The Machine in the Garden; Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America Study Guide

The Machine in the Garden; Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America by Leo Marx

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Plot Summary

Author Leo Marx has aptly titled his work, The Machine in the Garden. Against the backdrop of a critical analysis of the works of dozens of eighteenth and nineteenth century authors, Marx poses his central theme of American technological progress and society's attempts to reconcile such progress with the initial pastoral ideal of America's founders. Marx identifies two types of "pastoralism," sentimental and complex. The sentimental variety is that expressed by the early settlers, who saw America as a lush paradise, a natural environment into which man could inject himself and live simply. Such sentimentalism bred the ideas of equality and the superiority of the "common man," pushing America toward independence from England and a democratic society which envisioned equality for all.

Enter the railroad and the steam engine. To Marx, these two inventions forever changed America, and catapulted her rapidly toward an industrialization that destroyed the original simple, agrarian lifestyle of her citizens. Railroads and steamboats became the symbols of progress, as track, roads, and rivers allowed travel throughout the nation, and the destruction of nature as well. Villages turned into towns; towns turned into industrialized cities; property lines were drawn, and man embarked upon a rapid path from cooperation with nature to control of nature, destroying it if necessary. The rapidity with which industrialism came to America, during the nineteenth century, left man with the realization that sentimental pastoralism was merely a dreamy illusion, and that Americans must find some method of reconciling this myth with reality. Thus, the concept of "complex pastoralism" was born, reflected primarily in the works of noted authors of the time.

Through an analysis of the works of Emerson, Thoreau, Melville, Hawthorne, Twain, Henry Adams, James, and Fitzgerald, author Marx demonstrates how literature not only reflected this conflict between technology and nature, but posed a variety of views on its resolution. Many believed that a reconciliation could occur, if Americans preserved the concept of the importance of maintaining a reverence for nature, using technology to improve their lifestyles but not to destroy their environment. Others believed that such a reconciliation would not be possible, and that man, in his attempts to progress and to control nature, would, in the end, destroy himself.

Marx leaves the reader a bit unsatisfied, as he proposes no lasting resolution to the conflict which he believes American society will continue to face. The sentimental idea of communing with nature is reduced to a "flight" to the suburbs, occasional excursions into what is left of the natural environment, and the continuation of our environment's destruction. In the end, he states, it is not up to the artists to pose the solutions. As well, traditional institutions will not resolve the issues we face. Americans must regain their sense of community and their sense of cooperation with nature by establishing new institutions, and that is the work of politicians and government.

Sleepy Hollow, 1844

Sleepy Hollow, 1844 Summary and Analysis

The "pastoral ideal" has been a part of American culture since its initial colonization. A new land, unsettled and virgin in its natural surroundings, provided new residents a beautiful, bountiful setting, in which they could settle into farming and livestock raising, amid a peaceful environment, lush with forests, streams, mountains, lakes and fertile soil. This ideal, that is, to live among the beauties of nature, has remained a part of the American view of life, even through the twentieth century. This pastoral view has been reflected in both American literature and in the political, social and economic principles, and continues even as the complexities of an advanced society make "pastoralism" appear ancient and obscure.

Two kinds of pastoral ideal exist in America. The first, or "sentimental" type, is reflected in the principles so often espoused by politicians, sociologists and anthropologists—the pervasive value given to the green, simpler, moral, rural lifestyle. Thus, Americans abandon large urban areas in favor of the suburbs with green lawns and the opportunity to obtain trees, gardens and additional common green space. Americans themselves often express a longing for a simpler more natural existence. Leisure time activities involving nature are common; small town values are somehow more "American;" farmers are subsidized; advertising media glorify the quiet, peaceful, rural environment. In the latter part of the twentieth century, however, a number of more liberal thinkers have come to posit that nostalgic, outdated pastoral idealism is an impediment to progress, that it results in reactionary philosophies and movements which are both unrealistic and impractical in a modern industrialized society. As well, such nostalgia and effort to revert to former "agrarianism" serves to hinder focus on the current problems of our society.

The second type of pastoralism is the "complex" variety, most often typified by American authors, specifically those who wrote during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In literature, the conflict between the American pastoral ideal and the reality of history, that is, the inevitable encroachment of industrialism, is addressed and a more realistic outcome, both imaginative and complex, is postulated. Man's reaction to the encroachment of industrialism is portrayed as either alienation and an attempt to withdraw from the intrusions of modernization or some type of reconciliation between the two environments.

The assault on American pastoralism began in the period between 1840-1860. "The locomotive, associated with fire, smoke, speed, iron and noise is the leading symbol of the new industrial power," (p. 27). American literature began to reflect this assault, beginning with Nathaniel Hawthorne's small piece, "Sleepy Hollow Notes," in which he describes his reverie in a small wooded area outside Concord, Massachusetts, including all that he serenely observed. In the midst of this quietude, however, comes the shrill whistle of a train..."'the long shriek, harsh, above all other harshness, for the

space of a mile cannot mollify it into harmony,'" (p. 13). His reverie is denied its continuation. Using this as a first example, author Marx suggests that the central theme of man's tranquility assaulted by the progress of civilization has been the subject of writers from Virgil forward. The aspect of this assault in America by the 1840's was, however, was unique. In previous societies, there were definite demarcations between city and rural areas, and man was able to leave the "civilization" of cities and retreat to a pastoral environment; the train, however, marks the beginning of the boundary breakdowns, so that city and country are no longer exclusive.

Shakepeare's American Fable

Shakepeare's American Fable Summary and Analysis

Author Marx attempts to relate Shakespeare's play, The Tempest, to the experience of colonization of the New World. Specifically, "...an unspoiled landscape suddenly invaded by advance parties of a dynamic, literate, and purposeful civilization..." (p. 35). Marx presupposes that, most certainly, Shakespeare had read accounts of those who had traveled to the New World prior to his writing. Captain Arthur Barlowe, for example, upon his return from a trip to Virginia, describes America as a vast land of plenty and unspoiled nature with natives enjoying a simplistic, virtuous and idyllic existence, completely aligned with nature. America was thus portrayed as a huge beautiful garden in which man could enjoy the perfect pastoral existence—an actual "Arcadia," as described by Sidney in 1590.

Not all travelers to the New World shared Barlowe's view. To others, who experienced violent storms and a primitive land with no civilized offerings to weary arrivals, America was depicted as a raw, inhospitable place to be tamed and dominated through sacrifice and hard labor. Thus, America offered both a paradise and a place of severe hardship, a contradiction that came to be reflected in literature of the times, and certainly in Shakespeare's depiction of his fantasy island of The Tempest. The character Gonzalo muses on the type of empire he would create on this unspoiled island—no disparity between the rich and the poor, no intervening government, living only with nature and its products. The impossibility of this completely pastoral existence for groups of people, however, is clearly demonstrated, as the struggle for power develops between Gonzalo and Prospero, and includes the struggle for dominion over nature. The play's end sets forth the importance of balance between the forces of nature and the forces of civilized man.

The additional theme in The Tempest, as in subsequent American literature, typified by Thoreau's Walden, Melville's Moby Dick and Twain's Huckleberry Finn, is that a man may indeed pass through three "spatial stages,"—life in the city, retreat to nature, and then return to the city, with the "hope that what has been learned...in the wilderness....can be applied to the world," (p. 71). Somehow, there is a belief that man can reform the evils of the city and find a middle ground between urban and rural values and lifestyles.

The Garden

The Garden Summary and Analysis

A truly American pastoral image and ideal began to emerge in the eighteenth century, and it took on decidedly social and political flavors. Historian Robert Beverley set about to commit to writing the history of Virginia from original journals and writings of the early settlers up to his own time (1703). The first settlers, according to Beverley, saw Virginia as a "promised land," unspoiled by civilization, its native inhabitants totally unspoiled by typical European vanities and boundaries of property. In fact, he states, the colony and its surrounding areas were the "'gardens of the world,'" (p. 77). By the end of his work, Beverley is disappointed. He had expected the lush affluent environment and the wonderful traits of the Indians to alter the thought and behavior of English settlers. In fact, it was the opposite. The English came and imposed their civilization upon both the land and the Indians, through the "development of towns, trades, and manufactures," (p. 83). Thus, Beverley hits upon the ambiguity of existence. On the one hand, the Indian lives in the entire garden of Virginia without toil and labor. On the other hand, the English values of "discipline, work and performance"(p. 186) demand that they carve out a replication of their own society in the garden. What Beverley wanted was a reconciliation of these two opposite views of life in nature, a compromise.

Eighty years after Beverley's publication, Jefferson published his Notes on Virginia, and the Enlightenment had changed pastoral thought. First, landscape painting had reached a peak in interest, eighteenth century poets wrote of nature in new ways, and a new respect for nature and agriculture emerged, as opposed to the disorder of city life. Environmentalists extolled the value of agriculture as a means to a nation's wealth. At the same time, moreover, many saw enclosure laws, growth of cities, and the beginnings of industrialization, as a threat to the "...moral, aesthetic and, in a sense, metaphysical superiority..." of the rural way of life.

What America appeared to offer in the eighteenth century was a "middle state" for man. He would not be the primitive inferior creature living in nature, nor would he be the man of intellect, privilege and "civilized" society. He would be an industrious, independent individual, who farmed the land, enjoyed the comforts of what he produced, and found pleasure in both simplicity of life, which included some civility as well. This peculiarly American pastoral ideal was suggested by a number of European scholars, to include Scottish Hugh Blair in his lectures on rhetoric, an anonymous author of the pamphlet, "The Golden Age," and J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur in his Letters From An American Farmer. "In The Letters, as elsewhere in our literature, the voice we hear is that of a man who has discovered the possibility of changing his life...the chance for a simple man, who does actual work, to labor on his own property in his own behalf. It gives him a hope for the leisure and economic sufficiency formerly—which is to say in Europe—reserved for another class," (p. 111). Frontiersmen, however, were not characterized as pastoral agents by the Eastern farmers. Like the Indian savages, they were wild, untamed, and animalistic. The Eastern farmer now sees pastoral life as an

improved nature, molded by his labors. Thus, the original American states are set in between the savage primitive existence in raw nature of the West and the European courtliness of the advantaged classes.

Thomas Jefferson's Notes on Virginia, written in response to a French diplomat's questions, confirm again the pastoral ideal of Crevecoeur. He extols the virtues of the rural farming lifestyle, as opposed to the primitive barbarism of the Indian and the fraudulently "civilized" society of England. The Revolutionary War was not yet over when Jefferson wrote his Notes, however, and a type of industrialization had formed as a part of the war effort. While many believed the foundation had been laid for permanent "systems of manufacture" (p. 123), Jefferson saw such progress as a threat to the "moral center of a democratic society," (p.123). It was his firm belief that America's focus should remain on farming, with the purchase of manufactured goods from other countries. Indeed, "'for the general operations of manufacture, let our workshops remain in Europe,'"(p. 125). It was in this societal structure, Jefferson believed, that the farmer could pursue self-sufficiency and moral righteousness. Workers in factories, says Jefferson, are wholly dependent upon others for their livelihood and have no access to the land—an oppressive lifestyle which breeds degeneracy and moral disease.

In Jefferson's ideal America, then, there is equality and sameness of purpose for all men. This ideology of equality would later become the backbone of Jackson's "common man" political philosophy, which profoundly influenced American politics. Yet Jefferson knew, as did Jackson, that American ingenuity and desire for self-sufficiency would, eventually, lead to manufacturing as a logical outcome. It was Jefferson's hope, however, that such manufacture would still honor the farmer, and America could avoid the crowded cities and workshops of Europe. Ultimately, Jefferson came to believe that true independence for America meant that manufacturing had to be developed, no matter how distasteful it might be to his pastoral ideal.

For at least one hundred years after Jefferson, Americans held to his pastoral ideal. As cities grew, people moved west to form new agrarian societies, keeping alive the original philosophy that the independence, freedom, and moral superiority of working with the land was the ideal existence. At the same time, the industrial revolution was fast encroaching upon that ideal, its proponents seeing progress as the ultimate salvation, independence, and power of this nation.

The Machine

The Machine Summary and Analysis

As steam power continued to alter production and transportation in England, Americans continued to accept the belief that such power would never be a part of their own country. By the end of the eighteenth century, ninety per cent of Americans lived on farms, and the vast western portion of the continent remained largely unsettled. Geography itself, then, appeared to prevent industrialism. Machines, however, particularly those that could be used in milling, were welcomed, as were steamboats that could navigate rivers.

A little known figure in U.S. history, Tench Coxe, was a Philadelphia merchant who later became an assistant to Alexander Hamilton and whose speeches at the Society for Political Inquiries spoke of the value of industrialism in America. He foresaw manufacturing as an inevitable trend in America in another speech, this time to the Pennsylvania Society for the Encouragement of Manufactures and the Useful Arts. His strong belief that only domestic manufacture would guarantee America's independence and security was becoming much more widely accepted. Unlike cottage industry, Coxe concludes, the use of machines will free the nation's population to pursue western settlement and more agricultural production. Unlike European factories, moreover, Coxe is convinced that the wide span of land and the purity of air will make manufacturing far more healthy than it currently was in the smoke-filled darkness and consistent lack of sun in England. In America, factories could spread out and provide fr more pleasant pastoral conditions for their workforces.

The new "industrialism" was certainly not without its critics. Thomas Carlyle, British author, decried the disruption of both nature and the natural state of man by the increasing mechanization of production by machines. Further, Carlyle states that industrialism concentrates wealth into the hands of a few, "'increasing the distance between rich and poor,'" and encroaches into every aspect of human existence, to include the arts, science, politics and religion. In sum, Carlyle states that industrialism alters every aspect of man's existence, including "thought and feeling," (p. 174). This, he posits, devalues man as a creative, imaginative being, by placing too much emphasis on the external environment.

Subsequent thinkers, such as Hegel and Marx, repeat Carlyle's thoughts, claiming that, in and industrialized, capitalistic society, the masses become "alienated" from their work, unable to enjoy either the very process of production or the products they produce. The worker, as well, becomes a "mere commodity for sale," (p. 177). Emerson spoke of man's "detachment" from his own labors and believes in his own "powerlessness" to achieve inner peace and happiness. In opposition to this thought, however, others saw industrialization, the growth of cities, factory systems, new roads, steamboat travel, and thirty thousand miles of railroad, as positive transformation of the landscape, even to the west of the Mississippi River. There was little opposition to this

transformation, moreover, as Americans saw this progress as a means to produce more and enjoy a lifestyle that could now include intellectual and artistic pursuits. Machines would improve society as a whole, argued industrial proponents, even transforming "a wasteland into a garden" and allowing all Americans a sharing of plenty, (p. 183).

Nothing did more to seal the fate of the industrial age in America than the railroad. "...no one needs to spell out the idea of progress to Americans. They can see it, hear it, and, in a manner of speaking, feel it as the idea of history most nearly analogous to the rising tempo of life," (p. 193). American writers of the times, Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville, Tocqueville, and Twain, all responded to this new industrial age. Many of them viewed new mechanical inventions as a form of art, just as poetry, literature or music, embodying the creative intellect of the mind in manifestation. Others had misgivings. While certainly understanding the benefits of the new technology, writers like James Lanman characterized trains as "'iron monsters...breathing smoke and flame...leaping forward like some black monster...'" (p. 207). Daniel Webster spoke of the nuisance of the track and noise so close to his own farm, injuring the landscape, but lauded its merits, nevertheless, convinced that the pastoral ideal and technology could co-exist successfully. To him, as to most Americans, the railroad would serve to unify the country, allowing a vast co-mingling of East, West, North and South. Most Americans agreed and welcomed not just the railroad, but steamboats and telegraph wires as well.

As increased industrialization came to America, however, so came cities with factories, resultant worker abuses, and the divisive class structure of laissez-faire capitalism. Writers and orators now predicted a separation of man from his natural environment and the creation of an inhumane community characterized by dirty cities, harsh, dark, lengthy working conditions in factories, and a general alienation from the original pastoral ideal of America. A relatively unknown reformer, John Orvis, wrote predicting all of the evils of industrialization, but he was certainly dismissed by the more prominent politicians and orators. Indeed, the majority of Americans leaned toward the prevailing climate, that of focus on increased mechanization and progress, leaving the minority pastoral ideologist within the realm of "dreamers" and unrealistic idealists. The dominant belief remained that, once an individual had accumulated a small sum from factory labor, he or she could move west, thus becoming a part of the emerging agrarian society. Further, the railroad provided this opportunity to bring civilization to the West. The prevailing attitude, then, was that Americans had found the perfect "middle ground" between the original agrarian ideal and the opportunity and wealth of growing industrialization. Warnings of future clashes between these two forces were largely ignored or dismissed.

Two Kingdoms of Force

Two Kingdoms of Force Summary and Analysis

There is a specific form of romantic pastoralism expressed in American literature of the nineteenth century, and this chapter discusses several responses of well-known authors to the conflict between the pastoral ideal and the new industrialism of the age. Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote a great deal about man's relationship with nature, especially as mechanization was changing that relationship. To him, nature was the grand provider, giving man all of the raw materials with which men of science could then use to serve all of mankind. To him, acceptance of the growing factory system in New England is a given, the West being preserved for agrarian occupations. Reconciling technology with transcendental thought is rather interesting, given that Emerson's initial thrust was withdrawal from modern society and immersion in nature. He saw, however, the potential of the machine to "unearth the hidden graces of landscape" (p. 234), thus "science and technology can be made to serve a rural ideal," (p. 236). His prediction was that men of understanding would create the technology, while men of reason (perhaps akin to Plato's philosopher kings) would provide the spiritual leadership, maintaining the supremacy of natural values.

This reconciliation was further supported by Henry David Thoreau, as he retreated to Walden Pond for a year and concluded that man must simplify his life to be truly whole. To Thoreau, the new age of mechanism had made man a slave to his tools. His days were joyless routines of unhappy compliance with the requirements of his environment, void of leisure communing with nature, which produces "delight" and supplies "value and meaning," (p. 249). Thoreau's year at Walden Pond certainly gave him generous respite from the forces of industrialism in Concord, but as he concludes, there is no escaping the march of history and progress that machines and technology will impose. Perhaps the best man can achieve is temporary respite by returning to nature at temporary interludes in order to contemplate its essence while the world around him marches forward. These interludes, he insists, may often require a retreat into a spiritual consciousness in which the world of objects is mentally shut out. It appears that he calls upon man to practice meditation and frequent immersion into the pastoral and contemplative realm of literature.

Nathaniel Hawthorne expresses a much more ominous vision of the industrial revolution. In his short story, "The Unpardonable Sin," fire becomes symbolic of man's insatiable desire to forge forward in technology and, in the end, this continual pursuit of new knowledge destroys Ethan Brand, symbolic of all modern men. To Hawthorne, man's original purpose of cooperation with, rather than dominance and alteration of nature, would be disastrous for Americans. Hawthorne had the agreement of other nineteenth century writers in this prediction.

Herman Melville's works, Typee and Moby Dick, appear to ask the same questions posed by Hawthorne. Can man find some reconciliation between the modern, industrial,

urbanization of contemporary America and his desire and need for the peace and renewal of a relationship with nature? What of the baser side of nature, that which threatens to harm, if not destroy, man? Thus, the ship Pequod becomes symbolic of modern society, the ocean of nature, and, beneath the ocean, the primitive danger of nature. Somehow, then, man (Ishmael) must reconcile these forces. The symbol of modern society does not survive, but Ishmael does. Originally in agreement with Ahab and the crew, Ishmael comes to reject their position, not proposing a unification with primal nature, but, rather, finding the middle ground, existing within modern society and yet rejecting its baser accompaniments and developing a full appreciation for and need to preserve, pastoral ideals. Whaling, Melville posits, is a technological activity, with a complete division of labor, and yet "it remains a bloody, murderous hunt," (p. 296). In the end, Ishmael speaks Melville's true theme—man reveres nature but engages in "plundering" it for his own selfish aims and commitment to progress without thought of consequence. Ishmael survives as symbolic of those individuals who must continue to warn man of the disastrous effects of the destruction of nature.

The work which Marx believes to most exemplify and solidify the pastoral idea, as it relates to the peculiarly American experience, is Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn. Twain's writing career began out of nostalgia for the "old days" on the Mississippi River, a time when piloting involved an intimacy with that body of water that no technology or education could teach. The pilot "...must know the river by day and by night, summer and winter, heading upstream and downstream. He must memorize the landscape," (p. 320). In learning all of this, however, the pilot loses an appreciation for the totality of the river's beauty and its essence as an object of pure nature. It is reduced to science, as man subjects it to analysis for wind, weather, treacherous spots, and fishing capacity.

The tale of Huckleberry Finn opens with Huck's despair over his current living conditions in the "civilized" home of the widow Douglas. He must leave and retreats, ultimately, to an island, eventually joined by the Negro Jim. There, he enjoys a blissful encounter with pure nature. Pursued by townspeople, Huck and Jim are forced to take to the river where, again, they commune with another aspect of nature. As a symbolic statement, however, Twain causes the raft to be destroyed by a steamboat, apparently saying that progress and technology cannot be avoided. Despite the overriding theme of criticism of society and slavery, Twain resurrects the raft, through Jim's efforts, and the immersion into nature resumes. Twain's descriptions of natural environments are amazing pieces of art—jewels of sense and narration by Huck. While the novel is a complex work of numerous themes and statements, the conflict between nature and progress, and man's response to this, is certainly apparent. Huck chooses nature over progress, but the choice is not so easily made for most. Of course, progress will follow Huck as it will all men, whose attempts to avoid it involve simply moving westward.

Twain's concern with the dilemma of society's adjustment to technological progress was perhaps most significantly reflected in his novel A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court. At first a hero, the Yankee brings nineteenth century technology to a primitive people. In the end, however, the entire experiment backfires and as the Yankee's friend Clarence states, '"We had conquered. In the end we were conquered."' Twain seems to

have adopted the pessimistic belief that, as man becomes more technologically driven, the technology will destroy his humanness.

More modern writers, in commenting on American literature of the nineteenth century, tend to see its basis as two conflicting thoughts or values which must inevitably clash, and as a dialectic, produce a new view which must then clash with yet another thought or value, to produce yet a new view. American literature, then, must be seen as that of any nation's, as peculiarly reflective of the environment in which it is produced. Nineteenth century America witnessed the rapid and pervasive transformation of a postcard agrarian existence into a predominantly industrialized society. The transformation was so rapid, in fact, that literature could not ignore it as the most significant aspect of life upon which to comment. The conflicts and contradictions of change consumed politics, economics, social structures, and, of course, the arts. It is through the arts, however, that men dealt with the emotional impact of this change. Authors in particular used metaphors and sensory language to speak to the almost violent, ugly, and assaulting aspect of technology on towns which had previously been clean, quiet, idyllic places of residence. The entire episode of the incursion of industrialism is summarized by Henry Adams in his autobiographical work, The Education of Henry Adams. Here, Adams traces the evolution from his early childhood. His images of the "Dynamo" (machine) and the Virgin (America before the machine) pose a stark contrast, the Dynamo threatening to destroy the Virgin. Prophetic for his time, Adams even envisioned a future in which science would control man..."'and the human race commit suicide by blowing up the world,'" (p. 350). Henry James repeats Adams' despondency in his work The American Scene (pub. 1907).

Epilogue: The Garden of Ashes

Epilogue: The Garden of Ashes Summary and Analysis

Today, the United State is a non-agrarian society, only one in ten Americans actually living on a farm. Indeed, farming has become an industry itself. Nature seems to be expendable to modern man, as he constructs edifices, parking lots, and roads, pollutes his air and dirties his waterways. Yet, somewhere, within the deep thoughts, there remains the ideal of a pastoral environment in which man can live in cooperation with nature. This is "sentimental pastoralism," the type that is but a temporary dream. "Complex Pastoralism," addressed by more modern authors, such as Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Faulkner, accept the reality of history and thus the reality that man must find some reconciliation between the pastoral ideal and the industrial age. Modern writers, including author Marx, seem to be pessimistic in their view that such a reconciliation can occur. The humane society that once was the vision of a pastoral society has been reduced to "..a token of individual survival," (p. 364). The individual who chooses a pastoral life is an isolated one, "..alienated from society, alone and powerless..." (p. 364). If we are to reverse this continuing trend, it will not be accomplished by artists, but, rather, by politics and government, the only forces which can effect significant and lasting change.

Characters

Robert Beverley

One of the first colonial writers, Beverley's work, History and Present State of Virginia, published in 1705, portrays the original pastoral ideal in America. Using original sources, he relates the descriptions of the first arrivals, depicting Virginia as a "natural garden," close to paradise. His enthusiasm for the colony was obvious, as he described the untainted land and the natives who were not "'corrupted with those Pomps and Vanities, which had depraved and enslaved the Rest of Mankind,'" (p. 77). He was perhaps the first writer to pose the essential question that would face the settlers: would they live like the Indians, in a natural primitive state, or would they bring some of their cultural mores with them, building villages and towns and developing the land through farming? This was, indeed, the essential question, for it dealt with the concept of progress versus raw nature, and man's desire for both. Beverley's ambivalence is apparent by the end of his work. On one hand, he glorifies the Indians who live in the large garden of Virginia, without the confines of more "civilized" Europeans. On the other, however, he criticizes the early settlers for the laziness with respect to clearing land for building and farming, and for their general lack of work and performance. Progress versus primitive pastoralism is thus set as the conflict which is to plague Americans from that point forward.

J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur

Author of Letters From an American Farmer, Crevecoeur's farm became the symbol of typical husbandry in colonial America. All men, he states, are like "plants," who flourish and derive their nature from the soil. The American farmer, though simple and perhaps uneducated, can, nonetheless, take a piece of land, cultivate it and own the fruits of his own labor. This self-sufficiency gives him a freedom and independence not available in Europe and allows the possibility of a truly egalitarian society to be conceived. Crevecoeur adds to the "pastoral ideal" of America by proposing that it will result in democratic ideals of freedom and equality. Thus, the colonist is in a middle ground between the social and economic class distinctions of Europe and the primitive life of the Indians who have no "civilized" institutions. The small farm becomes the symbol of the uniquely American pastoral ideal in Crevecoeur's work, and this ideal takes hold. Political economists and statesmen of the time come to believe that agriculture would remain a way of life in America for centuries.

Thomas Jefferson

Author of Notes on Virginia, in response to questions from a French diplomat, Jefferson took great pains to describe the geography of the colony in detail. Within his descriptions, however, are impassioned statements regarding the value of a rural life

and an affirmation of the pastoral ideal in America. To Jefferson, the farmers are the "people of God," those at the "moral center" of their communities. Though he initially rejected the idea of manufacturing in America, he later came to accept its inevitability. It remained his belief, however, that the agrarian life was far superior and more natural for Americans.

Thomas Carlyle

An English writer of the nineteenth century, Carlyle criticized the new industrialism of both England and the United States. To him, the abiding focus on mechanization, technology and factory systems had caused an imbalance in society. Wealth was increasingly held by a few capitalists, widening the socioeconomic gap between rich and poor. Further, man was ignoring the other aspects of humanness, his creativity and his emotional needs, for the sake of technological progress.

Tenche Coxe

A merchant in Pennsylvania, Coxe had a reputation for "questionable" activity during the Revolutionary War, but was never charged with suspected treason. He later became an assistant to Alexander Hamilton and became a strong proponent of mechanization and industrialism. According to Coxe, such progress as could be achieved by the continued use of technology would be the salvation of the struggling economy of America following the Revolutionary War. Coxe was the ultimate pragmatist, insisting that increased industrialism would eventually allow America to take its place as a world power.

Daniel Webster

A U.S. Senator, Webster was known for his oratorical skills. He owned a farm in New Hampshire, near the start point of the Northern Railroad and delivered a speech at its opening. A few months later, he spoke at the opening of another section of the same railroad. In both speeches, he extolled the virtues of technological progress, stating that the railroad would become a force for "national unity" and "social equality." While agreeing that the railroad had "desecrated" some beauty of the landscape, he believed this a small price to pay for such great progress.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

A nineteenth century writer/philosopher, Emerson was concerned with man's relationship to nature. The pastoral ideal was a critical part of Emerson's belief system, but he, as well, saw new machines and inventions to be the product of man's great creativity, and potentially able to free man for more lofty pursuits, including his relationship with his natural environment.

Henry David Thoreau

A disciple of Emerson, Thoreau sought to retreat from society and refine his relationship with nature by spending a year at Walden Pond, maintaining a journal as he did so. Thoreau's goal was to capture the "simple" pastoral life.

Nathaniel Hawthorne

Hawthorne was a nineteenth century writer who held a generally pessimistic view of the impact of industrialism on man. He saw man as becoming less capable of human emotions and feelings as a result of mechanization and technology.

Herman Melville

Melville is another nineteenth century writer who shared Hawthorne's pessimistic view of the new industrial age. He is most remembered for his work Moby Dick, a tale many see as symbolic of man's self destruction at the hands of industrialization and technological progress.

Samuel Clemens

Under the pen name Mark Twain, Clemens was a prolific writer of the nineteenth century, using irony and humor to address human nature. Twain often dealt with the effects of industrialism on man and seemed to warn Americans that there needed to be a balance between the forces of industrialism and man's need for retreat from them.

Objects/Places

Sleephy Hollow

A wooded area near Concord, Massachusetts

The Tempest

Play written by William Shakespeare at about the same time that the New World was being colonized

The Machine

Refers metaphorically to all industrialism during nineteenth century America

The Garden

Metaphor for the general pastoral landscape of America, as found by the original settlers

Letters From an American Farmer

Book written by J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur, an American farmer of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries

Middle Landscape

The term for a compromise between mechanism and pastoralism, in which both may co-exist, but in modified ways

Husbandry

Term referring to farming occupations

The Young Americans

Published address of Ralph Waldo Emerson, espousing the philosophy of "romantic pastorialism"

Communist Manifesto

Work by Karl Marx in which he stated that industrialization had resulted in man's alienation from his work. He was no longer "spiritually" connected to what he did to earn a living.

Walden

A book by Henry David Thoreau chronicling his year spent in the woods, removed from the "civilized" society of Concord, Massachusetts.

Themes

The Pastoral Ideal in America

The pastoral ideal refers to the initial and continuing belief of Americans in the value of nature, pastoral settings, and the ability to find moral and spiritual strength in its value. When the first explorers arrived in the New World, they saw a lush land which could supply all human needs and natives who used but never abused their natural environment. America was, then, a paradise to those new settlers who farmed and built and raised livestock, and who became completely self-sufficient. This was the idyllic life they wished to preserve always. During the Revolutionary War, some of this early focus on husbandry was interrupted, as production of war materials became necessary. Following independence, the manufacturing experience pushed America into domestic production, which caused the growth of cities and towns that became centers of early manufacturing. The movement west, then, became the attempt to re-assert the "pastoral ideal"—Americans once again settling into natural environments and "engaging" with the land through farming and ranching.

The largest assault on the pastoral ideal, in Marx's eyes, was the railroad. Once transportation ceased to be an issue, it became easy to transport raw materials of nature to production sites and manufactured goods back to the West. The addition of steam power sealed America's fate. As industrialism progressed and continues to progress, however, the sentimental pastoral ideal remains firmly rooted in the American psyche. How Americans reconcile their desires for increased technology and their emotional need to glorify nature will to continue to be a complex political, economic, sociological issue.

Literature Reflects Its Times

The complexity of the American pastoral ideal and the reconciliation of that ideal with progress and industrialism is best portrayed by authors of important literary works. Since literature is so often a reflection of its time, and because nineteenth and early twentieth century America was inundated with technological progress so abruptly, author Marx devotes most of his work to the analysis of the writings of such authors as Emerson, Thoreau, Melville, Hawthorne, Faulkner, and Twain. These works of fiction and non-fiction all address the conflict between the underlying, ever-present pastoral ideal and modern technology, although conclusions differ. Some are optimistic, believing that man can find the appropriate balance between his pastoral and technical life; others are pessimistic, predicting that man's moral and spiritual strength will be sapped and eventually destroyed by his constant drive for progress. Whatever the conclusion, however, all writers of this time state that progress is historically inevitable, and man cannot return to the wholly pastoral conditions of his early years in the New World. The question becomes, rather, how man himself will evolve, as he attempts to use his advancements to dominate nature while, at the same time, professing reverence for it.

In many ways, then, literature of these earlier years predicted the very issues Americans face today—destruction of the environment, loss of personal sense of self, reverence for technology to a fault, and the moral and ethical compromises man makes in the name of progress. The sentimental idea of pastoralism is forever dead, simply a dream of a past era; the new complex idea of pastoralism, that is, man's ability to reconcile reverence for both nature and continued technological advancement, may continue to be the "meat" of literature, though it will be the task of society and its institutions to formalize that reconciliation.

Relationship Between Man and Nature

According to Marx, man's traditional relationship with nature was cooperative in a rather purified and primitive manner. Man was able to use the resources of nature to satisfy his basic needs of food, clothing and shelter, without altering nature in any way. Life was simple, and man freely moved about nature, which in turn continued to replenish itself. Even as man learned to farm, the cooperative aspect was not altered significantly. Certainly, tracts of land were cleared and crops planted, but surrounding the farms, "nature" continued to flourish.

The "pure" cooperation was assaulted by the advent of the machine and ensuing industrialism, phenomena which were transported to America following the Revolutionary War. As technological progress continued, man began to see nature as something to be controlled and to be placed in a secondary position, less valuable than progress itself. Factories replaced farms; railroads cut through land and mountains; cities grew as the factory system required large numbers of people in close proximity. Man was torn from the land and lost his affinity for his original relationship. Americans have continued to "destroy" nature, in the name of progress, so that now we face the potential of destroying ourselves as well. For Marx, the resolutions for this ultimate question and conflict (man's relationship with nature) are left to politicians and governments.

Style

Perspective

Author Leo Marx's perspective is that of an historian and as a twentieth century observer and researcher. As an academic, he is certainly well grounded in American literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and uses this thorough knowledge to demonstrate how authors of both fiction and non-fiction works discussed the basic conflict between the pastoral ideal of the original settlers and the growing encroachment of mechanization that was the result of a rather natural historical progress. The work is filled with excerpts from all major American writers of the time, with serious and complex analysis in order to present the major themes of this work: man's relationship to nature and the conflicts posed by the assault of industrialization upon that relationship. To Marx, analysis of the contemporary literature provides the views of a variety of Americans themselves. Aside from those who damned the destruction of America's natural environment and those who saw industrial progress as more important than preserving nature, many authors, according to Marx, saw compromise and means by which America could industrialize and yet retain its reverence for nature. Marx appears to be thoroughly objective and realistic in his account of the "machine's" assault on the "garden," understanding that historical progress is continually inevitable. In the end, however, he certainly calls upon politicians and governments to resolve the issue of environmental destruction in order to avoid self-destruction.

Tone

Upon completion of this work, the reader is left without much emotional reaction. While one can greatly respect the amount of research and analysis required to complete the book, there is often an overriding need for some subjective thought from the author. Aside from his own interpretations of literature, however, one receives little comment upon the worth of each point of view professed by any given author. Thus, the book must be assigned to that body of literature which is, in essence, purely academic, and this is a bit disappointing. For all of his research and his obvious comprehensive understanding of the conflict between man and nature, Marx seems unable to posit a personal opinion or offer possible resolutions to this conflict. One is left with only one position of the author, that is, that the advent of the machine, symbolized in the work by the locomotive, has irreversibly altered the pastoral ideal of early Americans and has been the single most important factor affecting their social, political, economic, and spiritual behavior. Further, in the final chapter, he admits that nature and the natural environment is horribly at risk, that man may in fact cause his own destruction, and then blithely assigns solutions to the politicians. Again, there is a determined lack of emotional response by Marx to all that appears to trouble modern society, and an abrupt end that leaves the reader just as un-impassioned.

Structure

As an historian, and as one who is chronicling the rapid changes of nineteenth century America, Leo Marx must, by necessity take a chronological approach to this theme, though he begins far before the century of his greatest focus. The first chapter sets the thesis for the book, speaking in general of two types of pastoralism, sentimental and complex, defining each and then setting up his metaphor of a garden and a locomotive, in juxtaposition. The second chapter speaks to the treatment of the peculiarly American pastoral ideal by Europeans, particularly Shakespeare, during the very early days of colonization. He moves on to describe the "garden," or unspoiled America, through the eyes of those who experienced and then wrote about it in the pre- and post-Revolutionary eras. The introduction of the "machine" into the American pastoral landscape, and the reactions of Americans to this new industrialism, are subsequently analyzed, again through the analysis of fiction and non-fiction writers of the nineteenth century. Once the two "kingdoms" occupy the same space, America, there is obviously conflict and a variety of resolutions, again posed by authors of the time. The final chapter, "The Garden of Ashes," Marx acknowledges the inevitability of historical progress, the current state of man's relationship to nature, including his potential for self-destruction, and proposes that solutions lie, not within the writing of contemporary authors but, rather, politicians.

Quotes

...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. (p. 32)

Although fashionable, the image of America as a garden was no mere rhetorical commonplace. It expressed one of the deepest and most persistent of human motives. When Elizabethan voyagers used this device they were drawing upon utopian aspirations that Europeans always had cherished, and that had given rise, long before the discovery of America, to a whole series of idealized, imaginary worlds.....What is more, the association of America with idyllic places was destined to outlive Elizabethan fashions by at least two and a half centuries. It was not until late in the nineteenth century that this way of thinking about the New World lost its grip upon the imagination of Europe and America. (pp. 39-40)

In addition to the genetic connection between The Tempest and America, there is another that can only be called prophetic. By this I mean that the play, in its overall design, prefigures the design of the classic American fables, and especially the idea of a redemptive journey away from society in the direction of nature. As in Walden, Moby-Dick, or Huckleberry Finn, the journey begins with a renunciation. The hero gives up his place in society and withdraws toward nature. But in The Tempest, as in the the best of American pastoral, the moral significance of this move is ambiguous. (p. 69)

...the eighteenth century added a new set of theoretical arguments. Political economists and agricultural reformers now dwelled as never before upon the primacy of agriculture in creating the wealth of nations. While the physiocrats, extremists of the movement, insisted that husbandry was the only true source of economic value, most of the experts, including the incomparable Adam Smith, agreed that agriculture was the primary and indispensable foundation of national prosperity. All of these ideas contributed to the steadily rising prestige of farmers and farming, often reaching the public by way of agricultural reformers and popularizers such as Arthur Young. (p. 98)

America's immediate situation...was a fringe of settlements on the edge of an immense, undeveloped, and largely unexplored continent. At the time nine out of ten Americans were farmers living in a virtually classless society, and all of the best informed statesmen and political economists agreed that agriculture would remain the dominant enterprise of the young nation for centuries to come. To be sure, in retrospect we can see that industrialization already had begun in England, but no one at the time conceived of the process even remotely as we do.....Crevecoeur...is able to imagine a society which will embrace both the pastoral ideal and the full application of the arts, of

power. His farmer is enlisted in a campaign to dominate the environment by every possible means. (pp. 115-116)

The controlling principle of Jefferson's politics is not to be found in any fixed image of society. Rather it is dialectical. It lies in his recognition of the constant need to redefine the "middle landscape" ideal, pushing it ahead, so to speak, into an unknown future to adjust it to every-changing circumstances. (The ideal, in fact, is an abstract embodiment of the concept of mediation between the extremes of primitivism and what may be called "over-civilization.") ...circumstances have changed. A quarter of century earlier it had been possible to imagine, at least when the wishful side of his temperament was in charge, that the choice was still open: America might still have elected "to stand, with respect to Europe, precisely on the footing of China." But this is no longer feasible. In 1816 the choice for America is continuing economic development or one of two unacceptable alternatives: becoming a satellite of Europe or regressing to the life of cavemen. (pp. 139-140)

By 1844 the machine had captured the public imagination. The invention of the steamboat had been exciting, but it was nothing compared to the railroad. In the 1830's the locomotive, an iron horse of fire-Titan, is becoming a kind of national obsession. It is the embodiment of the age, an instrument of power, speed, noise, fire, iron, smoke—at once a testament to the will of man rising over natural obstacles, and, yet, confined by its iron rails to a pre-determined path, it suggests a new sort of fate. (p.191)

The idea that history is a record of more or less continuous progress had become popular during the eighteenth century, but chiefly among the educated. Associated with achievements of Newtonian mechanics, the idea remained abstract and relatively inaccessible. But with rapid industrialization, the notion of progress became palpable; "improvement" were visible to everyone. During the nineteenth century, accordingly, the awe and reverence once reserved for the Deity and later bestowed upon the visible landscape is directed toward technology or, rather, the technological conquest of matter. (p. 197)

The sudden appearance of the machine in the garden is an arresting, endlessly evocative image. It causes the instantaneous clash of opposed states of mind: a strong urge to believe in the rural myth along with an awareness of industrialization as counterforce to the myth. Since 1844, this motif has served again and again to order literary experience. It appears everywhere in American writing. In some cases, to be sure, the "little event" is a fictive episode with only vague, incidental symbolic overtones. But in others it is a cardinal metaphor of contradiction, exfoliating, through associated images and ideas, into a design governing the meaning of entire works. (p. 229)

If technology is the creation of man, who is a product of nature, then how can the machine in the landscape be thought to represent an unresolvable conflict? Men of genius, who perceive relations hidden from other men, disclose the underlying unity of experience and so help to direct the course of events. A great poet not only asserts but exemplifies the possibility of harmony. When he assimilates new and seemingly artificial

facts into the texture of a poem, he provides an example for all men. What he achieves in art they can achieve in life. (p. 242)

Throughout Moby Dick, Melville uses machine imagery to relate the undisguised killing and butchery of whaling to relate the undisguised killing and butchery of whaling to the concealed violence of "civilized" Western society. In fact the primitive urge back of the machine is what seems to invest it with a sense of fatality. ("We have constructed a fate," Thoreau says of the railroad, "an Atropos, that never turns aside.") To Ismael the line is at once a token of man's inescapable need to consume the whale and of the whale's deadly hold upon him. (p. 296)

Though he (Chase) admitted that the peculiar traits of American writing must be traceable to the special character of the environment, he did not recognize the bearing upon his theory of certain controlling facts of life in nineteenth-century America. Above all, he ignored the unbelievably rapid industrialization of an "underdeveloped" society. Within the lifetime of a single generation, a rustic and in large part wild landscape was transformed into the site of the world's most productive industrial machine. It would be difficult to imagine more profound contradictions of value or meaning than those made manifest by this circumstance. Its influence upon our literature is suggested by the recurrent image of the machine's sudden entrance into the landscape. (p. 343)

Gatsby would let faith oust fact. He is another example of the modern primitive described by Ortega, the industrial Naturmensch who is blind to the complexity of modern civilization; he wants his automobile, enjoys it, yet regards it as the "spontaneous fruit of an Edenic tree." Nick also is drawn to images of pastoral felicity, but he learns how destructive they are when cherished in lieu of reality. He realizes that Gatsby is destroyed by his inability to distinguish between dreams and facts. In the characteristic pattern of complex pastoralism, the fantasy of pleasure is checked by the facts of history. (p. 363)

Topics for Discussion

Contrast the terms "sentimental pastoralism" and "complex pastoralism," as explained by author Marx. Marx states that the sentimental variety is still expressed by Americans today by what types of activities?

Describe Jefferson's republic of the middle landscape.

The title, The Machine in the Garden, is a metaphor. Explain this metaphor as it applies to nineteenth century America.

Colonists and Europeans who visited the colonies saw the predominantly agrarian society as a force for equality not available in Europe. Explain the logical progression of this idea. Did industrialization foster greater equality? Why or why not?

To Marx, the single most influential event in the nineteenth century was the railroad. How did the railroad forever alter the traditional pastoral ideal in America?

Melville and Hawthorne shared a pessimistic view of man's future. How did their view relate to industrialization?

In the work, The Education of Henry Adams, the author posits both optimistic and pessimistic views of his time. Describe each of these views.

Marx seems to be saying that, while literature reflects the time in which it is written, it rarely has the power to influence man's behavior. Do you agree or not? Give specific examples to support your opinion.