TOWARD SUSTAINABLE CHANGE: THE LEGACY OF WILLIAM MORRIS,

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW, AND H. G. WELLS IN THE ECOLOGICAL

DISCOURSE OF CONTEMPORARY SCIENCE FICTION

by

ARWEN SPICER

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and accepted by:

_____

Dr. William Rossi, Chair of the Examining Committee

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Date

Committee in Charge: Dr. William Rossi, Chair
                                 Dr. Paul Peppis
                                 Dr. Richard Stevenson
                                 Dr. Ted Toadvine

Accepted by:

_____

Dean of the Graduate School

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                    Dr. William Rossi

This study examines implications of utopian and dystopian fiction for

contemporary ecological praxis, emphasizing the respective differences in ecological

discourse arising out of (Neo-)Darwinian and Neo-Lamarckian evolutionary theories and

non-evolutionary discourses. Grounded in late-nineteenth- and early twentieth-century

British texts, this study traces the continuities and reformulations of progressionist and

non-progressionist discourses from William Morris's News from Nowhere, George

Bernard Shaw's Back to Methuselah, and H. G. Wells's The Time Machine and Men

Like Gods to more recent texts, specifically, Octavia E. Butler's Earthseed books, Ursula

K. Le Guin's The Dispossessed, and the television space operas, Babylon 5 and Lexx.

Using Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogic theory and Bruno Latour's concepts of purification and

hybridization of discourse, this study concludes that the texts most conducive to a sound

ecological praxis are strongly dialogic, hybrid narratives, such as The Dispossessed, that

enable complex, open-ended conversation among various discursive dyads, including progressionism and non-progressionism, utopia and dystopia, anthropocentrism and ecocentrism. Such a dialogic structure lends itself to ideologies that productively recognize the need for socio-ecological sustainability while accepting, and sometimes promoting, socio-ecological change.

CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME OF AUTHOR: Arwen Spicer

PLACE OF BIRTH: Napa, California

DATE OF BIRTH: June 15, 1975

GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

>   University of Oregon
>   Sonoma State University
>   Humboldt State University

DEGREES AWARDED:

>   Doctor of Philosophy in English, 2005, University of Oregon
>   Master of Arts in English, 2000, Sonoma State University
>   Bachelor of Arts in English, 1999, Sonoma State University
>   Bachelor of Science in Biology, 1997, Humboldt State University

AREAS OF SPECIAL INTEREST:

>   Literature and Environment
>   Evolutionary and Ecological Discourse
>   Utopia, Dystopia, and Science Fiction

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

>   Editorial Board of _Watcher Junior_: An electronic journal of undergraduate _Buffy the Vampire Slayer_ scholarship, 2005

>   Instructor, Writing 123: Argumentative Writing III: Introduction to academic, argumentative writing and critical reading, stressing research, University of Oregon, 2005

Instructor, English 104: Introduction of Literature: Fiction: General education course stressing the critical analysis of literary texts, University of Oregon, 2004

Instructor, Writing 122, Argumentative Writing II: Introduction to academic, argumentative writing and critical reading, University of Oregon, 2003-05

Instructor, Writing 121, Argumentative Writing I: Introduction to academic, argumentative writing and critical reading, University of Oregon, 2002-04

Instructor, English 99, Basic Composition: Remedial course in expository writing across the disciplines, Sonoma State University, 1999

Writing Center tutor, Sonoma State University, 1998-1999

GRANTS, AWARDS, AND HONORS:

Graduate Teaching Fellowship, University of Oregon, 2002-2005

Jane Campbell Krohn Fellowship for studies in literature and environment, University of Oregon, 2001-2002

BA summa cum laude (English literature), Sonoma State University, 1999

BS summa cum laude (Biology), Humboldt State University, 1997

PUBLICATIONS:

Co-author for the Instructors Manual for The Shape of Reason: Argumentative Writing in College by John T. Gage, 4th ed. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2005. Forthcoming.

"'It's Bloody Brilliant!': The Undermining of Metanarrative Feminism in the Season Seven Arc Narrative of Buffy." Slayage: The On-line International Journal of Buffy Studies. 15 (2004). <http://www.slayage.tv>.

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    the Gods</u>." <u>The Undying Fire: Journal of the H. G. Wells Society, the
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To Mr. Wells, with whom I shall continue to agree and disagree.

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CHAPTER 1

CONVERSATIONS FOR A BETTER WORLD
ECOLOGICAL DIALOGICS IN UTOPIA AND DYSTOPIA

> The dialogic method is a way to incorporate that decentering recognition
> of a permanent in media[s] res of human life and a constantly widening
> context for human interaction and interanimation within the biosphere and
> beyond.

Patrick D. Murphy, Literature, Nature, and Other: Ecofeminist Critiques

Introduction

In this study, I examine how nineteenth-century evolutionary and ecological ideology has shaped our current attitudes towards humanity's relationship with the non-human. Specifically, I focus on how these ideological trends are mobilized in utopian and dystopian fiction and the implications of this mobilization for our current ecological praxis. Because in using the genres of utopia and dystopia, authors didactically argue for the implementation of certain values and practices, these genres represent a particularly vibrant tradition in the interrogation and dissemination of ideology. Yet despite this tradition, these genres have received far less critical attention than the more "literary" genres associated with Modernism and Postmodernism. This relative lack of criticism is unfortunate precisely because didactic texts have such practical value: unlike many more avowedly "literary" texts, utopias and dystopias strive to reach a mass audience and frequently succeed. Indeed, some utopian and dystopian narratives, such as television's Star Trek, have achieved the status of cultural icons.[1]

In chapter 2 of this study, I investigate the utopian vision of William Morris's News from Nowhere (1890); in chapter 3, George Bernard Shaw's Back to Methuselah: A Metabiological Pentateuch (1921); and in chapter 4, H. G. Wells's Men Like Gods (1923), which I will read against Wells's better known dystopian novella, The Time Machine (1895). Having established a set of discursive trends within these texts, I next trace these trends through two types of more contemporary utopian/dystopian narrative. One is what I call the "hybrid science fiction novel." Borrowing from Bruno Latour, I refer to these novels as "hybrids" because they tend to collapse the utopia/dystopia dichotomy strongly evident in the earlier texts. In chapter 5, I explore as instances of these novels Ursula K. Le Guin's The Dispossessed (1974) and Octavia E. Butler's Earthseed series (1993, 2000). In chapter 6, I contrast these hybrid texts with the more dichotomized utopias and dystopias of television space opera, taking J. Michael Straczynski's Babylon 5 (1993-98) and Paul Donovan and Wolfram Tichy's Lexx (1996-2003) as my principal examples of utopia and dystopia respectively.

All these texts reveal trends that can loosely be classified as either anthropocentric or ecocentric, terms I examine closely later in this chapter. It will surprise no one that as an ecocritic, I generally favor the ecocentric trends. Yet I argue that the most useful paradigm these texts offer for our times resides in hybrid science fiction novels, within an amalgamation of utopian, dystopian, anthropocentric, and ecocentric tendencies. The paradigm that emerges in these novels is one that I term "sustainable change." I use "sustainability" to refer to a praxis that facilitates enough ecological stability that an ecosystem can adapt and persist without a catastrophic loss of biomass or biodiversity, such as the loss seen in the desertification of a grassland. A "sustainable" ecological praxis would militate against the resource depletion, mass extinction, and rapid climate change pervasive in our contemporary world, thereby supporting resource sufficiency, as well as limiting human-made disasters. "Change" I use in two senses. The first is an admission of the impossibility of perfect homeostasis. Evolution itself is evidence that, over time, ecological relationships change. To reject the inevitability of change is to reject the processes whereby ecosystems develop and persist. The second sense

embraces a more proactive model of humanity's ability to effect positive change. Utopianism presupposes that humans can improve their societies. This hope must be incorporated into a healthy ecological praxis: the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions to combat global warming, for example, would be a change we should strive to achieve. The acceptance of change as inevitable places a positive value on letting things exist without human interference. Conversely, the pursuit of proactive change posits that humans should take a hand in altering ecosystems. These passive and active attitudes toward change exist in an irreducible tension. No precise formula can dictate when we should act and when we should leave well enough alone. The criterion of sustainability, however, offers a general guideline. After all, if we cannot sustain a healthy environment, we will most likely die, and all change will be vain. An ecological praxis based on sustainable change, then, would tend to reject human interference when it threatens sustainability and embrace it when it supports sustainability. Such a praxis, for example, would reject deforestation but embrace population stabilization. I further contend that this paradigm, with its inherent tensions between stability and fluidity, is best represented through a dialogic rhetoric that grants value to a variety of voices without attempting to resolve all their potential conflicts.

The Dialogic in Utopia and Dystopia

To approach an analysis of these texts, it is useful to establish a basic theoretical framework. To that end, I begin with a broad question: how can fictional narrative aid us in developing a sound ecological praxis? To answer this, I must define some terms. The use of the word "fiction" to denote a type of narrative that may seem "realistic" but does not purport to be based in fact arose in the eighteenth century and gained currency in the nineteenth, roughly paralleling the rise of the novel, to which the term typically referred (Williams, Keywords 134). When I speak of "fictional narrative," I am referring to fabricated narratives as they have existed since the advent of this conception of fiction. Drama, for instance, is an ancient narrative form that has been affected by the more recent concept of fictionality. When I discuss Shaw's plays, I am discussing works

written within a cultural framework that accepts the distinction between "fiction" and "non-fiction" and would readily categorize those plays as "fiction" insofar as they do not claim to be literally relating factual events.

"Praxis," sometimes used as a synonym for "practice," suggests a practice or custom actively supporting a particular conceptual paradigm: a teacher's classroom "praxis" is based on a certain pedagogy, for instance. It is in this sense that I will employ the term. For example, one type of "ecological praxis" is "green living," the practice of choosing products and activities that have relatively little negative environmental impact based on a belief that such a lifestyle will promote a healthy environment and that this goal is worthwhile.

The paradigms that support a praxis are ideological. Simply stating this, however, explains little since "ideology" can be defined in any number of ways. Colloquially, it often refers to a set of rigid political beliefs (Kavanagh 306). In Marxism, "ideology" is traditionally defined as "false consciousness," a set of sociopolitical myths designed to maintain certain power structures. This definition, as David Hawkes observes, becomes problematic in a postmodern (or post-postmodern) society that widely accepts the impossibility of any unambiguously "true consciousness" that might be opposed to this "false consciousness" (4). The erosion of belief in an objective "true consciousness" necessitates a shift in our conception of ideology. James Kavanagh describes ideology, in the sense in which I use the word, as "a fundamental framework of assumptions that defines the parameters of the real and the self [. . .]" (310). Ideology provides us with a paradigm through which to make sense of our world. This paradigm may include both comparatively "true" and comparatively "false" assumptions; it may include beliefs that are rigorously investigated as well as beliefs unreflectively assumed to be self-evident. Because we have no access to total objective truth, we must interpret our world through ideology. And because we are social creatures, our personal ideology will, to a large extent, be shared with other people from the same culture, though a single culture can comprise numerous conflicting ideological positions. Despite the pejorative connotations of the word, then, "ideology" is an indispensable aspect of culture. Nonetheless,

ideology always involves adherence to unexamined assumptions. Thus, to minimize the negative social consequences, such as racism, misogyny, and environmental degradation, which such unexamined beliefs may enable, ideology must be routinely interrogated.

Works of fiction enact messages that support or subvert a culture's dominant ideology--or do both. Ideology, in turn, affects practice by a providing a conceptual framework through which actions can be evaluated. Is it acceptable, for example, to kill a rabbit in order to develop a vaccine for humans? Humanist ideology, which typically values human health over rabbits' lives, will say, "yes," and the development of the vaccine may well follow. Since works of fiction can reflect or challenge an ideology, they are implicated in the ideological construction of praxis.

How do fictional narratives explore ideology? Works of fiction differ from many types of non-fictional narrative in that they tend to emphasize showing a sequence of events in detail, as opposed to--or in addition to--explaining them. A history text will explain the events in a war; a work of fiction will illustrate them through the experience of characters. A strength of this illustrative strategy is that it is inherently metaphorical. Characters and events represent things in the non-narrative world. This is the case even in texts that deny realist referentiality: any mention of a concrete object in a text invokes that type of object in the "real world" on some level. This metaphorical representation is a particular type of communication that has certain advantages over more literal explanation. For some purposes, saying that the sun is a lamp conveys more than explaining that it is star.

In a text like Shaw's Back to Methuselah, for example, the depiction of myths of Creative Evolution in dramatic form conveys a resonance absent from the explication of Creative Evolution Shaw gives in his preface. Indeed, Shaw describes the project of constructing a "Metabiological Pentateuch" as a vital step in the development of Creative Evolution as a religious system. Simply explaining the system is not enough. If people are to live by it, they must have parables that enact their faith. "The legends, the parables, the dramas," says Shaw, "are among the choicest treasures of mankind," providing that "no one shall believe them literally" (lxxxvii). Understood to be literally

false, fiction operates as a metaphorical vehicle for illustrating complex positions in a register that is denied to reasoned explanation, a register that may include ambiguity and contradiction in ways that enhance, rather than restrict, a text's meaning. Thus, Shaw may explain in his preface that it would be advantageous for people to live to be three hundred years old. But when in his fourth play, <u>Tragedy of an Elderly Gentleman</u>, he depicts a world in which part of the population does live this long, the message immediately becomes more detailed, more complex, and therefore, richer. For while it is true that his three-hundred-year livers have developed a happier, wiser society, it is also evident that they look down on those with shorter life spans with a disdain that sometimes translates into a will to exterminate them. Is this a positive progression? Even in the work of so didactic a playwright as Shaw, the enactment of shortliver and longliver relations provides no simple answer. This metaphorical illustration, by its nature, expresses a set of social complexities that would be difficult to convey in a more literal explication.

While this metaphoricity is present in all fiction, it takes on a form that is particularly useful as a means of social argumentation in realist fiction, which typically depicts plausible, ordinary people involved in the events of daily life in a recognizable "real world" cultural context. It may appear digressive to discuss realist fiction in a study focused on utopia, dystopia, and science fiction. Yet realism has a powerful presence in many texts within these genres. Though a utopian narrative, by definition, does not take place in the "real world," it is, nonetheless, likely to present ordinary people pursuing activities that are mundane within the cultural context of the utopia. Such a text can be "realist" in mode to the extent that it extrapolates what ordinary, "realistic" behavior would be for a person within the culture depicted. Indeed, this process of realistic extrapolation is essential to an argument for the plausibility of an alternative society. Thus, an exploration of realist metaphoricity enables analysis of the metaphorical structures employed in many speculative texts.

In realist fiction, "ordinary" characters' lives stand for the lives of real people, yet it is understood that these characters are not real people. Consider quintessential realist

George Eliot's <u>The Mill on the Floss</u>. Maggie Tulliver's frustrations with women's education and sexual double standards may echo those of Eliot herself, but Maggie is, of course, not Eliot. This mutual acknowledgement between the author and reader that the story is not "real" creates a space for certain types of interpretation denied to non-fiction. In a text based on factual events, readers, legitimately, tend to be occupied with questions of historical accuracy. In a work of realist fiction, the accurate representation of a setting--its climate, customs, technologies, etc.--is at issue; likewise, the plausibility of the text's characterizations is at issue, but since the characters were never real people, the historical accuracy of their identities and actions is not. The author, therefore, is allowed a particular freedom in creating social statements, the reader more freedom in interpreting them. Maggie's status as a fictional character permits us to ask why Eliot chose to give her certain characteristics. Why might Eliot have created a Maggie who loves Latin--or loves her brother? Because a work of realist fiction is made to specification as a detailed metaphor for everyday aspects of the real world, it is an especially powerful form for interrogating that world. Even when the world depicted is not our "real world," the mundane details of the narrative's metaphor can produce a nuanced exploration of the ramifications of that world as a theoretical alternative to our own.

If realist narratives are apt for producing detailed critiques of specific cultures, they also have the advantage of producing critiques that are particular engagements with complex societies. Concerning the lives of just a few individuals within a "realistically" intricate web of social relations, such narratives depict a society through the experiences of those individuals. This emphasis on individuality militates against overgeneralization. It is easy to say that women in the nineteenth century were, by our standards, oppressed. Yet it would be absurd to claim that each woman shared the views or experiences of that oppressed fictional woman, Eliot's Maggie. As a particular character, Maggie is a focal point for a detailed illustration of her society's attitudes toward women's education, employment, and sexuality. Yet her story is too specific to be construed as reducing an entire society to a single paradigm. Because realist fiction resists generalizations, the conclusions it suggests remain provisional. Maggie's plight certainly implies a need for

certain social reforms: more educational opportunities for women, an interrogation of sexual double standards. But it is not put forward as a call for one specific program of reform. This provisionality acts against the reification of ideology by rejecting any single, definitive answer to a social problem.

I have argued that realism is particularly successful in mounting these critiques. It is no coincidence that realism is often strongly identified with Bakhtinian dialogism. Mikhail Bakhtin held that as a strongly dialogic genre, the novel is particularly well-suited to the work of interrogating a society's ideological assumptions. As the concept of "dialogue" suggests, dialogism focuses on an interplay of voices. Thus, dialogism is often strongly present in realist texts because it enables different individuals to converse with each other in a polyphony that echoes the multivocality of "real life." These voices express the relations among different types of language as they struggle to communicate about common objects. In his 1935 essay, "Discourse in the Novel," Bakhtin asserts:

> [N]o living word relates to its object in a singular way: between the word and its object, between the word and the speaking subject, there exists an elastic environment of other, alien words about the same object, the same theme, and this is an environment that it is often difficult to penetrate. It is precisely in the process of living interaction with this specific environment that the word may be individualized and given stylistic shape. (276)

Bakhtin emphasizes discourse as a means of understanding an object through words. And in the distance between the concrete objects and the words we use to express them, there are always uncertainties: different words brought to bear on the same object, single words with connotations that shift from moment to moment and speaker to speaker. Specific, individualized meanings, Bakhtin contends, are generated out of this interplay between an utterance and all the different utterances explicitly or implicitly in conversation with it. Within any given language (English, for example), innumerable "languages" exist: the language of the dentist, the literary critic, the hip-hop artist, the advertisement, the mother, the Baby-Boomer, the language of Alice, of Curtis, of Alice when she speaks to Curtis about going to the dentist. Bakhtin denotes this polyphony by the term, "heteroglossia," the "different languages" that comprise our common language.

This multiplicity of voices is an integral part of culture. Bakhtin states, "At any given moment in its evolution, language is stratified not only into linguistic dialects in the strict sense of the word [. . .] but also—and for us this is the essential point—into languages that are socio-ideological: languages of social groups, 'professional' and 'generic' languages, languages of generations and so forth" ("Discourse" 271-72). The "essential" point for Bakhtin is that heteroglossia and social power are inextricably connected. Languages are "stratified" into categories of greater and lesser prestige; some ring loudly in public discourse while others whisper. In Bakhtinian terminology, a dominant discourse is "centripetal," inserting itself as a centralizing force that absorbs and converts more marginalized discourses. These marginalized discourses, however, resist centralization by acting as "centrifugal" forces, pulling at the edges of the dominant discourse, deconstructing its hegemony. Because human society necessarily embodies heteroglossia, no centripetal language can exist without centrifugal languages that challenge it. Nonetheless, dominant languages commonly deny the legitimacy or existence of marginalized languages. When a discourse frames itself as the only valid or only possible language, it claims the status of what Bakhtin terms a "unitary" language. "Unitary language," according to Bakhtin, "constitutes the theoretical expression of the historical processes of linguistic unification and centralization, an expression of the centripetal forces of language" ("Discourse" 270). But this absolute unification can only be theoretical, never actual, because linguistic dominance can never be complete. "Language," Bakhtin contends, "like the living concrete environment in which the consciousness of the verbal artist lives—is never unitary. It is unitary only as an abstract grammatical system of normative forms [. . .]" ("Discourse" 288). The claim of a language to true unitary standing, thus, is always an oversimplification, an erasure of the essential complexities of human cultural experience. Texts that extensively enact the ways in which multiple languages inform, challenge, and sometimes contradict one another can mobilize these languages against the claims of any "unitary" language to total and transparent truth.

For Bakhtin, the novel best exemplifies this dialogic rhetoric. In "Epic and Novel" (1941), he writes that "[the] ability of the novel to criticize itself is a remarkable feature of this ever-developing genre" (6). By employing heteroglossia to challenge the assertions of any particular voice within the text, the novel becomes self-critiquing, and, thereby, critiques the society it enacts. Bakhtin contends that under a novelistic influence, other genres "become more free and flexible [. . . ,] they become dialogized, permeated with laughter, irony, humor, elements of self-parody and finally—this is the most important thing--the novel inserts into these other genres an indeterminacy, a certain semantic openendedness, a living contact with unfinished, still evolving contemporary reality (the openended present)" ("Epic" 7). While Bakhtin is not greatly concerned with speculative fiction, his description of novelistic characteristics demonstrates how speculative fiction novels serve as effective sources of social critique. The indeterminacy and openendedness Bakhtin identifies as deriving from the novel enables such texts to explore the implications of alternative civilizations without enforcing a single conclusion.

Dialogism's stress on the necessity of heteroglossia, thus, distinguishes it from types of multivocality that employ more than one voice to promote a single, "correct" ideology or "language." One of the most ancient multivocal rhetorics, for example, is Socratic dialectic, in which a teacher asks leading questions in order to push a student toward "correctly" working through a philosophical problem. By extension, a dialectic rhetoric may be considered one in which various voices within a text question a proposition in a way that opens textual spaces for defending rather than problematizing that proposition. Dialectic multivocality, therefore, aims toward the unification of discourse, while dialogic multivocality aims toward discursive multiplicity. Yet dialectic and dialogic processes function similarly insofar as questioning a proposition, whether to reinforce or challenge it, tends to complicate it by demanding more detailed explication. Thus, the dialectic and the dialogic are not so much distinct categories as different positions on a continuum of multivocal rhetorics. The more deeply dialectic questioning probes, the more nearly the questioning voice approaches to articulating a centrifugal language. In this study, News from Nowhere, Back to Methuselah, and Men Like Gods

all illustrate largely dialectic rhetorics that show signs of incipient dialogism. I contend that in this movement toward the dialogic these texts exhibit some of their most compelling challenges to dominant ideologies.

But if strongly dialogic fiction tends to be particularly amenable to critiquing ideology, dialogism is not the only means to launch such critiques. The genres of utopia and dystopia, for example, are specifically designed to challenge social attitudes and may do so with or without the incorporation of a notably dialogic rhetoric, as exemplified in the texts I mention above. Paul Ricoeur argues that utopian discourse is designed to complement and correct ideology. While some type of ideology is essential to ordering human society, the tendency of a society to reproduce its dominant ideology uncritically renders that ideology libel to distortion (Ricoeur 14). In its negative aspect, ideology ceases to function as a legitimate tool of social organization and instead becomes oppressive (Ricoeur 14). When utopianism is functioning properly as social argument rather than mere fantasy or escapism, it productively critiques ideology by exposing and opposing these distortions (Ricoeur 16-17). Of course, like all discourse, utopianism (and dystopianism) is itself ideological and can never completely break free of its own socially constructed preconceptions. Yet, as Fredric Jameson contends, in the very act of reproducing such preconceptions, a utopia challenges them. In The Seeds of Time, Jameson remarks that utopias imagine the unimaginable "by way of the holes in the text that are our own incapacity to see beyond the epoch and its ideological closures" (75). In other words, in the unfamiliar context of an alternative society, familiar elements that reproduce the dominant ideology are more likely to stand out as incongruous or illogical. These incongruities and fractures of logic create "holes" in the text, which direct the reader's attention to ideological problems that could otherwise pass unnoticed. This critiquing and defamiliarizing of the dominant ideology occurs in dystopia as well but as a product of a somewhat different rhetoric.

While utopias advocate reform by telling us what to strive for, dystopias do so by telling us what to resist. Dystopias are essentially warnings: if we venture down a certain path, we will regret it. Because they are designed to frighten us, dystopias can

generally function effectively when they present worst-case scenarios. And though the most disturbing dystopias are often those--like George Orwell's 1984--that seem to arise "realistically" out of existing social trends, dystopian scenarios do not have to be particularly plausible to be rhetorically powerful. Wells's The Time Machine, for instance, is chilling largely because of the sheer bleakness of its depiction of the degeneration of the human race and the eventual death of all life on Earth. The specific scenario is hardly likely. In fact, Wells's supposition that the sun will burn out without first engulfing the Earth has been shown to be scientifically incorrect. Yet the tale does not have to be realistic to communicate Wells's point: if we complacently assume that the future must bring advancement and if we do not take the active steps necessary to bring about this advancement, we may, instead, find ourselves regressing in ways far more horrible than we might imagine. If the story bears just enough relation to our social reality to frighten us into pondering ways to avoid such social and evolutionary degeneration, it has accomplished its purpose.

Utopias, typically, are not granted the same freedom to play with unlikely scenarios. If dystopias proscribe, utopias must prescribe, and this is generally a harder task: it is one thing to say, "Don't set the house on fire," quite another to explain how to build a better house. While a dystopia, therefore, need only unsettle us, a utopia must convince us that an entire society is organized in a way we might wish to emulate. As I discuss in the next chapter, even a text such as Morris's News from Nowhere, which advertises itself as a romantic "vision," owes much of its force to the depth of the realist detail with which it depicts a decentralized communist utopia. Because utopias must strive for plausibility, they are more likely than dystopias to offer a detailed depiction of the intricacies of social systems. Yet because utopias are invested in presenting a society that functions, if not perfectly, at least exceptionally well by our standards, they are also more likely than dystopias to gloss over potential problems. Thus, like Ricoeur's utopia and ideology, utopia and dystopia are complementary. Dystopias highlight social problems; utopias attempt to give solutions. Dystopias, in turn, either implicitly or explicitly, critique the solutions posited by utopias.

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This mutually constructive process could be described as a type of intertextual dialogism. "Intertextuality" describes a variety of ways in which a text invokes other texts, explicitly or implicitly, intentionally or unintentionally. In Image-Music-Text, Roland Barthes contends that "[a] text is [. . .] a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations [. . .]" (qtd. in Chandler). Barthes's radical denial of authorial originality has understandably been questioned, but his description of the blending and clashing of discursive dimensions within a text is apt. Like all utterances, all texts connect to semiotic practices used in other contexts. As I discuss in chapter 6, such conversation between utopias and dystopias sets ideas in motion to yield a more nuanced critique of society. This dialogism, however, is of a different order from the internal heteroglossia Bakhtin cites as characteristic of the novel. In intertextual "dialogue," voices are juxtaposed much less explicitly; "conversation" between texts often takes place more in the reader's mind than on the page. Moreover, except for cases in which an author is writing a series of related works, intertextual dialogue is not the product of a single writer orchestrating particular impressions through the use of many voices. In this sense, intertextual dialogism might register the complexity of reality more fully than the dialogism of the novel does. Where a novel is, in fact, the product of one authorial voice, intertextuality puts different authorial voices in conversation. Without some sort of systematic, intratextual interaction of voices, however, numerous potential points of conflict and complementarity may go unexpressed. Thus, though utopian and dystopian intertextual critiques can be valuable, they often lack the sophistication of intratextual critiques.

Yet ironically, while utopia and dystopia are genres designed to interrogate society, they are also genres in which these intensive heteroglossic critiques are comparatively rare. If dialogism is, indeed, a powerful means of questioning society, this relative absence of intratextual dialogism might seem surprising. Yet traditionally, dialogism has tended to work against the utopian project. (It is more forgiving to dystopia.) In keeping with their didactic aims, utopias are designed to present an

alternative society as admirable. The introduction of voices expressing disaffection with a utopia, therefore, threatens to undercut the text's vision. Dystopias, in contrast, can often withstand a great deal of discourse in defense of the dystopia and still maintain a reader's antipathy for the society. An example is Aldous Huxley's <u>A Brave New World</u>, a renowned dystopia made only more unsettling by Mustapha Mond's well-argued case that it is, in fact, utopian. If a utopia appears too flawed, however, readers are likely to wonder why they should bother to strive for such a world. A utopia whose potential problems are intricately delineated through dialogic conversation may, therefore, be in danger of losing its claim to utopian status.

This does not mean that a dialogic utopia will be ineffective. On the contrary, dialogic utopias may be among the most profound literary agents of ideological interrogation. They are not, however, conventional utopias. Their aim is not so much to present a nearly ideal world as to present a world, like ours, filled with flaws, that nonetheless embodies certain attitudes and practices from which our world might benefit- -were we to pursue those practices with enough insight to effectively address the problems they present. An example, which I discuss at length in chapter 5, is Le Guin's <u>The Dispossessed</u>, subtitled "an ambiguous utopia." Anarres, Le Guin's anarcho-syndicalist "utopia," clearly suffers from social stagnation and oppression. Moreover, it is not certain that all of its more openly venerated "virtues" are salutary. Would we want to live in a world, for instance, in which decorative arts are considered wasteful "excrement"? Yet for all this society's difficulties, it is equally clear that Anarres has qualities we long for: it has little serious violence, no prisons, sexual equality, fair distribution of resources, universal human rights, and--within limits--a high degree of personal freedom. Using conversations between characters to delineate various views of Anarres society, Le Guin creates a "utopia" that is ambiguous insofar as its status as a utopia is questionable. At the same time, this multivocality presents an alternative society all the more compelling for its "realistic" depiction of both the potential problems

and the virtues of such a system. Far from requiring us to dismiss the utopia of Anarres, the text's dialogism serves as a defense against the accusations of simplistic wishful thinking so commonly leveled against utopias.

Yet the fact remains that Anarres is not purely utopian; it is obviously flawed. The more ambiguous a utopia is, the nearer it approaches dystopia. Similarly, the more ambiguous a dystopia, the more potentially utopian it appears. In the gray zone between the pure utopia and the pure dystopia lies a type of text I describe as the hybrid science fiction novel, adapting Latour's concept of "hybridity." In We Have Never Been Modern, Latour critiques modernity's penchant for strictly separating--or "purifying"--the concepts of "nature" and "society," observing, for instance, that it is absurd to regard the hole in the ozone layer as a purely "natural" phenomenon or a purely "social" one; clearly, it is a hybrid of both (6). Moreover, Latour argues, such a hybrid cannot be productively dealt with so long as our conceptual framework refuses its hybridity. If we treat the hole in the ozone as purely a matter of nature, we will blind ourselves to the need to change our social policies. If we treat it purely as a matter of culture, we are in danger of denying its relevance as a physical force altogether.

By analogy, a fictional alternative society will be severely limited in its ability for social critique if it does not acknowledge both the utopian and dystopian possibilities residing within a given scenario. As I show in chapter 5, these hybrid novels offer more productive critiques by depicting alternative societies that combine both unsettling social problems and promising solutions. Simultaneously presenting an argument for a future society and a thought-experiment investigating how a certain type of society might function, such texts explore in detail the ramifications of a certain course of action. If embracing anarcho-syndicalism, for example, might eliminate class discrimination but could also make us vulnerable to social stagnation, should we embrace it? Such a text will typically favor one type of society or course of action over another: The Dispossessed embraces Anarres more readily than the capitalist society of Urras. But it will offer no single programmatic answer to all social ills; we are not advised to turn Earth into Anarres. Instead, the issue remains suspended amid the contrasting voices

of various characters, the final answer left to the determination of the reader. Such speculative dialogic texts are particularly useful tools for ideological critique because they rigorously explore the vagaries of certain present-day attitudes and actions with the goal of elucidating their implications for our future. Out of this process of elucidation, certain precepts are likely to appear as values that, in general, seem wise for us to adopt: in The Dispossessed, for example, the call to embrace a less materialistic life is clear.

A Case for Ecocentric Values

In this study, I investigate how utopian and dystopian texts enact ecological precepts, with the aim of identifying certain precepts that are particularly salutary for our ecological praxis. Of course, speculative fiction is only one of many means to explore ecological principles. Others include personal experience, cultural tradition, historical precedent, and, of course, ecological science. I enter into my investigation with my own assumptions about which principles our society should espouse, and I attempt to justify these assumptions by appealing to science, aware that such an appeal is problematic. As a discourse, science itself is a "hybrid," an amalgam of physical experimentation and ideological interpretation; it has no claim to transparent truth. In "Situated Knowledges," Donna Haraway articulates the necessity and difficulty of approaching science from both ideologically aware and physically "objective" perspectives: "So, I think my problem and 'our' problem is how to have simultaneously an account of radical historical contingency for all knowledge claims and knowing subjects, a critical practice for recognizing our own 'semiotic technologies' for making meanings, and a no-nonsense commitment to faithful accounts of a 'real' world [. . .]" (187). According to Haraway's paradigm, when I discuss a concept such as ecology, I am simultaneously invoking historically entrenched cultural constructions, particular linguistic practices, and information gleaned--sometimes more, sometimes less rigorously--through the application of the scientific method to the study of ecosystems. These facets are inseparable. The very concept of "ecosystem," a

word coined by British botanist Arthur Tansley in 1935, combines field studies of ecological interactions with Tansley's own preoccupations with Freudian concepts of energetic homeostasis (Anker 29-31).

Although few would seriously claim that we have no meaningful access to a physical world outside discourse, there has been a trend in certain strains of poststructuralism to emphasize the textuality of knowledge almost to the exclusion of non-discursive physical experience. If language mediates all but the most simple thought, runs the argument, and if language is always ideological and subjective, then no language can tell us anything "objective" about "reality." Instead, dominant ideologies use science as a tool for maintaining their power. There is no doubt that institutions of science have often been used to provide a falsely "objective" mandate to various oppressive social practices. However, numerous scientists and critics have argued that although science has certainly been put to dubious purposes, this fact does not invalidate it. In Practical Ecocriticism, Glen Love voices a concern

> that those hostile to science have extended their indictment of science's contextual sins--real enough--to include an attack upon the scientific method itself, which is the heart and center of science. This method of critical thinking through the gathering of data and testing of hypotheses is almost universally defended as the best means humanity has for freeing itself from dogma, prejudice, and error. (41)

Because the scientific method provides a mechanism for science to resist prejudice and error, Love claims a special status for science as a discourse less rooted than others in cultural subjectivity. His reasoning is sound. This is not to say that any piece of information marked as "scientific" must be accepted; such a practice would amount to simplistic scientism. In this study, however, I assume that if a finding has been substantiated by numerous scientists from various cultures in studies that the scientific community accepts as appropriately rigorous, then that finding can be provisionally viewed as correct.

A substantial body of scientific evidence points to certain key environmental problems currently of worldwide concern. Globally, we suffer from overconsumption of resources, exacerbated both by first-world consumer practices and third-world population

growth. We face resource depletion and a mass extinction of species. Pollution results in various hazards, from global warming and ozone depletion to more localized ecosystemic and health problems. Despite positive trends, many of these problems are worsening. Logically, we may conclude that they are likely to continue to worsen as long as our dominant social and economic ideologies enable them.

There are any number of ideological constructions that contribute to these problems: capitalism, overconsumption, misogyny, ethnic conflict, and scientism, to name a few, undoubtedly play their parts. A common theme in many of these constructions is an adherence to a hierarchical ontology, which assigns different degrees of value to discrete types. One of our most established hierarchical paradigms is, of course, anthropocentrism: the belief that human interests should be the focus of our moral system. I do not intend to argue that we should eliminate hierarchical thinking; the problems involved with ascribing equal value to a worm and a human are too numerous to enter into. There is a difference, however, between an ethical system that privileges a human's life over a worm's and a system that is preoccupied with assigning degrees of comparative value to different species, a process which necessitates the location of value in the species itself as a discrete type. The first system provides a practical framework for determining which entities to favor in a given situation; the second establishes a world view based on the categorical separation of entities. This second view, one deeply embedded in our dominant Western ideology, undermines an awareness of interrelatedness by privileging difference among types over similarity. Focusing on human privilege, an anthropocentric view would be likely to contend, for example, that if humans wish to hunt deer or protect livestock, they can legitimately eliminate the predator species that might thwart those goals. The negative repercussions of this assumption are clear. Not only is attempting to eradicate predators expensive, but without culling by their natural predators, prey populations explode, requiring rigorous human management, likewise at great expense.[2] Conversely, a view that does not strictly

hierarchize but assumes that all organisms have significance as partners within ecological systems is less likely to damage species or systems than a view that tends to consider the "unimportant" to be expendable.

Such an ecosystem-oriented view is commonly called "ecocentric." Since the precise definition of "ecocentrism" is a matter of some contention, I will briefly outline how I approach the term. In The Environmental Imagination, Lawrence Buell, quoting Timothy O'Riordan, espouses the following definition:

> "Ecocentrism preaches the virtues of reverence, humility, responsibility, and care; it argues for low impact technology (but is not antitechnological); it decries bigness and impersonality in all forms (but especially in the city); and demands a code of behavior that seeks permanence and stability based upon ecological principles of diversity and homeostasis."[3] I propose two amendments: (1) that ecocentrism may in fact be antitechnological, and (2) that it need not adhere to a dogma of homeostasis. Otherwise the definition suffices. (425)

O'Riordan's definition is predicated principally on a sense of moral responsibility toward the world in general, including human and non-human. It requires a personal, local interaction with other life forms that will tend to preserve a wide variety of organisms and inorganic phenomena. Buell amends that technology may or may not be favored. If it is favored, however, it must be applied in ways that produce a small and/or slow effect on ecosystems. Buell's amendment that ecological homeostasis need not be maintained is in keeping with the trends in ecological science away from adherence to a steady-state paradigm that perceives ecosystems as naturally inclining toward the maximum stability and relative changelessness of the climax community.

Discussing this shift in emphasis in ecological science, Dana Phillips goes still further than Buell in problematizing an adherence to homeostasis over instability and change. Indeed, in The Truth of Ecology, Phillips contends, "The values to which ecology dedicated itself early on--especially balance, harmony, unity, and economy--are now seen as more or less unscientific, and hence 'utopian' in the pejorative sense of the term" (42).[4] Phillips is correct that "balance, harmony, unity, and economy" are problematic terms for ecological science. Their value-laden imprecision makes them

inherently difficult to deploy in the service of any science that strives for "objectivity." However, in stressing that these concepts are seen as "pejoratively utopian," (i. e. as idealized fantasies) because they are not rigorously scientific, Phillips implicitly devalues concerns for ecological stability. "Balance" may not be a useful criterion in a scientific study, but its general conceptual applicability to a healthy ecosystem is evident in events as mundane as the annual resurgence of the same species of wildflowers in a field. If a relative "balance" in the interactions among of plant species, pollinators, soil chemistry, rainfall, insolation, and so on did not persist, a similar distribution of these flowers over many years would not occur. Buell and Phillips rightly concur that healthy ecosystems may--indeed, ultimately will--change. The vital need, however, is that they maintain enough stability that the changes they undergo are not catastrophic but allow time for a significant number of the system's participants to make adaptive adjustments so that a diverse functioning system can persist. O'Riordan's "virtues of reverence, humility, responsibility, and care," unscientific though they be, support a praxis in which ecological changes will be made with sufficient caution to preempt catastrophic change. Thus, O'Riordan's and Buell's principles go a long way toward expressing a set of ecocentric values conducive to the reform of our ecological praxis.

Nonetheless, I wish to step back a little from this definition and present a somewhat less prescriptive view of ecocentrism. "Ecocentric" literally means "centered around ecological systems." As Eric Katz, Andrew Light, and David Rothenberg state in their anthology on deep ecological philosophy, Beneath the Surface, "Ecocentrism is the idea that the ecosphere and ecological systems are the focus of value. It is a holistic view of value, for entire systems are thought to be valuable, rather than individual humans or individual natural entities (such as animals)" (xiii). While an anthropocentric view asks first, "How does an action affect human beings?", an ecocentric view asks first, "How does it affect the system?" This division between anthropocentric and ecocentric, however, represents something of a false dichotomy. Human beings do not exist outside of ecosystems; therefore, a phenomenon that affects an ecosystem in any substantial way is likely to affect humans. As much as I agree that O'Riordan's virtues of "reverence,

humility, responsibility, and care" are fundamental to an ecocentric worldview, these values are not immediately necessary to perceiving the basic fact of human-non-human connectedness. I do not have to revere oxygen to realize that I need it. The irreducible core of ecocentrism, as I see it, is not that we must revere nature or reject bigness but that we must place the system foremost in analyzing our practical decisions. This privileging of the system, if genuine, will almost certainly be underwritten by the values and practices O'Riordan and Buell cite. I propose, however, that even though ecocentrism may ultimately demand these values, we should not take them as our starting point.

When I speak of a false dichotomy between human needs and ecosystemic needs, I do not mean to suggest that the two never come into conflict. On the contrary, it is common for the preservation of an ecosystem, such as a rain forest, to require the limitation of certain human activities, such as logging, as a result of which local humans will experience privation and, at worst, death. Such ethical problems are real and must be addressed in all their many facets. Yet, ultimately, the needs of humanity and the needs of ecosystems are more in accord than opposed: if the rain forest is logged into extinction, the loggers will have lost their jobs in any case, and because such clear-cut land is ill-suited to agriculture, it is likely that the former loggers will still be faced with privation. In contrast, a type of forestry that is based on the harvesting of timber within the context of preserving the forest ecosystem will, over the long term, provide sustainable employment for at least a relatively small population of loggers. A value system that favors the forest and a value system that favors the loggers will come to very much the same practical conclusions if each begins with the premise that since the loggers cannot be considered in isolation from the forest ecosystem in which they live, the system as a whole must be the primary unit of consideration from the outset.

Put another way, to say that humans should be our primary concern is a bit like saying that vanilla extract is the most delicious part of a cookie. It may or may not be, depending on one's taste, but the vanilla extract only tastes like vanilla within the cookie as a whole. By this metaphor, I mean to illustrate the possibility of being simultaneously anthropocentric (favoring the vanilla) and ecocentric (baking the whole cookie). I do not

pretend to know the extent to which this particular feat of anthropo-eco-hybridization is, in fact, practicable. I would argue, however, that we should leave a discursive space open for the possibility. For if our most pressing concern is to stabilize the biosphere, our first step must be to develop a practice that will enable us to achieve that goal. This practice must be predicated on a primary concern for the stability of ecological systems. If individuals or groups--strongly anthropocentric religions, for example--are able to generate such a practice without personally adhering to values such O'Riordan's, Buell's, or deep ecologists', we would be ill-advised to disallow their practice because the attitudes on which they base it are "incorrect." For the purposes of this study, therefore, I will define "ecocentrism" pragmatically as a view primarily concerned with how practices may affect ecological systems.

Ecocentrism and Anthropocentrism in Evolutionary and Ecological Discourse

Though I do not propose to develop a list of moral principles indispensable to ecocentrism, my study is necessarily deeply concerned with how value systems put forward in utopian and dystopian texts support either an anthropocentric or an ecocentric praxis--or elements of each. Such an investigation must be grounded in the socio-scientific discourses out of which these texts arise. I have chosen to orient my study toward late-nineteenth- and early twentieth-century British texts in part because they represent a particularly productive moment in the development of the evolutionary and ecological discourses from which our own ecological attitudes descend.

The nineteenth century saw a revolution in scientific attitudes toward nature and humanity. In 1809, Jean Baptiste Lamarck published his oft-decried yet enormously influential Zoological Philosophy, one the first texts to describe an environmentally mediated mechanism for evolution. With Charles Darwin's On the Origin of Species (1859), the concept of environmentally driven evolution rose to undisputed prominence. In these theories, relations between humanity and other organisms took on a new level of

significance as a driving force of evolution. This new emphasis on the natural world as a network of dynamic relations was reflected in the development of the science of "oecology," a term coined by Ernst Haeckel in 1866.

Ironically, at the same time that the human species's dependence on and inseparability from nature was becoming apparent, humanity was also first achieving the capability to alter its environment in ways both rapid and expansive. Over the course of the nineteenth century, the American "wilderness" was transformed from a vast and perilous frontier to a patchwork of spaces increasingly seen as threatened oases in need of conservation. In Britain, such "wilderness" scarcely existed, yet the British, too, saw an unprecedented increase in the intensity of human land use, exemplified by the felling of forests and increase of suburban sprawl, to accommodate an exploding population. In both America and Britain, the Industrial Revolution gained momentum, making wide-scale pollution from coal-burning factories a social issue for the first time.

The nineteenth-century view of humanity's relationship to nature was, therefore, fraught with new fear and new hope. Evolution raised the disturbing idea that humans might be no more than "animals," while at the same time suggesting limitless possibilities for ascent beyond the flaws of the current human race. Likewise, humanity's growing sway over nature sparked the first glimmerings of modern environmental concerns over issues such as pollution, overpopulation, and deforestation, while simultaneously holding out the promise that nature could be subjugated to human needs and wants. This set of discursive tensions provoked a crucial question: is humanity subject to nature or destined to subjugate it? Put another way, should humanity accept the limitations imposed by its membership in a larger ecological context, or should it strive to control (or transcend) that context?

How writers went about answering this question depended to a large extent on how various schools of evolution and ecology influenced them. Over the course of the nineteenth century, numerous—often contemporaneous—theories of evolution rose and fell in popularity. The prevailing mood held that "evolution" was synonymous with advancement (however that might be defined), "devolution" or "degeneration" with the

frightening phenomenon of regression. The transmutation of species was most often considered naturally progressive: tending toward advancement. At the same time, countervailing trends explored the concept of devolution through racial senility, the idea that each species has a natural "life expectancy" beyond which its evolution will become increasingly maladaptive until the species becomes extinct. By the end of the nineteenth century, however, two chief schools of evolutionary thought contended for socio-scientific dominance: Darwinism (gradually mutating into Neo-Darwinism) and Neo-Lamarckism.

Since both these schools exist in diverse variations, I will attempt no more than a brief summary of them here. "Darwinism" may loosely be thought of as the evolutionary theory propounded by Darwin in Origin, though it is worth noting that Darwin himself continued to modify his theory up to the last year of his life.[5] Darwin's chief agency for evolution was natural selection: the process whereby environmental pressures lead to the differential reproductive success of well-adapted individuals. As that staunch anti-Darwinian Samuel Butler was fond of observing, however, Darwin never denied the existence of other agencies in the evolutionary process; indeed, after Origin, he progressively deemphasized the importance of natural selection, granting greater--though still relatively little--agency to forces such as Lamarckian use and disuse.[6] Neo-Darwinism, in contrast, stressed natural selection as the sole process needed to explain evolution.

Our cultural mythos teaches that natural selection came to be accepted as the chief mechanism of evolution soon after the publication of Origin. In fact, as Peter Bowler has argued extensively, natural selection was not widely accepted until the New Synthesis of evolutionary biology with Mendelian genetics beginning in the 1920s. In The Non-Darwinian Revolution, Bowler contends that while the nineteenth century did see a revolution toward the acceptance of evolution over creationism, the view of evolution most commonly espoused was progressive and teleological, not based on the selective mediations of the environment (5). Though Darwin himself saw evolution by natural selection as a wondrous process, many resisted the concept. The "war of nature"

was a prevailing metaphor for natural selection, the default assumption that environmental pressures selected for individuals who were combative, violent, ruthless—warriors. In Evolution and Ethics (1893-94), for example, Darwin's great popularizer, T. H. Huxley, distinguished between the "cosmic process" of evolution driven by a struggle for survival and the "ethical process" of divinely bestowed spiritual values. Human society, according to Huxley, exists in a perpetual tension between the war-like, competitive drives developed by evolution and the moral drives derived from God. Even Darwin, who was notable for his emphasis on the adaptive advantages of cooperation and caring, adopted the war trope. In the final paragraph of Origin, for example, he states, "Thus, from the war of nature, from famine and death, the most exalted object which we are capable of conceiving, namely, the production of the higher animals, directly follows" (490). Not surprisingly, many found it difficult to share Darwin's enthusiasm for the workings of "famine and death."

Against the seeming brutality of the survival of the fittest, Neo-Lamarckism offered a comforting buttress. British Neo-Lamarckism adhered to the idea that an individual's will or desire to effect a bodily change was the driving force behind evolution. Of course, the change might not be apparent within one or several generations. Nonetheless, just as with natural selection, changes so minute as to appear initially invisible could over numerous generations produce the full diversity of species seen on Earth. If Neo-Darwinism suggested that nature was a war in which those who, utterly by chance, happened to be most fit would survive at the expense of others, Neo-Lamarckism suggested that everyone who chose to exercise his or her will to its utmost could actively participate in the evolutionary improvement of humanity. If Neo-Darwinism stressed divisiveness and the capricious reign of chance, Neo-Lamarckism stressed harmony and personal choice, thus offering what Bowler calls "a more humane model of adaptive evolution than natural selection" ("Holding" 333).

Neo-Lamarckians placed a premium on the agency of the mind, and many saw themselves as doing so in stark contrast to their Neo-Darwinian adversaries. Neo-Lamarckian Samuel Butler argued that heredity and memory were essentially the same

process, asserting that memories were passed down to offspring in a latent form, eventually forming new, instinctive behaviors. It is no coincidence that it was Butler who remarked in his evolutionary diatribe Luck or Cunning (1887) that "the pitchforking, in fact, of mind out of the universe, or at any rate its exclusion from all share worth talking about in the process of organic development, this was the pill Mr. Darwin had given us to swallow" (6). Butler's complaint, in literal terms, is that Darwinism does not acknowledge the organism's agency in altering its own inborn physical and mental makeup. His hyperbolic rhetoric, however, suggests the broader accusation that Darwin's disciples deny the importance (perhaps even the existence) of mind. Hence Darwinian "luck" is opposed to Lamarckian "cunning." Echoing Butler, Shaw asserts in his preface to Back to Methuselah that "there is no place in Darwinism for free will, or any other sort of will [. . .]" (lix). In part, Shaw objects to Neo-Darwinism's common materialist assumption that "mind" or "will" cannot exist outside of a physical body, that transcendent spirit is illusory. This total rejection of consciousness--disembodied or embodied--as a feasible possibility within Neo-Darwinian theory, however, erroneously assumes that the ability to make choices cannot be selected for as an advantageous trait. Yet, erroneous or not, the charge that evolution by natural selection provided little or no explanation for the existence of conscious mind was common among Neo-Lamarckians.

Thus, while both these evolutionary theories tended to stress progress and human ascendancy, they developed markedly different conceptions of what mattered in the evolutionary process. Neo-Darwinism stressed struggle, Neo-Lamarckism will and desire. In this simple distinction lie the roots of two very different attitudes toward ecology. Struggle suggests a direct relationship of organisms with each other. This relational concept, its negative connotations notwithstanding, is inherently ecological, part of Darwin's "complex web of relations" whereby "plants and animals, most remote in the scale of nature, are bound together" (Origin 73). In other words, even the "least-evolved" of organisms affects and can be affected by the "most highly evolved." Indeed, natural selection itself describes how individuals relate to organic and inorganic elements of the environment they inhabit. Though desire also suggests some relationality--one

presumably desires to do something within an external context--this type of relationality is far more tenuous. In its consequent deemphasis on the environment, Neo-Lamarckism diverges from its Lamarckian antecedent. For Lamarck himself, the environment, or what he referred to as "locality," was vitally important to evolution: the giraffe develops a long neck in order to reach leaves high on trees. Though the physical evolution is driven by the giraffe's straining, the straining is driven by location of the leaves. Because it tended to emphasize human evolution, however, Neo-Lamarckism often invoked evolutionary "desire" without reference to what we would consider an ecological context. Shaw, for example, cites riding a bicycle or playing a violin (Back xxiv-xxv) as activities that might be made instinctive by generations of concerted striving. It is not surprising, therefore, that Neo-Lamarckian texts are often less engaged with ecological context--are less ecocentric--than Neo-Darwinian texts.

This analysis, of course, is a generalization. Within both Neo-Lamarckism and Neo-Darwinism, numerous subsets exist, presenting various types of engagement with ecology. Creative Evolution, for example, is akin to Neo-Lamarckism in its belief that evolution is driven by will. According to Creative Evolution, the individual's actions and desires are ultimately guided by Life Force (Henri Bergson's élan vital), a progressive drive inherent in all life. While Bergson rejects the agency of individual will in the evolutionary process, Shaw's version of Creative Evolution embraces both individual will and Life Force as evolutionary agencies. Since Life Force is a universal drive, however, Creative Evolution tends to describe life more collectively than individualist Neo-Lamarckism. In Creative Evolution (English translation 1911), Bergson relates his élan vital to the more conventional understanding of energy in physics. A type of energy flow, though not identical to that described by physics, is the process by which Life Force operates (Bergson 253-54); it is also the concept through which Tansley would define an ecosystem a few decades later (Worster 302). Indeed, Bergson's description of energetic flow is profoundly ecosystemic:

> Now whence comes the energy [that life procures and expends]? From the ingested food, for food is a kind of explosive, which needs only the spark to discharge the energy it stores. Who has made this explosive? The food

> may be the flesh of an animal nourished on animals and so on; but, in the
> end it is to the vegetable we always come back. Vegetables alone gather
> in solar energy, and the animals do but borrow it from them [. . . .] (253)

Thus, without reference to natural selection, Bergson uses Life Force to explain the functioning of food webs. In contrast, Shaw, also a Creative Evolutionist, seldom invokes ecological relations. Even within the relatively narrow context of Creative Evolution theories, a diversity of ecological attitudes abounds.

Similarly, Neo-Darwinism necessitates no single ecological dogma. For Neo-Darwinians, complications arise from a tension between ecological relationality and the perceived desirability of progress. In the nineteenth century, it was generally assumed that evolution should be progressive. The eugenics movement is founded on the will to ensure that this progress will persist. Progress, however, suggests among other things increasing freedom from environmental restrictions, increasing security in the face of environmental pressures. It suggests autonomy from the environment. Yet paradoxically, for Neo-Darwinians, evolution is driven by selective pressures defined by the environment. Ecological relationships are fundamental to the persistence and evolution of life. Thus, in Neo-Darwinian texts, it is not uncommon to encounter a tension between the need to preserve ecosystems and the desire to overcome this need. This tension speaks to a more fundamental ambivalence about the extent to which humanity should be considered a part of "nature."

This question has profound ethical implications; for if humanity and nature are properly separate categories, it is relatively easy to justify the exploitation of nature for human wants. If humanity and nature are not distinct, however, it is more difficult to justify a purely utilitarian attitude toward the non-human. In nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Britain, the utilitarian attitude prevailed. For instance, Peder Anker contends that the practice of ecological science in Britain in this period was centrally motivated by imperial economic interests: the study of nature must be justified by nature's utility to empire. As one of many examples, he cites the Imperial Botanical Conference of 1924, which launched a plan for a comprehensive survey of ecological relations among plant species throughout the British empire: "The focus of this grand

survey," Anker observes, "was the economic aspect of botany; as one lecturer put [it], 'it is our duty as botanists to enlighten the world of commerce'" (34). In the dominant discourse of the Conference, the importance of plants hinged on their economic value to humans.

Yet, though such anthropocentric views predominated, they did not exclude a sense of the intrinsic worth and rights of non-human beings. In Man and the Natural World, Keith Thomas amply documents the development of the British sense of nature's intrinsic value, a tradition that extends through the Romantics and post-Romantics, such as William Morris, to later preservationist movements.[7] But much of this sense of nature's worth remained localized within Great Britain itself. James Winter argues that the economic exploitation of British colonies permitted Britain to enjoy the luxury of a relatively protected landscape without sacrificing short-term economic growth: "The fact of empire," he contends, "'the empire of free trade,' [. . .] allowed Britain to use steamships and steam locomotives to export at least some environmental damage" by draining foreign instead of British resources (Winter 3). A common theme in these attitudes toward ecology and empire is a sense of ontological separateness from the forces on which one's existence depends: humanity is of a different order from the non-human, Britain of a different order from the colonies. By granting a special distinction to one group or entity (Britain, for example) as opposed to everything else (all other lands), such separation reinforces hierarchies (Britain is superior to other lands). Thus, a discourse that categorically separates humans from all other life forms tends toward an anthropocentric privileging of humanity.

Thus, despite countervailing trends, the dominant views of evolution and ecology in this period generally support a belief in human separateness from and superiority over other life forms. Such views use this superiority--and the need to maintain it--as a justification for a utilitarian attitude toward the non-human. At the same time, their emphasis on human separateness endorses the goal of minimizing human dependence on the non-human. In this way, the idea that humans are justified in using the non-human exists alongside a sense that ultimately humans should not need to use the non-human.

This anthropocentric advocating of human progress is expressed in the dream of "leaving behind": leaving behind dependence on the whims of nature and, finally, the need to participate in an ecosystem altogether. Conversely, the development of ecological science throughout this period led to an increasing awareness within the scientific community of the intricacy of ecological connections and the difficulties inherent in controlling or severing them. The more sensitive to these intricacies an ideology becomes, the more it questions the desirability of attempting to control or surmount ecology; the ideology, thus, tends toward the ecocentric. Anthropocentrism and ecocentrism, therefore, exist together in a tension between the desire to "leave ecology behind" and the fear that attempting to do so will prove detrimental to humanity.

Within this tension, individual texts can be placed on a continuum from strongly anthropocentric to strongly ecocentric. I contend that, in general, the more anthropocentric a position the more progressionist it tends to be, the more ecocentric the more non-progressionist. "Progress" itself is a difficult term, however, and demands further exploration. In "The Redefinition of Progress," Gilbert LaFreniere examines the numerous connotations of the word. Drawing from Leo Marx, LaFreniere distinguishes between "goal-oriented" progress, which describes the pursuit of a particular aim individually determined to be desirable, and "technocratic progress," which "emphasizes the most rapid possible rate of technological innovation as the essential criterion of social progress" (80). "Progress" can variously refer to any positive change or to a more narrow technological development. For an anti-technologist, therefore, it would be "progress" to slam the brakes on the steaming locomotive of "progress." Following a similar line of reasoning, Michael Ruse's study of the concept of progress in evolutionary biology, Monad to Man, distinguishes between "absolute progress," which describes a change widely regarded as an advancement under an accepted value system, and "comparative progress," which describes an advancement in a particular area, an advancement that may or may not be considered positive within a broader social context: "If one arrives at the Heavenly City," Ruse explains, "one has made absolute progress. If one makes a bigger

and better atom bomb, one has made comparative progress" (20). There is, of course, no universal, transcultural standard for differentiating absolute and comparative progress.

Even within the comparatively limited context of evolutionary biology, progress is a troublesome concept. Early evolutionary theory assumed evolution to be progressive in Ruse's "absolute" sense. This notion, however, began to be complicated as early as Lamarck's Zoological Philosophy. Lamarck developed a paradoxically dual sense of evolutionary change: on the one hand, change was progressive, following something loosely like a scale of nature. On the other hand, change was environmentally mediated and, therefore, not a predetermined progression. If a species's locality is inundated with water, for example, the species must evolve to swim, but swimming is not necessarily a "progressive" stage above walking, certainly not in an absolute sense. The advent of the theory of evolution by natural selection did nothing to remedy this difficulty. Evolutionary progress is often identified with an increase in structural complexity, particularly if complexity is a prerequisite for traits, such as intelligence, which humans value (Ruse 39). Yet it is entirely possible under natural selective pressures for a species to evolve into a simpler state, a less intelligent state, for example. For all the difficulties that evolutionary biology has presented to the concept of progress, however, evolutionary views continue to show a strong progressionist bent. Characterizing Darwin's view, Ruse comments, "In a way, progress is an artifact of the very fact of evolution itself. You have to start from the bottom up--necessarily go from simple to complex [. . .]" (147). As long as progress can be identified with increasing complexity, the very fact that the earliest fossils are single-celled organisms evidences a progressive aspect of evolution. In popular (versus scientific) views of evolution, progress is still unambivalently embraced to this day. In fact, Ruse contends, "At the popular level, Progress and evolution are synonyms [. . .]" (530; emphasis Ruse's). I discuss this contemporary identification of evolution and progress at length in chapter 6.

Faced with a concept as convoluted as "progress," I must circumscribe it with a limited definition for the purposes of this study. When I speak of "progressionism," I use the term in two ways. By evolutionary "progressionism," I mean a belief in the

inevitability or desirability of the advancement of species as typically defined by an increase in the complexity of physiological organization and/or the development of higher cognitive and moral sensibilities. In keeping with this view, I consider a "progressionist" ideology one that advocates a society in which the process of moral and mental advancement, typically accompanied by increasing power over matter and energy, is considered a good in itself: the goal is to continue to progress; the virtue lies in the continued forward movement. A "non-progressionist" ideology, then, is one in which this forward movement is not a primary goal. Instead, some type of balance, stability, sustainability, or perpetual happiness is typically the aim. By these definitions, texts that endorse an anthropocentric ethic of "leaving behind" tend to be progressionist (chiefly concerned with advancement), while texts that advocate an ecocentric participation within an existing system tend to be non-progressionist (chiefly concerned with sustainable living).

Ecological Dialogism

My task, then, is to explore how, as enacted in utopian and dystopian fiction, these anthropocentric/progressionist and ecocentric/non-progressionist tendencies serve to develop or undermine an ecological praxis. I argue that ecocentrism is akin to Bakhtinian dialogism in that both stress the irreducible complexity of relations among participants within a certain context. Dialogism presumes that an idea gains meaning through conversation; it is shaped by the networks of words that accrue around it. Similarly, ecocentrism presumes that a biological entity can only function within a web of relations among other entities and energies. Dialogism, therefore, provides an apt rhetorical structure for the expression of ecocentric principles.

Though Bakhtin wrote solely about human society, his method is amenable to a context that stresses human relations with the non-human. The affinity between ecological discourse and dialogism stems from their mutual concern with relationality. Indeed, Michael J. McDowell contends that "Bakhtin's theories may be seen as the literary equivalent of ecology, the science of relationships" (372). In order to mobilize

Bakhtinian dialogism for ecocritical ends, ecofeminist critic Patrick Murphy has integrated a triad of forces--ecology, feminisms, and dialogism--into a heterarchic model for revising of our dominant anthropocentric and androcentric discourses, a revision that assumes equal validity to inhere in female and male, human and non-human "voices." Much of Murphy's work is concerned with the complexities of ascribing voices to the non-human. Can we grant the non-human the discursive standing of a speaking subject? Murphy poses the question in concrete terms: "When selenium poisons ground water, causes animal deformities, and reduces the ability of California farmers to continue to overcultivate through irrigation land with little topsoil, are these signs that we can read? And in reading such signs and integrating them into our texts, are we letting that land speak through us or are we only speaking for it?" (14). Murphy contends that we can legitimately establish the non-human as a speaking subject, though in doing so, we must remain aware of the power relations involved in representing such subjectivity in our own human words.

Though the voicing of the non-human is a topic of great consequence, in this study, I focus on how a more traditional Bakhtinian understanding of dialogism as a literal, verbal conversation among human voices can elucidate ways in which texts challenge assumptions of anthropocentric domination. Likewise, I depart somewhat from Murphy's ecofeminist model by downplaying the role of feminisms per se in my dialogic investigations. In deemphasizing the issue of the voicing of traditionally silenced groups, I do not intend to deny the immense value of such work but rather to offer a different approach to pursuing the same goal of decentering dominant discourses that have been linked to the exploitation of disenfranchised "others," including women, non-whites, non-human life forms, and the environment.

I focus on human voices rather than the voicing of the non-human because it is ultimately through human voices, with human words, that our discourses are enacted. It goes without saying--or it ought to--that discourse is not merely a matter of words without reference to a non-verbal or non-human world. On the contrary, our relations with non-human energies and substances physically permit us to survive and, therefore,

to have discourse in the first place. A discursive artifact, such as Percy Bysshe Shelley's "Mont Blanc," can be intimately connected to a profound awareness of the mutual effects of the human and the non-human that is, on some level, nonverbal: the mountain, the river, the soul. Yet it is almost always through verbal communication that our experiences of interrelatedness with the non-human are conveyed to other humans. It is through human discourse that personal experiences accrue, reinforce and question each other, and ultimately form and interrogate ideologies.

Analysis of the literal conversations of characters within a text, as well as the intertextual dialogues that take place among several texts, can lead to an understanding of how this process of ideological formation and deconstruction takes place. Such a study inherently runs the risk of devaluing the literally non-verbal participants in our ecological "conversations." Indeed, the same can be said of attempts to "voice" the non-human. As McDowell observes, "Every attempt to listen to voices in the landscape or to 'read the book of nature' is necessarily anthropocentric" (372). Our access to nature is mediated by our human senses and cognitive processes. Nature must be humanly interpreted, and this interpretation places humanity, to an extent, at the center of the conversation. We cannot escape this type of anthropocentrism. We can only strive to remain aware of our own bias and continue to question our own assumptions. Dialogism provides a powerful means for doing exactly that.

Just as I do not focus on the voicing of the non-human in my dialogic analyses, I do not focus intensively on the marginalized voices of women or ethnic "others" as categories, although I touch on these issues. In the following chapters, I examine primary texts by only two women: one white, Ursula K. Le Guin, and one black--the only non-white author I study--Octavia E. Butler. As one of the very few well-known, female, African American science fiction writers, Butler clearly occupies the position of "most culturally marginalized" writer in my study. It is important to consider the marginalized status of these writers, just as it is important to take into account the cultural marginalization of Shaw as an Irishman or Wells as a child of the Victorian lower-middle class. Yet for two major reasons, I do not wish to orient my study around the

ramifications of these marginalizations. First, an engagement with these writers as individuals rather than representatives of categories provides some defense against the temptation to reduce their complex texts to simplified statements about their cultural status.[8] Second, the lines of similarity and difference which I trace among these texts cannot be most productively described in terms of our conventional categories of "dominant" versus "marginalized" cultural position. For instance, in its emphasis on the hybridization of the human organism with other organisms, the work of white Englishman John Brunner is more akin to that of Butler than it is to that of his fellow white Englishman, Wells.[9] Conversely, in their colonial progressionist overtones, Butler's Earthseed books resemble the work of Wells more nearly than the work of Butler's fellow American, female writer, Le Guin. While the ecocentric/anthropocentric and non-progressionist/progressionist dyads I explore can be correlated, to some extent, with a marginalized/dominant dyad, a strong emphasis on this correlation might well obscure other discursive phenomena that trouble these correlations.

As my above examples illustrate, in this study, I explore ecological discourse through disparate texts, spanning two continents and more than a century. I have chosen such an expansive time frame in order to track the development of eco-evolutionary discourses in utopia and dystopia from the post-Darwin origins of our contemporary ecological discourses to current, culturally influential texts. Necessarily, over such a time frame, I must omit numerous highly relevant texts, selecting only a few representatives of various types of discourse. Yet even careful selectivity would yield more texts than I could adequately address if I were to engage in a linear progression of utopian and dystopian narrative from 1890 to circa 2000. Thus, I have made the decision to explore no texts at all from the period between the mid-1920s and the mid-1970s. By omitting this period, I necessarily omit or radically compress discussion of such world-altering events as the Great Depression, World War II, and the social revolution of the 1960s. The marginalization of such significant historical moments is unfortunate.

Yet in selecting my focal periods, my aim has been to maximize my overall engagement with the development of utopian and dystopian ecological discourse within

the space constraints of this study. The period from the 1890s to the 1920s marks a fruitful time for evolutionary and ecological discourse, culminating in the overthrow of Neo-Lamarckism as a scientifically plausible theory. At the opposite end of my chronology, the late-twentieth and early twenty-first centuries are of particular relevance to us because they describe our own era and the discourses that currently shape Anglophone civilization. I contend that the earlier texts I have chosen can be usefully juxtaposed to these more contemporary texts precisely because they are old enough to reveal significant shifts in discourse yet recent enough to show clear lines of descent. Morris's News from Nowhere, impossible as its dream of a pastoral utopia may appear in the cyberworld of today, marks an early and still influential antecedent to many later counter-culture texts and movements from Le Guin's The Dispossessed to Ernest Callenbach's Ecotopia (1975) to hippie communes and more recent organic-farming cooperatives. The 1920s Wells and Shaw texts I have chosen, likewise, operate as antecedents to more recent discourses. Indeed, the 1920s marks an especially apt point of comparison for more contemporary texts. These earlier texts often express explicitly and unashamedly ideological positions that Anglophone culture has since partially repressed. In the 1920s, for example, eugenics could be characterized as an unmitigated "good"; Neo-Lamarckism could be seriously debated as a legitimate scientific theory; the systematic extermination of non-human species could be deemed moral and appropriate. In a (post-)postmodern society, such positions are no longer overtly tenable, yet tacitly their influence lingers. In the wake of the Holocaust, "eugenics" became an "evil," yet "genetic engineering" appears the wave of the future. Following the New Synthesis, Neo-Lamarckism became universally disparaged within the scientific establishment, yet versions of (Neo-)Lamarckian evolution (divested of the "Lamarckian" label) continue to be influential in popular culture; in fact, they are arguably more influential than evolution by natural selection. The Endangered Species Act (1973) serves as benchmark in American discourse for the public acceptance that (most macroscopic) species have an intrinsic right to exist, yet global economics continues to endorse a system that facilitates

the current mass extinction of species. An examination of 1920s-era texts can distill a comparatively "pure" form of ideological positions that remain powerful today despite their overt rejection within dominant discourses. By exploring the implications of these positions in their explicit form, we may better understand the nature of their influence in their semi-effaced form.

Having explained why I focus on the historical periods I have chosen, it remains for me to explain why I am grounding my core study in British texts, particularly since the more contemporary texts I examine are North American. I have already mentioned that late-nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Britain was a hotbed of evolutionary and ecological debate. Yet it is also true that equally vigorous debate was occurring in America. Nonetheless, I focus on British texts because their discourses embody an indistinctness between wilderness and humanly influenced land that has particular relevance for our current world. As a relatively small land continuously inhabited by settler cultures over many centuries, Britain lacks the type of "wilderness" so prominent in the American consciousness. It has little in the way of vast, "untrammeled" spaces, little concept of indigenous natives as naturalized yet troubling inhabitants of these spaces. What Britain does have is a distinction between rural and urban, uncultivated and cultivated. But even in these distinctions, there is a non-disjunction that differs from the civilized/wilderness or inhabited/wilderness dichotomies in America. In British parlance, both the rural and the uncultivated tend to be discursively opposed to urban civilization, yet rural spaces are, by definition, where most cultivation, most agriculture, takes place. Inherently, there is a slippage between areas largely free of human intervention and "country" areas adapted to human uses. This slippage is evident, for instance, in the eighteenth-century picturesque aesthetic, which developed concepts of landscaping based on maintaining the illusion of "wild" nature (see Thomas 258-65). Imperial Britain did, as I have already mentioned, make a distinction between British land and colonial land.

In this sense, the British had a concept of "frontier" as land in need of "civilizing," but these colonial lands were more often viewed as resources than pristine spaces.[10] All land could be seen, to some extent, as humanly mediated.

In the contemporary world, this sensitivity to the pervasive influence of humanity on the environment is essential to a sound ecological praxis. In the age of global warming, ozone depletion, radioactive contamination, and exploding human populations, cultural myths of an untrammeled wilderness become naive. While American society is increasingly aware of the problematic implications of "wilderness," Britain, in this regard, is a step ahead as it has little wilderness myth to deconstruct. I do not mean to suggest that wilderness is not a useful concept; it has, in fact, many valid uses. When investigating the development of alternative human societies, however, it is advantageous to begin with a sense of the human and natural worlds as conjoined. The removal of pristine, separate natural spaces from the discussion demands a direct engagement with the human capability to affect all environments. As illustrations of such engagement, the British texts I examine serve as apt antecedents to more recent texts, which, regardless of their country of origin, are likely to assume a human/nature non-disjunction based on an awareness of recent global environmental problems.

Conclusion

This awareness requires an ability to simultaneously appreciate stability while embracing the inevitability—and sometimes desirability—of change. In utopian and dystopian narratives, this negotiation is facilitated by a dialogic rhetoric. By empowering a multiplicity of voices, dialogism enables discursive hybridity, a productive means of expressing the irreducibly complex interactions between the values of sustainability and change. In hybrid texts, the traditionally anthropocentric value of "leaving behind" dependence on material systems may be refigured as an acceptance of change in both progressive and non-progressive forms. For such change to be enacted without devastating ecological consequences, however, it must reflect a deep concern for sustainable living within ecosystemic relations. While the hybrid paradigm offers no set

program for a utopian future, it does illustrate the need for the two core principles of sustainability and change to be at least partially reconciled in any future worth striving for.

NOTES

[1] The cultural impact of Star Trek was recently chronicled by TV Guide, which named it the number one cult television series of all time, remarking humorously, "The series (and its spin-offs) all but created fan obsession, conventions and an enduring link between science fiction and geekdom that has given countless outsiders the will to get out of bed every day for 38 years" (Malcolm 30). On a weightier note, George Takei (Sulu) recounts that the Star Trek cast "was invited to the rollout [of the first space shuttle]," named Enterprise after the famous starship; "[w]e had become part of the space program," he recalls (30). Babylon 5, the series I focus on in this study, was ranked thirteenth cult series of all time (Malcolm 24).

[2] In "The Value of a Varmint," Chapter 13 of Nature's Economy, Donald Worster offers a detailed historical overview of movements in the United States to eradicate predators and the ecological and economic impracticality of these movements. He observes, for instance, that in 1962, "the value of sheep lost [to predators] on National Forest land in California was $3,500, while the [predator] control program there cost over $90,000" (265).

[3] Buell takes his quotation of O'Riordan from Environmentalism, 2nd. ed. London: Pion, 1981, p. 1.

[4] In The Truth of Ecology, Phillips laments ecocriticism's conflation of ecological science with an ecological "point of view," contending that this conflation damages the credibility of ecological science by presenting it as overly ideological, while simultaneously damaging the credibility of ecocritism by presenting it as scientifically ignorant. Phillips's concerns are valid. I would contend, however, that an "ecological point of view" may usefully be considered "ecocentric" (a term Phillips does not explore) and that the concerted use of "ecocentrism" as distinct from "ecological science" goes a long way toward combating the conflation of scientific practice and social values that Phillips resists.

[5] In Luck of Cunning, Samuel Butler relates an amusing chronicle of Darwin's shifting views on the heritability of habit. Butler reports that in 1839, Darwin assumes habit to be heredity; in 1859, he calls this same view "the most serious error"; in 1876, it is still "a serious error," but by 1882, he finds it "not [. . .] at all incredible" that a habit should become instinctive over generations (46).

[6] Darwin explains the shift in his perspective on natural selection at length in The Descent of Man:

> I now admit [. . .] I perhaps attributed too much to the action of natural selection or the survival of the fittest [in early editions of Origin] [. . . .] I may be permitted to say, as some excuse, that I had two distinct objects in view; firstly to show that species had not been separately created, and secondly, that natural selection had been the chief agent of change, though largely aided by the inherited effects of habit, and slightly by the direct action of the surrounding conditions [. . . .] [H]ence, if I have erred in giving to natural selection great power, which I am very far from admitting, or in having exaggerated its power, which is in itself probable, I have at least, as I hope, done good service in aiding to overthrow the dogma of separate creations. (50-51)

[7] Thomas's <u>Man and the Natural World</u> chiefly charts changing attitudes toward nature in Britain from 1500-1800. He tracks a gradual but significant shift away from a view of "wild" nature as an affront to human civilization to a view, typified by Romantics such as William Wordsworth, that praises the uncultivated above the cultivated as a space of spiritual renewal. Thomas also describes this time period's development of the idea that nature and, in particular, animals might have intrinsic rights. By the late-nineteenth century, such ideas had been powerfully present in Britain for some time. On the whole, however, they remained culturally subordinate to a more utilitarian attitude.

[8] In the afterword to her short story, "Bloodchild," which describes a human's response to being parasitized by an alien's maggot-like offspring, Octavia Butler comments, "It amazes me that some people have seen 'Bloodchild' as a story of slavery. It isn't. It's a number of other things though" (30). She goes on to explain that the story is about love, coming of age, male pregnancy, fear of maggot infestation, and the accommodations humans might have to make when colonizing another planet (30-32). Butler's avowal that the story is not about slavery suggests a dissatisfaction with criticism that would assume that because she is an African American, she must inevitably write about "African American" issues. Of course, Butler's denial of the story's links to slavery-related issues does not necessarily mean that these links do not exist. At the same time, her denial is a salutary admonition to critics not to assume that the work of "marginalized" writers will always be primarily concerned with their marginalization.

[9] Though space constraints have required me to omit extensive analysis of John Brunner's science fiction from this study, his work, nonetheless, exemplifies the ecological and utopian issues that I engage with. In <u>Bedlam Planet</u> (1968), Brunner explores the potential ecological difficulties of adapting to an alien biosphere. When human colonists become infected by bacteria that prevent them from properly absorbing vitamin C, they address this problem by relinquishing their physical and emotional ties to Earth and fully integrating themselves into the alien biosphere, consuming native foods that enable appropriate digestive processes. Brunner presents the resulting society as a utopia predicated on intensely aware ecological participation.

[10] Wells extrapolates such imperial expansion into space. In <u>The War of the Worlds</u> (1898), his narrator optimistically ponders the day when humans may colonize space, much as the Martians attempted to colonize Earth, but ideally with greater success: "Dim and wonderful is the vision I have conjured up in my mind of life spreading slowly from this little seed-bed of the solar system throughout the inanimate vastness of sidereal space" (253). In <u>The Food of the Gods</u> (1904), spreading the human race throughout space, "[t]ill the earth is no more than a footstool" (190), is figured as a natural and positive progression. In these scenarios, the colonized spaces are described as resources that humans can use, for example, to guard against the extinction of the species in the event that the Earth becomes uninhabitable. These locations are not depicted as possessing the pristine otherness of the American wilderness nor much of any other type of intrinsic value.

CHAPTER 2

NATURE BETTERED

TENSIONS IN THE ECOLOGICAL AESTHETICS OF WILLIAM MORRIS'S

NEWS FROM NOWHERE

> But now, where is the difficulty in accepting the religion of humanity,
> when the men and women who go to make up humanity are free, happy,
> and energetic at least, and most commonly beautiful of body also, and
> surrounded by beautiful things of their own fashioning, and a nature
> bettered and not worsened by contact with mankind?

> Hammond in William Morris's News from Nowhere

Introduction

In Men Like Gods, H.G. Wells calls William Morris's News from Nowhere a "graceful impossible book," faulting it for painting an unrealistically rosy picture of human nature (197). Though brief, this evaluation is incisive. News is a graceful book, consummately crafted and--more than Wells realized--replete with practical social critiques and suggestions from which our civilization could undoubtedly profit. It is also an impossible book, depicting an idealized society that is almost certainly not achievable for the human race as we know it. This gap between the practical suggestion and the impossible utopia indicates the limitations of Morris's ideology as a model for our praxis. To develop a workable praxis, we must be able to assess where the practical becomes impractical: the point at which a basically salutary ideological principle becomes counterproductive. Focusing on Morris's ecological discourse, I will investigate how this discourse undermines his stated aim of achieving a harmonious relationship with Nature. Throughout this chapter, I will indicate Morris's quasi-personified concept of "Nature" by using his capital "N" and will use the lower case "nature" to refer loosely to that

which is neither human nor invented by humans.[1] I will argue that the ideological fractures in Morris's concept of Nature are largely the result of an oversimplified view of humanity, nature, and their relations to each other, a view that is tied to a rhetorical rejection of dialogism. This oversimplification exacerbates the unresolved tension between anthropocentric and ecocentric discourses in Morris's Nowhere.

A Marxist Aesthetics for the Defense of Nature

As a dedicated Marxist, neo-medievalist, neo-Romantic, and prime contributor to the crafts movement, Morris was keenly aware that his species of socialism differed from many others'. A believer in the necessity of communist revolution, he was uncomfortable with the Fabian ethic of socialist reform within the existing system. An anti-industrialist, he was convinced that a faith in the power of technological progress to solve social woes was misplaced. Morris first published News in 1890 as a response to his fellow socialist Edward Bellamy's urban-industrial utopia, Looking Backward (1888). He found Bellamy's argument that laissez faire capitalism would more-or-less naturally mutate into a utopian state socialism distasteful and disturbing. In a review of Looking Backward, Morris expresses what would become a major impetus for the writing of News: the fear that Bellamy's text would be considered a manifesto for socialism:

[T]his book, having produced a great impression on people who are really enquiring into Socialism, will be sure to be quoted as an authority for what Socialists believe, and [. . .] therefore, it is necessary to point out there are some Socialists who do not think that the problem of the organization of life and necessary labour can be dealt with by a huge national centralization, working a kind of magic for which no one feels himself responsible; that on the contrary it will be necessary for the unit of administration to be small enough for every citizen to feel himself responsible for its details [. . . .] (358)

Thus, to ensure that those inquiring into socialism would have access to an alternative to Bellamy's project, Morris provided them with a counter-utopia, one founded on aesthetic principles.

News depicts a futuristic Britain set somewhere between the early twenty-first and early twenty-second centuries, in which a workers' revolution, launched in 1952, has given birth to a decentralized communist utopia. In this Nowhere, healthy and happy people live in rural communities, enjoying close relationships with their neighbors and the natural world, while producing beautiful, carefully crafted wares as needed for legitimate human use. Since they do not produce more than they need and since the population of Nowhere is relatively stable, the Nowherians are able to pursue this lifestyle without stressing the natural resources on which they depend. Such a lifestyle emphasizes sustainability without a drive to "advance."

Thus, Nowhere is non-progressionist: it does not advocate "change" for the sake of change. While positive changes are embraced, a premium is placed on happiness with little need for major social or technological transformations. Nowhere, for example, is not opposed to technological progress.[2] But it values such progress only as it aids in the Nowherian objective of a sustainable happiness. Thus, Morris's narrator, William Guest, is impressed to see "barges [. . .] going on their way without any means of propulsion visible to me" (News 185). These "force vehicles" are a positive development because they replace loud, coal-burning steam ships (186) and thereby support the Nowherian value of a human agency that does not intrude upon Nature but operates in harmony with her.

Living in harmony with Nature is a governing principle of Nowhere. For Morris, Nature is always allied with beauty, and society should be oriented around the production and appreciation of the beautiful. Worthwhile "work," as opposed to "toil," cannot, therefore, be disruptive to Nature. For example, the Nowherian Hammond tells Guest that there are no separate manufacturing districts where such disruption would be permitted to flourish. Instead, coal and minerals are mined "with as little as possible of dirt, confusion, and the distressing of quiet people's lives" (102). The minimization of "dirt" and "distressing of quiet people's lives" suggests the avoidance of ugliness and pollution. Here, "confusion" is implicitly contrasted with "quiet"; "confusion" suggests

noise and disruption: natural spaces laid waste in industrial mining ventures. In Nowhere, industry cannot justly exist at the expense of Nature. Nature has an inherent worth, which must always be taken into account.

Indeed, while the anthropocentric values of Western civilization have traditionally trained us to evaluate nature's worth in terms of its human utility, Morris collapses the distinction between utility and intrinsic worth. When Guest asks Hammond if retaining spaces of wild nature is not wasteful, Hammond replies, "Go and have a look at the sheep-walks high up the slopes between Ingleborough and Pen-y-gwent, and tell me if you think we waste the land there by not covering it with factories for making things that nobody wants [. . .]" (107). The utility of this land is important: it is used to raise sheep, a more productive occupation than the unnecessary manufacture of assembly line commodities. But Hammond's primary appeal is to the visual impression of the place. The land's beauty is itself useful.

Beauty is utility, and beauty resides in Nature; therefore, Nature cannot be sacrificed without sacrificing both beauty and utility. This inseparability of Nature, utility, and beauty creates a powerful basis for an ecologically sustainable system of life. Herein lies one of Morris's central challenges to capitalism, which typically assumes that utility is separable from nature and beauty, that mass production for profit can persist independent of its effects on the raw materials essential to such production. A stereotypical capitalist view would hold that a factory pouring smoke into the air or a quarry leveling a hillside may be visually unfortunate, but so is going out with mismatched socks. The thing that matters, finally, is maintaining production, not looking attractive.

This is, of course, a reductive characterization of the "capitalist mind set." And indeed, Morris is similarly reductive when he implicitly argues in News that Ellen's retrogressive grandfather cannot appreciate the bird song because he is a capitalist and, therefore, has trained himself to dismiss the importance of beauty. But though Morris's

depiction of "the capitalist" is unfair--a point to which I will return--he is, nonetheless, incisive in his criticism of capitalist ideology, not least with regard to environmental concerns.[3]

The capitalist tendency to separate "profitable production" from its ecological context has generated negative consequences from Morris's time to our own. The belief, for example, that one can produce a crop without attending to the biotic and abiotic forces that have historically maintained the top soil proved detrimental in the Dust Bowl (Worster 219). Soil erosion, black lung disease, pesticide contamination, global warming, resource depletion--all are linked to this separation of a product from its ecological context. Of course, some communist states have shown a similar disregard for ecological concerns.[4] But though other ideological systems have been guilty of ecological negligence, capitalism particularly lends itself to such disregard. The fallacious assumption underlying capitalism's separation of product from context is that infinite growth can occur in a finite space. The aim of capitalism is to increase capital: a process of continual growth. And though it is conceivable that "growth" purely as a system of numbers could continue indefinitely, capitalism has traditionally been explicit in its advocating of material expansion: from automobile sales to population growth. Such an ideology encourages unsustainable social practices. Enough carbon dioxide released into the atmosphere will significantly change the properties of that atmosphere; a continuously growing human population cannot perpetually be supported by a finite amount of arable land.

Morris, of course, did not live to see things like global warming or the exponential population growth of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Nonetheless, the ideology he advocated, even without being specifically on guard against many of these problems, could have helped to guard against them. When work, nature, humanity, and beauty are considered inseparable, every aspect of production has value. The trees of Nowhere, for example, would not be over-harvested not only because such a practice ultimately impedes production--a reason most capitalists would find compelling--but also because the elimination of mass production in favor of unalienated craft demands a slower rate of

production and, finally, because the beauty of a forest should persist. Thus, where capitalist ideology provides one reason for preserving the forest--the need to maintain a wood supply--Morris's ideology provides at least three. Moreover, where capitalism inadvertently encourages deforestation by demanding an ever-increasing rate of production, Morris's ideology avoids such inherent imbalance by operating on the metaphor of stability rather than growth.

Morris's ideology has much to offer our current civilization. His emphasis on sustainability, healthy living--particularly the links between a healthy people and healthy environment--and respect for the non-human keeps his 1890 text germane in a world beset by unsustainable social and economic practices resulting in global environmental degradation. Paddy O'Sullivan sums up the contribution of News thus:

> What Morris did was to take Marxism, and apply it to the practical
> realities of everyday life [. . . .] What he also achieved, by no means
> incidentally, is to provide radical environmentalists with a document
> setting out many of their basic ideas, in plain English, which then also
> explored in quite considerable detail how these would actually operate in a
> future society. (181)

News undoubtedly does set out many of the basic principles of radical--and even moderate--environmentalism. And Morris did draw these principles out in substantial detail and with a great deal of sophistication. Yet his depiction of how these values would operate in human society is not necessarily a viable model for contemporary Western society or, indeed, for human society in general. Although there can be little doubt that our civilization would benefit from espousing the Morrisian ethic of sustainability, we must be wary of embracing Morris's ideology uncritically.

The Human and the Natural as Standards of Beauty

As with any ideology, the value-system upon which Morris's is founded contains internal contradictions. Notably, there is an unresolved tension between anthropocentrism and ecocentrism in Morris's discourse of Nature. In his 1877 lecture,

"The Lesser Arts," Morris describes Nature as if it were a transcendent law. Presenting a nightmare scenario of the end of art, Morris suggests that while art may be destroyed and humanity reduced to abjection, Nature will endure unmarred:

> [I]n all that has to do with beauty the invention and ingenuity of man will have come to a dead stop [when art is dead]; and all the while Nature will go on with her eternal recurrence of lovely changes--spring, summer, autumn, and winter; sunshine, rain, and snow; storm and fair weather; dawn, noon, and sunset; day and night--ever bearing witness against man that he has deliberately chosen ugliness instead of beauty, and to live where he is strongest amidst squalor or blank emptiness. ("Lesser" 240)

The belief that Nature's fundamental stability cannot be assailed is deep-seated in the Western tradition, at least as old as the impetus to subjugate Nature. Although Morris's disaffection with the conquest of Nature places him in opposition to the dominant discourse of his age, his invocation of Nature's resilience is conventional. In fact, Morris's discourse aptly reflects Bruno Latour's conception of the ontology expressed in modern Western civilization through what Latour terms the "Modern Constitution." According to one aspect of this constitution, Society is immanent, Nature transcendent. Society is within our power to change for good or ill, Nature a power that exists forever beyond us.

Thus, Morris speaks of Nature as unassailable: not even the worst of human actions (the killing of art) can stifle "her eternal recurrence of lovely changes." But he does not consistently abide by this view of Nature. Just a few pages earlier, he expresses a different view in a philosophy of aesthetics that would later become a central principle in Nowhere: "[E]verything made by man's hands has a form, which must be either beautiful or ugly; beautiful if it is in accord with Nature, and helps her; ugly if it is discordant with Nature, and thwarts her; it cannot be indifferent [. . .]" (234). Nature, here, still appears to be put forward as the transcendent standard for the beauty that should govern human society. Humanity should not shape Nature to its ends; rather, Nature should guide the ends of humanity. Yet here, Nature is not transcendent, for how can we "thwart" something that exists beyond our power to affect? For that matter, how can we "help" it? This helping and thwarting suggests the converse side of the Modern

Constitution: human society seems a transcendent, preexisting force, Nature something amenable to human transformation. For if humanity can improve upon Nature, Nature cannot fully be the transcendent standard by which beauty is judged.

This objection may seem largely semantic. In concrete terms, Morris's meaning is plain. A traditional illustration--one Morris deploys in News, as I discuss later--is the trope of the garden. The garden is a space in many ways "natural": it consists most obviously of plants, which are works of nature. Yet in the garden, humanity manipulates these natural elements in ways that make them more appealing. For example, plant species can be chosen such that the garden almost always has flowers in bloom. This marriage of art and Nature produces something more beautiful than either by itself. For Morris, if "art" opposed to "Nature" must be "ugly," Nature without art is not fulfilling its potential for beauty either. But there is still a problem here. For if Nature, by itself, is not the ultimate standard for beauty, then what is? What makes the flower garden aesthetically superior to the wilderness? Since the aesthetic is a human perception and art created by humans, the simple answer would seem to be "humanity." But if humanity, then, is the ultimate judge of beauty, what becomes of the standard of Nature? Who is to say that a smokestack is not as beautiful as a tree?

Morris, of course, would say so--and often did. And indeed, Morris's writings tend to assume that every reasonable person will agree with his perceptions of beauty. On one level, then, Morris's standard of beauty is his own subjectivity. Ironically, this crusader for mental as well as economic equality among all people failed to take into account the inevitability that not all people will agree with his aesthetic predispositions. Morris, for example, was fond of the pastoral English countryside. Percy Bysshe Shelley, whose poetry Morris was not fond of (Faulkner 6), was more liable to praise the sublimity of the Alps. Still less might Morris have in common with the aesthetic sense of many of the urban workers he sought to champion. In "The Lesser Arts," Morris speaks of the need for "general cultivation of the powers of the mind, general cultivation of the powers of eye and hand" (249). If his "cultivation" metaphor betrays his preference for pastoral over "wild" nature, it also suggests the "cultivated" classes. Though Morris

disdained conventional education and made Nature his putative standard for beauty, he recognized that men and women will not create beautiful crafts unless they have been trained to do so. The trainers, presumably, should be those who understand how to apply beauty in craft. Inevitably, these are socio-economically privileged individuals, like John Ruskin, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and Morris himself, who have the leisure to study architecture, medievalism, Norse sagas, and, indeed, the leisure to stroll in the woods. In his retrospective account, William Morris as I Knew Him, George Bernard Shaw takes up the problem of class difference, arguing that Morris's attempts to embrace working class men as his equals in the Socialist League were futile. According to Shaw, the League "was really Morris and nothing else [. . .]" (14), for "one man of genius of unique culture and mental power (Morris) with a handful of poor men coming from a different world seemed very democratic and equalitarian [sic]; but it made skilled criticism and genuine intellectual co-operation farcically impossible" (15). Despite Morris's sincere efforts to emancipate the "working man," his own elite upbringing and sensibilities ensured that he himself would remain a towering authority over his social inferiors.

Yet while the retention of a classist privilege in Morris's aesthetics indicates a fissure in his ideological commitment to equality, his assumption that most people will "naturally" share his view of the beautiful carries some weight. Edward O. Wilson's biophilia hypothesis, for instance, argues that humans have a genetic predisposition to appreciate much of the natural world. According to Wilson, if biophobia, the fear of other life forms, protects us from hazards such as being bitten by a snake, biophilia, too, might have a positive survival value, drawing us to healthy, fruit-bearing trees, for example. Though Wilson's hypothesis is not universally accepted within the scientific community, it nonetheless offers some substantiation for Morris's intuitive sense that "reasonable" people find "Nature" beautiful. Indeed, people across numerous cultures show an aesthetic appreciation for flowers, the moon, a blue sky. To an extent, therefore, humans may have some common standards for what constitutes a beauty in accord with Nature.

But even assuming such common standards exist, even if humankind could agree that the tree is more beautiful than the smokestack, the contradiction in Morris's adducing both Nature and human judgment as final standards for beauty remains. Morris's rejection of strict dualism, however, helps resolve this contradiction. One of Latour's central criticisms of the Modern Constitution is that it pursues "purification"--the dualistic segregation of categories such as "Nature" and "Society"--without acknowledging the existence of hybrids. But for Morris, Nature and humanity are not ultimately separable. If they were, then the state of the natural world would not affect the human organism, and clearly, for Morris, it does. In News, for example, a Nowhereian woman remarks to Guest, "[T]hey say that Southern England [within Nowhere] is a good place for keeping good looks" (57). Because she specifies "Southern England," she cannot not simply be referring to Nowherian social practices; Nowhere extends far beyond that particular region. Not only positive human interactions, but also physical location, climate, and landscape are integral to human well being. For Morris, both the land itself and human aesthetic values are vital. The final standard for beauty, then, might not be so much the green and pleasant "Nature out there" as human nature in tune with the forces of a vaster Nature.

Despite this non-dualistic strain, however, Morris's position invokes dualism. For while humanity not only helps but also thwarts Nature, Nature does not thwart itself. Therefore, humanity must be distinct from Nature. This distinctness enables the structuring of concepts into hierarchical power relations. Just as Morris's latent classism retains social inequalities between the undereducated laborer and the "cultivated" craftsman, so does the separation of Nature and humanity enable a discourse in which one term or the other must dominate. If humanity in accord with Nature is the final arbiter of beauty, then humanity retains the specially privileged position of pinnacle of evolution/creation. Put another way, if the garden is preferable to the wilderness, then humanity is the optimizer of Nature, human artistry the crowning achievement. Though this collaboration between humanity and Nature is anthropocentric in its emphasis on humans as the improvers of Nature, the qualification that humanity must be in accord

with Nature to fill this function circumscribes the anthropocentrism by retaining some sense of a transcendent Nature. Nevertheless, we have shifted a good way from the seemingly ecocentric aesthetic that establishes Nature as Morris's standard for beauty in "The Lesser Arts."

If Morris's ultimate standard of beauty is improved Nature, Nature combined with art, this standard is potentially ecologically destructive. Morris finally subordinates the authority of Nature that he adduces in "The Lesser Arts" to a subjective perception of what the senses find pleasing. Even assuming that enough people agree on certain general aesthetic principles to define a stable standard of "natural" beauty, this equation of the aesthetic with the ecological health is dubious. A fetid pool, for example, may be unattractive but still be an vital participant an ecosystem. Though a Morrisian aesthetics could, for example, promote the preservation of wetland ecosystems, it could just as easily promote their drainage for the sake of enhancing pastoral beauty.

Thus, Morris's positioning of humanity as the improver of Nature renders this ideology subject to an anthropocentric dismissal of the non-human. Morris himself was not immune to this dismissive tendency. In his 1884 lecture, "Useful Work versus Useless Toil," he adopts a rhetoric of "the conquest of nature" that is discordant with both his "Lesser Arts" lecture of seven years before and his utopian Nowhere of six years later. Distinguishing his socialism from the more limited aims of other socialists, he says:

> But though the compulsion of man's tyranny [over man] is thus abolished [by abolishing class-robbery], I yet demand compensation for the compulsion of Nature's necessity. As long as the work is repulsive it will still be a burden which must be taken up daily [. . . .] What we want to do is to add to our wealth without diminishing our pleasure. Nature will not be finally conquered till our work becomes a part of the pleasure of our lives. ("Useful" 295)

The ideology voiced here is near—if not identical to—that of Nowhere. Social equality is still a goal. The alliance of work with pleasure is still a central principle. What is radically different is Morris's rhetorical approach to Nature. Here, Nature is not a friend who holds the secret to a contented life. Instead, she is a force of material necessity

compelling human labor. The compensation for this compulsion is the pleasure of working, but the pleasure, in this phrasing, does not derive from helping Nature. Rather its attainment is an indication that Nature has been conquered, completely subjugated to human wants.

Indeed, Morris suggests that such a conquest is not only possible but imminent because the physical means to achieve it are already available. In making this point, he employs the terminology of violent domination:

> Men [. . .] have laboured many thousands of years at the task of subjugating the forces of Nature and of making the natural material useful to them. To our eyes, since we cannot see into the future, that struggle with Nature seems nearly over, and the victory of the human race over her nearly complete [. . . .] Surely we ought, one and all of us, to be wealthy, to be well furnished with the good things which our victory over Nature has won for us. ("Useful" 293; my emphasis)

Morris goes on, of course, to observe that we are not all thus well furnished. However, this is not because the conquest of Nature has not been achieved. Admittedly, his qualification that the "struggle with Nature seems nearly over" because "we cannot see into the future," suggests that he questions the imminence of humanity's victory. Yet elsewhere, Morris's discourse indicates that this qualification critiques capitalism more than the conquest of Nature. The struggle with Nature cannot be won in each individual's life as long as economic squalor prevents all individuals from benefiting from the victory. As Morris goes on to explain, "[T]he fruits of our victory over Nature [have] been stolen from us [. . .]" by a capitalist power structure, in which pleasurable work has "been turned into compulsion by man to labour in hope--of living to labour!" (293).[5] While capitalism has prevented the mass of humans from benefiting from the conquest of Nature, the conquest itself is imminent and desirable. This rhetoric of conquest is both hostile and belittling to Nature. Not only is Morris's Nature an enemy here; she is an enemy who has already been vanquished. One might observe that for a society such as Morris's, which was still grappling with domestic and agricultural pests, foul weather, excessive birth rates, disease, and death, this "conquest" of Nature is extraordinarily limited. Yet the perception that a total conquest has been all but achieved

was common in Victorian Britain and, indeed, is consistent with our own dominant, capitalist ideology, which assumes that we can "handle" anything that "nature" throws at us given a little technological ingenuity.

Given that "the conquest of Nature" is a standard trope of Morris's time, it is likely that he adopted this trope not so much because it best expressed his own sentiments but rather to appeal to his audience, the Hampstead Liberal Club, whose politics were more conventional than his own. In this instance, however, Morris's intentions are beside the point. The ease with which his discourse of Nature can be adapted to the imperial language of conquest problematizes his ideology as a model for responsible ecocentrism. The same perspective that tacitly makes humanity, not Nature, the ultimate standard for beauty can explicitly reinscribe humanity as Nature's master: a dangerous misconception for a species that only exists enmeshed in ecological relationships, many of which remain outside of its control.

Romance, Realism, and the Dialogic in *News from Nowhere*

In News, Morris's ideological inconsistency is enabled by a rhetoric that substantially rejects dialogism. As a means of exploring the type of ideological contradictions that arise within real human communities, the dialogic is associated with realism. But Morris writes less in the paradigm of realism than romantic vision. He himself identifies the book as "some chapters from a Utopian Romance" (News 41). By enacting types of experience beyond the logically explicable, the mode of romance opens up imaginative possibilities denied to realism. This refusal of the confines of "realistic" experience makes romance an apt form for the expression of utopian ambition. In conceptualizing a radically reformed future, a utopia may profit from rejecting limitations imposed by what Fredric Jameson characterizes as the "anti-Utopian" mindset of the self-described realist, who dismisses utopia as foolish and impossible. In contrast, as a romance, News is free to portray a society as felicitous as Morris's imagination could conceive.

At first glance, News seems to depict a dream: the central narrative voice, self-stylized as "William Guest," returns home from a typically contentious evening at the Socialist League.[6] Preoccupied with imagining a utopian future, he falls asleep, dreams of one, and at length reawakes to Victorian London. But the narrative structure is more complex than this. A dream would be consistent with a realist narrative insofar as dreams are part of our everyday experience. But such a commonplace experience would be easy to dismiss as the mere fancy of a discouraged socialist. Instead, Morris presents Guest's experience as more powerful than the ramblings of a sleeping mind. There are hints, for example, that Guest's transition into the future occurs before he falls asleep. On his unusually pleasant evening walk home, he wanders down to the bank of the Thames, enjoys watching the water swirl, and "as for the ugly bridge below, he did not notice it or think of it, except when for a moment [. . .] it struck him that he missed the row of lights downstream" (44). Has Guest already passed into the utopia that has replaced the "ugly bridge" with a bridge that is a work of art (48)? Or are his eyes merely playing tricks on him?

Similarly ambiguous is Guest's departure from Nowhere. He does not simply wake from his dream. Rather, after finding that he has become invisible to his futuristic friends, he is greeted on the road by an aged, grimy man he immediately identifies as a member of the Victorian working class. Shortly thereafter, "I saw as it were a black cloud rolling along to meet me [. . .] and for a while, I was conscious of nothing else than being in the dark, and whether I was walking, or sitting, or lying down, I could not tell" (228). This darkness, which is, "as it were," a cloud, not necessarily an actual cloud, suggests that Guest has not been swallowed by a literal blackness but by the metaphorical dark of being thrust out of utopia. His inability to tell what physical position he is in, likewise, might represent his confusion at losing the clarity of his vision. On a more literal level, however, this same image might indicate an interim state between sleeping and waking or between future and present. The text never shows Guest waking. Directly following his envelopment by the "cloud," the book's final section begins, "I lay in my bed in my house at dingy Hammersmith" (228). At first, he assumes despondently that

he has been dreaming, but almost at once, he wonders, "Or <u>was</u> it a dream?" (228). The more he ruminates, the more he feels that he has been literally transported to the future and back. He interprets his return to Victorian London as a call to pursue utopian work. In the closing lines of the book, he takes up this challenge enthusiastically: "Yes, surely! and if others can see it [a utopian future] as I have seen it, then it may be called a vision rather than a dream" (228). Guest's characterization of his experience as a vision--almost a prophecy--lends a weight to his tale that a realist frame would deny. Far from being a mere "dreamer," Guest is a "visionary." Morris's use of romance encourages his readers to consider that a future that appears unrealistic as an extrapolation of the Victorian present is, nonetheless, possible.

Herbert Sussman argues that Morris's refusal of a realist context reinforces his rejection of social extrapolation as a form.[7] According to Sussman, extrapolative science fiction demonstrates a plausible continuity between the present and the envisioned future by showing that that future grows directly out of the ideas and inventions of the present (121). Morris's Nowhere, however, is not an extension of dominant trends in Victorian Britain but rather a break from them (Sussman 124), a post-revolutionary society in which industrial capitalism has been dismantled and displaced by decentralized, rural communism. Because Morris's utopia is discontinuous with the present, it cannot be readily grasped through a realist narration that would describe it in terms of the known details of everyday Victorian life. Instead, Sussman observes, Morris uses a metaphorical descriptive strategy (123). For instance, Guest asserts that Dick's clothes "would have served very well as a costume for a picture of fourteenth-century life" (News 47). Morris uses the metaphor of fourteenth-century clothing to suggest things about Dick's attire that could not readily be conveyed through a direct description. But if Nowhere is not directly describable, it is not surprising that many readers have difficulty imagining it with clarity. Sussman conjectures that "perhaps this problem of the readability of News [. . .] can be said to prove Morris's implicit point about our limitation of consciousness in expecting that the future will be knowable though the hard language of the present" (126). News, in part, may be difficult to grasp not because it is

implausible but because we--perhaps mistakenly--assume that the future will resemble the present. If this is the case, then Morris's rhetorical departure from realist convention is successful in challenging us to look beyond the usual limits of our social expectations.

Sussman observes, however, that although Morris's narration is more in the tradition of "alternative" than "extrapolative" fiction, it does more than comment on his society by imagining an alternative to it; in fact, it advocates a socialist politics that might eventually lead to a society similar to Nowhere (127). News was first published in installments between January and October 1890 in the Commonweal, a socialist paper published by Morris (Parrinder 29). The primary audience for News, therefore, would have been socialist activists. Andrew Belsey contends that despite superficial identifications with Morris himself, Guest is in fact a socialist activist Everyman (349). Intimations that old Hammond may be Guest's grandson suggest a symbolic relation in which the utopians of the future are politically--as well as literally--the descendants of present-day activists (Belsey 349). The frustration of Guest's romance with Ellen and his eventual return to his Victorian society represent the activist's need to remain grounded in the present-day struggle in order to achieve a happier future (Belsey 349). Guest explicitly expresses this need in the book's final paragraph, imagining Ellen's sad parting glance to mean, "Go back again [. . . .] Go on living while you may, striving with whatever pain and labour needs must be, to build up little by little the day of fellowship, and rest, and happiness" (News 228). In this light, Guest's vision can be seen as a "pep-talk" for Morris's fellow socialists, evoking the prize he is calling them to struggle for. This prize, therefore, must be a future that may be brought forth out of the Victorian present. If Nowhere is not intended to describe the specifics of a communist utopia, it is intended to enact certain general principles which could be adopted by Victorian socialist politics and used to bring about a genuine utopian future. In this sense, Morris's Nowhere is extrapolative as well.

Yet this Nowherian society remains more "alternative" than "extrapolative" precisely because it is not likely to arise out of the continuous progression of Morris's own capitalist society.[8] Faced with the task of showing how it might arise, Morris

develops a scenario which is unconvincing. Though he explains in some detail how communist revolution resulted in the transformation of Victorian society into the Nowhere he envisions, this transformation seems unlikely. John Crump discusses several logical difficulties with Morris's revolutionary scenario: Morris's confining of the revolution to Britain implausibly suggests that a single nation could readily withdraw from an international capitalist economy (68-69); Morris posits "State Socialism" as a stage in the development of decentralized communism, when, in fact, the State Socialism he describes exists within capitalist society and would tend to support rather than undermine it (69-70); although Morris acknowledges that corrupt union leaders existed, he assumes too optimistically that they could not flourish in a climate of extreme social crisis (71). Thus, while Nowhere provides an intriguing model for a different type of society, Morris's extrapolative attempts to move his own society in that direction appear wanting.

Much of this narrative implausibility stems directly from Morris's simplified depiction of humanity, a simplification evident in his discussion of the ousting of corrupt union leaders. Hammond concedes that

> rascality often happened [. . .] but at the time of which I am telling, things
> looked so threatening, and to the workmen at least their necessity of
> dealing with the fast gathering trouble which the labour struggle had
> brought about, was so clear, that the conditions of the times had begot a
> deep seriousness amongst all reasonable people; a determination which
> put aside all non-essentials [. . . .] [S]uch an element [of determination]
> was too dangerous for mere traitors and self-seekers, and one by one they
> were thrust out and mostly joined the declared reactionaries. (137)

My aim is not to demonstrate that, as a thumbnail sketch of a historical moment, this course of events must be implausible. I would contend, however, that Hammond's explanation is so generalized that it appears implausible. He describes humans almost entirely as groups rather than individuals. He explains, for instance, that "things looked [. . .] threatening." But threatening to whom? The absence of a differentiated agent indicates that things looked threatening to society in general, in other words, to almost everyone in Britain. Hammond's next sentence introduces an agent: "the workmen." Yet

"the workmen" too are generalized: Hammond presents this vast segment of the British population as being, for all intents and purposes, of a unanimous mind. Next, he tells us that the crisis "begot a deep seriousness amongst all reasonable people" (my emphasis). In fact, the only people who emerge as individuals separated from a group identity are the "mere traitors and self-seekers" who "one by one" are thrust out and "mostly" join the reactionaries, the suggestion being that some do not.

One of Morris's main points, of course, is that society must pull together to effect the revolution: communism, after all, requires a commune, a group of people acting together for the common good. "Self-seekers" are anathema to this process. But what is elided in Hammond's explanation is legitimate human individuality. Is there not one workman, who like Ellen's grandfather, believes that capitalism should not be overthrown? Is there not one more or less "reasonable" individual who might face the crisis not so much with "deep seriousness" as with jocularity? The obvious response is, "Of course, such people existed. But they were so few and so out of step with the Zeitgeist that they had little effect on the final historical movement." Hammond's generalizations are almost certainly not intended to deny such exceptions. Yet exceptions remain starkly absent from the text: if the statement that "all" reasonable people agree does not literally mean "all without one exception," it is left to the reader to infer this. Morris's lack of engagement with the individual human stories out of which such a revolution would, in fact, be built suggests a lack of awareness of the diversity of people's possible perspectives. The end result is a scenario that seems too facile.

Of course, the revolution section, as a historical digression, must be summarized briefly. The book does not have space to focus on both individuals from 1952 and individuals from the Nowhere that followed. However, Morris's tendency to simplify humanity and collapse individual difference in his historical explication is part of a broader rhetoric of simplification that is evident in his specific Nowherian characters as

well. These characters, like his physical descriptions, often appear more as symbols for the people of the future than as examples of them. Patrick Parrinder argues, for instance, that in their final conversations, Guest and Ellen take on a symbolic function:

> In fact, it seems almost anomalous that Guest and Ellen are presented at this point as realistic characters, engaged in something so mundane as a riverside flirtation. For if this had been, say, a poem by Shelley, we should surely have seen Guest as the Ghost of the Past, and the ethereal Ellen as the Spirit of the Future. When Ellen foresees that "I shall have children; perhaps before the end a good many" [News 214], she is speaking of all the future generations of Nowhere. Guest is the manifestation of historical memory. (35)

Morris's book is not, of course, a poem by Shelley, Guest and Ellen not purely allegorical figures. Nonetheless, the text does align the two with past and future respectively. At one point, Guest and Ellen imagine the misery Ellen would have endured had she been born in Victorian England: "I should have been wrecked and wasted in one way or another" (223), she observes. This comparison with her happier Nowherian state implicitly emphasizes her status as the iconic woman of the future. Similarly, what Ellen calls Guest's "never-ending contrast between the past and this present" (222) highlights his function as the Victorian outsider who may strive for but will never fully belong to the utopian future. It is in keeping with Morris's dream-vision technique that his characters should bear such symbolic functions: Ellen the future; Guest the past and the role of "guest."

Yet as Parrinder observes of Guest and Ellen, Morris's characters exist in a realist mode as well. They seldom have obviously symbolic names: Dick, Clara, Hammond, Ellen, Annie, Walter. While one could search for etymological significance in the words, they appear foremost to be good, simple, English names for simple, happy English people. Moreover, the text depicts these characters as clearly differentiated, psychologically distinct individuals engaged in the activities of their everyday lives. They have their particular perspectives and problems. Dick, for instance, has had to suffer over his wife, Clara's, desertion. Philippa, head stone carver among the Obstinate Refusers, asserts her individuality by continuing her craft when custom expects her to participate in

the annual haymaking (News 196). Ellen's grandfather laments the passing of capitalism and the vivacity he believes competition ensures (174). To an extent, Morris's characters do suggest unique human beings engaged in a type of dialogic communication.

Indeed, Belsey contends, "The reason why a description of the plot fails to reveal the content of News from Nowhere is that most of the text is dialogue and discussion, and therefore not the production of a single voice" (342). For Belsey, a type of dialogism is central to constructing meaning in News. This dialogism functions, in particular, to generate an ambiguous narrative frame by rejecting any single, completely coherent account of Nowhere. For instance, while Dick says that the bridge Guest observes upon his arrival was opened recently, in 2003, Hammond tells Guest that the utopia founded in 1952 has existed for about 150 years, indicating that the date is nearer 2100 than 2000 (Belsey 345). Though it is possible that this inconsistency was an oversight on Morris's part, the confusion can also be read as part of a coherent rhetorical strategy. The point, in this case, would be not that either Dick or Hammond is inept with dates but rather that precise dates don't matter. Such multivocal discontinuities blur the edges of Nowhere's "reality," reinforcing the subtitle's declaration that the story is a "romance" (News 41)-- or as the final line asserts, "a vision" (228)--an expression of possibility, not a rigid prescription for the future.

This, however, is a multivocality in the service of romance more than realism. Refusing to prescribe a precise utopian program, the fluidity of the romance mode leaves open numerous possibilities for the application of a single set of principles. If a realist dialogism explores numerous ideologies, the romantic multivocality of News explores only one. Thus, while this multiplicity of voices may superficially resemble heteroglossia, the resemblance of Morris's "dialogism" to the dialogic strategy described by Bakhtin is limited. In "Discourse in the Novel," Bakhtin states that the multivocal nature of a national language "represents that co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between present and past, between differing epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles, and so forth [. . .]" (291). Cultural experience is too diverse to be reducible to a single

discourse. Granting expression to multiple discourses through the dialogic interaction of different voices highlights the complexity and ambiguity inherent in human culture and, thus, works against the reification of culture around a single, unquestioned ideology. Yet News, by and large, depicts a single ideology as so patently correct that it scarcely needs to be questioned. Guest appears to bring up numerous potential objections to the utopia: surely it must require formal schooling, a formal government, the incentive of scarcity to spur labor; surely it cannot exist without prisons unless crime and corruption run rampant. But we may question whether Guest, in fact, believes his own objections. He is a nature-loving, aesthetically motivated socialist himself. Preaching the values of Nowhere to Guest is essentially preaching to the converted. The dominant conversational form is nearer Socratic dialectic than Bakhtinian dialogism. Guest's questions and the questions he is asked are not, in fact, designed to interrogate Nowhere but to open up opportunities to defend it. When Hammond, for instance, explains that during one stage of the revolution, "very great progress had been made amongst the workers, though as before said but little in the direction of improved livelihood," Guest narrates:

> I played the innocent and said: "In what direction could they improve if not in livelihood?"
> Said he: "In the power to bring about a state of things in which livelihood would be full, and easy to gain." (136)

Guest, in fact, seems quite content with his role as enabler of utopian explication, even "playing the innocent" in order to give Hammond opportunities to hold forth.

Certainly, Morris does allow a variety of voices to express different perspectives on Nowhere, but their differences in opinion, though real, tend to be slight. Guest may sometimes be genuinely dubious about a Nowherian custom, but, on the whole, he is ready to be converted. The Obstinate Refusers are eccentric but fundamentally believers in Nowherian ideology. The only significant voice of dissent is Ellen's capitalist grandfather, and the text is at pains to dismiss him as a foolish, unpleasant old man. I have already mentioned that as a capitalist, he has no regard for nature. He is discontent with the charming June weather that everyone else enjoys (172). He disdains the sweet singing of the birds, and when Clara cries out in appreciation of it, he asks her, "a little

testily" if she has trodden on a thorn (172). Despite occasional moments of warmer courtesy, his typical manner is described as "sneering" (174) and "sulky" (176). When Guest compares Nowhere to heaven, the old man retorts, "I think one may do more with one's life than sitting on a damp cloud and singing hymns" (176). This flight from their discussion of the relations among competition, energy, and happiness into a tired religious cliche is, as Guest rightly observes, an "inconsequence" (176). Inconsequential is precisely what the old man is, his contribution to the text's dialogue intended to repudiate capitalism, not to present an intelligent voice to defend it.

Thus, though dialogue is central to Morris's rhetoric, it is not used principally to depict the type of irreducible multivocality described by Bakhtin. The text's rejection of multiple valid yet divergent points of view further separates it from realism, which typically represents such contrasting perspectives. In his concise description of the realist novel, M. H. Abrams defines it as "the fictional attempt to give the effect of realism, by representing complex characters with mixed motives who are rooted in social class, operate in a developed social structure, interact with many other characters, and undergo plausible, everyday modes of experience" (192; emphasis Abrams's). The "plausibility" of Nowherian "modes of experience" is debatable; indeed, the extent of their plausibility is a central issue for the text. But News undeniably diverges from Abrams's realist characteristics in its substantial refusal to develop "complex characters with mixed motives." As long as the characters' voices remain squarely in the service of a single ideological project, the characters themselves cannot readily emerge as multifaceted, sometimes conflicted, "realistic" people.

Of course, advocating a single ideology is a traditional characteristic of utopias. Hence the perennial criticisms that utopia does not respect individuality. But the rhetorical difficulty runs deeper even than this. Even if a utopia does not present a single ideology as "ideal," even if it strives--more than Morris does--to incorporate dialogic critiques, it must at least give the illusion of presenting a society as a whole in order to communicate an overall impression of the place to readers who, manifestly, have never been there. Yet the very particularity of human individuality thwarts this task. Ellen is a

case in point. When near the end of their romance on the Thames, she announces to
Guest, "Oh me! How I love the earth, and the seasons, and weather, and all things that
deal with it, and all that grows out of it [. . .]" (220), the sentiment rings false, not
because many people do not, in fact, feel this way but because the pronouncement has the
tone of propaganda. Ellen appears to be a cipher voicing the ideology of her utopia more
than a person stating her own thoughts. She is so slightly developed as a character that
her avowal does not seem to emerge from a particular moment within the life experience
of a complex individual. Although she is given a great deal of dialogue, in which she
discusses numerous social and personal issues, Ellen remains the simplistic model of
Morris's ideal woman of the future: invariably beautiful, healthy, physically strong,
intelligent, friendly, capable, unaffected, loving, kind, and deeply aesthetic in her
sensibilities. She is perfect. Regarding Ellen's apostrophe on Nature, Kingsley Widmer
calls her a "pastoral nymph narcissistically projecting natural piety to resolve human
problems" (87). We may question whether Ellen resembles a "narcissistic nymph," but
she certainly does not resemble a real person. Despite occasional expressions of sadness
at the necessity of Guest's departure, Ellen is not conflicted enough, not flawed enough,
to feel "real."

But conversely, if Morris had developed Ellen as a truly individuated character,
she could not serve as a general representative of the utopian woman. The world seen
through her eyes would be Ellen's world, shaped by her own individual concerns. Just as
the society of the title town of George Eliot's quintessential realist novel, Middlemarch,
appears in a different light to Dorothea than to Lydgate, so would a character-driven
utopia lack any single, stable identity. But the project of utopia has traditionally been to
present a plan for managing a society: one society, managed one way by one set of
principles, which almost everyone can agree on. Move too much into the realm of
individual difference, and the blissful utopia of Morris becomes the "ambiguous utopia"
of Ursula K. Le Guin.9 The degree to which a society appears unified around a laudable
ideal diminishes in proportion to both the number and the depth of perspectives permitted
to question that ideal.

News, then, is designed to be an inspiring, unabashedly optimistic "vision" of the future more than a realist description of it. And though Morris's development of intricate historical scenarios such as the revolution suggests that he set out to depict a utopia not out of touch with the complexities of human nature and society, he did not set out to depict an ambiguous utopia. News asks us to want the world it enacts--or one founded on much the same values--unambivalently. Yet the rhetorical steps Morris must take to present his utopia as an unambiguously "good" society make it a problematic one. It is too good, too simple.

The Effacement of Dialogic Critiques of Nowhere's Discourse of Nature

Much of this oversimplification resides in Morris's view of Nature. I have argued that Morris's identification of Nature as the standard for beauty breaks down at the point where the intervention of human art becomes necessary for beauty to be optimized. On an intuitive level, however, most of us can imagine scenarios in which this intervention obviously would increase the "beauty" of "nature." If nature is loosely defined as that which is not humanity or a human invention, it is difficult to get around the fact that, to most of us, a great deal of it seems ugly. Even if some of us can locate the beauty in a slug or a tick, it is difficult to find beauty in disease, putrefaction, excrement, starvation. Yet these are all common elements of nature. Morris, however, is reluctant to engage with such aspects. Just as his Nowherians are a consistent, unified, well-adjusted people with little troubling variation, so, too, is the land of Nowhere a single, beneficent pastoral space.

To be sure, like the people of Nowhere, the Nature of Nowhere is not completely without variety or degrees of "beauty." One of the book's most overt acknowledgements of unpleasantness in Nature is in its treatment of the seasons. Significantly, this treatment occurs in a rare, genuinely dialogic moment in the text. Dick has expressed regret at the passing of the gay summer and the coming of "the dark days" when "spring is almost too far off to look forward to" (224). "It is, then," he says, "in the autumn, when one almost believes in death" (224). This line is intriguing. While Dick is manifestly aware that

death exists, his "almost" rhetorically denies it. This denial encapsulates a paradox in Dick's thinking. He knows that Nature contains hardships such as death, yet he cannot bring himself to accept the implications of this knowledge. Guest uncovers this inconsistency when he challenges Dick's seeming preference for the seasons of life and growth:

> "At any rate," I said, "if you do look upon the course of the year as a beautiful and interesting drama, which is what I think you do, you should be as much pleased and interested with the winter and its trouble and pain as with this wonderful summer luxury."
>
> "And am I not?" said Dick, rather warmly; "only I can't look upon it as if I were sitting in a theatre seeing the play going on before me [. . . .] I mean that I am part of it all, and feel the pain as well as the pleasure in my own person." (225)

Dick is attempting to express that while he loves every season for its own unique wonder, he *is simultaneously aware that some seasons contain more of "pain," of death and darkness, than* others. Living as a part of Nature, Dick feels this pain, like the pleasure of Nature, as his own. The perfect idyll is a fantasy. Just as human lives are troubled by sorrows such as Dick and Clara's divorce, so is Nature subject to its own pains. This is News in its realist mode. And with the messiness of real life, Dick contradicts himself. When Guest suggests that he "should be as much pleased and interested" with the winter as the summer, Dick retorts, via rhetorical question, that he is. But plainly he is not. He is pleased and interested to some degree in all seasons, but he has already avowed that he is not "just as much" pleased with the winter; he prefers spring and summer. Perhaps Dick's question is not as rhetorical as it appears; perhaps he truly is unsure of his attitude toward the seasons. Guest's catching him in an inconsistency seems to unnerve him, causing him to reply with a "rather warm" defensiveness. The passage is a prime example of dialogism as a means of exposing the inner tensions that reside in an ideology. Here specifically, the text illustrates the ambiguity of using Nature as a standard for beauty when Nature itself is too varied to comprise one standard. To what extent, for example, should winter be a standard for beauty if summer is more pleasing?

Morris, however, retreats from these tensions. Guest does not pursue the issue. Rather, in his own narration, he contents himself with praising Dick's passionate love for Nature. Dick's defensiveness is incorporated into an unrelated movement in the text: the slippage of Guest out of Nowhere. Throughout the chapter, the Nowherians become less enchanted and involved with Guest, who is shortly to become invisible to them. This disenchantment is implicitly attributed to Guest's disruptive influence as a non-utopian presence. Dick, for instance, remarks that he feels as if Guest "had thrown a kind of evil charm over me" (225). This disruption, however, is not attributed to Guest as an ideologically questioning voice, for Guest is questioning the utopia less than he did in the beginning. Rather, it is Guest's symbolic presence as the man of the past that does not fit in Nowhere. Metaphorically, he must return home to the Victorian world because that is where he can do the most good. Thus, the paradox surrounding Dick's love for Nature that Guest inadvertently exposes is speedily covered over. The dominant message remains the simplistic correlation of Nature with pleasure, beauty, and happiness, an oversimplification that obscures the contradiction inherent in considering Nature a standard for beauty while improving that beauty through the (different) standard of human art.

Humanity and Nature in the Garden

This confusion over the final priority of Nature or art emerges in <u>News</u> in a discursive ambiguity over the concepts of the "garden" and the "wild," an ambiguity reflected in traditional British concepts of the relation between human agency and nature's agency. In traditional British usage, the uncultivated (wild) and the cultivated (humanly managed) resist dichotomization, a tendency that has both positive and negative implications, as I discuss presently. This resistance is the result of slippage between two different paradigms for dichotomizing humanity and nature. One is the opposition between "the country and the city," to borrow the title of Raymond Williams's text on British pastoralism. Williams argues forcefully that this dichotomy is fundamental to the divisions that underlie much of British culture: "The division and

opposition of city and country, industry and agriculture, in their modern forms," he states, "are the critical culmination of the division and the specialization of labour which, though it did not begin with capitalism, was developed under it to an extraordinary degree" (304). Williams sees this division of city and country as inextricably connected to a host of epistemological divisions, including mental and manual work, administration and operation (304) and social classes (305). A city person, for example, is more likely to be stereotyped as an "urbane" administrator, a country person as a rustic laborer on the land.

This opposition exists alongside a different human/nature dichotomy: the opposition between cultivated and uncultivated land. In Man and the Natural World, Keith Thomas orients his study of British attitudes toward nature around this distinction, arguing that the years between roughly 1500 and 1800 saw a shift toward greater appreciation for uncultivated land, which had traditionally been viewed as a "waste" in need of productive human use. As uncultivated spaces dwindled, however, this attitude began to give way to one which sought to preserve the uncultivated. Thomas ascribes this new appreciation for the wild to several tendencies:

> That concern [for preserving uncultivated land] had many ingredients: an aesthetic reaction against the regularity and uniformity of English agriculture; a dislike for the artificialities of the gardening movement; a feeling that wilderness, by its very contrast with cultivation, was necessary to give meaning and definition to the human enterprise; a preoccupation with the freedom of open spaces as a symbol of human freedom ('A wilderness rich with liberty,' thought Wordsworth); and an element of alienation or lack of sympathy for the dominant trends of the age [. . . .] (267-68)

In this conception, the uncultivated is essential for human health and even human identity.

Both these distinctions oppose humanity to nature. Nature is strongly present in the country, humanity in the city. Nature reigns over the uncultivated; cultivation is the triumph of humanity over nature. These two distinctions are not mutually exclusive: a farm can differ from a city and differ from a wilderness at the same time. Taken together, however, the two oppositions are subject to slippage. Williams restates his city/country distinction as one between "industry and agriculture" (304). But the division

between cultivated and uncultivated flips agriculture from the side of "nature" to the side of the "human." The "country," then, occupies a hazy zone that includes both cultivated and uncultivated spaces, and the opposition of both these types of space to the "city" tends to deconstruct the cultivated/uncultivated dichotomy. The key element in both these dichotomies is the intensity of human intervention in nature, but there is no clear point at which this intervention becomes negligible. When does a garden become a wilderness? In a land that has been populated by agricultural people for many centuries, there can be no definitive answer. In Britain, many a "waste" was once a farm and shows traces of that history. Many a "garden" was once a wild forest later maintained by pruners and game keepers. As I argue in chapter 1, this absence of a clear distinction has positive ramifications insofar as it assumes that human activity may affect any natural space, thus circumventing the myth of a pristine, untouchable nature and arguing in favor of a global sense of responsibility for the environment.

Yet, if the city/country dichotomy partially--and productively--effaces the cultivated/uncultivated dichotomy, the latter, nonetheless, is vital to British land and species preservation movements. In Britain as elsewhere, the expansion of human land use took a toll on non-human species. Thomas notes, for instance, that by 1800, numerous bird species were diminishing, including eagles, goshawks, marsh harriers, hen harriers, cranes, ospreys, ravens, buzzards, and bustards (275). Indeed, as a result of intensified hunting and agriculture, the bustard was extinct in Britain by 1832 ("Russian" 9). Conversely, efforts to preserve uncultivated land aimed at the conservation of species. In 1888, for instance, local councils began to develop by-laws to protect wild plants (Thomas 273). If an advantage of a discursive non-disjunction between cultivated and uncultivated spaces is a sense of global responsibility for the impact of humanity on nature, a disadvantage is the tendency to disregard uncultivated spaces, leaving insufficient habitat for many non-human species to persist.

Both the positive and negative potential of this discursive ambiguity is present in News in the mobilization of the "garden" concept. The "garden" is an apt utopian image for Morris: comprising both the human and the non-human, it epitomizes his ideal of a

human society in harmony with Nature. Indeed, so complete is this harmony in Nowhere, that the "garden" encompasses not only conventionally "gardened" spaces but also the wilderness and the city. Hammond tells Guest that "England was once a country of clearings [made by humans] amongst the woods and wastes, with a few towns interspersed [. . . .] It then became a country of huge and foul workshops [. . . .] It is now a garden, where nothing is wasted and nothing is spoilt" (105). While the wild "woods and wastes" are clearly preferable to the "foul workshops" of the industrial age, the garden country is preferable to both. Hammond's avowal that "nothing is wasted" in the garden contrasts with the "wastes," or treeless wilderness areas, a few sentences before. "Waste" is an old word for "wilderness" (OED) and need not necessarily denote a failure to utilize resources. Nonetheless, the proximity of the two usages in the text highlights the slippage between them. The suggestion that undeveloped nature is, indeed, a "waste" of potential human resources cannot be avoided. Hammond, then, characterizes the transformation of all England into a "garden" comprised of a humanly useful nature as one of the truly utopian accomplishments of Nowhere.

Hammond's grandson, Dick, however, voices a slightly different view. Leading Guest through the "wild" (64) regrown woods of Kensington, he remarks, "This part we are just coming to is called Kensington Gardens, though why 'gardens' I don't know" (64). Dick's usage of the term "garden" is more restricted than Hammond's. While Hammond would include Kensington as part of the garden of England, Dick excepts it. For Dick, what Guest describes as "a beautiful wood [. . .] where even the oaks and sweet chestnuts were of good growth [. . .]" (64) is more a "wild" space than a "garden" designed by human ingenuity. Compared to Hammond, Dick appears not to place so high a value on the idea of domesticating Nature to human use.

Hammond's and Dick's respective uses of the term "garden" highlight the slippage between "cultivated" and "uncultivated." It is not clear where one stops and the other begins. The ambiguity of the garden concept could have been a site of productive dialogic communication. We might imagine, for instance, that Dick is meant to have different view of the "garden" from his grandfather. Perhaps Hammond, being by age

more nearly tied to Guest's world of conquest and exploitation, is more concerned with getting Nature properly domesticated, while Dick, more fully the child of utopia, does not perceive the same need to define Nature in terms of human control of it. The text, however, does not support this reading: it does not contrast Hammond's view with Dick's, either through overt dialogue or clear juxtaposition.

The text does, however, offer a more direct comparison of the two concepts, a confrontation which, once again, occurs in a moment with strong dialogic overtones. Guest, having spotted a seeming contradiction in Hammond's avowal that Nowhere is a garden yet contains wild spaces, challenges this contradiction: "One thing, it seems to me, does not go with your word of 'garden' for the country. You have spoken of wastes and forests [. . . .] Why do you keep such things in a garden? and isn't it very wasteful to do so?" (106). Here, Guest has, at least partially, observed a crucial conundrum. His explicit question is why wilderness should be permitted in a garden. But the more fundamental point is that wild spaces do "not go with your word of 'garden.'" The cultivated/uncultivated dichotomy requires them to remain incommensurate categories: a garden is cultivated; a wild space is not. Guest, however, apparently resolves the first point to his own satisfaction by the time he gets to asking his questions since he does not ask for any clarification of the two concepts. Here, the dialogism of the interchange breaks down. Guest's challenge indicates a genuinely distinct perspective from Hammond's, but the challenge is quickly submerged into a dialectic designed to illustrate why Hammond's view is correct.

Unsurprisingly, Hammond has his answer ready: "'My friend,' he said, 'we like these pieces of wild nature, and can afford them, so we have them [. . .]'" (106). Nowhere keeps wild spaces as a pleasant corner of the broader garden civilization. Hammond's articulation of the Nowherian ideal places human and non-human, cultivated and wild, into harmonious coexistence within this overarching "garden." Moreover, for Hammond, not only the "wild" but the "city," too, is encompassed by the "garden." Williams argues that Morris's utopian London "is an imagined old London, before industrialism and metropolitan expansion, and a projected new London, in the

contemporary sense of the garden city" (273). To an extent, Morris, collapses the distinction between country and city by giving the city characteristics of the garden, for example, by transforming Kensington Gardens back into a genuine garden (or wilderness). What is left in Nowhere's representation of the city/country dichotomy is the "country," which makes no categorical distinction between the uncultivated and the humanly managed. While the "wild" remains somewhat different from the "garden," the two are not ontologically separate: a single space can be both wild and gardened.

I have argued that this non-disjunction has both positive and negative implications. A positive ramification of this attitude in Nowhere is the society's emphasis on "harmony." In a country that is, in essence, all one garden, the human and the non-human coexist in a single space conducive to the health and happiness of all. A more unsettling implication of this non-disjunction, however, is the devaluation of the non-human. Hammond's reasons for Nowhere's preservation of wild spaces are purely anthropocentric: humans like and can afford them. By implication, if Nowhere could not afford wild spaces--or even if it could but did not "like" them--there would no moral imperative to preserve them. The whole country would, indeed, resemble an obviously cultivated "garden." In this instance, human needs, and even wants, take precedence over any *intrinsic right of non-human Nature to persist without human management.* The anthropocentrism of this position is directly linked to Hammond's understanding of the terms "wild" and "garden." The garden is the overarching context, the utopian space, the irreducible setting that encompasses all other settings. The wild is a relatively uncultivated space that exists within the garden: a part of it, subordinated to it. Though Morris's utopia aspires to a non-dualist "harmony" of all life, it retains the anthropocentric dualism of Morris's Britain. A "non-dualist anthropocentrism," however, is an oxymoron that enables the erasure of the non-human from consideration: humanity remains central, while that which humanity is traditionally defined against is effaced. This seems a curious accusation to make against Morris's otherwise strongly nature-oriented and nature-loving Nowhere. And, indeed, Nowhere's impulse toward

harmony between human and non-human undoubtedly outweighs its impulse toward anthropocentrism. Yet the impulse toward anthropocentrism remains all the more worthy of exposure precisely because it is veiled behind the more overt discourse of harmony.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that News from Nowhere, like many of Morris's writings, provides both a useful critique of our current capitalist society and an inspiring "vision" of an ecologically sustainable alternative to it. As a utopian vision, the book provides general principles for utopian reform without applying them with a realist rigor. This romantic generality is a strength of the text insofar as it keeps open a free play of possibilities for specific applications, yet it is weakness in that it largely refuses a dialogic interrogation of problematic elements in Morris's discourse. Therefore, while we can learn much from Morris's alternative society, we must be wary of accepting his ideology as an adequate underpinning for incorporating the values of sustainability, pleasure, beauty, and the love of nature into our own way of life. Morris's ideology has its inconsistencies. At some moments, Nature appears as an irreducible value humans must live by; at others, humanity is the final determiner of how Nature should be used. Morris's final inability to articulate a coherent paradigm for power relations between the human and non-human, thus, leaves open the possibility of an anthropocentric appropriation of his discourse in the service of the very models of exploitation he sought to overturn. Specifically, Morris's insistence on a self-evident human aesthetic sense as a standard for addressing the non-human could enable ecologically unwise decisions. For though "natural beauty" may, indeed, often be allied with ecosystemic health, there is no guarantee that this will be the case. Different people define beauty differently: for some, a metropolitan skyline is lovelier than a forest. And even if a stable aesthetic standard could be a established, it would not necessarily accord with ecosystemic needs: the "ugly" vulture is a vital scavenger. A praxis that bases ecological policy on what is pleasing to the human senses, thus, fails to investigate both human diversity and ecological complexity.

We cannot expect any ideology to be free of ambiguity and internal tension. We can, however, interrogate ideological tensions through the dialogue of diverse voices. In narrative, this dialogic strategy is closely allied to realism because it provides a means of representing explicitly the muddiness inherent in the "real" human discourse of multiple subjectivities. Morris is clearly aware that any society will comprise a variety of personalities and viewpoints. Partially following the conventions of realism, he makes some effort to create characters who have genuine individuality and, thus, opens up possibilities for dialogic communication. In moments such as Guest and Dick's debate over the seasons or Guest and Hammond's chat about the "wild," the text's investment in realistic characters generates an incipient dialogism that poses vital questions about the attitudes of Nowhere. These questions, however, are shunted aside. The dominant literary form in News remains the utopian romance, an inspirational adventure in which multiple subjectivities are pushed into the service of a single ideological prescription. Morris presents his inspiring vision in all its June glory at the expense of developing a more realistic--but perhaps less emotionally satisfying--argument for concrete social reform. If News itself, however, is not a strongly dialogic text, it nonetheless participates in an intertextual dialogism with authorial voices distinct from Morris's own. One such voice is that of Morris's friend and admirer, George Bernard Shaw, whose radically different approach to utopia I will examine next.

NOTES

[1] Since Morris never defines his concept of Nature, I cannot precisely define it; in general, however, this concept is comprised of a female-gendered, typically positive force more or less distinct from humanity and most commonly embodied in the pastoral landscape.

[2] Like many present-day environmentalists, Morris advocated the use of science where it could genuinely benefit humanity but was wary of its appropriation for industrial capitalist purposes. He wrote, for instance:

> I fear she [Science] is so much in the pay of the counting-house and the drill-sergeant, that she is too busy, and for the present will do nothing [to help society]. Yet there are matters which I should have thought easy for her; say for example teaching Manchester how to consume its own smoke, or Leeds how to get rid of its superfluous black dye without turning it into the river, which would be as worth her attention as the production of the heaviest black silks, or the biggest of useless guns. (qtd. in O'Sullivan 171).

[3] A great deal of insightful criticism has addressed Morris's contributions to ecological awareness and environmentalism. For example, Eric L. Fitch's "How Green Was My Utopia?" compares the utopian ecological discourses of Morris, Wells, Ernest Callenbach. Paddy O'Sullivan's "The Ending of the Journey" offers an overview of News from Nowhere's contribution to environmental ideology. Kingsley Widmer's "Primatopianism: Some Pastoral Utopianizing" chapter in Counterings contextualizes News from Nowhere as part of the tradition of the pastoral Marxist utopia.

[4] Communist states have clearly been implicated in environmental destruction Yet in "Marxism and Ecocriticism," Lance Newman argues that the Soviet Union, in fact, practiced a form of state capitalism through competition with the West (13). The same might be said of contemporary China.

[5] This argument remains common in socialist circles today. Problems such as world hunger, it is argued, are not the result of material scarcity but rather of inequitable distribution. There can be no doubt that the vast and growing inequalities in the global distribution of wealth demand intensive interrogation. However, following Latour's critique of purified categories, I am uncomfortable with a rhetoric that rejects material scarcity as a factor in global poverty. Ross McCluney, Principal Research Scientist with the Florida Solar Energy Center in Cocoa, Florida, argues, for instance, that with a global population of six billion people, "Only [the number of] people in the U.S. and Europe [will have resources to live] at [our] current level of affluence. Everyone else [must live] at the current prosperity level of Mexico." While I do not have the expertise to evaluate McCluney's numbers, it is undeniable is that a continuously growing population will reach the material limit of its resources sooner or later. To ignore this aspect of the problem is as counterproductive as ignoring issues of distribution.

[6] The Socialist League was founded by Morris and his compatriots after conflicts with the Social Democratic Federation's leader, H. M. Hyndman, convinced them to break away from the SDF. Guest's membership in the League is one of several indications of Morris's playful identification of Guest with himself.

⁷ Sussman offers a sophisticated reading of News in the context of Victorian science fiction. He categorizes the text as "soft science fiction," where "hard" SF attempts to extrapolate realistic future scenarios based on present circumstances, while "soft" SF describes alternative societies nearer to fantasy than hard fact (121). Though the terms "hard" and "soft science fiction" are notoriously slippery, Sussman's distinction between "extrapolative" and "alternative" is useful in highlighting the two fundamental rhetorical options available to social argumentation within science fiction.

Sussman links "extrapolative" fiction to the Victorian realist tradition, noting that both are typified by a metonymic style, that is, a style in which certain objects are symbolic of social structures to which they are closely related (123). In the Victorian realist novel, for example, "the damp room filled with cooking odors [. . .] represents the full banality of bourgeois life" (Sussman 123). "Alternative" science fiction, in contrast, is marked by a metaphoric style, describing unknown objects by comparison with known ones (Sussman 123). In Morris, in particular, Sussman observes a metaphorical technique in which two known objects are used to identify a third which itself remains undescribed: the dress of the people of Nowhere is something between "classical" and "fourteenth-century" styles, but how exactly the garments resemble these styles is left to the reader's imagination (123).

⁸ Like Sussman, Simon Denith considers this discontinuity with the present to be one of the strengths of Morris's utopia. In his essay, "Imagination and Inversion in Nineteenth-Century Utopian Writing," Denith contends that one of the pitfalls of utopian writing is the tendency not to develop a new future so much as to invert elements of present society. For instance, Denith argues that Edward Bulwer-Lytton's The Coming Race enacts the author's fear of democracy by depicting a society in which democracy is unnecessary (141-42): the text can be said to have "inverted" the institution of democracy. In News, however, Morris "escapes from being trapped in the inverted categories of the present because [he] can mobilize the weight of pre-capitalist forms" (Denith 157). He draws his material not only from his present-day concerns, such as industrial capitalism, but also from the past: the medieval guild, for example. By searching for the future in the past as well as the present, Morris is able, to some extent, to transcend the ideological closures imposed by his present culture. This process is linked to dialogism insofar as it sets two periods into "conversation." In rooting himself in two different Englands from two different historical periods, Morris is able to cross the boundaries of both. This amalgamation of different historical epochs creates a challengingly different type of alternative society.

⁹ The subtitle of Le Guin's The Dispossessed is "An Ambiguous Utopia." This novel's enactment of an "ambiguous utopia" is discussed at length in chapter 5.

CHAPTER 3

MATTER DOESN'T MATTER

NON-ANTHROPOCENTRIC NON-ECOLOGY IN GEORGE BERNARD SHAW'S

BACK TO METHUSELAH

> I brought life into the whirlpool of force, and compelled my enemy,
> Matter, to obey a living soul. But in enslaving Life's enemy I made Life's
> master; for that is the end of all slavery; and now I shall see the slave set
> free and the enemy reconciled, the whirlpool become all life and no
> matter.

Lilith, George Bernard Shaw's <u>As Far as Thought Can Reach</u>

Introduction

Why George Bernard Shaw? The other authors I focus on are reasonably
straightforward choices: Morris's proto-green politics are exciting interest today; Wells is
notable for his work with both utopia and ecology; more recent science fiction is a
mainstay of utopian extrapolation in our contemporary world. But Shaw, today, is
considered neither an influential utopian nor any sort of ecologist. The theory of Creative
Evolution to which he was so dedicated has been thoroughly discredited within the
scientific establishment. In the post-Nazi world, his quasi-Nietzschean preoccupation
with the advent of the "superman" appears at best obsolete and at worst proto-fascist.
Yet while such factors suggest that Shaw is irrelevant to the discourses that will shape
twenty-first-century ecological praxis, he is, in fact, surprisingly useful to an
investigation of those discourses. If Morris offers a model for a non-progressionist,
proto-ecological utopia, the Shavian utopia elucidates the inverse: a progressionist, non-
ecological utopian tradition.

In his cycle of five plays, <u>Back to Methuselah: A Metabiological Pentateuch</u> (1921), Shaw constructs "legends" of the utopian promise of Creative Evolution, which, in Shaw's conception, locates the ultimate agency for the Neo-Lamarckian transmission of acquired characteristics in a transcendent Life Force that drives all life and reproduction. Following Samuel Butler, Shaw held that transmissible characteristics included memories that could eventually be made instinctive. Any skill from bicycling to speaking English could theoretically become as instinctive a knowledge as digestion. In <u>Back to Methuselah</u>, Shaw argues that, with conscientious human application, the action of Life Force could eventually lead to the victory of the soul over its enslavement to matter, the result godlike beings of pure thought. While this project is "utopian" in that it promotes what Shaw perceived as a vastly improved future for humanity, his view of utopia bears some qualification. In his 1887 lecture, "Utopias," Shaw asserts that "it may be taken as a rule that when a man builds himself a fanciful best of all possible worlds in which to fly from the miseries of the real one, he invariably does what all amateur architects do--makes it quite unfit for himself to live in" ("Utopias" 66). In this passage, Shaw's invocation of Voltaire's satirical "best of all possible worlds" to describe a space in which to "fly from the miseries of the real one" suggests that, to Shaw, utopia is merely an escapist fantasy, an idealized society where flawed human beings could never fit in. This view is reflected in <u>Back to Methuselah</u>. Shaw's cycle of plays presents no pure "utopia," no ideal land. Instead, Shaw shows a succession of societies progressing in a positive direction. He does not imagine a perfect goal to this process, only the continuance of the process itself. This betterment of human society does not rely on technological progress, although, like Morris, Shaw does not condemn specific technological advancements that appear genuinely useful. Instead, Shaw's concept of social progress requires humans to evolve: the humans of the future will be fit for a better society precisely because they will have evolved into a better species. When I speak of "utopia" in <u>Back to Methuselah</u>, then, I do not mean any single, "ideal" society but the societies Shaw presents as reflections of the biological advancement of the human species.

Shaw's dualistic utopian aspirations for humanity's "metabiological" advancement in Back to Methuselah are echoed in more recent and arguably more influential narratives, such as Gene Roddenberry's Star Trek and J. Michael Straczynski's Babylon 5, the latter of which I discuss at length in chapter 6. Yet because Shaw wrote Back to Methuselah before the New Synthesis of Darwinian evolution with Mendelian genetics had effectively quashed Creative Evolution as a "scientific" movement, his plays articulate a philosophical and pseudo-scientific theory underlying evolutionary and ecological assumptions that often remain unexamined in later utopian science fiction texts. By engaging in detail with Creative Evolutionary theory, Shaw's text makes explicit certain ideological assumptions that these texts often efface. One such assumption of particular concern for ecological praxis is the relative unimportance of ecological relationality. If evolution is driven by Life Force rather than selective pressures in the environment, then energetic and material relations within the environment are not a primary concern in the development of species. Indeed, Shaw's emphasis on transcending matter suggests that ecological relations should ultimately become irrelevant. The tendency of Shaw's Creative Evolution to dismiss ecological relations could readily be used to support discourses that would subordinate ecological issues to more purely "human" social and philosophical concerns. Moreover, this unexamined dismissal is exacerbated by a largely dialectic rhetorical structure, in which the didactic communication of the message of Creative Evolution undercuts the narrative's dialogic elements, thus substantially refusing multivocal critique. Yet if Shaw's discourse runs the risk of supporting an anthropocentric ideology that would efface the non-human world, it, ironically, also decenters humanity, emphasizing that humanity itself may be an evolutionary dead end destined to be superseded. If Shaw's text, then, supports a certain disdain for the non-human, it just as strongly refuses humanist adulation, aiming thereby to counter the hubris that might prove detrimental to the future of humanity.

Cognitive Estrangement in Shaw's Legends of Creative Evolution

Back to Methuselah challenges humanity to promote itself as the best vehicle for Life Force by developing a proactive faith in Creative Evolution. Indeed, in his preface, Shaw contends that a much-improved civilization cannot be achieved without widespread devotion to a religious faith that will support this end. Citing "[t]he success of the Hang the Kaiser cry at the last General Election" as evidence, Shaw prophesies that "common irreligion will destroy civilization unless it is countered by common religion" (lxxxiv).[1] This common religion, he contends, must be Creative Evolution. Further, he argues that like any religion, Creative Evolution can be most powerfully disseminated through the use of "legends" that capture the imagination. Thus, with typical Shavian modesty, Shaw offers Back to Methuselah "as a contribution to the modern Bible" (xix), a "pentateuch," as he subtitles it. He emphasizes, however, that his legends must not be read as facts but as metaphors: "The reading of stories and delighting in them made Don Quixote a gentleman," he explains; "the believing them literally made him a madman who slew lambs instead of feeding them" (lxxxvii).

This mythic character of Back to Methuselah is most evident in its first play, In the Beginning, a creative-evolutionary reworking of the Fall of Man. In Shaw's version of the Fall, however, the Serpent is not Satan but a female who learned the secrets of generation from the first mother, Lilith, who split herself in two to create Adam and Eve. In this play, Shaw recapitulates the connection between evolution and gender that he put forward in Man and Superman (1903). While he characterizes the masculine "superman" as the goal of Life Force, he places the prime agency for achieving this goal in the hands Woman, the mother.[2] Shaw's Serpent, a mother herself, exemplifies this female agency, initiating a Fall that presages a rise: an entry into the dynamic, progressive currents of Life Force. The serpent educates Eve in the art of reproducing mankind: a process that will spare Adam and Eve from the burden of immortality while allowing life itself to progress indefinitely. Guided chiefly by the Will of Eve, Life Force begins slowly and imperfectly to evolve humanity. Chief among the emerging humans is Cain, the warrior,

who believes in glory through Neo-Darwinian struggle. As flawed a specimen as he is, his type will persist even beyond the cataclysm of World War I, which form the background for the second play.

Set in 1920 A.D., The Gospel of the Brothers Barnabas, focuses on the utopian plans of brothers Franklyn and Conrad, who contend that the fundamental problem with humanity is that people do not live long enough. Their companions, Burge and Lubin-- caricatures of former Prime Ministers David Lloyd George and Herbert Henry Asquith-- are stereotypically inane politicians, yet they are inane only because they are still children psychologically. As a biologist and Creative Evolutionist, Conrad is convinced that humanity can combat this species immaturity by willing itself not to grow old. The brothers have adopted the slogan, "Back to Methuselah," to inspire people to live as long as the famous biblical longliver. Of course, Burge and Lubin do not believe the brothers and launch no great political movement to get "Back to Methuselah."

Life Force, however, is no slave to politics, as the next play, The Thing Happens, illustrates. Here, in the Britain of 2170 A.D., President Burge-Lubin and Accountant General Barnabas carry on politics-as-usual. Yet unbeknownst to them, longlivers have begun cropping up in the population. Specifically, two minor characters from the previous play, the young clergyman Halsam (now an archbishop) and the Barnabases' parlor maid (now Mrs. Lutestring), without any conscious effort, have simply continued living. Their innate will to survive, perhaps augmented by memories of that long-ago discussion in the Barnabases' parlor, has enabled them to achieve a mature adulthood. Once they learn of each other's existence, they determine to marry and have children in order to further the progress of the human species. Meanwhile, Burge-Lubin and Barnabas contemplate with trepidation the implications of a burgeoning longliver population for a shortliver society.

These implications are explored in depth in the fourth play, Tragedy of an Elderly Gentleman. By the year 3000 A.D., the world is split into populations of shortlivers and longlivers. The longlivers comprise two political parties, Conservatives and Colonizers. While the Conservatives are in favor of sequestering their society from that of the

shortlivers, the Colonizers advocate the extermination of shortlivers for the sake of furthering civilization. On holiday to see the longliver Oracle, the Elderly Gentleman, a proud shortliver descendant of the renowned "Bolge" and "Bluebin," makes so unfavorable an impression on his longliver guide, Zoo, that he inadvertently converts her from Conservative to Colonizer. Eventually, having lost faith in his own society, the Elderly Gentleman begs not to be sent back to live with the shortlivers. His request is granted: he is killed.

The final play, As Far as Thought Can Reach, picks up the progress of the longliver lineage in the year 31,920 A.D. Now hatched from eggs, humans move through all the recognizable stages of psychological development in their first four years of life. Beyond this point, practically immortal Ancients continue their search for understanding of the universe. These Ancients conclude that to perpetuate progress, they must evolve beyond the body altogether, becoming pure energy with unmediated access to the universe. The play ends with the return of the mythic figures of the first play, who meditate on the current state of humanity. While the Serpent, Cain, and Eve are satisfied with human progress and Adam disdains progress in general, Lilith, the embodiment of Life Force, holds that humanity has not yet progressed enough. To her, it seems they still have far to go, farther even than her own thought can reach.

As an argument for a program of utopian social development, Back to Methuselah is easy to criticize. One potentially serious criticism is that it undercuts practical efforts for utopian reform by assuming that the only hope for humanity's salvation is, in essence, to become a different species. Kingsley Widmer contends that a narrative that alters the human species cannot be a legitimate utopian argument: "Fundamentally change the premises [on which human society is based] by changing the beings--not just the conditions, not just the emphasis--and the arguments (and utopias are arguments) tend to the meaningless" (26). Here, Widmer is referring specifically to Wells's Men Like Gods, which I discuss in the next chapter, but his statement might be more aptly aimed at Back to Methuselah, which argues more explicitly that the human race must be fundamentally altered. Widmer holds that reliance on an improved humanity to solve social problems

avoids engagement with the problems themselves: "By definition, 'perfected' beings--or 'angels,' if one prefers a more ancient image--do not correspond to our language or other experimental tests. What we have, then, is speculation so arbitrarily pure as to be essentially false to the human. When anything goes, it does not go from here" (26). A solution to a human problem that requires the elimination of what we understand to be humans, Widmer argues, is not much of a solution. If, for example, humans have an unfortunate habit of initiating wars, the goal of utopian argumentation should be to develop social structures that would make war obsolete, not facilely to propose that if humans were less warlike, there would be less war.

Back to Methuselah is a prime example of this "form of pathological escape from the human" to which Widmer objects (26). There is a notable lack of practical utopian planning in Shaw's cycle of plays. While he does make alterations to social institutions, suggesting, for example, that eugenics must be implemented and class distinctions and sexual prudery eliminated, most of his argumentation exists in the more fanciful realm of imagining a greater, healthier, wiser, more longlived human being who will naturally manage things better than we do, no matter how he or she specifically goes about doing so. The vagueness of Shaw's plan allows him to advocate values that appear problematic if concretely applied. One such value is the goal of transcending the physical world. The Ancients characterize this project as a type of liberation that will enable them to "range through the stars" (Back 292). Rejecting the phenomenological position that perception is always enabled and mediated by a physical sensory apparatus, Shaw supposes that the spiritual self will experience the universe more immediately and fully than the physical self, which is limited by the input of its senses. He does not, however, produce an argument to substantiate this contention. Still less does he describe what this perception might be like or why it should be considered valuable, beyond the vague assurance that it will escape physical limitation. In this respect, Shaw's text fails to meet Widmer's definition of a valid utopian argument.

Yet while this failure does reveal limitations in Shaw's vision, it also indicates that Shaw is performing a type of utopianizing different from that which Widmer

addresses. Widmer presupposes that a utopian narrative will be constructed in a "realist" mode: he expects the people and institutions described to fit plausibly within our understanding of human nature. Shaw's dominant mode, however, *is satire, not realism*. His aim is to produce scripture, an edifying myth, not a "realistic" program for social reform. In a 1921 letter to St. John Ervine, Shaw himself articulates his inability to develop a "realistic" longliver utopia:

> In Methuselah I could not shew the life of the long livers, because, being a short liver, I could not conceive it. To make the play possible at all I had to fall back on an exhibition of the shortlivers [sic] and children [of the Ancients] in contrast with such scraps of the long life as I could deduce by carrying a little further the difference that exists at present between the child and the adult [. . . .] (Bernard Shaw 532)

Here, Shaw expresses concisely both his narrative problem and his tactic for addressing it. Just as a prehistoric primate could not explain human civilization, Shaw could not attempt any sort of literal depiction of a future whose inhabitants would be more evolved than he himself. Thus, much as Morris's "vision" in News from Nowhere offers a possible future without prescribing a rigorous program to achieve it, Shaw's "legends" reinforce a general evolutionary paradigm without requiring concrete description of practices Shaw could not imagine. Instead, Shaw uses three techniques to suggest the future. First, as his letter explains, he constructs human evolution via analogy: Shaw cannot conceive of the distinction between longliver and shortliver, but he can conceive of the distinction between adult and child. Thus, he extrapolates on those known differences to convey an impression of the differences that must remain unknown.[3] Second, as I have already noted, he stresses the metaphoricity of his narrative: we must evolve, he argues; that does not necessarily mean that we must literally evolve into a form that is hatched from eggs. Indeed, Peter Gahan contends that even Shaw's basic argument for life extension should be read metaphorically as a call for the extension of our imaginative powers (220).[4] Finally, Shaw illustrates the superiority of the more highly evolved by contrasting it with the inferiority of the less evolved. In each play,

therefore, the less evolved become the objects of satirical derision. These techniques do not produce a proposal for a specific type of utopian future, but they do produce a genuine argument.

A more useful paradigm than Widmer's for examining Shaw's argumentation is Darko Suvin's concept of "cognitive estrangement." Suvin has famously defined science fiction as "a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment" (7). In this formulation, science fiction is "estranging" in that it depicts alternatives to social and environmental conditions that the reader might ordinarily be expected to accept as necessary and natural: it might, for instance, portray a society that exists without gender or one that has achieved functional immortality. Science fiction is "cognitive" in that it posits and enacts a rational universe: its explanations for the events it presents are scientific and socio-historical rather than magical or mystical. Science fiction, of course, is not synonymous with utopia and dystopia; nonetheless, cognitive estrangement can be a powerful tool in the literary construction of a utopian or dystopian argument. The estranging effect encourages readers to explore alternatives to the social structures they might otherwise take for granted. The cognitive effect suggests that such alternatives might be plausibly produced through the application of the same institutions of science and reason that the post-Enlightenment world relies on to shape society.

While Back to Methuselah can aptly be described as a work of cognitive estrangement, it is more estranging than cognitive. The central "cognitive" aspect of Shaw's cycle of plays, its claim to plausible application, is the "science" of Creative Evolution. Today, of course, there is no doubt within the scientific community that Creative Evolution is an incorrect hypothesis. Even within the context of the science of 1920, Shaw's grasp of evolutionary theory is tenuous. He can produce no evidence that acquired characteristics are transmitted from parent to offspring. Like Lamarck, he contends that the vast amounts of time often necessary to create a noticeable evolutionary

change may make the inheritance of acquired characteristics impossible to observe from generation to generation. This argument, however, only indicates that Lamarckian evolution had not, as of 1920, been disproved, not that it is a correct hypothesis.

If Shaw's Creative Evolution is less than scientifically rigorous, his understanding of Neo-Darwinism is also lacking. Crucially, he fails to account for the broad acceptance within Neo-Darwinism that consciousness can be selected for, remarking that "there is no place in Darwinism for free will, or any other sort of will [. . .]" (lix). Shaw's complaint relates to legitimate concerns that Neo-Darwinism was overly deterministic, insufficiently concerned with the complexity and variety of human minds, and too eager to dismiss the possibility of transcendent spirit. Nonetheless, a cursory examination of the work of Neo-Darwinian Wells, whom Shaw knew and read, should illustrate that Neo-Darwinism need in no way deny free will or any other plainly existing human quality. Wells's Time Traveller, for instance, is an explicit product of natural selection and also a strong willed and thoughtful scientist.

If Shaw's science is weak, however, his text offers compensatory strengths. Shaw remarks in his preface that "the validity of a story is not the same as the occurrence of a fact" (xx). Here, he is referring to the interpretation of metaphors, not to his evolutionary theory, which he did hold to be factually correct. Nonetheless, this statement offers a key for approaching Back to Methuselah, a set of legends Shaw identifies as "metabiological," reaching beyond purely verifiable scientific facts toward a transcendent philosophy of biology. Though Shaw's evolutionary theory is wrong, it still serves the useful function of estrangement, challenging his audience to reassess its attitudes toward humanity and humanity's future. If Shaw's evolutionary beliefs provide an estranging content in Back to Methuselah, his rhetoric offers an estranging method for exploring that content.

Utopian Satire

In fact, Shaw's chief rhetorical mode, satire, is inherently an estranging rhetoric. By exposing accepted practices to ridicule, it encourages us to question our acceptance. In classical terms, Shaw's satire is Menippean, a style M. H. Abrams describes as typified by "a series of extended dialogues and debates [. . .] in which a group of loquacious eccentrics, pedants, literary people, and representatives of various professions and points of view serve to make ludicrous the attitudes and viewpoints they typify by the arguments they urge in their support" (277). It is something of a critical commonplace to dismiss Shaw's characters as "mere mouthpieces for ideas," as the New American Library's Reader's Companion to World Literature puts it (671). Admittedly, this reading of Shaw's drama is oversimplified. Though his characters typically do represent certain perspectives, they do not necessarily lack psychological depth. Indeed, Richard F. Dietrich credits Shaw with the development of "an entire system of psychological analysis," based on the categories of Realist, Idealist, and Philistine, which Shaw delineated in The Quintessence of Ibsenism (1890) (Dietrich 149). Though Dietrich's argument is convincing, it is significant that he does not include Back to Methuselah in his discussion. Because the plays in this cycle are short, each character has little time on stage and, thus, small opportunity for subtle development. Thus, in this instance, many characters are, indeed, little more than ciphers for certain viewpoints, which Shaw wittily exposes as ridiculous. Such satire is a useful means of raising challenging questions, but it is not well-suited to providing answers. Satire is designed to distort and mock; this makes it an apt tool for describing a dystopia. It is difficult, however, to present a social system as highly positive while simultaneously mocking and distorting it. In Back to Methuselah, Shaw addresses this difficulty by using satire to expose problems with human civilization while reserving more "reasonable" argumentation for prescribing solutions to these problems.

This strategy is evident in The Gospel of the Brothers Barnabas, in which Burge and Lubin exemplify the decrepitude of British politics. Burge styles himself as a

Liberal, a social reformer. Yet he does little but utter platitudes in an attempt to disguise his ideological inconsistencies. In discussing his stint as Prime Minister during the war, he illustrates his hypocrisy in conversation with Franklyn:

> FRANKLYN. [. . . .] I know who you are. And the earth-shaking part of it to me is that though you were placed in that enormously responsible position [of steering the British state through the war], neither I nor anyone else knows what your beliefs are, or even whether you have either beliefs or principles. What we did know was that your Government was formed largely of men who regarded you as a robber of henroosts, and whom you regarded as enemies of the people.
>
> BURGE. (adroitly, as he thinks) I agree with you. I agree with you completely. I dont believe in coalition governments.[5]
>
> FRANKLYN. Precisely. Yet you formed two.
>
> BURGE. Why? Because we were at war. That is what you fellows never would realize. The Hun was at the gate. Our country, our lives, the honor of our wives and mothers and daughters, the tender flesh of our innocent babes were at stake. Was that a time to argue about principles? (56; brackets with emphasis Shaw's)

Burge amply illustrates why, as Franklyn attests, no one knows what his beliefs are. Burge explains that during the war he formed two coalition governments--despite the fact that, in principle, he objects to them--because war is a time when principles must be suspended. They must be suspended in order to keep the Germans from doing unspecified but presumably untoward things to the usual assortment of sacred trusts one is expected to hold dear: life, nation, the purity of woman, the welfare of babies. But to value these trusts--as more than mere platitudes--is a matter of principle. In essence, Burge claims to have suspended his principles in the name of certain principles. What he demonstrates is that he has no clear principles to suspend. He will do or say whatever appears politically expedient.

If Burge plays the reformer, Lubin is convinced that nothing substantive can change. Only names, he asserts, from time to time, can be altered: "If it will be easier to carry on the business of the country on the understanding that the present state of things is to be called Socialism, I have no objection in the world to call it Socialism. There is the precedent of the Emperor Constantine, who saved the society of his own day by agreeing to call his Imperialism Christianity" (72). On one level, Lubin is perceptive:

there is no dearth of philosophies whose names have been coopted exactly as he describes. Nonetheless, the text holds Lubin's position up to ridicule. His way is defeatist at best, actively oppressive at worst. Following the precedent of Constantine, he would crush reform movements by appropriating their positive connotations to describe the same old institutions that perpetuate human misery.

Burge and Lubin together represent contrasting types of political incapacity. Burge twists like a weather vane in the winds of public opinion; Lubin sticks like a limpet to his immutable laws of human society. If the one embodies constant change without direction, the other embodies the refusal to acknowledge the possibility of change. This contrast is underscored by Burge's and Lubin's criticisms of each other. Lubin tells Burge, "You represent [. . .] mere energy without intellect and without knowledge. Your mind is not a trained mind [. . .]" (81). Burge is extremely active but intellectually incapable of directing his action meaningfully. Burge, for his part, accuses Lubin of having "no foresight and no hindsight [. . . .] no vision and no memory [. . . .] no continuity" (80). Lubin exists outside of history, standing by one system of values, which he deems to be unalterable. Through the dialogue of Burge, Lubin, and the Brothers Barnabas, Shaw holds the politics of his day up to scorn.

He makes it clear, however, that Burge and Lubin are not particularly inept individuals, nor are politicians as a class especially inept. After Franklyn has accused both Burge and Lubin of inadequate leadership, Conrad hastens to explain, "We're not blaming you: you hadnt lived long enough. No more had we. Cant you see that [living to be] three-score-and-ten, though it may be long enough for a very crude sort of village life, isnt long enough for a complicated civilization like ours?" (82). The human race, as a whole, simply does not live long enough to amass the experience necessary to manage a modern civilization. Thus, Burge and Lubin, though laughable, are no worse than the rest of us. As John Barnes contends, "The audience must be unhappy with the [satirical] characters but it must not blame the characters for their unsatisfactory qualities" (158). Shaw softens his satire by sparing those he ridicules from personal blame. But by the same token, he extends the blame to all of humanity for its incapacity.

Shaw's satire of figures such as Burge and Lubin is estranging in that it invites us to regard leaders of the human race, and by extension the whole human race, as biologically inadequate. Particularly within a utopian text, this move is unusual. As Widmer's delineation of proper utopian argument illustrates, a utopia of any plausibility is generally predicated on the assumption that the human species as it is could achieve a highly favorable society, an assumption Shaw did not share. Shaw's text estranges us by requiring us to examine the unsettling possibility that nothing short of a species-wide biological change can improve humanity's lot.

But though everyone in Back to Methuselah is inadequate in the sense that no one--not even the Ancients--has fulfilled the evolutionary potential of Life Force, not everyone is exposed to satirical critique. The view of Conrad and Franklyn Barnabas, for instance, is depicted as sensible. They hold to a single program for improving society without internal contradiction. Moreover, Shaw presents their views as grounded in sound evolutionary science: Conrad is a biologist, and when Franklyn's daughter, Savvy, remarks that "Darwin is all rot" (70), no one challenges her. Thus, The Gospel of the Brothers Barnabas adopts a rhetorical structure in which Menippean satire, enacting the ridiculousness of the satirical speakers, is combined with a more straightforward elucidation of the principles of Creative Evolution, which, the text argues, socially progressive people ought to espouse.

This structure is repeated throughout all the plays. In In the Beginning, the satirical element is comparatively muted. While the text endorses the Serpent as the voice of Life Force, the human characters who only imperfectly understand her are often more innocent than ridiculous: Adam and Eve's initial unfamiliarity with death, for instance, does not seem worthy of derision. The final three plays, however, closely recapitulate the structure of the second. In The Thing Happens, Burge-Lubin and Barnabas are held up to satirical scorn, while the Archbishop and Mrs. Lutestring make the case for a sensible dedication to Life Force. In Tragedy of an Elderly Gentleman, the shortlivers are ridiculed, while the longlivers are presented as voices of reason. In As Far as Thought Can Reach, the "children" become the objects of satire and the Ancients the

voices of wisdom. Shaw negotiates the difficulty of using satire as a tool for utopian argumentation by largely exempting his own utopian program of evolutionary progress from satirical treatment.

In keeping with the Menippean model's conversational rhetoric, this endorsement of a utopian philosophy via derision of "inferior" philosophies is constructed almost totally out of discussion. It is discussion that separates the fools from the comparatively wise and, ultimately, reveals the desirability of one school of thought over another. For Shaw, talking was often more central than "action" to achieving dramatic resolution. Christopher Innes notes that in The Quintessence of Ibsenism, Shaw identifies an emphasis on discussion over Aristotelian "action" as the revolutionary element in Henrik Ibsen's drama (Innes 162). Innes contends that Shaw adopted this centralization of discussion as a defining feature of his own drama. Indeed, Innes asserts, "The only distinct theatrical form Shaw originated was what he labeled the 'Disquisitory Play,'" a play based on extended discourse about a topic (163). But if Shaw's text is a fabric woven of interacting voices, his technique is more dialectic than dialogic. Instead of placing mutually challenging voices into a Bakhtinian polyphony, Shaw develops a rhetoric in which the ridiculous are schooled by those wiser than they. Such conversations serve the dual function of criticizing the objects of the satire while advocating a more utopian future through Life Force.

Dialogic Tensions in *Tragedy of an Elderly Gentleman*

Though the satire may be trenchant, the utopia is hard to embrace, not least because the characters who represent it are difficult to sympathize with. Crucially, these characters lack much of the common range of human feeling, refusing friendship, sexual love, and, to a large extent, even compassion. Shaw constructs this emotionally stripped psychology deliberately as a model for the more highly evolved human being, as he explains in a 1923 letter to Robert Thomson: "[M]y intellectual interests, in science, in history, in philosophy, in design and evolution, have been so much more lasting and dignified than the more primitive and fleshy interests that I can conceive of no better

paradise [to present in <u>Back to Methuselah</u>] than one in which they have developed into passions and become ecstatic" (<u>Bernard Shaw</u> 813). Here, Shaw most likely draws on the etymology of "ecstatic" to indicate standing outside of a physical body. In giving a disembodied intellectual passion precedence above interpersonal human caring, Shaw substantially rejects at least one value we typically consider indispensable to human society: empathy, the ability to vicariously feel another's feelings. A society without this basic interpersonal tie may seem "utopian" in much the same way as Aldous Huxley's Brave New World: the people inhabiting it may be pleased with it, but few of us would advocate it as a model for our future. Indeed, Huxley himself apparently noted the parallel: in <u>Brave New World</u> (1932), the Director of Hatcheries and Conditioning cites Shaw as "one of the very few whose works have been permitted to come down to us" (24). "Shaw" is also one of a select group of surnames retained for members of the Brave New World (154). Though Shaw's utopians are presented as positive evolutionary steps, they often seem less superhuman than inhuman.

The text itself, however, actively confronts this "inhumanity" in its "supermen." The plays' dramatic structure contains more nuance than a mere lecture to the ridiculous by the wise. The basic argument of <u>Back to Methuselah</u> is that humanity must evolve to survive. More particularly, Shaw suggests that Life Force will drive evolution in a direction that will ultimately sever the ties of the spiritual to the material, granting the spirit liberation from its enslavement to matter. He does not, however, present this liberation as coming without cost. David J. Gordon sums up the narrative tension of <u>Back to Methuselah</u>: "Here, as always, Shaw sided with spirit [over body], but there is enough resistance to this ultimate version of the sublime, enough irony, to make effective drama" (164). The text is not so fervent in its adulation of the future that it lacks a sense of pathos for the vanishing past. The less evolved world, the world humanity must supersede, is our world. Though much of it is deplorable, much also commands our affection. To illustrate this point, Gordon highlights Shaw's ironic use of a work of dramatic art to advocate the Ancients' abandonment of art: "From the Ancients point of view [. . .] art may indeed be surpassable. But that is only to emphasize, obliquely, its

fundamental human importance" (165). Though a time may come when humanity has evolved beyond the need for art, the very writing of Shaw's plays reminds us that that time is not yet. As an audience reading or watching Back to Methuselah, we are even encouraged to identify with the artists the Ancients dismiss as mere children. Thus, the message is not simplistic. Because we are not yet evolved enough to understand the Ancients' wisdom, we must accept the superiority of their judgment. At the same time, our very identification with the superseded values of the children prompts us to lament their supersession.

The plays' pathos is most evident in the aptly named Tragedy of an Elderly Gentleman, in which the kind and decent title character, a shortliver, must confront the "tragic flaw" of his own evolutionary inadequacy. This sense of tragic loss is heightened by the dubious callousness and cold calculation of certain longliver practices. In some ways, the outmoded Elderly Gentleman appears more moral than the society that has surpassed him. At the same time, the text presents longliver society as an indisputable improvement over shortliver society. In this play, Shaw depicts a human population consisting of individuals who live to be around three hundred. A group of shortlivers has come to longliving Britain to consult the Oracle, who, they believe, can guide them through the petty political shenanigans they face back home in Baghdad, now capital of the shortliver British empire. Shaw mocks the naivete of the shortlivers' faith by emphasizing the superficiality of the spectacle that the longlivers put on for the shortlivers' benefit. The Oracle projects her image onto a screen to create the kind of grand impression the shortlivers expect. She herself feels no need to do this. In fact, she is so impressive in person that the shortlivers are in danger of dying if they look closely at her. The shortlivers, however, demand childish spectacle. Like children, they focus on material trappings, battles over social prestige, and superstitions. Longlivers, in contrast, have no need of such rubbish; they live straightforwardly, securely, productively, and recognize tomfoolery when they see it.

The longlivers' pragmatism has led them to revise many familiar social practices. They have, for example, effectively abolished marriage, prudery, intense anger, religious

superstition, sexism, blushing, and heavily metaphorical language. They have also implemented eugenics. Zoo, a fifty-six-year-old young woman, remarks to the Elderly Gentleman, "I specialize in babies. My first was such a success that they made me go on" (Back 172). Reproduction is managed by longliver society--Zoo's "they"--rather than individual parents. Zoo does not characterize her society's "making her go on" as coercive. As a sensible member of a longliver society, she does not see any conflict between her personal choices and the social good. She explains, "Like all young things I rebelled against [longliver society]; and in their hunger for new lights and new ideas they listened to me and encouraged me to rebel. But my ways did not work; and theirs did; and they were able to tell me why. They have no power over me except that power [. . .]" (186). Far from being coercive, then, Zoo's society has simply found a social system so workable that practically any exercise in logical argumentation will have to conclude that the longlivers have the right idea.

Yet even if we accept that the government of longliver society is based purely on reason, not oppression, it is difficult to wholeheartedly embrace certain longliver attitudes. When the Elderly Gentleman asks Zoo what her people would do with their undesirables if they could not exile them to shortliver countries, Zoo answers flatly, "Kill them. Our tertiaries [in their third century of life] are not at all squeamish about killing" (197). The longlivers' pragmatism dictates that the needs of their civilization outweigh such trivial concerns as an individual's life. In fact, the longlivers' contemplation of a program of shortliver genocide indicates their conviction that the progress of longliver civilization may outweigh the lives of all shortlivers.

Yet for all their unsentimental pragmatism, the longlivers are reluctant to accept responsibility for the deaths they precipitate. There is a hint of equivocation in Zoo's description of how a degenerate longliver often "refuses to live" (196). She explains that "[h]e simply dies. He wants to" (196), but one wonders if his death is as voluntary as Zoo suggests, particularly in light of the Elderly Gentleman's demise. When he begs the Oracle to allow him to stay in Britain, she warns, "My friend: if you stay with us you will die of discouragement," the ailment that claims most shortlivers in the longliver countries

(230). Yet when the Elderly Gentleman does, in fact, die, it is as a direct result of the Oracle *taking his hands and "[looking] steadily into his face" (231). Has he died of his* own discouragement, or has the Oracle actively killed him? After his death, she reflects, "Poor shortlived thing! What else could I do for you?" (231). By her own account, she has taken active agency in "doing" something "for him." According to the longliver mind set, however, the distinction between actively killing someone and incidentally inspiring a kind of suicide is functionally non-existent. The weak-willed kill themselves with their own weak wills. And because this belief is perfectly in keeping with the mandate of Life Force, the longlivers admit to neither regret nor remorse over the deaths of such individuals. To lament over the deaths of inferiors would be counterproductive sentimentalism.

But if the longlivers reject such sentimental concerns as regard for inferiors' lives, the text itself does not. An argument in which Zoo threatens to kill the Elderly Gentleman illustrates both the longliver mind set and the shortlivers' understandable objections to it. In presenting this irreducible moral conflict, the text moves out of dialectic and into dialogic discourse. At the same time, the text so tightly circumscribes this dialogism that Shaw's creative-evolutionary message is never seriously called into question. Gordon contends that in the conflicts in Back to Methuselah, "the author's sympathy seems directed less toward the victim than the judge" (168): Zoo's contention that the Elderly Gentleman deserves death is presented as more "correct" than his resistance to her pronouncement. But if the text ultimately sides with Zoo, it does not dismiss the Elderly Gentleman, who states his own innocence in persuasive terms. Indeed, in many respects, the Elderly Gentleman is presented as the more mature and reasonable of the two.

The argument between the Elderly Gentleman and Zoo comes to a head when he insults her by calling her "a primary flapper playing at being an oracle," indicating that

because she is still in her first century of life, she is merely a self-important adolescent (190). When she responds by calling him "silly," he shoots back, "Hold your tongue!" (190). The interchange continues:

> ZOO. Something very disagreeable is happening to me. I feel hot all over. I have a horrible impulse to injure you. What have you done to me?
>
> THE ELDERLY GENTLEMAN. (triumphant) Aha! I have made you blush. Now you know what blushing means. Blushing with shame!
>
> ZOO. Whatever you are doing, it is something so utterly evil that if you do not stop I will kill you.
>
> THE ELDERLY GENTLEMAN. (apprehending his danger) Doubtless you think it safe to threaten an old man--
>
> ZOO. (fiercely) Old! You are a child: an evil child. We kill evil children here. We do it even against our own wills by instinct. Take care.
>
> THE ELDERLY GENTLEMAN. (rising with crestfallen courtesy) I did not mean to hurt your feelings. I-- (swallowing the apology with an effort) I beg your pardon. (He takes off his hat, and bows). [. . . .] I can say no more than that I am sorry.
>
> ZOO. You have reason to be. That hideous sensation you gave is subsiding; but you have had a very narrow escape. Do not attempt to kill me again; for at the first sign in your voice or face I shall strike you dead.
>
> THE ELDERLY GENTLEMAN. I attempt to kill you! What a monstrous accusation!
>
> [. . . .]
>
> ZOO. I know you are a murderer. It is not merely that you threw words at me as if they were stones, meaning to hurt me. It was the instinct to kill that you roused in me. (Back 191-92; emphasis Shaw's)

By our standards, the party more at fault in this interchange is Zoo. Unable to comprehend that Zoo is more than a mere "flapper," the Elderly Gentleman belittles and insults her. She, however, responds with a serious threat to murder him for the "evil" of making her angry. Far from taking responsibility for her own impulses, she refers to her emotional reaction as something he has "done to me." She extends this argument to her threat to kill him. According to Zoo, the Elderly Gentleman should be sorry for what he has done. In fact, she asserts, he has tried to kill her by throwing "words at me as if they were stones." He has roused her instinct to kill; clearly, if she kills him it will be his own fault. The fact that she threatens his life while his part in the dispute is merely name-

calling--not so different from her many avowals of his inferiority--does not enter into her reasoning. The fact that he apologizes while she does nothing to appease any hurt feelings of his, likewise, has no significance for her. Moreover, while the Elderly Gentleman behaves more or less as we would expect a normal adult to behave, the "mature" longliver, Zoo, behaves like a petulant child who overreacts to an insult, while refusing to take responsibility for her own role in the fight. She applies a double standard, judging the Elderly Gentleman more harshly than herself. Admittedly, Zoo is unused to feeling angry and insulted. If she has never been insulted before, we might expect her reaction to be strong. But though this contextualization makes her response more comprehensible, it does not make it obviously superior to the Elderly Gentleman's. If anything it looks "inferior," a failure of the basic ability to empathize with another.

It is this fight that convinces Zoo to change from a Conservative to a Colonizer, who "[does] not think there should be any shortlived people at all" (192). One shortliver's insult has convinced her that his race must be exterminated. The Elderly Gentleman articulates the seeming excess of Zoo's position:

> THE ELDERLY GENTLEMAN. Am I to infer that you deny my right to live because I allowed myself--perhaps injudiciously--to give you a slight scolding?
> ZOO. Is it worth living for so short a time? Are you any good to yourself?
> THE ELDERLY GENTLEMAN. (stupent) Well, upon my soul!
> ZOO. It is a very little soul. You only encourage the sin of pride in us, and keep us looking down at you instead of up to something higher than ourselves. (192-93)

In calling the Elderly Gentleman's soul "very little," Zoo hurls an insult as biting as anything he has said to her. Yet she does not recognize any impropriety in the observation: after all, her insults are plainly the truth while his are merely designed to hurt. The Elderly Gentleman, however, no longer has the luxury of feeling incensed. He understands Zoo quite correctly when he infers that his scolding has prompted her to seek his death (as well as the deaths of all his people). Faced with this disproportionate retaliation, he can only exclaim in stupefaction. Zoo, meanwhile, attempts to justify her cause by suggesting that anyone who lives so short a time does not get enough out of life

for life to matter. The important thing is saving the advanced civilization that really matters from the "evil" feelings of anger and the "sin of pride" that the existence of the shortlivers imposes upon it.

But if Zoo dismisses the Elderly Gentleman as a trivial being with a "little soul," Shaw's characterization of him does not. On the contrary, he is the protagonist of the play, a basically decent, tolerably thoughtful individual whose demise, though inevitable, nonetheless, inspires sympathy. Indeed, his death itself results from his integrity. Unwilling to return home where he would be expected to participate in the political mendacity of his son, the Envoy, he begs to be allowed to remain in the longliver world, even though he must risk death to do so. He tells the Oracle, "It is the meaning of life, not of death, that makes this banishment [from longliver society] so terrible to me" (230). The Elderly Gentleman would rather die than return to a world where life is defined by unalterable cycles of petty corruption. As a shortliver, however, he cannot fully escape from these cycles simply by remaining among the longlivers. Because he cannot overcome his own shortliver corruption, he must die. Alfred Turco, Jr. accurately sums up the Elderly Gentleman's situation: "By definition, there can be no tragedy of life, but there is tragedy in life whenever we become cut off from participation in the vital process [. . .]" (286). The Elderly Gentleman's tragedy is that--as good a man as he is--he is an evolutionary dead end. Yet as tragic as that is for him, and for us shortliving readers, ultimately, the text must side with Zoo.

For as rude, callous, and even childish as Zoo may sometimes appear, she is correct in her assessment of shortliver shortcomings. When the Envoy, for example, wants to know how poison gas is made because, despite wanting peace, he recognizes the need for an arms race, Zoo explains the folly of his position:

> You can make the [poison] gases for yourselves when your chemists figure out how. Then you will do as you did before: poison each other until there are no chemists left, and no civilization. You will then begin all over again as half-starved ignorant savages, and fight with boomerangs and poisoned arrows until you work up to the poison gases and high explosives once more, with the same result. That is, unless we have sense enough to make an end of this ridiculous game by destroying you. (210-11)

While Zoo is, indeed, proposing genocide, and while we may find her apparent comfort with this course of action troubling, the course itself is consistently advocated by the text. Zoo contends that because shortliver civilization is evolutionarily unable to address its basic flaws, it will perpetuate war and strife as long as it exists. The text legitimizes this argument most emphatically through the character of "Napoleon," a shortliver war hero caught in the same cycle of glory, destruction, and death as his namesake. Napoleon is a microcosm of shortliver civilization. He foresees his own demise in much the same terms as Zoo foresees the demise of the shortlivers en masse. He explains to the Oracle, "Victory I can guarantee: I am invincible. But the cost of victory is the demoralization, the depopulation, the ruin of the victors no less than the vanquished" (206). Just as poison gas may give a military advantage but will lead to the destruction of civilization, so does Napoleon's victory presage ruin. When Napoleon asks the Oracle how he can continue to fight and win glory when ruin is inevitable, the Oracle answers that the solution is "[t]o die before the tide of glory turns" (207). Her message is, thus, the same as Zoo's: the only escape from the cycle of violence and destruction the shortlivers perpetuate is their abrupt death.

The longliver understanding of aggression as a cycle of destruction casts Zoo's contention that the Elderly Gentleman has tried to kill her by angering her in a more positive light. Though her claim is absurd on many levels, on one level, it makes sense: anger leads to fighting, which leads to war, which leads to death. Thus, by arousing anger in Zoo, the Elderly Gentleman is, indeed, promoting an ultimately self-destructive response in her. Now, literally, Zoo's life is never in danger. Her response, however, is more instinctive than rational. It is based on the "horrible" feelings he inspires, not the specific facts of their interaction. Thus, while in this case, Zoo's reaction is unwarranted, she reacts according to a longliver instinct that is highly conducive to the survival of her civilization: if being angry feels instinctively "evil" and even life-threatening, people will staunchly avoid anger, even by killing what makes them angry. And a culture that instinctively avoids anger and aggression will have a natural impetus to avoid the destruction associated with war.

While Zoo as an individual is not particularly sympathetic, she, nonetheless, exemplifies what Shaw presents as a superior race. Although she is young for a longliver, and abrasive, her culture and race impel her toward constructive attitudes and behavior. Her name invokes images of wild creatures existing in an orderly, civilized space. Like a "zoo," Zoo is able to contain the "wild" shortlivers: she need only contact the authorities to have any wayward shortliver paralyzed until further notice. But she is also a creature of a "zoo" herself, a child of a well-structured civilization that has learned instinctively to reject "savage" impulses in order to keep its aims and actions productive. Connotatively, Zoo's name is antithetical to that of the plays' other "flapper," Franklyn Barnabas's daughter, "Savvy," which stands for "Savage" (65). While Savvy presents herself as a liberated woman of the future, smoking, playing tennis, and making authoritative declamations about Darwin, she is not among the twentieth-century characters to achieve long life. She may appear to have "savvy" and a progressive mind, but at heart, she is a shortliver, a "savage," whose native urges toward wild and destructive behavior will doom her particular species. In some ways, Zoo may superficially behave like Savvy, challenging her "elders" with unabashed pronouncements about the nature of life. But fundamentally, she is a more advanced specimen of a more civilized human race.

If Zoo is callously correct, the Elderly Gentleman is sympathetically ignorant. The text dismisses neither of them and, to an extent, allows their respective viewpoints to construct thought-provoking arguments in which both perspectives contribute valid ideas. Thus, the interactions of Zoo and the Elderly Gentleman approach a genuinely dialogic rhetoric. Yet the play refuses to grant free rein to this dialogic tendency. Multivocal critiques of the longliver worldview are preempted by a plot that demonstrates that view's correctness. No character can reasonably argue, for example, that evolution by natural selection makes more sense as a scientific theory than Creative Evolution: the plot illustrates Creative Evolution as a fact. Likewise, no one can plausibly argue that the human race can progress socially toward utopia without biologically evolving: the recurrence of "Napoleons" across the millennia shows that this is untrue. While we may

sympathize with the plight of the Elderly Gentleman, we must accept that, within the universe presented in the play, Zoo is correct and her behavior more or less justified. Even the Elderly Gentleman--the play's most admirable shortliver--finally sides with the longlivers, desiring to remain in their world and forsake his own. The Elderly Gentleman's fate is tragic in the microcosm of his life and, by extension, for the rest of us doomed shortlivers. But, in Shaw's presentation, it is not a tragedy that questions the legitimacy of longliver conquest. The longlivers represent Life, and the progress of Life, ultimately, defines moral propriety.

Shaw's Rejection of Ecological Relationality

Though the furtherance of Life in humanity is essential if humanity as a species is to persist, the Elderly Gentleman's tragedy illustrates that this very furtherance demands the sacrifice, and often the suffering, of the less evolved.[6] This mindset carries important ecological implications. The Colonizers' assumption not only of the shortlivers' expendability but, indeed of the necessity of exterminating them, indicates a profoundly non-ecological ideology. The Colonizers organize the living world into superior versus inferior entities and groups: the longlivers are superior to the shortlivers. The goal of Life, as they see it, is to maximize the advancement of the superior strains, to look "up to something higher than ourselves," as Zoo puts it, in order to climb higher (193). In pursuit of this goal, inferior strains must be eliminated, since their existence inhibits the progress of superior individuals by contaminating them with outmoded drives: the "sin of pride" or the instinct to kill that the Elderly Gentleman prompts in Zoo (193). What this worldview omits is a sense of the interdependence of life forms. The idea that the "superior" might materially rely on the "inferior" to survive does not occur.

Nor is there any reason it should. Though Shaw did not deny that natural selection happens, he considered the driving force of evolution to be Life Force. And for Shaw, Life Force is a matter of spirit, of Will, not a question of material relations.[7] Indeed, a sufficiently strong Will should be able to overcome any type of physical limitation. In the preface to <u>Back to Methuselah,</u> Shaw offers a typical example of this

perspective: "Perhaps nobody is at heart fool enough to believe that life is at the mercy of temperature" (lxxii), a view which radically denies the dependence of human life on its environment.[8] Throughout Back to Methuselah, he depicts Will overcoming age, death, disease, and the need for sleep, as well as such petty limitations as having a set number of limbs or heads. According to Shaw's Creative Evolution, if I run out of food, I need only will myself not to need food, and if my will is sufficiently strong, I will be in no danger of starvation. Of course, the present will of the human race is typically not strong enough to overcome such bodily demands. Therefore, our current weakness necessitates some material support from an environment. Yet if one accepts Shaw's view of evolution, it follows that, ultimately, ecological dependence should be unnecessary to the continuance of Life.

Such an ideology is unconcerned with ecology, as Shaw's near total lack of engagement with any overtly ecological question attests. Not surprisingly, in Back to Methuselah, when Shaw develops a hypothetical evolutionary scenario, he focuses on issues that concern only human society: humans could evolve to instinctively ride bicycles or paint masterpieces or live three hundred years, to hatch from eggs or be born knowing how to speak. Changes in human relations with other life forms or forces of nature are background at best. Only in In the Beginning and As Far as Thought Can Reach does Shaw create landscapes that explicitly include non-human life forms. The landscapes in In the Beginning are predetermined by the source myths Shaw uses: the Garden of Eden and the land Adam must subsequently till are necessary "primitive" settings for this prehistoric story. At the other end of the text's chronology, As Far as Thought Can Reach is set in an idyllic "sunlit glade at the southern foot of a thickly wooded hill" (Back 235). Yet this setting, likewise, is hardly an ecologically imagined space. Instead, it recalls the tradition of the Arcadian utopia, as do the Greek names of the children: Acis, Ecrasia, Strephon, and so on. Indeed, Shaw describes the design of the children's architecture as resembling "Grecian of the fourth century B.C." (235),

placing the infants' Arcadia in opposition to the higher, intellectual utopia of the Ancients. The woodland, then, exists to show that the idyll is inadequate, not to suggest that undeveloped "nature" may be conducive to human survival.

This relegation of nature to background is indicative of Shaw's dismissal of the material world in general. In the Shavian universe ecological needs are trivial. A society predicated on Shavian Creative Evolution, therefore, can only sustain an interest in ecological relations on the basis of moral care for the non-human. If trees are not important to our survival, then we have no pressing reason to save them--unless we care for them and the creatures that rely on them. Since a regard for the physical environment in Shaw's Creative Evolution cannot be rooted in pragmatism, it must be rooted in empathy, in a sense of fellow feeling for other entities.[9] Yet empathy is a characteristic Shaw's people of the future expressly lack, both in their disdain for "inferior" humans and in their disdain for the "inferiority" of physical life in general. Zoo's dismissal of the Elderly Gentleman is echoed by the Ancients' dismissal of physicality itself. The civilization of 31,920 A.D. is oriented around a progressive separation of the human spirit from physical preoccupations. Newly hatched "infants," bearing the appearance of adolescents, are subject to much the same physical drives as most of us: they sleep, sing, dance, fall in love, enjoy pretty clothes, and so on. By the time these "children" are about two years old, they have progressed to an interest in higher arts and sciences. By age four, they are bored with all physical occupations and begin their lives as wandering, solitary Ancients, who persist, ageless, until some accident kills them. As Ancients, they focus on more purely mental interests, such as higher mathematics, as well as more advanced and, thus, indescribable pursuits. They quickly lose most secondary sex characteristics; at least, the women are repeatedly identified as flat chested. Eventually, they forget how to communicate in a medium as limiting as words. Older Ancients even learn how to manipulate their bodies to give themselves extra limbs. Since physicality, however, is a limitation to be overcome, these bodily manipulations are nothing more than a precursor to the next evolutionary stage that will liberate humanity from the body altogether.

As the Ancients explain this process to the younger generation,

> THE SHE-ANCIENT. None of us now believe that all this machinery of flesh and blood is necessary. It dies.
> THE HE-ANCIENT. It imprisons us on this petty planet and forbids us to range through the stars.
> [. . . .]
> THE SHE-ANCIENT. The body was the slave of the vortex [of Life]; but the slave has become the master; and we must free ourselves from that tyranny. It is this stuff (indicating her body), this flesh and blood and bone and all the rest of it, that is intolerable. Even prehistoric man dreamed of what he called an astral body, and asked who would deliver him from the body of this death. (292-93)

The complaint registered here by the Ancients is twofold. First, they do not want to be bound to the Earth--or, by extension, to a material frame of reference--but to explore the broader reaches of the universe. Second, they do not want to die. The body, a tyrant, constrains them to both these fates. The She-Ancient's appeal to the dualistic impulses of "prehistoric man" posits that the dichotomy between spirit and matter is a basic, self-evident truth. Moreover, her contention that the body used to be the slave of spiritual Life recapitulates the "Back to Methuselah" motif: Life used to be freer, longer, more willful. Somehow, it "fell," as Shaw recounts in his reworking of the Garden of Eden. As the symbolic Adam and Eve began their agrarian lives and started their human family, humanity lost much of its instinctive understanding of how to will a better life and became enslaved to the limitations of the body. Thus, the Ancients' dream of abandoning the body is both a vision of a progressive climb to unimagined heights of experience and the recapturing of a lost birthright. It is both a forward movement and a return, a linear progression and a "setting things to rights." This perspective, thus, rejects the notion that the interaction of the spiritual and the physical could ever fundamentally be desirable.

As in Tragedy of an Elderly Gentleman, this philosophy is unapologetic in its dismissal of any life or matter that is "inferior" to the spiritual Life of these "supermen." The whole Earth is no more than a "petty planet," the body mere "machinery," not a living organism at all. Moreover, the text emphasizes that physicality per se is, by definition, not alive. When the youth, Acis, opines that mountains possess names,

individuality, strength, majesty, and beauty, the He-Ancient replies, "Mere metaphor, my poor boy: the mountains are corpses," the dead remains of the more life-like volcanic activity beneath the Earth (287). The He-Ancient explains that once he realized that the mountains are dead, he ceased to walk among them. The proper study of life is Life.

The play does, however, voice a potential criticism of this rejection of the physical via the figure of Adam. Near the end of the play, Adam opines, "We were well enough in the garden. And now the fools have killed all the animals; and they are dissatisfied because they cannot be bothered with their bodies! Foolishness, I call it" (298). Adam's charge appears grave. This "superior" human race has apparently willfully exterminated all other animal species. Yet all humans have achieved at the cost of this mass destruction is further unhappiness: now that they have conquered the physical world, they are discontent with having physicality at all. Adam's objection opens a potential space for the dialogic investigation of the desirability of this vision of utopia. Yet the use of the figure of Adam in the first play makes it clear that his objections are not to be taken seriously. Adam, while not a bad person, is a bit dim, rather lacking in imagination. It is Eve, not Adam, who determines to seize the power of Life Force to create new life. Later, Eve criticizes both Adam and Cain for their inadequacies, saying to Adam, "I hardly know which of you satisfies me least, you with dirty digging [i.e. farming], or he with his dirty killing. I cannot think it was for either of these cheap ways of life that Lilith set you free" (33). Adam, the tiller, is the figure most closely bound in a relationship with the Earth. But by limiting himself to his agrarian lifestyle, he shows a lack of progressive vision. Or as Eve accuses, "If you were not a fool you would find something better for both of us to live by than this spinning and digging" (38). But Adam does not. It, therefore, follows that his latter-day condemnation of humanity's "progress" is intended to represent reactionary traditionalism more than reasonable critique.

In the final play, it is Lilith, the figure who speaks after Adam, whose perspective carries more weight. As the first mother, Lilith is the voice of Life Force. It is, therefore,

uniquely her place to judge the extent to which her children have succeeded in fulfilling the potential of Life. Lilith recapitulates the progress of humanity thus far:

> They have accepted the burden of eternal life. They have taken away the agony from birth; and their life does not fail them even in the hour of their destruction. Their breasts are without milk; their bowels are gone: the very shapes of them are only ornaments for their children to admire and caress without understanding. Is it enough [. . .] ? (208)

Lilith's question--"Is it enough?"--indicates that all the changes achieved thus far are, in themselves, positive, though they may be insufficient.[10] It is good to wish never to die. It is good to eliminate pain from childbirth, as well as milk on which to feed one's children. The implication, here, may be that the removal of any close bodily bond between mother and child is a positive change, one which further attenuates humanity's visceral ties to other humans and, by extension, to physicality in general. It is good not to age, so that death strikes not as an internal failure of life but merely through unavoidable accidents. It is good not to digest food; there is no sign that these humans eat or drink. It is good, finally, to relegate the body to the status of mere ornamentation for the enjoyment of children. Lilith, thus, makes a powerful summation of the values involved in dichotomizing Life and Matter. In this system, the pursuit of life necessitates the breaking of all ties to matter, perhaps even destroying Matter. Lilith herself dreams of a universe that will become "all life and no matter" (300). Indeed, the only justification the text suggests for humanity's extermination of other animals is a general sense that Life is slowly severing itself from unnecessary material complications. Lilith asks, "Is it enough?" only because the ties to matter have not yet been totally severed. To the extent that humans are still physical beings, they have not yet fulfilled their duty to Life Force.

This ideology is disturbing from an ecological perspective because it supports a radical denial of the values most central to maintaining a healthy biosphere: an awareness of and respect for the interconnectedness of life forms and a focus on the physical base of economy, including the sustainable use of resources and minimization of damage to ecosystems. None of these concerns matter in Shaw's conception. Everything that the biosphere comprises is at best insignificant to human evolution, at worst an obstacle to be

eliminated. Thus, Shaw's Creative Evolution might plausibly be characterized not only as non-ecological but as anti-ecological, purposefully minimizing biological diversity in the name of progressing beyond a material frame of reference.

Shaw's Critique of Humanism

Yet, as disdainful of ecology as this philosophy is, it cannot comfortably be characterized as anthropocentric. Shaw privileges humanity insofar as he considers it to be the most highly evolved species on Earth and, therefore, the species most likely to fulfill the dictates of Life Force. But he refuses the humanist convention of granting humanity special privilege purely on the grounds of its being "human." Life Force exists to realize the potential of Life. If humanity accomplishes that, so be it. If humanity does not, some other species will. In the speech that closes the text, Lilith asks, "Shall I bring forth something that will sweep [humanity] away and make an end of them as they have swept away the beasts of the garden, and make an end of the crawling things and the flying things and of all them that refuse to live for ever?" (298-99). Her question suggests that just as it is perfectly legitimate for humans to exterminate other life forms in their quest for a more advanced, spiritual existence, so too is it acceptable for her—for Life—to stamp out humanity if some other species proves more promising. Lilith is hopeful enough about the progress of humanity that she determines to be patient with the species. Nonetheless, she observes that "mightier creatures than [humans] have killed hope and faith, and perished from the earth; and I may not spare them for ever" (300). This is Lilith's appraisal of "these infants that call themselves ancients" (300). How contemptible, by these standards, is our "present day" humanity, depicted in The Gospel of the Brothers Barnabas!

In one respect at least, satire is the ideal rhetorical mode for conveying Lilith's message: satire mocks people and civilizations. It knocks us off our proverbial pedestal. This diminution of humanity is one of the central themes of Back to Methuselah. In the bickering of Adam and Eve and Cain, in the politics-as-usual of Burge and Lubin and their technologically-more-advanced-but-philosophically-identical descendant Burge-

Lubin, in the petty insults of the Elderly Gentleman, in Zoo's anger at those insults, in the Ancients' continuing imprisonment within the flesh, one message is clear: humanity is not good enough. Indeed, 30,000 years of projected, progressive evolution may well still find it lacking. Shaw states this point explicitly in his preface: "The power that produced Man when the monkey was not up to the mark, can produce a higher creature than Man if Man does not come up to the mark. What [this] means is that if Man is to be saved, Man must save himself" (xvii). Shaw's comparison between human and monkey evolution suggests that because Man has superseded the monkey, the monkey is no more than a remnant of a failed experiment with no real justification to persist. If this is a harsh pronouncement on the monkey, however, it is an equally harsh admonition for Man: become a better being or be destroyed.

This advice to the human race may be productive in at least two respects. For one thing, Shaw demands that we take personal responsibility for our own survival. Each individual can will him- or herself to become a better individual. Indeed, one of the allures of Shaw's Neo-Lamarckian view of evolution is the agency it grants each individual in the evolutionary process. Turco contends that "Shaw's deeply held belief in the self as the source of values was to receive its most direct and suggestive expression in the final sections of the Methuselah cycle [. . .]" (126). He goes on to cite as an example the He-Ancient's avowal to Acis that "you can create nothing but yourself" (Back 285). To those given to complaining about the state of civilization, Shaw asserts that "the pitiless reply is still that God helps those who help themselves" (xvii), surely as sound advice today as it was in 1920. A second potential benefit of Shaw's reasoning for a productive ecological discourse is his emphasis on humanity as a species. An ideology that tends to frame social questions in terms of the good of the species can, for instance, serve as a useful corrective to such phenomena as First World overconsumption, particularly when this discourse foregrounds the species without denying the importance of the individual self. Creative Evolution is a process in which individual Will and Life Force interact to enable individuals to make themselves into forms more in accord with the goals of Life Force. If enough individuals are successful in this endeavor, humanity

as a species will persist and progress. Thus, Shaw advises everyone to take responsibility for improving human life and to do so not only for his or her own sake but for the sake of all humanity and, indeed, of Life itself. Such a sense of personal responsibility both to self and to a larger context of Life might support a responsibility for maintaining the biosphere in a material sense.

But while Shaw may encourage a productive sense of species responsibility, he posits a dubious system for reform, one based on a faulty--and ecologically ignorant--theory of evolution. Shaw's narrative is not simplistic: his dramatic investment in the plight of those, like the Elderly Gentleman, who are evolutionarily superseded demonstrates that the evolutionary progress he advocates is not without negative consequences. Yet his dialectic insistence on presenting Creative Evolution as "correct" fails to engage with Neo-Darwinian objections that a more dialogic structure could have brought against it. In failing to address the ecological implications of his system, Shaw presents a utopian future that is not only unbelievable but troubling in its dismissal of the physical world.

Ultimately, it is Shaw's satirical undercutting of his own culture rather than his utopian imaginings that conveys the greatest rhetorical force in Back to Methuselah. While his case for Creative Evolution as a science is not compelling, his criticism of Neo-Darwinism as a discourse can be trenchant. Shaw may be overstepping the bounds of reasonable argument when he accounts for World War I by asserting that "Neo-Darwinism in politics had produced a European catastrophe of a magnitude so appalling, and a scope so unpredictable, that as I write these lines in 1920, it is still far from certain whether our civilization will survive it" (Back x). Nonetheless, Tom Shippey argues persuasively that "the negative prop of Shaw's argument [blaming Neo-Darwinism for the war] carries weight where the positive one [Creative Evolution] does not" (207). Neo-Darwinism may not have caused World War I, but there is, at least, a commonality between a scientific theory preoccupied with the struggle for survival and a political will determined to win an ill-advised war. Such connections highlight the functioning of Neo-Darwinism as a discourse. Even though Shaw does not effectively challenge Neo-

Darwinism as a scientific theory, his contention that it supports troubling sociological trends is worth considering. Thus, as a social critic, Shaw raises provocative questions about the desirability of numerous beliefs and practices.

Conclusion

If Back to Methuselah's weakness is its implausible and ecologically irresponsible argument for utopian reform, its strength is its culturally estranging rhetoric. To the extent that Shaw uses satire and reasoned argument to challenge the beliefs of his own (and our) culture, he demands independence of thought in his audience. He supports the questioning of ideas in general, even--perhaps unintentionally--of his own Creative Evolution. He assaults the complacency of a humanism that assumes humanity to be the pinnacle of creation or evolution. He confronts his audience with the idea that humanity may be headed for extinction, with no one to blame but itself. Though Back to Methuselah militates against a productive ecological praxis by denying the importance of ecological relationality to Life, the text's challenge to the notion of humanity's unassailable supremacy remains vital in an age in which nations still contribute to climate change, pollution, and nuclear proliferation with a tacit assumption that such practices cannot ultimately harm "us."

While Shaw combined admonitions against human complacency with aspirations for a utopian future, his long-time friend and Neo-Darwinian adversary, H. G. Wells, was more likely to reserve such admonitions for his dystopias. His utopias display a more unambivalent positivity, an assurance that humanity will ultimately triumph. But if Wells comes nearer than Shaw to a frank adulation of humanity, he places such adulation within a context that is assiduously ecological and scientifically astute. He may question humanity less than Shaw, but he values the non-human more. In "The Testament of H. G. Wells," Shaw describes the differences he perceived between his work and Wells's, concluding that "[t]hese differences between us are very fortunate; for our sermons

complement instead of repeating one another; you must read us both to become a complete Wellshavian" (qtd. in Smith 216). Taking this advice to heart, I devote the next chapter to an investigation of the ecological utopia of Wells.

NOTES

[1] Throughout the preface of Back to Methuselah, there is an undercurrent of desperation, a sense that civilization is in imminent danger of collapse. This desperation is principally motived by the calamity of World War I, which Shaw describes as "a European catastrophe of a magnitude so appalling, and a scope so unpredictable, that as I write these lines in 1920, it is still far from certain whether our civilization will survive it" (Back x). This sense of imminent threat lends a particular urgency to Shaw's project: if European society does not begin to reform itself now, his text suggests, it might soon be faced with cataclysmic consequences, as indeed it was in World War II. Today, a similar sense of desperation speaks to a pressing need for systemic social reform to confront the ramifications of exponential population growth, global climate change, and the nuclear age.

[2] This female reproductive agency is a central theme of Man and Superman, in which word "Superman" operates as a pun meaning simultaneously "Superior Man" and "Woman." In the play, the reproductive drive of Woman (represented principally by Ann) proves "superior" to the better judgment of Man (represented primarily by Jack Tanner), who longs to remain romantically unentangled but ultimately cannot resist the Life-Force-driven seduction of Woman. Over many generations, the end result of Woman's sexual conquest of Man will presumably be that other type of Superman, the more highly evolved human being. In Back to Methuselah, this essentialization of gender difference is more muted, strongly recapitulated only in the initial play.

[3] John Barnes argues that Shaw uses an analogic technique to establish a readily comprehensible line of reasoning as a basic pattern for defending lines of reasoning that are harder to understand (158-59). Thus, In the Beginning presents the Serpent (a "superior" figure) explaining the concepts of birth and death, basic concepts for us, to Eve (an "inferior" figure). This structure is recapitulated throughout the plays: the Barnabases explain the need for longevity to Burge and Lubin, and so on.

[4] This reading is supported in The Thing Happens by an analogy the Archbishop draws between longlivers like himself and H. G. Wells's Giants in The Food of the Gods: "You will still find, among the tales of that twentieth-century classic, Wells, a story of a race of men who grew twice as big as their fellows [. . . .] The big people had to fight the little people for their lives [. . . .] Wells's teaching, on that and other matters, was not lost on me" (131). Like one of Wells's Giants, the Archbishop understands that the "little" people will try to kill him once they realize that he is a longliver whose superiority challenges their reign. In The Food of the Gods, Wells uses the metaphor of physical bigness to signify moral "Greatness." There is no biological reason for Wells's Giants to be superior to their small forbearers. Their brains are the same, their thoughts and feelings; they are simply bigger. Similarly, Back to Methuselah is designed to suggest the biological superiority that Creative Evolution might confer without attempting to depict this evolutionary future literally.

[5] My quotations from Shaw's writings reflect his unconventional punctuation, including the omission of apostrophes from contractions.

[6] It is not only shortliving humans who pay the price for Life's progress. In As Far as Thought Can Reach, the He-Ancient states explicitly that dogs are extinct (Back 237). Now, Shaw had no great quarrel with dogs. In Everybody's Political What's What (1944), he expresses indignation that "science" endorses the cruel vivisection of such animals (211). But though Shaw had no wish to see dogs suffer, he nonetheless presents the possibility that evolutionary advancement will leave no place for them.

7 In this sense, Shaw's version of Creative Evolution differs from Bergson's. While Bergson conceived of his élan vital as a drive operating through the material world, in such processes as photosynthesis, for example, Shaw envisioned his Life Force more as an energy that can potentially completely reject the substrate of matter. In this denial of the final importance of matter, Shaw's Creative Evolution is more dismissive of ecological relationality than Bergson's.

8 So firmly did Shaw hold to this view that it led him to suggest to his friend, Wells, that Wells's wife, who in 1927 was dying of cancer, need simply will herself to be healthy again: "If Jane is curing herself--if she has given up making the wrong sort of tissue and is replacing it with the right sort--then you have nothing to do but encourage her [. . .]" (qtd. in Smith 130). Wells was so angered by this bit of advice that in a 1945 memoir of Shaw, he still recalled it with obvious distaste:

> [Shaw] was impelled to write that [the cancer] was stuff and nonsense on the part of my wife and imply that she would be much to blame if she died. There was no such thing as cancer, and so forth, and so on.
> This foolish bit of ruthlessness came to hand, and with it came a letter from Charlotte Shaw, his wife. I was not to mind what he had said, wrote Charlotte. I must not let it hurt either him or myself. (qtd. in Smith 221)

Charlotte Shaw, indeed, had leapt into the breach, explaining that "[Shaw] must sometimes let himself go in this aggravating way--& he means it all so more than well! He is very fond of you and Jane" (qtd. in Smith 133). The well-meaning naivete with which Shaw went about offending his grieving Neo-Darwinian friend serves as ample illustration of the conviction with which he believed in a Creative Evolution that defied both the science and common sense of his own time. His faith, presented in Back to Methuselah, that Life could ultimately transcend physical limitation was quite literal and sincere.

9 Not every version of Creative Evolution implies a Shavian attitude toward the material ecological world. In Chapter 1, I cite Bergson's Creative Evolution as a discourse that places greater emphasis on ecological relations than Shaw's, both "pragmatically" highlighting the importance of ecology for human evolution and "empathetically" suggesting a positive regard for nature. In a typical example of his rhetoric in Creative Evolution, Bergson asserts, "The organized world as a whole becomes the soil on which was to grow either man himself or a being who morally must resemble him. The animals, however distant they may be from our species, however hostile to it, have none the less been useful traveling companions [. . .]" (266-67). His theory of evolution, here, is very like Shaw's: both consider humanity as--up till now--Life Force's greatest achievement in expanding consciousness. Yet Bergson's language contrasts notably with Shaw's. While Shaw seldom makes reference to the ecological world save in passing or to speak of transcending it, Bergson emphasizes the world as a whole as the "soil" essential to bringing about our development through Life Force, invoking a profoundly material and relational metaphor for our growth as a species. He calls other animals our "useful companions" on a journey toward the realization of Life Force's potential, suggesting an amicable as well as productive relationship. On the whole, Bergson's concern with non-human life renders his evolutionary discourse more amenable than Shaw's to ecological application.

10 George Slusser reads Lilith's speech as a sign that Shaw considers the Ancients' evolution to have proceeded in the wrong direction: "[Lilith] sees generations now frozen like statues. She alone realizes that, if the vital force is to flow again, she must, by an act of creative will, labor and bear once more" (136). On a literal level, this is a misrepresentation of the text. Lilith does not say that she must labor once more. Instead, she rhetorically asks whether she must and determines to hold the question in abeyance: "I will have patience with [the Ancients] still [. . .]" (Back 300). On a thematic level, Slusser has misunderstood Shaw's objective. As Shaw's letter to Robert Thomson, which I have quoted, evidences, he was not holding the Ancients' progress up to ridicule but rather presenting it--albeit metaphorically--as a positive step in the progress of Life Force.

CHAPTER 4

NO PLACE FOR GNATS

THE ANTHROPOCENTRICALLY ECOCENTRIC UTOPIA OF H. G. WELLS'S

MEN LIKE GODS

The air was free from gnats, the earth from weeds and fungi; everywhere
were fruits and sweet and delightful flowers; brilliant butterflies flew
hither and thither.

H. G. Wells's The Time Machine (49)

"Odd that there are no swallows," said Mr. Mush suddenly in Mr.
Barnstaple's ear. "I wonder why there are no swallows."

Mr. Barnstaple's attention went to the empty sky. "No gnats or
flies perhaps," he suggested.

H. G. Wells's Men Like Gods (43)

Introduction

In many respects, H. G. Wells dystopian novella, The Time Machine (1895), and
his utopian novel, Men Like Gods (1923), function as complements. The Time Machine
presents a failed garden utopia, Men Like Gods a garden utopia that is succeeding. In the
later utopia, Wells attempts to provide solutions to the problems delineated in the earlier
dystopia. In addition to addressing problems, however, Men Like Gods also expands and
explains practices that, in Wells's view, the utopians of The Time Machine handled well,
particularly ecological management. Both books endorse the subjugation of nature by
presenting scenarios in which it has been (The Time Machine) or can be (Men Like
Gods) successfully accomplished. But while The Time Machine spares merely a few
lines to assert that this subjugation has succeeded, Men Like Gods examines a detailed
program for undertaking the endeavor.

In both books, rhetorical structure shapes ecological discourse. The Time Machine's sparse engagement with ecology is enabled by a substantially univocal rhetoric that offers few opportunities for ecological questions to be probed. Conversely, in Men Like Gods, Utopia's profound ecological consciousness is explicated and reinforced by a dialectic rhetorical structure in which various objections to the Utopian view are put forward so that they can be refuted. By using oppositional voices not to challenge but to bolster the text's dominant discourse, however, this structure excludes voices whose challenges to Utopia might prove unanswerable. Eliding the more serious objections to Utopia, the text produces the illusion that science itself justifies Utopian ideology. The lack of discursive challenge to Utopian ideology, in turn, allows the text to characterize a radically anthropocentric project of ecological domination as unquestionably "correct." But if the text's dialectic rhetoric effaces certain objections, it, nonetheless, engages with others. Thus, this dialectic operates as an incipient dialogism, opening up discursive spaces for the examination of some potential problems with the Utopian system, even as it refuses to acknowledge others. The productivity of this multivocality is particularly evident when juxtaposed with the more limited, largely univocal discourse of The Time Machine.

In this chapter, therefore, I compare the ecological discourses of The Time Machine and Men Like Gods, arguing that the multivocality in Men Like Gods supports a far more detailed exploration of ecological relationality. Despite the relative complexity of its ecological discourse, however, the later text's rejection of dialogism ultimately allows its dubious anthropocentrism to pass uninterrogated. As a text that is at once highly ecologically aware and devoutly anthropocentric, Men Like Gods exposes the limitations of the pragmatic ecocentrism I describe in chapter 1, enacting what I term an "anthropocentric ecocentrism," which centralizes issues of ecosystemic health but does so solely to benefit the human species. In Men Like Gods, a rejection of dialogic critique permits the retention of internal inconsistencies in this Utopian ideology. These

inconsistencies, in turn, illustrate how anthropocentrism reinforces a potentially dangerous disregard for ecological complexity even within a scientific framework that is ecologically well informed.

Wells's Anthropocentric Ecocentrism

In the early twentieth century, Wells was a significant force for the dissemination of ecological thinking. In particular, Peder Anker observes, "Wells's popular books and lectures help explain why the acceptance of ecological reasoning in general and human ecology in particular gained momentum in the 1930s" (197). Wells's own thinking about nature and human society was profoundly relational. Indeed, the concept of "human ecology" contends that all human social activity participates in the larger context of ecological relationships, thus hybridizing the purified discourses of "Nature" and "Society" that Bruno Latour describes. A radical position in Wells's own time, even today, this notion that economy is ecology is globally marginalized, despite a growing understanding that human economy cannot persist without ecological sustainability. As an advocate of human ecology, Wells was an inveterate and influential "ecocentrist": to invoke my own working definition of the term, he was primarily concerned with how activities affect systems.

But if Wells articulated a hybrid discourse that collapses distinctions between human society and ecological relationality, he simultaneously retained a purified discourse of humanity as categorically distinct from everything non-human. Indeed, Wells was an extreme anthropocentrist, his moral system oriented almost entirely around the interests of humanity. To improve human society, he considered most any other life form potentially expendable, even if its extermination would accomplish nothing more than making humans a little more comfortable. In my epigraphs for this chapter, for example, I submit Wells's reiteration of the idea that a utopia will extirpate gnats. The main problem with gnats is that they swarm annoyingly around one's face. The fact that Wells evidently considered this annoyance sufficient justification for the extermination of these insects--and that he apparently persisted in this view from at least 1895 to 1923--

illustrates the extent to which he was attached to a value system that places human advantage above any intrinsic value in other life forms. In two areas only does Wells grant non-humans moral consideration. First, he is inclined to grant "human rights" to any hypothetical species more "advanced" than humans, hence his moral ambivalence toward the seemingly monstrous Martians in The War of the Worlds. Second, he does not condone the senseless suffering of any animal. Wells is consistent in this view, whether he is condemning the brutality of a Moreau or holding forth on the need to remove suffering for "any creature" in Men Like Gods. Apart from these provisos, Wells's anthropocentrism is total.

This marriage of radical ecocentrism and radical anthropocentrism makes Wells an ideal test case for the pragmatic definition of ecocentrism that I put forward in chapter 1. In that chapter, I argue for a suspension of definitions of ecocentrism that require adherence to a particular set of values, such as deep ecology's belief in nature's intrinsic rights. Instead, I propose an ecocentrism defined solely by systems-oriented thinking, even where the goal of such thinking is the preservation of the biosphere for humanity. Wells offers a case study of the uses and limits of this pragmatic definition. To an extent, Wells's anthropocentric ecocentrism is, indeed, conducive to maintaining a healthy biosphere. Wells did not need to care about the rights of anything non-human in order to advocate many positions that would be consistent with Green politics today: he supported sustainable living, population control, and a regard for the complexities involved in altering ecological relationships. His concept of utopia typically embraces what I call "sustainable change." Describing his utopian philosophy, Wells reflects in Mind at the End of Its Tether (1945): "[I]t was natural for him [Wells] to assume that [. . .] new things would appear, but that they would appear consistently, preserving the natural sequence of life. So that in the present vast confusion of our world, there was always the assumption of an ultimate restoration of rationality, an adaptation and resumption" (5). Change is constant, but change itself naturally occurs in consistent patterns that enable life to adapt and persist. Change naturally is--and should remain-- sustainable.

Yet while Wells's ecocentrism in many ways supports a sustainable ecological praxis, this concern with sustainability is undermined by his anthropocentrism. In assuming that humanity has a self-evident right to manipulate the non-human world for its own ends while granting little sense of intrinsic worth to the non-human, Wells endorses the massive alteration of the biosphere for the enhancement of human life. However, the same anthropocentrism that characterizes this project as desirable supports a dangerous underestimation of the practical difficulties involved in it. Anthropocentrism tends to dismiss the non-human as simple: too simple to be of much intrinsic interest and simple enough to be manipulated with relative ease. Men Like Gods dramatically illustrates this tendency toward oversimplification. Though the book is deeply concerned with ecological complexity, its anthropocentric bent, nonetheless, sabotages its engagement with the implications of this complexity. If ecological oversimplification is evident in Men Like Gods, however, it is more extreme in The Time Machine.

Univocality and the Effacement of Ecology in The Time Machine

By examining ecological discourse in The Time Machine, I intend to highlight the relative ecological sophistication of Men Like Gods, while tracing how problematic ideological assumptions in the earlier text remain an impediment to ecological understanding in the later text. One of Wells's most famous dystopias, The Time Machine recounts a Time Traveller's journey into the year 802,701 A.D. When the Time Traveller first arrives in this balmy world populated by carefree, jolly little people, he believes he has encountered a pastoral, communist utopia, a play on the Morrisian idyll. He soon discovers, however, that his initial impression is mistaken. Far from being a product of communism, this future society is the product of capitalist exploitation. Over millennia, a sharp class division between aristocrats and workers has separated humanity into the childlike Eloi and the monstrous Morlocks. Having lived under circumstances of ease and abundance for thousands of years, the Eloi have lost the physical and intellectual strengths that the struggle for survival selects for; indeed, natural selection has promoted indolence, for "[u]nder the new conditions of perfect comfort and security, that restless

energy, that with us is strength, would become weakness [. . . .] [F]or the strong would be fretted by an energy for which there was no outlet" (50). For the Eloi, energy is maladaptive, a disturbance to the indolent majority. Thus, energetic individuals would likely be ostracized, a process that would create sexual and social selection against energetic traits. The Morlocks are also a product of natural selection, their eyes suited to the dark underground they inhabit, their cannibalistic tastes shaped by the availability of the Eloi as a food source. Although they retain more intelligence than the Eloi, the Morlocks, too, have mentally degenerated, their intellect reduced to a rudimentary mechanical talent and a predatory cunning. Because humanity has lost the intelligence to plan for the future of the planet, the ultimate outcome of this scenario can only be the death of all life on Earth. Millions of years in the future, the Time Traveller visits a frigid, twilight Earth populated only by "a round thing, the size of a football [. . .] hopping fitfully about" in the shallows of the sea (93). Eventually, the death of the sun will render Earth uninhabitable, and with no human race to expand life into space, terrestrial life will end.

The Time Machine illustrates a worst-case scenario arising from two central social problems: bourgeois exploitation of the working class and a complacent disregard for the need to plan for humanity's evolutionary future. In broad terms, the lessons implicit in this dystopia are clear: if we are to guard ourselves against the degeneration of our species, humanity must eliminate the sharp division of the human race into exploited and exploiters; furthermore, it must not leave human evolution to the mercy of natural selection.

But while, as a cautionary tale, The Time Machine is a dystopia, it is set against the backdrop of a utopian habitat. The human race has devolved, but the paradisal land humanity once created remains remarkably paradisal in 802,701 A.D., presenting the appearance of "a tangled waste of beautiful bushes and flowers, a long-neglected and yet

weedless garden" (44). Conjecturing about the conditions that led to the seeming garden paradise of the Eloi, the Time Traveller posits a successful program of biological management:

> In the end, wisely and carefully, we shall readjust the balance of animal and vegetable life to suit our needs.
> This adjustment, I say, must have been done, and done well; done indeed for all Time, in the space of Time across which my machine had leaped. (49)

The Time Traveller characterizes the development of the "garden" as the utopian triumph of the subjugation of nature, a triumph that, he asserts, has been accomplished "for all Time." Indeed, the stability of this garden is remarkable. Given the current evolutionary state of the Eloi and Morlocks, we must assume that this garden has been "neglected" for many thousands of years, yet the forces of natural selection have apparently not devolved any of humanity's carefully bred plant species into "weeds." As far as the Time Traveller can tell, no new diseases have appeared to replace those once stamped out (49). Aside from appearing rather overgrown, the garden has retained its agreeably managed state without actual management. It is as if the evolutionary forces that have transmuted the Eloi and Morlocks into their present forms have ceased to operate on the rest of Earth's ecology. In the time of the Eloi and Morlocks, most species on Earth appear to have come close to achieving what we know today as Hardy-Weinberg equilibrium, hypothetical conditions under which evolution within a population will not occur (Price 316).

But though this garden appears almost to have attained a self-sustaining ecological stasis point, it is not ultimately unchanging. The final section of the book shows the whole landscape degenerating into a cold, lifeless wasteland as the sun slowly burns out, an image that contradicts the Time Traveller's assertion that "this adjustment [. . .] must have been done [. . .] for all Time." The Time Traveller's final vision of a frigid, almost lifeless Earth, is proof that the conquest of nature has not been permanent. This inconsistency might, at first, appear insignificant. The Time Traveller's meaning, after all, is plain: the ancestors of the Eloi and Morlocks did devise a garden utopia that

required minimal management for thousands of years. This is a monumental achievement, even though the inevitable demise of the Earth dictates that it cannot be everlasting. The Time Traveller's pronouncement that the change has been made "for all Time" can be read as merely a bit of hyperbole designed to praise these ecological engineers.

But, in fact, this moment of exaggerated praise is symptomatic of The Time Machine's underestimation of the difficulties involved in the subjugation of nature. Within the book's narrative frame, the Time Traveller's pronouncement is peculiar. His discussion of his adventures in the future takes place after his return. His most recent experience of the future, in fact, has been not the paradisal "garden" of the Eloi but the bleak, dying world whose existence he, nonetheless, seemingly forgets in his discussion of nature's "wise and careful" subjugation. This forgetting indicates an optimism that is out of keeping with the primary narrator's description of the Time Traveller's general view of the future: "[The Time Traveller], I know--for the question had been discussed among us long before the Time Machine was made--thought but cheerlessly of the Advancement of Mankind, and saw in the growing pile of civilization only a foolish heaping that must inevitably fall back upon and destroy its makers in the end" (Time 98). Yet the Time Traveller's pessimism vanishes when he speaks of controlling animal and vegetable life.

Wells probably did not intend this slip into optimism to be thematically significant. He gives no indication that he was aware of any inconsistency between the Time Traveller's praise for the subjugation of nature and his observations of the dying Earth, nor does any character comment on the Time Traveller's unusual optimism on the topic of ecological management. These apparently inadvertent inconsistencies, therefore, suggest a lack of deep engagement with ecological questions on both the Time Traveller's part and Wells's. The conquest of nature is not at issue. On the contrary, the text assumes that it is desirable and practicable. Indeed, not only does the Time Traveller state that this readjustment of life has been done "for all Time" (though manifestly it has not); he also tells us that it has been done "wisely and carefully." It is curious to see the

same society that allowed an unjust capitalist division of labor to degenerate their race into infantile fools and cannibalistic monsters described as "wise and careful." While marshaling the forces of evolution to advance humanity was a feat beyond these people, total mastery of the rest of biological life was evidently smoothly achieved. This contrast implies that humanity is complex, the rest of nature comparatively simple.

Implausible as this scenario is, its occurrence in Wells's 1895 novella is not surprising. Wells's assumption of the relative simplicity of nature reflects the prevailing view of his Victorian society. The Victorians commonly assumed that the natural world could be readily understood and prudently managed by humanity.[1] In chapter 2, I discuss how the imminence of the conquest of nature is put forward even by so respectful a disciple of "Nature" as William Morris in his 1884 lecture, "Useful Work versus Useless Toil." This faith in humanity's ability to control nature is supported by a belief that the human mind is more complex than nature's systems: complex enough to manage them better than "Nature" does. This complexity is often figured as an indication of human superiority not only in degree but in kind. Charles Darwin's co-contributor to the theory of evolution by natural selection, Alfred Russel Wallace, for example, contends in Darwinism (1889) that humans "possess intellectual and moral faculties which could not have been [. . .] developed [by natural selection], but must have had another origin; and for this origin we can only find an adequate cause in the unseen universe of spirit" (478). The human spirit is the only phenomenon Wallace describes as defying materialist explanation. Wells's mentor, T. H. Huxley, echoes this belief in Evolution and Ethics (1893-94). Like Wallace (and unlike Darwin), Huxley contends that human behavior cannot be explained in purely evolutionary terms. For Huxley, humanity is driven by an "ethical process" deriving from God that counters the "cosmic process" of the survival of the fittest: natural selection makes humans (and other animals) competitive and aggressive, but a divinely bestowed spirit makes (only) humans capable of altruistic behavior as well.

In his prolegomena to Evolution and Ethics (1894), Huxley implicitly invokes this ontological division between humans and other life forms to justify the transformation of

the Earth into a managed garden, "where every plant and every lower animal should be adapted to human wants, and would perish if human supervision and protection were withdrawn" (20). What Huxley goes on to characterize as the potential "serpent" in this "Eden" is not desire to subjugate the environment but the Malthusian tendency of humans to reproduce excessively and the temptation to manage this problem eugenically (20-21). According to Huxley, humanity is too complex for eugenics to be practicable:

> I doubt whether even the keenest judge of character, if he had before him a hundred boys and girls under fourteen, could pick out, with the least chance of success, those who should be kept, as certain to be serviceable members of the polity, and those who should be chloroformed, as equally sure to be stupid, idle or vicious. The "points" of a good or of a bad citizen are really far harder to discern than those of a puppy or a short-horn calf [. . . .] (23)

The implication, again, is that while the rest of nature is simple enough to be readily understood and manipulated, humanity is not. This dichotomy is facilitated by Huxley's lack of ecological contextualizing. He compares the selective breeding of humans to the selective breeding of dogs and cattle: a species compared to other species. He does not relate the management of human evolution to the management of an entire system: a species compared to a forest, for example. Though Huxley was well aware that natural selection is a product of selective forces at work in the environment, he does not describe the relationality among these forces as central to the functioning of a managed nature. In fact, his contention that "Eden" would be a place in which plants and animals would die without continual human intervention suggests that he considered the adaptation of each organism to human needs more important than the maintenance of functional webs of relations. Huxley's lack of ecological awareness is a product of his time: it would be demanding a great deal to ask him to write extensively about ecosystems some forty years before the word was coined.

Likewise, Wells's relative deemphasis on ecology in The Time Machine is understandable. In the 1890s, ecology was in the first stages of becoming an established science. Yet though Wells's ecological discourse in The Time Machine is in its infancy, he already shows signs of moving beyond Huxley in his capacity for relational thinking.

Despite being strongly influenced by Huxley, Wells rejected his mentor's ontological division between humans and other life forms. For Wells, the division between "cosmic" and "ethical" processes did not exist: as with other species, all human drives, including the will to develop ethical systems, were produced solely by natural selection.[2] Thus, there is no divine spiritual essence preventing the degeneration of humanity into Eloi and Morlocks: degeneration will progress as far as selective pressures drive it. One effect of this non-disjunction between humans and the rest of nature is Wells's willingness to endorse eugenics. If the natural world, in general, can be managed, then humanity can be as well; indeed, it must be if evolutionary degeneration is to be prevented. On the question of eugenics, most of us living in the post-Holocaust world would side with Huxley more than Wells. In refusing a strict separation between humanity and other species, however, Wells productively adopts a more ecologically oriented world view than Huxley. For Wells, everything the human species is can be explained in terms of relational tensions between humanity and its environment. Insofar as it discusses human evolution, therefore, The Time Machine is exceptionally ecological: every aspect of the development of the Eloi and Morlocks is explained relationally: as a matter of the availability of food, of the clemency of the climate, of the influence of the Eloi and Morlocks on each other, and so on. All these environmental factors combine to produce the two strains of humanity the Time Traveller encounters.

Even the slight attention the Time Traveller pays to the development of the Eloi's garden habitat suggests an assumption of ecological relationality. When the Time Traveller asserts that humanity will "readjust the balance of animal and vegetable life" (Time 49, my emphasis), he invokes the homoestasis principle that would later typify Arthur Tansley's ecosystem concept. Moreover, the Time Traveller shows an explicit awareness that the actions of all the participants within a habitat affect that habitat. He observes, for example, that due to the elimination of numerous decomposers, such as fungi, from the environment, "the processes of putrefaction and decay had been

profoundly affected [. . .]" (49). The elimination of many forms of fungi is an endeavor of ecological consequence, one of the factors in the "readjustment" of relations among life forms.

But just how such readjustments have been made is not explained. After his initial mention of the alteration of processes of decay, for instance, the Time Traveller never alludes to it again. While he invokes an underlying principle of ecology to explain the Eloi's garden, the text fails to apply the rigor of his analysis of the ecological relations that generated the Eloi and Morlocks to the ecological relations that would constitute the rest of the environment. Wells's garden paradise is not Huxley's "Eden": far from needing continual human maintenance, the world of the Eloi has maintained its own ecological stability for thousands of years. Yet like Huxley, the Time Traveller (and, by implication, Wells) still assumes that the conquest of nature will be comparatively "simple." Indeed, the very depiction of this "garden" as almost insusceptible to evolutionary change suggests an assumption that ecological stability is easy to maintain.

This dismissal of a complex non-human world is enabled by a predominantly univocal rhetoric that relies almost solely on the Time Traveller to explicate the Earth's future. This univocality is certainly not total. The Time Machine is, in fact, narrated by two people: the Time Traveller and the primary narrator, who is one of the guests present at the Time Traveller's recounting of his adventures. The primary narrator frames the first person narrative the Time Traveller delivers. And while the primary narrator is seldom present as a voice himself, his slight commentary, nonetheless, distinguishes him from the Time Traveller. The former is an optimist, the latter a pessimist. Though the Time Traveller thinks "but cheerlessly of the Advancement of Mankind," the primary narrator avers that "to me the future is still black and blank [. . .]" (98); in other words, the future is not preordained, the decline into dystopia not inevitable. The tension between these two voices complicates the Time Traveller's narrative. Is the bleak future that the Time Traveller has seen indelible, or is it a call for utopian thinkers to stave off

such a fate? The multivocality of this structure, however, is limited. The primary narrator offers no critique of the Time Traveller's tale beyond his slightly more hopeful interpretation of it.

There are other voices in The Time Machine, but the text openly advertises that they are not to be considered full human subjects. Almost all of them are indicated by allegorical labels rather than names: the Editor, the Psychologist, the Medical Man. They are examples of types, not individuals. Their main function is to represent a complacent Victorian bourgeoisie that foolishly refuses to accept the legitimacy of the Time Traveller's warnings. When the Time Traveller asks what his audience thinks of his story, not as a true account but as a speculation, the only response he gets is the Editor remarking, "What a pity it is you're not a writer of stories!" (95). The joke is obvious: this is a written story and a fine one at that! Within the narrative itself, however, this refusal even to engage with the Time Traveller's tale as a vehicle for social critique expresses the gathering's naive feeling that the Time Traveller has been spinning them a jolly yarn with no possible relevance to human society. The remaining characters, of course, are explicitly not human subjects: the Eloi and the Morlocks are given no dialogue. Although the Time Traveller learns the Eloi's simplistic language, even the single named Eloi character, the Time Traveller's companion, Weena, apparently says nothing worth recording. The Time Traveller never learns the language of the Morlocks.

The different perspectives present in The Time Machine can be categorized thus: the Time Traveller, who is the protagonist and central point of view of the story; the primary narrator, who is rather more optimistic but basically agrees with the Time Traveller's views (even if he doubts the literal veracity of his story); the rest of the Time Traveller's audience, who represent the average narrow-minded, middle-class Victorian; the Eloi, who are like foolish five-year-old children, and the Morlocks, who are not linguistically accessible. Given this array of characters, it is almost inevitable that no voice should arise to legitimately question the Time Traveller's suppositions about the future. To his credit, the Time Traveller manages a great deal of questioning on his own, working through several hypotheses about the development of humanity before hitting

upon what he considers the right answer. Yet since his--and Wells's--focus is on human evolution rather than broader ecological relationships, the Time Traveller does not apply the same skepticism to his analysis of the creation of the garden-environment. And because Wells does not adopt a rhetoric that encourages others to question the Time Traveller, the structure of the text does not demand extensive investigation of the Time Traveller's view of the conquest of nature. Thus, when the Time Traveller proclaims that the readjustment of the balance of life has been accomplished "for all time," there is no one to point out to him that his own narrative contradicts this.

Dialectic Support for the Conquest of Nature in Men Like Gods

Ideologically, The Time Machine and Men Like Gods are almost identical: the former enacts the horrors of rejecting a certain model of human advancement, the latter the rewards of embracing that model. In this ideology, progress is the guiding principle. In his better known work, A Modern Utopia (1905), Wells contrasts his utopian vision with Thomas More's Utopia: "[T]he Modern Utopia must be not static but kinetic, must shape not as a permanent state but as a hopeful stage, leading to a long ascent of stages" (Ch. 1, Sec. 1). In the Wellsian utopia, this "ascent" involves bettering human life and deepening human knowledge by instituting a welfare state that cares for everyone's basic needs while encouraging each person to foster his or her individual talents for the good of society. Such a utopia places a premium on scientific education, which Wells perceived as the cornerstone of a rational world state. The "ascent" must also include evolutionary advancement, and because the elimination of conditions of natural struggle will undercut the progressive agency of natural selection, a Wellsian utopia advocates some sort of eugenics.[3] John Partington argues that as a kinetic utopia, A Modern Utopia revises The Time Machine by providing a hopeful, progressionist alternative to the earlier text's failed static utopia.[4] I contend that Men Like Gods similarly functions as a response to The Time Machine but does so with a greater emphasis on the intricacies of ecological management. [5]

In Men Like Gods, Wells presents a Utopia that has avoided the fate of the Eloi and Morlocks by refusing to exploit a laboring class and adopting a mild form of negative eugenics to ensure that the human race continues to advance instead of degenerating. This Utopia exists in a parallel dimension to the 1920s England of the novel's protagonist, utopian thinker Mr. Barnstaple. When Mr. Barnstaple, along with a few Earthling companions, stumbles into this other dimension, he begins a journey of discovery akin to that of the Time Traveller. For while Utopia does not exist in the future of Earth, it is a society that represents a more advanced stage of human civilization. In its past, Utopia has suffered from and surmounted many of the afflictions of terrestrial society, including wars, economic exploitation, and overpopulation. Mr. Barnstaple embraces Utopian wisdom, while his fellow Earthlings are inclined to reject it. Thus, when the Earthlings are quarantined to prevent the spread of an epidemic caused by Earth microbes to which the Utopians have no natural immunity,[6] the Earthlings--minus Mr. Barnstaple--foolishly declare war on the Utopians. Before they can do much damage, however, the Utopians send them to another dimension, retaining only Mr. Barnstaple, whom they eventually return to England, where he resumes his life, refreshed and optimistic.

Men Like Gods is concerned with developing a Utopia that a rational thinker like Mr. Barnstaple will consider workable. To make a case that this Utopia is plausible, the text must describe Utopian practices in detail. It is never more detailed than in its discussion of the subjugation of nature. Indeed, in his 1986 paper, "H. G. Wells and Ecology," W. M. S. Russell singles out Men Like Gods as a text ahead of its time in its "far-sighted" principles for ecological management (150), which generate a "planned and landscaped environment of utopia which would [. . .] bear study by conservationists today" (148).[7] Though Wells's support for ecological control in Men Like Gods remains as enthusiastic as it was in The Time Machine, the later text demonstrates an enhanced awareness of the difficulties inherent in this task. Much of this heightened awareness is due to advances in the science of ecology and to an intensification of Wells's own concern with ecological questions between the 1890s and 1920s. Throughout the 1920s

and '30s, Wells became increasingly invested in the concept of "human ecology," or social economics (Anker 113).[8] In the influential popular science text, The Science of Life (1930), which Wells coauthored with his son, G. P. Wells, and Julian Huxley (grandson of Thomas Henry), ecology is described as "an extension of economics to the whole world of life" (961). "Human ecology" encapsulates the idea that all human activities--as well as non-human activities--have ecological implications. Industry, family structure, forms of government, educational institutions, balance of trade: all these things are part of Earth's ecology and have an ecological impact.

In Men Like Gods, this awareness of the interconnectedness of human and non-human agencies is mobilized to explain the conquest of nature sketchily outlined in The Time Machine. Though the Utopians are sensitive to the intricacy of ecological relations, they, nonetheless, wholeheartedly endorse human domination of nature. The basic Utopian assumption is that a biosphere, while extraordinarily complex, is not so complex that human science is incapable of comprehending and controlling it. The Utopians pursue the subjugation of nature by rigorously studying the ways in which life forms interact. Species that are harmful or unpleasant to humans may be exterminated but only if their loss will not occasion disproportionately negative ecological consequences. Thus, each unwanted species is "put upon [its] trial" (72) to determine if it can justify its existence in terms of human needs:

> Of each [species] it was asked: What good is it? What harm does it do?
> How can it be extirpated? What else may go with it if it goes? Is it worth
> while wiping it out of existence? Or can it be mitigated and retained?
> And even when the verdict was death final and complete, Utopia set about
> the business of extermination with great caution. A reserve would be kept
> and was in many cases still being kept, in some secure isolation, of every
> species condemned. (72)

The Utopians' ideology is unambivalently anthropocentric: principally concerned with the utility of organisms for human society, expressing little sense of intrinsic value in the non-human world. Their hesitation to exterminate species is primarily utilitarian. Species exist within webs of ecological relation; other species "may go with [a species] if it goes." To destroy a species is always to run the risk of upsetting these relations in

unexpected ways potentially deleterious to humanity. Therefore, it is in humanity's interest to limit such unforeseen disruptions by limiting species extinction. The "reserve" of an exterminated species is kept not out of a sense of the species's right to exist but as a precautionary measure should unexpected ecological instabilities require its reintroduction. Thus, the Utopians' anthropocentric praxis is informed by an extensive understanding of ecology.

The emphasis on ecology in Men Like Gods is doubtless more a result of Wells's growing interest in ecological questions than a product of a particular rhetorical paradigm. Nonetheless, the development of the Utopians' painstaking program of ecological management is enhanced by a multivocal rhetoric. While the univocal structure of The Time Machine militates against the examination of issues, including ecology, that are not a focus of concern to the Time Traveller, the relative multivocality of Men Like Gods opens up spaces for the examination of ecological questions through argument among different viewpoints. This multivocal structure is essentially dialectic, using oppositional viewpoints to support a certain position by providing a space for counter-arguments to be presented and refuted.

If Bakhtinian dialogism celebrates the power of heteroglossia to unravel dominant discourses, Men Like Gods is not dialogic. Its multivocality is designed to fortify the dominant Utopian discourse, not problematize it. Yet, as I argue in chapter 1, dialectical and dialogic processes are not categorically distinct but rather exist at different points along a continuum of multivocal rhetorics. In dialectic discourse, oppositional voices are intended to endorse the dominance of a certain view; in dialogic discourse, the emphasis shifts to challenging dominance. In both cases, however, the rhetorical structures acknowledge the value of conflicting perspectives to attaining a deeper understanding of an issue. Thus, the dialectic structure of Men Like Gods constitutes an incipient dialogism. Like a dialogic rhetoric, this structure recognizes the necessity of allowing diverse voices to be heard.

The rhetorical structure of Men Like Gods differs from a fully dialogic rhetoric, however, in its adherence to a paradigm in which all viewpoints can be resolved into a

single, "correct" answer. Heteroglossia describes a type of discursive milieu in which different "languages" are always, to some extent, incompatible. Some beliefs, some needs, some types of understanding will always be in conflict with others. Thus, dialogism posits that irreducible discursive difference is a precondition at least of modern society, if not all human society. The rhetoric of Men Like Gods does not accept this assumption. Instead, the text adopts a discursive structure that is an inevitable consequence of Wells's scientific positivism. If science can uncover definitive answers not only to physical but even to social questions, then a single language must be able to express those answers definitively. Now, scientific discovery itself thrives on dialogic challenge: the more rigorously a hypothesis or experimental procedure is questioned, the more reliable the conclusions will be. Thus, tested in the crucibles both of methodological rigor and dialogic investigation, experiments or even theories may be reported in a relatively "objective" language and determined to be provisionally correct. But the further removed from a concrete application of the scientific method a report becomes, the more likely it will reflect ideological vicissitudes. And when science is called upon to prescribe ethics, as Wells's scientific positivism demands, the scientific method, designed to determine how things occur, not whether they should, cannot be applied at all. By positing one "correct" language, however, Wells's positivism rejects the ideological dimension of ethical discourse. Dialogism and scientific positivism are, thus, incommensurate ideas. As a scientific-positivist text, Men Like Gods must either present different perspectives as reconcilable (reducible to one perspective) or as correct versus incorrect.

Presenting science as a reliable standard of correctness, Men Like Gods voices an array of perspectives through several named characters--both Earthlings and Utopians-- who are more or less distinct from each other, if not deeply developed. The story is recounted from the third person point of view of utopian dreamer Mr. Barnstaple. Like William Morris's William Guest, Mr. Barnstaple is the outsider to Utopia who is, nonetheless, already mostly converted to Utopian wisdom before the fact. Though Mr. Barnstaple has numerous questions for the Utopians, he is almost always willing to

accept their answers at face value. Consistently presented as the most insightful of the Earthlings, he functions as "yes-man" to the Utopians. Of their program of ecological domination, for example, he thinks that "it seemed to him the most natural and necessary phase in human history" (74); this response is typical of his attitude toward Utopia. The remainder of the Earthlings represent either caricatures of prominent British political figures (Mr. Catskill is Winston Churchill, for instance) or caricatures of types (the two chauffeurs are stereotypical cockneys). Some of these characters are merely contemptible: the prudish clergyman Amerton is despised not only by the Utopians but by his fellow Earthlings. Yet others, despite the element of parody in their presentation, are far from complete imbeciles. Wells's example of average womanhood, Lady Stella, has flashes of a mild insight; she, at least, is able to admit what Wells presents as unvarnished truth: "We are inferior creatures [to the Utopians]" (117). The Utopians are presented as wiser than the Earthlings yet are also less clearly differentiated. This lack of differentiation is almost certainly not an intended theme: Wells's concept of utopia is designed to foster a strong strain of individuality. Nonetheless, with the exception of the "backward" (183) Utopian woman, Lychnis, who is unhealthily preoccupied with death and sorrow, the perspectives of the adult Utopians are more or less interchangeable. Even with this rather "flat" array of characters, however, the conflict between Utopian perspectives and Earthling perspectives requires the Utopians to defend the wisdom of their system. And if this defense is not always rigorous, it nevertheless demands a more sophisticated explication of the subjugation of nature than The Time Machine.

A crucial objection to the Utopians' system of ecological management is put forward by the sentimental aesthete aptly named Freddy Mush. Mr. Mush is concerned that the Utopians have upset what he calls the "Balance of Nature," though "[w]hat this Balance of Nature of his was, and how it worked on Earth, neither the Utopians nor Mr. Barnstaple were able to understand very clearly" (72). Nor is Mr. Mush able to explain it: "Under cross-examination Mr. Mush grew pink and restive and his eyeglass flashed defensively. 'I hold by the swallows,' he repeated. 'If you can't see my point about that I don't know what else I can say'" (72). By "holding by the swallows," Mr Mush means

that he interprets the absence of swallows in Utopia as a sign that these birds have been driven to extinction; their extinction, in turn, must be a sign of an upheaval in the Balance of Nature. Mr. Mush is an idiot, a dandy with a defensive eyeglass and an amusing name, who blushes and sputters as he finds himself unable to answer the most basic of legitimate questions. But Mr. Mush's objection is valid. It is, in fact, so significant that the text goes to great lengths to answer it.

This objection is addressed in a third person narration vaguely ascribed to the Utopians, an indication of how little Wells distinguishes between different Utopians' views. This narration maintains that swallows are not extinct in Utopia. They are, however, restricted to the few localities where their insect prey has not been eliminated. In developing the "swallow objection," Wells addresses one of the central complaints that could be made against his Utopian project of ecological control: that it will adversely impact "desirable" species. The text concedes that this is not an easy problem; in fact, "[t]he question of what else would go if a certain species went was one of the most subtle that Utopia had to face. Certain insects, for example, were destructive and offensive grubs in the opening stage of their lives [. . .] and then became either beautiful in themselves or necessary to the fertilisation of some useful or exquisite flowers" (73). Even without considering a species's ecological roles, anthropocentric arguments may be adduced both for and against its persistence: humans may find the caterpillar "offensive" but the butterfly beautiful. The fact that a species does exist within webs of ecological relation makes the question of whether it should persist even more complex. If certain insects are eliminated, the swallows that feed on them will be eliminated too. The question, then, is whether the loss of the pleasant swallows and other insectivorous birds is a fair price to pay for the extermination of insect pests. In Utopia, the answer has been a cautious "yes." While "sufficient [insect] species had remained to make some districts habitable for these delightful birds" (73), in the main the birds have been considered expendable. Mr. Mush is right to this extent: the swallows have mostly been lost, and this loss is, in and of itself, a sad thing, a sign that the conquest of nature cannot be accomplished without sacrifice.

Mr. Mush is wrong, however, in his supposition that the absence of swallows must be a sign of a reckless imbalancing of Nature. Yet this accusation, too, has merit. The idea that nature exists in some sort of balance is far from absurd to Wells. I have already noted that the Time Traveller, an early portrait of Wells's educated scientific man, refers to readjusting "the balance of animal and vegetable life" as a laudable goal (Time 49). What makes Mr. Mush's avowal suspect is the capital letters: it is the "Balance of Nature" he is concerned about, a sort of sacred, holistic essence with which humanity must not tamper. Wells, however, was a dedicated reductionist. For Wells, it was undeniable--indeed, it would be foolhardy to the point of suicidal to deny--that life forms exist in more or less "balanced" ecological relations,[9] but these relations themselves can be broken down into analyzable parts. Wells assumed that given sufficient scientific advancement, it will be possible to determine with reasonable certainty how each species fits into ecosystems. On the basis of such knowledge, humanity can decide when a species can be eliminated without unjustified disruption of the "balance of nature" in lower case letters. The possibility of error, of course, still exists; this is why a portion of each exterminated species is retained in case reintroduction proves ecologically necessary.

Though Freddy Mush himself is not to be taken seriously, his objections to Utopia, nonetheless, create a discursive space in which such serious questions can be addressed. At the same time, this dismissal of Mr. Mush as a legitimate point of view thwarts dialogic engagement with the issues he raises. Thus, while the "swallow objection" provides an opportunity to explore in some detail the complexities of Utopia's subjugation of nature, Mr. Mush's inability to make such objections forcefully enables the Utopians to make precarious claims about the efficacy of Utopian ecological planning without having to defend them. For instance, the Utopians--via Wells's third person narration--mention that "[t]here had been much befriending and taming of big animals; the larger carnivora, combed and cleaned, reduced to a milk dietary, emasculated in spirit and altogether becattled, were pets and ornaments in Utopia" (Men 73). The text offers no explanation for how a large carnivore, evolved to be a fierce predator, can readily be

"becattled" into a complacent pet, nor for how an organism evolved to eat meat can subsist on a diet of milk. Given Wells's Darwinian training, the most likely answer would be selective breeding, but this answer is not given, nor are any possible objections to it addressed. More troubling from an ecological perspective is the passing remark, "It had been infinitely easier to get rid of such big annoyances as the hyena and the wolf than to abolish these smaller pests [various insects]" (73). Wells is undoubtedly correct that the elimination of large predator species is easier than the elimination of tiny, populous, quick-breeding insects. This claim is disturbing, however, in its assumption that wolves and hyenas are merely "annoyances," relatively easy "to get rid of." In chapter 1, I discuss the ecological havoc wreaked on American ecosystems as a result of the extermination of predators such as the wolf. In his discussion of the Utopians' strategy for "putting a species upon its trial," Wells addresses the possibility that the extermination of one species will lead to the extermination of its ecological partners: swallows cannot exist without insects. He does not, however, address the inverse possibility that certain populations may explode in the absence of a particular species: without wolves, what checks deer populations? Since the entire Utopian scheme for ecological domination is based on caution, one could hope that the Utopians' system would afford them the opportunity to negotiate such questions without ecological catastrophe. Nonetheless, the absence of rigorous interrogation of such an expansive program of extinctions, even by so ecologically astute a thinker as Wells himself, does not bode well for the realistic application of any such program, assuming such a goal were considered desirable.

By presenting Mr. Mush as too foolish to raise serious objections, the text refuses complex engagement with questions about the "balance of nature," reducing them to his simplistic ranting. Yet it does not so summarily dismiss other Earthling critics. Less ridiculous, though still satirical, is Rupert Catskill. It is given to Mr. Catskill, appropriately his country's Secretary of State for War, to defend the Social Darwinist position that struggle and privation are necessary for the continued development of humanity. A true politician, Mr. Catskill begins by praising the Utopians for their

accomplishments. Having established his appreciation for the "almost magic beauty" of Utopia (76), he goes on to develop much the same critique that the Time Traveller makes of the society that gave rise to the Eloi and Morlocks. He asserts to the Utopian, Serpentine, that "all the energy and beauty of life are begotten by struggle and competition and conflict; we were moulded and wrought in hardship, and so, sir, were you" (79). Mr. Catskill goes on to ask rhetorically, "Are you preventing degeneration [in the absence of a struggle for survival]?" (79). This is an argument Wells must respect: it is, after all, precisely the scenario he delineated with such precision in The Time Machine. The question of what is to prevent Utopian degeneration is one the Utopians themselves have grappled with seriously. What makes Mr. Catskill look foolish is his assumption that they have not grappled with it: "He assumed there had been losses with every gain [. . .]" (77; my emphasis), rather than asking the Utopians if this had been the case. Thus Mr. Catskill's error is a failure of genuine inquiry, an assumption that he knows the "right" answer and is addressing his case to the Utopians not to be challenged but only for the rhetorical effect of showing himself to be right.

Although Mr. Catskill intends his questioning of Utopian wisdom to be rhetorical, the Utopians have answers ready. Degeneration in the absence of struggle is a real possibility. The Utopians guard against it by instituting eugenics and maintaining a competitive society: "The indolent and inferior do not procreate here," Urthred explains (81), echoing an earlier section in which the Utopians explain to Mr. Barnstaple that "[i]f the individual is indolent there is no great loss, there is plenty for all in Utopia, but then it will find no lovers, nor will it ever bear children, because no one in Utopia loves those who have neither energy nor distinction" (64). Utopian society is progressive, its citizens trained to strive for ever greater scientific and social achievement. This cultural emphasis makes the indolent and unintelligent unattractive mates and, thus, guards against the degeneration of the Utopians into creatures like the Eloi. Mr. Catskill's legitimate question about the role of struggle in Utopia provides an opportunity for the Utopians to explain how they have decoupled evolutionary progress from Malthusian privation.

Yet, as with the complaint of Mr. Mush, the text undercuts the dialogic potential of Mr. Catskill's objection. Instead of developing this exchange of ideas as genuine "dialogue," a conversation in which the ideas of different speakers build on one another, the text presents Mr. Catskill's objection and the Utopian rebuttal in two blocks of text. After several pages of almost uninterrupted oratorical flourish from Mr. Catskill, he concludes with, "I have said my say" (80). Apparently he has, for his speech is followed by several pages of uninterrupted answering oratory from Urthred. In fact, when Urthred offers to engage him in a contest of strength to demonstrate Utopian biological superiority, Mr. Catskill responds only with this invitation: "You go on talking" (84). In fact, no one offers any counter-challenge to Urthred's rebuttal. This presentation of Urthred's exposition in a single, unanswered block once again enables the text to put forward as definitive a praxis that, in fact, is problematic. Utopian eugenics is based on the idea that social undesirables will not produce children because no one will mate with them. Our own--and indeed nineteenth-century--experience with population growth, however, suggests that in the absence of draconian sterilization measures, social undesirables often produce children. Urthred does not explain why this is not the case in Utopia. And since Mr. Catskill has already "said his say," there is no one to ask him.

This refusal of dialogic critique promotes disturbing trends in Western ecological disourse by allowing the text to wholeheartedly endorse a radically anthropocentric view of nature. The text's only hint of a challenge to this view comes once again from Freddy Mush. However, it comes less from Mr. Mush's own words than Urthred's interpretation of them: "This man with the lens before his eye [Mr. Mush] struggles to believe that there is a wise old Mother Nature behind the appearance of things, keeping a Balance" (82). It is clear that Urthred is mocking Mr. Mush's adherence to the concept of a holistic "Balance" that may be linked to a semi-sacred Mother Nature. Urthred asserts that Mr. Mush "struggles to believe" this, thereby trivializing his position by suggesting that, on some level, he already knows that he is wrong. Urthred goes on to reject Mr. Mush's and Mr. Catskill's arguments, asserting that nature "is not awful [i.e. awesome], she is horrible," a source of misery to be tamed to better use (82). The text offers some

refutation: "'Phew! Worse than "Nature red in tooth and claw,"' murmured Mr. Mush"
(82). However, this "murmured" invocation of Alfred, Lord Tennyson, a literary
reference Urthred cannot possibly be familiar with, is clearly a personal aside and not an
attempt at dialogue. Urthred interprets it accordingly, continuing his diatribe as if he had
never been interrupted.

Finally, Urthred summarizes the Utopian ecological attitude:

> Half the species of life in [sic] our planet also, half and more than half of
> all the things alive, were ugly or obnoxious, inane, miserable, wretched,
> with elaborate diseases, helplessly ill adjusted to Nature's continually
> fluctuating conditions, when we first took this old Hag, our Mother, in
> hand. We have, after centuries of struggle, suppressed her nastier fancies,
> and washed her and combed her and taught her to respect and heed the last
> child of her wantonings--Man. With Man came Logos, the Word and the
> Will into our universe, to watch it and fear it, to learn it and cease to fear
> it, to know it and comprehend it and master it. So that we of Utopia are no
> longer the beaten and starved children of Nature, but her free and
> adolescent sons. We have taken over the Old Lady's Estate. Every day
> we learn a little better how to master the planet. Every day our thoughts
> go out more surely to our inheritance, the stars. And the deeps beyond and
> beneath the stars. (82-83)

This passage raises numerous questions about the desirability of Utopian ecological
ideology, none of which are explicitly posed within the text. Urthred's exposition
provides, among other things, an excellent illustration of the dissonance inherent in the
Western identification of Nature with Woman. Female Nature is simultaneously "our
Mother," a figure typically regarded with respect, and the wild, "wanton" woman, an
inferior in need of constant domination. Thus, our Mother is a dirty "old Hag" in need of
a good washing, a mere "Old Lady," whose estate has been rightfully taken over by
"Man," her "sons" (human females are effaced). Far from needing to respect their
mother, Nature's sons much teach her to "respect and heed" them. Even within Wells's
Utopia, this discourse of nature is internally inconsistent. Urthred's contempt for
untamed Nature implies that Nature is no more than a "nasty" mass of "ill-adjusted"
energies to be "taken in hand." Yet this view is contradicted just a few pages earlier by
Urthred's discussion of the Utopian system for eliminating species. The caution

Utopians adopt in this process, their intense awareness of the intricacy of ecological relations, suggests a clear understanding that Nature (prior to human management) is, in fact, a highly complex system of approximate balances that should be tampered with only using extreme care. Hardly a trivial "Old Lady," nature itself must be taken seriously, and the very caution of the Utopians' program of ecological management does so. Yet the discourse of conquest Urthred engages in would seem to undercut this respect.

Here, then, is a rupture in Wells's ecological program: it is difficult to believe that a people who can speak so derisively of nature could, in fact, manage it with sufficient care to avoid ecological disaster. The text itself obliquely supports this objection. Later in the novel, remarking on the Utopians' low opinion of Mr. Barnstaple, the Utopian Sungold asserts that "contempt is the cause of all injustice" (211). Sungold's statement occurs in a different context from Urthred's exposition, and there is no evidence that Wells intended the one to critique the other. Yet Urthred's characterization of nature is clearly contemptuous. Can such an attitude, then, underlie a just eco-management policy? Perhaps so. But since no character questions Urthred's assertions, the issue of whether or not such a policy could be achieved is not addressed, with the result that Wells's program appears suspect.

Another rupture in Utopian ideology exists around the mandate that the Utopians give themselves for this conquest. The Utopians grant themselves the moral right to subjugate nature essentially because they alone have the mental capacity to do so.[10] It is with Man that "Logos, the Word and the Will [came] into our universe" (82-83). Here the biblical formulation that "the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (King James Bible, John 1.1) has been replaced by an identification of the Word with Man and, hence, of Man with God. The sense that humanity represents the pinnacle of knowledge is further evidenced by Urthred's assertion that humanity came into the universe "to learn it": as soon as the universe (or nature) becomes something containing secrets to unlock, the old Hag becomes a depersonalized "it," an object to learn, not a wisdom to learn from.[11] While nature as a source of wanton energy can be personified as a woman to dominate, nature as a source of knowledge cannot be personified because that "person"

would suggest an individual more knowledgeable than Man. And to maintain his mandate to dominate Nature, Man must be the most knowledgeable force present. But if humanity's right to dominate nature is based on knowledge, humanity's ignorance would call this right into question.

And Men Like Gods is adamant that the Utopians are only just beginning to comprehend the universe. The aged and venerable Sungold states the point emphatically: "We have gone on for three thousand years now [pursuing Utopia], and a hundred million good brains have been put like grapes into the wine-press of science. And we know to-day--how little we know. There is never an observation made but a hundred observations are missed in the making of it" (214-15). Through this portrait of the Utopians' limitations, Wells conveys his sense of Utopia as always in progress: "We have hardly begun!" Sungold avers (215). Similarly, Urthred calls Man Nature's "adolescent sons." To Mr. Barnstaple, the Utopians may appear to be "men like gods," but Urthred understands that as a society they are not yet even fully grown as "men." [12]

Here lies another problem with Utopia. The Utopians, Sungold explains, are "like little children who have been brought to the shores of a limitless ocean" (Men 215), where the ocean can stand for the complexity of the universe. Yet this is the same universe that Man exists to "know, comprehend, and master" (83). These two ideas might be reconcilable if the Utopians viewed Man as, indeed, a child learning about the universe so that when he is grown, he will know how to manipulate it. But the Utopians are not waiting for Man to be "grown." They are already pronouncing life and death sentences on every species on their planet: the little child has taken upon himself the right to determine the fate of the ocean, an image which does not inspire confidence in the ability of the Utopians to manage their biosphere.

Furthermore, the notion that the Utopians are pursuing this management with caution is undercut by Urthred's description of the project: "'The gnawing vigour of the rat,' he mused, 'the craving pursuit of the wolf, the mechanical persistence of the wasp and fly and disease germ, have gone out of our world. That is true. And we have lost nothing worth having. Pain, filth, indignity for ourselves--or any creatures; they have

gone or they go'" (80-81). Taken literally, this passage borders on nonsensical. The literal removal of pain from the world would presumably eliminate all predation, since being eaten typically hurts, and thereby eliminate all carnivorous, non-scavenging links in food chains. The extermination of "filth" would logically require the elimination of excretory processes, requiring a radical redesign of the entire animal kingdom. The concepts of removing "gnawing vigour," "craving pursuit," "mechanical persistence," and "indignity" from the world are so abstract and difficult to define that, as terms in a scientifically precise program of management, they are essentially meaningless. One could argue, for instance, that eliminating "mechanical persistence" might require eliminating such mechanically persistent processes as human immune reactions or digestion.

Since no character questions Urthred's ideas, the text is not compelled to clarify his meaning. It is left to readers to interpolate the ideology behind his discourse. Yet while various interpretations are possible, each interpretation retains troubling ideological elements. Taken literally, Urthred almost seems to be advocating the elimination of life as we know it. But it is likely that Urthred is not speaking literally. In this passage, he is answering Mr. Catskill's objection that competition has died in Utopian society. On the contrary, Urthred asserts, only its "gnawing, craving, mechanical" forms have died. Thus, some of Urthred's tropes may be aimed specifically at describing human social and eugenic constructions, not all animal species. Yet it is clear that his description is not solely oriented around humanity. He specifically states that these miseries are being eliminated "for any creatures." And ecologically, such a program is so impracticable as to be ludicrous. Perhaps Urthred is taking poetic license. Perhaps he does not literally mean that Utopia should eliminate all pain but merely that it should substantially lessen it. But if Urthred is being hyperbolic, his very use of hyperbole suggests an extremist bent in Utopian ecological praxis. Since practice is shaped by the rhetoric deployed to support it, hyperbolic rhetoric does not foster moderate practice. Indeed, in keeping with Urthred's statements, Utopian ecological management is extraordinarily intensive. In his discursus on that Hag, Mother Nature, Urthred asserts that "half and more than half of all

the things alive, were ugly or obnoxious, inane, miserable, wretched [. . .]" (82), all reasons, according to Utopian ethics, to eliminate or alter them as long as the ecological consequences are deemed acceptable. Utopia grants itself the sanction to alter or extinguish more than half of all life, for reasons as subjective--and, I might suggest, trivial--as being "inane." One could argue that such a program is inane. But, in the text, no one does.

The Incompatibility of Dialogism and Scientific Positivism

Ironically, Men Like Gods might have produced more productive--and less narrowly anthropocentric--arguments if it had challenged Utopian convictions more rigorously. Earlier in this chapter, I compare the rhetoric of Urthred to that of Sungold in order to illustrate inconsistencies in the Utopian vision of ecological management. While Urthred emphasizes humanity's ability to comprehend and, thus, to subjugate nature, Sungold emphasizes the extent of humanity's ignorance. While Urthred derides nature as an "old Hag," Sungold stresses the moral dangers of holding anything in contempt. Such differences could have been developed dialogically, investigating the tensions in Utopian ideology by contrasting the views of a progressively optimistic and contemptuous Urthred with a more cautious and respectful Sungold. Wells, however, does not place these voices in dialogue. Urthred and Sungold do not appear in the same scene, nor does Mr. Barnstaple contrast their perspectives in his own mind. Despite the differences in their rhetoric, both are presented as aware of humanity's limited knowledge and, at the same time, enthusiastic about humanity's continued conquest of the universe. They are presented, in fact, as two representatives of a single ideology. The inherent contradictions in supporting a conquest justified by the science of the ignorant or in arguing against contempt while showing contempt for nature are, thus, left to Wells's readers to make sense of--if they can. Conversely, some of the most impressive pieces of Utopian argumentation occur in response to potentially valid objections. By acknowledging Mr. Mush's observation that the swallows have largely been sacrificed, the Utopians demonstrate that they are aware of at least some of the negative

consequences of their ecological praxis; they, thereby, present themselves as reasonable and informed. The juxtaposition of genuinely different voices, such as Mr. Mush's and the Utopians', enables a comparatively detailed engagement with complex ecological questions. It is in the silencing of diverse viewpoints that Men Like Gods most notably fails to articulate a convincing argument for its anthropocentric ecological praxis.

Yet while the text's refusal to question the desirability of the Utopians' philosophy weakens Wells's Utopia by leaving potential problems unaddressed, the text's aim of presenting an unambivalently laudable Utopia renders engagement with serious objections almost impossible. The socio-ecological structure of a world government of the type presented in Men Like Gods must be so complex that no single novel could begin to answer all the questions that could be raised about its various practices. But if questions cannot be answered, there are only two ways to deal with them: they can be asked and left unanswered, or they can be left unasked. It is not surprising that Wells took the second option. If he had posed major questions without clearly answering them, he would have undercut his characterization of Utopia as a society in which science dictates a clear course of action for the betterment of the human race. Utopian clarity of purpose would become muddied by a cacophony of conflicting voices. Leaving questions unasked, in contrast, may suggest that all relevant questions have already been answered. The effacement of oppositional voices creates an illusion of ideological coherence. But it is only an illusion.

Yet this fantasy of complete coherence is essential to Wells's philosophy of scientific positivism. As a scientific positivist, Wells held that science could lead to an approximation of the "truth" about our world and that this approximate truth would illuminate a general course of right action that any properly scientifically minded person would agree to. W. Warren Wager sums up the implications of such a view: "Science, [Wells] believed, rendered not only politics obsolete, but also diversity of opinion, creed, and culture" (43). As Wells himself remarked late in his career, "Only one body of philosophy and only one religion [. . .] can exist in a unified world state" (qtd. in Wager 49), the type of utopia he had advocated, at least, since his 1901 Anticipations. Today,

however, it is widely accepted--as it was by many in Wells's time--that science does not imply a complete ethical system. Science may not be practicable without an ethical regard for adhering to the scientific method and an investment in seeking "objective truth." Beyond these concerns, however, science itself posits no values. It may tell us that no racial difference is reflected in the human brain, but it does not tell us that all races should, therefore, be treated equally. It may tell us that, contrary to Descartes's assertions, animals can feel, but that fact alone does not condemn the meaningless and torturous vivisection practiced by Wells's Doctor Moreau. Wells's belief that science will designate ethics, however, leads him to conflate his own culturally constructed ideology with incontrovertible scientific "truth." For Wells, an understanding of evolution naturally suggests an ethical system wherein Earth must be biologically managed by humanity to ensure the continuance of life and the advancement of Man. He does not typically address the idea that a properly educated person with a grasp of evolution might not find this course morally acceptable. He does not question whether a single species, however mentally advanced, has the right to claim absolute power of life and death over other species; he does not question whether this species has a right to redesign an entire biosphere--or by extension the whole universe. In Men Like Gods, no one--educated or absurd--reflects this contrary view. Even Mr. Mush's appeals to the Balance of Nature relate more to the feasibility of the Utopian conquest than its moral desirability.

A rejection of dialogic communication facilitates Wells's conflation of science and ethics. If no educated scientist emerges to challenge Utopian ecological ethics, there is no obvious space for observing that this ethics is not endorsed by the scientific method. Conversely, the more that diverse voices were to talk about Utopian ethics--even without the aim of deconstructing it--the more that ethics would be problematized; such problematizing is a virtually inevitable side-effect of open discourse about complex ideas. To maintain the illusion of an ethics dictated by sound science, Men Like Gods must,

therefore, strictly limit its multivocality. The necessity of such limitation is evident in the text's usage of the concept of telepathy, the chief means of face-to-face Utopian communication.

Kingsley Widmer criticizes Wells's telepathy as an inappropriately fantastic device for a utopian novel: "[In Men Like Gods] there is now a world of 'demigods,' beings bred into not only higher intellect but direct psychic communication [. . . .] This, I argue, should be viewed less as eutopian projection than scientistic fantasy" (26). Widmer's contention that Wells's use of telepathy is more fantasy than rational extrapolation is valid. Wells himself attempts no scientific explanation of the phenomenon. The Utopian Urthred states only that "in some manner which we still do not understand perfectly, people began to get the idea before it was clothed in words and uttered in sounds" (Men 50). This improbable occurrence, however, like the inter-dimensional travel that brings the Earthlings to Utopia, is most likely intended more as a useful plot point than a utopian argument. If it is nothing else, telepathy provides means for these two societies to communicate that is less ethnocentric than assuming that Utopians speak English.

But while Wells probably introduced telepathy as little more than a convenience to enable inter-dimensional communication, the phenomenon of telepathy, nonetheless, highlights the dialogic ambiguity inherent in verbal communication. In Wells's telepathic scheme, a signified concept is automatically translated into the appropriate signifier in the language of the "listener." If the "listener" does not comprehend this concept in the same way as the "speaker," however, the translation must be approximate. Thus, when Serpentine explains his profession, each of the Earthlings interprets his meaning differently:

> [Serpentine] called himself something that Mr. Barnstaple could not catch. First it sounded like "atomic mechanician," and then oddly enough it sounded like "molecular chemist." And then Mr. Barnstaple heard Mr. Burleigh say to Mr. Mush, "He said, 'physiochemist,' didn't he?"
> "I thought he just called himself a materialist," said Mr. Mush.
> "I thought he said he weighed things," said Lady Stella. (42)

Each of these translations reflects the knowledge and attitudes of the listener. Mr. Burleigh, a comparatively intelligent and educated man, hears a properly scientific approximation of Serpentine's "words." Mr. Barnstaple, likewise intelligent and educated but also unusually inquisitive and open-minded, hears at least two rather sophisticated translations. Mr. Mush, a literary man who disdains science, can get no further than a sense that Serpentine is involved with something that rejects the finer spiritual qualities of life. Lady Stella, the tale's representative of "invincible ordinariness" (22), hears the only translation her inadequate, woman's education leaves available, a vague sense of the empirical process involved in Serpentine's work.[13] Fantastic though the notion of telepathy is, it serves as an apt metaphor for the very real complexities of human communication. Words, like Wells's telepathic communications, are unstable, as Bakhtin observes: "The word, directed toward its object, enters a dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment of alien words, value judgments and accents, weaves in and out of complex interrelationships [. . .]" ("Discourse" 276). Telepathy, then, could readily serve as a vehicle for the intensive exploration of the "dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment" of verbal slippage in which we all communicate.

Wells, however, does not exploit this potential. After his initial detailing of the vagaries of telepathic communication, conversation proceeds more or less as if everyone were speaking a commonly comprehensible English. Wells's failure to return to the discursive possibilities of the narrative frame of telepathy suggests that he did intend telepathy as little more than a plot gimmick to explain how Earthlings and Utopians can communicate. I do not contend that Wells must have consciously--or even unconsciously--shied away from exploiting the dialogic possibility of telepathy because he sensed that do to so would undermine his utopian project. My point, rather, is that if this potential had been exploited, the Utopian ideology voiced most forcefully by Urthred could not have been presented as fully coherent and sufficient. Telepathy exposes the imprecision of verbal communication. If verbal communication is imprecise, however, then knowledge shared and expanded through it cannot be transparent. Yet the illusion of

a transparent language is essential to the validation of Utopian ideology. Imagine Urthred's discourses on ecological management being interpreted by each of his Earthling listeners with a slightly different shade of meaning. What constitutes an "inane" life form? Just what connotations is "Old Lady" supposed to carry? How exactly is nature like an "estate"? If a species is put on "trial," does that imply that it has been accused of crime? Urthred's every sentence could be intensely debated in an effort to pin down his meaning. And with every nuance that would be uncovered, the self-evidence of his position would be called into question, if only because it would become plain that his words can be read in several ways. But Wells's Utopia is predicated on scientific positivism, and scientific positivism can only function in a world in which knowledge is, for all intents and purposes, reliable and transparent. Wells's concept of telepathy problematizes knowledge; therefore, telepathy cannot be examined too closely. The discussions it would naturally occasion cannot occur.

An open, dialogic engagement with the complexity of human discourses would risk undermining Wells's scientific positivism. Yet Wells's failure to grapple with this discursive complexity in Men Like Gods, likewise, weakens the text's argumentation. Indeed, Wells's contention that a utopia must and can operate under a single, unambivalent, scientifically reasoned set of values is at odds with what many critics have characterized as strengths in his writing. Examining numerous critical studies of the ambivalence latent in the Wellsian utopia, Carol S. Franko concludes, "These studies suggest that Wells's ambivalence toward utopia was productive," exposing complicated tensions between utopian and dystopian impulses (12). Darko Suvin argues that a "fundamental ambiguity [. . .] constitutes both the richness and the weakness of Wells" (216). While this ambiguity robs Wells's specific social arguments of some of their force, Suvin argues that it endows his narratives with a different kind of power, a power to enthrall and stimulate minds that "makes thus an aesthetic form of hesitations, intimations, and glimpses of an ambiguously disquieting strangeness" (Suvin 217). Wells's son, Anthony West, has argued that Wells was predominantly a stoical realist who wrote with optimism against his better judgment (Hammond 78). In

Men Like Gods, however, Wells's pessimistic and ambivalent modes largely disappear into an optimistic oversimplification, as if any narrative more complex would collapse his utopian vision.

Men Like Gods superficially circumvents the challenge that telepathy presents to Utopia by downplaying the complications caused by telepathy. The underlying problem, however, remains. The Utopians' ideology is dubious. Their program for pervasive ecological management, though clearly scientifically informed, opens up disturbing possibilities for both ecologically and morally devastating practices. These possibilities are effaced by a narrative strategy that refuses an intensive dialogic interrogation of Utopia, opting instead for an objection-answer format, in which the Utopian answer to each Earthling objection is presented as definitive. The resulting text was more than adequate to please Julian Huxley, who praised the Utopians' pursuit of "the understanding of Nature for its own sake, and its control for the sake of humanity," adding that "[b]y control Mr. Wells means not only utilitarian control, but that which, as in a garden, is to please and delight, and that highest of all control, artistic and scientific creation" (qtd. in Anker 111-12). Huxley understood and applauded Wells's message. Of course, he already agreed with Wells, his future co-author of The Science of Life. Unfortunately, Wells's narrative strategy generates a vision of utopia so replete with unacknowledged ethical and logical gaps that the unconverted will find little reason to embrace it. This may be one reason why, as Wells himself commented, Men Like Gods "got a dull press" (qtd. in Russell 147). It certainly lies behind Widmer's contention that the novel is nothing more than "scientistic fantasy" (26).

Conclusion

In comparison to the substantial univocality of The Time Machine, Men Like Gods enacts a multivocal discourse that supports a relatively complex exploration of Utopian ecological praxis. Nonetheless, the absence of significant dialogic engagement with perspectives that would legitimately question Utopian ideology in Men Like Gods enables the text to present a problematic anthropocentric discourse as scientifically

"correct." Wells's endorsement, via the Utopians and Mr. Barnstaple, of a program of ecological management that could radically alter most of life on Earth raises questions not only about the morality of such a scheme but even about its feasibility from the anthropocentric perspective of maintaining a healthy environment for humanity. If, as Wells stresses, humanity is vastly ignorant about nature, then the idea that humanity can be trusted to redesign the biosphere without making any catastrophic mistakes is dubious at best.

At the same time, the text's refusal to allow discourses that would problematize its extreme anthropocentrism makes Wells's Utopian ideology an apt illustration of both the possibilities and the limitations of an anthropocentric ecocentrism. According to the definition I put forward in chapter 1, the ideology presented in Men Like Gods is "pragmatically ecocentric" (i. e. ecosystemically-oriented) in its basic assumption of the necessity of ecosystems to all aspects of human civilization. But while such an ideology could, to an extent, reinforce a productive ecological caution and concern for sustainability, its emphasis on the goal of total human management could readily be used to advocate radical, progressive change at the expense of sustainability. Thus, the gaps in Wells's discourse suggest that a purely pragmatic ecocentrism may be a place to start but not to end the search for a healthy ecological praxis. In contrast, later, more dialogic science fiction encourages various perspectives to challenge purified discourses, such as Wells's radical anthropocentrism, thereby creating a more nuanced hybrid complexity. In chapter 5, I examine two examples of such hybrid discourse in more recent science fiction.

NOTES

[1] Victorian society, of course, comprised a variety of views of nature. Some schools of thought questioned the conquest of nature more than others. Even the unambivalent belief that nature could and should be subjugated was justified in numerous ways. For an extensive discussion of this variety, see Donald Worster's Nature's Economy, chapter 9, "The Ascent of Man."

[2] In their essay, "The Socio-biological and Human-ecological Notions in The Time Machine," Katalin Csala-Gáti and János I. Toth argue that Wells's sociobiological ideas, like contemporary sociobiology, can provide a means for integrating social and biological factors in efforts to confront current socio-ecological problems.

[3] Just what sort of eugenics society should practice was a difficult question for Wells. While he cautiously advocates the humane execution of undesirables in Anticipations (1901) (168) and state coercion to prevent them from reproducing in A Modern Utopia (Ch. 5, Sec. 1), two decades later, in Men Like Gods, he hopes that an enlightened choice of mates will be sufficient to ensure the ascent of the species.

[4] According to Partington, The Time Machine's depiction of this degeneration of the human race into Eloi and Morlocks is intended to subvert the ideal of a static utopia in which an ideal state can be maintained forever by showing that a "paradisal" elimination of struggle will only stifle the productive processes of evolution and lead to a degenerate human race (60). In this reading, the problem with the "utopia" of The Time Machine is that it is static rather than progressive: its goal was the attainment of a state of "perfection" rather than continual betterment. A "modern utopia," in contrast, will avoid degeneration by adopting a kinetic model that advocates continual progress. Since A Modern Utopia and Men Like Gods present very similar utopian visions, it is valid to read both books as responses to The Time Machine.

[5] In chapter 9 of H. G. Wells and the Modern Novel, J. R. Hammond argues that Men Like Gods was intended as a parody of foolhardy utopian dreaming. He points out that the novel includes parodic elements, such as caricatures of prominent British political figures. Furthermore, the end of the novel shows that Mr. Barnstaple, the utopian dreamer, cannot stay in Utopia but must return to the mundane world of Earth. This return, Hammond contends, represents the necessary triumph of pragmatism. Hammond's reading, however, is not strongly supported by the text. He is correct that several of Wells's Earthlings are caricatures, but this is a parody of English society, not Utopia. Mr. Barnstaple's return from Utopia is not a rejection of it but simply an acknowledgement that, as an inferior Earthling, he does not yet belong there. Indeed, Mr. Barnstaple returns to Earth prepared to help bring Utopia about on Earth: "I shall take up my earthly life at the point where I laid it down, but--on Earth--I shall be a Utopian" (212). He remarks later to his wife, "I don't want a safe job now. I can do better. There's other work for me" (230); presumably this "other work" will involve living as a Utopian on Earth in order to bring Earth closer to a Utopian state. Finally, the fact that Men Like Gods embodies many of the utopian values that Wells consistently advocates in other works suggests that he intended these values to present positive principles for a better society.

[6] The idea that the Utopians have exterminated disease microbes and, thus, lost their natural immunity to them is the same that Wells used in The War of the Worlds to explain the demise of the invading Martians, who have no immunity to terrestrial diseases. The difference is that Utopian science is sufficiently advanced to find a cure for the epidemic before it devastates their society. The text does not explain how Utopian science accomplishes this feat, though Utopia's emphasis on scientific education does lend plausibility to the idea that the task would not be beyond their capability. At the same time, it is tempting to stand with Earthling character Rupert Catskill and proclaim the epidemic a sign of the potential folly of a program for ecological management whose elimination of interspecies interactions makes for an immunologically weaker human race.

[7] Russell is inclined to praise Wells's scheme for ecological management. He argues that in Men Like Gods, "Wells realized that man must now take active responsibility for ordering and improving life on earth" (149), suggesting that Wells was correct in this "realization." I approach Wells's program for total ecological control with greater hesitation. Nonetheless, in the current age of global, human-made environmental problems, Russell's contention that humanity must take responsibility for ordering life on Earth may, to some extent, be irrefutable. Even if we strive to minimize human management, some global management (of carbon dioxide emissions, for example) is necessary, if only to attempt to counteract already existing problems, such as global warming.

[8] Though Wells used the term "human ecology" chiefly from the 1930s on, he was already interested in human ecological concepts as early as the 1920s. Late in his career, he observed that his 1920 Outline of History was intended to be an "Outline of Human Ecology," developing an evolutionary explanation of historical events (Anker 200).

[9] A lack of consideration for such interconnectedness is responsible for the demise of the Martians in The War of the Worlds: the Martians do not account for the agency of microbes as participants in Earth's biosphere and, therefore, are not prepared for the microbial attack that exterminates them.

[10] The idea that superior intelligence grants the moral authority to exercise complete control over the less intelligent was common in Wells's time and, indeed, still has currency today. A particularly powerful endorsement of this view appears in Olaf Stapledon's 1936 novel, Odd John, which Leonard Isaacs calls "one of the most influential treatments of the 'superman' theme in science fiction" (25). John, the leader of the "superman" species, talks complacently about his early ambition of ruling the entire human species, an ambition he abandoned only because "[i]f I were to take over Hom. Sap. I should freeze up inside, and grow quite incapable of doing what is my real job" (Stapledon 69-70). Though his chief human companion, whom he mockingly calls "Fido," calls him an "arrogant young cub" (Stapledon 68), neither Fido nor any other character evinces any concrete objection to John's sense of entitlement. Stapledon once acknowledged Wells's influence on his work by stating, "A man does not record his debt to the air he breathes" (qtd. in Isaacs 25).

[11] Urthred's shift from a personified to a depersonalized nature is one example of a dissonance Louise Westling observes between the post-Enlightenment metaphor of nature as a mechanism and the earlier metaphor of a female Nature: "The idea of Nature as feminine clashes with the mechanistic metaphor and takes us back to the fact that new ways of figuring land and nature did not wholly displace older patterns of thinking about the physical world" (33). This superimposition of conflicting metaphors highlights an ambivalence in Urthred's (or Wells's) attitude toward nature.

12 This image of the limitations of human knowledge echoes Wells's belief that knowledge must, by its nature, be limited. In his 1903 lecture, "Scepticism of the Instrument," Wells asserts his belief in the impossibility of exact knowledge. Human knowledge is based on classification, Wells argues, yet classification necessarily places objects that are not identical under a single generic heading; it describes continuous change in terms of discrete gradations. It is, thus, always approximate. He compares human knowledge to a newspaper picture comprised of tiny black and white rectangles:

> At a little distance you really seem to have a faithful reproduction of the original picture, but when you peer closer you find not the unique form and masses of the original, but a multitude of little rectangles, uniform in shape and size [. . . .] I submit the world of reasoned inquiry has a very similar relation to the world I call objectively real. For the rough purposes of every day the network picture will do, but the finer you purpose the less it will serve, and for an ideally fine purpose, for an absolute and general knowledge that will be as true for a man at a distance of a telescope as for a man with a microscope, it will not serve at all. (Wells, "Scepticism")

As a scientific positivist, Wells held that science could yield definitive answers to how human society should function. Yet Wells's avowal of the impossibility of exact scientific knowledge seems to belie his scientific positivism. For how can a social system based on appeals to scientifically tested data produce indisputable judgments if the data are always, to some extent, erroneous? The most obvious answer is that "[f]or the rough purposes of every day the network picture will do." Even though scientific knowledge is approximate, it is reliable enough to prescribe a course for human society. Certainly, errors may occur, but this is why, for example, the Utopians retain a reserve of exterminated species for possible reintroduction. This answer, however, depends on an assumption that the margin of error in scientific knowledge will generally be small enough to do little damage. Contingency planning will be sufficient to avoid catastrophe. But it is not clear that scientific error will be slight in a world where, as Sungold observes, a hundred observations will be missed for each observation made. Wells own understanding of the necessary limits to human knowledge, therefore, seems to argue against the wisdom of the Utopian program of total ecological management.

13 Wells has justly been criticized for gender bias. But his misogynistic tendencies notwithstanding, he was a staunch advocate of improved education for both men and women. In Men Like Gods, to take just one example, the researchers into inter-dimensional travel, Arden (a man) and Greenlake (a woman), are treated as equally legitimate scientists; in fact, the two are almost undifferentiated.

INTERLUDE

MINDS LESS TETHERED

Near the end of his life, H. G. Wells came to question much of the view of human civilization he had advocated throughout his career. He expounded on his changing attitudes in Mind at the End of Its Tether (1945), a collection of reflections written in the third-person. Early in the text, he sums up the utopian ideology that underlies so much of his fiction in a passage I have already referred to in chapter 4 of this study:

> [I]t was natural for him to assume that there was a limit set to change, that new things would appear, but that they would appear consistently, preserving the natural sequence of life. So that in the present vast confusion of our world, there was always the assumption of an ultimate restoration of rationality, an adaptation and resumption. It was merely a question, the fascinating question, of what form the new rational phase would assume, what Over-man, Erewhon or what not, would break through the transitory clouds and turmoil. (5)

This passage offers a concise articulation of the philosophy behind the "kinetic utopia" described in A Modern Utopia and more intricately enacted in Men Like Gods. This utopia is "a long ascent of stages" (Modern Ch. 1, Sec. 1): out of every era of chaos, a higher order emerges, a step toward a Superman, a more utopian society. The "limit set to change" here is not absolute but relational: humanity can (and should) progress indefinitely, but it will always progress within a kind of coherent pattern: things will change together so that a workable socio-ecological system is maintained. Chaos is the exception: a "transitory" upset within a greater, more rational order.

But now, nearing his eightieth birthday, having lived to see two world wars, Wells found his positivist's faith in a rational universe under assault: "The more he scrutinized the realities around us, the more difficult it became to sketch out any Pattern of Things to Come" (Mind 6). The writer who for decades had predicted the course of his society's

future, often with an eerie accuracy, could make no more sense out of it. He became increasingly concerned that humanity might, indeed, be on the path to extinction, incapable of restoring rationality to the chaos of modern civilization. He commented that "in this strange new phase of existence into which our universe is passing, it becomes evident that events no longer recur. They go on and on to an impenetrable mystery [. . .]" (Mind 15; emphasis Wells's). The great pattern of ascending stages appeared to have been replaced by a linear movement devoid of recurrence: in this new world, there was no assurance that chaos would eventually be reordered. Wells's "universe" may refer either to a physical space or to the "universe" of human perception, or to both. But in both senses of the word, his statement resonates with the times.

When he wrote these reflections, Wells was old, his mind perhaps not at its sharpest; in his lifetime, he might simply have seen too many changes to be able to accommodate them all. Yet he was not alone in his pessimistic confusion. Wells wrote these reflections at the dawn of the postmodern age. And his description of a loss of order and rationality, his sense that our world has slipped out of recognizable patterns of history, his characterization of events as an "impenetrable mystery" all have a distinctly postmodern ring. Particularly in Euro-American culture after World War II, faith in the explicability and predictability of the world was eroding. By the late 1950s and early 1960s, exponential population growth and pollution were creating unprecedented global fears for the health of the biosphere. Cold War in the nuclear age was threatening the very continuation of life on Earth as we know it. Alongside such apocalyptic fears, changes in the fabric of daily social existence further unsettled dominant ideologies. Civil rights movements challenged traditional categories of race, class, gender, and, eventually, sexual orientation. Increasing multiculturalism problematized national and ethnic identifications. This questioning of identity categories resulted both in an estranging loss of stable identity and a liberating reaction against the power structures associated with those categories.

In such a world, the comparatively clean and orderly utopias of William Morris, George Bernard Shaw, and Wells appear not only fanciful but undesirable, falling prey to

what Jameson calls "the implacable postmodern critique of high modernism itself as repressive, totalizing, phallocentric, authoritarian [. . .]" ("Utopianism" 383). Though none of these three writers is properly a "high modernist," all are implicated, to some extent, in repressive, totalizing, and patriarchal ideological affiliations no longer acceptable in the postmodern world. In the second half the twentieth century, "utopia" itself became suspiciously dystopian, and dystopia appeared imminent. In the 1946 foreword to his quintessentially dystopian "Utopia," Brave New World, for example, Aldous Huxley revised the book's estimate that the world would sink into totalitarianism within a few hundred years, remarking that "it seems quite possible that the horror may be upon us within a single century" (xvii). A true utopia--in the pre-Brave New World positive sense of the word--did not appear similarly realizable. The Cold War and early post-Cold War years marked the hegemonic rise of what Jameson terms "anti-Utopianism," the belief that utopias are, by definition, totalitarian and, thus, that any non-totalitarian utopia is impossible. This assumption of utopian impossibility informs the work of many late-twentieth-century speculative fiction writers. In keeping with this spirit of the age, for instance, Octavia E. Butler comments, "I find utopias ridiculous. We're not going to have a perfect society until we get a few perfect humans, and that seems unlikely" (qtd. in Miller 339).

Yet Butler is often regarded as a utopian writer; indeed, I frame her as such in the following chapter. Her discourse is utopian in that it offers hope that humanity can create a better society. For even a disbeliever in utopias can "utopianize" as long as utopias need not consist solely of the kind of idealized social "advancements" depicted by Morris, Shaw, and Wells. If in the post-atomic, post-humanist, postmodern age, the dream of a substantially untroubled society loses its claim to plausibility, social reform remains, as ever, a conceivable goal. The utopias of the postmodern age, however, are more likely to explore reform open-endedly than to prescribe specific reforms. Søren Baggesen describes such texts as expressions of "dialogic pessimism." Using Ursula K. Le Guin's The Word for World is Forest (1972) as a case in point, Baggesen argues that by dialogically juxtaposing conflicting points of view, Le Guin opens up a space for a

productive discussion of social "evils" and, thus, for the possibility of mitigating them. He concludes, "[I]t might seem a meagre consolation to suggest that we can deliberate about evil, but never finally abolish it. Yet I would point out that the nadir of historical aspiration is still 'utopian': that such deliberation holds out a 'utopian' hope--slim though it be--for Blochian Möglichkeitsraum [a space of possibilities]" (41). These contemporary utopias remain utopian in their willingness to seek social improvement in the free play of possibility. In Bruno Latour's terminology, they are hybrids: partial, particular, provisional mixes of improvement and degradation. They cannot pierce the "impenetrable mystery" of the universe any more than the aged Wells could. But in the hybrid utopias, this impenetrability is no cause for despair.

These might be considered the utopias of minds less tethered to a faith in rational change and rational order. If Wells's trope of a "mind at the end of its tether" invokes a sense of desperation, it also implies a hope of breaking free. For the utopianizers who came after Wells, the very acceptance of the contemporary world's confusion provides a kind of freedom, a widening of scope. The dichotomies of utopia and dystopia, progressionism and non-progressionism, superior and inferior no longer hold much sway. Positive and negative trends can coexist free of the rhetorical necessity of arguing that one or the other must prevail. And if, in these new utopias, there is a concomitant retreat from idealized heights of utopian dreaming, it is a retreat accompanied by a concrete realism that lends force to their arguments.

This movement from absolute to hybrid utopia could be traced year-by-year throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. The relevance of utopian fiction for ecological praxis could be explored through the evolutionary and ecological discourses of Olaf Stapledon, Robert Heinlein, Frank Herbert, John Brunner, Kim Stanley Robinson, and a multitude of others. Since I do not have the space for such a comprehensive study, however, I explore instead a few texts that show particularly strong ideological affiliations with the earlier texts I discuss. In chapter 5, I focus on two case studies of hybrid utopian novels: Octavia E. Butler's Earthseed books (1993, 1998) and Ursula K. Le Guin's The Dispossessed (1974), before turning, in chapter 6, to examine

the science fiction television series <u>Babylon 5</u> (1993-1998) and <u>Lexx</u> (1996-2002), both of which show hybrid utopian/dystopian influence within the relatively purified discourse of TV space opera. In these final chapters, my focus on recent texts enables direct engagement with our current ideological formations. Although it is less recent, I include <u>The Dispossessed</u> not only because it provocatively revises Morris's Nowhere but also because it continues to speak to our current socio-ecological situations. Indeed, in chapter 5, I argue that Le Guin's text can be read as a response to Butler's, even though it is some two decades older. If <u>The Dispossessed</u> correlates with <u>News from Nowhere</u>, the <u>Earthseed</u> books correlate with <u>Men Like Gods</u>, refiguring the Wellsian progressive utopia for a more provisional age. Similarly, <u>Babylon 5</u>, which evidences a contemporary Creative Evolutionist strain in popular science fiction, may be usefully compared to <u>Back to Methuselah</u>. <u>Babylon 5</u>'s evolutionary discourse, in turn, can be problematized by the dystopian, non-progressionist series, <u>Lexx</u>, which, in many ways, articulates a cautionary ecocentric ideology antithetical to <u>Babylon 5</u>'s anthropocentric utopianism. All these texts ably illustrate the transformations of the older discourses of Morris, Shaw, and Wells as, having passed through the crucible of postmodern provisionality, they continue to strive in the midst of uncertainty to articulate hopes for a better future.

CHAPTER 5

CONVICTION AND PROVISIONALITY

TWO CASES OF ECO-UTOPIAN ARGUMENTATION IN

THE HYBRID SCIENCE FICTION NOVEL

Adulthood is both sweet and sad.
It terrifies.
It empowers.
We are men and women now.
We are Earthseed.
And the Destiny of Earthseed
Is to take root among the stars.

Octavia E. Butler, Parable of the Talents 394

Her concern with landscapes and living creatures was passionate. This concern, feebly called, "love of nature," seemed to Shevek to be something much broader than love. There are souls, he thought, whose umbilicus has never been cut. They never got weaned from the universe. They do not understand death as an enemy; they look forward to rotting and turning into humus.

Ursula K. Le Guin, The Dispossessed 185

Introduction

In this chapter, I present two case studies of the use of hybridity to strengthen utopian argumentation by provisionalizing it. Following Bruno Latour, I use the term "hybridity" to refer to a perspective that collapses the borders between concepts typically placed in binary oppositions, such as nature and culture, male and female, human and animal, utopia and dystopia. Binary oppositions generally assume the dominance of one term over the other. Latour's discussion of nature and society in We Have Never Been

Modern offers a concise illustration of this hierarchizing. According to Latour, Western civilization's unwritten "Modern Constitution" sometimes frames nature as transcendent and society as a force subject to nature's laws. Conversely, it may frame society as transcendent and nature as subject to society. But in neither case does it let nature and society stand simultaneously as equal terms. Hybridity, in contrast, deconstructs such oppositions to open a discursive space for a non-hierarchical synthesis of categories.

As categories, "sustainability" and "change" are seldom presented the type of ontologically purified dyad Latour observes in "nature" and "society." There is no cultural drive, for instance, to present one term as transcendent and the other as immanent. Yet just as the Modern Constitution enforces hierarchical relations upon "nature" and "society," so do traditional utopian and dystopian narratives tend to strongly privilege either "sustainability" or "change." Thus, William Morris's Nowhere stresses sustainability with minimal change, while the evolutionary utopias of George Bernard Shaw and H. G. Wells stress progressive change to such an extent that they devalue issues of ecological sustainability. Discourse in hybrid science fiction novels, in contrast, commingles the values of sustainability and change so that each becomes deeply dependent on the other. Instead of significantly privileging one concept over the other, these hybrid novels more fully attend both to the need to support sustainable socio-ecological practices and the need to accept the inevitability of change while actively pursuing positive changes.

In this chapter, I address how a hybrid discourse collapses the categories of "sustainability" and "change" in Octavia E. Butler's Earthseed series (1993, 1998) and Ursula K. Le Guin's The Dispossessed (1974). Both Butler's and Le Guin's texts exemplify what I term "sustainable change," an ideology which stresses that sustainability requires change, just as change must be sustainable if it is not to lead to wide-scale destruction. With neither term prioritized over the other, the two operate as a single process. In their adherence to this paradigm of sustainable change, the Earthseed

books and The Dispossessed each offer models for ecological praxis that can accommodate change both in human society and in the non-human world, while continuing to foreground the need for relative ecological stability.

As a hybrid philosophy, sustainable change is aptly expressed through a hybrid rhetoric, and the most apt rhetoric of hybridity is dialogism. A dialogic juxtaposition of voices troubles dominant discourses by demonstrating that non-hierarchical multivocality is essential to developing a more complicated, and thus realistic, understanding of human society. Because hybridity, like dialogism, is partial and non-hierarchical, dialogism is a natural rhetorical structure for a hybrid text. Yet the extent to which hybrid texts adopt dialogic strategies varies. Though both the Earthseed books and The Dispossessed enact an ecological praxis based on sustainable change, I contend that the more prominently dialogic rhetoric of The Dispossessed offers a more ecocentric and, thus, more sustainable model, while gaps in the dialogism of the Earthseed books permits the retention of a concernful anthropocentrism. I further contend that the hybrid utopian arguments of both texts are partially undercut by a tendency to endorse a single, insufficiently questioned discourse.

Both texts inscribe a dominant discourse by centralizing a voice that is marginalized within the cultural context of the text. I examine this process of centralization using Bakhtin's concept of "centripetal" and "centrifugal" languages. Bakhtin invokes the image of forces pulling toward a center to describe how a dominant or "centripetal" language "makes its real presence felt as a force for overcoming [. . .] heteroglossia, imposing specific limits to it, guaranteeing a certain maximum of mutual understanding and crystalizing into a real, although still relative, unity--the unity of the reigning conversational (everyday) and literary language, 'correct language'" ("Discourse" 270). Centripetal language reinforces the dominant ideology, defending the assumption that a single way of speaking and understanding can be "correct" and sufficient for ordering society. But the privileged status of a centripetal language is always being dismantled by discourses pulling at it from the fringes: "Alongside the

centripetal forces, the centrifugal forces of language carry on their uninterrupted work; alongside verbal-ideological centralization and unification, the uninterrupted processes of decentralization and disunification go forward" (Bakhtin, "Discourse" 272).

Both Butler's protagonist, Olamina, and Le Guin's protagonist, Shevek, develop discourses that are centrifugal to their societies' centripetal languages, re-visioning within their own cultural contexts the dominant ideologies of their cultures. Yet within both texts, the protagonists' voices are centralized, the "dominant" discourses, conversely, given comparatively little opportunity to defend themselves. In this centralization of their protagonists' voices, these texts risk reproducing the repression inherent in supporting a single discourse over all others: the protagonists' voices become centripetal within the narratives, pushing other voices to the periphery. As a result, the otherwise culturally marginal discourses that dominate within these texts are not questioned as rigorously as they might be, leaving some of their dubious assumptions unchallenged.

Their tendency to reinscribe a hierarchy of discourses notwithstanding, both the Earthseed books and The Dispossessed explore sophisticated philosophies that offer productive models for an ecological praxis based on sustainable change. By employing a hybrid discourse that refuses to erase the difficulties suggested by the scenarios they construct, these texts guard themselves against many of the accusations of "simplistic utopianizing" that may be leveled against Morris, Shaw, and Wells. Of course, no argument can be definitive in a context that accepts the final provisionality of our knowledge. It is to be expected, therefore, that Butler's and Le Guin's novels display their own gaps in reasoning. I contend, however, that a less hierarchical application of dialogic techniques might have enabled these texts to expose and, thus, address more of these gaps.

An Even More Modern Utopia

Anthropocentric Univocality and Sustainable Change in Octavia E. Butler's

Earthseed Books

I was tempted to title this section "A Postmodern Utopia." "Postmodern" is, after all, an apt description of Octavia Butler's science fiction. Indeed, as I discuss in the "Interlude" preceding this chapter, a postmodern cultural influence is pervasive in late-twentieth and early twenty-first century science fiction, supporting discourses that problematize ideologies and embrace hybrid complexity. Butler's postmodernism is typified by a hybrid discourse that challenges the process of identity categorization foundational to much of Western ideology.[1] Much productive critical work has been done on her deconstruction of traditional categories of gender, race, and species.[2] In this chapter, however, I examine Butler's texts along a different axis: instead of stressing her texts' postmodernity, I stress their ideological affiliation with the earlier tradition of H. G. Wells's "modern utopia," a type of progressionist society that stresses the ascent of humanity. In particular, I investigate the ecological discourse that derives from this mingling of hybrid provisionality and humanist progressionism in Butler's Earthseed books: Parable of the Sower (hereafter Sower) and Parable of the Talents (hereafter Talents). Butler's hybridity supports a paradigm based on sustainable change, an ideology that stresses the need to accept and shape change in such a way that enough ecological stability is retained to avoid catastrophic imbalances. She characterizes this ethic of change as a "partnership" among life forms, ecosystems, and whole biospheres that resists rigid hierarchy and classification.

At the same time, the Earthseed books undercut this hybrid model of "partnership" by reinscribing an anthropocentrism that gives the human agenda priority over other life forms' needs.[3] This reinscription is enabled by the series's relative univocality. Indeed, despite their hybrid mixing of discourses of utopia and dystopia, the Earthseed books deemphasize dialogic conversation among multiple perspectives, a departure from Butler's typically more multivocal rhetoric. In "Biopolitics of Postmodern Bodies," for example, Donna Haraway identifies Butler's Clay's Ark (1984)

and <u>Xenogenesis</u> series (1987-89) as examples of cyborg feminism, a discourse typified by the subversion of "myriad organic wholes" so that "[t]he transcendent authorization of interpretation is lost [. . .]" (Haraway "Cyborg" 152-53). Haraway contends that by embracing the necessary partiality of all perspectives, Butler's earlier novels argue productively against the acceptance of any one perspective as "correct." In the <u>Earthseed</u> books, however, this "transcendent authorization of interpretation," while certainly challenged, is not entirely "lost." Rather, Butler privileges the "voice of wisdom" embodied in her protagonist, Olamina, who, in turn, represents "humanity" as a uniquely privileged species. The centripetal dominance of Olamina's voice allows her anthropocentric hierarchizing to pass unremarked.

This anthropocentrism links the <u>Earthseed</u> books to the older Wellsian science fiction tradition. Both Butler and Wells develop scenarios that promote humanity's colonization of other planets. Both are aware of the difficulty involved in the transformation of ecological relationships that this colonization would require. Both frame this colonization effort specifically in terms of the survival of the human species, with comparatively little reference to other life forms. Although Butler's more provisional discourse surpasses Wells's in embracing the values of partnership and compromise, both scenarios are implicated in an anthropocentric ideology of ecological domination enabled by the texts' endorsement of a single centripetal discourse.

Now, all voices need not be equally weighted in order for productive critique to occur. Since the <u>Earthseed</u> books recount the rise of the Earthseed religion, it makes sense that Earthseed's values form the most prominent discourse. This emphasis reflects the Olamina's determination to implement Earthseed despite massive resistance from the dominant culture. Earthseed is born out of dystopian social crisis in America in the 2020s. <u>Sower</u> depicts a society in the grips of an apocalypse, or "Pox," in which, as Jim Miller observes in "Post-apocalyptic Hoping," unbridled capitalism has resulted not only in poverty but in environmental disasters, including drought and water shortage (353). By the 2030s, the setting for most of <u>Talents</u>, the worst of the Pox is over. Yet a frightened America all too willingly embraces the promise of renewal offered by the

fascist Church of Christian America, whose worst manifestation, the Crusaders, rounds up groups of "heathens" for "reeducation," which includes forced labor, the separation of families, rape, torture, and murder. Earthseed responds to these crises by enacting proactive, realistic social change. This change, at least in the short-term, cannot be radical: Earthseed initially lacks the power to substantially challenge more dominant social trends. But Earthseed's early actions are not less relevant for being limited to promoting survival, community, and hope among a few individuals. As Lisbeth Grant-Britton contends, "In these novels [. . .] these deeply-embedded new goals [of Earthseed] often manifest themselves as no more than the presence rather than absence of alternatives. But for many exploited people, change is often a matter of starting with almost nothing and making incremental advancements" (281-82). For the impoverished inhabitants of this twenty-first century dystopia, the important point is not that change be systemic or ideal but that it be possible and shapable.

Founded by a young African-American woman, Lauren Oya Olamina, Earthseed's fundamental tenant is "God is change." Change is the only constant: a force that must be both accepted and used. The idea that "God is change" impels Olamina to adapt to--and thus alter--the worsening conditions of her society. Instead of abandoning hope or merely waiting for things to get better, she is always planning and acting to improve her living conditions. At the end of Sower, Olamina founds the prosperous community of Acorn, a town she intends to use as a base for promulgating Earthseed. In Talents, Acorn is destroyed by the Crusaders, but the Earthseed movement itself, nonetheless, spreads and gains power. The end of the book finds an aged Olamina contemplating the imminent departure of Earth's first starship, a major step on the path to the "Destiny" of colonizing other worlds.

Because she is the hero of this series, Olamina's voice is emphasized. Sower is composed entirely of Olamina's writings, her journals and her scriptural text, "Earthseed: The Book of the Living." Thus, in this first novel, all dialogue is mediated by Olamina's voice. The reader hears Olamina's thoughts but has only her conversations with others to indicate their perspectives. Talents, in contrast, is the product of four voices. Olamina's

writings, which remain the bulk of the text, are joined by a few excerpts from the writings of her husband, Bankole, and her brother, Marc. The primary narrator of the book, however, is Olamina's daughter, Asha Vere, who has compiled the texts of her relatives and stitched them together with her own commentary near the beginning of each chapter. The Earthseed books, then, employ two main dialogic strategies. One is conversation recorded within the writings of a particular narrator. The other is the use of multiple narrative voices. Both of these strategies contribute multivocality to Butler's narrative.

Olamina's Earthseed begins, then, as a centrifugal language in Butler's twenty-first century dystopia, offering an alternative to that society's dominant discourses. Against the received view of her childhood community, Robledo, that hiding behind their walls will keep them safe until things get better, Earthseed builds positive changes by confronting a worsening world. Against the dominant discourse of Christian America's religious bigotry, Earthseed embraces diversity. Against a frightened America's dream of returning to a golden past, Earthseed offers the hope of an unpredetermined future. Throughout Olamina's life, Earthseed gradually gains prestige, ending as a language that is, if not "dominant," at least widely influential.

But while Olamina's language is centrifugal within the context of her own society, it is the centripetal language of the Earthseed books, representing the ideology endorsed by much--though not all--of the text. Although Olamina is presented as the proverbial "voice crying in the wilderness" of apocalyptic America, her voice dominates the series. Undoubtedly, the centralization of Olamina's discourse serves a valid function. In recounting the story of her life and her religion's rise to prominence, the narrative offers a powerful vision of personal agency and the vulnerability even of dominant languages to "Change." What is problematic is the silencing of critiques of Earthseed that this centralization effects.

To be sure, many aspects of Olamina's discourse are persistently challenged. Throughout most of the narrative, her marginalized status leaves her open to criticism from more dominant discourses. Olamina's father argues that her preparations for disaster in Robledo will only promote anger and panic among her neighbors. Her

childhood friend, Harry, accuses her of brutality for her cold willingness to hurt or kill people in order to survive. Her brother, Marc, criticizes Earthseed as a whole, arguing that God is changeless and that Christian America--in its less violent manifestations--is the best option for strengthening the nation. Finally, her dream of humanity's Destiny of "taking root among the stars" is derided by many as a fanciful excuse to squander valuable resources on space exploration.

Indeed, it is in this dream of interstellar colonization that Olamina's discourse is presented as most centrifugal: most marginalized by her society's centripetal discourse. Even many who embrace the basic tenants of Earthseed consider the Destiny an unrealistic fantasy. Yet, ironically, it is precisely this vision of colonization that the text itself challenges least. While the practicality of Olamina's space-faring ambitions is productively critiqued, her assumption that humanity has the right to colonize an alien biosphere receives no critique at all. Olamina's ethics of space colonization defines a unitary language simply because, on this point, none of the voices centrifugal to her discourse disagree with her.

A Comparison of Wells's and Butler's Colonial Discourses

Like Wells's Utopians, Olamina assumes that humanity has a right to expand indefinitely into alien ecosystems and to alter those systems with the principal aim of ensuring human survival, an assumption as unchallenged in the Earthseed books as it is in Men Like Gods. The irony of this commonality can hardly be overstated. Unlike Wells's Utopians, Olamina does not extol domination; she does not make a virtue of human "superiority"; indeed, she emphasizes the values of partnership and accommodation. Nonetheless, perhaps without intending to, she also voices an anthropocentric ideology that could readily be deployed in ways that trivialize ecological relationality.[4] In stating that the expansionist ideology of the Earthseed is akin to that of the Wellsian utopia, however, I do not mean that the two are identical. On the contrary, these ideologies differ in several respects, which can be directly traced to the pivot point of hybridity. As a hybrid thinker, Olamina treats hierarchical binary oppositions as

largely artificial. Such artificial categories provide little justification for conquest.

Indeed, Earthseed has a strongly non-dualistic strain that promotes a concord among all life forms:

> Nature
> Is all that exists.
> [. . .]
> It's you,
> Me,
> Us,
> Them,
> Struggling upstream
> Or drifting down. (Talents 383)

In this verse, Olamina adopts a rhetoric that stresses the commonalities of all life: everything is nature. This commonality refuses hierarchy. In her avowal that nature is "you / Me / Us / Them," the pronouns are connected by coordination rather than subordination: rhetorically each group she lists exists on the same level. Wells, who rejected T. H. Huxley's ontological division between humans and other animals, might agree that "Nature / Is all that exists," but he would be less inclined to express this sameness in the egalitarian terms Olamina adopts. For Wells, nature is decidedly hierarchical, the most "highly evolved" species legitimately claiming dominion over all others.

Earthseed, in contrast, offers "partnership" as the guiding principle for interacting with others, whether those others are human companions or alien biospheres. As Olamina explains to one of her companions, Len, "Earthseed is about preparing to fulfill the Destiny. It's about learning to live in partnership with one another in small communities, and at the same time, working out a sustainable partnership with our environment" (Talents 358-59). In creating an analogy between partnership with humans in a community and partnership with the environment, Olamina represents the environment as similar to a human ally, an agency deserving moral consideration, not

merely a tool to use. This attitude, Olamina suggests, is essential to the appropriate fulfillment of the Destiny. Earthseed scripture makes this point as well:

> Any entity, any process that
> cannot or should not be resisted or
> avoided must somehow be
> partnered. Partner one another.
> Partner diverse communities. Partner
> life. Partner any world that is your
> home. Partner God. Only in
> partnership can we thrive, grow,
> Change. Only in partnership can we
> live. (Talents 135)

"Partnership" suggests a relation in which both partners have agency and use it cooperatively for mutual benefit. To "partner" something is to take responsibility for acting with it and upon it while allowing it to act with and upon you. The idea of partnership is naturally linked to the central creed of Earthseed: that we must accept Change, but shape it too. Partnership is a relation of mutual respect. For Wells, change should ideally be guided solely by humanity, which should shape nature and humanity itself to its desired ends. In contrast, Olamina's concept of "partnership" suggests a need to conform to external conditions as well as to shape them. Her very survival during the Pox is predicated both on reshaping the disintegrating society she was born into and on learning to shape herself to survive within it. The community of Acorn is built as much upon practical adaptations to a harsh reality--such as staying well-armed and expelling untrustworthy members--as it is upon utopian hopes of refiguring human civilization.

This model of partnership accepts the impossibility of survival through total domination. To survive, one must recognize and accommodate the power of other agencies. If Wells's concept of a kinetic utopia evokes a linear technocratic and scientific progressionism, Olamina's "Change" evokes "rolling with the punches" as much as a progressive program. "All that you touch / You Change," she writes; "All that you Change / Changes you" (Sower 3): the agency is mutual. And because no single force has absolute control, no single agenda can proceed without interruption: "I know things will go wrong now and then," Olamina concedes (Talents 393). Change is chaotic,

unpredictable; new Poxes will arise. But as long as humanity takes the initiative in shaping change, it can weather these times of crisis and emerge stronger. In pursuing proactive optimism in the midst of dystopia, Earthseed embodies what Patricia Melzer calls Butler's "dialectical" understanding of utopia as "always in relation to the dystopian term, or its possibility" (33). Because the world is inherently unstable, absolute utopia is impossible, yet the very instability of the world always leaves open the possibility for positive change.

Clearly, Olamina views change as less controllable than Wells does. Yet finally, both embrace a progressive model of shaping change. Wells sees utopia as an "ascent of stages" (Modern Ch. 1, Sec. 1); similarly, Olamina teaches not just to adapt but to "[a]dapt and grow" (Talents 22). This growth, both spiritual and physical, is essential to avoiding extinction on Earth: "[Earthseed] will offer us a kind of species life insurance," she writes (Talents 393). This "insurance" derives from spreading humanity to different planets so that a disaster on one planet cannot destroy it. Likewise, in The War of the Worlds, Wells's narrator looks to space for species preservation:

> [W]hen the slow cooling of the sun makes this earth uninhabitable, as at last it must do, it may be that the thread of life that has begun here will have streamed out and caught our sister planet [Venus] within its toils.
>   Dim and wonderful is the vision I have conjured up in my mind of life spreading slowly from this little seed-bed of the solar system throughout the inanimate vastness of sidereal space. (253)

As if echoing Wells's "seed-bed" metaphor, Olamina teaches that "the Destiny of Earthseed is to take root among the stars" (Sower 68). One of her central creeds, repeated in several of her Earthseed verses, this avowal of self-designed Destiny recalls Wells's Utopian, Urthred, who asserts in Men Like Gods, "Every day our thoughts go out more surely to our inheritance, the stars" (83). Thus, the concept of "Destiny," like "inheritance," frames humanity as a privileged species for whom interstellar expansion is an unproblematic inevitability.

Olamina and Wells figure interstellar colonization as part of a natural progression, like growing up and leaving home. Indeed, both invoke the metaphor of a grown child leaving its mother to frame this colonization as a sign of the human species's achieving

adulthood. When Wells's Urthred speaks of reaching out to the stars, he does so in the context of proclaiming humanity to be "no longer the beaten and starved children of Nature, but her free and adolescent sons" (Men 83). Using a somewhat different rhetoric to a similar purpose, Olamina, too, writes of weaning humanity from Mother Earth:

> Earthseed is adulthood.
> It's trying our wings,
> Leaving our mother,
> Becoming men and women.
>
> We've been children,
> Fighting for the full breasts,
> The protective embrace,
> The soft lap.
> Children do this.
> But Earthseed is adulthood. (Talents 394)

Certainly, Olamina frames the relationship between humanity and the biosphere more positively than Urthred. She characterizes nature/Earth as a loving mother, not a cruel one. For her, humanity comprises both men and women, not merely "sons." In Olamina's language, too, the "blame" for humanity's problems is shifted from Nature, "beating and starving her sons," to Earth's children, "fighting for the full breasts." On the whole, Olamina's tone is less hostile to the world humanity has evolved in. And being less hostile to nature, her teachings are likely to be more amenable to the development of a harmonious, sustainable ecological praxis than Wells's more conquest-oriented philosophy.

Despite these significant differences, however, Olamina's and Wells's common metaphor of grown children leaving Mother Earth supports a similar disregard for ecological relationality. Both Olamina and Wells use the fundamental progressionist metaphor of "leaving behind" that I discuss in chapter 1. Being tied to the Earth is associated with childhood. The natural progression for the human species is to leave the Earth, to leave Mother. A problem with this image, in both Wells's and Olamina's writings, is that, superficially, it suggests that it is our natural "destiny" to exist outside of a biosphere. It is natural to leave behind the system that gives us the air, water, food,

light, gravity, and so on that we need to survive. Now, neither Olamina nor Wells suggests that living without a planet to support us should be an immediate aim. Both understand that humans require a web of ecological relations to survive. The purpose of leaving Earth is to gain greater agency in our own survival. On other planets, we will not be protected by our "Mother" but, like adults, will protect ourselves: we will construct our own relations to the environment more methodically than we have on Earth. Indeed, we must be able to do this if we are to survive in an alien biosphere. An "adult" humanity can shape its environment for itself. The dubious assumption, here, is that a non-Earth biosphere could readily be found (or made) to accommodate us. According to this view, the Earth is ultimately unnecessary.

In this dichotomization of humanity and the Earth, humanity becomes the force with significant agency. Both Olamina and Wells emphasize that humanity is the only species (on Earth at least) with the power to rationally choose its destiny. In The Science of Life, Wells (with Julian Huxley and G. P. Wells) argues that with humanity, evolution "has at least the possibility of becoming purposeful, because man is the first product of Evolution who has the capacity for long-range purpose, the first to be capable of controlling evolutionary destiny" (642). Similarly, Olamina explains, "The human species is a kind of animal, of course. But we can do something no other animal species has ever had the option to do. We can choose: We can go on building and destroying [. . . .] Or we can make something more of ourselves. We can grow up" (Talents 358). It is, indeed, probable that humanity is the only species on Earth capable of consciously planning for its future as a species. Yet in stressing humanity's ability to do what "no other species has ever had the option to do," Olamina, like Wells, does more than simply state a fact. She emphasizes humanity's responsibility to seize and use this power. She also supports a dichotomy between humans and all other life forms. For both Olamina and Wells, the focus remains squarely on the human species as a unit. Olamina repeats this emphasis at several points: "[The Destiny] offers us a kind of species adulthood and species immortality" (Talents 156); "We need to become the adult species that the Destiny can help us become!" Talents 179); "[Earthseed] will offer us a kind of species

life insurance" (Talents 393; all emphasis mine). For both Wells and Olamina, humanity is chiefly what matters. Other species, forces, and webs of relation are relevant but mainly as ancillary factors that must be taken into account as humanity shapes a destiny for itself. When Olamina speaks of humanity as "Earth's seed," the embodiment of the potential of the entire Earth, she risks replacing her principle of "partnership" among forces with an anthropocentrism that figures humanity as the only term of interest.

Unquestionably, the singleness of this human focus is more absolute for Wells than Olamina. As I argue in chapter 4, Wells's radical anthropocentrism almost completely rejects intrinsic rights for other species, the notable exception being his condemnation of the senseless suffering of any creature. Olamina's anthropocentrism is more moderate. Like Wells, she does not condone the suffering of animals. Unlike Wells, she seems to accept a species's intrinsic right to exist, at least as long as its existence does not immediately imperil humanity. When small, slug-and-slime-mold-like life forms are discovered on Mars, for instance, she comments,

> I suppose that if the Martian "slime molds" can be used for something--mining, perhaps, or chemistry--then they'll be protected, cultivated, bred to be even more useful. But if they prove to be of no particular use, they'll be left to survive or not as best they can with whatever impediments the company sees fit to put in their paths. If they're unlucky enough to be bad for business in some way--say they develop a taste for some of the company's building materials--they'll be lucky to survive at all. I doubt that Terrestrial environmental laws will protect them. Those laws don't even really protect plant and animal species here on Earth. (Talents 85)

It is clear that Olamina is not endorsing these commercial values. She implicitly aligns herself with the Martians by characterizing these practices as "impediments the company sees fit to put in [the Martians'] paths" and not, for example, as "efficient production standards." But while Olamina rejects a purely utilitarian attitude toward other life forms, she gives only a vague indication of what ethical guidelines should govern interspecies or interplanetary relations.

As an abstract principle, Olamina's concept of "partnership" is conducive to a judicious, non-destructive ecological praxis. Indeed, part of its power lies in its vagueness. Like the United States Constitution, Earthseed is designed to be general

enough to adapt itself to changing times. At the same time, this vagueness provides little practical guidance for the interstellar encounters already about to begin within Olamina's lifetime. Olamina counsels humanity to partner "any entity, any process that / cannot or should not be resisted or / avoided" (Talents 135). But she provides no means for determining what it is appropriate to resist or avoid. There is, of course, no simple answer to this question, and it is a strength in Olamina's teachings and Butler's books that no simplistic solution is put forward as definitive. What is of concern is not the absence of an answer to this question but rather the absence of any significant attempt to pose it.

The Destiny as a Centripetal Discourse

Despite her call to "partner any world that is your / home" (Talents 135), Olamina focuses so singly on the Destiny as the preservation of humanity that she devotes almost no attention to what this Destiny could mean for the planets on which it is to be carried out. She aims her dreams of colonization at worlds that already bear life: "I suspect that a living world might be easier for us to adapt to [. . .]" (Sower 74). Butler, likewise, espouses this view. In an interview about the Earthseed series, she explains, "The more our new world can do for us the more likely we are to be able to survive on it. For instance, a world that offers breathable air, potable water—or water that can easily be made potable—and arable land is much more desirable than a dead world like the moon or Mars" ("Conversation" 415).[5] But even on a living planet, it seems unlikely—or at least it should not be counted upon—that humanity will find another biosphere whose air is made of just the right composition of gases for us to breathe comfortably or whose soil contains appropriate nutrients to allow our crops to flourish. Faced with a non-Earth environment, how should humanity go about colonizing it? Olamina speaks of "adapting to" a new world rather than adapting that world to humanity. This willingness to shape oneself to fit one's environment is implicit in the Earthseed doctrine of embracing Change.[6] It is, therefore, likely that Olamina's disciples would attempt to transform themselves to breathe alien air before attempting to transform the alien atmosphere. (The

latter would, perhaps, be a more Wellsian endeavor.) Thus, Olamina's followers would probably spare the alien biosphere from the catastrophic destruction that would almost surely follow the recomposition of its own atmosphere.

Yet humans could not colonize a planet in significant numbers without having a profound effect on its biosphere. The very addition of biomass to a finite space would alter ecological relations within that system. Nor would this merely be human biomass. The starship that departs at the end of Talents includes animal embryos and plant seeds (406). Butler's mention of "arable land" indicates that colonists would raise Earth crops. But each hectare devoted to human farming and housing is a hectare taken away from the native environment, shifting existing ecological relations. Moreover, assuming that the alien environment does not kill terrestrial life forms, the introduction into the alien biosphere not just of humans, animals, and plants, but inevitably of microscopic organisms would run the risk of repeating disasters associated with introducing species between continents on Earth, disasters ranging from the ecological havoc wreaked by rabbits and mice in Australia, to the dangers posed by African "killer bees" in America, to the spread of diseases such as smallpox and syphilis.[7] To develop a colonization scenario that would begin to address these difficulties would be the work of another novel, and indeed, Butler has spoken of plans to continue the Earthseed series into the colonization phase ("Conversation" 415). What is missing from Sower and Talents, however--and it is a significant omission--is a concrete attempt to gesture toward these difficulties.

In fact, as real, fully imagined objects, the potential colony planets are almost completely absent from the text's discussion of the Destiny. Instead, Olamina repeatedly identifies interstellar colonization with "heaven." Describing the effort required to achieve the Destiny, she writes, "There's always a lot to do before you get to go to heaven" (Sower 75). Later, she tells one of her companions, Travis, that "my heaven really exists, and you don't have to die to reach it" (Sower 199). Olamina's use of the "heaven" trope is not disingenuous. She recognizes that people need a goal to galvanize them, a hope of some future "heavenly" enough to be worth generations of struggle. At

the same time, her equation of alien planets with "heaven" devalues considerations of the very "real-world" difficulties, both practical and ethical, that colonization will entail. Olamina also tends to equate any colonized planet with Earth. In her scripture, she writes, "Earthseed is all that spreads / Earthlife to new earths" (Sower 68). Once again, this rhetorical move obscures the alien planet itself: planets to be colonized are "heaven" or "earth," but almost never extrasolar worlds in their own right. This metaphorical effacement of other planets reflects Olamina's more literal lack of engagement with these worlds. She devotes almost none of her writings to conjectures about alien planets. While she supports the colonization of living planets, her only commentary on extraterrestrial life forms is her discussion of the Martian slugs. At the end of Talents, when she writes of the first colonization expedition, she does not even mention the planet to be colonized. Instead, the thrust of her commentary is the importance of an adult humanity's leaving (Mother) Earth.

Miller obliquely addresses this lack of engagement with colonized planets in his characterization of the Destiny as a utopian drive: "To think of this other world [i.e. the world to be colonized] is to think of a better world, the good place which is, as yet, no place" (355). Invoking they etymology of "utopia," Miller describes the Destiny as a proactive, optimistic impulse, "a way to begin to think the future" (355). Certainly, the Destiny can be a positive tool for encouraging human enterprise. It might even ultimately be the wisest course of action for preserving terrestrial life. But Miller's "utopia" also recalls a more negative sense of the word: utopia as idle fancy effacing the complexities of reality. Olamina's colonizable worlds are indeed "no place" in her rhetoric: blank slates for humanity to write upon. But a planet, of course, is not "no place." And to characterize it as an empty space to be shaped as a new heaven or earth is to deny its concrete existence in way that might be deleterious both for human colonists and indigenous life.

This effacement of an alien planet's material identity represents a gap in Olamina's discourse. The question of the "rights" of extraterrestrial life forms or ecosystems is apparently not a question she devotes much thought to. In discussing the

multiplicity of perspectives explored in the Earthseed series, Peter Stillman contends that while most of the narrative is told from Olamina's point of view, "her self-conscious self-reflections give the reader resources to question her decisions" (30). In Bakhtinian terms, when Olamina questions herself, she provides a centrifugal language to read against her own centripetal language. But on the ethics of extraterrestrial rights, she does not question herself. It is left, then, to other voices to open this question. Yet no voice does so.

Curiously, in the Earthseed books, this silence is limited to the ethics of interstellar colonization. Other aspects of Earthseed--and Olamina--are presented as open to criticism. Olamina's husband, Bankole, is skeptical of the feasibility of her ambitions. A self-described "doubter" (Talents 45), he writes that Olamina "dreams and writes and believes, and perhaps the world will let her live for a while, tolerating her as a harmless eccentric. I hope that it will. I fear that it may not" (46-47). Bankole's fears are justified. In the course of the narrative, Olamina makes one grave, practical mistake: she does not break up the community of Acorn in time to prevent the Crusaders from capturing almost all of her followers. In her consolidation of Earthseed in this single community, she unwittingly recapitulates the "gated-community" fallacy that destroyed her childhood home. The text explicitly presents this decision as a failure of Olamina's judgment. Indeed, she pointedly rejects suggestions, including Bankole's, to branch out into other communities. Her daughter Asha later accuses her of shortsightedness: "She sacrificed us for an idea. And if she didn't know what she was doing, she should have known [. . .]" (Talents 138).

Asha is Olamina's most cogent critic, the strongest centrifugal force pulling at the loose threads of Earthseed. In fact, in the first section written in Asha's voice, she calls Olamina's life work "misguided" (Talents 2). In particular, Asha rejects the Destiny, arguing that it diverts attention and resources from problems on Earth: "So much needed to be done here on earth--so many diseases, so much hunger, so much poverty, such suffering, and here was a rich organization spending vast sums of money, time, and effort on nonsense. Just nonsense!" (Talents 380). Asha's is the most sophisticated criticism

mounted against the Destiny. For there is, indeed, no easy balance to be struck between preparing for the future and helping the present. Nor is her criticism that the Destiny is a fanciful waste of resources definitively answered. This is a strength of the text. While a single answer to such a complex question of resource distribution would seem simplistic, the dialogic juxtaposition of views invites readers to openly explore the criticism.[8] Such an open exploration of the potential problems and solutions involved in a certain course of action is one of the core functions of the hybrid science fiction novel. In mounting this critique, Asha's voice ably serves the function of a centrifugal discourse, challenging assumptions of the centripetal discourse that might otherwise pass unexamined.

Yet Asha's critique is focused solely on the question of the desirability of the Destiny for humanity. She cites "diseases," "hunger," "poverty," and "suffering," all typically characterized as human social problems, as issues that should take precedence over space exploration. If anything, the ethical questions involved in human-extraterrestrial interactions are even less present in her mind than they are in Olamina's. At least, Olamina provides the concept of partnership as a principle for how to address such concerns. But no centrifugal voice exists to push this vague principle toward concrete ethical application. Asha is concerned solely with helping humans on Earth. Bankole, like most of Olamina's detractors, finds the Destiny only unrealistic, not ethically problematic. Marc objects to Earthseed in general, but he, too, dismisses the Destiny merely for being fanciful. Thus, on this crucial question of the ethics of colonization, even the type of dialectic questioning that Wells's puts forward in Men Like Gods is absent. On this issue, the centripetal discourse is literally the only discourse in the text.

This lack of engagement with the practical ethical problems surrounding interstellar colonization could easily enable social and ecological domination on the part of the colonists. The possibility is made explicit when the interstellar age is about to begin, an aged Olamina laments that the first starship has been named the Christopher Columbus: "I object to the name. This ship is not about a shortcut to riches and empire. It's not about snatching up slaves and gold and presenting them to some European

monarch" (Talents 406). Olamina's point is valid. Since these interstellar expeditions will not to return to Earth, they cannot use the "New World" as a mere source of raw materials to benefit the "Old World." The "New World" will be "home" and, therefore, will demand a certain loyalty and investment. Nonetheless, the fact that this name has been chosen, despite its obvious connections to imperialism, exploitation, and genocide, is an early warning sign that Earthseed itself is "changing" into something potentially more conquest-oriented than Olamina intended. Butler, of course, is aware of the irony and, thus, opens up a space of implicit critique of Earthseed's imperialist potential. The notion that Earthseed itself may become distorted, may be made, as Bankole predicts, "more complicated, more open to interpretation, more mystical, and more comforting" (Sower 234), is part of the irreducible complexity embodied in the concept of Change. Yet even in its original form, Earthseed emphasizes the need for the human species to grow and preserve itself, deemphasizing the role of other life forms and the ethics of colonizing other biospheres. In this respect, the religion begins with a gap in its ethics. As the colonization progresses, this gap may be filled by a practical, harmonious system for colonization as "partnership." Just as easily, it may be filled by the manifest "Destiny" of Earthseed to "change" alien worlds into "heavenly new earths" at the expense of the indigenous life.

Partnership in Acorn

Earthseed is implicated in an anthropocentric discourse that might privilege humanity at the expense of the non-human. Moreover, in deemphasizing the non-human, Earthseed runs the risk of devaluing ecological relations among non-humans that sustain humanity's environment. At the same time, it is clear that this anthropocentric strain is not the dominant theme in Earthseed ideology. Unlike Wells's Utopians, Earthseed rejects conquest more than it enables it. It embraces partnership. Its concept of Change requires human adaptation just as much as it endorses manipulation of the environment. Earthseed sees change as integral to sustainability, adaptation as the path to survival. Much of this ideology promotes a sound ecological praxis.

Indeed, Olamina's community of Acorn exemplifies such praxis. Acorn embraces a constant state of Change. As a base for the development of Earthseed, it is a growing community. This growth is intentional, not incidental, the result of Acorn's reaching out to help and teach more people. It is a growth that rejects overconsumption; indeed, Acorn routinely produces a surplus of food, which the residents sell to surrounding communities. They use their profits to purchase tools and equipment they could not readily produce in Acorn, thus accommodating the growth of the community without an overextension of resources. Acorn accomplishes this successful relationship with its socio-ecological environment through conscientious "partnership" with its environment in all details of its existence. Crops are planted at the correct time of year; pests are removed by hand if necessary; wells are dug in the appropriate location. A premium is placed on acquiring the hands-on knowledge needed to sustain this community. In Acorn, every object and aspect of life is important. Every act should be a thoughtful, informed decision geared toward developing a community that can survive times of crisis and shape Change to build a better future. Acorn is, thus, a powerful model for a healthy ecological praxis sustained according the values of Earthseed.

What is disturbing in Butler's depiction of the Destiny, then, is less Olamina's ideology than the text's univocality. Indeed, even the presence of anthropocentric trends in Earthseed need not, in itself, be a problem. Anthropocentric discourse is part of our world and, thus, deserves to be heard. It also deserves to be questioned. But in the Earthseed books, the anthropocentrism with which the Destiny is framed is insufficiently questioned. While the principle of "partnership" offers an alternative to anthropocentric and hierarchical models for ecological interaction, this principle is weakened by the text's tendency to efface the agency and identity of that non-human "partners" involved in the Destiny. The idea of colonizing alien worlds is not necessarily ethically unsound, but it is ethically complex. In the Earthseed books, however, every voice treats the ethics of interstellar colonization as unproblematic. Thus, the potential problems with this anthropocentric vision of human expansion pass unremarked through the sieve of a centripetal language.

Death Is Not an Enemy

Socio-ecological Critique in Ursula K. Le Guin's The Dispossessed

One potential alternative to Olamina's ultimately progressionist project of striving toward species adulthood is articulated in Le Guin's The Dispossessed. If the Earthseed books partake of the Wellsian utopian tradition, The Dispossessed is more nearly allied to the non-progressionist tradition of Morris's Nowhere. Indeed, Le Guin has stated that the anarchism she depicts in the society of Anarres was inspired, in part, by Peter Kropotkin (Moore 32), who, in turn, once described Morris's News from Nowhere as "perhaps the most thoroughly and deeply Anarchistic conception of future society that has ever been written" (qtd. in McMaster 73).[9] Like Morris, Le Guin privileges healthy, balanced living over progress as a utopian value. Yet unlike Morris, she does not present a clear argument for a particular type of utopia. Thus, while Morris advocates decentralized communism, Le Guin does not similarly endorse anarcho-syndicalism or any other socioeconomic system.

Le Guin subtitles her novel "an ambiguous utopia," suggesting that, in contrast to Nowhere, her utopia is designed as much to explore as to inspire. It is less a rallying cry for social change than an investigation of possibilities for change both positive and negative. In keeping with her avowal of ambiguity, Le Guin's Anarres is more complicated and problematic than Morris's Nowhere. Ironically, it this open acknowledgement of the problematic character of Anarres that enables a more realistic argument for the possibility of a utopian revolution against capitalism, bureaucracy, and the exploitation of nature. If Morris presents all "reasonable" people in News from Nowhere as endorsing his utopia, Le Guin offers more critical and more diverse perspectives. This mobilization of numerous, sometimes conflicting ideologies to represent social interactions with "realistic," multivocal complexity is a particular rhetorical strength of The Dispossessed. At the same time, this depiction of social diversity is partially undercut by the text's centralization of the single voice of its protagonist, Shevek, in such a way that other voices, though always present, are pushed to the periphery. While Shevek's anarchistic voice generates a productive intertextual

critique of discourses, such as the Wellsian/Shavian view, that advocate progress and control as central values, the marginalization of voices other than Shevek's, nonetheless, limits this critique by allowing the text to evade full engagement with the very viewpoints it is implicitly critiquing, thereby sacrificing certain opportunities to appeal to readers who might espouse those viewpoints.

The Ambiguous Utopia of Anarres

The Dispossessed contrasts the two societies of capitalist Urras and its anarchistic moon, Anarres, principally through the experiences of the brilliant Anarresti physicist, Shevek, who visits Urras, against his own people's wishes, in order to advance his study of temporal physics. On Urras, Shevek develops a Theory of Simultaneity that will eventually lead to the creation of the ansible, a tool for instantaneous communication across any distance. By liberating interplanetary communication from delays sometimes of many years, the ansible will open up the possibility of a genuine interstellar community based on the free exchange of knowledge. The ansible is, thus, emblematic of the dream of Odo, the founder of Anarres civilization, who delineated an anarchistic social theory based on freedom of action and expression and the rejection of private ownership.

The society Odo advocated has much in common with Morris's Nowhere. In both societies, there are no prisons, no formal punishments for crimes, yet theft does not occur because, as Shevek puts it, "[n]obody owns anything to rob" (Dispossessed 149). In both societies, murder does occur but is a rarity since most of the social conditions that promote such violence do not exist. Both societies encourage people to pursue whatever type of work appeals to them, yet people voluntarily take on the more unsavory jobs through a sense of communal responsibility enhanced by an appreciation for an occasional change of pace. Shevek explains that "if you work at a mechanical loom mostly, every tenth day it's pleasant to go outside and lay a pipe [. . .]" (150). In News from Nowhere, Hammond makes a similar point: "[A]ll work is now pleasurable; either because of the hope of gain in honour and wealth with which the work is done, which

causes pleasurable excitement, even when the actual work is not pleasant; or else because it has grown into a pleasurable <u>habit</u> [. . .] and lastly [. . .] because there is a conscious sensuous pleasure in the work itself [. . .]" (122-23). Hammond's explanation, though rhetorically more absolute than Shevek's, is similar in concrete application. While Shevek makes no claim that "all" work is pleasurable, both societies place a premium on the pleasure to be derived from work.

Yet Anarres and Nowhere differ in important respects as well. The two societies diverge strongly in their view of aesthetics. Certainly, both discourage non-functional ornamentation: Morris, for instance, writes disparagingly of the gaudiness of nineteenth-century women's fashions. Shevek refers to the useless trinkets in Urrasti gift shops as "acres of excrement" (132). Yet for Morris, aesthetics should be one of the guiding principles of society. It is a sense of beauty as much as anything else that encourages his Nowherians to reject the polluting factories of the industrial age and return to a largely pastoral lifestyle. In Nowhere, work is art: every created object should be both useful and aesthetically pleasing. Followers of Odo, on the other hand, are wary of art in general. Odo's teaching that the non-functional is "excrement," a waste product of the social organism, is sometimes interpreted so rigidly on Anarres that any aesthetic decoration may be suspect. Shevek's friend Bedap, for instance, humorously objects to Shevek's orange blanket: "'It's definitely an excremental color,' Bedap said. 'As a functions analyst I must point out that there is no need for orange. Orange serves no vital function in the social organism [. . .]'" (162). While Bedap's playful complaint is not a genuine moral objection to Shevek's blanket, the fact that he makes such an observation at all reflects the uneasiness with which the Anarresti approach the idea of valuing beauty for its own sake.

This difference between the Anarresti and Nowherian attitudes toward beauty reflects a fundamental difference between the two societies' approaches to nature and ecology. As I discuss in chapter 2, Morris generally equates Nature with beauty: Nature is one of the central standards by which the creation and preservation of beauty is to be judged. This view of Nature enables Morris's depiction of an unproblematic utopia: most

of the time, Nowhere is both beautiful and functional. No choice need be made between one or the other: the Nowherians can have it all. While this attitude promotes a profound affection for the non-human world, it effaces what might be termed "ugly nature": if Nature is synonymous with beauty, is a hookworm unnatural? As a central motivation for utopia, the preservation of an aesthetically pleasing lifestyle offers no reason to protect such aesthetically unpleasant species, thereby opening up a space for careless ecological management. A fetid pool may be aesthetically unpleasing yet an important participant in the health of a local ecosystem. In News from Nowhere, Morris's emphasis on beauty as a reason for preserving Nature underwrites a corresponding deemphasis on the gritty and often unlovely reality of ecological necessities.

The Anarresti's deemphasis on the aesthetic in general reflects different motivations for living in harmony with the environment. In contrast to the fertile countryside of Nowhere's pastoral England, Anarres is a world of ecological scarcity, a place where, as Kingsley Widmer remarks, "Full pastoral alternatives are hardly viable" (50). On Anarres, ecological relations must be carefully taken into account simply because the sustainability of life in such an environment is always precarious:

> Man fitted himself with care and risk into this narrow ecology. If he fished, but not too greedily, if he cultivated, using mainly organic wastes for fertilizer, he could fit in. But he could not fit anybody else in. There was no grass for herbivores. There were no herbivores for carnivores. There were no insects to fecundate flowering plants; the imported fruit trees were all hand-fertilized. No animals were introduced from Urras to imperil the delicate balance of life. Only the Settlers came, and so well scrubbed internally and externally that they brought a minimum of their personal fauna and flora with them. Not even the flea had made it to Anarres. (186)

On Anarres, nature is primarily conceived in terms of ecological necessity rather than aesthetic pleasure. In her emphasis on the intricacy and tenuousness of ecological relations, Le Guin is more akin to Wells than Morris. Indeed, far from retreating into the pastoral prettiness of Nowhere, The Dispossessed confronts the difficulties of interplanetary colonization much more directly even than Butler's reasonably ecologically conscientious Earthseed books. In the passage I have quoted, Le Guin offers

at least general answers to a major question Butler never takes up: how could humans fit into an alien biosphere? They could fit, Le Guin suggests, by severely limiting the number of introduced species, both macroscopic and microscopic, by rejecting "greed" in their harvesting of existing life forms (this must logically include human population control), and by showing, in general, an understanding of the scope and limitation of webs of relation they are entwining themselves into: flowering plants cannot reproduce without pollinators, and so on. It is also significant that in Le Guin's speculative universe, numerous planets, including Earth, Urras, and presumably Anarres, have been seeded with life originating on the planet, Hain. Thus, the biosphere of Anarres is not evolutionarily "alien" to Urrasti life forms. Ecologically, therefore, the Urrasti colonization of Anarres is more like the European colonization of Australia than the human colonization of a hypothetical alien biosphere. This common evolutionary lineage lends plausibility to the assumption that Anarres's atmosphere is breathable, its food edible.

This ecological scarcity is part of the ambiguity of Le Guin's utopia. By many people's standards, Anarres is not a beautiful place. Despite his intense loyalty to Anarres, even Shevek is favorably impressed with the comparative verdure of the country of A-Io on Urras. Anarres is not an easy place to live: Shevek sees first hand the effects of a famine brought about by drought. At one point, he even finds himself stranded on a train where "[a] raid on the truck gardens [to get food] was seriously proposed, and bitterly debated, and might have been carried out, if the train had not hooted at last for departure" (256). Even in a society that practices a utopian socialist distribution of resources "to each according to his need," real scarcity results in real hunger, which in turn, threatens the social fabric of Odonian "brotherhood." Anarres, then, is far from Morris's idyllic vision of the English summer.[10]

As Robert Philmus observes, however, an ecologically stressed world is conducive both to "mutual aggression" and to "mutual aid" (128). Privation fosters not only conflict but also social equality and cohesion. Scarcity on Anarres requires a modification of Odo's teaching that each community should be largely self-sufficient.

On Anarres, a single community is unlikely to have access to all the natural resources
required for self-sufficiency. Thus, ironically, ecological scarcity demands an even
greater cooperative "brotherhood" than Odo suggested: "The special resources and
products of each region were interchanged continually with those of others, in an intricate
process of balance: that balance of diversity which is the characteristic of life, of natural
and social ecology" (Dispossessed 96). This ecologically imposed need for social
coordination, however, is not entirely positive; indeed, it further contributes to the
ambiguity of the utopia by generating both positive and negative ramifications. For if
scarcity promotes cooperation, regard for diversity, and a deep awareness of the need for
"balance," it also demands a certain level of centralization, for "as they say in the
analogic mode, you can't have a nervous system without at least a ganglion, and
preferably a brain" (96). This administrative center, located in the city of Abbenay,
walks a thin line between coordination and control. Indeed, in Shevek's time, it is clearly
becoming a force for social oppression.

On Anarres, no one is legally required to do anything, but this does not mean that
certain actions are not coerced. Because life on ecologically scarce Anarres demands
centralized coordination, work postings are managed through an overarching syndicate,
Divlab. Though anyone is free to refuse a posting, such refusal carries social
consequences. A person who resists working where he or she has been assigned may be
labeled a "nuchnib," an uncooperative member of society likely to incur mockery or even
physical violence from his or her more cooperative fellows (150). Of course, most of the
time, an individual will be pleased with his or her posting because Divlab takes into
account personal interests, training, and career aspirations. If someone's field of study,
however, does not accord with what is perceived as functional for the social organism,
then there may be no postings that support that study. To pursue certain types of work,
therefore, one has no choice but to become a nuchnib. Such a person's work may be

dismissed, ridiculed, or even boycotted. When Shevek takes a liking to the music of the composer Salas, for instance, he is shocked to learn that Salas has never been given a posting related to music. Discussing the matter with Salas, Shevek protests,

> "But there must be postings for composers."
> "Where?"
> "In the Music Syndicate, I suppose."
> "But the Music syndics don't like my compositions. And nobody much else does, yet. I can't be a syndicate all by myself, can I?" (174)

Without public support to for his composition, Salas is free to compose but unlikely to be able to gather enough musicians and resources to make his music readily heard. In effect, his compositions are suppressed. More frightening is the case of Shevek's childhood friend, Tirin. After writing a comic play interpreted by some as anti-Odonian, Tirin is not only ridiculed--an expression of anarchistic free speech--but also posted to a series of hard physical jobs in remote outposts where he has small opportunity to pursue his theatrical ambitions. Eventually, this suppression of his freedom of expression drives him insane.

Shevek as Dialogically Constructed Protagonist

Most crucially, of course, The Dispossessed is the story of Shevek, who must ultimately risk exile on Urras in order to freely pursue his work. Throughout most of his career as an Anarresti physicist, Shevek runs up against "walls," a central symbol in the novel. His interest in Simultaneity Theory is not considered functional for society. His need to correspond with Urrasti physicists in order to find colleagues in his unusual field marks him as a subversive, a "propertarian" of ideas who secretly admires Urrasti society and "egoizes" over his own, anti-social work. As a result of these perceptions, Shevek is routed to posts that prevent him from fully practicing his physics, refused permission to export his major work on Simultaneity Theory to Urras, and finally--along with his friend Bedap--accused of "total irresponsibility toward society's welfare" because the two of them have sent unsanctioned communications to Urras (355). Shevek's family, too, is made to pay for his unpopularity: his partner and daughter are harassed for being

associated with him. In spite of all these pressures to abandon his work, Shevek decides to travel to Urras to pursue his physics, even though he may not be allowed to return to Anarres.

As one might expect of an Anarresti, Shevek disapproves of much of Urras society. Unlike Anarres, Urras is rife with social and economic inequality. In spite of the planet's ecological abundance, the poor suffer for want of basic resources and services, while the rich pay exorbitant prices for useless baubles. On Urras, nations spy on each other, wars rage, different social classes disdain one another, and women are derided as fatuous inferiors. In short, the planet is an amalgamation of many common social criticisms of our own Western civilization in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Yet if Urras is a dystopia, it is an "ambiguous dystopia." Perversely, Urras offers certain freedoms that anarchic Anarres lacks. Its artistic expression is less constrained; indeed, Shevek is entranced by Urrasti music. More crucial for Shevek, international competition on Urras drives a vigorous scientific establishment, which, far from rejecting Shevek's work, is eager to exploit its promise for socioeconomic superiority. Shevek reflects on the irony that while practicing physics on Anarres, "[h]e had had no equals. Here, in the realm of inequality, he met them at last" (72).

For Shevek, however, neither Anarres nor Urras provides a satisfactory outlet for his physics. If Anarres wishes to suppress his work altogether, Urras wishes merely to capitalize on it as a tool for propertarian power politics. Having defied Anarres to come to Urras, Shevek finally defies his Urrasti hosts as well. After briefly joining with A-Io's Odonian revolutionaries, he seeks asylum at the Terran Embassy, where he shares with the entire interplanetary community the equations that will lead to the construction of the ansible. In the true spirit of Odo, Shevek thinks freely, acts freely, and shares freely information that, by providing for instantaneous interstellar communication, will serve the eminently Odonian purpose of destroying walls between people and planets. Although by the end of the book, neither Urrasti nor Anarresti society has substantially changed, there is no doubt that by freely sharing his work, Shevek has taken a step toward preserving the spirit of true Odonian anarchism.

In this regard, The Dispossessed is not particularly ambiguous. Though Le Guin does not depict Shevek as a character without bias or perceptual limitations, she makes it clear that his course of action is a valid interpretation of Odonian principles, a course preferable to those of both Anarres and Urras. Philmus makes this point explicitly: "It is the burden of The Dispossessed to redeem [the] promise [of Odo's utopia] and to do so in and through the person of Shevek" (129). In other books set in the same speculative universe, Le Guin consistently presents the ansible as a boon to the peaceful, non-imperialistic social union of the interplanetary Ekumen. The fact that this positive presentation is already in place in The Left Hand of Darkness (1969), published several years prior to The Dispossessed, further suggests that The Dispossessed as a text is designed to endorse Shevek's actions. And, indeed, it is easy to view his actions as laudable. As Philmus observes, "Shevek must earn--and be shown to earn" his status as social redeemer "through certain painful realizations about his Anarresti past and his present life on Urras" (130). Shevek clearly does this: his actions, motivations, and revelations carry much of the nuance and plausibility of a real person's journey through difficult experiences.

Shevek's complexity as a character is constructed by the text's dialogic rhetorical structure. Mike M. Cadden has developed an extensive analysis of the centrality of dialogism to Le Guin's work, which is typified by the combining of numerous discourses, not all of which can be comfortably reconciled with each other. Cadden observes, for example, that Le Guin's Earthsea books include influences as diverse as Taoism, Jungian psychology, feminism, anthropology, and Sartre's existentialism, to name a few: "We would have trouble coming up with a single synthesis of these many systems, to be sure," he remarks (516). Cadden contends that this conglomeration of discourses is fundamental to Le Guin's conception of character. Her fictional characters, like living human beings, are shaped by their dialogic encounters with others.[11]

Shevek is a dialogically constructed character. From his childhood to his sojourn on Urras, his horizons are continually broadened by exposure to the voices and experiences of others. As a young man, for instance, Shevek disapproves of "intellectual

nuchnibi" who refuse their assigned work posts to pursue eccentric interests (173). Yet exposure to his activist friend Bedap and to Bedap's "intellectual nuchnibi" friends gradually encourages Shevek to join their ranks and, eventually, to challenge the mounting oppression of Anarres society. When Shevek wonders how Divlab can justify refusing Salas a posting in his own field of music, it is Bedap who replies, "They can justify it because music isn't useful. Canal digging is important, you know; music's mere decoration [. . . .] We've gone right back to barbarism. If it's new, run away from it; if you can't eat it, throw it away" (175-76). By the time he departs for Urras, Shevek has largely come to share Bedap's opinion: it is, after all, Anarres's fear of the newness of Shevek's physics that drives him toward Urras in the first place.

Similarly, Shevek's appreciation for Urras's biological diversity is informed by his partner, Takver's, career as a biologist. Long before Shevek has set foot on Urras, Takver tells him, "On the Old World there are eighteen phyla of land animal; there are classes, like the insects, that have so many species they've never been able to count them [. . . .] Think of it: everywhere you looked animals, other creatures, sharing the earth and air with you. You'd feel so much more a part" (186). Later, on Urras, when Shevek is shown a child's pet otter, he immediately calls it "ammar": "brother," as the Anarresti call one another (152). Although Shevek is not consciously thinking of Takver, the text directly links his response to her influence: "It was as if the beauty and strangeness of the beasts and plants of Urras had been charged with a message for him by Takver, who would never see them [. . .]" (152). Shevek's love of nature is forged out of Takver's love for it.

The Urrasti, too, shape Shevek's understanding of his universe. After a lifetime of fearing the Urrasti as a corrupt and corrupting civilization, Shevek discovers that they often behave just like Anarresti. At dinner with the family of the physicist Oiie, Shevek is surprised to hear Oiie speak to his wife with genuine respect and companionability. Oiie's attitude immediately complicates Shevek's assumption that Urrasti men merely

regard women as contemptible inferiors. Shevek is similarly startled to see Oiie's wife chastise her child in much the same way that he or Takver might chastise their own daughter:

> "Ini! Be quiet!"
> Sadik! Don't egoize! The tone was precisely the same. (147)

Just as the Urrasti are more like the Anarresti than Shevek has guessed, however, they are also different in ways he only begins to comprehend once he is on Urras. It is chiefly through conversation with Chifoilisk, a spy for the socialist country of Thu, that Shevek begins to understand the political volatility of his position on Urras. Chifoilisk explains that Thu and A-Io, two superpowers in a state of cold war, are both scrambling for possession of the potential power of Shevek's research. He warns Shevek to be careful of the Ioti physicist, Pae:

> "[Pae is] dangerous to you because he is a loyal, ambitious agent of the Ioti government. He reports on you, and on me, regularly, to the Department of National Security--the secret police. I don't underestimate you, God knows, but don't you see, your habit of approaching everybody as a person, an individual, won't do here, it won't work. You have got to understand the powers behind the individuals." (137)

While his dinner with Oiie shows Shevek that the Urrasti are, in some ways, more like "normal" individuals than he initially imagined, Chifoilisk shows him that they are also representatives of various mutually hostile factions for which Anarres has no counterpart. Being himself an individual, not merely the agent of a certain social group, Shevek does not blindly follow Chifoilisk's counsel. In fact, it is largely his insistence on regarding people as individuals that leads him to join with the Odonians on Urras. Yet, he learns from Chifoilisk all the same. After their conversation, Shevek is careful to consider the political contexts of his interactions with the Urrasti: he does, indeed, do his best "to understand the powers behind the individuals."

In his mounting distrust for such powerful Urrasti political agents, Shevek reaches out instead to a different kind of Urrasti, his servant Efor. The heteroglossia of Urrasti civilization is dramatically enacted in Efor's use of multiple dialects to negotiate different social situations. When he is functioning as the servant of "Dr. Shevek," he speaks the

centripetal language of his Ioti masters. But when Shevek convinces him that he regards Efor as his equal, Efor begins to communicate more freely in his native, centrifugal dialect, illustrating the privation of the Urrasti working class by discussing his inability to obtain medical care for his children. When Efor remarks that his "kid" died in a public hospital, Shevek prompts,

> "It was your child that died in the hospital?"
> "Yes, sir, my daughter, Laia."[12]
> "What did she die of?"
> "Valve in her heart. They say. She don't grow much. Two years old when she died."
> "You have other children?"
> "Not living. Three born. Hard on the old sow. But now she say, 'Oh, well, don't have to be heartbreaking over 'em, just as well after all!" Is there anything else I can do for you, sir?" The sudden switch to upper-class syntax jolted Shevek; he said impatiently, "Yes! Go on talking." (283-84)

Despite his Odonian upbringing, Shevek initially allows himself to see Efor as little more than a "servant," coming and going, washing and tidying. Once they begin to converse, however, Shevek is confronted with Efor's individuality, his identity as a member of the Urrasti underclass, his identity as a father--as Shevek is. Through this contact with Efor, Shevek is able to shift his attention away from the upper-class physicists and toward the working class Odonians struggling for revolutionary reform. His final choice to flee his university colleagues and align himself with the revolutionaries is constructed out of knowledge and values he has absorbed from his doctrinaire Anarresti upbringing, his relationship with his family, his nuchnibi friends, the writings of Odo, and his various interactions with both upper- and lower-class Urrasti. His course of action, while it is emphatically individual, is, thus, the product of a lifetime of dialogue.

Yet because Shevek is an individual, his relationship with the voices he encounters must be mediated by his personal ideology. He does not simply absorb what others say to him; he evaluates it, choosing, for example, to reject Chifoilisk's advice to cease seeing people as individuals but to embrace Takver's love of nature. Seeing the narrative primarily through Shevek's eyes, the reader is encouraged to identify with

Shevek's particular world view. In the previous section, I argue that Butler's Olamina develops a language that is centrifugal to the culture she inhabits but centripetal within the Earthseed books. Shevek's language functions similarly. On both Anarres and Urras, he is an outsider, whether a nuchnib, a rebel, a foreigner, or a "man from the Moon" (78).

Shevek's Contentment with Hybrid Provisionality

Yet within Le Guin's text, his perspective dominates. Shevek's worldview prizes Odo's emphasis on freedom, individuality, and sharing. It stresses equality and interdependence, appreciates commitment but is fascinated by the inevitability of change. Since this is a hybrid text, it is not surprising that its dominant discourse--defined by Shevek's point of view--is provisional, contentedly uncertain, more process- than goal-oriented. He is neither a Wellsian/Shavian "progressionist" nor a Morrisian "non-progressionist." Instead, while his life's work embodies scientific, technological, and social progress, his worldview also embraces limits to the efficacy of the progressionist paradigm. For instance, he views time as existing in linear and cyclic forms, both of which are essential. As he explains to his Urrasti colleagues:

> Only within each of the great cycles, where we live, only there is there linear time, evolution, change. So then time has two aspects. There is the arrow, the running river, without which there is no change, no progress, or direction, or creation. And there is the circle or the cycle, without which there is chaos, meaningless succession of instants, a world without clocks or seasons or promises. (223)

Though linear progressions and cycles are both inevitable and vital, it is the cycle that Shevek emphasizes most strongly, metaphorically locating progress within the broader context of cyclic time. Just as Shevek suggests a limit to the power of progress, he embraces the idea that knowledge itself not only must be but should be perpetually incomplete. As he struggles to develop a General Temporal Theory, he has a revelation: "But was not a theory of which all the elements were provably true a simple tautology? In the region of the unprovable, or even the disprovable, lay the only chance for breaking out of the circle and going ahead" (280). According to this view, progress does not

suggest any kind of ascent toward increasingly perfect, godlike knowledge. On the contrary, progress itself is predicated on a continual welcoming of uncertainty and the possibility of error.

A running theme in Shevek's philosophy, and one which reflects Le Guin's Taoist influence, is the surrender of the fantasy of total or near-total control over one's life or environment. The inevitability of cycles, the continuousness of change, the uncertainty of knowledge all point to the impossibility of any ultimate, stable mastery of the universe. By constructing the text around a discourse that proposes contentment with uncertainty and limitation, Le Guin places her book in an intertextual dialogue with other discourses more prominent in contemporary Western Civilization.[13]

This conversation has ecological implications. In ecological terms, Shevek's view is in harmony with my second epigraph for this chapter, which shows Shevek reflecting on Takver's attachment to "nature":

> Her concern with landscapes and living creatures was passionate. This concern, feebly called, "love of nature," seemed to Shevek to be something much broader than love. There are souls, he thought, whose umbilicus has never been cut. They never got weaned from the universe. They do not understand death as an enemy; they look forward to rotting and turning into humus. (185)

Though this passionate feeling is not Shevek's own, it embodies an attitude he clearly respects. This foregrounding of death and rotting differs from Morris's more edenic portrayal of nature, just as Shevek's stress on the uncertainty of life differs from Morris's simpler vision of a stable, non-progressionist utopia that will persist indefinitely. More pointedly, however, this perspective challenges the progressionist discourse exemplified by Wells, Shaw, and, to an extent, Octavia Butler. In the previous section, I discuss the similarity between Wells's and Butler's invocation of the trope of leaving behind the mother (Earth) and attaining species adulthood (in space). Olamina writes that "Earthseed is adulthood. / It's trying our wings, / Leaving our mother, / Becoming men and women" (Talents 394). Shevek's depiction of Takver's relationship with Anarres takes aim at the legitimacy of this metaphor. Takver is one of those "unweaned" souls "whose umbilicus has never been cut." In Butler's terms, she ought to be a child

"fighting for the full breasts" (Talents 394). But Takver is not a child. On the contrary, she is a partner and mother, a good one, a professional biologist and full participant in Anarresti civilization, who throughout the book maturely makes difficult decisions regarding the health and welfare of her children, her partnership with Shevek, her own career, and even her own safety. She does not, Le Guin suggests, need to "wean herself" from attachment to her world in order to be a functioning, "adult" member of the human species.

To Wells's Utopian, Urthred, Takver's inability to detach herself (physically and emotionally) from dependence on the whims of her environment would doubtless qualify her as one of the "beaten and starved children of Nature" (Men 83). To an extent, this description fits: like all Anarresti, Takver does go hungry during the famine, which prematurely ages her and robs her of two teeth. Yet Takver does not consider herself oppressed or enslaved by her ecologically harsh world. Even if that world were to prematurely kill her, she "[does] not understand death as an enemy; [she looks] forward to rotting and turning into humus." The power of nature to end human life--a power Wells's Utopians are deeply concerned with mitigating--is simply not a power that Takver begrudges. Let nature end her life, she will love it passionately as long as she lives. The contention of Shaw's Lilith that "Life" must destroy the "enemy Matter" as part of its attainment of eternity would be incomprehensible to humus-loving Takver. To Shaw, of course, this itself would be evidence of her imminent evolutionary supersession. Perhaps Shaw would be right. But to Shevek and Takver, that is not the point. Life is always uncertain. It would be ridiculous to waste time worrying about whether or not oneself or one's culture or one's species might be superseded by something else. Where death is not an enemy, ceasing to be is not ultimately an ill. "I don't give a hoot for eternity," says Takver bluntly in the midst of a philosophical talk with Shevek (190). Shevek agrees: "It's nothing to do with eternity [. . . .] All you have to do to see life whole is to see it as mortal. I'll die, you'll die; how could we love each other otherwise? The sun's going to burn out, what else keeps it shining?" (190). In The Time Machine,

Wells presents the dying sun as the ultimate bleak image of humanity's failure. In Shevek's imagery, however, such death itself is no more or less than a prerequisite for the joys of living.

The Centripetal Representation of Shevek's Discourse

The hybrid discourse that Le Guin develops in The Dispossessed admirably challenges both the discourse of progress and "leaving behind" as well as the less prominent, but still powerful, discourse of "return" to a stable, pastoral idyll. These challenges, however, remain mostly intertextual. Within Le Guin's text itself, the voices that stand in opposition to Shevek's philosophy are many but are given only slight development. Shevek is the only significant point-of-view character. While other points of view occasionally intrude, they do so for no more than a few lines at a time and often function primarily to validate Shevek. For example, his early physics teacher, Mitis, "watched him [study a physics equation] with compassion and admiration" (57); already she recognizes Shevek as a rising star in an unforgiving field. Years later, Shevek's friend, Bedap, watches him comforting his daughter, Sadik. Seeing the closeness of the father and daughter, Bedap reflects that he himself meddles "in other people's lives because I don't have one. I never took the time. And the time's going to run out on me all at once, and I will never have had. . . that" (370). Bedap's feelings are understandable and sensitively portrayed, but *in the larger context of the narrative*, they serve, once again, to highlight the achievements of Shevek, who manages to be a social reformer, physics genius, and good family man all at once. Still later in Shevek's career, the "compassion and admiration" of Mitis is echoed at a higher pitch by the Terran ambassador, Keng, who "was shaken by [Shevek], and looked at him with compassion and a certain awe" (346).

In contrast, those who are unimpressed with Shevek's attitudes and actions are generally not shown as point-of-view characters, even for a line or two. Since their objections are typically expressed in conversation with Shevek--as in Chifloilisk's avowal of Shevek's political naivete--it is left to Shevek to interpret their state of mind.

In Shevek's conversation with Chifoilisk, for example, the text states that "[Chifoilisk's] expression as he stared down into the fire was bitter [. . .]" (136). But is Chifoilisk's "expression" a true indicator of his feeling? And if he is bitter, what precisely in his own life is prompting the bitterness? While this description certainly adds a human dimension to the character, the mediation of Chifoilisk's mood and words through Shevek's perception prevents the reader from understanding Chifoilisk's perspective as it might appear in Chifoilisk's own Thuvian mind.

Even the views of major sympathetic characters, such as Takver, are typically mediated through Shevek's perspective. In the paragraphs in which I discuss Takver's attitude toward nature, it is almost entirely Shevek's interpretation of Takver's attitude that I am reporting. Takver's own voice, again, is mainly heard in conversation, the thoughts underlying her words finally inaccessible. I suspect that this persistent focus on Shevek's perspective to the near-exclusion of others underlies Widmer's contention that the characters and relationships in The Dispossessed read flat.[14] Widmer describes Shevek and Takver's egalitarian partnership as "somewhat thin, inadequately explored, and sentimental" (45). Widmer locates this "thinness" in characterization in "the conventions of fantastically changed conditions, ornate apparatus, synthetic nomenclature," which "depersonalize and thus weaken a subtle sense of human relationship" (45). There is some fairness to this contention. As a writer of alternate societies myself, I have found my ability to express subtle nuances in characters limited by a "synthetic" language that cannot plausibly make use of the richness of our own contemporary vernacular. At the same time, I argue that the "thinness" Widmer perceives derives more from Le Guin's choice to remain in Shevek's point of view than from her choice to locate Shevek on a far-flung, "fantastic" world.

Le Guin's earlier novel, The Left Hand of Darkness, may serve as a useful illustration of this point. As a narrative about the androgynous culture of the planet Gethen, The Left Hand of Darkness depicts a society that is, if anything, more "fantastic" than Anarres and Urras. Yet Sarah LeFanu describes Le Guin's development of the book's principal relationship, between the Terran Genly Ai and the Gethenian Estraven,

as an accomplishment of "immense subtlety." Far from reading the relationship as "thin," LeFanu calls its culmination in Estraven's death "heart-breaking." Though their relationship "almost founders on misapprehensions and mistakes" that arise from Genly and Estraven's cultural dissimilarity (LeFanu), the two, nonetheless, become more whole through their contact with each other, forming what Gary Willis describes as "two halves of one soul that is unifying itself" (38). Significantly, this novel is constructed out of both Genly's and Estraven's narrations. Thus, two contrasting and sometimes conflicting perspectives are continually placed in a dialogic relation that does not privilege one view over the other. Since both Genly and Estraven are shown in all their interior complexity, their interactions reflect that complexity. In The Dispossessed, in contrast, Shevek continually interacts with characters who appear "flat" next to him simply because their inner complexity cannot be fully revealed through his viewpoint.

The comparatively superficial examination of human relations enabled by this narrative structure reflects a concomitant superficiality in its intratextual socio-ecological discourse. Toward the end of the book, for instance, when Shevek states that he considers Urras to be "Hell," Keng counters that from her perspective: "[i]t is the world that comes as close as any could to Paradise" (347). She goes on to explain, "I know it's full of evils, full of human injustice, greed, folly, waste. But it is also full of beauty, vitality, achievement [. . . .] It is alive, tremendously alive--alive, despite all its evils, with hope" (347). This is a provocative challenge to Shevek's view. Keng acknowledges all the ills Shevek has perceived in Urras but considers them slight next to the planet's beauty and vitality. This is almost a direct inversion of Shevek's view: he, too, has perceived beauty and vitality on Urras but considers such things slight next to the planet's evils. By introducing Keng's alternative viewpoint, the text indicates that Shevek's view cannot be considered the single "correct" one. Yet this new interpretation of Urras cannot effectively interrogate Shevek's centripetal discourse. Keng's perspective is only introduced in the last pages of the book, unaccompanied by substantial development of her inner thought processes or personal experience of Urras. We have never seen Keng marvel at the vitality in the streets of A-Io. We have never seen her admire the artistry

that Shevek decries as mere excremental decoration. After numerous chapters devoted to the details of Shevek's experience on Urras and his Anarresti interpretation of that experience, Keng's alternative view, like Chifoilisk's, is too slight to enable the reader seriously to experience Urras from any perspective other than Shevek's.

While The Dispossessed offers a powerful intertextual critique of views such as the colonial expansionist strain in the teachings of Butler's Olamina, this critique is limited by the text's lack of fully developed counter-discourses. If Butler provides no character like Shevek to intelligently question Olamina's expansionist ambitions, Le Guin provides no character like Olamina to challenge the wisdom of Shevek's less progressively proactive philosophy. As Keng seems to hint, a case could be made that Urras does embody more hopeful vitality than Anarres, that for all its obvious ills, Urras may be the model more worth emulating. Urras is artistically and scientifically freer than Anarres. It might also ultimately prove to be the stabler of the two societies. While Urras, for all its social injustice, has endured as a civilization for millennia, the Settlement of Anarres occurred only 170 years before Shevek's journey to Urras. In less than two centuries, Anarres society has declined from Odonian idealism to a state of significant bureaucratization and oppression. Perhaps Odo's vision of society is not, in fact, practicable in the long term. One of the discourses that might most fervently support Urras as a healthier society than Anarres is the "anti-Utopianism" that Fredric Jameson identifies as dominant in our culture. This is the school of thought that equates "Utopia," particularly in its communist or anarchic modes, with naive fantasy and/or tendencies toward Soviet-style social repression. Writing in 1994, Jameson asserts, "It would seem that the times are propitious for anti-Utopianism; and [. . .] the critique and diagnosis of the evils of the Utopian impulse has become a boom industry" ("Utopianism" 382). The cultural sway held by this "anti-Utopian" discourse illustrates the need to address its concerns both fairly and rigorously in any utopian argument.

But the narrative structure of The Dispossessed does not seriously investigate the possibility that Urras may be the preferable society. And because the novel gives short shrift to perspectives that differ from Shevek's, readers who would be inclined to endorse

those perspectives may sense unacknowledged gaps in the philosophy that Shevek espouses--a failure, for example, to comprehend Keng's perception of Urrasti virtues. Such gaps are unavoidable. In an "ambiguous utopia," we must expect that no system of thought will be presented without questionable elements, not even Shevek's personal challenge to both Anarres and Urras. In its centralization of the text around Shevek's perspective, however, The Dispossessed, nonetheless, sacrifices some of the provocative socio-ecological exploration it might have achieved with more dialogic attention to diverse voices. While the book adds a powerful voice to discourses of ecological sustainability based on participation with--rather than control of--the environment, the text's relative lack of engagement with conflicting views may render this philosophy unconvincing to more anti-utopian readers.

Conclusion

In the foregoing critiques of Butler's and Le Guin's ambiguously utopian/dystopian experiments, I may sound as if I want to have my cake and eat it too: I praise these hybrid texts for embracing uncertainty and provisionality, then criticize them for not developing stronger arguments through a fuller dialogic exploration of multiple perspectives. So am I advocating open-ended exploration or convincing argumentation? To speak with a calculated degree of "uncertainty," there is no straightforward answer to this question. By definition, the more convincingly a case is put, the less provisional it appears. Yet in arguments relating to phenomena as complex as our biosphere and the action of human civilization within it, conclusions must be provisional: there are simply too many details and too many unknowns for them to be otherwise. Thus, perversely, the arguments that embrace greater uncertainty, up to a point, turn out to be more convincing arguments: Morris's utopia looks less plausible than Le Guin's precisely because his narrative enacts it in terms that are more definitive and, therefore, more simplistic. Of course, an excess of "uncertainty" ultimately generates no type of argumentation at all, merely unfocused confusion. Where the balance lies between a productive provisionality

in argumentation and a descent into a chaos of "provisional" viewpoints I cannot say. Each hybrid text will balance itself slightly differently, and there is, of course, no ideal formula.

In this chapter, I suggest that both Butler and Le Guin diminish the potential force of their arguments by employing a rhetorical technique in which a voice that is centrifugal within the narrative's dominant cultures becomes centripetal within the discourse of the text. By centralizing these "marginalized" voices, the Earthseed books and The Dispossessed risk recapitulating the marginalizing of discourses they overtly resist, deemphasizing dialogic engagement with perspectives that might challenge their respective protagonists' views. I do not mean, by this contention, to devalue the power of these narratives as effective challenges of our dominant Western ideologies. On the contrary, in these novels, both authors contribute provocative complications to our socio-ecological discourses. Both have made powerful use of multivocality, hybridity, and provisionality to produce sophisticated critiques of the social injustice and environmental exploitation inherent in current globalized capitalist economics.

The nuance with which such texts approach contemporary social and ecological problems is all the more evident in contrast to the greatly simplified appeal often embodied in the contemporary television space opera. In the next chapter, I examine the legacy of Neo-Lamarckian utopian progressionism in J. Michael Straczynski's science fiction television series Babylon 5. As an intertextual counter to this discourse, I offer the ecological egalitarianism of Paul Donovan and Wolfram Tichy's dystopian space opera, Lexx.

NOTES

[1] Since I have used Latour as a basis for defining hybridity, I must note that Latour considers postmodernism hostile to a productive hybridity. Postmodernism, according to Latour, does indeed reject the purification of categories but does so in a way that "rejects all empirical work as illusory and deceptively scientistic," retaining only "[d]isconnected instants and groundless denunciations" (46). Latour objects to postmodernism's nihilistic bent, its tendency to refuse physical reality and significant meaning. Butler's postmodernism, however, eschews this nihilistic vein. Her work uses partiality and uncertainty to confront socio-ecological problems proactively, not to support an enervated denial of meaning.

[2] Critical texts that have productively explored Butler's challenge to traditional categories of race, gender, and species include Donna's Haraway's "Biopolitics of Postmodern Bodies," which describes cyborg feminism in Butler's Clay's Ark and Xenogenesis series; Lisbeth Grant-Britton's "Octavia Butler's Parable of the Sower: One Alternative to a Futureless Future," which traces Butler's refiguration of the role of the black woman as hero; Catherine S. Ramírez's "Cyborg Feminism: The Science Fiction of Octavia E. Butler and Gloria Anzaldúa," which identifies Butler's black female heroes as exemplars of Haraway's cyborg feminism; and Jim Miller's "Post-apocalyptic Hoping: Octavia Butler's Dystopian/Utopian Vision," which argues against Hoda M. Zaki's characterization of Butler as a dystopian biological essentialist.

[3] On one level, a text that partially supports anthropocentrism while partially challenging it could be considered hybrid in its very mingling of those two discourses. The Earthseed books make this move: the daughter of a Baptist minister, Olamina is heavily influenced by the anthropocentric Christian patriarchy into which she was born, and she often incorporates elements of this anthropocentrism and patriarchy into the community of Acorn in a critical, self-reflexive way. While consistently treating women as equal to men, for example, she nonetheless make no serious challenge to her culture's privileging of heterosexual unions and traditional marriage. Within this broader hybridity, however, the paucity of significant challenges to the anthropocentrism of the Destiny empowers that discourse at the expense of less anthropocentric perspectives, including Olamina's principle of "partnership."

[4] I frame these two discourses as Olamina's and Wells's respectively, even though this requires me to compare the views of a fictional character to those of a real person, because these two figures are the best representatives of their respective discourses. Since Wells produced a large body of didactic work in support of certain utopian aims, it is useful to range over multiple Wells texts to illustrate values that transcend any single text. Butler is a more provisional writer. Though her narrative stance is favorably inclined toward Earthseed, it remains problematic to equate her view with Olamina's. I, therefore, use Olamina as a representative of Earthseed and Wells as a representative of the Wellsian evolutionary-progressive utopia.

[5] Butler goes on to identify life on a dead world with living biodomes. The possibility she does not address is what science fiction commonly calls "terraforming," that is, creating an Earth-like biosphere on a "dead" world. Such a task would be so immense that it might well prove functionally impossible, and Butler may be correct that the easier option would be the modification of life within an already existing biosphere. Terraforming, however, has one notable advantage over Butler's concept of colonizing preexisting biospheres: it would circumvent the moral and ethical problems involved in inserting terrestrial life into an alien biosphere in a way that would almost certainly substantially alter both the terrestrial life forms and the alien ecosystems, likely resulting in the extinction of certain species.

[6] This exploration of human adaptability and the fluidity of human identity is a characteristic of Butler's work that has often been remarked upon. Her Xenogenesis books, for instance, investigate the possibility of humanity becoming hybridized with an alien species. Butler describes her short story, "Bloodchild," explicitly as an attempt to explore the accommodations humans would have to make when living on an alien planet (Afterward to "Bloodchild" 32).

[7] Such potential difficulties with extrasolar colonization are explored in depth in John Brunner's Bedlam Planet (1968). Brunner's human colonists find themselves caught in a mounting crisis when an indigenous species of bacteria takes up residence in their guts and begins absorbing nutrients the humans need to survive.

[8] What Asha misses, however, in her critique of the Destiny is the point Olamina keeps returning to: humanity must eventually expand beyond Earth if it is going to survive as a species. In the Wellsian long term, this point is undeniable: life on Earth will be destroyed when the dying sun engulfs it. Even in the shorter term, it seems likely that a species prone to aggression, with the nuclear capability to destroy most macroscopic life on its planet, will end up annihilating itself sooner or later if it only resides on that planet. From this perspective, the Destiny is not at all fanciful. As difficult as it may be to achieve--and both Olamina and Butler concede this difficulty--it may, in fact, be the best long-term hope for the survival of terrestrial life.

[9] In his study of anarchism in News from Nowhere, Rowland McMaster takes issue with Kropotkin's assertion. Morris, McMaster argues, was more pessimistic than Kropotkin about the ability of human society to persist without the external enforcement of rules governing behavior. If Nowhere appears to present a completely efficacious anarchism, that is only because Morris wrote his book in the mode of romance, "a mode characterized by idealization [. . .]" (McMaster 73). As I argue in chapter 2, News from Nowhere is a "vision," not necessarily meant to be a realistic depiction of that future.

[10] The depiction of Anarres as ecologically scarce is part of a phenomenon in utopian fiction that Fredric Jameson terms "world reduction," which he describes as "an operation of radical abstraction and simplification" of the environment of a speculative society ("World-Reduction" 372). This simplification enables the strong expression of certain social arguments that might become muted in a more intricate setting. A society's response to absolute scarcity, for example, can be most forcefully depicted in a society where absolute scarcity can be readily distinguished from the scarcity that results from problems in production or distribution. In The Dispossessed, Jameson argues, "the principle of world-reduction has become an instrument in the conscious elaboration of a utopia" (372). Ecological scarcity on Anarres is more than just part of a setting: it is an integral aspect of the functioning of Anarresti society.

[11] Le Guin herself has often commented on her drive to create characters who speak to her as if they were real people in all their complexity. In "The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction," she says succinctly, "That's why I like novels: instead of heroes, they have people in them" (169).

[12] Here, Le Guin gives us a hint of Efor's Odonian affiliations: "Laia" was Odo's first name (Dispossessed 84).

¹³ Le Guin develops a similar argument against the fantasy of control in The Lathe of Heaven (1971). In this novel, she invokes a Wellsian rhetoric to characterize her antagonist, Haber's, goal of controlling the world to make it a better place. Like Wells, Haber advocates a "World State" whose responsibility it is to care for all people (142). Like Wells, Haber envisions a world where "men will be like gods!", a world that can only be brought about by "trained, scientific hands" (145). Ironically, it is a different aspect of Wellsian rhetoric that Le Guin explicitly cites in The Lathe of Heaven. In an epigraph from A Modern Utopia, she quotes Wells's assertion, "Nothing endures, nothing is precise and certain (except in the mind of a pedant), perfection is the mere repudiation of that ineluctable marginal inexactitude which is the mysterious inmost quality of Being" (44). Thus, within The Lathe of Heaven, Le Guin could be said to deconstruct the Wellsian utopian vision, quoting Wells himself to question the possibility of a utopia founded on "godlike" scientific control of the world.

¹⁴ Flatness of characterization is notorious in utopian fiction and, to a lesser extent, dystopian fiction. I attribute this tendency to at least two traits of these genres: first, characters in an alternative society often represent that society more than complex individuals, and second, these genres often minimize dialogic discourse among complex individuals in order to present an unambiguous utopian or dystopian message. The substantial dialogism of Le Guin's purposefully ambiguous utopia is crucial to the development of Shevek himself as complex character. At the same time, the limitations the text places on this dialogic engagement contributes to the flatness of Le Guin's secondary characters.

CHAPTER 6

POSITIVE CHANGE AND ECOLOGICAL SUSTAINABILITY

INTERTEXTUAL DIALOGUE BETWEEN BABYLON 5 AND LEXX

> This [galaxy] is yours now, and you have an obligation to do as we have
> done, to teach the races that will follow you, and when your time comes,
> as ours has, to step aside and allow them to grow into their own destiny.
>
> Lorien, "Into the Fire," J. Michael Straczynski's Babylon 5

> KAI. Her food gathering strategy is to imitate other life forms so these
> targeted life forms will not act defensively before being consumed.
> Lyekka consumed Boosh and Bando.
> STAN. You mean she ate them?
> KAI. Yes.
> STAN. Oh, that's just great. Well, are you going to save Moss?
> KAI. I have no motivation to save Moss from Lyekka. Or Lyekka from
> Moss.
>
> "Lyekka," Paul Donovan and Wolfram Tichy's Lexx

Introduction

In this chapter, I delve into television space opera. Like hybrid science fiction novels, TV science fiction inherits the late-twentieth century's postmodern distrust for monolithic answers to social questions. Instead of requiring an all-encompassing "correct" discourse, these TV shows typically present a diversity of socio-cultural views as desirable: in Star Trek, humans can learn from Vulcans and vice versa. Despite this regard for multivocality, however, TV science fiction typically enacts discourses more purified than those of hybrid science fiction novels. Like the alternative-society narratives of William Morris, George Bernard Shaw, and H. G. Wells, such shows are

either strongly utopian or strongly dystopian, progressionist or non-progressionist. Rarely do they embrace the "ambiguity" of a socio-cultural exploration like The Dispossessed. In utopian series, in particular, appreciation for discursive diversity, though genuine, is often subordinated to an endorsement of a hegemonic utopian discourse: ideological loyalty to Star Trek's United Federation of Planets, for example. By adhering to a purified discourse of utopian faith, utopian TV shows serve as a bastion against the contemporary "anti-Utopian" impulse described by Fredric Jameson, retaining a sense of hope that a unified, highly positive future society is attainable. These texts, thus, offer a productive counter to the postmodern jadedness of much contemporary literature. At the same time, the purification of utopian discourse is enabled by a rhetorical retreat from dialogic interrogation, a move that effaces provocative challenges to the utopia. In contrast, dystopian TV shows are amenable to a broader variety of views, though they, likewise, may silence voices that intelligently champion the dystopia. If both utopian and dystopian TV series restrict intratextual dialogic critiques, however, they can be used to mount insightful intertextual critiques.

In this chapter, I juxtapose J. Michael Straczynski's utopian, progressionist series, Babylon 5 (1993-98), with Paul Donovan and Wolfram Tichy's dystopian, non-progressionist series, Lexx (1996-2002). I contend that these shows function as complements. Babylon 5 presents an inspiring scenario of proactive change as a means to a utopian future yet adheres to a strongly hierarchical anthropocentrism that fails to consider the importance of ecology to human society. Conversely, Lexx foregrounds the necessity of sustainable ecological relations yet submerges the productivity of this ecocentric discourse in a rhetoric of futility. Put in conversation, however, the discourses of these shows enhance each other by posing necessary questions and alternatives, thereby becoming more useful proponents of change and sustainability, respectively, among the cultural influences on our ecological praxis.

The Ideological Influence of Television Space Opera

In chapter 5, I contend that hybrid science fiction novels offer a depth of dialogic exploration that is absent from more purified texts. It may seem anticlimactic, therefore, to end this study with a type of text that I have already identified as less sophisticated than others I discuss. But the importance of the television space opera for ecological praxis lies less in its discursive complexity than in its popularity. Every year, science fiction TV shows enter millions of homes. After ending its run as a syndicated series, Babylon 5 garnered 10.7 million viewers in the United States for its 1998 debut on TNT ("B5"). Though less popular in the United States, Lexx has aired in more than one hundred countries (Lohr). As popular entertainment, such shows are significant participants in reflecting, disseminating, and questioning the ideologies that produce and consume space opera. Because they are set in a fictive reality, these shows are well placed to challenge traditional assumptions about our own perceptions of reality. Yet, as Kathy Ferguson observes in her analysis Star Trek: Deep Space Nine (1993-99), "science fiction, particularly in the form of a popular prime time TV series, also stays in business and cultivates corporate sponsorship by confirming some of the cherished expectations held by readers/viewers" (181). To retain a mass audience, these shows must appeal to the dominant ideology, the ideology that is--by definition--most representative of that audience. Thus, the prime time TV space opera is both a radical and a conservative ideological force, a space where redefined realities mix abundantly with cliches. Given the ideological influence of TV space opera, therefore, its critical dismissal would leave a significant gap in the study of ecological discourse in speculative fiction.

But while critical engagement with space opera is necessary, the term, "space opera," itself is notoriously troublesome. A much-maligned subgenre of science fiction, "space opera" conjures images of space dogfights, hyperspace vortexes, and green-skinned alien seductresses. Beyond such superficial impressions, however, the subgenre has proven difficult to define. Patricia Monk describes space opera as "an attitudinal bias" that "sees the extraterrestrial universe [. . .] as both knowable and manageable" (300). Responding to Monk, Gary Westfahl offers an alternative definition of space

opera as a form that exists to provide light entertainment with "no scientific value and no literary value" ("Beyond" 177). Responding to both Monk and Westfahl, Joe Sanders argues that space opera is characterized by an assurance that human beings can positively confront "immensity," typically symbolized by the vastness of space. It is not my intention here to definitively define "space opera" but to embrace it as an apt, if loose, description for the narratives I discuss in this chapter. Both Babylon 5 and Lexx represent the universe as if it were substantially known or knowable. Both are designed to provide light entertainment and do not balk at introducing one-dimensional supporting characters, improbable plots, and questionable science to do so. Both readily confront immensity, addressing vast scales of time and expanses of space while presenting characters who mold galaxy-shaking events. Since these shows meet many criteria of various definitions of "space opera," the term provides as a convenient means for distinguishing these "popular" texts from the "literary" science fiction I describe in chapter 5.

As widely disseminated texts that both reflect and subvert of dominant ideologies, these TV shows are productive sites for exploring contemporary Western social issues. The original Star Trek (1966-69), for instance, is renowned for the integrationist message embodied in its "proto-multicultural crew" (Malcolm 30). Babylon 5's exploration of the rise of a secret police within the democratic society of Earth anticipates concerns over some anti-terrorism policies of the Bush Administration. Likewise, space operas explore the meaning of being "human." In two separate episodes, the British dystopian series Blake's 7 (1978-81) investigates the "humanity" of human-like animals genetically engineered as slave labor ("The Web" 1.5, "Animals" 4.5). In Star Trek: Deep Space Nine, the symbiotic relationship that defines the Trill species creates a space in which to explore gender identity (Ferguson). More crucial to this chapter is space opera's interest in future human evolution: Star Trek offers both the Metrons ("Arena" 1.18) and the Organians ("Errand of Mercy" 1.26) as utopian models for humanity's future. Conversely, Blake's 7 predicts humanity's evolutionary degeneration ("Terminal" 3.13). The central plot of Earth: Final Conflict (1997-2002)

pits human evolutionary potential against the evolutionary degeneration of the alien Taelons and Jaridians. And Babylon 5, as I discuss presently, crucially reflects upon the evolutionary progress of humanity.

Space Opera and Ecology

Yet despite all the subgenre's possibilities for ideological and (pseudo-)scientific exploration, these shows seldom engage ecological questions. Typically set outside of the Earth's biosphere, they often use contrivances to circumvent discussion of the physical complexities involved in inhabiting alien biospheres or creating artificial environments. In Star Trek, any "M-class" planet will handily sustain human life, while by the era of Star Trek: The Next Generation (1987-94), food can be conveniently "replicated" without recourse to agriculture. In most of these shows, "humanoid" aliens abound, while other life forms are rarely depicted. Attacks on a planet are usually quantified in terms of "people" killed as if a biosphere consists of "people" and nothing else. Westfahl explores this deemphasis on physical environment as exemplified by the use (or lack of use) of the space suit in American science fiction films, arguing that these narratives typically reject a realist engagement with the dangers of space, as exemplified by the need to wear a space suit in a vacuum. Citing the original Star Trek, he observes, "For the most part [. . .], the crew of the Enterprise experienced outer space only by watching it on television [i.e. their view screen]" ("The True Frontier" 60). Life in space becomes life within a set of rooms on a spaceship technologically buffered not only, as Westfahl contends, from the realities of space but also from the realities of existence within an ecological web of energetic interdependencies.

This lack of engagement with ecological issues is particularly striking in Babylon 5 because the series is so centrally concerned with evolution. It can be argued that most television space operas seldom discuss ecology because they focus on other issues: the original Star Trek, for example, is concerned principally with race, gender, and the Cold War. Significant engagement with ecology could be seen as a digression from these topics. But no such claim can be made about Babylon 5. The show pivots around its

evolutionary discourse, and since current biological science recognizes evolution as an ecologically driven process, the near absence of ecology in this discourse cannot be dismissed as an issue of thematic focus. Rather, Babylon 5's lack of engagement with ecology effectively reinscribes an environmentally destructive humanist ideology that privileges humanity as ultimately superior to and divisible from the rest of the physical world.

Ideology, however, must not be conflated with a text's overt "message." Babylon 5 does not endorse ecological destruction; indeed, it frequently cites harm to the environment and destruction of resources as pernicious consequences of violent conflict. But the ideological assumptions enacted by the narrative enable ecological damage by failing to appreciate the importance of ecological relations. It is not contempt for the environment but rather carelessness of it that renders Babylon 5's ideology suspect as a model for ecological praxis.

In a radical departure from the usual parameters of the TV space opera, Lexx inverts Babylon 5's ecological disregard. Lexx is not overtly "about" ecology; it seldom preaches environmental responsibility in the way that Star Trek preaches multicultural integration. Yet, on the level of tacit ideological assumption, ecology is foundational to the universe presented in Lexx. Questions of energetic relations, food production, waste disposal, and predator-prey balances are basic to the series, sometimes as major plot lines, sometimes as background realities, but almost always as vital considerations. In this way, the ideology of Lexx is ecocentric: the show does not need to preach ecological awareness; it enacts such awareness episode by episode.

This difference in approach to ecology is part of a broader contrast between the strategies Babylon 5 and Lexx employ to portray alternative civilizations. Babylon 5 is fundamentally humanist and utopian. Though much of the series is concerned with war, injustice, and corruption, these socials ills take place within a broader historical vision that promises human progress toward a higher civilization and state of being. The closing words of the finale of its fourth season express the show's ultimate position: "faith manages" ("Deconstruction" 4.22). Dedicated, optimistic struggle will reap its

rewards in the end. Lexx, in contrast, is unremittingly dystopian. The dominant cosmology of the Lexx universe depicts time as cycle--not unlike an organism's life cycle--that passes eternally through the same sequence of events. The events of the series take place in a time of universal degeneration as irrevocable as time itself. Though destruction may be temporarily mitigated through the actions of courageous people, sooner or later, it will claim the universe.

In many ways, Babylon 5 and Lexx function as antitheses, each presenting a philosophy that is absent or severely underrepresented in the other. Thus, when analyzed together, the two shows can be placed in a productive intertextual dialogue. The evolutionary progressionism of Babylon 5 provides an inspiring--but ecologically simplistic--model for progressive change, whereas the dystopian cycles of life, death, and time omnipresent in Lexx generate an ecologically nuanced--but dismally deterministic-- discourse of sustainability. As mutual critiques, these two series build a conversation that foregrounds the need for a proactive faith that action can achieve desirable change, as well as a cautionary awareness that maintaining ecological sustainability is both difficult and vital. Intertextually, these shows open a dialogic space for the exploration of sustainable change. Accordingly, in this chapter, I begin by examining the anthropocentric evolutionary utopianism of Babylon 5 before turning to the ecocentric dystopian alternative of Lexx.

"Get the Hell out of Our Galaxy!"

Utopian-Progressionist Evolution in Babylon 5

At the risk of being unoriginal, I have chosen the same title quotation as Thomas Marcinko in his comparison of the genre of the American western to Babylon 5. Original or not, the quotation is too apt to omit: in seven words, it sums up why Babylon 5 is ecologically problematic. In the scene this line is excerpted from, the show's protagonist, Captain John Sheridan (Bruce Boxleitner), and his ally and later wife, Delenn (Mira Furlan), have just deployed philosophy rather than military might to win the Shadow War, defeating the ancient races called the Shadows and Vorlons. They have

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demonstrated that they no longer need the guidance of these "First Ones." Because the younger races have achieved their own species adulthood, the galaxy is now "theirs." The ideology underlying Sheridan's claim to "ownership" of the galaxy shares the common progressionist assumption that species of great evolutionary advancement have the right and responsibility to manipulate their environment as they deem appropriate, with the implication that such manipulation is not ecologically problematic. Like Shaw's Creative Evolution, Babylon 5's evolutionary discourse decouples evolution from ecological relationality, stressing, instead, inherent evolutionary potential and strength of will as prime forces driving advancement. But while Shaw warns that Life Force may exterminate our inadequate species, Babylon 5 presents humanity as a species destined for evolutionary greatness. To emphasize the superiority of humanity, the show employs a rhetoric in which the discourse that extols humanity is figured as "right," all others as "wrong." Though the series's lionization of personal agency supports a proactive faith in the possibility of positive change, its combination of ecological deemphasis, anthropocentrism, and a rejection of dialogic critique supports an ideology that largely disregards ecology, thus enabling a careless ecological praxis, prone to underestimating both the complexity of ecological relations and their importance to human life. While the series's discourse, therefore, laudably promotes hope for utopian change, it risks endorsing ecologically irresponsible changes.

Set between the years 2258 and 2262, Babylon 5 is an epic of war and political intrigue, culminating in the establishment of an Interstellar Alliance among space-faring species that marks the dawn of a new age in the social and evolutionary development of these "younger races" toward a utopian future. The narrative is centered both physically and thematically on the space station, Babylon 5, a hub of intercultural exchange designed and operated by Humans.[1] (In this chapter, I use Straczynski's capitalized "Human" to designate the species as discussed on Babylon 5 and "human" to designate our species in the "real world.") Throughout the last four of its five seasons, the series focuses on the heroic figure of John Sheridan, a noble war veteran and tactical genius who becomes Captain of Babylon 5 and later President of the newly formed Alliance.

In this epic, Straczynski uses the series's sociopolitical events to illustrate his vision of evolution. The <u>Babylon 5</u> universe presents evolution as a process occurring among different generations of species. One generation, called the "First Ones," is comprised of a set of species millions of years more highly evolved than Humans. As if in fulfillment of the dream of Shaw's Ancients, the First Ones are depicted as having transcended the usual limits of physicality and, presumably, any need for bodily participation in ecosystems.[2] Indeed, one species of First Ones, the Vorlons, explicitly exists in a form of pure energy, using "encounter suits" as physical shells to facilitate interactions with more materially bound species. Similarly, the generation called the "younger races" has evolved at roughly the same time in roughly parallel ways to each other.[3] These younger races include all the "humanoid" species on the show: Humans, Minbari, Narns, and Centauri being the most prominent examples.[4] Still younger than the younger races are the ones who will come after them. While not characters in the drama, these youngest races are explicitly present in the show's evolutionary schema. Standing behind all these species is the figure of the "First One," Lorien (pronounced "Lor-i-EN") (Wayne Alexander), who identifies himself as the first being in the universe to attain "sentience."[5] A quintessential sage, Lorien articulates the vision of evolution endorsed by the narrative, most concisely in the passage I quote for my first epigraph, in which he explains the ethics of evolutionary progression to the younger races: "This [galaxy] is yours now, and you have an obligation to do as we [elder races] have done, to teach the races that will follow you, and when your time comes, as ours has, to step aside and allow them to grow into their own destiny" ("Into the Fire" 4.6). Like Shaw, Wells, and Octavia Butler, Straczynski orients his evolutionary paradigm around the metaphor of reaching adulthood. It is the moral responsibility of the elder races to be "shepherds for the younger races," as Delenn puts it, until the younger races are sufficiently mature to govern themselves ("Into"). It then becomes the duty of the elder races to depart the galaxy, leaving it to the government of their juniors, who, in time, will become the elders

shepherding those still younger. Like Butler's Earthseed religion, this vision of responsible evolutionary advancement empowers humanity to take active steps toward constructing a brighter future.

But while this scenario promotes a positive sense of human agency, it does so by reinscribing humanity as a privileged evolutionary "leader." Like Shavian and Wellsian evolutionary ideology, Babylon 5's discourse is concerned with categorizing species according to how "highly" they are evolved and how much evolutionary potential they possess. All assume that "advanced" species have the right to manage their environment. But whereas Wells and Shaw place almost no moral limits on this right, Straczynski does: elder races must not excessively interfere with the development of the younger. Yet this moral consideration extends only to those younger races undergoing the same type of evolutionary progression as their elders. It would not, for instance, extend to sharks or grasses. In short, "the galaxy" should be ruled by the races, including Humans, that can best advance in it.

The ideology that underlies this discourse can be elucidated by Straczynski's online Babylon 5 commentary. It is, of course, potentially problematic to use authorial intent to explicate a text: Straczynski's stated view on evolution, for example, is not necessarily equivalent to the view enacted in Babylon 5. But in this case, the series closely reflects its creator's philosophy. Few television writers have claimed the kind of creative authority that Straczynski has maintained over Babylon 5. Indeed, by writing every episode of Babylon 5's third season, Straczynski became the first to write an entire season of an American TV program (Wexelblat 212).[6] He is also unusual among television writers in his online accessibility to his fans, whose questions he has routinely answered via Usenet posts. In analyzing Straczynski's online presence, Alan Wexelblat notes, "Recovering authorial intent is the most prevalent activity in the Babylon 5 online community" (212). Since Straczynski has been forthcoming in voicing his intent, and since his intent has become a significant part of viewer reception of Babylon 5, it seems reasonable to incorporate it into this analysis.

Since Babylon 5 itself addresses the future of Human evolution and not its past, Straczynski's online posts prove particularly useful in relating the evolutionary discourse of Babylon 5 to a broader discourse of "real world" human evolution. Babylon 5 seldom comments on species outside of Straczynski's continuum of evolutionary progress; however, this does not indicate that Straczynski himself lacks ecological awareness. Educated in a scientific tradition that has discredited Neo-Lamarckian evolution, Straczynski, like Wells (and unlike Shaw), conceives of evolution as a process driven by environmental pressures. When questioned online about the plausibility of numerous "humanoid" species evolving independently, for example, Straczynski replied with an appeal to parallel evolution based on ecological relationality:

> From an evolutionary standpoint, you want your sensors at the highest part of your body, to look for prey or predator; you want your mouth that high as well, to eat leaves if need be. To run from predators or after prey you need good legs, at least two; four can be hard to get through narrow areas, and tends [sic] to deprive one of two limbs that could otherwise be used for tools and the evolution of the opposable thumb required for technology. [The humanoid body] seems a very sensible arrangement across the board for an advanced species. (Straczynski, "Parallel")

Whether or not Straczynski's explanation of humanoid evolution would be convincing to an evolutionary biologist, conceptually his scenario is ecological: concerned with how a species interacts with its ecological partners, including its predators and prey. Yet while Straczynski's discussions of evolution show an awareness of the importance of environmental pressures, they generally do not engage with natural selection per se.[7] In the passage above, either natural selection or the acquirement of characteristics could account for the evolutionary path he outlines. Traits like high sensory organs and long legs could be selected for because they confer a survival value: they help an individual to flee predators and catch prey. They could also be acquired by Lamarckian use, since searching and running would be habitual activities necessary to survival. Because Straczynski's discourse tends not to address evolutionary mechanisms, it could be used to endorse either natural selection or the Lamarckian acquirement of characteristics, both mechanisms ultimately driven by environmental pressures.

In the evolutionary discourse of <u>Babylon 5</u> itself, however, the amenability of Straczynski's broader discourse to a belief in the acquirement of characteristics enables the introduction of a <u>Neo</u>-Lamarckian bent that deemphasizes environmental pressures. At least among more advanced species, evolution appears to be driven not only by the environment but also by some sort of inner impetus to progress. Indeed, the fact that this impetus functions within numerous species to produce analogous advancements suggests an agency much like Shaw's Life Force, which derives less from individual will than a universal Will. This sense of a universal, spiritual connection among all life forms is articulated in the religion of the Minbari, a species the series generally identifies with spiritual wisdom. As the Minbari ambassador, Delenn, explains, "We believe that the universe itself is conscious in a way that we can never truly understand. It is engaged in a search for meaning, so it breaks itself apart, investing its own consciousness in every form of life. We are the universe trying to understand itself" ("Passing through Gethsemane" 3.5). This sense, reminiscent of Hegel and Bergson, that the consciousness of living beings manifests a drive to attain a higher universal consciousness reinforces the importance of evolutionary progress, defined mainly as mental or spiritual progress. The universe itself, thus, drives evolution by demanding advancement toward higher consciousness. By the same token, the universe promotes utopia, pushing species toward a deeper understanding of themselves and their surroundings that will ultimately lead toward a more just and fulfilling way of life.

The Unitary Language of Evolution in Babylon 5

Much of the series enacts this utopian, evolutionary progress. In the epoch during which <u>Babylon 5</u> takes place, most of the First Ones have already departed the galaxy. A few races, however, have stayed behind, most notably two old opponents, the Vorlons and the Shadows. Early in the series, the Vorlons are presented as mystical voices of cryptic wisdom, the Shadows as near-invincible destroyers bent on merciless annihilation. As the series proceeds, these characterizations are problematized. We discover that both the Vorlons and the Shadows regard themselves as guides for the

younger races and take this duty seriously. Their ideologies, however, are diametrically opposed. The Vorlons favor advancement through "order and obedience," casting themselves as the watchful parents overseeing the progress of their children's interstellar civilization ("Into"). The Shadows' philosophy, in contrast, is reminiscent of a Shavian satire on Neo-Darwinism: the Shadows believe in advancement through "chaos and evolution" ("Into"). Indeed, their adherence to the mechanism of the survival of the fittest is so extreme that they view it as their duty to launch an interstellar war every thousand years to weed out the weak races and leave the strong ones stronger. For millennia, the Vorlons and Shadows have kept an uneasy truce. While the Shadows leave the Vorlons free to indoctrinate the younger races, the Vorlons agree not to interfere in the Shadows' periodic mayhem. By the present crucial moment in evolutionary history, however, their truce has frayed. Unable to tolerate the Shadows' warfare, the Vorlons ultimately enter the Shadow War themselves, prepared to kill off the younger races rather than let Shadow "chaos" determine their future.

Thus, the younger races find themselves caught between two immensely superior fighting forces, both bent on the younger races' near total destruction--all for their own evolutionary good. In "Into the Fire" (4.6), however, Sheridan and Delenn, rhetorically supported by Lorien, convince the First Ones that this destruction does not help the younger races. This discursive confrontation occurs in a state of being that Lorien describes as "elsewhere." In this "elsewhere," Sheridan debates with the Vorlons, while, in a separate "space," Delenn debates with the Shadows. Delenn observes that the Vorlons and Shadows have both "lost [their] way." What was once a genuine wish to guide the younger races is now mere ideological one-upmanship. But the reification of their respective philosophies is not the Vorlons' and Shadows' only error. Their more fundamental error has been to remain in the galaxy after most of the other First Ones have left. They are attempting to "parent" already grown species that have, in fact, philosophically transcended their parents.

Within the evolutionary scenario of Babylon 5, this philosophical degeneration of the elder races is a peculiar move: the Shadows and Vorlons are, after all, millions of

years more "advanced" than the younger races, yet Sheridan and Delenn handily out-argue them. Reason, the narrative suggests, and not military might, earns the younger races their victory. But Sheridan and Delenn's victory is no great philosophical triumph, for neither the Shadows nor the Vorlons voice any substantive philosophy for Sheridan and Delenn to address. The Shadows' attempts to justify their guided Social Darwinism are woefully inadequate. They argue merely that war will select for the strongest, a contention that simplistically equates advancement with the ability to "win" in violent struggles. The Shadows do not address the possibility that the winners may simply be the best fighters, not the best people. One could argue, however, from a Shadow perspective, that victory in this type of war requires all the characteristics one would want in an "advanced" species, including not only a strong survival drive and the ability to master advanced technology, but also strategic intelligence, an ability to cooperate, and a sophisticated social structure. But though the Shadows' position could be developed in such provocative ways, the narrative does not do this. Instead, it reduces the Shadows to the peremptory assertion that "[t]here is only chaos and evolution," followed by a claim of absolute authority over the younger races: "You will fight because we tell you to fight." Delenn, unsurprisingly, does not find this argument compelling. With even less attempt at philosophical discussion, the Vorlons state only that their goal is "to destroy the darkness" (i.e. the chaotic power of the Shadows). Echoing the rhetoric of the Shadows, they assert, "There is only order and obedience," and command Sheridan, as a representative of the younger races, to "do as you are told." Like Delenn, Sheridan is not swayed.

The structure of the respective Vorlon and Shadow debates is closely parallel, with rapid intercutting between the two scenes emphasizing the philosophical kinship between the Shadows and Vorlons. Though each race perceives the other as its ideological antithesis, in fact, both have become dogmatic tyrants, incapable of reasonably defending their views. Likewise, this intercutting illustrates Sheridan's and Delenn's similar understandings of these First Ones. No sooner does Delenn tell the Shadows, "This is about you being right," than the scene shifts to Sheridan proclaiming

to the Vorlons, "You're trying to force us to decide which of you is right," indicating the parallel insights of our two heroes. Sheridan--the protagonist--then becomes the first to voice the crucial revelation of the Shadow War: "But what if the right choice is not to choose at all?" Cut to Delenn: "What if we reject the idea that we must decide which of you is right?" Thus, both Sheridan and Delenn independently and simultaneously determine that both the Shadows and Vorlons are wrong and must be rejected. The separateness of their reasoning processes underscores the narrative's endorsement of their insight: if two good minds independently reach the same conclusion, that conclusion is probably correct. It is at this point that the Shadows and Vorlons simultaneously abandon all pretext of persuasion and each demand unflagging allegiance. Sheridan and Delenn are so plainly in the right that the First Ones can contest them only by resorting to infantile threats. The discursive feebleness of the Vorlons and Shadows is further stressed by the Shadows' horror at the realization that Lorien has allowed the younger races to witness this debate: "You've let them see. You've let them know," they accuse Delenn, apparently considering her complicit with Lorien. The First Ones have defended themselves so lamely that the public's very access to the debate seals their defeat.

In fact, the positions of the Shadows and Vorlons are so indefensible that Sheridan and Delenn need no great wisdom to defeat them. It is hardly a revolutionary insight that there may be some compromise between order and chaos or that authorities that demand total obedience without justification do not deserve it. But the narrative is so concerned with presenting Sheridan and Delenn as unassailably "right" that it depicts their "highly evolved" adversaries as mental infants. By enabling our heroes to win a philosophical victory without ever engaging in anything more than the most superficial discussion, this move displays the series's resistance to genuine dialogic discourse.

Instead of fostering productive debate, the narrative finalizes its endorsement of Sheridan and Delenn's position by stamping it with the approval of Lorien. When Sheridan contends, "We've learned how to stand on our own," Lorien echoes, "This [galaxy] belongs to the younger races now. They have learned how to stand on their own." This rhetorical use of Lorien validates our heroes' thinking by appealing to

timeless authority: the First One, perhaps the oldest and wisest intelligence in the universe, sides so unreservedly with Sheridan and Delenn that he reiterates not only Sheridan's ideas but his exact wording. The correctness of Sheridan and Delenn is presented as so obvious that there is no discursive space for interrogating such crucial issues as the *disturbingly imperialist overtones of Sheridan's claim to ownership of the galaxy*. Because this discourse is never required to address subtle questions, it never transcends superficiality.

It might be argued that the medium of network TV demands a certain superficiality in philosophical discourse because discursive complexity would confuse or bore the *casual viewers essential to maintaining high ratings*. Indeed, this was the explicit reason behind the radical simplification of storylines in the TV space opera Andromeda, which replaced its original executive producer, Robert Hewitt Wolfe, in order to pursue simpler plots. As the show's starring actor and co-executive producer, Kevin Sorbo, explained in Cult Times Magazine, "Robert is a genius, but was developing stories that were too complicated and too clever for the rest of us to understand [. . . .] That simple 'turn-up-tune-in' attitude was what was missing" (qtd. in Sparborth). But while it is true that the medium of television imposes limits on discursive depth, such a production-level explanation for the simplistic philosophizing that concludes the Shadow War is inadequate. For while dialogism is rejected in Babylon 5's evolutionary discourse, it is embraced in the series's major secondary plot line involving two of the younger races, the Centauri and the Narn. Though it is clear that the Centauri's brutal occupation of Narn home world is indefensible, within this macrocosm, both sides are guilty of atrocities, both cultures rich with redeeming virtues. The dialogic dimension of the conflict is most dramatically enacted in the tempestuous relationship between the Centauri ambassador, Londo Mollari (Peter Jurasik), and the Narn ambassador, G'Kar (Andreas Katsulas). Diametrically opposed politically and sometimes mortal enemies, these two men, nonetheless, have much in common: both are politically astute, patriotic, witty, courageous, and ultimately moral (although both--principally Londo--commit many immoral acts). Their continual sparring builds the most subtle and sophisticated

socio-cultural commentary in the series and, indeed, one of the most sophisticated in TV space opera. The privileging of Sheridan and Delenn as the voices of wisdom, then, is not merely a TV convention but an ideological rejection of potential dialogic challenge to its evolutionary progressionist message.

This refusal of dialogic critique persists as the series explores the next stage of the younger races' evolution, an evolutionary progress presented in the finale of the fourth season, "The Deconstruction of Falling Stars" (4.22), which examines the course of Human evolution up to a million years past the ending of Babylon 5. Preceded by an episode entitled "Rising Stars" (4.21), which emphasizes the triumph of Sheridan and Delenn in founding the Interstellar Alliance, "The Deconstruction of Falling Stars" begins with the tribulations that will plague the reputations of its founders. Far from representing genuine interrogation of Sheridan and Delenn, however, these criticisms are coded as ignorant and invalid, thus reinforcing the narrative's commitment to its heroes' excellence. One hundred years after the founding of the Alliance, "experts" argue that Sheridan and Delenn's contribution to the "Hundred Year Peace" has been grossly exaggerated. Self-important and disdainful, these commentators vacuously proclaim our heroes' inconsequence with such assertions as: "They didn't do; they allowed others to do" and "They actually didn't do anything." Such absolute language, by itself, makes these claims indefensible. Even if Sheridan's historical importance were exaggerated, as Captain of Babylon 5, he could not have "done nothing" with regard to events centered on the station. This pedantic idiocy is finally challenged by an aged Delenn. Clad in a white robe and bearing a staff, with the awesomeness of an Old Testament prophet, she strikes the ignoramuses dumb, accusing, "You do not wish to know anything. You wish only to speak. That which you know, you ignore because it is inconvenient. That which you do not know, you invent [. . .]" ("Deconstruction"). Certainly, this condemnation is deserved. Yet Delenn's words might be applied to the discourse of the series itself. The narrative's very refusal to allow these commentators to pose legitimate questions

"ignores" any "inconvenient" implications in the discourse--such the imperialistic overtones of claiming ownership of the galaxy--thus "inventing" the legend of a Sheridan and Delenn who are indisputably correct.

The episode proceeds to expand upon this legend. As history unfolds, it seems that the legacy of the Alliance will be lost. By 2762, Earth, once one of the central planets in the Alliance, is reneging on its interstellar commitments and turning its attention to a looming civil war that will come to be known as the Great Burn. By 3262, the Great Burn has devastated Earth's biosphere and reduced its Human population to a pre-industrial level of technology; on Earth, the Alliance is no more than a distant memory. But none of these historical crises can thwart the broader evolutionary sweep of Human progress. Near the end of the episode, we see a man in Human form awaiting the artificially induced nova that will consume the Earth.[8] Speaking to a computer screen on which he has been watching records of human history, he explains, "Our job is finished [. . . .] This is how the world ends, swallowed in fire but not in darkness [. . . .] We created the world we think you would have wished for us, and now we leave the cradle for the last time" ("Deconstruction"). With these words, the man's Human shape dissolves into a bright mass of energy, which enters into an encounter suit reminiscent of those the Vorlons once wore in their interactions with the younger races. We, then, see the man's ship departing through a hyperspace jump point. This future-Human's speech encapsulates the evolutionary path of Humanity. As indicated by the man's Vorlon-like energy form, the future-Humans have fulfilled their evolutionary potential to become "First Ones." With the nova of the sun, the Earth--the world--is ending, but it will not be swallowed in "darkness" because the children who have left its "cradle" persist to carry its legacy out into the broader universe. The future-Human's address to the history played out on his computer screen highlights the evolutionary sweep of Humanity's progress. The labor of all prior epochs has built Humanity into the superhuman species it has become. The "you," the future-Human addresses includes Sheridan and Delenn, and the other major figures on Babylon 5 who helped forge the Alliance, and by extension, all the people who have contributed across history to Human progress. The episode ends

with the printed words "faith manages," an articulation of the show's commitment to the possibility of a utopian future despite the inevitability of catastrophes on the way to the achievement.

The utopian message is inspiring, not least because it foregrounds the difficulty of forging a better future: Straczynski accepts that "Great Burns" will occur; nonetheless, Human fortitude will triumph in the end. Yet for all its productive tension between utopian aspirations and historical crises, this glowing Human future resists dialogic interrogation. The future-Human is alone when he apostrophizes his forebears; there is literally no one present to question anything he says. Online, Straczynski has said of this scene, "By this point, [the future-Humans] were in the position of the Vorlons, and now have to take their (our) place guiding the younger races, the next wave, while not getting in the way and remembering the lesson of the shadow/vorlon [sic] conflict" ("Sol"). Straczynski sets this scene at the optimal moment for reinforcing the evolutionary excellence of Humanity, when Humanity is just embarking upon the task of guiding its juniors. Those races younger than Humans are not yet evolved enough to question their elders as Sheridan and Delenn question the Shadows and Vorlons. This is a Humanity at center stage: the glorious leader, not the outmoded parent who must let the children fly on their own. This is a Humanity whose words must be taken as truth because no challenging voice exists. Whereas we meet the Shadows and Vorlons at the end of their useful careers in this galaxy, we meet future-Humanity in its prime. Yet the Humanity represented here is not simply in its prime; it is better than those precursors. Straczynski announces that Humans will not make the same mistakes as the Vorlons (and, by implication, the Shadows), the final effect being the revelation of a glorious Human future in which all historical crises and Human folly will ultimately be transcended.

Imperialism and Anthropocentrism in Babylon 5's Evolutionary Discourse

The unitary language that validates the wisdom of the future-Humans similarly supports anthropocentrism throughout the series: Humans have a uniquely great destiny. Yet it would be simplistic to read Humanity's ultimate triumph in Babylon 5 as nothing

more than a literal extrapolation into the grand evolutionary future of humanity in the real world. Indeed, Straczynski describes his evolutionary scenario more as a metaphor than as extrapolation, explaining in an online post:

> Very early on, John Copeland [producer of Babylon 5] asked me, "Okay, bottom line it for me, what's the [Shadow] war about?" I said, "It's about killing your parents." And his eyes went wide, and I explained, "No, not literally. . . but at some point you have to step outside the control of your parents and create your own life, your own destiny. That process is inevitable. . . and if there are indeed older races, and they're interfering, that puts them smack in the middle of that same process." ("TTF"; ellipses Straczynski's)

"Killing your parents," here, can refer to the self-assertion of children seeking autonomy from their parents. But this literal growing up is also analogous to other processes. If there were interfering elder species like Shadows and Vorlons, for example, then the junior species interfered with would, likewise, have to mature and attain autonomy. Even without the literal presence of "advanced aliens," the Shadow War can represent human advancement beyond previous physical and mental limitations. On this level, the narrative can refer to literal evolution without advocating one particular evolutionary scenario. In Creative Evolution, Henri Bergson articulates this possibility: "Of course, the evolution of the organic world cannot be predetermined as a whole [. . . .] But this indetermination cannot be complete; it must leave a certain part to determination," one aspect of this "determination" being the vital impetus to evolve (86). Straczynski's extrapolations should not be read as a precise formula for humanity's future. Yet the basic idea that humanity can biologically progress toward a higher intellectual and spiritual awareness can be read literally. Between the microcosm of children leaving home and the macrocosm of human evolution lie such analogous processes as cultural evolution: the overturning of traditions that are no longer efficacious in a changing world, for example. The Shadow War represents all of these movements. They are all examples, Straczynski states, of the "same process." Not "similar," but the "same." Straczynski's discourse, thus, does not discriminate among psychological, cultural, and

evolutionary maturation. Each process is "inevitable," ontogenic: children grow up; cultures progress; species evolve. In each case, there is a necessary, quasi-predetermined advancement.

Moreover, on both cultural and biological levels, the narrative figures Humans as a species with a unique potential for such high advancement, although this does not mean that they alone will advance. The presence of Delenn--a Minbari--in the history outlined in "The Deconstruction of Falling Stars" implies that others among the "younger races" have followed the same evolutionary path as Humans. Indeed, the evolutionary schema of Babylon 5, which posits parallel evolution, suggests that Humans will not be the only race of new "First Ones," and Straczynski has even stated online that "[t]he Minbari eventually make it [to First-One status]" ("Future"). But if Humans are not alone among the new First Ones, "The Deconstruction of Falling Stars," nonetheless, focuses on the evolution of Humans and the fate of Earth. There might be many reasons for this narrative choice, not least of which is the marketing consideration that a human audience is likely to be most invested in the future of its own species.

Yet this Human focus also exemplifies the anthropocentrism implicit throughout the series. In fact, the show reflects two distinct kinds of anthropocentrism, a "literal" variety referring to the "real world" view that considers humans of greater importance than other life forms or systems on Earth, and a "metaphorical" anthropocentrism, describing a narrative position that privileges Humans over other "sentient" species in the Babylon 5 universe, such as the Minbari, Centauri, and Narn. This second category is "metaphorical" insofar as it does not literally signify species superiority but rather cultural superiority: it is "anthropocentrism" standing for ethnocentrism. In television space operas, "species" difference often represents human cultural difference.[9] In the Star Trek universe, for example, the silicon-consuming blob called the Horta stands for a different species--a truly non-human life form; Vulcans, Klingons, and Romulans stand for different cultures--peoples with strange, alien customs. Similarly, in the Babylon 5

universe, the Vorlons may represent a genuinely different species or the outline of a possible future for the human species. The "humanoid" races, however, are basically humans with foreign languages, religions, social structures, and so on.

This, of course, raises the question: foreign to whom? The obvious answer for an American television show is "foreign to mainstream America." There is no question that the Human characters in Babylon 5 subscribe to contemporary Western values, esteeming freedom, democracy, sexual and racial equality, religious tolerance, monogamy, marriage, and nuclear families. Additionally, Marcinko argues that the show is particularly American in its similarity to the genre of the western. Invoking Michael Wilmington's discussion of the western hero, Marcinko characterizes Sheridan and his predecessor, Season One's protagonist, Jeffrey Sinclair (Michael O'Hare) as "variations of the [western's] theme of 'an outsider or principled loner face to face with outlaws or sadists, prodded into the final showdown'" (60). Marcinko also sees a similarity between the western's depiction of "evil" as a purely human problem and Babylon 5's final struggle against the corruption of Earth's government. The Shadows and Vorlons having been dealt with, we discover that "[t]he real villains are human beings" (Marcinko 60). There is, moreover, a distinctly expansionist, American ring to Sheridan's Kirk-like avowal that he is drawn to space because it is "a new frontier" ("And Now for a Word" 2.14). Alien races, in contrast, embody characteristics that are not typically American. The Centauri are governed by an entrenched aristocracy; the Minbari divide their citizens into different castes; Narn warriors carry swords and follow a strict warrior's code of honor. All these characteristics recall human cultures: pre-Revolutionary France, traditional Hinduism, and samurai bushido, for example. But these are traits of cultures that America--and much of the contemporary Western world--marks as other.

But not only does the show "other" these alien cultures; it also depicts them as inferior to Humanity (as loosely represented by American culture), at least in some respects. The Centauri, for example, being exploitative, monarchical, patriarchal imperialists, are depicted as culturally inferior to nearly everyone. More surprising is that the Minbari are presented as inferior to Humans, even though they are typically regarded

as the most advanced of the younger races. The Minbari are, indeed, an impressive people. Technologically, they have begun to master the Vorlons' capabilities. Historically, they are far better informed than any other younger race, having already survived the Shadow War of one thousand years before. In hand-to-hand combat, their warriors are almost undefeatable. Culturally, they are sophisticated in their art and peaceful in their relations: murder within the Minbari species is practically unthinkable. Yet the Minbari have their weaknesses, notably cultural inertia. Their rigid caste system, for example, imposes rivalries and injustices, and the Minbari's faith in their own wisdom often renders them deaf to reasonable arguments for change. They also tend toward isolationism. This is the crucial point where Humans supersede them and, indeed, supersede all the younger races.

In a Season Two interview with a Human journalist, Delenn praises Babylon 5 as a unique meeting place for diverse races:

> [N]o one else [besides Humans] would ever build a place like this. Humans share one unique quality. They build communities. If the Narns or the Centauri or any other race built a station like this, it would be used only by their own people. But everywhere Humans go, they create communities out of diverse and sometimes hostile populations. It is a great gift and a terrible responsibility, one that cannot be abandoned. ("And Now for a Word")

There is a political agenda behind Delenn's encomium. As Earth becomes disgruntled with the expense of Babylon 5, Delenn seizes an opportunity to stress the station's value to its owners in terms that are calculated to flatter them. Yet while she speaks with political savvy, she, nonetheless, voices a position that the narrative presents as truth. Her very dedication to preserving Babylon 5 suggests that there is no other interstellar meeting place to fill its function. Indeed, the series repeatedly emphasizes that Babylon 5 is uniquely cosmopolitan. Delenn, moreover, is a voice of wisdom throughout the series: her sociopolitical judgments are rarely incorrect, her sense of morality intense and sophisticated. And while Delenn herself has a personal attachment to Humans--she undergoes a genetic transformation to become half Human and eventually marries a

Human--her primary loyalty to the Minbari lends further credibility to her praise for Humanity: the Minbari ambassador would probably not characterize Humanity as superseding her own people unless she found an important truth in her words.[10]

Yet the structure of the Babylon 5 narrative calls Delenn's statement into question. Humans, we are told, are uniquely gifted in building communities. If "Humans," here, evokes mainstream American culture, this statement recalls American pluralism and multiculturalism. Yet, ironically, the narrative characterizes "Humans" as building links between diverse cultures while it simultaneously "others" cultures that differ notably from an American norm. Such a move is more hegemonic than multicultural: uniting diverse peoples as long as they recognize that the unifiers' ways are best. The "community building" ideal is undercut by a rhetoric that frames the "Human" builders as apart from and--at least in some respects--superior to everybody else.

This hegemonic tendency is by no means unique to Babylon 5. Iver Neumann, for instance, observes that "[i]n Star Trek, the identity of persons as well as worlds revolves around the need to fit in with an already established social order epitomized by the United Federation of Planets [. . .]" (45). Naeem Inayatullah echoes Neumann: "My enjoyment [of Star Trek: The Next Generation] is based on overlooking that [. . .] its ideas serve to sustain the hegemony of an imperial culture" (60). Foucault scholar Clare O'Farrell, under the internet pseudonym "Panopticon," goes further, suggesting that "all of this [emphasis on human 'uniqueness' in American science fiction television] is perhaps a thinly disguised reflection of the USA's current imperialist stance with regards to cultures which are not American." While it seems clear that Straczynski did not intend to endorse imperialism in Babylon 5, his discourse is, nonetheless, implicated in the dominance-oriented ideologies that define much of American TV space opera.

In its emphasis on division and hierarchy, the "metaphorical" anthropocentrism (ethnocentrism) of Human (American) superiority to the alien (foreign) is closely related to the "literal" anthropocentrism of human superiority to the non-human. Both elevate a particular group to the privileged status of possessing "a great gift and a terrible responsibility" that implies a duty to guide the affairs of those less "gifted." While this

sense of responsibility might serve as a basis for proactive personal, cultural, and species agency, its implicit hierarchizing indicates an ideology fundamentally at odds with the "heterarchical" modes of relationality that Patrick Murphy describes as essential to combating the domination and exploitation of women, cultural "others," and the environment (5). Certainly, Babylon 5 advocates such relational values as cooperation, cultural diversity, and equal rights for all "sentient" beings: the great triumph of the series, after all, is the Interstellar Alliance that unites diverse peoples. Yet the narrative remains principally concerned with extolling good leadership. "The Deconstruction of Falling Stars" suggests that Sheridan and Delenn are among the greatest leaders in the evolutionary history of the younger races. In fact, in early Season Four, Sheridan literally returns from the dead, assuming a quasi-messianic status that he retains for the rest of the series. Just as Sheridan and Delenn are lauded as epic leaders, future-Humanity as a whole is cast as the optimal "leader" of the less-advanced. The future-Human shown at the end of "The Deconstruction of Falling Stars" is depicted as a wholly positive figure: his Human appearance is stately and attractive, his energy form a pure brightness, his words conveying respect, responsibility, and hope.

This lionization of Humanity's future implies that Humanity possesses a particular greatness not found in other beings. Sheridan--a Human--is the founder of the movement that will propel future-Humans to a status even more impressive than the Vorlons'. Even the Minbari's major prophet, Valen, was originally a Human: Jeffrey Sinclair, sent back in time to guide the Minbari. If Shaw's Creative Evolution stresses that humanity may be superseded by another species, Straczynski's evolution suggests that Humanity has a talent for superseding others. In the broad, evolutionary sense, "Humanity" stands for all humans, not just one culture. And indeed, Straczynski's commentary on human evolution echoes Babylon 5's illustrations of human superiority. In an online post explaining the importance of risk-taking to human culture and evolution, he writes, "What sets the human race apart from everything else is our persistence, the stubborn, noble dignity that propelled Washington's men [. . .] to refuse to knuckle under, and to go on" ("JMS Genie"). Here, though Straczynski's example is

quintessentially American, it is the entire "human race" that he "sets apart from everything else" as categorically different from all other life forms. Moreover, he sets humanity apart by asserting a unique area of human superiority: a "stubborn, noble dignity" that no other type of being can match.

Another of Straczynski's online posts on human evolution exemplifies his characterization of humanity as a uniquely privileged agency:

> The best physical evidence indicates that we evolved ourselves up from the ground, pulling ourselves up by our genetic bootstraps across a million years of struggle, evolution and blood, surviving because we were smarter than anything that was stronger than us. This, to me, is something to be proud of; we did it ourselves, we weren't just created whole and complete, all the work pre-assembled at the factory. We walked on the moon because we earned it by growing smart, and learning--in however inconsistent and fractured a way--to live and work together more often than we fought with each other [. . . .] ("JMS Question"; emphasis Straczynski's)

Here, Straczynski casts evolution as a type of human self-construction: we should "be proud" that "we evolved ourselves" by "pulling ourselves up by our genetic bootstraps." If this is not emphatic enough, he repeats, "we did it ourselves," and stresses, "We walked on the moon because we earned it." In this post, Straczynski is defending evolution (against creationism) as an inspiring worldview, and this defense doubtless underlies some of his rhetorical emphasis on the glories of evolution as human achievement. Nonetheless, his pronouncement that evolution is something humanity does by and for itself is as extreme an instance of the effacement of ecological relationality as any encountered in Shaw's Creative Evolution. In Straczynski's depiction of evolution, the idea that humanity not only acts but is also acted upon is almost completely absent. Straczynski mentions overcoming creatures "stronger than us," but he frames these creatures as vanquished adversaries, not evolutionary partners shaping the human species. Straczynski's rhetoric grants the agency for evolutionary change solely to humanity.

The Resurgence of Non-Ecological Creative Evolution in Babylon 5

This agency is predicated on a non-disjunction between personal, cultural, and biological evolution that is reminiscent of Shaw's. Just as Shaw believed that an individual's activities, memories, and personal will could, through Life Force, affect human evolution, so Straczynski constructs a scenario in which personal and cultural advancement are causally linked to evolutionary advancement. After expelling the First Ones from the galaxy, Sheridan remarks to Delenn that the younger races are now responsible for all their own mistakes: "We can't blame anyone else from now on" ("Into the Fire"). This cultural independence is figured as a step in biological evolution: the sociopolitical expulsion of the First Ones has launched the younger races into the next stage of their evolutionary journey toward becoming the new First Ones depicted in "The Deconstruction of Falling Stars." Unlike Shaw's Life Force, however, Babylon 5's evolutionary discourse posits no mechanism to connect these different types of progress. If the science of evolution is a crucial concern in Back to Methuselah, it is not in Babylon 5. It is not difficult, however, in the age of genetic engineering to imagine technologies that would link cultural with biological evolution. Indeed, in creating this link--even without direct reference to eugenic technologies--Babylon 5 embodies Bruno Latour's hybridity, illustrating that natural and cultural formations are not ultimately divisible. This openness to hybrids is potentially productive. But the discourse of Babylon 5 loses much of this productivity by emphasizing "society" at the expense of "nature." Indeed, apart from the fact that biological evolution alters organic bodies, Babylon 5's evolutionary scenario invokes almost exclusively non-biological social changes.

Like Shaw's Creative Evolution, Babylon 5's culturally driven evolution locates the prime agency in the evolutionary process outside of the physical environment. For Shaw, it is a matter of Will; for Straczynski, it is a matter of rising to the "terrible responsibility" of being a mature, self-governing species. By describing evolution as a matter of moral behavior rather than physical necessities, both discourses almost completely efface the necessity of ecological relationality to the existence of human life.

In both cases, human evolution--human existence--is ultimately contingent upon little besides human behavior. While Shaw's discourse sometimes invokes other terrestrial species as evolutionary potentials or dead ends, in Babylon 5's discourse, the vast majority of organic life is absent. All life that is not destined to become "sentient," for instance, is omitted from the cosmic genealogy of elder and younger races: this presumably includes almost all plants, fungi, microorganisms, and the vast majority of animals. If these life forms are not present in the discourse, then the ecological relationships among them are, necessarily, not present either. In this respect, the relationships outlined between the First Ones, the younger races, and the "galaxy" in the Shadow War are reminiscent of the relationships between the British, the Americans, and America outlined by The Declaration of Independence. The First Ones have become tyrants. The younger races, therefore, have a right and a duty to sever ties to them and claim the galaxy as a space of self-government. The ecology of the galaxy in Sheridan and Delenn's discourse is no more present than a discussion of American agricultural practices in The Declaration. In both discourses, the ecological underpinnings that allow life to persist are assumed to be so stably and unalterably in place that they are not at issue. Since there will always be air, water, food, there is no reason to talk about it.

Yet just as deforestation, pollution, erosion, and other environmental problems serve as reminders of the inescapability of ecology in American society, so does the ecological world intrude into the Babylon 5 narrative. Because Babylon 5 is fiction, however, these ecological intrusions occur less as explicit problems than as gaps in the text, points where ecological relationality is not plausibly addressed. "The Deconstruction of Falling Stars" offers a minor example. One thousand years after the time of Babylon 5, Earth has been plunged into a new dark age in which advanced technology has been lost, the environment devastated. Wise, old Brother Alwyn (Roy Brocksmith) remarks that during the Great Burn, "[t]hey burned the earth and the air and the cities and the sea," going on to explain that the world has scarcely recovered from this catastrophe, even after five hundred years. The importance of the biosphere to Human life seems plain here. Yet later in the episode, an off-hand comment from Alwyn

highlights the superficiality of the show's engagement with ecological relationality. Alwyn *mentions that his compatriots are* "*assembling a working gasoline engine.*" In the year 3262, more than a millennium after fossil fuels would have been exhausted on Earth, it is difficult to imagine how these Earth-bound people could have access to gasoline. Yet no reference is made to this difficulty. Though this engine itself is not important to the plot of Babylon 5, the script's oversight is an apt illustration of the mindset that underlies the series's sparse ecological discourse. Thus, the ideology of Babylon 5 expresses the distinctly American assumption of a perpetual surplus of natural resources: *build the engine, and the gasoline will be there.*

A more prominent example of this deemphasis on ecology occurs in "And the Rock Cried Out, No Hiding Place" (3.20), in which the Narn, G'Kar, returns to his home world after it has been bombed by its Centauri colonizers. A fellow Narn describes the effects of the bombing to G'Kar: "The wind never stops. They say it will take years for all the particulate matter to drift down out of the sky and back into the ground. The days and nights are colder. It never seems to feel warm anymore." Here, the narrative clearly expresses an awareness that a major bombardment of a planet from space would have long-lasting deleterious consequences. But these consequences are described merely in terms of sensory perceptions: the planet feels cold and windy. As G'Kar listens to his friend, he holds a handkerchief over his nose, suggesting that the dust is hard to breathe. What is not addressed is the ecological catastrophe that would result from such an attack. The dust cloud occasioned by the bombing would be akin to that associated with the meteorite collision thought to have precipitated the extinction of the dinosaurs. But while a disaster of this magnitude could be expected to threaten a mass extinction on Narn, drastically altering its ecosystems and devastating its crop production, no one mentions such repercussions.

This lack of concern for the ecological backbone that supports a civilization is characteristic of the series in general: it devotes little time to explaining how space ships are powered or agriculture managed or food distributed. At certain moments, these topics are, indeed, alluded to: we find Sheridan reviewing oxygen consumption and recycling

logs for the station, for instance ("And the Rock"). And the station's chief medical officer, Dr. Franklin (Richard Biggs) notes that "living in a big tin can surrounded by a vacuum" is far more precarious than living within a biosphere ("And Now"). But such issues do not rise to prominence as areas of concern. The Shadow War, for example, would almost certainly have destroyed agricultural resources supporting billions of people, yet interstellar hunger is not a significant topic in the aftermath of the war.

The show's anthropocentric concern with illustrating humanity's unique greatness militates against an ideological investment in ecological relationality. For if humanity were presented as just one participant among innumerable interacting forces, it would not stand out as categorically separate and superior. As Ursula K. Le Guin observes in "The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction," "[The Hero] needs a stage or a pedestal or a pinnacle. You put him in a bag and he looks like rabbit, like a potato" (169). Babylon 5 constructs its pedestal by endorsing a unitary language that presents the positions of its heroes as beyond legitimate criticism. This resistance to dialogic communication is symptomatic of an ideology that glorifies the leadership of select individuals or a select culture or species while largely disregarding "lesser" life forms and the webs of ecological relation in which they are integral participants. Such a disregard, in turn, indicates a problematic model for ecological praxis. Just as the series itself is careless in its ecological assumptions concerning a gasoline engine or the bombing of a planet, so would an ecological praxis based on such an ideology tend toward carelessness in the management of ecosystems. Ultimately, this carelessness undermines the series's otherwise productive utopian call for personal, cultural, and species maturation through responsible, proactive agency. If Babylon 5, however, does not substantially critique its own rhetorical presentation of humanity's relationship to the non-human, it receives an intertextual critique from the space opera, Lexx.

"It's Okay: Everything Dies"

Ecology as Living and Dying in Lexx

If, like many utopian texts, Babylon 5 establishes a unitary language of socio-evolution, Lexx, in keeping with its more dystopian theme, authorizes greater dialogism. In chapter 1, I cite Michael J. McDowell's contention that a dialogic rhetoric is particularly apt for discussions of ecology because both dialogism and ecology embody relationality. It is not surprising, therefore, that as a strongly ecocentric text, Lexx tends toward dialogic discourse. Admittedly, dialogic communication is not foregrounded in Lexx; in fact, the series subordinates verbal communication, in general, to action and special effects. But while verbal discussion is more prominent in Babylon 5 than Lexx, the conversations Lexx presents are more consistently dialogic. In Lexx, there is no moral leader, no infallible character or cause, and, therefore, no unitary language. For if no one can be relied upon to be "correct," no reliably "correct" discourse can exist. Thus, discourse in Lexx is always explicitly provisional, imperfect, subject to challenge. This provisionality, in turn, enables a discursive complexity in which "good" people can be mistaken and "villains" can make valid points. In such a rhetorical frame, no voice can be dismissed. All exist together in a fundamental relationality that forms the core of the series.

Ask a casual viewer of Lexx what the main theme of the series is, however, and that person is likely to respond, "Sex," rather than, "Relationality." And with good reason. The show is founded on a romantic triangle: Zev (Eva Habermann, spelled "Xev" after Season Two's recast with Xenia Seeburg) is a scantily clad "love slave" with an accelerated libido, who is in love with Kai (Michael McManus), who cannot reciprocate because he is "dead," meaning that his body has been "de-carbonized" in a way that renders him incapable of experiencing most human feeling. Xev is more than willing to seek sexual solace elsewhere--almost anywhere, in fact--except with her other traveling companion, the sexually frustrated Stanley Tweedle (Brian Downey), whom she, like most other women, finds profoundly unattractive. Trite, certainly. But there is more to Lexx than sexual cliche. Lexx is, indeed, about sex. It is also about death,

specifically about "dead" Kai's quest to achieve his final, irrevocable death. Lexx is about the crossroads between orgasmic intensity of feeling and feeling nothing at all. It enacts the shadow of death that hangs over the struggle for life. As a dystopia, Lexx can be dismal in its stress on degeneration and death as the inevitable end of all things. Yet the series's crucial philosophical realization is that dying is the same as living. Deaths, Lexx reminds us with ecosystemic awareness, make life possible. Thus, while Lexx is not "about" ecology, ecological relationality fundamentally underlies its entire narrative structure.

The Rejection of Hierarchy in Lexx

The creation of Canadian co-writers, Paul Donovan, Lex Gigeroff, and Jeff Hirschfield, this Canadian-German co-production began as a series of four made-for-television movies (collectively considered its first season) and subsequently ran as a TV show for three years (Seasons Two through Four). The series details the adventures of Xev, Stan, Kai, and lovelorn robot head, 790, aboard a living space ship, the Lexx, a genetically engineered "Insect" and the single most powerful destructive force in the Two Universes. Over the course of four thousand years of wandering (most spent in cryogenic suspension), these vagabonds defeat the totalitarian Divine Order and, later, its surviving representative, Mantrid (Dieter Laser), though not before Mantrid destroys the universe called the Light Zone. Exiled to the remaining universe, the Dark Zone, the crew become trapped in orbit around the planets Fire and Water, populated by the spirits of the dead, before finally journeying to a contemporary Earth, the narrative's depiction of which is rife with Canadian satire on American hegemony.

Similarly, as a show, Lexx defines itself against the "hegemony" of American TV space opera: "We [writers of Lexx] just don't care about Star Trek these days," remarks Donovan, commenting on Lexx's departure from the mainstream ("Lexx Appeal"). Produced by the small Canadian company, Salter Street Films, founded by Donovan and his brother, Lexx has a creative freedom denied to Babylon 5, beholden to the corporate interests of megaconglomerate, Warner ("Lexx Appeal"). Using this freedom to

systematically break established conventions of American science fiction TV, <u>Lexx</u> is more "campy" than dramatic, more irreverent than moralizing. If <u>Star Trek</u> and <u>Babylon 5</u> foreground human greatness, <u>Lexx</u> foregrounds human failings.11 Indeed, as Donovan notes, human imperfection is foundational to the series: "[T]he certain knowledge that we are a flawed species, fused with endless <u>Monty Python</u> and <u>Star Trek</u> episodes and everything else I watched [as a teenager], resulted in <u>Lexx</u>. . . I think" (qtd. in Gibson 36; ellipsis original). The crew of the Lexx are morally ambiguous, often inept, and frequently cause more harm than good, yet they are more admirable than most others they encounter. In <u>Lexx</u>, any obviously "noble" character is soon killed off or exposed as evil.

Given the show's dark attitude toward humanity, it may seem curious that one of the writers' humorous "rules" for the <u>Lexx</u> universe states, "There are no life forms more intelligent than humans, unless and until such a life form does the requisite script writing" (<u>Lexx: Bible</u> 24).12 This pronouncement, enacted throughout the series, seems to lend itself to an anthropocentric discourse: nothing can be better than humanity. This "rule," however, is a set against the conventional space opera practice of using "advanced aliens" to emphasize <u>human</u> greatness. Typically, such aliens either represent the grand potential of human evolution (Vorlons, Shadows, Metrons, Organians) or enervated species whose superiority to humans is illusory (Vorlons, Shadows, Taelons). <u>Lexx</u>'s rejection of any intellect beyond humanity's is part of its dystopian bleakness, denying the possibility of positive "advancement." But it is also part of the series's refusal to hierarchize. No species is "above" humanity, but neither is humanity--itself an unimpressive species--"above" all others. Instead, various types of beings stumble along together in webs of conflicted, often brutal, but necessary relationality.

<u>Lexx</u> does not, however, resist all traces of anthropocentrism. Significantly, the plot line most nearly replicating typical humanist assumptions of space opera is the one that comes closest to invoking a "superior" alien species. Millennia before the series begins, humanity warred with the Insects, beings which, if not more intelligent than humans, were vastly more powerful. Humanity, nonetheless, defeated the Insects for the conventional space-opera reason that, as Kai puts it, the humans showed more

"resourcefulness" than their "methodical" adversaries ("End of the Universe" 2.20). The Insects, whose malign influence survives for a time in the Divine Order, are motivated by a single-minded drive to exterminate humanity. Indeed, Mantrid wishes to destroy a universe purely to appease the hatred for humanity that he derives from his Insect aspect. Offering no reason for this hatred, the show presents humans solely as innocent victims of an irrational wrath. The defeat of the Insects, thus, recalls the space opera trope of the "superior" alien that is really "inferior" to a righteous humanity. In keeping with this trope, it is the Lexx's human crew who prevent Mantrid from destroying Dark Zone, thereby saving an entire universe. This human triumph, however, is undercut by Mantrid's successful destruction of the Light Zone, a devastation unwittingly enabled by the Lexx crew, whose actions earlier in the series allowed Mantrid to absorb the Insect essence that drives his destructive urges.

Despite such partial reinscriptions of space opera's conventional anthropocentric hierarchizing, on balance, Lexx rejects such hierarchies. The crew of the Lexx have no heroic leader. All three main characters are deeply flawed, psychologically marred by the Divine Order. Stan, imprisoned, belittled, and abused for years, is craven and insecure. Xev, raised "in a box" cut off from most human contact, is naive and emotionally needy. Kai, enslaved for millennia to a power he "died" trying to fight, is almost devoid of emotional affect. None of these characters fits the traditional paradigm of the space opera protagonist, the heroic Captain Kirk or Captain Sheridan. Indeed, Stan, the "captain of the Lexx," is the least heroic of his companions. Xev sometimes rises to "heroic" action but is just as likely to be petty or foolish. Kai, the most conventionally "heroic," persistently excludes himself from leadership decisions on the grounds that he is dead. In the absence of a "hero," all three leads act as co-protagonists, carrying roughly equal weight as participants in the drama. The narrative structure of Lexx is based on the bumbling interactions of these fallible individuals rather than the heroics of a noble leader. Thus, Lexx resists anthropocentrism by resisting not only the idealization of humanity in particular, but also hierarchical paradigms in general.

The Centrality of Ecological Relationality in Lexx

Instead the show emphasizes the web of interstellar ecological relations on which the crew's existence depends. To the best of my knowledge, Lexx is unique in TV science fiction in making the daily needs of organic life a major part of its narrative content. The Lexx himself is an organic entity, who exists in a symbiotic relationship with his crew that depends on the recycling of metabolic energy.[13] The Lexx excretes water and what passes for food, while digesting the excrement of the humans. This mutual caprophagy is, of course, the subject of much toilet humor, but it is also a pragmatic means of energy conservation. Unfortunately--but realistically--the recycling of bodily wastes provides only a fraction of the energy required for the Lexx to function. To make up the difference, he must periodically eat other organic material. He prefers to do this by blowing up planets and devouring any resulting organic debris, though he can also obtain sustenance by consuming space debris or landing on planets and eating small parts of them.

All of these practices raise moral considerations that the Lexx's crew sometimes address. At several points in the series, for example, the crew are forced to choose between allowing the Lexx to starve and become helpless--leaving them stranded and defenseless in space (and starving themselves)--or letting him kill and consume a vast quantity of organic material, often including humans. In fact, for most of Seasons Three and Four, the Lexx remains almost incapable of movement, his only option for refueling being to consume a large portion of an "inhabited" planet (i.e. a planet with human life), a course his crew are reluctant to let him take. Nonetheless, during their Season Four sojourn on Earth, they command him to bite a chunk out of the Amazon rain forest, and at one point, Stan is prepared to let him eat Holland. Such decisions are not presented as unimpeachable. Indeed, a persistent flaw in Stan's character is his willingness to sacrifice the lives of many he does not know to save a few he does, a tendency for which both Xev and Kai criticize him. The series seldom provides ideal moral solutions to the problems its protagonists face. Instead, the crew discuss (or explicitly fail to discuss) various options and muddle through with better or worse consequences.

But while Lexx does not empower a unitary language in the way that Babylon 5 does, it does advocate certain overarching values. If there is a voice that articulates an ethics for the series, it is Kai's. Kai repeatedly invokes two moral principles: one is "nature," in the sense of "living in accord with one's nature"; the other is "balance." He often appeals to what is "natural" to justify tolerance for life forms that would ordinarily be considered inimical. In the fourth TV movie, "Giga Shadow" (1.4), for example, Kai allows a newly hatched Cluster Lizard to imprint on him as its "mother," even though Cluster Lizards are aggressive, worm-like, brain-eating predators. The crew should accept the little Lizard, Kai argues, because "[i]t's a baby, an innocent." It is not morally culpable for its natural inclination to eat brains, though, as Zev observes, the crew may have to kill it sooner or later for their safety. This eventuality does not arise, however. Instead, in one of its more overtly moralizing plots, the narrative endorses Kai's choice: the Cluster Lizard ultimately saves the lives of the entire crew--and perhaps much of the Two Universes--by eating the brain of the Giga Shadow, a remnant of the destructive Insect race. Kai's refusal to dismiss the Cluster Lizard as an inferior, a pest, or an enemy enables the Lizard to fulfill a productive role in preventing the "unbalanced" devastation of the Giga Shadow. Kai's thought process illustrates a type of ecocentrism that accepts the intrinsic right of all organisms to participate in ecological relationships.

Similarly, when the crew befriend Lyekka (Louise Wischermann), a carnivorous plant in the shape of a woman from Stan's dreams, they reconcile themselves to her periodic consumption of human prey on the grounds that it is in her nature to eat living flesh. In Lyekka's introductory episode ("Lyekka" 2.3), the plant woman devours a crew of three astronauts who are guests aboard the Lexx.[14] After Kai has observed her eat two of them, he warns Stan of her behavior. When Stan asks Kai if he is going to protect the final astronaut, Moss (Stephen McHattie), Kai replies, "I have no motivation to save Moss from Lyekka. Or Lyekka from Moss." Though he is prepared to defend Stan apparently out of personal loyalty, Kai sees no moral reason to interfere in the predator-prey relation between Lyekka and Moss. Lyekka must eat to survive, while Moss to survive must avoid being eaten. While Stan expects Kai to protect Moss

presumably because Moss is a human being, Kai acknowledges no inherent superiority in the value of Moss's human life over Lyekka's plant life. Each has an equal right to try to live according to his or her nature. Though Lyekka ultimately does eat Moss, the crew of the Lexx find ways to coexist with her. Most of the time, she remains dormant in a vegetative pod on the ship's bridge, awakening only when she is hungry. Having a genuine fondness for Stan, she agrees not to eat him or Xev (she cannot digest Kai) unless she is too hungry to stop herself. Because Lyekka displays this self-control, the crew allow her to remain on board the Lexx. When she must feed, they do their best to locate food for her so that she will not consume the crew.

The crew's interactions with Lyekka's species, however, are not always so congenial. Though Lyekka herself dies protecting her companions at the end of Season Two, the Lexx encounters her people again in Season Four, this time as an invading force bent on eating all life on early twenty-first-century Earth. Whereas one plant person is a dangerous predator whose appetite can, nonetheless, feasibly be sated, thousands of such plant people become an intergalactic plague of locusts destroying all organic life on planet after planet, leaving no possibility for that life to renew itself. As Kai explains, "To consume other plants and animals is natural and normal, but to scour a planet of all life [. . .] is unbalanced" ("ApocaLexx Now" 4.20). Despite the fact that there is little love lost between the crew of the Lexx and planet Earth, the crew determine to rescue the planet from the plant people.

They do not, however, initially assume the plants to be the "enemy." Instead, they begin by reasoning with the new "Lyekka" who visits them as a representative of the plants. Kai begins by reiterating his appeal to ecological balance:

> KAI. Eating everything on the planet is unbalanced. What will you do afterwards?
> LYEKKA. Eat another tasty planet.
> [. . . .]
> KAI. And when the universe runs out of planets, Lyekka will starve to death.
> LYEKKA. This universe has lots of yummy planets. ("ApocaLexx Now")

Lyekka's view is in keeping with traditional capitalist assumptions that resources will always be available to accommodate growth--or that, if they will not be, their exhaustion is so distant an event as to be functionally irrelevant. Her position, thus, explicitly articulates the tacit assumption that underlies Brother Alwyn's gasoline engine in Babylon 5: in both cases, the discourse assumes a perpetual sufficiency of resources. Kai, in contrast, appeals to the need for sustainable living. If the plants to do not moderate their consumption of life forms to allow organic life the opportunity to regenerate, they will be making food into a non-renewable resource, thereby destroying the ecological base on which their own lives depend. Lyekka is, of course, correct that a whole universe--at least as presented in Lexx--contains many planets harboring organic life. The plants might, indeed, plausibly persist for many millennia, stripping planet after planet of all life. Yet Kai's assessment of the plants' fate is ultimately valid. Even a universe does not contain infinite resources.

The plants, however, do not accept the necessity of such long-term planning. Swayed more by the crew's threats of retaliation than their case for sustainable predation, the plants pretend to negotiate a deal: they will eat Japan and spare the rest of the Earth. This compromise, though unfortunate for the Japanese, would save the plants from starvation while allowing life on Earth to persist. It is only after the plants indicate that they will not abide by this deal that the crew seriously discuss fighting them. Stan, however, argues that Earth is not worth saving; it is, after all, a "type 13" planet progressing rapidly toward self-annihilation. Rather than incur the plants' wrath, he contends, the Lexx should flee the area, leaving Earth to its fate. Xev counters, conventionally, that they have a moral responsibility to protect the people on Earth. But Stan, who has not been greeted warmly by most Earth people, is unsympathetic. Kai, however, observes that more is at stake than Earth. In his view, "Lyekka [i.e. the plant civilization] is a dangerous predator who will consume this entire universe unless she is stopped" ("Lyekka vs. Japan" 4.23). Xev expands on Kai's reasoning, telling Stan, "We can take [Lyekka] on now. We can take her on later. But we definitely have to take her on sometime" ("Lyekka vs. Japan"). Both Xev and Kai remind Stan of the finite nature

of the universe and its ecological resources. While the crew of the Lexx could avoid battling Lyekka's people on Earth, they would only be postponing a confrontation over resources that must occur sooner or later. In suggesting that they attack the plants on Earth, Xev and Kai use the same reasoning that advocates switching to alternative energy sources well before petroleum reserves are exhausted. If it must be done sooner or later, why not sooner, with minimized damage? Though Stan is initially skeptical, Xev and Kai's reasoning eventually convinces him to battle the plants. In the final episode of the series, though they fail to save the Earth, the crew vanquish the plants at the cost of Kai's "life."

While the plant crisis is a simple tale of the perils of overpredation, the series investigates ecosystemic breakdown on a more complex level in its third TV movie, "Eating Pattern" (1.3). A narrative thematically centered around patterns of eating, this movie begins with the Lexx's need for food. The crew determine that the most convenient and least destructive way to appease his hunger is to land on a waste disposal planet and allow him to eat organic refuse. The crew soon discover, however, that this planet, a remnant of a civilization destroyed by war, is reaching the critical stages of ecosystemic collapse. During the war, the planet was seeded with a life form that had been removed from its native habitat to be used as a biological weapon. This parasitic queen organism creates drones that mimic human form and, by kissing a human, transmit a satellite worm into the human's nervous system. The worm, then, invades the human's brain, causing a ravening need to feed the satellite worm—which protrudes from the host's neck—with a substance called "pattern," which is distilled from flesh. When the worms consume sufficient pattern, the hosts are impelled to go to the queen's lair, where the worms regurgitate the pattern, thus feeding the queen. But in this alien habitat, the worms have had too few hosts to parasitize. By the time the crew of the Lexx arrive, every human has been infected and every conventional source of food consumed so that the humans must produce pattern by cutting off their own limbs as raw material for the distillation process. Plainly, the population that feeds the queen (and, thus, the queen herself) will not survive long under these circumstances.

The queen is well aware of this. She communicates her understanding through a drone named Wist (Doreen Jacobi), in the shape of an early human victim. Though Wist represents a merciless predator, the brutal destruction she wreaks on the planet's human inhabitants is an act of desperation more than free choice. Removed from her native habitat, she has survived using the only means at her disposal. Just as the infected humans are deranged with hunger for pattern, so Wist (and the queen she is a part of) is on the point of starvation. The planet, which, she recalls, was once "delicious, plentiful," now "has no future." Nor has the queen herself. But the queen accepts that it is her time to die: "It's okay," Wist tells Kai. "Everything dies. That's why we have daughters, so life goes on after us." What matters is the survival not of the individual but of life itself. Wist's sentiment is echoed by the leader of the infected humans, Bog (Rutger Hauer), who explains the Russian roulette-like game the humans engage in to determine who will lose limbs and who will win pattern: "The point of the game is that there's always another point. The points become dots; the dots become a line; the line is part of a bigger circle, the circle of life." Ultimately, the vicious game the humans play, like the parasitism of the worms that drive them to it, is the last struggle of a failing ecosystem to continue the "pattern" of life. This ecosystem, of course, cannot be salvaged, and, to protect their own lives, the crew of the Lexx resist Wist and the queen's daughter (in the form of a giant Wist), who is finally killed when the Lexx destroys the planet. But though Wist must be destroyed for the Lexx crew's safety, she is not depicted as evil. She is simply a predator. The moral wrong rests with the humans, many years before, who infected the planet with a life form that its ecosystems could not support.

"Eating Pattern," thus, enacts the abjectness of life's final struggle to persist in the absence of an adequate supporting system. Beyond this final struggle lies death. But death, in Lexx, is not only represented as the unconscious, decomposing state of an organism no longer living; it is also represented as a type of "life" stretched beyond its normal limits, a consciousness and activity substantially disconnected from the ecosystemic "circles" of life and death that perpetuate organic living. The show's prime example of this living death is Kai.

Kai as Exemplar of Life and Death

A once-living human who has spent two thousand years as a "de-carbonized" Divine Assassin, Kai is adamant throughout the series that he is "dead." This contention, however, is not as incontrovertible as Kai presents it. Lexx expert and fan essayist, D. G. Valdron, under the pseudonym, "Darrow," challenges Kai's assertion.[15] Playing on Kai's stock phrase, "The dead do not feel" (or engage in a myriad other activities), Darrow argues that "he's not dead. The dead do not make dry witty comments, the dead do not do contortions to evade moral responsibility, the dead do not get up and walk around. There is a long list of things that Kai does that the dead do not do" ("Living"). Indeed, Kai's claim to indisputable "deadness" is challenged not only by his broad range of behaviors but also by the claims of other "dead" characters that they are alive. In "Giga Shadow," for instance, the Insect essence of His Divine Shadow, ruler of the Divine Order, invades the body of a reanimated human Cleric after His Shadow's own physical form is destroyed. The Cleric, His Shadow asserts, is dead: "It is only I who am alive." Similarly, the robot head, 790, whose only organic component is a fragment of brain kept artificially "alive" by a substance similar to the protoblood that animates Kai, is physically at least as "dead" as Kai is. Yet 790 enmeshes himself furiously in living feelings, claiming to have "perfect human love" for Xev ("Norb" 2.12) and, later, for Kai.

More complex is the discourse of His Shadow's Chief Bio-Vizier, Mantrid, a megalomaniacal being whose physical state is akin to "dead" Kai's. Both Kai and Mantrid begin as humans and end as beings consisting of human, machine, and Insect aspects.[16] In "Norb," Kai asks, "Are you alive, Mantrid?" Mantrid answers, "I exist. Is there any more to it?" and goes on to explain that his essence is contained in a machine. When Kai asks if Mantrid is, therefore, a machine, Mantrid replies, "If you like. I function. And I know that I have purpose." Kai's questions--is Mantrid alive? is he a machine?--indicate an investment in distinguishing life from death. For Mantrid, on the other hand, what matters most is purposeful agency, be it defined as alive or dead. Yet Mantrid, too, shows a need to classify his existence. After surviving an attack by Season

Two's Lyekka, he proclaims, "I am alive" ("End of the Universe" 2.20). Kai, however, does not accept this: later in the same episode, he remarks to Mantrid, "I <u>know</u> I am dead, but you <u>believe</u> you are alive [. . .]" (my emphasis), his contrast between "knowledge" and mere "belief" rejecting Mantrid's claim to living status. But though Mantrid is not an admirable character, his description of his self-conscious and purposeful state as "living" seems as reasonable as Kai's professions of "deadness." The dialogic disagreement between Kai and Mantrid indicates that Kai's discourse of "death" is not the only way to interpret this state of being.

Darrow contends that Kai misunderstands his own state: "Kai is a sort of alive that he does not understand or recognize, so he thinks it's death." ("Living"). The "dead" Kai, Darrow argues, is essentially a fossil of the living Kai. Because this fossil lacks the original's biochemical systems, he is physiologically incapable of feeling in a recognizable way: "[Kai's] emotions feel distant and far away, faint, as if a person was shouting at him from across an abyss. Without the amplified stereo system of carbon based biochemistry, the emotions which arise naturally from cognitive function are simply not amplified the way they would be for us" (Darrow, "Living"). For Kai, this "distant shouting" of emotion would contrast so sharply with his memories of "living" emotion that he might readily interpret it as no feeling, no life. Unquestionably, Kai is telling the truth to an extent when he says he does not feel. In "Giga Shadow," when Zev asks him how it feels to have killed his ancient adversary, His Divine Shadow, Kai appears to genuinely grapple for an answer and find none: "I feel. . . I feel . . . I have no feeling for it," he finally decides.

But while Darrow's analysis of Kai's physical state sheds light on why Kai defines himself as dead, it does not fully account for his tenacity in clinging to this definition. Indeed, much as Judith Butler speaks of "performing gender," we might say that Kai "performs" death. And he does so with increasing scrupulousness as the series progresses. While in Season One's "Giga Shadow," he attempts a serious analysis of his feelings about the death of His Shadow, by Season Three, he is quick to assert to a woman who accuses him of having feelings, "I am dead, and I do not feel anything.

Ever" ("K Town" 3.6). Over the course of the series, his affect flattens, and his dialogue becomes more stereotyped, reiterating with increasingly frequency his catch phrase: "The dead do not [do various things]." Although Kai's physical being bears a resemblance to both a living and and a dead state, he systematically accentuates his deadness and minimizes his living characteristics.

Kai's insistence on his deadness derives not only from his physically altered state but also from his identity as a living person. We are obliquely introduced to the living Kai through a musical reenactment of his life in the episode, "Brigadoom" (2.18). Millennia before Xev and Stan's time, Kai was born into a human society called the Brunnen G. Like Shaw's Ancients, the Brunnen G long ago discovered how to halt the aging process, with the result that, in Kai's time, only a handful of people, like Kai, are their "natural age," born presumably to replace those Brunnen G who have died of accidental causes.[17] But if Shaw's Ancients use functional immortality to attain ever higher consciousness and understanding, the Brunnen G have not had similar success. Unlike the Ancients, the Brunnen G's agelessness is a technical rather than an evolutionary achievement. As "ordinary" human beings, the Brunnen G are not mentally constituted for immortality. Instead, their long life provokes a fear of accidental death so intense that most of them cower indoors, rejecting all hazardous activities. Moreover, their brains appear overloaded with too many years of information: the elders among them can scarcely remember who they are.

Along with a few other "newborns," Kai disdains the enervated society of his elders, pining for the days when noble Brunnen G warriors defeated the Insects in the Insect Wars. He attempts to revive this glorious past when his planet is threatened by the Divine Order. When Kai alerts the Brunnen G to their danger, most are initially panic-stricken but soon come to view their impending destruction as a welcome release from an intolerable immortality. Only a few newborns, led by Kai, venture out to fight the Order, knowing they will probably die. In fact, their entire civilization is obliterated. The last

survivor, Kai is killed by his His Divine Shadow and reanimated as a mindless Divine Assassin. After serving the Divine Order for two thousand years, Kai regains his memories and joins forces with Stan and Xev to defeat the Order.

But though Kai regains his memories, he does not regain his organic body. Indeed, the dead Kai contrasts starkly with his living self. While the dead Kai professes to feel nothing, want nothing, and "not meddle in the affairs of the living" ("ApocaLexx Now"), the living Kai is an emphatic participant in life. He likes balloons ("Lafftrak" 2.5) and fishing ("White Trash" 2.8) and is apparently so fond of making music that even his dead self shows an interest in singing and playing the piano ("The Rock" 4.6). The living Kai is involved in a tempestuous romance with a woman who, like most of the Brunnen G, cannot appreciate the sense of adventure that urges him to explore beyond his home planet. He is a leader, a spokesman for his fellow newborns, in the vanguard of the Brunnen G's doomed assault against the Divine Order.

He defines himself and his activities against the stagnation of his ageless elders. In the musical rendering of his life, so great is his contempt for the cowardice of his elders that when they refuse to combat the Divine Order, he asserts, "We are the Brunnen G; we deserve to die" ("Brigadoom"). He criticizes his people both for fearing to die and for fearing to live. In both instances, his basic criticism is the same: the Brunnen G fear to confront life. Whether they hide indoors to avoid catching a disease or wait passively for the Divine Order's destruction to release them from their miserable longevity, they refuse to participate in the actions that make life meaningful. Kai, conversely, participates in life on many levels, accepting that these activities may lead to his death. The basic premise that underlies his understanding of life is that living and dying are inseparable. To be fully alive is to be willing to die in the course of experiencing life. This basic philosophy survives unchanged in the dead Kai millennia later. In "The Key" (3.8), the dead Kai invokes the cliched--but in this case highly significant--analogy between orgasm and dying. Having experienced both, he states that while the sensations

are akin, dying *is far more intense. Dying is, thus, the epitome of living:* "The point of death is the point of joy," Kai asserts ("The Key"), the moment of one's most passionate participation in life, the antithesis of the Brunnen G elders' long living death.

Yet the series emphasizes that dying not only occurs at a single moment but is, in a broader sense, a precondition of all living: all organic bodies degenerate toward death. *This degeneration ends in decomposition into basic nutrients, which are essential to the* furtherance of new life. In order for life to continue, things must die. In keeping with Kai's analogy between life and sex, the living/dying must participate in the world around them, not only for the experience of living but for the physical continuance of life itself. Kai holds that the natural function of death is to provide for the living. In "Garden" (3.9), he attempts to fulfill this role by allowing himself to be buried in a flower bed. Returning to the earth, he explains to Xev, "is the natural way of all dead things." Actor Michael McManus has stressed his belief in his character's dedication to this process, remarking that if Kai had not had to disinter himself to rescue Stan and Xev, "I think he happily would have stayed there [in the flower bed], seriously and very, very, very determinedly trying to decompose there under the earth." Alive, Kai participated in life; dead, he is still dedicated to doing so--in the way proper to dead things--by fertilizing the flowers. Ironically, Kai's efforts fail: the flowers planted in the earth next to him soon shrivel and die, apparently poisoned by his de-carbonized body.

Kai, who so often appeals to nature and balance, defines the processes of life in terms of ecological relationality. He cannot, therefore, with moral integrity, define himself as "alive" because he is not significantly an ecological participant. Of course, he is not truly "dead" either: not unconscious, not decomposing. He is, in fact, involved in one ecological relationship: to function, he requires protoblood, a by-product of Insect metabolism. But since, by Season Two, the Insect race is extinct, protoblood is a non-renewable resource, a remnant of an ecological link that will soon be severed, along with Kai's conscious existence. Kai approaches this imminent oblivion with a certain relief, as it signifies his attainment of a more truly dead state. Indeed, so much does Kai long for a real death that in Season Four, he wagers Stan's and Xev's lives in a game of chess

with the evil spirit Prince (Nigel Bennett) on the condition that, if Kai wins, Prince will enable him definitively to die. Kai seeks death because he recognizes that if he is not absolutely "dead," he is nearer dead than living.[18] Genuine death is part of life, the earth in which life flourishes. Kai is excluded not just from living but from the entire cycle of life. He cannot feel pain or pleasure; he cannot eat or excrete, save for processing his protoblood. He cannot even fertilize the flowers. Like the Brunnen G elders he despised, he has merely existed century after century, excluded from meaningful participation in the processes that define living.

Living as Dying in Lexx

Kai's philosophy demands a moral rejection of this unlife. To him, such an existence contributes nothing meaningful to the universe. Thus, Kai must assert Mantrid's "deadness" as well as his own. To Kai, it is morally untenable for Mantrid to define himself as alive while not participating in the cycles of life. Events of the series support Kai's position; in fact, Mantrid shows more contempt for ecological relationality than any other figure in Lexx. In Season Two, Mantrid attempts to use his self-replicating robotic drones to transform everything in the Two Universes into Mantrid drones. As Darrow observes, Mantrid's goal is "simply to replace all the matter in the Universe[s] with himself [. . .]" ("Mantrid"). Mantrid is the ultimate solipsist. He literally sees no value in anything that is not Mantrid. Darrow remarks, "[Mantrid] wanted to take everything and give nothing. At the center of his character was an empty hunger, which in his new [post-human] existence was writ large" ("Mantrid"). What Darrow describes as "an empty hunger" aptly fits Mantrid's compulsions. Mantrid wishes to eat without being eaten, to live without dying. But this ambition, taken to its extreme, reduces to nothing the consumption of everything to no end but consumption itself. Kai notes the futility of this aim, challenging the Bio-Vizier, "And after destroying all of humanity and converting an entire universe into Mantrid drones, then what do you do, Mantrid?" ("End of the Universe"). Mantrid answers that he will eat the second universe, and "[o]nce I've done that, I'll rest." Mantrid's concluding his activity with

"rest" echoes God's creation of the world in Genesis. But Darrow contends, "Mantrid was actually on the way to becoming the antithesis of God. His goal was to be the being who would say 'Let there be Dark' and that would be the end" ("Mantrid"). Mantrid's aim is the final extermination of all the diversity and relationality of life. Fittingly, the final words he utters before being extinguished himself proclaim a nihilistic triumph: "I destroyed a universe!" ("End").

These "dead" figures are juxtaposed with Stan and Xev, both thoroughly enmeshed in the struggles of life. The series begins with Stan and Zev each being released from a type of prison: Stan from enforced service as a security guard for the Divine Order, Zev from her upbringing in a box and subsequent imprisonment for insulting her husband on their wedding day. For both characters, their new-found freedom on the Lexx excites a jumble of sensations: fear, courage, strength, hunger, sexual frustration, anger, friendship. Stan revels in his power as captain of the Lexx (he alone can command the ship as long as its organic key lives in his body); he attempts (in vain) to seduce Zev; he plots and executes revenge against the mercenaries who raped and tortured him and sold him to the Divine Order. For her part, Zev, bolstered by the ferocious Cluster Lizard DNA she has absorbed during her adventures, flings herself headlong into her first experience of personal agency: enthusiastically, she fights, explores perilous planets, taunts Stan, eats cockroaches, and falls powerfully in love with Kai, as determined to preserve his "life" as he is to assert his "deadness."

The exuberance of Stan and Xev is inseparable from their existence as living, organic bodies. Their lives are constantly being threatened: by the Divine Order, by Mantrid, by starvation on board a starving Lexx, by the evil Prince, by carnivorous plants. The very tenuousness of their lives pushes them to live with a furious energy: when death looms in the background, every moment of living matters. Even Stan, who is, of his companions, the most terrified of death, ultimately recognizes that the presence of death makes life worthwhile. At the end of "Brigadoom," the theatrical reenactment of Kai's life, the performers offer the Lexx crew a chance to travel between dimensions with their immortal theater troupe, thus avoiding Mantrid's imminent destruction of the Light

Zone. Stan refuses, "'[c]ause they [the theater troupe] don't live; they're not real. They are just like the Brunnen G: not alive, not dead." Stan realizes that facing death--just as Kai did long ago--is being alive, being "real." Fittingly, the series closes, in the midst of death, with the living. In the final episode, Prince brings Kai back to life, thus enabling Kai to truly die. The Lexx, too, now four thousand years old, dies of old age but not before reproducing a baby Lexx, which carries Stan and Xev out into the universe, still alive, still participants in the cycles of life that surround them.

<div align="center">Dystopian Futility in <u>Lexx</u></div>

The final episode ends with Stan and Xev in a fraternal embrace, smiling at the continuation of life in the midst of their grief for Kai and the Lexx. The scene suggests an appreciation for the persistence of the ecological webs that preserve life. Yet the hopeful note of this ending is largely undercut by a sense of futility inherent in the series's cosmology. <u>Lexx</u> posits a universe that moves through cycles of time, repeating the same events exactly in each cycle. Thus, the Time Prophet (Anna Cameron), a recurrent figure who aids Kai's Brunnen G people, is able to prophesy because she remembers the events that have occurred in previous cycles of time. The system is completely deterministic and, thus, fatalistic. In the microcosm of individuals' lives, people can strive to live well. But in the macrocosm of cosmic events, those educated in the course of universe know that their actions can never accomplish anything but the repetition of all that has passed before. The series offers no serious counter-discourse to this cyclic model of time. Though <u>Lexx</u> is more dialogic than <u>Babylon 5</u>, voices that might insightfully argue for a more optimistic philosophy are consistently silenced.

This backdrop of futility is heightened by the unchallenged assurance that the cycle will always end in universal degeneration and death. In their movement through different stages, these cycles of time may be likened to Northrop Frye's cycle of modes. Following Aristotle's practice of categorizing protagonists' powers of action as superior or inferior to "ours," Frye defines five main literary modes: myth, romance, high mimetic (tragedy and epic), low mimetic (realism and most comedy), and ironic (33-34). He

organizes these modes as a sort of degenerative process, a movement from those typified by the most "superior" protagonists to those typified by the most "inferior." Further, he notes that "[o]ur five modes evidently go around in a circle," irony finally approaching to myth (42). If we superimpose Frye's modes onto Lexx, the main action of the series settles most comfortably into a "mythic-ironic" mode. Like Frye's ironic heroes, the Lexx crew, in many ways, are "inferior" to us (or we may hope so): Stan and Xev can be awkward, naive, simplistic, morally questionable, while Kai is not a fully functioning human being at all. Yet their story often treads into myth, addressing the end of universes and cosmic prophecies. Moreover, in keeping with Frye's model, their history moves in a circle, accelerating toward the end that will lead to the next, mythic beginning.

But while universal rebirth is, indeed, vaguely discernible in the "future-past" as the Time Prophet calls it ("Super Nova" 1.2), the near future promises nothing but further decline. The noble Brunnen G who defeated the Insects degenerate into the frightened immortals Kai disdains, only to be exterminated altogether by the brutally oppressive Divine Order. The destruction of the Order, in turn, presages the rise of Mantrid, who destroys the entire universe of the Light Zone. Subsequently, in the Dark Zone, the Lexx destroys the age-old planets of the dead, Fire and Water, leaving the spirits of the dead to be reincarnated, often in twisted, insane forms on Earth, which is itself destroyed. Stan and Xev survive the end of the series, but the universe that awaits them is a bleak one-- and getting bleaker.

Lexx's dystopianism is linked to its ecocentrism. The same concern for cycles of life and death that foregrounds ecological balance, the necessity of dying to living, underlies the cosmic cycle of life and death that defines the growth and degeneration of the Two Universes. Yet the cyclic model of time in Lexx operates more according to a metaphor of organism than ecosystem. Life and death are preordained, not only as general processes, but as a developmental sequence. The randomness, the Darwinian "chance," that generates ecosystemic variation is effaced in Lexx's philosophy. Thus, the high regard Lexx shows for ecological relationality is partially subverted by a narrative

stance of hopelessness. Ecological balance, in the Lexx universe, is foregrounded as vital. And yet, in the long run, no depth of concern for balance will be sufficient: the universe will still age and die--and be reborn and die again.

As an ecocentric dystopian text, Lexx resonates against the utopian ecocentrism of William Morris's News from Nowhere. Both texts presuppose a need for humans to exist in "balance" (Lexx's metaphor) or in "harmony" (Morris's) with a broader environment. Both privilege sustainability over "advancement." Beyond these similarities, however, the texts diverge sharply. While News from Nowhere holds out a vision of a blissful, utopian future, Lexx is bleak even for a dystopia. For although most dystopian texts suggest a latent utopian content--The Time Machine, for example, depicts evolutionary degeneration in order to promote eugenic ascent--Lexx offers no such implicit hope. And yet for all its undercurrent of futility, this basic ugliness in the Lexx universe adds a dimension to the series's ecological discourse that is absent from Morris's. In chapter 2, I argue that in equating ecological health with beauty, Morris's ideology effaces the necessity of "ugly" aspects of nature. Lexx, in contrast, often lingers on the grotesque aspects of ecological necessity. Even more starkly than The Dispossessed, Lexx resists natural beauty as an indicator of ecological health, while preserving a focus on the primary need for balance within a system: beautiful or ugly, harmless or dangerous, living or dying, participants within the system of life cannot exist outside the system. This relational orientation encapsulates the profound ecocentrism of Lexx.

Nonetheless, in its commitment to being, as Donovan puts it, "a little bit more nihilistic" than the utopian space operas it defines itself against ("Lexx Appeal"), Lexx loses some of the potential power of its philosophy as a model for ecological praxis. In its drive to be anti-humanist, to foreground human failing where Star Trek and its ilk foreground human strength, Lexx suggests that humans can ultimately accomplish nothing lastingly significant. And though this is almost certainly true on a cosmic scale of billions of years, it is not a message that prompts positive human action on Earth here and now. Like Babylon 5, Lexx articulates a discourse that is finally inadequate, a piece

of an answer to the questions that beset the contemporary world. But set in juxtaposition with narratives like Babylon 5, this incompleteness may be seen to engage in an intertextual dialogue that strives toward a deeper understanding of possibilities for human action. If Lexx's anti-humanism trivializes positive human agency, it also strikes down human hubris. Its ecocentrism is interwoven with futility, but in this very futility, it advocates ecological caution by illustrating the difficulties of manipulating nature. It may be argued that, as a series, Lexx is too much in love with death. But in its persistent return to the end of life, the series offers the consolation that death is not an enemy to be overcome. Rather, dying itself is living.

Conclusion

Like the evolutionary discourse of Babylon 5, the ecological discourse of Lexx takes a cosmically long-term view of history. But while Babylon 5's operational metaphor for time is a line, Lexx's is a circle. In Babylon 5, races evolve, guide younger races to evolve, then leave the galaxy to those younger races while presumably continuing their own evolution elsewhere in the universe: the process is one of perpetual advancement. In Lexx, cosmic history is a closed loop. In cycle after cycle of time, events repeat exactly as they occurred in the previous cycle. Each of these metaphors, by itself, effaces fundamental attributes of time as it affects us. Babylon 5's progressionist model shows repetition but not cycling: new races evolve through the same stages as their elders, but the elder races simply pass away into the distance, into an immeasurable, unknown evolutionary greatness. There is no return, no final death, no ecosystemic background tying life forms together. Lexx's cyclic model, in contrast, focuses so heavily on death and return that it allows for no change, no re-imagining, no hope for anything better than what has gone before.

Integrated, however, these two models may be shown to produce a more nuanced discourse. One model for integrating them exists in Le Guin's The Dispossessed, in a

passage I have already cited in chapter 5. Here, Shevek explains his concept of time as cyclic and linear together, identifying the cyclic as vaster:

> Only within each of the great cycles, where we live, only there is there linear time, evolution, change. So then time has two aspects. There is the arrow, the running river, without which there is no change, no progress, or direction, or creation. And there is the circle or the cycle, without which there is chaos, meaningless succession of instants, a world without clocks or seasons or promises. (223)

According to Shevek's model, time is, as Lexx contends, ultimately a cycle, a beginning and ending and beginning of the universe. But within these cycles, time is, as Babylon 5 contends, a linear movement that allows "change, progress, direction, creation." Within the outline of the recurrent cycle lies the hope of personal agency, the hope that Humans may, indeed, learn from the mistakes of the Vorlons and become a better, more beneficent species. Yet, if humans exist, as Lexx suggests, within broader cycles, as members of systems before they are anything else, this progress need not be the result of any special "humanness" denied to all other beings. Instead, it would be the result of hope and effort, of Straczynski's contention that "faith manages." And yet this progress could only result if such faith is supported by a Lexxian regard for the balance of things, a respect for all creatures that make up the webs of life. For without such a regard, we will remain in immediate danger of perpetuating the ecological devastation already occurring in our contemporary world and, thus, of destroying ourselves. Speaking as almost antithetical voices, Babylon 5 and Lexx together articulate a set of tensions and values we must take into account in developing an ecological praxis that stresses sustainability within inevitable change, while keeping alive the utopian hope that we ourselves can change for the better.

NOTES

[1] The capital letter signifies Humanity as one sentient species among others--the Minbari, the Centauri, and so on--in much the way that "Earth" suggests a planet among planets as opposed to the more singular "earth and sky."

[2] The idea that "advanced" aliens will be beings of pure energy is also illustrated by Star Trek's Metrons and Organians and Earth Final Conflict's Taelons.

[3] By convention, "First Ones" is capitalized and "younger races" is not, perhaps because the "First Ones" refers to a precise set of species, while "younger races" could technically refer to any species younger than the First Ones.

[4] The Minbari, who look generally Human save for a bony casing covering much of the head, are a peaceful and culturally "advanced" people. The Narn are reptilian-looking race known for their warrior spirit and furious at their oppression at the hands of the imperialistic Centauri, who look essentially Human save for unconventional hairstyles.

[5] The term "sentience" in TV space opera is slippery enough to deserve its own essay. Its etymology suggests the possession of sensory perception. However, if such a definition were applied rigorously, "sentient" beings could include any entity that responds to sensory input, including flatworms, plants, and even viruses. In TV space opera, the term is often synonymous with "intelligent" life or, more commonly, "self-conscious" life. However, it is seldom applied to "animals," including such self-conscious beings as great apes. Most frequently, the term is used a standard for judging the extent to which a species deserves moral consideration. In practice, it almost always refers to species whose thought processes are equivalent to or "more advanced" than humans'. Of course, if translated back into the real world of life on Earth, this type of "sentience" can refer to nothing but humans. Read metaphorically, then, the term becomes a justification for excluding non-human life from significant moral consideration.

[6] Straczynski himself has noted that while he is the first to write an entire season on American TV, he is not the first do so in the history of TV science fiction. Terry Nation preceded him, writing the entire first season of the British space opera Blake's 7 ("Re. ATTN: JMS I Heard"). Straczynski counts Blake's 7 among the series that influenced Babylon 5 ("JMS: Influences"). In addition to sharing a "B Number" names, both Blake's 7 and Babylon 5 are considered pioneers of the increasingly common extended story-arc format, more recently adopted by space operas including Lexx, Farscape (1999-2004), and the remake of Battlestar Galactica (2003-), among others. The bond between Blake's 7 and Babylon 5 extends to their sharing the spotlight at the annual Redemption fan convention.

[7] In its vagueness about evolutionary mechanism and its equation of evolution with progress, Straczynski's evolutionary discourse is a normative example of what Michael Ruse characterizes as contemporary popular perceptions of evolution. Ruse states emphatically, "[L]et there be no mistake that at a popular level, which for most people is the beginning and the end of their acquaintance with evolution, Progress continues to ride high. I have yet to find a museum or a display or chart or a book which is not overtly progressionist" (526). The idea that natural selection can function either to complicate or simplify organisms, Ruse contends, is not a significant aspect of popular evolutionary thought in contemporary society (526).

[8] In writing this scene, Straczynski was aware that our sun is not due to go nova in a million years. The episode specifies that the emissions from the sun are "atypical," indicating that it has been tampered with in some way ("501"). Whether this tampering is caused by the future-Humans is not clear. The future-Human's juxtaposition of the "end of the world" with "our job [being] finished" suggests that the future-Humans themselves may have chosen to destroy the Earth by inducing a nova, a possibility that would suggest a near total rejection of the intrinsic rights of "lesser" life forms to persist on their native biosphere.

[9] For an anthology of essays addressing representations of culture and politics in science fiction at length, see To Seek out New Worlds: Exploring Links between Science Fiction and World Politics, edited by Jutta Weldes.

[10] The idea that humans are uniquely destined for greatness is common in TV space opera. In a fan-oriented essay, Clare O'Farrell, under the internet pseudonym "Panopticon," has argued that American series, in particular, tend to employ "a standard rhetoric that for all their faults and weaknesses, humans have 'special qualities' unique in the universe." She cites the original Star Trek, Star Trek: The Next Generation, Star Trek: Deep Space Nine, Star Trek: Voyager (1995-2001), Space Above and Beyond (1995-96), and Babylon 5 as prominent examples. A further example, not cited by Panopticon, is Earth: Final Conflict, a series based on a Gene Roddenberry premise in which humans hold the key to the evolutionary future or extinction of the "more advanced" yet sterile and degenerating Taelons.

This anthropocentrism is so apparent throughout American TV space opera that it has become an object of satire. The American-Australian series, Farscape, for example, indulges in a moment of self-satire in an episode in which white, male, American protagonist (also the show's sole human character and a fan of TV space opera), John Crichton, must don an amusing cape and goggles and cover his face in slime to rescue his companions. Mentally compromised by the influence of an alien being, he slurs, "Humans are superior!" ("Crackers Don't Matter" 2.4).

[11] Lexx is not much concerned with developing a plausible back story for its universe. Humans are pervasive throughout the Two Universes. How these humans are connected to the present-day Earth that the crew visits in Season Four is not discussed, nor is the absence of any language barriers explained. In fact, Lexx is the only TV space opera I know of that does not acknowledge the relativistic problem of traveling faster than the speed of light.

[12] I wish to thank Frank Shannon, creator of The Lexx Museum <www.lexxmuseum.com>, for giving me access to his copy of this widely unavailable production book.

[13] The show always refers to the Lexx as male, most likely based on his masculine voice. However, the fact that the Lexx has a baby at the end of the series suggests that his crew may have misidentified his sex. Alternatively, he may be a hermaphroditic being or belong to a species in which the males give birth.

[14] On one level, Lyekka's hunger is clearly a metaphor for sexual appetite; indeed, she brings her victims to an orgasmic bliss as she devours them. In Lexx, voracious appetite is often depicted through attractive female characters, with obvious sexual connotations. Xev, for example, who is part Cluster Lizard, has a biological compulsion to eat her mates. Yet this sexual dimension exists alongside the motif of literal eating, with an attendant ecological concern for finding food. In Lexx, sex and food are intimately linked as two manifestations of the appetites that define living.

[15] A significant presence in Lexx fandom, Darrow was once mentioned as a possible author for an official companion book to Lexx (Donovan, Interview with the Frey). Donovan, endorsed the potential project, stating, "I am very pleased because Darrow knows the show better than anyone" (Interview with the Frey).

[16] Both Mantrid and Kai retain what Mantrid calls human "programming" ("Norb" 2.12) within bodies that are largely inorganic machine: Mantrid a computer, Kai a de-carbonized being containing microcomputers. Both are also physically linked to the Insect race: Mantrid fusing with part of an Insect essence, Kai requiring protoblood—a by-product of Insect metabolism—as an energy source.

[17] That the ideology of Lexx is more ecologically oriented than that of Back to Methuselah is evidenced by the narratives' respective approaches to the population dynamics of an "immortal" society. Several of the characters in Back to Methuselah are under four years old, suggesting that this futuristic humanity reproduces regularly. Yet if the Ancients only occasionally die as a result of accidents, such regular reproduction would not only be unnecessary but would quickly result in extreme overcrowding. Unconcerned with the physical world, however, Shaw's text does not address this habitat-oriented problem. Lexx, in contrast, specifies that newborns among the Brunnen G are very rare. Though the narrative does not explicitly cite population pressure as a reason for this dynamic, an assumption of the need for population stability is in keeping with the show's emphasis on ecological balance.

[18] I do not mean to suggest that Kai's exclusion from ecological relationality must be his only motive for stressing his "deadness." Other likely reasons include survivor guilt (he is famously "the last of the Brunnen G") and a desire to deny the human feelings that would necessitate a painful grieving process for his extinct civilization and millennia of enslavement.

EPILOGUE

INTERTEXTUAL DIALOGISM

In the preceding six chapters, I explore comparatively purified discourses from late-nineteenth- and early twentieth-century British utopian and dystopian fiction to elucidate ideological patterns still evident in the more hybrid discourses of contemporary speculative fiction. I argue that progressionist discourses tend toward anthropocentrism, commonly advocating the value of "leaving behind" human dependence on ecosystems to attain a transcendent human freedom. Conversely, non-progressionist discourses tend toward ecocentrism, stressing humanity's need to exist in a relatively stable relationship with its ecological partners. Further, evolutionary progressionist discourses can be divided into diverse subsets, two of the most influential of which are (Neo-)Darwinian or Neo-Lamarckian, where the former tends toward greater concern with ecological health and ecological mastery, the latter toward a primary concern with spiritual transcendence.

The texts I have explored illustrate developments in these discursive trends that reflect Western literature's increasing emphasis on provisionality, hybridity, and dialogic tension over the course of the twentieth century. In the (Neo-)Darwinian tradition, the retention of an anthropocentric progressionism exists alongside an increasingly cautious ecological discourse. The sparse ecological explication of The Time Machine gives way to the more detailed program of ecological conquest outlined in Men Like Gods, which, in turn, gives way to the Earthseed books' avowal of the necessity of partnership with a complex and indomitable nature. As (Neo-)Darwinian discourse becomes increasingly attuned to the material complexities of ecological relationality, however, scientifically discredited Neo-Lamarckian discourses further sever their ties to an evolutionary science grounded in material observation. Thus, in the Neo-Lamarckian tradition, the spiritual transcendence advocated in Back to Methuselah is recapitulated in Babylon 5 without an apparatus of evolutionary pseudo-science to explicate the series's progressionist assumptions. But if Babylon 5 displays a simplified discourse of evolution, it,

nonetheless, deploys this discourse through the concept of "alliance," which, in contrast to Shaw's endorsement of single longliver lineage, at least putatively advocates the dialogic complexity of a multicultural community. In non-progressionist discourse, the aesthetic ecocentrism of News from Nowhere's pastoral idyll gives way to an increasing acceptance of the necessary and appropriate functions of hardship and death. Thus, The Dispossessed employs a hybrid discourse in which an "ambiguous utopia" exists within an ecological context of scarcity and privation, while Lexx develops a dystopian discourse, which, nonetheless, locates a positive valuation in the acceptance of living and dying as identical processes within a necessary framework of ecological sustainability.

Based on comparative analyses of these texts, I argue that a dialogic rhetoric, with its attendant regard for the irreducible complexity of human discourse, is most conducive to a complex exploration of possibilities for sound ecological praxis. As a rhetoric that eschews rigid purification and categorization, dialogism tends to support an ethic of sustainable change, which values both the necessity of socio-ecological sustainability and the acceptability and sometimes desirability of socio-ecological change. I contend that, among the texts I examine, The Dispossessed most fully develops a dialogic articulation of a utopian hope for sustainable change.

Yet each text I examine contributes to the heteroglossia of our ecological discourses. Even texts that substantially refuse engagement with peripheral voices within the text, nonetheless, may be placed in productive intertextual dialogue. Indeed, if the type of intratextual dialogic rhetoric that Mikhail Bakhtin identifies as characteristic of the novel is a representation of the complexity of discourse in our lived experience, then this intertextual dialogism is one example of the dialogic nature of "real life," the conversation among multiple authorial "languages" that constructs the discourses that shape our ecological praxis. Thus, the more extensively we investigate the numerous voices that contribute to our cultural discourses of evolution, ecology, and human society, the more fully we can draw upon these voices and their critiques of each other to develop practices conducive to healthy interactions between humanity and the non-human world.

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