



## Cosmopolitics and the Radical Pastoral: A Conversation with Lawrence Buell, Hsuan Hsu, Anthony Lioi, and Paul Outka

Lance Newman (*Westminster College*) and Laura Walls (*University of South Carolina*)<sup>1</sup>

### Lance Newman:

Welcome, everyone, to this roundtable discussion of “Cosmopolitics and the Radical Pastoral.”<sup>2</sup> It’s a little breathtaking to see this large audience.

I want to begin by explaining the format of this session, because it’s somewhat experimental. It’s an attempt to push the roundtable format that has been introduced at the last few ASLE conferences a little bit further, to push it beyond the boundaries of the conference. This discussion that we are going to continue today--and hopefully after the conference--began with a simple blog at [radicalpastoral.blogspot.com](http://radicalpastoral.blogspot.com), where ten people have posted position statements that engage the two concepts that make up our title: Joni Adamson, Larry Buell, Hsuan Hsu, Jennifer Ladino, Anthony Lioi, Paul Outka, Nicole Shukin, Julianne Warren, Laura Walls, and myself. About half of those people are in the room today to continue the discussion with you.

We’ll give the panelists an opportunity to start the discussion by briefly summarizing or commenting on what they had to say on the blog, and then we’ll open things up to a conversation. We would like invite participation from the audience from the beginning--not just questions, but clarifications, extensions, examples, counter-examples, disagreements, redirections, et cetera. We’d like to make this a conversation that involves the whole room. I’ll act as moderator, and I’ll also attempt to bring in some of the ideas of people who posted to the blog but are not able to be here today. We’re recording audio, and we will publish a transcript of this conversation. We invite everyone here and anybody else to participate in the future by commenting on posts on the blog or posting statements of your own, because we want to make this a genuinely open and ongoing discussion of these two key words and of what the pastoral means or can mean in the twenty-first century.

### Hsuan Hsu:

I’m coming to this panel as someone who is interested in cultural geography and race. So just briefly I’m interested in how the production of space produces and reproduces racially differentiated access to environmental goods and risks. One definition of racism that I’ve found really useful is Ruth Wilson Gilmore’s from *Golden Gulag* where she

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<sup>2</sup>This conversation took place on Wednesday, June 22, 2011 at the biennial conference of the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment at Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana. A standing room only crowd of approximately 150 people attended. Participants from the audience have been identified by name when possible.

defines racism as state sanctioned and/or extralegal production of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death. She is drawing there a lot on Foucault's work on biopolitics and biopolitical racism, which segregates and hierarchizes the population into the pure, desirable, and healthy, and those who are risky and unhealthy. A point where this becomes ecocritical is where Foucault discusses milieu or environment. He talks about swamps, urban planning, and so forth. I would suggest that this is one point where you get differential production of spaces that are modeled after the pastoral, such as suburbs and university campuses, and then spaces that are less so, spaces that are abandoned, consigned to vulnerability or unhealthiness and various risk factors.

Coming from there, I thought I would post a piece on pastoral power. Foucault traces biopolitics and governmentality back to Christian pastoral power and the idea of leading flocks of people, a mobile multiplicity I think he calls it. I'm interested in the relationship between ecocriticism and biopower, so in my post I discuss *Their Dogs Came With Them*, by Helena Viramontes, which is about young Chicano/a people growing up in L.A. during the peak decades of freeway construction. I find this book helpful because we see all different kinds of environmental harm and daily-life versions of slow death, as Lauren Berlant calls it. Slow death isn't always about dying, but just about disqualified or uncomfortable forms of life in East LA. After all, that very same process of freeway-building allows people from the suburbs to access the goods of the city and then get back to their suburbs. So you have spaces that are designed to look pastoral, although of course they are not really pastoral--that is, suburbs--being empowered and supported by the environmental depredation of East L.A.

**Laura Walls:**

I have just moved to the University of Notre Dame, which looks to me on first view like a very pastoral environment, both ideologically and ecologically. We're taking walks now right on the "Michiana" border, between Michigan and Indiana, which is all rolling farm country. And I'm fascinated by this pastoral landscape, so now the question really is relevant to me; it's not just an abstract topic that we dreamed up a few months ago. My first impulse is to think that the pastoral is nowhere to be found, that it's a total head trip or paper refuge. Then my next thought is that, no, the pastoral is in fact found everywhere; it is the middle landscape or the modern milieu, in Hsuan's term. And it is all that is left today, now that nature, as Bill McKibben tells us, has come to an end. As I sat and thought about these things, looking out the window at this landscape that I am just coming to afresh, it seemed to me that the pastoral is right here, right now, under my feet as I write. And of course, as I speak to you today and as you listen, it is out that window too. As I wrote these words, looking out the window, what was I seeing? Thunderclouds and roiling green fire--in the way trees move when a storm is coming in--punctuated by dragonflies and bluebirds and seven very talkative crows. I want to radicalize this pastoral view by looking to the literal meaning of radical, "roots," to insist that the local is already and has always been planetary, just as the global has always been under our feet. The global is local at every point.

I come to this place of thinking about the local and the global, as do many of you, by way of the cosmopolitan or cosmopolitical. Now this is an old term from Immanuel Kant, and it has recently become a useful catalyst for reframing hold-over Cartesian binaries like local and global, nature and culture, science and literature. My own view is that cosmopolitanism is an ethical stance taken up in response to the material fact of economic globalization. My path to this term comes not by way of theory, but actually by way of intellectual history, a long excursion I took that has now come back around home, because the project was born here at Indiana University, where I first began to work with the writings of Alexander von Humboldt. Humboldt, the scientist, was a student of Kant's work and gave birth to ecocriticism by revising Kant's cosmopolitanism into a planetary framework so that it would be not just a political platform, but an ecological platform, very much like the "eco-cosmopolitanism" that I've seen referred to recently by, for instance, Ursula Heise. This is interesting to me because here, in Humboldt, is an intellectual who consciously tried to intervene in the formation of a social/natural/ecological formation by reviving a term, "cosmos," in full consciousness of Kantian cosmopolitanism. Humboldt tried to extend cosmopolitanism to include what he called "the great garden of the universe." And he imagined seeing Earth from space; that is, the viewpoint of cosmopolitanism is a planetary view of Earth conceived as a stellar body. It is a very startling perspective to think from. He's a scientist, but this is more than empirical or imperial science adding more

knowledge. This is someone trying to reorient our sense of our relationship to nature--a kind of ontological revolution. In Humboldt's view, we are all part of the cosmos, quite literally, as partners and co-creators with the vast non-human, in the sense that both humans and non-humans are continually calling each other into ever more elaborate existences in a kind of dance. This means that the cosmos in this sense is a narrative or an unfolding, very much as Humboldt's follower, Charles Darwin, would put it in redefining the word "evolution."

My difficulty with the term "pastoral" has to do with my sense of cosmos as a kind of worksite, while the pastoral has the connotation of being a site of leisure. So I have considered perhaps the "georgic." I don't know if Mike Ziser is in the audience, but he wrote a very nice essay where he says, in effect, let's use the georgic in place of the pastoral because it is about labor on the land. But I am still pulled back to the pastoral because of the groundedness of it in the empirical facticity of real nature, as well as the imaginative leap the pastoral can take to utopian possibility; but then finally because it catches on to the other-where, the out-sidedness of nature in a way that I think the georgic does not. There is something radically strange and wild (and I am a Thoreauvian, so I am of the party of the wild) that is still very much a part of the pastoral ideology. So I am going to lean toward the pastoral and fight today to hold onto that word, despite all of the trouble that it causes.

**Anthony Lioi:**

I started thinking about this roundtable in terms of a question that my students asked in the last environmental humanities class I taught when we were considering Central Park. They asked, "Why is there no farming in Central Park." This is a wonderful question. I had given them a reading from a great book called *The Park and the People* about the historical and ideological formation of Central Park, which at first looks like this absolutely perfect pastoral project. I teach two blocks away from the beginning of the park on the Upper West Side, and the Upper West Side itself is all concrete and all metal, then suddenly, there's a line you cross, which is a New England style stone wall, and then you're in the park. So if you ever wanted to be on one side then the other, nature, then culture, it is designed to produce that experience, but not in a politically innocent way. So, my first answer to my students was that the reason there is no farming in Central Park is that the park was designed ideologically to teach nineteenth-century immigrants from southern and eastern and far northwestern Europe how to be bourgeois subjects, how to be good ladies and gentlemen. In the beginning, there were horse trails, but you weren't allowed to race horses. You couldn't play baseball, although everybody wanted to play baseball. There was a big fight in the newspapers that lasted fifteen years about whether there should be food vendors in the park, because what the park was really designed to do was to allow ladies and gentlemen in suits and dresses to promenade around this pastoral space. In part, it was a real pastoral space; after all, until 1934 there were real sheep in Sheep Meadow. And then there is the wilderness pastoral part, which is supposed to mimic the Adirondacks; it's call the Ramble, as you all probably know. The pastoral space of Central Park is really a class ideological space; it is designed to create certain types of behavior that acculturate immigrants into polite society. So my students and I started to talk about this and, being really smart, they said, well what would it take to see farming in the park? They're thinking, by the way, about rooftop gardens, since now there are rooftop gardens all over Brooklyn, in places like Red Hook, which is a very unlikely place for a rooftop garden, if you know anything about Red Hook; and now there's the Highline Park too, an abandoned elevated subway line which is now an elevated pastoral space that everybody loves. So New York is really all about the pastoral in some ways. Also, there's been this gradual evolution of what kind of behavior is allowed and what sort of behavior is considered middle class. Right now you can jog in clothing that the Victorians would be horrified by because there's too much skin, but that's because jogging is a middle-class activity. There are still working-class activities that you are not allowed to do in Central Park. In fact, there was recently a controversy about musicians near the Bethesda Fountain. They are not allowed to be there anymore. The city just said, no more musicians by Bethesda Fountain. The question is why? And the answer keeps coming back to this: pastoral space is designed to generate certain kinds of behaviors that are then supposed to be brought back into the city and back into the public sphere. These are behaviors that are super-polite; they're not really about animals, as such, or plants or farms, but about middle-class politeness.

At the same time, I was teaching a wonderful graphic novel, which I recommend to everyone, by Shaun Tan, who is an Australian graphic novelist, called *The Arrival*. Very briefly, Tan imagines a place that is both Sydney Harbor, apparently, and New York Harbor in the nineteenth century, where both Chinese and European immigrants are arriving. The trick is that no one can read the language of the city. So you are put in the position of trying to read this imaginary language whose script neither you nor the characters can read. And what winds up happening is that he solves the problem of integrating the immigrants into the new city by introducing animals at various cosmic levels. I like the idea of cosmos, in terms of order, scaling up and down. So at the personal level, people are introduced to animals that become sort of pets, but also sort of familiars. And there are these giant animal figures that are quasi-humanoid as well that loom over the new city. So the integration of animals (and also of farming) into the narrative leads to a truly cosmic moment where the city is reintegrated into the cosmos understood as universe. At the end of the book, the animals and the humans, all of the new immigrants and their animals are surrounded by these giant cosmic spheres in front of them in the sky. So there's a progression from arriving in the harbor, to meeting the animals, to meeting each other, to interacting with these giant figures that are clearly surreal and symbolic in some important ways. As a process, that integration of the pastoral leads to a moment of cosmic connection, you might call it, of the city and the characters to each other and to the universe. Interestingly enough, Tan has this vision of animals, leading to the city, leading to the world, understood as the universe, not just the planet.

**Lawrence Buell:**

I started my blog post, as I am wont to do, by emphasizing what I take to be the slipperiness, the multivalence of the pastoral as a signifier and as a practice or a set of conventions through the ages. Laura, in the first part of her remarks, has helped to explain why I see that to be the case. It is almost as slippery a concept, it seems to me, in the accretions that it has gathered over millennia, as Foucauldian heterotopia. In fact, I would say it is even more so. I should also say that to me radicality, what counts as radical, is almost as contestable as the category of the pastoral itself. Cosmopolitics, to me, seems somewhat less ambiguously, perhaps because it is a term that I don't use that much, so that it seems to present itself to me with utter clarity.

With regard to the pastoral and the question of radicality, just to confine myself to this for now, it seems to me that both for antique historical reasons--tracing the practice back in its genealogy--and for reasons that can be traced to more modern avatars, one has to presume the pastoral guilty of not being a radical practice, until it is proved innocent or capable of so being. If we go to Virgil, the *locus classicus*, the first eclogue works itself out in such a way that the voice of Tityrus imposes a kind of anodyne lyrical strategy of containment upon the disaffected Meliboeus who has been dispossessed of his land. And what lurks less said in the subtext is that these people, *de facto*, both are slaves. I owe this partly to a gifted Latinist ecocritical mentee, Sarah Wagner-McCoy, whose article on this--featuring Charles Chesnut's conjure tales--is forthcoming in *ELH*. But, by the same token, you could look at the same Virgilian eclogue and say, okay, there is a sort of latency or incipiency for what appears to be a strategy of containment to undo itself. That, to me, would be one of the marks of a radical pastoral, that it would function against its own anodyne propensities and instill discontent somehow. But by no means is that to be taken for granted as an outcome.

If we stroll forward and take the example that Anthony cited, Olmsted's Central Park, the design was to create a separate, rusticky space, or the appearance of such, where the various different classes could commingle decorously, where they could have a species of guarded interaction. It was a regulatory project, there is no doubt about it. So there again, the pastoral is found guilty until proven innocent. But I wouldn't be inclined to enlist Central Park as the springboard for moving further into the prospects for pastoral's potentially radical valences. In fact, I'm not even sure that going global, as Laura suggests, necessarily is a radical move for the pastoral, insofar as "pastoral" implies otherspace. Pastoral always already has the status of an elsewhere positioned against an implicit residential and civilizational norm, that is, a more urbanized social border than the one that is under view and placed under the sign of pastoral. By that logic, which has a long history to it, pastoral can be said always already to connect itself with a certain kind of cosmopolitical vision, certainly a vision of the urbanized world

where an ever higher percentage of all of us live. We live in metropoli, whether octopoid, tentacular, or enclaveish. So whether that in itself constitutes a radicalization of pastoral as opposed to a recalibration of nuances that have ancient roots, of that I'm not sure. On a positive note, I'd like to consider some of the ways in which what I've called the edge of discontent *can* be infused, has been infused, into different pastoral forms so as to make good on the claim of its potential for radicality. But for now, for openers, I've said enough.

**Paul Outka:**

I too began thinking about this by feeling how hopelessly multivalent the term was. Indeed, the pastoral seemed to me like a Rorschach test for ecocritics. It's almost anything you say it is, a fantasy mirror of your green politics, your critique, your own relations to natural space. So let me begin trying to limit the term a little bit.

The first thing I want to do is to distinguish between the pastoral landscape itself and the uses and interpretations that we make of the pastoral. I think it's a mistake to ask whether the pastoral landscape is radical or not. The "pastoral" means the use of that landscape and what comes out of it. The pastoral landscape itself means nothing at all. That's to confuse Nature and nature, to think that it has a meaning, when what it has is an interpretive--I mean interpretive here in the broadest sense--an interpretive history.

So then the question is, what use do we make of the pastoral, rather than trying to determine its content or how that preexisting content supposedly comes into our culture. That said, I do think the pastoral as a landscape and an experience has a structure. And the way I would define that structure is as an in-between space, a space that is, first, self-generatingly natural. So, it's not a concentrated animal feeding operation. It has a strong non-human presence. But, second, it also testifies everywhere to the presence of human beings. It's cleared land. There are no predators--not if those iconic shepherds and shepherdesses are doing their jobs. It's not a monoculture, but it's also not just what would be there without human intervention. It's not a wilderness, but a made space, a made natural space. It's in between what we would think of as wilderness and what we might think of as urban.

It also generally involves an experience of transition towards nature for the subject. It is rare that somebody comes in from the wilderness to describe the pastoral. Rather, people leave the city, they go "home,"--and their pastoral home is often a place they've never been--and they experience renewal. So you can think of the pastoral as a green trajectory, as much as a location. It is a movement.

Given those two things, the pastoral starts to sound to me, a post-despair ecocritic, like post-Natural nature, a.k.a the only nature we have left. So, my corollary is this: if a radical pastoral is not possible, then a radical environmentalism is not possible. Because this is the ground we now work with. Nature no longer signifies a pure, untouched, extra-human space, but rather one where everywhere we find ourselves. But that's not to say that this post-natural/pastoral is the same as a CAFO or an industrial monoculture farm. It's not. It's a much more mixed, much more of a continuum where purity isn't possible, but struggle most certainly still is. It's in between. So the pastoral is where, unfortunately perhaps, but truly, where we find the possibility of our environmental politics.

Lots of good work has been done on how the pastoral has often been used in the past as a mode to occlude the histories of human suffering, racism, and labor by naturalizing the viewpoint of some fantasized, leisured observer getting away from it all. So, as I say in my blog post, the pastoral is a lot different for a slave in Florida in the nineteenth century than it was for Virgil. We must always take care to make sure that the pastoral doesn't become just a test for enlightened subjectivity that only white people happen to pass in overwhelming numbers, a test where the ahistorical enjoyment of Nature becomes a test of character. In my own work, I have examined at length how the pastoral has historically been productive of whiteness as an unmarked ahistorical racial identity.

In my next project, I have been thinking of specific ways this continuum or in-between space of the pastoral might provide the ground of a post-Natural environmental politics going forward. I'm currently very interested in the role of biotechnology and in how we might think of pastoral space as being at once natural and artificial. After all, it is often dominated by domesticated animals, which are the first great--and/or awful--human biotechnology. Some of

the first deliberately genetically modified organisms--evolution is nothing but the production of GMOs after all--were domesticated animals like sheep and cows. The pastoral landscape is our first GMO. I'm interested in how we might think of the pastoral going forward in terms of the post-human, in terms of the post-natural, in terms of a world where increasingly the natural as opposed to the artificial is not an option. I hope the pastoral might provide a model for how biotechnology and its myriad interventions upon our natural world and upon ourselves and our own bodies might produce not just cyborgs or terminators, but a natural/artificial space that welcomes the presence of a wide variety of different entities, while also making sure that it does not just become another imagined escape to a pure, untouched Nature that arguably never existed outside of fantasy.

**Lawrence Buell:**

What Paul has said, with virtually all of which I agree, gives me an opening to say one thing about where the radical potential of the pastoral might lie. And here for me it's very important to bring the work of memory, collective memory, into account in order to understand at least one way in which pastoral's radical potential can be activated. I'm going to say memory rather than history because I think we are really talking as much about subjective processes as about empirical archives. In advanced industrial times, especially over the last two hundred years, there is something not just regressive, but progressive, potentially, to the Raymond Williams escalator proposition (at the start of *The Country and the City*) that the age before is perpetually conceived as having had a more salubrious baseline of environmental goods that by this generation has diminished. That way of thinking, which involves a certain amount of collective hallucination sometimes, admittedly, is potentially of very great importance, I think, to the rhetoric of environmental justice activism as well as to more mainstream ways of thinking about what we have done to the world and what it happening to us beyond whatever we as individual agents have done.

**Paul Outka:**

The only thing worse than nostalgia is no feeling of loss at all.

**Lance Newman:**

I come at this from a sense that perhaps the most important thing that ecocriticism has accomplished in its first thirty years is to take on a project of environmental activism, of scholarship as environmental activism. In the early years, a lot of that had to do with a very specific kind of 70s/80s-style wilderness-focused activism that was the dominant thread in the movement around the country. That's beginning to shift. We face a new world. We face increasingly global environmental issues. We face increasing awareness of environmental justice as not just a local issue in places like Cancer Alley, but as a global issue having to do with the way that multinationals operate around the world. Given that this is the world we operate in and that we look to literature to inform our activism, can the pastoral be made to inform a kind of activism that is meaningful in that world? As Greg Garrard put it, pastoral is a radical problem, because it can induce sleep or it can wake us up to real problems, and that's been true throughout its 2300-year history. Thinking as somebody who is interested in both nineteenth-century literature and contemporary experimental poetry, I want to know what I can learn from the first about how contemporary environmental poetry can solve the problem of the radical pastoral, at least for a while. What aesthetic strategies, what rhetorical stances, what other tricks of the trade can be used to make contemporary environmental poetry push against the tendency of the pastoral to put us to sleep and can maximize its capacity to make us think critically about the world we live in and the global environmental issues that we face? My blog post takes the form of a manifesto, stating several things about what the radical pastoral should do. I think the main idea that connects them all is that the radical pastoral calls attention to itself as a rhetorical strategy, it calls attention to its own artificial nature, it calls attention to itself as a thought construct that's designed to encourage critical thinking.

Our panelists have all had a chance to summarize their ideas, and we now have about forty-five minutes for discussion.

**Laura Walls:**

The obvious starting point, based on what I said and what you just said, is remind us all that cosmopolitics asserts that nature is part of the political order. You've written that, and I think we've all in various ways said that, but we should consciously ask, why use that phrase, "cosmopolitics"? It's a way of pulling that sense into a single word, that the making of a good common world, a cosmos in common, is a political project that involves all constituents, all elements, all beings of the cosmos. Frankly, most of them are not human, but that doesn't create a sense of a barrier or an elsewhere; it creates a sense of a combining or a project. That's why I spoke of it as a worksite and a narrative, which is a different kind of work. Also, Larry brought up a good point, which is that embedded in that word is the "cosmopolitan." I'm afraid this isn't a word that solves any of our problems, because there's a whole debate in a very extensive literature arguing about "cosmopolitan" and asking what kind of baggage that word brings into the discussion. It complicates things. I think it's a useful complication. The problem is that on the one hand "cosmopolitan" can mean "global," as in "going global" or "globalism" in the economic "the-world-is-flat" sense; but on the other hand, many people are using the word "cosmopolitan" or "cosmopolitics" to resist exactly that flattening out of the world, to resist the sense that globalism is something to which we must all inevitably bow. The language of resistance tends to be about moving down scale levels, to use a geographic phrase that Anthony mentioned. You can move up to higher scale levels, to discover solidarity with those who are far away, or down to very minute ones, where you're looking at, say, the ants clustering on your driveway and wondering what they're doing there--really local and precise. Again, consider Lance's idea about the material conditions of this place here, now, as part of what radicalizes or roots the cosmopolitical question. You can't answer this question in the abstract. You have to get immediate. So much of the discussion around cosmopolitics is about how you get down into that immediacy without losing hold of the large-scale issues. How do you travel up and down scale levels without losing coherence or losing your footing?

**Hsuan Hsu:**

These questions make me think of a David Harvey essay that came out a few years ago called, "Cosmopolitanism and the Banality of Geographical Evil," which is all about a certain kind of cosmopolitan universalism that overlooks and glosses over globalization and its production of uneven geographical space. So I want to add a question. Are there examples of global South writers and cultural producers taking up the pastoral and how do they use it? I can't think of examples of straight pastoral use, but a couple of other examples do come up. One is a poet from Guam named Craig Santos Perez, who is currently a grad student at Berkeley and who has these poems where he juxtaposes touristic descriptions of Guam as beautiful beaches and beautiful animals with descriptions in grey font of military dumping and toxic dumping. Guam is two-thirds American military bases, so Perez describes the kinds of environmental degradation produced there. One other example would be a novel by Robert Barclay called *Mela!*, where there's a beautiful pastoral space that these characters are trying to visit but they can't because it's radioactively poisoned from U.S. nuclear experiments and the Star Wars program launches missiles at it regularly. The other proposition, getting back to Larry's point about how the radical pastoral undoes itself, would be that maybe pastoral is radical insofar as it is juxtaposed with other discourses, other genres. I'm thinking of pastoral as a mode, not a genre, so perhaps it is a mode that can be in productive political friction with other forms.

**Lance Newman:**

That raises a question about genre and definition. What exactly do we mean by pastoral. Is it a genre? Is it a mode? Is it a trope? Is it a meme? Paul called it a trajectory. How far can we push the pastoral if we think that it is a trajectory that ends in a transparently conventional elsewhere where social problems are staged for purposes of analysis? How far can we get beyond the landscape of sheep, even if it's Dolly the cloned sheep, to other forms of pastoral? William Empson, in his book *Some Versions of Pastoral*, talked about the proletarian literature of the mid-twentieth century as a form of pastoral. So to return to the question of activism, for the purposes of literature as environmental critique, how far can the pastoral be pushed?

**Anthony Lioi:**

There's a moment in the Renaissance and the Restoration among British women writers when they use the pastoral to project an artificial discursive space where men are shepherds and women are nymphs or shepherdesses, but they're equal. In terms of the amount of talking they get to do, the shepherdesses or nymphs and the shepherds have a kind of dialogue, a classical dialogue, either in poetry or in prose. Aphra Behn has this awesomely titled poem called "A Voyage to the Island of Love" where this happens. And Lady Mary Wroth has a gigantic poem called "The Urania," in which there are many moments of pastoral escape where suddenly women have either equal voices with men or they just overwhelm the men and become the protagonists, both philosophically and in terms of the quest itself. That seems like an example where there's a radical gender politics going on, using artificiality and the fact that pastoral doesn't really exist as an advantage politically, rather than as a disadvantage--as a utopian space.

**Lance Newman:**

Another example might be a book called *Fuck You, Aloha, I Love You* by Julianna Spahr. It juxtaposes two kinds of imagery in very repetitive, incantatory language. It has to do with the experience of pastoral retreat on the Big Island of Hawaii, while from her apartment balcony, she watches ships mass in the harbor to go to Iraq for the 2003 invasion.

**Elizabeth Latosi-Sawin:**

How could cosmopolitics or radical pastoral help to address our conservative Supreme Court? This spins off of what you just said about Aphra Behn. Walmart is a multinational corporation. Walmart has a terrible record both for environmental practices, and of course it discriminates against women in many different ways. So I would like to know how any of these terms lead us to activism in light of what the Supreme Court just did?

**Laura Walls:**

This is not a complete answer, but it's perhaps part of a larger answer. The emphasis in the political project of cosmopolitics is on the sense that we construct a good common world together, which is of course an ongoing process and an incomplete one. We all have different roles to play in this ongoing process, and one of the important roles for us as literary people is that of the diplomat. Somebody should speak for the people who are shut out of the good common world, somebody who can mediate, who can travel, who has ears to the ground and for the voices of the excluded, and who can speak to the voices who are doing the excluding. Somebody has to travel like that. And I think that's one of our roles as people of language, people who witness and listen and speak. I think that it is a calling on us to raise our voices. Part of the cosmopolitical project is that you can't just let it happen or think it's going to happen by itself....

**Audience Member:**

As I understand it, the pastoral is a radically individual experience. How does that bear on our political tradition of federalism? How are we going to be able to have this cosmopolitical project in a country that is deeply skeptical of that, both in its leisurely wilderness activities--going to the wilderness and having an individual experience--but also in its political practice, both historically and currently.

**Lawrence Buell:**

I think I'd push back--a bit--against your assumption that pastoral is a subjective experience at the individual level. I think this goes to show that Lance's trope or mode question--what is it?--is more complex than it might seem. I think that you could apply pastoral to a collective condition, to collective memory, to the social rituals of communities living under bioregionalism, and not only there, but also in urban neighborhood settings, for example, to festivals which evoke ethnic memory. Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, the signature piece of U.S. literary naturalist urban muck-raking, includes a lot of evocation of home-country pastoral in relation to what happens to these poor Lithuanians in the stockyards.



**Anthony Lioi:**

To go back to cosmopolitanism for a second and then to link it to pastoralism, one of the potentially radical ideas of classical cosmopolitanism is that the Greek Stoics thought that loyalty to the polis is not enough. We have to be loyal, as human beings, to the whole world, as well as loyal to the city. And if you have to choose between them, you have to be loyal to the world. And then the Roman Stoics transformed that into the idea that there is more than just loyalty to the empire. Loyalty to the empire, patriotism about the *patria*, is not the ultimate political value. If we translated that into contemporary terms, it reminds me of what's happening with the problem of natural gas fracking in the northeast. People are starting to make the connection between the destruction of these beautiful pastoral landscapes in northeastern Pennsylvania and upstate New York and the threat to New York's water supply because the overflow from the fracking is going to wind up running into the Delaware River and then it's all going to be over. So what's happening with the political activism, which is just getting started, is that people are making a connection between the destruction of the beautiful pastoral land of Pennsylvania and the destruction of lands all over the world by fracking. Because one of the things the gas companies are saying is, "We've been doing fracking for fifty years, and this has never happened before." So, one of the things I think is really hopeful is that there is, at least at the political level so far among the activists that I've seen, a trend toward making international connections and saying, "The fight that we have in Pennsylvania and New York and New Jersey is also a global fight. We have to be in solidarity in order to figure out how to resist this, so that if you stop it in the U.S., it doesn't simply move somewhere else." So that's a potential radical use of pastoral.

**Lance Newman:**

There's a question I'd like to invite us to think about. How do the two main senses of pastoral relate? Hsuan, you write about this in your entry on the blog. There's pastoral in the sense of the function of a pastor who is leading a flock versus pastoral as a literary mode. One of the ways this question gets phrased on the blog by Nicole Shukin is to ask, "Is pastoral a technology of governmentality or environmentality?" Can we see the pastoral, perhaps not always, but sometimes, functioning as tool of ideological indoctrination? She starts off her wonderful book, *Animal Capital*, with an analysis of an ad for the weekly news magazine, *Maclean's*, that displays a dissected beaver, the animal symbol of Canada, and the ad's slogan is, "*Maclean's*. Canada. In depth." We've been focusing on the pastoral as potentially a radical literary move, but what about the pastoral as a tool of governmentality and even environmentality and biopolitics?

**Hsuan Hsu:**

I think Anthony's point about Central Park speaks to that question, which is to say that the pastoral there is being used to train up certain kinds of subjects or, in Foucault's terms, to separate persons from the population. You have immigrant populations, working class populations, some of whom will get to be disciplined through places like Central Park and move into healthier communities and modes of behavior. But to get back to the question of whether pastoral is individual or not, I take your point, Larry, that it's not purely individual or subjective, but it does seem that pastoral is scaled differently than naturalism, which seems much more interested in the crowd, the human masses. I write about Frank Norris's phrase, "the human swarm" from *The Octopus*. And *The Octopus* is also where the pastoral is killed by naturalism, when a sheep is run over by a train. But the point I want to make is that it seems that the pastoral is more appropriate to certain kinds of groups and certain kinds of places. And one of the things I want to do by looking at naturalism is to approach pastoralism comparatively. If pastoral is only appropriate to a certain kind of subject that pastoral is reproducing, then maybe, in order to get a dialectical perspective on pastoral, we need to look at the arguably more materialist, arguably differently urban genre of naturalism, which looks at modes of governmentality that treat humans as a flock.

**Lawrence Buell:**

But Hsuan, why do you banish pastoral from the precinct of naturalism because of an example like the sheep getting run over by the train? This seems like a mischievous reintroduction in the service of a certain kind of critique. It's different from the moment in Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd* where Gabriel falls asleep and his dog runs all the sheep over a cliff. That's more old-style bucolic that goes south. And then there's that episode in

the middle of *The Jungle* where Jurgis takes off into the countryside and he's going to have a pastoral experience, but it doesn't really work because he comes back penniless and being a migrant laborer really isn't all that much fun, even though it looks like a salubrious countryside. There's a space opened up in the text that serves to counterpoise Bill Cronon's worst-case scenario of stockyard reduction of people to spare parts.

**Hsuan Hsu:**

It's more that there is a de-idealization of pastoral; it is represented in *The Octopus*, but it's represented as very much in danger. So it's not a move to abandon the pastoral, but to point out its relative unavailability to different groups.

**Lawrence Buell:**

Let's go to Frederick Douglass's second autobiography, where he feels free to get away from the linear momentum that the slave narrative genre requires. There he goes into great detail about the pleasures of Colonel Lloyd's opulent farmstead and all that is denied the slaves and the longing in his young innocence to partake of that. And it seems as if there is a sort of implant, at that point in the text, that is meant to communicate and hopefully activate a sense of enragement through recourse to what I would call pastoral "outrage," appealing to the liberal-mainstream target readership's sense of grossly unequal access to environmental benefits.

**Lance Newman:**

I'd like to go back to your point, Hsuan, about groups and who has access to the pastoral, what they use it for, and at what moments in history. All of those things can change through time. One of my favorite examples is Bob Marshall, one of the most influential founders of the concept of wilderness in the United States, alongside Aldo Leopold. He was the socialist head of the Forest Service during the Great Depression and wrote *The People's Forests*, which is a manifesto about having collective experiences in the Western wilds as a way of building working-class solidarity. That's an entirely different use, a collective political use, of the pastoral. It's definitely true that we tend to think of the individual, of the solitary moment of epiphany on a mountain top or in a field as being the dominant mode, but there have been lots of others. We think of Thoreau as the guy who went walking in the woods by himself, but he spent just as much time organizing huckleberrying parties for the kids of Concord.

**Jim Warren:**

I want to give another example, and that would be Whitman's "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed" as a pastoral elegy, one that probably answers several questions about the radical pastoral. It seems to me to show some promises and dangers and to suggest the work of a spokesman for the entire nation and for a cosmopolitical rebuilding of a reunified, war-torn place. I hear a voice speaking for the million dead--the soldiers who are dead, not just the President. And he does so by listening as radically as possible to a hermit thrush in the swamp and then by looking at the landscape around him, Manhattan as well as the prairies. It's a good example of a writer in a tumultuous period who is able to speak, because he has listened well. He has been active in the field, in field hospitals and the hospitals of D.C. He has experienced a great deal, to his own cost, at the cost of his own health. And he is able to write one of the great poems of our militaristic country.

**Laura Walls:**

I think it's in "Democratic Vistas" where Whitman develops his notion of "kosmos," spelling it with a "k," and he speaks of poets, American poets specifically, as the "gangs of kosmos." I love the image, first of all because they're gangs. It isn't just the solitary poet; there will be gangs of them. It's kind of like *The Gangs of New York*. They're going to come swaggering down the streets, spouting Whitmanesque verse. I love Whitman's sense that the democratic masses are going to rise up and become the protectors, the enforcers of cosmos through poetry, through language, and through beauty.

**Paul Outka:**

I love "Lilacs" too, and one of the things I've been struggling to say about pastoral may be captured in that poem, in that it doesn't seem to me that Whitman is writing a poem of place at all. And I think that we go wrong when we think of the pastoral as a particular place. At least for me, to recover the radical potential of the pastoral, once again I need to think of it as a mixing. So the winds blow across the prairies from California and from the East, and they meet at Lincoln's tomb. Whitman's natural poetry is an enormously restless one. You constantly leave the city. You're on the bank, by the wood, under the sky, naked. There's this constant restlessness. So rather than thinking of the green trajectory of the pastoral as leading to an endpoint, a destination that's static and not useful politically--suddenly we're out of the city, in the field, and it's shepherd time--we should think of the pastoral as the activity of mixing nature back into culture and culture into nature. Instead of trying to work and build our struggles around a place of purity and rest that's external to culture or even within culture itself, we should see it as--what did you call it, Larry?--the edge of discontent, a place of instability and mixing that has to be produced in an ongoing way. It's not a location of rest, but a trajectory in a green direction all the time.

**Jim Warren:**

Could we also say, Paul, to connect with Larry's point, that it's an exercise in collective memory as well? In that poem, he's reminding us always that for all of our military adventures, there are human costs of such magnitude that we ignore constantly. We are ignoring them today.

**Paul Outka:**

Somehow when you get to the pastoral landscape, and you think you're done with your work, things have just started going bad. As Emerson says, "Power ceases in the instant of repose. It resides ... in the shooting of the gulf, in the darting to an aim." And there is something about pastoral that is, or should be, restless, unstable, in need of constant production, that is responsive to different contexts, and that is always working towards an inclusion. Different historical and subjective trajectories into that kind of space would produce a richer one, rather than an exclusionary one. That seems to be where the pastoral unlocks a kind of nature that I can work with in the twenty-first century.

**Audience Member:**

I love that poem, and I agree with a lot of what's been said about it, but I wonder what counts as radicalism in Whitman's context. It seems to me that one might imagine the reconciliation that the poem embodies to point forth a trajectory of reunion that comes at the expense of the trajectory of race. So I just wonder what we mean when we say that there is something radical in that moment.

**Lawrence Buell:**

Honestly, I see "Lilacs" myself as a poem of reconciliation. And I'm not sure that, Jim, when you brought it up to begin with, you were claiming that it had a radical activist edge to it.

**Jim Warren:**

Not necessarily. I was thinking of it as potentially dangerous as well, if you think of reconciliation as potentially dangerous. When I teach that poem nowadays, I teach it, as you all do, to young people who were born and have come to consciousness in the shadow of war. We are at war. We have been at war. And I try to impress upon them: Don't forget this. That's what it does for me; it brings that collective memory back that we are at war. And what this means is that thousands of our young people are dying. For what? For oil....

**Cheryl Lousley:**

I'd like to return to the question and perhaps to decide whether the pastoral is a mode or a trope or a tradition. It strikes me that we're looking at it only according to narrow versions of these concepts. It seems to me that what's interesting about the pastoral, particularly in light of the conversation that's been happening, is that the pastoral is

a materialized mode. It's materialized in all sorts of different ways, and this partly has to do with work. So it seems to me that this activist question of how we talk about the pastoral and the terms that we use really matters. I want to think about the environment by analogy with the idea of gender as a genre, as a performed mode where we recall certain conventions and we find our expectations confirmed. So is there a value in pushing our concepts of trope and mode or are they inadequate to talking about pastoral as a materialized aesthetic practice?

**Laura Walls:**

I'd like to answer that with a question. I'm not resolved on this, but we haven't talked about the pastoral in the theological sense--caring for those flocks of sheep. As I take it, the material practice that you could be invoking there is the idea of caring. Consider the terrible reintroduction of the sheep getting slaughtered by the railroad in *The Octopus*; so much of the pastoral is shadowed by the sense that we have betrayed the pastoral role. It's a kind of negative or nightmare pastoral in its absence. The caring is gone. So the pastoral function has been betrayed. I guess that's my question: is this the materiality of practice that we need to remember? Yes, there's governmentality and biopolitics to it, but we don't want to easily say, well, we all know how that story goes, so forget about it. We need to recuperate the part that we need. So is caring something that we need to recuperate as part of the material practice of the pastoral, caring for landscape and caring for the beings that actually compose it, human and non-human?

**Anthony Lioi:**

Here's a potential connection between what you two are saying. Wangari Maathai, the activist who is the originator of the green belt of 30 million trees planted in East Africa, was asked by people, "How did you do that? How did you start that movement?" She said, "I invoked my inner nun." Speaking of gender as a practice, gender as a genre, nuns are not women in the typical sense, in the classic, generic sense of women as mothers, except allegorically. What she meant by that was that she came to the U.S. and was educated by Benedictine nuns, and a very interesting fact about that tradition is that the Benedictines, against the world-domination view of *Genesis 1*, the lordship theology, see themselves as caretakers of the garden. The Benedictines, both male and female, think of themselves as caring for civilization by gardening. So, there's an example of a particular gendered form, a genre of gender, the nun, being internalized by someone who has a Ph.D. in biology who then leads this political movement to change the landscape.

**Lance Newman:**

Nicole Shukin uses what I find to be a really useful phrase when she talks about the animal as something that is "simultaneously material and symbolic." Other people have used the phrase, "material semiotic."

**Audience Member:**

Can we consider the idea of other elements of the pastoral potentially contributing to a radical possibility. For instance, the pastoral tradition, as you mentioned, is highly artificial. It calls attention to itself as an aesthetic activity. And also, in a sense, the pastoral traditionally is a stage of engaging with something. For instance, if we go back to the Virgilian career, the pastoral leads to the georgic which leads to, heaven forbid, the epic. So, can the pastoral lead people into itself, even in the sense of encouraging them to practice, to write, to see? Can the pastoral lead to a kind of radical practice?

**Audience Member:**

At the beginning we considered these examples of people who seem to be striving to see a pastoral landscape that they can't access. Are people calling on a tradition, maybe like the epic, that is no longer fulfillable because it's now a toxic landscape. It's like the landscape itself is dissenting and saying, "I am the site where this was supposed to play out and that's no longer available to you." The landscape is calling up all these tropes and expectations, and it's drawing on that collective memory, but there's an obstruction that itself is, maybe, the site for political potential. It's not that you would ever get to actualize the pastoral as political, but that obstruction itself is where that energy arises from.

**Laura Walls:**

I like that point about the landscape itself dissenting, because it helps us recall that we are not the only speakers here. Thank you for reminding us that other voices are part of the conversation whether they're speaking in English or not.

**Lance Newman:**

This is a good place to end for now, because it has brought us back to the initial impulse of this discussion, which is to ask about the pastoral, a 2300-year-old tradition, can it be intelligently reinvented to do the jobs that need to be done in the twenty-first century, given the new kinds of environmental challenges we face? Ecocriticism from the beginning has been interested in pastoral literature. It began with the tradition of Thoreauvian nature writing, has expanded its reach radically over the course of the last twenty years, but given where we are in 2011, what jobs can we imagine for the pastoral as a literary practice?

Once again, I invite people to visit the blog at [radicalpastoral.blogspot.com](http://radicalpastoral.blogspot.com), comment on the posts there, or send me more extended statements for the blog by email.

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