21
AGRICULTURAL STUDIES

Susan M. Squier

> [C]ountry life has many meanings. It is the elms, the may, the white horse, in the field beyond the window where I am writing. It is the men in the November evening, walking back from pruning, with their hands in the pockets of their khaki coats; and the women in headscarves, outside their cottages, waiting for the blue bus that will take them, inside school hours to work in the harvest. It is the tractor on the road, leaving its tracks of serrated pressed mud; the light in the small hours, in the pig-farm across the road, in the crisis of a litter; the slow brown van met at the difficult corner, with the crowded sheep jammed to its slatted sides; the heavy smell, on still evenings, of the silage ricks fed with molasses. It is also the sour land, on the thick boulder clay, not far up the road, that is selling for housing, for a speculative development, at twelve thousand pounds an acre.
>
> (Williams 1973: 3)

Thirty years ago, Raymond Williams set forth in this brief paragraph what we might view as the agenda for agricultural studies (Williams 1973). Yet despite its debt to his pioneering *Culture and Society* (Williams 1958), which laid the groundwork of cultural studies, in the years to come, the field of cultural studies showed little appreciation of the agricultural issues Williams evoked so memorably. Instead, from its origins in the work of Raymond Williams and Richard Hoggart, the field of cultural studies grew to emphasize engaged analysis, a focus on subjectivity, attention to the relations between culture and individual lives, and a commitment to the investigation of the impact of the political and technological centralization of first-world power in the great cities of the global North (Williams 1958; Hoggart 1958; During 1993). This emphasis is clearly evident in *The Cultural Studies Reader*, a well-known volume that covers nationalism, postcolonialism, and globalization; ethnicity and multiculturalism; science and cyberculture; sexuality and gender; carnival and utopia; consumption and the market; leisure; and culture (During 1993: 2, 1). Notably absent is any reference to the act of cultivating plants or animals for food, despite the fact that culture, derived from the Latin word *cultura*, was used as far back as 1420 to mean "the cultivation of a plant or crop" (*OED*).

Agriculture has a broad reach, from Stone Age ploughs to the pastoral, and discussions of rural and agrarian life have long been part of literary history and criticism (see Alpers 1997; Conlogue 2001: 6). Certain works loom

particularly large in our understanding of how the pastoral motif of a blessed retreat from the pressures of an urban world, "a green thought in a green shade," has structured English and American literature (Marvell 1938). While D.H. Lawrence describes the flight to the country as a classically American escape from European cultural dominance, in their 1930 introductory essay to the classic manifesto *I'll Take My Stand*, the "Twelve Southerners," known as the "Agrarians," affirm that they all "tend to support a Southern way of life against what may be called the American or prevailing way; and all ... agree that the best terms in which to represent the distinction are contained in the phrase, Agrarian *versus* Industrial" (Twelve Southerners 1930). Henry Nash Smith explores the myth of the garden as a foundational belief in American culture and politics, Leslie Fiedler argues that American men choose the wilderness because they associate it with masculine freedom from the civilizing domesticities of a feminized town life, and both Leo Marx and Annette Kolodny associate the rural with the feminine, whether that link invites consolation and embrace or leads to violence and exploitation (Lawrence 1923; Smith 1950; Fiedler 1960; Conlogue 2001: 6; Marx 1964; Kolodny 1975).

In contrast to such literary and historical explorations of the pastoral, agricultural studies focuses on the post-pastoral. I borrow this term from Terry Gifford, who frames its defining vision as awe at the natural world; recognition of "a creative-destructive universe"; realization that inner and outer nature must be understood in relation to each other; "awareness of both nature as culture and culture as nature"; acknowledgment that "with consciousness comes conscience"; and the ecofeminist understanding that exploitation of women and minorities emerges from the same state of mind as environmental exploitation (Gifford 2000). We can clarify the concept of the post-pastoral by considering the contemporary response to that 1930 text, *I'll Take My Stand*. Recent scholars have located populism, anti-industrialism, cultural conservatism, and whiteness in that volume's celebration of rural heritage (Donaldson 2006: ix). For example, Tanya Ann Kennedy argues that the volume formulates a gendered relation between private and public worlds that leads to a suppression of women writers even within a reclaimed regional identity. Kennedy charges the Agrarians with inconsistency and gender bias, because despite their attention to the "displacements and alienations engendered by imperialist, industrial, and urban impositions upon a primarily agricultural people," she argues, they fail to take into account the differences between male and female agricultural work. Instead, their defense of the Agrarian way of life "subsumes all white female members under the rubric of the household economy," shoving women to the margin "as an agent of the consumerism and sexuality associated with northern urbanism" (Kennedy 2005: 45).

We can sharpen our understanding of "post-pastoral" as a term by associating it with a paradigm shift within agriculture, during which the general concept of farming changed from a way of life to a business, subject to the same strategies

of rationalization, management practices, and control technologies as other industrialized businesses. Of course, such a broad claim omits the various niches within industrial farming where small, marginal, and recreational farmers have continued to exist alongside the rationalized and large-scale agricultural holdings on the High Plains at the turn of the twentieth century. It also relies on a restrictive and futuristic view of technology. Even the Bonanza wheat farms and the vast cattle ranches were forged by such low-technology tools as the mule-drawn plough and the barbed-wire fence (Hinrichs 2009). Yet depending on the types of agricultural practices they investigate, which will lead scholars to date the emergence of post-paradigm agriculture earlier or later, a major reference point is arguably England between 1649 and 1650, when a group of agrarian reformers known as the Diggers launched a "rural, radical and short-lived response to the enclosure laws and the widespread poverty and starvation" they had produced (Lyon 1999: 17).

The Diggers' argument that poor people were a distinct group with a shared interest in access to the common lands, recently fenced in by the Enclosure Acts for the landowning ruling classes, was legitimated by religious understanding. They drew on the thinking of reformers Robert Coster and Gerard Winstanley that the earth was a "common treasury" bestowed by God for all men and women to use. While the Digger uprising was quickly crushed by the landowning classes, their communities shattered, houses burned, and property destroyed, the rhetorical innovation they displayed remains. "Digger texts (and specifically Winstanley's writings) principally aimed to 'win over a rural proletariat (and other sympathetic groups) to a program of mass political action'" (Lyon 1999: 19, citing Holstun). They called, in songs and poems, "Stand up now, Diggers all," and the group whose solidarity they invoked was both called into being and given a cause. And so was launched a new literary genre, the manifesto. As a literary genre, the manifesto embodies the troubled connections between modernity and agriculture, between the ability to work one's own land and the status of citizen. A central theme of the manifesto is the protest that "We" (its empowered and oppressed collectivity) have not shared the fruits of modernity's technological and political innovations. Yet the manifesto's call for access to technological progress clashes with its origins in an agrarian protest, as the Digger movement waged a bitter and ultimately doomed fight against a new technology of land management: the fencing in, or enclosure, of common lands.

"Historically," Janet Lyon reminds us, "manifestoes ... appear most often in clusters around those crises that involve definitions of citizenship and political subjecthood" (Lyon 1999: 16). The very form of the manifesto *performs* the creation of a community, a "we" articulating its claim to the fruits of progress produced by contemporary science and medicine. Yet this new community also marked the end of an old subject position: the subsistence farmer who worked lands held in common. Rosemarie Garland Thomson has introduced the term

normate to designate "the social figure through which people can represent themselves as definitive human beings. Normate ... is the constructed identity of those who, by way of the bodily configurations and cultural capitalism they assume, can step into a position of authority and wield the power it grants them" (Thomson 1997: 8). The initial act of agricultural dispossession not only led to the manifesto, but also shaped the political subject: the functional, normate body of the citizen.

We can see this notion of the citizen taking shape in Locke's *Two Treatises of Government*, where Locke makes a distinctly agricultural case for the ownership of property:

> *As much Land* as a Man Tills, Plants, Improves, Cultivates, and can use the Product of, so much is his *Property*. He by his Labor does, as it were, inclose it from the Common. ... He that in Obedience to this Command of God, subdued, tilled and sowed any part of it, thereby annexed to it something that was his *Property*, which another had no Title to, nor could without injury take from him.
>
> (Locke 1689: 290–91)

Locke's accomplishment lay not merely in forwarding a new notion that labor is the warrant for property, or in linking that property to a man's body, but in implicitly restricting the *kinds* of bodies that can produce property. He saw the proper body as a commodity, which though it established a person's material identity, was functionally equivalent to all bodies, and thus robbed of its specificity. Those bodies which were, due to age, illness, or disability, unable to work were not, in the Lockean sense, individuals. Because they were held to dependence on others for the fundamentals of human life, these bodies had no agency. And, as Paul Youngquist has pointed out, "Bodies irreducible to functional norms live beyond the pale of liberal politics, the objects perhaps of charity and affection but not quite persons, not quite proper. They remain too dependent to be full participants in civil society" (Youngquist 2003: 21).

In equating labor with the property thus accumulated, Locke goes farther, reshaping the body that produces (and grounds) labor from something diverse and various (in its power and value) into something standardized and functionally equivalent *inasmuch as all forms of laboring bodies produce property*. "Not possessions but the ability to possess is what qualifies the individual for participation in civil society. It is because a man has a right to the free use of his body that he can accumulate property, which civil society then develops to protect" (Youngquist 2003: 20). Race, gender, ability, and even age are all implicitly specified in this understanding of property, which is focused not on possessions but on the power to possess. With that move the citizen is redefined. Those social technologies that assisted in the transformation of the citizen would also help to

transform farming over the next 300 years, from a way of life to a profit-driven business, or *agribusiness*.

In spite of Locke's explicit linkage between agriculture as a zone of subject production and the creation of a new citizen – so central to any cultural studies analysis – until recently it was left to such social science fields as agricultural economics, history, anthropology, geography, and rural sociology to challenge the metropolitan mindset of cultural studies (Levidow 1996; Sachs 1996; Soper 1996; Hart 1998; Cloke, Marsden, and Mooney 2006; Thompson 2007). One such challenge originates in the Program in Agrarian Studies at Yale University, an experimental, interdisciplinary academic program formed in 1991–92 with support from the Rockefeller Foundation and the Ford Foundation as well as Yale University itself. The Yale Agrarian Studies program explicitly reaches beyond its social science origins, eschewing the "purely statistical and abstract," and setting an agenda for itself that welcomes "the fresh air of popular knowledge and reasoning about poverty, subsistence, cultivation, justice, art, laws, property, ritual life, cooperation, resource use, and state action" ("About Agrarian Studies" 2009). Intending to draw together a wide range of disciplines, agrarian studies embraces three shared principles: "that any satisfactory analysis of agrarian development must begin with the lived experience, understandings, and values of its historical subjects"; "that the study of the Third World … must never be segregated from the historical study of the west, or the humanities from the social sciences"; and finally that "the only way to loosen the nearly hegemonic grip of the separate disciplines on how questions are framed and answered is to concentrate on themes of signal importance to several disciplines" ("About Agrarian Studies" 2009).

Agrarian studies is explicit in its intention to include the humanities in its social sciences-centered area of investigation. Yet unlike agrarian studies' attention to "rural life and society" broadly conceived, agricultural studies displays an explicit focus on agriculture. Moreover, while agrarian studies (despite its intentions) draws its strength predominantly from the social sciences, agricultural studies enrolls scholars in several emergent (and often interconnecting) areas of literary studies including science studies, animal studies, ecocriticism and environmental studies, women and gender studies, and science fiction. Literature-and-science scholars have begun to use specifically literary methods to assess the impact of agricultural innovations on the individual and society. For example, science studies scholars are forging a critical literature that explores the role of scientized agriculture in the production of the human being as citizen (Levidow 1996; Bryson 2002; Franklin, Lury, and Stacey 2000; Thurtle 2007; Haraway 2008).

Animal studies scholars explore not only the ontological otherness of animals and their interconnection with human beings, but also the broader issues raised by the farming of individual animals (chickens, cattle, sheep); agricultural interventions into animal breeding and human innovations in assisted reproduction; and the broader issue of the co-construction of veterinary and human medicine (Agamben 2002; Squier 2004; Franklin 2007; Broglio 2008; Clarke 1998). Ecocriticism and environmental studies research explores the social cost of an extractive approach to nature, while a sub-category styling itself "green cultural studies" adds the category "nature … plants, animals, elements" to such factors as "ethnicity/color, gender, sexuality, economic class, and age" that are all influenced by the impact of texts and social practices (Hochman 2000: 187). Women and gender studies explores the meaning of agriculture to women: as the source of loneliness; as a zone of racist eugenics; as a mode of economic and technological exploitation demanding feminist activism, and as a site where gender and domesticity can be reworked in relation to a contested modernity (Jellison 1993; Weinbaum 2004; Casey 2009). Finally, science fiction studies scholars have been making explicit the connections between science fictions about the production of food and reproduction of people, and contemporary agriculture (Franklin 1982; Le Guin 1996).

Just as our understanding of the manifesto genre is deepened once we know that it originated in the struggle against agricultural dispossession and the redefinition of the citizen in terms of the capacity to possess property, so too our understanding of other literary and aesthetic genres is enriched by attention to agriculture as a set of practices, technologies, and actors (both human and animal). An agricultural studies perspective enables a more socially situated understanding of specific literary genres. We see this demonstrated in three literary works dealing, respectively, with English Romanticism, nineteenth- and twentieth-century American literature, and feminist literary criticism of modernism/modernity. These works offer us new views of portrait painting, the novel, and periodical literature.

Ronald Broglio's *Technologies of the Picturesque: British Art, Poetry, and Instruments 1750–1830* demonstrates that British landscape painting, and particularly the genre of breed portraiture, was a technology of representation essential to the practice of cattle breeding (Broglio 2008). Arguing that eighteenth-century literature and painting co-create the picturesque relation to the natural world, Broglio challenges the conventional understanding of the picturesque by juxtaposing George Stubbs's and George Garrard's breed portraits to specific agricultural practices, and then demonstrating the relations between picturesque landscape paintings and Robert Bakewell's technique of "in-in" cattle breeding. Such paintings served as guide and template to breeders hoping to duplicate in their herds the proportions and weight of champion livestock, and thus helped popularize the new method of animal husbandry. Not only did changing agricultural practices drive the future of cattle breeding, but these practices were grounded in, and shaped, the development of artistic conventions in portraiture. Tracing the origins of a major human medical breakthrough, the practice of vaccination, back to routine, accepted agricultural practices, Broglio records a challenge to the customary division between veterinary and human medicine.

He demonstrates that when Edward Jenner developed a cure for smallpox by experimentally inoculating patients with the cowpox virus, he was drawing on farmers' long-standing experience that proximity with an animal disease, cowpox, provided dairymaids with immunity from smallpox. Jenner's development of the vaccine through attention to the relationship between animals and human beings ushered in the extensive technology transfers between animal reproductive sciences and human reproductive medicine of the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries (Clarke 1998; Squier 2005; Franklin 2007).

What is the agricultural studies method *in practice*, then? We can see its outlines by comparing Broglio's approach to Romantic literature and art with William Conlogue's treatment of nineteenth- and twentieth-century American farm texts, *Working the Garden: American writers and the industrialization of agriculture* (Conlogue 2001). Both studies consider an aesthetic category and set of cultural practices in relation to an agricultural innovation: whether it is the new practice of cross-breeding cattle (Broglio) or the restructuring of American wheat farming (Conlogue). In both studies, the juxtaposition of art and agricultural science results in a re-evaluation of customary aesthetic judgments: a reassessment of the picturesque for the former, and for the latter a challenge to the literary reliance on the pastoral mode as the appropriate prism through which to interpret the "farm text" (Conlogue 2001). And essential to each study is a thick description of changing agricultural practices: the new impetus to improve British beef by selective breeding, and the new huge bonanza wheat farms that emerged in the 1880s in the Dakotas' Red River Valley.

Exploring farm literature as a site of intense debate over the changes in American agriculture resulting from industrialization, Conlogue argues against using the literary model of the pastoral to approach these texts. Virgil's *Georgics* offer a better lens: the *georgic* addresses issues of "how work, community, technological restraint, and human uses of nature changed with the introduction of an urban-defined industrial agriculture that has erased the pastoral's central tension between city and country" (Conlogue 2001: 9). Conlogue's study distinguishes between the Old Agriculture, infused with the values of yeoman-like integrity, community, and the worth of inherited farm knowledge, and the New Agriculture, characterized by a rationalized, industrialized business model with profit at the core. Challenging an earlier formulation of the genre as any form of fiction that deals with farm life, that accurately portrays the details of farming in a vernacular style and reflects the essentially conservative attitudes and values of farming people, Conlogue reveals what differentiates an agricultural studies perspective, which responds to actually occurring changes in farming structure and practice, from a simple focus on agricultural themes. Viewed from his engaged perspective, with a focus on the relations between culture and the production of individual subjects, he defines farm fiction as that which attends to the interrelationships of the natural world and the world of human work, the force and importance of history, the relation between the well-being of

individual farm families and the broader community, and the effect of technologies (particularly but not exclusively agricultural technologies) on human beings and the environment.

Conlogue's agricultural studies analysis of farm fiction is attentive to gender, ethnicity, and race, categories which have all been intimately shaped by, and have left their mark on, the structure and practice of agriculture in the United States. Offering chapters assessing the visibility (or lack thereof) of women in the New Agriculture; the relationship between class and the transformation of agriculture from a way of life to a business; and the relationship between racism and industrial farming, Conlogue's study exemplifies the agricultural studies method of giving equal attention to the epistemological practices of widely divergent disciplines, including both a chart drawn from rural sociology that provides a detailed comparison of conventional and alternative agriculture, and also Conlogue's own autobiographical narrative. This strategic openness to both modes of knowledge exemplifies agricultural studies' commitment to analyzing the meaning of agriculture at all scales and magnitudes.

We have seen that agricultural studies characteristically gives us new ways to think about literary analysis as well as an understanding of changes in agricultural science. Janet Galligani Casey's *A New Heartland: Women, Modernity, and the Agrarian Ideal in America* exemplifies this method by reviewing modernism/modernity through the lens of agriculture. Casey argues that rural texts are modernist in that they challenge the dominant ideologies of agrarian life, ranging from its conservative positions on gender and race to its radical embrace of agricultural rationalization (Casey 2009). Turning to popular best-sellers, the early twentieth-century agricultural periodical *The Farmer's Wife*, and the work of two women rural photographers, this study, too, incorporates non-canonical texts, arguing that in their resistance to the categories of the pastoral and the agrarian ideal, these rural texts constitute a distinctly modern kind of aesthetic production.

Returning, in closing, to Raymond Williams's glimpse out of his window, we can consider how this paragraph exemplifies agricultural studies *ab ovo*. As we begin reading, we sense the scene's distinctly English tone. The elms, the white horse, and the may or hawthorn tree carry resonances of ancient Druid festivals and village celebrations of the maypole, as well as echoes of Tennyson's "immemorial elms" and Chesterton's *Ballad of the White Horse* (Tennyson 1847; Chesterton 1911; Lincoln 1918). We can follow Williams's vision of the country as it expands from the simply botanical and naturalist perspective to the explicitly agricultural, as he acknowledges that "there is a deep contrast in which so much feeling is held: between what seems an unmediated nature – a physical awareness of trees, birds, the moving shapes of land – and a working agriculture, in which so much of nature is in fact being produced" (Williams 1973: 3).

This awareness of deep contrast is essential to agricultural studies, a method of analysis attentive to the role of *techne* in all aspects of the agricultural endeavor.

It understands technology not only as the pruning shears which the farm laborers carry, but also the technology of gender that differentiates male from female farm workers, so that the men in their typical khaki coats and the women in their kerchiefs do different kinds of work at different times (Lauretis 1987). The men prune while the women harvest; the men work from morning to evening while the women can only hire themselves out as harvesters during school hours when the children are out of the home. And unlike the men, women's agricultural work is not only productive, but reproductive. As with the livestock (the pigs and the sheep), for women their share of farm work includes the bearing of and caring for children, as well as keeping the household.

Reading this passage from an agricultural studies perspective, we notice the rhythm of animal birth and death that forms the core of agriculture; we explore the texture and imprint of technology upon the land (those serrated tracks in the mud); and we see time passing – both the passage of a day (that small-hours light in the pigsty as the farmer helps with a litter of pigs), and an era (as good farm land gives way to a crop of new plots of sour boulder clay, sold on speculation for suburban housing). And we can formulate the essential qualities of an agricultural studies perspective. It will be situated in space and place, aware of the forces of gender and class, and sensitive not only to myth and folk knowledge, but to technology, economics and culture as well. While such complex, simultaneous, and often clashing experiences and meanings by no means exhaust its potential, they at least suggest some of the intellectual and cultural importance of the field of agricultural studies.

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22
ANIMAL STUDIES

Richard Nash

Two skunks, one day, by the roadside stood,
As an old Chevrolet passed by;
And the smell that it left was far from good,
And a tear stood in one skunk's eye.

"Oh, why do you weep?" the other skunk cried;
"Oh, why do you shiver and shake?"
"Because that smell," the first replied,
"Is like mother used to make."

G. Zabriskie, "Two Skunks"

My credit card called me today. It wanted to remind me – in that annoyingly impersonal, unflappable, slightly condescending human voice it has – that I needed to pay it. It gave me precise instructions, which in order to placate it, I dutifully followed to the best of my ability, pushing the button required at the moment indicated, through three or four levels, before it gave up on me and abruptly terminated the conversation by instructing me to call it back at a given number and then hanging up. When I returned its call, I eventually worked my way out of the automated maze, and after a short wait was put through to a courteous operator who spoke clear and articulate English with an inflection that struck my untrained ear as vaguely Pakistani. We conducted our transaction, with him pleasantly (but insistently) offering me products and services; and I, straining to match his courtesy, just as insistently declining these offers. Throughout the transaction, my refusals were strengthened by my irritated awareness that anything purchased would not be purchased from the kindly, precise, efficient fellow now making the offer, but from the hypocritical, overly pleasant machine who had first called me. I tend to be slow to anger when speaking with people, but I notice that I get irritated much more rapidly when conversing with machines.

That last sentence I wrote is the kind I grew up reading in sci-fi narratives of fifty years ago, but today it pops up on my monitor as a straightforward narrative of a widely held, non-idiosyncratic observation of affect in contemporary culture. In fact, if one Googles "anger automated voice," one will get not only the expected news stories documenting how widespread this new source of irritation is, one will also get citations to the burgeoning literature on how to build