

(An)Archiving after the Apocalypse: The Death Drive, Representation, and the Rise and Fall and Rise of Civilization in Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz*

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The notion of a nuclear apocalypse incites our imagination and terror as much as any biblical cataclysm—perhaps even more so, for, unlike the flood in Genesis or John's vision of the end of the world in the Book of Revelation, a nuclear holocaust can be actuated by human hands. Certainly the prospect of a worldwide nuclear war influenced an entire generation of authors during the Cold War, including the American Walter M. Miller, Jr., who in 1959 wrote *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, a novel that envisions life after the ostensible end of the world—that is, after a devastating global nuclear war:

It was said that God, in order to test mankind which had become swelled with pride as in the time of Noah, had commanded the wise men of that age, among them the Blessed Leibowitz, to devise great engines of war such as had never before been upon the Earth, weapons of such might that they contained the very fires of Hell, and that God had suffered these magi to place the weapons in the hands of princes, and to say to each prince: "Only because the enemies have such a thing have we devised this for thee, in order that they may know that thou hast it also, and fear to strike. See to it, m'Lord, that thou fearest them as much as they shall now fear thee, that none may unleash this dread thing which we have wrought."

But the princes, putting the words of their wise men to naught, thought each to himself: If I but strike quickly enough, and in secret, I shall destroy those others in their sleep, and there will be none to fight back; the earth shall be mine.

Such was the folly of princes, and there followed the Flame Deluge.¹

Miller's post-apocalyptic tale follows the efforts of humanity to build itself up again after a worldwide nuclear war, only to end up destroying civilization once more with another devastating conflict millennia later. Why does humankind seem so intent on its own extermination? Is the end of human society a foregone conclusion in this text?

¹ Walter M. Miller, Jr., *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (New York: Eos, 1959), 61. There is a tradition of using biblical or mythological language in post-apocalyptic fiction. In Mordecai Roshwald's *Level 7*, for instance, the protagonist and narrator writes "The Story of the Mushroom" in order to teach future generations about the nuclear apocalypse that he himself helped engender. This use of simplified and almost canonical language can be an interesting topic to pursue, especially if one considers that perhaps the severity and finality of the event being explained is not easy to convey using ordinary language. Mythological language may be an alternative when the traumatic event causes language to lose its ordinary representative value.

Perhaps Sigmund Freud can provide some insight, or at least a context for examining a few of the novel's themes. At the end of *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud leaves the future of civilization open: "The fateful question for the human species seems to me to be whether and to what extent their cultural development will succeed in mastering the disturbance of their communal life by the human instinct of aggression and self-destruction."² This all-too-human instinct that manifests itself as aggression and destruction is the death drive, or the *Todestrieb*, which is perpetually at work undermining civilization; this death drive stands dialectically opposed to Eros, which fosters people to come together into society.³ Interpreting Miller's text through a Freudian lens, then, humanity's death drive is responsible for the nuclear war. However, some life survives the war and the ensuing chaos, and a group of Catholic monks from the Albertian Order of Leibowitz embark on a centuries-long mission to reconstruct society by archiving knowledge; their endeavor to rebuild can be attributed to Eros. Indeed, according to Freud, the death drive and Eros engage in an endless aporetic battle:

And now it is to be expected that the other of the two 'Heavenly Powers,' eternal Eros, will make an effort to assert himself in the struggle with his equally immortal adversary. But who can foresee with what success and with what result?⁴

The Leibowitz monks' archive project, known as the Memorabilia, represents the preservation of civilization and can therefore be read as a struggle against the death drive itself. However, the death drive should not be thought of as the antithesis of civilization. Rather, civilization is a process that human beings undergo, with both constructive and destructive elements: Freud believes that "civilization is a process in the service of Eros, whose purpose is to combine single human individuals, and after that families, then races, peoples and nations, into one great unity, the unity of mankind."⁵ The evolution of civilization therefore involves "the struggle between Eros and Death."⁶ The efforts of the monks to safeguard the Memorabilia also demonstrate the compulsion to archive that Jacques Derrida describes in *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*. Yet it seems as if the

² Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1961) 154.

³ Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 118.

⁴ Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 155.

⁵ Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 118.

⁶ Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* 119.

monks' labors are in vain because their preserved knowledge cannot prevent another apocalypse. Indeed, the events in *Canticle* appear to be propelled by the death instinct: society builds itself up but destroys itself again centuries later in Miller's novel. Humanity's death drive and the monks' archive fever compete with each other for dominance in the same manner as the death drive and Eros as described by Freud in the conclusion of *Civilization and Its Discontents*. In this paper, I will describe how the monks' project, if not ultimately futile, only leads to endless aporetic variations between the death drive and whatever "Heavenly Power" stands opposed to death, whether it is Eros or the compulsion to archive. The idea of an archive compulsion, furthermore, leads to the notion of the repetition compulsion and its relationship to the death and archive drives: Freud hypothesizes that there is a profound connection between the repetition compulsion and trauma, that people often unknowingly and sometimes even passively find themselves in the same traumatic situations.⁷ Keeping in mind this relationship, one can see that the archives are not only the form that the life-preserving tendency of Eros takes but a result and a symptom of apocalypse as well. Thus, my second objective for this paper is to show how the archives, which are physical representations of memory, constitute a manifestation of the repetition compulsion that is triggered by the trauma of apocalypse.⁸

The Memorabilia is an archival project that dates from the time of the Simplification,⁹ a cataclysmic period following the Flame Deluge that witnesses the banding together of the few remaining people to kill "rulers, scientists, leaders, technicians, teachers, and whatever persons the leaders of the maddened mobs said deserved death for having helped to make the Earth what it had become."¹⁰ Isaac Edward Leibowitz, a Jewish electrical engineer who believes that humanity can only recover with science, uses the resources of the last remaining organization, the Catholic Church, to found a new religious

⁷ Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1961) 22-25.

⁸ For another interpretation of Miller's novel, refer to Thomas P. Dunn's "To Play the Phoenix: Medieval Images and Cycles of Rebuilding in Walter Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz*" in the collection *Phoenix from the Ashes: The Literature of the Remade World*, ed. Carl B. Yoke (Westport: Greenwood, 1987). Another worthwhile source is Dominic Manganiello's "History as Judgment and Promise in *A Canticle for Leibowitz*" in *Science-Fiction Studies* 13 (1986). And David J. Leigh's *Apocalyptic Patterns in Twentieth-Century Fiction* (Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame P, 2008) is a compelling reading that also examines the many biblical allusions in Miller's book.

⁹ Throughout *Canticle*, "Memorabilia" is treated as a collective noun and is paired with a singular verb; therefore, I do the same in this paper.

¹⁰ Miller 62.

order with the goal “to preserve human history for the great-great-great-grandchildren of the children of the simpletons who wanted it destroyed.”¹¹ The men of this order become either “bookleggers,” who smuggle books to the desert and hide them in kegs, or “memorizers,” who commit these texts to memory in case the bookleggers are caught and are forced to reveal the location of the nascent archives.¹² Later on, when the Leibowitz abbey, the home of this new religious order, is more established, its monks sedulously copy and recopy the Memorabilia to aid in its preservation. In this manner, the men of the Leibowitz Order attempt to keep safe from destruction the last vestiges of the civilized, pre-nuclear world.

Despite the brothers’ labors, the world succumbs to another nuclear conflagration. The recurring apocalypses in Miller’s novel provide an occasion to consider Freud’s thoughts on the death drive and its relation to the repetition compulsion. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud examines the compulsion to repeat and the conservative character of instinctual life. The compulsion to repeat comes from the unconscious repressed,¹³ and it is therefore buried deep inside everyone. Thus, the repetition compulsion is instinctual, and because of its instinctual nature, it tends toward a restoration to an earlier period; Freud avers that although we are used to thinking of instincts as working towards progress, they are actually quite conservative.¹⁴ The death drive, in other words, comes from an instinctual repetitive striving towards an inorganic state, and Freud concludes that the final goal of all organic striving must be “an initial state from which the living entity has at one time or other departed and to which it is striving to return by the circuitous paths along which its development leads.”¹⁵ Besides the instinct to preserve living substance and join it to ever larger units, another, contrary instinct seeks to dissolve those units and return to an inorganic state. This is the death drive.

This death drive stands in the way of perfection, both in individuals and in society. Freud asseverates that part of the death drive “is diverted towards the external world and comes to light as an instinct of aggressiveness and destructiveness.”¹⁶ That is, the death

¹¹ Miller 64.

¹² Miller 64.

¹³ Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 20.

¹⁴ Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 43.

¹⁵ Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 45.

¹⁶ Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* 114.

drive of individuals radiates outward and directly impacts society. The Simplification, if interpreted using Freud's analysis, is an offshoot of the death drive since it is a return to a previous, less complex state. In Miller's novel, this tendency to an earlier and less complex state is evident in the individual level, when the anti-knowledge crusaders cry, "*I'm a simpleton! Are you a simpleton?*"¹⁷ And it is also evident at the societal level:

And the hate said: *Let us stone and disembowel and burn the ones who did this thing. Let us make a holocaust of those who wrought this crime, together with their hirelings and their wise men; burning, let them perish, and all their works, their names, and even their memories. Let us destroy them all, and teach our children that the world is new, that they may know nothing of the deeds that went before.*¹⁸

Miller writes that it is "the hate," not individual people, who says these things. This hate is an articulation of society's instincts, which shows that the death drive is directed outwards towards civilization in the form of aggression and destruction, as Freud argues.¹⁹ In other words, the hate acts in the same manner as the death drive as described by Freud. Further connections can be made to Freud's theories because the hate specifically states its intended goals of destroying all vestiges of the past and teaching newer generations that the world is new, which recalls Freud's notion of the death drive tending towards an earlier state. The people who gleefully call themselves simpletons want the world to be new again, and more importantly, they want it to stay new. Any progress is bad, and this is the prevailing attitude after the apocalypse.

In *After the End: Representations of Post-Apocalypse*, James Berger ties the notion of apocalypse to the psychoanalytic idea of trauma:

Apocalypse and trauma are congruent ideas, for both refer to shatterings of existing structures of identity and language, and both effect their own erasures from memory and must be reconstructed by means of their traces, remains, survivors, and ghosts: their symptoms.²⁰

¹⁷ Miller 63.

¹⁸ Miller 62.

¹⁹ Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* 114.

²⁰ James Berger, *After the End: Representations of Post-Apocalypse* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1999) 19.

In other words, trauma or the apocalypse—in fact, Berger asserts that trauma is the psychoanalytic term for apocalypse²¹—involve erasures of memory. In Miller’s novel, the works, names, and memories of almost every educated person are erased, burned during the Simplification. The Simplification, which I believe is a discrete apocalypse of its own,²² results in the annihilation of memories, both of the people who are murdered by the mobs and the collective memory of the world. The hate, after all, wants to teach that the world is new again. The apocalypse, like trauma, causes losses in memory.

The hate-fueled simpletons are relentless and thorough. It is a testament to the persistence of the Leibowitz monks that there are any remainders left: “From the vast store of human knowledge, only a few kegs of original books and a pitiful collection of hand-copied texts, rewritten from memory, had survived in the possession of the Order by the time the madness had ended.”²³ These few written artifacts constitute the Memorabilia, and they are the only textual survivors from the world before the Flame Deluge and the Simplification. Berger advances a post-apocalyptic theory of trauma in which events occur and change the world radically, yet there are things—“remainders and reminders, signs and symptoms”—that survive.²⁴ The Memorabilia can be taken to be these remainders, reminders, signs, and symptoms. In fact, the Memorabilia can be interpreted as “the retrospective reconstruction of the traumatic event” since an understanding of trauma or the apocalypse cannot take place while it occurs; rather, Berger believes that a traumatic event can be remembered through representational means.²⁵

The archives of the Leibowitz monastery represent trauma in an interesting way. The monks’ archives are the reminder and concomitantly the symptom of the trauma. The Memorabilia survives the apocalypses, and in fact records the very apocalyptic events it endures, with the account of the Flame Deluge as only one example. In this respect, the archives are reminders of trauma. Yet the Memorabilia is also a symptom of the Flame Deluge and the Simplification because of the compulsive and repetitive actions needed to

²¹ Berger 20.

²² I count the Flame Deluge and the Simplification as two discrete apocalypses, even though the Simplification occurs right on the tail of the Flame Deluge. The Flame Deluge is a devastation of infrastructure: “Cities had become puddles of glass, surrounded by vast acreages of broken stone” (Miller 61). The Simplification, on the other hand, is an eradication of knowledge: books and literate people alike are burned.

²³ Miller 64.

²⁴ Berger 26.

²⁵ Berger 26.

preserve the documents. In “Fiat Homo” (“Let There Be Man”), the first part of the tripartite *Canticle*, the narrator observes, “Now, after six centuries of darkness, the monks still preserved this Memorabilia, studied it, copied and recopied it, and patiently waited.”²⁶ This copying and recopying by hand fulfills a compulsion to repeat. Derrida, in *Archive Fever*, makes explicit the relationship between the archive and repetition by declaring, “There is no archive [. . .] without a technique of repetition.”²⁷ The monks display an almost Sisyphean ability to do something over and over again: “If the old drawings were worth saving at all, they needed to be recopied every century or two anyhow. Not only did the original copies fade, but often the redrawn versions became nearly illegible after a time, due to the impermanence of the inks employed.”²⁸ The fact that the monks often do not know what they are copying, or even why they are copying a document in a certain way, does not deter them in their task.

The preservation of the texts, however, does not guarantee an understanding of these texts. The monks’ frequent inability to fully comprehend the material they are conserving emphasizes the traumatic element that is always present in this endeavor. While Brother Francis copies a blueprint of a piece of electronic equipment, another copyist named Brother Jeris teases him, asking him about the subject matter of the document. Francis explains that he believes that the subject matter of electronics is the electron, and when prodded to define what an electron is, Francis says, “Well, there is one fragmentary source which alludes to it as a ‘Negative Twist of Nothingness.’” Jeris plays with the grammar and few bits of mathematical theory that the monks do understand, exclaiming, “What! How did they negate a nothingness? Wouldn’t that make it a somethingness?” After a few more exchanges, wherein Francis conjectures that the negation may apply to “twist,” Jeris asks Francis if he has figured out how to untwist nothingness. When Francis sadly admits that he has not, Jeris sarcastically encourages Francis: “Well keep at it, Brother! How clever they must have been, those ancients—to know how to untwist nothing. Keep at it, and you may learn how. Then we’d have the ‘electron’ in our midst, wouldn’t we?”

²⁶ Miller 64-65.

²⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1995) 11.

²⁸ Miller 73.

Whatever would we do with it? Put it on the altar in the chapel?”²⁹ This incomprehension, though humorous at times, illustrates the trauma that is at the heart of the archival project.

Without someone to interpret the documents, they become mere fetishes and not tools to disseminate knowledge. In “The Post-Apocalyptic Library: Oral and Literate Culture in *Fahrenheit 451* and *A Canticle for Leibowitz*,” Susan Spencer explains, “But the texts, without [Leibowitz] as interpreter, survive and are handed down from generation to generation. As Leibowitz takes on the trappings of sainthood, the texts become holy items—not for what they communicate, but for what they *are*, something he died to protect.”³⁰ As time passes, the meanings of the texts become more and more unclear. The Leibowitz schematic that Francis copies amid Jeris’s mordant gibes, for example, “appeared to be no more than a network of lines connecting a patchwork of doohickii, squiggles, quids, laminulae, and thingumbob” to poor Francis.³¹ The monks do not preserve knowledge, per se, but the idea of knowledge, what the writings represent, not what they say.

And as the meanings of the documents become ever more obscure, the monks behave similarly to the simpletons. The Leibowitz monks “attempt to maintain a homogeneity of cherishing everything equally” because to these monks, “all texts are holy, and they continue to treasure their illuminated grocery lists long after they have grown sophisticated enough to realize that these texts are likely to be of doubtful utility. Text is above utility or politics and has entered the realm of the sacred, taking on almost the mystic quality of runes.”³² Francis eventually even creates an illuminated version of the cryptic Leibowitz blueprint.³³ When the monks value everything equally, they are employing the same logic as the simpletons who devalue all knowledge equally. Ultimately, the Simpleton movement and the Memorabilia project are similar reactions to trauma with analogous results: the former indiscriminately spurns knowledge while the latter indiscriminately treasures it. This preservation project, a reaction and symptom to the trauma of apocalypse, has a disrupting effect on knowledge, an upheaval that is felt as much as the losses suffered

²⁹ Miller 76.

³⁰ Susan Spencer, “The Post-Apocalyptic Library: Oral and Literate Culture in *Fahrenheit 451* and *A Canticle for Leibowitz*,” *Extrapolation* 32 (1991) 336.

³¹ Miller 74.

³² Spencer 339.

³³ Miller 78-79.

from the Simplification. Francis's illuminated copy of the technical schematic and the monks' inability to understand the materials copied and protected by the monastery can be taken as illustrations of how memory changes and mutates after traumatic events. The monks meticulously and compulsively copy the materials without knowing their meaning, like trauma survivors who compulsively repeat behaviors that stem from traumas they may not understand.

The compulsive and repetitive copying by the monks not only indicates their past trauma but can be a form of sickness in itself. The monks suffer from what Derrida calls archive fever:

It is to burn with a passion. It is never to rest, interminably, from searching for the archive right where it slips away. It is to run after the archive, even if there's too much of

it, right where something in it anarchives itself. It is to have a compulsive, repetitive, and nostalgic desire for the archive, an irrepressible desire to return to the origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia for the return to the most archaic place of absolute commencement.³⁴

The passion that drives the monks is their sworn duty. Miller's narrator explains, "The Memorabilia was there, and it was given to them by duty to preserve, and preserve it they would if the darkness in the world lasted ten more centuries, or even ten thousand years."³⁵ Thus, the monks are gripped by something that is more than a sickness; their archive fever encompasses everything, and they dedicate their whole lives to the endeavor.

The archive project by the Leibowitz monks, though it keeps part of the past alive, is intended for the benefit of future generations. Derrida writes that the archive, though mired in the past, is aimed at the future:

How can we think about this fatal repetition, about repetition in general in its relationship to memory and the archive? It is easy to perceive, if not to interpret, the necessity of such a relationship, at least if one associates the archive, as naturally one is always tempted to do, with repetition, and repetition with the past. But it is

³⁴ Derrida 91.

³⁵ Miller 65.

the future that is at issue here, and the archive as an irreducible experience of the future.³⁶

The monks, after all, assiduously engage in their repetitive activity of preserving the past precisely with greater hopes for the future. They patiently copy and wait “until someday—someday, or some century—an Integrator would come, and things would be fitted together again.”³⁷ The Memorabilia is to be maintained to assist in the rebuilding of society, which the death drive nearly obliterated. Through many centuries, society is slowly rebuilt, aided by the preserved and eventually to be understood Memorabilia: “After ages of striving to preserve remnants of culture from a civilization long dead, the monks had watched the rise of a new and mightier civilization.”³⁸

However, the death drive is never far away. The road to rebuilding is slow and suffers many setbacks, such as the anarchic effects of sectarian wars in “Fiat Lux” (“Let There Be Light”), the second part of the novel. And indeed, the death drive is an innate aspect of the project of archiving itself. Derrida writes that even if there is no archive without repetition, “then we must also remember that repetition itself, the logic of repetition, indeed the repetition compulsion, remains, according to Freud, indissociable from the death drive.”³⁹ Freud argues that the act of repeating is intimately connected to the death drive because all life continuously strives towards a restoration of an earlier state, which is death.⁴⁰ Derrida uses the repetition compulsion that ties together the death drive and the archive to explain that the archive is intrinsically given over to its own destruction. He avers that because the repetition compulsion is inherent to the death drive, “right on that which permits and conditions archivization, we will never find anything other than that which exposes to destruction, introducing, *a priori*, forgetfulness and the archiviolithic into the heart of the monument.”⁴¹ In other words, the archive is anarchic; it works to destroy itself. Inscribed in every archive is the need to destroy the archive. The project of archiving appears futile in its very nature because the death drive, the drive to destroy the archive, is part of the archive itself.

³⁶ Derrida 68.

³⁷ Miller 65.

³⁸ Miller 273.

³⁹ Derrida 11-12.

⁴⁰ Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 45.

⁴¹ Derrida 12.

Miller's novel apparently affirms this self-effacing nature of the archive. The Memorabilia, painstakingly maintained throughout the centuries, ends up being destroyed. In the beginning of the final part of the novel, the world is again on the brink of nuclear war. The monks say to each other, "Lucifer is fallen," the code for imminent war.⁴² The choice of the code calls to mind what Derrida calls the death drive: "this Devil—another proper name for the three-named drive."⁴³ After all, it is Lucifer's fall from heaven that makes him into the Devil. And it is the Devil—that is, the death/aggression/destruction drive—that destroys archives: "the death drive is above all *anarchivic*, one could say, or *archiviolithic*."⁴⁴ In the context of Miller's story, the quite literal devastation of the Leibowitz archives is heralded by the figurative expression of Lucifer's fall, which corresponds to the idea of Lucifer being the father of lies: lies destroy knowledge, just as the death drive destroys the archive.

Humanity's aggressive and destructive instincts wipe out civilization's hard-won attempts at progress, represented by the Memorabilia. But in another way, the archive destroys itself because the Memorabilia directly contributes to the rebuilding of society and leads to the development of nuclear weapons that end both civilization and the Memorabilia. Thus, the violence of the archive also reveals itself through the Memorabilia's role in the new apocalypse, an event that in turn violently obliterates the monks' carefully preserved archives. Inscribed in every archive is the need to destroy the archive; the fragments that the brothers copy and recopy over the centuries have their own destruction written on them because these rescued bits of knowledge eventually contribute to the creation of dangerous new technologies. Brother Francis's innocent copying of the so-called electron circuitously leads to the discovery of the electron and the splitting of the atom. Derrida explains that "anarchiving destruction belongs to the process of archivization and produces the very thing it reduces, on occasion to ashes, and beyond."⁴⁵ Derrida's use of the word "ashes" fits with the fate of the Leibowitz abbey and the archive project, since both are destroyed and will soon become ashes themselves. The war comes, and a nearby

⁴² Miller 245.

⁴³ Derrida 13.

⁴⁴ Derrida 10.

⁴⁵ Derrida 94.

explosion caves in the monastery.⁴⁶ The abbey has been engaged in a project of archivization that always ends in its destruction, in ashes. Derrida's word choice also resonates with the cries of Abbot Zerchi, who laments that civilizations are repeatedly "[g]round to dust" and "burned into the oblivion of the centuries."⁴⁷ These cinereous remains also recall the earlier cry of the Simplification: "*burning, let them perish, and all their works, their names, and even their memories.*"⁴⁸

It seems as if everything always ends in ashes. However, Freud himself is not so sure of the death drive's victory: "But who can foresee with what success and with what result?"⁴⁹ And indeed, Miller's novel is not a simple illustration of the death drive overriding all other forces. The Holy See, in New Rome, has a contingency plan in the case of worldwide nuclear war called "*Quo peregrinator grex*" ("Wither the flock may wander"): monks from the Leibowitz monastery and a microfilm copy of the Memorabilia are to go to the colony in Alpha Centauri.⁵⁰ Brother Joshua, the leader of the space-faring contingent, undergoes a crisis of faith as he considers whether the plan is futile or hopeful: "If Rome had any hope, why send the starship? Why, if they believed that prayers for peace on earth would ever be answered? Was not the starship an act of despair?"⁵¹ This vacillation between hope and despair can also describe the monks' attitude towards the act of archiving. Have the monks learned that archiving is in vain because the death drive works to destroy the archive, and they cannot escape from this fate? Have they learned that the archive leads to its own destruction because of its anarchic nature? How does this journey differ from a repetition compulsion, the same repetition compulsion that caused the

⁴⁶ Miller 324.

⁴⁷ Miller 264.

⁴⁸ Miller 62.

⁴⁹ Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* 155.

⁵⁰ Miller 266-67. The fact that only a microfilm copy of the Memorabilia, and not the physical archives themselves, is to be taken to space raises some interesting questions. Derrida writes of the "*topo-nomology*" of the archive, explaining that the topological aspect of the archive has to do with its place, its physical presence, whereas the nomological aspect has to do with the law (1-3). The escape of the Memorabilia on microfilm eliminates the topological characteristic of the archives. After all, the physical archives, along with the abbey, do not survive the war; the place of the law is gone. However, the Memorabilia retains its nomological function; the group that is to go to Alpha Centauri "will become an independent daughter house of the Order, under a modified rule" (Miller 282). Yet, the microfilm itself is a physical thing and can also be destroyed, which could mean that the archive's topological feature is changed but not thrown away. Abbot Zerchi even uses the language of what Derrida calls the "*domiciliation*" of the archive (2): "After the patriarchal see is established at the Centaurus Colony, you will establish there a mother house of the Visitationist Friars of the Order of Saint Leibowitz of Tycho" (Miller 289).

⁵¹ Miller 284.

Memorabilia to be archived in the first place? Is this just the beginning of another traumatic cycle?

Apparently, the monks have not learned: “And yet the Memorabilia was to go with the ship! Was it a curse? [. . .] It was no curse, this knowledge, unless perverted by Man, as fire had been, this night. . .”⁵² Thus, the monks decide to start over on a new planet orbiting another star. Whether it is out of trauma-driven compulsion or a genuine belief in progress—if there is even a difference between the two—the monks set out to try again. The death drive appears to be the dominant power in the battle between Eros and death in Miller’s *Canticle*, almost as if society as a whole has no choice but to follow this drive to the very end—if an end is indeed possible, for Miller implies that humanity is doomed to eternally repeat its destructive history as long as there is something left to archive. Therefore, although the death drive persists through act of archiving, Eros also succeeds, insofar as life—and history—repeats.

⁵² Miller 285.

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