

2009

Children of men: the American jeremiad in twentieth and twenty-first century science fiction and film

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CHILDREN OF MEN: THE AMERICAN JEREMIAD
IN TWENTIETH AND TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY
SCIENCE FICTION AND FILM

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of English

by
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A.B., University of Georgia, 2002
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May 2009

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DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my wife, Theresa Brown, whose love, patience, and encouragement made finishing this project possible. It takes a special kind of person to leave her home some five hundred miles away so that the person she loves can pursue a dream. For all of those early mornings to work and late evenings listening to ideas or reading drafts, this is for you and our future.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation would not have been possible without the help of some extraordinary and generous people.

The LSU Graduate School, through the LSU Graduate Dissertation Fellowship, fully funded my research during the 2008-2009 academic year. I will always be exceedingly grateful to the LSU Graduate School for choosing me to receive this distinguished and generous fellowship. To be able to devote my entire energies to this project was a great blessing, indeed a rare one, and I am very thankful for the opportunity.

I have been very fortunate to have Dr. Carl Freedman direct this project. From my first days on campus, Dr. Freedman made himself available to discuss my ideas and work. I am eternally grateful for his willingness to work with me over long distance during my last year in the program, discussing revisions over the phone, and mailing edited drafts. His insight has made me a better thinker and writer and the following pages attest to the effectiveness of his leadership and instruction and the enrichment of his friendship.

In addition, I would like to acknowledge the other members of my dissertation committee: Dr. John Lowe, Dr. Brannon Costello, and Dr. Lauren Coats. They have been exceedingly helpful throughout this process, whether suggesting reading or considering drafts of chapters, and always generous with their time. Particularly, Dr. Brannon Costello, in helping me prepare this project and other materials for the job market, has been a valuable asset, a model of professionalism, and a good friend.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge my mother, Sybil Brown, who always made education, knowledge, and learning priorities in my life.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation considers the dynamic and resilient influence of the jeremiad, an early American religious and literary mode, on contemporary American literature and culture. It argues that the polemical, dystopian, and apocalyptic narratives so abundant in twentieth-century literature and film participate in an ingrained literary tradition that accounts for society's misfortunes as penalty for its social and moral evils while, at the same time, emphasizing an American exceptionalism born out of a belief in the society's election through its covenant with God. The project makes connections between early-American texts and related works of twentieth and twenty-first century American literature and science fiction in order to engage issues of American nationalism and to interrogate how these texts construct and reinforce an American identity. It investigates how groups during different historical periods adapted the jeremiad either to advocate or to critique political and cultural movements. Chapter one discusses this history of the jeremiad, situates the project within previous scholarship on the form, and argues for the continued relevance of the jeremiad in twentieth and twenty-first century fiction. Chapter two considers the role of the jeremiad in the work of Robert A. Heinlein during the cultural Cold War. Chapter three concerns the indebtedness of environmental science fiction and film to the American jeremiad tradition and, more specifically, how their dual imperatives of polemical and exceptionalism rhetoric continue to shape the ways that Americans conceive of environmental problems and policy. Finally, chapter four interrogates the role of the jeremiad in science fiction films since 1980 that function as countersubversive texts and, subsequently, in films that serve as critical responses to earlier attempts at foreclosing dissent.

INTRODUCTION

“MAY THE LORD MAKE IT LIKE THAT OF NEW ENGLAND”

It has become commonplace to talk of America as a city upon a hill. Contemporary American politicians of all persuasions have invoked the historical metaphor to advocate for their particular policies or ideology. Some have conjured the metaphor for the nation in order to invoke its greatness and prowess, while others have used it to appeal to the nation’s virtuous founding principles in calls for reform. President Ronald Reagan’s frequent reference to “the shining city on a hill” stands as the most well-known example of its use (though embellished). Of course, the original sentiment, of America as a city upon a hill, was articulated first by John Winthrop in his 1630 speech given to the new members of the Massachusetts Bay colony as they arrived aboard the Arbella. We have come to know his speech as “A Model of Christian Charity.” Winthrop’s speech is a short sermon on the new demands, economic, social, political and spiritual, that life in the new world would require. A broad-ranging sermon, it covered aspects as pragmatic as how the new community would approach lending, forgiveness of debts, and how neighbors would provide for each other in times of calamity or of scarcity. More importantly, however, the sermon described the relationship this new community would have with God. Comparing themselves to the Israelites, these colonists saw themselves as entering a new wilderness and, as such, having entered into a new covenant with God: what Winthrop likened to a marriage of “most strict and peculiar manner” in which God would be “the more jealous of our love and obedience.”

His message carried with it a dual meaning: great is the reward if the covenant is kept, but great too is the damnation risked in failing. Reminding his fellow colonists of this charge, he used the metaphor, now famous, of a city upon a hill. He explained that the “eyes of the world

are upon us” and that, if we were to fail, “we shall be made a story and a by-word through the world.” Their failure, he said, would “open the mouths of enemies to speak evil of the ways of God.” On the other hand, their success would provide an example to the rest of the world. People then would say, Winthrop thought, “May the lord make it like that of New England.”

When Winthrop talked of the new American community as something exceptional, he was drawing attention to the tremendous burden that such a relationship meant for the colonists. This was no source of pride. Instead, it was a charge to be modest. This was not a boast of the colony’s covenant with God, but a reminder of the virtue and righteousness such a relationship demanded of them. Few other metaphors are so foundational to American discourse. The notion of American exceptionalism, borne from this early rhetoric, continues to permeate American culture. American fiction and discourse continue to assert that such a burden, and its ultimate promise of election and salvation, define the American experience. As late as the 2009 inaugural address, President Barack Obama referred to this burden as “the source of our confidence- the knowledge that God calls on us to shape an uncertain destiny.” This project considers recent attempts in popular genres such as Science Fiction to imagine, understand, and to critique this destiny.

Winthrop’s sermon stands as one of the earliest examples of the American jeremiad: an early sermonic form, known popularly as the election sermon, brought to North America by the early colonists. Though the following chapter will provide a much more detailed definition of the form and its place within the context of American discourse, suffice it to say that the jeremiad had a profound influence on the way the early colonists conceived of themselves, their relationship to their new home, and their community’s place in the world. The form’s contribution to American letters has been explored by scholars such as Perry Miller and, more

recently, by Sacvan Bercovitch. It is hard to overstate the influence of their work on American studies. However, there are two major areas concerning the jeremiad on which Miller and Bercovitch are silent. First, since the American jeremiad was a popular form, sometimes preached before hundreds of people or read so repetitiously that copies were read, literally, to pieces, it stands to reason that an analysis of its influence on subsequent popular American forms is a valid and needed area of inquiry. Secondly, both scholars appear reserved or unwilling to extend an analysis of the jeremiad's influence into the twentieth century. As we will see, Miller, while gesturing at the continued influence of the jeremiad in American culture, argues that the jeremiad is subsumed into other forms in the nineteenth century. While Bercovitch argues the jeremiad's role in constructing a myth of America that would serve as a cultural consensus-building narrative, his analysis, though suggesting a continuing function in American culture, is situated overtly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It seems a great oversight that few have considered the role of this form in the twentieth century. It is, after all, known popularly as the "American century."

At the same time, there have been few genres as popular and influential in the twentieth century as science fiction. In a century dominated by the rise of American ingenuity and technological advancement, no other genre can claim to have engendered and reflected this achievement, led and facilitated the kinds of reflection and critique necessary in a century defined by such rapid change, and, finally, no genre as much as science fiction served to stimulate a nation's imagination of the future. A major subgenre of science fiction in the twentieth century has become known popularly as apocalyptic science fiction. This subgenre usually consists of stories set after, or in the middle of, a disastrous event that has left Earth's population severely decreased and prostrate and its landscape altered dramatically or nearly

destroyed. These texts and films usually provide some sort of social criticism by way of a warning message to their readers or audiences. *On the Beach* (Stanley Kramer, 1959), for example, functions in precisely this way. At the end of the film, an ominous sequence of images show a Melbourne cityscape devoid of human life, killed presumably by the radioactive fallout from the third World War. The film ends with the camera resting on a sign that reads “There’s still time, brothers!” Messages like this one and others in similar texts and films are meant to encourage social criticism and urge the reader or the audience to action.

However, as we will see in the subsequent chapter, after carefully considering the definition of “apocalyptic,” such a distinction is incomplete and misleading. A better description of how these texts and films function can be found in understanding how they function as twentieth-century American jeremiads. The jeremiad, not the apocalyptic narrative, better explains the warning rhetoric aimed at the audience, the insistence on a national covenant, and the frequent assertion of American exceptionalism. Scholarship that has referred to such texts as apocalyptic, that is, texts that render nuclear, environmental, or biological disaster on a global scale, has fallen victim to a critical laziness and imprecision. In doing so, scholars have neglected a significant link to one of American literature's most enduring and important genres. It is the jeremiad that accurately describes and elucidates both the warning rhetoric found in these post-World War Two narratives and, more importantly, the insistence in these narratives of an American exceptionalism invested firmly in the concept of the Puritan covenant and errand. Therefore, the jeremiad better explains why these narratives lack the emphasis on revelation that the apocalyptic genre demands and their overwhelming insistence on articulating a national identity and national errand that places them in a much longer tradition in American thought. In short, what the generic distinction “jeremiad” offers that “apocalyptic” cannot is a connection to

a literary genre that explains both the destruction imagery characteristic to these texts and, more importantly, the definitions of American identity and nationalism that they frequently propose. Repositioning such texts is essential when it becomes clear that what is at stake is no less than America's grappling with the idea of itself consistently in its most popular of forms. Finally, what such an analysis suggests is that the genre of American science fiction has played a much larger role than previously considered in the process of American national identity formation while, at the same time, playing a significant role in the critique of that process and the concepts, more generally, of American identity and exceptionalism.

I begin by situating the project within the history and current scholarship on the jeremiad. After a brief survey of the history of the form (as a means of bridging it to the twentieth century), I consider landmark works by Miller and Bercovitch and illustrate how the jeremiad still functions as a twentieth-century popular form. Next, the discussion turns to Philip Fisher's work on popular forms to emphasize how certain narratives, in the way they are consumed, become incorporated into the culture. Science fiction, as one such popular form, works in this way. This is not inconsistent with the genre's definition as the literature of cognitive estrangement. Instead, twentieth-century jeremiads (such as *Soylent Green*, *Red Dawn*, or *I Am Legend*) can serve a critical function in providing critique of contemporary society by conjuring failed futures and incorporating the errands found in popular texts and film as a means of avoiding futures of ecological or nuclear disaster. The chapter concludes with a number of readings to illustrate the jeremiad's vitality in twentieth-century fiction. First, Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*, a widely-acknowledged jeremiad, and Walker Percy's *Love in the Ruins*, a novel straddling the borders of southern fiction, science fiction, and American literature, illustrate aspects of the jeremiad that have survived to the twentieth century. Interestingly, both serve as jeremiads on the

notion of American exceptionalism itself. Finally, the chapter concludes with an analysis of a popular television program, *Jericho*, set after a surprise nuclear attack on American soil. While the show serves as a jeremiad on the threat of terrorism and nuclear proliferation, it is equally interested in notions of national identity and community, thus providing an example of how the American jeremiad, science fiction, and questions of American identity coalesced in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Chapter two considers the role of the American jeremiad during the era known popularly as the Cold War. I begin by establishing the well-documented efforts by the Central Intelligence Agency to wage a cultural Cold War in the scholarly and artistic communities of the Western world. Interestingly, the Agency's efforts were built upon the same notions of exceptionalism and errand rhetoric that dates back to the Puritan era and, I argue, that this fact contributed to a positivistic understanding of the world and how the cultural Cold War had to be fought. Alongside this covert effort, I note the voluntary efforts that emerged from popular culture. Popular music, for example, reflected a conflation of fear, anxiety, and confidence identical to the jeremiad's dual rhetoric of warning and exceptionalism. The most influential effort in popular culture, though, can be found in the science fiction of Robert A. Heinlein. I argue that the political in Heinlein's work, often the subject of analysis in science fiction scholarship, is a function of the epistemological positivism that characterizes much of his fiction. Heinlein is, in other words, an author with a very particular, positivistic way of seeing the empirical world, the promises and limitations of knowledge, and the agency humanity has in its journey outward from Earth. Heinlein's definition of the role of science fiction domesticates scientific speculation and the role the genre plays in imagining the future. I argue that his works, including the twelve well-known Scribner juvenile novels, serve to incorporate particular cultural narratives and

determine the expectations of a generation coming to maturity during the Cold War. In their warnings about the Red Menace, the pitfalls of failing to reach a particular definition of masculinity and maturity, and their assertions on the kind of politics responsible for America's prominence, they serve as Cold War jeremiads.

The third chapter considers the indebtedness of environmental science fiction and film to the American jeremiad tradition and, more specifically, how their dual imperatives of polemical and exceptionalism rhetoric continue to shape the ways that Americans conceive of environmental problems and policy. I begin by establishing the moral warrants behind works such as Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, a landmark of environmental writing, and Al Gore's documentary *An Inconvenient Truth*, a recent important film, in illustrating how closely their rhetoric aligns with the jeremiad tradition. Next, I situate the discussion within the broader context of ecocriticism scholarship and bridge the analysis to the works of Kim Stanley Robinson, the most important American science fiction writer of his generation and one consistently interested in environmental issues. In his Three Californias trilogy, Mars trilogy, and his Science in the Capital trilogy, Robinson renders remarkable and effective contemplations about the nature of American identity and how such an identity translates to political and social action on the world's biggest problems; providing a savvy, complex dialogue with the form's characteristic emphases on polemical rhetoric and the concept of American exceptionalism. Finally, I explore the role of science fiction film in rendering ecological disaster and consider the implications of Susan Sontag's well-known criticism of science fiction film, that its sensational aspects (spectacle and special effects) disarm and frustrate any attempt at social criticism, for recent entries in the genre such as *The Day After Tomorrow*, *The Core*, and *Wall-E*.

Chapter four considers the role of the jeremiad in science fiction films from 1980 to the present that function as countersubversive texts, those that promote particular and intensely partisan cultural narratives at the same time that they advocate for particular notions of American identity, as well as subsequent films that respond to these attempts to foreclose dissent. I begin by situating the discussion within scholarship on 1980s culture and 1980s film such as Michael Rogin's work on countersubversion and political demagoguery and Richard Slotkin's work on the Frontier narrative (particularly his work on war films after Vietnam). I argue that John Milius' 1980s cult film *Red Dawn* functions as a countersubversive text reflective of the resurgent political conservatism of the 1980s and its re-embracing of a Cold War-era Manichean worldview. I suggest that *Red Dawn* and other films like it participate in the American jeremiad tradition in their use of warning rhetoric to articulate the dangers posed by political enemies and in their advocacy of specifically termed conceptions of American identity and the nation's preeminent role in world affairs. However, the jeremiad also comes into service in the subsequent critical response by later films. Films like *Children of Men* and *28 Weeks Later* take issue, specifically, with notions of American identity put forward by previous countersubversive films and by American political rhetoric in the first years of the twenty-first century. These narratives reflect an articulate and substantial opposition to such rhetoric and to American foreign policy more generally. By utilizing the jeremiad themselves, though, these responses utilize a proven American form in an attempt to counter the cultural directives and appeal to Americans in a traditional and familiar form. Finally, I consider the role of the jeremiad when the incomprehensible, global economic processes of the postmodern era frustrate concepts like national identity and community.

In conclusion, I would like to say a few words about my approach to this project that the reader may find helpful. This project is heavily indebted to the idea of making meaningful connections between American literature's past and present. I have tried to avoid the trap of forcing the jeremiad on my readings of these texts and films or having the category of the jeremiad become so expansive or inclusive as to become meaningless. What I have done, then, is to set up a strict set of characteristics that, when expressed, I have identified in the science fiction and film of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It is important that science fiction, regarded by some as the genre of the future, continues to be the genre that says something essential and meaningful about our present. By considering the influence of the American jeremiad on American science fiction, I hope to illustrate that new thinkers in dynamic genres continue to grapple with fundamental questions about American culture.

CHAPTER ONE A VEIL OF PROTECTION

“The malaise has settled like a fall-out and what people really fear is not that the bomb will fall but that the bomb will not fall...”

-Binx Bolling, Walker Percy's *The Moviegoer*

Only two days after the attacks on September 11th, 2001, Rev. Jerry Falwell, appearing on Pat Robertson's *The 700 Club*, attributed the single deadliest terrorist attack on American soil not to the Islamic-fundamentalist terrorists who hijacked the four commercial airliners used in the attack, but instead to groups actively working to "secularize America" and to a God who, according to Falwell, was increasingly withdrawing his "veil of protection" ("Falwell Apologizes"). He explained:

I really believe that the pagans and the abortionists and the feminists and the gays and the lesbians, who are actively trying to make that an alternative lifestyle, the ACLU, People for the American Way, all of them who try to secularize America, I point the finger in their face and say "You helped this happen." ("Falwell Apologizes")

Immediately, Falwell's comments drew harsh criticism. The Executive Director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, Lorri L. Jean, denounced Falwell's comments as "hate against those who do not think, live, or love as he does" and drew parallels between Falwell's speech and the fanaticism responsible for the attacks. Indeed, Falwell's comments drew criticism from many quarters and, by the day's end, he issued an apology clarifying that "only the hijackers and terrorists were responsible for the deadly attacks" ("Falwell Apologizes"). However, he continued to insist that groups, such as the

ACLU, "which have attempted to secularize America, have removed our nation from its relationship with Christ on which it was founded...[creating] an environment which possibly has caused God to lift the veil of protection." Four years later, after Hurricane Katrina ravaged the American Gulf Coast, Alabama State Senator, Hank Erwin (R-Montevallo), became briefly notorious for suggesting that the hurricane's destruction was the result of the wrath of God drawn out upon an area "known for gambling, sin, and wickedness" ("Senator: God Judging U.S."). "America has been moving away from God," he intoned, "we all need to embrace godliness and churchgoing and good, godly living, and we can get divine protection."

While many found these comments objectionable, inappropriate, and insensitive, what is striking about them is their connection to similar rhetoric in the American tradition. That is, in the hectic but increasingly patriotic days shortly after 9/11 or in the, sometimes despairing, sometimes rallying and regenerate energies along the Gulf Coast in the days following Hurricane Katrina, there was something distasteful and, almost, un-American in their castigations of American culture. Yet, their jeremiads, paltry as they are, stand as reminders that in the opening years of the twenty-first century, one of the nation's oldest literary and rhetorical forms continues to shape and influence American culture and thought.

Both men, in attempting to read the signs of the times, in trying to explain major cultural (near apocalyptic) events, reach for interpretations structured on a religious typology. Both men articulate societal ills, shortcomings, and, of course, sins as the reasons for divine punishment. Both emphatically assert an American exceptionalism (that, like the Israelites of the Old Testament, Americans are God's chosen people) born

out of a belief in a covenant with God. Falwell and Erwin are cheating, of course, in that their comments are reactive and, not, like the Jeremiahs of the American seventeenth century, prophetic. Nevertheless, their rhetoric only hints at the preponderance of jeremiads found in twentieth and twenty-first century literature and film.

Even casual observers will recognize the sheer quantity of what have come to be called apocalyptic, disaster, or end-of-the-world narratives (in film, television, and literature) released in the first years of the twenty-first century. Last December's *I Am Legend*, the third film adaptation of Richard Matheson's same-titled novel, stunned audiences with its spectacular views of a desolate New York City landscape and its dystopian narrative of Robert Neville's (Will Smith) struggle for survival as the apparent last man on earth. Making nearly seventy-seven million dollars on its first weekend, the film boasted the most lucrative December opening in history. A few months earlier, *28 Weeks Later*, the sequel to Danny Boyle's highly successful *28 Days Later*, continued to thrill audiences with "rage infected" zombies and an American military-led attempt to repopulate a London cityscape ravaged by the disease. In 2006, Alfonso Cuarón, in his film adaptation of P.D. James's *Children of Men*, posited an anomic future in which human beings can no longer reproduce. Furthermore, disaster films, *The Core* (2003), *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004), Steven Spielberg's *War of the Worlds* (2005) and the 2006 remake of *The Poseidon Adventure* to name a few, enjoyed a revival in the opening years of the twenty-first century due in part to staggering advances in computer graphics in film, an increasing interest in environmental concerns such as global warming, and the national shame over government inaction in the days after Hurricane Katrina. In addition, zombie films, as hinted above, have achieved a resurgence with the return of

Romero's *Dead* films (including the 2004 remake of *Dawn of the Dead* by Zack Snyder and Romero's own 2005 film *Land of the Dead*) and recent newcomer imitations (the *Resident Evil* films or the hilariously clever 2004 homage *Shaun of the Dead*).

If it seems that such an emphasis on (what has been termed) the apocalyptic narrative resides primarily in one medium, film, one need only look to the popularity of Cormac McCarthy's 2006 novel *The Road*. McCarthy's novel about a father and son traveling through a post-apocalyptic wasteland won the 2007 Pulitzer prize for fiction and, perhaps more telling in terms of its cultural influence, was a popular selection in Oprah Winfrey's book club. In addition, Alan Weisman's *The World Without Us*, a work of scientific non-fiction/journalism that explored the possibility of the earth's response if humanity were to suddenly disappear, was named the top nonfiction book of 2007 by *Time* magazine (Grossman). In television, CBS's *Jericho* told the story of a small Kansas town isolated after a large-scale nuclear attack on major American cities and, became such a cult hit that, after being cancelled by the network in the spring of 2007, it was brought back through an extensive internet and mail campaign.

The point to be emphasized here, however, is not merely the particular relevance of these narratives in the first decade of the twenty-first century, but how they fit within a much larger tradition in American literature and culture. It is a tradition that predates the nation itself, going back even as far as the earliest colonies. Michael Wigglesworth's *The Day of Doom* (1662) rendered the last day of judgment into a long poem that, in its use of a common hymn meter (alternating rhymed lines of eight and six syllables) and imagery familiar to its Puritan audience, became such a popular text that it was memorized by many, sold some eighteen hundred copies, and, since there are no surviving printings,

was literally read to pieces (Baym 284). With little effort, texts can be identified tracing the genre's persistence in American literature from that period forward. However, this project is concerned with the explosion of apocalyptic, disaster, and end-of-the-world narratives starting in the middle of the twentieth century. While such texts will be explored in greater depth later, a few key factors can be highlighted as reasons for the preponderance and persistence of the genre at just such a cultural moment. The rather dramatic introduction of the atomic bomb onto the world stage on August 6th, 1945 provided a concrete, material referent for the imagery of destruction long a part of eschatological fiction in American letters. It was an image that was quickly consumed by popular forms, most notably science fiction, in depictions of the end of the world.

Secondly, and in large part due to the atomic bomb, the United States, at the end of the second world war, was ushered into an unprecedented period of political and economic prosperity. Such an environment emboldened a long-standing notion of American exceptionalism that, as we will see, was either reinforced or reconsidered in narratives of this genre. Finally, advances in motion picture technology thrust the science fiction genre, benefitting from an investment in the magazines edited by Hugo Gernsback, John W. Campbell, and Horace Gold, squarely into mainstream popular culture. These narratives became the primary form for the modern jeremiad and constituted a new, spectacular permutation of the form in which its characteristic warning rhetoric and the old questions of salvation, damnation, and exceptionalism were considered alongside the fantastic narratives and stunning imagery of the burgeoning science fiction film. Films such as *On the Beach*, *The Manchurian Candidate*, and *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* are examples of mainstream films from the

era some scholars have termed the “long 1950s,” (that is, the period between 1946-1964) that function in precisely this way (Booker 3). *Planet of the Apes* (1968), *The Omega Man* (1971), *Silent Running* (1972), *Soylent Green* (1973), and *Logan’s Run* (1976) continued the tradition into the pessimism of the 1970s through a resurgent conservatism, of which the film *Red Dawn* (1984) is the most obvious example, in the 1980s. Yet again, lest one thinks that film is the primary medium for this new permutation of the jeremiad form, one need only look to some of the major works of the latter half of the twentieth century. Walter Miller’s *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1959), winner of the 1961 Hugo Award, is an example of the form in mainstream science fiction, while Walker Percy’s *Love in the Ruins: The Adventures of a Bad Catholic at a Time Near the End of the World* (1971) is often ascribed to other genres.

This essay will consider how the jeremiad continues to shape American consciousness and culture, how it continues to package the old dialectic of salvation and damnation into a narrative of national identity, and it will consider how resilient the form has been in adopting imperatives of different historical eras as America set out on her errand into the wilderness.

The American Jeremiad: A Critical Context

The American Jeremiad, also known as the political sermon, has its roots in the earliest of American rhetorical and literary forms. Perry Miller, historian and author of one of the first critical works on the form, *Errand into the Wilderness* (1956), argued that the New England jeremiad was America’s first distinct literary genre (10). Historically, as a literary term, the jeremiad has come to encompass a variety of rhetorical forms, taking their tenor from the biblical prophet Jeremiah, that account for a society’s or era’s

misfortunes as just penalty for great social and moral evils, while typically holding out the possibility that change would bring a happier future (Abrams 138). However, in early seventeenth century America, the form evolved and the jeremiad rhetoric was mapped onto a growing national narrative of election and purpose. Although Perry Miller takes his title and his iconic metaphor from Samuel Danforth's 1670 election sermon, *A Brief Recognition of New England's Errand into the Wilderness*, it was John Winthrop's 1630 "A Modell of Christian Charity," said Miller, that laid out the sense of mission characteristic to the American form. Many students of the period are familiar with Winthrop's celebrated metaphor for the Massachusetts Bay Colony as a "city upon a hill." Certainly this has been due, in large part, to the resiliency of the metaphor in adopting emerging national narratives throughout the nation's history (America's economic and territorial expansion in the nineteenth century to foreign policy in the twentieth). In 1630, however, Winthrop's metaphor was born out of an effort to theorize this new space, a vast landscape, within the context of politico-religious Puritan thought dominating English culture at the time of the Great Migration. It was in this context, Perry Miller argues, that Winthrop and his fellow colonists, saw themselves not as outpost but as exemplar. Hence, Winthrop termed their errand as an inauguration of a divine covenant:

We have professed to enterprise these actions, upon these and those ends, we have hereupon besought Him of favor and blessing. Now if the Lord shall please to hear us, and bring us in peace to the place we desire, then hath He ratified this covenant and sealed our commission, [and] will expect a strict performance of the articles contained in it; but if we shall neglect the observation of these articles...and shall fall to embrace this

present world and prosecute our carnal intentions...the Lord will surely break out in wrath against us; be revenged of such a perjured people and make us know the price of the breach of such a covenant. (Baym 216)

Here, one may already see the beginnings of the saved/damned rhetoric that Bercovitch would argue later characterizes the double-duty the jeremiad must pull as both warning of future punishment alongside assurances of eventual salvation. Winthrop, Miller explains, is quite explicit about what was expected of this new community. In short, in describing the ecclesiastical government he articulated a “pure Biblical polity set forth in full detail by the New Testament” (5). For Winthrop, this meant “a political regime, possessing power, which would consider its main function to be the erecting, protecting, and preserving of this form of polity...[and] would have, at the very beginning of its list of responsibilities, the duty of suppressing heresy...of subduing or somehow getting rid of dissenters” (5). “Of being,” Miller quips, “deliberately, vigorously, and consistently intolerant” (5).

Despite such definition and seeming clarity of purpose, ambiguity was inculcated into the colonist’s very concept of the errand they were upon. As Miller argues, there is, latent in Danforth’s title, ambiguity in precisely what kind of errand the Massachusetts Bay colonists were engaged (3). In the first sense, errand can mean a “short journey on which an inferior is sent to convey a message or to perform a service for his superior” (3). Miller notes, though, that by the end of the Middle Ages, errand had come to denote “the actual business on which the actor goes, the purpose itself, the conscious intention of his mind” (3). The tragedy the colonists eventually faced, Sacvan Bercovitch later condenses, “was that their errand shifted from one meaning to another in the course of the

seventeenth century” (5). Originally, the colonists most likely considered themselves on an errand in the first sense of the word. “These Puritans did not flee to America,” Miller explains, “they went in order to work out that complete reformation which was not yet accomplished in Europe or England, but which would quickly be accomplished if only the saints back there had a working model to guide them” (11). Indeed, Miller notes that the large unspoken assumption in the errand of 1630 was that if all went as planned in America “not only would a federated Jehovah bless the new land, but He would bring back these temporary colonials to govern England” (11). However, events in England in the 1640s rendered the Puritan colonies without an audience and, Miller argues, the colonists were forced to reconsider the sense in which their errand was run. “Their errand having failed in the first sense of the term,” Miller writes, “they were left with the second, and required to fill it with meaning by themselves and out of themselves” (15). It is in this turning inward, this taking account, that the jeremiad gained prominence. Fueled possibly by the second generation’s anxiety over moral backsliding since the days of great men like Bradford and Winthrop, the jeremiads, argued Miller, attempted to address the view the Puritans had of themselves that, when turning inward, appeared on first glance to be “nothing but a sink of iniquity” (15).

Herein, though, were found the beginnings of a distinct, domestic rhetoric and aesthetic. Miller argues that the jeremiad was the first uniquely American (or colonial) literary form. He argues that early works of literature or scholarship coming from the colonies, such as Thomas Hooker’s *Survey of the Summe of Church Discipline* or the poetry of Anne Bradstreet, while accomplished, maintained an aesthetic and focus that was still firmly rooted in England. Miller explains that “Anne’s flowers are English

flowers, the birds, English birds, and the landscape is Lincolnshire” (10). However, the jeremiad, of which he uses the published proceedings of the 1679 Boston synod, *The Necessity of Reformation*, as example, in its denunciations and lamenting of specific sins in New England (which, Miller tells us, makes for quite interesting reading) are necessarily forced to focus on the provincial (10). “Every effort, no matter how brief,” Miller concludes, “is addressed to the persistent question: what is the meaning of this society in the wilderness?” (10).

This is perhaps the clearest point of distinction between Miller and Bercovitch’s concepts of the jeremiad. In Miller’s formulation, the colonists would never receive an answer to that question but their striving would, in essence, launch them on a process of Americanization. Miller’s example of this dilemma is found in his reading of Cotton Mather’s *Magnalia Christi Americana* which, while fiercely asserting that it is “not an abject book,” Miller explains that it is, rather, characterized by “bewilderment, confusion, chagrin, but... no surrender” (15). “A task has been assigned upon which the populace are in fact intensely engaged,” Miller concludes, “but they are not sure any more for just whom they are working” (15). On the other hand, Bercovitch asserts the form’s “unshakeable optimism” found specifically within the jeremiad’s complaint (7). The American form of the jeremiad, Bercovitch argues, “in explicit opposition to the traditional mode, inverts the doctrine of vengeance into a promise of ultimate success, affirming to the world, and despite the world, the inviolability of the colonial cause” (7). In Bercovitch’s formulation, the very anxiety that Miller argued threw the errand into ambiguity is celebrated by the colonists as an affirmation, alongside more straightforward trials and punishments, of their election. The jeremiad’s function, Bercovitch argues,

“was to create a climate of anxiety that helped release the restless ‘progressivist’ energies required for the venture” (23). Bercovitch explains:

To this end, they revised the message of the jeremiad. Not that they minimized the threat of divine retribution; on the contrary, they asserted it with a ferocity unparalleled in the European pulpit. But they qualified it in a way that turned threat into celebration. In their case, they believed, God’s punishments were corrective, not destructive. Here, as nowhere else, His vengeance was a sign of love, a father’s rod used to improve the errant child. In short, their punishments confirmed their promise. (8)

The divergence in thought between Miller and Bercovitch seems to stem from the arguments each makes for the future of the errand. For Miller, the nineteenth century completes and subsumes the errand within a narrative of economic progress and expansion (236). In addition, after looking specifically at the apocalyptic imagery of the early jeremiads and the increasingly contradictory view that modern science cast on such predictions, prophecies, and warnings, Miller concludes that the jeremiad and its errand waned because “men cannot be scared into virtue” (238). Bercovitch, on the other hand, argues that the errand is a fundamental and guiding narrative indelibly tied into the overarching myth of America (xiv). He insists, contrary to Miller, that the jeremiad persists throughout “the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in all forms of the literature, including the literature of westward expansion” (11). It is an understanding of the American jeremiad, Bercovitch offers, that explains America’s ability to conceive of itself (while not monolithically) as a culture that could transcend differences in landscape, race, and creed “to believe in something called an American mission, and could invest that

patent fiction with all the emotional, spiritual, and intellectual appeal of a religious quest” (11). What is of particular interest to this study is how the jeremiad’s rise as a major rhetorical and literary mode in colonial America coincided with the budding of a new literary genre that, among other things, attempted to resolve the tradition of religious discourse with the burgeoning scientific knowledge characteristic to the era: science fiction.

Early America, Early Science Fiction

In the final chapter of *Errand into the Wilderness*, “The End of the World,” Miller argues that the jeremiad’s reliance on apocalyptic imagery and emphasis on resulting judgment were both thrown into doubt by the advances of modern science. Christian eschatology, which argued that the physical end of the world would be followed by divine judgment, was increasingly difficult to resolve with an emerging science that articulated and argued the rules by which the universe was uniformly governed. The question became, jokes Miller, “Could it any longer be assumed that the heavens would be rolled up like a scroll in order that adulterers and tavern-sots be judged... How was God Himself to intervene if motion, once started, continued eternally in a straight line?” (222). From this point, Miller says, the challenge that modern science placed on Christianity was that “the judgment must henceforth be preached as depending upon the feasibility of destruction” (222) and that “no religious thinker after Milton was again able to say with such magisterial indifference that the precise character of the conflagration was irrelevant” (221).

What followed was an attempt to resolve popular eschatology with the imperatives of modern science. However, this is not necessarily to say that, at this point,

eschatology and science were at odds. Indeed, Miller argues that scientific writings of the late seventeenth century showed significant collaboration in an effort to resolve and understand how the final days would come about. For example, Thomas Burnett's *The Sacred Theory of the Earth* (1681), which attempts to explain the biblical flood and the future apocalypse as the result of various geothermal properties of the earth's crust, was significant, according to Miller, in that it attempted to combine the providence of God with natural (or scientifically explainable) causation (225). "The breaking of the crust, both at the deluge and at the end, has the quality of an intentional act," Miller explains, "and can therefore serve...both as detonation and a judgment" (225). Indeed, William Whiston's *A New Theory of the Earth* (1696) utilized one of the last remaining unexplained phenomenon, comets, in trying to predict Earth's destruction (225). It was a trope that was popular, according to Miller, precisely because of its identity as a natural phenomenon that, while unexplained, could also be directed by divine intent. Increase Mather, for example, would incorporate the image of the comet in 1680 as a portent of "Droughts, Catterpillars, Tempests, Inundations, Sickness" even well after Edmond Halley calculated the orbit of his comet (229). Even Newton, who Miller reminds us was, "a Puritan by inheritance and a theologian by temperament" studied physics, posits Miller, "to know God" (228).

Eventually, however, notions of the scientific plausibility of the end of the world and a resulting divine judgment shear apart. An end can be imagined, but there is no space for imagining how judgment would follow. This is evident in the awkwardness, says Miller, of Jonathon Edwards' pushing back against the mechanical/ scientific cause for apocalypse while, at the same time, having respect for Newtonian science (234).

According to Miller, Edwards' imagery "revealed the Newtonian...It is ruthlessly physical- the stroke will crunch both rocks and mountains" (234). The separation between these two concepts coincided with a burgeoning narrative of economic progress totally at odds with a yearning for the end. Miller explains:

Thus the nineteenth century was completing the seventeenth's errand into the wilderness: the meaning was at last emerging, the meaning hidden from Winthrop and from the Puritan pioneers. After all, it now appeared, they had been dispatched into the forests not to set up a holy city on some Old World model but to commence the gigantic industrial expansion which, launched upon a limitless prospect, would demonstrate the folly of anxieties about, or even a lust for, the end of this physical universe. (236)

It is easy to see how Miller could make this argument; writing, as he does, only five short years after the release of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki (the chapter first appeared in article form in the *William and Mary Quarterly* in 1951). In fact, Miller's extensive reference to the apocalyptic imagery in the descriptions of the atomic bomb attacks in the *United States Bombing Survey* is done so to reinforce this separation. For Miller, the world described in that mid-century document had come about. With the advent of the atomic bomb, the end of the world was indeed conceivable outside of any notions of eschatology or divine judgment. Perhaps, during this major historical moment, Miller was too quick to fold the old Puritan errand into the narrative of economic progress without pondering the possibility that both could still exist and in relation to each other. If the rhetoric of the post-war years illustrated anything, it was the resiliency of the American myth and its ability to refashion post-war economic and political

prosperity into a national narrative of election. After all, was it not possible that the errand and its typology was still with us? Would not America, then, continue to try to explain events, even the apocalyptic, in terms of this fundamental narrative of its election?

Miller's argument, despite his conclusion about the jeremiad's end, is intriguing because it establishes a precedent for the collaboration between the jeremiad and the genre of science fiction. Admittedly, these are two genres seldom placed within the same century, let alone the same literary mode. It should come as no surprise, however, that alongside an emerging scientific outlook, a complimentary scientific-focused literary mode was evolving. Of course, the genre, as it is now known, began in England with the publication of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* in 1818 (and in America in the nineteenth century by Edgar Allen Poe), but it is clear that precursors to the science fiction genre were certainly present in the seventeenth century. Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* (c. 1617) and Johannes Kepler's *Somnium* (1634), for example, attest to the existence of a proto-science fiction during the seventeenth century that speculated on the outcomes of new technologies and discoveries resulting from the emerging scientific method. The fact that these texts were published outside of the Americas does not weaken their influence on colonial thought since intellectual discourse during this time period was necessarily transatlantic. Whether or not the jeremiad was, as Miller argued, folded under the nineteenth-century narrative of economic progress is irrelevant. What this connection to the science fiction genre makes clear is that some primary characteristics of the form survived and were incorporated into emerging popular American genres. While other scholars have argued the influence of the jeremiad on contemporary science fiction (David Seed, for

example), they have only done so as a means of explaining the polemical nature of dystopian narratives. Likewise, they focus only on the polemical nature of the sermon and its warning rhetoric. However, what these readings have neglected is the promise of the jeremiad, that sense of purpose, of being on an errand, and reading these events as evidence of American culture's covenanted election. In this way, even the most pessimistic dystopian text or film can (upon the reflection of the reader or audience that this future, horrific world can be avoided if certain steps are taken) reinforce an idea of American exceptionalism born out of one of the earliest American literary forms.

New Forms, New Warnings

One of the best examples of the continued relevance of the jeremiad tradition, although completely ignored by Bercovitch, is its persistence in popular culture and popular genres. As suggested above, even a cursory analysis of science fiction film in the twentieth century provides evidence of the jeremiad's persistence for those familiar with the tradition and its hallmarks. If pressed, however, it is doubtful that many observers would identify these narratives as jeremiads if only because they have been told, overwhelmingly so, that these belong to another genre: the apocalyptic narrative.

It is a mistake common to the latter half of the twentieth century (that is, after the discovery of the atomic bomb) that critics have been much too quick to assign texts to the apocalyptic genre based solely on an iconography of disaster (be it bombs, floods, earthquakes, etc.) comparable to that found in the book of Revelation while disregarding rhetoric that more accurately places them in the jeremiad tradition. In this way, the term, "apocalyptic," has become critically imprecise and all related genres have suffered from a kind of critical laziness. It is not uncommon, for example, to find disaster narratives

grouped into this genre as well. Films like *Earthquake* (1974), *The Towering Inferno* (1974), and, more recently, *Armageddon* (1998) and *Deep Impact* (1998) are attributed to the apocalyptic genre with little thought as to what makes them apocalyptic. The point becomes especially clear when one reflects that these disaster films have very little to nothing to do with the spirituality that characterizes the truly apocalyptic narrative. Most recently this problem was noted by Jerome Shapiro in his study of atomic bomb films, *Atomic Bomb Cinema* (2002). “Apocalypse” according to Shapiro, “has generally been misused, or misunderstood, to denote an end rather than a continuum” (25). Instead, Shapiro, pulling from both Jewish and Christian traditions, emphasizes that the apocalyptic tradition is focused on the promise of rebirth (28). In Shapiro’s analysis, despite the initial appearance of a dystopian future, the focus of the apocalyptic narrative is on the ultimate goal of the establishment of the kingdom of heaven on earth. Shapiro argues that “the apocalypse does not bring about the end of the world, but a crisis-like period of intense suffering that cleanses the world of evil” (28). “What was good or pure in the previous era survives to be reborn in the new era,” continues Shapiro, “and a just community or heaven on earth flourishes” (28). In this way, the apocalyptic tradition is inherently hopeful (28). Understanding the distinction between the genres is especially important when considering popular texts (which, because of the spectacle of film, have participated more than most) if any substantial consideration is to be made of their role in reflecting and influencing American cultural attitudes and anxieties. Put simply, “apocalyptic” has become a catch-all genre especially in the popular realm, for texts or films that are dystopian, for one reason or another, and offer a vision of the future in which some event, usually nuclear, has nearly destroyed society as we know it. The

problem, however, is that little or no attention is given to the didactic (perhaps political) and rhetorical purposes of imagining or showing such a future. When closely considered, what becomes instantly apparent is that the rhetoric of these texts is not a desire for the end as a means towards rebirth, for the kingdom of heaven on earth, but a depiction of a horrific end for humanity that serves as a warning aimed at the present reality of the reader or viewer. To put it succinctly, the jeremiad is about the end, about the horrors that await humanity if it should continue to slide, and, ultimately, influencing the present to avoid such an end.

However, instead of thinking of genre as a series of boxes into which texts must be accurately (or inaccurately) placed, it is perhaps more helpful in our attempt to understand a particular text to consider how it *behaves* as a product of a certain genre. Here, Carl Freedman's dialectical conceptualization of genre is very helpful in emphasizing how various tendencies are at work within a given text (20).¹ In this formulation, a reading of the way a text exhibits characteristics of (or functions within) a certain genre can be a way of allowing a multiplicity of readings that help illustrate and unpack a greater understanding of that text. This allowance of other possible generic interpretations, understanding how different genres are expressed in the text, is precisely what has not occurred because of the slap-dash assignment of the apocalyptic label. My argument, then, offers a reading of these texts as jeremiads in order to open up a line of discourse currently foreclosed by current generic definition.

The ending of Stanley Kramer's 1959 film *On the Beach* is indicative of just such a generic problem with a considerable number of post-World War II texts and films often described as apocalyptic. The film's final scene finds all of Melbourne's residents dead

from exposure to fallout drifting southward from a nuclear war between the United States and the Soviet Union that engulfed the northern hemisphere. The film's final shot rests on the city center where, earlier in the film, the city's residents met to gather news, food, and supplies. Now, the banner situated in the middle of city square, used earlier in the film in conjunction with a revival-like religious service, looms over a desolate city-scape and its message speaks to no one but the audience: "There is still time...brother!" The rhetoric is hard to miss. It implores them to do something to avoid this vision of the future. Avoid nuclear war. Avoid nuclear proliferation. If you do not, the film says (nearly screams) to the audience, this is your fate.

Such an ending is fundamentally different from what Shapiro argued occurs in an apocalyptic narrative. That tradition, he argues, is ultimately hopeful. The book of Revelation, in the Christian tradition, is filled with destructive imagery but only as a means toward the establishment of New Jerusalem and the kingdom of heaven on Earth. Revelation, in other words, is supposed to alleviate anxiety over the Earth's final days, and not, through its descriptions of destruction, elevate it. This is not at all what occurs in *On the Beach*. The film offers no such hope of the creation of a better world. Perhaps there is still time for the audience, but for Commander Dwight Towers (Gregory Peck), Moira Davidson (Ava Gardner), and the rest of humanity there is only death.

Shapiro reads the film quite differently and it is his reading of *On the Beach* as an example of the apocalyptic genre, his argument for how the film behaves within the conventions of apocalyptic literature that he has outlined, that determines his interpretation of the film's ending. For, in Shapiro's reading, he must find that emphasis on rebirth that he has, up to this point, strongly asserted is a hallmark of the apocalyptic

genre. As can be gathered from my sketch of the scene, the ending of *On the Beach*, the fact that everyone at the film's end is dead, makes this nearly impossible. In short, Shapiro suggests that the camera's lingering on the empty streets and buildings itself implies a continuance. "While the narrative suggests that everyone dies (which is antithetical to the apocalyptic imagination)," says Shapiro, "where there is a camera, there is a camera operator and a narrative that continues" (90). He concludes, "the cinematic structure reassures the audience that surviving a nuclear war is possible" (91). In contrast, I would argue that the film, frankly, does nothing of the sort. In Shapiro's rendering, the final image of the film, "There is still time, brother," is completely meaningless. In my reading it is important and meaningful. Let us explore, for a moment, how the film might carry another set of generic expectations.

As a jeremiad, the film functions to generate a sense of urgency and anxiety (and not a desire and excitement for rebirth). It is as a jeremiad that the film's call to action and the didactic rhetoric of showing a major city, Melbourne, completely dead, provide meaning for an audience living during the Cold War. In the film's final moments, the Australian folk song (and unofficial national anthem) "Waltzing Matilda" fills the background as Captain Towers's submarine, the *Sawfish*, sails, with American flag waving, out of the Australian harbor and towards North America (to die, as it were, on native soil). It is an unmistakably nationalistic moment, so much so, that the "Star-spangled Banner" might as well play instead (since Australia, in essence, has been standing in throughout the film for the United States, England, or any other major western power). The apocalyptic genre cannot explain this nationalistic moment. There is no space for nationalism when the tradition's emphasis is placed on the destruction of

the world as we know it in order to resurrect itself as a new and better one. However, the American jeremiad provides meaning for this esoteric musical cue by highlighting how the film participates in this tradition of constructing a narrative of national identity. That narrative, as we will soon see, has a great deal more to do with Cold War America than the Australia of the film.

A Diet of Reality

It may be unsurprising, then, that texts and films like *On the Beach* mirror so closely the jeremiad in both its formal characteristics and in its function as a popular form. It was in 1634 that the election sermon began to be preached as the traditional opening of the annual General Court in Boston (Elliot 102). Most of New England's best-known ministers appeared each year to give at least one election sermon (102). A few years later, in 1637, the sermons began to be printed and disseminated yearly. As a traditional part of the sermon, the minister would conclude by directly addressing various groups in the audience. Usually, such an audience would include the governor, current representatives, those standing for election, voters, and other clergy. Emory Elliot notes that the election sermon became quite a popular event both because of its presentation (or, one may say, performance) and because of the nature of its form. "The content of the election sermons," says Elliot, "was expected to integrate the theory of Puritan society and the current social and religious practices" (103). By its nature, then, the sermon was designed to connect the theoretical with the practical; religious dogma and moral imperatives with everyday New England existence. In doing so, Elliot says, "the pattern created a familiar ritual" (103). Audiences came to expect a certain experience and form from an election sermon: summary of the larger historical picture, a taking stock of the

past and present, and an articulation of a prophecy for the future, designed to inspire the people and leaders to pursue heavenly as well as earthly callings. These aims appeared in the standard sermon's three-part division (explication, doctrine, application) as significant modifications (103). In the "Explication," for example, as the minister closely examined the meanings of the words of a chosen text (and the biblical events foreshadowing the passage), his audience was invited to make typological parallels to their current situation. Later, in the "Application," the minister would make explicit how the "Doctrine" and the "Proposition" related to contemporary New England. The major themes of sermons from earlier in the century, notes Elliot, ranged from "the nature of good leadership, the limits of liberty and authority, the biblical roots of Puritan ideas of government and the proper relationships between the governor and the deputies, between all leaders and the people, and between civil and ecclesiastical powers" (103). However, from the 1660s through the 1690s, the anxiety of the colonists and the fear over the loss of their divine errand led ministers to construct their sermons in the bleak and cautionary rhetoric that has come to define the form.

Like the election sermons preached to the seventeenth-century Boston audience, texts and films like *On the Beach* are primarily popular forms designed from the outset to be consumed quite differently from other forms. Both forms invite audiences to see connections between the text and their empirical world. Both forms address their audiences directly and aim to inspire some kind of action or focused reflection. Finally, both forms function as a kind of ritual, in which the content both produces anxiety over the threat and reinforces a hope that change can be enacted by a diligent audience.²

It is precisely the extra-textual work these forms are designed to do that Philip Fisher argues was responsible for “setting in place part of the framework of national self-imagination” (8). In his study of popular forms in the American tradition, Fisher found that popular genres were essential in incorporating certain cultural imperatives, “central facts” he calls them, that in a process of recognition, repetition, and working through, became consolidated within the American consciousness (8). The cultural work of these forms, Fisher argues, was so effective and these facts became so ingrained, that what was previously considered unimaginable became obvious and accepted. For example, Fisher explores the role of Cooper’s Leatherstocking tales in dealing with the “hard fact” of the killing of the Indians and incorporating the notion of a “‘clear land’ where a ‘new world’ might be built” (5). He explains:

My interest here...was this act of inserting into the already filled moral and cultural realm one new reality. The strategies of this act seem to me to be the most radical of which culture is capable. Cooper “made up” the wilderness; the Indian and the killing of the Indian; the process of settlement and, along with that process, the single white figure, Leatherstocking, who made morally tolerable the ethical complexities of settlement and the superseding of the Indians [...]. To say that Cooper “made up” this reality is only to say that he was able to lodge the details, the settings and the characters, the moral pride and moral shame of this history in the imagination of the American and European world, and that later representations drew on the history that he made symbolically concrete. (6)

This process is contingent, says Fisher, on the repetitive nature of popular forms and how they are read (7). Citing such genres as detective novels, westerns, and romances, Fisher suggests that these forms make up a “diet of reality” that “returns again and again to the same few motifs so that they might not slip away” (7). One may very well add science fiction to such a list and, in doing so, shed light on the cultural work the genre did as it came to prominence in post-World War II America. This makes the cultural work of science fiction very similar to that which Fisher argues occurs in the historical, sentimental, and naturalist novels. Citing the criticism characters such as Uncle Tom, from Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, received from critics of later periods for being “wooden, offensive, and trite,” Fisher suggests that these forms were not written for the future, but were “forms for the active transformation of the present” (7). Fisher’s point explains a great deal about the stodginess or downright silliness that characterizes some older, jeremiad, science fiction narratives. Their warning rhetoric has already been incorporated by the culture and, likely, overcome or dismissed. Instead of threatening, they have become signposts of a bygone era’s anxieties. Robert Wise’s *The Day the Earth Stood Still* is an excellent example of this process at work. Klaatu’s message, culminating in what amounts to a lecture at the end of the film, chastises Earth for its increasing global hostilities and warns humans, now that Earth possesses the power (in this case, nuclear) to harm other planets, that their hostility and violence will not be tolerated by other planets. Gort, Klaatu explains, will destroy them if they continue down this path. It should be a sobering ending, but it is not. It is not Klaatu’s strong anti-global violence/ Cold War/ anti-nuclear statement that characterizes the film. Instead, despite being a classic of science fiction cinema, the film is most often viewed today as an

example of the typical science fiction camp that dominated the American film industry of the 1950s. That is, Klaatu's message is drowned out by Gort's lasers and Bernard Herrman's theremin-heavy score. What this understanding of popular forms suggests is that the film is considered campy and trite precisely because a fear of nuclear global annihilation has already been articulated, incorporated, and worked through. What is left is an entertaining, but predictable classic of science fiction cinema that warns audiences about a threat that has already been incorporated addressed by the culture.

While twentieth century jeremiads, like *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, explored individual threats against the community (such as nuclear annihilation or environmental damage), the central fact that is most frequently explored, promoted, or critiqued is the central fact of American exceptionalism. Deborah Madsen describes the concept of American exceptionalism as the “perception of Massachusetts Bay colonists that...they were charged with a special spiritual and political destiny: to create in the New World a church and a society that would provide the model for all the nations of Europe as they struggled to reform themselves (a redeemer nation)” (2). According to Madsen, this view holds that the New World “is the last and best chance offered by God to a fallen humanity that has only to look at His exceptional new church for redemption” (2). “Thus, America and Americans are special, exceptional” she explains, “because they are charged with saving the world from itself and, at the same time, America and Americans must sustain a high level of spiritual, political and moral commitment to this special destiny” (2). This charge the Puritans felt, and Americans continue to feel now (if one accepts the argument) is born out of the covenant discussed earlier. Madsen describes the “federal covenant” as the “agreement or contract by which the Puritan community could expect

collective salvation” (3). “Just as a redeemed individual exhibited signs of sainthood through pious behaviour, serious demeanor, and the keeping of God’s laws and those of the magistrates,” she explains, “so a redeemed community expected itself to be pious, well regulated and observant of divine and civil laws” (3). Both Madsen and Ernest Tuveson, in his *Redeemer Nation*, emphasize the collective interdependence that such a contract meant for the community. Any sin committed by a member of the community placed the entire community in jeopardy. Backsliding, of any kind, then, was closely watched. Ultimately, this emphasis on introspection, both individually and communally, led to attempts by the members of the community to gauge their success by reading signs of God’s favor or displeasure. According to Madsen, this led to the two major characteristics of subsequent exceptionalist rhetoric:

The glory...will be theirs, if the community of saints keeps to the terms of the covenant, creates a purified and perfectly reformed church to be the world’s model, and establishes the conditions for the realisation of millennial hopes. Alternatively, if they should fail then their failure will be as humiliating as their glory would have been, in equal measure. The world’s eyes are upon them and if they should betray the covenant then all the world will know and scorn them for their excess of ambition and pride. (20)

American exceptionalism, Madsen argues, has its roots in reform movements of the Tudor period Church of England. In the 1500s, various attempts were made to reinterpret the history and lineage of the Church of England as a means of reforming it further. Madsen shows that such efforts attempted to align the church with the primitive

church of the Apostles: arguing that the true origin of the church could be traced back to the arrival in England of Joseph of Arimathea (7). The effect of these historicizing efforts was a shift in the power structure of the church. Elizabeth, reigning over a reformed and purified church, now had power over the bishops and “ruled by divine right and by the authority of divine Providence that placed her at the culminating point of ecclesiastical history” (8). This understanding of ecclesiastical history, what Madsen calls an interpretation of history that is both temporal and divine, is precisely what becomes exported to the New World. In other words, it was a narrative of the church and the role it would play in secular and spiritual affairs.

This is essential to understanding, then, the various strains that were exported to the New World. Madsen distinguishes between the “non-separating” Congregationalists of the Massachusetts Bay colony (led by John Winthrop) and the “separating” Congregationalists who settled at Plymouth (led by William Bradford) in order to illustrate the theology and the social aspects that led to such a strong assertion of American exceptionalism.³ The Separatists believed that the bible’s promises, found in the Old and New Testaments, could only be fulfilled on a purely spiritual plane, that the Bible could no longer be used to predict the future of human history (thus negating, for the most part, the typology so important to the Massachusetts Bay Congregationalists and the jeremiad) (17). The non-separating Congregationalists, however, saw the promise represented by the Israelites and New Canaan as both a worldly possibility and a spiritual reward (18). In other words, this ideal community was both a physical (and thus, geographical) as well as spiritual possibility. That the Massachusetts Bay colonists saw their mission as both spiritual and physical in setting up the ideal church, is important in

understanding what of this rhetoric has survived in the nation's discourse. Madsen aptly traces this rhetoric as it adapts to political influences of the late 1700s. In Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography*, for example, Madsen finds that Franklin recast "the terms of success, where material property assumed a prominence it had not had before,... where the collective salvation of the community was transformed into a form of government that would protect the rights of all citizens" (37). What has remained to the present day, argues Madsen, is "the perception that America would continue to be judged by the other nations of the world to whom America would remain a model, guide, a measure...and also a guardian of the inalienable rights of man" (38).

Perhaps one of the most often cited examples of a twentieth-century jeremiad is Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*. That novel, while concerned with many issues, is not as overt in articulating its concern as, say, *The Day the Earth Stood Still* is about nuclear proliferation. However, an analysis of Pynchon's novel can help us explore the form in its current state, highlight which characteristics of the traditional form are now emphasized, and to consider to what end the form is now used. Outside of its frame narrative of Oedipa Maas' attempts to execute Pierce Inverarity's will, Pynchon's novel can be considered a jeremiad on a variety of issues. At times, the novel functions as a jeremiad on the consumer culture of the mid-twentieth century in which it was written (having been published in 1965). The novel begins, after all, with Oedipa Maas returning home from a Tupperware party to find that she has been named executrix of Pierce Inverarity's estate. The novel ends, appropriately, with the crying or (auctioning) of his estate. In this way, the novel can be read as an attempt by Oedipa Maas (and the reader)

to make meaning out of the disparate and dizzying financial and material aspects of one man's life.

In another but related sense, the novel can be seen as a jeremiad against the fractured nature of American culture in its postmodern state (a well-known concern of Pynchon's). Upon exploring the various holdings of Pierce's estate, Oedipa struggles to understand the world in which she is thrust. Indeed, the more she learns about the Tristero, for example, the more she appears to be estranged from her understanding of her marriage, her community, and (the novel suggests) her understanding of America. In fact, this is how Deborah Madsen reads Pynchon's novel. Striking at the very heart of the tradition, *The Crying of Lot 49*, she argues, is a jeremiad on American exceptionalism itself. She reads Pynchon's novel as a critique of the uses of the mythology of exceptionalism to "perpetuate internal class divisions and to further America's imperialistic ambitions" (152). Madsen points out that Oedipa Mass learns, throughout the novel, that her conception of America is woefully incomplete because it is based on a "mythology of visible sainthood, which means that a class of the unredeemed must be defined in order to distinguish God's chosen few" (154). "As a member of the redeemed," Madsen explains, "Oedipa has never known those who are sacrificed, dispossessed, disinherited, to make her privilege possible" (154). Indeed, much of the novel shows Oedipa exploring and learning about this part of the culture that, to her and the reader, did not exist before. The reader follows Oedipa as she learns the significance of the muted horn symbol, discovers the existence of a separate, subversive postal system (under the acronym WASTE), and, ultimately, comes to question the possibility of

knowing anything with her former degree of certainty. At the end of the novel, Pynchon considers Oedipa's position:

Another mode of meaning behind the obvious, or none. Either Oedipa in the orbiting ecstasy of true paranoia, or a real Tristero. For there either was some Tristero beyond the appearance of the legacy America, or there was just America and if there was just America then it seemed the only way she could continue, and manage to be at all relevant to it, was as an alien, unfurrowed, assumed full circle into some paranoia. (150-1)

But instead of this being a place to despair, of knowledge and understanding of Oedipa's nation and culture spiraling into a nihilistic nothingness, it is, argues Madsen, a space for understanding America outside of the strict categories of saved and damned. "What she does find," says Madsen of Oedipa Maas, "is a sense of the limitlessness of the land upon which she stands, in the absence of the divisions that are imposed by society" (154).

What Pynchon's novel accomplishes in its jeremiad mode, then, Madsen argues, is the questioning of "how it could have happened that in the New World, in a land of infinite possibility, all should be reduced to binary choices: elect or preterite, citizen or exile" (154). Madsen's argument is particularly useful because it makes visible the aspects of the jeremiad tradition at work in Pynchon's novel. Though not as overt as other texts I have cited, Pynchon's polemic on American culture is, at times, pointed. Although he ranges over different aspects of culture (consumer culture, American exceptionalism and identity, etc) he is calling attention to matters that continue to affect the lives of people within the culture (namely Oedipa Mass and, presumably, the readers). Furthermore, by packaging this polemic against American exceptionalism itself (in this

way turning the jeremiad on itself), Pynchon can have it both ways: he can both critique the effects of American exceptionalism at the same time that he utilizes a genre and rhetoric that has had, traditionally, a great deal to do promoting it (thus using its traditional cultural effectiveness to lay down his complaint). Such a complex situation fits ideally with Pynchon's focus in the novel.

The Crying of Lot 49 is not a novel with overt answers or suggestions as to how, like the old jeremiads, the community can atone and improve. What it does offer, however, is the assertion that the American experience is much more complex and dynamic than such certitudes and answers would suggest. Understanding how Pynchon's novel participates in this tradition, and what aspects are promoted and muted, can allow for a reading of a similar text that straddles the border between American literature proper, Southern literature, and Science Fiction.

Many have read Walker Percy's third novel, *Love in the Ruins: The Adventures of a Bad Catholic at a Time Near the End of the World*, as an exploration of the regenerative powers of the apocalyptic in a world characterized by postmodern alienation and ennui. There are strong reasons to read the novel this way. The novel, whose subtitle is "the adventures of a bad Catholic at a time near the end of the world," concerns Dr. Tom More, a psychiatrist and scientist who believes he has invented a device that promises no less than the ability to save mankind by healing the Cartesian rift separating essence from body. The device, the More's Quantitative-Qualitative Ontological Lapsometer (truncated to MOQUOL), reads electrical energy in the brain that More then correlates with "the manifold woes of the Western world, its terrors and rages and murderous impulses" (28-29). Later in the novel, More's device, which previously had only been a

diagnostic tool, is fitted with an adapter that allows More to apply doses of sulfur radiation to certain areas of the brain in an attempt to stimulate and heal the rift that rendered man with a permanent complex that More describes as “angelism-bestialism.” As a scene late in the novel illustrates, the device, in the hands of others, can be destructive: creating exacerbated cases of the very “angelism-bestialism” that More’s device was designed to treat and sowing discord and violence in the small Louisiana community. That is not to say that the community was not already at odds. The geography of Percy’s fictional Louisiana parish is divided by the ennui-plagued suburban secular utopia of Paradise Estates, occupied by clashing left and right-wingers, and Honey Island Swamp, which has become a refuge for college drop-outs, failed communitarians (seemingly out of Heinlein’s *Stranger in a Strange Land*), and the militant Bantus (African Americans whose response to the civil rights debate of the 1960s and 1970s is outright violence staged against the community).

Lois Parkinson Zamora, for example, points to the persistent images of “exhilarating” destruction (war, natural disaster, acts of sexual violence) in Percy’s fiction as “the antithesis of everydayness” (126). J. Gerald Kennedy, exploring the polemical aspect of Percy’s novel, situates Percy’s complaint within an attempt to diagnose the roiling discord in American society in the late 1960s and early 1970s (the novel was published in 1971) as the result of “the manifestation of the subject-object split which has been central to Western experience since the philosophy of Descartes and the beginning of the modern age” (116). Ultimately, Kennedy concludes that Percy’s novel “reminds us that if a person is to recover a fresh perception of the world, he must be prepared to circumvent established Cartesian modes of experiencing and understanding

reality” (119). It is only then, writes Kennedy, “he can recover what Emerson called ‘an original relation with the universe’...only then can he redeem his existence from the patterns contrived by the engineers of human happiness” (119). Such an emphasis on polemics, though specifically situated on this question of Cartesian metaphysics, leads Percy, according to Kennedy, to a “commitment to Christian eschatology [that] inevitably binds him to a didactic program and governs his representation of experience” (135). Brannon Costello, situating the novel’s regenerative energy on its criticism of traditional understandings of race and class in the American south (particularly racial paternalism) that serve to handicap progress and stifle “nonoppressive models of identity and political participation,” finds, in the novel’s epilogue, the hope of a new social arrangement represented by More’s inclusion in Victor Charles’s campaign for the United States Congress (159). This, he argues, despite the novel’s curious resolution in the epilogue that emphasizes Tom’s commitment to the system of race and class to the point of accepting, if he cannot play the part of wealthy paternalist, the role of “simple, rural, humble Other” (157).

Perhaps because of this commitment to the apocalyptic and the polemical, the novel was widely considered to be Percy’s weakest novel. William Allen argues, for example, that the “subtle ironies and complex but unobtrusive allusiveness of the first two books give way in Percy’s satire to broad, highly topical humor and heavy-handed allusion” (78). It is not a great novel, Allen contends, “because it is predominantly a vehicle for propagating ideas rather than a means of discovering them” (79). Allen may be correct in asserting that the novel functions in this way. However, this is no reason to disparage the novel. Instead, it may signal that a different set of generic expectations are

at work. In addition, the novel very well may be apocalyptic in precisely the way that the term is supposed to be used: that is, emphasizing the regenerative aspects of apocalypse's characteristic destructive imagery. In fact, I find Zamora's reading of the novel convincing even though, like Zamora, I find that the serene aesthetic of the novel's epilogue (in contrast to the violence that characterizes the novel proper) causes such a reading to unravel: she argues that the epilogue "serves to trivialize the apocalyptic aspirations described in the body of the novel" (133). Yet, there continues to be frequent images of and references to a strange brand of American nationalism. Given the previously discussed characteristics of the American jeremiad tradition, this prevalence of nationalism and the polemical mode are connected, I assert, to the novel's didactic posture. A consideration of *Love in the Ruins* as a jeremiad allows us to explore certain traits that have been, until now, unexpressed.

In addition, the novel's connection to the jeremiad coincides with Percy's argument for the role of the novelist in contemporary culture. In his "Notes for a Novel About the End of the World," Percy speaks directly to this function an author can perform:

Perhaps it is only through the conjuring up of catastrophe, the destruction of all Exxon signs, and the sprouting of vines in the church pews, that the novelist can make vicarious use of catastrophe in order that he and his reader may come to themselves. Whether or not the catastrophe actually befalls us, or is deserved- whether reconciliation and renewal may yet take place- is not for the novelist to say. (118)

Perhaps not, but this consideration seems interestingly epistemological. It suggests a connection between author and reader and of that connection having implications for the empirical world outside of the novel. Such a connection seems to be precisely the kind of function the American jeremiad wished to accomplish.

Furthermore, rather early in the novel, Percy connects a concern that appears throughout his novels to the rhetoric of exceptionalism:

Is it that God has at last removed his blessing from the U.S.A. and what we feel now is just the clank of the old historical machinery, the sudden jerking ahead of the roller-coaster cars as the chain catches hold and carries us back into history with its ordinary catastrophes, carries us out and up toward the brink from that felicitous and privileged siding where even unbelievers admitted that if it was not God who blessed the U.S.A., then at least some great good luck had befallen us, and that now the blessing or the luck is over, the machinery clanks, the chain catches hold, and the cars jerk forward? (3-4)

Here, readers identify the same concern over American exceptionalism so characteristic to the jeremiad along with Percy's characteristic anxiety over experience without meaning. In *The Moviegoer*, by comparison, Binx Bolling ruminated that what people really feared was that the bomb would not fall. In other words, their lives were characterized more by the constant anxiety of living under the threat of the bomb (until even that became, posits Percy, commonplace) than by definitive and violent events supplying meaning and definition to their lives. At the beginning of this novel, Dr. More, sitting by a pine tree next to the interstate, carbine rifle slung across his lap, and breaking

out in hives, reflects that “Undoubtedly something is about to happen...Or is it that something has stopped happening?” (3). More’s concern is that the cultural schism in American society, itself having become trite, now only exists as a conflict without meaning and as a conflict drained of its transformative, progressive power through which the future of a supposedly exceptional nation is determined. There is also another way Bolling’s statement, echoed by More in *Love in the Ruins*, can be interpreted: that such exceptionalism is contingent upon the threat and realization of dramatic, defining (and, perhaps, violent) events. It would suggest, in other words, that part of what makes the American experience distinct and exceptional is, not only the focusing effect such threats cause in a society under fear (be it A-bomb or God), but the regenerative energies of contemplation, accountability, and refocusing that naturally must take place after one occurs. It is significant, then, that Percy’s novel begins in medias res, tellingly, on the Fourth of July. In its second section, the novel then flashes back to July 1st and in subsequent sections, July 2nd, 3rd, and ultimately resuming where it left off on July 4th before, at novel’s end, skipping ahead five years in the epilogue. In other words, the novel’s narrative very closely follows a format of revelation, reflection, regeneration that is posited as being the very process throughout the jeremiad tradition that led communities to consider their ways and whether or not they may regard themselves just and principled.

However, the novel’s early engagement with the rhetoric of exceptionalism also serves to illustrate More’s, not necessarily Percy’s, investment with such rhetoric. In one particular passage, he considers whether this exceptionalism was sacrificed by the national sin of slavery:

Even now, late as it is, nobody can really believe that it didn't work after all. The U.S.A. didn't work! Is it even possible that from the beginning it never did work? that the thing always had a flaw in it, a place where it would shear, and that all this time we were not really different from Ecuador and Bosnia-Herzegovina, just richer... Was it the nigger business from the beginning? What a bad joke: God saying, here it is, the new Eden, and it is yours because you're the apple of my eye... And all you had to do was pass one little test... One little test: here's a helpless man in Africa, all you have to do is not violate him. That's all... One little test: you flunk! (56-7)

Earlier I noted that Costello's reading of *Love in the Ruins* argued that the novel examines the consequences of a society that remains committed to the ideology of paternalism. The above passage would suggest, similarly, that the novel is just as interested in examining the tradition of exceptionalism in American culture. The passage clearly illustrates More's need to read his nation's history in terms of this narrative and, more to the point of Percy's novel, understand the role he plays in its redemption and regeneration. More's reaction, after all, borders on indignation: "No! No fair! Foul! The test was too much!" (57). In perhaps the most direct connection to the rhetoric of exceptionalism, More distinguishes (presumably to God) America's perception in the world:

You tested us because bad as we were there was no one else, and everybody knew it, even our enemies, and that is why they curse us. Who curses the Chinese? Who ever imagined the Chinese were blessed by God

and asked to save the world? Who ever expected anything else from them than what they did? (58)

It is essential to remember that, like an investment in the ideology of paternalism, More is invested in seeing the cultural rifts in his community within the rhetoric of exceptionalism because of his personal interest in his invention and his hubristic belief that he can save mankind. After all, shortly after the above passage, More, thinking on his invention, exclaims, “But wait. It is still not too late. I can save you, America!” (58). It is a statement that only suggests what the rest of the novel makes explicit: Tom thinks of himself as the new Christ.

Like Pynchon’s novel, *Love in the Ruins* functions as a twentieth century jeremiad, as the form’s latest permutation, because it disrupts easy answers in favor of acknowledgment of the complexity of the human, and specifically American, experience. The novel functions as Tom’s (and by extension our) coming to terms with such dizzying complexity in a way that does not end in frustration and pessimism. In this way, the novel’s ending, in which Tom agrees to join Victor Charles’s new political coalition, is not so much Revelation itself, but a reinvigoration of the hope for a meaningful Revelation (or merely revelation) in the future. In other words, the novel ends with a rejuvenated covenant. Of course, such a situation is jeremiad because of its investment in the rhetoric of exceptionalism. As we will see, such an investment and its corresponding critique have become overt hallmarks of the jeremiad form in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Having considered how the jeremiad mutated in two major works of the twentieth century, we will now turn to an example of the form in the first years of the new century.

Twenty-First Century Warnings

A more recent example of the jeremiad in American fiction is CBS's *Jericho* (2006).⁴ The show, which ran for two seasons (2006-2008), concerns a fictional, small Kansan town, Jericho, in the days after a nationwide nuclear terrorist attack. Much of the plot centered around the efforts of the town's attempt to survive the aftereffects of such a devastating attack. In fact, much of *Jericho* is conventional in the sense that it engages many of the same ideas other texts and films considered fifty years earlier during the Cold War. In an update of the familiar Cold War narrative, terrorists (or rogue government agents posing as terrorists) have been substituted for Soviets. In fact, upon closer examination, the show's pilot, plays out much like an old civil defense film. After showing the initial attack in what is, frankly, an unsurprising and conventional way, the show busies itself with illustrating how the town deals with the resulting hysteria, paranoia, and confusion. In the show's decidedly local focus, for example, a rush on the local supermarket or gas station is posited to be a greater threat to the town than any possible armed invader. In another episode, the former U.S. Marine turned town mayor, Johnston Greene (Gerald McRaney), his sons Jake (Skeet Ulrich) and Eric (Kenneth Mitchell), and the town's law enforcement personnel rush to find adequate shelter for the town's residents as a massive storm carrying radioactive fallout approaches and threatens to blanket the town. If it seems that the show suffered from a characteristic banality, this was due in large part to its indebtedness to the genre of texts devoted to exploring post-nuclear scenarios and its commitment to updating that narrative in a post-9/11 landscape. Literally, viewers had seen most of this before.

However, by the end of the first season, the show had found a particularly vocal audience. When CBS tried to cancel the show in early 2007, fans notoriously inundated CBS with letters and roughly forty thousand pounds of peanuts (a reference to the season finale's final dialogue: itself an allusion to World War II 101st Airborne artillery commander Gen. Anthony McAuliffe's famous response to a German commander's call for surrender at the Battle of the Bulge). By May 2007 the show had been renewed for a second season, thus making it one of only a few shows to have ever returned after being cancelled ("Thanks to the fans..."). The show's cult status firmly in place, television and popular culture analysts scrambled to explain the show's resurrection as the result of the network's miscalculation of the show's viewership and argued that the traditional Nielsen ratings did not take into account new methods of television viewing (Digital Video Recorders-DVRs-such as Tivo and online downloading on services such as iTunes) in their estimation of the show's audience (La Monica). By the middle of the second season the show was consistently attracting upwards of five million viewers an episode in a television season postponed and depressed by the 2007-2008 WGA Writer's Strike.

How, then, can one resolve *Jericho*'s banal subject matter with its popularity, resilient production history, and cult status? Assuming that viewers are not uncritical consumers of whatever product is thrust on them, it appears that *Jericho* behaves precisely as Fisher claims popular texts have for some time. In this formation, the show's popularity and the particular zeal of *Jericho*'s fan base is consistent with the ways Fisher argued popular forms have been traditionally consumed. The question then arises: what cultural imperatives, themes, and ideas are being incorporated? How, in other words,

does this television show function as a product of the culture and as one that influences the culture?

In his analysis, Fisher describes the process through which a group of ideas become incorporated in the larger cultural narrative as a kind of “psychological rehearsal” (18). *Jericho* participates in this process in two important ways. The first and most obvious example is *Jericho*’s literal rehearsal of how a community faced with the post-nuclear scenario reacts. This is perhaps the most banal element of the show and the one reaching as far back to the Cold War for its precedent. Much of *Jericho* serves as a performance of behavior in the event that one is presented with this scenario. In an odd twist, the show’s writers apparently know this and in the places that the show looks most like a Department of Homeland Security preparation film, it is also a comment on the increased presence of such rhetoric in daily American life (color-coded threat level systems, for example). While *Jericho* serves to literally show Americans how to behave in such a scenario, a much more subtle act of psychological rehearsal is present. In the second sense, Fisher means that the text posits certain ideas that, through their frequent repetition, become ingrained into the cultural consciousness and lay the ground work for future conceptions of our present. For example, he notes how Cooper made the moral complexities of settlement (dispossessing and killing Native Americans) more palatable through a frequent aesthetic maneuver in positing the American landscape (making it “symbolically concrete”) in certain terms that later representations drew upon until, eventually, it became the accepted version. The cultural imperatives undergirding *Jericho* are similarly subtle but are related to the rehearsal we see in the first sense of the term. To put it succinctly, *Jericho* is a show that constantly asserts the importance of

community, family, and patriotism. Then, it reinforces those claims by showing the town's residents surviving precisely because they band together as a community, because they depend on family, and, more to the point, because they are guided by what they believe are uniquely American values.

It is in this way that the show behaves most convincingly as a twenty-first century jeremiad. Alongside these assertions of what makes Jericho and its residents exceptional (and thus the reason for their survival), the show also renders the jeremiad's characteristic warning rhetoric in its critique of the security state that grew substantially in the United States after the 9/11 attacks. Specifically, viewers eventually learn that the fictional attack was perpetrated by rogue agents in the United States government, led by none other than the director of the Department of Homeland Security, in what amounts to an ultraconservative coup d'état. In a variety of other ways the show functions as a rather overt allegory for many of the fundamental domestic and foreign policy issues of the opening years of the twenty-first century. For example, late in the show's first season Jericho has to defend itself against a group of pillaging military contractors, known as Ravenwood (a clear reference to Blackwater U.S.A.: a private security firm criticized for questionable actions in Iraq). In addition, in the show's second season, the town's reconstruction effort is facilitated by a private company, Jennings and Rall, who, for all intents and purposes, looks and functions identically to Halliburton.⁵ In another sense, *Jericho* updates the traditional Cold War narrative by rendering the confusion and misinformation characteristic to the geo-political realities of the War on Terror. That is, *Jericho* illustrates the shift from anxiety over attack from a clearly defined enemy in a

rival nation-state to anxiety over influence and attack at the hands of shadowy, non-governmental organizations and foreign terrorist organizations.

This is not, however, how allegory usually functions. *Jericho* pushes the connections to the point of collapsing the allegory. In such cases, the connections are unequivocal and it seems that, instead of allegory, another, more didactic, narrative strategy is at work. Much like the Puritan pulpit, in *Jericho*'s case the frequent references to and criticisms of popular culture, domestic politics, and foreign policy aim for much more than assurance and entertainment. What an understanding of *Jericho* as a jeremiad suggests is that alongside a conventional survival narrative (packaged with all of its traditional warnings and castigations of the society that led to its downfall), notions of family, community, and country are reinforced as reasons for their ultimate exceptionalism and salvation. Finally, *Jericho*'s role as a popular form would suggest that such frequent assertions about the contemporary state of the American republic are designed to transform both contemporary and, by extension, future conceptions of the political and social landscape. After all, it was the series's unofficial theme song, Five for Fighting's "World," that, in the show's pilot episode and throughout first-season commercials, asked, "What kind of world do you want?" *Jericho*, it seems, was a show that provided an answer.

As these examples have shown, the jeremiad remains a vibrant form. Ideas of national identity, community, and salvation (secular or spiritual) continue to be as central to the form and as relevant in the new century and its forms as they were in the seventeenth century. The analysis in following pages considers the extent to which contemporary popular forms are indebted to the jeremiad, how such a relationship

continues to shape American thought, and the promise and peril of an American discourse that continues to impress the notion of being exceptional upon its people.

End Notes

¹ Freedman explains: “In this understanding, a genre is not a classification but an element or, better still, a tendency that, in combination with other relatively autonomous generic elements or tendencies, is active to a greater or lesser degree within a literary text that is itself understood as a complexly structured totality. In other words: a text is not filed under a generic category; instead, a generic tendency is something that happens within a text” (20).

² Elliot, owing a great deal to Bercovitch, sums up the seemingly contradictory nature of the ritualistic aspect of the election sermon: “Overall, the jeremiads had a complicated, seemingly contradictory, communal function. On the one hand, they were designed to awaken a lethargic people. On the other hand, in their repetitive and ritualistic nature, they functioned as a form of reassurance, reinscribing proof that the saints were still a coherent body who ruled New England in covenant with God under His sometimes chastising and yet ultimately protective hand” (104).

³ What this meant, according to Madsen, was that Separatists “intended to make a permanent and lasting colony in the New World rather than a temporary refuge from the difficulties and persecutions they had endured in Europe” (16). “Bradford,” Madsen explains, “had no intention of developing a perfecting reformed church, to be a model to the imperfectly reformed churches of England” (16).

⁴ Beyond the show’s post-nuclear focus, connections to the jeremiad tradition appear even as immediately as in the show’s title: a clear reference to the Old Testament’s Book of Joshua and its narrative of the Israelite occupation of New Canaan.

⁵ One humorous example can be found in the fact that the website created for the fictional Jennings and Rall (<http://www.jenningsandrall.com>), as a web-based promotion for the show, looks nearly identical to Halliburton’s official site (<http://www.halliburton.com/>).

CHAPTER TWO

“PEACEFUL” METHODS: SCIENCE FICTION AND THE CULTURAL COLD WAR

In the previous chapter, I explored the powerful influence of the American Jeremiad, not only at the nation’s inception (as the colonists attempted to theorize a new national identity that would explain their place in the world), but also the continuing influence of the form in contemporary American culture and letters. The fundamental argument was that the rhetoric of the jeremiad was characterized by a polemic employed to emphasize a heavenly covenant and, most importantly, the resounding assertion of an American exceptionalism. However, Bercovitch’s argument for the persistence of this form does not include any discussion of American literature after the nineteenth century and, specifically, American popular forms and culture. It is precisely the jeremiad’s historical role as a popular form that connects it, I argue, with some of the most dynamic expressions of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

It is the argument of the following pages that the jeremiad’s polemical and covenant/exceptionalism rhetoric characterizes popular texts from the period of the twentieth century known popularly as the Cold War era. These texts are significant because they, like their seventeenth century forebears, participate in the articulation and construction of strong national and cultural narratives aimed at promoting or revising a national identity at a time when America and the Soviet Union were grappling over how the world would perceive American culture. It is the assertion of this chapter that, while the CIA conducted a global cultural campaign designed to convince the world’s intellectuals of America’s cultural and artistic merit, popular texts (usually American science fiction) participated alongside, though not in overt collaboration, in a domestic effort at articulating Cold War cultural narratives and, ultimately, asserting America’s exceptionalism.

At the end of Robert Heinlein's *The Puppet Masters*, his novel of alien invasion recognized universally by scholars as a Cold War allegory, the main character, Sam, is forced to reconsider their new understanding of the cosmos. "If Man wants to be top dog- or even a respected neighbor-" says Sam, "he'll have to fight for it"(338). The following is a examination of how the American jeremiad was drafted to do so.

The CIA and the Cultural Cold War

The winter of 1947 was an exceptionally hard one for post-war Europe. The unrelenting cold, wind, and snow combined with the misery, destruction, and poverty that characterized the first months following the war's end. Francis Saunders, in her influential history of the cultural Cold War, tells of ice floes running to the mouth of the Thames, trains carrying food supplies freezing to their tracks, and coal barges headed for Paris becoming ice-bound (7). Upon seeing Paris, devastated and prostrate, philosopher Isaiah Berlin described it as "empty and hollow and dead, like an exquisite corpse" (qtd. in Saunders 7).

"There really is no food," noted the wife of an American diplomat in Paris, "except for people who can afford the black market and not much for them" (qtd. in Saunders 9). In Britain, unemployment was rampant: rising by one million in just two months (7). By 1947, both the Tiergarten park and the Grunewald had been hacked down to stumps after an emergency measure allotted each family a tree for heating (8). All across Europe, Saunders notes, basic services (water, sewage, etc) collapsed, food supplies dwindled, and coal reserves reached an all time low (7). Indeed, Europe's economic trouble was brought into sharp relief for American GIs, who quickly found that a carton of cigarettes, purchased for fifty cents at an American base, could fetch roughly eighteen hundred Reichsmarks on the black market or one hundred and eighty dollars at the legal exchange rate (8). "For four cartons," Saunders points out, "you could hire a

German orchestra for the evening...or for twenty-four...acquire a 1939 Mercedes-Benz” (9).

While such an example may be amusing, it is set against stories of the misery and deprivation where men pounced on discarded cigarette butts (10), families lived in underground bunkers with no water or light, and children attempted to prostitute themselves to American GIs in exchange for chocolate (24). However, even at this early date, in the midst of such suffering and before the United States would set out on its bold Marshall plan to rehabilitate and secure Europe’s economy, the U.S. would, as the following anecdote illustrates, prepare for the looming ideological struggle with the Soviet Union.

On one of his first assignments, Michael Josselson, the CIA agent who would eventually lead the Congress of Cultural Freedom from 1950-1967, accidentally crashed his jeep into a Russian roadblock while driving through rainy weather on his way back to the Allied-controlled sector from Berlin. Suffering from severe cuts and bruises, Josselson was taken to a Russian military hospital where he was treated. Saunders characterizes it as one of history’s interesting ironies that the Russians, in treating Josselson, ended up saving “the man who was, for the next two decades, to do most to undermine their attempts at cultural hegemony” (18). As interesting as this irony is, what is more relevant is the objective of Josselson’s mission that day. Josselson and fellow agent Nicholas Nabokov (cousin to novelist Vladimir) were not tasked with retrieving sensitive government documents or high-value German scientists. On this day they were asked to retrieve thousands of costumes belonging to the former German State Opera safely housed during the war by the Nazis at the bottom of a salt mine outside of Berlin (but within the US occupation zone) (18). Saunders notes that the Deutsches Opernhaus Company was, at the time, considered the only serious rival to the Russian State Opera, and the costumes would help

provide a response to a highly successful performance of Gluck's *Orpheus* staged by the Russians in 1945 in the Admiralspalast (18).

The implications are startling. While Europeans were starving in the ruins of the last war, the Soviets and Americans were already posturing for a new one. While many did not have clothes to wear or shelter to keep them warm, American and Russian agents wrangled over who could offer them the best and highest in culture. Such efforts, one nearly leading to Josselson's death, signaled the importance of culture in the looming battle for the minds of the world.

Starting in 1947, the Central Intelligence Agency (born out of the wartime Office of Strategic Services) conducted an elaborate, well-funded, cultural propaganda campaign designed to frustrate and debunk the allure and promises of Communism in favor of American-styled democracy and democratic ideals. One of the major public organs of this covert effort was the Congress for Cultural Freedom. Through the auspices of private patronage, the CCF served as a front organization for the CIA's efforts to "nudge the intelligentsia of western Europe away from its lingering fascination with Marxism...towards a view more accommodating of 'the American way'" (Saunders 1). It is an important distinction that the CIA's kulturkampf program was, at its core, aimed primarily at persuading intellectuals across Europe (where the first battle lines in the new Cold War were being drawn) as opposed to attempting to persuade or influence culture more generally. In fact, one influential CIA agent, Tom Braden, joked that it could be considered "the battle for Picasso's mind" (qtd in Wilford 102). Its aim was to build "a consortium," says Saunders, "whose double task it was to inoculate the world against the contagion of Communism, and to ease the passage of American foreign policy interests abroad" (2). Much of this consortium was made up of former radicals and leftists who had become disillusioned with Marxism and Communism after seeing evidence of Stalin's totalitarianism (2). With the Cold

War having been defined as a battle for men's minds, this consortium set about waging its battles from a stockpile of journals, books, conferences, seminars, art exhibitions, concerts, and awards (2).

When the CCF was outed in 1967, it had already accumulated a list of considerable achievements on its Cold War front. The organization sprawled across the globe, having offices in over thirty-five countries. It published over twenty prestige magazines (including soft patronage to literary quarterlies such as *Partisan Review*) (Wilford 103). It held various art exhibitions such as the controversial "Masterpieces of the Twentieth Century" in Paris in 1952. In addition to the organization of several high-profile international conferences, various musicians and artists were rewarded with prizes and public performances (1). In its heyday the CCF's reach in the intellectual community was broad and its influence deep. "Whether they liked it or not, whether they knew it or not," Saunders explains, "there were few writers, poets, artists, historians, scientists or critics in post-war Europe whose names were not in some way linked to this covert enterprise" (2).

The cultivation of such influence was seen as a necessity because, in 1947, the Soviets had a head start. After all, between 1946 and 1948 Bulgaria and Romania quickly followed Poland in setting up servile, pro-Soviet governments (Walker 33). In Italy and France there were rumors of Communist coups d'état and, eventually, actual food strikes staged to protest the Marshall Plan (17). Saunders describes America as being at a disadvantage in waging a cultural war. Shortly after the war's end, the Soviets established (and in some cases, reestablished) a vast network of fronts among labor unions, women's movements, youth groups, cultural institutions, the press, and the publishing industry (17). America, she emphasizes, "was a virgin in the practice of international Kulturkampf" (17). Together, argues Wilford, these Soviet fronts were

working to portray the United States as “a cultural wasteland, its few artists treated as mere ornaments by its capitalist class, and its workers cretinized by the idiotic products of its culture industries” (100). Meanwhile, the Soviet Union, with its cinema, theater, dance, art, music, and literature, was put forward as the “true heir of the European Enlightenment” (100).

However, the American intelligence community quickly came to understand the Soviets’ unconventional tactics, as well as the nature of the conflict in which it found itself. In one report presented to General “Wild Bill” Donovan (the Chief of the Office of Strategic Services), an intelligence analyst, Gregory Bateson (who, after his service in the OSS, would later become a leading anthropologist of his generation), characterized the struggle in the following way:

The invention of the atomic bomb will cause a shift in balance between “peaceful” and “warlike” methods of exerting international pressure...And we must expect a very marked increase in the importance of “peaceful” methods. Our enemies will be even freer than [ever] to propagandize, subvert, sabotage, and exert...pressures upon us, and we ourselves shall be more willing to bear these affronts and ourselves to indulge in such methods- in our eagerness to avoid at all costs the tragedy of open war; “peaceful” techniques will become more vital in times of pre-war softening up, actual overt war, and in times of post-war manipulation. (qtd in Saunders 17)

Bateson’s use of the phrase, “peaceful” methods, with its quotation marks emphasizing the irony of this new method of war fighting, captures, specifically, the complexity of the American culture campaign and, generally, the larger Cold War effort. It expresses an understanding of a new style of warfare, of coercion and pressure, that would take the place of open conflict in an era, even at this early hour, characterized by the creation and proliferation of weapons of mass

destruction. Saunders considers this understanding significant for its definition of the Cold War “as a psychological contest, of the manufacturing of consent by ‘peaceful’ methods, of the use of propaganda to erode hostile positions” (17). It seems that after the imposition of Soviet friendly governments in Eastern Europe and the discovery, by large numbers of western intellectuals, of the mass show trials and swelling gulags in Russia of the previous two decades (10), the Allies’ World War II consensus started to crack and the race for post-war influence (and eventual supremacy) had begun.

The overall aim of the American campaign was to counter the Soviet argument of America’s artistic depravity by “accusing the Russians of disregarding the inherent value of culture, of subjugating art to the dreary dictates of a totalitarian political ideology” (Wilford 101). Not only, the U.S. claimed, was the picture of America as a bastion of philistinism badly outdated, but, they asserted, America had become the very site of the most creative impulses in modern culture (as shown by the influence of Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot) (101). It should be noted that one of the major arguments in contention among scholars of the cultural Cold War is the extent to which the CIA’s emphasis and patronage of modernist art and literature artificially buoyed its place in the intellectual community and scholarly discourse. Saunders argues that the CIA’s influence did, in fact, have a large part in the promotion of some artists and forms (Jackson Pollack and Abstract Expressionism, for example) while Wilford, of the post-revisionist school of thought, paints a more complicated picture of the CIA’s efficacy in patronizing some forms and artists.¹

The Cold War began, as has been well noted, by a wholesale shift in attitude towards those the Americans had so recently fought. Shortly after war’s end, many of Hitler’s industrialists, scientists, administrators and high-ranking officers were reinstated by the Allies in

effort to keep Germany from collapsing (Saunders 11). While Germany's survival no doubt had geopolitical implications in the new struggle against the Soviets, what had started as an attempt to keep the country afloat, quickly morphed into a race to dominate various spheres within the cultural Cold War. Many are familiar, of course, with the efforts to bring Werner Von Braun and other German scientists to work for the United States. However, a less well-known example, and perhaps more relevant to story of America's cultural campaign, is the story of Herbert von Karajan. Karajan, who had frequently opened his concerts to the Nazi favorite "Horst Wessel Lied" and whose enemies referred to as "SS Colonel von Karajan," was quickly reinstated as the director of the Berlin Philharmonic: the orchestra which, in subsequent years, would be built up as the "symbolic bulwark against Soviet totalitarianism" (15). Karajan's reinstatement occurred at the same time that a overzealous denazification program instituted across Germany was characterized by ironies in which a janitor could be blacklisted, for example, for having swept the halls of the Reichs Chancellery (11). However, such efforts by the CIA went forward because, in this new Cold War, "someone," says Saunders, "had to wield the baton against the Soviets" (16).

Saunders uses the Karajan example to illustrate the moral complications posed by a "hit-and-miss" denazification program. She suggests that Josselson and Nabokov, who were at this point running the predecessor to the CIA's cultural campaign, were victims of a moral confusion when it came to judging an artist's involvement with the Nazi regime (16). "The need to create symbolic anti-communist rallying points," says Saunders, "introduced an urgent- and hidden-political imperative to clear those suspected of accomodating the Nazi regime" (16). This, she said, "produced a tolerance of suspected proximity to fascism if the subject could be put to use against Communism" (16).

Finally, it is important and relevant to note the culture and character of the CIA at the point of its inception. The ranks of the early agency were filled primarily by the historic American elite (Saunders 33). These were Ivy Leaguers, influential throughout America's boardrooms, academic institutions, newspapers and media, law firms, and government, who believed their mission was to "save western freedom from Communist darkness" (36). One officer, in those early days, even went so far as to compare the atmosphere of the early agency to an order of the Knights Templar (33). These early architects of the American intelligence and foreign policy community, men like Charles "Chip" Bohlen, George Kennan, and Isaiah Berlin, were "internationalist, abrasive, competitive [with] an unshakeable belief in their value system, and in their duty to offer it to others" (37). Saunders further describes them, or rather how they thought of themselves, as "the patricians of the modern age, the paladins of democracy...[whose] job it was to establish and then justify the post-war *pax Americana*" (37). Curiously, having sprung from a class reared in both Christian values and the duties of privilege, these men brought to the agency a belief in democracy but a wariness towards unchecked egalitarianism (36). They were, as Saunders succinctly puts it, "the elect who had not been elected" (36).²

In addition to an institutional culture heavily indebted to the rhetoric of election, the CIA, according to Wilford, was also very familiar with writing, literature, and the literary establishment. James Angleton, the longtime chief of the CIA's counterintelligence division, was the founding editor of a literary magazine at Yale, *Furioso*, was sometimes known among fellow agents by the codename "the Poet," and was a personal friend of Ezra Pound (100). One of his proteges, Cord Meyer, had edited the Yale *Lit* and had published several short stories in the *Atlantic Monthly* before joining the agency (100). While Deputy Chief, then Chief, of the International Organizations Division, Meyer recruited a number of poets and critics associated

with John Crowe Ransom's *Kenyon Review* (100). That these high-level agents in the CIA were involved in such literary interests is an interesting fact if one considers that these men would set out to direct a propaganda effort designed to "write" America for the international (and, specifically, intellectual) community.

However, the CIA's cultural campaign was primarily waged overseas, particularly in western Europe. Wilford remarks that it was a fundamental irony of the agency's efforts that anticommunist American intellectuals stood to gain less from its patronage than their uncommitted European colleagues (102). If the CIA's cultural Cold War was waged primarily outside of the United States, what was being done domestically? It is the argument of this essay that, while a dynamic cultural campaign was being waged across the Atlantic by organs of the US government, voluntary efforts at the same kind of cultural work sprung up spontaneously on the mainland in the nation's most popular forms. The rhetoric of the jeremiad became attached to these popular forms to explore issues impacting the American consciousness during the period. In these works, the characteristic polemical rhetoric and a revitalized belief in American exceptionalism (due, specifically, to America's post-war economic prowess and the fact of the atomic bomb) coincide with interrogations of Cold War/ mid-century American culture found in science fiction.

There are more than a few reasons why science fiction came to perform this function. Easily one of the most popular genres in the post-war period, science fiction, more than any other genre, came to embody America's post-war technological and scientific prominence. In fact, some suggest that science fiction was specifically poised, due to a tradition started well before the war, to discuss contemporary issues, such as the atomic bomb, that other, more mainstream genres found difficult. In his influential study on the effect of the atomic bomb on American

culture, *By the Bomb's Early Light*, Paul Boyer argues that the literary world exhibited an obvious discomfort with discourse about the bomb. Initially, he offers, "the literary response to the atomic bomb was, to say the least, muted" (246). "Some writers," he continues, "seemed almost deliberately to ignore it" (246). Boyer goes on to establish a tentativeness among authors whose hesitancy, he offers, suggests a breakdown in the "intensity of imagination- a recognition of the folly of too quickly trying to assimilate this monstrous novelty" (250). Boyer's reading suggests, then, a breakdown of language to describe not only the bomb, but the cultural effect of the bomb. Not so in science fiction, Boyer argues. Instead, he argues that the genre took up the charge "with alacrity" (257). Citing SF's significant tradition of rendering atomic war in its narratives even before 1945 (including the oft-cited anecdote concerning *Astounding Science Fiction* editor John W. Campbell Jr.'s visit from War Department officials after publishing a 1944 story describing the possible construction of an atomic bomb), Boyer characterizes SF as specifically poised and eager to render the kind of post-war (read specifically: post-Hiroshima/Nagasaki) reflection and social commentary that other mainstream genres resisted.

From a more theoretical standpoint, science fiction has long been a genre interested in critical analysis of culture. Again, Darko Suvin's influential definition of science fiction as cognitive estrangement suggests that the genre's defining function is the critical thought that necessarily must occur by the creation of an "imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment" (8). The estranging element, or the "novum" as Suvin has termed it (borrowing from Ernst Bloch), is an aesthetic element of the narrative that serves to pull the reader out of the empirical world. According to Suvin, the novum is akin to poetic metaphor and is a novelty that "is 'totalizing' in the sense that it entails a change of the whole universe of the tale" (64). "As a consequence," writes Suvin, "the essential tension of SF is one between the

readers, representing a certain number of types of Man of our times, and the encompassing and at least equipollent Unknown or Other introduced by the novum" (64). To say that the novum is something as concrete as, for example, a rocket-ship, would be to deflate the varying narrative possibilities of the estranging element:

Quantitatively, the postulated innovation can be of quite different degrees of magnitude, running from the minimum of one discrete new "invention" (gadget, technique, phenomenon, relationship) to the maximum of a setting (spatiotemporal locus), agent (main character or characters), and/ or relations basically new and unknown to the author's environment. (64)

According to Suvin, the novum must be the common denominator of the narrative in order for it to be called SF. The importance of this concept is in its emphasis on cognition. Suvin is acerbically critical of fiction absent of the cognitive element (read: fantasy). That is because, for Suvin, this interplay between the two is essential to how the genre functions in stimulating critical analysis. "Cognition," Suvin writes, "implies not only a reflecting of but also on reality" (10). Ultimately, Suvin's aims for the genre are political. Science fiction is, by nature, he argues, progressive and revolutionary. In such a way, this political aspect of cognitive estrangement is similar to the CIA's cultural program (utilizing art, literature, and music) which sees, as its aim, an ideal social arrangement, the *Pax Americana*, it has already articulated. This is different from Suvin's ideal in a number of ways. The politics, of course, are antithetical and Suvin's definition (and science fiction's function) suggests a process of imagination, reflection, and scientific rigor in order to arrive at the ideal. The CIA's cultural program suggests an ideal already articulated.

Finally, there is evidence that the popular culture industry voluntarily aided America's attempts at cultural hegemony. In fact, Wilford suggests that such efforts were perhaps, ironically, the most successful. "The truth was," Wilford explains, "that the great majority of foreigners derived their main impressions of the United States not from *Partisan Review*, the Museum of Modern Art, or the Boston Symphony Orchestra, but from American popular culture and, most of all, the slick, spectacular, mass entertainments of Hollywood" (116). Strangely enough, the industry to do the most to help the CIA's efforts, was the one least reliant on its financial support (and, thus, independent of its influence) (116). While this situation put the industry in a position to do the most harm to America's perception abroad, a strong tendency towards self-censorship (after many years of experience avoiding giving offense to domestic pressure groups) and the fact that the men who ran the studios were intensely patriotic and anti-communist, secured its place as an ally in America's cultural Cold War (117). For example, celebrities such as John Ford, John Wayne, and Cecil B. DeMille volunteered their services to groups like "Militant Liberty": a multi-agency propaganda campaign devised in 1954 that aimed to embed American-style democratic values in foreign cultures such as Central America, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia (117). In other cases, the industry portrayed the Army or Navy in a favorable light (117). In other rare instances, the industry collaborated with the CIA on various film projects. The most documented example of this collaboration is an animated version of George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1954) featuring an altered ending that made it, according to Wilford, more "positively anticommunist and possibly somewhat more favorable to the western powers" (119).

What we find is that popular culture in general from this period is replete with images and assertions of America's post-war prominence. One of the most entertaining examples of this

phenomenon is the appearance of the atomic bomb in films, television, and music of the period. The atomic bomb, after all, was becoming the great symbol of America's post-war technological, intellectual, and martial dominance. As such, it is within the realm of popular culture that these Cold War jeremiads are so prominent: in most cases marrying the warning rhetoric of nuclear annihilation with assertions of American exceptionalism (citing the Atomic bomb as evidence). In the burgeoning genre of science fiction film, which was enjoying some success due to advances in special effects, this tendency is perhaps most prominent. *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951), *Them!* (1954), and *War of the Worlds* (1957) are only a few examples of the many science fiction films that engage in this tradition. Even a film such as *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, which takes great pains to present its message as one of global concern (thus frustrating a reading of it as a film promoting American post-war exceptionalism), retains an unmistakable focus on American culture and a rather sanctimonious tone in its warnings of nuclear annihilation. Indeed, American popular culture is saturated with similar rhetoric.

Popular music from the period, for example, has seen a recent revival of interest for its emphasis on Cold War tropes (cashing in, it seems, on its camp value). Bill Haley & the Comets' "Thirteen Women (and Only One Man in Town)" is likely one of the most familiar songs of this genre. However, recent efforts by Cold War culture enthusiasts such as Jayne Loader & Kevin Rafferty (directors of the 1982 documentary *The Atomic Cafe*) and Bill Geerhart (editor of Conelrad.com) have uncovered a plethora of similarly themed songs. One collection, *Atomic Platters: Cold War Music from the Golden Age of Homeland Security*, runs the gamut from fear of Atomic annihilation (Civil Defense public service announcements), to concern over Communism ("Get that Communist Joe!" and Hank Williams's "No, No Joe"), and concern over Castro and Cuba ("Down in Havana" and "Hey Castro!") to the overt conflation between the

atomic bomb and America's ability to spread evangelical Christianity to the rest of the world ("Atomic Sermon," "Atom and Evil," "They Locked God Outside the Iron Curtain," "Jesus is God's Atom Bomb," and the subtle, "Jesus Hits Like an Atom Bomb"). However, it should be pointed out that the majority of these songs were attempting to ride the sudden popularity of all things atomic following the end of the war. Many, even the ones with seemingly serious subject matter, are overwhelmingly lighthearted and fun. A track titled "Atomic Nightmare," for example, is set to a calypso beat. The track's vocals playfully intone:

You're gonna run, run, run back where you come from,
I just heard from a little bird they're going to drop the atomic bomb.
Talk about a flying saucer streaking through the sky,
I'm not going to wait to find if they're stopping or going by,
I'm gonna run, run, run like a son of a gun,
I don't know where I'm going to go, but I'm really going to run!

While quite a departure from the tone of seventeenth century election sermons, I would argue that the playfulness that characterizes many of these tracks, this conflation of fear, anxiety, and confidence can be explained in terms of the jeremiad's dual rhetoric of warning and exceptionalism.

Robert A. Heinlein and the Cultural Cold War: Epistemology and Exceptionalism

In an essay written the same year as *Starship Troopers*, Robert A. Heinlein argued for a definition of science fiction as "realistic speculation about possible future events, based solidly on adequate knowledge of the real world, past and present, and on a thorough understanding of the nature and significance of the scientific method" ("Science Fiction: Its Nature, Faults and Virtues" 28). The genre's focus, he continued, should be "preparing our youngsters to be mature

citizens of the Galaxy" (with the phrase "citizens of the galaxy" significant here because Heinlein later uses it as the title of his most popular juvenile novel) (61). Heinlein's definition is striking for its characterization of the galaxy and the role of humanity within it. In other words, the mysteries of space exploration, in this configuration, are not very mysterious. Heinlein's definition suggests a particular, positivistic way of seeing the empirical world, the promises and limitations of knowledge, and the agency humanity has in its journey outward from Earth. Finally, Heinlein's definition domesticates scientific speculation, the role the genre plays in imagining the future, and the expectations of a generation coming to maturity during the Cold War. By capturing contemporary anxieties and by asserting cultural narratives as a means of transcending them, Heinlein's text participates in the jeremiad tradition in ways entirely consistent with his work's positivism and his Cold War politics. Unlike traditional jeremiads, his work's insistence on his culture's exceptionalism does not spring from any sort of spiritual belief, but from an intensely nationalistic belief in his culture's ingenuity, toughness, and prowess.

Although the role of the political in Heinlein's fiction has received a great deal of attention among scholars and while, to a lesser extent, others have considered the role of epistemology in his work, no one has attempted to explain the political as a function of the epistemological positivism that characterizes Heinlein's fiction.³ A close analysis of Heinlein's 1951 novel *The Puppet Masters* and his Hugo award-winning 1956 novel *Double Star*, as well as the Scribner juveniles published between 1947-1959, reveals that these much discussed political tendencies result from the conspicuous epistemological positivism characteristic to Heinlein's work during the Cold War. These novels present a fictional world entirely accessible and knowable to its protagonists, where contact with aliens is, if not routine, then uncomfortably unhindered (as in the case of parasitic aliens of *The Puppet Masters*). Ultimately, these

narratives, in their expressed anxiety over duplicity, paranoia, and conformity, anticipate a containment culture that was to dominate the global political landscape until the end of the twentieth century. Indeed, Heinlein's positivism is best explained as a response to the Cold War aimed at instructing as much as entertaining.

Because the Cold War was a sprawling conflict for ideological, cultural, and martial supremacy that consumed nearly half of the twentieth century, it is necessary in a discussion of its influence on fiction, to define precisely how Heinlein's works can be thought of as Cold War texts. In *Containment Culture*, Alan Nadel argues that the policy of containment had significant effects on domestic American life. It would result, he says, "in a rhetorical strategy that functioned to foreclose dissent, preempt dialogue, and preclude contradiction" (14). This would primarily take the form of cultural narratives that would serve to "unify, codify, and contain—perhaps *intimidate*...the personal narratives of its population" (4). What makes the Cold War (and he specifies its peak as 1946-1964) unique, according to Nadel, was "the general acceptance...of a relatively small set of narratives by a relatively large portion of the population" (4). Nadel highlights the virtue of conformity as one of the primary national narratives. He argues that the Cold War was a period in which conformity "became a positive value in and of itself" (4). What George Kennan's famous "containment" essay did, according to Nadel, was to distinguish the Cold War narrative primarily as a battle between the Other and the Same (5). He references the political circumstances of the 1950s and 1960s as an effort at definition through, what he calls, a search for phonies:

Constantly legislation, hearings, speeches, and editorials warned Americans to be suspicious of phonies, wary of associates, circumspect about their past, and cautious about their speech. A new mode of behavior was necessary, the

president's commission noted, because America was now confronted with organizations that valorized duplicity[...]. (74)

Such a culture bred paranoia and suspicion, notes Nadel, and, in his resulting discussion of J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, he argues that such an emphasis manifested itself in the text in the form of statements attesting to the narrator's truthfulness ("If you really want to know the truth," "I really do," "I'll admit," etc). Nadel's reading of Salinger's novel leads naturally into the historical fact of the pervasive presence of loyalty oaths in Cold War America. However, Nadel is apt to point out that such loyalty oaths, inadequate by their nature, led to a natural duplicity. "The 'true' test of loyalty," he notes, "became betrayal" (78). Indeed, congressional hearings such as the HUAC only emphasized that an informer's willingness to name names conflated betrayal and truthfulness (78). As will be discussed shortly, one of the outcomes of this inherent duplicity was an anxiety over America's youth coming to maturity in such a culture. Heinlein's fiction of this period is remarkable specifically for its representation and negotiation of this fundamental aspect of the Cold War and for its worldview, determined by epistemology, that gave guidance and answers to a young SF reading audience.

It has become commonplace to think of Heinlein as a product of American culture and as one of its major guiding voices. H. Bruce Franklin calls Heinlein "a very representative American" and argues that "to understand the phenomenon of Robert Heinlein is finally to understand the culture that is the matrix for ourselves" (6). Indeed, Franklin sees this reflexivity as the defining characteristic of Heinlein's work (Franklin marks 1947-1959 as Heinlein's most productive burst) and sees Heinlein's science fiction "inseparably intertwined with the major historical events that define the late Depression, the Truman-Eisenhower years, the 1960s, the 1970s, and perhaps the 1980s" (15). To put it another way, Heinlein's work is both product of

and participant in the Cold War. Texts such as *Double Star* and *The Puppet Masters* rendered the inherent duplicity of the age that Nadel described in a confidence/anxiety dichotomy while they, reflexively, influenced perceptions of the Cold War. Franklin notes that the events of the late 1950s (specifically the launch of Sputnik in 1957) had a profound effect on Heinlein's fiction in its inscription of two conflicting narratives of America's view of its present and future (66). "On one hand," Franklin writes, "America's powers seemed invulnerable and its future... as boundless as space" (66). However, he continues, "the combined force of the Soviet Union and the anti-imperialist revolutionary movements in Asia, Africa, and Latin America threatened the very existence of a society based on worldwide economic and military hegemony" (66). Therefore, in understanding Heinlein as a Cold War figure, it should be noted that it is possible for Heinlein (and his mouthpiece characters) to be both the confident champion of personal liberties and freedom and the critic of Soviet-style collectivism, alongside narratives that render possible threats to American power. This is not to suggest that Heinlein is an uncomplicated Cold War partisan. A strong strain of mid-century progressivism runs through Heinlein's fiction. In characters that claim to be virulent anti-racist and the use of non-white protagonists (such as in Juan Rico in *Starship Troopers*), Heinlein shows a willingness to articulate and criticize American culture's shortcomings. In fact, by the time Heinlein publishes *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress* in 1966, arguably his finest novel, one could argue that this tendency towards cultural critique (particularly from his increasingly libertarian view) has become the defining characteristic of his work. Unlike his earlier novels, *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress* admittedly does not seem to promote the same Cold War cultural narratives. However, this jeremiad strain, Heinlein's cautionary rhetoric packaged with a strong sense of American exceptionalism (one can conjure plenty of examples in which *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress* is wrapped in the flag, so

to speak) still persists in the later novel. In that novel, perhaps, it is packaged as a response to the democratic presidential administrations of Kennedy and Johnson and, particularly, Johnson's Great Society programs. Certainly that novel's battle cry, "There ain't no such thing as a free lunch," usually associated with Milton Friedman, can be read in this way. Nowhere is Heinlein's dynamism clearer than in his 1951 novel *The Puppet Masters*, in which the country, indeed the world, is invaded by back-hugging, mind-controlling parasites. However, it is the solution (the maturation into the Heinleinian hero) that Heinlein proposes to conquer such a threat that, while instructive to youngsters trying to negotiate post-war American culture, was born out of a political framework that was dependent on a positivist epistemology.

Perhaps Heinlein's epistemological stance is best clarified when it is considered in dialogue with the epistemological pessimism of a major SF author outside of the American/western tradition: Stanislaw Lem. This is not to suggest that simply because Lem wrote and published his work from Soviet-controlled Poland that he is a Soviet writer (or that these two authors are representative of the American-Soviet division). Instead, Lem is considered because epistemology is so clearly the focus of *Solaris* and because Lem is a major SF writer outside of the American tradition in which Heinlein is so invested. Indeed, Lem directly challenges this positivism in his exhaustive romp through the canon of Solaristics in his 1961 novel *Solaris* (not published into English until 1970). Lem's novel follows the efforts of a team of scientists, the most recent generation of what we learn is a long-running effort, to communicate with the planet Solaris's only sentient lifeform, the massive ocean covering the entirety of the planet's surface. Lem's novel focuses on their failure, and the failures of their predecessors, in order to throw into question the very endeavor of alien contact. The novel specifically concerns the efforts of Kris Kelvin, psychologist tasked with understanding and communicating with Solaris. As the novel

progresses, his inability to communicate with Solaris is juxtaposed with what we have come to know of the failure of his marriage to Rheya (culminating in her suicide before his mission on Solaris). Throughout the novel, the scientists struggle to understand the nature of the creatures (copies of people the scientists knew on Earth) that the ocean manifests for them. For Kelvin, Solaris copies Rheya and this only increases Kelvin's confusion and consternation. Is Solaris trying to torment him, as he comes to believe at one point in the novel? Is this a sort of compassionate gesture? Or is it simply meaningless, having merely manifested the first image it encountered in scanning his mind while asleep? In the well-known scene of the novel, Kelvin sits in a small library on the station and recaps the major schools of thought from the last hundred years of scholarship. At last coming to the current state of impasse in Solaristics he admits that "gradually, in scientific circles, the 'Solaris Affair' came to be regarded as a lost cause" (23). He considers the idea, most often held by the younger scientists in the field, that Solaris has become "the touchstone of individual values" (23). "All things considered" Kelvin recounts, "it was essentially a test of ourselves, of the limitations of human knowledge" (23). Here, Sartorius's oft-cited assertion emphasizes Lem's stance:

We think of ourselves as Knights of the Holy Contact. This is another lie. We are only seeking Man. We have no need of other worlds. We need mirrors. We don't know what to do with other worlds. A single world, our own, suffices us; but we can't accept it for what it is. We are searching for an ideal image of our own world. (72)

Indeed, others, including Lem, have remarked upon this epistemological pessimism as one of the defining characteristics of his work. One scholar succinctly argues that "Lem's novels... demonstrate his disbelief in the existence of a common pattern of intelligent behavior of which

human reason would be a typical and necessary exemplar (Swirski). In an interview, Lem agreed, arguing that his fiction could be unified by such epistemological pessimism:

Their common denominator is my conviction that contact with, or any form of federation of, extraterrestrial forms of intelligence is not possible. This owes to the almost limitless diversity and distribution of evolutionary paths pursued by different civilizations. (Swirski)

However, as other scholars have noted, this is not just pessimism for its own sake. Carl Freedman reads Lem's interrogation of knowledge and exploration not as "epistemologically nihilistic relativism...but in order to enforce an authentically critical view of scientific rigor in all its complexity" (99). Lem, according to Freedman, exposes and frustrates the precritical desire for certainty and finality in favor of a scientific progress that "consists more in the provisional elimination of unworkable hypotheses and the evolving consideration of central problems from a variety of angles than in any arrival at final resolutions" (100). Therefore, what Lem's epistemological stance accomplishes is the estrangement of our conceptualization of scientific inquiry. Inversely, Heinlein, by virtue of his definition of SF based on a knowledge of the scientific method, sees our understanding of scientific inquiry as fixed and as the starting point for our understanding of the universe. A similar point is made by George Slusser, who sees the function of cognition in Heinlein's fiction as the opposite of Lem's. "If [Heinlein's] SF recognizes the paradoxes of cognition," Slusser writes, "it is to manipulate them as a means of making the phenomenal world obey the individual's deepest desires" (9). He concludes that "the alien encounter, for Heinlein, does not require dissection and disintegration of self; it is rather the chance to impose self on world..." (9). Such a relationship between the self and the world, engendered by Heinlein's epistemology, will be significant in the upcoming discussion of

Starship Troopers. What this dialogue between Heinlein and Lem's fiction illustrates is that, unlike Lem's emphasis on inquiry and the excruciating dilemmas of cognition, Heinlein's positivism is defined by its pragmatic attempt to find a solution to the duplicity, anxiety, and paranoia characteristic of American Cold War culture. This dialogue is far from the only instance when epistemology intersects with the Cold War. What is interesting is that it occurs at the same time that C.P. Snow's polemic, *The Two Cultures*, questioned the epistemological split between academic cultures in western society: "Literary intellectuals at one pole- at the other scientists...between the two a gulf of mutual incomprehension-sometimes...hostility and dislike, but most of all lack of understanding" (4). Allen Thiher explains that Snow's criticism of western education struck a resonant chord when it was published in 1959 because "the Western powers perceived themselves at a critical historical turning point in their competition with the Soviet Union" (6). After Sputnik, Thiher concludes, "many believed that defects in Anglo-American scientific education had somehow created deficiencies, if not actually allowing Russian superiority, in areas that could endanger the West" (6). If, in other words, Lem's fiction is about raising questions, Heinlein's is about providing answers.

Since, as Franklin has noted, the period between 1947 and 1959 in Heinlein's fiction was characterized by his interest in writing for young people, evidence suggests that those answers were intended for America's youth. During this period two minor novellas (*Nothing Ever Happens on the Moon* and *Satellite Scout*) were serialized in *Boys' Life*, the official magazine of the Boy Scouts of America, in addition to the twelve well-known novels in the Scribner's juvenile series: *Rocket Ship Galileo* (1947), *Space Cadet* (1948), *Red Planet* (1949), *Farmer in the Sky* (1950), *Between Planets* (1951), *The Rolling Stones* (1952), *Starman Jones* (1953), *The Star Beast* (1954), *Tunnel in the Sky* (1955), *Time for the Stars* (1956), *Citizen of the Galaxy*

(1957), and *Have Space Suit- Will Travel* (1958). It is during this period that *The Puppet Masters* and *Double Star* are both published.

The Puppet Masters, Heinlein's 1951 novel of alien invasion, follows three agents, Sam, Mary, and the Old Man, of the secret government agency, the Section, as they defend the United States from the parasitic creatures. The novel opens with the agents traveling to Iowa to investigate the crash landing of a flying saucer. They soon realize the town has been taken over by the "slugs," creatures that can attach themselves to a human being's back and control his or her thoughts and actions, and as the novel goes on, more and more of the United States is lost to their control. Although each one of the main characters is, at different times in the novel, captured by the slugs, it is Sam who is captured for the longest time and whose experience Heinlein chooses to narrate. He is eventually rescued and, through the course of the novel, succeeds his father, the Old Man (whose name we later learn is Andrew) as the leader of the Section. As the novel ends, the slugs have been defeated on Earth (through Sam's timely use of biological warfare, the "nine-day fever") and Sam, with Mary as his wife, leads an expedition to strike the slugs on their home moon, Titan. The novel's curious final lines promise, "Puppet masters—the free men are coming to kill you! *Death and Destruction!*" (340).

Double Star, Heinlein's 1956 update of Hope's *The Prisoner of Zenda*, follows actor Lorenzo Smythe, who has been hired to impersonate the recently kidnapped leader of the expansionist coalition, John Joseph Bonforte. Smythe, as Bonforte, negotiates an alliance with the Martians, continues to conduct Bonforte's political affairs until he is rescued, and is eventually elected to become the Supreme Minister. Ultimately, when the real Bonforte dies due to a drug overdose resulting from his captivity, Smythe chooses to continue playing Bonforte because if he does not, he is told, "all that he lived for- and died for- will fall apart" (237). In the

final section of the novel, some twenty-five years later, Smythe has played Bonforte for so long that he has become Bonforte in thought and deed.

While not part of the juvenile series, per se, these texts share many of the elements that characterize those works. For example, while Sam Cavanaugh in *The Puppet Masters* and Lorenzo Smythe in *Double Star* are not technically boys making their passage into becoming men, as Bruce Franklin has described the juvenile stories, these are both stories of maturation into the typical Heinlein hero. In the case of Sam Cavanaugh this point was most recently argued in Christopher Lockett's essay about domesticity in *The Puppet Masters*. Interestingly enough, Heinlein remarked once that his juvenile fiction was distinguished from his adult fiction only in that "younger readers relish tough ideas they have to chew and don't mind big words" (qtd in Franklin 74). This lack of difference between juvenile and adult fiction is precisely the point for Franklin, who offers that the story of the juvenile space epic is a stand-in for Heinlein's version of the human epic, "best symbolized in the lives of children becoming adults as they grow into a role in the galaxy" (93). Since these works were published between 1947 and 1959, it's hard to imagine that such a role was not influenced by Cold War culture.

In fact, other scholars have discussed the cultural work Heinlein and others were doing through science fiction during the 1950s. Robert Chapman argues that Heinlein specifically uses the frontier trope and its idolization of the violent hero to address 1950s America's concern with juvenile delinquency (40). A marked increase in teenage involvement with police, greater interaction with drugs, sex, and violence, and publication of various lurid exposés on the younger generation, Chapman explains, led to various approaches to address such societal concerns. Rev. Billy Graham, for example, formed the "Youth for Christ" movement to provide, he argued, "the much needed answer to juvenile delinquency and communism among the young people of

America" (qtd in Chapman 40). It is interesting how easily Graham conflates those two concerns, having once argued that "the greatest enemy we have ever known [is] communism" (qtd. in Chapman 39). Graham may have had his pulpit but Heinlein had his fiction. Chapman argues that Heinlein hoped to inculcate the frontier values and pioneer spirit of hard work and self-reliance into his readership by using the frequent trope of the "spoiled youngster achieving true manhood by accidentally confronting the unknown wilderness" (40). Chapman traces this trope through Heinlein's *Between Planets* (1951), *Tunnel in the Sky* (1955), and *Time for the Stars* (1956). The narrator's explanation in *Between Planets* that "Those who learned it lived; those who did not died," recalls the appearance of the social Darwinism characteristic to Heinlein's work. In these texts a character's maturation is contingent upon his ability to negotiate some unknown world or situation. In other words, epistemology is central to the story. It is indeed a positivist statement when a character achieves hero status upon his ability to conquer the unknown world or situation.

This is precisely what occurs in both *The Puppet Masters* and *Double Star*. Sam Cavanaugh and Lorenzo Smythe both achieve maturity and respectability after showing that they can negotiate and control seemingly overwhelming situations. The slug invasion that threatens Earth in *The Puppet Masters* is repelled ultimately by Sam's leadership and, most importantly for Heinlein, his rational thinking and organizational skills in the administering of the nine-day fever. Perhaps Lorenzo Smythe provides the most telling example of the intended effect of Heinlein's fiction. The situation thrust upon him is so overwhelming, leader of the political coalition soon to control the imperial government, that Smythe literally becomes another man in the process. The long hours of studying the speeches, writing, and videos of John Joseph Bonforte (whose surname Bruce Franklin reminds us translates tellingly to Goodstrong), along

with his preparation at the hands of friends Dak and Penny, literally transform Smythe to the point that in the last chapter, looking back on a manuscript he had written twenty-five years earlier, Smythe/Bonforte remarks: "I have trouble realizing that I was ever he" (241). Smythe's success, purchased by his hard work, is contrasted with the situation that arises when the group considers Bill, who until that time had been a speechwriter and member of the trusted group, for an appointment to assemblyman. Ultimately it is decided that Bill will not receive the appointment since the real Bonforte passed him up in a previous term. Bill's vain attempt to gain retribution by exposing Smythe's identity to the media essentially renders him the novel's only substantial villain. However, it is important to point out that the novel condemns him primarily because Bill expects something for nothing. The contrast between Bill's false sense of entitlement and Smythe's noble transformation through an ethic of hard work provides the novel's only clear morality and would seemingly have been constructed as a model to address the concerns articulated by many in 1950s America.

Without a doubt, Heinlein's most imposing answer is the way this positivism affects the issue of alien contact. Here, the contrast with Lem's *Solaris* is illustrative. Heinlein's fiction consistently presents alien contact as understandable, knowable, and, in later novels such as *Starship Troopers*, an opportunity for conquest. In this sense, *Double Star* most resembles the optimism for alien contact that characterizes the juvenile works. Franklin notes that while the juvenile texts recognize that we may have to fight against some hostile life forms, Heinlein's juvenile fiction "consistently attacks xenophobia and dramatizes respect—and even love—for the kinds of beings we may find in space" (100). That is certainly the case with *Double Star*. Smythe's induction into the Martian nest comes after he has been able, via Dr. Capek's hypnosis, to move past his own racist attitudes toward Martians. While the reliance on hypnosis comes off

as a gimmick, the emphasis here, with Smythe smelling Penny's perfume "Jungle Lust" instead of the Martian smell that had previously nauseated him, is the optimism that technology and knowledge will eventually provide a snap-of-the-fingers solution to racism. Furthermore, the complicated Martian ceremony that Smythe must complete and the Martian life wand that he carries into his audience with the emperor are symbolic of the kind of multicultural consensus Bonforte's political party is attempting to forge. Finally, Bonforte's Expansionist Party, in its formulation by Heinlein, attempts to carry all of the good from libertarian political philosophy while shedding the negative aspects of imperialism. In the novel, the Expansionists are, after all, the alternative to the racist, Earth-centric Humanity Party and, so, Heinlein begins with a statement against racism. Bonforte, Smythe tells the reader, "kept harping on the notion that the human race must never again make the mistakes that the white subrace had made in Africa and Asia" (158). Ultimately, the party's main tenet is a belief in universal values that unite Martians and men. We all play by the same rules, Heinlein seems to suggest, and if we do not, "some better race would slap [us] down for double-dealing" (162). "The price of expansion," explains Heinlein, "was virtue" (162). Such a formulation is tenuous at best. Patrick Parrinder explains how Heinlein attempts to distinguish expansionism from exploitative imperialism. Parrinder notes that "the libertarian ideal...presupposes that there is within humanity an infinite but frustrated potential for successful experimentation and self-realization" (85). "The liberationist," continues Parrinder, "is committed to the faith that self-realization is necessarily benign rather than destructive in its social effects" (85). Here, one can see a connection to a major criticism of the effects of jeremiad on American culture, particularly that of the form's assertion of an American exceptionalism driving foreign policy. Though the CIA's efforts in this regard were highlighted in the earlier part of the chapter, a recent example of this situation can be found in

the problematic notion of spreading democracy to historically undemocratic parts of the world. The primary criticism of such efforts is, of course, that they constitute a form of imperialistic expansionism. This is distinguished from the way expansionism is termed by Heinlein during the Cold War period. Expansionism, such thinking goes, is benign in its ability to spread freedom, rights, etc. to those subsumed. Ultimately, underlying this formation is a strong statement that the human experience is transferable to alien worlds and cultures.

But when the Titan slugs come to Earth, as in *The Puppet Masters*, readers are presented with the same situation in reverse. Their "expansion" is our "invasion" and the high ideals they promise humanity, "peace...contentment...and the joy of surrender" (later to be corrected by Sam to "nirvana") are rejected immediately in an overt anti-communist statement by the Old Man. "Me and my kind...have often been offered that bargain," the Old Man says after spitting on the floor, "it never worked out worth a damn" (102). Regardless of the bargain offered, the scene emphasizes that contact is possible to the point that the two species are able to converse with the same ease of Sam talking with his father. The point is further strengthened by the way that the aliens interface with humans. At first Sam compares the connection to the relationship between a rider and a horse: "as a 'high school' horse gets his orders, responds to them instantly, and is ready for the next signal from his rider" (70). Later, after being separated from the slug, Sam revises his description in much more intimate terms: "An instruction came at once- or, I made a decision, for the words mean the same; I tell you there was no conflict between my master and me; we were one" (100).

Of course, Sam's description, in both cases, smacks of homoeroticism. In other places Sam frequently refers to the slug as his "rider" or "master." When he is recaptured by the Section and is recovering, Sam realizes that the Old Man is treating him "warmly and affectionately...as

if," Sam says, "I were a girl" (88). Indeed, Sam's efforts throughout the rest of the novel can be read as his attempt to reclaim his masculinity. Christopher Lockett, for example, reads Sam's actions throughout the novel as a journey toward "the heteronormativity of community, family, and responsibility" (45). Seen within the context of Cold War culture, this rejection of homoeroticism coincides with the frequent conflation during the Cold War of communism with homosexuality. As Robert Corber notes, "homosexuals and lesbians were thought to threaten national security not only because they were emotionally unstable and susceptible to blackmail but also because they might convert heterosexuals to their 'perverted' practices by seducing them" (qtd. in Jacobson and Gonzalez 153). Increasingly during the 1950s, texts and films would exploit this conflation of homosexuality and communism. Just as in *The Puppet Masters*, this coding of communist/homosexual was just part of a larger fear of the effect of the Cold War on the American family. Indeed, in many texts and films during this period the family is rendered as both the site of possible communist corruption and the last, best hope against it. Lockett's point, in seeing the novel as Sam's journey towards a championed heterosexual normalcy, is valuable in understanding Heinlein's move in invoking a typical Cold War peril so that his protagonist can negotiate and conquer it.

Indeed, Heinlein's characterization of the slugs as communists/homosexuals coincides with Heinlein's overt allegorization of the slugs as communist invasion. The novel does not make it as far as the second paragraph before Heinlein invokes and denigrates the Soviets. Other scholars have remarked on the transparency of the allegory. Franklin cites, for example, Heinlein's tendency to point out the allegory at intervals throughout the novel (99). Lockett suggests that Heinlein's heavy-handedness collapses the allegory, thus rendering the association unequivocal to the point of signaling a didactic narrative strategy (46). Such a move would

suggest that Sam's journey toward maturity is also the reader's. After being given the chance to kill the slug that controlled him, Sam, having done the rational thing, deciding to keep it alive for research, turns to his father "feeling warm and relaxed, as if I had just killed a man or had a woman" (91). Realizing that his father has orchestrated the moment, Sam asks, "How does it feel to be a puppet master?" (92). His response is significant. "Not me," the Old Man says, "the most I ever do is to lead a man on the path he wants to follow" (92).

What makes Heinlein's fiction dynamic as it promotes this cultural narrative to conform is the way that it registers the inherent duplicity in such a message and then dismisses it. Schedule Sun Tan, the American government's response to the invasion that requires near nudity of its citizens, is consistently seen as a good idea, one, we are told, that even prevents vigilantes from reaping havoc and physical violence on clothed citizens. To be clothed, to differentiate oneself from the group, is to have something to hide. The dilemma that arises in the novel is identical to that which plagued 1950s America: the effort to conform and lose autonomy is done precisely to differentiate oneself from a Soviet society that demands conformity and loss of autonomy. Heinlein seems to have recognized the dilemma and packaged his response as a kind of gesturing at the loss of some trivial personal liberties. Sam says, "Conceded... things never go back quite to what they were before" (321). At the same time, Heinlein attaches this gesture to his frequent trope of personal choice and responsibility. Colonel Kelly replies, "as long as there exists a possibility that a slug is alive the polite man must be willing to bare his entire body on request- or risk getting shot" (321).⁴ That is what is demanded, suggests Heinlein, in a world where "titans are trickier and more prolific than rats" (322).

Heinlein would return to this dilemma in *Double Star*. In the novel, authenticity and deception are no longer seen as separate positive or negative values. Like the congressional

hearings that validated loyalty by asking witnesses to betray the names of suspected agents, the situation Heinlein presents shows that the two concepts are conflated to the point that authenticity is achieved only through deception. In other words, the novel's last chapter suggests that Smythe literally is Bonforte because his deception has become so perfect that it is indistinguishable from the real thing. Heinlein's seemingly existential move suggests to a readership dealing with the contradictions of Cold War culture that something as personal and individualistic as identity can be constructed or "styled" as Smythe puts it. Given the choice between the smarmy "Great Lorenzo" and the noble and powerful John Joseph Bonforte, it is clear that one was intended to be preferable. Ultimately, Smythe's choice to "style" himself as Bonforte presupposes a world in which a man can literally become another man.

Such is the case because Heinlein has very cleverly conflated conformity with adaptability. Lorenzo Smythe and Sam Cavanaugh are better men at the conclusion of their novels, Heinlein suggests, because they have adapted to meet the challenges of their fictional worlds. It is this adaptability that Heinlein highlights as the virtue of the genre in his essay, "Science Fiction: Its Nature, Faults and Virtues." Science fiction, he explains, "prepares young people to live and survive in a world of ever-continuing change by teaching them early that the world does change" (61). Such a message would have had particular resonance when it was published in 1959: only two years after the Soviet launch of Sputnik sent shockwaves of anxiety over possible technological and cultural inferiority throughout the United States. Heinlein's answer to such a cultural problem was science fiction. He suggests that the genre's unique focus on the future made it "the only fictional medium capable of interpreting the changing, head-long rush of modern life" (53). It was science fiction, alone among its contemporary literary brethren, that preached "the need for freedom of the mind and the desirability of knowledge...that prizes

go to those who study, who learn, who soak up the difficult fields of knowledge..." (61). It should be noted that Heinlein's claim for science fiction comes after a polemical section on the state of contemporary literature. Calling "serious" literature a "sick literature," Heinlein criticizes some of the major literary figures of the mid-twentieth century (James Joyce, Henry Miller, Jean-Paul Sartre to name a few) for writing "autobiographical novels centered around neurotics,...sex maniacs, concerning the degraded, the psychotic, or the "po' white trash" of back-country farms portrayed as morons or worse" (55). This last criticism, it seems, was a reference to William Faulkner who, only a few years earlier, had won the Nobel Prize in Literature. Heinlein's characteristic no-nonsense pragmatism leads him to offer: "I, for one, am heartily sick of stories about frustrates, jerks, homosexuals and comuters [sic] who are unhappy with their wives— for goodness sake! Let them find other wives, other jobs— and shut up!" (56). Science fiction offers an alternative, says Heinlein, and "leads in the direction of mental health, of adaptability" (61).

Ultimately, Heinlein's claim for science fiction is that its ability to posit the future allows for the negotiation of the rapidly changing present, and that the genre instills, in its readers, the work ethic necessary to do so. In *The Puppet Masters* and *Double Star*, Heinlein shows the incorporation of a similar ethic in his protagonists while positing it as a maturation process. In both cases, conformity attains a positive value when it exists alongside adaptation. Heinlein suggests that as these characters adapt to meet the challenges of their fictive worlds, so too must readers meet those of Cold War America.

Three years after the publication of *Stranger in a Strange Land* elevated Heinlein to a status somewhere between a celebrity and a cult leader, *Farnham's Freehold*, his nuclear war survival novel, would enlist this characteristic positivism to explore the era's most popular fears: the cultural effects of the spread of communism, deteriorating race relations, and global nuclear

war. Serialized in 1964 and published in book form later that year, Heinlein's novel owes a great deal to the national anxiety of the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis. As the novel opens, Heinlein explains that mounting tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union have brought the world to the brink of war. So serious is the threat that Hugh Farnham, the novel's protagonist, wears a radio earpiece in anticipation of an alert. Shortly, their relatively pleasant evening of dinner and contract bridge is interrupted and all of the household's occupants Grace (Hugh's wife), his son Duke, his daughter Karen, Karen's college friend, Barbara, and Joe (the African American employee/servant of the Farnham household) are rushed into a bomb shelter Hugh has constructed under their property. After what seem to be successive hits by nuclear weapons above them, they eventually open their shelter to find a near Edenic wilderness seemingly untouched by the devastation of nuclear war. They find that they have traveled forward in time over two thousand years to a future dominated by black cannibalistic Muslims. At the novel's end, while all other characters have met undesirable fates (Karen dies in childbirth, Duke is castrated or "tempered," and Hugh's wife is, effectively, an addict to a future drug called, ironically, "Happiness"), Hugh Farnham and Barbara (his new wife) are sent back to their time by Ponse, a kind of feudal governor in charge of the protected wilderness in which they were found, to live out the rest of their lives. There, Hugh and Barbara, Heinlein asserts triumphantly in the novel's final line, "are still going on" (333).

Farnham's Freehold is, with little doubt, an exceptionally strange, controversial, and, some would say, offensive novel. Its portrayal of a future in which black cannibal Muslims feed on a defeated and servile white race is paranoid to the point of being hardly recuperable. However, it is a novel that has been noted by scholars for having captured, albeit at a white heat, the anxieties of its time. Bruce Franklin, for example, reads Heinlein's characterization of the

cannibals as a reaction to the burgeoning of Black nationalism movements, especially the Nation of Islam, in the early 1960s. By capturing these contemporary anxieties and by suggesting a way of transcending them, Heinlein's text participates in the jeremiad tradition entirely consistent with his work's positivism and his Cold War politics. Heinlein is seen, then, for what he is at this point in his writing career: a Cold War partisan, and in a broader sense, a staunch supporter of dominant American cultural narratives promoted during this period. Such a characterization becomes clearer upon close analysis of *Farnham's Freehold*, perhaps the most problematic of Heinlein's texts that could be considered Cold War jeremiads.

At first glance, *Farnham's Freehold* looks to be a novel entirely about fear. The book begins with the fear of global nuclear war and transitions quickly to the anxieties of surviving one. Finally, the novel's concern with the oppression of the futuristic racial-feudal society (providing yet another opportunity for Heinlein to extol the virtues of libertarianism) eventually slides into the horror of outright cannibalism. In fact, the novel provides three clear allegorical references to Cold War era concerns before it provides any gesture at transcending or defeating them.

The first and most obvious is the novel's concern with nuclear war. Not only does the beginning of the novel capture the anxiety of a possible nuclear attack (for example, Hugh's earpiece tuned to the Conelrad channel, his wife complains, ruins their nice evening of dinner and bridge), but, in characteristic form, the subsequent section illustrates how a family would go about surviving after one did occur. In fact, much of the novel is reminiscent of other nuclear survival novels, Pat Frank's *Alas, Babylon* for example, until the intrusion of its ludicrous cannibal-future plot. All of the usual suspects are here: a bomb shelter, a well stocked pantry, and frontier know-how. This perhaps explains why the novel has become extremely popular among

survivalist groups. Suffice it to say, however, that this aspect of the novel is remarkable for the fact that it is so conventional. It is, literally, just like a number of other texts exploring the same concern with nuclear war.

However, less conventional, perhaps, is the novel's connection to *Generation of Vipers*, Philip Wylie's jeremiad on the deleterious effects of excessive mothering on a generation of boys. Certainly, "Momism," Heinlein suggests, has placed its mark on Duke (Hugh Farnham's adult son). Duke, it should be noted, is one of the few characters in Heinlein's work that, although he occupies a structural position in the novel that one would expect he would eventually achieve maturity to the Heinleinian ideal, he, in fact, does not. He does not, in other words, become like Hugh. Instead, by the novel's end, he has been physically castrated and this coincides with, it seems, the figurative castration and emasculation Heinlein suggests throughout the novel (clearly the antithesis of achieving maturity). He is not the scientist/ engineer typical to Heinlein's novels, but a lawyer and, we learn, an atheist. He frequently argues with Hugh (in one scene to the point of fighting), even in instances when he knows Hugh is right, and excessively dotes on his alcoholic mother. Finally, Barbara, who one would suppose would be the likely partner for Duke, chooses his father instead (despite the fact that Hugh is, of course, married and significantly older). Even Karen, Duke's sister, suggests that he may suffer from an Oedipus complex. What seems clear, however, is that Heinlein posits Duke as the product of the kind of softening of American masculinity that Wylie railed against. As discussed earlier, such softening, some feared, made American culture (and specifically American males) more susceptible to the cultural contamination of communism. By veering from his typical formula of youth coming to maturity, Heinlein renders yet another popular anxiety in his novel.

Finally, the state of race relations in the United States is the undeniable primary anxiety of *Farnham's Freehold*. The novel was, after all, serialized the same year that the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed. Frustrating the desire to dismiss *Farnham's Freehold* simply as a conservative, even perhaps racist, response to the broad social changes occurring in the early 1960s are the frequent anti-racist assertions in the novel (clearly another example of the influence of Heinlein's mid-century progressivism). Duke, readers may remember, is the novel's only clear racist and, throughout the novel, Hugh Farnham consistently berates him for his overtly racist attitudes and statements. In fact, Hugh, after a telling discussion over whether miscegenation is worse than incest, give his blessing to Karen and Joe's plan to marry. This is an interesting moment in the novel because even though Heinlein seemingly allows for an interracial marriage, Karen's death in childbirth (whose father is not Joe, it should be pointed out, but some man Karen knew in college before the attack) keeps the relationship from being consummated. In addition, Heinlein makes a point of explaining Joe's role in the house as an employee, not domestic servant, who is making a fair wage. When Joe, at the novel's end, betrays Hugh, explaining that Duke and Grace are to become his servants, Hugh's response, while expressing his disappointment, illustrates an attempt by Heinlein to sympathize with the plight of contemporary African-Americans. When Farnham, in his disbelief, argues that Joe was a "decently treated employee," Heinlein writes a response for Joe that attempts to express some understanding and sympathy for the experience of African-Americans in 1960s America:

The younger man's eyes suddenly became opaque and his features took on an ebony hardness Hugh had never seen in him before. "Hugh," he said softly, "have you ever made a bus trip through Alabama? As a 'nigger'?" (269)

This is an interesting passage because, in a canon of fiction in which the Heinleinian characters are usually portrayed as infallibly right, this passage suggests that Hugh Farnham has something to learn. Joe's response emphasizes the difference in their experiences as a way of justifying his behavior. Of course, it is a behavior, subjugating his oppressors to the position of the oppressed, that falls in line with the most paranoid of white fears (which, in turn, has been, historically, a typical justification for further oppression). However, Hugh's response is interesting in its implications for the larger debate about race raging in 1960s America. When Joe tauntingly asks Hugh what he thinks of his plan, Hugh responds, "I thought better of you, Joe...I thought you were a gentleman...It seems I was wrong" (271). Hugh's response, the disappointment that he expresses, suggests a disappointment at the loss of an opportunity to work out a new social arrangement, to forge a new understanding of race, now that they have been removed from the toxic atmosphere of the 1960s American society of the novel's initial setting (which is, of course, the same as the original readers'). In point of fact, the little community they forged after surviving the nuclear attack is relatively harmonious and, some could argue, utopian (as long as one recognizes that Joe is second-in-command under Hugh, our white protagonist). However, it is, of course, rudely interrupted by the future cannibal society narrative. That narrative, in fact, could have provided a kind of cognitive estrangement through its inversion of racial hegemony were it not for the introduction of cannibalism (which, of course, invites readers to dismiss it as purely evil, horrifying, and ludicrous).

Ultimately, Bruce Franklin's reading of the novel is perhaps the most helpful in understanding the various tensions at work in the novel. To be sure, it is a convincing argument that the novel is, or registers, a response to the Black nationalism movements growing at that time. However, Heinlein's staunch progressivism and expressed anti-racism register a disdain

for the tenor of the race relations dialogue in 1960s America and a kind of sorrow at the lack of a better understanding among its participants. This hints at the fact that Heinlein's political history is a bit more complicated than his fame as a libertarian icon would suggest. As a younger man, Heinlein supported Upton Sinclair's "End Poverty in California" socialist reform movement and supported Sinclair when he ran for governor in 1934. In addition, in 1938 Heinlein ran unsuccessfully as a democrat for a seat in the California State Assembly. Though he seems to have flirted with progressive causes and politics as a young man, *Farnham's Freehold*, suggests that Heinlein's mid-century progressivism was trumped by a mid-western wariness when it came to race and radicalism.

However, in typical jeremiad fashion, it is in Heinlein's novel that we find his solution to the cultural anxieties that he articulates. Endure, the novel's ending fiercely asserts. It is, perhaps, unsurprising for a survival narrative that the ending of the novel is replete with images and statements that emphasize that the solution to such problems rests on America's ability to outlast them:

They lived through the missiles, they lived through the bombs, they lived through the fires, they lived through the epidemics...and they lived through the long period of disorders while civil government writhed like a snake with a broken back. They lived. They went on. (332)

The novel's final image, the American flag flying high over the homestead, is followed by the fierce assertion that "they are still going on" (333). Such an assertion is consistent with what the novel's plot suggests. If Duke is a failure as a son, a symbol for the "Momism" afflicting American culture, the novel suggests that things will be different with Hugh and Barbara's twin baby boys (twice the man as Duke, etc). One need only wait for them to grow to manhood. If

Cold War political tensions and the threat of nuclear war are a concern, one need only find comfort in the idea that, as George Kennan asserted in his “Long Telegram,” the United States and its economic system will outperform and outlast its enemies. Finally, if the state of race relations threatens to tear the social fabric of the nation, one need not be alarmed by images of rioting and strife broadcast on the nightly news, but only to wait for Nixon’s “Silent Majority” to sweep a conservative President into office.

Heinlein’s admonition to endure is consistent with the positivism that pervades his other novels. In such a call there is a distinct confidence in humanity’s or, specifically, America’s ability to face and conquer future challenges. Unlike the jeremiads of the seventeenth century, Heinlein’s confidence in his culture’s exceptionalism does not stem from a belief that such exceptionalism springs from divine or spiritual roots, but rather from a fiercely nationalistic belief in the ingenuity, toughness, and prowess of the United States. In this way, Heinlein’s positivism serves to reinforce and promote the prevailing nationalistic Cold War cultural narratives of his day. While his novels are jeremiads firmly rooted in the belief of an American exceptionalism and warning against threats to that prominence, they are also committed to supporting an understanding of America and Americans very much in line with the officialdom of American Cold War domestic and foreign policy. This is perhaps why Samuel R. Delany once wrote that when he was growing up, Robert Heinlein, as much as any writer, taught him to “argue with the accepted version.”

The Puppet Masters, *Double Star*, and *Farnham’s Freehold* all end with the reflections of their narrators sometime after the events of the novel. Strong, brave, responsible, rational, they are changed men. Heinlein suggests that they have to be. “If this is just the opener,” Heinlein writes at the conclusion of *The Puppet Masters*, “we had better learn from it for the main

event...if man wants to be top dog- or even a respected neighbor- he'll have to fight for it" (338). Having thoughtfully considered the epistemological implications of Heinlein's fiction, it is difficult to shake the feeling that that was precisely what he was "preparing our youngsters" to do.

End Notes

¹ For a detailed review of the state of the discourse on this subject see Wilford 99-122.

² This, Saunders says, as opposed to Willy Brandt's celebrated declaration, "we are the elected of the people, not the elect"(36).

³ Carl Freedman defines epistemological positivism as "the dogmatic assumption of an unproblematic and invariably positive adequation between knowing subject and known object" (98).

⁴ Of course, this is not the only example of Heinlein's packaging politeness with libertarian notions of personal choice and responsibility. The same situation occurs in Heinlein's 1966 novel *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress*. It should be noted that this notion of "politeness" is usually associated with the threat of physical violence if it is not observed. After all, it was Heinlein who wrote that "an armed society is a polite society."

CHAPTER THREE
**“LIKE WE’RE JUST EXISTING IN THE RUINS”:
THE AMERICAN JEREMIAD AND ENVIRONMENTAL
DISASTER IN POPULAR SCIENCE FICTION FILM AND THE
WORK OF KIM STANLEY ROBINSON**

Close to the end of the documentary based on Al Gore’s influential presentation, *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006), Gore’s rhetoric shifts in tone from explanation and illumination to exhortation and petition. In a presentation designed to help others understand what is, by its nature, a global problem, he curiously appeals to the audience’s sense of nationalism. He suggestively asks, “Are we, as Americans, capable of doing great things even though they are difficult? Are we capable of rising above ourselves and above history?” Citing some of the nation’s greatest achievements, his remaining slides build a case for America’s ability to conquer similarly large problems. This is the country, Gore reminds the audience, that abolished slavery, defeated totalitarianism, and went to the moon. Perhaps more to the point, he reminds the audience that this was the country that took a lead role in reducing chlorofluorocarbon (CFC) emissions. He explains that, technologically speaking, America has everything needed to combat the problem. Everything, he says, except “political will.” Perhaps referencing the 2006 mid-term elections (the film was released in June 2006) and the 2008 presidential election, he reminds the audience that “political will is a renewable resource.” Such a nationalistic call to arms (albeit electoral) is an interesting way to end a presentation devoted to articulating a global issue.

However, such a call is not inscrutable or contradictory when considering the distinctly American tradition that such rhetoric engages. Just before the film ends, Gore explains that global warming “is a moral issue.” It is an interesting statement coming, as it does, after a presentation characterized more by persuasive data than platitudes. However, Gore’s framing of

global warming as a moral issue makes sense if one considers how *An Inconvenient Truth* is reminiscent of the American jeremiad tradition.

There are two major characteristics of the American jeremiad, articulated in the work of Perry Miller and Sacvan Bercovitch, that are also found in the Gore film. The first, and perhaps most immediately recognizable characteristic, is the jeremiad's polemical rhetoric. After all, the jeremiad takes its tenor from the Old Testament's book of Jeremiah, and, as such, is characterized by lamentations that accounted for a society's or era's misfortunes as just penalty for great social and moral evils (while holding out the possibility that change would bring about a happier future) (Abrams 138). The second important characteristic of the American jeremiad is its emphasis on the exceptionalism of the American community. Miller points out that the jeremiad was eventually mapped onto a growing national narrative of election and purpose. It was then that the colonists' purpose in the New World became a "errand into the wilderness" as Samuel Danforth's 1670 sermon suggested (and from which Miller takes his title). Later, Bercovitch would build upon this idea in order to assert the form's "unshakeable optimism" to be found in the jeremiad's inversion of the doctrine of vengeance into the promise of ultimate success (7). In other words, Bercovitch reads the sermon's record of punishments (crop failures, etc.) not as destructive but as corrective. The effect, then, was to reinforce the covenant that they believed they had entered into with God. "His vengeance was a sign of love," Bercovitch writes, "a father's rod used to improve the errant child" (8). It is this covenant, for example, that John Winthrop, in his lay speech aboard the *Arbella*, compares to a marriage "of most strict and peculiar manner" in which God would be "more jealous of our love and obedience" (215). This proposed covenant would promote a belief in their exceptionalism that, Bercovitch concludes,

explains America's ability to conceive of itself as a culture that could transcend differences in landscape, race, and creed "to believe in something called an American mission..." (11).

By beginning my analysis with *An Inconvenient Truth*, I do not mean to suggest, as critics of global warming have, that Gore's film is science fiction. The efficacy of Gore's film illustrates a tendency in American rhetoric and thinking that I wish to explore in American science fiction narratives interested in environmental and social critique. In this way, the fact that the film is polemical is unsurprising. However, that the solution to the problem is couched in terms that engage and, in fact, promote notions of American exceptionalism suggest that something more dynamic is at work. Gore's appeal suggests that the success of fighting global warming is dependent on the leadership of the United States and, perhaps more telling, that such leadership is moral, and not only technological or scientific, in nature. In other words, the difference in rhetoric does not merely suggest that Americans should build more hybrid cars or limit carbon emissions, but rather asks Americans to be the *kind* of people that would want to drive hybrid cars and limit emissions. Its aim is not technological or scientific, but a moral and cultural one.

One need only look to other monuments in environmental writing to find the same connection between the polemical and exceptionalism rhetoric. For example, Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) is often hailed as a fundamental text in the modern environmentalism movement. Certainly, a great deal of attention paid to *Silent Spring* was due to its stark appraisal of the role of chemical pesticides. Such pollution, she warned, had become "for the most part irrecoverable" (6). "The chain of evil it initiates," she continued, "not only in the world that must support life but in living tissues is for the most part irreversible" (6). As other have remarked, Carson was astute to compare the environmental damage wrought by pesticides to that

of radiation (a concern being given full attention in Cold War America) in its ability to change “the very nature of the world- the very nature of life” (6).¹

Yet, Carson leaves no doubt as to whom this message is directed. The first line of the opening chapter in which she outlines her disturbing, dystopian vision of a silent spring, a landscape in which most living things have been destroyed by chemical pollution, begins with the line, “there once was a town in the heart of America where all seemed to live in harmony with its surroundings” (2). Indeed, most of her examples of the pitfalls of community-wide spraying are from the American mid-west. One of her case studies highlighting alternatives to chemical spraying, the control of Japanese beetles for example, comes from the successful efforts of communities along the eastern seaboard. Finally, her work in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and her testimony before the congressional committee investigating pesticides illustrate an attempt to address the problem from within American governmental and political institutions. Today, Carson’s *Silent Spring* is considered something of a phenomenon in the way it has become incorporated in the culture. Its influence and popularity are widespread from public policy to popular culture. The same, of course, could be said for Gore’s film (having greatly contributed to him winning the Nobel Peace prize in 2007). Ultimately, what these two texts share (and what they share with the texts and films that will be discussed shortly) is a fundamental assertion, much like the election sermons of early America, that audiences and readers can and should act after seeing or reading them. In addition, such action is primarily moral in nature. Finally, in their frequent assertion that the United States must play a leadership role in global environmental policy, that the success of any global environmentalism movement is contingent upon such participation and leadership, these texts and films continue to advocate an American exceptionalism that has long been a hallmark of American discourse.

In similar regard, ecocriticism, that relatively new approach to exploring connections between literary studies and the environment (or ecology, depending on which term one prefers), shares similar characteristics with the established jeremiad tradition. This connection, their similar rhetorical stances, tells us something about why this approach and the texts studied are effective in understanding these broad challenges, and in promoting social, political, moral, and environmental change. In other words, this essay argues that these texts and the relatively new critical framework within literary studies designed specifically to call attention to environmental crisis explain a new problem in very old, established ways. In so doing, these texts are packaged in a way, proven through the history of the nation's discourse, to incorporate not only their particular complaints to help us better understand the issues, but the very emotions of worry and anxiety that serve as impetus for public policy designed to address them.

In their landmark collection of essays outlining the aim and approach of ecocriticism, *The Ecocriticism Reader*, Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm argue that the job of the critic, literary or otherwise, is to “help with...understanding” (xxi). Such understanding, their quotation of Donald Worster in the collection's introduction illustrates, is ethical rather than ecological. “Getting through the crisis requires understanding our impact on nature as precisely as possible,” Worster writes, “but even more, it requires understanding those ethical systems and using that understanding to reform them” (qtd in Glotfelty xxi). At its heart, the jeremiad was a form devoted to exploring the moral standing of the community. The early election sermons were a form of reflection focused on assessing the community's fulfillment of their covenant with God. If they were falling short, and in most cases it seems that they thought they were, the sermon turned naturally polemical in tone. Obviously, a similar vein of polemical rhetoric necessarily runs in ecocriticism. In her early definition, Glotfelty says that the fundamental motivation

shared in ecocritical work is “the troubling awareness that we have reached the age of environmental limits, a time when the consequences of human actions are damaging the planet’s basic life support systems” (xx). In a page seemingly pulled straight from the work of Increase Mather she intones, “either we change our ways or we face global catastrophe, destroying much beauty and exterminating countless fellow species in our headlong race to apocalypse” (xx). Beyond polemical rhetoric and a concern for ethical reform, ecocriticism shares the jeremiad’s concern with humanity’s relationship with the physical world. For example, many of the early jeremiads tried to reconcile scriptural accounts of the apocalypse with new scientific knowledge burgeoning during the seventeenth century. In other words, these writers were concerned with how the end of the world was to come about when science was providing substantial evidence of a universe governed by forces that could be understood and calculated. In addition, many jeremiads are rife with attempts to read the physical world for proof of God’s displeasure. In 1680, for example, Increase Mather would read comets along with “droughts, caterpillars, tempests, inundations, [and] sickness” as portentous signs of the community’s standing in the eyes of God (qtd in Miller 229).

Like ecocriticism, these early jeremiads share a fundamental premise, articulated most recently by Glotfelty, that “human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it” (xix). It just happens that the Puritans saw such an understanding of the physical world as a means to understand the spiritual one. According to Glotfelty, ecocriticism’s emphasis on the “eco” of the term implies a focus on “interdependent communities, integrated systems, and strong connections among constituent parts” (xx). One need only consider Winthrop’s formulation of the Christian community in “A Model of Christian Charity” to see that such an emphasis was incorporated within the Puritan’s attempts to theorize a new community,

one in fact that would, said Winthrop, serve as an example to others. Finally, Glotfelty's assertion that ecocriticism studies the "reciprocal relationships between humans and land, considering nature not just as the stage upon which the human story is acted out, but as an actor in the drama" recalls the power of the popular metaphor for early America as the "errand into the wilderness." The "wilderness" became, for these early Americans, an entity whose elements would test their spiritual resolve and, as others have argued, an entity whose influence would lead them to a distinct American identity.²

As Bercovitch and others have argued, such a role in American identity formation is one of the hallmarks of the jeremiad tradition. The jeremiad's function as a popular form (indeed one of the nation's first) and the way that the election sermons were consumed by audiences and readers suggest that the articulated, specific anxieties of those early jeremiads would eventually become incorporated into the public consciousness. The concerns then became so acknowledged as to become obvious, trite, and, ultimately, part of their everyday experience. Today, a similar effect is occurring with the rhetoric of environmental or ecological disaster and such an effort, as exemplified by recent popular nonfiction texts and documentary films (Alan Weisman's *The World Without Us* and Thomas Friedman's *Hot, Flat, and Crowded*, for example), was built on the cultural groundwork laid by dystopian science fiction, particularly the environmental "problem" films of the 1970s. Science fiction, packaged along with the rhetoric of the jeremiad tradition, effectively performs this function (helping to lay the groundwork for cultural changes in the perception of an issue) for two important and related reasons. First, science fiction, as Darko Suvin's influential definition suggests, is the literature of cognitive estrangement. That is to say, the genre encourages critical thought by its presentation of a reality estranged from the empirical world of the reader or viewer. If ecocriticism's aim is, as Glotfelty suggests, to direct

“our attention to matters about which we need to be thinking,” it is precisely this ability of the science fiction genre to shed or at least to mute, the cultural imperatives or ideological bonds that stand as barriers to understanding issues like impending ecological disaster. Secondly, if science fiction, as Suvin argues, has “always been wedded to a hope of finding in the unknown the ideal environment...,” then, inversely, dystopian science fiction, he suggests, articulates “a fear of and revulsion from its contrary” (5). In this way, the work of dystopian science fiction and the American jeremiad are united by their polemical stance. That is, both seek to articulate precisely what has gone wrong with the community. However, in both, a proposed solution is always implicit. Therefore, not only does the problem become clearly articulated and incorporated into the popular consciousness, but the author’s or filmmaker’s proposed solutions do as well. In this way, science fiction and science fiction films (such as *Soylent Green* and *Silent Running*) seek to do the early cultural work that later texts, films, and, perhaps, public policy makers, may later utilize.

Eco-Jeremiads in the Work of Kim Stanley Robinson

Few authors of Kim Stanley Robinson’s stature have consistently written as much about the environmental challenges facing the world. Having won the Locus Award (1985), Hugo Award (1982, 1994, 1997), Nebula Award (1983, 1987, 1993), and having received a National Science Foundation Grant (1995), Robinson may be the most important American science fiction writer of his generation and, perhaps, one of the finest American novelists of his generation. From his earliest novels to his most recent “Science in the Capital” trilogy about global warming, a concern with the environment and the role of science in preserving the biosphere has been central to his work. An avid devotee of nature, Robinson has remarked that his time spent enjoying the wilderness (particularly mountain hiking) inspired a great deal of his work (“Kim

Stanley Robinson”). “It’s got me thinking,” he once said in an interview, “about the environmental catastrophe we’re sitting on the edge of and solutions to that.” He concludes, “It doesn’t make any sense to just throw up your hands in despair and say, ‘The world is doomed!’” Instead, his fiction, utilizing an established tradition in American rhetoric and letters, attempts to stimulate social, political, and environmental change.

The polemical in Kim Stanley Robinson’s fiction runs the gamut from concern over nuclear proliferation, the threat of impending environmental disaster, and frustration over the disarray of postmodernism. In each of his major works (specifically his Three Californias trilogy, Mars trilogy, and his “Science in the Capital” trilogy), Robinson places the polemical within the context of the utopian concerns central to much of his work. The primary characteristic of Robinson’s work, in other words, is a concern with exploring the possibilities of the ideal world and the various polemics in his work play an important role in articulating those spaces where the world falls short.

At the end of *The Gold Coast* (1988), Robinson’s alternative future novel in which urban sprawl, a dizzying array of highways, and rapid technological advancement have drastically transformed Orange County, California, Jim McPherson, the novel’s protagonist, is troubled by a disturbing dream:

There’s an elevated freeway on the cliff by the edge of the sea, and in the cars tracking slowly along are all his friends and family. They have a map of Orange County, and they’re tearing it to pieces...Jim, down on the beach, cries out to them to stop tearing the map; no one hears him. And the pieces of the map are jigsaw puzzle pieces, big as family-sized pizzas, pale pastel in color, and all his family take these pieces and spin them out into the air like frisbees, till they stall and

tumble down onto a beach as wide as the world. And Jim runs to gather them up, hard work in the loose sand, which sparkles with gems; and then he's on the beach, trying to put together this big puzzle before the tide comes in—[...]. (388)

Jim's dream is relevant to this discussion of the polemical in Robinson's work because it so neatly encapsulates the anxiety of dizzying, rapid change characteristic of postmodernism that is related to environmental concerns permeating not only this novel but, by degrees, the other novels making up the Three Californias trilogy: *The Wild Shore* (1984) and *Pacific Edge* (1990). The novel is primarily about Jim, his struggle to make sense out of his life, and his search for authenticity in the increasingly artificial postmodern world. When the novel opens, Jim's days are spent working part-time as a writing instructor at a small technical college, while his nights are spent "lidding" psychotropic drugs, party-hopping with friends, or driving for hours on the Autopia, a complex series of highways built high above Orange County. He does not get along with his father, a mid-level manager for an aerospace company, for a variety of reasons: not least of which has to do with the fact that Jim blames the aerospace industry, in part, for the growth that has decimated and transformed the Orange County landscape. He eventually falls in with Arthur, the closest the novel comes to a revolutionary, and begins sabotaging the area's aerospace companies with shoulder-mounted rocket launchers. By the end of the novel, however, even this one act of defiance has lost its significance for Jim after he learns that their sabotage may have been organized and funded by rival companies looking to increase their market-share. Even Jim's rampage at the novel's end, in which he foregoes attacking Laguna Space Research, the company that employs his father, in favor of random buildings and malls, is strangely without consequence. It is as if even Jim's most erratic acts of defiance are anticipated and absorbed by the culture in which he lives.

What, though, does the novel's polemic on rapid change characteristic to postmodernism have to do with concerns over environmental disaster? For Jim, the two are heavily interrelated. Throughout the novel, Jim is fascinated with finding some authentic piece of Orange County. This is the significance of the novel's opening scene in which Jim and his friends dig through the parking lot of the Fluffy Donuts Video Palace in search of a relic from the past: in this case a piece of El Modena Elementary School (long since buried underneath the parking lot). Jim, writes Robinson, is "tense with excitement" over this "personal archaeology" (4). He has "an uncontrollable urge to recover something—to see, to touch, to *fondle* some relic of the past" (4). The failure of Jim's efforts in this scene (the characters are chased from the lot by the police) reinforce the overriding sense in the novel that Orange County, and whatever history might have been there, has been literally paved over. This point is brought into sharp focus by the novel's recurring theme: the loss of the area's orange groves.

As the novel opens, Jim is explaining the history of Orange County to his friends. "This whole basin," Jim says, "was covered with orange groves, over two hundred square miles of them...There were more oranges then than there are lights now" (3). Robinson suggests through the reactions of Jim's friends that this is a story Jim has told before. Two friends share a knowing grin while one of them eggs Jim on: "You're kidding" (3). Sandy, another friend along for the ride, cannot help himself and begins laughing at Jim. To be sure, his friends have heard this one before. We, Robinson suggests, have heard this one before. After all, the story of the loss of the Southern California groves is something of a cliché. Yet, for Jim, the story connects him to a history that he perceives is more authentic than his daily experience and explains the sequence of events that led to the society of the novel. Throughout the narrative, which the reader comes to learn is written by Jim, short vignettes relate the economic and agricultural

history of Orange County. The final one, of the loss of the groves, is a poignant elegy to what Jim obviously perceives is a cataclysmic moment. The loss of the orange groves are, for Jim, a symbol of everything wrong with the society in which he lives: the unbridled expansion and growth that replaced the land's natural beauty with concretized sprawl, the rise of the aerospace industry providing the economic engine for such growth and the subsequent military technology enabling further national expansion, and, finally, the loss of man's connection to the natural world. For Jim, however, these all culminate in the sense of a loss of agency that is thoroughly postmodern.

Here, we return to Jim's dream at the end of the novel. It is important that Jim has couched his anxiety within imagery that emphasizes his connection to the natural world. His family and friends are rootless, after all; suspended in air on the elevated freeway. On the other hand, Jim, like Antaeus, is rooted on the beach trying to save the pieces of the map they have discarded. This coincides with imagery throughout the novel that advocates for a culture with a closer connection to the natural world. Some of the novel's most beautiful images, for example, are of Tashii and Jim enjoying the peace of night surfing. Jim's sexual encounter with Hanna under an oak tree is characterized by a transcendence completely absent from the novel's earlier scene in which Jim and Virginia perform, for lack of a better word, in front of an array of cameras and mirrors designed to record themselves during intercourse. Jim's connection to the natural world is important because, Robinson suggests, it is in the natural world, and its small degree of authenticity, that Jim can reclaim a degree of agency. This connection between the natural world, authenticity, and agency is most evident when Jim and his friends travel the world in search of something "real." After eating at the same restaurants or staying in the same hotels in Europe or Asia that they would in Orange County, the group becomes disheartened and bored.

Something happens, though, when they travel to Crete. After venturing off from the tourist traps, they come upon a long deserted ruin on a hill by the sea. It strikes Jim as nearly identical to the coast back home and he wonders:

How could history have coursed so differently for these two dry coasts? It's as if they're not part of the same history, they are separated by such a great chasm; how to make any mental juncture? Are they different planets, somehow? It is too strange, too strange. Something has gone wrong back home in his country. (237)

This is an important moment for Jim because it emphasizes the fact that Orange County's development was not an inevitability, not a matter-of-course, but the result of an unjust sequence of economic events and processes. What follows is a nearly utopian section in which Jim and his friends swim, bask in the sun, watch the local fishermen, cook and eat good food, and sleep under the stars. It is a refreshing change of scenery from the ultra-urban, cyberpunk setting of Orange County and Jim returns a changed man.

Robinson's polemic in *The Gold Coast* works to engender the same kind of realization in his reader. Given the population boom California and many of the nation's urban areas have seen in the last half-century, Robinson's dystopia of an Orange County of rapid and dizzying growth certainly seems prescient. However, his novel reminds, these things do not happen overnight and such growth is not inevitable. There is still time.

At the heart of *The Gold Coast* is Jim's struggle for agency in a culture exceedingly able to deny, diffuse, or absorb it. Yet, at novel's end, Jim seems hopeful that he will be able to understand and to make meaning of his life in Orange County. After his troubling dream, Jim decides to drive to Hana's. The novel's final image, of Jim on the freeway, driving to Hanna's exit and "the embrace of the hills, the touch of the earth" suggests his recovery of something lost,

his reconnection with the natural world, and the progressive hope that the place you are headed is better than where you started.

Indeed, a preoccupation with the challenges of postmodernism extend to all of the novels in the Three Californias trilogy. In *The Wild Shore*, Robinson's novel of a small Californian town trying to survive after the complete destruction of the United States by surprise nuclear attack, the more overt polemic on nuclear weapon proliferation is subsumed into the overarching concern with postmodernism. In other words, the novel takes as its focus the confusion and powerlessness of a society that was victim to sneak attack and its continued oppression in a new world order. There is a great deal of confusion, for example, over how and why the attack happened. Partly this is due to the fact that the events of the novel take place roughly one generation after the attack. However, even among those of the older generation that have survived, the characters Tom, John Nicolin, and Mayor Danforth for example, there is disagreement and confusion over how the attack was perpetrated and who bears responsibility. Robinson's emphasis on the lack of information and the excess of rumor, innuendo, and bad information, is perhaps the most realistic way of portraying such a widespread and devastating event. People simply would not know what happened. However, even when the novel presents its most definitive explanation for the attack, that Russians placed small neutron bombs in Chevy vans and parked them in two thousand of the nation's cities, the style of such an attack (the kind of attack that currently has the American government and public policy-makers worried) is itself unconventional, decentralized, and thoroughly postmodern. Under that style of an attack, individuals and governments find they have little agency in defending against it.

This loss of agency is further emphasized in the failure of Mayor Danforth's resistance movement and the inability to keep tourists off the mainland. Near the end of the novel, after

Hank, Steve Nicolin, and the others are betrayed by Danforth's people and left to die, Hank, having survived, discusses the possibility of any resistance with Tom. Specifically, Hank considers the effectiveness of the Major's original plan of killing the tourists who sneak onto the mainland. Tom's response is significant. "Murdering those dumb tourists doesn't do a thing to change the structure of the situation," says Tom, "Catalina will still be Japanese, satellites will still be watching us, we'll still be inside a quarantine" (198). "Even tourists won't stop coming," concludes Tom, "they'll just be better armed, and more likely to hurt us" (198). Hank ponders this for a moment. Tom reminds him that such plans usually cost lives and, with regret, Hank thinks of Mando, his friend who died in the previous attack. At that moment, Hank's will to fight is sapped and he has a better appreciation for the things in this new world that he does not control and for the lives of the people in his town. Tom's response, Hank says, reminds him "how grand military plans...translated into chaos and pain and meaningless death" (362). Hank writes, "so in an instant I was all uncertain again, and my bold idea struck me as stupidity compounded by size" (362). Tom, sensing Hank's confusion, offers an interesting bit of comfort. "Don't fret about it, Henry," he says, "We're Americans; it ain't been clear what we're supposed to do for a long, long time" (362).

The Wild Shore, like Robison's *The Gold Coast*, functions as a polemic on the effects environmental disaster: albeit, in this case, as the result from a nuclear attack. The attack, it seems, has permanently disrupted the world's climate and conventional weather patterns. For example, Hank and Tom learn that Russia has become plagued by permanent electrical storms and devastating tornadoes (which, Tom muses at one point, is just retribution for Russia's attack). However, the major example is the fact that the San Onofre of the novel has become a strange mix of meteorological phenomena. Snow and bitterly cold weather has become commonplace in

Southern California at all times of the year. Robinson posits that the weather patterns have changed due to the altered nature of the Santa Ana winds. Commonly, the Santa Ana is known as a hot, dry wind that, usually in the fall, blows down into Southern California from the high inland plateaus. In Robinson's novel, however, it coalesces with winds off an altered ocean current to bring flash snow storms in the middle of Summer. This is dangerous for residents of San Onofre because of its unpredictability. Simple put, simply staying fed and alive is a challenge for the characters in Robinson's novel. The unpredictable weather patterns make growing crops difficult and fishing at sea treacherous. Sudden, powerful rains threaten to uproot and drown the crops on which they depend. These are the daily challenges Hank and others face. Yet, it is important to point out that San Onofre and the rest of the post-nuclear landscape of the novel is not desolate or dead. To the contrary, the natural landscape of Robinson's novel is lush and the soil appears capable of growing what people need. This fact provides the basis for one of the novel's utopian moments.

Early in the novel, the town is besieged by powerful, driving rains in the middle of the night. The residents rush out of their homes to spread tarps in an effort to protect the town's cornfields and gardens. The effort, though, is important for how communal it is. Surely realizing that their survival depends on the survival of the crops, everyone comes out to help. Afterward, the townspeople go to the bathhouse to dry their clothes and warm themselves in the baths. People talk, laugh, and joke. Their naked bodies, defined by a demanding life, exercise, and bit of deprivation, glisten in the lamplight. Hank's surveys the scene: "I sat in my usual corner listening to Kathryn and looking around contentedly: we were a room of fire-skinned animals, wet and steaming, crazy-maned, beautiful as horses" (55). While much of the novel functions as a post-nuclear dystopia in which the environment is permanently altered, such a scene suggests a

relationship between man and his environment that is neither man exploiting his natural environment nor being subdued by it.

Such a relationship is the focus of the series' third and firmly utopian novel, *Pacific Edge*. The town of El Modena, California in 2065 is a model of green living. Set after the Great Change, a series of reforms that brought the world back from the brink of overpopulation, plague, and destruction, the novel chronicles the efforts of a group of friends who, through their positions on the community council, fight a measure seeking to build a massive business complex atop the town's last undeveloped hill. From the various automobiles, airplanes, and cruiseships powered by renewable energy and the highly efficient eco-friendly homes Kevin designs, Robinson presents a community in equilibrium with its environment. However, the novel is about so much more than the burgeoning of green technology and the dispute between Kevin, the novel's protagonist, his allies on the council, and the town's mayor, Alfredo (who supports the development). *Pacific Edge* is primarily concerned about the state of the human condition in a utopian future. It is important to remember that even in Robinson's utopian text, such a society had to be pulled back from the brink. In doing so, Robinson is able to emphasize a number of concerns about contemporary society that appear in more overt ways in the previous two novels. In this sly way, Robinson engages the warning rhetoric so characteristic to the American jeremiad by way of illustrating the turbulent past and its social troubles that had to be overcome. By doing so, Robinson illustrates a dedication to the transformative possibilities of the form and its polemical, covenant, and exceptionalism rhetorics employed within the fiction of undesirable futures.

Scattered throughout the novel are sections of the diary of Tom Barnard, Kevin's grandfather, kept during the crisis that spawned the Great Change. As readers learn, Tom was

instrumental in drafting the reforms responsible for saving the world. What these sections tell us about that troubled time is very much like what the previous two novels have warned us against. According to Tom, overpopulation, runaway growth, wasteful uses of resources created a world characterized by depression, wars, and an AIDS plague (181). The fact of the planet's degraded state before becoming a paradise allows Robinson leeway to deliver the warning characteristic to the genre and, then, the space to articulate his utopia. What the novel's ending makes apparent is that the human condition in this world is characterized by an absence of poverty, hunger, and violence while those fundamental aspects of the human experience remain untouched. At the end of the novel, Kevin has lost his grandfather and best friend, Tom, to a hurricane at sea, and the woman he cares deeply for, Ramona, has decided to rehabilitate her marriage with Alfredo. The novel's ending passage brings the situation into focus:

Behind him Orange County pulsed green and amber, jumping with his heart, glossy, intense, vibrant, awake, alive. His world and the wind pouring through it. His hands came together and made their half swing. If only Hank hadn't caught that last one. If only Ramona, if only Tom, if only the world, all in him all at once, with the sharp stab of our unavoidable grief; and it seemed to him then that he was without a doubt the unhappiest person in the whole world.

And at that thought (thinking about it) he began to laugh. (326)

Pacific Edge's ending brings the limitations of utopia into focus while accentuating its triumphs. No utopia can prevent the death of a loved one nor prevent the woman Kevin loves from loving another man. Yet, Robinson emphasizes this utopia's triumphs and, also, its distinction from the world of the reader, if, in fact, Kevin truly is the unhappiest person in the world.

Robinson's other major trilogies also emphasize the role of the polemical in articulating the failings of the real world and in offering solutions for improvement. His Mars trilogy, made up of his *Red Mars* (1993), *Green Mars* (1994), and *Blue Mars* (1996), has received the most critical attention of any of his works. Those novels, a spectacularly thorough detailing of man's colonization of Mars, maintain their own polemical commentary on contemporary society. At the heart of the Mars trilogy, for example, is Robinson's characteristic critique of transnational capitalism. In *Red Mars*, Robinson's concern manifests itself in the conflict between the utopian desires of the original colonists and the economic interests of the transnational corporations that control much of Earth. The original colonists (known as the "First Hundred"), led by John Boone, Frank Chalmers, Maya Toitovna, conceive of a utopian Mars focused on scientific inquiry and discovery and devoid of the monetary system, poverty, violence, and corruption that the transnational corporations or "Transnats" eventually graft onto the planet. Sensing a threat to their growing hegemony, the Transnats eventually try to wipe out the remaining First Hundred and launch a full-scale war on the colonists loyal to the original colonists. There is little moral complexity to the actions of the Transnats. They are essentially evil, conspiratorial, and rapacious and reflect Robinson's overall critique of monopolistic capitalism as a system that is "grossly unjust and a danger to us all" (Szeman and Whitman 182). It is important to place Robinson's critique of transnational capitalism within the context of the trilogy's central fact: the terraforming of Mars's surface. Robinson takes pains to show the First Hundred agonizing over the decision to permanently alter Mars's surface. There is an intense debate in which friendships are ruined and grudges are created. Yet, the decision to terraform is made from the most idealistic visions for the future of Mars. By contrast, the erection of the space elevator is funded and built by the Transnats for purely economic reasons. Once it is built, they conclude, Mars will become

the preeminent economic power in the solar system. Compared to the decision to terraform, the decision to build the space elevator is done irrespective of its effect on the planet: a decision made all the more important by the dramatic changes to the planet's surface the elevator causes in its destruction during the war that ends *Red Mars*.

Another example is the issue of the societal consequences of technological and scientific advancement. In *Red Mars*, a new process, involving the repair of DNA strands as they replicate over the course of a person's life, effectively doubles the lifespan of those who receive the treatment. Back on Earth, however, this causes riots as those who cannot afford the treatment (given for free on Mars) grow angry. Eventually, the treatment's lasting societal effect is to create tremendous overpopulation and a scarcity of resources on Earth. This, in turn, fuels greater numbers of people colonizing Mars; even past the point the planet can adequately sustain them. Such unanticipated and unchecked growth is seen by Chalmers and others to be a major factor in causing the social problems that lead to the war between the colonists and the Transnats.

Finally, the novels that make up what has been termed Robinson's "Science in the Capital" series, *Forty Signs of Rain* (2004), *Fifty Degrees Below* (2005), and *Sixty Days and Counting* (2007), constitute a rather overt polemic on global warming and its consequences. At the end of *Forty Signs of Rain*, for example, the breaking up of the polar ice caps has effectively stalled the North Atlantic Current (a possibility we will see referred to again in the discussion of the film *The Day After Tomorrow*). San Diego is ravaged by massive storms and swells that cause substantial portions of the coast to fall into the ocean. On the east coast, severe thunderstorms flood Washington, D.C. to the point that politicians and their staff, of which the protagonist Charlie Quibbler is one, must be evacuated by boat. However, *Forty Signs of Rain* is also remarkable for its contemplation of the ideal relationship between science and government.

By the end of the novel, the reader has witnessed Senator Phil Chase's global warming omnibus bill become derailed and hacked to pieces by a hostile administration. Business as usual, it seems, fails as usual. With government unable to answer the problem on its own, however, there is the insistence at the novel's end that a new arrangement between the scientific community and public policy organs is what is needed. Frank Vanderwal, along with his colleagues at the National Science Foundation, argues for a set of new principles for how they will seek to influence public policy. Ultimately arguing for a paradigm shift "in how science interacts with society," Vanderwal lays out a much more aggressive mission for the NSF (321). Consequently, this is Robinson's point as well. With the exception of the dramatic meteorological events in the novel's final pages, *Forty Signs of Rain* is, to speak frankly, a rather uneventful novel. However, this is precisely the point. The trilogy's value resides in its role as a meditation on the ideal relationship between society and science at a time when it appears more and more that the issues raised in the novel will be of utmost importance for the foreseeable future.

What the previous analysis makes clear is that the major works of Kim Stanley Robinson, particularly his early dystopian/ alternate future novels, illustrate the author's dedication to the transformative possibilities offered by carefully employed polemical rhetoric; warnings of undesirable futures. Such a tendency is not new to the science fiction genre. However, these narratives function within the established tradition of the jeremiad precisely because they employ such rhetoric while interacting with the concept of America exceptionalism. Regardless of whether Robinson's novel's promote or criticize the concept of American exceptionalism, his interaction with the concept is yet another signal that he has engaged, though not uncritically, the jeremiad's long tradition in American fiction.

Robinson's interaction with the history and the rhetoric of the jeremiad is clear from even the first pages of his Mars trilogy. When the novel opens, John Boone, the first man on Mars, gives a speech about the first attempt to colonize the planet. How he structures the experience of the First Hundred is remarkable for its similarity to the rhetoric of the early American colonists led by Winthrop and Miller's analysis of the cultural change the early colonists underwent upon arriving in the colonies that launched them along the process of creating a distinct American national identity:

And so we came here. But what they didn't realize was that by the time we got to Mars, we would be so changed by the voyage out that nothing we had been told to do mattered anymore. It wasn't like submarining or settling the Wild West—it was *an entirely new experience*, and as the flight of the Ares went on, the Earth finally became so distant that it was nothing but a blue star among all the others, its voices so delayed that they seemed to come from a previous century. We were on our own; and so we became *fundamentally different beings*. (4)

Robinson's use of italics is interesting in the passage. This is, after all, a speech given by Boone and so the italics suggest an insistence on his particular interpretation of their history. The novel's very next line illustrates that Boone's interpretation, and the evocation of the rhetoric of American exceptionalism, is not unproblematic nor uncritical. "All lies," thinks Frank Chalmers (4). Though Frank understands the political reasons behind Boone's speech, efforts toward Martian independence, he rejects the interpretation Boone has constructed of the events that brought the First Hundred to Mars. Chalmers describes Boone's interpretation as "a lens that distorted everything he saw, a kind of religion" (4). In fact, the resulting chapters bear out Frank's interpretation rather than Boone's. However, this opening section of *Red Mars* illustrates

the trilogy's engagement with the rhetoric of exceptionalism and the process of national identity formation. It begins this interrogation by asking some very important questions. How is cultural identity engendered? Are all narratives of exploration bound to this way of conceiving of identity? As the subsequent novels focus more and more on the succeeding generations, these questions become more and more pertinent. This passage in *Red Mars* is only a small example of a pervasive interrogation of identity, particularly American, throughout his work. However, it is an appropriate place to begin to illustrate the connections between Robinson's science fiction and this long standing tradition in American letters.

Throughout the Three Californias trilogy there is a consistent interrogation of the concept of American identity and America's role in the world. The America of *The Wild Shore* is one in which defeat and the struggle to survive is the daily experience of its citizens. Yet, the reader is exposed to passage after passage in which the story's characters consider the nature of the past America, the culture of the America in which they now live, what it means to be an American in a defeated nation, and what it all means for their future. What occurs is a thoughtful interrogation of the role of the covenant rhetoric so central to the jeremiad and to the notion of American exceptionalism.

At the center of the story is the question of the past. Tom, the town elder and default educator, has taught Hank, Nicolin, and others an exaggerated history of the United States. He is, after all, the town's teller of tall tales. In some cases, his stories embellished the accomplishments of the fallen nation. At the end of the novel, Hank explains that he now knows that America "never included Europe...that they didn't bury their dead in suits of gold armor...that we weren't the first and only nation to go into space...that we didn't make cars that flew and floated over water..." (377). More the result of Tom's love of storytelling than any

attempt at purposeful aggrandizing, Hank's conception of the past America is frequently being revised throughout the novel. That is because Robinson has taken great pains to complicate any concrete notion of America and an American cultural identity. This is never clearer than in the contrast that the three main male figures in Hank's life, Tom, Mayor Danforth, and John Nicolin, offer for Hank's understanding.

Mayor Danforth (whose name, perhaps, alludes to the Puritan minister, Samuel Danforth) does not enter the narrative until the novel's second part, but he is important for his effect on the young Hank. When Hank and Tom travel to San Diego, they meet the charismatic Mayor, who presents them with the notion of joining a resistance. The idea appeals to the young, energetic, and idealistic Hank. Tom, on the other hand, is wary and critical of the Mayor and is resistant to the point of rudeness. In his characterization of Mayor Danforth, Robinson leaves little room for interpretation. Simply put, the reader comes to understand exactly what kind of American Danforth is. He wears a little American flag lapel pin on his jacket. When speaking to Tom, who is old enough to remember America before the attack, Danforth incessantly refers to America as "Paradise." During their pre-meal prayer, Danforth asks God to "make us strong in the service of you and of the United States of America" (97). While at a party at the Mayor's mansion, Hank, drunk with the vision of Danforth's new America, describes him as "the prophet of a new age" (107). The girl Hank is dancing with replies, "He is like a prophet...just like from church" (107).

Yet, behind Danforth's request that San Onofre join the resistance is an unmistakable threat. Eventually Danforth and his men are shown to be cowards when they set up Hank, Nicolin, and the other boys who join them, to take the brunt of a Japanese attack. Mando, Hank's friend, dies in the betrayal, and the other boys are left for dead. Although the Mayor is

shown to be a fraud, his idea of a resurgent America lingers. It is enough, for example, to persuade Nicolin to leave the village. However, for Hank, Mando's death is the concrete evidence of the bankruptcy of the Mayor's America. We know this because, as discussed earlier, when Hank talks with Tom about taking over Catalina Island, Tom reminds him that such plans mean taking lives: lives like Mando's.

Offering a competing vision is John Nicolin, the father of Hank's friend, Steve. Nicolin is a stern man and a strict father. When Tom and Hank plan to leave San Onofre for San Diego, Nicolin will not allow his son to go. Hank cannot understand this and Tom explains that, if it were not for John Nicolin, the village would have fallen to starvation. It was John Nicolin's idea to find boats and to fish with nets that saved the village. However, Nicolin lost his youngest son to a drowning accident, causing him to hold Steve that much closer. It is because of this history that John Nicolin argues most vehemently, when a town meeting is called to discuss San Onofre's inclusion in the resistance, for a strict isolationism:

We should be working...We should be gathering food and preserving it, building more shelter and improving what we got, getting more clothes and medicines from the meets. Getting more boats and gear, firewood, all of that. Making it all work. That's your job, Rafe. Not trying to fight people out there who have a million times the power we do. That's a dream. If we do anything in the way of fighting, it should be right here in this valley. Not for anybody else. Not for those clowns down south, and sure not for any idea of *America*...America is gone. It's dead. (188)

Behind John Nicolin's pragmatism is a complete dismissal of any history of America. For Nicolin, such a thing is completely irrelevant. It does not help him, for example, bring in the next

harvest or prepare the town for the next harsh storm. Yet, it is precisely John's pragmatism that drives his son away. Steve desires a life of adventure or, at the very least, to understand his place in a world mostly unknown to him. Hank, by contrast, nearly dies on his journey back from San Diego and, so, has his similar desires muted by the experience. However, he also has Tom to inspire his imagination and his sense of the myth of America. It is precisely this notion, of fighting for a myth, for a concept, that John Nicolin does not understand and detests. After all, Hank explains that when Nicolin argues that no fighting should be done for "any idea of *America*," Nicolin "said it like the ugliest sort of curse" (188).

Hank, it must be remembered, is the author of the narrative in *The Wild Shore* and it is because of him, and of course Tom, that the notion of America is complex. In Tom's teachings, the main characteristics of the jeremiad are fundamental to any notion of America. At issue in many of Tom's statements about America is whether or not America was a "good" nation and, consequently, whether it deserved its destruction. Such considerations are unmistakably grounded in the covenant rhetoric of the jeremiad. After the town meeting in which the plan to join Mayor Danforth is voted down, Hank cannot understand why Tom would vote against the resistance. "All our lives you've been telling us about America...how great it was," Hank says (198). Tom, he says, always makes America "sound like God's own country" (198).

In truth, however, what Tom has said is much more complicated than that. His response to Hank in this passage helps articulate some of that complexity:

I mean, America was huge, it was a giant. It swam through the seas eating up all the littler countries—drinking them up as it went along. We were eating up the world, boy, and that's why the world rose up and put an end to us. So I'm not

contradicting myself. America was great like a whale—it was giant and majestic, but it stank and was a killer. Lots of fish died to make it so big. (198)

Here, Tom is rather critical of America and its role as a superpower. He invokes the nation's bloody history of expansion and subjugation of its native peoples. Later, though, when Tom is stricken with a pneumonia-induced fever, Tom appears much more emotional and conflicted in lamenting the loss of America:

“We were free then. Not perfectly so, you understand, but it was the best we could do, we were trying, it was the best so far. Nobody else had ever done it better, we...it was the best country in history,” he whispered, like he had to convince me or die. “I tell you true now...with all the flaws and stupidities we were still the leader, the focus of the world, and they killed us for it. Killed the best country the earth ever had, it was genocide boy...the murder of a whole people. Oh it had happened before, we did it ourselves to the Indians. Maybe that's why this happened to us. I keep coming on reasons but they're not enough. We were wrong in a million ways and had flaws as big as our strengths but we didn't deserve this.” (296)

However, Hank, the apt student, sees the same contradiction that the reader sees. “You told us two different things,” he says at the end of the novel (360). “You made it seem like it was the golden age,” he continues, “like we're just existing in the ruins” (360). “You also said the old time was awful,” Hank points out, “that we live better lives now than they ever did” (360). Of course, Robinson intends both to be true. It is the culmination of Hank's education (again remembering that he is the author of the narrative) that he realizes that both understandings of the past are true, that any understanding of the past is necessarily this complex. In addition,

Robinson is able to raise the concept of American exceptionalism in a way that does not necessarily promote an uncritical view of the nation or its past. Doing so would be much more in line with the rhetoric of Mayor Danforth. Here, however, Tom's fever-induced assertions about the nature of America, whether it was good or bad, whether it was "the best country the earth ever had," and whether it "deserved" its destruction, all linger like questions posed to the reader. In so doing in a narrative of a possible future, Robinson/ Hank encourages the reader to consider their world in much the same way as the sermons of the American seventeenth century.

A similar focus on American exceptionalism rhetoric occurs in the remaining novels of the trilogy. In *The Gold Coast*, this Orange County of the future is described by one character as "some kind of brain mortuary" (41). "Just look at it," Arthur says, "look at these sleepwalkers, zombieing around in some kind of L-5 toybox...from sea to shining sea...while the rest of the world is a real mortuary" (41). He concludes, "the world is falling apart and we devote ourselves to making weapons so we can take more of it over!" (41). Similar critiques of American foreign policy and the state of American culture permeate the novel. Jim, a frustrated revolutionary for much of the novel, thinks about his new role as a saboteur the night before their first mission and the excitement of finally acting on his frustration:

He's thinking of the evil direction his country has taken for so long, in spite of all his protests, all his votes, all his deepest beliefs. Ignoring the world's need, profiting from misery, fomenting fear in order to sell more arms, to take over more accounts, to own more, to make more money...it really is the American way.

(111)

However, by the end of the novel, the thrill of this kind of resistance loses its flair for Jim and he is forced to recognize that his frustration is with something much more complex and incapable of

being articulated than merely American foreign policy. Like Hank, he comes to realize that a truer understanding of America, one that accepts its inherent complexity, resides somewhere between the competing visions offered by Arthur and his father. Jim writes that he “will have to find his own way, somewhere between or outside them—find some way that cannot be co-opted into the great war machine, some way that will actually help to change the thinking of America” (380). Like *The Wild Shore*, *The Gold Coast*’s rejection of certainty preserves its concerns on the postmodern condition in addition to allowing for a space in which the concept of America and American national identity are not dictated so much as they are explored. Jim’s contemplation on the past late in the book brings this point into relief:

The junk of the past, the memory’s strange detritus. Why should he remember what he does? And does any of it matter? In a world where the majority of all the people born will starve or be killed in wars, after living degraded lives in cardboard shacks, like animals, like rats struggling hour to hour, meal to meal—do his middle-class suburban Orange County memories matter at all? Should they matter? (347)

Robinson leaves those questions suspended in the reader’s mind without dictating an answer and without allowing his narrative of a postmodern Orange County to devolve into a kind of nihilism. The questions suggest, and what Robinson seems to imply that science fiction can offer, is an advancement of inquiry, of the project of science, and the avoidance of simplistic answers.

In *Pacific Edge* and the “Science in the Capital” trilogy, the fact that America is the setting for these dramas is significant. In *Pacific Edge*, after all, Orange County is the site of Robinson’s utopia. In addition, we know that Tom Barnard was instrumental in an American delegation that led the reforms of the Great Change. In *Forty Signs of Rain*, the battle with and

over global warming occurs in Washington, D.C., its major characters are officials of the United States government, and its scientists work for the National Science Foundation. It would further support the notion, articulated most recently in Gore's documentary, that the such movement on the issue of global warming is dependent on American leadership. This is perhaps an uncritical view given the complexity of the other novels in dealing with American exceptionalism, but a pervasive one nonetheless.

This analysis of Robinson's work suggests that the leading science fiction novelist of his generation has focused on a new problem, possible impending environmental disaster, by utilizing a traditional American form in order to maximize its cultural impact. However, Robinson's use of the form is not an uncritical use of the jeremiad's rhetoric. In their effective contemplations about the nature of American identity and how such an identity translates to political and social action on the world's biggest problems, the works illustrate a savvy, complex dialogue with the form's characteristic emphases on polemical rhetoric and the concept of American exceptionalism.

Eco-Jeremiads on the Big Screen

Silent Running (Douglas Trumbull, 1972) and *Soylent Green* (Richard Fleischer, 1973), along with *The Omega Man* (Boris Sagal, 1971), *Logan's Run* (Michael Anderson, 1976), and the various *Planet of the Apes* films, constitute significant entries in science fiction environmental problem-films of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Characterized primarily by the pervasiveness of an intensely pessimistic vision of the future, they register an anxiety over man's interactions with the natural environment that are usually seen as abusive, exploitative, or untenable. They offer an explanation for the disaster that indicts man's destructive relationship with his environment, and, in doing so, encourage the audience to make the necessary changes before the

horror of the film becomes their reality. While there is, perhaps, only anecdotal evidence concerning the efficacy of such messages with audiences (that is, people who were inspired to political action and conservation by viewing *Silent Running*, for example), what seems clear is that the films offer the kind of critique and attempt at understanding that ecocriticism pursues. In addition, given the tenor of the national discourse on environment-related issues, it seems clear that we are now living in a period of heightened awareness concerning human interaction with our environment. For example, both the 2008 Democratic and the Republican presidential candidate addressed the issue in some form alongside more traditional issues such as foreign policy, healthcare, or education.³ What the indebtedness of these texts and films to the jeremiad tradition suggests is that this contemporary awareness is the product of the cultural work done years earlier by texts such as Carson's *Silent Spring* and films such as *Silent Running* and *Soylent Green*. By laying the conceptual groundwork for these issues, these texts influenced the ongoing process of American identity formation.

Silent Running, a 1972 film directed by Douglas Trumbull, is set in a distant future in which Earth's forests have been completely destroyed. A fleet of large spaceships is tasked with stewarding the remaining forests in outer space until the time they are recalled and successfully replanted on Earth. Soon after the film begins, however, the fleet is ordered to destroy their precious cargo and return to regular fleet service. Freeman Lowell, the caretaker of the remaining forests, mutinies and murders the remaining members of the crew in order to save the final biodome aboard the *Valley Forge*. During the course of the film's remaining minutes, Lowell must evade the other starship whose crew believes that only a malfunction has kept him from jettisoning his final dome. In his attempt to flee, Lowell's new course pulls the starship further away from the sun's rays and the forests begin to deteriorate. After reprogramming the

starship's robots to become the new caretakers of the remaining forests, the film concludes with Lowell jettisoning the newly self-sustaining dome and destroying his ship and himself. The film's final image is of Lowell's dome floating in the vastness of space: presumably saved from destruction.

Soylent Green, a 1973 film starring Charlton Heston in one of his iconic science fiction roles, is set in the New York of 2022. Overpopulation, extreme scarcity, and prevalent poverty are the realities of this dystopian future and provide the background for the murder of a prominent member of the board of the Soylent Corporation: the company tasked with providing the world's food supply. Detective Robert Thorn (Charlton Heston) is assigned to investigate the murder and quickly uncovers a conspiracy involving the other members of the board and the highest levels of the city's government. In the course of his investigation he meets Shirl, the murdered man's companion who is bound to the apartment in a kind of indentured servitude. His partner Sol is a "book," a researcher of sorts, who pieces together the secret Simonson was murdered to protect. In this future, euthanasia, or "going home" as it is called in the film, is legal and encouraged. After Sol learns the Soylent corporation's horrifying secret, he decides to kill himself. While unable to stop Sol, Thorn arrives at the elaborate "going home" ceremony in time for Sol to share his finding before he dies. When Sol's body is disposed after the ceremony, Thorn tracks his remains to what should be a crematory but, instead, learns the secret central to film: Soylent Green, the food of the future, is made out of people.

As in Gore's documentary, these films, dedicated to warning audiences of global ecological peril, couch their message within surprisingly nationalistic terms. In the cases of *Silent Running* and *Soylent Green*, the films conspicuously function as products of American science fiction designed to speak to American audiences. In *Silent Running*, for example,

traditional American symbols appear throughout the film alongside logos of familiar American companies. The *Valley Forge*, the ship carrying Earth's last forests and whose name, of course, recalls one of the most famous episodes of the Revolutionary War, is, as many exterior shots of the starship illustrate, owned and operated by American Airlines.⁴ Throughout the main deck of the starship, containers holding various supplies are emblazoned with product logos from familiar American companies such as Coca-cola, Dow chemical, and Polaroid. Meanwhile, the crew members wear jumpsuits that are conspicuously red, white, or blue with American flag patches. During the film's very first establishing shot of the *Valley Forge*'s exterior, a sanctimonious speech plays in the background that explains the ship's mission:

On this first day of a new century, we humbly beg forgiveness and dedicate these last forests of our once beautiful nation, in the hope that they will one day return and grace our foul earth. Until that day, may God bless these gardens and the brave men who care for them.

A march-like piece plays as the ship's exterior is revealed from the outside of Lowell's window and the dual symbols of the American flag and the American Airlines logo (altered here to say "American Airlines Space Freighter") appear emblazoned on the side of the ship.

While *Soylent Green* was undoubtedly an American product (it was produced by MGM and its director, screenwriter, and all principle actors are American) the film's message is not as overtly couched in American terms and symbols as *Silent Running*. However, there are still convincing examples of ways in which the film invites viewers to read its narrative and its warning in domestic terms. The film, for example, reduces the scale of global ecological disaster to one American city and shows its effects on everyday Americans. Its narrative centers around a traditional murder-police investigation led by clearly one of the most well-known and iconic

American actors: Charlton Heston. The board of Soygent, the men responsible for running the corporation tasked with producing the world's food supply, is staffed, curiously, only by Americans: with our only representative examples being the murdered Simonson and the corrupt New York Governor Santini. In addition, the overtly domestic nature of the film exists alongside what we later realize is a horrific parody of the American marketplace. Throughout the film the audience is bombarded by references to Soygent products. There is a Soygent marketplace, for example, in which vendors yell out advertisements such as "Quick energy yellow Soygent, made of genuine soybean!" The audience sees the various incarnations of Soygent products: Soygent crumbs, Soygent buns, Soygent Red, Soygent Orange, and, of course, Soygent Green. The film's first spoken line is, in fact, a television program in which a speech by Governor Santini, the audience is told, is sponsored by Soygent Red and Soygent Yellow: "High Energy Vegetable Concentrates" and "new, delicious Soygent Green: the miracle food of high-energy plankton gathered from the oceans of the world." Indeed, throughout the film, commercials for various Soygent products float in the background appropriately alongside reelection posters for Governor Santini. "Remember," another commercial intones, "Tuesday is Soygent Green day!"

These keys to the film's investment in American culture, their positioning of themselves as American texts capable of speaking to American audiences, becomes especially clear when one considers how these images of American culture connect to the polemical rhetoric employed in each film. *Soygent Green*, at first glance, seems to trumpet a complaint that frustrates any possibility for reform or action. The film, loosely based on Harry Harrison's novel *Make Room! Make Room!* (1966), begins with a raucous sequence of images showing mankind's rush from humble agrarian beginnings toward mechanization, mass production, and, the film's explicit concern, overpopulation. The film's primary explicit complaint, then, is the disastrous effects of

human overpopulation and throughout the film, the audience is made excruciatingly aware of not only this pending disaster, but its subsequent evils as well (rampant crime, starvation and general human misery to say nothing of a reemerged virulent sexism). Such a polemical stance seemingly frustrates the natural transition to a call for political and social action (a hallmark of the jeremiad). However, the implicit complaint of the film is not population growth, per se, but population growth outside of a natural balance with the Earth's ability to sustain such life. This is, perhaps, where ecology's emphasis on the connectivity and interdependence of life systems on Earth is most relevant. The film's famous line, "Soylent Green is people," reveals that the Earth's natural interactions between biological organisms have been severed and forced into an incestuous loop in which humans (albeit unknowingly) eat humans. What the film does accomplish is an awareness of ecology and its emphasis on balancing human interaction and human growth with the Earth's other life systems.

In another sense, the horror of the film's reveal could be read as mankind's horror at the realization that it is not above such interdependent ecology but a part of it. Such a reading draws attention to a tradition of American conceptions of nature and human culture as separate and sometimes opposed entities. In his essay, "Cultivating the American Garden," Frederick Turner argues that such a conceptual division has led Americans to conceive of natural space as either sites for preservation (as in our National Park System) or sites of exploitation. Turner traces this tendency back to Puritan roots and argues that Puritanism's "denial of the validity and permissibility of mediating terms" fostered a horror "of any spiritual miscegenation between the human and the natural" (46).⁵ Therefore, Turner's essay, in fiercely asserting that "the state of America is the state of being able to change our myths," calls for a rethinking of natural space within American culture (48). Turner's call for an "American Garden" is not so much a call to

transform physical spaces in the American landscape than it is a call to re-conceptualize the dialectic leading Americans to think of their nation's natural spaces as separate from its public or political spaces. It is a call for a distinct American ecology that attempts to redress the damage done by the traditional concept of human culture outside of such interdependent ecology.

This is, despite all of the emphasis placed on DDT and other pesticides, the primary complaint of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*. For example, she explains the effects of pesticides on the soil in precisely these terms: "This soil community, then, consists of a web of interwoven lives, each in some way related to the others- the living creatures depending on the soil, but the soil in turn a vital element of the earth only so long as this community within it flourishes" (56). Carson targets pesticides precisely because they disrupt this natural exchange. In another section, she describes efforts to control the Japanese beetle population by introducing their natural predators into areas where the beetles were previously allowed to live artificially unhindered.

The film's emphasis on ecology manifests itself in the film's political and social concerns. All societal problems seems to emanate, as if to emphasize the connectedness of this society to its natural environment, from the scarcity of resources articulated ad infinitum throughout the film. The cities are overcrowded, we learn, because they are the only place to find work and, thus, food. Crime is rampant because it pays (one of the few occupations that does) and because the police are kept busy by frequent food riots. Sexism too has reemerged because women have found that the clearest path to sustenance and comfort is by being a companion to influential men as part of their expensive apartments (being literally referred to throughout the film as "furniture"). Finally, religion, curiously portrayed as the last vestige of morality and conscience in the film, is, in the representative character of Father Paul (Lincoln

Kilpatrick) driven to madness at the revelation of the extent of the damage. In this way, *Soylent Green* can be read as what Cynthia Deitering calls a postnatural narrative. That is, the film functions as a narrative that renders what Deitering sees as the fundamental shift in American culture in the twentieth century: “a shift from a culture defined by its production to a culture defined by its waste” (197). Modifying Martin Heidegger’s notion of the “standing reserve,” Deitering argues that the experience of the late twentieth century is one in which the Real shifted from the standing-reserve to the “already-used-up” (199). Deitering explains how the symbols that used to stand in for economic and technological possibility now represent that which has already been exploited:

The tract of land is now represented as a possible site of contaminated waste, left over from coal mining operations. The river is now represented as a possible waste receptacle for the by-products of a nuclear plant. The airplane is now represented as flaming debris. In other words, what is revealed now is the waste of the empire. (199)

While such images are rampant in *Soylent Green*, none are so relevant as the Soylent Green wafer. The conveyor belts filled with green wafers are horrifying because, by film’s end, the audience knows that they are not sustenance, they are literally the last vestiges of the used-up human body.

However, one of the film’s more subtle indictments provides another connection to the anxieties of American culture. In his analysis, J.P. Telotte reads the film as an exploration of the paradox of consumer culture. It was, he writes, a paradox in which “the very technologies we had embraced to make life more convenient, more efficient, more pleasurable, were contributing...to the very destruction of our way of life through air and water pollution,

deforestation, the eradication of natural habitats, and the extinction of other species” (104).

Telotte’s point is especially convincing when considering some of the film’s dynamic images.

When Thorn (Charlton Heston) begins investigating the Simonson case he gets to enjoy, albeit briefly, the spoils of the assignment. He steals Simonson’s bourbon, his food, his books (which, the audience later learns, are the Soyilent oceanographic survey reports that lead to the film’s shocking revelation) and he enjoys the apartment’s air conditioning, bathes in its hot water, and sleeps in Simonson’s bed with Simonson’s companion, Shirl (Leigh Taylor-Young). In one early scene Thorn is visibly stunned by the sight of running water. When the bodyguard, whose statement Thorn is taking at the time, leaves the room, Heston’s slow and deliberate splashing of water on his face conveys the unspeakably rare pleasure that such an act is for Thorn. In a later scene in which Shirl entices Thorn to stay the night, she tells him, “You can take a shower and let the water run as long as you like.” Thorn is visibly persuaded and replies, “All right, you turn that air conditioner on, all the way.” “All the way up,” Shirl responds, “we’ll make it cold like winter used to be.” The scene’s conspicuous consumption is bittersweet not only because the audience is aware of how rare and fleeting this experience is for Thorn (the contrasting scenes of squalor and starvation throughout the film drive that point home) but also because the film’s underlying indictment of consumer culture suggests that such consumption was the cause of the film’s prevalent misery.

This overt conflation of consumerism and cannibalism naturally lends itself to a reading of the film as an indictment of consumer capitalism. Telotte, for example, sees the film’s fundamental conflation as “a metaphor for our current condition, one in which we are already unwittingly in the process of destroying ourselves, consuming our fellow humans to maintain some semblance of the status quo” (104). Such a reading allows, unlike the film’s polemical

rhetoric on overpopulation, a space in which audiences can feel as if they have some recourse to action to avoid the future presented by the film. Fighting economic exploitation is one thing; asking people to stop having children is another.

A very similar polemic on consumer capitalism is found in *Silent Running*. When the film opens the *Valley Forge* has been recalled to merchant duty by the Earth government. Before they can return, however, they are ordered to jettison and explode their precious cargo. Freeman Lowell (Bruce Dern), the ship's caretaker, is horrified while his crewmates, John, Marty, and Andy exhibit a complete lack of concern, outright hostility to their mission of conservation, and even exuberance at the notion of exploding the domes so that they may return home.⁶ Their reactions stand in for the prevailing attitudes on Earth that have presumably led to such ecological disaster. To be sure, one of the film's most memorable scenes is one in which Lowell's crew mates shout in excitement over being able to destroy the forest domes. There is something particularly garish about their delight and Lowell's contrasting horror.

Just as in *Soylent Green*, American consumerism and consumption are indicted as the causes of ecological disaster leading to the *Valley Forge*'s mission. However, in a curious way, this same nationalism leads to the small triumph of the film's call for conservation. At one point in the film, the camera lingers over a copy of the "Conservation Pledge," clearly a flyer from the National Parks Service, hanging near Lowell's bed. "I give my pledge as an American," it reads, "to save and faithfully to defend from waste the natural resources of my country- its soil and minerals, its forests, waters and wildlife." Such conservation has come at a high cost for Lowell. He is a murderer, after all, and ultimately commits suicide to safeguard the final dome's survival. While such morality may come into question, his actions, the film posits, are necessary to fulfill the truer, higher charge of conservation.⁷ Perhaps, in this light, Lowell can be read as fulfilling a

new charge. Like the Puritans of early America, Lowell, finding his initial objective dissolved, launches upon his own errand (an errand *with* the wilderness, so to speak). The film's final image, of the dome containing the last forest solemnly floating in space, is surely meant to call forth the iconic Earthrise image brought back from Apollo 8. Such an ending emphasizes, as that famous photo did, the precarious, fragile nature of the planet and the desperate need for conservation.

Yet, compare this tendency to provide social critique to another popular genre of the same era, the disaster film, and one finds a profound distinction. The disaster film, having its roots in the earliest science fiction films, really became a hallmark of the genre during the 1950s. Susan Sontag, in her influential analysis of disaster films, "The Imagination of Disaster," argues that science fiction films of this era, in contrast to their counterparts in other genres and even to science fiction texts, "have unique strengths one of which is the immediate representation of the extraordinary: physical deformity, mutation, missile and rocket combat, toppling skyscrapers" (453). In this way, says Sontag, science fiction film is a privileged medium. It can provide something even novels of the same genre cannot: what Sontag terms "sensuous elaboration" (454). However, this is not to suggest that Sontag has a very high opinion of the genre and the uses to which it puts this unique ability. For example, she argues that the genre is characterized by a stultifying repetitiveness. These films, she argues, utilize the same icons and plots over and over again presumably in an attempt to duplicate box office success. In addition Sontag finds that the films perpetuate "cliches about identity, volition, power, knowledge, happiness, social consensus, guilt, [and] responsibility[...]" (465). However, her most damning criticism of the film is precisely what sets the genre apart from the genre considered in this analysis. She argues that disaster films contain "absolutely no social criticism, of even the most

implicit kind” (463). In addition, she fiercely asserts that, instead, the films only illustrate “the conditions in our society which create the impersonality and dehumanization which science fiction fantasies displace onto the influence of an alien It” (463). For Sontag, this tendency against social critique has much to do with how these science fiction films are viewed. At the heart of the science fiction film, she says, “is a morally acceptable fantasy where one can give outlet to cruel or at least amoral feelings” (456). Arguing that science fiction films “are one of the purest forms of spectacle,” Sontag compares the act of viewing a disaster film to how people view the physically deformed:

The sense of superiority over the freak conjoined in varying proportions with the titillation of fear and aversion makes it possible for moral scruples to be lifted, for cruelty to be enjoyed[...]. In the figure of the monster from outer space, the freakish, the ugly, and the predatory all converge-and provide a fantasy target for righteous bellicosity to discharge itself, and for the aesthetic enjoyment of suffering and disaster. (456)

This is precisely the opposite of what occurs in the science fiction films discussed in this analysis. In their dystopian polemics, these films have indicted the world of the viewer as cause for the suffering in the film. It is unlikely that a viewer of *Soylent Green* or *Silent Running* would not feel the sting of each film’s critique of consumer culture or lack of vigilance in conservation. In this sense, the viewer has an intimate connection to the suffering in the films. Such a connection provides the very real possibility for social change in merely the viewer’s desire to avoid the suffering warned by the film. Finally, if the genre is known for the spectacle and sensuous experience that its special effects and sheer imagination can provide, one can only imagine the possibilities for social change if such aesthetic enjoyment of disaster and suffering

were turned instead towards a concern for man's fellow man and his place on this planet. That is precisely what occurs in *Silent Running*, *Soylent Green*, and other films of the same genre. Those aesthetic tools are used instead to foster collective responsibility and environmental concern.

Perhaps this distinction would be made clearer in a comparison between *Soylent Green* and a film that emerged the very next year: *Earthquake* (Mark Robson, 1974). In *Soylent Green* it is clear that humanity, in general, and some groups in particular (perhaps the Soylent company) are responsible for the ecological damage and resulting human suffering. There is certainly a conspiratorial air to the film that is satisfied by Thorn's investigation and his shocking revelation of Soylent Green's origin. Ultimately, the audience participates in assigning culpability and such participation helps lay the conceptual groundwork for understanding their culpability in the larger issue of ecological disaster. However, in a film like *Earthquake* the very notion of culpability, of assigning blame, is a ridiculous gesture.

In this sense, Sontag's analysis is appropriate. In *Earthquake*, there is no one to blame and, as such, the audience is relieved of this moral connection to the world of the film. This point is only made clearer by the soap opera-like narrative that constitutes the film's exposition in which, it seems, the audience is introduced to some characters only so that they can root for some characters to live and (more importantly) some to die. Absent this connection to social critique, the earthquake is merely something that all of the characters must survive and the audience is meant to enjoy. It is appropriate, then, that some viewers have come to describe the two films that make up *Earthquake*: the soap opera and the disaster/special effects film. It is perhaps more appropriate that at Universal Studios Florida there was a special effects "ride," *Earthquake: The Big One*, based on the 1974 film that completely dismissed any mention of the

plot in favor of explosions, flooding, and other spectacular thrills. Such a ride (it closed permanently in November of 2007) did not, for example, ask riders to consider the plight of earthquake victims or the enormous human challenges cities face, as they inevitably do, when recovering from a disastrous earthquake (or any natural disaster, for that matter). In this way, *Earthquake: The Big One* provided a purer disaster film experience in the terms that Sontag describes (having, by cutting out plot and people, completely severed any hope of social critique in favor of a purer thrill-seeking, sensuous experience). Perhaps this is why fans of films like *Soylent Green* and *Silent Running*, films devoted to spectacle as a means to social critique, are still waiting for their themed attractions.

The Day After Tomorrow (Roland Emmerich, 2004), on the other hand, seems in many ways to be the kind of film that Sontag describes. In that film, massive hurricanes, tornados, wild temperature shifts and flash-freeze storms are discovered to be the product of a kind of fast-tracked global warming. Dr. Jack Hall (Dennis Quaid) discovers that the melting of the polar ice caps have dumped enough fresh water into the world's oceans to stall the North Atlantic Current. The unfortunate result, Hall concludes, is that the northern hemisphere will be plunged into another ice age. Set against the backdrop of dramatic global climate change, Hall sets out to rescue his son, Sam, who is stuck in a New York City paralyzed by flooding, massive snowdrifts, and killer flash-freeze storms. However, like *Soylent Green* and *Silent Running*, *The Day After Tomorrow*'s emphasis on social critique redeems it from the genre of films only invested in spectacle. That is not to say that *The Day After Tomorrow* does not employ spectacular images of a world being destroyed by drastic climate change. Instead, Roland Emmerich's film of a fast-tracked global warming disaster utilizes such imagery to accentuate its overarching interrogation

of the role of scientific knowledge and inquiry in a world hostile to the science of global warming.

Indeed, the film's allegorical aspects are pretty conspicuous. As the film's hero, Jack Hall is an under-appreciated paleo-climatologist whose calls for action on global warming and, specifically, the broad-ranging effects of stalling the North Atlantic Current, fall on cynical ears. The film's major cynic (and, perhaps, only real antagonist) is Vice President Becker and a dead-ringer for Vice President Dick Cheney. In these ways and in others, the film mirrors the current antagonism between the American environmental movement and its allies in the Democratic party (such as former Vice President Al Gore) and critics on the political Right. Besides a more overt concern (and characteristic warning rhetoric) over the perils of global warming, the film's central concern is really a warning against the dismissal of knowledge gained through scientific inquiry and, in fact, knowledge, in general. In other words, Dr. Hall is the film's protagonist precisely because he is a man of science that values knowledge and the power it gives him to understand the world. For example, it is Hall that discovers the reason behind the flash-freeze storms that cause helicopters to fall out of the sky, entire buildings to freeze, and people to die in their tracks. It is this knowledge that helps him negotiate the treacherous, icy trip to New York City save his son, Sam (who is, appropriately, in New York for a scholastic competition) when others have died. Admittedly, this emphasis leads the film into a few awkward moments. In one scene, for example, scientists gathered in a NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) war-room-of-sorts gasp (and the camera pauses to emphasize their shock) when Hall announces that "we've hit a critical de-salinization point." This is probably not the dialogue nor the dramatic moment the audience was expecting. However, it is precisely the point that even in its awkward way, *The Day After Tomorrow* seeks a world in which such discussions are

found in the prominent discourse (whether political or meteorological). In other words, while it would be easy to read *The Day After Tomorrow* as being designed to deliver the spectacle of worldwide disaster of global warming (albeit accelerated at a ridiculous rate) in an attempt to scare audiences into action, the film's prominent (and more viable) message is one that asks them to value scientific inquiry and warns them of the consequences if they do not. In this way, the film's warning and focus is not technological or even scientific, but, like Al Gore's concern in *An Inconvenient Truth*, moral. In this way, films like *The Day After Tomorrow* engage the tradition of the American jeremiad.

This is exactly the situation in a similar film released the previous year: *The Core* (Jon Amiel, 2003). In that film, the threat of global annihilation emerges because the Earth's core has stopped spinning (thus leaving the Earth without a magnetic field and susceptible to the ravages of solar wind). This effect generates a series of bizarre natural disasters such as electrical superstorms, violent birdstrikes (because, the film posits, birds have lost their ability to navigate), and electromagnetic disturbances that instantaneously kill unsuspecting, pacemaker-wearing citizens. Having correctly diagnosed the strange origin of the phenomena, Dr. Josh Keyes (Aaron Eckhart) leads a team of scientists to travel down into the Earth's core and, by detonating a series of nuclear bombs, restart the core's movement. Eventually, the audience discovers that the Earth's core was halted accidentally by a military project gone awry. In this sense, the film functions as a familiar warning about the role of scientific research in the military-industrial complex. However, such a criticism is specifically moral in nature because, in one of the most familiar veins of science fiction, the film explores how science can have a good or evil value given its application. After all, science in a military context is seen in the film as the cause for near global catastrophe. On the other hand, it is science that allows the team of

intrepid explorers led by Dr. Keyes to restart the Earth's core. This point is further driven home by the fact that the team uses nuclear bombs in a cascade effect to rehabilitate the core (seen here not in their destructive use, but in a positive, constructive and benevolent sense) and the foil of Keyes, the humble geophysics professor dedicated to his students, to Dr. Conrad Zimsky (Stanley Tucci), the arrogant, self-absorbed scientist behind the military project responsible for the disaster. The accomplishment of a film like *The Core* (2003) is that, despite its sensational special effects, the film's rhetoric comes across as so clearly focused on the morality of the warrants behind the science and insists on the importance of scientific inquiry in general.

Wall-E (Andrew Stanton, 2008), a Disney/ Pixar film, expands upon this foregrounding of the morality inherent in the use of science and technology by making its central, unavoidable feature the irony and complexity engendered by its main character, Wall-E, who is both the product of the rampant consumerism responsible for the Earth's future wretched state and the catalyst for humanity's regeneration. In the film, the future Earth has suffered widespread ecological disaster due in no small part to the Buy N' Large corporation and its overabundance of consumer products. Humans have abandoned Earth aboard a space cruiser, the *Axiom*, while mobile trash compactor robots, Wall-Es (Waste Allocation Load Lifter- Earth Class), were assigned to clean up the refuse literally littering the planet. However, with the environmental damage proving to be too widespread, the cruiser's original five year mission has ballooned by a number of generations. The narrative begins with Wall-E, apparently the last operational robot, in a lonely, desolate cityscape going about his daily business of trash compacting and, amusingly, collecting nicknacks that are of interest to him. Soon after the film's opening, an EVE (Extraterrestrial Vegetation Evaluator) robot arrives from the *Axiom* in search of life on the planet and Wall-E simply falls in love. After finding a small plant that Wall-E had collected

earlier in the film, EVE is retrieved by a rocketship and sent on her way back to the *Axiom*. The film then follows their attempts to deliver EVE's finding to the ship's Captain, their flight from robots tasked to stop them and their possible return to Earth, and humanity's triumphant return to Earth.

Wall-E is a film invested in and made richer by its implicit ironies. A Buy N' Large trash robot, a product of the consumer culture partly responsible for destroying the planet, for example, becomes the catalyst for the renewal of the human community and its new emphasis on environmental responsibility. Such a situation mirrors the fact of the film itself, a shiny, savvy product of one of the nation's biggest entertainment companies (no doubt with its army of tie-in toys and products) becoming the vessel for one of the year's most articulate critiques of that very same consumer culture. However, instead of making the film's polemical rhetoric confused or unintelligible, these ironies serve to foreground a kind of morality that the film's insistence on humanity and compassion engender. At its heart, *Wall-E* is a love story. His interactions with EVE are perhaps the most endearing and authentic in the film: especially when compared with the simple, mind-numbing consumption that has become the daily experience of the humans aboard the *Axiom*. As his efforts to be with EVE progress, Wall-E interacts with more and more people and robots aboard ship. They learn each others names, become friends, care about each other and, ultimately, consider a life outside of the infantilizing comfort of the ship. In this small way, Wall-E's interactions with others constitute his own little community that, taken along with the film's emphasis on love and compassion, suggest a renewal of the human community finally consummated at the film's end.

Wall-E, in his love and compassion for EVE, becomes a catalyst for the other film's characters and their resulting revision of their society's ethics. It is after the personal television

screens are turned off that some characters branch out to meet and care about others. It is after meeting Wall-E that the *Axiom*'s Captain becomes interested in Earth, its history, and, humorously, gardening. These things are possible (the film's hopeful ending is possible) precisely because Wall-E's existence, the very fact that he appears to have a soul, suggests that the impulses and ethics behind a culture that needs a Buy N' Large are instead deserving of scorn. In other words, the film's polemic is not simply a indictment of the overabundance of consumer products, but rather the questionable ethics and morals, the laziness and the predilection for excess, that lay behind them. This is the regeneration offered by the film. Even though the film begins after the ecological destruction of the Earth, it is not ultimately a pessimistic narrative because it holds out the hope that the moral underpinnings of a society, especially those of the audience, are the real site for possible remedy.

In each of the above cases, such critiques occur alongside rather conspicuous and iconic American monuments, buildings, and images (consider *Wall-E*'s frequent allusions to *Hello, Dolly!*, for example). However, the salient point about these films is that they all discuss the perils of forthcoming ecological disaster in a way that takes advantage of the cultural work done previously in the tradition. It is a tradition in which knowledge about the issue has become so culturally incorporated that they are able to bypass significant exposition in order to critique the moral underpinnings of the issue's rhetoric. As the twenty-first century unfolds and ecological issues become more prominent in the national discourse, such efforts at social criticism allow concerned citizens to directly focus on the warrants behind rhetoric that looks to shape American and global policy in the new century.

There is little doubt that these texts and films seem to be set at a white heat. In their strong polemical rhetoric, delivered through the cognitive estrangement of a dystopian future,

they highlight something in our world that is unjust and destructive in order to articulate a path to a just and great community. Therefore, implicit in that complaint is the assertion that within the audience and the culture is the frustrated potential to solve the problem and the moral obligation to do so. For better or worse, this is the legacy of the Puritan's covenant rhetoric. As a concern over global ecological damage continues to influence American discourse (political and otherwise), what an understanding of the American jeremiad tradition suggests is that Americans' conception of the problem, how they envision their blame for it, and how they understand their obligation to avoid it continues to be shaped by rhetoric equally invested in the ways Americans have come to conceive of themselves.

End Notes

¹ See Linda Lear's introduction to Carson's text in the latest Mariner edition.

² Jill Lepore's *In the Name of War: King Philip's War and the Origins of American Identity* goes into fascinating detail of the pragmatic aspects of the conception of the wilderness and its effect on the settler's mindset. Of particular interest is her section on the settlers's need for differentiation from the Native Americans, thus explaining why lost houses were tallied in raids before human casualties.

³ John McCain, the Republican nominee, for example, allowed the issue to pull a kind of double duty by conflating a concern with climate change with dependence on foreign oil. Such a move allowed him to pivot to a perceived strength on issues of national security. For the Republican party, this was, of course, a change in policy from previous positions of outright hostility toward the issue of global warming.

⁴ While the ship's name refers most explicitly to General Washington's famous Pennsylvania encampment in which his army survived the harsh winter of 1777-1778, the ship itself was particularly named for the decommissioned aircraft carrier that director Douglas Trumbull and crew used as soundstage for most of the film.

⁵ Such a conceptualization being traced back to Puritan roots seems to be at odds with an entire tradition of Puritan writing that looked to the physical world for signs of the community's standing in the spiritual one. When Increase Mather cites an overabundance of caterpillars as a sign of God's displeasure, for example, is he not including the Puritan community within a physical and spiritual world in which their salvation is read from and is connected to the natural world? On this point Turner is silent. He might assert that his argument of attributing this

conceptual division between the natural world and human culture to the Puritans remains intact if the natural world had value only so much as it fulfilled this utility to Puritan culture. On the other hand, Turner's call for an "American Garden" seems to hinge on the historical conception of the wilderness/ garden dialectic in early American culture. Only here, however, Turner's "wilderness" that needs cultivating (or rehabilitating) is the late 20th century American landscape of parking lots, suburbs, strip mines, and strip malls.

⁶ It is significant that Lowell is also the name of a prominent New England family with roots to early American that includes the poet Robert Lowell and nineteenth-century poet and critic James Russell Lowell.

⁷ It should be pointed out that, though the mission was aborted after a number of years, America, the film suggests, is the only nation who attempted such a dramatic mission of conservation.

CHAPTER FOUR
**“WOLVERINES!” THE AMERICAN JEREMIAD AS COUNTERSUBVERSION
AND RESPONSE IN SCIENCE FICTION CINEMA 1980 TO THE PRESENT**

“Demonization allows the countersubversive, in the name of battling the subversive, to imitate his enemy.”

-Michael Rogin, *Ronald Reagan, the Movie*.

In a climactic scene in John Milius’s 1984 film of Soviet invasion of the American heartland, *Red Dawn*, two brothers stand against the fence of a drive-in theater that has been turned into a “re-education” camp. While iconic Soviet images (Lenin’s portrait, etc.) appear in succession on the movie screen, the public announcement system drones its message in the background: “America is a whorehouse where the revolutionary ideals of your forefathers are corrupted and sold in alleys by vendors of capitalism.” Jed and Matt Eckert stare in, shocked, looking for the imprisoned father they have not seen since the Cuban and Russian troops parachuted in to their small Coloradoan town weeks before. It is one of the film’s most memorable scenes. It is shocking, horrific, and frightening. Here, something as American as a drive-in theater has become the site for the indoctrination of, the film suggests, an obscene and foreign ideology. However, the fascinating aspect of this scene and the key to understanding the rest of the film, is that the drive-in/ Soviet re-education camp and Milius’ film are one in the same. They each function in the same way. Both seek to indoctrinate their viewers with a set of cultural narratives and political directives. Both seek to sap the political power from their opponent’s rhetoric as they present their own as undeniably true and ubiquitous. In this way, *Red Dawn* functions as a countersubversive text reflective of the resurgent political conservatism of the 1980s and its re-embracing of a Manichean worldview, characteristic

of the early Cold War, in foreign and domestic affairs. *Red Dawn* and similar countersubversive films and texts promote particular and intensely partisan cultural narratives at the same time that they advocate for particular notions of American identity. In this way, these countersubversive texts participate in the American jeremiad tradition in their use of warning rhetoric to articulate the dangers posed by political enemies and their specifically termed conceptions of American identity and the nation's preeminent role in world affairs. In some cases, the jeremiad is used in a countersubversive manner in order to foreclose dissent. In other cases, the jeremiad is used on the other side of the argument as a response to attempts at countersubversion. As we will see in the case of President Reagan's insistence on the subtext of his acting career during his presidency, such responses exploit the countersubversive text's reliance on the slippery power and primacy of the image in postmodern culture and throw into doubt the very notion of a coherent political ideology or program, countersubversive or otherwise.

Standing before the fence, Jed and Matt see their father stagger up to them from deep in the camp. Perhaps once a strong man, he is visibly worn down by his internment. "I knew it," he says, "You're alive." He takes a moment to examine them closely and then his voice becomes wistful. "I was tough on both of you," he explains, "I did things that made you...hate me sometimes." Summoning a fleeting strength and resolve, he asks, "You understand now, don't you?" It is perhaps a question that the film's director, at the film's conclusion, is also asking of his audience. The following analysis will consider, precisely, just what it is the viewer of a film like *Red Dawn* is supposed to understand.

Political countersubversion is naturally a slippery concept. How does one define political efforts designed to be inconspicuous, whose very success is determined by the

unfettered, uninterrupted continuation of the status quo? The very process of definition, of articulating the limitations and reach of its influence, would precisely necessitate the exact critical, oppositional stance that countersubversive efforts are supposed to neutralize and render impotent. Add to this fact that such terms are not usually in the public or political discourse. Michael P. Rogin, in his influential *Ronald Reagan, the Movie: and Other Episodes in Political Demonology*, articulates the connection between political demonization and the countersubversive tradition in an attempt to explain the dearth of radical politics (or even a strong strain of dissent) in the American tradition. Put simply, political demonology, says Rogin, describes the “creation of monsters as a continuing feature of American politics by the inflation, stigmatization, and dehumanization of political foes” (xiii). Citing such figures as the Indian cannibal, the black rapist, the bomb-throwing anarchist, and the many-tentacled Communist conspiracy, he illustrates how such images are employed by the countersubversive to generate fear of the alien, to focus anxiety, and to foreclose dissent. Ultimately, Rogin is interested in the effect such efforts have in creating a bond between the countersubversive and his foe and the effects that such a manufactured bifurcation in political discourse has had on American national identity.

Rogin focuses his discussion within the American tradition because, he asserts, “American countersubversion has taken its shape from the pervasiveness of propertied individualism in our political culture; the expansionist character of our history; and the definition of American identity against racial, ethnic, class, and gender aliens” (xiv). For evidence he turns, appropriately, to Sacvan Bercovitch’s work on the jeremiad and the role early Puritan America had in articulating a distinct national identity. Here he

summarizes Bercovitch's assertion that Puritanism was responsible for erecting and enforcing a middle-class consensus, effectively stigmatizing those outside its boundaries (283). By the nineteenth century, asserts Rogin, this consensus fused with notions of American identity that incorporated concepts of God, the nation, virulent westward expansion, and the ego into what he terms as the imperial self.¹ The dialectic between the imperial self and the alien is the foundational tension of countersubversive political discourse. "For then," explains Rogin, "the contradictions derived at the center of American life are located in the dark side of Americanism, the alien" (284).

Perhaps one of the clearest examples of political demonization and countersubversion in American politics (and perhaps a means toward illustration and definition) can be found in the nation's policies towards Native Americans. Few other examples stretch back as far to the beginnings of the nation. In the seventeenth century, in what became known as the principle of expropriation, John Winthrop argued that since the Native Americans did not utilize their land for agriculture (since they, in Winthrop's words failed to "subdue and replenish" the earth) their lands could be acquired by white colonists (46). Displacement in one century led to disenfranchisement in the next. In the newly formed nation, George Washington, for example, justified the federal government's expropriation of Native American lands by treaty-making by arguing "the propriety of purchasing their lands in preference to attempting to drive them by force of arms out of our country" (qtd in Rogin 46). In a telling comparison, he likened such efforts to "driving the wild beasts of ye forests...both being beasts of prey tho' they differ in shape (qtd in Rogin 46). In addition, Rogin cites specifically the Dawes Severalty Act of 1887. That act, which originally offered Native Americans the opportunity to become

free Americans and the opportunity to own an allotment of lands previously held by their tribes, eventually resulted in granting those lands to railroad, mining, and cattle interests. In addition, the Dawes Severalty Act effectively diluted any possible cooperative political power by the tribes: most clearly seen in the loss of treaty making rights between the tribes and the federal government (47). This short history of Indian policy could not present a clearer illustration of countersubversive efforts. After Native Americans were literally disenfranchised (denied land and thrust out of the community) and then subdued by force of arms, efforts were taken to render their political power impotent as well. Their ability to function as a collective political entity, as a tribe with bargaining power with the federal government, was diluted. Finally, sequestered on reservations, their economic potential was limited to the point that, in 1983, Secretary of the Interior James Watt complained of their “socialistic” dependence on the federal government (47).

First, in the personal sense, Rogin best defines and illustrates the bond between the countersubversive and his foe through his analysis of Ronald Reagan. Partly a psychoanalytic reading of Reagan’s understanding and appreciation of his own films and their role in his own maturation and partly a critique of Ronald Reagan’s relationship with his various film personas and his persona as head-of-state, Rogin’s reading attempts to correlate seemingly contradictory facts of Reagan’s rhetoric and political policy. Suggesting that the countersubversive “needs monsters to give shape to his anxieties and to permit him to indulge his forbidden desires” Rogin illustrates this natural conflation and imitation between the countersubversive and his foe by, for example, pointing out Reagan’s support in the 1980s of the Nicaraguan Contras as a response to the subversive efforts of the Sandinistas (xiii). Painting Nicaragua as a “Soviet ally on the American

mainland” Reagan could then justify engaging in precisely the kind of political and military action that he was demonizing. Rogin traces this particular brand of countersubversion to developments during the Cold War. Through readings of popular films during the post-World War Two era until 1964, he highlights three major developments that contributed to this conflation between the countersubversive and the subversive. First, the rise of the national security state sought to counter Soviet influence by effectively imitating Soviet styles of surveillance (238). These films, writes Rogin, “politicize privacy in the name of protecting it and thereby wipe it out” (245). Secondly, in American culture, the family (and particularly the role of the mother) was simultaneously glorified as the bastion of American values and feared as the possible site of subversive contamination (with the film, *My Son John* in 1952, used as an example of the susceptibility to subversion excessive mothering could engender). Finally, the emergence of a mass culture that served to homogenize difference (effectively making subversives difficult to identify by traditional race or class markers) (238).

It can be imagined, however, that these developments have had consequences for American culture’s conception of its own identity. What the fiction of the twentieth century bears out is a tension between both the insider/outsider dialectic that such political and cultural developments have engendered and a view critical of being forced into a Manichaeian conception of the world. In other words, the films considered in the following pages, to be sure, do highlight the “rigid insistence on difference” that Rogin argues occurs at each countersubversive moment of history. However, these films also appear to draw critical attention to this manufactured system of difference in national identity formation. As we will see, these films, especially those from the late 1990s and

early 2000s, engage this constructed opposition in ways that suggest a critical reappraisal of its role in culture. When in *Red Dawn*, the 1984 film about a Soviet-Cuban invasion of the American mainland, a dead man's rifle is pulled from his lifeless hands just before the camera rests on a bumper sticker that says "You can have my gun when you pry it from my dead, cold fingers," there is an unmistakable element of critique as well alongside an attempt at countersubversion. This film, such a scene suggests, takes a much more critical, engaged position in considering those divisions engendered by countersubversion in Cold War cultural discourse. What this scene illustrates is that national identity is precisely what is at stake in such a struggle.

Ronald Reagan, after all, was fond of paraphrasing John Winthrop's "city upon a hill" metaphor when describing the nation. When Winthrop talked of the new American community as something exceptional, when he spoke of the "city upon a hill," he was drawing attention to the tremendous burden that such a relationship meant for the colonists. This was not so much a source of pride as it was a reminder to be humble. It was no endorsement of their growing power and prominence but a charge to exercise it for justice. People, after all, have no trouble seeing a city on a hill. Their actions are easily judged. In his farewell speech in January 1989, Reagan invoked the metaphor one last time and his interpretation is striking for its distinction from Winthrop's:

I've spoken of the shining city all my political life, but I don't know if I ever quite communicated what I saw when I said it. But in my mind it was a tall proud city built on rocks stronger than oceans, wind-swept, God-blessed, and teeming with people of all kinds living in harmony and peace. A city with free ports that hummed with commerce and creativity,

and if there had to be city walls, the walls had doors and the doors were open to anyone with the will and the heart to get here.[...]And how stands the city on this winter night? More prosperous, more secure, and happier than it was eight years ago. But more than that; after two hundred years...she still stands strong and true on the granite ridge, and her glow has held steady no matter what storm. And she's still a beacon, still a magnet for all who must have freedom, for all the pilgrims from all the lost places who are hurtling through the darkness, toward home[...].

(“Farewell Address”)

Reagan’s “city” in other words, is the envy of the world; Winthrop’s, the nation’s charge and burden. Such interpretations over America’s place in the world, whose nation it is, and the nature of our national identity are still being fought over. A major weapon in such a battle has been the invocation of the Frontier Myth in fiction since 1980.

The Reaganite Return to the Frontier

The Frontier as a geographical and conceptual phenomenon in American history is, of course, not a place or thing to which one may return. By definition, once one has been to the Frontier it has become knowable, charted, and domesticated. The frontier perpetually exists at the border of what is knowable and the abyss of our ignorance. Few concepts in American culture have been so closely studied and agonized over as the influence of the Frontier on American identity formation. Richard Slotkin, in his trilogy beginning with *Regeneration Through Violence* and ending with *Gunfighter Nation* charts the Frontier Myth through the entirety of American history and finding it, for example, determining policy towards Native Americans at the nation’s earliest moments and

influencing conceptions of national defense problems late into the twentieth century. However, in the 1980s, something curious happens to this common way of mythologizing America's past. Suddenly, it became possible to go back to the Frontier. It is at this intersection of national myth, political demagoguery, postmodernism and science fiction that popular films from the era jockey over definitions of American identity and invoke the Frontier Myth in both conventional and radical ways as a means to lay claim to what being an American was to be about.

The Frontier Myth, as Slotkin defines it, explains the historical fact of the conquest of the wilderness and the native peoples of the continent as the means to the achievement of a “national identity, a democratic polity, an ever-expanding economy, and a phenomenally dynamic and ‘progressive’ civilization” (*Gunfighter Nation* 10). The original task of the myth in terms of ideology, says Slotkin, “was to explain and justify the establishment of the American colonies” (10). However, as the colonies expanded and developed, the Myth, Slotkin explains, “was called on to account for our rapid economic growth, our emergence as a powerful nation-state, and our distinctively American approach to the socially and culturally disruptive processes of modernization” (10). For Slotkin, there are two primary characteristics to the Myth. First, conflict (or violence) became a characterizing element of the myth due to the early settlers' struggle with both the natural environment and the native peoples. In addition, the economic engine of the Anglo-American colonies ran on the displacement of native societies and the enslavement of Africans (11). As a result, says Slotkin, “the ‘savage war’ became a characteristic episode of each phase of westward expansion” (11). Secondly, such violence is read as regenerative to successive generations that employ the

Myth. The Puritans, for example, read spiritual regeneration from their conflicts with the land and its inhabitants, the Jeffersonians saw it as a “democratic renewal of the original ‘social contract’,” and Jacksonian Americans read the conquest of the Frontier “as a means to the regeneration of personal fortunes and/or of patriotic vigor and virtue” (12). In each case, says Slotkin, “the Myth represented the redemption of American spirit or fortune as something to be achieved by playing through a scenario of separation, temporary regression to a more primitive or ‘natural’ state, and *regeneration through violence*” (12).

In his earlier work, Slotkin explained the role of myth as a cultural phenomenon. It is, says Slotkin, “simultaneously a psychological and a social activity...articulated by individual artists and has its effects on the mind of the individual participant... [while] its function is to reconcile and unite these individualities to a collective identity” (*Regeneration Through Violence* 8). In this way, myth-making is essentially a conservative exercise and depends, argues Slotkin, “on its ability to play on conscious and unconscious memory, to invoke and relate all the narratives (historical and personal) that we have inherited, and to reach back to the primal levels of individual and collective psychology” (14). Slotkin emphasizes the regressive or outright destructive possibilities of myth’s influence on culture. “A people unaware of its myths,” he says, “is likely to continue living by them, though the world around that people may change and demand changes in their psychology, their world view, their ethics, and their institutions” (5). In *Gunfighter Nation*, Slotkin argues the effect the Myth had in promoting “bonanza economics,” what he terms as the “acquisition of abundant resources without commensurate inputs of labor and investment” (645). While this led to economic

expansion during the Reagan administration, its benefits were distributed so unequally that the number of persons living in poverty actually increased and the income and assets of most of the population declined all while the richest Americans were acquiring a larger share of the nation's wealth (648). Foremost, then, Slotkin's aim is to articulate the Myth and its influence on contemporary culture as a means of warning against the power of myth to "reach out of the past to cripple, incapacitate, or strike down the living" (*Regeneration* 5).

Like Rogin, Slotkin identifies the 1980s as an exceptional time in American culture due, in particular, to the myth-making/ myth-utilizing administration of Ronald Reagan. He suggests that the beginning of the era was characterized by a crisis of public myth. America, facing the trauma of defeat in Vietnam and the economic difficulties of "stagflation" and the Arab Oil Embargo of 1973-74, was feared to have lost its exceptional status among nations: of becoming a 'second rate' power (625). In other words, the incoming administration believed that the mythological underpinnings of the nation had been called into question in such a way that sapped the nation's confidence. This had implications in the arenas of economic, domestic, and foreign policy.

The Reagan administration began, as one of its primary goals, the task of rehabilitating the nation's foundational myths both as a campaign and political strategy and as a means to generating support for actual policy goals. With his experience as an actor, Reagan, as Rogin and Slotkin both point out, was ideal for such a role. Primarily, the myth-makers of the Reagan Revolution, says Slotkin, sought to "overcome the 'malaise' of the 1970s...by substituting for the distressing memory of 'the Sixties' a fictive replica of a simpler time: the 'Happy Days' when the Cold War was young and the

world was divided between an ‘evil empire’ and a TV-pastoral...” (643). The ultimate goal of these efforts, Slotkin argues, “was the systematic resanctification of the symbols and rituals of ‘public myth’” (643). There is significant evidence, of course, that such efforts did resonate within the culture. A television commercial from Reagan’s 1984 reelection campaign, popularly titled “Morning in America,” is commonly hailed as a stroke of genius for its ability to symbolize and sanctify American work, wealth, and progress. When Reagan died in 2004, the image that *Time* magazine chose for its commemorative issue was the now iconic picture of Reagan in his Stetson. So iconic was this image that erroneous references to Reagan primarily as a western/ cowboy actor began to permeate the culture (though, like all actors of his generation, he surely did appear in some films in the western genre). In fact, many of Reagan’s roles, such as *Storm Warning* (1951) and *Bedtime for Bonzo* (1951) had him playing the young, liberal intellectual.² Much of Reagan’s mythos, this suggests, was retroactively written. Indeed, it was Reagan’s uncanny ability to seamlessly include and invoke images of a heavily nostalgic and stylized America (clearly influenced by the Frontier Myth) as a means of articulating and advocating heavily ideologically determined policies, that made him a savvy and persuasive politician and the focus of various works of cultural studies of the era.

However, Reagan’s status as cultural myth-maker is made all the more dynamic by the fact of his distance from the actual historical experience to which he incessantly referred. Indeed, Slotkin contrasts Reagan’s claims to the cowboy persona to Teddy Roosevelt’s (a President responsible for a substantial promotion of the Frontier Myth in American culture). In contrast to Roosevelt’s actual deeds as a stockman, sheriff, and

Rough Rider, Reagan's claim to a heroic past was, as Slotkin puts it, "based entirely on references to imaginary deeds performed in a purely mythic space" (644). However, this is not meant to disparage Reagan's persona as cowboy-President but to highlight a thoroughly dynamic, postmodern moment in the Frontier Myth in American culture. According to Slotkin, "the myths produced by mass culture have become credible substitutes for actual historical or political action in authenticating the character and ideological claims of political leaders" (644). This slippage appropriately coincides with the unhinging of the Frontier Myth from its historical anchor within the genre of the Western in popular cinema (633). In other words, the fundamental assertions of the Frontier Myth became separated from the context of their historical past. Instead, they began showing up in the generic successors to the Western:

The "post-western" genre map suggests that, while the Western may no longer provide the most important of our ideological symbolic languages, the underlying mythic structures it expressed remain more or less intact. Action in the imagined world of myth-symbolic play still takes the form of captivities and rescues, still invokes the three-part opposition in which the American hero stands between the extremes of bureaucratic order and savage license, and still requires a racial symbolism to express the most significant ideological differences. What has been lost is not the underlying myth but a particular set of historical references that tied a scenario of heroic action to a particular version of American national identity. (642)

I quote Slotkin's explanation of what aspects of the myth survive and appear in successor genres because, as we will soon see, it is science fiction's fierce assertion of these aspects of the Frontier Myth that suggest a haggling over conceptions of American identity during the 1980s and well into the first years of the twenty-first century. These distinctions, therefore, will be instrumental to this chapter's later reading of representative films from the period.

This shearing between actual historical experience and myth, a thoroughly postmodern moment in which claims by political leaders or cultural texts (such as film) are authenticated by myth and not by any basis in historical fact is worth considering for a moment. Again, the primary issue at stake here is America's conception of itself after the trauma of Vietnam. The clearest example of how this new relationship between politics and myth functions can be seen in how political leaders and popular culture tried to explain the nation's defeat in that conflict. One common theme in the war movies of the 1980s that dealt with Vietnam directly was a re-situating of blame for defeat in Vietnam on liberal politicians and inept bureaucrats who betrayed the military (650). This conception reaches its ridiculous fever pitch in *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (1985) (in which John Rambo returns to Vietnam to rescue prisoners of war left behind) when Rambo asks Colonel Troutman, "Can we win this time, sir?" Such a conception of the war's outcome, says Slotkin, was echoed by Reagan (who Slotkin calls the chief spokesman for the revisionist history of the war) who frequently represented American involvement in Vietnam as a "noble, unselfish struggle that could have ended in victory if only the liberal politicians in Washington had not tied the hands of the military" (649). However, the clearest example of how this shearing between historical experience and

myth leads to authenticating the ideological claims of political leaders is President George H. W. Bush's assertion that the Gulf War rehabilitated the defeat in Vietnam (652). While for many Americans victory in the Gulf War lessened the sting of defeat and restored confidence in the military to the American people, Slotkin's point is that Bush poses this relationship in "exclusively mythic terms" (652). In other words, Slotkin asserts that President Bush substitutes a conventional rationale for war, as a means to a necessary end or as a defense of vital interests or principals, for a conception of war "as a cure for the illness of our imagination- to erase the discomfoting memory of our historical experience of error and defeat, and to substitute in its place the lie of 'symbolic victory'" (652). Understanding myth's new status in political rhetoric and policy is essential to understanding films of the 1980s and, later, of the early twenty-first century that utilize political allegory and myth to advance particular variations and interpretations of American national identity. In other words, they work to refashion those myths as arguments for just what kind of Americans we ought to be.

Countersubversion and the American Jeremiad in 1980s Film

As Slotkin showed in the *Rambo* and *Missing in Action* films, the frontier narrative continued to shape the ways that Americans conceived of their past and current conflicts at the same time that, as Rogin argued, a resurgent conservatism sought to control and eliminate opposition and dissent in cultural as well as political arenas. Before moving into a discussion about how all three of these concepts converge in *Red Dawn* and other popular texts of the 1980s, it would be helpful to illustrate how countersubversion was already in play in other genres.

According to Mark Winokur, the comedy films of the 1980s, for example, were characterized by a general erasure of “the history of blacks in America in the eighties” (195). Noting that, under the Reagan administration, African Americans and other minorities “saw a gradual erosion of the civil rights gained and consolidated in the fifties and sixties,” Winokur sees a strategy of racial passing that occurred in the films of the 1980s as a way of gaining “token inclusion into the essentially white society those films depict” (194-5). For example, Winokur sees the rise of *The Cosby Show* as an example of “a particular rewriting of American history as including only those blacks who are really white- [with] success, upward mobility, and virility defined as white- and exclusion of blacks who are black” (195). The problem with Winokur’s reading is that it does not allow that the African Americans on the *Cosby Show*, that of an African American middle and upper class, are, in fact, “black” too. In this sense, he has committed the same error for which he criticizes the show: reducing the experience of African Americans to a single, simplified category that is not representative of the African American experience in America. In another example, he points to Eddie Murphy’s performance in *Beverly Hills Cop* (1988), which depends greatly on Murphy’s imitation and “faking” (200). In the course of the film Murphy pretends to be a reporter, an effete homosexual, a customs agent, black-marketeer, a truck driver, and a florist delivery person. Winokur rightly points out that Murphy/Foley “is constantly explaining his presence as a black man” and notes that Murphy is, in fact, the only significant black man in the film” (200).

This argument extends to other genres as well. *Back to the Future* (1985) is an interesting example. Winokur illustrates the next logical step in his point about the

disappearance of African Americans from 1980s film by pointing out the film's attempt at a cultural revision. In one of *Back to the Future's* famous scenes, Michael J. Fox leads the band playing at the high school dance in a 1980s and Van Halen inspired version of "Johnny B. Goode." Because we discover that Marty (Fox) has unwittingly played this version in front of Chuck Berry's cousin, Winokur reads this moment as a rewriting of the history of rock and roll that is somehow more agreeable (202). The scene, he says, "reflects a desire on the part of white America to have been less beholden to black culture (among others) for the structure of its own culture" (202). This fact, Winokur suggests, speaks to the film's overall attempt to roll back American culture to a time more palatable to whites. He points to Robert Zemeckis' nostalgia in this and at least two other films, *I Wanna Hold Your Hand* (1978) and *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* (1988), conspicuously set "a few years after the trauma of war and its attendant racial tensions, [and] a few years before the trauma of the civil rights movement" (204). On the other hand, in both *Back to the Future* and *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?*, the present, notes Winokur "is offered to us as an insane future" to be avoided or, in the case of *Back to the Future*, altered into a kind of Reaganite utopia (205). The time travel scheme of the film writes out the experience of the 1960s and bridges the 1950s and the 1980s directly. It is significant, then, that one of the most popular television shows of the later years of the decade, *Quantum Leap* (1989-1993) promised to "put right what once went wrong."

Red Dawn, the 1984 film written and directed by John Milius, may be one of the strangest and most recognizable cult films to emerge from the 1980s. Clearly in the vein of alternate history science fiction, *Red Dawn* is the story of a Russian-Cuban sneak attack on the United States. It follows a band of high school students who become

guerilla fighters when their town, Calumet, Colorado, is overrun by Russian-Cuban-Nicaraguan allied forces. They are led by Jed Eckert (Patrick Swayze) to sabotage, ambush, and harass enemy forces and to hide and survive off the land in the nearby ranges of the Rocky Mountains. At the film's end, many have been killed by counter-insurgent forces. The remaining members, comprised primarily of the film's three biggest stars (Swayze, Charlie Sheen, and Lea Thompson), stage a daring assault on the Soviet headquarters in the town center. The Eckert brothers (Swayze and Sheen) die in the attack and Erica (Thompson) and Danny (Brad Savage) escape to Free America. The film ends with Thompson's voice over discussing the nature of their sacrifice as the camera lingers over Partisan Rock: the rock face-turned-monument where the guerillas etched the names of those who died.

Red Dawn has received little attention from scholars. There are many reasons for this. Certainly, the film is, by no measure, considered an exceptional achievement in formal composition. Its basic premise of Soviet invasion is neither profound nor unique; having been done nearly fifty years before in other Cold War films. Finally, its intensely paranoid vision of the future and its staunchly conservative assertions can appear uncomplicated and off-putting. However, *Red Dawn* has undeniably attained cult film status, having seemingly engendered an unmistakable level of passion among its fans. In the following pages I argue that the film, in fact, says a great deal about the political moment in which it was released. *Red Dawn* can best be understood as a countersubversive film reflecting the anxieties and aims of a resurgent political conservatism in the 1980s. Like the jeremiads discussed in earlier chapters, *Red Dawn* (and similar texts and films) packaged a polemic about the state of contemporary

American society along with particular and intensely partisan notions of American cultural identity and assertions about the nation's place in the world.

From the first moments of *Red Dawn* the film makes clear that its complaint, its warning message, is politically determined. With ominous chords playing in the background, yellow font on black title cards explain the state of foreign affairs that led to the invasion:

- Soviet Union Suffers Worst Wheat Harvest in 55 Years.
- Labor and Food Riots in Poland. Soviet Troops Invade.
- Cuba and Nicaragua Reach Troop Strength Goals of 500,000. El Salvador and Honduras Fall.
- Greens Party Gains Control of West German Parliament. Demands Withdrawal of Nuclear Weapons from European Soil.
- Mexico Plunged into Revolution.
- NATO Dissolves. United States Stands Alone.

These are important not only because they set the political stage for the film's invasion, but because they give a glimpse into how the film defines the kind of world in which such an invasion is possible. The opening title card, explaining the failure of the Soviet wheat harvest as impetus for the film's events, suggests the film's investment in political realism (in which international relations among states are governed by a struggle for power and security as opposed to ethics or ideals) and a pessimism over the efficacy of international institutions. This is borne out in the final title card in which the image of America, standing alone against a hostile world, invokes the frontier narrative and the notion of America as Rooseveltian Rough Rider. Interestingly, this comparison is made

explicit as the film's opening scenes of the beautiful landscape of the American West and establishing shots of the town of Calumet give way to an actual statue of Theodore Roosevelt in the town's center entitled "Rough Rider." The monument comes complete with an inscription that the camera lingers over for a moment: "Far better it is to dare mighty things than to take rank with those poor timid spirits who know neither victory nor defeat." While the film means this to foreshadow the struggle of the Calumet guerrillas, the "Wolverines" as they come to call themselves, the inscription also serves to reinforce assertions of America's greatness (staunchly unapologetic) in fashion in popular and political culture when the film was released in August of 1984. The explicit reference to Roosevelt and the early definition of the political landscape both signal the film's effort to term American hopes and problems in specific ways.

Nowhere is this clearer than in the warnings the film makes to contemporary society about how America became so vulnerable to invasion. Very much in the tradition of Cold War films (and, it would seem, in the tradition of American frontier narrative), in addition to the invading forces, the film suggests that America's troubled state is also the result of various failings from within. Before settling into its guerrilla resistance narrative, the film functions as a kind of list of warnings, a hodgepodge of conservative criticisms of American society that make it vulnerable to attack. In this way, the film's polemic, as we have seen a major characteristic of the jeremiad, functions to subvert the politics with which it disagrees. Some are rather overt. The previously mentioned scene, invoking the well-known pro-gun motto (eventually turned into a bumper sticker), is perhaps the most overt. That scene, its unabashed support for a particular interpretation of the second amendment, is followed later in the film by another pro-gun moment that

tries to illustrate the danger of gun registration. In the midst of the Cuban-Russia attack on the town, Commander Bella (the Cuban commander) tells a Russian subordinate to “obtain form 4473” because it “will contain descriptions of weapons and lists of private ownership.” This example is distinguished from the earlier pro-gun moment in its countersubversive attempt to, instead of advocating a pro-gun position, sap the political support for gun registration. After all, the film seems to say, in case of invasion, that is exactly what the Russians will count on. Perhaps this is not a particularly powerful or persuasive effort, but it does signal a rhetorical stance taken throughout the film. It should be noted that this particular scene is made all the more amusing coming, as it does, in the middle of Cuban-Russian efforts to take the town center in the midst of an air-raid attack by American helicopters. Clearly, the film suggests, registration lists are a priority of those who wish America harm.

Red Dawn is filled with so many similar moments and they are each significant because they suggest a return to the jeremiad’s covenant rhetoric. The good community will behave in ways presented by the film. On the other hand, the bad community, the one not fulfilling its charge, behaves in these ways (thus illustrating them in the film’s characteristic warning rhetoric). For example, just as in the *Rambo* and *Missing in Action* series, *Red Dawn* warns against betrayal by conniving, treacherous politicians. Early in the film, Mayor Bates (Lane Smith), betrays the families of the members of the guerrilla outfit, leading to their execution, because, he explains, troublemaking “runs in some of the families.” Later in the film, when the Wolverines are inexplicably tracked by the Russian counterinsurgent forces, it is discovered that Daryl, Mayor Bates’ son and Calumet Student Body President, swallowed a homing device after he was turned in to

the authorities by his father. While some characters are sympathetic to the fact that Daryl was betrayed by his father and forced to eat the device, Jed, furiously complains that Daryl “went and got caught.” Though he cannot bring himself to kill Daryl, Robert, whose growing fanaticism has begun to trouble even the Air Force officer that has since joined the group, shoots and kills Daryl with little or no remorse. What should be an excruciatingly difficult moment in the film amounts to only a quick nod at any moral complexity in the situation. In doing so, the film presents Robert’s actions as regrettable but necessary. Daryl, it must be remembered, was the character who, earlier in the film, tried to usurp Jed’s authority over the group. Referencing his position as class president and attempting to appeal to some form of democracy (asking that the group vote), Daryl argued that the group should surrender. This fact, taken along with Mayor Bates’ betrayal, conforms to a common trope in films of the post-Vietnam era. The redemption of national honor that is the central desire of these films requires, in addition to defeating the guerillas of the previous conflict via a reversal of roles, the defeat of the domestic enemy, the American politician or official who, these films contend, stabbed the soldiers in the back and kept them from winning the war (*Gunfighter Nation* 650). However, it is ironic that the very same form of government that the film strongly praises in its patriotic fervor and is contrasted with the authoritarian Soviet style, is cast aside by the Wolverines in favor of Jed’s unquestioned dictatorship. This, of course, speaks to Rogin’s point about the desire of the countersubversive to imitate his enemy. However, it should be noted that in another significant way the film participates in the desire for national redemption that is a trope of the frontier narrative and the post-Vietnam films.

That trope, of course, is the captivity/ rescue narrative. Slotkin terms it the “cult of the POWs/ MIAs” that emerged in popular film during the Reagan years (649). In these films, there is what Slotkin calls an “obsessive repetition of the rescue fantasy” that “makes them seem like rituals for transforming the trauma of defeat into a symbolic victory” (649). Indeed, there is a great deal of captivity and subsequent rescue in *Red Dawn*. Overall, it could be said that the narrative itself functions in this way as the Wolverines attempt to liberate their besieged Calumet. There are more obvious examples, though. The two girls, Erica (Lea Thompson) and Toni (Jennifer Grey) were sexually assaulted by Russian officers, the audience is told, on their way to Calumet. While the details of the assault are left hazy (no doubt to suggest the worst possible transgression), this fact provides a constant subtext for their characters and the impetus for their involvement in the resistance.

The primary example of the captivity/rescue trope in the film brings us back to the re-education camp. In what is the most daring attack of the film, the Wolverines liberate the drive-in camp. It is an interesting scene for how closely in dialogue it is with the frontier and captivity narratives. Richard Slotkin defines the captivity narrative, the oldest American rescue fantasy, as a narrative in which “a single individual, usually a woman stands passively under the strokes of evil, awaiting rescue by the grace of God” (*Regeneration Through Violence* 94). “The sufferer,” he continues, “represents the...chastened body of Puritan society; and the temporary bondage of the captive to the Indian is dual paradigm-of the bondage of the soul to the flesh and to the temptations arising from original sin...and the self-exile of the English Israel from England” (94). In those early narratives, once freed, men who had fallen to captivity were feared or

mistrusted: seen as weak and too willing to embrace Indian life (Lepore 129). Of course, one recent example, John Ford's *The Searchers* is widely held as the greatest artistic expression of the captivity narrative in modern American culture. *Red Dawn* brings this point into sharp focus when, upon first attacking the camp, the Wolverines hand out weapons to the prisoners, remilitarizing them. Jed drives the point home: "We're all going to die. Die standing up!" While there is little that is original about this command (it could easily be spoken in a number of war films), its effect in this film is to immediately invest those prisoners with a new identity. On Jed's calling, they are no longer downtrodden, passive vessels for Soviet indoctrination, but soldiers with nothing to lose. This point speaks to what is, perhaps, the most important function the film seeks to perform. *Red Dawn* is, ultimately, a film about American identity and American exceptionalism.

To say that *Red Dawn* is a nationalistic film would be to simplify and homogenize its particular brand of patriotic fervor. That is not to say that it misses an opportunity to evoke standard American images and icons. The "Battle Hymn of the Republic" and "America the Beautiful" figure prominently in the film. The American flag appears at the film's beginning and in its final shot. In addition, the concept of American exceptionalism is unabashedly promoted throughout the film. After all, against extremely poor odds, America repels the Russian invaders and wins the war. The film's final image, of a monument erected in honor of the Wolverines and others who fought in the cause, is evidence of this fact. This point is made all the more important by the fact that America, it seems, is the only nation with the will to challenge the invaders. When Col. Andy Tanner joins the group he brings with him information on the state of the war. In his

briefing, Tanner explains that Europe is “sitting this one out.” “I guess they figured twice in one century was enough,” he says. The only ally left is Great Britain and they, Tanner explains, “won’t last very long.” In other words, not only is America exceptional in its ability to conduct the war, but, more importantly, in its will to oppose the invader. This point is driven home in one of the film’s more histrionic scenes. Just before the Calumet citizens betrayed by Mayor Bates are executed, they begin singing “America the Beautiful.” As they reach the song’s chorus (“America, America...”), they are shot down by the Russian tank. Taken alongside Jed and Matt’s father’s final words at the drive-in/re-education camp (“Avenge me, son, avenge me!”), these examples illustrate an unwavering patriotism and will to resist. However, *Red Dawn* is very specific about what kind of American it is valorizing and what kind of American it suggests we all should be. Here, the figure of Theodore Roosevelt and the frontier narrative loom large. *Red Dawn*’s American is self-reliant to the point, perhaps, of being isolationist, severely masculine, and, when necessary, ferociously violent. This assessment is best illustrated through the characters Jed and Robert.

Jed (Patrick Swayze) is, of course, the group’s leader. At the beginning of the film we learn that he is out of school but not in college (therefore not too educated, the film suggests) and that, like his younger brother Matt (Charlie Sheen) he too played football (quarterback even). He is quick to respond to the crisis and it is because he returns to the besieged high school that the other major characters survive to eventually become the Wolverines. It is his idea to stock up on supplies and head for the mountains where, he explains, he has hunted and camped for years with his father. As the narrative progresses it is because of his stern leadership that the group survives, learning how to

hunt and, more importantly, how not to get caught. Upon returning to Calumet to see the state of the town since the invasion (which brings us to the scene at the re-education camp), it is Jed's idea to begin an armed resistance. For the most part, Jed's leadership is shown to be just and effective. It is only after the group is betrayed by Daryl that they incur any substantial losses. His final act as their leader involves a bold attack on the town that results in his and his brother's death. However, the film portrays this as an unselfish sacrifice to assure Danny and Erica's escape and safe passage to Free America. If this all seems a good deal familiar and not a little trite, it is because Jed is very much in the tradition of American western heroes. Even in the scene in which he and the others are betrayed, he is compassionate and cannot bring himself to kill Daryl. However, this scene presents an opportunity to distinguish Jed from another American type offered in the film.

Robert (C. Thomas Howell) is the film's most memorable character because of his unsettling fanaticism. It is Robert that kills Daryl without reservation. It is also Robert who delivers the film's most memorable line. When Col. Andy Tanner (Powers Booth) sees him etching marks for his kills into the stock of his weapon, he tells Robert, "All that hate's gonna burn you up, kid." "It keeps me warm," Robert replies with a smile. After the group ambushes its first small group of Russian soldiers (who are sightseeing in Araphaho National Forest), Danny, the youngest of the group, is clearly troubled by killing them. "They were people," he says, clearly trying to work out the morality of it all. "So was my dad," Robert responds coldly. At the film's end, Robert dies in a suicidal standoff with a Soviet helicopter and his act of self-immolation serves as an appropriate end to his role in the film.

The film suggests that Robert is a type of American that necessarily emerges in these kinds of situations. That is to say, the film sees the emergence of a character like Robert as necessary and unproblematically appropriate to a national invasion or, presumably, any other equally justifiable American military adventure. However, such an uncomplicated endorsement should give pause. Harvey Greenberg, for example, questions the psychological and cultural effect of using popular forms (film) to “recuperate the narcissistic injuries sustained by America in its Indochinese experience” (63). Along with *Uncommon Valor* (1982) and *Top Gun* (1986), he reads these films as an example of a rise, in the Post-Vietnam period, of an uncritical patriotism (which he erroneously identifies as New Decaturism, named after the nineteenth century American Naval hero who famously said, “My country, may she always be in the right, but right or wrong, my country!”) (qtd in Greenberg 63). In this particular instance, Greenberg seemingly misunderstands Decatur and what is actually an older, more modest understanding of loyalty to one’s country. What Greenberg means to highlight is an uncritical patriotism, in which a country is equated with a morally absolute cause, that he sees as an inevitable slide towards moral disorientation. The clearest example is found in the role reversal of soldier and guerilla that is characteristic to this genre of films and articulated by Slotkin as the latest iteration of the frontier narrative. Just as in the *Rambo* and *Missing in Action* films, *Red Dawn* has shifted the American soldier into the role of the savage guerilla. Here, a character like Robert is unrestrained by ethical or political limits to do his worst to the invader. For this, he is applauded and cheered by the film and not a small number of viewers. By portraying Robert in a heroic light, as some kind of new American ideal, *Red Dawn* falls in line with what Greenberg refers to as “bellwether

productions of popular culture [that] seem to be clearing the way for yet another generation of American youth to be enlisted in yet another dubious foreign adventure” (69). Perhaps, but what this situation makes excruciatingly clear is that the frontier narrative continues to structure our understanding of our conflicts and our roles at the same time that the jeremiad is enlisted to demand even greater vigilance to these slippery directives.

Science Fiction and the Postmodern Response

Films like *Red Dawn*, *First Blood/ Rambo*, and *Missing in Action* soon disappeared from the box office. In 1987, ABC aired a twelve-hour mini-series called *Amerika*, set roughly a decade after a Soviet takeover of America. Preachy, stiflingly serious, and tardy (airing in the last year of the Reagan presidency), *Amerika*, one observer joked, may “have extended the Cold War by roughly twelve hours” (Conelrad). By then, it seems, the party was over and by the time that *Starship Troopers* (1997), Paul Verhoeven’s surprisingly ironic take on the classic, militaristic Heinlein novel, was released, such films were impossible. The change, it seems, was the rise of postmodernism in popular film and television. Such partisan advocacy in films and television was unlikely and ineffective in a world in which shows like the highly popular *X-Files* pointed out the inconsistencies and instabilities of identity, experience, reasoning and other problems of epistemology coming to the forefront in the 1990s. That is not to say that the jeremiad disappeared from the popular films of the era, but rather that it adapted to account for the disruption, confusion and pessimism characteristic to narratives erected in response to those earlier films and the political narratives of the time.

Discussing postmodernism is a slippery exercise. The concept itself challenges definition. However, in the following analysis, several key aspects of postmodernism will be discussed and, to make this discussion as precise as possible, a few basic characteristics of postmodern literature and film are offered here having been adopted from Keith Booker's helpful discussion on the relationship between postmodernism and science fiction. One of postmodernism's primary characteristics is an intense suspicion of totalizing metanarratives that grew out of the trauma of World War II, the realization of the immorality and brutality of colonialism, and the dizzying, rapid growth of technology during the war (23). Because of this rapid pace of change in the post-war era, there emerged an increasing sense of the instability of personal identity accompanied by growing alienation (24). This bewildering pace of change instilled subsequent generations with a sense of loss of historical continuity. They, as Booker concisely puts it, "increasingly felt that they were living in unprecedented situations to which the experience of the past was irrelevant" (24). Next, a loss of faith in historical metanarratives led to a weakening of the utopian imagination. This led, says Booker, to an anxiety over the fact that "terrifying change was accompanied by an equally horrifying sense that, within the routinized context of late capitalism, nothing ever really changes at all" (24). This point will become excruciatingly clear when the discussion turns to the 2006 film, *Children of Men*. The final point relevant to this discussion is the problematization of polar oppositions (Good versus Evil/ Us versus Them) through which Western society had defined itself. The following analysis intends to show how these factors engendered a generation of films in response to the countersubversive films of the 1980s and the geo-political events of the 1990s and 2000s.

In his influential essay, “Progress versus Utopia, or, Can We Imagine the Future,” Frederic Jameson argues that science fiction, in presenting its various possible futures, does not actually attempt to imagine one “real” future, but insists instead on re-situating our understanding of the present, that “its multiple mock futures serve the quite different function of transforming our own present into the determinate past of something yet to come” (288). This serves to estrange the present and Jameson points to a number of works, by John Wyndham, Larry Niven, and Philip K. Dick, that employ “a process of distraction and displacement, repression and lateral perceptual renewal” and “elaborate strategies of indirection...therefore necessary if we are somehow to break through our...insulation and to ‘experience,’ for some first and real time, this ‘present’” (287). This is similar, says Jameson, to the function performed by the mysteries of Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler. In those novels, the mystery plot, with all of its puzzles and suspense, is a blind that distracts so that “the intolerable space of Southern California can enter the eye laterally, with its intensity undiminished” (287). “SF,” says Jameson, “thus enacts and enables a structurally unique ‘method’ for apprehending the present as history” (288). Taken in aggregate, these renewed, contextualized understandings of the present move us toward utopia. In other words, our attempts to conceptualize utopian or dystopian futures, having estranged and invigorated our understanding of the actual present, allow for a kind of success by failure. They serve, says Jameson, “to serve as unwitting and even unwilling vehicles for meditation...a contemplation of our own absolute limits” (289). This an ultimately hopeful situation because, he argues, it suggests that the present is not seized, immobile forever, in some

‘end of history,’ but move[s] steadily in time towards some unimaginable yet inevitable ‘real’ future” (288).

Therefore, this function places science fiction in an important role in its ability to address the challenges of postmodernism. Postmodernism, as it is defined by Jameson, is the concluding phase of the bourgeois cultural revolution: which he defines as “the process whereby the definitive establishment of a properly capitalist mode of production...reprograms and utterly restructures the values, life rhythms, cultural habits, and temporal sense of its subjects” (284). As Jameson explained in a subsequent work, postmodernism is the cultural situation in which:

[...]Late capitalism has all but succeeded in eliminating the final loopholes of nature and the Unconscious, of subversion and the aesthetic, of individual and collective praxis alike, and, with a final filip, in eliminating any memory trace of what thereby no longer existed in the henceforth postmodern landscape. (*Late Marxism* 5)

In addition, the critique of postmodernism can be understood as “an attempt to think the present historically in an age that has forgotten how to think historically in the first place” (*Postmodernism* ix). However, it is science fiction’s ability to break through what Jameson calls the “monadic insulation” of contemporary culture and this process of contemplating the present through imagining the future that he argues gives science fiction a profound and unique role in addressing postmodern culture and offers, ultimately, a degree of optimism in its movement toward utopia (287). The following films, though dystopian in nature, provide precisely this sort of movement by refocusing on and recontextualizing our attention to the present.

This is the accomplishment of the 2006 film *Children of Men*, Alfonso Cuarón's adaptation of the P.D. James novel.³ The film presents a future world in which human beings can no longer reproduce and follows Theo (Clive Owen) as he attempts to help a pregnant woman, Kee (Clare-Hope Ashitey), make her way out of the tortured, decimated, warring English landscape to a rendezvous with a group of scientists known as "The Human Project." At first glance, *Children of Men* would appear to present problems for interpreting it as a twenty-first century American jeremiad. The film's production history certainly frustrates an attempt to place the film within the American tradition. Cuarón, who gained no small amount of critical acclaim for his film *Y tu mamá también* (2001), is Mexican. This film, adapted from British novelist P.D. James's book of the same title, features Clive Owen, Chiwetel Ejiofor, Michael Caine, Clare-Hope Ashitey (all British) and Julianne Moore (the lone American). Finally, the film's setting is, of course, England.

Furthermore, the film seems to directly address and dismiss overt moralizing and spiritual condemnation. Early in the film, as Theo makes his way to visit an influential cousin who will help him get transit papers to make their trek across the English countryside, his car passes by a mass of people who are kneeling and holding signs that read "Repent!". A man on a loudspeaker preaches: "Earthquakes! Pollution! Disease and Famine! Our Sins have encouraged God's wrath, and in his anger he has taken away his most precious gift to us!" Before Cuarón cuts away, the camera rests on wall graffiti that reads: "Infertility is God's punishment!" It would be a sobering scene if Cuarón had not invited viewers to dismiss it in an earlier one. As Theo goes to visit an old friend, Jasper, they talk briefly about Theo's love life and a woman from his past:

Theo. She, uh, decided to renounce.

Jasper. Renouncers? Are those the ones that kneel down for a month for salvation?

Theo. No, they're the repenters. The renouncers flagellate themselves for the forgiveness of humanity.

Jasper. Oh, right. Dating ain't what it used to be, is it amigo? [laughs]

In so doing, Cuarón frustrates any desire to read the film as an overt allegory in the same way that, say, a text like *Jericho* can be interpreted. However, there is no denying that *Children of Men* is a film that attempts to say something about the major political issues of its day. A reading by Slovenj Žižek, that accompanies the film's DVD release, sheds light on how the film comments on and participates in contemporary political discourse.

In Žižek's reading, *Children of Men* is characterized, much like Cuarón's *Y tu mamá también*, by a tension in its formal composition between foreground and background. He argues that "the true focus of the film is...the background and it's crucial to leave it as the background" ("*Children of Men* Comments by Slovenj Žižek"). This is necessary, he says, because of a fundamental paradox in the film that he calls "anamorphosis." He explains, "if you look at the thing too directly, the oppressive social dimension, you don't see it. You can see it in an oblique way only if it remains in the background." Therefore, under Žižek's reading, such tension exists on an allegorical level between the major political issues of the film's day (immigration, terrorism, pollution) and their symbolic appearances in the background of the film. The film provides a tension between the shadowy, ill-defined symbolic references to such problems that exist in the film and the concrete referents in the world of the viewer. This is important

because, for Žižek, these problems are but symptomatic of the “true despair of the film: [...]the ideological despair of late capitalism, of a society without history.” So, for example, Žižek argues that the Ark of the Arts, a collection of the world’s great art that was saved from annihilation and maintained by Theo’s cousin, symbolizes this “very lack of meaningful historical experience” in having, for example, Michaelangelo’s *David* removed completely from its cultural context. Such an emphasis on the broader, overarching problem of the historical experience of late capitalism is only maintained, says Žižek, “precisely because it doesn’t directly make some kind of political, moralistic parable.”

In essence, Žižek reads the film as a jeremiad against the economic, cultural, and social conditions caused by late capitalism. In the same way that the Puritans did not look to droughts, attacks by Native Americans, and the secular behavior of the younger generation as the source of their misfortune, nor does Žižek see pollution, immigration, and terrorism as the contemporary source of despair. Both looked to a larger, overarching cause. The Puritans looked inward and blamed their misery on a lack of spiritual vigilance and a failure to uphold the covenant. The film, Žižek argues, finds a more contemporary fountainhead.

However, this does not completely explain how *Children of Men* functions as jeremiad within the American tradition. After all, as previously mentioned, so many of the production facts of the film resist this reading. Consider, though, that if the fundamental problem proposed by the film is the ideological despair of late capitalism, is such despair not, by virtue of the definition of the economic functions of late capitalism, particularly its emphasis on increasing globalization, universal to all western capitalist

economies? In other words, in an increasingly globalized economy, how is such despair limited by national borders? In fact, Žižek argues the exact opposite of this point by saying that England is the only place that such despair can be felt. He attributes this to the fact that England does not have a constitution but, instead, relies on its substance of traditions. He argues that “in such a country, the loss of this historical dimension, the loss of this substance of meaning is felt much worse.” Perhaps so, but it seems naive to underestimate the degree to which British and American economic and political policy came to mirror one another in the decade in which *Children of Men* was released (even among political parties that, on paper, should be substantially distinguished).

Furthermore, this says nothing of the degree to which American and British culture coalesced over the fundamental issue during the decade: the War on Terrorism/ The Iraq War. In this light, *Children of Men* functions in much of the same way as *On the Beach*. The film’s setting and principle characters, because they are raced as predominantly western and white, are easy stand-ins for Americans, American cities and American audiences (to whom, it seems, this complaint is being made). Consider, for example, that among the images that float unfocused in the background throughout the film, the images that come into sharp focus during an early scene with Theo, Jasper, and his wife, are photos of a demonstration with signs that clearly read “Don’t Attack Iraq,” “Get the U.S.A. Out of [illegible]” and “BU\$H” (with a bloodstained splat across the font): signs clearly in the American consciousness from various domestic demonstrations before and during the Iraq War. Jasper’s wife, Janice, the audience learns from the newspaper clipped to the wall, was a journalist that was tortured by MI5; a clear conflation of the concern over torture techniques used in the terrorist detainee camp at Guantanamo Bay,

Cuba and the two journalists, Matthew Cooper and Judith Miller, who were threatened with imprisonment for refusing to disclose their sources in the 2005 Valerie Plame leak case. In addition, the film's emphasis on illegal immigration, on "fugees" as they are called in the film, is indicative of the polarizing national debate in the United States (just before the film's release) on illegal immigration culminating in the dramatic defeat of the McCain-Kennedy Bill (S. 1033) in 2005. The frequent appearance of Quietus, the suicide pill issued by the government so that, as the commercial explains, "You decide when," is a sinister comment on the American pharmaceutical industry's aggressive practice of advertising prescription drugs. Finally, it is important to note the political moment into which *Children of Men* was released in the United States: less than two months after the mid-term elections that gave the Democratic party control of both houses of Congress. These referents and the fundamental anxiety that is manifested in the tension of the film's formal elements, add up to a language through which the film's complaint was uniquely packaged for American audiences. In doing so, the film adopted the form of the American jeremiad, a uniquely American rhetoric, to speak directly to an audience trained to hear it. However, by having all of these referents floating in the background, by the film purposefully frustrating the possibility of clear one-to-one connections in its allegory, the film functions precisely in the way Jameson argued science fiction could work as a way of addressing the crisis of postmodernism. The film comes at the overarching issue of the lack of political and individual agency sideways, allowing for the focus to sharpen on the present. This is perhaps why the film's final image is so very appropriate. In his commentary, Žižek lauded the metaphor of the boat, pointing out its inherent rootlessness. He explained, "the condition of the renewal means

you cut your roots.” The image of the boat, being pushed by the current, is an appropriate image for the film’s emphasis on the present. Such an image is also quintessentially jeremiad. Cut off by the restoration in the seventeenth century, colonial America was left unanchored, alone, and, yet, with the opportunity to reconsider and redefine itself. Americans viewing the film in 2006 found themselves in an equally precarious position embroiled in two wars abroad and having recently witnessed the destruction of a major American city by hurricane. What films like *Children of Men* do, what science fiction does, is encourage reflection of the present and, in doing so, drift closer to a more promising future. It is fitting, then, that the ship that Theo and Kee wait for is called the *Tomorrow*.

In May of 2007, *28 Weeks Later*, a sequel to Danny Boyle’s 2003 zombie film, *28 Days Later*, was released. Directed by Juan Carlos Fresnadillo (born in Spain), the film begins some twenty-eight weeks after (hence the title) the initial infection of the “rage” virus decimated England (the events of the first film). It should be noted that the sequel generally ignores the first film’s use of zombies and the rage virus as broad critique of the role of violence in culture. Instead, this film emphasis is an allegory of the Iraq War. The rage virus having essentially destroyed England, repatriation begins once all of the infected have died or have been destroyed. This effort, we are told, is being administered by a United States-led N.A.T.O. force. At the film’s opening only the Isle of Dogs is open for repatriation and, as one can guess, it is the site of the eventual outbreak leading to the film’s subsequent acts. In the film’s climactic outbreak scene, military sharpshooters, stationed on the roofs of buildings, struggle to distinguish the zombified infected from the frightened, fleeing uninfected on the streets below. At first they are told

to pick out the infected. As the film shows, this is an impossible request and, eventually, they are given orders to kill everyone (itself a morally impossible command). This, of course, is meant to evoke images of soldiers in Afghanistan or Iraq being given an equally flawed directive to distinguish between hostile and non-hostile in a culture they do not fully understand.

However, the film's overriding referent is, perhaps, the loss of New Orleans to Hurricane Katrina and, more importantly, the ensuing chaos and human suffering that resulted from a failure of governmental action. After all, the infected eventually overwhelm the military safeguards and it becomes clear that the city has been lost again. The particular allegorical referent does not matter. The reason that an allegory about the Iraq War can so easily slide into one about Hurricane Katrina is that both signal a suspicion in the efficacy of governmental action: itself the symptom of a larger cultural concern. When taken in context with *Children of Men*, these films signal a thoroughly postmodern skepticism of the power of political agency and action. Just as in *Children of Men*, *28 Weeks Later* comes at its subject from a direction that suggests this same suspicion. Watching those snipers, high above the night streets, struggle to discern the infected from the uninfected encourages a kind of sympathy for the impossible mission they have been given. The scene is only a microcosm of the larger conceptual failure of an Army (designed for a completely different type of mission) being tasked to control something as uncontrollable as the Rage virus. Six months later, *I Am Legend* (2007), the third film version of Richard Matheson's novel, presented a New York City empty save for one man, Robert Neville (Will Smith), after a cancer cure-turned-virus decimated the city and, presumably, the world. Robert Neville is the last man alive in the city, except

for the photo-sensitive zombies, and, before the outbreak, was the Army's biological warfare officer charged with finding a cure. The empty streets of the city are a constant reminder of his failure and, of course, the larger failure of the government, military, or any other authority to address the problem.

These films function as criticisms of governmental action and political agency for a number of reasons. First, they illustrate a profound level of disaffection reflected by popular culture. Such disaffection makes sense when placed in the context of the geopolitical moment in which these three films were released. As the above analysis illustrated, *Children of Men*, especially, conveyed a despair at the efficacy of political action in general and pointed criticisms of American foreign policy and of the Bush administration, in particular. This is supported by the film's rather overt references to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. At times, however, the film's frustration and invective devolves into a kind of uncomplicated grunt. For example, the film's end titles roll to a Jarvis Cocker track whose chorus intones that "cunts are still running the world." Of course, there are similar instances of this disaffection in all three films. It is conspicuously the American military, in *28 Weeks Later*, that is leading London's repatriation and, of course, the American-led force that loses control to an infected/insurgent population. In an early scene of *I Am Legend*, Neville retrieves gasoline from a station that, when it was in operation, was charging over six dollars per gallon. The scene provides one of the film's few overt criticisms of a foreign policy that, having sown turmoil in various oil-producing parts of the world, resulted in record-high prices in 2007 and 2008.

However, in a rhetorical move that speaks to that particular frustration, these films serve as responses to the meta-narratives brought recently back into service. After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the Bush administration styled its response, a “War on Terror,” similarly to the previous “wars” on equally elusive concepts such as the “War on Poverty” and the “War on Drugs.” In addition, the rhetoric that permeated political discourse for the next years seemed to take a page from the Cold War Manichaean framework. As a nation was rallied to war with Afghanistan and, subsequently, Iraq, Americans saw an attempt to return to the polar oppositions (Good versus Evil/ Us versus Them) through which Western society had previously defined itself. However, as we have seen, these conceptions of the world and their succeeding rhetoric were already in doubt when employed a generation earlier. The change in that time, of course, was the rise of postmodernism and the consolidation of the economic processes that engendered the anxieties that Jameson, Žižek, Booker and others have noted (and that I highlighted in the earlier analysis). This was, to recapitulate, an anxiety over the contradiction inherent in postmodern culture: that rapid changes in technology and culture were accompanied by the growing belief, based in the routinization of life under late capitalism, that nothing, in fact, really ever changes.

However, in responding to these dubious meta-narratives, their rhetoric and resulting policies, these films employ traditionally American rhetoric to do so. In *28 Weeks Later* and in *I Am Legend*, the frontier narrative, here rendered as infected/uninfected, reemerges as the conceptual framework for each film’s plot. Similarly, we see a return to the situational framework of a civilized fort under siege by a savage outsider/other. Such a situation would seem to fall back into the very polar opposition

rhetoric that the film responds to if it was not supposed to function as a critique of the notion of “homeland security” that lent its name to a sprawling governmental agency.

Of course, these films also function as jeremiads. Complex and critical, they also seek to critique the characteristics of the tradition that they engage. For example, *28 Weeks Later* problematizes any notion of exceptionalism in its rendering of an American attempt and failure at repatriating England. Yes, the film seems to say, America is perhaps the country powerful enough to lead such an effort, but such an effort is susceptible to poor management, incompetence, and failure. It should be noted that the film’s recolonization of England is a kind of reversal of the one that gave birth to the jeremiad. *I Am Legend* also struggles with the concept of American exceptionalism. After all, Robert Neville, the last man on earth (we presume), is American. He is alive, healthy, and, apparently, well prepared for the challenges of such a life. However, he is also isolated, lonely, violent, and possibly losing sanity. More importantly, the film’s ending provides what is perhaps the most overt reference to the jeremiad tradition of any film of recent memory. In the film’s conclusion, the KV (Krippendorf Virus) infected zombies assault Neville’s house and force him, and the recently arrived Anna and Ethan, to retreat to his basement-turned-laboratory. As the zombies begin to force their way into the basement, Neville has a kind of religious epiphany upon seeing the shape of a butterfly in the shattered glass of the wall dividing him, Anna, and Ethan from the bloodthirsty zombies. It reminds him of something his son said before his death and now, disregarding his previous statements to the contrary, Neville is convinced of the existence and benevolence of a God orchestrating the events of his life. He gives Anna a vial containing a cure made from his blood which, for reasons that are never fully explored,

happens to carry a natural immunity to the virus, and ushers her and Ethan into a coal shute where they can wait out the zombies until dawn. Resigned to sacrificing himself in order to give Anna and Ethan time to escape, he pulls the pin on a grenade and launches himself into the crowd of onrushing zombies. Neville's sacrifice rather overtly cements his position as a Christ figure: a point heavily suggested throughout the film. This is backed up by the other versions of the film and Matheson's novel. For example, viewers of the 1971 version, *The Omega Man* (starring Charlton Heston), will remember that film's blatant final image in which Heston poses, at the moment of his death, identically to Christ on the cross. This, obviously, does not explain the film's reference to the jeremiad in and of itself. In the following scene Anna and Ethan drive through what appears to be the New England countryside in autumn. They come upon a large gate, stop the car, and get out to have a look. The gate opens and we see an idyllic New England town. Children are walking to school and in the background a church bell rings. The camera pulls back to an aerial/ bird's eye view of the town among its beautiful foliage but surrounded, ominously, by large perimeter walls. It is as if the film suggests that America has had to boil itself down to its most fundamental size and type. Doing so, it seems, it uncovered the Puritan township. Lest we forget how such an ideal place is possible, Anna's voice over reminds us, the audience, of Neville's sacrifice:

In 2009, a deadly virus burned through our civilization; pushing humankind to the edge of extinction. Dr. Robert Neville dedicated his life to the discovery of a cure and the restoration of humanity. On September 9th, 2012, at approximately 8:49 P.M. he discovered that cure and at 8:52 he gave his life to defend it. We are his legacy. This is his legend.

What is clear is that this message, though stilted and strangely meticulous, is meant for the audience. Neville's sacrifice is supposed to illustrate something, some virtue, to us. The screen fades to black and Anna's voice says "Light up the darkness," referencing the film's continued fascination with Bob Marley as his "Redemption Song" plays in the background. While the ending's sanctimonious dialogue seems to clash with the cool appeal of Marley's track, the situation reveals something about the film's critique and revision of the jeremiad. Earlier in the film Neville explains that his love of Marley's song is due to its role as a vessel for social justice. By its continued use throughout the film and its featured use during the end credits, the film sanctifies Marley's track and its progressive aims within a narrative about the physical and social redemption of America. This attempt, taken alongside the fact that the film's protagonist and Christ figure is the African American actor Will Smith, seems to broach, precisely, the exclusive nature of the jeremiad tradition, arguing for the inclusion of other races in a tradition so heavily involved in the construction of American national identity. In so doing, the film's ending suggests a revision to the very covenant rhetoric on which the concept of American exceptionalism is based.

Starting in the 1980s, popular fiction reflected a movement in politics to determine, through various means, how Americans thought about the issues facing them, the world, and their role in addressing those issues. Alongside other American traditions such as the frontier narrative, the American jeremiad was enlisted by popular forms in this process of identity formation and myth making. Like castles built on sand, however, those directives eroded as more dynamic cultural movements and economic processes began to shape understandings of American national identity and conceptions of the

global community. Then, when similar narratives were attempted some twenty years later, popular culture reflected an articulate and substantial opposition and level of disaffection among Americans and those abroad. In the films after the Iraq War that some have erroneously termed “apocalyptic,” we see, instead of a yearning for revelation, a much more active focus on the present and an overriding concern with maintaining a just community (local, national, global or otherwise). Though they illustrate a recognition of the challenges of postmodernism, these films do not attempt to (and in fact challenge those that do) paper them over with simplistic, totalizing slogans, worldviews, or politics. It is, then, the trajectory argued in this essay that a step toward utopia has been made. Despite the startling, dark visions of dystopian futures in these films, such a fact should invite a small, though justified, feeling of hope.

End Notes

¹ While Rogin’s analysis includes a significant discussion of American exceptionalism, it should be noted that he has termed that concept quite differently from other uses. In Rogin’s analysis, it was offered as the explanation scholars (such as Richard Hofstadter and Louis Hartz) came to in trying to explain the lack of radical politics in American in general, and, in particular, the “limited and superficial” class conflicts in American as compared to the “the more tenacious European social and political divisions that had generated revolution and dictatorship” (275). These scholars, Rogin explains, claimed that the United States “lacked the class loyalties, the fixed and deeply rooted statuses, and the powerful state structures of societies with feudal and absolutist pasts” (275). He concludes that consensus historians “attributed American distinctiveness to such factors as material abundance, the pervasiveness of liberal individualism, social and geographic mobility, ethnic conflict, and a pluralist political tradition” (275).

² I am indebted to Carl Freedman, in conversation, for this information on the ironies of Ronald Reagan’s film career versus its retroactively written mythos.

³ The title of both the film and the book is a direct reference to Psalm 90 as quoted in the Book of Common Prayer: “Lord, thou hast been our refuge: from one generation to another. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever the earth and the world were made: thou art God from everlasting, and world without end. Thou turnest man to destruction: again thou sayest, Come again, ye children of men. For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday: seeing that is past as a watch in the night.”

However, Bercovitch happens to end his book on the American Jeremiad by quoting a passage from 2 Samuel that, he claims, was part of Winthrop's lay speech on the Arbella. It is perhaps, more significant to our understanding of the film. It reads: "Also I wil appoint a place for my people Israel, and wil plant it, that they may dwel in a place of their owne, and move nomore...I wilbe his father, & he shalbe my sonne: & if he sinne, I wil chasten him with the rods of men, and with the plagues of the children of men. But my mercy shal not departe away from him[...]" (210).

CONCLUSION “THEIR GREAT AND TERRIBLE FREEDOM”

This analysis has illustrated that the notion of American exceptionalism, of the nation's and its people's election in the world born from a spiritual covenant with God, continues to shape American thought into the twenty-first century. This, as we have seen, is not always a good thing. Uncritical notions of American exceptionalism are the ingredients of national arrogance, poorly formulated political policy, and bad fiction. The jeremiad, like other forms, is susceptible to the prejudices and persuasions of the eras in which it is written. However, it can also wield a great deal of power in encouraging social criticism. This project has illustrated that the form's collaboration with the science fiction genre in the twentieth century has involved both. Though someone might disagree with the politics or worldview of Robert Heinlein or the director of *Red Dawn*, these are not uncritical entries into the genre. These men provided their own critique of the America in which they lived and offered up their own notions of American identity. It illustrates the healthy state of discourse and inquiry that those texts and films generated responses of their own and that the process continues over a broad range of issues. What such a process emphasizes is a refocusing of such rhetoric on the burden Winthrop spoke of when he described America as the “city upon a hill.” It is this constant process of self-reflection that defines the American experience.

If that is so, then science fiction has played a much larger role in defining and fashioning this nation's concept of itself. Considering that the twentieth century has been described as the “American century,” this is no small point. For much of the century science fiction struggled for legitimacy among other popular genres. When one considers that the “American century” was defined by rapid technological progress, it seems rather obvious now that the one genre that

consistently engendered perspective and reflection on the century's dizzying changes was science fiction. At the same time, the twentieth century, for the most part, was defined by the invention of the atomic bomb and subsequent nuclear weapons. The first chapter illustrated that American discourse had long been preoccupied with predicting or rendering the end of the world. With the invention of the bomb, such imagining became concretized in the possibility of total nuclear annihilation. If life under the bomb was such a central concern to American culture, then science fiction, again, was the genre that was most relevant to that experience. As each of the chapters illustrate, science fiction provided a consistent and critical reflection on the American experience under the atomic anxiety of the twentieth century. It continues to do so for the effects of other emerging technologies and threats on American culture such as environmental and ecological disaster, terrorism, and economic collapse. Given the influence science fiction has had in our understanding of contemporary American culture, it should be clear why assigning such slap-dash distinctions as "apocalyptic" to texts and films that such a term does not accurately explain, is a dangerous exercise. This should be obvious. Americans, though they arrogantly may consider themselves the elect, do not yearn for revelation but are intensely focused on the present.

Having repositioned this subgenre from apocalyptic to jeremiad and argued for a more accurate way of understanding what now constitutes a great number of science fiction texts and films, further study is still possible. This project has not attempted to be an exhaustive catalogue of the jeremiad in twentieth and twenty-first century science fiction. There are other eras in which this connection between the jeremiad and science fiction could be further explored to compelling ends. Sinclair Lewis' *It Can't Happen Here* (1935) exhibits a fascinating intersection, for example, between depression-era anxiety over the state of American culture and

politics and the science fiction of the magazine era. While this project has considered the role of science fiction in asserting cultural narratives during the Cold War, a similar analysis of science fiction during World War II could yield interesting observations of the role the genre played in articulating the nature of American identity and its enemies during wartime. Of course, the primary characteristic of this subgenre is its ready adaptation of new, unimagined things. Science fiction continues to be one of the most popular and profitable genres in American culture. Because of its ability to adopt and critique emerging technologies or reflect upon evolving societal concerns, as we move further into the new century, science fiction will continue to be a genre well-suited to understand the human experience.

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APPENDIX: PERMISSION

From: "Javier A. Martinez" <Javier.A.Martinez@utb.edu>
Subject: RE: Permission
Date: February 20, 2009 3:24 PM EST
To: "Joseph Brown" <jbrow85@tigers.lsu.edu>

Dear Mr. Brown:

Please consider this email formal permission to use your article "Heinlein and the Cold War: Epistemology and Politics in The Puppet Masters and Double Star" as part of your dissertation. Please contact me should you or your school have any questions.

Sincerely,

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VITA

Joseph Franklin Brown Jr. was raised in Jonesboro, Georgia. After completing his bachelor's degree in English and political science at the University of Georgia, he received a master's degree in English from Auburn University. His academic "tour through the Southeastern conference" brought him and his wife, Theresa, to Baton Rouge in 2004. In 2008 he won a dissertation fellowship from the LSU Graduate School and, in 2007, was awarded the Science Fiction Research Association's Graduate Student Paper Award for his essay, "Heinlein and the Cold War: Epistemology and Politics in *The Puppet Masters* and *Double Star*." His published work in *Extrapolation*, the *Journal of Popular Culture*, and the *Explicator* reflects his research interests in American literature, science fiction, and popular culture. In May, 2009 he will graduate from Louisiana State University with the degree of Doctor of Philosophy from the Department of English.