



Clearing Land: Legacies of the American Farm

Jane Brox

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Though few of us now live close to the soil, the world we inhabit has been sculpted by our long national saga of settlement. At the heart of our identity lies the notion of the family farm, as shaped by European history and reshaped by the vast opportunities of the continent. It lies at the heart of Jane Brox's personal story, too: she is the daughter of immigrant New England farmers whose way of life she memorialized in her first two books but has not carried on.

In this clear-eyed, lyrical account, Brox twines the two narratives, personal and historical, to explore the place of the family farm as it has evolved from the pilgrims' brutal progress at Plymouth to the modern world, where much of our food is produced by industrial agriculture while the small farm is both marginalized and romanticized. In considering the place of the farm, Brox also considers the rise of textile cities in America, which encroached not only upon farms and farmers but upon the sense of commonality that once sustained them; and she traces the transformation of the idea of wilderness--and its intricate connection to cultivation--which changed as our ties to the land loosened, as terror of the wild was replaced by desire for it. Exploring these strands with neither judgment nor sentimentality, Brox arrives at something beyond a biography of the farm: a vivid depiction of the half-life it carries on in our collective imagination.

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