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ARTICLE

## Plutocratic Dystopia and Workers' Utopias in Morris's *News from Nowhere* and Pynchon's *Against the Day*

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Pynchon's *Against the Day* (2006) focuses on the opposition between owners and workers in the quarter century after the Chicago Columbian Exposition (1893). Pynchon depicts an existing plutocratic dystopia in which millions barely subsist and union organizers are tortured and killed—a world of which Matthew Josephson's *The Robber Barons* (1934) provides a detailed antecedent account. However, Pynchon also imagines numerous utopian sites that show strong parallels with William Morris's utopian *News from Nowhere* (1891). In both works, inequality between owners and workers is corrected outside state organizations; anarchist and socialist thought prove to be complementary, not opposed; and travel to the future or outside the dystopian present opens up alternate visions of the future.

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## "Anarchist Heaven, . . . Plute Hell"

— *Against the Day*

Pynchon's historical representation in *Against the Day* (2006) of the years between 1893 and 1923 revolves around the opposition between industrial owners and workers. The world over which the wealthy rule is dystopian and hellish—a world of mines and mine disasters, in which the harassment, intimidation, torture, and killing of union members is endemic, a world in which the vast majority at best barely subsist. As if in response, this novel, unlike Pynchon's others, envisions a proliferation of utopian centers—forms of association opposed to monopolistic capital accumulation, state organization, and exploitation of the many who work by those who don't.<sup>1</sup> While the dystopia actually exists—it is the capitalist world of the decades around 1900 (and of our own time)—the utopias remain only imagined and partial. In this analysis of *Against the Day*, I suggest that Pynchon's dystopian and utopian visions can be illuminated through a juxtaposition with two earlier works concerned with the times in which Pynchon set his novel. The novel's depiction of an existing dystopian society finds a close counterpart in Matthew Josephson's historical narrative of predatory late-nineteenth-century industrialists and bankers in *The Robber Barons* (1934).<sup>2</sup> The novel's utopian alternatives bear a strong affinity with the socialist/anarchist vision of a de-industrialized world in William Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1890–91).

The project of drawing out the relations between Pynchon's novel and these two texts rests on both ideological and historical grounds. Josephson's representation of and attitude toward the wealthiest and most powerful industrialists and financiers in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America—greedy, scheming, unscrupulous cheaters and bullies who regard workers as scum and assert that the sanction

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<sup>1</sup> For analysis of the utopian impulse in Pynchon's earlier novels, see Thomas and Karpinski.

<sup>2</sup> Josephson worked on Wall Street for several years before writing a series of biographies and works in American history. *The Robber Barons* gives an unvarnished account of how the American captains of industry and finance made their fortunes in the unregulated markets of the half century after the Civil War.

for their wealth comes directly from the divinity—entirely comports with Pynchon's depiction of the fictional Scarsdale Vibe, the quintessential plutocrat. Josephson was writing just a decade after the time when the narrative of *Against the Day* ends, in the Great Depression of the early thirties, and the name he gives to the giants of industry and finance of the previous half-century through his title denies them the heroicization that they received—and that their counterparts today receive—so often in popular culture. Josephson's robber barons are Pynchon's plutocrats, the real power behind the dystopian world.

Morris's work, by contrast—a fictional narrative of a future society—appeared in book form in 1892, just one year before the opening of the Chicago Exposition and of Pynchon's novel. Its vision of a socialist/anarchist utopia expresses salient ideas in the social, political, and intellectual life of the time. Strikes and mass demonstrations by workers multiplied dramatically in the late 1880s: well-known examples include the Haymarket Affair in Chicago in 1886; the Bloody Sunday demonstration in Trafalgar Square in 1887; the strikes of London match girls and dock workers in 1888 and 1889; and the Homestead steel strike near Pittsburgh in 1892. Morris helped found the Socialist League in 1885, and for the next six years he published the society's journal, *Commonweal*, in which *News from Nowhere* was originally serialized. Social anarchism was closely involved with the labor movement in the late 1800s and early 1900s. As a committed anarcho-communist, Morris was in the thick of these ideas and actions, and in Guest's dream in *News from Nowhere*, he articulates his ideal and how it might be attained. Pynchon in turn is focused on the ideas and actions of anarchists and socialists in *Against the Day*.<sup>3</sup> He shares with Morris his view of American and European society as dystopian, and his brief but recurrent utopias in *Against the Day* have distinctive features in common with Morris's more extended utopian vision.

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<sup>3</sup> In the first few pages of the novel, the airship's dog Pugnax is absorbed in his reading of Henry James's *The Princess Casamassima* (1886), which concerns a young idealist who pledges to carry out a terrorist assassination. The mention of the book prompts one of the Chums of Chance to pronounce sententiously concerning the dangers of "World Anarchism" (*AtD* 6).

## I

Although the characterization of the industrialist Scarsdale Vibe in *Against the Day* may seem exaggerated and stereotypical, in his representation of this plutocrat Pynchon brings together in a composite figure many features from Josephson's non-fictional portrayals of Cornelius Vanderbilt, Jay Gould, Andrew Carnegie, Henry Frick, J. P. Morgan, and John D. Rockefeller—monopolists of railroads, finance, steel, and coal. Josephson describes these men as chieftains, barons, and lords because of the way they made their wealth and ruled their domains. In addition to coming from humble backgrounds and keeping all or almost all of the accounts for the most complex industrial concerns of the time in their heads, Vanderbilt, Gould, Carnegie, and Rockefeller all sought through any means possible to corner a market, to engross a monopoly position on an essential commodity—rail lines, gold, steel, oil. In doing so, they used whatever schemes and means they could to ruin competitors, force them out of the market, or make them consolidate and surrender control of their companies. They operated not so much in violation of the law as outside and above it; more accurately, they often dictated the law. Josephson enumerates dozens of instances when Gould, Huntington, Rockefeller, and the others literally bought the law by paying legislators, executives, and judges to do their bidding or at least to stand out of the way and not oppose their illegal schemes. As Cornelius Vanderbilt is alleged to have said on one celebrated occasion, "Who cares about the law? Hain't I got the power?"

However much they sought to cheat, strangle, and defeat their rivals, there was one point on which the barons agreed: they fiercely opposed collective bargaining. Carnegie claimed to be reluctant to bring in scabs to take away workers' jobs, preferring to use the lockout instead. But it was when working with Carnegie that Frick ordered the reduction in wages and the occupation of the steel plant at Homestead, Pennsylvania, that led to the rioting, siege, and defeat of the union there (*Robber Barons* 378–81). Ironically, the collusive combinations of the industrialists in pursuit of astronomical fortunes were held not to be in violation of the same laws by which it was declared illegal for workers to combine in order to pursue a higher wage, a shorter workday, and improved safety conditions (*RB* 367).

This contradiction points to the main determinant of the injustice in the early unregulated industrial system as it is represented in *Against the Day* (and as it exists again in its contemporary reiteration)—the massive imbalance between, on the one hand, the millions who do the work that sickens, weakens, wounds, and kills them, for which they receive barely subsistence wages, and, on the other hand, the handful (fewer than one per cent of the top one per cent) who, possessing or accumulating capital, do no physical work but take in hundreds of millions of dollars from the products of those who do. Even Scarsdale's son Fleetwood, after he kills a black man in South Africa who was in possession of a diamond, understands through his monitory dreams that “there was some grave imbalance in the structure of the world, which would have to be corrected,” and that in the “secret backlands of wealth, [. . .] sooner or later it depended on some act of murder, seldom limited to once” (*Against the Day* 170). When Lew Basnight sees mounted troopers in Colorado escorting miners whom they have brutalized to the border, he thinks, “This was wrong in so many ways” (*AtD* 178), and soon thereafter renounces his job as a Pinkerton-style “detective”—that is, a corporate thug.

Thus, it is thoroughly in keeping with what we know of the attitudes of the industrialists that Pynchon represents Scarsdale Vibe as having ordered the torture and death of Webb Traverse for his union organizing. Vibe is scarcely able to control his delight in imagining the killing of what he terms “communards [who] speak a garble of foreign tongues, their armies are the damnable labor syndicates, their artillery is dynamite, they assassinate our great men and bomb our cities, and their aim is to despoil us of our hard-won goods, to divide and sub-divide among their hordes our lands and our houses [. . .] What we need to do is start killing them in significant numbers” (*AtD* 333). As his side-kick and alter ego Foley Walker thinks after hearing this speech, “it did take some getting used to”—perhaps not killing on a massive scale, but massacre “in the moderate American tradition of Massachusetts Bay or Utah” (*AtD* 334). Foley is thinking of the massacre of the Pequot Indians, perhaps particularly the burning by colonists of four hundred men, women, and children in their village at Mystic during the Pequot War in July, 1637, and he takes it to be his mission to restrain his boss from “bloodletting unrestrained” (*AtD* 334).

Ten years later, just before the historical Ludlow massacre in southern Colorado, and just before the fictional Vibe is assassinated by Foley, Pynchon gives Vibe a speech that is equally brutal and cold-blooded. "Of course we use them," he says to others of his class near the scene of the strike, "we harness and sodomize them, photograph their degradation, send them up onto the high iron and down into mines and sewers and killing floors, we set them beneath inhuman loads, we harvest from them their muscle and eyesight and health, leaving them in our kindness a few miserable years of broken gleanings. Of course we do. Why not? They are good for little else." He prophesies the coming of "clean, industrious, Christian, white" lowlanders to settle in the area and replace the foreigners with "their miserable communistic dreams" (*AtD* 1000–01). Vibe's prophecy will come true in the second half of the twentieth century with the arrival and proliferation in the area around Colorado Springs, just north of the coalfields, of reactionary groups such as Focus on the Family, as well as the entrenched proselytizing of fundamentalist chaplains and officers in and around the Air Force Academy. Vibe also foresees that the annual snows in the Colorado Rockies will be transformed from a curse to a blessing, attracting "moneyed seekers after wintertime recreation" (*AtD* 1001) to future ski resorts in the region. Vibe's rhetoric might seem too transparently villainous to be plausible. However, Henry Clay Frick used language implying a similarly murderous contempt for Carnegie's workers after he had provoked the strike and then broken the union at Homestead using Pinkerton men and government soldiers: "We had to teach our employees a lesson," he wrote Carnegie, who was conveniently out of the country at the time, "and we have taught them one they will never forget" (*RB* 371).<sup>4</sup>

As a composite figure, Vibe shares with the other barons his hatred of socialists, communists, anarchists, and unions; he is interested in scientific advances insofar as they open the door to greater profits and power. He believes that his course of action has been laid down by the deity, like John D. Rockefeller, who declared "God gave me

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<sup>4</sup> Vibe also resembles Henry Frick and Henry Huntington in spending freely to amass a collection of some of the finest European Old Master paintings.

my money" because he believed that "the power to make money is a gift of God [. . .] I believe it is my duty to make money and still more money, and to use the money I make for the good of my fellow man" (*RB* 318, 325). When Vibe comes to southeastern Colorado to check on the miners' strike in *Against the Day*, he stands in for Rockefeller, the actual owner of the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company, against which the miners were striking. Even Vibe's assassination there has parallels with events in a number of the other barons' lives: Jim Fisk was assassinated; Frick barely survived an assassination attempt; Gould was almost lynched (*RB* 156–57, 371, 147). Vibe and other plutocrats like him are responsible not only for the killing and burning of miners' families at the Ludlow camp in Colorado (*AtD* 1014–17), the crushing of the Pullman, Homestead, and Turin strikes (in which Antonio Gramsci was involved), and the killing of Webb Traverse and other union activists, but also for the impoverishment, degradation, and early deaths of hundreds of thousands of miners in North America, Southeastern Europe, and Mexico, among some of whom Reef and Frank work at various points in the novel. Vibe and the others like him are responsible for most of the dystopian nightmares that recur throughout the narrative, including the pursuit and experimental use of secret weapons, the buying of scientists and mathematicians, and the corrupting of all those who might be useful to them. It is of this world that a socialist newspaperman in Paris can say, not during World War I, but *after* the war, "We're in Hell, you know. [. . .] like the mindless dead, who don't know they're dead" (*AtD* 1077).

There are other centers of dystopian energy in the novel—Jeshimon, the town of death in Utah, where Webb's body is left by his murderers, and cities such as Johannesburg and Baku, at the center of ugly, polluting, resource-extraction industries (*AtD* 751). Pynchon also maintains that there is a continuity between the miners' strike in the coal fields of southern Colorado in 1913–14, and the wars in southeastern Europe of 1912–14, as he imagines that some of those killed in the Balkans find a parallel struggle in America where they continue trying to right the balance and make things equal (*AtD* 1003).<sup>5</sup> He thus makes the kind of connection that derives

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<sup>5</sup> On this parallel, see Narkunas.



from what Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe have called “equivalences”: conditions of social and political life that potentially link otherwise only distantly related groups by means of their shared opposition to the same dominant power (Laclau and Mouffe 127–34). Laclau and Mouffe contend that every society establishes its own grounds of rationality and understanding “by dividing itself; that is, by expelling outside itself any surplus of meaning subverting it” (Laclau and Mouffe 136). The workers and immigrants in *Against the Day* constitute such a surplus of meaning; Vibe speaks of them as “jabbering Union scum” (*AtD* 1001). The striking miners outside Ludlow are “Greeks and Bulgarians, Serbs and Croats, Montenegrans and Italians” (*AtD* 1002), who are now in Colorado because “wherever there’s accounts to be balanced, [. . .] all they feel is *that unbalance*—that something’s wrong and needs to be made right again” (*AtD* 1003). The actions of the miners and of others who find they share an opposition to powerful injustice are examples of what Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri call “singularities [. . .] act[ing] in common” (Hardt and Negri 105). They observe, “At the 1999 protests [against the World Trade Organization in Seattle], what most surprised and puzzled observers was that groups previously thought to be in opposition to each other—trade unionists and environmentalists, church groups and anarchists—acted together without any central, unifying structure that subordinates or sets aside their differences” (Hardt and Negri 217). Pynchon places such articulating of equivalences (Laclau and Mouffe) or acting in common (Hardt and Negri) in opposition to the systematic injustice perpetrated by the plutocratic robber barons in his novel.

## II

Pynchon’s attempt in *Against the Day* to fashion an adequate moral response to this “imbalance in the structure of the world,” a state of affairs that is “wrong in so many ways” (*AtD* 170, 178), produces a number of utopian visions—the French town of Yz-les-Bains, the Asian city of Shambhala, the Mexican Ténochtitlán, the city of the *Inconvenience* at the conclusion of the novel, even what Yashmeen sees as the Traverses’ own small Republic—to counter the prevailing, dystopian horror of modern inequality. In seeking to address this imbalance, and in the alternatives it

envisions, Pynchon's utopian imaginary bears a close kinship with a utopia published as a book just a year before the narrative in *Against the Day* begins—William Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1892). Both of these works are centrally concerned with reversing the domination of workers by plutocrats, and both offer visions that combine Anarchist and Socialist responses to the oppression and ugliness of industrial society.

Recognizing the affinities need not lead to neglect of the contrasts between the two visions. Morris opposes all modern technologies beginning with the steam engine, including reliance on coal and building with iron. His visitor to the future observes repeatedly, and with approval, that the technologies used in twenty-second century England closely resemble those employed in the fourteenth century.<sup>6</sup> People can offer any of the services or practice any of the crafts that produce necessary goods (although it seems that only women are interested in cooking and house-keeping). Morris's vision involves a radical rustication of the populace, and the reclamation of most of London by greenery. The British Museum continues to exist as a repository of cultural memory, and the nineteenth-century houses of Parliament still stand—although that neo-Gothic structure has been converted to a storehouse for manure, now called the Dung Market (Morris's satire can be a bit heavy-handed). Finally, Morris believes that the ethical improvement of making rewarding labor available for all will produce an aesthetic benefit: the high genres of tragedy and epic, which depend on human suffering for their subject, may no longer be written, but all goods are made with an eye to their beauty by willing craftsmen.

Pynchon subscribes to none of these notions in his utopian visions.<sup>7</sup> He does not set his face against modern technologies, although in his hands some technologies take on a greater prominence than they had in our world at the time; for example, in *Against the Day* airships dominate the skies for decades before airplanes come

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<sup>6</sup> The English visitor to Erewhon in Samuel Butler's utopian/dystopian satire witnesses a state of technology that is similarly identified with the level of European technology in the twelfth or thirteenth century (Butler 85).

<sup>7</sup> Ickstadt considers a number of passages that point to utopian visions in *Against the Day*; however, he focuses less on the characteristics of group life that would be utopian than on revelatory or transcendent moments of individual visions.

into widespread use. The history of technologies in his world diverges curiously from its history in ours; wireless telephones have been invented before World War I (*AtD* 795), as well as a machine, the Integroscope, that animates photographs, allowing the operator to follow the later lives of those whose images were once captured by a shutter's click (*AtD* 1037). Although the epicenters of misery, oppression, and pollution in Pynchon's novel are cities such as Johannesburg and Baku, he has little predilection for the rural: Yz-les-Bains is a resort, but the other limited utopias in this work are cities, especially Shambhala and the *Inconvenience*. The alternatives receive formulation as a clear either/or at one point: "Either Shambhala or Baku and Johannesburg" (*AtD* 631), that is, either ambiguous utopia or all-too-real dystopia. There seems to be very little middle ground between these extremes in this novel.<sup>8</sup> The increasingly utopian society of the *Inconvenience* especially indicates that Pynchon does not aim to return to the low-tech country life of fourteenth-century England. Nor is he concerned with the beauty and craftsmanship of the goods and services that workers produce.

It would overstate the differences, however, to argue that these two authors' visions diverge significantly because Morris's utopia is Socialist (with Anarchist elements), while Pynchon's vision is Anarchist (with strong affinities to Socialism). It is possible to show that the two political philosophies are compatible, even complementary, in Morris's time and in the world of Pynchon's narrative; in fact they are often coupled, or used interchangeably, by the plutocrats and their loyalists, as well as by their working-class opponents. In the venomous speeches in which Scarsdale Vibe pours out his hatred and contempt for the workers who do the actual work of the world, he accuses them in almost equal parts of being skulking anarchists,

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<sup>8</sup> In the face of widespread critical opinion that Pynchon rejects binary oppositions (see, for example, Collado-Rodriguez), I stress the difficulty of finding middle grounds between dystopian and utopian visions not to re-situate Pynchon as a binary thinker but to underscore the satiric nature of his enterprise. Like other narrative satires, Pynchon's do not decide between the oppositions they deploy, but remain openended, both dystopian and utopian, or undercutting both (see Palmeri, *Satire in Narrative*). That is one reason the utopian communities in this novel are partial, imperfect, or ambiguous; they do not claim to have the final answer, but instead gesture toward a realm to the side of the present.

communists, and foreign bomb-throwers (*AtD* 333, 1001). In addition, the workers themselves—both Socialists and Anarchists—are united in believing that history is their potential liberator (*AD* 372, 664).<sup>9</sup>

Morris's case may at first seem more complicated. When it was originally published serially in *Commonweal* (1890–91), Morris's *News* constituted a polemic against the Anarchists who were gaining strength in the Socialist League and were about to take over from Morris both the League and the editorial direction of the paper. The new editors continued to publish the novel in the paper through its conclusion several months later, although they also published articles by the prominent Anarchist Pyotr Kropotkin during the same period. Debates among Anarchists and Socialists concerning the best strategy for overthrowing the rule of the rich figure both in the first chapter of *News from Nowhere*, providing the impetus for Guest's vision of the future, and repeatedly in *Against the Day*. But such differences do not mean that the two groups are incompatible enemies: they agree in their fundamental goal of fairness for working people and, in the narratives of both Morris and Pynchon, in their lack of belief in the efficacy of legislative reforms, trade union activism, and the state. The convergence of Anarchist and Socialist can be seen both in Morris's close friendship with Kropotkin in the 1890s and in the extensive commonalities in their ideas.<sup>10</sup> In an obituary notice for Morris, Kropotkin praised *News from Nowhere* as "the most thoroughly and deeply Anarchist conception of future society that has ever been written."<sup>11</sup>

In the early days of his work for the Socialist cause, when Morris was asked about Marx's theory of value, he responded: "It is enough political economy for me to know that the idle class is rich and the working class is poor, and that the rich are rich because they rob the poor. That I know because I see it with my eyes. I need no books to convince me of it" (Glasier 32). In a similar vein, Webb Traverse explains to each of his sons the vital importance of the ten words printed on his most precious

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<sup>9</sup> For an analysis of Pynchon's use of anarchism throughout his novels, see Benton.

<sup>10</sup> The convergence of the anarcho-communist ideas of Kropotkin and Morris has been discussed by Hulse, Florence and William Boos, and Sargent.

<sup>11</sup> *Freedom* 10 (November 1896): 109–110, cited in Morris, *News from Nowhere*, ed. Arata, 347.

possession, his union card: "Labor produces all wealth. Wealth belongs to the producer thereof" (*AtD* 93). These two plain statements express the shared cardinal concern of Morris and Pynchon with the theft by the plutocrats of the wealth created by the workers. Indignation at this constitutive injustice motivates each to conceive alternative, though similar, ways of organizing work, production, and life.

In *Nowhere*, Guest early on discovers that there is no buying and selling of labor. People do not work for pay; they do work that is needful and that they enjoy doing. Like Marx in *The German Ideology*, Morris believes that human beings need to work and want to express their creativity through their work.<sup>12</sup> Dick the boatman is also a metal craftsman and an agricultural worker at harvest time. Indeed, since objects are not mass-produced to yield the greatest profit, most products of everyday use bear the mark of the individual craftsman, and possess an aesthetic dimension. In *Nowhere* there is no distinction between high art and the finely wrought goods made for use, because there is no high art. Moreover, when individuals work in large groups and large buildings that Guest thinks are factories, he learns that they are "Banded-workshops," where men have come together not to use machinery or a large-scale source of power, but for companionship, and because they want to work together at a useful handcraft such as glass-blowing. When he comes upon a road crew consisting of about a dozen young men, they look to him "like a boating party at Oxford" from the nineteenth century who enjoy the healthy physical exercise on the project of road repair that needs to be done (*NN* 82).<sup>13</sup>

Among the more remarkable brief or diminished utopias Pynchon imagines is the anarchist community at Yz-les-Bains in southern France, where political refugees from nearby Cataluña and other European and American countries can find

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<sup>12</sup> "In a Communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic" (Marx and Engels 53).

<sup>13</sup> In this scene, Morris is referring to John Ruskin's 1874 project, which was realized, of enlisting a band of Oxford men to work on building a road. See Spear 182. Citations from *News from Nowhere* are from the Penguin edition.

refuge without having to pay, although contributions are accepted.<sup>14</sup> When Reef and Yashmeen arrive at Yz-les-Bains, Reef asks skeptically who employs the members of the community—whom they work for. “We work for each other, I suppose,” says Ratty, the former spy. “No ranks, no titles, chain of command . . . no structure, really.”<sup>15</sup> To Yashmeen’s “How do you plan things? [. . .] assign duties, co-ordinate your efforts?” Ratty explains, “By knowing what has to be done. Which is usually obvious common sense” (*AtD* 933). Pynchon’s vision here closely parallels Morris’s. People in both utopias have enough sense to see what needs to be done, and almost all are willing to perform socially useful work; indeed, in Morris they enjoy the healthy physical exercise it often involves, or the opportunity it provides for exercising the aesthetic imagination. Ratty indicates an important revision of the workers’ violent opposition to the wealthy oligarchs when he informs Reef that the utopian anarchists have turned away from the tactic of bombing: “We’ve chosen more of a coevolutionary role, helping along what’s already in progress. [. . .] The replacement of governments by other, more practical arrangements, [. . .] when possible working across national boundaries” (*AtD* 933). This vision shifts presumptions and perspectives successfully, like the game of anarchists’ golf that the newcomers play the day after their arrival, where there is no fixed number of holes, no fixed sequence or distances (new holes can appear overnight), and where it would seem that keeping score is not the point—the activity, the journey, is the goal.

The absence of private property in *Nowhere* has consequences for relations between the sexes. Women no longer marry for economic reasons; in fact, there *are* no marriages, no divorces, and no incomes. Two people enter into a relationship out

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<sup>14</sup> In calling Yz-les-Bains a reduced utopia, I use a concept that George Lukács employed in discussing Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister*; see Lukács 56, 62. It can disparagingly imply that an imagined social grouping holds a small number of privileged people, sometimes following an authoritarian blueprint, in circumstances that are almost as isolated and inconsequential as the countries or city-states imagined by grander utopian visions. The society at Yz-les-Bains does not entirely escape such criticism. It is, after all, located in a town that is a resort for the upper bourgeoisie and aristocrats. However, its size, its lack of pretense and dogma, and its turn away from violence give it a claim to moral authority.

<sup>15</sup> The use of negatives in the definition of the utopian place, the absence of social institutions such as the law and social ranks, strongly recalls Montaigne’s strategy in “Of Cannibals” and Gonzalo’s echoing of Montaigne in the first Act of *The Tempest*.

of inclination, and when one of them no longer wants to stay in it, they separate. The whole community participates in the raising of children, so the separation of a couple does not dramatically affect their children's lives. In the absence of a formal contract and lifetime vows, the Nowhereans have developed a system of informal serial monogamy. However, this loosening of the tie of marriage does not mean that all unhappiness has been eliminated; we learn that Dick was somewhat depressed for the two years that Clara separated from him to be with another man. In fact, although the Nowhereans experience reduced sexual possessiveness, the feeling persists, and is responsible for many of the serious offenses that continue to occur in Nowhere: the one murder that we hear of was committed by a jealous man angered by a rival's success. In addition, sexual relations in Nowhere, set more than two hundred years later than Morris's own Victorian period, remain exclusively heterosexual and monogamous. In contrast to the dry abstractions that figure as characters in most utopias, William Guest often assumes an intensely sensuous tone in appreciating the beauties of women and nature in Nowhere, but he displays the erotic imagination of a fifty-something heterosexual male.<sup>16</sup>

In Yz-les-Bains, there has also been a dramatic loosening of the marriage tie. Soon after they arrive, Reef and Yashmeen hear of Ratty McHugh's departure from the Foreign Service, followed unexpectedly by his secretary Sophrosyne, and we learn that Sophrosyne and Jenny McHugh have been colleagues who worked together for years in the suffragette movement (*AtD* 932). In Yz-les-Bains, these characters constitute a stable, apparently unremarkable threesome. Just before the conclusion of the novel, as a result of a number of fortuitous circumstances, the two older Traverse brothers establish a small family community, where a similar revision of marriage and family ties takes place, making it almost a utopian "little republic" (*AtD* 1076), as Yashmeen proposes. Frank has become the partner of Reef's wife Estrella (Stray), of whom he has dreamed for years, and a father to their son Jesse,

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<sup>16</sup> Two exceptions to the prevailing abstractions in utopias can be found in Diderot's "*Supplement to Bougainville's Voyage*" and Fourier's writings on phalansteries. On the limitations of Morris's imagination of desire in *News*, see Marsh.

as well as having his own daughter with Stray, while Reef joins to their household his new partner Yashmeen and their two young children (*AtD* 1077). The expanded household constitutes a fantasy or a vision in which intimate relations can unravel without producing debilitating acrimony and jealousy, in which families can split apart and then be reconstituted in new and less rigid combinations (Glasier 32).

The expansion and reconstitution of the Traverse family is made possible by a number of moments of grace. Although neither Kit Traverse nor Yashmeen's father join the others in Colorado, each is brought back from the brink of death and oblivion by the plot. Kit, infatuated with the proto-fascist aesthetics of futurism, dive-bombs into workers' demonstrations in Turin, yet he does not crash or kill anyone, and he leaves such stunts behind him. At the end of the novel, he is about to be reunited with his wife Dally in Paris. Auberon Halfcourt returns from Central Asia with a young Japanese woman, showing up at Corfu, where he meets his daughter Yashmeen again and his granddaughter for the first time.

On the *Inconvenience*, another site of utopian imagining at the end of the novel, the pairings of the young Aetheronauts with the Chums of Chance seem to be strictly conventional—monogamous, reproductive, presumably lifetime commitments: Chick and Viridian, Miles and Glee, Blaze and Darby. In a way, it makes sense that this be so: the Chums are utterly conventional character-types from boys' adventure novels. However, the development of the *Inconvenience* into a small utopia is enabled by the boys' release from the atemporality of the novels; they enter the flow of time, in which they begin to change, will outgrow adolescence, become grandfathers, and eventually die. In another violation of convention, in the ruling agreement between the Chums and their Aetheronaut mates, the young women remain the independent operators, carrying out their own missions like irregulars or guerrillas, while the men provide the stable home base to which the young women return after their forays (*AtD* 1083–84).<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> The Aetheronauts resemble the Gy-ei, the young women among the Vril-ya, dwellers inside the earth, in Edward Bulwer Lytton's *The Coming Race* (1871). All the members of this humanoid species wear wings that enable them to fly, and they all employ vril, the mysterious source of energy that resembles electricity. However, the young women are both physically larger and stronger than the men, and are



In addition to reconceiving the terms of marriage and family, both of these utopian visions express an environmental consciousness. The intensity of Morris's ecological vision is one of the salient features of his utopia. He imagines a Nowhere in which the pollution of the Thames has been reversed and the river cleansed. Both Guest's journey into what was once London but has become countryside and his travel by boat up the river to Gloucestershire, where the novel concludes with a harvest feast at Morris's own home, Kelmscott Manor, give Morris the opportunity to describe a place whose air, land, and water have not been fouled and poisoned by the burning of coal, the smelting of iron, the manufacture of machinery, and the production of cheap, shabby, unnecessary commodities. A sensuous, joyful celebration of being alive to the sights and smells of the natural world pervades the text.

A related consciousness characterizes Reef and Yashmeen's stay in the Bulgarian Valley of Roses, where Lublica is born to the murmurs of speaking flowers, as well as the world of the *Inconvenience* after the Aetheronauts join the Chums. Viridian responds sharply to Chick Counterfly's skepticism of the young women's propulsion through the air without burning carbon-based fuels: "Fumes are not the future," she says; "burning dead dinosaurs and what they ate ain't the answer, Crankshaft Boy" (*AtD* 1031). On the penultimate page of the novel, the *Inconvenience* is incorporating new technology that allows the airship to use light as a source of power—in other words, the vessel now employs solar power for propulsion: it glides on and in the sun's light like a surfer in and on the ocean (*AtD* 1084).<sup>18</sup> Consistent with the title of the work and its repeated concern with the other side of "the day," the *Inconvenience* seems able now also to employ the power of darkness—or dark matter?—in a way that makes it comparable to solar power (*AtD* 1084).

Significantly, both of these utopian visions are partial, reduced, or incomplete. Although theft and other crimes that stem from private property have been eliminated in Nowhere, murder persists. In addition, some people refuse to

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acknowledged to be more intelligent. They challenge conventional gender hierarchies as the Aetheronauts do.

<sup>18</sup> On Pynchon's environmental consciousness in *Against the Day*, see Coffman.

participate in the work that others have decided needs to be done, and some are consumed by nostalgia for the old days of competition (*NN* 174–77, 194–98). In *Against the Day*, money continues to be used in Yz-les-Bains (*AtD* 931). The contracts into which the Chums enter have grown so long that, as in a caricature, they spill off the table on which they are written, and slum conditions have appeared on the *Inconvenience* as the airship has grown without planning or explanation to the size of a small city. We can only hope that we should find ourselves aboard some such ship as this, an interplanetary ark as it turns out, perhaps a counter-Earth, if we travel forward a little in time. Nevertheless, the last line of the novel says not that the airship and its inhabitants have reached a state of perfection or blessedness, but that “they fly *toward* grace” (*AtD* 1085; emphasis added).

Both *Against the Day* and *News from Nowhere* revolve around intensely re-imagined scenes of historical labor troubles and violence. At the center of Morris's work, in Chapter 13, a historian of the future recounts the way that a General Strike leading to socialism was triggered by an attack on demonstrators in Trafalgar Square in 1952 very similar to the one that took place on Bloody Sunday, November 13, 1887 (*NN* 143–46). However, the casualties were much larger—in the low thousands—as a result of the army's use of machine guns against the people. The old historian reports that this massacre “began the civil war” (*NN* 145), in which troops garrisoned major factories and occupied the city of Manchester, and bands of “reactionaries” fought skirmishes with the socialists (*NN* 155). Morris wrote a “Death Song” for Alfred Linnell, a poor Radical law clerk who was killed during a massive demonstration the Sunday after Bloody Sunday, and he gave a speech at Linnell's funeral. In Pynchon's case, this pattern culminates in the attack on and burning of the tent village of striking coal miners at Ludlow, Colorado, outside of Trinidad, on April 20, 1914 (*AtD* 1011–17). The Ten Days' War following the killings at Ludlow has been characterized as “the deadliest, most destructive uprising by American workers” since the Southern slaves fought in the Civil War (Andrews 14).<sup>19</sup> However, neither Morris

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<sup>19</sup> For different views of the significance of events at and around Ludlow, see *Stein and Taft*, Wolff, Martelle, and Andrews. Martelle and Andrews call for revising what they consider to be a narrative

nor Pynchon endorses a campaign of violence or the killing of innocent civilians.<sup>20</sup> Throughout the period of Morris's political activism, he rejected not only the meliorism of reforming legislation, but also violent resistance and bombing, the "propaganda of the deed" that militant anarchists advocated. But he did not believe that the transition would take place without violent resistance by the wealthy and some form of civil strife.

Pynchon has his characters point out in the later parts of the novel that such direct action as bombing is counterproductive: the plutocrats do not care about loss of life; all they care about is money. In fact, they may well be waiting for another pretext to arrest, terrorize, and kill workers, the strategy that Frick pursued at Homestead during the lockout of coal-miners there. Both in Los Angeles and around the nation, some people believe that the bombing of the *Los Angeles Times* building in 1910 that killed more than fifty people was not carried out by anarchists or union supporters but was paid for by Gray Otis, the fiercely anti-union publisher of the *Times*, to destroy the unions in southern California for generations to come, and that it succeeded (*AtD* 1058). Immediately after Reef has expressed his doubts about the ethics of anarchist bombings, he and Flaco help bind up the wounds of

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of victimization that sees the events at Ludlow simply as a massacre. Both point out that casualties among Guardsmen and mine guards actually were greater than the number of deaths among miners and their wives and children. Martelle calls the week and a half after the battle of Ludlow "the insurrection" (177–96). Pynchon's novel, which appeared one year before Martelle and two years before Andrews, anticipates their arguments in the attention it pays to the violent resistance of the miners to the violence employed by the mine guards and state militia.

<sup>20</sup> Thus, on this point, I disagree with Kathryn Hume's reading of Pynchon's position as one that endorses political violence ("Religious and Political Vision"). Hume's almost exclusive concentration on Webb Traverse leads her to neglect the evidence that accumulates in the second half of the book that the anarchists turn away from violence and bombing. Examples include not only Ratty's statement in Yz-les-Bains, but Flaco's decision to abandon bombing, Reef's reflection that it's "one thing to try and keep to an honorable deal with your dead, [. . .] another to just go spreading death any way you can" (*AtD* 850), and Ewball Oust's position that what is needed is not "slaughterin' of the innocent," which would make the anarchists just like the owners (although he does add, "what we need is more slaughterin' of the guilty" [*AtD* 922]). As the revolutionary anarchist son of a mine-owner, Ewball is an important instance of a plutocrat by birth who does not conform to type.

people bloodied when an anarchist bomb explodes at a café where they have been drinking coffee (*AtD* 850).

Most utopias are separated from the rest of the world by virtually impassable physical boundaries, like the mountain ranges surrounding Eldorado in *Candide*, or by the uncharted seas around More's original Nowhere; physical inaccessibility figures the near impossibility of realizing ideal principles in the world we know (Marin 102). Like Shangri-la, Shambhala in *Against the Day* is such a utopia, existing if anywhere only in the middle of the Gobi desert: the Chums of Chance and the readers of *Against the Day* are granted at most a momentary and doubtful glimpse of the city as it may perhaps have been revealed by the blinding explosion of the Tunguska Event (*AtD* 793). Yz-les-Bains in southern France does not seem nearly as remote as other utopias. It is true that one cannot find it in an atlas, but perhaps it is not too far from Aix-les-Bains, on the edge of the Alps, midway between Grenoble and Geneva. Perhaps it doesn't seem all that difficult to reach because its principles may not be entirely impossible to implement; we can at least imagine trying to do so on a small scale in a community or village. Its compassionate, non-state, anarchist workings stand at the opposite pole from the fixed, highly structured orders that characterize many utopian visions.

Still, Reef, Yashmeen, and Cyprian depart from Yz-les-Bains, or their narrative would cease. Visitors to utopia typically leave the ideal place they have discovered, often so that they can report on its institutions and customs to the corrupt world from which they set out. This is the plight of Morris's Guest, whose return to 1890s England from the future just and healthy society occurs as he fades into invisibility. The friends with whom he spent a week in 2102 no longer see him, including, poignantly, the young woman to whom he has grown so attracted. Thus, on his return to his own time, he resembles the Travelers in Pynchon's novel who appear as ghosts to warn the Chums of the coming horrors of the general European war of 1914–18, and the exhaustion of resources later in the twentieth century. Guest becomes a still-living Traveler or Revenant in his own time, one who remains alive, although he feels that he has died in the future; he, however, brings back a story not of doom but of hope.

In an anticipation of science fiction utopias of the twentieth century, when it becomes clear that Guest is ignorant of the social arrangements in Nowhere and their history, his hosts tacitly agree to consider him a visitor from another planet, offering him explanations of customs they take for granted (e.g., *NN* 139). Utopia, Nowhere, exists in a metonymic relation to us, adjacent to the corrupt, unjust world with which we are familiar. Similarly, by the conclusion of *Against the Day*, the *Inconvenience* seems to travel outside the familiar three dimensions: on its returns to earth, it docks "high in unmeasured outer space" (*AtD* 1084). But if the vessel has become a space ship, it has also become an ark, carrying not only the Chums and Aetheronauts, Pugnax and his canine mate Ksenija, but also other dogs, as well as "cats, birds, fish, rodents, and other *less terrestrial* forms of life" (*AtD* 1085; emphasis added).

In fact, both the *Inconvenience* and Nowhere exist, like other utopian speculations, alongside our world.<sup>21</sup> In this relation, they resemble More's original no-place, with its vision of co-education at all levels of schooling; Bacon's *New Atlantis*, with its dream of secretive scientific research institutions; Condorcet's tenth and final stage of world history, which establishes social security, workers' compensation, and the use of antibiotics; or Borges's *Tlön*, which demonstrates the ease with which the utopian dream of a few can turn into a dystopian nightmare for millions. Understanding this temporal adjacency, Yashmeen characterizes the anarchist utopia as an "unmapped country waiting beyond the frontiers and seas of Time," from which travelers return to "the bourgeois day and its mass delusion of safety" (*AtD* 942). The last question she poses before they leave the spa resonates with Morris's Nowhere and many other utopian visions: "What are any of these 'utopian dreams' of ours," she asks, "but defective forms of time travel?" (*AtD* 942). More, Bacon, Condorcet, and other utopian thinkers were time travelers using a technology of vision we do not yet understand.

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<sup>21</sup> For analyses of the way that alternate, adjacent worlds may intrude into the everyday, accepted world of capital and the nation in Pynchon's novel, see de Bourcier and Staes. Engelhardt points out that in *Against the Day* the use of imaginary numbers in the mathematics of Quaternions is analogous to the political imaginary of anarchism: both Quaternions and anarchism use the realm of the imaginary to find a way out of subordination to a single mathematical or political framework.

The proximity of dystopian and utopian visions emerges clearly from Frank Traverse's two visions of a city. First, he has a vivid cactus-induced vision of Aztlán, the city itself being dreamed into existence by its own inhabitants as they flee south (AD 924). Later (without the help of *hikuli*) he dreams of a hellish place of savagery where corpses pile up in the central square. Both turn out to be visions of Mexico City; the second vision of the unburied corpses takes place during the ten days of the uprising of Huerta against Maduro known as the Decena Trágica in February, 1913. The US ambassador encouraged and facilitated Huerta's coup; however, a year later, in April, President Wilson sent troops into Veracruz to overthrow Huerta—on the day after the Colorado National Guard attacked the miners' tent colony at Ludlow.

Events at Ludlow thus stand at the center of a pattern that draws parallels between nightmarish events from different centuries and across national borders. The burning of the workers' tent village repeats the burning of the Pequot village near Mystic. In both cases, the forces of violent white American men, whether religious extremists or corporate militia, kill mostly women and children of a subordinated group—Native Americans or immigrant workers—by burning them alive and shooting those trying to escape the flames. In addition, because of its duration, the ten-days' uprising after the burning of the tent village in 1914 recalls the Decena Trágica uprising in Mexico City the preceding year. In both of these cases, forces of the American government helped defeat the insurrectionists, although in Mexico they originally supported Huerta's forces before turning on them.

The recurrent utopian moments in *Against the Day* make possible a view of the way that the same work of narrative reflection, reconstruction, and reimagination can shape our understanding of the past, the future, and the present.<sup>22</sup> Conjecture and speculation prove to be crucial not only in relation to the future, but also to

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<sup>22</sup> The point I make here about Pynchon's use of an Anarchist utopia like Morris's is similar to Brian McHale's point that in *Against the Day*, Pynchon "appropriates the conventions and materials of genres that flourished at the historical moments during which the events of his story occur" (10). On McHale's view, Pynchon's aim in this novel is to show that, "multiplied and juxtaposed, an era's genres might compensate for each others' distortions," and produce a "cognitive mapping of the historical whole" (18).

the past. The historical novelist or metafictional historiographer, such as Pynchon in his major fictions, engages in conjectural reconstructions of what *could have* or *must have* happened in history even if the resulting narrative departs from what we have accepted as the facts. Indeed, such divergences may participate in a vision of what really *did* happen in some sense, even though the voices that would recount that essential story have been all but silenced or killed by the rich and the powerful. Speculative fictions are conjectural histories of the future, of what could and what should come to pass.<sup>23</sup>

Yashmeen Halfcourt proves to be among the most persistent, thoughtful, and self-conscious of those who engage in utopian imaginings in *Against the Day*. She forcefully expresses this utopian imaginary in her simple, though revolutionary, assertion to Cyprian: "We can do whatever we can imagine. Are we not the world to come? Rules of proper conduct are for the dying, not for us" (*AtD* 879). Although her words have immediate reference to sexual conduct, their political dimension emerges from the claim in her rhetorical question to embody the world of the future. Morris's Guest adopts a similar stance when he has awakened to find himself back in the ugly, unjust nineteenth century. He proposes that he did not have merely an empty dream of the future, but a conjectural experience of what will come to pass: "Yes, surely!" he cries at the conclusion of the narrative, in a plea for others to join him, "if others can see it as I have seen it, then it may be called a vision rather than a dream" (*NN* 228). Elements of the utopias of More, Bacon, Condorcet, and Borges (including dystopian elements) have over the last few centuries been realized, and the same may be said in the future of the socialist and anarchist utopias of Pynchon and Morris.

If Pynchon's vision of a conjectured future resembles Morris's, so does his condemnation of the present on moral and political grounds. The parallels between our own day and the time of the novel indicate that Pynchon believes we are again or still living in an unjust, violent, and repressive time, in which the self-appointed guardians

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<sup>23</sup> On conjectural history and its discipline-defining influence, see Palmeri, *State of Nature, Stages of Society*.

of “freedom,” the owners of energy companies and gigantic banks—like the industrial and financial barons of the 1890s and early 1900s—amass billions, destroy unions, deprive the poor of their health and insurance, destroy the environment, persecute and torture foreigners, and cause the deaths of hundreds of thousands to fight a phantom evil required by their Manichean view of the world. Perpetual low-grade wars are necessary, as in Orwell's dystopia, not only to fund the arms industry, but to generate fear, because a fearful people is a malleable people.

However, the breakdown of a firm distinction between public and private, between work and leisure, the personal and the political, may open the possibility of extending previously unrecognized equivalences among subordinated groups (Laclau and Mouffe 162, 182). Along these lines, Hardt and Negri emphasize the importance of the common—common knowledge, common language, acting in common—as *against* both the private and the public, observing that living and working now tend to become indistinguishable (Hardt and Negri 206, 148; see also Virno 102–4). Pynchon recounts a related development in Yashmeen Halfcourt, the insistently utopian thinker. In the last pages of the novel, as she, Reef, and their two daughters make up their small utopian community with Frank, Stray, their daughter, and Jesse—what she calls “our own little republic” (1076)—Yashmeen's desire for the other woman finds an answering desire in Stray (1077). Yashmeen consistently manages to integrate the sexual with the utopian impulse, to break down the line of demarcation between the private and the public.

An anarchist/socialist utopia has not emerged from the ground of such developments, either in Pynchon's time or in Yashmeen's—nor was it realized in 1952, as Morris forecast in *News*. Still, the possibility of utopia, a positive vision of what is beyond the order to be negated, is necessary for a “radical imaginary” (Laclau and Mouffe 190). Hardt and Negri argue that “[i]f the multitude were not already latent and implicit in our social being, we could not even imagine it as a political project; and similarly, we can only hope to realize it today because it already exists as a real potential” (Hardt and Negri 221–22). The utopias that Pynchon and Morris envision are the other face of the actual plutocratic dystopia of the robber barons from the late nineteenth to the early twenty-first century, existing alongside it both potentially



and actually, as alternate worlds that occasionally emerge into visibility. One can consider as an instance of such alternatives the leaderless, anarchist-inspired Occupy movement that emerged five years after the publication of Pynchon's novel.<sup>24</sup> To the charge that they are "just utopians," Hardt and Negri argue "that the multitude is not merely some abstract, impossible dream detached from our present reality but rather that the concrete conditions for the multitude are in the process of formation in our social world and that the possibility of the multitude is emerging from that tendency" (Hardt and Negri 226–27). In their utopian thinking, Morris and Pynchon understand that we need to be able to envision conjectural pasts and speculative futures in order to shape alternatives in—and to—the present.

### Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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<sup>24</sup> For an example of the political thinking of one who was actively involved in Occupy Wall Street, see Graeber.

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