Plowing the Prairie

Pamela Haines

Leaning into the plow—

an enduring symbol of virtuous work

Pioneers breaking virgin ground,
bent on mastering the prairie

whatever the cost.

The harder the work

the more noble the cause.

And subdue the prairie they did—

along with all the beings

that called it home.

The prairie, we are learning,

was the keeper of our soil.

Washed to the gulf

we wish it back.

The dead substrate

that’s left behind

cannot nourish on its own.

We pour in more and more,

for less and less return.

If we could listen

to the natives of the prairie,

now gone like the soil,
Plowing the Prairie
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what might we learn?

Maybe they would tell us
that some work
though it seems so masterful
is better left undone.

_Pamela is a member of Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting and the author of the book Money and Soul._

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