

Peasant Woman in Gascony

DEBORAH FLEMING

1972

Under the shadow of the Pyrenees
In a field at the bottom of a hillside,
Before a line of locust and of popular trees,
Around her waist a plain white apron tied,
In long black skirt and bonnet stands a woman,
Dressed as her mother dressed, and hers,
Raking grass for cattle fodder
Below the stony ruins of a Roman
Aqueduct, legacy of builders
Long forgotten, that spans the valley and the river.

Clouds rise into the azure sky like columns.

One hundred twenty centuries
Have celebrated this her holy labor.
From her rose the walls of cities;
Armies ceased to march before her.
Farmers on her day paused in their toil
To contemplate recurring mysteries

Sprung from the generous, tended soil
From which unending harvest flows
And all the other gifts that she bestows.

Note: Demeter, called Ceres by the Romans, also Rhea or Magna Mater (Great Mother), was goddess of agriculture. During her festival celebrating the cycles of birth and death, called the Eleusinian Mysteries, all work ceased and war was outlawed.