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For over four decades, Leo Marx's work has focused on the relationship between technology and culture in 19th- and 20th-century America. His research helped to define--and continues to give depth to--the area of American studies concerned with the links between scientific and technological advances, and the way society and culture both determine these links. *The Machine in the Garden* fully examines the difference between the "pastoral" and "progressive" ideals which characterized early 19th-century American culture, and which ultimately evolved into the basis for much of the environmental and nuclear debates of contemporary society.

This new edition is appearing in celebration of the 35th anniversary of Marx's classic text. It features a new afterword by the author on the process of writing this pioneering book, a work that all but founded the discipline now called American Studies.

The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America Details

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John says

An interesting bout of literary criticism that seeks to tease out the thread of emerging industrialization as it threatened the Arcadian dream in 19th and 20th century American novels/art. Launching from Irving's *Sleepy Hollow* note to notice a train whistle toot off in the distance of *Walden*, Marx introduces some profound critical insights into how America is imagined.

Marx's chapter on Shakespeare's *THE TEMPEST* is an amazing exercise in critical extension, as he laces together a maze of speculation and careful reading to introduce us to a wonderful new potentiality encoded in the subtext of Prospero's sad journey - that it comments on the wilderness potential of the New World, America.

The progression from Jefferson's chapter, *The Garden*, into the chapter, *The Machine*, which deals with lesser known Coxe is a seamless manoeuvre which makes narrative sense. Marx's careful study needs to be credited for such linear coherency.

The bits on Melville and Twain are brilliant too.

All in all, it had a good beat and I totally danced to it.

Emily says

While furiously critiqued as a potent example of the myth and symbol school, *The Machine in the Garden* posits that the pastoral ideal is unique to the American experience, tracing examples of it and its interruption by industrialization/technology within a self-selected (and now confirmed) canon of American literature (e.g. Hawthorne, Melville, Emerson, Twain, Fitzgerald). Published during the cold war and based on the postwar trend toward consensus history, Marx searches for and supports an argument that seeks to identify universality in the American character, a unifying perspective that he defends against the contemporary trend that analyzes conflict, fracture, competing interests, and difference.

While disregarded by some for a methodology that lacks empirical rigor, the salience of the pastoral ideal remains compelling -- for example in my own exploration, current notions of the pastoral might be part of what fuels the most recent interests in alternative food movements, organic production, urban farming, and farmers markets; all ways of producing, procuring, and consuming food that avoid what many consider the derisively mechanical nature of the industrial food system.

Mark Valentine says

It helped that I have read Shakespeare's, "*The Tempest*," and *Huckleberry Finn* and *Moby-Dick* and *Walden*

and Henry Adams', *Education and The Great Gatsby*. But in reading Marx, I am inspired to read other works he referenced too: Jefferson's, *Notes on the State of Virginia* and Robert Beverley's, *Notes on Virginia*, and Melville's, *Typee*, and Hawthorne's short story, "Ethan Brand." I am realizing that "I have miles to go before I sleep" in my journey through American Literature.

Marx's study of the pastoral movement in American writing and art over the centuries informs me of the dichotomous split between two incongruities, the idyllic and the machine world. Marx shows that the messenger, Ishmael, who survives to tell his tale and Nick Carraway, who goes back West, and Thoreau, who leaves his experiment for village living after only two years are the only ones who have gone between both worlds and still survived. Huck's leaving for the Territories shows he still craves the adventures of the pastoral before compromising. But these American writers saw the conflicts between notions and wrote about it with courage.

I find knowing of this split between the two notions even more important today as Americans grapple with AI, algorithmic solutions, treks to Mars, and the like to the neglect of homelessness and underemployment in our cities, pollution, over-population, deforestation, sea level rise, and water rights wars. This is where literature can inform us today.

I am indebted to Marx for his fascinating study.

Cat says

Marx's thesis, roughly stated, is that: Americans applied ideas developed about landscape in the old world to the landscape they discovered in the new world. In doing so, the landscape became a "repository of value" (value meaning economic, spiritual, etc.). The main idea about the landscape that travelled with them from Europe was the idea of "pastoralism".

Pastoralism, roughly expressed, represents the yearning by civilized man to occupy the space in between "art" and "nature". Marx does an excellent job of explaining the pre-modern understanding of "art" (which is different than our modern understanding of the word). Marx also distinguishes the a "simple" conception of pastoralism with a "complex" conception. Using the writings of Jefferson, Marx argues that Americans were more comfortable with the idea of a "complex" pastoralism that acknowledged the conflict inherent in the occupation of a "middle landscape" between art and nature.

Marx then attaches the concept of pastoralism to the symbol of the "garden" as representing a mediating space between art and nature (apply "arts" to "nature" and produce a garden).

After a further differentiation between the idea of the garden-as-continent vs. garden-as-garden, Marx moves on to the idea of the "machine".

What Marx means by the "machine" of the title is a relationship between culture and industry that was irrevocably altered by the industrial revolution. He details the attempts by writers to deal with the looming conflict between pastoralism and industrialization. Perhaps the most interesting portion of the book comes when Marx discusses the period when many saw NO conflict between the "machine" and the "garden".

However, the tour de force comes when Marx analyzes this conflict as it appears in the works of Emerson,

Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville and Fitzgerald.

Personally, I thought the analysis of Hawthorne's "Ethan Brand" was first rate.

Marx concludes by congratulating the authors he uses for "clarifying" the situation of Americans and noting that the ultimate resolution of the problem of the machine in the garden is not for writer's but for politicians.

In this way, the book is significantly more political than one might expect. It really belongs to the genre of "American Studies", even though my 1970's edition refers to it as belonging to "Literature".

Marx achieves greatness by tenaciously explicating the troubled relationship between America and its technology. Although written in 1964, this book retains great relevance.

HBalikov says

America in the 18th was looked on as "the new Eden" for the Western world. Perhaps a little more for the scholar, than the general reader, Leo Marx does excellent work in tracing this vision and its literary impact over the next two centuries. As the Industrial Revolution made its way "across the pond" this pastoral perspective was forced to confront reality on many levels. Oxford University Press reissued this several years ago and reading it has given me: 1) an new perspective on many works of American lit. and, 2) made me want to read others that had somehow slipped by me.

Mike says

According to Marx (Leo, not Karl) the pastoral — an ideal place balanced between capricious wilderness and urban despair — has been praised in Western arts since Virgil. So compelling was this vision of man's ideal habitat that after Europeans discovered an "empty" wilderness continent notable men (such as Jefferson) wished to create a society based on that which was for so long dreamt of in art. Hence the Jeffersonian plan to create a nation of small landowners, dispersed across the land and enjoying the benefits of clean air, fertile soil, handcrafted quilts, wheelbarrows, sex with animals, NASCAR, or whatever it is that simple folks in the heartland do that keeps them so pure.

Somewhere around the middle of the 19th century the nation's prosperity became increasingly tied to its industrialization, and your average future important white male writer couldn't spend more than a few moments staring slack-jawed at wildflowers or a canopy of leaves without being rudely interrupted by the shriek of a locomotive. At this point American literature began to wrestle with the incipient failure of the pastoral. The nation's forge was hammering out cities — which back then were full of awful things like soot, cholera, and orphans — and nothing was going to stop it. Marx shows how the tension created by this new industrial order supplanting the old was used in literature of the time, both high and low.

If you are interested in some of the major writers of that time (Melville, Hawthorne, Twain, Thoreau) and how their place and time affected their work then you will probably enjoy this. The treatment of the pastoral ("Et in Arcadia ego" and whatnot) was informative too.

Philip Palios says

Perhaps the best book I've ever read. Marx provides a detailed historical and literary account of the pastoral ideal. Not only does he reveal how this human longing dates back thousands of years, but also how it has influenced recent history, especially the colonization of America. Furthermore, he provides countless literary examples of how this ideal drives our collective consciousness and imagination. Lastly, Marx demonstrates the tight bonds between technology, industrialization, capitalism and American government.

I believe everyone should read this book and has something to gain by doing so, no matter where their interests lie.

Jules says

This work grew out of Marx's doctoral dissertation, written in 1949. Having said that, this thirty-fifth anniversary edition could use a bit of an update, as it feels archaic, and outmoded at times, as far as its presentation of history. Still, the central thesis and his exploration of the trope of the machine interjecting into the serene, romantic pasture, is really thought-provoking. We are grappling with the same question in our time: What is the cost of progress? In his chapter, Two Kingdoms of Force, he provides an interesting analysis of Thoreau's *Walden* and Melville's *Moby Dick*. There is a lot to ponder, especially given the increasing intimacy between humans and machines in our world.

Kristin says

An important, albeit flawed book in American Studies. As Marx acknowledges in the 2000 "afterward," his 1964 book did make large claims about "Americans" and "America" that were rooted in the work of a narrow population (privileged, white males) and that didn't take into account writers and peoples of other genders, races, and classes. Yet he resists the charge (which I'll repeat) that he universalizes his claims about culture -- he has few examples and uses them to make large pronouncements. (Also has an overreliance on Freud, but that makes sense given its context.) An important work to have under my belt, but I'm glad the field has moved on.

Joshua Stein says

For what it is, I'm sure *The Machine in the Garden* is very good. Marx puts forward an interesting analysis of the social consciousness of intellectual communities considering technology during the late-17th through mid-19th centuries, and presents the analysis in a thoughtful and artful way. That is no doubt why the book is still relevant to curriculums in the states decades after its initial publication. It is profoundly readable for something closing in on 400 pages, if you include the afterword [which I strongly recommend reading] and it is methodologically more sound, and more coherent, than most of the literature scholarship I've run across as a young academic.

That said, there are a lot of problems. The first is that Marx's general analysis of the importance of the myths and symbols present in the literature is at all of historical importance; this is a common objection to Marx

and that school of literary scholars, as he notes in the afterword. It is hard to find the book convincing, given the very limited scope of the data; Marx's analysis might do well at explaining a sort of pastoral ideal among a subsection of the wealthy and literate during the period he's looking at, but it definitely fails at identifying anything widespread. It has to, because of the nature of the data available to a literary scholar.

Marx also, quite unfortunately, suppresses his own political voice in favor of the professorial tone that's typical of a lot of the writing from the '50s and early '60s coming out of the fairly well-to-do academic environment [like Harvard, where Marx studied]. The failures here are remedied slightly in the afterword, where he discusses the importance of his own leftist views and why he chose not to do an analysis of leftist literature from the early 20th century. Unfortunately, Marx checked too much of his political ideology at the door, and it leaves the book wanting.

Overall, for those interested in American studies and the analysis of history via literature, my understanding is that the book is a classic in the field, and so you should read it. As I said initially, the book is very readable and shouldn't take long, especially for people who are used to the more theoretical work [which is often incredibly painful]. Don't let me own not-so-sparkly review turn you off to it; I have a suspicion that for those in other areas of the academy Marx will make for an engaging and thought provoking read, even though he wasn't for me.

Fekete Macska says

A thorough and captivating essay that will make you look at any American film differently.

Although his study is more concerned with America's literary canons, the Technology/Nature dichotomy is so present in America even now that reading this book will shed light on much more than just American literature.

Mark Bowles says

A. Synopsis: This book describes and evaluates the uses of the pastoral ideal in the interpretation of the American experience. Marx attempts to (1) trace how the ideal was adapted to the conditions of American experience (the train through the countryside) (2) Discuss how the pastoral ideal emerged as a distinctly American theory of society (the middle landscape) and (3) trace its transformation under industrialization (change from pastoral ideal to pastoral design). This is not a book about literature; it is about the "region of culture where literature, general ideas, and certain products of the collective imagination (cultural symbols) meet." (4)

B. Argument:

1. The change is from the Pastoral ideal (the sentimental view of the utopian Garden of Eden) to a industrial Pastoral design (this is a cultivated garden by man and his machines--the middle landscape)
2. Middle Landscape: This is the incorporation of technology into a pastoral ideal without disturbing the bucolic rural nature of America. This enabled the nation to "continue to define its purpose as the pursuit of rural happiness while devoting itself to productivity, wealth, and power" (226)
3. The middle landscape is the synthesis of the dialectic of garden, machine, middle landscape.
4. The resolution of the conflict between machine and garden offers several interpretations
 - a) Transcendental: Emerson, "The Young American," Thoreau Walden
 - b) Tragic: Hawthorne, "Ethan Brand," Melville Moby Dick

c) Vernacular: Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

C. *Sleepy Hollow*, Hawthorne 1844

1. This is used as the basis for discussing the relationship between pastoralism and technology.
2. As he writes he tells of the harmony between the farmers and nature
3. Suddenly a train whistle interrupts him.
4. This sudden appearance of the machine invading the garden is a common literary theme
5. This episode describes the emergence (after 1844) of a new American post-romantic industrial vision

D. Shakespeare's American fable

1. In 1611 he writes *The Tempest* which can be seen as a story about the New World
2. The theme of the play is about the conflict between nature and art (civilization)
3. Paradox of America
 - a) America was seen as a pastoral utopia to Europeans at this time. America as garden
 - b) America was also viewed as a desolate wilderness with no amenities of civilization
 - c) This conflicting paradox becomes a central theme of our national literature
4. Shakespeare resolves this conflict by saying that the artificial is a special human category of the natural

E. The Garden

1. The fully articulated pastoral idea of America did not emerge until the late 18th
2. Thomas Jefferson provides a thorough study of the pastoral idea in *Notes on Virginia*
 - a) The problem was that to put such ideas in effect would require a legislation against manufacturing
 - b) This was the type of governmental power that Jefferson detested
 - c) Therefore there was an inconsistency with Jefferson; Progress v. Pastoral ideas

F. The Machine

1. Jefferson did not see the steam engine as a threat
 - a) He believed the machine would blend into the garden
 - b) America represented the middle landscape: a balance between art (technology, civilization) and nature
2. By 1830 the contrasting image of the machine was becoming prevalent
 - a) Thomas Carlyle in England associated the machine with a mechanistic social system that was detrimental to individuals
 - b) He said that the intellect and culture is cultivated by the machine
3. Timothy Walker responded to Carlyle and defended mechanization
 - a) He discounted Carlyle's solemn fears and believed that the machine always had a place in the garden
 - b) He said that the intellect and culture is cultivated by the machine

G. Other examples of the interactions between the machine and the garden

1. Emerson's transcendentalism: technological progress shows human capabilities
2. Thoreau's *Walden*: More tragic than Emerson. He says that men have become tools of their tools
3. Melville: In *Moby Dick*. In the whaling world man's connection to nature is through technology (harpoons, the ship, etc.)

Humphrey says

A fine study and a lively read that works through some of the contradictions and co-dependencies found within the American 18th/19th-century dichotomy of country and city, progress and pastoral. My greatest frustration is that so much time is devoted to a reading of Shakespeare's *Tempest* which, neat though it may be, falls quite some distance from the period with which the work is concerned. Some of this space could have been spent much more usefully in fleshing out some of the issues only raised in later sections.

David Bates says

Leo Marx's 1964 literary study *The Machine in the Garden* emerged from the early decades of the interdisciplinary field of American studies, creating a foundation for thinking about nature and American society. Positing the existence of a coherent and continuous national culture, Marx and other scholars explored that national culture through recurring symbols and myths. Key to American identity, according to Marx, were two deep but conflicting systems of values; reverence for a purifying nature into which Man could escape, and an opposite attraction to the material progress offered by advancing industrial technology. "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," Marx wrote. Like the shepherd of Virgil's *Eclogues*, American writers dwelt on the yearning "to withdraw from the great world and begin a new life in a fresh, green landscape," and the motive was obvious – "here was a virgin continent!" With Jeffersonian agrarianism as a touchstone, Marx argues that early Americans hoped that the great vastness of the continent would yield a middle ground on which an empire of liberty could be built, between the primitive wilderness and the overbearing authority of civilization. A new strain entered American literature after the 1830s however, as industrialization became a shaping force in American experience. Narratives of the redemptive journey into the wilderness and the contemplation of nature featured an interruption – the sudden, troubling appearance of a machine that disrupts the integrity of the scene and prevents the escape into nature. The shriek of the steam engine in Hawthorne's *Sleepy Hollow*, the try-works scene of Melville's *Moby Dick* in which a whale is processed for its oil amidst darkness and fire, the steamboat that looms up from the night to crush the raft in Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* and the locomotive which crushes a herd of sheep in Frank Norris's *The Octopus*, to Marx exhibited a pattern of increasingly violent incursions by the modern technological world on the pastoral ideal and the values it represented.

Nineteenth century enthusiasm for material and scientific progress had, according to Marx, created an alternate system of symbols and values that extolled the annihilation of space and time and tied advancing democracy and technology together; a cultural anti-pastoral counterforce. Much of American culture, he suggested, was generated from the tension between the values of the Machine and the Garden. "Since Jefferson's time the forces of industrialism have been the chief threat to the bucolic image of America," and in Hawthorne's *Sleepy Hollow* the "locomotive, associated with fire, smoke, speed, iron, and noise, is the leading symbol of the new industrial power . . . The noise of the train, as Hawthorne describes it, is a cause of alienation . . . 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." For Marx Americans built cities only to flee them for the suburbs, left farms in droves only to idealize and subsidize them, worked in offices and factories but camped, hunted and fished as expressions of the root conflict in their culture – the frustrated pastoral values of an American experience in a world increasingly dominated by machines. Each literary recurrence of the "interrupted idyll," of the Machine's appearance in the Garden, draws its power from the bitter suspicion that the American dream is ultimately impossible to realize in the conditions of the modern world.

Jonathan says

A lovely book. Leo Marx argues that the pastoral ideal in America -- developed first by Europeans projecting their hopes and fears onto a new landscape, then by native-born Americans examining their growing society -- expresses an ambivalence at the heart of the nation's character.

On the one hand, Marx argues, the pastoral always implies that the peaceful, natural countryside is threatened by the advance of technology and industry. Thus, pastoralism constitutes a form of protest against anxiety-inducing social change. It suggests (to invoke the book's leitmotif) that the noisy locomotive engine is a dangerous and upsetting intrusion into a valuable but fragile ("Arcadian") garden. On the other hand, he stresses, *pastoralism* is not *primitivism*. The rural landscape is not an untouched place; it is a place of habitation, proprietorship, and cultivation. The pastoral imagination situates itself in the "middle distance," in the frontier between decadence and savagery. It does not repudiate human society, but suggests a supposedly natural alternative to the way things have gone in the city, where population density and concentrated wealth make human society's flaws most visible. In fact, pastoralism even presents a way to ratify technological development; Americans have frequently conjured what Marx calls the "technological sublime," the sense that human ingenuity manifests the deepest ways of God or nature. In the technological sublime, the machine actually becomes part of the pastoral landscape.

Marx builds his case on clever and persuasive readings of Shakespeare (*The Tempest*, which directly invokes the New World), Crèvecoeur, Jefferson, Hawthorne, Melville, Thoreau, Webster, and Twain, all of whom discussed or embodied this ambivalence, and on a brief analysis of certain American paintings that I wish were much more extensive.

The argument still holds up to scrutiny today. I am somewhat disappointed, however, that Marx does not do more to discuss the implicit image of the city in the American pastoral -- or the influence of very real Eastern and European cities on the development of the pastoral mode. I am convinced that the American pastoral itself is a product of urbanization and atlanticism, not of country or frontier life; yet for the most part, Marx takes the pastoral's existence for granted and does not investigate the reasons for its ascendancy in American writing.
