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The Oxymoron of American Pastoralism

PASTORALISM HAS BEEN VARIOUSLY DEFINED IN American literary studies. In European literature the pastoral persisted as a distinct genre and self-conscious literary tradition from Theocritus and Virgil through the eighteenth century. Major eighteenth- and nineteenth-century American authors alluded to this tradition, but they could not really lay claim to it, for as this essay will argue, the European pastoral was inapplicable to the American setting, both socially and ecologically: socially because although early Anglo-America was by no means a classless society, the distinction between landowners and shepherds was scarcely relevant in the young United States; and ecologically because the pastoral way of life, defined as a subsistence based upon herds of livestock, was not indigenous to America.

Leo Marx's landmark *The Machine in the Garden* employed the concept of pastoral to explain the primitivist and agrarian strain in American thought in the face of modern industrial technologies. In his introduction Marx wrote of how "the shepherd . . . seeks a resolution of the conflict between the opposed worlds of nature and art" (22). But the shepherd, who "is often the poet in disguise," does not, at least in America, herd sheep. In Marx's formulation American pastoralism is an ideology that has mediated conflicting desires for technological progress and bucolic retreat, "a desire, in the face of the growing power and complexity of organized society, to disengage from the dominant culture and to seek out the basis for a simpler, more satisfying mode of life in a realm 'closer,' as we say, to nature" ("Pastoralism" 54). Those lines from a 1986 article updating his renowned 1964 book, as well as a new afterword to a 2000 reprint of it, emphasized the political valence

of pastoralism, now also defined as “a left-leaning ideology not based on a progressive world view” (“Pastoralism” 66). Other influential Americanists and eco-critics have revised Leo Marx’s work. Lawrence Buell affirmed that pastoralism “portrays a less complex state of existence than the writer’s own” (4) and tried to refute assumptions that the pastoral has been a reactionary or hegemonic force in American cultural politics. In an important early contribution to ecological literary studies, Glen Love argued that “wild nature has replaced the traditional middle state of the garden,” and that “wilderness has radicalized the pastoral experience” (203).

In opening his 1996 book *What Is Pastoral?* Paul Alpers wrote that he was moved to undertake his project by irritation with two tendencies in the previous scholarship: “the first is the view that pastoral is motivated by naive idyllicism; the second is the way modern studies tend to use ‘pastoral’ with ungoverned inclusiveness” (ix). His response was to argue that “we will have a far truer idea of pastoral if we take its representative anecdote [invoking Kenneth Burke’s term] to be herdsmen and their lives, rather than landscape or idealized nature” (22). Alpers insisted that shepherds and the shepherding history of the Mediterranean world were essential to the genre. Marx, Buell, and Love, as well as scholars of the European pastoral tradition, have all committed the indiscretions that irritated Alpers. Leo Marx acknowledged that “in its root meaning ‘pastoralism’ refers to the ways of herdsmen, and today anthropologists and historians invoke that literary sense of the word to describe the way of life of peoples who usually do not practice agriculture, who tend to be nomadic, and whose basic economic activity is animal husbandry. But that straightforward descriptive usage is rarely invoked by anyone except the scholarly experts who study premodern cultures.” To update this archaic definition he extended the pastoralist label to anyone “with a similar, as it were, shepherdlike view of life” (“Pastoralism” 42). Other scholars such as David Halperin and Louise Westling, however, have traced the origins of pastoral back to the earliest extant writings concerning the conflict between nomadic pastoralists and settled agriculturalists, the Sumerian and Akkadian literature set down in clay tablets 4000–5000 years ago. As Halperin declared, “The quest for pastoral origins can now legitimately be pushed back in time as far as the invention of literature itself” (87). These origins are quite different, however, in the American context, where the earliest

indigenous writing, among the Mayans, could not engage pastoralism's conflicts with farming and hunting.

Among anthropologists, pastoralism is defined according to the relationships between humans, animals, and the land. In societies that rely on gathering and hunting for their food, neither land nor wild animals can be claimed as the property of any one individual. An area where berries or wild rice grow may be claimed by a tribe or band, but not by a single person, and only after a hunter has killed his game does the carcass become his to distribute as he wishes. The products of hunting are shared widely in order to even out the varying success of the hunters. In agricultural societies, on the other hand, both land and animals generally are claimed as the property of individual farmers. A pastoral society pursues a middle ground between these two strategies, and observes a distinction between moveable and real property. Pasture land is held in common if it is owned at all, but the livestock that form herds are the property of an individual, a family, or a small band, and the offspring of females in that herd belong to the same herd. This principle admits of many variations across the world's many climates and many species of herd animals. Pastoralists may be more or less nomadic, and may use their animals for products such as pelts, leather, wool, horn, bone, etc., as well as for food in the form of meat (carnivorous pastoralism, including many boreal reindeer peoples) or blood and milk (milch pastoralism, the Nuer of Sudan being a well-known instance).¹

In pre-Columbian North America, however, there were no pastoralist societies because no livestock species formed the basis for a nomadic pastoralism, whether milch or carnivorous. Dogs, beavers or other species were sometimes tamed or domesticated to follow and perform tasks for their owners, and were occasionally eaten, but did not serve as a staple food, and did not inspire humans to migrate seasonally alongside them.² Some Native American peoples kept domestic turkeys, but in most of North America the turkey remained a game bird for hunting.³ The pastoral subsistence strategy did not even occur among the huge caribou herds roaming the arctic and boreal sub-arctic of Alaska and Canada. Eurasian reindeer did become herd property for some peoples there, but the same species, known as caribou in North America, did not.

"The pastoral ideal has been used to define the meaning of America ever since the age of discovery, and has not yet lost its hold upon the

native imagination" (3) is the opening sentence of *The Machine in the Garden*. A decade later Annette Kolodny wrote of how "an irrefutable fact of history (the European discovery of America) touched every word written about the New World with the possibility that the ideally beautiful and bountiful terrain might be lifted forever out of the canon of pastoral convention and invested with the reality of daily experience" (5–6). The "pastoral" in these lines refers to the dreams that explorers nurtured of a life of ease in nature, free from burdensome labor, hungry privation, or political oppression. But because America in the "age of discovery" had no shepherds, it did not have pastoralism by the strict definition, and the "pastoral ideal" could only be imposed upon it by force of arms, will, or imagination.

By a cruel irony, it may have been the absence of any indigenous pastoralism in America that made it possible for Europeans to impose their pastoral fantasies on the American landscape. In his 1998 best-seller *Guns, Germs, and Steel* Jared Diamond brought wide awareness to the idea that because Native Americans did not live in close proximity to domestic animals, they failed to develop immunity to diseases, most importantly smallpox, that ravaged their populations during the European invasion. The microbiological pathogens that cause "lethal crowd epidemics" such as typhus, measles, tuberculosis, or more recently HIV and Lyme disease, develop and spread by being passed back and forth between dense populations of humans and of cattle, deer, rats, monkeys, or other animals. Any species living in symbiosis with sedentary human populations can be a disease vector, but the pastoral species such as cattle have been the most common such co-hosts because until the modern urban era it was these animals with whom humans lived most intimately. Diamond poses the question of "why the New World apparently ended up with no lethal crowd epidemics at all" (212), and concludes that "only five animals of any sort became domesticated in the Americas: the turkey in Mexico and the U.S. Southwest, the llama/alpaca and the guinea pig in the Andes, the Muscovy duck in tropical South America, and the dog throughout the Americas" (213).⁴ Literary and environmental scholars have examined the powerful symbolic impact of Europeans' unwitting germ warfare during the invasion of America. Stephen Greenblatt's famous essay "Invisible Bullets" discussed Thomas Harriot's observation in his *Brief and True Report on the New Found Land of Virginia* that "within a few days after our departure

from every such town, the people began to die very fast" (qtd. in Greenblatt 35). More recently, Cristobal Silva has studied how "epidemics shaped the meaning of the English migration [to New England] as well as its success" (253). Edward Johnson's *Wonder-Working Providence* (1653), for example, observed how native mortality aided colonizers' agriculture: "Their Disease being a sore Consumption, sweeping away whole Families, but chiefly young Men and Children, the very seeds of increase . . . by this meanes Christ . . . not only made roome for his people to plant; but also tamed the hard and cruell hearts of these barbarous Indians" (17, qtd. in Silva 252).⁵

As Francis Jennings argued more than thirty years ago, the trope of America as a "virgin land," so fundamental to theories of American frontier pastoralism from Henry Nash Smith to Annette Kolodny, is false; European colonists attacked and displaced a bountiful native population inhabiting what should properly be called a "widowed land" (15–31). Epidemics had already killed a large portion of the population before the *Mayflower* arrived at Plymouth Rock, but colonists on that ship, such as Edward Winslow, were aware of how they benefited from that mortality. A variation of Jennings's critique has been articulated by many literary eco-critics and environmental historians, notably William Cronon, who in the last two decades have come to question the myth of wilderness as a land unaltered by human presence. While there is no space here to analyze in detail the relationship between American colonialism and wilderness, my point is that this entire complex of American landscape ideologies—the virgin land, the wilderness, and the settlers' pastoral "middle landscape"—all rely upon the fact that indigenous American peoples practiced an agricultural and/or a hunter-gatherer subsistence, but not a nomadic pastoralism. Anglo-American authors of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, after all, did not write of the great equestrian cultures of the Plains Indians, nor the Indians employed or enslaved to herd sheep by *encomenderos* in New Spain. I describe in what follows several consequences of the oxymoron of American pastoralism, consequences that range from economics, to politics, to law, to historiography, to American painting of the early nineteenth century.

First, is it highly significant that not only were there no pastoral shepherds in Native North America, there were none established by the early English colonizers. Seventeenth-century English settlers did

not wish to create a pastoral sheep-herding economy in New England or Virginia, as some Spaniards had in Peru and New Spain. As Tim Sweet has observed, “despite their assumption of the New World’s potential to produce everything of the Old World, the promoters [authors of early promotional tracts in English] never suggest wool as a colonial product” (20–21). Wool production in England had grown since the mid-fifteenth-century, as landlords enclosed common lands and dispossessed cottagers in order to expand pasture and add to their flocks. But “in the second half of the sixteenth century . . . the cloth trade experienced a depression” (21). The wealthy English landowners and merchants who financed colonizing voyages, whether as independent investors or as a company with royal patronage, did not want to further depress the prices of their wool exports. Colonial investors and promoters instead emphasized luxury goods (dyewoods, feathers, and pelts for hat felt) or novel plantation crops (sugar, indigo, tobacco, rubber, coffee). Native Americans were regarded not as potential shepherds for colonizers’ sheep, but instead as consumers of wool clothing and blankets produced in Europe. Richard Hakluyt promised “an ample vent in time to come of the Woollen clothes of England, especially those of the coarsest sorts” (qtd. in Sweet 21). In colonial New France native peoples who for centuries had worn clothes made from the pelts of beaver, muskrat, and other animals were enticed to trade these pelts for European goods including wool blankets and coats (Sayre 147–54). One can also draw an instructive contrast between the seventeenth-century colonial American economy and nineteenth-century Australia and New Zealand. In the later period England was the world’s leading industrial textile producer and therefore a wool importer, not a wool exporter as it had been three centuries earlier. Australia and New Zealand became and remain huge producers of wool, lamb and beef.⁶ By the nineteenth century the United States also differed profoundly from seventeenth-century New England; a cattle boom grew alongside a myth of the cowboy as a figure of pastoral simplicity and virtue, driving herds of cattle across an open range. Film and popular literature have perpetuated the cowboy myth, but few Americans are aware of how barbed wire, industrial capitalism, and the erosion and degradation of grasslands punctured the cattle boom shortly after it began in the 1880s.

Colonial Anglo-American promotional tracts were forthright about the economic opportunities of the colonies, but the legal theories used

to justify this colonization were more oblique. Among the English legal tracts asserting the nation's right to claim lands in America in the face of challenges from native peoples and from competing Spanish, Dutch or French colonists, John Locke's *Second Treatise on Government* was extremely influential. Many scholars have quoted Locke's line, "Thus in the beginning all the world was America," (§ 49). As Barbara Arneil has observed, Locke's key principle of property rights, as based on the labor that an individual exerts to appropriate resources from nature, echoes the writing of Massachusetts Bay colony leader John Winthrop a half-century earlier: "Men accounted nothing their own but that which they had appropriated by their own industry" (*General Considerations for Planting in New England*, qtd. in Arneil 136). Locke offers as one example of this appropriation the primitive gatherer: "He that is nourished by the acorns he picked up under an oak, or the apples he gathered from the trees in the wood" (§ 26). The only specifically American example Locke uses, however, is of hunting: "Thus the law of reason makes the deer that Indian's who hath killed it: 'tis allowed to be his goods who hath bestowed his labour upon it, though before it was the common right of everyone" (§ 30). Locke invoked precisely the distinction anthropologists use to distinguish the hunter/gatherer from the pastoral subsistence regime. In his seminal chapter, "On Property," Locke mentions nomadic pastoralism only once—by invoking Abraham, Esau, Cain and Abel of the biblical Genesis. In "Abraham's time, they wandered with their flocks and their herds, which was their substance, freely up and down; and that Abraham did, in a country where he was a stranger" (§ 38). It would have been difficult for Locke to deny the biblical patriarchs the right to graze their flocks where they pleased, and fortunately the question did not arise with regard to the Americans. The line "in the beginning all the world was America" appears in the context of Locke's argument about spoilage, the concept that without markets and without any form of money such as imperishable gold and silver, the primitive American has no reason and therefore no right "to enlarge his possessions beyond the use of his family" (§ 48). The "primitive American" is a hunter-gatherer with no domesticated beasts of burden to carry his surplus, or to embody wealth on the hoof. The ensuing lines offer as a hypothetical case a man with "ten thousand or a hundred thousand acres of excellent land, ready cultivated and well-stocked too with cattle, in the middle of the inland parts of America, where he had no hopes of commerce with other parts of the world, to draw money to him by the sale of the product. It would not be worth the enclosing, and we should see him give up again to the wild common of nature whatever was more than would supply the conveniences of

life" (§ 48). The reference to cattle reveals that this is a speculative, counter-factual example. The man cannot be an American Indian and cannot be an English colonist either, for at that time none could or would settle in an area removed from trade with the home country.

In addition to its clever use of America, Locke's theory of property also (in)famously asserts the right to claim property through "enclosure," a word that already by the time he was writing carried a powerful political resonance in England. All through the early modern period, upper-class gentry were appropriating or enclosing land that for generations had been held in common by local farmers who grazed their household livestock and sometimes also planted gardens on it. As Raymond Williams observed, "the drive for more pasture, in the growth of the wool trade, led to major enclosures" (39). In Thomas More's *Utopia*, Raphael Hythloday vividly described the effects of enclosure on England around 1500: "the nobles and gentlemen, not to mention the saintly abbots . . . enclos[e] all the land they can for pasture, and leaving none for cultivation . . . Result—hundreds of farmers are evicted After all, it only takes one shepherd or cowherd to graze animals over an area that would need any amount of labour to make it fit for corn production" (46–47). Decades later, these dispossessed farmers became candidates for emigration to America.

It is important in this context to observe a fundamental distinction between nomadic pastoralism, where humans follow their livestock across open range, at least during some seasons of the year, and ranching, in which the owners of livestock rely on fences or natural features to confine animals who are domesticated in name only, as they are not known individually and may only rarely be observed by their owners. Locke's "enclosure" may refer only to surveying rather than to fence or hedge building (Arneil asserts this interpretation), but either way his tract invokes America, the Bible and the State of Nature for ideological support of English landowners, asserting that "the provisions serving to the support of human life produced by one acre of enclosed and cultivated land are (to speak much within compass) ten times greater than those which are yielded by an acre of land, of an equal richness, lying waste in common" (§ 37). The transition from pastoral to agricultural cultivation of land is justified by an appeal to the common welfare of the society, even as the thrust of Locke's argument is to assert the rights of elite private property owners over the commons and the commoners.

Those reading the passage with English history and landscape in mind might protest that the common-holders and their livelihoods are being dispossessed, but those reading it with America in mind could not raise this objection. If an Indian hunter does not own a deer or bison until he kills it, he also cannot claim as his own, in common or in severalty, the land upon which the deer or bison browsed or grazed.

In the European pastoral tradition, both visual and literary, the central figure of the shepherd represented a fantasy of peaceful leisure amid bountiful nature, a pastoral Arcadia, a mythical past in the Golden Age or State of Nature, prior to the corrupting influence of wealth and status. Locke's theory of property only obliquely implies that shepherds in the pastoral form of subsistence partake of this state of nature by holding land in common, and Locke does not wish to admit that it was enclosure, not money, which destroyed this Arcadia. Yet the iconography of the pastoral in landscape painting could nonetheless depict shepherds in specific local landscapes and thus evoke the Golden Age as a contemporary reality. When America's first great landscape painter, Thomas Cole, confronted the common prejudice that "American Scenery . . . being destitute of those vestiges of antiquity, whose associations so strongly affect the mind . . . may not be compared with European scenery," and proposed that "we have many a spot as umbrageous as Vallombrosa, and as picturesque as the solitudes of Vacluse; but Milton and Petrarch have not hallowed them by their footsteps and immortal verse" (7, 16), he did not explicitly acknowledge the problem that one of the picturesque vestiges absent from the American landscape, and missing from American literature, was the indigenous pastoral shepherd himself. Cole's signature works included specific naturalistic landscapes such as *The Clove* and *Kaaterskill Falls* in the Catskills and *The View from Mount Holyoke* on the Connecticut River, but also allegorical series such as "The Voyage of Life" and "The Course of Empire." The latter is a series of five large canvases (39.25 by 69.25 inches) now held at the New York Historical Society, entitled *The Savage State*, *The Arcadian State*, *The Consummation of Empire*, *Destruction*, and *Desolation*. Given *The Arcadian State*, the series cannot be interpreted as depicting an American landscape. Both the herd of sheep and the Stonehenge-like temple in the mid-ground signify that this can only be a European scene. An American version might depict instead a burial mound and a field of maize, but it could not continue

to the *Consummation of Empire* because America did not yet have such enormous classical architecture (although many large public edifices were being constructed in this style), and because expansionist Americans did not believe their empire had yet reached its climax. And if *The Arcadian State* cannot be in America, our continent must be shunted back to "Savage State." The stormy skies and gnarled trees of this first painting in the series match the characteristic sublime style of Cole's other famous American scenes, including *Falls of Kaaterskill*, *Schroon Mountain* and *View from Mount Holyoke*. In the latter painting, often referred to as *The Oxbow*, the left-hand side depicts a stormy mountainous wilderness, and the right-hand side a series of peaceful farm fields, many with haystacks. The *View from Mount Holyoke* neatly captures how the American landscape was changing from forest to field agriculture, without passing through pastoralism.⁷

In *The Machine in the Garden*, Leo Marx turned to a painting by another Hudson River School artist, George Innes's *The Lackawanna Valley*, to articulate his theory of an American pastoralism without shepherds. Innes was commissioned by the Lackawanna Railroad to produce a painting of the company's products, and although at first he was resistant, he created a pleasing composition, "a striking representation of the idea that machine technology is a proper part of the landscape" (220). Copses of woods, train tracks, and recently-cleared fields scattered with tree stumps form a gentle series of intersecting curves, with the railroad's roundhouse and a church steeple in the background. A man or boy in the foreground sits watching the scene, about whom Marx comments: "He holds no crook, but he contemplates the sight in the serene posture of the good shepherd looking out across Arcadia" (221). This assertion is contrived. There are no livestock in the picture, and the cleared fields will likely soon be planted in row crops. Marx's real point about the painting is that it portrays a peaceful and nearly instantaneous transition from wilderness forests to agricultural fields to industrial commerce. In the absence of a pastoral state, these three are the stages of American progress. Marx uses the term "pastoral" to describe the myth that the qualities associated with shepherds in the European pastoral tradition, such as simplicity, leisure, and emotional purity, can in America be possessed by people who do not herd flocks but instead are caught up in a breakneck rush toward modernity. The pastoral in anthropology referred to the middle state between nomadic

hunter-gatherers and sedentary agriculturalists, but in American Studies has come to signify instead a middle state between rural simplicity and urban modernity.⁸

Cole's "Course of Empire" can be interpreted as a work of Romantic neo-Classicism, the painter's effort to prove that he had been to Europe and absorbed the edifying lessons of Rome's splendor and decline. It can also be read as a speculative history and anthropology. The title is not "a course of *an* empire" but "*The* Course of Empire," and the titles of the five scenes are therefore stages that every empire will pass through. From the eighteenth through the mid-nineteenth centuries stadial historiography, or anthropological theories of the stages of social progress, became increasingly influential in western thought.⁹ The episteme was so pervasive that it is impossible to acknowledge all its manifestations from Hegel and Darwin to Marx and Freud. For the purposes of this essay I will refer to the Four-Stage Theory and discuss its articulation by Adam Smith: "There are four distinct states which mankind pass thro:—1st, the Age of Hunters; 2dly, the age of Shepherds; 3dly, the Age of Agriculture; and 4thly, the Age of Commerce" (14).¹⁰ In a critique of Smith's theory, Christian Marouby has observed that "the late eighteenth-century triumph of the notion of a universal human progress—at once anthropological and economic—may well be one of the most important long-term intellectual consequences of the discovery of the Americas" (85). Marouby examines the catalog of Smith's library and traces his citations in *The Wealth of Nations* and earlier writings to demonstrate how Smith relied on proto-ethnographic accounts of American Indians, such as the works of François-Xavier Charlevoix and Joseph-François Lafitau, and yet persistently misrepresented the evidence in these texts when it failed to support his stage theory. In his *Lectures on Jurisprudence* Smith declared that "in almost all countries the age of shepherds preceded that of agriculture . . . the whole of the savage nations which subsist by flocks have no notion of cultivating the ground." He used the accounts of Native Americans he read as an exception to prove his rule: "The only instance that has the appearance of an objection to this rule is the state of the North American Indians. They, tho they have not conception of flocks and herds, have nevertheless some notion of agriculture. Their women plant a few stalks of corn at the back of their huts" (15). Like many New England colonists, Smith was slow to recognize Native American agriculture.

The most influential American theorist of the stages of social progress was Lewis Henry Morgan.¹¹ In *Ancient Society* (1877), Morgan laid out a typology of Savagery, Barbarism, and Civilization, each subdivided into Lower, Middle, and Upper stages and correlated to the theory of kinship systems he had published in *Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity* (1871). Morgan brought stadial anthropology into the industrial age by tying each advance to a specific technological breakthrough: the use of fire, the bow and arrow, pottery, the smelting of iron ore, and the invention of a phonetic alphabet. For the middle status of Barbarism, however, Morgan was forced to break out of this determinist sequence. In the eastern hemisphere, this stage was inaugurated by the domestication of animals, while in the western hemisphere, it was the cultivation of maize by irrigation. Morgan's earlier study of the Iroquois made him aware of the agricultural skills of American Indians, but he nonetheless articulated a racist stage theory in which these people had strayed off course: "The absence of animals adapted to domestication in the Western Hemisphere, excepting the llama, and the specific differences in the cereals of the two hemispheres exercised an important influence upon the relative advancement of the inhabitants. . . . It is at least supposable that the Aryan and Semitic families owe their pre-eminent endowments to the great scale upon which, as far back as our knowledge extends, they have identified themselves with the maintenance in numbers of the domestic animals." This "new mode of life, the pastoral" (25) in turn inspired the cultivation of grains in the fertile crescent, as the "oldest traditions" (26) of western literature tell us. Much like Jared Diamond, Lewis Henry Morgan saw the absence of pastoral herding in the Americas as a key factor in the European colonial conquest.

In the late twentieth century anthropologists reached a consensus that the theories of stadial history are deeply flawed. As ethnographic studies of indigenous peoples were carried out in regions unknown to Smith and Morgan, such as New Guinea, the Australian Outback, the Arctic, and the Amazon basin, the great diversity of human subsistence strategies defied any neat categorization. And as economic anthropologists began to calculate the caloric values of various food sources and measure the time spent accumulating them, it became clear that in nearly all primitive societies the gathering of fruits, nuts and roots (accomplished mainly by women) exceeded the proportion of

meat from hunting (performed mostly by men). Finally, archaeological findings pushed back the apparent origin of agriculture in China, New Guinea and the Euphrates valley to 6000–8000 years ago, roughly the same time as the first evidence of the domestication of sheep and goats and prior to the oldest literary evidence. Moreover, as anthropologist Tim Ingold argues, it is almost impossible to determine from its archaeological remains whether a goat or sheep was hunted or culled from a domestic herd. It is also hard to tell if seeds of wheat or barley were gathered or cultivated (83–84; 133–43). Hence anthropologists now propose that pastoral herding developed at around the same time as agriculture, and that the two were not successive but complementary subsistence strategies which together slowly displaced hunting societies from the most favored land. In some places, such as pre-Columbian Peru, all three coexisted in ecological symbiosis (250–59; Mann 64–74). They coexist also today, of course, or at least did until recently.

But in the intellectual climate of the young United States the ideology of progress and the Four-Stage theory (though not known by that name) persisted even as its four stages had to be reduced to three due to the absence of indigenous pastoralists. The consequences for Native Americans were and continue to be deleterious. The influence of Locke and other stage theorists on American founding fathers including Thomas Jefferson led them to articulate a policy of assimilation that called for transforming the “savage” Indian hunters directly into farmers. There’s no space nor need here to enumerate the harm of this policy before and since the Dawes Allotment Act of 1887 (which might be called the Enclosure Act of the United States). And although it has not been widely recognized, one appeal of this policy was that it seemed to avoid the politics of enclosure as it had played out in England. Dispossession of Indian lands was not enclosure if the Indians had not held the land in common according to the practices well established among herders in England and elsewhere and recognized by Locke, and the principle of collective ownership even of reservation lands was scarcely acknowledged until the reforms of John Collier in the 1930s reversed key provisions of the Dawes Act.

Contemporary anthropologists have come to question stage theories, just as post-modern thought generally has challenged other such teleological master narratives, but the concept of American pastoralism continues to rely on progressive stage theory insofar as it tries to reverse

its direction. Another of Leo Marx's definitions asserts that "pastoral is the literary mode par excellence for recording man's ambivalent response to rapid social change" ("Technology and Classic American Literature," qtd. in Halperin 86). Pastoralism is the desire to regress toward a simpler way of life, and in Europe this meant regressing from the industrial or agricultural modes of subsistence toward the pastoral mode. But in America it often meant instead a regression from agriculture to a hunter/gatherer's subsistence. To backslide from civilized agriculture, or from the yeoman farmer ideal, was to become not a peaceful herder, but a hunter like the native Indians. The prospect was deeply ambivalent, heavily overdetermined, and the germ of some of American literature's greatest mythic heroes, including Daniel Boone and James Fenimore Cooper's Leatherstocking. I'd like to offer here brief discussions of Cooper's *The Pioneers* and of two texts from the canon of American pastoral nature writing, by J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur and by Henry David Thoreau.

The twelfth and last of Crèvecoeur's *Letters from an American Farmer*, "Distresses of a Frontier Man," departs from the more idealist rural sketches in many of the first eleven letters, yet as the lament of a farmer dispossessed from his land by war, it nonetheless qualifies as a pastoral in the Virgilian tradition. Fleeing threats of attack during the American Revolution, the Frontier Man declares that he will take refuge in a village of Indians, although the specific tribe and location are not given. His plan fits the definition of pastoral middle landscape: "I will revert into a state approaching nearer to that of nature . . . and at the same time sufficiently remote from the brutality of unconnected nature" (211). The Frontier Man may not be the same Farmer James who introduces himself in the first few letters, but like James he has a family, and he believes that pastoral regression poses a danger to them because their new way of life will not be pastoralist, anthropologically speaking: "My youngest children shall learn to swim and to shoot with the bow . . . the rest of us must hunt with the hunter. I have been for several years an expert marksman. But I dread lest the imperceptible charm of Indian education may seize my younger children and give them such a propensity to that mode of life as may preclude their returning to the manners and customs of their parents" (219). The Frontier Man fears the hunting life and wants to maintain his family's farming identity. His ensuing lines suggest that he would be pleased with a pastoral subsis-

tence if only it were available: “as we keep ourselves busy in tilling the earth, there is no fear of any of us becoming wild; it is the chase and the food it procures, that have this strange effect. Excuse a simile—those hogs which range in the woods, and to whom grain is given once a week, preserve their former degree of tameness; but if, on the contrary, they are reduced to live on ground nuts, and on what they can get, they soon become wild and fierce” (220). The hog is the American pastoralist *manqué*, an invasive species that quickly went feral, and resisted any fences that frontier settlers could build.¹²

Among early American novels, none engages the issues of property rights, subsistence strategies, and ecological change as profoundly as James Fenimore Cooper’s *The Pioneers*. The legal and moral confrontation between Leatherstocking and Marmaduke Temple is fundamentally shaped by the absence of pastoralism in the region around Lake Otsego. Leatherstocking, in contrast to Crèvecoeur’s Frontier Man, boasts of his sharpshooting skills and asserts the hunter’s right to property in terms consistent with Locke’s *Second Treatise*: “it’s wicked to be shooting into flocks in this wastey manner: and none do it, who know how to knock over a single bird. If a body has a craving for pigeon’s flesh, why! it’s made the same as all other creater’s for man’s eating, but not to kill twenty and eat one” (247). The “wastey manner” of slaughtering excessive numbers of passenger pigeons or fish violates Locke’s principle prohibiting the spoilage of perishable common resources. But Leatherstocking cannot articulate (or even imagine) a pastoral system of subsistence where he could claim ownership over herds of animals and over their future offspring. His reaction to the method of fishing with seines is to invoke a distinction between perishable and imperishable property: “If they had fur, like a beaver, or you could tan their hides, like a buck, something might be said in favour of taking them by the thousands with your nets; but as God made them for man’s food, and for no other disarnable reason, I call it sinful and wastey to catch more than can be eat” (265–66). Beavers and deer, the staples of the pelt trade in North America, were always hunted, never farmed or herded, until modern times. If only Leatherstocking or John Mohegan could claim property over the fish in the lake or the deer in the forests before the animals were hooked or shot, his claims against Marmaduke Temple might be much stronger. The absence of pastoralism also contributes to Leatherstocking’s famous asexual status, for he cannot employ his family members to

guard his flock and wean new lambs or kids, nor pass along the increase of his herds to his children. Pastoral subsistence and livestock property is the excluded middle in the novel's various contests between the values of the commons and of capitalist progress. The woodchopper Billy Kirby fills the role of a simple pastoral shepherd, who relieves his labors with a song to the tune of "Yankee Doodle" (224–25), but he herds only maple trees. The novel's climactic courtroom scene begins with the accusation that Natty Bumpo has killed a deer out of season. The deer was swimming in Lake Otsego, and Natty at first tried to spear it like a fish, before finally lassoing the antlers and slitting its throat. The famous hunter employs the skills of the western cowboy, America's mythical nomadic pastoralist, in an absurdly incongruous setting. Lake Otsego is a common "pasture," but its fish cannot be domesticated, and the only alternative to Locke's proto-capitalist theory of primitive accumulation is the notion of feudal dominion asserted by Marmaduke "duke" Temple, who claims dominion over all the fish so that he might distribute them to his grateful subjects. The "middle landscape" of pastoralism is excluded both in the legal and the anthropological senses of the word.

Thoreau's *Walden* may be the best-recognized American Pastoral text, a benchmark for scholars in literature and environment, and an inspiration for countless imitators withdrawing from modern society to live in cabins in the woods. The book is not only an idyll of regression, however, but also a disquisition on subsistence strategies, particularly in the opening chapter, "Economy." Like other speculative anthropologists, Thoreau examines humans' basic needs for "Food, Shelter, Clothing and Fuel" (8) and wishes to explore the limits of those needs: "It would be some advantage to live a primitive and frontier life, though in the midst of an outward civilization, if only to learn what are the gross necessities of life" (7). Unlike the Frontier Man's regression, however, Thoreau's was entirely voluntary, and although in "Higher Laws" he insists that a mature man "if he has the seeds of a better life in him . . . leaves the gun and fish-pole behind" (142), other passages suggest that Thoreau enthusiastically sought out the primitive habits which Crèvecoeur's Frontier Man feared. Each of the first two chapters of *Walden* opens with contemptuous remarks about Concord's farmers, and "The Bean-Field" episode continues with a satire of contemporary agricultural improvement tracts (see Gross). Thoreau preferred the techniques of Native American agriculture, without any animal hus-

bandry, to modern methods: "I am wont to think that men are not so much the keepers of herds as herds are the keepers of men, the former are so much the freer. . . . Certainly no nation that lived simply in all respects, that is, no nation of philosophers, would commit so great a blunder as to use the labor of animals" (38). Throughout *Walden* oxen and other livestock are implements for cultivation, not the basis for a nomadic pastoralism. Thoreau was ambivalent about returning to the most primitive way of life, declaring in the subjunctive mood, "if I were to live in a wilderness I should again be tempted to become a fisher and hunter in earnest" (143), but he did not see the possibility of taking up a shepherd's existence. In the discussion of the railroad in "Sounds," a passage important for Leo Marx's discussion of *Walden*, the industrial threat to the pastoral lies in the fact that livestock are now shipped to market by rail, rather than being driven as a herd, the closest that New England farmers ever got to becoming pastoral nomads. As he listens to the railroad Thoreau muses, "So is your pastoral life whirled past and away" (83), but, as Marx maintains, Thoreau's response was not to attempt to save or re-create pastoral simplicity in the face of the railroad or of technological progress in general: "The need for defense against the forces of history does not tempt Thoreau to a nostalgic embrace of the 'pastoral life' that is being whirled away" (*Machine* 255).

Pastoralism is foundational to ecological literary criticism not simply because it is a key trope of American exploration and nature writing, but also because it encapsulates the dilemma faced by environmentalists in industrial societies who need to simplify their lives and reduce their consumption of resources, but want to do so without giving up the pleasures and advantages of modern life. On the horns of this dilemma the pastoral ideal appears to be an idle (or idyll) fantasy. As Scott Hess has written, "pastoral has never called for an actual return to the challenges of earning a subsistence from the natural world" (73), and the postmodern pastoral's preferred genre is advertising, "promising a life of perfect leisure and secular happiness without effort" (78). Hess calls for a "sustainable pastoral" but defines it only in general terms with a call "to action and participation, rather than to quiescence and escapism" (95).

In the post-industrial twenty-first century, however, I believe American pastoralism has begun to shift away from a general discourse about technology and progress, and return to matters of animal husbandry. Many American consumers have become disgusted with the pollution

and cruelty of industrial pork, chicken, and beef production and are paying premium prices to eat “cage-free” poultry and grass-fed or “grass-finished” beef. These are pastoral ideals about the proper relationships between humans, animals, and the land whose impact can be measured in dollars. Michael Pollan’s 2006 bestseller *The Omnivore’s Dilemma* as well as his *New York Times Magazine* articles on the poultry and meat-packing industry helped to incite consumers to demand a return to traditional methods of animal husbandry. Pollan’s portrait of Joel Salatin and his Polyface Farm in Virginia reads as a post-modern pastoral idyll, detailing the rich taste of his chicken and eggs, the innovative yet low-tech method of his mobile coops or “chicken tractors,” as well as Salatin’s puritan Christianity and environmental stewardship (232–57).

If a new consumerist pastoralism inspires Americans to shut down confined animal feeding operations (or CAFOs) and pay higher prices for meat from animals raised outdoors, the country will be much healthier, but it still won’t change the fact that America lacks any indigenous pastoral society based on sheep, goats, or cattle. But at least one intellectual, Jim Corbett, has articulated a vision of modern nomadic pastoralism in America. In *Goatwalking*, this iconoclastic Quaker convert and founder of the Sanctuary movement for aid to Central American refugees describes his technique for nomadic subsistence in arid lands by living among, and feeding upon, his small herd of goats. Consistent with earlier visions of pastoral idyll, Corbett rejects the moral value of hard work: “Free-range pastoralists simply take what nature provides. Good farmers must be hard workers; good herders must be alert observers” (7). But he also acknowledges that his goatwalking lifestyle is more that of a hermit than the leader of a political movement: “nomadic pastoralism was a cultural dead end that often led to damaged land with reduced productivity” (22) and “pastoral nomadism could no longer provide the base for armed resistance to an industrial power” (76). Nonetheless, Corbett takes a step toward a sustainable and post-industrial American pastoralism, one that acknowledges the legacy of stadial anthropology, the latest research in archaeology and prehistory, and an intimate knowledge of herd animals. Literary and cultural studies can still contribute to a pastoralism that is politically and ethically persuasive, but they will need to recognize the differences between an idealization of rural farming life and an idealization of primitive hunting and gathering subsistence, and between cowboy ranching and nomadic pastoralism.

Most important, perhaps, this new sustainable pastoralism will need to reengage in a critique of technology and consumer capitalism that takes account of the new mystifications of relationships between consumers and producers, humans, animals, and the land.

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NOTES

This essay arose out of a graduate seminar "Pastoralism in America: Nature, Subsistence, Leisure, Labor," which I developed during a University of Oregon sabbatical in 2007. The writing was largely undertaken during a scholar-in-residence fellowship at the H.J. Andrews Experimental Forest, a unit of the U.S. Forest Service and Oregon State University, in Blue River, Oregon, in September 2008.

1. On the Nuer, see Evans-Pritchard. For a nuanced definition of nomadic pastoralism, see Ingold 224–27.

2. A notable exception has recently come to light from the research of archaeologists on the Northwest Coast of Canada. Indigenous peoples raised dogs for their wool, confining them on small islands (Prof. Madonna Moss, University of Oregon, personal communication).

3. Mann cites evidence that hunters actually tried to reduce turkey populations because they competed with humans for nut forage (356).

4. Diamond restricts his survey of domesticated species to mammals that weigh more than a hundred pounds as adults, which results in a census of 148 candidate species worldwide (162–66) of which only twenty-four were native to the Americas, and only one, the llama/alpaca, was domesticated. On Inca pastoralism in the Andes, see Brotherston. The Andeans did not ride these animals, because they are too small to carry a grown man, and they did not hitch them to a plow, since potatoes were their staple crop and their irrigated terraces are ill suited to plowing. But they did of course use them for wool, and textiles were the focus of their societies' greatest technological achievements.

5. A rare dissent to the thesis of "virgin soil epidemics" is Jones' "Virgin Soils Revisited." As a medical doctor, Jones points out that "no one is immunologically defenseless, and authors who make claims of no immunity probably do not mean them this literally" (727). Like Silva, he observes that "modern theories of immunological determinism have striking similarities to Puritan theories of providence" (714), but he also attributes the appeal of this theory in recent years to an image of "American Indians as a pristine population ruined by diseased Europeans" (713).

6. The pattern is consistent with a worldwide shift in neo-colonial capitalism. Today staple agricultural commodities such as maize, soybeans, cotton, sugar, and wheat are heavily subsidized in the U.S. and Europe, and much of the processed products are sold (or manufactured, in the case of clothing) in third-world former colonies. The central role of wool in the industrial revolution of the nineteenth

century has declined.

7. The hayrick, log cabin, mill and plowman are picturesque symbols for pastoral painters, but are not equivalent to the shepherd. As Barrell explains in his study of the English painting of rural life in the later eighteenth century: “the ploughman is the original of the working countryman; we never see him portrayed at rest, as we do the shepherd or even the haymaker—he ploughs a straight furrow towards an ever-receding horizon. . . . The figures of the shepherd and shepherdess, on the other hand, particularly in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, cannot be too easily identified as country folk, but are images of the courtier’s ideal of rural life, that combine his aspiration for a simpler life than that lived in courts, and his actual freedom from the need to make any effort to survive” (50–51). This is not to say that Hudson River School artists never painted idyllic scenes of shepherds. Asher Durand’s *The Beeches* (1845) is one, but it does not depict a specific place in America. In many other paintings, a log cabin serves as an icon of domestic peace and of the transition between wilderness and farm. Conversely, the portrayal of railroads by Hudson River School landscape painters is analyzed by Wallach as “visual demonstration of the possibility of harmony between man, nature, and material progress.” This art historian argues that Cole himself dissented from this consensus of “pastoral accomodation,” that he was an anti-pastoralist and that the railroad “epitomized much that he feared and loathed in the contemporary world” (338).

8. Another instance of the book’s forced application of bucolic language occurs in these lines on Crèvecoeur’s *Letters from an American Farmer*: “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” (114).

9. The earliest source of stadal history in the Mediterranean tradition is Hesiod’s *Works and Days*. This epic poem of the eighth century BCE anticipated nineteenth-century archaeological work that identified stages of human history with the materials from which they made tools: stone age, bronze age, iron age. However, Hesiod’s stages are retrogressive rather than progressive; the golden age is followed by a silver age, then bronze and iron.

10. The term “four-stage theory” is adopted by Meek, but the stages themselves were very widespread.

11. For some modern scholars Morgan’s importance is due to the impact his work had on Karl Marx, who copied out hundreds of pages from *Ancient Society* into his notebooks (see Krader).

12. Cronon described the role of hogs in early colonial New England: “in contrast to most other English animals, they were generally able to hold their own against wolves and bears, so that they could be turned out into the woods for months at a time to fend for themselves almost as wild animals. They required

almost no attention until the fall slaughter, which—much as deer had been hunted by Indians—they could be recaptured, butchered, and used for winter meat supplies. . . . What most distinguished a hog or a cow from the deer hunted by Indians was the fact that the colonists' animal was owned" (*Changes* 129). Anderson's research shows that as the Native Americans of New England began to keep their own herds, they often chose pigs, and the hogs' roaming aggressiveness and fertility led to conflicts with English farmers and destroyed any sense of a porcine pastoral.

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