

ALESSANDRA CALANCHI

## Out of Exception, Into Emergency: Fast-forward to Earth Zero

*“Faith” is a fine invention  
For Gentlemen who see!  
But Microscopes are prudent  
In an Emergency!*  
(Emily Dickinson, #202)

### Introduction

States of emergency have marked American literature ever since the colonial era. What changes in time is the kind of exit strategy from emergency – if any. While Anne Bradstreet confides in God after the burning of her house, Emily Dickinson, caught between faith and a microscope, will choose the latter. Every age has its emergencies – wars, drought, flooding, massacres – and literature has always been at the forefront, sometimes to report, sometimes to denounce, at other times simply to tell, its tones ranging from tragedy (Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath*, Roth’s *American Pastoral*) to irony (Ginsberg’s *Bomb*) to dystopia (Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451*, Burroughs’s *Naked Lunch*).

I have chosen to write about a period that goes from the end of the nineteenth century to the first decade of the twentieth. This period was marked by exceptional technological progress as well as by a strong crisis of national identity. In 1890 the federal census announced the end of the Frontier, and three years later Frederick Jackson Turner read his famous paper entitled “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” at the meeting of the American Historical Association in Chicago, during the World Columbian Exposition. A phase of history had come to an end,

and new frontiers were to be imagined if Americans wanted to pursue their “manifest” destiny. The terrible droughts which hit California, Texas, and Kansas in 1895 added to a sense of displacement within the country boundaries.

Over the centuries, the myth of exceptionalism has led the United States to describe themselves as a “city upon a hill” or a “beacon of liberty” or a “bastion of freedom” (Friedman 22) – in short, as a nation entitled to play a unique role on the world stage and capable of preserving values perceived as worthy of universal admiration. All this leads to the “perception that the United States applies one standard to the world and another to itself” (Koh 1487). It is beyond doubt that, while the American exception was being created, the idea that something might go wrong with it was spreading as well.

My research focuses on a bizarre corpus of novels which appeared on the literary scene at the *fin de siècle*, only to be soon forgotten. These novels belonged to different genres, ranging from utopia to scientific romance, and were addressed to a multifarious readership which might be interested in technology but also in parapsychology, in spiritual life after death but also in the new media of the time – the wireless and the telegraph. They were written by men as well as by women and had a common location: planet Mars. Also, they had a common denominator: they were counter-narrations of American exceptionalism and projected the US into outer space purposely in order to expose its limits and faults. Also, they had nothing to do with those “[n]arratives projecting human expansion into space [which] have been present since at least the late nineteenth century” (Rahder 161). They had nothing to do with colonialism and invasions. In their pages, science was not used – as happens in many SF novels – “as a tool to promote superiority” or “to sustain the view of [...] ‘white’ supremacy” (Patterson 33). And in our time they are almost unknown even to the scholars who work in the field of Martian imaginary, with a couple of exceptions (see Markley; Crossley). Also, the ethically superior and more “civilized” aliens (Martians) in the novels under examination do not just criticize the human civilization as a whole, but on the contrary they openly refer to the USA.

Since President Kennedy’s “Moon Speech” we have grown used to the idea of an outer space frontier, an idea that was worked on through the years of the Cold War and has recently gained plausibility thanks to Elon

Musk's and Robert Zubrin's (respectively the chief engineer at SpaceX and the creator of the Mars Society) passionate campaigns, but at the end of the nineteenth century such an idea was purely fantastic. Yet it spread like a contagious disease, to the extent that the expression "Mars mania" swept through the United States (Crossley ix). Thanks to a new generation of telescopes Mars seemed nearer than ever, and the famous mistake in translating Schiaparelli's *canali* into "canals" instead of "channels" led many people – and even scholars – to believe that Mars was inhabited and therefore "civilized." The debate on inhabited worlds had already successfully migrated from Europe to America and from science to popular fiction (see Edgar Allan Poe's "The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaall" and *Eureka*).

What is particularly interesting in this literary corpus is that all the books have a common aim: namely, to react to the emergency/ies afflicting planet Earth and in particular the United States. They do not just describe utopian societies where the souls of dead people will move to, or where injustices will cease to exist – that is only a part of the story. At a deeper level, what these authors really do – whether through a medium, or through a scientist – is to propose a solution to a condition of emergency that is threatening the US and possibly the whole planet. They are not interested in exceptionalism, but in how to face emergency – an emergency which is structural and systemic, since it refers both to the nefarious exploitation of resources and to social and gender inequalities. In these novels, Martians (who are called by many different names) are intelligent, highly civilized people, who wish to help humans to progress on sustainable grounds.

Among the several novels belonging to this corpus,<sup>1</sup> I have chosen the following three as the most representative: *The Man from Mars* by Thomas Blot alias William Simpson (1891), *Unveiling a Parallel: A Romance by Two Women of the West* by Alice Ilgenfritz Jones and Ella Merchant (1893), and *Journeys to the Planet Mars* by Sarah Weiss (1903). To these I will add an essay by astronomer Percival Lowell, entitled *Mars as the Abode of Life* (1908), since it shares the same concerns as the novels; here it is the author himself who invokes a radical change before it is too late, lest Americans (and maybe all humans) are obliged to look for another planet on which to take refuge. If a small number of very rich people will ever be able to fly to Mars it will be thanks to Elon Musk, but if we had heeded Lowell's

warnings we would probably not have to struggle against the very real emergencies of today.

### Men from Mars?

In *The Man from Mars* a Martian visits a terrestrial with the aim of informing him that the Earth will be destroyed if we do not quickly change our ethical and ecological attitudes. It is interesting to observe that the third edition (published in San Francisco in 1900 with the real name of the author) had this subtitle: *His Morals, Politics, and Religion. Revised and Enlarged by an Extended Preface and a Chapter on Woman Suffrage*. The preface (which occupies as many as 64 pages) speaks more about God, the Trinity, and Satan than about planet Mars; and yet, it offers such striking sentences as the following one, which refers to the dawn of Christianity but could be as easily linked to our contemporary age: “an age where three-fourths of mankind were outcasts, uncared, neglected, and abused by a cruel oligarchy” (Simpson 56).

The introduction opens with a male narrator informing the reader about the setting of the novel: “My habitation is upon a plateau on a mountain in California,” which he later describes as a “weird place” (65). The fact that he has built a cabin with his own hands and the description that follows remind us instantly of *Walden* by Henry David Thoreau: “This charming spot has its voices, as restless as the lights and shadows which play about within. Each miniature waterfall has its liquid note; while during certain hours there comes from every quarter of the foliage above a confused melody of birds” (68).

Later on, we learn that the narrator has a telescope: “The heavenly body which most engages my attention is, excepted our satellite, the nearest one to us, our neighboring planet Mars. I believe that body to be inhabited by beings in many respects like those of the earth” (75). Things go on quite normally, until, one night, something strange happens:

I looked out into the night. [...] A gentle breeze was stirring out of the West [...] Looking again, [...] I descried the figure of a man, not far from my window; and, strange to say, I was neither alarmed nor startled at his presence.

His face, of which I saw but little more than its profile, was turned upward looking at the moon, and its expression was unmistakably one of admiration and wonder. His long, and apparently well-cared-for, hair and beard, reflected a golden sheen under the light above. His arms were folded, and his shape and attitude impressed me as being majestic. (82-83)

The second chapter opens with the stranger stepping inside: he is a polite man who addresses the narrator with these words: "My brother, [...] you have a beautiful world. That moon of yours is magnificent" (85). Not realizing that the man comes from outer space, the narrator asks him: "Do you think Mars inhabited?" and the answer he gets is: "I am a good proof that it is [...] I am here by a process as yet unknown to you, and which may be best described in your language as reflection. I am here by reflection. That is to say, my natural body is at my home, on the planet, which you call Mars. [...] I know your thoughts" (85-87).

The Martian continues to list the fields in which Mars is superior to Earth (a more advanced civilization, greater knowledge in chemistry, a respectful attitude to animals, a vegetable diet, no wars, a common religion, etc.). As far as Earth is concerned, the Martian comments: "You have only measured us as a planet. We have measured you as a people. [...] In your present state, you appear to us as a world of discord, confusion, and strife" (87-97). A significant part is devoted to politics: capitalism is defined as "misgovernment," and gender inequalities are called "relics of barbarism" (217, 219). In particular, the visitor expresses disdain about sexual discrimination: "Your estimate of the mental capacity of women is singularly erroneous [...] with the enfranchisement of women the humanities of life would enter more largely into your politics [...] your legislation in the hands of men alone has accomplished but little alleviating the distresses of humanity" (216). Not only that: thanks to suffrage women will be able to guarantee more welfare, more morality, more cooperation, as well as less corruption, less distress, and less speculation. The Martian also underlines the fact that "With us maternity is not allowed to absorb the whole of a woman's life" (227). The American listener is, as one can imagine, overwhelmed by all this and is finally left alone to reflect on the visitor's words about human (and American) "breathless pursuit of wealth, beyond all reasonable limit" (272). What seemed normality to him

starts becoming disquieting and ominous, a real emergency to face for his generation and those that follow.

### Parallels Revealed

In 1893, two women from Iowa, Alice Ilgenfritz Jones and Ella Merchant, published the first American novel completely set on planet Mars. The authors called it a romance, but it is both a scientific romance and a powerful proto-feminist utopia. *Unveiling a Parallel: A Romance by Two Women of the West* (1893) tells the story of an American young man who travels to the Red Planet, where he is gradually forced to abandon his biased and stereotyped views about gender and society:

The parallel which Jones and Merchant unveil is a double one: at the same time as they develop the similarities between America in the nineteenth century and the civilizations on Mars visited by their aeronautically-inclined young male narrator, they also argue for the basic similarities between male and female natures which would become apparent once women attained the rights and privileges traditionally enjoyed by men alone. (Hollinger 233)

In my opinion, it is true that the parallel of the title refers to a comparison between Mars and the Earth (or better, the United States), and yet the whole narration evokes a wider dualism (between men and women, rich and poor, old and young, nature and “civilization”) which lies at the base of the Western construction of culture and politics. Here the protagonist is unaware of the crisis, if not actual emergency, taking place in his own world. He is the perfect representative of those people who believe in white male supremacy but find it difficult to defend their beliefs against all odds. On the contrary, Martians – men and women – do their best to persuade him of the absurdity of such terrestrial eccentricities as sexual double standard, gender gap, and social appearances.

Religion plays a significant role in the novel. While the final part of the book, which is set in a city far North from where the narrator lands (Lunismar), concentrates on spirituality, the long first part (set in Thursia)

portrays a materialistic society where religion exists and has something in common with the Christian tradition: even the Creation is included, but with an important difference. On Mars, as the story goes, “a pair of creatures, male and female, sprang simultaneously from an enchanted lake [...] in the northern part of this continent. They were only animals, but they were beautiful and innocent. God breathed a Soul into them and they were Man and Woman, equals in all things” (Ilgenfritz and Merchant 57-58).

The question of gender is fundamental, but what we find here is a radical deconstruction of the young man’s bias: while in *The Man from Mars* the alien is called “Man” (even in the title), here the American traveler remains nameless till the end of the story; moreover, he is invited from the very beginning of the tale to take off his clothes, forget about meat, and learn a new language. It is not only a question of gender, but of identity: the fact that our American protagonist is described as an unnamed creature who arrives from another planet is indicative of the real perspective from which the story is told. As a matter of fact, the narrator first resists the dismantling of his former identity, but later seems pleased about the reconstruction of his new self: “I happened to glance into the mirror, and I did not recognize myself. I had some sense of how a barbarian must feel in his first civilized suit” (17). Yet, his condition of being a stranger is there to stay: Martians “regarded me as I have some-times regarded un-English foreigners in the streets of New York” (31).

In the course of the novel, progressively and methodically, by gently objecting to everything the narrator tells them about his country of origin, the Martians reveal to their guest the dark side(s) of American exceptionalism. The young man is enchanted by the beauties of the planet and by the quality of places, food, and people: “their features were extraordinarily mobile and expressive” (7-8); “I found the fruit exceedingly refreshing” (8); “she was not like any other woman, – any woman I had ever seen before” (32). On the contrary, the inhabitants of Mars are horrified by whatever they learn about Earth – and about the US in particular. The narrator’s astonishment on learning that Martian women can be bankers, invest money, and hold positions of power (“Do not your women engage in business?” “Well, not to such an extraordinary degree”) provokes a strong reaction – “Is it because they are incapable, or – unreliable?” (42) – which upsets him because he

cannot find a reasonable response to this. The same happens throughout the story as regards sexuality, smoking, drinking, attending clubs, driving, and voting. Every time a parallel is implied, or alluded to, the terrestrial seems to lose ground since his dialectic is inadequate to justify the American status quo in the face of Martian self-evident and true exceptionality. Even as regards suffrage, the narrator cannot conceive of women voting – “the masculine instinct of superiority swelling within me” (49) – but he cannot explain the reasons for such an attitude.

In the final part of the novel, the narrator is led to a perfect society which has eliminated all inequalities. The poor do not exist: simply, “our people are not all equally rich” (215). Moreover, they believe in arts, sciences, education, honesty, and dignity. Machines do most jobs, but that just means that people have more time to enjoy leisure. Capitalism is completely unknown, and society is led by such principles as “mutual pleasure, mutual sympathy, mutual helpfulness” (216). And since life is considered sacred, “the body is held in honor, and his needs are respected” (218). Towards the end of the novel, as the protagonist is overwhelmed by the greatness of Martian society, his superior attitude turns to a feeble justification – “we are a young people” (238). Though God and religion play an increasing importance in the course of the novel, what strikes us today is the awareness, on the part of the female authors, of the need for a radical turn in political, social, and economic perspectives. They understood as early as 1893 that the world was changing, and even though they could not speak of the Anthropocene or Capitalocene or globalization, they were aware that the many unresolved problems concerning environment, economy, and class/gender/race discrimination would soon erupt.

### Psychic Journeys

A different approach is to be found in two other books from the same period, *Journeys to the Planet Mars: Our Mission to Ento* (1903) and *Decimon Huydas: A Romance of Mars* (1906). They are both authored by Sara Weiss and are social utopias of a particular kind, since they owe much to the supernatural: the journeys of the first title are, in fact, made with the help of a woman who is



called a Medium. What they portray are the desires and fears of American citizens in a period of uncertainty, poised between religion and science, spiritism and rationality, male patriarchy and female emancipation.

The idea we find at the core of both volumes is that technological progress will increase the possibility of communicating with Mars (here called Ento) through wireless magnetism and the development of physics: thanks to these, the relationships between humans and Martians will grow exponentially. Not only that: in *Journeys to the Red Planet* is described as a place where “[r]ight living engenders health” (Weiss 324), so that humans can partake in this superiority. If, in the US, the social hygiene movement was engaged in improving health through moral control, scientists on Mars use microscopes to study and fight against viruses:

In the adjoining class room other students are engaged in Microscopic examination of Cryptogamic growths. For a short time we will observe them. We perceive that the specimens are of various species found in moist localities, or in ponds or other sluggish waters. That their sporules, wafted by winds or through the agency of aquatic fowls, are borne from one locality to another. That some are known to be inimical to health, even to life, but that science has found means to oppose and render ineffectual their virulence. (212)

Next to biology, chemistry also plays a fundamental role: “Equilibrium of chemical affinities means health; the reverse means disease” (221). True, the journeys here described are of a paranormal nature, but it is the scientific thought that is highlighted throughout the novel. Martians insist on “scientific inquiry” (v), “investigation/s” (v and passim), and “knowledge” (passim). The protagonist (Carl De L’Ester, an amateur astronomer) and the female medium who accompanies him in his travels are joined by a Band of elected spirits which includes Alexander von Humboldt, Louis Agassiz and, later on, Charles Darwin and Edward Bulwer Lytton. It makes no difference whether they are living or dead, since the boundaries between life and death are of no importance in the novel. What really matters is the message these illustrious people convey: “humans are as links of an unbreakable chain [...] on Ento you will find the same humans [...] as you find on any planet [...] the universe is indeed a unit” (5, 40, 57).

Throughout the course of the novel the author insists on the superiority of Martian culture: “the Entoans, as a whole, are more highly civilized than are the peoples of our planet” (45). To give an example, they do not believe in superstition: “at this time among Earth’s peoples [...] multitudes are held in the bonds of ecclesiastical legends and dogmas which ever obscure the truth, and superstition ever is where truth is not” (46). Also, “[i]n the arts, their attainments are productive of most excellent results. As much may be said of the sciences” (47).

I find chapter five the most intriguing part of the book, since there we meet Giordano Bruno, the famous heretic philosopher and astronomer who was condemned to the stake by the Inquisition and burned. It is interesting that the author chooses this champion of independent thought and disobedience to dogmas not because she wants to speak of the past, but in order to warn Americans about the risks they run if they do not defend and protect their highest value, that is freedom of speech:

Madame, will you bear from me a message to the peoples of your native land? Yes? Then I thank you.

Children of Earth’s most favored land, children of America, I, Giordano [sic] Bruno, once a citizen of sun-kissed Italy, greet you.

Rejoice unceasingly that freedom of thought and speech are yours. Guard jealously this priceless blessing which through centuries of bloodshed, torturing flames and agony unspeakable has become your heritage. Glorious indeed are your United States of America, blest beyond expression in being as a “City of refuge” to the oppressed of other nations. [...] Let your unalterable declaration be: Liberty of conscience, liberty of speech for all; license for no one.

Cherish in your heart of hearts a love of justice, of forbearance, of toleration, of that charity which neither thinketh nor doeth evil, but permit no faction or Religion to interfere with your liberty of righteous action.

Insidiously, aristocratic ideas are striving to cross the threshold of your Temple of Equality.

Guard well its doorways.

(87-89)

The image of the United States as a welcoming country for migrants is threatened by “aristocratic ideas” which are not made explicit in the novel,

but that can easily be referred to the politics of the time. Between the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century the US was becoming the most powerful nation in the world. Financial capitalism was also at its peak, thanks to the constant acquisition of labor from Europe and the establishment of monopolies. From the 1890s on, socialist ideas and worker protests spread, but there were also the first signs of a change in migratory policies: in a nation of immigrants, new immigrants began to be less welcome. After decades of hospitality, in 1882 we find the Chinese Exclusion Law and the first Immigration Act which restricts the access to Europeans excluding criminals, the sick, convicts, “lunatics”, “those likely to become a public charge” (LPC, a label mostly used for women traveling alone), and in general “any person unable to take care of him or herself”; in 1891 the second Immigration Act increased controls and lengthened the list of excludible immigrants. In 1894 the Immigration Restriction League, taking inspiration from social Darwinism and eugenics, requested tests for the so-called “nonassimilating and undeserving,” and in 1903 the third Immigration Act identified anarchists “as targets for exclusion.”<sup>2</sup> The vision of America as a land of opportunity – of plenty, of milk and honey, of liberty – which fostered generations of “self-made men” was fading away. Exception was giving way to emergency.

### Abodes of Life

In those same years, an astronomer with an obsession for the Red Planet wrote three books, the last of which bears an interesting title: *Mars as the Abode of Life* (1908). It is a title that could make Elon Musk or Robert Zubrin envious. On his seventieth birthday, in April 2022, Zubrin was presented by key members of the Mars Society with a Mars base model named after him, and Musk has recently reiterated his goal to transport one million people to Mars by 2050 (Dvorsky).

The question is: is it possible that, as early as 1908, somebody was already dreaming – or better, projecting – a manned journey to planet Mars? And that that “somebody” was an astronomer, not a writer of fiction? Lowell – who was also a wealthy adventurer – had left his city,

Boston, and built an observatory in Flagstaff, Arizona, in 1894. He started watching the planet with the help of some assistants, drew maps, and rightly pictured Mars – unlike other astronomers of his time – as a “cooling, dying, drying planet, with declining atmospheric pressure and declining supplies of water. So far, so good – this general picture is still upheld today” (Hartmann 16). In the aforementioned book he went even further, wondering: “If simple life-forms had appeared on ancient Earth and evolved, why not on Mars?” (16-17). The theory was highly intriguing, but the idea that Mars could be inhabited turned out to be wrong. Telescopes and probes (starting from Mariner 4, 1964) would reveal that Mars was a desert, and that no canals nor vegetation nor people existed. And yet, in “his refusal to distinguish astronomical observation from sociological explanation, [...] he prefigured the hybridization of the human world and the earth-system that characterizes the Anthropocene” (Morton 131).

Today, after so many years, the debate concerning life on Mars continues. Mars is being watched, examined, analyzed, measured, listened to by rovers which send us daily news and pictures to the Earth. While some researchers are simply moved by a desire for knowledge, other scientists and investors are interested not so much in alien life but in the possibility for the human race to move to another planet, to *terraform* it, and have a second chance after the announced catastrophe of plan(et) A (= the Earth). As the conditions on planet Earth get worse and worse, colonial revivalism has been increasing: as Robert Markley suggests, “Mars has served as a screen on which we have projected our hopes for the future and our fears of ecological devastation on Earth” (2). Many questions arise: “Can humankind colonize the planet and transform its forbidding landscape into a habitable biosphere?” (Markley 5); and also: will alien life – if any – be respected? Shall we show more respect for the environment than what we have reserved for Earth?

Lowell had a truly pessimistic vision of men:

The true history of man has consisted not in his squabbles with his kind, but in his steady conquest of all earth's animals except himself. He has enslaved all that he could; he is busy in exterminating the rest. From this he has gone on to turn the very forces of nature to his own ends. This task is recent and is yet

in its infancy, but it is destined to great things. As brain develops, it must take possession of its world. Subjugation carries its telltale in its train; for it alters the face of its habitat to its own ends. Already man has begun to leave his mark on this his globe [sic] in deforestation, in canalization, in communication. So far his towns and his tillage are more partial than complete. But the time is coming when the earth will bear his imprint, and his alone. What he chooses, will survive; what he pleases, will lapse, and the landscape itself become the carved object of his handiwork. (108-10)

The astronomer was describing exactly what we now call the Anthropocene. He was a visionary scientist, and his words sound prophetic today. As we read in chapter four of his book *Mars and the Future of the Earth*, “[s]tudy of Mars proves that planet to occupy earthwise in some sort the post of prophet” (111). In other words, Lowell was saying that the Earth would decline in a similar way to that in which the Red Planet probably did. However, he was not listened to, nor believed.

In a review of the book published in *Nature* on April 22, 1909, we read this comment that makes us shiver today:

The one great aim and object of the whole of the intelligent minds on Mars is concentrated on making the utmost use of the slowly diminishing water supply, and, as Prof. Lowell finally remarks, “the drying up of the planet is certain to proceed until its surface can support no life at all.”

Our earth, fortunately, is not in such an advanced stage of its own life-history that like measures are necessary, but undoubtedly the time will come when all nations will have to work together to one common end, namely, to survive at all.

(“The Habitability of Mars”, 212)

We can smile at the reference to intelligent Martians, but the smile will freeze when we realize how similar the current condition of Earth is to the one depicted by Lowell a little more than a century ago. He had already understood where our “civilization” would take us, and, in fact, that time has come.

## Conclusion

It is weird indeed. Today, our exit strategies from catastrophe include Mars colonization. The very planet that should have taught us to adopt a different attitude towards nature and to perform more sustainable politics is now alluring us with the tempting promises of a new frontier. Assuming that there might have been life on Mars in the past, some scientists and investors think that it would be possible for men to escape from Earth and take refuge on Mars in the future. Zubrin, in his “The Significance of the Martian Frontier,” complains of a “loss of vigor” of American society at all levels of life, and Morton observes an “increasing decadence of the earth” (*Mapping Mars* 260). As Zubrin writes, “Once the production infrastructure is in place, populating Mars will not be a problem – under current medical conditions an immigration rate of 100 people per year would produce population growth on Mars in the 21<sup>st</sup> century comparable to that which occurred in Colonial America in the 17<sup>th</sup>.” What interests us here is not the dubious plausibility of his words, but the ideas from which they originate. Even more than Colonial America, I recognize the legacy of Manifest Destiny, American exceptionalism, and the Republican myth of endless growth and imperial expansion at the core of this project, with the old frontier of the West replaced by the New Frontier of outer space. Colonial America is at the core of this project and it seems to me that we have moved no further. Social utopias, proto-feminist issues, and even Lowell’s worrying prophecies seem to have been canceled and forgotten, so that today, after decades of postcolonial studies, authentic decolonization still seems to be a mirage.

If the most notable events of modern history – such as Pearl Harbor, the end of the Cold War, 9/11 and, recently, pandemics – have cyclically urged for what Donald Pease called “a reshaping of the exceptionalist paradigm” (20), the same is true with reference to current space projects, where the US still holds (the US is generally treated as a unity) a hegemonic position while competing with private corporations – now called NewSpace industries:

The race to the Moon was an offshoot of the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the United States [...] The race to Mars is different. It’s not being run between one country and another, but between the public sector and

the private sector. Instead of a symbolic confrontation between communism and capitalism, it's a real, head-to-head battle between taxpayer funding and private investment. (May 144)

Some years ago, Charles A. Kupchan cleverly proposed an upgrade he called "Exceptionalism 3.0," with the US keeping their dual role as "the global policemen" and "the arbiter of great-power peace" (146-47) – but of course he could not foresee what would happen from 2019 to 2022 in terms of pandemics, wars, social upheavals, and environmental crises. Emergencies are now dictating the political agenda more and more often, and an exit strategy is what we really need. Some visionary scientists think that humanity could be reassessed as an interplanetary species, while critical theorists do not approve of the idea of space as a site for human societies, either because they see it as "merely the next step in neoliberal capitalism's search for new profits and markets" or simply because they lack a cosmological vision (Valentine 1045). And, of course, exceptionalism 3.0 also includes the current drive for a renewed expansion, for a conquest of the space frontier, for new forms of colonialism.

According to David Valentine, the human species does depend on space settlements: in a section of his article entitled "Outer Space as Exception" (1049) he responds to those who speak of the devastating effects of neoliberalism by proposing a totally different narrative of the future which is not just based on "fantasies of capitalist expansion and extraction" but – following Harvey and Jameson – on a revival of utopian thinking as a "key mode for a progressive and socialist politics" (1052). The debate is lively and far from over; and while "the search for Earth 2.0" continues, Outer Space is perhaps offering not so much a way out as the fascinating possibility of a new, eco-centric vision capable of overcoming both current emergencies and human exceptionalism (Rahder 158). In this view, which is influenced by a more-than-human ethics, American exceptionalism turns to human exceptionalism: "As human exceptionalism becomes less and less possible to justify bioscientifically, this twist of extraterrestriality reunites humans with Nature while dividing them once again as special" (165). I doubt that this idea of a cosmic purpose in life might save Earth from becoming a sort of Earth Zero.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> *The Man from Mars* by Thomas Blot alias William Simpson (1891), *Messages from Mars, By the Aid of the Telescope Plant* by Robert D. Braine (1892), *Unveiling a Parallel: A Romance by Two Women of the West* by Alice Ilgenfritz Jones and Ella Merchant (1893), *A Cityless and Countryless World* by Henry Olerich (1893), *Daybreak: The Story of an Old World* by James Cowan (1896), *Edison's Conquest of Mars* by Garrett P. Serviss (1898), *The Man from Mars* by William Simpson (1900), *To Mars with Tesla; or, the Mystery of the Hidden World* by J. Weldon Cobb (1901), *The Certainty of a Future Life in Mars. Being the Posthumous Papers of Bradford Torrey Todd* by Louis Pope Gratacap (1903), *Journeys to the Planet Mars* by Sarah Weiss (1903), *Lieut. Gullivar Jones: His Vacation* by Edwin Lester Linden Arnold (1905), *Decimon Huydas: A Romance of Mars* by Sarah Weiss (1906), *The Lunarian Professor and His Remarkable Revelations Concerning the Earth, the Moon and Mars* by James B. Alexander (1909), *The Man from Mars, Or Service for Service's Sake* by Henry Wallace Dowding (1910), *Through Space to Mars, or The Longer Journey on Record* by Roy Rockwood (1910), *Ralph 124C 41+ A Romance of the Year 2660* by Hugo Gernsback (1911), *To Mars via the Moon. An Astronomical Story* by Mark Wicks (1911).

<sup>2</sup> <<https://immigrationhistory.org/timeline/>>; <<https://immigrationhistory.org/item/1882-immigration-act/>>.

## Works Cited

- Bradstreet, Anne. "Verses upon the Burning of our House, July 10<sup>th</sup>, 1666." *The Columbia Anthology of American Poetry*. Ed. Jay Parini. New York: Columbia UP, 1995.
- Crossley, Robert. *Imagining Mars: A Literary History*. Middletown: Wesleyan UP, 2011.
- Dickinson, Emily. "Faith" (poem 202). *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*. Ed. R. W. Franklin. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1999
- Dvorsky, George. "Elon Musk's Plan to Send a Million Colonists to Mars by 2050 is Pure Delusion: There's More to Settling the Red Planet Than Just Packing a Whole Lotta People Into Plus-sized Rockets." *Gizmodo*. 3 March 2022: n. pag. <<https://gizmodo.com/elon-musk-mars-colony-delusion-1848839584>>.
- Friedman, Uri. "Anthropology of an Idea: American Exceptionalism." *Foreign Policy* 194 (2012): 22-23.
- "The Habitability of Mars." *Nature* 2060 (22 Apr. 1909): 212.
- Hartmann, William K. *A Traveler's Guide to Mars: The Mysterious Landscapes of the Red Planet*. New York: Workman Publishing, 2003.
- Harvey, David. *Spaces of Hope*. Berkeley: U of California P, 2000.



- Hollinger, Veronica. "Utopia, Science, Postmodernism, and Feminism: A Trilogy of Significant Works." *Science Fiction Studies* 21 (1994): 232-37.
- Ilgenfritz Jones, Alice and Ella Merchant. *Unveiling a Parallel: A Romance by Two Women of the West*. Boston: Arena Publishing Company, 1893.
- Jameson, Frederic. *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*. New York: Verso, 2005.
- Koh, Harold Hongju. "On American Exceptionalism." *Stanford Law Review* 55 (2003): 1479-527.
- Kupchan, Charles A. "The Clash of Exceptionalisms: A New Fight Over an Old Idea." *Foreign Affairs* 97 (2018): 139-48.
- Lowell, Percival. *Mars as the Abode of Life*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1908.
- Markley, Robert. *Dying Planet: Mars in Science and the Imagination*. Durham and London: Duke UP, 2005.
- May, Andrew. *Destination Mars: The Story of Our Quest to Conquer the Red Planet*. London: North Road, 2017.
- Morton, Oliver. *Mapping Mars: Science, Imagination, and the Birth of a World*. London and New York: Fourth Estate, 2002.
- . *The Planet Remade: How Geoengineering Could Change the World*. London: Granta Publications, 2015.
- Patterson, Chloe. "Context Matters: Science, Politics and the Lingering Effects of Colonialism." *AQ: Australian Quarterly* 93 (2022): 31-39.
- Pease, Donald. "Re-Thinking American Studies after US Exceptionalism." *American Literary History* 21 (2009): 19-27.
- Rahder, Micha. "Home and Away: The Politics of Life after Earth." *Environment and Society* 10 (2019): 158-77.
- Simpson, William (pseud. of Thomas Blot). *The Man from Mars: His Morals, Politics, and Religion. Revised and Enlarged by an Extended Preface and a Chapter on Woman Suffrage*. San Francisco: E. D. Beattie, 1900.
- Turner, Frederick Jackson. *The Significance of the Frontier in American History* (1893), reprinted as *The Frontier in American History*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1920.
- Valentine, David. "Exit Strategy: Profit, Cosmology, and the Future of Humans in Space." *Anthropological Quarterly* 85 (2012): 1045-67.
- Weiss, Sara. *Journey to the Planet Mars, or: Being a Record of Visits Made to Ento (Mars)*. New York: Bradford Press, 1903.
- Zubrin, Robert. "The Significance of the Martian Frontier." *Ad Astra*. Sept.-Oct. 1994: n. pag. <<https://space.nss.org/the-significance-of-the-martian-frontier-by-robert-zubrin/#:~:text=The%20frontier%20drove%20the%20development,can%20persist%20without%20such%20people>>.

