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The Machine in the Garden

TECHNOLOGY
AND THE PASTORAL IDEAL
IN AMERICA

Leo Marx

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For JANE
more than ever

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I mention this peaceful spot with all possible laud; for it is in such little retired . . . valleys . . . that population, manners, and customs, remain fixed; while the great torrent of migration and improvement, which is making such incessant change in other parts of this restless country, sweeps by them unobserved. They are little nooks of still water which border a rapid stream . . .

Washington Irving, "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," 1820

THE pastoral ideal has been used to define the meaning of America ever since the age of discovery, and it has not yet lost its hold upon the native imagination. The reason is clear enough. The ruling motive of the good shepherd, leading figure of the classic, Virgilian mode, was to withdraw from the great world and begin a new life in a fresh, green landscape. And now here was a virgin continent! Inevitably the European mind was dazzled by the prospect. With an unspoiled hemisphere in view it seemed that mankind actually might realize what had been thought a poetic fantasy. Soon the dream of a retreat to an oasis of harmony and joy was removed from its traditional literary context. It was embodied in various utopian schemes for making America the site of a new beginning for Western society. In both forms — one literary and the other in essence political — the ideal has figured in the American view of life which is, in the widest sense, the subject of this book.

My purpose is to describe and evaluate the uses of the pastoral ideal in the interpretation of American experience. I shall be tracing its adaptation to the conditions of life in the New World, its emergence as a distinctively American theory of society, and its subsequent transformation under the impact of industrialism. This is not meant to be a comprehensive survey. If I were telling the story in all its significant detail, chronologically, I should have to begin at the moment the idea of America entered the mind of Europe and come down to the present — to, say, the death of Robert Frost in 1963. But I have chosen not to attempt anything so ambitious. Instead, I propose to concentrate upon selected examples, “some versions,” as William Empson might put it, of American pastoralism. Nor have I confined myself to the richest, most coherent literary materials. At points I shall consider examples which have little or no intrinsic literary value. In fact, this is not, strictly speaking, a book about literature; it is about the region of culture where literature, general ideas, and certain products of the collective imagination — we may call them “cultural symbols”^{*} — meet. To appreciate the significance and power of our American fables it is necessary to understand the interplay between the literary imagination and what happens outside literature, in the general culture. My special concern is to show how the pastoral ideal has been incorporated in a powerful metaphor of contradiction — a way of ordering meaning and value that clarifies our situation today.¹

The notion that pastoralism remains a significant force in American life calls for an explanation. At first thought the relevance of the ancient ideal to our concerns in the second half of the twentieth century is bound to seem

^{*} A “cultural symbol” is an image that conveys a special meaning (thought and feeling) to a large number of those who share the culture.

obscure. What possible bearing can the urge to idealize a simple, rural environment have upon the lives men lead in an intricately organized, urban, industrial, nuclear-armed society? The answer to this central question must start with the distinction between two kinds of pastoralism — one that is popular and sentimental, the other imaginative and complex.

I

The first, or sentimental kind is difficult to define or even to locate because it is an expression less of thought than of feeling. It is widely diffused in our culture, insinuating itself into many kinds of behavior. An obvious example is the current “flight from the city.” An inchoate longing for a more “natural” environment enters into the contemptuous attitude that many Americans adopt toward urban life (with the result that we neglect our cities and desert them for the suburbs). Wherever people turn away from the hard social and technological realities this obscure sentiment is likely to be at work. We see it in our politics, in the “localism” invoked to oppose an adequate national system of education, in the power of the farm bloc in Congress, in the special economic favor shown to “farming” through government subsidies, and in state electoral systems that allow the rural population to retain a share of political power grossly out of proportion to its size. It manifests itself in our leisure-time activities, in the piety toward the out-of-doors expressed in the wilderness cult, and in our devotion to camping, hunting, fishing, picnicking, gardening, and so on. But there is no need to multiply examples; anyone who knows America today will think of many others.

Nowhere is the ill-defined feeling for “nature” more

influential than in the realm of imaginative expression. There can be little doubt that it affects the nation's taste in serious literature, reinforcing the legitimate respect enjoyed by such writers as Mark Twain, Ernest Hemingway, and Robert Frost. But on the lower plane of our collective fantasy life the power of this sentiment is even more obvious. The mass media cater to a mawkish taste for retreat into the primitive or rural felicity exemplified by TV westerns and Norman Rockwell magazine covers. Perhaps the most convincing testimony to the continuing appeal of the bucolic is supplied by advertising copywriters; a favorite strategy, validated by marketing research, assumes that Americans are most likely to buy the cigarettes, beer, and automobiles they can associate with a rustic setting.

No single motive can account for these disparate phenomena. Yet each does express something of the yearning for a simpler, more harmonious style of life, an existence "closer to nature," that is the psychic root of all pastoralism — genuine and spurious. That such desires are not peculiar to Americans goes without saying; but our experience as a nation unquestionably has invested them with peculiar intensity. The soft veil of nostalgia that hangs over our urbanized landscape is largely a vestige of the once dominant image of an undefiled, green republic, a quiet land of forests, villages, and farms dedicated to the pursuit of happiness.

In recent years several discerning, politically liberal historians of American thought have traced the gradual attenuation, in our public life, of the ideas once embodied in this cherished image. I am thinking especially of the work of Richard Hofstadter, Marvin Meyers, and Henry Nash Smith. These writers have not been concerned, to

be sure, with the relation between this body of thought and pastoralism as a literary mode. Nor for that matter do they often invoke the word "pastoral." But whether they refer to "agrarianism" (the usual term), or to the hold of "rural values" upon the national consciousness (Hofstadter), or to the "agrarian myth" (Hofstadter), or to the "Old Republican idyll" (Meyers), or to the "myth of the garden" (Smith), they all seem to agree that for some time now this tendency to idealize rural ways has been an impediment to clarity of thought and, from their point of view, to social progress. Anyone who shares their assumptions is likely to find this judgment highly persuasive. They demonstrate that in public discourse, at least, this ideal has appeared with increasing frequency in the service of a reactionary or false ideology, thereby helping to mask the real problems of an industrial civilization.²

When seen by critics of "mass culture," moreover, the popular kind of American pastoralism assumes an equally pernicious, if slightly different, aspect. Then it looks like a native variant of that international form of "primitivism" to which Ortega y Gasset, among others, began calling attention years ago. In *The Revolt of the Masses* (1930), Ortega uses the term to describe the outlook of a new kind of man, "a *Naturmensch* rising up in the midst of a civilised world":

The world is a civilised one, its inhabitant is not: he does not see the civilisation of the world around him, but he uses it as if it were a natural force. The new man wants his motor-car, and enjoys it, but he believes that it is the spontaneous fruit of an Edenic tree. In the depths of his soul he is unaware of the artificial, almost incredible, character of civilisation, and does not extend

his enthusiasm for the instruments to the principles which make them possible.

Ortega's caricature points to the shallow, not to say perverse, conception of reality inherent in our sentimental pastoralism. If his industrial *Naturmensch* bears a striking resemblance to many Americans we should not be entirely surprised. After all, what modern nation has had a history as encouraging to the illusion that its material well-being is, in Ortega's phrase, "the spontaneous fruit of an Edenic tree"?³

The same phenomenon aroused Sigmund Freud's interest. In his *General Introduction to Psychoanalysis* (1920), he takes up the nostalgic feeling we often attach to the unspoiled landscape as an illustration of our chronic yearning to enjoy "freedom from the grip of the external world." To Freud this impulse is the very epitome of fantasy-making:

The creation of the mental domain of phantasy has a complete counterpart in the establishment of "reservations" and "nature-parks" in places where the inroads of agriculture, traffic, or industry threaten to change . . . the earth rapidly into something unrecognizable. The "reservation" is to maintain the old condition of things which has been regretfully sacrificed to necessity everywhere else; there everything may grow and spread as it pleases, including what is useless and even what is harmful. The mental realm of phantasy is also such a reservation reclaimed from the encroaches of the reality-principle.

Freud comes back to this subject later in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930). He admits that he is puzzled by what he calls the "amazing" tendency of presumably civilized men to idealize simple and often primitive conditions

of life. What puzzles him most is the implication that mankind would be happier if our complex, technical order could somehow be abandoned. "How has it come about," he asks, "that so many people have adopted this strange attitude of hostility to civilization?"⁴

Freud's answer — an avowedly speculative one — is that such attitudes are the product of profound, long-standing discontent. He interprets them as signs of widespread frustration and repression. Although he assumes that every social order rests upon the denial of powerful instinctual needs, we are allowed to infer that today's advanced society may be singularly repressive. Can it be that our institutions and cultural standards are enforcing an increasingly painful, almost unbearable degree of privation of instinct? If so, this might well explain the addiction of modern man to puerile fantasies. In the light of these conjectures, the sentiments we have considered take on a pathological coloring, as if symptomatic of a collective neurosis.

Aided by the insights of Freud, Ortega, and the historians, we may begin to characterize the dominant motive back of this curious state of mind. Evidently it is generated by an urge to withdraw from civilization's growing power and complexity. What is attractive in pastoralism is the felicity represented by an image of a natural landscape, a terrain either unspoiled or, if cultivated, rural. Movement toward such a symbolic landscape also may be understood as movement away from an "artificial" world, a world identified with "art," using this word in its broadest sense to mean the disciplined habits of mind or arts developed by organized communities. In other words, this impulse gives rise to a symbolic motion away from centers of civilization toward their opposite, nature, away from sophistication toward simplicity, or, to introduce the cardi-

nal metaphor of the literary mode, away from the city toward the country. When this impulse is unchecked, the result is a simple-minded wishfulness, a romantic perversion of thought and feeling.

If this more popular kind of pastoralism were the only kind evident in America today, we should have every reason to conclude that it is merely another of our many vehicles of escape from reality — one of those collective mental activities which can be taken seriously only for diagnostic purposes. When we turn from the general to the "high" literary culture, however, we are struck at once by the omnipresence of the same motive. One has only to consider the titles which first come to mind from the classical canon of our literature — the American books admired most nowadays — to recognize that the theme of withdrawal from society into an idealized landscape is central to a remarkably large number of them. Again and again, the imagination of our most respected writers — one thinks of Cooper, Thoreau, Melville, Faulkner, Frost, Hemingway — has been set in motion by this impulse. But while the starting point of their work and of sentimental pastoralism may be the same, the results could hardly be more different.

How shall we define that difference? The work of serious writers is different, clearly, in most of the ways that works of art differ from the flow of casual, undisciplined expression that makes up the general culture. In fact the question might easily be put aside, as it often is, simply by asserting that "literature" embodies a more sensitive and precise, a "higher," mode of perception. To do that, however, is to miss a chance of defining the complex relation between serious literature and the larger body of meanings and values, the general culture, which envelops

it. An initial receptivity to the pastoral impulse is one way in which our best writers have grounded their work in the common life. But how, then, are we to explain the fact that the same impulse generates such wholly different states of mind? While in the culture at large it is the starting point for infantile wish-fulfillment dreams, a diffuse nostalgia, and a naïve, anarchic primitivism, yet it also is the source of writing that is invaluable for its power to enrich and clarify our experience. Where, then, shall we locate the point of divergence between these two modes of consciousness?

Rather than attempt to answer the question in general terms, I want to describe an event which points to an answer. Although it is an episode in the life of a writer who was to become famous, it is in other respects a typical and indeed commonplace event of the time. No doubt most of the writer's contemporaries, whether literary men or not, had similar experiences. Yet in retrospect we can see that this ordinary experience, partly because of its typicality, was one of those inconspicuous moments of discovery that has proven to be decisive in the record of our culture. What the writer discovers, though he by no means recognizes its importance, is a metaphor; he seizes upon the symbolic property or meaning in the event itself — its capacity to express much of what he thinks and feels about his situation.

2

On the morning of July 27, 1844, Nathaniel Hawthorne sat down in the woods near Concord, Massachusetts, to await (as he put it) "such little events as may happen." His purpose, so far as we can tell, was chiefly literary.

Though he had no reason to believe that anything memorable would happen, he sat there in solitude and silence and tried to record his every impression as precisely as possible. The whole enterprise is reminiscent of the painstaking literary exercises of his neighbor, Henry Thoreau. Hawthorne filled eight pages of his notebook on this occasion. What he wrote is not a finished piece of work and yet, surprisingly enough, neither is it a haphazard series of jottings. One incident dominates the rest of his impressions. Around this "little event" a certain formal — one might almost say dramatic — pattern takes shape. It is to this pattern that I want to call attention.⁵

To begin, Hawthorne describes the setting, known in the neighborhood as "Sleepy Hollow":

. . . a shallow space scooped out among the woods, which surround it on all sides, it being pretty nearly circular, or oval, and two or three hundred yards — perhaps four or five hundred — in diameter. The present season, a thriving field of Indian corn, now in its most perfect growth, and tasselled out, occupies nearly half of the hollow; and it is like the lap of bounteous Nature, filled with bread stuff.

Then, in minute detail, he records what he sees and hears close by. "Observe the pathway," he writes, "it is strewn over with little bits of dry twigs and decayed branches, and the sear and brown oak-leaves of last year that have been moistened by snow and rain, and whirled about by harsh and gentle winds, since their departed verdure . . ." And so on. What counts here, needless to say, is not the matter so much as the feeling behind it. Hawthorne is using natural facts metaphorically to convey something about a human situation. From several pages in this vein we get an impression of a man in almost perfect repose,

idly brooding upon the minutiae of nature, and now and then permitting his imagination a brief flight. Along the path, for example, he notices that "sunshine glimmers through shadow, and shadow effaces sunshine, imaging that pleasant mood of mind where gaiety and pensiveness intermingle." For the most part, however, Hawthorne is satisfied to set down unadorned sense impressions, and especially sounds — sounds made by birds, squirrels, insects, and moving leaves.

But then, after a time, the scope of his observations widens. Another kind of sound comes through. He hears the village clock strike, a cowbell tinkle, and mowers whetting their scythes.

Without any perceptible change of mood or tone, he shifts from images of nature to images of man and society. He insists that "these sounds of labor" do not "disturb the repose of the scene" or "break our sabbath; for like a sabbath seems this place, and the more so on account of the cornfield rustling at our feet." He is describing a state of being in which there is no tension either within the self or between the self and its environment. Much of this harmonious effect is evoked by the delicate interlacing of sounds that seem to unify society, landscape, and mind. What lends most interest, however, to this sense of all-encompassing harmony and peace is a vivid contrast:

But, hark! there is the whistle of the locomotive — the long shriek, harsh, above all other harshness, for the space of a mile cannot mollify it into harmony. It tells a story of busy men, citizens, from the hot street, who have come to spend a day in a country village, men of business; in short of all unquietness; and no wonder that it gives such a startling shriek, since it brings the noisy world into the midst of our slumbrous peace. As our

thoughts repose again, after this interruption, we find ourselves gazing up at the leaves, and comparing their different aspect, the beautiful diversity of green. . . .

With the train out of earshot and quiet restored, Hawthorne continues his observations. An ant colony catches his eye. Possibly, he muses, it is the very model of the community which the Fourierites and others are pursuing in their stumbling way. Then, "like a malevolent genius," he drops a few grains of sand into the entrance of an ant hole and obliterates it. The result is consternation among the inhabitants, their frantic movements displaying their "confusion of mind." How inexplicable, he writes, must be the agency which has effected this mischief. But now it is time for him to leave. Rising, he notices a cloud moving across the sun; many clouds now are scattered about the sky "like the shattered ruins of a dreamer's Utopia. . . ." Then, in a characteristic tone of self-deprecation, he remarks upon the "narrow, scanty and meagre" record of observation he has compiled during his morning in the woods. What troubles him is the discrepancy between the shallow stream of recorded thought ("distinct and expressed thought") and the broad tide of dim emotions, ideas, and associations that had been flowing all the while somewhere at the back of his mind. "When we see how little we can express," he concludes, "it is a wonder that any man ever takes up a pen a second time."

Yet the fact is that Hawthorne has succeeded in expressing a great deal. True, there are no memorable revelations to be got from these notes, no surprises, nothing of immediate interest from a biographical, historical, or critical standpoint. And yet there is something arresting about the episode: the writer sitting in his green retreat dutifully attaching words to natural facts, trying to tap the sub-

terranean flow of thought and feeling and then, suddenly, the startling shriek of the train whistle bearing in upon him, forcing him to acknowledge the existence of a reality alien to the pastoral dream. What begins as a conventional tribute to the pleasures of withdrawal from the world—a simple pleasure fantasy—is transformed by the interruption of the machine into a far more complex state of mind.

Our sense of its evocative power is borne out by the fact that variants of the Sleepy Hollow episode have appeared everywhere in American writing since the 1840's. We recall the scene in *Walden* where Thoreau is sitting rapt in a reverie and then, penetrating his woods like the scream of a hawk, the whistle of the locomotive is heard; or the eerie passage in *Moby-Dick* where Ishmael is exploring the innermost recesses of a beached whale and suddenly the image shifts and the leviathan's skeleton is a New England textile mill; or the dramatic moment in *Huckleberry Finn* when Huck and Jim are floating along peacefully and a monstrous steamboat suddenly bulges out of the night and smashes straight through their raft. More often than not in these episodes, the machine is made to appear with startling suddenness. Sometimes it abruptly enters a Happy Valley, at others a traveler suddenly comes upon it. In one of Melville's tales ("The Tartarus of Maids"), the narrator is trying to find a paper mill in the mountains; he drives his sleigh into a deep hollow between hills that rise like steep walls, and he still cannot see the place when, as he says, "suddenly a whirring, humming sound broke upon my ear. I looked, and there, like an arrested avalanche, lay the large whitewashed factory." The ominous sounds of machines, like the sound of the steamboat bearing down on the raft or of the train break-

ing in upon the idyll at Walden, reverberate endlessly in our literature. We hear such a sound, or see the sight which accompanies it, in *The Octopus*, *The Education of Henry Adams*, *The Great Gatsby*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, "The Bear" — and one could go on. Anyone familiar with American writing will recall other examples from the work of Walt Whitman, Sarah Orne Jewett, Henry James, Sherwood Anderson, Willa Cather, Eugene O'Neill, Robert Frost, Hart Crane, T. S. Eliot, John Dos Passos, Ernest Hemingway — indeed it is difficult to think of a major American writer upon whom the image of the machine's sudden appearance in the landscape has not exercised its fascination.⁶

What I am saying, in other words, is that Hawthorne's notes mark the shaping (on a microscopic scale to be sure) of a metaphoric design which recurs everywhere in our literature. They are a paradigm of the second kind of pastoralism mentioned at the outset. By looking closely at the way these notes are composed we can begin to account for the symbolic power of the "little event" in *Sleepy Hollow*.

3

Considered simply as a composition, as a way of ordering language to convey ideas and emotions, the first thing to notice about these casual notes is the decisive part played by the machine image. Taken by itself, what comes before we hear the train whistle scarcely arouses our interest. Descriptions of contentment seldom do. But the disturbing shriek of the locomotive changes the texture of the entire passage. Now tension replaces repose: the noise arouses a sense of dislocation, conflict, and anxiety. It is remarkable

how evocative the simple device is, especially when we consider that at bottom it consists of nothing more complicated than noise clashing through harmony. This is the sensory core of the larger design, its inherent power to be revealed by its receptivity to the connotations that Hawthorne gathers about it. Like the focal point of a complicated visual pattern, this elemental, irreducible dissonance contains the whole in small.

These observations suggest the conventional character of Hawthorne's composition. For all the apparent spontaneity of his response to the event, and in spite of the novelty of the railroad in 1844 — a recent and in many ways revolutionary invention — it is striking to see how little there is here that can be called "original." One suspects indeed that if we had access to all the notebooks kept by aspiring American writers of the 1840's we would find this "little event" recorded again and again. Two years earlier, for example, one of Hawthorne's literary neighbors, Ralph Waldo Emerson, had made this entry in his journal:

I hear the whistle of the locomotive in the woods. Wherever that music comes it has its sequel. It is the voice of the civility of the Nineteenth Century saying, "Here I am." It is interrogative: it is prophetic: and this Cassandra is believed: "Whew! Whew! Whew! How is real estate here in the swamp and wilderness? Ho for Boston! Whew! Whew! . . . I will plant a dozen houses on this pasture next moon, and a village anon. . . ."

So far from being unusual, in fact, the "little event" doubtless belongs among the literary commonplaces of the age. Critics with a sociological bent often slight such a derivative aspect of the writer's response. Eager to fix his relations to his age, they look to a writer's work for direct,

which is to say, spontaneous, original, unmediated reactions — as if inherited attitudes, forms, and conventions had had little or no part in shaping them. In this case, however, we have only to notice the name of the place in the woods to realize that Art, as usual, has been on the scene first. Not only has it named Sleepy Hollow, but in effect it has designed the symbolic landscape in which the industrial technology makes its appearance.⁷

The ground of Hawthorne's reaction, in other words, had been prepared by Washington Irving and Wordsworth and the "nature poets" of the previous century. In 1844, as it happens, Wordsworth wrote a sonnet protesting against the building of a railroad through the lake country. It begins: "Is then no nook of English ground secure / From rash assault? . . ." and it ends with a plea to "thou beautiful romance / Of nature" to "protest against the wrong." By placing the machine in opposition to the tranquillity and order located in the landscape, he makes it an emblem of the artificial, of the unfeeling utilitarian spirit, and of the fragmented, industrial style of life that allegedly follows from the premises of the empirical philosophy. To Wordsworth the new technology is a token of what he likes to call the "fever of the world."⁸

The pattern, moreover, can be traced back to the beginnings of industrialization. In England, as early as the 1780's, writers had been repelled by the ugliness, squalor, and suffering associated with the new factory system, and their revulsion had sharpened the taste, already strong, for images of rural felicity. We think of Blake:

And did those feet in ancient time
Walk upon England's mountains green?
And was the holy Lamb of God
On England's pleasant pastures seen?

And did the Countenance Divine
Shine forth upon our clouded hills?
And was Jerusalem builded here
Among these dark Satanic Mills?

It is evident that attitudes of this kind played an important part in quickening the massive shift in point of view which was to be called the romantic movement. Just how important they were it is difficult to say. If we regard the movement (to use Whitehead's acute phrase) as "a protest on behalf of the organic view of nature," then the contrast between the machine and the landscape would seem to embody its very essence.⁹

And yet it is misleading to think of the basic design of Hawthorne's notes as a product of modern romanticism. When we strip away the topical surface, particularly the imagery of industrialism and certain special attitudes toward visible nature, it becomes apparent that the underlying pattern is much older and more universal. Then the Sleepy Hollow motif, like a number of other conventions used by romantic writers, proves to be a modern version of an ancient literary device. It is a variation upon the contrast between two worlds, one identified with rural peace and simplicity, the other with urban power and sophistication, which has been used by writers working in the pastoral mode since the time of Virgil.

Although Theocritus is regarded as the first pastoral poet, Virgil's *Eclogues* are the true fountainhead of the pastoral strain in our literature. For one thing, in these poems Virgil (as one classical scholar puts it) "discovered" Arcadia. It is here that he created the symbolic landscape, a delicate blend of myth and reality, that was to be particularly relevant to American experience. For another, it

is in the *Eclogues* that the political overtones of the pastoral situation become evident. In the background of the first eclogue, sometimes called "The Dispossessed," there was a specific action of the Roman government: the expropriation of a number of small landholders (including the poet himself) so that military veterans might be rewarded with the seized land. This display of political power no doubt intensified Virgil's feeling for the land as a symbolic repository of value; at the same time it compelled him to acknowledge the implacable character of the forces threatening the established order. Both responses are accommodated by the thematic structure of Virgil's poem; let us consider it in greater detail.¹⁰

The poem takes the form of a dialogue between two shepherds. Tityrus, like Virgil, has successfully petitioned for the return of his land. At the outset he is happily playing upon his pipe when Melibœus, who has been evicted, comes by with his herd. Here are the opening lines as translated by E. V. Rieu:

Tityrus, while you lie there at ease under the awning of a spreading beech and practise country songs on a light shepherd's pipe, I have to bid good-bye to the home fields and the ploughlands that I love. Exile for me, Tityrus — and you lie sprawling in the shade, teaching the woods to echo back the charms of Amaryllis.

Tityrus answers with praise of the patron in Rome to whom he owes his liberty and his "happy leisure." The man gave his word, says Tityrus, "and my cattle browse at large, while I myself can play the tunes I fancy on my rustic flute." In reply, Melibœus disclaims any feeling of jealousy. "My only feeling is amazement — with every farm in the whole countryside in such a state of chaos. Look at myself, unfit for the road, yet forced to drive my

goats on this unending trek." He points to one animal he can "hardly drag" along. "Just now," he explains, ". . . she bore two kids — I had been counting on them — and had to leave the poor things on the naked flints." He berates himself for not anticipating "this disaster."

The first eclogue certainly represents more than a simple wish-image of bucolic pleasure. No sooner does Virgil sketch in the ideal landscape than he discloses an alien world encroaching from without. Melibœus represents this other world. Through his lines we are made aware that the immediate setting, with its tender feeling and contentment, is an oasis. Beyond the green hollow the countryside is in a state of chaos. The very principle of natural fecundity is threatened (he has been forced to abandon his newborn kids). What is out there, from the reader's point of view, is a world like the one he inhabits; it contains great cities like Rome, organized power, authority, restraint, suffering, and disorder. We are made to feel that the rural myth is threatened by an incursion of history. The state of mind of Melibœus — we should call it alienation nowadays — brings a countervailing force to bear upon the pastoral ideal. Divested of his land, he faces the prospect of unending anxiety, deprivation, and struggle:

. . . the rest of us are off; some to foregather with the Africans and share their thirst; others to Scythia, and out to where the Oxus rolls the chalk along; others to join the Britons, cut off as they are by the whole width of the world. Ah, will the day come, after many years, when I shall see a place that I can call my home . . . ?

The whole thrust of the poem is toward a restoration of the harmony established in the opening lines. Lying at ease under the beech, playing his pipe, Tityrus embodies the pastoral ideal. Here, incidentally, the distinction be-

tween the pastoral and primitive ideals may be clarified. Both seem to originate in a recoil from the pain and responsibility of life in a complex civilization — the familiar impulse to withdraw from the city, locus of power and politics, into nature. The difference is that the primitivist hero keeps going, as it were, so that eventually he locates value as far as possible, in space or time or both, from organized society; the shepherd, on the other hand, seeks a resolution of the conflict between the opposed worlds of nature and art. Since he often is the poet in disguise — Tityrus represents Virgil himself — he has a stake in both worlds. In the first eclogue nothing makes the mediating character of the pastoral ideal so clear as the spatial symbolism in which it is expressed. The good place is a lovely green hollow. To arrive at this haven it is necessary to move away from Rome in the direction of nature. But the centrifugal motion stops far short of unimproved, raw nature. "Happy old man!" the unfortunate Melibœus says to his friend: "So your land will still be yours. And it's enough for you, even though the bare rock and marshland with its mud and reeds encroach on all your pastures. Your pregnant ewes will never be upset by unaccustomed fodder; no harm will come to them. . . ."

This ideal pasture has two vulnerable borders: one separates it from Rome, the other from the encroaching marshland. It is a place where Tityrus is spared the deprivations and anxieties associated with both the city and the wilderness. Although he is free of the repressions entailed by a complex civilization, he is not prey to the violent uncertainties of nature. His mind is cultivated and his instincts are gratified. Living in an oasis of rural pleasure, he enjoys the best of both worlds — the sophisticated order of art and the simple spontaneity of nature. In a few lines

Virgil quickly itemizes the solid satisfactions of the pastoral retreat: peace, leisure, and economic sufficiency. The key to all of these felicities is the harmonious relation between Tityrus and the natural environment. It is a serene partnership. In the pastoral economy nature supplies most of the herdsman's needs and, even better, nature does virtually all of the work. A similar accommodation with the idealized landscape is the basis for the herdsman's less tangible satisfactions: the woods "echo back" the notes of his pipe. It is as if the consciousness of the musician shared a principle of order with the landscape and, indeed, the external universe. The echo, a recurrent device in pastoral, is another metaphor of reciprocity. It evokes that sense of relatedness between man and not-man which lends a metaphysical aspect to the mode; it is a hint of the quasi-religious experience to be developed in the romantic pastoralism of Wordsworth, Emerson, and Thoreau. Hence the pastoral ideal is an embodiment of what Lovejoy calls "semi-primitivism"; it is located in a middle ground somewhere "between," yet in a transcendent relation to, the opposing forces of civilization and nature.¹¹

What is most impressive, when we read the first eclogue with Hawthorne's notes in mind, is the similarity of the root conflict and of the over-all pattern of thought and emotion. By his presence alone Melibœus reveals the inadequacy of the Arcadian situation as an image of human experience. His lines convey the intervention of reality; they are a check against our susceptibility to idyllic fantasies. In 1844 Hawthorne assigns a similar function to the machine. Like Virgil's unfortunate herdsman, the sound of the locomotive "brings the noisy world into the midst of . . . slumbrous peace." Although the railroad is

a recent invention (the first American railroad had begun operations in 1829), many of the associations it is made to carry are more or less timeless features of *the* world, that is to say, the great world as it traditionally had been conceived in literature from the Old Testament to the poetry of Wordsworth. The train stands for a more sophisticated, complex style of life than the one represented by *Sleepy Hollow*; the passengers are "busy men, citizens, from the hot street. . . ." The harsh noise evokes an image of intense, overheated, restless striving — a life of "all unquietness" like that associated with great cities as far back as the story of the tower of Babel. The central device of Hawthorne's notes is to expose the pastoral ideal to the pressure of change — to an encroaching world of power and complexity or, in a word, to history. It is a modern variant of the design of Virgil's poem.

4

What, to be more precise, then, is a pastoral design? And how is this particular design related to the two kinds of pastoralism introduced at the outset?

By *design* I refer to the larger structure of thought and feeling of which the *ideal* is a part. The distinction is a vital one. Much of the obscurity that surrounds the subject stems from the fact that we use the same word to refer to a wish-image of happiness and to literary compositions in their entirety — pastoral dreams and pastoral poems. Then, too, we sometimes confuse matters even more by taking the word completely out of its literary context to describe our experience of the real world. We say of a pleasing stretch of country that it is a "pastoral scene," or that it gives us a "pastoral feeling." But our reactions to

literature seldom are that simple. (The confusion arises, as it so often does, in crossing the borderland between life and literature.) Most literary works called pastorals — at least those substantial enough to retain our interest — do not finally permit us to come away with anything like the simple, affirmative attitude we adopt toward pleasing rural scenery. In one way or another, if only by virtue of the unmistakable sophistication with which they are composed, these works manage to qualify, or call into question, or bring irony to bear against the illusion of peace and harmony in a green pasture. And it is this fact that will enable us, finally, to get at the difference between the complex and sentimental kinds of pastoralism.

In addition to the ideal, then, the pastoral design in question (it is one among many) embraces some token of a larger, more complicated order of experience.* Whether represented by the plight of a dispossessed herdsman or by the sound of a locomotive in the woods, this feature of the design brings a world which is more "real" into juxtaposition with an idyllic vision. It may be called the *counterforce*. Admittedly, the portentous, melodramatic connotations of this term make it inappropriate for the discussion of many bland, pre-industrial versions of pastoral. (Among the more effective of the traditional counters to the pastoral dream have been certain stylized tokens of mortality. We should understand that the counterforce may impinge upon the pastoral landscape either from the side bordering upon intractable nature or the side facing

* The scope of the design need not be an entire work; it may be confined to a scene or episode (a "pastoral interlude") within a poem, drama, or novel which is not, strictly speaking, a pastoral. I regard those works as pastorals whose controlling theme is a variant of the conflict between art and nature — nature being represented by an idealized image of landscape.

advanced civilization. During the seventeenth century, Poussin and other landscape painters introduced the image of a speaking death's-head into the most delicate pictorial idylls. To make the meaning of this *memento mori* inescapable they sometimes inserted the printed motto, *Et in Arcadia Ego*, meaning "I [Death] also am in Arcadia.") * Nevertheless, the term *counterforce* is applicable to a good deal of modern American writing. The anti-pastoral forces at work in our literature seem indeed to become increasingly violent as we approach our own time. For it is industrialization, represented by images of machine technology, that provides the counterforce in the American archetype of the pastoral design.¹²

Since Jefferson's time the forces of industrialism have been the chief threat to the bucolic image of America. The tension between the two systems of value had the greatest literary impact in the period between 1840 and 1860, when the nation reached that decisive stage in its economic development which W. W. Rostow calls the "take-off." In his study of the more or less universal stages of industrial growth, Rostow defines the take-off as the "great watershed in the life of modern societies" when the old blocks and resistances to steady development are overcome and the forces of economic progress "expand and come to

* The device figures what Erwin Panofsky calls a discrepancy "between the supernatural perfection of an imaginary environment and the natural limitations of human life as it is." It is typical of the unceasing metamorphosis of the pastoral mode that sometime around 1630 the original meaning of this device was lost to view. In an illuminating essay, Panofsky has shown that at this time the motto was reinterpreted so that the words, instead of being attributed to Death itself, were taken as the sentiments of another shepherd. Thus what had been intended as a dramatic encounter with death was replaced by a relatively sentimental and tranquillizing idea, in consonance with the main drift of the age.

dominate the society." In America, according to Rostow, the take-off began about 1844 — the year of the Sleepy Hollow episode — just at the time our first significant literary generation was coming to maturity. Much of the singular quality of this era is conveyed by the trope of the interrupted idyll. The locomotive, associated with fire, smoke, speed, iron, and noise, is the leading symbol of the new industrial power. It appears in the woods, suddenly shattering the harmony of the green hollow, like a presentiment of history bearing down on the American asylum. The noise of the train, as Hawthorne describes it, is a cause of alienation in the root sense of the word: it makes inaudible the pleasing sounds to which he had been attending, and so it estranges him from the immediate source of meaning and value in Sleepy Hollow. In truth, the "little event" is a miniature of a great — in many ways the greatest — event in our history.¹³

That Hawthorne was fully aware of the symbolic properties of the railroad is beyond question. Only the year before he had published "The Celestial Railroad," a wonderfully compact satire on the prevailing faith in progress. In the popular culture of the period the railroad was a favorite emblem of progress — not merely technological progress, but the overall progress of the race. Hawthorne's sketch turns upon the idea of the new machine as a vehicle for an illusory voyage of salvation whose darkest meanings are reserved for readers of Bunyan. Like the hero of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, the American pilgrim thinks he is on his way to the Heavenly City. As it turns out, however, the same road can lead to hell, the partly concealed point being that the American protagonist is not a Christian at all; he has much more in common with the other traveler in Bunyan's Calvinist allegory, Ignorance.

Nevertheless, it would be wrong to suppose that the primary subject of the Sleepy Hollow notes is the transition from an agrarian to an industrial society. Plausible on its face, such a reading confuses literary ends and means. The whole tenor of the notes indicates that Hawthorne is not interested in directing attention from himself to what is happening "out there" in the great world of political and institutional change. Nor can it be said, incidentally, that any of the works that embody variants of the motif are, in the usual sense, *about* the great transformation. The point may seem a niggling one, but it is crucial if we are to define the precise relation between literature and that flow of unique, irreversible events called history. Although Hawthorne's account includes an element of representation — he draws upon actual objects and events — his chief concern is the landscape of the psyche. The inner, not the outer world, is what interests him most as he sits there in the woods, attempting to connect words and sense perceptions. His aim, as he says, is to represent the broad tide of dim emotions, ideas, and images coursing through his mind. When he seizes upon the auditory image of the train it is because it serves this purpose.

The primary subject of the Sleepy Hollow notes, then, is the contrast between two conditions of consciousness. Until he hears the train's whistle Hawthorne enjoys a serenity close to euphoria. The lay of the land represents a singular insulation from disturbance, and so enhances the feeling of security and repose. The hollow is a virtual cocoon of freedom from anxiety, guilt, and conflict — a shrine of the pleasure principle. To describe the situation in the language of Freud, particularly when we have only one example in view, no doubt seems farfetched. But the

striking fact is that again and again our writers have introduced the same overtones, depicting the machine as invading the peace of an enclosed space, a world set apart, or an area somehow made to evoke a feeling of encircled felicity. The setting may be an island, or a hut beside a pond, or a raft floating down a river, or a secluded valley in the mountains, or a clearing between impenetrable walls of forest, or the beached skeleton of a whale — but whatever the specific details, certain general features of the pattern recur too often to be fortuitous. Most important is the sense of the machine as a sudden, shocking intruder upon a fantasy of idyllic satisfaction. It invariably is associated with crude, masculine aggressiveness in contrast with the tender, feminine, and submissive attitudes traditionally attached to the landscape.

But there is no need, actually, to choose between the public and private, political and psychic, meanings of this event. Even in these offhand notes, Hawthorne's first concern — he is, after all, a writer of fiction — is the emotional power of his material, and that power unquestionably is heightened by the larger, political implications of the machine image. Emerson makes the point this way: the serious artist, he says, "must employ the symbols in use in his day and nation to convey his enlarged sense to his fellow-men." The ideas and emotions linked to the fact of industrialization provide Hawthorne with just such an enlargement of meaning. Their function is like that of the secondary subject, or "vehicle," of a grand metaphor. To say this is not to imply that the topical significance of the machine is "extrinsic" to the literary process, or that it may be treated as a merely illustrative appendage. As with any well-chosen figure, the subsidiary subject is an integral part of the metaphor. Thought and feeling flow

both ways. The radical change in the character of society and the sharp swing between two states of feeling, between an Arcadian vision and an anxious awareness of reality, are closely related: they illuminate each other. All of which is another way of accounting for the symbolic power of the motif: it brings the political and the psychic dissonance associated with the onset of industrialism into a single pattern of meaning. Once generated, of course, that dissonance demands to be resolved.¹⁴

At the end of Virgil's poem the resolution is effected by a series of homely images. Tityrus invites Melibœus to postpone his journey into exile. "Yet surely," he says, "you could sleep here as my guest for this one night, with green leaves for your bed?" This symbolic gesture may be interpreted as an offer of a "momentary stay against confusion" — Robert Frost's way of defining the emotional end-product of a poem. "It begins in delight," says Frost, "and ends in wisdom . . . in a clarification of life — not necessarily a great clarification, such as sects or cults are founded on, but in a momentary stay against confusion." To objectify this state of equilibrium Virgil closes the gap between hope and fear. In the last lines of the poem Tityrus blends the two emotions in a picture of the landscape at twilight:

I have got ripe apples, and some mealy chestnuts and a good supply of cheese. See over there — the rooftops of the farms are already putting up their evening smoke and shadows of the mountain crests are falling farther out.¹⁵

So ends the first eclogue. As far as the narrative is concerned, nothing has been solved. The poem offers no hint of a "way out" for Melibœus or those who inhabit the ravaged countryside. All that he gets for solace is one

night's postponement of his exile — one night of comfort and companionship. Yet this twilight mood, a blend of sadness and repose, succeeds aesthetically. It is a virtual resolution. Like the middle landscape, or the ritual marriage at the end of a pastoral romance, this consolatory prospect figuratively joins what had been apart. At the end of the *Sleepy Hollow* notes, similarly, the train moves off and a sad tranquillity comes over Hawthorne. Although he manages to regain some of his earlier sense of peace, the encroaching forces of history have compelled him to recognize its evanescence. Just as Virgil ends with the image of falling shadows, so Hawthorne ends with the thought of a "dreamer's Utopia" in ruins. In each case the conflict aroused by the counterforce is mitigated. These highly stylized resolutions are effective partly because the writers succeed in maintaining an unruffled, contemplative, Augustan tone. This tone, characteristic of Virgilian pastoral, is a way of saying that the episode belongs to a timeless, recurrent pattern of human affairs. It falls easily into a conventional design because it has occurred often before.

But the fact is that nothing quite like the event announced by the train in the woods had occurred before. A sense of history as an unpredictable, irreversible sequence of unique events makes itself felt even in Hawthorne's notes. In spite of the resemblance between the train and the archetypal city of Western literature, the "little event" creates an unprecedented situation. For in the stock contrast between city and country each had been assumed to occupy a more or less fixed location in space: the country here, the city there. But in 1844 the sound of a train in the Concord woods implies a radical change in the conventional pattern. Now the great world is in-

vading the land, transforming the sensory texture of rural life — the way it looks and sounds — and threatening, in fact, to impose a new and more complete dominion over it. (Compare plates 1 and 2.) True, it may be said that agents of urban power had been ravaging the countryside throughout recorded history. After they had withdrawn, however, the character of rural life had remained essentially unchanged. But here the case is different: the distinctive attribute of the new order is its technological power, a power that does not remain confined to the traditional boundaries of the city. It is a centrifugal force that threatens to break down, once and for all, the conventional contrast between these two styles of life. The *Sleepy Hollow* episode prefigures the emergence, after 1844, of a new, distinctively American, post-romantic, industrial version of the pastoral design. And the feelings aroused by this later design will have the effect of widening the gap, already great, between the pastoralism of sentiment and the pastoralism of mind.

At the outset I introduced the "little event" of 1844 to mark the shaping of a metaphor, or metaphoric design, which appears again and again in modern American writing. With Virgil's poem in view, however, we can see that the episode does not represent the beginning so much as the decisive turning point of a long story. It would be more accurate, then, to say that Hawthorne, in seizing upon the image of the railroad as counterforce, is re-shaping a conventional design to meet the singular conditions of life in nineteenth-century America. To understand his response to the machine we must appreciate the intensity of his feeling for its opposite, the landscape. The same may be said of many American writers. Their heightened

sensitivity to the onset of the new industrial power can only be explained by the hold upon their minds of the pastoral ideal, not as conceived by Virgil, but as it had been adapted, since the age of discovery, to New World circumstances. What those circumstances were, and how they influenced the development of native pastoralism, both sentimental and complex, is the burden of what follows.