

ants – a few of whom were aspiring graduate students – for personal use.

THOMAS MEANEY
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‘American Gothic’

Sir, – Kelly Grovier interprets Grant Wood’s iconic painting “American Gothic” as a recapitulation of the rape of Persephone by Hades (Arts, March 31). The fanciful argument rests primarily on the presence of a small sphere on the “weathervane” on the house behind the inexpressive couple, which reminds the reviewer of the planet Pluto.

The object in question is not a weathervane, but rather a lightning rod. Such devices are ubiquitous on American farms and even in American cities, such as Philadelphia, where Benjamin Franklin invented the lightning rod in 1749 to protect the beautiful new spire of Christ Church, beside the churchyard in which he now lies buried. Very often lightning rods carry glass orbs, like the one in Wood’s painting, which shatter when lightning strikes, giv-

ing householders notice that they should check for damage to the house or to the rod itself.

Thus rather than signalling rape and destruction, the lightning rod conveys safety and solidity, like the rest of the painting. The errant tress crawling down Nan Wood’s neck may hint at something chthonic, but any sexual implication is probably consensual. In this context your reviewer should consider what Nan’s left hand is doing while her companion clutches his pitchfork with such meaningful intensity.

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Sir, – In his astrophysical and allegorical interpretation of Grant Wood’s “American Gothic”, Kelly Grovier emphasizes the “small blue orb of a weathervane” on the roof of the house, “[whose] axis is an extension of the leftmost prong of the farmer’s pitchfork”. Sadly that claim is visibly wrong – the prong is offset to the left of the midline of the house, and also inclines slightly to the left, making an extension of the prong pass way to the left of the orb. Whether the orb is a weathervane may

also be doubtful, as it provides no obvious way of telling from whence the wind blows. Adding to the confusion, the Dibble House, on which the painting was modelled, has no orb. Removing the orb by a little photo-editing certainly seems to impair the overall compositional coherence, suggesting an aesthetic purpose.

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Public Lakes

Sir, – Richard Shelton (in his review of Fiona Reynolds’s *The Fight for Beauty*, March 24), presumably quoting the book reviewed, lists John Ruskin and Octavia Hill as starting nineteenth-century action over a threatened environment. Surely Ruskin’s hero William Wordsworth deserves at least equal credit. His poetry on nature’s benign influence was already massively popular; in 1844 he published some bad sonnets on the new railway engines’ piercing