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Cli-Fi Cinema: An Epideictic Rhetoric of Blame

Chloe Louise Powell

University of Nevada, Las Vegas

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CLI-FI CINEMA: AN EPIDEICTIC RHETORIC OF BLAME

By

Chloe Louise Powell

Bachelor of Arts - Communication Studies
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
2015

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

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Chloe Louise Powell

entitled

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Master of Arts - Communication Studies
Department of Communication Studies

Donovan Conley, Ph.D.
Examination Committee Chair

Kathryn Hausbeck Korgan, Ph.D.
Graduate College Interim Dean

David Henry, Ph.D.
Examination Committee Member

Emma Bloomfield, Ph.D.
Examination Committee Member

Denise Tillery, Ph.D.
Graduate College Faculty Representative

ABSTRACT

Cli-Fi Cinema: An Epideictic Rhetoric of Blame

by

Chloe Louise Powell

Dr. Donovan Conley, Examination Committee Chair
Associate Professor of Communication Studies
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

This thesis analyzes the symbolic mechanisms of guilt-redemption as developed by Kenneth Burke within two climate fiction (cli-fi) films: *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (2008), and *Interstellar* (2014). In doing so, this thesis offers an account of: (1) each film's role in providing their audience temporary assuagement of climate change related guilt, and (2) each film's role in transmitting values and "attitudes" to build and strengthen communities. Because cli-fi films begin from a dystopic vision of a possible future, it fulfills the "blame" function of epideictic discourse to provoke and inspire the "ecological imagination." Through this provocation, the audience is provided the possibility of hope and redemption through the adoption of the film's values or "equipment." As each film's imagination of climate change plays out, their political attitudes are excavated to demonstrate how the texts perform and portray these values. Specifically, I argue that *The Day the Earth Stood Still* demonstrates an eco-Marxist orientation, while *Interstellar* maintains a neoliberal environmental orientation.

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DEDICATION

And here's to you, Mrs. Robinson.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

When faced with unpleasant realities, we all prefer a fantasy. –Noah Gittell¹

Climate fiction, or cli-fi, in film, plays a significant role in the shaping of societal understandings and attitudes about climate change. As Frederick Buell corroborates, “More and more, popular culture hints that environmental problems and constraints are part of peoples’ daily, domestic, experience – that they are problems people now cope with daily, not just nightmares the future will bring more fully out.”² The recent emergence and popularity of cli-fi as a genre fittingly supports this claim by Buell about popular culture’s timely tapping of the climate change phenomenon. Due to the urgency of the climate change problem and its notable presence in the popular domain, I use the genre’s emergence as the initiation point for a rhetorical inquiry into cli-fi cinema.

The present thesis explores many closely related critical veins including: (1) the role of mankind’s entelechy, or preoccupation with perfectionism, and (2) the resulting Burkean guilt-redemption path restoring our perfection takes us down due to the psychological pollution stemming from the issue of climate change. Additionally, of interest for this project is the centrality of political orientations and attitudes, that through an epideictic rhetoric of blame, aid climate fiction films in the formation of communal values. The project’s theoretical foundation extends out of Burke’s guilt-redemption cycle and Perelman and Olbrecht-Tyteca’s “communion”-centered extension of the epideictic genre. Finally, by expanding our conception of dystopic fiction as being implicitly blameful and utopic fictions as implicitly praiseful, we create the space for a vision of sci-fi and cli-fi narratives, alike, as epideictically “blameful” in

nature. Therefore, the present project implements this framework to offer a unique analysis of the cli-fi film phenomena by applying this framework to the cli-fi films: *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (2008), and *Interstellar* (2014). The section to follow provides a brief introduction to the ongoing debate surrounding climate change to develop a full picture of the contextual factors that led to cli-fi's kairotic splash onto the silver-screen scene.

Climate Change Controversy

Forget about the Holocene, because the age of the "Anthropocene" is *so* hot right now. The earth's geological epoch for the last 11-12 millennia – the Holocene – has officially been eclipsed by a new era, the age of the Anthropocene.³ Although the earth *should* technically still be in the Holocene era, humanity now wields an unprecedented influence over the earth's environment as "geological agents."⁴ As Dipesh Chakrabarty interprets, "to call ourselves geological agents is to attribute to us a force the same scale as that released at other times when there has been a mass extinction of species."⁵ Historically, humans have been considered biological agents of the earth. However, a collective shift to the status of geological agents has occurred because "we have reached numbers and invented technologies that are on a scale large enough to have an impact on the planet itself."⁶ Suffice to say, society's newly renovated climatological epoch is less than ideal, as the age of the Anthropocene brings with it the possibility of mankind's end in the face of unimaginable ecological calamities.

In recent years, the momentum of environmental activism has hit a plateau in the task of shifting climate change awareness into meaningful, corrective action. An article in *Quartz* suggests that environmental advocates "fed up with slow (or in some cases, backwards) progress on climate change" are contemplating new and more radical measures to implement in their activism.⁷ To facilitate this critically important shift toward action, many activists and scholars

insist that environmental activism is in desperate need of a creative catalyst to stimulate the global community's ecological imagination in new and compelling ways. Peter Palik folds this call for the excitation of the social imagination into his notion of the "realist imperative."⁸ In its ideal usage, Palik describes his concept as being able "[to] provoke the metaphors of political philosophers or the imaginary worlds of science fiction writers, [it] reflects the determination to achieve wakefulness through the exercise of the literary imagination."⁹ For activists, stimulating the ecological imagination on a global-scale, whether through science fiction or other inventive mediums, is a one of the last available avenues for raising the critically important awareness about climate change and its issues. To this accord, this project contends that cli-fi, a relatively new species of dystopian science fiction, embraces this call for help by tapping into the ecological imagination.

The climate change debate has been an ongoing public controversy since at least the 1960s, when signs of an early environmental movement gained considerable momentum. Rachel Carson's "Silent Spring," is frequently described as a defining moment in the emergence of the climate change debate. Carson's book, released in 1962, warned of the dangerous effects of DDT and other synthetic pesticides. As a result, public awareness on climate change started to gain momentum.¹⁰ However, the continued expansion of the climate change movement owes its largest debt to the scientific evidence that came to light in the late 70s and 80s due to advancing technological abilities, which validated the reality of changing atmospheric conditions on Earth. In 1988, this awareness led the World Meteorological Organization and the United Nations Environment Programme to establish the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (henceforth to be identified as the IPCC) with the purpose of assessing human influence on rising greenhouse gas emissions, globally.¹¹ Most notably, within the IPCC's 2007 Fourth Assessment

Report, it was concluded as very likely (90% confidence) that: “a global assessment of data since 1970 has shown it is likely that anthropogenic warming has had a discernible influence on many physical and biological systems.”¹² According to a *Gallup* Poll from March of 2016, 64% of Americans had worried a “great deal” or “fair” amount about global warming; surpassing *Gallup*’s highest reading of 55% from a 2008 poll.¹³ The results of this poll show that more than half of all Americans acknowledge the reality of climate change, but reaching a consensus on its existence remains a monumental task that shows no indication of soon reaching a resolution.

Despite the 97% scientific consensus on the existence and threat of global warming, an opinion of dissent and disbelief has remained a persistent obstacle for securing meaningful action to correct or mitigate the catastrophic events to come.¹⁴ The scientific community’s success in conveying the magnitude and severity of climate change has thus far been unsuccessful in stimulating the necessary level of public action that the scientific data warrants. But, as cli-fi demonstrates, one way in which the threat of climate change is “made real” to the public is through dystopic narratives. Ultimately, cinematic handlings of climate change aid in the symbolic alleviation of the tensions and anxieties that have emerged from the climate change debate. An elaboration on the dystopic framing within cli-fi will help to frame the genre’s capacity as a symbolic guide for our mounting climate change frustrations.

Dystopia

By appearing in the fictional realm, imaginations of climate change offer a sense of the problem’s possible causes and consequences. Quite notably, Wayne Booth recognizes the power of fiction to inspire and mobilize collective action. As he explains, “when imagination takes on artistic expression, it ‘explores, and realizes, what might be, what ought to be, what can be’ and contributes to personality because it reveals the ‘potentialities of human life, of personal

characteristics, and of social action.”¹⁵ If we are to see the imagination as a link from the symbolic to the material realm, fiction becomes a critically important avenue for scholarly evaluation. The nature of science fiction has morphed from being seen primarily as a vehicle of entertainment, to instead being viewed as a form of entertainment that simultaneously engages the political. According to Rowland Hughes and Pat Wheeler dystopic imaginings:

Have the power to transfix their audience with horror, to command attention and shock people out of a position of comfortable apathy, in a way that strict adherence to the data cannot, even if the long-term implications of the data are terrifying enough in themselves.¹⁶

Kim Stanley Robinson and Gerry Canavan describe the capability of the “thought experiments of science fiction,” which throughout the last century have contemplated the possible realities of the future, “providing an archive of the imagination where science, story, and political struggle can converge and cross-pollinate.”¹⁷ Climate fiction has developed in response to the looming threat of global warming. However, the presence of the apocalyptic imagination in film is certainly not a new phenomenon; which is to otherwise say that cli-fi is not the only type of fictional text that has plugged into society’s doomsday-based fears. Stretching back to the writings of Greek mythology, to the Christian bible’s “Book of Revelations,” to now, apocalyptic discourse—or eschatological discourse, as Stephen O’Leary refers to them—have taken have been seen in some form in every generation.¹⁸

As Hughes and Wheeler corroborate, “climate change has made its way towards the mainstream in recent years, on both the screen and the page, and has now eclipsed nuclear terror as the prime mover of the apocalyptic and dystopian imagination.”¹⁹ Along with its science fiction predecessors’ appeal to the nuclear fear, climate fiction’s appeal to global warming fear suggests just how enduring society’s Armageddon anxiety has remained. We might, then, extrapolate this cultural constant as an illustration of an epideictic dimension of dystopic

narratives. Epideictic discourse provides its audience assurance by transmitting values of the communal past in hopes of enabling the communal present to overcome the anxieties of the communal future. In this way, the confusion and fear that past communities encountered during the nuclear age informs the society of the present on how to grapple with climate change. Cli-fi films address apocalyptic angst about global warming in a similar way to how science fiction films handled the nuclear age angst. Therefore, the values and strategies for grappling with the apocalypse that originated sci-fi nuclear disaster films are ingrained within cli-fi films. A piece of cli-fi's epideictic dimension is revealed through its science fiction influence. Nuclear disaster based sci-fi films "continues to 'speak' to us today," and operate as "[a] voice of the past [that] continues to animate the present."²⁰ The rise of cli-fi as a genre is due in large part to the persistence of the exigent nature of climate change and the ongoing discourse and dissent that surround the controversy.

From Sci-Fi to Cli-fi

For anyone curious about how global warming might manifest itself in the real world, they need only to look as far as the movie theaters to find the new, 'hot' spawn of the sci-fi genre: cli-fi. The genre of science fiction has often employed themes of cataclysmic, apocalyptic, and dystopian futures. In their book *Projecting the Shadow*, Janice Hocker Rushing and Thomas S. Frentz similarly argue: "the most profound insights into how technology is and might be experienced by society, often emanate from the literary and cinematic genre of science fiction."²¹ However, in the last two decades these themes have become increasingly inflected with climate change themes. Elucidating the connection between science fiction and apocalyptic imaginings, Hughes and Wheeler explain that:

Science fiction writing and film-making has embraced the possibilities of apocalyptic soothsaying, from the Victorian era to the present day; freed from the expectations of strict fidelity to scientific fact, and yet tethered to it, it has always been a popular genre within which extravagant speculation sits cheek-by-jowl with flashes of prescience. As such, it has become the primary vehicle for artistic mediation on the progress and impact of climate change.²²

Science fiction within literature, radio, television, and film has remained an enduring story-telling device, and brings with it the ability to expose large audiences to multiple facets of the issues at the forefront of their cultural conscience. Hughes and Wheeler offer Franklin J. Schaffner's 1968 *Planet of the Apes* (1968) against Roland Emmerich's *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004) as an illustration of the shift in the dystopian imagination in film from the late twentieth century's fear of a nuclear apocalypse to today's fear of a climate change apocalypse. The 1973 film *Soylent Green*'s portrayal of a dystopian world afflicted with pollution, overpopulation, and depleting resources, seems like an Orwellian anticipation of the climate fiction genre and apocalyptic imagination that would follow decades later. Another early example of climate fiction is found in the 1995, Kevin Costner flop, *Waterworld*. The film heavily relies on a dystopic framework to advance its plot. *Waterworld*'s first scene depicts a future Earth, after global warming caused the polar ice caps to melt and cover the entire planet in water. Ultimately, *Waterworld*'s climate change message falls short because it only briefly mentions global warming in the film's first minute and fails to identify humans as the cause of climate change.

Earlier iterations of climate fiction in film, like *Soylent Green* (1973), for example, demonstrate how environmental concerns are situated within popular culture cinema. However, these earlier films pale in comparison to the 2004 climate disaster blockbuster, *The Day After Tomorrow*'s success in spurring the proliferation of climate fiction films seen today.²³ *TDAT* is

largely held as the first film that deals solely with climate change, whereas the earlier examples of climate fiction film primarily used global warming as the setting or backdrop from which the plot develops.²⁴ In *TDAT*, the film's protagonist, a paleoclimatologist (Dennis Quaid), encounters nearly every type of natural catastrophe possible during his quest to save his son from imminent death in the doomed city of New York. *TDAT* attempts to show climate change through the lens of the generally accepted anthropogenic science, but diverged significantly from scientific projections about the rate at which global warming will occur. Despite its critical drubbing, in the years following the release of *TDAT* fictional films depicting imaginations of climate change erupted in popularity and quantity. The pervasiveness of these types of films inspired journalist, Dan Bloom to coin the term "cli-fi" to refer to them.²⁵ Overall, scholarship on cli-fi is very much still in its infancy; however, it is gaining the attention of academia at a rapidly increasing pace. The budding conversation on the cli-fi genre orbits around drawing the parameters of what should and what should not be categorized within it, as well as locating its major patterns and themes. Additionally, the genre of cli-fi is not the sole property of Hollywood; many small-scale, "B-films," and independently produced documentaries, have taken to the cli-fi genre. In 2006, just two years following *The Day After Tomorrow's* release, Al Gore's Oscar winning documentary *An Inconvenient Truth* highlighted the devastating consequences of global warming. Although *An Inconvenient Truth* falls outside of the realm of climate fiction, it is useful in measuring the proliferation of climate change in the mainstream at this time in the early 2000s.

As is the case with many Hollywood productions, *TDAT* takes its share of artistic liberties within its depiction of the magnitude and speed of climate change destruction. For this reason, in a review of the *TDAT*, *The New York Times* op-ed writer, Jason Mark, labelled it a

“storm-porn extravaganza.”²⁶ For many real-world scientists, the use of apocalyptic scenarios to portray climate change in films is counterproductive. Cli-fi often portrays climate change as occurring in a highly-dramatized fashion, which many scientists find problematic because it is not an accurate representation of the incremental nature of climate change. Beyond concerns related to scientific validity, the bulk of climate fiction films use apocalyptic scenarios to develop their plot. These scenarios might include an increasing number and frequency of natural disasters, melting of the polar ice caps, catastrophic flooding, or even tornadoes transporting sharks to ocean towns susceptible to the effects of rising sea level, just to name a few. The large majority of the themes within cli-fi films are consistent with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s 2007 Fourth Assessment report on the potential catastrophes that are possible results of increased greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. The IPCC’s list includes disasters like: an increased risk for severe droughts, intensified storm systems, sea-level rise, heat waves, floods, and tropical cyclones with crippling forces.²⁷ These apocalyptic scenarios are what give rise to the dystopic quality of many cli-fi films, an aesthetic framework that conjures a mood of hopelessness within the audience. This account of cli-fi’s common themes, characteristics, and traits provides a general picture of what the genre is up to. However, a consideration of the genre’s thematic trends is just the tip of the iceberg in terms of understanding cli-fi’s full cultural power. Accordingly, the next section briefly introduces the relevant theoretical concepts and framework this thesis advances to demonstrate the deeper rhetorical workings of cli-fi films.

Critical Approach

Cli-fi films progress through a problem-solution narrative structure, blame (problem) is capitulated through the plot but is resolved with a vision of praise (solution). Because cli-fi films develop their narrative arc within a dystopic, “fallen from grace” frame, I argue that they

operate primarily as an epideictic discourse of blame. As transmitters of epideictic attitude, cli-fi provides its audience “strategies” so that they may be “equipped to live” with climate change angst and therefore, can have hope. In suggesting certain “attitudes” for the audience to adopt, cli-fi films convey specific political orientations that offer their own views on how climate change might be addressed. In doing so, cli-fi situate certain “attitudes” or political orientations as “praiseworthy” and “blameworthy,” these characteristics serving as the film’s symbolic offering for achieving redemption. Thus, these political orientation, or strategies, serve as an “equipment for living,” by presenting a general, subjective orientation about climate change to facilitate its successful “symbolic” navigation.²⁸ Therefore, the audience, now “equipped” with these “attitudes” and “strategies,” form a communion with the film and its values.

Cli-fi’s ability to gain the adherence and trust of its audience about the specialized and scientific subjects like climate change is reliant on the film’s ability to demonstrate its authority. A cli-fi film’s ability to demonstrate its scientific *ethos* is crucially important to its ability to secure the trust of its audience. Along these lines, a rather interesting trend in cli-fi films comes through its specific use of main characters with a scientific or technological background as the epideictic transmitters of the film’s moral vision. These characters, due to their scientific or technical backgrounds are imbued with the credibility to advise on the matter of climate change, supplying all the necessary “good [scientific] reasons” for trusting the course of action they prescribe. Furthermore, the epideictic visionaries supplied in cli-fi films generally come in the form of an older, white, male, scientist that assume the role of the community “seer.”²⁹ For example, the main characters in both *TDTESS* and *Interstellar* have some sort of scientific or engineering background. The role of the “seer” within *Interstellar* is assumed by the NASA, astrophysicist, Professor Brand (Michael Caine); while in *TDTESS* this role is satisfied by the

Nobel Prize winning, scientist, Professor Barnhardt (John Cleese). The old, white, male, scientist, main character is a failsafe trope that is truly grandfathered into science fictions. And as such, these fictional figurations already have a well-established authority that enables the audience to trust and respect them. It is important to note that my discussion of the “scientific *ethos*” of cli-fi operates on one level through the film’s elements of production, while on a second level it operates through the fictional components and characters within its narrative. Relatedly, Thomas Lessl develops the concept of the “priestly voice,”³⁰ a concept that he connects to his analysis of Carl Sagan’s establishment of scientific *ethos* in the *Cosmos* television series³¹ Though only receiving brief mention here, the function of demonstrating “scientific *ethos*” within cli-fi is developed in greater detail in the analytic chapters to follow.

The present thesis analyzes the cli-fi films, *TDTESS*, and *Interstellar*, both of which grapple with the problem of climate change, yet imagine radically different solutions for addressing it. The starkest difference between the films emanates from their diametrically opposed political orientations and the specific partisanship and its related environmental management standpoints that each film aligns with. Each film’s solution configures industrial-technology as a means of solving climate change uniquely; with *TDTESS* opting for a completely anti-industry based solution, and *Interstellar* advocating an entirely industry-based solution. However, these films do share a deep appreciation and advocacy for scientific rationality to address and solve climate change. Chapter Two unpacks the theoretical framework I submit for analyzing the untrodden epideictic aspects of climate fiction films. As this chapter articulates, the epideictic genre plays a crucial role in the prefiguration of attitude, which is also to say, epideictic discourse is the breeding ground of incipient action. The chapter’s most notable contribution grafts Kenneth Burke’s theory of “equipment for living” with Chaim Perelman and

Lucie Olbrecht-Tyteca's concept of "communion," to elucidate cli-fi's enactment of epideictic "equipment."³² Chapter Three employs the framework laid out in Chapter Two for its analysis of the 2008 Twentieth Century Fox remake of the film, *The Day the Earth Stood Still*.

In the master's thesis, "The Rhetorical Significance of *Gojira*," Shannon Stevens looks at the film, *Gojira*, as the collective response of the Japanese people to WWII; their grievances otherwise were muffled by their own government.³³ In Stevens's analysis, she also identifies the role the 1951 *The Day the Earth Stood Still* played as an expression of American sentiment on the side against the proliferation of nuclear weapons. As my analysis shows, though the 1951 *TDTESS*'s rising tension developed from a nuclear warfare base, the 2008 *TDTESS* updates its plot around today's climate change-related anxiety. Chapter Four examines the 2014 film, *Interstellar* for its unique "solution" for addressing climate change through Burkean transcendence and its advocacy of technologically-based outcomes. Finally, Chapter Five discusses the project's limitations, implications, and heuristic potential for future scholarship. In the chapter to follow, cli-fi's epideictic is catalogued in greater detail. Additionally, Chapter Two's scope narrows in on a vision of cli-fi as an epideictic rhetoric of blame and concludes by situating Burke's guilt-redemption cycle in its mapping of cli-fi's narrative trajectory.

NOTES

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- ²⁰ Takis Poulakos, "Toward A Cultural Understanding of Classical Epideictic Oratory," *PRE/TEXT* 9 (1988): 149.
- ²¹ Janice Hocker Rushing and Thomas S. Frentz, "The Frankenstein Myth in Contemporary Culture," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 6, no. 1 (1989): 61.
- ²² Hughes and Wheeler, "Introduction: Eco-dystopias," 2.
- ²³ Hereinafter, *The Day After Tomorrow* will be referred to as *TDAT*. *The Day After Tomorrow*, directed by Roland Emmerich, 2004, (Burbank, CA: Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, 2004), DVD.
- ²⁴ Joanna Zajackowska, "Cli-fi: Cinematic Visions of Climate Change," *Contributoria*, last modified September 2015, last accessed June 30, 2016, <http://www.contributoria.com/issue/2015-09/55a116d01d70d5336c000002/>.
- ²⁵ Robin Bates, "Q&A with Dan Bloom, Popularizer of Cli-Fi (Climate Fiction)," *Teleread*, last modified January 27, 2016, accessed July 11, 2016, <http://teleread.com/qa-dan-bloom-popularizer-cli-fi-climate-fiction/>.
- ²⁶ Jason Mark, "Climate Fiction Fantasy," *The New York Times*, last updated December 9, 2014, accessed July 17, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/10/opinion/what-interstellar-and-snowpiercer-got-wrong.html?_r=0.
- ²⁷ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Fourth Assessment Report: Climate Change 2007: The AR4 Synthesis Report*, Geneva: IPCC, 2007, Introduction, 2.
- ²⁸ Kenneth Burke, "Literature as Equipment for Living," *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, (1974): 293-304.
- ²⁹ Dale Sullivan’s (1998) dissertation, "*A Rhetoric of Children’s Literature as Epideictic Discourse*," argues that C.S. Lewis’s *Chronicles of Narnia* serve as exemplars of epideictic discourse aimed at demonstrating and instilling positive communal values for children. Within his analysis, Sullivan develops the idea of the "seer" function within epideictic discourse – an "authority" figure that imparts moral wisdom on behalf of the community. Sullivan’s analysis demonstrates that specific characters in the *Chronicles of Narnia* fulfill the role of the "seer" and are readily accepted as trustworthy and credible by the community (audience).
- ³⁰ Thomas M. Lessl, "The Priestly Voice," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 75, no. 2 (1989): 183-197.
- ³¹ Thomas M. Lessl, "Science and the Sacred Cosmos: The Ideological Rhetoric of Carl Sagan," *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 71, no. 2 (1985): 175-187.
- ³² Chaim Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation*, (Notre Dame, London, 1969): 50.
- ³³ Shannon Victoria Stevens, "The Rhetorical Significance of *Gojira*," (master’s thesis, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 2010).

CHAPTER TWO

CONCEPTUAL SETUP: EPIDEICTIC BURKEAN BLAME

Cli-fi is a close relative of sci-fi and consequently, follows a similar teleological and narrative form. As Dale A. Sullivan describes, “it’s as if the [viewer] returns to a familiar pattern to reaffirm [their] sense of security in an otherwise threatening world.”¹ Because viewers enjoy the comfort of familiar retellings of stories, it’s of critical value to investigate the reason we have attachments to familiar patterns. Ron Von Burg explains in his analysis of *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004), “investigating all dimensions of a scientific controversy reveals how a popular culture resource can animate overlooked rhetorical commonplaces, pools of common discourses where interlocutors ‘go’ to generate persuasion.”² Cli-fi is a prime example of a popular culture artifact that embraces a scientific controversy and adds its own suasive handling, and as such, can be profitably examined from within one of the main oratorical types of speech – the epideictic genre.

More specifically, this chapter argues that cli-fi’s dystopic imagining takes the form of an epideictic rhetoric of blame. It first operates by admonishing its version of the guilty *attitudes* responsible for the catastrophic state of things. Then, by attaching itself to pre-existing attitudes or value-systems advanced for addressing climate change, it offers a journey of redemption or hope specific to that attitude. Cli-fi films function rhetorically as a form of epideictic blame by magnifying climate change guilt. These films then perform a figurative cleansing, offering their audience symbolic equipment in the form of a specific attitude for which they can, at least momentarily, resolve their internal climate change dissonance. Based on the omnipresence of dystopian themes throughout sci-fi and cli-fi films, an investigation of the epideictic blame

dimension at work within them is warranted. The present chapter provides a comprehensive explanation of the critical perspective and theoretical constructs that inform and guide this project. The theoretical setup included in this chapter aims to present a cohesive picture of some of the rhetorical workings of cli-fi films. The first section highlights some of the key scholarly conceptions of epideictic discourse to explicate this project's operationalization of the genre in its expanded sense. The second section infuses epideictic discourse with Kenneth Burke's "equipment for living" theory to show how cli-fi forges an "attitude" for symbolically addressing our climate change guilt. Finally, the concluding section of this chapter will introduce the precise Burkean theories and concepts that are employed in the analyses of *Interstellar* (2014) and *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (2008).

Rather than analyzing climate fiction film through an overarching narrative or mythic framework, I enter through the "blame" avenue of the epideictic genre. The acute presence of blame within this genre is a direct correlate to cli-fi's dystopic projections. By beginning in the shadow of a dystopic backdrop, cli-fi films contain implicit assertions about the ideas and actions that contributed to the Earth's climatory upheaval. Furthermore, through dystopia, cli-fi sets a tone about these fictional realities as "bad" and reflective of a state of hierarchical imbalance, or "fallen-ness." So once this dismal mood is in play, cli-fi can tap into our collective attitudes, using its fictional visions to create "structures of feeling," about the problems and solutions for climate change.³ This process, a-sort-of "motivistic" photosynthesis, cultivates the entelechial seeds of our own imperfection; namely, in relation to our imbalanced relationship with the planet. This entelechial drive, when germinated by certain epideictic tools, is motivated by and through guilt, for the reinstatement of a cleansed and redeemed status. To provide a full picture as to why I operationalize epideictic blame in my analysis of cli-fi cinema, the following section

will introduce some of the key scholarship on epideictic discourse that informed this project's development.

The Epideictic Genre

Of Aristotle's three "species" of oratory—deliberative, forensic, and epideictic—both deliberative and forensic were elevated by the Ancients for their more substantial argumentative function. The epideictic genre, on the other hand, was largely consigned to the aesthetic realm – this allocation was largely based on a view of epideictic as "mere display,"⁴ or simply as an exercise of the "ability of the speaker."⁵ Each of the three types of oratory evaluate different issues or actions for different reasons. Broadly speaking, deliberative rhetoric is concerned with a future decision or action, while forensic rhetoric evaluates a decision or action made in the past. On the other hand, epideictic discourse is primarily concentrated in the present –albeit, epideictic's "present" *learns* from values of the past, to best *inform* our future. In other words, the domain of epideictic operates across and within all three of the genre's temporal planes. Within the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle spends a significant amount of time discussing "topics (*topos*)," which he broadly conceives of as a kind of conceptual toolbox, a "place" that a speaker can pull from when crafting a message.⁶ Kenneth Burke suggests that "the modern sociological concern with 'values' as motives does not differ in principle from Aristotle's list of persuasive 'topics' in his *Rhetoric*."⁷ To this end, Burke productively connects these Aristotelian "topics" to his own work on Dramatism in *Rhetoric, Poetics, and Philosophy*. As he states:

The treatment of 'topics' in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* strikes me as the very center of the Dramatistic, though his *Poetics* mentions the *Rhetoric* only with reference to one qualitative part of tragedy, 'thought' (*dianoia*). I have in mind the fact that so many of the topics are like *recipes for character*, particularly insofar as, in a drama the recipes would not be merely spoken, but could be embedded in the very structure of the action.⁸

From Book II of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, Burke identifies "the most obvious" examples of recipes as those intended to induce: "anger, mildness, friendship, hatred, fear, confidence, pity, indignation, etc."⁹ For the advancement of a specific goal or purpose, it is essential that an orator select the proper tool(s) – or topic – to use within a given situation as a sort of "motivational trigger." For Aristotle, the primary concern of epideictic discourse was to identify the beautiful or the ugly, very much in the vein of Plato's notions of the base and the noble. Epideictic discourse, as Aristotle conceived it, relies principally on amplification to make its case. Cli-fi cinema's highly-dramatized, dystopic portrayals of climate change perform this amplificatory role and thus solidifies its epideictic importance. Aristotle's conception of epideictic as award and eulogical type speeches has been revisited and expanded in contemporary scholarship for its communal-orienting properties

Dale Sullivan links Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca's notion of "presence" with the epideictic argumentative device that Aristotle identifies as amplification.¹⁰ Drawing inspiration from Bacon's idea of rhetoric applying "reason to the imagination to move the will," Perelman and Olbrecht-Tyteca's "presencing" works to enhance certain features of a subject and intensify its value. By portraying accelerated and heightened climate change scenarios, cli-fi films succeed in making the issues of climate change "present." To establish "presence," epideictic discourse utilizes motivational cues familiar to the audience. Epideictic discourse often employs figurative and literary language, as well as highly imaginative and fantastic elements. Sullivan notes that "like imaginative writing, good epideictic rhetoric invites the audience into a world which fills their consciousness completely."¹¹ Sullivan, also, productively distinguishes epideictic rhetoric from the forensic and deliberative genres, explaining that epideictic audiences, "are observers instead of judges; its time is the present instead of the past or future; its topic is

virtue instead of justice or expediency, and its method is praise or blame, used to magnify virtue or vice.”¹² Sullivan’s explanation of the epideictic genre allows for a more textured and nuanced understanding of its function. But while Sullivan is among the many other contemporary scholars focused on expanding epideictic beyond Aristotle’s limited scope, much of the credit for laying this intellectual groundwork is owed to Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca.

In *New Rhetoric*, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca contend that epideictic oratory, in its classical/Aristotelian conception and beyond, has overlooked the role of the “good” at the core of the epideictic genre.¹³ They argue, further, that epideictic’s contribution to argumentation and its centrality to persuasion was falsely conceived by the Ancients. In turn, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca advance an expanded vision of epideictic discourse beyond its less than charitable earlier envisages as an ostentatious and showy genre with little pragmatic value. This enlargement also instigated the developing of epideictic as a broad literary and aesthetic operation. Further still, this expansion of epideictic to include the literary enables us to locate film within it, as well. As Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca articulate, the community strengthening capability of epideictic makes it tantamount to the other genres. In their view, epideictic discourse has the capacity to: (1) strengthen a disposition; which is also to say, it can strengthen a mood or attitude; and (2) to position its audience toward future action; meaning immediate action is not the specific goal for this type of discourse. Sullivan, on the subject, says that “epideictic does not aim at eliciting action; rather, it aims at affecting the general attitude of the audience toward a particular person or action.”¹⁴ Because values are not static, epideictic occasions serve as opportune moments for values to be “recast and remodeled.”¹⁵ According to Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca:

The orator's aim in the epideictic genre is not just to gain a passive adherence from his audience but to provoke the action wished for or, at least, to awaken a disposition so to act. This is achieved by forming a community of minds, which

Kenneth Burke, who is well aware of the importance of this genre, calls identification.¹⁶

Beyond Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, other notable scholars have similarly contributed to the exploration and enlargement of the epideictic genre. Takis Poulakos articulates the potential for epideictic as a “site of a critique or transformation of the social order.”¹⁷ Bernard Duffy advances the possibility of epideictic as a tool for cultivating a philosophical education.¹⁸ William Marcellino posits the epideictic genre as a site for arguing one’s hierarchy of values.¹⁹ Marcellino further explains that communion shows that the speaker and audience are in “agreement on values and the hierarchical ranking of competing values, such as the relationship between group and the individual.”²⁰ Dale Sullivan defines epideictic rhetoric as the “*rhetoric of orthodoxies*,” explaining that “epideictic deals with traditions, for orthodoxies have continuity; they form some sort of tradition that transcends a particular generation.”²¹ Michael Carter suggests that, the “function of epideictic is the generation of a powerful sense of community among the listeners,” and further, that, “the discourse itself defines those values and thus defines the community.”²² Similarly, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca’s conception of “communion” emphasizes the role of epideictic in facilitating a spirit of solidarity through shared communal value.²³

Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca further state, “the speaker tries to establish a sense of communion centered on particular values recognized by the audience, and to this end he uses the *whole range of means available* to the rhetorician for purposes of amplification and enhancement.”²⁴ Epideictic’s persuasive equipment includes many *kairotic* modalities, such as: amplification, allusions, and appeals to *ethos* – or credibility. Aristotle points to the imaginative license of the epideictic speaker, as they may use tactics of amplification or heightening to

supplement their crafting of someone or something as praiseworthy or blameworthy.²⁵ James L. Kinneavy explains that in an epideictic address, “the speaker attempts to portray himself as a person of good will, good sense, and good moral character.”²⁶ Epideictic *ethos*, then, is attributed to the speaker that demonstrates their possession of the qualities of: good will (*eunoia*), good sense (*phronesis*), and good moral character (*arete*). As Aristotle describes the role of *ethos*:

Persuasion is achieved by the speaker’s personal character when the speech is so spoken as to make us think him credible. We believe good men more fully and more readily than others: this is true generally whatever the question is, and absolutely true where exact certainty is impossible and opinions are divided.²⁷

Dale Sullivan corroborates this claim, explaining that the epideictic character “must be representative of the culture’s value system if the speaker is to gain the audience’s confidence.”²⁸ Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca explain that the epideictic “educator has been commissioned by a community to be the spokesman for the values it recognizes.”²⁹ Additionally, Sullivan highlights the important function of “authority” for an epideictic orator, as it “is attributed to the speaker by the audience because he or she ‘embodies’ the culture’s values, or common sense.”³⁰ Speakers use their authority – rather than authority of evidence – because the audience trusts their perceived *ethos*, and thus, “the epideictic rhetor has the presumption rather than the burden of proof.”³¹ Pinning down a more nuanced aspect of the ethical appeal, Sullivan explains that *ethos*, etymologically has been translated as either *ethos* or *eethos*.³² The former is generally translated as that of “habit,” while the former translates to the traditional conception of “credibility” – with this version being the one used by Aristotle in the *Rhetoric*. Sullivan argues, however that *ethos* has a far richer meaning than just “habit,” as it literally means a “habitual gathering place” or dwelling place.³³ He explains that “ethos is not primarily an attribute of the speaker, nor even an audience perception: it is, instead, the common dwelling place of both, the

timeless, consubstantial space which enfolds participants in epideictic exchange.”³⁴ So, for observers of an epideictic speech who already share the values of the speaker, the experience is a form of communion.³⁵

Cynthia Sheard advocates a view of epideictic as “a vehicle through which communities can imagine and bring about change.”³⁶ Along these lines, Sheard contends in her contemporary reconceptualization of epideictic, that:

By bringing together images of both the real--- *what is or at least appears to be*--- and the fictive or imaginary---*what might be*---epideictic discourse allows speaker and audience to envision possible, new or at least different worlds. We should keep in mind, too, that such images of the real and the fictive need not be positive for epideictic to accomplish its visionary function. Often enough, negative images of what is or could be provide powerful incentives for change.³⁷

Aristotle’s conception of epideictic discourse also incorporated the use of elements of the past with projections of the possible future. As he articulates in the *Rhetoric*: “for all speakers praise and blame in regard to existing qualities, but they often make use of other things, both reminding [the audience] of the past and projecting the course of the future.”³⁸ Thus, epideictic serves the socially significant purpose of “inculcating,” or transmitting, “timeless values distilled from past experience,” passing them from each generation to the next.³⁹ Similarly, Sheard posits epideictic as, “a rhetorical gesture that moves its audience toward a process of critical reflection that goes beyond evaluation toward envisioning and *actualizing* alternative realities, possible worlds.”⁴⁰ Cli-fi films offer this vision of the possible future, gesturing its audience in a direction, so that they may be provided with hope through an attitude or strategy that may equip them to navigate a looming dystopia. Therefore, cli-fi, deeply rooted in the epideictic genre, taps into an audience’s moods and attitudes via communal values about the problems and causes responsible for climate change.

Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's concept of communion, though only receiving brief mention in the *New Rhetoric*, has proven to be a fertile site for academic inquiry. Tying this all together for the purposes of the current project, epideictic rhetoric involves the recycling of collective values and attitudes for the cultivation of a community's "communion." This expanded view of epideictic, allows us to find the communal linkages within cli-fi films that provides the symbolic means for comforting an audience's climate change related angst. Additionally, through Richard Graff and Wendy Winn's three-leveled conceptualization of Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's communion, the epideictic devices and figures employed within these different levels of communion can be identified and unpacked. In doing so, we can analyze the specific points in which cli-fi films advance communal values and attitudes. Through the medium of cli-fi, collective anxiety can be temporarily anesthetized via a symbolic form of redemption. In the following section, the Burkean attitudes, or "equipment" within cli-fi that fosters this symbolic guilt-relief is developed in greater detail in the following sections.

"Equipment for Living" - an Epideictic "Strategy"

In *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, Burke devotes a brief section to explicate a theory that he suggests can be "catalogued" fairly accurately as "a *sociological* criticism of literature."⁴¹ Burke leads into this theory of "literature as equipment for living" with a discussion of proverbs by denoting their role in the "consolation of vengeance, for admonition or exhortation, [and] for foretelling."⁴² While Burke never explicitly mentions the term, there are some quite obvious traces to the epideictic genre in his discussion of "equipment for living." Proverbial wisdoms, Burke suggests, are akin to a type of "medicine," a way to diagnose and symbolically treat a recurring, socially generalizable situation.⁴³ Burke goes on to describe that proverbial wisdoms

are “timeless,” evidenced by the fact that “the situations and strategies framed in Aesop’s Fables, for instance, apply to human relations now just as fully as they applied in Ancient Greece.”⁴⁴ In a like manner, Graff and Winn’s cataloguing of the verbal techniques of Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca’s “communion” designates “maxims and proverbs” at the level of universally-held values.⁴⁵ As they note, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca observed “that although the value or standard suggested in a maxim or proverb might conceivably be rejected, the ‘presumption of agreement’ is strong: they are, as we might say, the characteristic or formulaic expression of a culture’s ‘proverbial wisdom.’ ”⁴⁶ The interconnectedness of epideictic communion and Burke’s discussion of “equipment for living” is quite apparent. Yet, there seems to be little uptake with these paired concepts in rhetorical scholarship.

In addition to his work on Burkean entelechy, Stan Lindsay unites Aristotle, Perelman, and Burke to show how epideictic topoi deposit and impart their value systems within a society. Lindsay proposes a method of “epideictic criticism,” which seeks to pinpoint the epideictic topoi of a text. The second part of his method involves identifying what the text deems as “good” and “evil,” which might otherwise be stated as “praiseworthy” and “blameworthy.” A key component of Lindsay’s method for epideictic criticism includes pinning down the values embedded in an epideictic text. Expanding on the rationale behind this method, he claims that “by supplying concrete examples of the values of a culture in the life being praised, epideictic supplies ‘presence’ and ‘amplitude.’ ”⁴⁷ Thus, the epideictic values, in the form of topoi, contain the societal virtues articulated within a text. Lindsay further reasons that “Burke’s entelechy claims that humans unconsciously act upon themselves in accordance with the implicit value systems of the entelechies/stories with which they identify. Hence, values are transmitted.”⁴⁸ Additionally, Lindsay—in remaining consistent with his supplying of constructive links to the present project’s

theoretical framework – contends that “while Perelman points us in the right direction, he does not offer a methodology for locating the cultural values as useful as does Kenneth Burke.”⁴⁹

Lindsay’s assertion highlights a Burkean methodology is particularly fitting for an analysis of the values embedded within an epideictic work. At the same time, Lindsay’s contention observes that Perelman helps us to *locate* these values. These values, or what Burke has elsewhere referred to as terminologically interchangeable with his conception of “strategies,” are the lynchpin for epideictic’s “proverbial” transference capabilities. As the thread that links one community or culture to the next, thus, these “willful particles,” are a universal access point an orator can enter and use to reach an audience.⁵⁰ To further explicate these theoretical linkages, the next section looks at how epideictic discourse may influence or propel “attitudes.”

Epideictic Attitude of Blame

Burke reasons that language as an “equipment for living” is instrumental in persuading an audience to “adopt an attitude.”⁵¹ A given film’s specific handling of epideictic blame can, I suggest, be unpacked and informed through Burke’s work on *Attitudes*; an area of Burke’s work that is closely aligned to Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca’s emphasis on “dispositions” in the *New Rhetoric*. In *A Grammar of Motives*, Burke conceives of an “attitude” as an incipient action based on a predisposed view or orientation toward the world, which is “the first step towards an act.”⁵² Sonja Foss, Karen A. Foss, and Robert Trapp’s work on Burke helpfully expands upon the connection and influence of attitude on action. As the authors explain, “words create orientations or attitudes, shaping individuals’ views of reality and thus generating different motives for their actions.”⁵³ Similarly, this adoption of an attitude is at work within Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca’s notion of “adherence.” By creating a “disposition to action,” a rhetor

gains the audience's "adherence to the value it lauds."⁵⁴ In *Counter-Statement*, Burke explains: "The present Program speculates as to which emotions and attitudes should be stressed, and which slighted, in the aesthetic adjustment to the particular conditions of today."⁵⁵ Hence, utilizing Burke's "equipment for living," as part of a film criticism's analytical framework enables the critic to uncover the attitudes or strategies prescribed to a text's audience for dealing with a pressing situation or exigence.

Barry Brummett, a big proponent for the "equipment for living" approach, elucidates the way cinema provides the resources for living:

(1) Insofar as it articulates, explicitly or formally, the concerns, fears, and hopes of a people...and (2) insofar as the discourse provides explicit or formal resolution of situations or experiences like those which people actually confront, thus providing people with motives to address their dilemmas in life.⁵⁶

In other words, films transmit an attitude through which the audience can be "equipped to live" with a troubling situation and therefore, can have hope. Daniel J. Lair's description of Burke's take on attitude, and "equipment for living," further illustrates the interplay between these concepts:

By suggesting a preferred attitude, literature prefigures intellectual and emotional orientations for agents to adopt. That is, equipment for living functions not so much by suggesting a specific series of actions, but rather by presenting a general subjective orientation towards the situation designed to facilitate its successful navigation.⁵⁷

The above quote from Lair hits on the suggestive power rhetoric can potentially hold over the attitude of its audience. These descriptions of "equipment for living" emphasize its role in the prefiguration of an attitude. The symbolic "equiptage" provided, then, is wholly concentrated on the conceptual, or motivistic level. Epideictic discourse invests the thrust of its resources at the level of motive, rather than toward the inducement of a specific action. Serving as a forerunner to

deliberative and forensic modes of discourse, epideictic lays the attitudinal bedrock that later action is informed upon. Through a union of these concepts as an epideictic “equipment for living,” we find the space to interpret films as intensifiers of epideictic attitude. Otherwise put, this is to say that the epideictic attitude has at its end the constitution of a community based on shared values and shared visions of the possible.

Therefore, through a view of epideictic as “a discourse that a community uses to reveal itself to itself,” the epideictic attitude requires a continual rearmament of the symbolic resources necessary for living.⁵⁸ Sullivan, in support of this conception of epideictic, explains that it “builds cultures by establishing and maintaining beliefs, values, and ways of seeing that serve as a form of life for everyday activities.”⁵⁹ At heart, epideictic provides a “way of seeing,” which is metabolized as a strategy, attitude, or perhaps, a recipe, even, for survival in the midst of an uncertain and anxious climate. Along these lines, Sheard’s recasting of the epideictic genre is illustrative of how attitude can be activated toward action. She posits epideictic as, “a rhetorical gesture that moves its audience toward a process of critical reflection that goes beyond evaluation toward envisioning and *actualizing* alternative realities, possible worlds.”⁶⁰ Hence, epideictic is a symbolic guide designed to “equip” us to live with the uncertainties associated with perceived threats that plague generation after generation.

Cli-fi “blame” begins from a vision of a nightmarish possible future so that they may, then, transport their audience in a direction of hope. As a result, this attitude equips the audience to navigate the tensions of a looming disaster. Despite our contemporary fears about the possibility of the earth meeting its apocalyptic end, “it is the desire of the human-race, the unfolding dream of our collective longing for a just or unfallen, world.”⁶¹ Through the medium of climate fiction films, the hopeful vision provided to the audience works as a sort of communal

redemption from the grips of global warming. This societal preoccupation with imagining and worrying about the onset of an ecological Armageddon is a side-effect of our entelechial situation. The following section will develop the cause of our perfection psychosis in more detail using Stan A. Lindsay's Burkean-specific take on the concept of entelechy.

Epideictic Entelechy

Burke's "definition of man" in *Language as Symbolic Action* maintains that humans are "rotten with perfection."⁶² This rottenness is a direct result of the perfectionist compulsion implicit in the symbol-using and tool-making aspect of the human animal.⁶³ This compulsion for perfection is symptomatic of the entelechial principle written into our basic human composition. Lindsay develops a concept of entelechy in his book *Implicit Rhetoric*, in which he gives extra attention to solidifying the conceptual distinction between Burkean and Aristotelian entelechy.⁶⁴ According to Lindsay, whereas, Aristotle's entelechy is grounded in a biological sense, Burke's conception of entelechy is founded in the logological. Aristotle thought of seeds as "possessing within themselves the 'final cause' or *telos* – the goal of what the mature plant would be."⁶⁵ Entelechy translation means a "process of development, while having one's *telos* within themselves."⁶⁶ The key point of divergence between Burke's and Aristotle's entelechy occurs through Burke's replacement of the "implicit determinism" of Aristotelian entelechy with "the implicit freedom of human action" within his conception of the entelechial motive.⁶⁷ The transcribed contents of Burke's lecture found in *Dramatism and Development*, provides a bit more clarity on his use of the term. Burke explains: "by entelechy, I refer to such use of symbolic resources that potentialities can be said to attain their perfect fulfillment."⁶⁸ As Lindsay argues that Burke's use of the concept is best understood as a "psychotic entelechy," something for

which Burke's insights possess a "curative value."⁶⁹ Elucidating the rationale behind his use of the term "psychotic," Lindsay explains that it "[refers] to the tendency of some individuals to be so desirous of fulfilling or bringing to perfection the implications of their terminologies that they engage in very hazardous or damaging actions."⁷⁰ Lindsay's development of Burke's psychotic entelechy and its associated "curative value" provides a deeper texture to my emphasis on guilt *as* motive within cli-fi film. Relatedly, we can see how entelechy is a crucial factor in the development of guilt.

The entelechial urge for perfection can be assuaged, in part, when society's sense of order and hierarchy has reached stasis. The idea of a symbolic hierarchy as described by Thomas Rueckert, is "any kind of graded, value-charged structure in terms of which things, words, people, acts, and ideas are ranked."⁷¹ Although this societal balancing act is an unending process, the perfection principle puts the utmost value on the coming to completion of things. When we are unable to maintain the different stages and levels of our perfection, we experience guilt. So, humanity's entelechy, taken to its furthest imaginative end within a society preoccupied with the possibility of an impending climate change disaster is precisely what is displayed by cli-fi films. Further, still, the role of entelechy returns in an important way in the two filmic analyses in the chapters to follow. This perfection principle, routed through the scientific construct of "biological altruism," is encountered in both *TDTESS* and *Interstellar* – however, as subsequent chapters demonstrate, the films' treatments of it are quite different.

Essentially, humanity is compelled by this unconscious, entelechial drive for perfection, and, as a result, are "separated from [our] natural condition by instruments of [our] own making."⁷² In the same vein, Burke quite prophetically offers a prediction of humanity's

developing relationship with technology and the planet when based on our entelechial impulse.

He explains:

Now, owing to technology's side-effect, pollution, mankind clearly has one unquestionable purpose; namely, to seek for ways and means (with correspondingly global attitudes) of undoing the damage being caused by man's failure to control the powers developed by his own genius. His machines are not just the *fruits* of human rationality. They are in a sense the *caricature* of his rationality. With the great flowering of technology, the problem of self-control takes on a possibly fatal new dimension. Man must so control his invented servants that they cease to control him. Until man solves that problem, he has purpose a-plenty.⁷³

Burke's warning echoes that of Karl Marx's view on overproduction – a connection further explored in the conversation on eco-Marxism in *TDTESS*. Similarly, Janice Hocker Rushing and Thomas S. Frentz tap into the possible consequences of Burkean entelechy for mankind.⁷⁴ Their projection is that “[it] drives us to finish what we start, even if that realization spells our own destruction.”⁷⁵ To this accord; and to our collective discord; humans are the inventor of the negative, driven by a need for order, and consumed by the ideal of perfection.

Through its deep immersion within a dystopic setting, cli-fi provides a cautionary forecast that a “fallen”-based-doom might soon be impending. The genre's intrinsic guilt-arousing blame properties then provokes the need to quench our entelechial thirst. This entelechial principle, what Burke likens to a symbolic perfection complex, is the crux of our need for redemption. As Shaun Treat explains, “Because humans can use symbols to create, negate, dream, idealize and fantasize about that which is lacking, our desire for perfection generates guilt when we inevitably fall short and thus necessitates some symbolic means for redemption.”⁷⁶ Cli-fi draws us to a place of guilt through blame, so that it may then direct us to its recommended path to redemption. The audience is prepared to receive this redemptive path and its corresponding political attitudes in the interest of symbolically rehabilitating their injured

perfection. As the plot of the film develops, some form of a fictional solution to climate change is unveiled; this solution, when closely examined reveals a specific redemptive “out” provided for the audience. Though, to accept the film’s path to redemption, one must accept the premise that the guilt is warranted, while also assenting to the values embedded in the film’s problem and solution. Thus far, this chapter has offered a rationale for this thesis’s connection of Burke and Perelman for the rhetorical analysis of cli-fi films. Additionally, as this section highlights, cli-fi films can feed and tap into our entelechial urges to amplify an audience’s feelings of guilt. What remains, then, is an explanation of the Burkean processes within cli-fi films that utilize blame to activate the cycle of guilt, with the cycle’s climax coming through the film’s strategy for securing “hope” via redemption.

Burke’s Guilt-Redemption Cycle

Burke’s guilt-redemption cycle aligns well with his theory of aesthetic production as “equipment for living.” This theory enables us to interpret how viewers of cli-fi films are symbolically equipped to grapple with the realities of climate change.⁷⁷ A reconceptualization of epideictic discourse as a value-centered tool with community-forming potential, ushers the role of blame through Burke’s cycles of redemption. Rotten with the pursuit of “the perfect,” when we fail to ascend to a desired level of perfection, guilt is the result.⁷⁸ Foss, Foss, and Trapp offer an elaboration of Burkean guilt, they explain:

Guilt is a permanent part of the human condition in that it is intrinsic in the negative and the hierarchy produced by language. Some methods of catharsis, purgation, purification, or cleansing are needed to rid individuals of this guilt so that they can receive redemption. Just as a language system creates guilt, it is the means through which guilt is purged.⁷⁹

As described above, symbolic guilt emerges when societal order or a society's hierarchical structure is unbalanced or fails to be maintained. When present, however, this guilt catalyzes the purification-redemption processes required for its alleviation. Although the climate change debate has received a significant amount of attention in the last decade, as it stands, our atmospheric-based anxiety has yet to be quelled. The growing social and political tension about rising carbon-dioxide emission and the planet's overall state of pollution, as a result, stimulates our own internal pollution, embodied in the form of guilt. The guiding light of our guilt-coping mechanism is found in Burke's "pollution-purification-redemption" process, which entails a "lifelong process of growth and change."⁸⁰ This process's purpose, as articulated by Trapp, Trapp, and Foss "is the drama of the self in quest, the human effort to discover and maintain identities so that they can move toward the perfection they seek."⁸¹ Ultimately, the process of rebirth is never finished. For just as one set of pollutants are cleansed, more pollutants begin to contaminate, thus requiring a cycle of rebirth to begin anew.

Currently, due to society's ongoing global fixation with the "free market" principles of privatization, deregulation, and commodification, "the earth *is* the rock in a hard place."⁸² Humanity has "fallen" from the grace of Gaia, Mother Nature, or any other anthropomorphic name we may use to refer to Earth. In *Rhetoric of Religion*, Burke describes this "Fall" from "a prior state of unity" as both possible, and implied, within the ideas of Creation and its resultant Covenant; a term Burke later substitutes for the Dramatistic term, "Order."⁸³ This "Fall" from grace is illustrated within cli-fi films through the dystopic imaginations they prophesize. The dystopic imagination advances a frightening projection of the future conditions of the earth should climate change not be stopped, while also implicitly lamenting our part in contributing to climate change, and our inaction in addressing it. Additionally, cli-fi films reveal that our current

hierarchy is entirely flawed, demonstrating that we have miscalculated societal order by elevating culture over nature. Our broken covenant with the environment is articulated in the form of an “ecological jeremiad,” in which the divine jeremiadic element of the “chosen,” emerges as a “chosen land, the pristine wilderness,” rather than a chosen people.⁸⁴ The broken covenant at the root of our “Fall,” merits the use of epideictic blame as a persuasive device in the interest of resolution. Through blame we are warned of our coming punishment should we not repent of our sins, which, all the while, contributing to a worsening feeling of guilt. Burke aligns the notion of punishment, which we might also usefully call sacrifice, with the need for redemption “to ‘pay’ for one’s wrongdoings by suffering punishment is to ‘redeem’ oneself, to cancel one’s debt, to ransom or buy back.”⁸⁵ The broken covenant with nature is depicted and recovered in some way in *TDTESS*’s addressing of climate change; however, to its detriment, the motivation for restoring this covenant comes only after an intervening entity forces our hand,

Kenneth Burke provides the theoretical notions of mortification, scapegoating, and transcendence, which work to (1) illuminate cli-fi’s ability to tap into our current social anxieties and guilt, and (2) illustrate how symbolic redemption might be made obtainable through fictive/imaginative solutions to the issues of climate change within two cli-fi films. A rhetorical inquiry into these cli-fi films using Burke’s guilt-redemption cycle is further bolstered with the inclusion of the related Burkean notion, the “rhetoric of rebirth,” and its conceptual constituents. Foss, Foss, and Trapp detail Burke’s “rhetoric of rebirth” process, identifying its movement through three stages: pollution, purification, and redemption.⁸⁶ In the cycle’s first phase, the pollution stage, guilt manifests as a state of uncleanness and impurity, a burden needing to be cleansed and purged. Purification, the second phase, involves the symbolic ridding of these

pollutants through some form of atonement. In the third and final phase of the cycle, the redemption stage, a new state of purity and cleanliness is secured.

The need for the rhetoric of rebirth cycle is a direct consequence of our entelechial obsession with perfection and maintaining society's established hierarchy. Pollution, or some *version* of this symbolic contamination and the guilt it incites, is an inevitability for everyone at some point. No one is immune from experiencing the "hierarchical embarrassment" included within a membership to the "symbol-using animal" tribe.⁸⁷ This "original sin," of sorts, is experienced as a social tension or anxiety in need of the curative cycle of rebirth. The "rhetoric of rebirth" cycle is a useful supplement for tracking the movement from a state of guilt to redemption. In consideration of cli-fi's admonitory tone, attention to the film's narrative thereby offers the ability to locate its progression through each of the phases of rebirth. Through an application of this Burkean method, we can demonstrate how cli-fi films provide the means for symbolically alleviating an audience's psychological, climate-related guilt – at least, temporarily. The final piece of this theoretical structure reveals how guilt is laundered through the redemptive channels of: mortification, transcendence, and scapegoating. Additionally, as this thesis asserts, cli-fi films create their possible guilt-assuaging paths through a combination of these redemptive modes. In the section to follow, the varying redemptive pathways at work within cli-fi films are further fleshed out.

Scapegoating, Mortification, Transcendence

Cli-fi's process of symbolically laundering guilt occurs through the Burkean concepts of: scapegoating/victimage, mortification, and/or transcendence. The first redemptive mode is through a scapegoat, which involves the transferring of one's guilt onto an outside vessel, a

“symbolic redeemer.”⁸⁸ Scapegoating is also often referred to as victimage, although these concepts are slightly nuanced from one another. In the symbolic act victimage, a “symbolic offering,” is loaded with all the atrocities of the guilty party, or parties.⁸⁹ Barry Brummett argues that victimage, as a mechanism for resolving guilt, is especially pertinent because “the goat is punished, not so much for what it has done, but for its ability to represent what the guilty themselves have done.”⁹⁰ Whereas victimage emits guilt outwardly and on to another, Burke delineates mortification as another redemptive mode, which works by drawing sin or guilt inward and into the self. Second, redemption can occur through mortification, which is a self-inflicted form of punishment or suffering that attempts to balance the scales of sin and redemption. As Sandra L. French and Sonya C. Brown explain, “to put mortification and victimage in a nutshell: If there is no bad guy, there must be a fall guy.”⁹¹ Although, in the case of mortification, we essentially act as our own “fall guy.”

Aside from the resolution of guilt through victimage or mortification, Brummett contends that transcendence, another of Burke’s concepts, also encounters and reacts to guilt. Notably, this third path to redemption essentially avoids guilt or denies it altogether, rather than attempting to *resolve* it. Brummett argues that the mode of transcendence reverses guilt and transforms it into virtue. Consequently, because transcendence attempts to prevent the sensation of guilty entirely, Burke does not include it alongside the two primary modes of guilt-redemption he identifies. In his piece, “Burkean Scapegoating, Mortification, and Transcendence in Presidential Campaign Rhetoric,” Brummett demonstrates how Ronald Reagan invoked Burkean transcendence to his advantage in the 1980 presidential election campaign. Reagan reframes liberal accusations of his constituents’ actions representing waste and irresponsibility, suggesting instead, that their actions were contributing to American progress and economic growth. To complete his redemptive

offering of transcendence, Reagan tells his American supporters that valuing “free enterprise” should not be a cause for guilt, but rather, it should be held as a celebration of their traditional values.⁹² In *Counter-Statement*, Burke warned of the looming threat of a “technological psychosis,” an industry-worshipping and industry-reliant society would face. Burke warned that a cult of efficiency would fall prey to menacing overproduction and a “technical efficiency [that] has become too much like psychological inefficiency.”⁹³ Within *TDTESS* and *Interstellar* the theme emerges that technical efficiency is of the utmost importance for humanity. While the technological priorities can be seen to shift towards a more ecologically mindful place in *TDTESS*, within *Interstellar* the logic of technical efficiency remains its gospel for evading humanity’s extinction. Additionally, there is no vision of solving climate change that can be imagined without requiring at least some version of sacrifice. As such, in Burke’s guilt-redemption equation, the only way guilt can be overcome is through sacrificial redemption. Through the implications of Burke’s symbolic action, motives and belief systems that guide and influence human action can be further understood. Several useful connections can be extended from Burke’s “definition of man,” such as (1) the role of hierarchy and order, (2) how a visual imagination of our guilt might serve as motive, (3) how the films provide a way of coping with our guilt, and as a result, (4) how the film packages redemption from our guilt. The need for attaining perfection also accounts for the need for completion and the relief it provides. Thus, by visualizing the devastation climate change could potentially cause to our planet, we are entelechially-satisfied through this imagining of the Earth coming to its own completion.

At the root of humanity’s reliance on a hierarchical structure of society and its systems is the goading principle of perfection, entelechy. Within the cli-fi genre, a significant and recurring plot component comes in the way it portrays a society’s ideal hierarchical organization. Very

much a reflection of the world's present proclivity towards emphasizing difference, the class differences within reality and fiction alike are products of the order and hierarchy that envelop all human existence. In the age of the Anthropocene, balancing the symbolic scales of society's hierarchy would require a major reordering of our economic and environmental value-systems – just what Naomi Klein's *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate* explicitly calls for.⁹⁴ This would entail moving the earth to a higher position within our hierarchy, or, perhaps, dropping capitalistic priorities down a few levels. Versions of these types of reordering appear in all cli-fi films. The motivistic function is to show us our guilt so that we may address it and be moved towards a sense of redemption. However, this guilt is dealt with in a variety of ways within cli-fi films. Within *Interstellar*, guilt is almost entirely avoided, with this avoidance resulting from the film's use of Burkean transcendence. Alternatively, the film *The Day the Earth Stood Still* goes out of its way to emphasize our feelings of guilt using Burkean mortification.

Stated differently, the dichotomous view of nature vs. society is a direct corollary of reconciling with our perfection. Man's relationship with nature can be thought of in an elevated sense, with nature being “above” us, or as a pure and divine entity that must be respected and celebrated. While, on the other hand, nature can be viewed as “below” man, perhaps, a commodity or possession, ultimately devoid of any romantic attachment or sentiment. Where films like *TDTESS* quite explicitly suggests the possibility of achieving harmony with nature within its ecological resolution, it simultaneously reinforces the idea that nature and culture are mutually exclusive. So, to summarize, “equipment for living” enables us to cope with climate-change-incited blame and the sense of anomie, and having “fallen” from grace that results from our “pollution.” Along with our guilt from the fall, we find that our path to “perfection” is

hindered, our sense of order and hierarchy are even more critically flawed, now. Therefore, cli-fi films give us a set of strategies, attitudes, or motives, through which we can navigate these guilt-redemption cycles and move toward a cleansed and redeemed state. Of the potential attitudes advanced in the films, certain political ideologies, or strategies, for solving climate change can be located by analyzing the level of emphasis each film places on industrial or ecological solutions. As each film's imagination of climate change plays out, these attitudes can be excavated to demonstrate how the texts embody the values of specific political orientations.

The Burkean framework laid out in the present chapter for application in the two subsequent chapter's film analyses, accomplishes a few valuable things. First, by locating the processes of mortification, scapegoating, and transcendence in a cli-fi film's guilt-relieving offering, we can extract the film's standpoint on what humanity's relationship with the environment should look like. Additionally, in identifying the guilt-redemption concepts embedded in the problem and solution of a cli-fi film, the critic is better equipped to evaluate the political implications of these messages. The visions of environmental disorder in the films are symbolically resolved by the rebalancing of the social order previously gone askew. Also, implicit within cli-fi narratives is a moralizing agent. The villains of these films representing the "bad" and the protagonists more generally representing the "good." These value judgements contain the epideictic encomium, identifying what one should praise, and, denunciation, which provides a judgment about what one should see as blameworthy. To ultimately fasten the audience's assent to its value judgments, the epideictic genre has several persuasive avenues it can venture down to achieve these ends.

As this section demonstrates, using an overarching Burkean framework can be complicated by the multitude of interrelated processes and concepts that stem from Burke's

extensive work. The first phase of the pollution-purgation-redemption process is initiated in the films through their dystopic projections of a world devastated by a changing climate. The pollution stage also activates our feelings of guilt, which we must resolve to recover from our fall from grace. Within the purgation phase, Burke's strategies of: mortification, scapegoating, and transcendence, equip us to resolve our guilt and move to the stage of redemption. Climate fiction film as an "equipment for living" provides us strategies and attitudes for responding to climate change. Altogether, cli-fi films operate as a motivistic guide, which through the guilt-redemption cycle enables us to better cope with an uncertain fate. The subsequent chapters specifically examine the guilt-redemption cycles illustrated through the problem and solution of climate change in the films: *TDTESS* and *Interstellar*, respectively. In these two films that are analyzed in the following chapters, we find an eco-Marxist attitude within *TDTESS*, and neoliberal environmentalism within *Interstellar*. As the analyses will show, these symbolic-coping attitudes for climate change guilt are understood as direct correlates to the phases of Burke's guilt-redemption cycle. More specifically, *TDTESS* employs the guilt-alleviating mechanisms of scapegoating and mortification, while *Interstellar* utilizes the guilt-assuaging techniques of mortification and transcendence. So, with a conception of the guilt-relieving motives and redemption-oriented drives received by and through cli-fi films now in place, this chapter will now provide its concluding thoughts and some of the implications of this theoretical framework for the rest of the project's analyses.

Conclusion

Couched in the cinematic language of dystopia, cli-fi films imaginatively tackle the specter of climate change to assuage "feelings of guilt and fear in audiences. Just as science

fiction imagines the possibilities of aliens, distant space, or time travel that exceed our current reality; climate fiction brings that same process of imagining to the ecological uncertainties of global warming. Epideictic discourse provides its audience hope by transmitting values of the communal past with the intention of enabling the communal present to overcome the anxieties of the communal future. In this way, the confusion and fear that past communities encountered like during the nuclear age, for example, functions as an informant to our present society on ways may go about grappling with climate change. Cli-fi films represent a space that allows the dual possible notions of *ethos* that Dale Sullivan carved out. On the level of *ethos* as a communal dwelling space, a cli-fi film represents both a literal place, like a movie theater, which is a material place one can go to view a film in; and a spiritual or symbolic space that we may commune together in through viewing the film. As an appeal to credibility it harnesses *ethos*, and even more accurately, its harnessing of scientific *ethos* plays a crucial role in cli-fi's ability to establish itself as an authority to speak on scientific issues.

Cli-fi films address apocalyptic angst about global warming in a similar fashion to science fiction films' confronting of nuclear age-incited angst. As such, the values and strategies originating from nuclear-based sci-fi films that aid in grappling with this apocalyptic angst, simultaneously, are ingrained within cli-fi films. A substantial element of cli-fi's epideictic dimension is revealed through its science fiction influence. Nuclear disaster-based sci-fi films "continues to 'speak' to us today," operating as "[a] voice of the past [that] continues to animate the present."⁹⁵ These films aspire to move audiences from a state of blame to a state of hope, and so my thesis examines the rhetorical mechanics of "redemption." It is through the processes of narrating, imagining, visualizing, and finally, then, grappling with our societal concerns, that our motives can be pointed in the direction of change. More to the point, cli-fi films offer a sense of

ease through the fulfillment of specific kinds of longings. They offer glimmers of hope and possibility that help assuage our real-world anxieties surrounding dire ecological promises. Through this process of generating the ease of hope around the issues of climate change, films have the power to conjure a mood and to strengthen a specific attitude or disposition.

The central argument advanced by my thesis, then, is that we find ourselves in a moment of ecological tension, and the genre of cli-fi offers audiences a way to imaginatively “resolve” this tension. Cli-fi films accomplish this resolution within a context of epideictic rhetoric, using their own cycles of blame and redemption to demonstrate the praise and blame worthy actions needed to implement their solution. The different problems and solutions played out through cli-fi fictions serve as a motivistic precursor for possible policy changes we might implement down the road. These fictions deliver us to a new or modified place; and this movement from a place of “fallen” to “grace,” is quintessential of Burkean pragmatics. This is to say that these fictions are motivational, they deliver, they have an energy behind them—but it really is just a question of how. Therefore, this thesis, through the construction and application of a theory of cli-fi as epideictic blame, creates the space for these answers.

NOTES

¹ Dale Sullivan, "A Rhetoric of Children's Literature as Epideictic Discourse," (Dissertation, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, 1998), 194.

² Ron Von Burg, "Decades Away or The Day After Tomorrow?: Rhetoric, Film, and the Global Warming Debate." *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 29, no. 1 (2012): 10.

³ Raymond Williams describes his concept of "structures of feeling" as "social experiences in solution." Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, (Oxford University Press, 1977): 128-135.

⁴ According to David M. Timmerman, the way in which Plato referred to epideictic was often sarcastic in tone. His use was referencing his "competitors" that used the genre to show off or display, thus, as "mere display." (230) David M. Timmerman, "Epideictic Oratory," in Theresa Enos, ed., *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric and Composition: Communication from Ancient Times to the Information Age*, (Routledge, 2011): 230.

⁵ Aristotle and George A. Kennedy, *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*, (Oxford University Press, 2006): 1358b2.

⁶ Aristotle and Kennedy, *On Rhetoric*, 45.

⁷ Kenneth Burke, "Dramatism," in *Communication: Concepts and Perspectives*, ed. Lee Thayer, (Washington D.C., Spartan Books, 1966): 338.

⁸ Emphasis Added. Kenneth Burke, "Rhetoric, Poetics, and Philosophy," in *Rhetoric, Philosophy, and Literature: An Exploration*, ed. Don M. Burks (Purdue University Press, 1978): 31.

⁹ Burke, "Rhetoric, Poetics, and Philosophy," 31-32.

¹⁰ Sullivan, "A Rhetoric of Children's Literature," 72.

¹¹ Sullivan, "A Rhetoric of Children's Literature," 72.

¹² Dale L. Sullivan, "The Epideictic Rhetoric of Science," *Journal of Business and Technical Communication* 5 (3), (1991): 230.

¹³ Chaim Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation*, (Notre Dame, London, 1969): 48.

¹⁴ Sullivan, "A Rhetoric of Children's Literature," 29.

¹⁵ Richard Graff and Wendy Winn, "Presencing" Communion" in Chaim Perelman's New Rhetoric," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 39, no. 1 (2006): 49.

¹⁶ Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric*, 7.

¹⁷ Takis Poulakos, "Toward A Cultural Understanding of Classical Epideictic Oratory," *PRE/TEXT* 9 (1988): 161.

¹⁸ Bernard K. Duffy, "The Platonic Functions of Epideictic Rhetoric," *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 16 (2), (1983): 79-81.

¹⁹ William M. Marcellino, "Talk Like a Marine: USMC Linguistic Acculturation and Civil–Military Argument." *Discourse Studies* 16, no. 3 (2014): 385-405.

¹⁹ Marcellino, "Talk Like a Marine," 401.

²⁰ Marcellino, "Talk Like a Marine," 401.

²¹ Sullivan, "The Epideictic Rhetoric of Science," 232.

²² Michael Carter, "Scholarship as Rhetoric of Display; or, Why is Everybody Saying All Those Terrible Things About Us?" *College English* 54 (3), (1992): 306-307.

²³ Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric*, 51.

²⁴ Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric*, 51.

²⁵ Aristotle and Kennedy, *On Rhetoric*, 1367a36.

²⁶ James L. Kinneavy, "[]A Theory of Discourse: The Aims of Discourse." (1971).

²⁷ Aristotle and Kennedy, *On Rhetoric*, 1356a 4-7.

²⁸ Sullivan, "A Rhetoric of Children's Literature," 124.

²⁹ Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric*, " 52.

³⁰ Sullivan, "A Rhetoric of Children's Literature," 77.

³¹ Sullivan, "A Rhetoric of Children's Literature," 131.

³² Sullivan, "A Rhetoric of Children's Literature," 125.

³³ Sullivan, "A Rhetoric of Children's Literature," 125.

³⁴ Sullivan, "A Rhetoric of Children's Literature," 140.

³⁵ Sullivan, "A Rhetoric of Children's Literature," 77.

³⁶ Cynthia Miecznikowski Sheard, "The Public Value of Epideictic Rhetoric," *College English* 58, no. 7 (1996): 771.

³⁷ Sheard, "The Public Value of Epideictic," 770.

³⁸ Aristotle and Kennedy, *On Rhetoric*, 1358b4.

³⁹ Poulakos, "Toward A Cultural Understanding," 148.; Duffy, "The Platonic Functions of Epideictic Rhetoric," 85.

⁴⁰ Sheard, "The Public Value," 787.

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- ⁴¹ Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, 293.
- ⁴² Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, 293.
- ⁴³ Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, 293.
- ⁴⁴ Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, 301.
- ⁴⁵ Graff and Winn, "Presencing Communion," 54.
- ⁴⁶ Graff and Winn, "Presencing Communion," 54.
- ⁴⁷ Stan A. Lindsay. "Burke, Perelman, and the Transmission of Values: The Beatitudes as Epideictic Topoi." *KB Journal* 11, no. 1 (2015), 7.
- ⁴⁸ Lindsay, "Burke, Perelman, and the Transmission of Values," 13.
- ⁴⁹ Lindsay, "Burke, Perelman, and the Transmission of Values," 7.
- ⁵⁰ Kenneth Burke, "Dramatism," in *Communication: Concepts and Perspectives*, ed. Lee Thayer, (Washington D.C., Spartan Books, 1966): 338.
- ⁵¹ Kenneth Burke, "Literature as Equipment for Living," *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, (1974): 293-304.
- ⁵² Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives*, (University of California Press, 1969): 236.
- ⁵³ Sonja K. Foss, Karen A. Foss, and Robert Trapp, "Chapter 7: Kenneth Burke," *Contemporary Perspectives on Rhetoric*, (Waveland Press, 2014): 197.
- ⁵⁴ Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric*, " 50, 54.
- ⁵⁵ Kenneth Burke, "The Program," *Counter-Statement*, (University of California Press, 1968): 107.
- ⁵⁶ Barry Brummett, "Electric Literature as Equipment for Living: Haunted House Films," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 2, (1985): 248.
- ⁵⁷ Daniel J. Lair, "Surviving the Corporate Jungle: The Apprentice as Equipment for Living in the Contemporary Work World," *Western Journal of Communication* 75, no. 1 (2011): 77.
- ⁵⁸ Michael Carter, "Scholarship as Rhetoric of Display; Or, Why Is Everybody Saying All Those Terrible Things About Us?," *College English* 54, no. 3 (1992): 303-313.
- ⁵⁹ Sullivan, "The Epideictic Rhetoric of Science," 232.
- ⁶⁰ Sheard, "The Public Value," 787.
- ⁶¹ Sullivan, "A Rhetoric of Children's Literature," 192.
- ⁶² Kenneth Burke, *Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature, and Method*, (University of California Press, 1966): 16.

⁶³ Throughout his writing, Burke often refers to humans universally as “man.” (Hu)man represents a more inclusive correction for this.

⁶⁴ Lindsay, *Implicit Rhetoric*, 5-12.

⁶⁵ Lindsay, *Implicit Rhetoric*, 5.

⁶⁶ Stan A. Lindsay, *Implicit Rhetoric: Kenneth Burke's Extension of Aristotle's Concept of Entelechy*, (University Press of America, 1998), 5.

⁶⁷ Lindsay, *Implicit Rhetoric*, 269.

⁶⁸ Kenneth Burke, "Dramatism and Development," (Clark University Press, 1972), 39.

⁶⁹ Stan A. Lindsay "Waco and Andover: An application of Kenneth Burke's concept of psychotic entelechy," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 85, no. 3 (1999): 278. Lindsay explains that this curative property is found in the tools Burke provides for “counseling” or “curing” psychotic entelechy. These tools in the form of Burke’s “concepts of discounting and the four master tropes.” (p. 278)

⁷⁰ Lindsay "Waco and Andover," 272.

⁷¹ William H. Rueckert, *Kenneth Burke and the Drama of Human Relations*, (University of California Press, 1983): 131.

⁷² Burke, *Language as Symbolic Action*, 16.

⁷³ Kenneth Burke, "Rhetoric, Poetics, and Philosophy." *Rhetoric, Philosophy, and Literature: An Exploration*, (Indiana: Purdue University, 1978): 33.

⁷⁴ I refer here to “Burkean entelechy,” which, although inspired by Aristotle’s conception of entelechy, Burke’s use of the concept is nuanced toward the psychotic as Stan A. Lindsay, expounds upon this distinction in his book *Implicit Rhetoric*. Lindsay develops and conceives of Burke’s entelechy as “psychotic entelechy.”

⁷⁵ Janice Hocker Rushing and Thomas S. Frentz, *Projecting the Shadow: The Cyborg Hero in American Film*, (University of Chicago Press, 1995): 18-19.

⁷⁶ Shaun Treat, "Scapegoating the Big (Un) Easy: Melodramatic Individualism as Trained Incapacity in K-VILLE," *KB Journal* 5, no. 1 (2008): 2.

⁷⁷ Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, 293-304.

⁷⁸ Burke, *Language as Symbolic Action*, 18.

⁷⁹ Foss, Foss, and Trapp, “Chapter 7: Kenneth Burke,” 208.

⁸⁰ Foss, Foss, and Trapp, “Chapter 7: Kenneth Burke,” 210.

⁸¹ Foss, Foss, and Trapp, “Chapter 7: Kenneth Burke,” 210.

⁸² Naomi Klein, “Introduction,” in *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate*, Simon and Schuster, 2015.

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- ⁸³ Kenneth Burke, *The Rhetoric of Religion*, (University of California Press, 1970): 175, 181.
- ⁸⁴ Dylan Wolfe, "The Ecological Jeremiad, the American Myth, and the Vivid Force of Color in Dr. Seuss's *The Lorax*," *Environmental Communication* 2 (1), (2008): 11.
- ⁸⁵ Burke, *The Rhetoric of Religion*, 176.
- ⁸⁶ Foss, Foss, and Trapp, "Chapter 7: Kenneth Burke," 207.
- ⁸⁷ Kenneth Burke, *Permanence and Change: An Anatomy of Purpose*, (University of California Press, 1984): 278
- ⁸⁸ Burke, *The Rhetoric of Religion*, 190-200.
- ⁸⁹ Burke, *Permanence and Change*, 284.
- ⁹⁰ Barry Brummett, "Burkean Scapegoating, Mortification, and Transcendence in Presidential Campaign Rhetoric," *Central States Speech Journal* 32 (4), (1981): 256.
- ⁹¹ Sandra L. French and Sonya C. Brown, "It's All Your Fault: Kenneth Burke, Symbolic Action, and the Assigning of Guilt and Blame to Women," *Southern Communication Journal* 76, no. 1 (2011): 3.
- ⁹² Brummett, "Burkean Scapegoating, Mortification," 260.
- ⁹³ Burke, "The Program," 120.
- ⁹⁴ Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate*, (Simon and Schuster, 2015).
- ⁹⁵ Poulakos, "Toward A Cultural Understanding," 149.

CHAPTER THREE

THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL

Only at the precipice do we evolve. -Professor Barnhardt.

Chapter Two detailed various functions of epideictic discourse as the means by which cli-fi films reassert communal value systems in pursuit of symbolic regeneration. As that chapter proposed, cli-fi's dystopic dimension constructs guilt through epideictic blame. After establishing a portrait of blame, cli-fi then delivers its audience with attitudinal "equipment" for the symbolic cleansing of their guilt. The present chapter analyzes Scott Derrickson's 2008 remake, *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (hereafter, *TDTESS*) and argues that the film exhibits an eco-Marxist "attitude" that situates anthropogenic, or human-based, causes at the center of its climate change blame. *TDTESS* is set in a present-day earth where alien forces have deemed humanity as the largest threat to the planet's survival, and as therefore in need of extermination. Klaatu (Keanu Reeves), an alien representative sent to earth, assumes a parent-like role opposite the child-like humans of earth who have abused the planet to the point of its climate change caused ruin. However, an important caveat about *TDTESS*'s climate change solution, is the implication of its solution requiring extra-earthly intervention to help mankind "evolve."¹

At its core, *TDTESS* advances the notion that mankind, when left to its own devices, will eventually cause the total degradation of our planet. *TDTESS* frames the military-industrial complex as its main antagonistic force due to this agency's encouragement of technological warfare and advanced weaponization. The brunt of *TDTESS*'s blame is directed at society's "techno-obsession," which is symptomatic of the depraved state of humanity and the inability to embrace the "Otherness" of nature within the film. The subject of *TDTESS*'s harshest judgment

is the military and government agencies that it depicts as a “shoot first, ask questions later,” mentality. Humanity’s depravity is a consistent theme in the story. The contemporary update of the film follows the film’s protagonist, Helen Benson (Jennifer Connelly), an astrobiologist who repeatedly comes to Klaatu’s aid despite not knowing whether his intentions on earth is to humanity’s benefit or not. Near the film’s conclusion, Klaatu observes an exchange between Helen her adopted son, Jacob (Jayden Smith), which shows him a redemptive side of humanity he previously had not seen. This interaction convinces Klaatu to save humanity from the already-in-progress extermination by sacrificing himself. Though to stop mankind’s continued polluting of the planet, the alien robot, “GORT,” sends out a massive electromagnetic wave, rendering all the Earth’s weapons and technology permanently defunct. Klaatu’s tour of earth, is a troubling mystery to Helen, the military, and especially to the United States’ Secretary of Defense, Regina Jackson (Kathy Bates). After unsuccessfully attempting to get information about Klaatu’s purpose on earth, she immediately orders that Klaatu be drugged so he can be questioned in a more advanced military facility. To the surprise of the other scientists in the room with Jackson when the plan for interrogating the alien is being devised, Helen volunteers to give Klaatu the drug injection. After switching out the “solution” given to her by an ominous, fancy suit-wearing, government agent, Helen gives Klaatu a harmless dose of saline and tells him to run – this interaction initiating Klaatu’s relationship with Helen in completing his mission on earth.

In the end, the film’s quite radical solution involves the destruction of all human technology and weaponry. *TDTESS*’s solution to the threat of ecological devastation pits unchecked industrial overproduction at the center of the problem of climate change. *TDTESS*’s solution to climate change involves the wholesale dismantling of capitalism; a solution, I argue herein, that exhibits an eco-Marxist political orientation. At heart, eco-Marxists believe that there

is no level of regulation that can moderate the nature of capitalism. For eco-Marxists, the only way to save the environment is the complete elimination of capitalism and its technological support system. Further, *TDTESS*'s eco-Marxist solution suggests that the only way climate change can be overcome, and the only way society can get off the never-ending treadmill of production, is if mankind reverts to a pre-technological way of life. In demonstrating *TDTESS*'s movement from a state of "fallen-ness" through its path to symbolic redemption, this chapter will proceed in two main "parts" that reveal the film's progression from guilt to redemption as it unfolds through the related "rhetoric of rebirth" cycle. Part One analyzes *TDTESS*'s framing of climate change's "problem," as the military-industrial complex. As we will see, *TDTESS* positions mankind and the products of its industrial efforts, like weaponry, at the root of its blame portrait. In Part Two, I begin by examining the eco-Marxist political "attitude" embedded in the film's road to redemption and the ways in which it delivers us from a state of "fallen-ness." Then, in the concluding section of Part Two, I analyze the specific "equipment" for symbolic redemption *TDTESS* offers through its employment of versions of Burke's scapegoating/victimage and mortification. The following section will highlight the contextual factors that contributed to the development and production of the film.

Context

Half a century ago society was gripped by fear of nuclear annihilation. Correspondingly, during that time Hollywood science fiction films became concerned with nuclear-based themes. Today, however, our predominant fear has evolved into concern over climate change based upheaval. Just as the sci-fi genre has slowly been obscured by cli-fi, it is quite fitting that the contemporary remake would follow suit. Kenneth Burke warned of the "cult of waste" that society is rapidly approaching, because "without radical changes in its technologic ways, the

world [is] headed for a calamity that might ultimately be as bad as were an actual nuclear war to break out.”² In view of Burke’s statement, the shift from the original film’s grappling with nuclear warfare to the contemporary remake’s handling of climate change, as the byproduct of mankind’s overconsumption, proves illustrative of the ways film “speaks” to communal concerns.

The 1951, black-and-white, original *The Day the Earth Stood Still* was directed by Robert Wise and starred Michael Rennie as Klaatu and Patricia Neal as Helen Benson.³ The original film, based off a 1940s short-story, “Farewell to the Master,” by Harry Bates, conveys a very strong message against the proliferation of nuclear weapons.⁴ Unlike its 1951 predecessor’s release a whopping 57 years earlier, the 2008 remake of *The Day the Earth Stood Still* did not receive high praise. Even with Keanu Reeves and the swapping of a cutting-edge, special-effect spacecraft in the place of the original *TDTESS*’s tinfoil-like, flying saucer, the remake failed to impress films critics and moviegoers, alike. Twentieth Century Fox’s 2008 *TDTESS* reboot proudly touted its scientific underpinnings during the film’s promotional phase. This claim is most evidenced by scientists from the SETI (Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence) Institute that worked on the film throughout its development. As the film’s director, Scott Derrickson supports, the SETI scientists aided the film in its attempt “to give the science some validity.”⁵ Also quite interestingly, *TDTESS*’s promotional team sent a radio transmission of the film to the *Alpha Centauri* star system – which, if the signal *is* ever intercepted by distant aliens, might not be some of humanity’s best work to display given the film’s 21% on *Rotten Tomatoes*. Nevertheless, with the help of the Deep Space Communications Network in Cape Canaveral, this 20th Century Fox flop succeeded in adding a notch to its scientific credos.⁶

As a version of epideictic, the scientific credibility of a cli-fi film is an important aspect of its ability to gain the audience's assent. As Chapter Four will corroborate, a film's scientific *ethos* can help to situate its authority on the subject, which for cli-fi films is obviously the issue of climate change. *The Day the Earth Stood Still* remake is a prime example of cli-fi's ability to amplify blame to trigger our entelechial need for redemption. With a heavy dystopic dose of cli-fi's signature doom and gloom, *TDTESS* sends its audience on a collision course for guilt. As such, the following section explores the *TDTESS*'s portrayal of humanity's state of "pollution" and highlights the "blameworthy" qualities the film uses to overwhelm us with guilt.

Part One: Epideictic Blame for the "Fallen" (Pollution)

As the film's rising tension develops, Helen is plucked from the home she shares with her stepson (Jayden Smith) and taken to a heavily guarded military complex in an emergency operation. In route via military helicopter, Helen and the other people assembled for the operation discover that they are all individuals with scientific, engineering, mathematical, or physics backgrounds. When they arrive at their destination, they are greeted by a former colleague of Helen's, Dr. Michael Granier (Jon Hamm), who informs them that an unidentified, extraterrestrial object is set to descend upon Central Park at the center of New York City. Dr. Granier informs the assemblage of scientists and informs them that they have less than one hour to determine what the object is and how they can deal with it. As the police officers, military personnel, and crowd of onlookers gather around the spherical spacecraft in Central Park to observe the events that would follow, in a mixture of fear and excitement the alien entity is accidentally shot by a panicked soldier. After the extraterrestrial entity is shot, it is rushed into "surgery," where the surgeon discovers that the strange layers of placenta-like alien material gives way to a figure more human-like in form. The entity is put in an incubation-like chamber

where it continues to morph until it takes its final form as a tall, dark and handsome “man-like” (Keanu Reeves) with the ability to communicate fluently in multiple different languages.

Klaatu, as the entity reveals his name to be, requests that his military captors allow him to speak to the world leaders about his reason for coming to earth. But instead of having his request granted to meet the world leaders, he is greeted by the headstrong, Secretary of Defense, Regina Jackson (Kathy Bates). Jackson informs Klaatu learns that there is the usual level of international animosity and that a meeting with all the world leaders together would be next to impossible.

Klaatu is submitted to a series of tests, including a polygraph test. In response to the question of whether he is human or not, Klaatu states, “my body is.”⁷ The importance of Klaatu’s response to the Secretary’s query becomes more pertinent in a section later to come. In the sphere-shaped spacecraft that descends upon Central Park, the alien figure, Klaatu is accompanied by a giant and menacing, alien-robot. The robot, what the military refers to as a form of genetically organized robot technology, is thus dubbed “GORT.” The robot’s name and unique chemical composition is an allusion to the growing “GMO,” or genetically modified organism, controversy. The reaction GORT receives by the society in the film, a combination of distrust and fear, directly mirrors the reception GMOs have received in popular society as of late. GORT is quickly judged as a threat to the public, though the teams of scientists studying the cyclops-looking robot know absolutely nothing about its genetic makeup or functioning. When GORT emerges from the sphere to defend the wounded Klaatu after he was shot by a military officer, the robot’s laser-beam response system is automatically activated, emitting an electromagnetic pulse that temporarily disables the weapons and technologies in its vicinity. The military forces that responded to the alien invasion are left with no way of communicating or capturing the extraterrestrials by force. It is later revealed that GORT’s response was not attacking the military

forces that surrounded the sphere, but that it was simply defending Klaatu, as the robot is activated in the presence of violence.

Blame: The Industrial-Military Complex

Throughout *TDTESS*, the technological and intellectual superiority of Klaatu's alien race is both insinuated and displayed. When the Secretary of Defense, Regina Jackson, first encounters Klaatu, she voices concern that as history has shown, stronger civilizations (Klaatu's alien race) generally succeed in overtaking weaker civilizations (humanity). Beyond the powers of telekinesis that Klaatu uses to evade his military captors, he also can heal himself and resurrect the police officer he accidentally kills. The supremacy and higher intelligence of the alien race in *TDTESS* provides them with the *ethos* to pass judgment on humanity. As an evolved, and far more advanced species, Klaatu's civilization can easily see the root of our climate change problem, but feel that we morally inferior to them as well.

Regina Jackson: My name is Regina Jackson. I'm the Secretary of Defense of the United States of America.

Klaatu: This body will take some getting used to.

Regina Jackson: I've been sent here to determine who or what you represent and what your intentions are.

Klaatu: It feels unreal to me. Alien. It will take time to adapt.

Helen Benson: What were you before you were human?

Klaatu: Different.

Helen Benson: Different how?

Klaatu: It would only frighten you.

Regina Jackson: What is your purpose in coming here?

Klaatu: There is a gathering of world leaders not far from here. I will explain my purpose to them.

Regina Jackson: I am afraid that is not possible. Perhaps you should explain yourself to me instead.

Klaatu: Do you speak for the entire human race?

Regina Jackson: I speak for the President of the United States. Now please, tell me why have you come to our planet.

Klaatu: *Your* planet?

Regina Jackson: Yes. This is our planet.

Klaatu: No, it is *not*.⁸

Because Regina Jackson is functionally speaking on the President's behalf in this interaction with Klaatu, she is then speaking on behalf of the entire United States. This is an important consideration in view of the last two lines in this exchange. Regina's statement reflects an attitude that humanity has a claim over the planet; that it belongs *to* us. Klaatu quickly corrects her, remarking that planet is *not* one of humanity's possessions.

Regina Jackson: History has lessons to teach us about first encounters between civilizations. As a rule, the less advanced civilization is either exterminated or enslaved. I'm thinking of Pizarro and the Incans, Columbus and the Native Americans, and the list goes on. Unfortunately, in this case, the less advanced civilization is us.

Michael Granier: This is the representative of an extra-terrestrial civilization. This is the most important discovery in the history of Mankind!

Regina Jackson: It may well be the last discovery in the history of Mankind.⁹

From this interaction, it becomes clear that Regina is unwilling to embrace Klaatu's "Otherness." She fears that aliens from an "advanced" civilization will have the upper hand on the earthlings and as such can easily "exterminate" them. Later in the film, "Madame Secretary" commands the military operatives to "bring in the reapers."¹⁰ The "reaper" nickname for the operation, reinforces the film's judgment about humanity's excessive violence, a theme that remains steadily throughout the film.

The soldier in the opening scene of the film who shoots the non-threatening extraterrestrial, Klaatu, as he exits the space sphere in Central Park sets the tone for *TDTESS*'s admonishment of humanity's highly reactive, child-like nature. By the same token, throughout the film the public's anarchic and riotous reaction to the alien invasion and shortages of gas, food, and water reinforces this sense of societal negligence. Outside of the help Helen provides Klaatu to escape the military base he was held at following his "surgery" and rehabilitation,

Klaatu sees almost no evidence of humanity's redemptive qualities. Along with the interaction he observes at the train station in which two strangers get in a physical altercation over a ticket. After one man has a heart attack, the other man then snags the incapacitated man's ticket and runs off with it. In these early scenes, the film goes out of its way to accentuate humanity's worst impulses. All the greedy, self-serving human actions that Klaatu observes early on in his time on earth are at the center of *TDTESS*'s blame. While Helen is taking Klaatu to a destination of his request, Jacob makes the comment that "they should kill them [the aliens] anyways... just to make sure it's not a threat"¹¹ because "that's what [his] dad would have done."¹² Klaatu, observing this exchange, seems unsurprised to hear this sentiment coming from a child, which further affirms to Klaatu that humans are rotten from the start. Because Jacob mentions that his father was in the military, Klaatu later derisively remarks to Helen that "the boy wants his soldier father to come fight."¹³ Helen reveals that Jacob's father was formerly an engineer in the army and that he died in service but had not gone "over there to fight, but to build."¹⁴ Klaatu's initial insinuation about Jacob's father remains consistent with *TDTESS*'s condemnation of the military and its impulse for warfare. Helen defends Jacob's army father's death at war because he joined to use his knowledge as an engineer to help build, not to fight. Conversely, Helen's specific mention of his engineering background shows the *TDTESS*'s praise for STEM backgrounds.

The trio later arrives at a McDonald's where Klaatu joins Mr. Wu, an alien associate who has spent 70 years as inhabitant of earth, while Helen and Jacob sit and wait at a booth nearby. Klaatu and Mr. Wu proceed to discuss their observations of earth's human inhabitants and what measures they should take in moving forward with their planned alien intervention.

Klaatu: You've been out of contact for a long time.

Mr. Wu: I had a dangerous assignment. This is hostile territory.

Klaatu: I've noticed. I was hoping I could reason with them.

Mr. Wu: I'm afraid they are not a reasonable race. I've been living amongst them for seventy years now. I know them well.

Klaatu: And?

Mr. Wu: Any attempt to intercede with them would be futile. They are destructive, and they won't change.

Klaatu: Is that your official report?

Mr. Wu: The tragedy is, they know what's going to become of them. They sense it. But they can't seem to do anything about it...I'm staying.

Klaatu: You can't stay here.

Mr. Wu: I can and I will.

Klaatu: If you stay, you'll die.

Mr. Wu: I know. This is my home now.

Klaatu: You yourself called them a destructive race.

Mr. Wu: That's true. But still, there is another side. You see, I... I love them. It is a very strange thing. I... I... I can't find a way to explain it to you. For many years, I cursed my luck for being sent here. Human life is difficult. But as this life is coming to an end... I consider myself lucky... to have lived it.¹⁵

In the beginning of this interaction Mr. Wu and Klaatu speak Mandarin to one another, but then switch midway through to English, though the reason for this is not entirely made clear. This conversation does reinforce the fact that their civilization is a highly intelligent one. The film's blatant admonition for society's reliance on technology and weaponry as an automatic response to their problems. In the second part of this chapter, *TDTESS*'s offering of an alternative prescriptive course, the eco-Marxist "attitude," is expounded.

Part Two: Path to Purgation/Redemption

A hallmark of cli-fi films is the way they utilize characters that function as epideictic "seers" or "virtuosos." In keeping with the theme of displaying *ethos*, these characters all have some affiliation or background in the techno-scientific realm. Aristotle defines virtue as the "topic most closely connected with forms of praise."¹⁶ Within cli-fi's "blame" function there is also an implicit notion of what is not to blame, or that which is "praiseworthy," or virtuous. The role of the epideictic "virtuoso" functions as a character more relatable than the epideictic

“elder.” Because they must embody “values assumed to be nearly universal, and by implication lives them out,” having a character the audience identifies more closely with, the film’s moral vision has more of a chance of being adopted by them.¹⁷ while in *TDTESS* its protagonist Helen, and the antagonistic alien, Klaatu act as its “virtuosos.” The dual conduits for epideictic wisdom, Dr. Helen and Professor Barnhardt, possess the necessary qualities that an audience member would find admirable, and thus want to emulate. Indeed, it is through these characters that the film displays the qualities and attitudes worthy of being imitated. Through these characters, the *TDTESS* conveys the “good will (*eunoia*), good sense (*phronesis*), and good moral character (*arete*),” necessary for an orator to demonstrate their *ethos* to an audience.¹⁸ Professor Barnhardt satisfies the requirements for a community’s epideictic seer: scientifically trained, older, white, and male. The epideictic “seer’s” within cli-fi are responsible for delivering the film’s attitudinal course, functionally speaking, within the seer’s lines in the film, we find the film’s guiding ideological, or moral compass. For the epideictic “seer” to be deemed credible, Sullivan argues that they cannot be a young person because they lack the prudence and experience a community would value.¹⁹

TDTESS positions scientific rationality at the highest level of its praise. When we first meet Dr. Helen Benson she is teaching a graduate class at Princeton University during which she assigns the question, “which type of microorganism could survive on Jupiter’s moon, Callisto, and why,” for homework.²⁰ Helen’s background is as an astrobiologist that specializes in microbiology, which focuses on the study of theories of life beyond earth. A scientific specialty that nicely compliments the eco-Marxist trajectory of the film. The idea of biological altruism, mentioned by both Helen and Professor Barnhardt is at the heart of the film’s epideictic vision. Dr. Helen Benson repeatedly comes to the rescue of Klaatu, despite not knowing whether his

intentions are good or not. When Helen fears that Klaatu will destroy the Earth before getting a full picture of human-kind, she decides to take him to meet her colleague and friend, Professor Barnhardt (John Cleese). The professor, having won a Nobel Prize for his life's work on biological altruism, is someone who Helen thinks may be able to provide Klaatu with "good reasons" for reconsider the planned extinction of the human-race. Importantly, these characters serve the function of delivering the film's attitudinal equipment to the audience. *TDTESS's* redemptive equipment entails an eco-Marxist agenda that the subsequent section expatiates upon.

Eco-Marxist Attitude/Equipment

For many scholars, the nature-culture binary cannot be separated from the relations between capitalism and the problems of global warming. Naomi Klein's book *This Changes Everything* is one such example from this school of thought. In the book, Klein positions corporations, and the political system of capitalism for enabling corporate gluttony to flourish, against the climate. To further develop this point, Klein writes that:

Our economic system and our planetary system are now at war. Or, more accurately, our economy is at war with many forms of life on earth, including human life. What the climate needs to avoid collapse is a contraction in humanity's use of resources; what our economic model demands to avoid collapse is unfettered expansion. Only one of these sets of rules can be changed, and it's not the laws of nature.²¹

Similarly, environmental scholars, John Bellamy Foster, Brett Clark, and Richard York suggest that society is plummeting headfirst into an "ecological rift." They describe this rift as an ever-widening separation of humanity through artificial divisions from the material-natural conditions of life. To summarize this claim, they explain,

Our argument, in brief, is that a deep chasm has opened up in the metabolic relation between human beings and nature—a metabolism that is the basis of life itself. The source of this unparalleled crisis is the capitalistic society in which we live.²²

As one of the leading scholars in the developing field of “ecocentrism,” John Bellamy Foster advances a revised-Marxist approach for addressing these antithetical issues of capitalism and ecology within contemporary society.²³ Marx, heavily influenced by the early materialist thinker, Epicurus, was more attuned to a view of humanity as being *estranged* from nature. Similarly, Burke’s “definition of man” explains that humans are “separated from [our] natural condition by instruments of [our] own making.”²⁴ According to Foster, Karl Marx is often, though inaccurately, classified as a proponent of a “Promethean,” or pro-technological and anti-ecological, orientation toward the environment; akin to Bacon’s conception of the “domination of nature.”²⁵ Foster points to Marx’s “metabolic relations,” what he refers to as “evolving material interrelations,” as the overlooked and vindicating aspect of Marx’s work.²⁶

Eco-Marxists believe that there is no level of regulation that can overcome the nature of capitalism; for them, the only way to save the environment is the elimination of capitalism entirely. Society is viewed as being stuck on the treadmill of production and either “unable or unwilling to get off,” as we just fall deeper into the metabolic rift that perpetuates the treadmill.²⁷ Relatedly, Burke’s Dramatistic “Coda” pinpoints one of humanity’s basic motivistic propositions as “being the drive to accumulate atop accumulation atop accumulation.”²⁸ As this suggests, overproduction is a motivistic drive implicit within our being “rotten with perfection.” The eco-Marxist view sees environmental ruin as inevitable, because capitalism by its very nature encourages the rape of the earth in the name of profit. The artificial division or “metabolic chasm” in *TDTESS*’s society manifests itself through the antagonistic forces of the military-industrial complex. *TDTESS* positions society’s “technological obsession” at the heart of its climate change blame. This “attitude” toward nature remains under the perpetual influence of

ceaseless production. So much so, that techno-capitalism's own entelechy can only be satisfied when all the Earth's productive faculties and resources are milked of all their nectar, even if it comes at the cost of the Earth itself. Given these points, we can see how capitalism's own entelechial fulfillment can only be achieved at the expense of the planet – which as a result catapults the Earth into its own premature, entelechial end. Burke equally echoed this view when he noted technology would come to the point of “fulfillment in a perfect apocalyptic holocaust.

As *TDTESS*'s climate change solution posits, the only way humanity will get off the treadmill of production's destructive path is if it is turned off, which in the film occurs against our will by an outside alien force. Consequently, *TDTESS*'s solution to climate change extends beyond the radical eco-Marxist stance for the takedown of capitalistic structures, as *TDTESS* requires a far more radical and fantastical solution via alien intervention. The eco-Marxist sentiment of the film is best encapsulated in the following exchange between Helen and Klaatu:

Helen Benson: I need to know what is happening.

Klaatu: This planet is dying. The human race is killing it.

Helen Benson: So, you have come here to help us.

Klaatu: No, I didn't.

Helen Benson: You said you came to save us.

Klaatu: I said I came to save the Earth.

Helen Benson: You came to save the Earth from us.

Klaatu: We can't risk the survival of this planet for the sake of one species.

Helen Benson: What are you saying?

Klaatu: If the Earth dies, you die. If you die, the Earth survives. There are only a handful of planets in the cosmos that are capable of supporting complex life.

Helen Benson: You can't do this.

Klaatu: This one can't be allowed to perish.

Helen Benson: We can change. We can still turn things around.

Klaatu: We have watched. We have waited and hoped that you would change.

Helen Benson: Please.

Klaatu: It has reached the tipping point. We have to act.

Helen Benson: Please.

Klaatu: We will undo the damage you have done and give the Earth a chance to begin again.

Helen Benson: Don't do this. Please, we can change. We can change.

Klaatu: The decision is made. The process has begun.²⁹

The interest of Klaatu's alien civilization, as a "friend to the Earth," is to protect the planet from the neglect and harm it is suffering by humanity's hands. Klaatu, in justifying the alien course of intervention, tells Helen that the Earth must be preserved because it is one of the only planets in the universe capable of sustaining life. For this reason, the aliens concluded that for the planet's restoration and preservation to be successful, mankind must be removed from it.

In the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx prescribes a socialist form of governance for the ails of alienation, estrangement, and the many other side effects of capitalism. Though *TDTESS* takes its climate change solution to a radical extreme in its depiction, at the solution's core we find an eco-Marxist attitude. Of course, since the film's blame is predominantly directed at the "naïve" and greed-driven human collective, its weapon and technology-targeted annihilation seems to be a quite fitting "time-out." The eco-Marxist outlook favors a sort of conscious consumption, a sentiment reflected in Klaatu's reassurance to Jacob that nothing in the universe is "wasted," but simply "transformed."³⁰ Beyond just wanting to promote a conscious model of consumption, *TDTESS*'s eco-Marxist "equipment" seeks to nurture a communal conscience around the rebalancing of mankind's relationship with nature. Triggering guilt on an internal wavelength requires the eco-Marxist attitude to stimulate our symbolic renovation from the inside out.

Redemption via Mortification

Burke, in *On Symbols and Society* defines mortification as the place where "the motives of sacrifice and dominion come to a head in everyday living."³¹ Burke also explains, that mortification "must come from within," it is a form of "governance," and "self-control" taken to the extreme.³² To once again borrow Burke's definition of the concept: "...in an emphatic way, mortification is the exercising of oneself in 'virtue'; it is a systematic way of saying no to

disorder, or obediently saying yes to order.”³³ As also described in Chapter 2, mortification is a form of redemptive suffering that involves self-inflicted denial, blame, or punishment, to stimulate the symbolic transformation necessary for the restoration of an out of balance hierarchy.³⁴ Barry Brummett shows that in the 1980 Presidential campaign, Jimmy Carter used the strategy of mortification to show that society’s “sinful” “over-consumption,” and “waste,” were responsible for weakening the nation’s hierarchical edifice.³⁵ To restore this imbalance, Carter suggests his constituents practice “restraint” and “conservation” to counteract their destructive tendencies.³⁶ By encouraging his constituents to exercise restraint and to be conservation-minded, Carter’s invocation of the mode of mortification calls for “self-imposed denials and restrictions designed to slay characteristics, impulses, or aspects of the self.”³⁷ As a redemptive process that involves suffering or sacrifice based on one’s own volition, mortification is an appropriate extension of the eco-Marxist orientation.

As Klaatu waits for Professor Barnhardt in his office study, Klaatu observes a mathematical equation on a chalkboard and immediately takes to it. Professor Barnhardt enters the study and Klaatu and the two together solve the complicated equation, to which the Professor mumbles in astonishment, “impossible.” This interaction enhances the film’s claim about the superior intelligence of Klaatu’s alien race. In the same scene, Professor Barnhardt and Klaatu once again become consubstantial, to borrow a different Burkean term, due to the music of Bach that is playing in the background of the Professor’s study. Klaatu mentions that it the composition is beautiful, to which Barnhardt replies that they clearly are “not so different.”³⁸ During the conversation that precedes their moment of scientific and aesthetic “consubstantiality,” Klaatu and Professor Barnhardt’s conversation, some of the film’s most potent mortification tactics are unveiled. The exchange:

Professor Barnhardt: There must be alternatives. You must have some technology that could solve our problem.

Klaatu: Your problem is not technology. The problem is you. You lack the will to change.

Professor Barnhardt: Then help us change.

Klaatu: I cannot change your nature. You treat the world as you treat each other.

Professor Barnhardt: But every civilization reaches a crisis point eventually.

Klaatu: Most of them don't make it.

Professor Barnhardt: Yours did. How?

Klaatu: Our Sun was dying. We had to evolve in order to survive.

Professor Barnhardt: So, it was only when your world was threatened with destruction that you became what you are now.

Klaatu: Yes.

Professor Barnhardt: Well that's where we are. You say we are on the brink of destruction and you are right. But it is only on the brink that people find the will to change. Only at the precipice do we evolve. This is our moment. Don't take it from us, we are close to an answer.³⁹

In the above interaction, Professor Barnhardt specifically asks Klaatu about the possibility of a technological solution for addressing the problem of climate change. Klaatu's response conveys the very sentiment that led his alien race to intervene on earth in the first place; humanity's over-reliance on technologically-routed production, consumption, and, as Professor Barnhardt inquires, redemption. As Klaatu discloses, the "problem" is due to human nature itself; with humanity's willful mutual mistreatment of the planet and one another, alike, along with an unwillingness to change. To this accusation, Professor Barnhardt responds by pointing out that Klaatu's own civilization was granted a reprieve from their imminent destruction. The difference is that Klaatu's alien civilization "evolved" when faced with extinction due to their dying sun.

Janice Hocker Rushing and Thomas S. Frentz explain that, "dystopian stories contain many instances in which humans see the problem for what it is: they are often shown literally waking up to face their shadow."⁴⁰ Being that the society's in these dystopic narratives are never aware of "the problem" as "it is" from the outset, we can see that the "facing" of "the shadow" is a process. Rushing and Frentz's "hunter's shadow," like Burkean mortification eventuates in the

recognition of the problem and one's role in contributing to it. In *TDTESS*, humanity's lack of awareness and responsibility for pillaging the planet is precisely why Klaatu's alien civilization has resolved to remove the human-race, after the many years the aliens watched them, they never changed. When meeting with Klaatu, Mr. Wu notes that humanity can see "the problem" in front of them, but cannot seem to do anything about it. Once again, Klaatu, on behalf of the alien civilizations he represents, assumes a role of authority in deciding humanity's fate. The same theme about humanity's blindness to their ecological problem comes up during Klaatu's time with Professor Barnhardt. Here, Professor Barnhardt beseeches Klaatu to see that there *is* reason, and more specifically *scientific* reason, to believe that humans, at their core, still have room for "the good." When given the chance to return to our natural, biologically altruistic state – a state free of the poisons of production, consumption, innovation, and basically anything *Interstellar* celebrates. *TDTESS*'s epideictic sentiment resides in the stream of thought that humans are "redeemable," This sentiment is echoed through our beacon of scientific goodness, Professor Barnhardt, when he explains to Klaatu, "only at the precipice, do we evolve." The mechanism of the film's blame induced guilt is most apparent through mortification. To restore their state of imbalance, Carter suggests his constituents practice "restraint" and "conservation" to counteract their destructive tendencies.⁴¹ Within the final line of the above excerpt, Professor Barnhardt implores "only at the precipice do we evolve." This expression serves as an epideictic communion tool, taking the form of a maxim. As Richard Graff and Wendy Winn delineate, the maxim functions as a sort of proverbial wisdom that expresses a universally-held value.⁴²

During their visit at Professor Barnhardt's house, Jacob realizes that Klaatu is the "criminal at large" the government is after that he's seen on the news, and immediately calls the authorities. As a result, Jacob and Klaatu are separated from Helen after she is captured by the

military operatives in pursuit of Klaatu. As the two wait to be reunited with Helen in a nearby military cemetery, Klaatu asks Jacob if the buried people there “*all* died for war?”⁴³ Jacob takes Klaatu to the spot his father is buried in and asks him to bring his father back to life like he had done for the police officer he accidentally killed earlier in the film. To this, Klaatu replies: “Jacob, nothing ever truly dies. The universe wastes nothing. Everything is simply, transformed.”⁴⁴ When Jacob is finally reunited with Helen in the cemetery, Klaatu witnesses, first-hand, this exchange between mother and step-son, which has a profound effect on him. The redemptive qualities of humanity, though largely absent in his other interactions, are fully realized by Klaatu in this moment.

Klaatu: *There's another side to you. I feel it now.*

Helen: [referring to the massive and looming black cloud in the sky] Is that how it ends?

Klaatu: Yes.

Helen: You can't stop it?

Klaatu: I don't know. *It would come at a price, to you and your way of life.*

Helen: But we can change, you know that now. Please, please, just give us a chance.

Klaatu: I'll try. I must get back to the city.⁴⁵

From this excerpt, the film's shift into the purgation stage of the guilt-redemption cycle becomes evident. As Klaatu states, to stop the already in progress attack, all of humanity will have to pay “a price” to their “way of life.” The price, a voluntary sacrifice, is a function of the film's mortification strategy. As an epideictic lesson, mortification is the film's most productive tool for inspiring guilt. Like Professor Barnhardt's aphoristic appeal to Klaatu: “Only at the precipice do we evolve” encapsulates, only when our hierarchy is at its breaking point will we recognize the need for internal repentance.⁴⁶ Margaret Cavin's analysis of the pastor and William Sloane Coffin's speeches offers a nuanced distinction about the differing levels of mortification.⁴⁷ As Cavin explains:

Although it is argued here that mutual mortification can replace the function of the scapegoat. The point should be made that sacrifice is still very much a part of this process. As stated above, mortification requires a death of self, in this case the collective self. Once an entity has been mortified it can no longer claim to be unchanged. A transformation has occurred in the confession. The offensive deed has been extracted from the metaphorical body of the collective individual.⁴⁸

Cavin explains that “in Coffin’s language there is a distinct difference between mortification in war (wasteful sacrifice) and mortification in peace (purposeful sacrifice).”⁴⁹ Cavin’s distinction of types of mortification is quite interesting given *TDTESS*’s clear anti-war attitude. With *TDTESS*’s call for mortification more in line with the wasteful sacrifice aspect.

In following the argument above, *TDTESS* does not close with by offering only the redemptive channel of mortification, however. The following subsection explores the film’s scapegoat tactic for redemption.

Redemption via Scapegoating/Victimage

Scapegoating, or victimage requires the purging of our own guilt by placing it upon another. or a scapegoat to “stand-in” as a representative for the larger community, they first must come *from within* that same community. Klaatu borrows a line from Professor Bernhardt, when at the film’s end he tells Helen: “Your professor is right. At the precipice, *we* change.”⁵⁰ Here, Klaatu invokes the term “we,” indicating that he is now consubstantial with humanity. The verbal merger tool is one of the three epideictic communion-attaining levels as delineated by Richard Graff and Wendy Winn. As Klaatu indicates, he *is* one of us, now. Graff and Winn use Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream Speech” to illustrate the verbal merger tactic in action.⁵¹ As they explain, this technique is intended to “prepare” the audience for adherence, but not to gain their assent, outright. This method cultivates communion through the “manipulation of pronouns,” to join the audience and speaker as a collective “we.”⁵² It is at this point in the film

that Klaatu's "friend to the Earth" sentiment expands to include humanity as a part of the Earth worthy of preserving. This shift in his standpoint and his willingness, like Mr. Wu, to stay among the humans is quite a remarkable change.

Klaatu's verbal merger shift also provides a connection to Klaatu's role as our symbolic scapegoat in the film. It is revealed in the film that Klaatu was bioengineered from DNA plucked from a human specimen from India's "Karakoram Mountains" in 1928. This revelation helps to explain the opening scene of the film in which we see a mountaineer –who is played by Keanu Reeves but is not Klaatu – hiking in the arctic tundra where he comes across the glowing alien orb. After touching it he passes out and when he wakes the orb is gone and his hand now has a mysterious scar – a result of the mountaineer's DNA being taken by aliens. Earlier, when Regina Jackson asked whether he was human or not, Klaatu responded that his body is. In one exchange with Helen, Klaatu mentions that he had to be "born in our environment"⁵³ So in his current state, Klaatu describes that he is human, but before he was "different." Fashioned from the DNA of a human, Klaatu, *is*, in effect, "one of us." Ultimately, for the film to offer Klaatu as a symbolic scapegoat in its redemptive path to a "solution," Klaatu had to distinguish himself as one of us. Hence, it is Klaatu himself that signals the verbal merger to satisfy the requirements of being "of our community" to function as our scapegoat. So, in the end, Klaatu ultimately "evolves" into our scapegoat. It is Klaatu's voluntary self-destruction that allows for the survival of Earth's human residents. Klaatu's sacrifice provides a symbolic redemption is as the scapegoat, as opposed to through victimage, which might suggest a less elective connotation. Klaatu's transformation from the orchestrator of our doom to the deliverer of our redemption occurs in the final sequence of the film. Robert Ivie's 'War and the Rhetorical Invention of Cold War 'Idealists.' " examined the "failure" of antiwar "idealists" during the Cold War due to their

use of the redemptive form, mortification.⁵⁴ As Ivie finds, mortification proved unsuccessful as a means of provoking the American people to the side of the Cold War “idealists” because it required them to assume guilt for their actions. Conversely, those in favor of the Cold War offered the Russians as a scapegoat and thus allowed the American people to pass their guilt to another vessel. As Ivie concludes, offering redemption through a scapegoat was the only successful form of symbolic redemption for an American audience – a finding that bears some similarity to today’s society.

Ivie’s assertions about mortification and scapegoating helps us to understand why the films contain two paths to redemption. *TDTESS* offers the dual redemptive outlets of mortification and scapegoating. The former functions by stimulating us to a place of inward guilt, whereas, the latter offers us a vessel upon which we can unburden ourselves of feelings of guilt. The final stage of the guilt-redemption cycle achieves its entelechial completion through one, or both, of these redemptive outlets. Now that the film’s means for our symbolical absolution of guilt has thoroughly been unpacked, the section to follow will conclude with final thoughts on the findings of this chapter.

Conclusion

In the 1950s the threat of a global nuclear war remained at the forefront of everyone’s minds. Nowadays, mankind’s climate change caused extinction is what musters up the bulk of our apocalyptic fears – *though*, given recent administration changes, the fear of the former has inched its way right back into our psychic docket. Nevertheless, there is a unique difference at the heart of nuclear and climate change based global catastrophes. As Dipesh Chakrabarty elucidates: “A nuclear war would have been a conscious decision on the part of the powers that be. Climate change is an unintended consequence of human actions and shows, only through

scientific analysis, the effects of our actions as a species.”⁵⁵ The distinct nature of the cli-fi catastrophe, provides the genre a rather unique sort of agency. Not only can cli-fi offer a vision of how the climate change problem may be solved, it also has an opening to create a productive foundation for actions and attitudes an audience can employ in the material world. Cli-fi has an agential opportunity, an opportunity which nuclear-grounded sci-fi cannot possess; cli-fi can use its epideictic suasion to society’s advantage as a mediating force to illustrate the power for humanity to: change, correct, adapt, and evolve.

For the ways in which *TDTESS* does supply a few productive ideas about measures for addressing climate change, it simultaneously propagates a few counterintuitive ones. Namely, the *TDTESS*’s counter intuition lies in the dependence of the film’s solution on a version of the *deus ex machina* trope. *TDTESS*’s path to overcoming climate change necessitates aliens as instigators of its redemptive force. For this reason, it reinforces a sense of humanity’s lack of agency to address and correct climate change. If *TDTESS* had it in its mind to *show* us how to correct our unbalanced relationship to this planet, it is about as successful as Steve Bannon’s Shakespearean rap musical screen-writing debut. In the day of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engel’s authorial union, they warned and worried of the endless repetition of soil degradation and the resulting agricultural anarchy that has led to the downfall of many a civilization. The eco-Marxist revolution, inspired by the ground Marx laid, is thus sown with his seeds of heed-taking and measures of prevention. About this utopian, and seemingly unrealistic, eco-Marxist hope to see the downfall of capitalism, Derrick King notes that, “representations of apocalypse might serve a utopian imaginary by inspiring the desire for a radical transformation of the social totality.”⁵⁶ So, does this mean eco-Marxism is suggesting that churning our own butter will solve climate change? Not quite, no – but it might suggest that few less CAFO’s and a reduction in the excess

of carbon dioxide pollution they emit sure could not hurt. At the core of *TDTESS*'s message of blame is the suggestion that when humanity is left to our own devices, there remains only one possible outcome to our greed and insatiable drive for perfection – the tragedy of the commons. Henry Giroux queries that “if it has now become easier to imagine the end of the earth and of nature rather than the end of capitalism, as Frederic Jameson argued in *The Seeds of Time*, it is due in large part to the redoubled efforts of a global, neoliberal capitalism.”⁵⁷ As this chapter demonstrates, capitalism and the environment remain the antagonistic interlocutors at the center of climate change in both reality and fiction. Chapter Four evaluates the film *Interstellar*, as a envisioning its course of climate change through a neoliberal environmental complex.

NOTES

¹ *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, Directed by Scott Derrickson, 2008, (Burbank, CA: Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, 2009), iTunes.

² Kenneth Burke, "Why Satire, with a Plan for Writing One," *Michigan Quarterly Review*, 13.4 (1974): 311.

³ *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, Directed by Robert Wise, 1951, (Burbank, CA: Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation), Netflix.

⁴ American Film Institute, <http://www.afi.com/members/catalog/DetailView.aspx?s=&Movie=50072>.

⁵ *ABC News*, "Real Science in 'The Day the Earth Stood Still,'" last modified December 8, 2008, accessed March 13, 2017, <http://abcnews.go.com/Technology/story?id=6453031&page=1>.

⁶ *ABC News*, "Real Science," 2008.

⁷ "Chapter 10," *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, 2008.

⁸ "Chapter 8" *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, 2008.

⁹ "Chapter 9," *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, 2008.

¹⁰ "Chapter 22," *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, 2008.

¹¹ "Chapter 14," *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, 2008.

¹² "Chapter 14," *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, 2008.

¹³ "Chapter 14," *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, 2008.

¹⁴ "Chapter 14," *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, 2008.

¹⁵ "Chapter 15," *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, 2008.

¹⁶ Aristotle and George A. Kennedy, *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*, (Oxford University Press, 2006): Book 1, Chapter 5, 1362a 12-14.

¹⁷ Sullivan, "A Rhetoric of Children's Literature," 124.

¹⁸ Dale L. Sullivan, "The Ethos of Epideictic Encounter," *Philosophy & Rhetoric* (1993): 113.

¹⁹ Sullivan, "A Rhetoric of Children's Literature," 129.

²⁰ "Chapter 2," *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, 2008.

²¹ Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate*, (Simon and Schuster, 2015): 19.

²² John Bellamy Foster, Brett Clark, and Richard York, *The Ecological Rift: Capitalism's War on the Earth*, (NYU Press, 2011): Preface, 1.

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- ²³ John Bellamy Foster, *Marx's Ecology: Materialism and Nature*, NYU Press, 2000.
- ²⁴ Kenneth Burke, *Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature, and Method*, (University of California Press, 1966): 16.
- ²⁵ Bellamy Foster, *Marx's Ecology*, 11.
- ²⁶ Bellamy Foster, *Marx's Ecology*, 11.
- ²⁷ John Bellamy Foster, "The Treadmill of Accumulation Schnaiberg's Environment and Marxian Political Economy," *Organization & Environment* 18, no. 1 (2005): 7.
- ²⁸ Kenneth Burke, "Rhetoric, Poetics, and Philosophy." *Rhetoric, Philosophy, and Literature: An Exploration*, (Indiana: Purdue University, 1978): 32.
- ²⁹ Chapter 18," *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, 2008.
- ³⁰ "Chapter 24," *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, 2008.
- ³¹ Kenneth Burke, *On Symbols and Society*, (University of Chicago Press, 1989): 288.
- ³² Burke, *On Symbols and Society*, 289.
- ³³ Burke, *On Symbols and Society*, 289.
- ³⁴ Sonja K. Foss, Karen A. Foss, and Robert Trapp, "Chapter 7: Kenneth Burke," *Contemporary Perspectives on Rhetoric*, (Waveland Press, 2014): 209.
- ³⁵ Barry Brummett, "Burkean Scapegoating, Mortification, and Transcendence in Presidential Campaign Rhetoric," *Central States Speech Journal* 32 (4), (1981): 257.
- ³⁶ Barry Brummett, "Burkean Scapegoating," 257.
- ³⁷ Foss, Foss, and Trapp, "Chapter 7: Kenneth Burke," 209.
- ³⁸ "Chapter 19," *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, 2008.
- ³⁹ "Chapter 20," *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, 2008.
- ⁴⁰ Rushing and Frentz, *Projecting the Shadow*, 74.
- ⁴¹ Barry Brummett, "Burkean Scapegoating," 257.
- ⁴² Richard Graff and Wendy Winn, "Presencing" Communion" in Chaim Perelman's New Rhetoric," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 39, no. 1 (2006): 54.
- ⁴³ "Chapter 24," *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, 2008.
- ⁴⁴ "Chapter 24," *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, 2008.
- ⁴⁵ Emphasis Added. "Chapter 25," *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, 2008.

⁴⁶ “Chapter 20,” *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, 2008.

⁴⁷ Margaret Cavin, “Replacing the Scapegoat: An Examination of the Rebirth Strategies Found in William Sloane Coffin’s Language of Peace,” *Peace & Change* 19 (1994): 276.

⁴⁸ Cavin, “Replacing the Scapegoat,” 290.

⁴⁹ Cavin, “Replacing the Scapegoat,” 290.

⁵⁰ Emphasis Added. “Chapter 26,” *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, 2008.

⁵¹ Richard Graff and Wendy Winn, “Presencing” Communion” in Chaim Perelman’s New Rhetoric,” *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 39, no. 1 (2006): 55-60.

⁵² Graff and Winn, “Presencing” Communion,” 60.

⁵³ As observed in the Prospectus defense of this project, Klaatu and many of the film’s plot devices serve as metaphors for biblical events and figures. The film references the incoming “flood” and the alien spheres function as a sort of “Ark” to preserve one male and one female of each of earth’s creatures – except for humans – after the Earth is wiped clean from the aliens’ planned planet cleansing. Klaatu, “one of us” has many clear parallels to Jesus and willingly sacrifices himself for the sins of all humanity.

⁵⁴ Robert L. Ivie, “Metaphor and the Rhetorical Invention of Cold War ‘Idealists,’” *Communication Monographs*, 54 no. 2 (1987): 178.

⁵⁵ Dipesh Chakrabarty, “The Climate of History,” *Critical Inquiry* 35, (University of Chicago Press Journals, Winter 2009): 221.

⁵⁶ Derrick King, “From Ecological Crisis to Utopian Hope: Kim Stanley Robinson’s Science in the Capital Trilogy as Realist Critical Dystopia,” *Extrapolation* 56, no. 2 (2015): 195.

⁵⁷ Henry A. Giroux, *America on the Edge: Henry Giroux on Politics, Culture, and Education*, (Springer, 2006): 205.

CHAPTER FOUR

INTERSTELLAR

The end of Earth will not be the end of us. – Professor Brand.

Originating in dystopia's midst, cli-fi films by their nature contain an implied judgment or attitude of blame. In Chapter Two, I developed the epideictic blame function of dystopic fictions, identifying cli-fi's role in (re)-asserting communal values. Chapter Three unpacked the rhetorical blame-redemption-equipage process at work throughout the 2008 cli-fi film, *The Day the Earth Stood Still*. The present chapter analyzes Christopher Nolan's 2014 blockbuster, *Interstellar* and argues that the film's unique handling of ecological guilt demonstrates a neoliberal environmentalist "attitude" for addressing climate change. As my analysis will demonstrate, *Interstellar's* narrative of redemption hinges on a combination of technology and the abiding spirit of entrepreneurialism. The film's protagonist, Cooper (Matthew McConaughey), is a former astronautical engineer turned corn-farmer who embarks on an intergalactic journey to ensure the fate of his children and all of humanity. In the end, through a combination of unceasing human ingenuity and technological muscle, mankind's climate change caused extinction is averted.

Interstellar, like *TDTESS*, offers a very radical solution for addressing climate change; however, these films are at the polar ends of the motivistic spectrum in terms of how they resolve the question of blame. *Interstellar* proposes a solution for climate change that favors abandoning the Earth for a new, and bountiful, home in the cosmos. Rather than attempting to repair the Earth's conditions or adapt human habits to quell the changing climate, *Interstellar* shows just

how far “the market’s” reach can overcome: literally, millions of light years farther. Despite *Interstellar*’s gushing over technology and scientific insight through most of the film, there are moments when these are both problematized to a degree. By contrast, *TDTESS*’s assertion of blame is aimed squarely at the technological fruits of human “progress.” Namely, *TDTESS* targets the military-industrial complex’s “techno-obsession” with developing new and advanced weapon systems. Additionally, while it is my argument that *Interstellar* largely circumvents blaming human agents for earth’s degradation, there are a few traces of human directed blame in a few notable moments of the film. *Interstellar* is a clear celebration of technology and scientific thought, but the film also points to human “greed” and “wastefulness” for allowing technology and consumption to push earth to a point of ruin. *Interstellar* advances an “attitude” that aligns with neoliberal environmentalism, which posits industry and free market capitalism as the answer to climate change. In Part One of this chapter, I examine *Interstellar*’s establishment of guilt and identify the epideictic mechanisms that reinforce the film’s various admonishments of blame. In Part Two, I then locate the film’s use of Burkean scapegoating and transcendence as modes of redemption. Additionally, throughout this chapter’s analysis, I extract and elaborate on the specific epideictic “equipment” *Interstellar* provides its audience as a “resolution” for climate change. To begin, the subsequent section provides a brief introduction to the context of the film’s emergence and production to illustrate this text’s unique contribution to the cli-fi genre and to the ongoing climate change conversation more broadly.

Context

The 2014 film, *Interstellar*, is a two-hour, 47 minute, universe-traversing tale that depicts humanity on the edge of extinction due to an impending “ecoapocalypse.” Director Christopher Nolan, with the help of his writer-brother, Jonathan Nolan, and theoretical astrophysicist, Kip

Thorne, crafted *Interstellar*'s narrative around a "real scientific" base. With a \$165 million budget, *Interstellar*'s worldwide box office gross of \$675 million proved it to be a successful production for Paramount Pictures.¹ Additionally, among the plethora of awards *Interstellar* was nominated for and won, the film received the highly sought after Academy Award for "Best Achievement in Visual Effects" in 2015.² Christopher Nolan's vision for *Interstellar* required a level of scientific accuracy palatable to an audience of lay individuals. With the help of Kip Thorne and a team of scientists and engineers, Nolan, for the most part, manages to do so. Throughout *Interstellar*'s promotional period, the involvement of Thorne in the film's development was a constant talking point in interviews and other press junkets.

A special feature included with purchasing the film is a documentary, "The Science of *Interstellar*," is further evidence of the film's attempt to construct its authority and credibility as a scientifically-infused source. The documentary opens with a line from Kip Thorne, the astrophysicist involved in the film's creation and production and is narrated by Matthew McConaughey. In the segment, Thorne notes: "in *Interstellar*, one of the most important features is the way that the science is totally embedded in the film."³ The "real science" involved in the making of *Interstellar* helps it to establish its scientific *ethos*, a crucial component in ensuring audience adherence with the message. The audience must believe the film is a credible source to accept its epideictic visions of praiseworthy and blameworthy attitudes and actions. One of the film's most impressive scientific feats was that it included the most scientifically accurate visual rendering of a black hole to date. The team behind "Gargantua," the name of *Interstellar*'s black hole, even published an article about it in a peer-reviewed scientific journal during the film's release.⁴

Interstellar, a film with notoriety on the level of one the most recognizable cli-fi blockbusters of our day, *The Day After Tomorrow*, tackles the problem and solution of climate change in a way that no other cli-fi film has before. To Nolan's credit, he recognized the implications of *Interstellar*'s narrative from an environmental perspective. As Nolan states in an interview, "Very specifically, Michael Caine's character says, 'We're not meant to save the world. We're meant to leave it.' That certainly isn't a very great environmental message. I haven't done a good job if I was supposed to be wagging my finger."⁵ In another press interview, Christopher Nolan has this to say about the role of the ecological disaster for the film: "We go to the movies to escape, and that's why the film isn't about global warming or addressing climate change. *Interstellar* deals with an agricultural crisis of the type that has happened before, and that was to give the idea of the film *credibility*."⁶ Nolan's statement is quite revealing as to why the Dust Bowl was the chosen ecological catastrophe in the film. *Interstellar* utilizes allusions from our cultural past as a way of inspiring and propagating communion with its audience.

Janice Hocker Rushing and Thomas S. Frentz define utopian fictions as "[employing] positive images of technology as 'the visible sign of the triumph of reason, the Enlightenment dream of human progress.'"⁷ On the other hand, Rushing and Frentz define dystopian fictions as "[creating] foreboding images of technology and regards the machine as a malevolent threat," a definition of technology that is certainly in line with Chapter Three's findings on *TDTESS*'s anti-technological attitude.⁸ Despite a cultural trend that divides the science fiction genre between dystopian and utopian themes, Rushing and Frentz locate the coexistence of both themes in their narrative analysis of the "hunter's shadow."⁹ In a similar fashion, I argue that *Interstellar* likewise contains both dystopian and utopian themes. Due to Christopher Nolan's notoriety as a risk-taking auteur – from the anti-linear 2000 hit, *Memento*, to the massively successful Batman

trilogy (2005-2012) to the 2010 psychological blockbuster, *Inception* – it comes as no surprise that *Interstellar* playfully juggles this utopian-dystopian dualism. As the first directorial project Christopher Nolan took on just off the cusp of directing the multi-billion-dollar grossing *Batman* series, *Interstellar* was one of the most highly anticipated releases of 2014.

Indeed, *Interstellar*'s success extended far beyond the box office, with the film receiving praise and adoration from fans and critics alike. So, with such an impressive worldwide reach, *Interstellar* stands out as a cli-fi film with massive influence. With the context of *Interstellar*'s development and authorial influence in place, the following section demonstrates the film's enactment of epideictic blame. By offering the audience examples of the guilty attitudes and actions it deems "blameworthy," *Interstellar* puts our guilt on 70 mm display as if to literalize the amplifying nature of epideictic appeals.

Part One: Epideictic Blame for the "Fallen" (Pollution)

Upon viewing *Interstellar*'s opening sequence, one might start to wonder if they had wandered into the wrong theater auditorium. Rather than the phantasmagoric space-porn that audiences expected to be greeted with, the film opens with a series of documentary style interviews, reminiscent of Ken Burn's documentary for PBS about the 1930s Dust Bowl. In this scene, various elderly individuals provide their first-hand accounts of the devastation they encountered in the face of an ecological catastrophe. Though they are senior citizens now, they were but young children at the time of these events; and it is through these emotional vignettes that the audience is provided clues as to the overall impact of this calamity. We learn that extensive and widespread crop failure, paired with dust storms of increasing frequency and severity, caused a massive depopulation and left the remaining inhabitants of Earth with health conditions on a steady decline. It is only in the final sequence of these "Dust Bowl" interviews

that a laptop, atop a dust-covered kitchen table, is revealed; cueing the audience in on the narrative's contemporary grounding.

The first interview in the film's opening sequence comes from an elderly woman (Ellen Burstyn), who recounts, "Well, my dad was a farmer. Um, like everybody else back then. Of course, he didn't start that way."¹⁰ This line packs expositional punch, as it conveys the importance of an agrarian mode of production in the early setting of *Interstellar*. At this point, the audience is not quite hip to the fact that Cooper ("Coop") has a background as an aeronautical engineer and at one point was the captain of a mission into space. The laptop focal point illustrates that despite the presence of certain technological tools indicative of "progress," the reversion back to a largely off-the-grid, agrarian-based lifestyle is symptomatic of a much larger societal problem. Ultimately, the dusty dystopia in the film's preface provides a clear vision of our progression into the first stage of Kenneth Burke's cycle of rebirth: pollution. These dust storms are allusions to past events, i.e. the devastating dust storms that plagued the 1930s Dust Bowl era. Along with allusions to the past, more current issues are also referenced in the film's potent, yet subtle, allusions. The film's employment of this, and other, literary devices plays a larger part in its invocation of epideictic blame. The function of these devices in amplifying their epideictic imports is explored further in the next section.

Epideictic Tools (*of Blame*)

In an attempt to resuscitate Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's underdeveloped concept of "communion," Richard Graff and Wendy Winn divide this epideictic device into three parts. This division is based on the type of value-ensnaring figures each employs to foster a sense of common ground or shared culture within an audience.¹¹ As examined in the previous chapter's

analysis, *The Day the Earth Stood Still* utilizes the third, “value-neutral” level (situational) of Graff and Winn’s elaboration, which includes those figures for an orator applies so that a verbal merger with their audience may be forged. Elements of the remaining two communion-forming methods – allusions from the second level (cultural), and proverbs, maxims, and value-terms from the first level (universal) – are present within *Interstellar*. These stratum of communion, beyond just serving as direct conveyors of value, even more critically, function as an extension of epideictic. In effect, by magnifying our relationship and connection to a problem they work like a symbolic “amp” for blasting the persuasive “set-list.” These devices are highly effective in demonstrating the “historicity” of an issue and the community’s value-precedent for addressing it. In other words, these figurative magnifications, heavily imbued with guilt, *show* us the community track record for addressing, or not addressing, these diachronic matters.

Increasing dust storms are leading to a rising number of respiratory disorders in children, amplifying the film’s ecological crisis and thus sharpening the audience’s sense of urgency on the blame front. This subtle allusion calls to mind highly polluted regions of the planet, like China, where children are subjected to emergency levels of toxic contaminants. As a result, many children wear breathing masks anytime they are outside. Along with the respiratory and health-based side effects of the dust bowl, crop degradation is another major threat to the people of *Interstellar*’s earth. Cooper eventually stumbles upon the headquarters for NASA thanks to his miraculous discovery that “gravity” had transmitted the space agency’s coordinates through dust particles in the upstairs library of his home. While at the underground NASA headquarters, Coop is shown the warehouse of crop specimen that scientists are feverishly trying to propagate. As his former colleague, Professor Brand (Michael Caine) explains, while scientists could extend the life of some crops for a short while, ultimately, the Earth’s crops would eventually succumb to

their dusty death. This sentiment is encapsulated in Professor Brand's ultimate assertion: "The last people to starve, will be the first to suffocate."¹² In other words, even if society is able to evade starvation, they will not be able to escape being engulfed and smothered by the encroaching plumes of their sooty demise. With such a grim diagnosis of humanity's trajectory a few versions of just who, or what, might be responsible for the changing climate and as a result, the extinction of mankind. *Interstellar* very carefully teeters this line and provides some hints that human causes played a part in the climate catastrophe. The film also extends its blame to the Earth and processes of nature, at large. The succeeding subsection explores these polysemous blame admonishments at work within *Interstellar* and incorporates relevant promotional interviews and related content that further develop these claims.

Versions of Blame: Anthropogenic vs. Naturogenic Causes

Generally, cli-fi films seem to gravitate in the direction of depicting climate change as the result of anthropogenic, or human-caused, involvement. Very few cli-fi films, however, depict the inverse version of the anthropocentric trope, the naturogenic, or naturally-caused climate change. A common naturogenic narrative, for example, claims that the Earth goes through naturally, and recurring heat cycles, something for which human intervention would have an impact. Though it is left rather open-ended, *Interstellar's* framing of climate change veers predominantly in the direction of naturogenic causes, with just a dash of anthropogenic influence. The film's naturogenic edge, what we could call its "Earth-blaming," suggests that our home planet is not really the *only* earth we were meant to live on.

Although, while the finished film remains somewhat ambiguous, *Interstellar's* head writer, Jonathon Nolan sheds some light on the film's socio-political influence. As noted in an interview with *The Washington Free Beacon*, Jonathan Nolan explains:

We're sort of in this moment in which humans are obsessed that we'll prove our own undoing—that we'll poison the planet, we'll destroy ourselves, and all these things... But I thought it would be more interesting to find a slightly less personal Armageddon, or the idea that the universe obliterates you or the planet *turns itself* toxic because it doesn't care about you and me because we're an accident in outer space... That's the fascinating question of why is it that humans are so obsessed with not just the idea of their own Armageddon, but their own culpability.¹³

In interviews prior to the film's release, Christopher Nolan is very careful to avoid the question of whether climate change plays a major role in the film's plot. When asked in a *Reuters* interview if he wanted *Interstellar* to address climate change, Nolan provides this rather ambiguous response:

Not consciously. The honest answer is we live in the same world, my brother and I. We work on the script, we live in the same world as everyone else so we're sort of affected by the same things, worried about the same things, but we try not to be didactic in the writing, we try not to give any particular message or sense of things.¹⁴

Naturally a major Hollywood blockbuster like *Interstellar* would need some ambiguous version of a catastrophic event to justify propelling us through space. Nolan does get a little closer to acknowledging the climate change undertones to *The Guardian*, admitting that the film “has as a jumping-off point not that we're meant to save the earth, we're meant to leave it. Obviously, if that's taken literally it would not be particularly positive.” He goes on to say, “The film feeds off certain concerns that are very valid in the world today. But really, it's about saying what is mankind's place in the universe?”¹⁵ Despite Nolan's attempts to distance the film's message from climate change, a special feature included with the film, *The Science of Interstellar*,

contains obvious clues to the film's embedded climate change influence. Jonathan Nolan confesses in a different interview that he had been disheartened by talks of NASA funding cuts and the possible termination of "manned" missions to Mars while he was working on the film's script. For this reason, he "found inspiration in his pessimism, as well as in Hollywood's fixation on apocalyptic sci-fi like *Avatar* and *WALL·E*. He set the story in a dystopian future ravaged by blight but populated with hardy folk who refuse to bow to despair."¹⁶ Interestingly, both *Avatar* (2009) and *WALL·E* (2008), alike, fall within the cli-fi domain, although they lean toward the anthropogenic depictions of climate change devastation.

With the film's inspiration in mind, perhaps, now, when we look back to the opening stream of "dust bowl" interviews, their messages may convey a slightly different connotation. As the elderly woman who opens the segment – and whom we later learn is the now, much older, Murph Cooper – states: "You didn't expect this dirt that was giving you this food to turn on you and destroy you."¹⁷ This statement suggests that it was, in fact, the Earth that *turned* on us. Along these lines, an exchange between Coop and Professor Brand in the NASA laboratory corroborates a naturogenic reading of the film. After learning of the depressing realities discovered by NASA's private operations, Cooper asks, "Shouldn't that energy be put into saving our home planet?"¹⁸ Professor Brand's response then directly challenges Cooper's beliefs about humanity's relationship with Earth. Professor Brand explains:

Earth's atmosphere is 80 percent nitrogen. We don't even breathe nitrogen. Blight does, and as it thrives our air gets less and less oxygen. The last people to starve will be the first people to suffocate. And your daughter's generation will be the last to survive on Earth.¹⁹

Taking his line of thinking to its logical conclusion, Professor Brand implores, "We're not meant to save the world; we're meant to leave it."²⁰ Professor Brand quite convincingly casts doubt on

the idea that Earth is our only possible home. The warrants in support of his claim, quite effectively, paints the earth's respiratory cycle as illustrative of its inhospitableness for the human-race.

On the alternative side, the brunt of *Interstellar's* anthropogenic climate change blame is found through Murph's maternal grandfather, Don (played by John Lithgow), though only having a few lines in the entire film, provides a brief, but telling account that hints at some of the prevalent social attitudes that contributed to the degradation of the planet. Don, in a conversation with Coop, recounts:

When I was a kid, it seemed like they made something new every day. Some, gadget or idea, like every day was Christmas. But six billion people, just imagine that. And every, last, one of them trying to have it all. This world isn't so bad. You're the one who doesn't belong. Born forty years too late, or forty years too early... My daughter knew it, God bless her. And your kids know it. Especially Murph.²¹

So, while, older Murph paints the earth as having "turned" on humans to "destroy" them, Don recalls that back in his "day," everyone was "trying to have it all." Of course, Murph, having been only a young girl at the time of the Dust Bowl, had a short frame of reference for understanding what activities may have contributed to the catastrophe. Alternatively, her grandfather Don had been around at a time when the earth was a buzzing place of invention, production and growth. Don's character is a pivotal player of the film's initiation of the cycle of guilt. Don shows us our state of psychological pollution, since the literal dust pollution is made clear from the get-go. Don is also very unimpressed by the absence of hot dogs and any other non-corn derived snack foods at the baseball game he attends with Coop and Murph. Although the characters have access to any corn-based food derivative, the days of Ball Park hot dogs have long since passed.

The specific actions or events that led to the dismantling of the military and the industrial sector's dramatic shift to "subsistence" farming remains strategically ambiguous throughout the film. We are given some hints that humanity's greed played at least a partial role through Don's monologue. One can infer, however, that with the Earth's remaining inhabitants representing a very small population, the various facets of the technical fields indicative of a modern society would be rendered useless. Whereas the 1930s Dust Bowl sent its displaced victims in the direction of sunny California, the "Land of Opportunity," the parallel destination for *Interstellar's* characters is made available only through the stars. An important caveat for the naturogenic or anthropogenic avenues of *Interstellar* is that regardless of which of the film's perspectives an audience member accepts in terms of climate change's cause, the only option for survival the film provides requires us to leave the planet. Still, there remains one more important target for *Interstellar's* blame, namely those remaining inhabitants who have lost faith in scientific and technological means for addressing climate change.

Science Denial as Blame

On the way his children's school, Cooper with Murph and his son Tom in tow, manages to track and reconfigure an "Indian" surveillance drone that is miraculously still in commission. In this scene, Cooper and (young) Murph's interaction provides clues to Cooper's stance about addressing their current ecological situation. The dialogue of this scene:

Murph: What are you gonna do with it?

Cooper: I'm going to give it something socially responsible to do. Like drive a combine.

Murph: Can't we just let it go? It wasn't hurting anybody.

Cooper: This thing needs to learn how to adapt, Murph. Like the rest of us.²²

The emphasis for Cooper here is on giving the plane something "socially responsible" to do. For him, this entails using his engineering background to rig it to farm more productively, increasing

its technological output. After Cooper successfully converts the drone into an autonomously operating farming tool, he puts the plane in the bed of his truck and heads to a meeting with the administration of his children's school. During the meeting with the principal and school counselor, it is revealed that a fight occurred between Murph and another student. The teacher informs Cooper that the dispute began based on a disagreement about whether the Apollo moon landing was faked as propaganda to mislead the Soviets. The interaction:

Cooper: You don't believe we went to the Moon?

Ms. Kelly: I believe it was a brilliant piece of propaganda, that the Soviets bankrupted themselves, pouring resources into rockets and other useless machines...

Cooper: Useless machines?

Ms. Kelly: And if we don't want to repeat of the *excess* and *wastefulness* of the 20th Century then we need to teach our kids about this planet, not tales of leaving it.

Cooper: You know, one of those useless machines they used to make was called an MRI, and if we had any of those left the doctors would have been able to find the cyst in my wife's brain, **before** she died instead of after, and then she would've been the one sitting here, listening to this instead of me, which would've been a good thing because she was always the... calmer one.²³

The counselor specifically locates the “excess and wastefulness of the 20th century” as a reason for not pursuing space travel. This sentiment helps explain why we find out later in the film that the team of NASA scientists that remain working on a solution for human survival are operating underground in total secrecy. Along these lines, *MSNBC*'s Adam Howard reasons that “in Nolan's alternate universe, in rhetoric that is reminiscent of climate change deniers who believe global warming is a myth, the legendary Apollo moon missions are dismissed as elaborate hoaxes and the space program has been reduced to going underground.”²⁴ Cooper's interaction with the faculty of his children's school shows that the social psyche has moved in a direction that now opposes technology. During the school meeting, the principal tells Coop, “the world doesn't need another engineer, it needs farmers.” As the principal continues, “we didn't run out of

planes and television sets. We ran out of food.”²⁵ It is also revealed through the course of this interaction is that military, weapons, are all gone away with. The textbooks have been revised from the “federal” ones, to provide the “correct” account of the moon landing’s being “staged as government propaganda to bankrupt the soviets.” This “alternative facts” account of the moon landing reflects society’s movement away from technology. The counselor goes on to mention funding and the better possible use of resources than for space exploration. As this scene illustrates, society’s shift away from technology –exactly what Chapter Three identified as *TDTESS*’s solution- is responsible for bringing humanity even closer to the brink of extinction. The film’s rhetorical purpose here is acute: to place “blame” on those of us who have given up. Audiences are left in state of agitation and curiosity, a state through which Burkean redemption strategies can deliver them through.

Part Two: Redemption- Praise- Solution(s)

As *Interstellar* moves into the second stage of Burke’s cycle of rebirth, purgation, the importance of a pro-science/pro-technological “attitude” is amplified even further. To transition into the next phase of our redemption, the film’s neoliberal leanings come to the forefront. Don and Coop, while sitting on the porch for one of the last times before Cooper is set to depart on his intergalactic journey, their conversation unveils a glimpse of the neoliberal impulse that drives him.

Cooper: This world's a treasure, Don; but it's been telling us to leave for a while now. Mankind was born on Earth. It was never meant to die here. We've always defined ourselves by the ability to overcome the impossible. And we count these moments. These moments when we dare to aim higher, to break barriers, to reach for the stars, to make the unknown known. We count these moments as our proudest achievements. But we lost all that. Or perhaps we've just forgotten that we are still pioneers. And we've barely begun. And that our greatest accomplishments cannot be behind us, because our destiny lies above us.²⁶

In this scene, Cooper ultimately unveils the film's strategy for "solving" the ecological disaster at hand, "We used to look up at the sky and wonder at our place in the stars. Now we just look down and worry about our place in the dirt."²⁷ Cooper's statement carries a veiled accusation that society has given up, accepting a path of pathetic acceptance about their disastrous reality.

Michael Caine plays the role of Professor Brand, the theoretical physicist behind the film's intergalactic quest to distant galaxies on behalf of NASA. Professor Brand's character is the one who voices the film's core rhetorical punch. He personifies the entrepreneurial rationale that drives the narrative of deep space exploration. Simultaneously, as the wiser, "elder" member of the community, his character enjoys the ethos necessary to win the assent of an epideictic audience. As Dale L. Sullivan argues, the "epideictic rhetor is presumed to be a 'living oracle,' a reliable guide to the moral truths of the world outside."²⁸ Professor Brand, in possessing all the necessary qualifications, is imbued with the audience's trust that he is a credible "authority" on the matter of climate change and how it should be addressed. In the film's telling, it is in fact Professor Brand who reveals the moral imperative at *Interstellar's* epideictic core. The entire "plan" for saving Earth is crafted and orchestrated by his hands. Professor Brand intentionally withholds the truth about the mission's purpose from Cooper and even his own daughter, Dr. Amelia Brand. Of course, a major component of the Professor's ability to do so is based on his credibility or scientific *ethos* a community will trust. It is ultimately through the characters, Professor Brand and Cooper, that the epideictic transmission of neoliberal sentiments is transported to the audience.

Attitudinal “Equipment” – The Tenets of Neoliberal Environmentalism

Broadly speaking, the neoliberal orientation delights in notions of resource privatization, deregulation, state power decentralization, and an unflinching faith in their “Market Shall Overcome” mantra. *Interstellar*, quite possibly mined from the scribbles of Elon Musk’s bedside “dream journal,” embodies many of these characteristics. Thomas L. Friedman’s (2008) *Hot, Flat, and Crowded* is perhaps the best example of what we may call the neoliberal environmental “articles of confederation.” Friedman’s call for a “Green Revolution” provides the very type of market-inflated lifejacket that has kept capitalism afloat since the *Wealth of Nations* days. Along these lines, Ross Singer contends, “Friedman upholds the primacy and possibility of solution criteria based on non-political technocratic reason, muscular individualism in the form of market value production, and faith in the universal rewards of Westernization.”²⁹ Further, Singer explains that Friedman articulates “a jeremiad that resonates with the Thatcherist, albeit realist, contention that there are ‘no alternatives.’”³⁰ Through his “pro-corporate jeremiad,”³¹ Friedman warns that should we not collectively ascend to our destined level of innovation-nirvana, “everybody is going to lose big.”³²

The neoliberal environmentalist position, in sum, argues that “To assume its inherent leadership responsibility, keep the spirit of the American way alive, and save the planet from disaster, America must lead an *entrepreneurial* green revolution.”³³ The neoliberal (environ)-mentality presumes that unfettered growth, made possible by an unhindered “faculty of human choice,” will eventuate in a balancing of economic *and* ecological interests.³⁴ But, in all reality, it “ain’t easy being green,” or truly *going* green, for that matter – hence, neoliberalism’s caveat of reward coming *through* sacrifice. Robert J. Cox, posits “sacrifice” and “reward” as the justificatory logic, or what he calls the “golden” tropes of neoliberalism.³⁵ Cox in articulating his

take on the “neoliberal narrative,” locates its integral function through an “assurance that present circumstances – however dire – can be converted into a more attractive state of affairs.”³⁶

Interstellar illustrates this neoliberal ambivalence, something akin to a “the darkest hour is just before the dawn” position on the state of things.

Neoliberal “Equipment”

The film’s “words of wisdom,” imparted by our neoliberal hero and his counterparts, supply all the “good reasons” a receptive audience needs to accept the message as credible. These messages, often a reaffirmation of the characters’ devotion to their cause, concomitantly aim to establish or reaffirm the same devotion within its audience. In doing so, the film acts as a conduit of neoliberally-charged, symbolic equipment, to its viewership so that they may similarly be equipped for addressing their real-world exigencies. Digging into *Interstellar*, we find countless instances from which neoliberal leanings are dogmatized and neatly wrapped for its audience to pack along in their own environmental odyssey. For starters, a featured tagline from one of *Interstellar*’s promotional posters, reads: “The end of Earth will not be the end of us.” Quite fittingly, this tagline summarizes the film’s advocacy for a laissez-faire attitude toward social governance and the planet alike. Then, there is *Interstellar*’s quite on the nose naming of its spaceship, the “Endurance,” which is a fitting trope for neoliberalism. Another notable example of *Interstellar*’s neoliberal orientation comes through its portrayal of the government space agency, NASA, as an off the radar, and highly privatized operation. A stark contrast to the publically operated NASA we know today, *Interstellar*’s NASA remains in line with the neoliberal championing of decreased government involvement. As can be seen, there are several lines and plot points within *Interstellar* that correspond and transport its neoliberal vision. With

the characters of *Interstellar* repeatedly finding themselves up against enormous odds these messages work to encourage, uplift, and reaffirm their neoliberal allegiance. Therefore, the neoliberal notions shown to guide our heroes through moments of trepidation simultaneously show the audience the “praiseworthy” ideas and actions that they can emulate for themselves.

The Dylan Thomas villanelle, “Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night,” repeated throughout *Interstellar*, perfectly echoes the entrepreneurial-Neoliberal spirit at the film’s heart. As film critic, A.O. Scott corroborates, “it celebrates the resistance to extinction—with its repeated invocation of “rage against the dying of the light”—“*Interstellar*” becomes an allegory of its own aspirations, an argument for grandeur, scale and risk, on-screen and off.”³⁷ As the adage goes, “Do not go gentle into that good night; Old age should burn and rave at close of day. Rage, rage against the dying of the light.”³⁸ This apothegm’s first appearance in the film comes through its haunting recitation by Professor Brand, whose voice is superimposed atop the visual sequence comes when Coop and the team of scientists are approaching takeoff from Earth to begin their mission for humanity’s future. As mentioned earlier, Graff and Winn’s communion-instilling devices include a level for “fitting quotations” and maxims.³⁹ The recurring invocation of the Thomas villanelle operates precisely in this capacity throughout the film. Very early on, Cooper’s posture is well-configured to embody the qualities deemed *praiseworthy* by the film. After learning the grave verdict about the Earth’s dwindling food supply and the increasingly limited supplies left to sustain human life, Cooper optimistically notes, “We’ll find a way, Professor, we always have.”⁴⁰ Another example unfolds during an exchange between Coop and Brand soon after they realize the lost twenty-three years of Earth time to spend just one hour on an uninhabitable planet responsible for the deaths of their crewmember and the Lazarus Mission astronaut sent there earlier to collect data. After Cooper exclaims his frustration and concern

over their lack of preparation for dealing with this situation, Brand responds: “we got this far on *our brains*, further than any human in history.”⁴¹ The operative phrase here, “our brain,” reinforces a sense of humanity’s propensity toward superciliousness.

Interstellar also convincingly folds Cooper’s guilt for leaving his children into its trope of sacrifice which it later translates into its transcendence move. Coop’s journey to space, as fulfilling for his inner astronautical ambitions as it may be, was necessary for his children’s survival. In one scene, Brand asks Cooper why he didn’t tell Murph he was leaving Earth because he was “going to save the world.”⁴² In response, Cooper explains that as a parent, the most important thing to you is that your children feel safe, which would certainly not be accomplishable by telling your young child the “world is ending.” Though, had Coop told his daughter all the details of the mission he was set to depart on, he may have received a more proper goodbye from a young Murph who refused to leave her room and see him off—a decision that likely haunted her for the decades to come. Devastated due to her father’s departure and overwhelmed by a sense of abandonment, the only message Murph sends to Coop in the twenty-five years since his departure is on her 35th birthday. In a heart-wrenching video transmission, Murph address her father,

Hey Dad. You son of a bitch. Never made one of these while you were still responding because I was so mad at you for leaving. And when you went quiet, it seemed like I should live with that decision, and I have. But today's my birthday. And it's a special one, because you told me... you once told me that by the time you came back we might be the same age. And today I'm the same age you were when you left. So, it'd be a real good time for you to come back.⁴³

Cooper’s stoicism throughout the film as he bears the brunt of Murph’s hostility—something that he easily could have averted if he had told his young daughter the mission’s true purpose—personifies the notion of neoliberal sacrifice. Cooper’s willingness to suffer so that his children

would not have to, he did without question. Coop is the “best of us,” he selflessly endures this emotional and physical suffering time and time again. Even when Coop –though technically 124, but still looking to be in his early 40s – is finally reunited with his dying 99-year-old daughter he can only spend a few moments with her. The brief exchange:

Cooper: I'm here now, Murph. I'm here.

Murph: No. No parent should have to watch their own child die. I have my kids here for me now. You go.

Cooper: Where?

Murph: Brand. She's... out there. Setting up camp. Alone, in a strange galaxy. Maybe right now, she's settling in for the long nap. By the light of our new sun. In our new home.⁴⁴

As one of the most emotionally charged scenes in the film, it is within this exchange that we see the start of the guilt-redemption cycle beginning anew. By willingly entering the black hole and offering his life as a sacrifice it might seem like Coop’s heroic mission is finally complete. Thus, for some, Coop’s journey into the depths of the black hole, Gargantua, represents our salvation. Our guilt cleansed by the blood “*of one of us*” on behalf “*of all of us*.” But as the rhetoric of rebirth requires, new forms of guilt will emerge in need of expiation. As Murph articulates, Coop’s mission is not yet complete. Brand is out there, all alone in a new world – even though this was the planet the Lazarus mission astronaut, Edmond was sent to, he had long-since passed away from old-age—a world destined to be the future home for all of mankind. This guilt over Brand being alone, paired with the reality that though “Cooper Station” is only a temporary solace for humanity, and much work still must be done to cultivate this planet for our permanent residence. Coop must venture back into the cosmic chasm and finish what he set out to do. He must ensure that his children—and his children’s children, and by extension all of humanity—are safe and have a reliable new planet to call home.

Although Cooper's ultimate motivation is to give his children a shot at a future free of suffocation and starvation. Along these lines, to elicit Cooper to spearhead NASA's new mission, Professor Brand heavily exploits Cooper's love for his children by suggesting the mission is the only hope they have for survival. Moreover, this exploitation of Cooper's paternal instinct to protect his offspring is a theme that frequently resurfaces. Throughout the film, Professor Brand's "plan" for humanity – even after his character's passing – is carried on through additional characters he had influenced, like the rogue scientist, Dr. Mann (Matt Damon). As the leader of the Lazarus Mission, Dr. Mann ventured out an entire decade before Cooper joined the underground NASA cause. The missions initially began with twelve astronauts, each travelling in different spaceship that then set out to distant galaxies through wormhole near Jupiter created by "They," to find habitable planets that might serve as a viable replacement to Earth. Dr. Mann, Miller, and Edmonds, are the only three astronauts who sent an indication back to NASA that their planets met the requirements to facilitate human life. The highly-revered Dr. Mann is thrilled to see the faces of other humans as the crew of the *Endurance* wakes him after having spent 35 years in cryosleep.

As the crew is getting acquainted with Dr. Mann and his planet, Brand receives a video transmission from Murph informing her of Professor Brand's passing. Murph, having just learned about the true "purpose" of the *Endurance*'s mission after Professor Brand revealed it in his deathbed confession, asks Brand if she and her father "knew" that they were left on Earth to die. Brand and Cooper, shocked and confused by the revelation about Professor Brand's admission to Murph, are provided clarity on the subject by the very unexpected source, Dr. Mann. Dr. Mann also delivers a few of the most important lines of the film, providing crucial

links to Professor Brand's motivations for deceiving his own daughter and Cooper about the mission's true objective. Professor Brand's master plan, as Dr. Mann articulates:

He [Professor Brand] knew how much harder it would be for people to come together and save the species, instead of themselves, or their children. Evolution has yet to transcend that simple barrier—we can care deeply, selflessly for people we know, but our empathy rarely extends beyond our line of sight.⁴⁵

This excerpt from Dr. Mann's has some useful implications for understanding his role in imparting aspects of the film's epideictic vision. Dr. Mann's statement is reflective of the free-market *ethos* at neoliberalism's heart. This political orientation's suspicion of government programs and blatant distrust of society suggests that the bonds that connect strangers hold no real sway in the neoliberal arena. In accordance with what turned out to be Professor Brand's theory all along, Dr. Mann believes that for our species to survive, we must move past the urge to preserve our own bloodline and expand that affinity to all humankind. Earlier in the film, Professor Brand made a similar claim when convincing Coop that interstellar time travel was the only viable reality for human survival, as he exhorts: "We must think, not as individuals, but as a species."⁴⁶ Dr. Mann's statement above reveals the Professor Brand and Dr. Mann's standpoint that physiologically, people are more inclined to protect their own bloodline than to help others. To reconcile this trait, we must override our natural inclinations to see the "bigger picture" that will ensure the survival and prosperity of all – at least according to Dr. Mann's sentiment.

This is a quite interesting contrast from Chapter Three's Professor Barnhardt who won a Nobel Peace Prize for his work on biological altruism. *Interstellar* essentially posits biological altruism as something outside of our genetic predispositions, the human impulse as it suggests, is one of self-interest. Dr. Mann's cynical read on human nature facilitates his ability to trigger our blame and sense of pollution due to the insinuation that our interest in protecting our home

“community” comes second to the protection of our own self-interest. In addition, quite like Chapter Three revealed about *TDTESS*’s depiction of the child-like aspects of humanity, Dr. Mann’s admonitory tone echoes *TDTESS*’s determinist judgment. In *TDTESS*, Klaatu repeatedly assumes a role of authority in deciding what course of action will be the best. Similarly, Dr. Mann and Professor Brand, by carrying out their covert “Plan B,” assume the same role in determining the best “plan” of action for humanity’s survival.

As the plot continues to unravel, it is revealed that Dr. Mann’s planet is completely uninhabitable and the data he sent back to Earth was fabricated in the hope that he would be rescued. Before entering the cryosleep he expected he would never likely awake from, Dr. Mann rigged his robot “KIPP” to explode in the off-chance that an attempt to extract its data log ever occurred. In tandem with the explosion scene, Dr. Mann lures Coop to the edge of one of the planet’s icy pits. There, Dr. Mann rips off Cooper’s radio communication transmitter, resulting in the depressurization of his helmet. Now sufficiently debilitated, Dr. Mann then pushes Coop off the cliff. Coop struggles to get up and locate his radio piece, unable to respond, only to listen, Coop must endure Dr. Mann’s soliloquy: “You’re feeling it, aren’t you? The survival instinct. That’s what drove me. It’s what drives all of us. And it’s what’s gonna save us. Cause I’m gonna save all of us. For you, Cooper.”⁴⁷ This interaction reveals a lot about Dr. Mann’s own sacrificial complex and drive for survival, as well as reaffirming the film’s core values. Despite being the leader of the Lazarus Mission, which involved the willingness to embark on a mission that almost certainly would result in his death, it seems that Dr. Mann’s time alone rerouted his resolve. In his mind, he is eliminating Cooper so that he can carry out Professor Brand’s original plan of repopulating a new Earth with the pre-fertilized human egg embryos brought aboard the *Endurance*. While Coop and Dr. Mann’s struggle is taking place, Romilly (David Gyasi) is killed

in an explosion when he attempts to restore Dr. Mann's robot, KIPP. This accident a result of Dr. Mann's booby trap. Though the murderous detour taken by Dr. Mann was in no way a part of Professor Brand's plan, the ideological sprinklings echoed through Dr. Mann's statements were reflective of his plan. In effect, Dr. Mann "filled in" for Professor Brand in conveying the film's epideictic vision.

It is also worth noting, that, like Cooper, Professor Brand had his own offspring to care for, and perhaps her deployment to space was enough solace for any qualms that arose based on his responsibility as a parent – because nothing spells safety and stability quite like the deep, dark, nether regions of the universe made available to us by an ominous entity referred to simply as, "they," for absolutely no apparent reason. But despite Professor Brand's knowing omission to the Endurance's crew about the mission's "real" purpose, writing him off as a villain negates the sacrifices he himself had to make. Perhaps his guilt for withholding the truth from Coop is the reason Professor Brand chose to take Murph under his wing as a mentee. In the end, Professor Brand ultimately *is* successful in saving his daughter's life, while remaining diligent to his cause from the moment it was "off the ground" up until his deathbed confession to Murph. Though the mission did veer in a dramatically different direction than he had originally envisioned, had Professor Brand seen his neoliberal vision through to its entelechial end, the film's soundtrack would need far fewer Hans Zimmer compositions. Professor Brand's character arc is a shining demonstration of the grit required of the neoliberalist; the unflinching faith, the sacrifice without question, the ability to delay gratification, and an unyielding resolve. By extension, Professor Brand upholds his status as the credible elder of our community, specifically in his capacity as our epideictic "seer." The words and actions of these epideictic characters demonstrate the actions and traits the audience should emulate to follow the redemptive path needed for

cleansing. Once the audience has been attitudinally cleansed, the film moves to its third, and final phase of the cycle of rebirth, the redemption stage. As the subsequent chapters will unpack, *Interstellar* operationalizes two redemptive paths—that of transcendence and scapegoating to complete its rebirth cycle.

Redemption via Transcendence

In *Rhetoric of Religion*, Kenneth Burke describes the redemptive path of transcendence, referring to this mechanism as a “passing note,” an ephemerally passing discord.⁴⁸ The mode of transcendence, can be understood as “a way of turning guilt around into virtue, of making it not-a-sin.”⁴⁹ Rather than resolving, or redeeming guilt, transcendence quite literally moves *around* guilt. Although Burke never identified transcendence in his conception of the modes of redemption, Barry Brummett posits it as a third such instance. Even though transcendence functions to prevent guilt, Brummett argues that transcendence nevertheless engages and interacts with guilt. In a similar fashion, *Interstellar*’s neoliberal “attitude” works to divert climate change guilt by using Burkean transcendence to reroute its path to redemption. *Interstellar* conveys a celebratory tone about leaving the Earth, as it creates new opportunities for economic progress and growth.

Alternatively, Chapter Three’s articulation of *TDTESS*’s eco-Marxist orientation would view the transcendence path as “abandoning” the Earth, what it believes to be the natural trajectory of systems of “neoliberal disaster capitalism.”⁵⁰ A useful example of the impact of transcendence for a neoliberal agenda comes from Ross Singer’s analysis of Thomas Friedman’s *Hot, Flat, and Crowded*. Here, Singer concludes that Friedman’s neoliberally-inspiring book, “positions audiences within a mythic America in which history and the sacred authority of prosperity guarantee transcendence of the nation’s freedom over its crises.”⁵¹ By transcending

our earthly constraints in favor of relocating to a new planet, *Interstellar* is simultaneously transcending and sentimental or romantic notions about our relationship to the planet.

In, “Burkean Scapegoating, Mortification, and Transcendence in Presidential Campaign Rhetoric” Brummett shows how Ronald Reagan put Burkean transcendence into action in the 1980 presidential election campaign. In the campaign, Reagan uses transcendence to reframe his constituents’ guilt that resulted from liberal narratives that painted their consumption habits as representations of their wastefulness and irresponsibility.⁵² As Brummett explains: “Reagan’s speeches call Americans to see production and consumption, not as sins, but as the playing out of values such as work, progress, and making a better world, ‘values that transcend persons and parties.’”⁵³ Essentially, Reagan proclaims that his supporters’ actions are contributing to American progress and working as “a strategy for growth,” which, in turn, illustrates the innate patriotism of their action.⁵⁴ Reagan further argues that his constituents’ habits are not deserving of guilt or shame, but rather of celebration. By reframing his constituents’ actions as reaffirmations of their conservative values, Reagan successfully employs the redemptive path of transcendence. Though Reagan’s message was tailored to his conservative audience, many of the values he celebrates: production and consumption as a “strategy for growth,” are in line with neoliberal interests.

Within *Interstellar*, the “space as the last frontier myth” plays a supplemental role in the film’s creation of a redemptive path via Burkean transcendence. Jeff Lavigne’s master’s thesis, “After the Fall: The Post-Apocalyptic Frontier in *The Road* and *28 Days Later*,” extends the “frontier myth” to space in his rhetorical film analysis.⁵⁵ We find evidence of *Interstellar*’s “space as the last frontier” invocation in the film’s tagline: “we were never meant to *stay* on this planet,” sets the stage early on for the film to reframe our climate change related guilt.⁵⁶ As this

tagline reflects *Interstellar's* climate change solution requires humanity to find a new home planet altogether. What we may have initially experienced as guilt about our deteriorating home planet is reframed in the film as simply false or mistaken guilt. If anything, *Interstellar* might even read a tinge grateful for the ecological catastrophe for allowing mankind to reach its full, neoliberal potential. *Interstellar's* transcendent path to climate change guilt purgation functions primarily by maneuvering us *around* our guilt. But we still must account for those audience members that Don's message –hinting at humanity's greed – earlier on in the film, may have resonated with. For these individuals, their guilt is perhaps not expunged by just transcending and ignoring our part in any Earthly damage. Thus, to alleviate the heavy burden of their guilt, redemption is only attainable for them through a (symbolic) blood sacrifice. The following section elaborates on *Interstellar's* additional redemptive path by way of Burkean scapegoating.

Redemption via Scapegoat

Interstellar's use of scapegoating and transcendence quite fittingly parallel the film's tropes of sacrifice and reward stemming from its neoliberal agenda. If we view transcendence, or moving beyond an exigence, as the reward, then scapegoating represents the neoliberal trope of sacrifice. In press interviews from *Interstellar's* release, Nolan describes the character of Cooper as an "everyman," a person who's desires and longings represent those shared by most of humanity.⁵⁷ As such, Cooper is a part of this hierarchy and can take our place as our "scapegoat," a substitute vessel onto which our collective guilt is transferred. For any of *Interstellar's* audience members clinging to an anthropogenically-based guilt, symbolic redemption is still possible through scapegoating. Conversely, Cooper's role as a scapegoat for the audience's guilt also has a unique appeal for the neoliberal audience in that scapegoating demonstrates both the importance of sacrifice, and the rewarding outcome of that sacrifice: redemption. Through his

willing self-sacrifice and his unceasing dedication to ingenuity and expansion, Cooper is the perfect embodiment of neoliberal virtues, *Interstellar*'s true "virtuoso." By watching Cooper's transformation from polluted to redeemed, the audience is provided a vision of the praiseworthy path he takes. Specifically, this vision demonstrates how a neoliberal "attitude" can be employed and what it can equip us to do.

So, what we define as the "virtuoso" might also be called the hero, a role Cooper undeniably fulfills throughout the film. According to Rushing and Frenz, "When frontierism evolved into industrialism, the hero still had to protect [their] community, for it was a collective form of [their] own 'perfection.'"⁵⁸ In some ways, then, broadening the mission's purpose for Cooper to all living individuals positions it as a motive of the hero's entelechy. Cooper, upon entering the wormhole, Gargantua, Cooper obtains and transmits the data Murph needs to solve the equation of "gravity," which is necessary for the salvation of humanity from extinction. The film's final sequence, we learn that Cooper's "hero's journey" is not yet over, after taking one of Cooper Station's spaceships, he descends back into space's depths to find Brand. Entering Gargantua only partially completed Cooper's personal guilt expiation mission, thus, to completely purge this cycle's guilt and reach entelechial fulfillment, Cooper must finish what he started and help Brand prepare the new, future home for humanity. As Margaret Cavin elucidates about the cyclical nature of guilt, "as we proceed in the cycle of rebirth, we find that purgation leads to a state of harmony or restored order."⁵⁹ Cavin describes the rebirth cycle, further:

At the point of redemption the culture evolves into a new understanding; it possesses a new value. However, this new value will be tested. Redemption always leads, due to the element of "original sin," to a recognition of yet more guilt and yet another need for purification.⁶⁰

As this quote from Cavin corroborates, redemption is ephemeral; our entelechy compels us through a perpetual cycling of this “rhetoric of rebirth.”

The guilt Cooper experienced as the result of his sacrificial journey is undeniably evident throughout most of the film’s plot. In the video transmission Coop receives from friends and family – many of which were delayed for years on end due to relativity or because crewmembers were in cryosleep – the conditions on Earth are shown to be increasingly perilous, and Coop received news of the passing of Don and his now 40-year-old son Thomas’s (Casey Affleck) son, Jesse. Able only to receive but not transmit messages to Earth, Cooper painfully watches the twenty-three years of video transmissions sent while he was stuck on Miller’s planet. Coop is consumed from guilt over leaving his family behind and being unable to be a part of his children, and, now, his grandchildren’s lives. And although his journey was necessary to the survival of his children, it was also in part out of Cooper’s longing for the adventure that plowing corn fields could not provide. Ultimately, sacrifice – on the part of Coop, and all the characters in varying ways– is the linchpin to *Interstellar*’s resolution of guilt, and for *Interstellar*’s ultimate solution to its ecological predicament. As *Interstellar* effectively shows, the only way out is through, or, rather, *around*. On the neoliberal journey, every reward comes at a cost.

The message of *Interstellar* basically eviscerates its audience’s climate change guilt by completely reframing climate change from a “problem” to a solution that allows mankind’s continued growth within new cosmic markets. But quite contrarily, despite *Interstellar*’s denial of a problem—and thus its denial of guilt—it still provides the very clear scapegoat of Cooper. So, despite *Interstellar*’s redemptive path of transcendence portrays the successful sidestepping of human extinction, however, what this outcome cannot evade is the need for a fitting offering.

Chapter Three argued that both mortification and scapegoating are provided by *TDTESS* as redemptive mediums. Interestingly, like *TDTESS*, redemption through scapegoating is also offered within *Interstellar*'s solution. The films do, however, diverge in their second redemptive paths; with *TDTESS* providing the mortification path, and *Interstellar* operationalizing transcendence. Chapter Three elucidated my argument as to why these films offer multiple routes of symbolic redemption. Chapter Three also delineated Robert Ivie's findings on the rhetoric of the Cold War that provides a crucial piece of my rationale for the redemptive dualisms. As Ivie's analysis reveals, scapegoating was the only mode of redemption that proved successful in persuading its audience.⁶¹ Whereas the anti-war advocates used mortification as a means of redemption, the pro-war advocates' invocation of the scapegoat path won favor with their American audience. The mortification route called for its audience to personally atone for their actions and guilt related to the war, but scapegoating enabled them to "pass the buck" of blame to the Russians. As Ivie concludes, scapegoating is the only redemptive path that is sure to be effective, as the passing of guilt to another is a far more seductive solution than through mortification's self-punishing path to guilt expiation.⁶² In Chapter Five I extend the implications of cli-fi's redemptive duality in connection to the nature of Hollywood's strategic ambiguity as visible within both *TDTESS* and *Interstellar*. The conclusion to the present chapter is provided in the section to follow and highlights the key takeaways from *Interstellar*'s rhetorical probing.

Conclusion

Works of climate fiction, although productive in stimulating climate change awareness, can, however, peddle some counterintuitive notions. The reality, or at least the reality that coincides with currently supported scientific speculation, suggests there is no Planet B and extraterrestrials will probably not come to save us. Although the science behind *Interstellar* is

founded in credible theory, it remains just that: theory. So much remains unknown about space, from wormholes, to black holes, to relativity. What is certain, however, is that *Interstellar's* incredible space odyssey is beyond the capabilities of science currently, and likely beyond the capability of science during our lifetime. Equally certain is the film's ability to resolve the dilemmas of actually-existence climate worry through a rhetoric of blame and redemption. With so much emphasis placed on the "real" science behind the film, *Interstellar* may do more harm to the climate change cause, than good. Perpetuating the idea that space provides the answer for humanity's survival sends our gaze in the wrong direction. Before we get caught up with our star-gazing, we must first, address the condition of the suffering planet we currently occupy.

Interstellar's neoliberal environmental orientation packs a heavy pro-technological punch, leaving little by way of ecological interests. Even when the film shows technology seemingly "turn on" humanity, it later reveals that these "malfunctions" and anomalies, were, in fact, orchestrated by "us," – albeit, a far more advanced, future "us." But, despite the seemingly doomed reality portrayed throughout *Interstellar*, Cooper's confidence in humanity's ability to survive literally sends him plummeting into the supermassive black hole, "Gargantua." Cooper's sentiments, whether deemed as faith or hubris, encapsulate the film's ceaseless trust in the ingenuity of man, "We'll find a way. We always have."⁶³ Once again, and in maxim form, *Interstellar* provides a neoliberal encomium to foster some level of epideictic communion with its audience. Based on *Interstellar's* neoliberal undercurrent, with its "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" attitude about the earth, it is easy to see why *The Atlantic's* Noah Gittell argues that "as a climate-change parable, it fails."⁶⁴ Likewise, Michael Svoboda suggests that *Interstellar* in many ways represents and reinforces climate skepticism. He goes on to argue that, "so eager is director Christopher Nolan to make the case for the return to space that he effectively accuses nature of

neglect, if not outright abuse. Humanity must look elsewhere, the film seems to argue, because Earth is no longer a reliable provider.”⁶⁵ Neoliberal environmentalism, a concept which in and of itself is quite paradoxical, would rather invest its resources in finding an entirely new planet to inhabit, than to repair any Earthly damage by putting a cap on production and growth. The neoliberal Earth is nothing more than a tool for survival. In fact, an infinite industrial expansion to galaxies far, far away, embodies the very essence of the neoliberalist. Simply put, Nolan’s answer for climate change is *more* innovation, *more* industry, *more* exploration, *more* technology, *more* science, and *more* Hans Zimmer. For *Interstellar*, the guilt it cultivates is less concerned with our care, or lack thereof, for the planet. Instead, its charge of guilt is directed at the Earth itself for its dwindling support for humanity.

The film’s contemporary take on the Dust Bowl reinforces the film’s message that the earth is an unstable and hostile “home,” and that we have overstayed our welcome. In consideration of Nolan’s claim it also sheds some light on why *Interstellar* utilizes not one, but two, of the Burkean guilt-redemption strategies. A neoliberal solution requires initiation by scapegoat that will serve as a willing centrifuge for sacrifice and suffering for the benefit of many. However, the presence of these seemingly contradictory strategies is even more intuitively apparent when considering the strategic ambiguity of the film’s political pitch. Yet, what could have served as a *Grapes of Wrath*-esque parable for learning from the mistakes of past generations; *Interstellar* ultimately undermines the educational and social potential of epideictic discourse. Noah Gittell accurately notes, that “The heroes in *Interstellar* do not talk much about their mistakes on Earth. Nor do they learn anything of value except that love, you know, transcends space and time.”⁶⁶ In reinforcing its own message, *Interstellar* simultaneously reinforces a sense of our inability to learn from the mistakes of the past. It handicaps our sense of

agency to *prevent* disaster, while, instead, celebrates mankind's ability to *overcome* and *recover* from disaster.

NOTES

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- ¹ “Interstellar,” *Box Office Mojo*, <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=interstellar.htm>
- ² “Interstellar: Awards,” *IMDb*, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0816692/awards?ref_=tt_awd.
- ³ Kip Thorne, “The Science of Interstellar,” *Interstellar*, special features, iTunes, directed by Christopher Nolan (Burbank, California: Paramount Pictures, Warner Bros., Legendary Pictures, 2015).
- ⁴ Although, the paper has received a significant amount of criticism from many scientists.
- ⁵ Tim Lammers, “Interview: Christopher Nolan Talks New Dimensions of ‘Interstellar,’” *DirectConversations.com*, Published: November 6, 2014, Accessed: February 24, 2017, <http://directconversations.com/2014/11/06/interview-christopher-nolan-talks-new-dimensions-interstellar/>.
- ⁶ Emphasis Added. Tim Lammers, “Interview: Christopher Nolan Talks New Dimensions of ‘Interstellar,’” *DirectConversations.com*, Published: November 6, 2014, accessed: February 24, 2017, <http://directconversations.com/2014/11/06/interview-christopher-nolan-talks-new-dimensions-interstellar/>.
- ⁷ Janice Hocker Rushing and Thomas S. Frentz, *Projecting the Shadow: The Cyborg Hero in American Film*, (University of Chicago Press, 1995): 67.
- ⁸ Rushing and Frentz, *Projecting the Shadow*, 67.
- ⁹ Rushing and Frentz, *Projecting the Shadow*, 67.
- ¹⁰ “Chapter One,” *Interstellar*, 2014.
- ¹¹ Richard Graff and Wendy Winn, “Presencing” Communion” in Chaim Perelman’s New Rhetoric,” *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 39, no. 1 (2006): 50.
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¹⁸ “Chapter Four,” *Interstellar*, 2014.

¹⁹ “Chapter Four,” *Interstellar*, 2014.

²⁰ “Chapter Four,” *Interstellar*, 2014.

²¹ “Chapter Two,” *Interstellar*, 2014.

²² “Chapter One,” *Interstellar*, 2014.

²³ Emphasis Added. “Chapter Two,” *Interstellar*, 2014.

²⁴ Adam Howard, “Does ‘Interstellar’ Make the Case for Climate Change?” *MSNBC*, Last Updated: December 11, 2014, Accessed: February 26, 2017, <http://www.msnbc.com/msnbc/does-interstellar-make-the-case-climate-change>.

²⁵ “Chapter Two,” *Interstellar*, 2014.

²⁶ Chapter Five,” *Interstellar*, 2014.

²⁷ Chapter Five,” *Interstellar*, 2014.

²⁸ Dale Sullivan, “A Rhetoric of Children’s Literature as Epideictic Discourse,” (Dissertation, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, 1998), 132. Sullivan’s citation includes reference to Wayne C. Booth’s notion of the epideictic “living oracle,” from his *Rhetoric of Fiction*, (University of Chicago Press, 2010): 221.

²⁹ Ross Singer. Neoliberal Style, the American Re-generation, and Ecological Jeremiad in Thomas Friedman’s “Code Green,” *Environmental Communication* 4, no. 2 (2010): 137.

³⁰ Singer, “Neoliberal Style, the American Re-generation,” 146.

³¹ Singer suggests that Friedman’s “pro-corporate jeremiad” is a deviation from Kenneth Burke’s “tragic frame of irreparable damage caused by an inherently tainted market.” Singer notes that the pro-corporate jeremiad runs counter to the anti-corporate sentiments contained within most of the ecological jeremiads of the genre. Singer, “Neoliberal Style, the American Re-generation,” 143.

³² Thomas L. Friedman’s *Hot, Flat, and Crowded: Why We Need A Green Revolution – And How It Can Renew America*. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, (2008): 6.

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³⁴ Singer, “Neoliberal Style, the American Re-generation,” 136.

³⁵ Robert J Cox, “Golden Tropes and Democratic Betrayals: Prospects for the Environment and Environmental Justice in Neoliberal Free Trade Agreements,” in R. Sandler & P.C. Pezzullo (Eds.), *Environmental Justice and Environmentalism: The Social Justice Challenge to the Environmental Movement*, (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2007): 230.

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³⁸ Chapter Six," *Interstellar*, 2014.

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⁴⁰ Chapter Four," *Interstellar*, 2014.

⁴¹ Emphasis Added. Chapter Ten," *Interstellar*, 2014.

⁴² Emphasis Added. Chapter Ten," *Interstellar*, 2014.

⁴³ Chapter Eleven *Interstellar*, 2014.

⁴⁴ Chapter Nineteen," *Interstellar*, 2014.

⁴⁵ Chapter Thirteen," *Interstellar*, 2014.

⁴⁶ Chapter Thirteen," *Interstellar*, 2014.

⁴⁷ Chapter Fourteen," *Interstellar*, 2014.

⁴⁸ Kenneth Burke, *The Rhetoric of Religion*, (University of California Press, 1970): 230.

⁴⁹ Brummett, "Burkean Scapegoating," 256. Brummett's defense of transcendence as a third resolution to guilt, and the quote cited, can be found in footnote 12 and 13.

⁵⁰ John Bellamy Foster, "The Great Capitalist Climacteric: Marxism and" System Change Not Climate Change", " *Monthly Review* 67, no. 6 (2015): 12.

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⁵² Barry Brummett, "Burkean Scapegoating, Mortification, and Transcendence in Presidential Campaign Rhetoric," *Central States Speech Journal* 32 (4), (1981): 259- 260.

⁵³ Brummett, "Burkean Scapegoating, Mortification," 259.

⁵⁴ Brummett, "Burkean Scapegoating, Mortification," 260.

⁵⁵ Jeffrey James Lavigne, "After the Fall: The Post-Apocalyptic Frontier in *The Road* and *28 Days Later*," (master's thesis, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 2011).

⁵⁶ Chapter Four," *Interstellar*, 2014.

⁵⁷ Jensen, "Inside 'Interstellar,' Christopher Nolan's," 2014.

⁵⁸ Rushing and Frentz, *Projecting the Shadow*, 64.

⁵⁹ Margaret Cavin, "Replacing the Scapegoat: An Examination of the Rebirth Strategies Found in William Sloane Coffin's Language of Peace," *Peace & Change* 19 (1994): 291.

⁶⁰ Margaret Cavin, "Replacing the Scapegoat: An Examination of the Rebirth Strategies Found in William Sloane Coffin's Language of Peace," *Peace & Change* 19 (1994): 291.

⁶¹ Robert L. Ivie, "Metaphor and the Rhetorical Invention of Cold War 'Idealists,'" *Communication Monographs*, 54 no. 2 (1987): 178.

⁶² Ivie, "Metaphor and the Rhetorical Invention," 178.

⁶³ Chapter Four," *Interstellar*, 2014.

⁶⁴ Noah Gittell, "Interstellar: Good Space Film, Bad Climate-Change Parable," *The Atlantic*, published: November 15, 2014, Accessed: June 26, 2016, <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2014/11/why-interstellar-ignores-climate-change/382788/>.

⁶⁵ Michael Svoboda, "Interstellar: Looking for the Future in All the Wrong Spaces," *Yale Climate Connections*, published: November 12, 2014, Accessed: February 25, 2017, <http://www.yaleclimateconnections.org/2014/11/interstellar-looking-for-the-future-in-all-the-wrong-spaces/>.

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CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

*The Earth is neither nature nor a machine. – Bruno Latour*¹

The realm of cli-fi and dystopic fictions, more broadly, have erupted onto the academic scene as of late. This area of research is still in its infancy, and for that reason, this project has the good fortune in getting to contribute to budding conversation. Cli-fi, a direct descendant of dystopia, is a pivotal player in the increasing cultural infatuation with this genre, a reason for which warrants a deeper look in to the rhetorical processes from within the cli-fi genre. Through the blameworthy actions or attitudes cli-fi films call attention to, a sense of guilt about our state of “fallen-ness” is activated. Society’s entelechy, interrupted by the unbalanced state of our hierarchy, can only be satiated by the purging of our guilt. Due to guilt’s ubiquitous nature, it can only ever be temporarily assuaged, rather than permanently absolved. From this place of unease, the audience is prepared to receive the film’s path for redemption and the values that correspond with this guilt-resolving channel.

As this thesis has demonstrated, the road to symbolic guilt-redemption is made possible through Burkean scapegoating, mortification, and/or transcendence. Cli-fi films provide the epideictic equipment an audience can pack along for their symbolic, guilt-cleansing journey. More broadly, however, the framework this thesis employed to analyze cli-fi could similarly fit other dystopic or science fiction narratives. Cli-fi films move through states of blame to praise, and in the process, releases its audience through Burke’s guilt-redemption cycle. In this project, I have heavily stressed the importance of viewing cli-fi as a form of epideictic discourse. The role

of this genre in that it is pre-deliberative is fundamentally important to understanding how these texts are not/can/might move society to action. These dystopic ecological imaginations—borrowing once more from Burke—are a form of “incipient action.” In Chapter Two the notion of *eethos* was briefly introduced, and as was noted, this concept’s translation shares etymological *praxis* with the better-known term, *ethos*. Eethos represents the common dwelling space for audience and orator, alike. Cli-fi cinema, whether viewed from the comfort of one’s home, or by way of 35mm in a theater, provides this very space for all to commune as one. As Dale Sullivan reiterates, “the author of epideictic stories draws the reader into the ethos of the story—the timeless consubstantial space that enfolds the participants—and in so doing draws the reader into the culture’s ethos.”² Cli-fi cinema enables film and audience to dwell in our problems allowing us to imagine, together, on consubstantial ground, the possibilities for grappling with climate change communally.

In *TDTESS*’s analysis, I argued that the film villainizes the techno-industrial “machine,” and assumes a parent-like-role through the alien Klaatu; suggesting that humanity is incapable of cleaning up their climate mess on their own. Regardless of the film’s insinuation, aliens are not going to save us – and even if they do, they most certainly will not look like Keanu Reeves. *TDTESS*’s “symbolic” equipment gives its audience a serviceable political orientation, that of eco-Marxism, as its attitudinal path to redemption. Despite *TDTESS*’s deeply “blameful” tendencies, it does provide a few glimpses of the praiseworthy eco-Marxist attitude through its characters of epideictic “virtuosity.” Through the characters of Helen Benson and Professor Barnhardt, *TDTESS*’s climate change resolving journey is guided by its “pure” science beacons. *Interstellar*, in celebrating scientific rationale and neoliberal advancement, shows how the public sphere, when entirely replaced by the technical sphere leads can lead humanity toward victory

and away from extinction. *Interstellar* even goes so far as to paint the anti-techno-scientific as conspiracy theorist-types, lacking the ability to comprehend the value of STEM-driven solutions.

The selection of *Interstellar* and *TDTESS* for this project's analysis was largely based on the interesting dichotomy they demonstrate. These films are at opposite ends of the spectrum in terms of their political leanings and they each balance their ratios of praise and blame differently. *TDTESS*'s blame runs consistent through most of the film, offering its vision of eco-Marxist praise largely in the final scenes. Comparatively, the first half of *Interstellar* frames its vision of blame, but then shifts to praising its neoliberal path throughout the film's second half.

Interstellar's version of utopia is one of pure ecstasy by virtue of technology. It follows, then, that the redemptive path *Interstellar* praises – the path being praised in the sense that it's the one the characters take to achieve the film's solution – is only possible through technology and science. On the other end of the spectrum from *Interstellar*'s techno-copia is *TDTESS*'s opposite solution – operation no more military operations (or technology). It is almost as if *Interstellar* starts from *TDTESS*'s future – a dismantled military (this was mentioned very briefly in the film) and during a major technological regression. For *TDTESS* the praise-- “utopic” vision is one of a society with no technology. Interestingly, *TDTESS*'s very clear anti-military attitude (carried over from the first one on this one, but way more mortification, which might explain why the 2008 version was received poorly. *Interstellar*'s scapegoat and transcendence move is the perfect crowd-pleaser in the vein of Ivie's findings that the most effective Cold War rhetoric transplanted the blame onto the backs of the Russians. *Interstellar* gives that to use through Cooper as scapegoat with the added-bonus of effectively erasing guilt under the rug by transcending it. We learned in Chapter Four that Christopher Nolan wanted to avoid being “overly didactic” in the film's message –which might explain the *Interstellar*'s flip-flopping of

messages in both the film's narrative and its special feature as well. Hollywood's ambivalence in providing a tangible path to redemption echoes the ambivalence the American government seems to have toward the problem.

Though *TDTESS*'s solution limits a sense of humanity's agency in resolving climate change via *deus ex machina*, the film's admonitory judgment about humanity's habits of waste and overreliance on weapons and technology, moves in the direction of a "sustainable attitude." Quite on the opposite end of the spectrum, *Interstellar*, in many ways, flips the *deus ex machina* trope on its head. *Interstellar* shows that its characters do not need the Gods to rescue them, rather, *Interstellar* humanity becomes their own version of one. *Interstellar*'s most successful blame-mongering is against the scientific non-believers. Elon Musk isn't the problem, the problem is that we didn't throw trillions of dollars at him sooner! It could perhaps be argued that mortification might be the *only* useful path to redemption for a real-world application, given that it is the only one that requires society to take stock of their own role in the problem and introspectively consider and implement changed behaviors. *TDTESS*'s use of mortification gives us moments where we might see hints of Burke's comic corrective. Arguably, of the two films I have analyzed, *TDTESS* gets the closest to Burke's comic corrective, at certain moments reflecting a "comic attitude." However, the *Deus Ex Machina* trope somewhat negates the frames purpose in helping us to "laugh at our foibles," to adopt a charitable view of ourselves to help us correct our actions.³ The Burkean modes of redemption at work within *Interstellar*'s ecological catastrophe solution both paths move the guilt away from its audience, never within. Interestingly, the presence of two paths to redemption is wholly contradictory. If *Interstellar*'s ultimate goal is to transcend the blame it lays out and erase the guilt, the film's offering of a scapegoat might seem unnecessary. However, any which path *Interstellar*'s audience can chose,

effectively moves their guilt away from them, or on to another. Perhaps this explains *Interstellar*'s popularity and strong critical reception, with the film receiving a 71% on *Rotten Tomatoes*. Even the character of Don in *Interstellar*, who hints at the wasteful era leading up to the massive population drop and crop degradation never personally accepts fault. In fact, it might even be argued that his attitude is laced with a type of blame that redirects guilt on to the “wasteful” society of the past and away from Don. *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, however, with its meager 21% on *Rotten Tomatoes*, employed the guilt-alleviating path of scapegoating after its heavy recommendation of the path of mortification. Like the unsuccessful anti-war “idealists” identified by Robert Ivie, *TDTESS*'s tapping of redemption via mortification also proved to be unsuccessful in securing favor with its audience. Whereas, *TDTESS* vilifies “versions of progress,” and the accompanying techno-industrial greed as its primary antagonistic force; *Interstellar* suggests that progress is the only way to move beyond climate change. What these films do share, however, is that they both recognize and celebrate the importance of science and scientists for addressing our planetary ails. While, neither of the films really offer a plausible climate change solution, one at least does get closer to the issue of what needs to be addressed.

In “Why Satire,” Burke notes that though his original interest was in “ritual pollution,” he eventually found himself taking notes about “pollution in the most pragmatic, literal, scientific sense; namely pollution as the ‘unwanted by-products,’ or ‘side effects,’ of advances in modern industry.”⁴ Though this thesis primarily focuses on Burke’s development of the “ritual” aspects of pollution, the purpose is, of course, to understand how the ritual might then influence or motivate literal pollution. In terms of the influence of film on the issue of climate change, outside of the 2004s *The Day After Tomorrow*, at present there is very little research that seeks to gauge the impact of cli-fi films in terms of policy change or audience activism. The 1993

fictional film, *Free Willy*, and the 2013 documentary, *Blackfish*, are great examples of the persuasive and rallying power a film can potentially have over an audience. In their day, both *Blackfish* and *Free Willy* were successful in garnering massive amounts of attention on the treatment of killer whales in captivity. *Free Willy* fans-turned-aquatic-activists launched a widespread campaign for the rehabilitation and training to prepare Keiko– the whale “actor” that played the role of “Willy” in the film– to be set free and released into the wild. Similarly, the documentary, *Blackfish* (2013) unleashed a multitude of negative attention on SeaWorld aquatic parks and their whale programs, which resulted in a significant decrease in the park’s visitor attendance. In the three years following the documentary’s release, SeaWorld ended its famed killer whale show and controversial whale breeding program.⁵ *Blackfish* and *Free Willy* offer tangible examples of Hollywood enterprises can be shown to effect and mobilize social action.⁶ Cli-fi films interested in providing a productive course of climate change solving action could be largely aided by research that examines audience reception and activism that stems from films from the cli-fi genre.

Future Scholarship

The world of fantasy has the potential to serve as a gateway for developing new reflective and political space. According to Frederick Buell ‘s analysis of David Brin’s book, *Earth*, the fictional characters of the story, having just come off the cusp of WWII do nothing to fix the disarray in the war’s aftermath. Instead, the characters create alternative ways to perpetuate and orchestrate a new war by feeding into fears about nuclear annihilation. As Buell concludes:

Human beings needed to do this because they *need* crisis; they *need* crisis because they are a species that thrives on disequilibrium---because they *need* the awful challenges of crisis to push themselves to a higher level of self-organization. Crisis shakes people out of their settled ways; crisis mobilizes people; crisis summons up human creativity.⁷

In line with this assertion, Derrick King advances the critical dystopian imagination as an intervention between the multitude of political versions that have advanced for overcoming climate change and the ideological contradictions within each of the political possibilities that surface as a result.⁸ For King, teasing out the relationship between realism and dystopia is especially useful when done through the lens of the ecological imagination. As Derrick King elucidates, if the dystopian genre is “a reflection of the dominant structure of feeling in our historical moment,” then the genre of realist dystopia arises “in a historical moment in which the dominant structure of feeling is that of constant, everyday crisis, upheaval, and the fear of catastrophe.”⁹ The dystopian moment, in the frame of the critical dystopian genre, becomes a starting point through which the utopian imagination might offer a radical solution. Although the dystopian imagination’s offering of a radical solution does not necessarily translate into a real-world solution for climate change, it does serve as a good starting place for managing our psychological distress about it.

Future scholarship might seek to expand or draw from the framework laid out in this analysis, perhaps broadening its scope to include all dystopic fictions. Additionally, due to the meteoric expansion of scholarship in the dystopic vein, examining literary works that operate solely in the realm of epideictic blame could be an interesting avenue for rhetorical inquiry. For example, the television series *Black Mirror* delves out some form of blame in every episode, but offers no resolution to the guilt it produces or vision of “praiseworthy” behaviors for us to emulate. The constant stream of dystopian fictions in popular culture as of late, raises some interesting questions about why we are so infatuated with these dark texts. If these dark fictions advance visions of the possible, then we consider our present the prequel, that as these dystopic depictions predict will not make it to a sequel.

NOTES

¹ Bruno Latour, "Agency at the Time of the Anthropocene," *New Literary History* 45, no. 1 (2014): 14.

² Dale Sullivan, "A Rhetoric of Children's Literature as Epideictic Discourse," (Dissertation, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, 1998), 197.

³ Burke, "Introduction," *Attitudes Toward History* (no pagination).

⁴ Kenneth Burke, "Why Satire, with a Plan for Writing One," *Michigan Quarterly Review* 13.4, (1974): 313.

⁵ Matt Patches, "Blackfish Director Gabriela Cowperthwaite on Killer Whales and the 20th Anniversary of *Free Willy*," *Vulture*, published: July 23, 2013, accessed: May 1, 2017, <http://www.vulture.com/2013/07/free-willy-sea-world.html>.

⁶ This is a great thesis idea for a Communication student to study down the road.

⁷ Frederick Buell, *From Apocalypse to Way of Life: Environmental Crisis in the American Century*, (Routledge, 2004): 269.

⁸ Derrick King, "From Ecological Crisis to Utopian Hope: Kim Stanley Robinson's Science in the Capital Trilogy as Realist Critical Dystopia," *Extrapolation* 56, no. 2 (2015): 195-197.

⁹ King, "From Ecological Crisis," 202-203.

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CURRICULUM VITAE

Graduate College
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Chloe Louise Powell

Degrees:

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University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Thesis Title:

Cli-fi Cinema: An Epideictic Rhetoric of Blame

Thesis Examination Committee:

Chairperson, Donovan Conley, Ph. D
Committee Member, David Henry, Ph. D.
Committee Member, Emma Bloomfield, Ph. D.
Graduate Faculty Representative, Denise Tillery, Ph. D.