

cultural criticism as already a thing of the past. True, most of the groundbreaking cultural scholarship on women's popular culture was carried out in the 1980s and 1990s but there clearly still exists a need for this kind of reading as long as one can still locate gaps in what this type of critical discourse has discussed. Christ identifies one such gap in scholarship on women's popular writing and sets off to fill it in. She does this both gracefully and diligently and deserves the greatest applause both for the effort and for the style in which she achieves her goal.

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Justyna Włodarczyk  
University of Warsaw

Florian Freitag. *The Farm Novel in North America: Genre and Nation in the United States, English Canada and French Canada, 1845–1945*. Rochester, New York: Camden House, 2013. 364 pages.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, farming, in its modern-day, North American form of industrial agribusiness, gets understandably little attention from fiction writers. Agribusiness seems devoid of artistic potential. As a system whose essence is control—of plant, animal and soil fertility, crop production, and mechanized labor input—it does not yield easily to the imaginative processing that thrives on human drama, passions, and the surprises of fate and nature. If contemporary American writers turn to farming as their subject, it is either to dramatize in their novels the struggle for survival of the anachronistic traditional family farm (Wendell Berry, Barbara Kingsolver, Jane Smiley), or to document in a nonfictional format their own exploits as gentle(wo)men/weekend/city farmers

who grow organic food or keep chickens for their own use. Both categories of writing—with the exception of Wendell Berry's essays on "culture and agriculture"—are peripheral tributaries of American literature's mainstream and, outside of agrarian and environmentalist circles, contribute marginally, if at all, to the national debates.

But things used to be very different. Between late nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries, the farm novel—that is, the novel set on a farm and concerned with farming as an occupation and lifestyle—enjoyed a remarkable popularity both with writers and reading audiences. As a genre, it not only gave expression to the experience of a substantial segment of North American population (in 1910, in the United States alone, farmers accounted for 30 percent of the national work force), but also contributed to articulating and fostering national ideologies and mythologies, while at the same time reflecting, sometimes critically, on their content. Inevitably, farm novels contributed as well to defining the place of land in the national sense of identity. This story of the farm novel as an agent of "nationaliz[ing] agricultural practices and spacializ[ing] national self-conceptions" becomes the subject of Florian Freitag's 350-page study, *The Farm Novel in North America*, published by Camden House.

Freitag assumes a comparative perspective in his book: instead of exploring farm novels, as they have often been explored, through the prism of the pastoral, or in their national/regional specificity, he makes his subject all three national literatures of North America, i.e. French Canadian, English Canadian and American, to reflect on how different historical circumstances and different national ideologies impinged on novelistic representations of a set of basically similar North American farming experiences—of homesteading, agricultural success, changes brought about by technological progress, environmental crises, competition with non-farming lifestyles, and the gradual loss of farming's economic significance. This transnational perspective allows the author to discern on the one hand the inevitable parallels in how the three national literatures represent farming life, but on the other, to bring out the differences between their visions of the rural world, the differences that have little to do with the actual experience of confronting specific agricultural, social, or environmental problems, but a lot to do with the ideological contexts in which the books were written. As Freitag writes, his goal is to "de-emphasize... the category of the pastoral... highlighting the genre's engagement with historiographical discourses and national self-conceptions instead" (12).

The farm novel enjoyed its heyday between 1880 and 1940, yet Freitag sees its sources or "prototypes" in three older texts, one for each national/cultural group. In Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur's "History of Andrew, the Hebridean" (1782), Susanna Moodie's *Roughing it in the Bush* (1852/1871), and Patrice Lacombe's *La*

*terre paternelle* (1846), all of the national characteristics of the North American farm novel of the future are already discernible. Crèvecoeur tells the story of a frontier farmer's success; Moodie introduces the theme of "control and order" that need to be imposed on the wilderness; in Lacombe's book, the paternal farm is presented as a site and synonym of French Canadian identity and resistance against English encroachments. Under the pressure of changing socio-political and cultural circumstances, these proto-stories would be with time revised in detail, reworked and even challenged, and yet the ideological framework which they introduced continued to structure the imaginations of writers for decades to come.

It is the French Canadian farm novel that is presented in the study as most persistently adhering over the years to the ideology and ideals first expressed in *La terre paternelle*. Until mid-twentieth century, when the farm and farmers finally disappear from Quebec fiction, the subsistence farm, owned for generations by one family, appears in French Canadian novels as a synonym and guarantee of French identity and as a stronghold of resistance against all forces threatening the survival of French Canadians in a world dominated by the English. These forces include Protestantism, materialism, liberalism and their epitome, the cities, that lure the young away from the farm, but also the wilderness, historically always a tempting alternative left to the less sedentary French Canadian spirits. The ones that let themselves be lured to live the life of *couriers de bois*, or to test their hand at business, or to marry an Englishman or American, almost as a rule eventually return home as prodigal sons or disobedient daughters to be pardoned and to resume their national mission of sustaining the French identity and traditions. Even those few texts that seem to reject the pattern, e.g. Claude-Henri Grignon's *Un homme et son péché* (1933), are seen by Freitag as only supporting through a negative argument the French Canadian ideology of agriculturalism—that is, the belief that the traditional family farm and farming are means of cultural survival.

English Canadian farm novels, on the other hand, communicate the original English settlers' preoccupation with "Order and Control." They present the settler-farmer as an agent of civilized improvement, understood as replacing the bush's "disorder" with the straight lines of the furrows, of roadlessness with roads. This controlling impulse extends also onto the human nature which always threatens the barely established order through unregulated sexuality or through other human passions, such as greed or envy. What is especially noteworthy about English Canadian farm novels, however, is that the most mature of them (as opposed to the English Canadian category of rural idylls) distance themselves from this national obsession with control, featuring characters who either break out of or sabotage such "rage for order" (Martha Ostenso's *Wild*

Geese, 1925) or, if they embrace it, eventually face doubts about what they have accomplished (Frederick Philip Grove's *Fruits of the Earth*, 1933). Moreover, English Canadian authors distinguish themselves by trying, rather stoically, to make sense in their novels of the dramatic changes which took place in agriculture in the first decades of the twentieth century—mechanization and depopulation—and that were soon to obliterate the old-time, heroic style of North American farming. Thus, in English Canadian farm fiction agriculture is gradually reconceptualized as food production for the world, which in the wartime period becomes also as service to the nation and a patriotic duty (R. J. C. Stead's *Grain*, 1926).

As for the American farm novel, its tone was set by Crèvecoeur. His small, independent farmer, the true American, blessed with the opportunities of the frontier which allowed him to pursue his American dream of progress and success, was to be resurrected in late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in many novelistic characters, the most memorable being Alexandra Bergson from Willa Cather's *O Pioneers!* (1913). However, American authors' vision of farm life darkened with time; first, the naturalists challenged the Jeffersonian myth of the farmer's independence, showing him not only at the mercy of nature (which in itself, Freitag argues, was no news in the farm novel, concerned as it had always been with lives determined by the environment), but also of the intangible forces of the market and capital. Then the Depression and the Dust Bowl shook the very foundations of the mythology, dispossessing the small farmer of the land and thus of the tool with which he could carve his better future. And yet, though humbled by their new knowledge, mid-twentieth century American novelists retained faith in the farmer, in his love of land and independence, in his hard-to-break spirit, and his ability to cooperate in the face of crisis. No book expresses better this allegiance to the national ideal of the farmer than Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* of which Freitag writes: "[it] can be categorized not only as a typical American novel—it depicts after all 'an exodus from a blighted land (Oklahoma) to a promised land (California)'"—but also as a typical American *farm* novel: ultimately the Joads are driven by their dream of home ownership and material success as settlers in California" (244).

Freitag's study brings into sharp focus the significance of the farm novel as a genre which helped to both shape and give voice to the consciousness of the three national/cultural groups. The book also makes it almost shockingly clear how these three groups, too often insufficiently distinguished one from the others from the transatlantic perspective, differ fundamentally in their responses to and interpretations of a similar experience. Farming the land can mean very different things to people who labor under different political and ideological exigencies. It can mean a patriotic obligation, it can mean

a civilizing mission, or it can mean translating the national dream into individual success.

Freitag divides his attention evenly among the three literatures, resisting the temptation to overemphasize the American over the Canadian, and especially over the French Canadian material. French Canadian farm novels, it should be stressed, get a fair share of space in this English-language study. They are also quoted in the original, even when English translations are available, which should probably be interpreted as a gesture of cultural respect and academic good manners. This being the case, one thing seems strikingly absent in this very culture-sensitive critique: an explanation of why the author has chosen to altogether ignore the Mexican farm fiction. The absence of any explanation (if not of chapters on Mexican literature) is all the more surprising since he acknowledges sympathetically in his "Introduction" the frequent Canadian complaint about being marginalized in North American comparative studies. So when one reads that the study "take[s] into account farm novels *from all over* North America" (8), one cannot help wondering about his reasons for the exclusion of Mexicans. Is it because Mexican writers did not produce farm novels in the author's understanding of the term? Or is it because these are so different in their concerns that the elegant symmetry of *The Farm Novel* as it discusses the three national literatures would have suffered? Or would including Mexicans bloat the book to an unreasonable size? Or maybe the author prefers to view the Mexican culture as part of South rather than North America? Whatever the reason, a word of explanation would disarm potential criticism of the author's decision, while at the same time simply satisfying the curiosity of the reader unfamiliar with transnational studies protocols.

But what is not there is less important than what is. *The Farm Novel* is a richly informative and extensively researched book that brings into discussion not only American and Canadian, but also German scholarship. At the same time, it is one of those critical studies which open vistas for further exploration. Freitag brings back to critical awareness many completely forgotten novels, such as e.g. Eleanor Gates's *The Plow Woman* (1906), Horace Kramer's *Marginal Land* (1939), Mary Austin's *The Ford* (1917), Louis Bromfield's *The Farm* (1933) or J.Cannon's *Red Dust* (1928)—the list is dozens of titles long—which, for one thing, beg to be reread today and reconsidered from the ecocritical perspective. In the epilogue to his book, he outlines more work yet to be done by mentioning several names of writers who continued to write farm novels in the second half of the twentieth century. In his study he also offers revisionistic readings of several canonical texts to reflect upon, most notably Frank Norris's *The Octopus* (whose ending he interprets as much more of a piece with the book's message than it is usually believed to be) and proposes original perspectives on the relationship

between the farm novel and naturalism (“the phrase ‘a naturalistic farm novel’ is threatened to become mere pleonasm”; 112) or on the farm epic as literary response to the end of the old-style agrarian way of life in North America. Thus, he leaves readers with a weighty agenda for their future reading and thinking. Yet what the book should be praised for in the first place is the precious reminder it offers to anglophone and francophone Canadianists, as well as to all Americanists—that without taking into account the two other national/cultural groups’ responses to the continent, their understanding of North America remains incomplete.

Joanna Durczak  
Maria Curie Skłodowska University, Lublin

Lucyna Aleksandrowicz-Pędich. *Memory and Neighborhood: Poles and Poland in Jewish American Fiction after World War Two*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2013. 170 pages.

When asked about images of Poles in American literature most critics and better informed readers would mention Stanley Kowalski from Tennessee Williams’ *Streetcar Named Desire* and Sophie Zawistowska from William Styron’s *Sophie’s Choice*. There are, however, more images and, which is not surprising, most of them, especially in the years after WWII can be found in works by Jewish American authors. Not many studies have been done on this topic. One can mention parts of Thomas Gladsky’s study *Princes, Peasants, and Other Polish Selves: Ethnicity in American Literature* (1992), encompassing a very large body of works, and more recently Danusha Goska’s *Bieganski. The Brute Polek Stereotype: Its Role in Polish-Jewish Relations and American Popular Culture* (2011).

While the first one, in spite of some drawbacks, is a good and balanced source, the other leaves much to be desired. Therefore the new book by Lucyna Aleksandrowicz-Pędich should be welcome as a new addition. The author made an enormous effort and put under scrutiny more than seventy books by Jewish American authors, discussing them in three main parts entitled: “Collective Portrait,” “Memory” and “Other Traces.” The first part discusses Polish anti-Semitism, the portrayal of Poles and Polish-Jewish relations in America; the second deals with images of Poland, predominantly as a land of hostility and death resulting mainly from the stigma of the Holocaust; and the last one with various motifs, including references to well-known Poles and Polish Jews, objects associated with