

CLARE LEIGHTON'S WOOD ENGRAVINGS OF ENGLISH COUNTRY LIFE
BETWEEN THE WARS

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A dissertation submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the
Department of Art.

Chapel Hill
2011

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ABSTRACT

CAROLINE MESROBIAN HICKMAN: Clare Leighton's Wood Engravings of English Country Life between the Wars
(Under the direction of Arthur Marks)

Clare Leighton's wood engravings of interwar English country life portray a rural culture barely touched by modernity, a domesticated landscape in which robust farm workers maintain a close relationship with the soil and its associated values of simplicity, stability, and diligence. Void of references to the hardships of rural life during a period of sustained agricultural depression and unprecedented rural commodification, the prints speak to a sense of order, permanence, peace, and purpose. At once imaginative and scrupulously accurate depictions of rural labor and craft, they nourish nostalgia and the preservationist impulse to record dying traditions.

This study seeks to contextualize the images in their original purpose as book illustrations. A close reading of the books for which Leighton created the engravings shows that the text serves to idealize country life while also speaking to the disorders and anxieties of the turbulent '30s. *The Farmer's Year* (1933), *Four Hedges* (1935), and *Country Matters* (1937), mediate her various publishers' senses of the market and differing viewpoints with her personal and wider concerns. All voice a deep sense of loss for traditional modes of living that fulfill a range of criteria for the country life genre, yet each addresses distinct concerns relevant to changing cultural interests and anxieties in a period of uneasy peace between the world wars. The landscape becomes a stage against which can be expressed deep-seated communal and personal reaction to the destructive

elements of mechanization as well as for advocating her strong humanitarian beliefs and modernist interests. Moving past debates about national identity, tradition and modernism, she sets out a basic doctrine for a peaceful, communal existence that rises above issues of race, class, and national interest: renewing an organic, symbiotic connection with nature and tending to the land, a creatively singular vision enabled by a sustained engagement with modernist formal means.

To my husband, Harrison Hickman; my son, Ralfe Hickman;
and my parents, Carol and Ralfe Mesrobian,
for their unwavering support and encouragement

and

To Betty and Douglas Duffy,
champions of Clare Leighton's art,
who introduced me to her work

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many friends, colleagues, and advisors have encouraged and guided me in my research and writing on Clare Leighton over the years, and I remain indebted to each of them for their sustained support and interest. Foremost is Dr. Arthur Marks, my dissertation advisor, who stuck steadfastly with the project over an extended period of time. Dissertation committee members Ross Barrett, John Bowles, Timothy Riggs, and Dorothy Verkerk, as well as advisory members Allan Life and Charles McNamara all provided extended wise counsel. David Leighton, Clare Leighton's nephew and the executor of her estate, generously gave of his time and expertise whenever I had questions and kindly granted me permission to quote extensively from her papers that were microfilmed by the Archives of American Art, as well as from other archival collections, and to reproduce numerous examples of her work as illustrations for this study. Moreover, I am truly indebted to him for taking time to read the manuscript draft and to offer his gracious, thoughtful guidance.

My thanks also to the staffs of the archival collections cited at the end of this study; their quick, professional responses to my inquiries and requests are greatly appreciated. I also thank numerous librarians at Washington, DC institutions, especially the Library of Congress, Smithsonian American Art Museum and National Portrait Gallery, American University, US Department of Labor, and National Gallery of Art, and

at UNC-Chapel Hill, for their expertise and assistance in locating and making available frequently hard-to-find publications.

Former fellow UNC-Chapel Hill art department graduate students Linda Docherty, Brandon Brame Fortune, and Nancy Witherell offered invaluable advice and perspectives and ongoing friendships. Anne Wake steadily encouraged me and kept up with my progress. Timothy Dickinson's encyclopedic grasp of Leighton's times helped open my art historian's focus to wider perspectives. Ben Margolis provided helpful technical assistance. Foremost, my family, including my husband, Harrison Hickman; our son, Ralfe; my parents, Carol and Ralfe Mesrobian; my sister, Catherine Mesrobian Smith; and her husband, Frank Smith, deserve my deep gratitude for their sustained interest, encouragement, and support for this project.

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INTRODUCTION

Thesis

Clare Leighton's (1898-1989) wood engravings of English country life between the wars portray a rural culture barely touched by modernity, a domesticated landscape in which robust farm workers maintain a close relationship with the soil and its associated values of simplicity, stability, and diligence. Void of references to the hardships of rural life during a period of sustained agricultural depression and unprecedented rural commodification, the prints speak to a sense of order, permanence, peace, and purpose. At once imaginative and scrupulously accurate depictions of rural labor and craft, they nourish nostalgia and the preservationist impulse to record dying traditions.

Little has been done to contextualize the images in their original purpose as book illustrations. A close reading of the books for which Leighton created the engravings shows that the text serves to idealize country life while speaking to the disorders and anxieties of the turbulent 1930s. Her engagement with contemporary debates about the place of the countryside in English culture and the impact of modern life on the landscape simultaneously heightens and subverts the pastoral image. The engravings call up a deep nostalgia for an imagined past and function as symbols of English national identity. They also act as poignant counterpoints to the countryside's rapid, often disfiguring

transformation under the pressures of modernity. The landscape becomes a stage against which can be expressed deep-seated communal and personal reaction to the destructive elements of mechanization.

Of central concern for this study is how Leighton's depiction of English country life during the interwar years relates to contemporary discussions of the countryside's significance to the nation's culture, economy, and social and political doctrines. How far and by what means does her imagery represent the time, and to what degree does she present a unique vision? How does her representation of traditional modes of agricultural life and rural values relate to modernity and modernism, so often seen as antithetical to native tradition?¹ Unique to the country life genre of this period in their unity of image and narrative, the books provide an uncommon opportunity to study ruralist themes from the perspective of an artist-writer whose evolving intellectual experience drew her deep into the great traditions of English pastoral literature and art, while putting her at the forefront of radical discourse on contemporary national and international affairs.

During the period between the world wars, the countryside, already deeply cast in Edwardian ideology as crucial to national identity and national values, took on an even heightened importance in English culture. Prime Minister (and industrialist) Stanley Baldwin's "To me, England is the country, and the country is England," while used for his and the Conservative Party's political purposes, distilled the sentiment surrounding

¹ Lisa Tickner's *Modern Life & Modern Subjects, British Art in the Early Twentieth Century* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 2000) provides a thoughtful evaluation of modernism, modernity, and modernization in her assessment of the historiography of British modernism. See her "Afterword: Modernism and Modernity," 185-96, as well as David Peters Corbett's discussion of the terms in *The Modernity of English Art, 1914-1930* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1997), 1-14.

this constructed national heritage, an idealized past where humanity was in touch with time-honored values, the soil, and the regenerative cycle of the seasons, as yet untouched by the perceived chaos and fragmented alienations of modern life.² A symbol of enduring Englishness, the land, real or imagined, served retrospective nostalgia and propaganda while at the same time experiencing a significant decline in agricultural production and an unprecedented urban expansion and growth in tourism and recreation. As Raymond Williams has observed, “There is almost an inverse proportion ... between the importance of the working rural economy and the cultural importance of rural ideas.”³

Martin Wiener and other social historians have argued that Englishness was frequently defined geographically, with a specific region serving in the name of the whole. By the end of the nineteenth century, the search for either authentic or imagined pre-industrial and anti-modern sites rested in the southern landscape, which projected order and tradition, in contrast to the “Northern metaphor,” which was perceived as overrun with industrialization and therefore not suitable as a representational image.⁴ This cultural ideology, which was articulated and advanced in country life literature and landscape painting, served the emerging heritage industry. Working in a period of high “Heritage England,” Leighton’s interwar period engravings continue a Southern Englishness metaphor, evoking a pre-mechanized, idealized landscape of rolling hills and

² Stanley Baldwin, *On England, and Other Addresses* (London: Philip Allan, 1926), 6.

³ Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 248.

⁴ Martin Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit, 1850-1980* (Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 1981), 40-42. For a summary and an expansion of these arguments, see David Matless, *Landscape and Englishness* (London: Reaktion Books, 1998), 17-19.

cultivated fields, a world in which agricultural laborers are closely linked to the natural order.⁵

As a result of the increased importance of the countryside in English culture, publication of books on rural life for a middle-class urban readership reached its height during the interwar years.⁶ Concurrent with the popularity of rural themes was the revival of wood engraving in England as a form of creative expression, in which Leighton played a central part, bringing about a brief “golden” era of fine and popular illustrated books on country life issued by commercial and private presses.⁷ These editions gave pictorial form to what Lisa Tickner has called “a structure of feeling in the culture at large: that form of nostalgia defined as a ‘melancholic response to the alienation consequent on the experience of modernization.’” Anxieties widely present in the Edwardian era, although not yet culturally focused, took definite shape and an increased significance after World War I.⁸

⁵ The metaphor as defined in Edward Thomas’s *The South Country* (1908) extended south of the Thames and Severn and east of Exmoor, quoted in Ysanne Holt, *British Artists and the Modernist Landscape* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 4. Paul Street (“Painting Deepest England: the Late Landscapes of John Linnell and the Uses of Nostalgia,” in *The Imagined Past: History and Nostalgia*, ed. Christopher Shaw and Malcolm Chase [Manchester, England: Manchester UP, 1989], 68-80) relates Linnell’s work to the ideologies of “heritage” and Deep England. I refer to “England” rather than “Britain” because Leighton’s work depicts a small area of the main island.

⁶ This literature ranged over a great tract of fiction, natural history, regional and recreational guidebooks to new editions of nineteenth and early twentieth-century ruralist writers and gardening books.

⁷ Publishers frequently brought them out as gift books in the fall in anticipation of the holiday season.

⁸ Tickner (*Modern Life & Modern Subjects*, 192) cites David Peters Corbett’s discussion of nostalgia and its close connection to the modern (*Modernity of English Art*, 156),

Leighton's three books on English rural life -- *The Farmer's Year* (1933), *Four Hedges* (1935), and *Country Matters* (1937) -- mediate her various publishers' senses of the market and differing viewpoints with her personal and wider concerns. All voice a deep sense of loss for traditional modes of living that fulfill a range of criteria for the country life genre, yet each addresses distinct concerns relevant to changing cultural interests and anxieties in a period of uneasy peace. I argue that *The Farmer's Year* celebrates the hardy English agricultural worker through the seasons while expressing anger and grief over the Great War. *Four Hedges*, which chronicles her garden in the chalky Chiltern Hills over the course of a year, and *Country Matters*, a portrayal of village life in Buckinghamshire, articulate aspects of her socialist-humanist vision. Her portrayal of workers on the land moves from an articulation of national identity and Englishness to a concern for the uneasy relationship between town and country and a demonstration of personal social egalitarianism as she takes up work on the land. The cohesive village community, linked in common purpose to the soil, now gravely threatened by mechanization and changing values, speaks to wider anxieties as nations return to fierce self-interest and move Europe closer to a renewal of war.

In light of Leighton's continuing deep concern with the negative aspects of mechanization, especially those serving war, I want to suggest that her work reaches beyond the urban and squirearchic fictions pressed upon the countryside and the realities of rural life -- fictions and realities that served the abundant ruralist art and literature of this period -- to articulate what she believed was an authentic vision for sane living. She seeks to reconnect humanity to the earth, the source of sustenance and regeneration, of

which builds on the sociologist Bryan S. Turner's view of nostalgia and alienation in "A Note on Nostalgia," *Theory, Culture and Society*, 4 (1987): 147-56.

physical, emotional, and spiritual health. Engaging in, then moving past deep-going debates about national identity, tradition and modernism, ancient ways being trampled down and new ones opening up in town and country, she sets out a basic doctrine for a peaceful, communal existence that rises above issues of race, class, and national interest: renewing an organic, symbiotic connection with nature and tending to the land. The prints show humankind productively engaged in work with the living world, caring for the earth and those on it with innate dignity, diligence, and purpose. She found commonalities among rural folk no matter where they labored, their “right” ways of life providing a necessary corrective to the prevailing more intense mechanization of contemporary society.

Her prints visualize aspects of British back-to-the-land idealists’ and reformers’ writings -- from Ruskin, William Morris, and the early twentieth-century Christian Socialists to the interwar writers C. F. G. Masterman, F. R. Leavis, and H. J. Massingham -- who advocated for the revitalization of an organic community rooted in the land to counteract the social ills of modern, urban England. Mechanization had destroyed “an art of life, a way of living, ordered and patterned ... growing out of immemorial experience, to the natural environment and the rhythm of the year.”⁹ Although Leavis’s concern here is more with reinvigorating a disappearing English culture, Leighton’s philosophy of living reaches beyond territorial boundaries to embrace all workers of the soil. Nature’s order, which was for her “something so eternally right,” could be located wherever the

⁹ F. R. Leavis and Denys Thompson, *Culture and Environment, The Training of Critical Awareness*, first pub. 1933 (London: Chatto and Windus, 1964), 1-2.

power of growth was visible, in England or Majorca, in the countryside or a small city garden.¹⁰

Leighton's portrayal of English agricultural labor and its indigenous craft tradition relates to wider ruralist interests and art in Europe and the United States during the 1930s. Her celebration of workers on the land, which I argue creates a continuum linking England's farming heritage to future revitalization, contrasts in purpose to the images of heroic country workers that served Soviet collectivist propaganda. Political agendas that promoted the interests of unchecked nationalism or race, such as the authoritarian energies of Germany, with its powerful rhetoric of blood and soil, were at odds with her deepest beliefs. Her concern for the ordinary rural worker is far removed from the elitist *Bundische* youth and folk movements that connected nature, rural culture, and nation, aspects of which some English organicists admired and incorporated into their proposals for reviving their nation.¹¹ Mindful of the appropriation of the countryside for political purpose and the consequence of rampant nationalism, Leighton stressed the catholic nature of working in the soil in that Midwestern lecture already quoted: "The growing of things and the tilling of the earth is one of the most international ... unpolitical things we

¹⁰ "The Philosophy of Gardening," an address to a national horticultural meeting in St. Paul, MN, 1947, in Clare Leighton, *Clare Leighton, The Growth and Shaping of an Artist-Writer*, comp. David Roland Leighton (Pewsey, Wiltshire: The Estate of Clare Leighton, 2009), 71.

¹¹ David Matless (*Landscape and Englishness*, 110-25) discusses European models to which English organicists looked in their varied proposals to revitalize England, which drew on the authoritarian practice of Germany and Italy.

can possibly do.”¹² Like the American regionalist Grant Wood, Leighton depicted an idealized, "usable past" to fabricate a sense of security during times of economic and political fear and disorder. Her dignified portrayal of the worker, concern for social and economic inequity, and urgent desire to communicate art to the whole public put her close to the ideologies of Mexican and American Social Realist mural painters.

Despite her continuing preoccupation with traditional rural themes and the negative effects of mechanization on contemporary life, Leighton's formal means confidently embrace aspects of modern art. Indeed, I argue that her engagement with modern formalist developments is critical to articulating her vision. Elements of the modernist visual vocabulary come together in an innovative, distinctive style characterized by a rhythmic, vitalizing unity of forms that are expressed through strong contrasts of black and white, patterning, and the negation of perspectival space. Empathetic, life-affirming visions of humanity in harmony with the land it works and the regenerative cycle of the seasons rise from an essential energy and power implicit in the underlying structure of her forms. The images of order, peace, and permanence challenge the fragmentation and rootlessness that many felt as characterizing modern life in an age of disorder and violence. This synthesis of naturalism and abstraction moves her work from a specificity of place and time towards a more general conveyance of humanity's close relationship to the earth, in which her contemporaries felt a vital, spiritual quality. Remarkably, she kept firmly committed to her vision and the formal means of expressing it throughout her long career.

¹² Leighton, *Clare Leighton, Growth and Shaping of an Artist-Writer*, 71.

Review of Criticism and Scholarship on Leighton's Work

Much of the commentary on and investigation of Leighton's art concerns her central role in reviving and developing wood engraving as a creative form during the 1920s and 1930s in Britain and her interest in portraying rural life in England and the United States. The British-born Leighton, who settled in the United States in 1939, produced over 800 prints over a fifty-year career. Most of her graphic work was commissioned to illustrate more than sixty-five books, most of which pertain to country life and the natural world -- fourteen by her own hand. Illustrating classic works by Emily Brontë, Hardy, Thoreau, and Gilbert White, she also gave pictorial form to the themes of such contemporaries as Thornton Wilder, Elizabeth Maddox Roberts, and Elsie Symington. She also brought out limited editions of these prints independent of the books in which they originally appeared, single-sheet prints that were sold separately.

Her wood engravings received critical acclaim while she was alive, but since then little art-historical inquiry on her work has appeared, much less study of her country-life books as they relate to English cultural concerns. Most contemporary analytical commentary on her prints came out in the late 1920s and the 1930s, the period with which this dissertation is concerned. Commentary on her early work by the writer Hilaire Belloc and the literary critic J. C. Squire centered on her employment of a new, powerful yet still national form as well as her uncommon ability to portray the essential life of humankind in all its vulnerable beauty and hard reality. Reviewing her work up to the mid-1930s, Martin Hardie, keeper of prints at the Victoria and Albert Museum, was struck by her synthesis of traditional and modern methods, of nature and design, a quality

that the American etcher John Taylor Arms also stressed in his foreword to *Four Hedges*. Her illustrated books on rural life, like others in the genre, received brief, at times perceptive, reviews, which most likely reflected their function as a popular enterprise as opposed to an aesthetic vision. Had she been a dedicated painter and exhibitor, and experimented with a more radical modernism, her books might have received more in-depth analysis, like her fellow wood engraver and the painter Paul Nash, whose interest in expressing the character of the English landscape in modernist idioms was closely followed by the influential art and literary critic Herbert Read.

Scholarship since her death has focused largely on the engravings that she printed independent of the books for which they were commissioned. Intended for exhibition and sale, these join a group of prints commissioned by print clubs as well as a small number created for her own purposes. No critical studies address her engravings, whether as entities separate from the books or as related to them, nor have her books been examined from a literary perspective. Publications on her work range from a 1977 retrospective, a short monograph and an exhibit assembled in England soon after her death in 1989, to more recent articles on her vision of the American South, and a fairly comprehensive exhibition that opened in 2008. The majority of these have focused on her visual imagery (making available reproductions of her work), her contributions to the field of wood engraving as a female artist, and her life story.

William Dolan Fletcher's slim catalogue for the Boston Public Library's 1977 exhibition remains an invaluable basic reference tool, providing a checklist of most of her wood engravings, a few drawings and paintings, the books that she illustrated and those

for which she was illustrator and writer, as well as a brief appreciation.¹³ Patricia Jaffé's *Women Engravers* (1988), which includes a discussion of Leighton's work, is important for its reintroduction of long-forgotten early twentieth-century British women engraver-book illustrators who pioneered the medium as a means of expression. In her *Wood Engravings of Clare Leighton* (1993), as in the earlier book, Jaffé sets out to reestablish the artist's contributions to wood engraving by reproducing numerous images and offering a biographical essay; overall a feminist perspective that emphasizes Leighton's gender and her long and unusual ability to support herself by her art.¹⁴ Beyond that, she makes no effort to explore the artist's social views on feminism, whether she participated in feminist activities, or how her work could relate to and reflect feminist issues and doctrine.

A 1992 exhibition of works owned by the Ashmolean Museum was accompanied by a small catalogue including brief appreciations by the artist's nephew David Roland Leighton and museum curator Anne Stevens, throwing additional light on Leighton's life and her commissions from publishing houses.¹⁵ *Clare Leighton: The Growth and Shaping of an Artist-Writer* (2009), compiled by David Leighton, which brings together for the first time her reminiscences and reflections on the creative process, her artistic

¹³ William Dolan Fletcher, *Clare Leighton, An Exhibition, American Sheaves, English Seed Corn* (Boston: Thomas Todd, 1977).

¹⁴ Patricia Jaffé, *Women Engravers* (London: Virago Press, 1988), 35-57; *The Wood Engravings of Clare Leighton* (Cambridge, England: Silent Books, 1992). Jaffé herself was a wood engraver.

¹⁵ Anne Stevens and David Leighton, *Clare Leighton: Wood Engravings and Drawings* (Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 1992).

development, gardening, and teaching of art, provides valuable insight into her entire career.¹⁶

Joanna Selborne's *British Wood-Engraved Book Illustration, 1904-1940, A Break With Tradition* devotes a chapter, "Two Innovative Illustrators of Nature and Rural Life," to Leighton's English works together with those of Agnes Parker Miller. Selborne's groundbreaking book remains the best study of its kind by virtue of its breadth and depth, its detailed historical perspective, its copious illustrations, and the author's acute attempts to group and compare the two artists by stylistic analysis.¹⁷ In bringing together a significant body of heretofore-unknown biographical information and a rather comprehensive picture of the engravers' *oeuvre*, Selborne establishes a broad and solid base for future in-depth studies of individual and groups of artists as well as for critical inquiries on the articulation of English cultural ideas in pre-World War II book illustration.

In the United States, several exhibitions and articles and a doctoral dissertation have appeared in recent years. My prior research on Leighton has focused on her impressions of the American South as well as providing a general overview of her career for the exhibition that opened in 2008.¹⁸ In her American Studies doctoral dissertation

¹⁶ *Clare Leighton: Growth and Shaping of an Artist-Writer* (op.cit).

¹⁷ Joanna Selborne, *British Wood-Engraved Book Illustration, 1904-1940, A Break With Tradition* (London: British Library and Oak Knoll Press, 2001), 374-82; see also references to Leighton throughout the volume.

¹⁸ Caroline Hickman, "Clare Leighton and the American South," *Duke University Libraries* 17 (Spring 2004): 8-13, an exhibit at Perkins Library 16 August - 24 October 2004; "Graphic Images and Agrarian Traditions: Bayard Wootten, Clare Leighton, and Southern Appalachia," in Judy Larson, ed., *Graphic Arts and the South* (Fayetteville: U of Arkansas P, 1991), 245-77; and "Clare Leighton's Art and Craft: Exploring her Rich

“Notations of the Heart: The Wood Engraving Illustrations of Clare Leighton, 1929-1954,” Kathleen Rice proposes to give “a methodological study of the interplay of text and image and the conveyance of meaning through the two media” by placing the illustrations in cultural, art historical, and the artist’s biographical contexts.¹⁹ She circumscribes her research by focusing on how the images comment on, contribute to, or contradict the narratives. Of relevance to my dissertation, her Chapter Four, “Clare Leighton and the English Pastoral,” attempts to situate Leighton’s books on the English countryside within the larger pastoral tradition: whether they reflect the pastoral or georgic, how the artist acts as a courtier in her actual working of the land, and why her work was acceptable to both conservative and liberal readerships.²⁰ While some of her interpretations of Leighton’s imagery are perceptive, I differ with many of her conclusions and find her work frequently descriptive and tangential to her arguments. Her analysis only begins to probe the meaning of image and text and especially of their interplay. Leighton not only delighted to convey her meaning in very subtle ways; she set out to craft an imagery with multiple layers of implication. Successfully to decode and decipher these works requires an approach thoroughly grounded in art history and more than a cursory inquiry into the social, political, and economic conditions of her time.

Legacy Through the Pratt Collection,” in Jonathan Stuhlman, ed., *Quiet Spirit, Skillful Hand, The Graphic Work of Clare Leighton* (Charlotte, NC: The Mint Museums of Art, 2008), 7-16.

¹⁹ Kathleen Rice, “Notations of the Heart: The Wood Engraving Illustrations of Clare Leighton, 1929-1954,” (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas, Austin, 1997), viii. Rice wrote her dissertation for the Department of American Studies; her undergraduate study was in history.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 165-219.

Method of Approach, Interwar British Landscape Art and Cultural Histories Models

Method of Approach

This investigation of Leighton's portrayal of country life, as it relates to culturally framed conceptions of interwar rural England, proceeds from the premise that her visual and literary material must be analyzed together as the larger artistic project for which they were created. Because the text metaphorically addresses concerns of the time, separating the two has contributed to a significant loss of meaning. This relatively rare opportunity to approach an artist's work by this method is an exciting endeavor -- Leighton points to the historical precedents of Blake, Rossetti, and Edward Lear when pondering her creative identity. For her, "all creative force [is] the same, [requiring] discipline, sense of shape, knowledge, design, [and] identification, whether it be in words or in lines and colors."²¹ However, this approach acknowledges possible inequities when attempting to evaluate the creativity, content, and intent of her work with that of other artists and writers. My analysis depends in part on a comparison of illustrated books in which the writer and artist are separate, and of different media, particularly that of book illustration with landscape art. Although their approach necessarily differs from the aesthetic interests of landscape painters, and they were conscribed by interpreting others' texts, illustrators were critically engaged with similar themes and concerns regarding the

²¹ Clare Leighton, "Writer and Artist: The Experience of Illustrating One's Own Book," typescript, n.d. (notes for "How I Made My Book," *American Artist*, Feb. 1955, 40-45), in the Clare Leighton Papers, owned by the Estate of Clare Leighton, microfilmed by the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

countryside and its relation to contemporary English culture in interpreting the narratives of writers on rural themes.

This dissertation draws on resources that other Leighton researchers have little consulted or not at all. While Joanna Selborne and Kathleen Rice make limited use of Leighton's papers, and Selborne consults a few of Leighton's publishers' archives,²² I have benefited from a number of archival resources not readily accessible at the time of their research, including the records of several other publishing houses that commissioned her work, the papers of art and literary critics who reviewed her wood engravings, and friends and associates who figured prominently in interwar literary and political affairs.²³ Recently published monographs on wood engravers who illustrated rural life between the wars have also provided helpful comparative material, as have the illustrated books themselves.²⁴

²² Rice consulted a portion of Leighton's personal papers that the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, filmed in 1969. Selborne and Patricia Jaffé were given access to additional material in the possession of the family in England, including Leighton's "Memoirs" and sketchbooks, which have not been available to American scholars. However, David Leighton's publication of a selection of Leighton's writings (*Clare Leighton: The Growth and Shaping of an Artist-Writer*) in 2009 has made available important unpublished material. Selborne used the Macmillan Publishing Archives at Reading University Library and papers at Victor Gollancz, Ltd.

²³ These are listed in "Sources Consulted."

²⁴ These monographs tend not to provide a critical analysis of the art or its relationship to cultural ideas, but are valuable for their biographical material and the reproductions. Those going beyond the typical monographic format include studies on Paul Nash and Graham Sutherland, such as David Fraser Jenkins, *Paul Nash: The Elements* (London: Scala, 2010); Jemima Montagu, *Paul Nash: Modern Artist, Ancient Landscape* (London: Tate Gallery, 2003); Roger Cardinal's *The Landscape Vision of Paul Nash* (London: Reaktion Books, 1989); and Martin Hammer, *Graham Sutherland: Landscapes, War Scenes, Portraits, 1924-1950* (London: Scala, 2005).

Art Historical Models

With little art-historical scholarship to consult that specifically addresses itself to illustrated books on rural life between the wars, my methodology derives from the investigations of art historians who have approached early twentieth-century British art from a cultural perspective, particularly David Peters Corbett's *The Modernity of English Art, 1914-1930*; Ysanne Holt's *British Artists and the Modernist Landscape*; and the essays collected in *The Geographies of Englishness: Landscape and the National Past, 1880-1940*, edited by David Peters Corbett, Ysanne Holt, and Fiona Russell.²⁵ These perspectives are in turn informed by the work of social and cultural historians interested in the relationship between nostalgia and the modern and of national identity, as they relate to rural England, perspectives on which I also draw.

Corbett considers post-World War I themes and painters "in the context of cultural reactions to modern life," seeing English art of that period largely as a struggle "to address the experience of a modern culture at a time when such an ambition had become in important ways unacceptable."²⁶ His chapter "Nostalgia and Mourning" has stimulated my thinking about Leighton's approach to the past and to the modernity of her day and her construction and uses of nostalgia.²⁷ Taking as a point of departure the

²⁵ Corbett, David Peters, Ysanne Holt, and Fiona Russell, ed. *The Geographies of Englishness: Landscape and the National Past, 1880-1940* (New Haven & London: Yale UP, 2002), papers delivered at the conference "Rethinking Englishness: English Art, 1880-1940," University of York, 1997.

²⁶ As it relates to the pre-war radical modernist movement, Corbett, *Modernity of English Art*, 1.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 152-191.

sociologist Bryan S. Turner's discussion of nostalgia and alienation, Corbett affirms Turner's view that nostalgia for a pre-modern past is closely connected with the modern, applying this analysis to the culture of English art after the Great War. But whereas Turner sees nostalgia as a reaction to modernity that acts as a negative force, Corbett argues that after 1914 "it adapts rather than rejects [the modern], and it takes on several different forms."²⁸ Of particular relevance to my study is Corbett's discussion of C. R. W. Nevinson's and Edward Wadsworth's renewed interest in rural and non-urban sites and their attempts to negotiate modernism within a representational mode, as viewed in the "romantic modernism" of 1920s critical discourse.²⁹

The exhibition catalogue *Rhythms of Modern Life, British Prints, 1914-1939*, which discusses the graphic work of the Vorticists and the Grosvenor School and the formalist means by which they adapted Continental modernism to new forms of abstraction, provides a framework for assessing Leighton's engagement with modernism as she develops her stylistic means. Although these artists were primarily inspired by the vitality of urban and industrial life, the catalogue section "Natural Forces" invites a comparison between the wood-engraving techniques of Leighton and Sybil Andrews, of the Grosvenor School, both artists working with broad bands of patterned shapes and bold, repeating rhythmic lines to delineate form and mass.³⁰

²⁸ Ibid, 156.

²⁹ Corbett (Ibid, 186) finds them both "victims of the destabilisation of modernism by the war."

³⁰ Clifford S. Ackley, ed., *Rhythms of Modern Life, British Prints, 1914-1939* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 2008), exhibition catalogue.

Over the past decade art historians have begun to explore developments in British landscape painting during the interwar years and the complex relationship between artists' responses to modern life and a rural genre densely entwined with national, cultural, and material conditions and concerns.³¹ Whether constructing an imagined past as an emotional refuge against the anxieties of modern life or giving voice to a deep sense of loss for native traditions being rendered obsolete by modernity, landscape art nevertheless in various degrees negotiated the seemingly antithetical ideas of Englishness and modernism.³² The essays in *The Geographies of Englishness* offer abundant evidence for this revisionist perspective. Shaped by the insights of a number of social and cultural historians, notably David Matless and Stephen Daniels, they provide a critical framework for my study, in their examination of nationality as it intersects with geography and visual culture, providing for the first time a sustained examination of "the interaction of modernization, landscape and national identity in English art." The volume comes closest

³¹ Frequently dismissing the landscape genre as a continuation of an increasingly conservative tradition, art historians have focused instead on modernist developments from the late nineteenth century through the 1930s, in particular the work of the pre-1914 avant-garde and the Bloomsbury Group. Major contributors to the study of the avant-garde include Richard Cork (*Vorticism and its Allies* [London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1974]), Paul Edwards (*Blast: Vorticism, 1914-1918* [Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2000]), and William Wees (*Vorticism and the English Avant-Garde* [Manchester: Manchester UP, 1972]). During the past decade, modernist studies have built upon and offered revisionist perspectives on Charles Harrison's seminal *English Art and Modernism, 1900-1939* (1976), whose arguments depend on a rigid opposition of the terms and categories of art and cultural history. In *The Modernity of English Art* (5), Corbett rejects Harrison's and others' polarization of modernism and other practices, examining instead the issues of English modernism of the period through "the ways in which all artistic production is implicated within modernity." His insights proceed from an examination of the relationship between modernism in painting and the modernity of English culture.

³² An ironic reversal for a country that initiated and long led the Industrial Revolution.

to analyzing issues in the visual arts that confronted or were of concern to Leighton, among them the search for a modern national identity, relationships between Englishness and modernization, and the rural and the urban. Her work explicitly bears out *Geographies*' conclusion that "Englishness, ideas of nationhood and national identity are especially important and influential" during the sixty years leading up to World War II.³³

Taking a small group of artists who painted the real or imagined landscape from the late nineteenth century to 1914, Ysanne Holt's *British Artists and the Modernist Landscape* considers the complexities of artists' responses to modern aesthetic developments in the face of "wider national, cultural, and material conditions and preoccupations," particularly the already considerable industry building up ruralist culture. Like Holt, I approach the subject from a cultural context, pose similar questions, and find that some of her conclusions regarding Edwardian landscape art hold for the interwar period. Holt contends that the landscapes must be evaluated in terms not only for what is present, but also for "the spaces in between," concluding that the "particular significance of these representations, much of the time, lies precisely in that which is unrepresented."³⁴ Given that these artists shaped the middle-class urban art market's perceptions and understanding of the country from the city, she finds a crucial commonality in their "determined avoidance of modern rural conditions," in itself a key component of Leighton's engravings of the countryside. Landscape painting's "duplicitous" nature proceeds from "a manifest desire for order and harmony" to

³³ Corbett et al, *Geographies of Englishness*, xvii-xviii. Italy is a case in point, the Fascist use of Futurist images to fuse a new Italian identity of sheer energy fascinating many people around Europe.

³⁴ Holt, *British Artists and the Modernist Landscape*, 9.

counteract the “disordered and discordant experience of the everyday,”³⁵ insights that Leighton skillfully makes her own and unobtrusively mediates for her readers.

Sue Malvern’s *Modern Art, Britain and the Great War*, particularly the chapter “Redeeming the War: ‘Englishness’ and Remembrance,” which raises post-war preoccupations with memory and remembrance and how they draw on Christian notions of “redemption, resurrection, and renewal,” provides a model for my investigations into Leighton’s responses to personal and communal traumas relating to the Great War.³⁶ Malvern argues that attempts to reconcile the impulse to portray pre-war England as “an Edenic state of prelapsarian innocence,” the obligation to honor the dead with integrity, and mounting doubts in an ever more disillusioned world as to whether the means justified the end became increasingly difficult during the interwar years.³⁷ Her analysis of Paul Nash’s “evocative, elusive, and poetic” imagery with Stanley Spencer’s overt use of Christian iconography helps frame Leighton’s approach to the dilemma of how to remember the war in *The Farmer’s Year*, where she uses pastoral and Christian imagery, and natural forms as metaphors for human life to mediate a vision of consoling redemption and unreconcilable loss.

Ian Jeffrey’s *The British Landscape, 1920-1950*, comprising an essay and a wealth of reproductions that includes paintings, book illustrations, and other commercial enterprises, locates fundamental changes in the landscape genre as the decades advance. Arguing that whereas artists frequently responded to the nightmares of the Western Front

³⁵ Ibid, 2-3, 7.

³⁶ Sue Malvern, *Modern Art, Britain and the Great War: Witnessing, Testimony, and Remembrance* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 2004), 151-77.

³⁷ Ibid, 153.

with visions of pastoral havens during the 1920s, the '30s “increasingly featured [the countryside] as an orderly, worked terrain of farmland and quarry,” even as the pastoral vision endured. Jeffrey finds a constant negotiation between “pastoral and modernizing tendencies, with pastoral usually in the ascendant” as the dominant leitmotif of these decades.³⁸ He also observes that while this body of work continues the British landscape tradition, it also operates against a background of “disquiet, of threats to be countered and of fears to be allayed” -- anxieties fueled by the horrific memories of war, the blight of industrialization, and suburban encroachment on the landscape.³⁹ These tensions contextualize Leighton’s rural perspectives as well. *The Farmer’s Year* becomes a forum for her to convey not only sustained horror and grief at a world of past and impending war, but also to bring attention to the once-thriving, now-waning place of English agriculture and its workers.⁴⁰

³⁸ Ian Jeffrey, *The British Landscape, 1920-1950* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1984), 7. Jeffrey’s bringing together numerous examples of landscape art in different media, created for various purposes, offers a broader perspective than most surveys of its nature.

³⁹ Ibid. Jeffrey sees the “Neo-Romantic” painters of the 1940s as turning to the wilder side of nature, which is gradually supplanted by the Realism of the 1950s. Catherine Jolivette (*Landscape, Art and Identity in 1950s Britain* [Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2009]) examines the ways in which the meaning of landscape representation changed after World War II, arguing that the two dominant, conflicting visions of national culture -- one rural and agrarian, the other focused on the latest developments in technology and design -- created an unsustainable tension. Landscapes that were intended to subserve nostalgia and propaganda came to embody anxiety for national, political, and regional identity. The landscape invested with ideas centering on national identity can no longer be sustained and is replaced by an international context for landscape art. She concludes that the 1950s were a “defining phase in British social and political history during which time the symbolic power of landscape art as an emblem of a unique and timeless national identity began to fade.”

⁴⁰ Leighton’s *Sowing: April* from *The Farmer’s Year* is reproduced full-page opposite Jeffrey’s Introduction, but he does not discuss her work.

Cultural History Models

In addition to the art-historical scholarship that advances a cultural model, my approach derives from the sources that have informed it, particularly the work of cultural geographers. David Matless's *Landscape and Englishness* explores the tensions of landscape and culture generated by the economic, social, political, and aesthetic forces operating on the countryside.⁴¹ Matless argues that landscape has been the site in which "English visions of the past, present, and future have met in debates over questions of national identity, disputes over history, and ideals of citizenship and the body." Apropos the ongoing debate on "the cultural effects of ruralism, nostalgia, and a concern for heritage" and the assumed alignment of nature, country, history, and resistance to advancing modernity, he finds instead a powerful historical connection between landscape, Englishness and the modern. His argument that a "vision of Englishness and landscape as both modern and traditional, urban and rural, progressive and preservationist, took shape around debates over building in the countryside, the replanning of cities, and the cultures of leisure and citizenship" informs my discussion of Leighton's actual experience and material shaping of the countryside in tandem with preservationist activism. Matless's construction of the organic movement as a "counter-current" of Englishness, which set an organic sense of rural life against urbanism and upheld traditional authority against progressive expertise, has helped me conceptualize

⁴¹ David Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, whose bibliography remains a valuable resource. Stephen Daniels, (*Fields of Vision: Landscape Imagery and National Identity in England and the United States* [Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993]), has also written widely on ideas of national identity and definitions of Englishness as they relate to the British landscape, as has Martin Wiener (*English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit*). Nicholas Pevsner's *The Englishness of English Art* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964) remains a springboard for cultural and art-historical debates on national identity.

and frame Leighton's vision of humanity's renewed connection with the earth, for her the source of physical and emotional health.

Many economic, social, political, cultural, and literary historians have investigated the English countryside between the wars, largely from the perspective of a period burdened by sustained agricultural depression, commodification of the land, and other deracinating forces of modern life. Recent revisionist arguments brought together by Paul Brassley, Jeremy Burchardt, and Lynne Thompson challenge this vision of rural decline by bringing into the argument the regenerating effects of urban dwellers who sought out the countryside for leisure, of increased standards of living, and the positive effects of modernization.⁴² A combination of these traditional and revisionist interpretations of what the impact of modernization was doing to the countryside shapes a wide lens through which to evaluate Leighton's perspective as articulated in her narrative, which generally portrays the "dark" side of modernity. Rural writers, a powerful force in establishing the image of the English countryside during the interwar years, were crucial in forming Leighton's knowledge and perceptions of the countryside. Glen Cavaliero's *The Rural Tradition in the English Novel, 1900-1939*, which examines both fiction and documentary literature, provides a framework to assess Leighton's approach to dominant themes and issues by which country life was evaluated. These include the theme of town

⁴² This revisionist approach coalesces in Paul Brassley, Jeremy Burchardt, and Lynne Thompson, ed., *The English Countryside between the Wars, Regeneration or Decline?* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2006). Although the papers are schematized into four categories: society, culture, politics, and economics, the organization belies the diverse interests and perspectives of its contributors as well as that of the membership of the Interwar Rural History Research Group, which was formed in 2000. Its bibliography brings together a wide range of primary and secondary sources. See also Jeremy Burchardt, *Paradise Lost: Rural Idyll and Social Change 1800-2000* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris), 2002; and Alun Howkins, *The Death of Rural England: A Social History of the Countryside Since 1900* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003).

and country, changing social hierarchy, and idealized or popular romantic attitudes versus authentic visions of the countryside and rural society, as well as the rural experience as a medium for personal investigations, reflection, and self-discovery.⁴³

Overview of Chapters

I address Leighton's three English country-life books in individual chapters, in the order in which they were published during the 1930s, for clarity and to honor their artistic integrity. Crucially, each articulates specific themes relevant to her changing relationship to and perspective on the countryside, and resonates with larger cultural issues. All the books fulfill an essential criterion for the genre by evoking nostalgia for traditional ways that were rapidly disappearing; each reflects and responds to changing communal and personal concerns. Apropos her steady preoccupation with the miseries of war, the landscape of *The Farmer's Year* serves as a site in which to lament the Great War, while mounting anxieties of another conflagration as the decade wears on become a leitmotif in *Country Matters*. Moreover, the city-raised Leighton's perspective and interests change as she develops a close attachment to the land and its people during the 1930s and evolves as a thinker and an artist. Common political views with a new publisher give her an increased freedom to set her socialist ideology within the context of the countryside. As a result, a personal experience of nature and issues of social class and community

⁴³ Glen Cavaliero, *The Rural Tradition in the English Novel, 1900-1939* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1977), which includes a representative list of works. Most of the books that Cavaliero considers lack illustrations.

supplant an earlier vision in which the landscape is closely bound to ideas of national identity.

Chapter One examines her formative years as an artist during the 1920s and early 1930s, as she begins to give form to her deepening sense of the English countryside in wood engraving, its innovative formal means drawing on naturalism and abstraction. My main arguments focus on her work's appeal to a broad spectrum of political, cultural, and commercial interests, and her finding by the end of the decade a singular means of articulating her vision. I discuss her early commissions to illustrate books on rural life, including that of Thomas Hardy, whose close portrayal of the land's varying moods she intuitively interprets. I analyze the critical responses of the prominent literary figures Hilaire Belloc and J. C. Squire to her early country-life prints and identify several crucial factors that shape her professional life and worldview, including a family milieu that centralizes literature and the arts, adheres to a progressive view of British imperialism and a romanticization of war. The loss of a generation of England's young men during the Great War, above all of her twenty-year-old elder brother Roland, once and for all brings to an end to these late-Victorian-Edwardian sensibilities.

Beginning in 1925, her professional and personal relationship with the radical socialist journalist Noel Brailsford significantly affects her political and social views, while his publishing her country-life prints in the Independent Labour Party's organ, the *New Leader*, gives her work the exposure necessary to further her career. I argue that her prints of rural life well accommodate journals with diverse political and literary aims as well as official propaganda that promoted agriculture and the countryside to the urban population. Crucial to her understanding of the countryside, her and Brailsford's purchase

in the early 1930s of a small parcel of land in rural Buckinghamshire gives Leighton first-hand access to traditional farming methods, crafts, customs, and hands-on experience in working the soil.

Chapter Two analyzes *The Farmer's Year: An Annotated Calendar of English Husbandry* (1933), the first book that Leighton wrote and illustrated with wood engravings.⁴⁴ Its folio size and format with full-page prints offers a powerful vision of agricultural labor that remains the touchstone for her wood-engraved work.

Commissioned by Collins and Longmans, Green, both traditionalist, long-established publishers of country-life literature, the book follows the calendar, devoting a chapter and engravings to each month. I argue that the prints portray idealized agricultural workers as embodiments of national pride and sturdy endurance, ironically during a period of significant rural decline and the depth of the Great Depression's weight on all economies. Plowman, sower, and reaper command the cultivated landscape over the course of the seasons. But Leighton also visually contrasts these vital, productive figures and the gently rolling landscape with the young English victims of the Great War, their mutilations signified by severely pollarded trees. Moreover, the year begins with a promise of redemption for those who had sacrificed their lives for their country, brutally unfulfilled as the year ends with a vision of impending slaughter. Her means of establishing and supporting a mythic image of a still-vibrant rural England while speaking to the realities of modern life, in particular mechanization's power to maim and destroy, and her exploration of complex issues of a love of country that does not have to issue as

⁴⁴ Her children's book, *The Musical Box* (Gollancz Ltd., 1932), which came out a year before *The Farmer's Year*, is illustrated with drawings.

unquestioning patriotism, form my discussion of these monumental engravings, images that forcefully command the narrative as in no other of her books.

Chapter Three examines *Four Hedges: A Gardener's Year* (1935), which chronicles Leighton's impartial observation of and emotional responses to nature resulting from her direct contact with the land. The engravings and narrative of this most personally oriented of her English country-life books address each month as does *The Farmer's Year*, but from the perspective of her and Brailsford's actual attempts to cultivate the soil, here the inhospitable chalk of the windswept Chiltern Hills.

I argue that the radical socialist and publisher Victor Gollancz's commissioning *Four Hedges* allows Leighton to freely address issues close to her own social and political views in the engravings and narrative. Subverting ideas of the divisions between classes and between city and country, disregarding anciently prevailing ideas of position and quality, celebrating the ordinary, she portrays Brailsford and herself -- city dwellers who become cultivators and caretakers of the land -- and their hired country folk laboring together as well as an egalitarian response to flowers and weeds in garden and field. The chapter also explores the apparent dichotomy between Leighton's record of the passing of traditional rural life and her efforts to protect areas surrounding heritage sites of antiquity from development while bringing modern architecture into the countryside, when she commissions a studio at Four Hedges. I contend that the book mediates nostalgia for traditional ways and a modernist aesthetic -- seemingly conflicting approaches to the land -- in a search for continuity and order between past and present.

Chapter Four assesses *Country Matters* (1937), a portrait of Buckingham village life in which Leighton most fully articulates her socialist concerns and anxieties about the

coming war. Commissioned by Gollancz just as Brailsford was writing his most fiercely collectivist works, Leighton addresses the uneasy relationship of town and country as they pertain to social division, contrasting the hardy rural worker who lives off the land with those for whom the countryside is but an occasional pleasurable pastime. I argue that her portrayal of one of society's most marginalized and reviled members, the tramp, with his anti-capitalist cast of spirit, is grounded in her socialist sensibilities. As in the earlier books, she conveys a deep nostalgia for the traditional rural crafts, trades, and gatherings -- components of a well-knit society -- that are being eroded by the rapid commodification of the countryside. However, I contend that *Country Matters*, its narrative increasingly elegiac and pessimistic as compared to *The Farmer's Year* and *Four Hedges*, also speaks to fears about the fracturing of the larger community of Europe, as the forces of Nazism and totalitarianism bear down.

Chapter Five, an Epilogue, further evaluates her vision of English country life, her worldview, and the means by which she sought to obtain a wide-based viewership by examining a small group of engravings that she created while working on the subjects of this study, yet not commissioned by publishers. Whereas her English oeuvre passes over the "dark" side of rural living and modern urban life -- in particular human suffering and the grinding poverty that the Depression only intensified -- the American scenes *Breadline* (1932) and *Gathering Firewood* (1936) starkly portray the dehumanizing effects of mechanization on society and the misery of the poorest of the poor. Prints published in the radical *Left Review* and the conservative *Listener* demonstrate her skill in conveying her socialist-humanitarian vision with both subtleness and power. In contrast, I argue that *Winnowers, Majorca* (1937), which portrays peasants utilizing the most

rudimentary of tools, most fully articulates her vision of humanity working in close harmony with the land. Far removed from the myriad of cultural concerns pressed on the English countryside, the primal landscape of the Mediterranean inspires a coalescing of her vision with her organic formal means.

Coming at a time of unprecedented change to the countryside and escalating economic and political world disaster, Leighton's prints portray an ordered and stable English landscape that well served the expectations of publishers and a readership invested in the rural life genre. Yet she also found ways to articulate such private concerns as the passing of rural ways of life and the futility and brutality of war. These and her socially progressive viewpoint were grounded in her belief in the importance of people's productive engagement with the earth. Leighton's sustained, creatively singular vision, which fused a sense of the world of "ordinary" people's work and the larger world of nature, reveals the point at which her sensibility and her modernist means of expression became most closely aligned.

CHAPTER ONE

SHAPING A VISION OF THE COUNTRYSIDE

Leighton's vision of the English countryside took form in the 1920s, when she began engraving rural subjects for exhibition and publication and illustrating books on country life. This chapter explores key factors that helped shape and direct that vision, including her family's pre-1914 imperialist, progressive sense of history and the war's defacement of that view, and her increasing commitment to aspects of left-wing ideology after she and the socialist journalist Noel Brailsford established a professional and personal relationship in the mid-1920s. I discuss her training in wood engraving and book illustration at London's Central School of Arts and Crafts, the center for the revival of wood engraving, and her development of a formal means that synthesized naturalism and abstraction. The remainder of the chapter analyses her early journal and book illustration commissions and the early critical response to her engravings. Reviewers singled out her work for its sincere, unsentimental portrayal of everyday rural people, adherence to traditional aesthetic models that diverged from overt abstraction, and her key role in revitalizing what was seen as the distinctly national art of wood engraving.

The chapter's two major arguments concern her work's appeal to a broad spectrum of political, cultural, and commercial interests, and her finding by the end of the decade a singular means to articulate her vision for authentic living. Appearing at a

moment when Britons with differing outlooks and agendas made substantial claims on the countryside, Leighton's engravings met the needs of those unsettled by modernity and the war and looking nostalgically to the rural, even as the left celebrated rural workers with an eye to incorporating them into national politics. Her work appeared concurrently in such diverse journals as the *New Leader*, the *Forum*, and the *London Mercury*, and served governmental propaganda promoting home agricultural products. Her forthright, emotive portrayal of country people also found favor with publishers issuing new editions of classic and contemporary rural fiction. Although most reviewers affirmed her work for its adherence to tradition, the chapter argues that by the end of this early period, Leighton embraced aspects of the language of modern art, which was critical to articulating her vision of people deeply engaged in peaceful, productive manual labor, her rebuttal of the carnage to war and the chaos of modern life.

Early Life, Art and Engraving Training, Early Prints

Family Milieu

Key factors that shaped Leighton's artistic and professional interests and worldview include her family's long association with the book industry, her elder brother's death in World War I, and her extended family's conflicting views on social mores and consciousness. Leighton grew up in a lively literary and artistic household in St. John's Wood, London, the only daughter of the popular commercial fiction writers Marie Connor (c.1865-1941) and Robert Leighton (1858-1934). Her father, who as a

young man had followed generations of family members in the arts of book design, binding, and printing, was literary editor of the Tory *Daily Mail*, the mass-market organ of Alfred Harmsworth (later Lord Northcliffe), when Clare was born. His long association with the London literary and publishing worlds facilitated Clare's entry into book illustration.¹ Marie Leighton's melodramatic mystery serials appeared in Northcliffe's papers, while Robert entertained a generation of adventure-seeking boys with British historical fiction and tales of the Wild West. Northcliffe, W. B. Yeats, G. K. Chesterton, and George Meredith, as well as the late-Victorian authors George Alfred Henty and William Gordon Stables were frequent visitors to the family's house, which Marie had romantically named Vallombrosa.²

Clare's memoir of her mother, *Tempestuous Petticoat, the Life of an Invincible Edwardian* (1947), recounts the pre-World War I world of a romantic, war-idealizing writer of fiction, and the war's abrupt upheaval of that disposition. From it and *Boy of My Heart*, Marie's memorial to her eldest son Roland, who fell early in the war, emerge additional insights into Leighton's formative intellectual and cultural interests and worldview.³ While the Leighton household seems to have possessed a free-flying Bohemian spirit, Marie enforced the old social order with an iron hand, drawing a strict

¹ See William H. P. Crewdson, "Robert Leighton," *Antiquarian Book Monthly* 20 (Oct. 1993): 18-24 for an account of Leighton's life and career, which includes a checklist of first editions of his books. His literary interests stemmed in part from his father, the Dundee-born Robert Leighton (1822-1869), a seed merchant's agent whose romantic nature poetry was posthumously collected in *Reuben* (1875) and *Records* (1880).

² Clare Leighton, *Tempestuous Petticoat, the Life of an Invincible Edwardian* (New York: Rinehart, 1947), 24, 41, 48, 201-02.

³ *Ibid*; [Marie Flora Barbara Connor Leighton], *Boy of My Heart* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1916), which Marie published anonymously.

line between herself and Robert (as master and mistress and as the adults) on the one hand, the children (emphatically to be seen, not heard), and the servants (including children's nurse, cook, parlourmaid, housemaid, undernurse, and kitchenmaid). Complicating this order was Marie's indispensable secretary, whose "good breeding" yet subordinate standing as an employee raised "subtle complications of shades of social difference ...[that] made life very difficult for us in the nursery."⁴

Robert's brother Jack, a liberal intellectual who led artistic amateurs on sketching trips to Italy and Switzerland, and their sister Sarah, a feisty socialist who, like her sister-in-law, ran off romances to order for several weekly newspapers, offset this rigid upbringing. Childhood visits to "The Meadow," Sarah's cottage near Swallowfield in Berkshire, introduced Clare to alternate ways that shunned class distinctions, stressing "the innate dignity of the human being." The cottage's lack of a garden gate (ordinarily ubiquitous in England), which let the lane merge imperceptibly into the garden, was a visible symbol of the family's openness to visitors of different classes. This egalitarianism stemmed in part from Clare's paternal grandparents, who had returned from a visit to America "fired with excitement over the New World, and the brotherhood of man." Clare later characterized the unobstructed cottage path as that family's "clarion call to earth brotherhood," contrasting the culture it represented with her mother's "high walls and a solid garden gate" in St. John's Wood.⁵

Catastrophe struck the Leightons early in World War I, when Clare was seventeen. Her older brother Roland, their mother's favorite and a promising poet who

⁴ Leighton, *Tempestuous Petticoat*, 56, 180.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 130-36.

delayed going up to Oxford in order to enlist, was sent to the front in March 1915, only to be cut down by a sniper at Hebuterne, France, on 22 December 1915, two days before he was due for leave to visit his family and his fiancée, the young writer Vera Brittain. He died the following day, several months short of his twenty-first birthday, and was buried in the military cemetery at Louvencourt. A few weeks after Roland's death, Brittain visited the Leightons at Keymer, near Brighton, where they had sought refuge from the Zeppelin raids that were terrorizing their Lowestoft residence overlooking the North Sea as well as London. Arriving as they were unpacking Roland's effects from the front, she found Marie and Clare "crying as bitterly as on the day we heard of His death." His mud-caked clothing reminded her of "not the usual clean pure smell of earth," but the putrid smell of the trenches ... the horror of war without its glory." Unable to bear the sight and stench of the clothing, Marie ordered her husband to dispose of them, as they "smell of Death; they are not Roland, they seem to detract from his memory & spoil his glamour."⁶ Clare helped her father bury the bloodstained tunic by carrying two heavy kettles of boiling water into their cottage garden to thaw the frozen earth.⁷ Official British policy, established early in the war, prohibited the exhumation of the dead and their reburial at home. The interment of Roland's clothing and the family's repeated listening to a

⁶ Vera Brittain's full account of this incident appears in a letter to her brother Edward Brittain, 14 January 1916, quoted in *Letters from a Lost Generation*, ed. Alan Bishop and Mark Bostridge (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998), 210-12. Brittain (1893-1970), whose brother was killed in action a few months later, wrote of her experiences in *Testament of Youth* (London: Gollancz, 1933), which was adapted for a PBS Masterpiece Theater series in 1979.

⁷ Clare Leighton, preface to Vera Brittain, *Chronicle of Youth, The War Diary 1913-1917*, ed. Alan Bishop (New York: William Morrow, 1982), 11.

recording of “Morning Hymn” appear to have served as instinctive, unplanned rites of grief, woeful substitutes for a funeral and a laying in English earth.⁸

Clare had been born into an era of Edwardian optimist achievement that undergirded her parents’ extravert world of commercial fiction. Building on substantially justifying experience, Robert’s colorful adventure tales for boys helped kindle a confident outlook in young empire-builders, preparing Roland’s generation to shape world history.⁹ Marie romantically envisioned her son “out in France, among the guns ... a Knight of the Round Table ... an inheritor of all the glories of the world.”¹⁰ Having “taught him what patriotism means,” she publically maintained this outlook after his death: he “willingly and even joyously gave up his life and all its brilliant promise for the sake of his country.”¹¹ Clare’s preface to a collection of Vera Brittain’s wartime letters written sixty-five years after Roland’s death recalls how that event shattered her confident outlook on life. Believing that he could not be killed, for he was “destined to do wonderful things in life,” “something of faith in life snapped inside me” when the telegram came the day after

⁸ Brittain (*Chronicle of Youth*, 301-04) relates their listening to George Henschel’s song; for Marie Leighton (*Boy of My Heart*, 198-99), the music evoked an image of a fallen Roland on the battlefield surrounded by the redeeming light of the Archangel Michael. Clare referred to the song again shortly after Brittain’s brother Edward was killed: “I love to think of our Archangel Michael singing the Morning Hymn even if it isn’t true; one can’t prove that He isn’t & somehow I feel that He must be – somewhere or other, with Roland & Victor. It will make the Morning Hymn trebly sacred now.” Clare Leighton to Vera Brittain, 23 June 1918, Vera Brittain Archive, The William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University Library, Hamilton, Ontario.

⁹ Robert Leighton’s *With Nelson in Command* (1905), *The Thirsty Sword* (1892), *Olaf the Glorious* (1894) all speak to the ideals of valor, fortitude and an inevitable, however hard-won victory.

¹⁰ Leighton, *Tempestuous Petticoat*, 245.

¹¹ Marie Leighton, *Boy of My Heart*, 41-42.

Christmas. Reading Brittain's diary left her "as emotionally destroyed as though my brother's death had happened but a short while before;" the impression of his "blood-stained and bullet-riddled" tunic remained "deep and harden[ed] over the years, never to be softened and erased by time."¹²

Clare's wartime art seems to reflect her sober, at times grim outlook. A sepia and pencil sketch of Roland for the dust jacket of *Boy of My Heart* (fig. 1.1) indicates none of her mother's fantasist ideas about war; rather, she portrays a vital young man in his officer's uniform, a forthright likeness and character study. Many of her "Ideas for Pictures," a series of detailed, un-illustrated pencil notes that date from the war years, bear morose titles: "Death in the Spring," "Parting at Morning," "Heaven In Hell," "The Call of Blood" and probably articulate her wartime terrors and anxieties. "Path of Life," "The Faith," and "The Atheist's Prayer" show a young woman questioning her beliefs.¹³ Living through a period marked by the wholesale destruction of a generation of young men, Leighton spent the rest of her life trying to come to terms with the horror and futility of war, even leaving England for America at Christmastime 1938, fearful that Europe would soon be locked in war. Unlike her contemporary the German expressionist Käthe Kollwitz, who dedicated a similarly long career to a visceral depiction of the agonies of war and the human condition,¹⁴ Leighton directed her creative energies into

¹² Leighton, preface to Brittain, *Chronicle of Youth*, 11-12.

¹³ "Ideas for Pictures," 1914, Clare Leighton Papers. Vera Brittain substantiated Leighton's emotional state in her diary: "From various remarks dropped by the family I gathered that her mind is at present largely occupied by religious doubts & difficulties both imaginary and real," Entry for 22 August 1915, in Brittain, *Chronicle of Youth*, 249-50.

¹⁴ Kollwitz (1867-1945) lost a son in World War I and a grandson in World War II.

affirming the productive, life-giving activities of rural people and communicating her vision for the peaceful coexistence of mankind.

Art and Wood Engraving Training

Both Leighton's father and his brother Jack were artists and encouraged her early interest and talent in drawing; a pastel crayon study of "Uncle Jack" (1916, fig. 1.2) demonstrates her ability to catch both physical likeness and character. Other titles in the series "Ideas for Pictures" (1914) show her aspirations to paint complicated subjects as well as her facility for descriptive writing. Unlike the scholastic opportunities afforded her brothers, Leighton had little formal schooling -- "a completely ignorant ... woolly old lady" governess in her early childhood taught the children piano and dance; there followed a brief sojourn at a dame school, where the "standard of scholarship was grotesquely low." But she read widely on her own Shakespeare's tragedies, Dryden, Shelley, and Keats, while her mother "moved about the house quoting Swinburne and Bryon and the lyrics of Henley."¹⁵ Her "Ideas for Pictures" demonstrate a wide knowledge of literature, art, and music and reveal the interior drama of a highly imaginative adolescent fixated on romantic relationships.¹⁶ The theme of loss dominates

¹⁵ According to Leighton, her mother disapproved of formal education for women, and following the custom of the day, sent only the boys, Roland and his brother, Evelyn, to schools that would prepare them for university and distinguished careers; Leighton, *Tempestuous Petticoat*, 182-85, 190, 193-94, 199-200.

¹⁶ "Ideas for Pictures, 1914," Clare Leighton Papers. It is not known if she actually gave drawing or painting expression to any of these word pictures.

“The Last Dance Together” and “Deserted;” in “The Exile,” Leighton focuses not on the Expulsion, but on the distraught Adam and Eve as they are “driven out of Eden in the darkness – sense of loneliness & fear of the unknown.” The whole body of jottings shows a keen awareness of the possibilities of landscape or an interior setting to convey the emotional states of her subjects.

Leighton studied at the Brighton School of Art in 1915, while she and her family lived at Keymer. Her teacher, a pupil of Walter Sickert who had exhibited at the leading London galleries, introduced her to the possibilities of creating light-filled canvases with an Impressionist palette; black, “a denial of light,” was not allowed.¹⁷ This approach soon changed, for during the early 1920s, Leighton took classes at the Slade, the art school of University College, London, where she studied under Henry Tonks, considered to be the most renowned and formidable drawing teacher of his generation.¹⁸ Tonks’s training in anatomical drawing formed the basis of his approach as an artist and teacher. He adhered to the constant study of the life model, which was the Slade’s founding and continuing credo.¹⁹ This approach undergirded Leighton’s own practical doctrine in depicting the natural world.

¹⁷ Leighton, *Clare Leighton, Growth and Shaping of an Artist-Writer*, 8. She does not name the teacher.

¹⁸ As her fellow wood engraver Paul Nash later put it, “Tonks was the Slade and the Slade was Tonks.” Paul Nash, *Outline, an Autobiography* (London: Faber and Faber, 1949), 89, quoted in Harrison, *English Art and Modernism*, 350.

¹⁹ Tonks was a qualified surgeon before he began teaching at the Slade. Clive Bell, *Art* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1914), 253, quoted in Harrison, *English Art and Modernism*, 22.

Needing to earn her own way, she began illustrating some of her father's Wild West stories and realized she knew nothing about working in black and white for printing purposes. Leaving the rarified atmosphere of the Slade,²⁰ she enrolled in 1922 in Noel Rooke's wood engraving and book illustration classes at the Central School of Arts and Crafts in London,²¹ a center for the revival of those activities. She had inherited an interest in the art of the book from her father as well as from her Leighton ancestors. The early-nineteenth-century Scottish bookbinder, Archibald Leighton (1784-1841) working in London, introduced stamped calico (cloth) as a substitute for the increasingly expensive leather; this cheap material was rapidly adopted by other bookbinders in England and abroad.²² Archibald Leighton's great-nephew John Leighton (1822-?) was a talented designer, known for his contributions to the British gift-book trade of the 1850s and '60s, whose covers and title pages show an English-school preference for ornament and symbol over pictorial designs.²³

The curriculum at the Central School, which was considered one of the most progressive European art schools of its time, stressed wood engraving as a creative art.

²⁰ Leighton relates that she and her fellow students dressed like "figures from the world of Piero della Francesca;" Leighton, *Clare Leighton, Growth and Shaping of an Artist-Writer*, 8-9.

²¹ "Chronology of Clare Leighton," in Stevens and Leighton, *Clare Leighton*, 6, lists the dates of her art studies.

²² My thanks to David Leighton for bringing this Leighton ancestor to my attention; David Leighton to the author, 27 Apr. 2008, Email. W. J. E. Crane, *Bookbinding for Amateurs* (London: L. Upcott Gill, 1903), 5, cites Archibald Leighton as being credited with inventing book cloth.

²³ Andrea Reithmayr, "Beauty for Commerce: Publishers' Bindings, 1830-1910," online exhibit based on the physical exhibit, 25 March-1 Aug. 2002, *Rare Books and Special Collections, Rush Rees Library, University of Rochester, NY*, Web, 4 Mar. 2007.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, the medium had been the primary instrument for quickly executed reproductions of other works for illustration, and the designer and engraver were often separate; by the late nineteenth century, the photographic process had reduced wood engraving to mechanical imitation. The Arts and Crafts Movement reinvigorated it as an expressive technique while renewing interest in the art of the book as a well-designed, capably printed, illustrated, and bound entity. Wood engraving has a natural affinity with book illustration, for both being in relief, type and image can be printed at the same time. Private presses such as William Morris's Kelmscott and Robert Gibbings' Golden Cockerell (the latter commissioning illustrations from many of Leighton's fellow wood engravers during the 1920s) set new standards for the medium. Moreover, the movement elevated the craftsman to the level of the artist's, and personal workmanship, and high levels of skill, materials and tools became central.²⁴

Noel Rooke, head of the Department of Book Production at the Central School, wanted to raise the standing of autographic wood engraving to that of "an independent and teachable graphic medium," stressing, moreover, the integral relationship between illustration and book, in the belief that "weight of line, tone, and harmony with areas of lettering and of blank paper" could best be achieved by wood engraving. He encouraged his students to work as commercial illustrators, even teaching them to print their illustrations on modern power-driven platen presses, so they could understand automatic inking and other processes; he would later make special mention of his pupils Leighton,

²⁴ For a detailed discussion and a bibliography of the wood-engraving revival in Britain, see Selborne, *British Wood-Engraved Book Illustration*.

Robert Gibbings, and John Farleigh regarding this training.²⁵ This instruction developed Leighton's skill with commercial presses; only once did she illustrate for a private press.²⁶

Rooke, who began teaching creative wood engraving as an independent subject in 1920, also taught his students to experiment with "white line" technique, in which the design is formed by the spaces that the artist carves into the block, a method Leighton found more natural and direct than the contrasting "black line," in which the design is created by the areas that remain.²⁷ "White line" was a hallmark of the late eighteenth century engraver Thomas Bewick, the "father" of English wood engraving, who used it to illustrate books on natural history. His recourse to this method, by which he achieved subtlety and sharpness, and his combination of art and craftsmanship were all models for Leighton and her fellow wood engravers.

Leighton's Wood Engraving Process

While a student of Rooke's, Leighton began to develop a characteristic approach to engraving marked by a synthesis of drawing and design and strong patterns of white and black. The actual process of wood engraving was for Leighton not just a technique,

²⁵ Ibid., 57.

²⁶ The books' wood-engraved illustrations were made by electrotype, the most commonly used method of reproducing engravings commercially from the mid-1850s to Leighton's time. This process creates an exact duplicate of the image; a wax mould is taken of the block and a copper skin electrolyzed over it to form the face of the plate.

²⁷ Clare Leighton, *Wood-Engraving and Woodcuts, How To Do It, Ser. 2* (London and New York: Studio, 1932), 7.

but a spiritual act in which the artist created light from the dark mass of the block. As she described it, the process was “almost a Biblical feeling that you’re making light – a sort of Genesis”²⁸ (fig. 1.3). A keen and sensitive observer of the natural world, Leighton drew heavily upon nature to create her designs. The master etcher John Taylor Arms observed that this, combined with her “powerful but subtle draftsmanship” and sense of design, particularly suited her to engrave on wood.²⁹

Her working method involved quickly executing several preliminary sketches and pencil notations onsite to grasp the subject’s essential form; then she would make studies of individual details of the scene. Sketches of a slender crabapple bough in bloom as well as of fledglings used for the engraving *Blackbird on Nest* and other bird prints in *Four Hedges* (1935, figs. 1.4-6) display botanical accuracy and exceptional ability to express in a few lines the newborn birds’ utter vulnerability and dependency on their parents. A comparison of her initial conceptual sketches with the final drawings used for the engravings shows that she usually grasped the desired compositional effects from the start.³⁰ While occasionally relying on photographs to make sure she had drawn a particular object with accuracy,³¹ she seems to have rarely used the camera to record her

²⁸ Conversation between Clare Leighton and Joanna Selborne, 25 Aug. 1983, quoted in Selborne, *British Wood-Engraved Book Illustration*, 376.

²⁹ John Taylor Arms, introduction to *Four Hedges: A Gardener’s Chronicle*, by Clare Leighton (New York: Macmillan, 1935), n. pag.

³⁰ The drawings are in the Pratt Collection, The Mint Museums of Art, Charlotte, NC.

³¹ Annotations in a signed copy of Hardy’s *Under the Greenwood Tree* (New York: Macmillan, 1940), which Leighton illustrated with sixty-two engravings, include a note to “look up a photograph of Alf’s cart” for the initial designing of *The Birdcage*.

observations from life, and then only as aids to her drawings;³² she never used it to transfer her designs to the block.³³ Leighton then drew or traced the final design on a woodblock, usually of box, which she first thinly coated with Chinese white, and set about engraving.³⁴ The charcoal and gouache drawing, a proof, and an engraving for “Dare to Call the Flowers My Own” (figs. 1.7-9), an illustration for Elsie Symington’s *By Light of Sun* (1941), show the process lying behind the evolution of her engravings.³⁵ She either drew the compositions in reverse from the very beginning, so that the print itself reflected her original intent, or used a mirror. In Leighton’s words, “unlike most engravers,” she made trial proofs from the very outset, seeking to be “controlled by the wood itself.”³⁶ She worked on the proofs with white paint until satisfied with the tonal contrasts.

³² The one published instance comes from an entry in a diary she kept while in a Canadian lumber camp in 1931. While observing the loading process, she “drew it and photographed it;” Leighton, *Clare Leighton, Growth and Shaping of an Artist-Writer*, 41.

³³ “I’ve just drawn the design on to the block and start engraving tomorrow. I wish I could work from it photographed on to the block, but I can’t.” Clare Leighton to Martin Hardie, 10 Sept. 1933, Martin Hardie Correspondence (Collection 940), Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles.

³⁴ The other primary way of transfer (blackening the surface with India ink and transferring the drawing with light tracing paper) was in theory, “the better, for the whole principle of wood engraving is that of cutting white upon a black surface;” but she had been trained in the alternate method; Clare Leighton, “How I Made My Book,” 44.

³⁵ Elsie Symington, *By Light of Sun* (New York: G. P. Putman’s Sons, 1941).

³⁶ Foreword written by Leighton to accompany her print *Winnowers, Majorca*, (1937), commissioned by the Woodcut Society of Kansas City, Missouri. The engraving tools are described and illustrated in Leighton’s *Wood-Engraving and Woodcuts* (7-8, 20-23).

Early Works; Developing a Formal Means

Leighton's earliest engravings established her lifelong interest in rural workingmen and women and the traditional modes of agricultural labor, transport, and trade fast going down before modern methods. Several of these prints depict everyday life in Bishop's Stortford, a Hertfordshire country town thirty-five miles northwest of London, where she lived with her family during the early '20s.³⁷ The town had long been situated in some of the best cereal-growing lands in the south of England, near the rivers Lea and Stort. *The Malthouse* (1923, fig. 1.10); *Barges* (1924, fig.1.11), long flatboats with men loading sacks of barley malt for the London breweries; and *The Calf Auction* (1924, fig. 1.12) show the two enterprises on which the town had thrived for centuries. Although Bishop's Stortford's malting industry had been declining for over a generation, the malthouses, which lined the Stort Navigation canal, and the weekly livestock market still provided un-mechanized sites of interest.³⁸ Leighton's scenes focus on the traditional modes of transportation, even though the Great Eastern Railway (fig. 1.13), a graphic reminder of the technologies that were rendering canals and barges increasingly obsolete, ran in close proximity to the malthouses.³⁹

³⁷ Leighton recalls those years in *Tempestuous Petticoat*, 262-72.

³⁸ Its malting industry had been firmly established by the sixteenth century but declined sharply before the First World War, as the London breweries began to establish their own maltings in Norfolk. The River Stort was navigated in the late 1760s; Paul Ailey, *Bishop's Stortford & Thorley, Hertfordshire, A History and Guide*, Paul Ailey, 2004, Web, 5 Sept. 2008.

³⁹ The 1896 Ordnance Survey map of Bishop's Stortford depicts the railway tracks running close to a number of malthouses situated along the Stort and the canals, many of

The Malthouse shows her working with elements of modernism to articulate space and mass, as well as rendering tonal contrasts of light, shadow, and texture with truth of detail. Having heretofore worked in drawing and painting, Leighton now had to create her designs out of line and tone instead of color. The building's distinctive features -- conical chimney, ventilation cowl, and directional vane -- are rendered from a low vantage point as bold abstract presences silhouetted against a cloudless sky.⁴⁰ Virtually two-dimensional, the engraving is surrounded by the black border, a hallmark of her early prints. Her accentuation of the oasthouse's broad, flat surfaces and geometric forms bears comparison with Stanley Spencer's *Mending Cows, Cookham* (1915, fig. 1.14), whose conical hoods rise in stark contrast to the dark, flat areas of roof and sky. Although both artists are concerned with articulating the cowls' architectural features, their overall interests differ: while Spencer's highly delineated forms evoke an otherworldly, mystical

which, if not all, were still standing when Leighton drew them. The map and enlargement were kindly provided by Elphin Watkin, 3 Oct. 2007, Email.

⁴⁰ Photographs of Stortford malthouses taken during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries indicate that Leighton chose to illustrate the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century examples; their designs are visually more interesting than those employed thereafter; for the photographs, see Paul Ailey, *Bishop's Stortford & Thorley, Hertfordshire, A History and Guide*, Paul Ailey, 2004, Web, 5 Sept. 2008. Leighton's prints as a whole provide an important record of vernacular architecture in England and America surviving into her time, in some instances even showing the structural evolution of a specific building type. For example, the round cone of the malthouse on the right side of *Barges* is built to a typically mid-to-late-eighteenth-century design, with a clover-shaped weathervane and a directional cowl, while the square-based cones of the maltings to the left display a type of kiln prevalent during the early nineteenth century. Elphin Watkin (director of restoration of the Great Dunmow Maltings, near Bishop's Stortford) to the author, 1 and 5 Oct. 2007, Email.

presence, Leighton focuses more on the human element, people actively engaged in work.⁴¹

Early Travels and Prints of Continental Europe

The engravings associated with Leighton's travels to rural France, Dalmatia and Yugoslavia in the mid-1920s with her artist uncle Jack show her continuing interest in everyday activities, especially people at work. However, they show an acute awareness of the sheer laboriousness of life, in what was then a truly European "third world," that does not figure in her engravings of the English countryside. Confronted with cultures still functioning with a low level of technology and scant material means, she portrays the hard realities for those merely eking out an existence. Women toil wearily over heavy piles of soiled cloth in *Washing Boat, Toulon* (1925, fig. 1.15). *Dawn in the Train to Mostar* (1927, fig. 1.16) shows exhausted passengers in a third-class rail carriage, their cramped conditions contrasting with the vast Balkan Mountains rising outside the window. The weatherworn faces of *Dalmatian Spinners* (1926, fig. 1.17) and *Jugo-Slav Gipsies* (1927, fig. 1.18) parallel the English rural life writer H. E. Bates's description of peasants in the "barbaric, bitter hills" near Dubrovnik who get "a living off an ass, an ox, and two square yards of earth."⁴² Yet Leighton portrays these women with great dignity

⁴¹ Spencer had been deeply attached to oasthouses since childhood, later writing that they "served as reminders of a religious presence;" Keith Bell, *Stanley Spencer: A Complete Catalogue of the Paintings* (London: Phaidon Press, 1993), 391.

⁴² H. E. Bates to Joseph Braddock, 11 Feb. 1938, quoted in Dean R. Baldwin, *H. E. Bates: A Literary Life* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna UP, 1987), 127.

and mines their character; their defiant stares and stances directly confront the viewer as well as their own hard existence.

Early Publication and Commissions for Journals and Books

Appearing at a moment when Britons of different persuasions made claims on the countryside, Leighton's rural-life prints appealed to a variety of interests, from those seeking nostalgia and locating national identity in the land, to those on the left, who celebrated rural work in an effort to incorporate country laborers into national politics. Editors of leading literary and socially and politically progressive periodicals -- notably J. C. Squire of the major literary monthly the *London Mercury*, H. G. Leach of the *American Forum*, and H. N. Brailsford of the socialist *New Leader* -- soon published them in their magazines. While their ideologies ranged from moderately left wing to openly Marxist, these editors shared a conservative aesthetic that did not embrace new literary movements such as *vers libre* and the experimental, or abstract art. Leighton's unsentimental images of country folk at work, presented in a somewhat "modernized," but conservative naturalistic style, conveyed a seriousness of purpose and commitment to everyday people that resonated with their post-war sensibilities and sociopolitical agendas. The prints also reinforced the prevailing image of the countryside as a cultural construct, an idealized landscape of southern England, which resonated with Squire's and Brailsford's preservationist concerns. While Brailsford also used her engravings to support his vision of allying the rural worker with the socialist party, the Conservative

government identified her as an ideal portrayer of farm life, commissioning posters with pastoral themes to promote home agriculture that were widely circulated.

The second half of this section addresses her work's appeal to publishers responding to the demand for contemporary and new editions of classic rural life literature. Leighton's engravings for Longmans, Green's *Home* (1927), by the New Zealand journalist Alan Mulgan, demonstrate her ability to portray an idealized vision of the countryside; those for Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native* (1929), published by Macmillan, reveal her ability to evoke the moods of the landscape and those who inhabit it.

Literary and Political Journals: J. C. Squire's *London Mercury*
and H. N. Brailsford's *New Leader*

Leighton's early engravings caught the attention of the journalist, critic, and poet J. C. Squire (1884-1958), the founder and editor of the *London Mercury*, a leading literary magazine during the 1920s.⁴³ Enhanced with reproductions of prints and drawings, the monthly featured a wide array of work by major authors, while reflecting Squire's bias against avant-garde modern movements in literature and art, his keen interest in rural England and preservation of its ancient sites, and the quintessential rural author Thomas Hardy. Squire published a selection of Leighton's continental prints, including *The Umbrella Menders: Toulon* (1926), *Loading the Ponies: Dalmatia* (1927),

⁴³ John Collings Squire was editor of the *London Mercury* from 1919-1934. Literary editor of the *New Statesman* from 1912 and as its acting editor from 1917-18, Squire also held a significant post-war position in London journalism. A member of the Marxist Social Democratic Federation as a young man, then a Fabian Liberal during World War I, Squire moved progressively to the right, especially in the 1930s.

and *Treading Grapes* (1928) as well as some of her illustrations for a new edition of Hardy's *The Return of the Native* (1929).⁴⁴ A well-established figure in London's literary scene, Squire not only publicized her work but helped her obtain commissions from leading book publishers, including Longmans, Green, and Macmillan. I discuss his critical reaction to her engravings, notably his comparison of Leighton's work to Hardy's poetry, later in this chapter.

Whereas Squire utilized Leighton's prints to further his interest in topics on rural life and Thomas Hardy's writings, and to enhance the appearance of the magazine, Brailsford also saw their potential to help shape his socialist political agenda. Under his leadership, beginning in 1922, the *New Leader*, the journal of the Independent Labour Party,⁴⁵ took on a heightened interest in economic and political aspects of the countryside, especially its farm laborer. Determined to see rural Britain revitalized against continued agricultural depression, Brailsford set the governing Liberal Party's various schemes for land reform against Labour's, which consistently pressed for a living wage for agricultural workers. Convinced that the party must reach out to the traditionally conservative-voting rural constituency, he addressed Labour's historic association with urban working-class interests and the need to expand its political program into the countryside: "Through these dreaming Shropshire villages lies our road

⁴⁴ Published in the *Mercury*: Nov. 1927, 16; Feb. 1928, 359; June 1929, 187; Sept. 1929, 481 and 486.

⁴⁵ Not to be confused with the Socialist Party of America's organ of the same name, this *New Leader*, originally the *Labour Leader*, was established in the 1880s and renamed the *Socialist Leader* in 1947. Founded in 1893 by the Scottish socialist Keir Hardie and others, the ILP quickly became known as the advanced democratic socialist movement and was affiliated as a constituent part of the Labour Party from 1906 to 1932.

to power.”⁴⁶ With the 1922 general election, Labour had taken on a new status as the opposition party at a national level, and was ready to carry its “international message to workers who had never heard it before.”⁴⁷ Leighton’s forthright depictions of country working folk linked with Brailsford’s rural interests in a general sense as well as with his aesthetics; he frequently featured her engravings until he was dismissed as editor in 1926,⁴⁸ thereafter championing her work in other publications.⁴⁹

H. N. (Noel) Brailsford (1873-1958, fig. 1.19), whom his fellow journalists considered “the most eloquent and incisive” radical journalist of their era,⁵⁰ wanted to produce a journal of literary distinction and socialist conviction that would engage broad strata of society, something that the British labour movement had lacked. Although highly critical of the absence of individual freedom and the suppression of dissent under authoritarian socialist regimes, Brailsford had always admired Communism’s commitment to the education of the working classes. Confident that *The New Leader*

⁴⁶ *New Leader*, 27 Apr. 1923, 2, quoted in Clare Griffiths, *Labour and the Countryside: The Politics of Rural Britain 1918-1939* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), 3. The Labour Party’s interwar identity generally remained one of male trade unionism and employment; see Matthew Worley, *Labour Inside the Gate: A History of the Labour Party between the Wars* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2005), 174.

⁴⁷ *New Leader*, 6 Apr. 1923, 2, quoted in Griffiths, *Labour and the Countryside*, 2.

⁴⁸ *The Malthouse* was the first to be published, in April 1924. F. M. Leventhal (*The Last Dissenter: H. N. Brailsford and his World* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1985], 9) relates that Leighton’s socialist Aunt Sarah encouraged her to show a portfolio of her work to Brailsford.

⁴⁹ Although Brailsford had become one of the most influential and widely-read socialist writers in Europe at the *New Leader*, he never again was so closely affiliated with a periodical, instead freelancing, working on contract for magazines like the *New Republic*, and lecturing in America; *Ibid.*, 203-04.

⁵⁰ Leventhal’s critical biography remains the only study of this influential journalist; he does not address Brailsford’s ideas for rural revitalization. The quote is from *Ibid.*, 1.

could bridge the gap between the quality periodicals and the popular press, he recruited such talent as George Bernard Shaw, H.G. Wells, and Bertrand Russell, and published illustrations by distinguished artists as Jack Yeats, Muirhead Bone, and Käthe Kollwitz.⁵¹ By 1925 he claimed to carry the “Socialist message to a larger number of readers than all the Conservative and Liberal weekly reviews can count among them.”⁵²

Although the *New Leader* likely did not reach the varied readership to which Brailsford aspired, it seems to have met its catholic aim of appealing to diverse cultural and social constituencies. He graphically portrayed contemporary social problems in the journal, selecting “fine” art instead of “popular” art to make his points. C. R. W. Nevinson’s lithograph *The Workers* (1919, fig. 1.20), which appeared there under the title *Strikers on Tower Hill* a month after Brailsford assumed editorship in 1922, caught the turmoil of current labor strife.⁵³ Keenly interested in featuring the creative efforts of the working class itself, he commissioned Leighton to illustrate the poem “In Normandy” (1926, fig. 1.21) by F. C. Boden, a heretofore-unpublished colliery labourer who was employed “in night work on the pit bank,”⁵⁴ and sought out the work of wood engravers

⁵¹ Ibid., 176-77.

⁵² *New Leader*, 2 Oct. 1925, 2.

⁵³ Ibid., 13 Oct. 1922: 9. Nevinson (1889-1946), the son of Brailsford’s long-time friend the radical journalist H. W. Nevinson and his suffragist wife Margaret, heightens the sense of the railway workers’ fierce discontent by portraying the demonstrators rallying under a foreboding industrial building that rises darkly into an ominous sky.

⁵⁴ “A Poet From the Mines, Four Lyrics by F. C. Boden,” *New Leader*, 19 Mar. 1926, 11. The engraving -- the sole direct visual allusion Leighton ever made to the Great War or for that matter, to Christian symbolism -- interprets the verse, whose imagery speaks of a couple wandering through an apple orchard at eventide, surrounded by the spirits and the graves of a “a thousand and three, ... not one who came back to his lover.”

who were “peasant by origin” to illustrate the magazine.⁵⁵ Leighton’s engraved profile of the left-wing German Jewish playwright Ernst Toller (1925, fig. 1.22) and the accompanying tribute to the recently released political prisoner demonstrates the *Leader*’s unqualified support of those on the front line for justice and peace.⁵⁶

I want to suggest that Leighton’s engraving *Turning the Plough* (1926, fig. 1.23) and the short story that it illustrated for a 1926 issue of the *New Leader* met Brailsford’s wide-reaching aims in their capacity to engage several strata of society.⁵⁷ Commissioned to illustrate the young writer and journalist Winifred Holtby’s “How Dossy Met God,” the print shows a ploughboy gazing at a heavenly aura as he prepares to turn his team into a new furrow. The story centers on the young man’s inner conflict as he revels in, then regrets, having proved his manhood to the village by seducing a married woman, remembering the parson’s sermon that “the wages of sin is death.” Drawing on the long-held cultural image of the simple, hard-working farm laborer whose work is indispensable to his whole nation, Leighton shows Dossy at the point in the story when a wrathful, unforgiving God manifests himself to the ploughboy, who unquestioningly accepts his judgment. Seemingly straightforward in its stereotypical image of the virtuous ploughman, the illustration also helps visualize the story’s deeper meaning. Although the magazine makes no mention of it, Holtby is alluding to William Blake’s *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*, as well as his last important poem *The Everlasting*

⁵⁵ Brailsford, “Woodcuts,” *New Leader*, 25 Dec. 1925, 3.

⁵⁶ *New Leader*, 11 Dec. 1925, 11, “A Poet of the German Revolution,” by Ashley Dukes.

⁵⁷ Winifred Holtby, “Between the Furrows: How Dossy Met God,” *New Leader*, 1 Oct. 1926, 11-12.

Gospel, in which he voices the belief that innocence has been lost largely by organized religion's subordination of mercy to dogma.⁵⁸ In their potential to be easily appreciated and power to engage a readership familiar with Blake's often obscure verse, story and illustration operate on several levels, even allowing Brailsford, the son of a self-righteous Methodist minister, to subtly voice his deep disdain for organized religion. Leighton would return to this multilayered approach in her country life books, which allowed her to meet her publishers' expectations while subtly articulating her own interests and concerns.

Leighton's Developing Socialist Views

Leighton's postwar interest in socialist philosophy took form in the late 1920s as she and Noel Brailsford formed a personal relationship -- despite a twenty-five year age difference -- that spanned the period in which she wrote her English country life books.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Holtby ends the story: "Dossy's heart was at peace with itself, thankful and humble, because God, who made heaven for the good, had made Hell also for the sinners." *The New York Times* (5 Apr. 1953, sect. 7, 1) published *Turning the Plough*, with the caption "Prophetic revelations based upon songs of innocence," as an illustration accompanying a review of *The Collected Poems of Dylan Thomas*. John Masefield's long, narrative poem *The Everlasting Mercy* (1911) may also have influenced Holtby's story. Masefield (1878-1967), who was known for his direct, realistic style, uses extensive Christian symbolism associated with the ploughman and the plow to convey the degenerate Saul Kane's conversion.

⁵⁹ Brailsford was separated from his wife Mabel, who was increasingly incapacitated by alcoholism. In 1928 he secured a flat for Leighton, who had been living in Bloomsbury and teaching drawing at St. Monica's School, near his own flat in Belsize Park Gardens, and by 1930 they were living together and had vacationed in Europe on several occasions. Although they never married, Leighton's stationery and exhibition announcements frequently read "Clare Leighton (Mrs. H. N. Brailsford)" during the 1930s, probably signifying a search on her part for respectability. Much of my

A man of strong convictions and at times explosive personality, Brailsford exercised a great influence over Leighton during their intense, frequently turbulent decade together.⁶⁰ As part of his circle, which included prominent left-wing intellectuals and journalists, Leighton met leaders of international opinion committed to social and economic equality and world peace.⁶¹ An independent thinker who was affiliated with the Independent Labour Party and the Socialist League during the '20s and '30s,⁶² Brailsford was a tireless promoter of world unity and a zealous humanitarian, especially concerned with the welfare of ordinary people and those yet poorer or more discriminated against and oppressed. His direct involvement as a correspondent and editor dedicated to national and international political, economic, and social issues during the years between the wars made Leighton constantly aware of the world's problems as well as his often remarkably enterprising proposals to alleviate them. The *New Leader*, the *New Statesman*, and the

information about their relationship comes from Leventhal's biography of Brailsford, *Last Dissenter*, which draws from their personal correspondence and Leventhal's interviews with Leighton. Brailsford's papers at the Labour History Archive and Study Centre, People's History Museum, Manchester, which were deposited by his second wife, Evamarie, only include his and Leighton's personal correspondence dating after World War II.

⁶⁰ Leighton told Leventhal (*Last Dissenter*, 215) that Brailsford had a "hypnotic power" over her. She drew on his far-reaching intellectual powers and profited from his vast-ranging interests, which included a command of art and literature, music, anthropology and archaeology.

⁶¹ Brailsford's strong support for the Indian nationalist cause, for example, led to her meeting Mahatma Gandhi during the 1931 Commonwealth Conference in London; this in turn led to Gandhi's being invited to visit Four Hedges, the couple's country cottage in Buckinghamshire. Leighton's sketches made during this period resulted in a portrait of the same year. In addition to the oil portrait, Leighton sketched a charcoal study of Gandhi sleeping; see Fletcher, *Clare Leighton*, no. 841.

⁶² A primary objective of the Socialist League was to persuade a future Labour government to implement socialist policies.

New Republic were among the many organs through which he repeatedly articulated and passionately defended his call for world peace and truly democratic socialism, as well as specific ways to redistribute wealth to the poor, particularly land to the “peasants.”⁶³

Leighton’s writings about ordinary rural people took on an increased politicized focus during the period that Brailsford was issuing some of his best-known socialist works, including *Property or Peace?* (1934), his most nearly Marxist work, which explores the connection between war and capitalism, and *Why Capitalism Means War* (1938).⁶⁴ His *Olives of Endless Age* (1928), which he dedicated to Leighton and commissioned from her the frontispiece engraving (fig.1.24), sets out a journalist’s quest for political and economic unity beyond the spurious divisions of nationalism, with a passionate plea for his generation to save itself by renouncing patrioteering passions and establishing “the Great Society of mankind.”⁶⁵ Brailsford’s anti-imperialist views, his quest for conciliation and world government, for disarmament, and for a fair sharing of natural resources, set him against “every government in power in England during his lifetime.”⁶⁶ Despite sustained frustration and despair in the face of the seemingly endless

⁶³ A term commonly used by Brailsford and other writers interested in the plight of the agricultural laborer.

⁶⁴ The publisher and founder of the Left Book Club Victor Gollancz suggested that Brailsford write a book demonstrating the inescapable link between capitalism and war to complement John Strachey’s *Coming Struggle for Power* (1932), publishing Brailsford’s *Property or Peace?*; Leventhal, *Last Dissenter*, 236.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 208-10.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

world problems during his life, he remained unshakable in his faith that a more humane society could be brought into being.⁶⁷

Leighton shared Brailsford's wide empathy and humanist beliefs. By linking rural people through time and space, however, Leighton focused on a continuum that was as apolitical as Brailsford's quixotic quest was politically focused. Her art and writings speak time and again of the kinship between the toilers of the earth, a worldwide community that transcended individual and national interests. She found a universality about the "people of the earth," as she frequently referred to them, that was healing and restorative, their productive living and "simplicity of elemental thought" a panacea to the disorder of modern civilization.⁶⁸ Her magazine and book illustration commissions, some of which I discuss in the following section, well served her readers' need for nostalgia and ideas of national identity regarding the English countryside; I would argue that Leighton's broad vision kept her work from being identified solely with these more parochial interests.

⁶⁷ Leventhal (Ibid., 123) traces Brailsford's belief that "human kinship transcended the political illusions over which nations fought" to 1913 while he was reporting the First Balkan War in Thessaly. Brailsford, who had fought for the Greek cause in 1897 and continued to condone wars of liberation against the Turks, relates in *The War of Steel and Gold* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1914) that as he stumbled over the corpse of a Turkish peasant soldier, he found himself wrenched by fellow feeling for this nameless figure, "sacrificed to abstractions whose meaning he probably never comprehended," instead of rejoicing at the death of an "enemy."

⁶⁸ Clare Leighton, *Southern Harvest* (New York: Macmillan, 1942; London: Gollancz, 1943), xi, and *Country Matters* (London: Gollancz; New York: Macmillan, 1937), xiv-xv.

Nostalgia and National Identity: Commissions for H. G. Leach's *Forum*,
Empire Marketing Board, and London Omnibus Company

Leighton's engravings for the American *Forum* magazine,⁶⁹ lithographic posters for Britain's Empire Marketing Board, and engravings for the London Omnibus Company convey a deep sense of the pastoral that closely relates the idea of Englishness with the countryside. Commissioned by its editor H. G. Leach, the *Forum* prints depict quintessential farming activities: *Milking*, *Lambing*, *Threshing*, and *Turning the Plough* (1926, figs. 1.25-27, 1.23), people working the land as opposed to an evocation of the land itself.⁷⁰ Leighton titled the series "British Yeomanry," mindful that she was representing her entire country for an American readership. But I would argue that the highly nostalgic scenes and use of a rather archaic word for those who work the land invoke the southern ideal of Thomas Hardy, whose novels were the face and character of a passing rural England in the eyes of the American public.⁷¹ Associations with his work could only invigorate her efforts to become a prime portrayer of rural life.

⁶⁹ The *Forum* addressed a wide range of topics in politics, economics, social affairs, religion, science, and education, making a feature of presenting both sides of the issue.

⁷⁰ "British Yeomanry, Four Woodcuts by Clare Leighton," *Forum*, Sept. 1926, 399-403. Leighton produced the engravings specifically for the *Forum* because her existing rural life prints were not the right proportions for the magazine. She also consulted with Leach regarding the sequence of the farming scenes. Clare Leighton to H. G. Leach, 30 Nov. 1925, Henry Goddard Leach Letters from Various Correspondents (bMS Eng 854), Houghton Library, Harvard University. *Turning the Plough* served as a commission for both the *Forum* and Winifred Holtby's short story "How Dossy Met God" that appeared in the 1 Oct. 1926 issue of the *New Leader*.

⁷¹ Hardy held international acclaim in the 1920s as the leading chronicler of the English countryside of a couple of generations before; "yeoman" appears frequently in his work. *Tess of the D'Urbervilles'* milking and threshing scenes and *The Return of the Native's* lambing scene probably served as conceptual models for Leighton. While she probably observed some of these activities first-hand, some of these early prints show that she was

The *Forum* engravings indeed established Leighton's reputation as a leading illustrator of farming scenes. Shortly after their publication, the Empire Marketing Board approached her as the most suitable artist to produce a set of posters depicting "home agriculture." Five nearly forty-by-sixty-inch color lithographs, their subjects ranging from *Tending the Flock* (fig. 1.28) to *Ploughing* and *Threshing*,⁷² were created from her designs and displayed in shops, schools, and factories, as well as on hoardings on municipal property during 1929.⁷³ Established in May 1926 to promote intra-Empire trade and encourage consumers to "Buy Empire," the EMB also began promoting home food and related products in response to concerns of British farmers and the Ministry of Agriculture that increased dominion competition would hurt home producers.⁷⁴ *Tending the Flock*, which carried the caption "Help Home Farms, Buy British," conveys an idealized vision of man and beast in pastoral harmony, its appeal and effectiveness rests on its narrative format and inclusion of the "human element." The importance of this

not careful to portray the processes accurately. An American reader wrote the *Forum* that the cow was being milked from the wrong side in *Milking* and that the ploughman lacked reins to guide the horse in *Turning the Plough*; G. F. Weeks, "To the Editor," *Forum*, Dec. 1926, 949.

⁷² Also *The Malthouse* and *The Dairy Farm*; listed in Fletcher, *Clare Leighton*, 25.

⁷³ Stephen Constantine, *Buy and Build: The Advertising Posters of the Empire Marketing Board* (London: H. M. S. O., 1986), 6-7. Leighton appears to have been the only woman to design posters for the Board. Fletcher's dating of the Marketing Board posters to 1935 is incorrect (*Clare Leighton*, nos. 790-794), as the Board only functioned from 1926 to 1933. Constantine's research of the Board's minutes and Leighton's writing Macmillan and Co. in 1929, "I have designed the set of Empire Marketing Board posters that are up at the moment," (Clare Leighton to Mr. Ratcliffe, 13 Aug. 1929, Clare Leighton Correspondence, Records of Macmillan and Company, Ltd., MS 1089, Special Collections Service, University of Reading, UK) confirm the earlier date of 1929.

⁷⁴ Stephen Constantine, "Bringing the Empire Alive," in *Imperialism and Popular Culture*, ed. John M. MacKenzie (Manchester: Manchester UP), 1986, 215-16.

quality becomes even more apparent when compared to her fellow wood engraver John Nash's un-peopled *Fruit Gardens and Orchard* (1930, fig. 1.29), an EMB commission that was to visualize "Home Gardens for Home Markets." His scene is detached and rather unworldly, hers emotive and highly nostalgic.

In addition to promoting home agriculture, Leighton's country life scenes served several other objectives of the EMB. As Stephen Constantine points out, for many, "Empire" and "Imperial" had come to symbolize exploitation and unwholesome arrogance; art showing heroic figures of labor working the English soil and the territories presented an alternative vision of Empire as a "cooperative effort in the tilling of the soil, reaping the harvests and the organization of a world economy." Furthermore, this uniting effort could be seen as a force for international peace. The EMB posters as a whole depict scenes of pastoral calm and harmonious exchange, replacing the traditional late-nineteenth-century imperial images of conquest and mastery.⁷⁵ I would argue that in the years after World War I, Leighton's nostalgic scenes of a pre-industrialized countryside more than met the EMB's expectations -- or at least its doctrine -- that propaganda could "bring the Empire alive" while promoting a vision of prosperity and peace.

Engravings for the London General Omnibus Company demonstrate Leighton's visualizing that corporation's aims of promoting travel to villages and parkland close to

⁷⁵ Ibid, 217-18. First contacted in December 1926, Leighton was paid £250 for her "Home Farms" posters, an amount regarded between the wars as more than a year's top wage for a skilled manual worker, and among the highest fee paid to artists by the EMB poster subcommittee; Constantine, *Buy and Build*, 9. Leighton's nostalgic scenes continued to be sought after during World War II; a teacher from the Caldecott Community in Dorset contacted her to ask for replacement of *Tending the Flock*, which had hung in the school for years; Leila Rendel to Clare Leighton, 22 May 1941, Clare Leighton Papers.

London.⁷⁶ *Chalfont St. Giles* (1929, fig. 1.30), with its highly idealized pastoral imagery of children playing on the common, duck pond, and cottages and church nestling together, taps into a deep nostalgia for an imagined past, a longing for the simpler, unhurried life of both childhood and rural idyll that could temporarily counteract the fragmentation and alienation of modern existence.⁷⁷ *Windsor Castle* (1929, fig. 1.31), its main tower rising over a field of sheep grazing and people relaxing in the shade of a verdant tree, serves a similar purpose.⁷⁸ I want to suggest, however, that the engraving speaks to the related, but weightier concerns regarding the Great War and sacrifice for country, and serves as an early example of her placing political commentary in a seemingly forthright portrayal of the countryside, in this case a British landmark.

Leighton draws on the earlier London Underground Railways posters of George Clausen and Fred Taylor for compositional purposes and perhaps with a desire to associate her work with that of Clausen, whose turn-of-the-century rural-life paintings critics saw as embodying the essence of Englishness.⁷⁹ Both Clausen's evocation of the prototypical village green anchored by the ubiquitous church -- the poster was sent to troops stationed

⁷⁶ The six approximately six-by-four-inch prints probably were used as newspaper advertisements, as opposed to the lithographic posters used for display.

⁷⁷ Used as the frontispiece to Shaw and Chase, *An Imagined Past: History and Nostalgia*.

⁷⁸ *Windsor Castle* and *Hampstead Heath*, which also calls up a pastoral vision (illustrated in Jaffé, *Wood Engravings of Clare Leighton*, no. 31), show Leighton's interest in experimenting with an impressionist idiom to convey the effects of sunlight. These two engravings are highly unusual in her oeuvre; whether she was experimenting for her own purposes or seeking to further the company's aims by turning to a popular formal mode is unknown.

⁷⁹ *Connoisseur*, 1904, 142, quoted in Holt, *British Artists and the Modernist Landscape*, 26.

at the front as a reminder of what they were fighting for (1916, fig. 1.32)⁸⁰ -- and Taylor's *Hampstead, London Memories* (1918, fig. 1.33) purposefully evoke a high pastoralism and sense of nostalgia during a true "In Time of 'The Breaking of Nations.'"⁸¹ Leighton's engraving follows the peaceful pursuits of sheep resting and people reading under mature, leafy trees, but the powerful state replaces the church, Clausen's bedrock of the village. The Crown watches protectively over the lambs, symbols of innocence and sacrifice, who have made the ultimate offering for country. This noble justification for the loss of a generation of young men became increasingly questioned in the years after the war, and is an issue that Leighton further addresses in *The Farmer's Year* (1933), the subject of Chapter Two.

Early Book Illustrations: Leighton's Interpretations of Rural Life for
Alan Mulgan's *Home* and Thomas Hardy's *Return of the Native*

During the late 1920s, publishers began to commission her to illustrate novels set in rural England, as well as studies that both romanticized the countryside and addressed its sizeable agricultural problems. The Longmans, Green-commissioned engravings for the New Zealander journalist Alan Mulgan's *Home* (1927), a colonial's responses to his

⁸⁰ The top of the poster reads: "The Underground Railways of London knowing how many of their passengers are now engaged on important business in France and other parts of the world send out this reminder of home." The verse at the bottom is from the poet Samuel Rogers' (1763-1855) "A Wish: Mine Be a Cot Beside the Hill ... The Village church among the trees." Martin Hardie and Arthur K. Sabin, ed., *War Posters Issued by Belligerent and Neutral Nations 1914-1919* (London: A. & C. Black, 1920). Leighton likely knew the book, as she consulted periodically about her work with Hardie, curator of prints at the Victoria and Albert Museum.

⁸¹ The title of one of Thomas Hardy's poetic responses to World War I (1915).

first travels in the motherland, interpret his purely pastoral idealization of the English countryside even as they pass over his candid discussion of its economic realities, thereby keeping to the publisher's objective to poeticize the countryside to its readership.

Leighton, however, took Mulgan's observations about class divisions in British society to subtly articulate some of her own interests. For Hardy's *The Return of the Native*, she depicts ordinary country people not as stereotypical characters who serve as little more than a background setting to the action, but responding to their environment, the formidable wind-swept Egdon Heath, revealing their disposition toward self-destruction or survival.

Leighton's illustrations for the first edition of Alan Mulgan's *Home* portray a domesticated English landscape that resonates with the author's idealized vision of the countryside, while keeping silent on his discussion of its problems.⁸² Mulgan (1881-1962), a first-generation New Zealander of Irish descent who was the chief leader-writer and literary editor of the *Auckland Star*, first visited England in 1926. His impressions of the heart of empire reveal a mind steeped in English poetry, yet keenly aware of the country's economic and social realities. In the book's prefatory note, J. C. Squire praises Mulgan's ability to discuss English politics honestly but compassionately while affirming the country's rich heritage of pastoral poetry:

In a world that talks about our decay ... We know ourselves to be still a country people, still an energetic people, still a poetic people.... [Mulgan] sketches the

⁸² Alan Mulgan, *Home: A New Zealander's Adventures* (London: Longmans, Green, 1927), with five engravings, accompanied by captions that provide the passage the engraving is interpreting. Longmans also commissioned Leighton to illustrate the first English editions of Thornton Wilder's early works, including *The Angel That Troubled the Waters* (1928), *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* (1929), and *The Woman of Andros* (1930).

background which English affections have created and to which English affections cling....⁸³

For Mulgan, part of the beauty of the English landscape was its domestication, as “the joint product of Nature and man,” unlike New Zealand’s, in which Nature was dominant.

English rural buildings were an integral part of the landscape and added to its charm:

Again and again you see a building that seems to be as much one with the scene as the trees about it. In fact it looks to be growing out of the soil... The great farmyard enclosures, the long barns, the oast-houses, the farm-houses themselves, so large and dignified to one accustomed to the rawness of wood and iron.⁸⁴

Mulgan’s impressions of the English countryside were a prime vehicle for Leighton’s searching vision; the engravings show her a keen observer of nature and of the built environment. *The Village* (1927, fig. 1.34) illustrates the author’s description of the prototypical English village, “trim and uniform [where the] houses nestle together, and look as if they had been there for hundreds of years.”⁸⁵ Thatched-roofed cottages with clay chimneys appear to hug the spire of the parish church and one another as they blend into the landscape, demonstrating Leighton’s ability to interpret sensitively another’s imagery and to elicit a sense of place. The absence of human activity and modern machinery -- she responded to Mulgan’s lament that motorized vehicles were marring the

⁸³ J.C. Squire, prefatory note to *Home*, by Mulgan, x. Lawrence Jones (“Alan Edward Mulgan, 1881-1962,” *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, vol. 4 [Auckland: Auckland Univ. Press, 1998, n. pag.], *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, Web, 14 Nov. 2008) sees Mulgan as an “important transitional figure in New Zealand culture ... articulating and attempting to reconcile the oppositions ... between the Victorian and colonial values of his father’s generation and the ‘modern’ nationalistic ideals of his son’s.”

⁸⁴ Mulgan, *Home*, 86-87. Mulgan observed that many of the houses in the New Zealand countryside were made of unsightly materials such as galvanized iron.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 88.

beauty of the village by keeping them out of her pictures -- make them evocations of an earlier time.⁸⁶ Acknowledging its power to evoke the quintessential English village, Longmans, Green selected this engraving for the frontispiece to *England Out of Doors* (1934), a nostalgic anthology of writings on the English countryside.⁸⁷

Although Mulgan gives the impression that his preconceived idea of the English countryside as a “garden” has been affirmed during his travels, he also acknowledges its dark side, the plight of the rural poor; the countryside harbors both myth and reality. He couches the various circumstances that have contributed to the “land problem” as a series of questions. “What is to blame here?” he asks, citing mass migration to cities, decrease in cropping and increase in pastureland under pressure of the competition of more abundant farming countries, inefficiency in farming methods, social subordination and convention, the land being largely valued for its political and social weight and prestige.⁸⁸ He thereby deflects outright criticism into subtle stating of the conditions under which agriculture had sickened. Leighton’s illustrations for *Home* gloss over the dire conditions of farm workers during the 1920s, maintaining an idealized vision of the countryside that was in keeping with the publisher’s objectives.

If the plight of rural England was not a suitable theme to illustrate, *The Squire Plays with the Village Blacksmith* (1927, fig. 1.35), for Mulgan’s chapter “Cricket at the Heart,” shows that Leighton found a way to articulate her egalitarian interests, with such

⁸⁶ The absence of vehicles became the norm for her village scenes.

⁸⁷ E. W. Parker and A. R. Moon, ed., *England Out of Doors* (London and New York: Longmans, Green), 1934.

⁸⁸ Mulgan, *Home*, 101-12.

subtleness that the reader probably would not have noticed.⁸⁹ Cricket was one of the few British sports that carried a strictly exclusive nature while permitting different social classes to play side-by-side. Interpreting the author's observation that "English cricket is a curious mixture of class distinctions and equality," Leighton casts the sport as a leveling enterprise of the village, a rare moment as the gentry and the ordinary country folk come together in common purpose. Club cricket, whose exclusiveness Mulgan considers at much greater length in the narrative, remains un-illustrated.

Leighton received the commission from the Macmillan Publishing Company to illustrate a memorial edition of Hardy's *The Return of the Native* (1878) shortly after his death in early 1928. That spring and summer, she immersed herself in his Wessex by lengthy walking tours through the Dorset countryside, which in his youth had been one of the poorest and least developed parts of England.⁹⁰ She later recalled that, "I was Egdon Heath, feeling the hooves of the cropper ponies and the turn of the undergrowth."⁹¹ Twelve full-page engravings and thirty-seven small chapter headings and tailpieces portray the villagers and the people of Egdon Heath and the land's many moods.⁹² The

⁸⁹ The engraving's title as listed in the book is taken from Mulgan's narrative. Fletcher's catalogue (*Clare Leighton*) re-titled the engraving *The Village Cricket Match* (no. 48), which omits a direct reference to the acceptance of differing social groups coming together to play the sport.

⁹⁰ Helen Josephy, "Gypsy Wanderings from Prehistoric Caves of French Pyrenees to Picturesque Herzegovina Recorded in Lovely Wood Cuts," *New York Sun*, 31 January 1929, 18.

⁹¹ Unpublished memoirs in the possession of the Leighton family, quoted in Selborne, *British Wood-engraved Book Illustration*, 376-77.

⁹² Thomas Hardy, *The Return of the Native* (London and New York: Macmillan, 1929). Harper & Bros.'s American edition appeared the same year. The large number of chapters dictated the frequent reuse of many of the chapter headings and tailpieces; the

commission gave her the opportunity to interpret a work by England's most important country novelist, who had broken with the charmed sensibilities of much late nineteenth-century rural life writing and its portrayal of the countryside and its people. His insights and concerns move beyond conventional stereotypes and any fantasy-based yearning for old-fashioned rural simplicity. While Hardy was concerned about the decline of valued aspects of village culture, he had no illusions about a "return to the land;" rather, his primary interests centered on the lives of ordinary people and a society stressed by difficult change and growth. Egdon Heath serves as a theater on human drama; "It is the means of evaluating the various characters and of assessing their tendencies towards self-destruction or survival."⁹³

Leighton's engravings interpret the characters' emotional relationship to the natural world, whether they happen to embrace it or estrange themselves. In *Clym Cutting Furze* (1929, fig. 1.36), Yeobright, who has purposefully returned from a successful career in Paris to live near his native wilderness, bends to the commonplace task of cutting the dead gorse, his body echoing its sinuous curves. But Eustacia, humiliated by her husband's lowly work, is a static figure, alienated from the landscape she so detests, her countenance as rigid as the wind-swept pine beside her. Leighton's power of expressing the characters' emotions and relationships to the land is far removed from the Victorian, didactic sensibilities of Arthur Hopkins, who illustrated the novel's original monthly serialization in the magazine *Belgravia*. Hopkins's scene of Eustacia coming

initial appearance of an engraving marks the passage that Leighton was illustrating or interpreting. Vivien Gribble (1888-1935), who also learned wood engraving from Noel Rooke at the Central School, had illustrated a large-sized, limited edition of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* for Macmillan in 1926.

⁹³ Cavaliero, *Rural Tradition in the English Novel*, 1.

across Clym toiling in the heath (1878, fig. 1.37), while exploring the characters' connection to or rejection of the landscape, does not express the underlying tragedy of human experience that figures large in Hardy's work. Hopkins instead focuses on the figures' outward appearance to indicate their social aspirations: Eustacia's finery for her ambition of entering upper-class society, Clym's work clothes for his willing embracement of a lowly life grounded in the primal heath.⁹⁴

Observing that Hardy was "himself a visual thinker" and that his landscape served as "no mere background," Noel Brailsford saw Leighton's numerous landscape vignettes as genuinely reflecting the dark and turbulent moods of the forbidding wasteland as well as its dominion over the characters' fates. Both Brailsford and the print critic Malcolm Salaman saw in her smaller engravings an expressive emotional power that hinted at "the destiny latent in the Heath," and equaling the power and technical mastery shown in the full-page illustrations.⁹⁵ The calm waters of *The Pond* (1929, fig. 1.38) make an ironic contrast to Hardy's description of the swirling currents of Shadwater Weir, into which Eustacia will cast herself in final desperation, as well as the doomed woman's nighttime

⁹⁴ The choice of Hopkins (1848-1930), a realist painter and illustrator of sentimental country life scenes, to illustrate the novel was in keeping with the magazine's image, as indicated by its full title: "*Belgravia, A Magazine of Fashion and Amusement*" (est. 1866). Arlene Jackson (*Illustration and the Novels of Thomas Hardy*, [Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield], 1981, 40) has noted that such illustrations were deployed to steer the reader from potentially troubling issues in order to make Hardy's work more popularly acceptable as entertainment.

⁹⁵ H. N. Brailsford, "The Woodcuts of Clare Leighton," *Studio*, Dec. 1929, 866. Malcolm Salaman, *The New Woodcut* (London: The Studio, 1930), 15. More recent critics, such as David Lodge (*The Art of Fiction: Illustrated from Classic and Modern Texts* [New York: Viking, 1993, 15]) also perceive Hardy as a very visual writer.

journey to meet her fate, her bent figure buffeted by rain and wind, the storm a reflection of her emotional turmoil (*Eustacia Vye*, 1929, fig. 1.39).

Encouraged by J. C. Squire's enthusiastic promotion of the book, Brailsford's unqualified praise of her ability to express its tragic aspects, and Mrs. Hardy's approval of the engravings, Leighton cast herself as "Hardy's Illustrator" in her promotional literature for periodic engagements on the American lecture circuit.⁹⁶ In 1930 Harper & Brothers contacted her about illustrating either *The Mayor of Casterbridge* or *Far From the Madding Crowd*. While she knew that many people considered *The Mayor of Casterbridge* to be the finer book of the two, Leighton had "no doubt whatever that *Far From the Madding Crowd* is incomparably more illustratable -- at any rate to me -- with all its wonderful farming scenes."⁹⁷ Although she went so far as to map out the "pictures" for the latter book in 1933, the project never materialized,⁹⁸ and she would not illustrate another of Hardy's novels until 1940, shortly after settling in America.

⁹⁶ According to Leighton, J. C. Squire liked "the woodcuts immensely and has undertaken to do his utmost for the book when it appears," Clare Leighton to "Mr. Canfield," 25 Oct. 1928, Clare Leighton Correspondence, Records of Macmillan and Co., Ltd. Regarding the book's reception by Hardy's widow: "I was with Mrs. Hardy last Friday and she is delighted with our woodcuts," Clare Leighton to "Mr. Ratcliffe," 28 Aug. 1929, *Ibid*; Brailsford, "Woodcuts of Clare Leighton," 866-69. As Hardy's illustrator: "Clare Leighton's Lecture Subjects," #6, "Thomas Hardy's Country -- by his Illustrator," pamphlet, Clare Leighton Papers.

⁹⁷ Leighton pointed out that both books were less expensive for Harpers to publish because they were out of copyright. Clare Leighton to "Mr. Macmillan," 17 July 1930, Records of Macmillan and Co., Ltd. Leighton asked Macmillan if they were interested in having her illustrate another Hardy book for them before she responded to Harpers.

⁹⁸ Clare Leighton to Martin Hardie, 31 Aug. 1933, Martin Hardie Correspondence. Harper did bring out an edition in 1930 illustrated with four unattributed photographs, part of a multi-volume "Anniversary Edition."

The Critical Response

Leading literary critics and journalists who were reactionary to modern art and literature, including J. C. Squire, Noel Brailsford, and Hilaire Belloc, affirmed Leighton's work for its adherence to tradition and its original vision, an unsentimental portrayal of rural life that not only spoke to the idea of the enduring English countryside but also to wider human experience through time and space. They credited her for reviving the art and craft of wood engraving, which they claimed possessed a distinctly national character. Her art's sincerity, with its unaffected vision and steady progression of craftsmanship, implied stability and order in the midst of chaotic and fragmented times. The print professionals Martin Hardie and Frederick Darton, however, saw her engravings as both traditional and innovative, her formal means breaking with tradition in its rejection of perspectival space and strongly contrasting areas of black and white. I would add that her engagement with these modernist idioms allowed her to realize her vision while also making her illustrations particularly compatible with the printed word and layout of the illustrated book.

In a 1927 review of Leighton's engravings for the leading British art journal the *Studio*, J. C. Squire commended her adherence to tradition and noted a "distinctive personal" element that was present in the work of all "great" artists. Like the etcher F. L. Griggs, she had rejected novelty and cleverness and was gradually building a permanent position as an artist. Noting her relative youth and inexperience at wood engraving as compared to the seasoned, well known Gwen Raverat, Eric Gill, and Paul Nash, Squire

nevertheless found her one of the most interesting engravers of his time. Her prints would last because of “their art, their honesty, and their vision.”⁹⁹

Squire observed that Leighton rarely chose to depict pure landscapes or single figures, rather groups of people at work or resting from work -- “elements of the life of Man.” He singled out several of her European engravings, *Dawn in the Train to Mostar* and *Washerwomen: Toulon*, as prime examples of her ability to transcend plain, skillful reportage of a particular place or time, to embody the hardships of rural people down through the ages. In *Dawn in the Train to Mostar* (fig. 1.16), he took the juxtaposition of the peasants against the broadly framed sky as an index of “the vastness of the world beyond” and compared it with one of Hardy’s war-time poems:

The mind which has looked at them is a mind akin to Hardy’s in “Only a man harrowing clods”; these occupied, or those tired, people are emblematic of all humanity and its mysterious destiny. The “thing seen” is registered with biting accuracy, but the background is always there, the background both of time and space. More is suggested than stated... The people ... take this tedium ... with the passive resignation engendered by a life of tedium and toil from cradle to grave. And they might be peasant humanity anywhere.¹⁰⁰

Leighton’s vision, like Hardy’s, conveyed people’s commonly endured lot beyond a fixed moment or place. Her uncommon ability to portray “essential life, in its whole significance” placed her with “those English rustic poets” who looked embraced both life’s beauty and hard reality and was akin to the poetry of Hardy, Wordsworth, Edmund

⁹⁹ J. C. Squire, “Clare Leighton: Wood Engraver,” *Studio*, Mar. 1927, 173-75.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 174. Squire is referring to Hardy’s poem “In Time of ‘the Breaking of Nations’” (1915), which reads: “Only a man harrowing clods / In a slow silent walk / With an old horse that stumbles and nods / Half asleep as they stalk. / Only thin smoke without flame / From the heaps of couch-grass; / Yet this will go onward the same / Though Dynasties pass. / Yonder a maid and her wight / Come whispering by: / War’s annals will cloud into night / Ere their story die.”

Blunden, and Vita Sackville-West, whose recently published epic poem, *The Land*, Leighton should illustrate.¹⁰¹

The celebrated writer Hilaire Belloc (1870-1953) credited Leighton with reviving the “great tradition of the English woodcut ... in a new, powerful, and still national form.” Coming across a reproduction of *The Calf Auction* in a 1925 issue of the *New Leader*, Belloc sought out additional examples of her art, and attended an exhibition of her engravings, which he reviewed for the *London Mercury*.¹⁰² He witnessed her strength and insightful power to convey commonly held truths even in her first attempts at wood engraving: “The best of this work ... is its nobility. It rings true; not only to what it represents, but to the kind of life we have to lead during our little passage through the daylight.... I find that the things I know, the realities of a moment, have been fixed.”¹⁰³

He further assessed her art in an appreciation to *Woodcuts: Examples of the Work of Clare Leighton*, a volume brought out by Longmans, Green in 1930 that included prints ranging from the early *Malthouse*, *Calf Auction*, and *Barges*, to recent illustrations for *The Return of the Native* and *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*. Leighton had recovered the art of wood engraving -- the genius of Bewick -- with her “exactitude of line,” successful rendering of surfaces, and ability to use the medium as a vehicle for creative

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 175. *The Land* (London: William Heinemann, 1926), an unsentimental portrayal of Kentish agricultural laborers’ collaboration and conflict with Nature, was awarded the Hawthornden Prize in 1927.

¹⁰² H. Belloc, “Miss Clare Leighton’s Woodcuts,” *London Mercury*, 12 Aug. 1925, 406. Leighton exhibited with the Society of Wood Engravers, founded in 1920 by a group of artists including Gwen Raverat and Eric Gill, at the Redfern Gallery, 29 Old Bond Street. She also exhibited with the English Wood-Engraving Society, established in 1925, at the St. George’s Gallery, 32 George Street.

¹⁰³ Ibid, 407.

expression.¹⁰⁴ Although he viewed black line engraving, in which the whites were carved out to leave dark masses, as “particularly English,” he also asserted that Leighton’s work, which usually exhibited the white line technique, also expressed a distinctive national trait.¹⁰⁵ He found her focus on the countryside and distillation of its essence another embodiment of national character. An engraving of “the chalk,” a small chapter heading for Hardy’s *Return of the Native*, had “in it that imprinted soil, the distances of South England, and the wind.”¹⁰⁶

Although not directly addressed in his introduction, Belloc’s argument that Leighton’s work represented a distinctly national character was colored by his distaste for most modern art, “the rubbish of our time” that seeks “to rouse emotion somehow, anyhow, even by a mad breach with tradition.” Tradition, for Belloc, was representational art whose fine draftsmanship and power of communicating feeling uplifted the spirit quality. It possessed a “nobility,”

something in the grand process of being, Art is ignoble when it is perverse
...when it is meaningless. It is noble when it sustains the right life of

¹⁰⁴ Hilaire Belloc, introduction to *Woodcuts: Examples of the Work of Clare Leighton*, by Clare Leighton (London and New York: Longmans, Green, 1930), vii-xi. Contemporary critics often used the term woodcut when referring to wood engraving; however, she never worked in the woodcut medium.

¹⁰⁵ “But then my point is that the old wood-cuts in which the line stood out in black (an infinitely laborious process) were particularly English. However, so is your work, and it is much the best being done. Only yesterday I was hearing high praise of it from a first-rate etcher of my acquaintance, who has the right to judge.” Belloc disliked prints that had too much black. Hilaire Belloc to Clare Leighton, 6 Nov. 1931, Hilaire Belloc Papers, MS2005-02, Box 105, Folder 15, John J. Burns Library of Rare Books and Special Collections, Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA.

¹⁰⁶ Hilaire Belloc to Clare Leighton, 20 July 1928, Ibid. The book appears to have been Belloc’s idea; he first negotiated with Jonathan Cape, writing in the same letter that “they will be doing themselves good, and you good, and great good to poor old England, which seems to have forgotten the difference between beauty and its opposite.”

mankind: when, upon leaving it, we feel ourselves well fed. It is ignoble when we feel ourselves merely disturbed, however violently disturbed.¹⁰⁷

Even as he had acknowledged that she was working “in a new, powerful, and still national form,” Belloc maintained a viewpoint that valued tradition over modernism, never seeking to discuss her innovative formal means of expression.

Leighton’s engravings appealed to Noel Brailsford for reasons similar to Belloc’s. In a 1929 review for the *Studio*, he found that her work fully expressed his personal aesthetic, which embraced representational art exhibiting technical mastery as well as that conveying “an inward vitality” and “the emotions of an experience directly lived.”¹⁰⁸ Despite his leftist beliefs, his literary and artistic tastes were conservative. Not only was the avant-garde unacceptable, he could not embrace the less radical English interwar modernism, even grouping the well-known wood engraver and painter Paul Nash’s evocations of the English landscape with “those modern experimentalists.”¹⁰⁹ Although he did not directly address her engravings in a modernist idiom, Brailsford intuitively saw that modernist elements contributed to their powerful vitality, using her recent

¹⁰⁷ Belloc, “Miss Clare Leighton’s Woodcuts,” 406-07.

¹⁰⁸ H. N. Brailsford, “The Woodcuts of Clare Leighton,” *Studio*, Dec. 1929, 866-67, also published in *Creative Art*, Dec. 1929, 866-67 (the *Studio*’s American edition).

¹⁰⁹ He refused to publish John Gould Fletcher’s Imagist poems on the grounds that “rightly or wrongly, I have a personal prejudice against free verse and prose poems.” Brailsford to John Gould Fletcher, 23 Sept. 1922, John Gould Fletcher Papers, Special Collections, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville. Fletcher’s article on Paul Nash, published in 1928 in *Arts*, prompted a similar response: I confess I want a guide [to Paul Nash], for I am a reactionary in all the arts, who can’t move beyond Manet & Brahms & (shall we say) Robert Bridges.... I think I understand, but I can feel nothing when I face these modern experimentalists.” Brailsford, to John Gould Fletcher, “Saturday” [c. 1928], *Ibid.* Brailsford gives no further specifics about Fletcher’s “Paul Nash,” which appeared in *Arts*, Oct. 1928, 195-99. Robert Bridges was the British poet laureate from 1913 to 1930.

illustrations for Wilder's *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* to make his point. *Loading the Boat*'s (1929, fig. 1.40) stark contrasts of dark and light suggested the quality of music, "a fugue on which these sudden and gymnastic lights chase the slow-moving bass of the shadow."¹¹⁰ A comparison of this work with an early abstract wood engraving of Robert Gibbings, in which pattern dominates the subject (*Hamrun*, 1920, fig. 1.41), illustrates Leighton's subtler use of patterning and a preference for mediating between representation and design.¹¹¹ Brailsford also raised the question of whether an image and its formal means reflect the gender of an artist and found that Leighton's art broke with traditional expectations of gender. He importantly perceived that the boldly executed, abstracted and rhythmically patterned forms of her prints signified a masculinity that belied her sex.¹¹² The journalist also noted her exceptional versatility to adapt her formal means to the subject at hand by contrasting *Loading the Boat*'s powerful forms with *The Abbess* (1929, fig. 1.42), whose "tenderness and grace" conveyed a sensitivity that only "a man of rare sympathies" could impart.¹¹³ I would argue that her muscular portrayal of

¹¹⁰ Brailsford, "Woodcuts of Clare Leighton," 868-69.

¹¹¹ Gibbings also spoke of his work in terms of music, the patterning created by pronounced contrasts of light and shade articulating major and minor chords (rather than the fugue's successive stating of a theme), and reflecting the language of Imagist poetry advocated by Ezra Pound; Patience Empson, ed., *The Wood Engravings of Robert Gibbings*, (London: J. M. Dent, 1959), xxxiv-v, quoted in Selborne, *British Wood-Engraved Book Illustration*, 93.

¹¹² Brailsford, "Woodcuts of Clare Leighton," 869.

¹¹³ Illustrations for Thornton Wilder's *Bridge of San Luis Rey* (London and New York: Longmans, Green), 1929. Fletcher (*Clare Leighton*, no. 144) lists the "Abbess" engraving with the title "*The Abbess and the Twins*."

men at work in the countryside is a hallmark of her work, which becomes fully developed in *The Farmer's Year* (discussed in Chapter Two).

Print and book professionals, who were less reactionary than Belloc, Brailsford, and Squire, noted her art's synthesis of tradition and innovation, even a break with the past. In *Modern Book-Illustration in Great Britain and America* (1931), the writer and historian of illustrated books Frederick Darton singled out her recent illustrations for Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1931) and H. M. Tomlinson's *The Sea and The Jungle* (1930) to underscore contemporary wood engravers' union of time-tested technique with new vision. *Sunday at Sea* (1930, fig. 1.43), which he reproduced to support his argument) demonstrated that such original, almost contradictory, combinations revealed "the mind of people almost surfeited with civilization, trying to think with the clear directness of primitive men to whom existence, not smooth civilization, is the breath of life." Just as the scientific concepts of the mid-nineteenth century went back to the origin of species, so post-World War I illustration, "by way of the wood-cut, has gone back to the origin of the graphic arts." In Leighton's illustrations, "dots and fine lines are freely used to suggest form, while at the same tie massed blacks and whites preserve the effect of almost flat perspective." The classical canon was now only one among many, the search no longer for "an ideal of civilized beauty of thought and form and colour, but for the destiny of man, for the constant springs of his elemental nature, and for some means of expressing them."¹⁴ Darton, then, affirmed her serious

¹⁴ Frederick J. H. Darton, *Modern Book-Illustration in Great Britain and America* (London and New York: The Studio, 1931), 18-20.

efforts to articulate the essence of human experience, even when having to visualize others' texts.

I would argue that Leighton found an appropriate formal means to express her vision in the starkly delineated terrain of the snow locked Canadian wilderness rather than the familiar, domesticated English countryside. A series of "Canadian Lumber Camp" engravings resulting from a trip to the Laurentian Mountains in early 1931 show how the land's strongly contrasted surfaces provided a model for her to balance light and dark, yielding a distinctive modernist patterning of forms (*Loading and Landing*, 1931, figs. 1.44-45).¹¹⁵ Struck by the photographer Margaret Bourke-White's strong sense of design and power in contrasting black and white, including her prints of logging taken the year before,¹¹⁶ Leighton's monumental engravings are likewise characterized by pronounced basic contrasts, carefully orchestrated to portray the cycle of the timber harvest and the men who labor by hand without the assistance of modern technology. She would later call this set of engravings -- extraordinarily powerful manifestations of her

¹¹⁵ The six engravings, intended for exhibition and unhindered by the limits imposed by book illustration, are monumental in size and content, nearly the largest she ever created. Leighton's diary of the weeklong visit to several camps up the Gatineau River in the Laurentian Mountains north of Ottawa, in February 1931, is reproduced in Leighton, *Clare Leighton, Growth and Shaping of an Artist-Writer*, 37-45.

¹¹⁶ Bourke-White encouraged Leighton to visit the North Woods and facilitated her access to the Canadian Paper Company's camps. Leighton wrote Bourke-White, "I always consider that you are the original person responsible for my going to the lumber camps." In 1933 the artists sent each other prints created from their respective trips. Clare Leighton to Margaret Bourke-White, 12 Apr. 1933, Margaret Bourke-White Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University Library, Syracuse, NY. The photographer's shots of camps taken for the Price Brother Paper Co. in May 1932 are at Syracuse; I have been unable to locate the ones from 1930, which are mentioned in the announcement for the publication of Bourke-White's *Soviets by Camera* (1931) in "Books: Soviets by Camera," *Time*, 14 Dec. 1931, *Time*, Web, 7 May 2006.

vision and craftsmanship -- the prime milestone in her creative and technical development.¹¹⁷

A few years after these seminal engravings appeared, Victoria and Albert Museum Print Keeper Martin Hardie explicitly articulated her synthesis of art and nature in an article for *Print Collector's Quarterly*:

Clare Leighton ... has the disciplined imagination which allows her to select and skim from Nature those forms and proportions, those spaces and shapes, which make for stability and firmness of design. On that side of her art she is of the moderns, but she is traditional – following the sound tradition of our British art – in her intense love of Nature's infinite moods and aspects.... It is astonishing that without the aid of pigments she can suggest the very life and colour and seasonal qualities of the landscape she depicts. It is the triumph of her art that beneath beauty and strength of formal design the presence of Nature's beauty is always felt.¹¹⁸

In initiating a design in terms of its underlying structural components, Leighton was then able to interpret, not to record, the natural world; both “both of the moderns” as well as “traditional,” she balanced both approaches so as not to overemphasize the “substructure of formal pattern” or allow the pictorial sense to “descend into sentiment.”¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ Leighton, *Clare Leighton, Growth and Shaping of an Artist-Writer*, 25. Mindful of Belloc's bias against prints drawing too heavily on black, as she was still striving to intensify the glaring white effect of snow, Leighton wrote to her mentor that the scenes were “by far the best things I've done! ... The lumber camp prints are in snow, and so you won't be able to say they are too black!” Clare Leighton to Hilaire Belloc, 5 Nov. 1931, Hilaire Belloc Papers. Other critics also found the early work “too dark;” “Wood Engraving,” *Times* (London), 3 Dec. 1929, 12.

¹¹⁸ Hardie, “The Wood-Engravings of Clare Leighton,” *Print Collector's Quarterly* 22 (Apr. 1935): 153, 155. Hardie's overview of her art was perhaps the strongest endorsement an aspiring British printmaker could have, as Leighton was well aware personally and professionally: “I always feared I wasn't good enough. It will ‘place’ me, so to speak, in the eyes of the serious print collectors.” Clare Leighton to Martin Hardie, 26 Oct. 1933, Martin Hardie Correspondence.

¹¹⁹ Hardie, “Wood Engravings of Clare Leighton,” 153.

By the early 1930s, Leighton had developed a formal means that expressively articulated her vision of people actively engaged in a symbiotic relationship with the English soil, who were, as she saw it, connected to agricultural laborers and craftsmen throughout the world. To establish a stronger relationship with the rural folk and the land and further pursue her vision, she purchased with Brailsford a small holding in the Chiltern Hills northwest of London. Although she continued to consider rural life largely from an urban perspective, extended periods in the country gave her an increased appreciation of the folk and their traditional farming methods, crafts, and customs as well as first-hand experience in working the land. It also brought her in direct contact with the problems facing the countryside -- its increasing defacement by unchecked development, and the plight of the rural laborer, which was only intensified by severe economic depression. Such issues and the horrors of war become recurring leitmotifs of her books, even as the engravings project a vision of pastoral calm, dichotomies that I address in the following chapters.

CHAPTER TWO

THE FARMER'S YEAR: PATRIOTISM, POLITICS, AND THE GREAT WAR

The Farmer's Year: An Annotated Calendar of English Husbandry (1933)

celebrates the agricultural laborer as a vital, productive force shaping the cultivated landscape, ironically at a time of severe depression and marginalization of the land in the nation's economy. Monumental engravings of plowman, sower, and reaper construct a rural England still operating within traditional ruralist ideals; yet they also project a larger social function, emphasizing the centrality of the worker of the soil in maintaining life and his industrious harmony with nature. Commissioned by William Collins, Sons, and Co., with Longmans, Green issuing the American edition – both traditionalist, long-established publishers of country-life literature -- the monthly calendar is a paradigm of Englishness, locating national identity not only in the land but especially in those who diligently husband it. This chapter argues that these patriotic vistas not only kept with the image of the countryside as still perceived in the popular urban imagination, but also could serve a broad spectrum of contemporary social and political agendas addressing the countryside, from the idyllic rhetoric of the Conservative leader Stanley Baldwin to those concerned with rural England's common working people, including Noel Brailsford and important elements of the Labour Party.

I also contend that the landscape serves as a locus for Leighton to articulate deeply felt concerns about the consequences of man's aberrant nature and the destructive

side of mechanization. Issued at a time of renewed anxiety regarding world affairs and Germany's increasing thrust of overbearing nationalism, *The Farmer's Year* lays out a grim reminder of the devastation of World War I against the peaceful, productive countryside. Following a dialectic that positions pastoral imagery against the brutality and fruitlessness of war, Leighton contrasts a scene of severely pollarded willows that subliminally evokes the mutilations of war's victims with those depicting the strong sound bodies of workers engaged in vital farm work. Moreover, she brings up, and questions, the idea of redemption employed by establishment Britain to memorialize the World War I dead and to sanctify sacrifice for one's country. Infused with Christian pastoral symbolism, *Lambing: January*, the opening chapter, establishes both a vision of hope for the New Year and anticipates the cyclical killing that takes place in *The Fat Stock Market: December*, which depicts the mundane gathering of livestock for slaughter.

I argue that issues surrounding love of country and its outcome in the Great War had been difficult to address directly in the cultural atmosphere of the 1930s, particularly in a book that overtly promoted national ideals. To openly criticize and politicize still sensitive issues that hung over the war and the idea of "honour, glory, and England"¹ would have gone against the very purpose of celebrating the country's great agricultural heritage and its heroically portrayed workers. Leighton conveyed her concerns with subtlety in order to maintain her standing as a primary contemporary engraver of English national life, and to operate within the expectations of her publishers and readership. This effectively concealed from her readers and critics how she had employed the landscape to

¹ A phrase used beginning in the nineteenth century and employed by Samuel Hynes in *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (New York: Atheneum, 1991), xii.

convey grief and register loss, to raise a somber awareness of the mounting menace of war and the hard costs exacted by mechanization and modern life.

The chapter opens with a brief overview of the book and how Leighton draws on literary and artistic traditions, particularly that of Thomas Hardy, to establish a deep sense of nostalgia for passing ways of rural life. I discuss her heroic scenes of plowman, sower, and reaper, who follow their peaceful pursuits on the land for the common good, figures that invoke both national character and the dignity and value of country labor. The section following discusses her publishers' role as cultural agents, and how her imagery could have woven itself into the agendas of both the Conservative and Labour Parties. Investigations into the impact of World War I on the imagery of the male body and its implication for the interwar period inform my analysis of *Lopping: February*, which deviates from the book's customary pastoral imagery by showing nature brutally cut to man's purposes. Issues of sacrifice and redemption, creativity and the life cycle cut short for a generation of young men, including Leighton's brother, inform this engraving and the one that addresses the month of December.

Overview

The Farmer's Year is an annotated monthly calendar that sets out to depict in word and picture plowing, sowing, cultivating and harvesting in a largely pre-industrial English countryside. Leighton recalled that she "had been wanting to do a series of large wood engravings, based on the twelve months on a English farm." When she consulted Collins as to who might write the text, they suggested that she should write, illustrate, and

design the entire book, which allowed her to work in “sensuous, verbal descriptions of colour ... I was ... both painter and graphic artist.”² The text organizes itself around twelve monumental wood engravings, filling the whole page at approximately eight-by-ten-inches, which face the narratives for their respective months (*Apple Picking: September*, fig. 2.1). Even the engraved capital letters that open each chapter -- not mere decorative designs but complete thematic scenes in themselves -- are large in feeling (Letter “I,” *Malthouses*, fig. 2.2). Leighton designed the book in a format that assigns to each month a substantial engraving, chapter initial, body of narrative, and concluding tailpiece, enabling each to stand alone while helping shape the whole year’s experience.

As its title shows, the calendar speaks for *English* agriculture, and as such defines the uniquely national characteristics of that country’s rural landscape. Allusions to the great rural heritage in literature and art -- James Thomson, Wordsworth, Hardy, Constable -- draw out a deep sense of Englishness. The south, primarily the Home Counties that ring London, serves as the standard image of English land, but it is not Leighton’s primary focus. The dominant force of the engravings is the workingman, seeder and shaper of the landscape, male to the female Earth; women have a role in the narrative, but Leighton does not portray them. The prints depict laborers -- particularly the iconic figures at work plowing, sowing, and harvesting -- enduringly nameless

² Leighton, “How I Made My Book,” 40. Keenly aware of the inability of wood engravings to convey the range of color contrasts, Leighton frequently relied on the text in *The Farmer’s Year* to heighten a sense of each scene’s palette. For example, describing the fall colors at the outset of “September: Apple Picking:” “It is the month of ripeness – a golden, crimson, and russet month.” Sending a print of this to Edmund Blunden, she articulates the intensity of her efforts to translate that season’s shift of color into tonal gradations of black and white: “I have tried to get into it the sort of gold and brown and old feel I had. It should be painted in earth colours, with no hint of aniline dyes.” Clare Leighton to Edmund Blunden, 27 Jan. 1932, Edmund Blunden Papers, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin.

embodiments of their particular toils, while the narrative describes the workaday mundane activities of farmers and their wives, characters with names and traits. No other calendar published between the wars addresses rural England solely through those born to it, or portrays them as proud, able-bodied providers of life. As with much interwar country-life writing, illustrated or not, *The Farmer's Year* combines close observation of the natural world with conventions that Raymond Williams has called “this strange formation in which observation, myth, record and half-history are so deeply intertwined.”³

The Rural Laborer, Nostalgia, and National Ideals

This section seeks to show how Leighton met the demands of her audience for nostalgic scenes of rural life, passing over the harsh realities of a depressed countryside, while addressing private commitments to her art and social vision. I focus on the engravings *Sheep Shearing: May*, which evokes a deep sense of loss for traditional ways of labor while articulating her mastery of the wood-engraving medium and use of modernist idioms. The autonomous, productive figures in *Ploughing: November* and *Stooking: August* stress the centrality of the rural worker as feeder of the nation, national ideals that cast England's agricultural heritage as one of self-sufficient abundance. *Sowing: April* creatively negotiates critics' calls for nationalistic scenes at a time of heightened economic crisis while invoking an image of French rural labor that had

³ Williams, *Country and the City*, 261.

become an icon for social change and dissent; the print accommodates both public and private concerns and interests.

Nostalgia for a rural past and the construction of particular idealized traditions and virtues are closely connected to the expression of English national identity. Drawing on the work of the social historians Christopher Shaw and Malcolm Chase, Ysanne Holt's study of the pre-1914 British modernist landscape finds nostalgia to be a vital undercurrent running through the late Victorian and Edwardian years, a phenomenon that continues to figure large between the world wars. Concerns about the modern experience of rapid social and economic change join with anxieties about world instability to open a perspective in which the past appears "as a site of authenticity, of harmony and orderliness, as a place where we once experienced life more vividly, when our senses were sharper."⁴ Moreover, the interwar ruralist culture, like its pre-war predecessor, operated on the assumption that literary and artistic expression and subjectivity were essential. As J. J. Hissey declared in *Untravelled England*, "To thoroughly enjoy the country one must needs look upon it with an artist's or poet's eye ... [the painter] casts a glamour over all he observes till the reality becomes a romance – the ugly fades away and only an impression of beauty remains."⁵ Despite an obligatory homage to the past, it was precisely a receptiveness to aspects of modernism that allowed artists to depict the rural

⁴ Shaw and Chase, ed., *Imagined Past*, 2-5, quoted in Holt, *British Artists and the Modernist Landscape*, 6.

⁵ J. J. Hissey, *Untravelled England* (London: Macmillan, 1906), 93, quoted in Holt, *British Artists and the Modernist Landscape*, 3.

laborer in “ideal, elemental relations expressed in a rhythmic harmony between man and soil.”⁶

Sheep Shearing: May (fig. 2.3) exemplifies the merging of these ideals, establishing a deep nostalgia for passing rural ways, romanticizing an arduous and bloody task while employing a modernist idiom to relate man, beast, and land. I would suggest that the engraving and its narrative draw on Thomas Hardy’s portrayal of traditional country life, rich with imagery, nostalgia, and sense of the enduring past that still stood as the standard for that genre. Leighton’s illustrations for a memorial edition of *The Return of the Native* for Macmillan in 1929, and critics’ comparisons of her rural scenes with Hardy’s imagery, closely associated her with his work, and she cast herself as “Hardy’s illustrator.”⁷ Imagery from *Far From the Madding Crowd* (1874), which she had mapped out in anticipation of a future commission from Macmillan, likely inspired “May: Sheep Shearing”’s deep-going nostalgia, and its engraving’s interest in pronounced light and dark effects. Although Hardy locates the labor inside a vast ancient barn that “embodied practices which had suffered no mutilation at the hands of time,” the qualities of light that he expresses control the scene: with “large side doors ... thrown open towards the sun ...”, the “bountiful light” shines directly on the shearers as they kneel, as well as over the “polished shears ... causing these to bristle with a thousand rays....”⁸ This effect

⁶ Holt, *British Artists and the Modernist Landscape*, 6, referring to George Clausen’s paintings of peasants working in the fields.

⁷ My Chapter One discusses more fully Leighton’s illustrating Hardy and her critics’ comparison of her work to his imagery.

⁸ Hardy, *Far From the Madding Crowd* (New York and London: Harper & Bros., 1930), 165.

Leighton accentuates in both word and picture, using manifold techniques -- cross-hatching, stippling, short and attenuated lines -- to enrich the textures and create strong contrasts of light and shade in a modernistic idiom. Brilliant sunshine reflects from the thick fleece on bellies and backs, caps and straining shoulders, as the men bend to their work; strong tonal contrasts blend with undulating rhythms and patterning to integrate the human effort of shearing with the ancient rolling hills. Leighton's narrative further articulates Hardy's passage, as the sun "throws the shadow of the shepherd across her [the ewe's] white chest, accentuating the contours of her form, and glints on the shears in a score of stars."⁹

Word and image unite to deploy an accurate yet poetic account of a skill now dying while calling up the lasting memory of the grace and loveliness that she finds inherent in that ancient labor. The visual and textual symphony at the end of the chapter is tempered by her lament: "The sheep shearing songs are silent these days, dead with the harvest suppers and the gangs of mowers. On most farms the shearing itself is no longer done by hand and the shepherd's smock has vanished." Still, she can draw upon the power of memory: "But the beauty of a May evening of sheep shearing remains, when dusk closes down the distance like a mist and the sheep look lilac against the grasses."¹⁰ All this contrasts with the camera's fix on hard truth (*Sheep-Shearing, Oxfordshire, c.* 1896, fig. 2.4), or Vita Sackville-West's poetic yet strongly realistic account in *The Land* (1926) offers a telling comparison:

⁹ Leighton, *Farmer's Year*, 22. "July: Cottage Gardens" and its engravings *To the Milking* and *The Lovers* (the chapter initial) interpret imagery of the Talbothay dairy in Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*.

¹⁰ Leighton, *Farmer's Year*, 23.

Each beast ...
Struggles, and kicks, but with a hands-twist thrown
Lies foolish, as the fingers slick and deft
Open the fleece and cut the belly up,
.....
Then on the heap is pitched the greasy fleece,
And the clipped sheep,
.....
Naked, and bleating, and at first forlorn
With narrow smear of blood on neck or side¹¹

Leighton's imagery invokes innocence and pure joy, intensifying the unacknowledged violent, bloody nature of shearing by employing white as a primary vehicle of expression, in engraving and text alike: "May is a white month. Sheared sheep and daisies in the meadows, chestnut candles and hawthorn snow in the hedgerows, white of blossom in the orchard."¹² It was precisely this romantic but relatively unsentimental vision of country life that appealed to an urban readership, perhaps one reason that Thomas Balston, historian of book illustration and wood engraving declared Leighton "unique" among the wood engravers who had revived the art and achieved popularity with the general reading public.¹³

If Leighton created these semi-historical, semi-mythic scenes to meet her publishers' expectations of how countryside literature should provide a usable past for a middle-class urban readership," her portrayal of the agricultural laborer as master of the land was atypical of interwar rural life illustration. Figures, at work or at rest, were generally shown as small parts of their environment within a much larger landscape, as

¹¹ Sackville-West, from "Summer," *The Land*, 63-64.

¹² Leighton, *Farmer's Year*, 23.

¹³ Thomas Balston, *English Wood Engraving 1900-1950* (London: Art & Technics, 1951), 14-15.

the wood engraver Gwen Raverat's pastoral scenes exemplify (fig. 2.5). Leighton's idealized depictions of proud, strong farm workers gave a new sense of how the countryside might be considered. She freights the heroic images of plowman, sower, and harvester with historical associations to underscore how indispensably fundamental are their tasks, and how important a means of individual and national revival even as British agriculture remained marginalized under the logic of a world economy. These master figures are basic to classical and Christian iconography, embodying life, fertility, abundance, and closeness to the Creator. Just as the standing of agriculture in the national life came under ever-greater question, her engravings affirm the sacred and essential aspects of farming and firmly link those who labor in the soil with national ideals and patriotism, order and stability.

Leighton employs modes that underscore rural workers' crucial, but frequently unacknowledged, function for society rather than emphasizing the great physical toil that such labor exacts, as does William Strang's still then widely disseminated *Ploughing* (1899, fig. 2. 6).¹⁴ For her *Ploughing: November* (fig. 2.7), a boy and his team are cresting a hill, whose commanding view proclaims the importance of the work while providing a panorama of the cultivated fields. Radiant morning light indicates the divine import of this labor, drawing on a long literary association of plowing with godliness, from the virtuous Piers Ploughman who symbolizes sustenance for the entire community

¹⁴ The wood engraver William Strang's monumental (three-and-one-half feet by four feet) image of hard labor, *Ploughing* (1899), widely distributed as a poster by the Art for Schools Association and published by Brailsford in the *New Leader*, 16 Jan. 1925, 13.

and Chaucer's plowman who "lives in peace and perfect charity,"¹⁵ to the anonymous plowman in the historical novelist and poet Maurice Hewlett's "The Song of the Plow" (1916). Hewlett's "Hodge the ploughman," who stood for the peasantry at large, was the true hope for England's well-being, his "blood, sweat and tears" having furnished the gentry's tables from time immemorial: "They shall perish but he endure."¹⁶

While the engravings underscore the English rural laborer's centrality and promote a sense of common national identity and interest, Leighton's narrative affirms the virtue of husbanding the soil and the commonality that plowmen share over great reaches of time and space:

Over the countryside ... tramp the eternal figures of ploughman and team.... For of all work on the land, ploughing is perhaps the most eternal, and fills us always with the same rush of emotion, whether it be on the little fields of India where the peasant guides the identical dwarf instrument of wood that his prehistoric sires used, or the team-drawn iron plough that gently turns the sod of the rolling English downland, or the Gargantuan tractor that devours the acres of the American earth; all impress us with the sense of the right values in life.¹⁷

Her emphasis on how the plowman upholds the basics of "right" living implies by way of contrast that the larger, more "sophisticated" social order has gone off track into

¹⁵ The suffused light resembles the quiet spirituality of Samuel Palmer's depiction of daybreak in his *Early Ploughman (The Morning Spread Upon the Mountains)*, begun before 1861). For the association in medieval literature, see Robin Lister, "The Peasants of *Piers Ploughman* and its Audience," in *Peasants and Countrymen in Literature*, ed. Kathleen Parkinson and Martin Priestman (London: Roehampton Institute of Higher Education, 1982), 71-90. Geoffrey Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, General Prologue, I. 529-32, *Project Gutenberg*, Web, 8 Oct. 2008.

¹⁶ This passage from Hewlett's (1861-1923) epic poem comes from "Prelude: The Man on the Hill," *The Song of the Plow, Being the English Chronicle* (London: William Heinemann, 1916), *Internet Archive*, Web, 3 September 2008, lines 330-44.

¹⁷ Leighton, *Farmer's Year*, 49.

misguided priorities and values. In *The Imagined Past: History and Nostalgia*, Christopher Shaw and Malcolm Chase detect in rural writers the appropriation of “an image of people, land, and work to articulate common purpose and national unity in time of crisis.”¹⁸ Leighton’s imagery speaks to this as well, but moves across the furthest prospects of national interest to underscore the bond that workers of the soil share throughout time and place.

On the other hand, *Stooking: August* constructs a mythic vision of England as a locus of divinely sanctioned agricultural abundance springing from unmechanized labor (fig. 2.8). Three heroic figures binding wheat sheaves by hand survey a broad valley of cultivated fields under radiant sunlight, evoking the well-being anciently associated with the harvest: peace, prosperity, patriotism, and the rewards of honest labor.¹⁹ The idealized panorama of patterned, rolling hills specifies its place -- the fertile Vale of Aylesbury in Buckinghamshire, which remained primarily farming country when Leighton drew it.²⁰ The scene signifies an England of abundance, the bountiful breadbasket of an earlier age, its implicit poetry expressed by James Thomson’s *Seasons* at a time of England’s growth

¹⁸ Shaw and Chase, introduction to *Imagined Past*, x, 12-13.

¹⁹ A “tossing golden sea of wheat,” Leighton, *Farmer’s Year*, 38. Walter Gibson observes that the view from a height, so often used in sixteenth-century Flemish landscapes, exalts people’s place on earth while signifying the greatness of God; Walter Gibson, *Mirror of the Earth: The World Landscape in Sixteenth-Century Flemish Painting* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1989), 57-59.

²⁰ Her and Brailsford’s Chiltern cottage lay near the Vale. An inscription under the mount of *Stooking: August* in the Ashmolean Museum, which reads in part “Stooking (incorporating views from Whiteleaf Cross)” confirms that this was a view of the Vale; Stevens and Leighton, *Clare Leighton*, 26.

to wealth, world power, and sense of supremacy, to “be th’ exhaustless granary of a world.”²¹

The engraving brings together an image of the laborer as a vital, preeminent figure amidst his wide expanse of productive fields, which differs from the traditional English harvest scene depicting men and women whether at work or at rest as small figures in a sweeping landscape -- a genre typified in John Constable’s, Samuel Palmer’s, and John Linnell’s nineteenth-century harvest scenes (figs. 2.9-11); Leighton’s contemporary Gwen Raverat likewise depicts harvesters within a broader setting (*Harvesters Resting*, 1934, fig. 2.12).²² Instead, Leighton draws on sixteenth-century Northern European panoramas of agricultural labor, laden with explicit moral and political implications, in which the worker commands the landscape. Pieter van der Heyden’s engraving *The Four Seasons: Summer* (1570, after Brueghel, fig. 2.13) depicts heroically figured peasants engaged in the whole range of harvest work, whether scything, stooking, carrying and carting, or gleaning.²³ Leighton’s harvesters, massed close to the front of the picture, resemble the virile laborers who command van der Heyden’s foreground, while her atmospheric effects acknowledge the sun as the ultimate source of fertility and suggest divine benevolence not unlike that expressed in the

²¹ From “Spring” (1728), James Thomson, *The Seasons*, line 77.

²² Constable, *The Wheatfield* (1815), Palmer, *The Harvest Moon* (1833), Linnell, *The Harvest*, 1850; Payne (*Toil and Plenty*) provides additional examples by less-known artists. Gwen Raverat, *Harvesters Resting*, illustration for A. G. Street’s *The Farmer’s Glory* (London: Faber and Faber, 1934).

²³ The engraving is after a drawing by Pieter Brueghel the Elder, which in turn is based on Brueghel’s painting *Summer* (1565).

northern print.²⁴ In its evocation of the moral richness of working the land, *Stooking: August* may be taken as a vision of the countryside as the natural home of peace and prosperity, the embodiment of national wholeness and material wellbeing.

Sowing: April further brings out a sense of the rural laborer as representing national ideals; a bareheaded figure, right arm outstretched, dominates the landscape while authoritatively casting seeds from the hopper (fig. 2.14).²⁵ The shadowing of his face imparts a collective identity -- he is every sower, embodying man's closeness to the land, just as that closeness is disappearing. Leighton writes that hand sowing will soon pass "irrecoverably into history ... in these days of machinery, where even on the smallest farms the driller is generally used." Here and there a farmer can be found who feels an emotional connection to the land along with an "economic" attachment. She also presents this figure as a symbol of universal fecundity, as he "walks the field like a god, flinging his bounties upon the world."²⁶ He is also the feeder of Britain, taken for granted but utterly to be relied upon, a heroic, idealized presence, master of the land and all that he surveys. His commanding height above the village, even above the village with its Gothic-towered church stresses his necessity and the godliness of his purpose, while

²⁴ Eighteenth and nineteenth-century British calendars also emphasize these benefits to the public good. For example, William Howitt's popular *Calendar of the Seasons* (London: Henry Colburn, 1831, 107): "To watch, with the greatest care, the proper time for sowing; because this, with Divine assistance, produces plenty of provision, and lays the foundation of the public welfare of the state, and of the private happiness of the people."

²⁵ The pose of the striding sower, right arm extended, runs through the centuries; see for example the figure portrayed in "October," *Les Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry*.

²⁶ Leighton, *Farmer's Year*, 17-18. Raymond Williams (*Country and the City*, 250-52) discusses the development of a "conscious intercourse with the Earth," a "fusion of agricultural and sexual imagery" as a dominant theme in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century English regional novels.

identifying him as the practical steward of the English soil. Leighton merges an image of the prototypical English village with the gently rolling hills of the imagined South Country landscape to produce a site supremely evoking national character.²⁷ I would argue that this, and Leighton's other farming scenes met the critical call for artists to return to a "thorough-going nationalism," to interpret their own country: "Britain is looking for British pictures, of British people, of British landscape."²⁸

Yet *Sowing: April* looks to Continental depictions of rural labor that had acquired dissident overtones to promote the importance of common working people for society. The image of the striding sower takes on broader social and political significance in its *hommage* to Jean-François Millet's large-figured *Sower* (1850, fig. 2.15), which dignified the rural worker during a period of economic, political and social unrest in mid-nineteenth century France. Spurred by the failed Revolution of 1848, artists such as Millet and Courbet established "the new era in images of rural life," bringing the peasant -- typically caricatured or romanticized -- into the sphere of history painting.²⁹ Widely distributed in lithograph and engraving, *The Sower* became a powerful icon of rural labor, a standard adapted for socialist movements and agrarian dissidents. I would suggest that Leighton's use of a work so charged with historical appropriations drew more on Millet's

²⁷ Brian Cook's design for the dust jacket of C. B. Ford's *The Landscape of England* (London: Batsford, 1933) employs a similar formula to articulate the prototypical English landscape, from a similar vantage point looking down over rolling hills and a village anchored by a towered church; illustrated in Jeffrey, *British Landscape*, no. 21.

²⁸ "The Editor," "What is Wrong with Painting? I. Internationalism," *Studio*, Feb. 1932, 64.

²⁹ See Robert Herbert, *Jean-François Millet* (London: Arts Council of Britain, 1976) for an analysis of *The Sower* (75-79). Millet created a number of sower pictures from the mid-1840s to the mid-1860s. Van Gogh's copies of the prime image are its best-known homage.

deep sense of the peasant's close relationship with the soil and the dignity and value of his work -- Victor Hugo's "the sower's noble attitude"³⁰ -- than its serving as a symbol of a people too long oppressed. Her interest in Millet's rendering of the country poor reflects that of George Clausen (1852-1944), probably the most respected painter of rural life in Britain before World War I, who caught Millet's significance for those artists striving to depict a symbolic universal relationship between "peasant" and place: "No other has seen so clearly or shown so well the beauty and significance of ordinary occupations, the union of man with nature."³¹

Leighton's Country Life Publishers as Cultural Agents

With *The Farmer's Year* engravings articulating both traditional and more progressively oriented visions of the countryside and those who work it, how closely did they reflect her publishers' goals and ideals? Energized by the ongoing sense of the countryside's being the ultimate repository of national spirit, the major publishers of rural life literature, including B. T. Batsford; Collins; and Longmans, Green, sought to give book form to this conservative rural idyll during the 1930s.³² I would argue that

³⁰ Victor Hugo, "Season of the Sowing, the Evening," from "Songs of the Streets and Woods," (1865).

³¹ From a series of well-received lectures given while he was professor of painting at the Royal Academy; George Clausen, *Six Lectures on Painting* 3rd ed. (London: Methuen, 1906), 106, quoted in Holt, *British Artists and the Modernist Landscape*, 13. Holt discusses Clausen's search for the means to portray this universal relationship in his turn from the French Naturalism of Jules Bastien-Lepage to Millet's figural compositions.

³² With publishers depending on the genre as part of their annual holiday-season gift trade, the advertisement "Collins Xmas Gift Books" listed, for a second season, *The*

Leighton's early country-life engravings, and those from *The Farmer's Year*, especially accommodated such a traditionalist vision in their evocation of a pre-industrial, imagined past of harmony and order that served to counteract the fragmentation and alienation of the modern experience. But in their dedication to the worker productively engaged on the land, they engage more progressive approaches set on improving the state of agriculture and the farm laborer's wellbeing. From the inheritors of anti-urbanist discourse deriving from the late nineteenth-century Arts and Crafts traditions and those searching for a new social vision for Britain, to publishers pursuing fairly blunt political and financial objectives, reformers, reactionaries, and cultural agents could find affirmation in Leighton's images of the countryside.

Collins broke new ground for interwar country life literature by commissioning *The Farmer's Year*, arguably a bold maneuver during a time of hardship for the publishing industry. An agricultural calendar was uncommon; Leighton's being both artist and writer was singular. But most importantly, the dominance of illustration over narrative was unprecedented, and casting the countryside in terms of those who worked it. Instead of keeping to a vision that highlights the material presences of the upper classes over the land, the engravings focus on the life and labors of those who have a reciprocal relationship with the soil. Leighton's sympathies and objectives are readily apparent; since it is difficult to reconstruct a publisher's part in the intellectual processes by which a book is conceived, and the relative scarcity of research in this area, it is less

Farmer's Year, "Selected as two of 'The Fifty Best Books for 1933,' still in constant demand," *Times* (London) *Literary Supplement*, 22 Nov. 1934, 829.

clear how Collins' ideological disposition manifested in the book's content.³³ My argument takes as a point of reference research on the political leanings of Harry Batsford, chairman of B.T. Batsford, probably the largest publisher of rural non-fiction during those years, and how that firm figured in interwar country-life publishing in asserting the landscape's centrality as a repository of meaning and value.

In "Publishing and Publishers: Towards an Historical Geography of Countryside Writing, c. 1930-50," Catherine Brace points out that the role of publishers as cultural agents in using rural landscapes to depict national essence through the interwar years has been overlooked. Taking Batsford as her model, she calls for a detailed examination of "the personal and political predilections of publishers and editors and the relationships between publisher, author and the reading public."³⁴ Her findings indicate that Batsford, whose directors' political leanings were conservative, had much influence on casting and legitimizing England as a fundamentally rural homeland, even consciously putting forth its 1930's country-life books as part of a patriotic master plan. Batsford's justification of policy at the beginning of World War II warrants quoting:

During the last few troubled years Batsford has been gradually building up a list of cheap, well-illustrated books which, in words and illustrations, give a true picture of the land whose freedom we are defending today: its fine tradition of craftsmanship, and the life and work of its countryside, evolved through centuries of peaceful endeavor. ...The Britain [we] present, the Britain of field, hedge and coppice, of villages and farms, of time-mellowed, historic buildings and ancient cities and towns, will be

³³ The Author Book Files and Authors' Correspondence Files in the Records of William Collins, Sons and Co Ltd, publishers, Glasgow, Scotland, University of Glasgow Archives, date from after the publication of *The Farmer's Year*.

³⁴ Catherine Brace, "Publishing and Publishers: Towards an Historical Geography of Countryside Writing, c. 1930-1950," *Area* 33 (2001): 287.

increasingly cherished by thinking people at a time when all it represents is at stake.³⁵

As in the national imaginative mobilization during World War I, the countryside, the repository of the national character, was to be defended; the literature of rural life was a prime site for validating and promoting nostalgic discourse while providing present comfort and inspiration to its readership. For some, even, the countryside's perceived values provided reinstruction in forgotten ways to a generation experiencing the fragmentation of modern life.

Brace sees Batsford's output as offering a "remarkably coherent, conservative, backward-looking and nostalgic vision of England," especially as promulgated by the dust jackets designed by Harry Batsford's nephew Brian Cook, which convey "a powerfully conservative mythology of England." This vision centers in the portrayal of the village "to construct an enduring narrative about England and Englishness ... as a material manifestation of the right relationship between people and the land."³⁶ I want to suggest that the village type that Cook portrays (which Brace does not address) is very different from Leighton's vision, and further validates Brace's argument that Batsford's ideology helped shape the image of its county-life books. A representative example of Cook's dust jackets (fig. 2.16) shows an idealized, prototypical village anchored by substantial material presences -- Tudoresque buildings signifying degrees of substance and standing that approach the uniformity and raw newness of historicist suburban sprawl. This design for Sydney R. Jones's *English Village Homes and Country Buildings*

³⁵ Ibid, 292, quoting from the firm's advertising copy "Batsford's Autumn Books and War-time Reading" of 1940.

³⁶ Ibid, 293.

(1936), part of Batsford's "British Heritage" series, appeals to an urban middle class increasingly attracted to a countryside offering places to live in radical contrast with the modest cottages of the rural working class. Leighton's indigenous-style frame and thatch dwellings and their dependencies, which appear as patterned repeats on the dust jacket and end covers of *The Farmer's Year*, evoke the centuries-old simple vernacular (fig. 2.17). While Brace does not discuss at greater length what she means by "the right relationship between people and the land," Cook and Leighton offer differing perspectives as to what that relationship might be -- one mediated more through the town, the other from the long perspective of the country folk.

To what degree did Leighton's vision reflect Collins' political concerns? Godfrey Collins, who had long been a director of this Scottish publishing house and overseen its publications, had represented Greenock as a Liberal since 1910, entering Parliament as a supporter of the social reforms that H. H. Asquith and David Lloyd George were then implementing, which included efforts to curb the powers of the House of Lords. While it is difficult to establish a firm connection between the political predilections of Collins and those put forth in *The Farmer's Year*, the firm appears to have been less conservative than Batsford; Collins' history of taking a keen interest in its workers' welfare, far beyond what might be considered paternalism, may also support this interpretation.³⁷

³⁷ An earlier head of the company, William Collins (1817-1895), had established the Collins Institute, which ministered to his workers' educational, social, and cultural needs; David Keir, *The House of Collins* (London: Collins, 1952), 201-02.

Longmans, Green, successor to the oldest publishing house in the United Kingdom, with whom Leighton had worked more than any other publisher to date,³⁸ seems to have kept to a conservative line, if one goes by its *England Out of Doors* (1934) and its use of her *Village* (1927, fig. 1.34), an illustration from Alan Mulgan's *Home*. This anthology of contemporary writings cast the countryside as a beloved and familiar national treasure, "so close to the Englishman's heart that it has the power to touch the pens of our greatest writers with something of magic." Leighton's highly pastoral, unpeopled *Village* was paired with passages from the once and future Conservative Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin's *On England* (1926) to serve as the introductory (and only) picture in that collection. Baldwin's widely publicized assertion of an organic unity between the land, the countryside, and the nation, "To me, England is the country, and the country is England" set the book's traditionalist, assimilative tone.³⁹

Appealing to Conservatives and the Left

Although not directly articulated in *England Out of Doors*, Baldwin's mobilization of the countryside in his political rhetoric to further the vision of a society based on traditional hierarchical values was implicit. In *The Rise and Fall of Class in*

³⁸ Longmans, Green had published Leighton's *Woodcuts: Examples of the Work of Clare Leighton* (1930) and *The Musical Box* (1932); she illustrated for them Alan Mulgan's *Home* (1927), Thornton Wilder's *The Angel that Troubled the Waters* (1928), *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* (1929), and *The Woman of Andros* (1930). The Archives of the Longman Group, Special Collections, University of Reading, hold no Leighton-related material, a casualty of the bombing of the publisher's Paternoster Row offices during World War II.

³⁹ Attracting wide attention as a speech to the Royal Society of St. George in 1924. Baldwin was a substantial shareholder in his family's notably paternalistic ironworks.

Britain, David Cannadine argues that for Baldwin and his Conservative followers, “interwar politics was primarily about the recreation of traditional social identities in a nontraditional world.” The countryside was cast as “a place of order, simplicity, and nobility, where everyone knew his or her place and which functioned on the basis of reciprocal rights and obligations.” Insisting that this was not a nostalgic vision of an imagined past, Baldwin believed such tradition-determined and inegalitarian relationships, as opposed to allegedly leveling collectivist ones, could best counter the unwholesome, ephemeral but destructive divisions in modern society.⁴⁰ I suggest that Leighton’s beautifully static, empty village scenes could generally serve this type of conservative vision, while her portrayal of the autonomous agricultural laborer so central to *The Farmer’s Year* would not have conformed to this hierarchical mythology. Eighteenth-and-nineteenth-century evocations of the master-servant relationship might better catch Baldwin’s societal model, such as George Stubbs’s *The Reapers*, in which a mounted farmer or overseer supervises laborers cutting and binding stooks of wheat (1785, fig. 2.18).

Let me suggest that Leighton’s focus on the agricultural worker not only reflected her private social and political sympathies but more publicly connected with the Labour Party’s efforts during the interwar years to engage rural Britain. Although Labour was seen as the party of the urban working class, with farming traditionally associated with the political right, it had resolved to become a national majority party, particularly after

⁴⁰ David Cannadine, *The Rise and Fall of Class in Britain* (New York: Columbia UP, 1999), 142-43.

its first, if brief time in office in 1924.⁴¹ Despite the fact that only 7% of the population lived in the country and agriculture had been reduced to a sliver of the national economy, the countryside, so closely associated with the idea of nationhood and patriotism in the popular imagination, was hotly contested by the major parties. Labour's interest went beyond tapping into the rural constituency, to expressing its concern for the widely acknowledged economic and social "plight" of rural Britain; its final major policy statement about this issue in the interwar years, *The Land and the National Planning of Agriculture* (1932) reiterated the need to raise agricultural wages and stop the drift from the land.⁴² One of Labour's chief, frequently stated objectives was to provide a "prosperous countryside" of revived village communities, thriving farms, good wages, and the benefits of modernization.⁴³

With Labour periodicals and those sympathizing with the party publishing Leighton's engravings during the '20s and '30s, how closely did her images reflect their concerns and their overall imagery of the countryside? What factors appear to have determined which of Leighton's prints were published? Why did Labour apparently not feature images from *The Farmer's Year* in its organs? As I discuss them in Chapter One, her early prints of rural life appeared in the Independent Labour Party weekly the *New Leader* at the same time that its editor Noel Brailsford was urging that Labour needed the

⁴¹ Leader of the Labour Party and the first British Labour Prime Minister. The Labour Party's 1918 constitution summed up its socialist program, "to secure for the workers by hand and brain the full fruits of their labour."

⁴² Griffiths, *Labour and the Countryside*, 222.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 234-35.

rural vote and articulating the plight of agricultural workers.⁴⁴ These pastoral works convey the general sense of a “prosperous countryside,” the party’s new interest in rural England, and its particular emphasis on the farm laborer, even as they belie the realities of a countryside sunk in severe decline, and yet to benefit from modernization.⁴⁵ In *Labour and the Countryside*, Clare Griffiths finds that Labour periodicals largely clung to the rural idyll in describing the countryside, an unpoliticized world of “quaint villages,” picturesque farmland, and traditional crafts untouched by modernity. She points out that this archaic imagery was severely at odds with the party’s political rhetoric, which was highly and justly critical of the condition of rural housing, the level of laborers’ wages, and the overall depressed state of agriculture. The party’s *Daily Herald* ran pastoral images showing “the countryside at its best ... a delightful study of English rural life” at the same time Labour was launching a major agricultural campaign in 1933.⁴⁶

Griffiths finds that even the National Union of Agricultural Workers’ and its Labour-affiliated magazine, the *Land Worker*, resorted to un-politicized scenes of farm workers engaged in hand labor. Questioning an agricultural union’s acceptance of a mode so closely associated with an urban-derived nostalgia, she suggests that this reflects the viewpoint of a citified editor, “a townsman’s vision of the country, imposed on a rural audience.” More broadly this may reflect the idyll’s appeal also to a rural audience since

⁴⁴ Established in 1893, the ILP was affiliated with the Labour Party from 1906 to 1932. The vote was extended to all males over 21 in 1918.

⁴⁵ Rural electrification, like much modernization, came after World War II.

⁴⁶ Griffiths, *Labour and the Countryside*, 100-01.

it exercised such a strong hold on urban psychology;⁴⁷ I would add that these people knew all too well in what conditions they were living. As Brailsford had done for the *New Leader*, H. B. Pointing, as editor of the *Land Worker*, established aesthetic standards that produced an attractive magazine capable of engaging manifold elements of society; its covers featured wood engravings and pen-and-ink drawings of high artistic merit that portrayed a real, if vanishing, working countryside. The magazine relegated political issues and policy to print and cartoon, in one case satirizing the union's success in raising wages, which was only a start in solving agriculture's many problems (fig. 2.19). Overt allusions to politics or displays of the mechanization of labor were rare.⁴⁸

Although the *Land Worker* prominently featured Leighton's engravings on its covers and within its pages during the 1930s, those from *The Farmer's Year*, which would have ideally articulated the organ's vision, were not among them. Practical concerns of format, the publisher's political predilections, and perhaps copyright charges appear to have determined what appeared. Illustrations from Leighton's gardening book, *Four Hedges* (1935), well accommodated the magazine's "portrait" orientation and dimensions (fig. 2.20), as contrasted with *The Farmer's Year* engravings' "landscape" orientation and large size. Moreover, Collins, who had commissioned the agricultural calendar, may have felt its interests could be better served by lending its name to venues aligned with an intellectually and progressively oriented audience than with an organ of

⁴⁷ Ibid, 102-03.

⁴⁸ Exceptions include the November 1935 (General Election month) cover, which shows a man pointing to the slogan "The Land Worker Who Knows His Own Mind Votes Labour," and the engraving of a man operating a tractor in a bold social-realist style on the cover for August 1931 (which saw the collapse of the Labour Government).

everyday working people. The publisher did approve a pre-release contribution to Dartington Hall's outreach brochures of *Cider-making: October* (fig. 2.21) and another engraving from *The Farmer's Year*, which was scheduled to come out in the fall of 1933. Dartington's social and agricultural experiment, more fully addressed in Chapter Three, appealed more to an intellectual elite in seeking to regenerate the countryside, its agriculture and crafts, and to advance progressive education and the performing and visual arts.⁴⁹ *The Farmer's Year* engravings, then, could serve the vision of a broad spectrum of politically progressive, social, and economic interests. Its scenes of productive, autonomous rural laborers fitted into one of the Labour Party's major publicity themes of the '30s, that the patriotism of the working and middle classes was one "of service and not that of possession,"⁵⁰ and aligned with its keen interest in winning over the rural vote, as well as the more "upscale" social and agricultural experiments of Dartington Hall.

Redemptive, Disfigured, and Pastoral Landscapes

While I have argued that *The Farmer's Year* engravings are highly patriotic expressions of national ideals, the second half of this chapter suggests that the book also

⁴⁹ Roger (R. C.) Morel (Manager, Orchards & Cider-House Dept.) to Leonard Elmhirst, 31 Mar. 1933, Papers of Leonard Elmhirst, Dartington Hall Trust Archive and Collection, Dartington Hall, Totnes, Devon. The Dartington literature retains *Cider-making: October*'s original proportions, with a reduction to one-half size.

⁵⁰ As articulated in a PEB (Party Election Broadcast) of 1935 given by Labour's Herbert Morrison, the leader of the London County Council; quoted in Laura Beers, *Your Britain, Media and the Making of the Labour Party* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard UP, 2010), 156-57.

obliquely voices Leighton's deeper doubts and ambivalence toward patriotism and war, with specific reference to her private bereavement and the wider, terrible loss of a generation of productive, vital men during the Great War. Taking as a model the ancient agricultural almanac, *The Farmer's Year* connects the land to peace and fertility and addresses the relationship between man and nature and the virtues of hard labor. Like Virgil's *Georgics*, the calendar looks forward to a rebirth of the soil as the violence, disorder, and unproductiveness that are the heritage of the past are overcome by dutiful cultivation of the land. Having established an image of agricultural abundance and pastoral harmony, national virtues and national revival, Leighton then concedes death its inescapable place in the landscape -- "et in Arcadia," a reminder that the agricultural calendar marks the passage of time with an imagery often anything but benevolent, a cycle so much of whose growth operates through decay, destruction that must precede (and follow) creation.⁵¹ *The Reaper* (fig. 2.22), an engraving reproduced on the title page and embossed on the cover, signifies this doubleness of nature; the laborer, balancing a scythe that is both farm tool and symbol of death, is bent to the labors of the agricultural year but also to the common fate of created things.

Let me further argue that *Lopping: February*, which shows men severely pollarding willow trees, presents death not only as a renewing step in the natural order but also as an unneeded consequence of man's aberrant destructiveness. The native, commonly recognizable landscape becomes a theater of disfiguration and irreparable loss, echoing the carnage and chaos of the Great War. *Lambing: January* and *The Fat Stock Market: December* are related to this grim image of mutilation: the first

⁵¹ See the chapter "Et in Arcadia Ego: Poussin and the Elegiac Tradition," in Erwin Panofsky, *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1955), 295-320.

establishing a mythic peace of pastoral innocence in the Christian iconographic tradition, the other a bluntly realistic scene from which defenseless livestock will soon be driven to the slaughter. Drawing on the countryside's power to arouse ideas of patriotism, remembrance, and redemption, Leighton ends the year by renouncing any justification of past war and any hope for future peace.

Leighton's quarrel is not so much with mechanization per se but with man's wanton misuse of the machine to devalue and destroy human life. Her farming scenes that incorporate machinery – granted in forms that had long been a part of the agricultural landscape -- show a symbiotic relationship between the workers and their rudimentary devices. In *Threshing: March* (fig. 2.23), men and machinery work together to thresh ricks holding last summer's sheaves; the thresher neither threatens nor overpowers the laborers as it separates the grain from the wheat stalks and sweeps straw to the top of the rick.⁵² Only part of the massive steam engine that powers the thresher and elevator enters the picture; even the black smoke disgorging from the engine is reduced to a linear stream that forms the engraving's upper margin. The narrative affirms a sense of man and machine working together in constant, reciprocally dependent, productive effort:

Everything and everyone moves. Let any one figure cease for a moment and the link in the chain snaps. Nothing is still.⁵³

Moreover, Leighton's simile for the constant roar and motion of the thresher is humanized:

⁵² The thresher, which replaced the tedious hand flail, had been the first machine to help move the English agricultural economy toward a truly intensive level; it appeared in southern England in the 1760s and was well established by the first decades of the nineteenth century.

⁵³ Leighton, *Farmer's Year*, 13.

Then steam engine shakes as it belches out its black smoke, while its tight-flung belting moves round the cog of the thresher; the threshing machine incessantly quivers and throbs like a person in a state of great emotion, as it consumes and discharges its winnowed grain.⁵⁴

Her description of the threshing process recalls Hardy's powerful threshing scene in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891), yet Leighton's machine is not diabolical nor are the workers its servants, unlike the automatized Tess, caught up to feed it without stopping and, by extension, bound to an unending cycle of labor to death.⁵⁵

The Redemptive Landscape

Lambing: January, which opens *The Farmer's Year* at the time that ewes traditionally deliver their newborn (fig. 2.24),⁵⁶ draws on Christian symbolism to link an otherwise mundane act of husbandry to the promise of a peaceful world, and, I would suggest, redemption for those who had died, heroically however fruitlessly, to attain a supposedly higher peace than had prevailed before 1914. Radiant dawn, time of daily renewal, casts into high relief a lambing pen resembling a manger, invoking the

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ In Hardy's description: "The inexorable wheels continuing to spin, and the penetrating hum of the thresher to thrill to the very marrow all who were near the revolving wire cage." The operator of the steam thresher was "in the agricultural world but not of it. He served smoke and fire" and was oblivious to his surroundings while he was "in the service of his Plutonic master;" Hardy, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, 381-82.

⁵⁶ In a letter to Edmund Blunden dated 27 Jan. 1932, from London, Leighton mentions that she had recently been in the Chilterns drawing "lambs and men pollarding willows," Edmund Blunden Papers.

circumstances of Jesus' birth and his heritage as the shepherd king,⁵⁷ as well as his coming as the good shepherd who gives his life for his sheep. Its composition rather resembles Samuel Palmer's *Opening the Fold* or *Early Morning* (1880, fig. 2.25), an illustration for his translation of Virgil's *Eclogues*, both prints glowing under a new day as sheep gaze directly toward the viewer, the form of her shepherd's hut corresponding to the crag that anchors Palmer's background. The devoutly Anglican Palmer, whose work Leighton knew well and admired,⁵⁸ imbued his pastorals with a deep spirituality, seeing an otherworldly power in the Poet himself, finding believable Virgil's vision of a child who would bring redeeming peace to the world: inspiration had "struck his immortal lyre in prophecy" of the birth of Christ.⁵⁹

Leighton begins the year with Christ's birth, just as Edmund Spenser opens *The Shepherdes Calender* with a January radix, as "the incarnation of our mighty Sauour and eternal redemmer the L. Christ ... left ... a memorial of his birth in the ende of the last yeres and beginning of the next."⁶⁰ Yet in her narrative, the beginning of life and the

⁵⁷ Jesus descended from the house of the shepherd king David.

⁵⁸ Her friend and mentor Martin Hardie, Keeper of Prints at the Victoria and Albert Museum and an expert on Palmer and Edward Calvert, lent her prints from their circle during the time she was working on *The Farmers' Year*; Clare Leighton to Martin Hardie, 29 Dec. 1932 and 10 Feb. 1933, Martin Hardie Correspondence. He reprinted Palmer's etching *Opening the Fold* in 1928.

⁵⁹ Quoted in David Blayney Brown, "'To Fancy what is Lost to Sight,' Palmer and Literature," in *Samuel Palmer, 1805-1881: Vision and Landscape*, ed. William Vaughan, Elizabeth E. Barker, and Colin Harrison (Burlington, VT: Lund Humphries, 2005), 25; see also the catalogue's entry no. 162, 241-42. *Eclogue IV* tells of a child destined to bring a Golden Age and free the world from fear.

⁶⁰ Edmund Spenser, *Shepherdes Calendar*, 1579, n. pag., *Electronic Text Center, University of Virginia Library*, Web. 6 Feb. 2009.

glorious news announced by shepherds is clouded with the knowledge that the lambs have been carefully delivered, only to perish so young and helpless:

“Fear not, little flock,” the sheltering pens seemed to say. “Outside is the frozen world, the worry of dogs and men, markets and butchers, knives, ropes, and big distances. Here there is rest and peace and warmth and no one shall come near you.”⁶¹

This may be in part an allusion to Noel Brailsford’s strict vegetarianism and his great love and empathy for the whole animal kingdom.⁶² But I would further suggest that the lamb, so often also a symbol of innocence and the Holy Victim, speaks for the sacrificial death of Christ as well as of Leighton’s brother Roland and the millions who perished young in the Great War.

Leighton appropriates the familiar language of Christian symbolism as a means to express the sacred nature of remembrance, and the sacrifice and cruelly won immortality of the dead, following on the rituals of remembrance that came into being directly after the Armistice and were devotedly observed throughout the interwar years. Bob Bushaway notes that these times of grave ceremony took on “religious, and specifically Anglican, sentiment and attendant liturgy and hymnody,” yet were “religious occasions in form only.” He attributes this to a desire to avoid specific invocation of Anglicanism so as not to offend other faiths, as well as to the fact that the rituals could offer little doctrinal

⁶¹ Leighton, *Farmer’s Year*, 4.

⁶² Leventhal (*Last Dissenter*, 45) cites Brailsford’s great fondness for animals and his vegetarianism, which he defended, in an exchange with G. K. Chesterton in *The Daily News* circa 1905, not on moral or religious grounds but “simply because he could not endure the suffering of animals.” Brailsford and his wife Jane had been vegetarians since the turn of the century, and it is plausible that Leighton practiced it during her relationship with him out of conviction or compliance. But she was not a vegetarian when Leventhal interviewed her during the late 1960s and the 1970s. F. M. Leventhal, Message to the author, 20 Apr. 2008, Email.

substance compared with the usages of orthodox Christianity. However, in both instances, the endearing iconography offers comfort to the living: the soldier's sacrifice, like Christ's, yielded redemption; "death in battle could expiate sin; the fallen were sanctified by death; the dead died in an automatic state of grace."⁶³ But in Laurence Binyon's gravely submissive lines, "They shall not grow old, as we that are left grow old," which haunted the memorial thanksgivings of the uneasy peace of 1918-39, there seemed to lurk a resigned paganism, a sense that sacrifice will culminate in no ultimate external fulfillment, and that all the agony of effort has preserved but a diminished world.⁶⁴

Druid Stones (fig. 2.26), the tailpiece to "January: Lambing," and the chapter's conclusion both link and counterpoint the Christian symbolism that informs text and image. The old shepherd, weary from tending the lambs during the long birthing, plods his way homeward,

across the wold, dark against the skyline.... Over that well-worn path along the ridge, pagan and Christian, Celt and Saxon, forerunners of his craft, had trudged since first the great stones went up round the Druid's circle on the moor.⁶⁵

Leighton connects the old man and his life-giving labors with those who have preceded him, whether Christian or pagan, in this place of pastoral solitude and permanence over the many centuries. But it is worth considering the possibility that she was drawing on the

⁶³ Bob Bushaway, "Name upon Name: The Great War and Remembrance," in *Myths of the English*, ed. Roy Porter (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1992), 158-59.

⁶⁴ From the fourth stanza of Laurence Binyon's "For the Fallen" (1914), recited on "Poppy" or Remembrance Day (11 November) originally commemorating the Armistice of 1918, later to include the dead of World War II.

⁶⁵ Leighton, *Farmer's Year*, 5.

long-held belief that the Druids raised the stone circles that dot the British landscape⁶⁶ to bring the Celtic priesthood's human sacrifices into a landscape otherwise pastoral, a preoccupation of those who shaped her sensibility: Blake, Wordsworth, and Keats. As Matthew Schneider argues, the English romantics, "following the paleoanthropological wisdom of their day ... associated some of the most commanding and picturesque features of their native landscape with a sacrificial cult, and, as a result, their familiar surroundings appear replete with evidence of prehistoric institutions of victimization."⁶⁷

"January: Lambing" begins with the birth of helpless creatures into the radiant dawn, which foretells the Glad Tidings, and ends with the stooped old shepherd walking in solitude beneath the towering monuments of his pagan forbears "into the winter darkness." Light and dark do duty for Leighton as inescapably plain markers of people's transient nature as well as means of celebrating Christ's promise of eternal life. Within the context of the whole book, "January: Lambing" serves partly as agricultural and partly as Christian calendar, as well as a determined joining of Christ's innocence and sacrifice for humankind and resurrection to all humanity -- but especially to the millions of those who had sacrificed themselves in a war whose wounds would not heal in the lifetime of any of those who had experienced it. The narrative celebrates the radiant birth

⁶⁶ Paul Nash associated the megaliths with Druidic rites; see his *Druid Landscape* (1934), illustrated in Andrew Causey, *Paul Nash*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), pl. 301.

⁶⁷ Matthew Schneider, "'Wrung by sweet enforcement': Druid Stones and the Problem of Sacrifice in British Romanticism," *Anthropoetics* II.2 (Jan. 1997): 1-8, Web, 29 Apr. 2009, analyses the historic and cultural sources of Wordsworth's and Keats' mistaken association of Druids with prehistoric circles. Jason Whittaker discusses at length the early British antiquarians' association of Druids with the megaliths in *William Blake and the Myths of Britain*, (Houndmills, Hampshire: Macmillan; New York: St Martin's Press, 1999), Chapters Three and Four: "Druids, Deism and Patriarchy" and "The Monuments of Albion," 114-78.

of the lambs, but also makes clear that they have been born to perish as the so recently new year draws to its close.

The Disfigured Landscape

Lopping: February (fig. 2.27), which depicts men hacking off willow branches to hurdle together sheep pens, visualizes the rural winter landscape of the '30s, but which I suggest also articulates Leighton's personal concerns. Patricia Jaffé senses this grim scene bears implication beyond its readily apparent rendering of a countryside activity, interpreting it as a sympathetic response to the abject poverty of English agricultural laborers during the Depression.⁶⁸ I would argue that the image of stark mutilated trees against the bleak winter landscape conveys a sense of war, disfigurement, and violent death. The narrative accompanying the engraving deepens this ominous sensibility by carrying Hardy's description of "pollard willows, tortured out of their natural shape by incessant choppings"⁶⁹ to ever grimmer intensity:

Giant willows border the mill stream. The piles of willow hurdles for the sheepfolds are wearing low. So the farmer lops. The grim individual shapes of the willow trees lean in a row over the black unfrozen waters of the running stream, seared and wrinkled, like a family of mourners. One by one the upspringing branches within reach of the ladder are slashed off ... until the last one towers alone and grotesque, like the single tooth in an old man's sunken mouth. This collapses too, and the tree stands compact.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Jaffé, *Women Engravers*, 49.

⁶⁹ Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 209-10.

⁷⁰ Leighton, *Farmer's Year*, 9-10.

The defenseless ravaged willows recall how man pollards trees into uselessly artistic forms; his overbearing mastery may at times pass from craft into art, but is just as often destructive and potentially more devastating than the savageries of nature. Here Leighton has again in mind the carnage of the Great War, which took from Europe a generation of promising young men (symbolized by the up-reaching branches), the mutilation of so many survivors, and the desolation of so many more, even, of their kinfolk. The “family of mourners, bent in lamentation” hovers over the Stygian, death-colored, frigid water; their spirits are as tortured as the bodies of the fallen. Leighton’s stark imagery recalls the attempts of Siegfried Sassoon, Wilfred Owen, Edmund Blunden, and Henri Barbusse to chronicle this evil harvest, Blunden contrasting masculine, optimistic young men soon mangled in war:

And some are sparkling, laughing, singing,
Young, heroic, mild;
Some incurable, twisted,
Shrieking, dumb, defiled.⁷¹

Pollarded trees are not uncommon features of British landscape scenes created between the wars; and at least on one other occasion a juxtaposition of pastoral imagery with these artfully cut trees appears to move beyond ordinary rendering to suggest death and world disaster. But the depiction of pollarding in process is rare. Gwen Raverat’s engraving *Sheep by a River* (1919, fig. 2.28) shows a small flock grazing under pollarded trees that flank a peaceful river, which in their juxtaposition can signify both actual observation and a commentary on peace and war; the print’s execution the year after the

⁷¹ Edmund Blunden, from “Can You Remember?” (1936).

armistice would seem to strengthen this latter argument. Raverat's *Fen* (1935, fig. 2.29) offers a further contrast, depicting the vibrant, graceful willows in their natural form.

In *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain, and the Great War*, Joanna Burke points out that "nothing in British history ... was adequate preparation for the physical devastation of the First World War ... [with] amputations on a scale never seen before, or since." At the close of war, the nation was reminded of its obligation to acknowledge the sacrifice of the wounded, a subject addressed in an illustration of Britannia -- her identity bound with symbols of the countryside -- holding out her arms to disabled soldiers (*The Appeal*, 1918, fig. 2.30). Although by the late 1920s "the respect that had initially been given to the fragmented bodies of war-mutilated men had ended,"⁷² the war continued to preoccupy artists and writers, and war books and soldiers' recollections began to appear in large numbers.⁷³ I would argue that *Lopping: February* relates to these resurgent concerns, speaking to the barbarities of war and the critical issue of remembering, emotionally -- and, still more, practically -- those who sacrificed life or health for their country.

Sue Malvern writes that World War I has sometimes been described as having provoked "a crisis in masculinity, meaning that expectations of virile manliness were first invoked in its prosecution and then confounded in the experience of its futility."⁷⁴ She

⁷² Joanna Burke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain, and the Great War* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1996), 33, in her Chapter One, "Mutilating," 31-75. The drawing by Will Dyson appeared in the periodical *Reveille*, 1918.

⁷³ Malvern, *Modern Art, Britain and the Great War*, 164.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 1, citing Joanna Burke, *Dismembering the Male*, and Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994).

cites Jacob Epstein's *Rock Drill*, in its original and its mutilated versions (1913-15, figs. 2.31-32) as a parallel to "an early phase of optimism and patriotism followed by disillusionment with mounting casualties and no end to war in sight." For some, the war's cold efficiency to maim and kill, if in nothing else, was linked with the brutal efficiency and dehumanizing effects of industrialization. Richard Cork sees Epstein's truncated sculpture as a reaction to the dismemberment of bodies on the battlefield, the "castrated victim of the mechanical age."⁷⁵ In *Lopping: February*, Leighton responds to the wanton destructiveness of the world's first mechanized war. By matching irreparably war-scarred forms with the bodies of strong vital farm workers, she redirects ideas of masculinity and patriotism, associating them with productive work on the soil rather than with aggressive patriotism.

Leighton's use of the landscape to articulate disfigured human forms may well relate to the war landscapes of the painter, and her fellow wood engraver Paul Nash and his sustained interest in natural forms as metaphors for the human body. He rarely depicted the human wreckage of the battlefield directly but let the scarred trees on foreign soil (not rural England's pollarded ones) tell of war's abuse of the landscape as much as of man. *We Are Making a New World*, which appeared untitled on the cover of *British Artists At The Front* (1918, fig. 2.33),⁷⁶ and *Sunrise: Inverness Copse* (1918, fig. 2.34) depict forests stripped from a denuded earth, cratered by intense shelling. Nash referred

⁷⁵ Richard Cork, *Jacob Epstein: The Rock Drill Period* (London: Anthony D'Offay, 1973), 10, quoted in Malvern, *Modern Art, Britain and the Great War*, 3.

⁷⁶ C. R. W. Nevinson et al, *British Artists at the Front* (London: Country Life, 1918). A series of large-edition books issued in 1918 by Wellington House, the government agency charged with promoting British war policies.

to war's distortion of nature as "a terrific creation of some malign fiend working a crooked will on the innocent countryside." Reading his official war paintings that appeared in *British Artists at the Front* within the context of their accompanying narratives, Malvern finds that they were early described "as metaphors for the effect of the war on men, as the horror of war, too horrifying to be portrayed except obliquely ... Images of war's effect on landscape sometimes stood for the corruption of the healthy male body, 'disemboweled, eviscerated'"⁷⁷

Nash's *Landscape at Iden* (1929, fig. 2.35), among the imagery commemorating the war that appeared a decade after the 1918 Armistice, relocates memories of the war-torn Continental countryside onto English soil. The painting, a complex exploration of death and war's destructive nature, depicts young fruit trees and a geometrically configured pile of logs that Mary Beale convincingly interprets as metaphors for defenseless and fallen humanity.⁷⁸ Nash's imagery would also seem to address the theme of thwarted fertility, with the loss of a generation of young men's procreative capabilities perhaps represented by the barren fruit trees and the split logs in the basket.⁷⁹ The

⁷⁷ Malvern, *Modern Art, Great Britain, and the Great War*, 159. The narrative was written by the well-known journalist and World War I veteran C. E. Montague.

⁷⁸ Mary Beal, "'For the Fallen': Paul Nash's 'Landscape at Iden,'" *Burlington Magazine* 141 (Jan. 1999): 20. The foreground upright staff and trug of logs have been linked to the symbols of male and female from Millet's *Angelus* (the digging fork and the basket full of potatoes), and to postlapsarian imagery in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, which recounts the fruits of Eve's womb as bringing death and destruction into the world. The staff and basket of logs represent Adam and Eve, the fruits of her womb are the billets of wood and by extension the log pile and bare fruit trees in the orchard.

⁷⁹ For further discussion of Paul Nash's war imagery, see Malvern, *Modern Art, Britain, and the Great War*, 63-67; David Haycock, *Paul Nash* (London: Tate Pub., 2002), 7; Simon Grant, "Paul Nash: War Artist, Landscape Painter," *Paul Nash: Modern Artist, Ancient Landscape*, ed. Jemima Montagu (London: Tate, 2004), 40-42. Andrew Causey's

painting not only illustrates Nash's use of trees as symbols of the war dead, the innocent, even the evil fruit of original mankind, but also his interest in themes relating to female and feminine forms in the landscape. Images of women do not appear in *The Farmer's Year*, either incidentally or to symbolizing ends, even in the harvesting of fruit, so often both a task delegated to women in the real world and used as a symbol of fertility in literature and art. *Apple Picking: September* (fig. 2.1) depicts a scene of great abundance, with men picking the ripe apples from their ladders and sorting them into great wicker baskets. While Leighton is most likely visualizing a passage from John Masefield's "The Land Workers,"

Then, more September memories
Of apples glowing on the trees,
Of men on ladders in the sun,⁸⁰

the absence of images of women throughout the calendar raises larger issues. I would argue that she is chiefly concerned with the idea of the male form as husband to the English earth, as procreator bringing life to the fertile soil.⁸¹ This productive duality is supported by the book's subtitle, "A Calendar of English Husbandry," signaling masculine effort, while *Fertile Land*, the tailpiece to "July: Cottage Gardens" that depicts cultivated fields over a wide landscape (fig. 2.36), has a markedly feminine connotation.

Paul Nash (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980) and Alexander Postan's *The Complete Graphic Works of Paul Nash* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1973) remain useful studies.

⁸⁰ In *Collected Poems* (London: Heinemann, 1923), 12.

⁸¹ The dimensions of Leighton's *Hop Pickers* of 1930 (eight by ten-and-one-half inches), which shows men, women, and children from the London's East End slums, are the same as the full-page engravings in *The Farmer's Year* and could indicate that she considered using the subject as an illustration for the book. However, the activity probably did not fit well with the overall emphasis on the farm laborer. The engraving was published in the *London Mercury*, Mar. 1932, 483.

Contemporary writing likewise cast the countryside as a fertile female; the town planner and author Thomas Sharp spoke of the “the richness, the fruitfulness of that mother of men, the countryside.”⁸²

The Pastoral Landscape

Like *Landscape at Iden, Lopping: February* transposes the notion of war directly onto English soil. The narrative that accompanies Leighton’s engraving heightens a sense of Englishness by alluding to a poem that was paradigmatic of pastoral imagery during the war. Taking up a literary antithesis frequently employed by war poets,⁸³ she contrasts the present devastation with the memory of refuge, beauty, and repose in a single sentence set off from the rest of the text: “In the lofty elms of the Vicarage garden the rooks, too, go home to rest, croaking loudly and solemnly as they settle into their bulgy nests in the tree tops.”⁸⁴ I would argue that the garden was specifically that of the Old Vicarage at Grantchester, immortalized by Rupert Brooke (1887-1915) in his 1912 poem of the same name, and visualized by Noel Rooke’s wood engraving that illustrated a 1916

⁸² Thomas Sharp, *Town and Countryside: Some Aspects of Urban and Rural Development* (London and New York: Oxford UP, 1932), 11, quoted in Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, 33. Sharp was lamenting the blurring of the “ancient antithesis ... the town is town: the country is country: black and white: male and female.”

⁸³ See the chapter “Arcadian Resources” in Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977), 231-69. By invoking the “British model world,” as Fussell describes the pastoral forms imagined by an industry-blighted England, England’s writers and artists could confront the calamities of World War I while at the same time providing comforts against them.

⁸⁴ Leighton, *Farmer’s Year*, 10. The capitalization of “Vicarage” is Leighton’s. The English believed that rooks nesting on one’s property brought good luck.

edition of the poem.⁸⁵ I would further suggest that Leighton is also evoking the unfulfilled poetic promise of her brother Roland, in her allusion to Brooke's poetry and by juxtaposing an image of war's destructiveness with one of peace fostering the creative life.

In "The Old Vicarage, Grantchester," the "sweating, sick, and hot" Brooke yearns from summer-heavy Berlin for the peace and dreamy repose of the dear place where he had worked under the shade of blossoming chestnuts as a young scholar. Leighton's evocation of the rooks among the Vicarage elms is a rebus for her teacher Noel Rooke, whose wood-engraving class at the Central School of Arts and Crafts was indeed known as "The Rookery."⁸⁶ His double-page illustration for Brooke's poem (fig. 2.37) shows the light-dappled trees in full leaf, a welcome refuge for burdened spirits seeking imaginative respite from the steamy, crowded German capital.⁸⁷ Leighton uses this image of The Garden, a paradise of "peace and holy quiet," as a gentle opposite to the hideous desecrations of war.

Although Brooke died from sepsis unrelated to active service early in the war, his verse, affirmed by Winston Churchill's valediction, became the touchstone of war poetry overnight.⁸⁸ Vera Brittain, Roland Leighton's fiancée, revered his poetry, especially the "War Sonnets." During Brittain's third term at Somerville College, Oxford, in 1915, she requested her tutor in English literature read to her group five sonnets by this "most

⁸⁵ Rupert Brooke, *The Old Vicarage, Grantchester* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1916).

⁸⁶ Selborne, *British Wood-Engraved Book Illustration*, 57.

⁸⁷ Brooke composed the poem at the Café des Westens, Berlin.

⁸⁸ This appeared in the *Times* (London), 26 Apr. 1915, 5; Churchill was then First Lord of the Admiralty.

promising poet of the younger generation,” who had recently died “to the great loss & mourning of all modern writers and literature. The sonnets were all sad & moving, in spite of their spirit of courage & hope, & through them all ran a strangely prophetic note, a premonition of early death,” leaving Brittain “sorrowful & heavy-laden with the thoughts of Roland & Rupert Brooke’s sonnets mingled in my mind.”⁸⁹ Brooke’s verse moved Roland’s mother just as deeply; she sent quotations from his poems to Brittain, asserting that, “they are Roland all over. They are just what he might have written. The last lines in particular – they were from “The Soldier,” “If I should die, think only this of me” – cut through me like so many knife-stabs with their truth in the matter of likeness to him.”⁹⁰

“February: Lopping” at once articulates Leighton’s anguish and loss while honoring the creative genius of Brooke and Rooke. Because the Leightons and Brittain so closely identified Roland’s poetry with Brooke’s, the chapter also recalls what powers perished unfulfilled with Roland. At the front Roland had wondered whether he could be both soldier and artist, juxtaposing destruction and creation by incorporating lines from Brooke’s poem:

I often think how strange it is that no one here knows me in any other than my present role. Someone once called me a chameleon, long ago.

O damn! I know it! And I know
How the May fields....

⁸⁹ Entry for 12 May 1915, in Brittain, *Chronicle of Youth*, 195. References to and usages of Brooke’s poetry pervade her diary.

⁹⁰ Marie Leighton to Vera Brittain, quoted in Brittain’s entry for 25 June 1915, *Ibid.*, 212. Brooke’s sonnet cycle had appeared in book form in May 1915.

And knowing, still go on inspecting rifles & seeing that men wash their feet....⁹¹

Roland thanks Brittain for sending him Brooke's poems: "It makes me feel as if I want to sit down and write things myself instead of doing what I have to do here. I used to talk of the Beauty of War; but it is only War in the abstract that is beautiful."⁹² He becomes increasingly caustic and disillusioned as trench fighting gets evermore bloodily intense:

Among [this] chaos of twisted iron and splintered timber and shapeless earth are the fleshless, blackened bones of simple men who poured out their red, sweet wine of youth unknowing, for nothing more tangible than Honour or their Country's Glory or another's Lust of Power. Let him who thinks that War is a glorious golden thing ... look at a little pile of sodden grey rags that cover half a skull and a shin bone and what might have been Its ribs ... and let him realize how grand & glorious a thing it is to have distilled all Youth and Joy and Life into a foetid heap of hideous putrescence. Who is there who has known and seen who can say that Victory is worth the death of even one of these?⁹³

Brittain, her fears for him ever mounting, reminds him that "Death cannot conquer some things, & over them 'War knows no power.'"⁹⁴ She privately conjures an image of him lifeless on the battlefield and, again resorting to Brooke, laments, "all that is left to us who worship him is just, 'some corner of a foreign field / That is for ever England.'"⁹⁵

For many English soldiers on the Western Front, including Roland, that corner was the wood at Ploegsteert in Flanders near the French front, which had become a place of rest and recuperation for worn troops before they were returned to more active sectors

⁹¹ Entry for 6 July 1915, Brittain, *Chronicle of Youth*, 218.

⁹² 5 Aug. 1915, *Ibid.*, 228-29.

⁹³ 14 Sept. 1915, *Ibid.*, 272.

⁹⁴ 17 Sept. 1915, *Ibid.*, 273. The verse is from Brooke's "Safety."

⁹⁵ 17 Sept. 1915, *Ibid.*, 273. The lines are from Brooke's "The Soldier."

of the front. Roland expressed his “‘sheer delight’ at standing in the wood in the early morning & listening to the waking song ‘of what seemed to be all the birds in the world.’”⁹⁶ But Death remained. “Violets,” composed for Brittain on 25 April 1915, and his photograph of a battle-ruined tract of the wood (fig. 2.38) show this new wilderness both as a place of death and as a garden:

Violets from Plug Street Wood,
Sweet, I send you oversea.
(It is strange they should be blue,
Blue, when his soaked blood was red,
For they grew around his head;
It is strange they should be blue.)

Violets from Plug Street Wood,
Think what they have meant to me –
Life and Hope and Love and You –
(And you did not see them grow
Where his mangled body lay,
Hiding horror from the day;
Sweetest, it was better so.)

Violets from oversea,
To your dear, far, forgetting land
These I send in Memory,
Knowing You will understand.⁹⁷

Roland Leighton and Paul Nash invoke the English pastoral tradition in their war imagery, contrasting it starkly with the smashed unburied bones, the rotting flesh, the reek of cordite. “February: Lopping” more indirectly contrasts the horrors of foreign war,

⁹⁶ 7 June 1915, *Ibid.*, 205.

⁹⁷ 22 Aug. 1915, *Ibid.*, 250-51. Roland enclosed violets from the wood to Brittain on the day he wrote the poem. British soldiers, having domesticated its name, referred to the wood as “Plugstreet,” further making it a corner of their homeland by naming locations in and around it from famous spots in London, such as the Strand, Hyde Park Corner, and Piccadilly Circus. See “World War One Battlefields: Flanders: Ploegsteert,” *World War One Battlefields: 2005-2009*, Web, 29 Aug. 2008.

resorting to an allusion to “Grantchester” to establish the English landscape as a gentle refuge. But even there, death flows through the Vicarage garden:

The poppy and the pansy blow ...
Oh! there the chestnuts, summer through,
Beside the river make for you
A tunnel of green gloom, and sleep
Deeply above; and green and deep
The stream mysterious glides beneath,
Green as a dream and deep as death.⁹⁸

The English countryside, it seems, is not immune to death, nor have witness and memory faded, as Leighton’s *Lopping: February* attests with its immediacy and graphic physicality, and Nash’s *Landscape at Iden* suggests with cerebral, surrealist detachment.

The Plow as a Symbol of Hope

“February: Lopping” closes with the engraving of a plow (*Plough in the Snow*, fig. 2.39) and a consoling narrative carried by the promise of renewal for the whole of creation:

And all the time, under the coverlet of snow, the vivid green wheat grows in the fields. Soon the thaw will come, and as the dark earth is visible again in the farmhouse garden, it shall be spotted with snowdrops and the pale gold of frilled aconites.⁹⁹

Snowdrops are symbols of hope, harbingers of the land’s rebirth. The unharnessed plough, lying unused against the snow, will soon resume its work, with the hope that war will be no more. Perhaps John Masefield’s use of pastoral imagery to ease the sense of utter devastation at the Somme also held promise: “All wars end; ... and the field full of

⁹⁸ Lines 6-12. The poppy is a symbol of death and remembrance.

⁹⁹ Leighton, *Farmer’s Year*, 10.

death will grow food.... When the trenches are filled in, when the plough has gone over them, the ground will not long keep the look of war.”¹⁰⁰

It seems likely that Leighton’s text draws on the vocabulary of Christian death and resurrection and is reminiscent of imagery such as that in “Now the Green Blade Riseth” (1928) by Canon J. M. C. Crum, published the same year in the *Oxford Book of Carols*:

Now the green blade riseth, from the buried grain,
Wheat that in the dark earth many days has lain;
Love lives again, that with the dead has been:
Love is come again, like wheat that springeth green.¹⁰¹

The Apostle Paul promises that “he that ploweth should plow in hope,” whose ultimate fulfillment will be Jesus’ gift of eternal life.¹⁰² Crum’s final stanza assures those in sorrow that:

When our hearts are wintry, grieving, or in pain,
Jesus’ touch can call us back to life again,
Fields of our hearts that dead and bare have been:
Love is come again, like wheat that springeth green.

In an analysis of Bruegel’s peasant imagery, Robert Baldwin relates that hope was as important a quality associated with plowing as diligence, good works, and obedience in sixteenth-century Netherlandish engravings. A cross was sometimes inscribed on the

¹⁰⁰ John Masefield, *The Old Front Line*, (New York: Macmillan, 1918), n. pag., *Project Gutenberg*, Web, 14 June 2009, first published in 1917. Masefield describes in detail the terrain at Hébuterne (the northernmost end of the Somme battlefield), where Roland Leighton had been cut down two years before, comparing its chalk rises and lynchets to those of the Chiltern Hills.

¹⁰¹ First stanza of “Now the Green Blade Riseth,” in Percy Dearmer, R. Vaughan Williams, and Martin Shaw, eds., *The Oxford Book of Carols* (London: Oxford University Press, 1928), 306-07. The piece, written for the boy choristers at Chiswick, quickly became a beloved hymn.

¹⁰² I Cor. 9:10.

plow; taken with “the patristic conflation of the plow and the cross because of the former’s cross-like shape and wooden construction, it was but a simple step to see Christ (or God) as a good plowman, uprooting sin from souls with the plow-cross.”¹⁰³

Leighton’s pairing of the language of hope and the plow, with its Christian associations of grace and justifying faith, likely speaks to similar concerns and supports the sense of redemption found in *Lambing: January*.

Redemption Repudiated

Although the ominously shadowed “February: Lopping” ends in hope, Leighton closes *The Farmer’s Year* with a vision of doom and impending slaughter, a subject highly atypical, even unique, in her oeuvre. In “December: The Fat Stock Market,” animals that the farmers have cared for over the year are driven to be sold for meat just before Christmas, a fate prefigured in “January: Lambing.” Turmoil reigns as

one by one the conveyances arrive ... each carries its store of victims.
Bleats and squeals, screams and moans fill the air, now, of the market
town as the animals’ terror overcomes them.¹⁰⁴

The corresponding engraving (*The Fat Stock Market: December*, fig. 2.40) shows pigs jammed together in temporary pens, helpless under a cold, driving rain. Well-dressed farmers lean over the fencing, poking and prodding the animals, even a sow with her piglets, which will soon be torn away from her. Rather than ending with the community enjoying the fruits of its labors after a successful harvest, or a farm family gathering

¹⁰³ Robert Baldwin, “Peasant Imagery and Bruegel’s ‘Fall of Icarus,’” *Konsthistorisk Tidskrift*, LV, 3 (1986): 104.

¹⁰⁴ Leighton, *Farmer’s Year*, 53.

around a bounteous feast, she chooses to depict man as part of devouring nature, whose innocent animals perish to make holiday for country and town alike.¹⁰⁵ The chapter ends by describing the carcasses swinging in shops -- as this decorative nineteenth-century *Butcher's Stall* shows (fig. 2.41) -- a broodingly clear vision: "All the following week the butchers' shops are gay with the rosetted bodies of animals. But they are silent now."¹⁰⁶

Leighton's grim articulation of these cycles of violence moves beyond an engagement with death in the customary rural world and seems to voice personal concerns, largely about war. Although Brailsford's vegetarianism and his deep feeling for defenseless creatures should be taken into account here, I want to suggest that the chapter speaks to her brother's being killed at the front, which occurred in late December. Many years afterwards, she would write to her friend the Virginia novelist Ellen Glasgow that she still associated the season with Roland's death, and confessed that she felt great relief when the holiday had passed:

It is good to have got over Christmas. To me it is peopled with many ghosts -- going back to 1915 when my 20 year old brother was killed in the war on Christmas Eve.¹⁰⁷

In a sense, Roland's sheltered life and untimely destruction, along with the larger fallen, can be seen as corresponding to the livestock's life experience and fate -- carefully nurtured, only to be taken from a secure environment, herded into units, and slaughtered for materially driven interests.

¹⁰⁵ An image of slaughter also ends the calendar of *Les Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry*. *December* graphically depicts a wild boar being torn apart by boarhounds.

¹⁰⁶ Leighton, *Farmer's Year*, 54.

¹⁰⁷ Clare Leighton to Ellen Glasgow, 27 Dec. 1939, Papers of Ellen Glasgow, Accession no. 5060, Special Collections, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA.

“December: The Fat Stock Market” may also be a commentary on commerce and its interruption of the organic movement of the agricultural calendar. The endlessly revolving cycles of the year from creation to harvest, and the plowman’s part in bringing human effort into sequence with that cycle, are dwarfed by the marketplace and by those who throng greedily to it. Its narrative touches on this break: the farmer’s wife laments having to sell a favorite animal, but finds materially driven consolation in the sale, which will buy decorative store goods to adorn herself and the house.¹⁰⁸ Leighton’s intention here becomes all the more poignant when one remembers that capitalism’s defining characteristics of self-interest and competition were viewed by most socialists as having driven the world to war in 1914. 1930s Britain witnessed a continuing crisis of capitalism, as Brailsford and his fellow social thinkers and reformers proposed alternatives to what they deemed a failed system. For some, the answer was social guildism, which looked back to a medieval order where society seemed, at least from this distance, to have worked for the common good, and communities were in touch with the soil and the seasons.

Her one portrayal of the act of slaughter, *Hog Killing* (fig. 2.42), which illustrates its chapter of that title in *Southern Harvest* (1942), her impressions of the American South, shows a vision of death that she casts as operating within the natural cycle. African-American men are dismembering a hog that they have carefully nurtured over the year but will now help to sustain them over the winter. Although the “blood stain[s] the thin snow crimson,” reminding her of the concurrent “blood soaked into the earth of Europe,” this is a sacred act, “a ritual that was gentle and right ... as old as man.” War

¹⁰⁸ Leighton, *Farmer’s Year*, 53.

thwarts the “culmination of the year’s harvests ... the birthright” of all the world’s people. Through its organic composition and portrayal of the slaughterers’ careful, even “reverential” handling of the body, *Hog Killing* affirms Leighton’s assertion that “in this scene of ordered obedience to the seasons lies human sanity,”¹⁰⁹ a very different vision than evoked in *The Fat Stock Market: December*.

I would further argue that *The Farmer’s Year* seeks to renew discussion of the justification for the war and the idea of redemption for the generation of young men who had sacrificed themselves for their country or their ideals. In *Modern Art, Great Britain and the Great War*, Sue Malvern discusses the efforts of Stanley Spencer and Paul Nash after 1918 to renegotiate “a mythic sense of Englishness” while attempting to “discover a path to redemption out of the debt that the dead had charged to the living;” to keep in tension “an obligation to never forget without becoming fixed in an illusory past at odds with the facts of events that could not be changed.” She analyses Spencer’s war paintings and Nash’s landscapes up to 1925 and their attempts to address issues of “memory and remembrance and how these hinged on Christian notions of redemption, resurrection, and renewal.”¹¹⁰

Leighton employs the agricultural landscape and the cyclic labors of the farming year to frame these issues, creating a tension between nostalgia for passing ways and physically robust men, full of energy and purpose; between myth and present reality; between life, death and redemption, the last, for her, springing from the fertile English earth, in whose defense so many had perished. *The Farmer’s Year* celebrates the virile

¹⁰⁹ Leighton, *Southern Harvest*, 77, 80, 85.

¹¹⁰ Malvern, *Modern Art, Great Britain, and the Great War*, 153.

laborer, tilling and seeding. To repay the debt to those who had made ‘the supreme sacrifice,’ it was fitting to return to the soil, the locus of life, sanity and wholeness, and also to uphold the Biblical injunction:

And they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.¹¹¹

The obligation to honor this mandate became increasingly urgent from the early 1930s on, as Leighton gave shape to *The Farmer’s Year*. The growing sense that another conflagration was smoldering towards inferno spurred her to revisit the horrific past in the name of peace. As Patricia Rae has written, this sense of “*déjà vu*” awoke a “double sorrow:” sorrow experienced and sorrow anticipated, “proleptic elegy, issuing in consolatory writing produced in anticipation of sorrow, where the expected loss is of a familiar kind.”¹¹² Leighton would make these “Janus-faced” sorrows leitmotifs of *Country Matters* (1937). Woodrow Wilson had been terribly wrong in calling World War I “the war to end all war.” George Santayana seems to have had it right: “Only the dead have seen the end of war.”¹¹³

¹¹¹ Isa. 2: 4.

¹¹² See Patricia Rae’s discussion of the interwar period’s “proleptic elegy,” in “Double Sorrow: Proleptic Elegy and the End of Arcadianism in 1930s Britain,” *Twentieth Century Literature* (Summer 2003): 1-21, *BNET*, Web, 5 Mar. 2008. “Double sorrow” is taken from Stephen Spender’s poem “The Separation” (1939): “Hands of the longed, withheld tomorrow fold on the hands of yesterday in double sorrow.” While Rae dates to the late 1930s British citizens’ “premonitions of sorrow commingled with memories of the grief endured in the Great War,” a sense of *déjà vu* and anxiety was weighing on prewar-decade poets; see Samuel Hynes, *The Auden Generation: Literature and Politics in England in the 1930s* (New York: Viking Press, 1976), 80-81, 95.

¹¹³ Wilson borrowed the phrase from H.G. Wells; George Santayana, “Tipperary,” in *Soliloquies in England and Later Soliloquies* (New York: Charles Scribner’s, 1922), 102.

The Critical Response

Reviewers affirmed Leighton's masterfully articulated vision of English rural life without touching on the book's subtle addressing of contemporary concerns. Collins' promotional literature, which solicited comments from leading British art critics and writers, and an independent review of *The Farmer's Year*, praised Leighton's mastery of the wood-engraved technique, the vigor that she brought to the craft, and her innovative style; her original vision; and her ability to convey the breadth of life on English soil.¹¹⁴ For the rural-life authors Phyllis Bentley and Naomi Mitchison, the engravings creatively mediated traditional and modern approaches, being "essentially contemporary in conception and execution," yet without the "fashionable symbolism which so often ... stands between [the viewer] and the artist." Supporting Hilaire Belloc's view that the engravings were wholly English, Collins asserted that Leighton's "feeling for the soil and for those who till it that surely gives her work a permanent value – not only artistic, but national." The country-life writer Winifred Holtby, daughter of a Yorkshire farmer, attested to "the integrity and authenticity of her vision;" Leighton had perceived the "perennial character" of the English countryside with "beautiful justice."

Above all, the reviewers for Collins noted "the broad humanity and sincerity of her outlook," a vision untouched by sentiment or affectation. Eric Gill, the sculptor,

¹¹⁴ "Some Opinions of Clare Leighton's Work," Collins promotional booklet, n. p., Hilaire Belloc Papers. The contributors were the art critics and curators Frank Rutter, Malcolm Salaman, Martin Hardie, and Campbell Dodgson; the artist Eric Gill; the journalists and writers Hilaire Belloc, Sir John Squire, Henry Nevinson, Winifred Holtby, Phyllis Bentley, Naomi Mitchison, Hamilton Fyfe; and the magazine owner Viscountess Rhonda. The independent review: C. Z. O., "A Farmer's Year," *American Magazine of Art*, Dec. 1933, 562-63.

writer, and her fellow wood engraver, perhaps spoke most directly and discerningly of her art:

Clare Leighton is nothing if not courageous and there is a grandeur of spirit about her which is very evident in her work. The size of these pictures, the boldness of their design and the clean dexterity of their engraving remove them entirely from the world of pretty country sentiment. Many people have done pretty little views of country life. Artists, like the great Bewick and our contemporary, Gwendolen Raverat, have done little engravings which are yet big in spirit. But no one in our time has succeeded better than Clare Leighton in presenting the noble massiveness and breadth of the life of the earth on a scale so grand.

While acknowledging her bold, unaffected portrayal of English country life, Gill perceived that she had moved beyond a specific time and location to express universal truths shared by workers of the soil. A comparison with other calendars published during the interwar years, such as Eric Ravilious' engravings that accompany a reprint of Nicholas Breton's *The Twelve Moneths*, support his assessment. Rather than interpreting the Elizabethan text for each month, which follows each season's labors, Ravilious' illustrations often depict contemporary pastimes and recreation: a lawn tennis match played by men in modern clothing pictures *May*; a girl lies in a hammock over *August* (figs. 2.43-44).¹¹⁵ Robert Gibbings' small figured engravings for Llewelyn Powys' *The Twelve Months* depict contemporary British life that has less to do with an authentic countryside than the leisure of couples dressed in 1930s-style clothing.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Nicholas Breton, *The Twelve Moneths* (Waltham Saint Lawrence, Berkshire: Golden Cockerell Press, 1927), from his *Fantasticks* (1626). Published by Robert Gibbings' Golden Cockerell Press in 1927, the calendar is unusual in that the engravings decorate charts that provide a concordance of the days of the week with days of the month for 1928-1955.

¹¹⁶ Published by John Lane in 1936.

Gill's contrast of Gwen Raverat's engravings of rural life, which he saw as "little ... yet big in spirit," with Leighton's "presenting the noble massiveness and breath of the life of the earth on a scale so grand" also rings true. Raverat's portrayal of the English countryside has a quiet, lyrical quality that contrasts with Leighton's bold, masculine conception of the land and those who work it. Yet their work is tied by a deep commitment to the countryside and an embracing of aspects of modernism to articulate the relationship of the rural people to the land. Lady Rhonda's *Time & Tide*, the feminist, then radical political and literary weekly, published Raverat's *Monthly Calendar* over 1930 in twelve installments¹¹⁷ that depict agricultural life and recreational pastimes around Raverat's birthplace of Cambridge (*October, July*, figs. 2.5, 2.45).¹¹⁸ As Joanna Selborne observes, without urging the harsh realities of life, they yet display an underlying seriousness, and even "seemingly calm and uncomplicated images are often imperceptibly tinged with melancholic or ominous undertones." Raverat's ability to capture the "spirit of the place" and to elevate the commonplace made her work highly appealing both to her public and her fellow wood engravers, notably Leighton, but they do not carry "sociological" messages like Leighton's.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ Founded by Margaret, Lady Rhondda in 1920. The engravings were published each with a poem by "Chimaera" (pseudonym for author Eleanor Farjeon) in the first issue of each month. Joanna Selborne and Lindsay Newman, *Gwen Raverat, Wood Engraver* (London: British Library; New Castle, DE: Oak Knoll Press, 2003), 86, 116-17, gives the exact dates of publication and the various states of the engravings.

¹¹⁸ Raverat (1885-1957), a granddaughter of Charles Darwin who helped found the Society of Wood Engravers.

¹¹⁹ Selborne and Newman, *Gwen Raverat*, 72. Regarding their formal means, both women developed unique, innovative styles that, while rooted in traditional representation and the close observation of the natural world, owed much to modernism. Raverat's soft, painterly approach reflects an Impressionist interest in the effects of light

If the period commentators were aware that Leighton was questioning societal values and raising the specter of past and future wars, they did not convey them. Nor did they view her work as an exercise in nostalgia for bygone days. Although she rightly sensed that Leighton had an uncommon ability to identify with her subjects, Mitchison felt that she had a “straight and innocent and above all friendly vision of the world” that conveyed “peaceful and eternal things.” Leighton herself seems to have belied the book’s serious, sometimes grim, leitmotif, characterizing the project to Vera Brittain as “such an unemotional thing ... what could be less exacting than engraving & writing about pigs & farmers?”, while trying to understand why she was so emotionally and mentally exhausted from doing the job.¹²⁰ She is, for whatever reason, choosing not to address the pressing concerns that the book takes up however obliquely: death, slaughter, suffering. We can read these as manifestations of the natural order of living things or as a critique of modernity, or both. The context within which she wrote to Brittain may help explain her focus on the subject’s mundane nature. Leighton had just broken down, having read parts of Brittain’s newly published *Testament of Youth* -- her diary that provides an at times wrenching account of her courtship with Roland during the war, his untimely death, and her and the Leighton family’s grief. Brittain had boldly made public her innermost feelings, while Leighton was left to subtly express her concerns under the dictates of the rural life genre.

and shade on form, avoiding any continuous black or white outline; Leighton’s eye fixed on underlying structure, creating powerful designs of solids, voids, and organic shapes. Choosing one of Raverat’s best-known engravings by which to distinguish their differing approaches, Leighton stated directly, “In Mrs. Raverat’s *Bowl Players in France* we have the painter’s attitude towards the block rather than the draughtsman’s,” Leighton, *Wood-Engraving and Woodcuts*, 34.

¹²⁰ Clare Leighton to Vera Brittain, 12 July 1933, Vera Brittain Papers.

Audience expectations and the means by which author and viewer communicate and receive messages may have contributed to her contemporaries' overlooking the deeper significance of *The Farmer's Year*. Broadly speaking, it may reflect the nature of its literature genre and the expectations that its audience brought to the book, to provide a comforting, nostalgic portrayal of traditional life to counteract modern anxieties. On a more basic level, the text requires a careful reading, as Leighton embedded concerns and allusions in a frequently anecdotal narrative that cannot match the creativity and authority of the monumental engravings. *The Reaper* (fig. 2.22), which is embossed on the cover and illustrates the title page, embodies the multiplicity of ways in which her imagery may be read: the farmer is bent to the labors of the agricultural year but also to the common fate of created things; the scythe is both a useful farm tool and a symbol of death, easily transposed from its practical use in the rural world to a symbol of people's seemingly endless readiness to turn from creation to destruction. More than an original vision of the English countryside, in Leighton's hands, the landscape became a powerful instrument to convey national identity and patriotic promise, emotions of redemption, desolation, loss, and disillusionment, and a universal sense of human folk.

CHAPTER THREE

FOUR HEDGES: MEDIATING TRADITION AND MODERNISM

This chapter seeks to position Leighton's vision of landscape and Englishness in the wider socio-political and cultural climate of the 1930s by analyzing *Four Hedges: A Gardener's Chronicle* (1935, fig. 3.1), word and visual impressions of her Chiltern Hills garden that mediate nostalgia for traditional ways and modernism.¹ The idea of the garden as an embodiment of national identity provides a framework here for analyzing an individual's shaping of an organic setting. Closely related to the book's seemingly contradictory sensibilities are her and Noel Brailsford's activism to preserve views of nearby sites of ancient heritage and their introduction of continental modernist elements into the landscape, which further negotiate contrasting senses of past and present. I will argue that Leighton mediated these seemingly conflicting approaches to the land in a search for continuity and order between past and present, at a time when the countryside was undergoing unprecedented rapid change.

While Leighton's professional identity was closely linked to the portrayal of traditional rural life, her significant engagement with modernism, as evidenced in the illustrations of *Four Hedges* and the modernist studio she built on that property while working on the book, must also be taken into account. The common identification of

¹ Clare Leighton, *Four Hedges* (London: Gollancz; New York: Macmillan, 1935).

nostalgia with preservation and resistance to the present does not follow in this case. As I discuss in my Introduction, cultural geographers' finding a "powerful historical connection between landscape, Englishness, and the modern"² during the interwar years has stimulated art-historical studies, which draw similar conclusions about the landscape art created during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These perspectives provide an enhanced framework in which to consider Leighton's responses to the natural world and the manifestations of modernism, as opposed to a more conventional approach that tends to polarize the latter with tradition.

I also contend that *Four Hedges* exhibits a socially progressive sensibility, an egalitarian focus that reflects Leighton's personal humanitarian ideology and her socialist publisher's, and contributed to the broader political and cultural debates about British society that marked the interwar years. Hers is a progressive version of Englishness that, while responsive to the gains made by the much-enlarged, post-war working-class electorate, diverges from the ordered patriarchal model of society advanced by the nation's leaders, including the Conservative Stanley Baldwin and Labour's Ramsay MacDonald, to bring about a unified and peaceful society. In *Four Hedges*, the status quo gives way to a vernacular landscape that celebrates communal effort and the commonplace. While her overall engagement with the Buckinghamshire landscape suggests a pursuit of continuity between past and present, *Four Hedges* seeks change in the established social order of class and rank to bring about a more democratic society, one in which people are not at conflict but united in common purpose toward the land, a very different vision from that evoked by the typical garden book of the period.

² Quoting David Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, 14, 16.

Overview

Commissioned by the socialist publisher Victor Gollancz, *Four Hedges* contains eighty-seven engravings (six of them full page)³ that depict over the course of the year the flora and fauna and the establishing of a garden at her and Brailsford's property near Monks Risborough, Buckinghamshire. Her observations and reflections issue directly from working the holding's windswept chalky soil, which they bought in 1931 and named Four Hedges.⁴ During their brief visits and more lengthy summer stays, this relatively small parcel of land provided a refuge from their urban environment while easily accessible by rail from London to the Whiteleaf Halt, opened a few years earlier in response to suburban development.⁵ Under the seasoned guidance of a local gardener and housekeeper, these city-bred professionals shaped and cultivated the land and became acquainted with the villagers' customs, the area's topography and historic sites, all of which were undergoing tremendous stressful change under development and related aspects of modernity. While the engravings of plants and animals weave intimately into her narrative, they are portrayed close up and on their own, not even in their immediate let alone larger environment. A number of prints show her and Brailsford working the land with their gardener and housekeeper, yet Leighton leaves to the reader's imagination

³ The largest number of engravings for any book she illustrated.

⁴ Clare Leighton to Hilaire Belloc [c. 15 June] 1931, Belloc Papers: from Icknield Cottage, Peter's Lane, Monks Risborough, Bucks: "I've had your letter sent on to me here to a cottage I've invested in."

⁵ The property looks up toward Bledlow Ridge from along a stretch of the Icknield Way, which predates the Roman conquest. The station opened in November 1929; "SP8004: Monks Risborough Railway Station," *Geograph*, Web, 16 Jan. 2009.

the buildings that she and Brailsford erected on the property: a traditionally styled cottage and a modernistic studio.

The book opens with Leighton's and Brailsford's return to Four Hedges in April, a time of renewal, after a lengthy absence, and follows month by month the changes in the garden. Highly autobiographical, it builds on a long literary tradition deriving from direct observation of the natural world. Her discoveries about local birds, animals, and plants; an awareness of the indispensable but fragile interdependence of the web of life; and a compassion towards all nature are in the spirit of Gilbert White's continuously reissued *Natural History of Selborne* (1789). Her friend the poet Edmund Blunden's assessment of White's contributions could apply to Leighton's: He "did not presume to give animation to the inhabitants of his tithe-map as to receive it from them by virtue of a supreme modesty, a constant curiosity, and a sense of worlds within worlds."⁶ *Four Hedges* also follows such well-regarded nature studies as Thomas Bewick's observations of birds, Richard Jefferies' late-nineteenth-century evocations of his native Wiltshire, and commonplace books like Rider Haggard's *A Gardener's Year* (1905). Intended for the holiday gift market, *Four Hedges* has an affinity with Victorian gift books on nature and gardening, whose authors' observations and emotional responses helped popularize a genre often closely affiliated with scholarly naturalism. These varied works, abundantly illustrated with pen-and-ink drawings, prints or, as by Haggard's, photographs, provided Leighton with a broad spectrum of inspiration, even as she used her own senses to catch the passage of the year through her garden. And as with Bewick, hers was a rare example of one hand crafting word and picture.

⁶ Edmund Blunden, *Nature in English Literature* (Port Washington and London: Kennikat Press, 1929), 135.

The Garden as Symbol of National Identity

Taking the premise that the turn-of-the-century garden often acted as a metaphor for traditional England and quietism, the following will argue that *Four Hedges* provides a sense of constancy and reassurance against the anxieties of modern life while acting as a agent for progressive social change. In a study of English gardens associated with small country houses between 1870 and 1914, Anne Helmreich contends that changing horticultural styles reflect broader debates within the culture and that the discussion of the styles and forms of English gardens intersected with notions of national identity: “The leading styles of garden design sought validity through recourse to the label English, and the garden was adopted as a symbol of national identity.” Gardens were not just pieces of land cultivated by individuals, but offered “competing visions of the national public discourse to express desired perceptions of the nation.” Seemingly apolitical, the garden embodies “a collection of ideologies, sometimes contradictory, bundled together and put to different uses.” Helmreich frames debates over formal and aristocratic versus “natural” and “peasant” styles, the use of native plants, and introduction of foreign materials and technologies both synchronically and diachronically. She finds that turn-of-the-century gardens were used at times to counteract anxieties over change, articulate desire for an alternative way of life, and mediate or accentuate differences.⁷ For example, when used

⁷ Anne Helmreich, *The English Garden and National Identity: The Competing Styles of Garden Design, 1870-1914* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2002), 1-3, 224, which derives from her “Contested Grounds: Garden Painting and the Invention of National Identity in England, 1880-1914,” (PhD diss., Northwestern Univ., 1994). As Helmreich sees it, debates that pitted the ordered, formal garden with “wild” and “cottage” gardens resolved in the collaborative designs of the garden designer Gertrude Jekyll and the architect Edwin Lutyens.

as a metaphor for England, the garden served to offset the blight of industrialism and stimulate patriotic attachment to country. By constructing an Edenic image of beauty and order, the darker aspects and problems and anxieties of modern life were avoided.⁸ “With its emphasis on rural life ... and domesticity,” the garden best encapsulated assumptions identified with traditional England by many at the turn of the century.⁹ Perhaps Gwen Raverat’s *The Garden* (1936, fig. 3.2) epitomizes these ideals of domestic calm and order, portraying nature controlled and shaped within an unthreatening, almost hermetic environment.

Raphael Samuel discerns a continuing association of gardens and gardening with national virtues during the period between the wars, when gardening established itself as “the most widespread leisure pursuit,” riding the growth of suburbia and the contraction of domestic service after World War I. Its predominant image projects domesticity and peace as opposed to a heroic nation of conquerors, even becoming “the greatest argument for quietism” in the face of unprecedented social change. As the avid gardener-householder tells his wife in *This Happy Breed*, Noël Coward’s fable of interwar British domestic life, “We don’t like doing things quickly in this country,” using the slow, predictable order of the growth of plants as a rationalization for staving off reform.¹⁰

⁸ As I discuss in Chapter One, Leighton’s illustrations for Alan Mulgan’s *Home* (1926) reinforce his use of this metaphor.

⁹ Helmreich, *English Garden*, 230.

¹⁰ Raphael Samuel, “Introduction: Exciting to be English,” in *History and Politics, Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity*, ed. Raphael Samuel, vol. 1 (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), xxv.

Four Hedges' Egalitarian Vision

Leighton's horticultural and egalitarian interests interface in *Four Hedges* to develop an alternate vision to long-established modes of garden design that typically align the landscape of privilege and hierarchy with national ideals. Her engravings and narrative speak of commonplace and locally native species as well as people of the land, their culture and traditions. Chapter One (*April*) establishes an orientation that focuses on the everyday: a cowslip, that folk-medicinal wildflower commonly found in pastureland (fig. 3.3), illustrates the opening sentence, "Ours is an ordinary garden." The narrative underscores this vision by referencing the former rough meadowland's past public communal function as part of a commons open to all until an Enclosure Act ended traditional rights, with the parish rector appropriating the land in the 1830s.¹¹ Her justification of the garden's design reveals a desire for authenticity and an engagement with the site's natural surroundings as opposed to imitating older gardens, which to her smacks of artificiality as well as an elitist sensibility. While the holding stood near historic houses set in great gardens along the Thames (Stowe, grand testimony to Capability Brown, Charles Bridgeman, and William Kent, lay only a few miles south), she would have "no sentimentality ... no willfully irregular edges to ornamental ponds, no badly-sculptured garden figures, no timidity showing itself in an escape into false 'mossy bits' or an aping of the old-fashioned. Without rich soil or shade-casting trees arched over great stretches of long rolled lawn, or "mellow, age-silvered bricks" walling

¹¹ Leighton, *Four Hedges*, 11. Cowslip derives from an Old English word meaning cow dung.

generations-formed designs, Leighton and Brailsford struggled to cultivate the chalky earth whose slope exposed it to fierce winds. Flowers flourishing in the rich Thames Valley soil prompt her to ask, “Is there something in us that enjoys the hard fight we have had for our plants in the cold chalk of our hills, so that we resent this easy profusion that shows no sign of battle?”¹² -- a reflection that affirms the hard labor, persistence, and well-earned pride that characterize the country folk in their struggle to eke out a living; Leighton aligns herself with the common people, not the landed gentry who have long benefited from the most fertile land.

The engravings celebrate ordinary indigenous species in individual detail, without the context of their wider environment, each example depicted for its own worth rather than forming part of a collective identity. Native berries growing in the hedgerows (*Berries*, fig 3.4) and common fauna such as the blackbird warrant two of the few full-page illustrations. The full-page *Weeds* (fig. 3.5), which focuses up-close on roadside flowers altogether lacking pedigree or hothouse origin, finds beauty and value in commonplace shapes and patterns. This oblique commentary on English hierarchy and social exclusivity becomes pronounced in the narrative. The page facing this last illustration tells of Leighton’s childhood defense of a bouquet of weeds that she entered in a flower show otherwise filled with showy heirloom and greenhouse displays. But children become acculturated to prejudice; only the country people remain the true locus for “right” values and seem to harbor “no feeling for class.”¹³

¹² Ibid, 35.

¹³ Ibid, 30.

The engravings and narrative address the relationship between Leighton and Brailsford as owners of Four Hedges and the country people who help them tend the garden. Full-page illustrations depict “master and man,” as the usage still held,¹⁴ toiling together as equals or at least comrades on the land (*A Lap Full of Windfalls, Planting Trees*, figs. 3.6-7). Here Leighton admits no social pretensions, portraying the hired help not as subservient to Brailsford and herself but partners in cultivating the soil. Rhythmic curving patterns link the women as they harvest apples; Brailsford and the gardener toil in common cause to ensure that a transplanted tree survives. Leighton carefully depicts their differences in dress: although their work caps indicate common effort, Brailsford wears a gentleman’s waistcoat and jacket, while a long utility apron protects the gardener’s clothing in *Planting Trees*; Leighton’s flowing skirt and straw hat that shades her from the sun contrast with the housekeeper’s bare head and gathered tunic in *Picking Strawberries* (fig. 3.8),¹⁵ all of which serve to identify them and indicate social rank. Leighton’s suggestion of different social classes’ common effort and concern would not be readily apparent had she shown them similarly dressed. Here a commonly held respect and admiration for the land’s life-giving capabilities unite the transplanted townspeople and country folk, the professional and the laboring classes.

The narrative speaks to Leighton’s perceptions of the country people and how they regard their employers and their own standing. She casts the gardener and housekeeper as embodiments of the country folk’s deep wisdom of the natural world,

¹⁴ My italics, not quoting from Leighton’s text.

¹⁵ The two-thirds-sized-page engraving *Picking Strawberries* also conveys a sense of Leighton’s and the housekeeper’s unity of labor.

with the power to forecast weather from the sky and wind, animal and bird behavior, and to gauge the proper times for planting, insights that the town people do not possess. But, to her consternation, she finds a subservient self-identity and remnants of the old order persisting in these skilled, thoughtful people's minds. For all the couple's progressive sensibilities, the gardener expects them to keep up a certain standing and appropriates the cold frame for cucumber plants in order to maintain the image of gentility that he feels his employees must keep up; coddled tomato seedlings are a close second to hothouse cucumbers as a mark of standing. While these emblems of refinement make the couple "fit employers for labour" and validate the help's place in the social order,¹⁶ they do not warrant a place among the many plant illustrations. Here, what is not visualized is as instructive as the illustrations themselves. Moreover, engravings and text firmly avoid idealizing references to the traditional social order of the old English countryside, or the mindset of those would look to a more distant fictional past to reinvigorate the countryside by reviving an idealized medieval patriarchy.

Leighton speaks for a rural working class that figured widely in visions of Britain's national character but in reality remained marginalized in the social order, even as the nation became more democratic in the wake of World War I. The social historian Laura Beers points out that by the time of the general election of 1935, British politics had been transformed, largely by the franchise expansions of 1918 and 1928, from an "elite club composed of and representative of a narrow stratum of property-owning men into a mass democracy. Nearly all men and women over the age of twenty-one were eligible to elect a parliament that, while still dominated by middle-class men, included a

¹⁶ Leighton, *Four Hedges*, 23.

growing contingent of working-class and female representatives.”¹⁷ The realization of near-universal suffrage raised hope on the Left that a more egalitarian society would come into being. In his study of changing characterizations of Englishness, Peter Mandler summarizes the leftist perspective on the national character of 1935: “English soil was more fertile for democratic socialism than Germany or Russia, then in the grip of militarism and authoritarianism,” and cites the Labour politician Hugh Dalton’s using the apocryphal tale of the French journalist who hurries across the Channel to cover the “English Revolution” supposedly set off by the 1926 General Strike, only to discover a fraternity of strikers and policemen playing football. But Mandler also makes it clear that fundamental attitudes were slow to change; fear of the country’s passing into the hands of semi-educated, “average” people who had lost “the shrewd and natural instincts of ignorance without gaining the difficult and compensating wisdom of culture” loomed large.¹⁸ Leighton’s seeming dismissal with conventional rank and order arises from her view of people as individuals of worth as opposed to members of the artificially imposed divisions that dictate inauthentic identity.

I would argue that Leighton’s engravings of “master and man” working the land as equals and her affirmation of the non-urban population, which was frequently deemed to have retained an innate wisdom in the face of modernization, were moved by private emotion no less than public political commitment. The images project her and Brailsford’s vision of a classless society, challenging the status quo to offer an alternate

¹⁷ Beers, *Your Britain*, 12.

¹⁸ Peter Mandler, *The English National Character* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 2006), 149-53. Britain’s first and only General Strike lasted from 3-13 May 1926, gaining no concessions for the striking coal miners.

vision of the nation at a moment when leaders of the National Government were actively engaged in reinvigorating hierarchal Britain. In his study of the British people's perceptions of their society, David Cannadine argues that hierarchy probably remained the most attractive construction of British interwar society, "as the visions and representations of hierarchy were reconstructed to reestablish it in an era when the traditional ordering of society seemed under unprecedented attack."¹⁹ He finds that both the Conservative Stanley Baldwin and the socialist Ramsay MacDonald, who successively led the coalition National Government after Labour fell in 1931, embraced a view of the world in which "continuity and stability, rank and order were maintained against the disruptive and leveling social regimes that seemed in power everywhere else."²⁰ Both royal and non-royal public life remained organized around traditional hierarchical procedures despite the decline of aristocratic society; whether Britons defended hierarchy or lamented the still-prevailing "cult of inequality," they largely viewed as given an order "so venerable and all-pervading, so hallowed by tradition and permeated with pious emotion."²¹ For Leighton, people coming together to work the land for productive purposes offered a source of order and continuity that could naturally transcend social hierarchy, in harmony with her own seeking to create an alternative collective identity stemming from common purpose.

¹⁹ Cannadine, *Rise and Fall of Class in Britain*, 147; his chapter "The Twentieth Century: Social Identities and Political Identities" (109-66) provides an overview of numerous politicians' and writers' attempts to understand and categorize British society and the various models they proposed.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 143, 145.

²¹ *Ibid*, 147.

Four Hedges' egalitarian images of employer and employee toiling together on the land challenged Baldwin's widely publicized vision of "'cohesive inequality'" modeled on both farm and factory alike, "stable, organic, harmonious Burkeian communities in which identities were individual and personal, reinforced by a shared sense of ancestral roots and historic associations," where everyone knew his or her place.²² But I would suggest that Leighton's finding socialist patterns among the more deeply communal sphere of the countryside was more palatable to her readership than had she situated it in the factory. Images of urban labor had the potential to project class war, class struggle, and the specter of strikes. The country folk, however idealized, were seen as plain practitioners of a "right" way of living, in tune with the land and the seasons, practitioners and memorialists of the native customs and traditions that were foundering under modernity. Leighton shows that however arduous their labor, so often intensified by far-from-ideal working conditions (*Warm Weather Coming*, fig. 3.9), the country people's indissoluble ties to the land were indispensable to its successful cultivation (*Digging Potatoes*, fig. 3.10).

With the exception of several independent engravings that depict the hardships of working people, and especially of the unemployed in Depression-era New York,²³ Leighton never addressed urban labor, even though the Labour Party was historically associated with the urban working classes. This was a function of her close identification as an illustrator of rural life early in (and throughout) her career as well as her deep belief in the emotional and spiritual healthiness of work on the soil, a belief she practiced for

²² *Ibid*, 143.

²³ *Snow Shovellers* (1929) and *Bread Line* (1932) are discussed in the *Epilogue*.

most of her adult life. And, as I have discussed in Chapter One, her scenes of country life resonated with Labour activists, notably Brailsford's vision to attract the new rural franchise to the party during the late 1920s. Images showing the positive, comforting attributes of a seemingly unchanging, cohesive rural world (as opposed to those that could be interpreted as condoning or promoting class war) took on an even greater significance as the Labour Party struggled to define itself. As Cannadine points out, Labour itself was split over ideology: the Left asserted the party "existed to promote class war in the interests of the workers, while those on the Right rejected the idea that Labour represented only one class and discounted the Marxist theory of class war and class struggle," believing that the party existed to further the interests of the community as a whole. I would suggest that Leighton's egalitarian gardening scenes aligned with those who viewed Labour's objective as "justice for all men and women of every class who live by honest and useful work."²⁴

How closely did *Four Hedges'* egalitarian themes reflect its publisher's ideology? Victor Gollancz (1893-1967), a radical humanitarian English Jew whose firm (founded in 1928) was a major force in twentieth-century British publishing,²⁵ commissioned *Four Hedges* and *Country Matters* (discussed in Chapter Four), which carry the most

²⁴ Quoting the Labour politician Philip Snowden, in Cannadine, *Rise and Fall of Class in Britain*, 143.

²⁵ See Ruth Dudley Edwards, *Victor Gollancz: A Biography* (London: Gollancz, 1987) and Sheila Hodges, *Gollancz: The Story of a Publishing House, 1928-1978* (London: Gollancz, 1978). Gollancz's interests were wide-ranging, from books with strong socialist leanings to high-quality novels, accounts of country life, and science fiction. For example, he commissioned George Orwell to depict urban working-class life in northern England in what became *The Road to Wigan Pier*, while he brought out Daphne du Maurier's conspicuously unproletarian *Rebecca* in 1938.

egalitarian perspective of all of Leighton's books. A dedicated supporter of socialist movements, he founded the Left Book Club with the Labour Left Stafford Cripps and the Marxist theoretician John Strachey in 1936, to revitalize and give British socialism a body of serious theory. Gollancz published Strachey's polemic *The Coming Struggle for Power* (1933) and commissioned Brailsford to complement it with a book linking capitalism and war (*Property or Peace?*, 1934).²⁶ The American historian Stuart Samuels sees the LBC's legacy as "the greatest single force in England for the dissemination of left-wing thought. It injected ... the first effective dose of Marxism into the English cultural bloodstream ... [and] helped popularize a new political vocabulary, especially such terms as full employment, socialized medicine, town planning, and social equality."²⁷ I would argue that *Four Hedges'* working-people's perspective fitted only rather obliquely into its publisher's socialist ideology, while harmonizing with his aim to capitalize on the current demand for books on gardening and rural life. Socialist sensibilities mediate with naturalist observation on flora, fauna, and the seasons, nostalgia for country life traditions and customs. With the rise in popularity of gardening among

²⁶ Brailsford's most nearly Marxist work argued that true democracy and order in economic life and world affairs could only be achieved within a socialist society in which most private property had been superseded by public ownership of industries and services. In his quest for a classless society, Brailsford, who had spent three months in Russia in 1920 and had entertained real hopes for the Communist state, looked to the Soviet model while rejecting its brutal reliance on intimidation, censorship, and propaganda -- walking, as Leventhal (*Last Dissenter*, 164, 236-39) puts it, "a tightrope between democratic liberalism and Marxist regimentation." But his independent spirit soon clashed with Gollancz's reluctance to publish books critical of the Soviet Union. *Why Capitalism Means War* (1938), written to meet Gollancz's request for a book on the history of socialism, infuriated its inspirer with its criticisms of Stalinism and totalitarianism, which he saw as a "violent anti-Soviet tirade," Ibid, 249.

²⁷ Stuart Samuels, "The Left Book Club," *Journal of Contemporary History*: 1.2 (1966): 84.

the middle classes during the interwar years, and the concomitant interest in gardening books, *Four Hedges*' vision of employee and servant working side by side to shape an "ordinary garden"²⁸ had the potential to reach a audience far beyond that of the more narrowly focused, doctrinal socialist literature.

With its numerous illustrations and carefully planned visual integration of type and engravings, *Four Hedges* was a popular success, warranting several reissues during 1935-36.²⁹ Joanna Selborne observes that *Four Hedges*, "the first of a series of country books published by Gollancz for a mass market ... [was] largely responsible for popularizing wood-engraved nature illustration," and spurred him to issue more books on rural life in the same style and format.³⁰ Gollancz commissioned two collaborations between the country life writer H. E. Bates and the wood engraver Agnes Miller Parker, *Through the Woods* (1936) and *Down the River* (1937), which followed this design and proved highly popular.³¹ While they reflect Bates' interests, observations, and opinions,

²⁸ Leighton, *Four Hedges*, 11.

²⁹ Including a second imprint in 1935, reprint and the first cheap edition in 1936. Macmillan released the American edition in November 1935. Recent interest: Gollancz 1970 reprint; Sumach Press 1991; Gardeners Books, 2004; Little Toller Books, 2010. On the book's popularity: "V. G. tells me he sold 7,000 of the cheap edition of *4 Hedges*, which is pretty good, isn't it?", Clare Leighton to Vera Brittain, 30 Dec. [1936], Vera Brittain Archive.

³⁰ Selborne, *British Wood-Engraved Book Illustration*, 379, noting that Leighton had originally proposed about 100 illustrations. Selborne's information derives from a conversation with Leighton in 1983 and the Gollancz Archive. The Title Files, which contain the correspondence between Leighton and Gollancz, are now in the Orion Books Archive, London, but not accessible at this writing; Frances Wollen (UK Rights Director, Orion Books) to the author, 29 March 2011, Email.

³¹ Studies of Parker's work include Ian Rogerson, *The Wood Engravings of Agnes Miller Parker* (London: British Library, 2005) and Selborne, *British Wood-Engraved Book Illustration*, 282-92.

neither seems concerned with pressing for greater equality or challenging social hierarchy, leaving us to evaluate *Four Hedges* (and *Country Matters*) as the unique collaboration of its radically minded author and socialist publisher.

Four Hedges' populist vision was at odds with other garden and gardening books published during the interwar years, which were largely illustrated with photographs and continued a pre-war concentration on the gardens and houses of large country estates. Intended for a middle-to-upper-middle-class amateur gardener readership, their *modus operandi* took for granted a certain level of wealth -- the property of the landed classes cultivated by the working classes. The imposing country house or substantial "cottage" served as the focal point, visually integral to and often dictating the design of the garden. *The Cottages of England* and *Homes and Gardens of England* issued by B. T. Batsford, the largest publisher of country-life books between the wars, exemplify such an orientation. *Homes and Gardens of England's* frontispiece shows an aerial view of the imposing, fortress-like Haddon Hall surrounded by an expansive private park that flaunts sheer unproductive display, a massing of established power and significant wealth (fig. 3.11).³² But *Four Hedges* takes no account of where the garden's owners live, usually the focal point of the property and a prime indicator of rank and material standing. Even though Leighton refers to the cottage in the text, it does not figure in her garden layout and warrants no illustration, not even allowing a comparison to pictures of gardens that feature less-imposing structures.

³² Basil Oliver, *The Cottages of England* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1929), with a preface by Stanley Baldwin; and Harry Batsford, *Homes and Gardens of England* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1933).

The unassumingly working-folk perspective of *Four Hedges* challenges these material assertions of landed proprietorship and wealth as well as gardening books that uphold the language of social inequality and pretense. The popular author Beverly Nichols' (1898-1983) much-reissued bestseller *Down the Garden Path* (1932) displays social pretension and pithy self-deprecating anecdotes about putting up with an ill-mannered, inattentive manservant and Nichols' own blunders in laying out a garden at his cottage in Glatton, suggesting a rarefied world of rolled lawns manicured by an array of subservients, reinforced by the illustrator and designer Rex Whistler's decorative, even fanciful, pen drawings (fig. 3.12).³³ Pretentious ornament, embellishments, and allusions to classical mythology point more to the likes of an elegant pleasure garden aligned to aristocratic sensibilities, than a garden devoted in good part to utilitarian endeavor. Nichols' narrative's tone implies that he would never have allowed himself to be pictured sweating over a fork with his servants. *Down the Garden Path* remains a foil to Leighton's earth-rooted observations -- including the proverbially lowly snail and earthworm (figs. 3.13-14) -- which set a value upon nature only marginally under human control, and those who tend it for what they are. She pictures these creatures not as insignificant but as worthy, rightful citizens of the earth, each species evoking from its own her emotional response, index of an interest reaching far beyond the naturalist's impulse to delineate and record (*Frog*, fig 3.15).

Even more progressively oriented garden and gardening books that speak to the post-war economic difficulties of keeping up large properties and their attendant keepers,

³³ Beverly Nichols, *Down the Garden Path* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1932). Whistler (1905-1944) also illustrated its two sequels, *A Thatched Roof* (1933) and *A Village in a Valley* (1934).

for instance *The Modern English Garden* (1927) and *The Garden of Today* (1933), assume substantial gardens and employ full-page photographs of large garden areas and estates as opposed to close-up depictions of individual plants and creatures that frequent gardens.³⁴ As this popular interwar genre demonstrates, the land continued to serve largely as a marker of belonging to a certain stratum of wealth and landedness. *Four Hedges*, then, had the potential to further public discourse on the nature of a more open society and its hopes for development in England during the '30s. The book's vision of a dismantled British social order had to be put obliquely to conform to the dictates of the country life genre, and it is not known whether its readers caught how different its viewpoint was. In contrast, Brailsford's published political and social opinions were much less constricted than Leighton's; his numerous, more widely read articles and books on contemporary domestic and international affairs reveal an outright unequivocal appeal for equality and parity without regard to class or nationality, with a particular condemnation of Britain's social elitism.³⁵

Leighton's advocacy of social and economic equity figures significantly and more transparently in writings other than the rural life genre, particularly on the art and craft of wood engraving, which were commissioned around the time that *Four Hedges* appeared, by publishers other than Gollancz. *Wood-Engraving and Woodcuts* (1932);

³⁴ E. H. M. Cox, *The Modern English Garden* (London: Country Life, 1927); H. Avray Tipping, *The Garden of Today* (London: M. Hopkinson, 1933), which had first appeared in Tipping's column for *The Morning Post*.

³⁵ Brailsford reiterates these long-held beliefs in *Shelley, Godwin and Their Circle*, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Home University Library, 1951), 42, 44, 47, 51.

Wood Engravings of the 1930s (1936); and the same-year essay “Wood Engraving,”³⁶ stress the medium’s egalitarian nature, and its growing acceptance as a fine art, a welcome advance made possible by rising educational standards in a public thus increasingly prepared to take an interest in art; and, ironically, by the current hard times, which had forced talented engravers into illustrating books in addition to producing their own prints for wall decoration.³⁷ She asserted that “the wealthy patron has given way to the ordinary man” as a consumer of works of art, creating a market well served by the block’s capacity to strike off a far greater number of fine-quality but inexpensive prints as contrasted with the much more erodible etched copper plate. The private presses were finding their “precious editions” no longer in demand, for “the ordinary commercial illustrated book” had attained a startling level of quality as it was served by England’s finest wood engravers. “Thus the bulk of the public is able to know and possess the work of artists that formerly was reserved for a select few.”³⁸ She cited the important, recent

³⁶ *Wood-Engraving and Woodcuts* (reprinted and new editions 1932, 1944, 1948); *Wood Engravings of the 1930s* (London and New York: Studio Publications, 1936); “Wood Engraving,” *G. K.’s Weekly*, 24 Dec. 1936, 312-13. The 1936 publications carry a markedly more populist tone than the 1932 book.

³⁷ Leighton, *Wood-Engraving and Woodcuts*, 94; “Wood Engraving,” 313. The bull market for etchings in the 1920s collapsed during the depression years; Richard T. Godfrey, *Printmaking in Britain: A General History from its Beginnings to the Present Day* (New York: New York UP, 1978), 120, 125.

³⁸ Leighton, “Wood Engraving,” 312-13. In her large-minded desire to provide art of quality for the nation in general, she paralleled the spiritually inspired objects of her ancestor, the early-nineteenth-century bookbinder Archibald Leighton, who introduced inexpensive cloth as an alternative to the customary and far dearer leather binding. As a member of the Sandemanian sect, he had refused to take out a patent, viewing such assertion of property rights as immoral, in that it involved profiting from a gift from God. To accumulate wealth was unscriptural and unjust. My thanks to David Leighton for this about Archibald Leighton; David Leighton to the author, 27 Apr. 2008, email.

establishment of subscription print clubs in the United States as demonstrating the “downwards” trend of interest in that medium, “away from the specialising collector and connoisseur, to the level of the ordinary member of the community.” Ultimately a “perfect state of existence” would arise, “where art is no longer an esoteric thing, to be understood by an elect, rich few, but is a necessity for the masses.”³⁹ The books themselves function as highly democratic entities. Her “how-to” manual *Wood Engraving and Woodcuts*, with photographs of the tools and demonstrations of the various stages of the engraving and printing processes, purported to teach the art and craft to anyone. *Wood Engravers of the 1930s* illustrates the versatility of the wood engraving as an expression of the artist’s design and intention from an egalitarian, non-nationalistic perspective, reviewing the work of engravers from nearly twenty countries to illustrate the medium’s uses, in categories ranging from traditional design (portrayal of life “in a more or less objective manner”), by way of book illustration and commercial design, to abstract design. Such a leveling perspective contrasts with the print critic Malcolm Salaman’s nationalistically oriented *The New Woodcut* (1930), which groups selected artists by their country of origin.⁴⁰

³⁹ Leighton, *Wood Engravings of the 1930s*, 10. The use of the print for a mass market was not new; William Hogarth had employed it with great success in the commercial reproduction of his paintings. For a discussion of the eighteenth century as the great age of the English print, “traditionally the most democratic of all the arts,” and as a primary source of entertainment and edification for the majority of the populace during the Victorian era, see Brenda Rix, *Pictures for the Parlour: The English Reproductive Print from 1775 to 1900* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Canada, 1983).

⁴⁰ Leighton, *Wood Engravings of the 1930’s*, 15; Malcolm C. Salaman, *The New Woodcut* (London and New York: The Studio, 1930).

Interviewed in her studio at Four Hedges in 1937, Leighton further articulated her views on the need for art to be accessible and affordable, declaring it to be the artists' responsibility to make their work inexpensive and abundantly available:

This popularization of art should be the woodcutter's aim and ambition. I have no patience with the attempt that is being made by some dealers today to limit output so as to appeal to the snobbishness of collectors. With etchings that cannot be reproduced indefinitely there is a reason. With woodcuts there is definitely no excuse for the limiting of editions and numbering of prints. Not only is it a far more moral attitude for an artist to sell his prints at the lowest price and in the largest quantities possible, but I am sure that it will also be to his advantage in the long run. A wide following is so much safer than the whims of a few well-to-do collectors.⁴¹

This reciprocal benefit to artists and their public, she argued, was most evident in the Soviet Union, whose immense demand for cheap illustrated books was such that "every available Russian artist is fully employed"⁴² -- a declaration which stems from Brailsford's first-hand appraisals of that culture during his months-long visits in 1920 and 1926,⁴³ and her own study of Soviet works for *Wood Engravings of the 1930s*, in which they figure prominently.

Leighton's vision of a world where the public benefited from wood engravers' readily abundant and inexpensive art came closer to how the medium was put to work in mass-reproduced ephemeral images than to her own practice. Although she insisted that it was the responsibility of artists like herself to make art available to the widest possible

⁴¹ Sybil Vincent, "In the Studio of Clare Leighton," *Studio*, Mar. 1937, 146.

⁴² Leighton, "Wood Engraving," 313. Despite this populist rhetoric, all her engravings were printed in limited editions.

⁴³ Brailsford of course considered that "the socialization of publishing constituted an intolerable censorship which could not survive without 'grave detriment to the liberty of thought;'" Leventhal, *Last Dissenter*, 165-66, quoting H. N. Brailsford, *The Russian Workers' Republic* (London and New York: Harper & Bros., 1921), 88-90.

audience, the print market dictated otherwise, as did the publishers, the socialist Gollancz included. *Four Hedges'* independently pulled prints were limited to an edition of thirty, just enough to satisfy a small group of collectors, while the book itself had a respectable distribution for a specialized genre directed toward a middle-to-upper-middle-class readership, with production serving only what the market would bear.⁴⁴ Her idealistic rhetoric, which hinted at the supposed access-expanding practices of the Soviet government toward art (but not its censorship), seems more a criticism of the capitalist system of supply and demand than the beliefs she practiced. Regardless of whether England would ever break the barriers of class and economic inequality, or whether “the ordinary man” might ever purchase a copy, *Four Hedges* offered a more egalitarianly oriented alternative to those aiming to meet the pretentious expectations of the better classes. Although it capitalized on what had truly become the most widely enjoyed, barrier-breaking pastime in Britain, it offered a perspective heretofore ignored by other authors and publishers of the garden and gardening book genre.

Bridging Tradition and Modernism

The second half of this chapter assesses Leighton’s engagement with tradition and modernism during the 1930s, arguing that these conventional polarities are not at odds in

⁴⁴ Gollancz’s refusal to let Leighton publish a few of *Four Hedges'* engravings in the *London Mercury* before the book came out suggests a possessive mindset while providing insight into the relationship between artist and publisher. Leighton apologized to Scott-James: “I feel pretty bad about it, but as I am doing the blocks for his book, I am not in a position to go against him.” Leighton to R. A. Scott-James, 10 July 1935, Rolfe Arnold Scott-James Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin.

her vision of the rural landscape, even as her works avoid examining the material effects of modernization on the countryside. My conclusions parallel those of scholars in the disciplines of art history and cultural geography, whose recent investigations of the British landscape from the late nineteenth century to World War I find a strong connection between landscape, Englishness, and the modern (discussed in my Introduction). While Leighton honors the countryside's visual character overall and in detail, she employs a modernist vocabulary to express its essential structure and vital nature. *Four Hedges* shows that her subject matter and her response to individual plants and animals determine the extent to which she embraces a modernist idiom. Its scenes of pre-mechanized rural labor that evoke nostalgia for the past keeps up a dialogue with modern life in its overt avoidance of change, even as the narrative directly addresses modernity's reshaping of the land. Lisa Tickner's observation that "modernism is ... bound up with an interest in the formal procedures of art and the elements of picturing," and her expanded framework for considering artists' relationships to modernism and modernity serve as points of reference here. She suggests we should "consider ... [them] as in some sense 'modern' within a cultural history of representations of modernity, rather than an art history of canonical modernists." Indeed, Tickner and David Peters Corbett argue that artists' apparent rejection of modernity and the modernist experiments of their contemporaries "obliquely" relate them to these processes and are "inescapably 'modern' in [their] attempts to resist or evade them."⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Quoting from Tickner, "Afterword: Modernism and Modernity," *Modern Life & Modern Subjects*, 189; Corbett, *Modernity of English Art*, 5, 16.

Leighton's writings and artistic output from the 1930s do not address the cultural tension between Englishness, modernity, and internationalism that some British painters experienced in the wake of the Great Depression -- whether an artist could "go modern and still be British," as the painter and wood engraver Paul Nash put it.⁴⁶ Nash ultimately resolved this conflict by approaching his native landscape in constructivist and surrealist vocabularies, which resulted in highly personal evocations within the pastoral idiom. David Mellor points out that calls by the leading art magazine the *Studio* for artists to redirect their vision to "British pictures of British people, of British landscapes ... a thoroughgoing nationalism"⁴⁷ were at odds with Nash's dedicated efforts to engage with modernism. Unit 1, the group formed by Nash, fellow artists, architects, and the critic Herbert Read in 1933 to revitalize British art, was a "hard defense"⁴⁸ against a tide that "favoured an indigenous 'British' Culture which would probably take the form of a revival of 'the Nature Cult' -- a regression to traditional landscape genres and representationalism."⁴⁹ Both Nash and Leighton were deeply engaged in shaping a vision of the English countryside, employing the landscape to express personal concerns. Had

⁴⁶ Paul Nash, "Going 'Modern' and 'Being British,'" *Weekend Review*, 12 Feb. 1932, 333, quoted in David Mellor, "British Art in the 1930s," in *Class, Culture, and Social Change, A New View of the 1930s*, ed. Frank Gloversmith (Sussex: Harvester Press and NJ: Humanities Press, 1980), 187. Mellor sees the National Government's suspension of the Gold Standard in the fall of 1931 as a major factor in bringing about this artistic crisis.

⁴⁷ *Studio*, Feb. 1932, 63, quoted in Mellor, "British Art in the 1930s," 186-87.

⁴⁸ Paul Nash, letter to the *Times* (London), 12 June 1933, 10, quoted in *Ibid*, 188. Nash's viewpoints were published during 1931-32 in the *Weekend Review*, which was absorbed by the left-wing political magazine *New Statesman* in 1933; and in the *Times* in 1933.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 190; the material in single quotes is from Nash's letter to the *Times*, cited directly above.

Leighton pursued painting, Nash's primary medium at this time, to advance her vision, she might have engaged more fully with modernism and contributed publicly to the debates about what it meant to be a British artist during the period in which she was working on *Four Hedges*.

Although her professional commitment to English country-life book illustration firmly links her to "the Nature cult,"⁵⁰ Leighton negotiated a dialogue between landscape, representation, and modernism; tradition and innovation; past and present. *Four Hedges*' full-page engravings have a strength of design that derives from a modernist vocabulary, which includes the use of a flattened picture plane, stylization, and patterning. Rhythmic forms unify the subject, whether the forms of an individual plant or of people absorbed in communal rural labor (*Transplanting Walnut Tree*, fig. 3.16). Yet Joanna Selborne's assertion that her close observation of flora and fauna produced "purely naturalistic compositions" is not entirely unfounded.⁵¹ *Japanese Anemone* and *Fledgling Wrens* (3.17-18) draw heavily on the naturalist illustrator's eye. I would argue that this variation of formal means issued from her emotional response to the subject and its unique nature as well as her artistic intention. As she explained to Victor Gollancz as the book was being planned, it would not be a text for professional gardeners, but rather an evocation

⁵⁰ Although she exhibited with the Society of Wood Engravers in London, Leighton rarely participated in group venues for her occasional paintings. Even when she exhibited, just once, in October 1921, with the London Group (1913-1939), she did not do so as a member; and this was before she dedicated herself to engraving. See Denys J. Wilcox, *The London Group, 1913-1939: The Artists and Their Works*, (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1995), "Non-Member Exhibitors 1916-1939," 179.

⁵¹ Selborne, *British Wood Engraved Book Illustration*, 379.

of “the living things in the garden & the effect of the garden upon me, too, as a living thing.”⁵²

Japanese Anemone and *A Lap Full of Windfalls* (3.6), whose pages face one another when the book lies open, provide a template for studying Leighton’s formal approach to various subjects. Their corresponding delicacy and boldness of attenuated, curving lines meet the fine and pronounced marks of the engraving tools to create a dialogue between naturalism and abstraction. The anemone, which Leighton renders with old-fashioned sentiment reminiscent of Victorian garden-book illustration, evokes nostalgia for heirloom species while aligning with the botanist’s interest in accurately recording a specimen.⁵³ Its naturalism has an affinity with the Victorians’ interest in picturing individual specimens accurately to aid plant identification, as well as the decorative use of plant pictures in the wealth of illustrated books on gardens and gardening that appeared in the late nineteenth century. The apple-gathering scene, however, in its rhythmic patterns and balanced contrasts of light and shade, conveys the vitality and purposefulness of present-day labor; Leighton’s interest lies as much in the essentially significant shapes and rhythms as the subject itself. Indeed, in *Wood Engraving of the 1930s*, she indirectly cast her work as more attuned to abstraction than representation in its focus on “creative design,” which imparted a “greater importance to the design than to the subject-matter.”⁵⁴

⁵² Clare Leighton to Victor Gollancz, 23 Oct. 1934, quoted in *Ibid.*

⁵³ Native to China, the Japanese anemone has populated British gardens since the 1840s.

⁵⁴ Leighton indirectly groups herself in the category “creative design” by featuring one of her prints; *Wood Engraving of the 1930s*, 55.

With regard to dominant thematic patterns, *Four Hedges*' engravings and text establish a tension between nostalgia for traditional country ways and the frequently unsettling here and now. The garden serves as a guardian of memory and heritage, a place of refuge from modern anxieties; then as a platform to display the unrelenting laws of Nature. The sensually rendered *Crown Imperial* (fig. 3.19) stimulates a longing for the once-observed fertility rites of May Day and the flower's former place as a high adornment of the queen's crown.⁵⁵ Yet the clinically observed *Blackbird Fledgling* (fig. 3.20), ugly and alone on a near-blank page, dismisses all trace of fond sentiment or vitality;⁵⁶ Leighton subverts the idea of the garden as a place of repose and sweetness by interjecting a strident image of the Darwinian struggle for survival. I would suggest that her frequent, at times jolting, shift from nostalgic images to harsh objective observation reflects ambiguities of an interwar culture seeking comfort in an idealized past, longing for a lost way of being in the face of the impermanence of life in a secular world, confronted with an impersonal, fragmented existence driven by modernization and mechanization.

Despite the illustrations' various formal means and thematic tensions that seem to speak for larger cultural issues of the time, *Four Hedges* maintains a visual integrity arising from the illustrations' stylization and a harmony and balance between them and the printed page. The gracefully curving *Grape Hyacinth* and *Hyacinth*'s geometric form relate in their stylized, "clean-cut" shapes even as they reveal the unique character and

⁵⁵ Leighton, *Four Hedges*, 25-26. Noel Brailsford's "Magic of May Day," *New Leader*, 30 Apr. 1926, 19-20, explores the history of this pagan rite of spring.

⁵⁶ Leighton's written reaction to the fledgling is as abrupt as the rendering: "I replace the grotesque object;" *Four Hedges*, 40.

structure of each bulb, even of the same family (3.21-22). The pages illustrating *Cherry Blossom* and *Transplanting Walnut Tree* (figs. 3.23, 3.16) exhibit skillful balance and spacing among individual forms and the whole design, and between image, word, and page.

Leighton considered wood engraving's capability to exact clean and hard-edged lines and pronounced contrasts of black and white (within an image and in its relationship to the whiteness of the page) to be uniquely suited to express her times: "The definiteness of statement that is inevitable in this medium ... is one of the main reasons for the present-day revival of wood engraving: a scientific age that thinks cleanly and precisely must carry this same attitude of thought into its art."⁵⁷ In contrast to etching's relative inability to emphasize whites and blacks, wood engraving "permits of far greater precision of tone and of a much stronger rendering of form, which is the intellectual element."⁵⁸ Not only was wood engraving capable of expressing the dominant attitude of her times, it resonated with the modern domestic interior's "strong simple lines and proportions ... and the more general use of positive, plain colours...." The increasing preference for white walls was in harmony with the "dead black" of the printing ink, a "denser black" than etching could produce. If the medium aligned with a modernist aesthetic, the subject matter and means of expression were not bound to this idiom: "In short it does not matter if a work of art be traditional, 'modern', abstract or surrealist, so

⁵⁷ Clare Leighton, "The Mutations of the Woodcut," *New York Times*, 16 Feb 1936, BR5, a review of Arthur M. Hind's *Introduction to a History of the Woodcut* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1935).

⁵⁸ Leighton, *Wood-Engraving and Woodcuts*, 95.

long as it has life.”⁵⁹ *Four Hedges* shows that despite the challenges of having to supply her publisher and her readership with the anticipated rural nostalgia, Leighton managed to engage key issues of her day, creating a significant dialogue between tradition and modernism while advancing her vision for a more egalitarian society.

Negotiating Innovation and Heritage: Modernist Architecture and the Vernacular Landscape

Leighton’s decision to introduce modernist design to her property in Buckinghamshire, still the most rural of the Home Counties in the early 1930s,⁶⁰ resonates with issues that she addresses in *Four Hedges*: an interest in finding common ground and steadily developing continuity between tradition and the new, and in casting her vision of progress in country terms. Her embrace of modern architecture took form in a commission to the socially committed architectural cooperative Tecton for a studio at Four Hedges (ca. 1934, fig. 3.24),⁶¹ whose simplicity and functionalism she saw as a further stage of the clearly utilitarian vernacular architecture that had helped define the English landscape for centuries. Although the building of the studio does not figure in the gardening book that was simultaneously engaging her, it runs parallel to *Four Hedges*’ negotiation of the organic relations of past and present, tradition and modernity, in appreciating the best of the past and commitment to a very different and better future.

⁵⁹ Leighton, *Wood Engravings of the 1930’s*, 14, 186.

⁶⁰ Francis Bendall, *Rural Architecture in Buckinghamshire*, The Tulleries Brochures, vol. II, no. 5 (New York: Ludowici-Celadon Co., 1930), 163.

⁶¹ The only image of the building that I have been able to locate is an early photograph reproduced in Vincent, “In the Studio of Clare Leighton,” 144; the article does not comment on the studio’s design or interior.

Similarly, her involvement with the progressive social and agricultural experiment at Dartington Hall, Devon, which aimed to recreate rural life as a model for national life overall and to generate a general social transformation from the countryside, shows an engagement with crucial issues of the nation's future beyond what she could articulate in *Four Hedges*.

Leighton's commission in the mid-thirties to the London-based Tecton Group helped introduce cutting-edge continental design to a country still deeply absorbed in historicism and a re-creative use of the vernacular, just beginning to take a serious interest in the modern movement. Tecton, a collective founded in 1932 by the Soviet Russian architect Berthold Lubetkin (1901-1990) and other like-minded designers, pioneered continental modernism in Britain. Lubetkin, who had studied in Berlin and Paris before immigrating to Britain in 1931, was influential in the Modern Architectural Research Group (MARS), formed in 1933 by an intellectual élite to advance the study and practice of modernism. The socialist ideals of Lubetkin, who had witnessed the Bolshevik revolution while a student and maintained that architecture was "politics pursued by other means," must have appealed to Leighton's and Brailsford's egalitarian sensibilities; his mantra, "nothing is too good for ordinary people," challenged the class-bound complacency of 1930s Britain.⁶² Certainly Tecton's object of making modern

⁶² Lubetkin's style was collaborative. Peter Coe's and Malcolm Reading's *Lubetkin and Tecton; Architecture and Social Commitment* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1981) remains a key critical study of Lubetkin's and Tecton's socialist vision. For an overview of early British modernism and the Tecton Group, see John Summerson, "Architecture," in *The Edwardian Age and the Inter-war Years*, ed. Boris Ford, The Cambridge Guide to the Arts in Britain, vol. 8 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989), 237-45.

design available at modest prices was attractive to the couple both ideologically and practically.

The project, headed by Tecton's Valentine Harding and designed to Leighton's specifications, unites modernistic design with vernacular forms and materials.⁶³ *Pilotis* support the upper story of the sharply angled building, which features a panoramic north-facing window set in the steeply pitched roof. The slender piers and covered terrace, which links the structure to the outdoors while providing shelter from the elements, are defining features of much modern architecture of this period even as they ultimately derive from ancient vernacular dwellings and barns. Native materials such as wood shingles and brick substitute for stark white concrete, the material that had become the classic expressive means of "the modern." Leighton's decision to sheathe the studio's modern design in traditional materials and to retain their natural coloring reduces the "shock of the new,"⁶⁴ and may have issued from her aesthetic sense, a desire to honor both innovation and tradition, or in terms of citizenship, as a defense against potential controversy. Leighton, probably aware of the outcry awakened when the concrete and simulated concrete house "High and Over" in the nearby village of Amersham was erected in 1930 (John Summerson considers it the first domestic modernist "shock," arousing "a resistance to modernism which made the selection of sites for future houses in the new style a sensitive matter"), may have been concerned not to provoke her

⁶³ Valentine Harding (1905-1940), at that time the youngest partner in the firm.

⁶⁴ Using the title of the art critic Robert Hughes' 1980 television series and book, which describe the development of and reaction to modern art and architecture (*The Shock of the New: Art and the Century of Change* (updated and enlarged edition, London: Thames & Hudson, 1991).

neighbors.⁶⁵ Whatever her motive, the studio visualizes her admiration for the functionalism of such vernacular forms as barns and silos, that were “unembellished and determined by use ..., rooted in the earth and constructed for work ..., shapes of the earth world.”⁶⁶ The essentially utilitarian nature of buildings erected by plain country people for their work resonated with Leighton’s sense of modern architectural design, as she encountered in them a dialogue and continuity between past and present.

Her commission to Tecton brought a radical modernist aesthetic to the traditional rural landscape, demonstrating her belief that these conventional polarities shared commonalities in their dedication to functionalist forms. I would also argue that the studio was a sign of her interest not just in utilitarianism but also in the firm’s guiding principle of implementing socialist ideals for the betterment of humankind. As Coe and Reading assert, Lubetkin’s “deeply held socialist beliefs were bound to a vision of the role which architecture could play in the construction of a new society.... No one was more aware than [he] that in Britain in the 1930s clear links were being made between the modern aesthetic and political radicalism.” Projects for a TB Clinic, the Finsbury Health Centre, and innovative public housing demonstrated Tecton’s commitment to social change. Even the firm’s widely acclaimed work for the London Zoo was intended as “a metaphor for a utopian future;” critics saw in the Penguin Pool (1934) a “new level of achievement and sophistication in British architecture.”⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Summerson, “Architecture,” 238. The house was designed for concrete but was built of concrete frame and brick infill faced to resemble concrete.

⁶⁶ Leighton, *Country Matters*, 69, making analogies to a chair bodger’s hut.

⁶⁷ Coe and Reading, *Lubetkin and Tecton*, 11, 43, 54, 36. MARS’ continual and conspicuous avoidance of “direct political involvement in the ‘struggle’ for the

Valentine Harding's contemporaneous design for his own house at Farnham Common, Buckinghamshire (1934-35, fig. 3.25) shares certain commonalities with Leighton's studio even as it adheres more closely to formalist principles. While the sheltered terraces supported by *pilotis* and freestanding spiral staircases are integral to both designs, the house's reinforced concrete construction and linear planes speak to modernist interests without reference to the vernacular or historicism. Taken together, these three early modernist structures and perhaps others began to redefine the Buckinghamshire landscape of the 1930s, even as Leighton's interest in relating her studio's forms and materials to those of indigenous functional buildings distinguishes her project from these more "purist" modernist examples.

I want to suggest that Leighton's vision of a landscape capable of accommodating both traditional and modern architecture took form in the early '30s at Dartington Hall, a rural community with which she and Brailsford were closely associated, that advanced the idea that the country and country life could be the basis for national life.⁶⁸ The "Dartington Experiment," initiated in 1920s by Dorothy and Leonard Elmhirst to promote a regeneration of the countryside, progressive education, and the performing and visual arts, lay on a 2,400-acre fourteenth-century estate near Totnes in south Devon.⁶⁹ The

transformation of society" and its apparent dedication to the bare doctrine of formalism led Lubetkin to form the socially committed Architects and Technicians Group (ATO) in 1935 (Ibid., 51).

⁶⁸ Studies of Dartington include Michael Dunlop Young, *The Elmhirsts of Dartington, The Creation of a Utopian Community* (London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), and Victor Bonham-Carter, *Dartington Hall: The Formative Years, 1925-1957* (Dulverton, Somerset: Exmoor Press, 1970).

⁶⁹ The American social-activist heiress Dorothy Whitney Straight (1887-1968) purchased Dartington in 1925 with her second husband, Leonard Elmhirst (1893-1974), a Yorkshire

Elmhirsts set out to reconstruct the medieval buildings and to introduce the idioms of modern international architecture to the estate, believing that it was crucial to achieve an aesthetic balance between old and new. Dartington's first modernistic building, the Corbusier-inspired High Cross House, designed by William Lescaze as the headmaster's residence (1931, fig. 3.26), was conspicuously sited on a rise overlooking the nearby Old Parsonage. Composed of two interlocking brick blocks, one whitewashed, the other painted blue, it invites a dialogue with its medieval neighbor. The architectural press saw in this juxtaposition of epochs "the beginning of a new harmony in a changed landscape."⁷⁰ Leighton herself was fully invested in the possibilities and means of realizing a new order in which Dartington's character and heritage would find its place. Her correspondence with the Elmhirsts, who solicited her advice regarding the architecture of another early project, a nursery school to be erected on the estate, shows a concern for the visual integrity of a landscape that could successfully accommodate the past and present. While the architect must respect the building's surroundings,

agronomist who devoted much of his life to the agricultural problems of England and India. Brailsford, a frequent speaker at the Elmhirsts' Sunday-evening gatherings on subjects ranging from Voltaire to current domestic and international developments, looked to Dorothy to support his causes, including the International Brigade, in which (aged over sixty) he tried to enlist against Fascism in Spain. She in turn engaged Leighton as a consultant in her arts projects, including innovative methods for teaching art to children and supporting the fresco work of the American painter Mark Tobey while he was in residence at the school during the early '30s. Clare Leighton to Dorothy Elmhirst, 9 Dec. [1930], 7 June 1932, Dorothy Elmhirst to Clare Leighton, 7 June 1932, Papers of Dorothy Whitney Elmhirst, Dartington Hall Trust Archive and Collection, Dartington Hall, Totnes, Devon.

⁷⁰ David Jeremiah, "Dartington Hall – A Landscape of an Experiment in Rural Reconstruction," *English Countryside between the Wars*, ed. Brassley, Burchardt, and Thompson, 122, 128. Jeremiah does not reference the source of the quote.

“Dartington and its earth and trees” had the capacity to inspire “something very vital and new ...,” advancing a vision of a revitalized countryside.⁷¹

Just as the landscape was being unprecedentedly transformed by unregulated speculative building, ribbon development, and new commercial enterprises, Dartington as a whole was acclaimed as an “ideal model of a modernisation that showed respect for the character of rural England, with the sensitive introduction of new building materials,”⁷² the restoration of ancient structures, and the consciously pursued compatibility of new buildings with the ancient contours of the land.⁷³ The positive critical response to Dartington’s architectural experiment confirmed that traditional and progressively designed buildings could be sensitively sited in a self-contained community. Although the estate’s claim that its program as a whole could provide a model for a planned nation -- “generating a social revolution from the English countryside” -- proved idealistic, its architectural program manifested a new vision of Englishness.

Leighton’s much smaller-scaled version of a countryside that could successfully assimilate the old and the new must be viewed in this light. Highly satisfied with her studio’s design and wanting to promote a firm that seemed to be “definitely coming to the front,” she lobbied Dorothy Elmhirst to consider Val Harding, the Tecton architect who

⁷¹ Clare Leighton to Dorothy Elmhirst, 9 Dec. [1930], Papers of Dorothy Whitney Elmhirst.

⁷² Jeremiah, “Dartington Hall,” 117.

⁷³ “The New Rural England,” *Architect and Building News*, 30 June 1933, 404, quoted in *Ibid.*

had led her project, for the next development at Dartington.⁷⁴ Moreover, Leighton's promotion of the Dartington social and agricultural experiment by contributing her engravings as features of its outreach literature reveals her public commitment to the ideals of rural regeneration.⁷⁵ Although the Dartington experiment proved financially unsustainable, Leighton's advancement of its ideals has parallels in *Four Hedges*' vision of a countryside in which tradition and modernity not only are compatible but also can come together to create a new order.

A Modernist Approach to Preserving the Landscape

Leighton's active struggle during the mid-1930s to protect the rural landscape against unchecked development and unreflective historicist design took form in her efforts to protect local heritage sites and her children's book, *The Wood that Came Back* (1934).⁷⁶ Disregard for heritage, which is crucial to a vision that finds continuity between past and present, and disrespect for the countryside's indigenous people, plants, and animals are themes that these endeavors and *Four Hedges* address, but which the garden book can at times take up only briefly or obliquely. Leighton's introduction of a studio of

⁷⁴ Clare Leighton to Dorothy Elmhirst, 1 Mar. 1935, Papers of Dorothy Whitney Elmhirst. She also sent Elmhirst photographs of Valentine's work and noted that the February 1935 issue of the *Architectural Review* featured a house he had designed.

⁷⁵ Roger (R. C.) Morel (Manager, Orchards & Cider-House Dept.) to Leonard Elmhirst, 31 Mar. 1933, Papers of Leonard Elmhirst. The publisher Collins approved her pre-publication contribution to Dartington's brochures of *Cider-making: October* and another engraving from *The Farmer's Year*, which was scheduled to come out in the fall of 1933.

⁷⁶ Clare Leighton, *The Wood That Came Back* (London: Ivor Nicholson and Watson, 1934; Poughkeepsie, NY: Artists and Writers Guild, 1935).

modernist design into the Buckinghamshire landscape, which she believed represented a further stage of craftsman-like practicality, came at a time when she was working to save Whiteleaf Cross, a nearby prehistoric site whose visual integrity was under the threat of suburbanization. Set amidst a period of economic and political crisis, issues of citizenship and tensions in asserting measured public concerns over unreflective private interest resound clearly in her advocacy of modernism and the nationalization of heritage locations. The following argues that her vision of the landscape encompassed a modernist aesthetic compatible with her regard for and impulse to preserve indigenous material presences on the land. Taking David Matless' broader exposition of competing visions of landscape and Englishness, vis-a-vis the planning and preservation of a countryside under stress from the developments of the automobile age,⁷⁷ I would suggest that Leighton's preservationist interests should be seen as "expressing a particular modernism, committed to order and design," by no means identical with nostalgia and anti-modernity.

My argument follows that Leighton's mid-1930s efforts to protect the landscape, notably her advocacy for the area surrounding Whiteleaf Cross, was an early, progressive attempt to plan a landscape both modern and traditional under public authority as opposed to a conservatively oriented attempt to safeguard the rural past. This reconfigured version of Englishness raises issues of authority and governance over the years when England sustained its biggest loss of agricultural land, land-use policies were in their infancy,⁷⁸ and proposals to nationalize property were often construed not merely

⁷⁷ Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, 14.

⁷⁸ Howkins, *Death of Rural England*, 110. To give another example, for all its title, the 1933 Town and Country Planning Act did not confer the power to formulate sound planning.

as socialist, but downright Bolshevik. Although tax policies after the Great War had forced many great landowners to divest themselves of much of their holdings, which opened the countryside to increased speculative building, the National Trust and the Council for the Preservation of Rural England (CPRE), unique in its aim to foster a comprehensive approach to the rural landscape, would not attain substantial influence in protecting and planning the countryside until after World War II.⁷⁹

Leighton's and Brailsford's efforts to preserve the landscape and its archaeological and historical sites from unplanned development touched on larger tensions of economics, politics, and culture, and demonstrate a necessary accommodation to the forces of suburbanization. In a letter to *The Times*, Brailsford urged that the view from the Cross, which panoramically overlooks the Vale of Aylesbury and harbors remains of a Bronze Age settlement and burial barrows, should be preserved as a national landmark. "Rarely is natural beauty so closely linked with monuments of the remoter past. We who live in this reminiscent landscape believe that it should be respected as a national possession." The appeal, signed by Leighton and neighbors prominent in the arts and letters, solicited funds to secure the two fields that dominated the foreground of the site, over sixty acres that were on the market and "ripe for development."⁸⁰ The property

⁷⁹ Although the Trust had been established in 1895, the CPRE was a relatively new organization, founded in 1926, which sought to coordinate groups concerned with architecture, planning, landowning, leisure, local government, and wildlife; Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, 25.

⁸⁰ [H. N. Brailsford], "A Buckinghamshire Landmark," *Times* (London), 10 July 1934, 17. Other signers included the painter John Nash, the archaeologist Ernest Mackay, the journalist A. G. Gardiner, and the writer Ernest Rhys, editor of the *Everyman's Library*. The Cross itself was in no danger, having been preserved with its immediate surroundings under a nineteenth-century Enclosure Act.

was to be offered to the Trust, which had endorsed the appeal along with the CPRE. Those parts of the larger field not essential to preserving the view were to be sold for building; if necessary, those funds would repay gifts that were treated as loans without interest. In an economy of scarcity, landscape must necessarily accommodate the past and future growth. The appeal also raised issues surrounding the concurrent rapid growth of the leisure and building industries, whose agendas regarding access to and ownership of the countryside markedly differed. With regard to the “open-air movement,” a term used by David Matless to encompass everyone from the weekend walker to highly organized fresh-air groups like the Ramblers Association,⁸¹ the Cross served as a popular destination for hikers, much featured in the proliferating travel and walking guides. Likewise, the nearby Icknield Way, a primitive but crucial roadway that predates the Roman invasion, and the ancient beech woods were under threat of “a builder’s road ... and a compact suburb.”⁸² By setting out to preserve the landscape and increase the public’s involvement with commonly held property, the appeal sought to protect the interests of open-air citizenship.

Leighton’s prints of the site and a letter that she sent to the Oxford don Edmund Blunden to raise additional funds for “The Whiteleaf Cross Appeal” alternately cast the landscape in “true-to-life” and nostalgic perspectives while consistently underscoring its agricultural character. Her engraving of the landmark, and another depicting the fields and woods that mosaic the valley, render their subjects more or less naturalistically (*Whiteleaf Cross, View from Whiteleaf Cross*, 1934, figs. 3.27-28). Issued in editions of

⁸¹ Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, 14.

⁸² Brailsford, “Buckinghamshire Landmark,” 17.

100, the prints serve as topographical records of Buckinghamshire's agricultural and historic heritage, likenesses of a farming area yet undisturbed by development. This is all the more apparent when one considers how she incorporated and reinvented the Vale of Aylesbury for *Stooking: August* (1933, fig. 2.8). *The Farmer's Year* engraving that identifies an idealized English agriculture of the past with national life. *Whiteleaf Cross's* prominent harvest stooks and stands of beech emphasize the landmark's cultivated and natural states, even as Paul Nash registers his reaction to the popular destination and the mystery surrounding its origins (*White Cross*, 1920, fig. 3.29). Nash's lifelong approach to landscape and nature centered on an emotional response to a place, as Jemima Montagu relates, "the idea of an inherent quality or spirit particular to certain landscapes."⁸³ While Leighton depicts the grove and its sacred feature in relation to the nearby cultivated fields, implying human labor but not recreational activity, Nash imparts an otherworldly sense to the trees and acknowledges the landmark's human presences, ethereal figures walking the path toward the spread arms of the cross, as fretful and ambiguous as the trees themselves.⁸⁴

Leighton's engravings underscore the abundance of the land stretching out from Whiteleaf Hill, but her petition in the form of a personal letter to her friend, the poet and

⁸³ Montagu ("Modern Artist, Ancient Landscape," in *Paul Nash*, ed. Montagu, 10-12) is the most recent Nash scholar to discuss this crucial facet of his work.

⁸⁴ Nash's early writings and art show a strong kinship with trees, honoring their sacred presence. Scholars of his art can only speculate on the meaning of *White Cross*: Andrew Causey (*Paul Nash*, 92) sees "a symbolist element" in the work, yet acknowledges that its meaning "is hard to pin down." Malvern (*Modern Art, Britain, and the Great War*, 154) cites *White Cross* when describing Nash's post-war imagery as "evocative, elusive and poetic rather than iconographic," and suggests that it may relate to contemporary debates about the design of war cemeteries or possibly "part of the more private themes in Nash's oeuvre as a whole."

countryside writer Edmund Blunden, sets out to draw on his deep emotional attachment to his native landscape. Whiteleaf Cross' endangered fields bordered land that sheltered the ancient burial landmark of Cop Hill, a property owned by Merton College, Oxford, of which Blunden was a Fellow and Tutor. Invoking Blunden's depth of feeling, Leighton reminded him that, "The Cop Hill neighborhood is a very tender, lovely piece of England" and expressed the hope that Merton would contribute to the Whiteleaf Cross fund. The landscape evoked is the southern metaphor so frequently given national identification, the gently rolling hills and woodland that were increasingly being consigned to memory. Her appeal also reveals the extent to which she and Brailsford were serving as grassroots citizen-activists at a time when public authority and planning controls were in their infancy. She sought additional funds for trees to screen the houses that had gone up near the fields before the campaign began, and urged Blunden to petition Merton to support an appeal to the Rural Planning Committee to zone "the whole of this part of the Chilterns as agricultural land." Her crossing out the words "an open space" in the letter to write in "agricultural land" indicates a change in her vision for the future use and character of the landscape, dedicating the area to productive use as distinct from an indeterminate, or perhaps recreational purpose of the kind that George Orwell pillories in *Coming Up for Air*.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Clare Leighton to Edmund Blunden, 8 Feb. 1935, Edmund Blunden Papers. By early 1935 Leighton and Brailsford had secured all but £50 of the £3,000 needed to protect the fields from development. In George Orwell's *Coming Up for Air* (London: Gollancz, 1939, Part IV, 5) the rural England of George Bowling's youth has been overrun by suburbanization and "health-food cranks or ... the Boy Scouts - in either case they're great ones for Nature and the open air."

Leighton's *The Wood That Came Back* (1934, fig. 3.30)⁸⁶ takes up issues at the forefront of the battle for the shaping of the countryside in the late '20s and '30s. Written for children, whose active participation in the preservation movement, the book implies, would be necessary for it to endure, the tale speaks to the consequences of unplanned development in terms of the physical disfigurement of the landscape and how this acts on the countryside's most vulnerable, and so often disregarded, inhabitants, its wildlife. An unthinking developer levels a "lovely little round hill with a beautiful wood on top," rendering homeless a great community of animals, birds, and plants, to build a house with a "bright pink roof and heaps of windows" (fig. 3.31). But the hill's first citizens gather in common purpose to drive out the interlopers (just as Brailsford, Leighton, and their neighbors had banded together to keep the bulldozers from White Cross), leaving the intrusive house at the mercies of the regenerating wood, "until at last the house was buried and disappeared."⁸⁷ The hilltop crowning "bright pink roof" probably refers to the influential planner and architect Clough Williams-Ellis' polemic against such eyesores that were increasingly visible on the southern landscape. In his *England and the Octopus*, such imagery concentrates his argument for preservation under the aegis of a well-planned, public authority: "We know well enough that decent God-fearing, God-damning Englishmen live very contentedly in the pink asbestos bungalows; and if they chance to

⁸⁶ Illustrated with thirty-three drawings. Leighton wrote one other children's book, *The Musical Box* (London: Gollancz, 1932).

⁸⁷ Leighton, *Wood That Came Back*, n. pag. Certainly the special hill in *The Wood That Came Back*, as well as similar elevated wooded clumps that crown many of Leighton's other landscapes, serve as a metaphor for regenerated Nature and sacred places. Such elevated woods frequently shelter evidence of ancient communities, such as burial mounds and stone circles; their associative qualities -- as sanctuaries and ancient holy sites -- move them beyond lovely compositional devices to articulate a spirit of place.

be on Salisbury Plain or Dartmoor or the South Downs, or some commanding hill in the Cotswolds or the Chilterns where they can be seen for miles around, they are the more content and very far from ashamed ... who shall decide what is and what is not an outrage?"⁸⁸ As David Matless points out, Williams-Ellis' book "promoted the message" of the CPRE,⁸⁹ the recently established, comprehensive approach-to-planning organization Leighton and Brailsford had marshalled in their preservationist efforts.

Leighton's concern for all nature and its imperiled balance runs throughout *Four Hedges*, where the indispensably necessary work of ant and worm and wasp counts for as much as the brief passing deeds of the garden's human makers. It and *The Wood That Came Back* serve as forums for her concerns and urgent sense of the need for planned stewardship of the hard-pressed land. The children's book is ultimately an allegory of Nature's eventual victory over self-serving defacements of the landscape, in its way a radically altered version of the ongoing urban-country conflict,⁹⁰ a voice for those most fundamentally linked to the land, but unable to speak for themselves. In both, her alarm at people's increasing estrangement from the land, whether as the ultimate source of their existence or as a matter of simple personal familiarity, redirects the old city-country

⁸⁸ Clough Williams-Ellis, *England and the Octopus* (London: Bles, 1928), 16.

⁸⁹ Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, 25.

⁹⁰ Leighton had taken up the urban-country theme when illustrating (fifty-five drawings) Eleanor Farjeon's *Perkin the Pedlar* (London: Faber and Faber, 1932), a straightforward warning against unchecked urban sprawl.

tropes to a discourse on the fundamental relationship between humanity and the rest of the natural world.⁹¹

The Critical Response

The British and American literary and art critics who reviewed the book appreciated Leighton's sincere, unsentimental, and imaginative portrayal of an individual's relationship with nature, a welcome change from those who chronicled only "dazzling successes" with the "customary process photographs of lily-pools and brilliant herbaceous borders."⁹² This weariness with the status quo can be found in the comments of several critics, in particular the Americans, which touched on her egalitarian sensibilities. They noted her dedication to the commonplace and the engravings' equally dignified depiction of the garden's small inhabitants and its creators and caretakers. What critics took to be her authentic examination of life around her revealed "a knowledge of the earth as an elemental thing" that spoke to the human spirit.⁹³ Perhaps Alvin Johnson articulated this most clearly when he spoke of *Four Hedges*' sincerity of "religious feeling." He found Leighton's observations and interpretation of the natural world vital

⁹¹ Regarding *Four Hedges*' engagement with these issues: on the usefulness of the ant, 65-66; concern for the disappearing hedges, which harbor nesting birds, other wildlife and plants, 75, 134; the disappearing wasp, 89; on the sense of and contact with the earth, 87.

⁹² "A Gardener's Chronicle," *Times Literary Supplement* (London), 2 Nov. 1935, 694; H. E. Bates, "A Wilderness Transformed," *New Statesman and Nation Literary Supplement*, Nov. 1935, 696.

⁹³ "A Leighton Book," *Art Digest*, 15 Dec. 1935, 22; Henry Beston, "An Artist Walks in a Chiltern Garden," VII, 9; *New York Herald Tribune Books*, 10 Nov. 1935, VII, 9.

and spiritual, especially when compared to what he argued were the far-removed, false totems of organized religion that mankind had conjured up to worship: “Four Hedges [sic] is ... beautiful in its pantheism, for all these lovely woodcuts have a religious feeling and so does the warm, rich text. If people had rested clear eyes honestly upon the eagerly vital life under the skies they would never have corrupted the wholesome and heartening religious emotion by imprisoning it in hollow brass effigies But mankind has too little real feeling and too great facility in fictions.”⁹⁴

In his Introduction to *Four Hedges*, the American etcher John Taylor Arms expressed a similar reaction to her work. Leighton’s quick perception and deeply felt response to “the beauty of the soil and of the labor that goes to the tilling of it ... of insects and birds and homely beasts ... of trees and plants and flowers and blades of grass...” made the contents of the book “live” for him. Her reaction to beauty in all its facets and her capacity to interpret it so sensitively bore the marks of sincerity, truth, knowledge, and skill, he argued. Without directly saying that modernism was crucial to her powers of articulation, his commentary resorts to a modernist vocabulary. He credited the work’s “vitality, variety, and imaginative power” to an integration of drawing and design: “A powerful, but subtle draughtsman, everything she does speaks of design ... everywhere there is selection, organization, arrangement, and everywhere a nice balancing of black and white and grey. Area fits into area, value matches value, lines flow and interweave into a strong, significant pattern.” None of the prints’ patterns were

⁹⁴ Alvin Johnson to Clare Leighton, 12 Aug. 1936, Clare Leighton Papers. Johnson (1874-1971), a founder of the New School for Social Research in New York and its director from the early 1920s to the 1940s, met Leighton through Brailsford, whom he knew from the *New Republic*, and had arranged for him to give a series of lectures at the School in the mid-1920s.

alike, which made them individual works of art, but they still possessed “a homogeneity” that seemed to “incorporate them into the text ...[making] illustrations and text one.”⁹⁵ Other reviewers also praised the engravings’ “vitality,” which arguably derives from her consummate draftsmanship and sense of rhythmic form, all the more evident when we compare *Berries* (fig. 3.4) with John Nash’s more two-dimensional, patterned, static *Deadly Nightshade* (1927, fig. 3.32).⁹⁶ Critics attributed the “singular beauty” of Leighton’s engravings to these rhythms, which could convey “delicacy and strength,” according to what she was portraying.⁹⁷

I would also argue that this use of modernist rhythmic design is crucial to her articulation of working people who have a close relationship to the land, and forms an important component of her vision that the reviewers did not address. *Scything*’s (fig. 3.33) rhythmic forms unite an idealization of the scythe-wielder Noel Brailsford, his instrument, and the field, and move the scene beyond representation to a dialogue between modernist idioms: shape and pattern, light and shadow, positive and negative space. The voids created by the scythe’s blade challenge conventional self-contained illustration with straight-edged borders, and offer an analogy between the functions of that instrument and of the engraver’s tools. This arguably innovative technique, under

⁹⁵ John Taylor Arms, introduction to Clare Leighton, *Four Hedges*, commissioned for the American edition (New York: Macmillan).

⁹⁶ John Nash, *Poisonous Plants: Deadly, Dangerous, and Suspect* (London: F. Etchells & H. Macdonald, 1927); see also his illustrations for H. E. Bates’ *Flowers and Faces* (London: Golden Cockerell Press, 1935) for additional examples of his two-dimensional, patterned style.

⁹⁷ J. Donald Adams, “A Distinguished Book by Clare Leighton,” *New York Times*, 1 Dec. 1935, BR6.

which the boundaries between image and page, and even image and viewer, appear to dissolve, was inexplicable to the young Beaumont Newhall, who criticized both the small and the full-paged engravings' "for no apparent reason" irregular outlines, the prints' relationship to the letterpress, and the coarseness of the engraving methods.⁹⁸

This chapter has addressed Leighton's key projects and concerns of the mid-1930s as they relate to the landscape, most of which set out to initiate a dialogue between tradition and innovation, past and present, the city and the country. Even *Four Hedges*, which evokes a deep nostalgia for disappearing folk customs, mediates aspects of the conventional urban-country, tradition-modernity debates. Apropos of Leighton's and Brailsford's relationship to the land, the engravings cast the urban newcomers as hard-working tillers of the soil, conceivably back-to-the-land farmer-gardeners, yet the narrative counters this romantic, ultimately untenable illusion. With the novelty of mowing their fields by hand quickly giving way to the task's arduous nature, the couple welcomes the gardener's bringing in a power machine to finish the work,⁹⁹ unlike her fellow engraver and friend Eric Gill and Hilary Pepler, whose rural artistic community at Ditchling in East Sussex was a conscious and dedicated effort to revive and live by pre-industrial values, entailing consistent use of such antiquated tools as scythe and flail. The couple had no intention of implementing the back-to-the-fields doctrines of Hilaire

⁹⁸ Beaumont Newhall, "New Books on Art - Clare Leighton's Garden," *American Magazine of Art*, Feb.1936, 123. While Newhall (1908-1993) appreciated *The Farmer's Year* engravings, he preferred the delicacy of Ernest Meissonier's wood-engraved illustrations for Léon Curmer's celebrated edition of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's *Paul et Virginie* (1838) to *Four Hedges*' engravings.

⁹⁹ Leighton, *Four Hedges*, 48, 61.

Belloc and G. K. Chesterton, seeking instead the hard-earned knowledge and genuine feeling for one's land along with the assistance of modern technology.¹⁰⁰

But the hardships of rural life and the changing face of the land undergoing mechanization remain unaddressed in *Four Hedges*. *Scything's* promotion of the rural idyll during a time of persistent agricultural depression perhaps reaches an ironic conclusion with its publication on the cover of the *Land Worker*, the official organ of the National Union of Agricultural Laborers.¹⁰¹ Leighton's metropolitan perspective and use of a modernist style keep alive the pastoral myth: the city-bred journalist-farmer Brailsford serves as an idealized, dignified surrogate for those whose life work revolves around manual labor; the engraving's modernist formal means helps convey the worker's close, organic relationship to the land that bears no trace of the machine. Moreover, Leighton and Brailsford are essentially part of the city-based outsiders who are altering the landscape by their mostly seasonal presence, a reality that some of the London artistic elite had the courage to publically address. The countryside author Sheila Kaye-Smith pointed out that "the artists," in their rather self-conscious love of things rural, were as much to blame for "the spoiling of our countryside" as the one who cared "nothing for it, and seeks its hospitality only for health or economy's sake."¹⁰² Taking a broader perspective, Brailsford directly addressed the tradeoffs between increased accessibility

¹⁰⁰ See Fiona MacCarthy, *Eric Gill: A Lover's Quest for Art and God* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1989), 140, for a discussion of the Ditchling community's pre-industrial rural economy.

¹⁰¹ *Land Worker*, March 1937.

¹⁰² Kaye-Smith ("Sussex Revisited," *The Legion Book*, ed. H. Cotton Minchin [London: Cassell, 1929], 235, 237) pointed out that "the artists," in their rather self-conscious love of things rural, were as much to blame for "the spoiling of our countryside" as the one who cared "nothing for it, and seeks its hospitality only for health or economy's sake."

and modernization of the countryside and preserving its character. While the “public authority’s” ugly new roads “popularized” previously hard-to-reach sites, gave jobs to “legions of unemployed men,” and infrastructure brought modern conveniences, it “destroyed with its mechanical touch the legacy of history and nature’s bounty.” Private and varying public interests were at odds; the solution lay in the establishment of “national estates” (National Parks) to preserve designated areas of historic and scenic significance.¹⁰³ These series of contradictions that Kaye-Smith and Brailsford articulate become more palatable if we consider Leighton’s artistic, architectural, and advocacy projects as authentic attempts to establish a close personal relationship with the land, a source of physical and emotional regeneration, with which to counteract the anxieties of modern life, a relationship that she prescribes for others as well.

Although *Four Hedges*’ engravings and Dartington’s and Leighton’s building projects had shown that the traditional and modern could coexist and offer an alternate version of Englishness, *Four Hedges*’ idealistic vision of people joined in common purpose on the land to create a new social order was not sustainable. As with the Tecton architectural cooperative, whose innovative use of modern technology and materials for the advancement of society conveyed an optimistic view of the future, new crises in the Europe would test these utopian visions. In 1936 the destructive side of technological advancement became all too evident with the outbreak of civil war in Spain. Coe and Reading point out that the British intellectual left began at this time to shift away from the social idealism of the early 1930s to the crucial issue of the struggle for freedom in

¹⁰³ H. N. Brailsford, “Making Beauty Accessible,” *London Mercury*, Feb. 1935, 346-48.

the face of Fascism.¹⁰⁴ Leighton's next book, *Country Matters* (1937), the subject of the following chapter, was composed during her and Brailsford's increasing disillusionment and anxiety over world events.¹⁰⁵ The book offers little interacting dialogue between the old and the new, tradition and modernity. *Four Hedges'* idealism and progressive spirit yields to a lament for rural ways and values, not transformed but basically overridden.

¹⁰⁴ Coe and Reading (*Lubetkin and Tecton*, 61, 66) argue that by the end of World War II, the group's social idealism of the 1930s was dead, and the anti-establishment Lubetkin was unwilling to continue practicing architecture in such a climate.

¹⁰⁵ Brailsford sought to enlist for the Spanish Republic, as a terrified Leighton wrote Brittain: "For myself, life has been an abominable worry. Noel decided again, just a fortnight or so ago, that he might go out to fight in the International Brigade in Spain. It's been hard working, going behind his back & putting the right sense of values to him & even now I may not have succeeded. I'm worn out with worry;" Clare Leighton to Vera Brittain, 30 Dec. 1936, Vera Brittain Archive. Bitterly disappointed when the Brigade refused to take him because of his age, Brailsford nonetheless helped recruit volunteers and solicited funds from Dorothy Elmhist. Forty years later Leighton would tell H. B. Leventhal that their London flat had become "a noisy hell" and that their telephone was tapped by Scotland Yard; Leventhal, *Last Dissenter*, 252.

CHAPTER FOUR

COUNTRY MATTERS: PORTRAYING TRADITIONAL RURAL LIFE IN A COMMODIFIED LANDSCAPE

Country Matters (1937), Leighton's third and last book about the English countryside, depicts village life with its traditional punctuations of the cycle of the year: flower show, village fair, horse show, cricket and ploughing matches; and beyond these annual gatherings, the crafts of blacksmith, chair bodger, and witch. Commissioned by the Victor Gollancz in a similar format to *Four Hedges* (1935), the book is abundantly illustrated with seventy-three wood engravings, five of them full-page.¹ Fourteen short stories, whose literary forms range from first-person narrative to essay to realistic fiction, individually take up the crafts and seasonal communal customs, portraying them both in an idealized state and under the stress of urbanization and mechanization.

Although she finds no common ground between "progress" and traditional life, Leighton employs modernist formal means to convey a sense of continuity in her scenes of an unchanged countryside. I argue that her abstracted style is crucial to her articulating the landscape's crucial role in the national psyche and her belief in the value of direct contact with one's work and the land. Drawing on a modernist vocabulary that incorporates elongated line, patterning, and foreshortened perspective, she portrays rural

¹ See Chapter Three for an overview of Gollancz's socialist views, his publishing house, and his commissioning Leighton. Macmillan issued the American edition of *Country Matters* in 1937.

people productively engaged and in harmony with their environment, a vision that seeks to offer a mode of living that can practically counter the ills of contemporary life.

This chapter seeks to relate Leighton's egalitarian and arts-and-crafts-movement-related interests to issues regarding the commodification of the landscape, particularly the effects of modernization on those born and raised there and the prosperous townspeople's pursuit of leisure and amusement. She employs the ancient antithesis of town and country to voice her concerns at the erosion of old country ways, constructing an imagined Chiltern Hills village of the 1930s that also speaks for the wider spectrum of English rural life.² In doing so she addresses one of the most pressing cultural issues of the decade -- unparalleled suburban growth and the townspeople's vision of the countryside as a theater for a variety of recreational interests. She speaks up for rural workers and their rightful place in the countryside, their values and customs, which have done so much to shape not only the idea of Englishness, but also reformers' visions of the restorative power of rural work to counteract the pressures of modern life. Neither the engravings nor the narrative consider the landscape's physical transformation by urban sprawl and commercial interests, a subject of much interwar writing on rural life, or the material benefits of modernization that bring comfort and relief to the original rural population.

Country Matters' illustrations and text function both oppositionally and in mutually supportive roles. Taken as independent entities, the prints portray a rural culture barely touched by modern life and mechanization. Careful evocations, and in some cases,

² On the relationship of town and country in English literature, see Williams, *Town and Country*; Cavaliero, *Rural Tradition in the English Novel*; and Burchardt, *Paradise Lost*, Chapters 2 and 6.

observations, of rural labor, craft, and customs, they nourish nostalgia and the preservationist impulse to record traditions without reference to the changing face of the landscape. However, the narrative both substantiates these idealized views of Englishness, upholding the image of a countryside that was central to national heritage in literary, visual, and popular discourse during the interwar years, and further romanticizes them by criticizing the urbanizing and mechanizing forces that are pushing them even faster into obsolescence. Jeremy Burchardt points out that this paradoxical perception of a countryside “at once under threat and yet embodying necessary or eternal values” is a defining feature of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century commentary on rural life.³ Leighton was able to clearly define and separate these dual perceptions visually and textually, which I would argue results in the engravings’ powerful, lasting influence on the reader’s perception of traditional rural activities.

The first section of this chapter provides an overview of Leighton’s interpretation of village life, how the illustrations and the narrative convey her vision, and evaluates this perspective by introducing a revisionist point of view that challenges the dominant image of country life between the wars as one of continual decline. The following section addresses Leighton’s deeply nostalgic vision of two village craftsmen whose work and way of life are being radically altered by mechanization: the smith, that hard-working, “right”-living village stalwart; and the chair bodger, whose elemental labor deep within the forest makes a primal relationship with nature. I discuss this “preservationist” image of rural industries with “progressive” programs designed to assist regeneration, which tended to subordinate arts-and-crafts principles stressing the integral relationship of the

³ Burchardt, *Paradise Lost*, 73.

craftsman and his work to material advancement. Given Leighton's strong advocacy and practice of craftsmanship and its related values, *Country Matters'* lament for passing ways moves beyond the conventions of the rural life genre to offer an alternative to such progressive proposals. Whether one considers this a historicist or a utopian vision, she speaks for a holistic relation to the land and work that can bring about personal and communal renewal in an increasingly fragmented and chaotic modern society.

The third section looks at Leighton's imagery of the tramp, a subject whose complex and contradictory mythical tradition has long influenced changing social attitudes. She matches the romantic idea of the individualist who has freed himself from the trappings of modern life against the social realist's view of the homeless poor as victims of their society to offer a distinctive vision of the wayfarer as a rightful child of the land. I argue that in linking the rural people's unaffected philosophy of living and closeness to the land with the homeless poor, Leighton repudiates the idea of the tramp as outcast and anti-hero, instead establishing him as a true citizen of the countryside. The challenges of articulating meaning through form and the relationship between message, illustration, and narrative inform my discussion of this potent symbol of the human condition.

The final section considers Leighton's use of the town and country convention to voice concern for those associated with or working the land. While *The Wood That Came Back* (1932) brought an optimist's perspective to suburbanization's defacing and destructive impact on the face of the land and its wildlife, *Country Matters* focuses on the disruption of rural traditions by city dwellers' recreational pursuits, creating an opportunity for her to criticize the still-dominant British social hierarchy. I also argue that

the final chapter “Bell Ringers,” in which the village men recall the past year’s adversities while bringing in another year, not only expresses her alarm before the forces of changing village life but also at the global community’s missed opportunities to establish a productive, peaceful existence as Europe moved toward war. Coming at a time of a crisis of confidence in the government’s ability to address depression at home and aggression abroad, *Country Matters* affirms a traditional culture being irreparably undercut by the very materialism that again threatens world peace. Moving beyond the conventions comfortably employed to evoke nostalgia for vanishing ways and to sustain national ideals, Leighton reveals a deep commitment to the land as the source of physical and spiritual regeneration, and to the country folk as its unconsciously steady practitioners, a vision that moves beyond fantasy and ideology to the fundamental needs and fulfillments of people by which to survive.

Maintaining a Historicist Vision of the Countryside

In recent years revisionists have argued that to see a countryside in continuing unidirectional decline, a perspective sustained by rural writing and visual media during the interwar years and by most historians, is to minimize the dynamics of rural regeneration and the mobilizing ideological power of modernism. As Christopher Bailey points out, “the products and images of rural industry worked both to support a picture of the countryside as England’s lost past, and, when the occasion required, as a seedbed of

reinvention and regeneration.”⁴ Despite the continuing loss of rural workers to urban areas, tradesmen were adapting their skills to new needs, and marketable crafts were being revived with the support of the Rural Industries Councils⁵ and private interests. Modernists were anxious to find in handicraft forms parallels with industrial design, thereby validating and absorbing tradition into an “unbroken chain of progressive design.”⁶

Why does not *Country Matters* engage this alternate view? The obvious answer lies in the rural life genre’s central object of upholding a mythic image of a traditional countryside, whose outlook and lifestyle are centrally distinct from those of towns. As the countryside writer Sheila Kaye-Smith observed, it could be difficult for the country novelist “to preserve his honesty.... Editors still ask for articles on the contrast of sophisticated town life with the simplicity and primitiveness of the country,” while the author knows that “his public demands ‘elemental’ characters.”⁷ I would argue that *Country Matters* is more than a series of well-worn tropes, articulating Leighton’s genuine concern for modernization’s disruption of traditional rhythms of work and craftsmanship. Moreover, it continues a dialogue with critical social and economic issues addressed in her earlier books and the interest that she displays in mediating tradition and modernism in *Four Hedges* a few years earlier. *Country Matters*’ appearance at a time of

⁴ Christopher Bailey, “Rural Industries and the Image of the Countryside,” in *English Countryside between the Wars*, ed. Brassley, Burckhardt, and Thompson, 132.

⁵ Founded in 1921, government-initiated and sponsored in the county towns.

⁶ Bailey, “Rural Industries,” 148.

⁷ Kaye-Smith, “Sussex Revisited,” 229.

deepening anxiety of another war made her vision the more uncompromising an alternative between the illustrations' portrayal of an unchanged countryside as record and memorial and the narrative's chronicle of irreparable rural decline.

The overall dark outlook of the narrative moves far beyond a static, genre-conforming nostalgia to an almost elegiac portrayal of a rural life moving toward extinction, which the final chapter, "Bell Ringers," attempts but purposefully fails to resolve. I want to suggest that this dark vision reflects Leighton's fearful certainty that war will return, stimulated by still unhealed memories of deep sorrow and anxiety from the Great War, a state of "proleptic elegy" or "double sorrow."⁸ If *The Farmer's Year* (1933) celebrates agriculture as the prime rightful enterprise of peacetime while reminding us grimly of World War I's senseless carnage, and *Four Hedges* (1935) finds accommodations between tradition and modernity, *Country Matters* offers no healing connection between the old and the new and sounds as a warning for what seems an inevitable return of war in the near future. Modernization's negative aspects disrupt both individual and collective stability and wellbeing, whether in the countryside or the wider community. The engravings meet their viewers' desire for nostalgic scenes of a "simpler," unchanging way of life, while the book as a whole speaks to the reformer's concern for a stable, organic community being eroded by modernist city living. One can even see in the village's communal disintegration a metaphor for Europe's instability and upheaval by war, enabled by the destructive powers of the machine.

⁸ See Patricia Rae's discussion of the interwar period's "proleptic elegy," in "Double Sorrow: Proleptic Elegy and the End of Arcadianism in 1930s Britain," 1-21, which I address more fully in Chapter Two.

The book's dispiriting viewpoint reflects Leighton's concern for those rooted in the land, living by their hands or their wit -- rural laborer, craftsman, tramp. Modernity alters the face and demographics of a countryside that was for her the repository of enduring values. She writes in the preface,

Here, in the heart of the labouring man, is the strong sane humour of the earth, without which there is no health.... It is the worker on the earth who matters -- the blacksmith at his anvil, the shepherd, the feller of trees. From him we must learn.⁹

For her, the countryman's closeness to the earth, contrasted with the unnatural life caused by "modern inventions and conveniences" offered "the last hope for sanity"¹⁰ in a world rife with conflict and artificiality. Aligned with this belief was her faith in the integrity, freedom, and personal responsibility of craftsmanship, a direct and holistic engagement with work that found no place for the separation of labor and the automation associated with the steady advance of mechanization, an Arts-and-Crafts-Movement-derived ideology that she herself practiced in her wood engraving.

Although illustration and narrative often function as opposites -- an idealized image of unchanging traditional rural life as contrasted with a countryside under stressful transition --, *Woman with Flowers* (fig. 4.1), an engraving not specifically associated with the narrative but prominently featured, directly states Leighton's abiding concern for the land and her refusal to take for granted the food and flowers that it yields when productively cultivated, not pressed into suburban development. This jacket illustration, which also appears as a full-page engraving within the book, appears to be an idealized

⁹ Leighton, preface to *Country Matters*, xiii-xv.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, xiii-xiv.

self-portrait,¹¹ evoking a maternal protectiveness that conveys a deep emotional attachment to the land, as she holds close the bounty of the fields, solemn countenance pressed into the large bouquet, feet firmly rooted in the life-giving earth.¹² This image breaks from the earlier books' almost completely masculine vision of the countryside -- a world of hard-working male laborers and craftsmen productively cultivating the landscape -- to associate woman's child-bearing, nurturing capacities with the earth's fecundity. Indeed, the other prints in *Country Matters* that depict baskets of vegetables and bunches of flowers feature women and small children carrying them, at times a child alone, in an almost reverential manner.¹³ Taken a step further, men initiate the productive (or destructive) process; women, like the earth, carry its fruit to a viable conclusion, and continue their nurturing, life-living role. Regardless, as the title *Country Matters* (formatted directly above the cover engraving) asserts on its most basic level: we came from the land and cannot do without its spiritual, no less than its physical, sustenance.¹⁴

Country Matters' dominant themes speak to the disorders and anxieties of the turbulent 1930s, touching on contemporary debates about the place of the countryside in English culture, and the impact of modern life on the landscape. Concerns regarding the

¹¹ Positioned exactly in the middle of the book.

¹² The title pages of *The Farmer's Year* and *Four Hedges* depict male laborers carrying their tools; the first book pictures men exclusively.

¹³ For example, *Going to the Festival* (101) and *Child with Flowers* (106). Leighton's decision to try to have a child at nearly forty years old and her miscarriage in the spring of 1936, while she was writing *Four Hedges*, probable bears on these images as well. She mentions the miscarriage in a letter to Dorothy Elmhirst, 30 July 1936, Papers of Dorothy Whitney Elmhirst.

¹⁴ *Country Matters'* title-page engraving, *The Lovers*, alludes to the phrase's rawer, Elizabethan usage in *Hamlet*, III, ii.

relationship of town and country, a society driven by materialism, and the psychological damage caused by loss and displacement serve as leitmotifs throughout the narrative as Leighton voices deep-seated, if obliquely stated, communal and personal reaction to the destructive elements of materialism and mechanization. Employing the text both to heighten the positive evocations of disappearing traditions and to voice concerns that the idealized visual imagery of country life does not address, she speaks to the adverse effects of modernization on craftsmen such as the smithy and chair bodger, and townspeople's intrusions into the yearly village gatherings, by which they unthinkingly redirect the significance of long-held, deeply valued traditions to their own purposes. What distinguishes Leighton's work overall is her overriding, consistent concern for rural laboring people, increasingly separated from the soil, whose purposeful work and closely regarded land are being upended by mechanization and the pursuit of leisure by an increasingly materialistic society. Although the engravings' being offered as single-sheet prints (separate from the book) must have influenced Leighton's decisions about what to incorporate into her images, I would suggest that her primary interest lay in portraying traditional rural life, as a record and reminder of the material and emotional benefits of a close association with the land. Leaving it to the viewer to infer the changes caused by modernity can perhaps evoke a greater sense of what has disappeared than a direct statement of those losses.

Constructing an Image of the Pre-industrial Rural Worker: Blacksmith and Chair Bodger

Leighton aligns with a historicist-preservationist perspective in portraying the smith and chair bodger, drawing on familiar literary imagery and popular perceptions of these craftsmen and of the rural laborer in general to demonstrate the inherent value of their work and ways of life. I would argue that her conservative point of view was crucial to conveying a powerfully renewed contemporary vision of the pre-industrial countryside as the central image of national energy and regeneration, just as an increasingly anxious middle-class readership was seeking this reassuring sense of English strength and wholeness to counter tensions at home and abroad. The accepted imagery of an unchanging green and pleasant land of cultivated fields and ancient woods, worked by sturdy, industrious inhabitants, held as much vested interest as it had during the earlier crisis, when popular imagery insisted that the countryside -- repository of the nation's physical and moral character, for which so many Englishmen laid down their lives -- must not change or England would be, as Martin Wiener puts it, in "mortal danger" (fig. 4.2).¹⁵

The engravings in the chapter "The Village Smithy" portray the proverbial blacksmith, a time-honored anchor of rural life, working in a preindustrial state as a paragon of physical strength and soundness of mind. *Shoeing the Horse* (fig. 4.3), in which the smith attends to a still-harnessed farm animal, exemplifies the long-held symbiotic relationship between the craftsman's specialized skills and traditional farming

¹⁵ A cartoon from *Punch*, used as the frontispiece in Clough Williams-Ellis' *England and the Octopus*, which denounces unchecked suburbanization and industrialization; Wiener, *English Culture*, 56.

methods. *The Smithy* (fig. 4. 4) resembles the familiar imagery of schoolroom poetry recitations of Longfellow's "The Village Blacksmith" (1841), where "Under a spreading chestnut tree / The village smithy stands;" while *The Blacksmith* (fig. 4.5) gives form to the poet's description of the "mighty man," whose "brawny arms / Are strong as iron bands.... You can hear him swing his heavy sledge / With measured beat and slow...."¹⁶ Leighton's narrative reinforces the fundamental nature of this "oldest of crafts"¹⁷ as its practitioner labors in the "ageless elements of fire and earth." Implying that this man is spiritual kin to Longfellow's "worthy friend," who lives and works with exemplary purpose, her blacksmith values the right things and leads an active, yet contemplative, and thrifty life: "All I want is to shoe horses in the daytime, and to go for a walk up in the woods and the hills in the evening and to dig my allotment."¹⁸ In this sense the text intensifies the engravings' message, with both media conveying the imagery of that widely beloved poetic window to the mythic past.

The narrative also lends urgency to the prints' meaning, establishing nostalgia for a trade -- even a way of existence -- by directly addressing the new technologies that have supplanted traditional ways. The blacksmith's shop has nearly vanished, victim of the internal combustion engine, with the conversion of the front of most smithies into gas stations, loudly flaunting rows of "flaming petrol-pumps, like dahlias in full bloom,"

¹⁶ "The Village Blacksmith," *The Poems of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow* (New York: Modern Library, 1932), 624-25.

¹⁷ Leighton is probably referring to Hephaestus (by Roman interpretation Vulcan) in Greek and Roman mythology associated with the constructive use of fire in metalworking.

¹⁸ Leighton, *Country Matters*, 22.

while the few horses that require shoeing are led to the rear. The still unmodernized forge reveals a man of strength as deeply rooted in time as his workplace, “the last sentinel against progress.... He is wise enough to realise his isolation and to know that he is fighting a losing battle; his crusade against speed and noise and rush means more to him than worldly loss or gain.”¹⁹ The fundamental, agriculturally based nature of his services gives him direct contact with his patrons, while his shop serves as a gathering place for the village’s men to thresh out issues of common concern.

Leighton’s use of modernist formal means to portray the smith gives a sense of permanence to this ancient craft. With its strong contrasts of black and white, sharply defined contours, and absence of background, which allows for an interplay of solid and void between engraving and page, *The Blacksmith* functions more as an archetypal image than an anecdotal illustration. The abstract patterning that shapes *The Smithy*’s trees and hills quite unsentimentally evokes the proverbial landscape of Longfellow’s poem for all time, giving material form to a familiar imagery that most encountered initially through the spoken word. I would argue that her embrace of the language of modernism to convey a sense of permanence and stability in no way contradicts her resistance to the negative aspects of modernization. Moreover, historical modes of representation inspired aspects of modernism, including medieval and early Renaissance woodcuts whose directness and sincerity derive from strongly delineated contours and tonal contrasts, as well as from employing a flattened perspective, craftsman-like elements that Leighton valued and employed in her own engravings.

¹⁹ Ibid, 17-18.

As I discuss in the chapter on *Four Hedges*, Leighton saw a continuity between modern forms and those of the past that exhibited a highly functional nature, the indigenous shapes of the countryside. *Country Matters* extends this perspective when addressing chair bodgers (fig. 4.6), who, like the blacksmith, practice an ancient trade being rendered obsolete by advancing mechanization -- but in the isolation of the forest, their workplace and source of raw material.²⁰ Although not as fixed in the popular imagination as the smith, during the interwar years the country (Windsor) chair maker became a paradigm of the craftsman close to his material and in direct contact with nature.²¹ Leighton shows the itinerant workers in a Chiltern beech wood fashioning chair legs, highlighting the bodger who uses a primitive hand tool to split the rough-hewn wood, a process that places him closer to nature than the man on his right who operates the hand lathe, a rudimentary form of mechanization. The finished product, several turned chair legs, are positioned behind the pile of raw wood lying inconspicuously against the hut. The men's seemingly far distance from civilization further enhances the image of the craftsman in communion with his trade and environment. Leighton's abstracted style of elongated, sinuous forms integrates the men with their work and their environment; they seem as growing from the earth as the trees themselves.

The narrative supports the image's positive message by speaking to the authentic nature and integrity of its subjects' labor. The bodgers' hut, made out of "wood

²⁰ A turner who makes chairs of beech wood. The print received 2nd prize in the Seventh International Exhibition of Lithography and Wood Engraving at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1939; *Art Digest*, 1 Dec. 1939, 24.

²¹ Bailey, "Rural Industries," 139, as especially articulated by the country commentator H. J. Massingham: "The rhythms of [the bodger's] craftsmanship bear so close a resemblance to those of Nature and none to the routines of mechanical production," in *Chiltern Country, The Face of Britain* (London: Batsford, 1940), 87.

shavings,” is “unembellished and determined by use,” resembling the clean, austere forms of South Carolina tobacco barns and the Kentish hop-oasts, to which the text also refers. All are functional in form and “rooted in the earth and constructed for work,” indigenous shapes of the countryside.²² The men epitomize the wholesomeness of thrifty craft, for they “follow in the wake of the wood-cutter, like gleaners in a field. Their work gives them a “calm and satisfied ... look;” neither is marked by “the harassed strain of the factory-worker.” But this will not last: the older man will live out his days practicing his trade, but his youthful companion’s life as a craftsman will probably be cut short by the competition of the town, as it substitutes industrial process for craft. Leighton’s rather selective perspective omits the fact that the bodgers were highly specialized component makers that did not produce a fully functional entity. Instead, they sold the parts to High Wycombe factories not far from her cottage, a detail that would have greatly diminished her contrast of the virtues of manual labor directly in contact with nature and the creator’s sustained engagement with the finished object, with repetitive factory work.²³

Country Matters makes no reference to local and national debates during the ’20s and ’30s about the role of mechanization and standardization in regenerating handcrafted goods and agriculturally based services. In contrast to Leighton’s preservationist, crafts-

²² Leighton, *Country Matters*, 69. My Chapter Three argues that Leighton found parallels between these building forms and the modernist studio she built at Four Hedges, providing a sense of continuity between tradition and the new.

²³ *Ibid*, 69-70. High Wycombe in the Chilterns, long known for its vast stands of beeches, was the chair-making capital of the world during the nineteenth century. By 1920 it had become the second largest furniture-making town in England, its industry boasting 10,000 workers by 1939. See “High Wycombe – Furniture Town,” *Wycombe District Council*, Web, 6 Jan. 2009, for a history of its chair craftsmen from the late seventeenth to late twentieth centuries.

oriented perspective, attempts by progressive rural-industry organizations to bolster rural employment in the late 1920s and 1930s focused largely on economic advancement, at the expense of keeping intact traditional crafts governed by anti-industrial arts-and-crafts principles, or for that matter, which sustained a romantic image of the countryside for the reader or the tourist. Adapting to modernized methods and changing markets often moved the product from its original utilitarian function, into a new decorative consumerism, changing its maker into a mass producer with little feeling for the inherent value of craftsmanship or relation to his purchaser. While it was true that “no amount of sitting under chestnut trees” would benefit the dying blacksmith trade, the suggestion that the smith create a demand for horseshoes by establishing a collectors’ club is a truly suburban solution, disregarding the integrity of connection between maker and craft that Leighton valued and practiced.²⁴ Although the mass-manufacturing processes of industrial design also eliminated this close relationship, the earlier craft forms were often used to validate the new ones. As Bailey points out, “many modernists were anxious to find in the forms, rather than the manufacture, of earlier work, parallels with industrial design,” thereby absorbing tradition into an “unbroken chain of progressive design.”²⁵ While the availability to the wider public of well-designed handcraft-inspired, mass-produced articles was in keeping with Leighton’s endeavor to popularize the arts, the separation of artist and maker contradicted her arts-and-crafts-based principles. Although

²⁴ As proposed by E. R. Vincent, Secretary of the Cambridgeshire Rural Council during the late 1920s, Bailey, “Rural Industries,” 135-36.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 148.

this must have concerned her (and some of those who bought her books), her publications and personal writings do not address this issue.

Some progressives cast the debate between preservationists and modernists in antithetical terms -- the “romantic and decrepit” against “the unromantic and efficient” -- a view that oversimplifies the dilemmas posed by rural decline and overstates the benefits of modernization, minimizing the significance of integrity and authenticity in craftsmanship, which Leighton placed at the center of her vision of wholeness of work.²⁶ Rural-life literature and mass circulation publications, which also disseminated a traditional, romanticized image of the countryside, helped emphasize this dichotomy. Christopher Bailey finds that national papers and magazines such as *Country Life* largely selected “picturesque” scenes of people at work in rural settings from Rural Industries Bureau photographs of the ’20s and ’30s, rather than pictures of modernized workshops or mechanization. Instead of educating the reader on craft technique and material, as the RIB intended, the photographs functioned as “a memento of the ‘living relics’” its readership might encounter while in the country.²⁷

Leighton’s images in *Country Matters* could have functioned similarly, certainly as single-sheet prints, and for those who purchased the book and might have looked at the pictures without reading the text. This consumer-oriented viewpoint that Bailey discusses served the new rural population that was changing the face of the land -- the commuter, the weekender, the suburbanite, the vacationer. He points out that a nostalgic patronage

²⁶ Ibid, 134-36. I have relied on Christopher Bailey’s discussion of Rural Community Council reports, which appear to be unpublished and which I have not been able to access. The phrases in quotes are from E. Vincent, “The Village Craftsman,” in “Notes of a Conference of Rural Community Councils held at Cambridge in 1927.”

²⁷ Ibid, 136.

of rural industries comforted these new country people, “providing an altruistic justification for their consumption.” Moreover, middle-class practitioners of the crafts brought “a new, consciously aesthetic approach to their work,” which out priced the older products. The result was a rejuvenation of handwork based on Arts and Crafts principles that the RIB had considered beyond help, but resting on an altogether different market. I would argue that Leighton’s practices struck a middle ground in this debate. Although she accepted the engravings’ reproduction by the electrotype process to make her books affordable and capable of reaching a wider readership than when produced in small numbers by a private press, the quality of the images was generally good, the books were not published in mass editions, and she also pulled the prints by hand for small editions.²⁸ She therefore maintained a high degree of involvement with and control over her work and furthered to some extent her interest in popularizing art. But she obviously had little control over who bought her books, including the new middle-class inhabitants of the countryside.

Leighton addresses this new constituency, its effect on traditional rural life, and its repercussions on society in general, in the preface to *Country Matters*. Communal wellbeing depended on the rural worker’s essential bond with the “strong, sane” temperament of the earth:

At no time has this been more needed, and at no time have we stood a greater risk of losing it. For with the modern rush of consciousness about the country we may destroy the thing we love. A sentimentalised,

²⁸ Chapter One discusses her engraving processes, including electrotype, while the Epilogue addresses aspects of her print editions and how broad an audience she could have reached.

self-conscious countryside, fixed for the sightseer, would have lost all that made it desirable.²⁹

This perspective risks comparison with the ruralist writing that Stella Gibbons parodies in *Cold Comfort Farm* (1932) -- pitting sophisticated city living against the uncomplicated, elemental nature of the country. As the cultural historian William Stafford summarizes this idealization of pre-industrial society, "Life had simplicity, wholesomeness, and rootedness; men and women, in touch with the soil and the seasons, devoted themselves to meaningful and fulfilling tasks. Art was collective and popular. Consequently human personality exhibited a psychic wholeness."³⁰ This utopian vision seems to have exercised a great appeal over Leighton as she reflected on the role the countryside should play in modern society. Her text directly argues, and her images imply, that a consumer- and-leisure-oriented countryside diminishes the rural laborer's close relationship with the natural world, source of a balanced life. She further develops this idea and the related question of ownership of the countryside in the chapter "Tramps," the subject of the following section.

Validating the Tramp

Country Matters opens not with a portrait of a representative village worthy such as the blacksmith, but the tramp, perhaps the most marginalized figure in society.

Leighton thereby subverts the book's otherwise dedicated image of rural England as the

²⁹ Leighton, preface to *Country Matters*, xiv.

³⁰ William Stafford, "This Our Happy Country: Nostalgia for Pre-Modern Society," in *Imagined Past*, ed. Shaw and Chase, 43.

repository of national virtues to bring up issues regarding the distribution of wealth, who belongs in the countryside, and society's attitudes toward nonconformists and its lack of compassion for the poor. The chapter reflects socialist ideals -- her and Gollancz's --, recasting conventional topics of the genre to draw attention to social and economic inequities. Leighton addresses the "down-and-out" tramp of the Depression-era countryside as opposed to the fresh-air-seeking middle-class city dweller who caravans during holidays "Romany style," and the tramper, both of whom intentionally remove themselves from the conventions of modern life for brief periods of time to experience rural life and the open road.³¹ In her hands, the tramp becomes more than a for the most part involuntary embodiment of socialist ideals, but rather an individual admirable in himself and a rightful member of society without regard to material worth or standing.

"Tramps" narrative and eight illustrations demonstrate a familiarity with the complex, often contradictory myths of the vagabond in literature and art over the centuries, which significantly influenced social attitudes towards the homeless poor.³²

Romantic accounts of vagrant life, which reached a height during the Edwardian years,

³¹ Regarding gentleman tramps, Leighton's parents' friend and fellow-author W. Gordon Stables (the thinly disguised "Alexander" in Leighton's *Tempestuous Petticoat*, 47-52), toured Britain in a custom-fitted mahogany caravan with servants. Publications like *Tramp* magazine and Harry Roberts' *The Tramp's Handbook* (London and New York: J. Lane, 1903) offered advice for the amateur gypsy. Concerning the artist tramp, see Lisa Tickner, "Augustus John: Gypsies, Tramps and Lyric Fantasy," in *Modern Life and Modern Subjects*, 49-78; on tramping, see Stephen Graham, *The Gentle Art of Tramping* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1926; London: R. Holden, 1927).

³² M. A. Crowther ("The Tramp," in *Myths of the English*, ed. Roy Porter [Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1992], 91-113) analyses myths of vagrancy through literature, from the mid-nineteenth century to World War I, with an emphasis on the Edwardian era's romanticized tramp -- part of an overall genre of those reduced or fallen in class, rank, or social position.

investigative journalism, authentic tramps' published memoirs, and Leighton's own contacts with wayfarers during stays at her socialist Aunt Sarah's Berkshire cottage inform her vision.³³ Her imagery seems more aligned with the Continental imagery of vagabonds that engaged with the political goals and ideals of a radical Utopian movement than with nineteenth-century British book illustration, such as Cruikshank's engravings for Dickens, which caricature vagabonds, and depict them as small figures in a group setting. While her portrayal of tramps and interwar documentary photography that occasionally illustrates journalistic accounts of vagrants share a common interest in social concerns, she refuses to portray the realities of their clothing or living conditions that the camera records. *Punch's* Depression-era tramp cartoons and the Chaplinesque film character function both as type and individual, exhibiting ironic humor and tragedy, elements that Leighton also explores.³⁴

But I would suggest that her imagery draws on late-nineteenth-century French socialist and Neo-Impressionist interest in the anarchist icon of the tramp. My argument takes as a point of reference John Hutton's study of prints depicting vagabonds by Neo-Impressionists who aligned with fin-de-siècle anarchist movements in France, whose key

³³ The tramp spurred a whole genre of literature, ranging from the romanticized imagery of Wordsworth, Stevenson, and George Borrow to the sociological accounts of Frank Gray (*The Tramp, His Meaning and Being*, [London: Dent, 1931]), who served as a Liberal Member of Parliament during the 1920s and toured the Oxfordshire workhouses disguised as a hobo; and Orwell's *Down and Out in Paris and London* (London: Gollancz, 1933), which Victor Gollancz published after Jonathan Cape and Faber & Faber rejected it.

³⁴ See Fiona Nickerson and David Wootton, *The Illustrators: The British Art of Illustration, 1800-2007* (London: Chris Beetles, 2007, 176-79) for a discussion of Frank Reynolds' portrayal of tramps published in *Punch* between 1908-1946. Simon Louvish's *Chaplin: The Tramp's Odyssey* (London: Faber and Faber, 2008) is among the recently published books that explore Chaplin in the role of the tramp.

themes and concerns ranged from criticism of bourgeois society to the impact of mechanization on modern life.³⁵ Addressing the complex, often contradictory, societal perceptions of the homeless wanderer, Hutton identifies the anarchists' dualistic characterization of the vagabond as "a heroic individualist, proof of the ability of a liberated few to live free of the constraints of bourgeois society ... [and] the victim of the bourgeoisie's indifference to the poor." Stock clichés that depict the tramp as jolly and carefree or as part of the "deserving poor," worthy of Christian goodwill, complicated attempts to develop an image that merged nonconformist hero with prototypical social victim. Hutton finds that the Néos' attempts to produce an integral image that conveyed a message without recourse to captions or conventional allegories was not tenable, and frequently could not be distinguished from the establishment Salon paintings that showed tramps picturesquely or elicited an empathic response.³⁶ Leighton faced a similar challenge in conveying her messages about the tramp in the engravings alone; while the absence of captions upholds the prints' autonomy, their fuller meaning depends on a close reading of the text.

"Tramps" numerous illustrations enable Leighton to differentiate and develop these varying vagrant types, to form distinct personalities and characterizations that do not require titles or text for their essential meaning -- carefree tramp, social victim, visionary, child of nature. These depictions of solitary men without companions or family underscore the tramp's isolation from society, whether as nonconformist hero proudly operating outside the conventions of a capitalist system or as its victim. Leighton moves

³⁵ John Hutton, "'Les Prolos Vagabondent': Neo-Impressionism and the Anarchist Image of the *Trimardeur*," *Art Bulletin* 72 (June 1990): 296-309.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 296-97.

beyond stereotype by distinguishing among these wandering destitutes, affording them some appearance of respect and dignity in their proud stance and by carefully sometimes individualizing their faces (*Head of Tramp*, fig. 4.7).

The narrative, which includes accounts of her alleged interactions with specific rural tramps, directs the reader's interpretation of the engravings by addressing the culture of the tramp and his relationship to society, the natural world, and the rural folk. Without depicting graphically or verbalizing the often-piteous physical appearance of the homeless wanderer, Leighton calls into question society's materialistic values and its indifference to the poor, differentiating between the "soft" tramp who evokes pity, as he moves through the fifteen to twenty miles of countryside that connects one village workhouse to another, and the "true" tramp whose nonconformist philosophy embraces the open road and "the needlessness of possessions."³⁷ She connects the tramp's seemingly conscious embrace of non-materialistic values with the rural people's "right" way of living and "simple" outlook, envisioning him as a rightful child of the countryside, if not a paragon of national virtues.

Tramp on Road (fig. 4.8) establishes the chapter's humanitarian tone by depicting a solitary homeless traveler exposed to the indifferent harshness of nature. A faceless wanderer wearily trudges the road winding from village to village through the driving rain, battered and exposed as the storm-blasted tree that he passes. The pitiless landscape he must negotiate summarizes his whole adverse existence, with the implication that the harsh environment is also a metaphor for society's unwelcoming, often hostile nature towards his kind. Hutton traces the origin of the image of the vagrant as social victim to

³⁷ Leighton, *Country Matters*, 1, 2, 5.

the romanticization of the medieval legend of the Wandering Jew, as exemplified by Eugène Sue's popular novel, *Le Juif Errant* (1845), which transforms the anti-Semitic legend into "a metaphor for the endless persecution of the poor and oppressed."³⁸ Paul Gavarni's illustration for the novel shows a wanderer with his back to the viewer, bracing against the elements in a sparse, rocky landscape (fig. 4.9). I would suggest that Leighton's tramp draws on such imagery to convey a similar message, his bowed back signifying his own burden and misery but also that of the nameless poor.

Several other prints that Hutton discusses, notably Théo van Rysselberghe's *Les Errants* (1904, fig. 4.10), and Camille Pissarro's *Les Trimardeurs* (1896, fig. 4.11), give context to Leighton's use of the landscape to convey the inequitable plight of the poor. Both show homeless wanderers negotiating the open road; the first positions a family in a bleak landscape of misery and hopelessness -- the path appears to lead nowhere; the stark tree trunks suggest a sort of nonnegotiable barrier that blocks the family out of any escape from such an existence. The other depicts a family walking alongside fertile, cultivated fields so obviously not theirs, which Hutton interprets as implying a "misordering of society" caused by "the imbalance between the riches of nature and the poverty of the people."³⁹

Leighton's image offers the possibility of some degree of accommodation for the tramp as compared to *Les Errants*. Despite the adverse conditions under which he travels, a village is within sight, the church perhaps a symbol of charity, the unpictured but quite possible workhouse a refuge of some last resort. This in no way lessens his grim

³⁸ Hutton, "Les Prolos Vagabondent," 297.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 305-06.

circumstance, or the knowledge that the inhabitants of the village already rely on the shelter that he seeks. The pelting rain -- the force of nature acting directly on the tramp and impeding his journey -- and the barren fields heighten his pitiful appearance, which seems as dire as van Rysselberghe's family's. Although the depiction of a family group could elicit a heightened emotional response as compared to a single vagrant, *Les Errants'* snow-covered ground conveys an inhospitable but passive environment that lacks dramatic engagement with the figures.⁴⁰ The forces that contribute to the family's plight are implied; in contrast Leighton's print visualizes the natural and societal entities that work to keep the tramp alive.

Leighton calls on the tradition of the nonconformist hero to further develop a vision of the tramp's role in society and relationship to the countryside, without necessarily subscribing to the anarchists' incendiary message. In place of the itinerant rebel or the social reformer are the self-described visionary burning "with the fire of religious mania" (*The Mad Prophet*, fig. 4.12.); and the individualist, who has liberated himself from the constraints of modern life (*Tramp Waving Farewell*, fig. 4.13). Leighton differentiates between the "soft" tramp, for whom the countryside is but an unnoticed distance through which he must move from workhouse to workhouse, from the free-spirited "true" tramp, whose real contentment stems from his independent spirit and embrace of the natural world. She characterizes him both as lighthearted, a "carefree

⁴⁰ Hutton ("Les Prolos Vagabondent," 303) points out that that standby of the salon, the entire homeless family (including babe in arms), could heighten a sense of the poor as deserving "Christian charity." The artists maintain the anarchist vision of the vagabond as victim of bourgeois society by keeping the family intact, so as to impose the blame squarely on an unjust system, not upon a deserting father.

romantic ... as true to type as if he existed between the pages of a book,”⁴¹ and one who has rejected capitalism, the source of economic inequity and modern anxiety. She relies heavily on the narrative to articulate such individualism: freed from the worries and preoccupations of all but the plainest living, the tramp embodies an aspect of the socialist spirit, albeit on a highly individualistic level. Leighton questions the values of mainstream, industrializing society, upon which she urges an alternative philosophy of living as exemplified by the tramp:

It is a pity that this fear has grown around the idea of the tramp, for there is much to learn from him. Who else demonstrates the needlessness for possessions? Who else corrects the blind rush of modern life? There is dignity in his poverty. He rarely trades on the rags he wears. If he shows us his worn-out shoes, and asks for our cast-offs, it is in a spirit of the communism of property. And his laziness? Should we blame him for this? His attitude to life must needs be based on different values from ours in that he has none of the usual urge to accumulate possessions. What, then, is there to prevent him from pausing and tasting life with gaiety?⁴²

The challenge of merging form and message, to convey both a pictorial sense of the idea of social injustice and of the carefree individualist, is apparent in *Tramp Waving Farewell*, in which the “true” tramp appears closer to the stock jolly traveler than the unconventional hero. As Hutton points out, the anarchist image of the social hero, intended to “assert the revolutionary challenge of the vagabond to the capitalist social order,” could easily merge into “the dominant ideological image of the vagabond as a picturesque, enviable happy-go-lucky character.”⁴³ The cheery vagabond in G. de Greef’s 1898 illustration for *Almanach de la question sociale*, the yearbook of international

⁴¹ Leighton, *Country Matters*, 1-2.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 5-6.

⁴³ Hutton, “Les Prolos Vagabondent,” 299.

socialism, exemplifies this problem. *Le Chemineau* (fig. 4.14) and Leighton's tramp both cheerfully confront the viewer, implying their carefree existences in the rural landscape with no reference to the social context or reality.⁴⁴

Leighton develops the notion of the individualist close to nature but a social victim in *Tramp Asleep* (fig. 4.15). Her "special tramp friend" lies in a ditch surrounded by foliage and flower, his clothing resembling classical robes rather than his actual tattered, filthy overcoat. Whether asleep or dead (the narrative implies both conditions),⁴⁵ he rests with as much dignity as the worthies in the parish church (*The Lady Caroline Bramleigh*, illustrating the chapter "The Harvest Festival," fig. 4.16). Unlike Camille Pissarro's image of a homeless man dying alone on a deserted city street (*Jean Misère*, from *Turpitudes Sociales*, 1889, fig. 4.17), or Alphonse Legros' *Death of the Vagabond* (1879, fig. 4.18), in which nature (the storm-blasted tree) signifies the transient's worn-out state,⁴⁶ he is enveloped and at ease in nature, which the narrative suggests is a result of his "right" values and "simple" way of living.

Leighton connects this "true" tramp's worldview with that of the authentic settled countryman: his life is as enviable as that of an old thresher (*Ted Lawrence*, fig. 4.19), whose similar "philosophy" derives from solitude and time free to think; "he too had

⁴⁴ Robert Louis Stevenson's "The Vagabond" epitomizes this image: "Give to me the life I love, / Let the lave go by me, / Give the jolly heaven above / And the by-way nigh me. / Bed in the bush with stars to see, / Bread I dip in the river – / There's the life for a man like me / There's the life forever."

⁴⁵ Leighton, *Country Matters*, 11.

⁴⁶ Discussed in Hutton, "Les Prolos Vagabondent," 305.

scoffed at possessions” and the accumulation of money.⁴⁷ Lawrence appears contented and at ease in nature, as he sits with the fruits of his leisure time, the freshly shucked peas and majestic stand of dahlias, which suggest his organic involvement with growing things for both sustenance and beauty. M. A. Crowther notes that by the Edwardian period the vagrant could be seen “as the guardian of primeval instincts against the encroachments of business or city life. Being close to nature, he understood elemental values” and was seen as being “spiritually richer than the householder,”⁴⁸ a view that carried into the Depression years.⁴⁹ Drawing on this romanticized image, Leighton then further develops the idea by linking the like-minded vagrant and rural people, which subverts the stereotype of the homeless as lazy and un-contributing; rather, she implies that it is the larger world’s pursuits that are unnatural.

Tramp Asleep also speaks to the theme of the vagrant as a victim of a neglectful social order, in a way totally conflicting with his romanticized nonconformist image. The bottle that has slipped from the tramp’s hand implies that he has drunk himself to sleep, and by extension, that alcoholism has caused his unconventional lifestyle.⁵⁰ Leighton’s

⁴⁷ Leighton, *Country Matters*, 14.

⁴⁸ Crowther, “Tramp,” 106-07, 109.

⁴⁹ As exemplified by the self-described “tramp parson,” the Rev. Frank L. Jennings (*Tramping with Tramps* [London: Hutchinson, 1932]), 34-35, who endorses the “wisdom on the road, a plain man’s wisdom” and the idea of the homeless wanderer as “a child of Nature ... (who) makes himself Nature’s guest.”

⁵⁰ Such outcasts’ plight was also addressed by G. K. Chesterton in “The Rolling English Road,” which poignantly juxtaposes humor and pathos in a vision of the vagrant life and how society should value the despised derelict. The poem begins by hyperbolically attributing the road’s crookedness to “the reeling English drunkard;” but when this force of nature shrinks to a filthy corpse “with the wild rose ... above him” in his ditch, Chesterton asks that, “God pardon us, nor harden us;... / But walk with clearer eyes and

accounts of conversations with tramps reveal that these men were among the psychologically and physically war wounded.⁵¹ A large number of vagrants were alcoholic, jobless veterans; one contemporary account estimates that up to 80% of post-war tramps were ex-soldiers,⁵² although immediate post-war official proposals to assist these men and public conscience had faded in time. Occasionally the death of a homeless veteran resulting from harsh vagrancy laws and negligence or outright cruelty while incarcerated jolted collective indifference, one high-profile case directly bringing about a 1935 amendment to the never-before-modified Vagrancy Act of 1824 to abolish the offense of “sleeping out” in the open air. Two Conservative MPs with distinguished military records took up the case in Parliament, one appealing for equitable treatment of the rich and the poor: those who “chose to sleep out as a ‘health giving’ pursuit” were not breaking the law, while those so poor to not “have the price of a night’s lodging in ... pocket” were considered criminals for sleeping out and were likely to go to jail.⁵³ John Garside’s *Gypsies and Gentiles* (1930, fig. 4.20), which depicts a wanderer passing a placard stating the penalty for “Rogues and Vagabonds ... lying about,” is a graphic

ears this path that wandereth / And see undrugged in evening light the decent inn of death ...;” *The Collected Poems of G. K. Chesterton* (London: C. Palmer, 1927), 183-84.

⁵¹ Leighton, *Country Matters*, 7-8.

⁵² W. A. Gape, *Half a Million Tramps* (London: Routledge, 1936), quoted in Lionel Rose, ‘*Rogues and Vagabonds*,’ *Vagrant Underworld in Britain, 1815-1985* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), 163.

⁵³ Rose, ‘*Rogues and Vagabonds*,’ 173-74.

reminder of the vagrancy law.⁵⁴ Whether or not Leighton's audience required the text to more fully understand her appeal for social tolerance, *Tramp Asleep* conveys a great compassion for a homeless poor, giving him a peaceful, dignified resting place in the natural world and a standing as an authentic, valued individual not part of a faceless criminal mass.

"Tramps" closes with *Old Boot* (fig. 4.21), a laceless relic rotting back to the earth among grass and dandelions, which serves, for all its immediate picturesqueness as a metaphor for life on the road, abjectly hard but void of pretense and convention. As Van Gogh paid homage to the life of the workingman in *A Pair of Boots* (1886, fig. 4.22),⁵⁵ so Leighton honors the object that keeps its forever-persecuted and moved-on wearer trudging over countless unwelcoming roads. Both images (especially Van Gogh's frontally-placed one) call upon the viewer to summon up a sense of their users' lives, with something of an implicit hint that we humble ourselves to understand those who have shaped these worn castoffs.

Perspectives on Social Standing and Otherness

A series of chapters about customary gatherings over the course of the year -- horse show, harvest festival, flower show, circus -- addresses the commodification of the countryside as it was affecting the rural people. Leighton's quarrel with the exploitation

⁵⁴ An illustration for John Sampson's *The Wind on the Heath* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1930); reproduced in Deborah Epstein Nord, *Gypsies and the British Imagination, 1807-1930* (New York: Columbia UP, 2006), 4.

⁵⁵ See Julian Treuherz, *Hard Times: Social Realism in Victorian Art* (London: Lund Humphries, 1987), 124-25, for a brief discussion of Van Gogh's many still lifes of boots.

of the landscape as the largest of consumer objects rather than for its agricultural production centers on the moneyed and socially prominent's appropriation of folk traditions and seasonal communal gatherings, which alters their fundamental context and meaning. With the quasi-mythic patriarchal system of parson, squire, and peasant holding little interest for her, she confronts contemporary social inequity, the continuing inorganic divide between the classes, and the elites' attitudes toward the countryside and its original inhabitants.

“Horse Show” speaks to the urbanites' appropriation of the rural community's stock exhibition for their own recreational interests without any practical consideration to voice questions about the uses of the countryside, class division, and social bias. For the townspeople the country is little more than a picturesque locus for conspicuous consumption, even as they disregard and disrupt their neighbors' ways. Sleek automobiles, trailers and vans transporting highly bred equines command the right of way to the show grounds, forcing farm workers and their daily useful horse-drawn carts off the narrow roads into ditches. A farm boy, who has walked his sturdy workhorse to the show (*Shire Horse*, fig. 4.23), observes the young horsewomen who dominate an event with a “hard tense look on in their faces,” as they ride sidesaddle on their sleek, pedigreed hunters (*Hunters*, fig 4.24).⁵⁶ Ashamed of his insignificant standing -- had the women “even bothered to notice him, [they] would have thought what a scrubby-looking little creature he was....” -- he still cannot but disdain the hunters' obvious unfitness to match

⁵⁶ Leighton, *Country Matters*, 118.

his draft horse's fitness to furrow the enduring land: "They be only for show. And they women too."⁵⁷

Hunters, the book's only visual reference to the town, directly contrasts the horse bred solely for display and elegant competition and its owner with the shire horse and his humble companion who eat together and work to feed humanity (*Dinner Time at the Show*, fig. 4.25). Leighton portrays the equestrians from a low vantage point to indicate their elevated rank; the Rolls-Royce-like hood ornament asserts their wealth, the prime force that is remaking the countryside. In contrast, the boy and his farm horse are side by side and depicted at eye level, which indicate their mutually dependent, equal relationship and "ordinary," even companion standing, and perhaps suggesting a degree of rapport with the viewer; the fruit-bearing tree that shades them indicates their close connection to the fertile natural world.

The narrative makes yet more explicit the "blatant social cleavage" between the classes, with the "heavy lines of the shire horses" and the "delicate, spare grace of the hunter" reflecting and contrasting the "flowing tranquility" of the farm boy with the "taut handsomeness of the aristocrat. While each kept to his separate meadow, there was no meeting point."⁵⁸ Leighton's assessment echoes the laments of such earlier rural writers as George Sturt concerning the erosion of rural customs by modernizing social and

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 116. Her comparison seems to visualize the agricultural writer and farmer Rider Haggard's observation that the common plough horse seems more intelligent than the "aristocrat of the stable," as he compares the former's steady, dully useful work over many years against the horse used only for a very few years for show; Rider Haggard, *The Farmer's Year: Being His Commonplace Book for 1898* (London: and New York: Longmans, Green, 1899), 107-08.

economic forces of the town. Sturt noted a significantly increased separation between the rural laborer and his employer, which he attributed to new wealth, new beliefs and new tastes: “So, in field and street and shop, the two kinds of folk meet face to face, not with an outlook, and hardly with a speech, which both can appreciate, but like distinct races, the one dominant, the other subject.”⁵⁹ The implication here is the town’s negative influence on rural society at large.

The chapter’s remaining illustrations reaffirm the primacy and value of agriculturally oriented work and living. *Shire Horse* inverts social rank by raising the farm horse’s standing, employing the traditional pose with which artists presented pedigreed livestock; Charles Frederick Tunnicliffe’s *Shire Stallion* (fig. 4.26), an engraving contemporary with Leighton’s, shows a gentleman, perhaps even the owner, showing off the pride of the stable.⁶⁰ *Evening After the Show* (fig. 4.27) pictures the weary but proud farm boy astride his prize-winning shire horse on the winding road home, long outdistanced by the impatient cars and horse-boxes that had again forced his team into the ditch. Man and horse and cultivated fields meld into the rolling hills, signifying a unity between the land and those who work it and a peaceful existence altogether lacking in the stress-ridden town.

While the old idea of the countryside as morally and physically healthier than the town comes into play here, Leighton’s emphasis on the rural laborer’s way of virtue

⁵⁹ George Sturt (1863-1927, pseud. George Bourne) *Change in the Village* (New York: A. M. Kelley, 1969, 106-07; first published in 1912).

⁶⁰ For an overview of the prolific illustrator C. F. Tunnicliffe (1901-1979), see Ian Niall, *Portrait of a Country Artist: C. F. Tunnicliffe, R. A.* (London: Gollancz, 1980). Earlier examples include George Stubbs’ (1724-1806) portraits of “aristocratic” horses.

through closeness to the land appears to have little to do with the racially oriented perception of the yeoman as a hardy stock from which England would regenerate. A subject of national discourse during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as rural population steadily fell,⁶¹ the debate carried into interwar years addressed itself to the agricultural crisis. England had paid more attention to the towns and the profits from an expandable market rather than the “development of a strong, healthy, vigorous race in the country.” Parliamentary debate on rural industries hoped to “encourage sturdy British village folk all over rural England to hold fast to their old traditions of faith and character.”⁶² But I would argue that Leighton’s interest is to be found more within the larger sphere of the whole human race’s relationship to the natural world, a sense of nature as the source of life, and the importance of community rather than the politics of “blood and soil” as promoted in 1930s Germany, an ideology that some English organicists found attractive as a means of reinvigorating the countryside.⁶³ *Going to the Festival* (fig. 4.28)⁶⁴ brings home the country folk’s productive attachment to the earth, as the vital landscape of curving tree and common roadside flowers seems to embrace a

⁶¹ For example, in his 1883 essay “The Dorsetshire Labourer,” Hardy argues that the laboring class’s weaker relationship to the land deprived them of their typical strong morality; see Holly Davis, “Hardy’s Romanticism in *The Woodlanders*,” *Deep South*, 3 (Spring 1997), n. pag., *English Department Ezine, Otago University, New Zealand*, Web, 7 Jan. 2009.

⁶² Mr. T. Williams and Brigadier-General Brown, House of Commons debate on “Rural Industries,” 15 March 1933, Hansard, the Official Report of Debates in Parliament, HC Deb 15 March 1933 v. 275 cc2049-10, Web, 2 July 2011.

⁶³ For a discussion of British organicists’ interest in the ideology and rhetoric of “blood and soil,” see Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, 168-70 and Burchardt, *Paradise Lost*, 136-37.

⁶⁴ A full-page illustration for the chapter “The Harvest Festival.”

mother and child laden with the bounty of the fields. The narrative makes it clear that these gifts then become “public property” to decorate the village church, as they join the whole parish’s dedicatory offerings in thanksgiving for the harvest.⁶⁵ For Leighton the soil is the ultimate source of goodness and abundance, not dependent on any narrowly defined community; service to it breaks down social barriers, uniting the whole people at a passing, but while it lasts, a very powerful, high point of each year.⁶⁶

Country Matters obliquely addresses the popular perception of the country as morally healthier than the town, while bringing up issues concerning social mores and otherness. The narrative in the chapter “The Village Fair” portrays the rural people as capable of harboring adverse personal and cultural values, suggesting that their conventional morality may not always conform to the idea of the countryside as morally healthier but instead reflects the commonly held prejudicial attitudes that can be found in the wider community. “The Village Fair” takes up the mythology of the gypsy to subvert this idea and to further explore hierarchical categorization of those who are different: the rural people disdain coming “face to face with these brazen hussies and evil-looking dark men,” who never seem to wash.⁶⁷ The engravings of the festival gypsies do not support this overtly stated stereotype, although the captions can direct it (*Evil-looking Dark Man, Soothsayer*, figs. 4.29-30). It is difficult to read Leighton’s intention here: to impart simple local color or to construct a land-rooted, purportedly racially pure stock’s bias counterpointed with people at once alien and familiar as a pointed commentary on

⁶⁵ Leighton, *Country Matters*, 104-05.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 106-07.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 46, 61.

continuing national bias, or even to criticize Germany's Aryan-centric prejudice and periodic pogroms of the Romani during the 1930s.⁶⁸ One is tempted to juxtapose the illustration of chasteness, whiteness, and ideal beauty (*Miss Stacy's Venus*, fig. 4.31), which Leighton casts as a coveted but ultimately unattainable fair prize, with the popular image of the swarthy gypsy. Deborah Nord relates that gypsies "functioned in British cultural symbolism as a perennial other, a recurrent and apparently necessary marker of difference," which served "as a field for the projection for what was both feared and desired in that part of the British cultural self that was denied, reviled, or prohibited."⁶⁹ Rather than identifying the Romani with "Tramps" free-spirited rogues who are close to nature and impervious to the oppressive constraints of modern life, which Nord argues expresses "the main appeal of gypsies to the British imagination in the early twentieth century,"⁷⁰ Leighton brands them here as purveyors of lust, avarice, and upheaval disrupting an otherwise tranquil community. More than long-presenced outsiders to the countryside, the gypsies embolden the villagers' latent, at times consciously felt but sternly hidden longings and passions, causing as much disturbance to their emotions and behavior as the suburbanites have to the face of the land.

⁶⁸ Donald Kenrick's and Sian Bakewell's *On the Verge: The Gypsies in England* (Hatfield : University of Hertfordshire Press, 1995) documents British attitudes towards the Romani.

⁶⁹ Nord, *Gypsies and the British Imagination*, 3.

⁷⁰ The gypsiologist Arthur Symons' (1865-1945) essay "In Praise of Gypsies" summed up this appeal: "they stand for the will of freedom, for friendship with nature, for the open air, for change and the sight of many lands; for all of us that are in protest against progress ... The Gypsies represent nature before civilisation ... the last romance left in the world," in Sampson, *Wind on the Heath*, 4, quoted in *Ibid*, 136.

Casting the exotic outsider as the hard force troubling the village to almost chaotic ending seems to reconfigure the dichotomies that inform the convention of town and country; its effectiveness depends on the ideas of urban-generated materialistic values and acting on sturdy rural folk living off the land. While *The Village Fair* (fig. 4.32) portrays a festival assembled for the local people's enjoyment, the narrative implies that it is the town's materialistic products, which the Romani ply in their exotically garish travelling show, that are undermining the decent old ways. If not overtly visualized in "The Village Fair," the town's casually powerful commodification of the country was readily apparent in more widely circulating publications than that of *Country Matters*. Pictures such as *Country Fair* (fig. 4.33) clearly stated who owned and enjoyed the countryside, challenging the rural folks' rightful heritage by transforming the experience into a show for the refined amusement of sophisticated urbanites.⁷¹ Leighton resolves this inequitable rural commodification by purging the town-generated vice (*Storm at the Fair*, fig. 4.34); the following day the quiet, seemingly deserted village (*The Village Green*, fig. 4.35) bears no trace of the fair, as if it had never brought the temptations of modern life to the country.

Visions of the Future of the Countryside and the Wider Community

This study has explored Leighton's use of the countryside to address multiple anxieties relating to the rapidly changing social and physical landscape. I want to suggest

⁷¹ Illustration by Charles Mozley for the cover of *Country Life Annual*, 1938. *Country Life* magazine, founded in 1897 for an elite landed readership, continues to be published.

that *Country Matters*' concluding chapter, which takes place just before the arrival of the New Year, connects her pessimistic vision for the future of traditional rural life with that of the wider community. "Bell-Ringers" speaks to the villagers' past calamities and hopes for brighter days as the old year gives way to the new, while invoking Revelations' prophecy of the end of this world and the coming of the heavenly order, transposing the local to universal significance. The header engraving, *Bell* (fig. 4.36), establishes the chapter's somber tone; the great bell stands silent, its cog and other works immobile.⁷² *Bell Ringers* (fig. 4.37) reinforces this solemnity, portraying the bellmen as abstracted forms casting ominous shadows on the belfry walls. The narrative introduces the apocalyptic vision, as the captain of the ringers swings the great tenor bell whose peals are to kill the old year. The flu-fevered captain sees a vision in the sky, as the ringers change sequences:

214356. 241536. 425136. Boom! Boom! Boom! The old year lay writhing in agony, and he, Timothy Childs, rope in hand, dragged its dying body along, among the clouds and the hills.... [H]e looked up and saw it, a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns upon its head. And in the air about it were lightnings and thunderings and voices, drowning the death rattle of the old year itself.⁷³

Leighton leaves it to the reader to associate the apocalyptic imagery of John with a specific visual image, perhaps suggesting Blake's powerful response to his verse, *The*

⁷² An effect all the more pronounced when compared to the ringing bell and the joined, uplifted arms of children in her *Celebration*, an engraving to illustrate Josephine Young Case's poetry marking the end of World War II (*Freedom's Farm* [Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1946], 41).

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 158. The imagery of the dragon and its casting out is to be found in Rev. 12:3 and 13.

Great Red Dragon and the Woman Clothed with the Sun: The Devil Is Come Down (c. 1805, fig. 4.38).⁷⁴

The rural people's helplessness to maintain life and livelihood under the forces of mechanization and their betters' self-righteous attitudes comes into play here. Childs blames the dragon (Satan) for the sorrows and setbacks of the passing year: the village rat catcher getting "destroyed by a motor car, till his body lay crimson in the road with blood;" the hardening of the rector's heart when he turned out the scullery maid "because she did grow and swell, like they marrows that is sent by Almighty God." His apocalyptic hallucination continues:

I am the bright and morning star.... And it be I as must bring her in.
Behold I make all things new.... She be young and pure and shy.... And
the bells do ring out for her, and I be drawing her along in a golden
chariot, to sit upon a great white throne. It be like a voice from heaven, as
the voice of many waters, singing a new song.⁷⁵

Hopes for a better year ahead prompt him to tell the New Year that she must bring a child for Mrs. Stanton and a new fence for the chicken run. All rung out, he stumbles home, nearly falling over the backdoor rain barrel (*Snow-banked Water Butt*, fig 4.39) and crumples into the chair by the fire, "his power ... gone."⁷⁶

Child's ringing out the Devil for his wicked deeds against his innocent neighbors and his hopes for the New Year gives voice to pressing country concerns. Cars speeding

⁷⁴ Leighton highly valued Blake's work: "I rejoice in the Blake postcard – he is one of my Gods;" Clare Leighton to Henry Schnakenberg, 16 Nov. [mid-1950s], Henry Schnakenberg Papers, Archives of American Art.

⁷⁵ Leighton, *Country Matters*, 158-60 (from Rev. 22, and directly quoting part of verse 16).

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 159.

down the narrow, winding country roads killed a good many people not yet used to dodging them. C. W. Empson's 1936 essay "This Motoring" depicts a culture still grappling with the problems brought about by that embodiment of rural commodification and modern technology -- its potentially destructive powers, the need to assert pedestrians' rights, the efficacy of speed limits and traffic lights. Powys Evans' *A Sacrifice to the Gods* (fig. 4.40), in which a well-dressed city dweller returns the salute of an honor guard of robot-like fuel pumps as his roadster cuts down a passerby,⁷⁷ satirically visualizes Empson's declaration: "Motors are made for men, not men for motors, and when motors kill men their use cannot be justified."⁷⁸

On a wider level, such order in economic life and in world affairs as there was seemed to further deteriorate. With civil war breaking out in Spain in 1936, the continued rise of fascism, and Germany's growing power, outright war seemed inevitable. Within the bell ringer's visions, world peace and a satisfying life for himself and the other villagers were possible. His recalling from Revelations the verse, "Behold, I make all things new," prompts a fuller contextual reading of the text, which promises a fresh beginning:

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new.⁷⁹

But Childs' hallucinations break, and he resumes his earthly self, even stumbling over the mundane water butt. Life's inequities and anxieties reassert themselves over their

⁷⁷ The full-page cartoon was published in *G. K.'s Weekly*, 23 Apr. 1936, 94.

⁷⁸ C. W. Empson, "This Motoring," *G. K.'s Weekly*, 6 Feb. 1936, 312-13.

⁷⁹ Rev. 21: 4-5.

powerless victims with a terrible vengeance. The glimpse of a brighter world for the here and now is but a mirage, tantalizing but ultimately ever receding.

Leighton's relationship with Noel Brailsford only served to intensify her anxieties concerning the world crises. His journalism was by now displaying an increasing despondency and frustration at the course of communism, the march of Fascism, and the seeming impossibility of rallying the leaders of the democracies to resist tyranny and stand up for decency.⁸⁰ Hitler's promise to maintain the superiority of "the Nordic race, the finest flower on the tree of humanity" was in direct opposition to Brailsford's antinationalistic vision of a world that would encompass all humankind. Like Timothy Childs among his bells, Brailsford had seen and yearned for the possibilities of a new world, but now felt utterly powerless to deflect the headlong downward course of events. Having helped prevent Brailsford from enlisting for the Spanish Republic, Leighton resolved in the fall of 1938 to leave both him and England, fearing for both her sanity and his while resolving not to endure another world war. In late December, she sailed to the United States without telling him of her decision.⁸¹

While Leighton had asserted that the countryside could "survive the tractor and the radio" in the preface to *Country Matters*, her private assessments were anything but sanguine. The Anglophile Virginia novelist Ellen Glasgow, writing years later about her last summer in England (1930), recalled that Leighton had confirmed her sense that the landscape was changing beyond recognition and had urged her to hold onto memories of an unspoiled England:

⁸⁰ Leventhal, *Last Dissenter*, discussed throughout the chapter "In the Nightmare of the Dark (1933-1938)," 228-262.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, 261-62.

There was something else that troubled me, and this was the feeling that the English themselves were doing their best to spoil the beauty of England. I had seen the slaughter of trees; I had seen a quick and flimsy American style of architecture (if it may be called that) springing up like toadstools after a rain; I had seen Stonehenge threatened, and the approaches to Cathedral towns made unsightly. "If you love the English countryside don't go back," Clare Leighton warned me as early as 1927. "Everything is sacrificed to speed and to the ugly coast to coast roads."⁸²

One could only sustain the image of the "romance" of the English countryside for so long.

Although Britons' interest in illustrated rural life writing remained high through the war years, professional concerns must have also influenced her decision to leave England. However much her powerful, unsentimental portrayal of England's cultivated landscape had sustained her creativity, and with it her livelihood, for over the past decade, she must have seen the vast North America continent with its various farming regions as offering untapped possibilities for future work. Her war-time commissions show her continued commitment to the land and its people: illustrations for Hardy's *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1940), her commemoration of the English countryside and its most deeply associated author; *Southern Harvest* (1942), her impressions of the cotton and tobacco lands still with their tap roots in the Old South, transitioning between

⁸² Ellen Glasgow, *The Woman Within: The Autobiography of Ellen Glasgow* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1954), 260-61, which was written over a number of years and published posthumously. Glasgow was probably mistaken about the date 1927. Although earlier correspondence is possible, she and Leighton did not meet until 1935, in New York; their correspondence (in the Papers of Ellen Glasgow at the University of Virginia) begins at that time.

traditional life and modernization, Jim Crow and social progressivism; and *Give Us This Day* (1943), a hymn to the enduring capacity of the land to feed its people.⁸³

The Critical Response

Leighton's British and American reviewers found *Country Matters*, which was issued as a gift book for the holidays, among the most attractive rural life publications of the late '30s.⁸⁴ They articulated the defining qualities that they found distinguished her work from others' in the genre, despite their need to be insightful and succinct and provide descriptive information while addressing both the stories, the illustrations, and often another recently published illustrated book on country life.⁸⁵ The engravings exhibited power, grace, and strong composition, "with so resourceful yet so restrained a use of repetition and contrast in shape and line" within a confined space. That the countryside portrayed was one that spoke to the imagination and the heart, not to the contemporary social and material problems of rural life, went unquestioned. Her vision

⁸³ *Under the Greenwood Tree* was published by Macmillan in London and New York; *Southern Harvest* by Macmillan in New York, and by Gollancz in London in 1943; *Give Us This Day* by Reynal and Hitchcock in New York.

⁸⁴ J. Donald Adams, "Country Matters in Prose and Woodcuts," *New York Times Book Review*, 12 Dec. 1937, 5; Edmund Blunden, "Sketches from Nature," *Spectator*, 19 Nov. 1937, 26.

⁸⁵ Typically *Down the River* (1937), the second collaborative effort of H. E. Bates and the engraver Agnes Miller Parker, commissioned by Gollancz. The reviews were usually brief, ranging from 250 to 350 words.

was an “homage of the English spirit to the beauty of England;” its landscape remained unsurpassed by any other country’s.⁸⁶

They noted Leighton’s particular interest in depicting working country people as opposed to “wild” nature or the interests of the English country gentleman, devoted to gardening, sport, and nature study. While her narrative might address the adverse forces of mechanization and modern life on the countryside, they found in her engravings the articulation of an “essential harmony of the village community with the land it springs from.” Her formal means, especially as conveyed in *Chair Bodgers* and *The Smithy*, seemed to fuse “the movements and shape” of people, animals, and landscape.⁸⁷ The American writer and naturalist Henry Beston found that her engravings had a “natural power and unaffectedness,” catching “the warmth of the earth and human living ... in its beauty and hieratic quality, never in its prettiness.” Using her imagination and her artist’s instinct for people, she had sketched the village people with a “Wife-of-Bath completeness.”⁸⁸

The reviewers generally did not mention her use either of the illustrations or the narrative to address contemporary social, political, and cultural issues. Several factors could have contributed to this contextual oversight, most likely the limited amount of space given to the reviews. Moreover, the reviewers were usually rather urban literary critics; while they rightly acclaimed the primacy of her engravings and her importance as

⁸⁶ Henry Beston, “Homage to England’s Beauty,” *New York Herald Tribune Books*, 19 Dec. 1937, 4.

⁸⁷ “Country Scenes and People,” *Times Literary Supplement* (London), 6 Nov. 1937, 831; Adams, “Country Matters in Prose and Woodcuts,” 5.

⁸⁸ Beston, “Homage to England’s Beauty,” 4.

an artist, they probably did not closely read the often-folksy narrative, which at times takes up themes and characterizations widely available in other interwar rural life literature. There were brief glimpses of insight: one critic found that Leighton's sketches of country life were "sometimes poignant," but offered no further discussion.⁸⁹ Another wrote of *Storm at the Fair* in metaphorical terms: the strips of wind-whipped tent canvas were "the elemental shapes that constitute the universe," while the scattering villager crowd represented sinners on judgment day.⁹⁰

As I have argued elsewhere in this study, Leighton's oblique manner of expressing her concerns requires a close reading of image and text and an understanding of how and when the two media function together or in opposition. Her livelihood depended on pleasing her publishers and readership -- she had to support herself for her entire adulthood --, which limited the extent to which she could digress from conventional expectations. The following, concluding chapter attempts to substantiate my interpretation of her interests and intentions by looking at the handful of engravings that she produced during the mid-1930s independently of her books. "Common" working people's hardships and their relationship to the land remain her concerns.

⁸⁹ Henry Seidel Canby, "Dramatic Sketches," *Saturday Review of Literature*, 11 Dec. 1937, 6, a review consisting of 150 words.

⁹⁰ Helen J. Lang, "In Rural England," *Boston Evening Transcript*, 15 Jan. 1938, Book Reviews, pt. 5, 3.

EPILOGUE

LEIGHTON'S INDEPENDENTLY PRODUCED ENGRAVINGS OF WORKING PEOPLE AND THE NATURAL WORLD

The preceding chapters have addressed Leighton's prints of English rural life commissioned during the 1920s and 1930s to illustrate books and government sentimentalization of the countryside and its alleged ways. I have argued that these works often subtly advance contemporary cultural, social, and economic concerns for all that they apparently frame the tastes and expectations of her publishers, various official British agencies, and a readership absorbed with a nostalgia for traditional rural customs. The inequities of class division and gross material inequality, war's brutality and fruitlessness figure largely, if not obliquely, in these works even as they endorse a vision of a pre-industrial lifestyle embodied in farm workers' close relationship with the land. Their power and effectiveness derives from Leighton's embrace of aspects of modernism as she developed distinctive formal means to convey an image of workers organically engaged in tasks on a landscape closely identified with "Englishness" and national identity.

The following examines a small group of engravings that Leighton created independent of book illustration during the late '20s and '30s, to further assess her commissioned work, her interests, and the means by which she sought to attain a wide-based viewership. The product of greater creative freedom and originality, they more openly establish her art's relation to social issues, political ideology and public taste,

demonstrating a wider-cast, more politically provocative and socially relevant vision than her books directed toward the seasonal gift book market could attempt. Out of an oeuvre of more than 850 prints over a fifty-year career, Leighton created very few independent engravings; I attribute this largely to her need to devote her time and energy to income-producing work.¹ But certain first-hand encounters compelled her to document a particular scene while investing it with deep personal reaction and long-meditated doctrine. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the majority depicts workers outside Britain: *Snow Shovellers* (New York, 1929), *Bread Line, New York* (1932), *Boston Cod* (1929), *Firewood in Georgia* (1936), *Winnowers, Majorca* (1937). Her professional success and livelihood derived from picturing a half-authentic, half-imagined rural England in a highly nationalistic idiom, with no reference to poverty (rural or urban) as it was judged at the time, industrial strife, alienation, or victimization. Her few scenes of London, commissioned as General Omnibus advertisements, depict unthreatening, indeed almost pastoral, historic or picturesque views. *St. Paul's Cathedral* puts that otherwise imposing mass on a scale with the natural world, its circular portico creating a dialogue with a vibrant elm shading un-mechanized labor (1929, fig. 5.1).² Even *The Docks*, a potential recourse to address urban working-class issues or to portray workers heroically, seems to be more concerned with the pictorial power of black and white contrasts (1929, fig. 5.2).

Leighton's engravings of the United States, made on several visits before she

¹ The catalogue raisonné (Fletcher, *Clare Leighton*) indicates that she made around sixteen independent engravings during the 1930s, her most productive decade, six of which comprise the Canadian Lumber Camp series (1931).

² The third of this series for the General Omnibus depicts the sizeable Caledonian Market, with its landmark tower (*Caledonian Market*, 1929), and is similarly scaled to the other engravings; reproduced in Jaffé, *Wood Engravings of Clare Leighton*, 48.

came to this country as an immigrant in late 1938, continue to address certain themes explored in the English subjects even as they pursue new aims, demonstrating her deep concern for social and economic injustice and an abiding interest in working people's relationship to the natural world, at a time of increasing alienation from a productive engagement with the land. While the '30s were a time of unprecedented world economic disaster and social upheaval, depression-era New York represented for her the depth of economic inequality and artificiality, exposing the excesses of corporate, capitalistic materialism and mass unemployment, in an environment utterly hostile to the natural world.³ For many European commentators, New York symbolized the nation, not only as the first and last sight of the vast continent, but as now surpassing London as cultural nexus and global financial capital. But for all that its publishing houses, galleries, and social networking made it indispensable to her professional advancement, Leighton disdained its clamor and rush, and her few prints of it underscore her view of urban life as antithetical to the natural world. Neither celebrating the city as the port of entry for millions eager to embrace the land of opportunity, nor exalting skyscrapers as shining symbols of America's unparalleled progress, she placed the common man against the heart of the financial district, in backbreaking toil or despairing in a breadline, not even the tedium of repetitive factory labor an option anymore.

³ Although New York served as a necessary base for Leighton's and Brailsford's periodic lecturing and exhibiting visits to the United States. Brailsford publicly chastised the city, whose forever-amplifying inhuman bulk callously flaunted "its triumph over Nature;" H. N. Brailsford, "America in Retrospect, An Unpolitical Society," *New Leader*, 30 March 1928, 11.

Snow Shovellers (1929, fig. 5.3), engraved shortly after Leighton's first trip to the United States,⁴ forms a subtle dialogue about the disparities between capitalism and the laboring class, material gain and comfort or lack thereof; and the place of the natural world (of which people are a part) in the predominant urban environment. Those most tangible manifestations of the capitalist system rise above faceless or obliquely profiled workers who toil in bitter cold, at the lowest kind of casual wage,⁵ to clear a path around lower Broadway's Bowling Green, the oldest park in the city, now but a ghost of "a fresh, green breast of the new world."⁶ Fall set trees -- reminiscent of the stifled transplants in their narrow concrete boxes along Fifth Avenue that Leighton remembers with much empathy in *Four Hedges*⁷ -- strain skyward, slender reminders of nature, vying to thrive with the marble and limestone fortresses of soaring American materialism.

I would argue that *Snow Shovellers*, neither an overt socio-political statement

⁴ A letter to the publisher Daniel Macmillan documents her "sailing for the States next Saturday the 22nd." Clare Leighton to Mr. [Daniel] Macmillan, 16 Dec. 1928, Records of Macmillan and Co.

⁵ The artist Norman Barr recalls hundreds of homeless men, who were living in Hooverville shanties along the Hudson, Harlem, and East Rivers, waiting in line all night for snow shoveling work at the forecast of snow; "Statement," in NYC WPA Artists, Inc., *New York City WPA Art* (New York: Parsons School of Design, 1977), xiii, quoted in Patricia Hills, *Social Concern and Urban Realism: American Painting of the 1930s* (Boston: Boston University Art Gallery, 1983), 10.

⁶ Nick Carraway's description of the new world as he imagines it, was at the moment of the European landfall, as he faces the new decade -- the 1930s; quoted from F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (New York and London: Scribner Classics, 2000), 154. Ironically for Leighton, Bowling Green had once been New Amsterdam's cattle market, and briefly the site of a gilded lead equestrian statue of King George III, soon melted down into Revolutionary bullets.

⁷ "There had been pathos in the sight of these little trees, each so soon to be imprisoned in a minute island of mould on the cement sidewalk. They had looked very lonely, cut off so completely from the earth that had fed them while they were yet in the open land;" Leighton, *Four Hedges*, 116-17.

or a scene based solely on non-reflective observation, invited its viewers to move beyond a casual reading to ponder the contrasts set before them: between rich and poor, artifice and nature -- clear and impassive articulations unhampered by extraneous details.

Although the scene is unpopulated with the exception of the laborers, Leighton's careful delineation of specific buildings gives a face to capitalists like John D. Rockefeller, whose greatly expanded Standard Oil Building stood as a symbol of individual and corporate power, its dominance of American industry triumphing over muckraking and antitrust to bestride the world's fuel resources like a colossus. The skyscrapers -- "icons of the Modern age, their advertising function as symbols of corporate power soon transformed into more generalized symbols of modern industrial civilization"⁸ -- shelter Big Business, impervious to harsh Nature and the plight of those below them, their heating systems emitting giant white plumes of steam that well impassively through the snowstorm.

The scene's low vantage point and the barrier formed by the curved, high-running El serve to bond together the natural world -- the men engaged in manual labor and the trees -- and to indicate something of life and energy, even as they divide nature from the rigidly artificial buildings. Moreover, these compositional elements make the men appear to be supporting the buildings, a reminder on whose backs the skyscrapers rose. Leighton strikes at the heart of the deepest logic of the Machine Age, as Miles Orvell characterizes it, "a division of labor and a division of society: between those who worked with their hands and those who thought with their heads." With its focus on men

⁸ Miles Orvell, *After the Machine: Visual Arts and the Erasing of Cultural Boundaries*, (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1995), 5.

in backbreaking labor set against massed stone power, unmoving, immeasurable wealth, *Snow Shovellers* rejects the hard-nosed but highly efficient American industrial system as conceived by Ford and [Frederick Winslow] Taylor, a pitiless process that Brailsford warned would replace manual labor and bring mass unemployment.⁹

If *Snow Shovellers* shows those cast beneath the hard discipline of want by the crude power of material progress and suggests the machine's capacity to dehumanize, *Bread Line, New York* (fig. 5.4) confronts the viewer with the unreflective, flattening forces of unchecked materialism and mechanization. The print evokes the misery of that quarter of a nation cast out of work by the greatest of depressions, reduced to a seemingly unending line, dehumanized and dwarfed by the mighty towers -- blatant in lacking the identifiable features of individualistic achievement. A few men warm their hands over a paltry fire to ward off the wintry chill, while a hard-edged concrete pathway divides the purposeless work-deprived from stilled machinery; a dark, tunnel-like entrance leads to a closed, fortress-like factory. Stark neon signs advertising "Loans" and now-unaffordable commodities of the consumer culture cast a cold glare, in contrast to the skyscrapers whose radiant glow does not filter down to the workless. Even the spire of what could represent Trinity Church -- a symbol of hope and refuge, a reminder of the human-scaled spirituality of the past -- seems pathetically out of time, overwhelmed by the cold stone of

⁹ Brailsford turned what he saw of rising unemployment in New York earlier in 1928 (perhaps reflecting the 1927 recession) into an article for the *New Leader*, which noted that the "queues of the destitute, who wait outside the doors of the soup kitchens and the offices of charitable societies, are lengthening out, until here and there they block the streets...." He placed the blame squarely on "the American process of ever-increasing mechanical efficiency. The restless substitution of mechanical process for human labour is on the march;" "The Victims of Progress: Unemployment in America," *New Leader*, 24 Feb. 1928, 9.

commerce. *Bread Line, New York's* sense of alienation and unnaturalness derives from Leighton's pursuing modes of expression that spring from a hard-edged modernist vocabulary that has no parallel in her entire *oeuvre*; her organic, rhythmic rendering of nature and people at work has no place here.

Deeply sympathetic to the victims of what she considered to be a flawed system based on materialism, Leighton aligns with those contemporaries whose "social viewpoint"¹⁰ centered on the miseries of those hammered by the wreckage of a collapsed economy, to confront the myths of American egalitarianism, dynamism, and the universal benefits of machine efficiency. She questions the nature of work in a culture that, as Michael Denning has argued, was seen in purely industrial terms.¹¹ Taking not only the idea of capitalism as a form of exploitation, but also as one based on the "boundless imposition of work," Leighton considers the spirit-lowering reduction of life to mere toil for gain. Her alternate vision of a physically and emotionally satisfying mode of living takes unequivocal form in *Boston Cod* (1929, fig. 5.5), which depicts fishermen as independent, autonomous agents dynamically engaged in one of New England's most important maritime activities. Whereas the city presents itself as a grid of lifeless, straight-edged buildings, this scene seems to cut against the grain, following no direct line, to convey with true power the sea toilers' vitality and purposefulness as they harvest

¹⁰ Following Helen Langa's proposal to use the term, which appears in contemporary art criticism, in place of the genre of "Social Realism;" *Radical Art, Printmaking and the Left in 1930s New York* (Berkeley: U of CA P, 2004), 6.

¹¹ Michael Denning (*The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* [New York: Verso, 1996], xvii and passim) has argued that during the 1930s there was a 'laboring of American culture;' cited in Erika Doss, "Looking at Labor: Images of Work in 1930s American Art," *Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts* 24 (2002): 235.

nature's bounty at its source.

But *Firewood in Georgia* (fig. 5.6) demonstrates the simple but hard truth that even those grown deep into the natural world cannot thrive in an environment of oppression and poverty. The large engraving, nearly the size of those for *The Farmer's Year*,¹² depicts three African-Americans trudging beneath the burdens of life, whether immediately in their pitiful want, or overall at the crushing bottom of a grossly unjust social order, kept going by little else than their own spirit and scarcely encouraged resourcefulness. The foreshortened background accentuates the heroic-sized figures, particularly the one in the center laboring beneath the cross-shaped bundles of firewood. The bent forms cry out sorrow and hardship; the woman on the left grips her aching back, while on the far right the unhappy soul pressing his hands over his ears exudes cold misery, a figure of lamentation.

Numerous devices, including the language of body gesture and plant symbolism, drive home the subjects' physical and emotional exhaustion and despondency and further figure them as martyrs.¹³ Clumps of soft, diaphanous-appearing Spanish moss, a symbol of the Old South, contrast with the biting sharp-edged kindling. The hard-spiked yucca leaves intensify the landscape's inhospitality, their shapes hinting at a crown of thorns, while the plants on the far right of the scene -- broad corn-like leaves and small heads of

¹² Nine-by-seven inches as compared to eight-by-ten inches.

¹³ The vegetation also serves to readily identify the locale; for example, the Spanish moss hanging from the trees, long an archetypal image of Deep South landscape, immediately locates the scene in the sub-tropic coastal plain.

thick tear-shaped seeds weighing down the grass stems -- strongly resemble Job's tears.¹⁴ *Coix lachryma-jobi*, long naturalized in the southeastern region and commonly known in the United States as Chinese pearl barley, deepens the visual allusion to Christ toiling to Golgotha beneath the cross, flanked by his fellow-condemned, uniting his impending suffering and death with an Old Testament theme of endless unearned affliction. Alluding to the righteous-living Job's faithful endurance of one calamity after another underscores the economic and social ordeals to which the African-American was still subjected to with brutal confidence in the South of the 1930s, seemingly still resigned to his fate, as W. E. Du Bois observed, "on a soil wet with [his] blood and tears." Once "as essentially necessary to the cultivation of Georgia, as axes, hoes, or any utensil of agriculture" in his servitude to King Cotton, he now embodies the "spiritual gloom" that the black educator and social activist found pervading the land.¹⁵ Leighton's deep concern for those under the yoke of social and economic injustice intersects with perhaps the most pathetically inequitable circumstance in the United States of the 1930s -- impoverished African-Americans eking out an existence in one of the South's poorest states, largely rural and agricultural, a hotbed of Jim Crow and the Ku Klux Klan. Her earlier misconceptions

¹⁴ The botanist and horticulturalist Dr. Larry Mellichamp, Director of the Botanical Gardens at the University of North Carolina-Charlotte and an expert on plants indigenous to and cultivated in the South, kindly identified the Job's tears, a grass long and widely grown in the tropics for food as well as for its large, porcelain-like seeds, used as beads – for decoration and as a source of income. "Re: plant ID," Message from Dr. Larry Mellichamp to the author, 6 Apr. 2009, Email.

¹⁵ W. E. Burghardt Du Bois, "Georgia: Invisible Empire State," in *These United States, Portraits of America from the 1920s*, ed. Daniel Borus (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1992), 103, 94, 99.

about black people and uninformed racial stereotyping¹⁶ give way to a greatly enlarged social consciousness likely stimulated by having directly observed such an occurrence during a road trip in the early winter of 1935.¹⁷

Her association of African-Americans' suffering with the sacrifice of Christ throws a clear grave light on her sense of and artistic responses to the differing American and British cultural climates of that period. As Erika Doss relates, some American "Social Realists" portrayed labor in terms of a Christian symbolism redefined along humanist lines. Christ was "often seen as a champion of the underclass" in portraying the sacrifice entailed by modern proletarian struggles in the 1930s United States, with artists depicting His sacrifice in an imagery of suffering contemporary toilers.¹⁸ I would argue that *Firewood in Georgia* speaks to this reconfigured, wider humanist perspective while retaining a specifically Christian relevance; the reference to the crucible aligns in a

¹⁶ Part of a publicity statement that she wrote in 1935 -- "She expects to go as far west as St. Paul, and she wants to do some painting in Florida, particularly of negro [sic] types" (Macmillan Company Book News Advance Copy for *Four Hedges*, 1 November 1935, Margaret Bourke-White Papers) -- reveals stereotyping and a seeming association of blacks with tropical climates. To put this into some perspective, British citizens were more familiar (if acquainted at all) with black people in their empire's African colonies than with those of the United States. *Tempestuous Petticoat* (197-98) recalls reading *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and of meeting Africans from Sierra Leone as a child. See also her illustrations of black people (imagined, not drawn from life) for H. M. Tomlinson's *The Sea and the Jungle* (London: Duckworth; New York: Harper & Bros., 1930).

¹⁷ Leighton's long-held desire to travel through the South was realized beginning in late December 1935, when she made good a reflection to Vera Brittain that, having recently drawn the Pittsburgh steel mills and "otherwise ... crudely selling myself in New York," she was considering going "for two or three weeks with a young woman I know, in a ramshackle Ford, and just traipse around and draw;" Clare Leighton to Vera Brittain, 13 Dec. [1935], Vera Brittain Archive. Leighton, who had not yet learned to drive, rode with Eleanor Musselman, who in 1938 would convince Leighton to settle in her hometown of Baltimore.

¹⁸ Doss, "Looking at Labor, 246.

general sense of mounting tyranny while serving as a reminder of Christ as a primary source of spiritual identification for generations of enslaved black Americans and their still-oppressed descendants. The configuration of the trees in *Winter* (1932, fig. 5.7), which appeared as the Christmas cover of the BBC's magazine the *Listener*, invokes the Crucifixion in barely discernible, humanist terms. I would suggest that the two prints' varied, nuanced approaches to the fundamental image demonstrate Leighton's informed responses to the differing degrees of British and American public religious faith during the '30s, a mindfulness of how and to what degree they would be received in the two countries, and an awareness of the historic relevance of Christ's suffering in the African-American culture.

Her depression-era independent prints *Firewood in Georgia* and *Breadline, New York* are the most overt assertions of suffering that she ever made, powerfully heartfelt responses, not only to what she had seen for herself, but also to the strong currents of progressive social awareness that some American artists were articulating. To cast American workers as victims of society held specific implications for her career in the cultural atmosphere of the 1930s. But she seems not to have exhibited with radical American initiatives or reached a wide American public. Although a leading New York gallery stocked a complete line of her work beginning in the mid '30s¹⁹ and she exhibited

¹⁹ During the Depression venerable commercial galleries began to expand into the cheaper print market as their more expensive offerings failed to sell; in late 1935 Kennedy Galleries became Leighton's agent in the United States. Clare Leighton to Leona E. Prasse (associate curator, department of prints and drawings, Cleveland Museum of Art), 18 Nov. 1935; Typescript Announcement from Kennedy & Co. regarding "Clare Leighton," 1936, Clare Leighton Papers. Redfern Galleries in London also carried a full line of her prints; Leighton to Rolfe Scott-James, 21 Sept. 1934, Rolfe Scott-James Papers.

periodically in the United States, *Snow Shovelling*; *Bread Line, New York*; and *Firewood in Georgia* received a limited viewership.²⁰ Contemporary exhibition announcements show that her work was publicized in northern cities, primarily New York, Boston, and Chicago, but featured her Canadian Lumber Camp series and recent illustrations for books, which maintained her reputation as an illustrator of rural life.²¹ None of the three engravings appear to have been published in American venues, although they could have well served the ideology of the leading American Marxist magazine *New Masses*.²² Regardless, her livelihood benefited in part from the capitalist marketplace even as she exposed its shortcomings.²³

Her American scenes reached a broader audience in Britain, in conservative, progressive, and leftwing publications; certainly, the images took on different meanings as they appeared in different venues and were viewed by different audiences. *Snow Shovellers* appeared in an expensive British literary anthology, the exclusive Curwen Press's *Legion Book* of 1929, brought out through "the personal interest of the H. R. H. The Prince of Wales" at the suggestion of King George V to raise funds for the Royal

²⁰ The prints were issued in mostly small editions: *Snow Shovellers*, 30; *Bread Line, New York*, 100; *Firewood in Georgia*, 60; Fletcher, *Clare Leighton*, entries 146, 198, 348.

²¹ As shown by a collection of announcements and programs listing the engravings exhibited, Clare Leighton Papers.

²² Andrew Hemingway (*Artists on the Left: American Artists and the Communist Movement, 1926-1956* [New Haven and London: Yale UP, 2002], 1-2) relates that *New Masses* (1926 -1948) was founded by a "mixed group of liberals and radicals" with the content being set by the artists and writers in an "artistic and literary" tone, not a "political" one.

²³ Leighton remained critical of her adopted country's consumerist orientation, writing to Vera Brittain that "I get positively sick at the selfish materialism of the American people;" 11 May 1946, Clare Leighton to Vera Brittain, Vera Brittain Archive.

British Legion, a charity for veterans and serving soldiers. Its subject is not thematically aligned to the publication's literary pieces, and its inclusion probably reflects Leighton's need to submit an unpublished or non-copyrighted image.²⁴ But the understated manner in which she conveyed the contrast between capital and labor alike and the natural world, and her concomitant interest in formal considerations and aesthetics, allowed her to submit the print to a conservatively oriented publication. *Snow Shovellers* exhibits a fine balance between Leighton's desires to express political critique and produce salable images that could appeal to a variety of audiences. On the other hand, *Firewood in Georgia*, which could have elicited controversy with its more overt depiction of poverty, of African-Americans in the Jim Crow South, would have held less than widespread appeal. Appearing in 1937 in the by-then liberal *London Mercury*, its placement near an essay that also speaks to the theme of individual and universal suffering, creates a subtle dialogue that bridges time and place, myth and reality.²⁵ As I discuss below, *Bread Line's* damning critique of American capitalism was material for furthering the ideology of

²⁴ H. Cotton Minchin, ed., *The Legion Book*, (London: Cassell, Sept. 1929), Curwen Press's special limited edition of 600 copies; the Doubleday trade edition has a reduced number of illustrations. Leighton's correspondence to Minchin sheds no light on why she submitted this particular print; "Humphrey Cotton Minchin, Inventory of The Legion Papers, 1927-1935," *Texas A&M University Cushing Memorial Library and Archives*, Web, 27 Aug. 2009.

²⁵ The progressively minded Rolfe Scott-James, who had assumed the *Mercury's* editorship from the then conservative J. C. Squire in 1934, appears to have purposefully placed it at the conclusion of Martin Cooper's essay "*Sunt Lacrimae Rerum*," which compares Giacomo Leopardi's and A. E. Housman's poetic pessimisms. The engraving and the title of the essay both speak of suffering: Aeneas, who overcome by the futility of war and the suffering of the world, sighs, "*Sunt lacrimae rerum et mentem mortalia tangunt*" (These are the tears in all things, and thoughts of death crowd on the mind); in Martin Cooper's "*Sunt Lacrimae Rerum*," *London Mercury* 36, Jan. 1937, 300-307. The engraving is on p. 307.

radical publications.

How do these works relate to or diverge from images of poverty and suffering created by American artists during the 1930s, many of whom were involved with left-wing politics? Patricia Hills and others have shown the wide range of these artists' approaches to Depression-era conditions in urban New York: from depicting the dehumanizing effects of want and the plight of the poor as victims; to individuals of dignity and worth despite their need, seemingly accepting life and engaged with those around them; or as militants, standard-bearers in the struggle of labor for its rights against capital.²⁶ Leighton's urban vision articulates the cold nature and dehumanizing qualities of New York to the exclusion of the city as a nexus for vibrant communal activity and energetic human interaction.²⁷ Unlike Isabel Bishop's *Fourteenth Street* (1932, fig. 5.8), or Raphael Soyer's *In the City Park* (1934, fig. 5.9), where those separated by social and economic differences share the same public space and occasionally interact, Leighton refuses to give humanity to the well-off, relegating them to the cold but powerful supremacy of the skyscrapers. For that matter, her political critique as expressed in her New York scenes allows little sense of the underclass' humanity, as shown in Soyer's empathetic individualized characterizations, or the pall of hopelessness conveyed in Harry Gottlieb's *Home, Sweet Home* (c. 1935-36, fig. 5.10), or the proudly defiant in Louis Lozowick's *Thanksgiving Dinner* (1938, fig. 5.11). On the other hand, *Firewood in*

²⁶ Hills, *Social Concern and Urban Realism*; see also Andrew Hemingway's *Artists on the Left*.

²⁷ As contrasted also with certain Ashcan School artists, especially Everett Shinn, whose street scenes convey a sense of lively physical energy; see Rebecca Zurier, "The Reporter's Vision Everett Shinn and the City as Spectacle," in *Picturing the City: Urban Vision and the Ashcan School* (Berkeley: U of CA P, 2006), 135-180.

Georgia sensitively but powerfully conveys the suffering of one of the most vulnerable and underserved constituencies in the Depression-era United States, while subtly evoking the socio-political conditions and gross inequities of a pre-Civil Rights South that left-wing artists like Harry Steinberg were then directly referencing and exhibiting in New York.²⁸

Although she appears not to have published or exhibited with radical American organizations at this time, Leighton supported the literary and political journal *Left Review* and the Artists' International Association, mutually affiliated British left-wing initiatives established in the 1930s to address social and political concerns and the artist's place in society.²⁹ The *Left Review*'s November 1935 issue featured *Bread Line* and *Net Menders* (1933, commissioned for the Woodcut Society, Kansas City, fig. 5.12), both of which illustrated short stories critical of the capitalist system.³⁰ Leighton was among the "more established artists" asked to exhibit in 1934 with AIA members in "The Social Scene – The Social Conditions and Struggles of Today," the inaugural exhibition of the Artists' International, as the association called itself until 1935.³¹ She helped spearhead

²⁸ For a discussion of the 1935 New York exhibitions on lynching in the South, see Helen Langa, "Two Antilynching Art Exhibitions: Politicized Viewpoints, Racial Perspectives, and Gendered Constraints," *American Art* 13 (Spring 1999): 11-39; and Patricia Phagan, "Critical Views of the South by Northern Artists: Antilynching in the 1930s," in *The American Scene and the South: Paintings and Works on Paper, 1930-1946*, ed. Patricia Phagan (Athens, GA: Georgia Museum of Art, 1996), 227-41.

²⁹ *Left Review* was published from 1934-1938; the AIA, established in 1933, existed until 1953.

³⁰ *Left Review*, Nov. 1935, 59, 77.

³¹ Robert Radford, *Art for a Purpose: The Artists' International Association, 1933-1953* (Winchester, Hampshire: Winchester School of Art Press, 1987), 24, 42. Radford does not cite his sources concerning Leighton, but the exhibition catalogue that he coauthored

the group's attempts at policy making in 1937 as an organizer for the "First British Artists' Congress," which explored the possibility of forming a trade union to safeguard the interests of artists. The three-day conference gave her a public platform to address topics ranging from art education reform and improving artists' conditions to the state's responsibility to artists and "unity of artists for peace, democracy, and cultural progress against war and fascism."³²

How closely did these radical initiatives correspond with her ideology, which, like that of many British intellectuals, embraced socialist ideas but for which Communism held a limited appeal? *Left Review*, the organ of the pro-Soviet Writers' International, espoused revolutionary socialism but not an orthodox Marxism until the Communist Party applied more rigid control in 1938, the year she left for the United States. Like the AIA, whose early exhibitions centered on social justice, world peace, and the dangers of Fascism, and which spoke approvingly of the Communists' wide respect for and employment of artists,³³ the journal championed causes that a range of socially concerned writers and artists could readily support during a time of urgent social and political crisis at home and abroad. Contributions to the *Left Review* by the likes of W. H. Auden, Stephen Spender, Eric Gill, and Leighton (prominently listed on the November 1935

(Lynda Morris and Robert Radford, *The Story of the AIA, Artists' International Association, 1933-1953* [Oxford, Museum of Modern Art, 1983], 14) refers to press reports (not specified) that name exhibitors and their work, including Leighton's. The Tate Archive holds the AIA's records, which are scant for the early years.

³² Morris and Radford, *Story of the AIA*, 35, reproduces the 1937 "First British Artists' Congress" informational circular, which lists Leighton as a supporter of the conference and exhibition.

³³ The 1935 exhibition, "Artists Against Fascism and War" had a viewership over of 6,000; *Ibid*, 4.

cover, fig. 5.13) demonstrated the journal's commitment to seriously engage in contemporary literary and artistic developments, beyond dogmatic polemic.³⁴

Although Leighton's association with these left-wing initiatives, which were supported by numerous other artists with established reputations, does not appear to have affected her standing as a artist of traditional rural life, her prints' deployment as agents of anti-capitalist rhetoric for the *Left Review* were a departure from her prints' customary use. Other political and literary journals that had published her works, including *New Leader*, *London Mercury*, and *Forum*, found them compatible with their interests in a general sense but had honored their autonomy. But a Marxist organ such as the *Left Review*, while maintaining a fairly high standard for the quality of the visual material, necessarily considered art for its usefulness in furthering its agenda. To that end, *Bread Line*, *New York* was situated in the middle of I. A. Lisky's short story "Productivisation," which targeted capitalism because of its failure to prevent unemployment.³⁵ The caption listed Leighton as the artist, but the title was altered to *Bread Line* to reflect the story's setting in Whitechapel, part of London's impoverished East End.³⁶ *Net Menders*, which

³⁴ Although such respected professionals as Lucien Pissarro, Paul Nash, Henry Moore, and Barbara Hepworth exhibited with the AIA, it welcomed any socially committed-concerned artist, including amateurs, *Ibid*, 45-46.

³⁵ *Left Review*, Nov. 1935: 57-62.

³⁶ Leighton refers to the engraving as "*Breadline Line, New York*" as early as 1934, when *London Mercury* editor Rolfe Scott-James asked her for some prints to publish in the magazine. Having few prints on hand that had not already been reproduced in England, she wrote, "I once did a BREAD LINE, NEW YORK that hasn't been reproduced. But it is an unco' dismal subject, isn't it?" Clare Leighton to Rolfe Scott-James, 12 Sept. 1934, Rolfe Arnold Scott-James Collection.

shows women mending fishing nets in the French Pyrenees near the Spanish border,³⁷ appeared in that same issue, within “J. P.”’s anti-capitalist story “Encounter in the Pyrenees.” The caption reproduces the narrative’s description of the women, “squat black figures sitting all day patiently toiling,” which speaks less to the shortcomings of capitalism than to illustrate the piece’s local color and portray productivity.³⁸ Earnest and moralizing, their literary value does not come close to matching their illustrations, whose vision bypasses sentiment and didacticism to clearly articulate social concern and the usefulness of art to society.

Winter’s appearance on the cover of the Christmas 1932 issue of the *Listener*, the BBC’s widely-circulated non-partisan weekly (fig. 5.7)³⁹ brought a subtly rendered social consciousness to a British audience on their own soil. A heavily burdened figure trudging wearily through deep snow particularly belies any rural idyll, an image of seemingly endless toil and hardship. Engraved independent of book commissions at the same time Leighton was working on *The Farmer’s Year*, the scene speaks for those to whom the holiday season is but another time of hardness and sorrow, perhaps sharpened by the

³⁷ “It is by the way, at Collioure, a marvelous place where the Pyrenees meet the Mediterranean, near the Spanish frontier; though I fear I’ve codged it a great deal!” Clare Leighton to Martin Hardie, 31 Aug. 1933, Martin Hardie Correspondence.

³⁸ *Left Review*, Nov. 1935, 75-78. The journal does not identify the author “J. P.” or comment on the works’ close relationship of subject and setting.

³⁹ On the cover of the 21 December 1932 issue. It is highly likely that Leighton chose the subject matter and engraved it specifically for the commission instead of submitting an unpublished engraving that she had on hand. The anticipatory notice in the 7 December issue (p. 809) about the “Christmas Number” described the cover as “an original snow and woodland scene designed and specially engraved on wood by Claire [sic] Leighton.” The issue in which it appears offers no commentary on the print beyond announcing that signed proofs can be bought (p. 911).

knowledge of others' joyful well-being. I want to suggest an additional level of meaning: the landscape serves as a site to convey the burden that Christ carried for humankind at Calvary -- with the vital, upright evergreen anchoring the stooped figure flanked by lesser trees, the load on the bent back signifying the whole weight of the world.

The publication of *Winter* in the *Listener's* 1932 Christmas issue undoubtedly reached a much wider audience than her other outlets,⁴⁰ and I would argue that she purposefully exploited the organ of an emerging mass medium to prompt its readers into reflecting on the deeper implications of the season at a time of sustained economic hardship: to those who were relatively well-off, remember the least of them. Although the BBC's broadcasts offered a cultural product that appealed to a "mass democratic audience,"⁴¹ the *Listener's* inclusion of essays, poetry, and reviews in addition to a record of broadcast talks aligned it with such intellectually oriented periodicals such as the *Spectator* and *New Statesman*.⁴² A voice of the establishment that was not associated with a political party, it drew a readership primarily from the professional classes and the socially conservative. However, Leighton's image moves beyond politics and class to

⁴⁰ While the BBC Archives could find no reference to the commission, it kindly supplied the average weekly circulation figures for 1939, the first year for which it could find such records; the figures for the last three months of 1939 were over 60,000. BBC Written Archives Researcher Jessica Hogg to author, 2 Sept. 2011, Email; "Confidential -- Circulations: Radio Times & Listener" 30 Jan. 1940, typescript, File Ref: R43/67 Listener, (The) Policy, BBC Written Archives Centre, Caversham Park, Reading.

⁴¹ In the early years of radio in Britain, the BBC was the primary broadcaster. D. L. LeMahieu (*Culture for Democracy: Mass Communication and the Cultivated Mind in Britain between the Wars* [Oxford: 1998], 230) argues that the 1930s saw this new media most thoroughly cutting across "class and regional divides of cultural demarcation."

⁴² The *Listener* was published from 1929-1991; the BBC's *Radio Times* provided the weekly roster of programs.

speak to the fundamental needs of all people. Its power to communicate social concerns in a nuanced way is all the more apparent when set against *Capitalism at Christmas-time*'s overt criticism of economic disparity (fig. 5.14). The scene, which Brailsford commissioned from an artist to illustrate a holiday-time cover of the socialist *New Leader*,⁴³ shows a gaunt street urchin pelted by the driving rain, unable to catch up with a cab that protects a prosperous foursome dressed for an evening of festivity.

At the same time that Leighton was using the BBC magazine to call attention to the plight of the "little man," Labour's leadership was recasting its previously obstructionist attitude toward the BBC as a capitalist entity, as it viewed the press, now seeing the Broadcast House as one of the greatest media of propaganda in Britain and embracing it.⁴⁴ For Leighton and the Labour Party, then, the possibilities of reaching a large audience via one entity to disseminate individual or political party propaganda outweighed upholding one's ideology and partisan principle.⁴⁵ *Winter*'s appearance in this particular economic and cultural climate was a social-political statement, a call to take into account the misery of others. Its at once pervasive and unspecific title and setting -- the landscape more closely matches the Canadian Lumber Camp prints of the

⁴³ *New Leader*, 2 Jan. 1925. Leighton's first publication in the magazine (*Barges*, 1924) appeared in this issue.

⁴⁴ Beers (*Your Britain*, 81-82) discusses Labour's changing strategy to engage the government-regulated BBC for its propagandistic purposes. *Left Review* cartoons continued to satirize the BBC as the mouthpiece of wealthy conservatives; see *Left Review*, Feb. 1937, 28-29; July 1937, 351.

⁴⁵ Leighton embraced the wider potential of this new media, and perhaps reached her largest audience, when she began broadcasting a monthly program on gardening for the BBC's "Children's Hour" in 1936 -- the year following *Four Hedges*' appearance; "Correspondence Regarding Clare Leighton's Work for 'The Children's Hour,' 1936-62," File Ref: RCONT 1 Leighton, Clare, BBC Written Archive Centre.

previous year than the English countryside -- strengthened its power to address a wider public, beyond its immediate relevance to the Christmas season. Leighton was able therefore to reach a very different audience when the engraving was published in 1938 on the cover of the *Land Worker*, the voice of the National Union of Agricultural Workers (fig. 5.15).

Seriously engaged in the “social-viewpoint” climate of the ’30s as these independently produced prints are, they do not convey Leighton’s sustained, creatively singular vision, which fuses a sense of the world of “ordinary” people’s work and the larger world of nature. I would argue that this latter perspective reveals the point at which her sensibility and means of expression became most closely aligned. *Winnowers*, *Majorca* (1937, fig. 5.16), a commission for The Woodcut Society, Kansas City, demonstrates a harmony of formal means and subject, as workers in a fluid bond with the land scatter chaff from grain with hand-crafted wooden forks in a preindustrial economy far removed from the artificiality and modern rush of New York. Without inherent tension or conflict, the print projects a utopian ideal of people’s relationship to work and nature while ignoring the harsh life costs that such manual labor exacts. It is perhaps not surprising that Leighton’s formal means most fully manifested themselves in depicting one of the least industrialized economies she ever visited.⁴⁶ To take John Taylor Arms’ assessment of her work, “everywhere there is selection, organization, arrangement, and everywhere a nice balancing of black and white and grey. Area fits into area, value matches value, lines flow and interweave into a strong, significant pattern” -- gathering in articulated clarity what Roger Fry termed the fundamental “emotional elements” of

⁴⁶ Leighton and Brailsford vacationed there in the mid-1930s.

design.⁴⁷ From this issues a vital energy that her colleagues spoke of in spiritual terms, “a wholesome and heartening religious emotion.”⁴⁸ It was this life-affirming vision that Leighton would continue to pursue in the United States, through the griefs of World War II and beyond for the next forty years of her career, uniting workers of the earth to people’s common physical and emotional good. Voicing neither mechanical propaganda nor strident protest, these works perhaps move towards a universal appeal in their search for an alternate way of living countering the unnatural life of modern existence, in a world from which had been taken the hope of immortality, stability, and order.

⁴⁷ John Taylor Arms, introduction to *Four Hedges*; Roger Fry, *Vision and Design* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1957), 33-34.

⁴⁸ Both Alvin Johnson, a founder and at that time director of the New School for Social Research in New York, and the prominent etcher John Taylor Arms wrote about the spiritual qualities that they found in her work. The quote is from Johnson to Clare Leighton, 21 Aug. 1936, Clare Leighton Papers; Arms to Clare Leighton, 18 March 1949, Clare Leighton Papers.

ILLUSTRATIONS



Figure 1.1 Clare Leighton *Roland Leighton*, 1916, dust jacket illustration for *Boy of My Heart* (1916), by Marie Leighton



Figure 1.2 Clare Leighton, *Uncle Jack Leighton*, 1916, pastel crayon



Figure 1.3. *Clare Leighton*, 1932, photograph, from *Wood-Engraving and Wood Cuts*, by Clare Leighton (1932)



Figure 1.4 Clare Leighton, *Bird Study*, c. 1935, pencil on paper, for *Four Hedges*, (1935), courtesy The Mint Museums of Art, Charlotte, NC



Figure 1.5 Clare Leighton, *Botanical Study*, c. 1935, pencil on paper, for *Four Hedges*, (1935), courtesy The Mint Museums of Art, Charlotte, NC



Figure 1.6 Clare Leighton, *Blackbird on Nest*, c. 1935, wood engraving, from *Four Hedges* (1935)



Figure 1.7 Clare Leighton, Study for *Dare to Call the Flowers My Own*, c. 1941, pencil and gouache on paper, for *By Light of Sun* (1941), by Elsie Symington, courtesy The Mint Museums of Art, Charlotte, NC



Figure 1.8 Clare Leighton, Proof for *Dare to Call the Flowers My Own*, wood engraving, 1941, for *By Light of Sun* (1941), by Elsie Symington, courtesy The Mint Museums of Art, Charlotte, NC



Figure 1.9 Clare Leighton, *Dare to Call the Flowers My Own*, wood engraving, 1941, from *By Light of Sun* (1941), by Elsie Symington



Figure 1.10 Clare Leighton, *The Malthouse*, 1923, wood engraving



Figure 1.11 Clare Leighton, *Barges*, 1924, wood engraving



Figure 1.12 Clare Leighton, *The Calf Auction*, 1924, wood engraving



Figure 1.13 Ordnance Survey Map of Bishop's Stortford, 1896, courtesy Elphin Watkin



Figure 1.14 Stanley Spencer, *Mending Cows*, Cookham, 1915, Tate Gallery



Figure 1.15 Clare Leighton, *Washing Boat, Toulon*, 1925, wood engraving



Figure 1.16 Clare Leighton, *Dawn in the Train to Mostar*, 1926, wood engraving



Figure 1.17 Clare Leighton, *Dalmatian Spinners*, 1926, wood engraving



Figure 1.18 Clare Leighton, *Jugo-slav Gipsies*, 1927, wood engraving



Figure 1.19 *Golda Meir Visiting with H. N. Brailsford of the British Labour Party, 1930, photograph, courtesy The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Libraries Digital Collections (Brailsford is seated, center)*



Figure 1.20 C. R. W. Nevinson, *The Workers, or Strikers on Tower Hill*, 1919, lithograph



Figure 1.21 Clare Leighton, *In Normandy*, 1926, wood engraving, commission for *The New Leader* (19 March 1926)



Figure 1.22 *Ernst Toller*, 1925, wood engraving, commission for *The New Leader* (11 Dec. 1925)



Figure 1.23 *Turning the Plough*, 1926, wood engraving, illustration for “How Dossy Saw God,” by Winifred Holtby, from *The New Leader* (1 Oct. 1926)

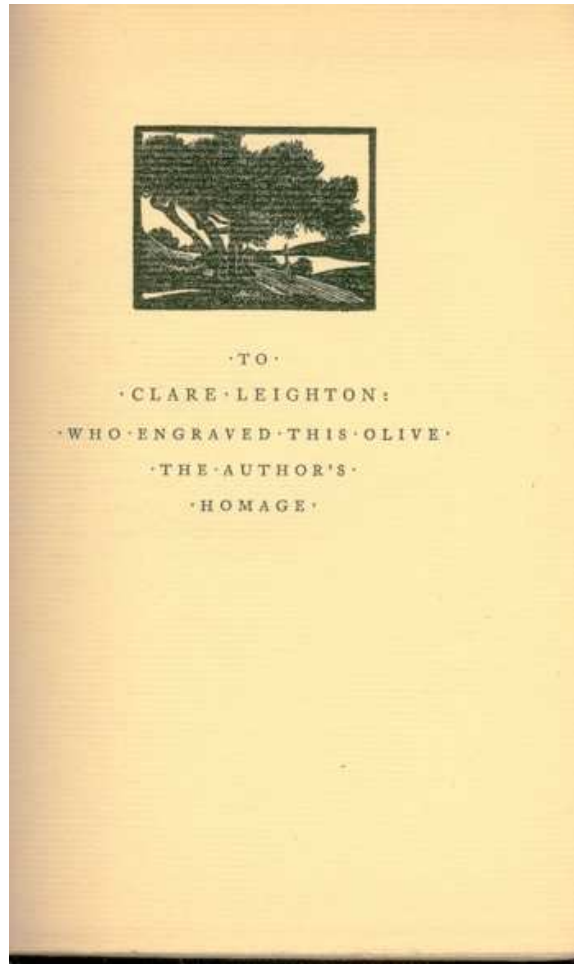


Figure 1.24 Clare Leighton, *Olive or Olive Trees*, 1925, dedicatory page for *Olives of Endless Age* (1928), by Henry Noel Brailsford

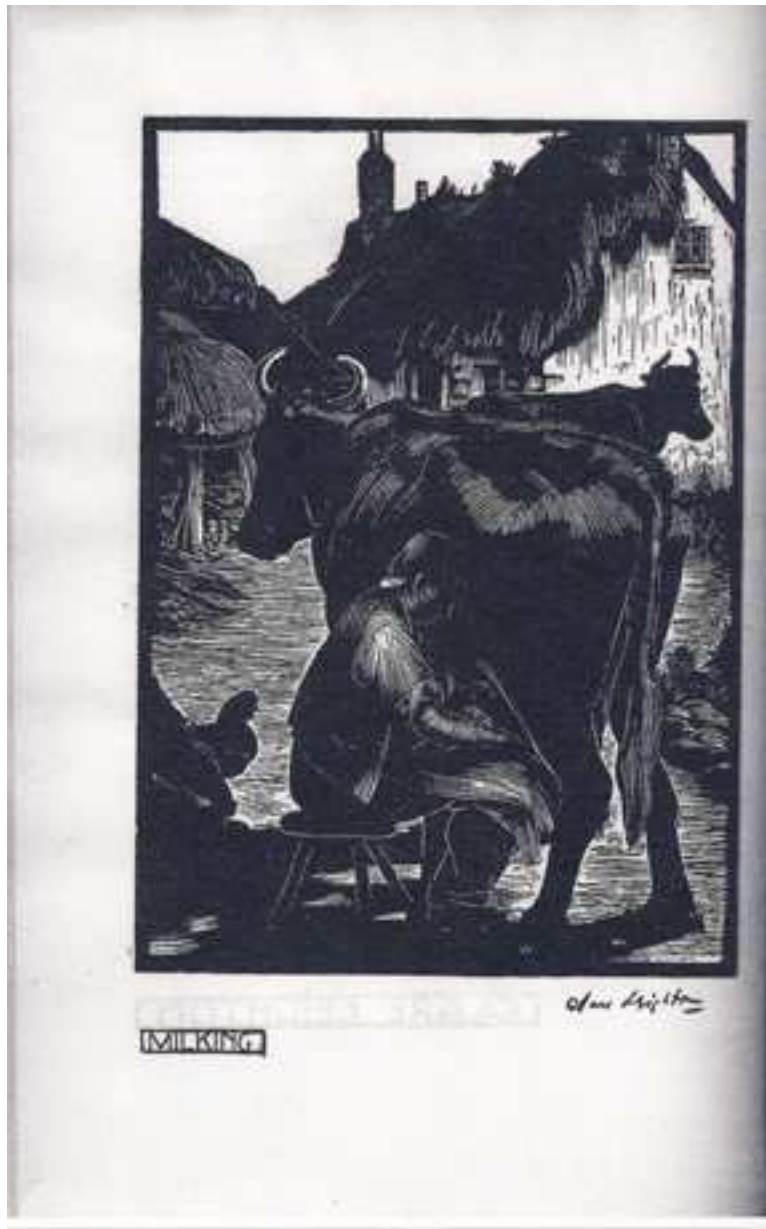


Figure 1.25 Clare Leighton, *Milking*, 1926, wood engraving, commission for *The Forum* (Sept. 1926)



Figure 1.26 Clare Leighton, *Lambing*, 1926, wood engraving, commission for *The Forum* (Sept. 1926)

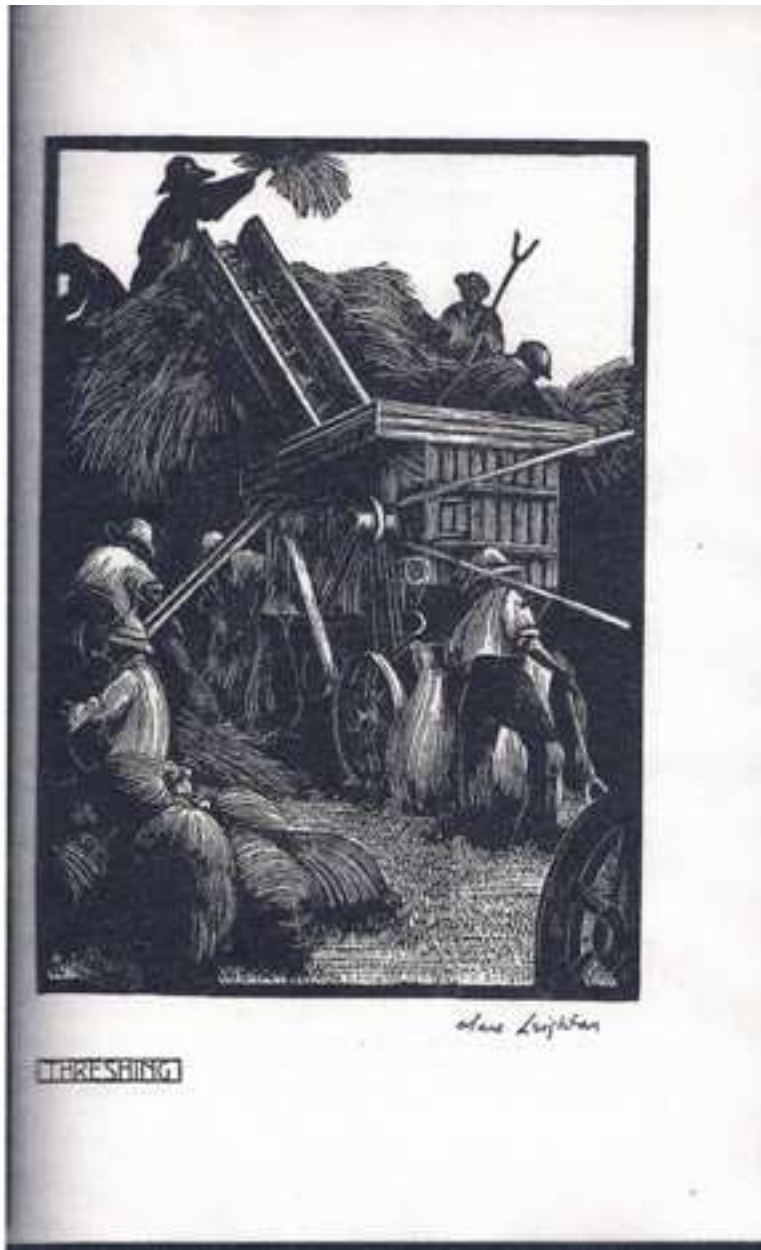


Figure 1.27 Clare Leighton, *Threshing*, 1926, wood engraving, commission for *The Forum* (Sept. 1926)



Figure 1.28 Clare Leighton, *Tending the Flock*, 1929, lithograph, commission for The Empire Marketing Board



Figure 1.29 John Nash, *Fruit Gardens and Orchard*, 1930, lithograph, commission for The Empire Marketing Board



Figure 1.30 Clare Leighton, *Chalfont St. Giles*, 1929, wood engraving, commission for The London General Omnibus



Figure 1.31 Clare Leighton, *Windsor Castle*, 1929, wood engraving, commission for The London General Omnibus



Figure 1.32 George Clausen, *Village Scene*, 1916, poster for The London Underground Electric Railways Company's distribution to soldiers at the front, Christmastime 1916



Figure 1.33 Fred Taylor, *Hampstead, London Memories*, 1918, poster for The London Underground

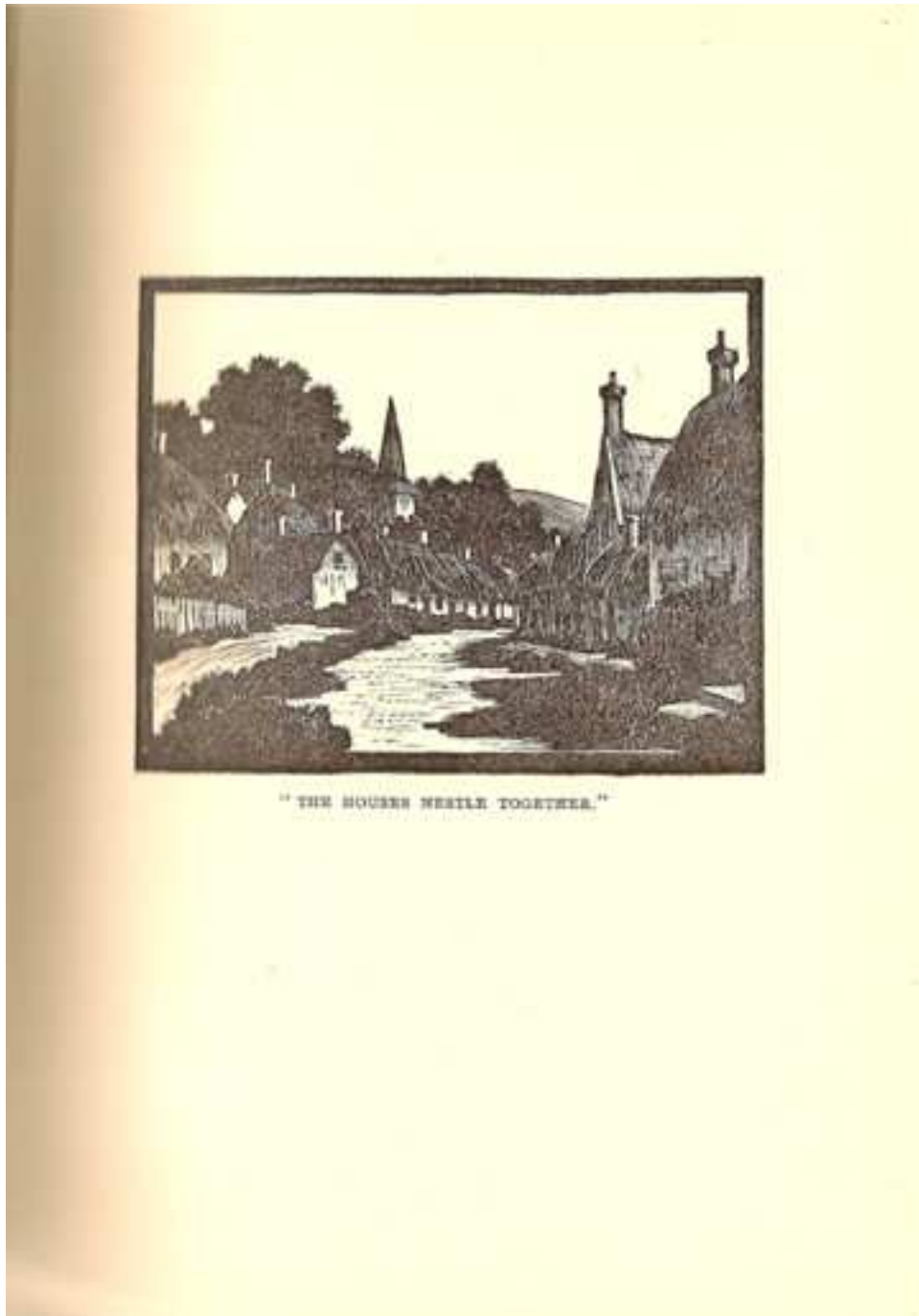
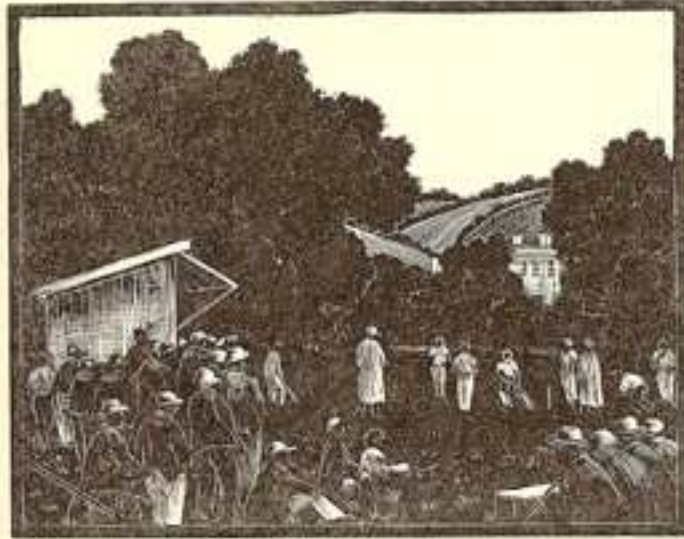


Figure 1.34 Clare Leighton, *The Village*, 1927, wood engraving, from *Home* (1927), by Alan Mulgan



“ THE SQUIRE PLAYS WITH THE VILLAGE BLACKSMITH ”

Figure 1.35 Clare Leighton, *The Squire Plays with the Village Blacksmith* (*The Village Cricket Match*), 1927, wood engraving, from *Home* (1927), by Alan Mulgan

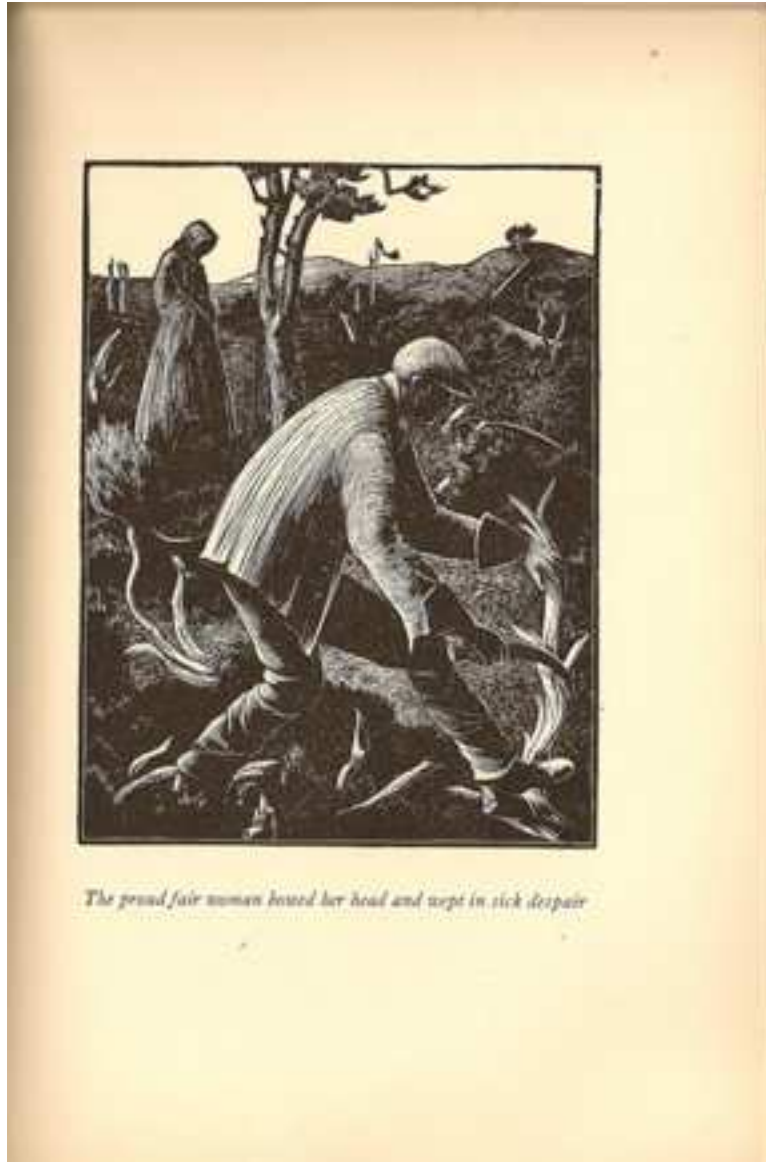


Figure 1.36 Clare Leighton, *Clym Cutting Furze*, 1929, wood engraving, from *The Return of the Native* (1929), by Thomas Hardy



Figure 1.37 Arthur Hopkins, “Unconscious of her Presence, He Still Went on Singing,” 1878, wood engraving, from *The Return of the Native* (1878), by Thomas Hardy



EUSTACIA IS LED ON TO AN
ADVENTURE

IV

In the evening of this last day of expectation, which was the twenty-third of December, Eustacia was at home alone. She had passed the recent hour in lamenting over a rumour newly come to her ears—that Yeobright's visit to his mother was to be of short duration, and would end some time the next week. 'Naturally,' she said to herself. A man in the full swing of his activities in a gay city could not afford to linger long on Egdon Heath. That she would behold face to face the owner of the awakening voice within the limits of such a holiday was most unlikely, unless she were to haunt the environs of his mother's house like a robin, to do which was difficult and unseemly.

The customary expedient of provincial girls and men in such circumstances is churchgoing. In an ordinary village or country town one can safely calculate that, either on Christmas-day or the Sunday contiguous, any native home for the holidays, who has not through age or *excess* lost the appetite for seeing and being seen, will turn up in some pew or other, shining with hope, self-consciousness, and new clothes. Thus the congregation on Christmas morning is mostly a Tussock collection of celebrities who have been born in the neighbourhood. Hither the mistress, left

Figure 1.38 Clare Leighton, *The Pond*, 1929, wood engraving, from *The Return of the Native* (1929), by Thomas Hardy



RAIN, DARKNESS, AND ANXIOUS
WANDERERS

VIII

While the effigy of Eustacia was melting to nothing, and the fair woman herself was standing on Rain-harrow, her soul in an abyss of desolation seldom plumbed by one so young, Yeobright sat lonely at Blooms-End. He had fulfilled his word to Thomasin by sending off Fairway with the letter to his wife, and now waited with increased impatience for some sound or signal of her return. Were Eustacia still at Mistover the very least he expected was that she would send him back a reply to-night by the same hand; though, to leave all to her inclination, he had cautioned Fairway not to ask for an answer. If one were handed to him he was to bring it immediately; if not, he was to go straight home without troubling to come round to Blooms-End again that night.

But secretly Clym had a more pleasing hope. Eustacia might possibly decline to use her pen—it was rather her way to work silently—and surprise him by appearing at his door. How fully her mind was made up to do otherwise he did not know.

To Clym's regret it began to rain and blow hard as the evening advanced. The wind rasped and scraped at the corners of the house, and filiped the eavesdroppings like peas against the panes. He walked restlessly about the untenanted rooms, stopping strange noises in windows and doors by jamming

Figure 1.39 Clare Leighton, *Eustacia Vye*, 1929, wood engraving, from *The Return of the Native* (1929), by Thomas Hardy

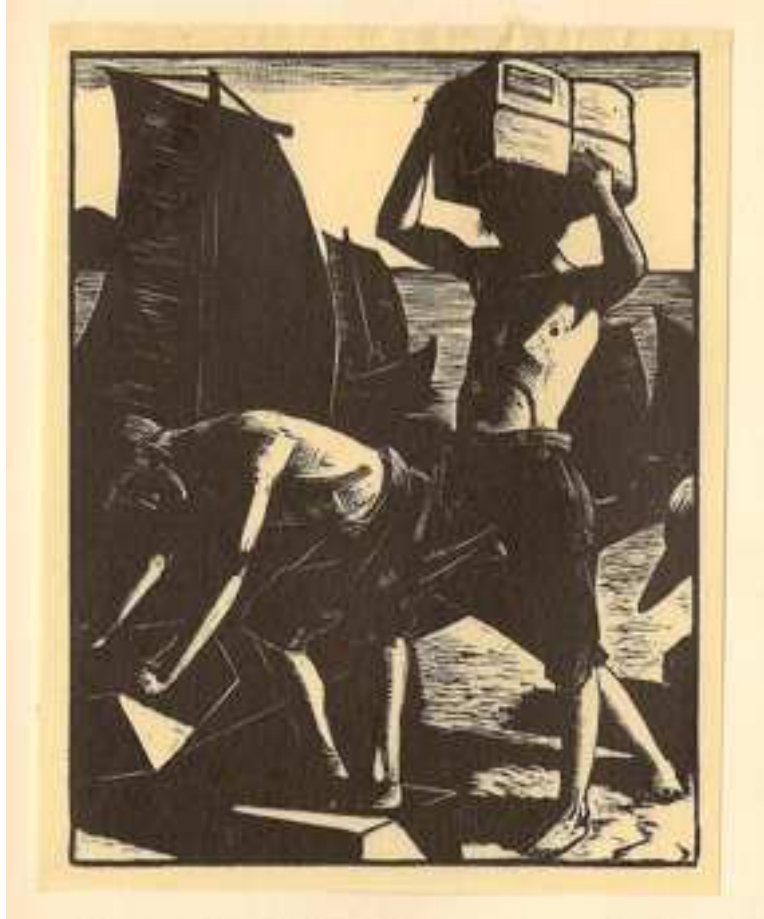


Figure 1.40 Clare Leighton, *Loading the Boat*, 1929, wood engraving, from *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* (1929), by Thornton Wilder

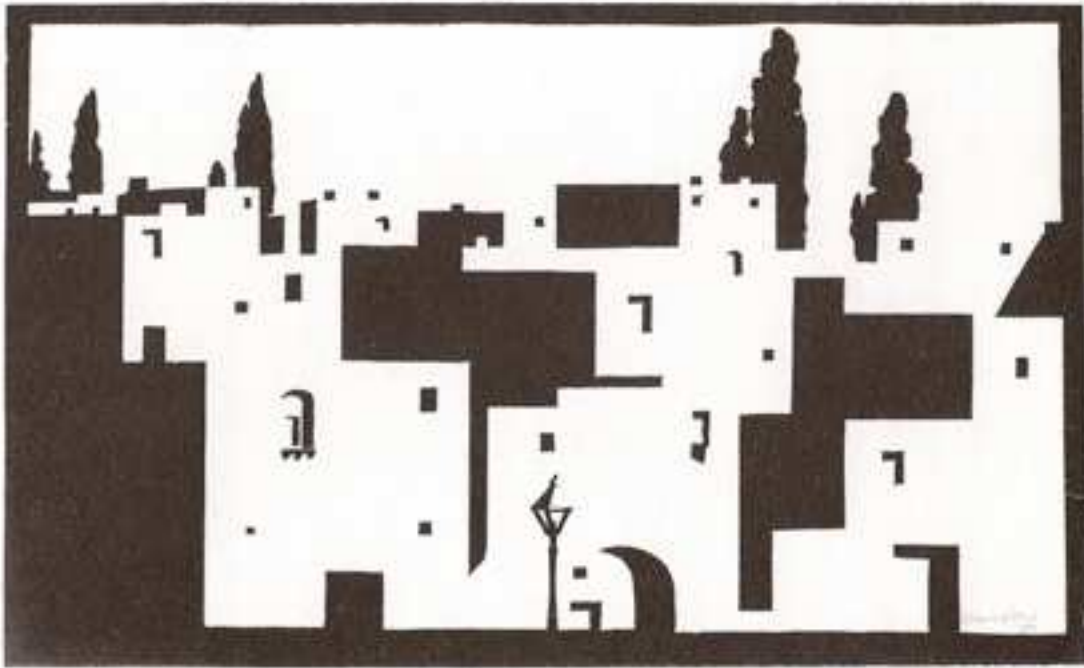


Figure 1.41 Robert Gibbings, *Hamrun*, 1920, wood engraving



Figure 1.42 Clare Leighton, *The Abbess*, 1929, wood engraving, from *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* (1929), by Thornton Wilder

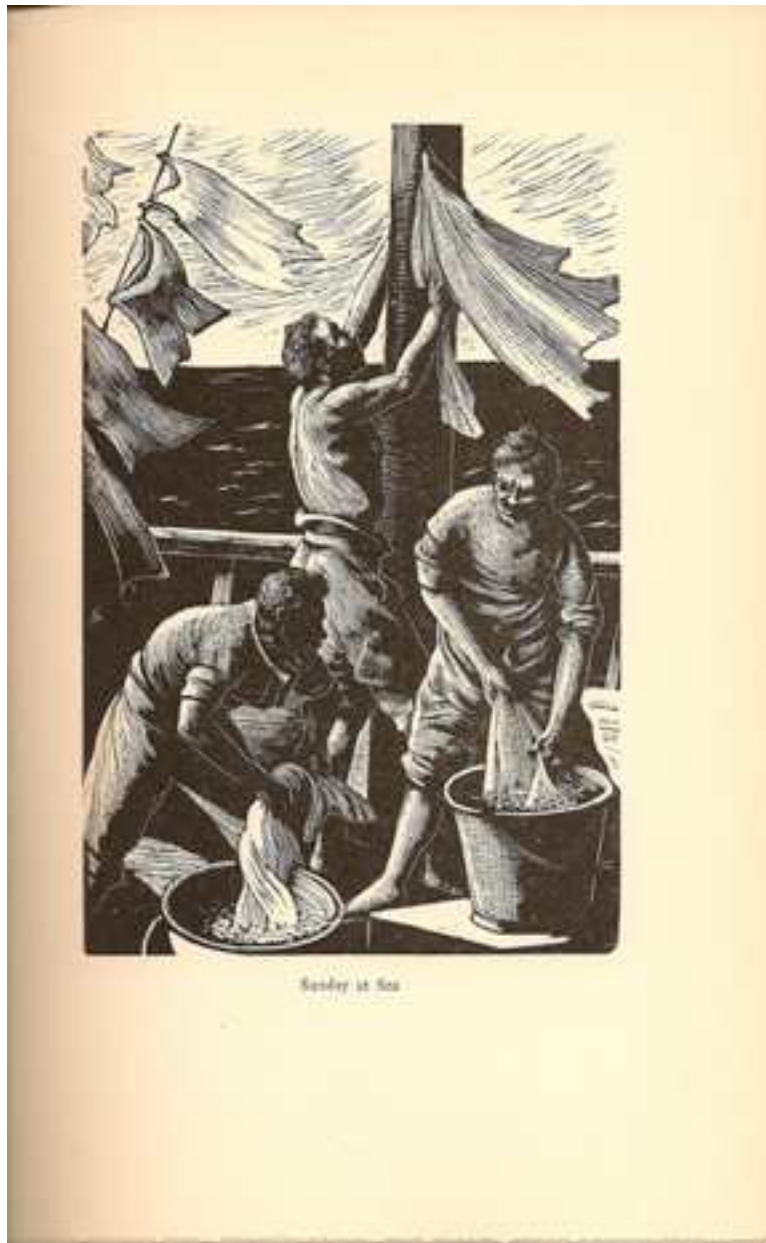


Figure 1.43 Clare Leighton, *Sunday at Sea*, 1930, wood engraving, from *The Sea and the Jungle* (1930), by H. M. Tomlinson



Figure 1.44 Clare Leighton, *Loading*, 1931, wood engraving



Figure 1.45 Clare Leighton, *Landing*, 1931, wood engraving



Figure 2.1 Clare Leighton, *Apple Picking: September, 1933*, wood engraving, from *The Farmer's Year* (1933)

SEPTEMBER : APPLE PICKING



IT IS the month of ripeness—a golden, crimson, and russet month. Here in Kent the orchards are suddenly the central figures in the drama of the year. Throughout the Summer, when the fields around were alive with the sounds of haymaking and harvest, these miles of trees grew in silence, while the pale green of the swelling apples hid beneath the leaves. Since their pink and white flaming in May, no one has remarked them, except perhaps the mower as he cut the grass from around their feet, or the farmer as he has watched the apples setting. But now all that is changed. These calm golden days have brought ladders and shouting, the creaking of wheels and the thud of falling apples.

The gatherers come early, when the dew on the heavy grass and nettles wet their legs and bediamonds the leaves, and there is a mysterious gloom and depth of shadow along the sides of trees.

A glow burns through the countryside at the thought of the apple gathering. "They have started picking," say the old people to each other down in the village. Something stirs in their blood, a memory of gatherings when the mistle was sacred, and prayer gave motion to the sun, and stones were still alive. So, too, do their hands and minds leap mountains and centuries, linking in pagan continuity with gods, grape-stained in their Mediterranean vineyards. It is one of the protocols in the rhythm of their year.

The army of ladders attacks the trees. On all sides, at all angles,

are they raised, placed against remaining branches and in the clefts of gnarled trunks—a veritable forest in ladders. The old men with their baskets on a hook start picking the lower apples within reach of the safety of the ground; rheumy limbs are not so fond of climbing. But the youths leap the ladders, and systematically the pillage begins. The trees shake and tremble, the figures run up and down, emptying picking aprons, exchanging full for empty baskets; and the branches leap upwards, relieved of their weight of fruit.

And now the sun is high and each tree cautiously spreads a circular dark green carpet of shade beneath itself. They stretch, these circles of shadow, back into the shapelessness of distance, narrowing into ellipses as they go.

At midday, as the sun bears down upon the bearded arms of the pickers, the men slip with relief into the shade. It is dinner time. Bottles of cold tea and beer are produced, and chunks of cheese and bread; and leaning against the trunks of the trees they sit, or sprawling in the shadow they eat and talk. Old Tom Latimer has picked "this seventh year." He mumbles with his toothless jaw, comparing this year with that, this year's yield with the one of thirty years back. He is himself like one of his own apples; red lacquer stains each cheek, wizened as an apple forgotten in the loft. As a shepherd knows each sheep in his flock, so in the intimate shape of each apple tree stamped upon Tom's mind. He shakes his head at the young men lolling and is off up the ladders again.

So throughout the hot afternoon they pick, moving their ladders and baskets over the board of the orchard like counters in a game.

[41]

Figure 2.2 Clare Leighton, *Malthouses* (Letter "I" for "September: Apple Picking"), 1933, wood engraving, from *The Farmer's Year* (1933)



Figure 2.3 Clare Leighton, *Sheep Shearing: May*, 1933, wood engraving, from *The Farmer's Year* (1933)



Figure 2.4 *Sheep-Shearing, Oxfordshire, c. 1896*, photograph, Rural History Centre, University of Reading



Figure 2.5 Gwen Raverat, *October*, 1930, wood engraving, from a 1930 issue of *Time and Tide*



Figure 2.6 William Strang, *Ploughing*, 1899, wood engraving



Figure 2.7 Clare Leighton, *Ploughing: November, 1933*, wood engraving, from *The Farmer's Year* (1933)



Figure 2.8 Clare Leighton, *Stooking: August, 1933*, wood engraving, from *The Farmer's Year* (1933)



Figure 2.9 John Constable, *Wheatfield*, 1815, oil on canvas



Figure 2.10 Samuel Palmer, *The Harvest Moon*, 1833, oil on paper



Figure 2.11 John Linnell, *The Harvest*, 1850, oil on canvas



Figure 2.12 Gwen Raverat, *Harvesters Resting*, 1934, wood engraving, from *Farmer's Glory* (1934), by A. G. Street



Figure 2.13 Pieter van der Heyden, *The Four Seasons: Summer*, 1570, engraving, after Pieter Bruegel the Elder

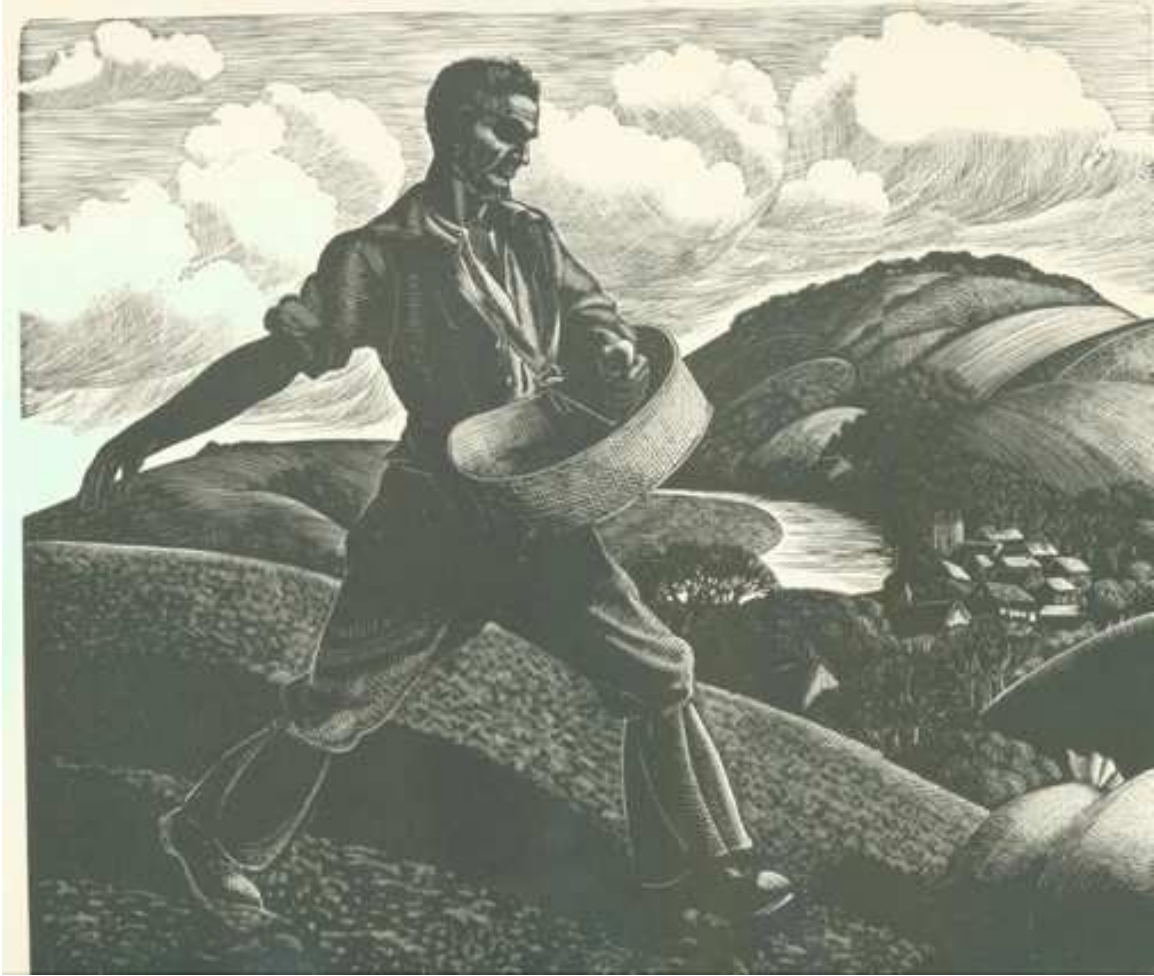


Figure 2.14 Clare Leighton, *Sowing: April, 1933*, wood engraving, from *The Farmer's Year* (1933)



Figure 2.15 Jean-François Millet, *The Sower*, 1850, oil on canvas, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston



Figure 2.16 Brian Cook, 1936, Dust Jacket for *English Village Homes and Country Buildings* (1936), by Sydney Jones

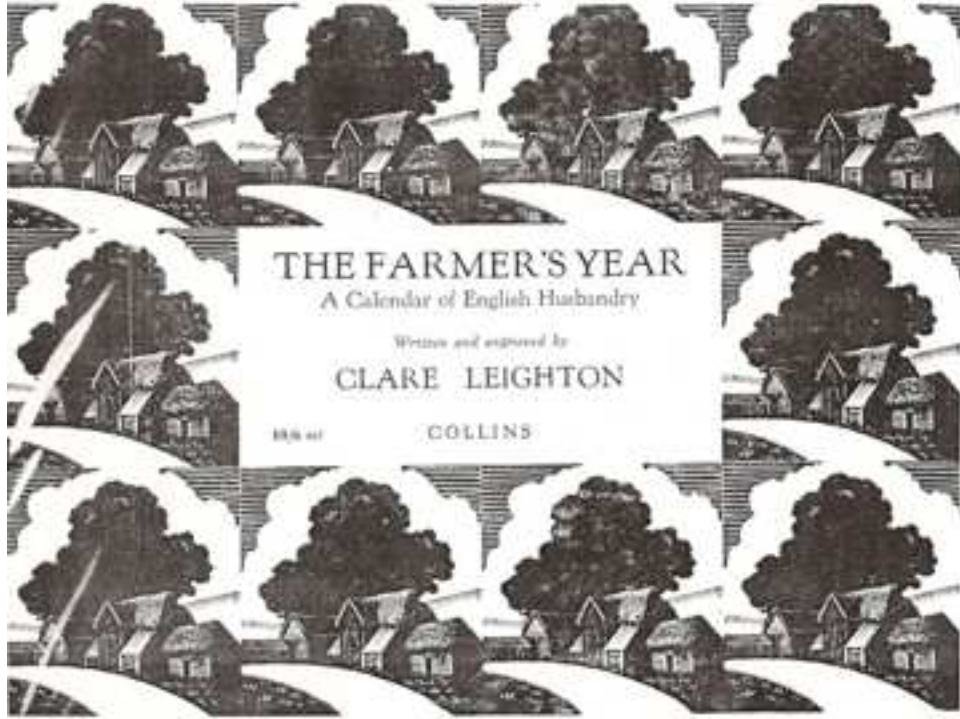


Figure 2.17 Clare Leighton, 1933, dust jacket, *The Farmer's Year* (1933)



Figure 2.18 George Stubbs, *Reapers*, 1785, oil on panel, Tate Collection

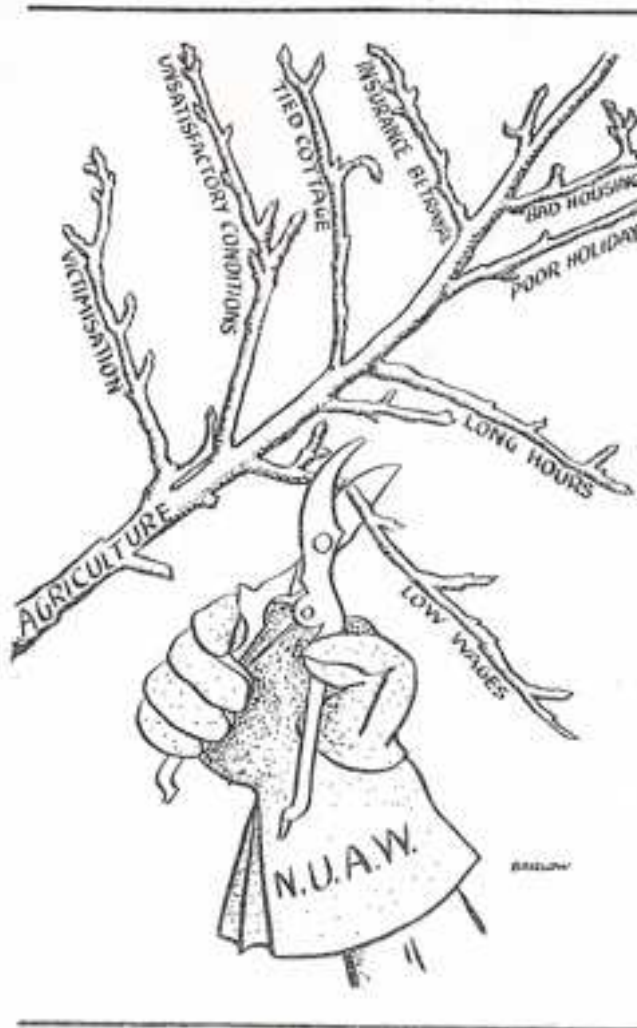


Figure 2.19 Illustration for *The Land Worker* (Dec. 1935)

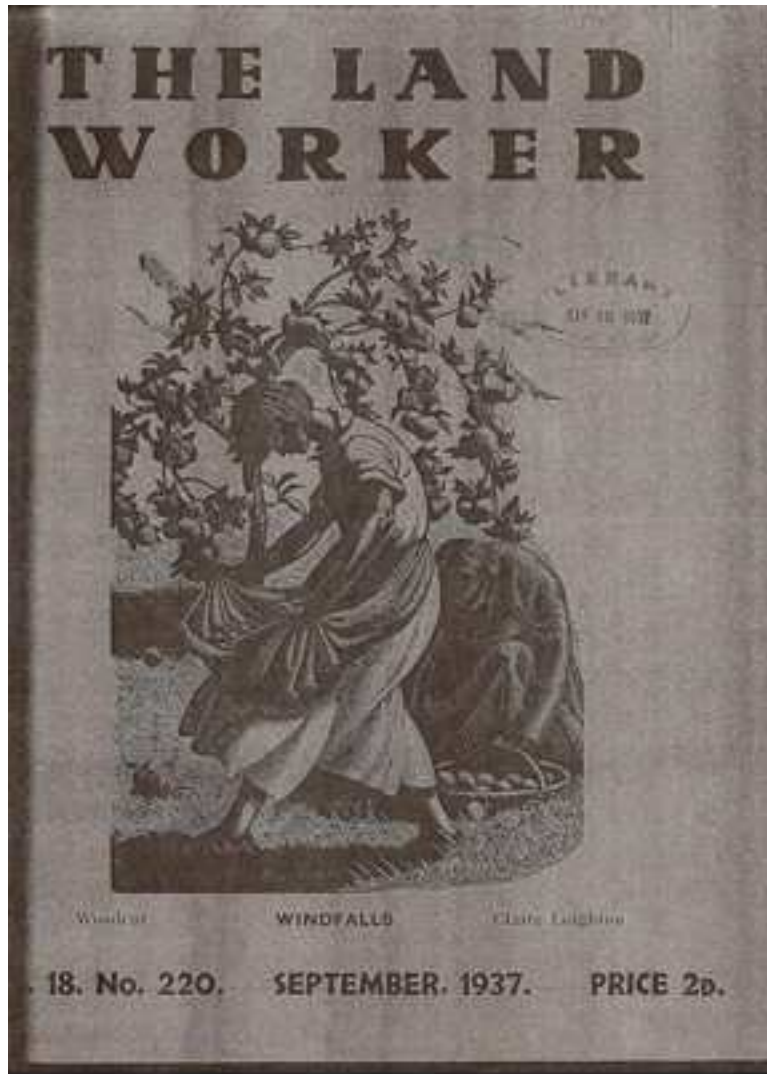


Figure 2.20 Clare Leighton, *Lap Full of Windfalls*, 1935, from *Four Hedges* (1935), cover for *The Land Worker* (Sept. 1937)



Figure 2.21 Clare Leighton, *Cider-making: October*, 1933, from *The Farmer's Year* (1933), for a Dartington Hall promotional brochure

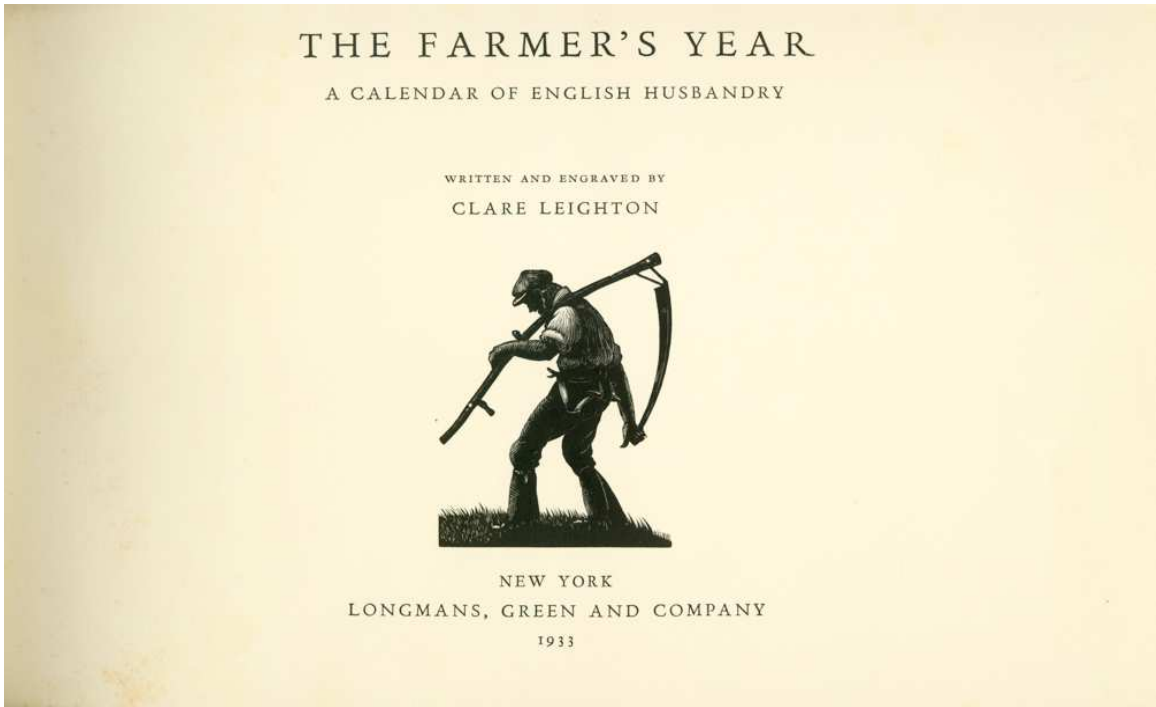


Figure 2.22 Clare Leighton, *The Reaper*, 1933, wood engraving, title page, *The Farmer's Year*

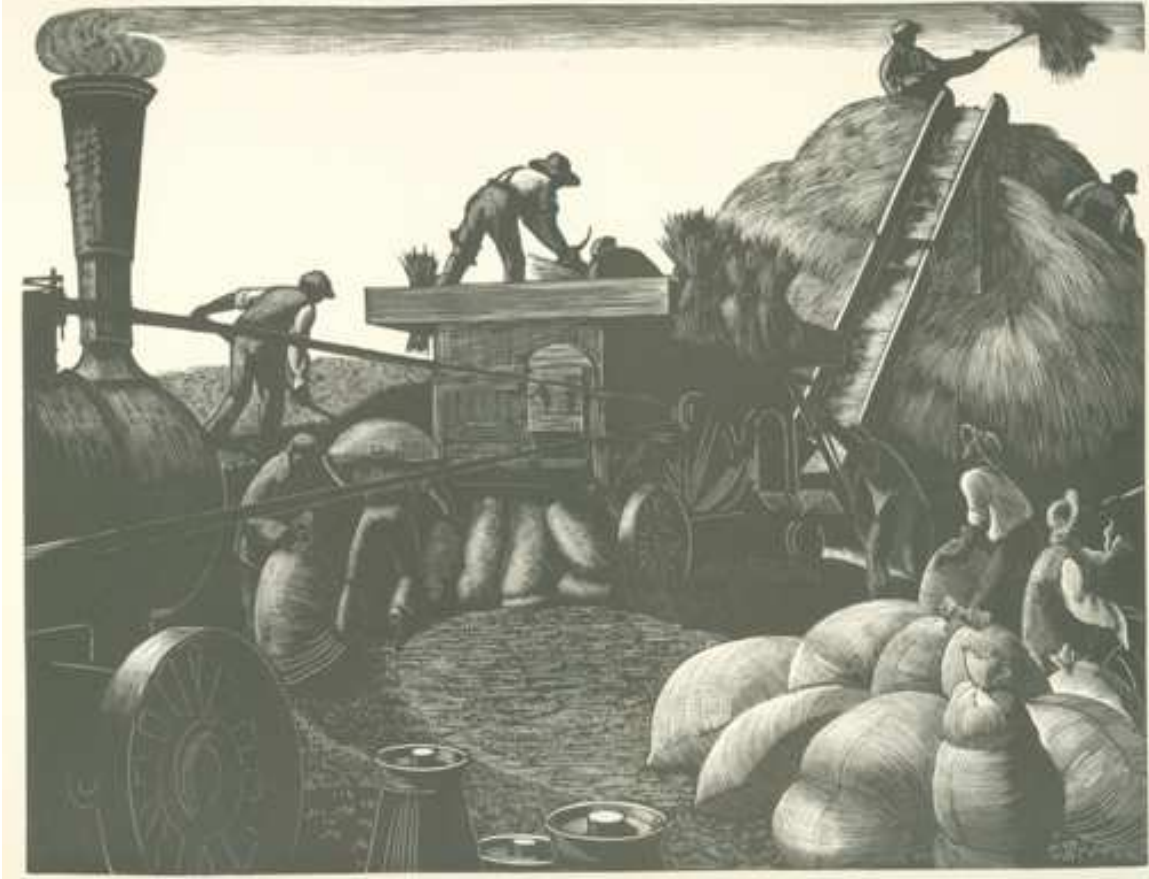


Figure 2.23 Clare Leighton, *Threshing: March, 1933*, wood engraving, from *The Farmer's Year* (1933)



Figure 2.24 Clare Leighton, *Lambing: January, 1933*, wood engraving, from *The Farmer's Year* (1933)



Figure 2.25 Samuel Palmer, *Opening the Fold or Early Morning*, 1880, etching

wriggling their tails, plunging at their dams for nourishment, kneeling down by their side, that they might the better reach their mothers' dugs. In clumsy exuberance a lamb would rush at the wrong dam, to be butted by her for its pains.

Through these short hours of light the shepherd would bring fresh bedding to the pens, or feed his ewes with white turnips, or fold a new bit of field to house his growing nursery. When the early afternoon sun sank crimson behind the rime-covered ticks, the rapid dusk sobered the lambs in the pen and the ewes settled themselves down to rest. The shepherd, intent on a night of sleep, made a last round of his

flock. Across the wold, dark against the skyline, he trudged homeward. Over that well-worn path along the ridge, pagan and Christian, Celt and Saxon, forerunners of his craft, had trudged since first the great stones went up round the Druids' circle on the moor.

The cartter was putting up his horses for the night as the shepherd passed the farm.

"A cold night," said the shepherd.

"Oh, aye, yes, a cold night," echoed the cartter.

The shepherd disappeared into the winter darkness.



[5]

Figure 2.26 Clare Leighton, *Druid Stones*, 1933, wood engraving, from *The Farmer's Year* (1933)



Figure 2.27 Clare Leighton, *Lopping: February, 1933*, wood engraving, from *The Farmer's Year* (1933)



Figure 2.28 Gwen Raverat, *Sheep by a River*, 1919, wood engraving



Figure 2.29 Gwen Raverat, *The Fen*, 1935, wood engraving



Figure 2.30 Will Dyson, *The Appeal*, 1918, *Reveille*, reproduced from Joanna Burke, *Dismembering the Male*, 42.



Figure 2.31 Jacob Epstein, *Rock Drill*, 1913, plaster and metal



Figure 2.32 Jacob Epstein, *Torso in Metal*, from *Rock Drill*, 1915, bronze

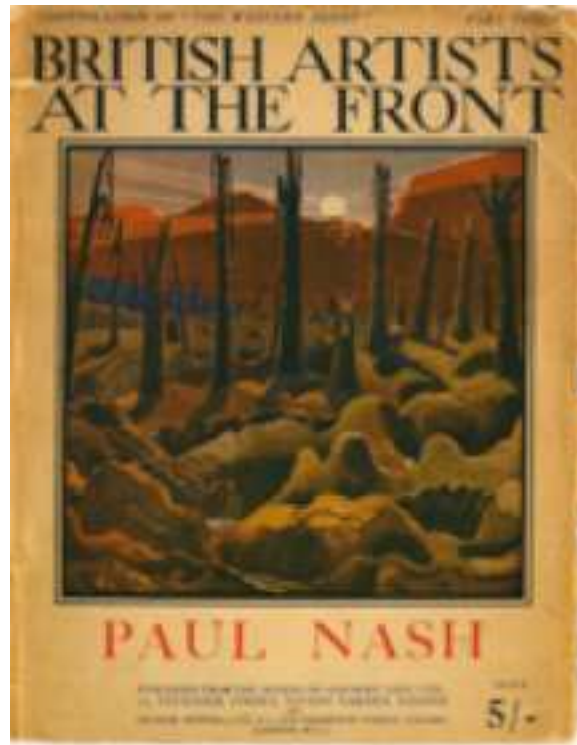


Figure 2.33 Paul Nash, *We Are Making a New World*, 1917-18, oil on canvas, Imperial War Museum Collections, London, used as the cover for *Artists at the Front*, 1918



Figure 2.34 Paul Nash, *Sunrise, Inverness Copses*, 1918, pastel on brown paper, Imperial War Museum, London



Figure 2.35 Paul Nash, *Landscape at Iden*, 1929, oil on canvas, Tate Collection

Through the afternoon the cows laze in the sloping meadows. But now it is milking time. They sleepily turn their heads as they hear the cowman lift the latch of the gate. He calls to them across the field: "Frump; Daisy and Moth; Flossy and Snowdrop; Dapple."

They swing themselves round like heavy ships and move in orderly line across the meadow. Slowly they saunter over the dry caked mud of the farmyard, and each cow goes to her ordained place in the coolness of the whitewashed cowshed. The udders are full and heavy and the cows are unstinting as they give themselves to the milkers. The men sit on the three-legged stools, peaks of caps turned to the napes of their necks, resting their heads against the hot flanks of the

murmuring is broken by shouts from the villa local cricket team is playing a neighbouring vil dering olms the old men sit to watch the game.

The evening air grows cooler. Outside their aged people. In the dusk their white aprons as show in the gardens like clumps of white bloss hour after hour, with tired hands at rest on their quietly around them at the swallows nesting in cat asleep under the roses, or the gold in the sky

Night falls upon the village very gently.



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Figure 2.36 Clare Leighton, *Fertile Land*, 1933, wood engraving, from *The Farmer's Year* (1933)



Figure 2.37 Noel Rooke, *Grantchester*, 1916, wood engraving, from *The Old Vicarage, Grantchester*, by Rupert Brooke (1916 edition)



Figure 2.38 Roland Leighton, *Ploegsteert Wood*, 1915, photograph, courtesy The Estate of Clare Leighton

dies for the sheepfold are wearing low. So the farmer lops. The grim, individual shapes of the willow trees lean in a row over the black unfrozen waters of the running stream, aged and wrinkled, like a family of mossers. One by one the upspringing branches within reach from the ladder are slashed off. The lopper next stands on the platform of the net top, like an elongation of the dark tree itself, and chops at the few remaining branches until the last one owners alone and greenest, like the single tooth in an old man's sunken mouth. This collapses, too, and the tree stands compact.

In the rickyard the root-hulk, covered with earth and straw, is opened, and out of it tumble gleaming balls of purple and orange, their colour enriched by contrast with the dirty snow of the sodden ground. These are carted to the pig farm and again tumbled out upon the dirty floor. Here in this shelter, the men cut and slice the roots for the cattle, thankful to be away from the passing wind on the fields. For there is no love of outdoor work just now. Eagerly the men search for those joints that will keep them in shelter; the cow-headers are whitewashed, harness is mended and polished, traps and carts and waggons need repairing.

The days cool early and, after feeding the animals in the stalls, the men go home down the lane, tripped up by the frozen ridges of the cart runs, rory in the setting sun. Hot meat was await them, and long evenings of drawn curtains and pipes and dozing.

In the lofty elms of the Vicarage garden the rooks, too, go home

to rook, croaking loudly and solemnly as they settle into their bulgy nests in the tree tops.

But the farmer sits throughout the long evenings in the farm kitchen, slowly and with many filterings making out his plans for the year. There is no beginning and no end to this year of his, but the hard weather brings a pause. The oil-lamp swings from the ceiling, casting great shadows into the corners of the room. It throws a circle of light upon him and his note-book and stump of pencil that are determined by a few scribbles on paper the face of the land through the year. By this stump of pencil is decided the fate of this calf and that sow, the rams over the hill, the bull in the huster. These badly shaped grey letters will turn one field to grass and another to woods, mark the grey mare and bring the perfume of a beanfield across the land. They will form a nesting place for larks and plough the field mouse from her home. The destiny of myriads of unsharbed insects waits on the twist that his horny hand gives to his pencil. So is the pattern of the year designed out of the farmer's brain.

For days on end the steel grip of the frost holds the land. The plough lies half covered with snow; the robin hops in at the farm kitchen window. And all the time, under the covert of snow, the vivid green wheat grows in the fields. Soon the thaw will come, and as the dark earth is visible again in the farmhouse garden, it shall be spotted with snowdrops and the pale gold of filled crocuses.



[10]

Figure 2.39 Clare Leighton, *Plough in the Snow*, 1933, wood engraving, from *The Farmer's Year* (1933)



Figure 2.40 Clare Leighton, *The Fat Stock Market: December, 1933*, wood engraving, from *The Farmer's Year* (1933)



Figure 2.41 Decorative Butcher's Stall, nineteenth-century English, painted wood, Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts, Winston-Salem, NC

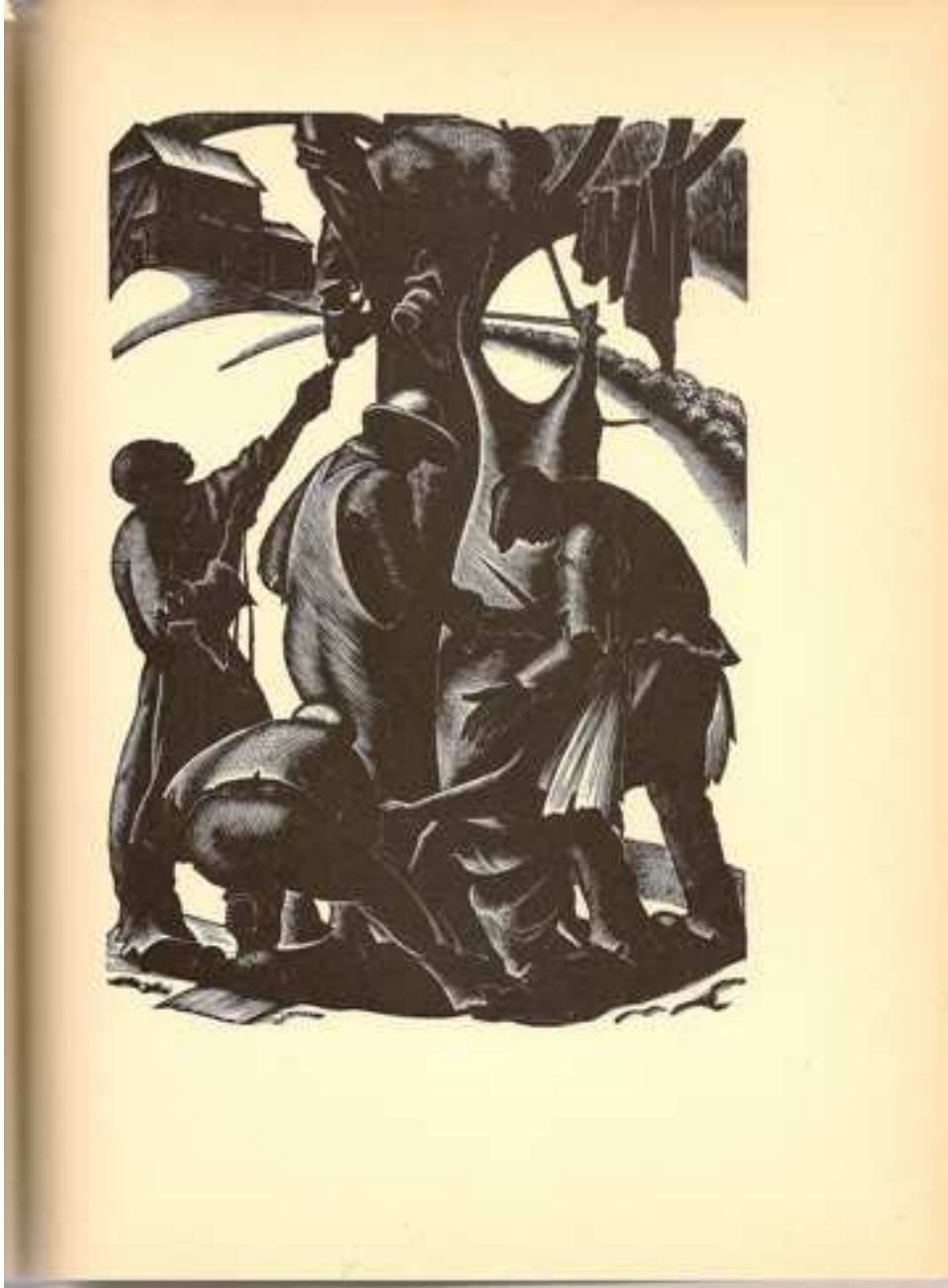


Figure 2.42 Clare Leighton, *Hog Killing*, 1942, wood engraving, from *Southern Harvest* (1942)

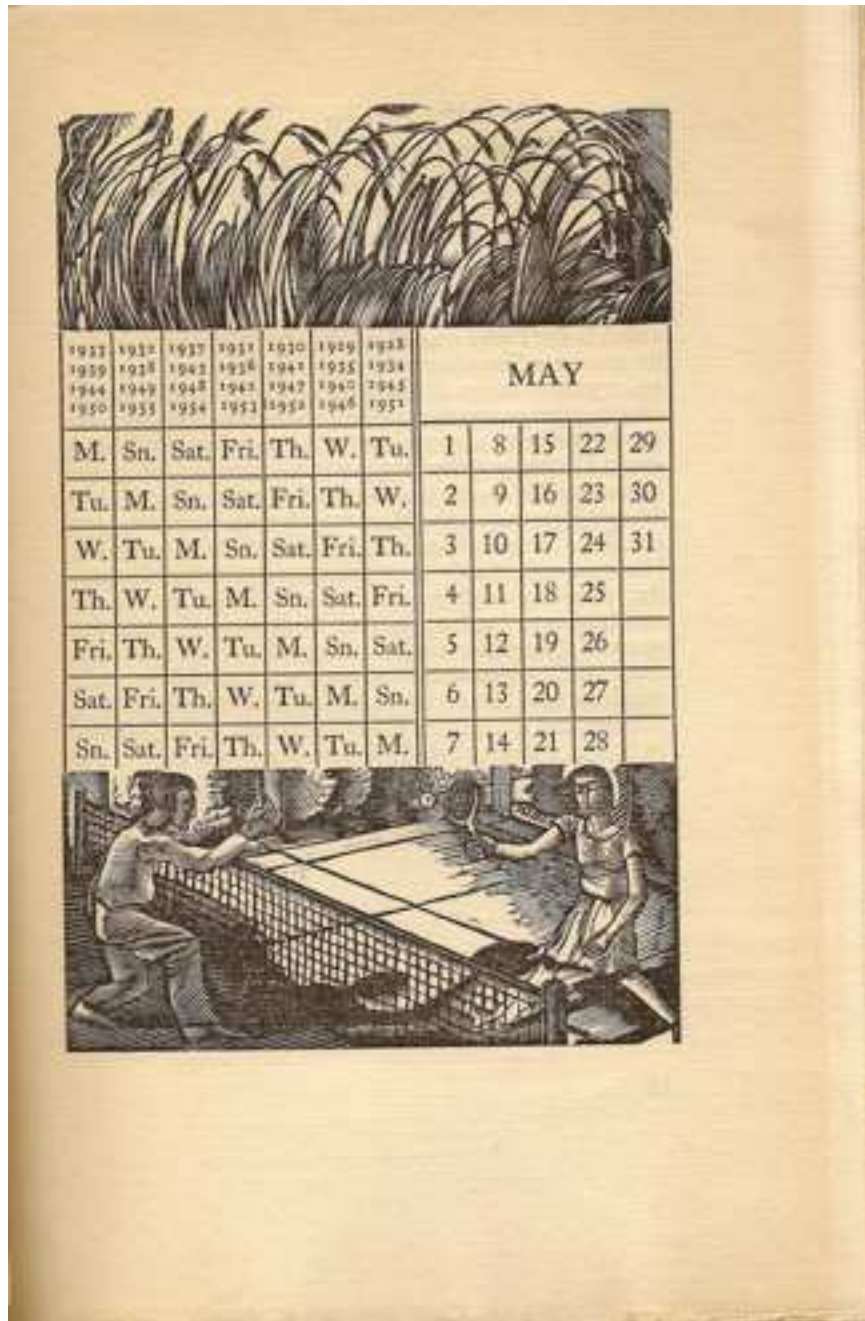


Figure 2.43 Eric Ravilious, *May*, 1927, wood engraving, from *The Twelve Months*, by Nicholas Breton (1927 edition)

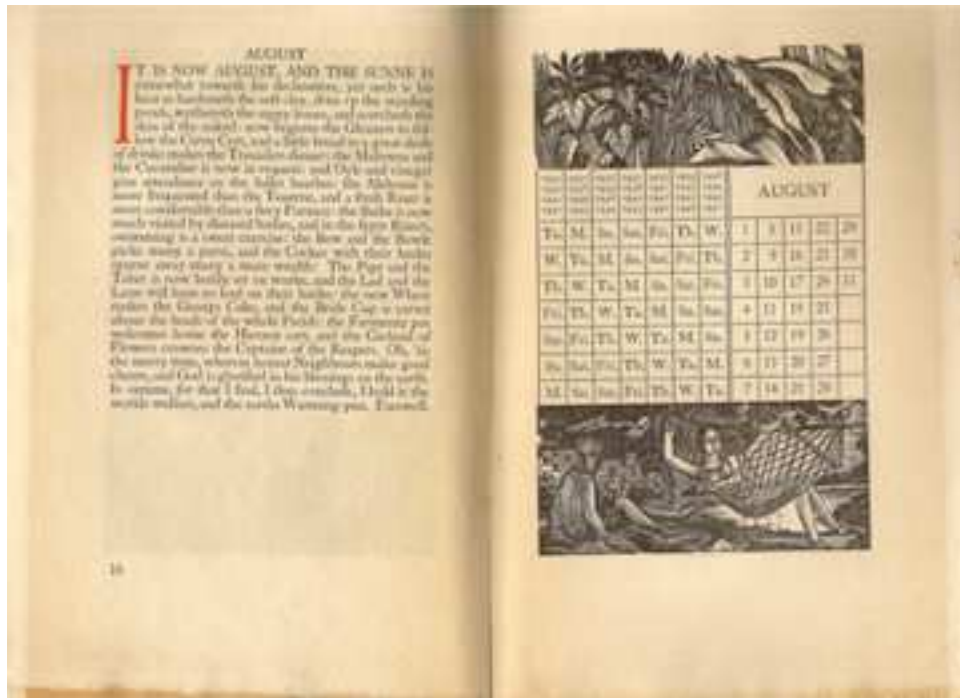


Figure 2.44 Eric Ravilious, *August*, 1927, wood engraving, from *The Twelve Moneths*, by Nicholas Breton (1927 edition)



Figure 2.45 Gwen Raverat, *July*, 1930, wood engraving, from a 1930 issue of *Time and Tide*

FOUR HEDGES

A Gardener's Chronicle

Written and engraved by
CLARE LEIGHTON



NEW YORK
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
1935

Figure 3.1 Clare Leighton, title page, *Four Hedges* (1935)



Figure 3.2 Gwen Raverat, *The Garden*, 1936, from *The Runaway*, by Elizabeth Anna Hart (first published 1872)



APRIL

OURS IS AN ORDINARY GARDEN. It is perched on a slope of the Chiltern Hills, exposed to every wind that blows. Its soil is chalk; its flower beds are pale grey. Dig into it just one spit, and you reach, as it were, a solid cement foundation. One might be hacking at the white cliffs of Dover. Only when it is wet from heavy rain does our soil darken and look normal. It is a new garden. In it there are none of the great trees that spread their shade over stretches of lawn, none of the mellow, age-silvered bricks that shelter a walled-in fruit garden, not a hint of a crazy paving patterned with moss, or a sundial with edges blunted by time. Four years ago it was rough meadowland, housing only larks and field mice. But a little over a hundred years ago it was common land which the rector of the day appropriated under an Enclosure Act. Grasses covered it throughout the year, changing in colour and height with the

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Figure 3.3 Clare Leighton, *Cowslips*, 1935, wood engraving, from *Four Hedges* (1935)

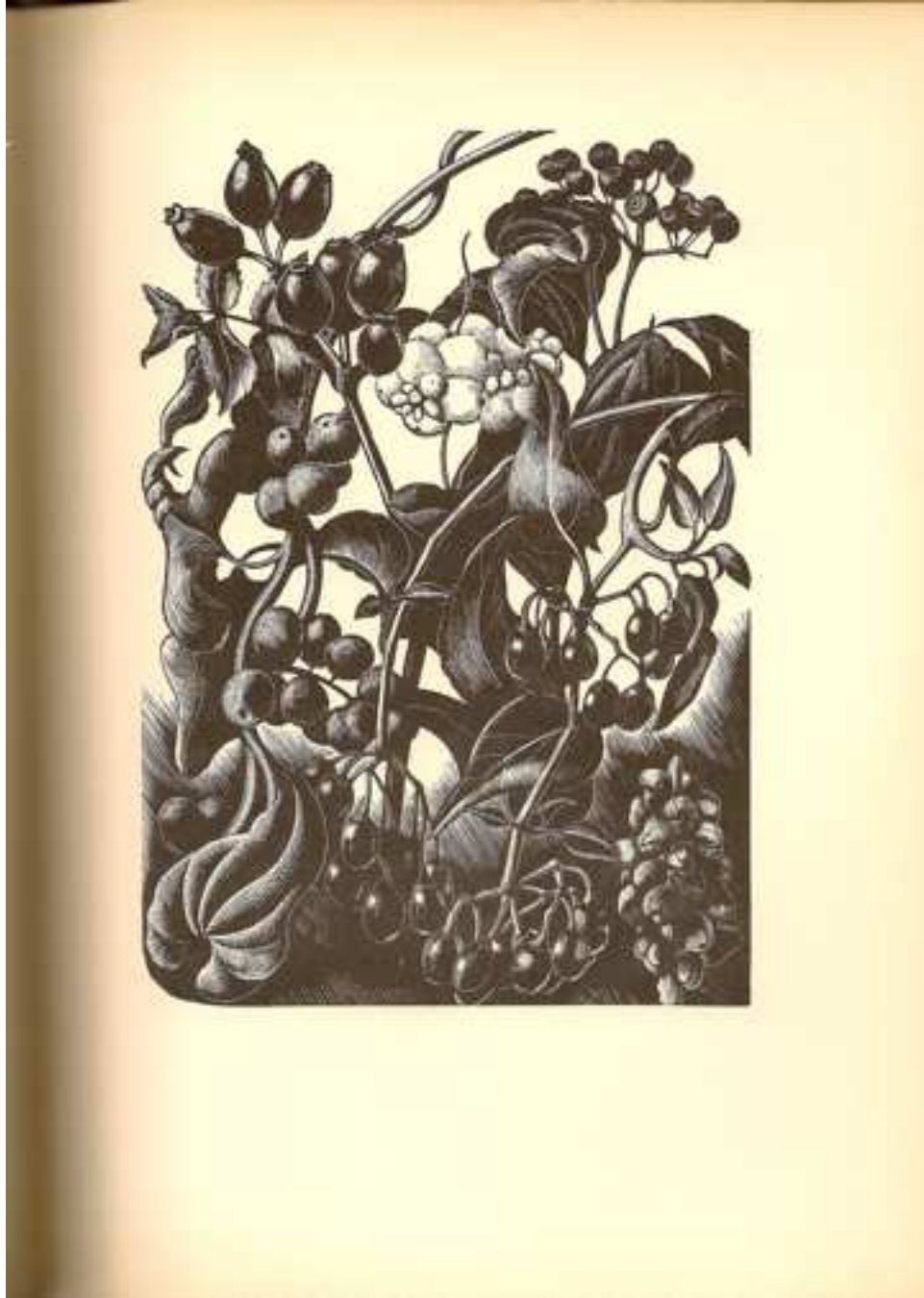


Figure 3.4 Clare Leighton, *Berries*, 1935, wood engraving, from *Four Hedges* (1935)



Figure 3.5 Clare Leighton, *Weeds*, 1935, wood engraving, from *Four Hedges* (1935)

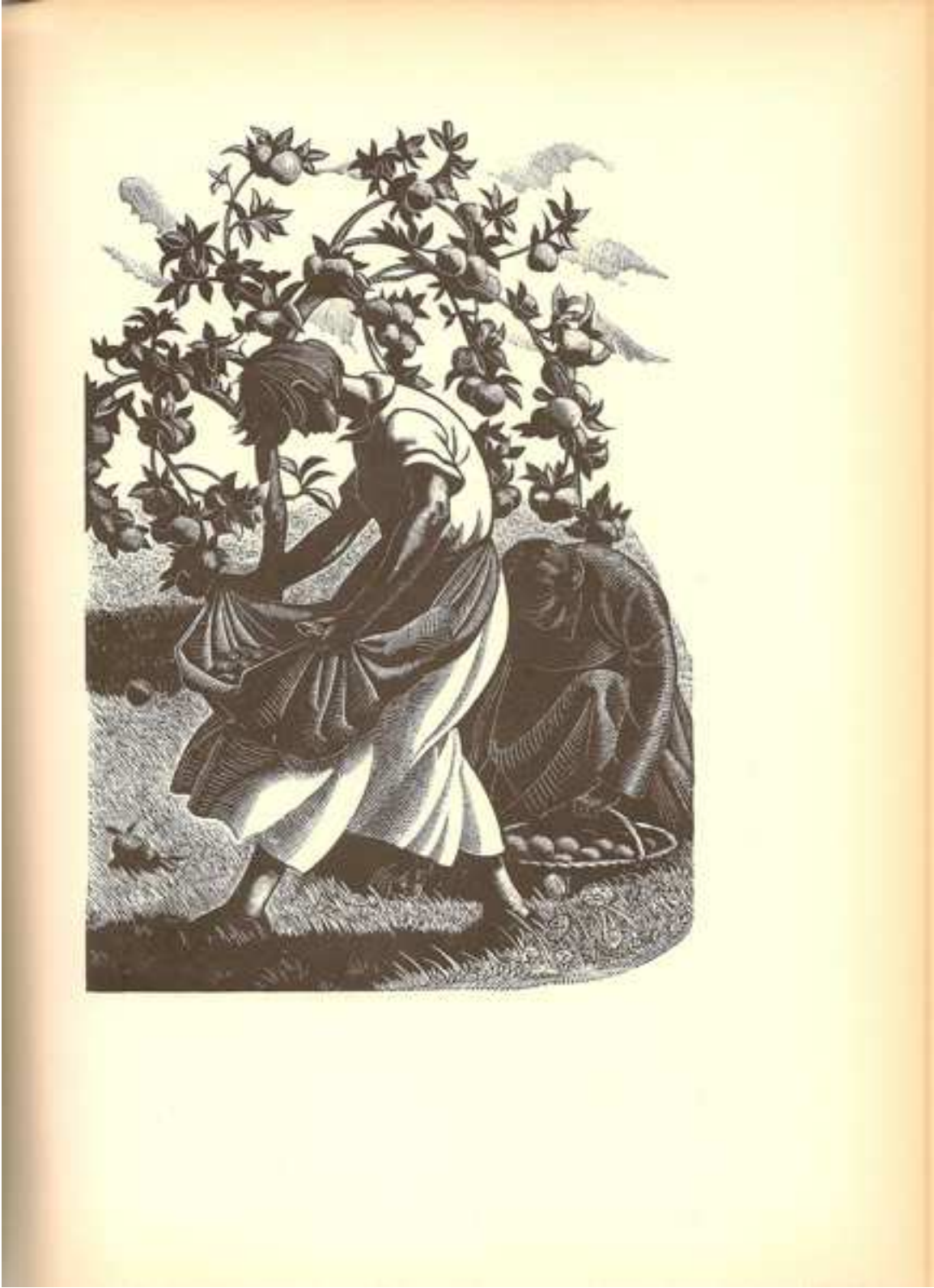


Figure 3.6 Clare Leighton, *A Lap of Windfalls*, 1935, wood engraving, from *Four Hedges* (1935)



Figure 3.7 Clare Leighton, *Planting Trees*, 1935, wood engraving, from *Four Hedges* (1935)



may swathe the bushes against the coming ravages of the birds. Raspberries and loganberries are forming. But the strawberries are ripe. We go strawberry picking, skinning off the covering net, removing the wooden pegs that hold it down. The net catches in the topmost leaves of the strawberry plants as we tear it off. A blackbird perches on a pear tree near by, watching us with interest and ready to seize his moment should we be called away and leave the strawberry bed exposed. For it is full of ripe berries, warm from the sun. They are large and heavy and drop towards the ground, hiding among the tangled

Figure 3.8 Clare Leighton, *Picking Strawberries*, 1935, wood engraving, from *Four Hedges* (1935)



As we wait for the time of the sowing of seeds, we prepare for planting our new alpines. We have a grand idea of filling in the straight lines between the cement paving of our shelter with tiny plants. But first we must provide good earth. We look at each other guiltily, for we know that the same idea has come to both of us. We will steal some good earth. We take baskets with us, covering our trowels with harmless looking sacking, and go for a walk on the hills and in the woods. Should we meet anyone, we will pretend to look at the distant view. Should we encounter a keeper—well, let us hope that we do not. Suddenly I am a small child again, trespassing in the woods for primroses, and the keeper is an enormous giant with legs as tall as a young tree, and a head that touches the lowest clouds. I watch and listen for every movement and sound, and it takes me a very long time to fill

Figure 3.9 Clare Leighton, *Warm Weather Coming*, 1935, from *Four Hedges* (1935)



OCTOBER

OUR POTATO CROP waits to be dug. As I fork up a root and scrape a potato with my fingernail the skin slips off. All around us work shouts to be done. We have no time now for quiet enjoyment of our garden, for the first frosts and the autumn rains will soon be upon us, checking our digging and planting.

We enjoy digging our potatoes. It is the big treasure hunt of the year, even more exciting than searching for the fruit in the tangle of straw round the strawberry plants. The excitement lies in the anticipation we feel each time we stick the fork into the ground. How many potatoes will there be beneath this plant? This anticipation never tires, even after rows of digging. Here is all the mystery of an unknown, invisible harvest. We can see the extent of our peas and beans, and we know that each green-leaved parsnip top will have a corresponding root below, but who can tell how many

Figure 3.10 Clare Leighton, *Digging Potatoes*, 1935, from *Four Hedges* (1935)

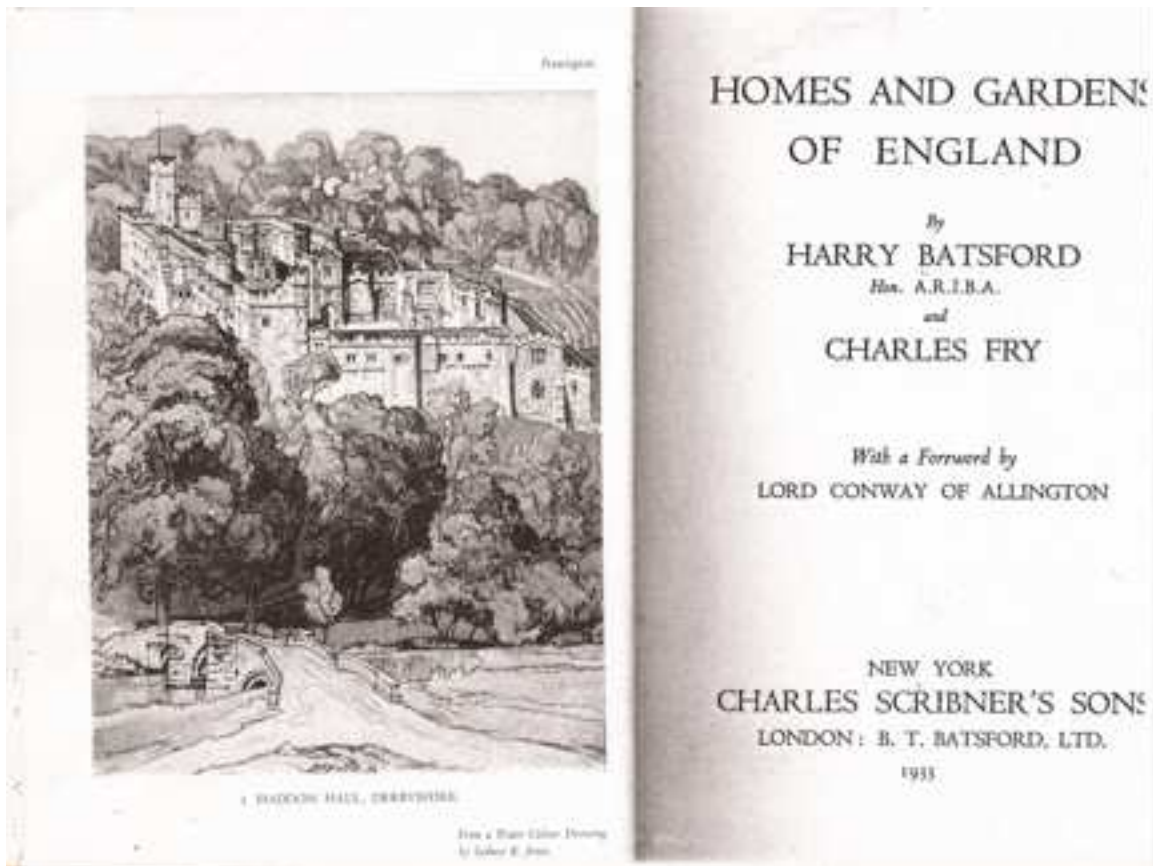


Figure 3.11 Sydney R. Jones, frontispiece, *Homes and Gardens of England* (1933), by Harry Batsford

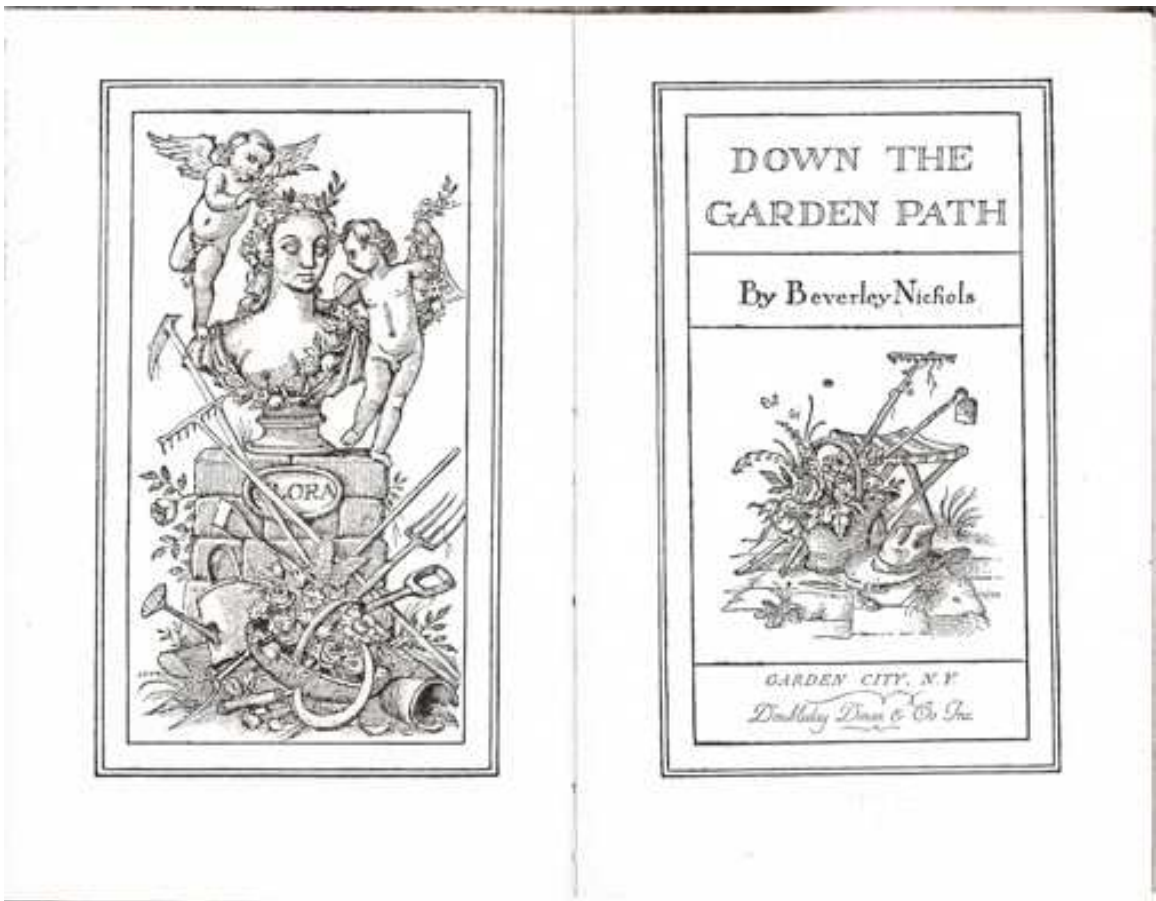


Figure 3.12 Rex Whistler, frontispiece and title page, 1932, *Down the Garden Path* (1932), by Beverly Nichols



past : the gurgle of rain-water down the pipes into the water butts. Released, I fall asleep to the noise of the slashing of rain on the windows.

It is next morning that the real excitement starts. We look out of the window and see the water butts brim full. The earth that has been white and hard for weeks past is dark grey, like the colour of heavy smoke. The whole garden is soaked and the grasses are cold and wet to my feet. The sky is grey and low, heavy with more rain ; and the storms roll after one another, darkening the earth still further. The lawns are covered with hopping birds, eagerly feeding on the rain-loosened worms ; for no worms have been seen for weeks past in the iron-hard soil. No longer is there any need for us to pour water into the wheelbarrow, that the thrushes may use it as their daily bath. No longer must we feed birds that could find no worms. Their food supply is once more assured. Slugs have suddenly appeared, and in the shade of the lavender bushes I find one large snail. It is the first one I have seen this summer, and I wonder where it has been hiding all these weeks. There is a rustle in the grasses at my feet. A frog hops across my path ; it is the first frog, too, that I have seen since the drought. It troubles me to imagine how it has been living in this rainless year.

A blackbird listens for worms. As I watch him and marvel at his sensitive hearing, I think what a raucous, strident thing we humans must have made of life for the birds. Ears

Figure 3.13 Clare Leighton, *Snail*, 1935, wood engraving, from *Four Hedges* (1935)



from the ground at points about nine inches apart and move toward each other, until they embrace, leaving half their length still under the earth. Thus they remain, blissful and unmoving, until the slightest vibration reaches them, when they withdraw from each other into their boles; for earth worms are shy lovers. The grass is patterned with them.

Now we change our gardener again, and Lacey comes to us. He is rhythmic, and his voice is earthy and rumbling. He digs with long slow movements, in harmony with the earth he touches. His breath in the damp air is like white smoke. We no longer feel that there is a discordant atmosphere among our plants and trees, and we are happier. Even Annie likes him. "He's rough, he is. That's what I like. You can always get on with them when they're rough." She puts her feelings in a somewhat crude way, but they are probably the same as ours.

The life of the garden is very gradual. There are none of the dramatic divisions of the seasons that we are told to expect. As the month runs through, we gather a strange assortment of flowers belonging to summer, autumn, and spring, all at a time. For the roses are still in bloom, with their muted autumn colourings: white is turned to pale green, yellow into dull gold, pink into flushed fawn. Auriculas show a clump of purple inside the cup of their leaves. Wallflowers and marigolds rival each other in brilliance, and primulas and chrysanthemums blossom in the same bed. Only the mauve of fungus, half hidden beneath drifts of decaying leaves, reminds us that it is still autumn.

Figure 3.14 Clare Leighton, *Earthworms*, 1935, wood engraving, from *Four Hedges* (1935)

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that can hear the wriggle of a worm must be hurt by the roar of a car or an aeroplane.

But we have a short time of release from the drought. The thirsty earth has sucked the rain deep into itself, and after a few days the garden is parched once more. The hoe beats at the earth as though it were grey stone. There is to be no enduring respite this year. And the garden grows tired. Colour leaves it. Most of the soft fruit bushes have given up their harvests : raspberry, strawberry and currant, all now are mere clumps of green leaves. Peas and roses are exhausted. Marrow flowers fade and bulge into marrows. The year is growing old very fast, the garden is bored. Only the lavender bushes bloom with exuberance, alive with bees by day and moths by night. As the year treads on, different weeds appear : milkweed and thistle, wild carrot and shepherd's purse have supplanted groundsel and plantain. The shorn orchard lies brown and parched : no rains have endured long enough to bring life to the starved after-grass.

And into this fatigued garden creep the first signs of autumn. For plums have started turning colour, and to-day's wind has tossed to the ground one rosy, mature apple.



Figure 3.15 Clare Leighton, *Frog*, 1935, wood engraving, from *Four Hedges* (1935)



NOVEMBER

“WE’VE HAD ICE the thickness of a penny,” says Alf as he comes up to help with the digging.

It is the morning after the first frost, and fearfully we go into the garden to look at our plants. Great damage has been done all round, for flowers have bloomed strongly in the warm, damp weather of October. This is no gradual, beautiful death, as is their normal due, but a cruelly sudden ending, with blackened stalks and leaves and the distortion of sharp decay. Flowers die in such different ways. Some, like the iris, wither and grow ugly on the stem. Most of the spring flowers, such as daffodil and hyacinth, fade and brown and crinkle, till one cuts them down as they pass the height of their blooming, rather than behold them in their old age. The poppy is hasty and dramatic. The kindest flowers are those that cast their petals on the ground, and in dying lose none of

Figure 3.16 Clare Leighton, *Transplanting Walnut Tree*, 1935, wood engraving, from *Four Hedges* (1935)

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balsams. It has never been more beautiful. No longer do we shrink from looking at our plants as we did during the summer's drought, for the rains have swelled the leaves once more, the flowers are happy in their second blooming and the grass at last is really green.

I mow the lawn. How many people know the right way it should be done? Feet should be bare; grass should be slightly damp. The cold, moist clover strikes up from the mower upon my bare feet, and blades of cut grass and bits of slashed weeds stick between my toes. I remember one of my moments



in life: I had been bicycling among the foothills of the Pyrenees at the time of the grape harvest, and, turning a corner had come upon a shouting clump of peasants. They were laughing as they sang odd little songs, and some of them were dancing. In the midst of them, and all among them, and surrounding them, were squat fat tubs, some full of grapes, others purple pools of juice. And in others again were men and women treading the grapes. They beckoned to me, and I, too, trod with bare feet. The grape stalks and the pressed skins were caught between my toes, and as I drew my feet up, there was a resisting, sucking noise, as if I were pulling against a tide. It was

Figure 3.17 Clare Leighton, *Japanese Anemone*, 1935, wood engraving, from *Four Hedges* (1935)



placed right on the tops of their heads, as in a frog. Their half-formed wings are like the flappers of a fish. At this stage in their development there is little in them of the grace and beauty of form of the wren.

The abundance of young birds seems endless. In the orchard noisy young starlings are being instructed in trial flights. A chatter, irresponsible as the talk of schoolgirls, comes from the row of poplars against the shed; three baby tits are trying their wings. They run up and down the poplar trunks, jumping off from one tree to another, learning to fly in little movements in the air. They are joined by a family of fledgling chaffinches, fresh from the nest; the newly planted plum trees are very popular with them as a taking-off point. As we watch them we decide that we should always manage to have a few small trees in our garden at this time of year. Young birds soon tire: they are as yet so accustomed to sitting in the nest that occasionally they flop down in the grass to rest from their exhaustion in the middle of their hopping walk.

And all this time, while the garden is turned into a nursery for young birds, the little hen linnets sits tight on her late nest, and we have discovered a new thrush's nest, filled with warm eggs. Courtship continues, too. Surely our blackbird is singing again. What else could account for the deeper, more steady note that has just entered into his song? He has never sung so well this year. And then we see him and understand

Figure 3.18 Clare Leighton, *Fledgling Wrens*, 1935, wood engraving, from *Four Hedges* (1935)



beautiful in the form of the individual flower, they should be allowed by reason of their beauty to remain. Experience, however, has hardened us against them. We slaughter them with hook and shears before they shall seed and cover the garden. We place poison at the heart of each plant ; but in spite of all this their numbers increase each day. For we have against us uncountable roots of many years' seeding, when dandelions flourished unchecked in the rough meadowland. They are strong opponents. The massacre of dandelions is a peculiarly

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Figure 3.19 Clare Leighton, *Crown Imperial*, 1935, wood engraving, from *Four Hedges* (1935)

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mother bird, watching, makes disquieted noises from the tree. I replace the grotesque object.

Everything bears abundantly this year. The newly planted maiden fruit trees are covered with setting blossom. Reluctantly I go the round of them, picking off nearly all the young fruit. It is a heartless job and seems a rude rebuke to their enthusiasm, but it is necessary, if young cherry and young plum are to grow up strong and bear well. In the hedges the white bryony throws out its tendrils, covering the hawthorn and wild rose with its rapid growth ; what does it matter how much it covers, with such beauty of leaf and tendril. All the garden plants and bushes thicken : summer growth nears its climax.



Figure 3.20 Clare Leighton, *Blackbird Fledgling*, 1935, wood engraving, from *Four Hedges* (1935)



days with pencil and paper, deciding where we should have lawn and flower bed and orchard, how many trees we should plant, what proportion of the garden should be given over to vegetables. As our bodies have skeletons so should our garden have bony structure. It is only upon a firm foundation that the irregular growth of plant and tree can best clothe and deck the garden. Frilled edge of flower contrasts with severe edge of design. In our garden we decided that we would have no sentimentality, no wilfully irregular edges to ornamental ponds, no badly-sculptured garden figures, no timidity showing itself in an escape into false "mossy bits," or an aping of the old-fashioned. This sentimentality of bad design has no historic heritage. It was by reason of its severe underlying structure that the really old garden scored its success; for what could be more rigid than the walled garden, with the tight symmetry of espalier fruit trees, ruler-straight lines of vegetable patch and unswerving order of box edging? We struggled with our shapes. The half acre turned out to be an imperfect rectangle and we had difficulty in compromising with the edges of flower beds and the lines of beech hedges.

Figure 3.21 Clare Leighton, *Grape Hyacinth*, 1935, wood engraving, from *Four Hedges* (1935)



We take our first walk round the garden, intimately noticing the many changes. Sadly we realise that we have missed the overture to this year, the snowdrops and crocuses ; they hang colourless heads with swelling seed pod, or lie wind-dashed with their faces to the ground. In this late spring we are in time for the almond blossom ; it is just opening its tight pink buds. The rhubarb is still covered against the frosts. Over the fence at the foot of the orchard our neighbour's old goat stands as she has stood for four years. As we go towards her, we frighten the timid green woodpecker from the tree stump at which he pecks ; he rushes off with a disquieted chuckle. Clumps of green have appeared in the big perennial bed ; thankful for the lateness of this season, we realise that we can still dig. With joy I find the shoots of my cherished yellow scabious plants ; I had tended the seedlings all last summer but feared that they had died in the first frosts. There seems to be special pleasure in tending and strengthening sickly plants. I remember a fight we once had for some diseased Canterbury bells. The seedlings grew brown and faded a few days after being put out into the ground ; people told us that they would die, but we persevered and hoped and moved the sickly creatures to clean earth, and at last young shoots appeared

Figure 3.22 Clare Leighton, *Hyacinth*, 1935, wood engraving, from *Four Hedges* (1935)



MAY

“AND WE’D SOAK OUR GARLANDS OVERNIGHT,
and they’d be fresh and ready ever so early next morning,
And when we’d got to the houses we’d sing :

“ *Good morning, ladies and gentlemen,
We wish you a happy day.
We’ve come to show you our garlands
Because it’s the first of May.*”

Annie is wiping dishes in the kitchen. Outside in the garden everything glows. It is May Day. But Annie is reflective, and her reminiscences trickle on.

“ There’s not much call to be here in the country on May Day nowadays. Nothing happens. Why, the schools don’t even give the children a holiday as they used to do. When we was children, we used always to go out with our garlands to all the houses. We’d pick every kind of wild flower and blossom and

Figure 3.23 Clare Leighton, *Cherry Blossom*, 1935, wood engraving, from *Four Hedges* (1935)

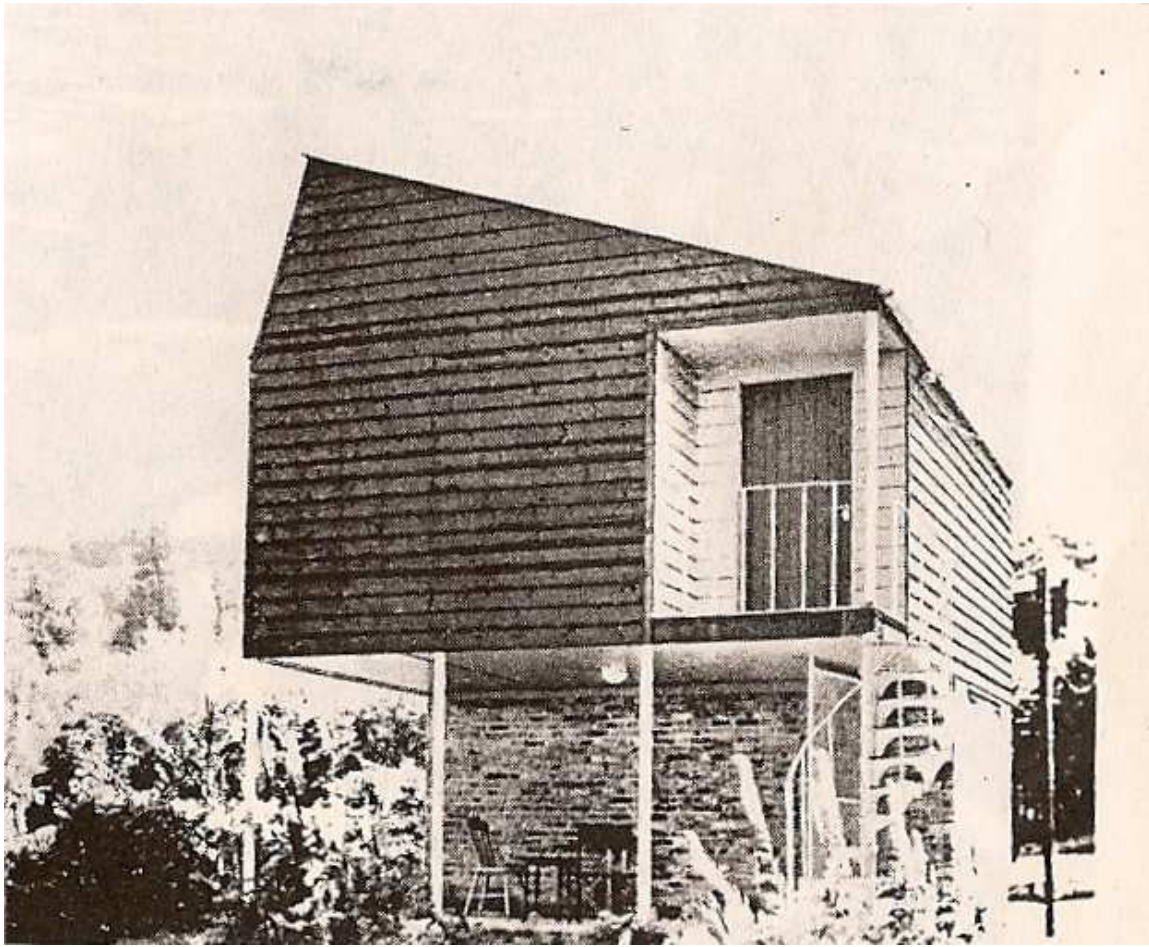


Figure 3.24 Clare Leighton's Studio at Four Hedges, photograph for "In the Studio of Clare Leighton, by Sybil Vincent, *The Studio* (March 1937)

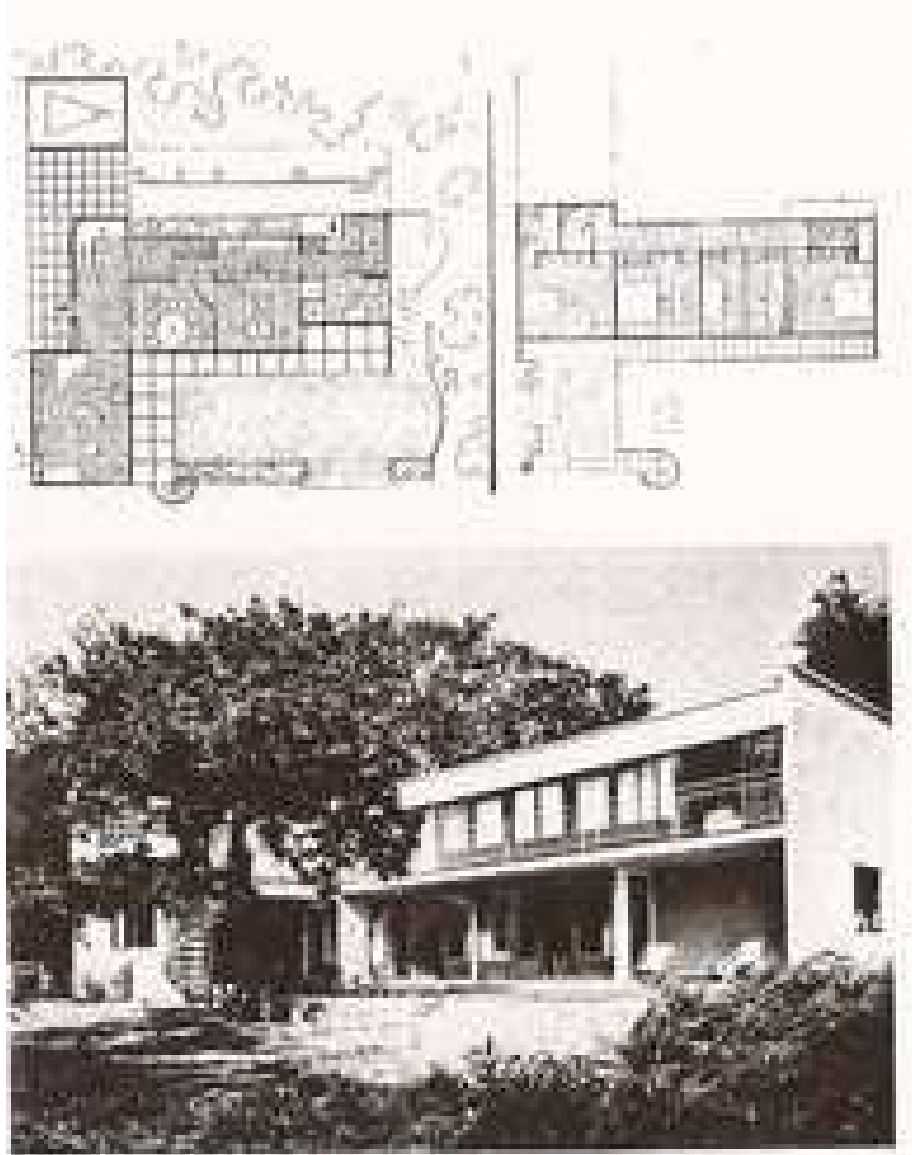


Figure 3.25 Residence, Farnham Common, Buckinghamshire, Valentine Harding, 1934-35, photograph (from Peter Coe and Malcolm Reading, *Lubetkin and Tecton: Architecture and Social Commitment* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1981, 128)



Figure 3.26 High Cross House, Dartington Hall, William Lescaze, 1931, photograph from *Country Life* (11 Feb. 1933)



Figure 3.27 Clare Leighton, *Whiteleaf Cross*, 1934, wood engraving



Figure 3.28 Clare Leighton, *View from Whiteleaf Cross*, 1934, wood engraving



Figure 3.29 Paul Nash, *White Cross*, 1920, ink, pencil, and watercolor on paper, private collection

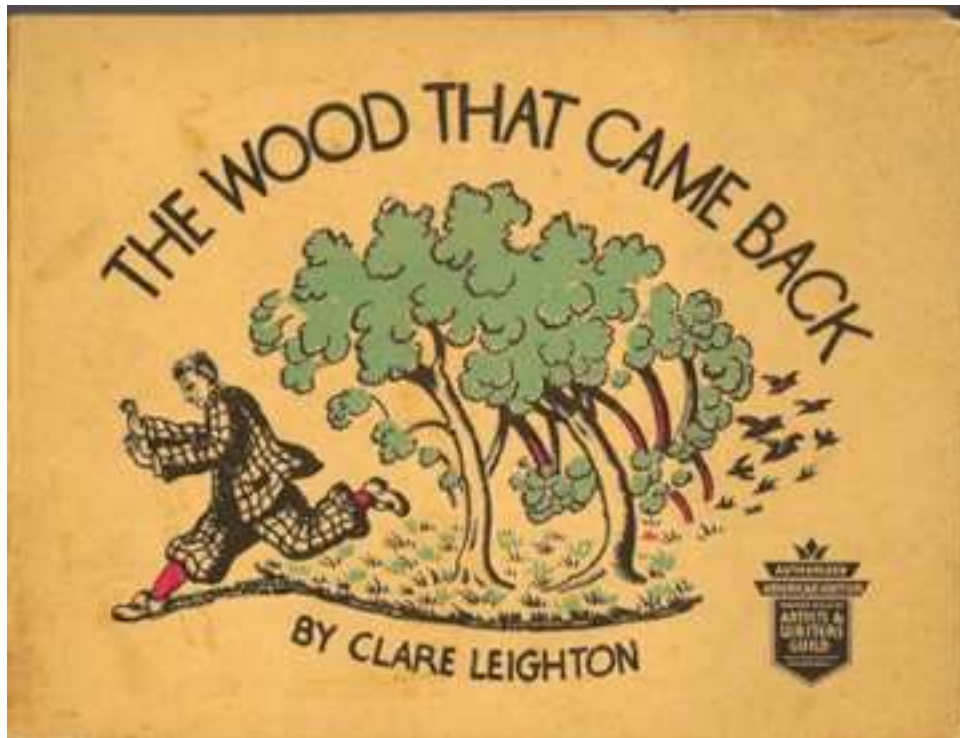


Figure 3.30 Clare Leighton, drawing, back cover, *The Wood that Came Back* (1934)

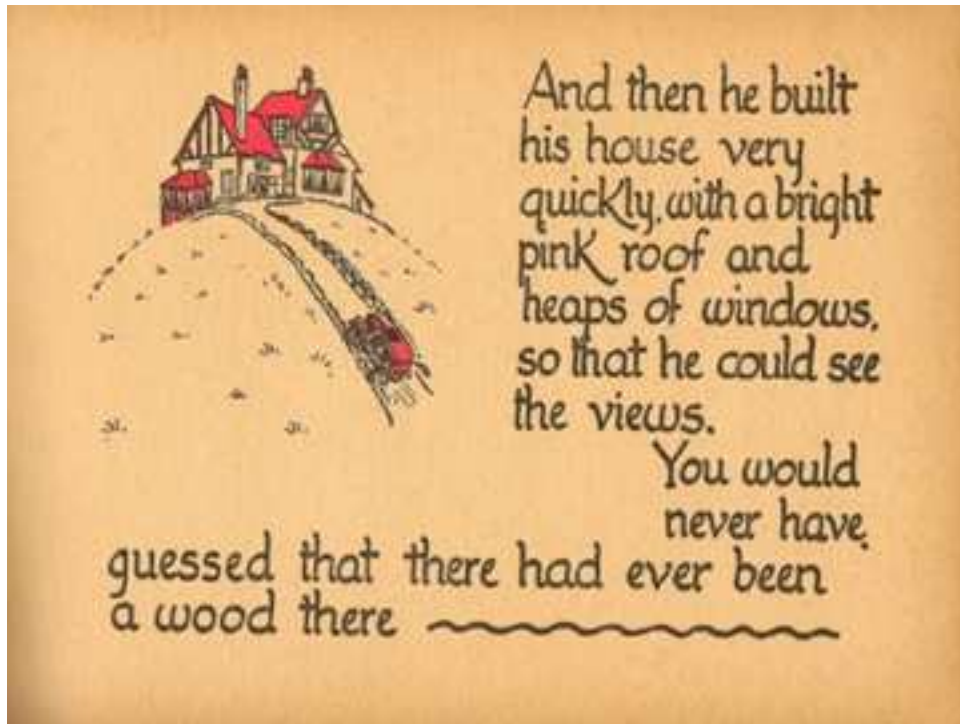


Figure 3.31 Clare Leighton, drawing, from *The Wood That Came Back* (1934)



Figure 3.32 John Nash, *Deadly Nightshade*, 1927, wood engraving, from *Poisonous Plants: Deadly, Dangerous, and Suspect* (1927), by John Nash

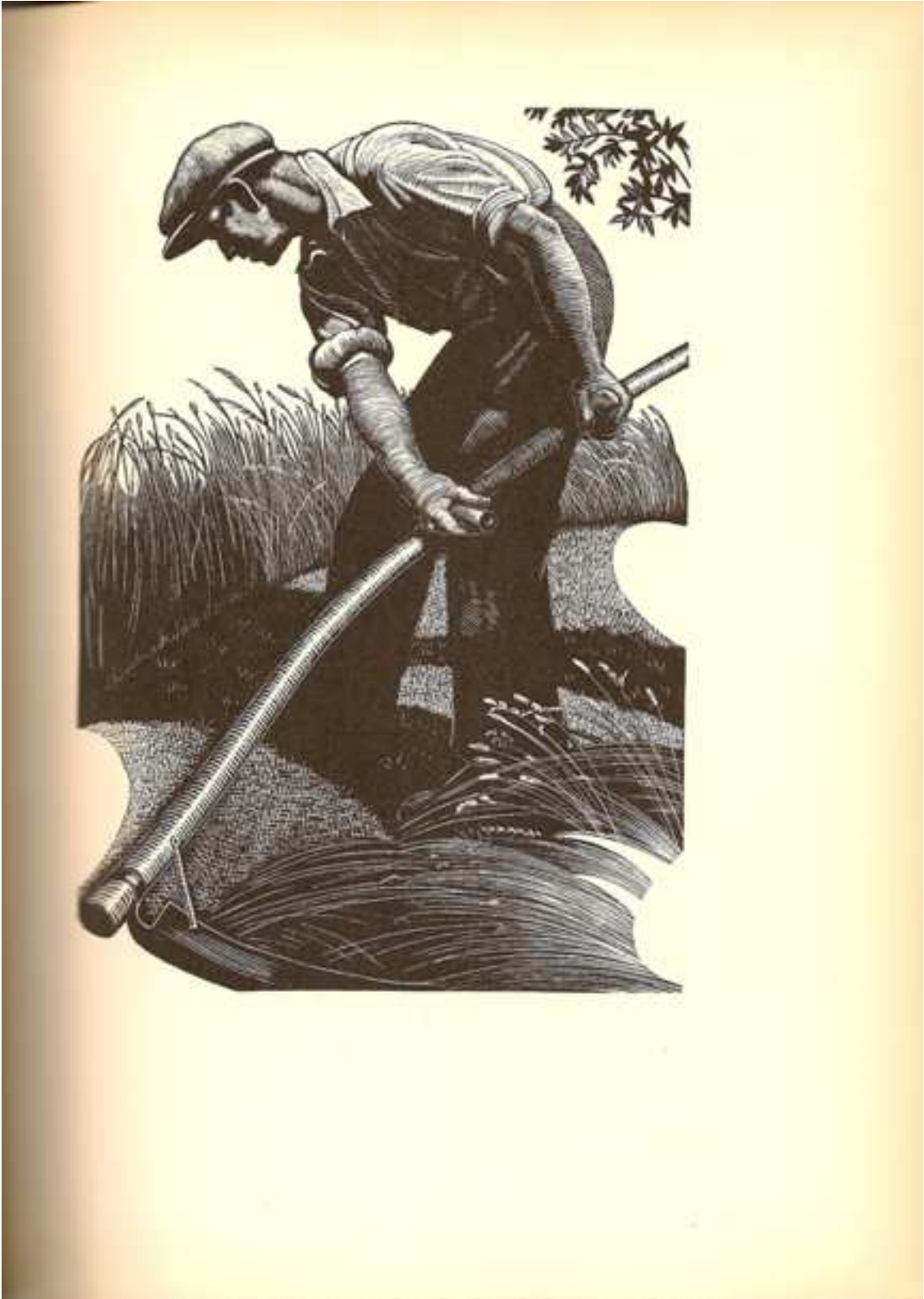


Figure 3.33 Clare Leighton, *Scything*, 1935, wood engraving, from *Four Hedges* (1935)

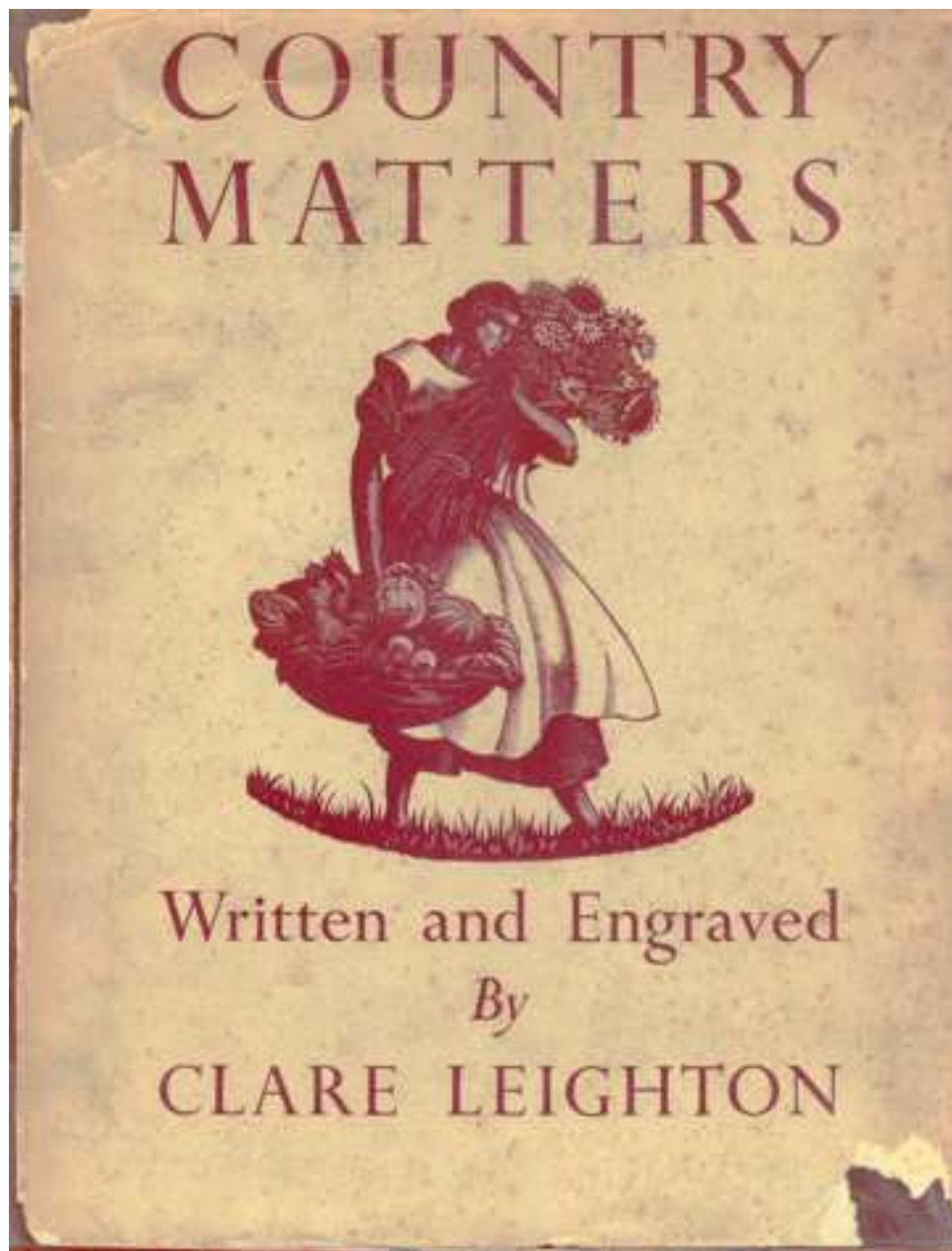


Figure 4.1 Clare Leighton, front cover (*Woman with Flowers*), 1937, wood engraving, from *Country Matters* (1937)

Reproduced by permission of "Punch".



1914. MR. WILLIAM SMITH ANSWERS THE CALL TO PRESERVE HIS NATIVE SOIL INVIOLEATE.



1919. MR. WILLIAM SMITH COMES BACK AGAIN TO SEE HOW WELL HE HAS DONE IT.

Figure 4.2 "Mr. William Smith....," *Punch* cartoon, from the frontispiece to *England and the Octopus* (1928), by Clough Williams-Ellis



THE VILLAGE SMITHY

THE SHAPES OF OUR HILLS stand out sharp and distinct as never before, when we are about to quit them for a long journey. Never before had we remarked the beauty of the clump of beech trees above the chalk cross. So it is with the village smithy. Any glimpse of it may be the last. We linger as we pass it, for it might fade before our eyes.

But already the smithy has changed, to meet the needs of the age. Already the few horses that come to be shod are led round by the back way, and the front of the smithy is gay with a row of flaming petrol-pumps, like dahlias in full bloom. The clang of hammer on anvil is a rare sound, these days; instead, the cars hoot as they stop to refill by the flaunting dahlias.

But I know a smithy and a blacksmith that do not disappoint. Few horses are to be seen there to-day, but I have watched a picture as happy as imagination could invent, when Joe Benyon sat on the great white mare and led the chestnut

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Figure 4.3 Clare Leighton, *Shoeing the Horse*, 1937, wood engraving, from *Country Matters* (1937)

THE VILLAGE SMITHY

car-infested roads and the shramming cold that awaits him outside. Here, in this warmth, with the great quiet strength of the blacksmith, he feels secure. He has been carried back into the past, to the age to which he belongs.

Justin Haynes has finished shoeing Beauty. He spits on his slate and writes on it what is owing to him from Ted. There is no need now for hurry. There may be no horse to-day, or to-morrow, or even for a week. Habit, though, runs strong within him, and he blows up the forge, that he may fashion yet more unwanted horseshoes.

As Ted Woolcott leads Beauty out into the knifing cold, he is followed by Ebenezer Stopps.

"I suppose I must be getting along," wheezes the rat-catcher. "But somehow or other, it do seem to me that that be my place, in there, along with Justin—and your place, too, by the looks of it. There be some of us what be born too late. And I do reckon that I be one of they."



Figure 4.4 Clare Leighton, *The Smithy*, 1937, wood engraving, from *Country Matters* (1937)



To-day they are formless gloom, but should the sun come out it would creep past the anvil and light numberless little fires in the derelict metal. It would struggle through the thick dust of the small paned windows, and the clusters of cobwebs would look like wisps of imprisoned smoke. It would turn the brick floor to a gentle red and overrule the glow from the forge. As the morning passed and it grew stronger, it would gild the arms of the blacksmith as he hammered at the anvil and throw a pattern of window-panes across the leather of his apron. But the sky is dead grey to-day and the smithy dark. The presence of Ebb Stopps and Ted Woolcott, gathered round the heat of the forge, is made known to us through our ears as a rumble of talk.

"It be they motor-cars what do do me in," wheezes Ebb Stopps. "Lor' bless my soul, when I was a young 'un I hadn't

Figure 4.5 Clare Leighton, *The Blacksmith*, 1937, wood engraving, from *Country Matters* (1937)

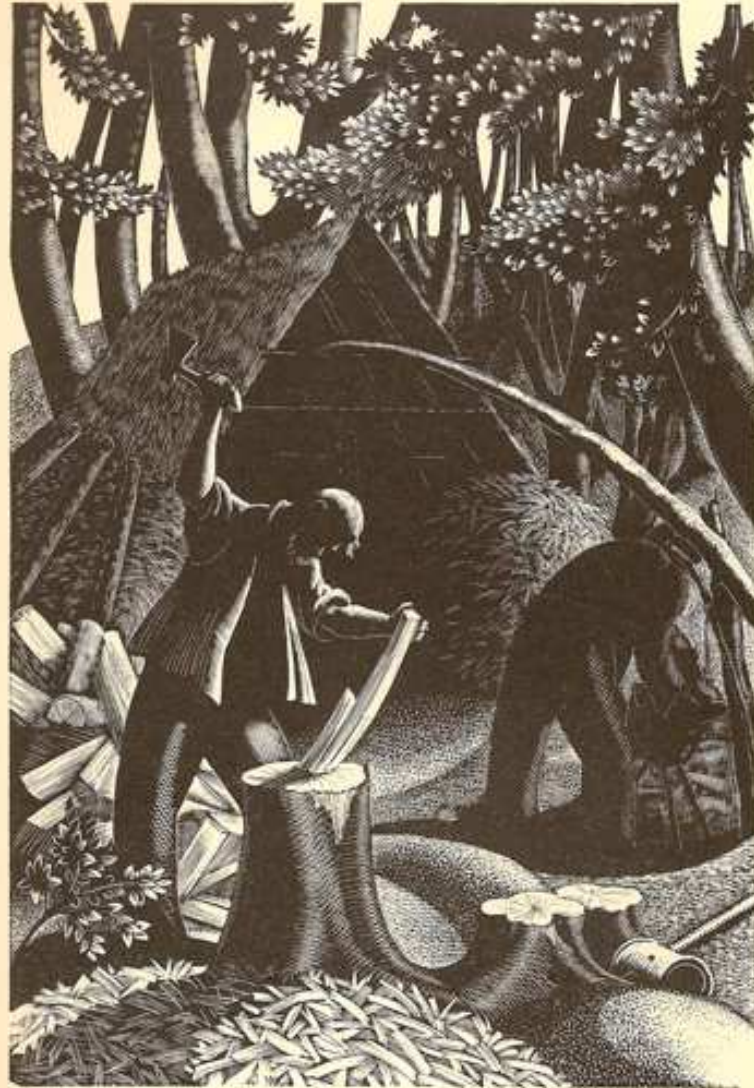


Figure 4.6 Clare Leighton, *Chair Bodgers*, 1937, wood engraving, from *Country Matters* (1937)



there is always somebody who will rebuild footbridges or cabins to supply fuel for future fires. It is an enviable philosophy.

But let us follow our tramp as he saunters along the road. His body is bent under the unwieldy weight of all his worldly goods, contained in numerous sacks thrown over his back. The uppers of his shoes burst apart from the soles, exposing frayed scraps of discoloured socks. His clothing is of a lovely harmony of muted tones; there is no discord to be seen anywhere. The general colour of his apparel is that of the countryside through which he passes: warm crimson-brown of the sun on the ploughed fields, buff of decaying vegetation in the autumn, deep blackish-green of the shadow on a pond under heavy trees. If he is wearing a blatant pink or red muffler, it seems, against the harmony of its background, to be a bright flower in the hedgerow.

It is his head, though, that arrests one's attention. Did ever

Figure 4.7 Clare Leighton, *Head of Tramp*, 1937, wood engraving, from *Country Matters* (1937)



TRAMPS

YOU SEE HIM AT NIGHTFALL, walking the road on the outskirts of a town. He seems especially to come into existence at sundown, as though he were a bat or moth or a clumsy brown maybug. The country road to him is nothing but the space between town and town. He is the "soft" tramp, who plans his life that he can arrive each night at a different workhouse. This kind walks with determined step, conscious of a fixed destination. His head may droop with fatigue, but his eyes are straight before him, never pausing to look at ditch or lane, or to search for sticks that he may make a fire for his billy can. In the particular rhythm of his walk we can sense the length of white road gathered up behind him, the ribbon of white road lying before him. He is a figure of monotony made manifest. Place him against an incongruous background and you would yet know by the shape of his walk that he was a tramp. His feet have grown accustomed to the smoothness of civilised roads, so that though he may move always with the stride of the countryman, yet there is about him none of the clumsy lurch of the ploughman, with his purposeful plodding upon heavy ploughland.

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Figure 4.8 Clare Leighton, *Tramp on Road*, 1937, wood engraving, from *Country Matters* (1937)



Figure 4.9 Paul Gavarni, illustration for *Le Juif Errant*, by Eugène Sue, 1845



Figure 4.10 Théo van Rysselberghe, *Les Errants*, lithograph, reproduced in *Almanach de la Révolution*, 1904



Figure 4.11 Camille Pissarro, *Les Trimardeurs*, 1896, lithograph

TRAMPS

carries a billy can full of tea—tea with milk in it, to make you strong, for tea without milk never does no one any good! —to be drunk at leisure in the woods. I listen for his song, but it has not yet formed. When it is born, I like to think that it will be less mournful than the dirge about the bit of fat bacon. I like to believe that I have begotten a happy song.

And then I remember a completely different tramp. He was as strange a figure as any, but in place of the usual sly or childish look, he burnt with the fire of religious mania. He stopped me one day in the folds of the hills, barring my path with his brandished stick. The sun caught the sharp planes of his face, throwing into deep shadow the lower part of his bony cheeks. Everything about him, from long pointed finger to pennant of torn overcoat, looked like black lightning.

"Have you ever met a prophet?" His words were the inevitable thunder.

". . . A prophet," echoed from the beech-wood slopes behind me.

"Then I tell you that you have to-day met one. The Lord has given me a message for you —and for you alone."

". . . You alone," declared the beech-wood slope.

The storm of his religious passion played around him. I dared not move. In the stillness of the hills his message rolled and tumbled and roared, tossed back by echo, till sentences overlapped and gained doubled force.

"Listen to me! If you have any genius in you, let it come



Figure 4.12 Clare Leighton, *The Mad Prophet*, 1937, from *Country Matters* (1937)



about. But the old lady laughed. It was true that there were so many of them about—more, perhaps, than even the village knew of. They would make a special point of diverging up her lane, asking for boiling water for their drink. With scriptural generosity she would give them tea and milk and sugar, butter on their bread, the use of her oil-stove for their cooking. “And why should they want to murder me?” she would ask. “We understand each other so well. It just happens that it’s I who have the tea and the butter. But it might just as well happen the other way round.”

It is a pity that this fear has grown around the idea of the tramp, for there is much to learn from him. Who else demonstrates the needlessness of possessions? Who else corrects the blind rush of modern life? There is dignity in his poverty. He rarely trades on the rags he wears. If he shows us his worn-out shoes, and asks for our cast-offs, it is in a spirit of the communism of property. And his laziness? Should we blame him for this? His attitude to

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Figure 4.13 Clare Leighton, *Tramp Waving Farewell*, 1937, wood engraving, *Country Matters* (1937)



Figure 4.14 G. de Greef, *Le Chemineau*, from *Almanach de la Question Sociale*, 1898

COUNTRY MATTERS

out. The Lord wants you to speak. The Lord wants you to have courage. The world is full of genius, but the world lacks courage."

He dumped his baggage on to the turf and flung his legs and arms apart, like a violent scarecrow.

"Now I am a prophet. I am neither better nor worse than all the prophets—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, St. Paul, we are all one." He shouted his words to a flock of crows overhead. "When I lie down at night I hear the angels singing and the golden trumpets blowing, and I see the stars above dancing with joy, and God on His throne on high. The day will come when I shall stand before the people of the world and I shall lift up my arms to Heaven and cry: 'Peace be still!'"

As he bellowed these last words, a frightened rabbit scuttled across the clearing. Birds in the undergrowth flew noisily into safety.

"And then you will see the Lord coming with glory and power. Even so. Amen."

"And when will that day be?"

But the prophet had finished. He stooped and packed his baggages about his scraggy person, and turned to leave me. He had delivered his message.



Figure 4.15 Clare Leighton, *Tramp Asleep*, 1937, wood engraving, from *Country Matters* (1937)



occasionally to grab at a particular flower she fancied, careless of who had brought it. The flowers by then had become public property.

Johnny felt happy, and there was triumph in his happiness, the triumph of fear overcome. Not only had he run and talked in the church, but, at the bidding of the rector's wife, he had fetched for her jam-jars from the belfry, and had dared—yes, actually dared to touch one of the hanging surplices. He recollected the terror he had felt as he looked at that row of ghosts, with their odd smell. And yet now he had touched one.

But how could you be frightened in the church this morning? There was he with the other children sitting astride the pews, and stepping over from one seat to the next. Inside him he held tight the memory of that venture into the pulpit. He could smell still the mustiness of the old hassocks. By standing on a pile of them he had managed to peep over the edge of the pulpit itself, and to imagine that he, Johnny Benyon, had been preaching. Little did all those women know, as they sipped their mid-morning tea furtively in the belfry, that he had grown up and preached to the whole church beneath him, peopling those empty pews from his

Figure 4.16 Clare Leighton, *The Lady Caroline Bramleigh*, 1937, wood engraving, from *Country Matters* (1937)



Figure 4.17 Camille Pissarro, *Jean Misère*, pen and ink, from *Turpitudes Sociales*, 1889

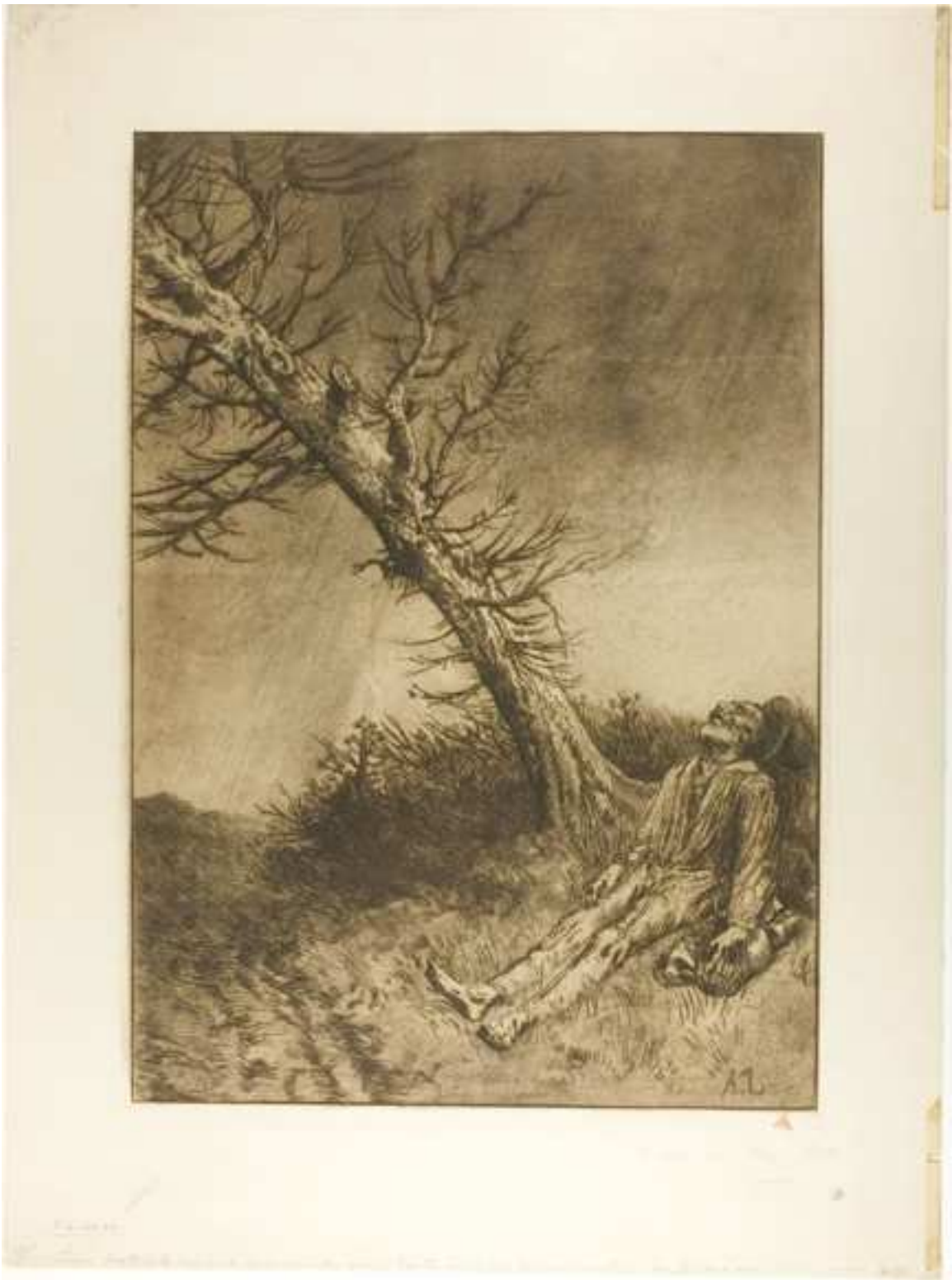


Figure 4.18 Alphonse Legros, *Death of the Vagabond*, 1876-77, etching with aquatint



the kitchen and the tight pink cheeks and absurdly blue eyes of the man sipping tea from his saucer before me. He was growing sentimental under the gentleness of Aunt Sarah.

"And the end? Well, if it comes to the ditch, I've always been at home in 'em. That'll be going home for good; that's all. I've been a good long way in my time. There's them what are full of fear as to when they're going to die, and where. But what I say is, it's no good your worrying, for you're not going to die until death comes for you. My father died six years ago; yes, six years ago my father died. And it was him as taught me to have no fear."

At last he got up to go, and we escorted him down the

Figure 4.19 Clare Leighton, *Ted Lawrence*, 1937, wood engraving, from *Country Matters* (1937)

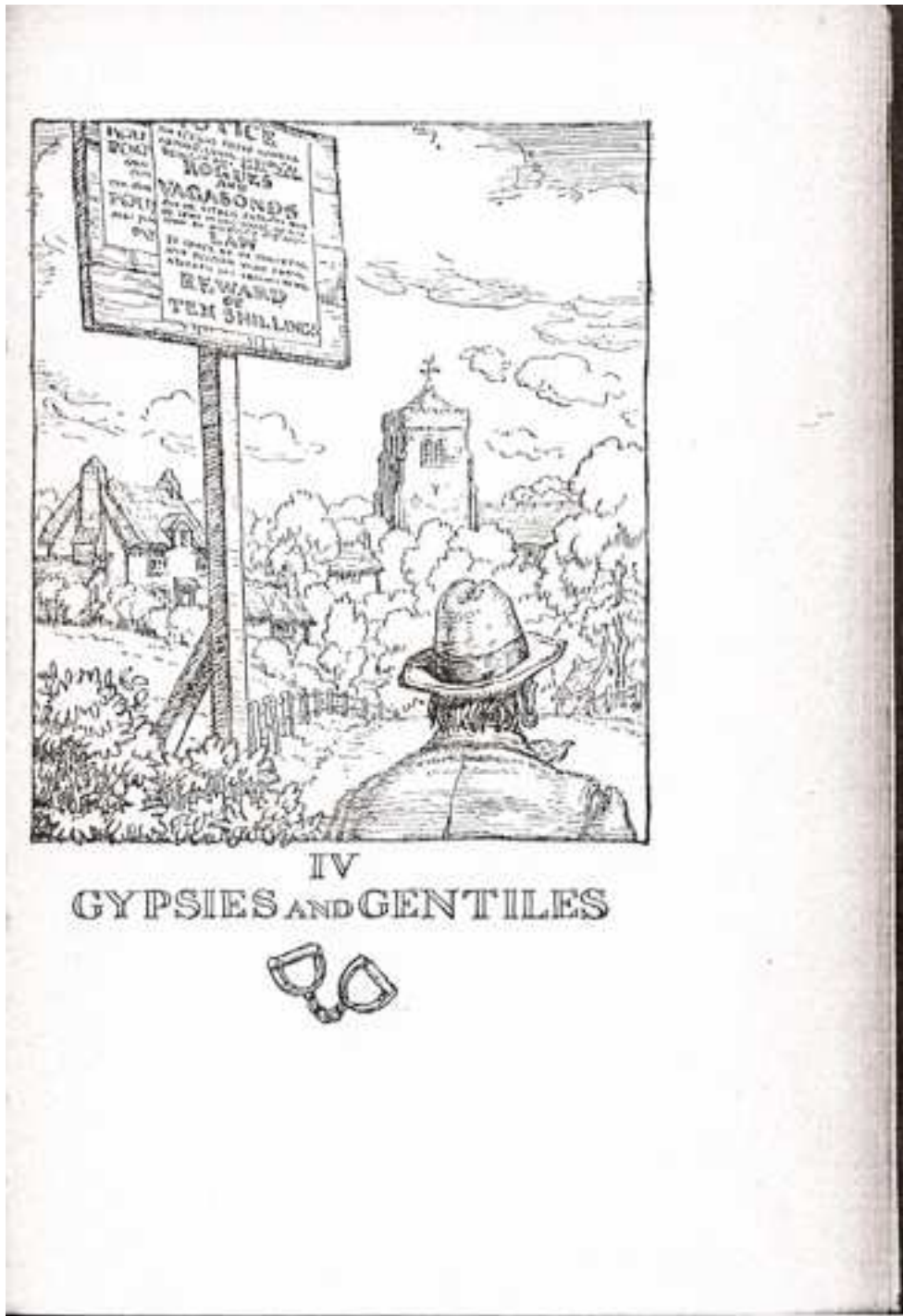


Figure 4.20 John Garside, *Gypsies and Gentiles*, from *The Wind on the Heath* (1930), by John Sampson

COUNTRY MATTERS

garden path, and helped to load him with his heavy sacks. But even then he could not seem to leave, and kept returning, waving his stick wildly in the air as he talked.

"Well, I'll look you up when I'm passing this way again and just see if you're still alive." He turned to my old aunt. "I wonder which of us will die first, you or me?"

He was gone for three years. Aunt Sarah and I looked at each other and smiled.

"That wasn't exactly a wasted morning, was it?" she said.



Figure 4.21 Clare Leighton, *Old Boot*, 1937, wood engraving, from *Country Matters* (1937)



Figure 4.22 Vincent Van Gogh, *A Pair of Boots*, 1886, oil on canvas, Rijksmuseum Vincent Van Gogh, Amsterdam



THE HORSE SHOW

THE PLACE SEEMED CHANGED. But there stood the familiar hills. Thanks to them one was certain that one had not strayed into an unknown district. Yet as the hills were lost from time to time in the deep mist of the rain, even that certainty grew dim. What was it that had happened?

For the quiet road on the outskirts of the little town was clogged and choked with cars. Strange police controlled the traffic, abrupt and ill-tempered in the wet heat of the September day; they were impatient with all who passed, respecting nobody. "And who do you think you are?" Stanley Peabody swore back at them. "I've lived here, in this place, pretty nigh on eighty-five year, and nobody ain't never stopped me from walking along my own road. 'Pass along, please!' And why, I asks you?"

The unending line of cars, horse-boxes and show animals pushed Stanley Peabody close against the hedge, and blocked

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Figure 4.23 Clare Leighton, *Shire Horse*, 1937, wood engraving, from *Country Matters* (1937)



Tom Grainger, with his stumpy figure and shabby overcoat, had the greater understanding of the eternal values.

But if the Flower Show belonged, essentially, to the villager, the Horse Show to-day was dominated by the aristocrat. Eddies of chance would sweep the world of the animals across that of the "county," as cows or bulls or horses were brought into the judging-ring. But it would be for a brief few moments, and back to the chestnut meadow would go shire or bull. In this idle crowd they were of fleeting importance compared with hunter and horsemanship.

As the morning drew on towards midday, the gentry preponderated yet more. Cars banked the race-course, in position for the afternoon's sport. With the stopping of the rain the air grew still heavier, as though sky and earth were bound together by steam. Into this close atmosphere rose and clung the hot smell of cars and motor tyres, and the odour of countless mackintoshes, subduing the scent of the trodden grass.

Tom Grainger had left Duke for a short while in the care of Jim Webster. He had to see a man about some wurzels.

Figure 4.24 Clare Leighton, *Hunters*, 1937, wood engraving, from *Country Matters* (1937)

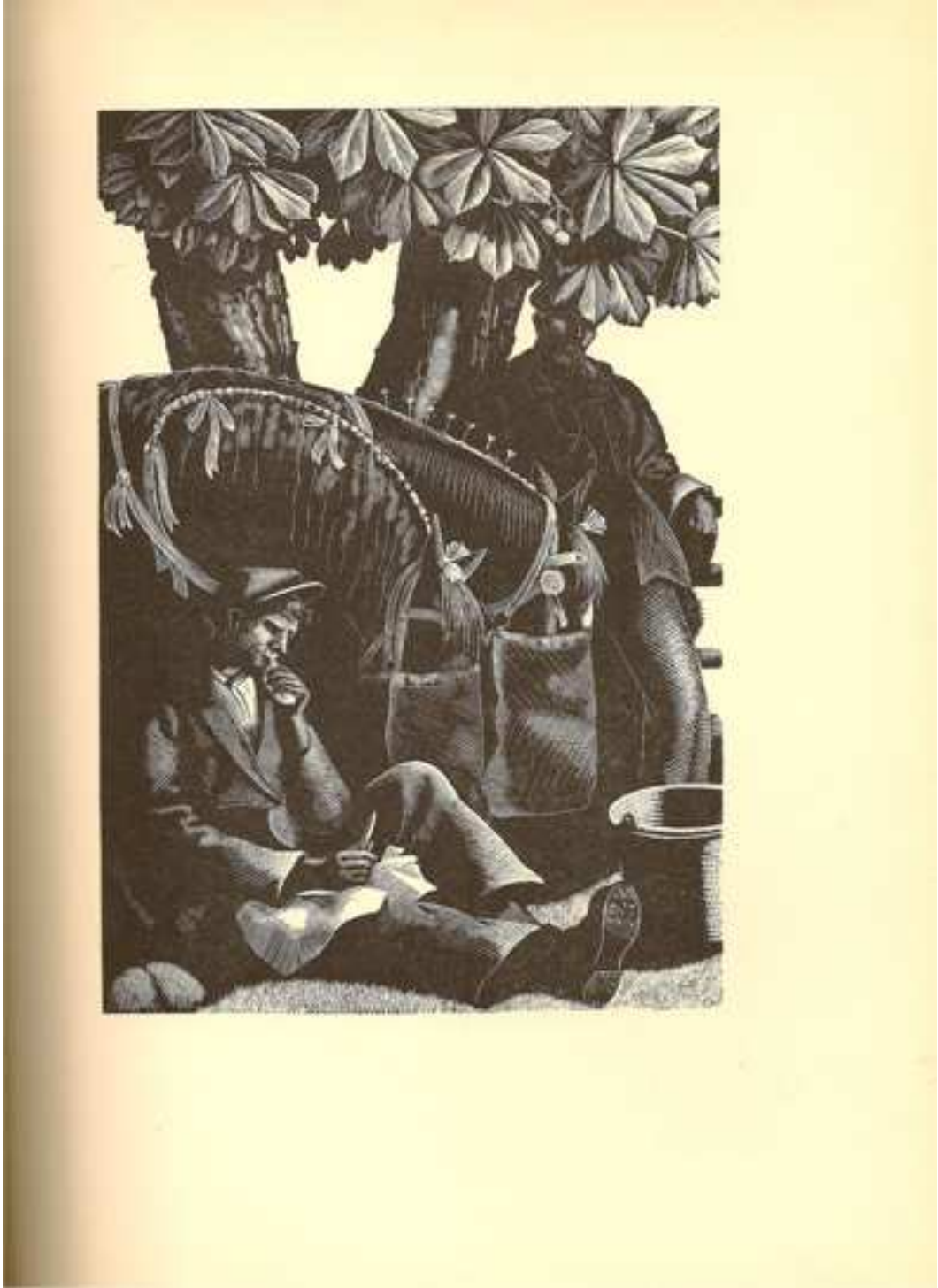


Figure 4.25 Clare Leighton, *Dinner Time at the Show*, 1937, wood engraving, from *Country Matters* (1937)



Figure 4. 26 Charles Frederick Tunnicliffe, *Shire Stallion*, wood engraving, c. 1930

THE HORSE SHOW

as I can't afford, I has to stand here instead of watching them be judged."

Along the hilly lanes, at dusk, clumps of animals might be seen going home to obscure farms among the folds of the hills. And this time the farm-hands do not scruple to ride the horses, as they dared not on their way to the show in the morning. For their destiny now is fixed. It is slow work, reaching home, for the lanes are narrow and twisting, and the horses have continually to be moved to the ditch, against the hedge, to give place to overtaking cars that carry the owners of the hunters, or to horse-boxes containing the hunters themselves. But the cars move so quickly that they have all passed while Tom has as yet another mile and a half to go. The rain wets the bright blue of the ribbons that deck Duke's mane, and drips down Tom Grainger's neck. Man and horse are tired and wet, but as Tom jumps to the ground to open the farm gate, pride banishes fatigue.



Figure 4.27 Clare Leighton, *Evening after the Show*, 1937, wood engraving, from *Country Matters* (1937)

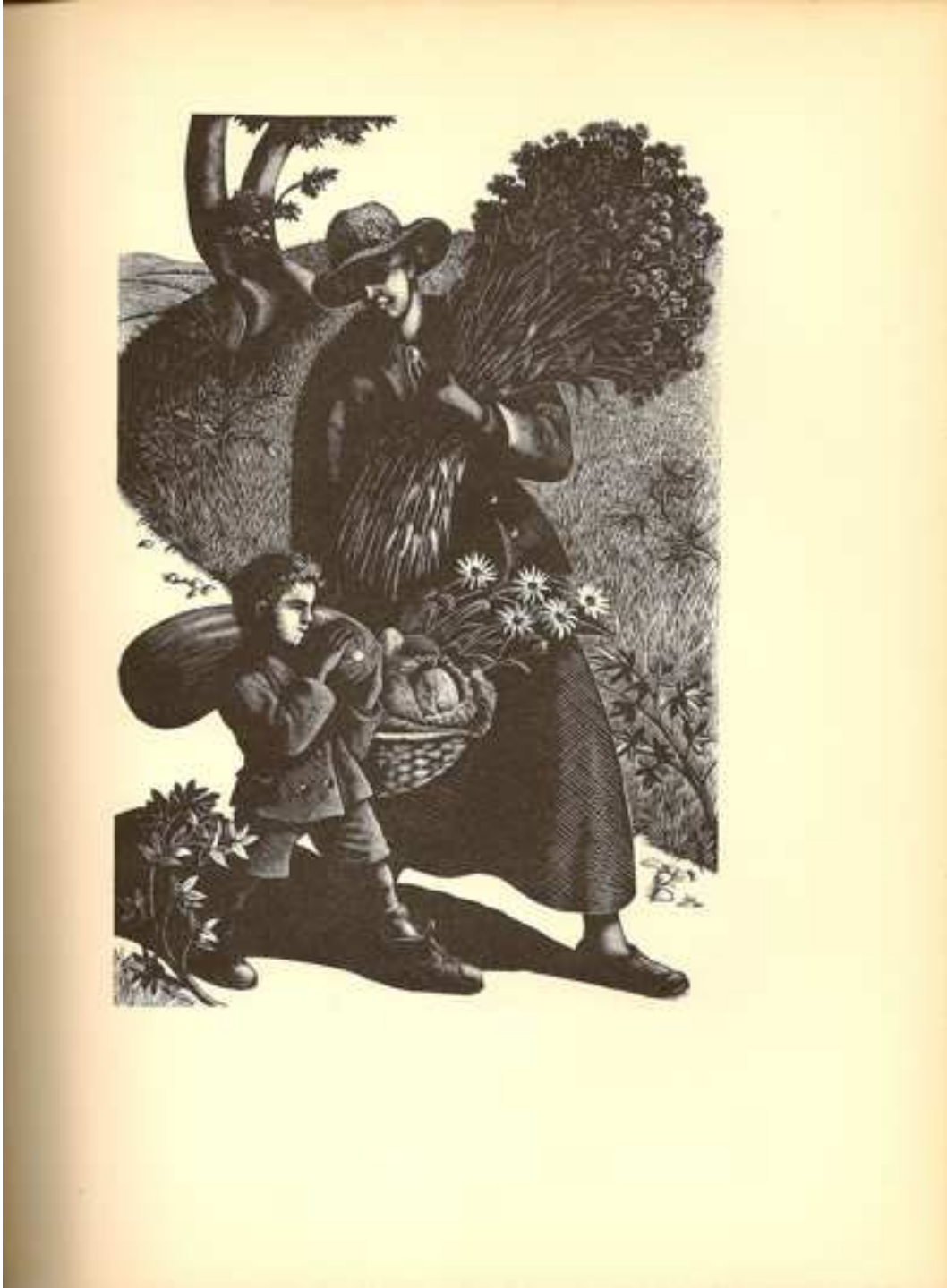


Figure 4.28 Clare Leighton, *Going to the Festival*, 1937, wood engraving, from *Country Matters* (1937)

COUNTRY MATTERS

wandered. Miss Moody rapped upon her desk with a pencil, but the geography lesson had lost its grip and India had retreated to its normal place beyond the horizon.

Twenty-three pairs of eyes watched the procession of the fair through the village street, matching heard sounds to imagined visions, unobstructed by map, distempered wall, masonry and brick. Miss Moody's voice went on unheeded, as she spoke of the animals that lived in India.

"There are monkeys and snakes and tigers and lions and elephants——"

"Elephants!" The word jerked itself into Betty Cole's dreamings. "Elephants! Why, that notice said there'd be an elephant at the fair, same as there was last time. Yes, a real elephant to ride on!"

Across the unrolled map of India lumbered an elephant.

"Five and two's seven and nine's one-and-four. And with the sixpence Uncle Charlie's promised me that'll make one-and-ten. Enough for the coco-nuts and twice on the roundabout."

"Johnny! You're not listening. Now what animals did I say there are in India?"

"Golden dragons and painted ponies and spotted giraffes and huge bright cocks," answered Johnny promptly, with unexpected excitement.

On the village green, just past the church, there was commotion. The traction-engine had conducted



Figure 4.29 Clare Leighton, *Evil-Looking Dark Man*, 1937, wood engraving, from *Country Matters* (1937)



of the emotions of the victor. Instead, he grew philosophical.

"There's nothing that can put back time," he told his pyjamas. "Now I shall never know what was inside that tent. And guessing isn't much of a help."

It was just as he lay in bed, beside Mrs. Norton, that the wind swerved and brought to him in full force the music of the fair.

"They oughtn't to be allowed to make all that noise so late at night," grumbled Mrs. Norton as she turned round to sleep. "Upsetting one like this!"

Mr. Norton writhed in anguish. "Yes, it does upset one, doesn't it?" he answered. And before his eyes in the darkness flamed the words of temptation.

Up at the manor house Cecilia Stanton heard the music of the fair. Like the Reverend Maurice Norton, she was troubled. She, too, was drawn by it and resisted. But for her the

Figure 4.30 Clare Leighton, *Soothsayer*, 1937, wood engraving, from *Country Matters* (1937)

COUNTRY MATTERS

patches of light, loitering that they might again be caught. But though Amy's blood ran as high as any, she had the reticence of the romantic.



It was some time before they reached the roundabout, and it was then that Amy started to cry. For there was no golden dragon. They were all ponies. She had set her heart on her golden dragon and the magic faded from life. The ponies became mere blocks of carved wood, gaudily painted. With difficulty Henry made her notice the difference between each pony, pointing out their golden manes, their crimson nostrils. "And look!" he said. "They've each of them got a name. Let's see if there's an Amy or a Henry! Look! Doris and Robert, Sidney and Mabel, Alfred and Dolly and—yes, look! Henry and Amy!" Strange though it may seem, it was the truth. And they mounted

the ponies and rode away, till the confining circle of the roundabout broke and shot to the skies.

Meanwhile Miss Stacey was feeling hot and worried. She could not find her turquoise-blue vase. There, on one of the stalls, were green china rabbits with black glass eyes, black dogs, fern pots decorated with pictures of deserts and palm trees and camels; in one corner, even, a crimson china swan with red-gold wings. She visited another stall, to find it covered with glass butter-dishes she didn't want and bright-coloured balls and fur dogs. She had turned in disappointment from a third stall, when she noticed a dazzle of white at the far end. She went closer, and saw that it was a white plaster statuette of some naked lady—Venus, she was called.

Figure 4.31 Clare Leighton, *Miss Stacey's Venus*, 1937, wood engraving, from *Country Matters* (1937)



THE VILLAGE FAIR

THE ELEPHANT LUMBERED down the village street. His feet crushed the buttercups that grew at its edge, sprinkling a film of gold dust upon the coarse hide of his legs. The breeze tossed the flowering chestnuts by the farm gates, shaking down stray blossoms that alighted on the elephant's back as he passed: so had the blossoms of the mango tree stroked his hide in India as they fell. For shade of jungle he had now the gloom under the chestnut trees, for glare of tropical sun but the kindly warmth of an English May.

The camel shuffled pompously along the village street. As he walked, his feet struck against the dust of the dry country road; but it was hard and resisting to the touch as compared with the sand of his African desert. A pony and cart passed him with a neat little patter of hooves; the camel dilated his

Figure 4.32 Clare Leighton, *The Village Fair*, 1937, wood engraving, from *Country Matters* (1937)



Figure 4.33 Charles Mozley, *Country Fair*, front cover, *Country Fair*, *The Country Life Annual* (1938)

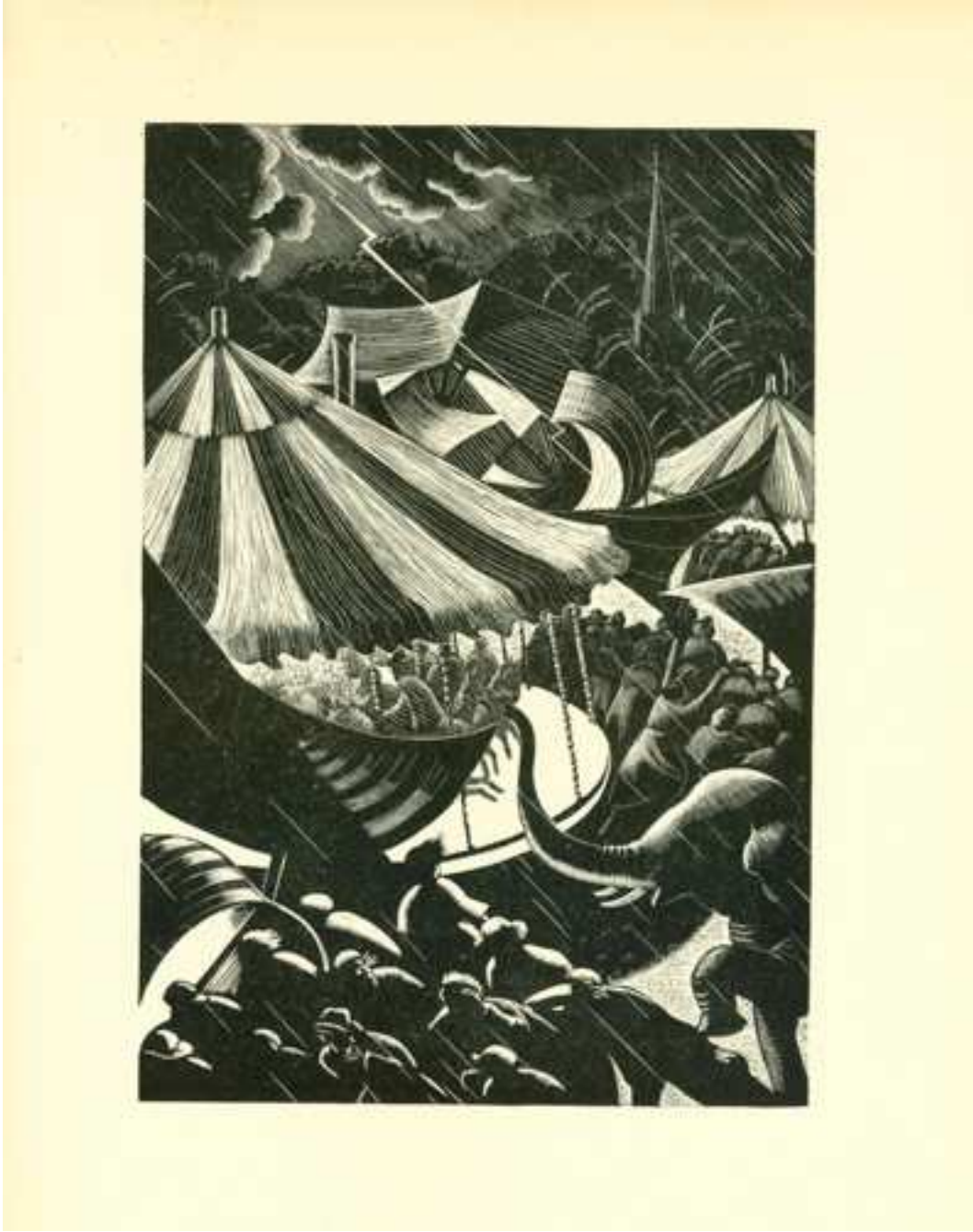


Figure 4.34 Clare Leighton, *Storm at the Fair*, 1937, wood engraving, from *Country Matters* (1937)

THE VILLAGE FAIR

somebody hit against her in the darkness and she slipped. The raindrops mingled with her tears as Miss Stacey crept home to bed.

But perhaps it was the landlord of the Wheatsheaf who was feeling as disgruntled as anybody. He sat at the window of his closed bar-parlour and swore.

“If there had to be a storm, why on earth did it have to wait until ten minutes past closing time?” he grumbled. “To think of all the folks I could have had in here, if it’d been but one hour earlier. It’s what I call the worst luck a fellow could have had.”

The sun shone next morning with the freshness of a May day after a storm. Early as the villagers had risen, the fair had been still earlier. It had disappeared. And so completely had it disappeared, and with so little noise, that several people who were more fanciful than the rest were inclined to wonder if it had existed at all outside their own imagination. It was a tempting thought, that might have developed one day into a legend.

But one thing remained. There, in the very middle of the village street, lay a heap of crushed white plaster. As Miss Stacey went across the street in the morning light, she paused and looked at the broken pieces. But it was no good. Her Venus was lost for ever.



Figure 4.35 Clare Leighton, *The Village Green*, 1937, wood engraving, from *Country Matters* (1937)



BELL-RINGERS

HE SEIZED MISS LILY round the waist and kissed her twice—big, smacking kisses on that red mouth of hers. Lord, how he'd wanted to do this, since the first day the new Rector came to the parish with those three plump daughters. He jerked the plate of turkey from Miss Lily's hands, and pulled her down to his lap, feeling the warmth of her soft body. But just as he was going to kiss her again, on her neck and her arms and down the front of her dress that was loose as she stooped with the plate of turkey, there stood Mr. Grinter, the farmer he'd worked for when he was a young man, across Shaftesbury way; and Mr. Grinter snorted. As he stared at the heavy man before him, he saw the nose thicken and the face turn into the head of a pig. And the great looming pig came nearer and nearer to him. He tried to escape, but Miss Lily was fastened to his lap, and he could not move. Miss

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Figure 4.36 Clare Leighton, *Bell*, 1937, wood engraving, from *Country Matters* (1937)



he'll forget they bells, and I shan't have no need to fight him about it. The very idea of his going out on a night like this with the influenza upon him ! ”

But at this moment the church clock struck eleven. Cloaked in snow though the sound was, it roused the man by the fire. The fever rushed upon him once more, and he sprang from his chair.

“ Be that ten or eleven that be striking ? ” He looked at

Figure 4.37 Clare Leighton, *Bell Ringers*, 1937, wood engraving, from *Country Matters* (1937)



Figure 4.38 William Blake, *The Great Red Dragon and the Woman Clothed with the Sun: The Devil Is Come Down*, c. 1805, pen and ink with watercolor over graphite on paper, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC

COUNTRY MATTERS

241536. 425136. How they bells do ring. It be like a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, singing a new song."

Three at a time, the men rang down the bells. With a smooth, sleek feeling, the ropes rose and fell. Triumphantly, the men swung on to the bell ropes, as they rose for the last time. The silence in the belfry beat down upon them from the stone walls around.

Timothy Childs lurched home. But he did not feel the cold or notice the falling snow. As a god he walked, one who had marshalled time and held within his hands the destiny of the earth. Like a sleep-walker he lifted the latch of the garden gate and crossed the path, stumbling against the snow-banked water butt at the back door.

Jane waited for him.

"It's a wild look you've got in your eyes, Tim. It's that fever, I tell you. Here, you come straight to bed, or you'll be hearing they bells in the churchyard next year."

She pulled him forward, but he jerked himself away from her.

"Don't you dare to touch me—me what have stood in the heavens with the Almighty, tossing the stars about and bringing in the New Year in her golden chariot. Me what have been given the power to——"

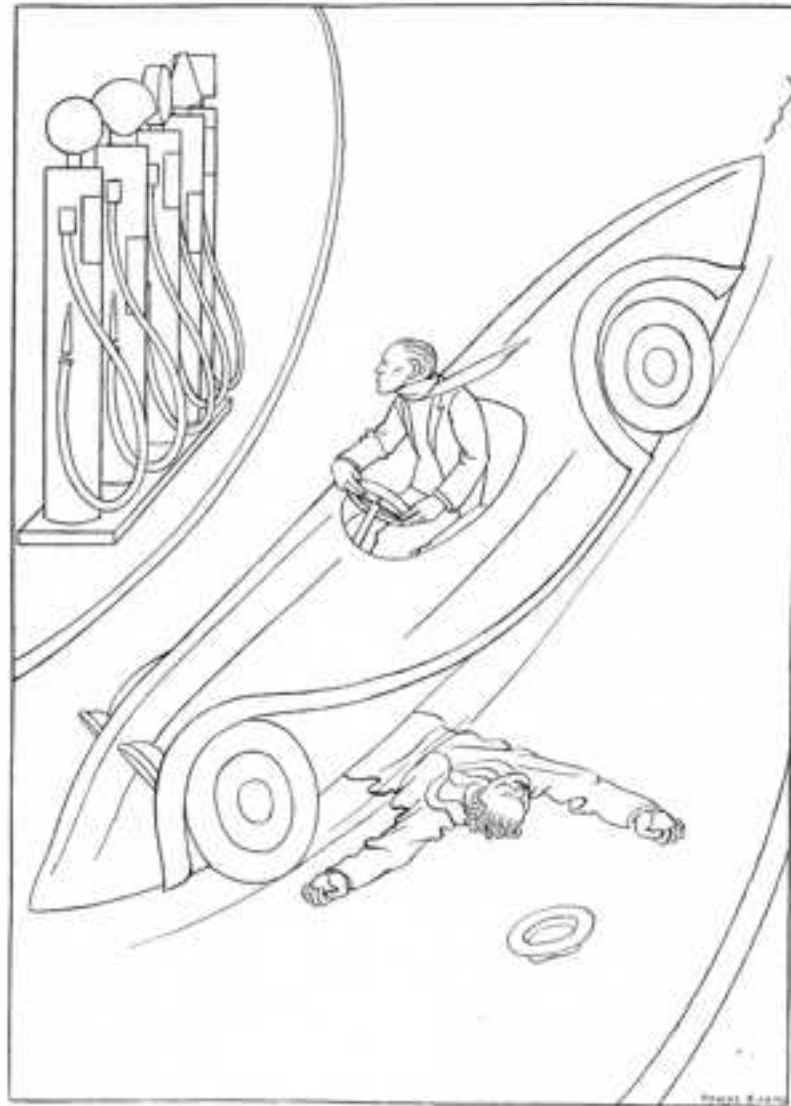
The figure of the man crumbled, and fell huddled in the chair by the fire.

His power had gone.



Figure 4.39 Clare Leighton, *Snow-banked Water Butt*, 1937, wood engraving, from *Country Matters* (1937)

V23



"A SACRIFICE TO THE GODS"

Powys Evans,

Figure 4.40 Powys Evans, *A Sacrifice to the Gods*, from *G. K.'s Weekly* (Apr. 1936)



Figure 5.1 Clare Leighton, *St. Paul's Cathedral*, 1929, wood engraving, commission for The London General Omnibus



Figure 5.2 Clare Leighton, *The Docks*, 1929, wood engraving, commission for The London General Omnibus



Figure 5.3 Clare Leighton, *Snow Shovellers*, 1929, wood engraving



Figure 5.4 Clare Leighton, *Breadline, New York*, 1932, wood engraving



Figure 5.5 Clare Leighton, *Boston Cod*, 1929, wood engraving



Figure 5.6 Clare Leighton, *Firewood in Georgia*, 1936, wood engraving

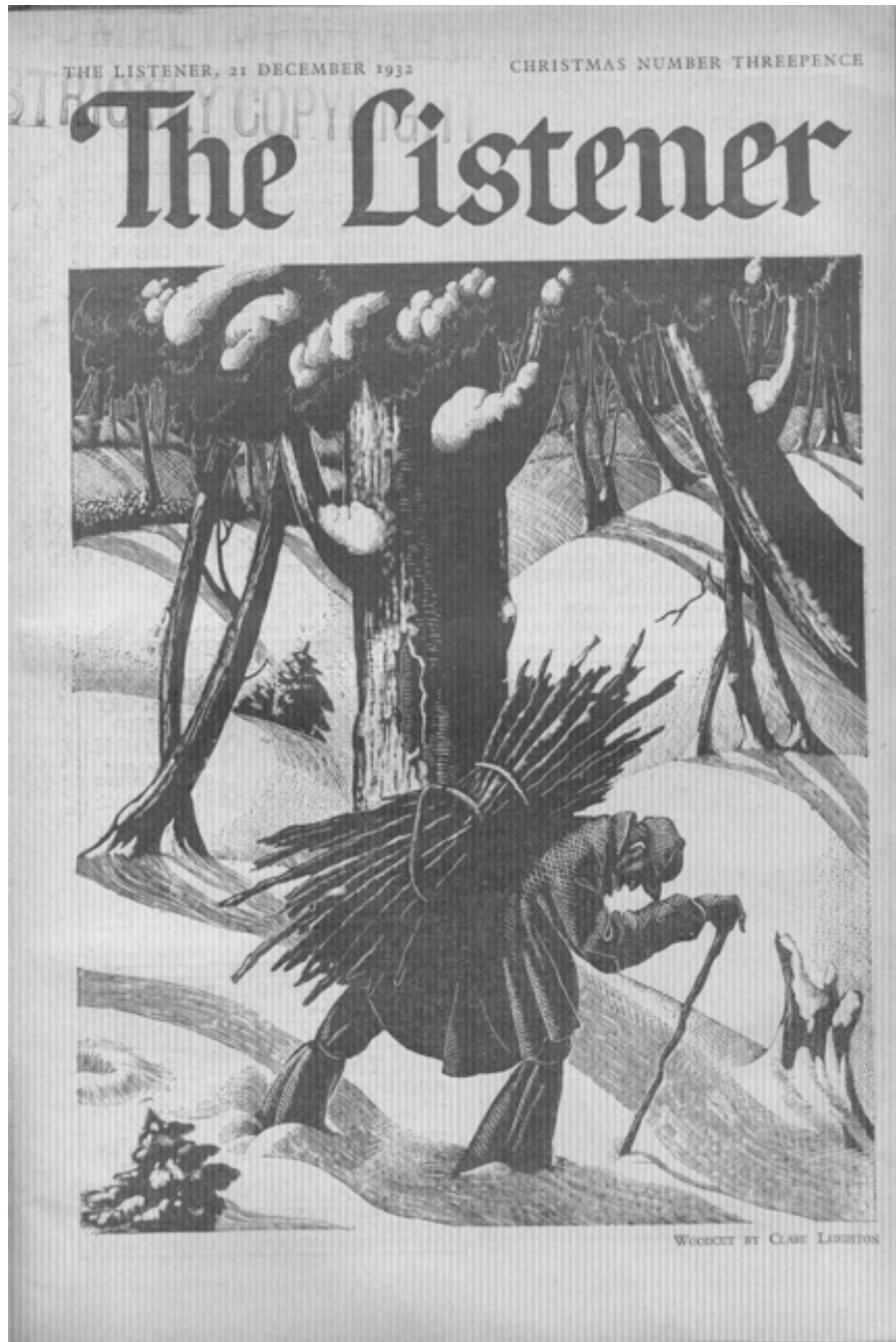


Figure 5.7 Clare Leighton, *Winter*, 1932, wood engraving, commission for *The Listener* (Dec. 1932)



Figure 5.7 Isabel Bishop, *Fourteenth Street*, 1932, oil on canvas, private collection



Figure 5.9 Raphael Soyer, *In the City Park*, 1934, oil on canvas, private collection



Figure 5.10 Harry Gottlieb, *Home, Sweet Home*, c. 1935-36, University of Arizona Museum of Art, Tucson



Figure 5.11 Louis Lozowick, *Thanksgiving Dinner*, 1938, lithograph on zinc plate



Figure 5.12 Clare Leighton, *Net Menders*, 1936, wood engraving

VIEW

ELVE MONTHS

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**John Strachey & T. H. Wintringham on
the war. Ralph Bates,
Clare Leighton, Eric
Gill; J. D. Bernal on
Science and Men. James
Fitton**

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VOLUME TWO

Figure 5.13 Cover, *The Left Review* (Nov. 1935)

The New Leader

H. N. Brailsford
Editor



Every Friday
Price 2d.

January 2
1925



Capitalism at Christmas-time

Contents : Whence Come Peace and Goodwill? :: By E. E. Hunter
The Bite-Hards :: :: By Evelyn Sharp
Freedom and Dictatorship in Russia By H. C. Stevens
The Devil and the Labour Members

Figure 5.14 *Capitalism at Christmas-time*, cover illustration for *The New Leader* (2 Jan. 1925)



Figure 5.15 Clare Leighton, *Winter*, 1932, wood engraving, used as the cover illustration for *The Land Worker* (Jan. 1938)



Figure 5.16 Clare Leighton, *Winnowers, Majorca*, 1937, wood engraving

SOURCES CONSULTED

ARCHIVAL SOURCES

A note regarding four outstanding sources:

The Records of William Collins, Sons and Co. Ltd, publishers, Glasgow, Scotland, University of Glasgow Archives, hold no Leighton material; the Authors Book Files date from 1951; the Authors Correspondence and Agreement Files date from 1937.

The Archives of the Longman Group, Special Collections, University of Reading, hold no Leighton-related material, a casualty of the bombing of the publisher's Paternoster Row offices during World War II.

Concerning the Victor Gollancz Archives: the Title Files, which contain the correspondence between Leighton and Gollancz, are now in the Orion Books Archive, London, but are not accessible at this writing. I have relied on the few references to their correspondence in Joanna Selborne's *British Wood-Engraved Book Illustration*.

Concerning the Papers of H. N. Brailsford (1873-1958): Deposited at the Labour History Archive and Study Centre, People's History Museum, Manchester, after the death of his widow Eva Maria in 1988, they contain correspondence between him and Leighton written only after World War II. I have therefore relied on *H. N. Brailsford and his World* by F. M. Leventhal, who had access to pre-World War II correspondence and interviewed Leighton on several occasions in the early 1980s.

The Archives of *The Legion Book*, Cushing Memorial Library, Texas A & M University, College Station

BBC (British Broadcasting Corp) Written Archives Centre, Caversham Park, Reading

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Edmund Blunden Papers, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin

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