspective:

His fences were continually falling to pieces; his cow would either go astray or get among the cabbages; weeds were sure to grow quicker in his fields than anywhere else; the rain always made a point of setting in just as he had some outdoor work to do (p. 40).

As a result of this neglect, Rip's farm had "dwindled away" until there was little more than "a mere patch of Indian corn and potatoes" (p. 40). In spite of its meager size, Rip's patch of land was still "the worst-conditioned farm in the neighborhood" (p. 40). In addition, Rip Van Winkle was a poor husbandman for his family as well. Unlike many farmers we have studied, this yeoman allowed his children to grow up
"ragged and wild as if they belonged to nobody" (p. 40).

Thus Rip's aversion to profitable labor and his inability to develop the habits of industry needed to run a prosperous farm were not without consequences. Rip caused his family to suffer and his children to grow up ragged, without proper training. Irving tells us that Rip would have been perfectly content with his slothful life if it had not been for his wife's nagging (p. 40). The only way Rip can escape from the demands of an agricultural community and from familial obligations "was to take gun in hand and stroll away into the woods" (p. 42).

Irving's description evokes the posture of the primitive frontiersman who abandons civilized values for the isolation of the frontier. Within the value system of the story, Rip's departure is not admirable. Rip Van Winkle escapes from reality in a fantasy withdrawal of twenty-years sleep in the wilderness. When Rip finally returns to the community, he is old enough to retire without opprobrium. All societal demands and responsibilities upon him have been silenced. Rip can relax and enjoy the virtues of a peaceful agrarian village, secure in the "snug, well-furnished house" of his daughter (p. 52). Significantly, Irving indicates that Rip's home, as well as his peace and contentment, are made possible by the labor and industry of Rip's "stout, cheery" son-in-law, an American farmer (p. 52).

This same industry and hard work make Sleepy Hollow's Baltus Van Tassel the "perfect picture of a thriving, contented, liberal-hearted farmer" (p. 337). A fine representative of the type of "substantial Dutch farmer," Van Tassel was "satisfied with his wealth, but not proud of it" (p. 337). Irving describes a vast barn near his farm
house "that might have served for a church" every window and crevice of which seemed bursting forth with the treasures of the farm" (p. 337). Barnyard animals basking in front of Van Tassel's agrarian "church" also testified to the rich abundance of his farm. As Irving narrates, within the boundaries of the farm "everything was snug, happy and well-conditioned" (p. 337).

In "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" as well as in "Rip Van Winkle," traditional farm life is invested with peace and security. Irving tells his readers that the "population, manners and customs remain fixed" on the agricultural landscape, while a great "torrent" of changes has transformed life styles elsewhere. At least, this has been true in Sleepy Hollow until the arrival of Ichabod Crane. Irving introduces the New Englander with an ominous description. In a story set on the richly abundant agrarian frontier, we are told that Ichabod Crane could be mistaken for "the genius of famine descending upon the earth" (p. 332). As we see within the tale, if Crane had his way, he would literally devour the bastions of agricultural life.20

Although Ichabod Crane supplements his teaching by helping farmers with the lighter tasks of their profession: by making hay, mending fences, watering the horses, and driving the cows from pasture, he remains essentially untouched by his experiences (p. 333). Since he derives no satisfaction from rural pursuits, Crane demonstrates no interest in preserving agrarian tradition. When the New Englander first encounters Van Tassel's farm he is delighted by its riches. Irving notes that he:
rolled his great green eyes over the fat meadow lands, the rich fields of wheat, of rye, of buckwheat, and Indian corn, and the orchards burthened with ruddy fruit, which surrounded the warm tenement of Van Tassel (pp. 338-39).

In response to his vision, Crane's heart "yearned after the damsel who was to inherit these domains" (p. 339).

Crane is obviously impressed with the abundance of Van Tassel's farm and meadows, but its moral and spiritual significance are lost on him. He sees only how the farm may be converted into hard "cash" (p. 339). Irving implicitly ridicule Ichabod Crane for his myopic monetary vision which seeks to destroy the peace and prosperity of the agricultural community for the immoral profits of speculation.

Van Tassel's vast wealth and Crane's monetary greed suggest an important notion about the farmer in American literary tradition. From the beginning, the yeoman was invested with self-reliance and was free to earn as much wealth as he desired. The qualifying condition, however, was that material well-being not become an end in itself. Earlier writers, such as Freneau and Crèvecoeur, warned about the destructive results of greed. Yet they believed that as long as a man stayed close to his soil and worked it, as long as he honored his intimate connection with society and his fellow man, he would be able to retain moral stature and dignity.

In Ichabod Crane Irving creates a would-be farmer-speculator without stature or dignity. As the personification of material interests, Crane is unable to recognize the moral value of a stable agrarian order. His humiliating defeat at the hands of Brom Bones
symbolizes the preservation of traditional rural life. The forces of rootless progress and encroaching materialism, at least temporarily, are defeated.21

Thomas Philbrick has said that "Irving's Knickerbocker writings, clever though they are, dodge the American artist's primary responsibility, the serious and accurate rendering of the life of his country ..."22 A close reading of "Rip Van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" does not support this conclusion. Irving dramatized the meaning of the American experience through a depiction of life on the agrarian frontier. Writing within the literary tradition of the American farmer, he satisfied the demand for indigenous themes and created two American classics. His humorous treatment of agrarian themes reveals an important insight. Irving suggests that as the American Republic moved into its fourth decade, the preservation of the farmer as the American literary ideal was becoming increasingly precarious. Disruptive forces like Ichabod Crane could not be forever contained in the rural landscape.

James Fenimore Cooper

James Fenimore Cooper published The Pioneers in 1823.23 On the title page of the book he used four lines from Paulding's poem The Backwoodsman, to serve as his motto.24 In tune with the literary concerns of his era, Cooper self-consciously employed American themes in the novel. Like many of his literary predecessors and contemporaries, Cooper found the meaning of the American experience to lie in the process of settlement. In The Pioneers he effectively dramatized the American farmer's conquest of the wilderness for the purposes of
civilization and created what has been called "the first genuinely original novel in the history of American literature."25

In approaching Cooper's portrayal of the American agrarian landscape in The Pioneers and in his later works, it is helpful to know that the novelist had first hand experience with the process of agrarian settlement. His father, William Cooper, had been "one of the most successful founders of new settlements in the early Republic."26 In addition to growing up in a farming village very much like the ones he describes in his novels, Cooper had an abiding affection for the role of gentleman farmer. Among other agricultural activities he engaged in, Cooper served as Secretary of the Otsego County Agricultural Society.27

When he began his literary career, James Fenimore Cooper had personal knowledge of the American farmer and strongly believed in the American agrarian ideal. His early works reflect praise and admiration for an American way of life which could combine the best of natural and civilized living. During the course of his literary career, however, Cooper's attitude toward the American husbandman was drastically altered. This change in perspective of a major American writer and its consequences for the literary tradition of the American farmer will be the subject of the remainder of this chapter.

Cooper's novel The Pioneers is subtitled "A Descriptive Tale," and it contains an impressive description of an entire society establishing itself in the wilderness. Although the action of The Pioneers takes place in 1793-94, Cooper introduces his subject with a panoramic view of the contemporary New York landscape. He describes
the "beautiful and thriving villages" as well as the "neat and comfortable farms, with every indication of wealth about them" which "are scattered profusely" throughout the landscape (p. 1). The civilized nature of New York's contemporary rural settlement is emphasized as the author details the academies, schools, and churches which dot the horizon (p. 2). According to Cooper, "unfettered liberty of conscience" has encouraged prosperity for this "moral and reflecting people" (p. 2). Cooper concludes his introductory passages to *The Pioneers* with the following succinct summary:

In short, the whole district is hourly exhibiting how much can be done, in even a rugged country, and with a severe climate, under the dominion of mild laws, and where every man feels a direct interest in the prosperity of a commonwealth, of which he knows himself to form a distinct and independent part (p. 2).

Through their acknowledgement of community and its laws, the author tells us, these American yeoman have prospered. The success of the individual has been synonymous with the success of society. Cooper affirms that the agrarian ideal has been accomplished and that contemporary American society, at least, has been transformed into something eminently praiseworthy.

With this achievement in mind Cooper returns to the past to trace the origins of this thriving agrarian community. His story begins seven years after the commencement of the settlement of Templeton (p. 2). At this time, the landscape was in a transitional state; clearings had begun to emerge but most of the surroundings remained thick wilderness (p. 3). In one of the many panoramic descriptions of the novel, Cooper delineates the "spots of white" which
were discoverable amidst the forest. As he tells us, the spots were actually "the smoke which curled over the tops of trees," and they announced "the habitations of man and the commencement of agriculture" (p. 28).

To suggest the energetic labor and industry involved in the commencement of settlement, as well as the rapidity of change in the landscape, Cooper has Elizabeth Temple imagine that the settlements were enlarging themselves before her eyes (p. 28). The stamina needed to succeed in converting the wilderness becomes a thematic motif of Cooper's book. As Judge Temple observes: "he who hears of the settlement of a country, knows but little of the actual toil and suffering by which it is accomplished" (p. 236). This insistence on the labor and industry needed to found a settlement is not new in the literary treatment of the American farmer.

Cooper's observation that the people of Templeton, a cultural mixture reminiscent of Crevecoeur's melting pot, had struggled from the beginning to make their community as civilized as possible is also a theme we have seen reiterated many times. Cooper informs us that although the original fifty dwellings which comprised the village were "slovenly and unfinished" in appearance, they were "grouped together in a manner that aped the streets of a city" (p. 29). The people desired wide, urban-like avenues because "nothing could look more like civilization, than a city, even if it lay in a wilderness" (p. 48). Judge Marmaduke Temple, the village's leading citizen, provided the money and land necessary to construct a building to satisfy the community's institutional needs. It served as a
school-house, court-house, meeting-house, and on Sundays, a place of worship (pp. 92-94). Elizabeth summarizes her father's civilizing contributions when she asserts, "The enterprize of Judge Temple is taming the very forests" (p. 212).

Judge Temple is an early representative of Cooper's agrarian ideal. 28 As the spokesman for a community, he is a man with a stake in society and its laws. His agrarian prosperity enables him to maintain the spirit of independence needed by the citizenry under a Republican government. The Judge speaks with moral authority in The Pioneers not because of his vast wealth, but because he is one of a long line of American husbandmen who laboriously toil to subdue the virgin landscape with human husbandry. As Cooper tells us: "The knowledge of Marmaduke was eminently practical, and there was no part of a settler's life with which he was not familiar" (p. 89).

When we understand the Judge's role in The Pioneers as the moral repository of America's greatness, as the law-giver and civilizer of the wilderness, we can better understand Cooper's attitude toward Natty Bumppo and the question of primitivism. 29 Much has been written about Natty's natural moral grandeur, about his archetypal resonance, and about his position at the forefront of American literary tradition. 30 Even granting Cooper's achievement with Natty, no one familiar with the body of Cooper's work could argue that Natty represented the whole, or even the major portion, of Cooper's social thought. James Fenimore Cooper was anything but an advocate of primitivism.

In The Pioneers as well as in the rest of the Leatherstocking series, Natty is the exception which proves the rule. 31 Although
Cooper has Natty maintain moral virtue through his contact with pristine nature, the novelist suggests that most men cannot. Without a strong social framework, without the solid bedrock of law, most men become gloomy, unsociable, destructive, and subject only to the power of their own egos. Judge Temple speaks for Cooper when he argues that "laws alone remove us from the conditions of savages" and that "the sanctity of laws must be respected" (pp. 394, 395). While Cooper has Natty reject the need for law in *The Pioneers* (p. 318), he later has Natty defend it in a confrontation with the more typical frontiersman, Ishmael Bush of *The Prairie* (1827). The reader is told at the conclusion of *The Prairie* that frontiersmen like Bush and his family cannot be "reclaimed from their lawless and semi-barbarous lives" until they rejoin the ranks of society (p. 404). In Cooper's view, it was the farmer and not the frontiersman who could best garner the advantages of nature, who could best help America meet her destiny.

Because of its setting on the agrarian landscape, *The Pioneers* has sometimes been viewed as an idyllic portrait of rural life, as an American version of the pastoral. William Cullen Bryant's response to the novel was to call his contemporary "the poet of rural life in this country - our Hesiod, our Theocritus." Modern critics have noted that Cooper adjusted the time scheme of his book to the seasonal cycle and that he employed many conventions of Thomsonian nature poetry. The following passage contains a commonly cited example of Cooper's use of the genre sketch. In explaining the origin of the "ancient amusement of shooting the Christmas turkey," Cooper narrates:
It was connected with the daily practice of a people who often laid aside the axe or the scythe to seize the rifle, as the deer glided through the forests they were felling, or the bear entered their rough meadows to scent the air of a clearing, and to scan, with a look of sagacity, the progress of the invader (p. 187).

Cooper, like Crèvecoeur before him, does employ poetic conventions such as lyrical descriptions of natural scenery, narrative episodes, and genre sketches to convey his subject. His use of such conventions, however, does not make *The Pioneers* an idealized portrait of rural life, nor does it transform Cooper into a proponent of simple-minded pastoralism. Noting Cooper's precise attention to the problems of agrarian settlement, James Grossman and Thomas Philbrick have underscored the realistic quality of the work by suggesting that *The Pioneers* represents an ironic treatment of the pastoral genre.36

Within the story there is no hint of Arcadian ease. Instead, the people struggle laboriously to construct an agricultural community in the wilderness. Pastoral harmony and peace are much wanted in the early years of Templeton; the people, jealous and resentful of each other, are forever bickering (pp. 55, 84, 146-47). In attempting to tame nature, the settlers engage in acts which are often wasteful, sometimes unpleasant, and occasionally immoral (pp. 229, 249, 270). Thus rather than describing an idyllic rural community in *The Pioneers*, Cooper paints a society in its most awkward stage of transition.37 Judge Temple attempts to provide moral leadership, but the agrarian ideal of the opening paragraphs, the society which will combine the best of rural and urban life, remains a vision in the future, yet to be
In addition, we must remember that Cooper was working within the literary tradition of the American farmer. His ideal community would not encourage its citizens to retreat from active life into the inherently static world of pastoralism. Instead, the economic security and political autonomy available to the American farmer was supposed to cause him to rededicate himself to the principles of Republican government. While Cooper's perspective can be seen in the active, moral leadership of The Pioneers' Judge Temple, it is more succinctly drawn in his description of what happens to Paul, the bee-keeper, at the conclusion of The Prairie. Cooper tells his readers that Paul underwent "a great and beneficial change in his character" when he committed himself to the agrarian community and became "a land-holder, then a prosperous cultivator of the soil" (p. 418). Eventually Paul, like Paulding's Basil, assumed a position of leadership in the Republic and was elected a state legislator (p. 418). As we can see in these two works, early in his career, James Fenimore Cooper enthusiastically endorsed an agrarian version of the American Dream.

One year after the publication of The Prairie Cooper responded to criticism of America by issuing the spirited defense, Notions of the Americans: Picked Up By a Travelling Bachelor (1828). This non-fiction commentary, reputedly written by a European nobleman (Cooper was living in Europe at the time) details a panoramic view of American society and manners. Written as a series of letters, this work deals with ordinary life as it is lived in America and with the farmer as symbol of America's middle landscape.
In Letter Five, "The Land of the Yankees," the narrator hits upon a familiar theme and describes the easy accessibility of freehold tenure. In New England, he tells us, "the whole country is subdivided into small freeholds, which are commonly tilled by their owners" (p. 57). This has resulted in a typical American independence of spirit. According to Cooper's spokesman, the people of this region are known for their "mental activity" and for their "absence of want." While acknowledging that New England was not "a particularly fertile region," the bachelor does extensively describe the "beautiful" and "fertile looking" country of Connecticut (p. 59). He suggests that evidences of abundance "in the shape of well-stored barns and spacious and comfortable dwellings" were everywhere present (p. 59).

Letter Fourteen, "West to Cooperstown: The Mohawk Valley," focuses on the chief distinction of American rural life. In America, as nowhere else, one sees "the admixture of civilization with the wild-looking memorials of a state of nature" (p. 255). The nobleman tells us the American settlers "carry with them ... the wants, the habits, and the institutions of an advanced state of society" into the very wilderness (p. 246). As a result, in America, "academies, churches, towns, and, in short, most things which an advanced state of civilization can produce, are blended with objects that commonly mark an infant state of society" (p. 256).

Through his narrative spokesman Cooper suggests that the promise of America and her glory are both tied up with the prosperity of the agrarian community. In Notions of the Americans he praises an American life style which is able to combine the benefits of civilization with
Cooper returned home from Europe in 1833. Upon resettling in America he became embroiled in a controversy with his Cooperstown neighbors over the legal ownership of a piece of land called Three Mile Point. When the Whig press inaccurately printed an account of the affair and refused to make a retraction, Cooper became involved in a series of libel suits which absorbed his energy for several years.

It seems fairly obvious that Cooper's personal problems with his neighbors and with the press played some part in his increasing dissatisfaction with American society. In 1838 Cooper published three works which reveal the beginning of a change in attitude toward American life and American agrarianism. The American Democrat is his textbook theory and practice of democracy in America, while Homeward Bound and Home As Found are fictionalized accounts of Cooper's theoretical ideas. All three books, but especially the latter, demonstrate the impact of Cooper's personal problems on his imaginative vision and on his changing conception of the agrarian ideal.

The major theme of The American Democrat (1838) is an explication of the author's attitude toward property which, in turn, influences his conception of the farmer ideal. In this work Cooper claims that "property is the base of all civilization, its existence and security are indispensable to social improvement" (p. 127). Acknowledging the desire of men to own property, Cooper supports the principles of freehold
tenure. He claims that we laboriously toil on our land "because we know that the fruits of our labor will belong to ourselves, or to those who are most dear to us" (p. 128). Cooper insists that the first principle of civilization is property and the first principle of property is its "inviolability" (p. 129).

Acknowledging that the rights of property resulted in an eventual unequal distribution of wealth, Cooper denied that such a condition demanded an aristocratic form of government (p. 71). Unlike the Federalists and the conservative Whigs of his time, Cooper did not believe that extensive property should entitle men to special political representation. He was a Jacksonian democrat in so far as he recognized the right of all to participate in the power, in so far as he believed that everyone had a stake in society (p. 90).

What Cooper desired from the large property owners of America was that they provide moral and social leadership. Cooper viewed the agrarian, country gentleman as "the natural repository of the manners, tastes, tone, and to a certain extent, of the principles of a country" (p. 84). Fundamentally concerned with the quality of civilized life in America, Cooper called upon these gentlemen to direct their "skill to those arts which raise the polished man above the barbarian" (p. 84). The independence which resulted from the ownership of property was to encourage agrarian gentlemen to stand fast against the mob (pp. 64, 142). This is the message of Cooper's treatise.

Sensitive to the threat poised by commercial interests in the New Republic, Cooper insists in _The American Democrat_ that property should never become an end in itself. He tells his readers:
Property is desirable as the ground work of moral independence, as a means of improving the faculties, and of doing good to others, and as the agent in all that distinguishes the civilized man from the savage (p. 135).

Cooper thus remains true to the principles of the literary agrarian ideal. He argues that property grants men the freedom and independence to meet their potential. Joining with writers such as Freneau, Dwight, Crèvecoeur, and Irving, Cooper also denounces the moral obtuseness of his more greedy countrymen. He claims:

... he who lives as if the acquisition of property were the sole end of his existence betrays the dominion of the most sordid, base and grovelling motive, that life offers (p. 132).

In Homeward Bound (1838), a novel largely devoted to adventure on the high seas, Cooper explicitly offers the agrarian gentleman as American society's natural leader. Making a famous comparison between two cousins who had "a strong family likeness" and "almost identical" features, he nevertheless insists "it was scarcely possible for two human beings to leave more opposite impressions on mere casual spectators when seen separately" (p. 12). We soon learn the reason for this discrepancy was the men's relationship to the land. Cooper narrates:

Edward Effingham possessed a large hereditary property, that brought a good income, and which attached him to this world of ours by kindly feelings toward its land and water; while John, much wealthier of the two, having inherited a large commercial fortune, did not own ground enough to bury him. As he sometimes deridingly said, he "kept his gold in corporations that were as soulless as himself" (p. 13).

At this point in his literary career Cooper still believed that the
rural environment was somehow conducive to sound morals. Subscribing
to an updated version of the Antaeus myth, Cooper remained hopeful that
agrarian leaders would be able to defeat the onslaught of commercial
interests and raise the mediocrity of public opinion.45 The Effinghams
of Homeward Bound are the literal descendants of Judge Temple in The
Pioneers. They attempt to carry on his noble tradition of moral leader­
ship in an increasingly complex society.

In Home As Found, a sequel to the previous novel, Cooper offers
vignettes of the American society the Effinghams encounter when they
return home after their extended stay in Europe, and after the sea
adventures of the earlier tale.46 Although Cooper probes the manners
and mores of New York City's polite society, it is the rural village of
Templeton and its adjacent agrarian landscape he most fully explores
in this novel.

The Effinghams return to the countryside and find a pleasant land­
scape filled with "bold, varied but cultivated hills." The fields, too,
are "teeming with the fruits of human labor" (p. 138). Looking about
them "in every direction" the Effinghams find that "comfortable dwellings
dotted the fields" (p. 138). Templeton itself is described in Home As
Found as "a sober country town that has advanced steadily," and as a
"fair specimen of the more regular advancement of the whole nation in
its progress toward civilization" (p. 139).

The Effinghams return home hopeful of taking their place at the
top of American society. As democrats they desire no political superior­
ity to their countrymen. They merely assume that their education,
wealth, and experience grant them the credentials of a higher social
station. Unfortunately, in Cooper's view, they are living in an age no longer receptive to gentlemanly leadership. When they take firm positions in defiance of the majority opinion, they are vulnerable to attack by the mediocre leaders of public opinion. Dramatizing an incident very close to the Three Mile Point affair, Cooper has the Effinghams defend his personal position (pp. 221-38).

In *Home As Found* Cooper attempts to come to grips with the increasing dissension on the agrarian frontier. He seeks the motives behind what he sees as the disappearance of taste and virtue in some of America's rural citizenry. In trying to explain why the American agrarian ideal of harmony and security was no longer operative in contemporary society, Cooper theorizes the existence of three stages of progress in the long process of agrarian settlement. Within the novel he briefly describes the major characteristics of each stage.

"At the commencement of a settlement," he tells his readers, "there is much of that sort of kind feeling and mutual interest which men are apt to manifest toward each other when they are embarked in an enterprise of common hazards" (p. 175). The various social classes mix freely during this stage as "men, and even women, break bread together, and otherwise commingle, that in different circumstances, would be strangers" (p. 175). Cooper summarizes the egalitarian nature of this, "the happiest" stage, by suggesting the people "meet, as it might be, on a sort of neutral ground" (p. 175). This is the time when "good-will abounds" and when "neighbor comes cheerfully to the aide of neighbor" (p. 176). It is a period that cannot last, but it is one which will evoke nostalgia for years to come (p. 176). (When
Cooper dramatized the actual commencement of Templeton's settlement in *The Pioneers* his vision was far less harmonious.)

In the second stage of agrarian settlement, Cooper tells us, "society begins to marshall itself and the ordinary passions have sway" (p. 176). As a result, there are numerous struggles for power. Jealousies arise and the "influence of mere money" is extensive (p. 176). In spite of the controversies, Cooper argues that "circumstances have probably established the local superiority of a few beyond all question, and the condition of these serves as a goal for the rest to aim at" (p. 176). Describing this period as "the least inviting condition of society," Cooper implies that the Templeton community of *Home As Found* was in this "equivocal position" (pp. 176, 178).

Hope for the future of Templeton and for agrarian America was held out in Cooper's brief suggestion of a third stage of settlement in a "new country." This is the time when "men and things come within the control of more general and regular laws" (p. 177). A civilization is achieved which combines the best of rural and urban life. In a securely settled society Cooper implies that men may again come to respect moral leadership and reject the demagogues of public opinion. Much of *Home As Found* decries the values rampant in contemporary society and condemns America for not fulfilling her potential. However, when Paul and Eve Effingham marry at the conclusion of the book, they continue to reside in Templeton. This offers, at least, the tentative hope that a stable order may be possible, that virtue and talent may again, one day in the future, reign supreme on the rural landscape.
Cooper returned to the theme of the process of settlement in the Littlepage trilogy, three novels generally considered to be the best of his later fiction. In *Satanstoe* (1845), *The Chainbearer* (1845), and *The Redskins* (1846), Cooper dramatizes an entire century of American settlement. He explores the conversion of the wilderness through an examination of the lives of five generations in the Littlepage family. Although these works are sometimes called Cooper's anti-rent trilogy, only the last book deals directly with the contemporary problem of the anti-rent war in New York. The two earlier works concern themselves with the commencement and early flowering of the settlement at Ravensnest.

In the first two volumes of the Littlepage trilogy Cooper reveals that he still admired the ideal of an American agrarian society which combined the best of the natural and civilized worlds. He was growing increasingly pessimistic, however, about the potentialities of its fruition. With the last volume of the series Cooper comes full circle and attempts to deny the myth of the farmer. He discounts even the possibility of an American agrarian ideal.

In *Satanstoe* Corny Littlepage, the narrator, introduces us to his home and describes the "particularly good farm" of Satanstoe in some detail (p. 13). During the course of this tale of excitement, adventure, and romance, Corny goes to upstate New York in order to explore some 40,000 acres of untamed land that his father and a partner had purchased. This land is adjacent to the settlement of Ravensnest, a microcosm of agrarian America, which Cooper uses as the setting for the rest of the series.
With Corny as guide, the reader becomes acquainted with the state of civilization at the commencement of settlement. The various expedients adopted "to free the earth from its load of trees," and the "slow and painful operation" needed to make a clearing in the virgin forest are meticulously detailed (p. 339). At Ravensnest, Corny encounters clearings which are "disfigured by stumps, dead and girdled trees, charred stubbs, log-heaps, brush, and all the other unseemly accompaniments of the first eight or ten years of the existence of a new settlement" (p. 443). The state of the landscape is metaphorically compared to the stage of adolescence in human development, "when we have lost the graces of childhood without having attained the finished forms of men" (p. 443).

The owner of Ravensnest and Corny's future father-in-law is Herman Mordaunt. As an experienced large landholder, he explains the nature and mechanics of the long term rental agreements between landlord and tenant-farmer to both Corny and the reader (pp. 339-42). Although these contracts will be the source of discord to later generations, Mordaunt argues that they are especially advantageous to the farmer-tenants. A landlord had to possess great amounts of "capital and patience" to even consider financing a settlement (p. 340). He could not expect any profits within his own lifetime; his investment was for the benefit of his posterity. On the other hand, since "people were scarce, while land was superabundant," the tenant-farmer enjoyed immediate profits. He had his choice of farm, he lived rent-free for the first six or eight years, and he paid only a nominal rent for the next thirty or forty years (p. 340).
In addition to introducing the location and origins of the settlement of Ravensnest in this first volume of the Littlepage series, Cooper also sows the seeds for future conflict and dissension by bringing Jason Newcome to the agrarian community. The son of a New England farmer, Jason is represented as narrow-minded, provincial and singlemindedly covetous (p. 49). As Cooper comments:

To one thing, however, he was much disposed to defer, and that was money ... Yes, Jason bowed down to the golden calf in spite of his Puritanism, his love of liberty, his pretension to equality, and the general strut of his disposition and manner (p. 51).

Jason and his descendants will be instrumental in bringing the ascendancy of commercial values to the agrarian frontier.

Corny's son, Mordaunt Littlepage, is the reputed author of the next volume in the series, The Chainbearer. This story begins at the close of the Revolutionary War, "as the nation rose from beneath the pressure of war to enjoy the freedom of peace" (p. 96). The major theme of The Chainbearer is the conversion of the wilderness into a cultivated garden. Cooper expresses a long-standing admiration for the American conquest of nature in this novel with the following ode to the American axe:

The American axe! It has made more real and lasting conquests than the sword of any warlike people that ever lived; but they have been conquests that have left civilization in their train instead of havoc and desolation. More than a million square miles of territory have been opened up from the shades of the virgin forest, to admit the warmth of the sun; and culture and abundance have been spread where the beast of the forest so lately roamed, hunted by the savage ... A brief quarter of a century has seen these wonderful changes wrought; and at the bottom of them all lies this beautiful, well-prized, ready, and efficient implement, the American axe! (pp. 95-96).
In *The Chainbearer* we see how the axe has played its part in the development of Ravensnest. Unlike the awkward appearance of the settlement at its commencement with its "piles of charred or half-burned logs," its "fields covered with stumps," and its "buildings of the meanest characters," Ravensnest now had the more polished look of a community that had been established for some thirty years (pp. 100, 127). As a result, "the stumps had nearly all disappeared" and the place had "the appearance of an old country" (p. 127). In "Nest Village" the characteristic buildings of civilization were present, including an inn, store, black smith's shop, school house, and a variety of mills (p. 128). While it was true that "the virgin forest still flourished in immediate contact" with the "shorn, tilled and smoothed" fields (p. 127), Cooper underscores how much was done "toward converting the wilderness into a garden" (p. 205).

The plot of *The Chainbearer* centers about Mordaunt Littlepage's journey to Ravensnest to survey the region and draw up new contracts with his tenants. Mordaunt is willing to sell the land to his tenant-farmers for reasonable prices, but most of them find it more profitable to continue the rental agreements (p. 204). Detailing the exact fees charged and the stipulations of the contracts, Cooper emphasizes the fairness of the procedure (pp. 193-95). Sensitive to contemporary criticism of rental agreements, Cooper has his spokesman, the Chainbearer, argue that "if there were not land enough for everybody, these restrictions and divisions might seem to be, and in fact be, unjust." In America, however, such was not the case. Andries insists that America's abundance assured that "any man can have a farm who will pay a very
moderate price for it. The state sells, and landlords sell; and those who don’t choose to buy of one, can buy of the other" (p. 129). If men decided to rent land, that too was their free choice.

Underlining the availability of freehold tenure, Cooper continues to affirm the foundation of the agrarian ideal. At the same time, however, he attempts to justify the single family ownership of vast estates. In *The Chainbearer* Cooper tries to make just rental agreements as acceptable to the American audience as their beloved doctrine of freehold tenure. After all, Cooper's Mordaunt Littlepage argues, "the use of the land is the very circumstance that enables [the farmer] to rise above his humble position, and to profit by the cultivation of the soil" (p. 205). Within the framework of a civilized agrarian community, rental agreements can provide worthy farmers with tremendous advantages.

In this second volume of the Littlepage trilogy, the New England farmer Jason Newcome reveals his monetary greed in his illegal and unethical transactions with the squatters (pp. 425-26). The real culprits of this tale, however, are the squatters. Aaron Thousandacres and his family, similar to the Bush clan of *The Prairie*, live outside the boundaries of civilized society. As lawless men, they not only refuse to pay rent for the use of the land, but they also hold Mordaunt Littlepage hostage, and are responsible for the death of the Chainbearer.

Cooper has the squatter, Aaron Thousandacres, defend his right to the profits of the land on the basis of the labor he has performed. He asks, "Do not the sweat of the brow, long and hard days of toil, archin' bones and hungry bellies give a man a claim to the fruit of his labours?"
Thousandacres' wife justifies her husband's activities with a type of natural rights philosophy:

His idee is, that the Lord has made the 'arth for his critturs; that any one that wants land has a right to take as much as he wants, and to use it as long as he likes; and when he has done, to part with his betterments for sich price as may be agreed on" (p. 339).

Through his spokesman, Mordaunt Littlepage, Cooper rejects the squatters' arguments. Selectively choosing the parts of the agrarian ideal which foster their own interests, the Thousandacres clan ignores the fact that the Littlepage family owns the land. As we have seen in Cooper's previous works, the author believed that without the rights of property there can be no civilization. As Mordaunt Littlepage tells the squatter's daughter, "Land is so plenty in this country no man need go without a legal interest in his hundred acres provided he be only sober and industrious" (p. 302). The true American agrarian ideal upholds industry, labor, and a genuine commitment to society and its laws. Within the framework of the trilogy, the Littlepage family remains Cooper's repository of moral and social values.

At the conclusion of The Chainbearer, Jason Newcome dies poverty-stricken, the squatter Aaron Thousandacres meets a justly deserved death, and Mordaunt Littlepage settles down with his wife and new son in a grand home he has constructed on his patent (pp. 489, 431, 487). While Cooper thus draws the defeat of the forces of monetary greed and unlawful behavior in The Chainbearer, their battle cry has been sounded on the agrarian frontier and will be heard again in the voices of the rowdy anti-renters of The Redskins. In the third volume of the trilogy,
Cooper's promised final stage of agricultural settlement, the time when
men live together in civilized harmony and admire the moral leadership
of agrarian gentlemen, never materializes. Instead, conditions in
the community of Ravensnest, and on America's rural landscape,
continue to deteriorate.53

It is the grandson of Mordaunt Littlepage, Hugh Littlepage, who
narrates Cooper's story in The Redskins.54 Significantly, Hugh and his
uncle are in Europe when the novel opens, and they are called back to
America because of the tenant uprisings on their estates. Fearing
physical harm, an indication of how far relations have deteriorated
on the agrarian landscape, Hugh and his uncle are forced to return
to their homesteads disguised as Germans.

According to Cooper, what has happened to the settlement of
Ravensnest and in the larger perspective to the American agrarian
community is the ascendancy of commercial interests over morality,
and indeed over the law itself.55 The tenant farmers who signed the
rental agreements with the Littlepage family have arbitrarily decided
that their contracts are no longer operative. As one yeoman tells Ro
Littlepage, the husbandmen believe that they have "paid for their
farms over and over again in rent. They feel as if they have paid
enough, and that it was time to stop" (p. 230). Cooper's spokesmen,
the Littlepages, are dumbfounded by the farmers' indignant refusals to
pay rent "forever" (p. 230).

Within The Redskins, Cooper characterizes several different anti-
rent farmers and has them selectively employ some of the sacred tenets
of American agrarianism in support of their position. They claim,
"Every man, in a free country, should be his own landlord," and that, "Now it's ag'in natur' to pay rent in a republican country" (pp. 297, 298). Since the farmers stood to gain considerable wealth from the break-up of the large estates and the forced sale of the land, and since they ignored all legal rights, Cooper, through his spokesman Hugh, refuses to see their motives as anything but mercenary. They are shown to be hiding the longing of covetousness behind the principles of liberty. Like Aaron Thousandacres in the previous novel, the anti-rent farmers argue that their labor is their "title" to the land, and that they need no other (p. 273).

These new spokesmen for the rights of the American farmer destroy his credibility in Cooper's literary perspective. The Redskins is Cooper's thinly disguised political statement about the anti-rent war in contemporary New York. The novelist believed that the supporters of the anti-rent forces were moving the American Republic away from the principles of its founders. Viewing their attack on the rights of private property as an assault on the very foundation of civilization, Cooper dissociates himself from the new American husbandman. In The Redskins he explicitly repudiates some ideas he had earlier advanced. Thus in the preface to The Redskins Cooper makes the following announcement:

The notion that every husbandman is to be a freeholder is as Utopian in practice, as it would be to expect that all men were to be on the same level in fortune, condition, education, and habits. As such a state of things as the last never yet did exist, it was probably never designed by divine wisdom that it should exist. The whole structure of society must be changed, even in this country, ere it could exist among ourselves, and the change would not
Cooper thus insists not only that the principle of freehold tenure was impractical in the real world of nineteenth-century America, but also that it never was a worthy ideal in the first place.

In this final volume of the Littlepage trilogy, Cooper offers no hymn in praise of the conversion of the wilderness. Indeed, there is no longer any superiority associated with America's rural environment. Hugh Littleplage suggests that rather than becoming ennobled by working close to the soil, there is something ignoble about getting one's hands dirty (pp. 273-74). The anti-rent farmers of The Redskins are portrayed as ignorant fools who are easily led by ruthless demagogues (pp. 276-79). No longer combining the virtues of nature with the educated intellect of civilization, these farmers are boorish, crude, and singularly ruled by the passion of greed. When Cooper has his bands of yeomen, under the direction of the Newcomes and cowardly disguised by calico sheets, commit arson and threaten murder, the literary stature of the American farmer sinks to a vastly new low (pp. 395, 498-99, 520).

At the conclusion of the novel, Hugh Littlepage is forced to abandon his ancestral estate and to seek redress in Washington. Disillusioned by what he has encountered in America, he is not hopeful about the future. Hugh Littlepage is heard to remark at parting that:

should Washington fail him he has the refuge of Florence open, where he can reside among the other victims of oppression, with the advantage of being admired as a refugee from republican tyranny (p. 538).

Interestingly enough, in Cooper's The Redskins the quest of American
themes for American authors has come full circle. Instead of using the farmer figure to affirm America's uniqueness, Cooper employs him to close both political and literary rank with Europe.

One might expect that Cooper's vehement attack on the myth of the American farmer in The Redskins would have satisfied his desire to explore agrarian themes. He apparently felt the need, however, to return to the agricultural frontier and the process of settlement a final time in the book The Crater (1847). While this novel is largely set on a volcanic island in the South Pacific, the people who settle it are predominantly American. Thus The Crater becomes, in a sense, a depiction of America's westernmost, and last, agricultural frontier.

Many themes and ideas of Cooper's earlier works are repeated here. The shipwrecked Mark Woolston, through industry and hard work, succeeds in making the barren land of the crater fertile. With the arrival of a carefully selected American community much progress is made and the island soon becomes an example of harmonious, moral, order (p. 298). As Governor Woolston and his wife comment, "abundance reigned on every side" (p. 387). Eventually, however, the seeds of discord are sown on this island, too. Religion, law, and the press affect the ascendancy of majority rule. One critic has suggested that Cooper attempted to encompass the entire cycle of civilization within the short span of history of this colony.
Near the end of the novel Mark meditates on what has happened in words which serve as a useful summary of the novel:

He would thus recall his shipwreck and desolate condition when suffered first to reach the rocks; the manner in which he was the instrument in causing vegetation to spring up in the barren places; the earthquake, and the upheaving of the islands from out of the waters; the arrival of his wife and other friends; the commencement and progress of the colony; its blessings, so long as it pursued the right, and its curses, when it began to pursue the wrong; his departure, leaving it still a settlement surrounded with a sort of earthly paradise, and his return, to find all buried beneath the ocean (p. 458).

What finally happened to the island is, of course, the key. This agrarian paradise was destroyed in a "dire catastrophe" (p. 456). The island sunk beneath the sea, and "the colony of the Crater perished to a man" (p. 458). In this novel, Cooper leaves no doubt that he means his ending to be taken as a sign of the judgment of God upon the unworthy (p. 459). The implications for American agrarian society, as it too "began to pursue the wrong," are obvious.

Near the end of his literary career, James Fenimore Cooper was not content to strip the symbolic American farmer of his alleged moral superiority. Rather than merely condemning the farmer for failing to meet his potential, Cooper attempted to blow up the yeoman's literary legacy in a fit of volcanic frenzy. At least one critic has suggested that "the best measure of Cooper's devotion to the ideal of a virtuous yeomanry is the vehemence with which he finally repudiated it" at the end of his life. Cooper was a writer "rudely deprived of a solacing vision." He was a major American author who could no longer believe in the American farmer.
Conclusion

During the early national period the farmer continued to provide American writers with a convenient symbol for their aspirations, values, and goals. When the cry was heard for a distinctive national literature the farmer aided the efforts of American authors by providing them with a cultural hero whom they could celebrate. The essence of the American experience was seen to reside in the process of settlement, and the farmer was depicted as the figure most responsible for the conversion of the wilderness.

As in earlier times, opposing political factions attempted to enlist the support of America's real farmers. Federalist and Republican, Whig and Jacksonian Democrat all appealed to the emotional prejudices of the political majority and encouraged the literary idealization of the American husbandman. Throughout most of the period, the farmer was depicted as the man who governed nature with the tools of civilization, and as the symbolic American who achieved dignity through his relationship to the land.

Early in the national period, Paulding's The Backwoodsman offered its readers an unqualified affirmation of the agrarian ideal. The American Dream was seen to be alive and well on the agricultural frontier of the Ohio Valley. Through an industrious relationship with their own land, Americans were told that they could, like Paulding's Basil, raise themselves from rags to riches. The sacred plough made it possible for the worthy to enjoy a moral prosperity in the New World. In addition, as Paulding proudly affirms, nineteenth-century America was still capable of leading the rest of the world toward the new
earthly millennium.

It has been said that the early national period was the era in which the adjective "American" was transformed from an apology to a boast. Perhaps embarrassed by all the boasting, Washington Irving responded by treating American manners in a humorous fashion. Although the mood of "Rip Van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" is gently mocking, Irving does manage to invest the American agricultural frontier with a lovely sense of peace and security. The virtues of hospitality, hard work, and good fellowship are seen to reside on the rural landscape. While Irving continues to paint a comforting picture of agrarian America, he recognizes the growing complexities of nineteenth-century life. His stories suggest that the agricultural landscape could not long remain impervious to the strife of commercial interests. Rip Van Winkle may have slept through the turmoil of the Revolutionary War, but it is only a matter of time, Irving hints, until the descendants of Ichabod Crane return at full gallop to destroy the lovely quietude of Sleepy Hollow.

James Fenimore Cooper began his literary career during this period, and, like countless writers before him, affirmed the American agrarian ideal. Cooper's early works depict the promise of America in the potential she offered for a life that could combine the best of rural and civilized living. Always sensitive to the threat poised by commercial interests, Cooper initially believed that as long as men stayed close to the soil they would retain their moral stature and dignity. Personal trials and public events during the 1830's and 1840's eventually caused Cooper to change his opinion. Near the end
of his career he began to view the American farmer not as a symbol of America's greatness, but rather as a radical threat to her very preservation.\textsuperscript{63}

Cooper's virulent attack on American agrarians was, in large measure, a personal vendetta. As our examination of Paulding's and Irving's works reveal, Cooper's bitter denunciation of American farmers did not represent the general attitude of the authors of his age. Yet, in focusing on the moral deterioration of the husbandman under the influences of commercial interests in his later novels, Cooper reflected a concern many authors experienced.\textsuperscript{64} Contemporary foreign visitors offered some support for Cooper's vehement denunciation when they suggested that American farmers no longer viewed their labor as a special, moral vocation, but instead used it as a convenient, accessible route to pursue the almighty dollar.\textsuperscript{65} In \textit{Democracy in America}, Alexis de Tocqueville, for example, claims that "the Americans carry their business-like qualities into agriculture; and their trading passions are displayed in that as in other pursuits."\textsuperscript{66} While denying that Cooper was totally representative of his age, historian Marvin Meyers in \textit{The Jacksonian Persuasion} concludes that Cooper was "a cicerone whose inflamed sensibilities reported the climactic changes of an era and whose intelligence gave some order to the process."\textsuperscript{67}

Although perhaps with some qualification, most American writers continued to extol the farmer as a representative of what was best in American society. Not possessing Cooper's ideal of a gentlemanly-directed, "decorous" democracy, and without his fear of the growing democratization and egalitarianism of society, many authors found
satisfaction in honoring the laborious agrarian efforts of the "common man." The overwhelming majority of the population remained involved with agriculture and the land. While the inroads of commerce, industry, and trade were making the ideal of the morally prosperous, self-sufficient freeholder increasingly remote from reality, American authors (and politicians) largely ignored and obscured this fact -- choosing instead to celebrate the myth of the farmer as an eminently satisfying national theme.

In the next chapter, we will see that some of America's most idealistic writers continued the literary tradition of the American husbandman. Like Cooper, these Transcendentalist authors freely acknowledged the American farmer's moral failings. They too denounced the gap between reality and the ideal. However, these writers attempted to heal the division, and to reconcile the disparity. As we will see in the next chapter, many of America's Transcendentalist authors self-consciously assumed the agrarian role in order to infuse it with its proper practical and symbolic meaning.
ENDNOTES


5. Ibid.


11. Ibid.


13. Ibid., p. 138.

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14. Ibid.

15. Paulding maintained his belief in the agrarian ideal throughout most of his life; see Westward Ho! He did become increasingly sympathetic to the perspective of Southern plantation owners. For a discussion of the changes in Paulding's later outlook, see Aderman.


17. See Nye, p. 257.


20. Ibid., p. 463.


31. Ringe, Cooper, p. 35.

32. Examples of men who become less moral outside the bounds of ordered society include: the Bush clan of The Prairie; Thomas Hutter and Hurry Harry of The Deerslayer; the Thousandacres clan of The Chainbearer.


37. See John P. McWilliams, Jr., Political Justice in a Republic: James Fenimore Cooper's America (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972).


40. For a discussion of the Three Mile Point affair and its effect on Cooper, see Grossman, pp. 105-111.


42. For a discussion of Cooper's complex politics, see George Dekker and Larry Johnston, "Introduction" to The American Democrat (Baltimore: Penquin, 1969); Schlesinger, pp. 5-10.

43. See also Cady.

44. Homeward Bound: or The Chase (1838; rpt. New York: P. F. Collier & Son, n.d.). Subsequent citations will be to this edition.

45. See House, p. 159.


47. See Ringe, Cooper, p. 76.

48. See also Cady, pp. 112-13.

49. Howard, "Introduction" to The Pioneers, p. xvii.


51. Satanstoe, or, The Littlepage Manuscripts (1845; rpt. New York: P. F. Collier & Son, n.d.). Subsequent citations will be to this edition.

52. The Chainbearer, or The Littlepage Manuscripts (1845; rpt. New York: P. F. Collier & Son, n.d.). Subsequent citations will be to this edition.

54. The Redskins, or Indian and Injin (1846; rpt. New York: P. F. Collier & Son, n.d.). Subsequent citations will be to this edition.

55. See Ringe, Cooper, pp. 124-25.

56. For a discussion of the anti-rent war and Cooper's attitude toward it, see Grossman, pp. 197-219.


58. Philbrick, "Introduction" to The Crater, p. xxiv.


60. Ibid.


62. Howard, "Introduction" to The Pioneers, p. x.

63. See Schlesinger, pp. 9-10.


65. Meyers discusses the Jacksonian attitude toward land at length suggesting that testimony varies. He argues that "the republican yeoman on his hundred acres, building his farm and his character together and taking his reward in self-sufficient independence, populates the speeches of Jacksonian Democrats but not the countryside that observers viewed" (p. 135).


68. Ibid., p. 100.
In the period between 1840 and 1860 the American labor force remained predominantly agrarian. Indeed, with the westward expansion of settlement, America's future development continued to be envisioned in primarily agricultural terms. However, this mid-nineteenth century American nation of prosperous farmers differed substantially from the country of its agrarian forbears. A veritable revolution in transportation -- the growth and development of canals, turnpikes, steamboats, and railroads -- had aided the conversion of American farms from subsistence to commercial agricultural ventures. As the farmer's markets became national and international in scope, the yeoman himself was transformed into a rural businessman. The change was all but complete by 1860.

In addition, the year 1840 marked the beginning of a long cycle of migration from the farm to the city. Between 1840 and 1860 American society was characterized by a spectacular growth of urban centers. Most of the large cities of the North more than doubled their population during this period. Coincidental with the changes in population distribution and agricultural production was an increasing economic shift of capital from land to commerce, trade, and industry. In short, the nature of American society and American life underwent a profoundly radical alteration during this twenty year span.
Except for the hard times of 1837-41, the period was generally marked by increasing material prosperity. For America's Transcendentalist writers, material progress meant nothing without a corollary improvement in man's moral nature. They believed that American society had somehow come to confuse material prosperity with paradise, and were determined to show their fellow citizens that money-grubbing was not the way to a richly fulfilled life. As America grew increasingly industrialized and urbanized, many Transcendentalist writers decried her path and called for a new beginning. Fearful that the dehumanization of man was imminent, these spiritual reformers tried to enact America's long-standing, millennial mission; they attempted to regenerate humanity.

George Ripley, a leading intellectual of the period, summarized the Transcendentalist perspective on the "influences of modern society" when he observed:

They [the influences] do not give fit nutriment to the noblest forms of character. They do not make man what he is intended to be by the constitution of his nature. They help him not to fulfill the destiny which is assigned to him by the Creator.

These authors called for the reintegration of man's spiritual, intellectual, and material well-being. The individual's self-realization was their major goal, and in an effort to accomplish this goal they often wrote normative literature. America's Transcendentalist writers concerned themselves with artistically envisioning not what was, or might be, but rather what ought to be. As they groped for a symbol to actuate and contain their vision of America these authors frequently
selected the American farmer.

For the Transcendentalist writers to focus their hopes for America's future in the mythic figure of the farmer was an obvious choice. In American letters he had long been represented as an integrated man, as one who combined physical labor with intellectual pursuits, one who reconciled urban values with rural values. The Transcendentalist writers could peer through the individual farmer to highlight his spiritual or ideal self. Moreover, in the symbol of the husbandman these authors found a figure who spoke to their fellow citizens. In spite of the commercialization of agriculture and the development of business-like attitudes, the majority of the labor force remained, in occupation at least, American farmers.

In this chapter we will see that for some authors, particularly Emerson, the agrarian way of life served primarily as a symbolic construct or metaphor for an idealized integration of self. Others, the active participants in Brook Farm, viewed it as a practical life style. With Thoreau we will examine the writings of a man who tried to have it both ways and consequently changed the nature and direction of the agrarian myth itself.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Ralph Waldo Emerson, the major force behind American Transcendentalism, resided in the agrarian community of Concord, Massachusetts, when he composed his major essays. To suggest the continued importance of the farmer and his life style to the small towns and villages of New England we may note that the leading Concord newspaper of the day was still published under the banner of The Yeoman's Gazette.10
Emerson himself owned and lived on a ten-acre farm which was worked, for the most part, by hired hands. The author did take a personal interest in agrarian concerns, however, winning several prizes at the annual agricultural fairs.\textsuperscript{11}

Thus it becomes fairly clear that Emerson was heir to New England agrarian tradition in his own life. He was its heir in his literature as well. As we have seen in previous chapters the ideal of the self-sufficient yeoman had become, by this date, a literary commonplace in American writings. The agrarian occupation had long been invested with economic, political, moral, and religious significance. Even before the Revolution, American authors had come to use the symbol of the farmer as a conventional shorthand for summarizing the meaning of the American experience. By the middle of the nineteenth century, an American author such as Emerson could make tacit assumptions about how his audience would respond to literary images of the farmer.

As a result of this background, Douglas C. Stenerson in "Emerson and Agrarian Tradition" argues that the yeoman ideal exerted a tremendous influence on Emerson's thought and writings.\textsuperscript{12} He summarizes his ideas with the observation:

Thus, in point of time, the agrarian strain preceded his nature philosophy, helped shape it, and, strengthened by the implicitly agrarian assumptions of that philosophy, became a major element in it.\textsuperscript{13}

Without specifically stating this conclusion, Stenerson suggests that in the symbol of the farmer Emerson found a personification of that vital relation between man and nature which he took as the liberating theme of his life, and which he transformed into the central construct of
his writings. 14

In Emerson's Transcendentalist manifesto, Nature (1836), the influence of American agrarian tradition reveals itself. This is not to suggest that Emerson's essay is directly concerned with farmers or even with agrarian tradition. Yet, both are important to it. In Nature Emerson announces the major theme of his life, the need for men to exercise "an original relation to the universe" (p. 11). Acting within reforming tradition, Emerson summons men to meet their potential, to expand their souls in an immediate contact with the universe. He demands that his fellow men open themselves up to an imaginative, many-leveled response to nature.

Emerson's essay and his philosophical ideas reveal their kinship with agrarian tradition when the author chooses to employ the farmer and the agrarian way of life as a symbolic construct or metaphor for that idealized integration of self he wishes all men to achieve. Since the husbandman labors intimately with his rural environment, the agrarian vocation, Emerson implies, is particularly conducive to a high degree of self development. 16 In Emerson's view, nature could aid man in his attainment of a satisfying wholeness through its ability to enrich the maturation of man's physical, mental, and spiritual faculties.

The essay Nature is divided into several chapters or subsections which deal with the many uses man may make of nature. In his chapter "Commodity" Emerson discusses the utilitarian contributions of nature, "all the advantages which our senses owe to nature" (p. 19). He informs his readers of what the farmer is well aware, that the cycles
of nature help to nourish mankind (p. 19). Under "Beauty" Emerson describes the material, spiritual, and intellectual delight man finds in nature. Imaging physical perceptible beauty in the rural landscape he notes: "To the attentive eye, each moment of the year has its own beauty ... The state of the crop in the surrounding farms alters the expression of the earth from week to week" (p. 23). Moving from a consideration of physical beauty to nature's spiritual element, Emerson suggests, as did many American writers before him, that the farmer is in a unique position to recognize that "nature is a symbol of the spirit" (p. 28). As man works God's soil, the author affirms, he perceives spiritual reality behind the surface.

In his section on "Language" Emerson insists that there is an "immediate dependence of language upon nature" (p. 31) and goes on to argue: "It is this which gives that piquancy to the conversation of a strong natural farmer or backwoodsman, which all men relish" (p. 31). When discussing the concept of "Discipline" Emerson is concerned with nature's role in educating man's Reason and his Understanding. "The moral law lies at the centre of nature and radiates to the circumference," he claims (p. 41). As a result, man can learn moral lessons from nature; his relations with nature can be the basis of moral insight. Concretizing his ideas in an agrarian metaphor, he rhetorically asks, "What is a farm but a mute gospel?" (p. 41).

Emerson concludes Nature with an affirmation of hopeful "Prospects" (pp. 59-69). Calling for men to build their "own worlds" he tells them to respond to nature and exert power over her through the use of their Reason as well as their Understanding (p. 67). With an agrarian analogy
he insists that mankind must learn to farm the soil of the world not merely with "chemical agriculture" but rather with spiritual cultivation as well (p. 64).

Emerson returns to the farmer as a symbol of an ideally integrated self in his next major essay, "The American Scholar" (1837). In this work he makes an impassioned plea for an active, enlightened leadership in American society. He focuses on the scholarly vocation. Much of the lasting power of "The American Scholar" results, however, from the author's discussion of what he considered to be the major problem facing American society. According to Emerson, industrialization's division of labor had effected a division of man, and mid-nineteenth century Americans desperately needed to overcome this fragmentation. Utilizing the ancient fable of "One Man" Emerson argues that "this original unit, this fountain of power ... has been ... minutely subdivided and peddled out" into a multitude of lesser men (p. 72).

In the author's view, man must integrate intellectual pursuits with manual labor if he is to recapture a satisfying wholeness. Thus he inform his audience of academic scholars:

I hear therefore with joy whatever is beginning to be said of the dignity and necessity of labor to every citizen. There is virtue yet in the hoe and the spade, for learned as well as for unlearned hands (p. 85).

Expanded vision and physical activity are jointly needed for man to regain his lost unity. The figure of "Man on the farm" supplies Emerson with one of the images he uses to personify his ideally integrated man (p. 73). Not content with superficial or partial solutions to the problem of how men should live, "Man on the farm,"
this Emersonian version of the agrarian ideal, continues to embody
America's highest goals, aspirations and values.

"Man the Reformer" (1841) is an Emersonian essay in which the
author attempts to address himself to the abuses of an increasingly
commercial society. The husbandman is employed, in this work, as
an exemplary or symbolic reformer with the power to physically and
spiritually "free" contemporary Americans if they would only follow
his lead to a richly satisfying life -- a life which combines the
rigors of labor with the pleasures of intellect. Reality and the
literary expression of rural life merge in "Man the Reformer" as
Emerson deals with both the symbolic importance of a life close to
nature and the literal possibility of a popular return to the cultivation
of the land.

Within the work, the author confronts the growing shame of
American society. Although the promise of the New World had long been
associated with access to freehold tenure, and although American
ideology had been built upon everyman's right to possess property,
in the year 1841 many Americans could no longer afford to own land.
An increasingly unequal distribution of the wealth "tainted" the previously moral ownership of American property (p. 191). "Of course,
whilst another man has no land, my title to mine, your title to
yours, is at once vitiated," Emerson claims (p. 190). In "Man the
Reformer" the author advocates the reformation of more than society's
institutions; he calls for the melioration of the human character
itself. Recognizing that he is advocating an ideal state of society,
Emerson admits that he sees "no instant prospect of a virtuous
revolution" (p. 191). Yet, he spends the remainder of the essay attempting to vivify the power and satisfaction men would feel if they simplified their lives. One appropriate method would be to return to the agrarian occupation and to a primary relation with the land.

With rhetorical acumen Emerson admits and then demolishes the opposition to his point of view in one bold stroke. He claims that to "give up the immense advantages reaped from the division of labor" and to return to a more simplistic style of life would not "put men back to barbarism by their own act" (p. 191). Arguing from a personal point of view, he assumes that he speaks for others:

Yet I confess, I should not be pained at a change which threatened a loss of some of the luxuries or conveniences of society, if it proceeded from a preference of the agricultural life out of the belief that our primary duties as men could be better discharged in that calling. Who could regret to see a high conscience and a purer taste exercising a sensible effect on young men in their choice of occupation and thinning the ranks of competition in the labors of commerce, of law, and of state?" (p. 191).

The quality of life is not determined by material possessions alone; such factors as "high conscience" and "purer taste" must be exercised to achieve true human progress. In addition to providing "a basis for our higher accomplishments" (p. 192), agrarian labor offers Americans an immediate source of inspiration:

When I go into my garden with a spade, and dig a bed, I feel such an exhilaration and health, that I discover that I have been defrauding myself all this time in letting others do for me what I should have done with my own hands. But not only health, but education is in the work (p. 192).

Emerson later adds, "that labor is God's education" (p. 195). The
As he further explains his ideas about the significance of the agrarian occupation, Emerson explicitly tells his readers, "I do not wish to overstate this doctrine of labor, or insist that every man should be a farmer" (p. 195). While "the husbandman's is the oldest and most universal profession" what is most important about the agrarian life style is "the doctrine of the farm." This "doctrine" is that of the self-reliant man, and it succinctly advocates that "every man ought to have this opportunity to conquer the world for himself" (p. 195). To stand in the "jaws of need" and extricate oneself enobles not only the individual involved but Man in the generic sense emerges victorious as well (p. 195). In a mood reminiscent of earlier authors, Emerson argues for the democratic nature of the agrarian ideal. The success of the individual is synonymous with the success of society. Each man labors for himself, his family, his country, and his God (p. 194).

In "Man the Reformer" the inherently dramatic vision of a man working in the field alone before God and the universe becomes a source of transcendental inspiration. Emerson concludes his essay by transforming images of the farmer and agrarian labor into a symbolic vision of America's future. He assures his readers:

As the farmer casts into the ground the finest ears of his grain, the time will come when we too shall hold nothing back, but shall eagerly convert more than we now possess into means and powers, when we shall be willing to sow the sun and the moon for seeds (pp. 206-07).
Future greatness lies in the metaphorical "conversion of our harvest into seed." Mediating between the spiritual and the actual worlds Emerson proclaims that "a purer fame, a greater power rewards the sacrifice" (pp. 206-07). This is the fundamental reformation to be accomplished in America. Man must remake himself into his own highest achievement. The symbol of the farmer aids in the literary expression of a Transcendental ideal.

In an essay of 1844, "New England Reformers," Emerson returns to the subject of reformers and to the enormous pre-occupation of his contemporaries with making things new. He demonstrates a lack of sympathy with all attempts to reform institutions instead of individuals. The communal agrarian projects which follow the ideas of St. Simon, Fourier, and Owen come in for particular criticism as Emerson comments that while "friendship and association are very fine things," we must "remember that no society can ever be so large as one man" (p. 346). Succinctly summarizing his attitude, he testifies:

The criticism and attack on institutions which we have witnessed, has made one thing plain, that society gains nothing whilst a man, not himself renovated, attempts to renovate things around him (p. 344).

Another essay of the same year, "The Young American" (1844), broadens the primary focus of the author's life-long theme from the reformation of the individual to the melioration of the larger social context. As he predicts a great agrarian destiny for the people of the New World, Emerson speaks in the tradition of an American prophet harkening back even to Captain John Smith's A Description of New England (1616). Leo Marx has said of Emerson's "The Young American,": "No
major writer has come closer to expressing the popular conception of man's relation to nature in nineteenth-century America."21 In expressing his vision of America, Emerson not only articulates the conventional tenets of agrarianism, but he also attempts to reconcile the American agrarian ideal with the onslaught of industrial progress.

"The Young American" opens with the pronouncement that "America is beginning to assert itself to the senses and to the imagination of her children" (p. 291). Like earlier works, the essay locates the imaginative power of America in the beauty and bounty of her land:

The land is the appointed remedy for whatever is false and fantastic in our culture. The continent we inhabit is to be physic and food for our mind, as well as our body. The land, with its tranquilizing sanative influences, is to repair the errors of a scholastic and traditional education, and bring us into just relations with men and things (p. 293).

Continuing and transforming previous American literary tradition, this passage suggests that the citizens of the New World possess the opportunity to participate in a gloriously redemptive relationship with the land.

This land is important to America because "the vast majority of the people in this country live by the land, and carry its quality in their manners and opinions" (p. 296). While acknowledging the place commercial interests have played and will continue to play in the American experience (pp. 300-03), Emerson testifies to the strength of agricultural interests and to his own agrarian bias when he tells his readers:
Whatever events in progress shall go to disgust men with cities, and infuse into them the passion for country life, and country pleasures, will render a service to the whole face of this continent, and will further the most poetic of all the occupations of real life, the bringing out by art the native but hidden graces of the landscape (pp. 295-96).

Like numerous authors before him, Emerson in "The Young American" continues to explicitly attribute moral, economic, political, and spiritual significance to the agrarian occupation. He tells his readers "beside all the moral benefit which we may expect from the farmer's profession," he is also assured of "plenty" (p. 294). The farmer's laborious improvements tend "to endear the land to the inhabitant" (p. 296) and "any relation to the land ... generates the feeling of patriotism" (p. 296). In short, the farmer can help us "appreciate the advantages opened to the human race in this country, which is our fortunate home" (p. 293).

Within "The Young American" Emerson attempts to reconcile the material advancement of nineteenth-century society with the traditional agrarian ideal. He tells his readers that inventions such as the railroad and the steamboat have acquainted "the American people with the boundless resources of their own soil" (p. 292). These new modes of travel allow men "to cultivate very distant tracts, and yet remain in strict intercourse with the centres of trade and population" (p. 294). While enormous tasks of "surveying, planting and building" lay before them, he suggests the potential of the farmers to conquer nature with the tools of civilization, to live a social, civilized life on the rural landscape, has taken on new, fully realizable possibilities.

Material advancement in nineteenth-century America is praised not for
its own sake, but rather as it acts toward the betterment of human life. According to Emerson, America continues to be the place "which offers opportunity to the human mind not known in any other region" (p. 312).

An optimistic vision of this country's future is prophesized in "The Young American." The newly accessible landscape captures Emerson's imagination and his artistic response to America's enormous bounty resembles that of his ancestors. It was as though the New World had been discovered all over again. The author proclaims, "How much better when the whole land is a garden, and the people have grown up in the bowers of a paradise" (p. 296). The original promise of America, the land, is extolled once more. As it was in the beginning, so it is in the nineteenth century, and so it will be in the future:

We must regard the land as a commanding and increasing power on the citizens, the sanative and Americanizing influence, which promises to disclose new virtues for ages to come (p. 296).

He later adds: "One thing is plain for all men of common-sense and common conscience, that here, here in America, is the home of man" (p. 312).

In spite of, or perhaps because of, his enormously optimistic perspective in "The Young American," Emerson concludes the essay with a discussion of America's problematic contemporary reality. Acknowledging the tremendous difficulties which must be resolved before his glorious agrarian vision can be fully realized, he admits that all is not well on the contemporary American landscape. After painful labor and long hours the farmer as well as the merchant often finishes his days bankrupt and in despair (p. 304). And yet, the overriding mood of "The Young American" remains that of supreme confidence. Emerson is encouraged by the growth of communal agriculture (pp. 304-07). The firm roots of
his optimistic vision become apparent when he joyfully proclaims that a virtual "revolution" is "on the way" (p. 307). America remains the country of the future and her people continue to provide moral leadership for the rest of humanity (p. 309).

During the decade of the 1850's Emerson's optimistic hopes for America's future lessened, and his skepticism generally increased. He became discouraged with what was happening around him in American society. As the United States drew closer to the Civil War the possibilities for sustaining a prosperous, family-size farm grew increasingly limited. Many authors recognized that the agrarian ideal was divorcing itself from the agrarian reality with amazing rapidity. Yet, society's form was still close enough to the ideal for its ideas to retain at least some vitality. In Emerson's case, the farmer continued to serve as a touchstone for a moral, ethical way of life. Acting as the guardian and controller of nature's energies, the husbandman enjoyed the transcendental benefits of a life close to nature.

In an essay first delivered to a predominantly agricultural audience at the Middlesex "Cattleshow," Emerson articulated his most sustained idealization of the agrarian profession. The following passage from "Farming" (1858) contains the author's honorific introduction to his subject:

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 for a time to other hands. If he have not some skill which recommends him to the farmer, some product for which the farmer will give him corn, he must himself return into his due place among the planters. And the profession has in all eyes its ancient charm, as standing nearest to God, the first cause (p. 749).

Affirming the unchallenged primacy of agriculture, the author argues that all other endeavors rest on the husbandman's creative achievement.

The body of the essay details the not unfamiliar theme of the yeoman's unremitting labor and industry. We are told of the farmer's toil as he "digs a well, constructs a stone fountain, plants a grove of trees by the roadside, plants an orchard, builds a durable house, reclaims a swamp ... and makes the land so far lovely and desirable" (p. 751). Not wishing to paint the farmer or his labor in "rose-color" Emerson insists that "he represents continuous hard labor, year in, year out and small gains" (pp. 750, 754-55). Indeed, "he the farmer knows every secret of labor, he changes the face of the landscape" (p. 751). Prodigious effort is needed to transform a wilderness into a pleasant agrarian community, and as the farmer "works at home," he "helps society at large" (p. 751).

Once the process has been accomplished the author praises the stable, calm and peaceful life available to men on the agrarian frontier. Personalizing the same pleasure in stable tradition which we saw in Irving and Cooper, Emerson points out:
In the town where I live, farms remain in the same families for seven and eight generations; and most of the first settlers (in 1635) should they re-appear on the farms to-day, would find their own blood and names still in possession. And the like fact holds in the surrounding towns (p. 750).

The stability of agrarian tradition is perhaps more powerfully imaged and expressed in Emerson's aphoristic description of the farmer: "He is permanent, clings to his land as the rocks do" (p. 750). As farms pass from generation to generation the farmer becomes a firm caretaker of agrarian tradition.

Continuing his emphasis on the spiritual value of the farmer's life close to nature, Emerson notes, "The great elements with which he deals cannot leave him unaffected: (p. 757). Indeed, "The farmer times himself to Nature, and acquires that life-long patience, which belongs to her" (p. 750). As the husbandman responds to nature, he "bends to the order of the seasons, the weather, the soils and crops, as the sails of a ship bend to the wind" (p. 750). Enjoying a "precise and important" office, the farmer undertakes a "grave trust" within "the great household of Nature" (pp. 750-51).

In this literary tribute to the farmer, the highest acclaim Emerson offers the agrarian is to extol him as a "natural" rather than an "artificial" man (p. 758). Suggesting that farmers are "men of endurance, deep-chested, long-winded, tough, slow and sure, and timely" (p. 750), the author implies that they persevere as a kind of inarticulate natural force. Encapsulating simplicity, "the farmer stands well on the world. Plain in manners as in dress, he would not shine in palaces; he is absolutely unknown and inadmissible therein" (p. 758).
Indeed, "that uncorrupted behavior which we admire in animals and in young children belongs to him" (p. 758) or so Emerson would have his audience believe.

In "Farming" Emerson thus celebrates the American husbandman as a primitivistic version of the natural man. He offers his countrymen, and in particular the rural citizenry, a sustained idealization of the American farmer -- but it is one couched in traditional pastoral conventions and cliches. Emerson's pleasant vision remains unchecked by any recognition of the growing commercialization of agriculture and its effect on the agrarian populace. In "Farming" Emerson depicts a romantic idealization of American agricultural life. It was, by the middle of the nineteenth century, a realistically untenable view.

In 1860, in an essay on "Wealth," Emerson returns to the subject of the American yeoman and this time acknowledges that the agrarian ideal was no longer a valid interpretation of the American experience. The author does not abandon his commitment to the moral potential of the farmer ideal. Rather, he suggests that contemporary social pressures have rendered obsolete many of the traditional underpinnings of the agrarian myth. While agriculture remained the major occupation of Americans, its nature had been radically altered. Emerson bemoans the conversion of America's farms from subsistence to commercial agricultural ventures:

When men now alive were born, the farm yielded everything that was consumed on it. The farm yielded no money, and the farmer got on without. If he fell sick, his neighbors came to his aid; each gave a day's work, or a half day; or lent his yoke of oxen, or his horse, and kept his work even; hoed his potatoes, mowed his hay, reaped his rye; well knowing that no man could afford to hire labor without selling his land (p. 712).
With a nostaligic look backward Emerson continues to praise traditional subsistence farming. He says that "a farm is a good thing when it begins and ends with itself;" he insists that a simple life close to nature admits many satisfactions (p. 712). Unfortunately, according to Emerson, contemporary husbandmen no longer adhere to this agrarian ideal. Like everyone else, "now the farmer buys almost all he consumes" (p. 712).26

Successful agricultural production demands increased specialization. The farmer can no longer function as an American "Renaissance" man. While Emerson displays an amateur gardener's awe for the professional knowledge of the husbandman,27 he is quick to point out that the contemporary farmer's intellectual range is narrowly bounded. "The genius of reading and gardening are antagonistic," he claims (pp. 712-13, 710). As he explains his new attitude toward the farmer, Emerson indulges in a revisionist history of New England's immediate past:

We had in this region, twenty years ago, among our educated men, a sort of Arcadian fanaticism, a passionate desire to go upon the land and unite farming to intellectual pursuits. Many effected their purpose and made the experiment, and some became downright ploughmen, but all were cured of their faith that scholarship and practical farming (I mean with one's own hands) could be united (p. 710).

He ignores his own previous commitment to this "Arcadian fanaticism." As we have seen, Emerson himself had called for man to unite labor and intellect in the profession of farming; he himself had praised the opportunities the agrarian occupation offered for a re-integration of the whole man.
Thus by 1860 Emerson concludes that however compelling the agrarian myth remained, American society had become too diverse and complex to be contained within the symbol of the farmer. In his essay "Wealth" Emerson suggests that the farmer represents only one part of many faceted Man; he can no longer serve as a metaphorical construct for an idealized integration of self.

The Brook Farm Experiment

We must retreat twenty years into the past, to the period of "Arcadian fanaticism" as Emerson calls it, in order to fairly approach the people and literature of Brook Farm. The Brook Farm community of the 1840's boasted the active participation of some of America's leading humanitarian reformers. Dismayed by the competitive forces of America's growing industrial institutions, these intellectual and literary transcendentalists rejected modern urbanism. They were the inheritors of a unique American ideology, and they continued to believe in the possibility of a life which combined intellectual pursuits with manual labor, which yielded material prosperity without spiritual bankruptcy.

Sensitive to the abuses of their age, the idealists of Brook Farm, like earlier writers, readily acknowledged that many contemporary American farmers failed to meet the potential of their profession. Yet the Brook Farmers possessed a tremendous faith in the capacities of man and a corollary belief in his ability to self-reform. In founding the community at West Roxbury, people like Ripley, Dana, and Dwight attempted to effect real social change. They tried to go back to the original condition of the agrarian myth to prove that intellectual
agrarianism was still a viable life style.

As Brook Farm's founders self-consciously assumed the agrarian role, they sought not only to meliorate existing social institutions, but also to serve as an example and inspiration for the rest of mankind. Thus, in some respects, Brook Farm existed as a nineteenth-century version of the covenanted community complete with a divinely sanctioned mission. Taking Emerson at his word, these reformers believed that by becoming "Men on the Farm" they would finally solve the problem of man's fragmentation and achieve an integrated wholeness of being. The promise of Brook Farm remained the eternal promise of America; it was seen to lie in a personally redemptive relationship with the land. As Charles Dana confidently informed his audience in 1844: "We announce the realization of the visions and promises of the past and of the hopes of the present." 29

Even before the participants took possession of the West Roxbury community, George Ripley, the leader of the movement, articulated the following cogent description of Brook Farm's purpose. In a letter to Emerson, dated Nov. 9, 1840, he states:

Our objects, as you know, are to insure a more natural union between intellectual and manual labor than now exists; to combine the thinker and the worker, as far as possible, in the same individual; to guarantee the highest mental freedom, by providing all with labor, adapted to their tastes and talents, and securing to them the fruits of their industry; to do away the necessity of menial services, by opening the benefits of education and the profits of labor to all; and thus to prepare a society of liberal intelligent, and cultivated persons, whose relations with each other would permit a more simple and wholesome life, than can be led amidst the pressure of our competitive institutions. 30
To accomplish their purpose the Brook Farmers propose to unite the "skillful husbandry" of the farm with "the most complete instruction" of a school or college (p. 6). In the above passage Ripley reveals himself to be, like Emerson, concerned with the reformation of the individual man. Writing within agrarian tradition, however, Ripley acknowledges that he and the other Brook Farmers acted in the hope of accomplishing "a great social good" (p. 7). As Ripley envisions his goal:

Our farm would be a place for improving the race of men that lived on it; thought would preside over the operation of labor, and labor would contribute to the expansion of thought; we should have industry without drudgery, and true equality without its vulgarity (p. 6).

The communal organization and eventual Fourierest plan of Brook Farm were, in some ways, the logical extension of the agrarian tradition we have been studying. For however self-reliant and independent the American husbandman was reputed to be, he was always depicted as a socially oriented man, as one who labored for the benefit of the larger community as well as for himself. As we have seen repeatedly expressed in earlier works, the success of the individual was viewed as synonymous with the success of society as a whole.

The organizers of Brook Farm approached their task with pragmatic seriousness. In order to raise capital for the agrarian venture, they proposed to place ownership of the community in a joint stock company which would issue stock at a fixed rate of interest. Two hundred and eight acres of good farmland were purchased in West Roxbury with options to buy adjoining land if expansion were deemed necessary. The leadership imposed formal structure on the project in its initial
stages with the "Articles of Association of the Subscribers to Brook Farm Institute of Agriculture and Education" (1841). This contract detailed the obligations and duties of active participants. When the development of the Association required changes in the articles, a new "Constitution of the Brook Farm Association for Industry and Education" was approved (1844). Thus we can see that the founders of Brook Farm were resolutely determined to insure the practical success of their venture.

Although some historians have dismissed the Brook Farm community as a utopian escapade of unrealistic dilettantes, Frothingham underscores the pragmatic nature of the reformers' attempts to fuse intellectual development with agrarian labor when, in his Transcendentalism in New England, he places his discussion of their efforts in his chapter, "Practical Tendencies." That at least some of the contemporary American citizenry viewed Brook Farm as a practical life style seems apparent in the following comment by an anonymous contributor to The Monthly Miscellany of Religion and Letters (May 1841):

His Rev. George Ripley's immediate object, as we understand, is the gathering of a cooperative association for the purposes of practical education. We can discover nothing chimerical or "Transcendental" in this scheme. On the contrary, it seems to us both practical and practicable. It proposes to unite the advantages of physical and intellectual development for the young, and of mental culture and healthful and economical habits for older persons, under social relations which it is thought will be peculiarly favorable to these ends.

The Brook Farmers' active and self-conscious attempts to transform the American agrarian ideal into a viable, communal life style was met with some apparent approval by their fellow Americans.
Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, although not a participating Brook Farmer herself, functioned as one of the best publicists for the community. Her series of articles in The Dial brought increased attention to the Transcendentalist farming enterprise. What Peabody emphasized in her discussion of Brook Farm was the religious and moral nature of the endeavor. In "Plan of the West Roxbury Community" Peabody announces that Brook Farm was an attempt to realize Christ's idea of a society, and that "its moral aura must be salutary" (pp. 62, 67). She comforts her readers with the observation: "As long as it lasts, it will be an example of the beauty of brotherly love" (p. 67). When Peabody elaborates upon the proposed goals of Brook Farm, she implicitly contrasts the community with the purposes of society at large:

The hours redeemed from labor by community, will not be reapplied to the acquisition of wealth, but to the production of intellectual goods. This community aims to be rich, not in the metallic representative of wealth, but in wealth itself, which money should represent: namely, LEISURE TO LIVE IN ALL THE FACULTIES OF THE SOUL. As a community, it will traffic with the world at large, in the products of agricultural labor; and it will sell education ... (pp. 64-65).

We have seen in Emerson's writings that the spiritual significance of close contact with nature was an unquestioned assumption in Transcendentalist thought. In "Plan of the West Roxbury Community" Peabody builds upon this assumption declaring the agrarian vocation to be the natural role of the reformer since it was "the most direct and simple in relation to nature" (p. 62). Unfortunately, Peabody implies, there is something wrong with farming as it is commonly practiced in America. The Brook Farmers are needed to "teach a noble lesson to the agricultural population" (p. 67). Concluding that if farmers would
learn to live their lives "with wisdom and moderation, and the labor mingled as it might be with study," they would achieve an integrated wholeness of self, and once again conform to the agrarian ideal, the Brook Farmers' attempt to serve as an inspiration to their fellow agriculturists (p. 68). In the words of an anonymous contemporary journalist, the purpose of Brook Farm was, at least in part, "to increase the attachment of the farmer to the cultivation of the soil, by showing the dignity of the pursuit and the knowledge and ability which it demands." The implication of the preceding rhetoric is that such dignity and knowledge are no longer common attributes of the American husbandman. Farmers now needed to be taught "the intelligent discharge of the duties of their calling" by intellectuals and literary men.

What George Ripley and the other reformers of Brook Farm wished to accomplish in their ideal community was nothing more than what previous writers had claimed for the real American citizenry throughout the preceding two hundred years. They wished to enjoy life on the "middle landscape" of the agricultural frontier, to combine the pleasures of rural life with the benefits of civilization. Thus the constitution describes the commune as being located in a place which combines "a convenient nearness to the city with a degree of retirement and freedom ... found in ... the country" (p. 94). That the participants genuinely attempted to combine the plowing of the fields with an appreciation for art, music, literature, and intelligent conversation is testified to by the numerous accounts of life on Brook Farm which survive. For example, The Harbinger, one of the most influential
reform periodicals of the decade, was published at the Farm. In short, as Frothingham has said, Brook Farm's greatest "harvest" was in the "ideal world" and "the most productive work was done in ... ideal fields."43

By September, 1847, the community at Brook Farm collapsed. Land and buildings were sold, but most participants suffered financial losses.44 Many suggestions have been offered to explain the demise of the commune. Some have argued that the plan was never practical to begin with, that the participants were more familiar with culture than agriculture and so the farm remained essentially unproductive.45 It might have survived in spite of this had not an uninsured fire to one of the buildings resulted in catastrophic financial losses. At the same time, major economic backers lost interest in the project and invested their money in alternative reform ventures such as Alcott's Fruitlands.46

In any case, the commune in West Roxbury did not accomplish its own articulated goals. While the participants in Brook Farm may have made, in Emerson's words, "an agreeable place to live,"47 they failed, in their own eyes, to provide American society with a truly viable model for the reformation of man and his institutions. The American agrarian ideal had somehow come to fail the test of life. Ripley was to eventually conclude that he had "no faith in external panaceas" and that he no longer believed in any "utopian ideal" except "that of contributing to the improvement of mankind by leading an upright life."48

A possible explanation for the failure of Brook Farm and the loss of faith in the agrarian ideal may be found in the letters and works of the commune's most famous resident, Nathaniel Hawthorne. Although Hawthorne was not overly optimistic about the prospects of Brook Farm
from the beginning, his letters indicate a growing disillusionment with farm life. After physically engaging in agrarian labor, Hawthorne comes to view his activity not as ennobling, but rather as a brutalizing experience. As he tells his fiancé Sophia Peabody (June 1, 1841), "It is my opinion, dearest, that a man's soul may be buried and perish under a dungheap or in a furrow of the field, just as well as under a pile of money." He adds in a subsequent letter (August 12, 1841):

Oh, belovedest, labor is the curse of this world, and nobody can meddle with it, without becoming proportionably brutified. Dost thou think it a praiseworthy matter, that I spent five golden months in providing food for cows and horses? Dearest, it is not so. Thank God, my soul is not utterly buried under a dungheap. I shall yet rescue it, somewhat defiled, to be sure, but not utterly unsuceptible of purification (p. 30).

In Chapter VIII of The Blithedale Romance (1851), "A Modern Arcadia," Hawthorne's narrator offers a possible explanation for his author's repudiation of the American agrarian ideal. As Miles Coverdale explains about the fictional agricultural community of Blithedale:

While our enterprise lay all in theory, we had pleased ourselves with delectable visions of the spiritualization of labor. It was to be our form of prayer and ceremonial of worship. Each stroke of the hoe was to uncover some aromatic root of wisdom, heretofore hidden from the sun. Pausing in the field, to let the wind exhale the moisture from our foreheads, we were to look upward, and catch glimpses into the far-off soul of truth. In this point of view, matters did not turn out quite so well as we anticipated (pp. 87-88).

The real experience of farming did not support the theoretical suppositions agrarian writers had long argued. There was little glory to be found in the field or dungheap. As Coverdale comments:
The clods of earth, which we so constantly be-labored and turned over and over, were never etherealized into thought. Our thoughts, on the contrary, were fast becoming cloddish. Our labor symbolized nothing, and left us mentally sluggish in the dusk of the evening (p. 88).

In The Blithedale Romance Hawthorne's narrator reaches a conclusion similar to the one we have previously seen Emerson express in his essay "Wealth." Coverdale charges:

Intellectual activity is incompatible with any large amount of bodily exercise. The yeoman and the scholar -- the yeoman and the man of finest moral culture, though not the man of sturdiest sense and integrity -- are two distinct individuals and can never be melted or welded into one substance (p. 88).

The division of labor and the division of Man were taking their toll on the symbol of the farmer. Still reputed to be a man of quiet, simple dignity, for Hawthorne he no longer represented the reconciliation of rural virtues with urban values. He was quite simply, nothing more than himself. Coverdale summarizes Hawthorne's view when he asserts:

The peril of our new way of life was not lest we should fail in becoming practical agriculturalists, but that we should probably cease to be anything else (p. 87). (Italics added)

As we can see, the literary potential of the American farmer was losing its power. Although the actual conditions of farm life may never have been as comforting as some earlier literary versions suggest, previous American writers had been able to find a factual basis in the widely extolled opportunities open to Americans through their ownership of the land. Reality and the literary expression of rural life had merged in profound ways. For some two hundred years the farmer had been able to symbolize the noblest goals, aspirations, and values of
In the middle of the nineteenth century Nathaniel Hawthorne tells us that he found reality and the literary tradition of the American farmer to be separate and distinct. It was not that this major American writer had not tried to believe in the ideology of the farm. Perhaps he had tried too hard. Along with his cohorts at Brook Farm, Hawthorne had literally returned to the land. He had returned to the original condition of the agrarian myth, and he had attempted to make America's most compelling vision his own way of life. When the yeoman ideal failed him in his life, Nathaniel Hawthorne responded, in The Blithedale Romance, by denying its imaginative power for his literature. He never again portrayed an agrarian literary hero.

Henry David Thoreau

One transcendentalist and major American author who had much to say about the American farmer was Henry David Thoreau. Envisioning the farmer as the reconciler of intellectual pursuits with manual labor, as the man who combined rural and urban life, Thoreau continued, in his most affirmative comments, to ascribe a superior moral, religious, economic, and political significance to the agrarian occupation. Following in the tradition of some of America's most thoughtful writers (Freneau, Crèvecœur, Cooper), Thoreau eventually qualified his affirmation by stressing the unrealized potential of the farmer.

Enormously frustrated by the narrow, self-imposed mental and moral limitations he encountered in his Concord neighbors, Thoreau, like the reformers of Brook Farm, physically returned to the soil. At Walden Pond he tried to show contemporary "cultivators" (and that included
all men) how to expand their souls into a meaningful relation with
can see that how to expand their souls into a meaningful relation with
nature and their fellow man. Along with Emerson he advocated the re-
making of the self rather than the melioration of social institutions.51
Taking his cue from his literary mentor, Thoreau, too, employed the
husbandman as a symbolic construct or metaphor for that integrated
wholeness of self he wished all men to achieve. He used the farmer to
give literary expression to what, in Thoreau's vision remained, the
fundamental values of American society.52
By his own words and actions Thoreau suggested, as did Emerson
and the reformers of Brook Farm, that at mid-century the American
agrarian ideal was in serious trouble. While popular attitudes toward
the yeoman may have remained consistent, and political propagandists
could glibly continue their affirmations, many leading American authors
revealed that they no longer found the farmer to be a compellingly
credible symbol.53 According to the writers we have been examining in
this chapter, the chasm between America's common reality and her yeoman
ideal was only too painfully apparent. What H. D. Thoreau self-
consciously did to revitalize, reconstitute, and reaffirm the myth of
the American farmer for his society and its literature will be the
subject of the remainder of this chapter.
We may begin our study of Thoreau with an examination of his early
essays. In "A Walk to Wachusett" (1842)54 Thoreau demonstrates an early
version of his lifetime literary trek westward, of his personal odyssey
of self-fulfillment.55 Encountering an agricultural village establish-
ing itself in the wilderness on this walk, Thoreau meticulously describes
the first inroads of civilization on a new frontier (p. 30). As he muses
on the meaning of the settlement Thoreau reveals his characteristic metaphorical style at work. He tells us: "So is each one's world but a clearing in the forest, so much open and enclosed ground" (p. 31). In the development of America he found each man's personal experience on a grander scale.

Returning to the process of settlement in another essay, "A Winter Walk" (1843), Thoreau praises the life which combines the beauty of nature with the arts of civilization. The farmer's "rude dwelling does not deform the scene." Thoreau tells us that the birds have made great strides in transforming the cabin into part of the natural landscape (p. 48). The smoke that curls up through the woods from an invisible farmhouse, Thoreau calls "the standard raised over some rural homestead" (p. 48). It is significant because "it is a hieroglyphic of man's life, and suggests more intimate and important things than the boiling of a pot" (p. 48). Thoreau affirms that the smoke means "human life has planted itself" and the author compares this settlement to "the beginning of Rome, the establishment of the arts, and the foundation of the empires" (p. 48). Following American literary tradition, Thoreau finds the agrarian frontier to be the place of man's highest accomplishments, where beauty in art and nature merge.

In "Paradise to be Regained" (1843) Thoreau initially denounces "how manly and grossly ... we deal with nature" (p. 60). He calls for "a nobler and finer relation to nature than we know" (p. 60). Thoreau suggests the spiritual significance of the agrarian occupation and its intimacy with the land, in this essay, when he asks American farmers if it would not be more "heroic and faithful" to "till and redeem this
New England soil of the world" instead of moving on to the Ohio Valley (p. 59).

Displaying his solid New England roots Thoreau denies that paradise may be found when "Man shall no more earn his living by the sweat of his brow" (p. 69). Important achievements must always be accomplished by industry and hard work. As American writers had claimed for over two hundred and fifty years before him, Thoreau asserts that "Industry ... is the force which stands behind every spade in the field. This it is that makes the valleys shine, and the deserts really bloom" (p. 70). In the continuing tradition of the American prophet, Thoreau predicts a moral and religious prosperity for American farmers, a prosperity which will benefit the rest of mankind as well. It will not be produced from any mechanical achievements or improvements but rather will result from a moral reform from within. Like Emerson in the earlier essays, Thoreau believes that the American soil can inspire men. Taking root in the earth, their capacities may reach toward heaven (pp. 74-75).

While Thoreau suggests in his early essays that the farmer's economic security and his self-reliant contact with the soil encourage political autonomy, his attitude becomes explicit in his more politically oriented works. In "Slavery in Massachusetts" (1854) Thoreau elaborates upon the political acumen of America's farmers. He voices the opinion that "with reference to any public question, it is more important to know what the country thinks of it than what the city thinks" (p. 136). Affirming the tradition of an intimate relation between the thoughtful exercise of political power and the agrarian
life style, Thoreau argues that when country people turn "their attention to the subject," with "a few sensible words," they manage to "redeem the reputation of the race" (p. 137). In a mood reminiscent of Philip Freneau's highest praise, Thoreau extols the democratic independence of America's rural citizenry:

When in some obscure country town, the farmers come together to a special town meeting to express their opinion on some subject which is vexing the land, that I think, is the true Congress, and the most respectable one that is ever assembled in the United States (p. 137).

In "A Plea for Captain John Brown" (1859) Thoreau establishes his subject's claim to integrity through his agrarian birthright: "He was by descent and birth a New England farmer, a man of great common sense, deliberate and practical as that class is, and tenfold more so" (p. 148). Thoreau also evokes the Cincinnatus figure of the Revolutionary writers -- the noble yeoman who threw down the plow and picked up the sword in defense of his country -- to bolster his subject's honor. The author tells his readers: "He [John Brown] was like the best of those who stood at Concord Bridge once, on Lexington Commons and on Bunker Hill, only he was firmer and higher principled than any that I chanced to hear of as there" (p. 148). In addition, Thoreau informs his readers that when John Brown left New England, he "went to the great university of the West, where he sedulously pursued the study of Liberty" (p. 148). In defending John Brown's moral stance Thoreau insists that the virtues of democratic rural life -- political autonomy and economic security as well as simplicity and dignity -- continued to be associated with the American husbandman.
With our examination of Thoreau's essays behind us, we may approach his use of the agrarian tradition in his more lengthy works. Thoreau's *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (1849), his first book length study, takes the form of a rural excursion. Rooted in nature and a physical trip, the book assumes the dimensions of a spiritual quest as the author proceeds on his journey. As Thoreau travels down a river rich in American history and lore, he counterposes the historical settlers of New England with the contemporary agrarians of his observation. Past, present, and future merge into one vision. Although filled with change and variety both in subject matter and form, the thematic centre of Thoreau's *A Week* deals with the artist's creative perception. The book's essential movement is from the author's depiction of a physical encounter with the rural environment to his self-conscious creation of mythopoeic art.

As should not be unexpected in Thoreau's journey into the rural past/present, he chooses to narrate the American story of settlement. It is one which we have seen described again and again, and for Thoreau at least, it still manages to retain excitement and power. American farmers are depicted as civilizers, as men who tame and conquer the wilderness. Thoreau looks at the contemporary landscape and determines: "The inhabitants were plainly cultivators of the earth and lived under an organized political government" (p. 60). Briefly acknowledging the accomplishments of these men Thoreau retreats into the past and images the laborious efforts of their ancestors. Like many American authors before him, he describes the clearing of the land, the planting of the town, and the construction of schools, mills and houses which have
endured (pp. 58-60).

Of course, the author indicates, man's accoutrements have not endured alone. Men also have taken root and flourished along New England's shore. Thoreau elaborates upon both the natural scenery and the people who so perfectly complement the landscape. Expressing admiration for the stability, peace, and contentment evident on the agrarian frontier, Thoreau observes that many of these farms have been in the same family for generations:

There dwelt along at considerable distances on this interval a quiet agricultural and pastoral people ... There they lived on, those few New England people, farmer lives, father and grandfather and great-grandfather, on and on without noise, keeping up tradition, and expecting, beside fair weather and abundant harvests, we did not know what (p. 266).

In another passage our traveler offers a heroic description of the "rude and sturdy, experienced and wise men" he encounters on his trip (p. 5). These farmers were in touch with nature every day of their lives, and Thoreau insists that they were "greater men than Homer, or Chaucer, or Shakespeare, only they never got time to say so; they never took to the way of writing" (p. 5). As he admires America's husbandmen Thoreau instructs his readers to:

Look at their fields, and imagine what they might write, if ever they should put pen to paper. Or what have they not written on the face of the earth already, clearing, and burning, and scratching, and harrowing, and plowing, and subsoiling, in and in, and out and out, and over and over, again and again, erasing what they had already written for want of parchments (p. 5).

Emphasizing the laborious toil of the husbandmen, Thoreau honors their energy and creativity as they subdue primitive nature.
Although Thoreau obviously appreciates the glories of the agrarian life in *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, he sometimes voices admiration for a romantic view of the primitive wilderness. He claims that his own "genius dates from an older era than the agricultural" (p. 60). In the following passage Thoreau lyrically describes ambivalent feelings toward both farming and wildness:

> 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 ... We would not always be soothing and taming Nature, breaking the horse and the ox, but sometimes ride the horse wild and chase the buffalo (p. 62).

In a later work, *The Maine Woods*, Thoreau's actual experience of the wilderness will temper his enthusiasm for it and he will acknowledge that he prefers to live on the agrarian landscape. America's untamed wilderness will continue to be presented as a vital source of inspiration for her people throughout Thoreau's literary career.

In *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* Thoreau uses the American farmer as a symbol for the integrated, wholly satisfied man. Like innumerable writers before him, Thoreau presents the merger of physical labor and intellectual stimulation in the agrarian occupation. He concerns himself with the relation between farming and writing in particular. This, too, is not a new theme in the tradition of the American farmer. The authors of *Mourt's Relation* had artfully apologized for being more fruitful with the plough than the pen, Crèvecoeur's farmer James had boasted that his toil in the fields inspired his art,
and Emerson had, at least initially, praised the tough, bold language of the husbandman. Within *A Week* Thoreau insists that he finds a substantive relationship between hard, physical labor and the art of writing:

> We are often struck by the force and precision of style to which hard-working men, unpractised in writing, easily attain, when required to make the effort. As if plainness, and vigor, and sincerity, the ornaments of style, were better learned on the farm and in the workshop than in the schools (pp. 126-27).

Thoreau determines: "steady labor with the hands, which engrosses the attention also, is unquestionably the best method of removing palaver and sentimentality out of one's style, both of speaking and writing" (p. 126). Using a specifically agrarian analogy, Thoreau goes on to argue:

> A sentence should read as if its author, had he held a plow instead of a pen, could have drawn a furrow deep and straight to the end. The scholar requires hard and serious labor to give impetus to his thought. He will learn to grasp the pen firmly so, and wield it gracefully and effectively, as an axe or a sword" (p. 127).

Thoreau finally takes his metaphorical argument to its logical conclusion when he suggests: "The scholar may be sure that he writes the tougher truth for the calluses on his palms" (p. 126). This discussion supports Thoreau's ideal of the integrated or complete man. In this author's view, agrarian labor may well serve as an inspiration to scholarly thought. (It is interesting to note that Thoreau composed *A Week* while living and farming at Walden Pond. He was attempting, at least temporarily, to put his ideas into practice.)
A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers contains Thoreau's most affirmative portrait of the common American farmer. In the antipastoral tradition of the earlier writers, Dwight, Humphreys, and Crevecoeur, Thoreau, too, explicitly contrasts the American experience with previous literary Arcadias. Yet, he does so with a difference. While Thoreau initially observes, "I have not read of any Arcadian life which surpasses the actual luxury and serenity of these New England dwellings," he adds, "For the outward gilding, at least, the age is golden enough" (p. 302; emphasis added).

Thus, this author subtly qualifies the typical blissful picture of American agrarian life by suggesting that its virtues may be only superficial. Clarifying his point of view, Thoreau explains, "If men will believe it, sua si bona nount there are no more quiet Tempes, nor more poetic and Arcadian lives, than may be lived in these New England dwellings" (p. 303; emphasis added). Although we may be oversimplifying the artist's perspective in these lines, he appears to imply that it is not the state or status of the farmer in "reality" which is most significant. Rather what men "will believe" about the American husbandman establishes his true credibility. As will perhaps become clearer in subsequent discussion, Thoreau explicitly acknowledges the mythic nature of the American literary tradition of the farmer.

Throughout A Week and indeed throughout his career Thoreau concerns himself with the artist's role in creating the fictions by which men may live. A self-conscious American writer, Thoreau was capable of expressing man's need for myth as myth: "that is, as a construction of symbols and values, derived from real and imaginary
experience and ordered by the imagination according to the deepest
needs of the psyche." In *A Week* Thoreau insists that mythology "is
the most impressive proof of a common humanity" (p. 67) and that "far
from being false or fabulous in the common sense, it contains only
enduring and essential truth" (p. 68). For a "fable" to be "naturally
and truly composed," according to Thoreau, is for it "to satisfy the
imagination, ere it addresses the understanding" (p. 65).

On Wednesday, Thoreau applies these theoretical attitudes toward
the myth of the farmer itself. Gazing at the rural landscape he
reiterates the familiar revolutionary tale of America's own Cincinnatus
figures:

Many of these heroes, like the illustrious Romans,
were plowing when the news of the massacre at
Lexington arrived, and straight-way left their
plows in the furrow, and repaired to the scene
of the action ... (p. 319).

As he observes the contemporary landscape, Thoreau's common sense leads
him to argue: "But generally speaking, the land is now, at any rate,
very barren of men, and we doubt if there are as many hundreds as
we read of" (p. 319). Remaining loyal to his suggested standard of
truth and to the role of myth in men's lives, Thoreau is prepared to
take the expansive view of New England's written history. He concludes,
"It may be that we stood too near" (p. 319). As Thoreau subsequently
explains to his readers:

We can never safely exceed the actual facts in our
narratives. Of pure invention, such as some suppose,
there is no instance. To write a true work of fic-
tion even, is only to take leisure and liberty to
describe some things more exactly as they are. A
true account of the actual is the rarest poetry,
for common sense always takes a hasty and super-
ficial view (p. 407).
As Thoreau concludes his excursion down the Concord and Merrimack Rivers, he artistically moves from a consideration of the physical "fields ... reaped and shorn of their pride" to their "inward verdue which still crowns them" (p. 473). He reminds American farmers of the spiritual nature of their calling (p. 437). Thoreau explains to his readers:

> But behind the sheaves, and under the sod, there lurks a ripe fruit, which the reapers have not gathered, the true harvest of the year, which it bears for ever, annually watering and maturing it, and man never severs the stalk which bears this palatable fruit (p. 474).

The man capable of creative perception will wrest this, the most glorious harvest, from the American soil (p. 437). At one point, Thoreau rhetorically asks: "Is not Nature rightly read, that of which she is commonly taken to be the symbol merely?" (p. 478). The hard realities of the husbandman's plowing, seeding, and harvesting provide the author with the solid basis for his mythopoeic art. In *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* the farmer and his labors grant Thoreau a structuring metaphor that bridges the gap between the world of men's actions and the world of the imagination.68

Coming to *Walden* (1854)69 after reading Thoreau's previous works might lead one to believe that the author wavers in his attitude toward the farmer. He discusses the husbandman at great length in *Walden* and includes a virtual diatribe against him. The heroic agricultural implements of the essays and *A Week* are transformed in *Walden* into the unfortunate trappings of a prison and the tools with which men dig their own early graves (pp. 2-3). Thoreau uses *Walden* to tell us that there
is something very wrong with farming as it is practiced in America. He appears convinced that the husbandmen have betrayed themselves and American society by forfeiting the satisfying wholeness that is their agrarian birthright. Acting in the same reforming tradition as the participants at Brook Farm, Thoreau conducts his own experiment, and in Walden, for a limited period of time, self-consciously takes the agrarian role upon himself in order to infuse it with its proper practical and symbolic meaning.

When we read Thoreau's statements about the farmer in Walden carefully, we see that the author does not change his attitude toward the potential of the American husbandman to live a wholly satisfying life. Rather, he is dismayed to see that rich potential thwarted and betrayed. He tells us:

Ancient poetry and mythology suggest, at least that husbandry was once a sacred art: but it is pursued with irreverent haste and heedlessness by us, our object being to have large farms and large crops merely (p. 137).

The fear that money and material well-being might become its own justification, a fear hinted at in the works of Freneau, Crèvecoeur, and Dwight, and more dramatically expressed in Irving's sketches and Cooper's novels, is stridently resounded on page after page of Thoreau's Walden. American farmers have lost the sacredness of their profession. They have the unique opportunity to labor intimately with nature and receive divine inspiration from the soil. Instead, they know nature only as its "robber." Thoreau continues:
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 (p. 137).

Thoreau categorizes degraded American husbandmen into two economic classes: those who have succeeded commercially and those who have failed. Whether the farmers prosper financially or not, they are, for the most part, morally and spiritually bankrupt. No longer representing what is admirable in the American character, they instead demonstrate the perversion of self-reliance and self-interest.

In strong language Thoreau tells us that the so-called model farm "stands like fungus in a much-heap" (p. 164). Its "fields bear no crops," its "meadows no flowers," its "trees no fruits, but dollars." The cultivator of the model farm feels no privilege to behold the beauty of nature, "his fruits are not ripe for him till they are turned to dollars" (p. 164). Thoreau judges the materially prosperous farmer quite harshly:

I respect not his labors, his farm where everything has its price, who would carry the landscape, who would carry his God, to market, if he could get anything for him; who goes to market for his god as it is (p. 164).

Interested only in money, the most successful of these breed of gentleman farmers have lost all vestiges of a close contact with nature. Their millions are gained through hired lackeys who rape the soil and the pond (p. 246). Thoreau insists, the farmers' fields are "under a high state of cultivation, being manured with the hearts and brains of men!" (p. 164).
In Thoreau's vision, those who fail economically have no moral or spiritual superiority over their more prosperous competitors. Inherited encumbrances have made them mere "serfs of the soil" (p. 2). The author pictures America's poverty-stricken farmers as "poor immortal souls" who are "well-nigh crushed and smothered" by their burden as they go "creeping down the road of life," pushing huge "Augean stables" before them (p. 3). Using the John Fields of Baker Farm to illustrate his case, Thoreau reveals how with a blind commitment to a mortgaged farm, the poor husbandmen hope, one day, to improve their condition (p. 171). Instead, Thoreau reasons, these "men labor under a mistake. The better part of man is soon plowed into the soil for compost" (p. 3).

As Thoreau tells his readers, "It makes but little difference whether committed to a farm or the country jail" (p. 68). "The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation" (p. 15). Losing all joy in an intimate contact with nature they become "the tools of their tools" and view labor in the fields as drudgery. This drudgery brutalizes men and makes them insensitive to the "finer fruits" of life. They have "not the leisure for a true integrity" and manly relations suffer accordingly (p. 34). Looking about him on the rural landscape, Thoreau concludes that the typical American husbandman "has no time to be anything but a machine;" he is so tied down to the earth and material considerations that he can no longer soar spiritually. In short, he has "forgotten heaven" (p. 29).
In spite of his loud and repetitive condemnation of the American husbandman's failures, Thoreau continues to insist that the agrarian profession subsumes the potential for a fulfilling, noble life. Indeed, Thoreau affirms that it is still possible for man to regain his ancient dignity as an American farmer. In *Walden* he reveals this optimism in three major ways. First, in his chapter "Higher Laws," Thoreau articulates the fable of John Farmer. As he listens to the sounds of the melodious flute, this physically tired yeoman opens himself to spiritual experience and joins in a new harmony with nature. Allowing "his mind to descend into his body and redeem it," John Farmer encounters a new, "glorious existence" (p. 186). He recognizes that he does not have to "live this mean, moiling life" (p. 186). In Thoreau's view the possibility for self-purification was open to all. John Farmer serves as a symbolic agrarian everyman.

In addition, in his chapter, "Winter Visitors," Thoreau mentions the visit of "a long-headed farmer, who from far through the woods sought my house, to have a social crack" (p. 223). Thoreau describes the old gentleman as "one of the few of his vocation who are men on their farms" (p. 223). He exemplified the potential all American farmers possessed to lead a fully integrated, satisfying life. Thoreau tells us that this farmer "donned a frock instead of a professor's gown and is as ready to extract the moral out of church or state as to haul a load of manure from his barnyard" (p. 223). In his ability to synthesize intellectual pursuits with manual labor, this old husbandman is a reminder "of rude and simple times" (p. 223), of previous ages when American writers found reality and the agrarian
ideal more closely aligned. Thoreau implies that his winter visitor could still provide contemporary American husbandmen with a worthy example to emulate.

Finally, *Walden* is about Thoreau's personal attempt to achieve a wholeness of being and it is his embracing of the agrarian role that ultimately allows him to fuse intellectual faculties with manual labor. Taking the agrarian role upon himself Thoreau uses it to search for the way to the truly civilized life, the life at peace with nature and man. Thoreau, as an American husbandman, tries to cut through the superficialities that have prevented men from recognizing the sacred origin of their profession. The natural rhythm of the seasons, and the feel of the soil inspire him; his work is no longer drudgery. Instead, he becomes a creative artist "making the earth say beans instead of grass" (p. 129). As he learns to "know" and "love" beans Thoreau is transformed into a contemporary Antaeus. He participates in an exciting epic adventure (pp. 128-29).

Of course, Thoreau's experience is more than literary. To underline the physical reality of his experience, Thoreau describes his construction of his homestead and his labor in the fields in concrete detail. Lists of the specific articles used are included with precise prices and measurements quoted (pp. 38-50; 128-38). Like earlier American writers, farmer Thoreau does not describe himself lolling about in pastoral ease. Farming has always been described in American literature as a rigorous and tough occupation. Thoreau describes how he plants, hoes, harvests, threshes, picks over, and sells his beans, achieving economic independence and political autonomy as the result of
his labor (p. 133). "I was more independent than any farmer in Concord," he tells us (p. 45).

Because he limits his crops and does not over-expend his energy, Thoreau has the time and the desire to pursue self-integrity. Work in the fields does not preclude development of the mind. His most intimate companions are books (pp. 81-90), and he spends much time writing. He has the time for leisure and the time to be truly civilized in nature. Thoreau sees his field as "the connecting link between wild and cultivated fields" (p. 130). As a farmer, he is the connecting link between frontier pioneers and urban city dwellers. Like the long line of his authorial predecessors, Thoreau does not advocate total isolation. He tries "to live a primitive and frontier life, though in the midst of an outward civilization" and the effect of that civilization is everywhere present (p. 8). Although he enjoys his solitude, he entertains frequent visitors and makes numerous trips into town and to other homesteads. Thoreau pursues his freedom in the context of the larger society. In short, he becomes the embodiment of the American agrarian ideal.

That Thoreau believed his experience had meaning for his fellow citizens is affirmed in the social act, the creation of Walden as literature. Numerous critics have observed that Thoreau was fundamentally a humanist. What interested him most was the moral question of how men should live. As he looked about him at contemporary American society he saw things askew. He wished to again set right the relations among man, society, and nature. And thus when Thoreau crows with success in Walden he is, like previous American literary farmers we have seen, crowing not for himself alone, but for society as well.
While *Walden* has been termed "a modern epic on farming," it is perhaps more accurately described as a new type of agricultural handbook. For Thoreau self-consciously attempts to instruct his neighbors. Of course, he writes as an artist, not as a social scientist or economist. The principle message Thoreau brings back to the people of Concord is one rich in biblical resonance:

> In proportion as he simplifies his life, the laws of the universe will appear less complex, and solitude will not be solitude, nor poverty poverty, nor weakness weakness (p. 270).

At the conclusion of *Walden* Thoreau abandons the literal role of farmer and returns to Concord. He tells us:

> I left the woods for as good a reason as I went there. Perhaps it seemed to me that I had several more lives to live, and could not spare any more time for that one (p. 269).

While Thoreau may actually have abandoned the agrarian life style, as Leo Stoller has claimed, because he recognized that his ideal of subsistence farming was no longer economically feasible, it is possible to take the author at his literal word. The most important "other life" that H. D. Thoreau had to live was that of poet and artist. His agrarian apprenticeship had served its creative purpose. Early in *Walden* Thoreau asks:

> Who knows but if men constructed their dwellings with their own hands, and provided food for themselves and families simply and honestly enough, the poetic faculty would be universally developed, as birds universally sing when they are so engaged (p. 36).

During the course of the book he finds his answer.
The life of subsistence farming has served as a means to creative perception. Secure with his own knowledge of cultivation, got from the rude earth, Thoreau hopes to plant not beans and corn next summer, but rather, "such seeds, if the seed is not lost, as sincerity, truth, simplicity, faith, innocence and the like, and see if they will not grow in this soil, even with less toil and manurance, and sustain me, for surely it has not been exhausted for these crops" (p. 135). What Thoreau is most concerned with and what he wishes to inspire in his fellow Americans is the need to raise "a new generation of men" (p. 136). He tells us, "Instead of noblemen, let us have noble villages of men" (p. 90).

As in A Week, Thoreau ultimately uses the husbandman to make a symbolic statement in Walden. The myth of the American farmer -- the story of the man who was able to live a spiritually, physically, and materially satisfying life, to combine the values of the city with the virtues of the country -- while perhaps no longer offering men a truly viable life style, could still, according to Thoreau, provide men with a credible fiction by which they could guide their actions. The metaphorical and symbolic possibilities for self-cultivation were open to everyone.

After pursuing Thoreau's literary treatment of the farmer through an examination of his essays, A Week, and Walden, we may find a reading of a selection of representative passages from his Journal to be most enlightening. Some critics have viewed Thoreau's Journal not merely as a writer's notebook, as a source mined for the riches of his more public works, but rather as his most important literary achievement. The composition of his Journal represents a life-time of creative perception.
Selecting, ordering and reshaping his experience into meaningful patterns, Thoreau employs wit, humor, and strikingly powerful imagery in this, his most private literary work. What is most important to our study is that Thoreau often articulates impressions about both American farmers and their potential to inspire literary treatment within the pages of his Journal.

As we have seen in Walden, at some points during his career, Thoreau expresses derision for the agrarian vocation. Voicing concern about the narrow limitations of his neighboring farmers, he writes in his Journal: "I must not lose any of my freedom by being a farmer and landholder. Most who enter on any profession are doomed men. The world might as well sing a dirge over them forthwith. The farmer's muscles are rigid. He can do one thing long, not many well. His pace seems determined henceforth: he never quickens it. A very rigid Nemesis is his fate" c27 March 1841 (p. 287).

At other times in his career, Thoreau expresses the contradictory idea that farmers are indeed the caretakers of all that is most noble and honorable in American society. Articulating fears that the country is "going to seed," Thoreau worries that "none of the farmer's sons are willing to be farmers" c27 Jan. 1852 (pp. 58-59). As he explains his meaning Thoreau grimaces that many of America's young were no longer willing to make the laborious sacrifices demanded of a spiritually prosperous life close to nature. Thoreau observes:
I say, standing there and seeing these things, I cannot realize that this is that hopeful young America which is famous throughout the world for its activity and enterprise, and this is the most thickly settled and Yankee part of it. What must be the condition of the old world! (pp. 58-59).

America had long been known as the land of promise and had long looked upon herself as the moral example for the rest of mankind. If men lived only for their own narrow interests in America, if the New Worldeers had allowed relations between men to deteriorate into selfishness and self-interest merely, then the fate of the rest of the world must be dismal indeed. Thoreau suggests that the symbol of the farmer had helped America achieve her moral prominence and could continue to do so if men would open their eyes, minds, and hearts to the honorable agrarian examples around them.

In men like George Minott and Cyrus Hubbard (the sources for the old farmer of Walden) Thoreau finds living testimonies of the rich possibilities of the agrarian vocation. As he writes in his Journal:

Minott is, perhaps, the most poetical farmer - who most realizes to me the poetry of the farmer's life - that I know. He does nothing with haste and drudgery, but as if he loved it. He makes the most of his labor, and takes infinite satisfaction in every part of it. He is not looking forward to the sale of his crops or any pecuniary profit, but he is paid by the constant satisfaction which his labor yields him. He has not too much land to trouble, - too much work to do, - no hired man nor boy, - but simply to amuse himself and live. He cares not so much to raise a large crop as to do his work well. He knows every pin and nail in his barn. If another linter is to be floored, he lets no hired man rob him of that amusement, but goes slowly to the woods and, at his leisure, selects a pitch pine tree, cuts it, and hauls it or gets it hauled to the mill; and so he knows the history of his barn floor [4 October 1851] (pp. 31-32).
This farmer is in harmony with himself and nature. Thoreau's highest testimony to this American agrarian occurs when he confesses: "Minott adorns whatever part of nature he touches; whichever way he walks he transfigures the earth for me" [6 November 1857] (p. 32).

Much the same is true of Thoreau's attitude toward Cyrus Hubbard. This "old pale-faced farmer" Thoreau confides to his Journal is "a man of 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" [11 December 1856] (p. 33).

Thoreau adds, "The old farmer condescends to countenance still this nature and order of things. It is a great encouragement that an honest man makes this world his abode" (p. 33). Thus Minott and Hubbard provide Thoreau with examples of how a moral life should be led. In some ways they live their lives fulfilling the demands Thoreau makes of poetry and fable.

The vision of husbandmen laboring in the fields alone before God and the universe has long inspired this country's creative artists. In his Journal entry for 17 August 1851, Thoreau includes an extended passage concerned with the harvesting of the meadows. Portraying the farmers' tremendous labors in simple, elemental, but at the same time bold and imaginative terms, Thoreau writes:

> For six weeks or more this has been the farmer's work, to shave the surface of the fields and meadows clean. This is done all over the country. The razor is passed over these parts of nature's face the country over. A thirteenth labor which methinks would have broken the back of Hercules, would have given him a memorable sweat accomplished with what sweating and scythes and early and late! ... To shave all
the fields and meadows of New England clean!
If men did this but once, and not every year,
we should never hear the last of that labor
(pp. 163-64).

Thoreau finds in the husbandman's labors the original source of myth.

He continues:

Early and late the farmer has gone forth with
his formidable scythe, weapon of time, Time's
weapon, and fought the ground inch by inch.
It is the summer's enterprise. And if we were
a more poetic people, horns would be blown to
celebrate its completion. There might be a
Haymaker's Day. New England's peaceful battles
(p. 164).

Its annual occurrence allows us to take the toil of the harvest for granted.
Instead, Thoreau insists, we should remain in awe of what man can
accomplish and celebrate his feat with appropriate testimonials. Thoreau
finds a rich source of inspiration on the agrarian landscape. Creative
perception of even common activities, such as Thoreau demonstrates in
this passage on the harvest, reveals the godlike potential of man. In
the author's view such activities deserve to be mythologized.

Within his Journal Thoreau explores this need for creative percep-
tion in detail. In one extended passage he contrasts the agrarian
ideal as it has been imagined in the hearts and minds of literary men
with the bitter reality sometimes found in life [3 October 1859].
Thoreau initially acknowledges "how all poets have idealized the
farmer's life" and "what graceful figures and worthy characters they
have assigned to them ... serene as the sky, emulating nature with
their calm and peaceful lives" (p. 282). Admitting his own tendency
to idealize rural life Thoreau confesses:
When I see only the roof of a house above the woods and do not know whose it is, I presume that one of the worthies of the world dwells beneath it, and for a season I am exhilarated by the thought (p. 282).

The sight of smoke rising from a rural cabin excites Thoreau's imagination and he conjures up pleasant associations:

It "the smoke" suggests all of the domestic harmony beneath. There beneath, we suppose, that life is lived of which we have only dreamed. In our minds we clothe each unseen inhabitant with all the success, with all the serenity, which we can conceive of. If old, we imagine him serene; if young, hopeful. Nothing can exceed the perfect peace which reigns there ... There we suspect no coarse haste or bustle, but serene labors which proceed at the same pace with the declining day ... Why are distant valleys, why lakes, why mountains in the horizon, ever fair to us? Because we realize for a moment that they may be the home of man, and that man's life may be in harmony with them (p. 281).

Thoreau counters this obvious idealization with the thought that we "forever delude ourselves" (p. 281). If we were to actually venture into these same rural homesteads we would find real despair as the result of "haggard poverty and harassing debt:"

To go into an actual farmer's family at evening, is to see the tired laborers come in from their day's work thinking of their wages, the sluttish help in the kitchen and sink-room, the indifferent stolidity and patient misery which only the spirits of the youngest children rise above (p. 282).

As Thoreau concludes his account of the unhappiness one may find on the agrarian frontier his prose assumes the vehemence and outrage of some of the "slice of life" narratives of America's later realists. Returning again to the sight of the same rural roof with its rising smoke,
Thoreau complains:

When I look down on that roof I am not reminded of the mortgage which the village bank has on that property; that that family long since sold itself to the devil and wrote the deed with their blood. I am not reminded that the old man I see in the yard is one who has lived beyond his calculated time, whom the young one is merely "carrying through" in fulfillment of his contract; that the man at the pump is watering the milk. I am not reminded of the idiot that sits by the kitchen fire (pp. 282-83).

Obviously, Thoreau is not oblivious to the hard social, economic, political, and moral realities of his age, to the disruptive forces on the agricultural landscape which prevent the agrarian ideal from being fully realized in life. In Walden he summarizes this situation with the observation, "The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation" (p. 5). In his Journal we see that Thoreau personally transcends the problems of American society through his role as an artist. The creation of myth and fable, as we have seen previously in A Week, allows Thoreau to respond to the challenge of mid-century America with an expansive and energizing view.

Conceiving of himself as an American writer, Thoreau roots himself in the soil of the New World and attempts to articulate an intense vision of how the moral life could be lived in this country. As he claims in his Journal, "If a man is rich and strong anywhere it must be on his native soil. Here I have been these forty years learning the language of these fields that I may better express myself [1857] (p. 321). In another passage he expresses his vision of America in the literal "language of the fields" and he concretizes his own chosen role as that of a spiritual cultivator of himself and other men. "It is
always harvest time with me," he writes. Thoreau continues:

I am always gathering my crop from these woods and fields and waters, and no man is in my way or interferes with me. My crop is not their crop... I am a reaper; I am not a gleaner. I go reaping, cutting as broad a swath as I can, and bundling and stacking up and carrying it off from field to field... The farmer has always come to the field after some material thing; that is not what a philosopher goes there for (13 October 1857).

Since "the poet has made the best roots in his native soil of any man," Thoreau implies that he could teach his neighbors a noble lesson (p. 321). Not to be satisfied with facts that address merely the common sense is the goal. As Thoreau confides to his Journal:

My facts shall be falsehoods to the common sense. I would so state facts that they shall be significant, shall be myths or mythologic. Facts which the mind perceived, thoughts which the body thought, - with these I deal (p. 325).

The transforming power of the poet's vision, his mode of perception and expression, could turn subjective facts as well as those drawn from nature into symbol and myth, into a language which had meaning for all men and all time. The imagination requires a long range," Thoreau is fond of saying, and he desires that men live in touch with their imagination (8 December 1859) (p. 239).

In his Journal the artist shifts his focus on the literary tradition of the farmer from physical communion with nature to the realm of consciousness. That the contemporary farmer does not always fulfill the literary agrarian ideal does not diminish that ideal as a worthy code by which to live. According to Thoreau, the very mythology of the farmer could itself continue to inspire men. As Sherman Paul so aptly phrases the artist's concern, in another context, "For Thoreau..."
end of life was not to gather fruit but like it to become ripe oneself" (p. 82).

Two of Thoreau's posthumous works, The Maine Woods (1864) and Cape Cod (1864) were not edited, in their final form, by their author. The texts were derived from a selection of Thoreau's Journal entries along with some previously published articles. Both works function more as anthologies than book length studies. They require at least mention in our examination of Thoreau because the author uses them to affirm and in some ways elucidate his earlier expressed ideas.

Thus in the "Ktaadn" piece of The Maine Woods Thoreau initially insists that the American Dream continues alive and well in the Maine wilderness. He argues that the poverty-stricken of the cities could, if they would only travel up to this new frontier, raise themselves from rags to riches in a place "where land virtually costs nothing, and houses only the labor of building" (p. 18). Thoreau narrates his personal encounter with the process of settlement, that archetypal American experience (pp. 18-21). Like Emerson in "The Young American" Thoreau, too, is inspired by a vision of America's vast and bountiful resources. He sees the future promise of America as continuing to reside in the land. Thoreau explains:

I am reminded by my journey how exceedingly new this country still is ... If Columbus was the first to discover the islands, Americus Vespucius and Cabot, and the Puritans, and we their descendants, have discovered only the shores of America. While the republic has already acquired a history worldwide, America is still unsettled and unexplored. Like the English in New Holland, we live only on the shores of a continent even yet, and hardly know where the rivers come from which float our navy. The very timber and boards and
shingles of which our houses are made, grew but yesterday in a wilderness where the Indian still hunts and the moose runs wild (pp. 106-07).

Thoreau modifies some of his earlier praise for the primitive wilderness in the "Chesuncook" essay of The Maine Woods. Personal experience leads him to recognize that while men could ideally love the wilderness for itself, instead many journey there for base or coarse motives (p. 156). Furthermore, after plunging into untamed and "unbroken pine forests" himself, Thoreau admits:

Nevertheless, it was a relief to get back to our smooth, but still varied landscape. For a permanent residence, it seemed to me that there could be no comparison between this and the wilderness, necessary as the latter is for a resource and a background, the raw material of all our civilization (p. 203).

According to Thoreau, the wilderness provides inspiration and energy for the development of mankind, but the middle landscape of the agrarian frontier remains the essential location for the secure and peaceful life.

In Cape Cod (1864) Thoreau demonstrates his ardent, life-long interest in his New England heritage. He had previously made New England history come alive for his readers in A Week and several of his essays by reflecting it through the prism of his artistic consciousness. Once again, in Cape Cod, Thoreau culls earlier documents for the imaginative power they yield. In addition, this transcendentalist author reveals a self-conscious identification with previous American literary tradition.

In the sketch "Provincetown" Thoreau compares what Puritan authors wrote about the fertility of the Cape with the results of his own investigation. He concludes:
I cannot but think that we must make some allowance for the greenness of the Pilgrims in these matters, which caused them to see green. We do not believe that the trees were large or the soil was deep here ... They saw literally, as well as figuratively, but one side of the Cape. They naturally exaggerated the fairness and attractiveness of the land, for they were glad to get to any land at all after that anxious voyage (p. 297).

According to Thoreau, the Pilgrims saw what they were prepared to see. He thus suggests that America's earliest writers imposed their own creative perception on the reality they encountered. (Perhaps, he finds the roots of his own literary technique in these works.)

In addition, in Cape Cod Thoreau compares the Pilgrims of history with contemporary American pioneers. Unlike the modern backwoodsman, Thoreau concludes, the Pilgrims were more interested in preserving the institutions of family and church than in conquering the wilderness. He adds: "Nevertheless, the Pilgrims were pioneers and the ancestors of pioneers, in a far greater enterprise" (p. 300). It was this "greater enterprise," this spiritual conquest of the New World, which primarily interested Thoreau. Sharing a reverence for the spiritual with his ancestors, Thoreau tries to preserve it through his affirmation of the American agrarian myth. At one point in Cape Cod Thoreau comments: "It brought me nearer to the Pilgrims to be thus reminded by a similar experience that I was so like them" (p. 109).

As we explore Cape Cod along with Henry David Thoreau, we read this major American writer, in turn, reading and responding to the literature of an earlier America. Thoreau brings this dissertation full circle as he incorporates the people and events of John Smith's A True Description of New England, Mourt's Relation, and Samuel Bradford's Of Plymouth
Plantation, seventeenth-century American writings which we have discussed in Chapter 2, into the text of his own work (pp. 263, 293, 298). Thoreau searches for the meaning of his own experience in an intimate contact with nature and in an imaginative encounter with the authors of his national past. In the tradition of the American farmer he finds both a structuring metaphor for his life and a mythic measure of continuity with his literary heritage.

It is appropriate for us to conclude our discussion of Thoreau with the posthumously published essay "Walking" (1862) because this work contains a deliberately self-conscious affirmation of the literary tradition of the American farmer. Within "Walking" Thoreau testifies to his awareness of previous tradition, acknowledges the limitations of the present on the agrarian ideal, and prophesies a satisfying future for America if her citizens will once again embrace the agrarian myth. As in his earlier works, Thoreau's use of the farmer moves from the world of men and activities to the world of the mind and imagination. For this Transcendentalist artist it is the spiritual "cultivation" of men which finally becomes most significant.

In "Walking" Thoreau acknowledges that America has been identified as the land of agrarian promise. "As a true patriot," he tells us, "I should be ashamed to think that Adam in paradise was more favorably situated on the whole than the backwoodsman in this country" (p. 208). Indeed, sounding very much like the authors of America's original promotion tracts, works with which he was familiar, Thoreau rhetorically asks:
Where on the globe can there be found an area of equal extent with that occupied by the bulk of our states, so fertile, and so rich and varied in its productions, and at the same time so habitable by the European, as this is? (pp. 205-06).

There is, Thoreau implies, no other place which can match America.

The common American farmer is, of course, the rightful inheritor of this country's boundless resources. Like many writers before him, Thoreau insists that America's husbandmen are not mere primitives but highly civilized and at the same time natural men:

It is said to be the task of the American to work the virgin soil and that agriculture here already assumes proportions unknown everywhere else. I think that the farmer displaces the Indian even because he redeems the meadow, and so makes himself stronger and in some respects more natural (p. 213).

Thoreau goes on to suggest that the benefits of this redemptive conquest of the wilderness are achieved not for the farmer alone, but for his posterity and all American society as well:

The weapons with which we have gained our most important victories, which should be handed down as heirlooms from father to son, are not the sword and the lance, but the bushwhack, the turf-cutter, the spade, the bog hoe, rusted with the blood of many a meadow, and begrimed with the dust of many a hard-fought field (p. 213).

While the major thematic metaphor of this essay is, of course, Thoreau's westward walk, he locates his original starting point on the middle landscape of the agrarian frontier, in that region between unconquered wilderness and decadent civilization. He explains:
Let me live where I will, on this side is the city, on that the wilderness, and ever I am leaving the city more and more, and withdrawing into the wilderness. I should not lay so much stress on this fact, if I did not believe that something like this is the prevailing tendency of my countrymen. I must walk toward Oregon, and not toward Europe. And that way the nation is moving, and I may say that mankind progress from east to west (p. 206).

Thoreau thus suggests themes we have seen repeated again and again in previous works -- "translatio studii" and "translatio imperii" -- the westward movement of the arts and empires, first to the eastern shore of America and now to her western-most regions. While the westward progress of America, that is the political idea of manifest destiny, was a hackneyed cliché in Thoreau's time, his use of the metaphor retains imaginative power. He concludes "Walking" with the following hopeful vision:

So we saunter toward the Holy Land, till one day the sun shall shine more brightly than ever he has done, shall perchance shine into our minds and hearts, and light up our whole lives with a great awakening light, as warm and serene-and golden as on a bankside in autumn (p. 226).

As America continues to "go westward into the future" (p. 205) Thoreau insists that the wilderness be preserved as a source of continual inspiration. Using the examples of the past homes of the arts and empires he asserts:

The civilized nations Greece, Rome, England -- have been sustained by the primitive forests which anciently rotted where they stand. They survive as long as the soil is not exhausted. Alas for human culture! little is to be expected of a nation, when the vegetable mould is exhausted, and it is compelled to make manure of the bones of its fathers (p. 212).

Later, Thoreau clarifies his meaning with additional agrarian imagery:
I would not have every man nor every part of man cultivated, any more than I would have every acre of earth cultivated: part will be tillage, but the greater part will be meadow and forest, not only serving an immediate use, but preparing a mould against a distant future, by the annual decay of the vegetation which it supports (p. 219).

This point of view is most succinctly summarized when Thoreau tells us: "In wilderness is the preservation of the world" (p. 209).

In articulating his vision of America as the land of the agrarian ideal, as the countryside where the primitive and the civilized are reconciled, Thoreau tells us that such a place "is fitted to raise not only corn and potatoes, but poets and philosophers for the coming age" (p. 212). Again in his essay "Walking" as he had done in A Week, Walden, and his Journal, Thoreau argues that rural life inspires his art. He moves his consideration of the agrarian ideal from life to literature. Looking forward to a literature "which gives expression to Nature," Thoreau tells us that its author would be one who "nailed words to their primitive senses, as farmers drive down stakes in the spring" and one who "transplanted words to his page with earth adhering to their roots; whose words were so true and fresh and natural that they would appear to expand like the buds at the approach of spring" (p. 214). The husbandman and his labors here provide Thoreau with a powerful concretization of the style of art he demanded as well as the way he believed a moral life should be led.

In his writings, Thoreau invests the agrarian way of life with mythic power. Like earlier American writers he continues to find economic, political, spiritual and religious significance in the figure of the farmer. To this extent he preserves earlier American
literary tradition. Somewhat nostalgic about the past when the farmer could by himself define the highest goals, inspirations, and values of American society, Thoreau is sympathetic to that vision of his country which sees the yeoman as the guardian of America's rights and freedoms.

The increasing industrialization, the growth of urbanism, and the impressive material prosperity of trade and commercial interests effected many changes in mid-nineteenth-century American society. As a result of these changes Thoreau comes to believe that the potential of the husbandman to live a richly fulfilled life has been thwarted and betrayed. Along with Emerson and the reformers of Brook Farm, Thoreau decides that his contemporary farmers need to be taught a noble lesson. At Walden Pond he tries to show his neighbors how to once again live the agrarian ideal.

When Thoreau eventually abandons the agrarian life style he admits, at least tacitly, that economic reality and America's most compelling literary expression of rural life could no longer be fused. Like Emerson, Hawthorne, and the other reformers of Brook Farm, Thoreau acknowledges the divorce between reality and the ideal. Unlike these other writers, however, Thoreau goes on to consciously embrace the ideal for the inspiration it continues to provide for both his literature and his life.

As a literary artist Thoreau self-consciously recognizes the mythic quality of the tradition he writes in. Indeed, he articulates man's deep need for myth, for fictions to live by, when, in "Walking," he tells his readers:
Perchance, when, in the course of ages American liberty has become a fiction of the past, -- as it is to some extent a fiction of the present -- the poets of the world will be inspired by American mythology (p. 215).

This Transcendentalist poet had already been inspired by the myth. For Henry David Thoreau the American mythology of freedom continued to reside most profoundly in the figure of the American farmer.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter we have seen the agrarian world drastically altered. As the result of the revolution in transportation, America's traditional subsistence farmers were transformed, almost overnight, into agricultural entrepreneurs. Except for unusual or isolated cases, the independent husbandman virtually disappeared by 1860. Engaging in commercial agriculture, American farmers were now subject to the vagaries of the market place; they became mere cogs in the giant machine of national trade and commerce. Consequently, many of the traditional underpinnings of the agrarian ideal were rendered obsolete.

The times demanded a revised conception of the agrarian myth, but American writers and the general populace were slow to respond. Farmers continued to be extolled in the conventional terms of the agrarian ideal. Praise for the moral and religious superiority of the husbandman, praise begun in the earliest stages of settlement, was continued in this era. The farmer's political autonomy and economic security, qualities attributed to him in the Revolutionary past when they were perhaps more appropriate, were also repeated. Authors honored the husbandman as the staunch supporter of democratic tradition, as a man of honesty, integrity and intellectual acumen. Encapsulating
what many Americans still perceived to be their highest aspirations and goals, the farmer survived as a concrete symbol of what was supposed to be the American way of life. 92

As we have seen in previous chapters, the farmer figure had aided American authors in their efforts to give literary expression to fundamental ways of life and values of their society for some two hundred and thirty years. Having long represented the combination of manual labor with intellectual pursuits, the reconciliation of rural virtue with urban values, the farmer provided literary Transcendentalists with an obvious symbolic choice for celebration. Early in his career Emerson used the farmer as a symbolic construct or metaphor for that idealized integration of self he wished all men to acquire. In the case of the Brook Farmers, as we have seen, intellectualized subsistence farming was initially thought to be a viable life style. Eventually, however, Emerson and the people of the West Roxbury commune were forced to reach a similar conclusion. They found reality and the literary tradition of the American farmer to be separate and distinct. By arguing that the symbolic husbandman no longer reflected American experience these authors threatened to sever the agrarian myth from its roots in American ideology. They signalled the possible end of a literary tradition.

Like his literary colleagues at the mid-point of the nineteenth century, Thoreau, too, came to recognize an obvious divorce between America's agrarian ideal and her common reality. Acting in the same reforming tradition as the participants of Brook Farm, he tried to return to the original condition of the agrarian myth, to recapture
the husbandman's intimacy with the land. Through his personal experience Thoreau learned that despite the compelling nature of the vision, his country had grown too diverse and complex to be contained within the symbol of the farmer. Thoreau himself had to leave the agrarian life at Walden Pond. And yet, even with its limitations, Thoreau discovered new sources of vitality and energy in America's agrarian myth.

The figure of the farmer continued to provide Thoreau with a structuring metaphor for an idealized integration of self. In addition, through his familiarity with his literary heritage, Thoreau detected in the husbandman a vibrant link with the archetypal and historic experience of his people. The farmer brought this author a spiritual intimacy with his national past. For Thoreau, the greatest power of the agrarian myth, however, lay in its ability to act as an intellectual or artistic construct, a bridge between the world of affairs and the world of the imagination.

Leo Marx has noted Thoreau's pivotal position in the "pastoral tradition" of American literature. Marx argues that Thoreau's major contribution was to remove the "pastoral hope" from history "where it is manifestly unrealizable" and relocate it in literature which is "its traditional location."93 I would like to suggest that while Thoreau was obviously concerned with artistic creation, and while he recognized the literary quality of myth, his deepest commitment was to the world of men and to the moral problem of how they should live. In self-consciously attempting to revitalize, reconstitute, and reaffirm the American agrarian myth, he tried to create a credible fiction by which men could live. Thoreau did not advocate values of
the agrarian ideal. He demonstrated that the possibilities for self-cultivation remained open to everyone.

Afterword

After Thoreau came the Civil War, and neither American society nor the farmer was ever the same again. The War completed the North's march toward industrialization and the commercialization of agriculture. It changed the literary climate of the nation as well. The major literary movement of the post-War era was, of course, realism. Even a brief review suggests that the farmer played a substantial role in the literary material of American Realists.

Before we discuss the husbandman's position in American literary realism, it is interesting to reflect back upon our findings on James Fenimore Cooper. In the last chapter we saw Cooper swing from a blissful affirmation of the agrarian ideal to a searing, bitter, denunciation of the farmer. Since the author's attitudes were largely the result of his personal situation, and since most of his contemporaries continued to extol the farmer, Cooper appeared somewhat eccentric. Yet the importance of a major American writer rejecting the American farmer and repudiating this cornerstone of American ideology was insisted upon, because it revealed that the agrarian myth was vulnerable to attack. As we approach the post-Civil War realists, Cooper's vision appears to have been prophetic.

American realists spent much time articulating their theoretical literary goals. What is perhaps most important in their discussions is that these writers viewed themselves as abandoning the explicitly prescriptive or normative literature of their predecessors. No
longer was the literary impulse directed toward portraying an idealized "Man" or proselytizing for the way men ought to live. Instead, these authors attempted to depict "men as they actually were," which is to say as the realists saw them. In the writings of Eggleston, Howe, Garland, De Forest, Frederic and others, we can see an extensive literary exploration of the reverse side of the American agrarian ideal, that is the agrarian reality.

These American authors took a long hard look at the world of the post-Civil War farmer, and what they chose to profile were images of dullness, futility and degradation. Revelations of hard work and honest integrity rewarded by squalid, grinding poverty and abject despair abound in realist writings. In reading these works we become aware that the authors were perhaps most bitter about the discrepancy between the rich possibilities of the agrarian ideal and what they saw around them. As Jay Martin has pointed out, much of the despair in Howe's *The Story of a Country Town* (1883) results from the juxtaposition of real with ideal society.

Reminiscent of Crèvecoeur's *Sketches of Eighteenth Century America*, these later realistic portrayals also indict American agrarian society for failing to meet its potential. (See Chapter 3) There is an implicit awareness that the farmer's life could, and should, define a world of peace, graciousness, and beauty. Instead, as Hamlin Garland says in his "Preface" to *Main-Travelled Roads* (1891), realist authors could find only "the ugliness, the endless drudgery, and the loneliness of the farmer's lot." Like innumerable writers before him, Garland claims authenticity for his literary account on the basis of agrarian
experience: "The stories were true of the farms ... no one can know better than I, for I was there -- a farmer" (p. xi). As a result of his intimate knowledge, Garland announces that he became "the militant reformer" (p. ix). He thus implies a moral core at the center of the realist vision. That life on the agrarian frontier need not be so desperate is the unspoken argument of many realist novels. The agrarian ideal continued to inform American literature if only by its discernible absence on the rural literary landscape.

Contemporary with the realist literary treatment of the American farmer was a grass roots movement of agrarian protest. With only brief interruptions a steady decline in farm prices had continued for some thirty years after the Civil War. Not only did the American husbandman's economic security diminish but his status in relation to the rest of society suffered as well. The organization of special interest groups such as the Grange, the Farmer's Alliance, and the Populist Party represented an attempt by America's husbandmen to effect real social, political, and economic change. Richard Hofstadter has attributed the farmers' eventual success in large part to their final rejection of the trappings of the agrarian myth and their acceptance of their role as rural entrepreneurs.

In the twentieth century Richard Hofstadter has not been the only historian to pronounce the death of the agrarian myth. Page Smith has suggested that as agriculture became commercialized and the country grew increasingly industrialized, the ideal of an independent, self-sufficient farmer was replaced by that of the self-made man. The latter ideal was, of course, a variation on the former one, but it was structured in
terms more congenial to the urban market place. In addition, Roy Meyer, in a study of the twentieth-century farm novel, found the modern farmer figure to be associated with primitivism, anti-intellectualism, conservatism and downright hostility to the town. All of these characteristics undermine the traditional American agrarian ideal as we have seen it recorded in the past.

And yet, just when it would appear that the farmer had ceased to represent the fundamental values of American society, just when we might be tempted to conclude that the literary tradition of the husbandmen had indeed ended, a group of American authors stepped forward to reaffirm the classic agrarian ideal. With the publication of the agrarian manifesto I'll Take My Stand in 1930, a group of Southern writers launched their attack on industrial society. What they advocated was a literal and symbolic return to subsistence farming. Intellectuals like John Crowe Ransom and Allen Tate affirmed their belief that ruralism fostered the virtues of self-reliance, physical courage, and moral integrity. They found an aesthetic satisfaction in the farmer's life as well. As Ransom stated in a 1932 article for Harper's:

It is tempting to write like a poet, philosopher or humanist about the aesthetic and spiritual deliverance that will come when the industrial laborers with their specialized and routine jobs and the business men with their offices and abstract preoccupations become translated into people handling the soil with their fingers and coming into direct contact with nature.

These Southern Agrarians have often been compared to the Transcendentalists of Brook Farm. While their utopian conception of an ideal agrarian community, like that of the Brook Farmers, was impractical as a life style in their own day, it did provide these authors
with a moral center for work in the agrarian literary tradition. Authors such as Robert Penn Warren and Donald Davidson created works of enduring value which continued to embody American agrarian ideals.

Again in the 1960's American writers chose to affirm the agrarian ideal. Communal agricultural ventures were begun to spiritually combat the military-industrial complex. The way to an integrated self and wholeness of being was, once more, seen to lie, at least symbolically, in a redemptive relationship with the land. Charles A. Reich's description of a glorious "Consciousness III" in The Greening of America (1970) sounds remarkably like the old-fashioned agrarian ideal. Describing his model as a combination of intellectual pursuits with manual labor, as a merger of rural and urban life, Reich tells us that "such integration promises more than the Brook Farm experiment that failed even in Hawthorne's day" (p. 420).

The people attaining Consciousness III recognized, in Reich's view, that "The promise of America, land of beauty and abundance, land of the free, somehow has been betrayed" (p. 237). The author subsequently comforts his readers that the original promise of America could be restored:

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Our forebears came thousands of miles for the promise of a better life. Now there is a new promise. Shall we not seize it? Shall we not be pioneers once more? The breakdown of the corporate state and the growth of radicalism would still lead nowhere, would still justify only despair, if there were not a new vision. It is the power of the vision that can turn hope into reality (p. 42).
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Reich's essential vision was "a veritable greening of America" (p. 430). The remarkable optimism and excitement generated, at least in the academic
circles, by Reich's book, the positive belief that such a reformation actually could be accomplished, serve as modern testimonies to the continued power of the American agrarian myth.

The time has come to ask ourselves how and why the myth of the American farmer has managed to survive. Surely the symbolic husbandman does not reflect or explain contemporary agrarian reality, and he had not done so for well over one hundred years. Each successive generation that calls for a literal return to the original experience of the agrarian ideal rediscovers this, anew. Yet the power of the agrarian myth to embody the values of Americans, to affect their way of perceiving the world, and ultimately to influence their behavior, somehow continues.

The most obvious explanation results from the literary background which we explored in Chapter 1. A celebration of the farmer and the joys of rural life has been a long-standing literary tradition in Western Civilization. Ancient Greeks and Romans praised the heroism and integrity of their husbandmen; they formulated his political significance. In Judeo-Christian scripture the farmer's vocation gained sacramental importance when God's first created man was depicted as a yeoman. The Elizabethan revival of pastoral and georgic literature occurring coincidentally with the discovery of America helped to launch the American version of the universal archetype. Throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries the farmer and rural life played a significant role in literary tradition both in America and abroad. Thus the modern continuance of the agrarian myth represents the American version of a more universal literary impulse.
A second explanation for the survival of the agrarian myth has to do with Americans' conceptions of themselves and their country. This nation has traditionally been associated with unlimited abundance. As David Potter has demonstrated, the most distinctive characteristics of the American people have been shaped by economic plenty. For most of our history abundance has been described in predominantly agrarian terms. While many contemporary American "strengths" are open to challenge, we remain undeniably self-reliant in agricultural production. The land, as an intensely powerful symbol, perpetuates the outward trappings of the agrarian myth. To confirm such a continuation with the past, if only superficially, provides Americans with an important source of psychic satisfaction.

This sense of continuity with the past suggests the third and perhaps the most significant explanation for the survival of the agrarian myth. As a heterogeneous society -- one fractionalized by diverse races, religions, creeds, and fragmented by varied regional interests, prejudices, beliefs, -- what we have in common with each other as Americans is a commitment to a distinctive national heritage. As Thoreau recognized over one hundred years ago, the myth of the farmer encompasses the essential, archetypal experience of our historical ancestors as they met and conquered the American land. Its recitation not only brings us into touch with our past, but also presents a concretization of many values we still cherish today. Thus the sense of America's millennial mission, the virtues of democratic life -- political autonomy and economic security -- the ideal of the self-reliant man and its converse, the ideal of the man as spokesman for
his community, all of these ideas and many more were originally formulated in agrarian metaphors.

Every school child knows that the first Thanksgiving was celebrated by New England husbandmen, that the Revolutionary War was won by a group of embattled farmers challenging and defeating the British Empire, and that America's great westward desert was transformed into a blooming garden by the enterprise of her agrarian settlers. Whether we realize it consciously or not, to celebrate our national heritage is in large measure to celebrate the American farmer. And when Americans try, as they obsessively do, to get back in touch with the "original" principles and ideas of this country, whether in literature or in life, they find themselves, if only metaphorically and symbolically, somehow seeking to return to the special vocation of the American farmer.


3. Hofstadter, p. 32.


5. Schlesinger, p. 108.


7. Ibid., pp. vi-vii.


24. See Stenerson, pp. 108-09. He believes that Emerson's praise is part of pastoral tradition.


27. Stenerson, p. 104.


32. See Sams, pp. 6-7; Crowe, p. 142.


36. Frothingham, pp. 142-83.


38. "Plan of the West Roxbury Community," The Dial, II (January 1842), 361-72, rpt. in Sams, pp. 62-72. Subsequent textual citations will be to this edition.


40. Ibid.

41. Crowe, p. 182; Swift, p. 70; Frothingham, p. 171; see also Sams.
42. Crowe, p. 182; Sams, pp. 141-42.

43. Frothingham, p. 167.

44. Crowe, p. 188; Sams, pp. 166-206.


46. Crowe, pp. 185-88.


48. George Ripley to George Bancroft, Feb. 13, Mar. 8, Mar. 18, 1869, as rpt. in Crowe, p. 223.

49. Nathaniel Hawthorne to Sophia Peabody, June 1, 1841, rpt. in Sams, p. 21. Subsequent textual citations to Hawthorne's letters from Brook Farm will be to this edition.


53. For discussion of the historical consequence of continued political affirmation of the agrarian myth see H. N. Smith, pp. 165-210; Hofstadter, pp. 54-59.


63. See Buell, p. 209.


66. Seelye, p. 611.


68. See Slotkin, p. 7.


73. Paul, p. 143.

74. Ibid., p. 294.

75. Ibid.

76. See Leo Stoller, After Walden: Thoreau's Changing Views on Economic Man (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957), p. 120.

77. Ibid., p. 31; see also Leo Stoller, "Thoreau's Doctrine of Simplicity," New England Quarterly, 29 (1956), 443-61.

78. If we define myth as a construct which embodies men's values, influences their way of perceiving reality and ultimately, their behavior, then Thoreau's version meets the appropriate criteria. See also Hofstadter, p. 24.


81. Ibid., p. 324.

82. Paul, p. 402; In a similar vein, see also Thoreau, A Week, p. 428. He tells his readers that the true poem of an artist "is that which he has become through his work." He also states, "My life has been the poem, I would have writ/ But I could not both live and utter it."


85. Harding, pp. 73-78.

86. Norman Foerster notes Thoreau's interest in early Americana but insists that the writings are "nearly worthless as literature," in "The Intellectual Heritage of Thoreau," The Texas Review, 2 (1916-17), 192-212, rpt. Twentieth Century Interpretations of Walden, p. 43.

88. Although working within a different framework, Sherman Paul comes to a similar conclusion: "The complete cultivation of man was, of course, the very thing affirmed for America by its mythology," p. 416.

89. See Paul, pp. 413-14.


91. Ibid.

92. Ibid., pp. 54-59; H. N. Smith, pp. 165-210.

93. Marx, p. 265.

94. Some examples are: Howells, Criticism and Fiction (1891) and Garland, Crumbling Idols (1894); for an excellent discussion of some major tenets of realism see Harold H. Kolb, Jr., The Illusion of Life: American Realism as a Literary Form (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1969).


96. Ibid., p. 117.


99. Ibid.


104. Ibid., p. 44.

105. "Land!" *Harper's*, 165 (July 1932), 221-22, as quoted in Karanikas, p. 41.

106. Ibid., p. 4.


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