

Greasing the Plow

by [Jeff Gundy](#) in the [October 2024](#) issue

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No wonder of it: shéer plód makes plough down sillion

Shine, and blue-bleak embers, ah my dear,

Fall, gall themselves, and gash gold-vermilion.

—Gerard Manley Hopkins, “The Windhover”

Sillion is usually called the slice or furrow-slice, sometimes the mould. . . . When freshly cut a plastic soil with a high clay content does take on a sheen and, from a distance, the whole field may gleam for a while in low sunshine.

—Farm Direct UK

My father rarely worshipped using words, though he never skipped church even when the harvest was late, and surely

not to plow. He taught mostly just by showing. He kept a bucket with grease and an old paintbrush to paint

the plowshares and rolling coulters so they wouldn't rust over the winter, a good job after school for the boy

I was, in dirty coveralls and too-big yellow gloves.

It was strangely pleasing to smear the heavy, smelly,

brown grease across the shiny steel, get it smooth and even, seal the polished curves and edges from the air.

Next fall I would back the tractor to the plow, hitch up the lift arms, plug in the hydraulics, drive from shed

to field, drop the plow in the ground. The first earth scoured the shares clean and I opened the throttle wide,

blasted slowly down the field, hid away the cornstalks
and bean stubble, turned up the black soil in flat thick slices,
saw it break and steam and shine in the blaze of fall sun.