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Ben Carver

Alternate Histories and Nineteenth- Century Literature

Untimely Meditations in Britain,
France, and America

palgrave
macmillan

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Palgrave Studies in Nineteenth-Century Writing and Culture
ISBN 978-1-137-57333-9 ISBN 978-1-137-57334-6 (eBook)
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-57334-6

Library of Congress Control Number: 2017937711

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The registered company address is: The Campus, 4 Crinan Street, London, N1 9XW, United Kingdom

To speak truthfully, one must talk of the impossibility, not simply the difficulties, of a satisfactory portrayal, if one reflects on the tangled hypotheses that press upon the steps of the alternate historian.

—Charles Renouvier, *Uchronie (l'utopie dans l'histoire)*
(Bureau de la Critique Philosophique, 1876), p. 408.

For my family

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Alternate history is a topic which encourages enthusiastic recommendations of further reading, and I am profoundly thankful for the many suggestions received and conversations about imaginary worlds that have taken place in and outside scholarly settings. It is also a subject which appeals to several types of specialist reader—of utopian, science, and other fields of speculative fiction. The many insights and suggestions I have received from these experts have been influential on the finished work. Many goose chases have been the result of these conversations, some wild but in many cases to works of prose and poetry that have become integral to the book. My thanks to all my interlocutors.

This work began as a doctoral thesis, and I am indebted to my Ph.D. supervisors, Alex Murray and Regenia Gagnier, for their advice and support; I am likewise grateful for the constructive feedback from the members of the assessment panel, Matthew Beaumont and Paul Young. These readers clarified the project's potential, and showed me what needed to be worked on in the passage from the thesis to a monograph that was ready to present to a wider audience. A large amount of theoretical elaboration has gone, and the chapters on lost worlds and American alternate history have been added. Chapter four is a development of ideas originally published in the *Journal of Victorian Culture* 18.4 (December 2013).

The support for the project at Palgrave has been constant, and the editorial guidance and efficiency have meant that the journey from proposal to completion has been as smooth as it could have been. Joseph Bristow's scrupulous attention to the submitted manuscript revealed the

imprecision and inconsistencies than I was blind to. The final version, I hope, rewards the reader's kind attention with sufficient clarity of expression.

The wonderful image of Lawrence Alma-Tadema's painting of *Sappho and Alcaeus* is reproduced here with the permission of the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore. The painting was in my thoughts long before I chose it for the cover illustration, and their generous cooperation has meant that the book has the best image I could wish for it. William West's illustration of the divergence of species (the only illustration in Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*) is reproduced with permission of John van Wyhe ed. 2002–, of *The Complete Work of Charles Darwin Online* (<http://darwin-online.org.uk/>). A number of images have been digitized by Edinburgh University, Main Library, and I am grateful for their assistance; these are the plates from the first edition of James Nasmyth and James Carpenter's work, *The Moon Considered as a Planet, a World, and a Satellite* (John Murray, 1874), William Herschel's engraving of the Nebula of Orion as it appeared in John Pringle Nichol's *Thoughts on Some Important Points Related to the System of the World* (William Tait, 1846), and a figure from Alfred Russel Wallace's *The Malay Archipelago: The Land of the Orang-Utan and the Bird of Paradise, a Narrative of Travel with Studies of Man and Nature* (Macmillan & Co., 1869). The providers of the other images are Alamy image service (*Napoleon Crossing the Alps*), University of Michigan Library (digitized image of Renouvier's untitled illustration of divergence), the Arthur Conan Doyle encyclopedia (www.arthur-conan-doyle.com) and Arthur Conan Doyle Trademarks (the illustrations which appeared in the *Strand Magazine's* serial publication of *The Lost World* (1912)), and the anonymous provider of the open-source digital image of the frontispiece to Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (Charles L. Webster & Company, 1889). I am grateful for all for their assistance and permissions to reproduce.

Several of the French-language sources have not been translated into English, and where not otherwise noted, I have produced my own translations to the best of my ability.

My family have lived with this project as long as I have, so my wife, daughter, mother, and father are now fellow travellers in the realms of *what-if*. Their love and patience during long periods of solitary study have kept me going; they have also been here to welcome me back into the lands of things-as-they-are, and I would not choose to live anywhere

else. My father deserves special thanks for the enormous task of proof-reading the work before submission. His attention and suggestions for revision have made this a better book. The remaining errors are my own.

Falmouth, UK

Ben Carver

REVISED PROOF

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ABBREVIATIONS

- AL* Benjamin Disraeli, *Alroy*, Bradenham edition (London: Peter Davies, 1927)
- AR* Castello Holford, *Aristopia: A Romance-History of the New World* (Boston: Arena Publishing Company, 1895)
- CR* Thomas Chalmers, *A Series of Discourses on the Christian Revelation: Viewed in Connection with the Modern Astronomy*, 8th edition (Glasgow: John Smith and Son, 1817 [1817])
- CY* Mark Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee at King Arthur's Court*, ed. Justin Kaplan (London: Penguin Books, 1986)
- ES* Auguste Blanqui, "Eternity According to the Stars," trans. Anderson Matthew H., *CR: The New Centennial Review* 9, no. 3 (2009 [1872]): 3–60
- HD* Richard Whately, *Historic Doubts Relative to Napoleon Buonaparte* (London: John W. Parker and Son, 1852 [other editions cited separately])
- HL* Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "Herland," in *The Yellow Wall-Paper, Herland, and Selected Writings*, ed. Denise D. Knight (New York: Penguin Books, 2009): 1–143
- "HO" Edward Everett Hale, "Hands Off," in *Alternative Histories: Eleven Stories of the World as It Might Have Been*, ed. Charles G. Waugh and Martin Harry Greenberg (New York: Garland, 1986): 1–12
- LU* Camille Flammarion, *Lumen* (Paris: E. Flammarion, 1887)
- LW* Arthur Conan Doyle, "The Lost World," in *The Lost World and Other Thrilling Tales*, ed. Philip Gooden (London: Penguin Books, 2001): 1–206

- MZ Mary E. Bradley Lane, *Mizora: A Prophecy* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2000 [1881])
- NA Louis Geoffroy, *Napoléon Apocryphe, 1812–1832: Histoire de la conquête du monde et de la monarchie universelle* (Paris: Chez Paulin, 1841)
- OS Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection; Or, the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*, ed. J. W. Burrow (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985)
- OW Richard Proctor, *Other Worlds Than Ours*, 3rd edition (London: Longmans, Green, 1872 [1870])
- “SH” Thomas De Quincey, “System of the Heavens as Revealed by Lord Rosse’s Telescopes,” in *Tait’s Edinburgh Magazine* 13, no. 153 (September 1846): 566–79
- TM James Nasmyth and James Carpenter, *The Moon Considered as a Planet, a World, and a Satellite* (London: John Murray, 1874)
- UC Charles Renouvier, *Uchronie (l’utopie dans l’histoire): Esquisse historique apocryphe du développement de la civilisation Européenne tel qu’il n’a pas été, tel qu’il aurait pu être* (Paris: Bureau de la Critique Philosophique, 1876)
- “UD” Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,” in *Untimely Meditations, Texts in German Philosophy*, ed. Charles Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983): 57–125
- WE Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Women and Economics: A Study of the Economic Relation Between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Evolution* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1998)
- WP Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, ed. Henry Gifford, trans. Louise Maude and Aylmer Maude, Oxford World Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998)

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Introduction: The Castle of If

This book studies the nineteenth-century imagination of worlds that history might have produced. Narratives set in unrealized pasts appeared in a variety of formats and in particular contexts: in post-Waterloo fantasies about the ways in which the career of Napoleon might have continued, in the incorporation of evolutionary theory into social imaginaries and possible worlds, and in meditations on the cultural health of America as it contemplated entry into the First World War. This book is the first attempt at a comprehensive survey and analysis of “alternate histories” in Britain, France, and America between 1815 and 1916.¹ These texts appeared where new knowledge disciplines were being formed, and in each case, alternate history was a means to reflect on how scientific, cultural, and historical discoveries altered the understanding of the past. New methods for interpreting the classical world and its legacy for modern-day Europe, information about the chemical composition (and history) of stars, and assertions of pre-historical matriarchal societies implied very different, often incompatible, temporal scales and chronologies. There is very little consistency in the mode of presentation of the alternate histories studied here; some are novels, others essays, and flights of past-hypothetical fancy are found in the work of scientists, political theorists, and philosophers.

Nor is there a prevailing political orientation. Alternate histories were produced by incarcerated revolutionaries (Louis-Auguste Blanqui) and aspiring Tory politicians (Benjamin Disraeli). It was also a practice

whose exponents often felt that they themselves had stumbled across or rediscovered from classical authors—more likely to be aware of Livy’s fourth-century BCE staging of a hypothetical battle between Alexander the Great’s forces and the Roman army than of contemporary uses of the conceit. The publication of G. M. Trevelyan’s essay, “If Napoleon had won the Battle of Waterloo” (1907), and a collection of counterfactual essays in the same year, suggest a transatlantic recognition of the practice in the early twentieth century.² Little more than a decade earlier, however, Castello N. Holford wrote in the preface to *Aristopia: A Romance-History of the New World* (1895): “of books giving a history of the past as it might have been [...] I know not one” (AR 3). This dispersal of works of alternate history—among disciplines and formats, and for diverse political purposes—indicates that although its emergence can be noted in disciplinary contexts, its practice in the nineteenth century was isolated, impetuous, and often contrarian in character. In short, it was an *undisciplined* mode of thought, which circulated across the literature and culture of the nineteenth century.

In *The Count of Monte Cristo*, Alexandre Dumas’ vast novel of 1844–1845, a sense of disjuncture from the past is presented at both personal and social levels. When the Count has nearly completed his project of revenge, he reflects upon the unreal quality that history acquires with the passage of time:

What my thinking today lacks is a proper assessment of the past, because I am looking at this past from the other end of the horizon. Indeed, as one goes forward, so the past, like the landscape through which one is walking, is gradually effaced. What is happening to me is what happens to people who are wounded in a dream: they look at their wound and they feel it but cannot remember how it was caused.³

The estrangement of cause and effect that the Count experiences arises after having invented multiple identities for himself (with fictitious biographical pasts to go with each) in order to bring about the downfall of each of his betrayers. The first transformation is from Edmond Dantès, a merchant sailor with good prospects, to the Count of Monte Cristo—the demonic persona he creates for himself after his long incarceration upon the island prison, the Château d’If. The curtailment of Dantès’ future, with its promise of a loving marriage and successful career, and its

realignment with the career of the avenging Count, is one of the substitutions and alterations that take place in the novel. He continues speaking to himself, but his thoughts turn outward and serve as a reminder to all of the alternative, disastrous paths that any life might be subject to:

Come, then, resurrected man; come, extravagant Croesus; come, sleep-walker; come, all-powerful visionary; come, invincible millionaire, and, for an instant, rediscover that dread prospect of a life of poverty and starvation. Go back down the roads where fate drove, where misfortune led and where despair greeted you.⁴

This invocation to think of life as a series of alternate histories recalls the *memento mori*, but rather than reminding the reader of an inevitable fate, it invites him or her to consider the phantasmal avenues of what might have been.

The vicissitudes of individual fates in *The Count of Monte Cristo* are set within the wider frame of European history, specifically the reversals of fortune that characterized the career of Napoleon Bonaparte. Dantès is imprisoned for (unknowingly) carrying a letter on behalf of Napoleonic sympathizers prior to the escape from Elba and the 100 Days (which culminated in the Battle of Waterloo). The particular contingency of European history at this moment is reflected in the incredulity of the Abbé Faria, a long-term prisoner in the Château d'If, when Dantès, on arrival, summarizes the past 4 years of history for him. The Abbé exclaims: "I could never have guessed what you told me a moment ago: that four years later the colossus would be overturned. So who rules in France? Napoleon II?"⁵ In one possible version of European history, Napoleon has established a stable French empire and is succeeded by his son; in another (which we know), he is defeated.

Charles Renouvier's diagram to represent the imagination of historical alternatives (which appears as the frontispiece and Fig. 3.3 in this book) represents the course of history as one route through a garden of endlessly forking paths. The texts studied here imagine alternative outcomes for societies, states, continents, and forms of life, a point which distinguishes the focus of this study from Hilary P. Dannenberg's and Andrew H. Miller's discussions on the incorporation of awareness—by characters and readers—of how one's life might have turned out differently.⁶ Miller describes the ending of Hardy's novel in which Tess Durbeyfield

lies on the stone slab at Stonehenge awaiting arrest, and how “we seem to see, on her left and on her right, all the lives we wished for her, all the lives she has not led.”⁷ Alternate histories in the nineteenth century expanded this individual scope of regret to a much wider frame, though the connections between the social and personal were apparent to their authors: two novels which imagine redeemed versions of American history (*Aristopia* (1895) and *The Climax; or What Might Have Been* (1902)) quoted John Greenleaf Whittier’s poem “Maud Muller” (1856): “For of all sad words of tongue or pen, / The saddest are these: ‘It might have been!’” Both texts describe utopian societies that history *might* have produced and whose representation as imaginaries might yet assist a project to realize them. These wishful instances of alternate history that excavate political possibilities correspond to what Ernst Bloch would call, much later, “the still undischarged future in the past.”⁸ Alternate histories were thus social in outlook but often coloured with a tone of regret that was personal to the author or the authorial persona. In the foreword to *Napoléon apocryphe* (1836, 1841), Louis Geoffroy asks whether, given the disappointments of history, “would man not have the right to take refuge in his thoughts, in his heart, in his imagination?” (NA ii).

The Castle (of If) can absorb some of these divergent tendencies of alternate history; it can refer to the enclosed space of a historical alternative that must be marked off from our world by a defensive barrier—the basalt cliffs, for instance, that isolate Conan Doyle’s *Lost World* (1912) are also the condition of its difference, or “ifness.” The figure of the castle can also stand for visions fabulated from the dungeon cell of the present: the time-travelling narrator’s carceral sleep in Mark Twain’s *A Connecticut Yankee* (1889) or Louis-Auguste Blanqui’s thesis of infinite worlds (1872), written from his prison cell with its corollary that “what I write at this moment in the dungeons of the Fort du Taureau I will have written for eternity, on a table, with a pen, in my clothes, in circumstances that are completely alike. And so it is, for each” (ES 57). The possible worlds of alternate history were shaped by (and reflected upon) emerging techniques for understanding the past; their authors were also more or less aware of the *strangeness* of fabulating alternatives in history, an activity whose outcomes could only ever be chimerical. This practice of retrospective speculation nevertheless appeared time and again, in diverse contexts and disciplines. By identifying the patterns, places, and uses of its instances in the literature and

culture of the nineteenth century, the interactions of modern scientific and philosophical discoveries with historical thought are illuminated in a new way.

Why were there so many instances of alternate-historical thought and writing in the long nineteenth century? Why did the presentation of imaginary pasts erupt repeatedly in such diverse contexts? The overarching theme for this book is the study of history and the nineteenth-century debates within the discipline about the best methods for studying the past, and from other disciplines as scientific knowledge repudiated established beliefs about the age, uniqueness, and natural history of the world. As history developed its disciplinary autonomy over the course of the nineteenth century, a print culture developed to transmit and hyperbolize scientific discoveries to a growing readership. Michel Foucault's explanation of the disaggregating effects of these new discourses of knowledge provides a framework for situating alternate-historical thought within wider intellectual history. He argues that prior to the nineteenth century, the world and all its objects belonged to

a vast historical stream, uniform in each of its points, drawing with it in one and the same current, in one and the same fall or ascension, or cycle, all men, and with them things and animals, every living or inert being, even the most unmoved aspects of the earth.⁹

Once this common chronology was dispersed into the heterogeneous temporalities of economics, geology, evolutionary time, and human society, mankind was compelled to discover the "historicity" to which it belonged.¹⁰ This account of the "human sciences" may be too expansive, but it chimes with the character of historical imaginaries in the nineteenth century: by nominating a point of departure in the historical past in order to imagine forms of society and the history of nations that might have followed, exponents of alternate history were working with and often testing ideas about the cycles of cause and effect that had produced the world they lived in. Alternate history was an engaging conceit for pursuing what Foucault saw as the great desire in the period "to historicize everything, to write a general history of everything, to go back ceaselessly through time."¹¹ Reimagining the past was a method for creating a vantage point from which to interrogate prevailing notions of

historical descent. Responses to contemporary astronomical knowledge or revisionist histories of the role of Christianity in European history required very different points of return from which to reflect on cycles of historical development.

History-writing in the nineteenth century is often described as a transition from a romantic activity to a scientific discipline. In Linda Dowling's summary, "scientific historiography transformed the public role of the historian from sage to specialist."¹² According to this narrative, the Scottish philosopher, essayist, and historian Thomas Carlyle is the exemplary romantic interpreter of the past, with the establishment of the first journal devoted to historical studies, the *English Historical Review*, in 1886 as a marker of its autonomy as a field of specialist knowledge.¹³

The history of History prior to this date was one largely influenced by the "new criticism" from Germany, which scandalized orthodoxies by its perceived erosion of the authority of ancient texts and "the once-general assumption that the 'sacred history' of the Bible was the foundation of historical understanding and that all other history, rightly understood, confirmed and harmoniously supplemented that history."¹⁴ David Strauss's *Das Leben Jesu kritisch bearbeitet* [*The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined*] (1835–1836) approached Jesus as a human being whose life and teachings could be historically interpreted; it was translated by the English novelist and essayist Marian Evans (George Eliot) (1846). Thomas Arnold's *Introductory Lectures on Modern History* (delivered in 1841) relied heavily on German historical thought, particularly Barthold Georg Niebuhr. The publication of *Essays and Reviews* (1860), which critically examined scriptural accounts of creation, demonstrated the willingness of British writers to brave accusations of heresy and "to force theological doctrine and biblical interpretation to take account of the critical-historical method that had been advanced in Germany."¹⁵

Michael Carignan identifies the 1870s as the decade in which the rise of positivist history began, and Richard W. Schoch details the break according to a similar timescale, claiming that "the 1840s and 1850s were perhaps the last years when the boundary between English historical writing and English literature was still permeable."¹⁶ The timeline is consistent with Hayden V. White's description of the historian as a "mediator between the arts and sciences" until 1850, after which the pressures of professionalization and specialization made this role no

longer tenable.¹⁷ Despite the usefulness of such periodizations, characterizations like this tend to paint over the messiness and anomalies of the change, of which the category of alternate history is an example.

Rosemary Jann has written that Carlyle's casual respect for accuracy has been overstated and that what became obsolete is better described as an approach to history as "essentially metaphorical and symbolic."¹⁸ Carlyle disdains the simple chronicler "without eye for the whole," a similar position to Thomas Babington Macaulay, the author of the monumental *History of England from the Accession of James the Second* (1848), who dismisses "facts" as "the mere dross of history."¹⁹ Carlyle's description of the "shoreless chaos" of history (in his introduction to *Oliver Cromwell's Letters and Speeches*) and his pronouncement that "History is a prophetic manuscript, and can be fully interpreted by no man" are not renunciations of method, but an aestheticization of the past as obscure, which renders the historian's work more heroic and vocational.²⁰ By presenting history as the foremost study of the day which encompassed all the others, Carlyle shares a view with historians with whom he has little else in common. In "On History Again" (1833), he writes in typically grandiose manner: "all books, therefore, were they but Songbooks or treatises on Mathematics, are in the long run historical documents [...]: thus might we say, History is not only the fittest study, but the only study, and includes all others whatsoever."²¹

Nineteenth-century historians of "romantic," "whig," and "scientific" orientation all celebrate comparable expansions of the historical field. In his 1828 review of Henry Neele's lectures on "The Romance of History" from the previous year, Macaulay links the technological and organizational achievements of the age with advances in historical method. He lists the factors that should be included in an analysis of the Civil War:

The austerity of the Presbyterian Sabbaths in the city, the extravagance of the independent preachers in the camp, the precise garb, the severe countenance, the petty scruples, the affected accent, the absurd names and phrases which marked the Puritans,—the valour, the policy, the public spirit, which lurked beneath these ungraceful disguises, the dreams of the raving Fifth-monarchy-man, the dreams, scarcely less wild, of the philosophic republican,—all these would enter into the representation, and render it at once the more exact and more striking.²²

A similarly optimistic anticipation of total historical knowledge is also laid out by the exemplary scientific historian Henry Thomas Buckle in his introduction to the *History of Civilization in England* (1857–1861). Here, he sets out an ideal pan-disciplinary expertise which draws on archaeology, philology, economics, statistical analysis, physical geography, climate science, chemistry, and demographics: “When we put all these things together, we may form a faint idea of the immense value of that vast body of facts which we now possess, and by the aid of which the progress of mankind is to be investigated.”²³ Philip Harwood, who provided the first translated excerpts from David Strauss’s *Das Leben Jesu* to an English readership in 1841, enthusiastically describes the future of the discipline in an essay of 1842:

The meanest and commonest things become historical: nothing is too lowly to furnish data for historic science. The successive aspects of national manners; statistics of education, disease and crime; every imaginable description of facts and figures—in general, whatever throws light on the domestic habits, the economical condition, the ways of living and doing of a people, is now asserting and establishing a place for itself in history.²⁴

Harwood even welcomes the coming “euthanasia of history in science,” but this science is not presented as an empirical one. “The modern student of humanity in history,” he writes, “must speculate and philosophise.”²⁵ Scientific methods of analysis were said to be compatible with the powers of imagination with which the modern historian could “recreate worlds out of the loose, chaotic elements furnished by chroniclers and bards.”²⁶ This description of the historian’s treatment of materials completes a circle that began with Carlyle’s “shoreless chaos” of the past, and demonstrates the endurance of the heroic persona of the historian as *he* confronted the totality of the past—a persona that persisted even as the study of history was repositioned as a scientific discipline.

Alternate histories, sometimes ironically, drew on these different models of knowledge. In *A Connecticut Yankee at King Arthur’s Court* (1895), Mark Twain’s modern protagonist vainly attempts to modernize chivalry out of existence after waking up in a notional sixth-century England. The novel’s dark humour reveals Twain’s doubts about the impossibility of resolving history into a clean narrative of progress, a stance which a recent study considers in light of Twain’s interest in philology.²⁷ Benjamin Disraeli’s implied claim in *The Wondrous Tale of*

Alroy (1833) that a messianic legacy in Jewish history, which is asserted in the literary culture of England, should be recuperated in the political realm, chimes with Carlyle's romantic sense of history as a "prophetic manuscript."²⁸ In a critique that is similar to and contemporary with Nietzsche's "untimely meditation" on the decline of history into a science, Auguste Blanqui's autodidact thesis on the infinity of worlds (*Eternity according to the Stars*, 1872) turns the materialist conclusions of spectrum analysis against the historical assumptions of a bourgeois culture which fetishizes scientific knowledge. "Untimely meditations" describes alternate history's defining conceit that placed it outside of chronological history and reflects the pluralistic nature of the category in the nineteenth century—diverse in context and intention, and provocatively responsive to the tumult of ideas regarding the techniques of historical knowledge.

The imagination of alternative versions of history was also untimely in that it did not correspond to periodizations of the related genres of the historical, utopian, and science fiction novels. Fredric Jameson has linked the decline of the historical novel in the mid-nineteenth and the rise of science fiction in the latter half of that century to a cultural logic (consistent with the description of history-writing as increasingly scientific), by which "the emergence of the new genre of science fiction as a form which now registers some nascent sense of the future, and does so in the space on which a sense of the past had once been inscribed."²⁹ Alternate histories were produced on either side of this mid-century transition, though they were, like both of these categories, "a structurally unique 'method' for apprehending the past as history."³⁰ Matthew Beaumont neatly distinguishes the historical perspective of the historical novel from the cognate category of utopian fiction: "If the historical novel transforms the present into the post-history of the past, the utopian novel transforms the present into the pre-history of the future."³¹ Alternate history also mediated relationships of past, present, and future by *altering* lines of historical descent and subverting historical methods. Beaumont's description can be modified for this study, leading to the formula: *The alternate history transforms the past into the pre-history of an otherwise unimaginable present.*

The five central chapters of this study correspond to the contexts which were productive of alternate histories and past-hypothetical thinking more generally. These include writing about Napoleon, revisionist accounts of antiquity, the idea of life on other planets, social

evolution in lost worlds, and transatlantic perspectives on the Old World and the New. Each chapter focuses on two or three full-length presentations of alternate history, which are analyzed in relation to the disciplinary and thematic contexts where the imagination of other histories repeatedly occurred, explicitly or implicitly. In Chap. 2, I start by discussing the unacknowledged ironies in Louis Geoffroy's *Napoléon apocryphe* (1836, 1841), which I contextualize in relation to the conflicting versions of Napoleon that circulated in partisan pamphlets and journalism, which drew parallels between him and earlier historical figures; I then return to Richard Whately's satirical essay (1819) in which Napoleon is claimed to be the invention of newspaper editors, before looking at Tolstoy's exploration of the philosophy of history in *War and Peace* (1869).

In Chap. 3, I concentrate on two works that use alternate history to reimagine, in very different ways, the legacy of antiquity for modern-day Europe. Benjamin Disraeli's early novel *The Wondrous Tale of Alroy* (1833) implants a messianic tendency in the political and cultural history of England, to be inherited by its author as a writer and politician. In *Uchronie (l'utopie dans l'histoire)* (1876), the philosopher Charles Renouvier describes an alternate history of Europe in which the emperor Marcus Aurelius constrains the power of the Christian Church in Rome, leading to the accelerated development of civilization in Europe without the catastrophic wars of religion. The contexts for that chapter are revisionist approaches to the study of classical history and, for Renouvier, the events of the Paris Commune which preceded the publication of *Uchronie*.

Chapter 4 examines the reverberations of the plurality-of-worlds debate and the imagination of variant versions of human civilizations on other planets. I focus on the flights of astronomical fancy of Thomas de Quincey, the American author and Unitarian minister Edward Everett Hale, the French astronomer Camille Flammarion, and the inveterate revolutionary Auguste Blanqui. I read their works, which date from the early to late nineteenth century, as attempts to mediate between the incursions of new techniques of astronomical knowledge (through evolutionary hypothesis and the analysis of light's spectral signature) and teleological beliefs about the Earth's history and destiny. These mediations led to speculative ideas about the universe and the possibility of variant civilizations that went far beyond the empirical evidence of the telescope.

In Chap. 5, I read *The Lost World* by Arthur Conan Doyle (1912) and *Herland* by Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1915) in relation to the importance of islands and other isolated geographical settings for evolutionary theories about species and social development, particularly for considering the “naturalness” of sex distinctions in the history of human civilization, and the possibility of alternative gender relations in the future.

The final chapter shows how alternate histories written in America in the late nineteenth century respond to the anxiety at this time that American “earliness” had come to an end, and that in its “lateness,” America would reproduce the history of the Old World. My readings of Mark Twain’s novel, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court* (1889), and the lesser-known *Aristopia: A Romance-History of the New World* (1895) draw on Frederick Jackson Turner’s “frontier thesis” and the ways in which American writers distinguish their cultural and literary identity from that of Europe. My brief conclusion considers the significant differences between alternate history in the nineteenth century and more recent uses of the format, and identifies the dissonance arising from incompatible historical timescales as the distinctive feature of the works studied here.

A few comments are necessary on the choice of terms used, as is a brief survey of their critical usage. “Alternate history” is the expression I choose to describe a narrative set in circumstances that history might have produced, which can be specified as an alternate history novel or story if presented as such. I also study instances of alternate-historical thought where possible worlds were implicitly or explicitly contemplated, for example in evolutionary theory’s descriptions of a world which “shimmer[s] with the reflections and images of all those other forms, attributes, and instincts, those that might have been and those that might yet be.”³² The more grammatical “alternative history” is increasingly common in literary-historical discussions, used for instance in Brian Stableford’s entry in *Science Fact and Science Fiction: An Encyclopedia* (2006). “Alternate” is preferred in *Brave New Words: The Oxford Dictionary of Science Fiction* (2007), which assigns primacy of usage to this term (the first recorded use is in *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction* in 1954).³³ One reason for my choice is that “alternative history” is also used to describe accounts which offer marginal perspectives normally excluded from histories of a subject.³⁴ “Alternative history” also

has been used to describe speculative fiction more generally, including texts which imagine unexpected *future* scenarios.³⁵ I am also guided by the fact that the most substantial studies of the category (discussed below), by Catherine Gallagher, Kathleen Singles, Gavriel Rosenfeld, and Karen Hellekson, all prefer “alternate.”

“Counterfactual” is a less problematic term but requires distinguishing from the category of “counterfactual history,” which is the historian’s practice of debating the consequences of a historical course of action and the consequences if it had been otherwise. Clear and workable boundaries between alternate and counterfactual histories are hard to establish, but the reader of the former tends to know that (s)he is being invited by a historian in *this* world to consider a “what-if” scenario and will be presented with the historian’s views about the likely consequences of the alteration. The first essay in Niall Ferguson’s collection of *Virtual History* is representative: “England without Cromwell: What if Charles I had avoided the Civil War?”³⁶ Alternate histories, at least modern ones, often depict the experience of historically minor characters’ lives in their altered settings; they are also written as if they are true, and the alternate history *novel* is one mode of this “as-if” presentation.

The distinction is anachronistic to my study of historical imaginaries, however, since neither format had yet solidified into a form that writers and readers were conscious of. Rather, as indicated already, examples of alternate-historical thought are found in a variety of disciplines and modes of writing. Back-projecting these categories into the nineteenth century leads to reductive readings of the texts in question. Richard J. Evans writes that “true counterfactuals [...] always involve drawing historical consequences, often far-reaching in nature, from altered *historical* causes.”³⁷ Implicit in this emphasis on “historical” consequences and causes is an insistence on counterfactuals being well researched and presenting plausible consequences. One extreme (and short-lived) form of plausible counterfactual history is “cliometrics.” In this category’s best-known example, Robert Fogel argues that the economic benefit of railway expansion had been overstated by using statistical analysis to compare America in 1890 with a hypothetical version of that year in which transportation was still limited to roads and waterways; he concludes that that the benefit of railways was only an additional 2.7% of 1890 gross national product.³⁸ Evans’s insistence on plausibility leads to a very partial analysis of the nineteenth-century works he discusses.

He labels Louis Geoffroy's *Napoléon apocryphe* "wishful thinking on the grandest possible scale,"³⁹ a description which neglects that work's dark ironies and absurdities—one example being Napoleon's discovery of unicorns, which are then put to work to meet the demands of "industry and luxury" (NA 246). This presentist bias also affects his reading of G. M. Trevelyan's essay "If Napoleon had Won the Battle of Waterloo" (1907), which Evans treats as a serious claim for the liberal consequences of the outcome of Waterloo, without registering its whimsical anomalies.

Other recent analysis of alternate-historical fiction also misses the character of earlier works. In *The World Hitler Never Made: Alternate History and the Memory of Nazism* (2005), Gavriel Rosenfeld claims that, apart from a few dispersed early experiments, "few alternate histories appeared until the 1960s."⁴⁰ The focus of his extensive work is the change over time in alternate histories' perspectives on the Nazi Holocaust. He argues that there has been a movement from alternate-historical novels which tend to reflect the extraordinary evil of the Holocaust, to more recent alternate histories of Nazism which "seem to indicate the emergence of an increasingly normalized view of the Nazi past within Western consciousness."⁴¹

For Rosenfeld, alternate histories (in the forms of film, novels, TV serials, and stories) are a reliable gauge of prevailing and changing attitudes towards these historical events, as is clear from the verbs he uses: these texts "*reveal* clear signs of the intensifying pace of normalization," "*indicate* the emergence of an increasingly normalized view," "*reflected* the pessimism of the era," and "*illustrate* the fading intensity of the fears and fantasies that originally inspired them."⁴² Their proliferation is said to be symptomatic of postmodern thought in their post-ideological resistance to determinism, willingness to blur historical periods and categories, and privileging of subjectivist or relativist approaches to historical knowledge.⁴³ They are misleading will-o'-the-wisps that make the work of historical knowledge harder: "Without evaluating the past on its own terms and by its own moral standards, we impose our own values upon the historical record and thereby risk misjudging and distorting it."⁴⁴ In contrast, writers of alternate histories in the nineteenth century adopted historical fabulation as a self-aware method of interrogating the reception of the past; for this reason, the texts reward an approach that treats them as more than passive indicators of contemporary historical attitudes.

At the time of writing, Kathleen Singles's book, *Alternate History: Playing with Contingency and Necessity* (2013), is the most recent full-length work on the subject. A monograph by Catherine Gallagher, *Telling It Like It Wasn't: The Counterfactual Imagination in History and Fiction*, is in press. Like Rosenfeld, Singles connects the practice of alternate history with "the postmodern tension between artificiality and authenticity," but, in contrast, infers a normative view of the *true* history from which imaginary narratives depart: "Rather than challenge our notions of history, or call into question our ability to know the past through narrative, they conservatively support the normalized narrative of the real past."⁴⁵ Again, this is simply not true of many of the examples of alternate-historical thought in the nineteenth century. While Singles's book is theoretically sophisticated and synthesizes a large body of scholarship on the category, its aim is the construction of a literary-theoretical framework that is adequate to a definition of alternate history and a description of the form's instances in the twentieth century.⁴⁶ Hilary P. Dannenberg has studied the functions of coincidence and counterfactuality in narrative fiction, but her analysis, like Andrew Miller's, focuses on how the suggestion that characters' lives might have turned out differently can enable a wider analysis of plot.⁴⁷ The emphasis on form means that alternate histories that appeared in very different nineteenth-century contexts are lumped together: in the space of three pages she surveys "P's Correspondence," "Hands Off," *A Connecticut Yankee*, and *It May Happen Yet: A Tale of Bonaparte's Invasion of England*, each of which is discussed in a separate chapter in this study.⁴⁸

Catherine Gallagher's analysis of alternate history does examine in greater detail examples that were produced or set in nineteenth-century history. Her three published articles on the subject relate to a Southern victory in the American Civil War (though the earliest example that she cites is Churchill's essay "If Lee Had Not Won the Battle of Gettysburg" (1930)), two novels of the 1950s and 1960s (by Ward Moore and Philip K. Dick), and alternative Napoleons.⁴⁹ She explains the difference between alternate histories and historians' counterfactuals by claiming that the former take a longer historical view of historical alterity and often imply a claim that "beneath the superficial causes of national events, there lay deeper forces impelling us in a certain direction."⁵⁰ In her essay on *The Man in the High Castle* and *Bring the Jubilee*, she argues persuasively that in these novels of the 1950s and 1960s, "their alternate worlds actually refer to our social reality," and that Dick's novel shows us

that “in some ‘essential’ way, the Allies lost the war.”⁵¹ Alternate history is able to embed claims about the shape and direction of history into a mode of fictional presentation, including the novel, and respond to very different historical questions than those enabled by the counterfactual-history essay’s focus on the causes and consequences that follow an alteration. Gallagher compares alternate histories to Walter Scott’s historical novels in their capacity to assume “the task of giving plot to history.”⁵² In doing so, and by applying conventional modes of historical explanations to fantastical imaginaries, they repeatedly endeavoured to strip history of its providentialist “plot,” whose naturalization as the dominant mode of interpreting the past as progress constituted an ideology of historical knowledge. The depiction of alternatives to the historical record was used, she argues (as I do), as a critical method for challenging this and other orthodoxies.

The cover image of this book is the painting *Sappho and Alcaeus* (1881) by Lawrence Alma-Tadema. The re-animation of figures from classical culture is one way in which its staging of history is a visual counterpart of the type of works examined here. Benjamin Disraeli and Charles Renouvier also revise the legacies of antiquity, and in Louis Geoffroy’s account of Napoleon’s universal monarchy, the Emperor excavates the (feminized) city of Babylon: “she felt her depths open and breathe, her roads struck again with rays of sunlight, and her valley reborn finally into the world” (NA 230). The composed attitudes with which Sappho and her followers respond to the male visitor also remind me of the inhabitants of Herland in Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s utopian novel; their lack of any feminine deference to the male intruders drives Terry to brutish violence and propels Vandyck into a possible future of sexual equality. In more general terms, the reciprocity of the gaze between Sappho and the poet Alcaeus—and the intensity with which the viewer contemplates their communication—exemplifies the nineteenth-century desire for total communion with the past. The axis of their mutual recognition forms a line as sharp as the horizon with which it is parallel. The historical subjects summoned to consciousness through the power of historical desire, here and in the texts studied, seem to gaze back in a distinctly modern way. Alternate history was a narrative technique which buckled as historical distance collapsed, and did so as new techniques of knowledge and writing introduced new timescales for natural, human, and planetary history.

One detail from the painting is worth mentioning: Sappho and her sisterhood listen to the poet Alcaeus on marble benches, which Alma-Tadema copied from the Theatre of Dionysus in Athens, but he changed the names from those of the recorded officials to the names of Sappho's followers. The past is altered in a way which brings the classical world into a new configuration. In a discreet way, the painting is a work of alternate history.

NOTES

1. My corpus of alternate history in this period extends earlier bibliographies, which are more literary-historical in scope, for instance, Barton C. Hacker and Gordon Chamberlain, "Pasts That Might Have Been, II: A Revised Bibliography of Alternative History," in *Alternative Histories: Eleven Stories of the World as It Might Have Been* (New York: Garland, 1986), 301–363; and "Uchronia: Oldest Alternate Histories," accessed November 1, 2009, <http://www.uchronia.net/bib.cgi/oldest.html>.
2. G. M. Trevelyan, "If Napoleon Had Won the Battle of Waterloo," in *Clio: A Muse and Other Essays Literary and Pedestrian* (London: Longmans, Green, 1913), 184–200; Joseph Edgar Chamberlin, *The Ifs of History* (Philadelphia: Henry Altemus, 1907), <http://archive.org/details/ifsof-history00chamuoft>.
3. Alexandre Dumas, *The Count of Monte Cristo*, trans. Robin Buss (London & New York: Penguin Books, 1996), 1036 (Dumas 1996).
4. Dumas, *The Count of Monte Cristo*, 1036.
5. Dumas, *The Count of Monte Cristo*, 150.
6. Hilary P. Dannenberg, *Coincidence and Counterfactuality: Plotting Time and Space in Narrative Fiction* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008); Andrew H. Miller, "Lives Unled in Realist Fiction," *Representations* 98, no. 1 (May 1, 2007): 118–134; Andrew H. Miller, "'A Case of Metaphysics': Counterfactuals, Realism, *Great Expectations*," *ELH* 79, no. 3 (2012): 773–796, doi:[10.1353/elh.2012.0022](https://doi.org/10.1353/elh.2012.0022).
7. Miller, "A Case of Metaphysics," 779.
8. Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press, 1995), 200.
9. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Routledge, 2001), 401.
10. Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 403.
11. Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 403.
12. Linda Dowling, "Roman Decadence and Victorian Historiography," *Victorian Studies* 28, no. 4 (Summer 1985): 603.

13. Thomas William Heyck, *The Transformation of Intellectual Life in Victorian England*, New edition (Chicago, IL: Lyceum Books, 1989), 148.
14. Norman Vance, *The Victorians and Ancient Rome* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 58.
15. Victor Shea and William Whitla, eds., *Essays and Reviews: The 1860 Text and Its Reading*, Victorian Literature and Culture Series (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 30.
16. Michael Carignan, "Analogical Reasoning in Victorian Historical Epistemology," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 64, no. 3 (July 2003): 462; Richard W. Schoch, "'We Do Nothing but Enact History': Thomas Carlyle Stages the Past," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 54, no. 1 (June 1999): 27.
17. Hayden V. White, "The Burden of History," *History and Theory* 5, no. 2 (1966): 125.
18. Rosemary Jann, *The Art and Science of Victorian History* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1985), 34.
19. Thomas Babington Macaulay, "The Romance of History," *Edinburgh Review* 47, no. 94 (May 1828): 340.
20. Ann Rigney, "The Untenanted Places of the Past: Thomas Carlyle and the Varieties of Historical Ignorance," *History and Theory* 35, no. 3 (October 1996): 348; Thomas Carlyle, "On History," in *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays Vol. II*, vol. 27, *The Works of Thomas Carlyle* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1896), 90.
21. Thomas Carlyle, "On History Again," in *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays Vol. III*, vol. 28, *The Works of Thomas Carlyle* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1896), 167.
22. Macaulay, "The Romance of History," 366–367.
23. Henry Thomas Buckle, *History of Civilization in England*, New edition, vol. 1 (London: Longmans, Green, 1867), 6.
24. Philip Harwood, "The Modern Art and Science of History," *Westminster Review* 38, no. 2 (1842): 366.
25. Harwood, "The Modern Art and Science of History," 353.
26. Harwood, "The Modern Art and Science of History," 370.
27. Matthew Giancarlo, "Mark Twain and the Critique of Philology," *ELH* 78, no. 1 (2011): 213–237, doi:[10.1353/elh.2011.0006](https://doi.org/10.1353/elh.2011.0006).
28. Carlyle, "On History Again," 90.
29. Fredric Jameson, "Progress versus Utopia; Or, Can We Imagine the Future?," *Science Fiction Studies* 9, no. 2 (July 1982): 150.
30. Jameson, "Progress versus Utopia," 153.
31. Matthew Beaumont, *Utopia Ltd.: Ideologies of Social Dreaming in England, 1870–1900*, Historical Materialism Book Series, v. 7 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 37.

32. Tina Young Choi, "Natural History's Hypothetical Moments: Narratives of Contingency in Victorian Culture," *Victorian Studies* 51, no. 2 (Winter 2009): 291.
33. Brian M. Stableford, *Science Fact and Science Fiction: An Encyclopedia* (Taylor & Francis, 2006), 19ff; Jeff Prucher, ed., *Brave New Words: The Oxford Dictionary of Science Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 4–5.
34. See Elijah Wald, *How the Beatles Destroyed Rock "N" Roll: An Alternative History of American Popular Music* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).
35. See Darko Suvin, "Victorian Science Fiction, 1871–85: The Rise of the Alternative History Sub-Genre," *Science Fiction Studies* 10, no. 2 (July 1983): 148–169.
36. I will not attempt to summarize the debates about the usefulness of historians' counterfactuals (which mostly date from after the period of this study); they have been dismissed by E. H. Carr as a "parlour game" and less generously by E. P. Thompson as "unhistorical shit." Niall Ferguson and Richard Evans both enjoy responding to these salvos in their extended discussion on the practice and its usefulness: Niall Ferguson, "Virtual History: Towards a 'Chaotic' Theory of the Past," in *Virtual History: Alternatives and Counterfactuals* (London: Papermac, 1998), 1–90; Richard J. Evans, *Altered Pasts: Counterfactuals in History*, Menahem Stern Jerusalem Lectures (Waltham, Massachusetts: Brandeis University Press/Historical Society of Israel, 2013).
37. Evans, *Altered Pasts*, 94.
38. Robert William Fogel, *Railroads and American Economic Growth: Essays in Econometric History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1964).
39. Evans, *Altered Pasts*, 6.
40. Gavriel Rosenfeld, "Why Do We Ask 'What If?' Reflections on the Function of Alternate History," *History and Theory* 41, no. 4 (December 2002): 92.
41. Gavriel Rosenfeld, *The World Hitler Never Made: Alternate History and the Memory of Nazism* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 23.
42. Rosenfeld, *The World Hitler Never Made*, 22, 23, 378, 380 (emphasis added).
43. Rosenfeld, *The World Hitler Never Made*, 6; Rosenfeld, "Why Do We Ask 'What If?'" 92.
44. Rosenfeld, *The World Hitler Never Made*, 393.
45. Kathleen Singles, *Alternate History: Playing with Contingency and Necessity*, Narrating Futures 5 (Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter), 7.

46. Another, less substantial study of the form, is: Karen Hellekson, *The Alternate History: Refiguring Historical Time* (Kent Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2001).
47. Dannenberg, *Coincidence and Counterfactuality*; Miller, "A Case of Metaphysics."
48. Dannenberg, *Coincidence and Counterfactuality*, 200–202.
49. Catherine Gallagher, "When Did the Confederate States of America Free the Slaves?," *Representations* 98 (Spring 2007): 53–61; Catherine Gallagher, "War, Counterfactual History, and Alternate-History Novels," *Field Day Review* 3 (2007): 52–65; Catherine Gallagher, "What Would Napoleon Do?: Historical, Fictional, and Counterfactual Characters," *New Literary History* 42, no. 2 (2011): 315–336.
50. Gallagher, "When Did the Confederate States of America Free the Slaves?," 54.
51. Gallagher, "War, Counterfactual History, and Alternate-History Novels," 62, 65.
52. Gallagher, "When Did the Confederate States of America Free the Slaves?," 61, 60. Gallagher's comments here appear to echo Lukács's notion of "critical realism," whereby the truest representation of history is not one that "sticks too closely to day-to-day events" (Lukács, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, 57).

Napoleonic Imaginaries

OTHER NAPOLEONS

After Waterloo, writers of alternate history were drawn to Napoleon just as narratives of Britain or America subjugated by Nazi Germany appeared after the end of the Second World War and the death of Adolf Hitler. Military history was the earliest field for counterfactual speculation, and when military campaigns were conducted in the name of one, pre-eminent historical figure (and the threat of invasion was also concentrated in the weight of a name), then what-if conjectures were formed around the possible trajectories of a single historical presence. Leo Braudy has studied the emergence of figures in the literature of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, whose power to menace the imagination was no longer based in theological fears but in secular ones, “as the order of God loses explanatory force.”¹ His discussion concerns fictional characters, but the description is entirely appropriate to Napoleon in terms of chronology and in his description of the “parade of world-historical hero-villains,” whose tyranny of the world invested them with “dark possibilities” that were now secular.² Napoleon also took on a complex set of identities during his career, given the many roles he adopted: military leader, first consul to the republic, liberator, emperor—and with uniforms for each. Excessive writing surrounded, reinforced, or challenged these identities, from the propagandist instrument of government, *Le Moniteur Universel*, to his opponents responding from England.

Napoleon was the first pre-eminent military figure whose career was accompanied by a print culture that was able to report his adventures with such speed. The wars with France meant that “the average Englishman [...] came to need newspapers as never before,” and print culture was shaped by the demands for rapid reporting and speed between an event and its elaboration in newsprint.³ One further circumstance that assisted the invention of Napoleonic possibilities was the partisan nature of his depiction in print culture. Factions for and against Napoleon represented (and exaggerated) entirely different aspects of him according to political orientation. The first full-length work of alternate history ever written was *Napoléon apocryphe* (1836), but its context was an existing culture of writing about Napoleon where contrasting definitions could be amplified and disseminated with new levels of speed and scale of production. Napoleon was *already* subject to mythical and magical associations in his own lifetime.

Louis-Napoléon Geoffroy-Château was the author of *Napoléon et la conquête du monde, 1812 à 1832: Histoire de la monarchie universelle*, which was published (anonymously) in 1836 and republished in 1841 as *Napoléon apocryphe, 1812–1832: Histoire de la conquête du monde et de la monarchie universelle*, this time under the name of Louis Geoffroy.⁴ Biographical information about the author is scarce. His father, Marc-Antoine Geoffroy-Château, took the second part of his surname to distinguish his family from that of his brothers according to the entry from *Biographie étampoise* of 1881, and had a successful career as a major in Napoleon’s army, achieving special distinction at the battle of Austerlitz.⁵ After his death following a duel at the age of 25, his son Louis-Napoléon became the *fillicul* of Napoleon, a term which translates as “godson” but is probably better understood as ward of the state. He became a judge of the Seine Tribunal and is remembered for his then-eccentric narrative of an undefeated Napoleon.

The implications of name and family history provoke rather than resolve questions about the intentions behind *Napoléon apocryphe*. In places, the idealized representation of Napoleon seems to have been an act of loyalty from a beneficiary of imperial protection; in others it appears to be a satirical work by an author who chose to publish the revised edition of the work under a name stripped of the word “Napoleon.” Geoffroy’s narrative departs from received history during Napoleon’s Russian campaign when, instead of waiting while Moscow burns, he and his army advance rapidly and achieve a series of victories

over the Russians before defeating the other European powers and eventually conquering the entire world. The description of a global empire is provided in extensive detail. The edition of 1841 contains 90 chapters, whose topics include legal institutions, political reformations, military conquests, archaeological discoveries, the condition of journalism under the Emperor, and advances in science and the arts. Despite its sophisticated ironies and its affinities with utopian literature, the alternate-historical account cannot satisfactorily be called a novel. It concludes after 350 pages with the death of Napoleon, the global monarch, in 1832.

Napoléon apocryphe was not, however, simply a continuation (at greater length) of the tradition of posing military counterfactuals and describing the imagined consequences. Geoffroy's work recreates the overheated atmosphere of news and hyperbole generated by the culture of writing about Napoleon in the press. In his account, when Napoleon finally subjugates all corners of the globe, it is the propaganda instrument, *Le Moniteur Universelle*, that proclaims universal monarchy to be "the destiny of the world" (NA 303). Geoffroy also chooses to describe the "confusion of victories" of the Napoleonic wars rather than an orderly imperial expansion; by doing so he reflects the experience of Napoleonic history for its contemporary subjects—and for us as later readers who are confronted with the excesses of the historical record. Geoffroy's rhetorical question, "as each day contained two or three battles to commemorate; and as capital cities submitted simultaneously, how could dates be assigned to each of these conquests?" (NA 109) is consistent with Mary Favret's description of the difficult modern reception of Napoleonic history: "For all its surfeit of dates, the set of events we call the Napoleonic Wars can drive linear history a little mad—or send it dreaming."⁶ Beneath its narrator's resemblance to a loyal Bonapartist, *Napoléon apocryphe* was a work that meditated on the unreality of the figure of Napoleon surrounded by a whirlwind of events and representations.

In 1914, Francis MacCunn expressed the historian's frustration in trying to understand the Emperor by studying contemporary newspaper writing: "The function of newspapers is ultra-writing; and ultra-writing, though it has its temporary uses, is valueless to the historian."⁷ This "ultra-writing" is extremely valuable for *this* study of "other Napoleons," and it was this feverish environment that was the true subject of Geoffroy's text.

By approaching Geoffroy's text in this way, a long history becomes apparent of other Napoleons in and outside of alternate-historical presentation, who emerged like apparitions from the cultures of "ultra-writing" about him, by French *émigrés* and in the rival accounts by his supporters and detractors. One plane of contestation was about who, from literature and mythology, could serve as models for Napoleon's career and historical significance. In the section below I discuss this atmosphere and some of the ways in which Napoleon was conjured into the popular imagination, for purposes as varied as stock market manipulation and literary criticism. A new addition to the category of alternate history also comes to light from this approach; Richard Whately's satirical pamphlet, *Historic Doubts Relative to Napoleon Buonaparte* (1819), argues that the accounts of Napoleon were so fantastical that he could only be the creation of newspaper editors in a conspiracy to increase circulation. This pamphlet was republished many times, each time with new material that disbelieved the latest episodes of Napoleonic history (including his death and, later, the rise of his nephew in French political life) until the final, posthumous edition of 1865, which proposed an explicitly counterfactual version of Napoleonic history: Moscow had never burned down at all.⁸ The chapter then reads *Napoléon apocryphe* against the grain of Paul K. Alkon's and Catherine Gallagher's interpretations by proposing that it be taken as a self-aware study of historical desire and the vacuity that lies at the heart of its fabulation. Its absurdist humour and reordered landscape of political concepts suggest an awareness of the impossibility of the historical desires that Napoleon provoked; as a later reader of speculative fiction writes, utopian wishes are often marked by "the hollowness or absence or failure at the heart of their most dearly fantasized visions."⁹

The final section of this chapter follows the persistent presence of counterfactual thinking about Napoleon. I look at the later passages of Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (1869) where Napoleon's supposed genius is claimed to be symptomatic of the most extreme example of erroneous historical assumptions about fate and providence, and at Isaiah Berlin's elaboration of these fragments in an essay on Tolstoy's philosophy of history that emphasizes the importance of counterfactualism (*The Hedgehog and the Fox* (1953)). I also consider late-nineteenth-century examples of imaginary Napoleons, including the alternate-history novel *It May Happen Yet: A Tale of Bonaparte's Invasion of England* (1899), an invasion narrative comparable to George T. Chesney's better

known “The Battle of Dorking: Reminiscences of a Volunteer” (1871). G. M. Trevelyan’s essay, “If Napoleon had Won the Battle of Waterloo” (1907), contributes to the adoption of counterfactual thinking for historians, and the battle’s recent bicentenary has prompted counterfactual reflection as a method for evaluating its historical significance.¹⁰ This range of materials roughly corresponds to the timeframe of the book. These variations and regenerations of the French Emperor (or democratic leader) give a sense of the many uses to which alternate history was turned in the long nineteenth century.

PHANTASMS AND HOAXES

The invention of phantasmal Napoleons was not limited to rewritten histories. He was a curiously indeterminate figure in his own self-presentation and induced something like hallucinatory perception. In 1817, Charles Phillips writes that “his fall, like his life, baffled all speculation. In short, his whole history was like a dream to the world, and no man can tell how or why he was awakened from the reverie.”¹¹ Napoleon’s reinventions may partly explain this disorienting effect: he had rapidly passed through the roles of military general, first consul to the republic and then emperor—with a full coronation that echoed the ceremonies of the Roman Emperors. In the last phase of his career, the “100 Days” of his escape from Elba and final military campaign that ended at Waterloo in June 1815, Napoleon carefully reinvented himself as a democrat by abolishing slavery, asserting citizens’ rights, and engaging Benjamin Constant to write a new Liberal constitution that was described in liberal England (for instance in the radical periodical *Cobbett’s Weekly Political Register*) as “essentially Republican.”¹² “Mr Walsh, of the United States” gave a contemporary description of the Emperor in his later years, which combined these roles: “He wore, on this occasion, a plain uniform coat, with the imperial insignia, and the cross of the legion of honour.” Walsh also claimed to have seen the Emperor “several times on horseback, almost always in full gallop”¹³—an image that recalls Jacques-Louis David’s iconic portrait of *Napoleon Crossing the Alps* (1801) and an event which struck the idealist philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel so forcefully outside Jena in 1806 that he described Napoleon as “this world-soul [...] who, concentrated here at a single point, astride a horse, reaches out over the world and masters it.”¹⁴ Contemporary descriptions of Napoleon repeatedly invoke a paradox by stressing his singularity as

a person, while turning to superlatives and abstraction, into which his identity overflowed.

Jean Duhamel has described the condition of legal uncertainty surrounding Napoleon when he was held in British custody aboard the HMS *Bellerophon* after surrendering himself to Captain Maitland on 15 July 1815 rather than turning himself over to the restored French monarchy.¹⁵ The “Fifty Days” of Duhamel’s title refers to the period between his surrender, during which he attempted to appeal to protection under British law, and his deportation to the island of St Helena. Napoleon’s appeal for asylum and protection by “the most generous of my enemies” in a letter to the Prince Regent repeated the tradition of Huguenots and aristocrats seeking protection in Britain from political turmoil in France, but was a further reinvention of his identity—this time as a stateless refugee.¹⁶ This attempt to insinuate himself into British life and law posed a legal problem for Lord Liverpool’s government. As hostilities with France were over, he could not be classified as a prisoner of war. Treating him as a citizen of France would require either his return to the restored Bourbon government or his prosecution for crimes committed against Britain and her subjects. Neither of these options appealed, for either would provide a rallying cause for liberals at home who had adopted Napoleon as the champion of progressive politics since his reinvention during the 100 Days of 1815.¹⁷ Until a solution could be found, Napoleon remained on board the *Bellerophon* in Plymouth Sound, within sight of British soil while afloat, but not subject to rights provided by British law. He would gratify the crowds of onlookers by standing for two hours on the afterdeck each day, and the sailors on board the *Bellerophon* assumed the duty of writing up in chalk his activities when he was not visible.¹⁸

His isolation was at times farcical. Capel Lofft’s liberal sympathies prompted him to intervene in a defamation case and attempt to deliver a writ to Lord Keith that would have required him to bring Napoleon to an English court; this led to a chase across Plymouth Harbour in rowing boats as Lord Keith successfully evaded Lofft’s attempts to serve the writ.¹⁹ Lofft was notoriously sympathetic to Napoleon, and his denial of Napoleon’s guilt in a letter of January 1815 makes very similar claims to those made satirically by Whately four years later: he denounced “those . . .ously lying papers, which have for these 15 years and more been the tools of our ministry, and the sources of delusion.”²⁰

The solution that placed Napoleon beyond the French and British legal systems was to define him as a supernatural being—or at least not an ordinary member of the human race. The Lord Chancellor, Lord Eldon, convened a team which concluded that “if Napoleon was neither a French subject nor a rebel, he could be disassociated from France altogether. He had been defeated in a legitimate war fought *against himself*.”²¹ Lord Liverpool enthusiastically accepted this legal position and suggested in response that Napoleon’s 100 Days had been carried out “as an outlaw and outcast; *hostis humani generis* [an enemy of mankind].”²² This judgement implied that Napoleon was an army unto himself, as if his corporeal frame contained field guns, cavalry, ships, and armies. Napoleon was indivisible from all the instruments of war he was able to unleash and was as a spectral, polysemous presence who had to be confined precisely because of all the forms he was capable of taking: republican, despot, conqueror, soldier. His removal to St Helena only reinforced controversy in Britain regarding his political identity and the justness of his punishment. Lord Liverpool’s prediction as to the effects of exile, that “being withdrawn so far from the European world, he would very soon be forgotten,” was mistaken.²³ When any return to Europe for a final act of disorder was no longer possible, Napoleonic identity took on a subjunctive mood; speculation as to what he *was* became reframed as all that he *might have been*—which required only a slight manipulation to be transformed into historical fantasies.

Another imaginary Napoleon (this time dead) was invoked for the purposes of financial speculation in the London Stock Exchange hoax of 1814, in which Admiral Lord Cochrane was implicated. The case demonstrated how the idea of Napoleon could be leveraged to distort financial markets. On 21 February, the price of government (“Omnium”) bonds rose on the reports of Napoleon’s death. The source of this information was a person calling himself “Du Bourg,” who appeared near Dover dressed in the military uniform of an aide-de-camp and claimed to be in the service of Lord Cathcart. He “leaked” the news of Napoleon’s death on the journey so that when he arrived in London, rumours were already circulating via financiers’ private information networks.²⁴ The conspirators’ plan, once the value surged but before the news was shown to be false, was to sell the bonds they had bought earlier at a lower price. In the end, the conspirators were caught and prosecuted; in Cochrane’s case this led to a long and expensive trial which eventually ruined his naval career.

In a nice set of coincidences, Du Bourg paid his way to London with “Napoleons”—a denomination of gold coin—in order to authenticate his story, and the spurious report of Napoleon’s death also invoked the commodity form of the emperor: “Bonaparte is dead, destroyed by the Cossacks, and literally torn into a thousand pieces as if they were fighting for gold.”²⁵ (Napoleon also figures as an untrustworthy and circulating commodity form in Conan Doyle’s short story “The Adventure of the Six Napoleons” (1905).) The Stock Exchange hoax was curiously *literary* in its structure and imagery; it relied on a metonymic circuit where gold coins authenticated a story about Napoleon who, when “torn” apart, spilled gold instead of viscera. The detail recalls the description of Dracula, another inscrutable character of mythic origin: when Jonathan Harker slashes through his coat with a knife, “a bundle of bank-notes and a stream of gold fell out.”²⁶ In a coda to this episode, Lord Cochrane, after his dismissal from the navy, went to South America where he played a vital (and profitable) role in the emancipation of Chile and Brazil. Richard Dale reports that the disgruntled Cochrane planned to stop at St Helena with the aim of liberating Napoleon and proposing him as a monarch to one of the soon-to-be-independent South American states.²⁷ The plan was prevented by bad weather but offers an excellent premise for a counterfactual departure: “If the weather had been fair on Cochrane’s voyage to Chile...”²⁸

The paradox of being an exceptional legal entity while at the same time circulating as a convertible source of value also applied in the conflicting accounts of Napoleon’s historical significance and the validity of comparisons between him and figures from literature and myth. Stuart Semmel argues, in language that recalls the legal position reached by Lords Eldon and Liverpool, that competing interpretations in Britain led to the perception “that Napoleon was unprecedented, a type unto himself, *sui generis*.”²⁹ Charles Phillips was also describing Napoleonic exceptionality when he referred to him in 1817 as “the man *without a model*.”³⁰ Of course, to assert singularity is also to invite comparisons, of which there were many, and the turns to history and literature were already tracing patterns of alternate-historical thought by nominating points from the historical past where the truth of his character could be established. Asserting historical parallels for Napoleon should be seen as part of the broader context of historiographical practice, where historical comparisons were consciously subordinated to political causes in the present.

Semmel shows that the ways Napoleon was written about by his supporters indicate a self-consciousness of historical interpretation and reveal a provocative historiographical ingenuity in radical political writing of the period, for example the delight in announcing after the death of Princess Charlotte in 1817 that a contender for the British throne was now Jérôme-Napoléon Bonaparte.³¹ The radicals' critique of the Tory government's support of monarchical rule took the form of unexpected historical comparisons between Napoleon and figures from British history, which exemplified an *ironic* historicity, characterized by playful engagement with the traditions and categories of history-writing. An example Semmel discusses is the claim by his supporters that Napoleon was comparable to William III, as he too represented the principle of popular rule laid down in the Glorious Revolution of 1688. By opposing Napoleon after his republican reinvention, they argued, the Tory government was opposing the *English* tradition of constitutional monarchy.³²

Geoffroy also plays this game from the other side in *Napoléon apocryphe* when he compares the conquest of England and Scotland to the arrival of William the Conqueror (NA 68). Monarchists at home likewise insisted on his Jacobin identity and tried to anchor him in the recent historical past. While liberal supporters proposed unexpected genealogical lines of affiliation between Napoleon and the heroes of English Whig history, monarchists denied the "legitimacy" of the associations by repeating rumours of Napoleon's bastard status—a key element of the "Black Legend"—and insisted on the original meaning of "legitimacy" as "born in wedlock" in order to assert the principle of hereditary rule.³³ *Napoléon apocryphe*, while participating in this type of comparison, also reflects on the distortions that history was subject to under the imperial sway, and how Napoleon seemed to subjugate the past, "forcing it to kneel at his feet" (NA 145). This reflexive mode of historical thought was the context for the earliest presentations of alternate histories about Napoleon. As Semmel writes, "the difficulty of classifying him would lead a good number of observers to turn their scrutiny to the very categories that he seemed to elude."³⁴

The literary canon also provided a resource of symbols and characters with which the historical affinities between the past and present could be configured and reconfigured. Byron anonymously published an "Ode to Napoleon Bonaparte" in 1814, which was rapidly republished in a second edition with authorship acknowledged. For the epigraph, Byron refers to a quotation from Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman*

Empire in order to place Napoleon in “a very ambiguous state, between an Emperor and an Exile.”³⁵ The first lines of the poem describe Napoleon’s condition as “a nameless thing / So abject—yet alive!”³⁶ Byron then provides a list of literary-mythological figures that he was like but not *quite* like: not exactly Lucifer, not quite a bloodthirsty Roman, similar to a lustful Spaniard, a little like an overthrown Jove or Babylonian ruler, not George Washington but more like Prometheus.

Another poem, also published in 1814 shortly after the exile to Elba, assumes the task of *disassociating* Napoleon from classical mythology; although the poem celebrates the “Heroes of other days,” rightfully honoured for their glorious deeds and celebration of war as sport, these values could not be attributed to Napoleon. The poet writes: “But thee, base man, no generous warmth inspires! / No virtue mingles with thy raging fires!”³⁷ Living in an age of Christian values, Napoleon is condemned by the poet to “The Curse of Cain”—in other words, he is treated as a literary anachronism: a pretender to classical greatness in a Christian age in which such martial disposition leads to criminal acts, and to which Christian judgements and punishment apply. These poems appear to have been motivated by a desire to disrupt any coherent lineage to the character of Napoleon, in particular to sever any line of descent from republican or Christian ancestry.

It is worth pointing out that both of these responses in verse were written in 1814 and that Byron’s poem was “falsified” by historical events. In a letter to Thomas Moore from 27 March 1815 (4 weeks into the 100 Days, when Napoleon had just reached Paris), Byron writes that he could “forgive the rogue for utterly falsifying every line of mine Ode.”³⁸ A resurgent Napoleon could no longer be described as “abject,” nor could the literary-historical comparison still be made to Cain, judged and marked. Napoleon’s capacity for reversal and reinvention, his resistance to finality and closure, exercised a critical and editorial power over texts that attempted to define his place in history. After the escape from Elba, Byron seems largely won over by Napoleon, to whom he decides to concede “talent and the most consummate daring.”³⁹ The Napoleonic myth(s) had become amenable to Byron’s self-image, and after 1815 he commissioned a replica carriage of the one Napoleon had abandoned at Waterloo, in which he toured Europe and composed poetry.⁴⁰

The 1814 poems’ attempts to diffuse and incorporate Napoleon into a field of mythic and literary allegory reflect the conflation of actual and

imaginary historical realms. Charles Phillips's most telling comment on the character of Napoleon is that his exploits seem to belong more to literature than the constrained realm of reality: "Scepticism bowed to the prodigies of his performances—romance assumed the air of history."⁴¹ Phillips does not make the more straightforward observation that history became romantic in character in the age of Napoleon; instead, he claims that the literary category of romance seem to seep into the nature of life and history. Later in this chapter we will see how this overflow of romance into the perception of history is transformed into the satirical premise of Richard Whately's *Historic Doubts Relative to Napoleon Buonaparte* (1819). For now, we can observe how the entanglement of history-writing and romance intensified around the figure and "genius" of Napoleon Bonaparte. Brian Hamnett has suggested that *imagination* was "the issue which, as eighteenth and nineteenth-century authors saw it, separated fiction from history."⁴² Responses to Napoleon, however, derived creative powers of historical imagination from Napoleon's indeterminacy, which could be explored in experimental cultures of writing—of which alternate history was one.

Just as political radicals constructed arguments by affirming alignments between Napoleon and figures from political history, Napoleon was evaluated by other critics who classified his career according to literary categories. In a pamphlet of 1812 that poses the question of whether Napoleon could be called "great," one author writes:

There remains a test of the approximation of a king or conqueror to true greatness, equally rigid, perhaps, and as universally applicable as any which I have already enumerated; which is, whether his life and actions will afford a proper subject for an heroic poem.⁴³

There is an appeal here to the essentialism of literary forms and an inflexible relationship between form and content. According to the argument, literary criteria stand above the messiness of history, and a sure way to evaluate contemporary politics is by judging to which classical literary genre the historical material belongs. This is to treat classical concepts and categories as stable, inherited forms with the capacity to interpret contemporary events. The author goes on to explain that "the subjects of the epic muse must necessarily be, hazardous enterprize, magnanimous character, generosity and unspotted fame, brilliant design and invincible resolution, the struggles, the sufferings, the success, and the

rewards of public virtue.”⁴⁴ Napoleon is deemed to fail *all* of these tests, and the appropriate manner of his representation is in other forms of art and thought:

The exploits of Bonaparte may glow upon canvas, may glitter in the tinsel of venal panegyric; they will afford much matter of reflection to the philosopher, and exercise the acuteness and the pen of the historian, but the poet who shall attempt their celebration, will have adopted an argument, which must ever be foreign to harmony and inauspicious to inspiration, ungrateful to his labours and sterile to his fame.⁴⁵

Philosophy and history are posed as realms of knowledge which are constrained in their adaptability to poetic expression. Both enable one to speak about the world, but the qualities of “harmony” and “inspiration” are granted by Calliope, muse of epic poetry, not Clio, the muse of history. If Napoleon cannot be composed and scanned into the requirements of epic poetry, that is unarguable proof of the failure of the subject—not the poet—to meet the requirements of the poetic form. As in *Buonaparte: A Poem*, discussed above, Napoleon is treated as a pretender to classical greatness in a modern world when such comparisons are inadmissible, anachronistic, and bound to fail by moral and aesthetic standards. According to this analysis, a literary work which extends epic or heroic modes to the history of the modern age must be a second-rate mode of representation that will always be subordinate to the achievements of classical epic.⁴⁶ As if on cue, alternate history appeared as just such a literary form, as an eccentric and minor prose format whose critique of historical judgement had a discordant effect on the concept of unbroken historical tradition and encouraged scrutiny of the means by which the past was received and interpreted. The idea of Napoleon stimulated his defenders in Britain to project him backwards into history and to make political arguments which were ironically filial in their rearrangements of past and present.

The opposition between values that were universal and timeless, and the fluctuations of historical interpretation also informed debates about the ability of journalism to describe the historical past without loss of truthfulness. The expansion of printed news at the time of the Napoleonic wars was not coincidental. With an increased appetite for news came anxieties about the truthfulness of its representation in mass publications that were aimed at a wide readership for commercial

reasons. Henry Stebbing's article, "Unpublished Lectures on Periodical Literature" (1828), identifies the difference between the writing of history, described as "the first branch [...] of what may properly be called the literature of a country," and contemporary journalism with "its squibs, its abuses of a public character, its flash paradoxes."⁴⁷ Similar reservations are expressed in Christian Johnstone's more circumspect article from *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine*, which observes a connection between "vendibility" and "untruthfulness."⁴⁸ He perceives a link between popular news journalism and fiction in the way that commercial imperatives satisfied an appetite for sensational news at the expense of the instructive truths that are associated with longer periods of historical reflection than the daily news cycle.

These commercial and stylistic pressures intensified during the Napoleonic Wars and the accelerations of print production to meet the demands of an expanding readership. Thomas Carlyle's famous idealization of history as a timeless "message, verbal or written, which all Mankind delivers to every man" is shaken by the machine-production of "forty-eight longitudinal feet of small-printed History in thy Daily Newspaper." The term "History" is sarcastically employed here by Carlyle, for even from forty-eight miles of newsprint, "there may not be the forty-eighth part of a hairsbreadth that will turn to anything."⁴⁹ In Richard Whately's pamphlet, the doubtfulness of journalistic accounts of Napoleon's adventures permits the alternate-historical hypothesis that these exploits could only belong to literature.

HISTORIC DOUBTS: A SCEPTICAL ALTERNATIVE

By declaring that Napoleon had never existed, Richard Whately takes the critique of journalistic exaggeration into the territory of alternate history. Whately held a chair of political economy at Oxford before becoming Anglican archbishop of Dublin in 1831, and over his long career wrote on subjects as diverse as scripture, emigration, household management, logic, weather, natural science, and political economy; he also produced textbooks for the Irish national school system.⁵⁰ To this list should be added *Historic Doubts Relative to Napoleon Buonaparte* (1819), which ran to 12 editions, the final of which appeared (posthumously) in 1865.⁵¹ Though it ostensibly discusses Napoleon and newspapers, and is certainly a piece of whimsy, it is also a rebuttal of Hume's sceptical treatment "Of Miracles" in *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*

(1748). Whately transposes Hume's critique of scriptural orthodoxy to the present day by arguing that newspapers are similarly unreliable accounts, and readers should therefore conclude that Napoleon—like miracles—is more plausibly explained in terms of the motivations of those who have invented the historical record. Whately concocted another piece of apocrypha under the pseudonym “Rev. Aristarchus Newlight,” which presents the pre-history of America (“Ecnarf”) and a great tribal leader (“Noel-Opan”); read backwards, the names reveal that Whately wished to mine the recent history of France and Napoleon still further. The title of the work identifies it as a companion piece to *Historic Doubts* and again satirizes modes of historical interpretation.⁵² For a pamphlet reprinted so many times, *Historic Doubts* seems to have attracted relatively little contemporary attention. An 1831 review of a different work by Whately in the *Athenaeum* mentions *Historic Doubts* in passing but does little more than describe it as a “*jeu d'esprit*,” adding that “if not a very bright piece of wit, it was a very long one.”⁵³ *Historic Doubts* is one of the works named in the title of a review article in the *Edinburgh Review* of 1849 on scepticism and faith in contemporary philosophy, but barely receives a footnote.⁵⁴

In the preface to the fifth, 1833, edition, Whately denies that his long essay is merely in jest and insists that those who criticize his logical argument fail to adequately explain “the grounds of their own conviction.”⁵⁵ It should, at least, be taken as serious fooling. The scant recent scholarship on the text is also inclined to take it more seriously. Lois J. Einhorn refers to a recent re-publication of the text and summarizes its editor's interpretation that “*Historic Doubts* is not a *jeu d'esprit*, but a serious argument showing that boundless skepticism is just as problematic as boundless credulity. [...] By ironically reducing Hume's position to absurdity, Whately attempted to show that the Scriptures contained valid historical evidence.”⁵⁶ *Historic Doubts* is also discussed in Mark Phillips's article on “Distance and Historical Representation,” and is again treated as a piece of writing whose principal object is the defence of Christian faith in the face of Humean scepticism.⁵⁷ The text, in other words, has attracted two main readings: one as a piece of whimsy, and another as a philosophical defence of Christian faith in the authority of scripture. I suggest that there is also a seriousness of thought behind the fanciful claim that Napoleon never existed, in its recognition of the capacity of print culture to transform Napoleon into a fantastical figure of the imagination. To provoke this reflection, Whately poses an alternate-historical

argument in the form of a conspiracy theory: Napoleon never existed, and the gullible public believe in a false image of the world which has been sold to them by those with a vested interest in maintaining the deception.

Whately's ironic argument is that although other historical figures may have had as many events attributed to them, none has been assigned so many "dissimilar characters" (*HD* 8). This brings to mind the indeterminate, equivocal quality that Napoleon acquired by the latter stages of his career, but it was the behaviour of newspapers which Whately held primarily responsible for the fabrication of the myth of Napoleon.

Most persons would refer to the *newspapers* as the authority from which their knowledge on the subject was derived; so that, generally speaking, we may say it is on the testimony of the newspapers that men believe in the existence and exploits of Napoleon Buonaparte. (*HD* 15)

The pamphlet includes references to Hume's essay "Of Miracles," and the assertion of Napoleon's non-existence is an application of Hume's argument that a judicious reader should be sceptical of any fact "which the testimony endeavours to establish [and] partakes of the extraordinary and the marvellous."⁵⁸ For Hume, the object of scepticism is not the possibility of miracles themselves, but the credibility of "these wonderful historians" whose descriptions should be questioned by rational individuals.⁵⁹ By transposing this argument onto journalism, Whately replaces these clerical historians with their secular, modern equivalents of newspaper editors and journalists. Just as the witnesses to the miracles might have been motivated, Hume suggests, by a belief in the good of the Church or personal vanity, newspapers have a commercial interest in the circulation of Napoleon's adventures, and despite their mutual antagonism, dare not expose each other's lies (*HD* 19). Hume's essay does not extend its scepticism to the more recent historical record but, intriguingly, it does contain a counterfactual proposition: "But suppose, that all the historians, who treat of ENGLAND, should agree, that, on the first of JANUARY 1600, QUEEN ELIZABETH died."⁶⁰ Counterfactual propositions, it seems, are closely related to the sceptical temperament.

Whately points to the various uses to which Napoleon was put by politicians, recalling the conflicting appropriations of him by liberals and monarchists in England, which is discussed in the section above. Hume's argument neatly applies to the conflicting identities that Napoleon

generated: from the “contrariety of evidence,” Hume writes that “we entertain a suspicion concerning any matter of fact, when the witnesses contradict each other.”⁶¹ These distortions of current affairs may have been a consequence of modern journalism in general, but Napoleon’s military adventures were so numerous and sudden that newspapers struggled to communicate a full and accurate picture of events; the profusion of battles that (to recycle a quotation) “can drive linear history a little mad—or send it dreaming.”⁶²

To take Whately’s critique of newspaper culture seriously does not require overlooking the irony on which the satire—the reduction to absurdity of Hume—depends. It would be wrong to infer that Whately sets out to dispute the historical existence of Napoleon, but it is not reading against the grain to discover an analysis of how a surplus of written accounts and the manner of their writing rendered Napoleon an incredible and hyperbolic figure whose apprehension could be compared to the consumption of romance literature, uncritically by the credulous, and sceptically by those with more refined taste and judgement:

All the events [in Napoleonic history] are great, and splendid, and marvellous; great armies,—great victories,—great frosts,—great reverses,—“hair-breadth ’scapes,”—empires sub-verted in a few days; everything happened in defiance of political calculations, and in opposition to the *experience* of past times; everything upon that grand scale, so common in Epic Poetry, so rare in real life; and thus calculated to strike the imagination of the vulgar, and to remind the sober-thinking few of the Arabian Nights. (*HD* 30–31)

That sober readership were, Whately tells us, able to distinguish between the historical past and its embellishment in literature, in texts such as *The Arabian Nights*, which mediate between a notional past and a modern readership via a complex process of editing and translation.⁶³ The reference to epic poetry repeats doubts, outlined earlier, about the possibility of recuperating a classical legacy in the contemporary age except as pastiche. Whately suggests that modern renewals tend to be populist, cliché-ridden (“hair-breadth’scapes”), and of dubious authenticity. His italicization of “experience” may have been a reference to Hume’s argument for empiricism that he was satirizing, but it also asserts a distinction between the complex reception of history (“past times”) and the realm of experience. Charles Phillips’s comment, quoted already, that during Napoleon’s reign, “romance assumed the air of history,” can be applied

to Whately's satirical argument. It was not the case that Napoleon's exploits recalled literature, but that they *were* literature: fictions accepted uncritically as historical truth.

Historic Doubts maintains that Napoleon was an invention not of the French, but of the English. The story of Britain's glorious defeat of the French tyrant was simply too flattering to its narrators to be true and must be an invention of British newspaper editors (in league with government). Once again, the production of these falsehoods is described as a debased form of a classical inheritance—epic transformed into populist entertainment:

If a story had been fabricated for the express purpose of amusing the English nation, could it have been contrived more ingeniously? [...] Bonaparte's exploits seem magnified in order to enhance the glory of his conquerors; just as Hector is allowed to triumph during the absence of Achilles, merely to give additional splendour to his overthrow by the arm of that invincible hero. (HD 45)

The republications of *Historic Doubts* allow Whately to argue that the posthumous history of Napoleon is also an invention of the conspiracy between the British government and its subservient newspaper men. In the postscript to the third edition he suggests that the character of Napoleon was killed off as a consequence of his unmasking of the Napoleonic myth; it was Whately himself who had "*killed* Napoleon Buonaparte" (HD 55). The ninth-edition postscript mocks the credulity of those who believe that the bodily remains returned to Paris correspond to their mythical owner, and furthermore claims that the ceremonial act was designed to bury Napoleon once and for all and prevent any future resurrections of the legend (HD 61). In the postscript to the eleventh edition (1852), on hearing of Louis Napoleon's accession, Whately throws up his hands in mock despair at the absurdity of French "history," whose authors repeat a familiar drama over and over with the same characters: always starring a "popular leader of superior ingenuity, who becomes ultimately supreme ruler, under the title of Dictator, Emperor, King, President, or some other [...], *Scene*, Paris" (HD 64). Each new Napoleonic event, even death, could be integrated into the contrarian thesis of Napoleon's non-existence.

Whately adds a final postscript to the twelfth edition of *Historic Doubts* (1865), in which he presents an account of an American

traveller's journal from 1812, apparently discovered in a New Orleans newspaper. The extract finally resolves the mystery of the destruction of Moscow by fire in 1812, an event that the French and Russians both denied causing.

It is above forty years that men have been debating the question:—Who were the parties that burned the city of Moscow?—without ever thinking of the preliminary question, whether it ever was burnt at all. And now at length we learn that it never was.⁶⁴

The “discovery [...] which startlingly contradicts the historical relation of one of the most extraordinary events that ever fell to the lot of history to record” is nested within a chain of accounts: a New Orleans newspaper reports a story from another, in which the journalist meets a Senator, who heard the account during his travels in Russia.⁶⁵ As throughout *Historic Doubts*, Whately makes use of the uncertainty that accompanied modern (global) news circulation in order to make assertions about the world that contradicted received history. What is different about Whately's final postscript, however, is that he asks his readers to imagine a specific counterfactual scenario rather than simply to take pleasure in the perverse consequences of unbridled scepticism. To put it another way, the main text of *Historic Doubts* alters history only by “correcting” a mistaken impression about the recent past; the postscript to the final edition differs in that it makes the explicitly counterfactual claim that Moscow never burnt down. The destruction of the city by fire is also the moment where Geoffroy's alternate-historical narrative of 1836 departs from received history. Geoffroy's may have been the first unequivocal expression of an alternate history, but this earlier moment of counterfactual thought was itself the culmination of a tradition of thinking sceptically about representations of Napoleon and his historical significance. The origins of alternate history in the nineteenth century lay in the hyperbolic print culture that surrounded the career of Napoleon, rather than in affirmations of what he might plausibly have achieved.

NAPOLÉON APOCRYPHE: “THIS IMMENSE REALITY”

At some point, a previous reader of the copy of *Napoléon apocryphe* available at the British Library added a handwritten note on a blank page inside the cover:

The dream which has passed through the mind of the author of this book as to the final subjugation of England, & its reduction to the condition of a French province, finds its parallel in the speculations of an earlier English writer, whom I believe to be one Samuel Madden, D. D., one of whose productions is entitled, "The Reign of George VI." London, 1763.

It is encouraging to discover a note from a fellow reader of a relatively obscure work, even if anonymous and undated. In this case, he or she classifies it among other works of speculative fiction that conceived a time when England was conquered by France. The annotator is not concerned with the different temporal settings: *Napoléon apocryphe* (1836) departs from the historical record in 1812 whereas the work by Madden (published in 1899) speculates a possible future. (The full title is *The Reign of George VI, 1900–1925: A Forecast Written in the Year 1763.*) This assimilation of an alternate history located (and locked) in the past into a category of futurism has persisted in readings of Geoffroy's and other alternate histories. Paul K. Alkon, one of the few critics to have written about *Napoléon apocryphe* at any length, reads it alongside Louis Mercier's *L'An 2440* (1770) and states: "I want to stress that the uchronia of alternate history, from its inception in Geoffroy's book onwards, easily accommodates implicit or explicit visions of possible futures."⁶⁶ My reading of this text makes its pastness the key to understanding the irony of the novel, which by being historically closed is admissible neither as a utopian delineation of a desired future, nor as a precautionary tale of what might happen if certain forces go unchecked. The unachievable nature of the fantasy suggests that its motivation was something other than the fulfilment of a wish.

The preface to *Napoléon apocryphe* alerts us to the possible irony of its presentation. Its author expresses sadness that "it is one of humanity's fatal laws that nothing attains its goal" and asks the reader whether, in the face of such disappointments, "would man not have the right to take refuge in his thoughts, in his heart, in his imagination, to compensate for history, to conjure the past, to touch the desired goal, to attain possible greatness?" (NA i–ii). Paul Alkon identifies these regrets as the author's, whom he describes as a "nostalgic Bonapartist."⁶⁷ Catherine Gallagher also interprets Geoffroy's work as a better, fulfilled version of the career that Napoleon should have achieved: "His history is the just history, the history proper to an unswerving Napoleon."⁶⁸ Richard Evans describes it as "wishful thinking on the grandest possible scale."⁶⁹ Geoffroy-Château

was made a ward of Napoleon after the death of his father, but that is not a reason to interpret the book as an idealization of Napoleonic rule—and its increasingly ominous politics suggest otherwise. Rather, I read the book as a reflection on the excesses of the Napoleonic myth; unlike Whately's satirical manoeuvre of interpreting the myth *as a myth*, Geoffroy creates the persona of a nostalgic Bonapartist whose impossible fantasy is a study of how such myths engendered impossible historical longings in the individual, a *douleur exquise* whose vain delineations of fulfilment are an outline of a sickness that distorts political and historical thought. The final words of the preface confess the idolatry: "Thus, the sculptor who has finished his statue and sees in it a god, kneels and worships" (NA ii).

Geoffroy's narrative peels away from the historical record shortly after the destruction of Moscow by fire in 1812. Rather than delaying for a month outside the city, Napoleon continues on his campaign. There is a decisive victory over the Russians and English at Novgorod, and Napoleon's armies overwhelm all their enemies except for a temporary setback against the Turkish army. This discussion is not concerned with whether these military encounters are plausible; despite its tables, lists, and statistics recording Napoleon's conquests, there is very little time spent by the author to represent these hypothetical encounters persuasively. The victories are simply recorded. A more pressing question, by implication, that the book asks of the reader is whether these outcomes are coherent as historical wishes. It is important to recognize the hyperbolic and even absurd quality of the scenarios that develop in the imaginary account. The narrative operates at first within a framework of realism, suggested through the detailed accounts of events and their consequences, whose accumulation leads to a breakdown in plausibility—which gives way to surreal and grim political seriousness. An early hint of this darker tone is when Poland is liberated from Russia and given her own kingdom; the celebrating Poles fall into a "silent stupor" of disappointment when Napoleon makes it clear that Poland will, however, be subject to Napoleonic oversight like his "other children" (NA 15). It is an inattentive reading of the text that does not take notice of such reservations that accompany Napoleon's glorious accomplishments.

At the close of Book I, Napoleon is reconciled with his brother Lucien, whom both our and the alternate history record as the more convinced republican of the two. This is shortly after Napoleon's conquest of the Iberian peninsula, and on being offered the kingdom of

Portugal among other favours, we are told that “Lucien felt the last glimmers of his democratic opinions extinguished before these magnificent offers” (NA 55).

It would be a mistake to assume a Liberal perspective on the part of the author and his intended readers just because the affirmation of totalitarian rule leaves *us* feeling uneasy. Geoffroy does not choose to redeem Napoleon at Waterloo after his republican self-reinvention; instead, *Napoléon apocryphe* breaks free from recorded history when Napoleon is still in his high-imperial phase, which it takes to its glorious conclusion. In her forthcoming monograph, *Telling it like it Wasn't: The Counterfactual Imagination in History and Fiction*, Catherine Gallagher interprets Geoffroy's tale as one which fulfils Napoleonic potential as an aesthetic work of “poetic justice”;⁷⁰ Alkon makes a similar distinction between the history of the real world and its ideal realization when he claims that the novel does present “the ideal society,” but it is a Platonic ideal rather than a realistic outcome.⁷¹ He is able to respond to the fantastical elements of the novel, such as the discovery of unicorns, by reading this as a presentation of Napoleon as “a magician who transforms legends into reality.”⁷² The implicit alteration of the laws of physics and geometry is proof of the increasingly fantastical realm in which the narrative operates; cures to all known illnesses are discovered, and a child in this utopian era manages to square the circle (NA 329). Other discoveries are more macabre, however: as part of the imperial project to conquer all areas of knowledge, “dissections without number are carried out upon living beings,” which enable medical knowledge to penetrate the secrets of life “so that the first moments following impregnation and the last moments before death could be observed” (NA 131).

At times in the narrative, the messiness of our world and our history breaks through into this platonic plane of ideal justice. Crossing the Atlantic, Napoleon passes St Helena (his final prison in our history), at which point “the Emperor paled, a cold sweat suddenly spread and shone across his face; one would have said that an unknown danger, or a frightful apparition had come to chill his spirit and his blood” (NA 264). A year later, we are told, he will send an explosives team to blow up the island. After conquering South America and returning to Europe, another apparition looms into view, this time of the Emperor himself.

It was him: his historic head stood above the summit of the mountain; he seemed to have his arms crossed on his chest and be sitting upon a rock.

This apparition appeared to be more than thirty leagues distant when the crew recognized with admiration the image of Napoleon. Some fearful and superstitious young sailors approached him and asked if this was not the rising sun which had remained behind the ship to project and fix in the firmament the immense shadow of Napoleon. The Emperor himself did not know what to think, his heart leapt with a supernatural joy; it seemed certain that here was something unearthly, which could well be a doorway [*transition*] from this lower world, of which he had had his fill [*dont il avait déjà assez*], towards a world beyond of which he dreamed. (NA 268–269)

I quote this long passage because it conveys the sophisticated doubling of worlds and careful manipulation of the reader. After the “apparition” of Napoleon’s actual fate that the island of St Helena intimates, the reader is here set up to recognize the seated figure of the emperor on an island-rock as another incursion of our history and Napoleon’s carceral fate into the imagined one. Napoleon’s anticipation that this is a doorway to a higher “world beyond” is bathetic, for the narrative is *already* set in a world of fulfilled wishes and a global monarchy. This is deliberate misdirection by Geoffroy; it turns out that the island is Tenerife, and the adoring population of Europe has carved an enormous bust of their beloved Emperor during his five years of absence. Instead of being a haunting presence of the persistence of known history, the sculpture reveals the book’s movement into ever-more dreamlike registers.

These porous historical dimensions do not add up to a straightforward opposition between the historical and the real. Alkon notes that, in this tale of Napoleonic success, “there could hardly be a more damning critique of Napoleon’s actual conduct during the Russian campaign.”⁷³ This is true, but the interaction of worlds—in particular the deferment of total fulfilment—also stages the curiously insatiable nature of historical desire; the text constructs a tantalizing vision for the Bonapartist reader who is not satisfied with a world republic and continues to dream of a “world beyond” which, when realized, rebounds against the intentions of the dreamer and turns its central figure into an unstoppable force. We are told that in this glorious imaginary, “the people were no more [...] than the shadow of this immense reality, *Napoleon*” (NA 189). Such authority cannot be meant to be entirely desirable when onlookers at his triumphal processions spontaneously expire from excess of joy, exclaiming “Vive l’empereur!” as their last rapturous words (NA 272). Napoleon returns to the town of his birth and weeps tears of happiness when Colonel

Fesch tells him it has been razed so that no further history should dilute its Napoleonic association. "Sire, if only you could have seen the universal joy with which we left the homes of our fathers! With what enthusiasm we aided their destruction!" (NA 275). These sentiments can hardly be taken at face value.

One moment of comical exaggeration occurs when Napoleon comes face to face with a lion. The beast devours the Emperor's horse, but is stopped in its tracks by the imperial stare. Napoleon then gazes at it tenderly, with "caressing and voluptuous eyes," at which point the animal rolls over and the two caress each other like lovers while Napoleon considers how to free himself from this undignified situation (NA 241). Elsewhere the laughter is darker. In one chapter, the subjugated kings dare to query an imperial command; in response, and after a violent tantrum, Napoleon goes to the window and summons a passing policeman, whom he declares king of Scotland and Ireland. The new monarch is a loyal but unsophisticated ex-soldier who has difficulty understanding that he does not need to report back to the police barracks for orders. Napoleon repeatedly fails to convey the significance of his new position, at which point, we are told, "they fell silent; the Emperor held his head in his hands" (NA 141). The disturbing end to this episode is that the "soldier-king" is found dead, having stabbed himself through the heart with his own bayonet.

At moments such as this, the universal monarchy feels distinctly dystopian, as it is surely meant to. When Napoleon's global dominion is complete, General Oudet confronts Napoleon in a private meeting and accuses him of "universal despotism," before killing himself (NA 311). Five fellow malcontents commit suicide at Oudet's graveside, leading the narrator to comment: "It was the last phalanx of free men, and there remained nothing on earth, nor men nor words, to express the idea of liberty" (NA 313). The suicides of Oudet and his followers are said to represent the extinction of the concept of liberty, the most explicit example of the work's unease, which intensifies as Napoleon's rule extends to the entire globe. It is not only liberty which becomes unintelligible in the universal monarchy; the whole terrain of political concepts is emptied:

Politics was only a word without value and without meaning where there exists a universal and total power; [...] in a world so constituted in a single government and with such a power, the word "politics" was no more than a nonsense. (NA 321, 322)

I am not satisfied with Alkon's verdict on this strikingly dark moment; he notes the Orwellian transformation of language, but suggests only that the author compels the reader to measure the loss of ongoing wars against these losses. "Is peace a fair trade for liberty? To his credit, the nostalgic Bonapartist did not evade this question."⁷⁴ To my mind, the Napoleonic alternate history asks no such question between the incommensurable planes of a historical fantasy and political concepts in our world where "nothing attains its goal." Edward Everett Hale reviews the work favourably in 1842 and also interprets it as a form of exemplary instruction as to what civilization could achieve "where human progress is permitted to take its full course unchecked by the million obstacles which really obstruct its passage." He infers a sentimental moral in the work: when Napoleon's daughter Clementine dies of fever, the Emperor learns "the insufficiency of the empire of the world."⁷⁵ The lesson in Geoffroy's book is more carefully directed at the reader who has indulged in political-historical fantasies than Hale's interpretation permits. Its instruction is through the engagement of the reader's desires, but the subject—the excess of Napoleonic culture—is collective rather than personal. Only once is the author's own history referred to: in a rare moment of crisis, Napoleon laments the absence of a loyal friend: "If only Geoffroy were here" (NA 197). The initials given, "M. A.," correspond to those of Geoffroy-Château's father, Marc-Antoine, whom the author has chosen not to resuscitate.

Napoléon apocryphe examines the politics of history explicitly. At the start of Book I, Napoleon sees Moscow (the city where this account will turn away from received into imaginary history), which is compared to Jerusalem and described as:

this city, with its thirty-two districts, its thousand clocks, its golden cupolas, its oriental, indian, gothic and Christian spires; immense city, undulating between the many hills on which it rests, like a caravan of all the peoples of the world, who had halted there and pitched their tents. (NA 2)

At this point in the narrative, Napoleon has one foot in the historical record and another in the alternate trajectory of human fulfilment that, for the narrator, fantasies of Napoleon in this world have generated. Moscow, envisioned as it is here, stands on the other side of a utopian threshold, and the city is presented as a microcosm of all the history of the world—with its religions, architectures, times, and

wandering peoples. This imaginary Napoleon initiates a number of historical and archaeological projects that illustrate how the uchronic narrative subsumes the past. Scholars of legal history are tasked with establishing a genealogy of every nation's laws to confirm the universality of the Napoleonic code. All the libraries of Europe are put at the disposal of a research committee, which is called the "higher council of the revision of laws." The narrator observes that "Roman law was not dead, it was reanimated in the studies of the wise juridical historians," and Geoffroy makes clear that the "reanimated" past affirms the political order of the present (NA 147). The title of this chapter is "Legislative Revision," and the meaning of "revision" is ambiguous: is this research exercise intended to modify and improve French law, or is it a retrospective organization of legal history to validate the universality of the Napoleonic code? A declaration by the emperor suggests the latter: "Napoleon said 'Everything in France must date from me' and he enforced this point by refining [*comprimer*] the past and constraining it [*refouler*] before him at his feet" (NA 145). Geoffroy's interest here seems to be in the violence that history-writing entails when it takes this form of subjugating the past to the needs of the present.

Napoleon's strategic adoption of Roman dress is well known, but his letters reveal that, as in Geoffroy's narrative, the relationship to the past was not one of deference. In a letter to Schönbrunn in 1809, he discusses the proposed inscription for the Arc de Triomphe. Not only does he insist that the language should be French, "the most cultivated of all modern tongues," but he wishes to qualify the relationship with imperial Rome to establish "what difference there is between their history and ours."⁷⁶ The suggestion is that the classical past was an anticipation of later fulfilment, an aspiration that *Napoléon apocryphe* fulfils. Napoleon in our history made the distinction clearly enough: "The Emperor's title is Emperor of the French. He does not want any name carrying alien associations—neither Augustus nor Germanicus, nor Caesar."⁷⁷

Both the dead and the mythological are put to work in the service of this alternate, parodic history of Napoleonic propaganda. The unicorns which are discovered and presented to the Emperor are transported to France, where they are bred and put to work. In Africa, military victories are barely mentioned, and more attention is given to describing Napoleon's conquest of the past: "Find me Babylon," he demands of his team of geologists and historians, which includes Alexander von Humboldt and Barthold Georg Niebuhr (NA 223). The subsequent

excavation of the city and its legendary tower also instrumentalizes the past to the service of the present. “Babylon, cleared from the mass which had covered her for thirty centuries, returned to the air; she felt her depths open and breathe, her roads struck again with rays of sunlight, and her valley reborn finally into the world.” The discovery is not only archaeological; by engaging an army of workers to excavate the city, it is returned to the condition of a thriving metropolis, “as if she had found her population of former times in the millions of men who reseeded and resuscitated her” (NA 229–230). Geoffroy makes it clear what type of “history” this alternate-historical project draws upon for sustenance; it is not the latter-day seats of empires such as Rome, Constantinople, or even London; these have kept their “grandeur” but “offered nothing new to Napoleon’s view or politics” (NA 294). America, in this dream, is said to have become “decrepid” already “and tended towards becoming an absolute ruin” (NA 302). This immense Napoleon who was the projection of ideals that conjoined myth and history is drawn in Geoffroy’s narrative to discover and conquer the cities of legend.

Of course, alternate history could be used as a format for expressing genuine regrets for the failure of Napoleon, which seems to have been the pattern of Joseph Méry’s story, “Histoire de ce qui n’est pas arrivé” (1854).⁷⁸ Méry’s narrative has marked similarities with Geoffroy’s, suggesting that he was familiar with the text. In his story, Napoleon deviates from history by choosing not to abandon the siege of Acre in 1799 (then part of the Ottoman empire, now in Israel) and goes on to conquer and unite the cultures of the Middle East and subcontinent. Here also, Napoleon is a figure who looms over and distorts the historical imagination, and is again able to resurrect ancient civilizations:

There was something stirring and supernatural about that name [of Napoleon] that alarmed the imagination. Bonaparte had not presented himself as a vulgar conqueror who had arrived at the coast of Malabar or Coromandel; but as a genius of providence who had gone beyond the confines of the world, escaped the English fleets, crushed the cavalry of Egypt between the Pyramids and Mount Thabor—the mountains of Man and the mountain of God—and, driven by the divine breath, crossed the immense solitudes of India to accomplish a mysterious work of civilization which was the renaissance of the Indian Orient.⁷⁹

Méry's Bonapartist credentials seem to support the reading of the story as a celebration of the lost emperor with no obvious moments of satire; in *Napoléon en Egypte*, co-written with his collaborator Auguste Barthélemy in 1828, Napoleon's career is rendered in epic poetry. Their short story of the following year, *Waterloo*, was seen as sufficiently anti-monarchist to have Barthélemy imprisoned by the Bourbon government.⁸⁰ Even without Geoffroy's ironic treatment, the hyperbole of the achievements takes the account outside of historical possibilities and into the realm of a mythic, utopian (uchronic) past. Napoleon's victories are miraculously free of actual fighting, and under his leadership, "military might triumphed without opening a tomb."⁸¹ The story finishes with a historical realignment of the world with the post-diluvian partitioning of the Middle East among the sons of Noah:

It is the awakening of an entire world; it is the rebirth of the first universe; it is the creation of the globe after the creation of God; it is another work of Sem, Cham and Japhet after the flooding of the barbaric world; immense and noble labour entrusted to France.⁸²

As with Geoffroy, Méry's alternate history of Napoleon allows myth to irrupt into the present's relation with history. The Napoleonic world empire (or "global monarchy") is imagined differently from the colonies and dominions of actual history, because its formation is narrated as if it was an extra, apocryphal book of the Bible and not subject to the real experience of warfare and imperial rule. Geoffroy's and Méry's alternate histories overlay ideas from the Old Testament, myth, and literature onto the modern world, and their narratives conjoin the planes of experience and fantasy.

Reimagining Napoleon as an all-conquering emperor involved restoring legendary and supernatural elements into the course of history, in order to provide him a narrative commensurate with the "immense reality" of the Napoleonic legend. Geoffroy's narrative is interesting because it explores the emptiness of the phantasmal scenarios to which such speculations lead. By the end of his book, its readers find themselves in a similar position to Napoleon himself, confronted by the hollowness of the wish fulfilled: "Having nothing more to do, because all had been finished, nor anything further to desire, because no further desires were possible, too far from things and man, he found himself alone in the universe."⁸³

“HISTORY’S SLAVE”: TOLSTOY’S CONDEMNATION

The *Westminster Gazette* organized a competition in 1907 that asked for essays titled “If Napoleon had Won the Battle of Waterloo.” G. M. Trevelyan was the winner; at the time he was 31 years old, had just published *The Poetry and Philosophy of George Meredith*, and was near completion of *Garibaldi’s Defence of the Roman Republic*.⁸⁴ It is a curious response to the counterfactual proposition, being something between literary whimsy and a historian’s counterfactual. First, it takes the liberty of imagining a reversal in Napoleon’s character after Waterloo rather than transferring a “known” personality and set of ambitions into slightly altered historical circumstances—the more conventional gambit of historians’ counterfactuals and at the heart of the practice’s supposed plausibility. Richard J. Evans reads the essay as an argument for “how badly things might have gone” if Napoleon had been successful, and a confirmation of the “multiple triumphs of Liberalism” that followed his defeat.⁸⁵ Evans’s interpretation implies that liberalism had very shallow roots in English history, and claims that a reversal at Waterloo would have confirmed a repressive political culture at home.

In Trevelyan’s story, Napoleon rides out to review the veteran troops and congratulate them on their victory at Waterloo, but he is surprised when an unexpected cry in favour of peace echoes down the line.

[Napoleon] spoke no word to the assembled troops to thank them for the late victory, rode slowly back like one in a trance, dismounted in the square, passed through the antechamber staring vacantly at his marshals and Ministers as if on men whom he had never seen before.⁸⁶

No one is more surprised by this event than Napoleon himself, and in this “trance” he dictates messages of peace to be sent to the defeated sovereigns of Europe. He abandons all imperial ambition, and Trevelyan appears (with chronologically complex affect) to *miss* the Napoleon we know: “A new Napoleon had been evolved, the Napoleon of Peace, a mere shadow, in spiritual and intellectual force, of his former self.”⁸⁷ The history of the subsequent period confounds comfortable assumptions about the character of Britain: the country becomes a repressive monarchy which executes Lord Byron for insurrection, and the energies of English republicanism are transplanted to the Pampas plains of South America. Europe follows a very different political history: the Catholic

Church fails to restore the *ancien régime*, and Mazzini is shot for attempting to incite Italian nationalism. The story closes with his physician's record of his death in 1836 in a state of senility. Realizing that he is about to die in the private rooms of his residence in Paris, Napoleon begins singing the republican songs of the revolution—which have long been banned on his own authority—before falling unconscious. A drunken worker in the street has heard him and takes up the melody; attendants enter the room to find Napoleon dead and hear the sound of the worker being arrested by the police.

The ending resists assimilation into a clear political or historical view. Napoleon's ministers hear the song and remember it as one he had sung previously, on the eve of his entry into Russia and into Italy. The doctor's narrative reads: "With the gestures of a wild animal just set free, he is intoning, in a voice of the most penetrating discord, the Revolutionary hymn of France, which he has forbidden under penalty of the law to the use of his subjects. But to him, I know it, it is not a hymn of revolution but a *chant du départ*."⁸⁸ Trevelyan appears intrigued by more than an alteration and its possible consequences; he is evidently interested in the identity of the Emperor who, if his career had continued, might have collapsed under the weight of the historical contradictions that were performed in his name, and which added up to far more than could be contained in a single human being. Here we encounter a quality that has been missing in the discussion of alternate histories so far. In Geoffroy's study of wish fulfilment, he was presented as "an immense reality." Whately suggested that he was a piece of bad plagiarism from classical literature. The Napoleon of Trevelyan's story is reduced by history to a man who acts "with the gestures of a wild animal" and cries out with a song that itself recuperates alternative versions of his character. A different cry of dissent initiated the departure from history in Trevelyan's "essay," and did so by confounding Napoleon's belief in his own destiny and setting him on the path of decline as if his successes until Waterloo required as much luck as they did military genius. Alternate history could also serve this purpose by cracking the carapace of historical supernaturalism, which encased Napoleon in the notion that history was no more than a handmaiden to his extraordinary powers and the force of his will.

War and Peace (1869) constitutes the most forceful rejection of the idea of Napoleon as a military genius in whose hands rested the fate of European history. Tolstoy's reflections on the nature of history in Volume III of the vast historical novel are intensely critical of Napoleon's

conduct during the Russian campaign, not only for his errors and cruelty, but also for his belief that he was in a position to determine events and outcomes. Tolstoy claims that all life is determined by causes and effects, and also that no one can pretend to know the repercussions of events beyond the small circle of their direct influence; this means that the biggest fool of all is the person who claims to be in control of whole currents of history, in spite of the incalculable matrix of factors in play in such complex events as the histories of nations and the events on a battlefield. Those in positions of authority, where they are professionally obliged to hold the conviction of their own power over events, are the *least* free of all historical subjects, for their delusions are the most firmly held and most opposed to the true nature of history. "A king is history's slave" (WP 647).

In Tolstoy's analysis, history is a process that cannot be represented as a single figure astride a horse; it is instead an impossibly complex interaction of forces and actors who are equipped with limited awareness of "the unconscious, general, swarm-life of mankind." In this vaster scheme of things, and with the intimation of an ineffable purpose behind it all, there is a historical force for which "every moment of the life of kings" is "a tool for its own purposes" (WP 648). Tolstoy makes this point, with tremendous force, by tying the Napoleonic legend to the moments of his greatest failure within this framework of history, causation and ignorance. He describes Napoleon at the battle of Shevardino, where the decision to continue fighting led to the death of thousands of men. At this moment of human failure, Tolstoy has Napoleon take refuge in the dreamlike belief in a fantasy of his own construction:

Even before he gave that order the thing he did not desire, and for which he only gave the order because he thought it was expected of him, was being done. And he fell back into that artificial realm of imaginary greatness, and again—as a horse walking a treadmill thinks it is doing something for itself—he submissively fulfilled the cruel, sad, gloomy, and inhuman role predestined for him. (WP 873)

Tolstoy's presentation of history opposes Hegel's impression in 1806 (referred to above) of Napoleon as "this world-soul [...] astride a horse," who "reaches out over the world and masters it," on every point. The single dissolves into the multiple, it is the unconscious—not will or genius—that determines events, and mastery of the world is a human folly that reduces a man to the level of a beast of burden.

Fig. 2.1 Jacques Louis David, *Napoleon Crossing the Alps*. 1805, Oil on canvas, 261 × 221 cm, Château de Malmaison

The equivalent in visual culture to Napoleon's personification of history was the well-known painting by Jacques-Louis David, *Napoleon Crossing the Alps* (Fig. 2.1), which was nearly contemporary with Hegel's observation of 1806.⁸⁹

The gloomy paradox that Tolstoy perceives, which prompted his reflections, is the incompatibility of reason with consciousness; from these incommensurate modes of cognition arise confused ideas about the operation of free will in an unknowable, even if causally determined, field of history. In an appendix to the novel he condenses this relationship between knowledge and belief into a maxim: "Free will is for history only an expression for the unknown remainder of what we know about the laws of human life."⁹⁰ The perception of free will is only the signature of our failure to understand a general subordination to fate and the laws of history. Counterfactual scenarios are useful for Tolstoy not in order to imagine what might have happened, but to remind his readers of a universal inability to understand these laws. Tolstoy asks: "What would have happened had Moscow not burnt down? If Murat had not lost sight of the Russians? If Napoleon had not remained inactive?" (*WP* 1056). He poses these questions, which correspond exactly to Whately's and Geoffroy's counterfactual moments of departure into alternate history, not because he is stimulated by the conjectures, but because they are a means of crystallizing the failure of humans to understand their actual historical circumstances in the "swarm-life of mankind."

Nineteenth-century imaginary Napoleons were very different from the cautionary or normalizing accounts of Nazi victories that Gavriel Rosenfeld describes.⁹¹ That purpose of justifying or questioning historical policies (such as American involvement in the Second World War) only appeared later in association with counterfactual propositions. Edmund Lawrence's belated description of a Napoleonic invasion of England was the first I have discovered which had such an intention. *It May Happen Yet: A Tale of Bonaparte's Invasion of England* (1899) is an alternate history novel whose plot of a missing will, smuggling, and romance is set within the counterfactual frame of a Napoleonic invasion in 1805, which is eventually repelled through good English pluck and resourcefulness.⁹² It is enjoyably aware of its own artifice: the narrator tells the reader that the invasion really *did* happen in our timeline but has been suppressed. The similarity of this piece of wit to Whately's is no coincidence as Lawrence shows he is aware of the precedent:

That pious prelate and eminent logician and most entertaining companion, Archbishop Whately, wrote a book to prove that Napoleon Bonaparte never existed. He may have erred on the side of incredulity. But that eminent man taught also that credulity and incredulity are, in reality, the same sentiment.⁹³

The more immediate context for *It May Happen Yet* was probably the fictional invasion narrative, a genre popularized by G. T. Chesney's "The Battle of Dorking" (1871), and which continued into the early twentieth century—for example in William Le Queux's *The Invasion of 1910*, which appeared serially in the *Daily Mail* from March 1906. Chesney's story was explicit in its purpose of warning the nation against military complacency: after the (apparently German) invaders' easy march inland with "nothing effectual [...] done to stop them," the author admonishes a general public: "A little firmness, a little prevision on the part of our rulers, even a little common-sense, and this great calamity would have been rendered utterly impossible. Too late, alas! We were like the foolish virgins in the parable."⁹⁴ Lawrence's novel, so long after the Napoleonic threat, shares this present purpose. He interrupts the narrative mid-way through the novel to address the reader directly and reveal a real-world lesson:

Therefore London should be placed in a state of defence now, in this year 1899, while we still have peace, by a series of works beginning at Kingston, going round by Redhill, and meeting the river at Woolwich, not neglecting defences towards the north and north-east, in case of accidents. We hope—we do not say we expect—to see this, or something on this principle, done before we die.⁹⁵

Harnessing imaginary history to such pragmatic purpose—to serve as a "parable"—could not be more different from Tolstoy's use of counterfactual conjecture as a shorthand for human ignorance. We can subsume the variety of purposes, however, under their common aim to raise awareness of what their authors saw as the historical errors of their time. In *The Hedgehog and the Fox: An Essay on Tolstoy's View of History* (1953), Isaiah Berlin sets out to rescue Tolstoy's philosophy of history from the accusation that it equated all belief with ignorance; rather, for Berlin, it should be understood as a rejection of a reduction of the study of the past to "a knowledge of facts as they succeed each other in time," which was the shallowest by-product of history but which was now "studied as an end in itself."⁹⁶ In order to recuperate Tolstoy's philosophy of history, Berlin asserts the value of historical imaginaries which, he argues, marked the historical conditions of humans' limited ability to imagine alternatives, as this extended quotation makes clear:

Tolstoy's meaning is not obscure. We are what we are, and live in a given situation which has the characteristics—physical, psychological, social, etc.—that it has; what we think, feel, do, is conditioned by it, including our capacity for conceiving possible alternatives, whether in the present or future or past. Our imagination and ability to calculate, our power of conceiving, let us say, what might have been, if the past had, in this or that particular, been otherwise, soon reaches its natural limits—limits created both by the weakness of our capacity for calculating alternatives—“might have beens”—and (we may add by a logical extension of Tolstoy's argument) even more by the fact that our thoughts, the terms in which they occur, the symbols themselves, are what they are, are themselves determined by the actual structure of our world.⁹⁷

Berlin takes Tolstoy's contemptuous use of counterfactuals (“What would have happened had Moscow not burnt down?”) as indicative of the *historically specific* ignorance of humans when confronted with the impenetrable complexity of events; and Napoleon is therefore the pre-eminent example of this ignorance for causing millions of lives to be sacrificed in the belief that history proceeded from his own will.

The Napoleonic myth, described by Tolstoy as “that artificial realm of imaginary greatness,” was the delusion in whose dumb embrace atrocities were ordered. It was also the mode of magical thinking that assisted, through fantasies of other Napoleons, the formation of a culture of writing and literary format for delineating these fantasies. Counterfactuals were used, repeatedly, to isolate and illustrate the errors in historical thought of their historical moments, whether seen as the distortions of history by journalism, the impossible desires generated by Napoleonic propaganda, a mistaken belief in free will, or military complacency. In all cases, however, these critiques of historical knowledge orbited around and reimagined, in failure or impossible success, the figure in whom history seemed so exceptionally invested.

NOTES

1. Leo Braudy, “Providence, Paranoia, and the Novel,” *ELH* 48, no. 3 (October 1, 1981): 622.
2. Braudy, “Providence, Paranoia, and the Novel,” 622.
3. Richard Daniel Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800–1900*, 2nd ed (Columbus: Ohio State University Press 1998), 322.

4. Louis-Napoléon Geoffroy-Château [unsigned], *Napoléon et la conquête du monde, 1812 à 1832: Histoire de la monarchie universelle* (Paris: H. L. Delloye 1836); Louis Geoffroy, *Napoléon Apocryphe, 1812–1832: Histoire de La Conquête Du Monde et de La Monarchie Universelle*, Nouvelle édition, revue et augmentée (Paris: Chez Paulin 1841). To make matters more complicated, the BNF also has a facsimile copy of a longer (500-page) edition also published by Chez Paulin in 1841. My references will be to the shorter (350-page edition) of 1841 and I will use the pseudonym, Geoffroy, to refer to the author. All translations from this work are my own.
5. Léon Marquis, “Biographie Étampoise: Les Rues d’Étampes et Ses Monuments, Chapitre VI (1881),” *Corpus Historique Etampois: Fleureau*, accessed August 18, 2016, <http://www.corpusetampois.com/che-19-marquis-rues06.html#geoffroychateaupere>.
6. Mary Favret, “The Napoleonic Wars,” ed. Dino Felluga, *BRANCH: Britain, Representation and Nineteenth-Century History*, sec. III, accessed February 3, 2015, http://www.branchcollective.org/?ps_articles=mary-favret-the-napoleonic-wars.
7. Francis John MacCunn, *The Contemporary English View of Napoleon* (London: G. Bell & Sons 1914), 5.
8. Richard Whately, *Historic Doubts Relative to Napoleon Buonaparte*, 12th ed (London: Longmans, Green, and Co).
9. Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London: Verso 2007), 83.
10. See this recent lecture and article: Richard J. Evans, “Waterloo: Causes, Courses and Consequences” (Gresham College, London, June 18, 2015), <http://www.gresham.ac.uk/lectures-and-events/waterloo-causes-courses-and-consequences>; Andrew Roberts, “Why We’d Be Better Off If Napoleon Never Lost at Waterloo,” *Smithsonian Magazine*, June 2015, <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/we-better-off-napoleon-never-lost-waterloo-180955298/>.
11. Charles Phillips, *An Historical Character of Napoleon* (London 1817), 5, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/60202665>.
12. Stuart Semmel, “British Radicals and ‘Legitimacy’: Napoleon in the Mirror of History,” *Past & Present*, no. 167 (May 2000): 142.
13. Phillips, *An Historical Character of Napoleon*, 7.
14. *Hegel, the Letters*, ed. Clark Butler (Bloomington, Ind: Indiana University Press 1984), 114.
15. Jean Duhamel, *The Fifty Days: Napoleon in England*, trans. R. A. Hall (London: Hart-Davis 1969).
16. Duhamel, *The Fifty Days*, 40. He nonetheless requested accommodation on a country estate from Lord Castlereagh.
17. Semmel, “British Radicals and ‘Legitimacy.’”

18. John Ashton, *English Caricature and Satire on Napoleon I* (New York: Benjamin Blom 1968), 423.
19. Duhamel, *The Fifty Days*, 90.
20. Oxford Journals, *Notes and Queries*, vol. 10 (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1854), 220.
21. Duhamel, *The Fifty Days*, 53.
22. Duhamel, *The Fifty Days*, 128.
23. David Cordingly, *Billy Ruffian: The Bellerophon and the Downfall of Napoleon: The Biography of a Ship of the Line, 1782–1836* (London: Bloomsbury 2003), 268.
24. Nathan Mayer Rothschild was the largest lender to the British war effort and, according to Dale, benefited by being first to receive news of Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo. In *The Count of Monte Cristo*, the Count ensures the downfall of one enemy by bribing a telegraph clerk to relay a false message to Paris.
25. Richard Dale, *Napoleon Is Dead: Lord Cochrane and the Great Stock Exchange Scandal* (Stroud: Sutton 2006), 7.
26. Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions 1993), 225. I believe Franco Moretti was the first to draw attention to Dracula's capitalist constitution.
27. Dale, *Napoleon Is Dead: Lord Cochrane and the Great Stock Exchange Scandal*, 155.
28. A recent work of alternate history imagines Napoleon to have been rescued from St Helena by the Gulf pirate, Jean Lafitte, and taken to America (Shannon Selin, *Napoleon in America* (Vancouver: Dry Wall Publishing, 2014).
29. Stuart Semmel, *Napoleon and the British* (Yale University Press 2004), 32.
30. Phillips, *An Historical Character of Napoleon*, 5 (original emphasis).
31. Semmel, "British Radicals and 'Legitimacy,'" 173.
32. Semmel, "British Radicals and 'Legitimacy,'" 143. Semmel's description of Napoleon's reinvention repeats the multiplication of Napoleons: To the British left, it appeared that Napoleon "had cast off the sins of imperial ambition and tyranny, and won 'a victory over himself'" (163).
33. Simon Burrows, "Britain and the Black Legend: The Genesis of the Anti-Napoleonic Myth," in *Resisting Napoleon: The British Response to the Threat of Invasion, 1797–1815*, ed. Mark Philp (Aldershot: Ashgate 2006), 148; Semmel, "British Radicals and 'Legitimacy,'" 146.
34. Semmel, *Napoleon and the British*, 19.
35. George Gordon Byron, *Ode to Napoleon Bonaparte*, The second edition (London: John Murray by W. Bulmer 1814), 5.
36. Byron, *Ode to Napoleon Bonaparte*, 7.
37. Edward Hincks, *Buonaparte: A Poem [Unsigned]* (London: for John Murray by W. Bulmer 1814), 8.

38. George Gordon Byron, *Byron's Letters and Journals*, vol. 4 (London: J. Murray 1973), 284.
39. Byron, *Byron's Letters and Journals*, 4:161.
40. Judith Pascoe, *The Hummingbird Cabinet: A Rare and Curious History of Romantic Collectors*, illustrated edition (Cornell University Press 2005), 102.
41. Phillips, *An Historical Character of Napoleon*, 4.
42. Brian R. Hamnett, *The Historical Novel in Nineteenth-Century Europe: Representations of Reality in History and Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2011), 29.
43. Anon., *An Inquiry into the Justice of the Pretensions of Napoleon Bonaparte for the Appellation of "Great"* (London: W. Miller & T. Payne; also by Trewwman & Son, Exeter 1812), 53.
44. Anon., *An Inquiry into the Justice of the Pretensions of Napoleon Bonaparte for the Appellation of "Great,"* 53.
45. Anon., *An Inquiry into the Justice of the Pretensions of Napoleon Bonaparte for the Appellation of "Great,"* 53–54.
46. William E. Channing turned to a different literary source to interpret Napoleon: "We can conceive," he wrote, "few subjects more worthy of Shakespeare than the mind of Napoleon, at this moment, when his fate was sealed; when the tide of his victories was suddenly stopped and rolled backwards" *Analysis of the Character of Napoleon Bonaparte: Suggested by the Publication of Scott's Life of Napoleon* (London: Edward Rainford 1828), 27–28.
47. Henry Stebbing, "Unpublished Lectures on Periodical Literature," *Athenaeum*, no. 18 (March 1828): 273.
48. Christian Johnstone [unsigned], "On Periodical Literature," *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine* 3, no. 16 (July 1833): 494.
49. Thomas Carlyle, "On History Again," in *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays Vol. III*, vol. 28, *The Works of Thomas Carlyle* (London: Chapman & Hall 1896), 171. There might be an even less valuable form of writing in the modern age: the reports of Napoleonic advances that were deliberately circulated as propaganda; Carlyle records in his chapter on Napoleon in *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (1841) that "'false as a bulletin' became a proverb in Napoleon's time" (*On Heroes, Hero Worship, & the Heroic in History*, The Norman and Charlotte Strouse Edition of the Writings of Thomas Carlyle (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press 1993), 204.
50. Edward Brynn, "[Review:] A Protestant in Purgatory: Richard Whately, Archbishop of Dublin," *Church History* 52, no. 3 (1983): 390, doi:[10.2307/3166765](https://doi.org/10.2307/3166765); S. J. Connolly, ed., *The Oxford Companion to Irish History*, 2nd.ed (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2004), sec. Richard Whately.

51. All references are to the 11th edition of 1852 unless specified otherwise; this edition included all the prefaces to the previous editions.
52. Rev. Aristarchus Newlight, *Historic Certainties Respecting the Early History of America, Developed in a Critical Examination of the Book of the Chronicles of the Land of Ecnarf* (London: John W. Parker 1851).
53. Anon., "[Review:] The Errors of Romanism Traced to Their Origin in Human Nature," *Athenaeum*, no. 167 (January 8, 1831): 17. The first edition of *Historic Doubts* was around 50 pages.
54. Anon., "[Review:] Historic Doubts Relative to Napoleon Buonaparte; The Nemesis of Faith; Popular Christianity, Its Transition State and Probable Development," *Edinburgh Review* 90, no. 182 (October 1849): 293–356.
55. Richard Whately, *Historic Doubts Relative to Napoleon Buonaparte*, 5th ed (London: B. Fellowes, 1833), iv.
56. Lois J. Einhorn, "Did Napoleon Live? Presumption and Burden of Proof in Richard Whately's 'Historic Doubts Relative to Napoleon Bonaparte,'" *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 16, no. 4 (October 1, 1986): 285. Einhorn's focus is the use of rhetoric in Whately's arguments on the burden of proof.
57. Mark Phillips, "Distance and Historical Representation," *Historical Workshop Journal*, no. 57 (Spring 2004): 130.
58. David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Oxford Philosophical Texts (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1999), para. 10.8.
59. Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, para. 10.21.
60. Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, para. 10.37.
61. Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, para. 10.7.
62. Favret, "The Napoleonic Wars," sec. III.
63. C. Knipp, "The 'Arabian Nights' in England: Galland's Translation and Its Successors," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 5 (January 1, 1974): 44–54.
64. Whately, *Historic Doubts*, 1865, 71.
65. *Ibid.*, 72.
66. Paul K. Alkon, *Origins of Futuristic Fiction* (Athens: University of Georgia Press 1987), 133.
67. Alkon, *Origins of Futuristic Fiction*, 152.
68. Catherine Gallagher, "What Would Napoleon Do?: Historical, Fictional, and Counterfactual Characters," *New Literary History* 42, no. 2 (2011): 326.
69. Richard J. Evans, *Altered Pasts: Counterfactuals in History*, Menahem Stern Jerusalem Lectures (Waltham, Massachusetts: Brandeis University Press/Historical Society of Israel 2013), 6.
70. Catherine Gallagher, *Telling It like It Wasn't: The Counterfactual Imagination in History and Fiction* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press 2017).

71. Alkon, *Origins of Futuristic Fiction*, 146.
72. Ibid., 139.
73. Alkon, *Origins of Futuristic Fiction*, 144. Tolstoy's critique in *War and Peace* is probably more damning.
74. Alkon, *Origins of Futuristic Fiction*, 152.
75. Edward Everett Hale, "The Apocryphal Napoleon," in *The Boston Miscellany of Literature and Fashion*, ed. Nathan Hale (Boston, Mass.: Bradbury, Soden & Company 1842), 234. Hale was also a writer who imagined alternative worlds ("Hands Off" (1881), his story of an parallel universe is discussed in Chap. 3).
76. Napoleon I, *Napoleon's Letters*, New edition (London: Prion Books Ltd 1998), 217–218.
77. Napoleon I, *Napoleon's Letters*, 218.
78. Joseph Méry, "Histoire de ce qui n'est pas arrivé," in *Les nuits d'Orient: contes nocturnes* (Paris: M. Lévy frères (Paris) 1854), 10–81.
79. Méry, "Histoire de ce qui n'est pas arrivé," 66.
80. Brian M. Stableford, "Introduction," in *The Tower of Destiny and Other Stories*, ed. Brian M. Stableford, 2012, 10–11.
81. Méry, "Histoire de ce qui n'est pas arrivé," 78.
82. Ibid., 81.
83. Geoffroy, *Napoléon Apocryphe*, 353.
84. Trevelyan published the story in a collection of essays in 1913 (*Clio: A Muse and other Essays Literary and Pedestrian*) and it was included in the American edition of J. C. Squires' collection of counterfactual history essays (If; or, History Rewritten (1931)).
85. Evans, *Altered Pasts*, 9.
86. G. M. Trevelyan, "If Napoleon Had Won the Battle of Waterloo," in *Clio: A Muse and Other Essays Literary and Pedestrian* (London: Longmans, Green 1913), 187.
87. Trevelyan, "If Napoleon Had Won the Battle of Waterloo," 185.
88. Ibid., 199.
89. The painting represented a historical incident that was also, tellingly, the subject of counterfactual speculation. Carl von Clausewitz had proposed counterfactual scenarios and argued that there were more advantageous options than crossing the Alps in the war with Austria (Gallagher, "What Would Napoleon Do?," 324). By coincidence, Clausewitz was aide-de-camp to Prince Augustus of Prussia during the Jena campaign and was thus present at the moment of Napoleon's impression upon Hegel; his own capture by Napoleon in that campaign may have influenced his negative evaluation of Napoleon's military decisions.
90. Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, ed. Henry Gifford, trans. Louise Maude and Aylmer Maude, Oxford World Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1998), 1303.

91. Gavriel Rosenfeld, *The World Hitler Never Made: Alternate History and the Memory of Nazism* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press 2005).
92. Very little biographical information about the author is available. He is presumably the same Edmund Lawrence who “edited” the memoirs of *George Stalden* (London: Remington & Co. 1887), another “secret history” that included gratuitous attacks on the Quakers, of which a reviewer wrote “We lean strongly to the opinion that the autobiographical form is only a cloak for an enthralling and exceedingly clever novel” (Anon., “History and Biography,” *Westminster Review* 129, no. 1 (1888): 117).
93. Edmund Lawrence, *It May Happen Yet: A Tale of Bonaparte’s Invasion of England* (London: Published by the author 1899), 84.
94. George T. Chesney, “The Battle of Dorking: Reminiscences of a Volunteer,” *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* 109, no. 667 (1871): 554.
95. Lawrence, *It May Happen Yet*, 153.
96. Isaiah Berlin, *The Hedgehog and the Fox: An Essay on Tolstoy’s View of History* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson 1953), 12–13. This description of Tolstoy’s view is similar to Nietzsche’s rejection of historical knowledge as a never-ending accumulation of facts in the latter’s nearly contemporary essay “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,” which I discuss in Chap. 3.
97. Berlin, *The Hedgehog and the Fox*, 73.

Inheriting Antiquity: Political Genealogy in Disraeli and Renouvier

“THE PERFECT STORY OF MANKIND”

Time will make the present age as obsolete as the last, for our sons will cast a new light over the ambiguous scenes which distract their fathers; they will know how some things happened for which we cannot account; they will bear witness to how many characters we have mistaken; they will be told many of those secrets which our contemporaries hide from us; they will pause at the ends of our beginnings; they will read the perfect story of man, which can never be told while it is proceeding.

~Isaac D’Israeli, “True Sources of Secret History” (1823)

It is to be recollected that individuals are not the offspring of their parents alone, but also of their ancestry to very remote degrees, and that although by a faulty system of civilisation the average worth of a race may become depressed, it has nevertheless an inherent ancestral power of partly recovering from that depression, if a chance be given it of doing so.

~Francis Galton, “Hereditary Improvement” (1873)

These statements about history and parentage were made 50 years apart, by writers with very different interests and sympathies. Isaac D’Israeli anticipates a future age when our “our sons” will have improved powers of historical interpretation and be able to formulate a “perfect history” from the obscurity of the archives and the poverty of available accounts. Francis Galton’s comments on racial decline and regeneration

also assume an improved understanding of the past on the basis of an emerging scientific consensus; this view reveals a belief that the culture of his time is on the wrong track, in the midst of a “depression.” For him, this predicament is to be addressed by discarding an identity based on immediate filial bonds and alignment with a longer-durational process of inheritance than that from our “parents alone.” For both, the circumstances and trajectory of present events are somehow aberrant, benighted, or, to use D’Israeli’s term, “obsolete.” The two perspectives, one anticipatory and one retrospective, promise a brighter world to come, whether thought of in terms of historical knowledge or the condition of civilization. In both cases, that improved future depends on a better understanding of the past and a revised understanding of how it should be inherited and recovered.

In the same essay, D’Israeli describes the “secret history” that was revealed by his recently granted access to state papers and correspondence: “Secret history is the supplement of history itself, and is its great corrector.”¹ The method of primary research that D’Israeli outlines so optimistically is to make use of the distance from the historical subject and the modern historian’s access to primary correspondence in order to traverse that distance and make the remote familiar: “We are transformed into the contemporaries of the writers, while we are standing on the ‘vantage ground’ of their posterity.”² I find in Galton’s essay a comparable call for judicious selection and use of historical material from a later time of crisis—one which is, importantly, framed in terms of historical mal-adaptation. “Our present moral nature is as unfitted for a high-toned civilisation as our intellectual nature is unfitted to deal with a complex one.”³ The project of taking hold of and directing human nature (which produces the alarming recommendations of Galton, William Greg, George Darwin, and others)⁴ is the application of the new science of mankind which would allow humanity to fashion its way out of this predicament by considering the whole of its history and rationally selecting the (racial) elements and characteristics that should constitute modern man. Galton writes in the conclusion to *Hereditary Genius* (1869): “nature teems with latent life, which man has large powers of evoking under the forms and to the extent which he desires.”⁵ The power to choose and to create is one which is half outside of nature, for it extends to man the power to return to those discontinued lines of evolutionary descent from “latent life,” or, to use Bloch’s phrase, “the still undischarged future in the past.”⁶

Once these elements are introduced, “nature” can be returned to the healthy mechanisms that are proper to it: human nature will be “gradually” modified “as a regular consequence of previous conditions.”⁷ The recuperation of humanity, however, requires the excavation of its own “latent life,” which is to say its history. To set out to correct a historical pattern of degeneration by resuscitating vitality latent in the human organism *sounds* distinctively eugenic, but once this alternate-historical pattern of recuperative thought is recognized, it becomes noticeable in very different disciplinary contexts. Matthew Arnold’s argument for the revival of Hellenism in English culture transposes Galton’s argument move for move by positing an aberrant history that could be overcome by accessing the culture of the past:

This contravention of the natural order has produced, as such contravention always must produce, a certain confusion and false movement, of which we are now beginning to feel, in almost every direction, the inconvenience.⁸

When the stakes of historical revisionism are raised from scholarly disagreement to a utopian project of correcting a “faulty system of civilisation,” and when there are so many episodes of history “for which we cannot account,” the restoration of healthy society and the proper methods of historical enquiry appear as a single problem to solve. And when the obscurity of the historical record became the resource for such recuperation, the techniques for “discovering” much-needed truths in the past are put to creative service to meet the needs of the present. Fabulations can be found in eugenic thinking, and in Chap. 5 I examine lost-world narratives that hypothesized variant forms of civilization which, through the geographical isolation of the island, valley, or plateau, corresponded to Galton’s “*segregation* of what already existed, under a new shape, and as a regular consequence of previous conditions.”⁹ Fabulated pasts were also used as a historical method, and first seriously theorized by Isaac D’Israeli in an essay published in 1823:

We shall enlarge our conception of the nature of human events, and gather some useful instruction in our historical reading by pausing at intervals; contemplating, for a moment, *on certain events which have not happened!*¹⁰

D'Israeli was aware of Livy's hypothetical staging of a battle between Alexander's armies and imperial Rome, and describes this as the "model" for the practice. His own scenarios include Charles II winning the battle of Worcester and a Muslim victory at Tours and Poitiers in 732 (a counterfactual outcome that Edward Gibbon also considered in *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*). Unlike Livy, D'Israeli's motivation is to counteract the "peculiar and particular interference" for the historian of "Providence," which is a "source of human error and intolerant prejudice."¹¹ In different ways and with different improvements in mind, both D'Israeli and Galton turn to the past to oppose the idea that their time is the best of all possible worlds.¹²

This chapter focuses on alternate histories which elaborated on this theme and refashioned the passage of culture and politics from antiquity to the modern world in order to advocate revised relationships between religion and politics in the present. After his father's anticipation of what "our sons" would achieve, Disraeli *fil*s used this method of historical invention in a complex early novel which integrated historical fiction with simulated scholarly research. The future Prime Minister and Earl of Beaconsfield wrote *The Wondrous Tale of Alroy* (1833) shortly after an unsuccessful contestation as a radical for the High Wycombe parliamentary seat in 1832—a political failure that he (and others) attributed to his eclectic political views, well-publicized financial precarity, and his Jewish birth. The novel is a romance in which a minor figure of Jewish history from the twelfth century is elevated to the stature of an imperial leader (who is then overthrown). The presentation of invented historical episodes as the authentic record of a historian (complete with a scholarly preface and endnotes) distinguishes this work from the category of historical romance, which required consistency with the historical record even if characters and episodes were fictitious. Though the invented history is compatible with the contemporary reader's present day, I analyze *Alroy* as an alternate history for its reconstitution of the present through the introduction of counterfactual elements into the historical record.

The second text examined here is by the prolific but largely forgotten philosopher Charles Renouvier, whose extensive output includes this complex account of how western civilization might have developed differently. The work was published in 1876 as *Uchronie (l'utopie dans l'histoire)*, and recounts in painstaking detail an alternate history in which the passage of the Christian religion to the West is delayed by a different pattern of succession following the rule of Marcus Aurelius in

second-century Rome.¹³ This account, supposedly written by a monk who has died at the hands of the Inquisition in 1601, is nested within a series of editorial supplements added by successive generations of the family who (we are told) have acted as custodians of the text with which they are entrusted. The heretical message of *Uchronie* is that the catastrophic wars of religion in Europe could have been mitigated by constraining the influence of religion upon European culture and politics.

What both *Alroy* and *Uchronie* have in common is a determination to change the course of history through a dialectical process of alteration. The modification of the historical record is intended to transform current dispositions, with a view to altering the future development of human civilization. In Disraeli's novel, the modification is a sleight-of-hand that operates in places in the manner of a forgery and at others is more an ironic game of dressing up which also serves to anticipate the author's political career. Before Alroy is executed at the end of his failed messianic project, his sister expresses the desire: "Perchance some poet, in some distant age, within whose veins our sacred blood may flow, his fancy fired with the national theme, may strike his harp to Alroy's wild career, and consecrate a name too long forgotten?" (*AL* 255).¹⁴ In contrast, the readers of *Uchronie* are explicitly told that the parallel history is an exercise in heretical thought and that its value is to reflect on the latent presence of political values which, despite prevailing historical beliefs, might be available for recuperation:

It may make us think. It indicates at least, to new supporters, serious and unresolved perhaps, of human liberty as it was achieved and might not have been achieved in the past, and which is pregnant with an immense future whose affirmation must be our principal object. (*UC* xiv)

These two critically neglected texts belong to quite different periods and modes of historical thought, and to two phases of Darwinian theory (of the *Origin of Species* and *Descent of Man*). This chapter will show that these works reflect how, more widely, representations of the ancient past combined romantic and scientific modes of thought. *Altertumswissenschaft*, Friedrich August Wolf's term for the science of antiquity, involved the excavation of the literature, ruins and relics of the past generated the materials for political self-formation.¹⁵ There were also more sensationalist revisions to the historical record, for instance the provocative claims that Anglicanism pre-dated the Catholic Church, or

of the Egyptian origins of Christianity, even if these were expressed in an entirely different register and format.¹⁶ The alternate histories of Disraeli and Renouvier are very different in purpose and programme, but are likewise historically revisionist in how they understand the values of the past and the best relationship between antiquity and the modern day. In the final section of this chapter, I explore correspondences between natural selection—with its fascination with extinctions and traces—and the presentation of alternate histories that draw their ideas from the “latent possibilities” of the past. To do this I consider the “romantic” aspect of Charles Darwin’s *Origin of the Species* (1859) and *The Descent of Man* (1871), and the alternate histories *Alroy* and *Uchronie*, whose dates of publication the *Origin* bisects.

ROMANTIC POLITICS AND STYLE

The Wondrous Tale of Alroy was first published in 1833 in three volumes and included the shorter tale, *The Rise of Iskander*.¹⁷ In the introduction to the 1927 Bradenham edition, Philip Guedalla stresses the apocryphal nature of the events in Disraeli’s novel, in which “the comparatively modest tale of David Alroi or Ibn Alruchi” is reworked to fashion a central character whom he describes as a “a Judaeo-Moslem Napoleon.”¹⁸ The successes of the historical Alroy, according to contemporary accounts, were short-lived and limited to the brief capture of the city of Amadia;¹⁹ Guedalla suggests he was a false prophet who was driven out of Bagdad after prematurely predicting the arrival of Zion.²⁰ In the fabulated events of the novel, David Alroy is nephew to the leader of the Jewish people, who are living in a state of subjection to the Seljuk Turks. He is roused from inactivity and despondency (and departs from recorded history) when in defence of his sister Miriam’s virtue he kills Alschiroch, the Muslim governor of the province, an act which precipitates his flight from Hamadan to the mountains and to his former teacher, the cabalist Jabaster. Alroy has a holy dream in which he is chosen as “the Lord’s anointed” and raises an army with which he achieves a series of glorious military victories as part of a project of Jewish emancipation through military conquest. By now, he has fallen under the influence of Schirene, a Muslim princess in Bagdad, and he conquers the city to pursue her. Jabaster and Esther, Alroy’s Talmudic advisors, issue periodic warnings during his apostatic decline: not to enter Bagdad, not to marry Schirene, and of the need to claim Jerusalem as the seat of

his empire. All of these are ignored, and supernatural opinion appears to condemn Alroy's abandonment of his messianic role when a mysterious voice in the night repeats the cryptic judgement from the Book of Daniel (5:27): "Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin!" (AL 166).²¹ Alroy himself is defeated in battle by the resurgent Seljuk army, flees to the desert, is betrayed and captured. He dies a martyr's death, proclaiming his renewed faith in Judaeo-Christian terms: "I shall both sink into the earth and mount into the air" (AL 266).

Disraeli's entry in the "mutilated diary," in which he writes that *Vivian Grey* represents his "active and real ambition" and *Alroy* his "ideal ambition," makes it difficult to avoid reading the novel as at least partly autobiographical.²² His own family seem to have been familiar with the self-contemplation that accompanied Disraeli's political reflections: in a pamphlet of 1833, he voiced the hope that "great spirits may yet arise to guide the groaning helm through the world of troubled waters—spirits whose proud destiny it may still be at the same time to maintain the glory of the Empire, and to secure the happiness of the People."²³ An editorial footnote reports his father's amused response, "Who will be the proud spirit?"²⁴ For this reason, responses to the early novels tend to read them as outlines of Disraeli's political aspirations. Daniel R. Schwarz imagines a young man contemplating his future career and suggests that "the novels played a crucial role in creating his character and personality."²⁵ In a later essay, Schwarz describes *Alroy* and *Contarini Fleming* as novels in which Disraeli "exorcised" the flamboyant and immoderate character of his early adulthood.²⁶

Paul Smith makes a similar claim that Disraeli was trying out future *personae*, but emphasizes an ironic distance in the process: they were "dress rehearsals," or "theatre workshops of personality."²⁷ These readings attempt to resolve the evidence for treating the novel as a romantic form of autobiography with its purpose of disavowal, on Disraeli's part, of youthful immaturity. Schwarz finesses this problem by stating that the novel "enables Disraeli to reconcile the conflict between his own poetic and political ambition."²⁸ Sheila Spector also reads the novel as an act of renunciation, as "a Christian apologetic, a fictionalized defense of Disraeli's own apostasy."²⁹ Even in the prolix culture of the early nineteenth century, the novel seems a curiously long-winded way of making amends. Robert P. O'Kell maps the events of *Alroy* onto Disraeli's own life more convincingly by reading Alroy's redemptive turn to religious orthodoxy at the end of the novel as an analogy for Disraeli's imminent

return to active political life after his defeat in the 1832 Wycombe election campaign, following charges of hypocrisy and insincerity.³⁰ In other words, Disraeli was confessing to a comparable episode of bad faith from which (not being fatal, as Alroy's had been) he would recover.

By taking biography as the most effective key to the novel, these responses tend to emphasize the personal over the broader political narrative in the novel and do not, I feel, adequately respond to the consequence of the ending, where Alroy's failure returns the Jewish people to the condition of slavery. If, however, the novel is approached in the sense outlined in the section above, as a fictional excavation of the past for elements that modify the constitution of the present, then it is possible to read the character as a romantic allegory of Disraeli himself. If we take Alroy to be the ancestor of Disraeli (we should recall that he also embroidered his immediate family background),³¹ *Alroy* can be interpreted as an exercise in self-fashioning through the supposition of historical imaginaries. Alroy's failure anticipates a future age when those qualities that nearly founded a political empire could be realized and fulfilled. Disraeli was simultaneously writing his own history, and writing himself *into* the history of English politics as a figure whose time was to come—as suggested in *Alroy* by Miriam's expectation of "some poet, in some distant age, within whose veins our sacred blood may flow" (*AL* 255). In the preface to *The Revolutionary Epick* (1834)—a poem with Napoleon as its ambiguous hero—he describes *Alroy* as "the celebration of a gorgeous incident in the annals of that sacred and romantic people from whom I derive my blood and name."³² The reference to descent by blood is strong evidence that he was himself this anticipated "poet," and the choice of word is significant, for this alternate-historical invention relies on literary style as much as it does political legacy.

The hybrid literary style of *Alroy* recapitulates a tradition of British canonical literature. Guedalla comments that "the author told his tale in a medium that owed much to Byron, more to the Authorised Version, something to Scott and several touches in the later chapters to the tent scene in *Julius Caesar*."³³ There are a medley of registers and modes; when Alroy kills Alsiroch, the narrative is made archaic through anachronistic syntax and diction: "Pallid and mad, he swift upsprang, and he tore up a tree by its lusty roots, and down the declivity, dashing with rapid leaps, panting and wild, he struck the ravisher on the temple with the mighty pine" (*AL* 16). Faux-medievalisms such as "prith'ee" in dialogue are in contrast to Alroy's meditations which read like stage soliloquies:

"The past is a dream," said Alroy. "So sages teach us; but until we act, their wisdom is but wind. I feel it now. Have we ever lived in aught but deserts, and fed on aught but dates? Methinks 'tis very natural. But that I am tempted by the security of distant lands, I could remain here, a free and happy outlaw." (*AL* 233)

In the preface to the first edition in 1833, Disraeli gives a brief explanation of his choice of literary style by quoting from the preface to his previous novel, *Contarini Fleming* (1832); he describes the necessity of verse-form for rendering a tradition of ancient, oral poetry which is "rather material than metaphysical." He does not explain how the adoption of "poetic diction" approximates to oral poetry, simply ascribing its use to a suggestion from his sister and to a desire to innovate: "Inversion was invented to clothe a common-place with an air of novelty; vague epithets were introduced to prop up a monotonous modulation."³⁴ The self-deprecating tone may be reflective of the awkwardness of a public figure who has to reconcile the exoticism of his writing with the need to appear an appropriate candidate for English political life. Disraeli was not reticent about absorbing exotic elements into a cosmopolitan persona privately, however; in a letter written during his middle-eastern expedition of 1830–1831, Disraeli describes the bewildering effect his oriental travelling costume has had on a Greek doctor: "Questo vestito Inglese o di fantasia ['Is your costume English or the product of your own fancy']?" he aptly asked. I oracularly replied 'Inglese e fantastica' ['It is both English and fanciful'].³⁵

Contemporary readers of *Alroy* comment unfavourably on its use of archaisms. One reviewer writing in the *Metropolitan* is scathingly critical of the novel's integration of scriptural quotation and novelistic action; the author provocatively interprets the novel as an ironic study in literary extravagance:

In the very first pages of the book Mr. D'Israeli [*sic*] commences his satire. The system of quoting from the sacred and inspired authors [...] has been ably ridiculed by a chorus of maidens, who constantly interrupt the soliloquy of the hero, and the reader's flow of ideas, by screaming out bits of Isaiah, about half a mile off.³⁶

A reviewer for the *Literary Gazette* took the novel more seriously, but still held the view that this "experiment on the English language" was "not likely to be a successful one, or to lead to future imitation," for it

was “neither prose nor verse, neither rhyme nor rhythm, neither Ossian nor the translation of serious opera.” Here the writer seems to have been less bothered by any of the individual elements of the style than by their combination: “Good ideas, bad epithets, true pictures, want of taste, and poetical images and something of philosophical reflection, marred by juxtaposition with monstrosities and turgid laboriousness, aiming at effect.”³⁷ More recent judgements have been equally unkind, with Disraeli’s biographer Robert Blake dismissing *Alroy* as “written in a deplorable sort of prose-poetry and [...] perhaps the most unreadable of his romances.”³⁸

Being less concerned with the success of its effects, my interpretation of Disraeli’s “new style” is that it is intended to be read as a precursor to the English literary canon, in the manner of a literary forgery such as that of Thomas Chatterton, who translated Shakespearean verse into medieval English to be interpreted as its antecedent.³⁹ This makes the reviewer’s reference to Ossian suggestive, even though the authenticity of the Ossian poems was still asserted in the 1830s. Disraeli’s work, although its editorial apparatus implies historical accuracy, is acknowledged to be a “Romance” on the first page of the preface to the first edition.⁴⁰

The inclusion of anachronistic language in *Alroy* feels (awkwardly) deliberate; there are archaisms such as “verily” and “pry’thee” and Shakespearean phrasing (“not a jot” declares Alroy at one point, reprising Othello’s protestation). We also note the irruption of a more contemporary tone in places, for instance when Alroy reflects on the intersection of personal and political life. During his contemplation of the future of the Jewish nation, the transition from past tense for narrating events (“upsprang”) to the present tense is a telling indication of the novel’s self-conscious movement between the two genres in which Disraeli was most prolific during his early career, the historical novel and political manifesto.

Empires and dynasties flourish and pass away; the proud metropolis becomes a solitude, the conquering kingdom even a desert; but Israel still remains, still a descendent of the most ancient kings breathed amid these royal ruins, and still the eternal sun could never rise without gilding the towers of living Jerusalem. A word, a deed, a single day, a single man, and we might be a nation. (*AL* 100-01)

Disraeli's style is a literary manifesto for itself, and works by recapitulating literary history in order to arrive at a hybrid of previous diction, syntax, and aesthetic values that are "inherited" from and are also the culmination of the canon. The fact that readers did not appreciate the invention should not distract us from its strategy of retrospectively inventing a lineage for "some poet" to inherit in the nineteenth century. Style is analogous to the novel's political argument. *Alroy's* counterfactual history is also intended to implant a legacy (of messianic politics) into the history of western culture, to be recuperated in Britain. Disraeli is not only making avowals of his own good faith (political and religious) for the present day; he is also modifying British literary and cultural history in a way that prepares for his own arrival as a writer and politician. It is a cultural counterfactual which both anglicizes the author (as the removal of an apostrophe had done for his surname) and inserts Judaic elements into British public life.

Alroy's political programme consists of the suggestion that Judaic, messianic politics contains elements of modern political rule. When Alroy captures the city of Bagdad, he refuses the advice of his followers to perform an act of genocide: "Fanatic! I'll send him to conquer Judah. We must conciliate. Something must be done to bind the conquered to our conquering fortunes" (*AL* 149). By choosing toleration and saving "the vast majority, and most valuable portion of my subjects," Alroy demonstrates care of his empire rather than the desire for retribution. Jabaster's view of government, guided by Cabalistic religion, is dismissed, and Alroy's modern form of rule must break from "old traditions, which, if acted upon, would render government impractical" (*AL* 147). Alroy's defeat is explicable in two ways: first, there is the abandonment of his messianic calling for the pursuit of the princess Schirene; but more importantly, he is presented as a character born too early, whose desires for restraint and a Jewish "commonwealth" are out of step with their historical moment. This displacement from one's historical time is comparable to the "sigh of philhellenism" that Joshua Billings identifies in Faust as a romantic "sense of liminality, which is at once temporal and spatial: they are out of time and place."⁴¹ Disraeli wishes to connect the novel's progressive but precocious messianism with the contemporary political scene in England; Alroy's failure could be complemented by Disraeli's successful recuperation of that project. This is also a precursive poetic strategy—the construction of an antecedent style—for both

literary-historical and political claims rely on the retrospective invention of ancestors which rewrite the genealogy of the present day.

That “distant age” that Miriam wishes for is a form of nineteenth-century modernity that would inherit a Judaic legacy. Patrick Brantlinger observes that Disraeli’s conservatism differed from that of figures such as Macaulay or Scott by replacing “Anglo-Saxonism” with assertions of the living force of Judaism in European and English culture.⁴² By rejecting a historiography of English culture with the primacy of the Christian religion and the Teutonic overthrow of the Roman Empire at its foundation, Disraeli is able to present an alternative national genealogy in which the Judaic element has always been present and awaiting recuperation. This rewritten history contains a political proposition: to reject the liberal and secular legacy of the Glorious Revolution and to propose another lineage which interprets Christianity as “completed Judaism.”⁴³ Paul Smith recognizes Disraeli’s historical revisionism and its relation to his political ambitions, stating that Disraeli’s impact on the English political scene was to be effected through a radical transformation of how the nation understood its own past:

The vindication of national genius did not require in England the political revolution which was often its apparent pre-condition elsewhere, but it did require, for Disraeli, a near-revolution in the conceptualization of the national past, national tasks, and national destiny, in the accomplishment of which his own genius could achieve its complete naturalization.⁴⁴

Smith’s argument is that Disraeli was not in a position to demand a revolution in politics; he did not possess the political standing or the means to impose a revolutionary programme onto English politics—unlike Napoleon. Instead, he was able to introduce a transformation into the past in an act of historical imagination that combined the forms of historical romance and political polemic in order to do so. O’Kell adopts a similar position towards Disraeli’s long essay of this period, *Vindication of the English Constitution in a Letter to a Noble and Learned Lord* (1835). The open letter is an elaborate defence of the House of Lords, with deliberate echoes of Burke’s *Letter to a Noble Lord*, and serves as an argument for a repositioned Tory party. This national party would recognize its affinities with Hebraic traditions, for “the English are in politics as the old Hebrews were in religion, a favoured and peculiar people.”⁴⁵ O’Kell writes that the text “reveals a need on his part to find ideological

ancestors whose lives vindicate his chosen political identity,” and that “Disraeli, convinced of his own nobility and having no actual estates, simply claims the whole of England as his inheritance.”⁴⁶ Historical imaginaries were used as the medium for the affirmation of one’s ancestry—as a means to select from the political, literary, and cultural legacy bequeathed by the past. All that was required was the fashioning of history as a genealogical tree, a selection of whose elements could constitute the desired outcome: “a word, a deed, a single day, a single man, and we might be a nation” (*AL* 40).

In an apt foreshadowing of the argument I am making about *Alroy*, Lord Eliot wrote to Disraeli concerning the *Vindication*’s celebration of Henry St John (of Bolingbroke), an early-eighteenth-century English politician: “In reading your sketch of Bolingbroke I could not help thinking that if opportunities are not withheld, you may become *what he might have been*.”⁴⁷ The alternate-historical format was one which enabled similar claims about what might have been and enabled conjectures which mined the latency of the past for amelioration in the present. With its counterfactual rearrangements, *Alroy* is an idiosyncratic instance of a wider process of historical revisionism, of new (and sometimes heretical) methods for reinterpreting the past and arriving at what Isaac D’Israeli called “the perfect story of man.”

ROMANCE AND HISTORY

Barthold Georg Niebuhr complicated the process of interpreting antiquity by questioning the reliability of the earliest sources, and described the nature of the earliest history of western civilization as “poetical” in a lecture delivered in the late 1820s and translated for an English readership in 1844 by L. Schmitz.

Our task now is to prove that the earliest history does contain impossibilities, that it is poetical, that the very portions which are not of a poetical nature, are forgeries, and, consequently, that the history must be traced back to ancient lays and to a chronology which was invented and adapted to these lays at a later period.⁴⁸

This statement on historical interpretation outlines an approach to the original record of antiquity that recognizes that this early history-writing should be seen as “poetical” rather than factual, posing hermeneutic

challenges for the later historian. He asserts the entanglement of myth with the historical record in the work of Roman historians such as Livy, and of the errors by modern historians who try to impose a chronology of events across the shadowlands of *ur*-history based on these early accounts.

This “new criticism” is brought to bear on the textual authority of these first historical records, in particular the literality of scriptural accounts of creation and the gospels’ version of the life of Jesus. The authority of sceptical historiography was founded on new disciplines of enquiry, which included geology’s evidence for an older age of the earth than previously thought, and the science of philology from the German classicist, Friedrich August Wolf, who claimed “to establish accurately the primacy, authenticity, and, perhaps most importantly, the *derivational relationships* among competing textual explanations of historical events.”⁴⁹ Linda Dowling’s emphasis on derivation is important when we consider that the relationships sought were between the literature of a nation and its history—the equation of which was at the heart of *Alroy*’s political argument. The mythic elements of history—the “impossibilities” of the quotation above—were not to be thrown out, but interpreted as the ideas which communicated the culture and identity of nations. Thomas Arnold, in his inaugural lecture as Regius Chair of History at Oxford in 1841, made the point that the interior character of a nation was primary in history, not the dramatic reversals that were conventionally treated as history’s formative events (for example, wars): “It is this inward life after all which determines the character of the actions and of the man.”⁵⁰ The fusion of individual and national character was expressed in Arnold’s maxim that history was “the biography of a nation.”⁵¹ This approach includes a method for interpreting historical materials. Arnold points out that just as we could know an individual life by examining its author’s private letters, so we could know a nation by its science, art, and literature.⁵²

These expectations of historical analysis that aimed to extract a historical narrative from myth and chronicle were far from neutral; Norman Vance, in *The Victorians and Ancient Rome*, writes of the new history-writing from Germany at this time:

Sceptical revisionism, in combination—or in tension—with imaginative responsiveness to the romantic-poetic and legendary dimension of early Roman history, could permit the old exemplary history to be reinvented as more explicitly ideological and all the more easily appropriated for modern political or religio-political purposes.⁵³

Alroy (and *Uchronie*) is revisionist, and its purposes are precisely “religio-political”; the novel differs significantly in that it does not set out to disentangle myth, invention, and authentic record from each other, but works in the very opposite way by *entangling* those very categories. The novel thus reaches the reader (assisted by the colourful scholarly and editorial apparatus) as a text which demands that its readers, enjoyably and perhaps ironically, approach it as if they are practising the most contemporary mode of sceptical historical interpretation.

The novel was written immediately after Disraeli’s return from his Mediterranean and Middle-Eastern travels from 1830 to 1831, and incorporated material from his letters home, which were later transformed into editorial notes. In a letter to his sister of March 1831, he describes his first sight of Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives:

In the front is the magnificent mosque built upon the site of the Temple, with its beautiful gardens and fantastic gates—a variety of domes and towers rise in all directions, the houses are of a bright stone. I was thunderstruck. I saw before me apparently a gorgeous city. Nothing can be conceived more wild and terrible and barren than the surrounding scenery.⁵⁴

The hero’s perspective in the novel echoes the epistolary description; Alroy also approaches from a high grove and sees the Holy City from across a ravine: “Nothing could be conceived more barren, wild, and terrible than the surrounding scenery, unilluminated by a single trace of culture” (*AL* 79). The description is an almost *verbatim* repetition of Disraeli’s letter, but without the mosque in the foreground (as-yet unbuilt in the twelfth century). A third account of the view is provided in an endnote to the revised, 1845 edition of *Alroy*: “The finest view of Jerusalem is from the Mount of Olives. It is little altered since the period when David Alroy is supposed to have gazed upon it, but it is enriched by the splendid Mosque of Omar, built by the Moslem conquerors on the supposed site of the temple.” The “editor” continues with a dramatic anecdote: “I endeavoured to enter it at the hazard of my life. I was detected, surrounded by a crowd of turbaned fanatics, and escaped with difficulty.”⁵⁵ This composite role of the historian-scholar-editor is emphasized in the revised edition of 1845, in which the dedication to his sister is removed and replaced by the preface written by this supposed editor. This figure is, however, linked to Disraeli himself as the preface is endnoted “Grosvenor Gate: July 1845”—thus geographically tying

the editor to Disraeli's west-London milieu. In the historical imaginary of *Alroy*, these contradictory identities become articulated and coherent through an argument about the inheritance of a cosmopolitan identity which links Englishness with the exotic.

The overlapping personae of author, editor, and hero (to which the differently inflected descriptions of Jerusalem alert us) illustrate how the novel plays with authenticity. After his return, when the manuscript of *Alroy* was temporarily put aside, Disraeli had a telling exchange of letters on the title of the forthcoming *Contarini Fleming*. H. H. Milman, Disraeli reports, suggested that the novel not be called a romance, so that it might be read as a real history. In a letter to John Murray, he writes:

Certainly it were most desirable that the title should not disturb the illusion of Reality [...]. Nor do I see that the term Romance precludes the notion of a veracious History, for on more than one occasion, a fabulous designation has been given to a very authentic narrative.⁵⁶

Just as the editor of *Alroy* seems at once to be an authoritative source of information while at the same time a romantic adventurer (and in both cases attached to Disraeli himself), so here the opposition between truthfulness and a fabulous tale is glossed over; as with Charles Phillips's contemporary observation on the Napoleonic period, "romance assumed the air of history."⁵⁷ The historical novel in the midst of these historiographical revisions was a format that already involved the fabrication of episodes that were then woven into received history, and these creative supplements "could be invented more or less at will to sustain particular ideological or religious messages."⁵⁸ The modern historian and the novelist drew on each other's energies: the former "could greet the ancient Romans as contemporaries,"⁵⁹ while the latter could simulate the scholarship that made history so lively. With *Alroy*, Disraeli presses upon the distinction between the fabricated and the fabulous to generate a religio-political message for the present, and the result tips over into the category of alternate history.

The process of excavation, romantically inflected, is one way to describe the proximity of discovery and invention. In a letter to his father during his middle-eastern expedition, he describes the empty landscape around Yanina, and the sensation of proximity to the historical past:

"You often find your horses course on the foundation of a village without being aware of it, and what at first appears the dry bed of a torrent turns out to be the backbone of the skeleton of a ravaged town."⁶⁰ *Alroy* excavates and reanimates these submerged landscapes in a romantic, *unscientific* pre-figuration of the type of research his father anticipated in the "Secret History" essay. Philip Harwood's expectation of being able "to reconstruct the skeleton from the single bone, and clothe that skeleton with flesh and blood, and breathe into it a living soul," is suggestive of the necromantic powers of the historian and novelist.⁶¹ These resurrections recall Geoffroy's apocryphal excavation of Babylon, which "felt her depths open and breathe, her roads struck again with rays of sunlight, and her valley reborn finally into the world."⁶²

Edward Bulwer-Lytton certainly brings the dead back to life in *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1834), the final section of which explains how the details of its characters have been taken from descriptions of the jewelry, costumes, and location of the preserved corpses that had been recently publicized by the celebrated archaeologist Sir William Gell (to whom the novel was dedicated) with the publication of *Pompeiana* in 1832. In the novel's afterword, Bulwer-Lytton describes the scene that inspired the events: "In the garden was found a skeleton with a key by its bony hand, and near it a bag of coins. This is believed to have been the master of the house—the unfortunate Diomed, who had probably sought to escape by the garden, and been destroyed either by the vapors or some fragment of stone."⁶³ These novels by Bulwer-Lytton and Disraeli pursued the warm life of the past that the ruin or trace could evoke, and were consistent with popular notions regarding the affect of the classical ruin.

Charles Bucke commends a visit to Herculaneum to visitors in a guidebook of 1840 by saying: "there would be a sense of the actual presence of those past times, almost like the illusion of a dream."⁶⁴ Bucke's description follows the impulse to restore sensuous life to the long-deceased: the shape of the remains "concur in revealing to us that this woman was young; that she was tall and well made, and even that she had escaped in her chemise, for some of the linen was still adhering to the ashes."⁶⁵ His description of a woman's body, whose form was preserved in the molten lava, also conveys this proximity: "This cement, compressed and hardened by time around her body, has become a complete mould of it, and in the pieces here preserved, we see a perfect

impression of the different parts to which it adhered.”⁶⁶ The use of the present perfect (“has become a mould”) rather than the preterite tense for completed events attests to the continuity of the past into the present for pre- and early Victorian tourists to antiquity, which this material figure of arrested life represents so compellingly.⁶⁷ The same presentism applies to Bulwer-Lytton’s historical prose, which he explains in his introduction does not “bow the creative to the scholastic.”⁶⁸ Historical realism required familiar (modern) language, and in this sense Bulwer-Lytton’s novel is different from Disraeli’s attempt to embed revisionist claims about national identity into the literary style of the historical novel.

The romance of the historical past, for the tourist or the reader, could be attached to material evidence, to a trace which had an empirical footing but required also an act of the imagination to interpret and summon into a vivid relationship with the past. The expectation of a science of history that could take a bone and return its owner to life typified the persistence of romanticism that absorbed and was even reinvigorated by the material sciences. Bulwer-Lytton explains the nature of his historical fiction in the preface to his novel in very similar terms.

It was not unnatural, perhaps, that a writer who had before labored, however unworthily, in the art to revive and to create, should feel a keen desire to people once more those deserted streets, to repair those graceful ruins, to reanimate the bones which were yet spared to his survey; to traverse the gulf of eighteen centuries, and to wake to a second existence—the City of the Dead!⁶⁹

The final phrase appears three times in the book, a repetition similar in its recurrence to the recycling of the Mount of Olives description in *Alroy*. As well as in the section quoted above, it is used to close a description of Pompeii at night: Arbaces, the Egyptian villain of the story, contemplates the city which is “locked and torpid under the ice of sleep”—and is soon to be arrested by a fiery death. His observations, loaded with the author’s and readers’ knowledge of the impending disaster, are interrupted abruptly when the modern-day visitor to Pompeii is invoked: “The city seemed as, after the awful change of seventeen ages, it seems now to the traveller—a City of the Dead.”⁷⁰ The future, still unknown,

explicitly shadows the narrative through the interjection of the narrator, but it also invades the perceptions of Arbaces, for the expression he uses is plagiarized from the future (a paradox that is invoked more knowingly in Mark Twain's novel, *A Connecticut Yankee at King Arthur's Court*, which I discuss in Chap. 6). The editorial footnote to this paragraph tells us that the expression "City of the Dead" was Walter Scott's repeated exclamation when he was given a tour of the excavations of Herculaneum by Sir William Gell. These references to the present day shake readers out of the dream of the past and remind them that the scenes of Pompeii are retrospections stimulated by now-cold and fragmented material traces.

The strategy of invoking the future in the midst of a historical fiction was a celebration of the historical imagination itself and its powers of summoning the past; it also turned the contemplation of the past into something like a historical looking glass, by which the nineteenth-century reader could encounter familiar figures, even oneself, in period dress. Richard Jenkyns observes a similar dialogue between the Victorians and their Hellenic precursors in historical novels: "A Victorian might try to imagine himself as an ancient Greek, but the Greek that he became tended to be one strangely obsessed with the future."⁷¹ Works of art and literature from the latter half of the nineteenth century would make this self-consciously reciprocal historical gaze central to the aesthetic contemplation of the past—for instance the observation in *Marius the Epicurean* (1885), Walter Pater's novel set in second-century Rome, that a polished floor "looked, as mosaic-work is apt to do, its best in old age,"⁷² or the painting of *Sappho and Alcaeus* (1881) by Lawrence Alma-Tadema (Fig. 3.1), which appears on the cover of this book and is discussed in the introduction. Before the appropriation of historical distance as a principle of the aesthetic movement, the dialogic historical correspondence between past and present was used more strategically and ideologically, and was essential for Disraeli's variant pre-history to function as an argument about the cultural composition of his own time.

Virginia Zimmerman records a nineteenth-century deception practised upon impressionable Victorian tourists to archaeological sites that also describes the method of synthetic pre-history of *Alroy*. Guides would bury artefacts so that visitors could enjoy discovering them—the red dust they brushed off appeared to be the passage of time which,

Fig. 3.1 Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema, *Sappho and Alcaeus*. 1881, Oil on canvas, 66 x 122 cm, Walters Art Museum, thewalters.org (accessed October 13, 2016)

once removed, brought the tourist into an immediate relation with the ancient past.⁷³ Disraeli's text was a similar fabrication, even if the readers understood the deception. The excavated object contradicted historical beliefs in order to revise genealogical connections and thus displaced the present from its cultural and historical genealogy. It was thus comparable to other heretical claims about religious history, for example Robert Taylor's declaration that "EVERYTHING OF CHRISTIANITY IS OF EGYPTIAN ORIGIN" in his *Diegesis* and on the walls of Oakham Gaol, where he was imprisoned for blasphemy;⁷⁴ or Samuel Lysons's novel *Claudia and Pudens, Or, The Early Christians of Gloucester* (1861), which took a scriptural anecdote as the basis for a speculative narrative of Christianity's arrival in England in the first century (making Anglicanism the original faith and older than the Catholic Church). These sorts of revision could "confuse the genetics of nationality."⁷⁵ Even though deliberately undermining its own aura of authenticity, Disraeli invited the readers of *Alroy* to ponder questions of style and national identity. The author proposed himself (more or less ironically) as the inheritor of a latent historical legacy.

UCHRONIE: LIBERTY AND HISTORY IN RENOUVIER

EXCUSEZ LES FAUTES DE L'AUTEUR (UC 412).⁷⁶

This apology (“pardon the errors of the author”) begins the editor’s postscript to *Uchronie* (1876), a work whose full title translates as *Uchronia (Utopia in History): An Apocryphal Historical Sketch of the Development of European Civilization, Not as it Was, But as it Might Have Been*. The text details an imaginary history of Europe from the first to the eighth centuries of our timeline, but which are the eighth to the sixteenth centuries in the imaginary (uchronic) timeline, according to the Olympian calendar of the alternate history (in which Christian-Era dating is never adopted). Renouvier began publishing the work serially in the 1840s, but put aside the project for approximately 25 years as a result of his forced withdrawal from political life that followed the accession of Louis Napoleon in 1851.⁷⁷ Renouvier had campaigned and argued for secular and republican education for all classes of society,⁷⁸ and shortly after the revolution of 1848 wrote a textbook affirming secular principles of citizenship and civics for use in schools; the work, *Manuel Républicain de l’Homme et du Citoyen*, was vigorously attacked in the Chamber and subjected to a vote of no confidence, which it lost. Renouvier (as well as his supervisor, the Minister of Education) was forced to resign.⁷⁹ It was after France’s defeat by Prussia in 1871 (and the removal of Louis Napoleon) that he returned to writing about politics and history. His prolific output between 1860 and 1906 included major publications on the science of morals, a classification of philosophical doctrines, an analytical philosophy of history, two studies of Victor Hugo, and a critique of Kant. William Logue attributes the relative obscurity for such a prominent figure to a tendency post 1871 to overlook French disciples of Kant and the decline of liberal political philosophy after World War I.⁸⁰

History is altered in *Uchronie* in that the Christian Church is not permitted to gain ascendancy over other religions within the Roman Empire, nor acquire significant political power; it thus never exercises its influence to initiate conflicts over doctrinal disputes or major wars between religions. The history of western civilization remains predominantly secular in this narrative, and cultural development and political advances (civic rights and freedoms) are achieved earlier than in our own history. The extreme complexity of *Uchronie* becomes apparent in the editorial apparatus that records the text’s own apocryphal passage

through history. As well as the five “tableaux” of alternate-historical narrative (which constitute *Uchronie* itself), there is a forward written by a modern-day editor (whom we take to be Renouvier), followed by an “untitled appendix by an author of the seventeenth century to serve as preface.” This section of the work tells the story of the composition of *Uchronie* by a monk, Father Antapire, who passed on his heretical history to the father of the unnamed commentator before dying in 1601 at the hands of the Inquisition.⁸¹ There is also a second appendix, written, we are told, in 1658 by the son of the author of the first appendix (thus the third recipient and guardian of the document); then a third appendix, added in 1709 by the grandson, who considers the last hundred years of *actual* history in light of the thoughts on civil society contained in *Uchronie*. The editor’s postscript (a final editorial reflection signed by Renouvier) examines the logical paradoxes of such hypothetical historical speculations. By disclosing here that Father Antapire is a “doubly apocryphal storyteller, who does not exist” (UC 407), Renouvier collapses the multiple identities of the collated fragments’ authors, extending to the editor an indistinct and multi-faceted role, as was the case in *Alroy*. The postscript closed the novel, and it is unclear whether the signature of “Ch. Renouvier” refers to authorship of the postscript only or the entirety of *Uchronie*—in which case the apology (“excusez les fautes de l’auteur”) is one he made on his own behalf.

The departure from received history occurs when Marcus Aurelius decides to accept the advice of Avidius Cassius to establish a 25-year dictatorship in order to reinstate the principles of the first Republic and curtail the growing influence of the Christian Church. (In *Aristopia* (1895), a benign dictatorship was also the proposed means of achieving an American Republic, as discussed in Chap. 6). He chooses Avidius Cassius as his adoptive son (rather than passing on the succession to Commodus), and they rule together until the dignified suicide of the former, who leaves behind a document containing advice for his designated, non-filial successor. The history that we are aware of, with its conflicts and violence, is always waiting to reassert itself, and the second tableau closes with the apparent realignment of the uchronic timeline with recorded history: Avidius Cassius is murdered and Commodus declared emperor by the Senate, whereupon he immediately nullifies all the progressive legislation of his father. Two thousand Christians are murdered and mystical ceremonies return to public life, while the Christian faith is forced back into the catacombs

to regroup and reform as an entity increasingly shaped and strengthened by political persecution.

The promise of progress and the renewed values of the Republic have been implanted, however, and the reign of Commodus is also cut short, at which point the benefits of secular rule and the legal protection of freedoms produce incremental benefits. The alternate-historical format makes it possible to present an argument for the long-durational, rather than eventual character of historical development. Despite the divergence of the two timelines and the achievement of cultural advance, the same forces and crises affect the alternate history as our own. The advent of free trade between nations in *Uchronie* is accompanied, at first, by “commercial wars,” which “ravaged the entire world” (*UC* 281). Also, the discovery of new continents in *Uchronie* occasions terrible atrocities upon their native populations (*UC* 275). Ignorance and violent self-interest are always present and cultural progress is perpetually in danger of regression; Barbarian hordes gather on the edges of the Roman Empire (supported by the Christian Church), but are more effectively withstood. Rome does not fall. The counterfactual achievement of secular values has better equipped the re-established Roman Republic to neutralize the shocks and setbacks that attend the turbulence of the history we know, and the struggle for power by the forces of church and hostile enemies.

Detailed, exhaustive delineation of this altered history of Europe makes *Uchronie* very different in terms of style and genre from *Alroy*, and places it outside the category of historical romance. The narrative records lines of succession, government policy, and crises which emerge, for example when combined Christian forces mount a series of Crusades against the Republic in the fifteenth (Olympian) century of the imaginary timeline. The text describes heretical dogmas that arose within the church, various national or racial characteristics, advances in science and culture, and the political structures and legal systems in European countries. The presentation of the alternate Europe is accompanied by long editorial footnotes that reflect on both the departures from received events and on the process of writing an imaginary historical narrative. Early in the narrative of *Uchronie*, the editor comments on the reflexivity of the exercise by which we attempt to imagine another history than the one we inhabit:

Of this uchronic world, of course, it is with great difficulty that we glimpse this modernity in a distant future, we men of the nineteenth century; the middle ages which, for the author, were a time of struggle between the principles of tolerance and theocracy, were instead a period of the triumph and dominance of a church and a priesthood. (*UC* 32n)

This refracted perspective upon the past, in which a supposedly later editor comments on and expresses reservations regarding the original author's historical heresies, has a disorienting effect on the reader, as does the use of two calendars throughout. The chronology adheres to the Olympian calendar, and the text's detailed narrative finishes in the sixteenth century of the Olympiads (corresponding to the eighth century of the Christian Common Era).

The 800-year differential complicates the reading of the text, for known events are dated according to the uchronic calendar, which becomes increasingly hard to follow as the effect of Europe's alternative development is such that events we recognize happen earlier than in our own timeline. This divergence between the two chronologies provides a numerical count for Renouvier's political argument: with the diminished influence of religion, advances in science and democratic culture take place much sooner, and the dates of recognizable waypoints of historical progress dated in the *Olympian* calendar begin to approximate to the same dates that we know from the *Christian* calendar. In an editorial note, Renouvier states that Father Antapire's presentation of the sixteenth century in the uchronic timeline (eighth century CE) "portrays a scene that roughly resembles the condition of republics from the middle ages" (*UC* 283n).⁸² In other words, as a result of the separation of church and state, this imaginary history gains several centuries of advance on our own. A review of a 1901 edition of *Uchronie* summarized the outcome of this historical alteration thus: Europe "seems to have caught up with, by the ninth century, the intellectual and moral condition of our modern civilization."⁸³

Civilization is not radically changed as a result of the alteration in the reign of Marcus Aurelius, but its history is accelerated; the same forces threaten to arrest achievements in politics and society, and those achievements are for the most part the civic structures that were familiar in the late nineteenth century (though not including his anticipation of an international legal system). The more radical historical departure lies in his evaluation of society *prior to* the counterfactual departure in the

second century, and in this sense *Uchronie* participates in historical revisionism. Father Antapire's interpretation of Greek and Roman history emphasizes the civic virtues and principles of liberty in these civilizations prior to the historical divergence in the second century, for example the "admirable systems of education destined to elevate each citizen's constitution [*valeur virile*]" (UC 22). He also asserts that there was a tradition of liberty in the West prior to the Greek city-states; their freedoms were not new, but were rather the formalization of liberties that originated in their forms of community. "Villages precede empires and freedom is older than enslavement" (UC 22). These observations constituted an interpretation of history (which had not yet departed into alternate history) that revised received accounts of the past in a way comparable to the sceptical revisionism that was contemporary with the publication of *Alroy*, but which occurred within new disciplinary frameworks. In *Uchronie*, Renouvier's revisionist claims drew on political philosophy and the new science of mankind—anthropology. He (under the guise of Father Antapire) departs from the familiar narrative of civilization's decline, fall, and rebirth, and interprets the failure of Rome as the result of the curtailment of liberties that accompanied imperial expansion; in other words, Roman civilization could have continued to develop across Europe. These lost liberties included the failure to maintain structures of citizenship, the impossibility of continuing to give land freely to citizens, and the concentration of power in order to administer the expanded empire. This type of explanation was consistent with a wider scepticism of Gibbon's thesis of decline and fall in the latter part of the nineteenth century.⁸⁴

Renouvier was also resisting developmental models of historical development that were inherited from the Enlightenment. As William Logue has pointed out, a tenet of the determinist historical philosophy of the Enlightenment was the need "to consider classical antiquity—thought, religion, and society—inferior to the European Middle Ages."⁸⁵ This belief in the ongoing improvement of human societies was one that Renouvier resisted throughout his life; alternate history provided a means of presenting an argument for an anti-deterministic philosophy of history, which I take to be his purpose for adopting the format. The preface to *Uchronie* describes the puzzle that afflicted nineteenth-century historians, from which he proposes an escape. Renouvier identifies what he sees as an erroneous avenue of historical enquiry, devoted to discovering the "necessary laws" which govern behaviour and events, and which

leads to a mistaken understanding of human action as “determined by its precedents, and all these events written in advance in who knows what eternal decrees” (*UC* viii). Renouvier consistently opposes the positivist and schematic historical models of Comte and others.⁸⁶ The anti-Catholic basis for the political argument in *Uchronie* should not obscure his broader argument about how organic and gradual historical development is the most effective safeguard of liberty, and how historical interpretation needs to respond to the character of social development rather than impose models which see progress as axiomatically equivalent to history.

Renouvier describes the work’s putative author as “a visionary who dreams the past [and explains] the systematic progress [*série philosophique*] of events”,⁸⁷ but his construction of a philosophy of history is very different from the mechanistic explanations of Hegel and Comte. Renouvier’s analysis is presented in depth in *Introduction à la philosophie analytique de l’histoire: Les idées, les religions, les systèmes*, which provides some context for the ideas in *Uchronie*. This *Introduction* was published in 1896 but, like *Uchronie*, was an expansion of earlier work (being an amplification of the fourth of his *Essais de critique général* (1864)). It is an attack on schematic accounts of historical progress, for when the human spirit accedes to such systems and declares “a posteriori that the past is necessary and good,” it allows autocratic powers to take hold.⁸⁸

He is concerned here with establishing the relation of ethical judgement to history and does so by redefining “history.” It is not a field of knowledge which can be examined from the outside according to principles of logic, or something that has happened in accordance with systems of development that can be grasped separately from events. Instead, history for Renouvier is a set of concepts relating to identity, time, and change that arise from the capacity of humans to study themselves. Without what he sees as the distinctive recognition of humans that they themselves are an object of knowledge, reflection on where “we” (as a nation or a species) come from and our destination is an impossibility. Reflexivity is the first necessary condition for historical knowledge. The type of thought that recognizes itself, he explains, is a faculty which “judges, corrects, refashions, reorders without cease the judgements of individuals and societies, acts, events, in a word history.”⁸⁹ Any claims regarding the ethics of history and historical events, therefore, have to be carefully made, because morality *seems* to be too continuous with history—“a function of history”—for the distance between subject and judgement for moral evaluation to be intelligible.⁹⁰ Morality cannot be

understood as an ideal that traverses history without alteration, but likewise, history cannot be examined or judged without recourse to principles that we suppose to be universal.

This paradox at the heart of historical knowledge can clarify Renouvier's reason for turning to historical imaginaries. For Renouvier, a deplorable result of the systematic explanations of history conceived by Hegel, Comte, Vico, and Bossuet is their supposition of a law of human development which relieves the individual of personal responsibility in the historical process. Renouvier is most critical of the intellectual laziness that such fatalism inculcates: "there is nothing so easeful for the human spirit as to acknowledge established facts, nothing so difficult as to comprehend and disentangle *the immensity of what might have been*."⁹¹ Alternate history, however suspect its assertions of what might have been, thus becomes an immense and difficult task whose purpose is to oppose a deterministic view of history; this usage is similar to Tolstoy's rhetorical questions of what might have happened in *War and Peace*. The critical purchase of the alternate history is even more similar to Foucault's much later project of making the study of the past an exercise in dismantling historical assumptions, and allowing one "to learn to what extent the effort to think one's own history can free thought from what it silently thinks, and so enable it to think differently."⁹² And like Foucault, Renouvier also turns to the study of Greek culture to look for instances of social organization that maximised the liberty of the individual.

Alternate history is not, therefore, a means of transforming the past into what one would have liked it to become, but to introduce an alteration which, in its proper exercise, is obliged to be coherent and possible. Although it cannot be presented as historically necessary or correct (which would require the reintroduction of laws governing history), the alteration has to be one that believably *might* have resisted those forces of the church that were so harmful to cultural and political history. The alteration *should* be extremely minor, and the consequence in *Uchronie* is an improved society, which becomes thinkable as the one that might have developed from Greek and Roman civic ideals, and with which readers could still align themselves. According to Renouvier, this improvement is one that the vigilant exercise of reason would have produced. Thus the work of the philosopher becomes continuous and compatible with political policy-makers and with social reformers. Of this collaborative project, Renouvier writes: "If this form of politics is

conducted wisely and with clarity, it will work with the philosophers for the education of public reason, for the improvement of institutions and power, for its correct transformation" (*UC* 60).

This conception of historical enquiry should be placed in the turbulent context of late-nineteenth-century politics in France, when another French Republic had given way to the re-established empire of Napoleon III, suffered a war with Prussia, and experienced the suppression of the Paris Commune. The disappointments after this disastrous period in French history were discussed with Louis Ménard, whom Renouvier had met in late 1852 and who remained a close friend and ally, despite their differences of opinion on the treatment of the communards. Ménard was a fellow exile, having had to withdraw from public life to avoid political persecution as Renouvier had also been obliged to. Both turned away from practical politics during the rule of Napoleon Bonaparte, but both transferred their advocacy of progressive politics to their areas of study: analytic philosophy for Renouvier and the study of Hellenic culture for Ménard. Both shared an admiration for the polytheism of Greek civilization and considered ancient Greece to be a high-water mark of philosophical humanism in western civilization.⁹³

The first letters of their correspondence were published in the *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* date from 1874 to 1875, and consisted of a disagreement over the value and legacy of the recently and violently suppressed Paris Commune.⁹⁴ Renouvier declared himself "as much a communard as yourself" (Ménard had recently advocated amnesty for the communards), but in a later letter (February 1875) he expressed his distaste for the idea of a government made up of the communards.⁹⁵ Despite their disagreements, they share a common concern with the apparent circularity of human history by which, Ménard writes, "we will thus always turn in the same circles like a squirrel in its cage."⁹⁶ Renouvier agrees and deplors the fact that national politics were left in the hands of those with a complacent belief in progress: "those who believe that the best means of advancing is to find that all is well and could not fail to go well, whatever happens."⁹⁷ In the same letters, Renouvier defends the stance of *Critique Philosophique* (the weekly journal that he edited), which favoured the rule of law over the insurrectionary self-rule of the communards. "The thesis of legalism that we defend in the *Critique*, and which no doubt displeases you, has its philosophical basis in the need to refashion for the nation habits to sustain her, unless we wish for her to perish through the renewal of her crimes."⁹⁸

What Renouvier finds alarming in the politics of the communards (and in France's revolutionary political tradition) is the violence of their rupture from an organic—but not predetermined—course of historical development. He underscores the importance of gradualism in the same letter where he writes: “on its own, the *loss of habits*, be they social, religious, or political, must necessarily lead to the most lamentable consequences.”⁹⁹ In other words, it is the constitutional protection of habits and customs that enables the cultural and political stability which made the development of liberty possible. Christianity, with its updated version of the blood sacrifice and its celebration of holy martyrdom, has for Renouvier been a regressive doctrine from its inception.

Renouvier was aware of the problems of alternate-historical narratives. “No one could know better than we the difficulties of an imaginary construction such as the one which is the subject of *Uchronie*” (*UC* 407). He lists the manifest faults of the speculative undertaking: its failure to reflect the infinite variety of life, its dubious presentation, the poverty of its invented facts; he points out that even historians of the *real* world are unable to persuade their critics of their arguments. This hedged, self-critical presentation expands the subject of the text: it is an extended attack upon the temporal power of the church and the notion of historical determinism, but at the same time a disquisition on historical knowledge and the value of counterfactual thinking. It is an argument for the importance of contingency in historical understanding in order to avoid the “imbecilic dogmatism” of historical determinism (that Victor Hugo had succumbed to¹⁰⁰). What he wished to replace dogmatism with is intelligent and rational doubt:

Despite the problems associated with counterfactual thinking, the exercise was nonetheless valuable, for it reclaimed the right to introduce into the actual series of historical events a certain number of different outcomes [*déterminations*] than those which were produced. In choosing these well, one can demonstrate the probability that the course of events could have been profoundly different. (*UC* 411)

This seems to be the same intention that Alkon identifies in the text: “to employ *uchronia* as a means of speculating on lines of historical causation,”¹⁰¹ a description that also applies to *Alroy*. We can, however, say more about the operation by emphasizing the role of scepticism. The value of the counterfactual scenario does not, in Renouvier's work, lie

in any production of positive knowledge about historical processes and causation; rather it is in “the right to introduce” historical concepts and outcomes in order to disrupt a belief in determinism. This in turn can serve the needs of the present, when the interests of society require the interpretation (or *excavation*) of history for the concepts and values to serve present needs.

INHERITANCE AND EVOLUTION

These historical imaginaries, which reconfigured the political genealogy of the present, have features in common with that most significant (and heretical) nineteenth-century explanation of inheritance—evolutionary theory. Isaac D’Israeli’s expectation of an improved knowledge of the past bears comparison with Darwin’s and others’ explanation of change and adaptation. He expresses a belief that future generations will develop faculties that are now only rudimentary; he also anticipates that as knowledge of history improved, the blank spaces of the past would be filled in. *Alroy* makes use of obscurities in the historical record in the same way that Darwin, in *On the Origin of Species* (1859), engages with the absences in the geological record; for both the interplay of remnants and obscurity is an explanatory process which invests subsequent claims about the past with shared aesthetic qualities. The search for remains and traces was practised in various disciplines, and before archaeology separated into the studies of the planet’s and the earliest human cultures (geology and archaeology as it is now known), the study of antiquity was profoundly interdisciplinary. Archaeology in the early to mid-nineteenth century bore upon philology, scriptural interpretation, and history, and shaped boundary disputes between them.¹⁰² We can recognize Disraeli and Bulwer-Lytton as a romantic archaeologists of literature and Darwin as a romantic biologist.

Renouvier’s alternate history, published four years after that of *The Descent of Man*, was contemporary with a later phase of Darwinian thought and its reception. *Uchronie*’s alternative version of European history was not a romantic exploration of historical absence; its precision and strenuous efforts at plausibility (undercut with reservations about the entire task) was an undertaking that was reflective of the belief in the possibility of a science of mankind, a system of explanation which could encompass the entirety of human development and which enabled

secular-utopian visions of the future. Renouvier's and Disraeli's alternate histories may seem to be unlike on every ideological point, being opposed on the relation of religion to politics and in the cultures of knowledge through which they explored alternatives. To record only the difference is to miss several important affinities, however, as their better societies equally imply a defence of civilization from the forces of revolution. Disraeli's defence of the English constitution is complemented by Renouvier's liberalism, for both were alarmed by the ongoing dangers of radical upheaval. Furthermore, both imagined that peace and stability provided the most favourable conditions for progress, under which it was possible to cultivate those favourable elements from cultural and political history, or legacy, in a gradual process of social amelioration. In Disraeli's case, this legacy involved a degree of national chauvinism, whereas Renouvier's optimum history of mankind was more broadly Eurocentric.

In the first volume of *Principles of Geology* (1830), Charles Lyell uses the discipline of history as an analogy to illustrate the range of materials that the geologist can draw upon. The historian is said to require familiarity with "all branches of knowledge, whereby any insight into human affairs, or into the moral and intellectual nature of man, can be obtained"; likewise, "it would be no less desirable that a geologist should be well versed in chemistry, natural philosophy, mineralogy, zoology, comparative anatomy, botany; in short every science relating to inorganic nature."¹⁰³ But the correspondences between natural history and the study of the past are more closely intertwined than this: in volume 2 of the *Principles of Geology* (1832), he asks whether the idea of species "being indefinitely modified in the course of a long series of generations" is compatible with the apparent phenomenon of periodic catastrophes that have the power to exterminate whole species of plants and animals.¹⁰⁴ This question applies also to man, and Lyell cites Bishop Berkeley's argument (made 100 years earlier) that the absence of material remains of *previous* civilizations suggests that man is a recently created addition to the world.¹⁰⁵

Lyell's later work, *The Geological Evidences of the Antiquity of Man* (1863), follows the same movement between natural-historical and human-historical observations, premised on the belief in universal patterns; ancient Rome is used as the case study to focus attention on the natural laws that influenced *all* species. He reports the naturalist and geologist Giovanni Battista Brocchi's suggestion that every species is

subject to a necessary decline in its vital energies—a biological law that mirrored the prevailing historiography of the Roman Empire’s inexorable decline.¹⁰⁶ Lyell, however, insists that a different dimension of human culture, the progress of language, offers a gradualist and improving sense of natural history, and one which is more progressive than previous theories of catastrophism and decline allow.¹⁰⁷ It is language that provides a persuasive metaphor for the single-species origin of mankind (as opposed to polygenism). The absence of a discoverable first language, like the missing remains of the notional earliest civilization, should not lead to the assumption of their non-existence and confirm the 6000-year age of the planet suggested by scripture. Rather, the true nature of the past should be approached through hypothesis, not *only* on the basis of empirical evidence.

The question now at issue, whether the living species are connected with the extinct by a common bond of descent, will best be cleared up by devoting ourselves to the study of the actual state of the living world, and to those monuments of the past in which the relics of the animate creation of former ages are best preserved and least mutilated by the hand of time.¹⁰⁸

Lyell, like Darwin, tends towards a view of natural history as incremental and progressive; but he does so in the face of missing evidence, a problem which Darwin addresses in the chapter “Imperfection of the Geological Record.” By drawing on the work of geologists, particularly Lyell, Darwin shows that richness of life rarely coincides with conditions in which fossil remains are preserved; “thus the geological record will almost necessarily be rendered intermittent” (*OS* 300). Darwin invokes the planet as its own archivist, one whose powers of preservation and display are insufficient to record the vast periods of time and richness of life of natural history.

What an infinite number of generations, which the mind cannot grasp, must have succeeded each other in the long rolls of years! Now turn to our richest geological museums, and what a paltry display we behold! (*OS* 297)

This emphasis on the vast scale of natural history, of which only fragments remain to be stitched together into coherence through a creative process

of inspired hypothesis, is the basis for thinking of Darwin as a “romantic” biologist whose connections with Thomas Carlyle are more than rhetorical. Carlyle places the historian above the antiquarian who deals only with relics of the past, “without eye for the whole”; he also emphasizes the obscurity of the historical record, which he describes as “the dark untenanted places of the past”—a description of history completely consistent with Darwin’s “ancient and utterly unknown epochs in the world’s history.”¹⁰⁹

Darwin, in the *Origin of Species*, constructs an odd argument where the absence of evidence is finessed as the evidence of absence, making his theory of descent with variation one which predicts discoveries that will eventually fill in these blanks. Gillian Beer describes the reasoning here as analogical metaphor. Analogy (a term used liberally by Darwin and a crucial method for Victorian science, as discussed in Chap. 5) contains a future orientation, Beer writes, for it negotiates the similarities between evolutionary theory and the observation of the world (existing species and the fossil remains of their ancestors) as well as the divergences (the missing evidence of the history that theory supposed) by implying that future discoveries would affirm or disprove the theory. When sufficient supporting evidence appeared, the theory would be transformed from hypothesis into an empirical, descriptive account. Beer writes: “In such a case the parallel narrative patterns reveal actual identity, and the distance between the two patterns vanishes. Total and satisfying congruity is revealed.”¹¹⁰ This is precisely the pattern of discovery and affirmation that Disraeli stages in *Alroy*, one which delves into the obscurity of the historical record and shapes its (creatively) excavated materials in a way which discovers the pre-history of the cultural landscape of the present day. Darwin explains the retrospective quality of natural-historical hypotheses in human terms also when he compares the way of working backwards from remains to establish their genealogy:

When we no longer look at an organic being as a savage looks at a ship, as at something wholly beyond his comprehension; when we regard every production of nature as one which has had a history; [...] when we thus view each organic being, how far more interesting, I speak from experience, will be the study of natural history become! (OS 456)

In *Alroy*, Miriam anticipates Disraeli himself; the presence of such a figure in the future (or the reader’s present) is vital for the novel’s

argument, which coordinates hypothesis and evidence in the same pattern of explanation as in *On the Origin of Species*. The two figures—David Alroy the leader born too early and Disraeli as the inheritor of an unfulfilled legacy—mutually support each other through the medium of predictive *analogy*.

Darwinian theory also provokes the conjecture of variant histories, for it shows the past to be latent with unfulfilled lines of development and thus undermines the necessity of current species relationships and forms. In the chapter on “Natural Selection,” Darwin writes:

Of the many twigs which flourished when the tree was a mere bush, only two or three, now grown into great branches, yet survive and bear all the other branches; so with the species which lived during long-past geological periods, very few now have living and modified descendants. (OS 171)

He explains the existence of “whole orders, families and genera which have now no living representatives, and which are known to us only from having been found in a fossil state” (OS 172). The diagram of natural selection (Fig. 3.2) that Darwin uses to illustrate the divergence of species schematizes the lineage of life in its present forms but also draws attention to the discontinued lines of development whose characteristics are not inherited. There are therefore two meanings of history: that which is genealogically related to the present, and the closed avenues of development which truly and *only* belong to the past. Alternate history was the literary format that elided the distinction, for its characteristic alteration was to take one of those discontinued lines of development and nudge it across into the stream of inherited life, from which it could flow down through genealogical history and—hypothetically, notionally—come into a relationship of descent and inheritance with a present thus modified. As Tina Young Choi puts it, the map of evolutionary history invokes a “moment of indeterminacy or indecision” and invites the imaginative return to moments of “divergence.”¹¹¹

The description could be applied equally to Renouvier’s very similar illustration (Fig. 3.3), which shows the operation of alternate history, with its moments of divergence and its invocation of other socio-political organizations as conceivable historical possibilities.

Fig. 3.2 William West, *Divergence of Species*. 1859, Lithograph print in Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* (John Murray, 1859), facing page 116

This diagram is included by Renouvier to illustrate the epistemological problems that accompany counterfactual speculation. Having proposed that the historical trajectory *Oa* can be imagined otherwise (as *OA*), why should a reader be convinced of the alternative history, *OAb*, and not imagine alternatives of his or her own that begin *OAB* (and so on)? The “uchroniste,” Renouvier remarks, is obliged to make decisions that are “multiplying, arbitrary, unverifiable.”¹¹² The angle of the alternative trajectory depends on the purposes and beliefs of the writer, and a problem with alternate history is the privilege of retrospection—and this ability to schematize and systematize after the fact is also, as we saw, responsible for the errors in the historical analysis of enlightenment philosophers. It was a problem which applied across disciplines, between history and evolutionary science, as John Glendening observes:

Fig. 3.3 Charles Renouvier, Untitled diagram, 1876, illustration in Charles Renouvier, *Uchronie (Putopie dans l'histoire)* (Bureau de la Critique Philosophique, 1876), page 408

Some students of evolution [...] clearly understood that Darwinian theory itself suffuses history with indeterminacy because of the multitudinous hereditary and environmental variables, coupled with humans' limited powers of perception and incomprehension, that make evolutionary developments unpredictable, impossible directly to observe in action, and intelligible only in retrospect.¹¹³

What Renouvier shares with Darwin is a fascination with the discontinued lines of historical development, despite his reservations regarding the propriety and logic of privileging one moment of divergence over another when evaluated with hindsight. His priority is thus to think of history as a tree of possibilities in order to counter theories of determinism and necessity; *Uchronie* does describe the history of a more enlightened Europe, but this improved narrative is presented as the dream of a disillusioned priest. Renouvier's more abstract purpose is to demonstrate the non-necessity of historical outcomes, including future ones.

The alternate histories discussed in this chapter also incorporate absences into their accounts of historical development. They wield a belief in the optimum character of historical development (messianic or secular) and exploit silences of the historical record as imaginative stimuli, even if those silences are contrived or created. The method of taking

a fragment, whether a fossil or minor episode from history, as the basis to construct a vision of the past is romantic in character. We should recall here that evolutionary theory describes not only a process by which the capacities of species became adapted to their environment with every-greater refinement; it also speaks to the abandoned functions of which only traces remain. “Rudimentary organs will speak infallibly with respect to the nature of long-lost structures” (OS 457). Disraeli’s description of riding across the empty landscape at Yanina indicates a similar fascination with the expressive remnant: “what at first appears the dry bed of a torrent turns out to be the backbone of the skeleton of a ravaged town.”¹¹⁴ The imaginative restitution of past cultures based on their residual traces was a form of romantic excavation that described the historical imaginary of *Alroy*, at a time when archaeology and geology were still entangled disciplines. Disraeli’s revised genealogy of the present, and assertions about its “long-lost structures,” disrupted given accounts in all of these areas: language, religious inheritance, and the legacy of antiquity.

Renouvier’s complex and demanding chronology did not, like *Alroy*, insert an invented history in the (self-created) absences in the historical record. According to William James, Renouvier saw acceptance of theories that explained unobservable phenomena (which would include the presentation of alternate history and evolutionary hypotheses) as acts of “volition.”¹¹⁵ *Uchronie* nonetheless participated in a discourse of development and civilization that was able to take the entirety of human history as a field of scientific enquiry, one which was dependent on Darwin and Wallace’s theorization of universal mechanisms of descent and variation. The perception of the historical past as a field of concepts, linked through genealogical lines of inheritance that could be drawn upon for present transformations was what Renouvier had in common with theorists who applied evolutionary systems to the history and study of mankind more explicitly than Darwin himself did in *The Descent of Man* (1871). Alfred Russel Wallace claimed that “Man has not only escaped ‘natural selection’ himself, but he actually is able to take away some of that power from nature which, before his appearance, she universally exercised.”¹¹⁶ Edward Burnett Tylor emphasized the role of scientific consciousness in the process in 1873 when he wrote that “the unconscious evolution of society is giving place to its conscious development; and the reformer’s path of the future must be laid on the deliberate calculation from the track of the past.”¹¹⁷

This view is identical with Renouvier's in his *Introduction to the Philosophical Analysis of History*, where he claims that European civilization is the "inheritor" of ethical achievements which have led to a position where humankind can "take possession of their own capacities to a formerly unknown degree and press upon the notion of progress itself, to create methods, to gradually build the sciences and arts which would in their turn become powerful aids to its perfection."¹¹⁸ In the preface to *Uchronie*, this project is described in terms which combine scientific revisionism with the figure of Isaac Disraeli's filial relations to describe the correct relationship with the past that should be acquired.

It is thus that the child, in becoming a man, needs to know himself, to know also his childhood, and to claim possession of it as a part of his consciousness, but through dispelling the phantoms with which his imagination, formed by the lies of his wet-nurse, has become obsessed. (*UC* v-vi)

Mankind has developed (evolved) to the point where it can make the history of civilization an object of scientific study, and interpret and choose the past achievements it wishes to inherit; this suggests the capacity, described by Galton at the opening of this chapter, of breaking from the inheritance of our parents and immediate environment, and of forming a new society for humankind through judicious selection from the past—or the "turning-point" described by Tylor, which is the acquisition of a reflexive consciousness of one's past and development.

This consciousness of universal historical processes not only produced visions of a perfected future. Darwin worried that "care wrongly directed" (conditions of modernity under which the poor outbred the wealthy) would lead to "the degeneration of a domestic race," and broadened the point with the warning: "progress is no invariable rule."¹¹⁹ Others like William Greg suggested that "the 'selection' is no longer 'natural.'"¹²⁰

So, paradoxically, the very moment when modern scientific knowledge gave mankind the power to recognize and take control of its own history was also a moment of revelation, when it appeared that the track upon which humanity was set was mistaken and had led to what Galton referred to as a "faulty system of civilisation." To remedy this crisis involved returning to the historical past and recuperating elements as if from a catalogue. The paradoxical claim was that through evolutionary development, humans could escape natural selection, by whose processes imperfect societies had also evolved. Renouvier's use of one instrument of reason, alternate history,

to counteract the mistaken beliefs in historical determinism was a parallel argument. The method was to make use of counterfactual imaginaries as a corrective type of thought to encourage “the comparison of what might have been with what happened in truth” (UC 292).

A final and unexpected point in common between Darwin, Lyell, Disraeli, and Renouvier is their common belief in the gradual and incremental nature of development in human and species history. Darwin and Lyell both reject the catastrophism of Cuvier and Buckland which inferred periodic mass extinctions from the absences in the fossil record.¹²¹ From very different perspectives, Disraeli and Renouvier are both deeply sceptical of the effectiveness of revolutionary change in the sphere of politics. The reason for his disdain for the communards, as we saw, was not their political ideals but the manner of their realisation through violent upheaval of continuities—the method likely to bring historical progress into the frenzied spirals figured as a squirrel in a cage. Similarly, Disraeli’s conservatism extends to a defence of the English constitution as a political event that took place at the incremental, gradual pace of a historical unfolding that was the equivalent to changes in the natural landscape. In his *Vindication of the English Constitution* (1835), he states that the political culture of a nation—embodied in its constitution—cannot be transplanted directly to other nations; it was, he writes, “the gradual growth of ages.”¹²² He also celebrates the gradualism of English political change in “The Spirit of Whiggism,” where he writes that “the march of revolution must here at least be orderly.”¹²³ This may seem inconsistent with his inventions and amplifications of *Alroy* but we should recall that the method of the book’s literary-political argument is not to force a new identity onto English cultural life, but to suggest that the qualities of messianism are historically present and available for inheritance.

Renouvier also advocates gradual change as a precondition for the improvement of civilization; gradualism also describes the manner of his project of imagining variant histories, which have to be worked through slowly and steadily, as if picking up one of Darwin’s discontinued lines of descent and following its slow divergence from recognizable history. In an editorial footnote that begins the third tableau (when the variations begin to become apparent), he writes:

Most features of this tableau are historical, entirely or in part. Some are altered, as necessary, as a result of the contingent facts that the author of *Uchronia* has introduced himself at the end of the reign of Marcus

Aurelius. Any serious change made to a historical moment has ripples which change subsequent events and transform them gradually, until finally rendering them unknowable. Uchronia is nothing other than a sketch of a choice between possible transformations. (*UC* 171n)

In counterfactual speculation, alteration to the historical record is often sudden and dramatic, with battles, assassinations, or coups the points of departure. But in Disraeli's and Renouvier's historical imaginaries, the peeling away from known history is far more measured and organic in quality. These authors make the transformation of history a long-duration exercise, intelligible in terms of growth and habitats. Darwin writes that "the process of modification must be extremely slow," and describes the variation to which species were subject as the outcome of "many complex contingencies."¹²⁴ For Disraeli and Renouvier also, to reimagine identity—political, cultural, literary—required the careful fashioning of historical materials into a narrative of inheritance.

NOTES

1. Isaac D'Israeli, "True Sources of Secret History," in *Curiosities of Literature*, vol. 3 (London: G. Routledge & co, 1858b), 380.
2. D'Israeli, "True Sources of Secret History," 380.
3. Francis Galton, "Hereditary Improvement," ed. James Anthony Froude, *Fraser's Magazine* 7, no. 37 (January 1873): 119.
4. William R. Greg, "On the Failure of 'Natural Selection' in the Case of Man," *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country, 1830–1869* 78, no. 465 (September 1868): 353–362; George Darwin, "On Beneficial Restrictions to Liberty of Marriage," *The Contemporary Review, 1866–1900* 22 (June 1873): 412–426.
5. Francis Galton, *Hereditary Genius* (London: Macmillan and Company, 1869), 376.
6. Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, Mass: M.I.T. Press, 1995), 200.
7. Galton, *Hereditary Genius*, 375–376.
8. Matthew Arnold, "Culture and Anarchy," in *Culture and Anarchy: And Other Writings*, ed. Stefan Collini, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 137.
9. Galton, *Hereditary Genius*, 376 (emphasis added).

10. Isaac D'Israeli, "Of a History of Events Which Have Not Happened," in *Curiosities of Literature*, vol. 2 (London: G. Routledge & co, 1858a), 438.
11. D'Israeli, "Of a History of Events Which Have Not Happened," 428.
12. This idea, satirised by Voltaire in *Candide*, derives from Leibniz's *Essays on Theodicy* (1710), which is an early instance of multiple-worlds theory. Catherine Gallagher discusses the significance of Leibniz for alternate history in Chap. 2 of *Telling It like It Wasn't: The Counterfactual Imagination in History and Fiction* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2017).
13. Charles Renouvier, *Uchronie (l'utopie dans l'histoire): Esquisse historique apocryphe du développement de la civilization européenne tel qu'il n'a pas été, tel qu'il aurait pu être* (Paris: Bureau de la Critique Philosophique, 1876). All translations from this text are my own.
14. I will be quoting from different editions of the novel but all references from *AL* are from the Bradenham edition of 1927.
15. Norman Vance, *The Victorians and Ancient Rome* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 70.
16. Samuel Lysons, *Claudia and Pudens, Or, The Early Christians of Gloucester: A Tale of the First Century* (London: Hamilton and Adams 1861), <http://archive.org/details/claudiaandpuden01lysogooq>; Robert Taylor, *The Diegesis: Being a Discovery of the Origin, Evidences, and Early History of Christianity, Never yet Before or Elsewhere so Fully and Faithfully Set Forth* (London: R. Carlile and J. Brooks, 1829).
17. Benjamin Disraeli, *The Wondrous Tale of Alroy. The Rise of Iskander*, 3 vols (London: Saunders & Otley, 1833).
18. Philip Guedalla, "Introduction to *Alroy*," in *Alroy*, Bradenham edition (London: Peter Davies, 1927), vi. Guedalla himself wrote counterfactual history essays; "If the Moors in Spain had Won" is included in the 1931 edition of J. C. Squire's *If it had Happened Otherwise: Lapses into Imaginary History*.
19. Harris Lenowitz, *The Jewish Messiahs: From the Galilee to Crown Heights* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 81ff.
20. Guedalla, "Introduction to *Alroy*," vi.
21. In the book of Daniel, this judgement is written by a disembodied hand upon a wall during a drunken feast at the court of Belshazzar. Daniel interprets the words to mean "numbered, weighed, divided," or, more pointedly, "You have been weighed and found wanting."
22. Benjamin Disraeli, *Benjamin Disraeli Letters: 1815–1834*, vol. 1 (University of Toronto Press, Scholarly Publishing Division, 1982), 447.

23. Benjamin Disraeli, "What Is He?," in *Whigs and Whiggism: Political Writings*, ed. William Hutcheon (Port Washington N.Y.: Kennikat press, 1971b), 22.
24. Disraeli, "What Is He?," 22n.
25. Daniel R. Schwarz, *Disraeli's Fiction* (London: Macmillan, 1979), 7.
26. Daniel R. Schwarz, "Disraeli's Romanticism: Self-Fashioning in the Novels," in *The Self-Fashioning of Disraeli: 1818–1851*, ed. Charles Richmond and Paul Smith (Cambridge (England); New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 50.
27. Paul Smith, "Disraeli's Politics," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Fifth Series, 37 (January 1, 1987): 72, 74, doi: [10.2307/3679151](https://doi.org/10.2307/3679151).
28. Schwarz, *Disraeli's Fiction*, 46.
29. Sheila A. Spector, "Alroy as Disraeli's 'Ideal Ambition,'" in *British Romanticism and the Jews: History, Culture, Literature*, ed. Sheila A. Spector, 1st ed (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 235.
30. Robert P. O'Kell, *Disraeli: The Romance of Politics* (University of Toronto Press, 2012), 63.
31. Robert Blake, *Disraeli* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1966), 3–4.
32. Benjamin Disraeli, *The Revolutionary Epick* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts & Green, 1864), ix, <http://www.archive.org/details/revolutionaryep00disrgoog>.
33. Guedalla, "Introduction to *Alroy*," v.
34. Disraeli, *The Wondrous Tale of Alroy. The Rise of Iskander*, xiv, xv.
35. Disraeli, *Letters*, 1:171.
36. Anon., "[Review:] The Wondrous Tale of Alroy," *Metropolitan* 7, no. 25 (1833): 2.
37. Anon., "[Review:] The Wondrous Tale of Alroy," *Literary Gazette: A Weekly Journal of Literature, Science, and the Fine Arts* 842, no. 849 (1833): 146, 147.
38. Blake, *Disraeli*, 108.
39. Nick Groom, *The Forger's Shadow: How Forgery Changed the Course of Literature* (London: Picador, 2002), 176.
40. Disraeli, *The Wondrous Tale of Alroy. The Rise of Iskander*, xii.
41. Joshua Billings, "The Sigh of Philhellenism," in *Deep Classics: Rethinking Classical Reception*, ed. Shane Butler (Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 52.
42. Patrick Brantlinger, "Nations and Novels: Disraeli, George Eliot, and Orientalism," *Victorian Studies* 35, no. 3 (April 1, 1992): 264.
43. Smith, "Disraeli's Politics," 83.
44. Smith, "Disraeli's Politics," 81.
45. Benjamin Disraeli, *Vindication of the English Constitution in a Letter to a Noble and Learned Lord* (London: Saunders and Otley, 1835), 205.

46. O’Kell, *Disraeli: The Romance of Politics*, 184.
47. Quoted in O’Kell, *Disraeli: The Romance of Politics*, 190 (emphasis added).
48. Barthold Georg Niebuhr, *Lectures on the History of Rome (from the Earliest Times to the Fall of the Western Empire)*, ed. and trans. L. Schmitz (London: Taylor and Walton, 1844), 2.
49. Quoted in Linda Dowling, “Roman Decadence and Victorian Historiography,” *Victorian Studies* 28, no. 4 (Summer 1985): 584 (emphasis added).
50. Thomas Arnold, *Lectures on Modern History* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1847), 31.
51. Arnold, *Lectures on Modern History*, 41.
52. Arnold, *Lectures on Modern History*, 40.
53. Vance, *The Victorians and Ancient Rome*, 70.
54. Disraeli, *Letters*, 1:187.
55. Benjamin Disraeli, *Alroy. Ixion in Heaven. The Infernal Marriage. Popanilla* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1845), 259.
56. Disraeli, *Letters*, 1:241.
57. Charles Phillips, *An Historical Character of Napoleon* (London, 1817), 4, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/60202665>.
58. Vance, *The Victorians and Ancient Rome*, 198.
59. Dowling, “Roman Decadence and Victorian Historiography,” 585.
60. Disraeli, *Letters*, 1:168.
61. Philip Harwood, “The Modern Art and Science of History,” *Westminster Review* 38, no. 2 (1842): 370. From the mid-century onwards, critics were often sceptical of the literary and philosophical merits of the simulated life of historical novels: George Henry Lewes, “Historical Romance; Review of *The Foster Brother* and *Whitehall*,” ed. William Edward Hickson, *Westminster Review* 45, no. 1 (March 1846): 34–55; Brander Matthews, “The Historical Novel,” in *The Historical Novel, and Other Essays* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1901), 3–30, <http://archive.org/details/historicalnovelo00mattuoft>.
62. Louis Geoffroy, *Napoléon Apocryphe, 1812–1832: Histoire de La Conquête Du Monde et de La Monarchie Universelle*, Nouvelle édition, revue et augmentée (Paris: Chez Paulin, 1841), 229.
63. Edward Bulwer-Lytton, *The Last Days of Pompeii* (London: Richard Edward King, 1842), 387.
64. Charles Bucke, *Ruins of Ancient Cities: With General and Particular Accounts of Their Rise, Fall, and Present Condition*, vol. 1 (London: Thomas Tegg, 1840), 336.
65. Bucke, *Ruins of Ancient Cities*, 1:348.
66. Bucke, *Ruins of Ancient Cities*, 1:348.

67. Felicia Hemans also uses this figure of the mother and child in her poem "The Image in Lava" (1828) as emblematic of the persistence of love, which "Outlives the cities of renown" Felicia Dorothea Browne Hemans, *Records of Woman, with Other Poems* (New York: William B. Gilley, 1828), 313, <https://archive.org/details/recordsofwoman-wi00hemarich>.
68. Bulwer-Lytton, *The Last Days of Pompeii*, 11.
69. Bulwer-Lytton, *The Last Days of Pompeii*, 5.
70. Bulwer-Lytton, *The Last Days of Pompeii*, 130.
71. Richard Jenkins, *The Victorians and Ancient Greece* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), 53.
72. Walter Pater, *Marius the Epicurean* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), 46.
73. Virginia Zimmerman, *Excavating Victorians*, illustrated edition (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 106.
74. Taylor, *The Diegesis*, 61.
75. Simon Goldhill, *Victorian Culture and Classical Antiquity: Art, Opera, Fiction, and the Proclamation of Modernity*, Martin Classical Lectures (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 98.
76. Translations from this work and its reviews in French-language journals are my own.
77. J. Alexander Gunn, "Renouvier: The Man and His Work (I)," *Philosophy* 7, no. 25 (January 1932): 46.
78. William Logue, *Charles Renouvier, Philosopher of Liberty* (Louisiana State University Press, 1993), 136.
79. Gunn, "Renouvier," 45.
80. Logue, *Charles Renouvier*, 1–33.
81. Benjamin Disraeli also recorded the persecution of his forefathers by the Inquisition; alternate history seems to have been a means for both Disraeli and Renouvier to conceive of history un- or less contaminated by religious persecution. Benjamin Disraeli, "Introduction," in *Curiosities of Literature*, vol. 1 (London: G. Routledge & co, 1858), viii.
82. It is in fact more than eight centuries of advance, for Renouvier points out that the alternative eighth century enjoys a level of emancipation in the arts and sciences that is *still* not achieved in the nineteenth century.
83. Anon., "[Review:] Uchronie. L'utopie dans l'histoire par Ch. Renouvier," *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 9, no. 2 (March 1901): 2.
84. Dowling, "Roman Decadence and Victorian Historiography."
85. Logue, *Charles Renouvier*, 107.

86. Walter Michael Simon, *European Positivism in the Nineteenth Century: An Essay in Intellectual History* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1963), 102.
87. Renouvier, *Uchronie*, iii.
88. Renouvier, *Introduction à la philosophie analytique de l'histoire*, 553.
89. Renouvier, *Introduction à la philosophie analytique de l'histoire*, 551.
90. Renouvier, *Introduction à la philosophie analytique de l'histoire*, 552.
91. Renouvier, *Introduction à la philosophie analytique de l'histoire*, 553 (emphasis added).
92. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Vol. 2: The Care of the Self* (London: Penguin, 1990), 9.
93. Logue, *Charles Renouvier*, 224.
94. M. H. Peyre, Charles Renouvier, and Louis Ménard, "Correspondence Indédite de Renouvier et de Louis Ménard," *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 39, no. 1 (January 1, 1932): 1.
95. Peyre, Renouvier, and Ménard, "Correspondence Indédite," 3, 5.
96. Peyre, Renouvier, and Ménard, "Correspondence Indédite," 6.
97. Peyre, Renouvier, and Ménard, "Correspondence Indédite," 7.
98. Peyre, Renouvier, and Ménard, "Correspondence Indédite," 8.
99. Peyre, Renouvier, and Ménard, "Correspondence Indédite," 8.
100. Charles Renouvier, *Victor Hugo le philosophe* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1921), 139.
101. Paul K. Alkon, *Origins of Futuristic Fiction* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987), 116.
102. Simon Goldhill, "A Writer's Things: Edward Bulwer Lytton and the Archaeological Gaze; Or, What's in a Skull?," *Representations* 119, no. 1 (June 2012): 95.
103. Charles Lyell, *Principles of Geology, Being an Attempt to Explain the Former Changes of the Earth's Surface, by Reference to Causes Now in Operation*, vol. 1 (London: John Murray, 1830), 2–3.
104. Charles Lyell, *Principles of Geology, Being an Attempt to Explain the Former Changes of the Earth's Surface, by Reference to Causes Now in Operation*, vol. 2 (London: John Murray, 1832), 1–2.
105. Lyell, *Principles of Geology*, 1832, 2:270.
106. Charles Lyell, *The Geological Evidences of the Antiquity of Man: With Remarks on Theories of the Origin of Species by Variation*, 2nd ed., revised (London: Murray, 1863), 393.
107. Lyell, *The Geological Evidences of the Antiquity of Man*, 467–468.
108. Lyell, *The Geological Evidences of the Antiquity of Man*, 470.
109. Thomas Carlyle, "On History," in *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays vol. II*, vol. 27, *The Works of Thomas Carlyle* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1896), 90, 87; Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species by Means of*

- Natural Selection; Or, the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*, ed. J. W Burrow (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), 439.
110. Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 2nd ed (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 74.
 111. Tina Young Choi, "Natural History's Hypothetical Moments: Narratives of Contingency in Victorian Culture," *Victorian Studies* 51, no. 2 (Winter 2009): 288.
 112. Renouvier, *Uchronie*, 409.
 113. John Glendening, *The Evolutionary Imagination in Late-Victorian Novels: An Entangled Bank*, New edition (Aldershot, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 30.
 114. Disraeli, *Letters*, 1:168.
 115. William James, "Revue Philosophique de La France et de l'Étranger," in *Essays, Comments, and Reviews* (Harvard University Press, 1987), 324.
 116. Alfred Russel Wallace, "The Origin of Human Races and the Antiquity of Man Deduced from the Theory of 'Natural Selection,'" *Journal of the Anthropological Society of London* 2 (January 1, 1864): clxviii, doi: [10.2307/3025211](https://doi.org/10.2307/3025211).
 117. Edward B. Tylor, "Primitive Society II," *Contemporary Review*, 1866–1900 22 (June 1873): 72.
 118. Renouvier, *Introduction à la philosophie analytique de l'histoire*, 554.
 119. Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*, Penguin Classics (London: Penguin, 2004), 155, 156.
 120. Greg, "On the Failure of 'Natural Selection' in the Case of Man.," 361.
 121. M. J. S. Rudwick, *The Meaning of Fossils: Episodes in the History of Palaeontology* (University of Chicago Press, 1976), 149.
 122. Disraeli, *Vindication of the English Constitution*, 104.
 123. Benjamin Disraeli, "The Spirit of Whiggism," in *Whigs and Whiggism: Political Writings*, ed. William Hutcheon (Port Washington N.Y.: Kennikat press, 1971a), 328.
 124. Darwin, *Origin*, 318.

Nebulous History and the Plurality of Worlds

“BEYOND THE VISIBLE”

In *The Moon Considered as a Planet, a World, and a Satellite* (1874), James Nasmyth and James Carpenter give as detailed a report on the moon as observation and conjecture allow. They describe, for an informed but non-specialist readership, the ease with which one gives way to the other: where empirical perception stops, the power of imagination takes over and begins to fabulate details *as if* they are actually observable. In one section (titled in later editions “A Flight of Fancy”) they describe the feelings of “a thoughtful telescopist—watching the moon night after night,” and write that it is “almost inevitable [...] for such an observer to identify himself so far with the object of his scrutiny, as sometimes to become in thought a lunar being” (*TM* 157–158). Figure 4.1 below is a five-colour lithograph taken from a drawing that represents an eclipse of the sun by the Earth and how it would appear to an observer seated on a lunar crag.

The written description that accompanies the view is mixed in mood; Earth is described as glowing with beauty, even at this remove, and the authors imagine that it “would be encircled upon the in-going side with a beautiful line of golden light, deepening in places to glowing crimson, due to the absorption, already spoken of, of all but the red and orange rays of the sun’s light by the vapours of our atmosphere” (*TM* 162). When the description turns to the moon itself, the observer is cast down by the gloom of the scene, for the harsh light and cold rock would

Fig. 4.1 James Nasmyth and James Carpenter, *Aspect of an Eclipse of the Sun by the Earth*. 1874, Five-colour lithograph print in *The Moon Considered as a Planet, a World, and a Satellite* (John Murray, 1874), Plate XXII, facing page 164

create “a scene of dreary, desolate, grandeur that is scarcely conceivable by any earthly habitant, and that the description we have attempted but insufficiently portrays” (*TM* 166); the passage culminates in the authors’ thoughts on the terror of asphyxiation. In a pattern that recurs in the flights of speculative astronomical thought that this chapter examines, imaginative journeys into space move from aesthetic appreciation to anxieties of loneliness and extinction.

The practice of and responses to nineteenth-century astronomy did not pitch observation against imagination, and the alternate-historical character of the plurality-of-worlds debate emerged from the power of optical instruments to energize speculation of other worlds among the

stars. Nasmyth and Carpenter's comments on the relationship are paradigmatic of this relation when they describe how analogy could create a world whose reality-status is indeterminate:

There is an irresistible tendency in the mind to pass *beyond the actually visible*, and to fill in with what it knows must exist those accessory features and phenomena that are only hidden from us by distance and by our peculiar point of view. Where the material eye is baffled, the clairvoyance of reason and analogy come to its aid. (*TM* 158)

Time and again, the enhanced but limited information provided by the telescope and other optical equipment stimulates conjecture, an "irresistible" urge to imagine the topography of other worlds. Increased recognition of the speed of light in the nineteenth century meant that intelligent beings on other planets could be imagined observing episodes from Earth's history long after their conclusion (for example the Battle of Waterloo), which had travelled across vast distances as light.

Similar "flights of fancy" appeared across a spectrum of texts written by practising astronomers, for instance Camille Flammarion and Richard A. Proctor, who were able to communicate with non-specialist audiences through popular-scientific publications that existed to circulate this less evidential type of scientific speculation. Non-scientists who were nonetheless enthusiastic followers of astronomical discoveries wished to incorporate astronomical discoveries into other spheres of writing; Anna Henchman cites Thomas Hardy's poem "In Vision I Roamed" (1866) as emblematic of repeated flights of imagination into the stars in his contemporary fiction.¹ Attempts to penetrate the unknown composition of nebulae with increasingly powerful telescopes, the expanded time and extent of space, the application of spectrum analysis to discover the chemical constitution of distant stars—these areas of scientific discovery were all accompanied by meditations on how new descriptions of the universe affected the interpretation of scripture, the belief in a creator, and received ideas about the history of our planet, in particular its *uniqueness* among the terrifying extent (in time and space) of the universe.

These philosophical reactions to scientific knowledge should not be described as backwards in comparison with "hard" science; their circulation in the public sphere was an integral part of the reconstitution of science, and the reverberations of discoveries across different print cultures

should not relegate these responses to a subordinate status in the history of ideas. Bernard Lightman points out that although John Tyndall, T. H. Huxley, and others chose to exclude clergymen-scientists from their institutions, “their power did not extend to the periodical press and great publishing houses.”² The reception of astronomical science was therefore made up of heterogeneous groups and responses, and cannot be demarcated with legitimate science on one side, and speculative populism and natural theology on the other. After the *Essays and Reviews* controversy in 1863–1864, for instance, John Lubbock and William Spottiswoode’s attempts to recruit signatories in favour of a “declaration” in favour of science over religion, were refused by such eminent scientists as J. D. Hooker and J. F. Herschel, who did not think that such a division would be helpful.³

Likewise, theologically minded views were not opposed to the technical apparatus of observation. Thomas Webb’s insistence in 1882 on the compatibility of Christian humility with current astronomical science was impelled as much by his understanding of optical instruments as by faith. Modern instruments were crucial for Webb’s defence of the numinous in science, for they showed how the most recent instruments of astronomical observation only added depth and detail to the awe and wonder at the work of a divine creator: in order to have the most up-to-date appreciation of the Andromeda Nebula, he instructs the specialist public how best to observe it: “let our aperture be restricted to 5 inches achromatic, or an equivalent light in a reflector.”⁴ Webb’s article in *Nature* exemplifies the ongoing dialogue of religious faith and scientific knowledge late in the nineteenth century.⁵

The nebula was an astral phenomenon that attracted intense interest about universal history and which was central to debates about a plurality of worlds. Webb describes how, like the moon, intense scrutiny of nebulae also transports the observer into the realms of speculation and possibility:

And if such speculations may seem improbable, we may bear in mind that in venturing into these abysses we have intruded into a strange and mysterious region, where probability is left behind, and we have to deal with possibilities alone.⁶

This passage again moves into a realm beyond the visible, a “strange and mysterious region” where imagination is the instrument for producing images for contemplation. The subject of Webb’s article is the Nebula

of Andromeda, which, like that of Orion, puzzled astronomers with its indistinct luminosity. The mathematician Pierre-Simon Laplace provided a model in the late eighteenth century for the annular formation of planetary systems out of nebulous matter (providing support for earlier formulations of the “nebular hypothesis” by Emanuel Swedenborg and Immanuel Kant). If, as Laplace surmised, they were new planetary systems in formation around a yet-to-coalesce star, there were frightening implications for a belief in the singularity of the planet Earth; the “nebular hypothesis” meant that our planetary *history* was being reproduced all over the universe, and had been for a potentially infinite length of time.

John Tyndall was also provoked by the figure of the nebula to meditate on the sublime processes of universal nature in a lecture “On the Scientific Use of the Imagination” (1870). All nature, he argues, even the processes of evolutionary law which govern its forms, including human consciousness, have their origins in one such cloud of luminous gas: “the human mind itself—emotion, intellect, will, and all their phenomena—were once latent in a fiery cloud.”⁷ This constitutes a material history that comprises all human and physical existence, but the possibility of “wonder” is maintained because “the question, whence came they? would still remain to baffle and bewilder us.”⁸

The reason for this ongoing mystery of the universe lay in the technical means for determining the nature of the nebulae: spectrum analysis did not provide visual evidence of their composition, but generated a non-figurative chemical analysis of remote celestial objects by analyzing light itself. Tyndall presents the limits of observational science through questions which rhetorically assert the importance of speculation for understanding the universe: “How then are those hidden things to be revealed? How for example, are we to lay hold of the physical basis of light, since, like that of life itself, it lies entirely without the domain of the senses?”⁹ By compressing these questions, however, into the examination of light, Tyndall directs us toward the paradox that persisted through the plurality-of-worlds debate. Light, the condition of visibility, also stimulated the mind to conjecture what remained invisible: the life of the stars and planets which were too far to discern, or observers of our solar system to whose superhuman vision this planet’s history was arriving now as light. In the late nineteenth century, light was shown to provide the key to Earth’s material formation, as well as its history, and became a medium for spatially expanded historical reflection in an age in which

new sciences were supplanting scriptural accounts of humans' origins in the universe.

A notion that recurred in writings by exponents of pluralism was of *human* (or human-like) counterparts in space with similar histories, perhaps with variant versions of our past and future—at which point pluralist conjectures took on an alternate-historical character. My treatment of the debate and its history across the nineteenth century shows how it was a formative context for alternate-historical thought, which inherited its terms and preoccupations. This chapter seeks to explain the imagination of astral alternatives to human history late in the nineteenth century as one of the many productive conjunctions of a desire to see the present as contingent (which could have been otherwise) and a disciplinary domain (which included specialist and non-specialist views) that was especially amenable to that historiographical assertion of contingency. The observation of planetary systems could not but provoke ideas of other possibilities, and the extension of the age of universal existence meant that these possibilities might be endless. Chapter 2 studied alternate histories of the most recent past; the alternate histories in Chap. 3 extended the time-frame back to the origins of recorded history. In the field of astronomical speculation, alternate histories were able to draw upon the entire time of creation to imagine variations on Earth's history.

At the heart of the plurality debate and its stimulus of alternate-historical thought was the process of reasoning by analogy. In the passage quoted from Nasmyth and Carpenter above, “the clairvoyance of reason and analogy” was the means for thinking beyond the “actually visible.” The material in this chapter follows the course of the plurality debate; each stage can be identified as a change in the value of analogy as the basis for drawing comparative conclusions about new worlds based on the empirical knowledge of Earth. In 1817, Thomas Chalmers proscribed the “romance” of imagining worlds based on “some vague and general analogies,” since such speculation must diminish the certitude of Christian faith (CR 10). In 1844, Robert Chambers claimed in (the anonymously published) *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* that all life and matter were the production of a single form: the globule at the microscopic level, and the nebula at the telescopic; drawing also on pre-Darwinian evolutionary theory, Chambers claimed that “analogy would lead us to conclude that the combinations of primordial matter, forming our so-called elements, are as universal [...] as the laws of gravitation and centrifugal force.”¹⁰ William Whewell was more circumspect in his use

of analogy and, as discussed below, countered some of the wild pluralist speculation by insisting that the emptiness of geological time provided a better description of life's distribution in space than the fecundity of biological analogies.

There was a despondency attached in the late-century to the idea of a universe whose character was infinite reiteration. In Camille Flammarion's dialogue between a junior and senior celestial spirit on the infinite nature of time and space, Quarens (the junior spirit) realizes that his previous incarnations have been variations of each other; he cries out "Analogies, analogies! Almost everything I had seen, done, thought on Earth, I had already seen, done, thought one hundred years before on the earlier world" (*LU* 121).

The chapter closes with Auguste Blanqui's hypothesis of infinite worlds, which is unusual not only for being an amateur astronomical thesis written in prison. Blanqui was sentenced in 1871 by Adolph Thiers's government, leaving him incarcerated during the insurrection and short-lived Paris Commune of which he would have been a natural leader. Blanqui takes analogical relations to their most extreme conclusion and infers from spectrum analysis and nebular theory that all possible outcomes of human history have already been endlessly replayed across the cosmos. Nietzsche's recognition of the "demand" of contemporary culture "that history should be a science" resonates with Blanqui's materialist thesis of historical exhaustion, as did his critique of historical culture as a belief in cultural improvement ("UD" 77). Blanqui's conclusion from his hypothesis of maximal plurality is that "there's no progress" (*ES* 57). The culmination of the plurality debate was thus to move from the issue of the theological propriety of imagining other worlds, with their own processes of salvation, to the historical question of human progress. The pattern is similar to the movement from Disraeli's recuperation of messianic politics to Renouvier's critical examination of the belief in historical progress discussed in the analysis of the alternate-historical treatments of antiquity in the previous chapter.

THEOLOGICAL LIMITS: "WHAT IS MAN, THAT THOU ART MINDFUL OF HIM?"

Thomas Chalmers joined the plurality-of-worlds debate with *A Series of Discourses on the Christian Revelation: Viewed in Connection with the Modern Astronomy* (1817), which was rapidly republished (nine

editions and 20,000 copies sold in 1817) and attracted significant attention.¹¹ The author of a 30-page response to Chalmers's essay describes Chalmers in the *British Review* as "a fixed star in that firmament of science, which he has taught to shine with the radiance of the Gospel,"¹² and Alexander Maxwell published a full-length response to Chalmers in 1820.¹³ Chalmers himself was a polymath: a Scottish minister who wrote and lectured on religious and scientific subjects and was a leading member of the Church of Scotland, a political economist, and a Bridgewater Treatise author.¹⁴ He was appointed Chair of Moral Philosophy at St Andrews University in 1823 and was elected Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 1834. Chalmers established the terms for the debate which were often repeated in the nineteenth century, for example his distrust of the imaginative leaps that could be occasioned by analogical reasoning and his turn to the microscopic to counteract the vertigo of cosmic scale apprehended by the telescope (CR 53). He also identified the troubling implications of plurality for the Christian belief in God's special care of mankind on Earth, citing a passage from the *Psalms* that was requoted by William Whewell, David Brewster, and Richard Proctor:

When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?—PSALM viii. 3, 4. (CR 17)¹⁵

As we will see, Chalmers is concerned that God's care of Man is diluted by the possibility of "mindful" relationships between the creator and his subjects existing (and having existed) elsewhere. If indeed the resurrection has already taken place on other planets, then the Christian experience of *anticipating* salvation was qualitatively diminished, and Christ's work of salvation likewise. The heresy of historical alterity here is to think of the resurrection and salvation having taken place in the same way elsewhere and robbing human history of its singularity in the cosmos. Brewster in *More Worlds than One* and Flammarion in *La pluralité des mondes* present materialist reconciliations of cosmology with salvation and resurrection, but Chalmers's text attempts no such explanation. Instead, its essential argument is against the speculations that advances in astronomy could be said to encourage and, unexpectedly, it is an argument that referred to the authority of science in order to protect the Christian values of piety and humility.

The Second “Discourse” in Chalmers’s essay is titled “The Modesty of True Science” and begins with praise for Newton’s steadfast empiricism by which no theory ought to be accepted without empirical evidence. “All the sublime truths of modern astronomy lie within the field of actual observation,” he writes, “and have the firm evidence to rest upon of all that information which is conveyed to us by the avenue of the senses” (CR 71–72). As the title of the discourse implies, science is divided into the true and the false. Newtonian empiricism is championed and contrasted with that which is not properly science at all, but a form of speculative reasoning which sought to make claims about what could not be directly observed. Chalmers deplores thinkers who “have winged their audacious way into forbidden regions—and they have crossed that circle by which the field of observation is enclosed—and there have they debated and dogmatised with all the pride of a most intolerant assurance” (CR 72). Even though it is unlikely that Kant is referred to here (Laplace is the more likely object of criticism), it is Kant who most clearly expresses the methodological position at issue when he suggests that “conjectures, in which analogy and observations agree perfectly to support one another, have the same dignity as formal proofs.”¹⁶ The object of Chalmers’s attack is the mode of reasoning by analogy that stimulates the imagination of worlds that cannot be observed. The analogical passage from the known to the unknown leads to the imagination of worlds, a process which is said to have more in common with literature than with proper scientific enquiry. Chalmers asks his readers to imagine:

that one of these philosophers made so extravagant a departure from the sobriety of experimental science as to pass on from the astronomy of the different planets, and to attempt the natural history of their animal and vegetable kingdoms. He might get hold of some vague and general analogies, to throw an air of plausibility around his speculation. He might pass from the botany of the different regions of the globe that we inhabit; and make his loose and confident applications to each of the other planets, according to its distance from the sun, and the inclination of its axis to the plane of its annual revolution; and out of some such slender materials, he may work up an amusing philosophical romance, full of ingenuity, and having, withal, the colour of truth and consistency spread over it. (CR 72–73)

Chalmers warns that bad reasoning produces a mode of astronomical writing that is more literary (a “romance [with] the *colour* of truth”)

than properly scientific—a criticism that echoes Richard Whately’s nearly contemporary critique of the presentation of Napoleonic history by newspapers (discussed in Chap. 2). The process of “working up” worlds involves a progression from mathematics through other knowledge disciplines, finally arriving at theological questions. An empirical foundation in observational and positional astronomy (“distance from the sun,” and “the inclination of its axis”) could be inflated into assumptions about “the natural history of [other worlds’] animal and vegetable kingdoms,” a line of enquiry later taken by Robert Chambers and Richard Proctor, whose arguments I discuss below. To continue this upwards trajectory leads to speculation about civilizations of these planets, then to their religions. Chalmers’s hierarchical presentation of the hypothetical life of other planets reaches its forbidden summit when he declares that “the theology of these planets is, in every way, as inaccessible a subject as their politics or their natural history” (CR 78).

The position of his readers is complicated by the fact that Chalmers is as opposed to the dogmatic denials of other worlds as he is to their supposition: “Are we therefore to say [...] that to this Earth alone, belongs the bloom of vegetation, or the blessedness of life, or the dignity of rational and immortal existence?” (CR 27) He even imagines a time when “perhaps some large city, the metropolis of a mighty empire, may expand into a visible spot by the powers of some future telescope” (CR 32). The reader has to negotiate a respectful awe for the wealth of creation, be prepared to countenance the existence of other divinely ordained worlds—but is prohibited from imagining their topography and indigenous life—until they can be actually observed. In a figure that recalls Icarus and foreshadows the celestial spirits of Proctor, Flammarion, and Hale, to do so would be an act of impossible hubris: “He wings his fancy” to a “hazardous [...] region and vainly strives a penetrating vision through the mantle of [...] an obscurity” (CR 79).

Chalmers’s readers were not always able to follow his prohibitions: he author of the *British Review* article endorsed the reconciliation of Christian faith with the telescope, but made hypotheses of his own whose historical slant was particularly relevant to this discussion: “The Bible intimates that the history of the redemption of our species is known in other parts of the universe, and allows us to conjecture that other worlds may be concerned in the mysterious virtue of the atonement.” In the same passage he even speculated on the alternate-theological possibility of “unfallen worlds.”¹⁷ Chalmers himself suggests that sin

“may have spread its desolation over all the planets of all the systems,” before catching himself and declaring: “Here I stop—nor shall I attempt to grope my dark and fatiguing way, by another inch, among such sublime and mysterious secrecies” (CR 80–81). He appears susceptible to the same temptations of theological speculation that he cautioned against.

HISTORY AND NEBULAE

The attempt to “penetrate” a “mantle of [...] an obscurity” describes the aspirations of nineteenth-century astronomy, particularly the desire to understand the nature of nebulae. The debate was relatively straightforward. One interpretation of the milky sections of light in certain constellations (for example in the Orion or Andromeda nebulae) held that they were only indistinct because telescopes sufficiently powerful to “resolve” them into distinct stars had not yet been developed. On the other side of the argument were those who followed Laplace’s theory of the annular formation of planets from nebulous masses of cosmic gas; according to this theory, the nebulous light in Orion was a new star system in the process of formation. Although this question was one of material constitution, the nebula was an astronomical puzzle, on which hung the question of Earth’s uniqueness; if planetary formation around suns was taking place *all the time*, then our history was similar to that of other planets. The argument that all nebulae would eventually be resolved into stars was not particularly reassuring for advocates of human exceptionality either, for it implied an even greater scale to the universe if such indistinct light originated in many millions of impossibly remote suns.

The relationship between nebulae and history (and what was at stake in the relationship) is summarized by William Whewell in the preface to the third edition of *Of the Plurality of Worlds* (1853), where he defends himself from David Brewster’s accusation that he is an advocate of the “nebular hypothesis”:

That the Nebulae *are not* in a state of progress towards becoming systems of worlds, is a doctrine prominently asserted and argued for in the following Essay: that the Nebulae *are* in such a state of progress, is commonly held in conjunction with the assertion of the Plurality of Worlds.¹⁸

For Whewell, the issue hung on the question of development: whether or not nebulae indicated the formation, or ongoing creation, of new

stars and planetary systems. If other planets were “in a state of progress towards becoming worlds,” that indicated that they were diachronic and possessed their own planetary history.

Whewell himself coined the phrase “nebular hypothesis” in his 1833 Bridgewater Treatise, *Astronomy and General Physics Considered with Reference To Natural Theology*, in which he subjects the hypothesis of Laplace to a metaphysical critique focussing on the question of origins, but does not reject it on materialist grounds. The Treatise is clearly influenced by Thomas Chalmers’s *Discourses*, both in its compensatory turn to the microscope to counteract the vast spaces presented by the telescope and by its repetition of Chalmers’s quotation from the *Psalms*. Whewell, like Chalmers, cautions against the “unbounded license of hypothesis” but argues that the conflict between the scale of the universe and the idea of providential care (or mindfulness) towards Earth is only an apparent one.¹⁹ He accepts, so long as “we disregard the common limits of our own faculties,” that “it is quite as allowable to suppose a million millions of Earths, as one, to be under the moral government of God.”²⁰ He differs from Chalmers, however, in the way he denies the nebular hypothesis for its implied destruction of universal time and origination from the supposition of ongoing, heterogeneous formation of worlds. Whewell insists that the nebula is *not* the originary object of the universe; there must have been a prior state, a source for the heat and light which animated the nebulae and impelled them to become worlds: “Do we not, far more than ever, require an origin of this origin?”²¹ By reaffirming the notion of a first cause or origin, he incorporates the possibility of ongoing planetary formation within a universal cosmic chronology that began with divine intervention at a single, first moment of creation.

In *Of the Plurality of Worlds* (1853) he significantly changes his position and argues against nebular formation by questioning the analogical assumption that all sources of light in the heavens are comparable to our sun; he famously suggests that nebulae may be “of a curdled or granulated texture” and that this type of substance may have “run into lumps of light.”²² David Brewster mocks Whewell’s curiously textured matter in his response to Whewell, *More Worlds Than One: The Creed of the Philosopher and the Hope of the Christian* (1854), but spectrum analysis would show Whewell to be the less incorrect of the two. A fundamental change that took place in the plurality debate, beyond the many local disagreements, was the increasingly material nature of the evidence

produced in the debate—in contrast to the metaphysical grounds of Whewell’s earlier appeal to the need for an “origin of this origin.” This materialist turn, away from theological and metaphysical reasoning, brought pluralism in amongst the materialist sciences of the nineteenth century: biosciences (or “natural history”), geography, and geology. Whewell’s later work makes its claims upon this terrain. Participants in the plurality debate came to argue which sciences should or should not inform (by analogy) arguments about the plurality of worlds.

Michael J. Crowe reports that a possible reason for Whewell’s change of position was the need to respond to Robert Chambers’s *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1844), whose intervention in the plurality debate was to claim that the formation of planets and of species were both governed by a set of universal forms that adapted to their environmental conditions.²³ George Lewis Levine provides a more personal motivation when he claims that Chambers’s suggestions derived from Whewell himself: “*Vestiges of Creation* was precisely natural theology extended to evolution, and this was possible by using Whewell’s view that God is the originator of laws which operate naturalistically from the time of their invention.”²⁴ These universal forms were, Chambers claims, the nebula at the cosmic level and the globule at the organic; given their formal inclination to produce worlds and life, “analogy would lead us to conclude that the combinations of the primordial matter, forming our so-called elements, are as universal as to take place everywhere, as are the laws of gravitation and centrifugal force.”²⁵ M. J. S. Hodge summarizes Chambers’s argument as one of completed development: “Clearly [for Chambers], just as all celestial bodies are more or less perfected and developed nebulae, so all animals and plants are more or less developed globules.”²⁶ The absence of mammals on the Galapagos Islands, reported in Darwin’s *Voyage of the Beagle* (1845), only reinforced Chambers’s belief in the programmatic development of species hierarchies: it appeared to him that life evolved in similar patterns on different parts of the Earth, but that some places had not yet reached their time for developing higher forms of life.²⁷ This view of species development as heterogeneous in time and location (and thus compatible with polygenism) was a domestic version of, and supporting evidence for, Chambers’s claim that species would develop on other planets similarly to how they had on Earth.

It also established a cross-disciplinary analogy of plurality in the universe to natural-historical discoveries on this planet. From the beginning

of *Other Worlds than Ours* (1870), Richard Proctor enlists the services of geology to stimulate the imagination of other beings in space: "Astronomy and Geology owe much of their charm to the fact that they suggest thoughts of other forms of life than those with which we are familiar." Interestingly, spatial remoteness is likened to temporal distance; the "epochs when those monsters throve and multiplied" become analogous to the idea of life on other planets, "upon other celestial bodies" (OW 1). Whewell, writing in 1853, does not reject analogical relations between the two scientific disciplines, but reaches the opposite conclusion from Chambers and Proctor. In the chapter titled "The Argument from Geology," Whewell explains that human life (divinely ordained) occupies only a tiny fraction of Earth's history as a planet, and that life is most likely as rare in the space of the universe as it is in the time of Earth's geological history. The decision to engage one scientific discipline (geology) to police the pluralist inferences apparently encouraged by another (natural history) is taken to counteract the sensational success of Chambers's *Vestiges*, which proceeded in the direction that Thomas Chalmers had prohibited: "to pass on from the astronomy of the different planets, and to attempt the natural history of their animal and vegetable kingdoms" (CR 72–73).

One apparent solution to the nebular debate was the occasion for Thomas De Quincey's extraordinary article of 1846, "System of the Heavens as Revealed by Lord Rosse's Telescopes."²⁸ This instrument, "The Leviathan of Parsonstown," was the first capable of penetrating the Orion Nebula, and provided evidence that appeared to support the position that all nebulae were resolvable. What Lord Rosse's "almost awful telescope" effected (it seemed) by resolving the Orion Nebulae into distant galaxies and stars was the dramatic expansion of the universe; in De Quincey's words, "the theatre to which he has introduced us, is immeasurably beyond the old one which he found" ("SH" 569).

The essay begins with Kant's reflections in his *Universal Natural History* on Earth's age—not in terms of her actual age but *relative* to other planets in our solar system, a supposed difference that is consistent with the nebular hypothesis that the inner planets around a star form first, and the outer ones later. In comparison with the younger inhabitants of Uranus or Venus, De Quincey suggests that our Earth is a declining parent with false hair and absent teeth. The tone may be whimsical but it is nonetheless a response to contemporary astronomy that engages history—here mythological history—to respond to the notion

of a suddenly enlarged universe. It is the association of the magnified image of the Orion Nebula with Memnon's head (seen by De Quincey in the British Museum), that provides the most striking figure of the article—though, as Jonathan Smith has pointed out, he derives his famous description of the nebula from a much older drawing, one by John Herschel of 1826, shown here as Fig. 4.2.

The passage where De Quincey describes the nebula (he instructed readers to “view the wretch upside down” for the vision of the head to appear (“SH” 571)) merits quotation in full:

You see a head thrown back, and raising its face, (or eyes, if eyes it had,) in the very anguish of hatred, to some unknown heavens. What *should* be its skull wears what *might* be an Assyrian tiara, only ending behind in a floating train [...]. Brutalities unspeakable sit upon the upper lip, which is confluent with a snout; for separate nostrils there are none [...]. One is reminded by the phantom's attitude of a passage, ever memorable in Milton: that passage, I mean, where Death first becomes aware, soon after the original trespass, of his own future empire over man. (“SH” 571)

The act of resolving a distant nebula, made possible by the most advanced telescope, here projects literary-mythological figures backwards in history and outwards into space: he recognizes an object of Egyptian statuary from the British Museum, which then gives way to (or *resolves* as) the figure of Death in Milton's *Paradise Lost*. The disorientation of time and space here acquires a historical sense: if the observer is imaginatively witnessing the Miltonic, pre-historical event of Death first apprehending the scent “of carnage, prey innumerable” on Earth (the phrase from Milton which De Quincey quotes), then the astronomer is in the anachronistic position of observing an event that dates from Milton's version of mankind's lapsarian origins—crossing a division both of time, and between material and imaginary history—a division traversed by the modal verbs of *should* and *might*. This puzzle of watching the deep past while in the present, a disjuncture between the perception of the senses with the experience of the body, appears in a more scientifically coherent sense later, when Proctor and others point out that historical events would be received by remote onlookers as the trace impressions of light as the medium of the distant past.²⁹ The description of Death scenting Earth *only now* is intelligible if we consider that smell, like light, would require time to travel to the remote corners of the universe. J. P. Nichol

Fig. 4.2 William Herschel, Engraving of the Nebula in Orion, in John Pringle Nichol, *Thoughts on Some Important Points Related to the System of the World* (William Tait, 1846), plate VIII, facing page 51

advised De Quincey to withdraw the description of Memnon's head from the article, suggesting that the interpretation was "more worthy of one whom the moon has smitten, than of one who gazes calmly upon the stars."³⁰ Though a rebuke, the criticism acknowledges the effect that reflective contemplation of planetary bodies could have on the individual—producing the fanciful strain of thought that projects thoughts of variant life (and death) onto stars and planets.

The turn to Milton's version of the story of original sin in order to personify the nebula represents the sort of historical dislocation that characterized the conjunctions of alternate history and astronomical thought in the nineteenth century. The essay describes a model of historical return when, in a proposed solution to the question of Earth's age, De Quincey suggests that "she is a Phoenix that is known to have secret processes for rebuilding herself out of her own ashes" ("SH" 568)—a rarely remarked early instance of the idea of eternal return. Alex Murray takes this figure to be representative of a response that recurs throughout the imagination of other worlds: of the horror that attended the transvaluation of theological concepts when absorbed into the discourse of materialist science: "Cast free from [divine revelation] into a process of endless reflection we end up with a horror of the phoenix, at the mercy of the infinite regresses of time and space, destined to repeat ad infinitum the resurrection without revelation."³¹ Through this conceit, other histories of Earth could be imagined, but upon unfamiliar terrain and with the planet presented as a younger body: "Where the south pole now shuts her frozen gates inhospitably against the intrusions of flesh, once were probably accumulated the ribs of empires; man's imperial forehead, woman's roseate lips, gleamed upon ten thousand hills." Readers are also invited to think that "little England" and her "sweet pastoral rivulets" once contained "a regal Ganges, that drained some hyperbolic continent" ("SH" 568).

The imagination of imperial capitals in the polar regions in a previous cycle of terrestrial history may have been fanciful, but the imagination of England having had dramatic phases of its natural history was consistent with the claims of natural history based on fossil evidence: Charles Wycliffe Goodwin suggested in 1860 that nature had not always been governable on the British Isles: "Grand, indeed, was the fauna of the British Islands in these early days. Tigers as large again as the biggest Asiatic species lurked in the ancient thickets; elephants of nearly twice the bulk of the largest individuals that now exist in Africa or Ceylon roamed

in herds.”³² The discoveries of astronomy, like those of geology, provoked historical visions of other civilizations and animal life on Earth, visions that were amenable to projection onto other planets and into deep space.

INSTRUMENTS OF PERCEPTION

Richard Proctor’s book, *Other Worlds than Ours* (1870), was the first significant contribution to the plurality debate that applied the new technique of spectrum analysis to the (possible) existence of other worlds. Proctor established his credibility as an astronomer with earlier, specialist publications, and reached a wider audience with his contributions to wider-circulation journals such as *The Intellectual Observer* and *Popular Science Review*. *Other Worlds than Ours* was the first of several books on astronomy for a non-professional audience. These publications and his prolific output as editor of the journal *Knowledge* from 1881 lead Bernard Lightman to describe Proctor, at the time of his death, as “the most widely read astronomical popularizer in the English-speaking world.”³³ The success of *Other Worlds than Ours*, indicated by its rapid republication (at least three editions within 2 years), probably lay in its clear presentation of contemporary optical technology and application of this material to the perennially interesting question of whether intelligent life existed elsewhere in the universe.³⁴

Proctor concisely summarized the old and new instruments of observation when he described the telescope as a “light-gatherer” and the spectroscope (which combined spectrum analysis with the telescope) as a “light-sifter” (OW 37). In 1859, Robert Bunsen and Gustav Kirchhoff had published their first paper announcing the application of spectrum analysis to the telescope (“On the Spectra of Some of the Fixed Stars”); in 1864, William Huggins’s paper on the stellar spectra of fixed stars concluded for the first time that celestial bodies were made up of the same elements known on Earth, and that some nebulae were made up of known gases and therefore unresolvable into stars.³⁵ Huggins described the significance of this new technique of analysis in a way which emphasized the uniformity of known materials and known laws throughout the universe in a lecture delivered to the British Association for the Advancement of Science (BAAS) in 1866:

The new branch of astronomical science which spectrum analysis may be said to have founded has for its object to extend the laws of terrestrial

physics to the other phenomena of the heavenly bodies, and it rests upon the now established fact that matter of a similar nature common to that of the Earth, and subject to laws similar to those which prevail upon the Earth, exists throughout the stellar universe.³⁶

The debate between the resolvers and anti-resolvers of nebulae was effectively over, and the potentially infinite task of categorizing stars according to their spectra began. Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison find the spectroscope representative of a new model for scientific objectivity that arose in the late nineteenth century, one that consisted of “a scientific self equipped with a stern and vigilant conscience, in need not just of external training but also of a fierce self-regulation.”³⁷

The effect of spectroscopy upon the plurality debate, however, was *not* to kill off speculations regarding the life and species-history of other planets; on the contrary, for Proctor and others it reinforced the validity of analogical reasoning as a means to speculate about the nature and inhabitants of other planets, which, it could now be claimed, were likely to be constituted of similar materials to those on Earth. Proctor rapidly moved from the description of spectroscopy as “the noblest method of research yet revealed to man,” to the assumption that “in all probability the other planets are constituted in the same way,” to the imagination of counterpart worlds where, for instance, iron also existed: “The imagination suggests immediately the existence of arts and sciences, trades and manufactures, on that distant world” (OW 40, 41, 45).

Another discovery about the constitution of light itself was that it travelled at a finite speed. Popular astronomical writing in the late nineteenth century regularly dwelt on how light from remote planets was the delayed visual record of their past histories according to the distance that their light travelled and the time it took to arrive at a human observer. Lynda Nead develops an argument that the enhanced powers of visualization such as the telescopic photograph and the spectroscope encouraged the imagination of other, even more powerful capacities for seeing, such as those of the astral travellers imagined by Georg Friedrich Ebert and Richard Proctor (discussed below). Furthermore, she suggests that the interpretation of planets and stars as “gigantic projecting devices, throwing beams into outer space that bore entire histories of worlds and civilizations” prefigured the operations of the film projector.³⁸ With so many planets’ histories on display, and by imagining the power to scroll backward and forward through time (by moving closer

or further from the object observed), space became “a kind of multiplex cinema.”³⁹ My focus is different from Nead’s. I do not look at this technology as anticipatory of later visual technologies of mass entertainment, but focus on how spectroscopy reinforced a tendency in astronomy to work by analogy, and invigorated the imagination of counterpart worlds whose inhabitants might also be imagining *us*. Eberty is the earliest source I have encountered who took the lag of light and time across interplanetary space as a premise for conceiving other intelligences: in 1846, he imagined “an inhabitant of a star of the twelfth magnitude,” with perfect powers of sight, who would now be watching Earth “as it was four thousand years ago, when Memphis was founded, and the patriarch Abraham wandered upon its surface.”⁴⁰

By bringing these two aspects of light together (its evidence of celestial composition and its historical information), the astronomical analysis of light became the method for determining a universal history, an articulation taken up by Walter Benjamin in his statement that “the historical materialist who investigates the structure of history performs, in his way, a sort of spectrum analysis.”⁴¹ Benjamin almost certainly derived this analogy from Blanqui’s *L’Éternité par les astres* (1872), and I expand on the importance of nineteenth-century astronomy to Benjamin below. For the discussion here, the important point is that spectrum analysis provided a materialist framework for understanding the cosmos as an endless continuation of the same material composition as that on Earth; and that the recognition of light as history transformed the temporality of the universe into a disaggregated, heterogeneous time-web in which all visible objects belonged to different historical moments. There was no central viewing location (Earth was no longer the platform for observing the universal diorama); Anna Henchman has identified the absorption of this astronomical truth by nineteenth-century novelists, in particular Thomas Hardy.⁴² For the plurality debate, this centreless cosmos became apprehensible as countless disaggregated variations on laws that were universal.

At this point, alternate history hovers on the margins of science fiction; the earliest works of science fiction were also profoundly influenced by the nebular hypothesis, which was a premise for two of the earliest “alien” narratives: *A Plunge into Space* (Robert Cromie, 1890) and *The War of the Worlds* (H. G. Wells, 1897). In Wells’s better-known story, the “intelligences greater than man’s” are so because, according to Laplace’s model, planets closer to the sun (Mars, for instance) have been formed first and, all else being equal, they would decline

earlier also; being one of “the older worlds of space” is the motivation for the martian invasion of the younger planet, Earth.⁴³ In Cromie’s novel, Mars is reached by explorers from our planet, who discover a decadent Mars, whose evolutionary over-refinement is a prophecy of Earth’s future if primitive energies continue to decline: “One look at a Martian’s face would convince the most obstinate sceptic that in them the *animal* had been suppressed and supplanted by the *intellect*.”⁴⁴ Before science fiction became a means for imagining alterity, its imagination of alien beings was framed as sameness—if more advanced along the planetary life-cycle—rather than difference.

Proctor takes the idea of an interplanetary observer of Earth’s past history in order to return to those points of historical suspense that are the occasion for alternate-historical conjectures. He proposes an alien witness watching events unfold at the battle of Waterloo in a way that makes an alternative outcome seem conceivable:

We can imagine, for example, an observer on Neptune watching the battle of Waterloo from the early dawn until the hour when Napoleon’s heart was yet full of hope, and our great captain was watching with ever-growing anxiety, as charge after charge threatened to destroy the squares on whose steadfastness depended the fate of a continent. (OW 322)

This reinvestment of historical events with suspense as to their outcomes is the same sentiment that, in part, motivates the alternate histories of Napoleon and continues to stimulate the alternate-historical imagination today; the return to the Battle of Waterloo indicates the ongoing perception of that encounter as one on which the history of Europe turned. It also exemplifies a desire to imagine that events, even in the past, can maintain the quality of contingency—that they might have been otherwise. This return to an anticipatory moment, when outcomes hang again in the balance, is achieved by Proctor through consideration of the time taken for light to reach remote parts of the universe:

Yet, while our Neptunian would thus have traced the progress of the battle from his distant world, the conflict would in reality have been long since decided, the final charge of the British army accomplished, the Imperial Guard destroyed, Napoleon fugitive, and the Prussians, who to the Neptunian would be seen still struggling through muddy roads towards

the field of battle, would have been relentlessly pursuing the scattered army of France. (*OW* 322)

As in other examples of alternate-historical thought, Napoleon is presented as the figure in whom decisively different trajectories of European history were contained. There is an assumption that the Neptunians share our historiographical bias toward military history and the fate of Europe; they become a proxy subjectivity which humans can adopt for the purposes of historical reflection.

Proctor extends the imagination of human history beyond single static locations, and also gives an imaginary observer the powers of selecting his or her (or its) viewing material. He invites his readers to “conceive that powers of locomotion commensurate with his wonderful powers of vision were given to this Being, and that in an instant of time he could sweep through the enormous interval separating him from our Earth, until he were no farther from us than the moon” (*OW* 326). By assuming the ability to travel at speeds greater than that of light, human history is rendered as a narrative which could be subjected to fast-forward or rewind functions. Other astronomers practised similar thought experiments predicated on the idea of an observer with immense powers of vision and locomotion. From this idea of history reverberating through space, Edward William Cox imagined the infinite persistence of one’s actions in the universe, and that “the most secret deed that is done lives through eternity.”⁴⁵

Georg Friedrich Felix Ebert describes a universe criss-crossed by different perspectives on Earth’s history, from whose past he selects the birth of the Saviour and the Council of Worms as exemplary historical moments. He also shows that, with super-human speed and powers of vision, it would be possible to fast-forward human history. We can imagine “an observer from a star of the twelfth magnitude capable of approaching the Earth in an hour [...] who would live through the period of four thousand years with all their events completely, and as exactly in a moment of time as he did before in the space of an hour.”⁴⁶ These were, he writes, theoretically comparable to the observational powers of God, for whom “a thousand years are as one day.”⁴⁷ Proctor suggests that this supercharged astral travel would enable a vision of universal history that approximates to God’s, for such a traveller “sees at each instant the whole universe as it has been in the infinite past, as it is now and as it will be in the infinite future” (*OW* 336). This compression

of time into a solid block disturbed the linear, chronological frame that Whewell was at pains to protect by insisting on an “origin of this origin.”⁴⁸ Although Proctor’s and Eberty’s speculations asserted their adherence to orthodox faith in a divine creator, their speculations on the nature of time—in all cases underpinned by the evidence of optical instruments that gathered or sifted light—produced materialist conceptions of the universe that were dangerously close to heresies.

HALE’S AND FLAMMARION’S ALTERNATE-HISTORICAL BEINGS

Lumen (1872) by Camille Flammarion and “Hands Off” (1881) by Edward Everett Hale both imagine celestial beings in possession of the supernatural powers of observation and locomotion that Proctor and others described. In both, these capacities belong to a celestial spirit who is also the narrator of the story. The fanciful premise is only a fictive realization of a figure whom astronomers already posited hypothetically to illustrate principles of astronomical physics. Flammarion was an eminent astronomer who had founded and later became the first President of the Société Astronomique de France, whose journal he edited. Like Proctor, he published extensively on technical astronomical subjects as well as producing popular and speculative works on the plurality of worlds and celestial⁴⁹ spirits. Hale was a short-story writer, historian, and clergyman, and had no such specialist background, but his review of *Napoléon apocryphe* 40 years earlier indicates an interest in alternate history as a narrative conceit.⁵⁰ The references to optical technology in “Hands Off” also reveal an awareness of the primary concerns of the pluralism debate.

“I was in another stage of existence. I was free from the limits of Time, and in new relations to Space” (“HO” 1). So begins Hale’s story, which was published in 1881 in *Harper’s Magazine* and is the earliest work that is reproduced in Waugh and Greenberg’s edited collection of *Alternative Histories*.⁵¹ The narrator is a celestial being, once a human but now a novice cosmic spirit under the guidance of a mentor. The narrator describes the ability to observe “the motions of several thousand solar systems all together,” all of which he is able to see “with equal distinctiveness” (“HO” 1). This being, we infer from the technical summary of the apparatus he no longer requires, had once been an astronomer (or at least an enthusiast): he describes being liberated from “eyepieces and object-glasses, with refraction, with prismatic colors and achromatic contrivances” (“HO” 1). The reference to freedom from

these tools of the astronomer, in particular the spectroscope, also hints at an awareness of the arguments and methods deployed in the plurality debate.

In his cosmic self-education, this being is able to replay human history, not in terms of its light still reaching distant parts of the galaxy, but as one who can access and *intervene* in past history. He observes Joseph, son of Jacob, in captivity by the Ishmaelites, and is about to help him to escape when his guardian prevents him, explaining: "No. They are all conscious and free. [...] You and I must not interfere unless we know what we are doing" ("HO" 3). Again, astronomical explanations of the speed of light already described the ability, for a being capable of immediate relocation across space, to rewind and fast-forward episodes from history (as light transmissions); Hale's story simply adds the power to intervene and produce different outcomes: counterfactual divergences from the history that we know and belong to.

In "Hands Off," the alternate history involves alterations to an experimental world, a sandpit which can then be compared to the history we know. The guardian points the narrator to a system "just like our dear old system, and world just like our dear old world." All geography and history are identical to Earth's, and the narrator is allowed to do as he wishes: "Here you may try experiments. This [world] is quite a fresh one; no one has touched it" ("HO" 4). The narrator allows the ersatz Joseph to escape, with catastrophic consequences: famines devastate the land without respite and the Canaanites rule mercilessly; Greek civilization never develops, nor Roman. (Renouvier imagined an improved course of Roman civilization without religious politics but Hale erases it and Christianity completely.) History is characterized by "lust, brutality, terror, cruelty, carnage, famine, agony, horror" ("HO" 8-9). At a date which is unspecified but which may correspond to Christ's crucifixion and resurrection, Calvary becomes the site of a final battle between the Molochs and the Canaanites, after which human history is extinguished: "Not a man or a woman, nor a boy or a girl, not a single soul left in that world" ("HO" 10).

Except, of course, this is not the world of humanity, merely a copy. When the guardian introduces the narrator-spirit to this alternative world, he explains: "these are not His children—they are only creatures, you know. These are not conscious, though they seem so. You will not hurt them whatever you do" ("HO" 4). The story, then, manages both to present the idea of human history having its doubles in space, on

other planets, but reintegrates the idea of plurality into a providentialist account of the cosmos in which Earth is the only world peopled with God's creations, capable of suffering, and in possession of souls capable of being saved; the copy-world is inhabited by "shadowy forms" only ("HO" 10). The story affirms the very opposite implications of plurality to those that troubled nineteenth-century astronomers from Chalmers onwards, who responded to the anxiety that the existence of other worlds in a divinely ordered universe diluted the special privilege of humankind: "What is man that thou art mindful of him?" Instead, Hale's story neutralizes plurality by creating a universe in which all material creation is subordinated to Earth, in which copy-worlds exist as training grounds where novice celestial beings experiment in order to apprehend the very providentialism that astronomical speculation called into question. Earth was indeed the only world in the universe, and the narrator, returning his attention to our world, comments: "How bright it seemed" ("HO" 11). By privileging Earth as divinely sanctioned, and its history as likewise specially ordained, Hale's story fights a rearguard action in support of a single historical trajectory for Earth, and a linear and homogeneous universal history that becomes increasingly tenuous in the face of astronomical science.⁵²

In *Lumen*, Flammario also adopts the format of a series of conversations between Quarens, who narrates, and Lumen, a wiser, more experienced celestial spirit. Lumen describes the process by which the soul leaves the body to become an interplanetary spirit. After the death of the physical body, the soul achieves a power of vision comparable to that described in "Hands Off," one which is "incomparably superior to the eyes of the terrestrial organism" (*LU* 12). By an effort of concentration, Lumen is able to focus his vision on the topography of specific planets, even to zoom and focus on specific locations.⁵³ He then describes learning to travel to remote planets at the speed of thought (which, unlike the speed of light, is instantaneous), and materialize there in bodily form. He recounts, for the purpose of instruction, the story of his first astral journey, in which he joins a group of observers who have assembled on a mountain-top to observe the tumultuous events taking place in Paris. There is a bloody civil war, and these concerned beings debate whether the human race will destroy itself.

Lumen describes his former inexperience and his puzzlement on finding the geography of Paris to be altered: new buildings are not visible, and the circumference of the city corresponds to its older limits. He

is unsure “if it was the *old* Paris [...] that I was observing, or if, by a phenomenon no less incredible, it was another Paris, another France, another Earth” (LU 21–22). The younger spirit, Quarens, is then given an extended explanation of how “it is not the present state of the sky that is visible, but its past history” (LU 33). Lumen’s uncertainty on watching previous events raises the seductive possibility of other worlds. He wonders if there are multiple versions of Earth: “Given the multitude of stars and of planets which orbit them, I asked myself, what is the probability of finding in space a world exactly like Earth?” (LU 58) Lumen concludes:

There is a very high probability in favour of the existence of one or several worlds exactly resembling Earth, on the surface of which the same history is taking place, the same succession of events, and which are populated by the same flora and fauna, the same humanity, the same men, the same families. (LU 58–59)

Plurality returns in the discussion on “Previous Existence,” which concerns precisely the soul’s past incarnations on other planets similar to Earth. It is the perpetual diffusion of light (and history) in space that makes it possible for Lumen to be aware of his prior incarnations and view them simultaneously. “I have thus before me, my two last existences, which were taking place quite naturally” (LU 120). This is the basis for Lumen’s (and Flammarion’s) explanation of *déjà vu*:

I had already lived in analogous regions on the planet in Virgo. The same life, the same actions, the same circumstances, the same conditions. Analogies, analogies! Almost everything I had seen, done, thought on Earth, I had already seen, done, thought one hundred years before on the earlier world. (LU 121)

It is only in the disembodied state that previous existences can be recalled; when incarnate, the perception of repetition disappears, but the true nature of universal existence is an endless chain of “analogies” that, when realized, give infinity a desolate tone. The idea of metempsychosis is extended to animals and plants: Lumen has, he reports to our surprise, experienced life as a rational tree (LU 148). Here, in fictional form, is

the idea that other worlds exist as an endless series of variations, not as subordinate copies of Earth, but as comparable versions of each other between which interplanetary spirits migrate.

Hale and Flammarion present entirely different versions of alternate planetary history. Hale's theologically terracentric universe includes counterpart Earths only for the purposes of training celestial beings in the nature of divine providence. There is no suggestion of other worlds in which life had evolved differently or of civilizations other than human having developed; the idea of other planets which had also been redeemed by a saviour would be inimical to the story's theological orthodoxy. In an earlier work, *La pluralité des mondes habités* (1862), Flammarion does engage explicitly in the idea of a plurality of redeemed worlds and considers the possibility, among others, that Christ had appeared in different incarnations on different worlds in different forms.⁵⁴ In *Lumen* he countenances the idea that "the Christian era itself, which would seem from several points of view to necessarily exist in the sky [...] is not known by other worlds" (LU 209). Worlds exist in isolation from each other and "the history of the planet Earth and its political dynasties is of utter insignificance" (LU 209). This isolation is traversed by celestial beings, but the possibility of learning from other worlds while in a state of material incarnation is prohibited; only in the sense of *déjà-vu* are memories of previous existences discerned at all by those still alive.

The continuation of life as a celestial spirit is not, however, comparable to Christian resurrection. Quarens utters the final reflection in the text, in which he considers the consequences of eternal, disembodied existence: "Eternal life!... without... possible... end! I repeated, searching to comprehend, and feeling my brain melt in its skull... Ah!... And I fell as falls a dead man!" (LU 225) This sudden nihilism at the end, in the face of a universe characterized by infinite duration, collapses the ideas of contingent outcomes of events on Earth into an infinitely multiple cosmology, reducing the history we know down to a single instance, trivialized by the other, countless variations.

Flammarion adopts an entirely different position toward pluralism from Hale. However discreetly, his reiterative universal history encloses Christianity within the confines of Earth; salvation is excluded from any universal scheme revealed by astronomy. Immortality becomes intelligible only on the plane of materialism, by which atoms and consciousness

persist for eternity. The apparatus of celestial spirits allows Flammarion to present a formulation of the soul's continuation beyond death on other worlds, but in a sense which is chilled by the perception of a bleak and uncomprehending cosmos. Our world would be destroyed eventually, a process described late in the text:

This beautiful planet, so lively today [...] will become dead, completely dead—and more than that: destroyed! Just as it harbours now in its breast the elements and dates of its origins, so it also contains the seeds of its decline and its end. (*LU* 220)

Earth will disintegrate and fall as meteors on distant worlds, Flammarion writes, which their inhabitants will collect and display in natural history museums. Lumen's perspective on planetary decline and extinction portrays a flat and undifferentiated time, a materialist eternity in which "atoms have no age" (*LU* 6). In this phase of alternate history, extended into the cosmos, the significance of variant worlds is not the possibility of better or even terrifying versions of human history, but an unedifying sameness which seems a terminal destination for the astronomical imagination of other worlds.

BLANQUI, NIETZSCHE, AND THE MATERIALISM OF HISTORY

Louis Auguste Blanqui's cosmological pamphlet, composed in prison at the age of 66, turned this nihilistic strand of astronomical speculation into a critique of bourgeois society. Its significance in the history of science is marginal at best, but *L'Éternité par les astres* (*Eternity According to the Stars*) (1872) merits analysis alongside Friedrich Nietzsche's essay "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life" (1874). The connection was recognized by Walter Benjamin, who planned to write an extended piece on Blanqui and Nietzsche, together with Charles Baudelaire.⁵⁵ This was never realized, but Blanqui is a recurring figure for Benjamin: there are 63 references to him in the index of *The Arcades Project*. This recognition of Blanqui's modernity, however, can obscure the previous set of tendencies and issues of the plurality debate, which it inherits and assimilates into its critique.

The pamphlet was not the first appearance of the idea of eternal return in Blanqui's writings, but what is distinctive about *L'Éternité par les astres* is how astronomical science is used as a weapon to combat

a different adversary from religious orthodoxy: the forces of bourgeois authority, against which he devoted his life to fighting, and by whose decree he was locked in a prison fortress with a terminal sentence. Blanqui was imprisoned for insurrection in 1871 by the Thiers government, just as he had been by every French administration since 1830.⁵⁶ The Communards offered a prisoner exchange in 1872—Blanqui for all of their hostages—to which Thiers reportedly replied that his prisoner was worth more than an entire battalion.⁵⁷ A biography by his friend and correspondent, Gustave Geffroy, casts him as the Christ of France's revolutionary struggles and writes of his incarceration in the Fort du Taureau: "The old man has been brought to the deepest level of shadow. It is the place chosen to enchain this force, to throw to rot this philosophical flesh."⁵⁸ Blanqui was eventually released from this imprisonment, and died in 1881 immediately after giving a public speech in favour of an amnesty for the Communards.

Blanqui's contemplation of alternate-historical outcomes, of what might have been, thus took place in particular circumstances, from the position of a committed revolutionary who learned the story of the failed insurrection, which he might have led to a different outcome, while inside a cell in the Fort du Taureau. Here, Blanqui harnesses the idea of plurality to history by imagining the universe to be filled with counterpart worlds upon which every historical outcome has taken place as variant arrangements of atoms. The corollary of his claim for the material existence in time and space of all historical alternatives is to strip the universe of teleology, for "fatality doesn't have a leg to stand on in the infinite, which knows nothing at all of alternatives" (*ES* 43). In this description of the universe, speculation about other histories becomes a redundant activity, for the lesson from science is that they *all* have a material existence in a universe which is indifferent to all variations. If the plurality-of-worlds debate in the nineteenth century began with Chalmers's admonition against speculation of other worlds, it can be said to have ended with a similarly cautionary (but differently motivated) treatise which poses infinite worlds *against* the indulgent speculation of counterfactual historical fantasies.

The idea of material eternity preoccupied Blanqui prior to his composition of *L'Éternité* in the months after the Paris Commune. In a broadside pamphlet, *Science et foi* (1865), he attacked Père Gratry for attempting to reconcile scriptural orthodoxy with the evidence of geology and astronomy, and presenting "God rigged up in the uniform of

atheism.”⁵⁹ It outlines his idea of material eternity, and a redemptive, theological tone accompanies his description of planetary death and rebirth:

The end of the Earth is not the end of the *world*. The former is no more than an ephemeral grain of sand. The other is infinity and eternity. The stars, like animals, like plants, are born, live and die and of their elements they reconstitute new globes.⁶⁰

Christians had a “monomania” regarding the end of the world, so Blanqui’s curious distinction between the “ephemeral” Earth and the infinite, eternal world seems to confront theological narratives with this material, secular eternity. The argument is not entirely clear; his criticism of the theological assimilation of science as “God rigged up in the uniform of atheism” is complemented by its inverse: atheism presented as a new (political) religion. In his preface to a recent edition of *L’Éternité par les astres*, Jacques Rancière compares Blanqui with Auguste Comte and other utopianists who invoked scientific knowledge of the stars to call for new regimes on Earth, through what Rancière calls “the translation of the power of scientific law into spiritual power to direct society.”⁶¹ Writing *Science et foi* in a moment of precarious freedom (after an escape from prison in 1865), Blanqui looks to the stars for a model of revolutionary energy and historical process that differs from the providential narratives of order and design on Earth; it is later, in *L’Éternité*, that he introduces an infinite set of historical alternatives into his political cosmology.

L’Éternité par les astres highlights the historiographical dimension to the plurality debate in the nineteenth century. The alternate histories discussed in the previous chapters (and the following ones) pose alternative courses for the history of this world, but the cosmic alternate histories discussed here are couched in pluralism rather than divergence; alternatives on other planets do not require a point of departure. According to Kathleen Singles’s definition, this would disbar them from the category.⁶² The importance of the plurality debate for multiverse or time-travelling science fiction, however, inclines me to think of these narratives as an important part of the genealogy of alternate history. As well as using plurality as a tool to dismantle the cultural complacency of modern Europe, where progress was taken to be a universal rule (as Renouvier does also), Blanqui wishes to use plurality to toxify indulgence

in fantasies of historical otherness—alternate history, in short. Blanqui effectively prohibits speculation of other, more fortunate worlds, not as a result of theological anxieties about the propriety of these conjectures (as was the case with Chalmers), but through the assertion that every conceivable wish has already been fulfilled, though for others, on worlds with whom communication is impossible.

It is no surprise that Blanqui's argument, which turns the culture of science against itself, is founded on Laplace's nebular hypothesis and the discoveries of spectroscopy. He assumes from the evidence of the latter (that celestial bodies are constituted from elements also found on Earth) that there are a finite number of elements in the universe. This view of analogous planetary formation, which is espoused by Chambers, Proctor, and many others, is accompanied by the idea of eternal recurrence. Time is assumed to be infinite, and Blanqui adopts a spurious interpretation of planetary life-cycles, according to which each celestial body undergoes a process of birth through fiery collision with others, followed by cooling and a period of stability, then disintegration until the next collision restarts the process—a conjecture similar to De Quincey's, that our planet possessed the Phoenix's capacity "for rebuilding herself out of her own ashes" ("SH" 568). This process is said to go on eternally, in an infinity of time. This is also a reiteration of the secular, material eternity of particles that Flammarion asserted in *Lumen*: "an arrangement of material molecules constantly renewing themselves" (LU 6). However, the linguistic and imagistic richness of Blanqui's account of planetary formation belies Flammarion's implication of monotony:

When, after millions of centuries, one of these immense eddies of stars—having been born and now swirling around, dead together—is able to cover the open regions of space before it, then its borders will collide with other extinguished whirlpools arriving at the encounter. They will then enter into a furious mêlée that goes on for countless years on a battlefield that stretches across billions and billions of leagues. This part of the universe is then little more than a vast atmosphere of flames, unrelentingly furrowed by the cataclysm's lightning bolts, that instantly volatilize both stars and planets. (ES 25)

This account of planets colliding and initiating violent birth is, of course, a description of the nebular formation of planets. It also projects a violent tumult into the heavens, one which is *revolutionary* in the two

senses of being cyclical and of involving profound change. Blanqui's cosmology is political, for it demands that a similar reformation take place on Earth.⁶³ Advances in astronomy enable a description of the heavens that supplants prior presentations of celestial order that were called upon to authorize stable and hierarchical systems of government, and which privileged stability and fixed relations between social groups on Earth. Whereas with Nasmyth and Carpenter, Richard Proctor, and others, there is a tendency for the telescopist to project him or herself into space as a solitary celestial Being,, Blanqui instead projects perpetual, insurrectionary war ("mêlée," "battlefield") across the cosmos. Although Blanqui and Renouvier both use alternate history to resist providential historical thought, they adopt entirely different positions on the character of history that they find most desirable. Renouvier prefers to see its ideal development as organic, where Blanqui celebrates an eternal material revolution of atoms and chance.

Despite the inaccuracies (and thermodynamic impossibility) of his account of planetary rebirth, Blanqui is attempting to solve the puzzle of celestial entities such as comets and nebulae by bringing them into something like an integrated theory of the cosmos. Earth occupies the position of a stable but moribund planet after its life as a star, and prior to its disintegration into its comet phase of interplanetary dust. It is said to have no future, being bound by a "fatal judgement" to eventually descend into eternal night and barrenness. Humankind would possess a habitable planet for long enough only to develop a primitive knowledge of the physical nature of the stars (*ES* 10). Given this implacable law of entropic destruction, Blanqui restates the dualism he first explored in *Science et foi* by obliging a modern reader to either accept a new material theology, or disavow the idea of salvation: "Either there is resurrection of stars, or universal death" (*ES* 74). This statement wrests the concept of resurrection from its religious context while maintaining its tropes: dead planets are said to dwell in "the night's entombment" until "the moment comes when their flame will again flash up like lightning" (*ES* 24). Eternity and resurrection are divorced from a Christian narrative of salvation by being rendered, Blanqui claims, perfectly intelligible as physical processes by modern science.⁶⁴ Eternity degrades to sempiternity, and resurrection to a process of cyclical renewal that is inimical to, not protective of, any sanctity to life and progress. This emptying of religious value from the universe leaves a cosmology governed by revolutionary struggle, but which can only be apprehended as repetition on

both the planetary level (“The same monotony and the same apathy even in the foreign stars” (*ES* 59)) and for individuals:

What I write at this moment in the dungeons of the Fort du Taureau I will have written for eternity, on a table, with a pen, in my clothes, in circumstances that are completely alike. And so it is, for each. (*ES* 57)

There was, in the nineteenth century, a growing preoccupation with the *equivalence* of our world and others—as seen in Nasmyth and Carpenter’s imagination of lunar counterparts, more explicitly in Flammarion’s notion of repeated experience, and finding its most extreme expression in *L’Éternité par les astres*. Here, Blanqui derives from modern optical technology, from the stars themselves, the conclusion that “there’s no progress” (*ES* 57).

With finite materials and infinite time for material formation, dissolution, and reconstitution, all possible arrangements of elements have already taken place; that is to say, every historical outcome for human civilization has been played out elsewhere, in a cosmology whose cycles of identity and difference are eternal and subsume historical destiny.

Finally, a world is born with our humanity; it develops its same races, its migrations, its struggles, its empires, its catastrophes. All of these peripeteia are going to change its fate, its destinies—throwing it onto tracks that are not at all of our globe. Every minute and every second, thousands of different directions are set before the human race. It chooses one of them, forever abandoning the others. (*ES* 42–43)

In such a universe, infinitely rich (or poor) with copy-worlds of Earth, concepts such as fate are inadmissible; all differences are simply variations within a material universe in which, unlike that of Hale, there is no master-copy to which others are subordinate. Blanqui imagines, like so many others, the many times the English have lost the battle of Waterloo (*ES* 44); but there is no sense of excitement at the idea of alternative outcomes, which are of equal indifference to the universe which contains all of them.

Blanqui is included in Barton C. Hacker and Gordon B. Chamberlain’s revised bibliography of “alternative” histories; their short note on the text suggests that it is “perhaps the earliest statement of multiple-Earths theory: an infinite universe of finite elements must necessarily produce parallel Earths with infinite variations.”⁶⁵ *L’Éternité par*

les astres is no doubt an important precursor to alternate history and multiverse science fiction in the twentieth century, though his politically invested astronomy has little in common with the adventurous “scientific romances” of Wells, Verne, and others; it extends no interest in describing a single alternative historical trajectory except to illustrate the exhaustion of possibilities. The text is occupied with the mechanics of planetary death and resurrection rather than with descriptions of alien beings or utopian (or dystopian) social alternatives. Blanqui explains that other versions of himself sit in identical prison cells, writing “upon a table, with a pen, in the same clothes, in circumstances entirely alike” (ES 57). History likewise becomes a series of repetitions, an imprisonment for all: “The same monotony, the same apathy even in the foreign stars,” Blanqui writes in one of the text’s closing sentences (ES 59).

This conclusion should not be taken as a capitulation, however. Confronted by this infinite series of duplicates, one is forced to accept the conditions of this world as subject to inexorable laws, while also making each moment in time laden with separations and divergences—even if they are unknowable and incomparable with the alternatives. The demolition of any belief in historical necessity does not absolve the individual of responsibilities, and Blanqui’s “decisive act is thus to turn repetition against itself,” Rancière writes.⁶⁶ Comparisons can be made with a more famous formulation of eternal return: in Nietzsche’s argument, the monotonous stability of mediocrity can be dispelled only through a description of cosmic history that makes repetition a universal law in order to stimulate individuals to imagine and realize a variant outcome or divergence. For Blanqui, according to Rancière, the situation is slightly different; in one universe Blanqui is a model citizen of the bourgeois republic, but in another he lives to see the completed insurrection (“there’s a globe for each” (ES 43)). The creed of the revolutionary should adopt belief in contingency rather than hope for progress: “The hope for progress is blocked. That for forking [*bifurcations*]⁶⁷ remains.” Blanqui’s inferences from nebular theory and spectrum analysis produce a model of revolutionary politics that depends on the defining feature of alternate history, the point of departure; but rather than nominating a single event that could have been otherwise, he suffuses every moment of existence with this quality of contingency.

Blanqui’s declaration against the necessity of progress was, crucially, dependent on the achievements of a technologically advanced culture in which the academic disciplines were increasingly professionalized

and governed by scientific values. Nietzsche also turns to an astral figure in order to describe the same process in his diatribe against historical self-satisfaction, “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life” (1874), when he writes that the “constellation of life and history” has been profoundly altered by the interposition of “a gleaming and glorious star”—that is “*by science, by the demand that history should be a science*” (“UD” 77, original emphasis). Blanqui’s text (despite the constrained conditions of its composition) illustrates how the plurality-of-worlds debate in the nineteenth century reached a point where it both reflected the advance of optical technologies that could inform astronomical knowledge, and was able to use this scientific culture to subject historical assumptions to critical scrutiny. Blanqui thus stands in a relation with Nietzsche, not only through their common interest in the eternal return of history, but in the way they both turned to astronomical figures in order to lambast the historical complacency of modern culture.

Nietzsche identifies several aspects of modern cultural life that afflicted German culture in the aftermath of military victory over France. In his first untimely meditation, “David Strauss, the Confessor and the Writer” (1873), he describes the condition of historical stasis brought about by an automatic and unreflecting homage to the “classics,” which have led to the self-satisfied view that culture has already produced its greatest treasures and that “all seeking is at an end.”⁶⁸ Another danger concerns disciplines—the transformation of “sciences” such as philosophy, “which might be expected to disturb [the] complacency” of modern culture, into an undifferentiated project of summarizing previous knowledge: history, reduced to an accumulation of facts, becomes the dominant mode of idle knowledge.⁶⁹ The consequence, for Nietzsche, is cultural philistinism: “stupefaction is now the goal of these unphilosophical admirers [...] when they seek to understand everything historically.”⁷⁰

The critique of modern historical consciousness is developed in “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,” in which Nietzsche describes the “excess of history,” and History as a modern “malady” (“UD” 64, 120). As with the unreflecting celebration of the classics, the effect of the modern mania for historical knowledge is first “to lose this sense of strangeness, no longer to be very much surprised at anything” and finally “to be pleased with everything—that is then no doubt called historical sense, historical culture” (“UD” 98). The outcome is two contradictory positions, both of which are contemptible to Nietzsche: in culture, an unreflecting admiration of all “classics,” and a self-identification

of one's age in terms of the *epigone* ("UD" 103). In an inversion of this view, the perspective of Hegelian thought is combined with the evolutionary sciences, leading to the world-view: "We have reached the goal, we are the goal, we are nature perfected" ("UD" 108). The connection between cultural complacency and historical return is not apparent at first, but becomes clear when we consider that Nietzsche takes the constitution and use of historical knowledge to be a defining principle of a culture of intellectual dissipation and material gluttony. Such a culture is satisfied with the endless celebration of the past, and must therefore encounter (via the uncomfortable truths of the true philosopher) its own image in a historical configuration that was commensurate with its uselessness: the eternal return of history presented as the endless material arrangement and rearrangement of atoms.

Consider the passage below where Nietzsche explains why "monumental history" (which can be glossed as "romantic history") is no longer intelligible in a modern era in which all knowledge is reduced to a dull and undifferentiated pursuit of knowledge, whose only process is the accumulation of facts.

That which was once possible could present itself as a possibility for a second time only if the Pythagoreans were right in believing that when the constellation of the heavenly bodies is repeated the same things, down to the smallest event, must also be repeated on Earth: so that whenever the stars stand in a certain relation to one another a Stoic again joins with an Epicurean to murder Caesar, and when they stand in another relation Columbus will again discover America. ("UD" 70)⁷¹

This wilful reduction of history to the location of material elements stands as a critique of the tendency of all disciplines, including history, toward the methods of science, which he views as a philistine accumulation of knowledge for its own sake. The final result of this historical materialism, Nietzsche suggests with contemptuous sarcasm, will be the prediction of human behaviour by scientists based on the observation of the stars, "when the astronomers have again become astrologers" ("UD" 70).

The parallel with Blanqui's material cosmology in which history is only the outcome of material combinations is obvious. Blanqui also makes history a function of an astronomical science that reduces events to physically determined variations of matter. This conjunction

of Blanqui and Nietzsche as critics of modernity was perceived by Benjamin, who planned a work on Baudelaire in which a section, to be titled “The Commodity as Poetic Object,” which would examine Blanqui and Nietzsche together.⁷² Writing on Blanqui and the illustrator J.J. Grandville in his *Convolut* on “Fashion,” Benjamin observes that “it is precisely in this century, the most parched and imagination-starved, that the collective dream energy of a society has taken refuge with redoubled vehemence in the mute impenetrable nebula of fashion, where the understanding cannot follow.”⁷³

Benjamin responds to the modernity of Blanqui’s material eternity, for example the latter’s comment that hydrogen and oxygen produce light in the universe, “as they illuminate the streets of Paris and London,” or his comparison of comets to two recurring tropes of the nineteenth century: vampires and “pallid Bohemians” (*ES* 16). Blanqui directs his verdict of universal repetition and monotony to “men of the nineteenth century” and chooses as the emblem of material eternity the particularities of fashion: “The number of our twins is infinite in time and space [...]. These twins are flesh and bone, in pants and jackets, in crinoline and chignon. These are hardly phantoms, rather the contemporary made eternal” (*ES* 57). Blanqui’s critique responds to modernity’s endless delight in novelty and discovery (fashion and astronomy) by reflecting the techniques and discoveries of modern materialist science back to itself as the secret mechanical nature of the universe. Crinoline and chignon are as eternal as any other arrangement of atoms. Benjamin calls this critique by Blanqui “the most terrible indictment of a society that projects this image of the cosmos—understood as an image of itself—across the heavens.”⁷⁴ Blanqui’s technique, according to Benjamin, is to make visible this self-projection, this “phantasmagoria of history.”⁷⁵

Analogy in the plurality debate could also be called astral projection, which perhaps captures better the whimsical flights of the astral imagination in the nineteenth century. Thomas Chalmers deplors those speculative departures by philosophers who “winged their audacious way into forbidden regions” (*CR* 72). Thomas De Quincey discovers that the largest telescope of the age has revealed the true constitution of nebulae, but also projects images of mythic imagination into the cosmos; once the speed of light is recognized, space becomes criss-crossed by transmissions of history as light, which Lynda Nead compares to the projection of moving images onto a screen. Robert Chambers presumes the laws

Fig. 4.3 James Nasmyth and James Carpenter, *Back of Hand and Wrinkled Apple*, to illustrate the origin of certain mountain ranges, resulting from shrinking of the interior. 1874. Photo-mechanical print in *The Moon Considered as a Planet, a World, and a Satellite* (John Murray, 1874), Plate II, opp. page 30

of biological generation to be universal, which prompts him—as it did Richard Proctor later, armed with the evidence of spectrum analysis—to conclude that the universe teems with variant forms of life and civilization. As I have attempted to show in this section, Auguste Blanqui and Friedrich Nietzsche both project the culture of the late nineteenth century into the heavens as a materialist history that passes terminal judgment on the society from whose stagnant self-satisfaction such visions of repetition have emerged.

One illustration of the analogical imagination and its tendency to project human, terrestrial values outwards into the cosmos is the image above (Fig. 4.3) from Nasmyth and Carpenter's *The Moon Considered as a Planet, a World, and a Satellite*. The authors use the most common

terrestrial objects to explain—by analogy—the reason for the moon’s corrugated surface. It is old, they postulate, and like the surface of an old apple or the wrinkled skin of a hand, no longer youthful. Our nearest celestial body has aged and shrunk, leaving a surface that also tells of the passing of time. This is one of many photo-mechanical prints included in the work, and Frances Robertson claims that the techniques and inclusion of these illustrations governed the production of the book from its inception.⁷⁶ Respected scientists were perfectly willing, apparently, “to treat these fabricated *mise-en-scenes* as real glimpses of the moon’s surface despite knowing perfectly well that they had been photographed from models.” Robertson’s argument, which is consistent with my account of the astral alternate-historical imagination, is that the combination of analogy, imagination and techniques of visualization produces works “of both science and fantasy.”⁷⁷

A consequence of these attempts in the nineteenth century to reach into space (as the hand in the image seems to), or imagining oneself as a counterpart being on another planet (the apple reminds me of a displaced brain), was that the history of Earth became something that could be meditated on from outside of itself, as only one story among many variant, alternate histories among the stars. Science fiction would propose the locomotive means for reaching other worlds, and stage encounters with these counterpart beings. This concretization of alien worlds and their inhabitants closed the subjunctive mood of the plurality debate, which always conceived of other worlds as alternative forms of our own.

NOTES

1. Anna Henchman, *The Starry Sky Within: Astronomy and the Reach of the Mind in Victorian Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 147.
2. Bernard V. Lightman, *Victorian Popularizers of Science: Designing Nature for New Audiences* (Chicago, Ill.; London: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 41.
3. W. H. Brock and R. M. Macleod, “The Scientists’ Declaration: Reflexions on Science and Belief in the Wake of ‘Essays and Reviews,’ 1864-5,” *The British Journal for the History of Science* 9, no. 1 (March 1, 1976): 45 Brock and Macleod 1976.
4. T. W. Webb, “The Great Nebula in Andromeda,” *Nature* 25, no. 641 (1882): 343.

5. Two others were the Bridgewater Treatises, funded by the Earl of Bridgewater to explore "the Power, Wisdom, and Goodness of God, as manifested in the Creation," and the Actonian Prize, which was initiated in 1838 by the Royal Institution and awarded to "the best essay illustrative of the wisdom and beneficence of the Almighty, in such department of science as the committee of managers should, in their discretion, have selected."
6. Webb, "The Great Nebula in Andromeda," 344.
7. John Tyndall, "On the Scientific Use of the Imagination," in *Scientific Use of the Imagination and Other Essays*, 3rd ed. (Longmans, Green and Co., 1872), 35.
8. Tyndall, "On the Scientific Use of the Imagination," 37.
9. Tyndall, "On the Scientific Use of the Imagination," 6.
10. Robert Chambers, *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (London: Routledge, 1890), 30.
11. Michael J. Crowe, *The Extraterrestrial Life Debate, 1750–1900* (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 1999), 184.
12. William Roberts, "Review: A Series of Discourses on the Christian Revelation, Viewed in Connection with the Modern Astronomy," *The British Review, and London Critical Journal* 10, no. 19 (August 1817): 9.
13. Alexander Maxwell, *Plurality of Worlds: Or, Letters, Notes & Memoranda, Philosophical and Critical*, 2nd ed. (London: Printed for A. Maxwell 1820).
14. Thomas Chalmers, *On the Power, Wisdom, and Goodness of God, as Manifested in the Adaptation of External Nature, to the Moral and Intellectual Constitution of Man*, 2 vols. (London: William Pickering, 1833).
15. Whewell's application of this quotation outlasted nineteenth-century debates; it was also taken for the title for a short story by Isaac Asimov, "...That Thou Art Mindful of Him," published in 1974.
16. Immanuel Kant, *Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens*, ed. Stanley L. Jaki (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1981), 107.
17. Roberts, "Review: A Series of Discourses on the Christian Revelation, Viewed in Connection with the Modern Astronomy," 15.
18. William Whewell, *Of the Plurality of Worlds: An Essay, Also a Dialogue On the Same Subject*, 5th ed (London: Parker, 1854), 329 (original emphasis).
19. William Whewell, *Astronomy and General Physics Considered with Reference To Natural Theology* (London: William Pickering, 1833), 30–31.
20. Whewell, *Astronomy and General Physics*, 282.
21. Whewell, *Astronomy and General Physics*, 189.
22. Whewell, *Of the Plurality of Worlds*, 139.

23. Crowe, *The Extraterrestrial Life Debate*, 267.
24. George Lewis Levine, *Darwin and the Novelists: Patterns of Science in Victorian Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 46.
25. Chambers, *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*, 30.
26. M. J. S. Hodge, "The Universal Gestation of Nature: Chambers' 'Vestiges' and 'Explanations,'" *Journal of the History of Biology* 5, no. 1 (April 1, 1972): 142.
27. Hodge, "The Universal Gestation of Nature," 148.
28. For a more extensive examination of this extraordinary article, see Henchman, *The Starry Sky Within*, 48–84.
29. An early elaboration of this idea appears in a work by Felix Ebert, first published in 1846 (*The Stars and the Earth; Or, Thoughts Upon Space, Time, and Eternity* (Boston, Mass.: Crosby, Nichols and Co., 1854), 16–38. The topic is discussed in Lynda Nead's *The Haunted Gallery: Painting, Photography, Film C. 1900* (New Haven, Conn. Yale University Press, 2007), 199–245. and in James Emmott's recent article, "Parameters of Vibration, Technologies of Capture, and the Layering of Voices and Faces in the Nineteenth Century," *Victorian Studies* 53, no. 3 (2011): 468–78.
30. Jonathan Smith, "De Quincey's Revisions to 'The System of the Heavens,'" *Victorian Periodicals Review* 26, no. 4 (Winter 1993): 207.
31. Alex Murray, "Vestiges of the Phoenix: De Quincey, Kant and the Heavens," *Victoriographies* 1, no. 2 (November 2011): 254.
32. Charles Wycliffe Goodwin, "Mosaic Cosmogony," in *Essays and Reviews: The 1860 Text and Its Reading*, ed. Victor Shea and William Whitla, Victorian Literature and Culture Series (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 366.
33. Lightman, *Victorian Popularizers of Science*, 299.
34. At the time of writing, "Proxima b" has just been identified as a planet with conditions that might be amenable to life; this recent announcement in *Nature* of the discovery, however, is strictly observational, unlike Proctor's use of new astronomical instruments which provided the means for analogical speculation about variant civilizations on other planets (Guillem Anglada-Escudé et al., "A Terrestrial Planet Candidate in a Temperate Orbit Around Proxima Centauri," *Nature* 536, no. 7617 (August 24, 2016): 437–440, doi:[10.1038/nature19106](https://doi.org/10.1038/nature19106)).
35. Crowe, *The Extraterrestrial Life Debate*, 361. At the risk of retrospective over-periodizing, 1864 was the year in which the scientific naturalists began to claim the ascendancy and disassociate theological questions from scientific enquiry. It was the year in which the X-Club was founded (a scientifically progressive dining club that included John Tyndall, T.H. Huxley, William Spottiswoode, and John Lubbock among its members,

- the Royal Society awarded the Copley medal to Charles Darwin, and the authors of *Essays and Reviews* (1861) were legally absolved from ecclesiastical censure.
36. William Huggins, "Results of Spectrum Analysis Applied to Heavenly Bodies," in *Essays in Astronomy*, ed. Edward Singleton Holden (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1900), 366.
 37. Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, *Objectivity* (New York: Cambridge, Mass: Zone Books; distributed by the MIT Press, 2007), 122.
 38. Nead, *The Haunted Gallery*, 203.
 39. Nead, *The Haunted Gallery*, 232.
 40. Eberty, *The Stars and the Earth; Or, Thoughts Upon Space, Time, and Eternity*, 20.
 41. Walter Benjamin, "Paralipomena to 'On the Concept of History,'" in *Selected Writings*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith, trans. Rodney Livingstone, vol. 4 (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 403.
 42. Henschman, *The Starry Sky Within*.
 43. H. G. Wells, *The War of the Worlds*, Penguin Classics (London: Penguin, 2005), 7.
 44. Robert Cromie, *A Plunge into Space* (London & New York: Frederick Warne & Co, Cromie and Warne 1890), 112 (original emphasis).
 45. Quoted in Emmott, "Parameters of Vibration, Technologies of Capture, and the Layering of Voices and Faces in the Nineteenth Century," 472.
 46. Eberty, *The Stars and the Earth; Or, Thoughts Upon Space, Time, and Eternity*, 36.
 47. Eberty, *The Stars and the Earth; Or, Thoughts Upon Space, Time, and Eternity*, 37.
 48. Whewell, *Astronomy and General Physics*, 189.
 49. Crowe, *The Extraterrestrial Life Debate*, 379.
 50. Edward Everett Hale, "The Apocryphal Napoleon," in *The Boston Miscellany of Literature and Fashion*, ed. Nathan Hale (Boston, Mass.: Bradbury, Soden & Company, 1842), 231–236.
 51. Charles G. Waugh and Martin Harry Greenberg, eds., *Alternative Histories: Eleven Stories of the World as It Might Have Been* (New York: Garland, 1986).
 52. Hale pursued the idea of duplicates in another story, "My Double and How He undid Me," which appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1859. In this story, an overworked minister trains a wastrel doppelganger to assume some of his clerical duties. In his best known story, "The Man Without a Country" (1863), a serviceman is falsely accused of sedition and condemned to permanent exile on board a U.S. warship; when he

- dies, the crew discover that he has turned his cell into a miniature version of America.
53. Flammarion may have been prepared to give celestial spirits unrestricted access to the universe and its planets' histories, but he was also concerned with pragmatic questions that related to such observations of history. When asked to describe the famous face of Julius Caesar, Lumen replies that, alas, the law of perspective means that he can only observe the tops of people's heads (*LU* 66).
 54. See Crowe, *The Extraterrestrial Life Debate*, 383.
 55. Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith, trans. Rodney Livingstone, vol. 4 (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 94n.
 56. Alan B. Spitzer, *The Revolutionary Theories of Louis Auguste Blanqui*, Studies in the Social Sciences/Columbia University (New York: Columbia U.P, 1957), 4.
 57. Spitzer, *The Revolutionary Theories of Louis Auguste Blanqui*, 13.
 58. Gustave Geffroy, *L'enfermé* (Paris: E. Fasquelle, 1897), 375 (my translation).
 59. Auguste Blanqui, *Science et foi*, l'Idée libre 104 (Seine et Oise: Conflans-honorine, 1925), 110, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k819846>.
 60. Blanqui, *Science et foi*, 9.
 61. Jacques Rancière, "Preface," in *L'éternité Par Les Astres*, Nouv. éd. (Paris: Impressions nouvelles, 2002), 13.
 62. Kathleen Singles, *Alternate History: Playing with Contingency and Necessity*, Narrating Futures 5 (Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter, 2013), 23.
 63. Rancière, "Preface," 10.
 64. This assertion of universal material history echoes the (sadly apocryphal) exchange between Napoleon and Pierre-Simon Laplace on the nebular hypothesis. The first Consul is said to have asked what role God played in this design, and Laplace to have replied "I had no need for that hypothesis." A different exchange is recorded in Sir William Herschel's recollection of the meeting between his two men; in his diary, he notes Napoleon's question as: "And who is the author of all this!" and reports that "Mons. De la Place wished to shew that a chain of natural causes would account for the construction and preservation of the wonderful system. This the first Consul rather opposed." See Constance A. Lubbock, *The Herschel Chronicle: The Life-Story Of William Herschel And His Sister Caroline Herschel*, Reissue edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 310.
 65. Waugh and Greenberg, *Alternative Histories*, 309.
 66. Rancière, "Preface," 22.
 67. Rancière, "Preface," 24.

68. Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, "David Strauss, the Confessor and the Writer," in *Untimely Meditations*, ed. Charles Taylor, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, Texts in German Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 10.
69. Nietzsche, "David Strauss, the Confessor and the Writer," 10.
70. Nietzsche, "David Strauss, the Confessor and the Writer," 11.
71. This interlocking of human history with the material arrangement of the cosmos was derived, Walter Kaufmann suggests, from a passage in Heinrich Heine's posthumously published *Letzte Gedichte und Gedanken* (1869) Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 3rd ed (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1968), 318.
72. Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, 4:94n.
73. Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 1999), 64.
74. Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 112.
75. Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 939.
76. Frances Robertson, "Science and Fiction: James Nasmyth's Photographic Images of the Moon," *Victorian Studies* 48, no. 4 (February 12, 2007): 610.
77. Robertson, "Science and Fiction," 598, 599.

Lost Worlds and the (Un)Natural History of Gender

“REPLAYING LIFE’S TAPE”: THE ALTERNATE HISTORY OF NATURE

In *Wonderful Life: The Burgess Shale and the Nature of History*, Stephen Jay Gould proposes a thought experiment to test the contingency of natural history, which he calls “Replaying Life’s Tape.”¹ He asks us to imagine turning back the dial of history to the Middle Cambrian era, when the organisms found in the fossil beds of the Burgess Shale were alive, and to run the last half billion years of natural history a second time. Would species evolve the way we know them today? Would humans develop again on the second run of the “tape”? These are profoundly alternate-historical questions, but without being counterfactual; Gould is not proposing an alteration of historical conditions, only offering the hypothesis of a different outcome to illustrate the non-teleological nature of evolutionary descent. By doing so (and concluding that the human is the outcome of an unpredictable and probably unrepeatable process of change and adaptation—not “a tendency”), he is reiterating the argument from Renouvier’s vast alternate history of Europe against historical necessity (discussed in Chap. 3). For both, humanity is “an item of history, not an embodiment of general principles.”²

The Burgess Shale, deposited around 500 million years ago and discovered in 1909, provoked dramatic revisions to the understanding of evolutionary descent. A section of the sea floor, loaded with fossil remains, was raised high above sea level to its current position in the

Canadian Rockies, where it serves as a fossil archive of scores of species that no longer exist, raising the question of their historical fate. Charles Walcott was the first to discover and interpret the shale beds, and he laboriously classified the species on the assumption that they were the ancestors of more recent ones. But Walcott's interpretation was incorrect. Forty years later, H. B. Whittington reinterpreted the fossils and recognized their tale of mass species extinction; they were the remnants of species which left no ancestors in modified form. Rather than supporting one aspect of evolutionary theory, descent with variation, the Burgess shale confirmed a different lesson from Charles Darwin, that *only* the fittest survive: "Of the many twigs which flourished when the tree was a mere bush, only two or three, now grown into great branches, yet survive and bear all the other branches."³ Gould describes how the discovery of these mass extinctions obliged evolutionary biologists to reject the model of the "Cone of Increasing Diversity" and instead think of natural history as "Decimation and Diversification"—a figure which recognized that "the later history of life proceeded by elimination, not expansion."⁴ The evidence of geological investigation revealed a version of natural history full of discontinued (or unfulfilled) lines of descent.

Whittington's and Gould's explanations are recent examples of a long tradition of defending Darwinism from the teleological models present in, for example, William R. Greg's assertions of the compatibility of evolution with divine providence, and Charles Darwin's own assumptions about the possible "degeneration" of human society.⁵ This chapter examines how alternate history drew on evolutionary theory to challenge prevailing norms of social organization in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, particularly in terms of gender. The literary format this analysis concentrates on, which has not been thought of as alternate-historical in critical literature so far, is the lost-world narrative. The topographical conceit of the lost world enabled the discovery of natural-historical and social alternatives that had been able to evolve in isolation from familiar configurations, but which had a starting point in common with *our* history. This axiomatically alternate-historical trajectory relied on the application of evolutionary theory to social development in the latter part of the nineteenth century ("social Darwinism"), and the porousness between modes of fiction and developmental theories—of which the "true" accounts of lost worlds are the best example. Stories such as Arthur Conan Doyle's novella *The Lost World* (1912) and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* (1915) thus carried out Gould's

MALONE'S ROUGH MAP OF THE JOURNEY TO THE CLIFFS.

Fig. 5.1 Arthur Conan Doyle, "Malone's Rough Map of the Journey to the Cliffs," in Arthur Conan Doyle, "The Lost World," published in the *Strand Magazine*, June 1912

experiment of "replaying life's tape" in the only environment where such experiments were possible: in speculative fiction.

The lost-world narratives I examine in this chapter referred, implicitly or explicitly, to models of human development that were retraced in order to question or solve perceived social crises in the present. As discussed in Chap. 3, eugenicist arguments about the decline of human civilization looked to previous historical periods for evidence of "latent life" which might be recovered.⁶ Arthur Conan Doyle's map of the journey to the "Lost World" (Fig. 5.1) describes a route to the plateau that recapitulates anthropological history (and places the explorers in the same space and time as dinosaurs); it follows a journey upstream that explores lost tributaries of the Amazon and returns to an ur-historical moment in order to plot a space and time for variant development secreted within modern time.

Based on the connections between theories of species evolution, human society, and lost-world narratives, my claim is that the hypothetical manner of alternate history subtended all of them. I begin by establishing the importance of the island setting for lost worlds—both for evolutionary theory and fictions of the discovery of untouched human societies; such isolated communities were vital both for Charles Darwin and Alfred Wallace to arrive at their conclusions about diversity and descent, and for the assertions of both feminists and masculinists about the proper relations between genders. The anthropologists who drew on evolutionary models to assert the necessarily upward progress of human history tended towards a linear model of human progress, whereas feminists, for example Eliza Burt Gamble and Charlotte Perkins Gilman, argued that in the natural history of humankind, there were also aberrant lines of development. The most important of these was the transfer of sexual selection from the female, which was the case with most pairings in nature, to the male in modern western societies. Lost-world fictions from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries often restaged the history of human social development via fictive encounters between visitors from the world their readers knew to lost societies which were sometimes more developed, sometimes less.

Besides *The Lost World* and *Herland*, these included *Mizora: A Prophecy* (Mary E. Bradley Lane, 1880–1881), *A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder* (James De Mille, 1888), *New Amazonia: A Foretaste of the Future* (Elizabeth Burgoyne Corbett, 1889). This chapter concludes with a new reading of *Herland*, which asserts the distinction between utopian programmes based on elements of evolutionary theory and the narration of utopian encounters in lost-world fiction by drawing on Miguel Abensour's attention to the ability of the utopian novel to work on the "education of desire." Based on the importance of "lost worlds" to evolutionary theory and examination of the characters and narrative techniques of these novels, I read *Herland* not as the presentation of an ideal society of women, but as a novel which carefully plotted the development of the ideal man.

THE ISLAND PARADIGM AS RULE AND EXCEPTION

In Conan Doyle's novella the narrator, a journalist, is told by his editor that "the big blank spaces in the map are all being filled in, and there's no room for romance anywhere" (*LW* 15). The comment illustrates

a prevailing view in the late Victorian and Edwardian periods, but the story's action depends on it not being entirely true. Lost worlds needed to be well hidden in order to be "found" in the imagination of the late nineteenth century. The undiscovered regions that were explored in romances of utopian societies or masculine adventure were sited in polar regions (*A Strange Manuscript*), plateaus or valleys made inaccessible by sheer cliff faces (*The Lost World*, *Herland*), and a hollow earth (*Mizora*). I take the island to be the archetypal site of the lost world and the sociological reflections that it permitted; it was the setting for Thomas More's political conjectures (though in this case a constructed island rather than a naturally formed one) and of Dr. Moreau's monstrous experiments, making it the original site of utopian literature and eugenic science fiction. It was also a foundational figure at the origins of modern evolutionary theory. In Darwin's and Wallace's addresses to the Linnean Society of London in 1858, Darwin invokes a notional island in order to illustrate the effects of environmental factors on population:

But let the number of inhabitants be small, as on an island, and free access to it from other countries be circumscribed, and let the change of conditions continue progressing (forming new stations), in such a case the original inhabitants must cease to be as perfectly adapted to the changed conditions as they were originally.⁷

The significance of the isolated location, access to which is "circumscribed," is complex, for its illustrative power depends on both its difference from and consistency with the world outside of it. In the passage quoted here, Darwin is describing the formation of "varieties" that have departed from the form of the parent species and he requires a location where such processes could take place in isolation in order to be apparent. The consequent variations only become visible as differences from the species forms that might mistakenly be thought of as immutable and "natural." The critical importance of the island for evolutionary thought is clear from its appearance at the precise moment when Darwin first presents the theory of descent with variation. It is also a site where beliefs about the earliest state of human society could be formed; E. B. Tylor cites the case of the Bounty mutineers who regressed to a more primitive state when marooned on Pitcairn Island, and Edward Morgan illustrates his claims about the earliest family groups ("gentes") by referring to native Australians, described as "these islanders in their secluded

habitat.”⁸ When Francis Galton anticipates the better humans that might be produced through eugenic breeding, he explains that they would not be “supernaturally added to the stock of nature, but rather as a *segregation* of what already existed, under a new shape, and as a regular consequence of previous conditions.”⁹ Evolutionary theory is illustrated, in its earliest expressions, by reference to the island habitat, and its application to the improvement of society also defines its aspirations through figures of isolation.

In the address of 1858, Wallace presented his paper “On the Tendency of Varieties to Depart Indefinitely from the Original Type.” Instead of making the enclosed space of the island the illustrative setting for the emergence of new varieties, he begins with the case of domesticated varieties (“Variation under Domestication” would be the first chapter of Darwin’s *Origin of Species* a year later). The ability of agriculturalists and breeders to create new varieties of dogs and cattle in a relatively short space of time was taken to be evidence of the immutability of species in conditions of nature. Wallace argues, against this view, that the processes of descent and variation are universal but that in conditions of domesticity, the variations produced are not subject to the competition for resources that applies to organisms in nature: “The life of wild animals is a struggle for existence” he writes, incorporating Thomas Malthus’s expression.¹⁰ Unlike its wild cousins, the domestic animal “has food provided for it, is sheltered, and often confined.”¹¹ This isolation from nature has a double role of explanation; it demonstrates *difference* (“Our quickly fattening pigs, short-legged sheep, pouter pigeons, and poodle dogs could never have come into existence in a state of nature”¹²); but it also illustrates the operation of universal processes to which animals both in nature and under domestication are subject.¹³

The island is paradigmatic for evolutionary theory through its double function of example and exception. It illustrates evolution’s universal rule of descent with variation, but could only do so by showing examples of *difference* that emerge when variation take place in the isolated conditions of domestication or the island. Its paradigmatic status compares with the linguistic example of a rule which, Giorgio Agamben writes, “is excluded from the rule not because it does not belong to the normal case but, on the contrary, because it exhibits its belonging to it.” The island, similarly, “is excluded through the exhibition of its inclusion.”¹⁴ For both Darwin and Wallace, the island (and plateau and valley) illustrates the variations that were produced by a rule to which all examples

in nature were subject, but could not be discerned if those exemplary sites did not present themselves in all their apparent strangeness. These variant forms are bound, in uncanny relation, to the other “variations” that are most familiar to us—domestic animals such as the breeds of dog and cow—which then acquire some of the strangeness and contingency of their removed relations. The isolated site of discovery is also, in the language of science fiction studies, one where the familiar can become *estranged* and brought into unexpected relations with the fantastical and scarcely imagined. When early anthropologists sought to establish similarly universal laws that could be applied to the development of human societies, the isolated society (the lost world) again became invested with the power to explain, exemplify, and estrange.

A particularly rich example of the imbrication of anthropological and natural-historical contemplation that island settings permitted is Wallace’s chapter on the Aru Islanders in *The Malay Archipelago* (1869). After much searching, the author finally holds a live specimen of a Bird of Paradise and meditates on the multiple and global causes which have brought the naturalist into direct encounter with this small, extravagantly decorated bird:

The remote island in which I found myself situated, in an almost unvisited sea, far from the tracks of merchant fleets and navies; the wild luxuriant tropical forest, which stretched far away on every side; the rude uncultured savages who gathered round me—all had their influence in determining the emotions with which I gazed upon this “thing of beauty.”¹⁵

The setting is conceived as a series of concentric circles, by turn anthropological and natural: oceans, the island, its forests, and the bird itself alternate with ships of modern man, the “uncultured savages” and the naturalist. Each seems to occupy its proper place in this stable and separate sequence of spheres, with western man in both the first and last place of this topographical series: he is the present as the creator of maritime networks of trade and force at the perimeter, and as the (sensitive) naturalist at the centre. Wallace’s feelings of melancholy are certainly anthropocentric: “It seems sad, that on the one hand such exquisite creatures should live out their lives and exhibit their charms only in these wild inhospitable regions, doomed for ages yet to come to hopeless barbarism.”¹⁶ But the extension of this thought, which contemplates human intervention across these concentric rings and the absorption of

the island into general culture and history, would lead, Wallace speculated, to the erasure of the differences produced where civilized man was absent, but which he is especially fitted—according to Wallace—to appreciate:

Should civilized man ever reach these distant lands, and bring moral, intellectual, and physical light into the recesses of these virgin forests, we may be sure that he will so disturb the nicely-balanced relations of organic and inorganic nature as to cause the disappearance, and finally the extinction, of these very beings whose wonderful structure and beauty he alone is fitted to appreciate and enjoy. This consideration must surely tell us that all living things were *not* made for man.¹⁷

Wallace's understanding of the processes of nature is refined by the melancholy that arises from the entanglement of discovery and imminent disappearance—the *exquise douleur* of the naturalist, especially acute when a pristine site is contaminated by mankind—a pattern which recurs in lost-world fictions.

Significantly, the (male) bird of paradise he cups in his hands epitomizes the development of secondary sexual characteristics that had arisen through the processes of natural selection in isolated communities free of predators. This prevailing, “natural” pattern of male decoration in the competition for female sexual selection had, according to several commentators, become reversed in the case of modern civilization, where women adopted decorative displays in the competition for selection by men. The male islanders of the Malay archipelago, who developed techniques for hunting the birds of paradise for precisely this reason, were thus closer to “natural” gender relations than the drab intruder-naturalist. Charlotte Perkins Gilman takes the peacock to be the representative, in the natural world, of an aberrant mode of natural selection where exaggerated secondary sexual characteristics (decoration) have developed to the point where they are inimical to the health of the species. Jim Endersby's gloss of Darwin's position, that “according to Darwin, sexual selection had two distinct aspects: male combat and female choice” may be too broad: Darwin does cite numerous examples of female choice, and even refers to the possibility in some species of “a double process of selection.”¹⁸

Nonetheless, “civilized” societies are characterized, he notes, by male choice and female decoration: “In civilised life man is largely, but

by no means exclusively, influenced in the choice of his wife by external appearance.”¹⁹ These tendencies in one’s own society required the isolated location to be made visible and their strangeness revealed. Wallace’s explorations of the Malay Archipelago provided double evidence of this difference: there were birds whose relatively un-predated conditions of life had allowed them to develop such marked secondary sexual characteristics, and the indigenous population whose men constructed splendid decorative headdresses from the feathers of these birds for courtship rituals. Isolated settings were places where the natural history of gender could be studied and configured into systems of laws. John F. McLennan suggested that the places where matrilineal societies persisted longest, and could still be found, were “isolated in islands or maintaining their savage liberties in mountain fastnesses.”²⁰ For Gilman and other writers of feminist utopias, the island, valley or plateau was the site where remedies to harmful social configurations of gender relations could be imagined.

The undiscovered enclave permitted genealogical connections between the pristine environment that was discovered and the seat of modernity from which the explorer had come. A visual illustration of this relationship is the figure Wallace chose to familiarize the barely known island of Borneo to his readers: this relatively unexplored and remote island he described as large enough to contain the United Kingdom (prior to Irish independence). The effect of the map (Fig. 5.2) is the estrangement of the domestic scene, for it reveals the ordinari-ness of the British Isles geographically, just as astronomical knowledge reveals our planet’s unexceptional character, as shown in Chap. 4. It also juxtaposes the modern and familiar with what was seen as primal and unknown. In Borneo, “the whole of the British Isles might be set down, and would be surrounded by a sea of forests.”²¹ The accompanying image in Wallace’s *Malay Archipelago* compares the size of the landmass many readers would call home with one they would hardly recognize on a map. By placing one inside the other, the image illustrates the complex relationship of island and exterior, the primitive with the modern, and the strange with the familiar. A description by Fredric Jameson of the relation of the utopian with the real describes this topographical situation: he suggests that “Utopian space is an imaginary enclave within real social space, in other words, that the very possibility of Utopian space is itself a result of spatial and social differentiation.”²² The lost-world narratives discussed in this chapter also overlaid social and spatial differentiation, and complicated this relationship further by

Fig. 5.2 Alfred Russel Wallace, "The British Isles and Borneo on the same scale," in *The Malay Archipelago: The Land of the Orang-Utan and the Bird of Paradise, a Narrative of Travel with Studies of Man and Nature* (Macmillan & Co., 1869), p. 5

making this distinction one of historical time. The primitive might be shown to be a vestigial element of modernity awaiting recuperation, or variant forms of social evolution might bear upon and change the direction of a general future.

LOST WORLDS AND THE RECOVERY OF MASCULINITY

The Lost World was published serially in the *Philadelphia Press* from March 1912, and in the *Strand Magazine* from April of the same year. Its transatlantic publication reflects the geography of the adventures of Professor Challenger and his companions; the story also adopts the conceit of being an authentic piece of journalistic reportage. Each section is written up as if for publication by Malone, the journalist-narrator; the last “report” before they travel up the remote tributary of the Amazon (addressed to his “patient readers”) is handed over to the steamboat for return to London, and the closing passages of the text are taken up (as was the case with another Challenger story, *The Poison Belt*) by a co-reporter. Malone only becomes involved in the expedition because he has been asked to cover the story of Professor Challenger’s eccentric theory of the survival of dinosaurs.

The story is also structured by evolutionary theory and its contestations. The group of four explorers are thrown together at a lecture on “The Record of the Ages,” delivered by Professor Waldron at the Zoological Institute’s hall—an event well attended by “white-bearded professors,” an enthusiastic public, and an unruly student body. Waldron’s lecture re-treads the by-then canonical landmarks of the popular scientific lecture: from the nebular formation of the planet from “a huge mass of flaming gas” (*LW* 48) to its present constitution and future directions. Doyle’s creation, Waldron, is a polished communicator rather than a scientist, with the “happy knack of being funny about the most unlikely objects” (*LW* 48). He is also prone to the error—as the book shows it to be—of interpreting evolution as a process of ongoing improvement.

He hoped he would not hurt the feelings of the gentleman in the red tie if he maintained that, whatever virtues that gentleman might possess in private life, still the vast processes of the universe were not fully justified if they were to end entirely in his production. Evolution was not a spent force, but one still working, and even greater achievements were in store. (*LW* 49)

It is at the point when he refers to the extinction of the dinosaurs that Challenger intervenes: “‘Question!’ boomed a voice from the platform” (LW 49). This interruption is one of the decisive narrative events in the novel, for it leads to Challenger’s heretical claims of dinosaur survival and Malone’s impetuous decision to volunteer to join the proposed expedition as witness and recorder, shortly followed by Professor Summerlee (expert in comparative anatomy, Fellow of the Royal Society and acerbic critic of Challenger) and Lord John Roxton, whose primary interest in joining the party is the prospect of hunting dinosaurs. The photograph of the party prior to departure (Fig. 5.3) appeared in the serial publication of the novella and adds to the faux-realism of the story.

Doyle’s conjunction of masculinity with reflections on the natural history of the planet is not only convention. In this story, the male

E. D. Malone, "Daily Gazette." Prof. Summerlee, F.R.S. Prof. G. E. Challenger, F.R.S., F.R.G.S. Lord John Roxton.
THE MEMBERS OF THE EXPLORING PARTY.
 Copyright. From a Photograph by William Renajford.

Fig. 5.3 Arthur Conan Doyle, "The Members of the Exploring Party," in Arthur Conan Doyle, "The Lost World," published in the *Strand Magazine*, June 1912

explorers return to the origins of human and animal life, as preserved on the plateau of the Latin American lost world. In *The Poison Belt*, the same four adventurers assemble to witness the imminent extinction of all life on the planet as Earth drifts into the eponymous “poison belt” in space—an imminent catastrophe that Challenger anticipates from the blurring of the “Frauenhofer lines” on his spectroscope.²³ In that story, Challenger has again discovered a heretical secret and invites the other three to watch the end of the world from—in marked contrast to their jungle explorations in the earlier story—“a charmingly feminine sitting-room.”²⁴ Before the sentence of planetary death is commuted to temporary unconsciousness, Challenger conducts some experiments in his laboratory and notices that amoebae are impervious to the poison. He exhorts his soon-to-expire colleagues to find succour in the future regeneration of life on the planet:

If you had the scientific imagination, you would cast your mind forward from this one fact, and you would see some few millions of years hence—a mere passing moment in the enormous flux of the ages—the whole world teeming once more with the animal and human life which will spring from this tiny root.²⁵

Extinction is the apparent fate of man, but the “scientific imagination” can provide solace by conceiving, in something like Gould’s thought experiment, another roll of the evolutionary dice.

The expedition in *The Lost World* is made up of different inflections of early twentieth-century masculinity, each of which has a historical character. Summerlee is one of the “white-bearded professors” who detest Challenger and disagree with him on every point of science. Challenger is repeatedly described atavistically. Malone first notices the “huge spread of his shoulders and a chest like a barrel,” then “two enormous hands covered with long black hair”; later, in the public meeting prior to departure, he is said to be in “a proper Berserk mood” (*LW* 23, 52, 158). Roxton’s private rooms in the Albany reflect the borderline decadent mixture of aesthetic refinement and physical prowess of the English aristocrat: “extraordinary comfort and elegance combined with an atmosphere of masculine virility.” The paintings, prints, and objets d’art combine conventionally masculine objects with more ambiguous ones: there are images of boxers and ballet-girls, and “a sensuous Fragonard, a martial Girardet, and a dreamy Turner” (*LW* 56). Items of aesthetic

contemplation are offset by trophies of vigorous activity, and the relation of dissipation to energy is explicit in the way that these are described.

The provenance of his art and the hunting trophies, “from every quarter of the world,” confirms the accomplishments of imperial experience, while at home there is a significant lack of such appropriate, masculine pursuits; Roxton complains to Malone (an accomplished player) that rugby is “the manliest game we have left” (*LW* 59). Bradley Deane examines the emergence of imperial masculinity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a remedial source of energy capable of redeeming the imperial system from the “men of the degenerate metropole” at its centre.²⁶ The pattern, whereby the primitive outposts of empire provide the renewing energies for masculinity at its centre, underpins his readings of the popular fiction he studies: “pirate stories, military adventures, mummy tales, and lost-world fiction.”²⁷ This approach can help to explain Lord Roxton’s restlessness; like Doyle’s most famous protagonist, Holmes, he tends towards torpor when not engaged in strenuous activities—though these are rather of the flesh than of the intellect.

One source of stimulation for Roxton from a life that is “a deal too soft and dull and comfy” is the prospect of an unexplored continent (“a forest that is very near the size of Europe,” as Roxton puts it), and the prospect of hunting in these unexplored regions: “Give me the great waste lands and the wide spaces, with a gun in my fist and somethin’ to look for that’s worth findin’” (*LW* 61). What Deane identifies as “the Victorian transvaluation of primitive masculinity” required an imperial system of domesticity and virgin land for its processes of restlessness and recuperation to be played out.

It is Malone’s personal motivation that is closest to the novella’s concerns with a perceived crisis in masculinity. “Mr Hungerton,” the character referred to in the novella’s opening sentence, is an example of the irredeemably refined modern man whose excessive secondary characteristics echo those of an exotic bird: “a fluffy, feathery, untidy cockatoo of a man, perfectly good-natured, but absolutely centred on his own silly self.” When he declaims on his the economic theme of “bad money driving out good” (one with evolutionary resonance), he speaks “with feeble violence.” When Malone makes light of the subject, he flounces off “to dress for a Masonic meeting,” at which point the narrator is finally alone with Gladys Hungerton, the object of his affections (*LW* 9). Gladys does not return Malone’s courtship, and the lack of erotic excitement in the meeting serves as an indictment of modern sexual relations. Gladys is

described in a way that suggests she has all the inherited traits needed to respond to male attention: "That delicately bronzed skin, almost Oriental in its colouring, that raven hair, the large liquid eyes, the full but exquisite lips—all the stigmata of passion were there"; but their relations are "perfectly frank, perfectly kindly, perfectly unsexual" (*LW* 10). The indicators of her erotic "fitness" are only residual traces of a sexual health fallen into disuse.

The qualities *she* lists as those of an ideal partner are corrupted by the sphere of print culture in which Malone earns his living; she requires heroism in a husband, she tells Malone, and cites Richard Burton and Henry Morton Stanley as exemplars of the type she would be prepared to love. Her refusal to marry a journalist is also presented as symptomatic of the predicament of modern sex relations, which turns to the paper-and-ink productions of print culture to define its ideal partners: "Think of Richard Burton! When I read his wife's life of him I could so understand her love. And Lady Stanley! Did you ever read the wonderful last chapter of that book about her husband?" (*LW* 12). The ideal "heroism" of the day is immersed in a culture of modern writing, where it is abstracted away from the "struggle for existence" and into the genre of romance. When Malone returns from discoveries more significant than those of Burton and Stanley, he finds that she has married a solicitor's clerk who conforms to the stereotypes of his profession.

Gladys's conflicting desires for romance and adventure—both mediated through popular print narratives—define the symptoms of her predicament, but its more fundamental character is the lack of "passion," which is presented in a particularly disturbing way. Malone reflects on the subject of modern love:

My instincts are all against a woman being too frank and at her ease with me. It is no compliment to a man. Where the real sex feeling begins, timidity and distrust are its companions, heritage from old wicked days when love and violence went often hand in hand. The bent head, the averted eye, the faltering voice, the wincing figure—these, and not the unshrinking gaze and frank reply, are the true signals of passion. Even in my short life I had learned as much as that—or had inherited it in that race-memory which we call instinct. (*LW* 10)

The words speak for themselves: erotic passion is constituted of violence by men and fear of violence on the part of women. The failure of Malone

to enjoy healthy sexual relations is attributed to the increasing equality of the sexes, and the “ease” which women have come to feel in the company of men. If we assume that Malone is a spokesperson for his views, Doyle here is profoundly and alarmingly regressive. August Bebel and Lester Ward, two anthropologists writing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, suggested that the earliest phase of human gender relations had been one of “general promiscuity,” but this was part of a thesis (derived from J. J. Bachofen) that this was followed by a stage of human history that was matriarchal. Masculine romance-adventures—for instance, H. Rider Haggard’s *She* (1887)—seemed to absorb these ideas.²⁸ There is no such nuance in Doyle’s presentation, by which the nexus of “love and violence,” and the “instinct” of such, has suffered a gradual and harmful refinement. Simply put, modern life, in Doyle’s presentation, has generated conditions where male passions are sexually frustrated.

The novel does not reconcile the crisis that provided the motive force for its narrative. Having been rebuffed by Gladys, despite his adventures, Malone returns to the male club-land of Roxton’s rooms, to which the other adventurers have also withdrawn. Roxton reveals that he discovered a cache of diamonds on the plateau and offers the others their fair share. He asks Malone if he will use his new wealth to find a wife; however, the novel does not end with the prospect of a (well-financed) restitution of healthy sex relations, but instead with male comradeship. “‘Not just yet,’ said I, with a rueful smile. ‘I think, if you will have me, that I would rather go with you’” (*LW* 206). It is a homosocial enterprise that closes the narrative and implies further instalments of the adventure. Instinctive sexual passions have been compensated by cigars, mineral wealth, and male company, which at such moments supersede even that first marker of civilization—speech. “Lord Roxton said nothing, but a brown hand was stretched out to me across the table” (*LW* 206).

Doyle’s story suggests that that human adaptation to civilization is precarious and provisional. The primitive has survived in the adventurers and returns atavistically when they return to an environment where, as Challenger explains, “the various checks which influence the struggle for existence in the world at large are all neutralized or altered” (*LW* 42). When they encounter such an isolated and illustrative site, where evolutionary survivals still exist, the primitive lurking within modern man flows back to consciousness. Malone’s Irishness, it is suggested, is the source of his facility with words, but also marks him phrenologically

as primitive. In an appreciative and racist appraisal (after their exploratory tussle on first meeting), Challenger remarks: ““Brachycephalic, grey-eyed, black-haired, with suggestions of the negroid. Celtic, I presume?”” In the battle with the ape-men on the plateau, Malone confirms Challenger’s hypothesis by reporting the “strange red depths in the soul of the most commonplace man,” and his own behaviour: “cheering and yelling with pure ferocity and joy of slaughter” (*LW* 159). The four adventurers even bear comparison to their ape-men adversaries. Malone describes seeing Challenger, after struggles have taken the refinement off his European dress and deportment, alongside one of the ape-men:

A single day seemed to have changed him from the highest product of modern civilization to the most desperate savage in South America. Beside him stood his master the king of the ape-men. In all things he was [...] the very image of our Professor, save that his colouring was red instead of black. (*LW* 158)

The plateau, like the island, is a site which manifests difference from the world at large; in such places, Challenger explains, ““evolution has advanced under the peculiar conditions of this country up to the vertebrate stage, the old types surviving and living on in company with the newer ones”” (*LW* 164). The difference that has become visible through its circumstances of isolation, however, serves to illustrate a general truth, which applies to the plateau and in general: the proximity of primitivism to modern species forms.

For this discussion, the most significant lesson of the plateau as a microcosm concerns the nature of history. Once Challenger and his party arrive, three levels of anthropoid (briefly) co-exist: the ape-men (who seem to correspond more or less to Neanderthals), the primitive “Indians,” who are at war with the ape-men and are presumed to be later arrivals on the plateau, and the four protagonists, representative of modern man. The progress of human evolution is conceived as a series of such confrontations, from which species (uncomfortably close here to races) fight it out for primacy and the right to survive—with extinction as the cost of failure. Alfred Russel Wallace was one of several evolutionists who saw extinction as inevitable for “undeveloped populations with which Europeans come into contact.”²⁹ The conceit of the lost world meant that this historical process could be represented within a single narrative frame: the plateau provides a literal stage for such evolutionary theories. After the

final massacre of the ape-men, assisted by the visitors, Challenger reflects upon the consequences of their actions, and compares the battle to others on which history has turned—Marathon and Waterloo. However, in the palaeontological view of history that Doyle puts forward, these inter-species battles for survival trumped the relatively minor squabbles of empires and nation states. Natural history supersedes human, that is to say social, military, and political history; contemplation of natural history becomes the basis for reflection on human fate and destiny.

What, my friends, is the conquest of one nation by another? It is meaningless. Each produces the same result. But those fierce fights, when in the dawn of the ages the cave-dwellers held their own against the tiger folk, or the elephants first found that they had a master, those were the real conquests—the victories that count. By this strange turn of fate we have seen and helped to decide even such a contest. Now upon the plateau the future must ever be for man. (*LW* 174)

Doyle is no doubt using “man” as shorthand for humanity, but this supreme assertion of masculine history—from its primitive origins to an unopposed future—indicates a gendered account of human history that perceives modern civilization as fatally effeminate; and by imaginatively dramatizing a return to the plateau (the exemplary *stage* of anthropological origins), its implicit correction of the aberrant sexual relations of civilized modernity should be recognized alternate-historical in presentation. The implicit argument, facilitated by evolutionary theory, is that crises of identity and masculinity are not necessarily terminal, and that their harmful tendencies can be corrected by returning to a prior point in the development of the organism—conceived here as the energizing encounters with one’s own primitive (masculine) nature. The point recalls the comparably corrective framing of history by Francis Galton discussed in Chap. 3, and the “inherent ancestral power of partly recovering from that depression.”³⁰ Here, that restitution of the natural order is explicitly gendered in terms of the development of the male sex: the verse dedication of the novel is “To the boy who’s half a man, / Or the man who’s half a boy.”³¹

Substantial attention has been paid to the relationship between empire and boyhood. In one analysis, Bradley Deane writes that imperialists in the late Victorian period and after “found in enduring boyishness a natural and suitably anti-developmental model of identity.”³² By reading the

novel as an argument for return to and correction of male evolutionary history, a very “developmental” model becomes apparent in *The Lost World*, hinted at in the dedication. To be a *whole* (and modern) man is not necessarily desirable to Doyle; a better man—and a “future ever for man”—can only be imagined by returning to evolutionary boyhood and holding fast to its potential energies. In *Herland*, and in feminist adoptions of evolutionary theory, the alteration to the history of gender is similar, but gendered female, and involves asserting the primacy of women at the origins of humanity.

RECOVERING THE FEMALE (SELECTOR)

The problem of masculinity’s over-refinement in the metropolitan centres of modern civilization was “solved” through alternate-historical encounters with lost worlds via a literary format whose conceit was amenable to these historical rearrangements. Femininity was also up for recuperation, in ways that were more egalitarian than Malone’s alarming nostalgia for “true sex feeling.” Julia Reid draws connections between even H. Rider Haggard’s hyper-masculinist romance narratives of discovery (and self-enrichment) and contemporary debates about early human societies that were matriarchal: “*She* imagines a matriarchal past that is poised to return to confound modernity.”³³ Her argument is that late nineteenth-century theories of primitive matriarchy were not entirely patriarchal in orientation; my parallel claim is that the alternate-historical imagination was not exclusively and necessarily male, and could be used to make claims for the recuperation of egalitarian relations between men and women from the remote past. Darwin’s, Wallace’s, and others’ presentations of the evolutionary history of gender were taken up enthusiastically by feminists who recognized that they was amenable to *détournement*. Darwin’s cautionary note in *The Descent of Man* (1871), that “we must remember that progress is no invariable rule,” introduced the contingency that made the imagination of alternative gender relations possible, by returning to the point when men and women had deviated from the proper natural-historical progress of gender.³⁴ Like Doyle’s valorization of primal masculinity, there was also a recursive alternate history of femininity to be written.

The looped circuits of human evolutionary history that this chapter focuses on should not obscure the linear narrative of human development in much nineteenth-century anthropological history. In a

foundational work of early anthropology, *Primitive Culture* (vol. 1, 1871), E. B. Tylor makes the progressive historical model self-evident:

If the advance of culture be regarded as taking place along one general line, then existing savagery stands directly intermediate between animal and civilized life; if along different lines, then savagery and civilization may be considered as at least indirectly connected through their common origin.³⁵

The former is the correct view, Tylor argues, and belief in “a period of primaeval glory” is only held by the enemies of modern science.³⁶ Tylor’s historical scheme, in keeping with the aspirations of Darwin, Wallace, Galton, and others, is future-oriented and hopeful of the increasing perfection of the human species. His fascination with the “survivals” of previous cultures indicates the temporal double-bind whereby a discourse of linear development is complicated by the sticky elements of earlier stages of civilization which trail behind like weed on the hull of a vessel, and whose troublesome persistence he describes as “obstinacy.”³⁷ These survivals include superstitions and children’s games, habits of belief that are inimical to modern science—but on whose residual traces modern science was curiously dependent, and which were at the heart of such explanations of civilization.

St. George Mivart was admittedly adopting a minority view by stating that materialist science represented a pagan revival, which it had in common with all other strands of humanism since the Renaissance. But “revival” is at the heart of many of the explanatory models of descent with variation posited by Darwin and others, and raises complex (and far from linear) historical dynamics. Gavin de Beer’s preface to *Evolution by Natural Selection* describes some of these patterns: “Hypertely,” the unhealthy overdevelopment of a particular, obsolete trait, and “paedomorphosis,” which described how the adult form of the descendant resembles the young form of the ancestor.³⁸ There is also Haeckel’s and others’ belief in embryonic recapitulation, and Darwin’s own assertion of “Gemmules” that facilitated the recuperation of lost faculties.³⁹ Tylor even describes the presence of previous cultures in children’s games as a transposition of recapitulation to the sphere of culture—memes in all but modern name. These processes of descent, which retain the presence of the past, and previous evolutionary stages, are what made theories of human natural history in the late nineteenth

century so amenable to the pattern of alternate-historical reflection and utopian aspiration.

One means of distinguishing between the two conflicting models of evolutionary descent, one linear and one circuitous, was to assign gender to them. Given Tylor's attribution of the backwards and residual in culture to the childish and primitive, it is no surprise that he feminizes civilization (from an objective and stern masculine viewpoint); *his* description serves to admonish *her* on the dangers of too meandering a course:

We may fancy ourselves looking on Civilization, as in personal figure she traverses the world; we see her lingering or resting by the way, and often deviating into paths that bring her toiling back to where she had passed by long ago; but, direct or devious, her path lies forward, and if now and then she tries a few backward steps, her walk soon falls into a helpless stumbling.⁴⁰

The advice was not always heeded; the subject of the remainder of this chapter is those literary works and reflections on gender that asserted the necessity of “devious” backward steps along the evolutionary pathways of gender. An important waypoint for these retrospections was the theory of matriarchal societies at an earlier stage of human social history.

Julia Reid cites *Mother Right* (1861) by J. J. Bachofen as an early and influential argument for the existence of matriarchal cultures in the earliest human societies. According to Bachofen, a state of general promiscuity was followed by “Demetrian matriarchy,” and Reid notes the nostalgic affect evident in Bachofen's contemplation of this historical phase: “mother love stands at the origin of all culture, of every virtue, of every nobler aspect of existence.”⁴¹ Lewis Morgan provides a more materialist explanation in *Ancient Society* (1877), when he argues that the *gente*, or family unit, was matrilineal first, for in a sexual politics of general promiscuity, maternity could be established but paternity could not, which meant that only women could act as the head of the family. Morgan offers no evidence of the survival of matriarchal societies but conjectures that some might be discovered among the Australasian “islanders in their secluded habitat.”⁴²

Friedrich Engels draws on Morgan's and Bachofen's theories in order to describe the founding moment of capitalism in terms of the transfer, after the matrilineal *gente*, to patriarchal society: “the transition to complete private ownership was accomplished gradually and simultaneously

with the transition from the pairing family to monogamy.”⁴³ This change also involved, he writes, a division of roles within the household, whereby women’s sphere of activity became domestic. “Here we see already that the emancipation of women and their equality with men are impossible and must remain so as long as women are excluded from social production and restricted to housework.”⁴⁴ August Bebel takes up Engel’s account, but reverses the priority of the relationship by arguing that it was man’s desire for exclusive possession of woman that preceded (and founded) the establishment of private property and her confinement in the domestic sphere.⁴⁵ The common ground between feminists and political theory of the left was the historical association between the segregation of women and the rise of private property.

Lester Ward asserts the primacy of the female in species relations much earlier than the arrival of humans, by showing how in organisms, prior to their differentiation into two sexes, the proto-males were simply “minute fertilisers” to the principal organism, which was female. “It follows that throughout untold ages the female sex alone existed, and that life was originally and is essentially female.”⁴⁶ His “gynocentric” theory of an original “great matriarchal state” was inferred, he writes, from the evidence of the “survivals” of these zoological patterns, which were “being discovered in all human races.”⁴⁷ This cursory overview is intended to demonstrate the common structures of historical theories that existed in the work of ethnographers, socialists, and evolutionary biologists; they—like geologists—discovered traces of previous times which had survived. For writers in these different disciplines (unlike the geologists), those traces were not out in the external world, but within mankind, whether at the level of anatomical form, or behaviours and beliefs. In a comparable way to Darwin’s working up the partial evidence of geology (as discussed in Chap. 3), the ethnographers had to use “inferential rather than experimental methods,” and “must examine *modern results* of historical processes and try to reconstruct the path leading from ancestral to contemporary worlds.”⁴⁸

Anthropologists were obliged to move between theory and conjecture in order to establish patterns of descent which articulated past and present. These speculations were translated into the sphere of feminist politics, and the ability of Charlotte Perkins Gilman to synthesize these separate realms of knowledge is acknowledged by Lester Ward in the article quoted above: “The only person who, to my knowledge, has clearly brought out this cosmological perspective, not merely in things

human, but in the vast reaches of organic evolution, is a woman.”⁴⁹ Feminist utopian narratives of the late nineteenth century, even if set in notional futures, possessed an alternate-historical quality for the way they posited a natural, historical set of feminine virtues which could be delineated and given full expression through their utopian inflections of lost-world narratives. *Mizora: A Prophecy* (1881) and *Herland* (1915) combine the imagination of matriarchal societies with social Darwinism in order to “excavate” new ideals of gender relations whose presentation acquires some of the validity of the evolutionary theories that underpin them. These explorations in literary format, however, were preceded by feminist appropriations of evolutionism itself.

Kimberly Hamlin provides a compelling account of the uses of evolutionary theory by participants in the women’s rights movement in America, whose positing of “alternative origins” of humankind were, in the sphere of evolutionary thought, comparable to the revision of historical origins by Benjamin Disraeli and Charles Renouvier (discussed in Chap. 3).⁵⁰ Despite Darwin’s chauvinist ideas about gender, “many feminists and other reformers were keen to these revolutionary insights and embraced evolutionary science as an ally.”⁵¹ Some of the appropriations of Darwinism were wilfully contrarian and revisionist, comparable in tone and method to the alignments of Napoleon with figures from literature and myth discussed in Chap. 2. One irreverent alignment of evidence and theory was in response to the Bible: Hamlin cited the argument by Emily Oliver Gibbes that since evolution produced later species better adapted to their environments, then Eve must be seen as a later refinement upon Adam.⁵² The anonymous author of an 1875 article in the *Woman’s Journal*, the mouthpiece for the American Woman Suffrage Association, declared that acceptance of evolutionary theory required a profound re-reading of the creation myth, and the rejection of its formulation of women’s existence as a curse on their husbands. The bedrock of these claims was, unexpectedly, Herbert Spencer’s axiom that was so central to social Darwinism: “with a sublime faith in the future, that one Utopia of human dreams, we lay aside our doubts and fears and perplexities, and rest in the shadow of that rock of reason—the ‘survival of the fittest.’”⁵³

The social application of Spencer’s formulation was clearly established at this point, though Gregory Claeys claims that the expression itself contained no such implications from the outset.⁵⁴ It had, nonetheless, acquired them by the late-century and urgently required reappropriation

for women's rights campaigners, if evolutionary theory were to be recuperated from a masculinist view that privileged strength over nurture and individuality over community. Eliza Burt Gamble, in *The Evolution of Woman* (1894), added a gender dimension to the phrase in a way that deserves careful reading:

It will be well for us to remember that the doctrine of the Survival of the Fittest does not imply that the best endowed, physically or otherwise, have always succeeded in the struggle for existence. By the term Survival of the Fittest we are to understand a natural law by which those best able to overcome the unfavorable conditions of their environment survive and are able to propagate their successful qualities.⁵⁵

The distinction is hard to make out. What is at stake in saying that Spencer's phrase "does not imply" the success of the physically strongest, but "does mean" the survival of those who are "able" to overcome unfavourable conditions? Some other faculty than being "the best endowed, physically or otherwise" must be the operative distinction, which enables the organism or group to overcome "unfavourable conditions." In one possible resolution of the meaning, individual strength is opposed to collective organization (and this is consistent with Spencer's early reflections on competition for resources, which has "forced men into the social state; made social organization inevitable").⁵⁶ The following sentence invalidates this reading, however, by conflating the natural histories of groups and individuals:

We must bear in mind that neither the growth of the individual nor that of society has proceeded in an unbroken or uninterrupted line; on the contrary, during a certain portion of human existence on the earth, the forces which tend toward degeneration have been stronger than those which lie along the line of true development.⁵⁷

The "fittest," then, are those who have survived and are best able to overcome adverse conditions. Crucially, Gamble's presentation of evolutionary history is temporal, and forked. It is not unilinear in the sense of ongoing adaptation, but presents the current state of natural history as a bad evolutionary pathway, a stream contrary to whose flow the human species must travel in order to restore health; and crucially, the degeneration is *masculine*. Fitness is untethered from the power to overcome

one's environmental conditions, for it can refer, as it did here, to this very capacity to rewind history and (re-)establish that "line of true development." To clarify, Gamble sees a difference between degeneration, conceived of as a harmful (and male-gendered) evolutionary pathway, and the historical restitution of a previous species-conditions in order to produce a better outcome. The model here is something like Gould's experiment of rewinding life's tape, but with the opposite intention: not as a conceit intended to refute teleology, but as a corrective process to restore original design and intention. Fitness in Gamble's usage involves a speculative excursion through time to a point of divergence, and invites the contemplation of an alternate history of gender.

The trope of stream and flow links these ideas with the feminization of natural history in *The Lost World*, in which the route to the plateau involves travelling upstream and discovering a secret tributary (Fig. 5.1). The lost river is dreamily described: "The thick vegetation met overhead, interlacing into a natural pergola, and through this tunnel of verdure in a golden twilight flowed the green, pellucid river." The insistence on green and light is only interrupted by the colouring of wild animals (monkeys, caymans, tapir, and puma) in a scene that recalls Rousseau's jungle paintings. The adventure is conducted by male explorers but nature is surely gendered feminine here; the river suggests nature's ur-feminine site of fecundity: "The deep peace of this strange waterway was unbroken by any sign of man" (*LW* 79). Gamble makes the stream a more purposeful metaphor when she applies it to the element of natural selection most amenable to a critique of gender relations. She notes that according to Darwin, sexual selection "resembles artificial selection, save that the female takes the place of the human breeder"; females (in nature, not domestication) select their sexual partners based on both fitness and display, and the resulting traits and variations are thus the consequences of *her* selection. The female is therefore the architect of gender relations, even if an unintended outcome of the process is male primacy.

*As a stream may not rise higher than its source, or as the creature may not surpass its creator in excellence, it is difficult to understand the processes by which man, through Sexual Selection, has become superior to woman.*⁵⁸

The superiority of males, therefore, is contingent upon female agency; all male victories in the bio-social realm are reversible, and can presumably

be swept away like an obstruction across a river in flood. For Doyle, the irreducible nature of the primal scene is female submission to male sexual violence; for Gamble and others, the unalterable first cause of evolutionary history is female selection.

Alternate history, and all counterfactual speculation, has so far been vulnerable to the charge of arbitrary *selection*. The nomination of one historical moment over others (by implication contingent and revisable) is hard to justify. The evolutionary theory of sexual selection, however, claimed a more concrete historical basis, for it allowed for the possibility of an aberration from a natural law (sexual selection by the female), which must be returned to. Assertions for the prior existence of matriarchal societies made such corrective returns tantalizingly close in history, and the romance genre of the lost world was the vehicle for arriving at such restituted social worlds.

EUGENICS AND EDUCATION IN *MIZORA*

The lost world depicted in *Mizora: A Prophecy* is located *inside* our world, accessed via an entrance at the North Pole; it is populated only by women, which makes the novel eligible for several descriptive tags: hollow earth, feminist utopia, and lost world. Its condition as a society with a previous history similar to its visitors', but that long ago harnessed the power of science for the improvement of the race, makes it also a work of alternate history. It was also one of a wave of around 100 recorded feminist utopian novels written by women in English on both sides of the Atlantic between 1869 and 1920.⁵⁹ *Mizora* was first published serially in the *Cincinnati Commercial* between 1880 and 1881 as "The Narrative of Vera Zarovitch," and was composed so secretly, according to Jean Pfaelzer, that Lane's husband was not aware that she was its author.⁶⁰

The novel is presented, in a familiar literary-utopian conceit, as an authentic manuscript, in this case belonging to Vera Zarovitch, a Russian aristocrat who has been exiled for speaking out against her own government.⁶¹ She escapes prison in disguise and, with a view to reaching the more liberal climate of Paris, takes passage on a whaling ship which drifts into northern latitudes before being wrecked. Vera is abandoned by the crew and, being "naturally of a hardy constitution," she reaches an "Esquimaux" community with whom she spends a winter.⁶² This plot element—staying with a group presented as primitive while en route to

a variant and hidden society (Mizora, not Paris)—recurs in James De Mille's *A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder* (1888). In this latter and delightfully strange novel, the (male) adventurer's discovered account records being swept southwards into unknown territory. Before reaching a society that inhabits the lost world of the South Pole, he stays with an unnamed cannibal group who are compared unfavourably to the tribes that Darwin described as most primitive on his Beagle voyages. The novel's narrator states: "Even the wretched aborigines of Van Dieman's Land, who have been classed lowest in the scale of humanity, were pleasing and congenial when compared with these, and the land looked worse than Tierra del Fuego."⁶³ The Inuit in Lane's novel are also described as the wretched of the earth: "these poor children of the North [whose] life is a continual struggle with cold and starvation." The coincidence suggests that the imagination of an alternative social arrangement can be reached by time-travelling backwards along a natural-historical timeline of human evolution through less developed forms of society.

The topography of Mizora's internal world is, by necessity, inverted, but gravity and daylight have their subterranean equivalents: centrifugal force keeps the fauna and everything else attached to the inside of the sphere. "Rosy light, like the first blush of a new day" suffuses the hollow space, apparently a similar light to the Aurora Borealis that we know from the surface; its milky light shortens perspective and obscures the sight of land overhead. There is no visible horizon (of course) and "everything appeared to rise as it gained in distance" (MZ 15). The diaphanous atmosphere, the extreme (and uniformly Aryan) beauty of the Mizorans, and the size and quality of their crops give this land of vegetarian plenty a mythical tone. We are soon informed that toil and hardship have been done away with by Science (capitalized), which is applied to the production of food in laboratories and in agriculture, technologies of daily life (city planning and communications technology), and to the production of an optimal, all-female population (through parthenogenetic production of life). If such achievements constitute, for the author, a programme to be emulated, then it would be difficult to read except as a technological, future-oriented, utopia.

In Mizora, menial work is performed by machines and domestic work has been transfigured through research and development. Respected food scientists produce synthetic dairy products, maximize crop yields, and perfect techniques of bread making. There is something like an

Open University lecture channel, which raises the level of general intelligence. Time freed by mechanical labour is devoted not to recreational or artistic activity, but to education and self-improvement. The "Preceptress" tells Vera that "Mizora is a land of industry" (MZ 28), and the reader may share Vera's reservations when she finds that the choice of evening reading of her host's eldest daughter is *The Conservation of Force and the Phenomena of Nature*. "I laid it down with a sigh of discomfiture" (MZ 35). The novel does not seem to offer or propose a political system to be immediately worked towards, as Edward Bellamy does in *Looking Backward* (1888), prompting the rapid formation of "Bellamy societies" to begin campaigning on both sides of the Atlantic to institute the book's recommendations.⁶⁴ The society of Mizora, in contrast, is an inversion of things as they are, and a meditation on the possibility of difference.

Men, we are told, have been extinct for 3000 years. Their distant and almost completely forgotten phase of history is preserved in a restricted archive of documents and portraits, which are strikingly similar to *our* history. The Preceptress begins by explaining: "The civilization I shall begin with must have resembled the present conditions of your own country as you describe it. Prisons and punishments were prevalent throughout the land" (MZ 94). The advancement of Mizora hinges on the female supersession of the corruption and brutality that prevailed during the masculine phase of history; this history closely resembles western history and reprises a number of familiar moments that have been taken for points of departure by writers of alternate history: the recent history of a civil war, the accession to power of a Napoleonic figure, and the corruption of a republic into an empire. The *unfamiliar* history by which women have won control of government is only glossed: "With consummate skill and energy they gathered the reins of Government in their own hands" (MZ 100). Men were banned from public life for 100 years, at the end of which they became extinct, as if conceding their evolutionary redundancy. These events are not meant to be plausible, which is why I do not take *Mizora* to be a programmatic utopia but an allegory of women recuperating the power of sexual selection and the restitution of a matriarchal society. In an inversion appropriate to the hollow-earth format, the almost forgotten mythic history of Mizora involves a once patriarchal society, which has been superseded by a matriarchal one.

The achievements of the Mizorans raise troubling issues of racial purity, though the attribution of intent on the author's part is a vexed question. The mastery of nature and institution of Science (feminized) as "humane Queen of this thrice happy land" leads, in the novel, to an acceleration of adaptation in the species, whose unerring pattern of improvement equates evolutionary development with progress, as explained by Wauna, Vera's intimate and guide, and the daughter of the Preceptress:

When my mind reaches the age of my mother's, it will have a larger comprehensiveness than hers. She already discerns it. My children will have intellects of a finer grade than mine. This is our system of mind culture. The intellect is of slower development than the body, and takes longer to decay. The gradations of advancement from one intellectual basis to another, in a social body, require centuries to mark distinct change in the earlier ages of civilization, but we have now arrived at a stage when advancement is clearly perceptible between one generation and the next. (MZ 67)

The series of slippages between mind and body, individual and group, implies a form of eugenics that aspires to be collective in character rather than the centralized administration of the right to reproduce. The "advancement" is not presented as the distinction between healthy and diseased *bodies*, but as a general improvement in the social body, achieved with the blessing of those being improved upon—the older generation. Ideas of unidirectional genetic progress are bad science and certainly not Darwinian, though the dream of a perfect race is entirely consistent with the utopian desires that the apprehension stimulated by awareness of evolutionary processes. William R. Greg drew from a pantheon of great men when he imagined a eugenic programme that would improve men and women, "till we were all Blondins, all Shakespeares, Pericles', Socrates', Columbus and Fénelons."⁶⁵ Alfred Wallace anticipated a future when humanity would become "a single homogeneous race" that had, like Mizora, successfully subsumed self-interest into common good:

Each one will then work out his own happiness in relation to that of his fellows; perfect freedom of action will be maintained, since the well balanced moral faculties will never permit any one to transgress on the equal

freedom of others; [...] compulsory government will have died away as unnecessary (for every man will know how to govern himself), and will be replaced by voluntary association for all beneficial public purposes; the passions and animal propensities will be restrained within those limits which most conduce to happiness; and mankind will have at length discovered that it was only required of them to develop the capacities of their higher nature, in order to convert this earth, which had so long been the theatre of their unbridled passions, and the scene of unimaginable misery, into as bright a paradise as ever haunted the dreams of seer or poet.⁶⁶

Wallace's presentation is especially suggestive for this discussion; the passage above is the transcription of a lecture delivered to the Anthropological Society of London in 1864, a body which still favoured polygenic theories of human origination at that point. Wallace argues against this position, which is the context for his aspiration of a "single homogeneous race" as an ideal rather than as miscegenation; the many objections raised after his lecture are recorded in the source cited. In sharp contrast to Doyle's implicit celebration of the primitive passions, Wallace argues that a sufficient advancement of the "moral faculties" would produce a utopian future when rules and restrictions will no longer be needed—abandoned along with those "animal propensities."

These futures were seen as both a restitution and completion of the past, establishing a continuity between the "dreams" of the seer or poet and the newly enabled perceptions of the evolutionary scientist. The resonances with the Mizoran utopia are several: in Mizora, there are savage penalties for crimes of violence (life imprisonment for striking a child), but these laws are redundant because the crimes are never committed in a society where everyone is self-governed by collectively held values. The Mizorans are a uniformly beautiful race, and all blonde. When Wauna describes the managed and accelerated process of racial improvement, she clarifies the achievement by positing a counterfactual scenario: "Had my ancestors thought as you do, and rested on an inferior education, *I should not represent the advanced stage of development that I do*" (MZ 67, emphasis added). When evolutionary theory was perceived, in the nineteenth century, as a vehicle for social improvement, the imagination of other histories that might have been was always involved, implicitly or explicitly; so too were questions of eugenics and racial superiority.

The whiteness and bloneness of the Mizorans is alarming, most of all for Vera, whose admiration for this society is tempered by the

impossibility of being one of them: she is a brunette and relatively diminutive in stature. The Preceptress's history lesson explains that Mizoran women, once in control of government and scientific research, discovered "the Secret of Life": parthenogenetic reproduction. This biotechnological breakthrough is presented as the discovery of the original reproductive power of women, which recalls Gamble's and Ward's assertions of the primacy of the female in organic life. "The MOTHER is the only important part of all life. In the lowest organisms no other sex is apparent" (MZ 103). The discovery allows the eugenic amelioration of the race: the unfit are prevented from breeding and criminals are denied having, in a sinister locution, a "posterity." Fitness and unfitness are racially marked, for it is said that "the elements of evil belong to the dark race"; when asked how they were removed, the Preceptress states only that "we eliminated them."⁶⁷ Euthanasia and eugenics are uncomfortably bound in Mizora: the preservation of the best genes requires death as a social necessity, and I find this undesirable formula to be one that Lane wishes us to reflect on.

Katherine Broad denies the text's feminist content altogether, instead finding it "a conservative experiment in social control" that "reproduces racist ideology."⁶⁸ She sees the eugenics programme in *Mizora* as an application of Francis Galton's aspiration for the improvement of society by "granting diplomas to a select class of young men and women, by encouraging their intermarriages, by hastening the time of marriage of women of that high class, and by provision for rearing children healthily."⁶⁹ But Vera does not return to the surface with the aim of selecting those most distinguished individuals to intermarry; we should remember that it is precisely for defending the rights and contribution of disenfranchised activist women from to political life that Vera has been imprisoned, then self-exiled. Remembering the incarceration in Siberia of many "patriot souls," Vera muses that "in *this* land they would have been recognized as aspiring natures, spreading their wings for a nobler flight, seeking a higher and grander life. The smile of beauty would have urged them on" (MZ 87). The vision of an improved Earth (on its surface) is one in which the ideals of the oppressed are realized, not a programme of restricted breeding. In Mizora this has been achieved through eugenics, and the utopianist author has the privilege of not having to describe the imposition of such a programme—which presumably has required the exercise of those harsh punishments that only later in Mizoran history became redundant.

Vera (and by implication Lane) does not advocate a system of eugenics, but instead offers education as the corrective power. When Vera confesses the barbarous state of society at home, the Preceptress rousingly encourages her: "Convince the rich that by educating the poor, they are providing for their own safety. They will have fewer prisons to build, fewer courts to sustain. Educated Labor will work out its own salvation against Capital" (MZ 41). This is the high tone of morality sharpened by utility, comparable to Bellamy's corporatist socialism. It is also the stirring note on which the novel closes: "THE FUTURE OF THE WORLD, IF IT BE GRAND AND NOBLE, WILL BE THE RESULT OF UNIVERSAL EDUCATION, FREE AS THE GOD-GIVEN WATER WE DRINK" (MZ 147). It is true that the achievements of the Mizorans are eugenicist and racist, and that the social problems to which these solutions respond are crudely framed; but the presence of eugenics in Mizora can be offset by the fact that the novel's final invocation for *this* world is not for a racialized programme of reproduction, but for a *universal* and *free* system of education, which was unheard of in any country at this time, and whose inclusivity should not be overlooked. In this reading, Mizora should be treated as a mirror world, with eugenics as the mechanistic or science-fictional device to facilitate the intelligibility of difference from established gender norms.

In an influential analysis for utopian studies, Miguel Abensour defends William Morris from a critical tradition which has found fault with the perfect and pastoral character of utopia in *News from Nowhere* (1890). E. P. Thompson popularized Abensour's argument that "Utopia's proper and new-found space" was "*the education of desire*." This was not a moral education, but a way of dismantling habitual values and training desire itself "to desire better, to desire more, and above all to desire in a different way."⁷⁰ *Mizora* also works on the narrator's and reader's quality and objects of desire, and this element of the novel has not been sufficiently acknowledged. When Vera first encounters the Mizorans, she immediately refers their physical beauty to the (absent) desiring male: "Their eyes were limpid wells of loveliness, where every impulse of their natures were betrayed without reserve. It would be a paradise for men" (MZ 21). She is repeatedly shown to be unable to consider female beauty except as an object of aesthetic consumption. When she looks at artworks in Mizora, all of which are studies of the female form, she seems to be balanced between an internalized masculine response of (erotic) enchantment,

and a recognition of the more noble and autonomous qualities of the women that the works celebrate: "I am a connoisseur in art, and nothing that I had ever seen before could compare with these matchless marbles, bewitching in every delicate contour, alluring in softness, but grand and majestic in pose and expression."⁷¹ Vera is not able to be at home in Mizora by virtue of her brunette colouring and (relatively) diminished physical stature, but also because she cannot assimilate its autonomy of feminine thought by recognizing female appearance except through the internalized male appreciation of beauty, as the display of secondary sexual characteristics to assist in the competition for a male partner.

To put it another way, she belongs too much to our world to be at home in a society where the power of reproduction has been returned to women. When she is shown the portraits of villainous Mizoran men, she admits to "an odd kind of companionship in this assembly," and later that "my heart yearned for my own; debased as compared with Mizora though they be" (MZ 115). Vera's desire is only partially redeemed by her visit to Mizora: she encounters a variant society where beauty has become emblematic of disinterested social good—brought about through a ruthlessly utilitarian programme of eugenic improvement. But as an inveterate surface dweller, she cannot assimilate the moral purity of the Mizorans. That this purity is rendered as white motherhood is certainly problematic (here and in *Herland*), as is the Aryan nature of the homogenized race. By recognizing the flawed nature of the visitor to the alternate society, however, and paying attention to the novel's closing invocation for free and universal education, it is possible to sidestep the idea of Mizora as a plausible and desirable destination. Instead, it should be read as an alternate history of gender which proposed lessons to be taken back to the surface: a desire for education, which was also an intention to educate desire itself to be better.

WOMEN, EVOLUTION, AND ECONOMICS

Food he ate for pleasure, and it slew him with diseases!
 Wine he drank for gladness, and it led the way to crime!
 And woman? He will hold her,—he will have her when he pleases—
 And he never once hath seen her since the prehistoric time!⁷²

In this first verse of the "Proem" to *Women and Economics: A Study of the Economic Relation Between Men and Women as a Factor in Social*

Evolution (1898), Charlotte Perkins Gilman imagines the existence of an original, “prehistoric” partnership between the sexes; her presentation of the historical estrangement of men and women rests on the dysfunctional entanglements of economic history and human evolution. Exploring these relationships made her an influential figure for socialist and Marxist theorists of both nature and politics, for instance Lester Ward and Anton Pannekoek (who both used quotations from her poems in their work, though they did not refer to the more substantial *Women and Economics*).

Gilman, like Gamble, argues that the improvement of society requires a restitution of sexual selection to women, an evolutionary journey upstream to a moment prior to the economic and social history, whose harmful consequences she saw around her; once this correction is made, she writes, “humanity will fly up like a released spring” (*WE* 317). *Women and Economics* asserts the importance of restored gender relations, and the staging of her argument for this return to earlier conditions is the basis for my reading of Gilman’s celebrated all-female utopia, *Herland*. The ideas developed in *Women and Economics* can inform a new reading that temporarily puts aside some of the repellent ideas about race that are unavoidable elsewhere in her writing, particularly in the *Forerunner*, the journal that she financed, edited, and wrote almost single-handedly. There is no possibility of redeeming Gilman’s output as a whole, but some of her influential arguments can be reconstructed without contamination by her toxic views on race.

Judith A. Allen, draws attention to the dysfunctional male-female relationships that Gilman was affected by. Her father left his wife and daughter financially precarious when he walked out of the family home after being advised that after Charlotte’s birth, any further pregnancies, and thus conjugal relations, should be avoided. Her first husband, Charles Walter Stetson, believed monogamy to be natural in women but not in men. Gilman eventually divorced him and financially supported his household after his marriage to a second wife, and her own brother through writing and public speaking work. Her daughter resented her absent mother, on whom in later life she and *her* family were also financially dependent. “Hence, sexuality, and sexed erotic rights, fatally intertwined with the (mal)distribution of material resources.”⁷³ The course of her self-education brought her into contact with contemporary debates regarding the history of sexual relations, and convinced her that “the present situation of the sexes was a monstrous distortion or hijacking

of natural evolutionary patterns.”⁷⁴ To link her stance (which Allen describes as “reform Darwinism”) to the circumstances of her life is not tendentiously biographical, for Gilman makes the personal experience of disappointment, and the desire to alleviate it, apparent on the first page of *Women and Economics*:

We begin to see that, so far from being inscrutable problems, requiring another life to explain, these sorrows and perplexities of our lives are but the natural results of natural causes, and that, as soon as we ascertain the causes, we can do much to remove them. (*WE* 1)

Gilman’s major theoretical work can be described as this—a natural history of what she and other progressive thinkers saw as the sorrows and perplexities to which women were subject.

For Gilman, the features which distinguish humans from other animals are also the basis for inequality between the sexes. “We are the only animal species,” she writes, “in which the female depends on the male for food, the only species in which the sex-relation is also an economic relation” (*WE* 5). Throughout nature, the argument goes, females are self-sufficient when it comes to finding food and shelter; in humans, that work of production and consumption of food and the home is economically organized; that is to say, systems of payment enable the distribution and valuation of the work required for these processes of survival. Gilman’s point does not concern principles of political economy and the best system to harness the self-interest of the species (*homo economicus*); her position is much more in keeping with Friedrich Engels and August Bebel, who linked the ownership of private property to the possession of women by men through systems of marriage (as ownership). Gender inequality thus is said to have a natural history, which cannot be separated from the material history of economic institutions and their effects, which are sorrow and perplexity. To conceive the primal scene of inequality in this way also produces a vision of uncorrupted and non-dependent relations between men and women, just as other nineteenth-century commentators imagined primitive societies to have been proto-communistic.⁷⁵

Existing explanations of the division of labour, by which men worked and women managed the household, were entirely unsatisfactory to Gilman. First, the economic value of domestic work was not recognized within a marriage; unlike wives, female servants were paid and even acquired a level of independence as a result of their wages. To be full-time

keepers of children was the role that society allocated to women, as if the only purpose of women's brains and bodies was to this end. Gilman's comparisons between humans and non-human organisms highlight the especially unfavourable condition of women: "We see the human mother worked far harder than a mare, laboring her life long in the service, not of her children only, but of men; husbands, brothers, fathers, whatever male relatives she has" (*WE* 19). Under these unnatural conditions of enforced and unpaid domesticity and motherhood, women have lost their economic independence, which is a proxy category for what in nature is the capacity to procure one's own food supply, a point Gilman makes with impressive directness: "The female of genus homo is economically dependent on the male. He is her food supply" (*WE* 22).

The unfavourable comparison of women in conditions of enforced domesticity with animals in the realm of nature (the mare) corresponds to the distinction which founded the initial presentation of evolutionary thought by Darwin and Wallace—that is, between the formation of varieties in nature and in domesticated animals. In Wallace's paper, "On the Tendency of Varieties to depart indefinitely from the Original Type" (1858), he identifies the need to procure one's own food as "the essential difference" between life in natural and domesticated conditions:

A wild animal has to search, and often to labour, for every mouthful of food—to exercise sight, hearing, and smell in seeking it, and in avoiding dangers, in procuring shelter from the inclemency of the seasons, and in providing for the subsistence and safety of its offspring. There is no muscle of its body that is not called into daily and hourly activity; there is no sense or faculty that is not strengthened by continual exercise. The domestic animal, on the other hand, has food provided for it, is sheltered, and often confined, to guard it against the vicissitudes of the seasons, is carefully secured from the attacks of its natural enemies, and seldom even rears its young without human assistance.⁷⁶

Reading Wallace in light of Gilman focuses attention on the importance of the female sex in articulating evolutionary thought at its origins. Wallace perceives an economy of nature in which the female is able to provide food and shelter for her young, against which selective breeding is compared. In the passage above, Wallace cites "our quickly fattening pigs, short-legged sheep, pouter pigeons, and poodle dogs," which "could never have come into existence in a state of nature, because the

very first step towards such inferior forms would have led to the rapid extinction of the race.”⁷⁷ The condition of women historically, according to Gilman, is to be segregated from natural life, and bears comparison with the enclosed life of domesticated animals as described by Wallace; she describes the subordinate position that similar domesticity has brought about in woman: “the degree of feebleness and clumsiness common to women, the comparative inability to stand, walk, run, jump, climb, and perform other race-functions common to both sexes” (WE 46).

As I have argued above, the perception of natural history required an enclosed space of experiment in order to be understood; for Wallace and Darwin the power of selective breeding—isolated from nature—illustrated an accelerated version of the processes that took place in nature. The plateaus or islands of lost worlds could also serve as spaces where remedies could be worked out by conceiving models of sex relations that restored the domesticated conditions of the farm to a condition of earlier health.

In order to explain the specific mechanisms that constitute “this abnormal sexuo-economic relation,” Gilman first explains the cyclical and non-progressive history that is its consequence. Races and civilizations have been successful according to their ability to “triumph over physical conditions” and “enemies and obstacles”; the degree of success, however, unfortunately correlates with the production of “social forces which have ultimately destroyed the nation” (WE 24). The unfruitful historical pattern of ascent and decline is recorded by the fossils and relics of extinct races. While gender relations are mired in inequality, improvement is similarly condemned to reiterative cycles, a point she illustrates with a quotation from Byron’s *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*: “History, with all her volumes vast, / Hath but *one* page” (WE 24, original emphasis).

Gilman’s distinction between the physical and the social is significant: the former has been the basis for ascent and is the result of competition for superiority (recalling Gamble’s “best endowed”); but decline is the result of “what the sociologist would call internal diseases rather than natural causes” (WE 25). Progress is impelled by the successful operation of natural selection, but undermined by “something in our own behaviour which did us more harm than any external difficulty.” The flaw inherent in our species (with parallels in others) is the excessive development of sex distinction, a technique of biological survival that,

she argues, has become “the natural cause of our unnatural conduct” (*WE* 25). This type of adaptation is emblemized in nature where the variance between the male and the female (sexual dimorphism) is greatest, for instance in the peacock’s tail, whose development has been the result of sex-distinction as a determining factor in competition among male birds for females with which to breed. There are thus two channels of evolutionary modification, whose divergence can harm the evolutionary prospects of a species: the adaptation to one’s external environment, and to one’s mate, which corresponded to the phases of ascent and fall described above. “Natural Selection develops race. Sexual selection develops sex” (*WE* 37), Gilman writes. As man was the “feeder” and “economic environment” of women, her modification to him has become divorced from normal sex-tendency and became “morbid” (*WE* 30). The inheritance of these traits through her offspring produces an inevitable historical decline.

In peacocks (and birds of paradise), it is the male who displays his decorative features for the female; Darwin and others noted modern society’s departure from the general tendency for male display in the competition for female sexual selection. Gamble also regretted the transferral of sexual choice to the male, and the “pernicious and health-destroying styles” of female fashion that perform this function of decorative display in women.⁷⁸ Wallace, among others, proposed the restitution of “female choice in marriage” as a solution to the social and biological problems that have resulted from private ownership and the disaggregation of natural and economic fitness.⁷⁹ Gilman differs slightly by attributing the evolutionary problem not to the fact that sexual selection is now the privilege of the male, but to the disparity between the sexes that is the consequence when one sex is obliged to adapt to the other for its survival, a process that has developed “to such a degree as to be disadvantageous to our progress as individuals and as a race” (*WE* 33). The solution to this disparity would be to restore selection to its natural, rather than sexual, mode, by which species adapt to their environment in partnership rather than through competition between males for mating rights, leading to differentiation between sexes. The doe, she gives as an example, must be able to keep pace with the stag for the good of the group.

Gilman’s argument rests on a distinctly unstable crux, which becomes clear when we consider its alternate-historical content and compare it to the more elaborate reflections on the evolutionary nature of human

civilization discussed already. Gilman (like Renouvier and Disraeli, discussed in Chap. 3) argues for the beneficial and progressive outcomes of human development when its processes are developmental, and common to males and females of the species, rather than subject to revolutionary breaks: "Great advances along social lines come slowly, like the many-waved progress of the tide: they are not sudden jumps over yawning chasms" (*WE* 140). This position is incompatible, however, with the view that history—natural and social—has gone wrong and required a drastic correction that would impel it forwards. Such a correction involving the restitution of former conditions would require a *revolution*—in its meaning as "upheaval; reversal of fortune," and in its etymological sense of "return or recurrence of a point or period of time."⁸⁰

The application of evolutionary development to human history is far more encompassing than an explanation of biological difference on the basis of gender. The modern situation of woman, Gilman argues, is the consequence of more than sex-distinction and economic dependence on man; the "modifying conditions" of cultural forms inscribed these inequalities into other spheres of thought and existence. Gilman's description of the way that culture imprints material inequalities into consciousness is Marxist in its recognition of the power of super-structural institutions to shape consciousness. The account below, of the power of one's cultural environment to "modify" beings, shows how compatible the laws of social and biological formation are for Gilman.⁸¹

It is painfully interesting to trace the gradual cumulative effect of these conditions upon women: first, the action of large natural laws, acting on her as they would act on any other animal; then the evolution of social customs and laws (with her position as the active cause), following the direction of mere physical forces, and adding heavily to them; then, with increasing civilization, the unbroken accumulation of precedent, burnt into each generation by the growing force of education, made lovely by art, holy by religion, desirable by habit; and, steadily acting from beneath, the unswerving pressure of economic necessity upon which the whole structure rested. These are strong modifying conditions, indeed. (*WE* 69)

Under these "conditions," how could any return to a previous and fore-closed evolutionary historical pathway be conceived? I argued in the discussion of *Alroy* that this required a combination of archaeological discovery and genealogical invention: Disraeli amplified an episode of

Jewish history to assert the living force of Judaism in English literary and political culture. Gilman's claim is similar, transposed into evolutionary thought; she argues that biological inheritance does not follow the "Salic law" of primogeniture, but involves the inheritance of both male and female characteristics by offspring of both sexes. The effect is therefore to "equalize what every tendency of environment and education made to differ" (WE 70). This claim has two edges: it establishes a space for the suppressed element of female nature, even in the face of the myriad cultural reinscriptions of masculinist discourse—a remnant comparable to E. B. Tylor's "survivals," which marked the persistence of primitive culture in modern life. It also serves to explain the intensity of female suffering under present conditions, for it requires that feelings common to both sexes persist, *unmodified*; and that every woman experiences keenly, as if for the first time, "the smothering 'no' which crushed down all her human desires to create, to discover, to learn, to express, to advance" (WE 70).

The character of these surviving traits in women is contrary to Darwin's view, pronounced in *The Descent of Man*, that male animals and humans had "stronger passions than females," and that it was through the competition for mating rights that "the victors transmit their superiority to their male offspring."⁸² It is also distinct from Lester Ward's explanation; Gilman and he shared a belief in the primacy of the female in primitive organisms, and a natural-historical interpretation of marriage as a manifestation of the male "sceptre" of sexual selection that made marriage for women an experience of prostitution and rape.⁸³ But by claiming that inheritance was passed onto offspring of either sex, Gilman gives female suffering a natural history, as an altruistic form of waiting, carried out in the interests of the species as a whole. In a surprising turn to her argument, she claims that the success of the human species (to come) would be achieved through the absorption of female qualities by males, which would eventually raise him to the level of development latent in the female sex for millennia. She takes up Lester Ward's gynocentric premise of "the millions and millions of years when puny, pygmy, parasitic males struggled for existence," and presents the long and current phase of male dominance as a strategic policy by the female sex to bring males up to their level.

With a full knowledge of the initial superiority of her sex and the sociological necessity for its temporary subversion, she should feel only a deep and tender pride in the long patient ages during which she has waited and suffered, that man might slowly rise to full racial equality with her. She could afford to wait. She could afford to suffer. (*WE* 129)

This belief is comparable to genetic explanations of human life as a medium for bacterial self-advancement; in this presentation, the “pygmy” male is the unwitting means for a much larger utopian project. It turns female oppression into martyrdom which is both Christ-like and instrumental, within which exaggerated sex-distinction, subjection to male violence, and even the phenomenon of love turn out to have been tactical moves in a larger, longer evolutionary strategy.

In her subordinate position, under every disadvantage, through the very walls of her prison, the constructive force of woman has made man its instrument, and worked for the upbuilding of the world. As his energy was purely individualistic, and only to be controlled by the power of sex-attraction, it needed precisely this form of union, with its peculiar exaggeration of sex-faculty, to hold him to his task. (*WE* 133)

The paradoxes of the “Proem” are thus resolved: man has also suffered: “Alone beneath his tyrants, alone above his slaves,” equally “sad and lonely” (*WE* lxxii). He is alienated from an earlier condition of equality, between him and “the friend and comrade of the day when life was younger” through his long dominance of womankind. The paradox of an organic revolution is also resolved, for that revolution is framed as a long and accumulating ascent of equality; the true nature of history is ameliorative and directed by women, in the direction of a stage of human society whose ongoing development would be in keeping with biology, and “the calm, slow, friendly forces of social evolution” (*WE* 340).

HERLAND—FOR HIM

By recognizing that Gilman’s argument in *Women and Economics* depends on the evolutionary improvement of men, it becomes possible to read *Herland* as something other than just a portrait of the ideal female society, and at least as much a narrative whose object is the imagination of an improved *masculinity*. This position sidesteps familiar debates about the undesirability of a white, statist, eugenically achieved

female society; instead, it reads the novel as one which engages the pre-conceptions of the reader in order to change them. I read it, as Abensour does Morris's dream novels, as a narrative whose unfolding is meant to educate desire.

Alys Eve Weinbaum summarizes the difficulty that Gilman's racism has posed for feminist readers and supports the view that "race animates Gilman's thinking, and that Gilman, like a number of First Wave feminists, was involved in shoring up an evolutionary discourse about white civilized womanhood."⁸⁴ She cites Ann J. Lane's anthology, *The Charlotte Perkins Gilman Reader* (1980) as illustrative of a selective approach to the author's prodigious output, which omits, for instance, such virulently racist articles such as "A Suggestion on the Negro Problem" (which proposes privately organized work-camps for "negroes below a certain grade of citizenship"),⁸⁵ or "Immigration, Importation and our Fathers" (where she claims that negroes and Hindus are "incompatible" with American values).⁸⁶ To the list of Gilman's unpalatable positions we could add her statement in "The Sanctity of Life," an article which abuts an instalment of *Herland*'s sequel, *With Her in Ourland*:

Human life is sacred, far too sacred to be allowed to fall into hideous degeneracy. If we had a proper regard for human life we should take instant measures to check the supply of feeble-minded and defective persons, and further measures to prevent the reproduction of such unfortunates.⁸⁷

In the preface for the 1999 re-issue of the *Gilman Reader* by the University of Virginia Press, Ann J. Lane acknowledges Gilman's "racist, chauvinist, and anti-Semitic" views, but quickly draws a curtain across these distasteful qualities and directs the reader to "her valuable ideas [which] better deserve remembering and repeating."⁸⁸ The Penguin Classics anthology includes only *Herland*, selected short fiction, and poetry, which Weinbaum sees as reflective of the selective approach to Gilman's output that creates an inaccurate impression of her contributions to feminism. By focusing on her uncomfortable social attitudes, there is more critical value, Weinbaum writes, for "her corpus can be situated as a lever for prying open the problems of writing feminist genealogy."⁸⁹

It is true that in both *Herland* and *Women and Economics*, Gilman does (and can only) arrive at her delineation of improved societies via

a white, heteronormative, and maternalist programme of eugenics. She places different human societies on various points on a linear path of development, as Tylor did, which situates her account of regression and species decline within a racist system that can only think of racial integration as miscegenation: "Marry a civilized man to a primitive savage, and their child will naturally have a dual nature" (*WE* 332). Such a dual character, when framed developmentally, becomes an anachronism: the partners belong to different periods of history. This is the inevitable outcome of treating species and social evolution as commensurate operations. Nonetheless, I want to suggest that this critical emphasis on the distastefulness of the achieved society overlooks the deconstruction, then development, of an enlightened masculine perspective on society, which is consistent with her argument in *Women and Economics* that female subjugation by men is a long game being played by the female sex. Just as in *Mizora*, Vera's initial response, that "it would be a paradise for men," is followed by the partial achievement of a more autonomously female appreciation of the "feminine," so in *Herland* the male adventurers are initially subjugated (confined and obliged to take the role of a curious but crude race); eventually, the central character and narrator, Vandyck, comes to recognize the autonomy and accomplishments of Herland's all-female society. The narrative development in *Herland* consists of the formation of an improved masculinity. The all-female, problematically homogeneous society is the background for the transformation of the male, which is the impetus for the novel's narrative development.

Utopian novels differ from utopian programmes according to those literary elements that distinguish them from the concrete specificity of a blueprint. Fourier's phalansteries, for all their bacchanalian excess and numerological weirdness, are completed systems ready to be instituted. The educative utopian novel requires a narrator whose intelligence and experience filter the arrangements in the society visited, and whose learning, inner adjustments, and mobile point of view constitute the plot. The long conversations comparing one world with another locate the adventures of the "utopian romance" in the dialogic sphere of adaptation and change.

The content of utopian novels is often framed as an authentic account so that its diaristic sequence of chapters can maintain the narrative conceit of a slowly forming position, unlike a type of novel which the reader understands to be the constructed product of an omniscient author-creator who has plotted the entire work in advance. It shouldn't need

stating that to concentrate on the sociological nature of the utopian setting is to forget that utopian fiction (like science fiction) needs to be recognized as a “*literary* artifact.” Darko Suvin’s seminal analysis of the science fiction genre insists on the importance of the definition because previous accounts failed to distinguish between narratives set in improved societies and systems for realizing them; the latter encountered problems of stasis due to their presentational method of the “*tableau*,” which exists in an arrested moment of time and in a synoptic space.”⁹⁰ To mistake the narrative for a tableau can and has produced readings of *Herland* that fixate on the contemporary reader’s response to a completed utopian programme of the novel (integrating Gilman’s feminism with her racism). It is also to overlook the development of the three male visitors to Herland, particularly Vandyck Jennings, whose development in the novel corresponds with Gilman’s ideal, in *Women and Economics*, of a better society in which man is brought to the level of woman.

The first words of the novel reveal the Gilman understands and wishes to emphasize the difference between a literary utopia and a utopian programme and also the centrality of the male narrator: “This is written from memory, unfortunately” (*HL* 3). The account is thus presented as partial and susceptible to that most subjective faculty—memory. Significantly, Vandyck has had to leave behind in Herland “whole books of notes, carefully copied records, first-hand descriptions, and the pictures,” which would have included “some bird’s-eyes of the cities and parks” (*HL* 3)—in other words, a completed utopian programme. Matthew Beaumont makes a similar point about *Looking Backward* (1888), in which “Bellamy’s protagonist loses his privileged rooftop perspective and becomes a terrified pedestrian adrift in an urban environment that seems increasingly alienating and strange.”⁹¹ In utopian literature (as in science fiction), what Suvin influentially refers to as the genre’s defining “cognitive estrangement”⁹² is a process of ideological de- and reconstruction, which in *Herland* is the process that Gilman subjects Vandyck to, as a proxy for the reader.

To make this case, it is necessary to chart the characters and progress of the three male adventurers. The fact that they are male distinguishes *Herland* from *Mizora*, whose proselytizing narrator is female, and from *New Amazonia: A Foretaste of the Future* (1889), in which the author herself awakes in a matriarchal society of the future. (Her intractably male-chauvinist fellow traveller has washed up there accidentally after a hashish

experience.) Much like the voyage to *The Lost World*, the male travellers' journey to Herland is upriver into a primeval landscape, towards an originary feminine: "as we got farther and farther upstream, in a dark tangle of rivers, lakes, morasses, and dense forests, [...] I noticed that more and more of these savages had a story about a strange and terrible 'Woman Land' in the high distance" (*HL* 4). They survey the land by plane (a "bird's-eye" view), and Vandyck's initial assumptions are masculinist: he assumes from the "perfectly cultivated" topography that "there must be men" (*HL* 13).

Vandyck describes himself as a sociologist who is interested in all branches of knowledge; his companions are Terry O. Nicholson, an explorer, and Jeff Margrave, a botanist and poet. On arrival in Herland, Terry anticipates "just Girls and Girls and Girls"; Jeff is the romantic of the group and is criticized for the "rose-colored haloes [with which he sanctifies] his women folks" (*HL* 9, 11). Of the three, only Vandyck has the resources to correct his first impressions while the others remain fixed in their initial attitudes to women. Terry attempts to rape Alima, his wife in Herland, and Jeff persists in an uncritical infatuation with the culture of this all-female society. His wife, Celis, becomes the first to conceive in the conventional fashion of our world, and remains in Herland after Terry and Vandyck return to modernity, accompanied by his wife, Ellador, who wishes to see the world outside the confines of the isolated plateau. In the sequel, *With Her in Ourland* (1916), Vandyck takes on the role of guide and she of interrogator.

The function of the male characters is not—unlike other visitors to utopia in literature—primarily to describe the society they have discovered, but to demonstrate masculine attitudes, which we see in Gilman's presentation of the trio's attitudes to the first women they encounter, then to others in the town. In a carefully worked image, the three young women they are pursuing balance on the boughs of a tree in which they have taken refuge while the men cling to the trunk that they believe gives them control of the line of descent. The young women are "so many bright birds" to the sociologist Vandyck, "Girls!" to the romantic Jeff, and "Peaches!" to the predatory Terry who can only see women (and "girls" especially) as sexual prey (*HL* 17). Terry uses a necklace of paste jewellery as "bait" and holds it outstretched to the interested Alima (his future wife). Vandyck records the encounter:

I did not like the look in his eyes—it was like a creature about to spring. I could already see it happen—the dropped necklace, the sudden clutching hand—the girl’s sharp cry as he seized her and drew her in. But it didn’t happen. (*HL* 18)

Vandyck anticipates an outcome of violent capture that would be expected in the conditions of “Ourland.” Instead, *she* bests *him* in the conventionally masculine fields of dexterity and deception, taking the necklace in an unexpected turn that departs from the gender relations that have evolved in our world.

Terry is left stranded in his undignified position up the tree, which serves as a diagram of alternative evolution. To Vandyck (who is not yet sufficiently enlightened by Herland), women are “bright birds”; in other words, he interprets their beauty as the secondary sex function that it performs in his (our) world. But Gilman’s language associates the women’s escape with other species, whose “fitness” are more usefully developed in a wilder, uncivilized environment:

They dropped from the ends of the big boughs to those below, fairly pouring themselves off the tree, while we climbed downward as swiftly as we could. We heard their vanishing gay laughter, we saw them fleeing away in the wide open reaches of the forest, and gave chase, but we might as well have chased wild antelopes. (*HL* 18–19)

The men had thought they occupied a tactically advantageous position in this tree by clinging to the trunk, but—to extend the allegorical reading—the women demonstrate the possibility of an alternative evolutionary *descent* by dropping down from the branches and circumventing the prevailing axis of evolutionary history.

When the men arrive in the town they are surrounded by more senior Herlanders, “every one of ‘em over forty as I’m a sinner,” as Terry remarks (*HL* 22). His offers of scarves and rhinestones are rebuffed, and Terry’s comments cause Vandyck to reflect on the tendency of men to associate women with younger members of the sex: “‘Woman’ in the abstract is young, and, we assume, charming. As they get older they pass off the stage, somehow” (*HL* 22). He is probably ventriloquizing for the author, but Gilman makes his progressive estrangement from the normative values of his own gender the primary axis of development in the novel; this gender-estranged self-awareness is appropriate to a sociologist

whose domain of enquiry is the human species itself and, by extension, the blindness and values that make up a masculine conception of the female sex. Gilman inserts a transvalued notion of “boyhood” into this episode by having the two most different male characters use the term in very different ways. Terry employs one meaning when he is faced with the “old Colonels” who try to march them into a building: “We mustn’t let them get us in this, boys. All together now—” (*HL* 23). The appeal is to what Bradley Deane describes as the “youthful men and heroic adolescents,” which functioned as a tactical figure in discourses of imperialism.⁹³ Only a few lines after Terry’s conventional appeal to “boys,” but speaking with the benefit of hindsight acquired later, Vandyck completely inverts the values of the term: “It makes me laugh, *knowing all I do now*, to think of us three boys—nothing else; three audacious impertinent boys—butting into an unknown country without any sort of guard or defense” (*HL* 23, emphasis added). Boyhood is reflected, in the critical mirror of Herland, back onto the male intruders as immaturity and vulnerability.

Vandyck’s most significant progress towards the “full racial equality with her” that Gilman presented in *Women and Economics* is in his re-evaluation of the feminine (*WE* 129), and again, Terry is the foil against which the new insights are achieved. When Terry refers to the natural order of female coyness and male competition that Darwin described in *The Descent of Man*,⁹⁴ Vandyck comments that “this led me promptly to the conviction that those ‘feminine charms’ we are so fond of are not feminine at all, but mere reflected masculinity—developed to please us because they had to please us, and in no way essential to the real fulfilment of their great process” (*HL* 60).⁹⁵ Importantly, Vandyck’s disavowals of masculinist, essentialist views are presented as hard-won insights; in typical phrasing, he says of the great female intelligence he recognizes, “I confess that this was the most impressive and, to me, most mortifying, of any single feature of Herland” (*HL* 79). The most difficult of Vandyck’s concessions are those that conflict with his own sex attraction towards Ellador, his wife. He acknowledges, with difficulty (“I don’t say it was easy for me; it wasn’t”), that completely fulfilled relations with a woman may be achieved without intercourse, and is surprised to experience “a growing sense of common ground between us, a pleasant rested calm feeling, which I had imagined could only be attained in one way” (*HL* 126). This harmonious equality is one which supersedes the processes of competition, pursuit and rape which had historically entailed such

suffering to women, but which had also brought humans to the point where these transvaluations of intimacy became possible.

Gilman presents Herland as a society which, like Mizora, has transcended the conditions of women and nature through a mostly elided programme of eugenics, which was now “history.” The systems which bring this society about are of a piece with Gilman’s distasteful notions of racial superiority and the management of defective beings that she advocated in response to perceived social problems. The development of the novel, however, involves the formation of Vandyck: his transcendence of aberrant gender relations and conventional masculinity marks him out as the New Man—and one that Gilman has created as paradigmatic of the better society to come. Vandyck’s elevation to her level is the point where Gilman’s evolutionary aspirations are fulfilled, but—ironically—this holy union between a man and woman empties the novel of the restless energy of the visitor’s failure to become a complete resident of utopia (in *News from Nowhere*, this failure is staged as sexual frustration⁹⁶); it is this unfulfilled desire that propels him or her back into the present day of the author, with the motivation to begin a project in *this* world to compensate for the failure to reside permanently in that better one. It is frustration with the conditions of this world that sends the visitor on the voyage to utopia in the first place—just as Malone’s sexual frustration is the occasion for joining Challenger’s expedition in *The Lost World*. In Elizabeth Corbett’s feminist utopian novel, *New Amazonia* (1889), the dream journey is preceded by the author’s despair on reading the “Appeal Against Female Suffrage,” and Matthew Beaumont identifies her “cold dank study” as “the novel’s absent centre, the empty space of her utopian society.”⁹⁷ Similarly, at the centre of *Herland* are “these sorrows and perplexities of our lives,” which Gilman refers to in *Woman and Economics*.

Vandyck’s submission to the primacy of the female sex is absolute: at the end of the novel he describes Ellador as a “Superwoman,” and reports “the restful reverence which looks up to the Mother Sex” (HL 129). Gilman believed this correction to be underway in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, visible in the movements campaigning for women’s rights in America. Her optimism is registered emphatically in many of her poems, for instance “An Obstacle,” “She Who is to Come,” and “She Walketh Veiled and Sleeping,” all of which were published in the 1895 edition of *In This Our World, and Other Poems*, and in her pieces in the *Forerunner*. In an article in 1910, for

instance, she declares that where legislation initiated or supported by women has been passed, “you will see one unbroken line of social service [...] one steady upward pressure; the visible purpose to uplift and help the world.”⁹⁸ The problems in sexual relations that Gilman perceived so acutely, and which were an integral part of the struggle for existence, were given their final and total resolution in the novel—a conclusion which reintroduced teleology and purpose to evolutionary history, which was the point where such aspirations became susceptible to the worst aspects of eugenic goals and methods.

It might seem that the trajectory that Gilman desired for humankind was not alternate-historical at all. The stages of female suffering and male elevation were thought of as part of evolutionary long-term planning along a linear (though circuitous) timeline. In this scheme, mankind was defined in the very opposite terms from Gould’s maxim: as a tendency, not an entity. But in order to dramatize this argument in narrative form, she required a notional society capable of delivering the necessary instruction, and educating his desire. Herland could only be presented by isolating it from the stage of evolutionary history that she and her readers occupied. It needed to be continuous with actual history but also to have been insulated in an environment whose circumstances allowed it to have diverged at an earlier point, in other words to have acquired the illustrative function of the island in order to function as an alternate history. Mizora and Herland were such sites of experimental thought that accelerated rapidly into the utopian future, where their inhabitants waited patiently for the men and women of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to join them.

NOTES

1. Stephen Jay Gould, *Wonderful Life: The Burgess Shale and the Nature of History* (London: Hutchinson Radius, 1990), 45.
2. Gould, *Wonderful Life*, 319.
3. Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection; Or, the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*, ed. J. W. Burrow (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), 171.
4. Gould, *Wonderful Life*, 47.
5. William R. Greg, “On the Failure of ‘Natural Selection’ in the Case of Man,” *Fraser’s Magazine for Town and Country*, 1830–1869 78, no. 465 (September 1868): 353–362; Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and*

- Selection in Relation to Sex*, Penguin Classics (London: Penguin, 2004), 159. An early example of defending Darwinism from the later positions of Darwin himself is Alfred Russel Wallace's *Darwinism: An Exposition of the Theory of Natural Selection* (London and New York: Macmillan and co., 1889), <http://archive.org/details/darwinism00unkngoog>.
6. Francis Galton, *Hereditary Genius* (London: Macmillan and Company, 1869), 376.
 7. Charles Darwin and Alfred Wallace, "On the Tendency of Species to Form Varieties; and on the Perpetuation of Varieties and Species by Natural Means of Selection.," *Journal of the Proceedings of the Linnean Society of London* 3, no. 9 (August 1, 1858): 49, doi:[10.1111/j.1096-3642.1858.tb02500.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1096-3642.1858.tb02500.x).
 8. Edward Burnett Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art and Custom*, 3rd ed., rev. vol. 1 (London: John Murray, 1891), 46; Lewis H. Morgan, *Ancient Society; Or, Researches in the Lines of Human Progress from Savagery Through Barbarism to Civilization* (Chicago: Kerr, 1910), 49.
 9. Galton, *Hereditary Genius*, 375–376 (emphasis added).
 10. Darwin and Wallace, "On the Tendency of Species to Form Varieties," 54.
 11. Darwin and Wallace, "On the Tendency of Species to Form Varieties," 60.
 12. Darwin and Wallace, "On the Tendency of Species to Form Varieties," 60.
 13. Darwin and Wallace, "On the Tendency of Species to Form Varieties," 54.
 14. Giorgio Agamben, "What Is a Paradigm?," in *The Signature of All Things: On Method* (New York: Zone, 2009), 24.
 15. Alfred Russel Wallace, *The Malay Archipelago: The Land of the Orang-Utan and the Bird of Paradise, a Narrative of Travel with Studies of Man and Nature* (London: Macmillan, 1886), 444.
 16. Wallace, *The Malay Archipelago*, 445.
 17. Wallace, *The Malay Archipelago*, 445.
 18. Darwin, *Descent of Man*, 261.
 19. Darwin, *Descent of Man*, 640.
 20. John F. McLennan, *Primitive Marriage* (Edinburgh: Adam & Charles Black, 1865), 229, <http://archive.org/details/McLennan1865gg670>.
 21. Wallace, *The Malay Archipelago*, 3.
 22. Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London: Verso, 2007), 15.
 23. See Chap. 4 for a discussion of spectroscopy and its effect on the imagination of other worlds.
 24. Arthur Conan Doyle, "The Poison Belt," in *The Lost World: And Other Thrilling Tales*, ed. Philip Gooden, New edition (London; New York: Penguin Books Ltd, 2001), 244.

25. Doyle, "The Poison Belt," 265.
26. Bradley Deane, *Masculinity and the New Imperialism: Rewriting Manhood in British Popular Literature, 1870–1914*, Cambridge Studies in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture, no. 91 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 1.
27. Deane, *Masculinity and the New Imperialism*, 2.
28. Julia Reid, "'She-Who-Must-Be-Obeded': Anthropology and Matriarchy in H. Rider Haggard's *She*," *Journal of Victorian Culture* 20, no. 3 (July 8, 2015): 1–18, doi:[10.1080/13555502.2015.1058057](https://doi.org/10.1080/13555502.2015.1058057).
29. Alfred Russel Wallace, "The Origin of Human Races and the Antiquity of Man Deduced from the Theory of 'Natural Selection,'" *Journal of the Anthropological Society of London* 2 (January 1, 1864): clxv, doi:[10.2307/3025211](https://doi.org/10.2307/3025211).
30. Francis Galton, "Hereditary Improvement," ed. James Anthony Froude, *Fraser's Magazine* 7, no. 37 (January 1873): 120.
31. Arthur Conan Doyle, "The Lost World," in *The Lost World and Other Thrilling Tales*, ed. Philip Gooden, New edition (London; New York, N.Y: Penguin Books Ltd, 2001), 3.
32. Deane, *Masculinity and the New Imperialism*, 86.
33. Reid, "'She-Who-Must-Be-Obeded,'" 365.
34. Darwin, *Descent of Man*, 166.
35. Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 1:37.
36. Tylor is probably referring to the residual notion that God had created mankind at a semi-advanced level of civilization, which accorded with scripture, from which he had either risen towards civilization or regressed into barbarity (Richard Whately, "On the Origin of Civilisation," in *Miscellaneous Lectures and Reviews* (London: Parker, Son, and Bourn, 1861), 26–59, http://archive.org/details/miscellaneouslec00what_0). Whately's alternate-historical treatment of Napoleon is discussed in Chap. 2.
37. Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 1:415.
38. Charles Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace, *Evolution by Natural Selection* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958), 18.
39. Jim Endersby, "Darwin on Generation, Pangenesis and Sexual Selection," in *The Cambridge Companion to Darwin*, ed. Jonathan Hodge et al., 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, n.d.), 83, accessed June 10, 2013.
40. Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 1:69.
41. Quoted in Reid, "'She-Who-Must-Be-Obeded,'" 359.
42. Morgan, *Ancient Society*, 49.
43. Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State; In the Light of the Researches of Lewis H. Morgan*, Marxist Library vol. XXII (New York: International Publishers, 1884), 135.

44. Engels, *The Origin of the Family*, 133.
45. August Bebel, *Woman in the Past, Present and Future*, trans. Daniel De Leon (London: Zwan, 1988), 10.
46. Lester Frank Ward, "The Past and Future of the Sexes," *The Independent (Formerly Countryside and Suburban Life)* 60 (June 1906): 542.
47. Ward, "The Past and Future of the Sexes," 544.
48. Stephen Jay Gould, *The Panda's Thumb: More Reflections in Natural History* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), 26.
49. Ward, "The Past and Future of the Sexes," 541.
50. Kimberly A. Hamlin, *From Eve to Evolution: Darwin, Science, and Women's Rights in Gilded Age America* (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2014), 2.
51. Hamlin, *From Eve to Evolution*, 3.
52. Hamlin, *From Eve to Evolution*, 39.
53. Hamlin, *From Eve to Evolution*, 37.
54. Gregory Claeys, "The 'Survival of the Fittest' and the Origins of Social Darwinism," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 61, no. 2 (2000): 223–240, doi:[10.1353/jhi.2000.0014](https://doi.org/10.1353/jhi.2000.0014). Relevant to this discussion is Claeys' identification of the Poor Law of 1834 as incipient social Darwinism, for its separation of husband and wife into segregated institutions of "care," and the way that Malthus's principles reframed the reproduction of the poor as a vengeful return of Original Sin (230).
55. Eliza Burt Gamble, *The Evolution of Woman: An Inquiry into the Dogma of Her Inferiority to Man*. (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1894), 73–74.
56. Herbert Spencer, "A Theory of Population, Deduced from the General Law of Animal Fertility," ed. John Chapman, *Westminster Review*. 1914 57, no. 112 (April 1852): 501.
57. Gamble, *The Evolution of Woman*, 74.
58. Gamble, *The Evolution of Woman*, 29 (emphasis added).
59. Darby Lewes, *Dream Revisionaries: Gender and Genre in Women's Utopian Fiction, 1870–1920* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1995), 1.
60. Jean Pfaelzer, "Utopians Prefer Blondes: Mary Lane's *Mizora* and the Nineteenth-Century Utopian Imagination," in *Mizora: A Prophecy* (Syracuse University Press, 1890), xiii.
61. The second part of the novel's title is "A MSS found among the private papers of the Princess Vera Zarovitch; Being a true and faithful account of her Journey to the Interior of the Earth, with a careful description of the Country and its Inhabitants, their Customs, Manners and Government. Written by herself."

62. Mary E. Bradley Lane, *Mizora: A Prophecy* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 11.
63. James De Mille, *A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder* (Richmond: Oneworld Classics, 2009), 24.
64. Matthew Beaumont, *The Spectre of Utopia: Utopian and Science Fictions at the Fin de Siècle* (Bern: Peter Lang Pub. Inc, 2011), 30. There were concrete applications: the Bradbury building, completed in 1893, was inspired by the description of the shopping mall in *Looking Backward* and, in a nice twist of utopian history, was used almost a century later as a location in the film *Blade Runner*.
65. Greg, "On the Failure of 'Natural Selection' in the Case of Man," 361.
66. Wallace, "The Origin of Human Races and the Antiquity of Man," clxix–clxx.
67. Lane, *Mizora*, 92.
68. Katherine Broad, "Race, Reproduction, and the Failures of Feminism in Mary Bradley Lane's *Mizora*," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 28, no. 2 (2009): 248.
69. Galton, quoted in Broad, "Failures of Feminism in Mary Bradley Lane's *Mizora*," 257.
70. Edward Thompson, "Romanticism, Utopianism and Moralism: The Case of William Morris," *New Left Review*, no. 99 (October 1976): 97 (original emphasis).
71. Lane, *Mizora*, 27.
72. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Women and Economics: A Study of the Economic Relation Between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Evolution* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1998), lxxii.
73. Judith A. Allen, *The Feminism of Charlotte Perkins Gilman: Sexualities, Histories, Progressivism*, *Women in Culture and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 14–15.
74. Allen, *The Feminism of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, 15.
75. Stephen F. Eisenman, "Communism in Furs: A Dream of Prehistory in William Morris's 'John Ball,'" *Art Bulletin* 87, no. 1 (March 1, 2005): 92–110.
76. Darwin and Wallace, "On the Tendency of Species to Form Varieties," 59–60.
77. Darwin and Wallace, "On the Tendency of Species to Form Varieties," 60.
78. Gamble, *The Evolution of Woman*, 71.
79. Alfred Russel Wallace, "Human Selection," in *Studies Scientific and Social*, vol. 1 (London: Macmillan, 1900), 523. The same or similar diagnoses and prescriptions were advocated by August Bebel and Lester Frank Ward: Bebel, *Woman in the Past, Present and Future*; Ward, "The Past and Future of the Sexes."

80. OED: "Revolution."
81. The connections between Marxism and Darwinism are beyond the scope of this discussion, but it is worth recording Marx's comment in a letter to Engels that "Darwin's book [*On the Origin of Species*] is very important and serves me as a basis in natural science for the class struggle." Quoted in Ralph Colp, "The Contacts Between Karl Marx and Charles Darwin," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 35, no. 2 (1974): 330, doi:[10.2307/2708767](https://doi.org/10.2307/2708767). Peter Kropotkin and Anton Pannekoek both found evidence in nature for the efficacy of communism; Pannekoek specifically referred to Gilman's work to support this view.
82. Darwin, *Descent of Man*, 256.
83. Judith A. Allen, "'The Overthrow' of Gynaecocentric Culture: Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Lester Frank Ward," in *Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Her Contemporaries: Literary and Intellectual Contexts*, ed. Cynthia J. Davis and Denise D. Knight, Studies in American Literary Realism and Naturalism (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2004), 67.
84. Alys Eve Weinbaum, "Writing Feminist Genealogy: Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Racial Nationalism, and the Reproduction of Maternalist Feminism," *Feminist Studies* 27, no. 2 (2001): 273, doi:[10.2307/3178758](https://doi.org/10.2307/3178758).
85. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "A Suggestion on the Negro Problem," *American Journal of Sociology* 14, no. 1 (1908): 80.
86. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "Immigration, Importation and Our Fathers," *Forerunner*, May 1914, 118.
87. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "The Sanctity of Human Life," *Forerunner* 7, no. 5 (1916): 128.
88. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Charlotte Perkins Gilman Reader*, ed. Ann Lane, New edition (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1999), xxxvi.
89. Weinbaum, "Writing Feminist Genealogy," 296–297.
90. Darko Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 44.
91. Beaumont, *The Spectre of Utopia*, 46.
92. Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, 61.
93. Deane, *Masculinity and the New Imperialism*, 85.
94. Darwin, *Descent of Man*, 257.
95. Terry is the spokesman for chauvinist Darwinism here and elsewhere: he objects to the history of Herland's rapid development by citing Weismann's assertions against the inheritance of acquired traits; Gilman had always favoured versions of Lamarck's position, a position she shared with Lester Ward (see Allen, *The Feminism of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, 16).

96. Jan Marsh, “*News from Nowhere* as Erotic Dream,” *Journal of the William Morris Society* 8, no. 4 (Spring 1990): 19–23.
97. Matthew Beaumont, “‘A Little Political World of My Own’: The New Woman, the New Life, and ‘New Amazonia,’” *Victorian Literature and Culture* 35, no. 1 (January 1, 2007): 216, doi:[10.2307/40347132](https://doi.org/10.2307/40347132).
98. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “The Humanness of Women,” *Forerunner*, January 1910, 14.

Earliness and Lateness: Alternate History in American Literature

ENGLISH AND AMERICAN COURTLY MUSINGS

To the States or any one of them, or any city of the States, *Resist
much, obey little*,
Once unquestioning obedience, once fully enslaved,
Once fully enslaved, no nation, state, city of this earth, ever afterward
resumes its liberty.
~Walt Whitman, "To the States" (originally "Walt Whitman's
Caution," 1855)

In Walt Whitman's compact poem, "To the States," the affirmation of restless, insurrectionary energy appears to have been prompted by the prospect of its loss.¹ The insistent repetition of "once" reinforces the axiom of the last three lines—that liberty can never be recovered—and raises the stakes for the American future. The inflexibility of the law suggests a repeated cycle of historical decline and the many times that liberty has been lost by other nations and never recovered. The subtextual anxiety expressed here regards whether America would repeat the pattern of decline of its precursors, which is to say European political culture.

American reflections on its political and cultural history in the nineteenth century were profoundly concerned with renewal and the possibility of renewal. Assigning America and Europe different positions on

the historical arc from ascendancy to decline was common on both sides of the Atlantic, though with very different values attached: Ralph Waldo Emerson famously declared cultural emancipation from the Old World with the assertion: "We have listened too long to the courtly muses of Europe," while Oscar Wilde inverted novelty's appeal in an 1888 article in the *Pall Mall Gazette* with the witticism that "the youth of America is their oldest tradition."² Robert Weisbuch summarizes the nature of the "Anglo-American contest" as "a struggle between two distinct senses of cultural time, British lateness and American earliness."³ To illustrate this point, he interprets the epigraph from the frontispiece to Henry David Thoreau's *Walden; or, Life in the Woods* (1854) as a declaration of novelty. "I do not propose to write an ode to dejection, but to brag as lustily as a chanticleer in the morning, standing on his roost, if only to wake my neighbors up." Weisbuch identifies the reference to Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Dejection: An Ode," and the less obvious association of the chanticleer with Geoffrey Chaucer. "It is Thoreau's New England neighbors who are to be awakened, but clearly neighbor England, in its originary spirit, is to be saved from its own lateness as well."⁴ This alternate-historical pattern of rejecting the literary inheritance of the immediate past, and instead asserting an affinity with an earlier, recuperable stage of history, is the temporal conceit that defines the material discussed in this chapter.

Recent scholarship demonstrates the complex currents of influence that flowed between the United States and Europe: Duncan Bell shows how America represented a model for supporters of a confederate, "Greater Britain."⁵ In similar claims for America's leading role regarding political and cultural ideas later adopted in Europe, Benedict Anderson has asserted that "nationalism emerged first in the New World, not the Old," and Jennifer Greeson takes a similar position regarding "American Enlightenment."⁶ Whether westwards or eastwards, the ecliptic of rise and fall was a persistent image for the passage of ideas; Emerson's figure of a new pole-star asserts both the pre-eminence of an American culture and its imperviousness to decline:

Who can doubt that [American] poetry will revive and lead in a new age, as the star in the constellation Harp, which now flames in our zenith, astronomers announce, shall one day be the pole-star for a thousand years?⁷

The millenarian image, like Whitman's admonition, imagines a particular type of American exceptionalism that is immune to history and historical repetition. The conceit involves the enlargement of American nature, as if under different skies and subject to variant laws; Thoreau's ideal of a grander American culture also implies this, when he discovers the evidence of American greatness already inscribed across the celestial sphere: "the heavens of America appear infinitely higher, and the stars brighter."⁸ When these aspirations shaded into anxiety, alternate-historical thought was a means to formulate attendant hopes and fears.

The two alternate histories I focus on in this chapter are both from the late century. Mark Twain's novel, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889), was published five years after *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and coincided with his disastrous investment in a revolutionary type-setting machine invented by James W. Paige, which led to Twain (or Samuel Langhorne Clemens) pursuing voluntary bankruptcy in 1894.⁹ Castello N. Holford's novel, *Aristopia: A Romance-History of the New World* (1895), is less well known than Twain's historical imaginary, and than some of the other politically progressive, speculative novels also published by the Arena Publishing Co. in Boston. These included Alice Ilgenfritz Jones and Ella Merchant's description of Martian republics (*Unveiling a Parallel*, 1893) and Solomon Schindler's response to Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* (*Young West*, 1894). Very little information about the author is available.

With different levels of irony and for very different purposes, Twain and Holford both register a problem with the state of the nation in the latter stages of the nineteenth century. They do so by returning to times of the "courtly" political life of European states. In *A Connecticut Yankee*, an American engineer is transported to King Arthur's court at Camelot in a notional sixth century. *Aristopia* diverges from received history when its English gentleman-protagonist, Ralph Morton, secretly founds a republic in America with the wealth derived from a vast gold deposit that he discovers when searching with Captain John Smith for a westerly passage out of Chesapeake Bay.

Aristopia, of course, means the "best place," and is unshadowed by the ambiguity of utopia's prefix. Hank's policies of industrial manufacture, secular rule, and ethnic toleration lead to a precociously advanced state, with fewer reservations and less backsliding than Renouvier describes in *Uchronie* (discussed in Chap. 3). The novel closes with the establishment of a republic at the time of America's declaration of

independence, though with certain differences which I discuss below. Hank Morgan's contribution to Arthurian England in *A Connecticut Yankee* is catastrophically different: he quickly resolves that "I would boss the whole country inside of three months" (CY 50) and sets about establishing modern-day institutions such as factories, telecommunications, military academies, a floating currency, and a patent office. His introduction of a stock exchange leads to the civil war between Arthur's and Mordred's knights (corresponding to Malory's fifteenth-century version of *Le Morte Darthur*) and a Papal Interdict. On the wrong side of the Church and aristocracy, Hank and his remaining supporters withdraw to the cave of the usurped Merlin and massacre every last knight in England when they attack. Despite these very obvious differences in outcome, there is a shared pattern in both: a protagonist equipped with a modern political sensibility effectively time-travels into the past in order to accelerate the advance of civilization.

With hindsight, the publication of two American alternate history novels within six years of each other suggests the coalescence of a genre. (Another, by Charles Felton Pidgin was published in 1902 in Boston: *The Climax: Or, What Might Have Been; a Romance of the Great Republic*.¹⁰) This should not obscure the novelty of the format, which struck the authors and readers. William J. Collins identifies *A Connecticut Yankee* as the first backwards time-travelling tale in an article which itself is early in its description of the novel as an "alternative history."¹¹ In his introduction to *Aristopia*, Holford acknowledges the French and Anglo-Saxon traditions of futurist writing (described as "fantastic" and "matter-of-fact" respectively), before continuing:

But of books giving a history of the past as it might have been if the current of events had been turned at a critical point by some man with sufficient virtue and mental power, combined with the power which some fortunate material circumstances might have given him, I know not one.
(AR 3)

This is an exemplary definition of the alternate history novel, though it associates the format with a conception of history shaped by great men. It echoes the plangent tone of Louis Geoffroy's preface to *Napoléon Apocryphe* (where he regrets that "It is one of humanity's fatal laws that nothing attains its goal" (NA i)). Holford quotes the well-known lament from John Greenleaf Whittier's poem "Maud Muller" that "Of all sad

words of tongue or pen / The saddest are these: It might have been” (AR 6).¹² The divergence of these two books’ historical arguments, however, is reflected by their titles, between Geoffroy’s apocryphal hero and Holford’s ideal republic. Holford’s claim to be the first to write this sort of book is obviously incorrect (though presumably sincere) as it comes more than 50 years after *Napoléon apocryphe* (1836) and *The Wondrous Tale of Alroy* (1833). The protagonist of Twain’s novel (the “Yankee”) has been described more often as a prototypical time traveller than a man able to redirect the “current of events.”

Betsy Bowden argues that Twain, “without clear precedent,” confronted a problem that would become a familiar one for science fiction writers, “to wit, that a credible time traveler to the past must not change the course of history.” She refers to an ending for Twain’s novel, discarded for this reason, “whereby sensibly clad knights would seek the Northwest Passage in lieu of the Grail.”¹³ In the final version of the novel, Hank only reports that “I was getting ready to send out an expedition to discover America”—a project that is prevented by events (CY 365). This compatibility with known history makes *A Connecticut Yankee* a less clear-cut alternate history, though I show below how Twain has Hank implant subtle, alternate-historical circuits of influence into American history. Like *Aristopia*, the novel dreams of implanting republican American values into a much earlier stage of history, and shaking off the traditions of “courtly” culture and politics at a much earlier stage. Twain’s use of philology in the novel in order to demonstrate the loops and paradoxes of historical knowledge enables more complex reflection on the delineation of historical imaginaries—and also, I claim, signals the transition of alternate history into science fiction.

This chapter looks at how questions of earliness and lateness are articulated in the two novels, and shows that temporal articulations of the New and Old Worlds were also present in related patterns of American self-identification: in the figure of the frontier and in transatlantic literary relations. *Aristopia* presents a relatively straightforward endorsement of modernity over the class-bound hierarchies of Europe, in comparison with Twain’s more complex and troubling critique of the cherished values of technological and cultural progress in *A Connecticut Yankee*. I draw on Matthew Giancarlo’s argument about the novel’s preoccupation with philology to elaborate how reading it as an alternate history can help clarify its unresolved positions on progress and the possibility of historical knowledge. Both novels involve attempts to repurpose

“chivalry” and “knight-errantry” for an American context, a manoeuvre also attempted by Henry David Thoreau in his essay “Walking.” The wider endeavour to forge a new American republic of letters, distinct from European precursors, was a project of self-definition that, as I show, was repeatedly alternate-historical in its methods.

The American frontier was invoked as a wellspring of American exceptionalism, as a supposedly pristine site of man’s original encounter with nature where it was possible to renew the dream of the American republic—until this natural resource, like Ralph Morton’s goldmine, was also tapped out. The depletion of natural and political resources was visible much earlier to the anonymous author of an article published in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1829, who regrets “that the globe can have no second America in reserve for us, where the red man [...] may be restored to his crown of feathers in his rightful forests—and whither the black man may never be carried in Christian chains across the ocean to deadly bondage.” After cutting short this alternate-historical whimsy, the author suggests: “we shall act more wisely in confining our thought to the singular conditions which America still presents for consideration.”¹⁴ Holford seizes hold of this dream of renewal, but restores the possibility of an improved history through the actions of a prescient seventeenth-century settler, who constructs an ideal republic out of the oppressed and disenfranchized populations of Europe. I compare the novel’s cosmopolitan values to the hospitality in Emma Lazarus’s poem, “The Golem of Liberty” (1883) and Randolph S. Bourne’s essay on “Trans-National America” (1916). America, so the claims in these sources went, needed to maintain itself and its founding values through openness to the cultures of its immigrant peoples from the East, just as the frontier represented a site of self-creation in the West. These positions were elaborated at a time when America appeared at risk of becoming insular and subjugated by a dominant class, which was European in character. In other words, I interpret these nineteenth-century alternate histories as prompted by anxieties that America had entered its own period of “lateness.”

ARISTOPIA: RENEWING THE REPUBLIC

A number of historical moments were, it seems, considered and rejected when Holford was planning his alternate history novel, *Aristopia*. In the introduction, he writes that George Washington had “great virtues, a

great opportunity, and good talents,” but that his opportunity was not “the greatest that history has furnished,” and his powers of foresight were not “so far-reaching and clairvoyant” for the purposes of reimagining the realization of the American republic (AR 3, 4). The fathers of the United States constitution were likewise limited in their power and opportunity by the insidious influence of the Old World, which was already corrupting the New: “Old evils were already deeply imbedded [*sic*] in the customs, prejudices and thoughts of men when our government was forming” (AR 4). For Holford, the rot went deeper into the woodwork and more extensive excavation was needed, hence the return to 1607 and Ralph Morton’s arrival at the first settler colony in Virginia. Even at this point, the fate of the colony is imperilled by the quality of the settlers. The admirable Captain John Smith asks the colony’s governor Newport whether the new arrivals are “good stout honest laborers and mechanics, or, like the first lot, jail-birds and gentlemen” (AR 17). The fate of the continent is presented as a transatlantic one, whose development depends upon the nature and quality of its first constituents.

One of the new arrivals is Ralph Morton, whose background is tellingly cosmopolitan rather than English: he is of gentleman stock, but the death of his father fighting against Spanish invasions has left his family in reduced circumstances and his mother is unable to afford the best available education. Instead, he picks up a distinctly modern form of learning while working for his brother-in-law, a London merchant. He neglects theology and Greek in favour of living European languages, and enthusiastically studies history, the culture of other countries, and the sciences, including astronomy—to learn the latter he engages a Genoese tutor. This taste of modern areas of knowledge, including business affairs, prepares him for a new life in the New World; his personal history incorporates elements of the Old World (its aristocracy and martial traditions) but he is already cast off from its privileges and obliged to make his own way outside of blood privileges in the emerging spheres of commerce and exploration. He is an exemplary admixture of new and old.

Castello Holford’s novel responds to the perceived failure of America to fulfil its potential, and instead to have succumbed to the historical fate of coming to resemble its European parents; of allowing earliness to be corrupted into an imitation of lateness. At the end of the nineteenth century, Holford writes, “it has come that this great republic of the New World, so long the hope of the poor and oppressed of the old world, is fast becoming like Europe socially, and threatens to become

even worse than Europe" (AR 5). The oligarchs have cornered the profits enabled by modern technologies (steam power, railways, and factory production), and this acquisition of wealth is compared to the "robber barons of the Middle Ages, with their castles in every mountain pass and on every river ford." The original "bounties of nature, which a little while ago seemed exhaustless, have been all appropriated" (AR 5). This exhaustion of natural resources, and their capture by oligarchs, has reproduced a state of feudalism and robber barons, thus collapsing the distinction between old and new. "In every American city are rising the castles of the plutocracy" (AR 6). The benefit of the fictional past, Holford explains, is in the contemplation of "the happiness that was or might have been," for it "may teach us to look forward to the parting of the ways" and "to grasp the opportunities which are to come" (AR 7). History is envisioned as a garden of forking paths which can, retrospectively, assist the renewal of earlier historical conditions. This position is similar to Renouvier's desire to escape squirrel-like circuits of historical repetition, and the structure of Holford's alternate history is comparable to *Uchronie*, which also reimagines a remote past where harmful entanglements are unpicked and modern institutions consequently liberated from corrupting influences that persist in modern institutions—the Church for Renouvier and industrial oligarchies for Holford.

Ralph Morton's ideal republic may be founded on the liberal principles of religious toleration, secular rule of law, and meritocracy, but they are underwritten by gold. He finds a vast deposit while assisting Captain Smith's search for a westward passage out of Chesapeake Bay. Ralph has been shooting game to provision the expedition when he rests beside a river and notices a mineral sparkle on the bank, which is revealed to be gold. Holford may not have been aware of the "courtliness" of the story of a hunting expedition leading to a fantastical discovery, or his transposition of this plot to an American wilderness and a hero who shoots turkeys may be deliberate. Ralph resists the urge to share the discovery in a passage which hinges on a series of modal verbs that communicate his hypothetical processes of thought:

His first impulse was to rush away and inform his companions of his incredible discovery. But after a little while he thought he *would* keep it secret. *If* he *could* form some scheme to get control of all this wealth, how much more good he *could*, and he thought he *would*, do with it than

would that dissolute and worthless crowd at Jamestown, or that company of selfish merchants in London. (AR 42, emphasis added)

In spite of the “dissolute” settlers and the “selfish” merchants, Holford invests Ralph with the power to imagine a different history; his *what-if* meditations convey the author’s alternate-historical speculation on what *would*, *could*, and *should* have taken place under these altered circumstances of fabulous wealth.

As already shown, Holford believes that the introduction of an alteration at the time of the first settler colonies has more retrospective potential than at the later moments of independence from Britain and the writing of the Constitution. When Ralph returns to Europe to exchange this resource for political capital, his voyage is weighted with the significance of much earlier historical events: “Ralph Morton could say with equal confidence that the little ship carried greater fortunes than those of Caesar, for he was about to influence the world’s history more than did Caesar” (AR 55). Ralph’s project is facilitated by the existence of the sufficiently modern system of banking and a commodities market. He converts the mineral resource into liquid funds in Amsterdam, purchases the land on which the goldmine sits from the Virginia Company (through a deception), and commissions a ship in England to begin large-scale transatlantic wealth production. All of this is made possible thanks to his earlier experience of commerce and his knowledge of languages. With these resources, he is able to plan an entire state: “Ralph’s scheme had by this time developed, not merely into establishing a colony, but founding a nation in Virginia” (AR 68–69).

The success of this nation depends upon its foresighted modernity, which could equally be called the benefit of hindsight. Holford implants technological innovation into the secular state of Aristopia: vaccination, machine production, industrial logging, and a centrally planned economy according to which all industry is state-owned. Europe, by contrast, is said to be prejudiced against machinery, largely by the doctrines of the Catholic Church (AR 157). Hank Morgan’s modernizing projects in *A Connecticut Yankee* also involve the introduction of modern industrial and communication technologies, in opposition to the Church. Two economic factors enable state management and ownership of the economy: the financial wealth of the goldmine (which somehow remains a secret), and the adherence to a gold standard for currency. Private wealth makes it possible to avoid borrowing from usurious foreign agencies,

who would acquire influence and concessions, leading to wars of speculation; in short, the private wealth, or *capital*, allows Aristopia to avoid the unstable cycles of borrowing and spending that are inimical to progress, according to Holford's history of the Middle Ages. A second policy speaks more to the modern day of the book's publication: it is to maintain a fixed gold value to ensure a "well-authenticated paper currency," while preventing the type of speculation on the value of gold which begins in the United States in the nineteenth century; this more recent history is presumably what Holford has in mind when he refers to those "who made a fetch [*sic*] of gold—a master, not a servant, of society" (AR 133–34).

The outcome of this enlightened state of Aristopia is the formation of an increasingly powerful trading network and an economy that is prosperous even when its gold wealth runs out, the last of which is devoted to creating a standing army. The point where the narrative departs from received history comes with the Aristopian intervention in the Battle of Lexington in 1775: "The crisis had come, the hour had struck" (AR 217, 219). Canada votes to join this new pan-American republic, and England eventually consents to this imaginary Greater America, which is described in the closing words of the novel:

In this new nation was realized the dream of the social philosophers and philanthropists of all ages: a government of the people, by the people, and for the people, resting on the deep and solid foundations of LIBERTY, EQUALITY, AND FRATERNITY. (AR 234)

I take the term "Greater America" from Duncan Bell's study of the ambition to maintain British influence through the formation of a federal "Greater Britain," to whom America could be an ally and even a model. Bell, an intellectual historian scholar of political thought, draws on political theorists from the late Victorian period for whom the classical world, and Rome in particular, needed to be replaced as the template for historical self-recognition; there was an understandable wish to uncouple Britain from the declining phase of Roman history, and the imitation of American federalism was a way of "shifting the source of inspiration from the past to the present."¹⁵ Bell summarizes the fitful character of British perceptions of America across the nineteenth century, describing the ambiguous exemplary function of America by the late century as "a site of both powerful desire and nightmarish visions of the future."¹⁶

This description applies equally when reversed, to describe the American perception of the Old World in *Aristopia* as the site of desire and nightmarish visions that threatened America. European ancestry seemed to have corrupted America in the way Holford describes—as an outcome that the book sets out to correct; but by returning to the time of the first settlers, Holford has only European materials to work with. The indigenous peoples of the Americas are entirely peripheral to the novel's political argument. The disappearance of the original population in the radiant light of pristine nature and republican values is a displacement effected in the novel, as it is more generally in nineteenth-century narratives of America's historical destiny.¹⁷ Ralph may be modern, but he is also a European whose development of an uncultivated and unexploited continent depends on his own cultivation and the techniques and infrastructure of state-building that are available in the early modern period. Just as the idea of Greater Britain required an alternative, American model for imagining the future, a utopian imaginary of a Greater American republic required an enlightened application of the ideas which failed to develop in their native European soil. This recuperation refers to a European work of political imagination from the early-modern period, *Utopia*, which Holford tendentiously interprets.

The author breaks away from the narrative and addresses the modern reader who would surely have been aware of the expanding category of utopian fiction in the 1880s and its earliest expression in 1516.¹⁸ Holford insists that Thomas More's work has been misread by "bigoted theologians and sneering cynics" as "the scheme of a mild lunatic" (AR 88). More is described as a "seer" in this passage for good reason: it is only with the passage of centuries that "his wild imaginings, as they seemed to be, became the accomplished facts of history." The complexities and paradoxes of hindsight come into sharp relief at this point. More's ideas may have seemed mad at the time, so Holford's claim goes, but they became less far-fetched long after his death. Holford adopts the alternate history novel in order to reactivate what he sees as More's political tenets in the period of their formulation, and by doing so transmutes his own privileged hindsight into the foresight of his main character. He even goes so far as to invent a spurious genealogy whereby Cardinal Morton, More's mentor in the sixteenth century, is the ancestor of Ralph (AR 89). This descendent of More's circle, in his prescience (and with this ancestry), accelerates history in the New World by overcoming these long periods of prejudice (repudiating those "theologians and cynics"),

and achieves an uncorrupted modernity in record time. This exemplary historical imaginary can then instruct the present. Holford hopes “that the accomplishment will be accelerated, so that a work equal to that of past centuries may be done in a few future years” (AR 88–89).

Ralph is—by name and nature—a modernized Raphael Hythloday who, instead of qualifying his conviction of the goodness of Utopian society with the jaded scepticism of princes and policy, sets out (with the wealth of a near-bottomless goldmine) to implement its policies in the New World, with the aim of encouraging his readers to endorse this happy historical marriage of the Old World and the New. Holford’s elimination of the irony in *Utopia* (Hythloday roughly translates from Greek as “speaker of nonsense”) is condensed in his alteration to the name of More’s island: the ambiguous *u-* of “utopia” conflates the prefixes of *eu-* (the good) and *ou-* (the non), but Holford simplifies this as *aris-* (the best). Aristopia adopts much from Utopia in good faith: all goods are held in common ownership, a universal system of schools produces a high level of general intellect, and good relations with neighbouring countries are achieved through a combination of trade and the threat of force. It omits More’s outlandish proposals, for instance naked inspections by potential partners prior to marriage, and, crucially, does not share the Utopian disdain for gold (in *Utopia* it is described as a metal only fit to serve as a marker of criminality and chamber pots¹⁹).

Holford populates his republic with what he sees as the most promising human materials from Europe: its refugees. Ralph, through a network of agents and shipping operations, is able to offer to transport and settle various groups of persecuted peoples. Some are the victims of English incursions and rule, for example the Irish during Cromwell’s campaigns and the oppressed peasantry of both Scotland and England. Immigrants from “eastern Germany, Bohemia, Poland, Austria, Switzerland, Savoy, Lombardy, and Venice” are all encouraged to establish a new life in Aristopia (AR 210). The most desirable state, it is implied, is a cosmopolitan mixture, and this view contrasts sharply with some English perspectives on the composition of the New World. In 1844, an anonymous author in the *Foreign Quarterly Review* attributed America’s poor standard of poetry to the fact that it has admitted the “dregs and outcasts of all other countries.”²⁰ In Holford’s cosmopolitan republic, refugees such as the Huguenots add “their peculiar qualities to those of the English, Germans, and Irish very greatly and beneficially influenced the new composite nation” (AR 181). This

pan-European mixture of settlers seeking a new life in America is consistent with recorded history, but the presentation emphasizes the obverse relationship between American inclusivity and European persecution; the strength of the new republic lies in its composition from the weakest and most marginalized populations of Europe whose capacities for productive work are unrealized in their countries of origin but may be fulfilled in America. Holford quotes from Thomas Campbell's poem "Gertrude of Wyoming" (1809) to show that Aristopia was also a place where "the exile met from every clime" (AR 147). This complementary transatlantic dynamic is applied to gender also: Aristopia, as a settler colony, has a disproportionately large male population, unlike European states, where the population of men have been reduced by war. Morton's agents persuade these "surplus women" to join the new republic (AR 171).

Hospitality has its limits in Holford's book, and the racial constitution of Aristopia is exclusively white. Holford avows his liberalism through Aristopia's prohibition of slavery, but this has the effect only of restricting the republic's racial composition. Persecuted groups sold into slavery in Europe have been welcomed into the republic, but escaped slaves who cross over into Aristopia from the neighbouring colonies are only assisted with their journey northwards to Canada. This policy is explained as politically pragmatic, for to do otherwise would lead to conflicts with neighbours and the colonial powers in Europe; in this way, Holford constructs an explanation for racial exclusion in his ideal republic. This cosmopolitanism is also a northern-European one, reaffirming an Anglo-Saxonism that is, paradoxically, intrinsic to the idea of American exceptionalism and political potential. Charlotte Perkins Gilman's alarm at non-European immigration, specifically of non-whites, is more explicit (see Chap. 5). She also proudly refers to her own family's traceable descent from William the Conqueror and, as Alys Eve Weinbaum puts it, "renders her old world genealogy that of a 'true' American."²¹ By returning the state to a condition of northern-European purity, Holford was making a similar sort of alternate-historical claim to the lost-world narratives, whose return to a point of origin contained an alarmingly racist element. This ordering of race is largely elided but uncomfortably present when Holford explains that although the Irish peasantry *appeared* as barbarous as the native American population, "this rudeness was not inherent in their race, as in the Indian" (AR 168). Alternate histories predicated on returns to prior evolutionary (Gilman) and

national-historical (Holford) moments thus rely on notions of racial purity, with attendant exclusions of “lesser” elements, racially defined.

The affirmation of Anglo-Saxonism in *Aristopia* bears further comparison with Bell’s study of *The Idea of Greater Britain*. Aristopia’s most significant territorial gain—and its most obvious departure from our history—is the absorption of Canada into Greater America. From a British perspective in the latter nineteenth century, the loss of Canada was a pressing concern for advocates of a greater, federal Britain.²² The United States had defied historical precedent by forming a nation-state that was territorially extensive and non-despotic; in this new era of international relations, Bell claims, small powers seemed fated to be small players in the modern world.²³ The category that needed to be asserted in order to maintain an idea of a cooperative federation of states with Britain as first among Atlantic equals was race.

J. R. Seeley describes America’s ideal conditions for the best political system in geographical and racial terms in *The Expansion of England* (1883), where he admires the United States for having been formed in “a temperate zone, by Teutonic liberty and Protestant religion.”²⁴ Similarly, Charles Dilke argues in 1868 that the United States are part of a shared Anglo-Saxon culture, and that the political virtues of America derive from the “vigour of the English race.”²⁵ John Clifford even claims in *God’s Greater Britain* (1899) that the United States and Britain (and presumably Canada) constituted a single nation.²⁶ The Anglicization of Lincoln after the Civil War is another example of English protestations of common racial identity with America.²⁷ *Aristopia* can be read as a rebuke to these protestations of blood kinship, by imagining a Greater America made up of citizens from the breadth of European stock rather than too exclusively English descent.

The racism of *Aristopia*, however, requires the maintenance of the northern-European character of the renewed republic, posing a problematic need for a formula that would both avow and disavow the relationship between America and Anglo-Saxon Europe. Alternate history answered this need: by returning to Europe in its political earliness and greatest potentiality (the early modern period), Holford selects the most productive mercantile and political elements of European identity, liberates them from their “courtly” restraints, and transplants them to the New World where they could be properly fulfilled. The technique recalls Harold Bloom’s “revisionary ratio” of *clinamen*, described in *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (1973):

I take the word from Lucretius, where it means a “swerve” of the atoms so as to make change possible in the universe. [...] This appears as a corrective movement in [the author’s] own poem, which implies that the precursor poem went accurately up to a certain point, but then should have swerved, precisely in the direction that the new poem moves.²⁸

Alternate history is a model that can describe both poetic and national strategies of liberation from those of one’s precursors. In the case of *Aristopia*, however, there is an anxious awareness that America has failed to fulfil its *own* republican potential; as explained already, Holford laments the *convergence* of American and European political culture and makes temporal adjustments to renew the republic and American distinctiveness.

“PERENNIAL REBIRTH”: NEW AND OLD FRONTIERS

The frontier is a familiar trope in American literature and culture. It is nonetheless worth returning to in order to show how its exhaustion was a crucial figure for considering American “lateness” in alternate-historical thought in nineteenth-century America. Frederick Jackson Turner’s frontier thesis (first presented in 1893) is the most celebrated theorization of the political function of wilderness, and his account draws on the historian’s eclectic disciplinary interests: cartography, geology, history, and political theory. The persistence and influence of Turner’s thesis is due in part to his tremendous influence in academic institutions: at the time of his death, Allan B. Bogue estimates that 60% of university history programs in America were based on Turner’s template.²⁹ The essay’s relevance to contemporary and earlier works, such as the ones analyzed in this chapter, indicates the flexibility of the concept.

“The Significance of the Frontier in American History” begins with the observation in a census report of 1890 that American wilderness was now so broken up by development that the frontier could no longer be said to exist. The essay retrospectively equates the formation of identity with the resources that could be found in this extinct *terra incognita*, thus articulating historical *potential* with current political identity. Henry Nash Smith spells out this relationship by characterizing the “unoccupied domain” in America as “a magic fountain of youth in which America continually bathed and was rejuvenated.”³⁰ The facility for renewal lends itself to alternate-historical articulation, and describes the

pattern of *Aristopia*, as well as the lost-world fictions discussed in Chap. 5. History is rewound to the point when this space was still available, and the addition of a fabulous goldmine at the heart of Holford's novel allows for this resource to be translated into hard currency. Kerwin Lee Klein describes the historical dimension of the frontier when he elaborates Frederick Jackson Turner's description:

The meeting point of savagery and civilization suggested not just an intersection of Euro-American and Native American societies but the convergence of two cleanly differentiated chunks of history, a face-to-face encounter, in the present, of the past and future of humankind.³¹

By making the frontier the site of encounter between western modernity and "savage" indigenous culture, and also with the past, this space acquired a comparable function to the discovery of lost worlds and the reflections on social development occasioned there; Turner even describes this meeting point as "a recurrence of the process of evolution in each western area reached in the process of expansion."³²

Turner makes it clear that the value of the frontier did not transform everyone who approached it; as in the grail quest, simply journeying into the wilderness required also purity of heart. For French colonists, it was little more than a trading line, and for English settlers it represented the extent of arable land. But as the native population withdrew beyond it and the European pressed upon its edge, the American identity-in-formation inherited the trails of the "Indian," which widened into roads, turnpikes, and eventually railroads. The transformation was not only forwards along the axis of modernity; crucially, the frontier was in Turner's description a place for regression as part for the formation of the new American identity:

The frontier is the line of most rapid and effective Americanization. The wilderness masters the colonist. It finds him a European in dress, industries, tools, modes of travel, and thought. It takes him from the railroad car and puts him in the birch canoe. It strips off the garments of civilization and arrays him in the hunting shirt and the moccasin. It puts him in the log cabin of the Cherokee and Iroquois and runs an Indian palisade around him. Before long he has gone to planting Indian corn and plowing with a sharp stick, he shouts the war cry and takes the scalp in orthodox Indian fashion. In short, at the frontier the environment is at first too strong for the man. He must accept the conditions which it furnishes,

or perish, and so he fits himself into the Indian clearings and follows the Indian trails. Little by little he transforms the wilderness, but the outcome is not the old Europe, not simply the development of Germanic germs, any more than the first phenomenon was a case of reversion to the Germanic mark. The fact is, that here is a new product that is American.³³

In this often-cited passage, the pioneer is said to travel backwards along the line of civilization, in terms of clothing, shelter, food production, and the struggle for existence. The regressive encounter was thus also a summation of anthropological narratives of human development as well as political theory. This original energy of the savage recalls the bloodlust of Challenger's party in *The Lost World*, or the battle dress of Sir Henry Curtis in *King Solomon's Mines*. After mingling with the original forces of the new continent, the resulting character was not a reconstruction of an over-refined European, but nor did it set the colonist irrevocably backwards into savagery—in that sense the civilized man was “too strong” for the environment. Instead, a third identity appeared, which Klein describes as “the higher synthesis of American democracy, a complex spirit holding the traces of all its previous moments together into an evolving matrix.”³⁴

According to this model Americanization was a process of cultural generation that could not be sustained indefinitely. The essay was written in response to the frontier's disappearance; Turner's conclusion is not that American political identity is completed, but the ending of its “first period.” In *Aristopia*, however, Holford *does* attempt to render a fully realized republic, not by taking the frontier as the productive site of alternative formations, but by giving the pioneers the material wealth and foresight to achieve Aristopia in time—at the point when their natural resources run out, the republic has been built.

In order to do so, Holford returns to the time of the first settlers, but also mounts a critique of the frontier myth in what seems to be a deliberate response to Turner's thesis. Of the frontier, he writes: “Although such a life produced a race of men with some prominent virtues, among them great courage and self-reliance, yet it tended to a mode of living not much above barbarism” (AR 142). He even writes that “no improvement could be expected from her frontiersmen living in semi-barbarism, and little from her aristocratic and indolent planters” (AR 212). The frontier thus becomes, in Holford's novel, an alternate-historical site in a double sense: he adopts Turner's argument for it as

the historical setting for the production of identity, but departs from this account through the replacement of healthy primitivism by material wealth as a resource for renewal: gold, which could be converted, through a transatlantic circuit, into an improved version of European civilization. In the early stages of the republic (named Mortonia at this point), Ralph “laboured to keep his people out of [frontier life] and in a state of civilization even superior to that of Europe” (AR 142). In the novel, the frontiersmen are supplanted as the true representatives of America; in the War of Independence with the British, the Aristopians fight against the frontiersmen of Virginia, and although they cannot match them as “skirmishers, sharpshooters, and bushrangers,” or even in their fighting passion, they overcome the wild Virginians through their “calm, enduring courage, [...] steady discipline, willing subordination to their commanders and skill in tactics in the line of battle” (AR 227). Despite what Holford sees as the deplorably European character of modern America, *Aristopia* does not reinvest America with a pristine western frontier, and instead takes its materials for change from the Old World in its youth. It should thus be read as a historical imaginary that gives Europe a privileged formative influence in its presentation of the ideal American republic; it “corrects” the historical development of both into a transatlantic synthesis.

Randolph S. Bourne’s essay of 1916, “Trans-National America,” also reworked the frontier myth and is comparable to Holford’s careful emphasis on the importance of welcoming Europe’s persecuted groups into Aristopia. The article was published in the *Atlantic Monthly* when American engagement in World War One was under review, and Bourne wrote and campaigned against intervention. In the essay, he contrasts cosmopolitan America with the “weary old nationalism” of Europe, characterized by “belligerent, exclusive, inbreeding, the poison of which we are witnessing now.”³⁵ America could stand apart, the essay argues, as “the world federation in miniature,” and achieve an improved ideal of harmonious, heterogeneous, identity.³⁶

The article’s reconciliation of an isolationist tone with ideals of cultural pluralism begins by criticizing the “melting pot” of America as really the imposition that immigrants conform to the cultural values of a ruling class whose character is essentially English. Their patrician disdain for the “hyphenates” (Dutch-Americans for instance) is old-world arrogance.³⁷ The reliance on the figure of the melting pot, in common currency since Israel Zangwill’s play of that title of 1908, can obscure the

affinities between his argument and the frontier thesis. Melting a culture down into its most basic material and then recasting it into a new form applied a metaphor of heat to describe a similar transformation to the one in Turner's thesis. Bourne even seems to have been responding to particular sentences in Turner's essay. The structure of the latter's claim that "Moving westward, the frontier became more and more American" is reworked into a statement of the precise opposite; in Bourne's words:

The tendency [...] has been for the national clusters of immigrants, as they became more and more firmly established and more and more prosperous, to cultivate more and more assiduously the literatures and cultural traditions of their homelands. Assimilation, in other words, instead of washing out the memories of Europe, made them more and more intensely real. *Just as these clusters became more objectively American, did they become more and more German or Scandinavian or Bohemian or Polish.*³⁸

Like Holford, Bourne sees America as having succumbed to the harmful influence of its parent culture which grips the country in a kind of stasis: "Our whole legal and political system remained more English than the English, petrified and unchanging."³⁹ The "distinctive qualities" of its new citizens are "washed out into a tasteless, colorless fluid of uniformity."⁴⁰ The Old World presses upon the New in a way similar to Marx's description, in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, of the past as "the tradition of all dead generations [which] weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living." Turner's frontier is one figure for resisting this bad historical dream, and Bourne also wishes to put together a vision of a future that might escape from the dead hand of the past.

The idea of a tolerant, federated political nation may seem opposed to the wild self-discoveries of the frontier, especially after presenting such a divergent account of the effects of life at the edge of civilization; as we can see, Bourne argues that it has had the very opposite effect by hardening expatriate identities. Of the first immigrant communities who were compelled to live in this borderland space, he writes: "Tightly concentrated on a hostile frontier, they were conservative beyond belief. Their pioneer daring was reserved for the objective conquest of material resources."⁴¹ It is surprising, then, to come across the claim in the essay that "only as that pioneer note is sounded can we really speak of the American culture."⁴² The argument involves an implied displacement of the frontier, from a notional place—the western edge of exploration—to

the temporal axis of politico-cultural development. America is said to require immigrants to ensure the fluidity and ongoing self-formation of national identity, just as the frontier was a site where self-formation was never a finished, constituted process. The advantage of such a presentation was that it liberated America from the “lateness” that was descending upon it like a moth-eaten mantle. Instead, the ongoing resource of immigration is a stock that could be perpetually renewed:

In the light of our changing ideal of Americanism, we must perpetrate the paradox that our American cultural tradition lies in the future. It will be what we all together make out of this incomparable opportunity of attacking the future with a new key.⁴³

A century later, these sentiments might appear uncomfortably naïve in their attempt to set history on its proper path with high-minded abstractions. But the longing to correct the direction of events through the (modified) reintroduction of a political principle is the desire which produces historical imaginaries; it is also a pattern that is discernible in some of the best-known expressions of political values in America. One example is Emma Lazarus’s sonnet of 1883, “The New Colossus,” which describes America’s role as the protector of refugees from Europe with memorable concision when she ventriloquizes for the Statue of Liberty the words that were inscribed on its pedestal in 1886.

In her personification of the statue, America’s political monument scorns the “storied pomp” of “ancient lands” and pledges to stand as a beacon of shelter rather than a manifestation of empire. In the poem’s most quoted lines, it speaks: “Give me your poor, / Your huddled masses yearning to be free, / The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.”⁴⁴ Lazarus’s own forebears were displaced Sephardic-Ashkenazi Jews, and the wave of pogroms in Russia in the 1880s created conditions for increased emigration. But events such as the Haymarket affair in 1886 and fears of foreign influence meant that at the time of the statue’s construction, the United States were becoming less inclined to extend an unqualified welcome. As Max Cavitch argues, this was a period of “federal moves to abandon the de facto principle of openness to immigration.”⁴⁵ Lazarus, Holford, and Bourne were describing an ideal of cosmopolitan hospitality, which, now that the country’s “early” resource of space was exhausted, had to reach into the past and future for its tropes of political regeneration.

Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, delivered in 1863 during the protracted conflict of the Civil War, also predicated its political aspirations on a careful fashioning of the past. The "Bliss Copy" (Lincoln's final autograph manuscript of the Address) begins: "Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal." The speech—in its original context and in hindsight—is pregnant with a sense of historical contingency and possible worlds. It asserts the availability of historical political ideals on which the "new nation" is founded in the midst of a war which has set the country against itself.⁴⁶ The Address adapted an earlier template, Pericles's funeral oration during the Peloponnesian War as recorded by Thucydides, which also defended principles of democracy on the *postbellum* battlefield. Garry Wills describes the difference between Lincoln's short address and the previous speaker's (Edward Everett's), which was much more concerned with the classical parallels. In contrast:

Lincoln's Address created a political prose for America, to rank with the vernacular excellence of Twain. Lincoln does not, like Everett, archaize—but neither did Pericles. Pericles rejected the notion that his predecessors had done more than his own generation. It was the challenge of *the moment* that both Pericles and Lincoln addressed.⁴⁷

This conjunction of past and present harnesses all the reinventive power of alternate history, but without, apparently, making any historical alteration. Lincoln's argument compresses Holford's by nominating the moment of America's political origins (87 years before), and then bringing the founding principle ("the proposition that all men are created equal") into contemporary political thought. The alignment is not a change to the historical record (the defining act of alternate history), but is better described as an act of forgetting, laying an episode of the recent past to rest. The ten sentences of the address, while advocating remembrance (the world "can never forget what they did here"), is nonetheless an act of deliberate elision of recent divisions, and implies the existence of a single nation through the appeal to common ancestors ("our fathers").

In his address on receiving the Illinois Republican Party's nomination for senatorship in 1858, Lincoln described the Civil War and other long-running sectional conflicts in the United States as a "house

divided against itself,” and Paul Giles notes that this language tended to “shore up nation-building agendas” by posing these internecine struggles as anticipatory of “a parallel state of unity and indivisible liberty.”⁴⁸ National identity, therefore, was dialectical in its alternation between anxieties of division and dreams of unity, which involved the nomination of historical precedents from the range of European models, including classical ones, and the anticipation of a unified future as a synthesis of the potentialities from the past.

Benedict Anderson cites such political discourse after the Civil War as an example of Ernest Renan’s articulation of nationalism and forgetting; nation-building after the Civil War involved a historical revision of the past which *misremembered* the war as one fought between brothers rather than one between rival states.⁴⁹ Lincoln’s speech illustrates this pattern by posing the recent past as an aberration to be put to rest. Anderson refers to Ernest Renan’s claim made in a lecture of 1882: “Forgetting, I would even go so far as to say historical error, is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation, which is why progress in historical studies often constitutes a danger for nationality.”⁵⁰ Forgetting employed for political ends, and pushed even to the point of (deliberate) historical error, describes the point of entry into the realm of alternate history. In the texts discussed in this section—Holford’s alternate history novel, Bourne’s essay, Lazarus’s poem, and Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address—forgetfulness of the recent past and present made the expression of political ideals possible.

In American alternate history—explicit and implicit—the pursuit of earliness required multiple layers of amnesia. First, Europe had to be forgotten, a process which Thoreau compared in 1851 to a westerly oceanic crossing: “The Atlantic is a Lethean stream, in our passage over which we have had an opportunity to forget the Old World and its institutions.”⁵¹ Mary Antin also sets out the importance of forgetting in the process of integration into American society: “The Wandering Jew in me seeks forgetfulness. I am not afraid to live on and on, if only I do not have to remember too much.” Similarly, though with reservations discussed below, Nathaniel Hawthorne prescribes sleep in the bosom of the native environment as the only method for “getting rid of old delusions and avoiding new ones; of regenerating our race, so that it might in due time awake as an infant out of dewy slumber.”⁵² Turner’s frontier thesis and the process of increasing Americanization through encounters with the retreating frontier is only a more systematic account of this strategic

aphasia. The second object of forgetfulness for Holford, Bourne, and Lazarus was contemporary America, specifically its reinstatement of the values of the Old World as oligarchies, Anglo-Saxonism, and the closure of its eastern border. The third was the rights of the original inhabitants of America, on whose lands these myths of virgin soil were first inscribed, then reinscribed as a historical imaginary.

TRANSATLANTIC “CORRESPONDENCE”

Nathaniel Hawthorne’s story of “P.’s Correspondence” is often cited as an early work of alternate history.⁵³ It was first published in *United States Magazine and Democratic Review* in April 1845 and was included in *Mosses from an Old Manse* (1846). The story takes the form of a letter, by an author who writes from a suspiciously institutional “white-washed little chamber” in London of 1845. Over this window, “for some inscrutable reason of taste or convenience, my landlord had placed a row of iron bars.”⁵⁴ The correspondent who introduces the letter believes that “my unfortunate friend P. has lost the thread of his life by the interposition of long intervals of partially disordered reason. The past and present are jumbled together in his mind in a manner often productive of curious results.”⁵⁵ The altered sense of past and present produces an alternative account of the fate of European and American writers. Byron (who died in our timeline in 1824) is now enormously fat and reconciled with his wife after a conversion to Methodism; Shelley, likewise, has returned to the Church, and P. is a great admirer of the poet’s recent work. He records a chance meeting with Napoleon, who now lives in London and is attended by a guard to protect him from pickpockets; P. regrets “the decline, the overthrow, the utter degradation of his powers.”⁵⁶ The hallucinatory nature of P.’s account of letters makes the story’s inclusion as an alternate history questionable, though the appearance of an alternate Napoleon is noteworthy, as is the focus on transatlantic cultures of writing and history.

The “disordered” nature of P.’s thoughts on European and American literature reflects descriptions in current scholarship of the asymmetrical and distorted views from either side of the Atlantic—in accounts that complicate Weisbuch’s earlier distinction between “earliness” and “lateness.” Wil Verhoeven describes “the discursive tussle between the New and Old World” as, at times, “little more than looking at each other across the Atlantic through the wrong end of the telescope.”⁵⁷ Meredith

L. McGill emphasizes a temporal disordering to the relationship, and describes American alternate history in the nineteenth century as one of “interrupted legacies, delays in recognition, revisionary back-projections, alternative chronologies, and complex feedback loops.”⁵⁸ “P.’s Correspondence” conforms to these patterns of wilful misrecognition, which, like the other texts considered in this chapter, refashioned literary relations between New and Old Worlds. American alternate history in this period was a format that American writers turned to, implicitly or explicitly, in order to establish a distinctive cultural identity; the authors of *The American Idea of England, 1776–1840* describe American writing in this period as “a self-realisation phase,” characterized by an engagement with the *idea* of England.⁵⁹ Alternate history was one such technique for examining questions of self-realization.

P. seems to be a Europhile whose ignorance of American literature makes him a satirical representative of British disdain for American letters; he asks: “What is there new in the literary way on your side of the water?”⁶⁰ But a second object of criticism may be the American advocates of idealism as the foundation for a distinctive literature and culture. P. reflects:

More and more I recognize that we dwell in a world of shadows; and, for my part, I hold it hardly worth the trouble to attempt a distinction between shadows in the mind and shadows out of it. If there is any difference, the former are rather the more substantial.⁶¹

This defence of past speculation—the “shadows of the mind”—is a familiar gambit of alternate-historical works, whether expressed as a valid defence of historical imaginaries (as it was by Holford), or ironically (as it was by Louis Geoffroy and here by Hawthorne). It might also be taken as a reflection on the idealism of Emerson and Thoreau, whose assertions of the primacy of the mind-nature nexus over matter and history are, I find, consistent with the practice in America of imagining history to have been otherwise.

In the “Idealism” section of his celebrated essay on “Nature” (1836), Ralph Waldo Emerson distinguishes between the “poet” and the “sensual man”; the consequence of the distinction seems to be a liberation (for the former) from a determinate relation with immediate material conditions. “The sensual man conforms thoughts to things; the poet conforms things to his thoughts. The one esteems nature as rooted and

fast; the other, as fluid, and impresses his being thereon.”⁶² His claim in his essay on “Fate,” that “Nature is made to conspire with spirit to emancipate us,” clarifies the point, which is entirely consistent with the ideals of the frontier in Turner’s thesis. I find in these avowals of independence from material surroundings an implied freedom to select one’s own ancestors from history—conceived as a rich resource of *ideas*.

“Nature” opens with a meditation on the dead hand of the historical past, and I take the first sentence to be anxious at the prospect of what I have referred to in this chapter as American lateness. “Our age is retrospective,” Emerson begins, before declaring that nature can correct this morbid preoccupation with one’s dead ancestors:

Embosomed for a season in nature, whose floods of life stream around and through us, and invite us, by the powers they supply, to action proportioned to nature, why should we grope among the dry bones of the past, or put the living generation into masquerade out of its faded wardrobe?⁶³

Emerson cites various methods for estranging oneself from the concrete immediacy of one’s surroundings; they include seeing a familiar shoreline from a ship or a balloon, viewing one’s native scene via a *camera obscura*, or just turning a portrait of a well-known face upside down. By all these means, the world is made into a “spectacle,” something arbitrary in comparison with the mind-nature relationship, which is itself “stable.”⁶⁴ The culmination of the essay is a hymn to the creative power of spirit and its creative energies: “Every spirit builds itself a house, and beyond its house a world, and beyond its world a heaven,” and this has been true for Adam and Caesar just as it is for the cobbler, pioneer, or scholar.⁶⁵ The application of these creative powers to the historical past—as a field of disaggregated ideas—is most clear in the section on “Beauty,” where he describes the synthesis of world history that can be achieved, given a day of health in communion with nature:

I will make the pomp of emperors ridiculous. The dawn is my Assyria; the sunset and moonrise my Paphos, and unimaginable realms of faerie; broad noon shall be my England of the senses and the understanding; the night shall be my Germany of mystic philosophy and dreams.⁶⁶

This celebration of Nature is consistent with Holford’s construction of an ideal republic out of the materials left by history: its ideas (for

instance in More's *Utopia*) and various national energies. Most importantly, for both, the capacity to select from a collective memory bank of ideals and practices depends on the pristine resource of a natural environment which can transform immediate, linear history into a fluid field of ideas, which is also treated as a natural resource. The affinity of a wilderness and the American alternate-historical imagination recurs even more clearly in Henry David Thoreau's essay, "Walking" (1851).

The universalism of Thoreau's endorsement of "wildness" as the location for the "preservation of the world" is discordant with the nationalism of his cardinal marks: "Eastward I go only by force; but westward I go free," which is then specified as the choice between Oregon and Europe.⁶⁷ Paul Giles notes the "structural duplicity" of this technique in Thoreau's appeals to nature, whereby the politically charged "Oregon question" is sublimated into a meditation on nature and spirit. Giles continues that Thoreau "is aware that the efficacy of his nationalist cause depends not upon pleading his political case but upon appearing to transcend it"; he does so by characterizing an English claim to the land as "merely distant and legalistic," whereas American claims are embedded in the soil.⁶⁸ The (presumably English) author of an anonymous review article of 1848 makes a comparable complaint when (s)he describes Emerson as "so great a republican that he would make nature a republican too."⁶⁹

I would add that this appeal to transcendence is achieved in Thoreau's essay through the processes of forgetting and/or misremembering that I have already associated with American alternate history. Thoreau links eastward consciousness with the "realization" of history and a relationship with "the works of art and literature," but westward movement is described "as into the future, with a spirit of enterprise and adventure"; immersion in wilderness is therefore opposed to historical knowledge.⁷⁰ The next figure in the passage is the comparison of the transatlantic (westward) journey to America with crossing the Lethe (the river of forgetfulness), referred to already. It seems to be topographically inconsistent, then, for Thoreau to say that "I walk out into Nature such as the old prophets and poets, Menu, Moses, Homer, Chaucer, walked in."⁷¹ Having identified eastward consciousness as future-oriented (and with its back to the past), he claims to discover the canonical figures of European religion and literature in the wilderness. Proximity with wild nature provides the possibility of drawing upon the European past, but selectively and with harmful influences removed. Similarly, Thoreau enjoys likening

the fossil remains of earlier species to dragons and griffins, admitting that “I am partial to these wild fancies, which transcend the order of time and development.”⁷² This desire to extract items from their linear histories in order to “restore” to them a mythic quality is the same procedure of re-enchantment, and is consistent with Holford’s explicitly alternate-historical method of imagining Aristopia.

The pattern in common is the transvaluation of ideas from European cultural values that is possible when they are imaginatively relocated to the western frontier, American wilderness, or a previous phase in American history when discovery was ongoing. In *Walden; or, Life in the Woods*, Thoreau asserts the value of “a primitive and frontier life (though in the midst of an outward civilization)” for its capacity to teach the individual “what are the gross necessities of life.”⁷³ When the process of learning involves stripping modern life back to its fundamentals, then this learning becomes a combination of remembering an earlier past and learning to *forget* more recent history—the conditions of historical imaginaries.

In the “Nature” essay, Thoreau plays on the shared etymology of *saunter* and *sainted*, and takes the corrupted values of knightly chivalry back to an earlier, purer meaning of pilgrimage. One who *saunters* is practising the activity of “idle people who roved about the country, in the Middle Ages, and asked charity, under pretence of going *à la Sainte Terre*.”⁷⁴ The practice of pilgrimage is presented as corrupt in its first, European, iteration, but authentic in its later, American form, where it means, in Thoreau’s words, “to go forth and reconquer *this* Holy Land from the hands of the infidels.”⁷⁵ The value of knight-errantry is thus rescued and realized properly in what Thoreau calls the “Walker Errant,” who is “a sort of fourth estate, outside of Church and State and People.”⁷⁶ Those “courtly muses” are not simply opposed to the value of earliness, but are transfigured through an act of alternate-historical imagination, which presents the old as debased, and the later as pristine and original. In *A Connecticut Yankee*, we find that the *initial* presentation of relations between the Old World and the New takes precisely this line: Hank represents that spirit of enterprise and adventure, in contrast to the activities of knight-errantry (or “grailing” in Twain’s acid locution), which are shown to be idle and foolish even in their first recorded instance.

A particularly clear example of this inversion of original and copy comes in the passage where Thoreau describes a visit to a panorama of

the Rhine Valley. "It was like a dream of the Middle Ages," he notes, which brings to mind Twain's unreal confection of medieval England from the tales of Thomas Malory.⁷⁷ When Thoreau thinks of the Mississippi, he is able to pose it as a *precursor*, "a Rhine stream of a different kind," for "the foundations of castles were yet to be laid, and the famous bridges were yet to be thrown over the river." The conclusion to the passage not only asserts that "*this was the heroic age itself*," but suggests that America would not be conscious of the fact, and that the proper chivalric quality of modesty can be achieved as if for the first time, on different social terms, as the "hero" is redefined as "the simplest and obscurest of men."⁷⁸

To return to Hawthorne, his use of alternate history is arguably a satire on the literary-historical distortions that come with the excessive forgetfulness of idealism. The story of "P.'s Correspondence" provides little suggestion that his compatriots are the intended targets, but the title essay of the collection, "The Old Manse," does. The Manse (minister's dwelling) in the village of Concord that he describes, concretizes a much more linear historical identity than the free-ranging selections of Emerson and Thoreau when they are "embosomed" in nature; the Manse is "worthy to have been one of the time-honoured parsonages of England," and its Puritan library is said to be typical of other "accumulations of, for the most part, stupendous impertinence."⁷⁹ It was in this study, Hawthorne reports, with its "grim prints of Puritan ministers," that Emerson wrote "Nature." This location, the site of a battle between British and Americans in the War of Independence, was also where he "used to watch the Assyrian dawn and the Paphian sunset and moonrise, from the summit of our eastern hill."⁸⁰ In other words, Hawthorne reinscribes historical and geographical specificity onto the house that was built by Emerson's grandfather, William—a concrete genealogy that Emerson elides in his essay.⁸¹

The account of the journey upriver with Ellery Channing (in the boat he bought from Thoreau⁸²) also moves from enchantment with nature to a reconciliation with historical lineage. At first (referencing Thoreau), Hawthorne describes a sudden sense of intimacy with a historically remote native American who "three hundred years ago could hardly have seen a wilder gentleness displayed upon its banks and reflected in his bosom than we did."⁸³ His idyllic description of the river trip seems to endorse Emersonian optimism: he refers to conversation as "gushing [...] like the babble of a fountain," and refers to "the freedom which

we thereby won from all custom and conventionalism and fettering influences of man on man.”⁸⁴

On sighting the Manse, however, he reports “how gently did its grey, homely aspect rebuke the speculative extravagances of the day! It had grown sacred in connection with the artificial life against which we inveighed; it had been a home for many years in spite of all; it was my home too.”⁸⁵ Robert Milder notes this pattern in Hawthorne’s writing, whereby “the act of emancipation quickly becomes one of voluntary reincorporation,” and identifies in Hawthorne a conflict between “the naturalist’s prospect of a life of the unfettered senses and the skeptic’s fear [...] that nature, however alluring, meant moral anarchy and spiritual oblivion.”⁸⁶ I see Hawthorne’s resistance to an unconditional spiritual commitment to nature as consistent with the condition of P. in the story that was published in the same collection. P. engages, the author speculates, in “a partly wilful and partly involuntary sport of the imagination,” and perceives “spectral scenes” of an alternate world of letters. Hawthorne dwells on the power of the writer’s mental creations in his short story “The Devil in Manuscript” (1835), in which the narrator expresses horror at the “shadows which I summoned to my bedside at midnight,” which persist into daytime thoughts: “they would not depart when I bade them; the gray dawn came, and found me wide awake and feverish, the victim of my own enchantments.”⁸⁷ I link the suspicion of the world of fancy and imagination to a scepticism towards nature as the wellspring of creative identity, and from this critique of transcendentalism arises an attitude towards alternate history that is very different from the historical rearrangements of Emerson and Thoreau, who take immersion in “wildness” as the pivot on which relations between America and Europe can be reimagined. In their hands, nature is the source of the American alternate-historical imagination, as well as the resource that enables American political and cultural exceptionalism. Hawthorne’s qualified distrust of “unfettered” freedom and the river Concord can serve as a frame for interpreting his use of alternate history as a satirical mode for demonstrating the dangers of an imagination untethered from historical realities.

A CONNECTICUT YANKEE: TWAIN’S HISTORICAL ROMANCE

In an enthusiastic essay on Mark Twain’s contribution to science fiction, William J. Collins makes a surprising claim:

Consciously or not, then, by placing Hank Morgan in a sixth-century England that in our collective history is a fabrication concocted by a series of romance writers six centuries after the fact, Mark Twain has invented not only, for all practical purposes, the time travel tale but also the alternate history.⁸⁸

While it is clearly not true that *A Connecticut Yankee* (1889) was the first alternate (or “alternative”) history, Collins’s attention to the literary-historical nature of the Arthurian setting is accurate and points to the most complicated aspect of the novel: the multiplication of worlds that was implied by the non-genealogical relation of notional past and nineteenth-century present. Twain’s novel pre-dates the more linear time-travelling of Wells’s novella, *The Time Machine*, which was published a year later. Another early observer of Twain’s precocious talent for science fiction notes its “anachronism, time-travel paradoxes, alternate worlds of the present created by a shift in the past—issues which have been examined and elaborated only since *Connecticut Yankee* was written.”⁸⁹ Collins’s and Philip Klass’s observations were made in 1986 and 1974 respectively, so what remains to be said now about Twain and alternate history? On one hand, these statements indicate a point where this study of alternate histories and nineteenth-century literature can hand over to existing scholarship, having extended backward the history of the category from this supposed point of origin. But there is also more to be said; these early incorporations of Twain into a science fiction tradition refer principally to the paradoxes of time travel and the conceits that Twain pre-empted. The chapters of this book have located clusters of alternate-historical thought in relation to disciplinary and thematic contexts in order to make claims about the history of the format in fiction. In the remainder of this chapter, I situate Twain’s novel (and a novella and short story) in relation to his contempt for and disillusion with features of the modern world he saw around him—which neither the myths of the renewing wilderness nor of technological progress could assuage. The restaging of the literary-mythic past was intended to demonstrate—as the earliest works of alternate history did in response to Napoleon—the incoherence of such historical fantasies.

Twain’s novel is presented as the written account of Hank Morgan, whom the narrator has met while on a visit to Warwick Castle in the modern day. During a tour, the guide draws attention to a bullet hole in a suit of armour on display, an “ancient hauberk, date of the sixth

century, time of King Arthur and the Round Table.” He suggests that this was caused later, “perhaps maliciously by Cromwell’s soldiers” (CY 33, 34). From the outset, spurious history is connected to cycles of violence, and resolved through the conceit of time travel, for Hank’s tale explains how he himself shot the knight in this distant, mythical past. Story-telling and modern weaponry were also connected in the context of the novel’s publication in 1889, when Twain was compromised by his disastrous investment in a new type-setting machine, manufactured in the Colt arms factory. According to Justin Kaplan, “the Yankee and the Machine were twinned in his mind.”⁹⁰ Hank is Head Superintendent in the Colt factory, where he “learned to make everything—guns, revolvers, cannon, boilers, engines, all sorts of labour-saving machinery,” and with this knowledge is able to create modern instruments of warfare in the sixth century. The word “everything” suggests his belief in the universality of modern industrial production, though already the reader might pause at the possible secondary meaning of “labour-saving,” and likewise at the gun-manufacturer’s boast that “I could make anything a body wanted” (CY 36).

Time travel into the mythic past in this story is brought about by a blow to the head, fittingly inflicted by a worker nicknamed “Hercules,” and takes Hank to a notional English countryside near the court of Camelot. He comes to, seated under an oak tree, and is immediately confronted with a hostile knight, “fresh out of a picture-book,” whose description is a conflation of modern-day bathos and the material of historical fantasy (Fig. 6.1). His helmet is “the shape of a nail-keg with slits in it,” he is loaded with shield, sword and spear, and dressed in “gorgeous red and green silk trappings that hung down all around him like a bed-quilt, nearly to the ground” (CY 37). In the first of many historical inconsistencies, which are typical of the novel’s anachronistic setting, the chain-mail hauberk (more historically appropriate to the sixth century) has been replaced by “old-time iron armour” that is more germane to a storybook version of King Arthur, and presumably Hank’s expectations.

The knight takes him, as prisoner, to Camelot through a “soft, reposeful, summer landscape, as lovely as a dream,” and when he arrives at court, the knights seem to be drawn from images of old England memorialized in museum displays of armour: they are “rigid as statues.” Prior to being locked up in the dungeons, Hank listens to exaggerated tales of chivalric feats and notices that “mainly the Round Table talk was monologues” (CY 52, 54). A work of literature has become

Fig. 6.1 Daniel Carter Beard. “I saw he meant Business,” in Mark Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court* (Charles L. Webster & Company, 1889), frontispiece

a stage-set for a dream. “Suppose,” Hank reflects in a telling comparison, “Sir Walter, instead of putting the conversations into the mouths of his characters, had allowed the characters to speak for themselves?” (CY 62). The past that Hank has arrived at is a confabulation of heritage clichés and literature, in which the knights ventriloquize episodes from Sir Thomas Malory’s *Le Morte Darthur* (1485). Hank is thrown into a dungeon, and when awoken by Clarence is surprised to find that the “dream” is still in place. “Prithee, what dream?” Clarence asks. “What dream? Why, the dream that I’m in Arthur’s court—a person who never existed; and that I’m talking to you, who are nothing but a work of the imagination” (CY 63). Hank may recognize the confected nature of his surroundings, but he does attempt to make the dream a profitable one in which he can combine the acquisition of personal wealth and celebrity with the introduction of political progress. He wishes, as in Louis Geoffroy’s novel discussed in Chap. 2, to use the dream of a fabulated past “to touch the desired goal, to attain possible greatness” (NA ii). He

is, in other words, the political emissary of the future, in the alternate history derived from Malory in which he lands.

He rapidly resolves either to dominate the asylum he has found himself in, or, if this really is the year 528, to “boss the whole country inside of three months; for I judged I would have the start of the best-educated man in the kingdom by a matter of thirteen hundred years and upwards” (CY 50). Hank presents history as an upwards trajectory towards the present, from superstition to modern pragmatism and know-how, though it is the fraudulent exploitation of superstition that allows him to escape from prison and establish himself as a sorcerer with greater powers than Merlin. Fortuitously, the date and time of his execution is the exact moment of a solar eclipse (a fact he somehow recalls), which he is able to present as evidence of magical powers. By doing so, he reprises the reported exploitation by Columbus of a lunar eclipse to intimidate the indigenous population of Jamaica in 1504, and lifts the scene from H. Rider Haggard’s novel, *King Solomon’s Mines* (1885). In a joke that hinges on time travel’s distortion of lineage and precedence, Hank excuses his appropriation of this storyline by explaining: “it wouldn’t be any plagiarism, either, because I should get it in nearly a thousand years ahead of those parties” (CY 66–67). Whereas Holford invests Ralph Morton with prescient modernity, Hank is made an opportunist who looks to benefit himself by exploiting ignorance and his knowledge of the future, though it should be added that Twain’s novel suggests that the two are not necessarily opposed.

Hank starts to modernize the country by introducing institutions that are either pragmatic (a telephone network), military (an academy), industrial (tool and weapons factories), or oddly unnecessary (court newspapers, a patent office, and a stock exchange). As in *Aristopia*, this infrastructure of the modern state is strategically kept secret from outsiders, though this strategy seems intended to benefit himself rather than any grand historical cause. Hank’s systems are shown to be terrifyingly effective by the end of the novel, but his fantasy of self-advancement and his conquest of the past are qualified by absurd traversals of the modern and medieval, which give the narrative the instability of a dream. The first newspaper is a garbled mixture of the amateur production, bad typography, petty commercialism, and hackneyed phrases of a gossip column—all of which turn the England of Malory’s presentation into a sort of journalistic pastiche: “The Demoiselle Irene Clewlap, of

South Astolat, is visiting her uncle, the popular host of the Cattlemen's Boarding Ho&se, Liver Lane, this city" (CY 248). Twain's presentation removes the mask of chivalry to reveal the squalor and violence of the medieval past, with its arbitrary punishments and general poverty; but Hank's efforts at modernization introduce the tawdriest elements of modern culture rather than progress. Other entertaining anachronisms are the deployment of knights-errant to carry sandwich-board advertisements and the formation of a baseball league—played in full armour.

Despite his protestations at the benighted condition of this sixth-century England, for instance the practice of slavery and more general feudal oppression, Hank is prepared to resort to violence when his attempts at modernization are met with resistance. While travelling with King Arthur, he identifies some artisanal professionals they meet as the class that possesses the seeds of future capitalism. In a chapter titled "Sixth-Century Political Economy," Hank, a wheelwright, a mason, and a blacksmith discuss "matters near and dear to the hearts of our sort—business and wages, of course" (CY 298). Despite this initial affirmation of common identity, they soon fall out over the subject of free trade. Hank relishes the prospect of correcting Dowley's mistaken belief in protectionism in markedly violent terms: "I rigged up my pile-driver, and allowed myself fifteen minutes to drive him into the earth—drive him *all* in—drive him in till not even the curve of his skull should show above ground" (CY 299). Hank does prevail, eventually, through a point of legal sophistry, but this only serves to antagonize the villagers, leading to a brawl, and later, along with Arthur, being forced into slavery on another point of law: their inability to a negative—that they are not escaped slaves. Hank observes that "this same infernal law had existed in our own South in my own time, more than thirteen hundred years later." His dismal conclusion is that "we are all fools. Born so, no doubt" (CY 320, 321). He and Arthur are rescued by Launcelot and "five hundred mailed and belted knights on bicycles" (CY 350), in another absurd convergence of past and present.

The combination of nineteenth-century pragmatism with warfare is more sinister, as much for the calculation of the cost-efficiency of death as its execution. When Hank returns from France to find the kingdom in a state of civil war and his own interests threatened, he is briefed by Clarence on the fortification of his base with electric fences. Hank's outrage at Clarence's wiring of the fences is bizarre and disturbing. He protests:

It's too expensive—uses up force for nothing. You don't want any ground-connection except the one through the negative brush. The other end of every wire must be brought back into the cave and fastened independently, and *without* any ground connection. Now, then, observe the economy of it. A cavalry charge hurls itself against the fence; you are using no power, you are spending no money, for there is only one ground connection till those horses come against the wire; the moment they touch it they form a connection with the negative brush *through the ground*, and drop dead. Don't you see? (CY 387–88)

The rewired electric fence does its job with all the cost efficiency that Hank could wish for, and the remainder of the knights of England are finished off by releasing a surge of water into the trenches and with thirteen Gatling guns which “vomit death” upon the few survivors. At the end of the battle, 25,000 are dead. Clarence's postscript finishes the narrative with an account of how Hank and his army of young boys are confined in their cave and fall victim to the poisonous air from the corpses. Merlin enters the camp disguised as an old woman and performs his only act of real magic by putting Hank to sleep for thirteen centuries—the visitor who has signally failed to introduce any social improvement to the sixth century.

Hank's project of improving the society of sixth-century England has much in common with Ralph Morton's founding Aristopia, despite the divergence in outcomes. Both characters are blessed with a significant advantage over their peers, which is the basis for their authority: Ralph has gold, and Hank has knowledge of material technology. Both are prescient. Ralph instigates a decisive intervention in the War of Independence, which confirms the American Republic with minimal loss of life; Hank hopes to introduce universal suffrage after Arthur's death and bring about “a rounded and complete governmental revolution without bloodshed. The result would be a republic” (CY 366). The crucial difference between the novels is that whereas Holford's novel follows a straightforwardly “corrective” pattern of alternate history, *A Connecticut Yankee* is more circuitous: the past returned to is a fantasized one which corresponds in this regard to what Twain disliked about his contemporary South; when brutal, Anglo-Saxon society encounters the violently progressive forces of technology, the outcome is the destruction of both sides, and the collapse into sleep or a coma curtails the *alteration* of the alternate history, of which the only surviving traces

are the bullet hole and the yellowed parchment of the Yankee's written account, under which are visible "traces of a penmanship which was older and dimmer still" (CY 38). Despite the good reasons for linking the novel to the genres of science fiction and alternate history, Twain's story concerns the *failures* of technology and Hank's inability to create an alternate version of history to the one we know.

TIME TRAVEL AND PHILOLOGY

Although the time-travelling that initiates the novel would seem to place it within a very causative type of alternate history (where the mechanics of time travel "actually" enable the return to and alteration of the past), the indications that the Arthurian setting is confected from the modern materials of retrospection belie this. The persistence of the bullet hole—fired across time—complicates the historical basis of the narrative still further; it serves as the sole piece of evidence to substantiate Hank's story, and thus the novel's games of time travel and anachronism revolve around the continuity of technologies of violence. It is a desolate line that subtends the lesson of Hank's disastrous attempts to modernize the sixth century into a democracy, and the more discreet meditations on philology present in the novel's articulation of archaisms and neologisms. Twain's paradoxes of linguistic change provide the best means to understand the non-linear nature of time travel in the novel, and are at the centre of its use of alternate history.

Twain's own hostility to the faux-archaism and spurious chivalry that he recognized in modern-day America's southern states is well known. To his mind, the "courtly muses" that other, earlier, American writers denounced as the defunct inheritance to European culture were part of modern-day American identity. Justin Kaplan, in his introduction to *A Connecticut Yankee*, refers to Twain's criticisms of the culture of the American South, which had appropriated the faux-medievalism of Walter Scott, and transmuted it into the veneer of respectability that masked a society that perpetuated slavery, illiteracy, and reactionary tradition. The novel, he writes, "explored a number of savage parallels between Arthur's England and the American South."⁹¹ Matthew Giancarlo describes Twain's hostility towards medieval revivalism, which was directed equally at the archaism of Walter Scott's historical romances and the absorption of these literary fabrications in the modern American South: "the sham chivalry, courtly nonsense, reverence for rank and

caste, bogus distinctions, pseudo-historical romanticism, sentimentality, and with all of it, the plain bad writing of the antebellum South.”⁹² Twain even went to so far as to claim that “Sir Walter had so large a hand in making Southern character, as it existed before the war, that it is in great measure responsible for the war.”⁹³ However improbable or improvable the claim (which could only be checked via time travel and replaying history without Scott’s novels), Twain was asserting that works of literature shaped history, and were not simply reflective of it. Circuits of influence were formed, he suggested, through acts of reading and misreading, which produced social and political consequences.

In her study of Twain’s reading of *Le Morte Darthur*, Betsy Bowden explains how Malory’s text was itself an adaptation of earlier stories to express contemporary, fifteenth-century concerns; an earlier generation of writers in the thirteenth century “had applied a Christian veneer to twelfth-century verse romances, which re-told earlier tales, and so on backward into unrecoverable oral tradition.”⁹⁴ Her article does not reconstruct this literary history, but rather the stages of Twain’s reception of Malory’s work, which was itself subject to change over time. Twain bought the complete text in 1884 but had read it earlier, condensed and modernized by Sidney Lanier, as *The Boy’s King Arthur* (1880).⁹⁵ The interruption to the composition of *A Connecticut Yankee*, between 1887 and 1888, corresponded to a number of difficulties in Twain’s life: illness, family troubles, and difficulties with the type-setting machine he had invested in. It was also the time, she suggests, that he read the complete version of Malory’s courtly history. After resuming, from chapter 21, “the novel’s plot and tone collapse,” which Bowden explains as his adjustment to the venality of the unexpurgated version, in which “King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table lie and cheat and steal and make solemn vows intending to break them. [...] They casually commit rape and adultery, betray friends and feudal lords, seek blood revenge contrary to law, shrug aside the slaughter of women, children, kin, innocent bystanders, and each other.”⁹⁶ This discovery of these crimes and the amorality of Arthur’s court in Malory’s full text, Bowden argues, instigated the descent into gloom that is so striking in Twain’s novel; in a not entirely persuasive reading (for reasons I discuss below), she suggests that Twain “anticipated finding in Malory what he saw lacking in nineteenth-century remnants of the class system: honor, faith, charity, selfless virtue, deserved nobility, essential human values that transcend time and place. He found nothing of the sort.”⁹⁷

In some of Twain's earlier writings, and in keeping with the belief in the power of the frontier, he proposed the invigoration of unexplored territory as an antidote to too much civilization. In the famous ending to *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), Huck "lights out for the territory" to avoid Aunt Sally's attempts "to adopt me and sivilize me," though Huck's sentiment is more likely reflective of the young Twain rather than the 58-year-old author.⁹⁸ Joseph L. Coulombe compares Twain, at least in his early to mid-career, to writers who "rejected the supposedly effeminate East in favor of a western land of rugged masculinity," and associates Twain specifically with an ethos of independence and self-formation at the frontier, where "every man acted as his own boss; instant wealth was a blast of dynamite away; and justice swung in the side-holster."⁹⁹ The terms of the description are well suited to a reading of *A Connecticut Yankee*: Hank chooses to go by the name of "The Boss" in Camelot, produces dynamite in order to secure his political career (by blowing up Merlin's Tower), and massacres a rout of knights with machine guns of his own manufacture. The failure of these titles and techniques of the frontiersman to produce any kind of political "new deal" (a term apparently coined in the novel), which Hank manages to confuse with his own career interests, must be read as Twain's recognition of the failure of the ethos of progressive, free-wheeling American entrepreneurialism.

By the time of writing *A Connecticut Yankee at King Arthur's Court*, then, Twain was prepared to criticize both American earliness and lateness. If we take the Yankee to be representative of the former, and the bogus English courtliness of the American South of the latter, then the novel's title is a compression of the dualistic transatlantic history that characterized American cultural identity—the same articulation of new and old also present in Holford's *Romance-History of the New World*. One part of Twain's coordination of past and present was to assert an alternative philological descent of the English language by establishing the primacy of German in the Anglo-Saxon pedigree celebrated in the South. Matthew Giancarlo notices the description of "the Demoiselle Alisande la Carteloise"—soon shortened by Hank to "Sandy"—as "the Mother of the German Language" (CY 204). "Why German?" Giancarlo asks.¹⁰⁰ His elaborate answer is that the scientific study of language could debunk false assumptions about history; in other words, it functioned as a critique of received knowledge. It was also, importantly, a science that revealed the character of its own authority: "as a science

exposing the fundamental limits of our historical knowledge, but one whose own dreams are also exposed.”¹⁰¹ By nominating German as the source of Anglo-Saxon culture, Twain was undermining the solidity of American celebrations of this lineage (we should remember that Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s racism was accompanied with her assertions of her own descent from William the Conqueror). The German language became a model for how modern users of English should recognize their own relation with their mother tongue, for German was described “a living dead language, a philological museum-piece, at once dated and awkward and slippery, labile, or flowing.”¹⁰² The archaisms and neologisms that meet in *A Connecticut Yankee* (in the dictions of Malory and the Yankee, respectively), correspond to the complex historicity of language that Twain drew upon in order to resist narratives of linear historical development.

Seth Lerer provides an interesting case study of how Twain’s vocabulary in the novel exemplified the passage of language-in-information into institutional language of the dictionary, itself a sort of museum of language. The first complete edition of the *New English Dictionary*, published between 1884 and 1928 (later the *Oxford English Dictionary*) included 27 citations from *A Connecticut Yankee*, such as the unusual usage of *sheep* (“sheep-witted earl”), *solidify* (“the tower episode solidified my power”), and *unreasoning* (“it was the stubborn unreasoning of the time”). Lerer argues that the project was both industrial, technological, and implicitly colonial by referring to the terms with which the dictionary was described by its primary editor, James A. H. Murray, in his Presidential Address to the Philological Society in 1884. He and other lexicographers were (in an apt metaphor for this discussion) said to be “pioneers, pushing our way experimentally through an untrodden forest, where no white man’s axe has been before us.”¹⁰³ Lerer’s claim is that the dictionary implied a particular reading of Twain’s novel, by establishing the political *meanings* of Twain’s usages; their satirical, deliberately neologistic meanings became inscribed into the corpus of the English language.

Twain was aware of these very processes of language formation. As well as taking contemporary linguistic usage back to the (spurious) sixth century, his Yankee also implants latter-day diction into the past as a paradoxical and anti-philological explanation of their modern usage. One example of this is, unsurprisingly, the result of Hank’s attempts to modernize Arthurian England. He has already persuaded Arthur to introduce

a fiat currency (in contrast to Ralph Morton's adherence to the gold standard), and dispenses the new equivalent currency via a "miller-gun," a device modelled, unsurprisingly again, on a firearm. "'Paying the shot' soon came to be a common phrase. Yes, and I knew it would still be passing men's lips, away down in the nineteenth century, yet none would suspect how and when it originated" (CY 310). This poses a causal-loop paradox: what would be the *original* source of a word that a time traveller takes back in time if that precocious usage is also the basis for its latter-day existence? This etymological chicken-and-egg problem is one specific instance of the more general anachronistic fun that is the basis for much of the novel's humour: the knights playing baseball, the storied Round Table converted into a stock-exchange committee forum, and the description of modern-day language to describe the vain knights as "iron dudes of the Round Table" (CY 119). It also repeats, in a different register, Benjamin Disraeli's technique of retrospectively inserting elements of style and history that interfered with established genealogies of literature and politics. (Disraeli's novel, *The Wondrous Tale of Alroy* (1833), is discussed in Chap. 2.) The untimely linguistic formations in *A Connecticut Yankee* depend on the conceit of time travel, but they also meditate on the limits of philology—which were analogous, Giancarlo writes, to the limits of historical knowledge.

Giancarlo extends the argument about language by taking the linguistic time-travelling to be consistent with Hank's introduction of violent technologies into the past. Twain "back-projects and unifies a foundational continent-clearing weapon, the gun, with the similarly explosive practice of a high-velocity capitalist economy."¹⁰⁴ The practice of alternate history then, for Twain, becomes an inherently violent form of imagination; the outcome is very different from the formation of an ideal republic by Holford—but *Aristopia* does have this quality in common with *A Connecticut Yankee*: in both novels, the introduction of a precocious capitalism is realized (or attempted) in order to accelerate historical development. The catastrophic outcome in the earlier novel means that it constitutes a critique of the historical desires that were delineated in the latter.

But Twain's novel is not solely a counsel of despair, for its circuitous paradoxes of time travel constituted an alternative model of the experience of history to the insistent progressivism that leaves Hank stuck in the dream-time of the historical imaginary. Twain the humourist, however dark the novel, seems to have wanted to celebrate the eccentric

spirals of historical knowledge that the alternate-historical form was especially suited to representing. It is in this vein that he celebrated Berlin as “The Chicago of Europe” in an essay published in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* in April 1892, as a city that permitted the fluid interaction of old and new:

The bulk of the Berlin of today has about it no suggestion of a former period. The site it stands on has traditions and a history, but the city itself has no traditions and no history. It is a new city; the newest I have ever seen. Chicago would seem venerable beside it.¹⁰⁵

Twain admired the formation of “a free city” whose daily affairs “are not meddled with by the state; they are managed by its own citizens, and after methods of their own devising.”¹⁰⁶ The account of such successful liberal modernity may be the biased enthusiasm of a visitor, but there seems to be a more careful point in the culmination of the piece, in an encounter with the eminent historian Theodor Mommsen. Mommsen’s German identity could, like Berlin, also have an American inflection: his face, writes Twain, is “Emersonian.” Mommsen had formerly been to Twain “a giant myth, a world-shadowing specter, not a reality.” The specific achievement that Twain reels in the face of (“comparable to a man’s suddenly coming upon Mont Blanc”) is his intellectual capacity for historical knowledge—figured here as cosmic space: “Here he was, carrying the Roman world and all the Caesars in his hospitable skull, and doing it as easily as that other luminous vault, the skull of the universe, carries the Milky Way and the constellations.”¹⁰⁷

One of the striking features in this passage is the conflation of a model of history with the diffusion of knowledge of the past into a spatial metaphor; the successful modernity of Berlin is tied, in the essay, to a metaphysics of past and present not instrumentalized according to the desire for self- or national advancement. Intimated instead is an ethical reception of history, which is “hospitable” in its accommodation of the past, and replaces direction and design with the distribution of stars in the cosmos. The passage brings to light the science-fictional aspect of Twain’s use of alternate history. Time is bent, sent into circuits of causality, which the time traveller Hank is unequipped to comprehend with his doctrines of progress and machine production. His aims are belied by the cycles of violence of which he is an unwitting agent.

A *Connecticut Yankee* provides a historical object lesson in two senses: it dramatizes the vain desire to correct the social problems of the late nineteenth century by sending backwards in time the very values that were causative of the present—only to produce similar results in the past. It also provides an unexpected solace through unexpected transformations. Hank marries Sandy, that “mother of the German language,” and has a child with her, whom he names “Hello-Central” in one of the novel’s most elliptical linguistic puzzles. When Sandy/Alisande offers her tale to Hank (in the formula of seeking knightly assistance), her description of a “damsel” requiring rescue triggers an involuntary memory in Hank, carrying him

back over the wide seas of memory to a vague dim time, a happy time, so many, many centuries hence, when I used to wake in the soft summer mornings, out of sweet dreams of her, and say, “Hello, Central!” just to hear her dear voice come melting back to me with a “Hello, Hank!” that was music of the spheres to my enchanted ear. (CY 142–43)

The word *Hello* is distinctively modern, for it was the neologism that Thomas Edison introduced as an appropriate salutation for answering the telephone (Alexander Graham Bell preferred the more nautical *Ahoy*).¹⁰⁸ Hank seems to be remembering a younger (though historically much later) love affair based on the tone and texture of voice across networks of technology. Later, Sandy hears Hank call out the name “Hello-Central!” in his sleep and recognizes it as a term of endearment (which for Hank, it is), and chooses it as a name for their newborn daughter. She is, unsurprisingly, disappointed to hear the name used as official salutation across Hank’s telephone network, but he reassures her with a typically anachronistic explanation:

I told her I had given order for it: that henceforth and for ever the telephone must always be invoked with that reverent formality, in perpetual honour and remembrance of my lost friend and her perpetual namesake. This was not true. But it answered. (CY 373)

This false etymology meets very human needs; as Giancarlo notes, it “‘answers,’ both as a greeting and as a fake way to speak of, and to, the past.”¹⁰⁹ In the sixth century, as in Twain’s own, the apparatus of telephone, cable, and exchange preceded the words that were chosen to

facilitate communication, and which acquired affect and significance within private networks of tele-romance. Hank's explanation is therefore a fudge, a white lie that turns the chronology of things upside down and—briefly, tentatively—sets love and intimacy above the machinery of modern life.

As earlier readers of the novel have observed, the constraints of “actual” history meant that Twain had to resolve Hank's attempts at accelerating history by re-wrapping them into Malory's account and the received version of technological history: the knights fall into civil war, as in the romance narrative, and no trace remains of Hank's instruments of capitalist war and peace.¹¹⁰ One change has been brought about by the alternate history, however. Hank, on the point of death, is in a state of delirium; the Old World and the New have become continuous and interchangeable; lines of historical descent are untethered from any secure chronology or narratives of progress. “Yes,” he cries out, “I seemed to have flown back out of that age into this of ours, and then forward to it again, and was set down, a stranger and forlorn, in that strange England, with an abyss of thirteen centuries yawning between me and you!” (CY 409). This travel through time and the unravelling of his dreams of precocious progress has brought about a change in the meaning of words: “Hello-Central” is no longer the formula necessary for the operating exchange, but his daughter's name that he calls out in his final moments of confusion: “Was that the child? ... Hello-Central! ... She doesn't answer” (CY 409). The protagonists in both *A Connecticut Yankee* and *Aristopia* set out to refashion the relation of the Old World and the New, but Hank's sole significant transformation has been to the meaning of words.

MULTIPLE WORLDS

Mark Twain's alternate-historical imagination differed from Holford's in that its paradoxes of descent and influence deliberately blocked the uncomplicated utopian revision of the past that produced the ideal republic of *Aristopia*. By reflecting on the incoherent wish to take modern knowledge and inventions back to a naïve past that would gratefully submit to them, Twain demonstrated an interest in the idea of multiple worlds. This tendency underscores his significance for the history of science fiction and which clarifies his affinities with other exponents of alternate-historical thought whose hypotheses also encouraged the

contemplation of scenarios in which history could produce divergent outcomes. One story that illustrates these connections is Twain's last finished novel, *The Mysterious Stranger* (1916). The narrator is a mirror opposite of Hank, for "Theodor" is a young boy who is entirely content in the benighted conditions in late-sixteenth-century Catholic Austria. He describes the town of Eseldorf (which translates as Donkeyville) as "a paradise for us boys. We were not overmuch pestered with schooling. Mainly we were trained to be good Catholics; to revere the Virgin, the Church and the saints above everything. Beyond these matters we were not required to know much; and, in fact, not allowed to."¹¹¹ Twain's location of the fictional town "in the middle of that sleep, being in the middle of Austria" is significant, according to the Mark Twain Encyclopaedia, for it set the "satirical fable" in "the heart of Europe, both spatially and temporally."¹¹² The disruptive influence in this novel—the "mysterious stranger" of the title—is Satan, whose heretical tendency is to reflect on questions of determinism, fate and the possibility of infinite worlds.

One of his first miracles is to build a miniature castle for Theodor and his friends, which is perfect in every detail, down to the animated servants and soldiers who prepare food and man the battlements. When two of the tiny workmen begin to fight, he reaches down and casually crushes them, after which he "threw them away, [and] wiped the red from his fingers on his handkerchief."¹¹³ This is a very similar act of destruction to the intervention by the narrator-spirit in Edward Everett Hale's story, "Hands Off" (discussed in Chap. 4), in which there are parallel worlds whose inhabitants are beings without souls, serving only as subjects of experiments by immortal spirits concerning fate. The boys are horrified at this and later acts of violence, but Satan continues talking "just as if nothing had happened, telling about his travels, and the interesting things he had seen in the big worlds of our solar system and of other solar systems far away in the remoteness of space, and about the customs of the immortals that inhabit them."¹¹⁴ Satan is an exponent of alternate-historical thought and the near-infinite possible worlds that attend every action and decision. When he instructs the boys on the subject of determinism, his explanation is perfectly consistent with the version of eternity and infinity described by Auguste Blanqui (see Chap. 4). Satan explains:

If at any time—say in boyhood—Columbus had skipped the triflingest little link in the chain of acts projected and made inevitable by his first childish act, it would have changed his whole subsequent life, and he would have become a priest and died obscure in an Italian village, and America would not have been discovered for two centuries afterward. I know this. To skip any one of the billion acts in Columbus's chain would have wholly changed his life. I have examined his billion of possible careers, and in only one of them occurs the discovery of America. You people do not suspect that all of your acts are of one size and importance, but it is true; to snatch at an appointed fly is as big with fate for you as is any other appointed act.¹¹⁵

It may be a curious choice of example to persuade a young boy in rural Austria, but for Twain's intended readers (implicitly addressed as "you people"), this is presumably meant to function as an illustration of historical contingency. It is the overriding but unknowable significance of luck and circumstance that Tolstoy wielded as an instrument to puncture Napoleon's and his supporters' disastrous belief in historical destiny. Columbus's "billion possible careers" also recalls Blanqui's doctrine of the near-infinite combinations of possible history. Twain, as we have seen in this chapter, was not prepared to subscribe to the doctrine of America's special historical destiny, nor to use alternate history as the means to realign that destiny with its proper course.

Another story which explored the dramatic possibilities of multiple worlds is "From the *London Times* of 1904." In this science-fictional tale, published in *The Century Magazine* in November 1898, the narrator's account begins in Vienna, in March 1898, with a meeting between Szczepanik (an inventor), Mr. K. (an investor), and Lieutenant Clayton from the United States, who has been called to Europe on account of the danger of invasion by Spain. A number of details are immediately disorienting: the narrator promises to give an account "down to the culmination of yesterday—or to-day; call it which you like."¹¹⁶ The ambiguous dating seems to become clear as the report will presumably appear in print only a day after being filed. Less explicable is the threat from Spain: no such danger of invasion had a historical referent in Twain's present-day of 1898. Clayton and Szczepanik disagree angrily over the usefulness of the latter's invention, the "teleelectroscope," whose function is not yet revealed to the reader. The dispute leads to a physical confrontation, as it does again at three subsequent meetings of the two men,

whose animosity is unexplained. When Szczepanik's body—or rather, “a corpse”—is discovered in the cellar under Clayton's house, the latter is condemned to death, and in his final days of life is granted the favour of the Chief Warden's apartment and access to the teleelectroscope, a machine which we now learn provides real-time remote views of any location on Earth.

The connection was made with the international telephone-station, and day by day, night by night, he called up one corner of the globe after another, and looked upon its life, and studied its strange sights, and spoke with its people, and realized that by grace of this marvelous instrument he was almost as free as the birds of the air, although a prisoner under locks and bars.¹¹⁷

Before his execution, Clayton's final use of the machine is to look at Peking, where a lavish ceremony is underway in sunshine that contrasts with the sleet of the American winter night of the execution. He asks what the occasion for the procession is, and history takes a strange turn when it appears that what is being shown is the coronation of the Czar of Russia as China's new emperor; we should remember that these events are confirmed as the recent past by the journalist who acts as the editor and narrator of the material; Clayton is not delusional in the manner of Hawthorne's letter-writing “P.”

Clayton is momentarily baffled, as Twain's readers presumably were also by this new world order. He is led to the scaffold and the narrator puts his eye to the viewing device so that he may avoid watching his friend's death, only to catch sight of the missing Szczepanik in Peking. He calls out to the executioner and Clayton's life is spared. Twain has not finished tormenting his readers, however, with paradoxes of time and space. There is a law, in this topsy-turvy world, a kind of reverse double jeopardy, which does not permit Clayton to be pardoned for the murder of a man whom he has not killed even though the victim is still alive—more accurately, he has been *seen* alive. The precedent for this intransigence of sentencing is said to be the Dreyfus case and Clayton's death sentence is renewed and carried out. The story ends with the unveiling of an alternate history in which the United States is no longer sovereign of its lands: “All America is vocal with scorn of ‘French justice,’ and of the malignant little soldiers who invented it and inflicted it upon the other Christian lands.”¹¹⁸ We realize that the entire tale has been told

within an alternate-historical setting, in which the globe has been parcelled up by three great empires of the Old World: Spain, Russia, and France.

But whose body was found in the cellar, and what is the significance of this unexplained corpse in the story? Twain's explanatory footnote provides a clue. "M. T." tells us when the name first appears that *Szczepanik* should be "pronounced (approximately) *Zepannik*."¹¹⁹ This is not quite correct: Twain's emphasis on the "*pan*" does correspond to the stress pattern in Polish words and names, but the first consonant cluster would not be pronounced as *z*, but as the phonemes *ʃ* and *č* run together (the *Sh* of "She" with the *Ch* of "Church"). It may be that Twain simply made a mistake, though the attention he paid to philology in *A Connecticut Yankee* suggests otherwise. If he did not, then the setting of the story seems to be a variant geopolitical, linguistic world, in which Spain and America are on the point of war and with a linguistic history in which the difficulties of speaking and writing the Polish language (for western Europeans) have been simplified. Also (and I risk over-analyzing here), the word *pan* is Polish for *man* and one of the two Polish words for *if* is *czy* (pronounced identically to the second syllable in *Szczepanik* in the Polish of *our* world). In the story, *Szczepanik* is the if-man who in one world attends the coronation of the Russian Czar as the new emperor of China, and in another is found dead in a cellar. Neither world corresponds to our own. The fabulous technology of the teleelectroscope, like the non-fictional spectroscope of astronomical science, provoked the imagination and visualization of other worlds with variant historical outcomes. Devices for communication, for instance the telephone exchange in *A Connecticut Yankee*, like language itself, multiplied worlds. The mysterious fate of *Szczepanik* raised the possibility of a multiverse, as did Hank's travels following a blow to the head. Alternate history, in Twain's hands, recapitulated many of the themes of the category across the nineteenth century, and became a format with a long post-history in twentieth-century science fiction.

NOTES

1. Walt Whitman, *The Complete Poems*, ed. Francis Murphy, Penguin Classics (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 44.
2. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The American Scholar," in *Nature and Selected Essays*, ed. Larzer Ziff, Penguin Classics (New York: Penguin, 2003),

- 104; Wilde's epigram is quoted in Robert Weisbuch, *Atlantic Double-Cross: American Literature and British Influence in the Age of Emerson* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 122.
3. Weisbuch, *Atlantic Double-Cross*, 109.
4. Weisbuch, *Atlantic Double-Cross*, 137.
5. Duncan Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain: Empire and the Future of World Order* (Princeton University Press, 2011).
6. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Rev. ed (London: Verso, 2006), 191; Jennifer Greeson, "American Enlightenment: The New World and Modern Western Thought," *American Literary History* 25, no. 1 (2013): 6–17.
7. Emerson, "The American Scholar," 84.
8. Henry David Thoreau, "Walking," in *Excursions* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1863), 182, <http://archive.org/details/excursionhenry00thorrich>.
9. Justin Kaplan, "Introduction," in *A Connecticut Yankee at King Arthur's Court*, Penguin Classics (London: Penguin Books, 1986), 12.
10. Charles Felton Pidgin, *The Climax: Or, What Might Have Been; a Romance of the Great Republic* (Boston, Mass.: C.M. Clark Publishing Company, 1902).
11. William J. Collins, "Hank Morgan in the Garden of Forking Paths: A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court as Alternative History," *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 32, no. 1 (1986): 109, doi:[10.1353/mfs.0.1263](https://doi.org/10.1353/mfs.0.1263).
12. Charles Felton Pidgin (unoriginally) quotes the same couplet at the start of his alternate history novel, *The Climax*.
13. Betsy Bowden, "Gloom and Doom in Mark Twain's *Connecticut Yankee*, from Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur*," *Studies in American Fiction* 28, no. 2 (2000): 194, doi:[10.1353/saf.2000.0000](https://doi.org/10.1353/saf.2000.0000).
14. Anon., "ART. IX.-1. Notions of the Americans," ed. Francis Jeffrey, *Edinburgh Review* 49, no. 98 (June 1829): 473–474.
15. Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain*, 209.
16. Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain*, 223.
17. For a discussion of the significance of the native population in American political identity, see Weisbuch, *Atlantic Double-Cross*, 126–132; Kate Flint, *The Transatlantic Indian, 1776–1930* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), Chap. 5.
18. The reviewer of *Aristopia* in *Arena Magazine* (whose publisher also published *Aristopia*) described the novel as speculative fiction and compared it favourably in comparison with "the majority of Utopian romances"

- that had been published in recent years (W. B. Harte, "[Review:] Aristopia," *Arena Magazine* 13, no. July (1895): 339.
19. Thomas More, *Utopia*, trans. Paul Turner, Reissued with new and updated editorial material, Penguin Classics (London; New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 67.
 20. Quoted in Sohui Lee, "[O]ur American Kinsman': British Nationalism and Book Reviews of American Literature in the 1840s," *Romanticism on the Net*, no. 38 (n.d.): para. 13.
 21. Alys Eve Weinbaum, "Writing Feminist Genealogy: Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Racial Nationalism, and the Reproduction of Maternalist Feminism," *Feminist Studies* 27, no. 2 (2001): 276, doi:[10.2307/3178758](https://doi.org/10.2307/3178758).
 22. Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain*, 241.
 23. Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain*, 247.
 24. Seeley, quoted in Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain*, 236.
 25. Dilke, quoted in Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain*, 255.
 26. Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain*, 256.
 27. Sam Edwards, "'From Here Lincoln Came': Anglo-Saxonism, the Special Relationship, and the Anglicisation of Abraham Lincoln, C. 1860–1970," *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 11, no. 1 (2013): 22–46, doi:[10.1080/14794012.2012.754199](https://doi.org/10.1080/14794012.2012.754199).
 28. Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (London; New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 14.
 29. Allan G. Bogue, "Frederick Jackson Turner Reconsidered," *History Teacher* 27, no. 2 (1994): 195, doi:[10.2307/494720](https://doi.org/10.2307/494720).
 30. Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth*, Twentieth anniversary reissue (Harvard University Press, 1970), 254.
 31. Kerwin Lee Klein, *Frontiers of Historical Imagination: Narrating the European Conquest of Native America, 1890–1990* (University of California Press, 1999), 15.
 32. Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," in *Frontier and Section: Selected Essays of Frederick Jackson Turner*, Classics in History Series (Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice-Hall, 1961), 38.
 33. Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," 39.
 34. Klein, *Frontiers of Historical Imagination*, 79.
 35. Randolph S. Bourne, "Trans-National America," *Atlantic Monthly*, July 1916, 91.
 36. Bourne, "Trans-National America," 93.
 37. *Ibid.*, 89.
 38. Bourne, "Trans-National America," 86 (emphasis added).

39. Bourne, "Trans-National America," 87.
40. Bourne, "Trans-National America," 90.
41. Bourne, "Trans-National America," 87.
42. Bourne, "Trans-National America," 92.
43. Bourne, "Trans-National America," 92.
44. Emma Lazarus, *Selected Poems and Other Writings*, ed. Gregory Eiselein (Peterborough, Ont: Broadview Press, 2002), 233.
45. Max Cavitch, "Emma Lazarus and the Golem of Liberty," in *The Traffic in Poems: Nineteenth-Century Poetry and Transatlantic Exchange*, ed. Meredith L. McGill (New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 114.
46. The speech was given after a battle which was taken as a pivotal one by counterfactual historians and writers of alternate histories who took it as their point of departure. Just three of the many which imagine the battle to have been won by the Confederate army include: "If Lee Had Not Won the Battle of Gettysburg" (Winston Churchill, 1931), *Bring the Jubilee* (Ward Moore, 1953), and *Gettysburg: A Novel of the Civil War*.
47. Garry Wills, *Lincoln at Gettysburg* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 52.
48. Paul Giles, *Atlantic Republic: The American Tradition in English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 72.
49. See Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 195–203.
50. Ernest Renan, "What Is a Nation?," in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1990), 11.
51. Thoreau, "Walking," 177.
52. Nathaniel Hawthorne, "The Old Manse," in *Mosses from an Old Manse* (London: Frederick Warne & Co., 1884), 28.
53. See Hilary P. Dannenberg, *Coincidence and Counterfactuality: Plotting Time and Space in Narrative Fiction* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 200; "Uchronia: Oldest Alternate Histories," accessed November 1, 2009, <http://www.uchronia.net/bib.cgi/oldest.html>.
54. Nathaniel Hawthorne, "P.'s Correspondence," in *Mosses from an Old Manse* (London: Frederick Warne & Co., 1884), 322.
55. Hawthorne, "P.'s Correspondence," 321.
56. Hawthorne, "P.'s Correspondence," 329.
57. Wil Verhoeven, "Beyond the American Empire: Charles Brockden Brown and the Making of a New Global Economic Order," in *Transatlantic Literary Exchanges, 1790–1870*, ed. Kevin Hutchings and Julia M. Wright (Ashgate, 2011), 176.

58. Meredith L. McGill, "Introduction," in *The Traffic in Poems: Nineteenth-Century Poetry and Transatlantic Exchange*, ed. Meredith L. McGill (New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 5.
59. Jennifer Clark, Kevin Hutchings, and Julia M. Wright, *The American Idea of England, 1776–1840: Transatlantic Writing*, Ashgate Series in Nineteenth-Century Transatlantic Studies (Farnham, GB: Routledge, 2016), 170.
60. Hawthorne, "P.'s Correspondence," 326.
61. Hawthorne, "P.'s Correspondence," 326.
62. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Nature," in *Nature and Selected Essays*, ed. Larzer Ziff, Penguin Classics (New York: Penguin, 2003), 65.
63. Emerson, "Nature," 35.
64. Emerson, "Nature," 65.
65. Emerson, "Nature," 81.
66. Emerson, "Nature," 43.
67. Thoreau, "Walking," 185, 176–177.
68. Giles, *Atlantic Republic*, 87.
69. R. L., "Literature of the United States," ed. John Chapman, *Westminster and Foreign Quarterly Review* 49, no. 2 (July 1848): 339.
70. Thoreau, "Walking," 177.
71. Thoreau, "Walking," 172.
72. Thoreau, "Walking," 197.
73. Henry David Thoreau, *Walden; Or, Life in the Woods* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1854), 14, <https://archive.org/stream/waldenorlifeinwo1854thor#page/n3/mode/2up>.
74. Thoreau, "Walking," 161.
75. Thoreau, "Walking," 162 (emphasis added).
76. Thoreau, "Walking," 163.
77. Thoreau, "Walking," 184.
78. Thoreau, "Walking," 185 (original emphasis).
79. Hawthorne, "The Old Manse," 5, 19.
80. Hawthorne, "The Old Manse," 7.
81. John S. Martin, "The Other Side of Concord: A Critique of Emerson in Hawthorne's 'The Old Manse,'" *New England Quarterly* 58, no. 3 (1985): 454, doi:[10.2307/365042](https://doi.org/10.2307/365042).
82. Robert Milder, "Hawthorne's Winter Dreams," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 54, no. 2 (1999): 166, doi:[10.2307/2903099](https://doi.org/10.2307/2903099).
83. Hawthorne, "The Old Manse," 23.
84. Hawthorne, "The Old Manse," 24.
85. Hawthorne, "The Old Manse," 25.
86. Milder, "Hawthorne's Winter Dreams," 170.
87. Quoted in Milder, "Hawthorne's Winter Dreams," 172.

88. Collins, "Hank Morgan in the Garden of Forking Paths," 112.
89. Philip Klass, "An Innocent in Time: Mark Twain in King Arthur's Court," *Extrapolation*, no. 16 (1974): 28.
90. Kaplan, "Introduction," 12.
91. Kaplan, "Introduction," 18.
92. Matthew Giancarlo, "Mark Twain and the Critique of Philology," *ELH* 78, no. 1 (2011): 225, doi:[10.1353/elh.2011.0006](https://doi.org/10.1353/elh.2011.0006).
93. From *Life on the Mississippi* (1883), quoted in: Giancarlo, "Mark Twain and the Critique of Philology," 225.
94. Bowden, "Gloom and Doom in Mark Twain's *Connecticut Yankee*," 180.
95. Bowden, "Gloom and Doom in Mark Twain's *Connecticut Yankee*," 181.
96. Bowden, "Gloom and Doom in Mark Twain's *Connecticut Yankee*," 180.
97. Bowden, "Gloom and Doom in Mark Twain's *Connecticut Yankee*," 196–197.
98. Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, ed. Peter Coveney, repr, Penguin Classics (London: Penguin Books, 1985), 369.
99. Joseph L. Coulombe, *Mark Twain and the American West*, Mark Twain and His Circle Series (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2003), 6.
100. Giancarlo, "Mark Twain and the Critique of Philology," 213.
101. Giancarlo, "Mark Twain and the Critique of Philology," 215.
102. Giancarlo, "Mark Twain and the Critique of Philology," 216.
103. Seth Lerer, "Hello, Dude: Philology, Performance, and Technology in Twain's *Connecticut Yankee*," *American Literary History* 15, no. 3 (2003): 495–496.
104. Giancarlo, "Mark Twain and the Critique of Philology," 231.
105. Mark Twain, "The Chicago of Europe," in *The Chicago of Europe, and Other Tales of Foreign Travel*, ed. Peter Kaminsky (New York: Union Square Press, 2009), 191.
106. Twain, "The Chicago of Europe," 203.
107. Twain, "The Chicago of Europe," 202.
108. Lerer, "Hello, Dude," 475.
109. Giancarlo, "Mark Twain and the Critique of Philology," 233.
110. Jan Pinkerton, "Backward Time Travel, Alternate Universes, and Edward Everett Hale," *Extrapolation*, no. 20 (1979): 169; Bowden, "Gloom and Doom in Mark Twain's *Connecticut Yankee*," 194; Dannenberg, *Coincidence and Counterfactuality*, 202.
111. Mark Twain, *The Mysterious Stranger: A Romance* (Harper & Brothers, 1916), 2, <http://archive.org/details/mysteriousstran02twaigoog>.

112. Christie Graves Hamric, *The Mark Twain Encyclopedia* (Taylor & Francis, 1993), 254n.
113. Twain, *The Mysterious Stranger*, 16.
114. Twain, *The Mysterious Stranger*, 17.
115. Twain, *The Mysterious Stranger*, 88.
116. Mark Twain, "From the *London Times* of 1904," in *Future Perfect: American Science Fiction of the Nineteenth Century*, ed. H. Bruce Franklin, Revised edition (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 382.
117. Twain, "From the *London Times* of 1904," 386. By enjoying the "freedom" of other worlds from prison, Twain's character's contemplations are very different from those of Auguste Blanqui (see Chap. 3), but very similar to the astral voyages of Ed Morrell described by Jack London in *The Star Rover* (1915).
118. Twain, "From the *London Times* of 1904," 392.
119. Twain, "From the *London Times* of 1904," 382n (original emphasis).

Conclusion: Infinite Worlds

Mark Twain's suggestion of infinite worlds in "From the *London Times* of 1904" (1898) is an appropriate place to close this study of alternate history, as its mechanical contrivances reflect the passage of stories that practised conjectural historical thought into the space of science fiction, from the proposition of divergence and a single variant timeline to an infinite series of possible worlds. Auguste Blanqui's thesis of historical exhaustion among the stars, and the others like it discussed in Chap. 4, could be said to have anticipated this development, though they stopped short of envisioning passageways or communication between possible worlds; they either reflected on these hypothetical versions of history from constrained conditions on Earth (in Blanqui's case), or invented celestial spirits whose domain was space (Flammarion and Hale). The first nineteenth-century examples of stories that imagined overlaps between worlds that could be traversed include the example by Mark Twain discussed already and the earlier story by Edgar Allan Poe, "A Tale of the Ragged Mountains" (1850). Novels by Robert Cromie and, of course, H. G. Wells in the last years of the nineteenth century conceived of machinery that enabled encounters with the inhabitants of other worlds.

Texts written in the latter twentieth century exemplify the shifting preoccupations of alternate-historical narratives. One canonical novel of the genre is *The Man in the High Castle* (1962), by Philip K. Dick,

which is set in a version of America partitioned between Nazi Germany and Japan—the victors of the Second World War. One of the novel’s characters, Tagami, stumbles into *our* modern-day San Francisco, where he is abused for being Japanese. “Idiotic daydreaming of fugal type,” he decides, in the syncretic Anglo-Japanese of this variant west coast.¹ The novel contains an internal alternate history, and one of the protagonists, Juliana, sets out to meet its author, Hawthorne Abendsen. At first we recognize this forbidden work of speculation, *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy*, as our own history, though some of the details are not quite consistent with recorded history. The scenario of this internal alternate history has been composed using the I-Ching method of divination that is common practice in the world of the novel. By implication, there are any number of variant worlds, each with its own methods for intuiting the others.

Jorge Luis Borges’s stories collected in *The Garden of Forking Paths* (1941) meditate on the capacity of literature to conceive innumerable possibilities through the figures of the infinite library, a lottery for deciding fate, and the power to dream other lives into being. The title story subsumes fate, history, and narrative into a “garden of forking paths,” or, in the words of one of Borges’s characters, “an invisible labyrinth of time.”² In Italo Calvino’s novel, *Invisible Cities* (1972), Marco Polo describes to Kublai Khan the many cities of his empire; one is Fedora, “that gray stone metropolis,” in which each room of a museum contains a crystal globe. “These are the forms the city could have taken if, for one reason or another, it had not become what we see today.”³ Fedora is only one of the fabulous cities that Marco Polo describes to the emperor, who gradually suspects the truth—that they are all elaborations of Venice, the explorer’s home. In her recent story, “The Assassination of Margaret Thatcher,” Hilary Mantel narrates an attempt to kill the Prime Minister, which, the reader learns, may have been successful in a parallel world. Entry into the realms of historical possibility is described as a “door in the wall,” and we are invited to consider that “history could always have been otherwise.”⁴ These examples all take history to be a labyrinth that make the infinity of worlds both a theme and a structural principle: the contemplation of alterity becomes a pleasurable disorienting conceit for story-telling.

This is not to say that the coalescence of infinite-worlds reflection into a category of science fiction was the only outcome for alternate

history in the twentieth century and present day. There is an extensive and growing corpus of alternate history novels and stories published since the mid-twentieth century. In Poul Anderson's "Time Patrol" stories (1955 onwards), the forks of past history are policed by an agency that time-travels into the past to correct dangerous aberrations, the dangers of which are also the subject of Ray Bradbury's story, "A Sound of Thunder" (1952). There are annual "Sidewise Awards" for "the best allohistorical genre publications of the year" and a number of websites dedicated to promoting alternate history, or which host collaborative counterfactual speculation. Some of these works argue for the plausibility of variant historical outcomes following a given point of departure; others combine lines of possible historical descent with science-fictional elements, including the postulation of multiverse realms.

These more recent categories of alternate-historical thought are very different from the practices of imagining history to have been otherwise in the (long) nineteenth century. Unlike the examples analyzed in this study, the more recent historically counterfactual novel or essay and the staging of plots within infinite worlds both restore a universal model of historical time to their narratives. By making plausibility a central evaluative criterion for assessing historical counterfactuals, causation and consequence become the dominant evaluative criteria of the construction of alternatives, and plausibility—though some may disagree—presumes an extra-historical objectivity. Referring to a realism consequences also implies the "normalized narrative of the real past" of Kathleen Singles's critical description.⁵ Alternate history in the nineteenth century was distinctive for the way in which it combined very specific timescales, or historical *rates* of change, which, once set in motion, produced dissonant chronologies. The natural sciences in the nineteenth century had introduced variant scales of time (of the gnat, geology, and civilizations), which broke up the perception of time as a homogeneous current (the "vast historical stream" of Foucault's account⁶); alternate history explored the differentials of flow and change that emerged in the nineteenth century, between the timescales of literary genres, historical interpretation, and scientific knowledge.

In the chapters of this book, literary conventions and genres are shown to have bent under the strain of the new chronologies and rates of change. Richard Whately's ironic scepticism of Napoleonic history referred to the conventions and inventions of romance in order to disbelieve contemporary journalistic accounts of current events and satirize

David Hume's scepticism of scripture. Benjamin Disraeli was able to synchronize the retrospective range of the historical novel with a patriotic timeline of messianic politics and a fabulated genealogy of literary style. Charles Renouvier posed a "plausible," long-durational alternate history of Europe's passage from antiquity into modernity, while hedging his argument for liberalism within a wider discussion of the philosophy of history. The articulation of plurality-of-worlds speculation with alternate-historical hypotheses brought the temporalities of astronomical knowledge and scriptural accounts of creation into dissonant conjunction. In the lost-world fictions of Arthur Conan Doyle and Charlotte Perkins Gilman, the conventions of the adventure narrative were adapted to enable encounters between humans and what the authors conceived as our historically remote relatives. Alternate history in America was used as a means for reflecting on the historical relations of the New World and the Old.

These narratives sometimes took the form of nostalgic laments for missed opportunities and delineated their utopian correction. But even where a wish was realized, the process was, time and again, a reflection on the historical conditions of those desires and their incompatibility with new models of historical interpretation. The anomalies and ironies that emerged in these texts were the gears grinding as incompatible models of historical interpretation were forced together. Existing concepts and cycles of progress, decline, and recuperation buckled when placed in conjunction with emergent disciplines of writing and knowledge. The "untimely meditations" of these alternate histories illuminate the variety of ways in which writers in the nineteenth century encountered their own past.

NOTES

1. Philip K. Dick, *The Man in the High Castle*, Penguin Classics (London: Penguin, 2001), 224.
2. Jorge Luis Borges, "The Garden of Forking Paths," in *Collected Fictions*, trans. Andrew Hurley (New York, NY: Penguin Books), 124.
3. Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, trans. William Weaver (London: Vintage Books), 28.
4. Hilary Mantel, "The Assassination of Margaret Thatcher," in *The Assassination of Margaret Thatcher and Other Stories* (London: Fourth Estate, 239–240).

5. Kathleen Singles, *Alternate History: Playing with Contingency and Necessity*, Narrating Futures 5 (Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter), 7. See the introduction for a discussion of critical assessments of alternate history.
6. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Routledge), 401. Foucault's comments are discussed in more detail in the introduction to this book.

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- . "[Review:] The Wondrous Tale of Alroy." *Literary Gazette: A Weekly Journal of Literature, Science, and the Fine Arts* 842, no. 849 (1833): 146–48.
- . "[Review:] Uchronie. L'utopie dans l'histoire par Ch. Renouvier." *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 9, no. 2 (March 1901): 1–2.
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