

clever than Alonso. Prospero relinquishes power, and, what is more, he turns our thoughts to his approaching death. *Et in Arcadia Ego.* In the end we are reminded that history cannot be stopped. The pastoral design, as always, circumscribes the pastoral ideal.³⁴

The pattern is remarkably like the pattern of our typical American fables. To be sure, many of them do not arrive at anything like the resolution of *The Tempest*. The American hero successfully makes his way out of society, but in the end he often is further than Prospero from envisaging an appropriate landscape of reconciliation. Nevertheless, the tacit resolution is much the same. Prospero's island community prefigures Jefferson's vision of an ideal Virginia, an imaginary land free both of European oppression and frontier savagery. The topography of *The Tempest* anticipates the moral geography of the American imagination. What is most prophetic about the play, finally, is the singular degree of plausibility that it attaches to the notion of a pastoral retreat. By making the hope so believable, Shakespeare lends singular force to its denial. *The Tempest* may be read as a prologue to American literature.

III

The Garden

Have you still got humming birds, as in Crèvecoeur? I liked Crèvecoeur's "Letters of an American Farmer," so much. And how splendid Hermann Melville's "Moby Dick" is, & Dana's "Two Years before the Mast." But your classic American literature, I find to my surprise, is older than our English. The tree did not become new, which was transplanted. It only ran more swiftly into age, impersonal, non-human almost. But how good these books are! Is the English tree in America almost dead? By the literature, I think it is.

D. H. Lawrence to Amy Lowell, 1916 *

It may in truth be said, that in no part of the world are the people happier . . . or more independent than the farmers of New England.

Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1797

ALTHOUGH Shakespeare and his contemporaries had thought about the unspoiled terrain of the New World as a possible setting for a pastoral utopia, a fully articulated pastoral idea of America did not emerge until the end of the eighteenth century. The story of its emergence illustrates the turning of an essentially literary device to ideological or (using the word in its extended sense) political uses. By 1785, when Jefferson issued *Notes on Virginia*, the pastoral ideal had been "removed" from the literary mode to which it traditionally had belonged and applied to reality.

But here again it is necessary to insist upon the vital distinction between the pastoral ideal and the pastoral

* From *Amy Lowell: A Chronicle* by S. Foster Damon. Reprinted by permission of Houghton Mifflin Company.

design. In speaking of *The Tempest* as a pastoral we refer to a highly wrought aesthetic form, a complicated way of ordering meanings that cannot be taken to imply any single, clear line of action. But Jefferson's formulation of the pastoral ideal affirms a belief which may serve as a guide to social policy. It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of this distinction in illuminating the obscure borderland where so many of the confusions between art and ideology arise. The implications of Shakespeare's play, taken as a whole, are not at all the same as those of Prospero's "majestic vision," a kind of pastoral dream that *The Tempest* encompasses. Granted that the dream seldom has inspired more exalted expression, the play has the effect, in the end, of checking our susceptibility to such dreams. On the other hand, the idea that the American continent may become the site of a new golden age could be taken seriously in politics. As every American knows, it has been capable of carrying an immense burden of hope. That hope in turn has been encouraged, from the beginning, by descriptions of the New World as a kind of Virgilian pasture—a land depicted as if it might become the scene, at long last, of a truly successful "pursuit of happiness."

It is necessary to stress the "as if": Elizabethan voyagers like Captain Barlowe seldom succeeded, if indeed they ever seriously attempted, to disguise the conventionality of the idiom. Long after the sixteenth century, for that matter, descriptions of America in this vein bore the unmistakable marks of their literary origins. Then, during the eighteenth century, the situation changed. The great revolution in science and technology we associate with Sir Isaac Newton was followed by a massive shift in prevailing ideas about man's relations to nature. An effort was made to rescue the pastoral—the formal literary mode—from

the confines of a decadent convention, but it failed. At the time that the old pastoral was dying, however, Europe was swept by a wave of enthusiasm for rural landscape and rural life. With this new feeling for the country came a fresh idiom, a vocabulary capable of investing the ancient ideal with new vitality.

One of the first colonial writers whose work reveals the affinity between the conditions of life in America and the pastoral ideal is Robert Beverley. His effort to interpret native experience seems to have impelled him, in spite of himself, toward a pastoral conception of society. Let us consider Beverley's *History and Present State of Virginia* (1705), the first full-scale treatment of the subject by a native.

1

Beverley's lively, if artless, book begins with the stock image of America as nature's garden, a new paradise of abundance. One gets the impression that he hit upon the motif in the same cavalier way that he became a historian. In 1703, Beverley, a self-assured, ingenuous Virginia planter, was in London on business. By chance a bookseller asked him to look over a few pages of a manuscript that dealt with Virginia, and the material struck Beverley as so inferior that he went to work at once on a book of his own. Two years later he published *The History and Present State of Virginia*. His research, such as it was, took him back to the reports of the early voyagers, and especially to an account of the new land, already mentioned, that Captain Barlowe had written for Sir Walter Raleigh. Barlowe had depicted Virginia as a natural garden of unbelievable fertility, and later Captain John Smith, drawing upon Barlowe, had elaborated upon the

same theme both in his initial description of Virginia (1612) and in his *Generall Historie* (1624). By Beverley's time, in any event, the convention was well established, and he uses it to set the theme of his *History*. The Country, says Beverley, struck the early voyagers as "so delightful, and desirable; so pleasant, and plentiful; the Climate, and Air, so temperate, sweet, and wholsome; the Woods, and Soil, so charming, and fruitful; and all other Things so agreeable, that Paradice it self seem'd to be there, in its first Native Lustre."¹

Although Beverley was working within an established convention, there can be no doubt that he found it exciting. Indeed, the opening pages of the *History* might serve as a showcase of ideas embraced by the image of America as a new Eden. Here are no hints of uncertainty or skepticism. From the beginning Beverley identifies himself with those worldly Elizabethan explorers who, in their astonishment, suddenly found themselves in a pristine garden. In expounding their views he becomes so enthusiastic that he seems to endorse the total simple logic of Renaissance primitivism. Even the name of the colony, he says, was selected as a tribute to the landscape (as well as the Queen). "Virginia" refers to a land that "did still seem to retain the Virgin Purity and Plenty of the first Creation, and the People their Primitive Innocence. . . ." This intoxicating idea inspires some of Beverley's most exuberant writing. It is also his measure of value. If unimproved nature is the location of all that we desire, then civilization as Europeans have known it can only signify a fall or lowering of man's estate. In Beverley's words, the Indians retained their purity because they had not been

. . . debauch'd nor corrupted with those Pomps and Vanities, which had depraved and enslaved the Rest of Mankind; neither were their Hands harden'd by Labour, nor their Minds corrupted by the Desire of hoarding up Treasure: They were without Boundaries to their Land; and without Property in Cattle; and seem'd to have escaped, or rather not to have been concern'd in the first Curse, *Of getting their Bread by the Sweat of their Brows*: For, by their Pleasure alone, they supplied all their Necessities; namely, by Fishing, Fowling and Hunting; Skins being their only Cloathing; and these too, Five Sixths of the Year thrown by: Living without Labour, and only gathering the Fruits of the Earth when ripe, or fit for use: Neither fearing present Want, nor solicitous for the Future, but daily finding sufficient afresh for their Subsistence.²

The major theme of the *History* is an elaboration of this idea; throughout the book we hear echoes (no doubt uncalculated) of Shakespeare's Gonzalo and, in the distance, Montaigne on cannibals:

. . . for no kind of traffic
Would I admit; no name of magistrate;
Letters should not be known; riches, poverty,
And use of service, none; contract, succession,
Bourn, bound of land, tilth, vineyard, none . . .

In Beverley's *History*, as in *The Tempest*, the landscape provokes a utopian vision. His ideas are grounded in a firm doctrine of geographic determinism: "All the Countries . . . seated in or near the Latitude of *Virginia*, are esteem'd the Fruitfullest, and Pleasantest of all Clymates. . . . These are reckon'd the Gardens of the World. . . ." Beverley devotes one of his four "Books" to a description of the garden or, as he puts it, to "the Natural Product

and Conveniences of Virginia; in its Unimprov'd State, before the English went thither." This whole section is a sustained, itemized tribute to nature's bounty. Beverley's enthusiasm occasionally leads him, as Louis Wright has noted, into the kind of inventive, high-flown boasting that was to become a hallmark of native humor. He tells, for example, of grapes so plentiful that one vine might fill a London cart, of potatoes the thickness of a child's thigh, and of a frog large enough to feed six Frenchmen. As in our Western humor, the line between fact and fancy becomes hazy. But the connection between natural facts and this hyperbolic state of mind could hardly be more plain. The whole book is colored by Beverley's exuberant, early-morning wonder in the face of nature's prodigal power:

About Two Years ago, walking out to take the Air, I found, a little without my Pasture Fence, a Flower as big as a Tulip, and upon a Stalk resembling the Stalk of a Tulip. The Flower was of a Flesh Colour, having a Down upon one End, while the other was plain. The Form of it resembled the *Pudenda* of a Man and Woman lovingly join'd in one. Not long after I had discover'd this Rarity, and while it was still in Bloom, I drew a grave Gentleman, about an Hundred Yards, out of his way, to see this Curiosity, not telling him any thing more, than that it was a Rarity, and such, perhaps, as he had never seen, nor heard of. When we arrived at the Place, I gather'd one of them, and put it into his Hand, which he had no sooner cast his Eye upon, but he threw it away with Indignation, as being ashame'd of this Wagery of Nature.³

So far from being ashamed of the waggery of nature, Beverley is everywhere drawn to the lusty, spontaneous,

primitive life. He devotes one book to a detailed description of Indian culture that anthropologists still regard as a valuable source. Although he comes out with an almost entirely favorable impression of the natives, he is not a doctrinaire primitivist. In the straight historical, or narrative, section of the *History*, for example, he does not shy away from the unpleasant truth about the Indians. He describes the massacre of the colonists in matter-of-fact language. The Indians, he says, use cunning and surprise, "destroying Man, Woman and Child, according to their cruel Way of leaving none behind to bear Resentment." And yet, in spite of such "Hellish Contrivance," when Beverley pauses to reflect upon the origin of these bloody episodes, he invariably puts the ultimate blame on the aloof, superior English:

Intermarriage had been indeed the Method proposed very often by the *Indians* in the beginning, urging it frequently as a certain Rule, that the *English* were not their Friends, if they refused it. And I can't but think it wou'd have been happy for that Country, had they embraced this Proposal: For, the Jealousie of the *Indians*, which I take to be the Cause of most of the Rapines and Murders they committed, wou'd by this Means have been altogether prevented. . . .

The quality, above all, that makes the *History* so engaging is Beverley's remarkable flexibility, his openness to unfamiliar experience, his tolerance and even respect for the vivacious unconstraint of the Indians. He admires their joy in play, and he is contemptuous of the typical European sneer, especially the sanctimonious charge of sexual license:

The *Indian Damsels* are full of spirit, and from thence are always inspir'd with Mirth and good Humour. They

are extreamly given to laugh, which they do with a Grace not to be resisted. The excess of Life and Fire, which they never fail to have, makes them frolicksom, but without any real imputation to their Innocence. However, this is ground enough for the *English*, who are not very nice in distinguishing betwixt guilt, and harmless freedom, to think them Incontinent. . . .⁴

All in all, Beverley's Indians are an admirable people. They are gay, gentle, loving, generous, and faithful. And for him the reason is not far to seek. It is implicit in his controlling image, the garden landscape, and the economic fact for which it stands. The "natural Production of that Country," he says, explains the ease of life, the fabulous freedom from care, hence the charm of the natives. He sums up his reflections on primitive society by noting that natural affluence is what chiefly enables this people to get along

. . . without the Curse of Industry, their Diversion alone, and not their Labour, supplying their Necessities . . . none of the Toils of Husbandry were exercised by this happy People; except the bare planting a little Corn, and Melons, which took up only a few Days in the Summer, the rest being wholly spent in the Pursuit of their Pleasures.

This primitive utopia has an intoxicating effect upon Beverley. He believes in it. It is for him neither a hollow convention nor a wish-fulfillment fantasy. He has seen this innocent and happy people with his own eyes. And, given his assumptions about the inescapable influence of the natural environment upon the character and fortune of men, we are led to expect that the Europeans, as a result of their removal to this virgin land, quickly will be redeemed. The logic of Beverley's ruling metaphor, the

new garden of the world, should result in a *History* that rises, in the end, to an inspired vision of America as paradise regained.⁵

But that is not what happens at all. On the contrary, as Beverley approaches the end he is overcome by a sense of disappointment, disgruntlement, and shame. Looking back, to be sure, one can detect a few hints of this revulsion in the earlier pages. In the narrative section, for example, he is impatient with all those Virginians and agents of the Crown who stand in the way of improvements — especially the development of towns, trade, and manufactures. And when he compares the English with the Indians, he usually takes this tone: "And indeed all that the *English* have done, since their going thither, has been only to make some of these Native Pleasures more scarce, by an inordinate and unseasonable Use of them; hardly making Improvements equivalent to that Damage." The Indians, he observes in the summary of Book III, have "reason to lament the arrival of the *Europeans*, by whose means they seem to have lost their Felicity, as well as their Innocence." Of course this critical view of the colonists could have been held within the thematic pattern of the book, especially if Beverley had shown that the British would be redeemed by the beneficent influence of the new environment. But that is not what he says. When he finally describes the influence of the new setting upon his countrymen, he becomes confused:

In fine, if any one impartially considers all the Advantages of this Country, as Nature made it; he must allow it to be as fine a Place, as any in the Universe; but I confess I am ashame'd to say any thing of its Improvements, because I must at the same time reproach my Country-Men with a Laziness that is unpardonable.⁶

In the closing pages of the *History* a paradox emerges. The new garden of the world, which Beverley has celebrated as the cause of all that is most admirable in the joyous Indian culture, now appears to have had a bad effect upon the English. The apparent contradiction, curiously enough, calls forth some of Beverley's most astonishingly vivid prose. So far from leading him to relinquish his belief in the power of nature over consciousness, his confessed ambivalence inspires him to invest the theme with even greater poetic intensity:

. . . the extraordinary pleasantness of the Weather, and the goodness of the Fruit, lead People into many Temptations. The clearness and brightness of the Sky, add new vigour to their Spirits, and perfectly remove all Splenetic and sullen Thoughts. Here they enjoy all the benefits of a warm Sun, and by their shady Groves, are protected from its Inconvenience. Here all their Senses are entertain'd with an endless Succession of Native Pleasures. Their Eyes are ravished with the Beauties of naked Nature.

What is most remarkable about this account of the American landscape doing its work, through the senses, upon the minds of Europeans, is the degree to which Beverley anticipates the coming fashion in thought and feeling. By 1705 he apparently takes for granted the assumptions of the new sensational psychology. It is a commonplace that the emphasis of the so-called nature poets upon sensory perception and, above all, upon the influence of visible nature, had been prepared by John Locke and the theory of mind expounded in the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690). Locke was widely interpreted to mean that visual images were the primary, if not the exclusive, form in which men gained knowledge of external reality. To popularizers and literary men it seemed

that Locke was identifying perception with seeing, and ideas with visual images. Whether they were in fact misinterpreting Locke's theory, as some scholars maintain, need not concern us. But cultural historians usually refer to Addison's "Pleasures of the Imagination" (1712) and James Thomson's influential poem, *The Seasons* (which began appearing in 1726), as marking the initial influence of these ideas upon aesthetic theory and poetry proper. When Beverley's *History* was published, however, Thomson was five years old, and seven years would pass before the birth of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. This is not to make any grand claim for Beverley's precocity; a new feeling for landscape, especially in painting, already was in the air. But Beverley's *History* does indicate the special appeal that the new epistemology was to have in America; it must have seemed peculiarly apt to a writer attempting to describe, say, how the British in Virginia are "ravished with the Beauties of naked Nature":

Their Ears are Serenaded with the perpetual murmur of Brooks, and the thorow-base which the Wind plays, when it wantons through the Trees; the merry Birds too, join their pleasing Notes to this rural Consort, especially the Mock-Birds, who love Society so well, that whenever they see Mankind, they will perch upon a Twigg very near them, and sing the sweetest wild Airs in the World. . . .

Nor does nature attack only through eyes and ears:

Their Taste is regaled with the most delicious Fruits, which without Art, they have in great Variety and Perfection. And then their smell is refreshed with an eternal fragrancy of Flowers and Sweets, with which Nature perfumes and adorns the Woods almost the whole year round.

Have you pleasure in a Garden? ⁷

But what is Beverley saying? The entire passage is ambiguous. Is he describing how the English have been corrupted, led into temptation, by the incredible bounty and charm of the new country? Or is he describing the regenerative power of nature in Virginia? He continues in this vein:

Have you pleasure in a Garden? All things thrive in it, most surprisingly; you can't walk by a Bed of Flowers, but besides the entertainment of their Beauty, your Eyes will be saluted with the charming colours of the Humming Bird, which revels among the Flowers, and licks off the Dew and Honey from their tender Leaves, on which it only feeds. It's size is not half so large as an English Wren, and its colour is a glorious shining mixture of Scarlet, Green and Gold. Colonel Byrd, in his Garden, which is the finest in that Country, has a Summer-House set round with the Indian Honey-Suckle, which all the Summer is continually full of sweet Flowers, in which these Birds delight exceedingly.

For a moment Beverley seems to offer redemption. The image of the garden is his most evocative trope for the joyous possibilities of life in the New World. It is not surprising, therefore, that he comes closest to revealing the essential cause of his ambivalence in discussing the gardens in Virginia. "A Garden," he explains, a few pages from the end, "is no where sooner made than there, either for Fruits, or Flowers. . . . And yet they han't many Gardens in the Country, fit to bear that name."⁸

If there are few gardens like Colonel Byrd's here it is because, paradoxically, all of Virginia is a garden. The existence of the garden-as-metaphor, nature's garden, has hindered the appearance of gardens-in-fact. Or to put it another way, by the closing pages of the *History* Beverley

is uncovering an ambiguity beneath the image of Virginia as a *garden*. In fact he is using the word in two distinct ways. When Beverley calls Virginia one of the "Gardens of the World," he is speaking the language of myth. Here the garden stands for the original unity, the all-sufficing beauty and abundance of the creation. Virginia is an Edenic land of primitive splendor inhabited by noble savages. The garden, in this usage, joins Beverley's own feelings with that "yearning for paradise" which makes itself felt in virtually all mythology. But when Beverley says that there are too few gardens in Virginia, he is speaking about actual, man-made, cultivated pieces of ground. This image also is an emblem of abundance, but it refers to abundance produced by work or, in Beverley's idiom, improvement. The contradiction between the two meanings of "garden" is a perfect index of the larger difference between the primitive and the pastoral ideals.⁹

Although Beverley uncovers this contradiction, he is far from comprehending it. For he is caught in no mere linguistic ambiguity.* His confusion, that is to say, arises from an inner conflict. On the one hand he is drawn to the Indians and all that they represent: a simple, effortless, spontaneous existence. They strike him as relatively autonomous, happy men. In their sensual, direct, joyous ways they call forth all the feelings that Beverley invests in the garden as a metaphor of the ideal society. But on the other hand he remains an Englishman, product of a

* Contemporary linguistic philosophers of the "Oxford School" do us a great service when they uncover the confusions in the words we use. But it is one thing to say that our language betrays our confused thinking, and quite another to imply that the origin of the problems we are thinking about necessarily is linguistic. In the present case, for example, the important ambiguities in Beverley's language are born of the ambiguities in his experience.

culture that values discipline, work, performance. He knows perfectly well how dangerous it is for the eyes of Europeans to be ravished by the beauties of naked nature:

... they depend altogether upon the Liberality of Nature, without endeavouring to improve its Gifts, by Art or Industry. They sponge upon the Blessings of a warm Sun, and a fruitful Soil, and almost grutch the Pains of gathering in the Bounties of the Earth. I should be ashame'd to publish this slothful Indolence of my Countrymen, but that I hope it will rouse them out of their Lethargy, and excite them to make the most of all those happy Advantages which Nature has given them; and if it does this, I am sure they will have the Goodness to forgive me.

So ends *The History and Present State of Virginia*. It is an ingenuous, vigorous, wonderfully vivid book. The rhythm of statement and counterstatement that begins to emerge toward the end leaves us with a sense of unresolved conflict. Having begun with Nature's garden as his controlling metaphor, Beverley discovers in mid-career that he cannot accept what it implies. He does not like what has happened to the British in Virginia. He denounces them for their soft, slack ways. Yet the apparent source of this evil condition is the lush green land itself, the landscape on which his high hopes had rested at the outset. Although in the end he repudiates the convention with which he began, he is unable to define a new position. Nevertheless, we can make out the direction in which he was moving. What he wanted, after all, was to reconcile his admiration for the primitive life with what he knew of the needs of a truly civilized community. He was looking for a conception of life which would combine (to use the language of Freud) the Indians' high level of instinc-

tual gratification with those refinements of civilization based on performance — work — hence a degree of repression. In other words, he wanted nothing less than the ideal reconciliation of nature and art which had been depicted by writers of pastoral since Virgil's time.

Beverley was groping for the distinction between two garden metaphors: a wild, primitive, or pre-lapsarian Eden in which he thought to have found the Indians, and a cultivated garden embracing values not unlike those represented by the classic Virgilian pasture. At times, in the *History*, he seems on the point of saying as much. And as a matter of fact the landscape of reconciliation, a mild, agricultural, semi-primitive terrain, was soon to become a commonplace in the rising flow of descriptive writing about America. Trying to persuade European friends and relatives to come over, or promoting various business enterprises, many colonists described the new land as a retreat, a place to retire to away from the complexity, anxiety, and oppression of European society. A favorite epithet was *asylum*, a word which also might be used to describe the setting of Virgil's first eclogue or, for that matter, Irving's Sleepy Hollow. In 1710, just five years after Beverley's *History* was published, an anonymous "Swiss Gentleman" writing from South Carolina put it this way:

This Country, perhaps, may not abound so much with those gay and noisy amusements which generally the great and rich affect; but . . . for those who affect Solitude, Contemplation, Gardening, Groves, Woods, and the like innocent Delights of plain simple Nature . . .

this is the place! To describe the country in these terms was to resolve the root contradictions of Beverley's *His-*

tory. It is the resolution implicit in the pastoral ideal. Eighty years after the appearance of Beverley's book his contribution was acknowledged by the foremost celebrant of the pastoral theory of America.¹⁰

2

By 1785, when Jefferson first printed his *Notes on Virginia*, the pastoral idea of America had developed from the dim, semi-articulate compromise hinted toward the end of Beverley's *History* into something like an all-embracing ideology. But then, too, the whole tenor of Western thought had changed. During the eighty years between the two books a whole series of ideas we identify with the Enlightenment helped to create a climate conducive to Jeffersonian pastoral. I am thinking of the widespread tendency to invoke Nature as a universal norm; the continuing dialogue of the political philosophers about the condition of man in a "state of nature"; and the simultaneous upsurge of radical primitivism (as expressed, for example, in the cult of the Noble Savage) on the one hand, and the doctrines of perfectibility and progress on the other. A full discussion of the English background would require a volume in itself. Yet we can get some sense of the way the over-all shift in thought and taste contributed to the pastoral idea of America by noting three closely related preoccupations of the age: the landscape, agriculture, and the general notion of the "middle state" as the desirable, or at any rate the best attainable, human condition.

In the record of Western culture there is nothing to compare with the vogue for landscape that arose in this

period. Today it is difficult to realize that Europeans have not always looked upon the landscape as an object of aesthetic interest and delight. But the fact is that landscape painting emerged as a distinct genre only during the Renaissance, and it did not achieve real popularity until the eighteenth century, when aesthetic interest in natural scenery reached something of a climax. One writer has suggested, in fact, that the arts of travel, poetry, painting, architecture, and gardening might be regarded as having been fused, in this era, into a single art of landscape. Moreover, the problem of judging the relative merits of landscapes produced a large body of aesthetic theory; complex distinctions were made between beautiful, picturesque, and sublime scenery. Nor was the landscape merely the concern of theoreticians. On both sides of the Atlantic ladies and gentlemen traveled great distances to gaze at inspiring vistas. Often they carried Claude glasses, pieces of tinted, framed glass with handles named after Claude Lorrain, who after his death in 1682 had become the most popular landscape painter of the age. When a viewer used the Claude glass the landscape was transformed into a provisional work of art, framed and suffused by a golden tone like that of the master's paintings. The significant fact is that the glass helped to create a pastoral illusion. No painter, with the possible exception of Poussin, has tried harder to depict the Virgilian ideal than Claude. His favorite subject, as described by Kenneth Clark, was a vision "of a Golden Age, of grazing flocks, unruffled waters and a calm, luminous sky, images of perfect harmony between man and nature, but touched . . . with Mozartian wistfulness, as if he knew that this perfection could last no longer than the moment in which it takes possession of our minds." Although their themes may not

be as explicitly Virgilian as Claude's, a similar mood colors the work of many other popular painters of the period.¹¹

Everyone knows that in the eighteenth century English poets also turned their attention as never before to the natural landscape. In the handbooks the work of men like Gay, Thomson, Akenside, Young, Gray, Goldsmith, Burns, and Cowper is often designated as "pre-romantic nature poetry." But we do not think of this school as having anything to do with the pastoral tradition, that is, with the pastoral poem defined as a distinct formal entity. Actually, reams of such poems were being turned out by English poets — in all likelihood more than in any century before or since — but they are largely unreadable: imitative, overstylized, cold, and, in a word, dead. Without question the sorry reputation of the pastoral as the dullest, most artificial of forms stems chiefly from this period. Thus Alexander Pope, who began his career in this vein:

First in these Fields I try the Sylvan Strains,
Nor blush to sport on Windsor's blissful Plains:
Fair Thames flow gently from thy sacred Spring,
While on thy Banks Sicilian Muses sing;
Let Vernal Airs thro' trembling Osiers play,
And Albion's Cliffs resound the Rural Lay.

Pope, it is said, was only sixteen when he wrote his pastorals, but the sad truth is that, dull as they seem, they are more accomplished and engaging than most of their kind written after 1700. Later he called them his most labored verses. What is curious, at least at first glance, is that so brilliant a technician was unable to breathe life into the pastoral at a time when the impulse toward

nature manifestly was vigorous and growing in vigor.*¹² A major difficulty lay in the very notion of provoking Sicilian Muses to song on the banks of the Thames. Even at the time poets and critics had begun to re-examine the whole conception of pastoral. By 1709, when Pope started publishing, a complicated critical debate on the subject had arisen. The neo-classicists, Pope's party, favored close imitation of the ancients; their opponents, the rationalists, wanted to modernize the mode. Starting with the reasonable assumption that the constant element in pastoral is psychological rather than formal, the rationalists (or moderns) argued for the inclusion of native materials. What they wanted was an idyllic poem after the manner of Theocritus and Virgil, but about *English* shepherds set in the *English* landscape. No doubt Spenser's work was the nearest thing to an ideal model. In the vast collection of arid theorizing on the subject, however, there is no recognition of the gulf that was opening between the convention and the feelings that people now had in the presence of nature. Accordingly the pastorals written under the banner of the moderns are on the whole indistinguishable in tone and spirit from the work of their opponents. Here, for example, are a few lines by Ambrose Philips, then generally regarded as the leading practitioner of the new style and Pope's most formidable rival:

HOBBINOL. Full fain, O blest Eliza! would I praise
Thy maiden rule, and Albion's golden days.
Then gentle Sidney liv'd, the shepherds' friend:
Eternal blessings on his shade attend!

* According to Joseph Spence, at one point Pope considered writing "American pastorals." "It might be a very pretty subject for any good genius . . . to write American pastorals; or rather pastorals adapted to several of the ruder nations, as well as the Americans. I once had a thought of writing such and talked it over with Gay. . . ."

LANQUET. Thrice happy shepherds now: for Dorset loves
The country Muse, and our delightful groves;
While Anna reigns. Oh ever may she reign!
And bring on earth a Golden Age again.¹³

In retrospect it is not difficult to see what was happening. While the debate about the character of pastoral poetry went on and on, generating endless speculation, and while Pope and Philips and others were writing their stiff, bookish poems, the old form actually was dying. At the very same time enthusiasm for the landscape was rising on all sides and Addison was laying a theoretical groundwork for a new visual literature. In his 1712 *Spectator* papers on the "Pleasures of the Imagination" he expounds what is in effect an aesthetic corollary to Locke's system. Arguing that sight is the most perfect of the senses and the true source of the pleasure we get from the exercise of the imagination, Addison prepares the way for the modern (romantic) notion of the imagination as a way of knowing. On the spectrum of modes of perception, with the gross sensual pleasures such as touch at one pole, and the refinements of the pure intellect (understanding) at the other, he locates the imagination in the middle position. It mediates between the brutish senses and the abstract intelligence. Although he grants to the powers of the understanding the highest place, he also notes certain ways in which the imagination is more effective and, by implication, more important: it offers obvious, easily acquired pleasures. "It is but opening the eye," he says, "and the scene enters."¹⁴

What kind of scene? What objects are likely to provide the greatest pleasure? If Addison had to choose, he would choose works of nature over works of art. No mere art, he says, can provide that sense of "vastness and immensity"

that we get from nature itself. Yet he does not identify the natural with the wild. In fact, he says, "we find the works of nature still more pleasant, the more they resemble those of art." It is the mingling of mind with brute matter that is most affecting. "Hence it is that we take delight in a prospect which is well laid out, and diversified with fields and meadows; woods and rivers; . . . in any thing that hath such a variety or regularity as may seem the effect of design, in what we call the works of chance." Applying this principle to taste in gardens, Addison rejects the formal English style, with its geometrically sculptured trees, in favor of the more "natural" style prevailing in France and Italy. In those countries, he says, "we see a large extent of ground covered over with an agreeable mixture of garden and forest, which represent every where an artificial rudeness, much more charming than that neatness and elegancy which we meet with in . . . our own country."¹⁵

In effect Addison is building a theoretical bridge between the ideal of the old pastoral, the imaginary landscape of reconciliation, and a new attitude toward the environment more congenial to a scientific and commercial age. Indeed, the "mixture of garden and forest" with its "artificial rudeness" points toward the pastoral image of America. Addison extends the notion of the garden to larger and larger tracts of land until he seems to be talking about the whole rural scene as if it were one vast garden. The formal style of garden which he rejects embodies a purely aristocratic, leisure-class ideal of conspicuous waste. It separates beauty from utility and work. "It might, indeed, be of ill consequence to the public," he notes, "as well as unprofitable to private persons, to alienate so much ground from pasturage, and

the plow. . . ." Instead, he proposes a garden landscape that is in fact a farmland:

But why may not a whole estate be thrown into a kind of garden by frequent plantations, that may turn as much to the profit, as the pleasure of the owner? A marsh overgrown with willows, or a mountain shaded with oaks, are not only more beautiful, but more beneficial, than when they lie bare and unadorned. Fields of corn make a pleasant prospect, and if the walks were a little taken care of that lie between them, if the natural embroidery of the meadows were helpt and improved by some small additions of art, and the several rows of hedges set off by trees and flowers, that the soil was capable of receiving, a man might make a pretty landscape of his own possessions.¹⁶

Within a few years James Thomson was following Addison's lead. Although his work cannot be described as pastoral in the old, strict meaning of the term, there is a more important sense in which it is continuous with the Virgilian tradition. To Pope, or, for that matter, to Philips, pastoral was a name for a fixed body of poetic conventions, and they had presided over its death. But if we take the vital element in pastoral to be the design, the ordering of meaning and value around the contrast between two styles of life, one identified with a rural and the other with an urban setting, then the pastoral was by no means dead. On the contrary, Thomson was helping to save the mode by fashioning a new idiom, a language closer to the actual feelings that men had about nature. Although strongly influenced by Virgil, Thomson had the wit to dispense with many of the formal devices of traditional pastoral and address himself to experience.

At once, array'd
In all the colours of the flushing year

By Nature's swift and secret-working hand,
The garden glows, and fills the liberal air
With lavish fragrance; while the promis'd fruit
Lies yet a little embryo, unperceiv'd,
Within its crimson folds. Now from the town,
Buried in smoke, and sleep, and noisome damps,
Oft let me wander o'er the dewy fields,
Where freshness breathes, and dash the trembling drops
From the bent bush, as through the verdant maze
Of sweetbriar hedges I pursue my walk;
Or taste the smell of dairy . . .

To our taste the language of "The Seasons" (1790) may seem excessively literary, but we can hardly fail to recognize a new resonance, an awareness of topography actually perceived that rarely, if ever, gets into the stock pastorals of the age. It seems "something strange," said Joseph Warton in 1756, speaking of Pope, "that in the pastorals of a young poet there should not be found a single rural image that is new." The crucial difference lies in the particularity of Thomson's imagery: the town buried in smoke, the walk through a maze of sweetbriar hedges, the smell of cattle strong enough to taste. Gone are the "flowery meads," "verdant vales," "mossy banks," and "shady woods" of the standard poetic landscape of the age. Although we recognize a stock pastoral contrast here, most of Thomson's contemporaries would have denied that "The Seasons" was a pastoral poem. Actually, the poem epitomizes an early stage in the revitalizing of the pastoral design that would culminate in Wordsworth's *The Prelude*. In these lines Thomson prefigures a characteristic Wordsworthian topography: a town of "noisome damps" set against a country landscape. What adds to the significance the passage holds for us is the fact that young

Thomas Jefferson copied most of it into his commonplace book.¹⁷

In recent years scholars have clarified the relation between the vogue for landscape as an aesthetic object and the great scientific revolution that began in the seventeenth century. In the first place, as knowledge of the physical universe rapidly increased, a new sort of environmentalism was encouraged in every department of thought and expression. The psychology of Locke demonstrated how meaning was derived, through sense perception, from the surrounding world of objects. Yet the scene "out there" no longer was conceived as it had been in Shakespeare's time. Telescopes and microscopes were uncovering a vast, orderly cosmos behind the visible mask of nature. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that a new mode of feeling, a heightened responsiveness to the environment now developed. In a sense the change in aesthetic attitudes toward nature was as revolutionary as the change in science. For now a well-composed landscape, whether depicted in words or paint, might arouse some of the feelings that men had when they contemplated the grand design of the Newtonian universe.

Although scientific knowledge seemed to drain certain traditional religious myths of their cogency and power, so that it no longer was quite possible to read Genesis as it once had been read, the same knowledge enabled artists to invest the natural world with fresh mythopoetic value. The movements of the heavenly bodies, space (an awesome, unimaginable infinity of space), and the landscape itself all were to become repositories of emotions formerly reserved for a majestic God. It was not enough to call this newly discovered world beautiful; it was sublime.

But the conventions of the old pastoral provided a totally inadequate vehicle for such ideas and emotions. The pastoral, said Dr. Johnson, is an "easy, vulgar, . . . disgusting" mode; whatever images it supplied were "long ago exhausted." Meanwhile, a large audience was being instructed in the appreciation of the landscape as a great religious metaphor, an expositor (in Emerson's fine phrase) of the divine mind.¹⁸

In the same period the importance of landscape was enhanced by a new veneration for certain of its sociological or economic meanings. There was nothing new, to be sure, about the expression of agrarian pieties. In England, much earlier, the general renaissance of classical learning had helped to intensify native respect for agriculture. Any number of Greek and Latin authors besides Virgil provided models of praise for husbandry: Hesiod, Xenophon, Cato, Cicero, Varro, and Horace among them. Then, too, the glamorous prospect of settling new lands, remote from centers of civilization, added to the appeal of rural as against urban life. The stock literary contrast between the happiness and innocence of a bucolic golden age and the corrupt, self-seeking, and disorderly life of the city (or court) had been a ruling motif of Elizabethan literature. Often it was invoked with high seriousness, as an apparent affirmation of a pastoral ethic that Sidney had compressed into a tidy couplet:

Greater was that shepheards treasure,
Then this false, fine, Courtly pleasure.

Although we generally assume that this simple moral scheme is offered ironically, many readers then and now have taken it straight. According to Hallett Smith, for ex-

ample, most Elizabethan writers of pastoral were seriously committed to the whole system of value which turns on the "rejection of the aspiring mind." Whether they were or not, the fact remains that they provided a paradigm for the agrarian celebration. By substituting the husbandman for the shepherd in Smith's account of the pastoral ethic, it was easy to transform the farmer into a cult figure. Instead of striving for wealth, status, and power, he may be said to live a good life in a rural retreat; he rests content with a few simple possessions, enjoys freedom from envying others, feels little or no anxiety about his property, and, above all, he does what he likes to do.¹⁹

To this traditional literary motif 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.

But there also was a curious strain of extravagance running through the cult, a seemingly neurotic tendency that these rational theories cannot explain. After the middle of the century, among the upper classes, the taste for the bucolic rose to an extraordinary pitch of faddish excitement. A passion for gardening and playing farmer cropped up in remote villages of England as well as at the court of Louis XVI. Some of the fever seems to have been pro-

voked by a recognition, however inchoate, of the impending threat to the supremacy of rural values. The early encroachment of what we would call industrialization becomes obvious, for instance, in Oliver Goldsmith's popular poem, "The Deserted Village." Published about the time the craze reached its peak, in 1770, the poem is a lament for the charms of rural life which the Enclosure Acts apparently were destroying. The whole situation is remarkably like that of Virgil's first eclogue. Here again the idyllic mood is intensified by the hostile policies of the state; like Virgil, Goldsmith dwells upon the eviction of the "laboring swain" from "lovely bowers of innocence and ease." Part of the effect is achieved by glossing over the distinction between the countryman who actually does the work and the gentleman (or poet) who enjoys rural ease. But the point, after all, is to idealize a rural way of life. By having the swain, like a traditional literary shepherd, enjoy both the ease of the rich and the simple honesty of the poor, Goldsmith is able to suggest (as William Empson has put it) a "beautiful relation" between the two classes. What is important about the rural world, in any event, is not merely the agricultural economy but its alleged moral, aesthetic, and, in a sense, metaphysical superiority to the urban, commercial forces that threaten it. Both the tone and the thematic design of "The Deserted Village" will reappear in American responses to industrialization. As a matter of fact, Goldsmith foresees the migration of the rural muse:

Ev'n now, methinks, as pond'ring here I stand,
I see the rural virtues leave the land.
Down where yon anch'ring vessel spreads the sail . . .

The vessel, needless to say, is bound for America, and when it sails "sweet Poetry" (that "charming nymph")

will be aboard. In the New World Englishmen will have another chance to realize the village ideal, a social order represented neither by the hideous wilderness:

Those poi's'nous fields with rank luxuriance crown'd,
Where the dark scorpion gathers death around;
Where at each step the stranger fears to wake
The rattling terrors of the vengeful snake;

nor by the European city where the swain flees only
To see profusion that he must not share;
To see ten thousand baneful arts combin'd
To pamper luxury, and thin mankind . . .²⁰

A belief in the superiority of rural life was a sociological corollary, for Goldsmith's generation, to the widely accepted ethical doctrine that the "middle state" was the best of all possible human conditions. According to this venerable idea, man is the creature who occupies the middle link in the "great chain of being," the point of transition between the lower and higher, animal and intellectual forms of being. A grand, compelling metaphor, it figures a moral scheme which Arthur Lovejoy calls the "ethic of the middle link." Men, in this view, must accept an unsatisfactory but nonetheless unavoidable compromise between their animal nature and their rational ideals. Whether we like it or not, the theory goes, we will always find ourselves mediating between these contraries, and so we had best learn to live in the uncomfortable middle.*

* It is worth noting that the unavoidable relativism implicit in this "middle state ethic" probably contributes to the pragmatic bent of American thought in the nineteenth century. By definition this is a scheme that admits of no absolute solutions, and looks to an endless series of *ad hoc* decisions, compromises, and adjustments in resolving problems.

It is a moral position perfectly represented by the image of a rural order, neither wild nor urban, as the setting of man's best hope.²¹

Although it stems from classical antiquity, the "middle state" theory enjoyed its greatest diffusion and acceptance during the eighteenth century. One thing that made it so popular was the need to reconcile increasingly strong claims by extremists at either pole of the debate about the nature of man. The two schools may be called progressivist and primitivist. At the same time that electrifying advances in learning and the arts seemed to sanction a belief, or at least a new degree of confidence, in the perfectibility of civilized man, books like Beverley's *History* were supplying Europe with apparent testimony in favor of primitive life. In effect, they called into question the whole value of civilization. After all, the Virginia Indian did seem happier and better-natured than the average Londoner. In many ways the stock figure of the Noble Savage, which now became immensely popular, resembles the good shepherd of the old pastorals. At least they share certain negative virtues: neither displays the undignified restlessness, ambition, or distrust so common in advanced societies; neither, above all, is consumed by a yearning for approval and praise.²²

Yet, as we have seen in the case of Beverley, it was not easy for intelligent men to maintain a primitivist position. In his *History* Beverley anticipates (in a crude and half-articulate fashion, to be sure) the dialectic that was to be worked out again and again during the next few generations. On a higher plane of sophistication, Jean-Jacques Rousseau was drawn to the spontaneity and freedom he associated with primitive life; but he too had to face the undeniable fact that "natural man" was, by Eu-

ropean standards, amoral, uncreative, and mindless. Unable finally to endorse either the savage or the civilized model, Rousseau was compelled to endorse the view that mankind must depart from the state of nature — but not too far.* He came to believe, as Lovejoy says, that “‘perfectionability’ up to a certain point was desirable, though beyond that point an evil.”²³

The desirability of a similar reconciliation between the animal and rational, natural and civilized, conditions of man always had been implied by the pastoral ideal. In his influential lectures on rhetoric (published in 1783), Hugh Blair, the Scottish divine, made the connection between pastoral and the “middle state” theory explicit. Discussing the nature of pastoral, Blair follows the line taken by Pope in his “Discourse on Pastoral Poetry” (written in 1704), distinguishing between the two ways of depicting bucolic life. One might be called realistic: shepherd life described as it actually is, which is to say, “mean, servile, and laborious.” The second way is to impute the polished taste and cultivated manners of high civilization to the swain. But if the first is repellent, the ideas of real shepherds being what they are (“gross and low”), the second is implausibly idealistic; hence Blair rejects them both.

Either of these extremes is a rock upon which the Poet will split, if he approach too near it. We shall be disgusted if he give us too much of the servile employments

* Curiously enough, Rousseau thought that mankind had passed through the ideal state during the pastoral phase of cultural evolution, by which he meant a pastoral situation in a literal, anthropological sense: a society of herdsmen.

and low ideas of actual peasants . . . and if . . . he makes his Shepherds discourse as if they were courtiers and scholars, he then retains the name only, but wants the spirit of Pastoral Poetry.

He must, therefore, keep in the middle station between these. He must form to himself the idea of a rural state, such as in certain periods of Society may have actually taken place, where there was ease, equality, and innocence; where Shepherds were gay and agreeable, without being learned or refined; and plain and artless, without being gross and wretched. The great charm of Pastoral Poetry arises from the view which it exhibits of the tranquillity and happiness of a rural life. This pleasing illusion, therefore, the Poet must carefully maintain.

Although Blair is talking about the best setting for a pastoral poem, not about social actualities, he does leave the way open for readers who might be tempted to confuse the two. At certain times, he says, such ideal societies of the “middle landscape” actually may have existed. And if they existed once, why not again? The conjecture is worth mentioning because of the great prestige that Blair’s work was to enjoy in America. “I shall take care to get Blair’s lectures for you as soon as published,” wrote Thomas Jefferson to James Madison in 1784. The *Lectures* were used as a textbook in American colleges down to the middle of the next century.²⁴

Attractive as it was, the idea of a society of the middle landscape was becoming less easy to believe in during the 1780’s. In England the process of “improvement,” or what we should call economic development, already seemed to have gone too far. By then the enclosures were destroying the vestiges of the old, rural culture, and the countryside

was cluttered with semi-industrial cities and dark, satanic mills. At this juncture the next thought was obvious and irresistible. For three centuries Englishmen had been in the habit of projecting their dreams upon the unspoiled terrain of the New World. Long before the 1780's George Herbert had got the prevailing attitude into a couplet:

Religion stands on tip-toe in our land,
Ready to passe to the *American* strand.

Andrew Marvell, who probably was indebted to Captain John Smith's account in *The Generall Historie of Virginia*, put it this way in his "Bermudas":

What should we do but sing his Praise
That led us through the watry Maze,
Unto an Isle so long unknown,
And yet far kinder than our own?

.

He lands us on a grassy Stage;
Safe from the Storms, and Prelat's rage.
He gave us this eternal Spring,
Which here enamells every thing;
And sends the Fowl's to us in care,
On daily Visits through the Air.
He hangs in shades the Orange bright,
Like golden Lamps in a green Night.

In America it still was not too late (or so one might imagine) to establish a home for rural virtue. In the period of the Revolution, accordingly, the pastoral idea of America caught on everywhere in England. To take one of many examples, here is Richard Price, the outspoken Unitarian minister, friend of Franklin and Jefferson, and a leading British champion of the American cause:

The happiest state of man is the middle state between the *savage* and the *refined*, or between the wild and the luxurious state. Such is the state of society in CONNECTICUT, and some others of the *American* provinces; where the inhabitants consist, if I am rightly informed, of an independent and hardy YEOMANRY, all nearly on a level — trained to arms . . . clothed in homespun — of simple manners — strangers to luxury — drawing plenty from the ground — and that plenty, gathered easily by the hand of industry; and giving rise to early marriages, a numerous progeny, length of days, and a rapid increase — the rich and the poor, the haughty grandee and the creeping sycophant, equally unknown — protected by laws, which (being their own will) cannot oppress . . . O distinguished people! May you continue long thus happy; and may the happiness you enjoy spread over the face of the whole earth. . . .

During the winter of 1785, when he received his copy of Price's *Observations on the . . . American Revolution* containing this apostrophe, Jefferson was getting the manuscript of *Notes on Virginia* ready for a Paris printer. "I have read it with . . . pleasure," he wrote to Price, "as have done many others to whom I have communicated it. The spirit which it breathes is as affectionate as the observations . . . are wise and just." Needless to say, there is no question here of Jefferson's having been influenced by Price's version of the pastoral ideal; by this time it was in the air on both sides of the Atlantic.²⁵

In 1785, for example, a pamphlet entitled *The Golden Age* was published. Although it does not reveal either the author or the place of publication, the title page itself is a nice exhibit of the affinities between America and the pastoral ideal:

THE
GOLDEN AGE:
OR,
Future Glory of North-America
Discovered
By An Angel to Celadon,
in
Several Entertaining Visions.

VISION I.

— Ferrea

Definet, ac toto surget gens Mundo

Virgil Eclog IV.

Thus Englished,

The iron past, a golden Age shall rise,
And make the whole World happy, free, and wise.

B Y C E L A D O N

Printed in the Year, M, DCC, LXXXV.

The sixteen-page pamphlet begins with a description of Celadon, a "man strictly honest, and a real lover of the country," who lives in "one of the American States." He had fought gloriously against England during the war and now he is "anxious to know the future condition of his people." One day, while musing on this subject, he is at last blessed with an agreeable vision. At this point, the writer shifts to the first person, Celadon describing his experience in his own words.²⁶

On a summer evening Celadon is tired, and he walks out and sits on the bank of a stream where he is "delighted with the music of the groves." With murmuring waters below and sighing winds above he falls into a trance. An

angel appears and all "nature seemed to smile at his approach." Describing himself as America's "guardian," the angel announces that he has come to dissolve Celadon's doubts about the future. The rest of the pamphlet consists of a dialogue between Celadon and his celestial confidant, who provides a graphic description of the American millennium. At the climax the angel takes Celadon in his arms and carries him to a high mountain in the center of the land. From the great summit the entire continent is visible. To the east he sees "spacious cities . . . thriving towns . . . a thick conjunction of farms, plantations, gardens . . . laden with every kind of fruit"; it is a countryside "charmingly diversified . . . plentifully watered" and filled with "elegant buildings adapted to all the purposes of life." Then the angel orders Celadon to turn his face westward, and he is "equally surprised at the wide extended landscape. This western part of America," he says, "is as yet but an uncultivated desert; the haunt of savages; and range of wild beasts.—But the soil in general is much richer than that of the eastern division. . . ." Into this great land the "poor, the oppressed, and the persecuted will fly . . . as doves to their windows." The pamphlet ends with a vision of "a beauteous world rising out of a dreary wilderness," unlimited progress (England's decline having begun with the American Revolution), the taming of the Indians, the conversion of the Jews, and the American way spreading over the face of the earth. Although more extravagant than most versions, *The Golden Age* is in essence another statement of the pastoral idea of America.

Two years earlier the same idea had provided the controlling theme of a full-scale, on-the-spot interpretation of American experience. In his popular *Letters from an*

American Farmer, J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur (another of Jefferson's correspondents) weaves all of the thematic strands just discussed into a delightful, evocative, though finally simple-minded, book. It projects the old pastoral ideal, now translated into a wholly new vocabulary, on to the American scene. At the outset Crèvecoeur sets up a typical pastoral situation. Writing as a "humble American Planter, a simple cultivator of the earth," he deferentially addresses a learned Englishman who has invited the rustic American to become his correspondent. Here the writer is no mere observer or dreamer; he is the American husbandman—a fact which underscores the literalness of the pastoral ideal in a New World setting. "Who would have thought," the first letter begins, "that because I received you with hospitality and kindness, you should imagine me capable of writing with propriety and perspicuity?" Incredulity is the dominant note of the opening pages. At first, says the epistolary narrator, he was overwhelmed by the invitation: is it possible, he had asked, that a man who has lived in that "big house called Cambridge" where "worldly learning is so abundant," actually wants to receive letters from a plain farmer? The problem had troubled him. He had consulted his wife and his minister. She laughed at him, said the "great European man" obviously was not in earnest; on the other hand, the minister reassured him, arguing that he need only write in his everyday, spoken language. If the letters be not "elegant," he said, at least they "will smell of the woods, and be a little wild." Besides, might the American rustic not "improve" the sophisticated Englishman by acquainting him with the "causes which render so many people happy?" At last the farmer was persuaded; but even then, he exclaims, "on recollecting the difference

between your sphere of life and mine, a new fit of astonishment seized us all!"²⁷

Anyone who knows American writing, incidentally, will be reminded of all the later fictional narrators who begin in the same way, impulsively dissociating themselves from the world of sophistication, Europe, ideas, learning, in a word, *the world*, and speaking in accents of rural ignorance. "I was young and ignorant," says Mark Twain's narrator at the beginning of *Roughing It*, compressing the gist of innumerable American literary beginnings. But Crèvecoeur, alas, makes no use of the potentially complex framework he establishes at the outset. Although he might have provided a counterpoise to the farmer's innocence, the Englishman virtually drops out of sight, and Crèvecoeur loses control of the initial contrast between the farmer and his learned friend. The *Letters* exhibit one of the great hazards awaiting American writers who attempt to work in this convention. To put it much too simply for the moment, the trouble is that under the singularly beneficent circumstances of native experience, the barrier between art and reality is likely to break down. Crèvecoeur, as one critic notes, "lived a kind of pastoral poetry." Having adopted the point of view of the self-derogating, uneducated American swain, he seems to forget that it is a literary device. (Actually, his family belonged to the lesser nobility of France, and he had been educated in a Jesuit school.) After the sophisticated Englishman drops out of sight the farmer's simple definition of reality is allowed to govern the entire work.²⁸

To account for the peculiarly "modern, peaceful and benign" qualities of his rural life, the farmer introduces all of the familiar environmentalist assumptions of the age. He believes that men everywhere are like plants, de-

riving their "flavor" from the soil in which they grow. In America, with its paucity of established institutions, however, the relation between mankind and the physical environment is more than usually decisive. Geography pushes men into farming, which is of course the noblest vocation. But the land is significant not only for the material and political benefits it confers; at bottom it determines everything about the new kind of man being formed in the New World. "What should we American farmers be," he asks, "without the distinct possession of that soil? It feeds, it clothes us, from it we draw even a great exuberancy. . . ." ²⁹

The delightfully graphic notion of man drawing exuberancy from the soil exhibits Crèvecoeur's imagination at its best; back of it lies his absolute confidence in the power of imagery. Skeptical of abstract ideas, he is a kind of homespun Lockian who thinks of the land, or rather the landscape, as an object that penetrates the mind, filling it with irresistible pictures of human possibilities. To paraphrase Addison, he has but to open his eyes and the American ethos enters. Just to see this virgin terrain is to absorb the rudiments of a new consciousness, the American "philosophy," as he calls it. Without the sense of the landscape as a cardinal metaphor of value, the *Letters* could not have been written. Indeed, for the farmer it is the metaphoric even more than the physical properties of land which regenerate tired Europeans by filling them to overflowing with exuberancy. We are reminded of Robert Beverley's exuberant style, not to mention Melville's and Whitman's — Whitman, whose hero will move from the contemplation of a single spear of grass to his barbaric yawp. It is not surprising that Crèvecoeur was one of the writers who convinced D. H. Lawrence that only the

"spirit of place" really can account for the singular voice we hear in American books. 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. Landscape means regeneration to the farmer. In sociological terms, it means 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. It therefore represents the possibility of a secular, egalitarian, naturalistic "resurrection" (as Crèvecoeur calls it at one point), the religious content of which is now deeply embedded in a new pastoral idiom. "These images I must confess," says the farmer of rural scenes, "I always behold with pleasure, and extend them as far as my imagination can reach: for this is what may be called the true and the only philosophy of an American farmer." ³⁰

The farmer's imagination, as it turns out, has a long reach. With his pleasant farm at the center, he expands the topographical image endlessly, until it achieves mythic magnitude. Eastward it reaches to Europe, encompassing *l'ancien régime*, an oppressive social order of "great lords who possess everything, and of a herd of people who have nothing." Westward he extends it to the dark forest frontier where something "very singular" happens to Europeans. Their lives being "regulated by the wildness of the neighbourhood," they become "ferocious, gloomy and unsociable." As he describes the frontiersmen, they are "no better than carnivorous animals of a superior rank, living on the flesh of wild animals" — native American Calibans. Like the Europeans rebuked by Beverley, they show what happens to those who trust too much in

the "natural fecundity of the earth, and therefore do little." Like lazy Virginians, they do not work, do not improve the natural environment. But now, when the typical immigrant arrives in America, he no longer beholds the raw wilderness. On the contrary, he sees "fair cities, substantial villages, extensive fields, an immense country filled with decent houses, good roads, orchards, meadows, and bridges, where an hundred years ago all was wild, woody, and uncultivated!" This ideal landscape obviously has little in common with the "plantation" dream of Shakespeare's Gonzalo or the Edenic Virginia of Beverley's *History*. The point needs to be made because Crèvecoeur, like many another American writer, often is mistaken (in Lawrence's derisive phrase) for a "littératur-Child-of-Nature-sweet-and-pure." But he is nothing of the sort. He does not believe, as Lawrence says he does, that Nature is sweet and pure. He admires improved nature, a landscape that is a made thing, a fusion of work and spontaneous process. "This formerly rude soil," he explains, "has been converted by my father into a pleasant farm, and in return it has established all our rights."³¹

Taken as a whole, the moral geography of the *Letters* forms a neat spatial pattern, a compelling triptych that figures an implied judgment upon all the conditions of man which may be thought to exist between the savagery of the frontier on one side and the court of Versailles on the other. It is in this sense a potentially mythic idea, an all-encompassing vision that converts the ethic of the middle link into "the true and the only" philosophy for Americans. No one possibly could miss the main point; nevertheless, the farmer dramatizes it in the final letter, called "Distresses of a Frontier Man." By now the rev-

olutionary war has begun, and he writes in a mood of great agitation. Exposed to imminent Indian attack, desperately anxious for the safety of his family, torn between loyalty to the homeland and to his neighbors, depressed about the need to abandon his farm with all its improvements, he reluctantly has decided to move further west to a peaceful Indian village. But the decision is a painful one. Perhaps, he says, "I may never revisit those fields which I have cleared, those trees which I have planted, those meadows which, in my youth, were a hideous wilderness, now converted by my industry into rich pastures and pleasant lawns." After weighing the relative advantages of moving east and moving west, he chooses west. Like many exponents of the pastoral theory of America, he veers toward the primitive. But even as he makes his choice, he reaffirms the ideal of the middle landscape:

I will revert into a state approaching nearer to that of nature, unencumbered either with voluminous laws, or contradictory codes, often galling the very necks of those whom they protect; and at the same time sufficiently remote from the brutality of unconnected savage nature. Do you, my friend, perceive the path I have found out? it is that which leads to . . . the . . . village of ——, where, far removed from the accursed neighbourhood of Europeans, its inhabitants live with more ease, decency, and peace, than you imagine: where, though governed by no laws, yet find, in uncontaminated simple manners all that laws can afford. Their system is sufficiently complete to answer all the primary wants of man, and to constitute him a social being, such as he ought to be in the great forest of nature.

In the *Letters from an American Farmer* there is no mention of Arcadia, no good shepherd, no stock of poeti-

cisms derived from Virgil, no trite antithesis of country and town, no abstract discord between Nature and Art. And yet all of these traditional features of the pastoral mode are present in new forms supplied by American experience. Instead of Arcadia, we have the wild yet potentially bucolic terrain of the North American continent; instead of the shepherd, the independent, democratic husbandman with his plausible "rural scheme"; instead of the language of a decadent pastoral poetry, the exuberant idiom, verging toward the colloquial, of the farmer; and instead of generalized allusions to the contrast between country and town, Crèvecoeur begins to explore the difference between American and European cultures, a complex variation of the grand Nature-Art antithesis which informs all pastoral literature. As for the dream of reconciliation, it is now reinforced by the agrarian philosophy and the "middle state" theory of the age, and it thereby takes on a credibility it never before had possessed.

Today, looking back across the great gulf created by industrialism, we can easily see what was wrong with the pastoral theory of America. We say that it embodied a naïve and ultimately static view of history, and so it did. But to project this judgment into the past is to miss the compelling power of the ideal in its eighteenth-century context. That is why we so often mistake it for a primitivist fantasy. From our perspective they may look equally regressive, but the distinction between them was once a vital element in the American consciousness, and to ignore it is to blur our sense of the past. Crèvecoeur was no primitivist; he had no illusions about the condition of man in a state of nature, nor did he repudiate change or economic development. But how, then, we may well ask, did he reconcile his admiration for roads, bridges, fair cities and

improvements of all sorts with the bucolic ideal? What did he think would happen when the new society approached that delicate point of equilibrium beyond which further change, which is to say, further departure from "nature," would be dangerous?

Part of the answer lies in the way he conceived of America's immediate situation. Here, as he saw it, 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. (It would be roughly fifty years before the word "industrialism" came into use.) Thus when Crèvecoeur's farmer makes one of the unavoidable inventories of feudal institutions missing in the new world — "no aristocratical families, no courts, no kings, no bishops" and so on — he includes "no great manufacturers employing thousands." This sentence could only have been written on the other side of the gulf created by industrialization. Obviously Crèvecoeur is unaware of any necessary relation between large-scale manufacturing and changing social institutions; the connections between technology, economic development, and the thrust of deprived people for a higher living standard, which we take for granted, did not exist for him; as he thinks about America's future, it involves nothing of that irreversible and accelerating process of change now regarded as the very powerhouse of history. As a result, he 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. "Sometimes," he says, "I delight in inventing and executing machines, which simplify my wife's labour." If there is a time ahead when the natural bent of Americans for improvement will have to be curbed, it is too remote to think about. "Here," says the farmer, ". . . human industry has acquired a boundless field to exert itself in — a field which will not be fully cultivated in many ages!"³²

But the unimproved landscape is only part of the answer. Granted that native conditions lent a remarkable degree of credibility to his idea of America's future, there is a more important reason for Crèvecoeur's failure to recognize the obvious dilemma of pastoral politics. Indeed, his desire to avoid such problems is precisely what made the rural scheme so attractive in the first place. Throughout the *Letters* the farmer describes America as the "great asylum," a "refuge" from Europe, from power struggles, politics, or, in our sense of the word, from history itself. In spite of all the deceptive local details, it is still possible to identify the main features of the idyllic Virgilian landscape in this idealized picture of America. It is a place apart, secluded from the world — a peaceful, lovely, classless, bountiful pasture.

3

With the appearance of Crèvecoeur's *Letters* in 1782 the assimilation of the ancient European fantasy to conditions in the New World was virtually complete. None of the obvious devices of the old pastoral could be detected in the farmer's plausible argument for an American rural

scheme. And yet, essentially the same impulse was at work beneath the surface; it manifested itself in the static, anti-historical quality of the whole conception, and by 1785 Jefferson said as much. Even as he endorsed the same goals he recognized the problems Crèvecoeur had glossed over. How could a rural America possibly hold off the forces already transforming the economy of Europe? What policies would a government have to adopt to preserve a simple society of the middle landscape? Even if they were adopted, what chance of success would they have when, minor distinctions aside, the same sort of men who were coming to power in England already were busy in America?

To appreciate the quality of Jefferson's answers it is first necessary to be clear about his own preferences. If he had been a mere practical politician, a man never tempted by utopian impulses, his criticism of the goals endorsed by Crèvecoeur would not be of much interest. But Jefferson was an ardent exponent of much the same theory; he argued for it with a poetic intensity rare in the writings of American statesmen. A man of immeasurably larger mind than Crèvecoeur, Jefferson also located the weak spot — the place where the theory and the facts were likely to come apart. This did not cause him to repudiate either; rather he kept his hold upon both, using the facts of power to check a proclivity toward wishful thinking, and avoiding the shallows of simple pragmatism by an insistence upon the need for theory — for long-range ideals. In fact, the "doubleness" of Jefferson's approach toward the pastoral ideal is akin to the basic design of the literary mode. Not being an artist, however, he never had to get all of his feelings down in a single place. As a result, we have to piece together his "version of pas-

toral," a way of ordering values which carries us far beyond Crèvecoeur's unqualified affirmation — beyond it in the direction of the complex attitudes at work in the writings of, say, Henry Thoreau and Robert Frost.

Still, Jefferson's initial commitment is unambiguous. Nowhere in our literature is there a more appealing, vivid, or thorough statement of the case for the pastoral ideal than in *Notes on Virginia*. Although it is his only original, full-length work, it has never been widely read. One need only turn the pages to see the reason: at first glance it looks like a cross between a geography textbook and a statistical abstract. Written in answer to a series of questions from François Marbois, a French diplomat, the book has a dense, dry, fact-laden surface. This should not be allowed to obscure its enduring qualities: it is in its way a minor classic, rising effortlessly from topographical fact to social analysis and utopian speculation. In 1780, when Jefferson began writing, the Revolution was not yet over and the ultimate goals of the new Republic were very much on his mind. Hence, he not only describes the way things are in Virginia, but he allows himself to reflect upon the way they might be.

Here again in *Notes on Virginia* the land — geography — has a decisive function. Nothing could be more remote from the never-never land of the old pastoral than the setting Jefferson establishes at the outset. This is the opening sentence of the book:

Virginia is bounded on the East by the Atlantic: on the North by a line of latitude, crossing the Eastern Shore through Watkins Point, being about $37^{\circ} . 57'$. North latitude; from thence . . .

Nor is this matter-of-fact tone confined to the first few sentences or even pages. Of the twenty-three "queries" into

which the book is divided, the first seven are devoted to the natural environment:

- Query I Boundaries of Virginia
- Query II Rivers
- Query III Sea-Ports
- Query IV Mountains
- Query V Cascades
- Query VI Productions Mineral, Vegetable and Animal
- Query VII Climate

In choosing to begin the *Notes* in this fashion, Jefferson almost certainly had no complicated literary theory in mind. Marbois had sent him twenty-two questions. He simply rearranged them in a logical order, expanding their number to twenty-three, and now he was answering them one by one. Nevertheless, the sequence embodies the "Lockian" presuppositions, already discussed, about the relations between nature, man, and society. Because they are part of the book's structure, moreover, these ideas do some of their most effective literary work indirectly. Thus the wealth and specificity of the geographical detail in the first part of the book conditions our response to what comes later, much as the whaling lore in *Moby-Dick* affects our feelings about the metaphysical quest. Before we get to Query XIX, with its passionate defense of a rural society, the image of the rich, rugged, but largely undeveloped, terrain of Virginia has been firmly embedded in our minds. It helps to make credible, as no abstract argument could, Jefferson's feeling for the singular plasticity of the American situation.

The book contains repeated movements from fact to feeling. Thus the fissure beneath the Natural Bridge is first described in mathematical terms, "45 feet wide at

the bottom, and 90 feet at the top. . . . Its breadth in the middle, is about 60 feet, but more at the ends" and so on. And then, with hardly a break: "It is impossible for the emotions, arising from the sublime, to be felt beyond what they are here: so beautiful an arch, so elevated, so light, and springing, as it were, up to heaven, the rapture of the Spectator is really indescribable!" The treatment of landscape in the *Notes* recalls a phrase from John Locke's second treatise on government, a book which influenced Jefferson as much as any other single work: "in the beginning," said Locke, "all the world was America. . . ." A great hope makes itself felt almost wordlessly in the texture of *Notes on Virginia*. The topographical details, like the opening scenes of *The Tempest*, establish a firm naturalistic base for utopian revery.³³

Like Shakespeare's Gonzalo, moreover, Jefferson at times seems to be carried away by the promise of a fresh start. Were it made a question, he says at one point, speaking of the rarity of crime among the Indians,

. . . were it made a question, whether no law, as among the savage Americans, or too much law, as among the civilized Europeans, submits man to the greatest evil, one who has seen both conditions of existence would pronounce it to be the last: and that the sheep are happier of themselves, than under the care of the wolves.

It is true that this statement, taken out of context, does sound as if Jefferson had joined a simple-minded cult of Nature. But as so often in American writing, what first strikes us as the merest vagary of a primitivist proves, on closer inspection, to be something quite different. (Admittedly, there is a charming absurdity in the very prospect of the Virginia *philosophe* casting his lot with the In-

dians.) Jefferson is not endorsing the Indian style of life here. What appears as a preference for the primitive actually is a rhetorical device: *were* it made a question, he says, he would prefer the Indian way, the whole point being that in the New World such questions need not arise.³⁴

Jefferson's syntax, in other words, is aimed at a pastoral, not a primitivist, affirmation. (Depicting the people as sheep is a stock device of pastoral poetry.) We might call it the "syntax of the middle landscape," a conditional statement which has the effect of stressing a range of social possibilities unavailable to Europeans. Jefferson remained fond of this sentence structure all his life. As late as 1812, for instance, he is still telling John Adams (speaking of the depravity of France and England) that "if science produces no better fruits than tyranny, murder, rapine and destitution of national morality, I would rather wish our country to be ignorant, honest and estimable as our neighboring savages are." Adams, incidentally, missed or pretended to have missed the point; in his reply he refers, as if Jefferson had made an unconditional statement, to his friend's "Preference to Savage over civilized life." But that is not what Jefferson meant. True, this syntax leads the mind toward an affirmation of primitive values, cutting it loose from an easy acceptance of established ideas and institutions, but behind it there is no serious intention of going all the way. It is a perfect expression of the American pastoral ethos. Actually, Jefferson had few illusions about the felicities of primitive life, as he makes clear elsewhere in *Notes on Virginia*:

The women are submitted to unjust drudgery. This I believe is the case with every barbarous people. With such, force is law. The stronger sex . . . imposes on the

weaker. It is civilization alone which replaces women in the enjoyment of their natural equality. That first teaches us to subdue the selfish passions, and to respect those rights in others which we value in ourselves.

The symbolic setting favored by Jefferson, needless to say, resembles the Virgilian landscape of reconciliation, but it now is a real place located somewhere between *l'ancien régime* and the western tribes.³⁵

Moreover, it is a landscape with figures, or at least one figure: the independent, rational, democratic husbandman. The eloquent passage in Query XIX in which he makes his appearance is the *locus classicus* of the pastoral ideal as applied to America. For a century afterwards, politicians, orators, journalists, and spokesmen for the agricultural interest cherished Jefferson's words and, above all, the ringing declaration: "Those who labour in the earth are the chosen people of God, if ever he had a chosen people, whose breasts he has made his peculiar deposit for substantial and genuine virtue." Sentences lifted from Query XIX are among the most frequently quoted but least understood of Jefferson's words. Taken out of context, for one thing, the picture of the husbandman loses a good deal of the charm and meaning it owes to the force of its opposite. It is significant that Jefferson creates this ideal figure not while discussing agriculture, but rather when he is considering the place of manufactures in the new nation. Although the process of industrialization, in our sense of the word (the use of machine power in large-scale manufacturing) had not begun, the states had stepped up the productivity of domestic manufactures during the war. When it was over there were some who believed that the foundation for a permanent

system of manufactures had been laid. This is the prospect that alarms Jefferson and that sets off the well-known tribute to rural virtue as the moral center of a democratic society.

At the outset, it is true, Jefferson asserts that his countrymen "will certainly return as soon as they can" to their former dependence upon European manufactures. But it is unlikely that he was so confident as he pretends. By 1785, as we shall see, he was making quite another prediction. Besides, the vehemence of this attack upon the idea of native manufactures would seem, in itself, to belie his words. A close look at the structure and style of his answer to Query XIX (*The present state of manufactures, commerce, interior and exterior trade?*) is revealing. This short chapter falls neatly into two parts, each written in a distinct style, each exemplifying one of Jefferson's attitudes toward America's future. It is important enough and, fortunately, brief enough to cite in its entirety. Here is the first part:

We never had an interior trade of any importance. Our exterior commerce has suffered very much from the beginning of the present contest. During this time we have manufactured within our families the most necessary articles of cloathing. Those of cotton will bear some comparison with the same kinds of manufacture in Europe; but those of wool, flax and hemp are very coarse, unsightly, and unpleasant: and such is our attachment to agriculture, and such our preference for foreign manufactures, that be it wise or unwise, our people will certainly return as soon as they can, to the raising raw materials, and exchanging them for finer manufactures than they are able to execute themselves.

The political economists of Europe have established it as a principle that every state should endeavour to

manufacture for itself: and this principle, like many others, we transfer to America, without calculating the difference of circumstance which should often produce a difference of result. In Europe the lands are either cultivated, or locked up against the cultivator. Manufacture must therefore be resorted to of necessity not of choice, to support the surplus of their people. But we have an immensity of land courting the industry of the husbandman. *Is it best then that all our citizens should be employed in its improvement, or that one half should be called off from that to exercise manufactures and handicraft arts for the other?* [Italics added.]

So far Jefferson is speaking in the voice of a scientific rationalist. In arguing that America is an exception to the general rule that nations should aim at economic self-sufficiency, he merely endorses the commonplace views of the political economists — notably Adam Smith. The argument has the incidental appeal, for Jefferson, of underscoring the geographic basis of American politics: abundance of land is what makes America a special case. But is it best for America to remain an exclusively rural nation? It is just at this point that he betrays the "soft center" of the pastoral theory. Having worked his way up to the great question in the spare, dispassionate idiom of political economy, he suddenly changes voices. Between two sentences, a rhetorical question and an "answer," he abandons discursive reasoning. Here is the question, once again, and the rest of Query XIX:

Is it best then that all our citizens should be employed in its improvement, or that one half should be called off from that to exercise manufactures and handicraft arts for the other? Those who labour in the earth are the chosen people of God, if ever he had a chosen people, whose breasts he has made his peculiar deposit for sub-

stantial and genuine virtue. It is the focus in which he keeps alive that sacred fire, which otherwise might escape from the face of the earth. Corruption of morals in the mass of cultivators is a phenomenon of which no age nor nation has furnished an example. It is the mark set on those, who not looking up to heaven, to their own soil and industry, as does the husbandman, for their subsistence, depend for it on the casualties and caprice of customers. Dependence begets subservience and venality, suffocates the germ of virtue, and prepares fit tools for the designs of ambition. This, the natural progress and consequence of the arts, has sometimes perhaps been retarded by accidental circumstances: but, generally speaking, the proportion which the aggregate of the other classes of citizens bears in any state to that of its husbandmen, is the proportion of its unsound to its healthy parts, and is a good-enough barometer whereby to measure its degree of corruption. While we have land to labour then, let us never wish to see our citizens occupied at a work-bench, or twirling a distaff. Carpenters, masons, smiths, are wanting in husbandry: but, for the general operations of manufacture, let our work-shops remain in Europe. It is better to carry provisions and materials to workmen there, than bring them to the provisions and materials, and with them their manners and principles. The loss by the transportation of commodities across the Atlantic will be made up in happiness and permanence of government. The mobs of great cities add just so much to the support of pure government, as sores do to the strength of the human body. It is the manners and spirit of a people which preserve a republic in vigour. A degeneracy in these is a canker which soon eats to the heart of its laws and constitution.

Although the term *agrarian* ordinarily is used to describe the social ideal that Jefferson is endorsing here, to call it *pastoral* would be more accurate and illuminating.

This is not a quibble: a serious distinction is involved. To begin with, the astonishing shift from the spare language of political economics to a highly figurative, mythopoeic language indicates that Jefferson is adopting a literary point of view; or, to be more exact, he is adopting a point of view for which an accepted literary convention is available. Notice the conventional character of the second half of this passage. There can be no doubt about the influence of literary pastoral upon Jefferson. We have touched on his youthful reading of James Thomson, and his love of Virgil and the classical poets is well known. In 1813 he still was quoting Theocritus in Greek to John Adams. But quite apart from his direct response to pastoral poetry, we are more likely to get a precise idea of Jefferson's meaning here if we interpret it as the expression of a pastoral rather than an agrarian ideal.³⁶

What, then, is the difference? The chief difference is the relative importance of economic factors implied by each term. To call Jefferson an agrarian is to imply that his argument rests, at bottom, upon a commitment to an agricultural economy. But in Query XIX he manifestly is repudiating the importance of economic criteria in evaluating the relative merits of various forms of society. Although the true agrarians of his day, the physiocrats, had demonstrated the superior efficiency of large-scale agriculture, Jefferson continues to advocate the small, family-sized farm. Ordinarily, he does not think about farms as productive units, a fact which may help to account for his own dismal financial record as a farmer. He is devoted to agriculture largely as a means of preserving rural manners, that is, "rural virtue." Therefore, he would continue shipping raw materials to European factories (and back across the Atlantic in finished form) no

matter what the monetary cost. Unlike the fully committed agrarians, he admits that an agricultural economy may be economically disadvantageous. But that does not trouble him, because he rejects productivity and, for that matter, material living standards, as tests of a good society. The loss of what nowadays would be called "national income," he explains, "will be made up in happiness and permanence of government."

All of this makes more sense once we recognize the noble husbandman's true identity: he is the good shepherd of the old pastoral dressed in American homespun. One of that traditional figure's greatest charms always had been his lack of the usual economic appetites. As Renato Poggioli observed, in the literary mode the shepherd appears everywhere as the "opposite of the *homo oeconomicus*." To find an almost perfect model of the Jeffersonian economy we need only recall the situation of the happy rustic in Virgil's first eclogue. There too the economy makes possible the contained self-sufficiency of the pastoral community. Like the swain in his bucolic retreat, the Virginia farmer on his family-sized farm would produce everything that his family needs and at most a little more. The goal is sufficiency, not economic growth — a virtual stasis that is a counterpart of the desired psychic balance or peace. (Notice that here "permanence of government" is one of Jefferson's chief concerns.) By equating desires with needs, turning his back on industry and trade, the husbandman would be free of the tyranny of the market. Here the absence of economic complexities makes credible the absence of their usual concomitant, a class structure. Jefferson grounds this happy classless state in the farmer's actual possession of land; in such a society all men would adopt an aloof patrician attitude toward ac-

quisitive behavior. (At this point the Lockian right of private property is woven into the pattern of these "natural" principles.) But the physical attributes of the land are less important than its metaphoric powers. What finally matters most is its function *as a landscape* — an image in the mind that represents aesthetic, moral, political, and even religious values. Standing on his farm, "looking up to heaven" and down to his "own soil and industry," Jefferson's rustic is in a position to act out all of the imperatives of the "middle link" ethic. Moreover, he derives these principles in much the same way that Crèvecoeur's farmer drew exuberancy from the landscape. Jefferson invokes the familiar botanical metaphor when he describes the "germ of virtue" being "deposited" in the husbandman's breast. It is this moral seed which enables him to renounce nascent industrial capitalism, that is, a market-regulated society in which men must submit to the "casualties and caprice of customers."³⁷

In developing the contrast between the American farmer and the European workman, Jefferson also follows the Virgilian pattern. He sets the joy of independence against the misery of dependence. As in the first eclogue, the crux here is the relation that each man enjoys with the natural environment — the land. Like Tityrus, the husbandman's life is attuned to the rhythms of nature; but the European worker's access to the land, like Melibœus', has been blocked. As a result he becomes economically dependent, a condition which "begets subservience and venality" and so "suffocates the germ of virtue." That is what will happen, Jefferson is warning, if America develops its own system of manufactures. The fresh, health-giving, sunlit atmosphere of Virginia will be replaced by the dark, foul air of European cities. At a time when the idea of the market economy as the "natural" regulator of

economic behavior enjoys great prestige, Jefferson associates it with oppressive institutions. So far from being part of benign nature, it is a kind of malformation or disease. It generates "mobs" of bestialized men who will eat, like a "canker," at the heart of the republic. At this point the intensity of Jefferson's feeling, a welling up of physical revulsion, makes itself felt in the imagery of suffocation, degeneracy, and disease ("sores on the body") with which he depicts this awful prospect. What concerns him is not agriculture for its own sake, but rather small-scale yeoman farming as the economic basis for what may be called a desirable general culture. It is the "happiness," "manners and spirit" of the people — the over-all quality of life — that rules out manufactures. These concerns have more in common with Virgil's poetry than with *The Wealth of Nations*.

But the literary ancestry of the husbandman, like that of Crèvecoeur's farmer, is obscured by the peculiar credibility imparted to the pastoral hope under American conditions. In this environment the political implications of the convention are subtly changed. William Empson has shown that the old pastoral, "which was felt to imply a beautiful relation between rich and poor," served as a mask of political purposes. By the "trick" of having a simple shepherd express strong feelings in a sophisticated language, the poet managed to combine the best of both worlds. The reader in turn was put in a position to enjoy the vicarious resolution of one of his culture's deepest conflicts.* The result was a kind of conservative quietism. In a sense, Jefferson's idealized portrait of the husband-

* I am paraphrasing Empson's argument, but I feel that Empson fails to clarify the distinction between those versions of pastoral which enable the reader to enjoy an easy resolution of the conflict and those which enforce the poet's ironic distance from the pastoral dream, that is, between sentimental and complex pastoralism.

man, a simple yet educated man, a noble democrat, performs the same service. But with this vital difference: Jefferson is supposed to be talking about an actual social type in an actual society; at no point is the reader warned, as he inevitably is when he picks up a poem, that he is crossing the boundary between life and art. Jefferson's enemies, who liked to denounce him as a dreamer, might have underscored their abuse by noting the resemblance between his husbandman and the literary shepherd. Later this "mythical cult-figure" (Empson's term) of the old pastoral will reappear as the Jacksonian "common man." If this democratic Everyman strikes us as a credible figure, it is partly because the pastoral ideal has been so well assimilated into an American ideology. He achieves the political results outside literature formerly achieved by the shepherd. In the age of Jackson there no longer will be any need to insinuate a beautiful relation between the rich and the poor. By his mere presence the "common man" threatens—or promises—to supplant them both.³⁸

In the egalitarian social climate of America the pastoral ideal, instead of being contained by the literary design, spills over into thinking about real life. Jefferson extends the root contrast between simplicity and sophistication to opinions on every imaginable subject. "State a moral case," he says, "to a ploughman and a professor. The former will decide it as well, and often better than the latter, because he has not been led astray by artificial rules." The pastoral element in this famous anti-intellectual homily is apparent. The true American is the ploughman, whose values are derived from his relations to the land, not from "artificial rules." To be sure, it may be said that the shepherd's moral superiority always had been based upon a some-

what obscure metaphysical link with "nature." But the conviction with which Jefferson makes this kind of assertion stems from his belief in the unspoiled American landscape as peculiarly conducive to the nurture of the "moral sense." It disseminates germs of virtue.³⁹

All of these feelings are at work in Jefferson's warning against sending an American youth to Europe, far from the benign influences of his native ground:

He acquires a fondness for European luxury and dissipation and a contempt for the simplicity of his own country; he is fascinated with the privileges of the European aristocrats, and sees with abhorrence the lovely equality which the poor enjoy with the rich in his own country: he contracts a partiality for aristocracy or monarchy; he forms foreign friendships which will never be useful to him, and loses the season of life for forming in his own country those friendships which of all others are the most faithful and permanent: he is led by the strongest of all the human passions into a spirit for female intrigue destructive of his own and others happiness, or a passion for whores, destructive of his health, and in both cases learns to consider fidelity to the marriage bed as an ungentlemanly practice and inconsistent with happiness: he recollects the voluntary dress and arts of the European women, and pities and despises the chaste affections and simplicity of those of his own country. . . .

It would be difficult to find a more comprehensive statement of the pastoral ethic in American terms. Away from his own country the chain that links the young man's manners to his vocation and his vocation to the soil is broken. A little further on, Jefferson extends the argument to literary style. An American educated abroad, he warns, is likely to return

. . . speaking and writing his native tongue as a foreigner, and therefore unqualified to obtain those distinctions which eloquence of the pen and tongue ensures in a free country; for I would observe to you that what is called style in writing or speaking is formed very early in life while the imagination is warm, and impressions are permanent. I am of opinion that there never was an instance of man's writing or speaking his native tongue with elegance who passed from 15. to 20. years of age out of the country where it was spoken.

Implying that the peculiar "simplicity" of American manners will be embodied in a native language and therefore a distinct style, Jefferson points toward the work of Henry Thoreau, Mark Twain, Ernest Hemingway, and Robert Frost—all of whom would write "versions of pastoral" in a distinctively American idiom.⁴⁰

In Jefferson's time this way of thinking about American differences reflected the popular mood of post-Revolutionary patriotism. It was fashionable, during the 1780's, to take a pious tone toward Europe, sophistication, aristocracy, luxury, elegant language, etc. "Buy American!" was a slogan that arose from the premises of pastoral economic theory. It meant that crude local products were preferable (on moral grounds, of course) to European finery. Years ago Constance Rourke named these attitudes, which appear everywhere in native lore, the fable of the contrast. She borrowed the name from Royall Tyler's play, *The Contrast*, first produced in 1787. Setting a forthright, plain-spoken American (named Manly) against a foolish, foppish, and sinister Anglicized type (named Dimple), Tyler fashioned a trite, melodramatic action. But the character who really took hold of the popular imagination, and who ultimately was to reappear in the guise of Uncle Sam,

was a Yankee rustic named Jonathan. His great charm is an intriguing blend of astuteness and rural simplicity. Beyond question he is a comic cousin of Jefferson's noble husbandman. Combining country manners with a wit capable of undoing city types, he too embodies the values of the middle landscape. As a matter of fact, Constance Rourke's seminal book, *American Humor* (1931), is a study of the pastoral impulse in its most nearly pure indigenous form. It suggests the degree to which the cultural situation in Jefferson's America, with its rare juxtaposition of crudity and polish, may have approximated the environment from which the pastoral convention had arisen centuries before. Perhaps that explains D. H. Lawrence's impression—see the epigraph to this chapter—that American writers somehow had by-passed English literature, had reached behind it for their inspiration, thereby producing work that seems "older" than English writing.⁴¹

Almost immediately after the first printing of *Notes on Virginia*, however, Jefferson referred to the idea of a permanently undeveloped, rural America as "theory only, and a theory which the servants of America are not at liberty to follow." He made the statement in answering some questions from G. K. van Hogendorp, who had been reading the *Notes*. Possibly Jefferson's skepticism was encouraged by Hogendorp's shrewd characterization of Dr. Price in the same letter as an "enthusiast" who was "little informed of local circumstances" and who was "forming a judgement on America rather from what . . . [he wished] mankind to be, than from what it is." In any event, Hogendorp asked Jefferson to elaborate upon his ideas about the new nation's future economic development.

Here is Jefferson's reply:

You ask what I think on the expediency of encouraging our states to be commercial? Were I to indulge my own theory, I should wish them to practice neither commerce nor navigation, but to stand with respect to Europe precisely on the footing of China. We should thus avoid wars, and all our citizens would be husbandmen.

He admitted that under certain conditions America might some day be forced to engage in commerce and manufactures.

But that day would, I think be distant, and we should long keep our workmen in Europe, while Europe should be drawing rough materials and even subsistence from America. But this is theory only, and a theory which the servants of America are not at liberty to follow. Our people have a decided taste for navigation and commerce. They take this from their mother country: and their servants are in duty bound to calculate all their measures on this datum . . .⁴²

Right here the reason for the strange break in the middle of Jefferson's reply to Query XIX becomes apparent. In this letter he reverts to the political economist's language, tone, and point of view. Once again the scientific empiricist is speaking. He tells Hogendorp that much as he would like to calculate measures according to his own theory, there is a datum which the theory cannot encompass. What could be further from the high-flown rhetoric of the apostrophe to "those who labor in the earth"? It is as if Jefferson had taken that leap into rhetoric because he knew where the discursive style led. To put the pastoral theory of America into effect it would be necessary at some point, in fact almost immediately, to legislate against the creation of a native system of manufactures. But to

curb economic development in turn would require precisely the kind of governmental power Jefferson detested. Moreover, he admits that the American people already have a "decided taste" for business enterprise. The seeds of a dynamic, individualistic economic system had been imported from Europe. Hence the noble husbandman inhabits a land of "theory only," an imaginary land where desire rules fact and government is dedicated to the pursuit of happiness.

What are we to make of this apparent contradiction? Ever since Jefferson's death scholars have been trying to discover order in — or to impose it upon — his elusive, unsystematic thought, but without much success. It simply does not lend itself to ordinary standards of consistency. There is no way, finally, to cancel out either his ardent devotion to the rural ideal or the cool, analytic, pragmatic tone in which he dismisses it. All of his commitments embrace similar polarities. He praises the noble husbandman's renunciation of worldly concerns, but he himself wins and holds the highest political office in the land; he is drawn to a simple life in a remote place, but he cherishes the fruits of high civilization — architecture, music, literature, fine wines, and the rest; he wants to preserve a provincial, rural society, but he is devoted to the advance of science, technology, and the arts. How, then, can we evaluate Jefferson's conflicting statements about the pastoral ideal?

The first step in understanding Jefferson, as Richard Hofstadter suggests, is to dispense with shallow notions of consistency. Observing that he "wanted with all his heart to hold to the values of agrarian society, and yet . . . believed in progress," Hofstadter concludes that such deep ambiguities lie at the very center of his temperament. To charge him with inconsistency, after all, is to imply that

a firm grasp of the facts or the rigorous imposition of logic might have improved the quality of his thought. But that is a mistake. The "inconsistencies" just mentioned are not the sort that can be swept aside by a tidying-up of his reasoning. They are not mere opinions. They stem from a profound ambivalence—a complex response to the conflicting demands of the self and society.⁴³

It is striking to see how closely Jefferson's attitude toward his own role conforms to the pattern of contradiction displayed in Query XIX. What he most wanted, or so he always maintained, was to live quietly in his rural retreat at Monticello. As Roland Van Zandt has shown, Jefferson thought of the whole realm of power politics, war, and conflict as something Americans might have ignored but for the evil pressures of the great (European) world. Invariably he regards his political activity as a temporary departure from the natural and proper pattern of his life. It is always a concession to an emergency.⁴⁴

At the beginning of the Revolution, in 1775, he writes to John Randolph to explain how much he hates "this unnatural contest." Even at the age of thirty-two he is contemplating a permanent retirement from active life.

My first wish is a restoration of our just rights; my second a return of the happy period when, consistently with duty, I may withdraw myself totally from the public stage and pass the rest of my days in domestic ease and tranquillity, banishing every desire of afterwards even hearing what passes in the world.

In 1793, after serving as governor of Virginia, minister to France, and Secretary of State, he still regards political life as a diversion.

When I first entered on the stage of public life (now twenty-four years ago), I came to a resolution never to

engage while in public office in any kind of enterprise for the improvement of my fortune, nor to wear any other character than that of a farmer.

And, again, in 1795:

It is now more than a year that I have withdrawn myself from public affairs, which I never liked in my life, but was drawn into by emergencies which threatened our country with slavery, but ended in establishing it free. I have returned, with infinite appetite, to the enjoyment of my farm, my family and my books, and . . . determined to meddle in nothing beyond their limits.

A year later he was a candidate for the Presidency; twelve years of public service ensued, and it was not until 1809 that Jefferson finally retired to his rural seat at Monticello. Calls to public duty followed by withdrawals to the country comprise the very rhythm of his life. Beyond question Jefferson's contradictory attitudes toward the pastoral ideal are analogous to these conflicting private motives.⁴⁵

When he expresses a yearning for country peace and pleasure he sometimes veers toward sentimental pastoralism. Then he insists that his true vocation is farming: that a rural life is the proper and the "natural" life for an American, and that he only emerges from his sylvan retreat when a nefarious "other" threatens the peace. Seen from this vantage the forces which make politics necessary are not truly American; they always originate somewhere else. Projected upon the larger scene, this attitude implies that all America is—or should be—a kind of pastoral oasis. There is the implication that the young Republic, if it only could remain undisturbed, would not have to confront any serious problems of power. This way of conceiving reality is buttressed by Lockian environmentalism, a theory of knowledge and behavior which on the whole

neglects individual or psychic sources of aggression. It is the feudal past, perpetuated by corrupt, repressive institutions, that accounts for the evil economic and military degradations of Europe. If the pristine landscape of Virginia is conducive to the nurture of democratic values, think of what happens to men in the European terrain, with its dark, crowded cities, its gothic ruins, and crowded workshops!

A cluster of natural images — the rural landscape, plants, organic growth, gardens, and gardening — connects Jefferson's political theories with his physical tastes. Like a great poet, he often achieves a striking fusion of intellectual and sensual experience. "I have often thought," he writes to Charles Wilson Peale in 1811, "that if heaven had given me choice of my position and calling, it should have been on a rich spot of earth, well watered, and near a good market for the productions of the garden. No occupation is so delightful to me as the culture of the earth, and no culture comparable to that of the garden." A garden is a miniature middle landscape. It is a place as attractive for what it excludes as for what it contains. Working in his garden he is free of the anxieties and responsibilities of political office. By the same token, if all America somehow could be transformed into a garden, a permanently rural republic, then its citizens might escape from the terrible sequence of power struggles, wars, and cruel repressions suffered by Europe. This is the "logic" back of what is known as the Jeffersonian dream — a native version of an ancient hope.⁴⁶

But, again, the impulse to withdraw from the world represents only one side of Jefferson. The other side, represented by his active political role, his empirical estimate of social forces, emerges clearly in his gradual accommo-

dation to the idea of American manufactures. In a brilliant letter to Benjamin Austin, in 1816, he retraces his thinking on the subject. "You tell me I am quoted," he writes, "by those who wish to continue our dependence on England for manufactures. There was a time when I might have been so quoted with more candor, but within the thirty years which have since elapsed, how are circumstances changed!" He then recounts the history of the Napoleonic era, the wars, the exclusion of American shipping from the seas, and, all in all, the experience of what, in 1785, "we did not then believe, that there exist both profligacy and power enough to exclude us from the field of interchange with other nations: that to be independent for the comforts of life we must fabricate them ourselves. We must now place the manufacturer by the side of the agriculturist." But what about the question he had raised in Query XIX? Did not the immensity of unimproved land in America argue the more or less permanent supremacy of agriculture?

The former question is suppressed, or rather assumes a new form. Shall we make our own comforts, or go without them, at the will of a foreign nation? He, therefore, who is now against domestic manufacture, must be for reducing us either to dependence on that foreign nation, or to be clothed in skins, and to live like wild beasts in dens and caverns. I am not one of these . . .⁴⁷

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 ever-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.") In 1816, accordingly, the momentous question he had raised in 1785 — in our language: shall America industrialize? — necessarily "assumes a new form." Why? Because circumstances have changed. A quarter of a 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.

To accept the need for manufactures in 1816, therefore, does not mean abandoning his basic principles. But it does mean that he must accommodate himself, however reluctantly, to the factory system he detests. It is important to stress his reluctance: one cannot read the long sequence of Jefferson's letters on the subject without recognizing the painful anxiety that this accommodation arouses in him. But then it may be said that his acceptance of the need for manufactures hardly constitutes mediation between ideal and reality — mediation, that is, in the literal sense of establishing a compromise; with this decision, after all, the distance between the two seems to be opening rather than closing. So it is. That is why the feasible policy in 1816 includes what had seemed avoidable in 1785. To admit this is only to underline the irony with which Henry Adams portrays the career of Jefferson: during his eight-year term as President of the United States, Jefferson's policies had the effect of creating precisely the kind of society he did not want. But then, even in 1785, Jefferson had acknowledged in his wistful letter to Hogen-

dorp that America was not headed in the direction he preferred. By the time he put it in words, Jefferson already had begun to shift his vision of a pastoral utopia from the future to the past.⁴⁸

In his greatest moments, Jefferson was clear about the difference between his preferences and what he called "circumstances." Similarly, he defined many of the important decisions of his life as choices between private pleasures and public responsibilities — between the garden and the world. So thoroughgoing was the doubleness of his outlook that he virtually had a separate language for each side. Far from being a handicap, it seems, this inconsistency was a source of his political strength. Tracing the history of the Jeffersonian image since 1826, Merrill Peterson attributes his continuing fascination for us largely to the fact that he expresses decisive contradictions in our culture and in ourselves.⁴⁹

Beginning in Jefferson's time, the cardinal image of American aspirations was a rural landscape, a well-ordered green garden magnified to continental size. Although it probably shows a farmhouse or a neat white village, the scene usually is dominated by natural objects: in the foreground a pasture, a twisting brook with cattle grazing nearby, then a clump of elms on a rise in the middle distance and beyond that, way off on the western horizon, a line of dark hills. This is the countryside of the old Republic, a chaste, uncomplicated land of rural virtue. In his remarkable book, *Virgin Land*, Henry Nash Smith shows that down to the twentieth century the imagination of Americans was dominated by the idea of transforming the wild heartland into such a new "Garden of the World." On the whole, Americans were unsentimental

about unmodified nature. Attempts to idealize the wilderness, moreover, finally produced only a sterile, formula-ridden art — the "western story." As Tocqueville noted, the wilderness was precious to most Americans chiefly for what could be made of it — a terrain of rural peace and happiness.

This symbolic landscape did not exist only on canvas or in books, or, for that matter, in the minds of those who were familiar with art and literature. What makes *Virgin Land* so illuminating is that Smith demonstrates in detail how the goals embodied in this image governed behavior on many planes of consciousness. It activated the stubborn settlers who struggled for years to raise crops in what was literally a desert; it led congressmen to insist upon certain impractical provisions of the Homestead Act; it lay back of the peculiarly bitter frustration of western farmers beginning in the 1870's; it kept alive the memory of Thomas Jefferson; it caused artists and writers both popular and serious to lose touch, as time went on, with social realities; it excited the imagination of Frederick Jackson Turner, not to mention all the historians who so eagerly endorsed the "frontier hypothesis" as the most plausible explanation for the Americanness of various attitudes and institutions — and one could go on. "The image of this vast and constantly growing agricultural society," says Smith, ". . . became . . . a collective representation, a poetic idea . . . that defined the promise of American life. The master symbol of the garden embraced a cluster of metaphors expressing fecundity, growth, increase, and blissful labor in the earth. . ."⁵⁰

For more than a century, then, the American people held on to a version of the pastoral ideal not unlike the one that Jefferson had set forth in 1785, investing it with

a quality of thought and feeling that can only be called mythic. The "master symbol" described by Smith is not a static emblem of private felicity; it is the aim of a grand collective enterprise. Accordingly, when he calls it the *myth of the garden*, Smith is not using the term as it is used either in ordinary discourse, meaning an illusory idea, or in contemporary literary criticism, as applied for example to the poetry of Yeats, meaning a manifestly fictitious, sophisticated invention designed to place a cosmological frame around one poet's vision of life. As he uses the term, myth is a mode of belief. He is saying that Americans, so far as they shared an idea of what they were doing as a people, actually saw themselves creating a society in the image of a garden. The quality of their feeling was not unlike that of the Greeks in the Homeric poems, for whom myth presumably expressed a believable definition of reality.

Yet Jefferson, as we have seen, could not give full credence to the myth. Although he never entirely repudiated it, he knew perfectly well that it did not encompass all of the essential truth about American experience. In detached moods, he recognized the restless striving of his countrymen, their get-ahead, get-rich, rise-in-the-world ambitions. Whatever it was that they wanted, or, rather, that they *thought* they wanted, it was not the domestic peace and joy of the self-sufficient farm. Hence Jefferson's attitude is not to be confused with a naïve trust in the fulfillment of the pastoral hope. Recognizing that the ideal society of the middle landscape was unattainable, he kept it in view as a kind of model, a guide to long-range policies as indispensable to intelligent political thought or action as the recognition of present necessities. Like certain great poets who have written in the pastoral mode, Jefferson's

genius lay in his capacity to respond to the dream yet to disengage himself from it. To a degree, he exemplifies the kind of intelligence which Keats thought characteristic of men of achievement, especially in literature, and which Shakespeare possessed above all others, that is, "negative capability": the capacity "of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason. . . ." Though Jefferson certainly did reach after fact and reason, he was able to function brilliantly under stress of doubt, and his superb mind maintained its poise as it moved ceaselessly between real and imagined worlds. As indicated by the example of Shakespeare, creator of *The Tempest* and *King Lear*, an exultant pastoral wish-image may well emanate from a mind susceptible to the darkest forebodings. Looking to America's future, Jefferson anticipates the tragic ambivalence that is the hallmark of our most resonant pastoral fables. "Our enemy," he writes during the War of 1812, "has indeed the consolation of Satan on removing our first parents from Paradise: from a peaceable and agricultural nation, he makes us a military and manufacturing one."⁵¹

IV

The Machine

Locke sank into a swoon;
The Garden died;
God took the spinning-jenny
Out of his side.

W. B. Yeats, *The Tower*, 1928 *

. . . the most idealist nations invent most machines. America simply teems with mechanical inventions, because nobody in America ever wants to do anything. They are idealists. Let a machine do the thing.

D. H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature*, 1923

In his *Life of Johnson* Boswell describes the moment when he first recognized the significance of the new technology. In March 1776, he visited Matthew Boulton's great Soho works where a steam engine was in production. The "very ingenious proprietor" himself was his guide. "I wish," Boswell writes, "that Johnson had been with us: for it was a scene which I should have been glad to contemplate by his light. The vastness and the contrivance of some of the machinery would have 'matched his mighty mind.'" In Johnson's absence, however, Boswell quotes the "*iron chieftain's*" own account of his work. "I shall never forget Mr. Bolton's [sic] expression to me: 'I sell here, Sir, what all the world desires to have—POWER.'"

As Boswell tells the story, there is no trace in it of that

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contempt for the machine later to become a stock literary attitude. In many ways, in fact, he anticipates the dominant American response. He finds the spectacle exhilarating, and his notion that the growing power of technology somehow is a "match" for the power of intellect implies a progressive idea of history. At the time most Americans no doubt shared this view. On the other hand, they surely did not assume, as Boulton does, that machine power entails manufacturing on a large scale. According to Boswell, there were seven hundred workers on the job at Soho when he paid his visit — a prospect that would have appalled Thomas Jefferson.¹

1

It did not occur to Jefferson that the factory system was a necessary feature of technological progress. In 1786, the year after the first printing of *Notes on Virginia*, with its plea that America let its workshops remain in Europe, Jefferson was in England. This was a moment, as Boulton put it in a letter to his collaborator, James Watt, when the population seemed to have gone "steam-mill mad." At Blackfriar's Bridge, near London, there was a new mill powered by Boulton and Watt engines which was generally considered one of the mechanical wonders of the age, and Jefferson went to see it. He was delighted. "I could write you volumes," he said in a letter to Charles Thomson afterward, "on the improvements . . . made and making here in the arts." Of course Jefferson's passion for utilitarian improvement, gadgets, and labor-saving devices of all kinds is familiar to anyone who has read his letters or visited Monticello. But in England at this time the new technology was visibly related to the new factory

system, and one therefore might have expected to hear Jefferson sound another, less enthusiastic, note. But not so. He singles out the steam mill as deserving of particular notice because, he says, it is "simple, great, and likely to have extensive consequences." And he is not thinking about consequences only in England.

I hear you are applying this same agent in America to navigate boats, and I have little doubt but that it will be applied generally to machines, so as to supercede the use of water ponds, and of course to lay open all the streams for navigation. We know that steam is one of the most powerful engines we can employ; and in America fuel is abundant.²

Today Jefferson's attitude is bound to seem curious. Why, we cannot help asking, does he fail to connect the new machinery with Soho and the transformation of England into a vast workshop? Why does he want the latest, most powerful machines imported to America if he would have factories and cities kept in Europe?

Part of the answer is that Jefferson's attitude reflects American economic realities. At the time industrialization scarcely had begun in America. Native manufactures were primitive. The war had stimulated production, to be sure, but chiefly in the form of household industry. In America there was nothing comparable to Soho, nor would there be for a long time. True, ritual gestures toward the "promotion" of manufactures often had been made, notably by Benjamin Franklin, but even he assumed that industry, as compared with agriculture, would be of trivial significance. All reliable opinion supported this view. In *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), the work of political economy to which the age deferred beyond all others, Adam

Smith had warned Americans that it would be folly to direct capital into manufactures. Everyone repeated his sensible argument. During the war, especially, the British delighted in reminding their difficult cousins that, even if they won political independence, they could count upon protracted economic subservience. Edmund Burke popularized this idea, and the Earl of Sheffield summarized it with an incontrovertible body of facts and figures in his *Observations on the Commerce of the United States* (1783). An advocate of a tough policy toward America, Sheffield demonstrated the Republic's helplessness. No matter how oppressive a policy the British followed, he said, there was no danger of provoking serious competition from America. The book was widely read, going through six editions by 1791, and it helped to establish the idea that America's economic development would be unusual, if not unique. Not that many people were disposed to quarrel with Sheffield. Most American statesmen accepted his seemingly flawless case. "I say," John Adams had written to Franklin in 1780, "that America will not make manufactures enough for her own consumption these thousand years."³

Under the circumstances, there was nothing farfetched about the prophecy. What made it plausible was not so much the absence of factories and machines, it was the geo-political situation of the country. One has only to recall how small an area had been occupied by 1786; most of the continent was unsettled and, for that matter, unexplored; nine out of ten Americans lived on farms; land was cheap, if not free, and capital was scarce. To be sure, political independence had removed Parliament's legal prohibitions against colonial manufactures, but it is doubtful whether they had made much difference. Geography had been more effective than any laws could have been

in blocking manufactures, and it still seemed to present overwhelming obstacles. The most formidable was simply the presence of the land itself — that "immensity of land courting the industry of the husbandman" which encouraged Jefferson in the hope that (the war being over) his countrymen would gladly revert to their former dependence on England. The availability of land worked against manufactures in two ways: it provided an inducement to agriculture, and it dispersed the people over an area too large to be a satisfactory market for manufactures. It is not enough, therefore, to think of the landscape at this time merely as an emblem of agrarian sentiments; it is a perpetual reminder of American differences, a visual token of circumstances which guarantee that the nation's workshops will remain in Europe. But workshops, to Jefferson, are one thing and machines another. It is no accident that his enthusiasm is aroused by a mechanized grist mill — a piece of machinery peculiarly suited to a rural society.*⁴

Quite apart from the state of the American economy, however, there are compelling reasons for Jefferson's failure to see the new machines as a threat to his rural ideal. For one thing, the very notion of "technology" as an agent of change scarcely existed. (It was not until 1829 that Jacob Bigelow, a Harvard professor, coined the word itself.) Although many features of what we now call indus-

* Ironically, the American inventor, Oliver Evans, already was perfecting a more impressive version back in the United States. Indeed, his water-powered mill, which was in operation by 1787, is now considered the world's first automatic production line. By using both horizontal and vertical conveyor belts, Evans was able to eliminate all human labor between loading the grain at one end of the continuous process and covering the barrels filled with flour at the other. Later he included even the final packing in the automated process.

trialism already were visible, neither the word nor the concept of a totally new way of life was available. Today our view of history is so deeply colored by an appreciation, if not awe, of technology as an agent of change that it is not easy to imagine Jefferson's state of mind as he inspects the powerful engines at Blackfriar's Bridge. Curiously enough, his very devotion to the principles of the Enlightenment obscures his perception of causal relations we now take for granted. Assuming that knowledge inescapably is power for good, he cannot imagine that a genuine advance in science or the arts, such as the new steam engine, could entail consequences as deplorable as factory cities.⁵

From Jefferson's perspective, the machine is a token of that liberation of the human spirit to be realized by the young American Republic; the factory system, on the other hand, is but feudal oppression in a slightly modified form. Once the machine is removed from the dark, crowded, grimy cities of Europe, he assumes that it will blend harmoniously into the open countryside of his native land. He envisages it turning millwheels, moving ships up rivers, and, all in all, helping to transform a wilderness into a society of the middle landscape. At bottom it is the intensity of his belief in the land, as a locus of both economic and moral value, which prevents him from seeing what the machine portends for America.

2

By this time, however, there were some Americans — not many — whose predilections enabled them to foresee what Jefferson could not. The most astute was Tench Coxe, an ambitious, young Philadelphia merchant who was disturbed by the unhappy state into which American

cover
art
driving
along
naturally

affairs had fallen by the end of the Revolutionary War. Although only thirty-one, Coxe already had made a name for himself as a capable spokesman for the nascent manufacturing interest. Later he was to be Alexander Hamilton's assistant in the Treasury, where he would play an important part in drawing up the *Report on Manufactures* of 1791. If Coxe has been slighted by historians, it is partly because he is an unattractive figure. After the Revolution he was accused of collaboration with the enemy, though he was never brought to trial. Hard-pressed financially, he later maneuvered endlessly for government posts. John Quincy Adams called him a "wily, winding, subtle, and insidious character." This judgment may be somewhat extreme, but it seems clear that Coxe was a careerist and political trimmer whose views seldom were far removed from the interests of his class. Except on the subject of economic development, where he was far ahead of his time, Coxe did not display intellectual distinction. His values were pragmatic in the limited material sense. Yet it was precisely the narrow, prudential quality of his mind that made him responsive to the forces which were to determine the main line of national development. In this sense at least he is entitled to the tribute of Joseph Dorfman, who considers him "closest to being the Defoe of America." At any rate, his claim to our attention rests on two talents: first, a rare empirical bent which led him to make predictions based chiefly upon economic data collected and interpreted by himself, and, second, a master publicist's knack of casting his own aims in the idiom of the dominant ideology. With a sure sense that machine technology would make a decisive difference in the nation's development, Coxe proceeded to make a place for it in the myth of the garden.⁶

In September 1786, just a few months after Jefferson's visit to the mill at Blackfriar's Bridge, Coxe attended the Annapolis meeting on commercial regulations which in turn led to the calling of the Constitutional Convention of 1787. By the following summer his anxiety about the deterioration of the economy of the young Republic had deepened. He was convinced that nothing less than the "salvation of the country" rested upon the delegates who were assembling to write, as it turned out, the Constitution of the United States. Although not a delegate himself, Coxe made his ideas known to the Convention. On May 11, three days before the scheduled meeting, he addressed the Society for Political Enquiries at the home of Benjamin Franklin. Some fifty leading citizens belonged to the organization, which met every two weeks to discuss topics of general interest. Later Coxe saw to it that his speech (*An Enquiry into the principles, on which a commercial system for the United States of America should be founded . . . [and] some political observations connected with the subject*) was published and "inscribed to the members of the convention." Then again, on August 9th, while the Convention still was in session, he elaborated upon his theme. At the request of Dr. Benjamin Rush, the president, he gave the inaugural address at the organizing meeting of the Pennsylvania Society for the Encouragement of Manufactures and the Useful Arts. Taken together, these two speeches outline the case for industrialization as a means of realizing the ideal of the middle landscape.⁷

Like most of the official delegates to the Convention, Coxe argues for a stronger, more centralized government with power to enforce uniform economic policies. On the political side, accordingly, he expounds the standard doc-

trine of the capitalist and nationalist groups. But Coxe is more interested than most in long-range economic goals. Convinced that political independence ultimately will require greater economic self-sufficiency, he insists upon the need for a "balanced economy" and thus, above all, for native manufactures. Without them the young nation's prosperity and its security always will be precarious. At the outset, then, he runs head on into the whole body of respectable economic theory that denies the feasibility of American manufactures. His problem, he admits, is to "disencumber" the case for manufactures of the usual objections: "*the high rate of labour, . . . the want of a sufficient number of hands . . . , — the scarcity and dearness of raw materials — want of skill in the business itself and its unfavorable effects on the health of the people.*" Impressive as they are, all of these objections may be disposed of, according to Coxe, by one new fact under the sun. It is so new that he does not even have a name for it, but he is certain that it will make all the difference, and so he says:

Factories which can be carried on by water-mills, wind-mills, fire, horses and machines ingeniously contrived, are not burdened with any heavy expense of boarding, lodging, clothing and paying workmen, and they supply the force of hands to a great extent without taking our people from agriculture. By wind and water machines we can make pig and bar iron, nail rods, tire, sheet-iron, sheet-copper, sheet-brass, anchors, meal of all kinds, gunpowder . . .

And so on. Describing the incredible productive power of machines and factories, Coxe becomes excited; a note of wonder and prophecy gets into his sober discourse:

Strange as it may appear they also card, spin and even weave, it is said, by water in the European factories.

Steam mills have not yet been adopted in America, but we shall probably see them after a short time. . . .

Machines ingeniously constructed, will give us immense assistance. — The cotton and silk manufacturers in Europe are possessed of some, that are invaluable to them. Several instances have been ascertained, in which a few hundreds of women and children perform the work of thousands of carders, spinners and winders.

The cumulative effect of all this is to undermine most prevailing expectations about the future American economy. Once the new technology is brought into the picture, Coxe is saying, the prospect changes completely. Indeed — and this is the crux no one else seems to have recognized — the very factors usually cited as inhibiting to the nation's growth, such as the scarcity of labor, then will become stimulants. Paradoxically, the extraordinary abundance of land in America is what lends a unique significance to the machine. Coxe knows that the practical, conservative men in his audience will suspect him of being a "visionary enthusiast," but he cannot restrain himself. So inspired is he by the changes to be wrought by machines that he is not satisfied merely to reject the idea of the young Republic's subservience to Europe:

. . . combinations of machines with fire and water have already accomplished much more than was formerly expected from them by the most visionary enthusiast on the subject. Perhaps I may be too sanguine, but they appear to me fraught with immense advantages to us, and not a little dangerous to the manufacturing nations of Europe; for should they continue to use and improve

them, as they have heretofore done, their people may be driven to us for want of employment, and if, on the other hand, they should return to manual labour, we may underwork them by these invaluable engines.⁸

To appreciate Coxe's prescience it is necessary to recall how conjectural these ideas were in the summer of 1787. Although machine production was becoming an accepted fact of life in England, it was little more than an idea in America. But this is not to suggest that Coxe was the only American drawn to the possibility. In the small but influential group of "friends of American manufactures" who made up the new Philadelphia society there were a number of men who had expressed one or the other of Coxe's thoughts on the subject. In 1787, moreover, Matthew Carey had founded a new journal, *The American Museum*, which took the same general line. Besides, it is misleading to stress the backwardness of native manufactures. Beneath the surface of economic life the colonies had accumulated a rich fund of technical knowledge and skill, soon to be revealed in the achievements of inventors like Evans, Fitch, Whitney, and Fulton. When all of these allowances have been made, however, the fact remains that it was Coxe who first gathered these scattered impulses and ideas into a prophetic vision of machine technology as the fulcrum of national power.⁹

But for Coxe the machine is the instrument and not in itself the true source of America's future power. If anything, he exaggerates its European identity, and he frankly advocates certain devious methods of wresting the secrets of technological power from the Old World. At the time the British were attempting, by strict regulations, to prevent any plans or new engines of production or skilled mechanics from leaving the country. As countermeasures,

Coxe and his colleagues advertised for technicians; they offered special bonuses to those who would emigrate—a policy notably successful in the well-known case of Samuel Slater; they also attempted to smuggle machines packed in false crates out of England, and the British foreign service was alerted to intercept these illicit cargoes; for a time, in fact, the Americans and the British played an elaborate game of technological espionage and counterespionage. Although Coxe led the campaign to import the new methods, he was intelligent enough not to conceive of American power as emerging from technology *per se*, but rather from the peculiar affinities between the machine and the New World setting in its entirety: geographical, political, social, and, in our sense of the word, cultural.¹⁰

In his 1787 speeches Coxe displays a striking sensitivity to the prevalence of rural pieties. He tactfully defers to agriculture as the "great leading interest" and repeatedly insists upon the subordinate rôle of manufactures. By employing workers unsuited to farming and thereby helping to develop a home market, he argues, the factory system will benefit agriculture. He anticipates all of the stock protectionist arguments of the next century. Farmers and planters, he says, are the "bulwark of the nation," and their pre-eminence will grow with the "settlement of our waste lands." In his references to the wilderness, incidentally, there is not a trace of primitivism or literary sentimentality. Unimproved land, he says, is "vacant"—a "waste." When discussing the middle landscape, moreover, he adopts the familiar pastoral attitudes. Of course, he says, "rural life promotes health and morality by its active nature, and by keeping our people from the luxuries and vices of the towns." To allay the fears of Jeffersonians, he relies chiefly upon the "safety valve" argument. After

all, "the states are possessed of millions of vacant acres . . . that court the cultivator's hand," so how can anyone question the "great superiority of agriculture over all the rest [of the economic interests] combined"? It is impossible to tell how much of this is the calculated strategy of a "gladiator of the quill"—as William Maclay referred to Coxe—and how much he really believed.¹¹

At any rate, instead of denying that the economic supremacy of agriculture ultimately inheres in the close relation between farmers and the soil (as Hamilton is tempted to do in the *Report on Manufactures* four years later), Coxe ingeniously contrives an equivalent argument for manufacturing. Building factories, he claims, is necessary to fulfill imperatives embedded in the terrain. "Unless business of this kind is carried on," he says, "certain great *natural powers* of the country will remain inactive and useless. Our numerous mill seats . . . would be given by Providence in vain." (Throughout Coxe is at pains to break down the association of manufactures with the "artificial" as against the alleged "naturalness" of a rural life.) Describing the policy to be inferred from the presence of numerous mill seats, he continues:

If properly improved, they will save us an immense expense for the wages, provisions, cloathing and lodging of workmen, without diverting the people from their farms—Fire, as well as water, affords . . . a fund of assistance, that cannot lie unused without an evident neglect of our best interests. Breweries, . . . distilleries, . . . casting and steel furnaces . . . are carried on by this powerful element. . . . 'Tis probable also that a frequent use of steam engines will add greatly to this class of factories.

Nowhere is Coxe's genius as a propagandist more evident than in the way he depicts the aims of American

society as emanating from geography. He presents his program of economic development as part of a grand topographical design. Not only the abundance of resources but the breadth of the ocean supports his case for developing native manufactures. In fact, America is better suited to the purpose than Europe. With the aplomb of a public relations expert, he turns the standard symbols of the pastoral myth to his own uses. The "clear air and powerful sun of America" will give producers of linens and cottons a distinct advantage over their overseas competitors when it comes to bleaching because, he says, the "European process by drugs and machines impairs the strength." (Although this apparent slur on machines may seem inconsistent, it fits the Coxean formula — the notion that machines merely bring out powers latent in the environment. Thus textile production is more "naturally" suited to America than to Europe.) As for the alleged immorality and ill-health of factory workers, Americans need not be concerned about that. He says that the objection to manufactures as "unfavourable to the health" is urged principally against the production of textiles which "formerly were entirely manual and sedentary occupations." The use of machine power erases that old objection.

At this point Coxe anticipates what was to become a central theme in the ideology of American industrialism: the capacity of the New World environment to "purify" the system. Just as the American sun is a more potent bleaching agent, so the entire social climate of the new Republic will cleanse the factory system of its unfortunate feudal residues. Later this idea also would ease Jefferson's mind: in 1805, recalling his diatribe against manufactures in *Query XIX*, he explains to a correspondent that in the 1780's he had been thinking about workers "of the great

cities in the old countries . . . with whom the want of food and clothing . . . [had] begotten a depravity of morals, a dependence and corruption" he had no wish to see repeated in America. But now, he observes, American "manufacturers are as much at their ease, as independent and moral as our agricultural inhabitants, and they will continue so as long as there are vacant lands for them to resort to. . ." Later variants of this refrain would be heard from European visitors, many of whom would develop the contrast between the pure, apple-cheeked farm girls in American mills (the "nuns of Lowell" in Chevalier's resonant phrase) and their pathetic European counterparts. Ironically, the sentiment rests at bottom upon the idea that the factory system, when transferred to America, is redeemed by contact with "nature" and the rural way of life it is destined to supplant.¹²

But to return to Tench Coxe in 1787. In addition to his foresight and the subtlety with which he adapts his program to rural values, what is most impressive about his thought is his responsiveness to the topographical and, indeed, "mythic" quality of the dominant ethos. He fully appreciates the function of the landscape as a master image embodying American hopes. At a decisive point in his first speech, accordingly, he offers by way of summary "to draw a picture of our country, as it would really exist under the operation of a system of national laws formed upon these principles." What follows is a geo-political landscape painting:

In the foreground we should find the mass of our citizens — the cultivators (and what is happily for us in most instances the same thing) the independent proprietors of the soil. Every wheel would appear in motion that could carry forward the interests of this great body

of our people, and bring into action the inherent powers of the country. . . . *On one side* we should see our manufactures encouraging the tillers of the earth. . . . Commerce, *on the other hand* . . . would come forward with offers to range through foreign climates in search of . . . supplies . . . which nature has not given us at home. . . .

Coxe has no difficulty blending factories and machines into the rural scene. Combining the best of art with the best of nature, the picture matches the pastoral ideal of the middle landscape.

As a frame for his whole program, Coxe begins his second speech of 1787 by invoking the American moral geography:

Providence has bestowed upon the United States of America means of happiness, as great and numerous, as are enjoyed by any country in the world. A soil fruitful and diversified — a healthful climate — mighty rivers and adjacent seas abounding with fish are the great advantages for which we are indebted to a beneficent creator. Agriculture, manufactures and commerce, naturally arising from these sources, afford to our industrious citizens certain subsistence and innumerable opportunities of acquiring wealth.

In arguing for the development of machine power, Coxe depicts it as "naturally arising," like agriculture, from the divine purpose invested in the New World landscape. To Matthew Boulton steam engines represented simple, stark power, but Coxe understands that it is wise to represent the machine to Americans as another natural "means of happiness" decreed by the Creator in his design of the continent. So far from conceding that there might be anything alien or "artificial" about mechanization, he insists

that it is inherent in "nature," both geographic and human. On the "subject of mechanism," he says, "America may justly pride herself. Every combination of machinery may be expected from a country, A NATIVE SON of which, reaching this inestimable object at its highest point, has epitomized the motions of the spheres, that roll throughout the universe."

With this deft allusion to David Rittenhouse and his orrery, Coxe brings his celebration of the machine in its New World setting to a climax. By reminding his audience of the famous orrery, a miniature planetarium which had won the Pennsylvania scientist international fame, he enlists the immense prestige of Newtonian mechanics in support of his economic program. The orrery is an ingenious replica of the universe: when the clockwork machinery turns, the heavenly bodies revolve in their orbits, music plays, and dials move indicating the hour, the day of the month, and the year. Here, Coxe implies, is a visual and auditory display of the same harmonious plan which has provided America with endless resources for manufactures. If a colonial farmer's son can "epitomize" the ultimate laws of nature — the very music of the spheres — then imagine what Americans will accomplish when they apply the same principles to their entire national enterprise! * At this point the impressive, Miltonic reach and grandeur of Coxe's rhetoric imparts a metaphysical sanction to his vision of American economic development. As he describes the situation in 1787, the momentous achievements of science, the political movement to establish the new American Republic and the forthcoming use of

* As if sharing Coxe's sentiments, incidentally, the new Society for the Encouragement of Manufactures and the Useful Arts proceeded to elect Rittenhouse to its vice-presidency.

machine power in production all belong to the same encouraging flow of history. They are all signs of a progressive unfolding of the structural principles of the universe — the laws of "mechanism."

There are few words whose shifting connotations register the revolution in thought and feeling we call the "romantic movement" more clearly than "mechanism." Once the influence of Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Carlyle had been felt in America, no writer (whether sympathetic with them or not) would find it possible to use "mechanism" in the unself-conscious, honorific sense in which Coxe uses it. His entire argument for what we would call industrialization rests on the assumption that celestial mechanics, the orrery, the new engines of production, even the factory system — all embody the same ultimate laws of nature. What is more, and this is perhaps the most difficult attitude to grasp in retrospect, it is the same "mechanism" to which we respond, aesthetically, in the presence of the natural landscape. The identification of visual nature with the celestial "machine" is difficult to grasp because of our own feeling, learned from the romantics, that "organic" nature is the opposite of things "mechanical." But it is impossible to appreciate the dominant American attitude toward technology if we project this sense of contradiction too far back into the past. In other words, Coxe, who anticipates the popular view, is writing in the tradition of James Thomson, whose feeling for the beauty of the countryside was inseparable from his reverence for the Newtonian world machine. On the occasion of Sir Isaac's death, Thomson had described the great man in these terms:

All intellectual eye, our solar round
First gazing through, he by the blended power

Of gravitation and projection, saw
The whole in silent harmony revolve.

And when Newton studied the stars they

. . . Blazed into suns, the living center each
Of an harmonious system: all combin'd
And rul'd unerring by that single power,
Which draws the stone projected to the ground.

Thomson's version of the Newtonian system is one of innumerable examples, a variant of the metaphor which George Berkeley had used in his *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* (1710):

Such is the artificial contrivance of this mighty machine
of nature that, whilst its motions and various phenomena
strike on our senses, the hand which actuates the whole
is itself unperceivable to men of flesh and blood. . . .

True, the "mighty machine" can be described with most precision in the language of mathematics; but this does not prevent the poets of the age, particularly those who celebrate the glories of the rural scene, from communicating a sense of Newton's universe in metaphor. Thus William Somerville toward the end of "The Chase" (1735):

. . . grand machine,
Worlds above worlds; subservient to his voice,
Who, veil'd in clouded majesty, alone
Gives light to all; bids the great system move,
And changeful seasons in their turns advance,
Unmov'd, unchang'd, himself . . .¹³

The speeches of Tench Coxe in the summer of 1787 prefigure the emergence of the machine as an American cultural symbol, that is, a token of meaning and value recognized by a large part of the population. By 1851,

when Walt Whitman tells the Brooklyn Art Union that the United States has become a nation "of whom the steam engine is no bad symbol," he assumes that his audience knows what he is talking about. Needless to say, a collective image of this kind gathers meanings gradually, over a long period, and it is impossible to fix upon any single moment when it comes into being. Besides, it invariably combines a traditional meaning and a new, specific, local or topical reference. The garden image brings together a universal Edenic myth and a particular set of American goals and aspirations. So with the machine. What is most fascinating about the speeches of Tench Coxe is that in them we witness the virtual discovery of the symbolic properties of the machine image — its capacity to embrace a whole spectrum of meanings ranging from a specific class of objects at one end to an abstract metaphor of value at the other.¹⁴

To Coxe the new and most exciting implication of "machine" is technological. In the summer of 1787 the possibilities of the latest technological innovations were just beginning to take hold of the American imagination. While the Constitutional Convention was in session, as it happens, "Mad" John Fitch managed, after inconceivable trials and tribulations, to propel a steam-powered vessel against the current of the Delaware River. When some of the delegates went down to the waterfront to inspect this remarkable invention, what they saw was another instance of, in Coxe's language, the power of mechanism. The existence of this kind of machine leads him to an optimistic view of the Republic's future, and there can be no doubt that in his mind the development of steam power and the business of the Constitutional Convention are aspects of the same grand enterprise. They

both represent a release of power through seizure of the underlying principles of nature. The universe is a "mechanism." At the abstract end of the spectrum, then, the symbol of the machine incorporates a whole metaphysical system. It often has been noted that the dominant structural metaphor of the Constitution is that of a self-regulating machine, like the orrery or the steam engine; it establishes a system of "checks and balances" among three distinct, yet delicately synchronized, branches of government.¹⁵

Between the two extremes, the machine as concrete object and the machine as root metaphor of being, Coxe identifies the power of "mechanism" with a specific economic faction. He is an avowed spokesman for the manufacturing interest. He and his associates in the Pennsylvania delegation are chiefly concerned about the kind of power to be generated by the national government's authority to enforce uniform economic laws, protect patents, and establish tariffs. Running through much of what they had to say is an inchoate sense of the vast transformation of life to be accomplished through what we should call economic development or industrialization. "The time is not distant," said Gouverneur Morris at one point in the debates, "when this Country will abound with mechanics & manufacturers who will receive their bread from their employers." But this is a rare example; the vocabulary at the command of Coxe, Morris, and their friends was inadequate to express their full sense of the power to be released through the combined agencies of commerce, science, technology, and republican institutions. To speak of it as "manufacturing" power hardly sufficed, particularly in view of the fact that the word still carried much of its pre-industrial meaning, as in handicraft or

household manufactures. Their vision had got ahead of their language.*¹⁶

Still, we can be sure about the widespread identification of the manufacturing interest, the new Republic, and the new technology. On July 4, 1788, after the Constitution had been approved by the electorate, there were parades and pageants in many cities, and several featured displays of recent industrial progress. In Philadelphia, the new "manufacturing society" entered a float in the grand Federal Procession. It was thirty feet long and thirteen feet wide, and drawn by ten large bay horses. On board eleven men and women demonstrated the operation of the latest machinery used in textile manufacture—a spinning jenny, a carding machine, and a loom. A new American flag flew above the float, and to it was attached the motto: "May the Union Government Protect the Manufacturers of America." One hundred weavers marched behind the float carrying a banner inscribed, "May Government Protect Us." Half a century later, when industrialization was well under way, the notion that 1789 marked the beginning of the process became something of a commonplace. The chief evil of the colonial situation, said Edward Everett in 1831, had been the "restraint" upon "the

* Actually, a whole new vocabulary of "industrialism" was just emerging at this time. In the 1780's and '90's words like "engine," "machine," "manufacture" and "industry," all of which had been in use long before the advent of power machinery, were beginning to take on new meanings. At one point Coxe refers to "handicraft manufactures," indicating that for him at least the word now had become ambiguous. (*A View of the United States*, p. 38n.) On the other hand, David Humphreys published "A Poem on the Industry of the United States of America" in 1802, in which he still used "industry" in its traditional sense as a character trait (diligence) rather than as an economic institution. A careful study of this shift in language would be invaluable for a detailed understanding of the impact of industrialization upon consciousness.

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labor of the country," and "the first thought and effort of our fathers . . . [was to] encourage and protect the mechanical arts and manufactures. . . ."¹⁷

Among other things, Everett had in mind the *Report on the Subject of Manufactures* which Alexander Hamilton, assisted by Tench Coxe, prepared for the Congress in 1791. This deservedly famous state paper reflects the unmistakable shift in attitudes toward manufactures that coincided with the formation of the new government. Only four years had passed since Coxe had expounded his ideas in Philadelphia, but Hamilton assumed that they had been widely accepted. "The expediency of encouraging manufactures in the United States," he says in the first sentence, "which was not long since deemed very questionable, appears at this time to be pretty generally admitted."¹⁸

In many ways the *Report* goes far beyond Coxe's speeches; it is composed with a systematic rigor and comprehensiveness that makes his thought seem crude and impressionistic. But there is one respect in which Coxe's argument had been more subtle: it took into account, as the *Report* does not, the hold of the pastoral ideal upon the national consciousness. Although Hamilton begins with a routine effort to placate the agricultural interest, he is an undisguised advocate of continuing economic development. He offers no equivalent of Coxe's symbolic landscape, or his vague implication that, somehow, technology would help America reach a kind of pastoral stasis. In fact, he finally makes no rhetorical concessions to Jeffersonian hopes and fears. To support his argument for machine production, he describes the advantages of the "cotton-mill, invented in England, within the last twenty years . . ." in this blunt language:

. . . all the different processes for spinning cotton, are performed by . . . machines, which are put in motion by water, and attended chiefly by women and children; and by a smaller number of persons, in the whole, than are requisite in the ordinary mode of spinning. And it is an advantage of great moment, that the operations of this mill continue with convenience, during the night as well as the day. The prodigious effect of such a machine is easily conceived. To this invention is to be attributed, essentially, the immense progress which has been so suddenly made in Great Britain, in the various fabrics of cotton.¹⁹

Whether he fully intends to endorse it or not, Hamilton makes no effort to disclaim the chilling idea of putting women and children on the night shift in cotton mills. The passage exemplifies the tough, hard-boiled tone of the *Report*. Throughout Hamilton is forthright, unsentimental, logical, and clear. Taken as a whole, in fact, the *Report* is a blueprint for a society aimed at maximum productivity, not as an end in itself, but as the key to national wealth, self-sufficiency, and power. The power of the United States as a corporate entity is the ultimate goal; what Hamilton wants is the economy best suited to the establishment of America's supremacy among nations. There can be little doubt that Tench Coxe wanted much the same sort of society. Unlike Hamilton, however, Coxe saw the need to couch this aim in the language of the prevailing ideology. No matter what the economic behavior of his countrymen might seem to indicate, Coxe understood that they preferred not to acknowledge wealth and power as their goals. In this sense he was a subtler and more farsighted — if less candid — advocate of industrialization than Hamilton. He foresaw that Americans

would be more likely to endorse the Hamiltonian program with enthusiasm if permitted to conceive of it as a means of fulfilling the pastoral ideal.

3

By 1830 a contrasting image of the machine had begun to attract the attention of American intellectuals. It came out of Germany by way of England. Friedrich Schiller, in his *Letters upon the Aesthetical Education of Man* (1795), had brought in a "complicated machine," "the monotonous sound of the perpetually revolving wheel," to figure the "degeneration" of contemporary culture. What was then happening in Europe, according to Schiller, resembled the decline of classical Greek culture. A "common and coarse mechanism" was setting in, society changing from one in which the individual enjoyed — or at least might have enjoyed — an "independent life" enabling him to become "a separate whole and unit in himself," into one dominated by "an ingenious mechanism." The state itself was "splitting up into numberless parts" and so was mankind:

Man himself, eternally chained down to a little fragment of the whole, only forms a kind of fragment; having nothing in his ears but the monotonous sound of the perpetually revolving wheel, he never develops the harmony of his being; and instead of imprinting the seal of humanity on his being, he ends by being nothing more than the living impress of the craft to which he devotes himself, of the science that he cultivates. This very partial and paltry relation, linking the isolated members to the whole, does not depend on forms that are given spontaneously; for how could a complicated

machine, which shuns the light, confide itself to the free will of man?

Here Schiller is using "machine," in the technological sense, to represent a "mechanistic" social system, the increasingly complex kind of society emerging along with the new machine power.²⁰

Of the English writers who used this device, none was to have a greater influence in America than Thomas Carlyle. He had published his "Life" of Schiller in 1823-4, and in his *Edinburgh Review* essay "Signs of the Times" (1829), he seizes upon the machine as the most telling "sign" of modern life. If asked to select a name for the age, he says, he would not call it the "Heroical, Devotional, Philosophical, or Moral Age, but, above all others, the Mechanical Age. It is the Age of Machinery, in every outward and inward sense of that word . . ." Playing upon all possible connotations of "machinery," Carlyle turns it into the controlling symbol for a new kind of culture. It is the culture, the inner world of thought and feeling, that really interests him, but he regards the image of machinery as representing the causal nexus between the new culture and the outer world, or society. Accordingly, he uses the words "machine," "machinery," and "mechanism" in two distinct, though finally complementary, ways.²¹

First, there is the "outward" sense: "machine" points directly to the new technology:

Our old modes of exertion are all discredited, and thrown aside. On every hand, the living artisan is driven from his workshop, to make room for a speedier, inanimate one. The shuttle drops from the fingers of the weaver, and falls into iron fingers that ply it faster. . . . Men have crossed oceans by steam; the Birmingham

Fire-king has visited the fabulous East. . . . There is no end to machinery. Even the horse is stripped of his harness, and finds a fleet fire-horse yoked in his stead. . . . For all earthly, and for some unearthly purposes, we have machines and mechanic furtherances; for mincing our cabbages; for casting us into magnetic sleep. We remove mountains, and make seas our smooth highway; nothing can resist us. We war with rude Nature; and, by our resistless engines, come off always victorious, and loaded with spoils.

Carlyle then extends the effects of "machinery" (still in the outward sense) to the emergent social and economic system which he would soon name "industrialism."

. . . What changes, too, this addition of power is introducing into the Social System; how wealth has more and more increased, and at the same time gathered itself more and more into masses, strangely altering the old relations, and increasing the distance between the rich and the poor. . . .

It is the second, or "inward," sense of the word "machine," however, to which Carlyle devotes most attention. What concerns him is the way the "mechanical genius . . . has diffused itself into quite other provinces. Not the external and physical alone is now managed by machinery, but the internal and spiritual also." Here "machinery" stands for a principle, or perspective, or system of value which Carlyle traces through every department of thought and expression: music, art, literature, science, religion, philosophy, and politics. In each category he detects the same tendency: an excessive emphasis upon means as against ends, a preoccupation with the external arrangement of human affairs as against their inner meaning and consequences. Although he is using the image of the ma-

chine metaphorically, he does not lose control of the distinction between fact and metaphor. In discussing the functions of government, for example, he admits that they include much that is essentially routine or mechanical. "We term it indeed, in ordinary language, the Machine of Society, and talk of it as the grand working wheel from which all private machines must derive, or to which they must adapt, their movements." In this context, Carlyle recognizes, machine is a figure of speech, yet the figure seems to contain a prophetic truth.

Considered merely as a metaphor, all this is well enough; but here, as in so many other cases, the 'foam hardens itself into a shell,' and the shadow we have wantonly evoked stands terrible before us, and will not depart at our bidding.

His point is that the age is increasingly reliant upon "mere political arrangements," and that in politics, as in all else, less and less account is being taken of that which "cannot be treated mechanically." Carlyle's immediate target is utilitarianism, with its emphasis upon the proper structure of institutions. But back of that philosophy he sees the environmentalism of the eighteenth century—the view that, on the whole, external conditions determine the quality of life, hence human suffering can best be attacked by contriving better social machinery. What bothers Carlyle is the easy assumption that, as he puts it, "were the laws, the government, in good order, all were well with us; the rest would care for itself!"

In philosophy this mechanistic spirit is reflected in the still high reputation of John Locke. "His whole doctrine," says Carlyle, "is mechanical, in its aim and origin, in its method and its results." When Locke makes the contents

of the mind contingent upon images flowing in upon it from the outside, he reduces thought to what is ultimately a reflex of the world "out there." To account for a man's ideas and values only, or even chiefly, by the circumstances in which he lives is, according to Carlyle, to divest his thought of will, emotion, and creative power. If the mind is a reflex of what is, how can it possibly control circumstances? Control implies the power to compare what is with what may be. To Carlyle the empirical philosophy is negative and quietistic. "By arguing on the 'force of circumstances,'" he says, "we have argued away all force from ourselves; and stand lashed together, uniform in dress and movement, like the rowers of some boundless galley." In its transactions with the world outside, a mind so conceived responds like one cogged wheel turned by another. Used in this way the image of the machine connotes loss of inner freedom even as it provides outward power. "Practically considered," says Carlyle, "our creed is Fatalism; and, free in hand and foot, we are shackled in heart and soul with far straiter than feudal chains."

One of the remarkable things about "Signs of the Times" is the clarity and cogency with which Carlyle connects the machine as object (a technological fact) and the machine as metaphor (a token of value). In large part his success is due to a tacit recognition of culture as an integrated whole. Like a modern anthropologist, Carlyle is attempting to make statements about an entire way of life, a complex which embraces all the behavior of Englishmen — their physical activities, their work, their institutions, and, above all, their inner lives. In using the machine as a symbol of the age, he is saying that neither the causes nor the consequences of mechanization can be confined to the "outer" or physical world. The onset of machine power,

he says, means "a mighty change in our whole manner of existence." This is the insight which would lead him to use the new word "industrialism," and it helps to explain why, from the beginning, the very idea of an industrial society as a unique phenomenon has been tinged by a strong critical animus. The machine represents a change in our whole way of life, Carlyle argues, because "the same habit regulates not our modes of action alone, but our modes of thought and feeling. Men are grown mechanical in head and in heart, as well as in hand."

To a democratic moralist the chief difficulty in Carlyle's argument would be immediately obvious. In taking a critical attitude toward the new technology he seems to deny the working mass of mankind its unique opportunity to escape lives of dull, repetitive labor. This point was particularly striking to a young American, Timothy Walker, who soon attacked the essay in the pages of the *North American Review*. Before considering Walker's reply, however, we must distinguish Carlyle's position as sharply as possible from the aesthete's nostalgic and facile rejection of industrialism with which we now are so familiar. For one thing, Carlyle does not deny the genuine advantages of machine production. He is not a reactionary in the strict sense of calling for a return to an earlier, simpler society. In fact, he ends his essay with an affirmation of the long-range progress of the race. It is, he says, "a well-ascertained fact, that . . . the happiness and greatness of mankind at large have been continually progressive."

Doubtless this age also is advancing. Its very unrest, its ceaseless activity, its discontent contains matter of promise. Knowledge, education are opening the eyes of the humblest; are increasing the number of thinking minds

without limit. This is as it should be; for not in turning back, not in resisting, but only in resolutely struggling forward, does our life consist.

Where then, we may well ask, is the ground for his attack upon the new industrial order? If he accepts the value of machine technology, if he believes that there is no turning back, why does he have this animus? In part the answer lies in his commitment to a traditional humanist idea of a proper balance of human life. To say that men have grown "mechanical" in head and heart is to say that they now over-value those aspects of life which are calculable and manipulatable and, by the same token, that they neglect the whole sphere of the spontaneous, the imaginative—all that springs from the inner resources of the psyche: "the primary, unmodified forces and energies of man, the mysterious springs of Love, and Fear, and Wonder, of Enthusiasm, Poetry, Religion, all which have a truly vital and *infinite* character. . . ." Carlyle calls this neglected province (the antithesis of the mechanical) the dynamical, and his entire argument must finally be said to rest upon the proposition that "only in the right coördination of the two, and the vigorous forwarding of *both*, does our true line of action lie."

Undue cultivation of the inward or Dynamical province leads to idle, visionary, impracticable courses, and, especially in rude eras, to Superstition and Fanaticism, with their long train of baleful and well-known evils. Undue cultivation of the outward, again, though less immediately prejudicial, and even for the time productive of many palpable benefits, must, in the long-run, by destroying Moral Force, which is the parent of all other Force, prove not less certainly, and perhaps still more hopelessly, pernicious. This, we take it, is the grand

characteristic of our age. By our skill in Mechanism, it has come to pass, that in the management of external things we excel all other ages; while in whatever respects the pure moral nature, in true dignity of soul and character, we are perhaps inferior to most civilised ages.

Though he is using a novel vocabulary, Carlyle is invoking a traditional morality. To speak of coördinating the mechanical and dynamical provinces of human behavior is, after all, but another way of describing the desire for a proper balance of man's outer and inner, material and psychic, selves. Carlyle is affirming an ideal akin to the "ethic of the middle link" and to the norm implicit in the pastoral image of America. It is a variant of Jefferson's hope that the new Republic would subordinate economic ambition to the "pursuit of happiness." All of which accounts for the fact that in America Carlyle's critique of the new industrial order was so readily adapted to the pastoral idiom. In his view the new power is to be feared, not as inherently evil, but rather as a threat to the necessary balance in the human situation. By placing undue emphasis upon the external environment, the new technology threatens to destroy moral force.

What Carlyle intends by "destruction of moral force" is akin to what soon would be known as "alienation." This seminal idea, then emerging out of the stream of post-Kantian idealism, has dominated the criticism of industrial society ever since. When Carlyle speaks of men having grown "mechanical in head and heart," he means that their behavior is increasingly determined externally, which is to say, by invisible, abstract, social forces unrelated (or alien) to their inward impulses. Hegel had called this state

"self-estrangement," thereby implying a conflict between the "social" and the "natural" self. Later Karl Marx was to make a more explicit connection between this inward state and the conditions of life in the new industrial society. He noted that within capitalist relations of production, accompanying the division of labor and mass manufacturing, the working man's product may well become his "enemy." The more he produces, in other words, the more danger there is that the market will be glutted and that he will lose his job. Hence machine technology is instrumental in creating what Marx calls "alienated labor." * Although it is morally neutral, the machine in a capitalist setting helps to transform the worker into a commodity for sale on the labor market. His work takes on a mechanical, meaningless character. It bears little or no relation to his own purposes. The result is the typical psychic set of industrial man which Marx calls alienation. In Erich Fromm's words, the alienated man is one for whom "the world (nature, others, and he himself) remain alien. . . . They stand above and against him as objects, even though they may be objects of his own creation. Alienation is essentially experiencing the world and oneself passively, receptively, as the subject separated from the object."²²

Describing in 1844 the situation which gives rise to alienation, Marx uses a language strikingly similar to Carlyle's in "Signs of the Times." "The devaluation of the human world," he says, "increases in direct relation with the increase in value of the world of things." During the

* He first developed the concept in the economic and philosophical manuscripts he wrote in 1844. These early manuscripts, which were not published until 1932, and not translated into English until 1959, establish even more clearly than before the humanist core of the Marxian critique of capitalism.

1840's variants of this idea swept through the intellectual community on both sides of the Atlantic. Three years after Marx's paper on alienation, Emerson wrote these familiar lines:

Things are in the saddle,
And ride mankind.

There are two laws discrete,
Not reconciled,—
Law for man, and law for thing;
The last builds town and fleet,
But it runs wild,
And doth the man unking.

Years later, in describing the intellectual climate of this period, Emerson stressed the pervasive sense of "detachment." He found it reflected everywhere: in Kant, Goethe's *Faust*, and in the mood generated by the advance of capitalist power. "Instead of the social existence which all shared," he wrote, "was now separation." He saw a connection, moreover, between this feeling of "separation" and the widespread emotional instability of the intellectuals. The young men of the time, he said, were born with knives in their brains.²³

When Carlyle speaks of the subordination of the "dynamical" to the "mechanical" aspects of life, he anticipates the post-Freudian version of alienation. In a recent book (*Eros and Civilization*), Herbert Marcuse attributes this state of psychic powerlessness to the increasing repression of instinctual drives made necessary by a more and more complicated technological order. To satisfy the imperatives of the mechanized society, men are called upon to endure an intolerable curbing of their spontaneous, erotic, and passionnal selves. In writing "Signs of the

Times," unfortunately, Carlyle lacked the systematic theory of the mind and the relatively unambiguous vocabulary of depth psychology. It is now obvious that his work, like much of the nineteenth century's criticism of the new industrial order, was vitiated by the inadequacy of his old vocabulary. Unable to describe man's emotional needs in any other terms, writers often fell back upon an outworn collection of religious and moral counters. In "Signs of the Times," however, Carlyle is reaching toward something like the post-Freudian view when he speaks of "mechanism" as stifling the "primary, unmodified forces and energies of man," or again when he sets the machine in opposition to the "mysterious springs of Love." That he appreciated the connection between the typical emotional crises of the age and industrialization becomes most obvious in *Sartor Resartus* (1833–34). This book, which Emerson read just before writing *Nature*, and which Melville read not long before writing *Moby-Dick*, was to have an immense influence in America. Although not written in the pastoral mode, it embodies attitudes which were easily assimilated to American pastoralism. At the climax Professor Teufelsdröckh, a semi-autobiographical figure, is overwhelmed by the meaninglessness of his life. He can establish no contact with a reality beyond himself. Doubtless such depressed states are not peculiar to industrial societies, but Carlyle imparts a distinctively modern aspect to Teufelsdröckh's depression by the image he uses to evoke the moment of total despair:

To me [says Professor Teufelsdröckh] the Universe was all void of Life, of Purpose, of Volition, even of Hostility: it was one huge, dead, immeasurable Steam-engine, rolling on, in its dead indifference, to grind me limb from limb.²⁴

By 1829, when "Signs of the Times" appeared in the *Edinburgh Review*, machine power had begun to play the part in American life that Tench Coxe had foreseen in 1787. A profitable factory system was firmly established in New England; new roads and canals and cities were transforming the landscape; on rivers and in ocean harbors the steamboat was proving the superiority of mechanized transport, and outside Baltimore the revolutionary machine of the age was being made ready for use: thirteen miles of the first important American railroad, the Baltimore and Ohio, were under construction. As Coxe had foreseen, the conditions once regarded as obstacles to America's economic growth had become stimulants. So far from perpetuating the "backwardness" of the economy, the abundance of land and the scarcity of labor had intensified the demand for machinery. Between 1830 and 1860 the nation was to put down more than 30,000 miles of railroad track, pivot of the transportation revolution which in turn quickened industrialization. By the time Carlyle's essay was read in America the economy was expanding at a remarkable rate, the new technology was proving itself indispensable, and the nation was on the verge of the "take-off" into the era of rapid industrialization.

On the plane of ideas, meanwhile, the views of Tench Coxe had been widely accepted. Apologists for the southern slavery system aside, there was not (nor would there be) any effective opposition to industrialization. This is not to deny that there were impulses to resist. But on the whole they were sporadic, ineffectual impulses; they provoked a number of vivid, symbolic gestures (chiefly of a nostalgic cast), but they did not produce an alternative

theory of society capable of enlisting effective political support. By 1829, in fact, Coxe's notion that the aims of the Republic would be realized through the power of machine production was evolving into what can only be called the official American ideology of industrialism: a loosely composed scheme of meaning and value so widely accepted that it seldom required precise formulation. In the written record it appears chiefly as rhetoric in homage to "progress." With this word the age expressed a faith in man's capacity to understand and control history which is now difficult to recapture. And it was the miraculous machinery of the age, beyond all else, which made it obvious that things were getting better all the time. It is not surprising, then, that Carlyle's passionate attack upon the "Age of Machinery" soon provoked an American reply.²⁵

Nor is it surprising that the reply appeared in the *North American Review*. Under the editorship of Alexander Hill Everett, brother of Edward, this journal was a vehicle for the rational and, in the main, politically conservative, theologically liberal opinion of the New England Establishment. Its contributors, many of whom were Unitarian ministers or Harvard professors, included George Bancroft, Orville Dewey, Samuel Eliot, Edward Everett, William Prescott, Jared Sparks, and Joseph Story. The young man who answered Carlyle, Timothy Walker, had been well trained for membership in this solid, professional elite. After a proper education at Harvard, where he graduated first in the class of 1826, Walker had taught school under George Bancroft and later had returned to Harvard to prepare for the law with Justice Story. When his reply to Carlyle was published in 1831, he had begun to practice law in Cincinnati.²⁶

Walker, casting himself as America's attorney, calls the essay in which he answers Carlyle a "Defence of Mechan-

cal Philosophy." It is a concise, lucid, and well-organized brief on behalf of technological progress. Unlike Coxe or Hamilton, Walker makes no effort to reconcile the new power with the pastoral ideal of economic sufficiency. But then neither does he acknowledge that any change has occurred in the aims of the Republic. He expounds the doctrine of unlimited economic development as if the American people always had been committed to it, as if there always had been a place for the machine in the myth of the garden. Although it contains little, if anything, that is original, Walker's "Defence" makes a fine exhibit of pervasive attitudes toward the new machine power.

At the outset Walker announces that Carlyle has raised a "grave and solemn" question, namely, "whether mankind are advancing or not, in moral and intellectual attainments." Quickly reviewing his adversary's "cheerless conclusions" about the new "Age of Machinery," Walker asserts that he can find in these views nothing but "phantoms." And yet Carlyle's skepticism is profoundly disturbing to him; it irks him because Carlyle manifestly repudiates Walker's faith, and that of the society for which he speaks, as a hollow faith. Incredulity is the dominant note of the opening section: what possible injury can "Mechanism" have done to man? "Some liberties," Walker agrees, ". . . have been taken with Nature by this . . . presumptuous intermeddler," and he describes them with heavy courtroom irony:

Where she [Nature] denied us rivers, Mechanism has supplied them. Where she left our planet uncomfortably rough, Mechanism has applied the roller. Where her mountains have been found in the way, Mechanism has boldly levelled or cut through them. Even the ocean, by which she thought to have parted her quarrelsome chil-

dren, Mechanism has encouraged them to step across. As if her earth were not good enough for wheels, Mechanism travels it upon iron pathways.

Now where, asks Walker, "is the harm and danger of this?" Since Carlyle had not grounded his critique of mechanization in sentiment for the countryside, the point of Walker's rhetorical question is a bit obscure. But it allows Walker to inject a cherished American image into the record: the machine as a "supplier" of rivers, a "roller" smoothing over what is "uncomfortably rough" in nature. The machine, in short, is an instrument for making what the age calls "improvements." With its help, a waste land can be transformed into a garden. Yet the capacity of technology to transform the landscape, however much it may engage the native imagination, scarcely meets Carlyle's objections — and Walker admits as much. What troubles Carlyle, he says, is not that "Nature will be dethroned, and Art set up in her place. . . ." Or at least, Walker adds, "not exactly this" — an astute reservation indicating that if Carlyle is concerned about the effect of technology upon "Nature," the "Nature" in question is not primarily the physical, or external, nature associated with landscape.

But then precisely what is threatened by Mechanism? It is typical of Walker's side in this familiar debate that he adopts the condescending tone of a no-nonsense empiricist trying valiantly to fathom the mind of a hopeless obscurantist. What worries Carlyle, he says ("if we rightly apprehend his meaning"), is that "mind will become subjected to the laws of matter; that physical science will be built up on the ruins of our spiritual nature; that in our rage for machinery, we shall ourselves become machines." By using these commonplaces Walker intends to convey the spuriousness of Carlyle's argument. (At points he in-

sinuates that Carlyle is a devious exponent of some nameless "Mysticism.") These phrases are stock expressions of the widespread and largely impotent anxiety generated by mechanization; no doubt the most popular, closely akin to the "men-will-become-machines" trope, was the Frankenstein fable: the story of the robot that destroys its heartless creator. Back of these clichés, as the twentieth century has discovered, there was a not wholly fanciful premonition of mankind's improving capacity for self-destruction. But Walker did not take that possibility seriously. As he phrases the issue, he intends only to expose the melodramatic hollowness of Carlyle's concern, which is (in Walker's words) whether or not "mechanical ingenuity is suicidal in its efforts."

To answer the rhetorical question Walker quickly reviews the contribution of technology to cultural evolution. "In the first ages of the world," he says, "when Mechanism was not yet known, and human hands were the only instruments, the mind scarcely exhibited even the feeblest manifestations of its power." (Although Walker is capable of extending the meaning of "Mechanism" almost indefinitely, so that it finally threatens to swallow up science and, for that matter, Being itself, here it chiefly means technology both as a reservoir of knowledge and as mechanical apparatus.) Without technology there would be no culture. Only after the "first rudiments of Mechanism made their appearance" did men have enough time to think.

Leisure gave rise to thought, reflection, investigation; and these, in turn, produced new inventions and facilities. Mechanism grew by exercise. Machines became more numerous and more complete. The result was a still greater abridgment of labor. One could now do

the work of ten. . . . It is needless to follow the deduction farther.

Proceeding from these postulates, Walker lines up the rest of his argument like a mathematical proof. (He was a master of simple linear logic, and in fact he had recently published a geometry textbook.) With perfect assurance he concludes that the "cultivation of the intellect" is "altogether the result of Mechanism, forcing inert matter to toil for man," and, therefore, he looks "with unmixed delight at the triumphant march of Mechanism. So far from enslaving, it has emancipated the mind, in the most glorious sense." What freedom man achieves is the direct result of mechanical inventions. Walker's theory of the technological basis of culture leads him to a simple formula for the advance of civilization. That nation, he says, "will make the greatest intellectual progress, in which the greatest number of labor-saving machines has been devised." In 1831 Walker envisages an Automated Utopia in which "machines are to perform all the drudgery of man, while he is to look on in self-complacent ease."

To lend an ultimate sanction to technology, Walker, like Tench Coxe in 1787, brings in the metaphysical overtones the machine image had carried over from Newtonian science. His cosmos is constructed according to a knowable, rational, and mathematically precise blueprint. "When we attempt to convey an idea of the infinite attributes of the Supreme Being," says Walker, "we point to the stupendous machinery of the universe." A new power machine, then, is not simply a useful implement, it is a kind of totem. This attitude no doubt explains the extreme repugnance that Carlyle's essay arouses in Walker. Since he regards technological progress as evidence that man is gaining access to the divine plan, a kind of gradual revelation,

Carlyle's attack is blasphemy. Technology supplants man's animal functions, thereby making possible the liberation of mind. From Walker's "Defence" one gets the impression that mankind is destined to arrive at a state, like that enjoyed by the ruler of a universe which operates like clockwork, of divine immobility or pure consciousness. "From a ministering servant to matter," Walker explains, "mind has become the powerful lord of matter. Having put myriads of wheels in motion by laws of its own discovering, it rests, like the Omnipotent Mind, of which it is the image, from its work of creation, and pronounces it good."

Although many of Walker's ideas had been anticipated by Tench Coxe, his tone and attitude are quite different. Whereas Coxe had proposed, with some caution, that the machine could change the fortunes of the Republic, Walker discusses technology in the accent of a true believer. He declares "an unfaltering belief in the permanent and continued improvement of the human race"—of which improvement, he says, "no small portion . . . [is] the result of mechanical invention." He invests the machine with the ebullience—the singular, not to say manic, millennialist spirit—which was widespread at the time. At moments he sounds like an inspired, transcendentalist prophet. But Walker fancies himself a realist, and—charming commentary on this era—he draws a fine line between foolhardy optimists who believe that man may arrive at perfection and more sensible people, like himself, who only credit the perfectibility of man. Having made this reservation, he unashamedly joins those who "see Atlantis, Utopia, and the Isles of the Blest, nearer than those who first descried them." He delights in contemplating "these imaginary abodes of pure and happy

beings" because, he explains, even though man may not re-create the golden age, such places "are types and shadows of a higher and better condition of human nature, towards which we are surely though slowly tending."

But the most important value that Walker attaches to the image of the machine is political. He regards the new technology as the instrument appointed to fulfill the egalitarian aims of the American people. He expounds the same explosive idea implicit in the irrepressible epithet "industrial revolution." * Coined in France sometime around 1810, the phrase expresses the close kinship between the two new forces, political and technological, which were to threaten the old order everywhere during the next 150 years. The feature common to this double "revolution" was the unprecedented claim of the propertyless, working masses for a fair share of the necessities and perhaps even the felicities of life. What now made the claim reasonable for the first time was science and technology. In America the plausibility of this novel idea was reinforced by natural abundance. So much so, indeed, that Walker honors the egalitarian implications of the new power without a hint of political radicalism. It does not occur to him that a basic change in the structure of society,

* In recent years the epithet has been the subject of an endless and often silly scholarly controversy. Economic historians, in particular, have quarreled about its validity as a descriptive term. For them, the issue seems to be whether there was a break, during the eighteenth century, in the economic and technological development of England so severe as to justify the name "revolution." But the whole issue becomes irrelevant once we recognize that we are dealing with a metaphor, and that its immense appeal rests, not on its capacity to describe the actual character of industrialization, but rather on its vivid suggestiveness. It evokes the uniqueness of the new way of life, as experienced, and, most important, it is a vivid expression of the affinity between technology and the great political revolution of modern times.

either its social or its property relations, will be required to achieve an economy of abundance. To Walker the machine represents the possibility of plenty shared by all.²⁷

On this native political ground Walker develops his most effective answer to Carlyle. Not that Carlyle had denied the machine's power to improve the physical conditions of life: indeed, he had conceded that the nascent industrial society probably would excel all others in the "management of external things." But for him this was not a damaging concession; he was convinced that the material gains would be offset by "moral" losses, and that the new system (which he would name "industrialism") threatened to be the worst ever known with respect to "pure moral nature," or "true dignity of soul and character." But, to repeat, Carlyle's language was not adequate to his thought. In retrospect we can see that he was trying to describe a condition of man's inner life, later to be called alienation, which he regarded as characteristic of the new, industrial environment. In any case, all of this was lost upon Walker, who thought Carlyle's argument typical of the puffed-upness of pious reactionaries.

The distinction between the "external" and "internal" consequences of mechanization, moreover, gave Walker just the opening he needed. To the bright young lawyer, it sounded like obfuscation or "mysticism," the weakest spot in his adversary's position. And so, in a sense, it was. To support his charge that science and technology were producing a moral and spiritual decline, Carlyle (like Schiller before him) had compared the quality of contemporary culture with that of ancient Greece. Walker firmly rejects the comparison. True, he says, the Greeks had achieved "high intellectual supremacy" without the help of mechanism. But how had they done it? His reply

to his own question is simple, stunning, and tinged with just enough sans-culottish impertinence to give it bite:

*Machinery
Not its effects*

Machinery
Not its effects

The answer . . . is ready. The Greeks themselves did not toil. Every reader of their history knows, that labor, physical labor, was stigmatized as a disgrace. Their wants were supplied by levying tribute upon all other nations, and keeping slaves to perform their drudgery at home. Hence their leisure. Force did for them, what machinery does for us. But what was the condition of the surrounding world? It is explained in a word. All other men had to labor for them; and as these derived no helps from Mechanism, manual labor consumed their whole lives. And hence their spiritual acquisitions have left no trace in history.

To the proposition that the new industrial order defiles the soul, Walker in effect is asking: whose soul, whose moral nature will be defiled? Would the souls of Greek slaves or English wage-laborers be threatened by labor-saving machines? All of which is a way of saying that men respond to change according to their social and economic perspective. Unlike Carlyle, the young American recognizes that mechanization will hardly seem a menace to those upon whom society confers little dignity of soul (or status) in the first place. To them the alternative is a life of drudgery or tedious, repetitive labor. On this point Walker is at his best. He addresses Carlyle in the manly voice of a humane, resolute, and thoroughly committed democrat. His political convictions in turn are supported by the scientific, humanistic faith of the Enlightenment. Like Jefferson, he assumes that knowledge can make us free, and not just some of us. It is all very well for Carlyle, or any European traditionalist, to compare the coming machine-based culture with ancient Athens, but let it be

borne in mind, says Walker, "that we are speaking of society in the mass, and that our doctrine is, that men must be released from the bondage of perpetual bodily toil, before they can make great spiritual attainments."

To have freedom of mind, Walker is saying, it is first necessary to have freedom from want. It is to his credit, moreover, that he does not shy away from the criticism usually leveled against egalitarians on this point. He freely admits that the intellectual caliber of the mass, industrial culture, particularly at the higher levels, may well prove to be inferior to that of traditional cultures. But he is willing to take that risk. The kind of community he wants "may not produce a Newton, Milton, or Shakspeare," he says, "but it will have a mass of thought, reflection, study, and contemplation perpetually at work all over its surface, and producing all the fruits of mental activity." To the American lawyer, the machine is a token of the possibilities of democracy. It promises unbelievable abundance, hence a more harmonious and just way of life — including the life of the mind — than mankind ever has enjoyed.

5

Between 1786, when Thomas Jefferson described the new mill at Blackfriar's Bridge, and 1831, when Timothy Walker defended mechanization against Carlyle's attack, the image of the machine had become a major symbol of value. We call Jefferson's reference to the Boulton-Watt engine an "image" because it conveys little more than a sense perception. But in the speeches of Tench Coxe, the following year, the image is well on its way to becoming a new sort of "symbol." There it is made to carry a burden

of implication, thought, and feeling far beyond that borne by a simple reference. Although it is not easy to draw a sharp line between image and symbol, there can be no doubt about the status of the machine in Timothy Walker's "Defence." There it is clearly, unmistakably, blatantly a cardinal symbol of value. It is not Walker's private symbol, but a property of the general culture. Within a few years it was to be as omnipresent as the image of the garden.

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 or 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. The "industrial revolution incarnate" one economic historian has called it. Stories about railroad projects, railroad accidents, railroad profits, railroad speed fill the press; the fascinating subject is taken up in songs, political speeches, and magazine articles, both factual and fictional. In the leading magazines, writers elaborate upon the themes of Walker's essay. They adduce the power of machines (steam engines, factories, railroads, and, after 1844, the telegraph) as the conclusive sanction for faith in the unceasing progress of mankind. Associated with what seemed a world-wide surge of the poor and propertyless, with democratic egalitarianism, the machine is used to figure an unprecedented release of human energy in science, politics, and everyday life. Armed with this new power, mankind is now able, for the first time, to realize the dream of

abundance. The entire corpus of intoxicated prose seems to rest on the simple but irresistible logic of first things first: all other hopes, for peace, equality, freedom, and happiness, are felt to rest upon technology. The fable of Prometheus is invoked on all sides. In his essay on "History" (1841), Emerson uses the example of the fire-stealer to suggest how "advancing man" unveils the authentic facts, such as the "invention of the mechanic arts," beneath the surface of ancient myth. "What a range of meanings and what perpetual pertinence," he says, "has the story of Prometheus!"²⁸

But no summary in paraphrase will convey the subtle influence of industrialization upon mass consciousness. Not that this familiar and all-too-simple body of ideas requires further elucidation. Anyone can understand it, and, of course, that is just the point: it is the obviousness and simplicity of the machine as a symbol of progress that accounts for its astonishing power. With the possible exception of Henry Adams, no one grasped this fact so firmly as John Stuart Mill. In his brilliant comments (1840) on Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, he argues that machine technology inculcates its message directly, imaginatively, wordlessly. A locomotive is a perfect symbol because its meaning need not be attached to it by a poet; it is inherent in its physical attributes. To see a powerful, efficient machine in the landscape is to know the superiority of the present to the past. If the landscape happens to be wild or uncultivated, and if the observer is a man who knows what it means to live by physical labor, the effect will be even more dramatic and the meaning more obvious. "The mere visible fruits of scientific progress," says Mill, ". . . the mechanical improvements, the steam-engines, the railroads, carry the feeling of admiration for

modern, and disrespect for ancient times, down even to the wholly uneducated classes." During the nineteenth century, therefore, 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.²⁹

Much the same feeling surrounds the symbol of the machine when it is put into words. That is why it is not enough to sum up the "ideas" embodied in the symbol if we are to appreciate its impact upon the serious writers of the age. For its meaning is carried not so much by express ideas as by the evocative quality of the language, by attitude and tone. All of the writers of our first significant literary generation — that of Emerson and Hawthorne — knew this tone. It was the dominant tone of public rhetoric. They grew up with it; it was in their heads; and in one way or another they all responded to it. It forms a kind of undertone for the serious writing of the period, sometimes rising to the surface spontaneously, the writer momentarily sharing the prevailing ebullience, sometimes brought there by design for satiric or ironic purposes. In its purest form we hear the tone in Emerson's more exuberant flights; but it also turns up in Thoreau's witty parodies, in Melville's (Ahab's) bombast, in Hawthorne's satires on the age, and in Whitman's strutting gab and brag. To say this is not enough, however; one must hear the words, for their meaning is inseparable from the texture — the diction, cadence, imagery or, in a word, from the "language." Here, then, are some passages culled from the magazines of the period; they are offered not as a precise gauge of opinion, but rather as a sample of the rhetoric of progress surrounding the symbol of the machine.

1. *The machine and nature.* We live in an age marked by the "successful culture of physical science and . . . extraordinary triumphs in mechanism." Man has arrived. "Indeed it would almost seem as though he were now but just entering on that dominion over the earth, which was assigned to him at the beginning. No longer, as once, does he stand trembling amid the forces of nature. . . ." To understand the American consciousness in this period the key image, as Tocqueville noted, is the "march" of the nation across the wilds, "draining swamps, turning the course of rivers, peopling solitudes, and subduing nature." Or, in the words of the writer quoted above:

The wide air and deep waters, the tall mountains, the outstretched plains and the earth's deep caverns, are become parcel of his [man's] domain and yield freely of their treasures to his researches and toils. The terrible ocean . . . conveys . . . [him] submissively. . . . He has almost annihilated space and time. He yokes to his car fire and water, those unappeasable foes, and flying from place to place with the speed of thought carries with him, in one mass, commodities for supplying a province.

No stock phrase in the entire lexicon of progress appears more often than the "annihilation of space and time," borrowed from one of Pope's relatively obscure poems ("Ye Gods! annihilate but space and time, / And make two lovers happy."). The extravagance of this sentiment apparently is felt to match the sublimity of technological progress. "There appears to be something in the pursuit of mechanical invention," says one writer for the *Scientific American*, "which has a reaching up after our divine title, 'lords of the creation.' . . . It is truly a sublime sight to behold a machine performing nearly all the functions of a rational being. . . ." ³⁰

The entire relation between man and nature is being transformed. Discussing the moral and other indirect influences of the new railroads in 1832, one writer foresees an unprecedented harmony between art and nature, city and country. The American population of the future, he says, will "possess a large share of the knowledge, refinement, and polish of a city, united to the virtue and purity of the country." It is the new mechanized landscape itself which may be expected to induce this ideal state of mind. In explaining how the sight of a railroad will inspire future generations, this writer reveals the assumptions lying back of the progressive rhetoric, which also may be called the rhetoric of the technological sublime:

Nye

Objects of exalted power and grandeur elevate the mind that seriously dwells on them, and impart to it greater compass and strength. Alpine scenery and an embattled ocean deepen contemplation, and give their own sublimity to the conceptions of beholders. The same will be true of our system of Rail-roads. Its vastness and magnificence will prove communicable, and add to the standard of the intellect of our country.³¹

Even the animals seem to recognize that a radical change is in store. Just back from an excursion on a new section of railroad, the editor of the *Cincinnati Enquirer* reports, in 1846, that he saw "herds of cattle, sheep, and horses, stand for a few seconds and gaze at the passing train, then turn and run for a few rods with all possible speed, stop and look again with eyes distended, and head and ears erect, seemingly so frightened at the tramp of the iron horse as to have lost the power of locomotion." People, he says, also were "dumfounded at the strange and unusual spectacle," and he often saw them rushing from their houses and "gaping with wonder and astonishment at the

new, and to them grand and terrific [sic] sight." Incredulity is a recurrent note. As if keyed to the subject, the rhetoric rises with man's power over nature.

Steam is annihilating space. . . . Travelling is changed from an isolated pilgrimage to a kind of triumphal procession. . . . Caravans of voyagers are now winding as it were, on the wings of the wind, round the habitable globe. Here they glide over cultivated acres on rods of iron, and there they rise and fall on the bosom of the deep, leaving behind them a foaming wheel-track like the chariot-path of a sea-god. . . .

Written in 1844, this passage, with its image of the ship's wake as a "foaming wheel-track," anticipates the scene in *Moby-Dick* where Ahab, having asserted his dominion over the crew, identifies his will with the power of machines: he gazes astern and the *Pequod*'s wake seems to him the track of a railroad crossing the continent. His feeling for machines is not unlike that expressed by this writer for a businessman's magazine in 1840:

We believe that the steam engine, upon land, is to be one of the most valuable agents of the present age, because it is swifter than the greyhound, and powerful as a thousand horses; because it has no passions and no motives; because it is guided by its directors; because it runs and never tires; because it may be applied to so many uses, and expanded to any strength.³²

On every hand man is displaying titanic powers. The sight of a new bridge provokes one writer to ask, "What is there yet to be done upon the face of the earth, that cannot be effected by the powers of the human mind . . .?" The answer is that man ". . . is indeed, 'lord of creation'; and all nature, as though daily more sensible of the conquest, is progressively making less and less resistance to his dominion."³³

2. The machine and history. 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; "improvements" 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.

The progress of human knowledge has accomplished within a century revolutions in the character and condition of the human race so beautiful and sublime as to excite in every observing mind feelings mingled with the deepest admiration and astonishment. No age has illustrated so strongly as the present the empire of mind over matter — and the ability of man to rise . . . above the obstacles with which nature has surrounded him. . . . It is a happy privilege we enjoy of living in an age, which for its inventions and discoveries, its improvement in intelligence and virtue, stands without a rival in the history of the world. . . . Look at our splendid steam-boats. . . .

To look at a steamboat, in other words, is to *see* the sublime progress of the race. Variations on the theme are endless; only the slightest suggestion is needed to elevate a machine into a "type" of progress. Thus George Ripley in 1846:

The age that is to witness a rail road between the Atlantic and Pacific, as a grand material type of the unity of nations, will also behold a social organization, productive of moral and spiritual results, whose sublime

and beneficent character will eclipse even the glory of those colossal achievements which send messengers of fire over the mountain tops, and connect ocean with ocean by iron and granite bands.³⁴

But if the artifacts are new, the underlying assumptions remain those of the Enlightenment. Handbooks of intellectual history neglect the fact that the "romantic reaction" against scientific rationalism, the attitude of Poe, Hawthorne, or Melville, is directed not only against the dominant ideas of the previous age, but also against their omnipresence in contemporary culture. In the period between 1830 and 1860 popular discussions of technological progress assume that inventors are uncovering the ultimate structural principles of the universe. In 1850 a writer inspired by a new telescope says: "How wonderful the process by which the human brain, in its casket of bone, can alone establish such remote and transcendental truths." The overblown, exclamatory tone of so much of this writing arises from an intoxicated feeling of unlimited possibility. History has a meaning, a purpose, and a reachable goal: it is nothing less than man's acquisition of the absolute truth. Can we doubt, asks the same writer, that it is "the Divine plan, that man shall yet discover the whole scheme of the visible universe . . . ?" Of course, it may be said that in this case the language is not entirely inappropriate, since the subject is an astronomical discovery. But the hyperbolic rhetoric was not reserved for new penetrations of the heavens, as the following question, provoked by the appearance of an improved haymaker, so eloquently attests: "Are not our inventors absolutely ushering in the very dawn of the millennium?"³⁵

3. *The machine and mind.* Describing the "Moral Influence of Steam" in 1846, a writer notes that it is "in the United States that the infant Hercules found a congenial

atmosphere, and imbibed that vigor which has since characterised his labors and his triumphs." The main point of the essay is that steam power, by relieving man from physical work, will upset the "moral economy of the world":

. . . it is now universally employed as the great motive agent in machinery, triumphing over time and space, outstripping the winds in speed, annihilating every obstacle by sea or land, and almost defying the organic influences which regulate the surface of our globe. Nor is it only over matter that it exercises this control; for so wonderfully does it relieve the necessity of physical exertion, that it seems destined, in its future action and developments, to disturb the moral economy of the world, by opposing that great law of the universe, which makes labor the portion of man, and condemns him to earn his bread by the sweat of his brow. . . .³⁶

Inventors, accordingly, are the intellectual heroes of the age. Speaking of Eli Whitney's contribution, a visitor to Yale in 1831 attacks those who feel that it "ought not to be compared with what has been done by the intellectual benefactors of mankind; the Miltos, the Shakspeares, and the Newtons."

But is it quite certain, that any thing short of the highest intellectual vigor, — the brightest genius, — is sufficient to invent one of these extraordinary machines? Place a common mind before an oration of Cicero, and a steam engine, and it will despair of rivalling the latter as much as the former. . . . And then, as to the effect on society, the machine, it is true, operates, in the first instance, on mere physical elements. . . . But do not all the arts of civilization follow in the train?

Later the rhetoric of progress becomes less diffident. One recurrent assertion is that all the other arts rest upon the mechanic arts. Another is that mechanism is, in itself, as

worthy as the fine arts: "inventions are the poetry of physical science, and inventors are the poets." To counter the sneers of literary traditionalists these writers develop ingenious turns. A favorite tactic is to borrow literary language, thereby producing such popular figures as "epic of machinery." "Who can tell of the dreamings—the wakeful nightly dreamings of inventors, their abstractions and enthusiastic reveries, to create some ballad or produce some epic in machinery."

A writer on the steam-engine . . . declared that it required very much the same kind of genius and intellect to invent a new machine, as was necessary for the inspiration of a poem, and whether a man be a poet or inventor of machinery, is more the result of circumstances, or the age in which he chances to live, than in a difference of mental organization.³⁷

A similar campaign is conducted on behalf of the machines themselves. Some people, one writer observes, regard the "mechanic arts as something undignified and degrading. . . ."

Reader, if ever you have such feelings, go to Matteawan to be cured of them. When you enter the machine shop, you will understand why the Greeks, with their fine imagination, wedded Venus the beautiful to Vulcan of the hammer and the dusky brow. We always feel an unutterable pleasure in looking upon the operations of fine machinery. . . .

There is a defensive tone about much of this writing, in part a resistance to the exclusion of the "mechanic arts" from the general category of the "arts," which formerly had included all skills but in the early nineteenth century is increasingly reserved for the polite or "fine" arts. Ray-

mond Williams has noted that the words "art" and "culture," as we use them, were in large measure formed in reaction against industrialization, and they still carry a strong negative bias. But not all literary intellectuals adopted the snobbish attitude. Emerson's essay on "Art" (1841) is written against it, and contributors to the *Dial*, in this case, Theodore Parker, often speak in this vein:

The head saves the hands. It invents machines, which, doing the work of many hands, will at last set free a large portion of leisure time from slavery to the elements. The brute forces of nature lie waiting man's command, and ready to serve him.

Parker continues, offering what is probably the most popular conceit of the progressive vocabulary:

At the voice of Genius, the river consents to turn his wheel, and weave and spin for the antipodes. The mine sends him iron Vassals, to toil in cold and heat. Fire and Water embrace at his bidding, and a new servant is born, which will fetch and carry at his command; will face down all the storms of the Atlantic; will forge anchors, and spin gossamer threads, and run errands up and down the continent with men and women on his back. This last child of Science, though yet a stripling and in leading strings, is already a stout giant. The Fable of Orpheus is a true story in our times.³⁸

The idea that machine power is fulfilling an ancient mythic prophecy evokes some of the most exuberant writing. Under the improbable title "Statistics and Speculations Concerning the Pacific Railroad," we hear this excited voice: "'By a horse shall Ilium perish,' ran the prophecy in Old World times. 'By a horse America shall live,' saith the Oracle to the New World." The rhetoric

often reaches its highest pitch when the machine is described hurtling in triumph across the landscape:

And the Iron Horse, the earth-shaker, the fire-breather, which tramples down the hills, which outruns the laggard winds, which leaps over the rivers, which grinds the rocks to powder and breaks down the gates of the mountains, he too shall build an empire and an epic. Shall not solitudes and waste places cry for gladness at his coming?

Or, in an essay on the coal business of the United States, we are told that civilized society is indebted to fire "for the greatest portion of its superiority over savage life." To indicate the importance of fire the writer notes that "in the Grecian mythology . . . the daring theft of Prometheus" was so resented by the gods that the "punishment of its author was destined to be eternal, and terrible, in sublime horror, above all the retributive punishments of paganism."³⁹

By the 1850's the celebrants of the machine take the offensive. Parity is not enough. A writer for the *Scientific American* regrets the "mass of thought and intelligence . . . expended by those who are termed the 'most highly educated,' upon subjects which have no practical bearing on the welfare of man or the advancement of the useful arts." What is striking here is that the complaint is directed not only against classical education, but against theoretical science as well. What good are long-winded studies of the age of the earth? No good at all! Academic interests of this kind explain the fact that "men from the workshop" (he mentions Watt, Fulton, Bell, and Stevenson) "have turned the world upside down by their inventions, while the sages of Oxford and Cambridge have but added some new theorems to the Principia." A

sharp note of anti-intellectualism gets into the industrial celebration in the 1850's, and the Commissioner of Patents, Thomas Ewbank, gives the doctrine of utility an official stamp. Indeed, nothing sums up the metaphysic of industrialism so well as a statement of his, quoted in this instance under the heading "Civilization, Inventors, Invention and the Arts": "'His works proclaim his preference for the useful to the merely imaginative, and in truth it is in such, that the truly beautiful or sublime is to be found. A steamer is a mightier epic than the Iliad,— and Whitney, Jacquard and Blanchard might laugh even Virgil, Milton and Tasso to scorn.'"⁴⁰

4. *The machine and America.* There is a special affinity between the machine and the new Republic. In the first place, the raw landscape is an ideal setting for technological progress. In 1850 an American magazine reprints an English writer's explanation for the greater success of technology, especially the telegraph, in the New World. Only half a century before, he says, "wild beasts, and still wilder Indians, wandered over the lands now traversed in perfect security by these frail wires. . . ." In some not wholly explicable way the backwardness of the country gives the progressive impulse an electric charge; hence the "transition from a wild and barbarous condition to that of the most elaborate civilization . . . [is not] gradual, but instantaneous." In America progress is a kind of explosion. Civilization "has at one bound leaped into life, surrounded with every appliance . . . which the existing knowledge of man has devised for ministering to his wants and his enjoyment." Never has there been anything like the violent coming together of advanced art and savage nature. Nor is the singularity of this clash lost upon Americans. In the words of George Perkins Marsh, speaking to the Rutland County Agricultural Society in 1847,

America is the "first example of the struggle between civilized man and barbarous uncultivated nature." Elsewhere the earth has been subdued slowly, but here for the first time "the full energies of advanced European civilization, stimulated by its artificial wants and guided by its accumulated intelligence, were brought to bear at once on a desert continent. . . ." ⁴¹

But there is an equally important political reason for the astonishing success of mechanism in the New World. After all, well-trained, ingenious minds had confronted barbarous conditions before. Consider the ancients, the exemplary Greeks and Romans. Although they had had brilliant, inventive minds, their inventiveness was "wrongly directed." They were not interested in the useful arts, chiefly because of what a twentieth-century social scientist would call their "value system," but what this writer in 1847 refers to as a "philosophy . . . repugnant to any invention which had for its object the benefit of the mass of mankind."

This very element in ancient polity and ancient philosophy, was the very cause which prevented in the working classes of those days that developement [sic] of mechanical genius, which by the construction of machines . . . might have elevated both Greece and Rome to that pinnacle of greatness on which some . . . modern nations now stand. . . . Every effort of genius is prostituted, unless directed for the purpose of benefitting the human family.

To account for the progress of American technology it is not enough to talk about geography, or even the combined effect of the virgin land and Yankee inventive skill. One must also recognize the incentives which call forth that skill. They are provided by a democracy which invites every man to enhance his own comfort and status. To the

citizen of a democracy inventions are vehicles for the pursuit of happiness.⁴²

The result is that Americans have seized upon the machine as their birthright. Granted that the best of the fine arts—statuary, painting, and architecture—is still to be found in the Old World, "there is one agent which we can call peculiarly our own, and in the application of which, the nation is destined to excel." What is more, the agent has appeared at a providential moment, just when our manifest destiny requires it.

Just as we are prepared to go forward in building the frame of our national enterprise, a new power presents itself! The spirit of the republic grasps it, . . . hails the agency of steam as the benefactor of man, and the power which stamps the character of the present age.

The new power, this benefactor of man, is not to be selfishly guarded as an American possession. (The European origins of industrial technology often are neglected.) Even now, in 1847, the inventive genius of the Republic is spreading its blessings in Europe. In Russia 30,000 men are building railroads under American supervision. Looking forward to the completion of this project, a writer extends the grand conceit of the progressive rhetoric, the image of a Promethean fire-machine sweeping across the continent and even beyond national frontiers, back to the Old World. He envisages the moment when, "across the Steppes of the Volga and through the Passes of the Ural Mountains, will yet roll the swift American locomotive, pealing notes of nobler victories than those of the reddest warfare—the triumphs of American mechanical genius."

Who knows now what great and good influence in the cause of Freedom and Reform is exercised by the

mingling of our mechanics with the peasantry of the Russian empire.—Who knows but in a few years the now Russian serf, may stand a freeman at his own cottage door, and as he beholds the locomotive fleeting past, will take off his cap . . . and bless God that the Mechanics of Washington's land were permitted to scatter the seeds of social freedom in benighted Russia.⁴³

This little fantasy, which concludes our sample of progressive rhetoric, is a projection of feelings that pervade the whole grandiloquent litany. By now the image of the American machine has become a transcendent symbol: a physical object invested with political and metaphysical ideality. It rolls across Europe and Asia, liberating the oppressed people of the Old World—a signal, in fact, for the salvation of mankind. It fulfills, as Walt Whitman later would put it, the old yearning for a "Passage to India." Above all, the rhetoric conveys that sense of unlimited possibility which seizes the American imagination at this remarkable juncture. Before coming down on the meretriciousness of the language, we need to remind ourselves how remarkable, in truth, the circumstances were. Consider how the spectacle of the machine in a virgin land must have struck the mind. Like nothing ever seen under the sun, it appears when needed most: when the great west finally is open to massive settlement, when democracy is triumphant and gold is discovered in California, here—as if by design—comes a new power commensurate with the golden opportunity of all history. Is it any wonder that the prospect arouses awe and reverence? Back of the stock epithets and the pious, oracular tone, there are emotions which cannot be dismissed as mere hokum: a plausible incredulity, wonder, elation, and pride; a generous, humane delight at the promise of so

much energy so soon to be released. But this is not to deny the intellectual hollowness of the rhetoric. The stock response to the panorama of progress, as Mill observed, by-passes ideas; it is essentially a buoyant feeling generated without words or thought. The same may be said of the rhetoric. It rises like froth on a tide of exuberant self-regard, sweeping over all misgivings, problems, and contradictions.

And there were misgivings. Quite apart from any overt criticism of the new power, it is possible to detect tremors of doubt within the rhetoric of praise. Often writers use imagery which belies their arguments. In 1840 James H. Lanman made what seems on first inspection to be a wholly affirmative survey of the "Railroads of the United States." Adopting the booster tone of Hunt's *Merchants' Magazine*, he praises the new machines as "the triumphs of our own age, the laurels of mechanical philosophy, of untrammeled mind, and a liberal commerce!" It is clear, he says of the railroads, "that all patriotic and right-minded men have concurred in the propriety of their construction." Nevertheless, he manages to convey something less than full confidence in the benign influence of machines. They are, he says, "iron monsters," "dragons of mightier power, with iron muscles that never tire, breathing smoke and flame through their blackened lungs, feeding upon wood and water, outrunning the race horse. . . ." At one point he describes a train "leaping forward like some black monster, upon its iron path, by the light of the fire and smoke which it vomits forth." All of these images, which associate technology with the destructive and repulsive, are in marked contrast to Lanman's manifest theme. They communicate a sense of anxiety and dread. It may be significant that he manages to make

technology seem most loathsome in describing the effect of a "steam screw" upon the landscape. It is an instrument, he says, which "should tear up by the roots the present monarchs of the forest, and open the ample bosom of the soil to the genial beams of the fertilizing sun."⁴⁴

But aside from such covert expressions of ambivalence, everyone knows that the great majority of Americans welcomed the new technology. As Perry Miller said, welcomed is too weak a verb: they grasped and panted and cried for it. Again and again, foreign travelers in this period testify to the nation's obsessive interest in power machinery. The typical American, says Michael Chevalier, "has a perfect passion for railroads; he loves them . . . as a lover loves his mistress." In the words of another Frenchman, Guillaume Poussin, "the railroad, animated by its powerful locomotive, appears to be the personification of the American. The one seems to hear and understand the other — to have been made for the other — to be indispensable to the other." Perhaps the most interesting comment, like a report of an informal projective test, comes from Frederika Bremer. When the boys in a schoolroom she is visiting are told to amuse themselves drawing on their slates, the Swedish novelist notices that most of them draw "smoking steam-engines, or steam-boats, all in movement." As if endorsing Carlyle's notion that mechanism is taking possession of mind, Miss Bremer concludes that "interest in locomotive machinery has a profound connection with life in this country." So profound indeed was the connection that Americans had little difficulty in reconciling their passion for machine power with the immensely popular Jeffersonian ideal of rural peace, simplicity, and contentment. As an example of the

way that reconciliation was accomplished, let us consider an episode in the life of the nation's foremost political rhetorician.⁴⁵

6

Because he owned a farm nearby, Daniel Webster happened to be in Grafton, New Hampshire, on August 28, 1847, the day the Northern Railroad was opened. A large crowd from neighboring farms and villages had gathered for the ceremonies. When the great orator's presence became known, he was called upon — spontaneously and with enthusiasm, we are told — and Mr. Webster "readily complied." Three months later, on November 17, another stretch of the railroad was opened in Lebanon. To celebrate this event a more formal entertainment, including a "collation," was prepared. Several distinguished guests were brought by rail all the way from Boston. When the official train reached South Franklin, it stopped to "take in" Mr. Webster. Later that day the assembly once again demanded a speech. "Thus called upon to speak," he said to the crowd, "I cannot disregard the summons." A master of language, keen politician, his ear nicely tuned to the prevailing mood, Webster knew exactly what was wanted. Taken together, these ceremonial speeches exhibit one way of neutralizing the conflict between the machine and the rural ideal.⁴⁶

Webster's major theme, needless to say, is the progress exemplified by the railroad. At first he dwells upon the changes in the countryside since his youth, when there were no roads between the river valleys. "At that day," he says, "steam, as a motive power, acting on water and land, was thought of by nobody. . . ." Then came the

remarkable series of internal improvements, first roads, then turnpikes and canals, and now, vastly greater, "the invention which distinguishes this age." The railroad "towers above all other inventions of this or the preceding age," he says, "as the Cardigan Mountain now before us lifts itself above the little hillocks at its base. Fellow-citizens, can we without wonder consider where we are, and what has brought us here?"

In answer to his own question, Webster brings on the familiar homage to progress. The railroad breaks down regional barriers. Those who came from Boston might have brought along "fish taken out of the sea at sunrise." Imagine, says Webster, eating as good a fish dinner in the mountains of New Hampshire as on the beach at Nahant! The new inventions hold the promise of national unity and, even more exciting, social equality. Nothing could be as important to the "great mass of the community" as this innovation "calculated . . . to equalize the condition of men." It is a mode of conveyance available to rich and poor alike, and he is pleased to report that the people regard it as their own. Upon asking one of his tenants ("my farmer") the meaning of a "line of shingles" across his fields, the man had replied, "'It is the line of our railroad.' Our railroad!" Webster exclaims, "That is the way the people talked about it. . . . It is the spirit and influence of free labor, it is the indomitable industry of a free people, that has done all this."

But Webster is not satisfied to rehearse these stock themes; he also feels a responsibility to dispose of certain "idle prejudices" against railroads. Some he dismisses quickly. In one sentence he brushes aside the charge that the new companies are undemocratic, monopolistic, closed corporations. What else could they be? — "the track of

a railway cannot be a road upon which every man may drive his own carriage." As for the danger of infringing on the rights of private property, that is easily avoided by ensuring ample compensation to landowners. Such technical problems apparently do not concern him. What does interest him, however, is a less easily defined way in which the railroads "interrupt or annoy" people:

When the directors of the road resolved to lay it out upon the river (as I must say they were very wise in doing), they showed themselves a little too loving to me, coming so near my farm-house, that the thunder of their engines and the screams of their steam-whistles, to say nothing of other inconveniences, not a little disturbed the peace and repose of its occupants.

As the diction plainly indicates, Webster is aware of certain far-reaching if unspoken implications of the event. He heightens the emotional charge by employing the stock device of the monstrous machine with its "thunder" and "screams," and by setting it against the conventionally pastoral "peace and repose" of the farm. Then, as if the train roaring past his rural retreat were not inconvenience enough, he tells how the landscape is being desecrated. "There is, beside," he says, "an awkward and ugly embankment thrown up across my meadows. It injures the look of the fields." For a moment at least the audience may well have been puzzled. What is he saying? Is he really annoyed? Does this monster threaten the American way of life? Webster continues:

It injures the look of the fields. But I have observed, fellow-citizens, that railroad directors and railroad projectors are no enthusiastic lovers of landscape beauty; a handsome field or lawn, beautiful copse, and all the

gorgeousness of forest scenery, pass for little in their eyes. Their business is to cut and slash, to level or deface a finely rounded field, and fill up beautifully winding valleys. They are quite utilitarian in their creed and in their practice. Their business is to make a good road. They look upon a well-constructed embankment as an agreeable work of art; they behold with delight a long, deep cut through hard pan and rock, such as we have just passed; and if they can find a fair reason to run a tunnel under a deep mountain, they are half in raptures. To be serious, Gentlemen . . .

The last, transitional phrase is the key to Webster's strategy. Without it, in fact, we might have some difficulty imagining his tone of voice. But it announces that the offended sensibility of lovers of landscape, for whom he had pretended to speak, is not to be taken seriously. Chances are that the note of injury in this plaint was delivered as mock injury. In any case, he is saying that it is foolish to deplore the cutting and slashing. From an eminence high above the offended and the offenders, Webster speaks as one who sees all around the situation; he sees the ugly scar cut into the green hills of New Hampshire, and he sees the forces represented by the railroad, and he knows beyond any possible doubt that to those forces Americans must and will pay homage. Within view, as he speaks, there is a locomotive embodying the dominant impulse of the society: "a zealous determination to improve and profit by labor. . . ." He admits that in their zeal Americans may seem to neglect impulses other than those resulting in profit or improvement. "New Hampshire, it is true," he says, "is no classic ground. She has no Virgil and no Eclogues." But the common-sense doctrine of first things first tacitly controls the entire discourse.

Pastoral poetry and the beauty of the landscape belong in one category, along with the peace and repose of rural life, but they are not to interfere with *serious* enterprises, with the activity of railroad promoters, men in touch with reality, whose "business is to make a good road." When Webster says, "To be serious, Gentlemen," it is with the serene assurance that his audience shares his definition of what is serious. "To be serious, Gentlemen," he explains, "I must say I admire the skill, the enterprise, and that rather bold defiance of expense . . . [of] the directors of this road. . . ."

With impressive oratorical craft, Webster has made an example of himself in order to display the proper response to the "inconveniences" attendant upon industrial progress. His trick is *reduction* in the technical literary sense of giving in to a feeling or idea in order, eventually, to take it back. By bringing it out into the open, he helps assuage that inchoate, hovering anxiety about change which often expresses itself obliquely, in moral or aesthetic language, and in a revulsion against the machine as a physical object. Actually, this feeling is grounded in the older, pastoral conception of American society associated with Jefferson's noble husbandman. By treating it as trivial, effete, and literary, Webster reduces the psychic dissonance generated by industrialization. To be truly serious, he says, is to put such feelings aside and rejoice in the changes wrought by the machine. Each speech, accordingly, ends on a note of high praise. At Grafton, in August, he urges that the policy which led to the building of the road be pursued "till internal improvement in some really and intrinsically useful form shall reach every glen and every mountain-side of the State." At Lebanon, in November, a more formal occasion for which he is better pre-

pared, Webster ends with a Ciceronian tribute to the mechanized sublime:

It is an extraordinary era in which we live. It is altogether new. The world has seen nothing like it before. I will not pretend, no one can pretend, to discern the end; but every body knows that the age is remarkable for scientific research into the heavens, the earth, and what is beneath the earth; and perhaps more remarkable still for the application of this scientific research to the pursuits of life. The ancients saw nothing like it. The moderns have seen nothing like it till the present generation. . . . We see the ocean navigated and the solid land traversed by steam power, and intelligence communicated by electricity. Truly this is almost a miraculous era. What is before us no one can say, what is upon us no one can hardly realize. The progress of the age has almost outstripped human belief; the future is known only to Omniscience.

Now, in the end, the orotund language overwhelms any lingering trace of uncertainty. The stately cadence of the peroration, a cliché the audience surely expects, lends the Senator's argument an aura of priestly assurance. The occasion has a certain ritual aspect to begin with, but now the rhetoric of the technological sublime heightens it, bringing in a sense of cosmic harmony, suggesting an obscure kinship between Webster, the spirit of the Republic, the machine power, and the progressive forces of history. Everything, it says, is working out according to a divine plan. Now the disturbing images of change, the screaming monster and the defacer of landscape, seem embarrassingly squeamish, effeminate, and trivial. The noise and smoke, the discomfort and visual ugliness, even the loss of peace and repose — these things, the rich voice proclaims, are of little consequence to true Americans.

That the Senator knew his countrymen is beyond question. Consider the increase in the nation's total railroad mileage before 1860: in 1830, 73 miles had been laid, in 1840, 3,328 miles, in 1850, 8,879 miles, and in 1860, 30,636 miles. But the contradiction between the feverish activity represented here and the pastoral ideal did not go undetected. Indeed, we shall be in a better position to appreciate the representative character of Webster's attitude if we set it beside its opposite. Consider, for example, a description of industrialization in Vermont printed in the Fourierist journal, the *Harbinger*, in 1847, the year of Webster's tributes to the Northern Railroad. The writer, who uses a pseudonym, almost certainly is one John Orvis, a recent resident of Brook Farm and a socialist lecturer. Just returned from a trip through his native state, Orvis begins with an apostrophe to the beauty of the scenery (the "luxuriant growth of grass upon the meadows . . . the freshest green upon the hill-side pastures"), and, in fact, he says, there is "no describing the picturesque harmony of the landscapes," which he thereupon describes:

The countenance of these hills is of inimitable softness, whilst the numberless flocks and herds that animate them, prove how wisely use is married with beauty. It is sublime, to stand in the mighty bowling alley which these mountains form . . .

The terrain, in short, figures an ideal blending of art and nature; it is a version of the pastoral middle landscape.⁴⁷

But in the last fifteen years, alas, this Virgilian countryside has been the scene of a technological and social revolution. First came the textile mills. They attracted cheap Canadian labor, and now even the daughters of native farmers "throng the factories . . . where they are al-

lowed but ten minutes to eat their dinners, and forced to sleep in brick pens. . . ." What follows is a Dickensian picture of calamitous industrialization — the girls "without home, friends or counseling, wearing life to decay, and weaving themselves shrouds whilst earning a gown" — but the worst is yet to come. Until now lack of transportation has prevented the use of the state's magnificent factory sites; but that impediment soon is to be removed. The great topic of excitement everywhere is railroad building. Within ten years, Orvis predicts, the "wild picturesque waterfalls . . . will be deformed by the ugly presence of mills, and their voices, that now sing to their mountain dance, will then groan at the slavish wheel." The transformation of visible nature prefigures a social transformation; soon, he says, the "beautiful pastoral life of the inhabitants will give place to oppressive factory life — quiet, rural pursuits will be absorbed in the din, conflict and degradation of manufacturing and mechanical business. . . ." Dire political changes will follow, the "golden equality which now exists, will precipitate into rigorous forms of caste, of capitalist and laborer." We may pause a moment to notice how the suggestion of a golden age helps to fix egalitarian social principles in a pre-industrial landscape. The point is, says Orvis, that Vermont soon will cease to be the "Evergreen State," and a "false society will have blasted its beauty and dried up the blood of its vigor and prosperity." (The blasting which destroys the beauty of the state is the blasting which clears a path for the new railroad.) Mechanization, both literally and metaphorically, means disharmony. It separates the people from the lovely green landscape which has, or ought to have, a primary place in their thought and feeling. Between man and nature it threatens to impose an ugly, depressing, and inhumane community.

What needs emphasis here is that Orvis is insisting upon precisely the metaphor Webster casually dismisses; he uses the image of the machine in the native landscape to figure a dangerous contradiction of social value and purpose. But Webster, knowing his audience, brings in the technological sublime to neutralize the dissonance generated by industrialization. The rhetoric forms an emotional bond between the orator and the public. It puts him in touch with the mass surge toward comfort, status, wealth, and power that rules the society. If Orvis is correct when he argues the patent inconsistency between industrialization and pastoral ideals, Webster is correct when he says, in effect, that it doesn't matter. Orvis has got hold of an intellectual, logical, and literary truth, but Webster understands the practical political truth — the facts of power.

The contrast, a case example in the politics of American culture, roughly indicates the relative force exerted by the opposed symbols of the machine upon the native consciousness. It is fitting that the apostrophe to the new power should be offered by a national hero, closely associated with the nation's dominant political, industrial, and financial groups, and speaking under the auspices of a corporation: Webster represents the organized community. It is fitting, too, that the essay that calls into question the assumptions governing capitalist industrialism should be written by a little-known reformer under an assumed name in an ephemeral, obscure organ of the Brook Farm Associationists. In the public view he appears as one of those queer intellectuals who flaunt their disaffection with gestures of withdrawal and, indeed, by quite literally withdrawing from ordinary social life to rustic utopian communities, pastoral oases. (An ". . . illusion, a masquerade, a pastoral, a counterfeit Arcadia," says Hawthorne's narrator, Coverdale, of the fictive Brook Farm in

The Blithedale Romance.) If Webster stands forth as the type of solid Yankee gentility, property, eloquence, and position, Orvis brings to mind a small cult of literary dreamers beyond the fringe.⁴⁸

The invidious comparison is further heightened by what might be called the public personality of the two ideologies, or world views, represented here. In the idiom of the 1840's, Orvis's attitude inevitably will be taken for another of the wild, "Germanic" theories to which the effete and the literary are said to be vulnerable. The epithet is calculated to evoke memories of Goethe and other vaguely disreputable poets with curious manners and an unrealistic, freewheeling, metaphysical turn of mind. It means, in a word, romantic *Weltschmerz*, a state of feeling thought to be basically subversive yet in most cases, like "beat" rebelliousness today, adolescent and harmless. To respectable, middle-class Americans who admire Daniel Webster, the viewpoint adopted by Orvis seems as mystical and un-American as Carlyle's "Signs of the Times" had seemed to Timothy Walker. Not that the difference between the two views is in any important sense an international difference; in England the division between the general culture and the intellectual, or literary, culture conforms to much the same pattern. In both countries the critical animus of men like Orvis or Carlyle was dismissed as the product of alien, European influences. But the case was stronger in America. Having been carried across the Atlantic on a wave of avant-garde, romantic thought, the new attitude seemed even more exotic in Vermont than in the Lake District. Here, after all, was a young Republic whose ideological underpinnings had been firmly set in the Enlightenment. Not only did the Constitution incorporate many of the basic assumptions

of the "mechanists," but the nation's favorite philosopher remained, well into the nineteenth century, "the Great Mr. Locke." All of which helps to explain the superb confidence of Daniel Webster, patriot and native Demosthenes, who keeps alive the neo-classic image of the American statesman.⁴⁹

Given the political and ideological climate, it is not surprising that the pastoral ideal is invoked against industrialization chiefly by those who, like Orvis, are radically disaffected.* Aside from apologists for Southern slavery, these dissidents belong to small, ineffectual groups—socialist, transcendentalist, literary, religious—far from the centers of influence and power. Outside the South the pastoral ideal has little or no practical value as a political weapon against industrialism. Even the Jacksonians, who have deep misgivings about what is happening to the nation, adopt an attitude much closer to Webster's. To be sure, they attack the Bank as a monstrous piece of financial machinery (Jefferson had referred to the Hamiltonian system as a machine), and they attempt in various ways to stay the centripetal forces at work in the economy.

* Yet the overt negative response to industrialization is not nearly as rare, in the written record, as one might expect. That is because it has a special appeal for the more literate and literary, hence it appears in print with a frequency out of all proportion to its apparent popularity with the public. One might easily cull an impressive exhibit of passages displaying hostility to the new technology (a kind of composite image of the menacing machine to set beside the sublime machine) from the periodicals of the day. But a merely quantitative sample of periodical literature would be misleading. By and large the negative response appears in newspapers like the *Harbinger*, organs of small organized minorities. On the other hand, the rhetoric of the technological sublime appears chiefly in such respectable magazines as Hunt's *Merchants' Magazine*, Littell's *Living Age*, Niles' *Register*, the *North American Review*, and the *Scientific American*, journals which on the whole represent the views of the governmental, business, and professional elites.

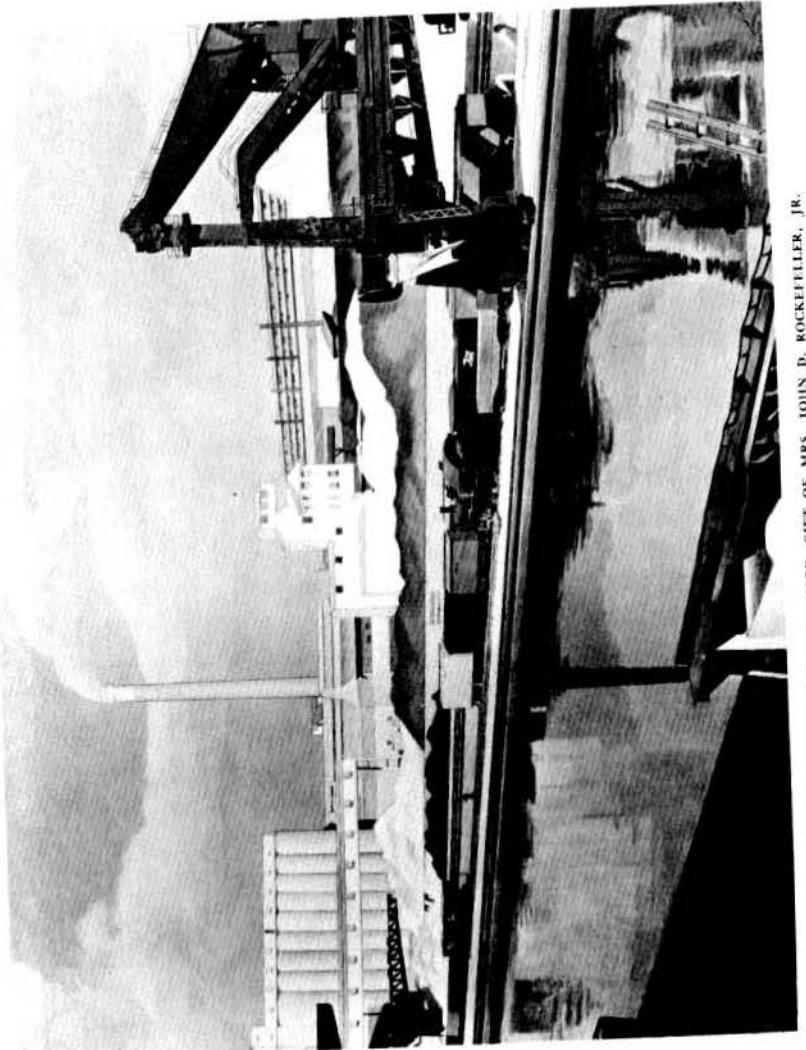
But in politics, the swelling, surging demand for everything that technology promises is irresistible. The result, as John William Ward and Marvin Meyers demonstrate, is that the Jacksonian "persuasion" embraces a typically nostalgic, or, as we say, ambivalent, look-both-ways kind of native progressivism. For all their misgivings, the Jacksonians are no more inclined than Webster to insist upon a root contradiction between industrial progress and the older, chaste image of a green Republic. On the whole they share the prevailing assumption that machine technology (and all that it represents) belongs, or can be made to belong, in the middle landscape.⁵⁰

The classic pictorial statement of this major theme is provided by George Inness. In 1854, seven years after Webster's New Hampshire speeches, the Lackawanna Railroad Company commissioned Inness to paint the scene of its operations. At first, apparently, the assignment repelled him. Hitherto a painter of pleasant, but on the whole conventionally romantic, landscapes, Inness was put off by the notion of painting anything as devoid of visual charm as a repair shop, a roundhouse, or a smoking locomotive. He did not see how such objects could be assimilated to his habitual Virgilian mode. But as it happens the difficulty proved to be stimulating, and the result, *The Lackawanna Valley* (1855; plate 2), is generally included among his best works.* It is a striking representation of the idea that machine technology is a proper part of the landscape. Like Thoreau's extended metaphor at the end

* One scholar, Wolfgang Börn, believes that Inness's effort to impose order upon this novel subject matter produced a significant technical innovation. In Börn's view, the striking luminosity of the work, which he thinks at least ten years in advance of continental palettes, was devised specifically as a means of making the technological artifacts seem of a piece with the rest of the landscape.

"The
Lackawanna
Valley"
by





"American Landscape"

by Charles Sheeler

The Machine

of *Walden*, the springtime thawing of the sand in the railroad bank, Inness's painting seems to say that "there is nothing inorganic." Instead of causing disharmony, the train is a unifying device. The hills in the background and the trees of the middle distance gently envelop the industrial buildings and artifacts. No sharp lines set off the man-made from the natural terrain. Nor is the Lackawanna's smoke unpleasant. The cottony puffs that rise from the engine and the roundhouse are merely duplicates of a puff that rises from behind the church — an ingenious touch! Instead of cutting the space into sharp, rectilinear segments as railroad tracks often do, the right-of-way curves gracefully across the center of the canvas where it divides in two, forming the delicately touching ovals that dominate the middle plane. It is noteworthy, too, that the animals in the pasture continue to graze or rest peacefully as the tidy, diminutive train approaches. Still, this is not a lament for Goldsmith's cherished land; the stumps indicate that the pasture has just been hewn out of a wilderness. But, of course, it is the solitary figure reclining beneath the dominant vertical, the tree in the foreground, who finally establishes the quiet, relaxed mood. He holds no crook, but he contemplates the sight in the serene posture of the good shepherd looking out across Arcadia.⁵¹

In 1855, the year that Inness completed his painting, Thomas Buchanan Read, a Connecticut poetaster, published his long poem, *The New Pastoral*. He begins with an invocation to the land, and especially to

. . . that pastoral phase,
Where man is native to his sphere, which shows
The simple light of nature, fresh from God! —
That middle life, between the hut and palace,
'Twixt squalid ignorance and splendid vice; —

Above, by many rods of moral moves,
The Indian's want, and happily below —
If the superior may be called below —
The purple and fine linen. . . .

He sings of "iron men who build the golden future," men with "heroic wills, . . . / . . . to which / The Wilderness, the rank and noxious swamps, / . . . bow and bear / The burthen of the harvest." Like Inness, Read is invoking the image of the middle landscape, a version of the pastoral ideal which continues to engage the American imagination long after the "take-off" into the industrial age.⁵²

Of American writers with authentic gifts, Emerson and Whitman pay the most direct, wholehearted tribute to this industrialized version of the pastoral ideal. It is fitting to consider Whitman here because he comes closest to transmuting the rhetoric of the technological sublime into poetry. Although the career of his mythic American, the "I" of "Song of Myself," begins with the contemplation of a simplified, stripped-down natural landscape ("I lean and loaf at my ease observing a spear of summer grass"), he has no difficulty assimilating the forces represented by the machine. In "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" there is a moment of hesitation, just a touch of doubt, as he notes the black and red lights cast by the foundry chimneys over the houses and streets. Later in the poem the industrial blackness is linked to an inward state, the "dark patches" of evil he discovers within himself. But the conflict is easily resolved, and in the final stanza the speaker confidently returns to the theme in the imperative voice:

Burn high your fires, foundry chimneys! cast black
shadows at nightfall! cast red and yellow light
over the tops of the houses!

Here, as elsewhere, the American scene induces an exuberance in Whitman's hero that rises above all possible doubts.

Although it comes after the Civil War, Whitman's "Passage to India" (1868) probably is the purest, most poetic use of the progressive idiom in our literature. It begins:

Singing my days,
Singing the great achievements of the present,
Singing the strong light works of engineers,
Our modern wonders, (the antique ponderous Seven
outvied,)
In the Old World the east the Suez Canal,
The New by its mighty railroad spann'd,
The seas inlaid with eloquent gentle wires;
Yet first to sound, and ever sound, the cry with thee
 O soul,
The Past! the Past! the Past!

Against the forward thrust of mechanized change, the mild "yet" counters a yearning for the past. But this feeling is soon overwhelmed by the sense of buoyant power that arises from the sight of the machine's motion across the landscape:

I see over my own continent the Pacific railroad
 surmounting every barrier,
I see continual trains of cars winding along the
 Platte carrying freight and passengers,
I hear the locomotives rushing and roaring, and the
 shril steam-whistle,
I hear the echoes reverberate through the grandest
 scenery in the world. . . .

And so on. Like the writers for the popular magazines, the poet foresees all the continents spanned, connected by one network, "welded together," and the globe one

. . . vast Rondure, swimming in space,
Cover'd all over with visible power and beauty. . . .

As for the "yet," the speaker's sense of separation from the past, his fear that he will forget his origins (most forcibly expressed as a cry out of the "dark unfathom'd retrospect"), it is dissolved by the familiar, all-answering logic of first things first.

After the seas are all cross'd, (as they seem already
cross'd.)
After the great captains and engineers have accomplish'd
their work,
After the noble inventors, after the scientists,
the chemist, the geologist, ethnologist,
Finally shall come the poet worthy that name,
The true son of God shall come singing his songs.

In "Passage to India" the machine power is a precursor of a higher, spiritual power. *After* it has done its work the divine bard will arrive to announce that "Nature and Man shall be disjoin'd and diffused no more." His songs will confirm the speaker's prevision of history as an upward spiral, a movement that dispels all doubt, carrying mankind back, full circle, to the simple vitality of "primal thought," above the "gardens of Asia" where history began:

. . . the voyage of his mind's return,
To reason's early paradise,
Back, back to wisdom's birth, to innocent intuitions,
Again with fair creation.

It should be said that "Passage to India" lacks the sharp particularity which redeems the bombast in much of Whitman's early work. Perhaps the hinted conflict between technological progress and the garden ideal, impossible to

resolve on the plane of ordinary experience, lends a particular impetus to this declamatory manner.

In "Passage to India" Whitman is expressing attitudes that dominated the general culture at the time. So far from causing serious concern, the new power often is interpreted as a means of realizing the classical, eighteenth-century aims of the Republic. According to a writer for a business magazine, factory labor is not "pursued here as in England." There it is "a continuous business for life," but here the young men and women enter factories "not as a main object of pursuit, but as a stepping-stone to a future settlement. . . ." After they have earned a small sum they are likely to "emigrate to the broad and rich fields of the west, where the soil, like a kind mother, opens its arms to receive them, and where they settle down permanent freeholders, perhaps the future legislators of the country." It is technology, indeed, that is creating the new garden of the world. "The great Mississippi valley," says a writer in *DeBow's Review* in 1850, "may emphatically be said to be the creation of the steam engine, for without its magic power . . . what centuries must have elapsed before the progress of arts and of enterprise could have swept away the traces of savage life." The railroad is the chosen vehicle for bringing America into its own as a pastoral utopia. That it also means planting Kansas City where the garden was supposed to be does not often occur to the popular rhetoricians.⁵³

No one captures the dominant mood so well as a writer for the *Scientific American* in 1849. Addressing himself to the question, "What Is the Golden Age," he begins by attacking those whose "affections are all with the past." Then, in the familiar idiom, he reviews the progress of the arts and sciences. They are doing more than has ever

been done before to "render mankind virtuous and happy." But surprisingly enough, his conclusion is not that the golden age lies in the future. Rather, he says, in a delightfully bland and circumstantial tone, "so far as we can judge, in looking back upon the experience of our life in the world, our opinion is favorable to the *now* being the *golden age*."⁵⁴

The pastoral idea of America had, of course, lent itself to this illusion from the beginning. In the eighteenth century it had embraced a strangely ambiguous idea of history. It then had provided a clear sanction for the conquest of the wilderness, for improving upon raw nature and for economic and technological development — up to a point. The objective, in theory at least, was a society of the middle landscape, a rural nation exhibiting a happy balance of art and nature. But no one, not even Jefferson, had been able to identify the point of arrest, the critical moment when the tilt might be expected and progress cease to be progress. As time went on, accordingly, the idea became more vague, a rhetorical formula rather than a conception of society, and an increasingly transparent and jejune expression of the national preference for having it both ways. In this sentimental guise the pastoral ideal remained of service long after the machine's appearance in the landscape. It enabled the nation to continue defining its purpose as the pursuit of rural happiness while devoting itself to productivity, wealth, and power. It remained for our serious writers to discover the meaning inherent in the contradiction.

V

Two Kingdoms of Force

Then the little locomotive shrieked and began to move: a rapid churning of exhaust, a lethargic deliberate clashing of slack couplings travelling backward along the train, the exhaust changing to the deep slow clapping bites of power as the caboose too began to move and from the cupola he watched the train's head complete the first and only curve in the entire line's length and vanish into the wilderness, dragging its length of train behind it so that it resembled a small dingy harmless snake vanishing into weeds, drawing him with it too until soon it ran once more at its maximum clattering speed between the twin walls of unaxed wilderness as of old. It had been harmless once. . . .

It had been harmless then. . . . But it was different now. It was the same train, engine cars and caboose . . . running with its same illusion of frantic rapidity between the same twin walls of impenetrable and impervious woods . . . yet this time it was as though the train . . . had brought with it into the doomed wilderness even before the actual axe the shadow and portent of the new mill not even finished yet and the rails and ties which were not even laid; and he knew now what he had known as soon as he saw Hoke's this morning but had not yet thought into words: why Major de Spain had not come back, and that after this time he himself, who had had to see it one time other, would return no more.

William Faulkner, "The Bear," 1942 *

THE incursion of the railroad in Sleepy Hollow, recorded by Hawthorne in 1844, typifies the moment of discovery. Recall the circumstances. On a fine summer

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