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Du Bois' "The Comet": Cataclysmic Political and Environmental Hope
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WPSA presentation: Environmental Political Theory section; Thursday, March 10, 10:00AM - 11:45AM

You not need to read this entire chapter. My WPSA presentation will mainly be on Du Bois's “The Comet.” For this, please see pp, 34-40. Additionally, I will make some introductory comments that will come from the introductory material below, especially from pages 9 to 17 (*Affect/Reason, Existential Intensity, and Uncertainty*).

Thank you.

Chapter 6: *Dancing on a Flaming World: Du Bois' Poetry and Creative Fiction*

1) *Introduction: Religion, Form, and Progressive Politics*

After exploring aspects of radical Romanticism with Coleridge and Wordsworth in the previous chapter, I once again turn to Du Bois. My strategy in constructing radical Romanticism is to reinterpret some “standard” Romantics but also to introduce new Romantic authors and themes: to critically appropriate the existing tradition but also to enlarge and enrich it. In the previous chapter, I sought to show the dynamic role of religion and form (including cultivation) in Romanticism. Bringing attention to these aspects of Romanticism allowed me to highlight progressive features of the tradition that are often overlooked. I now turn to Du Bois to investigate these same aspects of Romanticism—the role of religion and form and their implications for progressive thought and practice. Yet, in

Du Bois “these same aspects” are transformed. Anti-Black racism and misogyny are front and center, and the existential “stakes” are higher than those of Coleridge and Wordsworth. The struggle for life and freedom in the context of brutalized and oppressed Black women, men, and children brings a mortal urgency not seen in the previous Romantic authors. For example, Du Bois’ work contains a spirituality comparable to Wordsworthian and Emersonian panentheism. But Du Bois’ panentheism includes a divine permeating not only the beauty of the natural world but a Black Christ lynched and a Black female Moses character dying before experiencing the freedom that she brought to her people.

This chapter will place special emphasis on Du Bois’ poetry and speculative fiction published in his book, *Darkwater*. My main intervention is to how Du Bois used various forms of poetry and creative fiction to critique the unjust status quo and to vividly depict an alternative, anti-racist democratic politics. Furthermore, utilizing the forms of poetry and creative fiction, Du Bois depicted the more-than-human not as standing outside humanity but as an integral feature of a shared and interconnected world. Similar to Coleridge and Wordsworth, Du Bois worked in a creative, aesthetic medium that allowed him to: 1) express profound affect and pathos; 2) make robust declarations and judgments; and 3) craft forms of expressions that acknowledge uncertainty, ambiguity, or a lack of resolution. His artistic work was not for art’s own sake, but for the sake of promoting social justice and combatting racism, white supremacy, misogyny, and economic exploitation.

Hear the affect in these lines from “The Riddle of the Sphinx” as Du Bois responds to “the white world’s vermin and filth”:

I hate them, Oh!

I hate them well,

I hate them, Christ!
As I hate Hell!
If I were God
I'd sound their knell
This day!¹

Hear the ethical declaration and judgment in these lines from the poem, “A Litany at Atlanta,” as Du Bois condemned the Atlanta Race Riot of 1906, when mobs of whites brutalized innocent Black citizens, beating and shooting them:

From the leagued lying of despot and of brute,—
Great God, deliver us!

A city lay in travail, God our Lord, and from her loins sprang twin Murder and Black Hate. Red was the midnight; clang, crack, and cry of death and fury filled the air and trembled underneath the stars when church spires pointed silently to Thee. And all this was to sate the greed of greedy men who hide behind the veil of vengeance!²

Hear the uncertainty and ambiguity in “Children of the Moon,” as a powerful Black woman travels on a “highway to the moon,” seeking to liberate a society of Black men, yet without fully knowing the outcome of her work for the men or even for her own life:

I rose upon the Mountain of the moon—
I felt the blazing glory of the Sun,
I heard the Song of Children crying, “Free”
I saw the face of Freedom—
And I died.³

Stirring affect, astute ethical judgment, and authentic uncertainty about future outcomes mark Du Bois’ poems and speculative fiction, as he brings together his vision of change with the cruel reality of Black lives in the U.S.

I begin below with a general account of the role of religion, tradition, and practice in Du Bois’ poetry and creative fiction. I then offer specific readings of poems and speculative fiction in *Darkwater*, focusing on “The Prayers of God,” “Jesus Christ in Texas,” “The Comet,” and “A Hymn to the Peoples.”

2) *Religion, Form, and Progressive Politics*

When discussing Coleridge’s “The Eolian Harp” and Wordsworth’s “Nuns Fret Not,” we discovered that we miss much if we fail to attend to religion in Romanticism. The same lesson applies to Du Bois, who has frequently been described as a secularist or an agnostic who showed little interest in religion.⁴ Yet as more recent scholarship on Du Bois has shown, he was keenly attuned to and interested in religion. And he himself had profound religious sensibilities. For example, Jonathan Kahn has convincingly argued that it is wrong to think of Du Bois as “hostile to religion, as uninterested in religion and its rhetoric, concepts, narratives, and practices, and most important, as bereft of something recognizable

as religious faith.”⁵ Religion, of course, is a capacious term that refers to many different forms of beliefs and practices. As Aptheker has rightfully claimed, “Du Bois was not religious in a conventional sense.... He was, however, deeply religious in that he believed in a kind of ultimate mystery in life, guided by some Creative Force.”⁶ As we will see below, a particular aspect of Du Bois’ interest in religion and his own personal religiosity is its commitment to social justice, in particular, to anti-Black racism (and other forms of racism), misogyny, and economic exploitation. A prophetically religious voice is especially manifested in his creative, fictional writings. Edward Blum has noted that “Du Bois used biblical stories to rethink twentieth-century problems of race and economics often centering on the Christ figure as a friend of embattled black women and men... Encounters with messianic black figures brought joy and redemption for many fictive African Americans in Du Bois’ tales.”⁷ In his poetry and other creative works, we see the convergence of religion and radical justice. It is no wonder that Aptheker describes Du Bois as “a poet and prophet,” and that Blum sees in Du Bois’ creative works his “spiritual pathos and courage.”⁸

When Aptheker refers to Du Bois as “not religious in a conventional sense,” we probably have at least a vague sense of what he means. As an adult, Du Bois was not a regular church goer, was critical of many aspects of “organized” religion, and yet persisted in maintaining some form of religious (or spiritual) beliefs and sensibilities. Yet given that millions of people fit that sense of “unconventional,” it is more fitting to claim that Du Bois was not an orthodox or traditional Christian but instead was highly interested in the prophetic or ethical aspects of Christian traditions, especially those that galvanized Black solidarity. He also studied the sociohistorical roots, institutions, and practices of white supremacist Christianity. Moreover, Du Bois maintained a personal religiosity that largely resembled panentheistic, Romantic spirituality, a form of religiosity that I have alluded to

throughout this book. A genealogy of it could plausibly begin with Rousseau’s “Savoyard priest,” in which the revelatory guide for life consists of an attunement between the inner and outer—the inward authority of the self and the outer authority of “nature” or “spirit”—later manifested in Wordsworth’s and Coleridge’s “One Life” theology, and subsequently inherited and transformed by such North American Romantics as Margert Fuller and Ralph Waldo Emerson and then again by such American pragmatists as William James and John Dewey. This Romantic spirituality, broadly understood here, challenged the rigid binaries of Spirit/human and Spirit/nature. Instead, it supported a vision of a dynamic interrelation between humans, Spirit, and the natural world.

Du Bois manifested aspects of this Romantic spirituality in his life and work. We saw many examples of this in Chapter **, *Into the Wild*. Yet, as we also saw, in that same chapter, there were additional spiritual influences in his life. The Sorrow Songs—“the wild sweet melodies of the Negro slave”—profoundly influenced and shaped Du Bois. In them he discovered a distinctively Black religiosity that spoke of hope and loss, resistance and suffering, Black solidarity and a “spirit of revolt.” In *Divine Discontent: The Religious Imagination of W. E. B. Du Bois*—arguably the best book we have on Du Bois and religion—Jonathan Kahn argues that Du Bois launched a form of African American pragmatic religious naturalism:

Du Bois drinks fully from both streams—from pragmatist and African American traditions. In drawing on these two traditions—in creating a race-imbued pragmatic religious naturalism—Du Bois transforms both the American philosophical tradition and African American religious thought. By using pragmatist tools...Du Bois creates a new black faith: a radical version of pragmatic religious naturalism that displays a

grasp of the sociopolitical implications of pragmatist thought that is more powerful than the pragmatists themselves.⁹

Kahn skillfully draws attention to the way Du Bois brought together the sensibilities of both American pragmatism and a distinctively Black spirituality. For my part, I want to note the close connection between radical Romanticism and such pragmatists as John Dewey, George Santayana, and William James. I'm not the first to do this. Russell Goodman, for example, interprets the thought of "James and Dewey as a perpetuation in philosophy of the original Romantic enterprise."¹⁰ My point is not to claim that we ought to see Du Bois as a Romantic and not a pragmatist but rather that Du Bois, who powerfully contributed to diverse academic fields by way of various forms of discourse, including poetry, was influenced by a wide range of intellectual and spiritual traditions. Du Bois was influenced by Romanticism and pragmatism, but his reception of these traditions was always highly informed by distinctively Black intellectual and spiritual traditions and by Black responses to white supremacy and other forms of oppression. Du Bois fashioned a discerning amalgam of intellectual and faith traditions, and from that emerged a prophetic or religiously inspired progressive politics, one which included penetrating critiques of white America. In this chapter, I show that Du Bois' religiously inspired, prophetic engagement is most clearly seen in his poetry and creative fictional work.

Like Wordsworth and Coleridge, Du Bois' poetry and creative fiction broke down unhelpful, rigid binaries between the human, the divine, and the natural. His panentheistic, Romantic spirituality understood Spirit or the divine as working intimately in humans, history, and the natural world. Spirit was not relegated outside or above the human and natural realm. Also, like Wordsworth and Coleridge, Du Bois employed "form" and

“cultivation” for the sake of liberatory aims. As Wordsworth celebrated and employed the power of the form of the sonnet, so too Du Bois employed *forms* of poetry—the psalms, hymns, Biblical stories, among other forms—to produce powerful social critiques and an embodied progressive politics. He inhabited these various forms in his own distinctive way, both honoring the forms and innovating within them, composing a body of work that portrayed the shapes and shades, the struggles and hopes, of life behind the Veil.

The very shape of *Darkwater* illustrates both Du Bois’ awareness of and skillfulness in literary forms. Du Bois crafted powerful prose essays and skillfully interspersed them with his lucid, intense poems and short stories. The result is that his nonfiction and “fiction” pieces respond to each other, echoing but also augmenting the arguments, affect, and pathos of each piece. The shape of *Darkwater*’s composition may seem ad hoc, but it in fact possesses a distinctive *form*. Allison Blackmond Laskey has convincingly argued that Du Bois employed the ancient, oral story technique of *the ring composition*, a form of narrative structure in which a central theme is announced, developed, and then returns to its original starting point. In *Darkwater*, the nonfiction and fiction “form a larger ring and more elaborate pedimental movement, which can be noted as AaBbCcC’dDeD’fEe’E’d’E”c’B’b’A’a’.”¹¹ I am bringing attention to the form of *Darkwater* not to make a purely aesthetic remark but to draw attention to the larger ramifications of the role of forms and of the process of *in-forming* in Du Bois’ work. For Du Bois, working within a set of forms, disciplines, and traditions need not be stifling but rather can contribute powerfully to a progressive politics. Of course, Du Bois understood that form—cultivation, discipline, and tradition—can also enforce an oppressive status quo. But he sought to use form in order to advance an embodied, anti-racist democracy. Just as Wordsworth sought tangible means to contribute to shaping a democratic second nature, so Du Bois employed a variety of forms (cultural, religious, and

aesthetic) to cultivate progressive, democratic sensibilities that exposed and challenged white supremacy, gender inequality, and colonialism. Du Bois understood the connection between using forms and producing social critique.

My main intervention, here, is to note that Du Bois used various forms of poetry and creative fiction to critique the unjust status quo and to vividly depict alternative anti-Black democratic politics. Social scientific research and publications, in Du Bois' view, contributed to social change, but more was required. Ignorance or lack of enlightenment were not the only or perhaps central obstacles to change. Social practices, affect, and stubborn bias needed to be addressed. For this reason, Du Bois claimed that:

not simply knowledge, not simply direct repression of evil, will reform the world. In long, indirect pressure and action of various and intricate sorts, the actions of men which are not due to lack of knowledge nor to evil intent, must be changed by influencing folkways, habits, customs, and subconscious deeds.¹²

Du Bois' poetry and speculative fiction belong to "actions of various and intricate sorts," designed to influence "folkways, habits, customs, and subconscious deeds." Racism and other social evils must be combatted by various means, socio-scientific but also artistic and activist. The society and culture at large require a profound democratic transformation in their practices and affects, their habits and manners. It requires a spiritual—and not only a formal institutional—transformation. Religion and form, in Du Bois' poetry and creative fiction, are at the heart of that transformative effort.

3) *Affect/Reason, Existential Intensity, and Uncertainty*

In *Darkwater*, Du Bois attempted to address the *whole* person: one's mind and heart, reason and affect. Yet it would be a mistake to assume that in *Darkwater* the fictional writings address the "heart" whereas the essays address the "mind." Heart and mind are addressed in both forms of writing. The prose pieces, for example, elicit strong affective responses, and the poetry and fictional pieces often respond to and even extend arguments from the essays. Indeed, one function of the creative fictional pieces is to advance an argument in the prose essays by taking the reader beyond empirical realities and allowing the reader to imagine, for example, a world free of racism and classism.¹³ As or more likely, the creative pieces vivify—in graphic detail—the very pain and suffering that the prose arguments sought to identify and combat. The creative pieces, together, elucidate both a fully realized, just democracy and the formidable obstacles to achieving such a society.

Du Bois anticipated what we now call the genre of speculative fiction, a genre that often clarifies present issues by situating them in imaginative settings—the fantastical, the futuristic, the magical, the supernatural, the cataclysmic. Speculative fiction presents us with what is and what may be, and the unknown between the two. And it is precisely this tension or uncertainty between what is and what may be, that has been put to great use by various Black, Indigenous, and Latinx authors.¹⁴ Du Bois is one of those authors.

The essays and the creative fiction in *Darkwater* are combined thoughtfully, each one augmenting or supplementing the others. One might be tempted to ask, which type or form of writing was more important to Du Bois, the scholarly essay ("the Thought") or the poetry and creative fiction ("the Fancy")? In his "Postscript" to *Darkwater*, he mused, "In my mind, now at the end, I know not whether I mean the Thought for the Fancy—or the Fancy for the Thought..."¹⁵ It seems clear that, in spite of Du Bois' social scientific training and

commitments, he valued both types of writing, acknowledging their differences but also their interrelatedness. Lawrie Balfour writes of Du Bois' "deliberate blurring of boundaries between argument and poetry in the hope of conveying the truths visible from that vantage more effectively."¹⁶ And Keith E. Byerman claims that "each chapter [in *Darkwater*] depends for its effect on the blurring of discursive distinctions [between "fancy" and "thought"]".¹⁷ By "blurring," I take Balfour and Byerman to mean that the essays and fiction pieces work together toward the same aims (for example, dismantling anti-Black racism, misogyny, and economic exploitation). I would insist, however, that we recognize—as did Du Bois—the distinct forms of writing without "blurring" them together. Both types of writings have their strengths and limits.

Again, the relevant distinction is not between heart and mind, affect and reason. I am even uneasy with the distinction between fiction and nonfiction, as if the fiction pieces were not firmly rooted in an honest engagement with actual state of affairs. No, the distinction between "thought" and "fancy" is more about how argument and affect—combined in one and the same piece—are expressed differently in the different genres. For example, the prose essay, "The Souls of White Folks," powerfully and discursively names the national and international harm that flows from white supremacy. In the essay's companion poem following it, "The Riddle of the Sphinx," we find the same topic but this time it is addressed with greater pathos and intensity: "I hate them ["the white world's vermin and filth"] Oh!/I hate them well." But again, the presence of "greater pathos and intensity" should not imply that "thought" or "argument" is not present. The poem *argues* for the dignity of Black women in light of their heavy burdens and their "Wild spirit of a storm-swept soul, a-struggling to be free."¹⁸

Du Bois' poetry and creative fiction pieces are, above all, powerful forms of social critique. Take the first poem in *Darkwater*, "A Litany at Atlanta." This prayer boldly critiques God, religion, and white America. It begins by accusing God of silence and, later in the poem, of being white:

O Silent God, Thou whose voice afar in mist and mystery hath left our ears an-
hungered in these fearful days—

....

Keep not thou silence, O God!

Sit no longer blind, Lord God, deaf to our prayer and dumb to our dumb suffering.¹⁹

God's silence and indifference is intolerable given the injustice and suffering inflicted on innocent Black women, men, and children. The accusation and outcry is a global one, participating in the long tradition of theodicy and protest against a removed, distant divinity. Yet the protest is also decidedly local: Du Bois accuses God of allowing lawless white mobs to brutally batter and kill innocent Black citizens during the 1906, three-day Atlanta riot.

Immediately after addressing God as blind and deaf, Du Bois lodged still another charge and possible explanation for God's callous inaction: "Surely Thou too art not white, O Lord, a pale, bloodless, heartless thing?" (p. 13). Is God white? Is God a white supremacist who turns a blind eye to the torture and murder of Black humans? Yet immediately after posing the frightful question, Du Bois recanted: "Forgive the thought! Forgive these wild, blasphemous words" (p. 13). This recantation is reminiscent of Coleridge in "The Eolian Harp," as is also the way that Du Bois, like Coleridge, went on to declare faith in God: "Thou art still the God of our black fathers and in Thy Soul's Soul sit some

soft darkenings of the evening, some shadowings of the velvet night” (p. 13). Du Bois professed a Black faith in the Black souled God of Black ancestors. And it is to this God that Du Bois then beseeched:

But whisper—speak—call, great God, for Thy silence is white terror to our hearts!

The way, O God, show us the way and point us the path (p. 13).

Ultimately, the poem offers no resolution regarding God’s silence or Du Bois’ own personal struggle between faith and despair.²⁰ No neat solution is proposed. Rather, the poem deftly poses profound questions and accusations, matches them with apt affect and pathos, and then concludes with the same silence with which it began:

We bow our heads and hearken soft to the sobbing of women and little children.

We beseech Thee to hear us, good Lord!

Our voices sink in silence and in night.

Hear us, good Lord!

In night, O God of a godless land!

Amen!

In silence, O Silent God.

Selah! (p. 14)

When Coleridge wrote “Fears in Solitude,” he struggled to make sense of the chaos, injustice, and war—justified in the name of God—that his country was determined to wreak on the world. Coleridge cried out to his God for understanding and accused his country of

fervently supporting unjust war, slavery, and religious intolerance. When Du Bois wrote “A Litany at Atlanta,” he, too, struggled to make sense of a cruel world, but above all, he strove powerfully to *name* the cruelty:

A city lay in travail, God our Lord, and from her loins sprang twin Murder and Black Hate. Red was the midnight; clang, crack and cry of death and fury filled the air and trembled underneath the stars when church spires pointed silently to Thee. And all this was to sate the greed of greedy men who hide behind the veil of vengeance! (p. 13).

Here racial hatred, economic greed, and their horrid consequences are named. But Du Bois, as is his way, also felt compelled to name concrete particulars: “Behold this maimed and broken thing, dear God; it was an humble black man who toiled and sweat to save a bit from the pittance paid him” (p. 13). *This* man, who did all that was expected of him, struggling to make a living, abiding by both written and unwritten laws, “lieth maimed and murdered, his wife naked to shame, his children to poverty and evil.” “A Litany at Atlanta” exemplifies what is accomplished in Du Bois’ poetry and fiction pieces: *a creative, affective form of social critique that is rooted in an unassailable logic and that resists easy resolutions or closure.*

Resistance to easy resolutions or closure is especially noteworthy in Du Bois’ creative fiction pieces. These short stories often transport the reader to an alternate time or place, suggesting how this world could be—what it would look like, how it would feel—if racial and economic justice were achieved. In “The Princess of the Hither Isles,” for example, a Princess rejects the oppressive gold and power of the colonial white king who pursues her, and instead longs for a “black beggar man.”²¹ The Black man, “set ‘twixt Death and Pain,” is

revealed in his “grave majesty”—he is a person of justice, beauty, and courage (38-39). To him the white Princess offers her “bleeding heart,” which she literally rips from her breast. In anger, the king strikes with his sword “that little, white, heart-holding hand until it flew armless and disbodied up through the sunlit air” (39). A great chasm appears— “wide as heaven from earth, deep as hell, and empty, cold, and silent”—separating the warm, blissful “Empire of the Sun” from the cold, gloomy Hither Isles (p. 39). The Princess, peering into the abyss, issuing “a cry of dark despair,” hears from the depths, “Leap!” “And the Princess leapt,” and thus the story concludes (39).

But what kind of conclusion is this? Does she reach the Empire of the Sun, “the warmth of heaven’s sun”? Is she united with the noble Black beggar man? Does the offering of her bleeding heart bring about redemptive change, or does it simply disappear into a “empty, cold, and silent” abyss? Does her longing for beauty and change bring new life or simply death? These are fundamental, daily questions for those who witness all manner of suffering and sorrow caused by unbending racial and economic injustice, and yet continue to hope and work for change.²² Does their struggle and blood merely vanish into a silent void?

Analytic, discursive prose can articulate the logic of Du Bois’ fictional writings’ skillful inconclusiveness, but it cannot elicit the appropriate affect, convey the existential intensity, or parse the various threads of ambiguity, uncertainty, and open-endedness. Genres have strengths and limits. A strength of Dubois’ fiction is to express a wide range of the human drama that is not easily captured in sociological, political, or economic discourse. “Racial inequality” is a necessary but abstract term. Du Bois’ radical aesthetics sought to transform the abstract term—and all that it means—into vivid experiences and richly textured events and characters. Like Wordsworth, he did this, in part, by introducing characters not commonly found in the standard texts of his readers. As we saw in Chapter *,

Wordsworth introduced characters who, at the time, were considered unsavory as topics for poetry: the “beggar,” the “idiot boy,” “the banished negro,” the wounded veteran, the homeless, and the refugee. Wordsworth vividly portrayed these characters so that we might see and feel—intellectually and affectively—their suffering, challenges, and occasional victories.

Du Bois introduced into socioeconomic texts his own set of unusual or atypical characters: the Black farmer struggling under Jim Crow; the Black woman molding clay who is refused admission to any school of sculpture; the young Black woman, Josie, who struggles to receive an education and to “advance” in life’s opportunities, but faces myriad obstacles and dies without medical attention; the (fictional) Black man who, after a global catastrophe wipes out most of humanity, finds himself in a new, hopeful world as a Black Adam with a white Eve, but only to have racism soon come rushing back upon him.

Wordsworth and Du Bois introduced non-standard characters into their genres to reveal and name a world to their readers, and to elicit appropriate responses to that world. But the task for Du Bois was a more complicated one. Wordsworth’s readership was economically diverse but solidly white. Du Bois, in contrast, was addressing both Black and white readers, and this entailed a different set of challenges. For his Black readers, Du Bois sought to *name* an anti-Black racist world that was already intimately known. In the act of naming came a palpable, compassionate, mutual understanding and mourning, as if to say: “yes, this is the world that we encounter daily.” Naming also acknowledged and supported prophetic Black rage as well as what I have called dark, wild hope.

For white readers, Du Bois’ task was perhaps still more difficult. First, there was the challenge of a Black author addressing a white readership. How is a Black man to write to white supremacist America? How is the perceived “problem” to address the actual problem?

Does he assume a common humanity—a minimally shared sense of justice, integrity, honor, and decency? Does he assume solidarity, or at least pretend that it is present? Does he assume that truth and beauty will prevail if depicted honestly and compellingly? Or does he simply seek to speak the truth to his white audience, regardless of consequence? Du Bois occupied all these stances. But there is an additional one. Du Bois sought to work on his white readership, to subtly cultivate and change them, such that they could see and feel—to *some extent*—the world of anti-Black racism, with all its suffering, cruelty, and injustice. Like Wordsworth, Du Bois sought to create a reader that wasn't there before: someone whose body and soul could be exposed—*not temporarily transported into*, but opened up—to life behind the Veil, and thereby experience a praxis oriented (not sentimental) empathy. Again, however, as a Black author, this endeavor was all the more difficult. We see this powerful endeavor—what I have called his radical aesthetics—in most of his writings, but especially in such essayistic texts as those in *Darkwater* and in his poetry and short stories.

Having introduced Du Bois' fiction and poetry, I now wish to linger with a few pieces from *Darkwater*.

4) *The Poetry and Short Stories of Darkwater: Spiritual Vision and Hope Stained in Blood*

The poem, “The Prayers of God,” mingles heaven and earth to such an extent that it seems impossible to distinguish between them. The poem repudiates white supremacist Christian ideology and asserts a religiosity that breaks down the rigid binaries that would separate the Divine from humans and the rest of the world. In contrast to a high white Divinity that rules over humanity while sanctioning white lords over Blacks, “The Prayers of God” speaks of a Divine that weeps and suffers with and in a cruel, racist, and war-torn world. “The Prayers of

God” expresses *God’s* prayers, pain, and hope. Again, heaven and earth are topsy-turvy. We saw how Wordsworth and Coleridge employed a “One Life” worldview that articulated a non-dualistic, holistic relation between the human, the more-than-human, and the Divine. That ethical and spiritual stance often highlighted the beauty and goodness of the world and the need for humans to recognize their home in the interconnected fabric of the One Life. We noted the progressive, beneficial political and environmental implications that might flow from such a One Life theology.

In “The Prayers of God,” Du Bois articulated his own version of One Life theology. But unlike that of Wordsworth and Coleridge, this Du Boisian spirituality breaks down the unhelpful binaries by beginning with the death and the ugliness of the world, not its life and beauty. “Death” and “the ugly,” as you may recall, are the companion terms to “life” and “beauty” in Du Bois’ powerful chapter, “Of Beauty and Death”—the chapter that immediately precedes “The Prayers of God.” The two compositions are related. “Of Beauty and Death” oscillates between moving accounts of life and beauty in the natural and social world and accounts of death and the (morally) “ugly,” especially that of racism and war. The chapter concludes with the mournful notion that while evil exists eternally in its incompleteness, beauty triumphs only in death:

All is not beauty. Ugliness and hate and ill are here with all their contradictions and illogic; they will always be here—perhaps, God send, with lessened volume and force, but here and eternal, while beauty triumphs in its great completion—Death.²³

“The Prayers of God” begins where “Of Beauty and Death” ends. Like beauty, God, too, is present in the finite that is near at hand, not in some distant eternal. And it is in

war and hatred, in racism and greed—not in goodness and beauty—that revelation occurs. God, as it turns out, is in fact closer than we thought. For God is the victim of every murder and of every form of racism, hatred, and economic exploitation. Spirit is not separate from the world. Spirit is fully present—and suffers accordingly.

“The Prayers of God” begins with a white man praying to God. Du Bois was attentive to the *form* of the poem. Its form resembles the psalms of lament in the Bible: the beseecher begins by invoking God, and then complains to God and pleads for help in light of a particular crisis or injustice. Thus Du Bois’ “The Prayers of God” starts with:

Name of God’s Name!

Red murder reigns;

All hell is loose;...

Thou sittest, dumb.²⁴

As war, greed, despair, and death are covering the earth, the suppliant calls on God to no longer remain silent:

Stand forth, unveil Thy Face,

Pour down the light

That seethes above Thy Throne,

And blaze this devil's dance to darkness!

Hear!

Speak!

In Christ's Great Name— (122).

And then, for the first time in his life, the white man hears and grasps a truth that turns his world upside down:

'This gold?

I took it.

Is it Thine?

Forgive; I did not know.

Blood? Is it wet with blood?

'Tis from my brother's hands.

(I know; his hands are mine.)

It flowed for Thee, O Lord.

War? Not so; not war—

Dominion, Lord, and over black, not white... (122).

The psalm of lament is suddenly interrupted by the shocking, profound revelation that the unjust wars, vicious colonial trade, and murderous oppression were not, in fact, licensed by God for the benefit of the supposed white chosen people. The one who started by asking God for help in the midst of a bloody catastrophe is learning that he in fact is responsible for the bloodshed. God has heard his prayer and has spoken, and the white man responds:

I hear!

Forgive me, God!

Above the thunder I hearkened;

Beneath the silence, now,—

I hear!...

We murdered

To build Thy Kingdom (122).

But more revelation is to come. The man's *earth* has now been turned upside down: his white supremacist worldview is exposed as vicious and categorically ungodly. Next his understanding of *heaven*, or the divine, is turned upside down. The man confesses:

..., and in Thy Name,

I lynched a [N-word]—

(He raved and writhed,

I heard him cry,

I felt the life-light leap and lie,

I saw him crackle there, on high,

I watched him wither!) (123)

The revelation that follows announces that this horrid murder of a man is also a lynching of God:

Thou?

Thee?

I lynched Thee? ...

That black and riven thing—was it Thee?

That gasp—was it Thine?

This pain—is it Thine? (123).

The Divine is here, present in the finite, lynched, over and over again. The Divine is not white. The Divine is every Black innocent who has been lynched. The religious ideology that supported white supremacy is turned on its head. The white man who prayed for God's intervention against sinners discovers that he and his kind are the sinners committing the most grievous crimes. These crimes certainly include anti-Black racism but also other forms of oppression, colonialism, and concomitant wars:

Are, then, these bullets piercing Thee?

Have all the wars of all the world,

Down all dim time, drawn blood from Thee?

Have all the lies and thefts and hates—

Is this Thy Crucifixion, God...

Is this Thy kingdom here, not there...? (123)

The kingdom of God is here on earth, and in it God suffers and is repeatedly crucified. This is the Divine revelation that the white sinner has been granted. He started by asking God not to sit “dumb” but to “speak!” (122). God grants his petition. What does the white man hear?

Who cries?

Who weeps?

With silent sob that rends and tears—

Can God sob?

Who prays?

I hear strong prayers throng by,

Like mighty winds on dusky moors—

Can God pray? (123).

The white man had asked to hear the voice of God, and his prayer was answered. He now hears God, not as a booming voice from some faraway heaven but weeping and praying close at hand. There are two revelations at the end of the poem. God weeps, suffering with humanity and all wounded creation. But also this: God *prays*, and hence the title of the poem, “The Prayers *of* God.”

What would Du Bois compose as God’s prayer in the company of the white supremacist? What might God pray for? And *to whom* does *God* pray?

Prayest Thou, Lord, and to me?

Thou needest me?

Thou *needest* me?

Thou needest *me*?...

If the reader is shocked by the prayer of God, so is the white supremacist in the poem. The three italicized words express three revelatory astonishments: 1) God, who is supposedly perfect and hence complete and not in need of anything, is in fact not self-sufficient: God has *needs*; 2) God needs *humans*; and 3) God needs the *white supremacist*. This is a surprising turn, to say the least. Du Bois, a Black activist, crafts a God who needs white supremacists. To imagine a God in need of humanity and the rest of creation is, in many ways, to be in the company of Wordsworth and Coleridge and all those who would insist on an intimacy between Spirit and Earth, shunning a radical polarity between the two. To imagine such a God is to envision a panentheistic partnership, a universe in which Spirit and matter are radically intertwined, evolving, changing, and growing together. That is the God of Wordsworth and Coleridge and of such North American Romantics as Emerson, Fuller, and Whitman. It is an affirmation of both Spirit's material immanence and of earth's sacredness.

All this can be seen in Du Bois. God is present in the here and now ("Thy kingdom here, not there"). God is not divorced from humans and the rest of creation but is instead radically immanent, so much so that God is in the world and needs it. The earth, then, is a sacred place. And yet for Du Bois, the close proximity of God and the sacredness of the earth should make us tremble. For insofar as the earth is sacred, Du Bois insisted that it is desecrated. It is despoiled by anti-Black racism and all other forms of hatred, oppression, bigotry, and economic exploitation. We have desecrated the earth and hence God weeps.

But "The Prayers of God" does not principally address a *generalized*, sinful humanity—a sinful "we"—but rather a particular white supremacist. And it is this white supremacist that God needs. In this remarkable turn, Du Bois declared that Spirit—justice, truth, honor, beauty—seeks out the transformation of the anti-Black racist. The corollary to this is that as long as racism persists, the earth remains desecrated. The oppressed

populations of the world and their allies can perhaps create pockets of hope and justice and home, but the earth and its Spirit will mourn and suffer as long as racism persists. Hence God needs the white supremacist, transformed, to join the struggle for a just and truly beautiful earth.

What is the white supremacist's response to the prayers of God? The poem closes with:

Courage, God,

I come!

These two concluding, optimistic lines would seem out of place in any of Du Bois' writings, but perhaps especially in a book that contains such scathing essays on white culture as "The Souls of White Folk" and "The Damnation of Women." My own view is that, in the context and form of poetry, Du Bois sought to startle the imagination by posing at the end of the poem a final astonishment: *Imagine, just imagine, the white supremacist is awakened by Spirit and seeks to become its ally. Just imagine.* Perhaps Du Bois' fierce struggle against—and despair over—anti-Black racism required, on occasion, such flights of the moral imagination. The imaginative, here, provides not only modest hope but also a resounding and instructive counterfactual to the world as we know it. Most commentators, to my mind, have not adequately addressed the final two lines of the poem. Keith Byerman is an exception. Of the last two lines, he writes:

What Du Bois attempts here is another exposure of the souls of white folk, both as they are and as they could be... But the division between expository and poetic

discourses implies that the spiritual truth [whites as they could be] is fundamentally different from the social and historical reality [whites as they are]. A deep pessimism is implicit in such discursive differences; white virtue must be recorded in the language of the imagination because unlike black spirituality, it is not evident in Du Bois's reading of history.²⁵

To this poignant interpretation, I would add the qualification that there is no essential "division between expository and poetic discourses," certainly not along the lines of what is and what could be. Poetic discourse, as seen in "The Prayers of God," should not be confined to expressing "spiritual truths" or imaginings about the counterfactual. But I agree with Byerman's main point: at the end of the poem, Du Bois poetically expressed "the souls of white folk...as they could be." In "The Comet," the dystopic, speculative fiction that immediately follows "The Prayers of God," Du Bois again expressed in the language of fiction the souls of white folk as they could be. But, in the same fictional language, he concluded "The Comet" with whites *as they are*.



I will soon turn to "The Comet," but first I want to reflect on the short story, "Jesus Christ in Texas." Like "The Prayers of God," "Jesus Christ in Texas" exposes white supremacist Christian ideology and offers an alternative version of Christianity that associates Spirit with the downtrodden, specifically with Blacks suffering under white oppression. Also, in "The Prayers of God," the white man, due to the Veil, failed to recognize Spirit for most of his life. This same theme is found in "Jesus Christ in Texas." For above all, "Jesus Christ in

Texas” is a story about *recognition*: about how some and not others are able to recognize the humanity in front of them, the divinity in front of them, and the close connection between the two.

The short story begins in Waco, Texas, with four men in the twilight: the recently captured convict, the convict’s guard, the colonel, and “the stranger.” The Black convict is breaking up stones with a heavy hammer. The white guard convinces the white colonel that it would be in their financial interest to force the Black convict to build a new railroad line rather than pay for his room and board in prison. All the while, the stranger quietly listens and then poses the rhetorical question: This will be a good thing for the Black convict?²⁶ The colonel rationalizes the exploitation of the convict while also sensing something compelling and mysterious about the stranger. He offers him a ride to town and eventually invites him into his home. As they are about to get into the car, the eyes of the stranger and those of the convict meet, and “the hammer fell from his hands.” This is the first sign of recognition. The Black convict recognizes the stranger for who he is.

During the next few hours, there is a series of recognitions, partial recognitions, and misrecognitions. When the stranger enters the colonel’s home and is introduced to his wife, he is shown gracious hospitality, until the light is turned on:

the woman stared in amazement and the colonel half rose in anger. Why, the man was a mulatto, surely; ...He was tall and straight and the coat looked like a Jewish gabardine. His hair hung in close curls far down the sides of his face and his face was olive, even yellow (60).

Jesus Christ, apparently, is in Waco, Texas. But who is able to recognize him? When the twilight rendered the stranger's complexion difficult to see, his divine presence made a captivating impression on all he encountered. The colonel, his wife, a minister, and the guard—all these whites recognized something of importance in the stranger, until their captivation turned to indignation when his complexion and race were revealed. Only in the dark—in the absence of color—can these whites achieve a partial recognition of the humanity and divinity in front of them in the Christ figure, the person of the stranger.

There is a white exception: the colonel's young child is immediately drawn to the stranger, and she continues to desire his company even with the lights on. Could it be that this child, thus far, has not been thoroughly trained in the ways of the Veil? She embodies that trope of Romanticism—so prominent in Wordsworth, Emerson, and now Du Bois—the Child who has a fresh relation to the world and has yet to be corrupted by vicious habits, practices, and beliefs, that is, corrupted by a vicious *second nature*. The child, then, still has the capacity to recognize the humanity and divinity of those around her, and innocently wishes to spend time with and play with the stranger.

There are examples of partial recognition of the stranger. The minister, even with the light on, says to the stranger, "Surely, I know you, I have met you somewhere." But the stranger responds, "I never knew you." For a passing moment, a guest in the home thinks that she sees "the shadow of great, white wings" behind the stranger (61). These are fleeting glimpses of recognition that generate no appropriate response, change, or action. The Black adults in the story, however, exhibit a full recognition of the stranger and respond robustly. The colonel's Black butler, for example, upon seeing the stranger, feels a "sudden gladness," drops to his knees, and whispers, "My Lord and my God!" (60). The Black nurse in the household runs down the staircase, clutches the stranger's cloak, and "kneels in the dust"

(61). He blesses her, and with a glad cry, she leaves the house and “turned north, running.” *Running to freedom* is one of many examples of what I mean by a “robust response” to a full recognition of the stranger.

Full recognition, here, goes both ways: The Black adults recognize the Christ figure, while the Christ figure recognizes the Black people’s humanity. Such mutual recognition has intrinsic value. It appropriately honors and does justice to the parties involved. But this Christ figure is no miracle worker in the traditional or sentimental sense of the term. Social and racial justice, for example, do not pour down from Heaven and set all right. Does the nurse who runs to freedom obtain it? Does the butler escape his servitude? And what of the convict at the start of the story? Does the Christ figure save him from cruel captivity?

As the stranger leaves the colonel’s home, to the great relief of his hosts, bloodhounds are heard. The minister comments casually, “Another one of those convicts escaped...Really, they need severer measures” (62). The convict has escaped and the stranger seeks and finds him just as the bloodhounds do as well:

A greyhound shot out of the woods behind him, howled, whined, and fawned before the stranger’s feet. Hound after hound bayed, leapt, and lay there; then silently, one by one, and with bowed heads, they crept backward toward the town (62).

The bloodhounds honor the Christ figure and stop their pursuit of the convict. This is an act of recognition with a robust response. The dogs, these more-than-human creatures, join that rank that are able to recognize the stranger, and in doing so, the rigid binaries that would radically separate the human, the non-human, and the divine are torn down, or at least

blunted. Perhaps miracles do occur in “Jesus Christ in Texas.” But the question of social and racial justice remains.

In the end, the Black convict is lynched. After the Christ figure bathes the head of the convict, unfetters him from his chains, and conceals “the prison stripes” by wrapping him in his own cloak, the convict finds employment on a farm. It is a new day and the convict works with great integrity. But circumstances quickly turn against him. Later that night, the white wife of the farmer collides with the Black convict who is running in the dark. The white farmer yells to the convict guard and his mob:

“He—attacked—my wife.” The mob snarled and worked silently. Right to the limb of the red oak they hoisted the struggling, writhing black man (63-64).

Immediately before this, the farmer’s wife was in conversation with the stranger. Like the other white adults in the story, she had initially been attracted to the stranger in the night. There was a partial recognition. But when he began to press her to extend Christian neighborly love to local Blacks living in destitute, she lit a lamp, saw his “dark face and curly hair,” “shrieked in angry terror,” and ran away into the dark (64). And that is how she happened to collide with the Black convict. It was one white act, among many, that braided the rope of the Black man’s death.

At the end of the story, the white woman is afforded a full recognition of the Christ figure. Recovering inside her home, she feels compelled to look out the window. Behind the dead, lynched Black convict, she sees “hung the stranger on the crimson cross, riven and blood-stained, with thorn-crowned head and pierced hands” (64). In an agony of tears, she proclaims, “Despised and rejected of men” (a biblical passage from Isaiah 53:3 that

Christians commonly associate with Jesus as the suffering servant). What change does this full recognition bring to her life? What is her robust response to this gift of revelation? All we are told is that she “stretched her arms and shrieked.” There is little hope here of repentance and change. As for the hope of a better life for the tortured, Black convict, the final words of the story are from the stranger on the cross to the dead convict: “This day thou shalt be with me in Paradise!”

Paradise has historically played an important role in Black religious traditions in the U.S. It has offered some comfort and hope to a people who had little comfort or reason for hope in a cruel world. Du Bois, of course, knew of this form of religious solace so prevalent in the Sorrow Songs, and he honored it (even if he himself took no or little metaphysical comfort in an otherworldly paradise). Yet there is another function of *paradise*, or the *kingdom of God*, that is found in Black spiritual traditions, one that Du Bois himself frequently utilized. The Kingdom of God stands in radical judgment of the injustice in the world. The Black convict and the mulatto stranger are associated with the Kingdom of God and its justice, while those who, in one way or another, crucify them are associated with divine judgment. The white adults in “Jesus Christ in Texas” are not the epitome of Spirit but rather are those judged by it. “This day thou shalt be with me in Paradise!” are not only words of comfort but of fierce critique.

As in “The Prayers of God,” so in “Jesus Christ in Texas”: white supremacists have lynched the divine and those associated with the divine.²⁷ The Christ figure and the oppressed Black humans are tortured and murdered. They share Spirit and they share crucifixion—that is, humiliation, oppression, torture, and murder. They mutually recognize Spirit in each other. Indeed, Spirit breaks down the divide between the Christ figure and

Black humans. Again, then, in the work of Du Bois, the rigid binary between humanity and divinity is challenged. That, in part, is the everyday miracle presented in the story.

The essay that immediately precedes and is paired with “Jesus Christ in Texas” concludes with these words:

In fine, can we not, black and white, rich and poor, look forward to a world of
Service without Servants?

A miracle! you say? True. And only to be performed by the Immortal Child (58).

“The Immortal Child” signifies Du Bois’ this-worldly, heavenly hope: a liberatory, bright future for this world. There is a chapter in *Darkwater* titled, “The Immortal Child,” and it begins with these words:

If a man die shall he live again? We do not know. But this we do know, that our children’s children live forever and grow and develop toward perfection as they are trained. All human problems, then, center in the Immortal Child and his education is the problem of problems.²⁸

In “Jesus Christ in Texas” there is one child—the white daughter of the colonel. Is she the Immortal Child? For good reason, we think of Du Bois’ “The Immortal Child” as the “dark children” who deserve a broad-based, high quality liberal arts education to help them flourish as individuals and democratic citizens. Such an education would, among other things, address institutional racism and how to dismantle it. It would include practical skills, but the emphasis would not be on how to train students “as servants and labors and

mechanics to increase the land's industrial efficiency" (102). Ultimately, it would "aim to develop human souls; to make all intelligent; to discover special talents and genius" (101). This is the education that Black children are denied and yet deserve. But about two-thirds of the way through the chapter, "The Immortal Child," Du Bois asked, "But why am I talking simply of 'colored' children? Is not the problem of their education simply an intensification of the problem of educating all children?" (103). Du Bois concludes the chapter by stating that if the world is to make the "future safe," then it must educate "the Immortal Child. And that child is of all races and all colors. All children are the children of all and not of individuals and families and races" (106). It's clear, then, that the "Immortal Child" is all children and the "infinite possibilities"—alternative futures—that they represent.

And so, in "The Immortal Child" Du Bois asked, "Is democracy a failure? Train up citizens that will make it succeed...Do we despise women? Train them as workers and thinkers and not as playthings, lest future generations ape our worst mistake. Do we despise darker races? Teach the children its fatal cost in spiritual degradation and murder, teach them that to hate [n-word and a Chinese slur] is to crucify souls like their own" (104). In these lines, Du Bois implored his readers to honor the child, to acknowledge its spirit, and to educate the child to love justice, work for democracy, and abjure misogyny and racism. Anything short of such humane training is to inflict on them "spiritual degradation."

The white daughter of the colonel is among "the immortal children." She is yet to be fully trained in the ways of racism and hatred. Her spirit is relatively intact, and hence she can still recognize the divine, discern the everyday miracle of the presence of Spirit in the world. For the daughter, white is not the definition of divinity. It is easy and natural for her to see the dark stranger as love and Spirit. Du Bois' hope is in this child and all children, that is, in the future that they *potentially* represent. This hope is not in a replication of the present

but an alternative future in which humanity is at one with Spirit, and in which white supremacy, racism, and misogyny have no place. “The Immortal Child” was Du Bois’ hope, but it was a dark, wild hope. It nurtured his work and vision, and it was rooted in a world where a Black Jesus Christ is lynched by a white mob. The hope offers no answer to the question, will the white colonel’s daughter eventually join the lynching mob? Hope doesn’t answer questions, it only asks them.



In Du Bois’ speculative fiction piece, “The Comet,” there is another “white daughter” on whom some hope rests, at least momentarily, before that hope is shattered by the realities of white supremacy. “The Comet” begins with *how things are* (that is, with the solidity of anti-Black racism), moves to *how things could be* (a new age in which racism and anthropocentrism dissolves), and concludes abruptly by returning to *how things are*. Hope is located perilously between the first and third moment of *how things are*—that is, hope between the hard, cruel facts of racism in North America. Speculative fiction, here, is used to depict both *how things are* and *how things could be*, drawing on religious and biblical themes. In particular, we are presented with a new Eve and Adam in a post-anthropocentric world created by a great catastrophe (not unlike Noah and the flood). By means of this fictional primordial couple and New World, Du Bois offered a glimpse of Spirit, humanity, and the more-than-human coming together at the end of history, or at least at the end of racist history.

“The Comet” starts with a Black man who is both invisible and hypervisible: “Few ever noticed him save in a way that stung.”²⁹ His name is Jim, but the narrator initially refers to him as “the messenger.” Angels are messengers, and this particular messenger will bring a

message to the world not with trumpets blaring but with a quiet integrity. Having descended into the dark depths of New York City, he will emerge in the light of a new age and earns his place as the new Adam. Once again, religion plays a powerful role in Du Bois' fiction.

Jim, the messenger, works in a bank. The president of the bank sends him into "the lower vaults" to look for some records. The narrator notes (but it could be Jim's inward thoughts) that this task is "too dangerous of more valuable men" (124). The vaults are dark, damp, dirty, rickety, and rat infested. And so Jim descends into "the bowels of the earth, under the world." While Jim is below, the tail of a comet passes the earth and poisons it with its gases. Underneath the city, Jim hears a "boom" and eventually notices a strange odor. When, after much struggle, he finally emerges from the depths, he discovers dead bodies wherever he looks and goes. Noah was saved by a great ark; Jim is saved by dangerous labor in the pit of the earth.

Wherever Jim goes in the city, he sees nothing but scenes of death. It is also the first time in his life he can move freely through the city without the scourge of racism. At one point he realizes that he is hungry and he enters a restaurant to find some food: "Yesterday, they would not have served me," he whispered" (126). His freedom from racism, however, comes at a heavy price: he is all alone and everywhere he hears only silence. Yet the silence is suddenly broken by a woman's voice: "The human voice sounded in his ears like the voice of God" (127). In the midst of cataclysm, when all humankind and history seems to be suspended or erased, Jim hears the woman's voice as divine, subtly registering the interconnectedness of the human and Spirit. But that subtle recognition is short lived. Jim runs to the aid of the woman who is screaming, "Hello—hello—help," but when they come face to face, silence returns:

They stared a moment in silence. She had not noticed before that he was a Negro. He had not thought of her as white...Yesterday, he thought with bitterness, she would scarcely have looked at him twice. He would have been dirt beneath her silken feet... Of all the sorts of men she had pictured as coming to her rescue she had not dreamed of one like him (127).

Eventually, the two of them—Jim, the Black man and Julia, the white woman—drive around the city in search of life, but “everywhere was silence and death—death and silence!” (128). They go to the central telephone exchange in an attempt to contact someone, anyone: “hello?...Would the world *answer*? Was the world—Silence!” (129). A terrible silence is how they hear a world without humans: a dreadful, anthropocentric silence. The natural agency of the more-than-human comet silences the anthropocentric world.

And then it happens: the anthropocentric silence, death, and despair subtly shift or give way to a more ecocentric world of silence, reverence, and hope. The anthropocentric world is gone, but a new, more inclusive world is preparing to welcome the new human couple: Jim and Julia now “seemed to move in a world silent and asleep,—not dead. They moved in quiet reverence...All nature slept until—” (130). The more-than-human is quiet, resting, and waiting *until* Jim and Julia fathom “the vision of a mighty beauty”: the couple, Black and white, can begin humankind anew in a freshly awakened, non-anthropocentric world. And they are now able hear more than silence in the new world. They hear “the lapping of the waters,” “where the water called below,” the waters that speak of a new world and that swallowed up the old one that “lies beneath the waters now” (130). They perceive the “mighty beauty”—spirit, humanity, and the more-than-human intertwining and conspiring for the sake of a new beginning, vision,

and hope. The more-than-human is not depicted as outside humanity but as an integral feature of the human-divine drama. The announcement of the new bride couple and fresh beginning for humanity is proclaimed by a star: “low on the horizon lay a long, white star—mystic, wonderful!” (132).

The agent that brings this message of a new beginning, then, is this bright object of the more-than-human. The agency of the star joins the agency of the comet. Nothing less than the end of human history is required for the white woman to grasp the senselessness of racism and the humanity—and spirit-filled nature—of Jim. And the agency required to erase racism is located in the more-than-human, namely, in the comet. Sometimes called an act of God, the comet brings both justice and a fresh start. The more-than-human bestows on Jim the recognition of his humanity. Now that the anthropocentric world has been destroyed, Julia has new perspective: “how foolish our human distinctions seem—now.” Jim responds, “Yes—I was not—human, yesterday” (131). It is the new, ecocentric world that allows Jim to be fully human. Ecocentric is not anti-human.

When Jim notes that death is “the leveler!,” she responds “And the revealer”:

A vision of the world had risen before her. Slowly the mighty prophecy of her destiny overwhelmed her. Above the dead past hovered the Angel of Annunciation.... She was neither high nor low, white nor black, rich nor poor. She was primal woman; mighty mother of all men to come and Bride of Life. She looked upon the man beside her and forgot all else but his manhood... She saw him glorified. He was no longer a thing apart, a creature below, a strange outcast of another clime and blood, but her Brother Humanity incarnate, Son of God and great All-Father of the race to be (131).

Before the comet erased human history, the enactment of this spiritual vision—a Black man marrying a white woman—had been a felony for most of U.S. history. Until as recently as 1967, sixteen states still had deemed interracial marriage a crime. Anti-miscegenation laws sought to crush and punish this “vision of a mighty beauty.”³⁰ But with the sudden erasure of such cruel laws and all that they mean, the union of Jim and Julia is “a thought divine, splendid” (132).

Here Du Bois reached for and employed religious images and themes in order to show not only the *injustice* of racism but also the *beauty* of a post-racist, post-anthropocentric world, crafting a utopian futurity that inspires ethical possibility by imagining profound social, political, and environmental transformation. In “The Comet,” justice and beauty unite in what Du Bois considered to be the truth of “the mighty human rainbow of the world,” a phrase from the concluding poem of *Darkwater*. Justice was always Du Bois’ first priority, but he also sought, by means of aesthetics, to portray the beauty of a world free of racism, patriarchy, economic oppression, and anthropocentrism. Spirit, or the divine, is depicted as the *earthly* locus for both justice and beauty, just as Jim is described as “Son of God”—as “Humanity incarnate”—and the more-than-human is depicted as a vital agent and integral feature of the divine-human drama.

Yet the promise of the new couple and an antiracist world are dashed with the arrival of Julia’s father and a group of white men. As it turns out, the anthropocentric world did not come to an end—“only New York.” Jim is called “a [n-word]” and is almost lynched (133). Julia does state, quietly, that Jim rescued her, but she “did not look at him again.” As Jim makes his way past the mob, a bystander cries out, “Well, what do you think of that?...of all New York, just a white girl and a [n-word]!” (133). So much for Julia’s revelation and

transformation. It lasted only as long as the comet had eclipsed racism and racism's grip on the present. There was a brief moment of freedom, beauty, and justice as the Veil was lifted and removed. But the cataclysm was not total, history and the status quo returned, and the Veil fell back to earth.

“The Comet” is the last chapter in Du Bois’ book, *Darkwater*, and the only chapter that does not pair a discursive essay with a short story or poem. Clearly, as Du Bois sought to bring his book to a conclusion, he looked to the future—a speculative, fictional future. He employed the moral imagination to create something new, something not otherwise present a post-racial and post-anthropocentric world. This imaginative act fashions a titanic conditional: “imagine, just imagine, if *this* were to happen...” By means of this fantastical story, Du Bois intimated that humanity could perhaps overcome racism if given a fresh start. He crafted a utopian futurity that inspires ethical possibility by imagining profound social and political transformation. The story is an exercise in hope. The story is an exercise in the education of the “the Immortal Child,” for each birth, however modestly, represents humanity’s chance at a fresh start. To those who will populate the next generation, the story announces—as might a biblical angel—this could be your future.

The form of this hope, however, is but another example of dark, wild hope—hope rooted in death, vulnerability, and despair.³¹ After all, the hopeful vision requires a cataclysmic event. The immensity of the catastrophe is but an indication of the immensity of “the Veil”—that catastrophe—and the challenge to overcome it. And the hopeful vision of a post-racial, post-anthropocentric world is situated precariously between the racist world before and after the comet’s destruction. The hope is provisional, conditional, vulnerable, even “fantastic.” This is not to discount the work and practice of such a precarious, dark hope. It is only to make clear that when Du Bois looks to the future, the sight is neither clear

nor certain nor optimistic. A post-racist world is far from an inevitable future. “The Comet”—the culminating chapter of *Darkwater*—looks forward, offering a powerful vision of justice and beauty. Yet in the end, the future looks gravely like the present and the past.



Du Bois chose to conclude *Darkwater* with his poem, “A Hymn to the Peoples.” As a particular aesthetic *form*, hymns are religious songs or poems that express a people’s praise of the divine but also their profound sorrow and joy, their despair and hope. Hymns are built on and create solidarity—even when sung in private, as when the slave moved alone in the woods to run an errand, singing “wild songs, revealing at once the highest joy and the deepest sadness” (to quote from Frederick Douglass).³² Du Bois’ concluding poem is no different from other hymns, except that it is a hymn *to the peoples*. It is not a hymn of one people or religion, but a hymn of many peoples and their many faiths. Moreover, although the hymn is at times addressed to “Lord of Lands and Seas!” and to “World-Spirit,” it is also addressed “to the Peoples,” and concludes with these lines: “Help us, O Human God in this Thy Truce,/To make Humanity divine!”³³ The hymn, then, is addressed to both an immanent divinity and a divine humanity.

This ambiguity, if that is what it is, is fitting of a spirituality that does not conform to the rigid divine/human binary. The poem also refuses the simplistic, religious/secular binary. Once again, Du Bois’ poetry and fiction resist the facile impulse to categorize complex human belief and practice into one of two categories, secular or religious. Neither an orthodox Christian nor a conventional atheist, Du Bois intricately interwove religious and secular language, yielding a spiritual sensibility that speaks of a “World-Spirit”—a spirituality not unlike the Romantic pantheistic “One Life.” But if this Du Boisian sensibility is akin

to “One Life” spirituality, it also breaks from it. For “World-Spirit,” found in the last lines of a book that details the pain and sorrow of anti-Black racism, would seem to repudiate the gentle, “healthy-minded” presence of Wordsworth’s and Coleridge’s “One Life” spirituality. Du Bois both employed and troubled what we might call Romantic spirituality.

“A Hymn to the Peoples” is a plea for the diverse peoples of the world to join in solidarity and confess their sins (their unethical deeds), repenting of them in order that war, hatred, and racism would cease. This promethean task—that humans change their ways—requires that humans become god-like. Once again, as in “The Comet,” the measure of the vast challenge (to overcome oppression) is shown by the immensity of what is required (to become god-like). The hymn is an appeal to both the divine and to humans themselves to “make Humanity Divine!”

The poem begins:

O Truce of God!
 And primal meeting of the Sons of Man,
 Foreshadowing the union of the World!
 From all the ends of earth we come!
 Old Night, the elder sister of the Day,
 Mother of Dawn in the golden East,
 Meets in the misty twilight with her brood,
 Pale and black, tawny, red and brown,
 The mighty human rainbow of the world,
 Spanning its wilderness of storm (134).

The “truce” is *the break from suffering*—the radical, transformative *disruption*—that is to come at dawn, at the potential beginning of a new era. As in “The Comet,” the new era is a post-racist time, its harbinger being when “Pale and black, tawny, red and brown/The mighty human rainbow of the world” comes together, “spanning its wilderness of storm,” and prefigures the solidarity of a possible New World. *That* is the vision, the conclusion, that Du Bois offered in *Darkwater*. Religiously, it is ecumenical in the spirit of the one Life:

So sit we all as one.
 So, gloomed in tall and stone-swathed groves,
 The Buddha walks with Christ!
 And Al-Koran and Bible both be holy! (134)

The temporal tones of the poem are futuristic, centering on the light that shines at dawn and the starlight that pierces the dark night, announcing the daylight that is to come:

And on the darkest midnight blaze the stars—
 The far-flown shadows of whose brilliance
 Drop like a dream on the dim shores of Time,
 Forecasting Days that are to these
 As day to night (134).

There is in the poem, then, much future light—“*Forecasting Days*” that will bring humanity out of the present darkness. But this future light is matched by the present pain and despair caused by moral evil—by cruel, wrongful human deeds. The poem accuses humans of

murder, greed, hypocrisy, tyranny, and of despising “*the Soul that breathes within*” (134; emphasis added). The accusation is that humans have departed from their Soul-full, spirit-filled status, bringing destruction and ruin to fellow humans.

The poem then concludes with human contrition and *a cry for help*. As Du Bois understood, the cry for help is a characteristic *form* of the hymn, especially of the Sorrow Songs. And as he also understood, the cry for help is a characteristic form of religion, especially slave religion and what William James described as “sick-soul” religion (see Chapter **). It is noteworthy that Du Bois began “Of Our Spiritual Strivings,” the first chapter in *The Souls of Black Folks*, with these lines from Arthur Symons: “O water, voice of my heart. . . All night long crying with a mournful cry.”³⁴ He then paired *the mournful cry* with musical notation from the Sorrow Song, “No Body Knows the Trouble That I’ve Seen.” For Du Bois, *a cry for help* is central to religion and to Black spiritual striving. And hence when we come to the last lines of the poem and of *Darkwater* itself, Du Bois concluded with both spiritual striving and a plea for help, “Save us.” With “bowed hearts,” humans now understand the corruption of their ways; they “see the poverty of Wealth” and “know the Anarchy of Empire” (135). After these twin anti-capitalism and anti-empire remorseful declarations, the poem closes with these lines:

Save us, World-Spirit, from our lesser selves!
 Grant us that war and hatred cease,
 Reveal our souls in every race and hue!
 Help us, O Human God, in this Thy Truce,
 To make Humanity divine! (135).

There is a plea for “World-Spirit” to raise humans up from their criminal ways and deliver them from racism, hatred, and war. “World-Spirit,” we have seen, is in many ways resonant with Wordsworth’s and Coleridge’s “one Life within us and abroad...at once the Soul of each, and God of all.”³⁵ Spirit is immanent, belonging to humans, yet also somehow transcends humans, at least transcending their “lesser selves.” Spirit, then, is neither identical to nor alien to humankind: both alterity and commonality are present. This “World-Spirit” that troubles the strict human-divine binary is powerfully expressed in the final two lines: “Help us, O Human God...To make Humanity divine!” The divine *in* and *of* humanity is called upon to assist humanity in achieving their status as spirit-filled, soulful creatures. Perhaps only when humans gather together in a revolutionary truce—in a disruptive break from violence and hatred—will the divine of humans be revealed. In that event, we perceive the “Human God”—a phrase that radically upends the facile secular/religious binary.

“A Hymn to the Peoples” is clearly a plea for global peace and racial harmony—that “the mighty human rainbow of the world” would prevail over hatred and bigotry. The poem was initially written for the occasion of the 1911 Universal Races Congress, an international event held in London that was dedicated to combatting racism and fostering mutual understanding between “the peoples of the West and those of the East.” Knowing this context elucidates the “universal,” ecumenical nature of the poem, including such lines as: “The Buddha walks with Christ!/And Al-Koran and Bible both be holy!” It would be a mistake, however, to limit the significance of the poem to the event that initially occasioned it. Du Bois *chose* to conclude *Darkwater* with it. He ended *Darkwater* with a vision of—and an entreaty for—hope and unity. We must acknowledge Du Bois’ choice here. With *Darkwater*’s ending, we ought to pause and linger.

We must also, however, consider another context of “A Hymn to the Peoples,” and that is *Darkwater* itself—the entirety of the book. The poem concludes the chapter, “The Comet,” a short story that shoots troubling arrows through “the mighty human rainbow of the world.” Remember: a vision of hope and unity was offered to us in “The Comet,” too, only to be abruptly shattered. Du Bois’ hopeful visions—as well as his Romantic spirituality—are always tempered and forged in realities of pain and injustice. In *Darkwater*, such realities are powerfully depicted when Du Bois wrote of how Black women are abused and oppressed variously by white men and women but also by Black men. In the essay chapters, “Of the Ruling of Men” and especially “The Damnation of Women,” Du Bois mounted arguments for dignity and rights of women in light of unjust oppression. These arguments are greatly enhanced—not only “supplemented”—by the short stories that accompany the chapter essays. In “The Call,” the short story that accompanies “Of the Ruling of Men,” a solitary Black woman courageously answers the call of God (and God, it turns out, is also Black). In the short story, “The Children of the Moon,” which accompanies “The Damnation of Women,” we again have a brave Black woman who skillfully leads Black men to their freedom. These short stories, in conjunction with the essays, depict not only the suffering and oppression of Black women but also their wisdom, strength, and mighty achievements. The force of the essays and short stories is, in part, to *move* readers to grasp this imaginative horizon: if Black women can achieve such leadership and accomplishments under conditions of brutal oppression, think of how the world would benefit from them should they be released from their unjust chains and burdens.

Again, however, reality runs up against vision. In the “The Children of the Moon,” for example, the powerful Black woman leader works to liberates her people, but she herself can only glance from afar at the freedom for which she fought. The vision of freedom and

hence hope is rooted in the liberatory work of this Black, female Moses figure, but racist and misogynist reality determines the story's conclusion. Like so many courageous Black women in the U.S., the protagonist fights for the freedom of others that she herself never experiences.

This tense, tragic commingling of vision and reality is perhaps most powerfully displayed in the poem, "The Riddle of the Sphinx" (formerly titled "The Burden of Black Women"). In Chapter Two of *Darkwater*, this poem accompanies the trenchant essay "The Souls of White Folk." In that essay, Du Bois crafted a persuasive and moving account of Euro-American white people systematically oppressing people of color globally. White empires claim global privilege and possession: "Then always, somehow, some way, silently but clearly, I am given to understand that *whiteness is the ownership of the earth* forever and ever, Amen!"³⁶ The intensity of the critique of whiteness in the essay continues and flows into the accompanying poem, "The Riddle of the Sphinx." The white empires—"The white world's vermin and filth"—are "spoilers of women" and "unarmed men."³⁷ This empirical reality, so forcefully described and judged ("I hate them, Oh!/I hate them well"), will one day be challenged when "the black Christ be born!" and "daughters of even-song" sing:

Black mother of the iron hills that ward the blazing sea,
 Wild spirit of a storm-swept soul, a-struggling to be free,
 Where 'neath the bloody finger-marks thy riven bosom quakes,
 Thicken the thunders of God's Voice and lo! a world awakes! (27).

The Black mother with her a *wild* spirit, "a-struggling to be free," and the Black Christ will jointly awaken the world. "God's Voice" announces hope, newness, and change, but in the

midst of “the bloody finger-marks.” Again, Du Bois deliberately brought together, tensely, two different sets of existential affect: the despair and anxiety of struggle and oppression; and the resilience and hope of new, liberatory ways of life. A religious vocabulary is employed to capture both sides of this tragic equation. Romantic, panentheistic, one Life spirituality is engraved and stained by bloody finger-marks.

The white empire has brought and will bring suffering to the four corners of the earth, “Till the devil’s strength be shorn” by the Black mother and the Black Christ (27). In the context of the poem’s simultaneously holding together of hope and despair, vision and reality, the final lines of the poem seem less about a *future* time than a *continuous process* of suffering, struggle, and “awaking.” That process, among other things, relies on a cooperation between the human and the divine, or perhaps on a divine understanding of the human and a human understanding of the divine. In either case, Du Bois rejected the rigid human-divine binary as well as the despair-hope binary. In its place, we find a dark, wild hope animated by an immanent spiritual vision in the context of struggle and suffering.

5) *Dancing on a Flaming World*

In this chapter, I have focused on the role of religion and form (including cultivation) in Du Bois’ poetry and short stories. Among other things, this focus allowed me to show how Du Bois both belongs to radical Romanticism and also challenges and expands it. Like Wordsworth and Coleridge, Du Bois’ poetry and short stories defied destructive binaries that radically separate the human from the divine, and the human and the divine from the natural world. His “naturalistic,” Romantic spirituality conceived of the divine as working immanently in humans, history, and the natural world. Moreover, like the Romantics before

him, Du Bois used *form* and *cultivation* in pursuit of liberatory aims. He employed and uniquely inhabited forms of poetry, hymns, psalms, and biblical stories, producing vivid, striking social critique that revealed the shape and horror of white supremacy. When faced with deep-seated, persistent anti-Black racism that was immune to “reason” and other forms of “enlightenment” via social scientific or scholarly arguments, Du Bois employed literary forms in an attempt to address both the mind and heart, the reason and affect, of his white readership. Like Wordsworth, he sought to cultivate in his readers a range of pathos, affect, and praxis oriented empathy. This attempt was for the sake of social change but also a powerful form of *truth telling*. Whether or not his white audience would listen or understand, Du Bois would speak the truth to them in a language full of powerful imagery, concrete characters, and compelling narratives. At the same time for his Black readers, Du Bois would honor their struggle and suffering, their victories and achievements with poetry and short stories that centered their experiences under white supremacy—behind the Veil. He would also offer them a complex, dark wild hope.

Du Bois offered his art to promote existential understanding, social critique, and social change. As we saw in Chapter ** where I discussed the “Criteria of Negro Art,” Du Bois was adamant that art—and specifically Black art—should have a robust role in civic engagement. However, I also wish to note that Du Bois celebrated not only various forms of Black art but *Black lives as works of art*. Listen, for example, to this passage from his autobiography, *Dusk of Dawn*:

Art is not simply works of art; it is the spirit that knows Beauty, that has music in its soul and the color of sunsets in its headkerchiefs; that can dance on a flaming world and make the world dance, too. Such is the soul of the Negro.³⁸

Here, Du Bois described art as the matter and manners of daily lives—in sunsets but also headkerchiefs. The everyday courage, struggle, beauty, and spirit of Black lives are honored as forms of art. Du Bois' own art—in the written word—attempted to convey the richness of this day-to-day, living Black art. It is an art that experiences and expresses the “flaming” world—a world on fire—but also that dances “on a flaming world” and even makes “the world dance.”

Art that dances in morning and mourning, that honors the everyday and everyday people, that reaches hearts and minds, that critiques and transforms—such is the aesthetic of radical Romanticism. Du Bois belongs to this tradition even as he transforms it.³⁹

Notes

¹ Du Bois, “The Riddle of the Sphinx,” *Darkwater* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 26.

² Du Bois, “A Litany at Atlanta,” in *Darkwater*, pp. 12-13.

³ Du Bois, “Children of the Moon,” in *Darkwater*, p. 94.

⁴ See for example, David Levering Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2000), pp. 19, 175.

⁵ Jonathon Kahn, *Divine Discontent* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 5.

⁶ Herbert Aptheker, ed., *Creating Writings by W E B Du Bois* (New York: Kraus-Thomson, 1985), p. xii.

⁷ Edward J. Blum, *W. E. B. Du Bois: American Prophet* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), pp. 153-54.

⁸ Aptheker, ed., *Creating Writings by W E B Du Bois*, p. xii; Blum, *W. E. B. Du Bois: American Prophet*, p. 154.

⁹ Jonathon Kahn, *Divine Discontent*, p. 13.

¹⁰ Russell B. Goodman, *American Philosophy and the Romantic Tradition* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 129. Relatedly, Ulf Schulenberg claims that Romanticism is “an important phase of a development that culminates in (neo)pragmatism” (Schulenberg, *Romanticism and Pragmatism* [New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015], p. 5).

¹¹ Allison Blackmond Laskey, “Of Forms and Flow: Movement through Structure in *Darkwater’s* Composition,” *The New Centennial Review* 15:2 (2015): 109.

¹² Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 111.

¹³ By “creative fictional pieces,” I refer to the poetry and short stories. However, I am uneasy with referring globally to Du Bois’ poetry as “fictional,” because his poetry often depicts real or actual events, sorrows, and oppression.

¹⁴ For example, Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower*, Louise Erdrich, *Future Home of the Living God*, and Carmen Maria Machado, *Her Body and Other Parties* [add full REF]

¹⁵ Du Bois, *Darkwater* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. xli.

¹⁶ Lawrie Balfour, “*Darkwater*’s Democratic Vision,” *Political Theory* 38 (2010): 539.

¹⁷ Keith E. Byerman, *Seizing the Word: History, Art, and Self in the Work of W. E. B. Du Bois* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010), p. 182.

¹⁸ Du Bois, “The Riddle of the Sphinx,” *Darkwater*, p. 27.

¹⁹ Du Bois, “A Litany at Atlanta,” in *Darkwater*, pp. 12-13 (henceforward, references to “A Litany at Atlanta” will be embedded in the text).

²⁰ Arnold Rampersad claims that “the essential debate in ‘A Litany of Atlanta’ is not between a man and a distant God, but within the speaker himself...he finds himself wavering between the rival forces of radical anger and divine reason, between human despair and sublime faith” (Arnold Rampersad, *The Art and Imagination of W.E.B. Du Bois* [New York: Schocken Books, 1990], p. 105. While I take the debate “between a man and a distant God” to be central to the poem, I appreciate Rampersad bringing attention to the equally important internal struggle within Du Bois.

²¹ Du Bois, “The Princess of the Hither Isles,” in *Darkwater*, p. 38 (henceforward, references to “The Princess of the Hither Isles” will be embedded in the text).

²² In an excellent article on Du Bois’ short stories in *Darkwater*, Hee-Jung Serenity Joo refers to the conclusions of Du Bois’ stories as intentional “failures”: “I look at moments in his *Darkwater* stories in which he could easily resolve the instances of social injustice he depicts

but chooses not to, resulting in the world staying the same or going back to how it was. These narrative failures are...scathing critiques of the historical specificities of his time. Moreover, I regard these moments of narrative failure as ones of political resistance, a rejection of ideas of social development rooted in capitalist trajectories” (Hee-Jung Serenity Joo, “Racial Impossibility and Critical Failure in W.E.B. Du Bois's *Darkwater*,” *Science Fiction Studies* 46:1(2019) 107).

²³ Du Bois, “Of Beauty and Death,” *Darkwater*, p. 120.

²⁴ Du Bois, “The Prayers of God,” *Darkwater*, p. 121 (henceforward, references to “The Prayers of God” will be embedded in the text).

²⁵ Keith E. Byerman, *Seizing the Word: History, Art, and Self in the Work of W. E. B. Du Bois* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010), p. 191.

²⁶ Du Bois, “Jesus Christ in Texas,” *Darkwater*, p. 59 (henceforward, references to “Jesus Christ in Texas” will be embedded in the text).

²⁷ As Thomas Meagher puts it: “in lynching blacks (as occurs in ‘Jesus Christ in Texas’) they are lynching the divine” (Thomas Meagher, “*Darkwater*’s Existentialist Socialism,” *Socialism and Democracy* 32:3 (2018): 95.

²⁸ “The Immortal Child,” *Darkwater*, p. 95. Henceforward, all references to “The Immortal Child” will be embedded in the text.

²⁹ Du Bois, “The Comet,” in *Darkwater*, p. 124 (henceforward, references to “The Comet” will be embedded in the text).

³⁰ On a personal note, to forbid this “mighty beauty” would be to deprive me of the greatest beauty in my life—my partner and our three children.

³¹ “Irony,” too, could be added to the grounding of this hope. As Eric Sundquist wrote of “The Comet,” Du Bois’ “allegorical scenarios could not easily translate philosophical

consciousness into revolutionary political actuality but more often ended in irony” (Eric J. Sundquist, *To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993], p. 540).

³² Frederick Douglas, *Narrative of the Life*, in *Autobiographies*, ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. (New York: The Library of America, 1994), p. 23.

³³ Du Bois, “A Hymn to the Peoples,” in *Darkwater*, p. 135 (henceforward, references to “A Hymn to the Peoples” will be embedded in the text).

³⁴ Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folks*, p. 7.

³⁵ Coleridge, “The Eolian Harp,” in *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: The Major Works*, ed. H. J. Jackson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), lines 26 and 48.

³⁶ Du Bois, *Darkwater*, p. 16. Emphasis added.

³⁷ Du Bois, “The Riddle of the Sphinx,” in *Darkwater*, p. 26.

³⁸ Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn*, ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp.74-75.

³⁹ I wish to state, again, that to claim that Du Bois “belongs” to radical Romanticism is not to claim that he only or mainly belongs to this tradition. The influences on him were various, and many will want to make a case for Du Bois belonging to their camp or tradition. This is to be expected and is as it should be of any powerful thinker and artist.