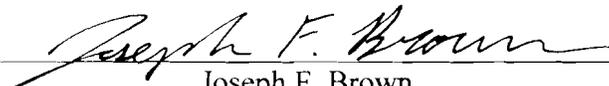


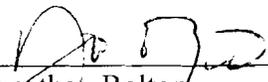
VIOLENCE AND THE APOCALYPTIC AESTHETIC

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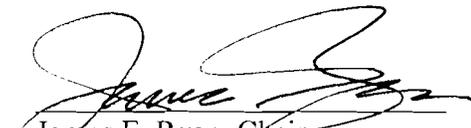


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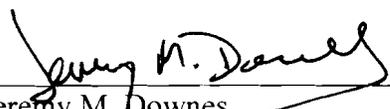
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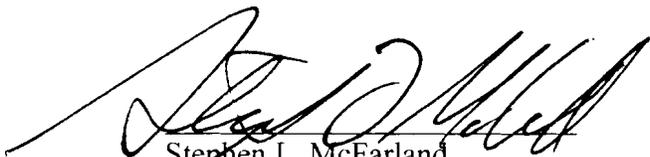
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VIOLENCE AND THE APOCALYPTIC AESTHETIC

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THESIS ABSTRACT

VIOLENCE AND THE APOCALYPTIC AESTHETIC

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Directed by Dr. James E. Ryan

This thesis explores the unifying aesthetic constructed by the repeated use of destruction imagery in apocalyptic film and fiction narratives. With roots in the American Jeremiad tradition, the apocalyptic narrative is a popular form whose aim is the cultural incorporation of its warning rhetoric and the participation in the process of forming an American national identity. The study examines atomic age media, apocalyptic fiction, and a selection of late twentieth century apocalyptic science fiction films.

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This project would not have been possible if it were not for the support of some important people in my life. I would like to thank my mother for making education, whether merit badges or graduate work, the priority in my life. I would like to thank my fiancée and muse, Theresa, for her constant support and excitement for my academic endeavors.

The Omega Man (1971) opens on Robert Neville's red convertible speeding recklessly through the downtown district of Los Angeles. But it is not the Los Angeles audiences would recognize in 1971. The streets are empty and the city is deserted. The only sounds the audience hears are Neville's car screeching around turns and his eight-track recording of "A Summer Place" playing ironically in the background. Finally Neville's car slows to a stop, we see him look up into the windows of a nearby building and in a sudden flash of movement he pulls out a submachine gun and fires at a human shadow in the windows. He pauses, considers his effectiveness, and drives away. As the opening credits appear, the audience is shown images confirming that Neville(played by Charlton Heston) is, in fact, the last man alive in the city. We see various victims of the plague, a school room of skeletons, a bank robbery foiled only by the plague, empty streets, and abandoned cars. The only thing moving in this twentieth century ghost town is Robert Neville.

In other apocalyptic films, like *The Omega Man*, the protagonist usually finds himself one of the last humans, if not the last, to survive some previous apocalyptic event.¹ The event has destroyed the world as we know it, leaving in its wake either the remains of the cities we knew or new cities that rose out of the destruction. The new

¹ When I refer to the apocalyptic narrative or apocalyptic genre I mean to point to narratives that were made after World War II that have, as their primary plot element, the overt or subtle representation of Earth's nearly complete destruction. These narratives usually center around a lone survivor or a small band of survivors. They are distinguished from the preceding disaster film genre in a couple of ways. The use of the atomic bomb is either visually represented or its use subtly implied through the appearance of wrecked buildings and deserted or destroyed cities. Social commentary is much more prominent in the apocalyptic narrative. The apocalyptic event results in a dystopic world that we should not want to become our own. The narrative's message is one of avoidance. It is a distinct "Stop it while you still can!" message.

world is either utopian or dystopian and the narrative's plot usually centers around our protagonist negotiating this new world. He walks around in it, tries to comprehend it, and tries to understand how it all happened. In the process, the narrative, usually film, presents its audience with sets of symbols that convey this information to the audience. For example, in *Planet of the Apes*, the sand-covered Statue of Liberty image stands for the destruction of America and, by extension, the civilized world. Other films may employ mushroom clouds or large scale explosions. But all of these different images are united by their ability to signify a nearly complete annihilation. This is a study of how artists go about destroying the world one image at a time.

The 1945 bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki ushered in an atomic age in which images of widespread destruction, either real or imagined, began permeating the American consciousness. Whether it was news footage from recently released atom bomb tests, advertisements to build bomb shelters in the backyard, or music reflecting atomic anxiety, atomic culture dominated American life. Almost immediately, fiction reflected the culture's fascination with its own possible destruction. Even as early as 1953, an atomic blast appears in the film version of *War of the Worlds* in the fight against the Martian invaders. With the invention of the atom bomb, artists and audiences had new tools to figure the apocalypse. Americans would know exactly how such destruction could take place. And, what is more, it was a very real possibility that it would. Such large scale destruction inevitably led to a comparison to biblical destruction. These images were dramatic, powerful, and above all, frightening. And they were everywhere. Within these "potential sites for invasion" these images began to colonize the American

consciousness.² A natural consequence of the rising popularity of television as a means of information distribution led to these images becoming part of American society's diet of images of destruction. Soon after the war, images of the bomb and other weapons of mass destruction became linked with science fiction narratives. Admittedly most apocalyptic films come across as hackneyed. While some of the earlier films may have frightened their audiences with the possibilities of atomic annihilation and ecological disaster, the later films most likely evoked as much laughter as they would to viewers today. And yet, underlying their absurdity is threat that it all could happen. The fact remains that more films were made. They are still made. These films, for a reason, connect with an audience. People may laugh when they think of *Planet of the Apes*, but the fact remains that most people have seen the film. Some films have achieved cult-film status with loyal followings and avid fans. For films that invite no one to take them seriously, these films have shown remarkable resilience. Films of the 1950s, such as *War of the Worlds* (1953) and *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951), attest to the extent to which these images and the fear that they represented had permeated popular film. But to get an idea of what is meant by atomic culture or images associated with the atomic age, a discussion of some artifacts from that period would be helpful. Fiction, films, public service announcements and other artifacts from the post World War II era are connected by an aesthetic of destruction imagery that is unmistakably apocalyptic.

The early years of the atomic age were the heyday of public service announcements. After all, information concerning atomic energy and weaponry was not

² Hendershot explains the effect this repeated use of imagery had on the American consciousness: "In the Atomic Age, there is no place to hide. Thus, the small town and the city, the home and the workplace, the body and the mind, are all potential sites for invasion by the physiological and psychological effects of the bomb" (127).

available to the public before the 1950s and this led to a major (mis?)information campaign on behalf of the United States government to educate its citizenry. One efficient way of doing this was by utilizing the latest technology- television, film, and radio- by creating short public service announcements. Two particular public service announcements stand out among the rest. The first is the *Duck and Cover* public service announcement featuring "Burt the Turtle." Equipped with his civil defense helmet and tough half-shell, the cartoon Burt was naturally suited to instruct Americans, and especially young children, on the proper action to take in the event of an atomic attack. This video is appropriate to this study because it illustrates the extent to which atomic imagery had saturated everyday life. This video, presumably made for schoolchildren, aims at instruction but still assumes a great deal more of its audience than a contemporary film(if it even existed) could. What it shows is a familiarity with the language of the atom bomb and with atomic culture in general. Terms such as "atomic flash," "fallout," "duck and cover," that most adults might not be able to define today, appear to be easily within a child's lexicon when this film was made in 1951. A small portion of the film is devoted to explaining how exactly an atomic bomb can cause injury. But the largest part of the film is designed to teach children the "duck and cover" survival tactic. Children are shown Burt's duck and cover example not once, but three times when the film starts. Repetition seems to be the guiding force behind the film as the rest of the video exists to show children different scenarios in which they may need to avoid the blast. Clearly within the realm of psychological rehearsal, the film shows nearly every possible scenario from being in the classroom, to the lunchroom, to a family picnic, riding a bike, or even driving a tractor.³

³ Philip Fisher uses the term "psychological rehearsal" in reference to the kind of cultural work the

The mushroom cloud itself looms as the ultimate, popular symbol of the atomic age. The one image of the mushroom cloud, regardless of what test it comes from, stands in for all of the meanings associated with it then and now.⁴ In other words, when someone sees a picture of the explosion, something happens. It is evocative of some meaning that is either interpreted culturally or individually. For example, seeing the Maryland civil defense poster, "It can happen here!," is supposed to invoke fear. It is supposed to make citizens join the Civil Defense and we know this because in the face of this looming, destructive image, the word "Join" is placed in bold, red letters center-mass of the explosion. The image is there, frightening you and, at the same time, calling you to action. But the point is that there is some meaning being passed along through this image. The mushroom cloud is an icon, albeit a dynamic one since it may mean many different things to different viewers, and the example of the civil defense poster stands in as a smaller example of how this iconography will work in apocalyptic fiction.

The 1962 Bobby Braddock tune "Fallout Shelter" was another example of the atom bomb's saturation of American popular culture. Not only did people encounter images of the bomb on television and film, but they were also being confronted with rather morbid narratives of atomic destruction in popular music. One of the most striking things about "Fallout Shelter" is its description of the atomic blast and horror of death by fallout radiation that exists under the guise of a love song:

historical novel does. Since Fisher focuses on the repetition of plots, images, and so forth, I find that it translates well to the science fiction genre. He writes, "It is a psychological rehearsal that creates an ordered resignation that lets a group 'face,' as we put it, a future that they have already chosen and set in motion, but have not yet morally or psychologically passed through" (18).

⁴ Rosenthal explains in more detail: "And in its remarkable receptivity to projections upon it of even vaguely congruent images, whether fetus or phallus or smiling face, brain or tree or globe, the mushroom cloud projects back the array of human responses to all that it stands for: responses of pride, parochial possessiveness, creative resistance, denial, despair. All of these responses, these readings of the mushroom cloud, are equally human, equally natural" (88).

Then I heard my mother call out our savior's name.
I looked to the east and the sky was filled with flames.
Then Dad said "Don't worry, we don't have to be scared,
We've got our new fallout shelter waiting for us there."
When I told Dad I'd get you he said "Don't you dare.
There's no room for your girl, son, that just wouldn't be fair."
I'd rather die with you than live without you
And I hope that you feel the same.
You hold my hand, I understand that the sickness has just begun
And if we live or die our hearts will beat as one. (Braddock 1962)

Braddock's implication is that these two teenagers will suffer the effects of an atomic blast rather than be separated. And while it is not musically exceptional, it shows that atomic imagery had permeated popular culture enough to make a young artist think it was not only romantic to write a song about love surviving nuclear attack, but also lucrative as well. Having never broken into the top forty charts, it cannot be said that "Fallout Shelter" was ever a popular tune. But it is representative of a genre of songs produced around the same time that contained similar atomic imagery. The 1965 Tom Lehrer tune, "So Long, Mom," for example, involves similar imagery in the way that the apocalyptic event is described. Like the death-by-fallout imagery Braddock employs, Lehrer refers to the heat of the atomic blast in the line, "But while you swelter,/ Down there in your shelter." What is interesting about Lehrer's satirical song is that it is sung from the point of view of a son who goes off to World War III whose mother, meanwhile, watches it all on television. The notion of watching the war on television or, as Lehrer puts it "While

we're attacking frontally,/ Watch Brinkally and Huntally,/ Describing contrapuntally,/ The cities we have lost" emphasizes a reliance on visual imagery to imagine World War III. Describing the war as being a telecast makes sense because television constituted the dominant medium for envisioning such destruction. In a way, it is a respectful nod to the influence and incorporation television had achieved in atomic imagery. At the same time the satirical nature of the song gets at the underlying message of all apocalyptic films: avoiding nuclear annihilation.

The Braddock and Lehrer tunes are taken from what appears to be a multitudinous genre. For example, Conelrad.com, a website devoted to atomic culture, runs an internet radio station out of their site consisting solely of music of this genre. Other songs that appear on their playlist are "A-Bomb Bop"(1959), "I'm Gonna Dig Myself a Hole" (1951), and "Uranium Rock" (1958).

There are more overt examples of the culture of atomic imagery appearing in popular fiction. *Alas, Babylon*, the 1959 novel by Pat Frank, contains the most complete rendering of an atomic attack that a reader of that era was likely to find. As Frank reveals in the foreword to his book, his purpose was to make the feared event real:

A man who has been shaken by a two-ton blockbuster has a frame of reference. He can equate the impact of an H-bomb with his own experience[...]To someone who has never felt a bomb, bomb is only a word. An H-bomb's fireball is something you see on television.[...]So the H-bomb is beyond the imagination of all but a few Americans.

This idea of bringing the threat of atomic war out of the imagination and into the realm of the real-life threat is exactly the point of the apocalyptic narrative and is exactly the type

of cultural work that this genre does. Frank's description of the apocalyptic event is powerful and frightening because it remains anchored in the reality of what would happen. In fact, this narrative is only considered science fiction because it involves an attack that has not happened. Other than that fact, the action of the plot is plausible and that is where the horror and the spectacle of it lies:

Then the sound came, a long, deep, powerful rumble increasing in crescendo until the windows rattled, cups danced in their saucers, and the bar glasses rubbed rims and tinkled in terror.[...]He stepped out onto the upstairs porch. To his left, in the east, an orange glow heralded the sun. In the south, across the Timucuan and beyond the horizon, a similar glow slowly faded. His sense refused to accept a sun rising and a sun setting. For perhaps a minute the spectacle numbed reaction. (91)

That is the same reaction Frank expects his audience to have. The event, so simply horrific, is beyond response. And it is at that moment when we start to see the work of the novel. The reader is at once experiencing and not experiencing this event. The apocalyptic narrative is about avoidance and the idea of a reader experiencing the events of the novel plays a large part in enacting that sort of avoidance. In his foreword, Frank talks about a conversation that spawned the idea for the book in which he and a friend talked about the effects of a large-scale nuclear war:

I said, "Oh, I think they'd kill fifty or sixty million Americans-but I think we'd win the war."

He thought this over and said, "Wow! Fifty or sixty million dead! What a depression that would make!"

I doubt if he realized the exact nature and extent of the depression-which is why I am writing this book. (vi)

Frank's purpose is to show a reader what the apocalypse, through nuclear war, would look like in order to make an impression. He helps the reader see it with the implication that once that reader has seen it, he will take steps to avoid it.

It is easy for subsequent generations to forget the extent to which the threat of the atomic bomb permeated American culture in the 1950s and 1960s. It is forgivable that later readers are impressed and a little shocked at the amount of awareness Americans, and children in particular, had about the threat they lived under. However, in *Alas Babylon*, Frank makes a point of showing one of the younger main characters, Ben Franklin Bragg, as a representative of his generation's familiarity with atomic culture. He knows the blast radius of certain weapons. He knows which cities would be safe and which ones would not. He knows survival techniques that go well beyond the simplistic and ineffective duck and cover. Ben Franklin is a product of the imagery and information of atomic America and this is especially evident in a parting exchange with his father: an Air Force Colonel who has been called to duty:

"I hate to send you away but it's necessary." Looking at Ben Franklin was like looking at a snapshot of himself in an old album. "You'll have to be the man of the family for a while."

"Don't worry about us. We'll be okay in Fort Repose. I'm worried about you." The boy's eyes were filling. Ben Franklin was a child of the atomic age, and knowledgeable. (67)

With a title like *Alas Babylon* and names like Ben Franklin Bragg and Fort Repose, Frank's novel is allegorical. He uses allegory to explore an American identity in a setting newly devoid of such political distinctions. His allegory serves to question American identity when America no longer exists. Regardless of its allegorical meaning, the repeated use of atomic imagery served to usher Americans into a new age. It was an age in which the threat was ever present and the cost of not assimilating the information and the culture was possible annihilation.

Another public service announcement film, *Survival Under Atomic Attack* (1951), is designed more for adults than children. To begin with, this film marks an intersection between the real threat and the film companies that utilize it in their films. The opening credits reveal that the film was produced by Castle Films, the production house responsible for producing a variety of B-rate science fiction and horror films in the 1950s and 1960s. That fact raises a couple of questions that are important to this intersection between violence and entertainment. Why did Castle produce the film? Were the previous public service announcements not entertaining enough? Did the emphasis shift from information to entertainment? And when the film is viewed, a question remains: how much is meant to inform us and how much is meant to entertain us? The opening narrating line is most interesting: "Let us face, without panic, the reality of our time. The fact that atom bombs may someday be dropped on our cities. And let us prepare for survival, understanding the weapon that threatens us." Again, there is the same sort of self-reflexive understanding that 1950s America is a distinct time period because of the threat of the atom bomb. The video continues by explaining the major risks of an atomic bomb attack and how to safeguard, albeit ineffectively, against them. From the way the

narrative of the film is set up, we are to understand that the narrator is speaking to a young married couple. And so, what the film sets up is the illusion that this average American couple can go about their lives once having prepared for the possibility of an atomic attack. After all, the resolution at the end shows the couple happily reading over a Civil Defense handout and sitting comfortably on their couch while the narrator expounds:

If the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki had known what we know about civil defense, thousands of lives would have been saved. Yes, the knowledge is ours. And preparation can mean survival for you. So, act now. Someday your life may depend on it.

The implication is for Americans to go about their lives in the face of the threat, but prepared with the knowledge given to them by this film and other civil defense materials.

The same year that the *Survival Under Atomic Attack* was created, John Wyndham published *The Day of the Triffids*. Wyndham's book is apocalyptic but the reasons for the apocalyptic event seemingly have nothing to do with the atomic bomb. Instead, the protagonist, William Masen, is the last man left on the planet with his eyesight after a comet, having passed incredibly close to Earth, renders everyone on Earth blind. Masen escapes their fate because, as luck would have it, he was recovering from an eye surgery to restore his sight. Shortly after this event, giant talking flowers, most likely the offspring of some sort of 1950s style atomic mutation, attack mankind. But there is a subtle reference to atomic anxiety in the book. When Masen explains the political climate of his world, he talks about a mysterious satellite weapon system that at least one nation deployed and others were suspected to have deployed. Of course, it is an

atomic weapon system, and the way that Masen describes it is fitting considering this culture of anxiety and paranoia that the public service announcements pointed to earlier:

It was by no means pleasant to realize that there was an unknown number of menaces up there over your head, quietly circling and circling until someone should arrange for them all to drop-and that there was nothing to be done about them. Still, life has to go on- and novelty is a wonderfully short-lived thing. (27)

Just as appropriate, the way that Wyndham describes the comet that renders nearly all of humanity blind is reminiscent of the way that atomic bombs were figured in films at that time. Masen describes the event from the eyewitness accounts he hears over the radio:

It was reported in the news bulletins during the day that mysterious bright green light flashes had been seen in the Californian skies the previous night.[...]Accounts arrived from all over the Pacific of a night made brilliant by green meteors[...]. (14)

As with the description from the Frank novel, the emphasis in this description is on the tremendous sensation of the bomb. It had a particular look and feel that made it unique, somewhat frightening, and a little seductive. Part of the draw of the apocalyptic narrative is the need and the desire to look that gets fulfilled. To see a film of the atomic explosion is to engage in the spectacle of the bomb, to experience devastation vicariously. And even though the film invites the audience to be terrified by the bomb, it also invites fascination of it as well.

The icons of the apocalyptic science-fiction narrative generally take two forms. First, there are images of destruction that are necessary to destroy the old world and

establish the new. For example, these are the images of explosions, rockets firing, cities burning(or empty), and people dying. Second, there are images that establish the dystopian future. A new world is created that depends on, for its emergence, the destruction of the old.⁵ These are the images that show the social result from the previous destructive image. The overgrown jungle of the Washington D.C. mall in *Logan's Run* is one example. In *The Omega Man*, Los Angeles is untouched but it is populated by counter-culture psychotic zombies in monk robes. In the apocalyptic film, these images or situations establish the future as undesirable and horrific. The future is a violent place. Most of the time this is accomplished by showing violence as a characteristic of the new order: images of anarchy for example. Both of these forms have a strong background in the Judeo-Christian tradition and, specifically, in the American jeremiad tradition.⁶ It is there that we start looking for the meanings that make up the iconic images.

The jeremiad was a type of sermon derived from the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah's explanation that Israel's ills could be attributed to the breaking of the covenant with Jehovah. According to Sacvan Bercovitch, the jeremiad tradition was brought from the Old World to New England by the earliest Puritan settlers that was both a warning of the punishments they would incur if they disobeyed God and an explanation of the ills that they had already experienced. But for Bercovitch, there was a strong degree of optimism involved with the jeremiad because it was intimately linked with the Puritan

⁵ Eric Rabkin identifies this situation in apocalyptic narratives: "ending our world, we simultaneously create a new one, one sometimes fearful and sometimes hopeful, but one that always depends for its emergence upon the destruction of the world that preceded it" (vii).

⁶ As a literary term, the jeremiad, as M.H. Abrams defines it in *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, is "any work which[...]accounts for the misfortunes of an era as a just penalty for great social and moral evils, but usually holds open the possibility for changes that will bring a happier future" (138).

belief in their divinely appointed errand and, therefore, linked to their notions of American identity. Even though the sermons emphasized the shortcomings of the people, their faults, their sins, the reasons that the society was being punished, Bercovitch argues that the emphasis was on the instructive nature of the sermon.⁷ The jeremiad did explicate many of the things that were wrong with early New England, but at the same time, the implication is still there: something can be done about it. As time passed, it becomes clear to Bercovitch that, within the later jeremiads, the emphasis is not on shaming the audience into compliance but in refocusing them on their purpose.⁸ Presumably, the audience of a jeremiad sermon quits the sermon with a feeling of expediency and a renewed sense of commitment to the errand. Something should be done. There is still time to do something. As Bercovitch points out, the jeremiad does not emphasize the threat but the possibility of escaping the threat through proper Christian action. Bercovitch writes, "To this end, they revised the message of the jeremiad. Not that they minimized the threat of divine retribution; on the contrary, they asserted it with a ferocity unparalleled in the European pulpit. But they qualified it in a way that turned threat into celebration" (8). And even when one does feel the wrath of a punishment,

⁷ Bercovitch explains: "But the Puritan clergy were not simply castigating. For all their catalogues of iniquities, the jeremiads attest to an unswerving faith in the errand; and if anything they grow more fervent, more absolute in their commitment from one generation to the next.[...] The essence of the sermon form that the first native-born American Puritans inherited from their fathers, and then "developed, amplified, and standardized," is its unshakable optimism. In explicit opposition to the traditional mode, it inverts the doctrine of vengeance into a promise of ultimate success, affirming to the world, and despite the world, the inviolability of the colonial cause" (6-7).

⁸ Bercovitch writes, "The question in these latter-day jeremiads, as in their seventeenth-century precursors, was never 'Who are we?' but, almost in deliberate evasion of that question, the old prophetic refrain: 'When is our errand to be fulfilled? How long, O Lord, how long?' And the answers, again as in the Puritan jeremiads, invariably joined lament and celebration in reaffirming America's mission"(11).

Bercovitch explains, this only affirmed the Puritan's belief of their election in God's eyes, the rightness of their cause and the truth of their errand. After all, why punish the lost?⁹

The major element of social commentary in apocalyptic narratives is this suggestion of recommitment to the errand. The audience or reader is presented with the worst case scenario: the destruction of civilization as we know it. The implication is clear: the ills of our society led us to destruction. When it appears, the city destroyed by the atomic blast can be a stand-in for the lost "City on the Hill" whose creation John Winthrop charged his fellow puritan immigrants with in his speech on the *Arbella* upon their arrival in America. The errand has failed. There are two questions implied through the social commentary of the narrative. How did this happen? How can we avoid this future? These questions are important because the event is always the result of some human action. The events do not just happen to humans. Humans cause them. So, for example, in a film like *The Omega Man*, the audience leaves the film with a sense of fear over the use of biological weapons. The implication is, if the film has enough of an effect on enough people, then a message is incorporated.¹⁰ In the case of *The Omega Man*, the message incorporated would be something like, "The use of biological weapons would have horrific consequences." Today, however, that message is obvious and may explain why audiences are not watching *The Omega Man* in packed theaters.

The notion of the errand of the jeremiad also fits with Wyndham's novel. While John Wyndham was born in England, *The Day of the Triffids* was the first book he wrote

⁹ Bercovitch writes, "In their case, they believed, God's punishments were corrective, not destructive. Here, as nowhere else, His vengeance was a sign of love, a father's rod used to improve the errant child" (8).

¹⁰ Fisher explains how these meaning gets incorporated: "Repetition is in the service of working through or at least in the service of refusing to forget. All three acts, recognition, repetition, and working through, are features of cultural incorporation. Only a few facts keep on being remembered as who we are and those facts are incorporated and then, after a time, felt to be obvious and even trite" (8).

after coming to America. While Wyndham clearly was within the culture of atomic anxiety while living in England, there is evidence *Triffids* connects its atomic anxiety with the tradition of the American jeremiad. In discussing the origin of the Triffids, the infamous flowers, Wyndham suggests that, although no one really knows how they were created, some people believe "that they were a kind of sample visitation-harbingers of worse to come if the world did not mend its ways and behave its troublesome self" (25). In the novel, this particular theory is not given much credence by Masen. In fact, he clearly denies it. But the question still remains: why make that connection? Perhaps this is an example of the time-honored science fiction tradition of never really giving an explanation for something. Instead, what usually happens in a work of science fiction is that people postulate on the possible origins of a thing or a problem and it is then left up to the audience to decide which they choose to believe. But clearly this is a connection, even if a subtle one, to the American jeremiad tradition and an interesting intersection between it and atomic anxiety.

It is impossible to overstate the importance of the jeremiad tradition on the genre of apocalyptic narratives. The clear saturation of religious imagery in these films is another way in which these two traditions appear to be linked. In *The Omega Man*, the final shot of the film shows Charlton Heston in a crucifixion-like pose and the suggestion is that he has saved the world through his Christ-like sacrifice. Secularly, Heston's character, Neville, has saved what is left of the civilization we know. The serum that he provides will presumably cure the remaining children of the disease responsible for the decimation of Earth's population. The connection to the jeremiad is not as overt. But what this imagery does suggest is that, with Neville's sacrifice, the errand continues. At

the end of the film, the remaining band of survivors leave the city for what Neville earlier in the film describes as "someplace nobody ever bothered with. A river nobody ever dammed. A mountain nobody built any bloody freeways to. Where everything we do will be the first time it happened" (*The Omega Man*, 1971). The survivors head back out into the wilderness and, more important, they do so with the knowledge that man's misdeeds and the resulting destruction have been atoned for by Neville's Christ-like sacrifice. The errand has been revitalized and the flock has been corrected.

A similar situation occurs in *Logan's Run*(1976). At the end of the film, Logan, after learning the truth of the outside, returns to the bio-dome to lead humanity back out into the landscape. This makes Logan a Moses figure. After returning, Logan destroys the computer controlling the bio-dome and humanity. The film ends with Logan leading people out of the dome and into the jungle-like wilderness. Again, the errand had presumably failed when the ecological disaster occurred that forced humanity inside the dome. The utopia that the society erects, while seemingly the end, culmination, and realization of the errand, is false. And we know this from the emphasis on the secular, material pleasure of the dome utopia and the information provided by the film that there are people that want to escape the limiting rules of the society of the dome. Even the employment of the term "renew" in the film has implications for the jeremiad. In both examples, we see the optimism that Bercovitch emphasizes. While both films present worlds where the society has been destroyed and the errand diverted, they also show that the errand, with proper sacrifice and action, can be reestablished. As Bercovitch says about the puritan sermons, no matter how bad the sins, the resulting punishments, be they

biological warfare or ecological disaster, are merely corrective measures on the path towards fulfillment.

As Philip Fisher argues in his *Hard Facts: Setting and Form in the American Novel*, these repeated images are a kind of cultural incorporation aimed at transforming the present (8). In essence, the purpose of these films is to warn. They contained a glaring statement; "this will be your future!," so that the dystopian views of the future that they presented did not become reality. The strong emphasis on warning helps explain why the apocalyptic narrative and film have not disappeared. As some threats are prevented or addressed, others emerge. According to Fisher, the popular form and the message that it advocates loses its efficacy once the message is completely incorporated. The message becomes obvious. Because new threats to the future emerge, the apocalyptic film's message cannot be completely incorporated into the society's consciousness. This is how the genre grows and, in turn, makes itself very hard to classify. New films are produced with new images concerning new threats. The one element binding them all is the scene of violent apocalypse.

It is important to remember that the image of destruction is also always an image of construction. This relation between destruction and creation is especially appropriate concerning the biblical background of these images. It is a theme that occurs frequently in the Bible. To begin with, the earliest parts of Genesis explain the creation of the Earth as God forming it out of the void. God ends the void by establishing form. The story of Noah is also one of the primary texts injecting meaning into the apocalyptic image of destruction. According to the story, God, having seen "that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil

continually,” sends a flood that kills all humans and animals except for Noah, his family, and the animals in his ark (Gen. 6.5). The description of destruction is striking:

And every living substance was destroyed which was upon the face of the ground, both man and cattle, and the creeping things, and the fowl of the heaven; and they were destroyed from the earth; and Noah only remained alive, and they that were with him in the ark. (Gen. 7.23)

What this early story establishes is that destruction is possible on a large enough scale to render the world changed, restructured. Not only does the story of Noah provide meaning to the destruction aspect of the apocalyptic tradition, but it also establishes the apocalyptic event as a constructive force for the new, resulting order. However, even in the story of Noah this new future is rife with violence and sin and, even though God promises “neither will I again smite any more every thing living,” in later stories he applies similar destructive force to accomplish similar transformative aims (Gen. 8.21). For example, God, having found the men of Sodom and Gomorrah’s sin “very grievous,” decides to destroy the cities. The destruction is described: “Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven” (Gen. 19. 24). What this ancient example sets up for the icon is that cities get destroyed by overwhelming acts of violence and that that violence is important because it wipes out some evil. Here, also, the situation sets up the icon. Lot survives the destruction of these cities. One man surviving destruction is a situation often repeated in the apocalyptic tradition. One can begin to see how icons in science fiction are loaded with meaning and what the audience understands about destruction when they see the world as they know it destroyed on film.

No other biblical story contributes more meaning to apocalyptic icons than the book of Revelation. The final chapter of the Bible describes the destruction and fall of Earth, the establishment of New Jerusalem, and the final battle with Satan. Because the text is filled with widespread, global violence it is easy to draw connections to apocalyptic icons of destruction. Since Revelation concerns the establishment of New Jerusalem, it also serves to load the icon with images of establishing a future time through violence. For example, the vials of wrath provide the material for what would later become filmic images of worldwide destruction. The first vial that causes “a noisome and grievous sore upon the men which had the mark of the beast[...],” could be the precursor to images of chemical or biological warfare (Rev. 16.2). The fourth vial is violent enough, giving that particular angel the power to “scorch men with fire” (Rev. 16.8). Finally, the seventh vial is described as bringing about a sort of natural violence: “And there were voices, and thunders, and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth[...].” (Rev. 16.18). But related to these overtly violent acts is the power to erect a new world. In Revelation, it is New Jerusalem that is the result of the apocalyptic violence:

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. (Rev. 21. 1-2)

These images of destruction and the future utopia become iconic because the culture recognizes them and so they appear frequently in subsequent literature and film.

Although apocalyptic science fiction and Puritan writing seemingly have little in common, they are similar because the rhetoric is similar. Both warn that punishment lurks beyond the horizon if humanity does not address its sins. In the same way that a jeremiad sermon describes the hellfire awaiting the congregation, the apocalyptic narrative presents a future characterized by plague, radiation sickness, and overcrowded cities. In fact, as one example illustrates, the imagery used to describe punishment of the jeremiad, is similar to the imagery of the apocalyptic film.

What Michael Wigglesworth's *Day of Doom* (1662) constitutes is an intersection between apocalyptic fiction and the jeremiad. *The Day of Doom*, an early American apocalyptic work by a Puritan writer, was very popular when it was published in 1662. What this popularity suggests is a need to experience the religious apocalypse through narrative. It also shows that the icons were already in place and that the reader already understood their meaning. For example, compare the selected passages from Revelation to a stanza from Wigglesworth's work:

The mountains smoke, the hills are shook,
The earth is rent and torn,
As if she should be clean dissolved,
Or from the center born.
The sea doth roar, forsakes the shore,
And shrinks away for fear;
The wild beasts flee into the sea,
So soon as He draws near. (113-120)

Very much similar to apocalyptic science fiction in its descriptions of destructive violence, Wigglesworth's poem capitalizes on the knowledge of apocalypse that the reader brings to it. Since the readers approach the poem knowing that it is about the end of the world, the images of natural disasters allude specifically to the corresponding parts of Revelation. Even so, Wigglesworth placed notes in the margin of his text that directed the reader to certain passages of the bible. This shows apocalyptic iconography at work very early in America's literary history.

On the way to discussing the particular images that constitute a unifying aesthetic among the different forms of the apocalyptic narrative, it is important to understand that these narratives function as productions of their genre. The repeated, almost clichéd, imagery serves as a set of identifying markers for the audience. In the disaster film genre, for example, the audience expects to see, at some point in the film, a disaster. How that disaster plays out is ultimately left up to the creator of the particular film but it functions within what is perceived as a set of norms specific to the genre.¹¹ What science fiction scholar J.P. Telotte identifies is the relationship between the film and the audience. The stock images, stock situations, or stock characters identify the particular film/narrative as a member of a certain genre because they carry meaning that the audience/reader already understands. Leo Braudy explains this relationship between film and audience as building on tradition.¹² In fact, Braudy argues that because so much of the film depends

¹¹J.P. Telotte notes how these identifiers work within genre: "Anyone who has watched even a few science fiction films[...]would probably argue that he or she could, with little hesitation, decide if a certain work belongs within the science fiction category. That sense of certainty springs from the fact that the typical viewer easily recognizes particular hallmarks, visual icons that, over the course of many years, have helped constitute a common signature that cultural consensus or historical use has by now assigned to the genre" (17).

¹² He writes, "Genre in films can be the equivalent of conscious reference to tradition in the other arts- the invocation of past works that has been so important a part of the history of literature, drama, and

upon conventions of genre, the status of genre films as works of art are continually in question.¹³ This goes a long way in explaining why apocalyptic narratives have typically been in the realm of popular art.¹⁴

However, Braudy's assertion that such works of art become static and thus historical markers does not apply to the dynamic nature of the apocalyptic narrative. This "signposting" of sorts both has and has not happened. This has happened because by the very nature of the apocalyptic narrative, a film based on exploring threats to humanity, some threats are more dated than others. While the threat of widespread atomic warfare was very real to readers of *Alas, Babylon* in 1959, now that threat seems dated. There is no longer a connection with the audience and the narrative says more about readers in the 1950s and early 1960s than a reader in 2004.¹⁵ However, the apocalyptic genre has retained this connection with the audience. Since it is a film based on the threat of destruction, there are always new threats to be explored. And because there are new threats, it allows directors the opportunity to both utilize the previous traditions of the genre and to explore the new.¹⁶ But the most important reason why these narratives have not disappeared is because they are linked to notions of American identity. Because they

painting"(108). What Braudy suggests is that the composition of the film is determined to a substantial extent by the conventions of the genre of which the film belongs.

¹³ "Genre films offend our most common definition of artistic excellence: the uniqueness of the art object, whose value can in part be defined by its desire to be uncaused and unfamiliar, as much as possible unindebted to any tradition, popular or otherwise" (105).

¹⁴ Instead of the quality of the filmic product being determined by criteria, such as uniqueness, he asserts that the film is judged by its connection with its tradition and then, subsequently, its audience. He explains that "the only test is its continuing relevance, and a genre will remain vital[...] so long as its conventions still express themes and conflicts that preoccupy its audience. When either minority or majority art loses contact with its audience, it becomes a mere signpost in history[...]" (109).

¹⁵ Braudy writes: "Genre cycles, like the present one of the disaster film[...], engage the feelings of the audience at their deepest level. When they don't, no one goes to see them and they cease to be made" (121).

¹⁶ Braudy recognizes this dynamic quality of the genre film: "The joy in genre is to see what can be dared in the creation of a new form or the creative destruction and complication of an old one. The ongoing genre subject therefore always involves a complex relation between the compulsions of the past and the freedoms of the present, an essential part of the film experience" (109).

are part of this process of national identity imagination then the films can never lose efficacy to their audience.

These markers, or icons, are not limited to character types and plot situations.¹⁷ Another film scholar, Peter Hutchings, notes that icons become repetitive in the creative process because they “could be used by film-makers as a kind of shorthand” (64). Hutchings mentions that the mere existence of genres is related to the nature of the industry in that “they offer a means by which the industry can seek to repeat and capitalize upon previous box-office successes” (61). Therefore, the industry has an economic incentive to keep producing genre films. However, it is easy to see the weakness in discussing apocalyptic films as productions of genre now that such formulaic films are not as visible as they were thirty years ago. Admittedly, the way we think about genre films and narratives has changed a great deal from the position that Braudy writes from in 1976. When we think about recent apocalyptic science fiction films, such as *28 Days Later*, such films are not known (and applauded) for what they do that is similar to earlier films of the genre, but rather for how they depart from that formulaic construction.

The disaster films of 1950s science fiction that preceded the apocalyptic genre are primarily responsible for incorporating images of destruction into science fiction film. While this statement seems obvious at first, it is hard to overestimate the amount of repetition that occurred in this genre because of the films’ popularity.¹⁸ Even though she discusses a different genre, what Susan Sontag says about aesthetics of destruction in the

¹⁷Telotte explains: “Included in this category are[...] clothing, lighting, tools or weaponry, settings—all those elements that have often been described as the ‘language’ of the genre, and much of which has been long established in the popular consciousness thanks to the corresponding literary tradition[...].” (17).

¹⁸Susan Sontag argues that the genre became so repetitive that she explicates the model scenario of these films in the beginning of her article. Later, she notes that “the films perpetuate clichés about identity, volition, power, knowledge, happiness, social consensus, guilt, responsibility[...].” (465). The article itself is a study of disaster films through genre theory and so, Sontag’s primary question deals with the prevalence of disaster imagery in the genre.

disaster film translates to the apocalyptic genre because it shares many of the same icons with the disaster film. To begin with, Sontag points out that filmic science fiction narratives are privileged over other mediums: "Certainly, compared with the science fiction novels, their film counterparts have unique strengths, one of which is the immediate representation of the extraordinary: physical deformity and mutation, missile and rocket combat, toppling skyscrapers" (453). This disparity, according to Sontag, makes films weaker than novels on the science presented in the films, but stronger in "something the novels can never provide- sensuous elaboration" (454). Therefore, the films are not really about science but rather about disaster, which, she reminds us, "is one of the oldest subjects of art" (454).¹⁹ The filmmaker expects the viewer to bring the meaning with them; to fill in the gaps of information when presented with the images. The audience of Aldrich's *Sodom and Gomorrah* (1962), for example, would most likely be familiar with that film's history before even viewing it. A viewer does not watch a film entitled *Sodom and Gomorrah* without already knowing that it is about destruction and, also, that they are viewing it to see destruction. What Sontag argues is that the situation is no different than when viewers watch a film entitled *War of the Worlds* (1953).

If many films were made in this genre and these films were very popular, one question remains. What need do these disaster films, with their images of destruction, fulfill? On the surface, audiences desire to see destruction. Sontag notes that "science

¹⁹Here, Sontag's mention of disaster's relation to art shows that she recognizes that narratives of disaster are loaded with the meaning of that previous history and art. In fact, she compares the type of destruction seen in science fiction disaster films with other films representing destruction from other genres. She writes: "Neither do these sequences differ in aesthetic intention from the destruction scenes in big sword, sandal, and orgy color spectaculars set in Biblical and Roman times-the end of Sodom in Aldrich's *Sodom and Gomorrah*, of Gaza in De Mille's *Samson and Delilah*, of Rhodes in *The Colossus of Rhodes*, and of Rome in a dozen Nero movies" (455).

fiction films are one of the purest forms of spectacle[...]" (456). Going deeper, Sontag notes that, at the heart of the science fiction film is "a morally acceptable fantasy where one can give outlet to cruel or at least amoral feelings" (456).²⁰ Her assertion is that because the disaster genre films contained "absolutely no social criticism, of even the most implicit kind" the films instead only illustrated "the conditions of our society which create the impersonality and dehumanization which science fiction fantasies displace onto the influence of an alien It" (463). In essence, the disaster that happens in these films gets deflected from being man's responsibility and projected onto some outside force. Because the disaster films presented destruction without any social commentary, it left a vacuum that would be filled with the apocalyptic genre's use of both images of destruction and images of dystopia to advance its social message.

The Omega Man (1971) is the best example of the genre's use of both types of icons to deliver social commentary. The title itself is clearly iconic in that it alludes to Revelation: "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last" (Rev. 22.13). The situation is also iconic. Warfare fought with weapons of mass destruction has left only one man alive in the world. It was a familiar situation in science fiction literature a decade before. Further, *The Omega Man* (1971) was a remake of the 1964 film, *The Last Man on Earth*, starring Vincent Price. It was also based on the 1954 book by Richard Matheson, *I Am Legend*. Robert Neville is a scientist (an Army one at that) and, thus, he follows the long line of main characters in science fiction films who are scientists of some sort. Even more compelling is the selection of Charlton Heston to

²⁰She argues that the way audiences view disaster is related to the way people view freaks: "The sense of superiority over the freak conjoined in varying proportions with the titillation of fear and aversion makes it possible for moral scruples to be lifted, for cruelty to be enjoyed. [...]. In the figure of the monster from outer space, the freakish, the ugly, and the predatory all converge-and provide a fantasy target for righteous bellicosity to discharge itself, and for the aesthetic enjoyment of suffering and disaster" (456).

play the part. In addition to Heston being well known for his roles in films like *The Ten Commandments* (1956) and *Ben-Hur* (1959), Heston played the majority of 1970s apocalyptic science fictions leads. He was in *Planet of the Apes* three years earlier and would play the lead in another apocalyptic film *Soylent Green* in 1973.

Twice in the film the audience is given a recap of sorts of how Heston became the last man on earth. The first one takes place after he kills members of “the family” (the luddite, zombie-like victims of the plague who want to kill Neville) and walks into the elevator that will take him to the second floor of his home. When he pushes the elevator button, there is a graphic match with an exploding bomb. The bomb image is followed by a fade-in to Heston’s face which then fades to a missile launch. However, the fade-in leaves Heston’s face translucent so as to suggest that these images are memories. This shot is followed by a shot of a hammer and anvil soviet symbol intruding upon a map of the northwestern United States accompanied by an indiscriminate Russian voice. A news reel, beginning with file footage of Chinese soldiers marching, informs the audience that a Sino-Russian conflict has escalated. The next scene is of a standard control room where a man pushes a button. That shot then cuts to a hydrogen bomb explosion that fades into the previous shot of Heston in the elevator as a voice from the past says “Abort firings, interception will fragment bacilli-carrying missiles.” In this entire sequence there are only two shots that are original to this film: Heston in the elevator and the reporter in the newsroom. Every other shot is an image most likely gathered from newsreels or declassified government films. The point is that the audience has seen these images before.

In the book that spawned *The Omega Man*, *I Am Legend*, the apocalyptic event does not carry the same intensity of spectacle as the film. Instead, the emphasis seems to be placed on the ever present anxiety of atomic warfare and its consequences that typified early atomic fiction. Instead of the spectacular hydrogen bomb firings, Matheson, in a series of flashbacks, tells of a war that has already been fought and won and the only vestiges of warfare remaining are large dust storms that may be carrying disease infected insects. In fact, the most information the reader gets is this small bit of information in a discussion Neville has with his wife over breakfast. Of the bombings, Neville says, "Well, they're causing the dust storms. They're probably causing a lot of things" (56). Instead of the striking bomb imagery that typifies most of the apocalyptic films, *I Am Legend* portrays more of the atomic anxiety characteristic of that era. In the book, the dust carrying the plague is everywhere and suffocating:

The whole top of the washbasin was grimy with dust. The damn stuff was everywhere. He'd finally been compelled to erect a tent over Kathy's bed to keep the dust from her face.[...]He didn't get a good shave because there was grit in the shave soap[...]He ran a finger across the top of the shelter half and drew it away with dust. With a disgusted shake of his head he left the room. (53)

While not quite the ever-present threat of the bomb, the dust symbolizes a similar atomic anxiety. We know that the bombs are causing the dust and so the dust is the symbol of the inescapable nature of the threat.

The second recap in *The Omega Man* is important in that it shows the effects of the plague. Since this film's message concerns biological warfare it is important that the

film shows exactly what happens to plague victims. The recap shows people dying in the streets, dropping dead in their homes, overcrowding hospitals, and a voice tells the audience that martial law has been declared. This recap is important because, as Susan Sontag noted in the disaster genre, it provides the spectacle for the audience's enjoyment. They get to see what happens to people in germ warfare.

The future of *The Omega Man* is a violent, dystopian future. The film opens with Heston driving a convertible through a barren downtown Los Angeles. The 1971 audience would recognize the song playing softly from Heston's radio as "A Summer Place" by Max Steiner.²¹ It is a nice moment of irony because it is not long before Heston introduces the audience to this dystopian world by slamming on his brakes, pulling out his sub-machine gun, and firing at a person in a nearby building. Immediately, the audience realizes that all bets are off. And even the music that plays immediately after Neville fires into the building (halting "A Summer Place" abruptly) emphasizes this fact. Ron Grainer's main theme for the movie is dark and minor. This is not a calm movie about romance in a small town on the Maine coast, but rather the horror of loneliness and alienation in a dead world and Grainer's track conveys this irony when the two tracks are played back to back as they are in the film.²² In this dystopia, Heston is accompanied by the survivors of the plague brought about by the biological warfare. "The Family," as they call themselves, appear to be communitarian and luddite, rejecting

²¹ The chart-topping theme song to the 1959 film. Its presence in *The Omega Man* is ironic given the comparison between plots. But more than that, the song, as it is normally used, is supposed to convey a sense of serenity. Its use is an attempt to trick the audience into thinking this is just another Sunday drive for Mr. Neville. And when Neville clutches his submachine gun and fires at a shadow in a nearby building, the effect is supposed to be jarring, as if waking from a dream.

²²In fact, in many places the music does a great deal to invoke the fervor and reckless violence characteristic of the film's future. The track "Needling Neville" is a fascinating track that travels from the zealotry and the fervor of the Family's book burning siege of Neville's apartment to the failed domestic bliss of Neville's home.

“the tools that destroyed the world.” Their leader, Mathias, is more of a religious zealot than political leader. What makes this dystopian future so interesting is its political underpinnings. At the heart of *The Omega Man* is a battle between the forces of political conservatism and counter-culturalists. Heston(Neville) is the conservative hero who refuses to give up the vestiges of the old world, his house, technology, for example, and takes it upon himself to exterminate the Family. Meanwhile, the Family, coincidentally rendered colorless by the plague, embodies a communitarian ideology as seen through their similar dress, communal rejection of technology, and frequently referring to each other as “brother.” They want to establish a new order but, before they can, they have to kill Heston. Again, it is allegorical of the social upheaval of the 1960s. The Family’s struggle for transformative power smacks of the various civil liberties movements of that era. Because the film’s hero is the conservative Neville(Heston), it seems to say that the dystopia brought about by germ warfare is only a dystopia to conservatives. Regardless, the violence of this dystopia is iconic even given the Family’s distaste of technology. For example, even though they do not use guns, they have no qualms using spears or catapulting flaming balls of trash into Neville’s home. In this film, conservatism is the victor and liberalism is the dystopia that the film warns against. The message that the dystopia of *The Omega Man* suggests is that the use of biological weapons would bring a fate worse than death; it would allow communitarian counter-culturalists to gain power.

The first five minutes of *Planet of the Apes* (1968) come across as preachy. Reclining in a chair on his spaceship, Charlton Heston’s character ponders, “Tell me though, does man, that marvel of the universe, that glorious paradox who sent me to the stars, still make war against his brother? Keep his neighbor’s children starving?” Of

course, the question goes unanswered until the end of the film. Although the audience does not realize initially that it is being presented with a dystopian future, it is still bombarded with the icons of dystopia. It is only at the end of the film that the audience understands the icons it has been presented with as dystopian. In a sense, the film plays with iconography because it holds the audience from attributing meaning to the icons until they are shown at the end of the film that it is an apocalyptic film. The icons are present throughout the film, though we initially do not recognize them. Early in the film, Heston and his fellow astronauts are stripped of their clothing and supplies and are reduced to wearing loincloths. The desolate wasteland setting that appears throughout the film is also iconic of destruction. It is because the audience does not know that it is a dystopian vision of their future that they are seeing that, once it is revealed, the message of that dystopia is even more powerful and clear. A planet ruled by apes, in which man is hunted and treated like an animal seems like quite the perversion. Surely the early scenes in which the apes hunt Heston and the other humans are meant to emphasize this difference between the world the viewer knows and the one with which they are presented. Eventually, the viewer has to ask how the world became so distorted. Heston tells them in the final scene: "We finally, really did it. You maniacs! You blew it up. Oh, damn you. God damn you all to hell!" Heston's revelation emphasizes the film's social message and reinstates the jeremiad: this will be our future if we continue as we are now.

Violence is key to the dystopian future. For example, our introduction to the planet of the apes shows the apes hunting man in order to enslave them. A loud scream announces their arrival in the calm pastoral setting. The humans immediately run from the sound only to encounter large sticks the apes use to flush them out of the field. The

apes on horseback then fire on them with rifles and later capture the surviving humans. The scene stands in contrast to the calmness that characterized the action of the film preceding it. Because this dystopian future is essentially our society gone wrong, it must show the new order as being violent. Otherwise, it would be a positive view of the future, utopian, and the film's message would not work. In this film, the dystopian message indicts the status quo that destroyed the world and the status quo embodied by the older apes. This is further supported by the appearance of such phrases as "Don't trust anyone over thirty" frequently heard throughout the film. But it really indicts 1960s society. After all, the title's suggestion is that humans are apes and all the negative consequences of that comparison. 1960s Earth is a planet of apes. Heston's struggle in the film is not only against the conservative, tradition-based society advocated by the older apes, but also of his own time. After all, he reveals later that his purpose in leaving Earth was to start a new society, a new errand into an unknown wilderness.

Logan's Run (1976) presents a dystopia where, without the guidance of older people, younger generations live in a hedonistic society that has only one rule: man can only live to be thirty years old. Because not everyone abides by this rule, "Sandmen," of which Logan is one, must be employed to find and kill "runners." As is already becoming apparent, violence is an important aspect of this society. Those who do not run (and therefore are not killed by the Sandmen), are killed in a highly ritualistic ceremony called "Carousel." In the ceremony, the people who have turned thirty years old seek "renewal," which will supposedly be granted to them according to how they have lived their lives. Again, this genre's use of the spectacle of violence reappears in the Carousel scenes. Crowds cheer the people on as they seek renewal and are ultimately incinerated.

The dystopic message is again two-fold. First, it brings into question the role of violence in utopia as a means of entertainment. Second, it proposes that a society that discards the wisdom of the older generation becomes quickly misguided. This last part is advanced through Logan's attempt to escape renewal.

Logan, attempting to escape renewal, finds his way outside of the bio-dome that protects his society from the environment that was supposedly destroyed by previous generations. He wanders through the dense jungle that has emerged in their absence until he comes upon the ruins of Washington, D.C.. Again, the icons of the genre reemerge as the camera pans to the desolated city reclaimed by the forest. It is in this city that he finds an old hermit, who happens to be the first old person he has ever seen. After a few scenes that show Logan learning from the old man, Logan decides to take him back to the dome. For example, the old man explains the strange concept of marriage to Logan. Upon returning to the dome and destroying the oppressive computer that runs it, Logan and the old man are approached by thousands of people that want to see the old man. The movie ends with this scene and its message is clear. Not only has the old man's presence brought the people outside of the dome, but the film's ending with this scene suggests that he and not the computer will provide their guidance. It is a markedly conservative message that suggests that the young have something to learn from the older generation.

A similar message is advanced in the 1973 film, *Soylent Green*. In this future, man's advance into the industrial age has caused not only overpopulation and extreme poverty, but also severe destruction of the environment. Again, the older, wealthier class that holds a monopoly over the world's resources is blamed for its future destruction.

This is also the case with the 1975 film, *Rollerball*. In this film, the world is organized by major corporations that control such resources as energy, food, and transportation. Because the previous apocalyptic event known as “the Corporate Wars” brought the corporations to power and thus rendered warfare unprofitable between them, humans satisfy humanity's violent nature through the game Rollerball. The irony is that in a society where violence is rendered useless, a violent game becomes incredibly popular. With each corporation represented by a particular team, the Rollerball matches become the arena for man's most savage behavior. However, what the film shows is that the corporate executive is as violent and dangerous as the most ruthless Rollerball player. The film not only indicts the older generation's hegemonic control of Earth's resources, but also our society's growing fascination with the spectacle of violence.

The fact that these films are set in the future emphasizes that their message is intended for the present. Philip Fisher argues that popular forms are “forms for the active transformation of the present” (7). Fisher borrows from Freud and notes that this transformation of the present is possible through a process of “recognition, repetition, and working through” (7). Fisher's argument fits nicely with the images native to the apocalyptic genre of films. To begin with, it has already been discussed that in order for the icons to work they must be repetitive. Fisher continues, “Popular forms are frequently repetitive[...]becoming part of what might be called a diet of reality that returns again and again to the same few motifs so that they might not slip away” (7). This is how apocalyptic images of the bomb and the resulting dystopia work. The audience sees the same images, settings, actors, etc. used repeatedly and begins to associate meaning with them. When the icons are used subsequently the audience

recognizes them and their previous meaning. What Fisher says about images (and, by extension, meaning) becoming culturally incorporated translates to icons: “Only a few facts keep on being remembered as who we are and those facts are incorporated and then, after a time, felt to be obvious and even trite” (8). The work that these films accomplished seems obvious to one now. For example, today our society holds as self-evident that nuclear war would bring global destruction. Whereas, during the Korean War, the use of nuclear weapons against the Chinese was advocated by many American politicians and the military practiced contingencies involving the deployment of nuclear weapons by troops on the battlefield (*The Atomic Café*, 1981). The horror of such uses of weapons of mass destruction is obvious today. This is the kind of work Philip Fisher argues that popular forms accomplish. He writes, “The cultural work that I am describing is the process by which the imaginable becomes, finally, the obvious” (8). At the heart of these films is the desire to change the world. The purpose of the apocalyptic narrative, just as in the American jeremiad, is to recommit ourselves to the true course or, at least, to avoid a perceived devastating future through altering the present. Fisher notes that “the ambition to redesign the common world is the ambition of the best instances of cultural work” (9). The icons work in this way because they visually present the horror of our future. They show a reality that will be ours if we continue as we have. Just as the early jeremiad sermons constructed a picture of God’s future wrath, the narratives allow us to exist in the dystopian future for a time in order to understand how to avoid it.

Fisher notes this situation:

In this sense the historical novel is a device for practicing how to meet a certain but postponed future. It is a psychological rehearsal that creates an

ordered resignation that lets a group “face,” as we put it, a future that they have already chosen and set in motion, but have not yet morally or psychologically passed through. (18)

I believe it is the purpose of the apocalyptic science fiction film to allow its audience the rehearsal Fisher suggests with the hope that, having experienced the future of ecological disaster, biological and nuclear warfare, the excessive spectacle of violence, or political conservatism or liberalism run amok, the warning and the danger will become so obvious that such a future will be impossible.

Perhaps this is why the genre persists. While some threats to the future have become obvious, time exposes new threats. Films such as *Mad Max* (1979), *The Terminator* (1984), *Waterworld* (1995), and *The Matrix* (1999), show how vital the genre is and, with the exception of *Waterworld*, how profitable. New narratives are made to allow the audience to understand new threats. And new images, although anchored in the old icons of destruction and dystopia, are presented to provide that spectacle so necessary to the apocalyptic narrative. But, more than that, they are an affirmation of American national identity because they connect and remind Americans that the errand demands constant vigilance and correction. For as long as man is capable of destroying himself, he must always be forward looking. We must all, as instructed by the ending of *The Thing from Outer Space*, “Keep looking at the skies! Keep looking!”

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