

Nineteenth-Century American Antebellum Literature: The Yeoman Becomes a Country Bumpkin

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Some few towns excepted, [Americans] are all tillers of the earth,
from Nova Scotia to West Florida. We are a people of cultivators.

—Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur
Letters from an American Farmer
(1782)

Those who labor in the earth are the chosen people of God, if ever He
had a chosen people . . . Cultivators of the earth are the most valuable
citizens. They are the most vigorous, the most independent, the most
virtuous, and they are tied to their country, and wedded to its liberty
and interests, by the most lasting bonds.

—Thomas Jefferson, “Notes on
Virginia” (1788)

I

In the late-eighteenth century, the combined efforts of Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur and Thomas Jefferson projected a clearly agricultural vision for America.¹ This vision, which has come to be dubbed “the agrarian myth,” suggests that the American yeoman farmer is the epitome of sufficiency, self-reli-

ance, and industriousness. Significantly, literary scholars, historians, and journalists treat the vision as a largely accepted notion that is exhibited in American letters for at least the next century.² The farmer in this allegedly unified agrarian myth is without class—all distinctions between tenant, landowner, subsistence farmer, and aristocrat are collapsed into a single representative American.³ One of the most recent arguments contingent on the notion of the agrarian myth comes in Stephanie Sarver's *Uneven Land* (1999), where she suggests that Hamlin Garland, writing in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, was among the first of the American fiction writers to see through the agrarian myth and challenge the notion of farming as idyllic, noble work.⁴ “[Garland’s] place as a realist relies primarily upon his indictment of the agrarian ideal through a realistic depiction of farming,” she suggests. “Indeed, his realistic descriptions are forceful if not examined too deeply, and they reveal an aspect of American life that had hitherto been ignored.”⁵ Although this point is not necessarily central to her larger project,⁶ it tellingly reveals the assumption among scholars that the agrarian myth was evident through much of the nineteenth century.

I argue that the challenge to the agrarian myth came much earlier, as revealed in several important works of American antebellum literature. The five texts I examine—Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *Blithedale Romance*, Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden*, Susan Warner’s *Wide, Wide World*, James Fenimore Cooper’s *The Pioneers*, and Herman Melville’s *Pierre*—depict the farmer most frequently as an unsophisticated, ignorant country bumpkin, a portrayal which hardly fulfills the vision of the farmer espoused by the agrarian myth. Importantly, the portrayal reveals the changing class structures in American society, suggesting the perceived characteristics and lifestyle of the farmer do not meet the changing class expectations of the newly emerging middle class in the antebellum period. The traditional farmer (that is, if he or she is to remain a farmer) is shown to be unable to achieve and demonstrate the markers of the middle class, indicating a growing chasm between the farmer and the middle-class American. Implicitly, the farmer is relegated to the lower class. In this paper, I will be looking at why and how this is done. The paper will demonstrate the extent to which several important antebellum works illustrate changing attitudes towards the paradigms of femininity and masculinity, the relationship between home and work, and the importance of education, leisure, and manners.

I have chosen to focus on literature targeting a middle-class audience, and for that reason my focus remains on *belles lettres* (and, with the exception of Thoreau, more specifically, novels), rather than newspapers or journals.⁷ Notably, the middle classes, with more disposable income and leisure time, had much easier access to novels and book-length essays and more time to read them than the working class.⁸ The publishers, writers, and readers of such literature were all committed to upward mobility, education, urban growth, and the market—features of the new, capitalistic economy that were not always compatible with the older, agrarian lifestyle. Hence, middle-class readers, still struggling to es-

establish their own tenuous, “placeless” identity in the rapidly changing era, see farmers as a negative reference group. In the five texts I have chosen, the farmer figures prominently, or at least importantly. I limited my choices to northern works because the yeoman farmer belongs to the north,⁹ New England for the most part, and because industrialization was a northern phenomenon in the antebellum era. Significantly, I focus not on lesser known literary works, but rather works that scholars continue to view as the most important for or most reflective of the mid-nineteenth-century reader. In other words, while my analysis is by no means exhaustive—certainly the farmer’s ambiguous role in the context of industrialization could be fruitfully examined in additional genres and contexts¹⁰—I believe the works I examine give us sufficient reason to reconsider the actual place of the agrarian myth in the American consciousness.

II

As Crèvecoeur’s *Letters* imply, America does have roots in subsistence farming. At the end of the eighteenth century, America was dominated by farmers who, by necessity, grew or made nearly everything they needed. For the relatively few items they could not grow or make, they traded labor or sold extra produce or meat for cash.¹¹ American farmers were versatile and able to take care of themselves in the isolation of the new frontier.¹² The dominance of the small family farm continued into the early part of the nineteenth century, with three-fourths of the American population at the turn of the century farming on single-family homesteads.¹³ Even those who did not farm were in close contact with farmers and agriculture, providing the tools and services farmers needed. Many of the people living in towns were actually part-time farmers—owning large lots and keeping a number of animals along with large gardens. According to the 1810 census, only 6 percent of all Americans lived in communities of more than five thousand people, and only eight cities in the entire country numbered more than 10,000.¹⁴ In that same year, over two-thirds of the people in the states of Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island lived in towns with less than 3,000 inhabitants, and many of these townspeople farmed land located close to the village.¹⁵ Although the nineteenth century brought important demographic changes, even on the eve of the Civil War, farming remained the nation’s largest employer and the primary basis for the economic system.¹⁶

Washington Irving conveys this dominance of America’s agrarian culture and reinforces Crèvecoeur’s and Jefferson’s agrarian myth in his popular 1819 short story, “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow.” Repeatedly throughout the story, Irving vividly describes the abundance of the successful subsistence farmer, Baltus Van Tassel, owner of “the rich fields of wheat, of rye, of buckwheat, and Indian corn, and the orchards burdened with ruddy fruit” (*Rip Van Winkle and the Legend of Sleepy Hollow* [New York: Macmillan, 1960, 1951], 65). The Van Tassel home is characterized by the markers of self sufficiency:

Under [the eaves] were hung flails, harness, various utensils of husbandry, and nets for fishing in the neighborhood river. Benches were built along the sides for summer use, and a great spinning-wheel at one end and a churn at the other showed the various uses to which this important porch might be devoted. . . . In one corner stood a huge bag of wool ready to be spun; in another a quantity of linsey-woolsey just from the loom; ears of Indian corn and strings of dried apples and peaches hung in gay festoon along the walls, mingled with the gaud of red peppers. (ibid., 66)

Of the farmer himself, Irving writes: “Old Baltus Van Tassel was a perfect picture of a thriving, contented, liberal-hearted farmer. . . . He was satisfied with his wealth, but not proud of it, and piqued himself upon the hearty abundance, rather than the style, in which he lived” (ibid., 61). In other words, Baltus Van Tassel is Jefferson’s yeoman. Significant, too, is that Ichabod, the local schoolteacher, finds Van Tassel’s daughter Katerina attractive, in part, because of her father’s farm. Ichabod fantasizes about inheriting the farm one day and assuming her father’s place.

What is important, however, in the seeming celebration of the subsistence farm, is Irving’s subtle indication of the priorities accompanying the emergence of the new market economy. The young schoolteacher, a member of the new generation, thinks of the farm not merely in terms of food and good living. He considers, quite deliberately, how much money the farm would be worth if sold:

As the enraptured Ichabod fancied all [the wealth of the farm], and as he rolled his great green eyes over the fat meadowlands . . . his heart yearned after the damsel who was to inherit these domains, and his imagination expanded with the idea how they might be readily turned into cash and the money invested in immense tracts of wild land and shingle palaces in the wilderness. (ibid., 65)

Readers might assume, on the one hand, that Ichabod simply wants to make a go of it himself on the frontier—he wants to prove himself a true yeoman by taming his own corner of the wilderness, by supporting himself with the fruits of his own labor (rather than simply receiving a farm someone else has already established and nurtured). On the other hand, and more likely, given Ichabod’s vision of “shingle palaces,” we might see his desire for the money itself *and* the added property that such money could claim.¹⁷ Of course, Ichabod’s dream is partially discredited because he disappears (in fleeing the alleged headless horseman), while Brom Bones, a local of the village, marries Katerina, presumably to continue the family farming tradition. Nevertheless, in Ichabod’s aspirations, we see a subtle subversion of the agricultural utopia Irving so romantically depicts.

Indeed, the development of industrialization and the market economy brought about tremendous changes in the United States, not the least of which was in agriculture. In *Ecological Revolutions: Nature, Gender, and Science in New England* (1989), Carolyn Merchant describes the important changes that industrialism and the notion of “progress” brought to the farm.¹⁸ Improved transportation, the steamboat and railroad specifically, moved goods more quickly from rural regions and exchanged them for goods in urban regions.¹⁹ New technologies in equipment increased farming efficiency and increased yields, and the extra cash farmers earned from these higher yields gave them options that they hadn’t previously possessed.²⁰ Industry opened up new non-farming-related occupations, prompting many to leave the farm for the growing cities, and this exodus further encouraged farmers to produce more than they needed, in order to support the ever-growing non-farming population.²¹ Farmers responded to these new circumstances by becoming more specialized. Rather than growing a little of everything and making virtually all that their families needed, they aimed to produce specific crops, sell them for cash, and then buy what they didn’t have the time or expertise to make themselves.

In shifting from the family’s needs to the larger market, farmers changed their tilling and management techniques as well as their attitudes towards farming. Merchant writes that in the early-nineteenth century, farmers were “urged by elite scientists, improvers, clergy, and doctors to abandon their old ways and become entrepreneurs,” adding that “a host of local farmers’ journals began broadcasting the gospel of improvement. . . . Almanacs, farm journals, state and county societies for promoting agriculture and agricultural fairs meant that New England farmers no longer needed to rely solely on local know-how for guidelines. The improvers and their spokespersons—almanac makers, doctors, clergy, newspaper editors, and scientists—trumpeted science, management and numbers.”²² Specifically, for example, they were instructed to keep account books, carefully logging in their working hours and expenses.²³ In short, rather than just working to meet their needs, they were to think of themselves as efficient producers of money-earning surplus.

Inevitably, the new technological developments created unforeseen difficulties for farmers, too. The growing market opportunities prompted them to buy more expensive equipment, and they often went into debt in order to do so.²⁴ Debt increased their need for a steady cash flow, which meant they were more vulnerable to the whims of the market. Farmers felt compelled to increase their land holdings, whether they could afford to buy or not, and therefore their move to a cash economy appears to have increased the tenancy rate.²⁵ Leasing land (rather than owning it) also increased the farmer’s need for cash, as he had rent to pay on a regular basis. Furthermore, market changes and increased farm incomes changed farmers’ expectations. Specifically, the increased contact with the city introduced farmers to “educational and recreational facilities” they had not known before.²⁶ It is perhaps not surprising, then, that rural dwellers began

moving to larger cities in increasingly large numbers.²⁷ “[Visions of a better living] sent men to the cities and towns of the Atlantic coast and to the urban communities in the West,” Clarence Danhof noted. “The farm resident who preferred trade, transportation, or ‘tinkering’ to the tasks of caring for crops and animals found in the city the opportunity to pursue his interests as a principal occupation.”²⁸ The impact of the changing possibilities was profound. Merchant argues that these changes constituted both an “ecological revolution” and brought about crucial “new forms of consciousness, ideas, images, and worldviews,” particularly in regard to nature and people’s relationship with it.²⁹ In *The Farmer’s Age: Agriculture, 1815-1860* (1960), Paul Gates suggests the changes were equally dramatic, declaring the mid-nineteenth century to be the end of the “farmer’s age” in America.³⁰

While agriculture was undergoing these important changes, the middle class was evolving in the city. America’s newly developing nineteenth-century middle class has been characterized by its departure from manual labor and the new familial divisions between domestic and wage-earning labor; its interest in sensibility and education; and its new-found leisure time and attention to social graces.³¹ At the end of the eighteenth century, certain occupational tasks (such as those in banks, insurance companies, shipping companies, newspaper offices, and manufacturers) became more specialized and compartmentalized. Hence, office work was increasingly separated from manual labor.³² Industrialization and the rise of the market economy meant that retailers began to replace artisans as the marketers of goods, thereby separating the producer from the product.³³ In “The Hypothesis of Middle Class Formation in Nineteenth-Century America: A Critique and Some Proposals”(1985), Stuart Blumin explains that although the term artisan was still frequently used in the antebellum period, the label was much looser than in the previous century. Often the “artisan” of the nineteenth century merely supervised production, while specialized laborers, clerks, managers, and retailers assumed the jobs the true artisan had once held.³⁴ The people who filled the positions of clerk, manager, and retailer—that is, those filling the non-manual, paid positions—were a part of the population we now identify as middle class. In *The Culture of Professionalism: The Middle Class and the Development of Higher Education in America* (1976), Burton Bledstein argues that these nineteenth-century trends led to an important new development: the concepts of professionalism and “career.”³⁵

Because these white-collar, professional career men were separated from the production of goods, they more frequently purchased needed items, rather than making them. Once the domestic sphere’s contribution to the household economy lessened, families became increasingly characterized for their consumption rather than their production. Other features of the urbanized middle class included that they tended to live on the edges of the cities—thereby creating the first suburbs—away from the expensive housing of the wealthy and the squalid poverty of the urban lower class. Middle-class families also had fewer

children and strongly prioritized education. In contrast to eighteenth-century American children, those in the nineteenth-century middle class received more education, worked less, stayed home longer, and married later. All of these factors increased the likelihood that the children themselves would end up in white-collar jobs, thereby perpetuating the cycle. Finally, members of the middle class were marked by their involvement in various voluntary organizations and social causes, such as temperance and abolition. Blumin comments: "The widespread joining of various organizations suggested among the middle class a certain desire to learn how to behave according to rules of middle-class respectability."³⁶ In regard to the particular issues of temperance and abolition, Blumin also remarks: "The specific issues of drink and slavery underscored to reformers their own intermediate social and economic circumstances, for resistance to both temperance and abolitionism seemed to come from the fashionable wealthy and the powerful rich and from the dissipated and fearful poor."³⁷

This conscious attempt of the newly urbanized, professionalized middle class to carve a niche for itself is particularly evident in the sudden interest in and emphasis upon manners and politeness. In "Middle Class Rising in Revolutionary America: The Evidence From Manners" (1996), C. Dallet Hemphill argues that for the middle-class individual, status was achieved "by his own efforts, as an individual, not by virtue of his membership in a group. Status was now a function of one's personal behavior, and thus required self-discipline. Self-discipline entailed, above all, control of physical drives, hence focus on the body."³⁸ Lord Chesterfield's advice manual, written in 1774 and primarily targeting those beneath the aristocracy and above the servant class, initiated the hugely popular etiquette manual genre, which exploded in the nineteenth century. Between 1830 and 1860, approximately seventy etiquette manuals were published by teachers, clergymen, and sentimental writers.³⁹ The manuals covered hundreds of rules about proper public behavior, ranging from social conversation to table manners to dress and cleanliness. For example, polite individuals were expected to contribute to conversation frequently but never talk too long. The goal of conversation was to encourage others to discuss their favorite topics and listen attentively.⁴⁰ Most bodily activities, such as scratching, coughing, sighing, spitting, hair combing, yawning, and so forth were to be strictly controlled, if not altogether repressed in public.⁴¹ In *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-class Culture in America, 1830-1870* (1982), Karen Hulttenun argues that the "sentimental culture" nurtured by etiquette books was a response to anxieties about the unfamiliar "placelessness" of the newly established, urban middle class in antebellum America.⁴²

III

Several antebellum literary texts suggest that despite the farmer's willingness to embrace the "gospel of improvement" and "improve himself," his innovations did little to improve his social standing. Instead, he found himself in a

new world where he was expected not only to negotiate the new market successfully, but also to behave as if he were living in a middle-class suburb. In other words, the social rules changed along with the economic ones. The advent of professionalism, for example, meant that Americans began to identify themselves in terms of what they did and their career advancements rather than their community relationships and obligations.⁴³ Perhaps for this reason, it was often considered a failure to return to the farm after obtaining a college education.⁴⁴ Because they did not share the features described above as characterizing the middle class, yeoman farmers came to be grouped with the lower, working class. In “Land and Freedom: The New York Anti-Rent Wars and the Construction of Free Labor in the Antebellum North” (1998), Reeve Huston states that despite their different experiences, both farmers and working-class wage earners viewed themselves as the “producing class.”⁴⁵ This shared class status was supported also by the increasing of rate of tenancy and working for wages among farmers during America’s nineteenth-century industrialization.⁴⁶ The literature of the period clarifies this, demonstrating that the farmer was, in fact, a representative not of the new American middle class, but of the lower, working class.

For example, Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Blithedale Romance* (1852; reprint, New York: Meridian Classic, First Meridian Classic Printing, April 1981), a story of an intentional, utopian farming community, problematizes the farmer in several ways, indicating cultural anxieties regarding his social position in relationship to the middle-class reader. The narrator, Miles Coverdale, an urban transplant, does seem genuinely attracted to the simple rural lifestyle and finds value in his labor. After a number of months in the community, Coverdale muses: “After a reasonable training, the yeoman life throve well with us. Our faces took the sunburn kindly; our chests gained in compass, and our shoulders in breadth and squareness; our great brown fists looked as if they had never been capable of kid gloves. The plough, the hoe, the scythe, and the hay-fork, grew familiar to our grasp. The oxen responded to our voices” (ibid., 49). Coverdale finds not only physical benefits, but also social and emotional benefits in his farm work: “Thus the summer was passing away;—a summer of toil, of interest, of something that was not pleasure, but which went deep into my heart, and there became a rich experience. I found myself looking forward to years, if not to a lifetime, to be spent in the same system” (ibid., 102). Despite these positive sentiments, however, Coverdale asserts that the farmer cannot also be intellectually sharp, explaining:

The clods of earth, which we so constantly belabored 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. 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. (*ibid.*, 50)

Even as Coverdale buttresses the moral integrity of the idealized yeoman, he downplays the farmer's mental capabilities. Coverdale views the farmer as incapable of maintaining both a physically demanding and intellectually rewarding life—promoting the notion that the farmer was not merely uneducated but also intellectually limited. Equally troubling, however, is Coverdale's remark that his physical labor "symbolized nothing." His comment indicates that the literal and tangible value of the farming labor was of lesser value than the abstract activities of the mind. In short, not only are physical and intellectual occupations incompatible, but the intellectual work is of greater value.

Coverdale's response to Silas Foster, a "stout yeoman," the veteran farmer at Blithedale, indicates that farmers are challenged culturally as well as intellectually, which brings to mind the importance of middle-class manners, as described by Hemphill and Halttunen. In introducing Foster, Coverdale notes: "He greeted us in pretty much the same tone as if he were speaking to his oxen" (*ibid.*, 12), suggesting Foster did not contribute to the table conversation in ways that "drew out" his companions. More troubling for Coverdale, however, are Foster's table manners. When Priscilla arrives, Foster can't be bothered to stop eating; instead he "had been busy at the supper-table, pouring his own tea, and gulping it down with no more sense of its exquisiteness than if it were a decoction of catnip; helping himself to pieces of dipt toast on the flat of his knife-blade, and dropping half of it on the tablecloth; using the same serviceable implement to cut slice after slice of ham . . . and, in all other respects, behaving less like a civilized Christian than the worst kind of ogre" (*ibid.*, 22). Certainly, this description, emphasizing Silas's crude behavior, conflicts with the bodily control strenuously advocated in the antebellum era's etiquette manuals.

It is worth mentioning that the criticism goes both ways. Foster has difficulty appreciating Coverdale's need for a vacation away from the farm, and he scoffs at Coverdale's promise to return "with genuine Yankee intolerance of any intermission of toil, except on Sunday, the fourth of July, the autumnal cattle show, Thanksgiving, or the annual Fast" (*ibid.*, 110). Hence, the agrarian life is presented as one nearly devoid of leisure. The neighboring farmers also spread untrue rumors about the Blithedale community—claiming the urbanites cannot distinguish a crop plant from a weed and recounting stories of tools being misused. In other words, Hawthorne's novel suggests inherent and consistent cultural differences between yeoman farmers and middle-class city dwellers.

The relative ease with which Coverdale leaves the farm and returns to his urban life suggests that the agricultural life was never taken seriously. This turn

of events also reminds the reader of what Coverdale himself identified early in the story when he questioned the authenticity of an experiment in yeoman husbandry located “within practicable distance of a wood market” (ibid., 16). During the community’s first night together, Coverdale sees in Zenobia’s discarding of her wilted flower an indication that the “heroic enterprise” was “an illusion, a masquerade, a pastoral, a counterfeit Arcadia, in which we grown-up men and women were making a play-day of the years that were given to us” (ibid., 14). Coverdale’s allusion to the pastoral, a romanticized and unattainable version of the agrarian life, emphasizes the possibility that the farm, and the relationship with the land that it implies, cannot be reconciled with the cultured middle class. Coverdale admits: “Though we saw fit to drink our tea out of earthen cup to-night, and in earthen company, it was at our option to use pictured porcelain and handle silver forks again tomorrow” (ibid., 17). The Blithedale community embraces yeomanry only because they realize it is temporary, and they are free at any point to return to their former, less physical lives. A lifetime commitment to farming is nothing to anticipate too eagerly, at least for men and women who have better options—an identity, that is, which links them with the intellectual sophistication, manners, and leisure of middle-class urban life.

Although it is a work that glorifies the simplicity of simple rural living in reaction to the surrounding dominant cash-driven society, Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden* (1854; reprint, New York: First Vintage Books/The Library of America Edition, 1991) unexpectedly reinforces the negative attitudes towards the farmer, strangely disparaging the farmer not for his markers of “self-improvement” but, instead, for the same qualities other writers criticize—that is, the farmer’s perceived lack of intelligence and sophistication. For example, Thoreau describes the neighboring farmers, the Fields, a family also living a simple life in close contact with the land, in condescending terms: “An honest, hard-working, but shiftless man plainly was John Field; and his wife, she too was brave to cook so many successive dinners in the recesses of that lofty stove; with round greasy face and bare breast, still thinking to improve her condition one day; with the never absent mop in one hand, and yet no effects of it visible anywhere” (ibid., 165). The family’s baby has a “cone-head” and the “broad-faced son . . . worked cheerfully,” oblivious to the futility Thoreau sees in his labor. Thoreau makes clear that he considers the farmer’s work drudgery, and he suggests the farmer could live more fully if he followed Thoreau’s example and gave up tea, coffee, butter, milk, and fresh meat.

While Thoreau implies that the farmer has bought into the market economy, the “buying and spending” and therefore “lives like a serf” (ibid., 168), the influence of the cash economy on the farmer’s life doesn’t address Thoreau’s deepest concerns. Rather, Thoreau suggests that the farmer, in living as he does, fails to achieve intellectual and spiritual consciousness. This is the way Thoreau would have Mr. and Mrs. Fields “improve [their] condition.” In the last lines of

chapter ten, “Baker Farm,” Thoreau imagines the farmer sitting on his doorstep one evening and, hearing the notes of a flute, encounters “his intellectual man. . . . [T]he notes of the flute came home to his ears out of a different sphere from that he worked in, and suggested work for certain faculties which slumbered in him” (ibid., 179). The implication here is that John the Farmer cannot possibly enjoy “his intellectual man” while working the land, and furthermore, intellectual curiosity is not something that John Fields often experiences. The general ineptitude of the mentally sluggish farmer is reinforced in Thoreau’s description of their shared fishing trip, where John cannot catch a single fish while Thoreau brings in one after another. John—who will, fortunately, never read *Walden*, which therefore allows Thoreau the freedom to ridicule him openly—is “born to be poor” and permanently trapped in his “boggy ways” (ibid., 169). The suggestion, of course, is that John Fields does not meet the criteria of what Thoreau has come to expect and recommend in intellectually conscious living. Notably, Thoreau’s observations reiterate the portrayals of Hawthorne—that farm work deadens the intellect.

David Foster in *Thoreau’s Country: Journey Through a Transformed Landscape*, (1999), suggests that Thoreau’s journals provide a decidedly different perspective of the farmer. Over the course of his lifetime, Thoreau wrote thirty volumes—totaling nearly two million words—of daily journals recording his observations of New England life. In these journals, Thoreau consistently records the farmers’ activities and acknowledges and praises their hard work. Foster points out that Thoreau in his journals sees the farmer as both noble and heroic.⁴⁷ Foster also admits, however, that farm work was disregarded by Thoreau’s contemporaries, and *Walden*, heavily edited for the reading public, presents this negative view. So while the journals demonstrate that Thoreau’s initial response to the farmer was favorable and complimentary, they remained private and unavailable to middle-class readers at the time. This strongly supports the possibility that the agrarian myth was, in fact, of low cultural currency during the antebellum period.

Susan Warner’s *The Wide, Wide World* (1850; reprint, 1st Feminist Press edition, New York: Feminist Press at the City of New York, 1987), an enormously popular antebellum bestseller, provides readers with one of the most extended portrayals of the farmer in nineteenth-century antebellum fiction. Warner’s novel clearly indicates that farming is discordant with the emerging values of the nineteenth-century middle class. Warner’s farmers, Mr. Van Brunt and Miss Fortune, are similar to Hawthorne’s Silas Foster and Thoreau’s John the Farmer: uneducated, unintellectual, and lacking in social graces. For example, when Ellen, the story’s young protagonist, initially meets Mr. Van Brunt, he is described as “well-made and rather handsome,” but with “something of heaviness in the air of both face and person” (ibid., 93). Unless he is discussing farming or trees, Mr. Van Brunt cannot carry on a conversation of any length or

depth. Even more troubling, he appears relatively unaware of the rationale behind his farming techniques. For example, when Ellen watches him work one day, she asks: “‘What’s the use of pouring water upon the grindstone? Why wouldn’t it do as well dry?’” Mr. Van Brunt answers: “‘I can’t tell, I am sure. Your questions are a good deal too sharp for me, Miss Ellen; I only know it would spoil the axe, or the grindstone, or both most likely’” (ibid., 136). That Mr. Van Brunt would not simply be uneducated but also completely ignorant of why the grindstone needs water is not merely condescending, but it is in fact ridiculous.⁴⁸

The differences in speech and educational priorities between the novel’s farmers and middle-class characters emphasize the idea that a person engaging in a life of physical labor will not and *cannot* achieve the cultivated speech and conversational markers of the middle class, a class that, seemingly, belongs exclusively to the city. Both Mr. Van Brunt and Miss Fortune use nonstandard English, and Warner brings attention to this in both the dialogue and in Ellen’s comments to the middle-class true woman, Miss Alice. When Miss Alice corrects one of Ellen’s grammatical errors, for instance, Ellen replies: “‘I believe I have got into the way of saying that by hearing Miss Fortune and Mr. Van Brunt say it; I don’t think I ever did before I came here’” (ibid., 171). Also, Miss Fortune does not provide Ellen with the means of attending the local school, and Ellen makes a point of regularly lamenting the fact that her time spent on the farm, where she can’t engage in formal schooling, is a “waste” of her time (ibid., 141).

While middle-class characters might appreciate pleasing landscapes, Warner’s text suggests they do not necessarily value the realities that accompany a close relationship with the land. When Ellen first arrives on the farm, she notes the surrounding beauty of the landscape and finds the farm setting pleasant. Her dissatisfaction with her locale, however, soon becomes evident. Ellen doesn’t like her room although it is quite neat and clean because it is without carpet, paint, a suitably sized dressing table, or a wash basin. She doesn’t like the “coverlid” of the bed—however warm and practical it might be—because it is “home-made white and blue worsted mixed with cotton, exceeding thick and heavy” (ibid., 102). Ellen’s unreasonably snobby reaction to this perfectly functional comforter makes sense only when we remember that by the 1850s, urban middle-class women were no longer making their household blankets; they were buying them. Ellen projects a similarly urban naiveté the morning after her arrival. When she explores the farm, she peers into a shed and finds that “[a]ll manner of rubbish lay there, especially at the farther end. There was scattered about and piled up various boxes, boards, farming and garden tools, old pieces of rope and sheepskin, old iron, a cheese-press, and what not. Ellen did not stay long to look, but went out to find something pleasanter” (ibid., 107). Ellen’s reaction implies that the cultivated should not have to encounter or think about “the mess” required to sustain an individual or family or farm. This possibility is

strengthened by Ellen's profound dislike for household chores. She resents the household tasks—cleaning, churning butter, spinning wool, stringing apples, ironing—that her aunt requires her to do, although these tasks are necessary, of course, to keep her fed and looking presentable. In addition to taking time from her preferred studies, the household work does not interest Ellen. In fact, the entire business of farm living does not interest Ellen—she was “generally wearied with the sameness of her life” (ibid., 114).

Readers might attribute these negative reactions to Ellen's young age and loneliness, as she is only ten or eleven when she arrives on the farm, and she has recently been separated from her beloved mother. However, Warner's emphasis on other issues, as well as femininity in particular, prevents readers from dismissing Ellen's unhappiness with her agrarian life to immaturity. Miss Fortune, for instance, who runs her own farm, is perceived negatively by both Ellen and others. The reader learns, via Nancy, that the community finds fault with Miss Fortune's “doing all her own work, and living all alone, when she's so rich as she is” (ibid., 119). The implication here is not only that Miss Fortune is a miser but also that individuals would not *choose* to do farm work unless necessity forced them to do so. It is important to read this in view of the fact that while traditionally farm women were responsible for the cows, poultry, and vegetable production—the farmyard, in other words—men began to oversee these areas as nineteenth-century industrialization pushed specialization on the farm.⁴⁹ By participating in these tasks, Miss Fortune was overstepping her gendered role.

Furthermore, any reader aware of nineteenth-century criteria defining a “true woman”—namely, domesticity, purity, piety, and submissive selflessness—soon realizes why Ellen has reason to dislike her aunt. Certainly, Miss Fortune meets the standards of domesticity—she is “in a perpetual bustle,” and she leaves her house “in the last extreme of neatness. Not a speck of dust could be supposed to lie on the shining painted floor; the back of every chair was in its place against the wall. The very hearth-stones shone and the heads of the large iron nails in the floor were polished to steel” (ibid., 237). In other areas of true womanhood, however, Miss Fortune falls short. To begin with, Miss Fortune is hardly the spiritual leader of the home. One of Miss Fortune's acquaintances mentions to Ellen that her aunt doesn't “take to . . . your pious kind” (ibid., 251). Miss Fortune doesn't go to church, and Ellen notices that her aunt sometimes works on the Sabbath: “Sunday passed quietly, though Ellen could not help suspecting it was not entirely a day of rest to her aunt; there was a savoury smell of cooking in the morning which nothing that came on the table by any means accounted for, and Miss Fortune was scarcely to be seen the whole day” (ibid., 245-246). Miss Fortune also resists submissive behavior and brings attention to her own role in running the farm. When Miss Fortune's mother comments that Mr. Van Brunt is a “good farmer—very good—there's no doubt about that,” Miss Fortune sharply retorts, “I wonder what he'd do if there warn't a head to manage for him!” (ibid., 217). Warner clarifies how the reader should perceive Miss

Fortune's hard work when she remarks: "The ruling passion of [Miss Fortune] was thrift; her next, good housewifery. First, to gather to herself and heap up of what the world most esteems; after that, to be known as the most thorough house-keeper and smartest woman in Thirlwall" (ibid., 338). That Warner named Ellen's aunt "Miss Fortune" further drives the point home. As a successful farmer, Miss Fortune has little to offer Ellen's education in middle-class values and true womanhood that is positive.

Miss Fortune must be contrasted with Miss Alice, Ellen's true mentor and "sister." Miss Alice is well-spoken, educated, kind, pious, pure, domestic (in the right kinds of ways—mending, tidying, making tea cakes and cocoa), and unspeakably selfless. In short, she is the epitome of true womanhood. While Alice does often take walks and ride her horse, she does not labor hard physically, nor does she run her household. That is relegated to the household servants or the men in her family, John and Pastor Humphreys. Given the pleasure Ellen takes in spending time with Alice, the reader soon sees that Ellen's maturing process will not win her to farming, but instead will mold her into another Alice.

This is made particularly clear when Alice dies, and Ellen literally assumes her position in the household. Interestingly, Ellen does not mind the household chores when she executes them in the Humphreys household, and she even takes up gardening voluntarily. The reader must assume that the chores assume a greater dignity when they are executed in a household where more cultivated interests (reading, pleasure riding, and painting) are encouraged and where gender hierarchies are fully intact. And gardening, presumably, is a hobby more fitting of ladies than farming as an occupation. John Humphreys, whom Ellen worships and obeys unquestionably, provides a marked contrast in disposition, education, and values to both Miss Fortune and Mr. Van Brunt. Hence, Warner's novel reinforces the idea that education, professional prestige, intellectual curiosity, refined tastes, and good manners are incompatible with an agrarian lifestyle. She adds to this list femininity. Miss Fortune repeatedly proves herself a capable farmer who not only has deliberately chosen her lifestyle but also seems to thrive on it. While the twenty-first century reader may admire her accomplishments, the nineteenth-century reader would not. Although Miss Fortune does embody the traits of a successful yeoman farmer, the gender expectations of the period, which assumed women would not interfere in business endeavors or support themselves independently, kept her from being a respected character.

IV

Antebellum fiction implies that farming is incompatible not only with middle-class notions about good manners, education, and femininity but also with the nineteenth-century's changing expectations for true manhood. In *Manhood and the American Renaissance* (1989), David Leverenz describes three different paradigms for masculinity—the patrician, the artisan, and the entrepreneur—that might illuminate changing class attitudes and provide a useful

complement to antebellum domestic ideology. Leverenz explains that masculinity in colonial and early America was characterized by the first two paradigms:

The patrician paradigm, which helped to sustain a relatively small colonial elite composed of merchants, lawyers and landed gentry, expresses manhood as property ownership, patriarchy, and republican ideals of citizenship. The artisan paradigm [which includes the yeoman farmer], expressing the values upon which the elite depended, defines manhood as freedom, pride of craft, and, to a lesser degree, citizenship along with a good deal of ambivalence about patriarchal deference.⁵⁰

Leverenz mentions that within this two-paradigm system, the assumption that the aristocracy was best suited for governing the nation's people was common. In *The Federalist* papers, for instance, Alexander Hamilton "waxes enthusiastic about the likelihood that farmers and tradesmen will put their interests in the hands of their betters."⁵¹ Leverenz asserts, too, that Benjamin Franklin's autobiography promotes aspirations for moving from the artisan paradigm to the patrician.⁵² Nonetheless, Leverenz suggests that the colonial years and the very earliest antebellum years allowed both professional men and artisans/yeomen to maintain their masculine identities in socially respected ways. Leverenz also argues, however, that the third paradigm for masculinity, the entrepreneur, which promoted the skills of those men who successfully negotiated the new cash economy, is evident in the early nineteenth century. Importantly, the entrepreneurial paradigm strengthened as the nineteenth century progressed, weakening the ideals of the artisan paradigm of masculinity, in particular.

In *Gender, Fantasy, and Realism in American Literature* (1982), Alfred Habegger makes a suggestion quite similar to Leverenz's, arguing that the nineteenth century witnessed a shift in what was considered manly. "Among farmers and small-town tradesmen, one of the most important indices of proper masculinity had traditionally been shrewd judgment, variously called smartness, gumption, or [acuteness]. . . ." Habegger posits. "But in the modern world, with its much bigger business systems, communications networks, and cities, success came to mean something rather different. . . . The new way of proving one's masculinity was to fight one's way to the top."⁵³ Proving one's masculinity required finding a place for oneself in the entrepreneurial paradigm.

The assumed class difference between farmers and non-farmers is evident as early as James Fenimore Cooper's *The Pioneers* (1823; reprint, New York: Penguin, 1988). From the very beginning, Cooper draws contrasts in both wealth and intellect between the town's presiding judge, Marmaduke Temple, his daugh-

ter Elizabeth, and the townspeople and farmers. For example, on the first night of her return to the village of Templeton, after a four-year absence, Elizabeth attends the local Christmas Eve service, where the congregational members are described as wearing “[s]ome one article of more than usual finery . . . in connexion with the coarse attire of the woods” (ibid., 123). One woman, for instance “wore a faded silke, that had gone through at least three generations, over coarse, woollen, black stockings,” while another wore “a shawl, whose dies were as numerous as those of the rainbow, over an awkwardly-fitted gown, of rough, brown woman’s-wear” (ibid., 123). Certainly, these garments contrast with those of Elizabeth, whose hood is elegant, well-fitted black silk, or the clergyman’s daughter’s apparel, whose “dress was neat and becoming” (ibid., 126). Even more significant, the same group of common villagers at the church service is presented as ignorant and intellectually simple. For instance, the clergyman, Mr. Grant, “well understood the character of his listeners, who were mostly a primitive people in their habits . . . knowing how dangerous it was to contend with ignorance, [he] uniformly endeavored to avoid dictating, where his better reason taught him it was the most prudent to attempt to lead” (ibid., 126). In other words, Mr. Grant must adjust, even compromise, his rhetoric, in order to appeal to the non-intellectual interests of the greater portion of his congregation, the artisans and yeoman.

Cooper brings attention to the growing concern with professionalism and career, too, when he reinforces the differences between Judge Temple and his professional equals, like Mr. Grant, and the “working class” throughout the novel. The professionals tend to interact, primarily, with those who have similar levels of education. When Mr. Grant encounters the young lawyer Mr. Lippet, for example, the narrator comments: “There was very little similarity in the manners or opinions of the two; but as they both belonged to the more intelligent class of a very small community, they were, of course, known to each other” (ibid., 339). Moreover, the professional class is granted the rights to speak on behalf of the general population. When the village men are drinking together at the local bar, the narrator notes: “The physician [Mr. Todd] and his companion, who was one of the two lawyers of the village, being the best qualified to maintain a public discourse with credit, were the principal speakers” (ibid., 150). Furthermore, the professionals of Judge Temple’s circle admit marked and consistent astonishment because Oliver Edwards, a companion of the hunter Natty Bumpo, expresses himself articulately and demonstrates educated manners. Soon after meeting Edwards, Judge Temple remarks: “The youth delivers himself in a chosen language; such as is seldom heard in these hills, and such as occasions great surprise to me, how one so meanly clad, and following so lowly a pursuit, could attain” (ibid., 110). Later, Mr. Grant, an Anglican, reveals surprise about Edwards familiarity with the format of the church: “It is so unusual to find one of your age and appearance, in these woods, at all acquainted with our holy liturgy” (ibid., 134). When the judge invites Edwards to work for him, he makes clear

that a career in law is preferable to a life supported by hunting: “[T]his youth is made of materials too precious to be wasted in the forest” (*ibid.*, 202). Elizabeth appears to share her father’s sentiments; after Edwards breaks from the Temple family, when he is disguised as a teamster, Elizabeth unexpectedly bumps into Edwards, exclaiming: “I—I—am quite sorry, Mr. Edwards, to see you reduced to such labor” (*ibid.*, 384). Although Edwards is a hunter, and not a yeoman farmer, specifically, there is evidence in the text that the Temples see the hunter and the farmer as equivalent occupations in terms of class. Near the end of the novel, Elizabeth speaks to her father about the possibility of her friend Louisa moving to the city in order to meet a husband; Elizabeth assures her father that Louisa’s father, Mr. Grant, can lease the farm he owns. She then adds: “Besides, would you have a clergyman toil in the fields!” (*ibid.*, 449).

In many respects, the class distinctions between the professional class and the working class illustrate Leverenz’s patrician and artisan paradigms. What is important to notice, however, is that while the patrician class is certainly privileged in the text, it does not go uncriticized. Certainly, Natty Bumppo, an uneducated, illiterate man, who nevertheless proves himself canny and intelligent, illustrates the “ambivalence about patriarchal deference” that Leverenz describes. Natty repeatedly expresses doubts about the professional class’s ability to make wise environmental and legal decisions. Natty himself is celebrated in a number of ways—for his courage and common sense, particularly—and this further complicates the story’s portrayal of the nonprofessional class. Furthermore, occasionally the narrator does describe the yeoman positively. An unnamed farmer attending Natty’s trial, for example, is described as “a well clad yeoman, mounted on a sleek, witch-tailed steed, ambling along the highway, with his red face elevated in a manner that said, ‘I have paid for my land, and fear no man’” (*ibid.*, 358). This man brings to mind the idealized farmer of Crèvecoeur and Jefferson, and he fits the criteria of artisan masculinity, as put forth by Leverenz.

Perhaps more significant than the differences portrayed between the patrician and yeoman/artisan versions of masculinity, then, is the extent to which Cooper’s novel predicts the values of the new market economy. The narrator notes, for example, that “[t]he village was alive with business, the artisans increasing in wealth with the prosperity of the community, and each day witnessing some nearer approach to the manners and usages of an old-settled town” (*ibid.*, 216). When Judge Temple is speaking to a man who has recently sold his farm and moved to town, Temple explicitly articulates the assumptions of a cash-based society in his question: “And what do you mean to do with your time, this winter? You must remember that time is money” (*ibid.*, 158). Equally notable is the specific profession of the educated men in the novel. Leverenz argues that as American culture shifted to a predominantly cash-based economy, and as professions became both more specialized and further separated from the home, men came to associate their identity and masculinity “much more stringently through their work than through any other aspect of their lives.”⁵⁴ This reiterates

Bledstein's description of the rise of professionalism in the antebellum era and casts another angle that the central protagonist of the Cooper novel is a judge. In "Institutionalizing Masculinity: The Law as a Masculine Profession" (1990), Michael Grossberg suggests that after the revolutionary war, legal practice in the United States became increasingly not only more specialized, but also associated with the masculine ideal.⁵⁵ In other words, in *Judge Temple*, by means of Temple's chosen profession, Cooper asserts the masculinity and, therefore, the respectability, of his central character.

Even more interesting, however, is Grossberg's suggestion that the "institutionalization of masculinity in the bar" reinforces the public nature of manhood.⁵⁶ This perception of masculinity is incompatible with the yeoman or artisan lifestyles, which, given the extent to which family members worked together in these professions, are both necessarily and intimately connected with the home and family. Hence, with the rise of the entrepreneurial paradigm for masculinity, one that emphasizes a man's professional identity over his domestic identity, the farmer, whose profession is domestic by its very nature, suffers a blow to his manhood. Cooper's novel, with its emphasis on class difference, its depiction of America's changing economic base, and its hints about changing male roles, illustrates the emerging values of the new American middle class.⁵⁷

Herman Melville addresses agricultural issues most explicitly in *Pierre* (1852; reprint, Chicago: Northwestern University Press, Fifth printing, 1986), in his portrayal of the subsistence farm family, the Millthorpes. Melville subverts the agrarian myth in his description of the "old farmer Millthorpe" as "refinely ennobled by nature, and yet coarsely tanned and attenuated by many a prolonged day's work in the harvest—rusticity and classicalness were strangely united. The delicate profile of his face bespoke the loftiest aristocracy; his knobbed and bony hands resembled a beggar's" (*ibid.*, 275). Despite its nobility, the family clearly bears the characteristics of overwork and poverty, and the reader is led to believe that these two factors are what eventually kill the old farmer. At his death, Charlie, his son, rejects farming for a number of reasons. First, the family is barely surviving on the farm, a farm they are leasing, so Charlie liquidates their possessions and moves the family to the city. Charlie's economic motivation for doing so reinforces the tenuous quality of tenancy. But the social motivations for Charlie's move are equally important. When his father dies, Charlie "recalled the ancestral Knight" of his past family history "and indignantly spurned the plow" (*ibid.*, 279). This strongly suggests that Charlie felt he could do better than farming, that farming was not merely hard work but also lowly regarded work. This possibility is reinforced when Charlie reflects to himself: "[T]o his family he resolved to be a second father, and a careful provider now. But not by hard toil of his hand; but by gentler practices of his mind" (*ibid.*, 279). The city also brings the family economic challenges, but Charlie comes to have the dignity of a profession. Rather than aim to be a smarter farmer

than his father (and try to buy the land the family leased), Charlie begins at the bottom of the business world (perhaps not coincidentally, he selects the legal profession) and works his way up, fulfilling Leverenz's entrepreneurial paradigm.

Pierre's family—aristocratic landholders—belongs to the patrician class. Even before he encounters Isabel and chooses to leave Saddle Meadows, the family estate, Pierre never considers working the land himself (which, thus, emphasizes the distinctions between the patrician paradigm and the artisan paradigm). In leaving Saddle Meadows, however, Pierre abandons his upper-class privileges and joins Charlie in the struggle to enter the urban middle class. Once he moves to the city, Pierre opts for an occupation of the mind over physical labor. He decides to let his "body stay lazily at home, and send off his soul to labor," believing his "soul would come faithfully back and pay the body her wages" (ibid., 261). Like Coverdale, Pierre perceives an intellectual life as uncongenial with hard physical labor. As he muses over his occupational options, Pierre thinks to himself: "Yoke the body to the soul, and put both to the plough, and the one or the other must in the end assuredly drop in the furrow. Keep, then, thy body effeminate for labor, and thy soul laboriously robust; or ease thy soul effeminate for labor, and thy body laboriously robust. Elect! the two will not lastingly abide in one yoke" (ibid., 261). Hence, Pierre spends his days holed up writing, sitting in a single position, refusing even to enter the warmer portions of the home (where the women were engaged in their domestic activities) during the coldest months of the year. The recurrence of this conscious distinction between the labors of the body and the mind among nineteenth-century writers suggests the extent to which an antebellum man's professional life was increasingly separate from his personal life, and his intellectual life was increasingly separate from his physical life. Notably, Pierre's over-reliance on his mind paralyzes him—he never finishes his book.

More than the other novels I have discussed, Melville's *Pierre* emphasizes the anxiety of placelessness that underlies the seeming preference for the city. The city is inhospitable, even foreboding, and yet the alternative, rural living, is never considered. The domestic, communal, and place-based quality of the rural life in which the farmer finds himself necessarily immersed is not easily reconciled with that of the public, individualistic, newly displaced urbanite. Hence, the agrarian life is rejected altogether. *Pierre* indicates more explicitly what the other novels imply in their bumpkin farmers: there is no turning back. The farmer is irredeemable precisely because "progress" is, apparently, not only an "improvement"—but also irrefutable as well as irreversible. Progress and technology, by their very nature, absorb the farmer, and he is transformed beyond recognition. This, perhaps, explains why the "improved" farmers—that is, those committed to progress and technology—never find their way into the pages of antebellum fiction.

V

Over 150 years after the mid-nineteenth century, the “improved” farmer is fully integrated into our cash-based, technological society. Though nineteenth-century farming in the United States would have still been recognizable to a farmer of 2,500 years ago, the agricultural developments of the twentieth century—electricity, internal combustion, chemical use, and genetic engineering—have made this no longer so.⁵⁸ Technology has rendered farming less physically laborious, and most American farmers and their families exhibit the same markers of the urban middle class: formal education and material amenities, for example. Nevertheless, the place of farming has shrunk even further in most American communities as well as the larger national economy: the agricultural population is only 2 percent of the national total,⁵⁹ and farm production comprises only about 1 percent of the \$7 trillion U.S. economy.⁶⁰ Moreover, the small, independent farmer is anything but self-reliant. Farming is heavily subsidized, and the majority of farming families rely on wages from salaried jobs in order to meet daily expenses.⁶¹ In contrast, the large, faceless corporate farm has become the successful entrepreneurial model of our era. While one arm of the environmental movement has expressed an interest in returning to a simpler, more agrarian lifestyle, as evidenced by the 1970s back-to-the-land movement, the writings of Wendell Berry, or the recent scholarship in ecocriticism, for the most part, agriculture is altogether absent from the consciousness of the urban, middle-class American. Our reconciliation with an agrarian, emplaced lifestyle seems even more unlikely now than it did 150 years ago.⁶² In examining the ways farmers are portrayed in five important works of nineteenth-century antebellum literature, which reveals the urban middle-class’ expectations about education, culture, gender roles, and public and private space, readers can both predict the farmer’s absence in contemporary America and identify the motivations for Americans’ impulse to distance themselves from the farm—its land and its life.

Notes

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1. Crèvecoeur, in the third letter of his fictionalized *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782), celebrates the simple pleasures of farming and promises that with a little land and a willingness to work hard, even the poorest European peasant will find independence and prosperity. Jefferson’s “Notes on Virginia” (1788) takes the vision of the American farmer even further, linking strength of character with husbandry. See Thomas Jefferson, “Notes on Virginia,” *The Complete Jefferson*, war edition, ed. Saul K. Padover (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pierce, 1943), 678.

2. Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1950); Roy W. Meyer, *The Middle Western Farm Novel in the Twentieth Century* (Lincoln, Nebr.: University of Nebraska Press, 1965); Leo Marx, *Machine in the Garden* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967); Osha Gray Davidson, *Broken Heartland: The Rise of America’s Rural Ghetto* (New York: Free Press, 1990); Cheryl Herr, *Critical Region-*

alism and Cultural Studies (Gainesville, Fla.: University Press of Florida, 1996); Stephanie Sarver, *Uneven Land: Nature and Agriculture in American Writing* (Lincoln, Nebr.: University of Nebraska Press, 1999). Nash claims the myth of America's agrarian paradise continued through the end of the nineteenth century (139). Meyers refers to "the nostalgic sentimental view of the farm prominent in nineteenth century fiction" (80). This shared assumption continues in more recent scholarship, as evidenced in Davidson's mention of the popularity of the farmer in American mythology, Herr's reference to the "ideological consistency" of the "agrarian imaginary," and Sarver's assertion that Hamlin Garland distinguishes himself by departing from the pattern of the myth.

3. Marx argues that Crèvecoeur's *Letters* and Jefferson's "Notes" are actually American versions of the European pastoral. Like all simple pastorals, Marx contends that the eighteenth-century vision for a fully self-sufficient, independent farmer as America's representative man was never fully grounded in reality. Timothy Sweet has more recently extended this analysis, suggesting in "American Pastoralism and the Marketplace: Eighteenth-Century Ideologies of Farming," *Early American Literature* 29, no. 1 (1994), 59-80, that neither Crèvecoeur nor Thomas Jefferson actually believed the idealized yeoman to live in a homogeneous, classless society, although their rhetoric implies this is the case.

4. Sarver, 57.

5. *Ibid.*, 70.

6. Sarver focuses on five writers—Ralph Waldo Emerson, Hamlin Garland, William Ellsworth Smythe, and Liberty Bailey—analyzing "their attention to agriculture and to the relationship among the agrarian experience, the human spirit, and human culture," *Uneven Land* (16). Specifically, she looks at the relationship between farming and non-human nature.

7. Nina Baym, *Novels, Readers, Reviewers: Responses to Fiction in Antebellum America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984); Ronald J. Zboray, "Antebellum Reading and the Ironies of Technological Innovation," *Reading in America: Literature and Social History*, ed. Cathy N. Davidson (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989). Baym argues: "[T]he novel was thought to have originated as the chosen reading of the newly literate masses, and its dominant position represented less a change of taste in an existing audience than a change in the makeup of the audience for the written word" (29). She also remarks that in the July 1827 issue *North American* pronounced the era "an age of novel writing" and "[b]y 1850 American reviewers had accepted the novel as the literary art form of the nineteenth century" (26, 44). The rise of novels, in particular, coincided with the tremendous changes occurring at the time. Zboray concurs that novels marked the middle-class reader (50).

8. Zboray, "Antebellum Reading," 196.

9. Henry Nash Smith writes that two versions of the agrarian vision were in place by 1830s, with each finding "expression in imaginative and symbolic terms: that of the South in a pastoral literature of the plantations, that of the Northeast in the myth of the garden of the world with the idealized western yeoman as its focal point," *Virgin Land*, 151. This is not to say that southern literature does not include depictions of the small-farm yeoman. Caroline Lee Hentz's relatively unknown novel, *The Planter's Northern Bride* (1854), the story of a young northern woman who marries a southern planter, gives specific attention to an aspiring southern yeoman farmer/overseer. In describing the protagonist's response to the southern yeoman and his family, Hentz makes points about the incompatibility between true womanhood and farming that are remarkably similar to Susan Warner's.

10. Also interesting is the extent to which non-literary texts of the antebellum period indicate a growing class consciousness among farmers themselves. In his article "The Agricultural Press Views the Yeoman: 1819-1859," *Agricultural History* 42 (Winter 1968), Richard Abbott examines nineteenth-century farming journals and finds that editors worked deliberately to promote the reputation of farming. The letters readers sent into these magazines often implied that "the low status of the yeoman stemmed from society's view that physical labor was degrading," and farmers as well as the larger society "appeared to agree that [farm] work was humiliating" (38). Abbott comments that one correspondent "told the editor of the *Cultivator* that 'for ages the employment of the husbandman has been looked upon as uninteresting work . . . and there has been too much foundation for such an impression'" (37). Another editor remarks: "Farming too long has been considered an occupation fit only for those who were good for nothing else." Although a thorough exploration of non-literary texts constitutes a subsequent project, evidence suggests that, despite the considerable lip service given to the agrarian myth, the status of the farmer has, perhaps, long been much more precarious.

11. Joseph Schafer, *The Social History of American Agriculture* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1936), 49.

12. *Ibid.*, 52.

13. Clarence Danhof, *Change in Agriculture: The Northern United States, 1820-1870* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969), 3.

14. Paul Gates, *The Farmer's Age: Agriculture, 1815-1860* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960), 1.
15. Schafer, *Social History*, 53.
16. Jeremy Atack and Fred Bateman, *To Their Own Soil: Agriculture in the Antebellum North*, (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1987), 4.
17. In perpetuation of feudal principles, the woman, Katerina, is still seen as property herself.
18. Carolyn Merchant, *Ecological Revolutions: Nature, Gender, and Science in New England* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989). Merchant posits that during the first half of the nineteenth century a "mechanistic, instrumental universe" replaced the "animate, vitalistic cosmos of the agrarian age," 211
19. John Mack Faragher, *Sugar Creek: Life on the Illinois Prairie* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 199; Wayne Rohrer, "Agrarianism and the Social Organization of U.S. Agriculture," *Rural Sociology* 35 (March 1970): 6; Danhof, *Change in Agriculture*, 4-5. According to Danhof, the farm goods sold in urban markets between the years of 1820 and 1870 increased from twenty percent to forty" (2).
20. For example, many farmers were able to buy processed wood for their houses, and thereby replace their log cabins with frame homes. (See Gates, *The Farmer's Age*, 418.)
21. Danhof, *Change in Agriculture*, 1.
22. Merchant, *Ecological Revolutions*, 113, 212, 213.
23. *Ibid.*, 214.
24. Atack and Bateman, *To Their Own Soil*, 11.
25. Jeremy Atack, "Tenants and Yeomen in the Nineteenth Century," *Agricultural History* 62 (Summer 1988): 16.
26. As a result, Danhof suggests "the money incomes attainable in urban pursuits became increasingly attractive and established standards against which farming incomes and prospects were measured," *Change in Agriculture*, 9.
27. *Ibid.*, 7-8. After the year 1800, urban growth outpaced rural growth in Connecticut, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Maryland. Similar trends occurred in New Hampshire, New Jersey, and Maine after 1820; in New York after 1830, and in Delaware after 1840. Apparently, by the year 1850 the state of New York reached urbanization levels comparable to Great Britain. The Midwestern states experienced similarly increased rates of urban growth—urban growth outpaced rural in Ohio after 1820, in Missouri after 1840, and in Indiana, Illinois, and Michigan after 1850. In 1820, the rural population of the United States comprised 90 percent of the total, but by 1870, the rural inhabitants had dropped to 68 percent of the total.
28. *Ibid.*, 7.
29. Merchant, *Ecological Revolutions*, 3.
30. Gates, *The Farmer's Age*, 7. Gates argues that after the mid-century point, the number of farmers was even lower than what Danhof estimates. Gates maintains that the Census of 1860 indicates "agriculture was the occupation of only forty percent of those whose employment was listed that year" (420).
31. Burton Bledstein, *The Culture of Professionalism: The Middle Class and the Development of Higher Education in America* (New York: Norton, 1976), 5. Frances B. Cogan, *All-American Girl: The Ideal of Real Womanhood in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989), 13; Stuart Blumin, "The Hypothesis of Middle-Class Formation in Nineteenth-Century America: A Critique and Some Proposals," *American Historical Review* 90 (April 1985): 312.
32. Blumin, "Hypothesis," 313.
33. *Ibid.*, 315.
34. *Ibid.*, 316.
35. Bledstein, *Culture of Professionalism*, ix, 171-2.
36. Blumin, "Hypothesis," 334.
37. *Ibid.*, 334.
38. C. Dallet Hemphill, "Middle Class Rising in Revolutionary America: The Evidence from Manners," *Journal of Social History* 30 (Winter 1996): 333.
39. *Ibid.*, 320, and Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-class Culture in America, 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 1, 92, 94.
40. Hemphill, "Middle Class Rising," 320, Halttunen, *Confidence Men*, 110.
41. Halttunen, *Confidence Men*, 97, 104.
42. *Ibid.*, 198.
43. Bledstein, *Culture of Professionalism*, 14.
44. *Ibid.*, 170.
45. Reeve Huston, "Land and Freedom: The New York Anti-Rent Wars and the Construction of Free Labor in the Antebellum North," *Labor Histories: Class, Politics, and the Working-Class Experience*, ed. Eric Arnesen, Julie Greene, and Bruce Laurie (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 21.

46. *Ibid.*, 24.

47. David Foster, *Thoreau's Country: Journey Through a Transformed Landscape*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 232, 238. Merchant also argues that Thoreau was a champion of the subsistence farmer, *Ecological Revolutions*, 256. Merchant reinforces Foster, writing that "Thoreau was an articulate champion of the preservation of the values of subsistence farming," 172, 233.

48. Susan Warner was living on a farm at the time she wrote the novel, not by choice, but because her father had gone bankrupt and lost everything except the country home. Warner resented this life and hoped the novel she wrote would catapult her back into the leisure of her former life. See Nina Baym, *Women's Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America, 1820-1870*, (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1978), 140, 142, 143.

49. Merchant, *Ecological Revolutions*, 172, 233.

50. David Leverenz, *Manhood and the American Renaissance* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1989), 74.

51. *Ibid.*, 80.

52. *Ibid.*, 83.

53. Alfred Habegger, *Gender, Fantasy, and Realism in American Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 220.

54. Leverenz, *Manhood*, 89.

55. Michael Grossberg, "Institutionalizing Masculinity: The Law as a Masculine Profession," *Meanings for Manhood: Constructions of Masculinity in Victorian America*, ed. Mark C. Carnes and Clyde Griffen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 140.

56. *Ibid.*, 134.

57. Nathaniel Hawthorne's *House of the Seven Gables* (1851; reprint, New York: Penguin, 1986 c. 1965) adeptly portrays the way the entrepreneur replaces the artisan and yeoman. The original Maule is a subsistence farmer, who "succeeded in protecting the acre or two of earth which, with his own toil, he had hewn out of the primeval forest, to be his garden-ground and homestead" (7). Although this farmer is portrayed sympathetically (if briefly, as the narrative almost immediately shifts to mid-nineteenth-century urban life), it seems significant (and telling) that the Maule family's farming roots have been long since left behind by the time Holgrave, Maule's nineteenth-century descendant, arrives on the scene as a trendy photographer. Holgrave's long list of former occupations—a country school-master, country-store salesman, newspaper political editor, cologne water peddler, dentist, and public lecturer on hypnotism—indicates his eager participation in the newly emerging market economy. Importantly, these numerous occupations reinforce his identity as a man in Leverenz's entrepreneurial paradigm for masculinity. Hawthorne's narrator explains that Holgrave, "[l]eft early to his own guidance . . . had begun to be self-dependent while yet a boy; and it was a condition aptly suited to his natural force of will" (176). That Holgrave did not return to the profession of his forefathers is telling. Rather than return to the farm, even as a technologically-improved agrarian of the industrializing market economy, the "self-dependent male" who demonstrates a "natural force of will" enters the urban workforce instead. It is important, too, that the powerful man in the town, Jaffrey Pyncheon, whose house Holgrave and Phoebe assume at the novel's end, was a judge. As in Cooper's *Pioneers*, the community's leaders are legal professionals, deeply immersed in urban civic affairs.

58. Tim Unruh, "Sowing Solutions: Past, Present, and Future of Farming," *The Salina Journal*, October 10, 1999, Great Plains Edition, 6.

59. *Ibid.*, 6.

60. Lillian Zier, Russ Keen, Kevin Bonham, Worth Wren, Tom Webb, and Lee Egerstrom, "The Family Farm: Losing Money, Hope," *The Wichita Eagle*, July 25, 1999, 12A.

61. *Ibid.*, Kara Rhodes, "Extra Income: Most Farm Families Dependent on Second Jobs," *The Salina Journal*, October 10, 1999, Great Plains Edition, 3. In 1997, for example, 87 percent or 61,000 of the farmers in Kansas, one the nation's leading agricultural states, held second jobs, and only 56 percent claimed farming was their primary occupation. Thirty-seven percent of these Kansas farmers earn less than \$10,000 a year from their farms—hence, in an economic sense, farming is more of a hobby than an occupation for them.

62. Dale Fooshee, a Kansas farmer who lost 2,000 acres in the 1980s farm crisis and spent the next eight years paying off his farm loans, predicts that the family farm will eventually disappear altogether. He remarks: "Personally, I don't think even the concept of the farm as we know it has much time left." Duane Hund, who oversees a Kansas State University program that provides farmers with financial advice, agrees with Fooshee. (See Zier et al., "Family Farm," 12A).