

The Machine against the Garden

2 Essays by Fredy Perlman

Fifth Estate Collective
Fredy Perlman

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Critiques of economic development, material progress, technology and industry are not a discovery of the *Fifth Estate*. Human beings resisted the incursions from the earliest days, and many of North America's best-known 19th century writers, among them Melville, Hawthorn and Thoreau, were profound critics of the technological society. Since these writers became "classics of American literature," and therefore available to all interested readers, defenders of official views have had to carry on a "cold war" against them. The most powerful weapon has been the classroom assignment; most students attacked by this weapon never again cracked a book by a "classic." Other ways of "conquering and pacifying" the classics have been more subtle: the authors were maligned, the works were misinterpreted, the critiques were diverted and at times inverted.

The two essays below are descriptions of some of the methods used in this "cold war." The first was submitted to (but not published in) the official organ of the "cold warriors," *The New York Review of B.* [FE #321, Indian Summer, 1985] The second, originally a letter, attempts to unravel and expose the diversions and inversions of one of the more influential "cold warriors." [FE #321, Indian Summer, 1985]

—F. Perlman

FE Note: The first essay is a response to the domestication and malignment of Nathaniel Hawthorne by academic critics. The second is a critique of Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*, published in 1964. This book is considered a classic study of the development of the "American" consciousness. An entire generation of American Literature academics teaching in U.S. universities today grew up on this vision of the American poetic imagination enmeshed in the conflict between nature and industrial progress.

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