

From winter to autumn, he takes us on a journey through the fields and barns. We learn how to harness a team for plowing, how to sow oats, and how to shell corn as well as how to make butter, butcher hogs, render lard, train draft horses, raise chicks, and shoe horses. Robinson takes a topical approach within the seasonal farm activities, through which he introduces the rural school, revivals, mail delivery, moving day, cream separators, automobiles, and tractors. By metaphorically riding a wagon loaded with corn bound for the elevator on a cold winter morning, we gain a better understanding of the hardship of farm life prior to widespread adoption of the automobile, truck, and tractor.

This is Home Now is a touching story of farm life from the eve of the First World War to the Great Depression. It is a delight to read. The author's concern is daily farm work. He does not discuss political or economic matters, such as the boom years of World War I, the postwar Depression, or the McNary-Haugen plan. As such, his family seems more isolated than it probably was. Certainly, although farmers tend to be concerned with the everyday problems of their land, livestock, and families, in the 1920s and 1930s they experienced a gripping recession followed by hard times which made them question the federal government's passive relationship with agriculture. The Harper family seems untouched by national and international events which must have dramatically influenced their lives. Still, Robinson provides an excellent overview of farm life at a time when American agriculture was on the verge of mechanization with the internal combustion engine. It was a far different time than now, and Robinson's remembrance gives us a better understanding of earlier midwestern farmers' lives. Anyone interested in midwestern agriculture during the early twentieth century would find value in this book. While it will have nostalgic appeal for some, it will also serve as a useful reference about daily farming activities. Robinson has told a fascinating and poignant story that awaited telling.

OHIO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Where the Sky Began: Land of the Tallgrass Prairie, by John Madson. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1982. xvi, 321 pp. Illustrations, appendix, selected references, index. \$13.50 cloth.

Over the past 150 years, the Emersonian nature essay has served as a prototype for a specialized genre with regional themes. The New England variety bloomed earliest and looms largest, with its nineteenth-century founders, Emerson and Thoreau, and with secondary

figures such as Thomas Starr King, Wilson Flagg, and Frank Bolles. The California school of nature essayists, oriented around the northern California mountains, began in the late nineteenth century with the publications of Clarence King, John Muir, and Thomas Starr King, who had transferred his presentation efforts from New Hampshire's White Mountains to Yosemite. In the twentieth century, Mary Austin, Joseph Wood Krutch, and the recently deceased Edmund C. Jaeger created nature essays on the desert Southwest, while the Hudson River school of the Northeast included John Burroughs, the most popular nature essayist at the turn of the century, and, more recently, John Kieran.

Although the grassland Midwest has stimulated a few nature essays, such as Bess Streeter Aldrich's, *The Rim of the Prairie* (1925), Jim Wilson's and Alice Wilson's, *Grass Land* (1967), and Torkel Korling's, *The Prairie: Swell and Swale* (1972), no coherent tradition of the grassland nature essay has emerged. This absence seems doubly ironic, since Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac* (1949) towers as the greatest nature essay of our postwar era and other essayists repeatedly cite its inspiration. Moreover, the grasslands have contributed profoundly to the American novel.

In his fine and important nature essay, *Where the Sky Began: Land of the Tallgrass Prairie*, John Madson opens new possibilities for a midwestern nature literature. Madson reconstructs the prairie that greeted European pioneers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and describes the processes by which it devolved to the contemporary grassland, with bluegrass displacing the bluestem dominants. Ten chapters describe tallgrass historical ecology and climate and the prairie's settlement and alteration. Madson writes vividly. In perhaps his most powerful passage, he recalls an Iowa duck hunt he undertook with a friend in a snowstorm when both were teenagers. Reminiscence and personal testimony perform an important literary role, typical of the nature essay, as vehicles to carry forward the reader's appreciation of nature.

Moral concerns pervade Madson's book. The author weaves the twin Emersonian themes of nature's utility and moral compensation throughout his evocation of the tallgrass. He mutes the Darwinism of scientific ecology's core. That nature is morally neutral, or that evolutionary change occurs in random processes, are principles that have no major place in the Emersonian tradition. This contradiction between Emersonian moral symbolism and Darwinian moral neutrality creates tensions in Madson's attempt to build the nature essay upon modern ecological science.

For his ecological definition of the tallgrass prairie, Madson seems

to rely (whether directly or indirectly is not clear in the text) on Edgar Nelson Transeau's classic conceptualization, "The Prairie Peninsula," published nearly fifty years ago in *Ecology*. Generally, Madson's scientific understanding of the prairie derives from the Nebraska school of plant ecology, which began in the 1890s in Roscoe Pound's and Frederic Clements's work and which reached its natural conclusion in the 1950s in the work of Clements's student, John C. Weaver. Although the later scientists traded metaphorical treatment of the prairie as a single biological organism for treatment of it as a system, Madson reaches back to an earlier generation for most of his scientific work, perhaps because the organismic metaphor resonates with his own Emersonianism.

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Ecology and History: Studies of the Grassland, by James C. Malin. Edited by Robert P. Swierenga. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984. xxix, 376 pp. Notes, tables, bibliography, index. \$28.50 cloth, \$13.95 paper.

Once in a while new ideas may spring up on the edges of metropolitan society, away from its garden of fashion and consensus. Germinated in isolation and defiance, they may take on a crabbed, distorted quality, but also may offer a fresh, creative vigor that the metropolis needs. James Malin had such wild ideas, and at least the world is discovering them and taking them more seriously. During his long tenure as a history professor at the University of Kansas, he slipped more and more into obscurity as his work became increasingly bold and imaginative. Students who walked past his office door (as this writer did) may remember him, in Robert Swierenga's phrase, as "the Kansas curmudgeon." He was not popular in the last two decades before his death in 1979; to most students he seemed a fossil, hard and encrusted, and difficult to decipher. Why would anyone spend so much time studying Kansas soils and farm mobility data, they wondered, when German movies were showing on campus and satellites were lofting into outer space? Now this book comes along to show us why and to make the curmudgeon into a seer, a man of some genius.

Malin was born in North Dakota in 1893, the son of frontier parents who eventually settled in western Kansas and opened an implement business. Rejecting that life for himself, he went east to school and took his doctorate at the university in Lawrence. He began to teach there in 1921. For a while he was a conventional nation-cen-

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