

WHAT SO ★ PROUDLY ★ WE HAIL

The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song

The Man Born to Farming

WENDELL BERRY

Page | 1

Born in 1934, Wendell Berry grew up working on his family's farm in Newcastle, Kentucky and attended the University of Kentucky. After serving as a creative writing fellow in the Wallace Stegner writing program at Stanford University, he became a professor of writing and literature at New York University. He soon returned home to Kentucky, however, teaching at the University of Kentucky, buying a farm near Port Royal, and pursuing a long career of writing. He is the author of more than 30 books, comprised of novels such as Nathan Coulter (1960) and The Memory of Old Jack (1974), nonfiction and essays such as The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture (1977) and Sex, Economy, Freedom & Community (1992), and collections of poetry such as The Broken Ground (1964) and The Mad Farmer Poems (2008), among many others. Today, he continues to live on the farm he bought in 1965.

In this poem, Berry describes the farmer, whose life is divided into the same seasons as the crops he grows. "He enters into death yearly," Berry writes, "and comes back rejoicing." As you read the poem, pay attention to the imagery Berry uses: he describes the soil as a "divine drug," and he likens the farmer's thought to "pass[ing] along the row ends like a mole" and his sentences to "a vine clinging in the sunlight." How do these descriptions give a voice and overall feeling to the poem? In what ways is the farmer's life changed or affected by his farming? What is his relationship to nature? Does the poem provide a critique of modern city life?

The Grower of Trees, the gardener, the man born to farming,
whose hands reach into the ground and sprout
to him the soil is a divine drug. He enters into death
yearly, and comes back rejoicing. . . .

Read the entire poem at On Being: www.onbeing.org/program/poetry-creatures/feature/man-born-farming/1419.