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# The Jeremiad in American Science Fiction Literature, 1890-1970

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# THE JEREMIAD IN AMERICAN SCIENCE FICTION LITERATURE, 1890-1970

by

Matthew J. Schneider

A Dissertation Submitted in  
Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in English

at

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

May 2019

## ABSTRACT

### THE JEREMIAD IN AMERICAN SCIENCE FICTION LITERATURE, 1890-1970

by

Matthew J. Schneider

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2019  
Under the Supervision of Professor Peter V. Sands

Scholarship on the form of sermon known as the American jeremiad—a prophetic warning of national decline and the terms of promised renewal for a select remnant—draws heavily on the work of Perry Miller and Sacvan Bercovitch. A wealth of scholarship has critiqued Bercovitch’s formulation of the jeremiad, which he argues is a rhetorical form that holds sway in American culture by forcing political discourse to hold onto an “America” as its frame of reference. But most interlocutors still work with the jeremiad primarily in American studies or in terms of national discourse. Rooted in the legacy of Puritan rhetoric, the jeremiad is most commonly used to frame discussion of political speech or literary texts that grapple with national identity.

The jeremiad is also firmly entrenched in science-fiction literature, and some attempts have been made to assay its function in that genre. But studies of the jeremiad in science-fictional literature tend toward framing those works, too, in terms of national discourse, even though science-fictional literature typically relies on tropes and strategies that are far beyond the ability of nationality to contain.

In this dissertation, I argue that the jeremiad in science-fictional American literature works against the framework of national identity. Though the texts draw on contemporary political discourses that are often specifically American, their engagements with the jeremiad lead them beyond the imaginary of the United States. Instead, by examining specific science-fictional approaches to the concepts of time and space, race, technocracy, and images of exodus, I demonstrate that these texts consistently urge readers to imagine political belonging outside the framework of national culture.

After examining the science-fictional approaches to these concepts and how we can best understand them in terms of the jeremiad, I put them together to show that, even in an American literary context, the American jeremiad militates against cohesion, generating different vectors of political action within and without the American paradigm.

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A is for Adventure

may we always be on one

B is for Bastian

our beloved son

E is for Ellen

wise, patient, and true

F is for Friends

especially (you know who you are) you!

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As seems to be customary, my penultimate paragraph in the acknowledgements section is reserved for my wife and son. Whenever I read a scholarly monograph, I actually do tend to read the acknowledgements. I've had this tendency for years, though it has become a sort of ritual the further along I got in writing my dissertation. That's because I came to appreciate on the most fundamental level that a scholar's immediate family, much like the dissertation committee, has a unique status in the composition of this kind of work. They're not co-authors, quite. But the amount of time, cognitive and emotional energy, and personal investment that goes into a project like this is otherwise unremarked outside of the acknowledgements. My son won't remember the hours that he watched me scratching illegible script in my notebooks with a book or article PDF opened in front of me; nor will he remember how much time he spent curled up in a playpen or grinning toothlessly at me from his chair or

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However much credit all those wonderful people deserve for helping get this thing done, I *do* have to reserve some credit for myself: if you happen to catch any errors in fact, judgment, or interpretation anywhere in this manuscript, *those* belong entirely to me.

# INTRODUCTION. Imagining Prophecy—The Jeremiad in American Science Fiction

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## The Propheteers

Prophecy, prophet, prophetic, prophesy—these terms are as endemic to science fiction critical discourse as “spaceship,” “future,” “robot,” or “alien.” Almost invariably, what is meant by such a term is a kind of futurological prognostication. Though more recent examples can easily be found,<sup>1</sup> I would like to take as an example the emblematic 1962 essay entitled “The Hazards of Prophecy,” in which Arthur C. Clarke suggested that a science-fictional prophet runs the risks of either a failure of nerve or a failure of imagination. Failure of nerve: “when *even given all the relevant facts* the would-be prophet cannot see that they point to an inescapable conclusion” (134, emphasis in original). Failure of imagination: “when all the available facts are apprehended *and* marshaled correctly—but when the really vital facts are still undiscovered, and the possibility of their existence is not admitted” (142-143, emphasis in original). For Clarke, prophecy proceeds from the accumulation and interpretation of data; his “prophet” is more aptly called a scientist: a forecaster of technological probabilities. Everything predictable is within the realm of material possibility, from rocket ships to nuclear power. If we were to use Clarke’s examples to define them positively rather than negatively, prophecy encompasses two basic

categories: what we think we know and what we think we don't. But prophecy in its historic social functions does not operate on the basis of data. Prophecy is multivalent, often intuitive, and finally concerned with the social order.

Until the early twentieth century, the science-fictional prophecy was typically intertwined with utopian narratives of an anthropological cast set sometime in the future. At least from the appearance of Louis-Sébastien Mercier's *L'An 2440* in 1770 to the utopian speculations of H.G. Wells—such as *A Modern Utopia* (1905) or *The Shape of Things to Come* (1933)—futuristic “sf” in everything but name often showed snapshots of better, more just societies. Rather, such stories projected their authors' social ideals onto potential futures. Mixed with the more optimistic forecasts were dystopias or apocalyptic fictions, ranging from Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* (1826) to Yevgeny Zamayatin's *We* (1924). By the 1930s, utopian narratives as such had become incredibly rare, with the sunnier imagined futures migrating to the adventure yarns published in sf pulps like *Amazing Stories* or *Astounding Science Fiction*, where the focus was less on the anthropology and more on showing those bug-eyed space pirates what for with a little heat from one's hip-mounted, chrome-plated zapper. Narratives set in dystopian societies, such as Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) or George Orwell's *1984* (1949), have dominated socially-critical sf henceforth.

These prophetic warnings tap into contemporary fears about emerging social trends, and to be a science-fiction prophet after Hiroshima has frequently meant

anticipating some form of technological or social catastrophe—one that, in the sf produced from 1950 on, we usually have brought on ourselves. So it is not uncommon for people to regard science fiction, as George Hay once put it, as a sort of “early warning system.”<sup>2</sup> But because they draw on hopes and fears about the shape of society, even if we consider science-fictional speculation to be rooted in technological prognostications—as Clarke does in the example in my opening paragraph—those prediction are still freighted with the moral, spiritual, and political concerns of the present. Especially when prophecy takes the form of a warning, that warning implies (or explicitly states) how the prophet thinks things ought to be.

American literature has from its inception nurtured a particular form of prophetic warning called the jeremiad. A jeremiad is a particular kind of prophetic warning, derived from the style of the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a jeremiad as “A lamentation; a writing or speech in a strain of grief or distress; a doleful complaint; a complaining tirade; a lugubrious effusion.” In vernacular usage, it may be the hysterical raving of a visionary, or it may be a forecast laden with dire portents. Though not commonly used, it is a term commonly associated with a certain kind of science fiction story. A popular example is *Soylent Green* (1973), adapted from Harry Harrison’s novel, *Make Room! Make Room!* (1966). Both the film and novel depict a future in which overpopulation and its attendant food shortages are managed by turning corpses into government-distributed food rations. Harrison’s novel

was published two years before Paul R. Ehrlich's bestselling *The Population Bomb*, which one retrospective *New York Times* article describes as "a jeremiad that humankind stood on the brink of apocalypse because there were simply too many of us" (Haberman). *The Population Bomb* was but one of several nonfiction jeremiads of the 1960s, including Rachel Carson's *The Silent Spring* (1962) and Ralph Nader's *Unsafe at Any Speed* (1965), all of which alerted the public to imminent threats that demanded immediate, concerted action before all was lost.

More important than the nature of the message was the prophetic mode in which these jeremiads were delivered. *Soylent Green* certainly paints a nightmarish portrait of an overpopulated urban hellscape, and to do so it taps into the jeremiadic mode. Charlton Heston, bleeding out from a bullet in his gut, cries out in the indelible denouement that "Soylent Green is *people!*" Kitschy though it might be, *Soylent Green's* "lugubrious effusion" works in concert with its social critique in part because of its science-fictionality. To the extent that it was able to persuade audiences seriously to ponder the warnings of doomsayers like Ehrlich, it did so because audiences were able to see their own contemporary situation—not, one hopes, nearly so desperate or terminally sweat-stained—in that of Heston and Edward G. Robinson's betided protagonists while simultaneously taking *Soylent Green's* projected future on its own terms. Heston's anguished cry—"Soylent Green is *people!*"—is a legible shorthand for

a particular form of environmental social catastrophe because it is a science-fictional jeremiad.

Because both the jeremiad and science-fiction have particularly strong roots in American literature, this dissertation explores the science-fictional jeremiad in American literature from the late nineteenth through the mid-twentieth century in order to sketch its contours and varieties of species. The purpose of this exploration is to use the American jeremiad as a framework for understanding the political dimensions of particular science-fictional texts and their relations to their social contexts. Doing so will illuminate how science-fictionality works in each text to enhance its jeremiadic aspects. Focusing on the science-fictional aspects of these works of literature will enhance our understanding of the jeremiad as a particular prophetic mode in American literature, and, I hope, this study will lay the foundation for further research into the intersections of the jeremiad and American speculative fiction. Not every text in my dissertation *is* a jeremiad, *per se*, but every one is shaped, in some respect, by jeremiadic discourse. Not only does each text therefore expand our understanding of how the jeremiad works in different contexts, but examining each text in the context of the jeremiad enables us to clarify some of the stakes involved in those texts.

Before outlining the structure of my dissertation, I will review the scholarly conversation on the American jeremiad, define and defend my use of science-fictionality as a theoretical framework, and briefly justify my periodization. In the

chapter outline at the end of this introduction, I will identify my core primary texts and how they have guided the structure of each chapter.

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## **The Nationless Jeremiad**

As a literary form of distinctly American character, the jeremiad dates back to the Puritan settlers who arrived in the Massachusetts Bay Colony from the early 1620s to 1640. Perry Miller's magisterial two-volume intellectual history, *The New England Mind* (1939), laid the foundations for a renewed interest in Puritan studies in American letters, and he posited the jeremiad as exemplary of the Puritan character. In towns like Boston and Salem, seventeenth-century ministers would typically deliver sermons on election days, and in these sermons, the orator would index, in high prophetic register, the sins of the community and offer them as violations of the covenant—thereby identifying the causes of whatever crisis currently plagued the community. Declension was always linked to the ways in which the community had violated its covenant with God, and with each passing generation, the spiritual and moral stature of the founders of the covenant which engaged the Almighty's providential blessing on the community seemed to grow.<sup>3</sup> Forsaking immorality and re-embracing the virtues embodied in these quasi-mythic figures was the surest way to renewing the covenant and revitalizing the community.

The language of covenant and providence was endemic to Puritan rhetoric, which relied on biblical typology for metaphors to frame the colonists' own experiences. Though the culture of religious radicalism in England had fostered this frame of references,<sup>4</sup> the colonization of the New World called for a special set of symbols, which evolved their own unique resonance in the nascent culture of colonial America. The harshness of the continent and its distance from their actual ancestral home in England led the Puritans to liken themselves to Israelites setting out on their exodus through the wilderness in order to reclaim a Promised Land, a spiritual, ancestral home that none of them had ever seen. In guiding Israel through the wilderness by his providential hand—a journey elongated as a punishment for the Israelites' disobedience, thus making it a time of trial for the covenanted nation—God fulfilled his promise to Abraham, the patriarch, and his descendants. But that covenant depended upon Israel remaining faithful to God's law. For each generation of God's chosen, this was a moral struggle with political dimensions, as the Old Testament books (not least Jeremiah) repeatedly illustrate. Miller argues that the jeremiad helped the Puritans make sense of a transition "from European to American experience," "a way of conceiving the inconceivable, of making intelligible order out of the transition" (31). Believing as they did that their purifying trial in the wilderness of the New World was to be the first step toward renewing Christ's kingdom across the earth, the Puritans could not countenance failure. Failure on a practical level—to erect and

maintain John Winthrop's famed "city on a hill"—meant a prerequisite failure on a spiritual level, as these latter-day Chosen could only endure declension as a result of Providence withdrawing its guiding hand from their colonial venture. This became especially urgent as each colonial generation seemed to fall further and further away from the righteous example of the settlers who journeyed to the New World on their world-redemptive, civilizing mission. So it was that prophetic sermons lamenting moral turpitude and communal crisis were "the one literary type which," Miller concludes, "the first native-born Americans inevitably developed" (31).

Though Miller interpreted the jeremiad primarily as a lamentation meant to drive degenerate faithful back into the fold, Sacvan Bercovitch saw the jeremiad's social function as much more flexible and expansive. In *The American Jeremiad* (1978), Bercovitch made the case that the jeremiad's essential optimism about the American project, as it evolved from a provincial religious outpost in New England to a continent-spanning nation, served to contain political dissent. In contrast to Miller, whose New England divines uttered jeremiads that bore witness only perpetual disappointment and dissolution, Bercovitch contended that the form of the jeremiad itself survived the Puritans because it ultimately retained confidence in the eventual triumph of the Elect. He described it as "a ritual designed to join social criticism to spiritual renewal, public to private identity, the shifting 'signs of the times' to certain traditional metaphors, themes, and symbols" (xli). By retaining the ideal of "America" as a vessel of hope (the

eternal Promised Land, ever waiting to be reclaimed by the true Chosen People), political contradictions between ideal and reality can be reconciled rhetorically, if not in fact. So even in the midst of apparent decline, declension will lead to a revitalization of the errand, and thus, too, to an even greater restoration. This rhetorical strategy most benefitted, in Bercovitch's view, the white Anglo-Saxon Protestant bourgeoisie, which remained culturally dominant in part thanks to the jeremiad. Bercovitch charted the evolution of the jeremiad from Puritan election-day sermon to its expression in mid-nineteenth-century American literature. Authors such as Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, and Henry David Thoreau all attempted to cleave a more secular millenarian faith to the fate of the nation during the period of its greatest expansion. For Miller, the gap between ideal and reality in their jeremiads was a sign of the Puritans' declining influence; for Bercovitch, the proliferation of the jeremiad beyond the historical confines of colonial New England was evidence of their success in transforming "America"—heavily inflected with the so-called New England Way—into a powerful and enduring myth.

Criticism from within American studies has taken issue with the scope of Bercovitch's formulation. The New Americanists, who strove in the 1980s and nineties to undercut the tendency in their field to present America as totalizing paradigm for all its subjects, particularly resisted this. As Donald Pease has argued, Bercovitch's model of the jeremiad leaves absolutely no place outside the catchall idea of "America" from

which progressive dissensus can gain critical distance, denying the progressive potential of the rhetorical form itself in any capacity.<sup>5</sup> Critical work on the jeremiad into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has also often emphasized American exceptionalism to the point of becoming a myth in the service of raw imperial violence, far in excess of the middle-class liberalism Bercovitch sought to critique.<sup>6</sup> Attempting to redeem the jeremiad from its close association with national exceptionalism, Andrew Murphy distinguishes between traditionalist and progressive jeremiads. The former he characterizes as “a vision for the future in which the past serves as a model and a limiting condition” (111), whereas the latter treats historical circumstances as “a promise or birthright” which urges the nation “to realize founding principles ever more fully and completely” (115). The African-American jeremiad is a distinct enough variant that I will discuss it separately in chapter two. At issue for these interlocutors are three entwined problems in Bercovitch’s interpretive analysis. First, despite the generational flexibility of the jeremiad, he contends that its essential function remains unchanged; that is, it is always about containing dissent through a rhetorical “ritual of consensus.” Second, Bercovitch neglects the potential of the jeremiad to subvert the status quo because he identifies it too closely with an essentially bourgeois nationalism. Finally, despite the ever-increasing pluralism of the United States, Bercovitch reads the New England character as quintessentially dominant, even though the challenge of a

pluralist culture—or, perhaps, the fact of America being multicultural—is itself often the focal point of the jeremiad's anxiety.

In the wake of *The American Jeremiad*, Bercovitch spent the next three decades refining his analysis of American culture to account for these critiques,<sup>7</sup> but, ironically, the debate with his critics only gave him more grist for his totalizing theory of the American jeremiad. He never relinquished the contention that the processes of American culture-making—exemplified by the jeremiad—did anything less than harvest the energy of dissent in order to shore up the mythological power of an “America” haunted by the specter of industrious Puritans. As Bercovitch's critics note, though, the WASPy provinciality of New England does not—and cannot—contain the multitudes who actually inhabit what has become the United States of America. While the trope of the wilderness suggested endless possibility for reinvention—fertile ground for Jeremiahs of each generation to sow their seeds—Bercovitch always reframed it in terms of the proto-capitalist New England Way. Or he argued that the jeremiad inevitably reframed it as such, which is a distinction without difference. In so doing, he neglected the untamed power of the jeremiad's prophetic mode.

Despite its appeal to ultimate, divine authority, the prophetic mode tends to be a bit bumptious. Prophets in Judeo-Christian tradition—which primary informs the jeremiad—exercise power from both the center and the margins. Certainly prophets are classically considered to be fortune tellers and revealers of divine truth. Since

antiquity, though, especially in theocratic societies, prophets also function as civil lawgivers, judges, and mediators between rulers and their people.<sup>8</sup> Because prophets claim authority derived from their own experience of the divine, they are not necessarily beholden to established political institutions. Or, more abstractly, they derive moral and political authority from their intuitive comprehension of the cosmos, which may be a prophet's peculiar sense of righteousness and justice, or it may be a sense of the will of the people.<sup>9</sup> Since the authority that undergirds the prophetic mode is drawn, as it were, from the aether, the social criticism which prophets level at the political establishment (or, just as often, each other's religious doctrines) has often been viewed with suspicion by political theorists or censured by official decrees, especially in the early modern England that spawned the Puritan errand.<sup>10</sup> Christian sects and unaffiliated prophets proliferated in late sixteenth- through mid-seventeenth-century England, contributing to the civil war that culminated in regicide.<sup>11</sup> So incendiary was prophecy in the Jacobean era that mentioning the king in a prophetic vision was explicitly outlawed.<sup>12</sup> Prophecy has always thus retained an innate revolutionary potential. The seventeenth-century Puritans prophetically cast themselves as the Israelite remnant on an exodus to the Promised Land, and that prophetic antitype can be found just as readily in Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's millennial call for a global revolution of the dispossessed poor or in the jeremiadic writings of Cornel West.<sup>13</sup> Trying to limit the prophetic purpose of the jeremiad to the American

middle class thus ignores the basic propensity of the prophetic mode to foster a wide variety of political aims, whether radical or conservative.

At the heart of any prophetic discourse is a normalization of one's own commitments as inherently, perhaps transcendently, superior. The great Jewish theologian Abraham Heschel considered prophets to be vessels of "divine pathos," which he described as "a reaction to human history, an attitude called forth by man's conduct; a response, not a cause. Man is in a sense an agent, not only the recipient" (225). Prophets respond so fiercely to their times because they perceive political evil, because the prophetic perception of injustice is at one with a reaction against it. In a religious sense, prophets feel these evils so intensely because injustices work against God's active participation in human history (118, 121). In a broader sense, prophets respond to a feeling that their community is being profoundly wronged in some way, even if that community is culturally or politically dominant.

The anxiety a jeremiad prophetically creates—the crisis to which a prophet is compelled to respond—is therefore necessarily rooted in the political jostling of divergent and often opposed political interests. Bercovitch acknowledged this anxiety; it was essential to his notion that the jeremiad "is not divisive but progressive—or more accurately, progressive because it denies divisiveness" (*Jeremiad* 17). Building on Miller's foundation, Bercovitch argued that the jeremiad attempts to wrest control over the process of cultural transition into the guiding vision of the bourgeoisie. In a pluralist

society, culture is always evolving—always in process—so the jeremiad became a stable framework for identifying dissident or minority political concerns and complaints with the work of realizing the dream of America. What Samuel Danforth, a mid-seventeenth-century preacher, called the “errand into the wilderness” became the central trope of the jeremiad. Bercovitch writes that the American jeremiad “made anxiety its end as well as its means. Crisis was the social norm it sought to inculcate. The very concept of errand, after all, implied a state of *unfulfillment*” (*Jeremiad* 23). So even having colonized the New World, and with each generation deepening its roots in now-native American soil, the jeremiad made it possible for political groups in America to think of themselves as still making their way *toward* the Promised Land, an exodus threatened by some internal or external threat. Jeremiadic discourse, “enforces an identity that is at once transitional and representative,” but, Bercovitch crucially argues, “it identifies the community’s ‘true fathers’ not by their English background but by their exodus from Europe to the American strand” (26). And this is certainly the case for most of the jeremiads or works influenced by jeremiads analyzed by Bercovitch.

But the form of the American jeremiad *per se* is not the exclusive property of one class or race or ideology, however they are comprised within a national discourse. To invoke Raymond Williams,<sup>14</sup> an emergent prophetic discourse may coexist with a dominant prophetic discourse as part of the evolution of hegemony within a culture, and the political interests represented by each prophetic vision may be mutually

irreconcilable. Not all people who live in the United States are from Europe; not all are even originally from America. Even among those who claim European ancestry may not adhere to the cultural traditions their ancestors brought with them. George Shulman argues that prophets must still “resist the fantasy of escaping the nation, which still is the organizing center of political life,” since it is their purpose to “invoke *and trouble* national political identity by dramatizing what is costly, fantastical, and fateful in it” (25). Which is to say that the organizing framework of a particular nation does not foreclose different—perhaps radically opposed—visions of nationhood and who gets to be part of it. But what if the cultural process of troubling national identity by its nature exceeds, ignores, radically reconfigures, fractures, or abandons national political identity?

By evoking the mythic image of an “America” that never existed and can only fully be realized in the imagination of a self-identified remnant, the jeremiad in American political discourse can sometimes dispense altogether with the United States—its history, its people—as it actually exists. This may seem unlikely, given how closely linked the jeremiad is to narratives of national exceptionalism. In both political rhetoric and even in literary texts such as those hotly debated by the New Americanists, America remains the floating signifier. But though it always, interminably invokes the nation, the American jeremiad does not, in practice, even attempt to reconcile the divergent political interests of its various people. Instead, the Jeremiah presenting his prophecy attempts to offer a unifying vision for an emerging discourse that seeks to

become dominant or a dominant discourse competing with the emergent. Though people excluded by the jeremiad's vision may recognize that they have been rhetorically exiled from the nation, Bercovitch would say that those *to whom and for whom it speaks* feel that the community has been satisfactorily reintegrated—at least rhetorically. I would say the opposite. I do agree with him that the jeremiad normalizes a sense of crisis and reifies irreconcilable differences within society. But it creates endless possibilities for renewal because there will always be divisions and subdivisions among the populace to exploit.<sup>15</sup> Even if, in the process of exiling a nation within the nation (to paraphrase Frederick Douglass), the jeremiad rhetorically resolves the crisis it has conjured, it has also established the preconditions for the next crisis, precisely because it has set the terms by which the Elect sets itself apart from everyone else.

While perhaps unifying a political Elect, the jeremiad therefore undermines the discourse of national community and elevates the distance between the remnant and all others. To put it crudely, the American jeremiad makes it easier for people not to consider their fellow citizens to be real Americans. That is, it's a form of cultural discourse that normalizes a hierarchy based primarily and foremost on a particular sense of cultural identity, but not one that is exclusively middle-class or even rooted in manifest destiny. In the final instance, the jeremiad fractures any broadly coherent national identity at all. As a result, I define the jeremiad as *a prophetic warning of communal—not national—decline and the terms of promised renewal for a select*

*remnant*. What this means is that when we talk about the American jeremiad, what we refer to is a prophetic discourse addressing present American political concerns through a particular set of tropes (errand into the wilderness, a remnant or Elect, crisis due to failing to uphold the covenant, idealized founding figures, exodus, a city on the hill which represents civilizational redemption, providential grace), but from a specific cultural standpoint. Our task, therefore, is to identify the characteristics of the remnant and what renewal means for it in a specific context, because the nature of the remnant illuminates how the crisis is to be managed or averted. To do this, we need to know the political controversies primarily at stake for the prophet, which means tethering a jeremiad to its time and place. In the process, we will see that there is no one, monolithic American jeremiad, because there is no one, monolithic American culture. We will also see that even when the nation remains a central rhetorical sign in the American jeremiad, the concept of the nation may be so thoroughly troubled that, contra Shulman's caveat, the prophecy may even explicitly dispense with the nation as its organizing political unit.

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## **Nerve and Imagination: Science-Fictional Prophecy**

By the early 1960s, sf had established its credentials as an intellectually serious endeavor, even though (then as now) many regarded it as frivolous, paraliterary trash. The big moment was, of course, Hiroshima, which turned pulp fantasies about

tomorrow's superweapons into yesterday's news. But fantasies and nightmares about civilization-threatening weapons had operated on the American consciousness for decades, and the public looked as much for guidance to the editorials of John W. Campbell, Jr. (editor of *Astounding Science Fiction*) as it did to the scientists of Los Alamos.<sup>16</sup> By the sixties, though, civilizational conflict conducted via technology was not just about futuristic WMD. Every facet of American and Soviet technological advancement became a contest of Cold War dominance. Vice-President Richard Nixon, for instance, managed to squeeze almost as much political mileage out of a model kitchen in 1959 as he did when NASA put a man on the moon during his presidency a decade later.<sup>17</sup> So prognosticating technological developments became for writers like Clarke—as mentioned at the outset of the introduction—a way to coin cultural capital for their science fiction, not to mention burnish their credentials as a forecaster.

Early critical theorization of science fiction as such framed it in technological terms, too. Hugo Gernsback classically defined it in 1924 as “a charming romance intermingled with scientific fact and prophetic vision” (3), and three decades later Golden Age tyros like Campbell and Isaac Asimov were still grappling with the implications of that formulation, expanding the technological territory of sf into the potential of the human mind or sociology.<sup>18</sup> Early scholarly histories of sf were often bibliographic in nature or focused on defending sf as “literature” *per se*.<sup>19</sup> In the late 1960s and seventies, theoretical frameworks moved beyond technology or the effects

of the industrial revolution as definitive hallmarks of sf, though overviews based on historical anecdotes and wide-ranging surveys remained popular.<sup>20</sup> The most enduring scholarly intervention in sf theory has been Darko Suvin's *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* (1979). Suvin proposed that the unique characteristic of sf was not a set of tropes, but a poetic device that makes it "a literature of cognitive estrangement" (4), meaning that it defamiliarizes the reader's reality through the introduction of some new thing, which is presented to the reader as materially plausible. Borrowing from the utopian philosopher Ernst Bloch, Suvin dubbed this new thing the *novum*, something whose introduction into the world carries the potential to alter it fundamentally and irrevocably. A science-fictional *novum* must therefore depict revolutionary social consequences of any alteration to reality's status quo. Thus for Suvin and sf critics who draw upon his framework—including but certainly not limited to Fredric Jameson, Carl Freedman, and Philip Wegner—the best sf evinces radical politics consonant with historical materialism. That is, sf is a literature of change—often political change. More specifically, debates about sf tend to be about how progress is represented, whether progress is identified with technological advancement or political revolution (or both). Like the early authors, editors, fans, and scholars who carved out the contours of sf discourse, the Suvinian paradigm therefore retains both a prophetic register and a commitment to a materialist worldview, if not necessarily one as inflected with

nineteenth-century positivism as the early pulp stories Gernsback solicited for *Amazing Stories*.

As sf slowly gained stature in the academy, Samuel R. Delany—himself a science fiction author of considerable stature—produced criticism, like Suvin’s, that focused on the interaction of the text with the reader, but he emphasized linguistics. Inspired by Michel Foucault’s approach to French historiography, Delany suggested that sf discourse taught readers to read science-fictionally through certain reading protocols.<sup>21</sup> What that meant in practice was that science-fictional stories presented a wider variety of possible readings than what he called “mundane” fiction. Delany’s most famous example is this sentence: “Her world exploded” (“Conscience” 68). Such a sentence would have a very different valence in the context of Mr. Darcy’s proposal to Elizabeth Bennett than to Princess Leia in *Star Wars*. In anything other than a science-fictional story, that sentence would be a metaphor, but in sf, its literal meaning is privileged without sacrificing the multiple other registers on which the sentence works. For sf texts, Delany explains, “as the sentences build up, we build up a world in specific dialogue, in a specific tension, with our present concept of the real” (69). Seo-Young Chu has taken Delany’s ideas from this period a few steps further, arguing in *Do Metaphors Dream of Literal Sleep?* (2010) that essentially all representative fiction is in some sense science-fictional, since all fiction must struggle in some ways with mimesis, and sf is simply a more “high-intensity” variation on that struggle. That particular claim

erodes, if not collapses, the meaningful distinction between science-fictional modes of representation and all others,<sup>22</sup> but Chu mounts an important critique of Suvin's approach to sf. It is not the poetics of sf that induces estrangement, but aspects of our lived reality itself. She therefore conceptualizes "science fiction as a mimetic discourse whose objects of representation are nonimaginary yet cognitively estranging" (3). Especially with regard to slippery yet operative phenomena such as race, the flows of capital, or the scope of the technocratic apparatuses that help corporations and governments perform their basic functions—not to mention national identity—science fiction is a way to concretize the experience of such things. Philosophy Timothy Morton has dubbed such referents "hyperobjects,"<sup>23</sup> but Chu suggests that science-fictionality can represent virtually everything in human experience in a much more evocative, tangible sense. "In transcending the literal/figurative dichotomy," Chu argues, "science fiction provides a representational home for referents that are themselves neither purely ideal nor purely figurative in nature" (14). The literalness of a science-fictional story gives life and breath to concepts and political ideas that cannot find their fullest narrative expression in any other way.

The linguistic framework articulated by Delany and Chu comes closest to the way that I want to present science-fictionality in this dissertation. I agree with John Rieder, who argues that it is less useful simply to classify a text as sf than it is to consider more deeply "the dynamic interaction taking place between its different

generic elements or strategies" (14). Undoubtedly, technological tropes such as airships, appearance-altering chemical treatments, telepathy, and futurological prognostication—which we will see in the coming chapters—are all science-fictional in the classic sense. But science-fictionality is not ultimately derived from specific tropes. As a literary mode, I see it as a way of giving concrete form and substance—specificity and tactility—to ideas that otherwise exist only in the abstract. Though I would emphasize its linguistic register more than Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr., he is right that science-fictionality is more of a *habitus*, a "kind of awareness... a mode of response that frames and tests experiences as if they were aspects of a work of science fiction" (2). More significantly, it is a mode of response that extends proactively beyond the science-fiction text, once one is accustomed to its protocols.

When Arthur C. Clarke offers his formulae for prophecy, he is of necessity synthesizing more than the current state of scientific knowledge. Implied in his failures of nerve and failures of imagination are all the hyperobjects that make them possible. Implied, too, in his notion of prophecy is the notion that progress can be measured by technological benchmarks. Progress itself therefore becomes a science-fictional conceit. To succeed as a prophet, even in Clarke's extremely narrow, technologically predictive sense, a person would have to be aware of historical trajectories, different epistemologies, and the flux of current affairs. That is, one would have to be plugged in politically and historically, even if the issue at hand is the approximate year that a

human being will set foot on Mars. Science-fictionality does create critical distance between the world of the text and the world, and it does offer new political possibilities, but those possibilities only come into focus once that critical distance is once again synthesized into concrete form. It is not enough to want to get beyond the horizon, as Bloch might put it. One has to have a specific, plausible vision of how to get there. Science-fictionality charts those uncharted waters, and even if the form a course takes is silly or improbable, if it is at all persuasive, it is going to navigate by the light of the stars—even those yet undiscovered.

When a prophecy is presented science-fictionally, it presents in concrete, literal form a normative spiritual and political vision of society and the individual's role in it.<sup>24</sup> The texts we will examine in this dissertation create science-fictional protocols of comprehension that engage with the jeremiad in a number of ways. I have already suggested that the American jeremiad works to destabilize, fragment, or dispense with the nation, but when it takes the form of political speech, the typical reconfiguration of the Elect in an American context does, as Bercovitch argues, nominally resort to America as its signifier. When the jeremiad is engaged with science-fictionally, the reconfiguration of the fragmented national culture does not have to take that form. Instead, it can recrystallize in all sorts of ways, each with its own particular dimension.

I do not intend to index every science-fictional vector in every text we will examine. What I will do is attempt to identify each text's specific engagement with the

jeremiad. So doing, we will be able to identify the science-fictional aspects of each text that most directly correlate with its prophetic purpose. In some ways, this makes our task more challenging, since we have to draw connections between the historical context of each text in order to identify the vectors that are transmuted into science-fictional representations. As we will see, this can be somewhat circuitous at times. By the same token, this process may make the outcome of our labors more provocative. Once we tether the science-fictional representations to their cultural contexts, both the science-fictionality and the contexts will, I hope, render each other more legible, thus highlighting what is most at stake in the text's engagement with the American jeremiad.

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## **Rituals of Dissent**

My work builds on the understanding that science-fictional elements ranging from early American novels such as those by Charles Brockden Brown through Cold War polemics and into the contemporary work of sf masters like Kim Stanley Robinson are deeply entwined with the jeremiadic tradition.<sup>25</sup> In charting the evolution of the jeremiad in American science fiction from the late nineteenth through the mid-twentieth centuries, though, I endeavor to push beyond establishing that these texts are jeremiads. As a matter of course, the jeremiad is different from one text to another, so I do not chart the evolution of the jeremiad into a powerful science-fictional form, as

if each text is a stepping-stone toward some final incarnation. Not every text qualifies as a jeremiad *per se*. This dissertation is not a genealogy of a direct line of descent from the *Arabella* to the *Quo Peregrinatur*, which appears in the final chapters of Walter M. Miller, Jr.'s *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1960). Much like the branches of an evolutionary tree, the varieties of the jeremiad all stem from a common root, but the fact of their genetic interrelation does not make *The Iron Heel*, for instance, the missing link between *Caesar's Column* and "The Comet." Rather, the examples of the jeremiad taken up in this project produce an intertwining genealogy. Though these texts may be said to branch from the trunk of the same tree, I urge you to remember the jeremiad as a discourse, a framework, a way of thinking about each of these texts, rather than a form to which each of them conforms.

Each chapter explores a key motif in two key science-fictional texts that form a bounded historical period. The chapters are presented chronologically in part to situate them within the rapid changes that occurred over the course of the eighty years that this dissertation covers. The chronological arrangement also facilitates a cumulative overview of the historical-cultural contexts in which each of these books appears. Chapter One engages with Ignatius Donnelly's *Caesar's Column* (1890) and Jack London's *The Iron Heel* (1908) in order to chart how each novel constitutes a sense of class separatism. I situate contexts of late-nineteenth-century Populism and early-twentieth-century socialism in terms of the novels' science-fictional representations of

space and time to accentuate how those authors conceive of the unbridgeable distance between their political constituencies. In Chapter Two, W. E. B. Du Bois and George Schuyler posit the centrality of racial difference in American culture, exploring its possibilities and limitations in "The Comet" (1920) and *Black No More* (1931), respectively. Du Bois operates in a fully prophetic mode while Schuyler savagely lampoons it; both ultimately uphold the color line as the central problem of the twentieth century. In Chapter Three, we will explore two influential space operas: E. E. Smith's *Lensman* saga (1935-50) and Isaac Asimov's *Foundation* trilogy (1941-53). These series will be shown to exemplify an ideology of technocratic control which is ultimately expressed in the science-fictional trope of psychic superpowers. Finally, Chapter Four examines the trope of exodus in Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged* (1957) and *A Canticle for Leibowitz*. For Rand, exodus symbolizes the quest for dominance, while for Miller it represents a posture of epistemic humility. In my Conclusion, I suggest that the aspects of the jeremiad examined in the previous chapters outline a new way to think about the jeremiad and its social function, a way that is more broadly applicable than analyzing the American character, yet narrow enough to remain a distinct prophetic mode.

As Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr. has said, "Modern historical consciousness is shaped by belief in novums" in part because the "dominant cultural consciousness of the twentieth century perceived the nonstop emergence and production of novums in a myriad of technological and social relations" (*Beauties* 57-58). At the beginning of

the twentieth century, a sense that the United States was the vanguard of those myriad technological and social relations was felt widely; it was precisely that sense that fueled H. G. Wells's *The Future in America* (1906), for instance. But the sense of society's development being contingent upon ever-emerging newness has never been an exclusively American phenomenon, and it is even less so now.<sup>26</sup> The science-fictionality of a *novum* has always been as keyed to technological emergence as to evolving social relations. Whenever Americans have grappled with a crisis, they have often responded with a prophetic vision that attempts to reconfigure those social relations. As my dissertation will argue, many such prophets have done so through science-fictional discourse.

Both science fiction and prophecy respond to socio-historical situations in a way that bypasses abstraction and reason. They make intuitive, extrapolative leaps. Prophets, both science-fictional and divinely-inspired, create their authority by articulating political yearnings as-yet unimagined in a concrete form. For nearly a century, the jeremiad in the context of the United States has largely signified the legacy of Puritan cultural consensus as ultimately binding and normative for the American literary imaginary. As I attend to a diverse body of science-fictional texts over a period of rapid historical transformation, I hope to demonstrate that the prophetic responses to those changes fundamentally challenge our understanding of the American ritual of consensus. Perhaps narratives of decline ultimately say more about the irreconcilable

tensions in the body politic than they do about the ability of a powerful myth to forge many peoples into one.

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<sup>1</sup> For instance, see Peter J. Bowler, *A History of the Future: Prophets of Progress from H.G. Wells to Isaac Asimov* (2017), which ably traces the discursive dimensions of futurological speculation from late Victorian to early twentieth-century science fiction.

<sup>2</sup> Hay, "Science Fiction: Mankind's Early Warning System" (1973).

<sup>3</sup> See Sacvan Bercovitch, *The Puritan Origins of the American Self* (1975), which highlights the importance of Cotton Mathers's *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1702) in establishing a mythos of the colonies' founding fathers.

<sup>4</sup> See Christopher Hill, *Intellectual Origins of the English Revolution: Revisited* (1997).

<sup>5</sup> For Pease's critique of Bercovitch, see *Visionary Compacts*, pp. 248-256, and "Echoes of Bercovitch in the Obama Inaugural." Much of the debate among the New Americanists about the nature of the jeremiad hinged on nineteenth-century texts, in which critics like Pease often find more ambivalence toward the American project than Bercovitch allowed. See, for instance, the essay collection, *Cohesion and Dissent in America* (1994).

<sup>6</sup> See William V. Spanos, "American Exceptionalism, the Jeremiad, and the Frontier: From the Puritans to the Con Men" (2007) and "American Exceptionalism in the 9/11 Era: The Myth and the Reality" (2013).

<sup>7</sup> For example, see "The Problem of Ideology in a Time of Dissensus" in *The Rites of Assent* (1993).

<sup>8</sup> See Joseph Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel* (1996); Birch et al., *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament* (1999).

<sup>9</sup> Max Weber classically defined prophetic authority as based on "charisma"; see *Sociology of Religion* (1920), p. 46. Spinoza also thought of prophecy as an non-empirical grasp of the natural and political totality he eventually termed *conatus*; see his *Theologico-Political Treatise* (1620), esp. ch. 1-3.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Hobbes, for instance, devotes portions of *Leviathan* (1651) to critique of prophecy, calling it "a presumption of the future, contracted from the experience of time past: so there is a presumption of things past taken from other things (not future but) past also" (18); see also pp. 282-90.

<sup>11</sup> There exists a wealth of scholarship on prophecy in early modern England, especially with regard to the expansion of women's role in civic discourse. See Kevin Sharpe, "Reading revelations: prophecy, hermeneutics, and politics in early modern Britain" (2003); Teresa Feroli, *Political Speaking Justified: Women Prophets and the English* (2006); Hilary Hinds, "Prophecy and religious polemic" (2009). Keith Thomas notes in his comprehensive *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (1984) that both Roman Catholicism and Protestantism could claim a number of prophets during this time; see pp. 154-55.

<sup>12</sup> See Peter Stallybrass, "Macbeth and Witchcraft" (1982).

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<sup>13</sup> The motif of exodus is woven throughout *Empire* (2002); see esp. pp. 156-59. I discuss West's call in *Prophesy Deliverance!* (1982) for a Marxian Afro-American Christianity more in depth in chapter 2; though it is more than 35 years old and he has cultivated additional nuance and revision, West has remained true to the radical vision outlined out in his seminal manifesto.

<sup>14</sup> See *Marxism and Literature* (1977), esp. ch. 8.

<sup>15</sup> Mark Jendrysik remarks that "individuals or groups *outside* the author's audience become the sources or standard bearers for decadence. The modern Jeremiah 'follows the medieval practice of identifying God's enemies by category instead of name'" (3, emphasis mine).

<sup>16</sup> See Paul S. Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light* (1985), esp. chs. 20 and 21. H. Bruce Franklin's *War Stars: The Superweapon and the American Imagination* (1988) is an erudite guide to the theme of peace through technological strength in American letters.

<sup>17</sup> Nixon's "kitchen debate" with Nikita Khrushchev took place in an American National Exhibition set up near Moscow, which mean to showcase United States domestic goods as proof of our nation's cultural superiority. See Stephen J. Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War* (1996), pp. 72-76.

<sup>18</sup> I discuss in more detail Campbell and Asimov's grappling with the nature of sf in chapter 3.

<sup>19</sup> The overview of "Critical and Historical Works About SF" in John Clute et al.'s *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* is very helpful. In particular, I refer here to J. O. Bailey's *Pilgrims Through Space and Time* (1947) and Sam Moskowitz's *Explorers of the Infinite* (1963) and *Seekers of Tomorrow* (1966), which were staples in scholarly discussion through the 1970s, and still are occasionally referenced.

<sup>20</sup> Of the wide-ranging surveys, I'm thinking particularly of those by authors of sf, such as Kingsley Amis's *New Maps of Hell* (1960) and Brian Aldiss's *Billion Year Spree* (1973), later updated as *Trillion Year Spree* (1986), and James Gunn's *Alternate Worlds* (1975), all of which seem to remain in circulation among fans and scholars, especially where questions of generic definition come into play.

<sup>21</sup> See "Some Reflections on SF Criticism" (1981).

<sup>22</sup> Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr. elaborates on this overreach in his review of Chu's book, "Fantastic Mimesis: A Diamond in the Rough, Not the Philosopher's Stone" (2012).

<sup>23</sup> See *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (2013).

<sup>24</sup> Ingrid Bartsch et al., for example, present Donna Haraway's science-fictional methodology as a "postmodern jeremiad" that productively troubles the easy dichotomy between literal and figurative representation in her work, although they would also say that Haraway's prophetic mode distinctly works to circumvent attempts at normativity; see "Witnessing the Postmodern Jeremiad" (2001).

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<sup>25</sup> Much of this work is done in as-yet-unpublished dissertations. Jerilyn Zulli focuses on colonial and early American literature to situate its twentieth-century descendants in "Puritans, Patriots, and Proto-Science" Fiction (2004); Dustin Harvey examines the cross-pollination of British and American working class jeremiads during the Victorian era in "The Industrial Jeremiad" (2003), with a conclusion that considers the jeremiad in context of early twentieth-century British sf; Joseph F. Brown, Jr. extends Bercovitch's argument to account for several canonical sf texts in "Children of Men" (2009). David Seed considers one of the Cold War's leading polemicists in "The Postwar Jeremiads of Philip Wylie" (1995), and Lincoln Geraghty uses the jeremiad to frame *Star Trek's* evocation of the errand to the wilderness in *Living with Star Trek* (2007).

<sup>26</sup> Within the last decade, a large amount of sf scholarship has wrestled with the intersections of empire and discourses of modernity with science fiction; see, for instance, John Rieder, *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction* (2008), Jessica Langer, editor, *Postcolonialism and Science Fiction* (2011), Eric D. Smith, *Globalization, Utopia, and Postcolonial Science Fiction* (2012), and the special issue of *Science Fiction Studies* on "SF and Globalization" (2012).

# CHAPTER ONE. Imagining Class: Ignatius Donnelly's *Caesar's Column* and Jack London's *The Iron Heel*, 1890-1910

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## Project for a New American Century

In 1906, the British prophet of science fiction, H. G. Wells, published an account of his voyage to the United States of America. He wished to ascertain the quality of the nation's "collective will," so that he might better understand what world-historical events America might shape "in the next thirty years or so" (2). A committed socialist, Wells was deeply engaged with the progressive intelligentsia of his day, most of whom presumed that the contradictions of capitalism would be exploded and resolved in the young nation, which was an economic and technological tyro, for all its fits and starts. Thus it was in the West—rather than the East, as it actually happened a bit more than a decade later—that many radicals expected the proletariat to emerge victorious from the class struggle.

At the very least, European thinkers knew that the United States would be a continued factor in geopolitics; they speculated as to how large a shadow the nation would cast. Secondhand knowledge was insufficient to fuel Wells's "prophetic habit of mind": he needed to witness the people and environs of this nation directly. "For all

the Philippine adventure," Wells thought, America's "future still seems to lie on the whole compactly in one continent" (17). It is strange that Wells did not foresee that a nation dissatisfied to remain east of the Mississippi River would confine itself to a single continent in the intermediate future, to say nothing of the coming century. In fact, this passage illustrates the even stranger complexities of tying spatial imagination ("compactly on one continent") to temporal imagination (the "future still seems to lie"), and how central a colonial "adventure" (the acquisition of the Philippines from Spain in 1898) plays in that nexus. Space and time and imperialism are all so tightly knit in this offhand observation that it is difficult to parse how implicated each of these concepts is by the others. But the imagination of distance—temporal distance and spatial distance—was integral to the way reformist and revolutionary movements in the United States had thought of their resistance to capitalist plutocracy. As it would turn out, America would not be the revolutionary vanguard of the twentieth century, but it was home to radical political groups which harnessed the language of temporal and spatial distance to articulate their class grievances.

Though it may sound counterintuitive, the novels I discuss in this chapter use distance space and time—which are often presented as abstractions—to give concreteness and recognizable dimension to irreconcilable class differences. So doing, the imagination of space and time also gives specific form to the boundaries of political belonging. Both Ignatius Donnelly and Jack London use temporality and

spatiality in the texts explored in this chapter to imagine ways of being that they see as radically different from the status quo. As a result, they also imagine ways of belonging—ways of defining the nation—that refuse the messy, plural reality of the body politic. For Donnelly, this was Populism; for London, socialism. *Caesar's Column* depicts a late twentieth-century America in which the plutocrats of Donnelly's time have consolidated total economic and political control in Europe and America. As a reaction, the masses stage a bloody uprising that wipes away Western civilization, and Donnelly's protagonists flee to the mountains of Uganda to found a utopia along Populist lines. *The Iron Heel* presents itself as a manuscript of the near future, annotated by a historian in the distant future. The main narrative depicts an abortive socialist revolution, but the future historian's retrospective palimpsests confirm that after several hundred, a global socialist utopia is built on the ashes of the oligarchs' oppressive police state. Space and time in *Caesar's Column* and *The Iron Heel* help readers imagine vast, unbridgeable distances between themselves (the Populists, the socialists) and the rest of their fellow citizens. Donnelly and London's science-fictional prophecies gave their readers ways to imagine clearly the class-based political divisions that wracked the United States in the decades surrounding the turn of the century. In these jeremiads, class proves to be the covenanted nation that transcends America itself.

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## Populism's Jeremiah Laureate

While perhaps most famous for writing the preamble to the platform of the national People's Party in 1892, Ignatius Donnelly maintained a vigorous, if turbulent, political career in Minnesota, which stretched from the antebellum period to the waning years of the nineteenth century. Having moved west from Philadelphia in the 1850s, Donnelly quickly became a radical abolitionist, active in Minnesota's young Republican Party. After the war, without the moral clarity of antislavery as an anchoring issue, Donnelly's liberal reform politics found the two major parties less and less hospitable, and he drifted between Republicans, Democrats, and third parties. Settling by the mid-1870s on monetary policy as his political lodestone, he made a reputation for himself as a freewheeling advocate on behalf of the country's farmers. While his political career boasts a number of modest achievements, his work in building the Minnesota Farmer's Alliance into a viable regional political entity,<sup>1</sup> starting in 1883 and going up through the early 90s, is what attracted the attention of the national Populist movement. That, and a novel called *Caesar's Column* (1890).

The People's Party was the culmination of a movement that originated in nonpartisan alliances organized by farmers for the purposes of self-education and cooperative mercantilism. After the Civil War, tycoons in a variety of agrarian ventures—grain elevator combines in the Midwest, the crop lien system in the South, railroad

monopolies everywhere—consolidated their political influence over Republicans and Democrats in the northern and southern states, respectively. The evolution of the farmers' alliances from nonpartisan experiments in self-sufficiency to an insurgent third party reflected a growing (and only partially reciprocated) sense of solidarity with urban laborers and a belief that a political revolution alone would provide the economic preconditions necessary for the nation's real producers to gain ground against the corporations squeezing them.<sup>2</sup> While Donnelly's preamble to the People's Party platform gave eloquent form to the grievances of the Populists who had organized it, his first novel is explicitly a warning against the potential of the multitude's anger to overflow the levees established by existing political institutions. *Caesar's Column* is therefore surprisingly inextricable from the context of the nineteenth-century Populist revolt.

The protagonist of Donnelly's novel is Gabriel Weltstein, a Swiss shepherd from a colony in Uganda who comes to New York City in 1888 to sell his wares to purchasers directly (a strategy of last resort with which Populists, in their struggles with railroad monopolies, would sympathize). After some scenes depicting Gabriel's initially disquieted appreciation for the city's technological wonders, he is shown the city's underbelly by Max Petion, who is a kind of Scarlet Pimpernel-cum-Vergil. Max is one of the triumvirate heading a worldwide Brotherhood of Destruction, primarily made up of the evolutionarily degenerate masses, which is on the verge of bringing a global

uprising to fruition. While the novel's nominal villain is an Oligarchy headed by the Jewish Prince Cabano, who pulls the strings on a plutocracy grinding the world into dehumanizing impoverishment, the Brotherhood's goal is not the overthrow of the Oligarchs. Instead, its goal is the total destruction of Western civilization—to wipe the slate clean for building a better future. Trapped between these historically overdetermined classes, both bent on catastrophic collision, Gabriel can do little but bear witness to the apocalypse. There's a bit of erstwhile skulduggery involving the rescue of Estella Washington (a descendent of America's venerable first president) from Cabano's clutches. Estella and Gabriel fall in love, and Max, too, finds a mate in Christina Jansen, a young songstress whose literary genealogy brings her within a twig or two on the same tree as Stephen Crane's *Maggie* (1893). After providing a pastoral interlude for the happy couples to consecrate their double-marriage, Donnelly has the Brotherhood wreak its bloody revenge on the world. While one of the Brotherhood's other leaders, Caesar Lomellini, erects a phallic monument to the orgy of violence, Gabriel and his tiny band of refugees flee the chaos in an airship, laden with the best learning and technology that civilization had to offer, back to his farm in Uganda. There, the colonists and the refugees build a Populist utopia in the mountains.

The unmistakable connections between Donnelly's increasing Populist agitation at the time he wrote the novel and its political themes have given *Caesar's Column* a somewhat privileged place in some accounts of nineteenth-century Populism. Richard

Hofstadter's pathfinding analysis of agrarian Populism in *The Age of Reform* (1955), in fact, rests heavily on Donnelly's novel.<sup>3</sup> This "nettlesome if distinctly minor prophetic book" offers, to Hofstadter, "a frightening glimpse into the ugly potential of frustrated popular revolt" (70). As such, it not only serves to explain the anti-Semitic rhetoric of Midwestern Populists like Mary Lease (79),<sup>4</sup> but even Woodrow Wilson's forebodings about monopoly capitalism more than 20 years later (231). Even without reference to Hofstadter, literary critics frequently posit *Caesar's Column* as a synecdoche for the most apocalyptic aspects of nineteenth-century Populism.<sup>5</sup> But Hofstadter wrote *Age of Reform* in the McCarthyite 1950s, and developed his theory of the "paranoid style" in tandem with the Barry Goldwater insurgency in the early 1960s. In his essay explicating the paranoid style, Hofstadter argues that the perspective of seeing vast forces arrayed "against a nation, a culture, a way of life" (4) is most often "the preferred style only of *minority* movements"—in contradistinction, he notes, to the German fascists or Soviet Stalinists, whom he believed succeeded in winning over majorities in their respective countries (7). While his readers could take small solace in radicals attaining, as yet, only minority status in the United States, Hofstadter does find it expedient to quote a 1895 Populist manifesto as exemplary of this style, with the obligatory footnote of Donnelly's preamble (8). Hofstadter's basic framework resonates in the analyses of many later political theorists who view the Gilded Age Populists as the antecedents of more regressive populisms throughout the twentieth century.<sup>6</sup>

Others see Donnelly's Populism as part of the root system of a more constructive range of political possibilities, even though populism's unruly energy also engenders some ambivalence.<sup>7</sup> In his monumental *Democratic Promise* (1976), Lawrence Goodwyn straightforwardly characterizes third-party Populism as realizing in good measure a progressive alternative politics to the entrenched, binary Republican and Democrat establishment. In direct contrast to Hofstadter, who alleges a nostalgia for Jacksonian agrarianism when he writes, "The utopia of the Populists was in the past, not the future" (62-3), Goodwyn says the Populists treated the nation's past as an adaptable resource, not a monolithic myth: though they "would appear to involve a backward look toward a Jeffersonian ethos, they would speak less to the past, or to their contemporaries, than to the future" (xix). Though stump orators like Donnelly often brought a revolutionary fervor to their Populist apologetics, Populism was in broad strokes more reformist in scope. As Goodwyn cogently argues, the actual political program of the People's Party advanced solutions to political problems that did not fundamentally alter the terms of the American social contract; the reformers thought of themselves in continuity with a grassroots democratic tradition, and defensibly so. But the movement fed off the apocalyptic urgency of firebrands like Lease and Donnelly. As a consequence, even though Populism made room for women and minority advocates in its big tent, that tent was also capacious enough to include outright racism and paranoid conspiracy theories.

Donnelly's career as a popular author exemplifies Populism's less judicious approaches toward the wild energies of democratic politics in his attempts to revolutionize the accepted paradigms of natural science and literary history. As Martin Ridge notes in his thorough biography, though Donnelly was a renowned man of letters by the early nineties, he was not universally acclaimed. His first book, *Atlantis: The Antediluvian World* (1882), was a bestseller, though reputable scientists regarded his argument—that all of Western civilization owed its greatest accomplishments to the cultural heritage of ancient Atlantis, now swallowed by the ocean—as hokum. His next two books—one which predicted a geological cataclysm and one which tried to provide that Francis Bacon was Shakespeare—were about as critically lauded as *Atlantis* and much less financially successful.<sup>8</sup>

Perhaps because of his growing reputation as a crackpot, and perhaps because the subject matter of the book was so “revolutionary not to say inflammatory,”<sup>9</sup> *Caesar's Column* was published pseudonymously (Ridge 265). Though the book sold well, Donnelly did not reveal his authorship to his own political constituents until the National Farmers' Alliance and Industrial Union convened in December of 1890. Already “projected into national leadership,” his fight to retain presidency of the Minnesota Alliance Labor Union was cemented into certain victory when it became known that he had written the apocalyptic novel (277). Afterward, he was proudly identified as the author of *Caesar's Column* in *Donnelliana: An Appendix to Caesar's*

*Column* (1892), written by one of Donnelly's associates largely to raise Donnelly's political profile. Being the author of *Caesar's Column*, in short, was integral to Donnelly's rise in the Populist movement in the early 1890s, even as it bolstered his national notoriety as a crank.

Into this context, Donnelly delivered the polemic for which he is best remembered: the preamble to the "Omaha platform" of the People's Party in 1892. The author of *Caesar's Column* drew on agrarian mythology rooted in a Jeffersonian ideal of American democracy. In Donnelly's soaring rhetoric, freedom and prosperity belongs to a landed yeomanry, a myth of the tamed wilderness filtered through values inherited from the Jacksonian age of westward expansion. Critics and historians tend to highlight Donnelly's apocalyptic language of "a nation brought to the verge of moral, political, and material ruin," as well as the specter of "A vast conspiracy... organized on two continents," and appropriately so. This is clearly prophetic rhetoric in the tradition of the jeremiad.<sup>10</sup> He warns that "two hostile camps" lay in "wait only for the drum-beat and the trumpet to summon them to armed conflict," and it draws into the Populist camp a diverse array of political groups whose common interest is in a "nation"—that is, America—"brought to the verge of moral, material, and political ruin." It is not coincidence that these images correspond so closely to the structure and climax of *Caesar's Column*, and the images Donnelly evokes in his preamble strive to knit together a sense of common class interest under the aegis of a new political party.

Tension between nation and class remained nestled inside the rhetoric of the Populist revolt. Though most talk of “battle,” “conflict,” or “revolution” throughout the 1880s did not call for bloodshed,<sup>11</sup> people were certainly angry, and the Civil War served as an apt revolutionary metaphor for Leonidas L. Polk in 1891 as he traveled the country, trying to gin up support for a third party.<sup>12</sup> Stirring up the living memory of the most deadly and divisive conflict in U.S. history was not uncommon practice in electioneering, but it did not exactly nurture comity between conflicting regional identities. As his protagonist avers in the *Caesar’s Column*, Donnelly himself sought to avoid political revolution fomenting another civil war.<sup>13</sup> That does not mean he was not committed to change. As a lecturer for the Minnesota Farmers Alliance, he was particularly sensitized to the hardships of agrarian life in his grassroots contact with common folk.<sup>14</sup> The United States had already undergone the turbulent transition from an agrarian to an industrial economy in the middle of the nineteenth century; by the 1890s, it was in the nascent stages of the transition from monopoly capitalism to the decentralized flow of extranational capital.<sup>15</sup> With the deprivations of capitalism visible everywhere and felt by a majority of Americans, the language of class had the potential to regional, gender, and racial boundaries. In order to achieve political goals, political parties are by necessity something of a coalitional hodgepodge, a cold fact most Populist leaders recognized, yet struggled to finesse into their *realpolitik*. And so Populist rhetoric (like most populist rhetoric) fell back on the language of nation, even

though what the Populists offered was essentially a class-based critique. Though the agrarian ideology may have carried the Populist agenda to fruition in the Progressive Era after the turn of the century,<sup>16</sup> Donnelly's preamble reaches beyond divisions of race and gender (to a limited extent) to forge his audience into a cohesive whole precisely by hinging it on national identity.

But a common interest in the fate of the nation did not preserve the Populist revolt from collapse. Laura Grattan argues that "internal contests over race, gender, and national identity" were central to Populists' "efforts to enact horizontal popular power" (54). But horizontal popular power—that is, class interests—did not prevent the People's Party from being co-opted by William Jennings Bryan into the Democrat Party in 1896, and national Populist leader Charles W. Macune's litmus test for Populist political solidarity, the federal subtreasury, finally died on Bryan's cross of gold.<sup>17</sup> The Populists also struggled to reconcile the interests of urban laborers with their own, and racism strangled the potential alliances between white and black farmers' alliances in the South.<sup>18</sup> Despite the Populists' best efforts, they ultimately failed to create a viable third party in their own time in large part because they were unable to reconcile multiple coalitional interests into a cohesive political vision of a new American class. But the discourse they fostered has remained, not least in the fact of cleaving the language of threatened class interest to the ideology of producerism—to which subscribe the people who believe that they make things, create jobs, and materially

drive economic growth. Sacvan Bercovitch might have noted this development as simply another in a long line of the jeremiad's permutations, all working to identify American striving with the ideological goals of the middle class. And it is that, in part. But the other part is the ways in which this particular class identity ultimately dissolves attachment to America, a dissolution—the effect of an irreconcilable division—expressed in terms of space and time.

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### **As a City on a Mountain (in Uganda)**

Of all the books examined in this dissertation, *Caesar's Column* is probably the one which adheres in its form the closest to the narrative logic and tropes of the jeremiad.<sup>19</sup> The cleavage has been noted by several critics, most notably Lee Schwening, who explicates the resonances in detail, and whose account I cannot avoid replicating to some extent.<sup>20</sup> As we examine key scenes in the novel, I will also draw attention to the motifs of spatial and temporal distance. The moments in which Donnelly is at his most jeremiadic are also moments in which he lays particular stress upon distances in space and time. He starts before the novel proper even commences, in an introduction addressed "To the Public."

Here we find Donnelly wishing that his novel, "under the providence of God, do good to this generation and posterity!" (3). He also identifies himself as a "prophet [who] is not responsible for the event he foretells. He may contemplate it with

profoundest sorrow" (3). To avoid any misunderstanding: Donnelly explicitly positions himself as a prophet offering a lament, one privileged with insight into historical *telos*. He goes on to warn readers about historical forces which will "eventuate in the overthrow of society and the destruction of civilization," which can be avoided if society reaffirms "the essentials of religion," though with an emphasis on "deeds, not creeds." He is even prepared to accept the fact that not everyone will take his jeremiad to heart: "Some will say the events herein described are absurdly impossible" (3). While no friend to orthodox religion,<sup>21</sup> the religious sentiment which inflects his apocalyptic vision often invokes providence and the divine in moments layered with Donnelly's faith in historical overdetermination. The overdetermination is a dichotomy between mutually opposed forces: "society divides itself into two hostile camps; no white flags pass from the one to the other. They wait only for the drum-beat and the trumpet to summon them to armed conflict" (4). (At this point, you may recall the phrasing of his preamble.) All of this derives from the lineage of the Puritan jeremiad; taken altogether, the "impossible" events are not Donnelly's technological prognostications, but the cataclysms that destroy the Western world at the novel's climax. The very idea that there may be two classes locked in a life-or-death dialectical struggle certainly might strike some readers in Donnelly's time as difficult to swallow, but because Donnelly frames his novel as a jeremiad, he still holds out hope that his prophetic voice will arrest people in their backsliding.

One particular impossibility requires a little more explication: the novel's setting, one hundred years hence. It is not the case that Donnelly's reading public was unfamiliar with the conceit of utopian novels set in the future; the late nineteenth century saw a tremendous proliferation of American literary utopias, not least of which was Edward Bellamy's lightning rod, *Looking Backward* (1888). But many of them, as Jean Pfaelzer observes, did not in any immediate way depict the transition from Now to Then.<sup>22</sup> *Caesar's Column* is one of the few that does. To do so he invokes a naturalist analogy: "There is an acceleration of movement in human affairs even as there is in the operations of gravity" (4). Stuart Culver argues that Donnelly's synthesis of pastoralism, apocalypse, and utopia points to a broader trend in nineteenth-century historiography to conflate natural and social history. If *Caesar's Column* fits into the cosmology sketched in his previous work,<sup>23</sup> the social catastrophe for which Donnelly sets the stage *is* and *is like* a natural catastrophe—an evolutionary bottleneck that winnows cultural progress to its essentials. In a rhetorical move that might have channeled the ghost of Jonathan Edwards, he reconfigures an impossibility—his futurological speculation on the coming catastrophe—into an inexorable natural law.<sup>24</sup> And it's a law of historical overdetermination, as Donnelly's invocations of "posterity" and "the event he foretells," drawing attention to the distance between the readership's contemporary period and the setting of the novel, set a hundred years in the future. That distance,

though, is presented as the logical extrapolation of a natural law, and the natural law of acceleration toward catastrophe—born from the divisive conflict between “two hostile camps”—is the very thing Donnelly prophesies against. Distance in time supplies the power of Donnelly’s prophetic warning, a jeremiad against the consequences of class warfare.

Let us linger for just a moment longer on how Donnelly generates his prophetic power in this introduction, because it informs everything that follows. Having established distance in time as a key motif, he buttresses it with the authority of natural law. But the evidence of that natural law lies in Donnelly’s futurological speculation. The class conflict that is already happening in his own country is not what Donnelly laments, but “the event he foretells.” Though he invokes Providence, and though his protagonist, Gabriel, expends much energy in one memorable scene haranguing a church congregation, the prophetic authority he invents for himself comes from a proleptic invocation of an apocalypse he hopes to avert. The images of that apocalypse, summoned forth from the future, are immediate and terrifying. The vast temporal distance of a century signifies the outcome of a historically overdetermined class war. The science-fictionality of Donnelly’s strategy here is the source of his prophetic authority. In both *Caesar’s Column* and *The Iron Heel*, the play of distances of space and time again and again signify the stakes of class conflict.

With a great gulf of time establishing the authority for Donnelly's intervention, he next sets to work setting up the motif of distance in space. The first chapter of the narrative proper, opens with Gabriel surveying the wonders of futuristic New York City. But in his mind, he turns "back to the old homestead, amid the high mountain valleys of Africa; to the primitive, simple shepherd-life." From the Darwin Hotel, he writes to his brother, "This gorgeous, gilded room fades away, and I see the leaning hills, the trickling streams, the deep gorges where our wooly thousands graze; and I hear once more the echoing Swiss horns of our herdsmen reverberating from the snow-tipped mountains" (9). From the outset, Donnelly signifies his commitment to agrarian values, evoking the pastoral mode. Pastoral motifs recur only sporadically throughout the text, but emerge most forcefully in two more occasions.<sup>25</sup> One is the final chapter, when Gabriel and his companions escape the apocalyptic violence of the Brotherhood's revolution, and they found a new utopian society in the mountains of Uganda. We will examine that in more detail later. The other key evocation of the pastoral mode occurs when Gabriel and Max marry Estella and Christina on the Jansens' farm. All of these scenes set the images of pastoral paradise far from the urban centers—at a great geographical distance. The vast distances involved uphold the jeremiad's purpose of illustrating the mutually exclusive class value systems and the necessity of committing to only one.

Marrying on the Jansens' farm, well outside the New York City limits, Gabriel, Max, Estella, and Christina enjoy their joint honeymoon free from the cares of impending revolution, but not free from political implication.<sup>26</sup> In the ribaldry of their garden idyll, Max jokes that Gabriel is "about to marry a girl with pedigree, and I another without one," to which Christina ripostes: "I am 'Christina Carl's Dotter,' and 'Carl' was the son of 'John'... I have a long pedigree; and I am very proud of it; and what is more, they were all good, honest, virtuous people" (183). Estella, you may recall, is descended from the closest thing the United States has to a founding monarch, George Washington, and the other from Scandinavian "plain people." Max is himself the scion of a family crushed by the plutocrats. The double-marriage represents a strategic set of unions that unite agrarians, aristocrats, and plain people against the wealthy. As the bucolic interlude draws to a close, Donnelly speckles the chapter with shades of Vergil's poetry and a paean to the technology of animal husbandry. More significantly, he links the provenance of Gabriel and Max's wives' ancestries to an agrarian mythos.<sup>27</sup> He evokes the domesticated cow, husbanded over hundreds of generations, as a eugenic metonym for "Aryan" civilization. The double-wedding serves to link Gabriel and Estella culturally to Christina of the "milk-maiden daughters," so intimately associated with "the foundation on which to build civilization" (187).<sup>28</sup> This patch of land, the protagonists' temporary bulwark against the decline of western civilization, is located "about twelve miles beyond the built-up portions of the suburbs,

in a high and airy neighborhood, and contained about ten acres of land” (175). This pocket utopia is, in short, a just-so intersection of culturally and genetically inherited traits—literalized in the provenance of Estella and Christina’s ancestry—and physical separation from the city.

The greatest distance represented in the novel is, of course, that between New York City and Gabriel’s plantation in the mountains of Uganda. The specificity of Uganda and why Donnelly settled on it as Gabriel’s home is a bit puzzling, but there are some suggestive threads we might tentatively weave together to understand it.<sup>29</sup> The Uganda of 1889 was beset by factional religious and political conflicts, which would eventually prompt the British Empire to consolidate the northern great lakes region of East Africa into a colonial protectorate in 1894 in order to fortify its own interests in the region.<sup>30</sup> Nothing in *Caesar’s Column* refers to the process by which Uganda came to be settled by Swiss shepherds and miners and, apparently, almost entirely depopulated of its native kingdoms and their inhabitants, but that depopulation might be related to contemporary internecine conflicts. At the time Donnelly was writing, Swiss missionaries had established a presence along the southeastern coast, and beyond the influence they exerted in places like Mozambique, they were often the source of European accounts of the various peoples in these regions, which were often amateur ethnographies sketched.<sup>31</sup> But it is not clear that the Weltstein plantation is run by missionaries at all, and Gabriel’s pieties (following

Donnelly's, I suspect) are decidedly universalist rather than particularly Presbyterian or Calvinist. The nineteenth century was the high tide of Western colonialism; not just with the European "scramble" for Africa, but also with the United States' expansion from Atlantic to Pacific. Homologies can be made between the depiction of Africa throughout the 1800s as a "dark continent," waiting to be filled with the blessings of European civilization, and the myths of the Western frontier of the North American interior,<sup>32</sup> although I scruple to lean heavily on those homologies alone, since they apply broadly to the continent, rather than Uganda in particular. More significantly, though, Lake Victoria is the source of the Nile, and Donnelly's particular interest in ancient Egypt in *Atlantis* lends the river's own origins in the sub-Saharan continent the aura of being civilization's wellspring, a trope imported into *Caesar's Column*.<sup>33</sup>

Donnelly's well-established cosmology, in which evolutionary bottlenecks winnow decadent civilizations to their hardiest, most productive, and most intelligent members seems most apt to his selection of locale. As the Nile was the source of the ancient Egyptian empire's flowering, so it may serve, for Donnelly, as the source of civilization's redemption. The trope of the dark, uncivilized continent and the city on a hill (mountains), coupled with the founding of utopia at the source of one of the world's most storied rivers, all support the jeremiadic purpose of *Caesar's Column*: an errand into the wilderness to bring the light back to the world. What is more, it is on nearly the opposite side of the globe from New York City; not quite the antipodes, but a

landlocked garden in a place that, at the time, was considered the social and geographical opposite of Western civilization. And only a certain class of people is allowed entry.

Each of these Edenic evocations is expressed in the pastoral mode, which is contrasted sharply with the industrial aesthetic of New York City, the metropole of Western civilization and the seat of oligarchic power. The very first scene of the novel—in which Gabriel lets his mind drift across the Atlantic to the mountains of Uganda—establishes the need for physical distance. As he pastoral reverie is interrupted, Gabriel remarks, “But my dream is gone. The roar of the mighty city rises around me like the bellow of many cataracts” (9). It is a moment not unlike the locomotive whistling so rudely past Emerson’s copse, as Leo Marx argued in *The Machine in the Garden*.<sup>34</sup> The city immediately challenges Gabriel (and his readers) to retain the memory of the garden in the belly of the machine. This moment, coming immediately after Donnelly establishes the conceit of distance in time in his introduction, establishes the conceit of distance in space. Gabriel’s inability to retain the utopian memory of his home represents the power of the industrial, oligarchic hegemony. The utopian dream—which is, in this novel, a reality, albeit one on another continent—and the crushing immediacy of the urban machine are two mutually incompatible modes of existence. The dream cannot be realized in the West.

This memory, this dream, is conspicuously located in the East, in Uganda, whence the Swiss colonist traveled with samples of wool and ore. Thus Gabriel dutifully follows, at least at first, the course Berkeley charted for empire in the early eighteenth century, and on which Josiah Strong drew for his vision of westward expansion in the late nineteenth.<sup>35</sup> Richard Hofstadter argued in *Age of Reform* that a great many of the farmers who settled the frontier throughout the age of expansion did so because of the land's value, not because they valued the land (43). This is, in fact, largely the story behind Donnelly's own migration from Philadelphia to Nininger, Minnesota, a city he co-founded in 1856 with an eye toward profiting from a rise in land value.<sup>36</sup> And like many ventures in land speculation, both Donnelly and Nininger foundered upon the complex economics of expansion, infrastructure, and boom-and-bust cycles that characterized the late nineteenth century. Gabriel's dream, however, is shattered by urban industrialism, not by periodic economic depressions and the exigencies of real estate value. But here Donnelly identifies the vagaries of agrarian production with the inescapable reach of the oligarchic machine, as did the disenfranchised farmers, entrepreneurs, and non-industrial laborers who comprised the Populist revolt. Gabriel has gone west, and the West does not even permit him the uninterrupted memory of his garden home. Urban alienation thus extends outward from the city, touching even the lives of Swiss shepherds in Uganda. At the novel's outset, nowhere is far enough to escape the reach of the oligarchs.

As the narrative progresses, the conflict of pastoral dream and urban nightmare develops into a dialogue. Alexander Saxton describes this dialogue as “a kind of binary constellation and the power generated was that of a double wish fulfillment through justification of the elect and confusion and torture of all enemies” (231). In Donnelly’s cosmology, the oligarchic machine’s eradication of pastoral virtues provokes and justifies the apocalyptic uprising that ultimately swallows it. Like Jean Pfaelzer, Saxton interprets this as Donnelly’s attempt to resolve the problem of transition from anti-utopia to utopia (230, 233). Indeed, the slippage between the pastoral mode and the mode of literary naturalism leads Pfaelzer to classify *Caesar’s Column* as an “apocalyptic utopia,” a kind of nineteenth-century utopia whose key feature was that it “attempted to represent historical process” (112).<sup>37</sup> The shadow of apocalypse hangs over even the double-wedding at the Jansens’ farm. Like Gabriel’s initial dream of his mountain home upon his first contact with New York, this pastoral dream also “faded away, and the storm came down, at last, heavy and dark and deadly” (188). Once again, we see that pastoral utopia and industrial anti-utopia are mutually incompatible. Even the twelve miles between city and country is insufficient to reconcile the tension. As we saw earlier, the pastoral honeymoon helps Donnelly attempt to weld several types of people together into a single class interest. Only once this union of class interests is achieved can the deluge break forth and sweep away the oligarchic machine. And it is only the apocalyptic uprising, which destroys the western civilization, that ends the

oligarchic machine's hegemony around the world. Whereas Gabriel had come to New York precisely because Uganda was not far enough away, the impending doom of civilization finally makes it just far enough for a better, more just civilization to be born anew in those mountains.

When Gabriel and his band complete the exodus from New York to the mountains of the moon in their airship, the only natives Gabriel identifies are "the remnants of that curious white race first described by Stanley"; still, the refugees build a "wall so thick and strong that it would be impossible for any force... to batter it down" (231). The Uganda of the 1980s is totally estranged from historical developments at the time of Donnelly's writing by its removal into the future and by its distance from the United States—a spatiotemporal place where a new republic might "reside outside of the historical process" (Axelrad 54).<sup>38</sup> As a jeremiad, *Caesar's Column's* science-fictionally distances its readers in time, geography, and nationality from Donnelly's present circumstances places it outside the framework of American promise, but that very process intensifies the exclusivity of the city on the Ugandan hill. Militantly isolationist and rabidly committed to statist intervention on behalf of Jeffersonian ideals, Gabriel's government actively discourages the land speculation at the heart of Hofstadter's analysis of the agrarian myth (237). In this *aetas aurea*, however, remain echoes and reinforcements of other inequalities. The government is divided into three classes, of which the "producers," who are the "workmen in the

towns and the farmers and mechanics in the country," are the largest and most heavily represented by the legislature (234).<sup>39</sup> The other two branches are fundamentally "employers" or those employed in letters and science. The utopia in *Caesar's Column* is therefore removed by space and time *and* nationality from the United States (even as it does draw on a much more globalized mythology of decline and renewal that transcends national discourse), and it instantiates a producerist class at the top of a political hierarchy.

Each of these moves in *Caesar's Column* outlines specific attributes found in the class of the Elect, signs for the receivers of Donnelly's jeremiad to recognize so that they may know if belong to that class—and if not, the consequences they will reap if they do not swiftly alter their class consciousness. As Lee Schweninger remarks, the novel is full of sermonic moments. Didacticism is characteristic of utopian novels in this period, but Donnelly repeatedly contrives opportunities for his protagonist to deliver sermons—as opposed to being sermonized to by occupants of the utopia he is visiting. Like Jeremiah, Gabriel repeatedly "puts himself in physical danger and his enemies cast him out" (Schweninger 113).<sup>40</sup> First, Gabriel blows his covert surveillance of the oligarchs to plead with them not to massacre potential rebels with chemical weapons. Full of prophetic pathos, he offers himself on the altar of their mercy, vowing to "wear the flesh from off my bones, if I can reconcile the castes of this wretched society, and save civilization" (Donnelly 107). It goes as well as one might expect, and after a

successful escape, Gabriel accompanies Max to a workingmen's meeting and then to a church service. At the former, Gabriel tries and fails to persuade the workingmen out of anarchic revolution; at the latter, he attempts and fails to persuade the congregants that their Spencerian, hedonist creed is an abomination. The workingmen—many of whom suffer Lamarckian genetic deficiencies due to their mistreatment—refuse to heed Gabriel, and the meeting is broken up by the police; the church service ends with Gabriel and Max bolting for refuge under a fusillade of the worshippers' accoutrements. These scenes provide occasions for Gabriel to proselytize in vain to groups that ultimately fall outside the class he forges with Max, Estella, and Christina on the farm twelve miles outside New York. Political salvation is rejected by the comfortable upper class, the deformed lower class, and the oligarchs themselves. Gabriel repeatedly laments the blindness of those who have refused to listen (137, 146), as well as the passive role he seems doomed to play. Gabriel laments to Max that "we witness the working-out of great causes which we did not create." In these moments, Gabriel becomes the mouthpiece for Donnelly's overdetermined historiography: "When man permits the establishment of self-generating evil he must submit to the effect. Our ancestors were blind, indifferent, heartless. We live in the culmination of their misdeeds" (135-136). When Gabriel bemoans his inability to reach the hearts of his contemporaries, blaming his ancestors, he is, of course, pointing

outward toward Donnelly's contemporary readers—a fact of which many of them were keenly aware.<sup>41</sup>

As Alex Beringer argues, Donnelly primes readers to search their own reality for auguries of the future he prophesies in *Caesar's Column*, but not merely for the sake of discovering the possibilities. Instead, Gabriel directly places moral—that is, political—responsibility squarely on his readers' shoulders, specifically charging them to avert this particular social catastrophe. In the chapter titled "How the World Came to Be Ruined," Max shows Gabriel several journalistic accounts from the late nineteenth century, telling him that "even a hundred years ago the air was full of prophecies" (71). According to Beringer, Donnelly's readers would have been the ones who could, following Gabriel's example, treat "every document in the public sphere [as] an object of suspicion and, accordingly, a chance to re-create this invigorating experience of sifting and searching for evidence of a sublime underlying system" (53). While he does acknowledge the millenarian tropes Donnelly uses (55), the practice of storing up records of daily events and sifting through them for providential significance was already part and parcel of hermeneutic practices that dated back to the Puritans and deeply informed the assumptions governing their jeremiads.<sup>42</sup> Donnelly explicitly signals that practice at the very start of his novel with his address to the public. So even in these moments where Gabriel bears prophetic witness to his contemporaries, Donnelly is bearing witness to his. The science-fictional distance in time between

present and future once again, as a jeremiad should, turns readers' attention to the apocalyptic stakes in the looming class conflict.

The apocalyptic climax ultimately facilitates the revitalization of the civilizing errand by stripping it of its American context and replanting it in the mountains of Uganda. *Caesar's Column's* contrast of the industrial present against the "bucolic past," as Schweninger puts it,<sup>43</sup> shores up the claims of a racially homogenous, property-owning yeomanry to political power in a world rapidly moving away from a Jeffersonian economic model (if it had ever really rested on one in the first place). As Gabriel explicitly states, the function of the Ugandan colony's laws is to "*protect ourselves from ourselves; for the worst enemies of a people are always found in their own midst*" (232, emphasis in original). In other words, the system must be made to protect the claims of this particular class against the claims of other classes or face catastrophe. We know that many Populists did regard *Caesar's Column* as an apt prophecy for their time, and even though he distorts some of the features of Populism and the novel itself to fit his analysis of agrarian radicalism, Hofstadter correctly identified agrarian mythology as ascendant in the Populist movement.<sup>44</sup> And this novel, more than the politics of the People's Party itself, demonstrates that the cultural legacy of Populism shares some continuity with the evolution of producerism into movement conservatism later in the 1950s.<sup>45</sup>

Because Donnelly's ideology is a *petit bourgeois* producerism, it cannot help but enshrine inequality into law. The providential calamity, which has overdetermined the evolutionary bottleneck of civilizational collapse, winnows to their most essential—that is, the most rooted in agrarian, Populist values—the political tools to be used in progressive social reconstruction. The peculiar, quasi-republican constitution erected by the remnant is one of those tools. It breaks society into three classes with competing claims, with workingmen garnering the most constitutional power. This political hierarchy in the Ugandan garden is Donnelly's attempt to reckon with the power of monopoly capitalism, and Donnelly seems to sense the need to reckon with the transition from monopoly capitalism to decentralized Empire.<sup>46</sup> The fact that his jeremiad terminates in legislating class divisions and aesthetically justifying them by appealing to a pastoral aesthetic is troubling. In part, Donnelly simply cannot resist the colonization of the future by some form of capitalism, which Fredric Jameson warns against.<sup>47</sup> This particular extrapolation of American populism went a bit further than the People's Party's demands, but it was a logical extension of the basic critique of the system. The legitimate grievances of an alienated class found a prophetic articulation in *Caesar's Column*, warning the public of a coming social disaster, thus troubling the dominant organizing political unit of Donnelly's day. But the vast distances in time and space which Donnelly introduced to emphasize the apocalyptic stakes and to draw necessary boundaries between the class of the plain people and their political

opponents also render the United States irrelevant to their class interests. By relocating their political imaginary to Uganda in the then-distant future, the Populist class escapes America as a vehicle of prophetic fulfillment or containment.

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## **1908—The Rising Tide and Impending Ebb of American Socialism**

Populism in its agrarian-producerist form was dead by the turn of the century. While the Democrats seemed content to keep nominating William Jennings Bryant for president, even as the great reformer's views grew more and more distant from the American mainstream, the socialists had gained some momentum in the last prewar decades. Though tensions with organized labor would continue to plague the more theoretically doctrinaire socialists well into the twentieth century, the workers of the United States (if not the world) felt united in common cause against the excesses of monopoly capitalism. It was this, after all, that had momentarily appealed to farmers and industrial workers alike during the high tide of anti-capitalist revolt. With the reformist/Populist constituencies largely domesticated by the Democrat Party, those still feeling overwhelmed by sweeping change on a civilizational scale found a refuge of sorts in the Socialist Party.

Jack London came of age during the 1890s, sailing to Japan, marching toward Washington in Kelly's Industrial Army, whiling away a brief period in the Erie Co. hoosegow, and—most famously—spending a year in the Alaskan wilderness looking for

gold in all the wrong places but finding a rich vein of literary material to mine. And it was in 1896, before lighting out in the gold rush but after returning home from his cross-country tramp alongside the dispossessed vagrants comprising Kelly's and Coxey's Armies, in the year of Bryant's crucifixion on a cross of free silver, that London—that American avatar of defiant masculinity—joined the Oakland Socialist Party. By the time *The Iron Heel* was published in 1908, London, already a celebrated author, had also established his reputation as a socialist lecturer, delivering the speech later published as "Revolution" across the country. Following the events of Bloody Sunday in 1905, London encouraged American support for the Russian socialists resisting Tsar Nicholas II.

There was a substantial feeling among American socialists that Marx's most radical prophecies really might come true "here, now," as London put it near the end of his speech. When the Californian writer issued his challenge to those opposing the socialist revolution, "Stop it who can" (156), he expressed an article of faith held by most Marxians in the West: capitalism was in its final throes, and with its final convulsions would come the socialist future. Strangely enough, the political ascent of the Socialist Party since 1900 suggested that a socialist revolution might succeed in the United States without armed insurrection. Ignatius Donnelly presented violent apocalypse in 1890 as a foregone conclusion, but Upton Sinclair was able to close his otherwise ghastly 1906 novel, *The Jungle*, with a hopeful prophecy of socialist triumph

through the ballot box. In this, the spirit of Edward Bellamy was alive and well.

American socialists, as represented by the Socialist Party, were cautiously sanguine about their prospects in the twentieth century's first decade.

And if they couldn't win enough hearts and minds to vote them into power, examples in Europe and Russia offered the possibility of remaking the world through force. Even as London preached the inevitability of socialism from the lectern, *The Iron Heel* shows that he was skeptical as to the timeframe of its success. The novel famously opens a gap between the revolutionary activity that could arise from contemporary conditions and the final form of a utopian socialism that could scarcely be imagined. The novel presents itself as a found manuscript written by Avis Everhard sometime in the 1930s. In her manuscript, Avis documents the rise of the proto-fascist oligarchy (the titular Iron Heel) and the germination of a mass revolution that, in her lifetime, ends in bloody failure. But a future historian named Anthony Meredith, writing from within a socialist utopia, alludes in his introduction—which frames the novel—and footnotes to the eventual triumph of the socialist cause through long, bloody struggle. Avis is known to the Meredith and his contemporaries as the wife of Ernest Everhard, a martyr whose exploits as a revolutionary freedom fighter have enshrined him in their history as a hero. The climax of the book is an abortive uprising in which the agents of the oligarchs crush a revolutionary commune in Chicago, and the novel ends on the eve of another abortive revolution in which Ernest will die, a historical turning point that ushers in the

age of the titular Iron Heel, which is how dissidents refer to the oligarchs who grind egalitarians underfoot for several hundred years.

Like Donnelly and most other utopian writers from the 1870s through the 1910s, London's socialism could only be imagined at great temporal distance from his own time. But the specter of mass violence loomed over it all even as socialists like Victor Berger gained material political power in localities like Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and the Socialist Party ran up exponentially increasing vote totals in presidential races for the charismatic Eugene V. Debs. Why would London write a novel so pessimistic about the possibilities of his own historical moment when the time seemed so ripe for revolution—a nonviolent one at that?

As we saw in *Caesar's Column*, *The Iron Heel* relies upon science-fictional presentations of temporal and spatial distance to heighten a sense of class division. In *The Iron Heel*, we will see the working class occupy a much more central place in this division, as opposed to the producer class of *Caesar's Column*. (London's racism is less overt than Donnelly's; while it recedes into the background, it does not disappear completely.) London uses the science-fictional narrative device of depicting the (distant) socialist future in the marginal annotations of *The Iron Heel*, while the primary text takes the form of a memoir about an abortive uprising in the early twentieth century. London dispenses with the possibility of realizing a distinctly *American* socialism and consolidates the optimism of his jeremiad in a class identity so far

removed in space and time that it transcends not only nationalism but internationalism, becoming truly global in scope. As he declared of the 1905 Russian revolt, "The comradeship of the revolution is alive and warm. It passes over geographical lines, transcends race prejudice" (142). Space and time in *The Iron Heel* signify the degree to which London's jeremiad upholds class over national identity, and thereby enables his readers to consider other Americans to be little more than counter-revolutionaries who must be consigned to the dustbin of history.

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## **In but Not of the Nation**

From the vantage point of 1937, Leon Trotsky could plausibly claim the "incontestable fact" that *The Iron Heel* "foresaw and described the fascist regime as the inevitable result of the defeat of the proletarian revolution" (138). Such a "fact" was indeed plausibly "incontestable," but "inevitable" is often how we describe historical events in a way that is suspiciously consonant with our present desire to have been right all along. Trotsky was probably safer in declaring that the novel bore "the undoubted imprint of 1905": "Jack London not only absorbed creatively the impetus given by the first Russian revolution but also courageously thought over again in its light the fate of capitalist society as a whole" (137). St. Petersburg, however bloody, was not the United States, as contemporary reviews reflect. The *Overland Monthly* acknowledged America's "serious problems," but asserted, "The end in America is to

be reached by a process of peaceful evolution rather than by war" (135). Even socialist critic Joseph Wanhope, while recognizing the probable insufficiency of revolution by vote, averred that as long as "capitalists will abide by the rules of the game," socialists will remain "consistent in our advocacy of the ballot to achieve Socialism." He provided a key addendum, though: "If the point is ever reached when the ruling class refuse to abide by this method, nothing remains for Socialists but armed revolution." In his view, London deserved much credit for "calling attention to these contingencies" (132).<sup>48</sup> What Trotsky saw as inevitability was seen by his American peers as but one possibility, albeit a possibility rooted in the brutal experience of many American socialists.

Unlike Trotsky, Jack London did not have firsthand knowledge of the 1905 Revolution, but as his lecture indicated, he was well aware of it. His daughter, Joan, bluntly declared that it "was of supreme importance, bringing him to full stature as writer and Socialist. Without 1905 *The Iron Heel* would never have been written" (280). She emphasized that while many reform-minded socialists who sought victory through the ballot box panned the novel rather badly, the book grew in stature among socialists and unionists on the front lines of labor struggle.<sup>49</sup> The year after the Tsar crushed the revolt in Russia, the IWW ramped up its attempts to organize strikes even as three of their leaders were framed for a terrorist assassination of Idaho's Populist governor. They sponsored Maxim Gorky's stay in the U.S. and proclaimed solidarity with workingmen overseas.<sup>50</sup> London clearly had the long history of anti-capitalist struggle in mind as he

wrote *The Iron Heel*, given that he has Meredith specifically mention the Haymarket affair and the Idaho frame-up (143-44). Such outrages, according to Joan, formed a continuum with the 1905 revolt. To her father, peaceful democratic processes were clearly insufficient, and the decades since his birth merely proved “his instinctive belief in militant, revolutionary action amply justified” (264). While the violent repression at home and abroad signaled to London the need for much more direct action than the Socialist Party was prepared to perform, his was but one voice, and apparently not the most persuasive one at that. At least, not in the form of *The Iron Heel*. As it turned out, the putatively milquetoast Socialist Party was right to fear that overheated revolutionary rhetoric would be as apt to drive people away as to draw them in, perhaps especially when derived from foreign internecine conflicts like the Russian Revolution.

Socialist leaders like Debs, Berger, and Morris Hillquit tended to present their revolution to the public in the lexicon of the American republican tradition, emphasizing votes and voluntary self-organization.<sup>51</sup> By way of illustration, Hillquit in his *History of Socialism in the United States* (1903) observed the “exceptional position” held by America “among the nations of the earth” (150). Echoing Frederick Jackson Turner’s frontier thesis, Hillquit argued that America’s prosperity was linked to its historically unique situation: an abundance of uncultivated land available to a new nation delinked from the Old World’s established hierarchies. These very factors were, in his view, central to its resistance to socialism, because opportunity and wealth

tended to disincentivize radicalism. But industrialization and the concentration of working people into cities by the end of the nineteenth century had redirected political tension from the agricultural frontier to the swelling urban centers: “In short, the United States, so recently the ideal republic of equal and independent citizens, became the theater of the most embittered class wars and most glaring social contrasts ever witnessed in modern times” (152). Another way to put it is that America’s uniquely good historical luck also made it uniquely susceptible to socialist intervention in Hillquit’s time. His history ends with a survey of the Socialist Party’s gains in elections, media, and membership—clearly staking the future of socialism in the United States on the nation’s existing democratic processes.

Violent uprising seemed a much more viable response to others in socialist circles. The railroad strikes of the previous two decades—especially Attorney General Richard Olney’s crackdown on ostensible radicals following the 1894 Pullman Strike—had underlined for reformers and radicals alike the shared interests of the state and corporate trusts in using state-sanctioned violence to preserve capital’s dominance over workers. But while state violence nudged Eugene Debs toward radical Leftism, Samuel Gompers urged trade unionists to withdraw from partisan politics and to focus on issue advocacy. The tensions among socialists, unionists, and reformers remained throughout the early twentieth century. The 1905 convention of radicals, including Debs, visionary organizer and theorist Daniel De Leon, and activist William Haywood, that resulted in

the Industrial Workers of the World was meant to offer the proletariat an organization that functioned as a union and a conduit for radical political action.<sup>52</sup> The IWW's founding radicalism was matched by escalating rhetoric. By 1912, IWW leader Bill Haywood would declare that "no Socialist can be a law-abiding citizen. When we come together... to overthrow the capitalist system, we become conspirators then against the United States government" (qtd. in Salvatore 253). The U.S. government (somewhat understandably, if not forgivably) reacted strongly to such rhetoric, engaging in two decades of repression of the IWW that were often marked by horrific bloodshed. It is no wonder that the Wobblies (as IWW members came to be known) referred to capitalists and their strikebreaking minions as "the Iron Heel."<sup>53</sup> For many Left radicals, the nation-state was simply an enforcer for global capital, making appeals to American cultural norms and institutions—such as those practiced by Debs—a form of betrayal of the world proletariat. So it was that American socialists were intensely divided on how "American" the revolution ought to be and what kinds of civic protections and norms should, as a result, be ignored.

Reactions to the radicalism of the world proletariat are similar to, but not the same as, nativist fears that Marxism was a foreign doctrine smuggled into America by immigrants.<sup>54</sup> The socialism that attracted widespread support for Eugene Debs in the 1900 and 1904 elections was built on traditional American notions of individual responsibility, citizenship, and republicanism that contrasted sharply with the more

theoretically orthodox (read: European) versions of socialism championed by leaders like De Leon.<sup>55</sup> London's own vision of socialism corresponded with Debs's homegrown radicalism in many ways, not least of which was a personal trajectory that adapted a communitarian individualism brewed in U.S. culture to his revolutionary socialist ideals. This home-brewed socialism fermented in traditional American notions of citizenship but was not bound to them. As he testified in "How I Became a Socialist" (1903), his experience as one of the downtrodden caused his "national patriotism" to leak "out of the bottom of his soul somewhere," though he "finds that he cares more for men and women and little children than for imaginary geographical lines" (127).

That same phrase, "imaginary geographical lines" was used in his "Revolution" speech, making it clear that London's attachment is to class, not nationality. It is also clear, however, that London's evolution as a socialist hinges on his specifically American context. It was in the course of his cross-country march as a tramp-soldier in Kelly's army that he experienced (capitalist) state violence in his brief incarceration, and it was through American interlocutors that Marxism rooted itself in his worldview. Bill Haywood's oft-repeated quip comes to mind: "I've never read Marx's *Capital*, but I have the marks of capital all over my body" (qtd. in Cohen 34).<sup>56</sup> American socialists were not necessarily well-versed in Marx or his European heirs, but the general contours of his diagnosis were legible enough to anybody in the United States who possessed a passing acquaintance with industrial conditions and corporate

malfeasance. But it was the experience of capital in the American context, not the Hegelian schema of Marx's writings, that provided American socialists with their primary theoretical basis. Daniel Bell famously charged American Marxists in 1952 with being too "*in* but not *of* the world": too little attentive to the peculiarities of the American context and too much enthralled with (European) dogmata, which continually fractured socialist coalitions with doctrinaire sectarianism.<sup>57</sup> The problem was that, as Marx and Engels predicted in the *Manifesto*, workers had to deal with their own ruling class first, within their own national contexts, while still maintaining a focus on the endgame of a worldwide proletarian revolution. Reconciling supranational class identity with the specifically American experience of capitalism was a nearly impossible task. American socialists were *of* the world but *in* the United States. Imagining citizenship beyond "imaginary geographical lines" required science fictional acumen.

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## Scry Like an Eagle

Like *Caesar's Column*, *The Iron Heel* is set in the future; also like *Caesar's Column*, it makes use of the conceit of found documents. In Donnelly's case, these take the form of letters written by Gabriel to his brother (or, later, simply addressed to future generations). London presents *The Iron Heel* as an annotated manuscript, a memoir written in the near future but discovered and historically contextualized several hundred years hence.<sup>58</sup> Donnelly's seemingly forgets about his epistolary conceit within

a few chapters, whereas London maintains a semblance of verisimilitude with respect to his conceit throughout the entire novel. *Caesar's Column* evokes the jeremiad in its structure, tone, and tropes to the point of being a jeremiad itself. London does not so closely follow the form of the jeremiad, but *The Iron Heel* is forcefully prophetic and it shares the jeremiad's concern with civilizational crisis and redemption, and his commitment to the aesthetic of the found manuscript is crucial to that end. As we have seen, the political context of *The Iron Heel* was somewhat ambivalent, with some radicals favoring outright revolution and others favoring something more along the lines of incremental reform. All fellow travelers shared a sense that they lived in a critical historical juncture, but not all felt the crisis to be so pressing as to necessitate mass violence. London therefore drew upon jeremiadic discourse to create and sustain a sense of imminent crisis in *The Iron Heel*, accentuating the gulf between the committed revolutionary class and everyone else and prophesying that the future would belong to the vanguard which was willing to do everything in its power to redeem civilization on behalf of the world proletariat.

Though *Caesar's Column* and *The Iron Heel* are occasionally linked—mostly by virtue of the similarity of their apocalyptic climaxes<sup>59</sup>—the most subtle discussion of both books together to date can be found in Philip Wegner's *Imaginary Communities* (2002). He argues that one of utopia's central functions is materially to imagine spatiotemporal ways of social living that make the constant change of modernity

meaningful for communities.<sup>60</sup> Naturally, this is impossible to do without finding meaningful ways to address the evolving forms of global capital. As I mentioned in my introduction, science-fictionality is one way to give concrete form—it is a way for the human imagination to get a real handle on—materially real objects that are otherwise too big or too slippery to grasp. Capital and its relationship to institutional power is one of those things. Wegner argues that by identifying monopoly capitalism so closely with the oligarchs *per se*, Donnelly failed to prophesy “the migration of social hegemony” from the relatively concrete oligarchy and its institutional infrastructure at the end of the Gilded Age to “into some new, as yet untheorized stage (Power)” (123), a symptom of Donnelly’s misguided belief that political reform through existing institutions was the only way to avoid catastrophe.<sup>61</sup> In Donnelly’s time, he argues, social critics may have been possible to imagine whom or what the oligarchs or their apparatuses were. By the time London wrote *The Iron Heel*, capitalism had become such a flexible, totalizing, and global system that even a class-based response to it would have to rethink how such a class would be structured.

Wegner contends not that London had wished to “countenance the consequences” of revolution, but that “the social totality, its horizons now extending far beyond the borders of the individual nation-state, has emerged in an original and... cognitively ungraspable new form” (125). *The Iron Heel*, in other words, was to London more than the sum of its parts: the trusts, the state, the vigilante enforcers, etc. The

corporation, a legal fiction, had emerged as the dominant class, and networks predicated on that legal fiction had established themselves in forms that he dubbed the Iron Heel. To battle the Iron Heel required a new kind of class organization, one that would transcend class differences—differences embodied, in 1907 America, in diverse political organizations like the IWW, the rural reformers, the trade unionists, and the various socialist groups (137-138). *The Iron Heel* is London's attempt to articulate what it might actually feel like for the resistance—the revolutionary vanguard—to coalesce into a class. Ultimately, his fictional revolutionaries must mimic the structure of the Iron Heel. Just as the agents of the Heel are faceless, potentially everywhere, infiltrating any organization (covert or otherwise) that the vanguard manages to get off the ground or co-opt into the revolution, so must be the revolutionaries. The fact that London leaves it open to the reader how, exactly, the revolution eventually succeeds, is part of London's success in recognizing that the forms of political resistance must continually evolve in a dialectic process with the forms of capitalist power.

Though Wegner seems to admire London's ambitious grappling with the demands of revolutionary action in this context, he reads the "increasingly receding horizon" embodied by the text's spatiotemporal lacuna—that centuries-long gap between the end of Avis's manuscript and the emendations that Anthony Meredith makes on it for the readers of his utopian society—as a political stalemate. *The Iron Heel* maps out its revolutionary program in the manner of a corporate bureaucracy,

which erases vital and concrete class demands, in addition to replicating the Heel's nefarious power structure. This is perhaps the most significant point of comparison to *Caesar's Column*. However flawed Donnelly's diagnosis of capital's structure and however regressive his conception of class hierarchy may have been, he charted a path through the process of revolution to utopia. Extrapolating from Wegner, and echoing Arthur C. Clarke, we might say that if Donnelly was wrong, he suffered from a failure of imagination; London, if he, too, was wrong, may have suffered from a failure of nerve. What is not at issue is whether London invoked a prophetic mode—his muscular prose and revolutionary fervor certainly place him firmly in that—but how he proposed to arrest civilizational decline. London's most jeremiadic touch is connecting the seeming hopelessness of the present (or near-future) moment with the utopian promise of the distant future. The distance in space and time embodied by the dialogue between manuscript and annotations once again underlines the unresolvable class tensions of London's moment. To whom is redemption promised? Who builds the city on a hill in London's far-flung future?

The problematic dialogue which embodies the jeremiadic tenor of *The Iron Heel* appears in the first pages of the narrative proper. We are introduced to Avis, anticipating the Second Revolt, worried that it may be "premature," as Meredith informs us in his note that it indeed was (1). On this eve of destruction, she thinks of Ernest, her husband, whom she calls "my Eagle," "the flaming ideal of human

freedom" (1-2). Avis and Meredith have a hermeneutic disagreement as to Ernest's importance to the Second Revolt, but both agree that it is unprecedentedly international. "There has been nothing like it in the history of the world," she writes. "The solidarity of labour is assured, and for the first time will there be an international revolution wide as the world is wide." Meredith concurs that it "was truly international. It was a colossal plan—too colossal to be wrought by the genius of one man alone," and as united as the workers of the world had been, Meredith notes that also were "the united oligarchies of the world" (2). In these details emerge the central tensions that sustain the rest of the narrative.

If Meredith's introduction did not signal it clearly enough, his annotations throughout consistently indicate that he believes Avis's historical perspective to be constrained by her proximity to events and distorted by her adoration for her martyred husband, whereas his perspective is more authoritative, if admittedly sketchier. This tension between the historical longview and the present's fog of war also imparts a sense of doom with Avis's foreboding of the coming revolt—a doom already confirmed by Meredith's introduction, though alleviated in part by the fact of his speaking to us from a utopian future. In his analysis of the novel's dialogical conceptual structure and its relation to Marxist aesthetics, Nathaniel Teich praises London's presentation of the novel through both Avis and Meredith a "dual focus" as appropriate to revolutionary literature. He argues that London's technique presents individual perspectives of anti-

capitalist struggle (Avis) and victory over capitalism (Meredith), but transcends the individual limitations of each.<sup>62</sup> A more apt term, one which reflects the focus on these two characters' perspectives, might be dual *focalization*. Emphasis on focalization reminds us that these are characters with emotional and psychological biases and commitments, and I believe that we are better served to think of them as such. But Teich is right to consider these characters as cornerstones in a dialectical schema, and I tend to agree with him the sense that the tension between these focalized perspectives works to create a more coherent overall political aesthetic. By contrast, Alessandro Portelli reads the novel's dialectical structure as addressing a "vacuum" of realistic, rational paths forward (181). *The Iron Heel* is emblematic for Portelli of American literature's general tendency to leave "black holes" in narratives dealing with revolution—a reticence to "countenance its consequences" (187). Furthermore: "This structure"—that is, the 700-year gap between Avis's and Meredith's narratives—"tells us more about London's attitude toward revolution than all his explicit political statements" (183). In his reading, the gap between Avis and Meredith reveals an inability or unwillingness on London's part to confront the political ramifications of his revolutionary stance. These examples are illustrative of how London's use of dual focalization has remained at the forefront of critical discussion of *The Iron Heel* since the advent of Marxian formal analysis in the mid-1970s, and resolving its political

implications typically frames the critic's judgment of the novel's efficacy as a revolutionary novel.<sup>63</sup>

Those ramifications ultimately hinge on how the revolutionary vanguard constitutes its class identity, a problem that taps into the problems which has plagued class formation across groups with distinct political goals. Building on Trotsky's appreciation of *The Iron Heel*, Paul Stein observes that its dual focalization emphasizes "the transience and relative insignificance of individuality when seen in context of the slow but relentless evolution of human society" (90). That is, Avis's idealization of her husband—which tends to affirm his individual importance—is undermined by Meredith's persistent addenda, which always remind his readers of the larger world-historical forces that eventually brought about the utopian Brotherhood of Man.<sup>64</sup> Avis and Meredith's joint authority, by contrast, is always upheld wherever the global revolutionary working class is mentioned. Stein interprets the defeat of the novel's middle-class reformers by the ever-adaptable oligarchs as a sign of the need for "a socialist party, fortified by invincible theory and comprised of fighting revolutionaries" (88). That is, the bourgeoisie must pick sides or get crushed between them. He notes the similarity between London's fictional revolutionary movement and V. I. Lenin's outline for the same in *What Is to Be Done?* (1902)—an organization that, as Wegner has observed, adapts to and adopts the form of the Heel itself.<sup>65</sup> But in endorsing a socialist organization "fortified by invincible theory and comprised of

fighting revolutionaries,” Stein also unwittingly confirms Daniel Bell’s diagnosis of Left Marxism in the United States of the time as a loose gathering of socialists whose twin overriding commitments to ideological purity and radical action rendered them perpetually fragmented and at war with each other. Francis Shor suggests that, though the marginal utopia of Meredith’s annotations holds the future open to socialist triumph, London presents a basically pessimistic view of internecine radical politics, which undermines the text’s utopian optimism.<sup>66</sup> So despite the international character of the revolutionaries who eventually overthrow the Iron Heel, London’s uncompromising concept of class consciousness seems to reproduce the dogmatism that has persistently divided would-be revolutionaries throughout the last hundred-plus years.

Though division across diegetic space and time—represented by the literal spatial division between annotations and narrative proper—signifies social chasms that London is both unable and unwilling to bridge, I would suggest that this is more indicative of optimism than pessimism. The spatial and temporal realization of true international solidarity is relegated to the margins (Meredith’s annotations), but its seeds are planted in the more conventional, linear testimony by Avis. Avis spends the narrative in and about the United States, it is true, removed from London’s time by mere decades but occupying the same space—most notably the Sonoma Hills in California, London’s own home in his last years and, not-so-coincidentally, the place

whence the Everhard manuscript is recovered. She also bears eyewitness to the bloody Chicago Commune. Meredith writes his annotations from Ardis, a “wonder-city” whose construction is begun in Avis’s lifetime, and whose wondrousness has only been increased in the Brotherhood of Man era. The locations of Ardis and Asgard, the other wonder-city mentioned by Meredith, are nonspecific—they may be located in continental North America, perhaps elsewhere. Even though they provide a concrete link between near-future and far-future, they are located nowhere particular. Much like the jeremiad itself, which ardently condemns backsliding and predicates a present crisis upon the failure to adhere to opprobrious standards, *The Iron Heel* offers a detailed catalogue of moral-political abuses and a civilizational catastrophe that flows from them. As Bercovitch argued, though, it also affirms a nigh-inevitable redemption of civilization for those who act upon the correct precepts. London renders the gap between ideal and reality—which is to say, a reality he characterizes by decline and rampant civil corruption—by presenting a gap between legible, concrete places (Sonoma, Chicago) and imaginary places (the wonder-cities). This is just another layer of dual focalization. Avis is identified with the places closer to home, while Meredith is identified with a city on a hill just over the horizon. In jeremiadic fashion, this reconciliation between a more immediate Here and a more distant There resolves the tension between decline and redemption—but only, again, for the covenanted remnant, for a particular class. As conceptually important as the Iron Heel itself is, more

important to the narrative's jeremiadic function is being able to classify the non-*Elect* as counter-revolutionaries.

Both *Avis* and *Meredith* refer to the "serfs" conscripted by the oligarchs for the building of what *Meredith* identifies as wonder-cities. *Avis* more colorfully describes their "dull bestiality" (168), while *Meredith* simply provides dry statistics. *Avis* continues to say, "We of the revolution will go on with that great work, but it will not be done by the miserable serfs. The walls and towers and shafts of that fair city [Asgard] will arise to the sound of singing, and into its beauty will be woven, not sighs and groans, but music and laughter" (168-9). This is true in a generational sense, of course, but it also signals a clear distance between the revolutionary class and the counter-revolutionary laboring classes that have knuckled under to the oligarchs.

Earlier in the text, *Ernest* discourses with co-conspirators on the difficulty faced by the proto-revolutionaries in maintaining the general strike as a tactic against the *Iron Heel*. *Ernest* fails to persuade a Gompers-esque trade unionist to maintain solidarity with the socialists, and he prophesies that with skilled labor under its thumb, the oligarchs will use their surplus value generated from pitting various working-classes against each other to build wonder-cities as decadent monuments to themselves. Both *Ernest* and *Meredith* cite *William J. Ghent's Our Benevolent Feudalism* (1902) as a blueprint for the coming dystopia (102). *Ghent* himself, as *Meredith* wryly notes, was no friend to the capitalists, and his tract is a sardonic extrapolation of current trends that,

in retrospect, has aged rather well. Joan London repeatedly affirms it as a key inspiration for *The Iron Heel*,<sup>67</sup> and its warning is implicit, rather than explicit. Ghent shrewdly argues that corporate capitalists will increasingly present themselves as lords to a peonage increasingly beholden via wage-slavery to their masters. While the barons will curtail their worst excesses out of self-interest, the majority of workers will remain docile out of gratitude to the trickle-down patronage, and if they become restless, their exercise of democratic freedoms will signal the shifting contours of the limits by which the oligarchs must abide. In this arrangement, the state will increasingly be used to suppress militant rebellion (as opposed to vigilante groups or strikebreakers like the Pinkertons) in order to maintain the safety and security of satisfied lords and serfs alike. In Ghent's view, the "elastic limit" democracy provides for capitalist exploitation is to the overlords' benefit, because "the mass of mankind are more ready to endure known ills than to fly to others that they know not" (182-3). Mediating institutions like skilled trade unions, therefore, are primarily tools for oligarchs, not instruments for laborer self-protection: slots in a hierarchy.

Any person or institution that does not stand with the revolutionaries is, in Ernest's view, counter-revolutionary, because they maintain the Iron Heel's quasi-feudal hierarchy. This was the logic that led to the creation of the IWW and the perpetual fragmentation of more radical from more conservative socialist groups. More tellingly,

Ernest's prophecy, set down by Avis, is thrice affirmed by Meredith. "Everhards' social foresight was remarkable"; "We cannot but marvel at Everhard's foresight":

And since that day of prophecy have passed away the three centuries of the Iron Heel and the four centuries of the Brotherhood of Man, and today we tread the roads and dwell in the cities that the oligarchs built. It is true, we are even now building still more wonderful wonder-cities, but the wonder-cities of the oligarchs endure, and I write these lines in Ardis, one of the most wonderful of them all. (124)

In these lines, London establishes continuity between Ernest's revolutionary prophecy and Meredith's historically authoritative retrospection. We should consider what else is affirmed, though. The other laboring classes and artists wind up being confirmed as collaborators with the Iron Heel. Everhard prophesies that from under them, "who knows in what day, the common people will rise up out of the abyss; the labour castes and the Oligarchy will crumble away" (125). In this vision, the distance is implicitly widened between groups such as the Industrial Workers of the *World* and the *American Federation of Labor*, Gompers's life's work.

At that point in the narrative, Ernest identifies the common man with what Avis and Meredith later call serfs. But the serfs are still not the revolutionary corps. As Wegner pointed out, the revolutionaries build an organization that mimics by necessity the amorphous adaptability of the Iron Heel. With that comes a willingness to

dehumanize and utilize those outside the revolution as raw materials. London describes the climactic outbreak of the People of the Abyss in the Chicago Commune as “misshapen monsters... a raging, screaming, screeching, demoniacal horde” (181). Walter Rideout cites this Donnellian scene as evidence that London’s “concern is with the struggle, which horrifies and fascinates him, rather than with the achievement” (45). Rather than mere avatars of London’s lurid fascination with violence, Geoffrey Harpham argues that these monsters “are agents not only of the revolution, but of the wrath of God,” yet they “also embody afflictions of degeneration and devitalization” (30). Joan London calls the scene a transmutation of his “scorn of the pacifism of the Socialist party leaders and disillusionment with his own slogan, ‘The revolution is here, now. Stop it who can!’” (249). The result of Jack London’s disdain for anyone not committed to direct revolutionary action is to deny them meaningful political agency or count them as enemies.

The abortive, premature Chicago Commune is “precipitated by the Iron Heel,” which primes the serfs to revolt by “a course of outrageous treatment” (172). Donnelly’s oligarchs also prime the revolutionary pump, but they do not adequately prepare for the far-reaching foresight of the Brotherhood of Destruction. While both Donnelly and London depict conspiracies against the capitalist overlords, in *Caesar’s Column*, the degenerate laboring classes are co-conspirators who successfully destroy the Oligarchy, even if they are not taken to the Promised Land in the end. London

simply weeds them out. Donnelly feared the latent power of the loosed masses; London advocated harnessing it for revolutionary ends. "Why, we even depended much, in our plan, on the unorganized people of the abyss," Avis states. "They were to be loosed on the palaces and cities of the masters. Never mind the destruction of life and property. Let the abysmal brute roar and the police and Mercenaries slay." In short, the plan of the international revolutionary vanguard was to pit counter-revolutionary classes against each other as so much cannon fodder. "In the meantime we would be doing our own work, largely unhampered, and gaining control of all the machinery of society" (171).

For London, the common man is a tool of the revolutionary. Meredith remains strangely silent throughout most of the novel's climax, mostly remarking that Chicago really was rather bad in the early twentieth century (171) and offering a few emendations to Avis's account of the guerrilla urban warfare (191-2). The serfs are not revolutionaries. They, like the skilled trade unionists, are tools of the oligarchy—responsible for building the wonder-cities, but a class apart from the international vanguard, which seeks to appropriate the masters' tools. Wegner calls this "the double negation of the place of the working class" (141), and identifies the mediating socio-cultural place of the revolutionary vanguard with "the appearance of the transnational corporate entity" that birthed the "administrative, informational, and regulative *bureaucracy*" (144). For Wegner, this was a conceptual dead end that London

struggled in vain to resolve. In his view, London created the spatiotemporal distance between Avis and Meredith in order to preserve “the possibility of the ‘task’ that the very logic of his narrative made it impossible for him to represent” (146). Yet the revolutionary task remaining open and unrepresented—the black hole noted by Portelli—is still reified, because London *does* narrate its origins and conclusion; it is represented through his dual focalization. There is no room in his class for the oligarchs, the sellouts, or the underclass.<sup>68</sup>

Meredith is evidence of the revolutionary vanguard’s triumph, not the liberation of the common man, the serfs. As a jeremiad, *The Iron Heel* seeks to revitalize the errand into the political wilderness for American socialists, grown reformist and meliorist. London’s dual focalization science-fictionally denies the shared interests of *all* American socialists, though. He underlines the provincialism and insufficiency of the reformists by emphasizing the internationalism of the revolutionary vanguard. Meredith is heir to the Everhards; the serfs and the oligarchs may have built the wonder-cities together, but these nonspecific locations are finally appropriated by the children of the revolutionaries and their children’s children. London prophesies in *The Iron Heel* that the world will belong to, as Stein put it, “a socialist party, fortified by invincible theory and comprised of fighting revolutionaries,” not to the trade unionists, the capitalists, or even to the drudges, the latter of whom are barely human in the end—reduced by Avis to beasts and to abstract numbers by Meredith.

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## Stop It Who Can

“What he failed mainly to foresee was that the middle class would not only survive but actually grow stronger through the capitalistic system,” write Earle Labor and Jeanne Campbell Reesman in their gloss of *The Iron Heel* (66). In actuality, London quite aptly prophesied the continued division of the national community into classes with mutually exclusive interests. On one level, his novel is a canny extrapolation of the trends that would continue to fragment the socialist Left in the United States and around the world (though he’d hoped to circumvent that). On another level, London’s creative appropriation of Ghent’s modified feudal hierarchy was tonally consonant with the co-evolution of globalized capital and urban centers.<sup>69</sup> More than that, *The Iron Heel*’s science-fictional use of space and time dispenses with the American nation as the vehicle for communal revitalization and redemption. The backsliders in London’s novel are reformers and socialists who have allowed themselves to be duped by the hollow promise of peaceful revolution. Donnelly prophesied the danger of men like London, who would willingly and gladly unleash the multitude upon society in order to remake it in their own image, while London prophesied the enervating influence men like Donnelly would have upon militant revolution. For both authors, the science-fictional use of space and time enabled their jeremiads to ignore America altogether as

a vehicle for their prophetic critique, moving their readers into identifying much more explicitly with particular class loyalties than with national belonging.

In that very decades that H. G. Wells traveled to the United States to see for himself whether the nation's collective will boded well for his brand of political progress, America's Jeremiahs were indeed using science-fictional devices of space and time to shatter the imagined experience of collective national will and reimagining it along class lines. Donnelly and the Populists had struggled to articulate a non-revolutionary class consciousness for Americans who had fallen through the cracks. London, for his part, tried to lead the charge toward socialist uprising. In *Caesar's Column*, Donnelly prophesied the need for a new class system that accounted for differing group interests and talents, though he held out little hope for the underclass or middle class to support its ascent; he feared that they would immolate themselves in a revolutionary backlash. London explicitly called for such a revolution, but *The Iron Heel* goes further than *Caesar's Column*. Unlike the ignorant hordes who sweep themselves away along with Western civilization, London's underclass is deliberately fashioned into a weapon to be wielded by the revolutionaries or the oligarchs. Both authors work to reify deep and untraversable divides between the multitudes contained within America, carving the imagined community of America into classes whose competing interests are totally incapable of being tamed—let alone resolved or resolved, even rhetorically—within the framework of the nation.

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<sup>1</sup> Ridge is much more generous in his assessment of Donnelly's leadership in the Minnesota Farmer's Alliance (247, 267-72) than Goodwyn (157-9, 259-60).

<sup>2</sup> For this necessarily truncated overview, I am primarily indebted to Goodwyn's *Democratic Promise*, but I also consulted Kazin, chapter 2, McMath, chapters 3 and 5, Hofstadter, chapter 2, and Grattan, chapter 2.

<sup>3</sup> See Abrahams 111, Axelrad 49-50, 63, Beringer 37-8, and Ruddick 257n23. For historians of Populism on *The Age of Reform*, see McMath 12-13 and Grattan 52, 210n5-8.

<sup>4</sup> Historians have debated the degree of anti-Semitism in the Populist movement for decades. Norman Pollack most vociferously contested Oscar Handlin's use of *Caesar's Column* as the basis for his interpretation of Populism's anti-Semitism in "Handlin on Anti-Semitism," with further refutations in "Hofstadter on Populism" and "The Myth of Populist Anti-Semitism." Ridge notes that, as in *Caesar's Column*, Donnelly often attempted in his public rhetoric to blunt charges of anti-Semitism, reserving his ire for the rich plutocrats, and not the race as a whole (263-4, 336-7). The novel is, in fact, virulently racist, not only in its depiction of Jews, but also in its association of villainy or Spencerian devolution with dark skin, as well as in its reference to "vile hordes of Mongolian coolies" (77), which reflected Donnelly's own unambiguously racist views (Ridge 325).

<sup>5</sup> See Goldman 281-2, Williams and Alexander 8-9

<sup>6</sup> See, for instance, conservative pundit Jonah Goldberg's *Suicide of the West* (2018), ch. 13. Gary Marotta provides a sympathetic contextualization of Hofstadter's views in "Richard Hofstadter's Populist Problem and his Identity as a Jewish Intellectual," which appears in *Transformations of Populism in Europe and the Americas* (2016), edited by John Abromeit, Bridget María Chesterton, Gary Marotta, and York Norman; see pp. 105-115.

<sup>7</sup> Norman Pollack, writing in dialogue with Hofstadter, insists that Populism was "a mirror of America, and its criticism, a reflection of social conditions during the 1890's," conditions amounting to "the trend toward what we today call alienation" (*Response* 10). Michael Kazin flatly admits in *The Populist Persuasion* (1995), "my own sentiments about the populist persuasion are firmly equivocal" (6). He traces the language of Populism from Ignatius Donnelly to Ross Perot (269), but Kazin is not trying sympathize with the politics of the Texas millionaire; he simply attempts to demonstrate the rhetorical continuity from agrarian revolt to latter-day plutocrat. Populism can draw the energies of "the dispirited, the vengeful, and the cynical" from the vortex of "the whirlpool of decline" (283), but, like Grattan, Kazin does not think "the harmonious, hopeful, and pragmatic aspects" of it must be sacrificed as well (284). Many historians wrestle with reconciling the American right-wing populisms of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries to their progressive nineteenth-century progenitors, sometimes overtly denying any necessary connection; see *Transformations* (2016), esp. Charles Postel, "The American Populist and Anti-Populist Legacy," pp. 116-135. Controversially, Ernesto Laclau contends in *On Populist Reason* (2005) that the motive power of populism is its capacity to knit together diverse coalitions against the evolving forms of capital, which he sees as the ever-pressing central issue of politics. Political theorist Jan-Werner Müller disagrees, even though he does not think the People's Party of the nineteenth century fits the criteria of populism as such; see *What Is Populism?* (2016).

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<sup>8</sup> *Ragnarok: The Age of Fire and Gravel* (1883) argued that the earth continually undergoes a cycle of obliterations from meteors while *The Great Cryptogram: Francis Bacon's Cipher in Shakespeare's Plays* (1888) that Bacon, that clever Renaissance man, had ciphered evidence of his authorship into the printed texts attributed to the Bard. As before, few experts in the field (whether English literature or cryptology) found Donnelly's amateur literary sleuthing to be terribly compelling, though the book did earn him some notoriety and a trip to England (Ridge 236-41).

<sup>9</sup> The publisher who wrote this opinion to Donnelly, A. C. McClurg, was speaking quite literally. "It is possible [...] to make people believe that brutal and frightful remedies must be plotted... I believe the effects of this book (because it is so extravagant and so unjust toward the wealthier classes) would have effect only upon those who already believe in disturbance and anarchy" (qtd. Ridge 265). He urged "that it be sold for more than one dollar to keep it from falling into the wrong hands" (Ridge 266).

<sup>10</sup> See Goodwyn 265-6, Hofstadter 66-7, Ridge 295-6, 300, Grattan 55-7, Kazin 28-31, McMath 161-3.

<sup>11</sup> See Goodwyn 57, 63, 76-7, 94, 176, 192, 197, 211, 245, 251.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, p. 259.

<sup>13</sup> Donnelly: "I believe in *Caesar's Column*, and I would avert these results if possible" (Ridge 308).

<sup>14</sup> Goodwyn argues that traveling lecturers hired by local alliances were particularly radicalized by what they witnessed firsthand, and that this was key to the more hardline Left commitments of Populists like William Lamb, among others, who pushed Farmers Alliances toward partisan politics. See 74-5, 111-13.

<sup>15</sup> See Hardt and Negri 174-6.

<sup>16</sup> Elizabeth Sanders makes this her central claim in *Roots of Reform* (3-4).

<sup>17</sup> Goodwyn contends that monetary reform was at the heart of Populism's radical potential, and a lynchpin issue not only for the People's Party, but also for the transition from the nonpartisan cooperative association of farmers to an activist third party (149-53, 169, 223-4). Bryan's famous "Cross of Gold" speech at the Democratic convention in 1896, however, shifted the focus of monetary reform to "free silver." The Populists' signature issue, the subtreasury, was thus not only abandoned in favor of bimetallism as an alternative to the gold standard, but, William Harpine argues, Bryan's rhetorical use of it may have cost him the election. In any event, the most radical policy proposal holding together the Populist coalition, once cast aside for the sake of expediency, dissolved the coalition.

<sup>18</sup> See Goodwyn, chapter 10; Kazin 34-7, 40-2; Grattan 59-60, 77-82.

<sup>19</sup> Allan Axelrad (1971) characterizes Donnelly's "routinized hyperbole" in *Caesar's Column* as redolent of "the abusively damning tone of the Puritan jeremiad" (63).

<sup>20</sup> See "The Building of the City Beautiful: The Motif of the Jeremiad in Three Utopian Novels" (1985).

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<sup>21</sup> "I cannot believe that the maker of the universe with its hundred million visible stars and its thousand millions of invisible suns with a billion planets and satellites, worked for twenty years at the carpenters trade in Judea; and permitted a lot of lousy Jews to murder him. The proposition is too incredible to be thought of. But this does not say that the spirit & purpose of God may not be behind this Christianity" (qtd. in Ridge 266fn9).

<sup>22</sup> See *The Utopian Novel in America, 1886-1896* (1984), ch. 6, esp. pp. 113-114.

<sup>23</sup> Specifically, *Atlantis* and *Ragnarok*, as discussed above and in endnote 8 for this chapter. Culver suggests that these two books represent a kind of apocalyptic cosmology, and I believe that *Caesar's Column* fits into it quite nicely.

<sup>24</sup> See Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (1984), pp. 233-239. In Miller's account, Edwards long wrestled with the intersections of natural science and theology, and Donnelly's *Ragnarok* corresponds eerily with Edwards's private meditations on meteorological cataclysm and their religious significance.

<sup>25</sup> I am particularly indebted to Jean Pfaelzer and Ernest Yanarella for their discussions of the pastoral mode in *Caesar's Column*.

<sup>26</sup> See Pfaelzer's discussion of the "Elysium" chapter, pp. 123, 131-33.

<sup>27</sup> See Culver, pp. 408-9.

<sup>28</sup> Like London, Donnelly conceives of class in incredibly racialized terms. Because I discuss race explicitly in chapter 2, I am setting aside for now the racism of *Caesar's Column*, though I acknowledge it in a few endnotes where it is most relevant to this discussion.

<sup>29</sup> I have not delved into Donnelly's papers, which might hold a more decisive clue as to the question of, "Why Uganda?"

<sup>30</sup> See Ingham, chapters 1 and 2; Low, chapter 3.

<sup>31</sup> See Patrick Harries, *Butterflies and Barbarians: Swiss Missionaries and Systems of Knowledge in South-East Africa* (2007). The years of the depression in the 1880s saw a great increase in missionary activity, which very much tied into Western ideas of civilizing the "dark continent," though Harries does not deal with Uganda at all, and his focus is on the reception of such accounts in Switzerland.

<sup>32</sup> Hickey and Wylie highlight how Henry M. Stanley's training as correspondent on the Western plains during the American Indian Wars of the mid-nineteenth century provided the tropes for his famous African travelogues. See 7-13, 188-9.

<sup>33</sup> See *Atlantis*, ch. 14. See also Ruddick 267, endnote 1.

<sup>34</sup> "It is interrogative; it is prophetic: and this Cassandra is believed" (Marx 17).

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<sup>35</sup> Berkeley's "Verses on the Prospect of Planting Art and Learning in America" (1726) prophesy "another golden age," in the New World, for "Westward the course of empire takes its way." In *Our Country: Its Possible Future and Its Present Crisis* (1885), Strong writes, "Like the star in the East which guided the three kings with their treasures westward until at length it stood still over the cradle of the young Christ, so the star of empire, rising in the East, has ever beckoned the wealth and power of the nations westward, until to-day it stands still over the cradle of the young empire of the West, to which the nations are bringing their offerings." Echoing Hobbes, he swells to the imperial theme: "The West to-day is still an infant, but shall one day be a giant, in each of whose limbs shall unite the strength of many nations" (29).

<sup>36</sup> Despite Donnelly's best efforts, Nininger never became the jewel of the plains he envisioned, although his popularity in his home county was integral to his admittedly uneven success as a regional politician. See Harmon (1936).

<sup>37</sup> Darsey claims the opposite, that apocalyptic rhetoric places hope for change outside of history (114-19). As I discuss later, Donnelly's book bears this out in some respects. Ernest Yanarella claims to concur with her that the overly literary nature of this depiction of history offers little practical political use (203), though the stakes for Pfaelzer are in the possibilities that this particular literary form preserves. As she argues, Donnelly consciously draws on the literary modes of naturalism and the pastoral throughout his novel, in addition to the chialistic tropes of decline and fall that precede the establishment of a utopian city on a hill. "With the secularization of the apocalyptic telos, utopia resists the fatalism of literary naturalism and insists on the possibility of hope" (Pfaelzer 140). Yanarella, however, interprets this combination of literary modes as "a formula for political barbarism": "the pastoral heritage inevitably assumes the risk of countenancing either campaigns of cleansing from within or expeditions to new virgin lands beyond American borders" (202).

<sup>38</sup> In *Imaginary Communities* (2002), Philip Wegner considers the reversal a "transvaluation of the America-Africa polarity" (123).

<sup>39</sup> This reflects the view Donnelly still retained in 1895 that "one great interest binds together all who labor to produce the real wealth of the world," but it also reflects the further implication that, in conjunction with the farmers, "the vast army of... men who labor in the cities, towns and villages" should "regard every man who advises otherwise [against moving into the People's Party] as the corrupt tool of the Plutocracy" (qtd. in *Response* 67). In other words, both farmers and workingmen, despite being lumped together into one class, ought to be ever vigilant against the class traitors in their midst.

<sup>40</sup> Schweninger contextualizes *Caesar's Column*, Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward*, and William Dean Howells's *A Traveler from Altruria* as all participating in jeremiadic discourse concerning the same social ills of this period.

<sup>41</sup> Donnelly's onetime ally, Everett Fish, in *Donnelliana: An Appendix to "Caesar's Column"* (1892), not only frames *Caesar's Column* in terms of (what he deemed) indelibly corrupt Minnesota politics, but the critical notices he cites invariably situate the novel in contemporary social conditions. See pp. 119-122.

<sup>42</sup> See Hall (1980) on Puritan personal providentialism. For accounts on historical providentialism in the nineteenth century, especially regarding the Civil War, see Noll, esp. 426-438 (2002), Guyatt, ch. 7-9 (2007), Murphy, ch. 3 (2009), and Hauerwas (2012).

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<sup>43</sup> Page links the jeremiad to the agrarian tradition in his account of Donnelly's critique of the city (40-3).

<sup>44</sup> In *Roots of Reform* (1999), Elizabeth Sanders argues that agrarian rhetoric even "generated the bulk of the reform agenda and furnished the foot soldiers that saw reform through the legislature" (4) in the Progressive Era.

<sup>45</sup> Though I focus more on the discrete context of their own historical moments, resonances between *Caesar's Column* and Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged*, which I discuss in chapter 5, are readily apparent.

<sup>46</sup> See Hardt and Negri 174-6.

<sup>47</sup> See *Archaeologies of the Future*, p. 228.

<sup>48</sup> Quotes from Trotsky, *Overland Monthly*, and Wanhope as well as other contemporary reviews are from chapter 5 of *The Critical Response to Jack London* (1995), ed. Susan M. Neurnberg.

<sup>49</sup> An article she sources to the *Butte Daily Bulletin* in May 1919 reads: "Those who have read Jack London's *The Iron Heel* will have no difficulty in recognizing the historical epoch through which we are passing. The ruthless suppression of all groups opposed to capitalism is outlined in this work. Many of the passages might, without exaggeration, be termed prophetic" (311). Foner notes that *The Iron Heel* was one of the rare fiction books in IWW lending libraries, and "always popular" (151).

<sup>50</sup> See Foner, ch. 2; also pp. 68-70.

<sup>51</sup> I am particularly indebted in my summary comments on the history of American socialism to Daniel Bell's *Marxian Socialism in the United States* (1967) and Gary Marks and Seymour Martin Lipset's *It Didn't Happen Here* (2000).

<sup>52</sup> See Philip S. Foner's *History of the Labor Movement in the United States, Vol. 4* (1965) and Melvyn Dubofsky's *We Shall Be All* (1969).

<sup>53</sup> Michael Cohen documents the terrorism directed against the Wobblies in the period leading up to and especially during World War I; see "'Ku Klux Government'" (2006), esp. 34, 40.

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<sup>54</sup> In *Marxism and the United States* (2013), historian Paul Buhle flatly argues that “Marxism in the United States has been a class manifestation of the National Question,” which has struggled with “complex group loyalties and vernaculars” (13). Buhle quite specifically credits the diaspora of the March Revolution with importing Marxism to the U.S., along with later Jewish emigrants; see esp. pp. 24-40. The fact of German immigrant culture being central to Marxism’s foothold in America shouldn’t be conflated wholly with the nativist reaction: vernacular political philosophy is but one of a wondrous myriad of things nativists feared from the foreign masses. John Higham defines nativism generally as “intense opposition to an internal minority on the ground of its foreign (i.e. ‘un-American’) connections” (4), but elaborates that anti-Catholicism and a nascent Anglo-Saxon racialism were as important to the American nativism that flowered in the mid-nineteenth century as was the suspicion of European political radicalism. In the first decade of the twentieth century, Higham argues, personalities as diverse as Edward A. Ross, Jane Addams, William R. Hearst, British writer Israel Zangwill, and the heads of the National Association of Manufacturers were motivated by pragmatism, idealism, or profit to adopt a cosmopolitan attitude toward immigrants. See chapter 7 of *Strangers in the Land* (2002). In short, it was not an auspicious time in the context of national discourse for critics to conflate socialist radicalism with foreignness.

<sup>55</sup> Nick Salvatore argues that Eugene Debs embodied the way the Socialist Party framed its “prophetic call” to many Americans within the legacy of the American Revolution (229-30).

<sup>56</sup> Sam Baskett argues that *The Iron Heel* offers specific evidence not only of plagiarism but his dependence on secondary sources; see “A Source of *The Iron Heel*” (1955).

<sup>57</sup> See esp. pp. 5-7 of *Marxist Socialism in the United States* (1967). Michael Harrington concedes much to Bell, but emphasizes that similar problems occurred to socialist movements the world over, and argues that socialists didn’t fail so much as operate too much outside traditional partisan institutions to gain mainstream purchase; see *Socialism*, pp. 252-5.

<sup>58</sup> For page numbers, I refer to the Wordsworth American Library edition (1996), but since that edition does include Meredith’s foreword, any references to that are based on the Project Gutenberg edition (last updated 2018).

<sup>59</sup> See Francis Shor, “*The Iron Heel’s* Marginal(ized) Utopia” (1994); Alexander Saxton, “*Caesar’s Column: The Dialogue of Utopia and Catastrophe*” (1967); and Allan M. Axelrad, “Ideology and Utopia in the Works of Ignatius Donnelly” (1971).

<sup>60</sup> See chapter 1 of *Imaginary Communities* (2002). Wegner further contends in *Shockwaves of Possibility* (2014) that sf originated in the late 19th century in “a moment of proto-modernism” (7), and that amid the totalizing effects of the modernisms and modernities emerging with globalization, “A similar sensitivity to the emergence of the radically new has been a crucial dimension of the modernist technology of science fiction since its inception” (47).

<sup>61</sup> In contrast with Jack London’s *Iron Heel*, which more accurately traces the contours of capitalism’s decentralized pervasion of society, even though his insight struggles to offer a workable vision for revolution. See chapter 4 of *Imaginary Communities* and my discussion of *Iron Heel* later in this chapter.

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<sup>62</sup> See Teich, "Marxist Dialectics in Content, Form, Point of View: Structures in Jack London's *The Iron Heel*" (1976).

<sup>63</sup> The term "dual focalization" is mine, but articles, other than his own, focusing on what Teich's "dual focus" include: Nadia Khouri, "Utopia and Epic: Ideological Confrontation in Jack London's *The Iron Heel*" (1976); Alessandro Portelli, "Jack London's Missing Revolution: Notes on *The Iron Heel*" (1982); Francis Shor, "*The Iron Heel's* Marginal(ized) Utopia" (1994); John Whalen-Bridge, "How do Read a Revolutionary Novel: *The Iron Heel*" (1998); Aaron Shaheen, "The Competing Narratives of Modernity in Jack London's *The Iron Heel*" (2008). Teich, Khouri, and Whalen-Bridge basically affirm the progressive potential of the dialectical structure, while Shor and Shaheen interpret it as more regressive.

<sup>64</sup> Portelli claims that the way London positions Avis as a science-fiction narrator toward the audience "assures not only their survival, but also the continuity of the essential foundations of their culture. The more the plot concerns itself with historical, political, and otherwise public events, the more it allows us to take for granted that things are unchanged in private and daily life" (190). Whalen-Bridge, by contrast, argues that Meredith's authority is not necessarily more certain than Avis's, given the gaps in his own historical knowledge, and that this double uncertainty opens the text up to speak prophetically to the future; see pp. 49-55.

<sup>65</sup> Lenin: "Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement" (25), but "the Social-Democratic movement is in its very essence an international movement. This means, not only that we must combat national chauvinism, but that an incipient movement in a young country can be successful only if it makes use of the experiences of other countries... At this point we wish to state only that the *role of a vanguard fighter can be fulfilled only by a party that is guided by the most advanced theory*" (26).

<sup>66</sup> See Shor, "*The Iron Heel's* Marginal(ized) Utopia" (1994)

<sup>67</sup> See esp. pp. 249, 255, 303-4. The passage in Ghent of particular relevance to *The Iron Heel* is on p. 191.

<sup>68</sup> Elements of the way London characterizes the counter-revolutionary class as racialized; as with *Caesar's Column*, I will discuss this aspect a little more fully in chapter 2.

<sup>69</sup> See Abbott, "Suburbia and the Dual City in *The Iron Heel*" (2011).

## CHAPTER TWO. Imagining Racial Difference: W. E. B. Du Bois's "The Comet" and George Schuyler's *Black No More*, 1910-1935

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### Harlem's Jeremiah and Jester

In the same year that Jack London published *The Iron Heel*, with Avis's visceral, eyewitness account of the Chicago Commune, a group of progressive activists were gathering in response to an act of violence that took place on the streets of another Illinois city. The riot began as an attempted lynching, and African-Americans fought back, killing five white aggressors in self-defense when the frustrated mob turned its attention to the black citizenry. In all, the 1908 race riot in Springfield resulted in the deaths of seven people. More than fifty years after the Civil War, black Americans remained second-class citizens in many parts of the country—not just in the Jim Crow South, but even, as the Springfield riot showed, in the North. Such barbarism taking place in the land of Lincoln galvanized the formation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in 1909. Founded by a who's who of progressive whites and blacks, the first secretary of the NAACP, William E. Burghardt Du Bois, became the editor of the *Crisis*, its official magazine. Most widely known now for *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), Du Bois marked his transition from academe to full-time

activism with his 1909 biography of *John Brown*, an apologia for the kind of prophetic critique he honed to an art over the next 24 years at the *Crisis*—two and a half decades that started with a liberal dream of integration and ended with an explicit call for black nationalist separatism.

At the apex of his influence as editor of the *Crisis*, Du Bois published *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil* (1920), a collection of essays, poems, and fables written in his prophetic mode and presented in complementary pairs. Though mostly revised from pieces published in periodicals throughout the previous decade, *Darkwater* was published the year after the so-called Red Summer of 1919, which saw a number of deadly race riots around the country in both major cities and relatively isolated hamlets.<sup>1</sup> Du Bois—a Jeremiah for what his magazine called “the darker races”—had tirelessly chronicled white racist violence in the *Crisis* throughout the decade, often despairing of America’s ability to rise above or progress beyond it, but he fought to retain a semblance of hope. From the “Credo” that opens *Darkwater* to “A Hymn to the Peoples,” which closes it, Du Bois struggles in the book to maintain the tough, pragmatic faith in humanity’s capacity to improve its character that marked his earlier career.<sup>2</sup>

The book’s penultimate text, paired with the “Hymn,” is a short story in the vein of the many parables Du Bois penned in his career as a propagandist. “The Comet” imagines New York City after all but one black man and one white woman have been

killed. It is a seminal science-fictional articulation of the desire to transcend racial division, although, as we shall see, Du Bois trenchantly curtails the utopian potential in the story, fulfilling it only in the “Hymn” that ends his book. This prophetic diptych draws on the tradition of the African-American jeremiad to critique the failure of contemporary society to live up to its founding promise, warning of disaster but ultimately holding out hope for the fulfillment of that promise.

Du Bois honed his prophetic style throughout the remainder of his career, eventually writing *Dark Princess* (1928) as something of a riposte to the freewheeling modernists of the Harlem Renaissance, such as George Schuyler. Rather than record heroic examples of pan-African striving, the younger artists’ raw depiction of African-American life rankled Du Bois’s romantic, New England sensibilities. Perhaps nobody exemplified the most irreverent, tricksterish sensibilities of the New Negro than Schuyler, whose science-fictional novel *Black No More* (1931) mercilessly lampoons every example of black striving as hustling or hogwash. The novel’s audacious premise is that an entrepreneur named Dr. Junius Crookman invents a treatment physically to turn people of African extraction into Caucasians: it is literally a whitewashing process. A Harlem hustler, first of many to undergo the treatment, decides to head South to make good on his newly-acquired white privilege. He hooks up with a white supremacist organization and lucratively stokes white anxiety, ultimately masterminding his father-in-law’s nearly-successful bid for the White House on the basis of those racial

fears. The entire scheme collapses when evidence surfaces that the white supremacists share African descent, and the novel ends with the revelation that Crookman's treatment renders its subjects a little *too white*, sparking a craze for skin-darkening treatments. While Du Bois's jeremiads chided a racist nation for failing to live up to its democratic promise, Schuyler mocked African-Americans who fell for the illusion of America's democratic promise in the first place. *Black No More* certainly criticizes America's obsession with race, but Schuyler's engagement with the prophetic mode of the jeremiad is an ironic contrast to Du Bois's romantic sincerity. Though both Du Bois and Schuyler write with the intent of encouraging a regeneration of American promise, Schuyler remains skeptical of prophecy. *Black No More* works toward a similar goal as *Darkwater* as through a mirror, snarkily. When Schuyler evokes the jeremiad near the end of his novel, it is to expose its most facile, horrifying role as a prop for white supremacy.

In this chapter, I will argue that race in our *exempla* is a science-fictional way to attempt to transcend or subvert America's white supremacist caste system of the early twentieth century. Du Bois and Schuyler were both subtle thinkers who tended to write bluntly. Du Bois favored oracular pronouncements and romantic allegories while Schuyler favored whatever rhetorical footwork would enable him to leave the biggest bruise with his verbal jabs. In focusing on these particular writings, I want to emphasize how intensely tactical they were in their engagements with the jeremiad. Neither writer

essentialized the “blackness” of the Afrodiaspora. Instead, Du Bois and Schuyler treated race science-fictionally, with all the challenges inherent in doing so. The science-fictional approach to race we will explore in this chapter—Afrofuturism—recognizes the problems inherent in retaining race as a conceptual category, even in a context where it is absolutely necessary to the project of undermining and subverting attempts to use race to reify caste-based systems of power. Du Bois utilizes the prophetic mode as a weapon against caste, while Schuyler refuses prophecy as a tool most apt to enable racism’s most violent extremes. Even though Schuyler engages with the jeremiad only to parody it, he and Du Bois both recognize science-fictional prophecy’s tendency to present race as an intractable problem, one which people of all nations must face squarely.

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## **Afro-American Prophecy and Afrofuturism**

The concept of race has been a flexible tool in the hands of those invested in shaping and maintaining a social hierarchy that benefits those who already have power. Since antiquity, what we call “race” has incorporated notions of culture, geography, and biology in a variety of formulae. By the nineteenth century, the scientific positivism of the European Enlightenment, combined with Europe’s global investments in colonialism and the civilizing mission of Christian churches, produced a variant of race theory that emphasized whiteness as an intrinsic measure of excellence and

civilizational advancement, while blackness signified subhuman status and civilizational backwardness. In the United States especially, the discourse of scientific racism became a method of, first, justifying slavery and, after the Civil War, justifying laws and civic norms that denied full citizenship and human rights to persons formerly enslaved and of African descent. White racism was flexible enough to survive a nearly 180-degree shift across the conflagration. For instance, Thomas F. Gossett notes that blacks in the antebellum South were widely considered to be affable, helpless children, whereas they were spoken of as rapacious beasts after the war.<sup>3</sup> Either way, they required the strict supervision of enlightened whites, even as the South's quasi-feudal plantation economy gave way to the Northern-inflected industrial capitalism of the so-called New South.<sup>4</sup> What replaced colonial slavery was a multilayered system of Jim Crow laws, capitalist manipulation of racial tensions in the service of controlling organized labor, and the persistence of white supremacy, even among those who presented themselves as friends to the American Negro.

In response to the vagaries of evolving oppression, African-Americans had developed their own variant of the jeremiad as a method of holding the racist nation of the United States to account and exhorting it to fulfill its redemptive promise. While not the only prophetic mode employed to challenge the realities of systemic racism,<sup>5</sup> the jeremiad has been employed by black leaders and thinkers throughout American history to address problems facing both the nation and the Afro-Americans who live in

it. Frederick Douglass, James Baldwin, Martin Luther King, Jr., Toni Morrison, and Barack Obama have all drawn on the jeremiadic tradition in some fashion.<sup>6</sup> Prior to the Civil War, African-American jeremiads, such as David Walker's *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World* (1829), focused on slavery and the right to freedom, while during and after Reconstruction the focus shifted to the demand for equality and freedom from racist persecution. David Howard-Pitney agrees with the scholars of Puritan rhetoric that the African-American jeremiad, as a distinct variant of the genre, follows a formula that established a covenantal promise, issues a warning against the declension that accompanied backsliding, and prophesies eventual fulfillment of that promise. He adds, however, that the African-American jeremiad speaks of the relationship between "two American chosen peoples—black and white—whose millennial destinies, while distinct, are also inextricably entwined" (13). While the Puritan jeremiad evolved over the course of two hundred years from primarily religious origins into a political rhetorical tool of middle-class republicanism, Willie Harrell, Jr. emphasizes that the African-American jeremiad was intrinsically political from the beginning, since the cornerstone of its function was to lament the institution of slavery in the United States. John Winthrop's "Modell of Christian Charitie" was delivered from the deck of a ship destined for an unknown land to be civilized as a redemptive errand into the wilderness. By contrast, jeremiads by African-Americans such as Walker, Phyllis Wheatley, Jupiter Hammon, and Lemuel Haynes developed mainly in the context of

the Great Awakenings and the founding documents of the early republic.<sup>7</sup> They were thoroughly American and thoroughly sociopolitical in nature and intent; African-American Jeremiahs, Harrell wryly observes, were not venturing into the same spiritual, cultural, or geographical wilderness.<sup>8</sup> African-American jeremiads were not mere narratives of redeeming Christendom from its wickedness. They were that, but they were also explicit, straightforward demands for “basic civil liberties for the oppressed” (*Origins* 26).

In the classic accounts by Miller and Bercovitch, the Puritan jeremiad predates the establishment of the United States proper, but the colonists drew heavily on biblical typology to frame themselves in their own narrative as Israel coming to the Promised Land. Over time, this rhetorical form evolved into a vehicle for sustaining national consensus, especially after the revolution. As Eddie Glaude, Jr. argues, the Puritan jeremiad evoked the figure of Israel’s Exodus from Egypt, which helped establish a national identity founded on colonial territorial expansion; the black jeremiad evoked Israel’s Exodus to solidify a sense of being a distinct people within a nation, and that their errand into the wilderness was more ethico-political than territorial—it is exodus as liberation.<sup>9</sup> Glaude disagrees in this respect with Wilson J. Moses, who contends that the black jeremiad—in its antebellum form, at least—was linked more directly to the chiliastic role of the United States. The national chauvinism of the Puritan legacy tended either to conscript black leaders into the myth of American exceptionalism or

inflected black nationalism with its own brand of chauvinism.<sup>10</sup> According to Glaude, “The black jeremiad as a rhetorical form ought to be understood as a paradigm of the structure of ambivalence that constitutes African Americans’ relation to American culture” (35).<sup>11</sup> American culture *per se* preexists and frames the African-American experience, thus making Afro-American prophecy intrinsically political and intrinsically concerned with the position of African-American subjects within a white supremacist society. Though some African-American jeremiads prophesied the redemption of American promise, others prophesied the redemption of the black people oppressed by America. Whatever the form of a particular jeremiad, if it draws on the tradition of African-American prophecy, it recognizes that, as Frederick Douglass once put it, “A nation within a nation is an anomaly”<sup>12</sup>—an anomaly reified above all by race, not religious or national exceptionalism. It recognizes the anomaly, and it demands justice.

Du Bois’s own concept of double-consciousness most famously articulates this awareness of race as a distinguishing feature of the nation within a nation. Double-consciousness is not merely the “sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others”; it is, as Du Bois put it in *The Souls of Black Folk*, a striving “to satisfy two unreconciled ideals”: “to be both a Negro and an American.” More broadly, it is an awareness of the inescapable blackness of oneself in the context of a society that defines itself by norms of European (English, Nordic, Aryan) white supremacy. As long as the conditions for double-consciousness persist, a black subject can never escape a

dual conception of the self: one that must strive for assimilation and one that can never be assimilated.

While double-consciousness describes the psychology of the divided African-American self, the Veil was Du Bois's metaphor for the social conditions that maintain that state of irreconcilability. Ever adaptable, the Veil makes the suffering of black subjects invisible to dominant whites even as it reinforces the blacks' lower caste status. Both the Veil and double-consciousness are productions and producers of race.<sup>13</sup> But the Veil did not stop at the borders of the United States. Du Bois himself was a founding figure of what came to be known as Pan-Africanism, which extended the problem of a nation within a nation beyond national borders and into the realm of international colonial politics. The color line, which he declared to be the problem of the twentieth century, was not just the American Negro's problem, but the problem of every Afrodiasporic subject affected by European colonialism.<sup>14</sup> To speak of the Afrodiaspora is *per se* to speak of nations within nations—a phenomenon that was never anomalous, but a standard feature of the colonial world.

Afrofuturism is a science-fictional paradigm that grapples explicitly with this problem. Though coined by Mark Dery in the mid-1990s as a framing device for interviews with African-American writers involved in science fiction, "Afrofuturism" has been developed in the last twenty-odd years beyond his initial formulation of an "African-American signification that appropriates images of technology and a

prosthetically enhanced future" (180). In addition to being produced by Afrodiasporic subjects who don't identify as *African-American*, Afrofuturist projects include many forms of media.<sup>15</sup> Rather than a particular kind of science-fictional literary mode, Afrofuturism is, as argued by Kodwo Eshun, a way for Afrodiasporic subjects to resist an oppressive, white supremacist record of the past, present, and future. With globalization motivating the "futures industry" (Eshun's term for capitalism's ever-reaching consolidation of emerging markets) to control and commodify all possible versions of the future, he calls on Afrodiasporic subjects to articulate not only double-consciousness, but triple-consciousness, quadruple-consciousness, and more (298). Drawing on the Suvinian critical theory of sf, Eshun declares, "Afrodiasporic subjects live the estrangement that science-fiction writers envision" (298). Liza Yaszek concurs, arguing that Afrofuturism is a way "to say yes to the possibility of new and better futures and thus to take back the global cultural imaginary today" (58-9). It does this "by harnessing one of the signature languages of modernity—the language of science fiction" (46).<sup>16</sup> Afrofuturism is not a mere literary mode of generic science fiction; it is a discursive strategy for disclosing and rending the Veil in all its material and imaginary forms.

In the previous chapter, I argued that the political subjects who saw themselves in Donnelly and London's novels recognized the boundaries of class interests in the way the authors science-fictionalized time and space to help them imagine the distance

between themselves and their fellow citizens. The political subjects in Afrofuturist fiction need only skin color. What Eshun highlights in his assessment of Afrofuturism is that science-fictional estrangement is not something Afrodiasporic subjects experience only when they read science fiction; it's part of living in black skin in Western culture. As Seo-Young Chu might put it, Afrofuturism helps to science-fictionally imagine a conceptual referent. This is not an essentialist or mystical variant of Pan-Africanism. The counter-memories and counter-histories being preserved for the future are particular to the different contexts of different Afrodiasporic peoples. This is why Eshun calls for triple- and quadruple-consciousness: the multiplication of subjectivities predicated on complicated historical legacies, not merely on blackness. Because racism in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has retained its ugly, incoherent conflation of culture and genetic ancestry, Afrofuturism acknowledges the visual signifier of dark skin, but subverts the historical, cultural, and biological (read: political) essentializing imposed upon it by white supremacy. In her critique of *Darkwater*, Lawrie Balfour reminds us of the prominence of optical metaphors in politics, especially with regard to race (540-1). White subjects, such as Donnelly and London's readers, take for granted the opportunity to think about which culture they belong to in terms of history (time) or geography (space). Black subjects, in a Western context, must begin such reflections with their own skin. The Veil, in short, is the site of struggle within a political discourse

premised on white supremacy. Skin color is its ultimate boundary and frontier of political possibility.

Looking back at chapter 1, this adds a layer of complexity to the way Donnelly and London constitute class in their novels. In *Caesar's Column* and *The Iron Heel*, class is the ultimate boundary and frontier of political possibility. As we saw, Donnelly's protagonists are all constructed as white; darker complexions belong to the nefarious Jewish plutocrat, Prince Cabano, and Caesar Lomellini, the atavistic brute who constructs the titular column as a monument to his bloodletting. Donnelly also codes the workingmen as twisted by their depredations into subhuman status. London explicitly builds this into his own conception of the underclass. As Geoffrey Harpham notes, the bestial, degenerate nature of the serfs could be read as racially inflected: a Spencerian influence, as it was for Donnelly. London was unquestionably racist, though his racism was somewhat ambivalent toward the long-term supremacy of any race extant in his time, and he was already thinking less in nationalistic terms and more in continental paradigms. His presentation of the serfs as a demoniacal horde was certainly an outgrowth of Spencerian philosophy, a eugenic dehumanization of his fellow Americans rooted more in his revolutionary class loyalties than in race.<sup>17</sup> But for each of these authors, race is an integral component of class identity, and the cleavage of race to class results in the erection of a class hierarchy. Donnelly's eugenicist obsession with the provenance of Gabriel and Max's wives justifies the aristocracy of

plain people that wait out the apocalypse in the mountains of Uganda. And it is worth bearing in mind that Meredith's annotations of the recovered Everhard manuscript are conspicuously silent on the question of how, exactly, racial strife was settled. Like many Marxists, London assumed that racial questions would be resolved as a natural outgrowth of settling class questions, and his even if his utopia is not as explicitly white as Donnelly's, his ambivalence toward racial supremacy rests upon racial competition—a centuries-long culling, science-fictionally presented in his dual focalization. For him, the primacy of class revolution does resolve the problem of the world's color line, but only by erasing it through impersonal racial hygiene.

Class supremacy in those novels is unfortunately inseparable from the discourse of white supremacy, which polices that boundary of the color line as a limit, a beachhead for political repression. But skin color is thus also a beachhead for Afrodiasporic subjects to push back: to refuse race as the end point for their strivings. Because its insistent materiality *and* its political potential are always held in tension—in double-, triple-, quadruple-consciousness—the way race is bound to skin color makes it a site of critical estrangement. It is, Afrofuturism posits, inherently science-fictional. Both Du Bois and Schuyler respond prophetically and science-fictionally to the problem of the color line. But because the color line polices the boundary between white and nonwhite peoples, "The Comet" and *Black No More* do not address solely a black audience. Yaszek shrewdly observes that Afrofuturists "create" an audience of "young,

white, Western, and middle class men” in addition to their Afrodiasporic audience (46). That is, an audience similar to that imagined not just by Donnelly and London, but to authors we will meet in later chapters: E. E. Smith, Isaac Asimov, Ayn Rand, and even Walter M. Miller, Jr. Looking ahead, I would like to suggest that we remember the intersections of class and race and how prophetic Afrofuturism calls forth a rebuke to the implied caste dynamics in those narratives.

African-American sf writers from the mid-twentieth century onward, such as Samuel R. Delany, were keenly aware of and subverted the expectations of their white audiences,<sup>18</sup> but earlier writers in the Afrofuturist tradition were no less aware or subversive. Du Bois edited *The Crisis* from 1910 to 1934; Schuyler wrote for A. Philip Randolph and Chandler Owen’s *The Messenger* from 1923-24 and Robert L. Vann’s *Pittsburgh Courier* from 1924 through 1964. All of these periodicals were produced primarily for African-American audiences, with *The Messenger* advocating for socialist radicals, *The Crisis* cultivating progressive liberals, and the *Courier* goosing circulation by whatever sensational means were deemed just this side of respectable.<sup>19</sup> Yet Du Bois and Schuyler were ever keenly aware that their pronouncements were heard and even taken seriously beyond the black press. With utmost seriousness, Du Bois comported himself in public since his teenage years as a representative of his race, while Schuyler gleefully stuck a finger in the eye of race hustlers—white and black—at every opportunity. So while these writers spoke for, to, and from within African-America

(a cultural location denoted by the color line), they also conjured a white, Western audience.

The tightrope-walk of the color line forced Du Bois and Schuyler to combat white supremacy among white audiences while exhorting black audiences simultaneously. Double-consciousness was for Du Bois (and Schuyler, though he may have resisted acknowledging it as such) a means to gaining insight into white supremacy and resisting it. Writing from that subject position—science-fictionally—was a means by which to force white readers to start from the same premises they did. That is, white and black audiences alike would have to reflect on their political subjectivity with skin color as the starting point. Writing Afrofuturist science fiction is a political act of lifting the Veil: a mind-meld that enables readers—of any race—to experience double-consciousness.

The liberating potential of this form of science-fictional prophecy comes with its own drawbacks. Jeremiads often develop science-fictional myths as resources for national revitalization. The nations within the nation literally went to war in *Caesar's Column* and *The Iron Heel* so that the nations within the nation to whom those texts spoke could imagine themselves more clearly as the chosen people. Du Bois and Schuyler develop their engagement with the jeremiad in slightly different directions. Du Bois, too, is a mythmaker, and his myths are resources for Pan-African revitalization. Schuyler attacks myth as a mode of political revitalization, reframing that kind of

resource as a poisoned well. But he remains invested in revitalization of a kind, and the negative contrast of the jeremiad serves to bolster his science-fictional burlesque of race as the primary unit of political organization. Both authors, though, engage the jeremiad to make readers more keenly aware of the historical limits they face. Race itself reinforces those limits: an unfortunate (and perhaps inevitable, as Schuyler indicates) consequence of using race as the tool of liberation. Du Bois and Schuyler at least offer their readers the possibility of recognizing the folly of race, even if their narratives doubt the likelihood of that outcome.

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## **A Voice of One Who Cries within the Veil**

The life and work of W. E. B. Du Bois were so widely acknowledged in his lifetime that, had he last been witnessed flying into the clouds aboard a flaming chariot rather than passing away quietly in his home in Ghana on the eve of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s famous speech at the March on Washington in August 1963, the story would stretch plausibility but perhaps not credulity. None of his biographers or critics refrains from referring to him as a poet and prophet as well as a pathbreaking sociologist and propagandist.<sup>20</sup> Edward J. Blum, for example, casts him "in the mold of an Old Testament Isaiah declaring vengeance of God against a sinful, neglectful, hateful world" (12). Upon hearing of his death, an old woman attending the march on Washington lamented, "It's like Moses. God had written that he should never enter the

promised land” (qtd. in *Biography of a Race* 3). And, of course, even Du Bois himself explicitly acknowledged the prophetic mode of his *Crisis* editorials: “The jeremiads were needed to redeem a people” (qtd. in 478). Even prior to the *Crisis*, he was extraordinarily prolific. From the time he published his Harvard dissertation, *The Suppression of of the African Slave Trade* (submitted 1895, published 1896), Du Bois had authored *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899), *The Souls of Black Folk* (1902), *The Negro in the South* (1907, with Booker T. Washington), dozens of academic and popular articles, and the contents of two largely self-published magazines. All this, in addition to organizing and attending a variety of conferences and colloquies with intelligentsia—often serving as keynote speaker, too—invested in the fate of the colored world.<sup>21</sup> For all his accomplishments (and there were few people in America whose *curricula vitae* could compare favorably), Du Bois found himself stymied professionally on several fronts, which informed and were informed by his growing radicalism. When he published *John Brown* in 1909, Du Bois signaled a major shift toward the prophetic as his primary mode of expression, a shift motivated in large part by his experiences over the course of the last decade and a half. His overt embrace of the mantle of the prophet (as Arnold Rampersad put it) defined his ex cathedra editorials throughout his tenure at *The Crisis*, and especially in the literary style of *Darkwater*.

Du Bois's decisive shift toward prophecy in 1909 coincides with his abandonment of academe for public propagandism. Rampersad calls *John Brown* "a study in the sociology of modern prophecy" (112), emphasizing the influence of Hippolyte Taine in Du Bois's focus on the significance of Brown: his biography is less a historical intervention than a historiographical one. Du Bois employs the literary devices of naturalism to lend his narrative prophetic heft, though the text retains stylistic artifacts of his training under historians like Albert B. Hart and Gustav von Schmoller.<sup>22</sup> Nahum Chandler has more recently analyzed the way in which Du Bois inflects John Brown with double-consciousness, rewriting this white revolutionary as a bearer of an essentially black messianic vision.<sup>23</sup> 1909 was, if nothing else, a year that decisively called for what we might identify as an Afrofuturist prophet, and Du Bois was primed for the role.

The better part of Du Bois's career up to this point had entailed an attempt, in proto-Afrofuturist fashion, to address both white and black audiences prophetically from within the Veil. David Levering Lewis describes the infuriating circumscription of Du Bois's work as a sociologist and public intellectual in the early 1900s. Despite the success of *Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois had endured the denial of an education position in the nation's capitol, thanks largely to Booker T. Washington's meddling, the scuttling of a report on an economically depressed county for the U. S. Department of Labor, and the terror of not knowing until after it was over if his family survived the Atlanta riot

of 1906.<sup>24</sup> Additionally, Du Bois could perceive no material decrease in the level of discrimination or violence directed at African-Americans throughout the decade, even with his sterling research and polished prose regularly being set before the eyes of the white elite. Though lynchings of black Americans had decreased somewhat since the spike famously documented by Ida B. Wells-Barnett in the 1890s,<sup>25</sup> the proportion of anti-black lynchings in the South actually increased in the first decade of the twentieth century. More than a decade of good social science and sterling academic erudition were not uplifting the millions of African-Americans impoverished by enforced inequality or preventing their blood from being spilled by white racist crowds. Du Bois would have to expand his audience.<sup>26</sup> The formation of the NAACP afforded Du Bois the opportunity to address most directly in prophetic mode the problems facing his people in the United States. Even within a prophetic register, addressing his audience required a tricky triangulation, and the savagery of white supremacist violence proved to be a particular challenge when addressing a double- or triple-audience.

In August 1908, white mobs rampaged through Springfield, Illinois, shouting, "Lincoln freed you, we'll show you where you belong" (qtd. in Woodward 351). The perversity of Southern barbarity being exported to the North was enough to persuade white liberals like Oswald Villard, Mary Ovington, and Joel and Arthur Spingarn to organize in 1909 a National Negro Committee, which became the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in 1910. Though militant in its advocacy for

integration and denunciation of lynchings in the South, the NAACP had to engage three publics: African-Americans, mostly educated, zealous for an aggressive champion of their interests; African-American leaders who, like Washington, accommodated white supremacy out of a kind of pragmatism; white moderates and liberals who would fund legal efforts and political campaigns designed to counter the worst impulses of America's racist population. The result was an organization that was widely seen as militant but was nowhere near as radical as leaders like Du Bois wished it to be. In his official capacity of director for research, Du Bois was given the reins for the organization's magazine, *The Crisis*. Du Bois was keenly aware of the interstices he had to work with in his audience. Though he wrote primarily for the black bourgeoisie—moderates and radicals all included—Du Bois did not hesitate to use the aegis of the NAACP to engage white audiences in America and beyond. In October 1910, Du Bois wrote a scathing reply to a speech given by one of Booker T. Washington's more reliable proxies at the time, published as "Appeal to England and Europe." Du Bois roundly criticized Washington's practice of overlooking blatant racial violence and unconscionable discrimination in favor of preserving a patina of interracial amity. He also signed the "Appeal" from "Headquarters, National Negro Committee" and under his title, "Secretary, National Afro-American Committee."<sup>27</sup> Besides giving the distinct impression that this was not just Du Bois, but the newly-rechristened NAACP throwing a glove at Tuskegee's feet, it engaged—and enraged—white publics. While

sympathetic writers endorsed the “Appeal” to varying degrees, one wrote “of Professor Du Bois and his friends” thus: “They are educated, cultivated, refined and of high character. Their quarrel is that they are not white. It is a tragedy that they are not, but it is a great fault with some of them, that they nurse their wrongs too much rather than trying, like Dr. Washington, to improve the race in a practical way” (qtd.in Rudwick 136-7). From the moment Du Bois began his career as a full-time propagandist, he thus wrote for “the darker races” of various political temperaments, but his prophetic critique also spoke to white audiences. As we see from the above response, white supremacists often reframed his critique in terms of his own skin color—they lowered the Veil. But the Veil could also be used as a starting point in Du Bois’s outreach to black audiences: something to lift, or from behind which to issue his jeremiads, a *sanctum sanctorum* accessible only the Negro clerisy.

So the central dilemma for Du Bois as a propagandist was whether to rend the Veil or appropriate it. For the publication of *Darkwater* in 1920, he developed a literary style that attempted to do both dialectically. Du Bois structured the book around diptychs, often balancing an allegorical fable or poem against an essay of social criticism. This technique commonly elicits critical analyses that connect it to modernist aesthetics and modernism’s implication in cultural imperialism. To wit, John Carlos Rowe finds in *Darkwater* “a postcolonial socialism built on a spiritual democracy” (207).<sup>28</sup> At stake for Rowe is how the style of works like *Darkwater* (and

*Souls and Black Reconstruction*) provide a way to understand and resist capitalist neocolonialism by recovering counter-histories and futures. For him, Du Bois's prophetic mode places African America at "the site of this crossing of past, present, and future, and thus it holds a privileged position as the *origin* of resistance to modern imperialism" (201). Reiland Rabaka similarly identifies *Darkwater* as a "critique of modernity"—that is, a critique of the idea that "when and where whites broke new ground, in whatever technical capacity and whichever area of existence, they did so on the graves of people of color" (24). Amy Kaplan, too, argues that the style of *Darkwater* "deploys modernist forms of incongruity, fragmentation, and discontinuity for the opposite effect" of European modernism: "to collapse distances and overturn the hierarchy between metropolis and hierarchy" (185).

A common theme running throughout these commentaries is that the literary style of *Darkwater* puts the Veil to use, even though it retains and depends upon racial tropes. Rowe regards Du Bois's democratic tenor to be generally salutary, though he acknowledges the drawbacks of its Enlightenment positivism.<sup>29</sup> Kaplan trains her attention more on the ambivalence inherent in a style that "charts the way that the anarchy of empire dissolves the boundaries between the domestic and foreign," yet "imagines forms of transnational collectivity that go beyond the boundaries of colony and empire" (173). Rabaka's term for it is "guerilla wordfare" (27). He contends that *Darkwater* demonstrates unequivocally that "unless and until the racial rulers relinquish

race and rid themselves of racism," Afrodiasporic subjects must "cautiously employ race as a socio-political vehicle to counter racism and create anti-racist theory and revolutionary praxis" (40). Race in these readings is not something to get beyond; it is the necessary starting point for any productive (let alone revolutionary) political discourse. It is furthermore a starting point for unraveling the role race plays in maintaining racial hierarchies throughout the capitalist imperium. Unraveling race does not mean merely attacking the irrational bases of racism in white supremacist cultures. It means imparting, through literary style, the experience of the Veil to audiences both black and otherwise. In Afrofuturist terms, it means imparting the experience of more than just double-consciousness.

But seeing through the Veil—relying on it as a critical apparatus—precludes rending it. In his initial book proposal for *Darkwater* unearthed by Herbert Aptheker, Du Bois reasserted the centrality of the color line as the common thread sewing together all the social problems of the age. "The nation and the world think of their problems of work and wage, domestic service, government, sex, and education, and then envision the race problem as apart and beyond these," whereas, in truth, "the color line shows itself, not as a separate problem, but directly as a problem of work, rule, sex, and training." Explaining how the book's structure addresses this bold agenda, Du Bois claims,

“In order to carry out this central thesis, the author has sought, first, to make clear, objectively, his own childhood, training and outlook upon the world as a Negro, so as to start from a definite, human point of view. He has tried, too, to indicate, rather than describe, the vast emotional content of this social problem by inserting between the arguments bits of poetry and fancy, which interpret the bewilderment, the disappointment, the longing, and the faith of millions of men.

The book, finally, ends with a brief philosophy of beauty and death, and a story and a hymn, looking toward human unity. (qtd. in Aptheker 148)

The central dilemma Du Bois faced—appropriating the Veil or rending it—remained a paradox. The “definite, human point of view” is specifically “Negro.” Both the “arguments” and “bits of poetry and fancy” are rooted in the color line, as they must be. For Du Bois, rending the Veil would be tantamount to ignoring the specific precarity of African peoples and the structures of ambivalence that characterize their experiences of oppression throughout the colonial world. Taken as a whole, *Darkwater* encompasses problems of sex, class, and international conflict. All of these vectors of oppression are, however, always already raced. Du Bois demonstrates, for instance, his socialist sensibilities in “Of Work and Wealth” and “Of the Ruling of Men,” his feminist sensibilities in “The Damnation of Women,” and his cosmopolitan sensibilities in “The Souls of White Folk.” But proletarian class consciousness cannot ignore the realities of the way capital plays the white working class against its black comrades; women’s

suffrage can accomplish nothing without acknowledging black mothers; the roots of the European World War were in the colonial scramble for Africa. The final story of *Darkwater* is “The Comet” because it is a story that, like the book, encompasses these themes as a whole. But it is science fiction. It underscores the implacability of the color line in the face of these other problems—problems that, in the story’s apocalyptic imagination, can be got rid of, if only for a time.<sup>30</sup> But when they return, it is because they are first and foremost premised on the Veil.

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### **A Vaster, Mightier Thing**

The story begins with a black bank messenger named Jim being sent to an underground vault by his white superiors, a job “too dangerous for more valuable men” (149). A comet sweeps near the Earth, and everyone in New York City is killed by its toxic tail except for Jim, ironically saved by his dangerous task in the vault, and a white woman named Julia, who had been developing pictures in her dark room. The messenger runs about the lifeless city with no one to whom he can bear witness before hearing her voice, “like the voice of God” (152). Though Jim is a “tall, dark workingman of the better class” (152-3), she is “rarely beautiful and richly gowned” (152), a banker’s daughter. Forced together by circumstance, Julia fears being sexually assaulted. When the black man and white woman attempt reaching the rest of the world via a dead operator’s switchboard, there is only silence. “It was as if she had

heard the last flicker of creation, and the evil was silence." In the silence, "she was alone in the world with a stranger, with something more than a stranger,—with a man alien in blood and culture—unknown, perhaps unknowable" (155). Yet when they return to their commandeered car, they "move in a world silent and asleep,—not dead," and "quick with the same startling thought," they see a "vision of a mighty beauty—of vast, unspoken things."

In this moment, they find themselves by the ocean—"the dark and restless waters"—and Jim asks, "The world lies beneath the waters now—may I go?" She replies, "No" (156). After saving Jim from his despair, they travel to the Metropolitan Tower, and this onetime stranger is now to her "a man—no more." From the rooftop, they set off a rocket flare, earlier confiscated in a desperate plan to make contact. Contemplating their place in the cosmos, Jim and Julia experience a momentary transcendence of their race and class prejudices. "She was primal woman; mighty mother of all men to come and Bride of Life" (157-8), and as for Jim: "The shackles seemed to rattle and fall from his soul. Up from the crass and crushing and cringing of his caste leaped the lone majesty of kings long dead" (158). The moment of transcendence continues beyond even their sexual roles. "Silently, immovably, they saw each other face to face—eye to eye. Their souls lay naked to the night. It was not lust; it was not love—it was some vaster, mightier thing that needed neither touch of body nor thrill of soul. It was a thought divine, splendid" (158). Finally, "He lifted up his

mighty arms, and they cried each to the other, almost with one voice, 'The world is dead.' 'Long live the'— (158)"

At which point the silence—which once seemed evil to Julia, which once signified her alienation from her companion—is broken by the honk of a car horn. The car belongs to her father and fiancé. After embracing her with relief, her father and betrothed take notice of Jim; they immediately ask Julia if she'd been violated. They believe her when she says Jim rescued her, so Julia's father stuffs some cash in his hand by way of thanks and nebulously offers him a job. A forming crowd considers lynching Jim for the crime of fraternizing with a white woman, but they manage to restrain themselves. He is instead reunited with his wife, "brown, small, and toil-worn," who arrives carrying their dead baby. Du Bois writes, "He whirled and, with a sob of joy, caught her in his arms" (160).

Rabaka reads this final scene as a rehearsed betrayal of African-Americans' good faith in American society: a defeat at the tyrannical hands of America's ever-resilient white supremacist caste system.<sup>31</sup> As Du Bois indicated in his proposal for *Darkwater*, he wished to demonstrate the convergence of social problems on the color line. Even as "The Comet" critiques Julia's racist assumptions, his portrait of her bears a striking similarity to, say, Ibsen's Nora: a privileged white girl in a gilded cage. Despite her racism, she merits a chance for liberation. One may get the impression, at the end, that Julia's restoration of white caste privilege is a return to her cage, perhaps with the gold

leaf noticeably flaking off. Nor does Du Bois exempt his fellow citizens in the North from the same murderous impulse as a Southern lynch mob. The horrible isolation of wandering a dead city is broken not by the *demos* rejoicing that there are two survivors, but anger that one of them is black. The cash buyout Julia's father gives Jim is insulting on its face, but what of the job offer? Being a banker by trade, it is likely that the work vaguely offered to Jim would be no better than the position he had at the story's outset: a messenger in name who in reality simply does work "too dangerous for more valuable"—read: *white*; read: *educated*; read: *wealthy*—"men." Despite the apocalyptic social leveling, the denouement of "The Comet" clearly ties together the strands, which Du Bois had woven throughout the book, into a Gordian knot. Given the prophetic images in the climax, a vision of some "vaster, mightier thing," that would have transcended body and spirit and which *almost* unified Jim and Julia in one voice, Du Bois unquestionably frames the ending as a betrayal of latent progress on all fronts.

Backsliding is, of course, a key motif of a jeremiad, and like most African-American jeremiads, "The Comet" does not rely on a mythologized past as its measure of political progress. Instead, Du Bois prophetically evokes the possibility of a true unity based on equality. Because he has traced the color line through all of the interactions Jim has had with the dead city and Julia, its last living woman, up to this point, it is the primary hurdle that must be overcome. This does not happen simply because Jim and

Julia think they are the last humans on earth. It happens because they experience a prophetic revelation of what it *means* to be the last humans on earth. The moment of their almost-union is the only moment in the story in which the Veil is almost lifted. In their awareness of each other's fullness, Jim and Julia experience—almost—a radically different form of double-consciousness, one in which they see each other and themselves, but as persons containing multitudes, not as categories of caste. It is this moment in which the Veil is almost moved beyond, almost gotten rid of. Du Bois cannot take that moment further. He sees through the Veil, darkly. The color line science-fictionally affords Du Bois the ability to imagine, concretely, a world without race. Unfortunately, it also insists upon the intrusive reality of his world: a world where the Veil produces the double-consciousness that enables such bits of fancy and poetry to be imagined in the first place. The Veil points the way toward political progress, but it ends with backsliding; it prevents political progress from being imagined within the American context.

Whether Du Bois attempts to imagine a specifically American context for liberation has been theorized in different ways. Eric Sundquist calls *Darkwater* "a kind of philosophical scripture, a militant cry from within the veil that fused the forms of the jeremiad and visionary lyric" for Pan-African consciousness (610). He locates *Darkwater* within the context of Du Bois's Pan-Africanism. Du Bois had been active in promoting Pan-Africanism since at least 1897, when he presented "The Conservation of Races" to

the American Negro Academy; he had participated in the July 1900 Pan-African Congress in London as well as helped organize the 1911 Universal Congress of Races, and his 1915 volume, *The Negro*, strenuously boasted the accomplishments of African peoples and their civilization.<sup>32</sup> Pan-Africanism in the broadest sense of the term was, in the early years of the twentieth century, a movement that recognized the overlapping political goals between all people of color whose subjugation by people of European descent was premised on a white supremacist racial hierarchy. This made the movement global in scope and heavily invested in decolonization.<sup>33</sup> Though Du Bois was highly critical throughout most of his life of back-to-Africa movements such as Marcus Garvey's,<sup>34</sup> he foregrounded the intersection of European colonialism and the U. S. caste system in essays like "The Color Line Belts the World" in 1905, and developed a full-throated critique in "The African Roots of the War" in 1915. The latter essay was folded into *Darkwater's* "The Souls of White Folk," which elaborates on the role of white supremacy in creating the conditions for Pan-African solidarity. He warns in the essay against "great, ugly whirlwinds of hatred and blood and cruelty"—that is, the blowback against the colonizers. "I will not believe them inevitable," he vows (29). In such writings, Du Bois prophetically demands equality on behalf of his black readers by evoking American promise while warning his white readers of a coming—and entirely preventable—social catastrophe. His jeremiad is not restricted to white and black Americans, though. Du Bois prophesies to the world.

This somewhat modifies the American jeremiad's initial formula, which posited the New World as a redemptive outpost for the rest of the world (that is, Europe, but the scope increased alongside the United States' imperial ambitions). As we saw earlier, Bercovitch holds the jeremiad in deep suspicion because it transmutes dissent from the status quo into an affirmation of American exceptionalism. But the language of nation, as Glaude argues, was a way for the African-American jeremiad of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to articulate political critique: to demand that the nation honor its founding promise and to exhort the public to positive, material action to fulfill that promise. In his own exegesis of the American prophetic literary tradition, George Shulman acknowledges the divisive role of the jeremiad, but argues that "we should also resist the fantasy of escaping the nation, which still is *the* organizing center of political life," since American prophets "invoke *and trouble* national political identity by dramatizing what is costly, fantastical, and fateful in it" (25, emphasis in original). Part of the price paid by the United States, in Du Bois's vision, was the human cost of empire: a cost dramatized by America's legacy of slavery, Jim Crow laws, and social apartheid. Though often dramatized by images drawn from the national mythos, the America of *Darkwater* is submerged in a prophetic vision that unifies the world's social problems through the color line. Thus the decimated New York City through which Jim and Julia peregrinate imagines the *world's* problem of the color line—a social problem, one requiring metaphors like the Veil to encapsulate its capaciousness—in immutably

concrete terms. The city is American; the redemptive promise is racial; the prophecy is global.

Such ambivalence *is* troubling, as it should be. Sundquist perceives in *Darkwater* “a black ‘nationalist’ philosophy—rather, a vision with all the messianic overtones implicit in a story such as ‘The Comet’—that has both European and African intellectual roots and is specifically diasporic in its effects” (546). But Sundquist thinks that the ending of “The Comet” forecloses messianic hope, referring to it as an “antiprophetic turn” that “brings the hyperactive Pan-African rhetoric, which surges forth in waves throughout the volume, to a numbing halt” (618). He refers to William H. Ferris, who reviewed *Darkwater* in 1920. “Du Bois is a Jeremiah who lyrically sings the woes and lamentations of his people,” Ferris carps, “but not a prophet who brings a message of hope, not a Moses or Joshua who is bent on reaching the Promised Land... Dr. Du Bois has no constructive plan and programme” (345).<sup>35</sup> Apart from the feigned ignorance of the numerous political positions Du Bois had been staking out during the last decade as editor of the *Crisis*, Ferris ascribes no productive function to the jeremiad. Sundquist rightly notes that “A Hymn to the Peoples,” which concludes *Darkwater* directly after “The Comet” is restorative and optimistic, but he neglects the contours of his own thesis regarding *Darkwater’s* Pan-African politics. If *Darkwater* maps out a way for peoples of color to imagine themselves united in an antiracist, decolonial struggle, how is it fruitless or antiprophetic to dramatize the stakes in a story that ends in backsliding?

Kaplan picks up on this element of "The Comet" in her own reading of *Darkwater*. Her interpretation of the "anarchy of empire" encompasses everything touched by American imperialism in 1919:

This apocalyptic violence works as a metaphor that merges the carnage of European "civilization," the "Red Summer" across the United States, the militancy of the black soldiers who "return fighting," and the threat of anticolonial revolts at home and abroad. The comet brings the war home into the modern metropolis and into the heart of the black and white families. (207)

Like Sundquist, she reads "Hymn to the Peoples" as a restoration of utopian hope, but the political reckoning with all those events signified by "The Comet" is a necessary—and productive—prerequisite. As evidenced by her invocation of various historical phenomena within WWI's milieu, she emphasizes the "transnational scope of *Darkwater*," which "explores multiple forms of consciousness, not delineated solely by nation and race though informed by both, and routed instead through the dispersed locations and dislocations of empire" (184). Rather than Pan-Africanism *per se*, Kaplan sees the generative potential of "The Comet" that Sundquist missed. Yet she identifies the ambivalences of *Darkwater* as united by the "anarchy of empire"—a phrase taken from Du Bois's "Hymn"—not by the color line.

Kaplan recovers a prophetic "troubling" from "The Comet" which in her view rends the Veil to reveal the face of the imperial metropole. But Du Bois explicitly

refuses that move. As a work of Afrofuturism, "The Comet" does explore multiple consciousness; it is informed by both nation and race; it does weave together the dispersed locations and dislocations of empire. Sundquist is right about its diasporic effect, even as Kaplan is correct to see it as generative. It is ultimately a specifically Afro-American prophetic critique, one that negates what is and transforms prevailing realities against the backdrop of the present historical limits.<sup>36</sup> Though unified science-fictionally by race, the prophetic critique of "The Comet" is not any less about empire or the Afrodiaspora, but it is also not primarily about them, nor is it irreducibly about how empire and the Afrodiaspora intertwine. And just because "A Hymn to the Peoples" is more explicitly utopian does not mean that "The Comet" does not contain the seeds of hope. In this jeremiad, Du Bois upholds his own earlier prophecy that the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line. But he also demonstrates that it is a problem *that* the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line. In *Darkwater* as a whole, but in "The Comet" in particular, Du Bois prioritizes the problem of the color line, but the seed of hope lies in the recognition of formulating the problem that way. He troubles it with science-fictional ambivalence.

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## George Schuyler, the Anti-Jeremiah

This particular brand of prophetic troubling was not sufficient for George Samuel Schuyler. A generation younger than Du Bois and much more the iconoclast, Schuyler had served time for going AWOL from the U. S. Army, rubbed shoulders with the tramps of Harlem who attended lectures like Marcus Garvey's in libraries and on street corners, and cut his teeth as a columnist at A. Philip Randolph and Owen Chandler's avowedly socialist *The Messenger*.<sup>37</sup> Du Bois had already endured Schuyler's "Shafts and Darts"—the name of the young turk's column in *The Messenger* between 1923 and 1925, aided and abetted by Theophilus Lewis from April 1924—for his Pan-African Congresses, his stentorian style, and lukewarm socialism.<sup>38</sup> Though Schuyler traveled in socialist circles throughout the 1920s and wrote almost exclusively about race issues, he adopted the stance of what Jeffrey Ferguson calls a modernist trickster—someone who places his faith in the "skeptical intellectual orientation of modern life" (39). A particular target of Schuyler's skeptical mockery was anything resembling the positivist racial chauvinism that undergirded white supremacist tracts like Madison Grant's *The Passing of the Great Race* (1916) and Lothrop Stoddard's *The Rising Tide of Color* (1920), but also the romanticized Ethiopianism that had always haunted Du Bois's work—increasingly so after he finally set foot on Liberian soil in 1923.<sup>39</sup> Schuyler certainly invoked what can be called race pride when it suited his rhetorical purposes,<sup>40</sup> but in

general, he ardently opposed any attempt to describe or prescribe racial characteristics deterministically, whether or not the attempt was made by a person of color. While debate continues over the degree to which Du Bois fell into racial determinism,<sup>41</sup> Schuyler thought the Veil to be very flimsy indeed: as a metaphor and as a discursive social practice. The very romanticism that gave Du Bois's prophetic critique such force was, in Schuyler's view, detrimental to the fight for equality. As long as race set the terms of how to measure a people's right to democratic participation, racial supremacy would always be at stake: combating a myth of Nordic supremacy with a counter-myth of African supremacy was a political dead end. The risk inherent in retaining the use of the Veil for the purposes of social critique, for Schuyler, was that it would always give white supremacism a framework, even if it rendered the scaffolding somewhat unstable.

The most infamous example of this, outside Schuyler's novels, is the essay he wrote for the *Nation* in 1926, "The Negro-Art Hokum." While often cited in connection with the Harlem Renaissance and "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," the essay solicited by the *Nation's* editors from Langston Hughes as a sort of companion piece to Schuyler's,<sup>42</sup> "Negro-Art Hokum" is less a broadside against the great Harlem artists of that period than it is a clear warning against racial exceptionalism, however inadvertent. Justly notorious for his calculatedly outrageous claim that "the Aframerican is merely a lampblack Anglo-Saxon" (14), Schuyler's broader point is

that white and black Americans share the United States across a plurality of geographical and cultural vectors. Staking out a separate-but-equal sphere of cultural accomplishment would not bridge the divide between castes; racists would only co-opt the idea of “peculiar” Negro art to buttress their own claims of unbridgeable differences between whites and blacks (16). “Aside from his color,” Schuyler argues, “which ranges from dark brown to pink, your American Negro is just plain American” (14). Color was—or ought to be—beside the point, because when an African-American “responds to the same political, social, moral, and economic stimuli in precisely the same manner as his white neighbor, it is sheer nonsense to talk about ‘racial differences’” (15). Schuyler was not blind to the realities of the racial caste system in 1920s America, and he routinely lamented the evils of white supremacy in his newspaper columns throughout his career. Even after his hard turn to the political right, which began in earnest in the 1930s with a virulent anti-communist streak and which led him to deride the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, Schuyler fatalistically acknowledged the endurance of white racism in the U. S.<sup>43</sup> Not that Schuyler did not find value in hierarchy; he simply put more stock in effort and cunning than in patently absurd theories of racial supremacy. He knew that black Americans in the 1920s did not respond the same way to the same circumstances as white Americans, because he recognized the same pervasive, racist social dynamics as Du Bois. What he rejected was the possibility of transcendence hinted at in “The Comet,” in large part because

his view of human nature was more jaundiced. His fear that proclaiming the peculiarity of Negro art was “flattering to the white mob” makes sense when one considers the popularity of Carl van Vechten’s sensationalistic *Nigger Heaven* (1926) among both white readers and African-American literati like Charles Johnson, Walter White, and Hughes.<sup>44</sup> Not only was such flattery a capitulation to the first principle of racist theory—that races are fundamentally, irreconcilably different—but a capitulation to the lowest common denominator.

If the premise that Negro art was special flattered the white mob’s ideas of essential racial difference, Schuyler believed, it also flattered the black mob’s idea of exceptionalism. “While such reasoning may seem conclusive to the majority of Americans, it must be rejected with a loud guffaw by intelligent people,” Schuyler concludes (16). Schuyler makes a key distinction in his final claim. Earlier in the essay, Schuyler insisted that “your American Negro is just plain American.” Color is no marker of superiority or inferiority. *Intelligence* is. The average American of any color had already achieved the equality of being just as dumb as anybody else, whereas exceptional individuals of any color could only credit themselves for rising above the masses. In Schuyler’s opinion, the romanticized Afro-chauvinism of Du Bois erased that distinction with its insistence on the unique contributions of the Negro to world civilization—contributions only visible through the Veil. Du Bois’s Afro-American

prophetic critique was anti-intellectual and unrealistic. Schuyler therefore set himself the task of rending the Veil by lampooning the conventions of the Harlem Renaissance.

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## **As a City on a Happy Hill**

Published in 1931, *Black No More* arrived at the high tide of the Renaissance, ironically one of the movement's more canonical texts while also being a document that excoriates its assumptions. David Levering Lewis uses it to frame the beginning of the end of the Renaissance, along with Wallace Thurman's bitter, ambivalent valediction, *Infants of the Spring* (1932).<sup>45</sup> Schuyler knew or had passing acquaintance with most of the folks involved in New York City's black leadership, either as acquaintances or sparring partners, and finds places for most of them in his novel.

The novel's protagonist, Max Disher, is a Harlem hustler who undergoes the titular procedure, "Black-No-More," which gives him Caucasian features and color, motivated in large part because he was rejected by a white girl at a club. Freshly whitened, he goes South to take advantage of caste privilege and winds up becoming the brains (under the alias Matthew Fisher) behind the Knights of Nordica, a white supremacist organization revived by the Reverend Henry Givens, whose daughter, Helen, is the very same one who refused him at the novel's outset. As Max gets rich stoking white racial anxiety over the Black-No-More treatment, the Harlem personalities make their entrance in caricatured forms as they scramble to adapt their own hustle to

the rapidly changing social landscape of whitened America. Most personalities are given the drive-by treatment in a summit convened by Dr. Shakespeare Agamemnon Beard, the novel's primary Du Bois surrogate. Beard's National Social Equality League rapidly disintegrates as more and more African-Americans, like Max, get the treatment and, now passing for white, require no race leaders to lead their race.

Over the course of the narrative, Max leverages Givens's populist appeal into a viable presidential campaign as a Democrat candidate. He calls in Arthur Snobbcraft and Samuel Buggerie, a pair of pseudo-scientists on the order of Stoddard and Grant, to research the family tree of his father-in-law to burnish his racial *bona fides*.

Unfortunately, they discover that virtually everyone who claims Anglo-Saxon or Nordic superiority actually has some trace of African blood in their lineage. As it happens, Beard—having lost his position as a race leader—has gotten the Black-No-More treatment, changed his name, and has been working for Snobbcraft and Buggerie on this very project. On the eve of the election, Republicans burglarize the genealogy results and release them to the public. The presidential campaign collapses, and Snobbcraft and Buggerie flee from racist Georgia mobs who are outraged that these white men were black all along; they disguise themselves in blackface to avoid detection; they arrive in a town—Happy Hill, Mississippi—whose citizens are itching to lynch a black man and they immediately seize the two “black” men; the quacks reveal that they actually have white skin and are spared; the mob then learns of their true

identities and lynches them anyway. Max and his family evacuate the country, and in the novel's epilogue, he reads with amusement that Dr. Junius Crookman, inventor of the Black-No-More process, has published his discovery that recipients of the treatment are actually a bit whiter than white, jump-starting a craze for blackening treatments.

Appropriately for a no-holds-barred satire, Schuyler's ending leaves no hope for ending the problem of race. Critics interpret the political regression at the end of the novel in different ways. Jane Kuenz sees Schuyler assessing the power dynamics inherent in whiteness being used as a litmus test for democratic participation, which is the only thing that grants a measure of popular control over a capitalist society. Even without black skin, "in the world of *Black No More*, 'blackness' can always reemerge within class in the form of a threat of alienated labor or as the comforts unavailable in this alienated world" (188). What Kuenz means is an alienated *white* world, where to desire to be in a higher color caste is itself "a really white thing to do" (176). Sonny Retman's reading takes this insight even further, arguing that Schuyler discerned in the Harlem Renaissance a commodification of blackness. Just as capitalism had already found ways to exploit reproductive processes among white women and children on a biopolitical level, and just as slavery had attempted to reduce Africans to pure property, *Black-No-More* represents the possibility of treating blackness as a renewable resource—one whose market potential rivals even whiteness. "In other words," Retman argues, "if new technologies enable new forms of black agency on the market, they are

inexorably tied to processes of commodification and hegemony” (1461). Retman is thinking primarily of the feedback loop of racial anxiety fostered by Max and Crookman. Max and his fellow whitened Negroes—not to mention Crookman—are able to profit from their whiteness only to the extent that blackness is something it is desirable to escape from. Max is able to go South to pursue his opportunities, and Crookman takes his business empire global. The more black folks escape across the color line, the more versatile blackness becomes as an exploitable resource.

This represents a perversion of Alain Locke’s New Negro, extending democratic participation within the U. S. and the cultural reach of the American metropole throughout the world—but always in connection with an emerging market opportunity for *erasing* blackness, rather than celebrating its potential for revitalization.<sup>46</sup> Locke presented the New Negro as a vanguard of an emerging race-consciousness that would galvanize political revolution at home and abroad; Schuyler science-fictionally recasts the New Negro, via *Black-No-More*, as a sort of technology that would galvanize *reaction*. At the very least, one might escape one’s blackness, but one will never escape race and the varieties of racial experience. And as long as there are varieties of racial experience, there will be a market for cognitive fictions that exploit them.

Dana Carluccio uses the term “cognitive fiction” to refer to “an inevitable cognitive propensity to act as *if* such traits existed”—that is, racial traits (513). She

interprets both Du Bois and Schuyler as giving voice to a sort of nascent evolutionary psychological perspective on race and behavior. She contends that “evolution may have invented an inclination toward organizing the world as if race existed, rather than having invented a stable set of racialized traits” (518). This cognitive fiction, however, is no less real for being a fiction. The Happy Hill incident is a prime example. Snobbcraft and Buggerie exhibit no particular set of racialized traits other than skin color; the entire episode is a series of rapid turns of fortune’s wheel. The only thing that remains stable throughout the series of revelations about their identities is the way race is constructed and acted upon by the barbarous citizens of the town. In this scene, Retman claims, “we confront the horror of whiteness and the rituals and technologies of violence out of which it is constructed” (1458). Which is to say: the racial exploitation of capitalism is taken to its most logical extreme. After all, these peddlers of junk science had bought part and parcel into Max’s schemes, which traded on the intersection of white supremacy and technologies of the self. They brought this on themselves, but the cognitive fiction of race preceded their efforts. Carluccio argues that, rather than being manipulated by the exploitative logic of the market, Schuyler “stresses the social deception as an outlet for, or exploitation of, built-in compulsions” (532). It is almost as though nobody in this scene could help but follow through on the ritual.

Each of these readings takes race for granted as a fiction. Schuyler clearly thinks it is, and Retman, Kuenz, and Carluccio agree. But Retman and Kuenz use the lynching scene to highlight the limits of the market as an arena for agency, and they seek to recover in Schuyler some ambiguity in the way he handles agency in a racist and capitalist society as well as critique his own propensity to celebrate the amoral agency of a character like Max. Carluccio, I think, hits closer to the narrative's effect by theorizing a way that Schuyler illustrates a certain "stuck-ness" of this particular cognitive fiction: race. Max is able to escape the color caste. He "seems immune to the cognitive fictions of race," Carluccio observes, "and his entrepreneurial acumen is the mark of it" (536). But does not Schuyler present Max's *skin* the actual mark of his acumen? In the novel, he is the very first African-American to undergo the Black-No-More process. We might say that he is an early adopter; that he got in at the ground floor. By virtue of his willingness to alter his physical being, he was able to get in with the Knights of Nordica, marry the woman who spurned him, almost win a presidential election for his racist father-in-law, and then escape with his riches and his family from the United States. The cognitive fiction of race is literally and metaphorically Max's skin: it changes and adapts to circumstance. Race in *Black No More*, being at once a social construct and a technology of the self, is therefore science-fictional.

Schuyler's science-fictional approach to race is ultimately a way for him to resist and critique the prophetic mode. Afrofuturism embraces race as a signifier, but one

that must be troubled and woven with the threads of double-, triple-, and quadruple-consciousness. Not only is race a fulcrum of power, but Schuyler recognizes it as one that can be moved, almost as if in a shell game. He does not flinch from recognizing the evils of racism, but he sees power in being able to adjust one's relationship to a caste system premised on racial hierarchy. It is Crookman and Max's ability to see race science-fictionally—to get a handle on a materially real yet elusive object—that lets them profit from and manipulate it so effectively to their own benefit. Though the framework of the caste system remains firmly in place—Max and the white supremacists see to that—the African-American “race” evaporates, leaving a gap in America's racial hierarchy. Given the chance, Schuyler argues, the average African-American would prefer to escape his caste than fight to end racial discrimination. Race is a cognitive fiction so big and elusive that getting a handle on its varieties of institutional embodiments is an impossible task. Society, as such, will never end white supremacy, Schuyler argues. But by turning race into something that any individual can adjust and manipulate to his own benefit—that is a science-fictional way of really making it pliable. Taking a social construct and literally transmuting it into a technology of the self is a way for Schuyler to concretize it in a single fictional conceit—the better to handle as a fulcrum of power, and the better to penetrate with multiple vectors of consciousness. Even if escape from the caste system is ephemeral—which Schuyler believes it is—the latent potential for adaptation remains.

By contrast, *Black No More* depicts prophetic black leaders trying to keep African-Americans in their place within that system so that they can fulfill their redemptive mission. Their mission is to eradicate the system—in practice, though, that only grants the premise that the caste system, so long as it exists, is inescapable. The key illustration of this is, of course, the scene at the N. S. E. L. office, from which Dr. Shakespeare Agamemnon Beard publishes *The Dilemma* and “comely yellow stenographers with weak resistance” apparently comprise most of the staff (90), Beard appeals to the assembled Talented Tenth and solemnly introduces his first speaker, concluding with this passage:

Before I gratefully yield the floor to Dr. Jackson, however, I want to tell you that our destiny lies in the stars. Ethiopia’s fate is in the balance. The Goddess of the Nile weeps bitter tears at the feet of the Great Sphinx. The lowering clouds gather over the Congo and the lightning flashes o’er Togoland. To your tents, O Israel! The hour is at hand. (92)

Besides its lethal burlesque of Du Boisian prose and tropes, the passage stands out as a prophetic call to arms that ultimately, as we have seen, comes to nothing. Beard’s messianic grandstanding is the apotheosis of black America’s race leaders leading the race into a political cul-de-sac. “To your tents, O Israel!” clearly evokes the language described by Glaude, Harrell, and other theorists of the African-American jeremiad. But Schuyler has Beard reject this prophetic mode of discourse and go back to his scientific

training, which ultimately is much more helpful in defeating the white supremacists. By channeling Du Bois at his most jeremiadic and skewering his pretensions toward world-historical redemption, Schuyler sets up *Black No More* as an anti-jeremiad.

His anti-jeremiadic purpose is most explicitly laid bare in the macabre face at Happy Hill. The backwater town has been perversely revitalized by the presence of Rev. Alex McPhule, who declaims how “other churches had grown soft and were flirting with atheism and Modernism which, according to Rev. McPhule, were the same thing” (205). The highly unorthodox McPhule has orgies and preys upon the fears of his flock in various ways, but ultimately decides that to cement his new church’s dominance, he must provide a providential sign, which must be “a nigger for his congregation to lynch” (208). He entreats his congregants by telling them of an angelic vision and “shaking his head and rolling his eyes” like “one of the Prophets of old.” Schuyler is not subtle: “The man was a natural actor and his voice had that sepulchral tone universally associated with Men of God, court criers and Independence Day orators” (210). There is no mistaking McPhule’s prophetic mode as anything other than jeremiadic. After the victims are castrated, gunned down, and set ablaze, even the ex-Negroes who had undergone the Black-No-More treatment “began to yell and prod the burning bodies with sticks and cast stones at them. This exhibition restored them to favor and banished any suspicion that they might not be *one-hundred-per-cent Americans*” (218; emphasis added). Throughout this section, Schuyler rehearses with

liturgical precision the formula of the jeremiad. On its face, Schuyler's anticlericalism and contempt for prophetic critique seems unmistakable.

But this violent scene is essentially the climax of the novel, and the centrality of jeremiadic discourse to *Black No More's* critique suggests a dialectic that is borne out in one other key respect. Though Schuyler seems to hold no truck with Beard's Du Boisian palaver, Beard himself is a vital minor player, and he serves as a kind of foil to Crookman. While Crookman rakes in the dough and eventually becomes Surgeon General, Beard takes Crookman's treatment and puts his sociological training to work for the white supremacists who wind up lynched at the end of the novel. When asked by a former comrade what he's been up to, he explains, "Now we're trying to get the material in shape for easy digestion" (171). At the end of the novel, it is Beard's digestible summary—meticulously researched and documented—which the Republicans steal and release to the masses in order to swing the election against Givens. Whereas the real-life Du Bois felt that his academic work had achieved almost no measurable political progress—leading him, in part, to move into full-time prophetic critique—Schuyler's satirical version defeats white supremacy in the most ironic fashion: anonymously, empirically, and under the cover of white skin. Crookman, by contrast, reawakens the entire craze with his report that Black-No-More renders black skin "three shades whiter" (218): "To a society that had been taught to venerate whiteness for over three hundred years, this announcement was rather staggering. What was the world

coming to, if the blacks were whiter than the whites?" (219). Ferguson sums up Crookman's position as "back where he started: somewhere in the ambiguous space between eliminating and exacerbating the race problem" (224). While Beard almost solves the race problem by proving through his research that, as Givens observes the morning after the election, "I guess we're all niggers now" (193), Crookman undoes it all with his own. Yet Schuyler does not necessarily hold Crookman or even Beard responsible for the backsliding in the epilogue (if Schuyler can even be said to represent it as "backsliding," *per se*, a jeremiadic concept he would likely reject). Neither version of Du Bois can be blamed, since both have either given up or never adopted a prophetic view of race. The problem remains with the masses and their jeremiadic way of thinking about social organization.

Ferguson points out that Crookman "appears to commit an act of symbolic genocide against his own people, but he also makes a similar threat to whites and to the whole dream of superiority by decent [sic]" (239). Since Schuyler does not consider eliminating race a sign of declension—for either the U. S. or black peoples—Beard's prophetic fulmination, taken seriously, would set back political progress. It is no coincidence that Crookman, like Beard, shares many characteristics with Du Bois.<sup>47</sup> Both apply European education and advanced scientific ideas to America's race problem; and, in Schuyler's view, both stand to profit from such endeavors. The difference is Crookman's entrepreneurial pragmatism, which stands in direct contrast to

Beard's prophetic pontification. Beard is, it seems, finally cured of his prophetic habits, but people—white people, at least—are as susceptible as ever, as the Happy Hill mob demonstrates with stomach-churning efficiency. But there is a twist to Schuyler's gimlet observation of this susceptibility. Within the novel's context, Schuyler has his mob—whipped up by a jeremiad—bump off his exponents of scientific racism. It is a cathartic episode in one sense, because the men primarily responsible for lending a veneer of scientific legitimacy to racist rubbish are destroyed by the ignorant mob whose prejudices they propped up. But it is also an incredibly jaundiced critique, because Schuyler suggests that this is how the caste system survives. It is not the discourse of science that ultimately preserves it and passes it down, but the discourse of prophetic critique—the jeremiad. To top it off, the lynching pulls other African-Americans, whitened by the Black-No-More treatment, into the ritualistic violence. They do it to prove that they are "one-hundred-per-cent-American." There is one final irony to this. These are people who had already, in one sense, evaded the caste system by taking the treatment. But the uniformity of caste and race as a marker of American national belonging—as expressed in McPhule's jeremiad—is what pulls them in and confirms them as members of that community. So the jeremiad does its work of containing potential political dissent, but explicitly on the basis of exterminating those who do not conform to the intertwined pillars of race and caste.

For Schuyler, the jeremiad is a buttress that reifies the racist caste system in America, and though McPhule is the most extreme practitioner of its logic, he demonstrates in Beard's early speech that African-American leaders struggle to escape its pull. Ferguson argues that Schuyler's satire is an attempt to provoke "regeneration" via accepting the "necessary element of pollution and chaos at the center of a democratic culture staked on newness, dynamic movement, and the untapped possibility inherent in the lives of its lowliest elements" (214-15). Those lowly elements include not only Max, the protagonist, but all who attempt to harness the dynamism of race for profit and power: Beard and Crookman; Givens and his daughter; even McPhule. In a novel that lampoons prophetic discourse, and which treats race science-fictionally, why is it that Snobbcraft and Buggerie are the only ones who pay the ultimate price for their attempt to manipulate the system to their advantage?

In essence, the hustlers who survive and thrive in *Black No More's* America do so because they are hustlers. Snobbcraft and Buggerie are true believers, not hustlers. Moreover, their insistence on digging up the past to legitimate their claims is what gets them into trouble. They think that they can legitimate their myth empirically. As Ferguson argues, instead of reinventing themselves like everyone else in the novel, instead of moving forward, instead of doing something new, they hold onto a past they do not correctly understand. They backslide away from the future—rather, they fail to see race science-fictionally, which even the Rev. McPhule, in his benighted way, is able

to do. It is not to redeem his community that McPhule decides the town needs a lynching; it is to secure his own power base. It is a way to consolidate his gains, not his people's. Schuyler's fear for the New Negroes was that, instead of being genuinely new, they were instead attempting to recapture a past with which they had not adequately reckoned. For both the lynching victims in *Black No More* and the Harlem Renaissance artists Schuyler criticized in "Negro-Art Hokum," the very concept of race as a stable, reliable measure of difference was antiquated and ran contrary to Schuyler's understanding of America's promise. Instead of eradicating the color caste system for the sake of a race, Schuyler contends that seizing opportunities to evade or escape it on the individual level are more effective. As Happy Hill demonstrates, the jeremiad works only if the African-Americans prove their "one hundred percent American"-ness by acting white. The fight for equality, for Schuyler, is meaningless in racial terms. Max escapes the color line because he is a genuinely New Negro, severed from his past by his science-fictional white skin. Another way to put it is that Max can save his own skin because he science-fictionally recognizes how his skin can save him.

This is the ultimate irony of *Black No More*: Schuyler essentially upholds the social necessity of race. Hustlers like Max, Givens, Du Bois, and himself always need some social structure to circumvent. Schuyler certainly does not endorse systemic racism, but he also sees no chance for overcoming it. What that means, though, is that Schuyler never succeeds in rending the Veil. While the idea that "we're all niggers

now" implies that all Americans share a consciousness, the very concept of "nigger," with all its connotations, only makes sense in a racially stratified society—something Schuyler never believed could be reformed or transcended. Ferguson argues that "Schuyler never escaped the dilemma of 'twoness' that Du Bois stated so profoundly" (61), and I agree. But I also think that his Afrofuturist anti-jeremiad goes beyond double-consciousness. The introduction of Black-No-More does not erase the sense of people born black that they are both "Negro" and "American." After all, Max's entire scheme hinges on shoring up America's race problem. And the whitened Negroes who participate in the lynching of Snobbcraft and Buggerie are keenly aware of their double-agency in the midst of the Happy Hill mob. Yet the Happy Hill mob, full of people born white, is much more keenly aware of the potential "blackness" in its midst *after* that blackness has been rendered genuinely, literally unseeable (but not invisible). The science-fictionality of race in *Black No More* troubles "whiteness" for whites as much or more so than it does "blackness" for blacks. The more the concreteness of race is linked to skin color, the more it metaphorizes social relations in the U. S. It becomes an unassailable framework; the net result of Schuyler's anti-jeremiad, his resistance to prophetic critique, is a reification of the Veil.

In "The Comet" and *Black No More*, both authors recognize the social reality of race. Du Bois sought to transcend it, but his theorization of race did not permit him to imagine how. Schuyler thought it could be escaped, but only for a time, and only by

exceptional individuals. Du Bois, one could say, took the Max Disher option when he left the United States for Ghana near the end of his life. Schuyler stayed behind and posed for photographs with Richard Nixon. In the early 1930s, though, their dialectic of jeremiad and anti-jeremiad found potential uses for race by subaltern peoples. By science-fictionally troubling race, they both imagined the possibility of political revitalization, even though they were unable to see beyond the Veil to describe what such possibilities of renewal would be. In a culture saturated with “scientific” racism, Du Bois and Schuyler recognized that race itself was a science-fictional technology capable of determining which people would have the power to choose the future. They did not find a way entirely around it, nor could they find a way to eliminate it in their own contexts, but they recognized that being able to name and conceptualize the ways that race worked—getting a science-fictional handle on it—was a necessary component to any project of liberation.

This is in large part what marks these authors as Afrofuturists, but I think there’s something further to consider. Neither “The Comet” nor *Black No More* promotes black nationalism in its engagement with the jeremiad; not in the broadest Afrodiasporic sense, nor even in the narrower sense of the African-American jeremiad’s call for the nation to fulfill its democratic promise to all people. I think it important to linger on the ways in which both texts refuse that move. Neither Du Bois nor Schuyler could use race to imagine a path beyond race, but they were able to explore multiple-

consciousness in their texts, conjuring both white and black audiences and forcing those audiences to reckon with the stakes of America's race-inflected caste system. Though neither text shows its audiences a way to break down that caste system *in toto*, it is nonetheless important to note that instead of excluding the white readers, each folds them into their narratives. Du Bois and Schuyler provided readers of any race a way to science-fictionally imagine whiteness and blackness at the same time, which created at least one counter-history where the color line stitched two peoples into a future they would have to experience together.

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<sup>1</sup> See William M. Tuttle, Jr., *Race Riot* (1970), ch. 1 for a brief overview; Arthur I. Waskow's *From Race Riot to Sit-In* (1975) provides more detailed studies of the pogroms across the nation, all of which drew the NAACP into the aftermath. The late July riot in Chicago is perhaps the most notorious, but Walter White, for instance, later head of the NAACP, provided on-the-ground reports from rural Elaine, Arkansas, site of an early October riot, while "passing" as white. See Waskow, chs. 7 and 8.

<sup>2</sup> "Credo" was originally delivered in October 1904 at the first conference of what became known as the Niagara Movement, a political network of black progressives opposed to Booker T. Washington's accommodationist approach to white supremacy in the South and anywhere else in the United States where capitalist opportunism trumped civil rights advocacy. "A Hymn to the Peoples" was originally delivered in July 1911 at the Universal Congress of Races, a precursor to the Pan-African Congresses Du Bois organized after World War I. See Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race* (1993), pp. 297-322 on Niagara, and pp. 439-43 on Universal Congress of Races.

<sup>3</sup> See Gossett, pp. 261-63.

<sup>4</sup> See C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South* (1951).

<sup>5</sup> See Stephen Marshall, *The City on the Hill from Below* (2012); see also George Shulman, *American Prophecy* (2008).

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<sup>6</sup> Eddie Glaude, Jr., Willie Harrell, Jr., David Howard-Pitney, and Marshall have all written on the relation of Douglass, Baldwin, and King to the African-American jeremiad specifically; for Morrison, see Shulman, *American Prophecy*, ch. 5; for Obama, see Harrell, "'The Reality of American Life Has Strayed from Its Myths': Barack Obama's *The Audacity of Hope* and the Discourse of the American Reclamation Jeremiad" (2010) and "A '21st Century Economic Agenda for America': Barack Obama's Pre-Presidential Economic Jeremiads" (2011), as well as Katherine Henry, "'Slaves to a Debt': Race, Shame, and the Anti-Obama Jeremiad" (2014).

<sup>7</sup> See further examples in *Moral Evil and Redemptive Suffering* (2002), ed. Anthony B. Pinn, which collects sermons and speeches from key African-American figures throughout U. S. history that meditate on the theological implications of slavery and the black experience.

<sup>8</sup> See *Origins of the African-American Jeremiad*, esp. pp. 10, 23-29.

<sup>9</sup> See pp. 54-55.

<sup>10</sup> See Moses, *Black Messiahs and Uncle Toms*, ch. 3; also *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism*, esp. pp. 23-25, 29-31. Glaude more specifically critiques Moses's periodizing of black national language pre-1850 as being more mystical in its messianic tendencies (e.g. Alexander Crummel); Glaude reads it as much more pragmatic, more engaged with the immediate sociopolitical context. See Glaude, pp. 13-15.

<sup>11</sup> By "structure of ambivalence," Glaude means "a social experience (that is still in process) characterized by a sense of wounding, of being in but not of a nation that structures the experiences of African Americans" (174-75n46), a formulation drawing on Hortense Spillers, viz. Raymond Williams.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Moses, "Hero Worship, Du Bois, and Presentism," p. 129. The line comes from "The Nation's Problem," delivered 16 December 1889 in response to African-Americans of a more separatist persuasion. Douglass went on to insist, "There can be but one American nation" (qtd. in *Biography of a Race* 172). Moses highlights Douglass's speech as part of the reformer's longstanding assimilationist advocacy, in contrast to that of Crummell, who favored the colonization of Africa by Western-educated blacks, and of Du Bois's position as outlined in "The Conservation of Races," which was first addressed to the American Negro Academy in 1897. In that paper, Du Bois took up Crummell's sentiment that educated people of African descent had a particular role to play in civilizing the world, presaging his development of "The Talented Tenth" and his complicated role in promoting Pan-Africanism later on. See Harding, "W. E. B. Du Bois and the Black Messianic Vision" (1969).

<sup>13</sup> The scholarship drawing upon and critiquing double-consciousness and the veil is unanswerably daunting in scope and volume. I am most indebted to the following discussions: Howard Winant's "Dialectics of the Veil" (2004); Shamoan Zamiz's *Dark Voices* (1995), ch. 4; and Eric Sundquist, *To Wake the Nations* (1993), ch. 5.

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<sup>14</sup> Cornel West has suggested that the crisis of self-recognition makes it more apropos to speak of *triple-consciousness*, given the global economic and political scope of the Afro-Americans' prophetic calling. See *Prophesy Deliverance!*, pp. 30-31.

<sup>15</sup> This is especially true of musical production. See Eshun, *More Brilliant Than the Sun* (1998), and Alexander G. Weheliye, "'I Am I Be': The Subject of Sonic Afro-modernity" (2003).

<sup>16</sup> See Yaszek, "An Afrofuturist Reading of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*" (2005) and "Afrofuturism, Science Fiction, and the History of the Future" (2006), both of which contain much overlapping material. In this chapter, I quote from the 2006 article.

<sup>17</sup> In "The Salt of the Earth" (1902), London asserts that while Anglos are the current masters of the world, they may give way to a fitter race in the future (114-15): "Disguise it though we may, though a good world it is yet a brutal one" (100). Berkove argues that London's lifelong engagement with evolutionary theory tended less toward toward Spencerian determinism and more toward the potential of politics to trump eugenics; see "Jack London and Evolution: From Spencer to Huxley" (2004). Harpham also doesn't dismiss London's racism as tangential to his political philosophy, but he makes the case that London's formulation of it was a particular strain—Spencerian-Nietzschean-Darwinist evolution as moral force—that was very American, but it had run its course by World War I.

<sup>18</sup> For instance, see Gregory Rutledge, "Science Fiction and the Black Power Arts Movement" (2000). Rutledge's reading of Delany's *Babel-17* credits it with expressing something Rutledge calls "transpositional cosmology," which is, in my view, virtually indistinguishable from Du Boisian double-consciousness.

<sup>19</sup> Jeffrey Ferguson offers a good overview in *The Sage of Sugar Hill* (2005), his critical biography of Schuyler; see pp. 96-103.

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, Vincent Harding, "W. E. B. Du Bois and the Black Messianic Vision" (1969).

<sup>21</sup> For biographical information, I rely mostly upon Lewis's magisterial two volumes, *Biography of a Race* and *The Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919-1963* (2000) and Elliott Rudwick, *W. E. B. Du Bois: Propagandist of Negro Protest* (1960). Manning Marable's *W. E. B. Du Bois: Black Radical Democrat* (1986) and Gerald Horne's *Black and Red* (1986) trace Du Bois's intellectual history to frame him as a champion of Left politics to varying degrees, with Horne focusing on his decisive later turn toward Marxism. I also, of course, recommend Du Bois's own autobiographical writings in *Darkwater* and *Dusk of Dawn* (1940), which are most productively considered alongside the historical evidence of his biographical interlocutors.

<sup>22</sup> See pp. 109-115.

<sup>23</sup> See *X—The Problem of the Negro as a Problem for Thought* (2014), ch. 3.

<sup>24</sup> See *Biography of a Race*, chs. 12 and 13.

<sup>25</sup> See *Southern Horrors and Other Writings* (1996).

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<sup>26</sup> Though it is apparent in Lewis's narrative of this period in chapters 12 through 14 of *Biography of a Race*, Manning Marable emphasizes in chapter 3 of *Black Radical Democrat* that neither the publication of *John Brown* nor his move to the NAACP was a sudden rupture that neatly divided his previous, scholastic endeavors from his later career as a propagandist. Du Bois had been augmenting his academic efforts with essays in popular periodicals for years, and he continued to publish in academic journals long afterward. There was more continuity than not. If biographers tend to treat the move into full time activism as a natural chapter break or easy-to-hand periodizing event in Du Bois's storied career, it's in large part because Du Bois himself treated it as such. There is evidence in his autobiographical writings such as "The Shadow of Years" in *Darkwater*, in which he refers to 1909 as the beginning of "The Age of Miracles" (13). Marable also notes that as Du Bois deliberated giving up his position at Atlanta University, he led a series of appropriately "political and spiritual" prayers "in the great prophetic tradition of the black church" for students reflecting on what the career change would mean for his professional future and the future of his race: "Mercifully grant us, O God," Du Bois intoned, "the spirit of Esther, that we say: I will go unto the King and if I perish, I perish—Amen" (qtd. in *Black Radical Democrat* 74). I've retained the narrative convenience of 1909 as a pivot point in large part because I believe that, for Du Bois, this career move was a meaningful embrace of a more explicitly prophetic role for himself, even if his mission remained the same.

<sup>27</sup> See Rudwick, pp. 133-35.

<sup>28</sup> Rowe's assessment of Du Bois's work reflects an engagement with intersectional critical race theory, even if Rowe does not explicitly identify it as such. He argues that Du Bois uses the experiences of African, African-American, and women subjects as an foundation for "invoking influential European ideas... then *revising* them" (209). The emphasis he puts on revision is that, rather than European civilization redeeming the fallen (colonized) world, it is the colonized subjects that may end up redeeming European civilization. But only if they coalesce around the decolonial project.

<sup>29</sup> See Rowe, p. 215.

<sup>30</sup> Du Bois famously opened his 1905 essay, "The Color Line Belts the World" with the observation, "We have a way in America of wanting to be 'rid' of Problems. It is not so much a desire to reach the best and largest solution as it is to clean the board and start a new game" (33). He goes on to imply that the other colonial powers as well think, to their peril, that America's provincial "Negro problem" does not apply to them.

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<sup>31</sup> See Rabaka, esp. pp. 37-39. Several critics interpret the final scene as an expression of political pessimism. In his ecocritical reading of "The Comet," Lawrence J. Oliver contends that "in the wake of the natural disaster and death of the child, we may assume that they [Jim and his wife] will undergo the same struggle as the rest of the refugees and outcasts elsewhere in *Darkwater*" (81). Balfour reads it as a dialectical counterbalance to the utopian hope of "Hymn to the Peoples," as Du Bois "cautions against the idea that racialized habits of thought and structures of power can fall away in a single stroke" (56). Ximena Gallardo C. also reads it as a fable of equality experienced then snatched away (221-22). Kaplan, like Eric Sundquist, connects the dead baby to the child of Matthew Townes and Princess Kautilya in *Dark Princess*, which realizes some of the hope of the "Hymn" that ends *Darkwater*, even if that possibility is not visible in "The Comet." See Kaplan, pp. 207-12; Sundquist, *To Wake the Nations* (1993), esp. pp. 618, 621-23.

<sup>32</sup> On "The Conservation of Races" in Du Bois's development of black nationalism, see Moses, *Golden Age*, p. 101-2, 133-36. On his involvement in the 1900 London Congress, see Lewis, *Biography of a Race*, pp. 246-51; Immanuel Geiss, *The Pan-African Movement* (1974), pp. 182-98; Rudwick, 208-10; Marable, *Black Radical Democrat*, pp. 39-40. On his involvement in the Universal Congress of Races, see Geiss, pp. 216-18; Lewis, *Biography of a Race*, pp. 439-43; Rudwick, pp. 143-48. On *The Negro* as Pan-African historiography, see Aptheker, pp. 123-42; Lewis, *Biography of a Race*, pp. 461-62; Marable, *Black Radical Democrat*, pp. 92-94.

<sup>33</sup> See Geiss, ch. 1, and George Padmore, *Communism or Pan-Africanism* (1971), chs. 6-8.

<sup>34</sup> See Rampersad, pp. 147-9; Lewis, *The Fight for Equality*, chs. 2 and 4; Rudwick, ch. 9. More illustrative of the feud's tenor are the columns published in Du Bois and Garvey's rival publications, the *Crisis* and the *Negro World*, respectively, between 1921 and 1924. High points include Garvey commenting in 1923 on Du Bois's distinctive "French Beard": "Surely that is not typical of Africa, it is typical of that blood which he loves so well and which he bewails in not having more in his veins—French." For his part, Du Bois stated bluntly in 1924, "Marcus Garvey is, without doubt, the most dangerous enemy of the Negro race in America and in the world. He is either a lunatic or a traitor." See Garvey, "W. E. B. Du Bois as a Hater of Dark People," and Du Bois, "Marcus Garvey: A Lunatic or a Traitor?"

<sup>35</sup> Aptheker provides a sampling of the reactions to *Darkwater*, ranging from Southern hysteria (the North Carolina *Daily News* of Greensboro compared Du Bois to a KKK leader for what they saw as his fulsome black supremacism) to critical praise. He notes the response of one *Crisis* reader, dated December 1922: "I have just been reading your 'Darkwater'. The other night I sat up until two o'clock trying to break its spell. When one begins to see the Negro problem, as pointed out by our own people, one awakens to a fuller realization of life." See *Literary Legacy*, p. 161n11.

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<sup>36</sup> My phrasing here is indebted to Cornel West, whose *Prophesy Deliverance!* (1982) helped frame my initial thinking about Du Bois for this chapter. African-American tradition in particular, he argues, exemplifies what West calls “prophetic pragmatism,” which is uniquely democratic because it emerges from the shared experiences of black people in response to evolving, particular forms of oppression. See also his *The American Evasion of Philosophy* (1989), ch. 6. West succinctly comments elsewhere that he perceives the historical record as “black progressive movement going hand in hand with other progress” (*Prophetic Thought* 109), a premise taken up by the contemporary Black Lives Matter movement. See “The Postmodern Crisis of Black Intellectuals” in *Prophetic Thought in Postmodern Times* (1993) and Alicia Garza, “A HerStory of the #BlackLivesMatter Movement.”

<sup>37</sup> I rely heavily for historical background on Michael W. Peplow and Jeffrey Ferguson’s critical literary biographies of Schuyler.

<sup>38</sup> The African-American socialists were quite critical of Du Bois for his politically tactical embrace of the United States’ entrance into World War I, as well as his refusal to back Socialist Party presidential candidates; for his part, Du Bois criticized the Socialist Party for being insufficiently attentive to the particularity of white supremacy in the United States, especially with regard to the prevalent racial discrimination in trade unions. While the editors of *The Messenger* and the *Crisis* had substantial differences regarding political strategy, U. S. Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer was quite happy to treat them as equally radical in 1919, just as Marcus Garvey was content to blame them equally for their tacitly coordinated campaign to get him deported in 1924. See Philip S. Foner, *American Socialism and Black Americans* (1977), chs. 13 and 14.

<sup>39</sup> Ethiopianism was a term for a providential view of history that gave Africa—and its peoples—the leading role in redeeming Western civilization. See Moses, *Golden Age*, ch. 6. On Du Bois’s first visit to the African continent, see Lewis, *Fight for Equality*, ch. 4.

<sup>40</sup> See Ferguson’s discussion of how social theorists J. A. Rogers and Lester Ward influenced Schuyler’s thinking on the subject of race and social evolution, pp. 138-42. Ultimately, Ferguson contends that black chauvinism was only useful to Schuyler to the extent that it inverted white supremacy. Future readers, in short, can read Schuyler as inconsistent or hypocritical, or simply adept at rhetorical compartmentalization.

<sup>41</sup> Kwame Anthony Appiah’s critique of race in Du Bois’s thinking in “The Uncompleted Argument,” originally published in a special issue of *Critical Inquiry* edited by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. in 1985, then collected in the same editor’s anthology, *Race, Writing, and Difference* (1986), is canonical. In that essay, Appiah contends that Du Bois never quite moved beyond the biological racial essentialism first intimated in “The Conservation of Races,” though not for lack of trying. Appiah later appended his reading of “Conservation,” emphasizing the German idealist influences on Du Bois’s thinking and arguing that there was more slippage in Du Bois’s ideas of race, and thus that the trajectory of Du Bois’s theorizing of race might have led away from conflating biology and culture. See *Lines of Descent* (2014), esp. pp. 83-93.

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<sup>42</sup> Lewis provides a good overview of the context and stakes in chapter 6 of *When Harlem Was in Vogue* (1984), esp. pp. 191-92. Sonny Retman's reading of *Black No More* also draws heavily on a nuanced appraisal of how Hughes and Schuyler's apparently contrasting perspectives on Negro art. See "*Black No More: George Schuyler' and Racial Capitalism*," esp. pp. 50-51.

<sup>43</sup> In his 1966 autobiography, *Black and Conservative*, Schuyler contended that African-Americans "need more optimism and less pessimism": "Once we accept the fact that there is, and always will be, a color caste system in the United States, and stop crying about it, we can concentrate on how best to survive and prosper within that system. This is not defeatism but realism" (121-22).

<sup>44</sup> The endorsements of the novel by these African-American critics were, understandably, given with some qualifications. See *When Harlem Was in Vogue*, pp. 180-9.

<sup>45</sup> See *When Harlem Was in Vogue*, ch. 8.

<sup>46</sup> See Locke, "The New Negro," originally published in 1925. Locke heralds the urban migration of African-Americans in the early twentieth century as the avant-garde of a modernity defined by a cosmopolitanism deeply shaped by African-American experience.

<sup>47</sup> Ferguson expands on the parallels in depth; see pp. 222-29.

## CHAPTER THREE. Imagining Technocracy: E. E. "Doc" Smith's *Lensmen* and Isaac Asimov's *Foundation*, 1935-1955

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### Great Galaxies!

Of the myths that have endured through American history, the notion that progress may be measured by our civilization's command of technological advancement is quite durable indeed. Faith in the power of scientific technique is at least as old as the European Enlightenment, and celebrations of mechanical prowess certainly fixed themselves ineradicably in the public imagination after the Industrial Revolution. Scientistic positivism runs through the American psyche like a transcontinental railroad, and its perhaps most strident expression was given voice by the space opera authors published in the science fiction magazines of the 1930s and '40s.

Less than ten years. That's how long it took to get from Hugo Gernsback's formula for "scientifiction" to the the fully-fledged space opera. Or, perhaps, longer—depending on whether Gernsback is afforded the privilege of being the originator of "science fiction" as we know it. In the editorial for the April 1924 debut issue of *Amazing Stories*, Gernsback defined scientifiction as "a charming romance

intermingled with scientific fact and prophetic vision" (3). By the time George Schuyler had finished *Black No More*, pulp magazine writers such as Edmond Hamilton, Philip Nowlan, and Edward Elmer "Doc" Smith had honed the tropes of spaceships, ray guns, bug-eyed monsters, and cosmic conflict to an art. At the time, nobody would have classed Schuyler in the same literary tradition as someone like Nowlan, whose short story "Armageddon 2419 A.D." (1928) was the basis for the Buck Rogers comic strip. But science fiction was at a critical stage in developing a coherent literary identity of its own, and the boundaries were being drawn.

Early editions of *Amazing Stories* and other sf pulps often reprinted novels and stories that were considered canonical milestones for science fiction. Besides masterworks by H. G. Wells, Edgar Allan Poe, and Jules Verne, Gernsback and his editorial cohort also republished dime novels and short stories—texts of often undistinguished literary character, but very much models of the type of fiction Gernsback wished to see from his contributors. Critical opinion since the earliest literary histories of sf has been unkind (with some justification) in its estimation of such texts' literary merits.<sup>1</sup> Yet these texts were vital to the understanding of science-fictionality that developed in dialogue among writers, editors, and the reading audience both before and during the 1920s and '30s. Editors like Gernsback and John W. Campbell, Jr. deeply valued the combination of venturesome spirit, engineering knowhow, and creative application of emerging scientific knowledge on display in

Victorian sf, and they proudly published stories that exemplified these virtues. Science-fiction pulp magazines thus represent a vital link in the continuity of modern progress as a civilizational ideology.

This chapter examines two iconic space opera series which originated in the pages of the pulp magazines. E. E. "Doc" Smith's *Lensmen* ran from 1934-1954, mostly serialized under the Campbell's editorship in *Astounding Science Fiction*. Over the course of this saga, humanity ascends to galactic leadership, led by a family of particularly hardy and psychically gifted superheroes. With the support of transcendental aliens, the interplanetary space corps plays a decisive role in destroying a civilization of corrupt extradimensional entities, inaugurating an Arthurian-esque reign of peace and prosperity. The *Lensmen* stories cemented Smith's reputation as the pre-eminent practitioner of space opera of his time, simultaneously guaranteeing him canonical status in sf literary history and sealing his fate as a scapegoat for once and future fans who begrudge science fiction's status, *pace* Smith, as a disreputable, juvenile literature. Isaac Asimov's *Foundation* series overlapped chronologically with *Lensmen* in its serial publication in Campbell's *Astounding* from 1942 to 1949, reaching a wider audience starting with the publication of the stories as a novel trilogy from 1951-53.<sup>2</sup> Asimov's series enjoys a critical and popular eminence lost to Smith's. The stories originate with a mathematics genius named Hari Seldon, whose innovative science of "psychohistory" predicts the decline and fall of the Galactic Empire. He

sequesters two “Foundations” full of civilization’s best and brightest, foreseeing that their interdictions at critical junctures in course of galactic events will exponentially reduce the length and severity of the coming dark age. Though Seldon’s project more or less succeeds, Asimov continually interrogates his premise, finally settling on the idea that Seldon secretly appointed a cabal of technicians of the mind to give history’s *telos* nudges in the right direction. Though *Lensman* resonates powerfully with jeremiadic themes, the *Foundation* trilogy evokes the jeremiad most explicitly.

In this chapter, we will examine how Smith and Asimov’s engagements with the jeremiad ultimately offer visions of hierarchic control. The fact that they are both space operas means that they rely on tropes—interstellar space ships, ray guns, mental superpowers—most commonly thought of as comprising “sci-fi” in the popular imagination. We will see that it is, perhaps surprisingly, the last of those tropes—mental superpowers—that most typifies these series’ ideological orientation toward command and control.

Our task in this chapter is to untangle these series’ positivism—a jeremiadic optimism—and how the Elect are able to usher their civilizations to the covenantal future. To do this, we will first examine the degree to which space opera as a distinct science-fictional subgenre embodies positivist faith in technological progress, which is, in space opera, equivalent to civilizational progress. In exploring the roots of this phenomenon, we will see that technological advancement includes the refinement of

techniques of social control; indeed, this form of sociology is the pinnacle of scientific achievement. This positivism blended with a political movement at the time called technocracy. We will then examine how the scientific discourse of the pulp era was steeped in theories of the psionic potential of the human mind—fringe science that attempted to validate the existence and applications of mental powers such as telepathy mind control. In the context of technocracy—which proposed scientifically to manage society’s positivist trajectory with maximum efficiency—the discourse of psionic powers was a way for Smith and Asimov to science-fictionally portray the Elect bringing civilization’s covenantal promise to fruition. But the faith these space operas display in positivist, technocratic progress ultimately upholds an authoritarian elitism that perpetually threatens to undermine democratic politics.

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## **Spectres of Positivism**

When a sf fan named Wilson Tucker dubbed the “outworn spaceship yarn” as *space opera* in 1941, it was a play on “horse opera” westerns, specifically American stories whose own roots lay in nineteenth-century dime novels.<sup>3</sup> Patricia Monk notes that the frontier adventure parallels oft-cited by critics of this subgenre link the tropes to violent colonial conquest: gunslinging lawmen, marauding outlaws and alien savages, fast pacing and turgid plotting, etc.<sup>4</sup> These tropes are augmented with sundry other technological wonders, not least of which is the spaceship itself. Already familiar

to readers of Verne and Wells, the spaceship is considered by sf author and scholar Adam Roberts to be sf's *sine qua non*—it is the icon of interplanetary voyage, which is in his view the ur-trope of the science-fictional dialectic. In his account, Roberts traces the trope of the interplanetary (or, more broadly, inter-worldly) voyage back to Greek and Roman satire, with post-Renaissance layovers in works like Johann Kepler's *Somnium sive Astronomia Luminaris* (1634), Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), Voltaire's *Micromégas* (1750), and Giacomo Casanova's *Icosameron* (1788).<sup>5</sup> In space opera, the civilizing mission of the dime-novel frontier adventure is thus rooted in motifs and ideological conflict that stretch back to the first half of the nineteenth century and beyond. As shopworn as the plots and wafer-thin characterizations of space operas may have been by 1941, they expressed concerns that were the bleeding edge of public debate in a nation which had elbowed its way to the front of the world stage. America's cultural roots in the myth of the "New World," whose non-native pioneers crossed over from the "Old World," harmonized adroitly with the evolution of the horse opera into spacefaring adventure at the dawn of the American Century.

But that mission is an outgrowth of an industrial society stretching toward its apex. Monk argues that space opera is less a subgenre than "an attitudinal bias" that "reveals an authorial mindset which sees the extraterrestrial universe in holistic terms as both knowable and manageable, just as writers of the models from which it derives had seen the terrestrial world" (300). Roberts notes that these stories appeared in the

pages of mass-market magazines at precisely the same time that the Atlantic colonial powers had had their first major reckoning with the economies of scale that helped make World War I an industrialized, mass-scale slaughterhouse. Rather than simply place the sf pulps comfortably in the “low” end of a cultural dichotomy with emergent “high” modernism, Roberts argues that the pulp authors were key voices in a literary dialogue that recognized the fragmentation of shared reality even as it sought to create a constructive monomyth for the future.<sup>6</sup> Serial stories of the 1930s in particular “captured precisely the hectic sprint of time towards the unknown” (93). Thus space opera retains social engineering as part of its ideological chassis, even if its authors expressed it in the tropes of the romantic adventure. But they did so in a way that presumed that that unknown could be *made* known—and made useful—by application of science. In other words, space opera as a science-fictional mode is emblematic of a very nineteenth-century kind of technological positivism that was endemic to the pulps, and which continues to haunt sf like a pedantic specter.

Auguste Comte did not arrantly conjure this specter from the pages of his *Cours de Philosophie Positive* (1830-1842), but positivism as such he certainly did. Comte developed a program for a new discipline of sociology, in his view the highest stage of scientific development, which studied the historical human being for the purpose of curing his social ills. In his introduction to the 1974 anthology of essays grappling with the relationship between positivism and sociology, Anthony Giddens articulates a set of

suppositions that positivist sociologists make, which presume that they can discern scientific laws in the operations of human society and apply their scientific conclusions to solve entrenched problems.<sup>7</sup> The problem of gathering and interpreting sociological data from within the society under scrutiny is addressed by the sequence of selected essays, and it foreshadows the work continued by critics of scientific discourse such as Bruno Latour, who insists that science is always social, always political.<sup>8</sup>

In other words, the mastery over our material universe promised by nineteenth-century natural science was extended by Comte and his sociology over the domain of human affairs. No shortage of ecocriticism, for instance, has rightly noted that the distinction between Humanity and Nature was always a false one, and that humanity's understanding of nature has always been social.<sup>9</sup> Mary Pickering argues, however, that Comte's extension of mastery over nature into mastery of social dynamics was part of a project to hold industrialism—and the the fragmenting, atomizing division of labor (with its attendant individualist "egoism")—in check. Comte's sociology was an attempt to reinstate a holistic conception of society. In this conception, not everything *could* be made known, and that is why he extolled the necessity of developing an interpretive—sometimes speculative—paradigm.<sup>10</sup> Ironically, Comte's project of reinstating holistic harmony was supplanted by an often-uncritical faith in measuring social progress by a society's degree of industrial-technical sophistication. Critical theory, as expounded by the sociologically-rooted Frankfurt School and its heirs, lives on as an exemplary

outgrowth of this founding dilemma in the discipline Comte invented, wrestling with the consequences of what theorists Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer famously termed “the dialectic of enlightenment.”<sup>11</sup> But positivism in the narrower, colloquial sense of the attitudes identified by Giddens became a byword for the ideology of nineteenth-century natural science, often justifying appeals to scientific authority to resolve moral and political questions. More significantly, positivism came to connote a faith in human social progress, a *telos* intimately bound to and driven by scientific advancement.

Not all Americans in the early twentieth century adopted this *telos* as a framework for narrating the United States’ westward course of empire—a course often conflated with its progressive arc through history.<sup>12</sup> The onrush of technological development stemming from the late eighteenth century has always had a fraught legacy in American letters, especially where it bears upon the errand into the wilderness.<sup>13</sup> But even within the precursors to American “scientifiction,” positivism is not adopted uncritically. In a narrative tonic distilled from this dialogue in the late nineteenth century, a can-do engineer who travels back in time to the middle ages uses modern science to dominate the kingdom with the miracle of modern industrialization, only to have his mighty works blow up in his face at the end. *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court* (1889) is whimsical and caustic (that is, Mark Twain at his best), but

it can also be read as a trenchant critique of positivist logic taken to its extreme conclusion.

The application of scientific theory to practical problems gave rise in the 1920s and '30s to a kind of cult of the engineer.<sup>14</sup> Despite the warnings and critiques by authors ranging from Twain to Ignatius Donnelly to George Schuyler, Americans remained generally optimistic that the blessings of technological advancement would outweigh its curses. In the ferment of Taylorism, engineers gained prestige as heuristic wonder-workers—not only could they build bridges, railroads, and canals, but they could troubleshoot and scientifically manage social problems.<sup>15</sup> Herbert Hoover won the presidency in 1928 in no small part due to his reputation as “The Great Engineer.” But when Hoover’s pro-business engineering solutions failed to end the Depression, many Americans entertained the possibility of something called technocracy.<sup>16</sup>

“Technocracy” in the 1930s articulated a slightly different set of political assumptions than those now associated with it. At this stage, the term did not specifically describe an approach to centralized, democratic government which makes decisions based on expert advice from within and without the official state apparatus, nor was it a business management system that seeks to incorporate and consolidate the innovations of workers at every level of the corporate structure through an adaptive bureaucracy.<sup>17</sup> These later developments have some roots in the technocracy I discuss here, but some of those roots were diagnosed even earlier by sociologists such as Max

Weber, and the implementation of technocracy in public and private sectors varied by country.<sup>18</sup> Initially conceived as a research program into domestic American industrial energy expenditures since the early 1800s, the Committee on Technocracy made waves in 1932 because of the radical diagnosis it offered for the current economic catastrophe. The committee members synthesized the managerial paradigms of Frederick W. Taylor and Henry Gantt with Thorstein Veblen's critique of industry, business, and the price system.<sup>19</sup> The technocrats argued that capitalist valuation, coupled with efficient, high-energy technology's displacement of industrial workers, was largely responsible for ongoing inequalities and economic volatility.<sup>20</sup> Only by appointing a bureaucratic elite of engineers to manage the increasingly complex social system could the nation hope to maximize the potential of its technologically-advanced infrastructure. Like many political polemicists, technocrats thought of themselves as presenting a genuinely new third way beyond the progressive and reactionary dichotomy that had botched things. Because they focused on economic solutions, and because those solutions were located in better management of markets and infrastructure—modern technologies—technocrats often presented their program as apolitical. This apolitical posture stemmed from the nineteenth-century discourse that construed science as objective and rational; it was thoroughly positivist.

In the U. S., this positivism could take a distinctly jeremiadic form. Howard Scott, one of the most radical exponents of technocracy, proclaimed in 1936 that, because

they are structured around a presumed “economy of scarcity,” the governments of North America were rendered obsolete by the “economy of abundance” promised by modern technology. “Technology marches on,” cried Scott. “The political governments of the United States and Canada are beseeching Providence for economic absolution for the sins of the Price System, and Providence tenders them droughts and floods and even more technological equipment” (9). The only logical solution, in sum, was to place governance in technocratic hands. He concluded his jeremiad with familiar heraldry, invoking Franklin Delano Roosevelt only sardonically:

This continent has no choice but to lead the march of civilization. The opportunity is given to no other Continent... This Continent will have its rendezvous with destiny within the next decade, and upon this generation of Americans will fall the competent and orderly achievement of a new civilization. This generation of Americans has the technology, the men, the materials, and the machinery for its accomplishment” (24).

When Scott referred to “Americans,” he capaciously included all North Americans—but he only ascribed revolutionary political potential to science and engineering elite. And the triumphal *telos* he invested in “the march of civilization” was inextricable from accelerated technological development.

Though Technocracy as a revolutionary political movement never got off the ground, its pronouncements were lightning rods which added sparks to an ongoing

discourse about the nation's historical trajectory in terms of science and industry.<sup>21</sup> Leading intellectuals such as John Dewey and Charles Beard had written extensively about the necessity of interweaving science with America's democratic institutions since the twenties or earlier.<sup>22</sup> Meanwhile, Lewis Mumford cautioned that unthinking dependence upon technique and the machine often strengthened exploitative political structures.<sup>23</sup> Nor did America's presidents neglect the issue. Hoover commissioned a wide-ranging survey of Americana that included a chapter on technology,<sup>24</sup> while at least three major investigations into the social problem of technology were conducted by the United States government between 1937 and 1941, not to mention a 1936 documentary produced by the government on the origins of the Dust Bowl.<sup>25</sup> Through all this, the brand of positivist discourse that emerged from the Progressive Era tended to retain a veneer of benevolent, apolitical authoritarianism which coupled neatly with a professionally-engineered and efficiently-managed manifest destiny.

The jeremiadic vision of world-historical redemption starting with a city on a hill in the New World blended almost seamlessly with the pulp era's technological positivism, because the politics of technocracy—whether associated with the movement or simply a faith in the soteriology of applied engineering solutions to social crises—wove them together. For Hugo Gernsback, both "prophecy" and "progress" were part of his triangulation with the social applications of modern technology. The positivism which began with Comté, filtered down through sociology, and took on a

mechanical cast under technocratically-minded Americans found expression in the editor's vision of "scientifiction" stories. About these, Gernsback prophesied in his 1926 editorial, "Posterity will point to them as having blazed a new trail, not only in literature and fiction, but in progress as well" (3). Intriguingly, Pickering describes Comté's advocacy of "scientific fiction" in order to "free scientists from being slaves to direct evidence"—not as a way of undermining empirical truth, but because "purely abstract rationalist rules not only made scientific research less flexible but came dangerously close to metaphysical practices" (37). Even the progenitor of positivism saw value in science-fictionally concretizing materially real but abstract-seeming concepts. But Pickering also notes that Comté's concern with maintaining flexibility of the imagination was mainly to ensure the capacity of his sociologists to better manage the whole. While Comté did not believe it was possible for anyone, even his positivist elite, to know everything, he wanted to leave room for blazing new trails into the unknown precisely because such imagination would facilitate tighter control and thus ensure civilizational progress. Had he been a scientific engineer rather than a clergyman on a providential errand, John Winthrop might have said something similar about the Puritans' colonization of the North American wilderness.

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## Lensing the Future

E.E. “Doc” Smith’s Lensman space opera—sometimes referred to as the Galactic Patrol saga—is the embodiment of pulp science fiction’s positivism *par excellence*. Though only retroactively folded into his Galactic Patrol storyline later on, E.E. Smith’s *Triplanetary* began publication in 1934 on the heels of his immensely popular *Skylark* space opera.<sup>26</sup> *The Skylark of Space* and its sequels had established Smith as master of the space opera starting with its publication in *Amazing Stories* in 1928, and it opened outer space adventure to truly cosmic proportions. Smith himself was a chemical engineer by trade,<sup>27</sup> and in the Gernsback era, his doctorate earned him credibility as a purveyor of *science fiction*. (Hence the moniker “Doc” Smith.) The plot of *Triplanetary* mainly concerns two converging storylines: in one, we thrill at the swashbuckling derring-do of humans attempting to foil the plot of alien invaders trying to confiscate Earth’s iron resources, at the cost of unspeakable collateral damage; in the other, we gape in amazement at engineers solving the problem of interstellar transportation with the invention of “inertialess” flight (read: warp drive), accompanied by mountains of technobabble. Eventually, using their superior warp drive, Earth delivers an apocalyptic superbomb to the aliens’ home planet, forcing a peace treaty and paving the way for humanity’s ascent to cosmic dominion. Repurposing this story’s heroes in *Galactic Patrol*, he later added a prologue reframing *Triplanetary*’s story as merely the opening

gambit in a much larger war between alien races with no less than the prospect of civilizational progress itself at stake.<sup>28</sup>

While it is eerie to consider the historical doppler effect of Hiroshima in *Triplanetary's* denouement, it is not the reason why Smith used this adventure to frame his Lensman saga. The development of the inertialess drive turns out to be far more important than anything else in the *Triplanetary*—it's a technology capable of annihilating space much in the manner of nineteenth-century railroad. The ability to traverse unimaginable amounts of space in spectacularly-reduced time is prerequisite to any space opera, which expands the amount of explorable (and conquerable) frontier exponentially. Smith's crucial insight in developing his Lensman saga was this: with all that conquerable space, a method of instantaneous communication is essential to any attempt at civilizing it. Inventing a method of high-speed travel, in other words, is not enough to civilize the frontier: a method of networking both the outer fringe and recently-civilized interior with the metropole is the only way to exercise effective hegemony. Enter the Lens.

Described as an iridescent lens worn like a wristwatch, Lenses are a sort of "pseudo-life" uniquely designed for each Lensman, which kill anyone but their designated wearer if removed (*Vol. 1*, 499-500). The Lens exists beyond known physical science, but it consolidates the power of the Galactic Patrol to exercise command and control over two galaxies. A sizable portion of *Galactic Patrol*, *Gray Lensman*, and

*Second Stage Lensman* follows the dashing hero, Kimball “Kim” Kinnison, as he develops greater facility with the Lens’s powers. At first, the Lens serves as a badge of authority and a means of instantaneous, literally universal communication via telepathic link. However, Kim discovers that the Lens also allows him to mind control other life forms—including people, dogs, and worms—and to kill with a thought. He also discovers that he can use his Lens to spy on anyone anywhere in the known cosmos. Lenses are built by Arisians, an ancient, disembodied race wholly dedicated to ensuring the rise of civilization as a bulwark against their enemies, the Eddorians. Though both races have incredible psionic powers, the Arisians are more or less pure mind, while Eddorians are hideous, foul monstrosities. Arisians are portrayed as democratic and communitarian, while Eddorians are violently hierarchical and individualistic. Eddorians are invaders from another dimension, seeking to colonize our universe as part of a megalomaniacal imperialist plot, while Arisians seek to protect the flourishing of our cosmos’ native species. To this end, they have created Lenses, which effectively serve as training wheels to wean the universe’s various civilized species into higher evolutionary stages.

The most powerful mentation is one only available to the Kinnison progeny: a precognitive ability that Arisians call the “Visualization of the Cosmic All.” It is not perfect, as we will later discuss, but it is what enables Arisia to conduct its eons-long civilizing mission so successfully, accounting for almost every possible variation in

causal probability in the known universe. Visualization of the Cosmic All is the culmination of the psionic powers facilitated by the Lens. Without the Lens's ability to sustain the panoptic network of the superpowered samurai caste, the Galactic Patrol, heralds of Arisia, could not function effectively—and civilization would collapse.

Civilization is held in a state of perpetual crisis thanks to the Eddorians' machinations, which are channeled through a criminal syndicate named Boskone. The Patrol's efforts to eradicate Boskone and the syndicate's strategies to counter the Patrol's powers of psionic surveillance drive most of the series' subplots. Echoing the government's Prohibition era attempt to rejuvenate American society by eliminating alcohol, the Patrol expends most of its effort attempting to exterminate thionite, an addictive drug that gives users utterly realistic dreams which cater to their "EVERY DESIRE" (*Vol. 1*, 338). Along with the thionite black market comes political corruption and pirates operating with impunity. Once Boskone discovers the Patrol's ability to "Lens" thoughts and events from any distance, it develops thought-screens to thwart the Lensmen's superpowers. Kim therefore spends a lot of time undercover—as a meteor miner, a fence, a far subordinate Lensman, a Boskonian pirate, even a space opera novelist<sup>29</sup>—leading the more perceptive Boskonian underbosses to recognize the existence of a particularly skilled espionage agent and going to great lengths to capture or kill him. The high-tension cat-and-mouse gamesmanship leavens a conventional romantic adventure with ever-increasing strains of paranoia, as the levels

of Eddorian/Boskonian infiltration are revealed to have rooted themselves deeper and ever deeper into society.

Already, several jeremiadic tropes are evident in this extended summary of the six-book series. The Arisians' guidance serves a providential function, and humanity's commitment to uphold the civilizing mission set out for it evokes the covenantal promise. Earth itself serves as a city on a hill, and though the interplanetary alliance includes several alien species, it is humans who are the truly Elect, because it is ultimately a human family—the Kinnisons—which carries forward the torch of cosmic-historical redemption from the Eddorian corruption. The Eddorians' Boskone itself is rooted in vice—backsliding—which continually undermines the stability of the galactic order. The significance of the Lens in this context is how it buttresses the cosmic caste system and centralizes control. Nonhuman species may be part of the alliance, but Smith joins together racial caste identity to the technocratic hierarchy symbolized by the Lens. At first, the Galactic Patrol masters the material universe through engineering, but it then maintains social control through the Lens.

The jockeying for intergalactic starts in *Triplanetary*, as we have seen, with the twin developments of warp drive and a destructive superweapon—Smith just escalates from there. The Patrol's interminable battle with Boskone, which formally commences in *Galactic Patrol* (originally published in 1937-38), involves an arms race entrenched in a civilizational contest of technical mastery. Because Boskone is an ideology as well as an

organization, its conflict with the Patrol is not merely cops-and-robbers;<sup>30</sup> it is a clash of civilizations. Boskone “was a culture already inter-galactic in scope,” we learn in *Patrol*, “but one built upon ideals diametrically opposed to those of the civilization represented by the Galactic Patrol.

It was a tyranny, an absolute monarchy, a despotism not even remotely approximated by the dictatorships of earlier ages. It had only one creed—“The end justifies the means.” Anything—literally *anything at all*—that produced the desired result was commendable; to fail was the only crime. (588)

Boskone’s ethos explicitly justifies, for Smith, the mutual commitment to total war. In describing one deep space battle, for instance, he writes, “Victory of itself was not enough. This was, and of stern necessity had to be, a war of utter, complete, and merciless extinction” (611). In *Gray Lensman* (originally published 1939-40), Smith again describes the struggle as “one of ruthless, complete, and utter extinction” (Vol. 2, 23). In this saga, this is unavoidable; it is necessary for the health of society and for the eventual success of the civilizing mission. Technological mastery equals civilizational superiority. Entire worlds are ultimately simply resources to be suborned to the civilizational conflict playing out across two galaxies. It is the elite Lensmen who have sufficient imagination and can-do to regard everything in the universe as raw material. As Port Admiral Haynes, Kim’s superior officer, observes offhandedly after using the Sun itself as a weapon against a Boskonian phalanx comprised of planets converted

into space ships, "Not bad-looking planets; maybe we can use them for something" (*Vol. 2*, 282). Such is the tenor of an elite caste capable of wielding planets like medieval flails. So it is that the climactic battles in the series often end with spectacular scenes of apocalyptic violence such as the Patrol clapping two planets together into a third (*Vol. 2*, 239) or hurling planets into a sun, forcing it to go supernova, all to destroy a single base (*Vol. 2*, 705). Such scenes resolve a clash of ideology as a competition of military-industrial knowhow. It is tempting to view this approach as science-fictional anticipation of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's 1940 declaration that America "must be the great arsenal of democracy" (qtd. in Kennedy 469).

Such a reading should be approached with caution. Though FDR had been plying the electorate with appeals to support America's allies against the fascists since at least 1935, when the first Neutrality Acts were passed, Smith's saga is not a straightforward allegory. Nor is presenting a science-fictional clash of civilizations as a dialectic of technological advancement unique to Smith or 1930s sf. Andy Sawyer writes that Smith's paranoid vision of civilizational conflict "offers a sense of the infinite sublime which is at the heart of sf's 'sense of wonder'" (506), an "other world" where "the great moral metanarratives of Totalitarianism versus Democracy can be observed" in transformed state (508). Smith repeatedly presents the series' theme as such. Space opera, with its cosmic scales of time and space, is ideally suited to narratives of

civilizational struggle. But Adam Roberts, in commenting on Smith's penchant for "colossal" scale in his *Skylark* series argues that he "takes the fantasy of the individual empowerment of Will to a hyperbolic and extraordinarily distasteful extreme" (81-82). The struggle is *not* a mere arms race played out against an empyreal backdrop. It is an apologia for technocratic control as manifest destiny.

By the time *Galactic Patrol* was published, the general public in the United States had only recently overcome its ambivalence toward electronic telecommunication technology. Numerous "wire thrillers" from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had dramatized suspicion of the telegraph and telephone; images of the spider and octopus conflated in popular imagination the reach of telecom networks with the encroachment of faceless corporations into the life of the nation. Robert MacDougall argues that the Bell corporation's sustained propaganda campaign, commenced in 1907, decisively reconciled in the following decades American attitudes toward corporations, telecom tech, and economic progress within the framework of the nation. Time and space had been effectively annihilated by the midpoint of the nineteenth century by technologies like railroads and telegraph;<sup>31</sup> it took until the early twentieth for Americans to process that fact in any meaningful way. In this context, Smith introduced his *Galactic Patrol*: a paramilitary governmental organization whose mission was to bring stability to the galaxy, but whose members could not be everywhere at once, nor interact effectively with citizens who speak in

totally alien languages. “But how—how—can a legal process work efficiently—work at all, for that matter—when a man can commit murder or a pirate can loot a space-ship and be a hundred parsecs away before the crime is even discovered?” gripes Virgil Samms in *First Lensman* (Vol. 1, 260, originally published 1950). Samms is responsible for ensuring the efficient operation of the Patrol, with protecting its citizens, and with ensuring its productive expansion. He recognizes that a technological society must have a means of coordination if it will succeed, and most especially the Patrol must have that means if they are to eliminate vice and corruption from society. The means of command and control he procures—the first Lens—signifies the moral and political authority of combating backsliding. Smith explicitly argues that such authority properly belongs only in the hands of the best and brightest, people of sterling character and physical vigor. The authority to conduct surveillance, bend people’s will to the needs of the state, and to kill untraceably with but a thought—this authority belongs to the caste of scientist-supermen who wear the Lens.

More specifically, and more suggestively, it belongs to the Kinnisons, who are the product of the Arisians’ millennia-long eugenics project. As early as *Galactic Patrol*, Kim suffers a literally crippling defeat and winds up in the fleet hospital, where he’s nursed back to health by Clarissa MacDougall (whom Kim affectionately dubs “Cris”); she becomes his fiery love interest and, eventually, wife. In contemplating the pairing of nurse-and-patient Haynes holds an extended conversation with Surgeon-Marshal

Lacy, the attending physician. Both comment approvingly on the “perfect skeleton” possessed by both specimens (646), and Haynes decides that if a woman must fall for Kim (as any woman, of course, must), he does not “want him to have such a good chance of making a dive at something that doesn’t rate up” (648). In *Gray Lensman*, Haynes and Lacy toast their success as surreptitious matchmakers, with Lacy still in awe of their physical superiority: “Man, what a pair of skeletons!” (Vol. 2, 38). Over the course of the series, Haynes and Lacy use Galactic Patrol funds to bankroll Kim and Cris’s wedding and honeymoon, and when the blessed event finally occurs in *Second Stage Lensmen* (originally published 1941-42), it is staged as a marriage of state, televised “to every planet of Civilization,” with viewing figures “too fantastic to be repeated here” (487). Upon completion of the vows, “as Kinnison kissed his wife, half a million Lensed members were thrust upward in silent salute” (488). Thus the ruling caste of the Galactic Patrol, already the upper institutional echelon of civilization, treats Kim and Cris as a prince and princess, with royalty flowing through their very veins—or, we might say, bred in their bones.

Though the ceremony is symbolically and politically important to the Galactic Patrol, it is even more vital to the Arisians’ master plan. Mentor, the Arisian emissary to the Patrol—who is primarily responsible for dispensing Lenses and training Lensmen in their use—tells Kim and Cris that their union “is not merely permissible; it has now become necessary” (482). The five Kinnison children, introduced in *Children of the Lens*

(originally published 1947-48), at last discover the truth of their provenance. Mentor explains that the purpose of the "breeding programs" set up by Arisia for the galaxy's races was "to eliminate as many as possible of their weaknesses and to concentrate all of their strengths." At one point, he tells one Kinnison daughter that she carries "the genes of every trait of strength ever known to any member of your human race.

Therefore, while in outward seeming you are human, in every factor of importance you are not; you are even less human than am I myself" (567). That is, they are truly and spectacularly *superhuman*. The Kinnison children are physically perfect, nigh immortal, and "have a destiny, the nature of which your mind," explains Mentor, "is not yet qualified to receive" (568). In fact, the children have been bred for a dual purpose.

Most proximately, Arisia intends for them to deliver, together, the psychic death-blow to Eddore. The children, naturally, succeed in this endeavor. More distantly, but no less importantly, the children are to evolve into a new species of cosmic guardians to replace the Arisians, so that when the next threat emerges to destroy civilization itself, civilization will have been made ready. In sum, the Galactic Patrol has been designed from time immemorial by godlike beings to establish a hierarchical caste system across all civilized worlds so that its eugenically advanced guardians could take their rightful place at its apex. This is the logic of technological positivism coupled with the jeremiad's world-historical redemptive mission and pushed to its cosmic extremity.

The soteriological promise of the Lensmen must contend with a society constantly in danger of backsliding, and only people with their rectitude and mental fitness are capable of rising to the challenge. *Second Stage Lensman*, for instance, begins moments after the end of *Gray Lensman*, with Mentor halting Kim and Cris on their way out the door to get married. The Arisian encourages him to look again at his supposed victory against the latest iteration of Boskone, pushing him to recognize that the organization has once again wriggled free of his grasp. "I should have seen them," reflects Kim. "Little things, mostly, but significant. Not so much positive as negative indices" (266). Mentor's prompt for Kim to look more closely at the details—a paranoid reading practice, one might say, in the vein of that which Donnelly practiced back in 1890—only makes sense in a narrative where a civilization's guardians must attend to its internal virtues and vices, not just its external threats. Indeed, the structure of the series establishes the interplay between internal corruption and external threat. Just as the Galactic Patrol manages to mop up Boskone's bases in its own galaxy, it discovers in *Second Stage Lensmen* that Boskone has for some time been operating out of a *second* galaxy! This external galaxy, too, is soon brought under the aegis of the Galactic Patrol. Haynes vows, "'We'll civilize 'em!'" (Vol. 2, 399), and indeed, in true settler colonial fashion, the Patrol "imported millions upon millions of men, with their women and families" (407-408); Smith records that "the invaders"—that is, the Patrol—began to "allow—yes, foster—free speech and statutory liberty; they suppressed

ruthlessly any person or any faction seeking to build a new dictatorship, whatever its nature, upon the ruins of the old" (393). Yet even once both galaxies have been successfully colonized, there emerges a "Civilization-wide epidemic of revolutions and uprisings for which there seems to be no basis or justification whatsoever" (502). Keeping order on that scale—stoking the light of civilization on an intergalactic scale—can *only* be done by Lensmen. It can only be done by a caste specifically suited to the purpose. In jeremiadic fashion, only the Elect can carry that torch.

Even though Arisia has the power to predict and control future events, it cannot do to omnisciently, and neither can the Kinnison progeny. The five Kinnison children destroy the Eddorian threat once and for all, but backsliding remains a danger. Mentor leaves the children with this message:

The time may come when your descendants will realize, as we did, their inadequacy for continued Guardianship. Their visualizations, as did ours, may become imperfect and incomplete. If so, they will then know that the time will have come for them to develop, from the highest race then existing, new and more competent Guardians. (730)

In one of Smith's most effective stylistic moves, *Children of the Lens* is bookended by a message from the eldest Kinnison child, Kit. In the final passage of the book, he addresses civilized people in a future time of crisis: "You already know that Civilization is again threatened seriously. You probably know something of the basic nature of that

threat... Know now that the task of your race, so soon to replace us, will be to see that it does not fall... Prepare your mind for contact" (731). The burden of knowing "something of the basic nature of that threat" is placed on the future—it lies beyond the power of the Kinnison kids' visualization. But visualization is adequate to the task of recognizing when the crisis will come, and of recognizing the potential inherent in whatever species is destined to assume the mantle of guardianship. The Lens is the ultimate symbol of stewardship of the galactic city on the hill, and while the problems of one generation are necessarily not those of the next, the need for stewardship remains a cosmological constant.

The only institutional bulwark capable of preventing societal decline, the only one capable of managing emerging crises, is the moral and political institutionalization of the Lens. This is the meaning of Kim and Cris's "necessary" marriage and the transcendence of their children beyond humanity. It's also the meaning of the Galactic Patrol itself. Alexei and Cory Panshin argue, "Smith's stories, with their mastery of the macrocosm and visions of higher levels of possible being, simultaneously served to sum up Age of Technology science fiction and laid the groundwork for the modern science fiction of the coming Atomic Age" (228). The Lens itself, as Kim is told as he is about to join the Cadet Corps, is "not essentially scientific in nature. It is almost entirely philosophical" (*Vol. 1*, 499). Kim discovers in *Gray Lensman* that he no longer needs his Lens on him to use his mental powers (*Vol. 2*, 80), and his children are born with the

ability to manifest their own Lenses (Vol. 2, 505). Much like space opera itself, as Patricia Monk's argues, the Lens could be thought of as an attitudinal bias—but one only materially effective when applied by people of superior character and expertise. In this, the Lens prescribes technocratic control.

Taken as a philosophical approach to the cosmos, the Lens science-fictionally makes society—its individuals and groups—as malleable as nature's raw material. Manipulation of the masses—that is, literally planets and populations—is what the Lens is *for*. It is there to facilitate technocratic control. On a civilizational level, nothing is beyond the reach of the technological positivism embodied by the Lens and its psionic wielders. Brian Aldiss glibly dubs this “the logical development of Gernsbackian thought, the infinite extension of technology for its own sake, the glamorous disease of gigantism” (209). Let me reframe his comment a bit. The near-infinite expansion of scale in Smith's *Lensmen* is an extension of a pulp-era technological positivism that regarded the natural world as a reservoir of near-infinite resources. It is also an extension of an industrialized, networked society whose rapidly expanded size and increasing diversity could only be managed by communications technologies that defied the capacity of the human imagination. The science-fictional conceit of the Lens is a way for Smith to project his fantasy of authoritarian control over an increasingly networked society—an increasingly networked global society—onto a technocratic elite whose civilizing mission derives from the discourse of the jeremiad. We have

already seen how technological positivism fed into the space opera of the science-fiction pulps, but the political authority of the Lens which we have charted derives from an even more specific offshoot of this discourse. The idea that the minds of the masses could be controlled or surveilled through modern technology, was not new, but the specificity of the Lens as a science-fictional way to imagine those technologies of technocratic control ties into the role of psychic—or psionic—abilities in scientific discourse at the time, particularly in the stories edited by John W. Campbell, Jr.

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### ***Terra Incognita, a Half Inch Back***

Wherever psionics are semantically involved in propping up political power, it is likely to be the case that they signal a site of contested authority. Parapsychology never gained the traction with the scientific community that its advocates felt it deserved, but it always enjoyed a certain amount of cultural currency. In 1930, Dr. J. B. Rhine began conducting experiments at Duke University which were meant to establish scientific data confirming the existence of extra-sensory perception, or ESP. His faith in his research conveys a whiff of positivism. “In this more secure approach,” he wrote in *New Frontiers of the Mind* (1937), “we rely upon neither the proofless revelation of the primitive priest nor the unverified speculation of the ancient philosopher” (3). Rhine looked askance at “the circumscribing law of mind” that restricted sensory capacity to the five material senses, declaring of this arbitrary boundary line, “whether we like it or

not, the old frontier must go the way of Newtonian mechanics in the light of relativity" (269). Like many revolutionaries, Rhine attempted to accomplish by declarative fiat the overturning of established theories and practices in favor of a new paradigm. But the still-relatively young scientific establishment was fully capable of striking back at the parapsychological insurgency.

In his *ESP: A Scientific Evaluation* (1966), a thorough debunking of the most prominent parapsychological research to date, C. E. M. Hansel wrote that his review of the literature was merited in part because it had infiltrated the scientific establishment to such a degree that "investigations are in progress in numerous university departments... and higher degrees are awarded in the topic" (4). And a paper published in *Philosophy of Science* in October 1938 expressed concern about the philosophical premises of parapsychological research. In it, H. Rogosin accused Rhine and his cohort of taking "psychological thought in the direction of the anti-materialistic doctrine of philosophical idealism" (482). He claimed that "in the history of science, which is coextensive with the history of civilization, the immaterial does not exist. Whatever is scientific, is to be considered as true by definition: Truth and Science are equivalent" (475). Here seems to be a parallel positivism to Rhine's, just one more heavily invested in materialism. Both vectors have their historical roots in the establishment of science as an institutional discipline in the nineteenth century.

Historically, natural science had most often been a gentleman's pastime, but the 1800s saw an explosion of interest on the part of amateurs and aspiring professionals alike. Martin Willis characterizes Victorian-era science as "a wide range of practices and beliefs without strict boundaries or accepted regulations, a melting pot of discordant models of the natural world struggling for supremacy and legitimacy" (11). It took the better part of a century for coterie of learned individuals, interested government reformers, and dedicated entrepreneurs to build the foundations of the scientific establishment currently ensconced in universities and corporations and fueled by a labyrinthine ecosystem of grants and capitalist ventures. Within the nineteenth century's burbling stew of quasi-scholarly discourse, a number of intellectuals and naturalists pursued paranormal research as part of the general push toward an episteme rooted in modern scientific investigation.<sup>32</sup>

The legitimacy of parapsychological research, even in these heady days, was often questioned by skeptics, which prompted the formation in England of the Society for Psychical Research in July 1882.<sup>33</sup> Roger Luckhurst argues persuasively that telepathy specifically is a useful "device for traversing the knowledge networks of the late Victorian era" (4). As coined by Frederick Myers in the pages of the Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research, the "scientific" phenomenon of telepathy became a way for Victorian thinkers to organize their knowledge of the world, however that knowledge was derived. As it turned out, parapsychology was successfully banished to

the margins by the beginning of the twentieth century, but not before it had taken root in science fiction. Stories by Edgar Allan Poe, Henry Dummond, Edward Bellamy, and Edward Bulwer-Lytton all featured telepathy and other parapsychological tropes.<sup>34</sup> These and other Victorian texts struck an uneasy balance between mind and matter, spirit and materialism. Perhaps even more than later sf texts, they insisted upon a materialist explanation for paranormal phenomena.<sup>35</sup> In contrast to the fear of interlocutors like Rogosin, psychical researchers of the Victorian era often sought to domesticate occult knowledge under the discipline of natural science. Rhine's effort in the 1930s to bring ESP, telepathy, clairvoyance, etc. into accepted scientific discourse is a direct extension of this ethos. But the basic contest over what constitutes legitimate science remained at issue, and that contest informed the struggle for interested parties—such as science fiction writers—to acquire cultural and political currency by invoking the authority of science.

The science fiction of the 1930s and 40s reflects the tense negotiation between the materialism of natural science—held so dear by Rogosin—and the yearning for something more expressed by Rhine. In his taxonomy of “psi fi,” Peter Lowentrout argues that sf writers grew less concerned with integrating mental powers into a materialist paradigm by the end of the 1950s. Instead, psionics were “all implicitly grounded in a radical and transcendent unity of being”—a metaphysical, theophanus kind of psi fi story (399). By contrast, he classes *Lensmen* with the “biological radio”

stories of the forties and fifties, in which the psionic power is explained as a “somatically-based talent” (392-3). Lowentrou’s categorical distinctions signal, for him, the ways that the texts construe plausibility in their cultural contexts. Biological radio psi fi assumes that mental powers inhere in the physical makeup of the person. Metaphysical psi fi assumes that “a fictional world of epic proportions without a point of transcendence is counterintuitive, finally less persuasive than one which includes the transcendent” (394). As times change and new technologies are developed, the paradigm of plausibility changes as well.<sup>36</sup> The distinctions Lowentrou draws do not fully capture the thrust of Smith’s use of psionics, because Smith’s vision is finally metaphysical in the sense that he means it—though the Lensmen certainly possess “biological radio” talents, they represent for Smith a transcendent appeal to cosmic order and civilizational redemption.

The Panshins’ articulate precisely this appeal in the series. Though they find Smith’s *Lensmen* series to be “dull” (227), they herald 1930s science fiction as a beacon of hope, as striking a note of optimism in a nation awash in narratives of civilizational decline:

In that hour of political and economic desperation, with the whole world apparently falling into collapse, a handful of exploratory writers had flatly denied the inevitability of the decline and fall of Western man. Instead, these bold visionaries had foreseen man bursting free of the bonds of Earth and leaping

lightly to the stars... So powerful would men become that they might destroy whole planets with nothing more than a seeming child's toy or the pure overwhelming power of their thought. Out of the nothingness of space, they might produce anything their hearts desired. And there would even come a day when ancient alien races saluted humanity for its maturity and breadth of vision, and men served as the guardians of the galaxy. (346-347)

*Lensmen* is, in this view, absolutely a transcendent, metaphysical kind of psi fi story—albeit one rooted in cosmogonic eugenics, in a Manichean vision of intelligent design. More importantly, Smith's science-fictional negotiation of the material and spiritual through his use of psionic supermen taps into a discourse with roots in nineteenth-century natural science in order to present a new kind of technocracy: one whose technical mastery of the universe is signified, in the *Lens*, by mastery of the mind. As we have seen in *Lensmen*, this science-fictional negotiation builds technocracy into a jeremiadic errand into the wilderness.

Perhaps the greatest apologist for this technocracy was John W. Campbell, Jr., who championed the union of technological positivism and psionic potential in the pages of *Astounding Science Fiction*. When Campbell took over as editor-in-chief of *Astounding* (*ASF*) from F. Orlin Tremaine in 1938, he immediately set about expanding the literary potential of science fiction. Besides publishing seminal stories by genre luminaries such as Robert A. Heinlein, Clifford Simak, A. E. van Vogt, Frank Herbert,

and (as we'll see) Isaac Asimov, Campbell championed sf as a vital and necessary mode of social prophecy. Aldiss compares Campbell's *ASF* to an orchestra: "Space travel was the major chord, with war and telepathy as minor ones" (221). With Campbell as conductor, his magazine provided the overture that prepared the Western world for the Space Age, an era in which technological development demands continuity and expansion. Aldiss continues, "The Manhattan Project, involving specialists from many countries, drove the lesson home,—but the lesson is foreshadowed in science fiction before it emerges in society" (224). Campbell had made much of the fact that *ASF* predicted the atomic bomb before Hiroshima, having published Cleve Cartmill's "Deadline" in March 1944—a story so scientifically accurate that government agents interviewed the editor and author to establish whether or not they were national security risks.<sup>37</sup> If sf had prepared the way for atomic physics, Campbell hoped that sf would be the forerunner of a revolution in parapsychology, too.

In his 1953 essay, "The Place of Science Fiction," Campbell reviewed the seismic shift of atomic energy and sf's role in helping society grapple with its political implications. Allow me to quote two illustrative passages from that essay:

The culture we live in today accepts the need and the inevitability of change.

But only gradually is it beginning to recognize, too, the vital necessity of

discussing the nature of the change that are desirable before making them and

trying them out. Science is the magic that works; it contains no moral or ethical judgments whatever. (15)

In other words, if we don't anticipate probable technological changes in our fiction, we will be that much more unprepared to deal responsibly with their dangers once they become a reality of daily life. This is the role he claimed for sf with regard to the Cold War. Science fiction's role, in Campbell's opinion, is to assume the kind of moral authority that science lacks. In practice, this means political authority. He then took it a step beyond atomic energy.

Human thought, not atomic energy, is the most powerful force for either construction or destruction in the human universe. It is this aspect that science fiction is exploring today—the most dangerous and most magnificent of all *terra incognita* still lies a half inch back of your own forehead. Naturally, that is the next great area of exploration for science fiction! (21)

It is vital here to bear in mind the scope of the Manhattan Project and the infrastructure necessary to bring nuclear power to fruition in the years leading up to Hiroshima.<sup>38</sup> In this essay, Campbell does not grapple with the institutional prerequisites for the success of the nuclear program, nor would he necessarily be inclined to do so. As Albert I. Berger argues throughout his literary biography of Campbell, *ASF's* editor-in-chief was a reactionary—an authoritarian and an elitist—but he balked incessantly at the prospect of institutionalizing technological progress in the form of government

programs or private corporations.<sup>39</sup> But Campbell's suspicion of the demos always trumped his rankling against the elite. Berger summarizes Campbell's conviction that "technology was the source of a better life for all, the prime mover of human history; therefore, the machine must be kept running"; the social machine therefore "must become as predictable as physical laws, despite the contemporary absence of a true science of sociology to make it possible" (175-176). *Lensmen* enshrined its telepathic supermen at the very apex of an overtly stratified caste system whose political authority rests primarily upon a technologically positivist evolutionary arc. And that political power rests explicitly in the hands of a technocratic police state. Though its leaders are not *quite* engineers and scientists *per se*, they are the only ones capable of managing the apparatus, which makes them technocrats above all else.

Like parapsychology itself, science fiction during this period sought legitimacy as a literary form, and Campbell was at the forefront of that quest. As his essay suggests, Campbell sought to legitimize science-fictional literature on an essentially prophetic basis. More than being able to predict the future, Campbell claims for sf a unique moral and political authority that science itself could not claim. But it is also sf's penchant for accurately tapping into scientific inquiry and theory—such as nuclear physics—for its narratives that makes it, in Campbell's view, relevant to society. In circular fashion, Campbell relies upon society's embrace of technological positivism in order to argue that technologically positivist science fiction has the authority to critique

technological positivism. In the context of the crisis of political legitimacy scientists faced after America inaugurated the Atomic Age by dropping two atomic weapons on Japan, this kind of claim makes a kind of *prima facie* sense. It is as straightforward as claiming that art can be a critical reflection on society, as boilerplate as one can be in justifying the social role of the artist. Weirdly, though, Campbell then stakes sf's unique claim to authority on human thought—which is to say, parapsychology. Psionics. Of all the science-fictional conceits that he could invoke to legitimate the political authority of his literary domain, Campbell chooses the “terra incognita... a half inch back of your own forehead.” In the pages of his magazine, explorations of psionic power were prophecies about the untapped potential of the human mind to reshape the very fabric of the social order. These prophecies tied the pinnacle of human scientific achievement—the final fulfillment of civilizational redemption, the ultimate realization of positivism—to the fringe scientific discourse of parapsychology. The badge of political and moral authority, the Lens, is a science-fictional emblem of this discourse.

As it happens, Campbell—a former test subject of Rhine, it may be worth mentioning<sup>40</sup>—published a series of stories in *ASF* between 1942 and 1950 that reflected his concerns much more subtly. These stories told of imperial decline and fall and the city on the hill that serves as a beacon of hope in the new dark ages; it was a series about civilizational crises and the providential plan that guides the chosen community toward its redemptive destiny. The city on the hill, populated entirely by

scientifically-minded people, works throughout the interregnum to exert counter-hegemonic influence from the margins. It succeeds brilliantly. And then, one day, it is discovered that the civilizational guardians actually responsible for its success possess incredible psionic power.

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## **Seldon's Jeremiad**

There were three key influences on Isaac Asimov's development of the original *Foundation* stories in the 1940s. First was Edward Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-89), upon which the young Asimov meditated one day on his way to a meeting with Campbell. A history buff, he'd long cherished historical novels and wanted to write one—a galactic variation of Gibbon struck him as potentially interesting.<sup>41</sup> Second, as he mused on a science-fictional plot device for how to bring this off, Asimov reflected on the laws of gas molecule behavior, which he learned from classes at Columbia University: "The randomness of their motion works out to the point where you can predict the total behavior of the gas very accurately, using the gas laws... We know these things even though we don't know how individual molecules behave" (Ingersoll et al. 70). Finally, there was Campbell himself, who persuaded Asimov not to write a story about decline, but about the birth of the new empire.<sup>42</sup> The resulting trilogy is perhaps the most classically jeremiadic space opera ever written.<sup>43</sup>

In *Foundation* (1951), a mathematician named Hari Seldon in a far-future Galactic Empire invents an advanced statistical model that he calls "psychohistory." His model predicts that the Empire will fall, and the ensuing anarchy will cause a dark age that lasts for 30,000 years. Facing exile for daring to question the invulnerability of the empire, Seldon proposes establishing a pair of Benedictine-esque colonies: one, dubbed "Foundation," on the planet Terminus, at the outermost rim of the empire; and a second on a vaguely-defined "Star's End." In the Foundation project, men and women of learning will pool the accumulated knowledge of the millennia into an Encyclopedia Galactica, which will reduce the dark age to a mere thousand years. Within fifty years, Terminus begins to face a series of existential crises as the barbarism resulting from the empire's collapse threatens its security. It is at this point that we learn the true purpose of the Foundation, as revealed by a holographic recording of Seldon, timed to appear at specific points in Foundation's history: the Encyclopedia project was a sham meant to force the nascent civilization through a series of crises, "and in each case," Seldon's recording calmly informs his legates, "your freedom of action will become similarly circumscribed so that you will be forced along one, and only one, path" (94). However, Seldon cannot reveal the path to victory, nor the science of psychology, lest his psychohistorical calculations be thrown off. His legates must simply have faith in his plan. "But whatever devious course your future history may

take," Seldon concludes, "impress it always upon your descendants that the path has been marked out, and that at its end is a new and greater Empire!" (96).

For the rest of *Foundation* and the first half of *Foundation and Empire* (1952), the descendants face a series of "Seldon crises" which clever protagonists resolve by exploiting the structural weaknesses of the military and economic forces arrayed against Terminus. After each crisis, the gathered doubts about whether there is a correct path to victory transform into cumulative faith in the probability—nay, the inevitability—of success. The mayors of Foundation do, as Seldon importuned, impress upon their descendants the rightness of Seldon's Plan. A direct conflict with the Empire's mightiest general ends up being neutralized in Foundation's favor by the overdetermination of macroeconomic and political forces—metaphorized by "the dead hand of Hari Seldon" pointing toward the future (96).

Then the Mule arrives and throws everything into chaos. As the next Seldon Crisis dawns, the statesmen of Foundation complacently expect to emerge from the fray once more on the right side of history. When Seldon's hologram appears once again on schedule, though, his predictions are skewed by the Mule's conquest of the galaxy. The Mule, it turns out, is a mutant with incredible empathic powers, able to adjust the "emotional balance" of entire populations (253). A small band of Seldon Plan loyalists travel to Trantor, former seat of the imperium, to search the archives for a clue to the location of Star's End: the Second Foundation. They narrowly manage to

prevent the Mule from discovering it, but his unpredictably effective conquest forces the Second Foundation not only to reveal its existence, but its purpose: to serve as the stewards of psychohistory's calculations. "It's the more important of the two," declares the psychologist responsible for nearly discovering its location. "It's the critical one; *the one that counts!*" (261) Beyond serving as the keepers of the psychohistorical flame, Second Foundation has also developed psychological science to the point where they, too, possess something like the Mule's power—the ability to manipulate the emotions of others. Second Foundation's desperate ploy to thwart the Mule's autocratic ambitions succeeds, but at the cost of alerting First Foundation that Terminus is not the real crux of the Seldon's scheme. Instead, Second Foundation has been manipulating First Foundation all along—all as part of the Plan.

Reactions to this revelation vary wildly. Terminus was taken unawares once by Seldon with the Encyclopedia Galactica, and again in *Second Foundation* (1953). Some Foundation citizens form a secret cabal with the intent of ferreting out Second Foundation and preventing it from "adjusting" them any further (179-81, 253). Their efforts drive most of the plot in the last half of *Second Foundation*. Other citizens, though, simply rely upon Second Foundation to carry through the inevitability of the Seldon Plan's success. A Foundation combat engineer being interviewed during wartime discounts the enemy's faith in victory: "Even if things got too bad, that's when I'd expect the Second Foundation to step in. We still got the Seldon Plan—and *they*

know it, too'" (235). The intense self-awareness of the Seldon Plan's mechanisms threaten to cause a sort of Heisenberg reaction in the psychohistorical calculations, so the Second Foundation executes yet another desperate mission to convince First Foundation's citizens that 1.) they can't be "handled" by Second Foundation, and 2.) that Second Foundation therefore is not the prime mover of galactic history. The ruse succeeds, and it is revealed to the reader that the masters of mental science have actually been based on Trantor the entire time—the "*social opposite end of the Galaxy*" from the stultified, weak-minded mandarins of the dying empire (277). The trilogy thus ends with Seldon's Plan apparently put back on track with no one but Second Foundation's leaders the wiser.

Much like First Foundation's citizens, Marxist critics have not liked the idea that they're being handled. Charles Elkins accuses Asimov of "vulgar Marxism": however Seldon's Plan is understood—as a predictive formula or an agenda carried out by psychically-powered overlords—Elkins contends that Asimov's brand of historical determinism denies true agency both to individuals and the masses, which "is the very essence of slavery" (34). Angus Taylor also perceives "vulgarized Marx" in *Foundation*. He sniffs, "No doubt it is too much to expect philosophical profundity from fiction that is sold in supermarkets and intended above all as entertainment" (64). But Carl Freedman notes that Asimov's psychohistory resolves the "practical exigencies of periodical publication," giving "the trilogy the multiseular sweep that the plot

requires. The Seldon Plan itself is allowed to function as, in effect, the protagonist of the story" (130). Freedman by no means excuses Asimov through this observation, noting that psychohistory, "like all versions of positivism, is essentially contemplative rather than transformative and dialectical," with the masses reduced to a passive role. "The artificial separation between knowing subject and known object leads as contemplative epistemologies almost invariably tend to, towards the investing of all meaningful agency in an elite and aloof clerisy" (133-134)—Second Foundation being the prime example of the latter, and very much presented by Asimov as characteristically technocratic. These critics are right to note the elitism inherent in the series, whether it is embodied by Seldon and the mayors in the earlier chapters of the series or the empaths of Second Foundation in later chapters. But it's also worth keeping in mind that Asimov's historiographical models were primarily Gibbon and Arnold Toynbee, not Marx.<sup>44</sup> As Freedman observes, Seldon's "quasi-actuarial prediction of the future" (136) is "the reduction of science to nineteenth-century positivism" (133), not a meaningful engagement with historical materialism.

Rather than trying to map psychohistory onto a Marxist dialectic (vulgar or otherwise), it is more useful to read psychohistory as the melding of quasi-actuarial prediction (as Freedman shrewdly puts it) with providential historiography to produce a transcendent technological positivism. In *Foundation*, the Encyclopedia Galactica entry on psychohistory defines it as "that branch of mathematics which deals with the

reactions of human conglomerates to fixed social and economic stimuli..." with references to "Seldon's First Theorem" and the "Seldon functions," etc. (19). But the way Seldon speaks of his Plan is, as evidenced above in his hologram's dialogue, jeremiadic in a classic sense: promising a trial of the faithful in a time of crisis, but also promising eventual triumph if his legatees place faith in his psychohistorical calculations—which is to say, the founding covenant of the Foundation remnant. The apogee of purely providential thinking comes in *Foundation and Empire*, as a former imperial courtier ruminates, "'There was a dead hand pushing all of us; the mighty general and the great Emperor; my world and your world—the dead hand of Hari Seldon'" (96), acknowledging, "I can't *prove* anything; I haven't the mathematics. But I appeal to your reason" (98). Reason here retains the human-centric undertone of Enlightenment philosophy, which saw no necessary contradiction between religion and reason.<sup>45</sup> Civilization as a whole is history's protagonist, but only the Elect can usher the story to its triumphant conclusion—the Elect being the inhabitants of that celestial city on a hill, Terminus. The errand into the wilderness was initially conceived of as a way to redeem the Old World from the periphery of civilization, and the arc of the *Foundation* trilogy adheres closely to that model.<sup>46</sup>

Faith in Seldon's Plan is, for the First Foundation, a science-fictional device in itself, a kind of feat of applied scientific engineering that feeds a positivist ideology. Maxine Moore notes that Asimov's fiction generally presents technology as "another of

many servant-gods” which humanity simultaneously reveres and despises—a contentious relationship predicated upon the determining role it seems to play in our development. “Asimov,” she says, “as a matchmaker who weds Moses to Calvin, Einstein officiating, has, in the New England tradition, postulated a massive philosophy based on fixed fate” (103). What she means by this is that Asimov’s seeks to derive a liberal humanism from his determinist historical philosophy, and he leans upon his science-fictional technologies—such as robots or psychohistory—to do so. American evangelicals who have inherited the cultural theology of the Puritans retain a practice of “occupation”: a sense of urgency to prepare for a future about which they believe they have certain knowledge. Rather than contemplation, apocalyptic faith promotes active promotion of readiness for the End.<sup>47</sup> In the *Foundation* trilogy, the primary struggle is always over what shall be done in the face of impending crisis. Even after the surety of the Seldon Plan is established, the struggle then shifts from ascertaining the correct course of action (or non-action) to determining the proper way for the Foundation to occupy itself until the Plan comes to full fruition and redeems the galaxy from the barbarism of the interregnum. This shift happens gradually over the course of the first two novels, until the gravity of the Mule’s threat becomes apparent. While Freedman rightly notes the largely contemplative stance of providential historiography, in the *Foundation* series, it is only the masses that occupy that role, while the technocrats of both First and Second Foundation exercise a great deal of agency, with

Seldon's dead had serving as the ultimate technocratic metonym. The gradual shift from the First Foundation's technological positivism to the Second Foundation's technocratic positivism registers an evolution in the series' conception of the role the ruling caste must play in guiding the city on the hill toward the goal of its covenanted, redemptive mission.

At first, it is the Foundation's superior technology that gives it the ability to exert its counter-hegemonic influence. From the periphery, the tiny dust mote of Terminus cultivates a priestly aura with its advanced technology in order to cow its neighbors, then innovates a flourishing mercantile trade network, amassing wealth and privilege enough to build up its military. Once the Mule upsets Seldon's Plan, though, the emphasis on technology shifts from the physical sciences to the mental. The Panshins say that the intrusion of the Mule upon the Foundation series marks a point where sf had "cast off the appearance of science-beyond-science which had served it through the modern scientific era, and presented it in the shining new raiment of consciousness-beyond-consciousness," ostentatiously claiming, "We may understand it as the sign of the start of a whole new era in the social and psychic development of the Western World" (630). This is not quite accurate.

What the emergence of the Mule and the revelation of the Second Foundation signify is a shift in the focus of technological positivism. Space opera had provided a canvas on which to paint spectacular scenes of civilizational conflict, often with a focus

on rocket ships, ray guns, and strange, new worlds. In *Lensmen*, these tropes represent most of the action, yet Smith built his series around the establishment of an elite caste which represented the next, higher stage of human development. Civilizational conflict was ultimately represented by an arms race not of physical might but of willpower and the capacity to wield a state apparatus—the Galactic Patrol—effectively. The technology of the Lens made the Patrol’s dominance possible, thus redeeming the entire cosmos. The Kinnisons themselves, however, are but the apex of a centralized, authoritarian hegemon. Their mental superpowers are the sign of their superiority and fitness to rule, and their dominion is enforced and facilitated by the Patrol’s mastery of the material universe. For Smith, these overlapping magisteria—material and mental control—are isomorphic and located in the same small, elite caste. The *Lensman* saga thus science-fictionally registers a cruder, overtly authoritarian technocratic ideology, in which engineers simply are the best equipped to manage the socioeconomic structure of society by virtue of their command of the universe’s material forces.

Asimov adds a little more complexity to the technocratic formula. By Seldon’s design, the First Foundation is restricted to mastery of the material universe; the Second Foundation is restricted to mastery of the mind. The First Speaker of the Second Foundation explains that in Seldon’s vision, “the First Foundation supplies the physical framework of a single political unit, and the Second Foundation supplies the mental framework of a ready-made ruling class” (*Second* 127). Asimov parses his

hierarchy much more finely than Smith and makes it clear that those with the highest psychological training are those guiding the course of history—and thus also guiding the material control of the universe. Smith fairly consistently cleaves mental to material power throughout *Lensman*. Asimov feels his way toward an embrace of the mental power paradigm over the course of the stories that comprise the *Foundation* trilogy, but like Smith, he presents each new installment as a revelation of a technocratic logic that had been there all along. Even if the introduction of the Mule and Second Foundation signals a shift in focus, Asimov retroactively recognizes (or reorganizes) the series as having been about command and control over the mind. Without the advent of the Mule, the Foundation series might have been simply a more urbane recapitulation of the themes explored in *Lensmen*, as his scientist-heroes bring to fruition a plan worked out in advance by a technocratic mastermind. Like the Kinnisons, who have been bred for generations for their roles as cosmic-historical redeemers, the Foundation mavericks would simply have fulfilled the Seldon Plan because they are the Elect and because their City on a Hill must survive. But First Foundation does not engage in active technocratic control in order to bring Seldon's Plan to fruition. Instead, the engineers of Second Foundation are the ones constantly nudging history along the right path. They might not possess the material engineering prowess of First Foundation, but they are the ones who set the table for the engineers of Terminus. Without their guidance, no feats of science and engineering would be necessary or

possible. The psionic masters of Second Foundation exert centralized control over people, primarily—everything else follows from that, including the fulfillment of Seldon’s jeremiadic covenant.

Science and technology in Second Foundation are a blend of technical knowhow and emotion. Second Foundation’s clerisy all contribute anonymously to something called the Prime Radiant, which allows the Plan continually to be updated and revised according to advanced mathematical formulae. But, the First Speaker cautions, “A Speaker must not only be aware of the mathematical intricacies of the Seldon Plan; he must have a sympathy for it and for its ends. He must love the Plan; to him it must be life and breath. More than that, it must be even as a living friend” (20-21). For Second Foundation’s chief engineers, the future is not inevitable; it is a living, breathing entity that must be tended and cared for. Humanity *is* history here, as Freedman and David M. Hassler observe, and it must be looked after. All science and technical accomplishment point toward that one end. What the technicians of Second Foundation practice, in effect, is sociology in the classic, Comtean sense of the term.

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## **The Right Side of History**

As we have seen from their chronological overlap and the convergence of both series in the pages of John W. Campbell’s *Astounding Science Fiction*, the period stretching from the Depression to the postwar years showcased a profound interest in

managerial control over industrial society. The science-fictional expression of this interest was the development of institutions through which powerful telepaths could exert control over the patterns of social life. The only ones capable of gaining a firm grasp of the socioeconomic turbulence seemed to be those with the ability to cut through the noise and direct human energies where they would be utilized most efficiently. Both Smith and Asimov embrace the logic of sociological control through the device of a psionic clerisy. Psionic power was a way to represent, science-fictionally, the political, moral, and scientific authority of an elite caste; it was a way to extend the authority of technological positivism into the realm of those who could prophetically narrate the consequences of applied technique—namely, those with the power to manage the massive communication infrastructure that would power postindustrial society. People like John W. Campbell, Jr. thought that such experts might well be science-fiction writers themselves. But in the words of cyberneticist Norbert Wiener, it would simply those who would best recognize and utilize the potential human use of human beings.<sup>48</sup>

In his essay, "Social Science Fiction," Asimov praises the "heights" to which Smith and Campbell brought space opera, and suggests that such adventure stories have their place in acclimating young readers to more sophisticated sf: "space opera, unlike horse opera, is not a dead end" (170). Asimov contends, "Science fiction is the literature of social change, and it treats social change as the norm" (189). He situates

the inevitability of social—political—change within the legacy of the Industrial Revolution. Politically, science fiction has the potential to make the politics of “technological advance” (167) more legible than political discourse itself: “while changes in political affairs often hit us at an abstract and rarefied level, technological changes always hit home, right in the bread basket” (166). The responses to change in *Lensmen* and *Foundation* place political authority in the hands of qualified mental technicians—sociologists who are able to alter the social fabric through direct apprehension of the minds of the populace. In a society where expert management of social needs increasingly called for psychosocial insight and canny prediction of political fallout from geopolitical decisions, psionic power was a science-fictional way to represent those who could science-fictionally apprehend the complex dynamics of civilization.

The increasingly visible roles of both the federal government and corporations in managing the political affairs of a populace too dispersed and too diverse to imagine itself as anything other, perhaps, than a federation of worlds made technocracy—with its inherent authoritarianism—a viable political alternative in the 1930s and 40s. Beyond technocracy *per se*, the critiques of technology in the 1950s and 60s accounted for the mission creep of the managerial class and their intersection with phenomena such as mass culture and propaganda.<sup>49</sup> Those are certainly tools used in social management, but the emphasis in these series is on the nature of the ruling

caste itself and what grants it authority. In *Lensmen*, it is only by yoking the psionic strength of the entire Patrol that the Kinnison children are able to defeat Eddore; in *Foundation*, the Second Foundation works collectively and anonymously to update Seldon's Plan and put it into action. It is not enough to possess telepathic technique—that technique must be coordinated and institutionalized.

The Lensmen operate openly from within the governmental hierarchy; the Second Foundation operates invisibly from seemingly everywhere and nowhere, but they coordinate their actions. In a nation so large that its telecommunication networks were initially seen as a threat to local autonomy, *Lensmen* and *Foundation* assure their audiences that the real source of power is located—if not *somewhere*—with some *one* or some *group*. This recognition can spur paranoid quests for hidden conspiracies. The Lensmen or the Second Foundation are essentially the form of political control that Jack London's protagonists sought to overthrow in *The Iron Heel*, only London lacked the grammar to articulate it as Smith and Asimov did. The caste system is utterly central to the narratives of these series; unlike the critique of caste offered by Du Bois and Schuyler, Smith and Asimov affirm its value. Civilization itself is unimaginable without its ruling caste.

Space opera is a mode of science fiction uniquely suited to depicting civilizational conflict. Not everyone agrees that the *Foundation* trilogy qualifies as space opera,<sup>50</sup> but I endorse Patricia Monk's claim that the *Foundation* series

“incorporates to the utmost effect space opera’s characteristics of scale and multiplexity” (310), especially as it pertains to the civilizing mission of expressed by the jeremiad.<sup>51</sup> The relation of scale to multiplexity really comes into focus, though, when considered in the context of technological positivism in the early/mid-twentieth century. Unlike previous jeremiads we have examined, Smith and Asimov do not engage in criticizing the ruling caste, but they make it easier to imagine that if such an elite caste exists, it is on the right side of history. How can we tell if it is? The answer might as well be another question: If the ruling caste weren’t on the right side of history, then why does it already wield so much power over us? Anyone can be part of an organization. Anyone can be part of a civilization. Not just anyone can discharge the duty to preserve and expand that organization, that civilization, through each successive crisis. If we prevail through whatever happens to be the current crisis, then that must mean the right people were in control.

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<sup>1</sup> Mike Ashley’s *The Time Machines* (2000) and *Transformations* (2005) are invaluable entry points into the literary history of the pulp and Golden Age eras of sf, offering wide-ranging surveys of the editors and writers, but also considering the development of fans into later writers. See also Brian Aldiss, *Trillion Year Spree* (1973), chs. 7-9. Thomas Clareson covers the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in *Some Kind of Paradise* (1985), with ch. 7 providing immediate context for the development of space opera. I have relied heavily on these scholars for my gloss of the history of sf pulps.

<sup>2</sup> John Clute claims that the *Foundation* trilogy was “the first multivolume sequence to appear in the SF world after the release of E.E. Smith’s great Lensman space opera sequence” (.370)

<sup>3</sup> See Gary Wolfe, “Space Opera” (1986).

<sup>4</sup> See esp. pp 297-99. Though not specifically mentioned by Monk, Richard Slotkin’s three-volume account of the American frontier as mythic source of renewal through violence is paradigmatic.

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<sup>5</sup> In establishing such a long period in his historiography, Roberts does not claim to break new ground, as Darko Suvin's *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* (1979), for example, established a similar timeframe for consideration.

<sup>6</sup> See pp. 156-58.

<sup>7</sup> Giddens specifically cites described three suppositions, any one of which was necessary to a positivist attitude toward sociology. Sociological positivists believe in (a) "methodological procedures of natural science" transferring directly to their own field, (b) the possibility of formulating "'laws' or 'law-like' generalizations," or (c) the "technical character" of sociology, meaning that it can be applied practically to social problems (3-4).

<sup>8</sup> Or, as he puts it in *Pandora's Hope* (1999), it's "the politics of reason, that old settlement among epistemology, morality, psychology, and theology" (22).

<sup>9</sup> For a small sample, see Raymond Williams, "Ideas of Nature" (1970), John Bellamy Foster et al., *The Ecological Rift* (2010), Jason W. Moore, *Capitalism and the Web of Life* (2015), etc. These critics all forcefully remind us that Marx and Engels were keenly aware of natural science's propensity to enforce the false division between society and nature, and their own scientific application of historical materialism worked to counter that division.

<sup>10</sup> See pp. 34-8.

<sup>11</sup> See Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination* (1996).

<sup>12</sup> See chapter 1.

<sup>13</sup> Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden* (1964) is a classic myth-symbol argument about the defining role that the dialectic between the pastoral ideal and industrial technology has played in canonical American literature; for an influential critique of Marx and the myth-symbol school's totalizing approach to art and culture, see Bruce Kuklick, "Myth and Symbol in American Studies," (1972).

<sup>14</sup> See Akin, *Technocracy and the American Dream* (1977); John M. Jordan, *Machine-Age Ideology* (1994).

<sup>15</sup> Carroll Pursell argues that "'science' seemed to hold the promise not only of efficiency but also of impartiality and even inevitability" for reformers and radicals alike (204); see ch. 9 of *The Machine in America* (2007).

<sup>16</sup> The term originates with William Henry Smith, who contended in 1919 that World War I had ushered in a new phase of governance for the U.S., and "technocracy" described the organization of scientists and engineers who must play a role in "national industrial management." See Jordan (1994), p. 106.

<sup>17</sup> See Jürgen Habermas, *The Lure of Technocracy* (2015), one of the more recent of his many attempts to grapple with the challenge of institutionalizing a European government; see also Beverly H. Burris, *Technocracy at Work* (1993) for an account of the transformations of technocracy into a professional culture that assimilates technical expertise and deploys it flexibly.

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<sup>18</sup> See Jean Meynaud, *Technocracy* (1969), for instance.

<sup>19</sup> For the intellectual origins of technocracy, see Akin (1977), chs. 1-3.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 65-66

<sup>21</sup> Akin pinpoints the high point of the movement as such in the winter of 1932-33, when the Committee was still doing its work; see pp. xii, 64. He also notes that while many engineers welcomed the possibility of a more politically central role, the Technocracy movement fizzled in part because engineers like Committee co-founder Walter Rautenstrauch "could not escape the engineers' inherent conservatism" (96).

<sup>22</sup> See Jordan, pp. 214-31.

<sup>23</sup> See *Technics and Civilization* (1934).

<sup>24</sup> *Recent Social Trends in the United States* was a comprehensive compendium of sociological data, and David M. Kennedy comments that "it was launched at last in 1933 onto a Sargasso Sea of presidential and public indifference" (12), thanks to the grievous deepening of the Depression.

<sup>25</sup> See Carroll, pp. 256-58, 260-61.

<sup>26</sup> All of the *Lensmen* citations are from *The Chronicles of the Lensman, Volume 1 and 2*, edited by John Clute (1998 and 1999), distinguished by the volume number prior to page number.

<sup>27</sup> See Brian Aldiss, *Trillion Year Spree* (1986), pp. 209-211.

<sup>28</sup> For complete bibliographic information, see the bibliography compiled by Al Lewis for *The Universes of E.E. Smith* (1966), by Ron Ellik and Bill Evans, pp. 255-263.

<sup>29</sup> Most of Kim's undercover adventures take place in *Gray Lensman*, *Second Stage Lensman*, and *Children of the Lens*.

<sup>30</sup> Brian Aldiss dismisses it as such. See *Trillion Year Spree*, p. 210.

<sup>31</sup> The nineteenth-century description of "annihilation of time and space" was relatively commonplace, and appears throughout discussions of transportation and telecommunications technologies as well as global capital. Stephen Kern suggests that Einstein's theory of relativity offered a way for people to puzzle through the sudden experience of global simultaneity; see *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880-1918* (2003), esp. p. 81. See also Rebecca Solnit, "The Annihilation of Time and Space" (2003); see also Rebecca J. Rosen, "'Time and Space Has Been Completely Annihilated'" (2012).

<sup>32</sup> Among the luminaries cited by Hansel as precursors to Rhine's experiments are Sir William Crookes, Sir William Fletcher Barrett, Sir Oliver Joseph Lodge, Augustus De Morgan, and Alfred Russell Wallace; see *ESP*, pp. 3-4. Also see Roger Luckhurst, *The Invention of Telepathy* (2002), ch. 1.

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<sup>33</sup> As laid out in the first presidential address, given by Henry Sidgwick, the organization's explicit mission was to "drive the objector into the position of being forced either to admit the phenomena as inexplicable... or to accuse the investigators... of a blindness or forgetfulness incompatible with any intellectual condition except absolute idiocy" (qtd. in Hansel 27-28).

<sup>34</sup> See Susan Stone-Blackburn, "Consciousness Evolution and Early Telepathic Tales" (1993).

<sup>35</sup> This is George Slusser's argument; see "Paranormality: Science Fiction's Holy Grail" (2007).

<sup>36</sup> For instance, see Andy Sawyer, "'Dreaming Real': The Conquest of Psiberspace?" (1998), where he argues that the advent of networked digital technologies and cyberpunk alongside them "is bypassing the ambiguous, 'magical' nature of mental abilities by imagining technologies which access the mind itself," concluding that these developments "will change the nature of SF itself" (268).

<sup>37</sup> This story is widely-reported; I'm drawing primarily from Albert I. Berger's detailed account in *The Magic That Works* (1993), ch. 4.

<sup>38</sup> Richard Rhodes's *The Making of the Atomic Bomb* (1986) is a classic account; see also Cynthia Kelly, *The Manhattan Project* (2009).

<sup>39</sup> Or religions, as his role in the birth of Dianetics indicates. An early enthusiast of L. Ron Hubbard's science-fictional religion (originally unveiled in 1950 in the pages of *ASF*), Campbell was later offered a plum job in the newly-founded Church of Scientology, but declined it. Berger attributes Campbell's lack of nerve in the face of such a radical career change to his bourgeois complacency; see pp. 41-42, 145. Another possibility might be the quite sensible fear that Scientology would calcify into simply another authoritarian cult.

<sup>40</sup> Berger, p. 88.

<sup>41</sup> See Asimov's *I. Asimov* (1994), p. 117 and *It's Been a Good Life* (2002), pp. 67-69.

<sup>42</sup> See Panshin, pp. 528-32.

<sup>43</sup> In the 1980s, Asimov returned to his Foundation universe, writing sequels which linked it explicitly to the continuities established in his *Robot* and *Empire* series. In the 1990s, select sf authors continued to flesh out Foundation in canonical stories. Though some of the criticism I engage in this chapter speaks to the more recent novels, I focus here on the original "trilogy," published as separate stories in *ASF* between 1942 and 1950, then edited together as three novels, which were published between 1951 and 1953. In part, this is to retain my methodological focus on the time period under discussion; it is also due to the exigencies of writing a coherent chapter in the time I have available to me. For extended considerations of the *Foundation* as part of Asimov's sf megatext, see Donald Palumbo, *Chaos Theory, Asimov's Foundations and Robots, and Herbert's Dune* (2002); for a consideration of the authorized spin-offs, see Carl Freedman, "Remembering the Future: Science and Positivism from Isaac Asimov to Gregory Benford" (1998). For bibliographic detail on the publication order of the original *Foundation* stories, see Palumbo for a discussion of the emergence of what he calls a fractal pattern in Asimov's work; the Panshins' consider the literary context of the timeline in detail in chs. 17 and 18 of *World Beyond the Hill*.

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<sup>44</sup> Elkins notes Toynbee's influence, p. 27; see also Panshin, p. 636, and Palumbo, p. 39; See Berger on Toynbee's influence on Asimov's "Trends," pp. 38-39.

<sup>45</sup> David M. Hassler writes that "the real hero of the trilogy is the sublime history of humankind itself. And it is this large vision, which only the Enlightenment could take, that ultimately—and poignantly—submerges even the individual heroism of the writer" (44). Here, Hassler refers to the efforts of a precocious teen girl to uncover the truth of Second Foundation, but her experiences are consistent with those of most of Asimov's protagonists, who are more often swept along by the tide of history—perhaps riding the waves—than making it happen.

<sup>46</sup> Jori Käkälä explicitly links the Puritan errand to the renaissance project of Foundation in "Asimov's Foundation Trilogy: From the Fall of Rome to the Rise of Cowboy Heroes" (2008).

<sup>47</sup> Matthew Sutton invokes this concept to explain the intense institution-building of fundamentalists throughout the twentieth century; see *American Apocalypse* (2014), pp. 4-5, 113. Paul S. Boyer also explains in *When Time Shall Be No More* (1992) that apocalyptic belief is an ethical spur to action, not an excuse to sit on the sidelines. Though Asimov was an atheist Jew, because the early *Foundation* trilogy draws on jeremiadic discourse these influences are deeply embedded in the narrative. John Clute goes so far as to argue that Foundation is analogous to Christianity itself, and that the series' narrative is about the problem of "making predictions about the working out of history leads inevitably to attempts to preshape events so that the predictions will (as of course they must) come true" (371).

<sup>48</sup> Much like the Technocrats, Wiener was very much concerned with the social and political impact of automation and computerization, and both *Cybernetics* (1961, originally 1948) and *The Human Use of Human Beings* (1950) warn the public that failure to account for the transition to what we might now call postindustrial society would carry with it grave and probably dehumanizing consequences for workers. This was precisely the kind of situation technocracy proposed to resolve.

<sup>49</sup> I'm thinking here primarily of Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and Jacques Ellul's *Technological Society* (1954/1970) and *Propaganda* (1965).

<sup>50</sup> Aldis considers *Foundation* "in marked reaction against the slam-bang space opera preceding it" (218). Andy Sawyer also thinks the thematics of space opera exclude *Foundation*; see "Space Opera," p. 505.

<sup>51</sup> Jori Käkälä puts it well when he says that "what Golden Age science fiction did with the frontier thematic entailed a better understanding of its metaphorical potential" than the dime novel horse operas (433).

## CHAPTER FOUR. Imagining Exodus: Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged* and Walter M. Miller, Jr.'s *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, 1955-1960

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### Banishment and Return

The biblical book of Jeremiah brims with passages prophesying the fall of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. Fall they do, and God's chosen people are carried off into Babylonian captivity. All those warnings and lamentations delivered by the weeping prophet—for what? Nothing the people could do at this point would change the course of events. Besides passages prophesying the fall of Israel and lamenting its decline, the book also brims with passages in which God promises eventually to call his people home, to restore them to their land, to renew the covenant that they broke, but which he always will honor. Jeremiah's purpose is to prepare God's people for their exile, to let them know in no uncertain terms why they are being banished for a time. The prophet establishes the terms of the reflection God wishes his people to undertake during their exile so that, when they undertake the exodus back to the land promised to them, they will do so with right minds and renewed commitment to the ways of the Lord. In this respect, one of Jeremiah's functions as a prophet is to frame for the people

what is most important about the mass exodus into exile and the exodus out of captivity back to the Promised Land of their ancestors.

We have encountered the motif of exodus repeatedly in the narratives examined so far. In *Caesar's Column*, it is when Gabriel Weltstein takes the refugees from the great conflagration to his plantation in Uganda. The settlers of the First Foundation make an exodus to Terminus. The motif is arguably present even in *The Iron Heel*, where the revolutionary vanguard figuratively have made their way across the centuries to the utopia occupied by Anthony Meredith as he scribbles his annotations on Avis Everhard's manuscript. Surprisingly, George Schuyler's *Black No More* even depicts an exodus of sorts, as the vast majority of African-Americans who get Dr. Crookman's treatment leave their race and caste behind; the flight of Max Disher and his family represents, in a small way, yet another form of exodus. Only in the most distant way do W. E. B. Du Bois and E. E. Smith engage with the motif. For Du Bois, deliverance for his people out of bondage to a Promised Land forms the yearning that powers *Darkwater* and its penultimate story, though nothing in the story itself until the final scene depicts a mass movement of people. And even then, it is a return to New York City of all the prejudices and institutional racism from which Jim and Julia's had almost escaped. In "The Comet," the exodus is more of an ironic subversion of the hopes with which the African-American jeremiad typically invests it. Smith's galactic heroes sometimes engage in settler colonialism and imperial conquest, but that is taken in stride as part

of civilization's march. Like London's revolutionaries, the exodus of the Lensmen takes place through the millennia, achieving a *pax technocratica* that itself will eventually give way to further civilizational crisis.

For my final chapter, I would like to concentrate our focus on the motif of exodus in two texts which were published contemporaneously, but which illustrate vastly different prophetic visions of exile and restoration. Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged* (1957) stands as her most comprehensive polemic, a monumental tome whose primary argument is on behalf of the moral authority granted to every individual who, beholden to no other, embraces his own rational, creative potential. This novel's exodus is the withdrawal of the world's leading artists and captains of industry into a Rocky Mountain refuge where they let the world's welfare state(s) fall to apocalyptic shambles without their creative genius. Walter F. Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1959) charts the rise and fall of civilization after nuclear holocaust from the perspective of an abbey, dedicated to the preservation of knowledge, in the southeastern North American continent. Miller mourns the passing of civilization (though not uncritically) and offers two alternate images of hope at the novel's conclusion, one of which is explicitly an exodus to the stars. In high jeremiadic fashion, Rand's protagonists emerge from their city on a hill to forge a new world from the blighted wilderness. Miller's monks more ambivalently board a rocket which is an ark for the species, though signs of life remain on the homeworld, even without the church's spiritual guidance.

The fact of an exodus occurring in each novel is clear enough, but the purpose and implications of the exodus are what establish its significance in each text's engagement with the jeremiad. From what sort of captivity are the chosen people being delivered? Who is doing the delivering? To what kind of land do they go, and what are they meant to do with that covenanted inheritance? In the book of Jeremiah, the exile into Babylonian captivity is meant to humble a wayward, stiff-necked people. Rand's heroes are also stiff-necked; they are worshippers of the individual self, and it is they who undertake an exodus in order to teach the world a lesson. Miller, in contrast, sends his chosen people into exile with lessons learned, but without a land to which they are meant to return. The way each of these prophetic novels science-fictionally frames its exodus ultimately reveals how each author construes the covenant and the true meaning of errand into the wilderness.

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## **The Only Prayer She Knew**

In the wake of *The Fountainhead's* success in 1943, Ayn Rand had attracted a coterie of young acolytes, who ironically referred to themselves as "The Collective." Headed by Nathaniel Branden, Rand's protégé, lover, and impresario, the Collective became, at worst, a cult, or, at best, a highminded echo chamber.<sup>1</sup> Though the fundamental plotline and characters had been pretty well fleshed out since 1946, it took Rand a decade to complete *Atlas Shrugged*, during which time she had testified

before the House of Un-American Activities Committee and broken publicly with former allies or fellow travelers in the political Right, such as Isabel Paterson and Milton Friedman.<sup>2</sup> In this first decade of the Cold War, Rand had become particularly disenchanted with the heightened emphasis on religion in response to godless communism, especially as represented by William F. Buckley, Jr. and his *National Review*.<sup>3</sup> Always a champion of individualism since she started making a name for herself in conservative circles during Wendell Wilkie's presidential campaign in 1940, Rand had nonetheless been an enthusiastic participant in the national ferment of right-wing activists and intellectuals that coalesced around opposition to the New Deal and Soviet-style communism in the 1930s and forties. She even penned a jeremiadic tract titled "To All Fifth Columnists," which urged "organization against organization" in order to fight totalitarianism at home and abroad.<sup>4</sup> But by March 1957 when she put the finishing touches on her *Atlas Shrugged* manuscript, she had withdrawn from the conservative movement she had helped foster and ensconced herself securely at the apex of the adoring salon which met regularly in her New York City apartment. The members of the Collective comprised for Rand a social world apart, and *Atlas Shrugged* was the crowning literary achievement of her self-imposed exodus. "They were with her to celebrate when she wrote the last pages of [John] Galt's speech in the fall of 1956," writes Jennifer Burns, "and were the only ones who understood its significance to her" (*Goddess* 160).

And just who is John Galt? This question begins *Atlas Shrugged*, and it takes 1,168 pages fully to realize that he is a Nietzschean avatar of creative destruction and Rand's idealized embodiment of Aristotelian reason. At first, it is not even clear that Galt is a real person; the question, "Who is John Galt?," serves the same rhetorical function of "So it goes" in Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969). We later learn that when an engine manufacturer attempted to seize control of his invention—"a motor that would draw static electricity from the atmosphere, convert it and create its own power" (*Atlas* 289)—Galt realized that the "looters" of the world will always leech off of men with superior minds while claiming that it is the creators who are the parasites. He decides to turn their logic against them. "I propose to show to the world who depends on whom, who supports whom, who is the source of wealth, who makes whose livelihood possible and what happens to whom when who walks out" (741). So begins his quest to persuade the ablest minds in the world to go on strike against the looters and moochers.

Though Galt is the prime mover of *Atlas Shrugged's* plot, the protagonists are Dagny Taggart and Hank Rearden. Dagny runs a family-owned railroad, which her brother, James, is busy running into the ground on behalf of the welfare state. Hank is a steel magnate whose newest alloy of his own invention is unmarketable to anyone but Dagny. (Because everyone else fears trying anything new.) When she orchestrates the construction of a new transcontinental line built from Rearden Steel—thus proving its

excellence—the government attempts to confiscate his formula. Meanwhile, Dagny and Hank—who become lovers for a time—try to foil Galt by reaching the creators before he can persuade them to go on strike. Dagny and Hank believe that they can save their businesses—and, incidentally, society—if only the other creators would stay and fight. Eventually, when Rearden rejects the “Steel Unification Plan”—a backroom deal brokered by a bureaucrat named Wesley Mouch—the looters stage a riot at his steel plant, and he joins Galt’s strike. Dagny is the last holdout, only joining the strike when she must rescue Galt—with whom she, of course, also falls in love—from the state’s torturers. The book ends with the industrialists of the world retreating to a Rocky Mountain refuge to let everything fall apart. They then emerge to seize control of mankind’s destiny in the name of their own creative ambitions, symbolized by the American dollar sign.

Appropriately, recent critical discussion of *Atlas Shrugged* tends to focus on the novel as an apologia for capitalism. Andrew Hoberek devoted a chapter of *Twilight of the Middle Class* (2005) to the novel, arguing that Rand situates her industrialist heroes within a more generalized cultural anxiety among middle-income earners in American society. This anxiety had its source in the transition of middle-class identity from nineteenth-century property-owners to twentieth-century white-collar proletarians. Rand’s emphasis on “property” as being primarily the product of the mind—as opposed to being a product of a wholly-owned business or perhaps a plot of

productive land—allowed readers to regard their intellectual work as a badge of property ownership while extending empathy to wealthier owners of various properties, intellectual and otherwise. Myka Tucker-Abramson argues that Rand turns the volatility of global capitalism into a source of stability, displacing the anxieties such volatility produces onto the welfare state and its attempts to resolve the problems of urban racial segregation and blight. *Atlas Shrugged* thus “refigures the creative destruction of capitalist modernity into a process of personal salvation, one that if submitted to will lead to a stronger, more flexible, more tensile human subject and... a more modern, profitable, and healthy city” (87). The rhetoric of healthier cities, though, partakes of racial dog-whistles. The fitness of the “stronger, more flexible human subject” is thereby associated with the phenomenon of white flight to the suburbs.<sup>5</sup> Like Hoberek, Stacey Olster notes Rand’s attention to the transition from property to income; rather than its racial aspects, she focuses on its misogyny. She foregrounds the significance of Dagny and her succession of lovers: starting with her childhood friend, Francisco d’Anconia (heir to an international mining company), then Rearden, and finally Galt. The mutual esteem in which these *übermenschen* hold each other is cemented by the fact that they have each, in turn, loved and been loved by Dagny, who, “much like the gold standard... [becomes] a medium of exchange among them, each of whom, with exemplary grace, cedes her to the other in a paradigm of free trade practices” (302).

Inherent in this Lockean provenance, Olster observes, is the violence that makes possession of property possible. In Rand's world, though, such violence is a testament to the mettle of possessor and possessed—the moral stature of the authentic creator.<sup>6</sup> It is healthy and purifying. Rearden watches with “detached, impersonal pleasure” as one of his guards calmly, confidently guns down the rioters at the gate of his steel plant, imagining him as “a hero of Western legend,” enjoying “the sight of the competence and certainty with which men of that distant age had once combatted evil” (*Atlas* 996). In this moment, what gives Hank pleasure is to observe an employee doing a job well—a job protecting Hank's property against the faceless hordes. But his pleasure is linked to a mythological conception of the frontier, replete with colonial implications.<sup>7</sup> So it is that a paid employee becomes a symbol of stability, a bulwark against the instability of the collectivist masses, an object of admiration for the actual property owner who will presently abandon the guard to his fate when Hank finally joins Galt's strike. The relationship here between employer and guard is essentially that of a latter-day robber baron and his enforcer. Rand draws the violence of nineteenth-century capitalism—and its expansion into the American frontier—into the twentieth century and valorizes its deployment on behalf of intellectual property owners.

This frontier mythos pervades the novel, and not only in Hank's vicarious gunfighter fantasy. In one early scene, Dagny contemplates a statue of her ancestor, Nathaniel “Nat” Taggart, who founded Taggart Transcontinental Railroad. Rand coyly

frames “his battle to build it... [as] a legend, because people preferred not to understand it or to believe it possible” (59). So the narrative Rand presents of this nineteenth-century robber baron gets to play fast and loose with its facts and Dagny’s interpretations. It is said that “no penny of his wealth had been obtained by force or fraud,” but, apparently without contradiction in Rand’s view, he reputedly “murdered a state legislator who attempted to revoke a charter granted to him.” The charge was ultimately never proved, but, Rand wryly notes, “He had no trouble with legislators from then on. With her permission, Nat “pledged his wife for security for a loan from a millionaire” after throwing “down three flights of stairs a distinguished gentleman who offered him a loan from the government” (60). Nat Taggart’s emblem adorns the engine on the maiden voyage of the John Galt Line—the railway she builds with Rearden Steel—and when she sees people turned out to watch the passing of the train, she reflects, “It was like the age when Nat Taggart moved across the country, and the stops along his way were marked by men eager for the sight of achievement” (243). Like her revered ancestor, Dagny even has the opportunity to murder someone —“Calmly and impersonally” (1148), Rand assures us—a guard who simply stands in her way during the rescue of John Galt near the novel’s end. After the rescue, the rescuers board a plane and head back west to their Rocky Mountain refuge. Inside the speeding airborne machine which bears her and her comrades in their exodus from

what remains of American civilization, at last shaking the dust of the looter state from her heels, Dagny takes time to reflect.

She looked ahead. The earth would be as empty as the space where their propeller was cutting an unobstructed path—as empty and as free. She knew what Nat Taggart had felt at his start and why now, for the first time, she was following him in full loyalty: the confident sense of facing a void and of knowing that one has a continent to build. (1159)

Turning anew to the “empty” frontier—to the standards set by a more heroic, pioneering generation—and looking ahead to a revitalized future: these are all hallmarks of the jeremiad. Old Nat Taggart, incidentally, is even “from somewhere in New England” (59)! The strike is no less than another errand into the wilderness, one explicitly framed by the manifest destiny that delivered American Indians to mass slaughter on behalf of the robber barons who wanted access to their resources: robber barons like Nat Taggart, whose statue dominates the concourse of the Taggart Terminal.

“To look at that statue whenever she crossed the concourse,” Rand writes of Dagny’s communion with the past, “was the only form of prayer she knew” (59).

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## Going Galt

Rand was never less than explicit about her admiration for the ethos she ascribed to the nineteenth century. In her *Romantic Manifesto* (1969), Rand called the pre-World War I world “the last afterglow of the most radiant *cultural* atmosphere in human history” (8), because the “nineteenth century was guided, not by an Aristotelian philosophy, but by an *Aristotelian sense of life*” (86, emphasis in original).<sup>8</sup> What made the nineteenth century so wondrous were its two influences on what she called romanticism: “Aristotelianism, which liberated man by validating the power of the mind—and capitalism, which gave man’s mind the freedom to translate ideas into practice” (86). Aristotle was for her the avatar of reason—as opposed to the alleged mysticism of Plato—and the free market consequently a place where reason could operate as unfettered as humanly possible. Though Rand was reticent to acknowledge the genealogy of her own philosophical and literary ideas, she always claimed Aristotle as her chief influence.<sup>9</sup> Near the beginning of her work on *Atlas Shrugged*, Rand averred that her “personal crusade” was “not merely to fight collectivism, nor to fight altruism,” but that she was “out after the real cause; the real root of evil on earth—the irrational” (qtd. in *Goddess* 100).

While *Atlas Shrugged* is, among other things, certainly a paean to what Rand would have considered a life lived reasonably, its purpose was much more utopian. “It

was Aristotle who said that fiction is of greater philosophical importance than history,” she wrote in her *Manifesto*, “because history represents things only as they are, while fiction represents them ‘as they *might be* and *ought to be*’” (169).<sup>10</sup> It is worth quoting at some length Rand’s own conception of her fiction’s purpose, which is that

man needs a moment, an hour or some period of time in which he can experience the sense of his completed task, the sense of living in a universe where his values have been successfully achieved. It is like a moment of rest, a moment to gain fuel to move farther. Art gives him that fuel. Art gives him the experience of seeing the full, immediate, concrete reality of his distant goals.

The importance of that experience is not in *what* he learns from it, but in *that* he experiences it. The fuel is not a theoretical principle, not a didactic ‘message,’ but the life-giving fact of experiencing a moment of *metaphysical joy*—a moment of love for existence. (171)

Rand’s philosophy of literature carries resonances of Ernst Bloch, a German philosopher associated with the Frankfurt School whose *Principle of Hope* (3 vols., 1954-59) is one of the central texts in utopian studies. The utopian impulse in *Atlas Shrugged*, “like a beacon raised over the dark crossroads of the world, saying: ‘This is possible’” (172), is instantly recognizable as an expression of Bloch’s *Not-Yet*—though Rand’s idea of paradise is diametrically opposed to the world beyond the horizon yearned for by the old socialist visionary. Bloch would undoubtedly view Rand’s utopianism as misguided

—it fails to comprehend the totality of what the world might and truly ought to be, hidebound by selfishness and capitalist individualism—but still no less an expressed yearning for a better tomorrow.

In his essay for Kenneth Roemer's anthology, *America as Utopia* (1981), Lyman Tower Sargent includes *Atlas Shrugged* among the handful of notable capitalist eutopias (specifically good places, as opposed to Thomas More's pun, which conflates "good" and "no" place),<sup>11</sup> but Roemer himself specifically classifies it as an example of utopian fiction which "hasn't been completely swallowed up by science fiction," further insisting in no uncertain terms that it "should not be classified as science fiction" (235). Even so, such offhand classifications appear sporadically, though usually in popular sources, and often without much exposition.<sup>12</sup> Sf authors John Scalzi and David Brin have subjected the novel to extended critique,<sup>13</sup> and both P. Schuyler Miller and John W. Campbell reviewed the book in 1958 in the pages of *Astounding Science Fiction*. Miller grumbled that Rand was "a rank outsider" blundering into the SF community like "a rank greenhorn" (147), though at least she included Rearden Metal, "the super-invention that any SF novel needs" (148). Campbell was more favorable, declaring it "science fiction in the same sense George Orwell's *1984* was," but "more important; Orwell described what tended to happen. Ayn Rand describes, with powerful accuracy, some of the forces that make disaster happen... and what the methods used by the destroyers are" (152). Here, of course, Campbell refers to the looter state bureaucrats

—the real destroyers—not the plutocrats.<sup>14</sup> Broadly speaking, there is little question that *Atlas Shrugged* is science-fictional, but, as indicated by Miller's remark, much of the discussion focuses on technological innovations, such as the subplot involving an atomic bomb-like superweapon which ultimately destroys its looter overseers, or Rearden's new alloy—or on the apocalyptic climax itself. But the most significant science-fictional device in the novel, as Robert Hunt notes, is in its mythological approach to history, and this frames the utopian meaning of the protagonists' withdrawal to their Rocky Mountain refuge, their exodus from a hopelessly corrupted socialist world.

Rand's *novum* is her mythic vision of America's past, which supplants our actual history. In the first volume of *Principle of Hope*, Bloch introduces the concept of the *Novum*, by which he means any genuinely new development in human society that helps drive revolutionary change.<sup>15</sup> As I discussed in the introduction, Darko Suvin borrowed this term to describe the science-fictional element that drives the cognitive estrangement he theorizes as central to any understanding of science-fictionality. Hunt duly indexes the aforementioned various technological tropes in *Atlas Shrugged*, but his most crucial insight is that Rand rewrites American history so as to clear the board for her heroic remnant. He notes that Rand has purged her fictional world of all real corporations, individuals, any "invention, movement, system, or theory—including communism, fascism, evolution, or relativity—that can be attributed to one person,"

and “any other event of the twentieth century or of any preceding century.” In sum, “Despite their geographic ties to the factual United States, Rand’s people actually live in a version of that familiar science-fictional setting, the alternate universe” (86). In the universe of *Atlas Shrugged*, Rand’s utopian vision of what *might have been* and what *ought to have been* blend with what *was*. Hunt characterizes the isolationism of this science-fictional United States as “far more than an economic one. Rand’s America is cut off from its past—our past. She has rewritten American history to fit her vision of the apotheosis of capital” (85-86).

As a science-fictional subgenre, the alternate history has been subject to a considerable amount in scholarly attention in the last few decades.<sup>16</sup> Unlike sf stories that project their narratives into the future, alt-histories are frequently set in a version of the past or present that has turned out differently because of an alteration of a particular event in the timeline known to our own reality. In *The Alternate History: Refiguring Historical Time* (2001), Karen Hellekson sketches out a taxonomy of alt-histories, ultimately privileging what she dubs the “genetic” type, because it is primarily concerned with the fact of an alteration and tracing the effects of it. I am less concerned here with fitting *Atlas Shrugged* into Hellekson’s taxonomy than with focusing on the political stakes she identifies as inherent in the alt-history as a science-fictional narrative. The purpose of this kind of *novum*, she argues, is to foster “the enriching realization that history is something that it is possible for an individual to

shape. The psychological effects of reading the alternate history are important: it could have happened otherwise, save for a personal choice” (110). Though Hunt is right that Rand has created is an alternate universe, it is not clear what specific event(s)—what point(s) of divergence—in the past led to the present depicted in the novel. One may as well ask, “Who is John Galt?” And that is the point. Minding the spirit of Aristotle’s dictum, Rand is not a historian, she is a romantic artist; history, what really happened, is hers to rewrite to her own purpose. In order to create a world as it ought to be, she creates a world as it ought not to have been. The backsliding by degrees that has gotten the world into its mess is the work of generations, of any number of people who compromised their integrity, whom it is nearly impossible to hold to individual account.

Rand’s depiction in her novel of bureaucratic mission creep on the part of the government and the complacency of moocher corporations pointedly reinforces the theme that people—individual people—have chosen in the course of perhaps two or three generations to surrender their free will and creative powers. To Rand, that’s how collectivism works. Contemporary Americans reading *Atlas Shrugged* would recognize in her looter villains the right-wing caricature of the New Deal brains trust and their corporate partners.<sup>17</sup> This was an era when conservatives spoke of a “fifth freedom” of economic liberty, especially freedom from government interference in the private sector.<sup>18</sup> In *Atlas Shrugged*, the United States is surrounded on all sides by People’s States; it is the last bastion of free enterprise and individual liberty, and Rand offers no

explanation of how this happened. But these things, as the saying goes, don't just happen. And in the novel's arguably most infamous passage—one which, as Gary Weiss observes, was likely in Whittaker Chambers's mind when he wrote that he could hear Rand hissing from almost any page, "To the gas chambers, go!"<sup>19</sup>—Rand spends in excess of twenty pages detailing how the mismanagement of the bureaucratic stooges and the daily habits and attitudes of train passengers are all complicit in a social turning away from reality. The price of the mass turning away from moral principles—the backsliding—is paid by the people aboard a stalled passenger train who suffocate to death in a tunnel; the tunnel then collapses in an explosion when a second train collides with it. The episode decisively reaffirms Dagny's commitment to her family's business and, by extension, the irrational civilization that *chooses* to let such things happen. Having detailed the various faults of the passengers as they ride into the tunnel, Rand concludes, "These passengers were awake; there was not a man aboard the train who did not share one or more of their ideas" (*Atlas* 607). They knew, Rand implies, exactly what they were doing. The precipitate historical crisis in *Atlas Shrugged* is no less than the aggregate of choices made by people who should have known better, and who bear final responsibility for the disaster befalling them.

This theme clearly exemplifies Rand's jeremiadic mode, but it also exemplifies what Hellekson identifies as the taxonomic root of the alternate history: the agency of personal choice. But rather than attempt to identify a single point of divergence from

the established historical timeline, Rand simply submerges it in the collective guilt she assigns to every character in her novel except John Galt, his strikers, and the robber barons of the nineteenth century. Rand's science-fictional alternate history and her jeremiadic purpose thus reinforce each other. Campbell astutely noted that Rand uses the methods she ascribes to the moochers, and the train accident is a case in point. Rather than identify each passenger by name or contextualizing their accountability (which would, admittedly, stretch the very possibilities of the novel form), she simply indexes them as social types, not individuals. Thus she ascribes nonspecific, collective guilt to the disaster victims much as she eradicates any specific point of divergence in her alternate history. Only her hyper-individual protagonists are even capable of truly feeling guilt, but her project is to liberate them of responsibility—or guilt—to anything or anyone beyond themselves.

The guilt they feel is, Rand argues, the most evil form of social control—a sense of obligation to others beyond oneself. One of the chief ironies employed by Rand in *Atlas Shrugged* is that the looters' backsliding—making an idol of collective responsibility—is what ultimately destroys them. Like an angry Old Testament god, Rand gives her backsliders what they want. The train car passengers who worshipped collective responsibility are given it in the ghastly accident scene. But she contrasts that sense of social responsibility with true ownership, which can only properly belong to the individual. The emotional climax of the book is when Hank finally realizes that his

fight to save his company has been rooted in a sense of social responsibility, leading him inexorably toward martyrdom. But “the soul and essence of his enemies: the *mindless* face of the thug with the club,” which he glimpses during the riot at his steel plant, is the image that wakes him from his own slumber (997, emphasis mine). “He felt a peculiar cleanliness. It was made of pride and of love for this earth, this earth which was his, not theirs.” An individual who lacks enough mind to even truly possess his own body is a non-person. Better to forsake social obligation and embrace mastery of one’s own self. Post-epiphany, Hank regards himself as a “living motor,” an image which fills him with “the sense of his own superlative value and the superlative value of his life” (997). It is at that moment of self-purification that he receives absolution. He is finally ready to take John Galt’s oath: “I swear—by my life and my love of it—that I will never live for the sake of another man, nor ask another man to live for mine” (731, 1069). Now fully in possession of himself—and mentally in possession of the “earth which was his, not theirs”—Hank is finally free to realize his creative potential, imbuing his creations with the life of his mind. Rand calls for individuals to shed their guilt over failing to live up to social responsibilities; she importunes them to embrace true ownership instead. And the Rocky Mountain refuge is the only place in the world where Galt’s disciples, who have withdrawn their animating genius from the world, are free to exercise their mastery as they see fit.

Known as "Galt's Gulch," the enclave in the Rockies is, as Rand titles one of her chapters, a utopia of greed. Until the apocalyptic fall of civilization at the novel's end, Galt's Gulch functions for the makers of the world as a yearly retreat. In this place, they ply their trades and get paid for them (in gold, of course), then return to the world incognito, to work menial jobs disconnected from their vocations. Carl Abbott observes that the Colorado Rockies often served in early twentieth-century tourism propaganda as a place of unspoiled wilderness, a site of frontier rejuvenation, even though the frontier was now closed. "Sf novelists imagine Colorado in four overlapping, sometimes intersecting ways," he argues: "as a *remnant* society or site, as an isolated *refuge* or hiding place, as a place of *redemption*, and as a place to *reconstruct* a better social system." All four elements, of course, are classically jeremiadic. He also reminds us that Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier was "a process rather than a place," but that "science-fictional Colorado... is often pictured in terms of static isolation" (224). He slots *Atlas Shrugged* into this mold, but he neglects Rand's obsession with dynamism, often represented in technological motifs. Even in Galt's Gulch, a verdant valley which serves as a sort of morally pure respite from the oppression of the collectivist world, is nowhere near the embodiment of an epoch of rest.

Machine imagery and the dynamism it symbolizes suffuse Rand's utopia. Dagny's first sight upon awakening from a plane crash in the valley is Galt's face, which "bore no mark of pain or fear or guilt," and eyes that are described "as if his faculty of sight were

his best-loved tool," "the deep, dark green of light glinting on metal" (702). Everything in this valley glitters: The birch leaves (702), the waterfall (705), the windows (706), the roofs (798). When Dagny is examined for physical damage after her crash by the Gulch's resident physician, she feels "as if her body were an engine checked by an expert mechanic" (711). Upon inspecting Francisco's copper mine, she reflects that this "was the story of human wealth written across the mountains":

a few pine trees hung over the cut, contorted by the storms that had raged through the wilderness for centuries, six men worked on the shelves, and an inordinate amount of complex machinery traced delicate lines against the sky; the machinery did most of the work. (792)

Even the concerto of a composer impresses Dagny with its "controlled violence and the mathematical precision"; it has "the stern discipline of business" and "the radiance of engineering" (784). Then there is the iconic image of the solid gold dollar sign in the center of town, a "beacon" in the rays of sun, but one "like some transmitter of energy that sent them in shining blessing to stretch horizontally through the air above the roofs" (706). As Hunt notes, all of this is of a piece with the whole novel, a narrative Futurist Manifesto. Because Rand values dynamism—movement, speed, action, action, action—Galt's Gulch is the antithesis of static. Its inhabitants cycle through it like a way station, a place of temporary withdrawal for a remnant engaged in occupation until the exodus.<sup>20</sup> More importantly, it is pure; the copper mine which Dagny surveys with

approval is a mark of the moral goodness being actively cultivated in this garden.<sup>21</sup> In *Atlas Shrugged*, it is the masters of the universe, the dynamos,<sup>22</sup> who have the power, privilege, and moral imperative to withdraw their favor, and their strike is the means by which they prove it.

Their Promethean prerogative finds unlikely expression in gold-embossed cigarettes made by one of the strikers. After contemplating Nat Taggart's statue, Dagny stops to buy cigarettes and the vendor introduces the motif with Rand's characteristic bluntness: "I like to think of fire held in a man's hand. Fire, a dangerous force, tamed at his fingertips... When a man thinks, there is a spot of fire alive in his mind—and it is proper that he should have the burning point of a cigarette as his one expression'" (*Atlas* 61). In the scene where Galt explains the strike, just after he completes his monologue, is this description: "The windows were now sheets of darkness, reflecting the dots of lighted cigarettes. He picked a cigarette from a table beside him, and in the flare of a match she saw the brief sparkle of gold, the dollar sign, between his fingers" (741). The first demand Galt makes, naturally, after being rescued from his torturers: "'Give me a cigarette'" (1155). To smoke a cigarette is a mark of enlightenment (the pun is Rand's, not mine), and in Rand's novel, the creators—the enlightened remnant—can be spotted easily enough by simply looking for a crisply-rolled, gold-dollar-sign-embossed cylinder of smoldering tobacco perched between their fingers. The cigarette tip, like those dots in the darkness, is yet another

gleaming, glittering testament to the each individual genius who comprises the remnant retreating to the Gulch: a thousand points of light, one might say.

The agency of this remnant is underlined by the fact that the way has been cleared for them to exercise their agency. An emblematic example is the passage mentioned in the previous section, where, after rescuing Galt, Dagny contemplates the fall of civilization while dreaming of Nat Taggart. The world is become a blank slate, thanks to the strikers, an empty wilderness. She revels in the confidence of “facing a void and of knowing that one has a continent to build.” As Hunt argues, though, Rand has cleared the way for them science-fictionally by wiping away the particulars of American history, the better to showcase their personal choice and dynamism. Setting *Atlas Shrugged* in an alternate timeline where the aggregate choices of the multitude have led a once great nation into terminal decline is Rand’s jeremiadic indictment. The exodus Rand maps out for her enlightened remnant is modeled on the science-fictional history of this alternate cosmos: her remnant withdraws only temporarily into Galt’s Gulch, their city on a hill, and their exodus from a corrupt, dying civilization where the producers are treated as slaves is as through through a purifying wilderness, finally returning to a Promised Land. In Rand’s jeremiad, though, the city on a hill is not the final destination; it is the place of temporary exile. But it is not any god that will deliver them from their captivity. Not even John Galt would claim as much for himself, messiah though he may be. They have delivered themselves from a backsliding world, and they

are the ones meting just punishment to it. The science-fictional conceit of the alternate universe erects a teleological structure for their exodus: a place from which they have come (in the past) and a place toward which to go (in the future). It is the myth of progress reframed. Unburdened by guilt or the particulars of history, and resolute in their commitment to their own superiority, the exodus of the overmen lays waste to the world while birthing a new mythology of self-actualized greatness.

*Atlas Shrugged* pins its jeremiadic structure on the exodus, and the exodus is an exaltation of individual will, even as the individuals who undertake the exodus utterly cleanse the legacy of every nation—American included—from their shared future. Rand's well-established penchant for Nietzschean heroes here reaches its zenith,<sup>23</sup> with the exodus itself of the strong men of the world destroying civilization so that they may live free and die guiltless. Though she drew on the nineteenth-century American mythology of manifest destiny, the conquerors who descend from Galt's Gulch are not setting out to restore the United States. In the "void of darkness and rock" hides "the ruins of a continent," not America. "'The road is cleared,' said Galt. 'We are going back to the world,'" he says—not the United States. And in the novel's final line, Rand completes her science-fictional task of wiping away America on behalf of the capitalist elite. "He raised his hand and over the desolate earth he traced in space the sign of the dollar" (1168). Rather than a society, it is the earth itself—the malleable source of material for making—over which Galt traces the dollar, literally a floating signifier in

space. *Caesar's Column* ended with the remnant building utopia in the mountains and walling themselves in for the foreseeable future until the world was ready to receive enlightenment. John Galt and his compatriots' errand into the wilderness revitalizes civilization, but that civilization is decoupled from the myths of the American republic or even the idea of nationhood itself. Instead, the capacity to exert one's will upon the universe is established as the final arbiter of social standing in a community of entirely self-interested individuals. Not even history can place limits upon the endless possibilities afforded to the Elect of Rand's alternate world. The Promised Land of *Atlas Shrugged* is itself a science-fictional thought experiment, where every chosen one is Prometheus, exodus from captivity is always an exercise of supreme individual will, and the burning ember of ambition is always lit, glittering in the dark, in the cancerous haze gathered round the tip of a gold-embossed cigarette.

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## **And the Quest for the Holy Grales**

The stories that Walter M. Miller, Jr. revised into *A Canticle for Leibowitz* coincided in their publication with a series of lectures delivered to young monks at the Atheneum of Saint Anselm by Dom Jean Leclercq on the subject of spirituality, learning, and literary expression in medieval monastic culture.<sup>24</sup> The lectures were given between 1955 and 1957, with a book adapted from them published in the latter year; an English translation first appeared in 1961. In a controversial passage in the

epilogue of the book, Leclercq argues that the mysticism of the most enduring medieval monastic literature derives from the authors fitting contemporary literary forms to the inspiration derived from their holy meditations. "Whatever literature is needed, experience raises to its own level. Consequently, a higher type of sincerity is apparent in the writings of the mystic even amid the forms appropriate to the various periods, sometimes to our confusion. We are so prone to judge the ancients by the standards of today" (266). In his review of the first American edition, Giles Constable argues that Leclercq's "somewhat uncompromising view of the dependence of literature on experience... leaves little room for the sympathetic insight of the author into events and emotions he has not himself experienced" (139). Constable's quibble, however, was registered with consideration for a general audience, and the context of Leclercq's argument is that sometimes the monks drew on rhetorical forms that were themselves controversial—that is, not suitably sacred in themselves—in the medieval period. Leclercq was attempting to recover the urgent spiritual truth of writings presented in generic modes not commonly associated with the church.

I would like to suggest the task of untangling the critical reception of Miller's *Canticle* in its immediate historical context has something in common with the recovery undertaken by Leclercq in his lectures. Miller had only been a Roman Catholic for about a decade when the first novella was originally published, but he had been writing science fiction stories since the early 1950s. Despite the religious tropes

invoked by several of the authors—Donnelly and Du Bois, especially—none of the literary output we have examined so far is particularly religious in nature, and most of these authors were quite hostile to religion—particularly Schuyler and Rand, though London and Asimov also had no use for it. Many classic science-fictional novels have been openly mystical or religious in nature—C. S. Lewis’s *Space trilogy*<sup>25</sup> bears the imprint of Christian allegory, while Frank Herbert’s *Dune* saga, inaugurated in 1965, offers an evolving and sometimes ambivalent critique of prophetic politics—but the idiom of sf, as we have seen Darko Suvin argue in the introduction, tends toward materialism. *Canticle* is the rare science-fictional text that places its engagement with a particular faith tradition at the center of its narrative without subverting it as part of the text’s thematic arc. At least, that what I must establish in order to explicate how I read Miller’s engagement with the exodus motif. The science-fictionality of *A Canticle for Leibowitz* is not commonly associated with the Church, but unlike the other texts we have examined so far, I do not believe we can make sense of its jeremiadic qualities without first firmly establishing whether or not its basic assumptions are primarily religious or secular.

Originally published as three novellas in *Fantasy and Science and Fiction*, the novel’s three sections trace roughly 1,800 years of civilizational rise and fall after a twentieth-century nuclear holocaust. The first section, “Fiat Homo,” chronicles a young monk’s discovery of a cache of esoteric materials in a fallout shelter in the desert.

Brother Francis's abbey, home to the Albertian Order of Leibowitz in what used to be Utah, was founded by the eponymous scientist-turned-monk for the purpose of preserving knowledge in the time after the nuclear holocaust—known as the Simplification—when hordes of people tried to destroy all instruments, records, and people of learning, whom they blamed for developing the weapons of mass destruction responsible for the apocalypse. The artifacts the monks safeguard are known as the Memorabilia, and their original significance has been largely lost. Francis spends fifteen years illuminating a copy of a blueprint found in the shelter, and when Leibowitz is canonized, Francis journeys to New Rome to deliver his illumination and the original blueprint to the Pope. On his journey there, his illuminated copy is confiscated by bandits. On his journey back, he is murdered by mutant cannibals. The second section, "Fiat Lux," is set roughly 600 years later, and it tells the story of an irreligious renaissance man called Thon Taddeo Pfardentrott, cousin to a local warlord named Hannegan, who comes to the Abbey to recover the Memorabilia, from which the monks have gleaned enough understanding by this point that one of them has fashioned a crude electric light. Taddeo's technical approach to sacred objects sows discord among the monks, but the head abbot, Dom Paulo, eventually grants Taddeo permission to take what he needs, though not before cautioning him against his reckless pursuit of knowledge unchecked by wisdom. Book II ends with Hannegan turning his cousin's technical innovations to militaristic ends. Set a further 600 years on,

"Fiat Voluntas Tua," the final section, depicts the desperate final days of human civilization as it careens toward nuclear holocaust once more. Near the abbey, mercy killing camps identified by their Green Star have been erected to euthanize people suffering from the effects of fallout. While the abbot, Zerchi, wrestles with his impotence in confronting the moral degradation embodied by the Green Star camp next to his abbey, one of the younger monks, Brother Joshua, has been selected to lead an exodus offworld, one authorized by the pope for the sake of saving a remnant of the human race from the impending catastrophe. As the starship *Quo Peregrinatur* leaves Earth, the abbey is destroyed in the final phase of the second nuclear apocalypse. Zerchi, trapped under rubble, is given one final communion by a two-headed mutant who, prior to the blast, had been known as Mrs. Grales. In life, Grales's second head had seemed asleep, a mere freakish appendage, a mutation bestowed by the apocalyptic cycle initiated long before the novel began; now, her second head, named Rachel, blesses the dying monk and wanders off into the post-apocalyptic landscape.<sup>26</sup>

As one of the most remarkable novels of science fiction produced in the twentieth century,<sup>27</sup> there are two broad contours of scholarly interpretations of its nature. One contour is rooted in David Samuelson's erudite critique of the novel from his 1975 dissertation-turned-monograph, *Visions of Tomorrow: Six Journeys from Outer to Inner Space*. Samuelson diligently indexes Miller's extensive utilization of Catholic

religious imagery and tropes alongside his science-fictional imagery and tropes, paying particular attention to the motives and mindsets of the religious characters in *Canticle*. His project is to validate the literary qualities of sf, and to that end he privileges the aspects of Miller's novel that favor ambiguity and ambivalence. Near the end of his analysis, Samuelson privileges a supporting character from "Fiat Lux" known only as the Poet, an anarchic provocateur staying at the abbey. He highlights a passage where Dom Zerchi reads "a satirical dialogue in verse between two agnostics who were attempting to establish by natural reason alone that the existence of God could not be established by natural reason alone." The dialogue is between a "Poet" and a "Thon," and they ultimately conclude: "*Non cogitamus, ergo nihil sumus*" (Miller 304). Samuelson argues that, like the characters in the satiric verse, Miller also "is denying the reader 'any conclusion of certainty,'" and that he presents all of his characters "with a sense of irony suggesting they are *all* agnostics; those religious persons whom we see going beyond mere fear and ritual in their thinking are doubters, as all the non-religious persons appear to be" (268). Thus the ultimate message of *Canticle*, Samuelson contends, is that both religious and scientific paradigms are both limited in their perspective on the true nature of the cosmos; Miller therefore structures a narrative "in which each discipline is seen as inadequate from others' perspectives" (269).

Many subsequent scholars have followed through on this characterization of *A Canticle for Leibowitz* as a dialectic or synthesis between science and religion, typically emphasizing Miller's skepticism, and usually with an emphasis on the relationship of scientific progress in a Cold War context. After Hiroshima, American culture went through rapid series of contortions in its efforts to assimilate the specter of the mushroom cloud. During this period, political and cultural institutions tried to channel fear of imminent nuclear annihilation toward either the Soviet Union and its communist brethren or into an optimism about the wonders that nuclear science could unlock for humanity's (read: America's) benefit.<sup>28</sup> As we saw in the last chapter, science fiction earned mainstream credibility for having "predicted" the atom bomb and offered prophetic visions of how to deal with its political ramifications. There is simply no way to read *A Canticle for Leibowitz* without reference to anxieties about nuclear war and the debate about how much culpability for potential catastrophe the scientific establishment ought to share with the politicians ultimately responsible for pushing the red button, or not. Michael Alan Bennett discovers in the theme of individual responsibility a way for Miller to resolve the problem of science's amoral advancements in knowledge and technique. Robert Scholes and Eric S. Rabkin describe the novel as an amalgamation of "science and religion into a modern humanism" (226). Gary B. Herbert characterizes Miller's cyclical vision of history as a twist on Hegel's "bad infinite," in which humanity is doomed always to progress but never to transcend

history, always learning to manipulate the “nonmoral Logos” of a wholly material universe but not growing into its own potential. He thus reads the novel as hopeless. David Seed offers a more historicist reading, arguing that Miller’s ambivalent, postmodern treatment of religious and scientific signifying systems subverts American self-assuredness during the Cold War. David J. Tietge reframes this ambivalence in Foucauldian terms, arguing that Miller treats science and religion as discourses vying for dominance in that Cold War cultural climate.

These critical readings therefore emphasize Miller’s skepticism, either as a scientific stance or as a suspicion of scientifically-acquired knowledge. A key motif of the novel, for instance, is the unreliability of historical memory. When Brother Francis discovers the fallout shelter near the beginning of “Fiat Homo,” among the sacred objects he discovers are a shopping list for pastrami, sauerkraut, and bagels, and a reminder to pick up an I.R.S. tax form alongside the blueprint that becomes his life’s work to replicate. But when he examines the filled-out 1040, with the tabulated numbers punctuated by a “*damn!*” Francis can “find no fault with the abominable penman’s arithmetic, at least, although he could deduce nothing about what the quantities might represent” (27). The fact that Saint Isaac Edward Leibowitz apparently owed the I.R.S. a great deal of money is totally lost on him. Similarly, the learned Thon Taddeo greatly upsets the monks in “Fiat Lux” by condescendingly lecturing them about the history of present-day humankind’s evolution from a “servant species” on the

basis of a “fragmentary reference” (232); Dom Paulo recalls that an old church patrician had classified that “fragment of a play, or a dialogue... as ‘probable fable of allegory. But perhaps the thon would care little for the evaluations of the Venerable Boedullus, when he can make his own” (233). Taddeo has, it turns out, mistaken Karl Čapek’s *R.U.R.* (1920) for a historical document.<sup>29</sup> And then, in “Fiat Voluntas Tua,” when Zerchi reads the Poet’s satirical verse, he reflects that “No one, indeed, had ever found evidence that such a person... had ever lived,” and he suspects that “the thin book of verse had been penned by one of the secular scientists who had visited the abbey to study the Memorabilia at about that time” of the Hannegan conquest (303).

Seed suggests that the novel’s structure science-fictionally calls attention to these ironies; they are part of Suvinian cognitive estrangement. Miller’s concern with demonstrating “an awareness of how texts are constituted, circulated, and validated” (260) is a fundamental part of his effort to subvert the political power derived from the competing epistemes of his era. Such moments as those summarized above “involve the reader in revising his/her sense of the real at the beginning of each section” (268), thus destabilizing the reader’s own political equanimity. But that’s not what actually happens. Attentive readers, by recognizing the errors of historical fact that Miller dramatizes, are made *more* stable in their own understanding of the narrative’s historiography. Rather than a narrative strategy to induce doubt and skepticism, the novel actually invests the reader with interpretive authority denied to

the characters, affirming that truth exists, even if, as Samuelson suggests, characters' perspective is limited. It is a narrative strategy that *reduces* the reader's own skepticism with regard to the text while also making the reader mindful of one's own limited perspective. Accordingly, Miller's strategy trains readers to value the epistemic humility displayed—intentionally or not—by his monks, who never quite adopt the agnosticism of the Poet.

Critical emphasis on the productive tension between religion and science is entirely warranted by the novel, but these readings build upon Samuelson's categorical error in confusing a person who *has* doubt for someone who *identifies* as a doubter. Thus these critics fall into a pattern of interpreting the novel's nuances or ambiguities as a balancing act between science and religion, or between the claims to authority of each magisterium. In fact, it is very hard to read Miller's believers' moments of doubt as evidence of a skeptical paradigm. Francis's euphemistic view of the world is shaken during the highway robbery that deprives him of his illuminated blueprint, but he remains capable of blessing the robber: he "quietly praised God for the existence of such selfless robbers, who could make such an ignorant mistake" (104)—that is, stealing the illuminated copy, not the original. Dom Paulo contends with Taddeo over the scholar's responsibility for his work, and though he questions his own culpability in opening the Memorabilia to researchers who would only turn their discoveries into weapons of war for their benefactors, he ultimately affirms that "neither infinite power

nor infinite wisdom could bestow godhood upon men. For that there would have to be infinite love as well" (238). For him, this is a measure of comfort, because while he mourns the lack of love, the lack of love among the powerful also means that they are *not* gods, and that there is, by implication, a true God who *does* possess power, wisdom, and love in infinite abundance.

Of the believers in Miller's main cast, Zerchi's inner conflict is the most incendiary. His denunciation of the Green Star camp leads him to punch the doctor running it, in a moment of great shame. When he is trapped under the rubble of the abbey near the novel's close, he embraces the torment as an expiation for asking those seeking the Green Star's services to endure that kind of pain as well. But when Mrs. Grales—the two-headed mutant—appears in her transformed state as an awakened Rachel, his faith is affirmed. "He did not ask *why* God would choose to raise up a creature of primal innocence from the shoulder of Mrs. Grales... He had seen primal innocence in those eyes, and a promise of resurrection. One glimpse had been a bounty, and he wept in gratitude" (336). In all three of these monks is a posture of humility and gratitude, even in extremity. There is no good reason for this posture. There is only faith.

The other major thread of scholarship on *Canticle* picks up on this and affirms it as a quintessentially religious work, which grapples with the necessity of submitting to an established order, however imperfectly understood and however imperfect the act

submission may be. Teresa M. Tavormina argues that the practice of order in liturgical and epistemological contexts gives shape to the novel's ultimate affirmation of hope. Ralph Wood highlights that the monks' preservation of secular knowledge and their submission to the will of God as it is presented in church tradition is not a contradiction, but a radical embrace of the Logos in its totality: a robust church culture is capable of accepting suffering as an intrinsic part of existence, whereas modernity (in the novel) rejects the necessity of suffering. Deanna T. Smid reads the novel's religious embrace of totality in terms of Fredric Jameson's discussion of synchronic versus diachronic mapping. The monks live a liturgical life of order, one inevitably sensitive to historical progression; yet, "While the monks desire a single, synchronic understanding of the past, even their lives deny such a model" (45). In Miller's novel, they desire the integration of the fragments of the totality—represented by the recovery of the *Memorabilia*—a yearning for, as Smid interprets it, an Integrator. This remains an ideal, not a realizable goal, provoking precisely the "representational dilemmas" and "low-level or everyday ideological questions about change itself" that Jameson notes in his own discussion (89). But the Integrator is, for the monks, Christ, not a mere historical *telos*, a truth which demands an attitude of epistemic humility even as it commands them to persist in preserving human knowledge. The historical knowledge that the monks so often fail to grasp in its particulars is still worth conserving because they

affirm its intrinsic value as a reflection of cosmological order into which they believe each person is ultimately called to integrate.

Dominic Manganiello argues that *Canticle's* yearning for integration operates within an explicitly typological, linear framework. Miller's novel, he argues, has "the purpose of a *warning*... His historical vision at once embraces nuclear catastrophe and transcends the immediate spectacle of tragedy. In this respect, he resembles most the Old Testament prophets, whose view of history, despite the terrible judgments on Israel they announced, was always hopeful of God's promises" (165). In a word, *A Canticle for Leibowitz* is a jeremiad. Like Smid, Manganiello emphasizes "Miller's eschatological optimism," interpreting the apparent cycle of destruction in the book's structure as a Kirkegaardian "'recollection forward' to the final coming of the Integrator or Lord of history, who, as Alpha and Omega, is able to join the beginning and the end, fold up the narrative of the human story like a book, and fit things together again" (166-67). Miller's eschatological optimism, however, is not quite the same as that outlined by Bercovitch. Miller's is more provisional, more contingent on *not* knowing precisely where the Promised Land is or what the city on the hill ought to look like. More important than a nation or even the makeup of the community is that the people be united by a posture of humility—toward the cosmos and toward their own potential. Though Miller emphasizes contingency and humility, the optimism does take material form, and it does indicate a rebirth of civilizational innocence, though in quite different

ways. And each of these ways is connected to the exodus which takes place at the end of the novel.

As I mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, Miller offers two alternative images of hope. The first is the aforementioned awakening of Rachel, the second head of Mrs. Grales. She represents a divine mystery. Walker Percy declares it to be the key which every reader should ask at the end of the novel: "Who is Rachel? What is she?" And "the answer," he says, "will tell whether he got the book or missed it." But this question, Percy posits, is a correlate to the questions that Percy imagines Brother Joshua asking the native inhabitants of Alpha Centauri when *Quo Perigrinatur* arrives with the survivors of Earth: "'How is it with you? Did something go wrong? Was there a disaster? If so, where do you presently stand in relation to a rectification of the disaster? Are you at a Time Before? Or a Time After? Has there been a Happening? Do you expect one?'" (578). Percy speaks of the tendency of cultures to compare each other on a time-line of progress, a model often used in sf: "the abscissa runs from left to right, from past to future" (575). But he also speaks of y-axis intersection that lets readers locate *Canticle* at a particular set of coordinates, and identifies that y-axis as Judeo-Christian. This interruption or challenge is where the first image of hope—Grales—intersects with the second: the exodus aboard the *Quo Peregrinatur*. Because only a Joshua would even think to ask about a Rachel, and the questions he asks are about the people and their soteriological experience, not about their degree of technological

advancement. Returning to Percy's example, Grales/Rachel and Joshua are connected, but they are like opposite ends of the y-axis; that is, they are opposite ends of the *Quo Peregrinatur's* exodus to the stars—a starship which embodies as an interstellar quest the yearning for the coming Integration.

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## **Canticle of Canticles**

Before turning to the exodus that concludes *Canticle*, we should take stock of the exile experienced by Miller's protagonists to better understand what the exodus means to them when they finally undertake it at the end of the novel. Unlike the Babylonian captivity, the exiles in first two books of have engaged in a more or less willing retreat from the world, after the fashion of the early desert fathers or medieval monks in the Christian tradition. In each book, a character seeks some sort of knowledge. In "Fiat Homo," it is Brother Francis, who seeks spiritual enlightenment first in a desert fast, then through illuminating his copy of the blueprint, then finally in a pilgrimage to New Rome. In "Fiat Lux," it is Thon Taddeo who undertakes a pilgrimage. Unlike Francis, who is too simple a soul to fully grasp the intricacies of theology—or the blueprint or even the fundamental purposes of his monastic discipline—Taddeo seeks practical scientific knowledge in he *Memorabilia*, something to fortify his theories. The self-imposed exile of the Albertian monks in "Fiat Homo" gives way in "Fiat Lux" to a genuine exile-in-captivity, as the arrival of the Thon presages the

coming empire of Hannegan. These books set the stage for the exodus, as the conflicts between different ways of knowing the world in each previous book indicate the different ways of living in the world in "Fiat Voluntas Tua," lifeways that are finally incompatible with a world bent on annihilation itself.

A wandering Jew encounters Brother Francis during the novice's Lenten fast in some ruins near the abbey. He helps Francis find a keystone for the rudimentary shelter he has built for himself aboveground (somewhat in contravention of his ascetic program) and inscribes the rock with the Hebrew letters *lamed-tsade*; lifting the rock causes a small avalanche which reveals the fallout shelter. Scholes and Rabkin translate the inscription as "fool" (225), but Russell Hillier provides a more nuanced interpretation, pointing out that it carries the connotations of scerner, mocker, blasphemer. The stone itself therefore represents a fateful choice about the importance of finishing his shelter. "The outcome of Francis's choice will affect human history far beyond Francis's own imagining. For to take the keystone is to finish the first rationally constructive project in the book" (171). Thus this "mocker-stone, serving as a keystone to Francis's impoverished miniature dome, is, in turn, Miller's satirical omen presaging the second nuclear apocalypse... His one small impulse resonates over the course of the novel's post-apocalyptic history" (172). In short, had Brother Francis Gerard of Utah focused a little more on his meditation and a little less on the danger posed by desert

predators and mutants, the cycle of destruction depicted in the book might have been forestalled.

But Francis's fast in the desert is dual-edged. Though he engages in a sort of double-withdrawal—first, from his monastic community, for the purpose of mediation; second, into the safety of his crude shelter—he also engages actively with the cosmos. First, in his effort to focus his mind and soul on God; second, in his interaction with the wanderer. In an ironic twist characteristic of the novel, Francis is murdered at the end of "Fiat Homo" precisely because he seeks to engage with the bandits who robbed him; he waits at the ambush spot with money with which he intends to purchase back his illuminated copy of the blueprint, somewhat ashamed that he had initially fought the robber to keep it. The monk who constructed the shelter (which led to his discovery of priceless Memorabilia) out of fear of the desert's dangers is ultimately slain for gathering the courage to face a band of cannibals. So "Fiat Homo" is bookended by Francis's two attempts to obtain the blueprint and the scientific knowledge it signifies. The first attempt is entirely inadvertent: he discovers the fallout shelter entirely by accident, but only because he employs engineering technique (however crude) out of a perceived need for self-defense. The second attempt is purposeful, but it is undertaken in a spirit of contrition, with no thought whatsoever of self-defense. In the end, he has learned to abandon his pride, and he dies for the sake of redeeming an engineering blueprint (the true significance of which he still does not fully understand) invested with

his creative spirit. While Hillier is right to note that Francis's impulse leads to apocalypse, it is also important to note that Francis's arc leads to a tragicomic embrace of his own limited power. In the end, he accepts that he cannot defend himself against the world he recognizes that he does not fathom; he can only seek to beautify it in his own humble, simple way. Naturally, the world consumes him, but Miller and his readers bear witness.

The key pilgrimage in "Fiat Lux" is undertaken by a secular scholar. Unlike Francis, Thon Taddeo is interested only in expanding his command over the materials of the universe; not for his own sake, but for the sake of knowledge itself. Yet his pride is wounded when he finds that these ignorant monks in the Albertian Order of Leibowitz have managed to create an electric light without the theoretical knowledge that he has spent his years cultivating. "'Why have you hidden it? Is there some religious significance—,'" he sputters upon witnessing it for the first time (192). Taddeo blames the monks for having sat on useful knowledge for so long, later accusing them of having withheld it in his climactic confrontation with Dom Paulo. The abbot retorts that the monks' reticence in promoting their knowledge should not be confused with keeping it secret, listing the the martyrs that the order has sacrificed to a world unready for such knowledge. He explains to Taddeo that he sees in Hannegan a tyrant unfit to receive the kind of power Taddeo could bestow, given access to the abbey's

Memorabilia. "If you try to save wisdom until the world is wise, Father," Taddeo replies, "the world will never have it."

"I can see the misunderstanding is basic!" the abbot said gruffly. "To serve God first, or to serve Hannegan first—that's your choice."

"I have little choice, then," answered the thon. "Would you have me work for the Church?" The scorn in his voice was unmistakable. (225)

Unlike Brother Francis, who took up the mocker-stone in ignorance, Thon Taddeo faces his choices squarely and justifies it philosophically as a political exigency. He returns to Texarkana, Hannegan's fiefdom, having returned as a point of honor the sketches his cousin's spies had made of the abbey but vowing that the secrets contained in the walls will be brought into the open. War inevitably follows.

Samuelson notes Taddeo's "evasion of responsibility" in this scene (246-47), while Smid observes that the scholar "cannot understand the interrelations of the factors of history and he accordingly does not acknowledge his own connections to the rest of humanity and the implications his research may have" (247). Tietge similarly contrasts the "amoral scientist" to the more prudent and world-wise Paulo (685-87), but ultimately concludes that the novel's Cold War concerns with the nuclear arms race lead Miller to posit that science and religion are compatible, but that religion cannot provide the "moral grounding to prevent indiscriminate and disastrous use of highly powerful technology," because it is still a human-made institution (688).

Taddeo's assumption that the monks had "hidden" their knowledge away would only make sense to a person raised in a culture where technical mastery is always displayed or deployed for political purposes. That is to say, technical mastery is correlated to the political ambitions of powerful individuals in Taddeo's native culture. It is worth noting here some structural correspondences between Taddeo's journey and Dagny Taggart's. She, too, questioned why the technical mastery on display in Galt's Gulch should be hidden under a bushel, only to find that it was so those responsible for cultivating their own mastery could exercise it more fully over a docile, blighted land. She eventually converts to this gospel. Taddeo does not have to be converted, though he does, like Rand's strikers, care more about displaying and relishing his own mastery than he does for the impact his self-serving mastery will have on other people. Rand undoubtedly would excoriate Taddeo for not striking against Hannegan (thus making his selfishness truly immoral), but then she, unlike Miller, refused to imagine a world in which technical masters such as Taddeo or the lowly monk who reinvents the electric light would be anything less than towering, Nietzschean lords of creation. For Taddeo, as for Rand's protagonists, the world is a wilderness meant to be redeemed by the applied power of the human mind—and for Miller, this positivist forward leap is a lurch toward the precipice. In jeremiadic terms, civilizational decline really begins in earnest once Taddeo helps Hannegan build his city on a hill.

"Fiat Voluntas Tua" picks up at the end of a long period of declension, and it is the historical arc of the previous two books that form the foundation of why the exodus becomes necessary. Brother Joshua, at the behest of the Holy See, gathers together the passengers of his space ark, a project Zerchi considers "a long and doubtful journey, a new Exodus from Egypt under the auspices of a God who must surely be very weary of the race of Man" (292). Besides a cadre of the Order of Leibowitz, the ship will also carry the entirety of the Memorabilia. Joshua has his moment of doubt in the abbey's garden, where he begs God for a sign whether he should lead the mission to Centaurus. He thinks he hears a snake in a rose bush and throws a rock out of fear, instantly feeling "sheepish." He reflects, "Ask for an omen, then stone it when it comes—*de essentia hominum*" (289), then drifts back inside to join the mass in progress, submitting to the burden: "*Accipiam*" (290).<sup>30</sup> In the final chapter of the novel, the starship departs. "The last monk, upon entering, paused in the lock. He stood in the open hatchway and took off his sandals. '*Sic transit mundus,*' he murmured, looking back at the glow. He slapped the soles of his sandals together, beating the dirt out of them" (337). The posture of Joshua and the last monk (who may or may not be Joshua himself) is one of submission to a burden of great responsibilities. These responsibilities are to the generations past and present as well as the future, and all of them accept the failure and weakness as incipient aspects of humanity. (This stands in marked contrast to Rand's abhorrence of such responsibilities, as we have seen.) Joshua's exodus is thus

marked at each stage by a recognition of humanity's collective failures, with the glow of atomic blasts lighting the way clear of the world.

Because the monks take with them the Memorabilia, the fate of the *Quo Peregrinatur*, or at least the fate that it signifies for humanity, has been read as forecasting yet another cycle of destruction. "Text, with the seeds of destruction encoded within it, follows man like a recurring damnation," asserts Susan Spencer, who perceives Miller as viewing text-based literacy as inherently prone to papering over historical violence (341). Gary B. Herbert more forcefully suggests that preserving historical memory only loops back on the Hegelian "bad infinite": "A *Canticle for Leibowitz* is, then, a canticle to the rhythmic reptition [sic] of historical forms, to imperfect incarnations of the nonmoral Logos, and to man's inability to transcend. It is man's imperfect desire for the perfect that makes unending repetition inevitable" (167).

But boarding the *Quo Peregrinatur* and taking literally Christ's admonition in Matthew 10:14 to shake the dust of the unreceptive town off one's sandals makes the exodus itself an embodiment of yearning for redemption.<sup>31</sup> It's hope. As Teresa M. Tavormina describes Miller's motives: "Only faith and hope give him any reason to create a Rachel, or to send a bare handful of souls into interstellar exile before the final firestorm circles Earth like a sword" (58). In true jeremiadic fashion, even the trial of nuclear annihilation carries with it a promise of renewal. "As the new inheritors of God's promises, these voyagers are prefigured by the faithful Remnant of Israel, who survived

various cataclysms. Their space exodus acts as a providential sign that the human race, if not the planet, will go on" (166). But there is more at stake for Miller in their exodus than mere survival. "The real problem," argues Ralph Wood, "is how to direct human life to ends which are redemptive rather than expedient, ends which are not humanly devised and managed, but ends which enable people to live for a higher good than the avoidance of pain, even agonizing pain" (38). Without moral responsibility to a power higher than itself, Wood claims as one of Miller's "most searing insights... that our culture's anthropophagus urges spring from unconfessed fury against God for having made a suffering-laden world" (39). To Wood, that is the significance of Rachel, who actually enters the world singing: she "embodies the hope that can save the world because it is the hope that dissolves all bitterness. It comes whenever the saving words are pronounced: ... *Fiat voluntas tua: Thy will be done*" (40). The exodus is an act of submission to a burden that nonetheless is graced with the benediction of innocence. It is also a submission to the will of God, not an extension of humanity's will. When Zerchi and Joshua pass by Mrs. Grales and Rachel earlier, Joshua is the only one who notices Rachel smiling at him—a glimpse of the primal innocence that Zerchi sees only moments before his death, but a memory which, alongside the Memorabilia, Joshua may take with the remnant into the stars.

As an embodiment of submission, the exodus aboard the *Quo Peregrinatur* also embodies the desire for integration, for wholeness, for the tempering of knowledge

with utmost restraint. For medieval monastics, Dom Leclercq wrote, the Cantic of Canticles—also, and perhaps better, known as the Song of Solomon or Song of Songs—was the biblical text of choice. At once it evinced a fervent desire for union with God while also inspiring a contemplative—receptive—posture toward spiritual truth.<sup>32</sup> Faith in the power of man is what leads ultimately to the destruction of Earth, and Miller’s jeremiad is one that promises renewal, but only for those who strive for innocence. “A *Cantic for Leibowitz*, then is offered to its readers as a third testament or divine revelation that warns the world of the future that waits for it—the *Götterdämmerung* of the technological universe,” says Frank D. Kievitt, but “the single voice crying in the wilderness... reminds the world of its often forgotten vocation to know, love, and serve God regardless of what may happen or fail to happen in human history” (175). Among the stars, the remnant seeks only to preserve the memory of humanity in its glory and its fallibility, but will never seek to re-establish mastery over the desolated Earth. It bears only a humble message of love and communion with God across the celestial abyss... and, wherever the remnant settles, the fragility of human civilization.

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## **A Land Flowing with Likeminded Individuals**

Whether they favored a more secular or more religious interpretation of Miller’s novel, all critics, as we have seen, have detected a certain level of ambivalence in *A Cantic for Leibowitz*. Part of this is rooted in the context of the Cold War and Miller’s

response to the ascension of the military-industrial complex. Like Donnelly in at least this one respect, Miller lamented the probability of civilization annihilation itself. He recognized that it would be an end that humanity has wrought for itself; in blunt terms, we would deserve what we get should the bombs fall. He also chronicled the foibles of his monks in equal measure to the faults of the politicians and scientists who dehumanize the Earth's people and eventually depopulate the Earth itself. The Green Star camp physician that Zerchi assaults is not presented as an evil man; by his own estimation, he is offering the most humane treatment available. Miller recognizes these nuances. But he is not ambiguous about the positivism that links scientific progress to civilizational progress; that is the logic of the military-industrial complex, and it is the logic of mutually-assured destruction. A civilization willing to destroy itself along with all others because it must have dominance at any cost is a civilization trapped in an ideological captivity from which Miller's remnant makes its exodus, with Rachel's blessing.

In the end, the dominance that Rand justifies on the part of her own heroes stands in irreconcilable contrast to the humility embraced—however imperfectly—by Miller's protagonists. They stand across a vast ideological gulf from each other. Fittingly, neither author's engagement with the jeremiad appeals to the trope of America to reconcile its remnant to the rest of the population. Rand's science-fictionally scrubs the United States as it has actually existed from her universe so that

her ruling caste may take its rightful place as the makers of the planet's glittering future. Miller essentially abandons not only America, but the Earth, leaving our pale blue dot to the descendants of Rachel—beings that, by God's grace, may not even be human. Rand's heroes undertake an exodus to bring the world to its knees, to celebrate their own will to power; Miller's protagonists undertake an exodus as a form of service, to celebrate the preservation of life itself. Both Rand and Miller dispense with America as a unifying fiction in their jeremiads, and the Promised Land at the end of their characters' exoduses is not the United States, or even the ideal of America. In *Atlas Shrugged*, the rulers have broken the power of the nation-state altogether; it seems doubtful that such a political entity will be reinstated along lines at all similar to something recognizably American. But they will certainly reinstate something—perhaps a kind of corporate feudalism like something imagined by William Gibson or Neal Stephenson in their cyberpunk novels, *Neuromancer* (1984) and *Snow Crash* (1992). Miller is reticent to give even a hint of the Promised Land. Rachel's fate is unknown in the final pages of *Canticle*, as is that of the *Quo Peregrinatur*. What the Promised Land looks like for Rachel or the remnant aboard the starship is far less important in *Canticle* than how the attitude in which the remnant approaches it. Should Rachel and her offspring have the chance to repopulate the Earth, they will do so singing songs of joy and innocence. Whatever the monks aboard *Quo Peretrinatur* encounter elsewhere in the galaxy, they bring with them the memory of humanity laying waste to itself. They

bring with them the Memorabilia, a constant reminder of how the makers of history tend to repeat their mistakes. That starship is a vessel of last resort, a message of fragile hope tossed upon the roiling currents of history: a wan hope, a lament over the nations trammeled underfoot in the march toward manifest destiny, a humble exodus toward a horizon untainted by the radioactive dust of the onetime city on a hill, which now smolders in the afterglow of its hubris.

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<sup>1</sup> Jeff Walker in *The Ayn Rand Cult* (1999) argues forcefully for the former; Jennifer Burns in *Goddess of the Market* (2009) leans toward the latter.

<sup>2</sup> See Burns, "The Three 'Furies' of Libertarianism: Rose Wilder Lane, Isabel Paterson, and Ayn Rand" (2015).

<sup>3</sup> See Burns, "Godless Capitalism: Ayn Rand and the Conservative Movement" (2004).

<sup>4</sup> See Burns, *Goddess of the Market*, pp. 59-60.

<sup>5</sup> See pp. 79-82.

<sup>6</sup> Rand summarizes the first night of Dagny and Hank's consummated passion as "hours of a violence which they could not name now, not in words or in daylight" (*Atlas* 253).

<sup>7</sup> See Tucker-Abramson, pp. 80-81.

<sup>8</sup> Apart from the introduction, the chapters of the *Romantic Manifesto* largely appeared first as essays in her *Objectivist* newsletter between 1965 and 1969, with a few appearing even earlier.

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<sup>9</sup> See Burns, *Goddess*, p. 2. Among the potential literary influences on the plot and characters in *Atlas Shrugged*, Jeff Walker offers arguments for Theodore Dreiser's *The Financier* (1912) and *The Titan* (1914), Garet Garrett's *The Driver* (1922), and Ernest Bramah's *The Secret of the League* (1907). In making his case for understanding Rand in the context of Russian literature, Adam Weiner strenuously alleges in *How Bad Writing Destroyed the World* (2016) that Nikolai Chernyshevsky's Rakhmetov from *What Is to Be Done?* (1863) is the original mold for Galt, and suggests the influence of Dostoevsky and Nabokov on Rand besides. Curiously, while building his circumstantial case, Weiner neglects to engage at all with Chris Matthew Sciabarra's *Ayn Rand: The Russian Radical* (1995), which accounts a bit more persuasively for Chernyshevsky more marginally while situating Rand's philosophy more broadly in dialogue with dialectical thought in Russian art, culture, and philosophy.

<sup>10</sup> Characteristically, Rand adjusts Aristotle to suit her own purposes, switching "poetry" to "fiction." Thanks to Jason Puskar for pointing this out.

<sup>11</sup> "Capitalist Eutopias in America," pp. 192-205.

<sup>12</sup> For examples of offhand remarks in scholarly literature, see the *College English* articles by Mimi Reisel Gladstein, "Ayn Rand and Feminism: An Unlikely Alliance," p. 49 and Judith Wilt, "On *Atlas Shrugged*," p. 62, both in Gladstein and Sciabarra, *Feminist Interpretations of Ayn Rand* (1999). For an example of popular articles aimed at a geek audience, Gizmodo site *io9* has published a smattering of articles briefly situating *Atlas Shrugged* as science fiction; see Annalee Newitz, "Are Conservatives Better at Creating Futuristic Stories?" (2008) and Alex Carnevale, "The Longest Science Fiction Books of All Time" (2008), as well as commentary on the film adaptations *passim*.

<sup>13</sup> Scalzi, "What I Think About *Atlas Shrugged*" (2010); Brin, "Atlas Shrugged, The Hidden Context of the Book and Film" (2011).

<sup>14</sup> It's also interesting to note that both Miller and Campbell refer to Orwell, with Miller also looping in writers like Aldous Huxley and Pat Frank, as exemplary of mainstream fiction writers dipping into sf—that is, they frame now-classic works of science fiction like *1984* or *Brave New World* or *Alas, Babylon* as outside the norm of typical sf, precisely because they were produced outside the sf community. The reason this is interesting, in this context, is that while *Atlas Shrugged* is not typically considered primarily science-fictional, these other works are now considered paradigmatic examples of sf as a genre.

<sup>15</sup> The section of *Principle of Hope, Vol. 1* I find most helpful in this context appears in pp. 214-22, where Bloch discusses the "pre-appearance" of utopian images in exaggerated or fantastical form.

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<sup>16</sup> For a small sampling of the literature on alternate histories in fiction, see Amy Ransom, "Alternate History and Uchronia: Some Questions of Terminology and Genre" (2003); Catherine Gallagher, "War, Counterfactual History, and Alternate-History Novels" (2007) and "When Did the Confederate States of American Free the Slaves?" (2007); Matthew Schneider-Mayerson, "What Almost Was: The Politics of the Contemporary Alternate History Novel" (2009).

<sup>17</sup> Again, though she covers this period in *Goddess of the Market*, Burns details the degree of Rand's involvement in conservative reaction against New Deal liberalism in "The Three Furies of Libertarianism" (2015).

<sup>18</sup> See Harvey J. Kaye, *The Fight for the Four Freedoms* (2014), esp. pp. 119-20.

<sup>19</sup> See Weiss, *Ayn Rand Nation* (2012) pp. 10-11. The notoriously harsh review of *Atlas Shrugged* which William F. Buckley, Jr. commissioned from the ex-communist is a staple of any scholarship on both the novel and Rand's place in the conservative movement at the time. It was originally published in December 1957; I have referred to the reprint available on the *National Review* web site, posted in 2005.

<sup>20</sup> See my discussion of "occupation" in chapter 3; see Sutton (2014), pp. 4-5, 113.

<sup>21</sup> Galt's Gulch is almost a perfect literary realization of the middle landscape Leo Marx theorized in his *Machine in the Garden*.

<sup>22</sup> The dynamo is a key metaphor for Isabel Paterson's *God in the Machine* (1943); Burns offers persuasive evidence of Paterson's influence on Rand's thought; see *Goddess*, pp. 74-78, 107-112, 125-132.

<sup>23</sup> See Burns, *Goddess of the Market*, pp. 16, 24-26, 41-42. In an endnote, Burns agrees with the many critics who have pointed out the many ways in which her vulgarized Nietzsche diverges from the philosopher, and acknowledges that Rand herself tried to put distance between herself and his influence after *The Fountainhead*, but emphasizes the importance to Rand of "Nietzsche's transvaluation of values and his call for a new morality. From this perspective, though Rand's reliance on Nietzsche lessened over time, her entire career might be considered a 'Nietzsche phase'" (303-304n6).

<sup>24</sup> Teresa M. Tavormina describes the publication overlap as "not entirely coincidental," arguing that the appearance of these classic works is evidence of "an interest, not uncommon among educated Catholics of the fifties, in the relations between faith and various forms of knowledge" (60). I tend to agree that the publication is likely not entirely coincidental, but I prefer to retain the framing of coincidence, if only because it is outside the scope of this chapter to chart the discursive parameters of Catholic interest in epistemology in addition to the rest of my argument.

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<sup>25</sup> *Out of the Silent Planet* (2003, originally 1938), *Perelandra* (2003, originally 1943), and *That Hideous Strength* (2003, originally 1945).

<sup>26</sup> The sections were originally published in this respective order under these titles: "A Canticle for Leibowitz" (1955), "And the Lights Is Risen" (1956), and "The Last Canticle" (1957); see Olsen, "'Re-Vision: A Comparison of *A Canticle for Leibowitz* and the Novellas Originally Published" (1997).

<sup>27</sup> That is to say, widely-remarked-upon: Besides winning the Hugo Award for Best Novel (1961), *Canticle* has placed consistently in polls by outlets such as NPR ("Your Picks") and *Locus* among the indispensable sf books, according to the International Speculative Fiction Database. Periodic essays on the novel, such as Jon Michaud's in *The New Yorker* (2014), also appear sporadically to consider its legacy.

<sup>28</sup> See Paul S. Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light* (1985).

<sup>29</sup> Both Seed and Samuelson duly note the allusion; see p. 265 and pp. 243-44, respectively.

<sup>30</sup> Miller puns with Latin in this section to great effect. When Joshua first accepts the duty of leading the mission, Zerchi asks, "'*Hoc officium, Fili-tibine imponemus oneri?*'" ("This duty, will we assign it to you, son, to [be your] burden?"), and Joshua mishears the last word, replying, "'*honorem accipiam*'" (290). The misunderstanding is gently comic, but it's worth noting that the verb form of *accipiam* here is both indicative future and subjunctive present, so it could mean either "*I will accept the burden (or honor)*" or "*May I accept the burden (or honor).*" Furthermore, while the verb *accipio*'s cognate is the primary meaning here, the verb also can mean to receive, sometimes with connotations of being ready to learn something new, to obey, or to begin a new task. So the exchange underscores on several levels the posture of humility and submission to the burden/honor of leading the exodus.

<sup>31</sup> In Matthew 10:9-15, Jesus tells his disciples: "'Do not get any gold or silver or copper to take with you in your belts—no bag for the journey or extra shirt or sandals or a staff, for the worker is worth his keep. Whatever town or village you enter, search there for some worthy person and stay at their house until you leave. As you enter the home, give it your greeting. If the home is deserving, let your peace rest on it; if it is not, let your peace return to you. If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, leave that home or town and shake the dust off your feet. Truly I tell you, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town.'" Exploring various exegeses of this passage are beyond the scope of my project, but I'll register two intriguing questions raised by this passage in the context of *Canticle*. First, how does preserving the Memorabilia comport with Jesus's command not to bring nothing on the journey but the clothes on one's back? Second, though the answer seems obvious, what does the allusion to Sodom and Gomorrah's destruction and its relative bearability suggest with regard to Miller's view of Western civilization?

<sup>32</sup> Leclercq, pp. 84-86.

## CONCLUSION. Imagining the Science-Fictional Jeremiad

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### July 1969: A Lunar Chalice

In the midst of exalting the historic achievement of the Apollo 11 mission, Ayn Rand watched the broadcast of Neil Armstrong's first moments on the surface of the moon with some apprehension. "I felt one instant of unhappy fear, wondering what he would say, because he had it in his power to destroy the meaning and the glory of that moment, as the astronauts of Apollo 8 had done in their time," she wrote, recollecting the Christmas Eve reading of Genesis 1 in 1968. "He did not. He made no reference to God; he did not undercut the rationality of his achievement by paying tribute to the forces of its opposite; he spoke of man."<sup>1</sup> The relief Ayn Rand expressed at Armstrong's philosophically-correct announcement of his "giant leap for mankind" is a rhetorical lodestone in an essay that morphs into a jeremiad.

The distance traveled by the Apollo 11 crew—now demarcated by the separation of the Saturn V's stages—becomes in Rand's essay a metaphor revealing "an abyss between the physical sciences and the humanities that has to be measured in terms of interplanetary distances." This "abyss" marks the separation between the men and women of America's space program—astronauts, theorists, technicians—and those whose response to this achievement is to wonder why the enormous resources

involved weren't instead spent on solving socioeconomic inequality. The proliferating think pieces that Rand sampled in her essay—those castigating the American government for expending so many resources on such a socially useless endeavor—grieved her deeply, and served as an illustration of the gap between what Rand saw as the moral and immoral voices in society. The distance the Apollo 11 astronauts put between themselves and their world erected a clear division between purpose and purposelessness, between creation and parasitism, and America, Rand thought, was far too beholden to the latter on both counts. "If the United States is to commit suicide" by spending its wealth on government programs, then: "Let some of its lifeblood go to the support of achievement and the progress of science. The American flag on the moon—or on Mars, or on Jupiter—will, at least, be a worthy monument to what had once been a great country." The only thing that could have shattered that monument to man's mastery of the universe, in Rand's view, would have been to invoke the divine, the ultimate symbol of altruistic, collectivist, purposeless irrationality.

Unbeknownst to capitalism's most vociferous twentieth-century apologist, Edwin E. "Buzz" Aldrin had, shortly before his comrade Armstrong became the first person in history to set foot on the lunar surface, signed off the module's broadcast and quietly served himself communion, becoming the first person in history to celebrate the eucharist on the surface of another planet. He kept his sacrament private in part so as not to further anger areligious zealots who, like Rand, found the Apollo 8 Genesis

reading to be intolerable blasphemy.<sup>2</sup> Aldrin later described that moment with humility. “It was my hope that people would keep this whole event in their minds and see, beyond minor details and technical achievements, a deeper meaning behind it all—a challenge, a quest, the human need to do these things” (qtd. in Armstrong et al. 251). Rand might have agreed with that sentiment, but would have found the ritual to be a degrading framework for it. Aldrin’s gesture of submission to the dictates of NASA’s public relations, to the imposing nature of the historical moment, and, most critically, to the Word of the Lord, was anathema to her ethos of heroic self-fulfillment through the application of pure reason. In the moon landing, Rand celebrated “not the greatest achievement of science, but its greatest visible result” (“Apollo 11”), whereas Aldrin celebrated “our particular task, and the challenge, and the opportunity that had been given me” (qtd. in Armstrong et al. 251). An astronaut withdrawing from the world’s attention to read John 15:5 silently to himself would hardly have befitted the comportment of a man whose very presence in that capsule, to Rand, symbolized the conquering spirit of a species whose crowning achievement was to leap from this planet, cross the radiant abyss of space, and stamp an ageless footprint in the dust of our celestial satellite.

The last chapter concluded with a summation of the difference between Rand’s jeremiad and Miller’s engagement with the jeremiad, in which the attitude of conquest evident in *Atlas Shrugged* contrasts sharply with the attitude of submission in *A*

*Canticle for Leibowitz*. With regard to *Atlas Shrugged*, I made the case for the importance of Rand's science-fictional approach to alternate history. Her approach to building the world of the novel is of a piece with the attitude she displays in her remarks about the moon landing. For Rand, human accomplishment is all about mastery, dominance, the will to power. In her 1969 jeremiad, the meaning of the Apollo 11 mission is tied to her diagnosis of her nation's decline: the men who planted the American flag on the lunar surface are evidence of a once-great country's last gasp. But the moon landing itself is a testament to the power of the human mind; she celebrates this achievement as the kind of destiny mankind is meant to embrace, one which may herald the species's world-historical redemption. Aldrin minimized the technical accomplishments as "minor details;" for Rand, the technical accomplishment was the fulfillment of the quest, this seizing of a scientific holy grail.

In Rand's view, the moon landing did not, in fact, belong to mankind in the sense that Armstrong meant it. It really belonged to those who were capable of recognizing what the United States' greatest technical accomplishment really meant: that the victory did not belong to America or even humanity itself. It belonged to those dedicated to the task of exalting the human mind and its dominance over the Earth—and beyond. The Saturn V rocket was an *Arabella* for a new kind of chosen people, the kind venerated in *Atlas Shrugged* and Rand's other writings. These people owed allegiance ultimately to themselves, to their capacity to possess the Earth and make of

it what they will. Walter M. Miller, Jr.'s *Canticle* stands as a humble rebuke to all that, as does Aldrin's private eucharist. But in order to serve as a sufficient rebuke to the rapacious conquest worshiped by Rand, Miller, too, cast off allegiance to the nation and to the world. When Aldrin speaks of the moon landing being an occasion to meditate on the meaning of "the human need to do these things," is he ignoring the the Space Race and the cultural victory it delivered to America in the context of the Cold War? When Aldrin speaks of the "opportunity" given to him, is he mindful of the privilege that benefitted him as a member of the white caste in America? What of the enormous infrastructure planned and managed by technical experts of every kind that helped put him there—a technocratic edifice designed primarily so that the nation could gain an edge in its civilizational contest with the U.S.S.R.? And why was it that three American men crossing such a vast, vast distance from the Earth to its moon, and two American men setting foot upon the lunar surface could even be read as a shared accomplishment for all humanity? Did the success of Apollo 11 stem the tide of nationalist movements that continued to spring up in the wake of decolonization? Did the workers of the world finally unite? Did the visible success of the enormous infrastructure erected by America's space program bring its own people together? In light of these questions, Aldrin's humility is perhaps even more warranted. But could it be that Rand was also right in this one, narrow sense: that if the Apollo 11 mission was a success, it was so in jeremiadic terms? Not as a sign of political salvation for the

United States, but a sign that the Elect are not defined by nation, but by other markers of political solidarity?

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## **We, a People**

The questions asked above are predicated on the very ideas we explored in each previous chapter. In each chapter, we saw how the authors' science-fictional engagement with the jeremiad highlighted a particular political function of it. Chapter one examined how distances in time and space reinforced the irreconcilability of political difference; the jeremiad often creates and maintains distance between political constituents that can only be resolved by one side or another claiming total victory. Donnelly and London were primarily concerned with class interests, but the racial character of their classes were founded upon assumptions that were interrogated by Du Bois and Schuyler in chapter two. There, we examined how the social construct of race reinforces the caste dynamics. Caste systems depend on social hierarchies and reinforce them. Though Donnelly attempted to evade class hierarchy, he ended up doubling-down on it in his utopia, but London, Du Bois, and Schuyler tried to theorize ways beyond caste—to varying degrees of success, but never quite escaping it altogether. The space operas we explored in chapter three explicitly made the case for caste hierarchy, and particularly privileged those with an aptitude for technocratic control. In retrospect, we can see this penchant toward technocratic control in

Donnelly's vision of a strong, central state. In embracing the logic of the Iron Heel to fight against it, London's revolutionaries also adopt the Heel's then-emergent technocratic characteristics. Max Disher also displays an aptitude for technocratic management in *Black No More*, which Schuyler identifies with his entrepreneurial spirit.

Not all of these valences work in total alignment, of course. London's more totalizing class consciousness is more comprehensive than Donnelly's. E. E. Smith's outright authoritarianism—much more in alignment with the characteristics of technocracy in the 1930s—is not quite the as Asimov's fumbling attempt toward a more liberal-democratic politics, one which aligns much more closely with technocracy as it evolved in the latter course of the twentieth century. Rand's heroes are a libertarian union of the Smith and Asimov schools of technocratic control, replete with all the technological positivism. Like Smith's galactic crusaders, the strikers in *Atlas Shrugged* are violent, frontier-taming *übermenschen*, but they display all the powers of mind and managerial sophistication championed by Asimov. Schuyler would admire their entrepreneurial spirit, though it seems unlikely that Max Disher or Crookman would see any profit in joining Galt's strike. By contrast, their retreat into Galt's Gulch in order to let the world fall to pieces feels like a corollary to Donnelly's protagonists doing the same at the end of *Caesar's Column*, though Donnelly would likely (correctly) identify them as simply latter-day plutocrats adopting the methods of the Brotherhood of Destruction.

In all of this, the engagements with the jeremiad rehearse the familiar tropes— an Elect, an exodus, an errand into the wilderness, a covenant, providential historical thinking—without relying on America as the nominal vessel of covenantal hope. Though these texts are all written by American authors primarily for American audiences, but their science-fictionality manipulates the conceptual boundaries of their jeremiadic engagements—those engagements undermine, subvert, expand beyond, or focus more narrowly than the idea of America itself. None of this is to say that these texts are not legibly about American concerns. I think it is entirely possible to read, say, *Caesar's Column* as an expression of the nineteenth-century Populist movement, which was very much a Midwestern-Southern phenomenon. Similarly, *A Canticle for Leibowitz* is absolutely in dialogue with the discourses of the nuclear arms race and the role of the scientists in America's military-industrial complex. Each of my readings of these texts is grounded in such contexts. Yet reading each of these novels through the paradigm of the American jeremiad, as expositied by Sacvan Bercovitch, reduces or erases the science-fictional ways in which they engage with the jeremiad. The particular science-fictional approaches of each author have intersected with the prophetic tenor or purpose in ways that simply make it impossible to read them as performing what Bercovitch saw as the jeremiad's most crucial function: neutralizing political dissent by folding it back into the middle-class New England Way.

One thing I hope that this dissertation has accomplished is establish that scholarly work on the American jeremiad must, at the very least, account for how it does not, in some instances, contain dissent at all. In some cases, this may simply be a failure in its execution. But in many cases, the jeremiad may offer a vision of what America is or ought to be that diverges significantly from the status quo. In rarer cases—and I believe that many of the texts examined in this dissertation—the jeremiad implies a severance from everything that America is purported to contain. What this means in political terms often hinges on how the jeremiad construes its subjects, their political differences with the rest of the people, and the terms under which the political project of the prophet can be integrated into the American political project. Perhaps that simply will not even be a real possibility. And when it is not a real possibility, when it is something that can be visualized concretely only in the imagination, that is when it is perhaps most profitable to examine science-fictional prophecies that engage with the jeremiad.

The other thing I hope that this dissertation might accomplish is to establish that when a writer engages with the jeremiad to create and sustain an irreconcilable divergence from the status quo, the political ramifications may be somewhat ambivalent. Most of the authors included in my project display authoritarian tendencies in some form or another: Donnelly, London, Smith, Asimov, Rand. But there are elements of their prophetic critiques which ring true. In some ways, for instance,

Donnelly and London adopt the authoritarian tendencies of the forces they are fighting because, as Wegner suggests, they had to find ways to make their coalitional interests legible and actionable. In historical hindsight, their racism may not be forgivable, but their struggle to imagine a genuinely egalitarian politics is one we still face. For another example, Asimov struggled dialectically with his own premises throughout the *Foundation* series, never quite content with the authoritarian implications of his story. In such cases, it seems too easy to read the texts as simply supporting a view of the jeremiad in American literature as supporting a nascent neoliberalism or authoritarianism or some other form of social control. Prophecy is always about control and about establishing some sort of hegemony. So are most forms of politics. Some of the prophets we have seen appear quite sincerely to lament the implications of their jeremiads.

That element of compassion is easy, I think, to write off as a rhetorical ploy, but it is probably more productive to take it seriously in its own right. The pathos of writers like Du Bois and Miller opens space for their readers to share in their ambivalence. As the cited examples in chapter two show, Du Bois's prose can be stentorian or lachrymose—in a word, "purple"—but he has an ineffable sense of timing that keys into emotional moments. That car horn at the moment of Jim and Julia's epiphany, for one. Also the final line, when Jim embraces his wife with a sob. These are moments when the Veil almost pierced, almost lifted, almost, almost, almost. Du Bois at his most

prophetic seems genuinely to weep because he is unable to wrench the world free of the color line. Miller himself, with his authorial eye for tragic irony, is merciless—as when Francis is murdered at the end of “Fiat Homo” or Zerchi’s passion at the end of “Fiat Voluntas Tua.” But he presents and preserves a universe in which mercy exists, where hope in the face of impending nuclear catastrophe is not facile, but simply necessary. When I read these jeremiads, I feel that the authors are creating or reifying irreconcilable political divisions. I feel troubled, appropriately, by Du Bois’s critique of white supremacy. I feel implicated, inevitably, by Miller’s unsparing critique of participation in a technologically positivist society that has lost the sense of life’s intrinsic value. In each case, though, I also feel that these Jeremiahs have not lost sight of a crucial fact that people, in America or anywhere else, coexist. We share land, the Earth itself, a common humanity, however different it may be experienced or constructed in each of our own separate contexts. At their best, a jeremiad reminds us that our contexts *are* intertwined, or that they *could* be, if only. The prophet might not be able to see a way to bring us together, and might even weep for being unable to do so. But maybe that is why we need a way to see, hear, touch what we cannot otherwise imagine. Perhaps that is one of the unique strengths of approaching the world science-fictionally. So if we want to listen, to understand what kind of world is being prophesied by the voice calling out in the wilderness, the science-fictional jeremiad—American or otherwise—will show us the way.

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<sup>1</sup> Rand, "Apollo 11" (1969). As noted on the Ayn Rand Institute's web site, Rand's essay on the Apollo 11 launch originally appeared in the September 1969 issue of *The Objectivist* newsletter.

<sup>2</sup> See Andrew Chaikin, *A Man on the Moon* (2007), pp. 207-208.

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## **MATTHEW SCHNEIDER - Curriculum Vitae**

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### **TEACHING EXPERIENCE**

#### **Teaching Assistant, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2014-2018**

*Courses taught:*

English 101: Introduction to College Writing (Fall 2014-Fall 2015)

English 102: College Writing and Research (Fall 2016-Spring 2018)\*

English 192: First Year Seminar (Fall 2017)

English 215: Introduction to English Studies (Fall 2015, Spring 2018)\*

\* includes both face to face and online sections

#### **Facilitator, Common Read Experience, UW-Milwaukee, 2013-2017**

- Led discussions on provocative texts by authors such as Carl Sagan, Ta-Nehisi Coates, and Kao Kahlia Yang for incoming freshmen.

### **EDUCATION**

#### **Doctor of Philosophy in English, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2019**

*Dissertation Project:* "The Jeremiad in American Science Fiction, 1890-1970"

- Committee: Peter Sands (chair), Jason Puskar, Annie McClanahan, Aims McGuinness, Gregory Carter

*Coursework.* Emphasis in American Literature from late nineteenth century to mid-twentieth.

#### **Master of Arts in English (Creative Writing), Northern Michigan University, 2006**

*Honors.* Magna cum laude

*Coursework.* Writing workshops for creative fiction, nature writing, creative nonfiction; special topics in Joyce's *Ulysses*, a survey of Faulkner; literary theory.

*Thesis project.* "Sunday Last," feature length screenplay

*Thesis adviser.* Prof. J. Marek Haltof

#### **Bachelor of Arts in English (Creative Writing), Northern Michigan University, 2004**

*Honors.* Magna cum laude, Honors Program

## **PUBLICATIONS**

### **SCHOLARSHIP:**

"DVD Review: *Log Horizon*." *Science Fiction Film & Television*, Vol. 10, No. 3, 2017, pp. 438-441

"Translating the Unthinkable: Global Weirding in *A Dark Room*." *Paradoxa*, No. 28, 2016, pp. 157-176

### **JOURNALISM:**

#### **The North Wind**

- Northern Michigan University's independent student newspaper.
- Chief film critic from 2004-2006.
- Opinion writer from 2004-2006. Weekly columnist from Fall 2005.

#### **Northern Horizons**

- Northern Michigan University's official alumni magazine.
- Contributor from 2004-2006. Selected publication credits:
  - "Prodigal Plants: Sowing the seeds of interest in plant restoration." Spring/Summer 2005.
  - "Friends in Need Become a Family Indeed: Bill Savola '54 BME and Burl Jordan '00 BS." Winter 2005.
  - "Friends indeed help those in need: Ann (Dougherty) Graziotti '78 BSN and Maureen Tippen '78 BSN." Winter 2006.
  - "The North Wind: Still blowing strong after 87 years." Summer 2006.
  - "Journeys in Fine Writing: *Passages North*." Summer 2006.

## **PRESENTATIONS**

- "The Alterity of *Atlas Shrugged*: Ayn Rand's Science-Fictional Jeremiad." Presented 3 July 2018, Science Fiction Research Association Conference, Marquette University.
- "Roundtable: Global Weirding." Moderator: Gerry Canavan; Participants: Andy Hageman, David Higgins, Mindi McMann, Ali Sperling. Participated 5 November 2016, Science, Literature, and the Arts Conference, Peachtree Hotel, Atlanta, GA.

- “*Letters from a Ugandan Farmer: Utopia, Hegemony, and the American Jeremiad.*” Presented 18 March 2015, Midwest Conference for Utopian Studies, Valparaiso University.

## **AWARDS AND HONORS**

- James Sappenfield Fellowship, Department of English, UW-Milwaukee, 2018
- Student Success Award (for teaching), UW-Milwaukee, 2014-15.
- Honorable Mention, Review Writing, 2006. (Best of the Midwest College Newspaper Convention, Associated Collegiate Press)
- Honors program participant, NMU, 2004-2006.)
- Full tuition graduate assistantship, NMU, 2004-2005.
- NMU Merit Award scholarship, 2000-2004.

## **SERVICE**

Development Chair, 2017 Midwest Interdisciplinary Graduate Conference (UW-Milwaukee)

Judge, UW System Undergraduate Symposium, Spring 2015

## **EDITING**

Nonfiction Editor, *cream city review*, Spring 2014-Fall 2018

Graduate Assistant, Northern Michigan University Communications and Marketing Department, 2004-2006

Editor, Opinion section, *The North Wind*, 2005-2006