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Environmental Aesthetics and Environmental Justice in Jonathan Edwards's Personal Narrative and John Woolman's Journal

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Environmental Aesthetics and Environmental Justice in Jonathan Edwards's *Personal Narrative* and John Woolman's *Journal*

Abstract: This essay examines the relationship between Christian theology, environmental aesthetics, and environmental justice in colonial America. As opposed to the work of secular writers from the early republic like J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur and Thomas Jefferson, the Christian environmental aesthetics of Jonathan Edwards and John Woolman have potential to address questions of environmental justice in American literary history, such as tenant exploitation, African enslavement, and Indigenous displacement. Edwards, however, worked in a pastoral literary tradition, which limited his ability to imagine environmental justice due to his commitment to the doctrine of election. Woolman, on the other hand, worked in a tradition of agrarian jeremiad that was able to connect a Christian theology of creation with a concern for those marginalized by agrarian capitalism. This article reconfigures the standard account of pastoral and agrarian writing in American literature, foregrounding how Christian environmental aesthetics can both fail and succeed in imagining environmental justice.

KEYWORDS: Jonathan Edwards, John Woolman, Puritanism, Quakerism, environmental aesthetics, environmental justice, pastoral, agrarian

The essay juxtaposes the work of Jonathan Edwards and John Woolman in an examination of the relationship between Christian environmental aesthetics and environmental justice, reformulating the standard account of eighteenth-century pastoral and agrarian writing in early America. Edwards and Woolman are neither theorists of environmental justice per se, nor pastoral or agrarian writers in the mold of J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur and Thomas Jefferson, but herein lies their

significance. Edwards and Woolman usefully condense long-standing but neglected genres from their respective Reformed Protestant and Quaker traditions whose theological character generates unique renderings of the environment. Edwards's portrayal of the environment in *Personal Narrative* is pastoral, celebrating creation's resplendence as a sign of God's glory. This celebration, however, is circumscribed in its focus on the exaltation of members of God's elect church, overlooking how the landscape could also be a site of privation and injustice. In his *Journal* Woolman also represents creation as fundamentally good, but because of his attention to those who labor he is more concerned with matters of economic exploitation caused by certain uses of the environment—such as plantation slavery, the dispossession of Indigenous peoples, and capitalist agriculture generally. Consequently, his writing takes the form of agrarian jeremiad, drawing attention to those marginalized within the landscape. Edwards's preoccupation with the elect limits the scope of his environmental aesthetics; Woolman draws on Christian theology to make demands for environmental justice.

I use the phrase “environmental aesthetics” to refer to the perception and representation of the natural world and the built environment.¹ By “environmental justice” I mean what Giovanna Di Chiro describes as a “merging of social justice and environmental interests,” which “assumes that people are an integral part of . . . the environment” (301).² While theological perspectives have been suggested for joining these concerns, they remain underexamined.³ If we take one cause of environmental injustice to be a secular, instrumental view of the environment, it may be that more expansive theological understandings of nature and humanity as part of one created whole are better suited toward De Chiro's definition of environmental justice.

De Chiro and other environmental justice theorists focus on contemporary literature and events, but more systematically theological environmental aesthetics such as those of Edwards and Woolman are to be found earlier in literary history. Furthermore, given that these environmental aesthetics were developed during a period of colonization that theorists of environmental justice often look to for the origins of current forms of exploitation, Edwards and Woolman are historically well positioned for a consideration of how environmental aesthetics informed by Christian theology are able to meet the representational and political challenges identified by environmental justice theorists. Still, such an approach may

seem anachronistic given the emergence of environmental justice concepts in late twentieth-century social movements, not, presumably, eighteenth-century theology written in colonial North America. For Di Chiro, the main legacy of the colonial period is the alienation experienced “by many people who have been forced off their land and detached from their sense of place,” whether through enslavement, dispossession, or other forms of exploitation (313). Yet Di Chiro briefly notes that a “colonial discourse of nature often emphasizes the problem of increased alienation . . . as a consequence of capitalist advancement” (313). My reading of the Christian environmental aesthetics of Edwards and Woolman extends this insight by analyzing theology’s capacity to interrogate agrarian capitalist alienation, and in the process address matters of environmental justice. After all, the landmark environmental justice text *Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States* (1987), and the equally important First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit (1991) were both sponsored by the United Church of Christ, a Congregational Church descended from the Reformed Protestant tradition to which Edwards also belonged (Di Chiro 304). Like theologically informed environmental aesthetics, the theological background of environmental justice has been understudied.

Giving greater attention to eighteenth-century Christian environmental aesthetics also revises the literary history of agrarian and pastoral writing in North America by breaking the habit of associating these closely related genres with more secular writers from the early republic: J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur and Thomas Jefferson.⁴ This is a needed intervention, as the canonical agrarian pairing of Crèvecoeur’s *Letters from an American Farmer* and Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of Virginia* has hardly been questioned since the publication of Henry Nash Smith’s *Virgin Land*. Smith himself noted the shortcomings of these writers for what can be construed as environmental justice reasons, drawing attention to “a crucial ambiguity” in “the ideal of a society composed predominantly of freeman tilling their own acres”—the coexistence of this ideal with the pervasive coercion of labor that agrarian capitalism depended on (133).⁵

This ambiguous relationship between environmental aesthetics and environmental justice in the work of Crèvecoeur and Jefferson coincides with theological ambivalence. While vaguely pious, Farmer James primarily celebrates “religious indifference” in America; Jefferson famously declares in *Notes* that “it does me no injury for my neighbour to say there are twenty

gods, or no god. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg” (Crèvecoeur 33–34, 36; Jefferson 165). But theology, or ambivalence toward it, has consequences, and the contradictions in Jefferson and Crèvecoeur’s environmental visions can arguably be traced to their disenchanting views of land and agriculture.⁶ In order to locate theological environmental aesthetics that, unlike those of Jefferson and Crèvecoeur, are concerned with environmental justice, it is necessary to move not just beyond contemporary examples, but also past the secular versions of pastoral and agrarian writing found in the early republic.

While Christian environmental aesthetics in colonial America have generally been neglected by literary critics, a more theological understanding of the environment does not necessarily translate into a greater concern for environmental justice.⁷ Indeed, when the environmental aesthetics of Edwards have received consideration, the social and political context of his environmental thought has not drawn sustained attention.⁸ Disavowing social and political contexts while celebrating the natural world is a hallmark of the pastoral, and this approach thus encourages readers to consider Edwards as a pastoral writer compared to an agrarian such as Woolman.⁹ But even more formalist definitions of the genre can support a consideration of Edwards as a pastoral writer. For example, Paul Alpers argues that “landscapes are pastoral when they are conceived as fit habitations for herdsmen or their equivalents” (28). While this definition is meant to anchor pastoral in the conventional figure of the representative shepherd, Alpers’s phrase “or their equivalents” opens up a relatively inclusive set of possibilities—one of them being Edwards’s role as an *ecclesiastical* shepherd. We can thus read Edwards as combining two strands of the pastoral tradition often kept apart: that of the Virgilian *pastor felix* celebrating the beauty of the landscape, and that of the Christian *pastor bonus*, the good shepherd who instructs the flock in the ways of God and salvation (Cullen 2–4).

In combining these traditions, however, Edwards disregards the Christian genre that distinguishes Woolman’s work, agrarian jeremiad, in which plowmen speak on behalf of oppressed rural laborers and advocate for a more moral economy. By reading the work of Edwards and Woolman together, then, it becomes possible not only to analyze the strengths and shortcomings of their aesthetics in terms of environmental justice, but also to reorient our sense of the scope of pastoral and agrarian writing in

American literature writ large. This comparative approach to Edwards and Woolman takes seriously Perry Miller's underappreciated proposal for "an intellectual *and* social history" that begins with "Puritans *and* Quakers," and, by extension, Edwards *and* Woolman (188–89; emphasis added).

The differences between Edwards's Reformed Protestant pastoral and Woolman's Quaker agrarian jeremiad can be traced to the complex interaction of Virgilian genres with Christian literary traditions during the medieval and early modern periods, especially the seventeenth century. Crucially, the seventeenth century also saw the emergence of a transatlantic agrarian capitalist economy. By agrarian capitalism I mean to designate an agricultural economy characterized by "wide-spread and systemic market dependence" that compelled landowners "not only to sell but also to produce at a competitive cost" (Clegg 282, 284). This imperative to produce at a competitive cost drove multiple kinds of exploitation in the transatlantic economy, from the enslavement of Africans to the dispossession of land belonging to Indigenous peoples to the bound labor of indentured servitude.¹⁰ As this economy expanded in the eighteenth century, Reformed Protestant and Quaker environmental aesthetics alternatively reinforced and questioned these phenomena, evidenced in the work of both Edwards and Woolman.

In their first-person narratives both writers compose observational catalogues of creation, but Edwards renders the environment in a pastoral mode that expresses God's glory and inspires readers to seek salvation in the Reformed Protestant church backed by the British Empire, while Woolman develops an agrarian jeremiad that calls imperial machinations into question. The emphasis Edwards places on the Reformed Protestant church foreshortens the scope of his vision, whereas Woolman's Quaker focus on the presence of God, not in the elect, but in marginalized laborers, yields a far broader representation of the landscape. The politics of Edwards's theology comes more clearly into view when read together with Woolman's social analysis; likewise, the principles of the sometimes theologically reticent Woolman can be better discerned alongside Edwards's more intellectual style. This results in an account of how the Christian environmental aesthetics of Edwards and Woolman diverge in consequential ways when it comes to matters of environmental justice, causing us to reconsider our standard account of these issues in American literary history.

This reconsideration should displace Jefferson and Crèvecoeur from our account of the origins of pastoral and agrarian writing in eighteenth-century North America, while also clarifying the ways Christian environmental aesthetics possess specific affordances and limitations when it comes to imagining environmental justice.

REFORMED PROTESTANT PASTORAL
AND QUAKER AGRARIAN JEREMIAD

We may tend to think of environmental aesthetics in eighteenth-century North America as neoclassical derivatives of Virgilian pastoral and its close relative, georgic, but to understand Edwards's Reformed Protestant pastoral and Woolman's Quaker agrarian jeremiad we must look not to the literature of the ancient world but to that of medieval and early modern Christianity.¹¹ Christian environmental aesthetics from the medieval and early modern periods were shaped by the feudal ideal of the moral economy, foregrounding the labor of shepherds and plowmen rather than excising it from rural landscapes.¹² Medieval literature—such as the *pastor bonus* tradition that used shepherding imagery to critique church corruption, or the plowman tradition embodied in William Langland's *Piers Plowman*—valorizes rural laborers and maintains that they possess rights to subsistence and reciprocity, especially in times of dearth (Little 28–47). As opposed to the representative shepherd of Virgilian pastoral that serves as a cipher for the poet, the shepherds and plowmen of medieval literature are meant to provoke reflection not only on what these figures signify but also on their actual referents and the conditions under which they work.

The environmental aesthetics of medieval Christianity, invested as they were with strong moral imperatives, were well suited to address what could be thought of today as matters of environmental justice. During the English Reformation, for example, Protestants appropriated the ideal of the moral economy embodied in shepherds and plowmen in an outpouring of agrarian jeremiad. Written in response to the dissolution of the monasteries and enriching of the state through reassigned lands, early modern agrarian jeremiad, according to Andrew McRae, “sets the simple values of the downtrodden labourer against the expansive desires of the ‘great possessioners,’ [and] decries processes of socio-economic change as manifestations of the sin of covetousness” (18).¹³ Contrary to the version of

jeremiad well-known to Americanists, agrarian jeremiad in early modern England was conservative in that it advocated for a return to already established social ideals, rather than referring to “the mythic past . . . in order to demand progress” (Bercovitch 23–24). The early modern tradition of agrarian jeremiad would leave a strong legacy even as growth of agrarian capitalism put the moral economy under increasing pressure.

The displacement of agrarian jeremiad by reanimated pastoral and georgic forms in early modern England parallels the decline of the moral economy and the rise of agrarian capitalism. This transition cannot be fully rehearsed here, but it is sufficient to say that various developments tended to minimize the importance of subsistence and reciprocity, putting a more commercial, profit-oriented model of agriculture into place (McRae 12–17). Protestants during the Elizabethan settlement, McRae argues, executed a “shift of focus in preaching, from social justice to social order,” deemphasizing the plowman as a figure of the common laborer, and valorizing the individual, improving yeoman farmer (65). Shepherds too underwent a transformation, losing their identity as traditional rural laborers and becoming representatives of agrarian capitalist policies such as enclosure (Little 92–94). In the process, the connection between environmental aesthetics and environmental justice was strained. During the seventeenth century, Reformed Protestants focused more intently on the triumph of the regenerate church rather than those afflicted by the growth of agrarian capitalism, maintaining the *pastor bonus* tradition without its concern for the justice owed to rural laborers. Quakers, on the other hand, would reanimate the rhetoric of the moral economy and agrarian jeremiad with it.

Seventeenth-century examples of Reformed Protestant pastoral and Quaker agrarian jeremiad will be provided below, but first I will briefly discuss the origins and differences of these two Christian traditions. While both have antecedents in earlier centuries, their seventeenth-century development initially occurred in reaction to Church of England reforms led by Archbishop William Laud in the 1630s. Laud’s more traditional aesthetic emphasis on church architecture, liturgy, clerical vestments, and the Christian calendar, offended the sensibilities of some Reformed Protestants, prompting certain groups—sometimes known as Puritans—to leave England for Europe or even North America.¹⁴ The Reformed Protestant response to Laud, however, was more fractious than unified, a tendency

further illustrated by the simultaneous appearance of radical Spiritualists, who, David Como argues, “emerged organically as amplifications upon prior conventions . . . that were current among English Puritans,” such as “lay activism and participation” and an emphasis on the “unmediated power of the Holy Spirit” (243–44, 248). This radical Spiritualist strand would feed into Quakerism when the movement coalesced during the turbulent 1650s and is key to understanding the differences between Quakers and Reformed Protestants. For while Reformed Protestants expressed continual concern with who should be counted among the elect, Quakers took the emphasis on unmediated access to the divine to its extreme conclusion, focusing not on election, but on the presence of the Holy Spirit in every person.¹⁵ This theological difference was to have significance aesthetic consequences.

The well-known sermon “A Modell of Christian Charity” illustrates how Reformed Protestant environmental aesthetics often hinged on the valorization of the elect. This sermon, long attributed to Massachusetts Bay Colony governor John Winthrop, has recently undergone significant reevaluation of provenance and authorship, but it remains a useful point of reference (McGann; Van Engen 296n3). In fact, the sermon’s potential origins in tense negotiations with investors underwriting the Massachusetts Bay colony illustrate its broader commercial context, and the efforts Reformed Protestants made to prosper in it (Rodgers 21–23, 98–101). Inequality emerged as a fundamental problem, and “A Modell” depends on a theology of creation for assistance, reasoning that God “being delighted to shewe forthe the glory of his wisdome in the variety and differance [*sic*] of the Creatures and the glory of his power,” ordained material “differences for the preservacion and good of the whole” (282–83). While all “creatures” are presumably equal here, comprising one created “whole,” the focus of the sermon narrows to special status of the elect. Those “in the estate of regeneracy” are enjoined “to put a difference betweene Christians and others,” and “doe good to all especially to the household of faith” (284). This “sweete Sympathie of affections” is the privilege of the regenerate community, and what initially was a broad theology of creation is reintroduced with crucial distinction: “The Lord loues the Creature, soe farre as it hath any of his Image in it [and] he loues his elect because they are like himselfe” (290). While a “creature,” a member of creation, might be loved for retaining “any” of the divine image, the elect are understood to be set apart, “like

[God] himself.” Such treatment of the elect as a special category of created being—inhabiting a pastoral “estate of regeneracy”—would continue to be characteristic of Reformed Protestant environmental aesthetics.

However, the older environmental aesthetics shaped by the moral economy persisted among groups like the Quakers. As John Bossy has observed, the radical Spiritualist tradition from which Quakerism emerged cultivated “the Christian figure of the peasant,” and of Quakers specifically Bossy writes, “They strike one as a bit old-fashioned, inhabitants of a[n older] moral universe” (83, 114). Unsurprisingly, much early Quaker writing advocates for rural labor through agrarian jeremiad. During the 1650s charismatic Quaker leaders began gathering and connecting the loose milieu of Spiritualists spread across England, achieving their initial success in rural northern areas where the presence of the English church had been historically weak, and where Reformed Protestantism had not taken strong hold either (Barbour 41–42). Several of these leaders came from agrarian backgrounds themselves, giving the movement a strong concern for agriculture and fair treatment of laborers. Many examples of Quaker agrarian jeremiad could be given, but the best is perhaps Stephen Crisp’s broadside *A Word in Due Season: or Some Harvest Meditations*. In it Crisp admonishes farmers and rich men to “the remembrance of him from whence every good Gift cometh,” “lest ye eat off the Portion of the Poor, and the Hand of the Lord be turned against you” (148–49). He reminds readers that “the Gleaning of thy Harvest, it is for the Poor and for the Stranger” (149). Those with hired laborers should be “good Examples” in “giving that which is due” and “not oppressing them in Work nor in Wages” (152). The basics of the Quaker vision for an agrarian moral economy are outlined here, emphasizing that all things in creation are a gift from God, a gift that must be fairly distributed by those who command resources to those who do not. The environment is figured not only as a gift to be received but also a resource to be redistributed.

Works by William Penn and Cotton Mather illustrate how colonization efforts in North America both intensified and put pressure on Reformed Protestant pastoral and Quaker agrarian jeremiad. In general, North American colonization gave writers the opportunity to apply the motifs of pastoral writing to actual landscapes rather than imaginary ones, and this holds true for both Penn and Mather (Buell, *Environmental Imagination* 54; Parrish 27–33). Penn had cast a moral vision for society along the

lines articulated earlier by Crisp in *No Cross, No Crown*, claiming, “If the Landlords had less lusts to satisfie, the Tennants [*sic*] might have less Rent to pay” and emphasizing further that “those who can take the primitive state, and God’s Creation for their Model, may learn with a little to be contented” (50). Once he became proprietor of Pennsylvania, however, Penn’s focus on simplicity, the obligations of the rich to the poor, and creation as a model for a moral economy were difficult to combine with the objective of making Pennsylvania profitable. In fact, in promotional writings like *Some Account of the Province of Pennsylvania in America*, Penn would work less in the tradition of agrarian jeremiad, and more in terms of the ascendant genre Karen O’Brien has called “imperial georgic,” which drew on the form’s characteristic middle style to link agricultural improvement with imperial expansion (163–67). Colonies, Penn argued, “are the Seeds of Nations . . . best for the increase of Humane Stock and, and beneficial for Commerce” (1). In the process of giving an example, Penn asks a telling rhetorical question: “What is an improved Acre in *Jamaica* or *Barbados* worth to an improved Acre in England? We know,” he answers, “’tis three-times the value” (2). This question makes a clear gesture to merchants in the Caribbean, suggesting that Pennsylvania would be the next area Atlantic settlement where georgic improvement would lead to profit.

In Cotton Mather’s *Magnalia Christi Americana*, we see how Winthrop’s restrained celebration of “the sweete Sympathie of affections” moves closer to Edwards’s later rhapsodizing. Mather writes about “the *Wonderful Displays*” of God’s “Infinite Power,” which “hath *Irradiated* an *Indian Wilderness*,” drawing on the typical conceit of Native Americans inhabiting a dark wilderness in need of illumination from European peoples (89). Preoccupied with how Reformed Protestants might settle in and transform what had historically been Native space, Mather looks to French Huguenots who had tried to find in North America “Quiet Seats, *for the retreat of a People harrass’d already with deadly Persecutions*” (114). This subtly pastoral description—“Quiet Seats” evoking the image of a country seat—depends on the topos of peaceful respite from the troubles of life, a topos that persists as Mather goes on to describe English settlement on “the Spot of *Earth*, which the God of Heaven *Spied out* for . . . a *Resting-place*” (122). In sum, Mather proclaims, “*Geography* must now find work for a *Christiano-graphy* in Regions far enough beyond the Bounds wherein the *Church* of God had thro’ all former Ages been circumscribed” (118). Mather imagined New

England as a sacred geography, but this sacredness depended on the presence of God's elect church.

In a sense, by the middle of the eighteenth century the environmental aesthetics of Reformed Protestantism and Quakerism in North America had both grown distant from concerns about environmental justice characteristic of earlier Christian environmental aesthetics. Reformed Protestants like Mather maintained the tradition of the *pastor bonus*, but mostly in the celebratory mode reminiscent of the *pastor felix*, focusing on the glory of God and the elect church. Quakers like Penn, despite their obvious familiarity with the rhetoric of the moral economy, turned to georgic as a way of promoting colonial improvement. However, both Reformed Protestants and Quakers experienced increasing pressure on their communities as crises mounted for the British Empire throughout the eighteenth century, and Edwards and Woolman would respond in their first-person writings with their own versions of Protestant pastoral and Quaker agrarian jeremiad.

EDWARDS'S *PERSONAL NARRATIVE*

Jonathan Edwards foregrounds environmental aesthetics in descriptions of the New England landscape throughout *Personal Narrative*, but the theology and politics of Reformed Protestantism constitute a crucial background. The result is a construal of the natural world as a theatre for piety, not justice. In his opening paragraph Edwards writes about praying in the woods as a boy, but he also mentions that this occurred during "a time of remarkable awakening in my father's congregation" (790). His retreats to the forest were not unconnected to such revivals. Along with promoting evangelism, revivals attempted to consolidate the power of the Puritan clergy and to preserve orthodoxy in response to declining state support, which threatened the Reformed Protestant mission to "establish one pure church supported by each Christian state" (Marsden 7). While the context of the Reformed Protestant church is not made explicit in *Personal Narrative*, it clearly informs the development of Edwards's pastoral sensibility, which would work to celebrate the glory of the elect church.

The doctrine of God's sovereignty and the divine plan of election bridges Edwards's ecclesiastical commitments and his environmental aesthetics, and can be summarized with a single word: *sweet*. While one critic reads

“sweet conjunction” in *Personal Narrative* as a shorthand for an epiphanic connection between mind and world characteristic of Edwards’s metaphysics, sweetness is used to conjoin not only mind and world but also doctrine and church (Johnson 270). After writing about overcoming his doctrinal doubts Edwards emphasizes that “The doctrine of God’s sovereignty had very often appeared, an exceeding pleasant, bright and sweet doctrine to me” (792). Edwards found this doctrine to be so “pleasant,” “bright,” and “sweet” because to accept the doctrine of God’s sovereignty was to accept God’s immutable glory in all the world, and to aspire to be one of the elect who would share in this glory.

In *Concerning the End for Which God Created This World*, a treatise he wrote later in life, Edwards writes of “the astonishing fabric of the universe” (419), created by a God who was “infinitely the greatest and best of beings” (421). His descriptions of the natural world in *Personal Narrative* can be understood as part of his celebration of this “astonishing fabric,” often emphasizing its sweetness. Once while walking in his father’s pasture Edwards “looked up on the sky and clouds; [and] there came into my mind, a sweet sense of the glorious majesty and grace of God, that I know not how to express,” and at a later point in the narrative Edwards’s tries to convey this glory by composing a catalogue of what he sees (793). He writes, “God’s excellency, his wisdom, his purity and love, seemed to appear in everything; in the sun, moon and stars; in the clouds, and blue sky; in the grass, flowers, trees; in the water, and all nature” (794). Edwards loved “to behold the sweet glory of God in these things. . . . And scarce anything, among all the works of nature, was so sweet to me as thunder and lightning” (794). Consequently, he would “fix myself to view the clouds, and see the lightnings play, and hear the majestic and awful voice of God’s thunder” (794). Hearing the voice of God during these “sweet contemplations” inspires Edwards “to sing or chant forth” (794). Thunder and lightning are not usually features of pastoral, but the descriptions Edwards offers generally render the “enamelled world” Raymond Williams cites as characteristic of the genre (18). Furthermore, his compulsion to sing puts him squarely in the company of the Virgilian *pastor felix*.

The Christian *pastor bonus* emerges later in the narrative, as encountering the world beyond his father’s pastures aligned Edwards’s environmental aesthetics more clearly with the Reformed Protestant church. After recounting the advent of his initial period of “sweet delight,” the narrative

shifts to his time as a temporary pastor at a church in New York City. A significant group among this population were likely to have been the French Huguenots that Mather had referenced, who had moved to New York after revocation of the Edict of Nantes by Louis XIV in 1685. These Protestant refugees would have reinforced Edwards's belief in the danger of the Catholic French Empire as a rival to his tradition of Reformed Protestantism (Marsden 47–48). At this point in *Personal Narrative* Edwards gives a sense of his growing awareness of Reformed Protestantism global reach, writing of his “great longings for the advancement of Christ's kingdom in the world” (797). Even “the least hint of anything that happened in any part of the world” related to “the interest of Christ's kingdom” would “animate and refresh” Edwards (797). He begins to scour “public news-letters . . . to see if I could not find some news favorable to the interest of religion in the world” (797). Needless to say, for Edwards “Christ's kingdom” and “religion” meant the true religion of Reformed Protestantism.

Indeed, in the philosophical treatise mentioned earlier, *Concerning the End for Which God Created the World*, Edwards writes that those predestined by God for eternal salvation, “must be looked upon as the end of all the rest of creation, considered with respect to their whole eternal duration, and as such made God's end, must be viewed as being, as it were, one with God” (443). Thus, as in “A Modell,” Edwards's environmental aesthetics become circumscribed by his commitment to Reformed Protestant ecclesiology, which imagines communion with God only for the elect. Edwards subordinates his universal metaphysics and environmental aesthetics to an exclusivist ecclesiology, executing a characteristic pastoral move that William Empson famously summarizes as “putting the complex into the simple” (23).

In *Personal Narrative* Edwards's new interests in the global politics of Reformed Protestantism are reintroduced into the landscapes he inhabits, as long walks become times to assess not only doctrine but also the progress of the church. While he would “frequently . . . retire into a solitary place, on the banks of Hudson's River . . . for contemplation,” he would also sometimes walk with his New York City host, and their “conversation used much to turn on the advancement of Christ's kingdom in the world, and the glorious things that God would accomplish for his church in the latter days” (797). Later on, while describing his time as pastor at Northampton, Edwards reflects on how the “histories of the past advancement of Christ's

kingdom, have been sweet to me” (800). Sweetness has come to comprehend not only the landscape—from New England meadows to the Hudson River—but also international Reformed Protestantism, uniting theology, politics, and the environment into a powerful program representing the glory of God and of the Reformed Protestant Church. Edwards joins the *pastor felix* to the *pastor bonus*, celebrating God’s glory and offering his experience as instructive to the flock in *Personal Narrative*.

Edwards, however, had no jeremiad to offer regarding the labor conditions that existed in the landscape around him. While he may have addressed economic issues in the language of the moral economy elsewhere in his writings, he did not think of them in terms of the environment. Edwards in fact grew pessimistic about the possibility of a Christian economics (Valeri). Just as Edwards’s attempts to promote a more moral economy were frustrated, any attempt to find environmental justice within his environmental aesthetics is disappointed by his circumscribed focus on the elect. While Edwards believed transatlantic slaving should end, he was in favor of continued domestic enslavement in North America, and enslaved four people himself—Joseph, Lee, Titus, and Venus (Minkema 825). His work as an Indian missionary in Stockbridge at the end of his life changed some of his negative views of Indigenous peoples, but Edwards still viewed them primarily as individuals to be assimilated into Reformed Protestantism and the British Empire (McDermott). For example, in a 1751 letter he wrote, “The only remaining means that divine providence hath left us to repair and secure these Indians in the British interest, is . . . instructing them thoroughly in the Protestant religion” (“To Speaker Thomas Hubbard” 400–401). In Edwards’s writing, Wilson Brissett has observed, “it becomes practically impossible to distinguish the advent of the heavenly kingdom from the perpetual expansion of the British Empire” (713). I would add that along with the British Empire, transatlantic agrarian capitalism built on servitude, enslavement, and dispossession was another entity Edwards made little effort to differentiate from the pastoral heavenly kingdom he celebrated.

WOOLMAN’S JOURNAL

The environmental aesthetics of John Woolman’s *Journal* focus not on the sweetness of an elect community, but sympathy with those marginalized by the agrarian capitalist economy. While discourses about sympathy were wide-ranging in the eighteenth century, scholars have noted that

Woolman's understanding of sympathy is unique, shaped by the Quaker tradition of the moral economy (Stewart 271; Meranze 86). He focuses on agricultural labor to a greater extent than Edwards because his writing takes a different point of departure: not the glory of God and individual salvation, but the responsibility owed to others that loving God entailed. This different point of departure is clear in the theology of creation Woolman describes near the beginning of the *Journal*:

I was early convinced in my mind that true religion consisted of an inward life, wherein the heart doth love and reverence God the Creator and learn to exercise true justice and goodness, not only towards all men but also toward the brute creatures; that as the mind was moved on an inward principle to love God as an invisible, incomprehensible being, on the same principle it was moved to love him in all his manifestations in the visible world. (28)

This sentence articulates the twofold obligation to love God and to love the whole of God's creation. Woolman's fundamental identification of God is as a being, and importantly an "invisible, incomprehensible being," yet despite this being's transcendence there exists an immanent relationship between God and creation, and thus "true justice and goodness" must be extended toward all.

Woolman's environmental aesthetics, therefore, often touched on matters of environmental justice. In 1746 he took a particularly significant journey as an itinerant minister "to visit Friends in the back settlements" of Pennsylvania, Virginia, and North Carolina (36). In a town named Red Lands Woolman reflects, "it is the poorer sort of people that commonly begin to improve remote deserts. With a small stock they have houses to build, lands to clear and fence, corn to raise, clothes to provide, and children to educate" (36). Rather than simply enumerating the features of the landscape like Edwards, Woolman sees the way labor is embedded in the environment, recognizing that it was the poor who were left to improve marginal lands on edge of English colonies. At this point Woolman did not connect settlements like Red Lands to the dispossession of Indigenous peoples, but it did give him knowledge regarding the fringe of the transatlantic agrarian capitalist economy that would help him to make this connection.

Woolman would gain further knowledge of another aspect of labor in the transatlantic economy as he turned south to Virginia and North Carolina and visited Friends who depended on the labor of enslaved Africans.

He recalls that “Two things were remarkable to me on this journey” (38). The first was “uneasiness” he felt receiving hospitality from “people who lived in ease on the hard labor of their slaves” (38). Second and more systematically, he observes, “this trade of importing them from their native country . . . and the white people and their children so generally living without much labour” led to “so many vices and corruptions increased by this trade and this way of life that it appeared to me as a dark gloominess hanging over the land; and though now many willingly run into it, yet in future the consequence will be grievous to posterity!” (38). Here Woolman sees how the structure of the broader Atlantic economy enables some to live “without much labor” and characterizes it ominously as a “dark gloominess” threatening future generations (44).

Along with the experiences of poor agricultural workers and enslaved Africans, Woolman would become cognizant of the way Indigenous communities were impacted by the growth of agrarian capitalism, in part due to his relationship with Papunhank, a leader of dislocated Delaware, Machican, and Munsee Indians living in the town of Wyalusing on the west branch of the Susquehanna River. Papunhank, one of a series of prophetic leaders in what has been called the Indian Great Awakening, drew on both Indigenous and Christian beliefs to articulate a new form of Native spiritual life suited to a town like Wyalusing (Dowd 27–33; Pointer). He had traveled to Philadelphia in 1760, a visit summarized in a report titled *An Account of a Visit Lately Made to the People Called Quakers in Philadelphia, by Papoonahoa, an Indian Chief* (1761). While *Account of a Visit* cannot be taken as a straightforward representation of Papunhank’s words, it reveals, if not precisely what he said, the way Quakers interpreted what he said. Papunhank apparently claimed that God gave “an acquaintance with the works of nature. For he apprehended a sense was given him of the virtues and natures of several herbs, roots, plants, and trees, and the different relations they had to one another; and he was made sensible that man stood in the nearest relation to God, of any part of the creation” (19–20).

Woolman likely read a manuscript version of *Account of a Visit*, and he had the opportunity to personally hear Papunhank reiterate its themes during his second visit to Philadelphia in 1761, along with another aspect of his thought, trade. *Account of a Visit* mentions that Papunhank “complained of some abuses in trade; that they did not receive the price for skins which had been promised them” (9), and Woolman’s notes from their meeting show that this topic came up when they spoke (Plank 139–40).

Critical of Native dependence on British trade, Papunhank attacked the greed of colonists, and, as Jane Merritt summarizes, “cast the points of conflict in terms that Euramericans might better understand; instead of an alliance of mutual obligations based solely on networks of kin, trade relationships could be ordered by the same ethical and moral principles that governed Christian behavior” (85). Papunhank’s oratory probably initiated not only Woolman’s greater interest in Native American life but also his growing understanding of the ways Indigenous people had been impacted by settler encroachment.

Indeed, Papunhank’s concerns made their way into Woolman’s *Journal*, in the account of his journey to Wyalusing during the violence of Pontiac’s War. It was in relation to the Wyalusing journey that Woolman made his first explicit connection between frontier settler communities like Red Lands and the dispossession of Native peoples. After speaking with an Indian trader about the way “white people do often sell rum to the Indians,” which Woolman thought to be an act of greed and “a great evil,” he “remembered that the people on the frontier, among whom this evil is too common, are often poor people, who venture to the outside of a colony that they may live more independent [rather than] on such who are wealthy, who often sell high rents on their land” (125). Woolman laid the blame for Indigenous economic dependencies not on frontier traders, but on what he perceived to be the agrarian capitalist problem that was the root cause, the way the “wealthy” set “high rents on their land.” Alternatively, if the rich lived simply and kept rents low there would be less incentive to be “drawn into schemes to make settlements on land which have not been purchased of the Indians” (125–26). As the journey to Wyalusing continued, Woolman would deepen this basic insight into the way the economy of agrarian capitalism adversely affected Indigenous communities.

Days later, as Woolman “rode over the barren hills,” he writes, “my meditations were on the alterations of the circumstances of the natives of this land since the coming of the English”:

The lands near the sea are conveniently situated for fishing. The lands near the rivers, where the tides flow, and some above, are in many places fertile and not mountainous, while the running of the tides makes passing up and down easy with any kind of traffic. Those natives have in some places, for trifling considerations, sold their inheritance so favourably situated, and in other places been driven back by superior force, so

that in many places, as their way of clothing themselves is now altered from what it was and they far remote from us, [they] have to pass over mountains, swamps, and barren deserts, where travelling is very troublesome, in bringing their skins and furs to trade with us. (128)

The environmental aesthetics Woolman use here are particularly attuned to issues of environmental justice, reflecting an increased awareness of the problems of Native dependence on British trade. “By the extending of English settlements and partly by English hunters,” Woolman continues, “those wild beasts they chiefly depend on for subsistence are not so plenty as they were, and people too often, for the sake of gain, open a door for them to waste their skins and furs in purchasing liquor which tends to the ruin of them and their families” (128). Woolman perceives a double injustice caused by settler expansion: the undermining of the Indigenous subsistence economy, and the replacement of it with trade that works against the interests of Native communities.

Woolman’s concerns with the agrarian capitalism come together in his late essay alternatively titled *A Plea for the Poor* or *A Word of Remembrance and Caution to the Rich*, which he began after his journey to Wyalusing in 1763 and continued to revise until 1769—it was published posthumously in 1793. Not only is he concerned that due to high rents “persons who have but small substance are straightened in hiring a plantation” and “tenants . . . often find occasion to labour harder than was intended by our gracious Creator”; he also points out how “oxen and horses are often seen at work when, through heat and too much labour, their eyes and the emotion of their bodies manifest that they are oppressed” (238). The master logic that enables Woolman’s perception of the oppression experienced by humans and animals in the contemporary economy is that of the relationship between a divine Creator and finite creation, a relationship he elaborates in *Plea for the Poor*. “The Creator of the earth is the owner of it,” he asserts (239). Yet it is not ownership, but gift, that is the primary way Woolman describes God’s relationship to creation. “He gave us being thereon [the earth],” Woolman continues, “and our nature requires nourishment which is the produce of it. As he is kind and merciful, we as his creatures, while we live answerable to the design of our creation, we are so far entitled to a convenient subsistence that no man may justly deprive us of it” (239). In the space of a few sentences, Woolman has moved from the metaphysical contention that human life derives from a gift of God’s “being,” to a corollary

that humans “while we live answerable to the design of our creation,” have a right to “convenient subsistence,” that is, continued participation in this gift of being on the earth. His environmental aesthetics shift seamlessly into questions of environmental justice.

Though up to this point in the essay Woolman has only considered the exploitation of agrarian labor, when he wrote of injustice facilitated by “bargain and purchase,” the experience of enslaved Africans and dispossessed Indigenous peoples could not have been far from his mind (257). Indeed, the moral economy Woolman’s imagines in *A Plea for the Poor* will extend to these issues by the end of the essay. “Those ancient possessors of the country,” Woolman writes, “are yet owners and inhabitants of the land adjoining to us . . . under these considerations we may see the necessity of cultivating the lands already obtained of them and applying the increase consistent with true wisdom” (258). While Woolman argued for an end to encroachment on Native lands, he did not go as far as to recommend reparations for Indigenous peoples. However, he did believe that monetary payment was owed to the children of the enslaved, “on account of the great injuries committed against” them (269). He maintains a belief that some people “bought those poor suffers with intent to treat them kindly as slaves. . . . but, I believe, without entering deep enough into the consideration of the consequences of such proceedings” (269). For Woolman, considering the consequences of agrarian capitalism through an environmental aesthetics that rendered issues of environmental justice visible was the culminating achievement of his late work.

CONCLUSION

In this essay I have examined the possibilities and limitations of Christian environmental aesthetics when it comes to questions of environmental justice by analyzing unique uses of the pastoral and agrarian genres by Jonathan Edwards and John Woolman. Generally, I argue that theological viewpoints like those of Edwards and Woolman may have a special capacity to think in terms conducive to environmental justice: understanding the cosmos and everything in it to be created by an intentional act of love by God embeds strong moral imperatives into the environment. However, theology does not necessarily lead to these insights. While Edwards developed a metaphysics that, if taken to its logical conclusion, would transcend certain social and political boundaries and recognize its responsibilities to

every being on earth, this possibility was circumscribed by his commitment to the doctrine of election and the global triumph of the Reformed Protestant church, wrapped in the combination of the *pastor bonus* with the *pastor felix*. Woolman's environmental aesthetics are not, strictly speaking, opposed to those of Edwards. Rather, we can read Woolman as more consistently applying Christian theology as part of a tradition of agrarian jeremiad that calls attention to the marginalized.

Ironically, it is Edwards's Reformed Protestant tradition that has perhaps had the most influence on American environmentalism.¹⁶ Even more ironically, while Edwards held proslavery views and enslaved people himself, the environmental justice movement that began in the late twentieth century was led by Black clergy—such as Benjamin Chavis, author of *Toxic Wastes and Race*—from the United Church of Christ, a denomination directly descended from the congregational churches of Edwards's era (Stoll 238). Yet there are also examples of the persistence and power of the Quaker agrarian jeremiad tradition, none more notable perhaps than that of Jim Corbett, an eccentric Quaker shepherd whose book *Goatwalking* (1991), chronicles his conversion to Quakerism, his experiences as a goat herder in the Sonoran Desert, and his involvement in the 1980s Sanctuary movement supporting refugees coming North across the border from El Salvador and Guatemala. Corbett directly references Woolman's *A Plea for the Poor* as influential for his thinking, demonstrating the continuity of Quaker environmental justice concerns over centuries (184). Edwards and Woolman are, therefore, a useful pair for examining Christian environmental aesthetics in the colonial period and their capacity to respond to questions of environmental justice that shape the rest of American literary history. By beginning our account of pastoral and agrarian writing in North America with Edwards and Woolman, we are better positioned to address contemporary questions of how environmental aesthetics relate to matters of environmental justice.

NOTES

1. While "environmental aesthetics" can refer to a subfield of philosophical aesthetics, its usage in literary criticism tends to be more general. On the place of "aesthetics" in early American literary studies and a similarly "broad definition of . . . that ever-capacious and unwieldy term," see Cahill and Larkin 235–43.
2. Environmental justice as a concept originated in social movements that started in the United States during the late twentieth century. See Di Chiro 303–9.

3. As part of his criticism of how “the aesthetic gets . . . severed from . . . broader sociopolitical environmental contexts,” Rob Nixon remarks on the secular character of much environmental violence that “discount[s] spiritualized vernacular landscapes” (32, 17). Amitav Ghosh suggests that “religious worldviews” could be well-suited to respond to environmental problems because “they transcend nation-states,” “acknowledge intergenerational, long-term responsibilities; do not partake of economistic ways of thinking,” and practice “acceptance of limits” (160–61).
4. Lawrence Buell notes that a “split between pastoral and agrarian sensibility” is “not present in early American” literature, citing Crèvecoeur and Jefferson as writers who “domesticated the pastoral ideal in an agrarian context” (*Environmental Imagination* 127–28). My analysis glosses over differences between Crèvecoeur and Jefferson to make an overarching point about their similarities. For a more nuanced reading, see Sweet 99–108.
5. Scholars have grown more pointed in their analysis of agrarianism in the early republic, yet they maintain Smith’s basic interpretive orientation, parsing the gap between idealistic rhetoric and brutal economic realities, always using Crèvecoeur and Jefferson as touchstones. See Jehlen 139–42; Buell, *Environmental Imagination* 439, 55; Sweet 6; Sturges 686, 689, 701–3; and Bushman 22. Ed White examines backcountry insurrection and American nationhood, but his focus the late eighteenth century adheres to scholarly convention.
6. Consider how Jefferson’s willingness to dig up an Indigenous burial ground, reported in *Notes* (104–6), dovetails with his assertion elsewhere “‘that the earth belongs in usufruct to the living’: that the dead have neither power nor rights over it” (“Thomas Jefferson to James Madison”).
7. Leo Marx’s foundational study of the pastoral illustrates Americanist neglect of Christian environmental aesthetics. Marx mentions Edwards only in a footnote to his discussion of Emerson, observing that he exemplifies “the idea of the countryside as the appropriate site of the conversion experience . . . common to the Christian tradition” (*Machine in the Garden* 232n). In a later essay Marx acknowledges that the “exclusion” of this tradition from his work stemmed from his interest in “an essentially secular . . . version of pastoralism” (“Pastoralism in America” 68n14). Buell has recognized religion’s role in “conceptualiz[ing] humankind’s relation to the nonhuman,” while retaining Marx’s outlook that “the fate of the earth has ironically been more a more conspicuous animating spiritual concern for American writers than for American religion” (“Religion and the Environmental Imagination” 235–37).
8. When John Gatta finds in Edwards “intimations of an environmental ethic,” he focuses on explicating theology without historicizing Edwards’s thought (55). For a similar interpretation, see Knight and Johnson. In passing reference to Edwards’s enslavement of four people over the course of his life, Gatta finds his “inability to grasp the social import of his own far-reaching moral philosophy . . . disappointing” (57).

9. Use of the term *pastoral* in American literary criticism tends to be thematic. In Buell's usage, pastoral encompasses "all literature that celebrates an ethos of rurality or nature or wilderness over against an ethos of metropolitanism" (*Environmental Imagination* 439n4). The classic statement on pastoral's tendency to elide politics is Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City*.
10. While scholars generally agree that the early American economy was capitalist, they debate the degree to which farmers produced with the market in mind. See Innes and Bushman for differing interpretations. Another way of describing the agrarian capitalist economy and its relationship to enslavement and Indigenous dispossession is what Tiya Miles has termed a "settler colonial slavery complex" (420).
11. Literary critics often look to Virgil, and then skip directly to much later writers, indicating the extent to which medieval literary traditions are overlooked (Little 1–8, 15–17). Referencing Virgil, Sweet defines pastoral and georgic, respectively, as genres in which the natural world functions as "a site of leisure" or "a site of labor" (2). Sweet also discusses georgic as a subset or extension of pastoral that "concern[s] not the retreat to nature or the separation of the country from the city, but our cultural engagement with the whole environment" (5). While I comment on georgic in this essay, my primary focus is on pastoral, with the understanding that the genres are related by a common Virgilian tradition.
12. To call this economy *moral* is not to say that it was more just than the capitalist economies that would follow. Rather, this adjective underscores that this economy was not, in E. P. Thompson's formulation, "disinfested of intrusive moral imperatives" (201–2).
13. McRae uses the phrase "agrarian complaint" (18). I employ "agrarian jeremiad" for the sake of continuity with Americanist studies of the jeremiad.
14. The term *Puritan*—and the question of whether or not it should be capitalized—is much debated. In this essay I use "Reformed Protestant" in most cases. For a discussion of these issues, see Stein 192n6.
15. For a succinct overview of debates about the relationship between Puritanism and Quakerism, see Winship 298n4. Geoffrey Nuttall, despite being one of the strongest advocates of Quakerism as a radical extension of the tenets of Puritanism, notes that Quakerism's "contradistinguishing character is . . . fundamental and far-reaching faith in 'the Spirit in every man'" (166).
16. On the influence of Reformed Protestant traditions such as Congregationalism and Presbyterianism on American environmentalism in the twentieth century, see Stoll.

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