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**AN EXPERIMENT IN CRITICAL MODERNISM:
ESCHATOLOGY, PROPHECY, AND REVELATION IN LEWIS,
HUXLEY, AND GOLDING**

by

Jonathon Penny

Supervised by Professor Dominic Manganiello

Thesis submitted to the
Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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Department of English
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ABSTRACT

AN EXPERIMENT IN CRITICAL MODERNISM:
ESCHATOLOGY, PROPHECY, AND REVELATION IN LEWIS, HUXLEY, AND
GOLDING

Jonathon Penny

Department of English

Doctor of Philosophy

Chapters I through III of this thesis seek to advance the study of apocalyptic form, themes, and imagery in fiction, and more specifically British literature from the twentieth century, by demonstrating that critics of the period have tended to apply an exclusively secular concept of literary apocalypse informed by a deep skepticism about the scriptural tradition whence it comes. Chapter I establishes both the significant value of and oversight in critical discourse on this topic, including an analysis of major works on the subject (Kermode and Frye). Chapter II examines the character of Revelation as both sacred scripture and literary object, and posits a model of secularization that accounts for the cumulative assumptions made by what I have termed “critical modernism” about literary apocalypse, showing that this model delimits critical uses of apocalypse to ethical apocalypse, principally in the guise of eschatological anxiety, and discourages the study of texts that involve scriptural apocalypse in other ways. Chapter III identifies and defines prophecy and revelation as companion dimensions to eschatology, and suggests

ways of analyzing apocalyptic elements that will help focus and thus enhance the critical use of apocalyptic language. The thesis argues that prophecy and revelation are overlooked as apocalyptic elements chiefly because they occur in a “second stream” of texts that considers the spiritual dimensions of scriptural apocalypse as vital to the uses of apocalypse in the literature of the British twentieth century as the eschatological dimension is known to be.

The second part of the thesis (chapters IV-VI) addresses the absence in critical treatments of apocalypse of the texts in this second stream, and the concomitant absence of scholarship on them, by analyzing the uses of eschatology-as-hope in Wyndham Lewis' *Blast* and *Tarr*, the representation of prophetic vocation in Aldous Huxley's *Antic Hay* and *Time Must Have a Stop*, and the *ontos* of revelation in William Golding's *Pincher Martin*, *The Spire*, and *Darkness Visible*.

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DEH, VIENI . . .

INTRODUCTION

APOCALYPSE: AN EXPERIMENT IN CRITICISM

Now, there is an urgent need for experiment in criticism of a new kind, which will consist largely in a logical and dialectical study of the terms used. . . . In literary criticism we are constantly using terms which we cannot define, and defining other things by them. We are constantly using terms which have an *intension* and an *extension* which do not quite fit: theoretically they ought to be made to fit; but if they cannot, then some other way must be found of dealing with them so that we may know at every moment what we mean.

T.S. Eliot, "Experiment in Criticism" (1929)

Ask a typical undergraduate student to give you an example of an "apocalyptic fiction," and most will rattle off a list of movie titles as long as your arm, starting with *Apocalypse Now* and ending with *War of the Worlds* or, if their sense of what is apocalyptic extends beyond imagery, *Syriana*. Some few will manage to name a novel or two, probably sci-fi—*A Canticle for Liebowitz*, perhaps, or something by William Gibson. Not many of those texts will have much, if anything, to do with *the* Apocalypse:

the Book of Revelation that closes the New Testament.

This is because in the popular imagination the word “apocalypse” evokes cinemascesapes of nuclear disaster, alien invasion, pandemic disease, or natural catastrophe on a global scale. In such stories, the world erupts in a chaos of violence and flight, a backdrop of madness that serves to highlight the earnest, reasoned calm of the heroes working to divert or reverse the calamity, save a loved one from destruction, or, more poignantly, lay old grievances to rest in acts of contrition and forgiveness. These stories are increasingly set in the present or near-future. Recent examples include *The Day After Tomorrow*, *Deep Impact*, *Independence Day*, and *Armageddon*. Many of these are humanistic narratives tracking the survival of a handful of heroic characters in a “post-apocalyptic” world as they seek to rebuild a lost civilization. Starker narratives portray a world without natural order or affection; their protagonists struggle to live according to dead values, in futile conflict with the base, “primitive” tribal culture of violence and lust that surrounds them (Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* comes to mind).

The religious sensibility of such stories is usually limited to the dogged reason and stoic humanism of the heroes, or it is represented in cultic weirdness: fundamentalist enclaves, radical outgrowths of recognizable sects, bizarre caricatures or hybrids of now distinct world religions, all led by charismatic, if typically quirky (or predictably psychotic) figures. Overtly religious persons—sign-wearing Johanine hoboes, blonde-haired paramilitary fundamentalists, orange-robed automatons, and small congregations gathered in conspicuous and ornate prayer—are usually killed off without apology. The theme of these stories is, after all, either the indomitability of human reason and the human spirit, or the futility and entropic, inevitable end of human existence in a natural

world gone off the rails, and there is very little room for serious figures of religion in them.

Ask those same students to identify apocalyptic texts from the modern British canon and they will likely name *1984*, *Brave New World* or other dystopic or post-apocalyptic novels before titles like *To the Lighthouse*, *Finnegans Wake*, or *The Rainbow*, if only because the interest of the first texts, or the ‘apocalypse-ness’ of the images and themes in them, is more explicitly “apocalyptic” in the popular sense. Ask a scholar or critic of the same period the same question and you will likely get the second list. Of course, the texts called “apocalyptic” by critics of modernism differ considerably in scope and application from the popular, or, as Kermode calls them disdainfully, “demotic” apocalypses (*Sense* 96). The modern canon focuses on representations of “personal” apocalypse, chiefly eschatological in theme, as an outgrowth of larger socio-political concerns. Yet the humanism of these canonical and “demotic” fictions alike springs from the same factors, and the similarity of their use of apocalyptic elements, however different in kind or scale or subtlety, raises a question: what is the relation between literary apocalypse and scriptural apocalypse?

My interest in answering this question, and in observing how others might answer it, led to my twice teaching a course called “Modern Apocalypse: Secular or Sacred?” I challenged my students to develop their own theory of literary apocalypse based in part on the key texts of apocalypse theory: Frye’s theory of apocalyptic imagery, Kermode’s iconic study in endings, Paul Fiddes’ apologetic reading of eschatology in twentieth century fiction, and a handful of other essays, theoretical and critical, including several by Thomas Altizer and Paul Ricoeur. Along with the theory, we read three novels:

Huxley's *Time Must Have a Stop* and Golding's *Darkness Visible*, both of which feature in this thesis, and DeLillo's *White Noise* (in 2005), which I replaced in a second version of the course the following year with Pynchon's shorter and denser *The Crying of Lot 49*.

In the first version of the course I gave only the barest description of scriptural apocalypse, and encouraged students to seek it out independently, if at all. In the second version, I provided much more specific information about Revelation and the history of apocalypticism in the West. While a sampling of thirty students in two sections is hardly the basis for a scientific conclusion, the outcome was nonetheless telling: not one student was prepared to disconnect their sense of literary apocalypse from its scriptural origins, however tentative their grasp of those origins was.

The course raised two additional questions fundamental to my efforts to interrogate critical uses of apocalypse: "What is 'apocalypse' now?" and "What, critically and theoretically, should it be?" The first of these questions begs definition—theological and literary—of "apocalypse" and related terminology: an anatomy, if you will, of the literary elements of scriptural apocalypse—its structures, images, and themes—but also of its rhetorical constituents—eschatology, prophecy, and revelation. The second question requires an examination of critical uses of the term in an effort to understand how literary apocalyptic is taken to behave in relation to the scriptural. Clearly "scriptural" apocalypse works under a different set of purposes, responsibilities, and generic constraints than "literary" apocalypse, but it is also reasonable to expect that a work of literature be called apocalyptic because it borrows in some discernible way from scriptural apocalypse. Understanding the nature of that relation is essential to understanding the uses of "apocalypse" in critical modernism. What, for instance, would

be meant by a “secular” versus a “sacred” literary apocalyptic? Is the difference chiefly attitudinal? Is it located in the disposition of the author, characters, or story toward or away from scriptural meanings?

My own sense is that whatever its philosophical assumptions, literary apocalypse always draws its power from scriptural apocalypse, which gives us at once a “grammar of imagery” (Frye, *Anatomy* 141) and a useful rhetoric for engaging emotionally with the ends we experience. While scriptural apocalypse and apocalyptic writing have long been influential in Western thought and letters, modern literature is especially “disposed to apocalyptic, crisis-centred views of history” (Bradbury and McFarlane 20). Indeed, apocalyptic imagery and experience recur thematically and topically as profound imaginative preoccupations for the moderns. This is hardly surprising. The moderns inherited from the nineteenth century a religious skepticism, growing political dissent, and burgeoning social entropy. They experienced the industrial and technological nightmares of the World Wars, and the Shoah of the European Jewry, the death-knell of a modernism that had, by its political fantasies and early eugenical tendencies, helped create the conditions for the Third Reich. These facts are certainly immanent in modernism, and are still not far from our consciousness. Indeed, the global nuclear threat of the Cold War, mass-casualty terrorism, and the continued march of technology toward globalization and dehumanization give even more currency to the study of apocalyptic themes and images in postmodern literary culture.

Apocalypse resonates generally with British writers of the twentieth century in a variety of ways: topically and thematically (see Bull, ed.), philosophically (see Altizer, Derrida, and Ricoeur), figuratively as part of a “grammar of imagery” (Frye), structurally

(see Kermode, *Sense*), and generically (see Comens; Dellamora, ed.). More recently, Paul Fiddes has compared theological and literary apocalypse in, among British writers, James Joyce, T.S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf, Samuel Beckett, Doris Lessing, Julian Barnes, and John Fowles, arguing that modern texts are saturated with apocalyptic imagery and anxiety, even in some surprising cases. My own reading of these and other British novelists¹ confirms that apocalyptic is a defining generic preoccupation of the literature of the last one hundred years. But strangely, whether they deal with a specific writer or text or with many, critical treatments of apocalyptic in the twentieth century generally fail to connect apocalyptic elements in the literature with either scriptural apocalypse or the tradition of religious belief that might inform them. This is due in large measure to two notions: the critically touted modernist *penchant* for novelty (Pound's "make it new," for instance), and the thesis of Kermode's now ubiquitous study, *The Sense of an Ending*.

Pound's credo, and similar pronouncements, is, I think, tossed off rather easily without explanation. I intend to explore it in the context of the avant-garde in my treatment of Lewis and Vorticism (Chapter IV). For now, I refer to the hypothesis of Matei Calinescu's *Five Faces of Modernity* as a fine articulation of the core critical perceptions of modernity that have tended to inform critical discourse about the literature of the century more generally:

[A]esthetic modernity should be understood as a crisis concept involved in a threefold dialectical opposition to tradition, to the modernity of bourgeois civilization (with its ideals of rationality, unity, progress), and, finally, to itself, insofar as it perceives itself as a new tradition or form of authority. (10)

¹ Including, but not limited to, Wyndham Lewis, D.H. Lawrence, Ford Madox Ford, Evelyn Waugh, Aldous Huxley, Graham Greene, Iris Murdoch, William Golding, Anthony Burgess, Salman Rushdie, and Ian McEwan.

Note that Calinescu calls modernism a “crisis concept”: a crisis chiefly of aesthetic, political, and philosophical identity.

Kermode’s book—first published in 1967—is a persuasive work whose hypothesis has heavily influenced apocalypse theory, attaining the status of a quasi-catechism in the field. Kermode prefers to view apocalyptic as a function of narrative perspective and plot structure grown out of a sociological and technological anxiety, and thus as a fully realized, secular aesthetic that emphasizes closure, sublimating what he calls, in turns, “naive,” “spurious,” and “bogus” “apocalypticism” (9, 15, 96). Much of the criticism that has followed either takes Kermode’s essays as foundational, or shares in the assumption that canonical, non-vulgar twentieth century literature presupposes both the death of God and the demise of *bona fide* religious influence in modern letters.

The case is compelling. Modern texts are considered “apocalyptic” insofar as they resemble or recall the structures, language, activity, or imagery of scriptural apocalypse, or as they share or secularize certain of its thematic preoccupations. Rupture, fissure, decay, silence, uncertainty, alienation, death, and annihilation are problems which permeate aesthetic and thematic structures across the genres in modern literature. The moderns sought to resolve these problems (exclusively, it is supposed) by generating annihilative or continuative visions of aesthetic or socio-political apocalypse contiguous to the philosophical skepticism of the day, by creating or making room for new systems of reason or belief, or by restructuring the old systems. The second and third of these approaches were most common, even if they resulted in deliberate or incidental failure.

For example, in the preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), Oscar Wilde, that decadent, Victorian *enfant terrible*, seeks to establish grounds for a literature outside

of the tradition of ethics and morality that preceded him, claiming, among other things, that there “is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book.” His is an aesthetic theory that turns its back (unconvincingly, in *Dorian Gray*)² on anything but Beauty for its own sake. Consider additionally, as replacement ideologies, Joseph Conrad’s ultra-moral world of stoic pragmatism, James Joyce’s Dedalusian aesthetics of Irish nationalism (art as answer to paralysis, and a rejection of Irish identity caught up in dead myths), D.H. Lawrence’s ‘will to love’ as rooted in an “intense exaltation of unfallen human sexuality” (Bloom “Introduction” 11-12), and the values of loyalty and friendship exemplified (and heartbreakingly ironized) in Ford Madox Ford’s *The Good Soldier* (1927).

But whether they turned to philosophy, politics, mysticism, aesthetics, or religion, the modernists valued meaning for life, and their anxiety about the alienation and death of the subject pushed them to search for and articulate a tenable basis for living meaningfully in a skeptical age. That modern, guardedly empiricist desire for comprehensive or “closed” systems (James, “Will” 13) which might reduce or even eliminate their anxiety gave way in the 1960s to a radicalized “postmodern” ironization and subjectivization of the anxiety itself. Rather than yearn for closure, postmodern texts generally figure modern crises as individually and culturally correlative, and thus irresolvable. They use a grammar of skepticism or openness rather than one of closure or belief (of any kind). Moreover, they seem to prefer a meta-textual openness to

² Of course, Wilde was playing with the adjectival function of “moral” in his statement. Books are incapable on their own of any kind of Being, moral or otherwise, but the words and action of books are invested with either an authorial or imaginative moral sense. If he intended otherwise, he might have claimed that there is no such thing as a “moral” or an “immoral” artist: a harder claim to support. Whatever Wilde’s intention, *Dorian Gray* is a picture of Evil realized and incarnate, atheistic as that concept of evil might be, and the portrait is unflattering. In this sense it is a moral book through and through, and his early pronouncements serve principally to help us know where to find Wilde himself in his novel.

comprehension, chaos to closure, noise to silence: an aesthetics exemplified structurally in Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* (Eco 83), tentatively in some of Virginia Woolf's experimental fiction, and only fully in later novelists who reflect through their fiction a world marked by inevitable religious, political, cultural, and philosophical atrophy and waste.

Specific examples include Anthony Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange* (1962), Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* (1964), Iris Murdoch's *The Black Prince* (1973), Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (1988), Julian Barnes' *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters* (1989), and Martin Amis' *Time's Arrow* (1991). Each of these works emphasizes the impossibility of apprehending truth except on a very limited, personal level—the subjectivity of which is liberating, and the incompleteness of which makes that liberation futile. Each ironizes some traditional absolute—religion, history, culture, objectivity, stable knowledge of the Other—by foregrounding the subjectivity of narration in a meta-textual self-consciousness, and then by destabilizing even the subjective truth of the narration. In other words, the modern anxiety about not being able to know and the correlative modern will to believe that there must be some meaning-making system are replaced in postmodern literature by a will to *disbelieve* based on the assumption that we cannot *know* anything—or, worse yet, that there is nothing to know.

Both the anxiety and disaffection of modern fiction and the moral and emotional wastelands of early postmodern fiction are represented in critical modernism³ in decidedly apocalyptic terms, in part because the material is the same. The grammar of

³ This phrase is an invention of my own: “critical modernism” refers to the ways in which critical discourse has constructed our perceptions about periodic sensibilities and assumptions. Once critical discourse achieves a certain mass, especially where a degree of agreement is reached, criticism experiences inertia. That inertia is pronounced in apocalypse criticism: Kermodean apocalypse has become something of a juggernaut.

imagery and experience the postmoderns use is derivative of the grammar the moderns used, and the meta-textuality of postmodern literature is the very thing that evinces the relation. Even as the postmoderns negate hope and despair as equally “dead” options,⁴ they are conscious of the brutal vacuity of their own vision, and the futures it foretells, often with very striking and complex results. Burgess’ *A Clockwork Orange* and Ian McEwan’s *Cement Garden* (1978) are particularly disturbing examples, especially because, as for Orwell and Huxley before them, the substance of those visions is suggested to them in the present state of things, in a present reality that functions as the framework for a future truth. Their work, whether or not it means to, muses on the same problems that preoccupied the moderns, but with a fundamental difference: those problems are facts of postmodern life, and the texts that depict that life are reflections, at least in spirit, of an inexorable state of things rather than representations of a possibility should we carry on the way we are. This moral and philosophical ambivalence—the application of Wilde’s or Stephen Dedalus’ aesthetic visions—serves only to heighten readerly anxiety because of the black hopelessness of the irony and ambiguity of postmodern narrative. Without closure, without redemption, postmodern fiction rests its readers quite transparently in the menace of a meaningless and immanent stoppage or “damnation”: that is, in a negative and truncated apocalypse.

All of this is, I believe, accurate as a portrait of the age, or better as a very good caricature: one which emphasizes the secular face of modernist literature to the exclusion of any trace of ostensibly religious faith or belief. In the context of aesthetic modernism,

⁴ In “Will to Believe,” William James suggests that we cannot believe in propositions that are “dead” to us. By this he means that certain religious doctrines, belief systems, and philosophical principles are so alien to our sensibilities and habits of mind as to render them outside the range of possible adoption in practice.

such an emphasis may be appropriate, but it has become problematic precisely because it has become exclusive, and because the assumption of secularity has also been applied more broadly to twentieth-century literature on the whole. Specifically, treatment of apocalypse in literature has undergone a gradual and almost complete separation from the mediation of the ordained prophet, the promise of a Messianic Coming, and the hopes of an eternal and millennial peace. Critical interest in apocalypse is now almost exclusively eschatological, and this term, too, has lost some of its original theological significance. We speak of modern British literature as “apocalyptic” because of the violence of its aesthetic revolutions, or its thematic preoccupations with ends, personal, political, or social. In consequence, “apocalypse” has become a critical watchword for themes and aesthetic strategies oriented on endings. We have tended to disconnect the apocalyptic elements that occur in modern fiction from their roots in scriptural apocalypse and religious belief by emphasizing the eschatological, and reducing eschatology itself from a four-fold concern with the scriptural “last things”—death, resurrection, judgment, and immortality—to a generic concern with “last things”—any “last thing” at all that can serve as an analogue for the end of “the private time created by the unfolding of the self” (Calinescu 5).

The premise of my thesis is that a separation of apocalypse and its constituents from its original generic forms and functions and its concomitant theological significance limits our ability to identify and interpret its uses in literature. Of course, a critic who acknowledges the roots of apocalyptic need not necessarily be credulous, but disregarding those roots is a critical error because appropriations and renovations of the vocabulary of apocalypse and the grammar of images derived from it depend, even in

difference, on the original meanings. Furthermore, if it is to fully classify or define the meaning of apocalyptic elements, critical discussion of the literary nature of Revelation and other apocalyptic books must take into account their importance in the faiths of so many billions in the religious cultures of the past and present, including the faith, however tortured, of many of the figures canonical in British modernism (Eliot, Waugh, Auden, and Greene, for example). Even authors famous for their atheism, agnosticism, or personal theologies antagonistic to mainstream Judaeo-Christian institutions (Lewis, Joyce, Woolf, and Lawrence) confirm the cultural relevance of belief in modernity if only, as in the case of Joyce, via their inability to convincingly exorcise the forms and practices of belief from their own imaginations. Those forms and practices are at very least influences to be overcome, to be sublimated, drained of their significance, and applied anew.

That process, which I theorize in Chapter II, is a curious one. In our case, regardless of whether it functions aesthetically as part of a grammar of apocalyptic imagery or as a structural conceit, or theologically by means of explicit allusion to scriptural tradition, apocalypse necessarily evokes the rhetorical framework of apocalyptic scripture in some way. Since scripture is, for the religious, the revelation of the divine mind and will to the human through the medium of a prophet or spiritual gift of prophecy, the dimensions of prophecy and revelation are integral to the genre of apocalyptic scripture, and thus may inform a literature which borrows from or alludes to it. By restoring these dimensions to apocalypse theory, and by showing how they function in exemplary cases, I hope to establish that the apparent critical preference for the story of artistic secularism of modern British literature has overshadowed a

profoundly religious vision and anxiety manifest in the corpus, not just about the end of individual life, or even of history as it had been known, but about human longing and capacity for truth.

However, it is not my intention to “recover” ostensibly secular texts in the way that Fiddes or George Steiner might, though I think their work shares an affinity with my own. As indicated, I will posit the conditions of a secularization of apocalypse in a later chapter, for I accept that a so-called “apocalyptic” text can be secular in its intention, and in its attempt to appropriate the terms and elements of scriptural apocalypse. But there are two ideas generally not considered in “secular” uses of those terms. First, all apocalyptic texts rely on scriptural apocalypse for their meaning, even when that meaning is being turned on its head, or where the terms and elements of the source are being appropriated for other uses. (This leads in turn to two initial conclusions about critical treatment of apocalypse thus far: texts that we call “apocalyptic” may not always be so, and texts that *are* apocalyptic are possessed of a religious consciousness if not a religious sensibility.) Second, these texts are not representative of the whole of modernism. There are, after all, as many modernisms as there are modernists,⁵ including authors wishing to examine the metaphysical relevance of scriptural apocalypse in an ostensibly secular world, and that do so by reaching outside of “realism” and establishing a romantic mode in modern

⁵ See Calinescu and Nicholls. Calinescu identifies five faces of modernity: the “traditional aesthetes,” or the first modernists of the latter half of the 19th century (Stendhal for one), the avant-garde of the early 20th century, and decadence, kitsch, and postmodernism. It would seem that the avant-garde began to view itself as decadent (being the two principal “modernities”), and turned on its own efforts to create the third front of modernism’s “dialectical opposition” mentioned earlier. Nicholls critiques nine movements specifically, and perceives other modernisms as well. Kermode identifies two modernisms as well, easily locatable in his colleagues’ longer lists: that which adopted the “posture of the authoritarian traditionalist” (Pound, Eliot, and Lewis fit here), and that which preferred the posture of the “hipster anarchist” (the Beats, for instance, though in its day Vorticism might also have belonged: see *Sense* 121-22). See also Bradbury and McFarlane, “Name and Nature,” 27.

apocalyptic writing.⁶

Let me be clear. I do not assert that all twentieth-century literature is religious in its sensibility, but neither do I accept that it can be called apocalyptic or even eschatological without some qualification of its relation to scriptural source texts. I wish primarily to encourage a more careful application of these and related terms to ensure that the important links between modern “apocalyptic” fictions and the scriptural tradition from which they borrow, whatever the character or modality of those links may be, are not lost in a critical vocabulary that has tended to displace and/or appropriate theological and scriptural language a bit too cavalierly, and often with little regard for the vital, alternative currents that move in literature generally. More simply, I wish to elucidate an alternative *in*—not *to*—apocalypse theory as it is traditionally presented in critical discourse.

Specifically, my thesis makes two contributions to the study of apocalyptic forms in twentieth century British fiction. First, it establishes, by illustration and analysis, that the apocalyptic vocabulary of critical modernism is problematic, and suggests some ways of tightening up that vocabulary considerably. Second, it examines the traces of generic apocalypse and apocalyptic experience in works of Wyndham Lewis, Aldous Huxley, and William Golding, writers who are useful, though not exclusive, exemplars of the kind of authentic manifestations of apocalypse in modern fiction via the constituents I mentioned earlier: eschatology, prophecy, and revelation. Those traces are not merely the echoes of a compelling generic tradition, or useful metaphors in a literature of crisis, but are evidence that modern literature may be said to stand in an elliptical relation—both

⁶ See Douglas Robinson’s “Literature and Apocalyptic.” He posits five “hermeneutics” or modes of apocalyptic interpretation which I later suggest may constitute five modes of literary apocalypse as well (Robinson 373-74).

grammatical and geometrical—to the rhetorical power of the scriptural religion it is generally taken to have disavowed. That is, while much of the literature of the twentieth century ironizes or effaces scripture and scriptural religion, accepting the premise of Naturalism and the assumption of Realism that the idea of God is a psychological or cultural fantasy,⁷ a critical preference for these texts sublimates a significant parallel stream in modernism that reaches beyond the limits of the “real.” By evoking the terror, power, or promise of scriptural apocalypse through any one of its dimensions, the modern fictions I study here arc out toward the divine and draw it back upon themselves as an object for contemplation, reifying divine presence and will for its characters and readers alike, even if it refutes, resists, or fails to establish the terms of this rapprochement.

The Plan

I open Chapter I, “Terminal Visions,” with a survey of critical uses of “apocalypse” and related terminology, establishing more concretely than I have here that the common critical view assumes skepticism or secularity, and showing that even some treatments of modernism are beginning to question that assumption. I engage with Kermode and Frye—the foundational thinkers in apocalypse theory—as a way of interrogating the substance and nature of apocalyptic thinking original to critical modernism directly.

In Chapter II, “There and Back Again,” I comment on D.H. Lawrence’s

⁷ In some of these texts, God is a non-entity and a non-consideration. In others, God is a decidedly *sine qua si*: here the absence of theological reflection is intentionally conspicuous. Glicksberg, whose view of modernism is that it constitutes a total and tragic heresy terminal to a capacity for meaning in life, puts it nonetheless illuminatingly: “In contemporary fiction God often appears as a quality of blackness, a source of ontological emptiness”; and later, “God is, as in *Waiting for Godot*, a shadow of desire, an empty word, a promise of hope that shall never be kept” (*Modern Literature* 11, 15).

Apocalypse as a critical text that paradoxically questions the value of Revelation as a work of literature even as it confirms the importance of scriptural apocalypse in the literary imagination, and I outline the character of Revelation as both scripture and as a literary object open to critique. I present a model of secularization that serves to explain the way apocalypse is being used both critically and creatively in the twentieth century, a model which points to the basis for its own deconstruction, or more specifically to the looseness of the apocalyptic vocabulary in question.

In Chapter III, “Alternative Vision,” I suggest ways that apocalypse theory might take the relationship between secular and sacred texts more carefully into consideration. I offer a clarification of the key terms of this study (apocalypse, eschatology, prophecy, and revelation), and examine the close generic relationship between fiction and scripture, offering a surprisingly straightforward “quick fix” that will concretize our use of certain terms. Finally, I make the transition to the critical portion of the thesis by arguing that secular uses of apocalypse are complemented by a second stream of fictions that resist secularization, restoring an explicit religious sensibility to an examination of the problems of modern skepticism, and more specifically to the modality of apocalypse in modern literature. This second stream requires an additional re-examination of the basic assumptions of apocalypse theory. A key component of that theory is the recognition that scriptural apocalypse is not always reducible to eschatology exclusively, and that its complex of images, themes, genres, and rhetorical dimensions includes prophecy and revelation in several forms.

Chapter IV treats Wyndham Lewis’ *Blast* and *Tarr* as texts representative of the eschatological strain of modern and postmodern fiction, even as it argues that Lewis is a

special case in that his eschatology borrows explicitly from the scriptural tradition normally overlooked by critics of modernism. Chapter V engages with two novels by Aldous Huxley—*Antic Hay* and *Time Must Have a Stop*—as texts that explore the role and nature of the prophet and prophecy in the modern age. Chapter VI offers a reading of three novels by William Golding—*Pincher Martin*, *The Spire*, and *Darkness Visible*—that deal with the experience or *ontos* of revelation.

Of course, eschatology, prophecy, and revelation—and the works in which they appear—are evocative of each other, and of the form from which they derive, and I am aware that as with all such theories, the boundaries between the constituents of apocalyptic as I describe them are obfuscated by their formal correlevance. In this light, Chapter IV does not avoid reference to prophecy and revelation as they are relevant to a critical examination of Lewis' work, Chapter V opens with a discussion of Huxley's eschatological sense before moving on to the prophetic, and Chapter VI works similarly, describing the significance of prophecy and revelation as linked concepts in Golding's work. The conclusion predictably seeks to tie together what is necessarily a broad-ranging thesis, isolating a handful of conclusions drawn from the theoretical and critical sections of the thesis, and articulating specifically the nature of the challenge this thesis presents to the status quo.

In addition to addressing apocalypse as a literary concern in critical modernism, this project has critical value in its readings of the primary texts I mentioned above. While it will become clear that I am not alone in my sense that these figures, and many others like them, are interested in representing the experience of God as something worth examining even now, there is precious little criticism on the questions of prophecy and

revelation in their work. Critical interest in each of the three figures I will examine is relatively limited to specific questions, and very few scholars have approached them the way I do here. Lewis is discussed for his politics, or evoked primarily for his criticism of better-known artists, or mentioned in the context of debates about the constitution of modernism. Huxley criticism tends to concern itself with utopianism, eastern wisdom, psychedelics, or the dialectic between science and religion. Critical interest in Golding, while more alert to the explicitly religious character of the questions Golding asks, tends to either inflate or marginalize the Christian element in his work, and thus to squabble over his value as an author. Though I do not consider my readings definitive, I hope my modest observations about these texts and figures make a contribution to their larger study in our field, and that at the very least my readers find them engaging and illuminating in the context of the larger argument I make about the uses of apocalypse in critical modernism and critical discourse about the century more generally.

There remains one more thing to disclaim before I begin: in the interests of reasonable length, I assume that the reader has a degree of familiarity with each of the fictions I read. What description or narration I offer has to do with a particular interpretative or heuristic point, and not with an intention to provide plot summary at every turn. Anyway, the texts I read are complex and my engagement with them is consequently dense and focussed; summary would simplify them unduly. I hope this serves the argument and does not compromise its clarity.

CHAPTER I

TERMINAL VISIONS: THE APOCALYPTIC VOCABULARY OF CRITICAL MODERNISM

[I]t may be argued that it is only the particular historical circumstances of the second half of the twentieth century that have fostered so much interest in apocalypticism while allowing conceptual confusion about its definition to persist.

Malcolm Bull, "The End of Apocalypticism?" 658

Indeed . . . maverick assertiveness has been a problem in the field of "apocalyptic" literary criticism, where critics typically use the term to mean anything they vaguely think it might mean.

Douglas Robinson, "Literature and Apocalyptic" 373

In the review cited above, Malcolm Bull marks the publication of the *Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism* as a "watershed in this area of religious studies for it is the first such encyclopedia and also quite possibly the last." His statement smacks of Alpha-and-Omegaism, and he acknowledges his tentative prediction might be "an incautious, some might say apocalyptic, prophecy," but the reason for his skepticism is understandable, as he makes clear:

The *Encyclopedia* has been made possible by the conjunction of two factors: first, the explosion of historical scholarship on apocalyptic topics, which has furnished the materials on which the *Encyclopedia* draws; second, the continuing uncertainty about what apocalypticism actually is, which allows the editors to incorporate “a broad range of materials that may be regarded as apocalyptic in various senses,” including discussions of eschatology, messianism, otherworldly journeys, and millennialist [sic] utopianism. It seems improbable that research will continue at the same rate without the development of a more generally accepted differentiation of these terms. (658)

J.J. Collins, one of the editors of the *Encyclopedia* under review (Vol. I), confirms that this is a problem, referring in particular to the “current, loose and inconsistent scholarly use of ‘apocalypse’ and ‘apocalyptic’” (“Introduction” 3). These are important terminological questions that, at bottom, ask us to think about what does and does not constitute apocalypticism, and under what conditions. What Collins and Bull identify as problematic in religious studies is exacerbated in literary scholarship, specifically critical modernism, which draws on the literary tradition of scriptural apocalypse, specifically Revelation, for its terminology, and at the same time discards the concomitant meanings. If the theologians and scholars of religion have difficulty defining these terms, then heaven help the critics.

Irony aside, this seems to me precisely the problem with the use of “apocalypse” and related terminology by critics of modern literature: the terms are applied a bit willy-nilly from among a “broad range” of possible meanings, denotative and connotative, and are often deployed as implied synecdoche or metonymy, usually without any attempt to define the specific sense of the term in the particular instance. Indeed, the problem may

be graver in literary studies than in religious studies: there the constituents of apocalypse are at least recognized as such, though they may not always be differentiated one from the other. In critical discourse, certain elements of scriptural apocalypse have been bracketed off from apocalyptic thinking without apparent circumspection.

To illustrate this problem, I present below a survey of apocalypse theory in two parts: first, a catalogue of exemplary passages from a sampling of studies of the period, and from a handful of articles on specific figures or works will help clarify what is meant by “apocalypse” and its bedfellows in the context of critical modernism; second, a reading of relevant passages from Frye’s *Anatomy of Criticism* and Kermode’s *The Sense of an Ending*.

1. Apocalypse and Crisis

I will begin with a rather lengthy statement that characterizes the quandary of critical modernism from the point of view of two critics attempting to characterize the whole:

As a general article of belief . . . the idea of a Great Divide between past and present, art before and art now, has drawn much allegiance. But it is also a fact that about the nature of the modern situation, and the consequences of that situation on the form and character of art, there is less than unanimity. . . . And the stylistic plurality of twentieth-century art . . . reminds us how variously it has been interpreted, by writers and artists themselves, and of course by critics and commentators. There is an abundance of accounts of the condition of modern art, and a wealth of explanation of its character and causes. Most of these views are apocalyptic; though one is . . . that there is nothing especially singular and novel

about our art and situation at all. In the present state of artistic and critical opinion—a highly fluid state marked by sharp differences of view—then perhaps the most any account can offer is a personal or at least partial version of an overwhelmingly complex phenomenon. . . . (Bradbury and McFarlane, “Name and Nature” 21)

This statement is important for two reasons: 1) it acknowledges, as I have suggested above, that critical views of modernism, even if they are many and in agreement, are at best “personal” or “partial” for now; 2) it acknowledges that the view of critical modernism is generally “apocalyptic.” In the absence of clarification, this second point may mean that most critics see in modernism a manifestation of apocalyptic thinking or writing or, more profoundly, the enactment of a “cultural” apocalypse (27). This is an ambiguous formulation. “Most of these *views* are apocalyptic,” Bradbury and McFarlane write, and those views may be “personal” or “partial.” What they can concretely say about modernism, however helpful, must therefore be considered critically.

Bradbury and McFarlane recognize the instability of that notion as they seek to explain “why Modernism is our art”: “[t]he assumption that the age demands a certain kind of art, and that Modernism is the art it demands, has been fervently held by those who see in the modern human condition a crisis of reality, an apocalypse of cultural community” (27). Thus modernism is written by the critics, and perhaps especially by critics who elevate the modernist aesthetic and modern being to the level of a crisis, but here is the *caveat*: “What, though, is clear is that not all *artists* have believed this to be so—that, indeed, ours has been a century not only of de-realization but of realism, not only of ironic but of expansive modes” (*idem*).

This is an important qualification, and a mildly ironic one itself: Bradbury and

McFarlane have already established *their* view with a statement I have quoted before. They claim that “one of the features of the age we are talking about is that it is remarkably historicist, disposed to apocalyptic, crisis-centered views of history” (20). They exemplify that view by referring to Herbert Read’s characterization of the difference between modernism and previous aesthetic “revolutions” (*Art Now*, 1933). He wrote,

I do think we can already discern a difference in kind in the contemporary revolution: it is not so much a revolution, which implies a turning over, even a turning back, but rather a break-up, a devolution, some would say a dissolution. Its character is catastrophic. (qtd. in Bradbury and McFarlane 20)

The statement helps their case, for though the word “apocalyptic” is absent from the extended quotation they offer, Read’s characterization of the nature of the modern aesthetic revolution as a “break-up,” “devolution,” or “dissolution” comes very close to Bradbury and McFarlane’s own statement that modernism is characterized by a “crisis-centered” historicism. And it is precisely this topos of crisis that underscores most of the “apocalyptic views” of modernism, including Kermode’s.

1.1 Kinds of Crisis

The crises identified by critical modernism touch every aspect of modern being. They include social, political, cultural, ideological, and philosophical crises, and they constitute, chiefly, a mass crisis of identity. The particulars of what would precipitate those crises—ranging from changes in scientific theory (Darwin and Einstein) and concomitant changes in theosophy and philosophy (Nietzsche) to new theories in psychology (Freud, Jung) and culture (Jung, Frazier)—are commonplaces in critical

modernism, and as such are not worthy of elaboration here. What matters is how these crises are characterized in critical modernism, or more specifically how they are associated with apocalypse.

For instance, in characterizing the 1930s, a decade that “ended in apocalyptic fears and horrors,” Michael Heller coins the term “utopocalyptic,” “my made-up name for a sense of uncertainty, for that odd socio-political or cultural product, both fever and exacerbation, in which an individual is torn between idealized hopes and gnawing dread” (144). Heller’s description is a familiar one, if a bit dramatic. Notice especially that the “apocalyptic” element is negative: “apocalypse” = ‘fear and horror,’ and “utopia” = ‘idealized hope.’ Apocalypse is, in this formulation, the negative pole of a dreadful psychological crisis. Here is another crisis-centered characterization of modernism, this one from Anne Wright’s stirring book on *Howards End*, *Heartbreak House*, *Women in Love*, and *The Waste Land*—four representative texts from a *Literature of Crisis*:

In what sense do the texts I have chosen constitute a ‘literature of crisis’? . . .

Crisis is not merely the perception of change: each of the four texts is permeated by a sense of crisis, and disturbed by what is registered as an accelerating deterioration in the quality of life. Crisis is expressed as the fracturing or dismantling of personal relations, of social institutions, of civilisation. The dimensions of crisis are in fact questioned by each text, and actually vary: the site and scope of the breakdown may be individual, national, cultural or cosmic, extending from sexual intercourse to the extinction of the species. Crisis is the distant or immanent threat of cataclysmic disruption of the familiar: total devastation, even if . . . dimly perceived. In tendency, at least, all four texts are apocalyptic. (3)

In this passage Wright has defined quite nicely the ‘limits’ of crisis as she perceives them, and those limits are once again quite broad. It is the breadth that is problematic in the appellation “apocalyptic”: can any crisis be considered apocalyptic just because it is a crisis? Or is it the specific nature of the crises she has identified that she considers apocalyptic? And may the “threat of disruption” that provokes crisis be either “distant” or “immanent” for it to evoke an apocalyptic sensibility?

But note that Wright has merely said that these works are apocalyptic in “tendency.” What she means by this is only marginally clarified by what follows: she identifies “features” of these works “which characterise their common rendering of the contemporary experience” (3). These are “madness,” “heartbreak,” and “violence,” with violence ranging from emotional cruelty to total environmental destruction (3-4). On the basis of these motifs, images, and themes which she perceives, rather broadly, to be apocalyptic, Wright labels both the crises represented in these works, and the works themselves (“in tendency”) apocalyptic. There is little consideration here for a generic definition of apocalypse, but rather a “demotic” instinct for what apocalypse means culturally.

Mindful of the implications of many of the “source texts” in the modern sense of crisis, Peter Childs argues that Darwinism and the eugenical science derived from Darwin’s work provoked a significant sense of social crisis. In *fin-de-siècle* fiction, the themes of degeneracy (racial and moral), depravity, and deviance are prominent, and continue to be reflected in anxiety about social decay, the dissolution of empire, race-consciousness, exhaustion, and languidity through to the Holocaust and beyond (35-47), captured most poignantly, says Childs, in Wells’ *The Time Machine*. That Childs means

to associate social crisis with apocalypse is evident in his definition of Modernism, borrowed from Malcolm Bradbury in Fowler's *Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms*. The language is familiar: "[modernist art] tends to associate notions of the artist's freedom from realism, materialism, traditional genre and form, with notions of cultural apocalypse and disaster" (qtd. in Childs 2). Childs' treatment of modernism assumes this cultural apocalypse, and in fact seeks to trace its foundations and outline its features.

That Childs' view of modernism is patently and completely "secular" is made evident when he introduces Nietzsche, quoting first from *The Birth of Tragedy*: "Art—and not morality—is represented as the actual *metaphysical* activity of mankind . . . it is only as an aesthetic phenomenon that the existence of the world is *justified*" (55). Childs then asserts that

Modernism was the first secular literature, in which natural selection replaced God's ordering of creation and a human will to power eclipsed the divine will. World War I shattered any remaining belief in natural or supernatural benevolence, in terms of aristocratic *noblesse oblige* or providence. However, almost every article of faith challenged by the Modernists had previously been attacked by Nietzsche. . . . Nietzsche was a prophet. . . . (55)

This is a strikingly totalizing—and thus perhaps a naïve—reading of modernism, and by association of literary apocalypse, even as it has achieved the status of a critical commonplace. Clearly, for Childs, "apocalypse" is as secular as the modernism he describes for us, and this is the common view. Crisis—apocalypse—is generally represented in critical modernism in secular, catastrophic terms. We have seen this already, notably in Bradbury and McFarlane (20) and in Wright. Even Calinescu, whose reading of modernism ("cultural modernity" is his preferred term) is both plural and

ideologically open, speaks of apocalypse only in the context of a list of “expressions of disgust” that the aesthetic modernists, the root and branch of the avant-garde, would mount (42). In other words, “apocalypticism” is one of a set of aesthetic responses to the socio-political “bourgeois” modernity that the “cultural modernists” (the ostensibly ‘anti-’modernists we are most familiar with) found so unappealing.

Jane Goldman’s *Modernism, 1910-1945: Image to Apocalypse* fares little better in providing us with a specific sense of what apocalypse means in critical modernism, perhaps because she is restricted by the titular conceit of her project, and therefore anxious to explore the semantic possibilities of the phrase. The apocalypses she describes are aesthetic (214-20), gendered (220-21), and imagistic (221-36), and these portraits fail to anchor the conceit persuasively. Here “apocalypse” takes on an assumed significance, one implied by an account of images of destruction (fire) and death (Picasso’s *Guernica* and Nathanael West’s *The Day of the Locust* as chief examples), and by the crisis of identity and aesthetic revolution already seen in the other materials.

Her treatment of “The Apocalypse,” a self-named group of poets led by Dylan Thomas and publishing their key texts in 1939 and 1941, is of slightly more use (239-43).¹ Goldman quotes (from Francis Scarfe’s *Auden and After*) the basic convictions that undergird the group’s theory. The four principles are, in sum, that humans needed more economic and artistic freedom, that political systems could only fail to provide that freedom, that the Machine Age had too much influenced and stunted human development, and that “myth, as a personal means of reintegrating the personality, had been neglected and despised” (Scarfe qtd. in Goldman 239). Goldman acknowledges the

¹ “The Apocalypse” is Francis Scarfe’s designation of the group (ctd. in Goldman 239), which is known alternatively as “The New Apocalypse” (after their first collective book published in 1939).

role of Christian and Greek myth in the imagery and sensibility of these poems, but characterizes their sense of apocalypse as a political response to Surrealism and objectivism—the movement as a revolution and renovation of art—and glosses over the re-situation of “apocalypse” in myth as an evocation of an elevating mysticism, or a source for revelations. Indeed, religion is, conspicuously, effaced from Goldman’s representation of crisis and her sense of apocalypse alike.² That tendency away from a religious sensibility and religious meanings, or even implications, to an exclusively aesthetic or socio-political model of apocalypse is troublingly common in treatments of both modernist writers and by critical habit of writers working outside modernism, even if the alternative readings of the apocalyptic elements in fiction are productive.

1.2 Apocalypse as Eschaton

What runs underneath this critical view is an identification of eschatology as a central trope in modernism, principally in the forms of social, cultural, and political anxiety, but also in the form of a “personal” or “ethical” apocalypse (Robinson 382-84; see “Apocalyptic Identity” below). The larger eschatological “ends” or collapses these artists perceived or experienced are categorized along the same lines as the crises already

² The index to Goldman’s book lists 11 references to “religion”: Goldman quotes Michael Levenson (*Cambridge Companion*) offering a litany of things to doubt in High Modernism, but makes no specific comment on religion as one of them (62); he quotes Eliot’s pronouncement of Catholicism, again without comment (82); on pp. 101, 200, and 201 he refers to “blasphemous” and “secular” statements from Joyce or Joyce’s work; he quotes a poem by Huxley which Goldman unconvincingly and unnecessarily interprets as blasphemous (116); he quotes Huntly Carter’s “vision” for the theatre, where he evokes religious experience movingly as an analogy, without comment by Goldman (109); he glosses over two additional quotations that mention “religion” to focus on other things (140, 156); and a final reference to religion is entirely incidental to other points (220).

mentioned: for Yeats, “the twentieth century marked the final days of his apocalyptic gyre” (Berger 389), a gyre fat with cultural, socio-political, and religious implications; Virginia Woolf stated that in December 1910, around the time of the death of King Edward, “[a]ll human relations shifted,” sparking a sea-change in “religion, conduct, politics, and literature” (Bradbury and McFarlane, “Name” 33); D.H. Lawrence offered 1915 as the year “the old world ended” (qtd. in Bradbury and McFarlane 33) motivated by an “equally apocalyptic assumption” (Bradbury and McFarlane 33), probably about domestic and social relations, especially as they were impacted by World War I; Wyndham Lewis and his colleagues might well have considered 1914, the year they published *Blast 1* and the year of the outbreak of war, as both a cultural and socio-political zero-year; “Eliot’s *The Waste Land* was placed between the material and cultural catastrophe of the First World War and an unnameable revelation that would culminate and redeem the world’s devastation” (Berger 389); and critical modernism has long identified 1922 as modernism’s aesthetic “*annus mirabilis*.”

This sort of epoch-marking, evident in the attitudes of the modernists themselves, is reminiscent of the tendency for various religious communities and cults to try and demarcate the “end of the world” as prophesied in Revelation, in effect to reduce apocalypse to event or action. The most obvious associations are between the global destruction foretold in scriptural apocalypse and forms of mechanized destruction—trench-gas, aerial bombardment (Hooley 183), the Bomb (Goldman 21), mass casualties of War—especially the Shoah (Goldman 184), nuclear winter, and eco-disaster. In the wake of these technological “achievements,” says Tristram Hooley, “apocalypse fiction, the novel which explores the extremes of destruction, has an obvious and immediate

relevance” (184). The point Hooley makes is that while earlier apocalyptists could only imagine the destruction—literal or figurative—of their own little worlds, the twentieth century generated destructive possibilities that are global and potentially cosmic in scope—literal (weapons and conflict, environmental disaster, etc.) and figurative (globalization, for instance, which radical sects of all faiths consider apocalyptic in its association with evil: usually as the dragon of Revelation, or Satan). Even on the level of empire, earlier apocalyptic imaginings were only subjectively universal. Now we are able to “blow it [all] up” in a disturbing variety of ways (Hooley).

For our purposes, Hooley’s statement is indicative in two specific ways. First, apocalypse is firmly and squarely associated with image and action, and with event as destructive occasion. Second, the polarity of the significance of the association depends on an dislocation of apocalyptic thinking from theological discourse and its induction into aesthetic discourse. Whereas a believer might study Revelation and then look for manifestations or fulfillments of prophecy in the currents of the day, an “apocalyptic” fiction looks around at the possible outcomes of technological or political trends, and is reminded of the destructive elements—images or events—from scriptural apocalypse: the only “grammar” possessed of both the necessary scale and power. The fundamental difference, then, is that the apocalyptic fiction foregrounds the destructive element and speaks of it in apocalyptic terms, though not in apocalyptic language, whereas for the believer, the destruction is a potential partial fulfilment of a much fuller and broader-ranging prophecy.

James Berger suggests that for some of the moderns, this inversion carries with it a revelatory element after a fashion. In an extension of his comments on Yeats, Eliot, and

Williams (cited above; Williams' *Spring and All*), Berger says this:

For these writers, and for Lawrence, Hemingway, Djuna Barnes, Henry Miller, and other writers of the teens, twenties, and thirties, the memory of the historical catastrophe of the First World War produced the need to imagine an even greater catastrophe that would finish the job. But this second, imaginary disaster would be apocalyptic in a way that the first, the historical, catastrophe could not be, for it would be revelatory; would *reveal*, as it obliterated, the full meaning of civilization's failures. (389)

This is clearly not the kind of revelation that distinguishes scriptural apocalypse from other modes of scripture and prophecy—the self-disclosure of God through the agency of a prophet; rather, the revelation would constitute a retrospective comprehension and, ideally, a wisdom. Therefore, it does not culminate in renovation, but in *anagnorisis*: in recognition. Berger, unconcerned with this difference, continues with a passage that evokes Kermode:

These modernist writers wrote at what they took to be a moment of transition, between two apocalypses, one historical—and thus merely destructive—and one to be imagined. The imagined apocalypse would then convey retrospectively a fully apocalyptic status to the material, cultural, and human devastation of history. (389)

Berger's acknowledgement that the "historical apocalypse" is "merely destructive" is important, and he has done well to convolve the revelatory in his sense of literary apocalypse and its purpose, even if the adjective-phrase "fully apocalyptic" evokes too totally the scriptural origins of apocalyptic writing, an evocation ultimately unsupported, and eventually abandoned, in Berger's concept.

What he means has as much to do with the rhetorical sense of prophecy as with revelation. Berger states that the “modernist [read: intra-war] apocalyptic vision, marked and wounded by the past, nevertheless extended forward, if only toward some even greater catastrophe” (389). In this sense, then, the literary apocalypse of modernism tended to forecast or predict even as it glanced backward in horror or longing. Anne Wright and Tristram Hooley, writing respectively about fiction of the teens/twenties and the thirties/forties—between the bookends of the two world wars—make the same connection, and their specific formulations are worth considering here.

Wright argues that the literature of crisis “reaches towards . . . a normative configuration” that has “a multiple aspect or purpose”: to “encode” the elements of characterization and plot in “an expected and inevitable harmony” that also “reveal[s] or uncover[s] all the events, intrigues or complications as discord” (11-12); and to offer a final “moral recommendation” or “projected ‘solution’” (12). “There is, further,” she observes, “the predictive aspect, according to which the final configuration may be an apocalyptic or a millenarian vision” (12). At first glance the second and third “aspects” of the final configuration appear to be one and the same, and in fact both represent, in secular terms, different functions of prophecy (see “Constituents” below). What is most striking about Wright’s formulation, however, is that it differentiates between “recommendation” and “projection” from “prediction,” this last being essential to apocalyptic writing, but not a guarantor of it.

Writing about roughly the same period—in the growing shadow of the First World War—Jay Winter observes that artists employed “apocalyptic motifs” (145) as an “art of anticipation.” He notes that “[a]pocalypticians can’t wait. They see the end of time

rushing towards them. Before the war, some of their visions, and the beliefs embedded in them, were hopeful. Following the crash would come rebirth and renewal” (176). After the war, however, “the art of anticipation turned to . . . the allegory of catastrophic disaster” (idem):

After 1914, most sought in the Biblical tradition a range of signs and symbols through which to imagine the war and the loss of life entailed in it. The art they produced was intended to help to heal . . . through ‘catharsis’, not ‘elaboration’. Here is one essential point to which the sacred returned in the period of the Great War: as a vocabulary of mourning, and as a code through which artists expressed in enduring ways the enormity of the war and the suffering left in its wake. (177)

Two striking pre-war examples of this in the visual arts are David Bomberg’s *Vision of Ezekiel* (1912)—which evokes, ambiguously, the vision of resurrection and the destruction of Gog and Magog (Ezekiel 37-39)—and William Roberts’ *The Resurrection* (1912)—which imagines the resurrection of Christ in acutely active terms familiarized by the use of a sarcophagus or coffin, and framed by highly hierophanous images (see Cork I:69, 64). Winter points out that the War itself provoked, as one would expect it to, a “growth in spiritualism” in both traditional and non-traditional fora (54), the chief manifestation of which in art were depictions and “tales of the return of the fallen” in paintings, films, and a “form of popular literature linking front and home in a kind of spiritualist embrace” (69).³

Looking to the fiction of the Second World War, Hooley differentiates between

³ In a move that emphasizes the vibrancy and importance of resurrection imagery in war-time and post-War culture, Winter opens his first chapter with “one of the most powerful and haunting visions of the Great War. It is the final sequence of Abel Gance’s film *J’accuse*, made in 1918-19” (15): “[o]n the day of the celebration of victory, on 14 July 1919, the living march through the Arc de Triomphe; the dead march above it” (69).

“apocalypse discourse,” which sees war as an end rather than a beginning,” and “apocalypse fiction,” which “starts with the end and works backwards to a concern with the idea of modernity and where it has gone wrong,⁴ and forwards in a quest for what to put in its place” (191). You will remember that for Hooley apocalypse fiction is a fiction about total destruction, this being the vital element, but it is also a fiction that articulates “political and personal solutions”: “[i]f modernity was perceived as declining into a decadent cesspool, a total apocalyptic solution could have been seen to be necessary in order to talk clearly about its problems and possible solutions” (191). Here the apocalypse is imagined, just as it is in Berger’s concept, as a way of wiping the slate clean and generating a relative political and social order, as I will argue about Lewis’ vorticism, an aesthetic void to be filled. This kind of aesthetic bespeaks a degree of hope, or of a desire for hope, in a state of the world or of art that offers little.

This hope, displaced from the hope of spiritual redemption or even continuation, and associated instead with aesthetic or political renovation (Hooley 196), co-exists with the philosophical despair inevitable in the wake of such a significant displacement (Glicksberg, *Modern Literature* 4), and both, in the critical account, give way to bitter indifference and malaise in post-WWII postmodernity (see Berger below). I distrust the simplicity of that account (Occam’s Razor may work in the sciences, but in the

⁴ This is a commonplace in the “post-apocalyptic” novels and films of the last fifty years. For example, *Planet of the Apes* (1968), based on Pierre Boulle’s novel *La planète des singes*, ends memorably with Charlton Heston as astronaut George Taylor escaping ape society on horseback, still thinking he is on a planet millions of light years from Earth, and experiencing a disturbing *anagnorisis*: he stumbles across the remains of the Statue of Liberty, and realizes that humanity had, through its technological and economic greed, got itself into its own mess. The 2001 film (Tim Burton) partially enacts (and Americanizes) Boulle’s original, and decidedly postmodern, ending: the astronaut, Leo Davidson (Mark Wahlberg), escapes the planet in his ship and returns to his own time, only to discover, in a second *peripeteia*, that the statue of Abraham Lincoln is an orangutan, and that this time is also ruled by simians.

humanities it should be met with a “clerical skepticism”). The implications of any of these positions are important enough to merit a more substantial narrative. Each of them also precludes an engagement with religious sensibility *qua* religious sensibility. Accounts of that sensibility range from Altizer’s reading of Hegel, where history becomes the apocalyptic “self-realization or self-embodiment of God” (“History” 151) and Glicksberg’s less Gnostic but equally Manichaeic assertion that “modern writers, even as they repudiate God, wrestle with the religious problem” (15) to something like that attempted here: the recognition that religious questions continue to matter, though in a variety of ways, including skepticism or secularization as well as in personal and traditional onto-theologies.

In essence, then, Hooley’s apocalypse fiction is secular in its assumptions, for Hooley is most interested in socio-political and aesthetic “solutions,” but it is not without its religious overtones. Hooley surmises that “for many [survivors/observers of the Blitz] it must have seemed that a world in the process of turning its back on God was to be visited with a disaster of biblical proportions” (193), so that apocalypse fiction as he conceives it not only looked to scriptural apocalypse for a ready grammar, but was in a sense derived directly from it, acting out apocalyptic prophecy on a world stage that resembled the catastrophic elements of that prophecy, and seeking desperately for a way through those elements. Of the poets of “The Apocalypse” (Goldman) or “New Apocalypse,” as they are alternatively known, Susan Acheson observes, “they sought to express in their writing the vision that should accompany the Armageddon, a vision that contained the seeds for renewal” (189). Yet Acheson tends to bracket renewal off from generic apocalypse: she says these poets “envisage[ed] the war as apocalypse,” an

equation that narrows the full generic and spiritual purviews of scriptural apocalypse.

After the War, observes Berger,

the apocalypse became, to a much greater degree, a matter of retrospection. It had already happened. The world, whether it knew it or not, was a ruin, a remnant. More destruction could occur, but it could only be more of the same. Nothing more could be revealed. All subsequent, post-apocalyptic destruction would be absolutely without meaning, mere repetition. (390)

This is the way the modern ends: not with a bang, but a resigned whimper.

Acknowledgements of the importance of prophetic or quasi-prophetic vision, or of quasi-revelatory experience in relation to literary apocalyptic are, on the whole, rather rare, especially in critical readings of British modernism. The three critics to which I have been referring stand out from the rest in this sense, even if they generally efface the notion of *bona fide* prophecy and revelation, or even reasonable facsimiles of such as imagined or represented in the rhetoric of literary apocalypse. For instance, Bradbury and McFarlane, who ground their sense of literary apocalypse principally in image and crisis, only belatedly introduce the modernist desire for renovation as an aesthetic urge (48), though once they do, in the context of “ends and beginnings,” it takes a substantial place in their portrait of modernism. World War I is “the apocalyptic moment of transition into the new” (51). In this concept, though, the “apocalyptic moment” is not a revelation, but “the blast or explosion which purges and destroys” (49), the terminus; what hope there is for an afterwards remains an embattled hope for “secular change:” inwardly conceived and individually enacted; imagined, not known.

1.3 Apocalyptic Identity

[C]ulture is composed of a multiplicity of political, ideological, and material circumstances and positions. Our understanding of a historical period's culture should recognize this and avoid simply advancing the dominant ideology or its most credible, or popular, critique as a totalizing representation.

Tristram Hooley, "Blow it Up and Start All Over Again" 197

It would seem that the perspective of apocalypse fictions as critical modernism imagines them seems binocular. Whether it manifests in annihilative visions like those of H.G. Wells, set off against *fin-de-siècle* anxiety about racial and cultural degeneration, or in visions of cultural renovation and renewal like Yeats' or Lewis' (see chapter III), anticipating the arrival of the new age as a "rough beast" or an explosive new aesthetic, apocalypse-as-eschaton clearly owes much to the tradition of scriptural apocalypse and the rich hermeneutical tradition that grew out of it. Imaginative possibilities increase in number as the modes of interpretation do, especially since each way of reading scriptural apocalypse emphasizes certain of its features. In particular, Augustine's interpretation of Revelation as an allegory of the salvation of the soul turns the focus of scriptural eschatology to the individual self (Robinson 366). Since individual being—the ontology of self-as-self and self-in-the-world—is a defining preoccupation of the modernisms, it is tempting to speak of the experience of the self and selfhood in apocalyptic terms.

This trend represents a third trajectory or visual direction attributed to literary apocalypse: inward. In its most radical manifestations, this "vision" is decidedly "anti-apocalyptic." Mary Shaw notes this tendency in French modernism, where "one must be

absolutely modern”⁵: “[f]or ‘fin-de-siècle’ writers to embrace modernism was not typically to look forward to a brighter stage in history [but] to declare the ultimate installation of the future in the present” (258). In a formulation that synthesizes these three visions, Bradbury and McFarlane argue that modernist art holds “transition and chaos, creation and de-creation, in suspension”: the “‘Janus-faced’ quality” of modernism (49). Their synthesis reduces modernism to a fundamental stillness or paralysis, with the forward and backward glances fused together, and the point of fusion, the dialectic of past and future, representing the site of modernism’s contribution.

The secularity of this formulation—however accurate it might be with respect to the nexus of “high modernists” Bradbury and McFarlane prefer—shares in the pessimism of Berger’s characterization of post-war apocalyptic quoted above. It is stunning for its totality, and (perhaps accidentally) for its attempt to fuse the modernisms, because it ends up painting all of them—the modernisms of writers and critics alike—with the same brush. It is, in its essence, a negative version of *kerygma* (Altizer, “Apocalyptic Identity” 24). In this version of modernism, the absence of God or of His kingdom is absolute and permanent because transition is both permanent and godless. Or perhaps it is something more than this. Perhaps it is the ironic idealization of the period as a stoic age, an age of hard intellectual “honesty” and courage, one that reflects the values and beliefs of the contemporary critic in his heroes, and therefore one that shies away from anything that calls that vision into question. Whatever the reason, absent from this portrait is the idea that there might be a significant reason for hope outside of the aesthetic endeavour, and

⁵ Shaw quotes Rimbaud from *Une Saison en Enfer* (1873): “Il faut être absolument moderne” (257-58: my translation).

outside of politics.⁶ More importantly for my argument, the bracketing of past and future sets critical limits on the relation between scriptural and literary apocalypse, thus limiting the nature and grounds of apocalypticism in modern fictions, and limiting, too, the concept of the modern.

Allow me to clarify that I do not think Bradbury and McFarlane are seeing bogeymen. Paralysis plays an important role in Joyce's work, just as recursion and rhythm do in Woolf, and Forster, and Yeats, and many others. What I object to is that critics of modern literature like Bradbury and McFarlane overlook alternative visions at work and preclude alternative readings of the modernists claimed by them. I offer two examples to illustrate my point.

The first example, one that skirts the "hopeful" and ostensibly mystical aspect in modern fiction entirely, comes from David Trotter, who recalls Rupert Birkin's epiphanic musings over Gerald's corpse at the end of *Women in Love*. Trotter observes that Birkin "remembers 'the beautiful face of one whom he had loved,' and feels momentarily restored. 'No-one could remember it without gaining faith in the mystery, without the soul's warming into new, deep life-trust'" (79). For Trotter (invoking David Bradshaw), as for Wright, this moment of mystery constitutes a slippage from a modernist impulse—a dangerous teetering on the edge of an authorial impulse to "impose [the writer's] own anxieties and aspirations on the characters in a 'coercive form of wishful thinking'"

⁶ In his impressive dissertation, Steven Lane Pugmire explains that the seeds of a secular eschatology are located in a shift from protological longing to eschatological yearning: from a nostalgic longing for a Golden Age to a yearning for the future restoration of Edenic peace in a Millennial vision or something similar. In some cases, this shift may be based in an understanding that what has been promised is even better than the original Golden Age. It seems apparent that longing always begets anticipation. Eschatological hope becomes eschatological despair precisely where longing loses its object: one cannot hope for the restoration of a "Golden Age" on a cosmic, global, communitarian, or individual scale if one does not believe it ever existed except as an organizational mythology.

(idem). Trotter continues,

Where . . . does this restoration come from? Not from the narrative, since we have no idea which beautiful face Birkin, the man without a history, is talking about. It comes from Lawrence's own determination to warm at least one soul, if only for a moment, before the last day (and literature's last day) is finally done.

(idem)

Trotter's interpretation is striking: he goes out of his way to avoid a reading that acknowledges the character-presence of anything metaphysical, the "mystery," and further out of his way to admit that Lawrence might actually give credence to such a mysterious providence—whatever its specific character for Lawrence—that inexplicably and suddenly links the souls of characters in fictions just as it does in life.

The second, and stronger, example comes from Anne Wright's *Literature of Crisis*. First, Wright observes in Wells' *Mr. Britling Sees It Through* (1916) a certain relief in Britling's questioning of the logic of the war when placed beside the human casualties it 'creates.' Britling has to inform the parents of a young German of his acquaintance that the youth is dead. In doing so, he overcomes his own formless antipathy for the Germans in a sort of epiphanic recognition, one that "acknowledge[s] larger historical forces at work" than his own, or anyone else's, prejudice or greed. "Moreover," Wright observes, "a new phase has been reached: '*Now we need dread no longer. The dreaded thing has happened*'" (21). In this moment, the destructive event of the war serves not as end but as beginning, and offers an avenue for 'getting on' with whatever would follow. But the significance of the feeling is subsumed in a religious sensibility: it is "God," whom Britling experiences in a "climactic vision," "who is the end, who is the meaning" (Wells qtd. in Wright 21). Oddly, Wright characterizes the

irruption of faith as a “lapse of reason,” and Britling’s recognition about the war and history as a “finality.” It feels rather more like an aperture, a release valve, and the start of something superior to the despairing, rootless prejudice of the past.

Another passage follows very closely on the heels of this one: Britling “steps away from his desk to look out the window” and, Wells narrates, “[f]rom away towards the church comes the sound of some early worker whetting a scythe” (Wright 22). Here is Wright’s comment:

That symbolic gesture of hope in social renewal and natural continuity is curiously similar to the rural idyll with which *Howards End* closes. Both Forster and Wells, we may think, endorse the pastoral vision, and at some cost to their novels. But *what about* that scythe? (22).

Note the terms “social renewal” and “natural continuity.” These phrases seem out of place in discussing a novel that has included a theophany among its significant plot points; included it, no less, smack in the middle of the “final configuration” of the denouement—the device, you will recall, that Wright argues is meant to “harmonize” the whole and identify the discordant elements as compared to its “moral recommendation” or “solution” (12). Clearly Wright is uncomfortable with Wells’ solution and its unapologetically theological implications, and she does not answer her own question in consequence, but at least she has the courage to pose it.

2. In-finity: Frye’s Theory of Myth in Literature

Northrop Frye and Frank Kermode are the chief surveyors of apocalypse theory as

it is currently known. Frye has, it would seem, fallen off that particular map,⁷ perhaps because of his unabashed interest in the “Great Code” of the Bible as a cornerstone, even the very foundation, of Western culture. He is often evoked in genre theory or in myth criticism, and with good reason; however, his neglect in apocalypse theory is, I believe, a mistake, and another manifestation of a critical prejudice: Frye sees that the state of literature—its genres, its meaning-making mechanisms—has very much to do with its origins in mythic literature, though in no way does he suggest that all literature is mythic. In literary criticism, Frye says, “myth means ultimately *mythos*, a structural organizing principle of literary form” (341). In this sense, his work is much like Kermode’s effort to see eschatology as a structural principle, except that Frye’s interest exceeds narrative structure.

In *Anatomy of Criticism*, Frye seeks to redress a problem of identity in the literary criticism of his day, which was, he felt, subject to invasion by its near-neighbours history and philosophy (12) or tended to an ideological determinism (6). Not much has changed. That Frye’s own intention is theoretical and not ideological is attested to by the sagacity of his warnings to critics of every persuasion: “Critical principles cannot be taken over ready-made from theology, philosophy, politics, science, or any combination of these,” he writes, advocating instead an “independence of criticism from [ideological] prejudice” (7). He rejects as fallacious the “notion that if we plant our feet solidly enough in Christian or democratic or Marxist values we shall be able to lift the whole of criticism at once with a dialectic crowbar” (12), but is as eager to point out that the critic must not heave over the ideas or the cultural materials associated with those value systems—the

⁷ I refer again to a rather unscientific measure: a search of the MLA Bibliography performed in August, 2006. Using the search terms “Frye and (apocalyp* or revelation)” resulted in three hits, roughly three percent of scholarly works dealing in some measure with Frye’s major works.

sacred text of Judaeo-Christianity, for instance:

Western literature has been more influenced by the Bible than by any other book, but with all his respect for “sources,” the critic knows little more about that influence than the fact that it exists. Biblical typology is so dead a language now that most readers, including scholars, cannot construe the superficial meaning of any poem which employs it. (14)

This last statement has obvious relevance to apocalypse criticism, especially if the uses of an apocalyptic vocabulary derive from partial or popular meanings that ignore the *mythos* from which we have inherited them.

The better point emerging from Frye’s “Polemical Introduction,” and one that I am admittedly shaping a bit here, is that in its “naïve” stage, criticism “sees literature as a huge aggregate or miscellaneous pile of discrete ‘works,’” and he asserts that the only “organizing principle [that] has so far been discovered in literature [is] the principle of chronology” out of which comes the notion of a “tradition” (16). The critic who wishes to step back from a myopic engagement with a specific work and develop instead a “conceptual framework” for an oeuvre, a period, or the whole of the tradition must conduct “an inductive survey of the literary field” (7). Only then will he or she be able to discern patterns of organization or recurrent motifs of image or structure, and therefore be able to say something about the literature of the period as well as about the individual work.

The critical modernism I have portrayed above seems just such an attempt, but the matter is not so simple. In critical modernism, the notion of the “modern” in each critical view both emerges from the survey *and* informs the texts included in the survey in terms of both selection and interpretation. If critical modernism assumes the skepticism of the

atheism of the period, that very assumption will either tend to colour readings of all the texts of the period or it will encourage the construction of a canon of texts that conform to that general sensibility. The same may be said of a critical view that argues that the period is profoundly religious in its sensibility. In this respect critical theory becomes guilty of determinism and myopia alike. Rather than a “miscellaneous pile of discrete ‘works,’” then, we view the modern canon as an exclusive club that admits works of only a specific aesthetic quality or ideological disposition, texts which may be made to swear fealty (even disingenuously) to the club motto. That motto? “rejection of tradition”, “Make it new!”, “God is Dead!”, and similarly succinct and fragmentary articulations of the concerns of modernism.

Of course modernism is concerned with all of these things and more besides,⁸ and its relation to the tradition is as complex and varied as in any period, though it is arguably complicated by a greater volume and, perhaps, a greater intensity of socio-cultural change. Furthermore, its relation to the tradition is “by no means purely one of complication” as a linear, historicist model might have it, but is rather “a point at which we [may] see an enormous number of converging patterns of significance. . . . not only complicating itself in time, but . . . spread out in conceptual space from some kind of center” (17). The center Frye imagines is integral with the substance, though not the temporal structure and therefore the critical construction, of the tradition. That center is the site of myth and myth-making.

⁸ I may be charged with a degree of irreverent heterodoxy here, but the examples I introduced in the previous section suggest that even in texts which are identified as modernist, there are moments and patterns of anagogical vision, even mythopoetic moments that defy received notions of what constitutes modern literature. These moments might individually be glossed or dismissed as lapses into traditionalism, or as the cultural echoes of dead hymns or prayers, but taken together they present a considerable challenge to critical determinism.

In what follows, I look at some of the concepts and structures germane to Frye's theory, specifically from *Anatomy of Criticism*. My treatment will, I am afraid, be a bit simplistic if only because I have neither the space nor the imperative to deal with the whole of Frye's very complex theory, so I will look especially at those notions and statements that might shed some light on the assumptions of critical modernism with regard to apocalypse, or that might conversely call those assumptions into question. I will refer mainly to Frye's first three essays, "Historical Criticism: Theory of Modes," "Ethical Criticism: Theory of Symbols," and "Archetypal Criticism: Theory of Myths." As with Aristotle's *Poetics*, we encounter in Frye a strange tension between "description as classification" and "classification as prescription or as valuation," though in Frye's case any prescription is incidental to description, and is generally critical rather than "poetic." In other words, Frye can be seen as advocating the adoption of his schema as a useful, general critical framework, but not as limiting the possibilities of literature to exceed or necessarily transform the limits and structure of that framework.

Frye first classifies fictions (including poems and plays) "by the hero's power of action" relative to human possibility, coming up with five modes which I have represented in the following table (33-35):

Mode	Hero	Hero's Relation to Persons	Hero's Relation to Nature	Classification in European Fiction
Myth	god	superior in kind	superior in kind	pre-medieval myth: important in the formation of literature, but "found outside the normal literary categories"
Romance	godly human	superior in degree: actions are marvellous	superior in degree: actions are marvellous	legend, folk and fairy tale (marchen): medieval accounts of knights errant (secular) and saints (religious)

Mode	Hero	Hero's Relation to Persons	Hero's Relation to Nature	Classification in European Fiction
High Mimetic	leader	superior in degree—station, passions, expression—but subject to social criticism	subject to natural law	“national” epic, tragedy: Renaissance Drama—Early 18 th c. (Aristotle’s “hero,” this)
Low Mimetic	one of us	normative: we respond to common humanity	subject: we demand probabilities	comedy, realistic fiction: Defoe—late 19 th c. middle-class culture (as in <i>Vanity Fair</i> , “hero” becomes a misnomer)
Ironic	inferior	inferior, even if we identify	inferior: as judged from the norms of a greater situational freedom	normative mode for 20 th c.: France from 1850, England from 1900

As is clear from the generic classifications in the far right column, “European fiction . . . has steadily moved its center of gravity down the list” (34), and in this assessment Frye is in line with his colleagues in critical modernism. The bulk of fictions generally called modernist are ironic in mode, and foreground scenes of “bondage, frustration, or absurdity” (idem), though in general the inferiority of the protagonist is a smokescreen. We meet most often persons of genius, of precocious talent, who languish as failed or unrealized leaders—who would be happiest in a high mimetic fiction, perhaps, but who suffer miserably in a low or ironic fiction instead. Think of characters such as Stephen Dedalus, Leo Bloom, Theodore Gumbriel, Mr Ramsay, Kreisler, Mrs Dalloway, etc.

Of course, the satirical element in many of these fictions belies both the irony of character and the direction of the *catharsis*, “reflected to the reader from the art,” and not accessed in or dispensed from it (40). Joyce’s notion of paralysis is a biting example, as is much of the narratological posturing in Lewis’ fiction (*Tarr*, for instance) and in early Waugh. Frye seems aware of this additional complexity in his recognition of “naïve” and “sophisticated” versions in each of the modes he has enumerated: naïve means, as in

Kermode, “primitive or popular” (35), and in the ironic mode, “the naïve ironist calls attention to the fact that he is being ironic, whereas sophisticated irony merely states, and lets the reader add the ironic tone himself” (41). In either version, however, the ironic fiction “has no object but [its] subject,” and that subject “does not necessarily have any tragic hamartia or pathetic obsession⁹: he is only somebody who gets isolated from his society” (41). In short, the ironic mode is characterized by randomness, absurdity, and godlessness.

It would seem, then, that critics are justified in calling modern literature secular in its assumptions as well as its materials, and in reading modernism historically as a total turning away from the conventions, assumptions, and culture of the “primitive” past via appropriation, transposition, or outright rejection. But remember that Frye has said

that the relation of later literature to these primitive formulas is by no means purely one of complication, as we find the primitive formulas reappearing in the greatest classics—in fact there seems to be a general tendency on the part of the great classics to revert to them. (17)

Even more notably,

Irony descends from the low mimetic: it begins in realism and dispassionate observation. But as it does so, it moves steadily towards myth, and dim outlines of sacrificial rituals and dying gods begin to reappear in it. Our five modes evidently go around in a circle. This reappearance of myth in the ironic is particularly clear in Kafka and in Joyce. . . . However, ironic myth is frequent enough elsewhere, and many features of ironic literature are unintelligible without it. (42)

⁹ Lewis, Joyce, and Eliot are more than happy to provide their subjects with such obsessions.

This observation does not suggest that the negations of modernism or of critical modernism for that matter are actually affirmations, or even that mythic elements—“symbols,” as Frye calls them in his next essay (71)—mean the same thing in the ironic mode as they do in the mythic mode. Indeed, in an ironic myth, as Frye says of James’ “The Altar of the Dead,” “the god of one person is the *pharmakos* [the scapegoat] of another” (43).

What Frye’s observation does tell us, is that the mythic and ironic meanings are inseparably connected, and in the context of Frye’s comment on James, Nietzsche’s provocative “God is dead,” viewed as the opening sentence in the ironic mythology of modernism—whether triumphal proclamation or *cri de coeur*—makes of God a scapegoat, the object of the frustration, anger, and fear of a generation. This move ironically enacts the first part of the expiational cycle described in the Gospels, the killing or death of the divine king so prominent in Frazer’s and Frye’s grammar of archetypes. What differentiates critical modernism from any other epoch is the silence that follows that proclamation: God’s death, as an idea, is considered final, and thus the proclamation echoes in a profound void. Gone is the hope of resurrection in ironic literature. As we shall see, however, there are other figures in modernism willing to follow it up with the exultant, and often terrifying rebuttal, “He is risen!”; these writers imaginatively close the distance between God and man, and consequently close the gap between ironic fiction and the myth from whence it descended.

Much of what Frye has to say about apocalypse comes, as I have mentioned, in his “Theory of Myths,” but his second essay, “Ethical Criticism: Theory of Symbol,” is worth a longer glance in terms of what it has to say about the use of “symbols” or

“elements” from a tradition or prior text (71). A “symbol,” “[a] word, a phrase, or an image used with some kind of special reference” (*idem*), may be considered either a “sign” or a “motif.” “Signs” constitute the “centrifugal” component of our reading, the “verbal units which, conventionally and arbitrarily, stand for and point to things outside the place where they occur” (73). “Motifs” are those “[v]erbal elements understood inwardly or centripetally, as parts of a verbal structure,” which we use to develop a “sense of the larger verbal pattern they make” (73). This is vaguely Saussurean, but the upshot is that symbols, borrowed elements, mean in two directions at once: as signs of the extrinsic world or source text, and as motifs within a new world or text. “In all literary verbal structures the final direction of meaning is inward,” Frye concludes, but with the understanding that the meaning of the literary texts is “imaginative,” and operates on the basis of “a hypothetical or assumed relation to the external world” (74).

The idea that we look for meaning both centrifugally and centripetally makes perfect sense, and even if we agree with Frye that ultimately it is the inward meaning that matters most, we must contend in some fashion with the extrinsic meanings associated with the signified or referent. In the case of apocalypse theory, scriptural apocalypse is the core referent, and a symbol as sign will evoke it directly, whereas a symbol as motif prefers to make its own sense of the term. But it can do so only if it is identified as a motif, and as a motif that defines itself against an established tradition of meaning.

Symbol can also manifest formally as description (low mimetic), “image” (high mimetic), “archetype” (mythic phase, but romantic mode), and monad (mythic mode) (116), where the symbol achieves unity with the thing symbolized. Here we are moving back up the modal ladder, toward an “anagogical” or “dream” phase whose “limits are

not the real, but the conceivable,” and the “limit of the conceivable is the world of fulfilled desire emancipated from all anxieties and frustrations” (119). “The universe of the dream is entirely within the mind of the dreamer,” and, in Frye’s anthropological view,

is not reality, but it is the conceivable imaginative limit of desire, which is infinite, eternal, and hence apocalyptic. By an apocalypse I mean primarily the imaginative conception of the whole of nature as the content of an infinite and eternal living body which, if not human, is closer to being human than to being inanimate. “The desire of man being infinite,” said Blake, “the possession is infinite and himself infinite.” (idem)

Blake being a favourite of Altizer, this conception of “infinite in finite” also features prominently in Altizer’s theory of literary apocalypse (see “Identity” 25 and “Apocalypse of Spirit” 34-35), and Altizer forcefully suggests that an attempt to secularize apocalyptic forms or symbols is an attempt to contain the infinitude of nature and time, and is thus an anagogical or myth-making impulse, if one that wrests power rather than creating it.

Frye won’t take it this far, though he will develop the notion more specifically in the next essay (see 141-43). For him, myth originates in the human imagination, whereas for Altizer it is a way of understanding a world that exists. What is striking, however, is the emphasis Frye places on the importance of religion in literature, and this is significant as a point of contrast with the current view of critical modernism. The following passage is quite lengthy, but worth looking at as a whole:

Interpretation proceeds by metaphor as well as creation, and even more explicitly. When St. Paul interprets the story of Abraham’s wives in Genesis, for instance, he says that Hagar “is” Mount Sinai in Arabia. Poetry, said Coleridge,

is the identity of knowledge.

The universe of poetry, however, is a literary universe, and not a separate existential universe. Apocalypse means revelation, and when art becomes apocalyptic, it reveals. But it reveals only on its own terms, and in its own forms: it does not describe or represent a separate content of revelation. When poet and critic pass from the archetypal to the anagogic phase, they enter a phase of which only religion, or something as infinite in its range as religion, can possibly form an external goal. The poetic imagination, unless it disciplines itself in the particular way in which the imaginations of Housman and Hardy were disciplined, is apt to get claustrophobic when it is allowed to talk only about human nature and subhuman nature; and poets are happier as servants of religion than of politics, because the transcendental and apocalyptic perspective of religion comes as a tremendous emancipation of the imaginative mind. . . . [T]he loftiest religion, no less than the grossest superstition, comes to the poet, *qua* poet, only as spirits came to Yeats, to give him metaphors for poetry. (125)

Herein lies the whole, or at least the heart, of Frye's treatment of apocalypse: religion *provides* metaphors for poetry, and religion *is* a metaphor for poetry, and perhaps vice versa. Not only, then, can the literary text deploy symbols from scriptural apocalypse, but it can approximate the revelatory function of apocalyptic scripture as well, and for Frye the substance of what it reveals is "the imitation of infinite social action and infinite human thought, the mind of a man who is all men, the universal creative word which is all words" (*idem*). I take this to mean that Frye considers all poetry—all literature—apocalyptic in its rhetoric, in its intention, or as a manifestation or revelation of the creative instant: in short, of myth.

Perhaps this idea is too broad to be of much use to us here, though its very

breadth, while nearly the opposite in scope of the reductive critical modernism described earlier, is of a piece with the secularity of that vision. But it is one thing to “treat every religion . . . as though it were a human hypothesis” (126) and quite another to ignore the religious significance of a symbol, whether that significance be introduced from outside the text, or it be acquired from within. The job of the critic in Frye’s scientific model is to make neither too much nor not enough of the religious element *qua* element (*idem*); rather, if I may be allowed the liberty of an inference, the job of the critic is to see, identify, and define the mode and substance of that symbol, including its relation to an external referent. The role of the critic is not that of eisegete, but of exegete.

In his third essay, Frye confirms the importance of the archetypal and anagogical criticisms as “the only kinds [of criticism] that assume a larger context of literature as a whole,” and therefore as the source of the “structural principles of literature” (134). Here he simplifies that structure just a bit, reducing the five fictional modes of the first essay to three worlds as backdrops or contexts for the activity of literature. “Myth . . . is one extreme of literary design; naturalism [later, ‘realism’] is the other, and in between lies the whole area of romance,” being in this case a “tendency to displace myth in the human direction and yet, in contrast to ‘realism,’ to conventionalize content in an idealized direction” (136-37).

The “world of myth [is] an abstract or purely literary world of fictional and thematic design,” “the imitation of actions near or at the conceivable limits of desire,” and is therefore “apocalyptic”: “a world of total metaphor, in which everything is potentially identical with everything else, as though it were all inside a single body” (136). When mythic structures (“symbols” generally, we might say) appear in realistic

fiction, and in order to resolve the issues of plausibility that crop up in consequence, the realist deploys devices that Frye calls “displacement” for solving issues of plausibility (idem). Displacement grows more and more earnest the further down the scale one moves, with ironic literature (one of the five modes identified in the first essay), being the “low point” in a vertical arrangement, or, in a circle, the northwest quadrant. Again, “ironic literature begins with realism and tends toward myth, its mythic patterns being as a rule more suggestive of the demonic [the undesirable] than of the apocalyptic [the desirable]” (140). Again, Frye’s theory both agrees with and resists a critical vocabulary that analyzes the structure of meaning in a text written in the ironic mode while insensible to the whole structure of apocalyptic thinking in the mythic mode. This vocabulary as it is deployed in modern fiction proper, he might say, tends to the demonic, but the demonic belongs quite squarely to mythology, even if invoked metaphorically, and the result is to mythologize, depressingly perhaps, the modern. The critic has a responsibility to acknowledge that tendency, and to consider its implications.

Fundamentally, though, Frye’s theory of apocalypse, especially his theory of apocalyptic imagery, seems to have been largely ignored, or at least effaced to the point of not being recognizable. In “Theory of Archetypal Meaning (1) and (2),” he sketches out the framework for apocalyptic and demonic imagery, the first not resembling the images evoked or identified in apocalypse criticism, the latter resembling them all too well. “The apocalyptic world,” he asserts, “presents . . . the categories of reality in the forms of human desire, as indicated by the forms they assume under the work of human civilization” (141). Those forms correspond to five divisions or components of the world as follows (141):

World	Human Form	Apocalyptic Identity
divine	society of gods	One God
human	society of men	One Man
animal	sheepfold	One Lamb
vegetable	garden or park	One Tree (of Life)
mineral	City	One Building, Temple, Stone

The human forms of apocalyptic imagery—the city, garden, and sheepfold represented, in turn, as sites of intercourse between humans and between humans and gods¹⁰—“are the organizing metaphors of the Bible and of most Christian symbolism, and they are brought into complete metaphorical identification in . . . Revelation,” a “carefully designed . . . undisplaced mythical conclusion for the Bible as a whole” (idem). Here the notion of the infinite contained in the finite (myth as an expression of human desire taking shape in the human imagination—the anagogic phase) is complemented by the containment of the finite in the infinite: each of the apocalyptic identities corresponding to the worlds and their forms in human desire points, in the Western tradition, to Christ. In religion, this identity is generally taken as “existential,” and in literature it is “metaphorical” (142), since for Frye the chief structure of mythic literature in the archetypal phase is that of metaphorical identity.

He elaborates this model considerably, but the important thing here is the conspicuous absence in Frye’s conception of apocalyptic imagery of the images of destruction, suffering, torment, punishment, and death that preoccupy critical modernism.

¹⁰ *Civitas Dei* is a prime example of the city as metaphor *in* myth.

Those are to be found in demonic imagery: the imagery, you will recall, that constitutes the “mythic patterns” of literature in the ironic mode—modern literature, to be precise.¹¹

Here the corollary human forms and identities are these (147-50):

World	Human Form	Demonic Identity
divine	“inaccessible sky”	“inscrutable fate”; “external necessity”; the implacable indifference of Nature and natural law.
human	“tension of egos”	“tyrant leader” ↔ “ <i>pharmakos</i> ”
animal	“monsters,” predators	“dragon”
vegetable	“sinister forest,” “enchanted garden,” “waste land”	“tree of death” or “forbidden knowledge”
mineral	“deserts, rocks, and waste land”; “ruins”; “weapons”	“prison”; “dungeon”; “furnace”

Frye’s description is much more detailed than this, and I should clarify that he ascribes the demonic identity to apocalyptic scripture just as he did the apocalyptic identity of desirable forms. Indeed, for Frye, demonic images find their total identification in the Bible, and more precisely in Biblical Apocalypse, as do apocalyptic images, and the mechanics of that identification in turn evoke the whole complex, and conflict, of these forms as they find expression in Revelation.¹² The forms of ironic literature, he tells us, are most often the parody and the satire, but the significance of the forms depends on, or appends from, the significance they have in their demonic identity. Again, most striking is that Frye brackets off these latter images as a separate category, though one in a dialectical relation, actual (scriptural) and literary, with the forms of desire—the

¹¹ The romantic, high mimetic, and low mimetic modes are assigned to the category “analogical imagery,” finding their best expression in the analogies of “innocence,” “nature and reason,” and “experience” respectively (153-54).

¹² In *The Great Code*, Frye’s treatment of Apocalypse as the “seventh phase” of the Biblical code colludes both sets of images in what turns out still to be a “positive” reading of Revelation (135-38).

apocalyptic forms already cited.

In brief, even if it were the case that *all* of modern fiction were ironic (and much of it certainly is), we would still need to situate its meaning with respect to the “grammar of apocalyptic [and demonic] imagery” we have in “Biblical Apocalypse” (141). As I hope to show in the later chapters of this thesis, however, not all modern literature is ironic, or at least not in the way that Frye defines it here, and thus a clear division between “demonic” and “apocalyptic” becomes even more desirable in critical modernism.

3. “The Artifice of Eternity”: Kermode’s Sense of Endings

In contrast to Frye’s theory of apocalyptic imagery, Kermode’s *The Sense of an Ending* has achieved cult status: it is cited in every work of apocalypse theory or apocalypse criticism I have consulted. I find this difference in explicit influence interesting in a number of ways. It is reasonable to call both *The Sense of an Ending* and *Anatomy of Criticism* structuralist after a fashion, for both wax Aristotelian, both seek to understand the aesthetic structures at the heart of literary forms, and both see the Bible, and specifically Revelation, as a key-text in the development of those forms. Frye is more enthusiastic about the mythic element, though his work is quite clearly rooted in a cultural anthropology reminiscent of and partially indebted to Frazier and Jung. Kermode is more formally ascetic and skeptical: his is an aesthetic interest exclusively, and he has no patience for “naïve” (9), “spurious” (15, 124), “demotic,” or “bogus” (96) uses of apocalypse. Frye, of course, would see them as culturally valid, though he wouldn’t believe them anymore than Kermode.

And perhaps it is his impatience with the explicitly scriptural overtones of Frye's hermeneutic that makes Kermode the theorist of choice in apocalypse theory. His is an aseptically secular notion—austere, condescending in its dismissal of “bogus” apocalypse—and it is easy to see the foundations of the critical modernism described above in his theory. Of course, as a public critic and not an academic one, he is at more liberty here than might otherwise be the case: *The Sense of an Ending* is the published version of lectures he delivered in 1965, and it presents itself accordingly, making sweeping dismissals and generalizations in order to foreground the theory itself, a move that is not only permissible but desirable in a lecture format.¹³ As with Frye, my review of Kermode is incomplete: I will refer to passages, usually sequentially (i.e. as they are presented in his book), that are indicative of Kermode's tone as these inform his use of the terminology of apocalyptic thought and literature, and I will attempt to sketch the basic structure of his argument clearly and fairly. I am particularly interested in what he has to say about apocalypse in the context of modern literature, of course, reminding the reader that Kermode, like Frye, covers extensive territory in the development of his theory, though with a tendency to analogy and repetition rather than systematic development. In this light I am most interested in two lectures: I, “The End”; and IV, “The Modern Apocalypse.”¹⁴

Kermode opens his first talk with two assumptions. The first aligns him with Frye's sense of the ideal character of the critical enterprise, and the second announces the

¹³ That it should become the cornerstone of critical talk about apocalypse is, perhaps, a little alarming, or should be, for while Kermode is erudite, in *The Sense of an Ending* he is also casual.

¹⁴ Kermode has written on this subject since—notably two chapters in anthologies (“Waiting for the End” in Bull, *Apocalypse Theory* and “Apocalypse and the Modern” in Friedlander et al, *Visions of Apocalypse*), but he has added little by way of substance to his original formulation, a formulation he approves in his 1999 epilogue to the edition I am using here.

object of his attentions:

It is not expected of critics as it is of poets that they should help us to make sense of our lives; they are bound only to attempt the lesser feat of making sense of the ways we try to make sense of our lives. . . . [and] it makes little difference—though it makes some—whether you believe the age of the world to be six thousand years or five thousand million years; whether you think time will have a stop or that the world is eternal; there is still a need to speak humanly of life’s importance in relation to it—a need in the moment of existence to belong, to be related to a beginning and to an end. (*Sense* 3-4)

The first of these assumptions sets up a charming and necessary humility topos. Kermode confesses the possibility of “ignorance and dull vision.” Though the ignorance and vision he refers to are never vulgar, they are qualities generally left unchallenged in apocalypse theory, perhaps because they overstate the case: Kermode is far from ignorant, and almost never dull. I will agree, however, that his vision is limited.

The second assumption comes after a reference to Yeats’ “Sailing to Byzantium” (*The Tower*, 1927), stanzas III and IV, a citation that stacks the deck a little in favour of Kermode’s first assumption: the critic should notice the implausibility of the fundamental fiction in Yeats’ poem. A “golden bird,” ornamental (not even mechanical), sings, to “keep a drowsy Emperor awake/ . . . /Of what is past, or passing, or to come” (ln. 29-32). “Out of nature” (ln. 25) becomes a key phrase in Kermode’s brief reading, as both an evocation and implicit rejection of the mythological or magical sensibility of the image. As it turns out, the rejection is Kermode’s entirely. In the poem, the speaker muses on his own death, anticipates being “gather[ed]/Into the artifice of eternity” (ln. 23-24), and wills reincarnation as the artificial bird. The essence that survives, the activity, is the

poetic-prophetic, and the poem is a revelation of desire in the form of a “total metaphorical identification” of the kind Frye was interested in—anagogical, monadic, and that embodies the poet in the world of myth. Kermode’s treatment of the lines is essentially misprive, but it serves to set up the disposition of his argument quite well, and to establish him as a critic not overtly interested in making sense of life in any of its forms, especially not its primitive forms. “There are other prophets beside the golden bird,” Kermode says, “and we are capable of deciding that they are false, or obsolete” (4). Prophecy is false, or obsolete: these are the limited choices of Kermodean apocalypse, though not, as we shall see in the later chapters, of British fiction itself.

Kermode is most interested in “fictions of the End,” and in his view Apocalypse (Revelation) is “rectilinear,” “ends [the Bible as model of history], transforms, and is concordant,” and is still the “type and source” of fictions that, while “open,” “still have, and . . . must continue to have, a real relation to simpler fictions about the world” (5-6). As a source text, it is “[consonant] with our more naïve requirements of fiction” (7). The principal requirement is to provide an end, a concord, and one that “give[s] meaning to lives and poems.” The trouble is, “[m]en, like poets, fear [the End] . . . ; the End is a figure for their own deaths” (idem), so we “project ourselves—a small, humble elect, perhaps—past the End, so as to see the structure whole, a thing we cannot do from our spot in the middle” (8). We wish, in other words, to get the meaning *of* life *in* life, and “fictions” like Revelation help us do just that, even if the meaning turns out to be terrifying.

Our readings of Revelation in particular require a historical more than a personal view, however, and Kermode picks at this bone relentlessly in his dissociation of the

“naïve” forms of apocalypse (9) from the literary forms that interest him. Scriptural apocalypse survives by “absorb[ing] changing interests [and] rival apocalypses It is patient of change and of historiographical sophistications. It allows itself to be diffused, blended with other varieties of fiction” (8). Yet it can also “survive in very naïve forms” (9), and this really exercises Kermode, since despite its apparent failures as a prophecy, “[a]pocalypse can be disconfirmed without being discredited” (8). His treatment of “naïve apocalypticism [sic]” (9) confirms that Kermode’s primary requirement is that we leave off believing Revelation as a *bona fide* revelation, whether we cultivate arithmological predictions or political forecasts for its fulfilment, or admit it as the whole story of the end of human history without attempting a literal identification of its images, characters, and events with the history that unfolds around us. As much, then, as Kermode protests it is not his role as critic to make sense of the way we live, it seems important to him that we not live in expectation of the End, that we “de-mythologize” scriptural apocalypse, and encounter it only on the literary field.

Kermode proposes, therefore, to “say a word about apocalyptic doctrines of crisis, decadence, and empire, and of the division of history into mutually significant phases and transitions; with a word on disconfirmation, the inevitable fate of detailed eschatological predictions” (14). Again, Kermode’s language is saturated in his personal epistemological bias, and in his limited view of Revelation as “rectilinear,” an idea that serves his aesthetic and his ideological intentions. Disconfirmation is of the “eschatological predictions” that come from hermeneutical readings of Revelation. They are the by-product, not the province, of scriptural apocalypse, except in broad strokes and otherwise apparently figurative terms. Revelation resists total interpretation, and thus leaves itself

open to interpretation. We might well say of it, in fact, what Alain Robbe-Grillet said of the *nouveau roman* of the 1950s: it “repeats itself, bisects itself, modifies itself, contradicts itself” (qtd. in Kermode 19). Revelation is always and never relevant, immanent in the mind and also imminent in time, though our expectation of its fulfillment can never be ingenuously certain. In his disdain for failed eschatological prophecies, however, Kermode is anxious to reduce—to aestheticize—the meaning of scriptural apocalypse absolutely. Thus, where Frye is content to separate the hermeneutical function of the critic from that of the disciple or believer, Kermode must discredit the believer.

For example, disconfirmation, and the subsequent crisis (though not vanquishment) of belief, becomes in Kermode’s concept a re-enactment of “the familiar dialogue between credulity and skepticism,” the intentional “falsification of an expectation,” and therefore a narrative strategy, a structural principle. Such a text, we determine, “respects our sense of reality”—presumably, and oddly, reality’s randomness, its unpredictability—and is therefore the locus of a plausible and “*real*” revelation (18). If this can be said of the aesthetic appropriation, or application, or transposition of structural elements of apocalypse (as source) and the hermeneutic resulting from it, why not of scriptural apocalypse as type? Somehow the intentionality Kermode assigns to modern and postmodern fictions does not apply to the ancient texts. A “skeptical modification” of this “paradigmatic fiction” *requires* that it not apply, of course: Kermode wishes to “make sense” of Revelation, given he cannot “break free” of it, and so credulity in any form must give way to rationalism (24).

Part of Kermode’s aestheticization of scriptural apocalypse—its adoption, in other

words, as a literary and not merely a scriptural genre—is grounded in an analysis of its parts. Kermode identifies the three thematic preoccupations of apocalypse as indicated above: crisis, decadence, and empire. Each of these themes figures prominently in critical modernism’s sense of apocalypse as I parsed it above, especially as the eschatological visions of the moderns are situated aesthetically (decadence to renovation) and socio-politically (collapse of empire), but it is crisis that features most consistently in Kermode’s concept, and he believes he is justified by the history of Catholic eschatology itself:

The earliest Christians had a sharp experience of disconfirmation, and the text of St. Mark, the least favoured of the gospels in early days, became important: ‘of that day or that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.’ They had, as Bultmann puts it, abolished history in favour of eschatology; but it was a premature abolition. Already in St. Paul and St. John there is a tendency to conceive of the End as happening at every moment; this is the moment when the modern concept of *crisis* was born—St. John puns on the Greek word, which means both ‘judgment’ and ‘separation.’ Increasingly the present as ‘time-between’ came to mean not the time between one’s moment and the *parousia*, but between one’s moment and one’s death. This throws the weight of ‘End-feeling’ on to the moment, the crisis, but also on to the sacraments. ‘In the sacramental church,’ says Bultmann, ‘eschatology is not abandoned but neutralized in so far as the powers of the beyond are already working in the present.’ No longer imminent, the End is immanent. (24-25)

In Kermodean apocalypse eschatology becomes increasingly personal, and its association increasingly attached to crisis, and most specifically to the crisis of death.

Clearly, Kermode’s conception of “apocalypse” is different from Frye’s, and it

lacks a comparable basis in a critical survey. Where Frye's conception is rooted in a specific critical framework, or in certain assumptions about what constitutes a stable critical framework, Kermode's is informed by a deep skepticism that seeks to recover literature from credulity. Specifically, what Frye called "demonic" is for Kermode the primary manifestation of apocalypse in modern letters, and this reduction informs the network of assumptions that are the framework and foundation of Kermode's theory. Augustine, Kermode says,

speaks of the terrors of the End as a figure for personal death, as Winkelhofer calls each death a recurring *parousia*. But apocalypse, which included and superseded prophecy, was itself to be included in tragedy¹⁵; and tragedy lost its height and stateliness when the single unritualized death became the sole point of reference. Literary and theological apocalypse have alike chosen to concentrate upon what was only an implication of the original apocalyptic pattern; this is the way they have responded to modern reality. (25-26).

Kermode acknowledges that there are modern theologians—Pieper in particular—who have not "departed so far from the archetype" (26), but he makes no such allowance for literary apocalypse. As a result, he offers a reading of literary apocalypse as totalizing as Childs' (and perhaps inspirational to it): "the sole point of reference" is personal death, and apocalypticism survives only as a fragment, an "implication."

This is a bold and effective reading of modern apocalypse, and it allows Kermode to conclude, in high schoolmaster style, in even more totalizing terms,

We can see how what I have called naïve apocalypticism has been modified to

¹⁵ Kermode says later that it was in the Renaissance, when "epic poets were reviving the Sibylline eschatology for imperial purposes," that "the terrors of apocalypse were absorbed by tragedy" (27).

produce (under the pressure and relevance of great new systems of knowledge, technological and social change, of human decision itself) a sense of ends only loosely related to the older predictive apocalypse, and to its simpler notions of decadence, empire, transition, heavens on earth. Granted that the End becomes a predicament of the individual, we may look back at these historical patterns with envy, but without any sense that they can ever be useful except as fictions patiently explained. (26-27)

The critical tendency that I critique in this thesis—the “loose” application of apocalyptic terminology—is here elevated almost above reproach, in contrast to “naïve” readings and ways of reading, and one begins to see clearly the imprint of Kermode’s theory on critical uses of apocalypse: the dissolution or fragmentation of apocalypse into a set of themes or images, a skeptical suspicion of anything resembling apocalyptic belief except in figurative terms, and a general displacement of apocalyptic figures and themes from “the older, predictive apocalypse.” The attraction of Kermode’s theory is considerable. Critics have, if they espouse Kermode’s doctrine, *carte-blanche* to redraw the boundaries of literary apocalypse and, in turn, their readings, like the fictions they describe and construct, “are not subject . . . to proof or disconfirmation” (40).

To be fair, Kermode later acknowledges that a reading of modernism that emphasizes crisis as the crucial or central element is itself “dangerous,” prone to becoming a “myth” which, “uncritically accepted, tends like prophecy to shape a future to confirm it” (94). He argues further that the “eschatological anxiety” of modernism is hardly peculiar, that such anxiety has been with us for millennia, and that the “character of our apocalypse” is to be found in its “imagery of past and present and future” rather than in “our confidence in the uniqueness of our crisis” (95-96). At bottom, though,

Kermode is not interested that “apocalypse” mean much of anything in a secular age. No sooner has he fragmented the genre than he wishes to demythologize its parts. Our sense of crisis is human, perennial, and uninteresting; time has become, in Beckett, “an endless transition from one condition of misery to another, ‘a passion without form or stations,’ to be ended by no *parousia*. It is a world crying out for forms and stations, and for apocalypse; all it gets is vain temporality, mad, multiform antithetical influx” (115).¹⁶

And indeed, transition is the order of the day for Kermode, the *modus vivendi* of modernity in all its stages, and, together with “decadence-and-renovation,” transition is the “dominant aspect[] of apocalypse for the arts. . . .” It is “elevated to secular status” (114). (That is a startling formulation, and if Kermode’s feelings about “naïve” apocalypse were ever in doubt they can no longer be.) As an exemplar, Kermode turns again to Yeats, who is “certainly an apocalyptic poet, but . . . does not take [apocalyptic elements] literally,” a figurative-mindedness Kermode thinks typical of the “modern literary public”: “[a]ll the same, like us, he believed them in some fashion, and associated apocalypse with war” (98). In Yeats, then, we find “all the elements of the apocalyptic paradigm that concern us”:

There are the Terrors; the clerkly skepticism proper to a learned aristocrat confronted by these images of horror; a deep conviction of decadence and a prophetic confidence of renovation; and all this involved in the belief that his moment was the moment of supreme crisis. . . . (99)

Here is, in Kermode’s hands, and not altogether convincingly, the portrait of a modern apocalypticist, a prophet-poet bringing the crisis of his own time into metaphorical and

¹⁶ “Antithetical multiform influx” comes from Yeats, and is the abstraction of the time of transition from one gyre of history to the next. See Kermode 99.

skeptical identity with a version of scriptural apocalypse, working anagogically, but with serious and ironic reservations. This modern sense of the end is a “sophisticated apocalypticism” (100) that has left behind the credulity and literal-mindedness of the old apocalyptic thinking, even though it patterns itself on the interpretative renovation of the old hermeneutic.

Kermode’s portrait of Yeats isn’t very convincing for two reasons. The first is that it is difficult to reconcile Yeats’ “clerkly skepticism” about one mythology and his reported “conviction,” “prophetic confidence,” and “belief,” literal or not, in what amounts to another, albeit idiosyncratic and heterodox. The second reason is that Kermode’s interpretation of Yeats’ gyre imagery seems at odds with Yeats’ own conception. Kermode says the “old age narrows to its apex [while] the new broadens to its base, and the old and new interpenetrate [in] an age of very rapid transition” (100). Contrarily, in “The Second Coming” at any rate, the formulation runs thus: “Turning and turning in the widening gyre/The falcon cannot hear the falconer;/Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold” (ln. 1-3). Surely the image of the old age expanding to the point of collapse fits better with the theme of decadence-and-renovation that Kermode argues accompanies transition as one of the “dominant aspects” of apocalypse in modern letters (Kermode, *Sense* 105). It may be that collapse is the wrong figure, though, since Kermode wishes always to emphasize the perpetuity of transition, not the discernible end of an age or cycle. “The Second Coming” resists his notion in another way as well: while the *parousia* Yeats imagines here is terrifying, it is also unmistakably reminiscent of the first coming, born as the slouching beast will be in Bethlehem (ln. 22), even if it signifies something other than the Christ in Yeats’ own system.

But perhaps my interpretation of the image is too close to Frye's notion of "centrifugal" or "outward" meaning—the symbol as sign—and thus to the sense that the vocabulary of an age, of a canon or a critical enterprise, reaches out to its external, mythic significance as it exhausts itself. What serves Kermode in all of this is not the mythological overtones of such a formulation—the replacement mythology that demands interpretation in its own right, and which borrows heavily from scriptural apocalypse in its construction—but the element he has already decided matters most: a transition which is "an age in its own right," and in the absence of credulity in an end, a "permanent" age at that (102). Should any of the objects of his veneration—Pound, Yeats, Lewis, Eliot, Joyce: "men of critical temper, haters of the decadence of the times and the myths of *mauvaise foi*" (104)—should any of them commit "dangerous lapses into mythical thinking," such lapses are said by Kermode to constitute a "failure" of the "clerical skepticism" (109) he so values and requires of his canons, prophets, and icons of modernism. This is decidedly pick-and-choose criticism, however compelling it might be as a partial portrait or map of modernism, and Kermode would damn the streams fed by these lapses rather than sketch them on his map. Such a map is artificial in its selection, and aphasic by design.

Kermode says much more—about the distinction between "authoritarian traditionalist" and "hipster anarchist" or schismatic modernism, for instance—but it is all in service to these basic assumptions about what constitutes and characterizes literary apocalypse, especially in the modern context. He chooses, for instance, Joyce's *Ulysses* as the ideal modern apocalypse: "Joyce chooses a Day; it is a crisis ironically treated. The day is full of randomness" (113). The "Day" is certainly "full of randomness," and of

course the novel is not. It is among the least spontaneous of the modernist texts, very tightly controlled to give the sensation of randomness in both stream of consciousness and the human stream into and out of which both Stephen and Leo move. In this sense, *Ulysses* is never relaxed, even for all its ribald wit, paronomastic athleticism, and allusive brilliance. More significantly, Kermode chooses Joyce over Lawrence, whose “fictions of apocalypse . . . turn easily into myths” (112). Myth is excommunicate in Kermode’s conception of modern apocalypse, and this imposition, this critical decision, stands once again in stark contrast to Frye’s sense that the ironic tends back to mythology naturally, since it constitutes both the furthest remove from and a trajectory of return to myth at one and the same time. For Kermode, to be secular is to be elevated above superstition. Yet to hold secularity—in Kermode’s terms, skepticism—as the essential quality of the modern is to restrict the corpus, the canon, and the character of modernity, and to make over modernism in the image of the critic. Worse, because Kermode’s theory of apocalypse privileges secularity, and because Kermode’s theory has for the last three decades been, excuse the irony, the “bible” of apocalyptic study in literature and, to a lesser degree, in religious studies, apocalypse theory has generally ignored uses of apocalypse that do not secularize or ironize its rhetorical or generic structures.

4. Conclusion (For Now)

What if we do not grant that the End becomes, exclusively, “a predicament of the individual,” though it is unarguably that insofar as apocalyptic concerns are limited to eschatological ones? What if we do not agree that all modern fictions are at an ironic distance from the mythology they are said by Kermode to displace and by Frye to re-

invoke in demonic terms? What if not all apocalypses are without hope in *parousia*—or, for that matter, *Parousia*? What if not all literary apocalypse is eschatologically oriented, obsessed with crisis as terminus, or with perpetual and meaningless transition? Certainly we find the themes and traces of apocalyptic thinking in the way Kermode and his colleagues suggest, but we find much else in modern fictions as well: much that defies explanation in the terms to which we have grown accustomed.

After all, what about that scythe in *Mr Britling Sees It Through*? To be fair, the scythe may well and simply represent the continuation of work, and may register the novel's hope in the things that endure through war: planting and harvesting, churchgoing, the peace of contemplation. If so, in accounting for the binocular vision of critical modernism, it participates nicely in both looking forward through the war for a restoration or renewal of human society, and looking back nostalgically at what is threatened by the spectre of war, or more accurately looking back to times and things as they were before modernity's corrupting and desecrating touch. Yet it also confounds Kermodean apocalypse in that it returns the present time of the novel to itself, removing it from the immanence of "apocalypse now" and replacing it in the imminence of apocalypse (as event, and as revelation) yet-to-come.

It does this by dint of its unmistakable allusive function. The whetting, or sharpening, of the scythe indicates a preparation for harvest, and harvest imagery in the Bible, and therefore in Western literature generally, is "apocalyptic" in its significance, having reference to the various "ends" of Israel throughout its history and to the destruction of the wicked (Rev. 19:11-21), the gathering in of the righteous (Rev. 19: 1-9), and the judgment both implicit in the separation of the wheat from the tares (Rev.

14:14-20), and that awaits all God's children on the "great and very terrible" day (Joel 2:11, Rev. 20:12).

There may be yet other ways to read the final aural image in Wells' novel or the idea of mystery in Lawrence's, just as there are several ways to read Revelation. Such "symbols" certainly acquire new significance, and are not necessarily to be read as "literal." As Frye puts it, the "appearance of a ghost in *Hamlet* represents the hypothesis 'let there be a ghost in *Hamlet*.' It has nothing to do with whether ghosts exist or not, or whether Shakespeare or his audience thought they did" (*Anatomy* 76). And the same thing might be concluded about Lawrence's "mystery" or Wells' scythe. But to efface or skirt the clearest of the readings—which is, in the context of apocalyptic "symbols" or elements deployed in modern fictions, still figurative, and never literal (see Frye 81)—is to falsify the total identity of "apocalyptic" fictions of the period precisely because to do so is to totalize the apocalyptic identity of the period as an exclusively secular one. Such exclusions add to the looseness of a vocabulary of apocalypse in critical modernism that favours the secular view of an aesthetic modernism and therefore excludes fictions that seek a more "fully apocalyptic" identity, or that represent a more fully apocalyptic experience.¹⁷

¹⁷ Another example of a critic who acknowledges this "hopeful" and ostensibly mystical aspect in modern fictions is David Trotter. Recalling Rupert Birkin's epiphanic musings over Gerald's corpse at the end of *Women in Love*, Trotter observes that Birkin "remembers 'the beautiful face of one whom he had loved,' and feels momentarily restored. 'No-one could remember it without gaining faith in the mystery, without the soul's warming into new, deep life-trust.'" For Trotter, as for Wright, this constitutes a slippage from a modernist impulse.

CHAPTER II

“THERE AND BACK AGAIN”: SCRIPTURAL AND SECULAR APOCALYPSE

There was a time not long distant when it was commonly thought that the historical discovery of the eschatological foundation and origin of Christianity, and the consequent “eschatological scandal” to faith, was of import only to the Christian believer, and to that rapidly retreating subculture of Christian theology and Christian thought. But now we are gradually coming to see the integral relationship between Christian apocalypticism and Western culture, and not simply in the political arena, but also in the realm of the imagination, where the unique styles and genres of Western literature are being forced by contemporary analysis to reveal their long hidden apocalyptic roots.

Thomas J.J. Altizer, “Apocalyptic Identity” 22

Will you be as gods? Gaze in your omphalos.

Stephen Dedalus, *Ulysses* 53

Near the end of his life, D.H. Lawrence sought to recover “mystic, ‘loving’ Christianity” (20) from the “religion of John of Patmos”—the “Christianity of self-glorification,” as he perceived it (16)—principally by offering a critique of the Revelation of Saint John. The resulting book is a strangely acerbic and (typical of Lawrence)

unapologetically self-reflexive work, combining rather incautious, impassioned, and anachronistic literary criticism with a pseudo-theological reflection rooted in several things. The first of these is the author's admitted lifelong antipathy for the Bible: he found his recollection of the "portions" he had been made to memorize as a child "almost nauseating" after so many years, and characterized his feeling for it as, progressively, "dislike, repulsion, and even resentment" (4). He was especially turned off, from the age of at least ten years old (7), by Revelation, finding it "antipathetic," its imagery "unnatural" and "unpoetic," and its tone insidiously vengeful (9-13). Another factor in his distaste for the book was his share in Nietzsche's antipathy for the "rule of the weak" (20), which he considered to be the politic of Revelation, the mark of a "popular religion, as distinct from thoughtful religion" (13), and the product of a "second-rate mind" which could only appeal, then, to the "vast mass of Christian minds—the vast mass being always second rate" (20-21).

Still another factor in the peculiarity of Lawrence's critique is his nostalgia for a pre-Christian simplicity of art and perception. Indeed, the portrait of Lawrence that emerges from both Aldington's preface and Lawrence's own text is one of a romantic seeker after an ancient, and largely unknowable way of life. Lawrence apparently fixed his nostalgic gaze¹ on the Etruscans, and Aldington's description of the attraction

¹ Lawrence was not alone in his nostalgic looking back. Calinescu observes the same tendency in Petrarch, who, while conscious that he belonged to an age of darkness relative to the bright light of the classical, felt also that there would "follow a better age. This sleep of forgetfulness will not last forever. When the darkness has been dispersed, our descendants can come again in the former pure radiance" (*Africa* IX.451-57; ctd. Calinescu 21). Note that, while nostalgic, Petrarch's gaze is also future-oriented. The same might not be said of Lawrence, but perhaps of several of his contemporaries: Pound and Eliot, for instance, who looked both backward to recuperate and renovate older forms and traditions, and forward to see the impact of that renovation on the future of art and life as modernity developed (see Nicholls 166-67). I say more about nostalgia and renovation in chapter III.

explains it well: Lawrence perceived in Etruscan art the vestiges of an “intense ‘physical’ life he thought the world [had] very nearly lost” (xxii). Theirs struck him as an art of the “living,” characterized by “real warmth and tenderness” and an honest, anti-idealist “vitality” free of the sexual prudery he despised for its false morality and false modesty, and no doubt for the domestic malaise he felt such principles masked (xxii-xxiii: see also Stewart).

Lawrence’s critique is subjective and impositive, lacking in his usual tenderness, and certainly in tidiness. Of course, Lawrence never was one much for tidiness, writing as he did out of passion more than a coherent aesthetic theory.² Indeed, passion seems to be the principal attraction to studying Lawrence among the moderns: he was a late-born romantic with Marxist tendencies and a Latin temperament, and he certainly brought that explosive passion to the task of reading Revelation. As a work of scholarship, theological, at any rate, *Apocalypse* is “quite worthless.” As Aldington notes, its value was not as a commentary of the revelation of John of Patmos, but rather as a “revelation of Lawrence” (xxvi).

And yet, while *Apocalypse* exhibits the old brawling muscularity of prose that characterized Lawrence’s best novels, it also exhibits a strident “sharpness” that Aldington had detected in the author’s final years, and which he attributed to the persecutions under which Lawrence laboured for the better part of his career (xi-xii). Aldington fails to say that sharpness is on display here, but it is: it quickly becomes apparent that Lawrence’s distaste for the Bible, and for Revelation in particular, comes out of a general antipathy for the religious culture of his day more than the book itself.

² E. M. Forster describes “the novel through which bardic influence has passed” as having “a wrecked air, like a drawing-room after an earthquake or a children’s party.” Then he quips: “Readers of D. H. Lawrence will know what I mean” (125).

For instance, he says he “detested the pie-pie mouthing, solemn, portentous way in which everybody reads the Bible,” calling it a “‘parson’s voice . . . always at its worst when mouthing out some portion of Revelation” (7-8). He objected, too, to the utter ubiquity of biblical instruction in his youth that was “poured into the childish consciousness day in, day out, year in, year out . . . expounded, dogmatically, and always morally expounded.” He objected further to the sameness of the interpretations he heard, whether voiced by a “Doctor of Divinity in the pulpit, or the big blacksmith who was [his] Sunday-school teacher” (4). Clearly, Lawrence’s objections to *Revelation*, apart from his aesthetic dislike of it, lay most deeply in the manner and matter of his experience with scriptural interpretation and teaching. In other words, he most strenuously objected to his Victorian, lower-class heritage, and by extension to the version of apocalypse it presented to him. As an artist, he “turned away from [his] immediate world,” not the whole of it (see Lewis, *Tarr* 29). Such, Lawrence asserted, was “the condition of many men of [his] generation” (5).³

I accept the reasons for his antipathy, associative or otherwise, even if I find his conclusions about Revelation narrow minded and unimaginative. The relevance of his critique to this project is simply this: while *Apocalypse* is unique in its design, purpose, and focus as a commentary on Revelation, it exemplifies twentieth-century skepticism about the spiritual and temporal reality of the prophetic framework that scripture—especially apocalyptic scripture—makes claim to, and the reality in time of the events it prophesies. Yet *Apocalypse* also exemplifies the continued interest of writers and thinkers

³ Harold Bloom claims “Lawrence compares oddly with the other major British writers of fiction in this century” because “[h]e is primarily a religious writer, precisely apocalyptic; they are not” (“Introduction” 14). Aldington concurs (xiii). They are both quite correct, however heterodox Lawrence may have thought himself. And that deep religious feeling, wherever it eventually takes him, makes Lawrence suitable for first mention here.

alike in theological problems, and their living sense that scripture and scriptural culture, as and through art, have still to do with the finite world in some way, even if only as cultural artifacts or ancient heresies to be overcome. Put simply, the fact that a high modernist, even a mystic and humanist like Lawrence, should devote a portion of his last months of life to reading a book of apocalyptic scripture indicates that Revelation still held imaginative and spiritual power in what critical modernism has generally considered a skeptical age.

Lawrence is not alone in his opinions about Revelation. C.H. Dodd felt that Revelation fell “below the level, not only of the teaching of Jesus, but of the best parts of the Old Testament” (qtd. in Rowley, 2nd ed., 123 fn.2), and a new generation of New Testament scholars, encouraged by conclusions of the controversial Jesus Seminar about the “actual” sayings of Jesus, agree with Lawrence that the Jesus of Revelation bears no resemblance to the figure they’ve constructed (see Patterson), though on very different grounds: Lawrence offers here a literary and philosophical critique of Revelation, not an analysis of its authenticity, which he appears to assume. There are, of course, dissenters to this position: notably Rowley, who thought that Revelation was “a great apocalypse” included in the canon “by a sound instinct” (2nd ed. 115, 123), and, more recently, Altizer (“Apocalyptic Identity” 22-23).

Their analyses illustrate that Revelation need not be read as an insidious document, that judgment need not be equated with vengeance, that prophecy can comprise both warning and promise, and that readers need not celebrate the sufferings of the wicked in order to anticipate the blessing of the righteous. Whatever their theological inclinations, Revelation strikes them as it struck Frye as at least a book of immense

literary utility and importance, for it is a repository of images and ideals that endure even today, and as a *topos* of intense emotion. Even Lawrence is “guilty” of drawing on the power of the book, despite his repugnance for it.⁴ Indeed, the value of the moods, tones, imagery, and interpretative possibilities of apocalypse for the moderns is clear. Given the extent and uniqueness of their break with previous traditions, most critics agree that the moderns and modern literature tend, as I have already mentioned, to generally apocalyptic views (Bradbury and McFarlane 20). We commonly assert that the moderns were anxious about the relation between and the duration of individual being and time in a century that had accepted a fundamentally changed view of western religion as a credible belief system or practice. After unparalleled destruction of human lives, and unparalleled political, scientific, and cultural revolution, apocalypse seems for the moderns an ideal handle on the importance and horror of their age, and a ready-made “grammar” for understanding and shaping their own work as artists.

The apocalyptic views of the moderns are often realized as they manifest in literature, constituting either new philosophical interpretations or distinctly aesthetic uses of apocalypse, for they were not generally interested in a literal fulfillment of Revelation on a global or universal scale, but rather in figuring the cosmic drama in the life of the individual self—the “only terra firma in a boiling and shifting world” (Lewis, *Time* 132), especially as it shaped the *durée* of “private time” (Calinescu 5). Several works assert that the relationship between modernism and Judaeo-Christianity in particular is not one of divorce or separation but of at worst an intense dialectic, and that even ostensibly atheist modernists “represent [the Judaeo-Christian tradition], no matter how deviantly”

⁴ See Barr, Colmer, D’Andrea, Fjågesund, Gregory, Gutierrez, Kermode (“Apocalypse and the Modern”), and Urang for examinations of apocalypse as it figures in Lawrence’s oeuvre.

(Calinescu 62). Calinescu continues:

even if it attempted to do so, [modernity] did not succeed in suppressing man's religious need and imagination; and by diverting them from their traditional course it may even have intensified them in the guise of an untold flourishing of heterodoxies—in religion proper, in morals, in social and political thinking, and in aesthetics. (62-63)

This is certainly the case, and will be recognized as important to a more democratic critical concept.

In a reading of Kafka's *Amerika* as part of an examination of the canonical authority of the Bible in literature, Robert Alter observes that the character Karl Rossmann carries an "unread" "pocket edition of the Bible (no doubt, in Luther's translation). . . . at the bottom of his suitcase next to the photograph of Karl's parents that so mesmerizes him." Alter surmises that for Rossmann the Bible has a metonymic "contiguity with parental authority," thereby reducing it to a "talisman" or "token" (77-78). Yet it is also clear that while the Bible, unread by Rossmann, is not an intertext for him, it is an intertext for Kafka's novel, and for Kafka, even if not as a "fixed source of authority" (95). Rossmann's—and Kafka's—attachment to it illustrates the moderns' relation to scripture as at least a significant cultural object. Alter takes this further in arguing for the "literary canonicity" (50) of the Bible:

The effect produced by [Kafka's] imagining in biblical patterns in a contemporary setting is whimsical, sometimes vaguely grotesque, at moments deliberately absurd. And yet, the canon continues to confront him, to address him, to demand that he make sense of his world through it. In *Amerika* he proceeds from the assumption that the Bible can provide him a resonant structure

of motifs, themes, and symbols to probe the meaning of the contemporary world. If his existential doubt, his perception of a labyrinth of contradictions in both the text and the world, are modernist, his urgent engagement in Scripture is traditional. (95-96)

This is a portrait of a strange and complex relationship with scripture, and Alter knows it. He detects the same odd combination of irreverent manipulation and ironization of biblical language and figures in Joyce, closer in spirit and culture to the figures I deal with specifically in this thesis. Of Joyce, Alter observes that “[i]n the extraordinarily supple and varied uses to which the Bible is put in *Ulysses*, it is converted into a secular text, but perhaps not entirely secular, after all, because it is reasserted as a source of value and vision” (182-83).

That conclusion occurs at the end of Alter’s meditation on canonicity, and it leaves the question of the relation between the doctrinal and literary influence of scripture quite open. Other figures take it even further. For instance, Fiddes, and particularly Steiner, go so far as to suggest that religious culture and faith are always immanent in modernism, and not just as a literary source-text or pre-text. My own thesis stops well short of that claim; my concern is chiefly with a restitution of lost dimensions to our notion of literary apocalypse, and thus, as I have stated before, with a re-examination of the critical uses of “apocalypse” as a defining characteristic of modern literature. What matters here is that “the association between modernity and a secular view of the world has become automatic” (Calinescu 59), and that some recent discussions of Modernism reconsider that association as a totalizing reading of the period (e.g. Altizer, Calinescu, Fiddes, Glicksberg, and Steiner).

1. The Character of Apocalypse

“Apocalypse”—in Greek *αποκαλυψις*—means literally “unveiling” or “lifting of the veil.” In general terms, the Apocalypse (Revelation), belongs “to the genre of ancient Jewish and Christian literature which modern scholars call apocalypses” (Bauckham 1): “a complex of writings and ideas which were widespread about the turn of the era in Palestine, in the Israelite diaspora and in early Christian circles, but which can also appear in similar form in other religious situations and mental climates” (Koch qtd. in Collins, “Introduction” 2). As a generic label, however, “apocalypse” is “modern,” and generally means “literary compositions which resemble the book of Revelation, i.e., secret divine disclosures about the end of the world and the heavenly state” (idem). The precise composition of the genre is “a matter of dispute,” as is a precise definition of it as a “literary genre,” though it is agreed that every apocalypse “contains a number of smaller recognizable forms—such as visions, prayers, and exhortations,” and that one cannot “preclude the possibility that the larger frameworks, within which these elements are held together, are also marked by distinctive recurring characteristics” (Collins 3).

Collins notes further that “[n]ot every writing which expresses apocalyptic eschatology can be classified as an apocalypse,” and that many scholars distinguish between “‘apocalypse’ as a literary genre, ‘apocalyptic eschatology’ as a particular religious perspective and structure of thought, and ‘apocalypticism’ as a sociological ideology” (3). It should be noted that when Collins speaks of apocalypse in literary terms, he refers to the ancient texts generally classified as apocalypses, or presented as candidates for inclusion in that tradition, all of which have some relationship to scripture,

either as canonical texts or as apocryphal scriptural witnesses.⁵ Yarbrow Collins assigns Revelation to the category of “otherworldly visions and auditions” (69), since although its “content . . . is primarily eschatological,” its “dominant literary form . . . is the vision account” (71). Here again is a confirmation of the importance of the revelatory substance, the prophetic mediation, and the eschatological character of the book as source text for literary apocalypse.

Richard Bauckham notes that Revelation belongs to “three kinds of literature” (1), and he cites the first verse, which I offer here: “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John” (Rev 1:1). Bauckham draws attention to the “chain of revelation” outlined in the opening verse as what amounts to a complexly layered narratology: “God → Christ → angel → John (the writer) → the servants of God” (1). In its claims of authorship, Revelation enriches the sense of the word that serves as its title: this is the “Revelation of Jesus Christ,” with God as its author, Christ as its speaker, an angel as its herald, John as its narrator/scrivener, and Christian disciples as its hearers or readers. It claims to be nothing short of the “self-disclosure” of God: the revelation is “given” to Christ, and therefore belongs to him, but it is also the revelation “of” Christ to humankind.

Subsequent verses broaden the generic footprint of Revelation. The phrase “things which must shortly come to pass” from verse 1 is clarified in verse 3: this is a “prophecy” meant to be “read,” “heard,” and “kept,” for the “time” of its fulfilment “is at hand”; and this prophetic dimension, and its sacred character, Bauckham points out (1), are

⁵ See the tables in Collins, John: “Jewish Apocalypses” (28) and Yarbrow Collins, Adela: “Early Christian Apocalypses” (104-105). The structural (narratological and organizational) and thematic elements are listed on one axis, the known apocalypses on the other.

confirmed later in the book (Rev. 22:6-7, 18-19). Here, too, the eschatological character of Revelation is confirmed. But Revelation is also a letter (Bauckham 2, Yarbro Collins 70) as indicated by verse 4-6 of the first chapter. It constitutes a blanket address to seven churches or branches of the Church, a feature which, apart from some minor differences with apostolic epistolary forms (Paul's, in particular), situates Revelation squarely in the Christian scriptural tradition (Bauckham 2). In sum, Revelation "seems to be an apocalyptic prophecy in the form of a circular letter to seven churches" (idem), and the letter is undersigned, in a sense, by Christ himself: "I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: . . . What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia" (Rev 1:11). These "letters"—the seven messages addressed to each of the seven churches (Rev 2, 3) are clearly "prophetic messages," and serve as an epistolary preface to what is a single revelation, one meant for any "that hath an ear to hear . . . what the Spirit saith" (Rev 2: 7, 11, 17, 29; 3: 6, 13, 22).

I propose to forego a "history of reception" for scriptural apocalypse, and more specifically for the book of Revelation, except as a fact or two become organic to the discussion that follows of the secularization of the genre. It should suffice to say that Revelation has, for good or ill report, a special status in the Christian canon. Its claims of provenance are direct, and its concomitant rhetorical power unmistakable. Generations of believers accept that Revelation is the revelation to humankind of God (Christ) and of universal history through the mediation of a prophet who acts as speaker or scribe. The book is sacred to them. It is a special form of prophecy. It is difficult, but not impenetrable, and meant to be read with spiritual as well as temporal eyes. A specific

knowledge of some parts of it will remain veiled until the time of their fulfilment,⁶ but the book specifically invites study and meditation.

In consequence, the believer lives the Gospel as it has been taught in all of scripture, as though the world will carry on, but she also looks forward in expectation to the union and salvation promised in scriptural apocalypse. She may not dare give that history a solid shape composed of the events that go on around her, though in general she will be attentive to the “signs of the times.” Of course, there have been many sects and leaders of sects who have thought to know with a great degree of specificity what the hour and day would be (most infamously, in recent years, the Branch Davidians). Such groups radicalize the prophetic and eschatological elements of Revelation, and their failures, in any generation, constitute the “eschatological scandal” to which Altizer refers above.⁷ These attempts are perhaps anomalous, perhaps not, but they constitute eisegetical excursions in any case. For the believer—whatever apprehension he or she may feel about the complexity of the text, its symbolisms, its numerology, and its prophetic warnings—situates the whole in a vast and intensely personal soteriology—in the promise of parousia, and of peace: “Surely I come quickly,” Christ promises; John replies, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus” (Rev 22:20).

It may, however, be useful to consider the work as a literary work. We have already got Kermode’s and Lawrence’s opinions about the “second-rate,” “spurious”

⁶ For instance, the specific time of the *parousia*, or Christ’s coming: “that day and hour knoweth no man” (Matt 24:36); “ye know neither the day nor the hour” (Matt 26:40); “If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee” (Rev 3:3).

⁷ It is also noteworthy that Christianity is not the only world religion with an apocalyptic tradition, and in other traditions, too, apocalyptic thought provokes a variety of responses, as evidenced by the exaggerated “apocalyptic” sensibilities of many of the radical clerics and militant groups in Islam which lead them to believe they can, in fact should, help bring about the apocalypse event.

quality and character of the book. What Frye, as a systematic critic, has to say about Revelation gives us a very different sense of its character as a work of literature, and may help set up a standard, however idiosyncratic and however steeped in myth and archetype criticism, that helps us look beyond the limits of critical apocalypse to this point. In *The Great Code*, Frye calls Revelation “a mosaic of allusions to the Old Testament: that is, it is a progression of antitypes” and thus “[w]hat the seer in Patmos had a vision of was primarily, as he conceived it, the true meaning of the Scriptures, . . . whatever or however he saw” (135). The “general material of the vision is the familiar material of prophecy,” says Frye, including material from older apocalypses (Ezekiel and Zechariah) as well as motifs from Genesis: falling stars and the “tree and water of life” most notably (135, 137). The purview of Revelation, or rather the purview of the destruction and renovation it forecasts, is both “social” and “natural” (135), and the vision itself is very complex. This complexity is literary: “We are greatly oversimplifying the vision,” warns Frye, “if we think of it simply as what the author thought was soon going to happen” (136). Rather, “all these incredible wonders are the inner meaning, or more accurately, the inner form of everything that is happening now. Man creates what he calls history as a screen to conceal the workings of apocalypse from himself” (idem), and modern man “represses” revelation (135) by refusing to understand it as an anagogical text that brings things as they are into total metaphorical identification with things as they are imagined.

Because his reading of Revelation is steeped in an understanding of the workings of mythology, because mythology neither frightens nor offends him, and because he understands that the immanence that Kermode calls the secular solution to failed imminence also belongs to the original text, Frye is untroubled by the failed readings or

predictions that punctuate the religious reception of Revelation. The “mystery” of the “half-esoteric beliefs of the primitive Christians” wins out over any of these, and “turns into a revelation of how things really are”: “the obvious power of Nero rolls into the darkness of the mystery of corrupted human will from whence it emerged” (136). This is a startling notion, especially considered against the deep skepticism of Lawrence and Kermode, who respectively disdain the literary dimensions and mystical claims of the text. Yet while it is poetic and fearless, it maintains its critical objectivity, that discipline Frye advocated in *Anatomy* that has the critic view sacred text as a human hypothesis, whatever else it might claim to be. Indeed, in Frye’s critical view of Revelation, the text itself is the agent of revelation proper, and the reader takes the place of the prophet-mediator: its “vision . . . is the vision of the total meaning of the Scriptures, and may break in on anyone at any time” (idem). Furthermore, it is the text, merely personified as Christ in the spirit of metaphorical or anagogical identification, that “comes like a thief in the night,” and “[w]hat is symbolized as the destruction of the order of nature is the destruction of the way of seeing that order that keeps man confined to the world of time and history as we know them” (idem).

Frye suggests that the apocalypse that tends to preoccupy us, believers and skeptics alike, is the “panoramic” apocalypse, “the vision of staggering marvels placed in a near future, and just before the end of time” (136). We read this apocalypse passively, as a “legal vision” that culminates in Judgment (136-37), a dock into which we enter as prisoners.⁸ It is this legal element—the high-minded, severe, authoritarian commandment one might hear if it were read in certain ways—that bothered Lawrence so. If Frye is

⁸ Lewis imagines something like this, albeit absurdly, in the *Childermass*, though of course his setting proves to be counterfeit.

right, then of course we might expect the truncated kind of apocalypse that enters into secular literature, since this judgmental severity would resonate most powerfully in the cultural response to Revelation.

But Frye reminds us that “panoramic apocalypse ends with the restoration of the tree and water of life, the two elements of the original creation,” and that this restoration “is a type of something else, a resurrection or upward metamorphosis to a new beginning that is now present” (137). Thus, as for the reader, a misprived prediction “rolls into the darkness of the mystery” (136) of the text as organic, living prophecy, so too “panoramic apocalypse gives way, at the end, to a second apocalypse” or “second life” in which the “creator-creature, divine-human antithetical tension has ceased to exist, and the sense of the transcendent person and the split of the subject no longer limit our vision”: the “law loses its last hold on us,” and the reader is “delivered from [its] power, because it is his own power” (137). Again, Frye’s language positively vibrates with poetry in a quasi-romantic mode, but this is because it is language suited to the subject of mythology, and to the experience of myth. Altizer would see in it, of course, a Manichaean identification, and Kermode would dismiss it as claptrap, but they would both be wrong. All Frye has told us is that Revelation is a startlingly literary text, or a text—a myth—of considerable power, and of considerable complexity. The limit of the panoramic vision is an *aporia* of perception and imagination: seeing into and behind the beasts, the eyes, the wings, the dragons, and the catastrophic upheavals, “the reader completes the visionary operation of the Bible”: and the “apocalypse is the way the world looks after the ego has disappeared” (138). In short, reading Revelation requires work, and for the critic, and perhaps for the modern novelist, it is the work of the imagination—a kind of “re-creation” of what we

feel we lost in the inceptive myth, and seek to re-imagine in nostalgic and redemptive terms, whether we are credulous or skeptical.

2. Secularization

Harold Bloom would dismiss the distinction between secular and sacred outright as *non grata*, even frivolous (*Ruin* 4).⁹ Right or wrong, Bloom's attitude is telling: if "sacred" is relative, then it is also irrelevant, but so, too, is "secular": and as we have seen, many of the critics I have cited care very deeply that their modernism be secular, or at least skeptical. For them, the dialectic between secular and sacred literary forms is important in our cultural history.¹⁰ Robert Alter observes in the Hebrew context that the Bible experiences a "second" or "literary" canonicity in Europe "in the wake of the Enlightenment and then Romanticism," and that this "second canonicity of the Bible becomes the matrix for the conscious, even programmatic, creation of a secular Hebrew culture" (50-51). Furthermore, "it involves, with the passage of time and for increasing numbers of . . . writers, an impulse to displace entirely the doctrinal canonicity of the Bible with its literary canonicity" (51).

The same might be said of twentieth century British texts and of the critical modernism that seeks to construct a canon of its own. The outcome, as for the Hebrew

⁹ In a brilliant riposte, Kevin Hart notes that while the distinction does not matter for Bloom, who is a "pragmatist," a "Romantic," and a "Gnostic," who thus considers truth incidental to functionality, and who holds to the supremacy of his own imagination as a saving doctrine (97-99), this does not mean that truth does not matter.

¹⁰ Kermode is one who cares about the distinction, even though it brings him dangerously close to myth: "It is not difficult to be satirical about popular apocalyptic, and not difficult to ignore the nice speculations of the theologians. It is harder to dismiss consideration of the degree to which the ideas and the literatures we value, and some of the assumptions we ordinarily do not question, are impregnated by an apocalypticism that is neither vulgar nor technical" ("Waiting for the End" 255). For him, the secularization of apocalypse is its redemption from vulgarity.

writers Alter addresses,¹¹ is mixed. In Joyce, for instance,

the canonical status of Scripture is subverted, transformed, and reaffirmed in new terms. By equating the Bible with Homer as a matrix of allusion, Joyce implicitly rejects the traditional notion of Christians and Jews that the Bible is the ultimate or even the exclusive source of authority. . . . But the Bible was a necessary complement to Homer in Joyce's literary scheme. It offered him an elaborate set of national equivalencies for Odysseus's more personal undertakings, put into play as Homer does not the category of history itself, and introduced considerations of ethical imperatives together with a horizon of redemption. . . . The notion of a single authoritative canon that sets the limits for the culture is tacitly and firmly rejected, while the perennial liveliness of the old canonical texts as a resource for imagination and moral reflection is reaffirmed. In the extraordinarily supple and varied uses to which the Bible is put in *Ulysses*, it is converted into a secular literary text, but perhaps not entirely secular, after all, because it is reasserted as a source of value and vision. (181-83)

The distinction between secular and sacred matters, in other words, insofar as it clarifies an authorial intention and as it creates new possibilities for cultural meaning of old texts. But neither the texts themselves nor their old meanings are effaced by that dialectic.

What differentiates the literary or aesthetic act of interpretation (*epoch-marking* as *apocalypse-making*) from the act of religious interpretation (a general watchfulness, or the more radical labelling of real-world events as fulfilment of apocalyptic prophecy) is the assumption that apocalypse has passed entirely into the realm of the mundane (Childs 55). For Mary Shaw, for instance,

modernism was born of and continues [in postmodernism] to be sustained by a

¹¹ See my earlier discussion of Alter's reading of Kafka.

kind of repression (and thus an inversion and/or a denial) of Apocalyptic millenarism [sic], that is, of the doomsday thinking prevalent in European Cultures [sic] during early Christianity and the Middle Ages. (257)

Peter Childs puts a cruder point on it: “Saussure has been accused of trying to replace God with structure, just as the Modernists were accused of trying to compensate via art for the chaos created by God’s absence from the universe” (64). But these statements merely confirm what the catalogue of critical uses of apocalyptic terminology I offered in the first chapter suggests: that the secular—in its strongest form the “nihilistic”—view of modernism is common. And again, since apocalypse is often evoked in the context of a political or aesthetic vision, and since modernism is nothing if not politically and aesthetically tempestuous, the pervasiveness of the assumption is hardly surprising, nor is it without justification or value as a way of reading modernism.

David Trotter shares Jane Goldman’s sense that apocalypse in modernism is principally aesthetic: the modernists imagined apocalypse “fondly,” he says, and found in the “literature of crisis” that evoked apocalypse “a formula which enabled them to investigate at one and the same time a collapsing civilization and a collapsing genre” (77). And despite the evasiveness of his interpretation of Birkin’s epiphany (which I discussed in Chapter I), Trotter is one of the few critics to acknowledge that the mythic dimensions of apocalypse are part of the attraction, even as he places it in a secular aesthetic. His readings of Lawrence’s *Women in Love*, Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*, and Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse* posit the idea that modernist fiction requires at very least the idea of myth or mythic structure to help it make sense of both “the continuous purposeful violence generated by an extraordinary event like the First World War” and “the random incidental violence sometimes shaken loose from ordinary existence.” “In a

time of crisis,” he continues, “the fabric of meaning wears thin in places, and meaninglessness shows through: the stories we tell about experience, the symbols which offer themselves from within it, no longer suffice” (77). Myth makes sense where literary realism cannot; or, as Alter implies (see passage above), the “value and vision” of the sacred, Biblical text is, in part, the “horizon of redemption” it provides where the secular vision offers none.

However, granting that the “secularization” or “subjectivization” (Kinsley 47) of apocalyptic structures and discourse is the basic *modus operandi* in modern letters, how precisely does it work? In general, a literature of crisis borrows energy and power from the mythic, seeking out “concentrations” or “nodes and clusters where rottenness accumulates the portents of the catastrophe which will validate its apocalyptic fantasies” and investing them via an association with scriptural apocalypse with “narrative as well as rhetorical substance” (Trotter 78). The intention behind the association may range from the provocation of a culturally programmed response to a desire to “view historical events” (or personal lives) “as parts of a cosmic pattern” (O’Leary 63). These apocalyptic elements—structural, thematic, or imagistic—are fragments called up from the cultural memory of a genre located in a cultural tradition, displaced or dislocated from their theocentric or onto-theological meanings, and which therefore in turn displace the genre in its full sensibility. Thus the fragmentary associations become at one and the same time the source and symbol of what makes us anxious, much as the word “Holocaust” lost its sacramental significance and became synonymous with the events the name was originally intended to illuminate. Apocalyptic discourse is now a mode, or a mood: a fixation more than a kind of revelation.

This generic description cannot satisfactorily answer the question I have posed. I wish, therefore, to theorize the process of secularization in detail for two reasons: first, to confirm the validity of the assumption critical modernism makes as a partial view of the modern mindset, and second, to point out how and why such a model is deficient in accounting for the whole of the apocalyptic disposition of modern fiction. I will do so by posing two intermediary questions: How do we look for or perceive apocalyptic elements in fiction? What is it that we look for in identifying or “diagnosing” an apocalyptic element, purpose, or disposition in a work of fiction?

3. How We Look

The ways in which apocalypse is brought to bear in both creative and critical texts boil down to two general categories: design and association. Apocalypse by design might also be further sub-divided into “apocalyptic” and “anti-apocalyptic” intention (Robinson 362-63). A secular apocalyptic intention would be of the kind I have been describing: the adaptation of apocalypse to secular contexts via the transposition or dislocation of structural, thematic, or imagistic elements in order to invest the fiction and its aesthetic or socio-political vision with that power, giving the “resulting ‘literary’ apocalypse . . . an intended truth-value . . . strikingly congruent with that of religious apocalypses” (362). An anti-apocalyptic intention would import those elements for the purposes of satire or other ironic modes: to “*combat* the apocalyptic imagination” (idem: James Joyce comes to mind).¹² What distinguishes the religious apocalypse and the literary apocalypse from

¹² See my discussion of Joyce below. Or, for a more useful distinction, contrast Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s “A Very Old Man With Enormous Wings” and Jorge Luis Borges’ “The Gospel According to Mark.” Though the vision of both stories is ironic, Marquez takes his bedraggled angel very seriously—the revelation of the world of myth is actual, if absurd—whereas in

each other is form and intent. Though he regards them as at best “fuzzy,” Robinson offers a few helpful distinctions to make his meaning clear. Overt borrowing means the work is “more apocalyptic in literary form;” the more implicit the borrowing, “the less appropriate it will be to describe those literary forms as apocalyptic” (364). A strong predictive element, especially as that prediction involves upheavals “of cosmic and eschatological proportions,” means the work is apocalyptic in intent, and clearly that intention diminishes as the work moves away in scale from the cosmic or universal to the personal, “exploring emotional or spiritual tensions or problems without imagining historical correlatives” (*idem*). A work that is strongly apocalyptic in form and intent is likely to be a “religious” apocalypse, whereas one that is apocalyptic in form but not as much in intent is a “literary” apocalypse; and one that is apocalyptic neither in form nor intent fits neither description (*idem*).

I have suggested something similar already, and the implications of these distinctions are important for apocalypse criticism, especially the second: eschatological anxiety experienced on the personal level would be insufficient to establish an apocalyptic intention, and in the absence of any specific formal element, it may be inaccurate to think of those texts as apocalyptic in either the religious or the literary senses.¹³

It is in his effort to generate a model of apocalyptic hermeneutics that accounts for the ways we read scriptural apocalypse, and in particular the “secularization of apocalyptic motifs in modern literature,” that Robinson makes his most significant

Borges’ story the world of myth is exclusively textual, and must be acted out if it is to gain a footing in the world.

¹³ If adopted, these distinctions would, on their own, require a rethinking of much of critical modernism that speaks apocalyptically of the period and its figures, but I will not linger on this point for now, for fear of throwing the baby out with the bath water.

contribution, and it is this contribution that best informs the model of secularization I offer below. Specifically, Robinson argues that the whole reception history of Revelation is hermeneutic, starting notably with the early saints and Augustine, and carrying on through Blake, Frye, R.W.B. Lewis, Kermode, and David Ketterer. Apocalyptic hermeneutics, concludes Robinson, can be divided into five types, which he arranges clockwise from the top of his “Apocalyptic Hermeneutical Circle,”¹⁴ each “sharing something in common with” and also linking and mediating between the two adjacent hermeneutics (374-75). Those hermeneutics are as follows:

- (1) the *biblical* prediction of an imminent end to history, controlled by God so as to provide for a paradisaic continuation; (2) the *annihilative* prediction of an imminent end to history controlled by no God at all and followed by oblivion; (3) the *continuative* prediction of no end at all, but of simple secular historical continuity . . . ; (4) the *ethical* internalization of apocalyptic conflict as a figure for personal growth in ongoing history; and (5) the *romantic* or visionary internalization of the fallen world by an act of imaginative incorporation, so that the world is revealed as the paradise it already is. (373)

Robinson has doubts about the fertility of this model and, taking his notions on the whole, so do I.¹⁵ But it is, as he acknowledges, a useful starting point (386), especially as

¹⁴ Robinson owes more than a minor debt to Frye, I think, given the similarity of their models. His principal contribution, though, is to synthesize Frye’s structures of generic mode and critical phase into a singular structure of hermeneutics.

¹⁵ Robinson, like so many other contributors to apocalypse theory, tends to emphasize the eschatological over the other dimensional components of scriptural apocalypse (no surprise: he evokes Kermode uncritically in the first paragraph). Further, his division of “literary” (fictional) and “religious” apocalypses seems to disqualify a “biblical” hermeneutic that seeks to imagine the fulfillment of apocalyptic prophecy, or even to select that prophecy as an element of setting taken on its own terms. This becomes apparent as he develops the grounds of his literary hermeneutics, especially the biblical—which is rooted in some contestable assumptions about the nature of prophecy and of God’s will-to-apocalypse, as well as about the nature of the text itself—and the romantic, which strains to preclude religious sensibility as such.

it gives us categories of literary apocalypse to allow us to differentiate between them: the biblical, since it is apocalyptic in form and intent, as religious apocalypse¹⁶; the romantic and the ethical, since apocalyptic more in form than intent, as literary apocalyptic (though Robinson later calls the romantic a “religious” vision); and the annihilative and continuative, since apocalyptic in intent or ironically in form, as anti-apocalyptic (though one could argue, adopting a narrow view of the structures of Revelation, that annihilative visions are apocalyptic in both form and intent).

What is most telling for our purposes is that Robinson calls the annihilative and continuative the only exclusively “secular” visions: for him the “ethical,” the hermeneutic most often treated in critical modernism, “mediates between ‘secular’ . . . and ‘religious’ visions” (375). This is a key point in the overall interrogation this thesis mounts and to which we will return later. It is also a necessary point of departure if I am to posit a functional theory of secularization that accounts for some of the assumptions critical modernism has made thus far. Annihilative visions, pessimistic novels that end in global or at least regional catastrophe, and continuative visions that deny the end-orientation of apocalyptic thinking (post-apocalyptic novels), are outside the range of this thesis, in that they are typically works of science fiction. They are, importantly, also outside the range of the modernist fictions most commonly spoken of in apocalyptic terms. The works I treat in the final chapters resemble more closely the works that interest critical modernism, and these belong more squarely to the ethical and, potentially, the romantic visions Robinson has defined.

¹⁶ And literary, I protest, so long as it imagines the end orthogonally, like Walker Percy’s *The Second Coming*, Wendell Berry’s *Remembering*, or Golding’s *Darkness Visible*, and not as an exegetical fiction like the “end times” novels of Tim La Haye and company.

4. What We Look For

I have already summarized the basic generic and rhetorical structures of Revelation—revelatory, prophetic, and epistolary, chiefly, with an eschatological focus throughout—and the complex narratological layering of the work as well. How these structures tend to translate into fictions is at least partially the subject of the sections “Why Fiction?” and my readings of Frye and Kermode (see Chapter 1). For now it will suffice to remind the reader that the principal structure of Revelation most commonly identified in modern fictions is the macro-eschatological progression of creation through destruction and renewal: the basic “plot” of universal history. Douglas Robinson goes so far as to unite all narratives under the umbrella of this basic structure, associating, with Kermode, scriptural apocalyptic structure and the “classical narrative structure [of] rising action > climax > denouement” which he says “seems to have been modeled on the apocalypse” (360).¹⁷ Central to the eschatological structure of Revelation is the concept of millennial division, or the passing of ages correspondent to the opening of seals and other devices. In the “fictive” sensibility, these transitions and epochs mark portions of the complication or rising action, culminating (in popular readings) in Armageddon, and falling off into Judgment, millennial peace, and eventual sanctification.¹⁸

That leaves, in a very simple schema, themes, images, and events.¹⁹ Here is a

¹⁷ This statement is obviously anachronistic: no matter how one does the history, Aristotle precedes Revelation by a few centuries. Yet it still serves to confirm that apocalyptic structure, whether it was called apocalypse or no, has been with us for a very long time.

¹⁸ Given the emphasis on the events occurring between the opening of the seventh seal and the Second Coming (*parousia*) of Christ (Chs. 8-19: 211 of the book’s 289 verses), it is tempting to problematize that structural model, and suggest that with an exegetical shift, or a hermeneutical emphasis on other-than-destruction and punishment, sanctification is the climax, and there is no effectual denouement at work here.

¹⁹ Again, see Yarbrow Collins for the shared generic features of New Testament apocalypses (104-105).

crude overview of those elements:

Theme	Image		Event
Repentance	Fire	Whore	Threatened extinction of Israel
Justice/Mercy	Brimstone	Babylon/City	Destruction of Wicked
Purification	Monsters/Beasts	Horsemen	Persecution of Righteous
Restoration	Dragon	Trumpets	Rapture
Suffering of Innocents	2	Bowls	Parousia
Final Judgment	7	Seer Stones	Salvation of Saints and Jews
Ends	Red/Scarlet	Scrolls	Resurrection
Death	White	Seals	Final Judgment
Renewal	Black	Water	Millennium
Reward	3	Lake/Mirror	Binding of Satan et al
	4	Knight "True and Faithful"	
	40	Christ w/ Double-edged sword	
	144,000		
	Millennium		

Clearly some of these elements belong more exclusively to Revelation and the tradition of scriptural apocalypse than others. The number 7, for instance, will remind us more immediately of the creative periods as reported in Genesis than it will of Revelation unless it is accompanied by candlesticks, churches, spirits, or dragons, or is associated with "millennial" epochs or divisions. (This distinction may be redundant: as I have pointed out, Genesis and Revelation are thematically linked.) The colour scarlet might also evoke a broad range of associations, most of them generic, unless it is tied to themes of prostitution or moral corruption. "Seer stones," "final judgment," resurrection, millenarianism, the double-edged sword as word (or vice versa), the lake of fire, and the opening of scrolls belong exclusively to the "grammar of imagery" found in Revelation, so their allusive function is more immediately "apocalyptic."

5. The Secular Uses of Apocalypse in Fiction

What the apocalyptic element means in the fictive setting is another matter. In keeping with Robinson's basic theory, we need to analyze both the strength/relative

importance of the element and its intended meaning or effect. It will be useful to remind the reader of Frye's basic schema as a framework for the mechanics of the secularization of apocalyptic elements.

As you will recall, Frye's theory of myths posits three planes or "organizations of myths and archetypal symbols in literature" (*Anatomy* 139-140):

- 1) "undisplaced myth, generally concerned with gods or demons, . . . which takes the form of two contrasting worlds of metaphorical identification, one desirable [apocalyptic] and the other undesirable [demonic]";
- 2) "the tendency we have called romantic, the tendency to suggest implicit mythical patterns in a world more closely associated with human experience";
- 3) "the tendency of 'realism' . . . to throw the emphasis on content and representation rather than on the shape of the story."

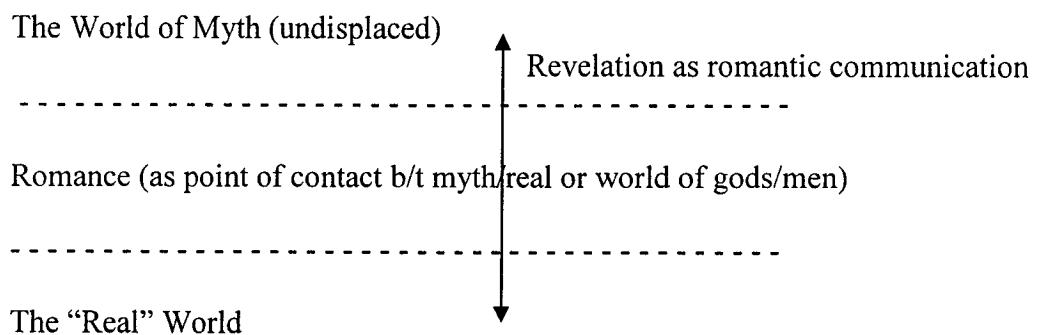
Where scriptural apocalypse fits in this model is uncertain: it might be considered undisplaced myth in the sense that it is the self-disclosure, albeit in human terms, of God, and of universal history; or one might attribute to it the "romantic tendency" by emphasizing the rhetorical framework—God to Christ to Angel to John to Reader—of the revelation, and recognize this as a point of contact between the metaphysical or infinite world and the physical or finite world. In either case, however, the contextual plane or mode allows for the reality of the world of myth and the "real" world, and for intercourse between them.

The move from a religious or sacred sensibility to a secular application of apocalyptic terms or images constitutes an attitudinal, a referential, and a contextual shift. Romantic and undisplaced apocalyptic (Robinson's "biblical") visions accept the reality

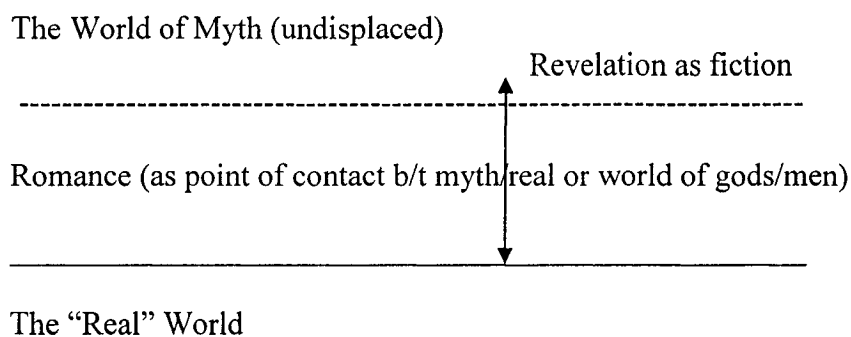
of the metaphysical world, and its interest in this one, so they locate experience seriously within the realm of the disclosure of the Divine on its own terms or as they manifest in the human world. “Revelation” in these visions is literal and factual. The ostensibly secular visions that are taken to characterize literary apocalypse in the last century—the “ethical,” “continuative,” and “annihilative”—bracket off the romantic and mythic contexts as realities and therefore as valid contexts for meaning of mythic and archetypal symbols. In the case of apocalyptic eschatology, the “‘End-feeling’ of the apocalyptic passes, demythologized, into the process of secular narratives” (Wright 14). It may be useful to imagine how other elements of apocalyptic do the same.

Frye’s formulation is a little more complex than it first seems, so it is difficult to represent graphically, but the following figures may give us the basic idea:

The Religious or Sacred View



In this view, the limits between the three planes are perforated, and may be crossed either by the self-disclosure of myth in the world via revelation of specific beings or via dreams and visions (the infinite disclosed or put into the finite: Isaiah, John of Patmos, Blake), or the transportation of a human into the unveiled world of myth via the otherworldly journey (the finite taken into the infinite: Jeremiah or Dante).

The Secular View

In this view, the world of myth and the notion of a “romantic” intersection between that world and the “real” world are imaginative fictions, constructs originating in the human mind and therefore having no substantive basis outside of it. A secular fiction either refuses to acknowledge the sacred or its absence, or it ironizes that absence by treating it as an intellectual, not a spiritual, lacuna.

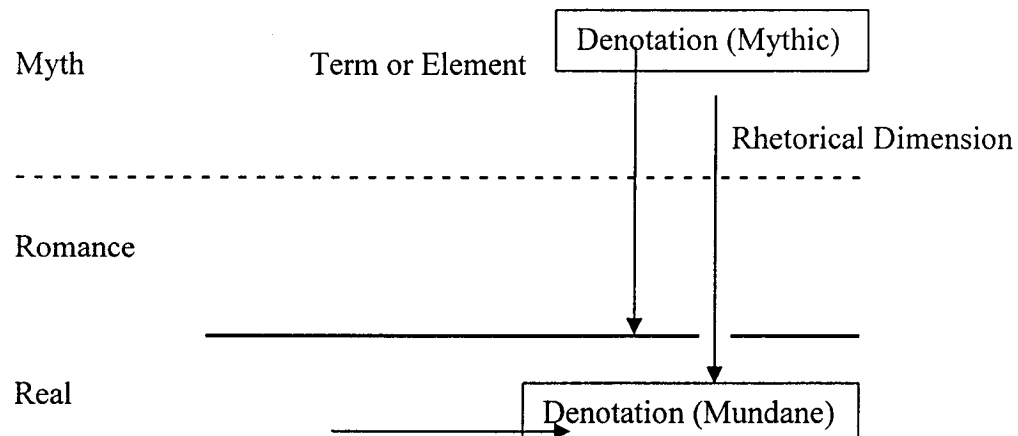
And yet literary apocalypses do borrow from myth in order to bolster the truth-value of their own political, social, or ethical visions, or to de-mythologize the substance of the myths that have grown beyond the self-consciousness of human imagination. Something, in other words, has to get through the epistemological barrier between the “real” world and the imagined world of myth. My sense for how this works might help us account for the mechanics of the secularization taken for granted by critical modernism. The inspiration for this model comes from Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49*, and more specifically a scene from the fictional play, *The Courier’s Tragedy*, that Oedipa Maas attends in pursuit of the Thurn and Taxis conspiracy. In this scene, the evil Duke Angelo composes a letter to a potential ally, and “lets drop a few disordered remarks about the ink he’s using, implying it’s a very special fluid indeed” (54). Specifically, Angelo speaks these lines:

The swan has yielded but one hollow quill,

*The hapless mutton, but his tegument;
 Yet what, transmuted, swart and silken flows
 Between, was neither plucked nor harshly flayed,
 But gathered up, from wildly different beasts . . . (idem)*

As it turns out, the ink is made from the charred bones of Duke Angelo's enemies, but that is of little importance. What matters is that the quill is hollow until filled, and that the parchment is referred to as a "tegument," the skin or outer covering of a sheep. Thus the parchment is a covering or barrier (in this case one cruelly manufactured), the quill a hollow and otherwise ineffectual implement except as a vehicle, and the ink—the substance or tenor—what constitutes the message of the text when properly contained and manipulated.

This is a useful metaphor for how critical modernism tends to interpret apocalyptic images and structures in modernist fictions:



This model attempts to demonstrate that while the secular hermeneutical forms or visions borrow the rhetorical sensibility of apocalyptic (the ethical authority or pathetic impression of a specific figure in the context of the original text, and thus the authority

and impression of the whole), they empty its terms or elements of their original denotative meanings. The word or image retains only the quality, not the substance, of its meaning in the original. The word or image is, therefore, transformed into a hollow quill, emptied out, and filled with new ink. It is transposed from the level of myth to that of the mundane.

A ready precedent for this kind of transposition/transformation is Joyce's appropriation of the term "epiphany" from a theological context to a largely aesthetic or artistic one. Here is the passage as it appears in *Stephen Hero*:

This is the moment which I call epiphany. First we recognize that the object is *one* integral thing, then we recognize that it is an organized composite structure, a *thing* in fact: finally, when the relation of the parts is exquisite, when the parts are adjusted to the special point, we recognize that it is *that thing* which it is. Its soul, its whatness, leaps to us from the vestment of its appearance. The soul of the commonest object, the structure of which it is so adjusted, seems to us radiant. The object achieves its epiphany. (213)

The first thing we notice about this definition of epiphany is its mundanity: only the object and the consciousness beholding the object ("we") are party to the experience, there is no guiding extrinsic consciousness acknowledged or perceived, and the experience is a far cry from the manifestation of a divine or supernatural being. This is, in fact, a manifestation, or an acute and sudden awareness of a decidedly natural being. The second thing we may notice is that in its efforts to move epiphany away from its theological sense, Joyce's definition strains to assert the agency of the object: the "recognition" belongs squarely to the beholding consciousness, but Joyce claims that it is the object that "achieves its epiphany." Yet the thing perceived cannot be "one" and

itself, for it “achieves” epiphany only as it is integral with an extrinsic perception—as it is beheld by a being who is conscious of it. This is not, in other words, a self-disclosure, or even a disclosure of the thing to a self, but a self-oriented apprehension of the thing. Religious epiphany, in contrast, depends on an active, extrinsic spirit or grace as the medium or source of the experience.

There is a heady theological counterpoint in the paradox of Joycean epiphany, but this is not the place to engage it. More to the point, it would appear that Joyce attempts to draw into his definition the *gravitas* of the religious epiphany while simultaneously adjusting its contextual framework, its nature, and its substance: to infect his epiphany with extrinsic mystery while refusing theophanic implications. But this is not the self-disclosure of an extrinsic object, it is the recognition of “an earth or world body which has been resurrected as soul or whatness within the interiority of our imagination” (Altizer, “Identity” 28), and “such an epiphany could never be meaningful or real to a seer whose mind and sensibility are grounded in an apprehension of an integral or analogical relationship between a contingent or totally dependent creation and its unmoving Creator who is the sole cause or source of Himself” (27). In its secularity, Joyce’s epiphany achieves its difference from religious epiphany, even if it fails to keep the power of the latter.²⁰

Nonetheless, the illustration is still useful. The new meaning seeks to gain by association because what survives the transposition of the element is the sensibility of its original weight, or our culturally inculcated response to it. The term as it originally meant is converted into a vehicle for a new tenor. This notion works for the transposition or

²⁰ The failure matters, though I gloss over it here. Hans Blumenberg makes the point succinctly: “Secularization does not transform; it only conceals that which the world cannot tolerate and to be unable to tolerate which is its [secularization’s] essential character” (40).

“borrowing” of images, thematic elements, events or plot points, and structural conceits, and it depends on the currency of scriptural apocalypse as a cultural source text. Our knowledge of it may be direct (we are familiar with the scriptural tradition and the key texts, like Revelation) or incidental (we have experienced the principal elements in other cultural documents). Think of this at the level of image: the 7-headed dragon loses its Satanic denotation, its cosmic politic, but not the menace or fear we derive from it. It retains them because culturally we associate dragons with danger, and with that special kind of threat we reserve for the alien or evil other. Without that much knowledge, the secularization or subjectivization is without effect.

If, for instance, a given text is apocalyptic in intention, say in the ethical mode, it will try to attach the rhetorical power of scriptural apocalypse to some object, event, or person it depicts by figure or association:

Guilt-ridden, his mind still reeling with the scenes of his debauch, his heart driven wild with the expectation of the doom that awaited him, Harold made his way slowly home to his wife. He felt as if he were being drawn inexorably to face the Final Judgment already knowing he would be damned to Hell.

Of course, the association would likely be more subtle (and hopefully more elegant) than this, and in order to justifiably refer to the whole text as apocalyptic we would need more substantial material—a structural resonance, say, where others of the major events of Revelation were also represented: Harold faces his judgment repentantly, is forgiven, endures the natural consequences of his actions—a period of explosive reproach, mistrust, and humiliation—and eventually experiences a renewal or resurrection of love for and with his wife. But clearly the dread and fear evoked in the popular imagination by the invocation of apocalyptic Judgment (with a capital ‘J’) is, in this moment at least,

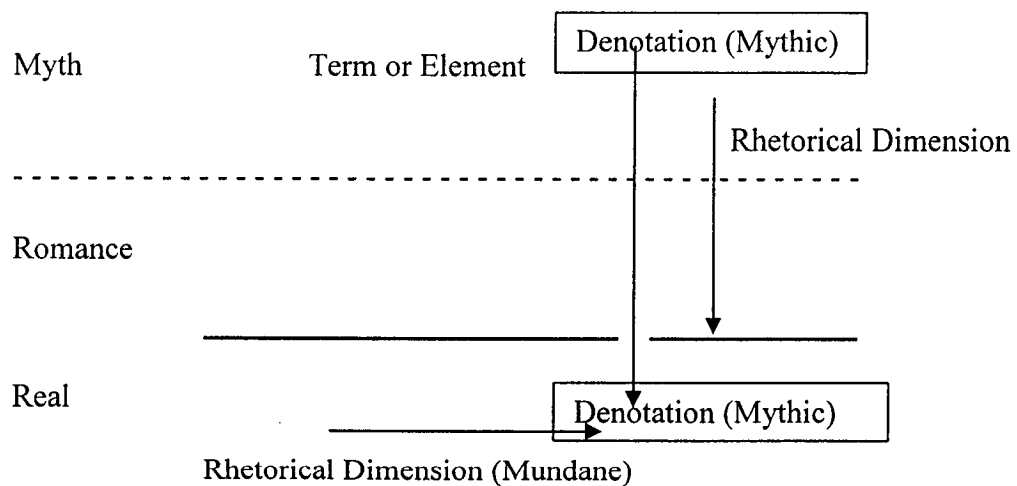
attached to a very human and mundane event: a spousal confession and the expected storm. If, however, the use of an apocalyptic element is mock-ironic, we can hardly think of it as apocalyptic in intent:

Maude's peace was destroyed quite suddenly as her sons tumbled into the house in a mad, chaotic jangle of stomps, shouts, and skirmishes. She heard something break, probably the old vase, followed by a curse. 'Good lord,' she sighed.

'Them four brats could wreck a house faster than the four horsemen!'

Here none of the rhetorical significance of the image is preserved, for the comedy of the moment, and therefore of the allusion, saps it of terror. Instead the image takes on the garb of exasperated affection.

This raises another point: if our text is anti-apocalyptic in intent, the transpositive arrows of the first model switch functions: the denotation may survive, but it will be ironized, stripped of its rhetorical power, and "revealed" as merely a trope or device in a fiction:



The point in common between these models is this: in borrowing elements of scriptural apocalypse, secular apocalypse strips those elements of their denotative/contextual meanings or their rhetorical associations, thus borrowing only certain meanings or

associations from scriptural apocalypse and “covering” or “veiling” others.

In structural terms, secularization is a reduction in scale and/or a diminution in scope. The great tragic-comic arc of humanity as God’s creation becomes, in the annihilative or continuative modes, the tragic or tragic-comic arc of the human race or of a specific nation or community or group. In the ethical mode, it is the experience of the self that is foremost. In theological terms, secularization is the transformation of the original as allegory or it is outright displacement: Church is replaced by the State, the Soul by the Self, the Prophet by the Politician or Poet, and God by a Superman or the Id. Revelation goes from being the self-disclosure of God to the mere recognition or comprehension of something mundane, and activated by the same: an insight, an idea, or a discovery owing entirely to human agency, and in this respect akin to Joyce’s sense of epiphany. The world of myth is bracketed off as a work of the imagination, and so all mythic experiences must find an objective correlative in human and self experience.

6. Does the centre hold?

Presuming this model is correct in both its variants, we might conclude that secularization intentionally generates filters, layers, distances, and voids of referential meaning in order to make new and newly productive associations. The process of secularization appears to be promoted by the winnowing of biblical literacy—the consequence of a forgetting or repression of cultural and religious heritage (Frye, *Great Code* 135); its actuation in modern literature appears also to be a core assumption of critical modernism. Yet what are the necessary conditions of its success? If the apocalyptic element is perceived or experienced in any but an exclusively figurative way,

then it might be said that the text wishes to situate its meaning over against scripture or rather within the religious tradition associated with scriptural apocalypse. If it is not, we might say, short of George Steiner's arguments about an inexorable Presence, that the text has secularized apocalyptic thinking and experience successfully. In the case of a fiction with apocalyptic intent, the denotative meaning takes on the mantle of the metaphysical or sacred sensibility without itself being displaced from the world.²¹ In the case of the anti-apocalyptic model, the form is preserved but emptied of its rhetorical power.

Or is it? The relation between the scriptural and the secular apocalypse is figurative in either case, it is true, but figures depend for their effects on the significance of the vehicle in its original context. Insofar as the relation is one of metaphoric or metonymic identity, the secular achieves its sense because we are reminded of what the figure used to mean, and still means, in another context, and because we are made to realize the new meaning according to its difference from the old. Insofar as the relation is allusive or synecdochic, it is evocative of more than itself, or more precisely of the whole, and again its logic is subordinate to the theo-logic of its original setting. If the figure is isolated from the tradition, then we would do just as well not to mention the tradition in the first place. Such is the tenacious religious influence of apocalyptic elements as a reminder, albeit corrupted, of the larger contextual consciousness of the genre: if anything is deliberately borrowed from scriptural apocalypse—something that belongs culturally (and exclusively) to that genre and its effect on us—then the secularization of that element in any form is incomplete.

²¹ Pynchon's work is replete with such attempted transformations (ironic, in his case), DeLillo's *White Noise* attempts the same, and much of Ian McEwan's work does, too, though much more seriously.

If we restrict ourselves to secular fictions that are apocalyptic in intent, the process fails from another direction as well. Because this model, and I think any other model of secularization, must accept that something survive intact from the original context, and because the original context was one of religious belief, we might well argue that the process of secularization is also, ironically, a process of sacralization. We have need of the sacred, and so we seek to make sacred formerly secular things, or at least to append a sacred sensibility to them.²²

In the structural sense, secularization of apocalypse is tenable. It might succeed as an aesthetic allusion to the older text, as a set of images or feelings borrowed and organized in a new way, as a structural conceit or element (ethical), as a way of ironizing belief and hope (continuative), or as the account or warning of a manufactured end (annihilative). But the secularization of apocalypse in its full rhetorical sense is more difficult because part of the power of apocalypse, what needs to be borrowed for the ethical and aesthetic apocalypse that exercise critical modernism, is the importance, the gravity, and the scope of an anagogical sensibility: the world, the universe, the cosmos, and each individual life as part of that larger organism, as an individual part and personality that is known, counted, sifted, judged. A passage from Graham Greene makes the point more poignantly:

Even in one of the most materialistic of our great novelists—in Trollope—we are aware of another world against which the actions of the characters are thrown into relief. The ungainly clergyman picking his black-booted way through the mud, handling so awkwardly his umbrella, speaking of his miserable income and

²² Childs again: “In literature, a progressive shift can be detected from the dismantling of religious narrative elements to the construction of new mythological models. . . . [Modernist writers] set about creating their own myths and Bibles” (58).

stumbling through a proposal of marriage, exists in a way that Mrs Woolf's Mr Ramsay never does, because we are aware that he exists not only to the woman he is addressing but also in God's eye. His unimportance in the world of the senses is only matched by his enormous importance in another world. (115-16)

Greene's take on Trollope and Woolf illustrates that God can be a meaningful presence in fiction, and his observation captures the character of the second stream to which I alluded nicely. True, he contrasts the modernist work of Woolf with the work of the nineteenth-century writer, but he does so in the context of a kind of lament for the anagogical sensibility of the past, and signals a hope for the return of meaning. Without the sense of importance offered, in Greene's view, by the evocation of an "infinite" frame of divine activity and consciousness, and without, in turn, a readerly consciousness of God's presence as an (even subtly) self-disclosing character, "apocalyptic" fictions will be considerably difficult to classify as such.

Even if it were a simple matter of secularization, this model, and others like it, would still fail to account entirely for the broad range of attitudes about the physical and metaphysical worlds, as my critiques of Wright and Trotter have already demonstrated, and as Robinson's sense that the ethical vision mediates between secular and religious sensibilities implies. There must be room in apocalypse theory for fictions that are "romantic," that seek the terms whereby their human characters may perceive and experience the Divine, and be in turn perceived by it. Greene's implicit criticism of Woolf suggests that he, at any rate, felt it important to restore that connection, even if only in imaginative fiction.

CHAPTER III

ALTERNATIVE VISION: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

One of the questions I have tried to answer in this thesis is why critical modernism has reduced apocalypse to eschatology, and further reduced eschatology to a shadow of itself as it figures in scriptural apocalypses like Revelation. The short answer is that critical modernism accepts that, for the moderns, God is either dead (Nietzsche), or has abandoned the world (Lukács). There is, in short, either nothing to reveal, or no one to call or whisper to the prophets. Steven Pugmire tracks this notion as far back as the Neo-Platonist “Alexandrian schoolmen,” Christian thinkers who, in response to the gradual mystification of gnosis as a special form beyond simply ‘the knowledge of the Church,’ “de-materialized Christianity as early as the second century. . . . [contending] that physical matter, being imperfect, could be of no value to God [since] matter . . . is the antithesis of spirit [and] God was unknowable; in effect, there could be no gnosis” (81).

In either form, this ideology creates a spatial gap (on the vertical plane of mythos, romance, and realism) between God or the idea of God and the human consciousness. In the modern context, it also creates a temporal enclosure: Time becomes God, in the sense that our being is now measured exclusively by time. Effectively, secular apocalyptic can only be eschatological, and only despairingly so, because it has bracketed off the sense of a continuation or eternity of being, and because it has closed off the notion that the human consciousness can perceive or experience anything outside of the “reality” it perceives with its physiological senses, because there frankly isn’t anything there—no wizard in Oz, no ghost in the machine, no life in death—or so goes the assumption. This view encloses or encapsulates selfhood, and makes the self the only text available.

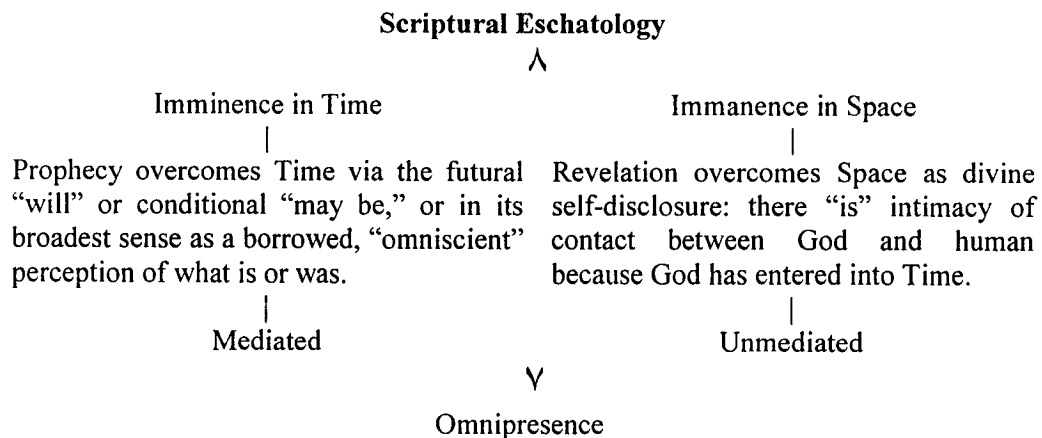
Perhaps what is most anxiety-inducing in all of this, as Kermode reluctantly acknowledges and Fiddes confronts, is that we need ends in order to make sense of beginnings and middles. In the “secular” model, we fear the end, and we also require it. Once there, however, we cannot experience its benefits, except for a brief moment of dying consciousness, if we are “fortunate” enough to be self-aware through such moments. Therefore the death of God is, in a very real sense, the death of perspective. Michael Hollington observes that this problem of perspective was known to critics of modernism early on:

Lukács, a critic hostile to Modernism, yet more illuminating than many of its admirers, regards the absence of perspective as a quintessential feature of the modern. Perspective, he argues, issues from the standpoint of the end of affairs; it is, in the phrase that haunts *Ulysses*, a “retrospective arrangement.” (437)

In other words, the end is all we have in a world bereft of revelation and prophecy, and it is this dearth that figures prominently in Kermode’s account of the sense of ending, and

thus in the bulk of apocalyptically minded criticism since. It is also true, in a sense, for Frye, in that the myths toward which we yearn originated from within us in the first place: the finite imagination contained and gave birth to the infinite, which gained enough gravitas to become the notional source of inspiration to the collective finite imagination. Though Frye has no interest in disparaging this process as anything other than socio-culturally normative, in his concept, belief in myth is a kind of credulous hallucination or dream.

What changes when we open up our critical sense of eschatology to its scriptural significance is this: eschatology moves beyond the terror of the terminal, unjust truncation of being and time by opening up into hopeful eternal projections because prophecy and revelation become players once again. They overcome, respectively, temporal enclosure and the “vertical” ontological gap or distance between human and divine consciousness as constructs of a skeptical imagination:



Of course, Frye would treat the notion of “artificial” I have introduced above as itself an illusory construct of the human imagination, however salutary he might consider it in the context of cultural anthropology. Kermode would dismiss it entirely as laughably demotic.

But if we are to treat scriptural apocalypse responsibly—critically and generically—and if, furthermore, we are to treat works that invoke the full dimensions of scriptural apocalypse, or at very least of apocalyptic eschatology, we should understand their full purport. Scriptural apocalypse—Revelation, particularly—includes these victories over Space and Time in its generic structure, since it is at once the self-disclosure of God to a prophet (in the form of the Messianic vision and its concern with *parousia*, judgment, and the seat of God’s throne), and a very complex prophetic record (that both describes the current state and predicts the future one, near and far, immanent and imminent, simultaneously). Revelation is the experience and substance of the manifestation or disclosure, and prophecy is the articulation or transmission of that substance to a third party: the textual record or pronouncement of what was revealed. Apocalyptic prophecy is the record of God’s self-disclosure (imminent for the world, immanent for the prophet), and prophetic apocalypse asserts the authority of the instrument or medium as a vocation, as an extension of the “seeing” or “perceiving” and “writing” self.

Edward Ahearn introduces his treatment of the visionary, and more specifically the apocalyptically prophetic, aspects or interests of a range of writers “from Blake to the Modern Age” (title page) by defining his key terms. His definition of “apocalypse” is reductive, but helpful in summarizing the way critical modernism tends to understand and deploy it, and therefore in setting up an alternative vision that includes and supersedes current theoretical and critical dispositions. He writes,

Apocalypse of course means the violent end of the world and the coming of the Last Judgment, as mystically described in the biblical book of John of Patmos, and many have viewed events from the French Revolution to the nuclear age in

apocalyptic terms. We shall see that a number of our works have apocalyptic elements, whereas some are “millennial” in projecting a final or at least a thousand-year-long period of universal peace. . . . But all involve a radical transformation for our judgment on the state of society; hence all are what I call visionary fictions. . . . [that] vehemently claim that the world as we perceive it is an impoverished and dull thing, fundamentally delusory, and that they can put us in touch with a reality far more exciting, “even infinite.” (2-3)

Ahearn’s work is very different from that of the critics I have cited thus far. He seeks out fictions that have and proclaim their own visions, and, like Frye, he is unbothered by their mythical inclinations or content. He is also careful to imply that “visionary fictions” are not necessarily apocalypse fictions, though they may have apocalyptic elements. I applaud him on both counts, since the first broadens his view of the apocalyptic canon to include texts that do something besides secularize generic and theological apocalypse, and since the second suggests a degree of critical responsibility to the terms in question. What perplexes me, however, is the incorrectness of his definition of “apocalypse,” which doesn’t mean “the violent end of the world and the coming of the Last Judgment” except by metonymic association or, more accurately, synecdoche. Revelation as a key text (and most apocalyptic scripture) comprises those events, but scriptural apocalypse is not defined by them as its total identity. Unsettling, too, is Ahearn’s compartmentalization of the elements of Revelation: the “violent end” and the “Last Judgment”—the proverbial bogeymen of apocalyptic thinking—are “apocalyptic,” but millennial peace is not. It is apparently something other.¹

¹ Ahearn has an ally in this truncation. In the epilogue (1999) to the “millennial” edition of *The Sense of an Ending*, Kermode remarks that “there is no *intrinsic* connection between apocalypse and millennium,” the “terrors” being *a priori* the idea of the millennial period” (183). Once again,

Critics are, of course, quite right to think apocalyptically when they encounter the elements of apocalypse: but then again, the apparently apocalyptic element can be a bit of a false friend. As Collins notes, writing of the ancient literary tradition, “[n]ot every writing which expresses apocalyptic eschatology can be classified as an apocalypse” (“Introduction” 3). Indeed, many of the features of the genre of apocalypse appear in other genres as well. In acknowledging the openness of (postmodern) culture and criticism to the truth-value of apocalyptic prophecy, presumably via soft relativism, Richard Emmerson puts it this way:

This new interest in and attitude toward the study of apocalypticism is certainly a welcome development. But with it has come a new danger: the tendency to define the notion of apocalypticism so broadly that its influence appears to be at work everywhere. All enigmatic prophecies become visions of the end, all villainous figures Antichrists, all catastrophic events Armageddon. (430)

This is an apt warning for readers of scripture and readers of literature alike, and a hint as to the nature of the first step in addressing the terminological breadth and looseness of the critical uses of apocalypse: a clarification of the terms in question.

1. Terms of Apocalypse Theory

Much of the material that follows comes from Jeffrey’s *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature*. The principal value of this dictionary is that its entries draw from both theological/traditional uses of the terms and from the secular (non-scriptural) literary tradition—a kind of literary etymology in the spirit of the *OED*. The

however, Kermode’s assertiveness is marked by his rather aggressive skepticism: the millennium is represented here as something to be feared as equally as the End. Yet, as Frye and Robinson and Collins and Kermode himself have established, it is Revelation that embodies the western apocalypse, and millennium matters quite integrally in Revelation. It is not so easily disposed of.

utility of other sources is limited in that those sources tend to focus on historical or sociological uses of apocalypse (e.g. Boklund, Bynam and Freedman, Collins' *Morphology*). The *Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, for all its strength, is characterized by the very looseness I am trying to avoid, as Malcolm Bull has observed: contributors either assume a basic definition, or use the terms differently from their co-contributors. In addition, the emphasis of the *Encyclopedia* is theological or "literary" in the sense that it treats a tradition of scriptural or pseudo-scriptural apocalypse, not a secular canon.²

In any event, Jeffrey's *Dictionary* is the best source I am aware of for defining the relevant terms with any degree of confidence and specificity, and in the absence of any open contradiction between contributors, it will serve as a solid hook on which to hang the remainder of this thesis. Ironically, the binocular vision of the *Dictionary* also poses something of a challenge: because it tends to an Aristotelian description, its contributors occasionally fail to engage critically with the uses of the terms in the sources from which it draws. In that event, and in the interests of clarity, I interrogate the definition and seek to distil the most stable meanings from the material provided. Here are the terms.

*1.1. Apocalypse*³

In its theological and theoretical contexts, "apocalypse" refers to scriptural apocalypse, "principally as found in the books of Daniel and Revelation . . . which contribute most significantly to the literary tradition" of apocalypse and apocalyptic

² The single exception is Douglas Robinson's "Literature and Apocalyptic" (vol. III)—which I discussed substantially in Chapter II.

³ I have already discussed some of the characteristic features and themes of scriptural apocalypse, and specifically of Revelation, in previous chapters, but a summary is in order with a view to a clarification of terms and an application of those terms in the critical chapters that follow.

fiction (Kinsley 46).⁴ The word means “uncovering” or “unveiling,” as we have already seen, and the texts themselves are the articulation of “a series of visions which foretell God’s destruction of social, political, and cosmic order . . . , the punishment of the wicked, and the inauguration of a holy kingdom” (idem). As a form of prophecy, scriptural apocalypse differs from “normative” prophecy (God working through men, nature, history) in that it typically describes “a radical break between history and the new kingdom,” or the cataclysmic and ultimately redemptive entry of the Divine into the mundane by direct, theophanic means. Thus it is also eschatological: a terminus or *aporia* of human society, and the limit of human comprehension of self. Apocalyptic visions are fantastic, complex, often messianic, given to “elaborate numerology,” and grow “out of a conviction that most persons and institutions are irredeemably corrupt, fit only for destruction” (idem). Because of this, scriptural apocalypse is commonly read as revolutionary in nature and purpose, with specific reference to various periods of Jewish and Christian history where, for instance, the “Babylon” of Revelation has been taken to refer to specific oppressive regimes and peoples inimical to the “righteous.” Since a similar mood is detectable in the social and political revolutions of the last two centuries, especially those based on the belief that “social justice can exist only if present corrupt institutions are totally destroyed” (Kinsley 46), or that art can break with the past only if it does so totally, modern art is especially disposed to apocalyptic thinking, principally secular in sensibility.⁵

⁴ Canonical apocalypses include the following: Daniel, Revelation, Isa 2:9-19; 24: 1-27:13; Jer 4:18-28; Ezek 38-39; Matt 24-25; Mark 13:14-20; 24-27; Luke 21; 1 Cor 15:42-55; 1 Thess 4:13-5:11; 2 Thess 2; 2 Pet 3:1-13. However, most criticism refers to Revelation as the key text in scriptural apocalypse, a convention I follow in this thesis.

⁵ Loosely, any political, social, or aesthetic philosophy or programme that imagines or

The influence of scriptural apocalypse is ambiguous in that it contains “themes of both destruction and re-creation” (47). The “positive” aspects of apocalypse manifest in the contemplation of a “New Jerusalem,” an image which drops out of British literature with the romantics, but which perseveres in American political philosophy and letters. The negative aspects emphasize destruction, decay, and degeneration. Early twentieth-century interest in eugenics can thus be seen as apocalyptic after a fashion, marrying racial and cultural insecurity with the darker edges of medical science. This is an example of the “secularization” or “subjectivization” of apocalypse. Kinsley suggests that this secularization is not a new phenomenon, referring to Abrams’ *Natural Supernaturalism*, which argues that “much Romantic poetry can be seen as the result of a subjective reinterpretation of apocalyptic motifs” (47). I have argued that the secularization or subjectivization of apocalypse in the twentieth century moves apocalyptic structures or elements from the forum of romantic mythos to the secular fields of culture, politics, and philosophy, and invests those fields with religious feeling because apocalypse is always a “grammar of religious imagery.” Thus, secularization of apocalypse can never be absolute, and may in fact serve to perpetuate its theological effects on readers.

The isolation of scriptural motifs as the basis for a theory of literary apocalypse is potentially problematic because in scriptural terms, “apocalypse” and “apocalyptic” refer to the document as a kind, not to the events it prophesies. This last, popular association is, as I have suggested, synecdochic and metonymic, though it accounts for the broadest use of the term in referring to ostensibly secular literature, and generally refers to eschatological images or themes. But eschatology is a minor part of the genre—perhaps

recommends the annihilation of old forms of life to make way for the new is, by analogy, apocalyptic. Marx, Nietzsche, Bergson, Lenin, Marinetti, Lewis, and Yeats would all qualify.

not even essential to it. The communicative/rhetorical elements of apocalypse are most concerned with revelation and the comfort of divine communication, even if of terrifying things, to and through the medium of a prophet. Prophecy itself is, among other things, a ‘futural knowing’: knowing, and really only knowing *in*, the future. It is the human side of the equation of the revelation of divine will.

In its fullest sense, then, and considered from the perspective of the believer, it is impossible for a fiction *qua* fiction to *be* an apocalypse—a revelation of God’s mind and will.⁶ A fiction may approximate the conditions of apocalypse imaginatively, or it may represent the transmission and receipt of a divine revelation, but it cannot authentically claim to be one. If it were, it would cease to be fiction and stand instead as scripture. This is why the principal points of contact between imaginative literature and scripture are images, themes, and generic structures.

1.2. *Eschatology*

Eschatology is specifically concerned with the “end-times” or “last things” of human and universal history. The root word *eschatos* was used by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 with reference to the resurrection of the just, the “last enemy” of human progress toward the Divine being death (see v. 26), but now “eschatology” “applies to biblical materials touching on the end times and, more loosely, to religious or secular end-of-world thinking and expression” (Fixler, “Eschatology” 240). That eschatology can be at once religious and secular is attributed to the disappointment of the early Christians that the Second Coming of Christ did not occur in the generations following the establishment

⁶ Frye would disagree, and would assert that for the critic, myths are fictions, and therefore a fiction might in fact imitate scriptural apocalypse in every aspect. That it had no canonical authority in a community of faith would be incidental to its generic features, though this would certainly impact its rhetorical effects.

of the Church, and more specifically to Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*, wherein he interprets John of Patmos' hermeneutic stance not as fixedly historical, but as being about "the eschatological struggle for ascendancy *in each individual Christian soul* between good and evil, salvation and perdition, God and Satan" (Robinson 363).

Fixler says this led the Christians to "spiritualize" eschatology, giving resurrection in particular the more general quality of "renewal." He calls this kind of eschatology "realized," an adjective that applies nicely to the eschatologies of British fiction, especially where plot and character development focus on an internal renewal of hope, conciliation, or even resignation, or where the traditional hope of *parousia* or corporeal resurrection is replaced by hope in some new form of renewal of the mind or spirit, whether it be substantially imagined or not (Lewis' Vorticism and Yeats' gyres are prime examples). As with apocalypse, the transvaluation of eschatology from a religious to a political/cultural experience had begun with the Romantics, and devolved considerably by the time of the postmoderns, where "an evident winding down of the world disjoins renewal from the old eschatological pattern, leaving only a movement from decadence to an ending resolutely devoid of meaning" (Fixler 241).

I have argued that the complex modality of scriptural apocalypsis in modern fiction is the best indicator of its ongoing currency, and this will be especially clear as I examine the modes of prophecy and revelation in Huxley and Golding. Prophecy and revelation resist secularization more completely than eschatology, which, short of specific allusions to scriptural apocalypse or religious thinking, and despite its elemental prevalence in Revelation (Yarbro Collins 71), is the weakest of the modes or manifestations of scriptural apocalypse, or at least the most unstable—not necessarily

linked to apocalypse as a whole genre—since death and ends are always with us. In the absence of explicit allusion, then, eschatology is typically an associative link between a fiction or a reading of it and scriptural apocalypse. What may, indeed, encourage us to associate our anxieties about ends with the eschatological impulse is precisely the loss of certainty endemic to the modern. As Glicksberg suggests, contemplating the effect of Nietzsche's pronouncement of God's death,

How would humankind bear up under the inevitable and always imminent threat of death now that it had been deprived of the promise of salvation? If God is dead and the old supernatural sanctions are but superstitious myths of the infancy of the race, then there is no transcendent goal toward which mankind must move and no answer which the mind can provide for its metaphysical questioning. Henceforth godless man, despite all his soul-searching and desperate conflicts of conscience, could discover neither meaning nor purpose in Nature. (*Modern Literature* 4)

Once God is dead, that is, scriptural apocalypse becomes fundamentally invalid, both in its religious function and in its comprehensive generic ingredients. Eschatology, then, is truncated: it stops henceforth with death, and has no hope of resurrection, and apocalypse generally is only a repository of fear and anxiety.

1.3. Prophecy

In Hebrew tradition, a “*nabi*,” or prophet (see Jeffrey, “Prophet” 644-45), was called by God to minister His word to the Jews and their neighbours (see Amos 3:1-8). In effect, a prophet was called out of the world to be the voice of God's calling and warning to the faithful and sinful respectively, and to be the chosen instrument in showing forth

his miraculous power of salvation and chastisement. Christ seems to have implied that with John the Baptist the role of the prophet changed fundamentally, though he also implied that in a certain sense He, too, was a prophet (see Matt 11:13, 13:57). What seems to have changed more than anything is the title by which God's servants were identified, and the conditions of transmission of authority—now by inspired calling to the apostleship and the laying on of hands by other apostles (see Matt 10:1, Mark 3:14, Luke 6:13, Acts 1: 24-26, and 1 Tim 2:7). The apostleship is at once a priestly and prophetic office, for like a prophet, an apostle is called out of the world by God's authority, not man's, and thus represents Him in word and deed (see Manganiello 48).

Both prophecy and apostolic witness have been appropriated as aesthetic functions in critical theory. Dante, Blake, and Whitman fancied the poet (and more particularly each himself) a kind of prophet (Fixler 644; Kugel 1), and twentieth-century critics have been even more liberal with the term, referring to Wells, Orwell, Huxley and many others as "prophets" for the modern age on the mere basis of speculative prediction, not inspired foretelling. "Apostle" has experienced a similar "reorientation" from the religious to the aesthetic (Manganiello 49); yet another instance of the secularization to which I have been referring. Certainly none of the figures I have mentioned qualify as prophets in the purely religious sense, for their "authority" is literary and readerly, not divine; their vocation artistic, not religious. Of course, a skeptical criticism assumes that in both cases, the figure of "prophecy" is invested with authority from below, not above. But it is useful to understand the persistence of theological terms in explaining aesthetic activity, both as an indication that the writers and thinkers of the twentieth century still yearned for truth of some kind, and that in the

context of an age disposed to eschatological discourse, however “realized” the terms of that discourse might be, they felt their sensibilities obligated them to look into the dark future and enumerate its possibilities for their readers.

The claim to speak prophecy is a statement of access to God’s knowledge, ever mediated by the limits of mind of the particular prophet, though those limits may, in turn, be extended by God. Accepting prophecy as valid and true is to share in a certainty which requires faith both in God and in the servant who speaks for Him. The Children of Israel, for instance, believed Aaron because they trusted that Moses had chosen him, and so with Moses because they trusted that God had chosen him, and the rightness of that trust was proven to them many times over, reinforcing their faith in the figures and speakers of prophecy who led them.

To say that prophecy entirely belongs to scriptural apocalypse would be grossly incorrect, but certainly apocalyptic scripture depends for its truth-value and rhetorical effect on the authority of the prophet or apostle as such. Apocalyptic scripture is *revelation* which adds to the oral/textual dimension of prophecy the imaginative and ties literature to prophecy like nothing else. Whitman had something like this in mind in 1889 while writing “a Backward Glance O’er Traveled Roads.” He felt that a prophet is “one whose mind bubbles up and pours forth as a fountain, from inner, divine spontaneities revealing God. Prediction is a very minor part of prophecy. The great matter is to reveal and outpour the God-like suggestions pressing for birth in the soul” (qtd. in Jeffrey 645). The Wordsworthian foundation to Whitman’s conception is evident here, though Whitman’s ecstatic, patriotic hubris would not let him stop short of equating the writer with the prophet.

Of course, as an American Romantic, Whitman is not an authority, nor was he an overt influence, on British fiction of the twentieth century. His attitudes are telling, however, precisely because they were formed in the middle of the dramatic changes in science and philosophy originating in Europe and productive of modern sensibilities. In the 1876 preface to *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman indicated that while he “joyfully accept[ed] Modern Science, and loyally follow[ed] it without . . . hesitation,” there remained a “higher” absolute, namely that of Religion and the “Eternal Soul of Man.” The function of the poet was precisely that of the prophet with respect to these new truths in this new age:

The Prophet and the Bard,

Shall yet maintain themselves—in higher circles yet,

Shall mediate to the Modern, to Democracy—interpret yet to them,

God and Eidólons.

To me, the crown of Savantism is to be, that it surely opens the way for a more splendid Theology, and for ampler and diviner Songs. . . . There is a phase of the Real, lurking behind the Real, which it is all for. (Whitman 755)

The British moderns carried within them a similar sense of an underlying “phase of the Real” undetectable by science, and unaccounted for by agnostic philosophy, though they pursued it with less certainty and concomitantly greater trepidation. Writing out of a secular theory, E.M. Forster could only say that prophecy in fiction “is a tone of voice [that] may imply any of the faiths that have haunted humanity” (125), and that prophetic fiction “reaches back” or extends to all persons anywhere, anytime (136). If Forster is right—if prophecy is merely a mood or tone, we might come some distance in understanding that for critical modernism, apocalypse is chiefly the same.

And yet the transcendent value of this kind of prophecy is still somewhat mystical, despite Forster's attempts to say otherwise, and even if only in terms of the mundane sameness of humans of all ages. One sees in Huxley's subjects (even at their most decadent), and in Golding's choice of objects, a desire to discover the persistent, mystical (Forster would disagree on this point), more-than-human Reality that might make sense of human habit and activity, that might link us all together. In other words, one sees in them, and in writers of the period of all or no persuasion, the desire for the experience and substance of revelation, whether they be exiles and wanderers (Joyce, Beckett, Greene, or Golding), visionaries or forerunners (Yeats and Lewis), or imagists and foretellers (Pound, Wells, Huxley, and Orwell).

1.4. Revelation

Fixler identifies five categories of influence that Revelation has had on western literature and criticism, all of them textual. They are as follows: 1) Revelation's "very character as visionary revelation symbolically and allegorically expressed"; 2) its "aspect as a progressive visionary unfolding of sacred history"; 3) "the disposition of writers who, as they handle['] themes derived in part from the Apocalypse, use['] in some way or another its sevenfold form"; 4) "its themes, motifs, figures, imagery, and symbolism" (the bulk of what I've been calling generally "apocalypsis"); and 5) its treatment as a text open to critical analysis ("Revelation" 665-66). Each of these categories of influence is pertinent to a study of apocalyptic in the authors I have chosen, and indeed of the apocalyptic essence of the general body of twentieth-century literature in Britain and elsewhere. Fixler considers the first category in relation to poetry, but the experimental

nature of the work of the high moderns in textual arrangement and narrative structure and consciousness encourages comparison in ways I have already suggested. The second category also links a literature of decay and renewal with scriptural apocalypse, especially where universal “sacred” history gives way to political and even personal history. Like the first, the third category of influence invites textual comparison of the kind I will be doing with Lewis’ *Blast* and *Revelation* (see the summary of Chapter II below), and in my examination of Golding’s work.

The relevance of the fourth category is already obvious, and I have made mention of Lawrence’s *Apocalypse* in connection with the fifth category of critical treatment, though his influence on my own thinking is clearly nominal. There is, however, a sixth category that eludes Fixler, perhaps because of his particular concern with more reverential Renaissance and Reformation writers, and perhaps because it is difficult to articulate. That is the category of apocalyptic experience, which manifests in fiction as a modal realization of one or more of the three principal constituents of apocalypse defined above. Writers concerned with the collapse of history into silence or with a renewal of hope, or who seek to represent that collapse or renewal (symbolically or allegorically in their narrative structure) are writing eschatologically, dealing with a lived experience of apocalypse exacerbated by the skepticism of the age. Writers understanding their role as one of mediation between a culture of despair and decay and some better way, or who represent that mediation in their characters, are attuned to the rhetorico-prophetic aspect of apocalypse. Writers whose texts explore the dynamics of communication between God and man are most concerned with the nature of revelation and its relevance to Being in an age of disbelief.

Each of the three authors I have chosen for this study represents the deployment of at least one of these modes of apocalyptic in the context of twentieth-century British fiction. They recover (or reupholster) lost or fading theological notions (Huxley, Golding) or enact them (Lewis). Specifically, since critical modernism is generally a period of secularization or ironization of vestigial mythologies—a period interested in finding suitable, stable replacements for crumbled or crumbling ideologies—it is at best a caricature of the century on the whole. These authors (Huxley and Golding, at any rate) take it all very seriously. They imagine myth as actual, as real, and so they write in the realm of the romantic, not merely the godless “reality” of modern life: a revelation for them may indeed be a revelation of or from God, a prophecy may be legitimate and authentic, and eschatology peers beyond the limit of death.

Their principal role here is, therefore, to help me begin to construct a poetics or theory of apocalypse that recognizes that faith is not universally dead, a recognition that is not identical with critical practice; that is, faith need not enter into the critical act for it to be relevant to the understanding of a text or body of texts. We have not exhausted the possibilities of critical theory or poetry with respect to the function of apocalypsis in modern literature, but we have exhausted their intellectual honesty by refusing the notion of an abiding faith in belief as a truth, and not just a personal one. Even in the identification of “apocalyptic” imagery or other apparently apocalyptic elements, critical modernism tends to an exclusively eschatological tendency, thereby foregrounding the significance of the image against a backdrop of anxiety about the end, whatever its form or scope. We have, as I suggested in the introduction, “disconnected apocalypsis from its roots in scriptural apocalypse by emphasizing the eschatological, and reducing

eschatology itself from a four-fold concern with death, resurrection, judgment, and immortality to simply ‘last things’—and any “last thing” at all will do, especially if that last thing is terminal. Yet since scriptural apocalypse is, for believers, the revelation of the divine mind and will to the human through the medium of a prophet or spiritual gift of prophecy, the dimensions of prophecy and revelation are as integral as eschatology to the rhetorical experience of apocalyptic scripture, and thus to the construction of a literature which borrows from or alludes to it. Surprisingly, the prophetic and revelatory constituents of apocalypsis tend to be overlooked, or, if they are examined, they are rarely treated in the context of an apocalyptic critical intention. And yet whether it functions aesthetically as part of a grammar of apocalyptic imagery or structural conceit, or theologically by means of explicit allusion to scriptural tradition, apocalypsis necessarily evokes the total rhetorical framework of apocalyptic scripture.

2. Fiction and Scripture

English literature owes an obvious debt to canonical scripture—particularly for its themes, conceits, and images—and given that the moderns were a generation grappling with a pervasive upheaval, their relationship to the authority and substance of the scriptural tradition, and the beliefs represented in that tradition, is key in understanding its peculiar moods and attitudes. Writing in 1920, Lukács called the novel “the epic of an age in which the extensive totality of life is no longer directly given, in which the immanence of meaning in life has become a problem, yet which still thinks in terms of totality” (56) and, more famously, “the epic of a world that has been abandoned by God” (88).

Speaking of the arts in general, Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane express it this way:

If Modernism is the imaginative power in the chamber of consciousness that, as [Henry] James puts it, ‘converts the very pulses of the air into revelations’, it is also often an awareness of contingency as a disaster in the world of time: Yeats’s ‘Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold.’ If it is an art of metamorphosis, a Daedalus voyage into unknown arts, it is also a sense of disorientation and nightmare, feeling the dangerous, deathly magic in the creative impulse explored by Thomas Mann. If it takes the modern as a release from old dependencies, it also sees the ‘immense panorama of futility and anarchy’ that Eliot saw in *Ulysses*. And if an aesthetic devotion runs deep in it, it is capable of dispensing with that abruptly and outrageously. . . . (“The Name and Nature of Modernism” 26-27)

That is quite a portrait—a seascape, really, and a tumultuous one—of the conditions out of which modernist (or anti-modernist) conceptions of art emerged. What interests me most are the opening lines, which tell us, if James and Bradbury and McFarlane have it right, that the air fairly teemed with revelations, and that the source of those revelations was the human imagination. This would not bemuse Frye, of course, who would call this formulation the assumption of a good criticism. But I think James’s statement means more specifically in the context of a religious tradition, or specifically in the context of a substantial stress on religious faith. Read this way, it would seem that imagination had supplanted divine inspiration, and imaginative power had usurped religious meditation: that in the wake of an assault on faith, of a general epistemological and ontological crisis, it was the “task of art,” not religion or science, to redeem, essentially or existentially, the

formless universe of contingency” (50). In another view, “the importance of myth applied to contemporary literature was in its ordering power which the disharmony of modern society and culture had lost and only art could recapture” (Childs 58). More specifically, the “act of fictionality . . . becomes the crucial act of imagining; and Modernism thus tends to have to do with the intersection of an apocalyptic and modern time, and a timeless and transcendent symbol or node of pure linguistic energy” (Bradbury and McFarlane 50). Fiction, therefore, is crucial to both the nature of modern art, and to the shaping of and accounting for modern experience. It is the insertion of the word—in the sudden absence or mutability of Word—in time.

Critical modernism often imagines the artist in prophetic terms: the “artist as seer . . . attempt[s] to create what the culture could no longer produce: symbol and meaning in the dimension of art, brought into being through the agency of language” (Friedman 98). In a sense, artists, in our case writers, take to themselves the mantle of prophecy, “dismantling . . . religious narrative elements” and, as we have already noted, “creating their own myths and Bibles” (Childs 58). In radical terms, the writer “must necessarily be a prophet” though he be “despised,” and “those who have eyes to see and ears to hear shall learn from his Apocalyptic utterance” (Treece qtd. in Acheson 189).⁷ More mildly, as noted above, E.M. Forster labelled prophecy in fiction “a tone of voice [that] may imply any of the faiths that have haunted humanity” (125). What permits this presumption, either on the part of the moderns themselves, or as a conceit in criticism, is the belief that while not “all fictions are necessarily myths[,] . . . all myths are fictions”

⁷ Here Acheson quotes Henry Treece, one of the founding poets of the “New Apocalypse” movement of the late 30s and 40s. The apocalyptic language of this pronouncement is obviously quite striking: few other artists of the period are as bold, or as interested in open affiliation with mystics and romantics.

(Gould 113), and fictions⁸ that seek the status of myth “imitate” the form and substance of myth “in the service of urgent interpretation” (115).

Such statements are in keeping with the tradition of the “poet-prophet” I discussed above, and in particular with the reputation of certain figures (especially Wells, Huxley, and Orwell) and certain genres or strains (sci-fi, dystopic literature: see Hooley 185), but there is a general formal affinity between literature (specifically prose fiction) and scripture worthy of our attention here. The Psalms of David and the Songs of Solomon are the scriptural equivalents of poetry, as are the occasional songs and verse-prayers in other portions of the Bible. Yet the majority of scripture is, at least in translation, rendered in prose and tends to a narrative function. The Pentateuch is a hybrid of legalistic discourse and narrative, telling chiefly the stories of creation, fall, captivity, and exodus that are the foundation of Judeo-Christian belief about the natures of man and God. The Prophets and the Gospels tend to narrative as well—the latter featuring allegory and parable as didactic literary forms. The letters which constitute the middle section of the New Testament serve as a kind of present-narrative; a developmental, apostolic and ecclesiastical history meant for doctrine and read concurrently for story.

Apocalyptic scripture is also narrative in essence, even though it narrates the future rather than the past or present exclusively, for it does so episodically (see Fixler, “Revelation” 665). Scriptural apocalypse as a prophecy means across time, or through

⁸ Such myths are rather pallid things in comparison. In the modernist context this is in part because of a fixation on the self, and in part because modernism tends to realism. The identity of fiction is bipolar as a result. In his introduction to Ricoeur’s *Figuring the Sacred*, translator Mark Wallace notes that “[t]he aim of an imaginative text is the creative imitation of human action—even as the purpose of the metaphor [for Ricoeur] is to re-describe the actual world in terms of possibility. Yet while narrative fiction’s mimetic capacities are creative—they do not offer slavish copies of the ordinary world—they remain historically rooted in the common world of human action” (12).

history, never outside of it as has often been charged, for it is revealed through the medium of a prophet who is, ontologically, at least in the act of speaking or writing the revelation, located in time. True, its historical sense challenges linear models of time, and the events and periods it narrates extend futurally into an infinity that is unknowable by mechanical measures of time. But the overall structure of events is sequential, even where the genre itself makes use of flashbacks, or where the sequence as presented resists identification in historical reflection. This narrative quality is what determines its most direct use in the literature of the twentieth century. Fiction always tells, and scriptural apocalypse *foretells*, even when that telling is “opaque and . . . bewildering” (idem).

Poetry had long since given up epic proportion and narrative focus by the twentieth century, and modern poetry in particular emphasized the articulation of sensation, or the representation of isolated experience—often sensual—under the influence of Pound and Eliot. But modern fiction, while never eliminating a basic narrative function, pushed experimentally into the psyche of its characters, and began to warp the representation of thought and action accordingly. For example, Virginia Woolf’s fiction, especially her short stories and her novel *The Waves*, and Joyce’s *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* are all hyper-conscious of time in its relation to perception and experience, and that consciousness figures in both the conceptual framework and the narrative structures of their works in a way that resists readerly apprehension. A similar anxiety permeates certain chapters of Revelation, though on a much larger scale.

By its nature, fiction can be the special province of metaphysical and theological reflection, a ready analogue for the interplay between an absolute consciousness and human activity on a smaller scale. The relation between the writer and his text is layered,

especially in prose fiction, by levels of abstraction which separate author from narrative persona, and narrator from character. Narrators set at an ironic distance from the author are often made a bit anxious about their relation to characters, and self-conscious of their grasp of the truth, however much they are permitted to know within the limits of the artifice. They are imbued with a sense that the narrative they are forming originated in and is controlled by a higher consciousness, that they are characters at a lesser remove from the author than the other characters, and that such privilege is also a great burden. They are, in effect, the uncertain prophets of that authorial intention that controls the limits and nature of their participation in and comprehension of the drama they unfold.

With customary zeal, Charles Glicksberg takes this one step further in his portrayal of Joyce's deployment of blasphemy: "Stephen Dedalus . . . forsakes Catholicism for the religion of art. For him the artist supplants the function of God; he 'remains within or behind or beyond his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails'" (*Modern Literature and the Death of God* 11). Peter Childs, speaking figuratively, inadvertently supports this portrayal when he characterizes the "writerly" strain in fiction, starting with Henry James, whose

Reliance on ambiguity, on careful revelation and on neither third-person omniscient narration nor first-person pseudo-autobiographical forms but on centres of consciousness, suggested alternative ways of writing fiction and implied that the novel was less a device for unravelling a story to a reader-as-consumer than a vehicle for conveying mental images to an active intelligence.

(76)

Here again, scriptural apocalypse, that special form of prophecy, is a possible model. Believers of Revelation, for instance, accept that John wrote what he perceived with his

senses: a lush concert of images and impressions, ‘conveyed’ to his intelligence by divine messengers, that was (and is) apparently ‘ambiguous’ and ‘carefully revealed’ (see Rev 1:1-11).

Simply, if God is the author of scripture, then prophets are his narrators, and the distance between divine author and narrator is closed, mystically, by revelation. This mystical dimension is heightened in scriptural apocalypses (a special kind of prophecy) because the substance of the revelations—their images, language, and mode of transmission—are so strangely fantastic, so obviously vivid in reception and both compressed and uncontainable in narration (how much is lost in translation?), that the uncertainty of the narrator-revelator must be greater than with a strictly oral or textual prophecy. Thus, a writerly concern with inspiration, a longstanding *topos* in critical theory, invites a second shift of the points of reference in my analogy. If modern texts are apocalyptic, it is because the moderns feel the uncertainty of this relation in both the theological and aesthetic senses more acutely than the writers before them, who hadn’t to contend with Darwin, Nietzsche, and upheaval on quite the same scale, so that their whole world-view was in some sense apocalyptic. And because of their sensibility that there is a truth, or at least their desire for one whether they feel it is to be had or not, they stand absurdly and self-consciously in the place of the prophet and revelator in the secular world.⁹

Thomas Altizer speaks of the implications of that analogy for the apocalyptic fictions, or the apocalyptic sensibility in fiction, of the twentieth century:

[P]rophetic language even as apocalyptic language has been . . . most purely reborn in the Christian epic tradition, which from Dante through Joyce has been a

⁹ See “Terms of Apocalypse Theory” below for more on this point.

prophetic and an apocalyptic tradition at once, and just as each of our great epic poets has ushered in a new historical age, each has sealed a final ending of a previous age. Yet if that tradition culminates in *Finnegans Wake*, . . . such a culmination is a reversal of our epic tradition itself. . . . [O]ur final epic language [is] an inversion of an original prophetic language, for it is an inversion and not a dissolution of such language. (“The Apocalypse of the Spirit” 37)

What he means is that the ostensible prophetic fictions of the century, especially those of high modernism, that situate the source of inspiration in the human imagination, and more specifically in their own, invert the terms of prophetic saying by supplanting it with a counterfeit. In the context of Altizer’s doctrine of “deep apocalypticism” (38), a Manichean philosophy of negation and affirmation, the resultant fictions are in fact affirmations of the sacred. I shall be content with a milder concentration of Altizer’s conclusion: if we accept, as critical modernism sometimes does, that the writers of modernism are also its prophets, “we therein know that literature as scripture,” and “as an apocalyptic scripture” at that (41).

3. Quick Fix

A resolution to the problem of the critical vocabulary as I have represented and complicated it thus far—the simplification or unjustified and unqualified conflation of terms associated with both generic and theological apocalypse that results in lost and falsely exclusive dimensions—is surprisingly simple. We might adopt Frye’s modal cycle, or Robinson’s hermeneutic circle, and require, in the critical context, that the invocation of scriptural apocalypse be intentional, whatever its modal function in the text (ironic, low mimetic, etc). That is, we call a fiction “apocalyptic” only where the author

conveys that intention subtly or explicitly, but unmistakably. We say, as Frye said of allegory, that “[g]enuine [apocalypse] has to be there, and cannot be added by critical interpretation alone” (*Anatomy* 54).

I see two problems with this requirement, though neither of them is insurmountable, and indeed a consideration of them only serves to clarify the outcomes of the requirement. The first is a problem of scale or significance: a “minor” allusion to scriptural apocalypse might not justify calling the whole work apocalyptic, though it might suffice in describing the moment or image. In this instance we might call the apocalyptic “symbol” a “motif” rather than a “sign” of apocalyptic meaning (see Frye, *Anatomy* 73-74). Structural manifestations of the scriptural source tend to be pervasive, of course, and are thus easily accepted as conveying an apocalyptic or anti-apocalyptic intention. Either way, we are asked to think of the tradition or a specific text in order to contextualize the work we are reading. Themes, if supported by other discernibly apocalyptic elements, are also likely justifications for the use of the term. Images—unless they are exclusive to scriptural apocalypse, travelling in at least a pair or preferably a herd, or clearly illuminated within the text as apocalyptic—are the most problematic of the three categories of formal manifestation. The same might be said of prophetic and eschatological elements (given “prophecy” and eschatology as non-exclusive rhetorical categories of scriptural apocalypse), with an additional caveat: prophecy and eschatology are varied concepts, so using these elements to justify calling a text apocalyptic requires that they *be* apocalyptic (Collins, “Introduction” 4).

The second problem is that such a requirement would exclude fictions that are “accidentally” apocalyptic: informed by the sense of crisis, end, or renovation that is their

milieu, but not consciously so. Such fictions are problematic for inclusion and exclusion for the same reason: if Kermode is right, all of history and therefore all of literature has been arguably “apocalyptic” in the general sense of crisis, and more accurately the images and themes of Revelation are immanent in the western imagination, with or without our blessing. A critic may, therefore, see apocalyptic elements where the author did not, and may make a case for it. But that would require work, and would naturally tend to a sufficient qualification of the use of “apocalyptic” with respect to the particular text—a detailed, argued attribution of apocalypse-ness to a tone, a mood, a particular statement, event, or image—and thereby responsibly preclude scriptural apocalypse as a “dominant influence” (Emmerson 430). All told, the exertions required by qualification and definition will succeed in establishing a vocabulary that meaningfully expresses and characterizes the relation between the literary work and scriptural apocalypse as a deliberately invoked source or tradition. So the requirement of a discernible, unmistakable intention would, it would seem, serve us quite well.

4. Apocalyptic Fiction. Really.

And yet while a clarification of terms currently in use, or the adoption and adaptation of a more specific set of terms might result in a more responsible use of our apocalyptic vocabulary, it will only get us halfway in resolving the shortcomings of critical modernism as I have presented them. There is still the matter of a “second stream” of modernist fiction that is something more or other than ironic in “apocalyptic” disposition, if not in fictive mode, and to which the standard metaphorical uses of apocalypse may not apply. I do not have in mind “apocalypse fiction” in the sense that

Tristram Hooley intended (texts that imagine or represent the End on a global scale), nor do I refer to works of science fiction, or to utopic or dystopic novels, or to “apologetic fictions,” in part because their generic and modal behaviours resist identification with the traditional canons of modernism, and though they are interesting in their own right, they belong to clearly recognizable sub-genres.¹⁰ I am instead interested in pointing to “mainstream” texts in the century, and texts easily assigned to modernism without substantial qualification, since an analysis of these texts, unlike their sci-fi contemporaries, will require a second phase in the adjustment of the apocalyptic vocabulary of critical modernism: a recognition that not all texts in the period are skeptical, not all secularize the theological vocabulary they have inherited from the tradition, not all treat the structures and images of scriptural apocalypse as metaphors, and not all eschew onto-theology as the work of mythicists or madmen. For these writers, a cigar may well be a cigar.

In what remains of this chapter, and in preparation for the critical treatments that follow, I seek to establish the grounds of a theory that accounts for that “second stream.” I do this in two parts: first by invoking the work of Paul Fiddes in *The Promised End: Eschatology in Theology and Literature*, and second by bringing Lukács’ *The Theory of the Novel* into dialectic with Mikhail Bakhtin’s “Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity” and “Epic and Novel: Toward a Methodology for the Study of the Novel.”¹¹ I should note

¹⁰ Two recent articles engage, respectively, with the origins of “last man” fiction in nineteenth century literature starting with Mary Shelley’s *The Last Man* and contemporary works “written in the key of apocalypse” (Sussman 286), and the American “homiletic novel” (Jackson).

¹¹ Portions of this and later chapters having to do with the dialectic between Lukács and Bakhtin are adapted as an essay in an anthology edited by Zubin Meer (forthcoming: see Works Cited). In later sections, I connect these ideas with material from Josef Pieper’s *The End of Time*, Hans Robert Jauss’ *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics*, and Paul Ricoeur’s *History and Truth*, and with my reading of Golding.

that whereas Lukács' ideas are clearly eschatological, or anti-eschatological, Bakhtin's have more to do with revelation in the form of an opening of the self to God, an openness that I see as instrumental to the self-disclosure of God as it is imagined in the works that figure in this thesis. I will seek to connect Bakhtin's terminology and grammar with my own, but remind the reader that the fundamental purpose of these next pages is to characterize a set of novels that resist classification under current critical assumptions about modernism—that challenge the assumption of universal skepticism or secularity—and request that you await patiently the exposition of those novels. Meanwhile, consider what follows an extension of my meditation on the relation between modern fiction and scripture: one that turns our attention to an alternative stream in modernism that deepens and enriches the critical modernism I have been critiquing.

4.1 Eschatology: An Alternative View

Hope tells me that there is meaning and that I should seek it.
Paul Ricoeur, *History and Truth* 95

In his reading of Kermode and Frye, Paul Fiddes concludes the following about literary eschatology: “the end organizes and unifies the whole,” “the end expresses a desired world,” and “a satisfactory ending of a text would integrate closure and openness” (23). Kermode's theory is certainly incapable of moving us beyond closure, however much it strains at doing so, and Frye's theory, while it treats apocalypse in the positive terms of desire, still feels a little elusive and disingenuous when all is said and done: Frye and Kermode assume that myths are fictions, after all, and that myths are

therefore realizable only as metaphors. Fiddes disagrees, and suggests that there is a stage beyond desire, opposed to despair: “an attitude of hope” that can achieve what neither closure nor fantasist desire may—a “balance between openness and closure” that finds its best representation in “a truly religious view” (23).

Fiddes’ reading of literary apocalypse is informed by this basic assumption, and more specifically by his faith in the messages of scriptural apocalypse; the benefit of reading Fiddes is that we get the perspective of one who believes critically, and who is sensible therefore to a manifestation of the rhetorical components of scriptural apocalypse in literature—nuanced, and in their complexity. As an able critic and scholar, Fiddes is also responsible to the requirements of objectivity as Frye established them: he qualifies his belief with an acknowledgement that the textual content of the apocalyptic “mythos” that interests him is at least in part a human hypothesis, whatever its existential origins. That is, Fiddes attributes the text of Revelation to John of Patmos, even as it is still a revelation or “discovery of the will of God” (25), for it was John who committed the content of the revelation to language, and made it therefore a verbal structure subject to interpretation and analysis.

Fiddes differentiates helpfully between “prophetic eschatology” as the foretelling of “the end *of* history” (24), apocalypse “as a literary genre” with its own distinct concerns and features (*idem*), “apocalypticism” as a “broad historical ‘movement of mind’” or “mood” of the sort Kermode critiques (25), and “apocalyptic eschatology” as a “mode of expectation”:

To speak of ‘apocalyptic eschatology’ does not then, I suggest, in itself presume a predetermined view of the future, nor the imminence of the end, such as is found in some apocalypses. This kind of eschatology is, however, marked by the

confidence that God will bring the divine purposes to completion, and so by a concern for the sovereignty of God. (25)

His purpose in differentiating between prophetic and apocalyptic eschatology is important, then, not in making a concession to the critical assumptions evident in both Frye and Kermode, but rather in rescuing apocalyptic eschatology from the charge of “determinism”: the future as predicted—as described—in scriptural apocalypse is a metaphorical one, but that metaphorical identification does not preclude its fulfilment. It merely asks us to be careful about claiming to unveil the fixed, the total manifestation in human history of metaphysical events (24). God is free to act, and thus to surprise.

Of course, Fiddes’ principal object is eschatology, not the whole of scriptural apocalypse, and so his book is much braver than my own. Specifically, Fiddes concerns himself with this “apocalyptic eschatology” branded by expectation and not by despair or literal, eisegetical fixation. He argues further that theological reflection can illuminate textual closure without necessarily “imputing religious intentions to the author where they do not exist” (12). Yet to “recover,” as he convincingly does, certain works of Eliot, Woolf, Beckett, and Martin Amis (among others)¹² as pushing the limits of the critical eschatology I have critiqued—that paltry, shrivelled, truncated and impotent slave to despair—is thus to suggest that even in the forceful currents of high modernism, in both its distinguishable phases (modern and postmodern), there were undercurrents of an inexorable and immanent will to believe.

Fiddes later clarifies his approach, noting the dangers of the intentional fallacy in

¹² Fiddes’ treatment includes several other figures that are closer than these in spirit to those of the “second stream” suggested in Bakhtin: Shakespeare’s *King Lear* (a response to Kermode’s treatment), and among the moderns Doris Lessing, Huxley, and Le Guin, with minor reference to a host of other texts, many of them from the 20th century.

this and other critical experiments:

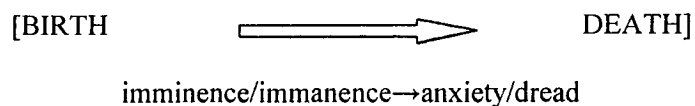
A literary text thus has an autonomy; it is not owned by the author, and its meaning is not to be found by investigating the author's intention. Rather, we must employ tools of structural analysis to find the inherent meaning of a text, or the meaning of the text in its own right. (16)

This is a reasonable statement under the circumstances, though there is something equally dangerous in a "structural analysis" that seeks an "inherent meaning," given that the literary text tends to openness as Fiddes well knows (7). In the interests of this project, let us agree that an analysis, in our case a "structural" analysis (the search for generic structures, themes, and images reminiscent or evocative of scriptural apocalypse), may allow us to find *a* meaning that is arguably inherent in the text, and that even if an author has no religious intention, conscious or otherwise, such an intention may be "inherent" to the materials of the text, and therefore be piggy-backed in. "The end of a story thus articulates not the individual intention of the author" (at least not exclusively), "but the desire of a collective subject of the human race" (Fiddes 16).

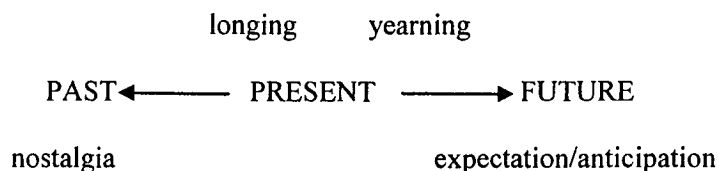
In critical modernism, it is assumed that eschatological anxiety is fuelled by a loss (which must not be felt as a loss) of faith in "the End" (which is not a terminus, but an interchange), and by a practical rationality that denies the continuation of life beyond death, and which thus has as its ultimate object a terminal death, the cessation of sensibility. Insofar as this is an accurate, albeit partial, view of modernism, it is simply drawn. The pessimism of the moderns grew out of the decay and degeneration they perceived around them: of morality, of political and economic stability, of culture, of faith. That decay was ubiquitous, and it suggested a terminal point: a death. Little wonder that the majority of the moderns were therefore not only critical of the decay itself, but

anxious about where it was leading, and doubly anxious about the relative meaninglessness of it all.

Thus eschatology is disconnected from the object of its nostalgia or of its futural, apocalyptic desire. Again, this may well be what Lukács had in mind when he spoke of modernism as “demonic”: the necessary conclusions of rational nihilism are, in Frye’s terms, precisely those things which desire rejects (*Anatomy* 141, 147, 151). And no wonder, since such a life begins and ends with nothing but its own sensory perceptions, playing out in a bracketed and inevitable organic linearity:



And yet we have also seen that when death is brought into metaphorical identification with various ends, it is capable of transforming anxiety into anticipation, especially as that death is made to represent the end of decadence, or of stagnation, or of languidity, or of the object of fear itself. In these instances, eschatology returns to its roots in the form of either nostalgia or a futural “expectation” (Fiddes 25), and generally, even as it speaks (literally or metaphorically) of an Edenic restoration (something that falls far short of the post-millennial visions offered in Revelation), the appearance of this expectation, this “attitude of hope,” in these forms further transforms protological longing into eschatological yearning, best expressed in John’s own hortatory prayer that Christ keep his word, and “come” soon (Rev. 21:20). Here is a simple representation of those two dynamics:



(Golden Age)

(Millennial Age/Renewal)

Remember that “renewal” can be represented in “secular” apocalypse as political, social, or aesthetic renovation, and that several movements and figures in modernism advocated just such a futural disposition. I will argue in the next chapter that Lewis’ vorticism was one such movement. But the other works I read treat eschatological hope as oriented in “actual” prophecy and revelation, rooted again in a romantic rapprochement between divine and human consciousnesses.

In the portrait of modernism typical of the critical view, it is considered an act of bravery to refuse the comforts of theology, especially as one considers them fictions and fantasies. Yet if Fiddes is right, such refusals generally misread the promise of scriptural eschatology as at worst the expression of a desire for vengeance on the part of an otherwise disenfranchised and impotent people (Nietzsche, Lawrence), or at best a “consoling deception” (Kermode, and Fiddes 13)—a pipe dream of patience rewarded. What they tend to overlook, of course, is the power of the eschatological vision to transform present life: one lives now for an end whose coming one cannot predict with certainty, but which gives the universe a story, which in turn “makes more reasonable the belief that God *gives* it a story” (idem).

As I said, Fiddes is braver than I, and more foolhardy if I follow his syllogism, meant principally to call to account Kermode’s seemingly contradictory conclusions that fictions answer, apocalyptically, a human need for concord, unity, and meaning by intentionally “deceiving” their readers about the reality of ends. We need an end because we are in perpetual crisis, in perpetual transition between crises, rather, which is precisely the nature of our crisis; and yet those ends are lies because, Kermode observes, they never come. This is no longer certain. The end could well be nigh, Fiddes retorts: the

annihilative vision of Revelation is, technologically, no longer necessarily a fiction, and certainly not consolatory. And to the extent that fictions refuse to console (by refusing to end, for instance) they also deceive, because they package life as absolute purposelessness and openness when life itself naturally resists that openness by searching for form and concord. Furthermore, if all mythologies are equally “consoling fictions,” the universality of mythos should tell us something about our natural inclination to be consoled—to find meaning for our lives and deaths.¹³ Of course, Fiddes does not pretend that death is a non-issue. “A Christian view of eschatology,” he says, “must take the fact of death seriously, as the ‘last enemy’ that the Apostle Paul identifies,” but it is inevitably swallowed up in other “facts”:

Biblical writers view the human person as a psychosomatic unity; the soul is not a survival capsule which can simply float through death unscathed. The New Testament hope for eternal life is in the resurrection of the body and personality together, when God acts to conquer death. Death itself cannot be our ‘final concern’ in the way Heidegger proposes; but we may agree . . . that facing the shock of the nothingness of death will alert us to God who is our final concern, and it is openness to the God of promise that will bring an integration to a broken existence. (12)

The problem as Fiddes sees it is in a tendency for critical modernism, and perhaps modernism itself (especially postmodernism), to be increasingly reluctant to face death: to defer, gloss, ritualize or sensationalize death in order to avoid thinking about what it is (12-13). Whatever my personal feelings about the End, or ends, I certainly agree that the

¹³ Paul Ricoeur agrees, and charges Kermode along the same lines (see *Time and Narrative* 2.27).

narrative of scriptural apocalypse is more complex than it is thought to be by a dismissive critical modernist apperception, and that its complexity is represented in the literature of the period. If the imminence of the end gives the universe a story, and if that story makes a belief in God's authorship more reasonable, then that relation would be represented in fictions interested in the meaning that concomitantly settles upon the individual. In this sense critical modernism's fixation of the self has it right: if the world means because of God, it can only mean as the sum of the individual lives—the “bodies *and* personalities”—that inhabit it as God's creatures.

4.2 *Two Streams*

As I have noted, in *The Theory of the Novel* Georg Lukács asserted that the modern novel is “the epic of a world that has been abandoned by God [and] a symbol of the essential thing which needs to be said” at a given moment in human history (88), but which paradoxically “tells of the adventure of interiority” of its subject (89). Lukács wrote his study two years shy of the *annus mirabilis* of high modernism, but his assertion holds for the key modernist texts that followed: the novel was the ideal form for the attempt of the modern self to find new means of definition in the wake of the weakening, though not the eradication, of the old means.

The “absence” or “non-existence” of God was foundational to Lukács' conception of the modern, and more specifically to the crisis of selfhood that is now broadly considered the defining preoccupation of the novel since 1890, and that lends a decidedly, though limited (i.e. eschatological), apocalyptic sensibility to what is generally considered an avowedly skeptical if not outright atheistic period in Western culture.

Indeed, it would be naïve to negate the validity of a critical framework that foregrounds loss of faith and belief among modernists: skepticism and profound anxiety are critical and demonstrably historical commonplaces in the modern period. However, that framework has tended to eclipse readings of modernism that call the completeness and authenticity of the loss of belief into question, and it has tended also to ignore a second stream in modern literature that openly grounds the definition of self in the experience of a divine presence both alive and active in the lives of its characters—an epiphanic or theophanic revelation, often caught up in prophetic or quasi-prophetic vocation, and therefore looking beyond eschatology. I refer to these works from here out as the “Other” modern novel, a set of novels that includes the works by Huxley and Golding at which I have been gesturing throughout this thesis.

In the preface to the 1962 edition, Lukács characterized *Theory* as “naïve,” admitting that it was firmly rooted in a “totally unfounded [socialist] utopianism”, and thus acknowledging the book’s revolutionary intention: the young Lukács, he observed, had not been “looking for a new literary form but, quite explicitly, for a new world” (20). His intention isn’t surprising. Like many of his contemporaries, Lukács was “anti-Modernist,” “regard[ing] Western civilization as undergoing a transitional phase, where the loss of normativity (of standards of belief and conduct) made it an age of ‘absolute sinfulness’” (Saim 411). For him, the novel was the “epic of an age in which the extensive totality of life is no longer given, in which the immanence of meaning in life has become a problem, yet which still thinks in terms of totality” (Lukács 56). Compared to other forms of epic literature (Homer and Dante specifically), the loss of the “immanence of meaning in life” in the age of the novel resulted in a preponderant

“heaviness” in the novel itself, and “a hopeless engagement in senseless casual connections, a withered sterile existence too close to the earth and too far from heaven” (57) that was deprived of “the perfect immanence of the transcendent” as its referential ground (59).

Lukács’ early view of the modern world presupposed a romantic disconnect—the severing of an apocalyptic link between man’s world and God’s—less a displacement than a total rupture. In his complaint that the world had been “abandoned” by God (88), we might perceive a poignant, melancholy, and even petulant lamentation and affirmation of Nietzsche’s pronouncement of God’s death.¹⁴ Yet Lukács’ view, however familiar it is in current critical treatments of modern literature, is hardly comprehensive. Within about ten years of the publication of *The Theory of the Novel*, Mikhail Bakhtin would argue that an account of the self is an impossibility without a “transgredient” other, and that the ideal, totalizing account of the self must be taken in relation to God as the “ultimate limit” of a self-accounting which can only be “consummated” outside of the self (“Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity” 143-44). He rejects the possibility of an “axiological void,” for

outside God, outside the bounds of trust in absolute otherness, self-consciousness
and self-utterance are impossible, and they are impossible not because they

¹⁴ Lukács himself makes only one overt reference to Nietzsche in *The Theory of the Novel*—in the preface he wrote forty-two years after its initial publication. In that preface, Lukács speaks of the contribution *The Theory of the Novel* made in being the first book to couple “a left ethic oriented towards radical revolution . . . with a traditional-conventional exegesis of reality” (21). He was followed in this, he claims, by Bloch and Benjamin, and then makes this rather cryptic statement: “The importance of this movement became even greater proceeding from a ‘left’ ethic, attempted to mobilise Nietzsche and even Bismarck as progressive forces against fascist reaction” (21-22). The difficulty of the comment is syntactical, which may be the result of translator or publisher error. Whatever its meaning, the comment suggests that Nietzsche was invoked politically by this “movement” (of Marxist theory?) only after Lukács’ book had already been published. This is a political evocation, however, and does not alter the likelihood that Lukács knew Nietzsche, and had accepted his pronouncement as a cultural fact at very least.

would be senseless practically, but because trust in God is an immanent
constitutive moment of pure self-consciousness and self-expression. (144)

This statement is ostensibly limited to Bakhtin's meditation on the aesthetics of "confessional self-accounting," where the ethical self is defined in relation to God: he refers to the *Psalms*, Augustine's *Confessions*, and Bernard de Clairvaux's commentary on the *Song of Songs* as limited instances of this aesthetic (145). But the meditation is instructive in the context of our interest in a second stream of modern experience which does not, in fact, jettison belief in an external "totality," nor does it accept an "axiological void" as a reality, but seeks instead to work out a new way of figuring the importance and activity of belief, and of God, in human experience.

In "Author and Hero," Bakhtin applies this notion to character and authorship in the novels of Dostoevsky, so he clearly intended to look beyond the limits of explicitly confessional literature, and opened the door to a similar reading of modern literature generally, especially as it evokes structures, themes, or images of revelation (as self-disclosure) or comprehension (as discovery) of God. We can assume, therefore, that he considered characterization a fictive form of confessional self-accounting, and the "performed acts" of characters meaningful only in the context of a larger narrative and the relation between the human and the divine that it figures or denies. If this is so, then Bakhtin's theory effectively suggests the need for fiction to look beyond aesthetic and epistemological limits to onto-theology, for characters, like authors, can only ultimately be defined through the experience of God.

For him, then, the assignation of the novel as the "epic" of a fallen, demonic, abandoned world is too narrow. Bakhtin suggests that the novel may, in fact, be a point of contact "with the open infinitude of the event of being" ("Author" 143), as in Frye's

“literary” mythology and Altizer’s negation/affirmation dyad. True, Bakhtin considers the *modus operandi* of the novel “an eternal re-thinking and re-evaluating” of the past as it attempts to predict the “real future . . . of the author and his readers” (“Epic” 31), but this re-evaluation hardly signals the loss of “the immanence of meaning in life.” If anything, it could be said to signal a greater intensity of relation with the “totality of life” in the novel than in other literary forms. Where the epic (and the verse forms descended from it) could take the past for granted as “closed” and “absolute,” and thus be “indifferent” to “problems of a beginning, an end, and ‘fullness’ of plot, the novel had to “pose [those problems] anew.” For Bakhtin, then, the “absence of internal conclusiveness and exhaustiveness creates a sharp increase in demands for *external* and *formal* completedness [sic] and exhaustiveness” (“Epic” 31). In other words, rather than merely telling of “the adventure of interiority” of its subject, the modern novel might look outside of itself to understand and define that subject. In this case, “[a]uthor and hero are fused into one: it is the spirit prevailing over the soul in process of its own becoming, and finding itself unable to achieve its own completion or consummation, except for a certain degree of consolidation that it gains, through anticipation, in God” (“Author” 147).

These two theories offer us two very different views of modernism, though they make use of the same materials. Lukács replaces the cosmic relation between humanity and God with a relation between characters and an author who stands in for God as “symbol”: in a sense, he places Baal in Solomon’s temple, as (in Frye’s terms) a *motif* and not a *sign* of God himself. This works very much like the secularization I posited in Chapter II: God’s importance, his creative majesty, his omniscience, are transferred to the author who is, finally, only metaphorically identifiable with God, and who remains the

author in the inward sense of the word. Bakhtin examines that cosmic relation figuratively in and through the instrumentality of the literary relation: the figure as symbol means outwardly, and thus is a *sign* of God as real. Who are Lukács' modernist *baalim*? Naturalists, realists, and absurdists who attempt to negate or by-pass the sacred, and to situate self-definition in cultural or environmental, rather than divine, grounds: writers like Conrad, Hardy, Joyce, Ford, Woolf, Orwell, and (perhaps) Beckett. Who are Bakhtin's onto-theologists? Romanticists, in Frye's sense of the term, who acknowledge a greater consciousness attending to human action, and therefore a greater meaning in human anxieties and hopes: Chesterton, Waugh, Huxley, Greene, Murdoch, Lessing, and Golding, to name but a few.

Of course, none of these figures, in either stream or category, is always doing the work attributed to them here, but they do it in some of their fictions, and in varying ways. Specifically, in the novels of the first set we encounter alienated, skeptical, and eschatologically anxious characters that remain more or less static, if with a greater degree of an ultimately theomachic or anthropomachic self-consciousness. These novels are apocalyptic in a secular and even skeptical way: insofar as they invoke scriptural apocalypse, it is to borrow or ironize its rhetorical power in the ways I described in Chapter II. The novels of the second set, while they are of course secular texts, do not displace the rhetorical framework of scriptural apocalypse, but rather invoke it to preserve in some way its "total" meaning; eschatological ruin, millennial hope, prophetic vocation, and revelatory experience are taken seriously, and if not literalized, considered literal. In this "Other" modern novel we witness the ontological encounter of similarly "modern" characters with a divine presence that jolts them out of the smallness and

secularity of their malaise, and invites them into a relation with God's love.

CHAPTER IV

ESCHATOLOGY AND ITS MALCONTENTS: SCRIPTURAL APOCALYPSE IN WYNDHAM

LEWIS' *BLAST*¹ AND *TARR*

In literature, the poet/critic as prophet is called by an impersonal talent, or by his or her own voice, and invested by popular assent with the imaginative authority of seer or the critical authority of the apostle or teacher. The case of Huxley is well known, at least insofar as *Brave New World* is considered the work of a sensitive or seer. I will deal more specifically with Huxley in the next chapter. Allow me to say here that Huxley is as interested in figures of prophecy as he is in his own apparent “gift” of prophecy vis-à-vis the technocratic future. Less examined is the career of Percy “Pierce-eye” Wyndham Lewis, who constructs himself as a prophetic consciousness in both his role as editor and author of *Blast*, and in his role as critic and artist throughout his career in that he claims a clarity of oracular sight and an awareness of movements in art (and eventually politics)

¹ A portion of this chapter, including much of the general material on Lewis and Vorticism, and significant portions of my reading of *Blast* were published in the proceedings of the 2005-06 Northeast Region Meeting of the Conference on Christianity and Literature (see Works Cited).

that signal its entropic decay and its coming end, and which also claims the priestly or apostolic authority to write the doctrine that will guide those movements. I argue below that as the (heavy-handed) editor of *Blast*, Lewis sought to bring about the end of art to clear the way for something else, so his was at once a voice of dire warning and an exultant attempt to “create” that end, or at least the conditions that would bring it about. In his efforts, Lewis puts scriptural apocalypse to use in ways his fellow modernists would not, and thus his eschatological vision resists definition by a critical modernism that seeks at once to secularize and reduce the substance and limit of apocalypse and apocalyptic eschatology.

1. The Elephant in the Room: Wyndham Lewis as Modernist

I am an “outcast” and a man “maudit.”
 But how romantic! Don’t you envy me?
 A sort of Villon, bar the gallows: but
 Even there I may be accommodated yet.
 Why yes it’s very jolly to be picked
 As the person not so much as to be kicked,
 As the person who de facto *is not there*,
 As the person relegated to the back-stair.

Lewis, “If So the Man You Are,” *Collected Poems and Plays* 51

Though his association with many of the key modernists is a matter of historical record, Lewis’ inclusion as an important figure in literary modernism has been a matter of significant debate, and as a result he is a neglected figure compared to his friends and associates. There are several probable reasons for this, not the least of which, from a critical perspective, that Lewis was an artistic jack-of-all-trades, and therefore not purely a writer. But it seems that much of the critical neglect is owed to Lewis’ reputation

among his peers. On this point Anne Quéma offers the following portrait:

[Lewis'] reputation is built on the notion that Lewis was a strange bird, combining mordant satire with inveterate paranoia; that he was a "lonely old volcano of the Right" (as Auden and MacNeice put it); that he had the terrible habit of sowing his seed here and there without due regard to the mother of his children; that he had "the eyes of an unsuccessful rapist" (or so wrote Hemingway); and that he socked it to Roger Fry and Bloomsbury in *The Apes of God* and earlier in rebelliously seceding from the Omega workshops . . . (11-12)

These charges are at best frivolous, of course, and none of them offers any serious justification for excluding him. If anything, Lewis' pugnacity and assertive individualism fit him well for a modernist disposition to innovation and experiment. Like Foshay and Schenker, then, Quéma favours including Lewis among the key modernists, and squarely so, saying his neglect has had a "pernicious effect" on his reputation:

On account of a general critical discourse that functions at the different levels of genre ('satirist'), ideology ('fascist,' 'right-wing'), psychology ('cantankerous,' 'egotist'), studies focusing on Lewis have in one way or another introduced, and indeed, analyzed him as the odd man out, the singular personality, the outsider, the true genius who cannot be categorized. This approach, which stems from the still-lingering notion of romantic genius, runs the risk of isolating Lewis's achievement from its ideological, cultural, and social contexts. (12)

Indeed the only one of these charges worth paying any attention to is that of Lewis' perceived politics, which are still commonly defined by his apparent "fascist" leanings, articulated in some rather careless "polemical works" of the early to mid-thirties (principally *Hitler* of 1931, *Left Wings Over Europe* in 1936, and *Count Your Dead*—

They Are Alive! in 1937), where his concern about Hitler in particular now seems rather casual and (inexcusably) typical (Ayers 30), and which outlasted his attempts to qualify his attitude after Hitler broke the Munich Pact (in *The Hitler Cult* and *The Jews, Are They Human?* both published in 1939; see Kenner 82-85 and Schenker 5-6). Critical opinion about this matter is split, but tends increasingly toward a softer view. In his chapter on Lewis' "Antisemitism," Ayers asserts that Eliot and Pound, in varying degrees, have been comparatively unscathed by charges of anti-Semitism because Lewis "has not proved as adaptable . . . to the post-war canon." Ayers' psychoanalytic critique of the Jew in Lewis is interesting, but overstates Lewis' pre-Munich ambivalence as no less than a "long antisemitic [sic] campaign" (31) and, as Kenner and Schenker note is typical of discussions of anti-Semitism in Lewis, it largely ignores his post-Munich qualifications. Like Kenner and Schenker, Materer downplays the ferocity and genuineness of Lewis' anti-Semitism (17). Kenner concludes his discussion of Lewis' intra-War politics with this significant tidbit: "The Hitler book, incidentally, displeased both Hitler and Goebbels. As soon as they came to power the German translation was pulped" (85). The larger irony is, of course, that Lewis' political views, whatever they may have been, pale in comparison to Pound's own Italian-era fascism which, while controversial, has not been considered cause to dismiss his work.

However dubious his politics may have appeared to be (and Schenker argues persuasively that they were no more dubious than anyone else's, and only appeared so because of accidents of publication), the importance of Lewis' contributions to modernism should not be doubted. Despite his being (even now) the "least read and most unfamiliar of all the great modernists of his generation" (Jameson 1; see also Quéma

11),² we must not forget (but do) the “admiration” his contemporaries felt for him (2). In *Today the Struggle* (1969), a study of the literature of the politically charged thirties, Katharine Hoskins observes that Lewis was “fiercely combative, fully convinced of the unique rightness of his position on any given subject at any given time,” but also quick to “change or reverse positions in the light of new knowledge and understanding,” and “capable of recognizing when he was wrong”: “this integrity of character,” she writes, “as much as his independence of intellect and his very remarkable talents as writer and artist, . . . explains the respect in which he was held even by those who have rarely been able to agree with him” (qtd. in Materer 115; my emphasis). Lewis himself declared: “I am paralysed the moment I try to write something I do not regard as true” (*Writer and Absolute* 3). Surely a person of such integrity deserves a closer look and a second judgment, especially in comparison with his more implacable contemporaries.

Lewis himself eschewed politics as a solution to anything. If Daniel Schenker is right, Lewis “opposed efforts to resolve conflicts” politically with an anti-socialist, anti-humanist zeal that “connect[ed] him with an Old Testament tradition that extends from Amos and Elijah down through such latter-day prophets as William Blake and Friedrich Nietzsche” (2). Indeed, “he understood life as a struggle between the human and the divine and tended to side with God against man” (4). If true, and I think it is, this alone would qualify him for a study that seeks to tease out an enduring religious sensibility by

² As it turns out, Lewis was not much better known in the fine arts than he has been in critical modernism (Jameson 1), though there are more scholars that have taken him seriously as an important figure in War painting than as a central figure in literary modernism (see Cork, Edwards as examples). Neglect of Lewis as visual and literary artist is, thankfully, on the decline, influenced by the efforts of Kenner, Jameson, Schenker, Foshay, and Materer, and evidenced by a significant increase of interest in Lewis in the past twenty years. These critics have not been as successful in getting Lewis inducted into the critical canon of modernism—an important next step—even if Lewis would have considered the denizens of the modernist canon a largely miserable company, and the canon itself a rather mediocre hall of fame.

tracking a fuller apocalyptic sense in twentieth century literature.

Fundamentally, however, Lewis was preoccupied with aesthetics, though not as an aesthete (Foshay 4), as he made clear in *The Caliph's Design*. Rather, his preoccupation was pragmatic: each mode in art—each discipline, each technique—constituted a distinct communicative or representational act, and some ideas, some sentiments, some arguments were better suited to one medium over another. The overall impression one likely gets from his essays is that of a person passionately concerned about art because art matters. Art says something about a culture, a people, a nation, and Lewis' sometimes acrimonious “blasting” of England and her creative children bespeak the exasperated concern of a caring guardian or servant; yet however condescending or abusive his criticisms could be, Lewis was never affecting.

By his own account (*Blasting and Bombardiering, Men Without Art, Vorticism and Wyndham Lewis*), and in the judgement of a growing number of critics willing to take that second look (Ayers, Foshay, Jameson, Kenner, Materer, Schenker), Lewis is considered the driving force behind Vorticism, and the chief critical intelligence of the day. This portrait is not difficult to accept: Lewis was Paul to Pound's Peter, really: Pound is often still considered the chief apostle, but it was Lewis providing all the doctrinal, epistolary force. Pound catalyzed Vorticism and raised its profile, but Lewis was its chief engineer and architect. Pound himself noted broadly that “the English prose fiction of [his] decade [was] the work of [James Joyce and Wyndham Lewis]” (*Literary Essays* 424), and of Vorticism specifically that “it might be said that Lewis supplied the volcanic force, Brzeska the animal energy, and perhaps that I had contributed a certain Confucian calm and reserve,” but that “[t]here would have been no movement without

Lewis” (*Ezra Pound* 219; see also Wilson 39).³ A passage from Hugh Kenner says it best:

No historian’s model of the age of Joyce, Eliot, and Pound is intelligible without Lewis in it. More than any of these men, whose craft functioned with comparative freedom within the time, Lewis reveals the time’s *nature*. . . . If Lewis has stood for intelligence rather than intuition, for creation rather than craftsmanship, for Western Man rather than his daemon the *Zeitgeist*, without ever personifying any of these things quite convincingly, yet even in illustrating the radical incapacity of will alone to do the work of patience, he has discredited the spuriousness we meticulously reward. . . . He is the necessary antidote to everything, from Freud and Lawrence to the cults which have surrounded Eliot and Joyce. (xiv-xv; see also Schenker 3)

Toby Foshay responds to Marcelin Pleyne’s call for an “overall reevaluation of the problems raised by ‘modernity’” by launching “a revised estimation of [Lewis’] role in the modernist movement, and through him of the movement itself” (Foshay 3).

There is still the question of whether or not Vorticism is properly avant-garde or modern, and the additional question of whether or not those two are exclusive categories. Foshay and Quéma both address these questions. I like Quéma’s formulation: “Modernist writers are modernists because they use avant-gardist practices and idioms to split apart systems of totality they have inherited from the past *and* by which they remain

³ Lewis wasn’t nearly as kind in his assessment of the foundations of Vorticism as this: “My opposition to Marinetti, and the criticism of his ‘futurist’ doctrines that I launched, Pound took a hand in, though really why I do not know; for my performances and those of my friends were just as opposed to Pound’s antiquarian and romantic tendencies, his velvet-jacket and his blustering *trouvère* airs, as was the futurism of Marinetti. . . . Pound supplied the Chinese Crackers, and a trayful of mild jokes, for our paper; also much ingenious support in the english and american [sic] press; and, of course, some nice quiet little poems—at least calculated to vex Signor Marinetti with their fine *passéiste* flavour” (*Time* 38).

fascinated” (16); “Lewis’s practice of secessionist avant-gardism means that his salvos were directed at other avant-gardes Significantly, the past and its painterly tradition is rarely if ever the target of Lewis’s scoffing manifestos” (22). In sum, Lewis exhibits the spirit of the age, but turns it critically against his peers rather than accepting the directions of the self-oriented art of novelty that threatened to define and defeat the century.

These claims—supported broadly by Foshay, Schenker, and Richard Cork—confirm my own sense of Lewis’ aesthetic intention, and they offer a further justification of his inclusion in this study. I choose Lewis because he was both centrally positioned among the midwives, obstetricians, and nursemaids of modernism, and because he held himself a little apart from them as well. Lewis was both “exemplary practitioner of one of the most powerful of all modernistic styles and an aggressive ideological critic and adversary of modernism itself in all its forms” (Jameson 3). He “gave consummate expression” to modern attitudes about tradition (Levenson 78) and was a nexus of agitation and fertility in an otherwise sterile environment, but he also needed his contemporaries and colleagues and defined himself in difference. When others were looking to revitalize the past, Lewis sought steadfastly to construct a genuinely new future.

2. Lewis’ *Blast*: *Aporia* and *Parousia* as Literary Eschatology

A sort of neglected bride, her nuptials long overdue, Art remains waiting and watching, in the company of other disappointed entities—such as “the proletariat”—for the millennium, of course, which never comes.

Wyndham Lewis, *Time and Western Man* 31

If the reader agreed that my opening the critical portion of this thesis with Lewis was a bit strange, it will seem doubly strange that I begin the earnest portion of this chapter—and indeed preoccupy myself most substantially—with a reading of the first number of Lewis’ short-lived, but very influential periodical *Blast*. After all, *Blast* defies ready generic definition, even as a periodical, and seems out of place in what amounts to a study of fiction. Its first relevance is principally intentional: obsessed with history and the place of “Western Man” within that history, Lewis meant Vorticism to be an *eschaton*—a “last thing”—in the world of art, and with *Blast* he managed to develop a narrow, secular “apocalypse” that prefigured, and was necessarily swallowed up in, the chaos of the Great War. Like the later novels, only more so, *Blast* works to create its own end: to not only welcome it, but to generate it as both agent of destruction and, ultimately, candidate for the nature of the renewed, re-born aesthetic. Here is something of Hooley’s notion that modernists may have sought apocalypse (as event) in order to clear the decks; only Lewis, who lived through the War as both a soldier and as one who lost friends, was after a spiritual and aesthetic apocalypse, not a literal one. Indeed, Lewis would later reflect that the Great War—“a bigger BLAST than mine[,] had rather taken the wind out of my sails” (*Blasting and Bombardiering* 85).

A second reason to read *Blast* is the relative clarity of its structural and rhetorical resemblance to scriptural apocalypse. A comparative reading of Revelation with the textual and logical arrangement of *Blast 1* (and *2*, to a lesser degree) illumines Lewis as the “prophet of a new fashion in art” (*Blasting and Bombardiering* 32). This was a protean, promethean sensibility, I think, but one very carefully ironized by Lewis himself.

Lewis asserted democratically in the opening expostulation of *Blast 1* that “intrinsic beauty is in the Interpreter and Seer” (“Long live the Vortex!”)—that art belongs to the individual consumer—and joked as well that the prophet, “a most unoriginal person,” was inferior to the artist, for “all he is doing is imitating something that is not there, but soon will be” (*Blasting and Bombardiering* 4). Furthermore, at least in the context of the vorticist movement, Lewis was also a god-figure⁴—the editorial, Pygmalion consciousness of the whole project, and the majority author—who, thirty years after the demise of the movement, claimed that “Vorticism . . . was what I, personally, did, and said” (“Introduction,” *Wyndham Lewis and Vorticism* 3). Here he sheds the mask of the *ieron* both to claim what was his intellectual property, and to shoulder responsibility for its futility and failure as well, so the claim becomes rather important. Yet at the same time, as it found expression in the first number of *Blast*, Lewis’ Vorticism represented by its texture and vision the chaos and noise of an apocalyptic mood in modern England—“the time’s *nature*” (Kenner xv)—and also revealed Lewis as an apocalyptician who, in his efforts to bring about the end of an aesthetic tradition (*Time and Western Man* 38), aestheticized and even secularized apocalyptic forms and structures.

To be clear: three important elements intersect in Lewis’ career. The first of these is his share in the eschatological anxiety that characterizes so much of the work of the

⁴ I mean this in the sense established in my III.3. Lewis never spoke of himself seriously in these terms, of course: he was passionate and proud, but never a megalomaniac. Speaking of the writing of his own biography, with customary deprecation (of himself and the whole race), he evoked his own “godhood” in these terms: “With this area or section I deal as would a tidy god. The god was of course mortal at the time he experienced the events in question. Having attained immortality, he feels he had better go back and have a look around—like a week-end trip to a Flanders Battlefield, but more curious than sentimental. You and I, you see, all men, in the matter of our past are little immortals. It is not an ‘immortality’ to be very puffed up about, it is true. Still there it is: even last year, even last week, answers to that description, and bestows upon us a portion of a rather uncomfortable god-hood. I am in this sense a conscientious godling” (*Blasting and Bombardiering* 6).

twentieth century. Many of the characters in his better known fictions (*Tarr*, *Rotting Hill*, *Self Condemned*, *The Apes of God*) are effete, languid, and often degenerate, and either represent the slow decay of moral, ethical, philosophical, or physiological health, or worry over it obsessively. In this sense, Lewis writes in the vein of what Kermode calls the “less lurid modern forms” of apocalyptic eschatology (*Sense* 187). As Fredric Jameson puts it, Lewis was the “exemplary practitioner of one of the most powerful of all modernistic styles” (3). But he was also “an aggressive ideological critic and adversary of modernism itself in all its forms” (idem): the “Enemy,” by his own designation and critical practice. That contradiction manifests in his work. For all that he shared the eschatological sensibility of his day, one gets the sense that Lewis, often a satirist, was in his early career⁵ less concerned about the arrival of the end—about the apocalyptic “tock,” as Kermode calls it (*Sense* 45)—than he was impatient with the complexion and mechanics of the “*kairos*” or “*aevum*” or season that inhabited, “intemporally,” the time between the genesis of tick and the apocalypse of tock (Kermode 47, 195-96) that seemed to drag on around him.

In the epilogue to the millennial edition of *The Sense of an Ending*, Kermode reasserted that what triggers apocalyptic anxiety for the moderns is that apocalypse “still carries with it the notions of a decadence and possible renovation, still represents a mood finally inseparable from the condition of life, the contemplation of its necessary ending,

⁵ Brian James Murray argues that the works of the last seven years of Lewis’ life (1950-57) exhibit a *bona fide* concern with military escalation and a literal, annihilative blast that manifested in a darkly “comic” but “resoundingly apocalyptic mood” (R.W.B. Lewis qtd. in Murray 3) that put him in the company of his near-contemporary Pynchon, and introduce a Kermodean end-sense in Lewis’ work (see Murray 1-4). I concur with one qualification: Pynchon never takes his apocalypticism seriously, or rather, as anything but the sacralization of secular experience. Lewis, if *Time and Western Man* still holds in his later career, could never disregard the idea of “God as Reality,” and this suggests that apocalypse in Lewis is never entirely secular—or Kermodean—in its assumptions (see *Time* 361-80).

the ineradicable desire to make some sense of it” (187). Lewis certainly seeks renovation. Other moderns—Woolf, Ford, Joyce, and Lawrence—embraced a notion of the presence (presentness) of time, often quite radically, in either turning to secular realism, or in confining the scope of their narratives and narrative structures experimentally to moments of time, or representing the moment as one of “intemporal significance” for the individual (Kermode 47). In contrast, time in Lewis’ fiction is sluggish, and human action both futile and repetitive within its frame, a concept brought cosmically to aesthetic fulfillment in the “apocalyptic” *Childermass*, set in a purgatorial between-space (and time) characterized by fuzzy temporal, material, and psychological boundaries and fuzzier theologies. These moments are turgid and therefore decidedly uncomfortable, offering themselves as objects of critique rather than standards or models for thought. In this sense, Lewis’ sluggardly “time” illuminates a decidedly darker version of Joyce’s paralysis, and reveals a heightened sensibility to the considerable and continuing changes in modern thought. In short, “[w]hat distinguishes Lewis from his contemporaries was his determination to pursue these insights to their unpleasant logical conclusion” (Schenker 10).

That sensibility and concomitant determination dovetail nicely with the second important element in Lewis’s career: his early interest in the Bergsonian philosophy of time—time as *ontos*, not *episteme*, and therefore as something we experience rather than know, and can therefore affect. Lewis later turned from Bergson, but in this early stage, he applied that notion to a theory of Art, and herein lies the root of Lewis’ Vorticism: Art, like Time, and like Being, must have a stop if we are to break through and into a new age or place or mode of representation. I see this as an aporetic tendency in Lewis’

vorticism, and as something that sets him even further apart from the other moderns. As an aesthetic project, *Blast* is rather ironically full of the vim and spirit of eschatological hope in its attempt to bring about the conditions favourable for a total renewal: a second coming of sorts. That coming is only figurative, of course, as a secularization of what is promised in Revelation. As we have seen, this secular modernist eschatology was typically reflected thematically as anxiety and annihilation, and aesthetically as endlessness, multiple endings, seizures, exhaustions, apertures, and closures of various kinds that all lead to paralysis or waylessness: not hope, then, but mere eschatological expectation—a bored and feckless kind of dread. These themes are certainly evident in Lewis’ fictions. In *Blast*, however, and to a certain degree in the exhausted resistance of characters like Kreisler (*Tarr*) and Pulley (*The Human Age*, especially *Childermass*) to the pull of passive being, that expectation carries within it a substitute for *parousia*.

Many moderns—like Pound and Eliot, for instance—discovered material from the past and tried to “make it new” in order to mark out a path for the future of the arts (see Pound’s “Art Vortex” in *Blast 1*). What differentiates Lewis from his contemporaries, at least in *Blast 1*, is an unwillingness to provide a substitute—to pin down or articulate a theory except as an antithesis to what was already happening. Indeed, Lewis was often bemused as noted at Pound’s early association with Vorticism, rejecting the elder’s romantic, rearward looking “archaism” as being able to “lay no claim to participate in the new burst of art” (*Time 38*), and consequently limiting Pound’s contribution in *Blast 2* to poems. Lewis’ own manifestoes and blasts are negative in that they tend merely to clear the way. In a sense, then, he was a proto-post-structuralist (Schenker 194), grappling with the un-knowability or ineffability of what was coming, and projecting his despair as hope

or desire into an aporetic—a pathless, but inevitable—space: a vortex. That is, Vorticism was not the end, but the means to bring about an end, the gateway to an essential pathlessness. And this difference is the third of the elements of Lewis' career that make *Blast* useful for a study of the connections between modernist literary eschatology and scriptural apocalypse: Lewis wanted to achieve that vortex, that aporia, not by revolving art out into something expansive that would fill the world, but rather by creating a final, essential point of energy and activity.

In this respect, Pound's and Lewis' views of Vorticism were similar. Pound was attracted to this essentialism, which he considered akin to his own literary imagism. The image, as he put it, is “a vortex or cluster of fused ideas and is endowed with energy”; a notion he exemplified in reducing a poem of thirty-two lines to the two-line “In a Station of the Metro” (ctd. Wilson 35). Lewis himself described Vorticism as a “whirlpool” at whose heart is a “great silent place where all the energy is concentrated. And there, at the point of concentration, is the Vorticist” (idem). Rather than a point of visual focus, then, the “heart” of the vortex is the locus of the artist, and the vortex, potentially, a thing he has made. However, that sense of vortex as a drain or downward, narrowing spiral is unstable in Vorticism. Indeed, the recurring symbol in both numbers of *Blast* suggests that the vorticists who knew, at any rate, saw the “mechanical centre” of the vortex as an upward movement. Here is the Vorticist logo:



If this symbol is meant to evoke vortex, it would seem as though the movement is indeed upward to a centre point, but the imagery is always rather loose or perhaps intentionally multi-faceted. For instance, Lewis wrote in 1937, prior to the Great War the “world was getting, frankly, extremely silly. . . . It went on imitating itself with an almost religious absence of originality: and some of us foresaw an explosion” (*Blasting* 15).

One could therefore view vortex as a point of turbulence that sapped the energy of other movements, or as a point of concentrated power that figuratively “blasted” the world of Art: a “burst of art,” indeed, but one that occurs out of “stillness” (*Blast* 1, 148) and contemplative silence—both notions at odds with the “noise” of the Vorticists and the rather quarrelsome and garish first issue of their periodical. On that subject, Paige Reynolds argues that Lewis made ironic use of the print idiom of contemporary commercial advertising, for *Blast*’s “oversize, boldface type, capital letters placed only for emphasis, and unlineated text with large white spaces” were visible in the first advertisement for *Blast* published in *The Egoist*, an ad written by Pound which “adumbrates the vorticist cultural agenda” (238).⁶ In her recent study of the “vorticist idiom,” Miranda Hickman catalogues the critical instant of *Blast* in particular, noting the ways in which it made its graceless, brash, and very puce splash (27-31). Lewis himself remarked in *Time and Western Man* that *Blast* was a destructive project, bent on ruining the elitist “Royal Academic tradition” because of its tendency to produce anything but

⁶ Vincent Sherry sees similar features in Vorticist painting, particularly in Lewis’ work after 1913-14. *Design for “Red Duet”*, Sherry remarks, “loosens the close juxtapositions of black and white in [the earlier work], unraveling those graphs of densely compacted energy. Ampler, more frequent, his white spaces now fit like multiple margins of silence, voids against which the vectors of energy arrest or deflect themselves” (97). Sherry’s interpretation of the drawing in question aligns nicely with my interpretation of the aims of the Vorticist project generally. Not coincidentally, Lewis has Tarr assert that “what we call art depends upon human beings for its advertisement. As men’s ideas about themselves change, art should change, too” (*Tarr* 300): fitting, then, that Vorticism be a kind of art of advertisement.

individuals, and to ignore those deserving of cultivation and experience from lower classes (37-38). The cry of the avant-garde of Vorticism was, in a way, the “en garde!” of all revolutionaries: opposed in principle to the ruling party, but innocent of any notion of forming a replacement government. *Blast* was less an attempted coup than an act of terrorism.

Regardless, I am not sure those two models are mutually exclusive. One could view the “blast” model by analogy as using a destructive force to cap another: like fighting fire with fire, or quite literally using explosives to cap gas fires by depriving the fire of oxygen. Or we might invoke a veil image, and suggest that the vorticists sought to draw or force the energy that was wasted in the world of Art through a point of concentration—an aporetic partition—and out into a raw explosion of artistic creativity in any form. It would matter only that it was vital, “vivid,” and “violent” (*Blast* 17). Indeed, Lewis’ first clarion call is “Long live the great art vortex *sprung up* in the centre of this town!” (idem; my emphasis). It was early days yet, however, and English society was, in Lewis’ view, still culturally overrun by the effete and the derivative. In order to exorcise that influence, Lewis wanted to create a vacuum—a void—undefiled by either tradition or the languid, disingenuous being that he so often satirized: a void that could be filled by something positive and pure and new (see Kenner 119).

But Vorticism was foremost a visual artistic movement, and *Blast* a redactive project “run chiefly by Painters . . . [who] do their work first, and, since they must, write about it afterwards” (*Blast* 27). And there were multiple vortices, at least in print. Pound and Gaudier-Breszka each offered a textual vortex in *Blast* 1, and Gaudier-Breszka offered another from the trenches just prior to his death, which Lewis printed in *Blast* 2.

These vortices tend to be “personal” (Edwards, “Introduction” 13) and somewhat heterogeneous, and so treatments of the theory and intention of Vorticism tend to be circumlocutory and historicist rather than interpretive, but we can make some general amateur observations. In painting and sculpture, Vorticism seems to force everything into a center, as if the images were being drawn out through, or driven angularly into, some point in the canvas; or, in our other view, Vorticism finds the “mechanical center” and then uses its energy against itself. That “center” isn’t always central to the image, nor does it appear to be arbitrary; some idiosyncratic logic orients and informs vorticist painting and sculpture, and we may have a hint to what that logic is in Lewis’ whirlpool analogy.

But what might vortex look like in a written text? What does a textual vortex do to the text itself? Does vortex devolve thematically? through periphrasis or refrain? through some centripetal or centrifugal figure around which orbits or into which disappears the meaning of the whole? Is it as “simple” a matter as concentrating the emotion or energy of the text into a singular image, as in Pound’s imagist poems? What is removed or drained from the text, and what remains as potential energy as revealed or yet-to-be revealed? Would the exhaustion and anxiety that became commonplaces in modern fiction serve as draining points for a vorticist deconstruction, leaving something positive and creative in their wake? Or would it be the apocalyptic sensibility that such exhaustion and anxiety elicit, which “blasts” forth in its own eschatological power, and both annihilates and creates, then, the “great silence” at the heart of the vortex?

Other than the ostensible personal “vortices”—proclamations of an aesthetic theory or view that punctuate *Blast*—*Blast* offers us a view of several others that occur

subtly or “naturally” in the structure and arrangement of the text as a whole. I refer to these vortices later when I compare *Blast* with Revelation, so I will refer to just one for now: the one not coincidentally at the heart of the whole of *Blast I*. The structure of “Enemy of the Stars,” a play that Lewis included as “an example of what a truly modern literature might be” (Edwards, “Introduction” 13), is “mad” to say the least (*Blast I* 61). The play seems to begin at several different points, and, as written, is unperformable, since much of the action and poetry of the play is narrative rather than dialogic, and since the textual elements of the play seem to run into the performative: “its dramatic form is a matter of Lewis’s assertion rather thanactable form” (Klein 225).

We are invited, that is, to question its genus. Paul Edwards equivocates without blinking: “Enemy” is in his account a “prose poem or play” (“Introduction” 13), and his unwillingness to pin it down is understandable, and probably to the point. Reed Dasenbrock sees “Enemy” as a “gesture” meant, as Lewis claimed, to “show [other] writers the path” (qtd. in Foshay 23-24): Foshay disagrees, and sees more than an aesthetic significance or gesture, especially in the revised version published in 1932 (26-33). Scott Klein makes “Enemy” a symbol of the fundamental *esprit de contradiction* of *Blast*:

The relationship between the narrative of “Enemy of the Stars” and its style illuminates a paradigmatic crux in Lewis’s work. The concerns of his nascent modernism are theoretically and practically incompatible with its chosen genre, and that incompatibility is a key contradiction of the vorticist aesthetic, particularly in its presentation of the individual artist as self-reliant creator of new forms. “Enemy of the Stars” narrates the artistic struggle of mind against nature as a parable of the vorticist movement’s own contradictory attitude toward

tradition and creation. This mode is made clearer when the play is positioned first within vorticism itself and then within the tradition of Romantic “closet” drama, the philosophic form that “Enemy of the Stars” both repudiates and obliquely follows. (226)

That contradiction is both theoretical and structural, and in this respect “Enemy” becomes a nice microcosm for *Blast* and Vorticism on the whole.

For instance, the fifth page of text (61) is part prologue, part stage direction, part poetry, and, since the theatre is arranged vertically, stadium-style, seems to describe/interpret not only what the audience sees, but how it is seeing it, as if the audience, like the “stars,” were the “cast” of characters, or the stars themselves, looking down on their enemy. I have reproduced the page below for clarity’s sake:

ARGOL.

INVESTMENT OF RED UNIVERSE.

EACH FORCE ATTEMPTS TO SHAKE HIM.

CENTRAL AS STONE. POISED MAGNET OF SUBTLE, VAST, SELFISH THINGS.

HE LIES LIKE HUMAN STRATA OF INFERNAL BIOLOGIES. WALKS LIKE
WARY SHIFTING OF BODIES IN DISTANT EQUIPOISE. SITS LIKE A GOD BUILT BY AN
ARCHITECTURAL STREAM, FECUNDED BY MAD BLASTS [OF] SUNLIGHT.

The first stars appear and Argol comes out of the hut. This is his cue. The stars are his cast. He is rather late and snips into it’s [sic] place a test button. A noise falls on the cream of Posterity, assembled in silent banks. One hears the gnats’ song of the Thirtieth centuries.

They strain to see him, a gladiator who has come to fight a ghost, Humanity—the great Sport of Future Mankind.

He is the prime athlete exponent of this sport in it’s [sic] palmy days. Posterity slowly sinks into the hypnotic trance of Art, and the Arena is transformed into the necessary scene.

THE RED WALLS OF THE UNIVERSE NOW SHUT THEM IN, WITH THIS
CONDEMNED PROTAGONIST.

THEY BREATHE IN CLOSE ATMOSPHERE OF TERROR AND NECESSITY TILL
THE EXECUTION IS OVER, THE RED WALLS RECEDE, THE UNIVERSE SATISFIED.

THE BOX OFFICE RECEIPTS HAVE BEEN ENORMOUS.

THE ACTION OPENS.

In addition to the cryptic and essentially poetic imagery of the “play’s” frontmatter, the pronouns of the first section of all-caps are strictly antecedent-less and thus nearly indecipherable, though we might assume that Argol (alternately “Arghol”) is its object. Its mood is at odds with what follows, and our sense that Argol is being described in that section is initially called into question by the mundanity of his actions (the scene carries with it the sensibility of a grammar school examination before giving way to a purgatorial one), by his appearance from within the hut (initially veiled, in other words, from the audience’s view while the “prologue” speaks), and by the implied temporal change from “MAD BLASTS [OF] SUNLIGHT” to the appearance of stars. The third-person plural “they” of the second section is also without definite antecedent, except symbolically the “stars” or “cream of Posterity” that gather around him, and thus, as I suggested earlier, the audience themselves. This is a spatial enclosure, and one that literalizes the shape of a vortex as whirlpool, with the “condemned protagonist” at its silent center, the locus of performance and creation. All eyes are on him, but the experience belongs to all. Once he is (presumably) executed, and the “universe [is] satisfied,” that sense of enclosure is relaxed, or opens up again as the walls recede.

It is also a temporal enclosure, where past and future, or rather beginning and end, are collapsed into a single point of presentness. This “prologue” or dumb-show both embodies and situates the action of the show before “the action opens,” but it also predicts the “real” outcome of the performance itself—“the box office receipts have been

enormous”—in the present perfect: that is, as a thing already known or accomplished. Of course, I am taking this far more seriously than Lewis himself would. His prediction about box office receipts is probably comic, and is preceded by another joke: in the “SYNOPSIS IN PROGRAMME” (53), Lewis includes an advertisement for an un-named play which I assume is “Enemy,” whose characters include “TWO HEATHEN CLOWNS, GRAVE BOOTH ANIMALS [and] CYNICAL ATHLETES” with absurdly muscular physiologies. This play is advertised as “VERY WELL ACTED BY YOU AND ME” (55). Comic or no, “Enemy” as a whole document works aesthetically to invoke vortex as a conceit, collapsing boundaries of performance, time, space, textuality (syntactical clarity: see Klein 234), and editorial/creative intention to focus the energy of the play and blast the audience’s apperception of the play and of itself.

Klein’s analysis is much more detailed, both in its presentation and interpretation of the play. Significantly, Klein observes that at the heart of the play’s vortical contradiction is the correlative dualism of Argol and his disciple Hanp (227-28), who seem to represent generational moments in a philosophy of art, the first refusing to act even when acted upon except when he is assaulted by the “younger” figure, and in this act of self-defense, which he believes will pollute his own self, he disgusts himself and Hanp, who thus feels justified in killing Argol. There is, of course, a larger philosophical moment evoked in all of this: Lewis’s response to Stirner, whose philosophy Argol had adopted, but which, after his fall into violence (response, actually: the violence is incidental and, while effective—(Hanp “lay for some time recovering”; *Blast* 1 80)—rather effeminate in its representation), Argol rejects (in a dream) by throwing his book out the window. It is returned to him by a “young man he had known in town”—his

younger self, Klein surmises (231)—then Hanp, then “Stirnir [sic] as he had imagined him” (*Blast* 77). Argol fights with Stirner, chases him from the house, destroys his books, and comes eventually to the proposition that he has failed “in his solitude” to remain true to his principles, and that his failure was part of him as well: embodied in Hanp (80).

The two are nearly brought into metaphorical identification when Hanp returns to kill Argol (84): there is as much a vortex of identity at work here as anything, which suggests again that “Enemy” (Argol-Hanp as Lewis himself, “The Enemy” of the post-war scene) embodies in its turn the vorticist contradiction, yes, but also its apocalyptic intention. It is not enough that Hanp destroy the older man, but that he both recognize the “sameness” of their flesh, of all flesh, in the silence and inertness of death, and that he share in that death voluntarily by drowning himself (85). Here the principles of Vorticism must be overcome by their enactment, and to effect this victory, the “play’s content is therefore opposed to that of the manifestos” (Klein 232): the contradictions and oppositions, the dualities in vorticism are meant precisely to realize the aim of Vorticism itself. Klein comes close to understanding this, though I think it ultimately evades him: “Lewis seems to negate himself by creating a text whose content suggests his own necessary failure” (233). This blasting or “discharging” from and for both sides (or neither) is precisely the objective of Lewis’ Vorticism (*Blast* 1 30).

Set ostensibly against both tradition (especially romanticism and impressionism) but more especially the burgeoning Futurism of his day, Lewis makes room in *Blast* for traditional literary forms: like the first chapter of Ford’s *The Good Soldier* (here printed as “Beati Immaculati” from Heufer’s “The Saddest Story”: *Blast* 1 87-97); the arguably impressionist works of Frederick Gore whom he praises posthumously for a growing

consciousness, a futural gaze, and a natural individuality, if not for his work to date (150); short fiction by Rebecca West (“Indissoluble Matrimony” 98-117); and rather mild and backwards-looking poems by Pound (see “Poems,” some imagist, some more traditional, like “Pastoral” 45-50). In *Blast 1*, Lewis unsettles his readers, speaking in words of codified warning, rendering them insecure and uncertain of his purposes and meaning. He confounds curses and blessings (9-28), conflates and combines genres (*Blast* reproduces graphic and textual art, and confounds categories as in the “prose-poem-play” “Enemy of the Stars”: see Edwards 13), and steeps his manifestos in contradiction. He provides corrections in a short list of errata at the beginning of *Blast 1* that hardly make sense, and indeed offer only further ambiguity to the original phrases. This “*esprit de contradiction*” (Jameson 4), these contradictions and ambiguities of purpose and judgment combine to produce in his readership a “pervasive sense of bafflement and anxiety . . . [the] kind of cautious paranoia that comes when one hears a brilliant joke which is truly funny but which is not comprehensible” (Morrow viii). Overall, it is the evocation of a revelatory, denunciatory complexity that is the vortex in *Blast*—a sense of being chidden, attacked, reprovved, or outright mocked. That denunciatory element becomes quite pronounced in *Blast 2*, the “War Number,” which is made sober by the destructive realities Lewis and his colleagues were then experiencing, often firsthand.

If, as I suspect, *Blast* as a vorticist work seeks to silence sense and open sensibility, then it is possible that it seeks to work scripturally, and more specifically as a kind of aesthetic apocalypse, the revelation to end all revelations, because it announces and makes way for the things it cannot articulate except in familiar and insufficient

terms—the coming of an ineffable newness: and the energy and power of the individual artist would come to fill the void (Kenner 119). “Even so, come” (Rev 22:20), Lewis might say reverently and with urgency, risking sacrilege, to that new aesthetic.

Within the context of a generally accepted modern eschatological anxiety, however, this impulse signals that the influence of scriptural apocalypse is more profound and more “actual” than critics of the period often think. The possibility of a generic similarity between *Blast* and Revelation—even if that similarity is more abstract and intentional than it is structural or figurative—suggests that “apocalyptic” literature always evokes scriptural apocalypse, and the eschatological hope inherent in it. Specifically, as an aesthetic and secular apocalypse, *Blast* looks forward in hope to the coming of a new word, a new theory and practice of art, and is thus not merely “apocalyptic” in its eschatological anticipation of an end, but also in its hope of emancipation and renewal. Of course, that hope is not religious, it is secular, and as I indicated earlier, I am not interested in reading Lewis as a believer. The importance of the similarity between Lewis’ aesthetic hope and the hope of the faithful as constructed in and by Revelation is that Lewis’ secular apocalypticism more concretely refers to that of Revelation than does the anxious eschatology more generally described by critical modernism.

I am not alone in observing this openly scriptural element in Lewis. Speaking of his work in general, though just precedent to a series of examples from *The Human Age*, Bernard Lafourcade writes the following:

Quoi qu’il en soit on constate qu’à une époque de déclin religieux, de dilution sémantique, de sécularisation des acteurs apocalyptiques et de triomphe d’un diabolisme profane sur Satan, Lewis est peut-être le seul écrivain important à oser encore mettre directement en scène (même si elle est minée par

l'anachronisme) l'apocalypse, ses protagonistes, ses décors, ses symboles ou ses clichés . . . (196)⁷

In *Blast*, Revelation works structurally and as a motif, or rather by the inculcation of its motifs in the text of *Blast*.

Let me here catalogue, point by point, what are subtle but compelling similarities in structure and disposition between *Blast 1* and Revelation. They suggest that something of the power of Revelation, Frye's "grammar of imagery" (*Anatomy* 141), peeks through in Lewis' work. They are as follows.

1. As we know, "Apocalypse" means "unveiling," or, in the Judaeo-Christian sense, the "revelation" of God's mind and will. This is an act of "self-disclosure" a "manifestation" that results in a scriptural record and may accompany a prophetic "proclamation" (Ricoeur, *Figuring* 17). *Blast 1* opens with two lengthy manifestos which "make manifest," or "reveal" the ideas essential to the vorticist project (9-28, 30-43).
2. Revelation opens with a catalogue of authority and a statement of intention: that "he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy . . . keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand" (1:3). *Blast 2* opens with the celebratory "Long live!," and announces its intention, tongue in cheek, to make converts of the "simple and great" people found everywhere, for it is "created for [the] timeless, fundamental Artist that exists in everybody" (8).

⁷ "Whatever it may mean, one notes that in a period of religious decline, of semantic dilution, of the secularization of apocalyptic figures and of the triumph of a profane devilishness over Satan, Lewis may well be the only important writer still to dare to place [scriptural] apocalypse, its protagonists, its scenery, its symbols, or its clichés directly in his work (even if these are undermined by anachronism)" (my translation).

3. Revelation proceeds with letters to the seven churches written by John on behalf of the figure with the “seven stars” in his right hand, and “a sharp twoedged sword” proceeding from his mouth, mixing denunciatory and encomiastic elements, and urging all to repentance (1:16). *Blast 1* proceeds with a first manifesto that offers up seven “blasts” or “curses,” (the last of these not numbered, but clearly intended as a seventh by its pagination and demarcation by the figure of the vortex: 21), and then offers seven blessings of some of the same objects (numbered as four, but on seven distinct pages, each beginning with “bless”: 22-28). It also includes the “play” “Enemy of the Stars,” which claims to have two scenes (as settings: 60), but is composed of seven numbered scenes or acts (53-85) as well as a number of other prefatory elements (drawings, title pages, preludes).
4. Revelation prophesies the destructions brought about by the four horsemen (Rev 6:2, 4-6, 8), in growing degrees of terror and devastation, and Lewis’ last vortex in *Blast 1* includes four parts, each of them more openly violent and threatening than the other (147-49).
5. The images of Revelation are inscrutable to the uninitiated, and difficult at best for the expert: the paintings and sculptures featured in *Blast* are as difficult to interpret, even if one knows a little something about Vorticism, and both texts may be said to constitute rhetorical puzzles, or *aporiae* of meaning.

I offer these similarities in scant detail, but they confirm that Vorticism, and especially *Blast 1*, seeks to create an *aporia*, if in irruption and rhetorical violence rather than the

natural limits of contemplation. Vorticism was meant to snuff out movements that Lewis felt were at least reprobate if not outright reprehensible, and thus it is the pseudo-apocalyptic work and prophetic vision of a chaotician, though certainly not that of a seer. These similarities confirm, then, that even in high modernist works informed by Nietzschean nihilism and rational scientism and marked by the eschatological anxiety and despair typical of the grim atheism of the time—manifest in this case a in *reductio in estetico* of the hope for *parousia*—we can trace the shadow of a scriptural and metaphysical Christology that recognizes the need for a second coming, however rough and beastly it imagines it to be.

Both numbers of *Blast* were intended by Lewis, Pound, and Hulme—but especially by Lewis—to be themselves an “art vortex.” As I have noted, *Blast* includes original works of poetry, fiction, and painting, as well as essays and manifestos which, in *Blast 1*, altogether articulate vorticist resistance to contemporary theories and practices of art, and in *Blast 2* articulate a resistance to Germany’s militancy and to war in general as wasting a generation of potential individual artists. Both numbers include, then, categories of the literary, and *Blast* is itself at once a written and a visual object meant to stir a response in its readers. Whether or not it can be taken on the whole as a work of literature is incidental to its particular importance: namely, what it distills from the period of the Great War, the cradle of the modernism we now study, and which begat us in the intellectual and social senses.

What matters here, however, is that *Blast*’s theoretical intention is manifestly eschatological, and representative, in its way, of the psychological desire for both end and renewal experienced broadly across the twentieth century. What individuates it from

these other works is the conspicuous absence of the fear and anxiety usually latent in eschatological contemplation. It is fearless because, like its editor, it longs for, and seeks to bring about, an end. Yet while the vorticists were conscious and critical of the Machine Age and the dehumanization it threatened, vorticist eschatology was not represented exclusively in the immanence of personal or actual death, as in so many of the works called “apocalyptic” by critical modernism, even though death figured prominently and terribly in its own demise (or realization, if we believe Lewis’ own assessment).⁸ Furthermore, though Vorticism was renowned for its architectural or geometrical, mechanistic frames and figurations, its eschatology was not represented architecturally as the passage of a social age (as in Waugh’s *Brideshead Revisited*), uniquely temporally (as in Joyce’s *Ulysses*), or symbolically and spatially (as in Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*). Vorticism made use of all of these eschatological conceits, but not while fearing death (not even its own); fearing, rather, the continuation of things repugnant to its sensibilities, and thus seeing death—even its own—as an avenue of hope, as essential to renewal. In *Blast* that eschatology is represented in a bold textual prophecy, one that looks deeply into the past (Pound and Gaudier-Brzeska) and the present (Lewis and Hulme) in order to discern the future, and is thus evocative of absolute sight and wisdom, even if it fails to find them.

In this sense, however secular a document it might be, *Blast* works, like Revelation, out of abstraction and back into things concrete through the interpretative act

⁸ Both Henri Gaudier-Brzeska and T.E. Hulme were killed in action (in 1915 and 1917 respectively), and six of the original vorticists experienced the front lines during the war, principally as volunteers (see Orchard 20-21 and Wilson 37). Gaudier-Brzeska had submitted a ‘vortex’ from the front in time for inclusion in *Blast 2*, otherwise subtitled the “War Number,” in which he was also eulogized by Lewis. These deaths, and the war experiences of the vorticists in general, contributed to the demise of the movement (Orchard 22-23).

of the reader under the guidance of an intentional editorial consciousness: one that has arranged the diversity of paintings, poems, stories, advertisements, and expostulations in a way that is meant to alienate the reader from the world of art itself, and to mark that alienation as a starting point. It blasts and blesses in equally ironic and irreverent tones (*Blasting and Bombardiering* 38), negates its own objectivity and superiority, and draws the reader “through the node of things,/Back-sweeping to the vortex of the cone,/Cloistered about with memories, alone/In chaos, while the waiting silence sings” (Pound, “Plotinus” 1-4)—a silence waiting to be filled by new things only, for Lewis, once the old things have passed entirely away. It opens a space, as it were, for silence: a ruminatory, revelatory, creative space. And it does this on the strength of its sheer, unmitigating confidence that what it says is true, and essential, and necessarily dying with the age.

The editorial consciousness takes on, as I asserted earlier, a “rather uncomfortable god-hood,” and insofar as it is artistic, makes of Lewis a “conscientious godling” (Lewis, *Blasting and Bombardiering* 6), both inspiring and organizing the content of the text, asserting its presence in the Present, crying “amid the void” it seeks to create, and making “[n]ew thoughts as images” of itself (Pound, “Plotinus” 10-14; see also Sherry 97) in an effort to exhaust them and draw them “through the node of things” and out into a fresh way of seeing and thinking (Lewis, *Rude Assignment* 125).

This is precisely the challenge offered by scriptural apocalypse, which comprises letters, pronouncements of judgment, warnings, commentary on history, and codified and seemingly cryptic visions of the future. *Its* power—its *enigmatic* and often disconcerting power—is to be found in the conflation of these different texts, which brings past,

present, and future into stark relief, and which also blurs the boundaries of those three times in the readerly consciousness. No single reading of Revelation has been demonstrably “accurate” or totalizing, no interpretative system accounts satisfactorily for all of the images or hardens into experience a singular interpretation of the work as a whole: which produces the unsettling, exciting prospect that though we as Revelation’s readers might sense in the state of affairs around us (or in the futural trajectory those events suggest) the threat and promise of the realization of what is prophesied in that text, there are always things yet to occur, shapes and abstractions meant to coalesce before us in space and time. Imaginatively, at least, Revelation is and always will be immanent in human experience, even as it announces the revolution of human history and consciousness, until such time as the Coming to which it points occurs absolutely and unmistakably.

The difficulty of scriptural apocalypse, then, lies within its textual complexity. It evokes a ruminatory response in its readers, as does *Blast*—a crying out “amid the void” it creates by its generic and imagistic complexity. Thus, it promotes an individual *rapprochement* with its divine author—a seeking of wisdom and clarity of sight and thought beyond human reason and temporal grasp. Of course, where readers of Revelation might expect to see an image of God, and Spirit, and Christ gazing back at them in that space, and speaking a single Word, readers of *Blast* see an image of Lewis, and Pound, and Hulme: a rather unholy Trinity gazing forward into the void (or backward, in Pound’s case), and straining to see and hear through and into the heart of it.

And herein lies the chief difference between the *aporia* of *Blast* and the *parousia* of Revelation. In the context of Alpha and Omega, which is a cosmic circle, an infinitude,

aporia is meaningless except as it represents the limit of the human mind as it seeks for or experiences the Other, the more than human. It can do so imaginatively, of course, and the fruits of the imagination may be intrinsically or extrinsically suggested, inspired, and formed. Here is another tentative link between scripture and literature, and here, too, the chief distinction between them as textual objects. The writer's imagination is to literature as divine inspiration is to scripture. An idea or moment or meaning might be rooted in inspiration, but in the case of scriptural apocalypse—the record of the putative self-disclosure of no less than God's mind, will, or being—the whole thing is given. Revelation claims authority as an unveiling, not a glimpse. It claims God as its author, not the human mind. Of course, it comes to us as readers through the medium of the prophet (and the myriad of scribes and translators and commentators), funnelled, in a sense, restricted by the capacity of the human to a) grasp and b) articulate what is experienced and understood. What veils to comprehension remain are the limits of the human mind, so *aporia* is the human limit.

The end as *aporia* may, then, be considered a closure, a capstone, a ceiling, or it may be considered a point of departure or aperture, an opening or the invitation to seek an opening: it is the divine centre and the demonic, human limit. Apocalypse is an answer to *aporia*, and theological reflection is the only ticket into the beyond. The hope of riding *aporia* into that beyond drains the modern of its menace and despair, and superimposes a sense of the metaphysical future onto the here and now. Lewis' *Blast* attempts to do the same—"we wish the Past and Future with us," he proclaims—although because the vision of *Blast* is aesthetic and secular, it can only seek to generate the end of things in the "Reality of the Present," the aporetic still-point of the vortex where the "Vorticist is at

his maximum point of energy” (*Blast 1 7*, 148), for it is to the “heart of the Present” that the “new vortex plunges,” a fact which somehow eliminates the present (147). Rather than being an answer to aporia, then, Vortex may be said to generate it since vortex is by design the point of disappearance of access to meaning. Vorticism is not fundamentally a revolution, though it has revolutionary character (and Lewis’ notion of renaissance encourages the pun), nor is it strictly devolution to a point (though this is a useful way of imagining the work of Vorticism). Rather, Vorticism looks beyond itself by constructing that point as a key to non-meaning, a driving toward an *aporia* of meaning, of artistic representation, in the hopes that the artistic system will reset itself. So Vorticism is, in principle if not in practice, terminally eschatological, apparently ignorant of what will spring up in its place, but expectant and hopeful all the same.

After the War, Lewis’ work with apocalyptic shifted from figuring eschatology structurally and aesthetically to a more recognizably modern thematic eschatology in his philosophical works, reviews, and critical essays as well as his major novels, including specifically the tri-partite *The Human Age*. In truth, that shift was discernible even in *Blast 2*, the *War Number* published in July, 1915. In both stages of his career in letters, Lewis foregrounded death and silence as an elliptical, aporetic space, so that the industrial and social decay and degeneration that led to those states were for him, and fairly widely for the modernists, eschatological stoppages. And in both stages, Lewis reaches beyond those stoppages. His Vorticist work constructed that space as a closed “artistic” apocalypse, though the “real” apocalypse of the war evoked in Lewis and other moderns an eschatological despair and, in the case of Lewis, who for all his bluster and posturing recognized the humour and futility of his early work (*Blasting and*

Bombardiering), a correlative ironic eschatological hope. And so in his work after the war, the anxiety of his characters reaches beyond the stoppage of time and into the dead space, suggestive of a desire to fill the real eschatological *aporia* created by modern nihilism and crisis with a stable truth, just as Lewis fills the artistic *aporia* generated by his earlier work with more conventional forms. In this sense, Lewis replaces the *parousia* of Christ, and His subsequent judgment of mankind, with a second incarnation of his own artistic sensibilities, and with a critical judgment, not a godly one.

3. “Real Wounds for Imaginary”: The Art of Living and Dying in *Tarr*

Vorticism was, ostensibly, a movement in painting and sculpture, though its embodiment in the two issues of *Blast* renders the metaphor of the vortex quite nicely; there the visual arts are at the center, and draw in other modes of art around them, both in the necessity of articulating the theory that accompanies the practice, and of blasting all genres to effect a total end to the aesthetic past and the “sentimental” futurism seeking ground under Marinetti’s influence. And while Lewis’ “experiences at the front had made him uneasy about the dehumanizing effect of the abstract style he had been perfecting” before the war, and while there is a perceptible turn in his visual art “toward more naturalistic representation” in the years following the war (Schenker 5), Lewis’ “maturation”⁹ and his substantial difference from his peers is most notable in his fiction. There—in the arguably mainstream works (*Tarr*,¹⁰ *The Revenge for Love*, *The Apes of*

⁹ For example, Eliot notes a “difference in maturity between *The Childermass* and *Monstre Gai*” resultant from “a development in humanity” (qtd. in Schenker 9).

¹⁰ Lewis disputes that this was, in its day, mainstream. He so consciously sought to deliver “bullets” rather than “eggs,” and this without padding (*Blasting* 88-89). Like *Blast*, *Tarr* was intended by Lewis to upset the opinion English Art had of itself, and to deaden its notions as well. It becomes a complex matter, then, to sort out what is Lewis’ and what is in Lewis’ sights in

God), at any rate—Lewis makes use of the conventions of plot structure, considering climax, anagnorisis, or peripety the point of vortex. In those works, anti-climax is the aesthetic climax of a work, and the irony of reversal is a kind of aporetic point: a point of division in either case—with one expectation on this side, and a very different expectation on the other.

For instance, *Tarr* arguably reaches its moment of climax with Kreisler's duel in Chapter 5 of "Holocausts" (263-77), which comes in waves of anger, humiliation, and accidental and surprising violence like the spasmodic, periphrastic waves of seduction, violence, and chagrin that serve as the structure of the narration of Kreisler's assault and rape of Bertha (191-95), and upon which the duel was predicated. In this case the climax propels Kreisler forward in his deathwish, leading him, as rape led him to murder, toward the ineluctable moment of choice and justice, transforming his death from a mere specter or idea (164) and giving it fleshly proportions and forensic power (263).¹¹ Though *Tarr* is not an observer of the duel and its horrific outcome (rendered like the rape and like *Tarr*'s own bullish and disingenuous emotional indifferences, with black comic grit, though Lewis wisely allows Bertha the irony, leaving Kreisler to huff and pant with brute animal shock), this moment changes the landscape for *Tarr* as well. Kreisler must, of course,

Tarr: we take recourse in the idea of *Blast*—that it discharged on both sides in order to silence the whole. *Tarr* is mercenary.

¹¹ In a letter to his father, delinquent with Otto's allowance, Kreisler writes "I shall not return as you suggest in person, but my body will no doubt be sent to you about the middle of next month. If—keeping to your decision—no money is sent, it being impossible to live without money, I shall on the seventh of July, this day next month, shoot myself" (164). He posts the letter immediately, so it gains some firmness from his vanity, and reflects that this was a "conventional and respectable decision. . . . Death—like a monastery—was before him, with equivalents of a slight shaving of the head merely, a handful of vows, some desultory farewells, very restricted space, but none the worse for that" (163-64). Remembering this vow later, Kreisler reflects, "[h]e was almost dead (he had promised his father his body for next month and must be punctual) but people had already begun treading on him" (263).

flee, as Tarr himself had planned to do (under different circumstances), leaving Tarr no excuse for abandoning his fiancée. From this point on, Tarr's expectations shift dramatically. So much for the structural element in the fiction: ends are inevitable, surprising, often disappointing, and even farcical (*Tarr* 276; see also Schenker 40-41); but they come, and they are traversed.

As for other modes of apocalyptic eschatology, there can be little doubt that *Blast* fits in Frye's realistic mode: a human "story" made by humans about humans, naturalistic and provocative in its tone, and having very little to do with deific or apothotic pretensions, as is clear from Lewis' own ironic declarations of godhood. The "apocalypse" of *Blast* is aesthetic: a secular aesthetic with a clear *literary* connection to scriptural apocalypse, and that apparently eschatological. In *Blast*, then, Lewis secularizes apocalypse, but he also draws in several of its elements: eschatology certainly, approached with a desire to see past the manufactured end (a "troublesome optimism" to be "absorbed" by the future; see *Blast* 1, 147), and so apocalyptic in its intention, however devoid of the comforts, and concerns, of its scriptural counterpart; but also prophecy and revelation as modal traces of scriptural apocalypse and the broader implications of its eschatology. As we have seen, these are evoked by the metaphorical identification of artist with an "Interpreter and Seer" (7), by allusion to the motifs and structures of Revelation, and by Lewis' fearless rejection of "the empty formal experimentation of modernist painting" (Foshay 4) and art generally, as *Wild Body* and *Men Without Art* make clear. All of these elements are further evocative of the framework of scriptural apocalypse and its eschatological intention because they call the self's primacy in Art into serious question: individual experience, individual achievement

matter, but not as much as the revolution of aesthetic principles on the whole.

The Lewis of *Blast* is, as I have noted, a figure of prophecy, albeit secular and self-appointed like the bulk of ostensible poet-prophets, but very like John in the wilderness: rude, essential, unapologetic, unrefined, and utilitarian. The similarity shouldn't surprise us: Lewis' was not a psychological or scientific disposition, but was rather the disposition of the artist and moralist. He was a grain in the oyster shell of modernity, calling it boldly to aesthetic and philosophical repentance and self-sacrifice. Similarly, the dual protagonists of *Tarr* tend to be sensitive to the inexorability and nature of the end that is prescribed for them as an entropic inertia or malaise, and they respond in a variety of ways. Tarr, for instance, sits outside of events until they rupture properly, and then enters back into the stream of things once he is past the point of danger. He experiences, that is, a restoration of the "golden age," however sordid and flat it was (all things being relative), and however diverting (albeit with a degree of anxiety) he found the tumult to be, as a sort of Tiresias hanging back in pained amusement at the amateurish blindness of the other characters, or as a Prufrock who decides to chuck his despair and go along for the ride (albeit as a passenger). Kreisler is more active and possessed very clearly of a burgeoning deathwish. He resolves his anxiety about this entropic pull by creating his own end: he dies, as it were, on his own and therefore heroic terms, at once a victim of the entropy occurring around him, but to the last also its sneering enemy (285).

These figures strain at the new and away from the old. They are caught up in movement, but they seek to direct or at least upset that movement methodically, with varying degrees of success. They lean in—toward—their "deaths" in curiosity or longing,

not away from them in fear: Kreisler literally, Tarr figuratively, as the chronicler, the teller, the interpreter, and therefore potentially as a figure of prophetic witness, however dubious a prophetic figure he may cut. As he says to Hobson, caught in a contradiction, “I am responsible for you. = I am one of the only people who *see*. That is a responsibility” (35). I write that and smile wryly: there is none of the dignity or gravity of prophetic witness in Tarr or any other character. The novel is a motley zoology of modernist being. But Tarr resembles Lewis, and Kreisler does, too. These two are the resident duality, like Argol and Hanp in “Enemy of the Stars,” who together form a whole person: the first the principle, the second the muscular agent and actor of a reaction against the principles that make of Tarr’s consciousness a satellite held in helpless orbit to the humour and sex he, like Lewis, seeks to disavow. Kreisler plunges into gravity’s field, driving with astounding physicality into the still centre of the vortex.

And actually the connection between *Tarr* and “Enemy” is very close, since they share a similar climax: insofar as Soltyk, Kreisler’s victim, is a surrogate for Tarr himself—in his “thirst for conventional figures” (150), Soltyk is Kreisler’s fantasy-rival for Anastasya’s affections (251-53) as Tarr is for Bertha’s (226)—and insofar as Soltyk beats Kreisler soundly (272-73) before being shot, unarmed, by the same (275), and insofar as Kreisler hangs himself consumed with the memory of Soltyk’s death (285), he is a veritable Hanp. More poignant than this: just as Hanp looks on the warm corpse of his teacher with its stab wounds fresh and steaming and “feels friendly” toward it (*Blast* 84), so does Kreisler wish to “plunge a sword into [Soltyk], to plunge it in and out and up and down!” because “[h]e *loved* that man!” (270).

Tarr is not a very convincing Argol, of course. His failures lack the spasmodic

anger of Argol's dream, but it is Tarr who generates and circulates the ideas and epigrammatic wisdoms in the text. He discovers in himself the same helplessness to what he considers an ignoble capitulation to the stream of social expectation. We come close to admiring the action he finally takes, legitimizing Bertha's child, the product of Kreisler's violence (311), and keeping his "pledge" to her by marrying her, as he explains to Anastasya (318). And yet he has met Anastasya for dinner in the hours following the wedding, and the marriage itself is doomed to fail, and Tarr doomed to abandon himself to the unsatisfactory rhythms of his lusts in a series of affairs drawn out into an elliptic, pendular *stasimon* without *exodos* (320).

This is another witness of Lewis' humility; the characters that stand in for him are far from romantic portraits. Lewis splits himself in two, and sees that the divided self of modernity makes a poor protagonist, indeed. Together, Tarr and Kreisler "provided Lewis with a kind of ontological background against which he could attempt to achieve the self-definition that ultimately eludes [Tarr]" (Schenker 46-47). Tarr, as I have stated, is the vorticist in principle and the self-conscious intention: "I'm going to swear off Humour for a year," he proclaims, because "Humour paralyses the sense for Reality and wraps people in a phlegmatic and hysterical dream-world" (43). This sounds very much like every second page of the rabid manifestos and vortices of *Blast*. Tarr is conscious that he stands "sick and useless" in an "impasse of arrested life" coalesced by his accidental engagement to Bertha: that she "lay a dead-weight" against his desire for motion (60), an "itch of action" the whole triangle shares (57), but he is ultimately incapable of shaking that weight off, despite her offers of consensual retreat (67, 69). Instead, he justifies his own inert passivity by attributing it to her: "she is so intensely

alive in her passivity, so maelstrom-like in her surrender, so cataclysmic in her sacrifice, that very little remains to be done. The man's position is a mere sinecure" (70). What follows is a total vortex of will (69-74), and an anti-eschatological dance: Tarr fears conclusion. His attempt to leave Paris is impotent: he changes quarters merely, constructs a fiction about his absence, and thus attenuates and delays moments of decision and decisive action.

Arguably, though he is painted in negative terms in *Tarr* (93) and in much of the criticism of the novel (see Schenker 46, for example), Kreisler is the real protagonist of *Tarr*: he is the apocalyptic vorticist in action who, watch in hock, lives outside mechanical time (77), only vaguely aware of and indifferent to its passage (79) until he has made all but the last of his moves toward death (278), but very conscious of the immanence of the end: "How near was the end? This might be the end. So much the better!" (81). He is also, spatially, of "immoderate physical humanity. . . . The large body lounged and poised . . . in massive control and over-reaching of civilised matter. It was in Rome or Paris. . . . This body was in Paris now! – with an heroic freedom" (84). What gifts he has in indifference to Time and Space are undermined by his lack of social sophistication: he is a man of often belated passions, nervous, but who therefore is given to the "prophetic logic of . . . hysteria, racing through the syllogisms his senses divined" and only later recognized and articulated (99). His are the moments of total self-perception (see below), but the manner of these moments bespeaks a revelatory sensitivity. When he sees himself for what he is, takes account of the "useless ennui of his life," its petty concerns and restless evasions, the "image, Reality now before him, [draws] out all his energy, like a distinct being nourished by him" (123). Where Tarr

breaks away from moments of introspection, defers and deflects his own weaknesses on others, Kreisler is the artist at the still center in these moments, the true visionary. “*His* weakness drew him on, back into the vortex” (124; my emphasis), but with a conscientious, decisive diving action: “Kreisler did not know how he should wipe out this debt with the world, but he wanted it bigger, more crushing. The bitter fascination of suffering drew him on, to substitute real wounds for imaginary” (125).

Kreisler wishes for death, and enacts this wish in sexual violence, alcoholism, provocation, re-invention, accidental murder, and finally—after withdrawing from the City, and thus no longer sustaining the body’s impulses—incarceration and suicide. That is an uncomfortable assertion, given Kreisler’s conduct, and I do not for a moment imagine that Lewis approved of Kreisler. Indeed, we know he did not. In the preface, Lewis clarifies that the “German” was not a product of the war, no caricature of political symbol of the Hun, but that he had been working on the novel for eight years: “having had him up my sleeve for so long, I let him out at this moment in the undisguised belief that he is very apposite. I am incidentally glad to get rid of him.” Kreisler is, further, one more “Prussian germ”: “I was moved,” writes Lewis, “to vomit Kreisler forth” (13).

Kreisler is a motley creation, and Tarr a not much more favourable one. But the idea implicit in this disavowal is Tarr’s as well: “The artist is he in whom [the] emotionality normally absorbed by sex is so strong that it claims a newer and more exclusive field of deployment. = Its first creation is *the Artist* himself, a new sort of person; the creative man” (29). Neither man succeeds in being the Artist in the first sense, though Tarr manages aloofness from sex and physicality longer, but his failure is total, whereas Kreisler directs himself toward death once it has become a hard fact, and in a

sense he creates that death and thus himself. He sees himself as Tarr does not, and sees the contradiction that he is, “gradually discovering the foundations of his personality” (119): a man of “vigorous muscle” and sensational “deadness” (111), “with all organs, bones, tissues complete, but made of cheap perishable stuff, who could only live for a day, and then die of use” (123). He despises the same things in others and in himself that Tarr does, but he “forges ahead” (114) where Tarr hangs back, “revenge himself” on life, and fills the narrative frame (198). Caught out in the open, shabby, degenerate, wild, Kreisler does “not become timid and deprecatory, but a haughty and insurgent outcast” (139; see also 264), the Enemy of the “Invisible Audience” of stars “haunting life” (151). Like Lewis, Kreisler is, however paradoxically, “for the physical world” (*Time* 110).

Tarr himself articulates the conditions of Kreisler’s (relative) heroism (or at least his vorticism). To Hobson he says “Everyone who does not *fight* openly and bear his share of the common burden of ignominy in life, is a sneak, unless it is for a solid motive” (33). Hobson retorts that Tarr is no more “free from sentimentality” than himself, and Tarr replies, “I don’t care a Tinker’s curse about that. = I am talking about *you*” (33). Tarr admires muscularity of action—physical or intellectual—that is circumspect and motivated by the will-to-act or to-be. Hobson, and Tarr, represent “the *dregs* of Anglo-Saxon civilisation! = There is nothing softer on earth. . . . You are concentrated, systemic slop. . . . systematizing and vulgarizing the individual” (34). Hobson is indifferent to the insult, so Tarr follows with what amounts to the principal theory of art (and, incidentally, of vorticism intention) that permeates the novel:

“You know Baudelaire’s fable of the obsequious vagabond, cringing for alms? For all reply, the poet seizes a heavy stick and belabours the beggar with it.

The beggar then, when he is almost beaten to a pulp, suddenly straightens out

beneath the blows; *expands, stretches*; his eyes dart fire! He rises up and falls on the poet tooth and nail. In a few seconds he has laid him out flat, and is just going to finish him off, when an 'agent' arrives. = The poet is enchanted. He has accomplished something!

"Would it be possible to achieve a work of that description with you? No. You are meaner spirited than the most abject tramp. I would seize you by the throat at once if I thought you would black my eye. But I feel it my duty at least to do this for your hat. Your hat, at least, will have had its little drama to-day."

Tarr knocked his hat off into the road. = Without troubling to wait for the results of his action, he hurried away down the Boulevard du Paradis. (35)

Kreisler, like Hanp in "Enemy," does precisely this work: to provoke a response, a becoming, though he enacts his outrage on a counterfeit object, perhaps because he knows, as Tarr knows of Hobson, that Tarr will not "black his eye." He creates the ugly tableaux of the aftermath of rape and murder, and the uglier tableaux of his own suicide, and he waits for "the results of his actions." Here is the first eschatological victory: though it remains a terminal one (this is not a novel by Huxley, after all), it is, fundamentally, a vortocist triumph over the forces that eventually claim Tarr for once and all.

There is, also, a hapless and muted cycle of restoration; the story of Tarr and Bertha is a circle that closes temporarily (again Lewis allows Bertha the ironic vision and maturity: "she let Tarr marry her out of pity, and never referred to his confidence about his other love"; 316). Tarr has "turned over a new leaf" at the novel's end, which recognition alarms him considerably (315). That circle is soon proved the site of ironic intention, insincerity, and the languid passivity that so infuriated Lewis in its banality,

and is thus a failure of the attempt to cap and blast it into the void and thus effect or at least provoke a transformative “expansion” of the modern person: Tarr’s new leaf will itself turn back, time and again. But it is at least a movement through eschatological stoppage and out of the perennial despair and anxiety of the modernist apocalypse we have been talking about. There is a way out, even if Tarr is too “idle,” finally, to take it (34). The shape of the novel’s conclusion pushes this idea along: the last lines, observes Schenker, “destroy any sense of narrative closure.” For instance,

Who is this woman, Rose Fawcett, with whom Tarr had a sufficiently long and intimate relationship to father a small brood? Lewis introduces this woman just to keep us in the dark about her, as though defying his audience’s wish for a final denouement. The same holds true of Prism Dirkes, who rises spectrally at the very end: probably no other English novel introduces a character in its last two words. (42)

I know of none, but this doesn’t surprise me coming from Lewis. Dirkes is no specter or shade: she is a lump, a refraction of Tarr’s own personality, and the splitting of himself in a recursive and futile dance. Schenker continues:

Of course, a moment’s reflection will reveal these two figures as latter versions of Bertha Lunken and Anastasya Vasek, between whom Tarr had oscillated throughout the novel. But this awareness does not serve to restore a satisfactory sense of ending. It does, in fact, suggest that nothing has been resolved. (idem)

Yes, Lewis defies the structure in this last moment, in order to convey the languidity and entropic indifference of Tarr’s sort of life. The non-ending highlights Tarr’s failure. And it really isn’t all that unsatisfactory: we care little for Tarr after Kreisler murders action by murdering himself. His role is simply that of witness—the priest interpreting the

oracle of Kreisler's life and death. Kermode is both represented and trumped here: Tarr languishes, post-transition and therefore forever in flux and transition, but Kreisler has succeeded in escaping that cycle. Kermode's sense of an ending is not requisite in a narrative that understands the place of death, and of eschatology, as something more than an organizing principle, but potentially as a locus of meaning to be sought.

In short, eschatology figures prominently in *Tarr*, both in the typical modernist sense that Death looms over the whole of the novel in a variety of characters—death proper, the death of freedoms, the failure of ideas and ideals, and the inexorability of modern being as an entropic force or field. It is also a thing restored, however satirically, to its fuller dimensions; here death as eschaton is deliverance from a demonic state of affairs, and thus the coming of the last thing is desirable even if what will follow is unknown. Death is a heroic state, or at least not much different from the deadness of Life, and “*deadness* is the first condition of Art” (299): Kreisler's duel, like the whole life of the novel, takes place in a “waste land” (267), and “[a]ll this instinctive resistance to the idea of Death, the indignity of being nothing, was rendered empty by his premature insensitiveness” (269): “Life had no value for him” (267).

Gone, in other words, is the broader textual anxiety about Death. Tarr tries to explain to Anastasya what he knows in principle and what Kreisler has experienced in reality:

Death is the one attribute that is peculiar to *life*. It is the something that it is impossible to imagine in connection with art. = Reality is entirely founded on this fact, that of *Death*. All *action* revolves round that, and has it for motif. The purest thought is totally ignorant of death. = Death means the perpetual extinction of impertinent sparks. But it is the key of life. (299)

Art, as an idea or principle of Life, however, cannot die, and thus it is to be disconnected from Life. This whole discourse feels decidedly vorticist, *plein de l'esprit de contradiction* from stem to stern, and it concludes with a tortured articulation of the final idea: Art participates in deadness, is a cousin to Death in the sense that it needs be soulless, but what it represents is Life (299-300). Death gives life meaning, but Art is the prophetic vessel of that meaning—Life and Death alike serve Art; hence the Artist's insistence on superiority of perception, and on the notion that his experience is different: he is the retrospective, conscientious godling of Life, the prophet of Death, and the creator of significance. As Schenker imagines him, Lewis believes in this elite caste, a priesthood whose activities provoked the masses to silent awe" (47). I have my reservations about the total implication of that portrait, especially given Lewis' "democratic" pronouncements in *Blast*. Regardless, in Kreisler, the Artist comes into metaphorical identification with Art and with Life: Kreisler creates himself, and creates by his choosing death an aperture in the possibilities for Art.

4. "Dubious Oracles": Notes on Prophecy and Revelation in *Tarr*

I referred earlier to Tarr's rather dubious status as the prophetic consciousness, and to Kreisler's own share in a prophetic function or sensibility. I should differentiate more carefully between them. In the spirit of my reading of Golding's *The Double Tongue*, I will call Tarr the Priest and Kreisler the "dubious oracle" (a phrase Kreisler jealously applies to someone Anastasya is interested in: 134). Tarr mediates the principles of Art and Life that occur to him and that he observes in others. He is a member of a select club of savants who hold forth with panache, eschew materialism in

favour of aesthetics, but rarely do anything to risk their material health. Lord Henry, Stephen Dedalus, Prufrock, and Eustace Barnack are gold members of the same club, and represent a range of relations to Life: Henry is a dedicated sensationalist, Barnack the same but corpulently, Prufrock longs to experience sensation, and Dedalus is desperately and passionately committed to experiencing the epiphanies of persons and objects—to discern their secular essences—more than to the gratification of his own lusts and whims, but he is not, finally, immune to them. Like these figures, Tarr lives with one foot in the priesthood of art, and one in the dark, sweaty places of sensation, and seeks consciously to maintain that division. He is, in this sense, and ironically, “*the perfect sensationalist*”: a seeker of the moment who refuses to commit to anything but periodic change or waves of being, and who very quickly abandons such notions as so many New Year’s resolutions. As such, he fails to achieve “*individual continuity*” (Lewis, *Time* 13).

Kreisler plunges headlong into Death, and therefore into Life. Schenker compares him to the Ancient Mariner, “a spectre provisionally returned from the world of the dead” (45), since Kreisler’s deadness “recalls others to the lives they have almost surrendered to routine and cliché,” a sort of “prophetic office” (*idem*). This commitment seems to qualify him for a number of “apocalyptic” experiences. These are “dubious” revelations, and secular in that they grow out of an artistic sensibility more than a metaphysical one: grow, that is, out of Kreisler’s way of looking at the world, and not out of the movement of a higher will seeking to disclose itself to and through him. In this sense, *Tarr* succeeds like Pynchon’s *Crying of Lot 49* in wresting the material of scriptural apocalypse from its theocentric moorings, and transporting the whole into the realm of the “Real.”

What I mean by this is a clarification: I do not think *Tarr* is anymore invested

with a religious doctrine or vision than *Blast*, but I do think it is invested with a religious sensibility via the importation of the rhetorical tropes of scriptural apocalypse, and these moments of apparent insight are interesting in precisely this way and, as in *Blast*, confirm that Lewis is writing apocalyptically. The first of these is Kreisler's apocalyptic view of the dance, the event that kept him in life and that also served as the impetus of his ennui and artistic impotence. He has obsessed over it nearly as much as Sebastian Barnack over his schoolmate's party, and for nearly the same reason: he hasn't the money to rescue his evening clothes from the pawn shop.

The stress of poverty and his growing isolation from society are more likely the point, of course, but the dance provides an opportunity for Lewis to incorporate the interference of all of the factors that oppress and warp Kreisler's spirit in the tuning of his vision. Kreisler seeks in particular to make "contact" with Anastasya, his outrageous Beatrice, and after prowling around the conservatory for a time, he re-enters the ballroom:

The dancers were circling past with athletic elation, talking in the way people were talking when they are working. Their intelligences floated and flew above the waves of the valse, but with frequent drenchings, as it were, and cessations. The natural strangeness for him of all these English people together did not arrest his mind or lead him to observation, but yet got a little in the way. — Couple followed couple, the noise of their feet, or dress, for a moment queerly distinct and near above the rest, as though a yard or two of quiet surrounded Kreisler. They came into this area for a moment, everything distinct and clear cut, and then went out again. Each new pair of dancers seemed coming straight for him. Their voices were loud for a moment. A hole was cut out of the general noise, as it

were opening a passage into it. Each new face was an hallucination of separate energy, seeming very distant, laughs, words, movements. They were like trunkless, living heads rolling and bobbing past, a sea of them. = The two or three instruments behind the screen of palms produced the necessary measures to keep this throng of people careering, like the spoon stirring in a saucepan. It stirred and stirred and they jerked and huddled insipidly round and round. (152)

Two features of this “vision” strike me particularly. The first is that Lewis, having invested both Tarr and Kreisler with his own manner and critical disposition of perception, transforms the room into the very embodiment of everything he objected to in English society: the pretensions, the babble, the noise, the ugly laughter, the herd-like movements, the de-personalization of the whole. The second feature is the passivity of Kreisler’s perception: this moment comes across very like a revelation. Kreisler is arrested at the still center (in this case an actual periphery) of a moment of perception, and in order to highlight this fact, the impressions are caught up in the narrative. Kreisler is not the agent of this vision, but its indirect object. It is, in short, the self-disclosure of the author’s opinion to Kreisler and to the reader.

The moment fixes Kreisler’s own sensibility: he positively fulminates over Anastasya’s sudden appearance (153), as a thing that undermined his own will and “upset and ended everything of his ‘imaginary life’” (156), and her laughter at his method of contact both excites and infuriates him. The whole of it is surreal, inflected by the deep-down “sex-tumult,” as Tarr later deems it (302), and it leads Kreisler to demonize Anastasya: “She was *néfaste*. = She was in fact evidently *the Devil*” and the dance was “*infernal*” (157) and the whole of his perception an “illogical” and neurotic “vision” grown out of his own self-consciousness (158). Of course, like the rape and murder that

follow, the whole of this moment is farcical, with Kreisler behaving quite comically throughout for our benefit, part of the caricature of nicety and manners that Lewis is drawing for us, or rather the part of the caricature that is funny because it is implausible and refuses to fit—not just exaggerated, but possibly disturbed. When he prepared himself to leave, for example, “[h]e smiled, rather hideously and menacingly, at the two English people near him, and walked away” (159). The suddenness and awkwardness of all of Kreisler’s movements, and the sheer lunacy of his perceptions are rather endearing in this moment: flashbacks of high school dances disturb us all, no doubt.

The earlier vision, then, provided by the agency of the narrator, tinted darkly with the author’s sensibility, catches Kreisler up insensibly in itself—he is, after all, a dubious oracle. This seems par for the course in *Tarr*, for the second moment of revelatory power plays out with particularly oracular terror. The scene itself works backward cyclically in time, using emotion and image as its structure, not sequence. Indeed, the whole chapter is strangely compressed, even when chronology re-enters the narration. Half-an-hour after she leaves Kreisler’s studio, Kreisler rings the bell at Bertha’s rooms, and his “sudden appearance . . . seemed to swallow up the space and time in between” (199). We are greeted with Bertha’s outrage at having been assaulted, as an horrific tableau of attenuated, pulsing, sweat-stained angers. Bertha herself takes the role of oracle, and Kreisler the role of Apollonian bully. She “had been conscious of an eeriness” throughout (192), the rape partaking “of the unreality of a nightmare” (193). She had even experienced a “shiver of warning” before Kreisler pounced (*idem*). The rape itself filled her with a distance but vital recognition, a vision of

Kreisler’s Bertha: the woman that you couldn’t shake off, who, for some unimagined reason, was always hanging on to you. She even had the strength to

admit, distantly, the logic of this act—what had happened to her—still more disgusting and hateful than its illogic. (193)

For all his violence and definite culpability, Kreisler comes off as himself possessed by something else, something alien to his consciousness, like a post-seizure delirium (192).

Looking at him, trembling with affront and “spasmodic returns of raging,” Bertha sees

side by side and unconnected, the silent figure drawing her and the other one full of blindness and violence. Then there were two other figures, one getting up from the chair, yawning, and the present lazy one at the window—four in all, that she could not bring together somehow, each in a complete compartment of time if its own. (194)

The rape and her subsequent vision objectify Kreisler, not Bertha: the figure at the window could not be interested in the others, nor held accountable for their actions, but all told Kreisler was a creature, an “it,” a “mad beast” (194). Though she finds a way to blame herself, as victims of rape in ages of helplessness to patriarchy have always tended to do, Bertha comes away from this enriched by the revelation, having earned a wisdom and awareness that change her own perceptions: with Yeats’ Leda, she puts on knowledge with her assailant’s power—poor recompense, but profound. For her, “Tarr had been the real central and absorbing figure, all along, of course, but purposely veiled” (198).

There are several other such moments: of recognition, of epiphanic insight, the majority of them shared among the constituents of this absurd love triangle. Tarr, for instance, recognizes that he has backslid into humour once again, and that his humour has necessary ethical limits (242-43). His resistance to ethical being for its own sake winds him up in a trio of resolutions, all of them abandoned later, and all of them mocked by his

own blindness: Tarr is still ignorant of the rape, and therefore of his own impotence relative to any of the other players in the black comedy of manners whose cast he rounds out. But this “revelation”—mere recognition—fails to compete with visions as ways of seeing impressed extrinsically on Kreisler at the dance and actively welling up in Bertha after she was assaulted by the same. These carry with them the imprint of a greater apocalyptic sensibility, an expanded awareness of the dynamics and implications of scriptural apocalypse, and a translation of these notions into authorial or narrative self-disclosure: there is a greater consciousness at work in *Tarr*, and Kreisler and Bertha are made more nearly aware of it than the title character ever is.

If my purpose were to re-sacralize that consciousness, to draw a link between Lewis’ godling author and God himself it would not be a very onerous job. Lewis has left every indication that, as with so many of the other apparent or granted modernist assumptions, he was opposed to the relegation of God to the back stair, his unceremonious ejection to the cosmic curb, and his demotion from “Cause” to “Effect” (*Time* 138). Perhaps his religious sense is one of identification with God after all—not as a god-complex, but as one nursing feelings hurt by rejection. Whatever its basis or significance, this religious sense is certainly clear in two essays in the *Time and Western Man*: the “Preface to Book Two” (129-44), and “God as Reality” (361-80). In sum, while he has little patience for sentimentalism in religion even, he is unwilling to jettison the Father ship just yet.

In any event, were a recovery of Lewis as religious writer my purpose here, I would do better to treat the later *The Human Age*, and specifically *The Childermass*, as Daniel Schenker has done persuasively. Schenker even subtitles his chapter on

Childermass “Modernist Apocalypse.” If critical modernism were to have placed Schenker’s notion of literary apocalypse alongside Kermode’s, there would be no need for this thesis: Schenker rightly sees literary apocalypse, and specifically *Childermass*, as being informed by both scriptural and literary sources, and in complex ways. The scriptural elements, like the literary, are meant to be taken seriously—actually—if not literally as informing the meaning of Lewis’ absurd vision of Limbo. Here, eschatology and apocalypse are named, not just evoked (*Childermass* 92, 260 for starters), and they mean what they mean in the theological sense, even if they undergo a degree of transformation or appropriation here. Schenker’s chapter on *The Human Age* as a whole suggests that Lewis quite clearly “favored the Divine” in these later works (159), and in strikingly modernist ways.

The Human Age, despite its Dantesque structures and mythic elements, strikes one as allegorical. In *Childermass*, Pulley and Satters get their strings pulled now and then, like Argol and Hanp, and Tarr and Kreisler, reverting helplessly to essential (and therefore disingenuous) caricatures of themselves, but these are states that leave them instinctually unsettled, and against which they constantly chafe. *Childermass*, and the other parts of the *Human Age*, reflect the human comedy (not necessarily divine, though Dante is the critical literary source at work in the whole novel) in a cosmic situation. Mortality is still the frame, in a sense. Lewis has brilliantly worked in the opposite direction of the model of secularization I sketched earlier: he has transported, via mythology, very real persons into a slippery but devastatingly familiar metaphysical space. He elevates them to see what they will do, in effect, when all bets are off. Lewis’ characters, eventually, resist the static ebb and flow of their existence, and strike out to

become involved in the efforts to alter that condition. However strange a narrative it might be, it certainly seems to suggest that whatever one does, one should do something, and refuse the languid, effete temper of the times. Perhaps this is why the War was so useful to Lewis, and why, evidently, it was also his undoing vis-à-vis *Blast* and Vorticism: it was an event, it provided a context for action and a locus for thought, and it simultaneously threatened and promised the irruption of the status quo.

Yet a religious recovery of Lewis is *not* my purpose. I need only have shown that his eschatological complex exceeds the limits of the eschatology of critical modernism to account for it. As early as 1927, Lewis himself was aware that critical modernism was problematic:

“Modern” or “modernity” are the words that have come literally to stink: every intelligent man today stops his nose and his ears when somebody approaches him with them on his lips: but that is not, I argue, because what is peculiar to the modern age, or because the “new” itself is bad or disgusting, but simply because it is never allowed to reach the public in anything but a ridiculous, distorted, and often very poisonous form. The interpreter—not seldom the interpretative performer, where it is art or science—is to blame. (*Time* 130)

His opinion here is general, and much more aggressive than is warranted, I think. I have already made clear that conventional readings of modernism are valuable and, if selective, valid. Yet there is a worthwhile caution in Lewis’ argument that we not lay claim to the definitive reading for fear of overlooking something, as we might do with Lewis’ work. Given the complexity of the structural elements and motifs in *Blast*, the competing eschatologies of *Tarr*, and the unabashedly mythic “apocalypticism” of *The Human Age*, it is clear that Lewis’ sense of the apocalyptic is broader than that which

critical modernism ascribes to his contemporaries. Lewis' eschatology extends beyond the mundane ends that are said to preoccupy the moderns, and his broader generic implication of apocalypse in his work generally requires another look not only at Lewis, but at the way we have defined modernism, and the doctrines we have taken for granted along the way.

CHAPTER V

ESCHATOLOGY AND SECULAR PROPHECY: HUXLEY'S NEW WORLD(S)

But there remained two of the men in the camp, the name of the one was Eldad, and the name of the other Medad: and the spirit rested upon them; and they were of them that were written, but went not out unto the tabernacle: and they prophesied in the camp.

And there ran a young man, and told Moses, and said, Eldad and Medad do prophesy in the camp.

And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of Moses, one of his young men, answered and said, My lord Moses, forbid them.

And Moses said unto him, Enviest thou for my sake? would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his spirit upon them!

Numbers 11: 26-29

1. Huxley and Poet-Prophecy

I mean to restrict my reading of Huxley to two novels only—*Antic Hay* and *Time Must Have Stop*—with a special emphasis on the latter. I will mention others in passing, including *Brave New World*, *The Devils of Loudon*, and *Ape and Essence*, but have excluded them and other similarly themed novels, including *Island*, from specific study

for a number of reasons: many of Huxley's other novels, including *Brave New World*, *Ape and Essence*, and *Island* are dystopic/utopic in focus, and as such fit better in the general strain of "apocalyptic fiction" regularly studied in critical modernism. *The Devils of Loudon*, while it certainly treats of both the theological and ontological significance of all three elements of apocalypse (eschatology, prophecy, and revelation), does so as the fictional account of a historical event (not a depiction of modern life, then), and in an explicitly Catholic context. What is and is not part of Huxley's own concept of these elements is therefore questionable. Other novels (*Crome Yellow*, *Those Barren Leaves*, etc.) I leave out in the interests of cogency and focus: prophecy, and more especially apocalyptic prophecy/prophetic eschatology, feature most prominently and helpfully for this study in *Antic Hay* and *Time Must Have a Stop*.

In keeping with my interest in scriptural apocalypse and specifically Revelation, rather than speak of the prophetic in "mystical" or eastern terms, I will attempt to uncover a western or "Biblical" sensibility, especially in the prophetic impulse and in the soteriological and eschatological strain evinced in both novels. Here again there is a happy precedent in Huxley's own writings: he acknowledged in a compilation of his recommended "Readings in Mysticism" (1942) that "most of the books belong to the literature of Western spirituality" because of his relative "ignorance" about "Oriental mysticism" (*Huxley and God* 254). Huxley's knowledge of Oriental philosophy expanded considerably in his later years, as did his interest in psychedelics as a means for opening the "doors of perception,"¹ but his disclaimer is meaningful in an examination of the two novels I have chosen, the first having been published in 1923 and the second in 1944.

¹ In the scriptural sense, such moments masquerade as "bona fide" revelations and give way to bad prophecy. In 1952, at any rate, Huxley was himself skeptical about the authenticity of drug

Before turning to that analysis, it might serve to revisit the notion of prophecy as it has grown up in the literary tradition of the last century in particular, and to situate Huxley in that overall “school of poet-prophets” and vice-versa. As I have already noted, the tradition of the poet-prophet goes as far back at least as Dante Alighieri (and through Dante, Virgil), and extends in very broad senses through Milton, Blake, Whitman, and Yeats in poetry, and through Melville, Wells, Orwell, and Huxley in fiction. The term “prophet” broadens considerably when applied to poets, of course, losing the requirement of the divine vocation, but assuming the presence of a gift, divine or otherwise, of acute hindsight, insight, and/or foresight.

The mode of such prophecy has also obviously changed over the years. The *Divine Comedy* is an illumination—if somewhat egocentric and self-promoting, a dream-revelation or dream-prophecy. Milton tended to work in the vein of the Jeremiad critique: illuminating and condemning damnable traits and habits in English government, but

visions. In “Downward Transcendence,” one of many essays Huxley wrote on the subjects of mysticism and religion, he says this:

In actual life a downward movement may sometimes be made the beginning of an ascent. When the shell of the ego has been cracked and there begins to be a consciousness of the subliminal and physiological otherness underlying personality, it sometimes happens that we catch a glimpse, fleeting but apocalyptic, of that other Otherness, which is the Ground of all being. . . . Very occasionally a single “anaesthetic revelation” may act, like any other theophany, to incite its recipient to an effort of self-transformation and upward self-transcendence. But the fact that such a thing sometimes happens can never justify the employment of chemical methods of self-transcendence. This is a descending road and most of those who take it will come to a state of degradation, where periods of subhuman ecstasy alternate with periods of conscious selfhood so wretched that any escape, even if it be into the slow suicide of drug addiction, will seem preferable to being a person. (*Moksha* 24-25)

This is not transcendence through the instrumentality of the substance ingested, but is rather the manipulation and passive generation of absences imagined, perceived, and believed in the subject him or herself. The idea that we might, through artificial means, not only seek to open ourselves to metaphysical experience, but somehow impel or control that communion runs contrary to the very notion of revelation as divine self-disclosure that is essential to scriptural apocalypse: assuming his reality, we cannot presume to compel God to come forward of the curtain.

always over-against his Protestant theology. Blake's *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* is a pseudo-mystical, imaginative theodicy which rejects, denies a larger theology for its own sake, but works very obviously with the terms of a Judaeo-Christian heritage, even as it inverts and renders them idiosyncratic. Whitman, we have seen, like Dante and Blake, seemed somewhat to believe in the authenticity of poetry as prophecy. But each of these visions represents a tendency to a literary conception of prophecy—a step into literature and literary inspiration is a step away from the scriptural function of the prophet to speak God's words, not his own.

E.M. Forster takes this one step further by wresting the notion of prophecy from its theological significance and seeking to give it an aesthetic significance only.² His is a “tegumental” approach, or a divinization of the terms of human experience merely. Still, it is interesting that the word survives even in modernism, and quite vivaciously, as we shall see. It would seem that “poet” and “author” still aren't sufficient in themselves in conveying the rhetorical power of “prophet” and the rhetorical gravitas—power, privilege, and *pésance*—it invokes.

It would seem, then, that the notion of the poet prophet has depended on one of two assumptions. First, that there is a divine source to the inspiration the poet receives, something extrinsic to himself. Blake and Whitman seemed to feel this in and about their work. Huxley wonders about this as well, as will become clear. If we allow for divine inspiration, we obliquely accept that God can write through the human in some way: that the poetic text is God's text—something like scriptural prophecy—transmitted or mediated through the poet, as a revelation or warning or commendation might be through

² Ahearn's *Visionary Fictions* covers this territory very well, offering an account of the kind of secularized, aestheticized, politicized, degenerate appropriation of a supra-literary, divine activity that seems to rule the notion of literary prophecy in critical modernism.

the priest or prophet. It is his timber, in other words, stacked in the intellectual warehouse as well as the spiritual and moral disposition of his “mouthpiece.” As *vates*, then, the poet may be a willing or an unconscious conduit for a cosmic truth that yearns toward the human mind.

The second possible assumption—the one that most comfortably appeals to critical modernism—is that the poet takes the place of the prophet in a schema that rejects the notion of a divine. In other worlds, in a world that not only rejects prophets but the very idea of a prophet because it accepts the death, absence, or non-reality of God, literature becomes one of the primary sites of wisdom and warning. Wells, Orwell, Huxley are key figures. Again, though Huxley was nearly always interested in the notion of extrinsic sources of revelation, the reception of *Brave New World* as a socio-political warning from the voice of one crying in the wilderness, influenced, as it turns out, by Lawrence’s doctrines of physical being-in-the-world as the ultimate mystery (see Enroth 130), aligns him squarely with Wells and Orwell.

Strictly speaking, “prophet” is a misnomer in each case. With a restless, scientismic horror, Wells predicted a future devoid of values and moral bearing. In this way he was like the Old Testament prophets, each work a fantastic jeremiad, but each, too, a vision drawn from within, from an ethical imagination rather than a deep moral sense. Orwell was closer, in a secular sense, to that figure of the prophet as social critic, as voice crying in the wilderness. And yet his concept of the future was rooted in opposition to a political present, to the asepsis of modern technology married with a eugenical social fascism; in short, a very secular kind of warning which never made vocational claims of inspiration or divine authority.

James Champion expounds helpfully on the nature of prophecy as a received term in twentieth century thought, and argues persuasively that even the changed function of the prophetic still has its roots in Old Testament theology, and specifically in “prophetic criticism.” “Radical cultural critique,” he suggests, “is rooted in the prophetic impulse, even when it announces itself as something entirely new” (23). He traces this impulse in Marx, Freud, Adorno, and Derrida because “they demystify the auras around leading symbols and expose illusions that underwrite culture” and doubt even Cartesian consciousness (24), but (and here he evokes Ricoeur) are “consciously suspicious of” and “attack” “false consciousness” in ways that “expand rather than detract from consciousness itself” (24-25).

Even in Nietzsche, Champion argues, “[h]owever [he] secularizes, re-creates, or deploys those traces in his prophetic attack, they may still reflect back upon his own religious roots and Protestant desire itself—that underlying historical move to break with all heteronomous religious closures in the name of a greater, life-giving principle” (26). In the twentieth century, this impulse finds expression philosophically in Jung, Heidegger, and Gadamer, who

must all attack a mindset that in many respects propels modern culture and eradicates hermeneutical trust: namely, positivism. As Ricoeur notes, in opposition to positivism, “hermeneuts” of affirmation presuppose “that the ‘true’ and the ‘real’ cannot be reduced to what can be verified by mathematical and experimental methods but has to do with our relationship to the world, to other beings, and to being as well.” (28)

In general, Yeats is the nearest thing to a secular prophet of this temperament that we have: his recrimination of the urban, his refusal to accept the run of the modern is

prophet-like, Wordsworthian and Johanine. He knows his limits. His is a prophecy of a personal, responsive kind. But one could say the same of Orwell and Huxley and be very nearly right. The moderns adopted a prophetic tone: always looking for a way out, an appellation and a chastisement.

Ape and Essence and *Brave New World* are literary, secular apocalypses, which makes them something more than simply “apocalyptic” in the popular sense. They imagine a future in narrative form, and the personality and shape of that future warn the reader even as they intrigue. The future is thus linked with the present in the reader as a kind of political, technological, and spiritual vision, as is the case with scriptural apocalypse. In consequence, Huxley, like H.G. Wells and George Orwell, was and often still is acclaimed a “prophet” of the modern age, especially on the strength of *Brave New World* (1931), a plausible projection in the wake of eugenic politics and subsequent advances in genetic and radiological science. Huxley’s work thus has the effect of collapsing the distance between writer and prophet, at least for his readers. That Huxley was himself sensitive to this dual role, and to the problems associated with the identification of writer with prophet, is clear. In his foreword to the 1946 edition, he refers to the projections of the book severally as “prophecies,” “prognostications,” and “forecasts” subject to revision, and thus ironizes his prophetic role by associating prophecy with the language of mysticism and meteorology, as a rational interpretation of visible signs rather than divine inspiration (9; see also *Tomorrow* 142-43, and Heard, Jones, and Wheeler).

In *Brave New World*, this critical impulse is pronounced and very secular. John Savage (read John Baptist) is wild and ascetic in contrast with the regular inhabitants of

Huxley's new world. Because he represents both natural living and the social value of freedom of choice absent in the totalitarian society Huxley imagines for him, Savage is for Huxley a very modern prophet, albeit an accidental one (and a life that, by its nature, protests and thus prophesies). And yet the irony of Huxley's own self-consciousness as writer-prophet is evidenced in Savage's confusion and weakness, and in the absence of any rational or mystical strength on his part. This, too, is prophetic. Where his wildness and difference recall John the Baptist, his failure to live or even to articulate the values which make him different evokes Jonah and Balaam. The "orgy of atonement" Huxley describes in the final pages of the novel (201), and Savage's tortured exclamation "Oh, my God, my God!", evoke, of course, Christ on the cross (200). But this is a suicidal, Judas-Christ: a failed apostle, a traitor to Good, and thus the tortured conscience of a decadent, godless age.

Huxley's works look increasingly beyond the aporia of time and technology for a restoration of the sensual and essential mysticism of the human experience in an age of savage civilization. Like Blake and Yeats, Huxley replaced traditional notions of heaven, hell, and history with his own visions—mystical and heterodox, yet also humane, heroic, and theistic—especially in his later work. Huxley's is an explicit eschatology which moves past the modernist tendency to fall into agonized silence and agnostic uncertainty, and, like Yeats' "widening gyre," points to a fuller apocalyptic experience of resurrection and renewal, even of terrific proportions. In an essay originally included in the 1945 edition of *TMHS*, Huxley made his intention clear: to reveal the patterns and presences of mythos at work in the very human stories that unfold in this sphere: to reveal the infinite body contained in the finite, and the containment of the finite in the infinite.

More useful, though, than the reception history of *Brave New World* as itself a “prophetic” document (as prediction and as critique) are the comments about and portraits of prophecy and the prophets that occupy Huxley’s fictions as a motif if not an actual theme. The protagonists of *Brave New World*, *Antic Hay* and *Time Must Have a Stop* are three very different figures of prophecy, each in a pseudo-mystical, secular milieu. John Savage recalls, in a rush, John the Baptist, Jonah, Moses, Balaam, Judas, and Christ. His message—in a way he *is* the message—is delivered to the reader, not to the other characters, and this makes of him, in the ways mentioned above, a mouth-piece for the god of Huxley’s politics and values. Theodore Gumbriel and Sebastian Barnack are very different portraits of prophecy, the first brushing up against inspiration and ultimately running from it, and the latter coming into the prophetic only via significant suffering and meditation.

In general, what is meant by the poet-prophet is one who has achieved a depth of psychological insight available only to a “seer” interested in looking hard enough at it. The prophetic impulse is all but missing in the experimental fictions of high modernism, which content themselves with interpreting the self as the only remaining sacred text, attending almost exclusively to form and suspension of time as ways of reducing eschatological anxiety. But this is false eschatological conscience: truly eschatological fiction looks past the terminus and finds grounds for hope. And among the ostensible “writer-prophets” of the twentieth century, only Huxley does this.

2. Pseudonymous Vision and Mantles of Prophecy in *Antic Hay*

How simple to spit on the floors of churches.

Huxley, *Antic Hay* 124

Antic Hay is Huxley's second novel, and considered the work of the young Huxley who was bitterly satirical and anti-religious. Sybille Bedford, a Huxley biographer and friend to the family for more than four decades, provides some context:

Aldous's second novel came very near the knuckle. It reflected, perhaps crystallized, attitudes of the time, and many young people began to see and judge in Huxleyan terms. Sir Isaiah Berlin speaks of Aldous as one of the great cultural heroes of his youth, and the transforming power of the early Huxley, "the 'cynical', God-denying Huxley, the object of fear and disapproval . . . the wicked nihilist . . . [the delight of] those young readers who supposed themselves to be indulging in one of the most dangerous and exotic vices of those iconoclastic post-war times . . ." (142)

This is an extraordinary statement, though apparently it was the quite ordinary view of Huxley's novel at the time. But in a letter responding to his father's disapproval of the manner and matter of the work, Huxley hints at its larger concern: "[*Antic Hay*] is a book written by a member of what I may call the war generation for others of his kind," writes Aldous, and "is intended to reflect—fantastically, of course, but none the less faithfully—the life and opinions of an age which has seen the violent disruption of almost all the standards, conventions and values current in the previous epoch." "It is also a very serious book," he continues, and "has a certain novelty," combining "into a single entity"

the “ordinarily separate categories—tragic, comic, fantastic, realistic” and thus may “appear at first sight rather repulsive” (qtd. in Bedford 142). *Antic Hay* is certainly very secular, and therefore a nice counterpoint to *Time Must Have a Stop*.

Rather than celebrating the cynicism and languidity of that generation, however, *Antic Hay*, like *Tarr*, worries the character and climate of the age, exercising (and exorcising, insofar as Gumbriel Junior has some of Huxley in him) its transitional deadness (Bedford 143). The prophetic impulse in *Antic Hay* is thus that of prophetic critique, and it belongs principally to the novel as a whole: here Huxley is the prophetic consciousness, working satirically to “unveil” the vacuity and entropic dimness of the wit and wisdom of the leisured classes.

I offer two passages for consideration on this point. The first is tucked away in Gumbriel Junior’s meeting with his new business partner, Mr. Boldero, who holds forth for several minutes about the complex but straightforward task of marketing and advertising “Gumbriel’s Patent Small Clothes”—pants, as you will recall, with a pneumatic seat for wearing on hard surfaces. The conversation is lengthy (99-106), and ranges from talk of the difficulty of selling the pants with sex, and settling on appeals to health (via some snake oil science: “There was a young man of East Anglia,” Gumbriel offers, “whose loins were a tangle of ganglia”) and vanity. In the middle of this deliberation, Boldero observes that

there’s nothing like a spiritual message to make things go. Combine spirituality with practicality and you’ve fairly got them. Got them, I may say, on toast. And that’s what we can do with our trousers; we can put a message into them, a big, spiritual message. (103)

This statement certainly pokes fun at the credulity of the age, and seems, in a rather sweeping cynicism, to eschew spirituality, to be a rather impetuous, oblique criticism of the people's opiate. And yet the thing is spoken by a character whose chief objective is to capitalize on other people's weakness, to live parasitically off this supposed sickness. And it is spoken to a person who turns tail and runs whenever authentic spirituality enters his sphere of influence. Their shared cynicism seems rather the object of this criticism: that cynicism is made ugly in contrast to the naivety of their target market, and the self-congratulatory tone of the whole scene rings rather discordantly (103, 106).

The second passage occurs not long after the first. Shearwater, the physiologue, has come to visit Gumbriel Junior, and Gumbriel Senior invites both men to admire his scale model of London, based on Christopher Wren's radical reconstruction proposal after the London Fire of September 2, 1666. The plan, Gumbriel Senior tells them,

offered them open spaces and broad streets; he offered them sunlight and air and cleanliness; he offered them beauty, order and grandeur. He offered to build for the imagination and the ambitious spirit of man so that even the most bestial, vaguely and remotely, as they walked those streets, might feel that they were of the same race—or very nearly—as Michelangelo; that they too might feel themselves, in spirit at least, magnificent, strong and free. (114)

But they wouldn't take it, he observes, for they "preferred to re-erect the old intricate squalor; they preferred the mediæval darkness and crookedness" (*idem*). Gumbriel bemoans the fact that "*experientia*" most decidedly *non docet*: "People offer us reason and beauty; but we will have none of them, because they don't happen to square with the notions that were grafted into our souls in youth, that have grown there and become a part of us" (*idem*).

This is an implicit criticism of the medievalism of religion, of a human tendency to cling to what is past. It is voiced by an “atheist and an anti-clerical” who thought religion so much “mumbo-jumbery” (8), and yet in expounding on Wren’s plans and his own model of them, Gumbriel Senior takes on the mantle of prophet:

He pointed to the model on the ground, he lifted his arms and turned up his eyes to suggest the size and splendour of his edifices. His hair blew wispily loose and fell into his eyes, and had to be brushed impatiently back again. He pulled at his beard; his spectacles flashed, as though they were living eyes. Looking at him, Gumbriel Junior could imagine that he saw before him the passionate and gesticulating silhouette of one of those old shepherds who stand at the base of Piranesi’s ruins demonstrating obscurely the prodigious grandeur and the abjection of the human race. (117)

We can easily see the Mosaic and Johanne implications in this sketch: arms raised hieratically, hair blown wild, glasses flashing with the potency of second-sight, a seer’s eyes. He is a “shepherd,” not the Good Shepherd, of course, and perhaps not even typologically, but a shepherd nonetheless, bristling with impatience at the ignorance of his wayward people. And all of this over a model of London (O Jerusalem!) where

every two or three hundred paces the line of houses is broken and in the indentation of a square recess there rises, conspicuous and insular, the fantastic tower of a parish church. Spire out of dome; octagon on octagon diminishing upwards; cylinder on cylinder; round lanterns, lanterns of many sides; towers with airy pinnacles; clusters of pillars linked by incurving cornices, and above them four more clusters and above once more; square towers pierced with pointed windows; spires uplifted in flying buttresses; spires bulbous at the base—the multitude of them beckons, familiar and friendly, on the sky. From the other

shore, or sliding along the quiet river, you see them all; you tell over their names;
and the great dome swells up in the midst overtopping them all.

The dome of St. Paul's. (116)

The theme is architectural, of course, as is the passion, but the vision—the language, even—are prophetic and almost “apocalyptic.” Gumbriel Junior very nearly sees through into something grander and larger as he observes his father both declaim the real and proclaim the possible: the “prophet’s present moment is an alienated prodigal son, a moment that has broken away from its own identity in the past but may return to that identity in the future” (Frye, *Great Code* 129). Rather than remaining a critique of spiritualism, then, the moment becomes a transcendent critique of the time itself.

The bulk of the references to prophecy and to scriptural apocalypse in *Antic Hay* are comic, profane, or secular. For instance, Gumbriel Junior profanely attributes his idea for “Gumbriel’s Patent Small Clothes” to “divine inspiration,” saying it “came like an apocalypse,” “suddenly,” “[a] grand and luminous idea” (21). Tricked out in his false beard and greatcoat as the “complete Rabelasian Man,” Gumbriel fancies himself a “seeker of truth and prophet of heroic grandeurs” (80), but only manages to win for himself a dismal sexual conquest (Shearwater’s wife) and a few hundred pounds (in advance and salary from Boldero). Winning Rosie Shearwater over, Gumbriel evokes Tiresias (87), and while entertaining Myra Viveash, Coleman, and his new-found friend (the young Porteous, son of Gumbriel Senior’s good friend and as prodigal a boy as ever was), Porteous says “I feel I’m going to be sick”: “Good Lord!” cries Gumbriel, but “before he could do anything effective, the young man had fulfilled his own prophecy” (155). To Rose Shearwater, tricked into seeking out her “Toto” (Gumbriel all this time incognito as the Complete Man) at Mercaptan’s flat, remarks that “Toto . . . had been no

more than a forerunner; the definitive revelation was Mr. Mercaptan's" (172). Gumbriel himself, waiting for Myra to awake so they can go for his "last supper" as Coleman calls it (199), channels Huxley for a moment, casting his mind forward to the reception of his memoirs, anticipating dismissive incredulity, but recognizing a strain of genuine feeling in himself, says, "I have a premonition that one of these days I may become a saint. An unsuccessful sort of saint, like a candle beginning to go out" (192).

These moments and many more like them are, en masse, irreverent and a touch blasphemous even when they are, as Huxley protested to his father, "serious." But that touch of sobriety turns their irony back on the ironizers, and thus impresses them into the service of the larger prophetic criticism at work in the novel. And there is also another strain of prophecy at work, beyond prediction, as an evocation of the scriptural sense that a prophet is a type and conduit for cosmic forces.

Two such moments tie in the critique and the notion of a sensibility awakened. In a moment of charitable sensibility, he feels himself a very uneasy "prophet in Nineveh," interrupting the decadent repartee of his acquaintances to alert them to the real suffering of a poor couple being narrated a few feet away (56). The allusion means, one supposes, that he expects resistance when he raises the social conscience of his companions, though beyond some blasphemous and totally irrelevant punning by Coleman, the reaction is positive, if largely ineffectual: they raise five pounds between them. A companion allusion is made much later by the old anti-Semite on the train as Gumbriel speeds as ineffectually to find Emily. Bemoaning the parcelling out of farmland and wild spaces for the construction of "red cities pullulating with . . . prosperous Jews," the old fellow asks,

“Am I right in being indignant, sir? Do I do well, like the prophet, Jonah, to be angry?”
(160).

Clearly both of these moments mean as prophetic critiques, but both also signal a marginal prophetic activity. The first recalls the story of Joseph and Mary: the woman is expecting, the couple has lost their broken down horse—their only means of income—to an unjust and thoughtless law, and they have recently travelled by foot to Plymouth and back, where there was no job nor room for them. They are encircled by others of their class, and Gumbriel and his friends come like wise men proffering a gift. This deeper allusion, beyond Jonah, looks forward to several other moments in the text where Gumbriel in particular will have an opportunity to see beneath the surfaces of things and “discover,” as Ricoeur suggested above, “that the ‘true’ and the ‘real’ cannot be reduced to what can be verified by mathematical and experimental methods but has to do with our relationship to the world, to other beings, and to being as well” (qtd. in Champion 28).

Such moments “arouse” his “sense of social responsibility” (194), but these are generally moments of impotent reflection, passed over as quickly as they are aroused, and exchanged, as Gumbriel Senior laments, for the familiar noise of egoism. Following the “manger scene,” for instance, the company breaks up, and Shearwater and Gumbriel Junior share the road for a time, Gumbriel continuing to reflect with a degree of admirable compassion and genuine suffering on the plight of the poor. In this attitude, he looks “through the railings at the profound darkness of the park”—a “vast” and “melancholy” sight—and has a kind of vision where he recalls “legless soldiers grinding barrel organs,” “hawkers of toys stamping their leaky boots in the gutters of the Strand,” an “old woman with matches, forever holding to her left eye a handkerchief as yellow and dirty as the

winter fog,” a “phthisical charwoman who used to work at his father’s house,” and “lovers who turned on the gas” or “ruined shopkeepers jumping in front of trains.” “Had one a right,” he wonders, “to be contented and well fed, had one a right to one’s education and good taste, a right to knowledge and conversation and the leisurely complexities of love?” (59). These are jarring and pathetic considerations, made all the more acute by their being brought into contrapuntal relation with Shearwater’s obsessive musings about his experiments, but they are whisked away as quickly as they came. Another look through the railings at the park, and Gumbriel recalls a very different memory, one that obliterates his consciousness of the “not-self”: his heart-break at being spurned by Myra Viveash.

This motif of “diversion” takes on the dimensions of a pseudo-doctrine made poignant by the structure of contrasts that undergirds the whole of Huxley’s novel. Principally, Gumbriel’s sordid affair with Rosie—the vacuity of their conversations, the languidity of their sexual relations (Grumbil as the Rabelasian Man conquering her, and she doing her “best to pretend she was dead”: 92-93), the impact of his connection to her resulting in Coleman’s assault and the total corruption of her sexual sensibilities into the “freedom” of the libertine—contrasts starkly with Grumbil’s experience of Emily, and it is this relationship that opens up a window onto the spiritual dimension of the novel. Defrocked as the Complete Man who had frightened and disappointed Emily at their last meeting, once again in the persona of the “Mild and Melancholy One” whom, he guesses, appeals more to Emily (not least because she senses he is himself without the beard), Gumbriel observes in a moment of tranquility that “[t]here are quiet places also in the mind, . . . [b]ut we build bandstands and factories on them. Deliberately—to put a stop to

the quietness. We don't like the quietness" (123). The noise of thoughts, preoccupations, jazz bands, music hall songs, etc. serves to

put an end to the quiet, to break it up and disperse it, to pretend at any cost that it isn't there. Ah, but it is, it is there, in spite of everything, at the back of everything. Lying awake at night, sometimes—not restlessly, but serenely, waiting for sleep—the quiet re-establishes itself, piece by piece; all the broken bits, all the fragments of it we've been so busily dispersing all day long. It re-establishes itself, an inward quiet, like this outward quiet of grass and trees. It fills one, it grows—a crystal quiet, a growing expanding crystal. (idem)

But for Grumbil, man of the lost generation, the quiet is unsettling,

terrifying, as well as beautiful. For one's alone in the crystal and there's no support from outside, there's nothing external and important, nothing external and trivial to pull oneself up by or to stand on, superiorly, contemptuously, so that one can look down. There's nothing to laugh at or feel enthusiastic about. But the quiet grows and grows. Beautifully and unbearably. And at last you are conscious of something approaching; it is almost a faint sound of footsteps. Something inexpressibly lovely and wonderful advances through the crystal, nearer, nearer. And, oh, inexpressibly terrifying. (123-24)

The approach of this "lovely and wonderful" thing—peace, Spirit, God—must be stopped, Grumbil says, because

if it were to touch you, if it were to seize you and engulf you, you'd die; all the regular, habitual, daily part of you would die. . . . and one would have to begin living arduously in the quiet, arduously in some strange un-heard of manner. . . . Quickly, before it is too late, start the factory wheels, bang the drum, blow the saxophone. Think of the women you'd like to sleep with, the schemes for making

money, the gossip about your friends, the last outrage of the politicians. *Anything for a diversion*. Break the silence, smash the crystal to pieces. (124; my emphasis)

Tellingly, Grumbil Junior does all of these things, profaning even his moments of tranquility with Emily by literally thinking of “the fornications” he has committed elsewhere (124), profaning his night of sweet and sexless repose with her, the profound exchanges of wisdom and unassuming affection (130-31); all must be “[l]et go. Into the mud. Leave it there and let the dogs lift their hind legs over it as they pass” (136). As usual, Grumbil “sees a possible goal but prefers to wander aimlessly” (Enroth 126), dancing away from the chance for his life to mean something.

The prophetic element in all of this, parallel to the critique, is Gumbil’s self-consciousness: he knows he is being called away from the egoism, the dead “*entr-actes*” of modern life, and he evades the “transformation scene” all the same, yearn as he does for its arrival (145). He is verily a Jonah fleeing his vocation because of the suffering he wrongly anticipates, and knows he is wrong to anticipate: his false anxiety is, it turns out, the only limit to his happiness, an artificial eschaton that hedges up his way and keeps him from the freedom he refuses and profanes. The problem he poses at the beginning of the novel—God as “a sense of warmth about the heart,” “exultation,” “tears in the eyes,” “a rush of power or thought” was “all right”: God as “truth,” “as $2+2=4$. . . wasn’t so clearly right. Was there a chance of their being the same? Were there bridges to join the two worlds?” (7)— is unsolvable because he refuses the solution, and “resigns himself to continuing the antic hay” (129).

Other figures round out the complex, and again Huxley applies an ironic redirection: we are to see in the vacuity of the characters, some of whom grasp

redemption and then let it go, a parabolic reflection of ourselves. Myra Viveash, whose very name evokes the notion of living death, who speaks out of her “inward” and “eternal deathbed” (50-51), who walks the knife edge between two abysses (61) provides the eschatological element of the text almost single-handedly: her death, we are reminded again and again, is an immanent fact, languorous and static. She is the point of departure and of arrival for almost every male character—a kind of fly tape—and therefore a substitute apocalypse. Casimir Lypiatt provides the spark of life, and pretends to stand against the bulwark of scientism and its rebellious children (47), but for all his bluster it is a rather pitiful spark. He is a failed prophet as he is a failed artist, though, like Kreisler in *Tarr*, he is likely to generate a certain degree of pathos. He “dreams,” and is reminded that dreams are out of style: “Too Wellsian . . . Too horribly Utopian” (40-41). He “feels,” but fails to articulate or communicate that feeling (70). As Myra Viveash observes, “[t]here was a flaw in the conduit; somewhere between the man and his work life leaked out. He protested too much” (67). Finally, Lypiatt relies too much on the favours of others, despite his stubborn self-belief. Myra is the source of revelation for him: her attentions are the momentary parting of the veil (50), her murmured and disingenuous comforts a counterfeit “prophecy” (68).

Two of the characters manage some sort of arrangement with the spiritual reality that Grumbil so carefully escapes. Emily, Grumbil realizes, “was native to that crystal world; for her, the steps came comfortingly through the silence and the lovely thing brought with it no terrors” (124). Given that the infinite is fused within her, a result, no doubt, of her own significant suffering, she is allowed some degree of clarity of sight, and of conditional foresight: she sees the hand of “Providence” in Grumbil’s delay,

recognizing, no doubt very accurately, that Grumbil would have eventually tired of her (157). The language of her letter to Grumbil is precisely that of the seer or visionary: “I saw,” she says, “that that accident had been something really arranged by Providence. It was meant to warn me and show me what I ought to do” (157).

She repeats the phrase “I saw” several times in the letter, and despite her naïve acceptance of the lie—for Grumbil had not, in fact, been in an accident, but had chosen once again to succumb to the languid forces of the familiar—we are inclined to accept that she is telling the truth, and that her prophetic vision is the genuine article. Grumbil’s own perception of her letter confirms this: “Would it really have lasted no more than a little while, and ended *as she prophesied*, with an agonising cutting of the tangle?” (159; my emphasis). This possibility is, for Grumbil’s spiritual life, a near fatal stroke: “Wasn’t she perhaps the one, unique being with whom he might have learned to await in quietness the final coming of that lovely terrible thing, from before the sound of whose secret footsteps more than once and oh! ignobly he had fled?” (*idem*). The nail is now quite squarely in Gumbiril’s coffin.

The other character who achieves a degree of harmony with the “lovely and wonderful” spirit is, ironically, Gumbiril’s atheist father. We have already seen him behave, in caricature, at any rate, like a prophet. He does so un-self-consciously, as Huxley prescribes in *Moksha*, and as he will require of the artist in *Time Must Have a Stop*. The calculus of his prophetic function is established early on: on the night Gumbiril Junior returned home after abandoning his teaching post and launching his apocalyptic “new dispensation” (irresponsibly, but given the quality of the essay examinations he was asked to evaluate, understandably: 15), Gumbiril Senior “jumped up excitedly,” and his

“light silky hair floated up with the movement, turned for a moment into a silver aureole, then subsided again” (17). Porteous, his guest for the evening, associates Gumbril Senior quite explicitly with Revelation. Gumbril Senior encourages his friend to hurry and become wealthy so he can build him a marvellous house, and Porteous replies, “my splendid house won’t be built this side of New Jeruslaem and you must go on living a long time yet” (23).

As with the later “revelation” of his work, Gumbril Senior is hieratic and reverential as he shares with his son the fruits of his talent and imagination (24-25). He is a foil for Lypiatt, of course, succeeding where that other man fails, though also unrecognized, because he mediates between worlds, and doesn’t refuse stubbornly to strike out in either one. He is also a foil for his son’s Jonah-like reluctance to attend to the sacred: the father’s one “diversion” from work is to sit on his balcony and attend to the birds that flocked exclusively to “his fourteen plane trees” (16). In their unfathomable routine of chattering songs and profound silences, Gumbril Senior senses “mystery” and “endless depths” (17). He turns from this diversion to “serious matters,” as he considers them, but this is a moment of sacredness, experienced but not subjected to inquiry.

We are reminded of this habitual mystery near the end of the novel, when Gumbril Junior brings Myra home for a brief visit. The routine of the birds is elaborated: they would sleep soundly, then something would provoke them and they would “all start to talk at once” and subside again into quiet. “At these moments Mr. Gumbril would lean forward, would strain his eyes and his ears in the hope of seeing, of hearing something—something significant, explanatory, satisfying. He never did, of course; but that in no way diminished his happiness (204): whatever his views on religion, it would seem that

Gumbril Senior allows room for the quiet and what attends it. His, therefore, is the “transformation act,” though it is less a transformation of his own character than a moment of recognition on his son’s part that he had understood his father very little. Porteous’s son having squandered considerable sums, it appears that Porteous was forced to sell his considerable and very dear library, acquired after years of painstaking sacrifice. With no thought for himself, or for what the act might say about him, Gumbril Senior had undertaken to sell his Wren model and buy back some of the “best” books for his friend.

Gumbril Junior is struck by this, and the narrator recalls his earlier comic nihilism, blasphemously formulated in the opening scene at chapel, where he had bitterly recalled his dead mother’s goodness, and turned his back on spirituality: “Beyond good and evil? Below good and evil? The name of earwig . . .” (207). The meditation goes no further, but we understand that Gumbril Junior has had to reconsider, however briefly, his replacement theology.

As goes its protagonist, so goes the novel. Ultimately, *Antic Hay* doesn’t escape the navel-gazing of the modern sensibility, evinced by the *circus maximus* of the novel’s end, with Grumbil Junior and Mrs. Viveash riding fruitlessly around and around, passing through garish Piccadilly, she insensible to the nature of the world, Grumbil resigned to it, and nearly all the other characters caught up in it as well. But *Antic Hay* also contains the seeds of Huxley’s later work, for orthogonal to the blasphemies and the profanations of prophetic speech and character, in Huxley’s portrayal of prophecy as the province of art and literature, and as unrestricted to the future, something finds its way out of the novel all the time. It comes as a tegumental transposition, except here Huxley isn’t wresting rhetorical elements from scripture, but ironically seeking to restore certain

dimensions to the notion of prophetic vision. In short, the novel is not “cynical,” “God-denying,” or “nihilist,” at least not about religious experience; if anything, it is anti-scientism. It may in its middle be a mad dance of yawning lusts and counter-lusts, but the world of that *Antic Hay* is after all reduced to a vulgar peep show and a motley laboratory, a corrupt and broken sequence of exhibits from within which the exhibits themselves “look” voyeuristically and viscerally at each other in a nauseating complex of gazes on parade. This is the life, and these are the opinions of Huxley’s age, uncovered by a prophetic criticism that also, beneath and behind it all, detects a “force that comes from somewhere else”: “it’s Life, it’s God” (65).

3. Eschatological Thought and the Gift of Prophecy in *Time Must Have a Stop*

But all these men, even La Rouchefoucauld, even Machiavelli, were aware of certain facts which twentieth-century psychologists have chosen to ignore—the fact that human nature is tripartite, consisting of a spirit as well as of a mind and body; the fact that we live on the border-line between two worlds, the temporal and the eternal, the physical-vital-human and the divine; the fact that, though nothing in himself, man is a “nothing surrounded by God, indigent of God, capable of God and filled with God”, if he so desires.

Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy*

A word or two (again) before the analysis: *Time Must Have a Stop* has not been ignored by critics, but it is rarely treated intensively or even alone in articles or books. A search of the major scholarly periodical databases yields at best two handfuls of articles that even discuss the book, and better than half of those are interested in its minimal science, not its theology. Indeed, what little there is tends to focus on two perceived

faults: the “unfortunate” mysticism of the later novels (see Enroth), and the awkwardness of the book’s epilogue, which, it is felt, artificially resolves Sebastian’s *agon*, and strips the novel of its modern anxiety and ambiguity. Even Douglas Dutton, who is a Huxley devotee and a fan of the novel, complains in his introduction to the Dalkey edition I am using here that the “Epilogue feels artificial in how it bequeaths on the protagonist his much needed character metamorphosis (read: character development) and ties together a few frayed strands of the story (which are more than a few, and rather frayed)” (x).

I see the point, and I disagree. If I object to anything in the novel it is to its relative familiarity. We’ve gone at least partway down this road already with Huxley, in *Antic Hay* in particular, and we may not be nostalgic for a return trip. But we mustn’t forget that Huxley was not a novelist first, nor did he consider himself a good one at that. He was a philosopher, and he wrote novels of ideas—some of them very good ideas, and some of them very good novels—and all of them erudite, sharp-witted, and fundamentally profound. He goes back over this territory in the spirit of mimesis, introducing minor fluctuations and adjustments to see what new inroads he might make this time around, and he asks us to suspend our usual ticklish thirst for novelty. On this point, Sybille Bedford quotes two passages from the novel itself: the first where Bruno instructs the young Sebastian about the dangers of writers becoming central to the composition, writing greedily everything they know as a kind of self-portrait, and leaving nothing for God (*Time* 211), and the second passage is where Sebastian gently instructs his father that one can choose to stop listening to the noise of the world, and start listening to “something else” (263). (That sounds very much like Grumbil Junior’s problem with the quiet, but it seems Sebastian has solved that particular problem

himself.) Bedford tells us that the first of these passages “gives us the key to Aldous’s choice about his own writing during the later half of his working life; the choice to withhold some substance or vitality from his writing for the sake of something else” (435).³ The second passage gives us an enigmatic sense of what that something else should be.

In short, the problem of the Epilogue is only a problem if one resists Huxley’s turn to the mystic, the religious sense in and of life, and critical modernism clearly resists that turn. That, if nothing else, suggests that *Time Must Have a Stop* is an ideal addition to this particular study. In light of the resonances between *Time Must Have a Stop* and *Antic Hay*, I propose to proceed at full speed, bringing us as quickly as possible to the forks in the road, and focussing as well as I can on the element of prophecy, though as with *Antic Hay*, prophecy in *Time Must Have a Stop* is mixed in rather intricately with revelation, as it should be, for whether prophets seek to understand the past, present, or future, they seek that understanding through revelation. Again, I hope the little I have to say about the novel here makes some contribution to an understanding of the work and its larger significance, if not an appreciation for its achievements.

It will strike readers familiar only with the title of *Time Must Have a Stop* as odd that I should include it in a chapter ostensibly about apocalyptic prophecy, or at least prophecy. By its title one would think it should have much more to do with eschatology—and it does, though not with the traditional anxiety: here death takes on the character of a passage to be feared but not dreaded, for it is a country already discovered

³ Sebastian also remarks that the same thing goes for religion: “one-hundred-percent revealed religions . . . are too elaborately dogmatic, [so] most of them discover only what they were taught to believe” (247-48).

through narrative consciousness and prophetic teaching. Thus, prophecy, as a way of knowing or representing the reality that underscores and permeates the world—the idea implicit in *Antic Hay* and by now a full-fledged assumption—, is the greater preoccupation of the novel. Its characters, conscious or no, are figures of prophecy by the immanence of their Being, by the hard, unchanging facts of their representation of modes of Being. *Time Must Have a Stop* is a portrait of an encroaching secularization, of various forms of unconvincing atheism, and of a quasi-angelic sensitivity to the wills of others and that of God.

This novel pushes the problem of secular prophecy into the metaphysical realm in a more pronounced if no less ironic way than *Antic Hay*. The novel presents as a portrait of the “call” of its protagonist as a figure of prophetic reflection and redemption, at least within the limits of his circle of acquaintance. Sebastian Barnack is a more serious and more successful version of Theodore Gumbriel, influenced by a number of relations from more clearly distinct philosophical positions: in particular the dual tutelage of his hedonist uncle and the book-selling mystic Bruno. In the final chapter he engages in a pseudo-apocalyptic reflection on the dystopic future of western society, and on his personal failure, portions of which constitute Huxley’s free-standing essay “The Minimum Working Hypotheses” (see *Huxley and God* 11-14). In the novel, those reflections are interrupted by the “real” world of the narrative, and interact with that narrative in ways that suggest the merging of the narrator-character as the enduring figure of prophecy.

Sebastian Barnack, the novel’s protagonist, has much in common with Theodore Gumbriel Junior, though we get him much younger and much less mature than Gumbriel.

Like Gumbriel, Sebastian is given to sympathetic humanitarian reflection, and like Gumbriel he is easily distracted from those moments of perception that get him outside of himself. His is a persistent and quicksilver egoism and a sensitive conscience, and the two make for as much vacillation as was noted in his forerunner. But where Gumbriel would divert himself quite consciously with thoughts of sex or money, Sebastian gets carried away in a youthful and naïvely heroic poetry which only gradually works its way to concupiscence, and even then he maintains enough of a blush that his concupiscence is easily excused. Sebastian is, we learn, quite full of himself.

Take, for instance, the opening scene, where Sebastian has been approached by Daisy Ockham, who sees in him the shade of her son Frankie. He is initially (though only inwardly) peeved at her intrusion on his meditations, and then chagrined at his hostility when he learns that Frankie is dead. He meditates on the “millions and millions” of suffering souls, and on the omnipresence of horror, “even when one happened to be feeling well and happy” (1-3). The weight of “death and agony” to which he succumbs puts him in mind of a poem by Keats, which he then critiques with “compassionate irony” as “pretty careless” (3), and composes one of his own that is inflected with Yeats and very quickly turns paranomastically cheeky: “breasts and buttocks” become “what orbbed resiliences,/The last veil loosened, uneclipse their moons!” (4-6) and so on down puberty’s naughty hill.

This pattern gains strength and speed under Uncle Eustace’s tutelage until it begins to experience disruption under Bruno’s, repeating in either Eustace’s or Sebastian’s mind and mouth severally (Sebastian: 112-13, 156, 227-30; Eustace: 67, 72, 95, 104-5, 148-53, etc.), but they all amount to the same thing: an avenue of escape from

sober, constructive thought and “unitivity” with the light of God. And to some degree nearly all of the characters in *Time Must Have a Stop* experience this resistance: Veronica Thwale reacts against the idea that God might know her secrets (63), John Barnack drowns himself in causes, the Queen Mother indulges her taste for gossip and séances, and so on. Each avoids looking things in the eye (204-6), especially Sebastian, in a general epidemic of solipsism. Each “God-proofs” his or her soul (244), in other words, and very few manage to reverse the process, and in this respect the two novels are indeed very similar, though *Time Must Have a Stop* names the encroaching quiet and *Antic Hay* does not.

Both novels invoke the language of revelation. In *Time Must Have a Stop* the allusions are both imagistic and figurative: Sebastian’s first sexual experience is with a prostitute, and the whole event takes on for him a shrieking and apocalyptic humiliation (22); Eustace experiences a hedonist “revelation” in the smoking of a cigar (105); in a dense passage just prior to his death, Eustace invokes the “time, time and half a time” of the Messiah’s mother’s nourishment (Rev. 12:14—an association made profane by Eustace’s “suckling” of the cigar: 44) and, prophetically, the damnation of Faustus (111); and Daisy Ockham, we learn, considers dead Frankie (no less blasphemously, but less offensively) to have been “the living sacrament, the revelation, the immediate experience of divinity” (170).

Prophecy is similarly profaned—more secularized than profaned, actually, as “baseless” political projection (41), or Weyl’s “oracular” warning about associating with Bruno (162). But unlike references to prophecy in *Antic Hay*, the majority of references to prophecy here have some basis in the larger meaning of the text. That is, even under

the auspices of a dramatic irony, these insights, pronouncements, and warnings turn out to be true in some way. For instance, Sebastian grapples with the question of inspiration even before he becomes aware of its relevance to his own experience. He composes on the updraft of observation or illumination, and inevitably, as he begins to appreciate the text and wish to shape it to his taste, falls onto a downdraft that empties the poem of its potential. But the original inspiration has substance, and Sebastian experiences it as a revelation or a revelatory perception of something already out there. He perceives, for instance, that a certain “light and energy” accompany his best ideas (4), and remarks to Eustace that “things are lighted from the bottom” (95). A few moments later, the “essential form and animating spirit” of a poem he means to write comes to him, and “[f]or a moment he knew it perfectly, his unwritten poem—and the knowledge filled him with an extraordinary happiness” (95; see also 131).

This is, of course, a central conceit in the novel, and it makes of Sebastian a poet-prophet, especially as he learns to make room for inspiration throughout the whole process, and not just in the inceptive moment of vision. Later, Bruno and Barnack both remark that the danger of a poetic talent, God-given, is that it becomes its own idol, giving rise to narcissistic self-reflexiveness, and drawing the gaze away from the face of God to one’s own face in a mirror. It can never mean beyond the self that way, and the poets who endure (except for those of massive technical virtuosity or important historical relevance—Dante and some of Milton, for instance) are those who keep their gazes averted from their own navels, so to speak. The poet—erudite, articulate—is less likely than the prophet to render the substance in purity, uncontaminated by his, or his

audience's, conception of what is beautiful, or by his perceived or wrested "authority" (86). The poet wishes to be the maker, not just the mediator.

Other characters participate in this prophetic sensibility as well, even if only by association: John Barnack, Sebastian's father, is spoken of by everyone but Sebastian and Eustace in nearly reverential terms, as though he were a prophet revered in his own country, looking ahead to an apothecic transformation (32). Eustace associates him, ironically, with the Baptist (68); Professor Cacciaguida calls John's austere taste "positively prophetic! . . . A fragment of the rational and hygienic future" (30), and Sebastian himself thinks of the breaks in his father's "impassivity" as "pronouncement[s], as though from Sinai" (29). Appropriately, John is allowed a prophecy—of a market collapse, which he predicts "with manifest satisfaction" (48), and which is borne out to the tragic disadvantage of his sister's family.

Eustace is also allowed a certain prophetic tendency, though his "talent" tends more to the work of prophetic criticism that must ultimately fall short because it isn't circumspect enough to factor in his own shortcomings. For instance, he predicts, without knowing it, his own death (48), and in a larger sense he serves as a kind of warning to Sebastian, who might well follow in his footsteps if he isn't careful: the young Eustace is recalled by his sister in terms very similar to the descriptions of Sebastian that we get early on (33). In death, however, and more specifically in theomachic agonies, Eustace experiences three visions of the future. The first of these is of Veronica Thwale(-De Vries) entertaining a young soldier on her divan (153), whom we assume to be Sebastian, but who goes unrecognized by Eustace. In any event, the only effect of this vision is to provide Eustace a handgrip of sorts in his efforts to escape the "austerely and menacingly

beautiful” light that wishes to subsume him (153). The second vision affects him slightly more: Eustace sees the brutal murder of his nephew Jim Poulshot—“the vacant pigeonhole which was so obviously destined to contain the moderately successful stockbroker of 1949”—at the hands, or rather the booted feet and drawn bayonets, of Japanese soldiers. He experiences “horror, pity, indignation” but also a “blast of frantic laughter” at his own little joke. It is the laughter that persists, and the brutality of Eustace’s stubborn refusal to give up his hedonistic individualism cancels out any salutary, cathartic effects of the vision: again, even Jim’s poor, mangled face is a handhold in the physical world.

In the final vision, preceded by an anticipatory apperception that the Weyls were “enormously significant” to him, even “epoch-making” (219), what is left of Eustace comes to understand that because he doesn’t wish to be deified in unitivity with the light, he can be re-born as the Weyls’ child. But before he makes his final choice, he “knew himself remembering events that had not yet taken place,” and he sees his mother’s death, and his own grief (223): more than this, he recognizes the “agony of that grief and terror” as his own (224). And he chooses.

The broader significance of this chain of visions, apart from elaborating an idea of the after-life, and apart from confirming that Eustace belongs quite squarely to the race of men depicted in *Antic Hay*, is to render the notion that time is a function of mortality only: an idea that Sebastian will later elaborate. Eustace experiences the visions as memories of things that haven’t happened, and Sebastian notes that the “life of the spirit is life out of time, life in its essence and eternal principle” (237), whatever that essence decides to be. Ultimately, though, the logic of prophecy in *Time Must Have a Stop* is

rooted in the intersection of the infinite and finite worlds: prophecy in its *bona fide* form is a kind of irruption, a grace of perception or vision, and is therefore of a piece with revelation itself.

Bruno is, of course, the legitimate seer in the novel: Elijah to Sebastian's Elisha. He is a seer, endowed with penetrative, prophetic vision that is capable of prophetic criticism, but, accompanied by a profound humility, tends instead to a constructive, hopeful kind of persistence in guiding or willing his protégé to enlightenment. He senses poverty of spirit and body (89-90), sees through falsehood (202-3, 207), patiently endures the condescension of people like Eustace and Sebastian who dismiss his spirituality as quaint (199), but speaks very directly and powerfully against the nihilism (91) and hack-credulity of occultic practice (201). He is capable of profound self-sacrifice and even profounder forgiveness, and of "enormous compassion" for those who fail to see, as he does, the cosmic conflict that rages all around: Bruno was like a "living crystal"—a seerstone into the unnamed quiet of *Antic Hay*, one of a "whole galaxy of awarenesses . . . possibilities that had actually been realized" (145), but who lives tranquilly in the middle of the mad dance (87). He is, in short, a disquieting consciousness in the novel (209), and perhaps the fundamental reason *Time Must Have a Stop* poses such difficulty for critical modernism, because to accept the genuineness of his vocation is to accept that there are more things in heaven and in earth than are dreamed of in our philosophy: for dreams are now impossible—"no dream, no religion, no morality" (*Antic Hay* 39-40).

I have said very little about the eschatological framework of the novel, but all of the usual suspects are on parade here, as in *Antic Hay* and a host of other modern novels: death, entropy, futility, nihilism, solipsism, and so on. What changes here is that the

emphasis is not on the negative eschatology, not on anxiety, but on hope: and more especially on how prophetic insight serves to break the hold of a vacuous eschatological despair. In the closing pages of the novel, Sebastian reviews a notation in one of his notebooks: a commentary on the lines from Henry IV Part I, where Henry Percy, or “Hotspur,” “casually summarizes an epistemology, an ethic and a metaphysic” (249):

But thought’s the slave of life, and life’s time’s fool,
And time, that takes survey of all the world,
Must have a stop.⁴

Here is Sebastian’s gloss:

. . . time must have a stop. And not only *must*, as an ethical imperative and an eschatological hope, but also *does* have a stop, in the indicative tense, as a matter of brute experience. It is only by taking the fact of eternity into account that we can deliver thought from its slavery to life. And it is only by deliberately paying our attention and our primary allegiance to eternity that we can prevent time from turning our lives into pointless or diabolic foolery. The divine Ground [God] is a timeless reality. Seek it first, and all the rest—everything from an adequate interpretation of life to a release from compulsory self-destruction—will be added. (251)

This is a striking statement, considering our subject here, and it is important to note that it is preceded by a wartime meditation on the terrible sacrifice of human lives: in the context of Huxley’s oeuvre, as a prophetic dictum this statement breaks through the

⁴ The first line of the quotation is a bit suspect: it should read “But thoughts, the slaves of life, and life, time’s fool,/And time, that takes survey of all the world,/Must have a stop” (V.4.80-82), which changes things considerably: thought, life, and time are co-subjects in that formulation, so all “must have a stop,” and not by merely by association. The rest of the speech is also significant: “. . . O, I could prophesy,/But that the earthy and cold hand of death/Lies on my tongue. No, Percy, thou art dust,/And food for—[worms]” (V.4.82-85).

despair of a fixedly eschatological view, and restores to the death of time the urgency of an eternal act, and invokes the final hope of Revelation itself: *parousia*, death, and judgment are not intended in scripture to make us afraid, but rather to hold out the promise of release from the corruption and death and misery that seem always to attend human societies that cannot see past the ends of their own lusts. Eustace needed fear “compulsory self-destruction” only because he had based his identity entirely on things that could only be temporary: lusts, pleasures, sensations—even pain. He had exalted the flesh over everything else, and in consequence he was unable to turn away from it. Bruno, in contrast (and to borrow Golding’s phrase from *Pincher Martin*), “died into the light,” arms stretched wide, and entered into it a whole person. For Huxley’s enlightened few, that image eclipses all else.

Asked in an interview about Huxley’s influence on his own work, William Golding replied,

I took him very neat, you know. I was fascinated by him. And he was, I think superb—but *clever*; it was cleverness raised to a very high power indeed. Never what Lawrence can sometimes produce—never that mantic, inspired . . . I don’t think Huxley was even inspired; almost too clear sighted to be inspired. (qtd. in Baker 316)

Perhaps this signals a judgment on Golding’s part that Huxley didn’t leave enough unsaid, that his “search for an acceptable religious faith” (Baker 316) was stymied by the acuity of his critical vision, by his immense talent for constructing patterns and webs of allusions, even in what feels to many Huxley readers to be the stilted structure of *Time Must Have a Stop*. And perhaps Golding is right: Golding himself preferred to leave so

CHAPTER VI

PROPHECY AND REVELATION:

VISIBLE DARKNESS AND GOLDING'S PSYCHOLOGY OF SPIRIT

Golding employs all three of the essential elements of apocalypse—eschatology, prophecy, and revelation—in his oeuvre, and his relatively orthodox position in relation to Christian theology distinguishes him from many of his modern and postmodern predecessors and peers, and places him in this second stream alongside Waugh, Huxley, Jones, and Greene. Or better, his relative orthodoxy distinguishes Golding from other writers of the century as these have been constructed critically, even the figures I have just mentioned, in part because Golding unabashedly writes the metaphysical into his work. The primary difficulty with Golding is thus that he has made it impossible to read him as anything but a straight-faced “believer,” though, as Leon Surette observes, “many of his early critics . . . tried all sorts of dodges to evade the literal sense” of the numinous

(206)¹ as “something powerful and dangerous[, a notion] with which few ‘humanistic’ readers are comfortable” (209). Surette plays down this difference, pointing with considerable erudition to a number of other writers of the twentieth century—including Joyce, Pound, Beckett, Woolf, Lawrence, and Forster—who exhibited a “‘credulous interest’ in the numinous” (210-11). In his view, it is not Golding’s interest in an after-life or parallel existence that distinguishes him, but his arguably “Judaeo-Christian” morality (213), and more specifically that he assigned “a clear moral function to the noumenal” (idem). This is a reasonable assertion.

What the specific content of Golding’s beliefs might be is another matter. Indeed, “[e]very Golding novel is textually rich, informed by more than a set of scriptural glosses would imply” (Clews 319). Golding’s orthodoxy is only relative, making Golding something of a free agent, and allowing him to treat apocalypse apologetically across a range of historical and imaginative contexts without being tied to the particular doctrines of any one sect. Surette observes, “Golding cannot tell us what he believes, for he is not a scholiast or even an apostle. He is a prophet. He can tell us about his experience—usually through allegory, myth, or fable—but he cannot, *ex hypothesi*, convey his ‘knowledge’” (213-14). It would indeed seem that Golding fits nicely into the tradition of “poet-prophets,” from Dante through Orwell and Huxley; certainly he owes a debt to Dante and Huxley (see Baker 315), and perhaps to Blake.

Yet Golding distances himself from the egoism essential to that vocation which inflects the rhetorical element most often borrowed from apocalypse. He did not consider

¹ James R. Baker wonders if it wasn’t the “gloomy allegory,” an anti-humanist pessimism about the human capacity for saving itself, of *Lord of the Flies* that offended Golding’s early readers and coloured their perceptions of the rest of his work (311-13). This is a naïve assertion: Golding’s religious sensibility would push more buttons than a dystopic cynicism, especially post-Hiroshima.

himself to be a prophet even in the secular or literary senses. He was more interested in the psychology of prophetic figures than in prophesying, and in the experience of revelation—or more precisely what E. M. Forster called its “manner” rather than its “matter”—than in claiming to have had a vision.

As a result, though neither prophetic nor revelatory in a theological sense, Golding’s fiction touches on something fundamental to the speaking—and hearing—of prophecy. I have in mind part of Forster’s anatomy of prophetic fiction. He said that in addition to its ability to “reach back” into the throbbing pulse of human life, “prophetic fiction”

demands humility and the absence of the sense of humour. . . . It is spasmodically realistic. And it gives the sensation of a song or sound. It is unlike fantasy because its face is towards unity, whereas fantasy glances about. Its confusion is incidental, whereas fantasy’s is fundamental. . . . Also the prophet . . . is in a remoter emotional state [than the fantasist] while he composes. Not many novelists have this aspect. (136)

Not many, indeed. Lewis and Huxley are out on the first two counts alone; Lewis by the open sarcasm and austerity of his ironic view of modern man, and Huxley by his consciousness of the authority of his social criticism and prophetic status, even in his earlier fiction. For his part, Golding does write with a certain humour. Portions of *The Spire*, for example, enjoy the moral, psychological, and physical frailty of its protagonist, especially in his monastic ministrations. Christopher “Pincher” Martin, too, is shown to be ridiculous in the assertion of his will against the obvious ministration of grace, but is considered by narrator and God worth the effort all the same. Even *Darkness Visible*, a decidedly sobering and earnest novel, has its moments of idiomatic and stylistic play. Yet

while Golding paints his characters with a Dickensian brush, he does so with the wise and charitable humour of a mature and humane mind and heart, never casting stones or aspersions, preferring to shed light on what are assuredly, and ubiquitously human, spiritual traits.

By “spasmodically realistic,” Forster probably meant that prophetic fiction refrains from giving too much importance to realism in art; that is, to the external realities of action and dialogue—and the confusion that results is “incidental” and we may also say “fundamental” to it. Golding’s fiction is blessed with a unique elasticity of purpose and flexibility of focus. While never out of control, he is willing to move along with the characters and their stories in spasms of consciousness and action, rather than force the characters to advance his story in a particular direction. And this natural, “spasmodic” motion, coupled with the unity of the narrative structures of his texts, gives rise to a natural confusion, both of meaning and sound. Put simply, the language and structures of Golding’s fiction come as near to song as anything in prose, not because his prose is like poetry, but because it drives through the intellectual and into the emotional and spiritual center of his characters and readers alike. Golding gives himself and his reader over to the full experience of his characters, and we lose sight and sense of him in the mediation. For Golding, and for the reader, what matters in the moment of prophetic revelation is what Ricoeur calls “manifestation,” not “proclamation” (*Figuring the Sacred* 17): something akin to Forster’s “manner” over “matter.”

Golding imbues his work with a sense of the importance of human contact with the divine, even in humanity’s ugliest moments. Rather than reaching into the future himself, and thus placing himself in a tradition of supposed poet-prophets who proclaim

truths, Golding employs prophetic figures in an attempt to sort out the existential and spiritual logics or manners of prophecy and revelation. As Dominic Manganiello once suggested to me, Golding

serves as a kind of bridge from the totally secular writer who nevertheless is dependent on religious or biblical concepts to convey his vision of apocalypse to the type of writer who acknowledges not only the power of this religious tradition in the past but also sees it as providing a vital link to understanding the present. (e-mail)

Golding treats immanent “Presence” as the numinous and meaningful manifestation of God in and to the individual, often at extremity (see Granofsky; Clews 318; Tebbutt 47) and in the between spaces where salvation is imminent but unseen and therefore faith is tested (Crompton 198), but with universal implications, thus re-establishing revelation as a significant “apocalyptic” experience: and of course that is precisely what revelation is.

1. Forewords: Nihilism and the Necessity of Revelation

In his treatment of the subject, Fiddes posits revelation as a “fuller presence,” but seems incapable of escaping the morass of thinkers with whom he engages. The bulk of his discussion is a response to a variety of thinkers—Derrida, Altizer, Kristeva, and Moltmann—and through them a range of concepts accounting for the interaction between God and the world. Fiddes explains *kenosis*, the *khora*, *zimsun*, and a host of other philo-theological constructs worthy of his attentions in an attempt to demonstrate that what motivates these other thinkers is a very modern concern with the centrality and continuing identity of the self. The crux seems very much an unwillingness to give over personal identity in a naked acknowledgement of God’s total difference from ourselves.

Fiddes considers these unnecessary concerns. Most helpfully, he connects revelation and millennium in the context of eschatology, viewing the *eschaton* in positive terms as not the last thing absolutely, but the last thing before God enters into and “heals” time once and for all (248). Judgment and resurrection are thus for Fiddes the last things that we can project in the context of a time-bound imagination (259). After that, all bets are off.

Insofar as it constitutes an epistemology, the theology of the end and of revelation is certainly complex, and certainly fascinating, but here it is not required to engage with this or that doctrine, this or that philosophical tradition, so much as to demonstrate that some of the fictions of the British twentieth century themselves engage with eschatology, prophecy, and revelation as scriptural and theological concepts, and also as intensely personal experiences, and the personality of such experience is perhaps the most intriguing in this critical context since it speaks to the heart of modernist apocalypse as itself personal. Theological reflection may help sharpen our critique of these texts insofar as the texts themselves make use of theology and theosophy, but we should not forget that theology and theosophy are at best human ways of talking and thinking about God, and that even where these grow out of a tradition of prophetic or scriptural teaching, or are rooted in forceful spiritual experience or awareness, they are inevitably articulations in human language of things that live, if indeed they do, over and above and therefore outside our comprehension to some degree.

After all, Revelation is, theologically, the voluntary *self*-disclosure of God, and not the discovery of God by human agency. Revelation is related to prophecy in that it must be inspired and willed and actualized by God, and be a revelation of the divine in some sense: of the personal being of God, or of a divinely ordered future, for instance. It

is always, though, the revelation of God to man, and sometimes, by God's agency or mediation, of man to himself. In a secularized version, it might retain some of its exteriority in the person of the author, who embodies a message in the features of prose, and leads his characters and audience alike to some truth or other of his own. In openly apologetic versions, the revelation is typically treated as already known and delimited substantively, though God himself is typically treated as "impossible impossibility" (Fiddes 239)—that is, as an ineffable mystery—so that the emphasis is nearly always on the matter and proclamation. In other words, apologetic fictions emphasize semiotic interpretation or articulation of the significance of theophanic experience, and not experience itself.

Golding certainly treats these issues: in the revelation of God to Pincher Martin, for instance, or that gritty self-revelation which leads to an "apocalyptic" (rather "demonic") psychological break for his island boys, but which also invites other characters (Pincher Martin, Jocelin, Pedigree, and Arieka) into humble society with God. But Golding's primary concern is ontological, not theological: he imagines and describes divine and demonic manifestations in a variety of ways chiefly in order to imagine and describe possible human responses to these experiences. And on this matter Fiddes' lengthy meditation finds satisfaction:

It seems that the 'flickering presence' of what lies beyond *our* network of linguistic signs in postmodern thinkers such as Derrida and Kristeva offers more hope in the void than the 'total presence' of Altizer's apocalypse The task for a Christian eschatology which maintains hope in a future new creation is thus not only to name the veiled presence as God, and to show that this kind of presence does not oppress or destroy the endless creativity of the inscription of

signs or ‘writing’. Altizer shows us that the challenge is also to name an eternity which is *full* of the presence of God while not being thereby an empty void in which all otherness of persons must vanish away. (250)

Similarly, the point for Golding is not to worry over possible objections to the mechanics of the experiences he presents, but to shift the ground in every case and thus make intercourse between the finite human world—the individual personality, more precisely—and the infinite world the central fact or doctrine. This emphasis, more than the esoteric concerns of theologians and philosophers, speaks to the fundamental *agon* of modernism. As Arieka, the Pythia who is also the narrator and “author” of *The Double Tongue*, puts it: “We moderns? We had made a play of [religion], with scenery and a cast, with triviality, so that it became much as its new surrounds were. All that glitters was gold, except the words” (97). What Golding was constantly after was revelation as a moment of ontological “*perichoresis*”—the “inter-penetration of divine and cosmic attributes” (Fiddes 252) as it plays out in the personal, not necessarily the universal.

In his reflection on the importance of the “end” for modernism, Josef Pieper argues that nihilism—and, we might add, the modern condition Lukács laments—is at heart not a natural state, but a realized one, the result of a “pattern of a human operation, or at least of human wishing, or longing” (59). We know that for the moderns—or at least for critical modernism—this longing was of two kinds: for the young Lukács, and in radical aesthetic projects like Vorticism, it could find expression as a longing for a “new world;” however, it was more likely to be expressed as a longing for the old world via a georgic or pastoral nostalgia as an incomplete or inverted form of apocalyptic desire.²

² Fiddes offers a third alternative: “true Christian desire is rooted not in lack or retrospection, but in hope for a future which is anticipated in the present” (221).

What Pieper points to is the more insidious form of that longing—the longing for the “demonic” (again, in Frye’s sense). He suggests that while Nietzsche could not annihilate the phenomenological reality of God’s work and creation, he could deny belief in God’s existence, and thus His authorship of the world and time, and could therefore alter his own and others’ perceptions of that reality. In this sense, then, Pieper sees Nietzschean nihilism as a will-to-nothingness in relation to God’s being, a choosing of the limits of reality and a refusal to admit anything beyond them: less Protean or Icarian than absurdly Faustian. Indeed, if Nietzsche’s obituary for God holds true as a basic assumption for the modern imagination, and if that assumption is wrong, then critical modernism is the fulfilment of the Faustian tragedy on a generational scale.

The Faustus analogy is worthy of comment here, both as a portrait of skeptical modernism and as it pertains to myth as theological and literary structure. Faustus sought to escape the bounds of his universe by seeking what was opposite to God as the source of a power equal to God’s, and in this way to become God-like. Yet he was ultimately unable to move beyond God’s universe and power because he restricted his range and space of motion to a mere subset of God’s creation and to the diminutive opposite of His power. Similarly, the nihilist seeks to overcome the “limits” of a theological universe by deifying nothingness and seeking to make it come about, but as Pieper argues, *annihilatio* is exclusively the domain and prerogative of the Creator (59-60), and in this respect the nihilist is merely guilty of an appalling but resoundingly Judeo-Christian hubris. This is equally true of any person who seeks to set the terms of his or her own righteousness or redemption, for, as Jauss argues,

to the degree that man strives toward autonomy as his goal and begins to ground his true self in his own individuality instead of seeking it in the alien “Thou” of

his creator, the aesthetic experience takes hold of the predicates of divine identity and turns them into norms of a self-experience. . . . (142)

That final clause envisions the modern project as an ontological circularity: the transposition of divine character and activity into the self through a secularizing aesthetic—a kind of reverse apotheosis or anthropomorphism. Jauss' statement refers specifically to the claims of modern autobiography, but many modern fictions are apropos.

For Bakhtin, and for Pieper and Jauss after him,³ any attempt at self-definition without God must of necessity be artificial because such a definition is ontologically vacuous: the apparently “autonomous” act is inauthentic and incomplete, swallowed up in a greater reality that moves beyond, around, and within the self, and of which that act is a pitiful reflection or paradoxical rejection. In such cases, the protagonist seeks to deny the heroic and the divine within himself, making meaningful service and life impossible.⁴ Huxley brings such characters into contact with their opposite numbers, or he situates the conflict between the theomachic impulses and theophanic experiences internally in his

³ Fiddes sees something similar at work in the later Derrida (see Fiddes 238-39), with the proviso alluded to earlier: that “all reference to a self must happen by way of detour through an other, and so presupposes an original self-effacement” (238).

⁴ The Whisky Priest, for example, the protagonist of Greene's stunning *The Power and the Glory* (1940), defines himself in the negative sense *before* his redemptive experience of God; his Jonah-like reluctance to serve God in the community is born of self-loathing precedent to rather than constitutive of real repentance (see Bakhtin, “Author and Hero” 146). Waugh's Charles Ryder (*Brideshead Revisited*: 1945) works similarly, though in this case it is cultural reason and a fundamental humanist egoism, not shame per se, that keep the protagonist from union with God (see below). In both of these stories, God pursues the protagonist with varying degrees of aggression, and the protagonists resist to the last.

We might also think productively of Joyce's Stephen Dedalus, a martyr to an elusive aesthetic autonomy, who places his faith in a new Poetry, but who fails to create it (except, perhaps, in the career of Joyce). Yet even here, the new idea can only be developed in opposition to the old one. Instead of establishing a new basis for a new faith, a new vision that would replace the old without reference to it, Joyce must seek to evangelize his audience by undermining faith and tradition in the limited experience of his characters. Joyce's atheism is a reaction to belief in God, a theomachic disavowal, and not a self-definition independent of that belief.

most tortured protagonists. For his part, Golding allows the authenticity of spiritual experience and knowledge to remain questionable, as it often is in life, at least to the extrinsic, “objective” gaze.

Nonetheless, Lukács’ plaintive view of the novel as, you will recall, the “epic of a world that has been abandoned by God” allows for an illuminating portrait of the modern imagination if it holds true (88). He says that the “content of the novel is the story of the soul that goes to find itself, that seeks adventures in order to be proved and tested by them, and, by proving itself, to find its own essence” (89). So far this seems very like an attempt to define one’s own limits, and then to test and prove those limits against experience as the “predicates of divine identity” (Jauss 149). What makes the protagonist of the novel interesting to Lukács, however, derives only from an unnecessary but entirely natural passivity. “Biological and sociological life has a profound tendency to remain within its own immanence,” he argues, and passivity is what “characterises the hero’s relationship to his soul and to the outside world [having] a specific psychological and sociological nature and represents a distinct type in the structural possibilities of the novel” (89-90).

Action that comes out of or in spite of this natural passivity is for Lukács demonic in the sense that it is without reason and inexplicable by reason, suggestive of an extrinsic or profoundly intrinsic possession against which the “God-forsakenness of the world reveals itself as a lack of substance, as an irrational mixture of density and permeability” (90). Blessed—or cursed—with sudden vision, and intoxicated by the illusory knowability of the human landscape in which he lives (perhaps even of the divine landscape that lies behind it—Lukács does not clarify which), the modern protagonist

finds that new permeability “suddenly transformed into a glass wall against which [he tries to] beat in vain, . . . incapable of breaking through, incapable of understanding that the way is barred” (90).

The revelation made possible by Lukács’ hero is an appalling one, both because the hero himself is apparently insensible to it, and because the motive for and means of the revelation is located outside the character, but not in a positive ground. His overreacher “falls prey to the demon,” a condition more pitiful even than Faustus’ who, while deluded about his power and the possibility of salvation, is nonetheless aware that he has *chosen* demonic association in the “Real” mythic sense,⁵ in his case literally, and not merely as a function of desire. In order to explain this, Lukács turns from character to author, the real mystic and sage, and therefore the real hero of the novel:

The writer’s irony is a negative mysticism to be found in times without a god. It is an attitude of *docta ignorantia* towards meaning, a portrayal of the kindly and malicious workings of the demons, a refusal to comprehend more than the mere fact of these workings; and in it there is the deep certainty, expressible only by form-giving, that through not-desiring-to-know and not-being-able-to-know he has truly encountered, glimpsed and grasped the ultimate, true substance, the present, non-existent God. This is why irony is the objectivity of the novel. (90)

In this formulation, Lukács seems to want to bring about for the novel the absoluteness of the philosophical framework of the epic, for he asserts that God is not an ineffable, but real, absent presence in the modern novel—or rather, a present absence, and knowable as such. Altizer would be positively giddy about this, but probably without cause. I think

⁵ It is the straight-faced mythological element in the Faust story that makes it a useful analogue for the modern “demonology”—the opposite or counterfeit of apocalyptic desire—that Lukács evokes here.

Lukács imagines a human revelation in modernity: God is not, and therefore that is what God *is*. We have been abandoned by a futile belief in a false concept, in other words. This is nihilism indeed, and more likely to please Kermode and Childs than Altizer or Fiddes.

For his part, Bakhtin was no *naïf*. He recognized the human capacity for resisting definition in relation to “transgredient,” “extrinsic” factors, even in the context of confessional genres, but as a refusal that originates in authorial or character consciousness—and thus veils and disables the mind—not as an epiphanic revelation. “An element of theomachy and anthropomachy,” he observed, “is possible in confessional self-accounting, that is, the refusal to accept a possible judgment by God or by man, and as a result tones of resentment, distrust, cynicism, irony, defiance appear” (“Author and Hero” 146). These elements are the “result of despair,” however, and “preclude aesthetic concord”—in this case, the wholeness of the Hero of the confessional work. Bakhtin saw them at work most explicitly in Dostoevsky’s novels,⁶ but they are certainly familiar to us: in modern literature despair often does result in “tones of resentment, distrust, cynicism, irony, [and] defiance” and, ultimately, in a fractured self. Bakhtin continues: “What is also possible is the infinite self-revocation of repentance . . . analogous to the hatred one may feel toward possession by the mirrored image of

⁶ And yet Dostoevsky doesn’t always leave us gasping for hope. In *Crime and Punishment*, for instance, Dostoevsky bridges the gap between theological sensibility and modern realism by leaving Raskolnikov awash in the after-effects of his Nietzschean nightmare, hopeful for his peace and happiness in a “new unknown life” and sober about the “great striving [and] suffering” that is to come (629). His is a more “realistic” vision of man’s potential in a Christian universe. Like Wilde, Dostoevsky limits the theological elements of his novel—a metaphysics of peripheral Presence and the eventual conversion of the protagonist from rebellion to acquiescence and rest in the influence and will of that Presence—to a series of associations and implications. He will not bring us further than this, of course. Having brought Raskolnikov out of the disorder of his mind to a knowledge of love, to a great feeling for the first time in his life (628), Dostoevsky is content to let him rest and consider, leaving full repentance—and redemption—for the untold “new story” (629). Raskolnikov may be the exception.

oneself" (146). We might think of the disembodied Eustace Barnack, who refuses salvation because it means giving up certain habits of mind, and certain elements of self-perception, choosing instead a re-birth even though he is shown that his new life will be fraught with agonies. In this chapter we will consider Golding's *Pincher Martin* as our chief example of theomachy, though his refusal of Grace ends more darkly and futilely.

Where Bakhtin's impossible autonomous individual at least exhibits a kind of humanism which rejects both poles of the theological universe through disbelief, Lukács' protagonist, like Faustus and Nietzsche, fails to account for himself without the aid of a transgredient force or ground: in this case the demonic. The demonic in Lukács' concept apparently serves as a catalyst for the dissolution of the world, replacing Christian *mysterium* as a non-motive and non-reason. It goes unexplained otherwise, and so fails to account for its own status as an "other" external to human experience, or as a preferable substitute to God in the creative or wilful act. It may even be that Lukács intended "demonic" only metaphorically to refer to the authorial intention that shapes the novel, opposed to the "divine" that the modern hero discovers does not exist. That is, under the weight of conventional critical modernism, it is tempting to suggest that Lukács, drawing on the same classicism, means "demonic" in the way Frye would define it later: as a "metaphorical identification" of the "undesirable" opposed to the "apocalyptic" form of the "desirable"—without, of course, any concern for questions of reality (139).

Yet we cannot forget that, even for Frye, the demonic as a formal framework operates at the level of undisplaced myth, and as a modal element—via "demonic imagery"—demonic expression is "appropriate" to the "ironic mode in the late phase in which it returns to myth" (Frye 151). Whatever his intention, then, Lukács' use of the

term affirms a preternatural influence acting on the hero, even if that influence is “merely” mythological and not “actual.” Indeed, by ascribing an orgiastic sense to the activity of the modern protagonist, and by calling him possessed, Lukács eliminates the free will of the human entirely. The author himself forces that possession and the subsequent revelation of the world’s “true” nature: his is the only choice, his are the limits of awareness of the novel, and they disallow any truth but what he has imagined within the confines of his “learned ignorance.” The author will allow neither the protagonist, nor the reader, nor himself any knowledge but the reality of the non-existence of God: the god against which he paradoxically invites self-definition, and around which he constructs self-experience. Lukács seeks, it seems, to aestheticize the very wilful ignorance that damned Faustus and undermined the humanist potential of his earliest desires. And by aestheticizing that ignorance—indeed, by making the revelation of that ignorance the object and end of fiction in the modern age—he relegates both protagonist and author to the hell of a divided self.⁷

To imply that such knowledge is desirable, and to call the double irony of an insensible protagonist and a vanished god “objectivity,” perceptual or grammatical, is to belie the sense behind Lukács’ earlier formulation that the modern age was “abandoned” by God. This sentiment, more than his concept of the novelized hero, reveals the motive behind what Lukács calls the “writer’s irony.” In this sense the writer associates the

⁷ The kind of demonic or authorial possession I have been talking about is typified in Wilde’s *Dorian Gray*, who makes a Faustian bargain without referent, the “magic” or power of which is never explicitly revealed (25-26), except in its connection to the Faust tradition and, by implication, in Basil Hallward’s entreaty to repentance (133-37). *Dorian Gray* seeks to compound the insult of a rejection of his dependence on God and subjection to the natural limits of mortality by adding injury via sins of the flesh, sins against nature, and sins of hubris. All of these things are done, not to discover that there is no god, but to create a “truth” independent of God’s reality, and therefore win out over the signs of His presence.

conclusions of his philosophical inheritance—that “God is dead,” or at least absent—with God Himself, and seeks to justify that belief by making his character prove himself or seek adventure in sin and survive, he supposes, intact.

Golding is obviously not alone in exploring the soteriological aspects of prophetic insight and the revelatory *ontos*, but he does it devilishly well, and with an equally devilish complexity of style, so I will briefly summarize the final direction of his *oeuvre* in simpler terms than are typical in Golding’s own idiom, and that may lend us a degree of clarity as we move along. Golding’s work assumes and examines two doctrines or elements of the soul’s experience of God: 1) the worth of the individual to God, even in His superior power and wisdom; and 2) the working of Divine patience precisely in the locus of man’s *potential* being. Those elements inform the whole of this “second stream,” but not necessarily in fantastic or otherworldly terms.⁸ As in Huxley’s Brunian teaching,

⁸ These elements are especially prominently in Evelyn Waugh’s *Brideshead Revisited*. Disorder in *Brideshead* is caught up instead in the milieu and themes of the novel, working within a backdrop of a very modern eschatology: the decline and collapse of values, traditions, and relations. As a modern man, Charles Ryder falls in love at first with the Arcadian pleasures of the aristocratic ideal, and ultimately and altogether with the Marchmains, just at the point where the social and familial systems in which both operate are disintegrating. Ryder’s devotion to Sebastian and Julia borders on obsession, and in this sense he seems a composite of Pincher Martin and Raskolnikov: he exercises an unbending will to love which pollutes his relationships, and manifests a naivety and delusion about the nature and object of his affections. It is precisely the deterioration of the values and relationships—the human experiences—in which he invests himself that allows space for the growth of his awareness of a very different Presence, one that endures beyond the degeneration of social systems and human love.

In what is arguably the most theo-centric passage of *Brideshead Revisited*, Waugh’s Ryder reflects on the irony of the condition of the Marchmain estate—of Brideshead in its decline as the site of this revelation, abused now by men ignorant of its history and of its intimacy with a larger story, ruined in its uses by decay and delinquency:

Something quite remote from anything the builders intended has come out of their work, and out of the fierce little human tragedy in which I played; . . . a small red flame [that] could not have been lit but for the builders and the tragedians, and there I found it this morning, burning anew among the old stones.
(Waugh 351)

or Sebastian's "Minimum Working Hypothesis," given the humility requisite to this kind of revelation, we discover the individual's beauty as a creature of God, and his potential for good, marking his "unimportance in the world of the senses [and] his enormous importance in another world" (Greene, *Collected Essays* 115).

In the novels I treat below, Golding rounds on just such propositions and on their alternatives—acceptance of and acquiescence to those signs—and finds them equally fascinating and rich in fictive potential.

2. Dark Centres: Theomachy and Delusion in *Pincher Martin* and *The Spire*

In *Pincher Martin*, William Golding examines the futility of Lukács' doctrine of ignorance by showing it for the hell it must be, and by underscoring its systematic and stubborn nature, even in the glaring light of God's presence and grace. His Dorianesque Christopher "Pincher" Martin is very much a bee buzzing against a windowpane (Lukács 90), ignorant of the fact that the pane is in this case of his own construction. The narrative is characterized by a readerly share in the limits of Martin's sense and vision nearly throughout. Perception is crowded with memories projected like slides or film trailers so that the patterns of nature dissolve and re-form as images and patterns from Martin's deep consciousness and vice versa (26). Memories are in turn shrouded by the buffer and blur of time and distance and madness, limited to persons and bodies, with only a very few objects in the setting visually clarified. When Martin finds himself on the rock in the

In this way, Waugh treats the myth of decline and discovers in it the revelation of a dual inclination: man to God, God to man. As a Christian subject, Ryder experiences himself in Augustinian terms as "a particle of [God's] creation" and a "mere trace of that most profound unity" dependent on "the capacity of its memory which is equally deficient and can reach neither the origin nor the totality of its life" (Jauss 142). Ryder comes to accept the beauty of the traditions he has newly embraced, and of the Presence they mark, when he can finally see the poverty and ruin of the truths, relations, and places he had once held sacred in their stead.

present, we share only in the limits of his crippled perception as filtered through the omniscient narrator, and in some ways the eventual revelation of an “Other” presence is more of a surprise to us than it is to Martin. All of these sensations serve to stifle our awareness and force us into a proximity to Martin’s mental and emotional state that is at least discomfiting if not downright terrifying. We are, to a point, devoured by the narrative as thoroughly as any one of Martin’s victims by the man himself (90).

The *agon* of *Pincher Martin*, and the cause of its character’s despair, includes the essential modern anxiety about death that characterizes critical modernism’s eschatological view. The novel is sometimes sub-titled “The Two Deaths of Christopher Martin,” after all. We eventually learn that the first of these deaths occurs at the moment he is blown from the bridge of the ship.⁹ Since, narratologically, at any rate, Martin’s death is a given from the outset, Golding’s novel enters more specifically into a dialectic with death itself similar in object to Huxley’s Eustace chapters in *Time Must Have a Stop*, and in Dantesque scope to Lewis’ *The Human Age*. The question the text knowingly poses endures throughout the narrative, veiled as we are almost to the last. Mr. Campbell, the man who discovered Martin’s body, asks the coast guard skipper, “Would you say there was any—surviving? Or is that all?” (208).

Because the novel has already answered that question, mounting the very complex and terrifying play of consciousnesses on the equally terrifying stage of perception, its *agon* is ultimately more than eschatological anxiety. It appears to be what Fiddes calls a ‘postmodern’ loss of the self, when the Cartesian subject which can make

⁹ Mr. Davidson, the coast guard skipper, observes in the final sentence of the novel that Martin “didn’t even have time to kick off his seaboots” (208); we observe Martin kick off his boots moments after he comes to in the water (10). In other words, the whole of the novel occurs post-mortem.

decisions and order its destiny has been replaced by a self which is 'an opaque product of variable roles and performances imposed upon it by the constraints of society and by its own inner drives or conflicts'. With the loss of self has come a sense of loss of grasp of the world as a whole; we do not know how to name the world when it is no longer an object to be dominated by the self. (227)

Indeed, the more I consider this statement, the more precisely it seems to describe Pincher Martin's disposition, revealed as increasingly a stubborn solipsism rather than a heroic attempt at survival of the body. At first, his statements are apparent affirmations: "I won't die! I won't!" he vows while still in the water after his ship has been torpedoed (17). These affirmations take on a more desperate pragmatism as the novel wears, however. Later, in fitful, exhausted sleep on the rock, the narrator observes that

. . . the consciousness was moving and poking about among the pictures and revelations, among the shape-sounds and the disregarded feelings like an animal ceaselessly examining its cage. . . . It was looking for a thought. It found the thought, separated it from the junk, lifted it and used the apparatus of the body to give it force and importance.

"I am intelligent." (31-32)

Here the fragmentation between body and consciousness has already taken significant hold, with the "dark centre" of consciousness taking primacy. Still later the affirmations are tinged with prophetic paranoia: "I'm damned if I'll die!" Martin ejaculates as he recalls Nathaniel's prophecy of his early death (72) and, more elementally, in a pitiful rejection of any other identity, and no doubt a certain degree of ironic repetition of Yahweh's certain, quiet declaration of identity, "I am! I am! I am!" (145). In an interview with Frank Kermode (one can imagine the raised eyebrows), Golding confirmed that

Martin “is not fighting for bodily survival but for his *continuing identity in the face of what will smash it* and sweep it away—the black lightning, the compassion of God” (qtd. in Surette 207; his emphasis).

Parallel to these affirmations is Martin’s desire to name things: to ascribe sense, shape, and function to them. As the profundity of his isolation occurs to him, Martin seeks desperately to associate his location with the memory of a spot on the map, one that rings gently with paronomastic significance: “Near miss whatever the name was. And now to be huddled on a near miss how many miles from the Hebrides?” (31). In the absence of a concrete location, Martin organizes his world in familiar terms—the Red Lion, the High Street, Piccadilly (84-86)—and these strategies shield him from the truth that dogs his consciousness: that he is quite literally controlling and shaping the environment in some metaphysical sense. Martin manages to avoid this realization even when he employs the language of the creation story: “Let there be rain and there was rain” (171), he muses, and refuses at the same moment to allow the rock to become more elaborate or more comforting than it is, as that would signal assent.

This desire to pin things down, to organize the environment around him, grows, as I have implied, out of a grossly limited sense of self. “I must not let anything escape that would reinforce personality,” he admonishes himself (106), and yet Martin defines himself in such negative terms that he is incapable of imagining any other form of being. “I am a good hater,” he affirms, and perceives love in any salutary form as a threat to that fundamental strength of being (103). This sentiment is in step with Fiddes’ critique of postmodern loss, but Golding extends the irony even further. Martin insists on his difference, but that difference depends, as selfhood always does, on the presence of

others, on the means for self-identification: there, in the world of the living, “were other people to describe me to myself—they fell in love with me, they applauded me, they caressed this body they defined it for me” (132). More insidiously, and in keeping with his burgeoning self-awareness, Martin reflects “there were people I got the better of, people who disliked me, people who quarrelled with me. Here I have nothing to quarrel with. I am in danger of losing definition” (idem).

The tentative solidity—and therefore the willed restriction—of Martin’s perception begins to break down when Martin’s “dark centre” locates certain features of its setting in the memory of physical experience, further identifying inconsistencies with what he is experiencing and what he knows to be possible within the limits of the “real” that give the rock an “otherness.” The first of these is the swimming lobster (167), a sight whose implications send him into a defensive blackout, a “gap of not-being” (168) that “enabled him to forget what had caused the terror” (167). The second occurs some time after the attack, when he recognizes that things have changed significantly, and he calls the rock “inimical,” though he considers this impossible, and forces himself to say it (172). His efforts to stave off the breakdown of reason are futile, for “the dark centre was examining a thought like a monument”: “Guano is insoluble” (174). And “if guano is insoluble,” he thinks, “then the water in the upper trench could not be a slimy wetness” (174). The thought arrests him in his attempts to convince himself he is not mad, and on the heels of this awareness he senses further the relation between his rotting tooth and the rock on which he lives.

From here the centre begins to know things that extend beyond the body it has created for itself, and yet rather than embrace that knowledge, it refuses to know, much

like Lukács' writer-protagonist or Bakhtin's theomachist, shrinking back from the knowledge and hiding away in the crevasses of an obstinate being (Golding 177). "There was still a part that could be played," he insists: "there was the Bedlamite, Poor Tom, protected from knowledge of the sign of the black lightning" (177-78). Martin's division of self becomes markedly psychotic, with the centre seeking to protect itself from the encounter with the Other by enforcing exterior ignorance: "Martin refuses in the end to see himself for what he is," requiring (and rejection) "a revelation which will alter his very means of seeing" (Granofsky 53). The centre is the author of ignorance, the body its blind protagonist. In this way Golding subverts Lukács' irony by collapsing the ironic distance between author and character, and showing the ironic project to be entirely subjective.

Even so, awareness of God slips out from Martin's centre to his mouth in three stages of recognition. First, Martin refers to God in the third person when he appeals to the silver headed dwarf to intervene, crying, "if *he* 'll only let it alone it'll last for ever" (178; my emphasis). Second, Martin realizes with a stupid kind of terror that he is in a heaven of his own making, a realization made present by the transference of his present body into the memory of Nathaniel's earlier suggestion of it. Grinning stupidly and dripping water, Martin's body composes and confirms what his dark centre has been dreading (183). Third, he begins to refer to God in the second person: beaten by the collapse of the sky and forced lower and lower in the rock, Martin calls out "You bloody great bully!" (191), and shortly begins a dialogue with God or some being associated with God at the end of which he chooses madness and refuses forgiveness absolutely (194-97).

He has found his enemy, of course: not the “inimical” rock (172), but the greater consciousness that is seeking him patiently out. He casts it as Thor, and himself as Prometheus as a way of maintaining the false dignity of his refusal to give it room (188-89), preferring the illusion of the “sane life of [his] belly and [his] cock” and even the onset of madness to the possibility that his consciousness is a separate, vital thing of its own—a spirit staring into the filmic projections of his body’s past in purgatorial fear (190-91). Martin hates that he was warned of all of this by one whom he had held in relative disdain, if in bemused affection. More even than this, he hates that Nathaniel, whose innocence precluded the possibility of second sight or some other natural gift, was the prophetic voice of a warning that originated in a greater love even than Nathaniel’s.

The warning and the memory of it are parts of the complex of “clues” meant to drag Martin’s consciousness out of itself. Martin recalls the warning twice (70-72 and 182-83). The first time his conversation with Nathaniel begins *in medias*, with Nathaniel stating “Take us as we are now and heaven would be sheer negation. Without form and void. You see? A sort of black lightning destroying everything that we call life” (70). Nathaniel is sensitive to the connectedness of their two lives, and this conversation constitutes not just a warning—a feeling, a foreknowledge of Nathaniel’s (71)—that Martin would die in just a few years (72), but also a partial revelation about Martin’s own self, and an opportunity to grow, and to make sacred the relation. Nathaniel observes,

“You have an extraordinary capacity to endure.”

“To what end?”

“To achieve heaven.”

“Negation?”

“The technique of dying into heaven.” (71)

The second time Martin recalls the warning the scene plays back from an earlier point, and this time Martin reflects more fully on his own love for Nathaniel, his unabashed and fraternal affection for the creature he would later seek to destroy—and be thwarted in the effort (183). Martin emphasises the peculiar horror of that recognition, given that in the moment he was swept from the ship he was about to murder his friend in order to possess a woman he had already violated, and this out of spite, not love or even desire to love, but simple greed. Yet it also strikes me as a peculiarly soteriological moment, one of many such in Golding, where persons guilty of venial and even mortal sins are offered a glimpse not only of the shame and horror of the past, but of some brief moment of goodness that reminds them of their value.

Despite this moment, Martin rejects salvation. Confronting the figure on the rock—the one he “could never have invented” (194), he realizes, and thus that he is not hallucinating, though we are never certain if this is a theophany, an angelic visitation, a vision of Nathaniel come once again to try and pull him out of himself or, as Surette suggests, a sort of mirrored confrontation with himself (222)¹⁰; confronting that figure, not being able to see it all at once and thus to master it (195), Martin refuses to see it (196), and thus refuses its patient invitation to consider the cost and futility of his obstinacy. Here the inevitability of the thing weighs falsely on him. The whole affair of

¹⁰ I don't find this particular suggestion very persuasive. This is one of a trio of interpretative errors on Surette's part, in my opinion. I will mention one other here. Surette assumes that Martin manages to dispatch Nathaniel before he is blown off the bridge (220), which he justifies by Martin's anticipatory visualization of the murder (a mental rehearsal: see Golding 183, Surette 221), but which is not supported by the narrator's description of the moment itself (the moment is truncated: Martin, it is implied, lunges for Nathaniel's throat, but notices the torpedo, and barks out an order to the crew instead: see Golding 186). This is not an innocuous point: Golding is very specific in *Pincher Martin* and later in *Darkness Visible* (Pedigree agonizes about one day killing a boy to keep him quiet) that murder is a point of no return spiritually. Had Martin killed Nathaniel, he might not be sought after for heaven.

his life, and his connection to Nathaniel and Mary in particular, strikes him with a sort of Calvinist implacability, though Golding won't let him off that easily. Martin is "dreary" with the "foreknowledge of a *chosen* road" (159; my emphasis). The ambiguity of the participle is telling: who chose the road remains unspoken, but there is no question that Martin is aware on some level of the activity even then of a revelatory consciousness seeking acknowledgment. In the moment relief is offered, Martin protests that the deck has been stacked all along in this oddly contradictory way:

. . . You gave me the power to choose and all my life you led me carefully to this suffering because my choice was my own. Oh yes! I understand the pattern. All my life, whatever I had done I should have found myself in the end on that same bridge, at that same time, giving that same order—the right order, the wrong order. Yet, suppose I climbed away from the cellar over the bodies of used and defeated people, broke them to make steps on the road away from you, why should you torture me? If I ate them, who gave me a mouth? (197)

There are two important elements in this passage. The first is the allusion to the recurring image of the cellar as a place of darkness and childhood fear, as an inceptive place for Martin's self-definition, and an insight into his peculiar revulsion for the negation he fears. We only get this motif, like all the others, in fragmented and sudden succession, but the most telling of these occurrences comes in a string of associative memories seeking to give shape to the grating noise that haunts his consciousness, and which he seeks at first to naturalize as thunder (188), but which turns out to be "the grating and thump of a spade against an enormous tin box that had been buried" (189). Here is the passage: "The cellar door swinging to behind a small child who must go down, down in his sleep to meet the thing he turned from when he was created" (*idem*).

The tin box may or may not be a clue to Martin of his own death (his body was found in possession of a tin: 204), though the grating and thumping of the spade certainly convey a necrotic sensibility, and refer most obviously to his producer's drunken rant about the delicacy of the Chinese maggot—a thing buried in a tin box that devours a fish and its fellows until it remains last, “one huge, successful maggot” (136), and then is itself devoured. Peter clearly associates this maggot with Martin, as Martin does himself. As for the cellar door, again the image is unclear: it has to do with an old woman, perhaps a mother-figure, a figure he does hallucinate and, in his hallucination, brutally tear apart with his seaman's knife (192-93). If so, the motif suggests an oedipal significance that Golding would refuse it (Dick 481). It is also a death image in its own right, and thus a clue to Martin that what he is experiencing is illusory, and merely staves off a moment of reckoning:

Past the kitchen door. Draw back the bolt of the vault. Well of darkness. Down pad, down. Coffin ends crushed in the wall. Under the churchyard back through the death door to meet the master. Down pad, down. Black lumps piled, smell damp. Shavings from coffins. (178)

But the motif also suggests something pre-Oedipal: a thing rejected by Martin again and again, and yet which pursues him relentlessly, a “love . . . which can break through the signifiers of language” (Fiddes 242). Stripped of its rational menace, or rather, seen as an inversion of Martin's own doing—the transformation, via guilt, or reckoning that promises reconciliation to reckoning alone—the significance of the cellar collapses, and we ask with the figure to “what” Martin, left without motive, “prefers” his limbic pain.

At this point it is important that we step back from Martin's consciousness. To be clear, the personage, whoever he is, responds to Martin's “I prefer it, pain and all” with a

simple question: “To what?” (197). Surette, like Martin, thinks that the alternative is “the extinction of personality in union with the divine” (217). He takes his cue from Golding’s interview with Kermode: Martin is fighting for “his continuing identity in the face of what will smash it . . . the compassion of God.” But what Golding says after is equally important: “For Christopher, the Christ-bearer, has become Pincher Martin, who is little but greed. Just to be Pincher is purgatory; to be Pincher for eternity is hell” (qtd. in Surette 207).

This is a peculiar kind of extinction, and together these quotations mean something very specific: it is not Martin’s personality—his personhood or individuality—that is in peril, but rather it is his “identity”: one built solidly around an appetite, around greed as a single trait that itself threatens to destroy all else that Martin was or could be. Martin’s answer complements this idea. To what does he prefer his pain? His answer is unsatisfactory: “To the black lightning!” (197). Yet the black lightning is Martin’s own creation, a façade or mask he wills it to wear. It is how he perceives, constructs, and experiences heaven—as a negation—but it is not that, as the slippages and eventual collapse of the delusion indicate. The “weight” and “ponderous squeezing” (127) is the “timeless” and merciless “compassion” of heaven that is the counterforce to his own, limpet obstinacy (201). His sense of being eaten is not the doing of some black humour, not some obtuse iteration of justice or karmic balance, but an awareness of the inexorability, failing his capacity to die into heaven, of his devouring of himself (201), and the final, instinctual, stubborn reduction of selfhood to a mere refusal: “like a dead man” (34), “like a limpet” (36), Martin closes himself off from a love that would extend and redeem him, not devour him. And herein lies the irony *Pincher Martin* exposes, and

its Dorianesque and clearly Faustian sensibilities: in his theomachic refusal to be anything but what he is on his own terms, in a maniacal act of “self”-preservation, Martin reduces his own being to a mere symbol of himself—a thing that devours merely to exist, and is in turn devoured.

Golding accomplishes two things through the narrative and its ideas that would be impossible if he adhered strictly to Lukács’ doctrine of ignorance. First, as mentioned above, these revelations of the hallucinatory nature of Martin’s rock, body, and condition open up the readerly awareness and perception considerably. The novel literalizes the anagogical or fourth level of reality, so we begin to know and sense ideas and forces beyond the strictures of the narrative and the narrative shifts from a reader-focussed situational irony to a macabre kind of dramatic irony, and finally to a theological irony. We may even acknowledge and embrace the presence and benevolence of God that Martin refuses, and begin as well to open back up those parts of the narrative we have already read, illuminating them under the light of this revelation. Second, we may situate Martin’s story and self in the context of this greater awareness and over against a greater being, shrouded as it may still be in mystery and fantasy, and study him now with the tools of that awareness and our new freedom of movement. Thus, while Martin’s perception continues to shrink and fail, forcing him into a reductive insensibility, our awareness tends to pan out and backwards, able to comprehend the timeless and merciless “compassion” of the lines of divine light that seek access to Martin’s enclosures, “wearing them away” patiently, with what looks to us like both the tenderness of mercy and the force of justice. Like Martin, we might also wrestle with the implications of such a relentless compassion.

Admittedly, Golding's sense of the divine and of its role in the formation of the self might be just as contrived as Lukács' "learned ignorance," especially when we remember that Pincher Martin is his creation, as is the shipwreck, Martin's death, the rock, the fancy that imagined this kind of liminal heaven, and so forth. But we must also remember that Golding was a modern man, aware of the tendencies and demands of the modern imagination, participant in that imagination, and writing not only imaginatively, but symbolically or representatively from within that tradition. His truth—for whether in theological, philosophical, ideological, aesthetic, or theoretical terms, all modern fiction presupposes a truth or "totality"—merits as much attention as (and perhaps more than) Lukács' writer's truth for the complexity and richness of his vision, and for its transferability, not *as* but *to* human experience.

Akin to Flannery O'Connor's concept of "anagogical vision" (O'Connor 72), the vision of Golding's *Pincher Martin* is the implicature of an idea that grows beyond the limits of experience and casts experience into a narrative flow that seeks to open up the mind rather than will it to remain closed. Accommodating Jauss' concern about the "gaps and limitations" of human memory, Golding introduces into the equation a Mind capable of helping the reader "gauge the significance" of events in the context of "life as a whole" (Jauss 149). He also sets his self-accounting in death rather than life, slowing the dynamics of being and reducing Martin's being to a set of obstinate traits and refusals. Lukács' modern novel, on the other hand, depends on an artificial split between the real and the imagined which is absolute, and yet which absolutely confuses the difference between them, resulting in a hopelessly divided self, the fruit of which can only be an "essential" despair.

The Spire works similarly, and ends almost as bitterly, though with a greater degree of hope or the potential for hope, so I propose to convey just enough to render its chief difference: a move from theomachy to credulous delusion. Like *Pincher Martin*, *The Spire* is Faustian—not methodically, for Golding was too fine an artist, and too sensitive, to merely adapt Faustus, and thus birth a “still-born” child (Dick 481). But the elements are there nonetheless. Goody Pangall is Dean Jocelin’s Helen, the dark angel that attends him his Mephistopheles, and like Faustus Jocelin sees himself as beyond the petty requirements of the lower forms of life, even turning aside from the rhythms and responsibilities of his ecclesiastical position in preference for the grander, phallic, Babel-folly of the spire’s construction (50). Ronald Granofsky considers this the essential element of the text, preferring to psychologize *The Spire* rather than to accept it as a spiritual concern. But what he has to say about the body in this novel is relevant. Jocelin bemoans his “unruly member” (72), but fails to see that he is seeking to build just such a phallus in his spire, though the builders understand this: one of them torments Pangall by using the model of the spire as a phallus (84), and Roger Mason, sick and drunk, and hearing from Jocelin that the Spire is still standing, shouts out the window to the spire, “Fall when you like, me old cock!” (200). Their denigration of the spire and its theoretical meaning is somehow less crass, less blasphemous, than the fact that the spire represents Jocelin’s hubris, his desire for power and legacy, as the embodiment of the “thrusting upward” of his will (35). Blind to all of this, Jocelin sees himself as at the “crossways” of a battle between God and Satan (70), though he makes what is light—i.e. the shuddering warnings and signs of his folly—dark, and what is dark—the obsessive

spiral downward in the attempt to spiral upward—light.

Like *Pincher Martin*, *The Spire* is also difficult to follow at times. Golding refuses once again to give us any more than the characters themselves perceive or understand, or what their perceptions imply about them. We know enough early on, however, to suspect that Jocelin's vision is impure. First, Jocelin's feeling for the men of the chapter, the church buildings, the orbiting employees and workers, and the congregation he is meant to serve is one of ownership (4), and in the case of Goody Pangall, this ownership has taken an enduring and malevolent turn (53, 121, 171). Second, he is "proud," "ignorant," and "thinks he is a saint" (9), feeling himself "uniquely chosen" (29), and indulging in both a Christological hubris—"I am about my father's business" (62)—and an apotheotic presumption—"I shall thrust you upward by my will. It's God's will in this business" (35). Third, he has clearly made a habit of calling attention to his difference, for after praying/posing for the dumb sculptor, and sensing his angel "in the warmth at his back," Jocelin asks Father Adam "Did you see—see anything behind me there, as I knelt?" Receiving a negative answer, Jocelin self-importantly adds, "If you had, of course, I should have commanded your silence" (21).

Fourth, we learn that it was not God, but a doting, adulterous aunt who asked her lover—the king—to "drop a plum in [Jocelin's] mouth," thereby ensuring his position (177), and Jocelin unfit for the office (193). Fifth, and most damning, we learn that Jocelin was "never taught . . . to pray" (188)—a fact which is meant to call into question the whole complex of his visions and revelations, not as insubstantial, but as the fevered dreams of a fevered and unstable mind (187) given to epileptic delusion (189, 208), and more insidiously as the revelation of a demonic will that seeks only to destroy lives and

loves. Jocelin is consequently blinded to the true cost of his fanatical and narcissistic obsession: even the sculptor, who seems to admire the Dean, fixes the gaze of Jocelin's bust because at "the moment of [this] vision, the eyes see nothing" (20). (And for Golding, says Mark Kinkead-Weekes, that "is the most dangerous blindness of all": 69). Indeed, it is Roger Mason, the "master builder," (a title that puts him in uncomfortable relation with Paul, in part because of his own growing Davidian unrighteousness and in part because he is asked to build on an unsuitable foundation in both the temporal and spiritual senses: see 1 Cor. 3:10-11), who has the greater capacity for vision (Golding, *Spire* 32). Whereas Mason could see things "in totality," Jocelin must increasingly narrow his vision in order to maintain his faith in it (61).

In truth, these men share that capacity, though Jocelin's vision is fed by an ethereal and indiscriminate solipsism which accepts or creates counterfeits where it cannot access the real thing, though these "revelations" of word and image contradict the very law of God (58-59). Mason's vision is, in contrast, that of the craft and of imagination. He knows that "there comes a point when a vision's no more than a child's playing let's pretend" (80). Jocelin persists, like Pincher Martin, in the obstinacy of his vision, and more importantly, even as the charm of the spire itself gives way to horror, of his self-vision as a chosen vessel, and as an essential element in God's work (76, 83).

The Spire is an uncomfortable novel from start to finish, especially in a cultural climate that tends to dismiss religious faith—especially religious vision—as at best quaint and at worst deadly lunacy. There are figures here who temper Jocelin's fanaticism, and it *is* fanaticism, but the thrust of the novel is given over to the portrait of an essentially prophetic consciousness, albeit one misled by demonic and personal

influence. What I mean by this is that Golding is not willing to discount the veracity of Jocelin's fundamental experiences, though he calls Jocelin's comprehension of them squarely into question. For instance, when the earth begins shifting in the pit dug at the crossways, and Mason gives the order to fill it, Jocelin flees to the safety of the "key of the arch" in the choir, there willing the stability of the pillars, and "[knowing] that the whole weight of the building was resting on his back" (76). Experiences like these are taken as real by the narrative consciousness, even in error, just as they are in *Pincher Martin*, *Darkness Visible*, and *The Double Tongue*; the character's self-perception always counts, and what is understood in the novel is not the external, but the internal reality, even when that reality proves unstable for either the character or the reader. We are confounded by Jocelin's perceptions, even as we know he engineers them.

This is in part because there is a second, *bona fide* revelation in *The Spire*: one that is dialogic, slow, wrought with that terrifying patience we detected in *Pincher Martin*: the piecemeal introduction of a nagging doubt in the subject himself. The destruction is so complete and so thorough in human terms, the humiliation and the possibility of salvation that grows out of it so complete that it begs the question of the validity of Jocelin's vision, of its being an enactment of the divine will after all, though in some way inscrutable to Jocelin himself. The association of scriptural apocalypse as a constant theme running through the novel may well be the reason for this tension, for at times the association participates in the blasphemy of Jocelin's self-perception as prophet, and at other times it seems very much an extrinsic gift of sight, meant to provoke an alteration of direction, or a Lenten sacrifice of the obsession itself.

The first of these open associations comes as Jocelin reflects on the "arrival" of

his “guardian angel”:

I do thy work; and Thou hast sent Thy messenger to comfort me. As it was of old, in the desert.

With twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly.

Joy, fire, joy.

Lord, I thank Thee that Thou hast kept me humble. (18)

This passage is striking first for the presumption of Jocelin’s ascetic quality, especially the apparent allusion to Christ’s forty day fast during which he was strengthened by heavenly emissaries: hardly the association of a humble mind. Close on its heels, however, is a presumption of prophetic vocation equal to that of Isaiah, whose apocalyptic vision Jocelin quotes (Isa 6:2). Here one of the seraphim, the creatures described by Isaiah in this verse, flies from the throne of Jehovah to deliver the live coal that purifies Isaiah’s mouth and fits it for prophecy. The moment confirms Jocelin’s dangerous pride, and functions also as a diminution or a demonic inversion of the terms of apocalyptic prophecy.

The image of the seraph takes on menace as the novel progresses, literalizing and transmuting in Jocelin’s consciousness as his madness deepens, and then as he begins to find his way at least partly out of the net he has cast. After his inquisition, as he stands at the pillar and offers himself as part of the building, willing it to fall upon him, “his angel put away the two wings from the cloven hoof and struck him from arse to the head with a white-hot flail” (181). Later, during his interview with Roger Mason, Jocelin remarks the presence of “other things moving in the room. . . . beating about him with black wings” (204). Here the seraph of Isaiah has taken on its correct demonic sensibility—feet to hooves to black wings—though Jocelin himself fails to acknowledge the graduation of the image.

Another moment that alludes to scriptural apocalypse is Jocelin's invitation to Father Adam to "see [his] faith," the record of his vision as he had written it in a "little notebook" (183): "Take. Read." This is a clear allusion to two passages from Revelation: a contracted version of Revelation 5, and more specifically Revelation 10:9-10, where John takes the "little book" and eats it, discovering it is sweet to the taste and bitter to the belly. Golding ties the image up even in these details: Jocelin refers to the "sweetness of his devil" (170) coming in as his angel departs, and to the rising of the "dark waters of his belly" when it was there, and burdening him with its "great weight of glory" (133-34). It is also an allusion to Matthew 26:26, where Christ speaks sacramentally and orders his disciples to consume the bread of the Passover: "Take, eat; this is my body." The associations are deliberate, for given his pretension of prophetic authority, Jocelin intended the spire to be "a stone bible, . . . the apocalypse in stone" (103). As it turns out, the spire is an apocalypse *of* stone, in the eschatological sense: a blight, a curse, and a Babel-sin that brings the justice of ruin, not the revelation of God.

But despite the magnitude of these associations, there is some evidence that Jocelin finally sees the folly that was so apparent to everyone else. When he tells Father Adam to "take" and "read" the notebook, he "laughs," and Adam's reading of the vision is interrupted by Jocelin's commentary, in turns both sardonically self-deprecating and desperately quizzical, searching for some confirmation that the impulse, at very least, had been good. Additionally, while the vision of constructed spire fails to carry the weight of revelation, and indeed runs counter to the warnings spoken by others and impressed upon Jocelin in dream, there are moments of apocalyptic insight. The first of these is when Pangall is hounded through the chapel by the workmen, his wife assaulted and humiliated

by them. Jocelin sees it all “[i]n an apocalyptic glimpse of seeing” (84), a moment given credence because it is actually occurring, and because it is a mere glimpse. Here Jocelin sees the far-reaching impact of his folly, not merely the actions of the workmen, and it is this that gives the glimpse the potency of apocalypse.

Later, as he lies dying and considering the full weight and consequence of what he had willed, and as Father Adam prepares the last rites, Jocelin has a vision worthy of Ezekiel 37, though it, too, is undermined by the “rotting” of his mind. It is a vision of “what an extraordinary creature Father Adam was,” though not a very pretty one (214). *This* moment of seeing—“truly” apocalyptic in that it is a revelation opened up extrinsically—heals the separation between what Jocelin had mistaken for prophetic insight, for revelation, and his “natural” sight—that of reason (see Kinkead-Weekes 65). And the vision is incidental to the necessary and final revelation, which is composed of two recognitions: Jocelin had “traded a stone hammer for four people” whose lives were now taken or in tatters (*idem*), and the gross error in his judgment was that he had forgotten that there is more to a tree than a single branch (196, 215), neglecting the roots and foundations of his community, of his morality, of his own spirituality for an artificial monument that could never carry its own weight. Thus, Jocelin’s true revelation is a “slowly accumulating understanding that vision unallied to true self-sight can become dangerous” (Granofsky 59). Still, as in *Pincher Martin*, Jocelin is offered and allowed his salvation, though he will pollute it to the last.

Golding’s study, here as in the other novel, is not secular, but born of the imagination of faith. Both novels, dark and desperate as they are, are portraits of the spiritual struggle to hear, understand, comprehend, and enact God’s will which is at the

core of the experience of Revelation. Pincher Martin “actively seeks to evade [a] deeper kind of insight” (Kinkead-Weekes 68), and rejects those overtures because he misunderstands them, though he interrogates his own misunderstanding without knowing it: “how can [the R]ock be inimical?” Jocelin confounds the realms of the spiritual and the temporal—the image of his prayer as spire was personal, not general: symbolizing that experience against reason and in the face of his abandonment of all other spiritual responsibility, importance, human feeling, and even prayer proper makes it a false text, a false prophecy, and leads him backward into the realm of demonic influence and pride. His acknowledgement, his weak attempts to cut through the darkness of his vision, begin, at least, to lead him back out. And that is the best kind of revelation.

3. “SIT MIHI FAS AUDITA LOQUI”: *Darkness Visible* as/and Revelation

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock,
and it shall be opened unto you:

Matthew 7:7

[Seeing] must always be grounded in sense perception. For Golding the sceptic and modernist, that is indeed before all, and everything. But what comes through that seeing is another dimension in it, and another, each proving a lens for further and deeper focus, from seeing to insight, from insight to revelation. (And ‘epiphany’ is religious not Joycean, it has its full meaning of Apocalyptic showing forth, Revelation, coming through the act of seeing, but not the creation of the artist.)

Mark Kinkead-Weekes, “Visual and Visionary in Golding” 75

Golding is never an easy read: he looks into the darkest of places and challenges the most delicate sensibilities. I consider *Darkness Visible* his darkest novel of all, and think it no coincidence that this novel is explicitly set over against scriptural eschatology

(Revelation, specifically), and that it is also the novel most powerfully concerned with the ontos of revelation—divine and demonic.¹¹ Perhaps, as Glorie Tebbutt suggests, this is why it is conspicuously under-studied (47): it concentrates all of the “mystical,” “credulous” *noumena* that has historically made Golding critics nervous. Yet it does so much more than explore spirituality. It scours the deep and tortured psyches of its characters in their moral, sexual, and spiritual dimensions, casting the human drama over against a cosmic conflict, but never succumbing to cliché or sentimentality. In *Darkness Visible*, Golding is as brutally committed as ever to examining that conflict, and to accounting for its toll on the humans caught up in it.

Indeed, the epigraph—“sit mihi fas audita loqui”—assigns the potency of a revelatory narrative to the novel in the vein of the prophetic travelogue into the nether-regions and spirit-places of the universe, like Dante’s *Divine Comedy* or, as the allusion suggests, Aeneas’ trip to hell:

Di, quibus imperium est animarum, umbraeque silentes,
et Chaos, et Phlegethon, loca nocte tacentia late,
sit mihi fas audita loqui; sit numine vestro
pandere res alta terra et caligine mersas! (Virgil, *Aeneid* VI.264-67)

The third line is the epigraph: “allow me to retell what I was told” (my translation; see also Mandelbaum VI.353). In the interests of verse, most translations change the meaning of this line considerably (see Dryden’s translation of these lines below),¹² but my

¹¹ *The Double Tongue* (1993) is also concerned with revelation, but in a remote classical context, and in a meditative, not a narrative mode. I had considered including it in this study, but its additions to the “doctrine” of revelation in Golding’s oeuvre can be summed up as two things: 1) its protagonist is the oracle at Delphi, thus Golding explores “positive” revelation through female experience; 2) because of the first fact, revelation takes on a Donnean sensibility—the character of ravishment, of a total physical and spiritual nature.

¹² Here is Dryden’s translation: “Ye realms, yet unreveal’d to human sight, / Ye gods who rule the regions of the night, / Ye gliding ghosts, permit me to relate / The mystic wonders of your silent state!”

translation gets at the heart of Golding's very subtle suggestion that, like Dante, he has been permitted access to a truth, and represents it here in novel form. And it seems very clear that it is Golding-as-narrator (as prophet, in the figurative sense from chapter III of this thesis), not Matty, who asks permission to tell the story of the novel. He has "heard" or "heard about" the matter of his novel, in the larger thematic sense at any rate, and seeks permission to divulge it. Donald Crompton notices that the line is spoken before Aeneas descends, and that more poignantly it is "the poet Virgil," the writer, not Aeneas, the character, who invokes the dark gods to allow him to penetrate beneath the surface and to make darkness visible" (197): apropos, since the novel almost has more hell in it than heaven, and as much earth. In terms of its insight into the human condition, and in terms of its gentle claim to be the chronicle of a larger conflict, *Darkness Visible* doesn't just treat of Revelation, but claims to be a sort of revelation.¹³

That claim is supported by a number of general features, including a complex of apocalyptic motifs that rivals Lewis' *Blast*, a similarly tumultuous energy, a sophisticated numerology (see Clews 324), and a set of allusions to and outright evocations of Revelation, many of which I discuss below. But the primary apocalyptic figure of *Darkness Visible* is its protagonist: a divine messenger made human under circumstances of such mystery and such suffering that he is at once a pariah and a Christ-figure—a prophet and revelator, but also a type and a promise of *parousia*. He is an absurd figure,

¹³ It is tempting to take Golding at his words here, given a precedent for this kind of inspired, visionary approach to writing novels. In *The Hot Gates*, Golding discusses the scene in *Lord of the Flies* where Simon, who has been seeking a place of quiet and holiness in the jungle, is left alone with the pig's head. The other boys have deposited it precisely where Simon is hiding without knowing he was there. "It was at this point of imaginative concentration," writes Golding, "that I found that the pig's head knew Simon was there. In fact the Pig's [sic] head delivered something very like a sermon to the boy; the pig's head spoke. I know because I heard it" (98).

easily dismissed by the cynical reader, but as Kinkead-Weekes suggests, “we have been challenged to read between the lines of his wordless behaviour, while cobbers laugh at what they see as idiocy, and some readers turn off. Those that have eyes to see, let them see—and feel” (75).¹⁴

Happening as it does out of an “open stove” (Golding 12), a veritable “burning bush” and “furnace” of affliction (9-10) caused by German incendiaries in World War II London, a blaze that is “melting lead and distorting iron” (12), Matty’s coming defies both reason and language. This is a horrific birth: the bringing forth of a child out of a purgatorial womb into a world reeling in the shock of its own death, a figure that “condense[s] out of the shuddering backdrop of the glare” and moves stumblingly toward the firemen who witness the birth, transfixed and incredulous. The child had “no background but the fire” which had burned the left side of his body so that it shone, and the hair and skin on the left side of his face and head burned entirely away (17, 14). Supported by the Stanhope twins and other pairings, this literal duality will serve as an unsavoury symbol of the fundamental schism in human being between the spirit that yearns for righteousness and the body that does not: the darkness of the human condition is made visible by its contrast to the human potential for light.

In the aftermath of the boy’s rescue, one of the volunteer firemen, a bookseller, recalls being uncertain as to whether the boy were “a human shape or merely a bit of flickering brightness. Was it the Apocalypse? Nothing could be more apocalyptic than a world so ferociously consumed” (15), nor, we might add, than its producing something so

¹⁴ As with the other novels, there is a tendency for humanistic critics to ignore, dismiss, or denigrate the “mystical” elements of *Darkness Visible*. Michael Mitchell, for instance, transmutes the powers at work in the novel to “mere” magic (773), and scoffs at Matty as a “hideous and unbearably pious simpleton” (idem).

vital and so tragic. Crompton observes that the opening images of the novel mean beyond the association with Moses:

In Biblical terms, the German bombers have their apocalyptic counterpart more in the prophecy of Ezekiel (10:2) when the avenging angels scatter fire over the doomed city of Jerusalem; and the emergence of Matty from the flames is more reminiscent of an incident in the same prophecy when Ezekiel is visited by a mysterious being who is on fire from the waist down and has the “brightness as the colour of amber from the waist up” (Ezekiel, 8:2). (197)

The boy is indeed a motley angel and a dual symbol of God’s judgement and his miraculous power to save it, and therefore a revelation and a catalyst for revelation (see also Granofsky 50). In the wake of the boy’s passing, “the screen that conceals the workings of things . . . shudder[s] and move[s]” (16), opening a small revelatory space in the consciousness of the few who really see him. For instance, the fire chief sees “in a kind of interior geometry” that if he had not hesitated, uncertain of the boy’s reality, but had immediately run to retrieve him from the fire, he would have run straight into an explosion (16). Later on, the boy’s nurse comes to understand that he “thinks [she] brings someone with [her]” in her tender ministrations to his poor, burned body—and indeed she does (18).

Because he was the seventh child brought into the hospital that night, and in the absence of any reasonable alternative, the boy is called “Matthew Septimus Windrove,” though the narrator will not give us his last name until the end of the novel, and there it serves as a final, humanizing gesture (280). The name itself is “received” in a way by the hospital director, and has the “curious effect of having come out of the empty air and of being temporary, a thing to be noticed because you were lucky to be in the place where it

had landed” (17). It strikes him as “not quite right,” so he alters it slightly, and we are never given the original. In any case, Matty’s name conjures in turns apostolic (Matthew) and prophetic associations (a character calls him “Windrave” evoking a variant of the Hebrew word for prophet, which means “raver”), apocalyptic images (seven churches, seven millennia of history, and, in the nickname “Windup,” the impertinent and perspicacious sense of Matty’s role in the winding up of human history), and angelic qualities (“wind” as movement, breath of God).¹⁵

Matty’s theological significance is indeed variegated. He is associated variously with Abraham, Esau, Joseph, Moses, Jonah, Job, Samuel, Ezekiel, John the Baptist, John the Revelator, and even Christ. That he is meant to be both prophet and revelator is clear: he dreams, has visions, and “writes.” Two of the book’s chapters give an account of Matty’s experiences with angelic ministration—with vision and revelation specifically—and are written as a series of journal entries. These chapters include his working out of spiritual impressions, his account of the visitations, his theological reflections, and his meditations on his own spiritual status. As prophet, “he is the model of the ‘mandated subject,’” an exile who “works for the health of the community by responding to the call to withdraw from the community in order to be sent back to the same” (Wallace, “Introduction” to Ricoeur, *Figuring* 29). In Matty’s case, exile is both philosophical and actual. He grows up in alienation for his ugliness and his strangeness, is rejected by his

¹⁵ Donald Crompton supplies a complete list of the variants of Matty’s surname, most of them derogatory or only absently applied, all of them suggestive of Matty’s preternatural and extrinsic restlessness (he is “wild,” and goes where the “wind” blows, tossed like a “wave,” at once a “grave” reminder of death, but paradoxically a “grove” of sensations and activity, etc.) but these are obviously significant (196). Hetty Clews speculates that the “original” name may have been “Windhover,” in keeping with the director’s sense of having caught a momentary glimpse of a rare bird (the windhover is not rare, but Clews associates the name of a bird with the figurative identification of the director’s experience: see 318). This idea is appealing, especially as it alludes to Hopkin’s windhover, and thus adds to the Christology of the novel.

schoolmaster, the pederast Mr. Pedigree whom he tries to help, and by his peers. He eventually leaves England for Australia, learning there the dual prophetic disciplines of symbolic action (and speech) and self mastery in pain, silence, and isolation.

Despite the seriousness of the novel overall, Golding has a little fun with Matty's prophetic vocation. For instance, fleeing from the temptation of lust at seeing Mary Michael Hanrahan (for "whoever looked on Mary Michael was lost": 59), Matty drives frantically away, reciting the whole of Revelation until the feeling of sexual desire subsides in him. And then the narrator says this: "And Matty came in the evening unto the city of Gladstone which is a great city. And he sojourned there for many months at peace, finding work as a grave-digger" (60). The clear, and gently wry, invocation of Biblical language gives way after the comma, symbolizing Matty's movement from the idealized peace of Gladstone back into a world of danger and humiliation. Matty has mixed feelings about this. Rejected by the denizens of Queensland after warning them of great destruction by building and destroying matchbox structures on the lawn of the State house (and inadvertently setting fire to an adjacent field and "singeing" several people), Matty decides to return to England. "After all," said the minister, "that place needs your language more than this one" (71).¹⁶ At the port, in a gesture of apostolic authority (see Matt. 10:14, Acts 13:51), he shakes the dust from his shoes, and, moved with compassion, immediately sprinkles some back on (77). This simple act converts him at least partially from fanatic to a mature and humane figure of sensibility and empathy. It also confirms his growing awareness of his own role as a figure of prophecy, and his

¹⁶ This is an allusion to Britain's atomic tests conducted in Australia in the sixties (Crompton 203). The conflagration, however unintentional, that results from Matty's first "prophecy" likely means dually: an "apocalyptic," nuclear holocaust, and the purification of the world by fire (Rev. 17:16, 18:8).

growing caution in exercising the privileges of that role.

The revelatory elements of the novel develop concurrently with Matty's change in status and nature as prophet, and eventually outstrip the prophetic elements in substance and significance. In this sense, too, Golding imagines a process: a gradual acclimatization to the Presence and purpose Matty senses in himself and in the world at large. And he presents that process in terms of a comparison between Matty's experience with revelation and that of the people God brings into contact with him. Pedigree's "revelation" will be the final and the most significant, for Pedigree resists Matty's—and God's—love in the way typical of Golding's anti-heroes: with great violence and appeals to the inescapability of his own fallen nature. But Golding imagines a revelation of the divine for all his characters, each given according to the ability, and the disposition, of the individual to receive it.

For instance, Edwin Bell, headmaster at Foundlings, Matty's old school in Greenfield, proclaims after his adult encounter with Matty, "Ecce Homo—if that isn't too disastrously blasphemous and really do you know . . . I don't think it is?" (196). He calls himself a "Seeker," and speaks of Matty as a Holy Man and mystic who will "rub off" the old names for things and stamp out human language (201, 199). Edwin himself is a bumbling and tragic Adam living in a kind of asexual Eden with his wife Edwina (their very names play on the "Eden" association), whose only difference from him is that she has "more bosom" than he does (198). Golding makes the association explicit by referring to the excited "bobbing" of Edwin's "Adam's apple" as he recounts his first encounter with Matty for Sim (205). This Edenic innocence carries over into Edwin's rejection of Pedigree's society after the latter's return from prison. Edwin nervously

covers his privates through the pockets of his great coat as Pedigree approaches him and then, as if Pedigree were the Serpent himself, and because Pedigree is a sexual being, however degenerate, shouts “No, no, *no!*” as Pedigree follows him to the door of that Eden (80-81): not a moment of great charity, certainly, but one evocative of the greater spiritual conflict to which these characters are otherwise blind.

Edwin has the habit of calling everything by its name, too, until he meets Matty, and then he becomes a kind of Aaron, speaking for Matty, “finding words for him . . . more than words” and experiencing “more than words can say” (201). He calls this “Ursprache,” a kind of mystical singing, the “innocent language of the Spirit” and the “language of paradise” (204), his hands elevated in the *orans* position. He says he spoke seven words of it, though he cannot now remember or retrieve them, and though they came before him as a “luminous and holy shape” (204).

This is a significant moment in the revelatory logic of the novel, and an answer to a question Ricoeur poses in *Figuring the Sacred*: “Is Christianity without the sacred possible?” (64). In a passage that resonates powerfully with Edwin’s speech-experience, Ricoeur responds to his own question as follows:

All the antinomies upon which our meditation has been based now need to be reconsidered. The word, we said, breaks away from the numinous. And this is true. But is it not so to the extent that the word takes over for itself the functions of the numinous? There would be no hermeneutic if there were no proclamation. But there would be no proclamation if the word, too, were not powerful; that is, if it did not have the power to set forth the new being it proclaims. A word that is addressed to us rather than our speaking it, a word that constitutes us rather than our articulating it—a word that speaks—does not such a word reaffirm the sacred

just as much as abolish it? It does so if hearing this word is impossible without a transvaluation of the values *tremendum* and *fascinosum* into obedience and fervor. (64)

Further:

That word and manifestation can be reconciled is the central affirmation of the Prologue to John's Gospel:

So the Word became flesh;
he came to dwell among us,
and we saw his glory,
such glory as befits the Father's only Son,
full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)

This identification of word and manifestation was the basis for the concept of revelation that from the Greek fathers to Hegel constitutes the central category in terms of which thought about Christianity was organized. (idem)

Edwin's words are a symbol for the Word, then, and while he is interested in the moment as numinous, certainly, and his experience of the moment is invested principally in his role as speaker, he is not ignorant to its larger implications, eschatological and otherwise: "this is it!" he exclaims to Sim (200). He simply accepts this experience without the need for proof: for him the revelation of God goes beyond substance and deep into the heart of things. Most importantly, though, he considers Matty a spiritual guide and saviour: not a herald or forerunner of last things, but rather a manifestation, on a personal level, of *parousia* itself. His sense, then, precludes sensibility, and his vision is reflected self-wise, and is ultimately very limited. He sees mainly that portion of glory that incites his own mystery.

Sim Goodchild—God's child—is more skeptical than Bell, and his reluctance to be pulled in brings him somehow closer to the truth than Bell. Though he is tentatively

impressed, or at least troubled, by Matty when he first meets him, that doubt disappears at their second meeting. The second meeting takes place in the former domicile of two neighbour girls in whom Sim always had an unhealthy interest. That obsession colours his experience of the place, and he feels as if it were “magical” by their having been there. In truth, the girls are the manifestation of evil in the text, or at least Sophy is, and so for Sim’s head to clear, he must experience the “desecration” of that atmosphere, and the revelation of something better. This meeting is a kind of “Last Supper” or “upper room experience,” affiliating Sim and Edwin with the apostles (‘Simon’ Peter and John), and Pedigree with Judas.

This comes about in three successive waves. The first wave is a recognition of Matty’s humanity. Matty removes and replaces his hat, and in the interim Sim sees his face with its marred duality. Golding calls this a “revelation of a fact” that made Matty “no longer a forbidding monstrosity but only another man” (230-31). This is one of two places that Golding uses the word “revelation,” and it works quite literally as a description of the act itself. It is what Augustine would call a *visio corporale*, “a sensory and realistic presentation of natural images” (Jeffrey, “Dreams, Visions” 214) that occurs to the exclusion of all other sense, dovetailing with Sim’s earlier sense that Matty was “the point” of his background, “outlined” in some way by it, and radiating potent grief and anger (Golding, *Darkness* 207). Sim seems to understand Matty, at least to sense the bigness of what Matty is about, and it aligns him with Matty in a more substantial way than Bell, whose interest is egoistic, is capable of experiencing.

Sim’s reaction to this “revelation” surprises even him: he holds out his hand as a simple social grace, in its turn a gesture of spiritual grace, since Matty is typically

shunned. The oblique and natural warmth and charity of the gesture counter-balance Sim's former spiritual misdirection, and he is given, now, a *visio spirituale* of his own being. His hand held palm up by Matty, Sim, a bookseller by trade, sees his palm as if it were a "volume . . . most delicately bound in [the] rarest or at least most expensive of all binding material—and "then he [falls] through into an awareness of his own hand that stopped time in its revolution" (231). He sees his hand, we conclude, as God sees it, or at least as someone allowed to look through time and human corruption briefly might see it: it was "made of light," "precious and preciously inscribed with a sureness and delicacy beyond art and grounded somewhere else in absolute health. . . . Sim stared into the gigantic world of his own palm and saw that it was holy" (*idem*). Of course, in the way noted earlier, Golding reserves the substance of holiness, and can only give us—and that figuratively—the barest of sensory images, but the near poetry of the moment conveys something of its larger revelatory importance as a moment of romantic connection between the real and metaphysical worlds. What it seems to mean, if we are paying attention, is that the irruption of the divine in the human is not a disruption, but a transfiguration and restoration of the natural order (Kinkead-Weekes 72), much as Pincher Martin's "hallucinations" were irruptions of healed and healing self-perception, and the tree that Jocelin sees embodies the virtues he wished to convey in his architectural "prayer" (*Spire* 196).

The third wave works similarly: in a circle at the table, Sim finds he must scratch his nose, and the contrast of that urge with the "vastness" and stillness of the circle they had formed makes him even more aware of the urge (*Darkness* 232). He relieves the itch by screwing up his face and rubbing it on the table, and at the moment Sim makes this

inelegant and anti-hieratic movement, Golding has Bell sing a word incomprehensible to Sim, but one revelatory of the world of spirit. That world emerges momentarily and withdraws, “[hiding] itself again . . . reluctant as a lover to go and with the ineffable promise that it would love always and if asked would always come again” (233). If the promise is indeed “ineffable,” then it can only be figured in terms of human love, and not represented in its actual substance.

Figuration sits well with us here, perhaps, as I suggested above, because the moment nears poetry, and because the humanity and personality of the figuration at once obscure and more acutely suggest the promise and glory inherent in experience. That glory is this: that underlying our basest urges, encrusted and veiled in our too human flesh, are beings made glorious because they are loved by God, and are expressions of his love. Even Sim’s interest in the girls, an interest later acknowledged to have acquired sexual and profane dimensions, is originally rooted in a fatherly affection. It is the flesh, Golding’s novel tells us, that corrupts and limits our vision of self and others, and spirit which tries to break through and redeem the flesh.

We are reminded a number of times that “there, but for the grace of God [go we]” (213, 246). Sim is the proof of this. Returning to the girls’ room, a room Sim had imagined in sexual fantasy many times, Sim and Edwin see one of the girls bathed in the light of a “brothel pink” lamp, and then discover at her departure a chair and some rope in a cupboard—what they think is evidence of prostitution and sexual bondage—and the idea cures him of the profane feeling (246-47). He feels only shame and grief for Sophy under the weight of that evidence—and grief for what the world has lost in her (259). He is wrong in the absolute sense, for this is not revelation, but speculation: Sophy’s

prostitution is primarily spiritual, not physical—or not merely physical—and much more tragic than Sim thinks. And yet the scene tells us something about Sim’s vigilance of mind and spirit, and of his role in the world. He recognizes a fundamental rent in Sophy’s moral being, and this is the cause of his grief. Edwin, ever the mystic, turns to meditation as he waits for his master to come—and promptly falls asleep. It is Sim that is the rock, who sees if he does not see clearly, and who seeks to understand what he sees as a superior kind of meditation (280).

Matty’s own experience with revelation is, as I noted earlier, processual and cumulative, proportional to the importance of the role he plays in the novel’s eschatology. It includes intuition, impression, and all three kinds of vision outlined by Augustine: corporeal, spiritual, and intellectual. The peculiarity and coherence of his development set him apart from the minor characters and affirm his prophetic status. Furthermore, they establish an “apocalyptic” sense of revelation in both Frye’s sense of apocalyptic “imagery” as expressions of a desirable world and in the scriptural sense of the self-disclosure of divine being, a strain that contrasts with the “demonic”—undesirable *and* actual, here—and robs it of its power. This other sense is given through Sophy, a twin of questionable origin who discovers a duality of her own. She is Matty’s dark foil, the one whose darkness is made visible by his light.

We learn early on that Matty’s mouth is a kind of “partition,” a veil-motif that is evoked several times in the novel—as partition, shutter, curtain, and fall of hair—and which is consistently a motif in Golding’s fiction, including the other novels I discuss in this chapter. That image is most poignantly represented in Matty’s efforts at speech, the narrator tells us, “it seemed that a word was an object, round and smooth sometimes, a

golf ball of a thing that he could just about manage to get through” (18). Edwin Bell later observes that Matty’s mouth is not intended for speaking (206). No mistake, then, keeping in mind the substantiation of the Word-as-Flesh, that he repudiate all text but the Bible, and that he prefer silence to noise. He works this out on the basis of his sense of something following him around—of an undercurrent or overcurrent beyond “words, . . . that endless cackle of men” (47). Silence and the “still dimension of otherness” it opens up become his preferred idiom. As an adolescent he stands outside Sim’s bookshop, brooding over the unattainable beauty of a cashier at the ironworks where he is employed. In the window he sees a glass ball, translucent and refractory, that penetrates his vision with light and allows him to enter the dimension of stillness; a diversion, in grace, from the world of the flesh that had been claiming him (47-48).

Released from his experience of light, Matty realizes he is leaning nearly at right angles to the building, and that the sun has been obscured by cloud, and that this was something he was “shown” from outside himself, though it is as yet unintelligible to the intellect: it is a *visio corporeale*. As he tries to recall the experience it changes shape and becomes an intuition or impulse (48). Seeking shelter from the rain he sees and enters a church as something “he had to do.” He kneels, prays, is dissatisfied, and lets his mind wander back to his romantic vision of the girl. He is impressed with an ungrammatical but highly significant phrase: “*The daughters of men*” which he understands to be a rebuke of his sexual interest and an injunction to celibacy. And then the curate cries out “Who are you? What do you want?” (49). Unlike Samuel, Matty hears the voice as if in his head, and he answers it there, ignoring the priest. It is a moment of vocation, “of pure, whitehot anguish” in which he chooses to submit his will to the Will that stands behind

the revelation and the rebuke he has received. Indeed, the rebuke is the revelation to Matty of God's interest in him, and he discovers that what he wants, despite the grief it brings him, is what God wants for him.

In contrast, Sophy will seek the noise of the transistor, the cackle of media, and refuse the voice of God (131). Her early demonic "revelations" occur in the midst of noise or distraction, not stillness. Hearing "two talks" in her transistor (the spoil of her first, failed exercise of will)—one, a voice speaking of the "running down of the world," and the other, that of a statistician speaking about the probabilities of counting cards—Sophy chooses to attend to the latter (131), even if the message about entropy remains with her. The angels tell Matty later that they called her at that moment, but she refused them (238). Sophy prefers the babble, the numbers, the possibility of her own will and the abject and misplaced individualism of self-belonging (123). It is a farce. Under the influence of a "Sophy-Thing," a consciousness of Being that lies at the mouth of a dark tunnel that leads out into a cone of black light backwards from her eyes, a thing which she mistakenly identifies as herself, and thus which gets more and more control over her, Sophy begins to "hunger and thirst" not after righteousness, but after "Weirdness" (132).

Surprisingly, though they are willing to treat Matty as an angelic figure, and consider his visions *bona fide*, few critics are willing to equate Sophy with demonic powers. Crompton identifies her with Satan (209), but other critics (Granofsky and Clews, notably) fail to consider that her senses of "of course" and entropy originate not only from within, but from behind and beneath Sophy as well—in other words, from a demonic realm, which gives her relationship to the "Sophy-Thing" at the rear of the tunnel a necessary clarity. Her weirdness evolves into something more than simple

difference or strangeness. It finds expression in violence and sexual amorality, as if to break down the “Sophy-girl” and awaken and empower the “Sophy-thing” that lies behind the daylight Sophy. It evokes “wyrd” and “wyrding,” terms associated with mysticism and witchcraft, the Celtic equivalent of voodoo or truth/reality-making. Sophy’s imagination is *a kind* of prophetic mechanism, but in the sense of a false prophet or raver. She sees and imagines things as revealed or born in the darkness, and then tries to bring them about out of darkness into light (126, 132). These impulses take on an increasingly eschatological character: Sophy tells her boyfriend later that her plan to abduct and hold for ransom a child from the school where Matty works as caretaker will “help the world run down” (166-67), the demonic impulse opposed to the redemptive optimism and hope of apocalypse. In another sense, “weirdness” feels to her like her very destiny, as if she were helpless to its impulses in her rather than in control of it. Hers is the darkness made visible, as I mentioned before, but not made visible to her, and her “revelations” obscure and bias her vision as much as they give her access to a dark infinitude of being, which, as with the revelations of the divine in the novel, is never explicitly characterized as Satanic in the novel, but is recognizable as the malevolent counter-presence to that of Matty’s experience.

The evidence of this opposition is in the characters themselves. Matty, disfigured, awkward, and strange, is also morally high-minded, and mercilessly compassionate, even to those who injure him. Sophy is pretty, highly intelligent and sociable, and is filled with darkness, depravity, and an inability to love except selfishly. Matty’s idioms are silence, patience, honesty, grief, and righteous anger: Sophy’s are static, noise, violence, prevarication, illusion, and outrage. Sex for her is a conduit to self-awareness and the

exercise of her will over others, and she brutalizes her sexuality in order to exorcise her hatred of her own body and mortality, prostituting her body and soul as a result, and becoming, Matty is given to understand, “the terrible woman” (236) of Revelation, the “whore of all the earth.” Sophy even refers to herself as a whore after her first sexual experience (139), the seduction and manipulation of a much older man, an act she considers inconsequential “in view of how the whole thing is running down” (138). Here the nature of her sexuality is linked directly to eschatology, and the connection with the “terrible woman” is cemented again later. Gerry, uncomfortable with Sophy’s false engagement (amorous, if indifferent) to Fido, remarks “Think you’re something out of history, don’t you?” Sophy replies, “I don’t know any history.” Gerry rejoins, “Don’t need to. Whore’s instinct” (169).

Matty’s celibacy is contrapuntal to Sophy’s promiscuity: a sacramental offering, an obedience that helps him hear and see what others are insensible to. Matty grows stronger in the revelatory experience, and clearer in his understanding of it, so that he becomes, in the final stages of his life, “an elder” in the spirit world, receives his “spiritual name,” and sees what he is to be: a bright and glorious personage who, like Christ, will speak with a “two-edged sword” (239). Sophy’s revelatory moments resemble more and more possessions, fits, and seizures that leave her exhausted and strange. She experiences an “entropy” (185) of self, growing wilder, more anxious, stressed, broken, and eventually berserk at her failure to make her will happen, as evidenced by her reaction to her failure to commit the “outrage” of seducing her own father (185-88), and her final demonic tantrum when she learns that the kidnapping scheme has failed and she won’t be allowed to fulfil her murder-fantasy (252-53). And

here is the key—she is never sensible to the counter-valent forces that trump her will, or better that trump the will of the thing that inhabits her, and that reach out to her as much as they do to everyone else.

The question of sex and celibacy is one of many incremental refrains in the novel which serve to clarify that revelation comes, to Matty at any rate, on the heels of meditation, sacrifice, and even anguish, and in God's own time. His experiences foreground the need for a disciplined and humble patience with the revelatory process that cannot be affected by the recipient. Sex, or rather orgasm, is for Sophy one of the experiences that launch her into her own "revelatory" space. She is no more in control of the process than Matty, of course, but where Matty achieves a state of readiness through discipline, Sophy is often drawn into contact with the will of the Sophy-thing in moments where her body and mind are undisciplined.

Another important refrain has to do with Matty's sense of purpose. He is aware that something will be expected of him, and he is anxious about it, but even more fundamentally he seeks to understand the reason for his difference. In response to the curate's/God's other question—"who are you?" (49)—Matty asks the same question of himself. His exile in Australia will see that question evolve as does his sensitivity to and experience of the revelatory. "Who am I?" (and do we see the shimmer of the "I AM" in that question?; 51) becomes "What am I" (a more essential and provocative question; 56, 60) becomes "What am I for?" (68) as Matty is led from the familiar language of a "revised" and "updated" version of the Bible to the relative complexity and opacity of the KJV—a volume that has been both praised and maligned, but that for many years was considered the most accurate and proximate translation of the Hebrew and Greek texts. In

other words, Matty is asked to encounter the Word on His own terms, and taught that his understanding matters less than his obedience. Again, Ricoeur's statement is helpful:

. . . does not such a word reaffirm the sacred just as much as abolish it? It does so if hearing this word is impossible without a transvaluation of the values *tremendum* and *fascinosum* into obedience and fervor. For my part, I cannot conceive of a religious attitude that did not proceed from "a feeling of absolute dependence." And is this not the essential relation of humankind to the sacred, transmuted into speech and, in this way, reaffirmed at the same time it is surpassed? (*Figuring* 65)

At one point, Matty asks the angels, "What does HE want of me?"; they reply, "Obedience and to throw away your Bible" (92). This is not a rejection of scripture by any means, for by now, the word has been so deeply impressed in Matty's mind and heart as to be writ in "fleshy tables" (2 Cor. 3:3: see also Ricoeur, *Figuring* 175). It is, rather, both an Abrahamic test of obedience, and a way to bring Matty further into unmediated association with the divine beings.

Word had already given way to symbolic action as Matty had retired into silence, only rarely reciting his portion, and thus attuning himself more acutely to the sense of that obedience as a "MUST" or compulsion that is trying to break through, and to which language is a barrier (57). After the first evolution of the question, Matty has dreams (*visi spirituali*) and dialectical impressions: an internal voice (his own) that speaks in his language and which he recognizes as thought which is largely unstable. He flees from the voice as he had fled the temptation of wanting Mary Michael Hanrahan, and wanders in what turns out to be the periphery of the outback, an experience which culminates in a "crucifarce or crucifiction" and near castration at the hands of an aboriginal. Through the

“force” of this experience, which aligns him with Christ but only in very lowercase terms, Matty is even more ardent to know his purpose, and it is here that the question evolves into “what am I for?” (68). Again, the question is dealt with only obliquely, and its function seems to be to keep him seeking and acting so that he would be in the right places at the right times. Mimicking the actions of an “Abo” charmer, Matty freezes and stands “for half-an-hour, without moving” (*idem*). The precise nature of this experience is kept hidden from us, and perhaps from Golding as well, though he later connects it with the familiar apocalyptic images of “silence in the heavens for the space of an hour” at the opening of the seventh and final seal (Rev. 8:1) and the darkening of the sun in Sophy’s murder-fantasy (Golding 252: see Rev. 6:12).

Whatever occurs, however it comes to him, Matty acts with benign patience and faithful certitude in representing the demise of the world in front of the Queensland State House. After the accidental fire, the government minister asks him if he “sees”—that is, does Matty have “second-sight” (71, 201). He replies, with difficulty, “I feel!” (71), and this is the only characterization we get of the experience, though it proves to be essential in Matty’s broader experience of prophecy and of revelation: the substance of what he is to represent (Ricouer’s “proclaim”) or do (Ricouer’s “manifest”) is given to him in something beyond body, spirit, and intellect, and in some way beyond language, that excites all three faculties and speaks more clearly than language ever could. And this marks a shift in his experience of revelation.

Upon his return to England—to Cornwall—Matty begins to receive angelic visitation, and to record those visits as I mentioned earlier: one angel is dressed in red and wears an “expensive hat,” and the other is dressed in blue, his head more modestly

covered (86). At first they merely gaze at him, and the visits leave him cold and aching, and even afraid. They also sensitize him even more to the “feeling” of his prophetic responsibility, and on June 6, 1966, he walks the streets of Cornwall with the number “666” written in blood on a scrap of paper in his hatband. The need to do this, he says, “came to [him] in a flash, a great opening . . . a hand was laid on me and I understood what I must do ON THE DAY” (89). The day passes for him without apparent incident, though he is told later that judgment was passed in a way inscrutable to human understanding.

The immediacy and solidity of that understanding is what is significant, and from this point on the mode of his intercourse with the angels changes. He is at first shown white pages with words written on them (90), but eventually experiences an almost wordless exchange of understanding with the angelic figures, as his intimacy and familiarity with them increases over the years. We understand this to be a kind of gradual nurturing of his humility, submission, and spiritual capacity, and also a preparation for the fulfilment of his purpose. That purpose, he is told, is to save the life of a boy who will restore the spiritual language—*Ursprache*—to the earth, and thus prepare the faithful for the final day of judgement (239). Matty himself is a “great spirit” “brought down” by the “cry that went up to heaven” at the peak of suffering during the war (239). His revelation, then, is preparatory to a futural and global revelation of a medium that will allow intercourse and understanding between God and all his children that circumvents ineffability.

Some critics “actualize” this element of the text. Hetty Clews is under the impression that Matty himself is the *parousia* of Christ (Clews 317, 323), transformed

after his death into the figure he sees in vision (Golding 239), which is the Christ of Revelation (1:16). Crompton argues more reasonably that it is the boy he saves who will be the Messiah (205), and that Matty is to be the figure from the vision who will protect the boy spiritually in perpetuity (Golding 239). I consider these readings too pat, too wishful of a total metaphorical identity between the novel and scriptural apocalypse. While I agree with Crompton in particular that the whole of the scriptural story, from Eden to Apocalypse, finds its way into *Darkness Visible*, I do not agree that we are meant to systematize the whole to excess. Indeed, as I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Golding's orthodoxy is only relative, and in many ways his vision of the "last days," if that were what *Darkness Visible* is, would be called heterodox. Matty has received no formal authority, by training or ordination, and neither the manner of his coming nor the life of the boy he saves resonates with the prophecies of Christ's glorious appearance as the resurrected Saviour. There is no room for reincarnation (the boy) or for a second death and resurrection (Matty) in apocalyptic prophecy.

What makes the most sense is to view Golding's novel as obliquely connected to scriptural apocalypse—caught up in the spirit and energy and meaning of Revelation, but narrating events precedent to and a little outside the official purview, much like Michael O'Brien's fiction. Golding brings us to the edge of parousia, of the ultimate revelation of the infinite universe and its subsumption of earthly time, but leaves those matters to scripture. Besides, Golding likes a bit of a mess and, as I have already noted, he is much more interested in saving individuals than he is in saving the world: I prefer to think that whatever Matty's connection to those larger eventualities, he is granted some measure of peace and rest once his sacrifice is complete. Matty is certainly a Christ-figure, but in the

way prophets have always been in the Christian tradition—types and forerunners, acting out in lesser ways the Salvation that comes ultimately through Him. The “last things” here are portents, but also very personal, and therefore much more affecting and “apocalyptic” because of this.

Darkness Visible takes its title from a passage in *Paradise Lost* that refers to Lucifer’s metaphorical identification with darkness and the “sights of woe” “illuminated” by the lightless flames of Hell (I.63). In the novel, that dark presence of evil is made visible by the presence of a contrasting light. The contrast of darkness with vision or light suggests that a recognition of evil as a visible force is itself a kind of revelation. Matty’s physiognomy personifies that contrast. He is often described as “two-toned,” and Golding describes often and in detail the grotesque hemispheric division of his face and head: black hair grown out on one side pulled over to cover the bad side with a black, broad-brimmed hat (shades of O’Connor’s Hazel Motes) to keep it in place; a shriveled ear and turned down mouth and quashed eye contrasting with an attractive, radiant, even luminous (in times of happiness) good side.

Yet he is informed by the angels that the disfigurement of his “spiritual face” by sin is what unsettles them, and that it is very difficult for them to look at him, though they bear it for love (93). Clearly Matty’s disfigurement is symbolic, both of spiritual ugliness, and of man’s dual nature. The contrast is served poignantly by the other major characters, but Golding holds all of these back in some way. Sim and Edwin, despite their being, like Peter as the cock crows (257), a little lost, their lives and reputations in ruin, they bask as disciples in the warmth of the afterglow of their experiences with Matty, without really understanding what it was that he brought to them (261). Sophy is left reeling in an

absolute failure of will, and is only elliptically and futilely left to pursue that will in the absence of any other creed. Matty sees. Matty feels. Matty knows. Matty saves. And Matty is eventually sacrificed and transfigured in a final holocaust, in a flood of earthly and heavenly fire, and in a moment of absolute forgiveness.

4. Last Words: Revelation as Two-edged Sword

The Swedish Academy, in a statement quoted on the front cover of the Harcourt editions of Golding's novels, explain Golding's fitness for the Nobel Prize thus: "His novels, . . . with the perspicuity of realistic narrative art and universality of myth, illuminate the human condition in the world today." For all his theological flexibility, his creative curiosity about the different ways in which a figure, a person, might experience belief, and doubt, and grief, and fear, and even God himself, Golding seems always to come back to one instinctual, archetypal truth: that the individual is precious, no matter his or her own failing. Even Pincher Martin has some sense that he is "precious" (14). But this idea is most profoundly realized in the person of Pedigree, whose name reminds us, even obliquely, that we are not just creatures, but offspring, and worthy of the effort and attention of God. What is required in Golding's model is the willing dissolution of the "concealing screen" (Kinkead-Weekes 76), that veil of perception that keeps our physical sense divided from the spiritual, and thus precludes the union of all three kinds of vision: corporeal, spiritual, and intellectual.

Pedigree himself is a sinner *in extremis*. We never see how far things go, but the implication is that he follows through on his lusts in an accelerated and alarming pattern, and he confides, in a violent protest, that he feels the compulsion and the catastrophe

coming, and is helpless to it, and that one day he fears he will kill to keep his secret (*Darkness* 265). It is a fundamental and profound cry for help against himself (Tebbutt 54). That Golding should select him as his object for the work of salvation is alarming but not surprising. He is the culmination of Golding's antiheroes, and his addiction—his choice and trajectory—as attainable a *hamartia* as we know: there but for the grace of God. Golding's final eschatological vision is, then, a soteriological one, though he refuses to work out the details of that salvation. Instead, he moves Pedigree tremulously and humbly through it. In a passage reminiscent of the transformative redemption in C. S. Lewis' *The Great Divorce*, Matty appears to Pedigree and wrests from him the tool of his seduction and “snaps the thread” that keeps Pedigree from God (265). In Pedigree, Golding “deliberately chooses the seamiest material to uncover ‘where the connections are’” between humankind and its creator (Kinkead-Weekes 80), and shows us how terrifyingly thin the thread that binds his characters to their blind, seamy selves really is, and how imminent their transformation may be.

Since Golding treats “prophecy” and “revelation” as tailored manifestations of God in and to the individual, thus establishing apocalypse as an intensely personal, spiritual, and theological experience, his work requires critical sensibility to the rhetorical dimensions of prophecy and revelation, and restores the spiritual dimension of hope vital to scriptural apocalypse. In *Darkness Visible*, prophecy exerts pressure on the narrative of apocalypse proper by casting its significance into an unfulfilled and new future (see Ricouer, *Figuring* 173-76). And herein lies the strength of the novel's reassertion of eschatological hope. If *Darkness Visible* reveals anything, it is the ubiquity and scope of ignorance and weakness and evil in modern life. Yet it foregrounds spiritual blindness

and moral degeneracy against a background of holy light, a purgatorial flame, and the divine presence these imply. Only against these things is darkness truly visible, and perhaps it is only when we see the darkness that the light, too, becomes visible. In Ricoeur's terms, the narrative "obscures" the substance of Revelation because it "reinforces the enigmatic aspect" of the same (199). It preserves or creates mystery, but perhaps because fiction can put us in touch with the object of mystery we may feel the ineffable truth or presence behind or through the language of narrative and the semiotics of imagery. Golding dramatizes prophecy, judgement, and revelation, imagining those experiences in language as far as possible, in order to draw characters and readers alike to the brink of language and self-knowledge, and thus toward a moment of exquisite, often excruciating salvation.

Given the flexibility of his authorial vision and control, the nature of that salvation can seem as much a surprise to Golding as it is to his audience, which lends to it in all of its incarnations a revelatory dynamic. In fact, because he is imagining and not realizing the "running down" of the world and of the subsequent coming in an anticipatory and typological sense (he imagines a preparatory conflict, not Armageddon or the Mount of Olives), he helps us see even the eschatological elements of Revelation as vibrant, living, and unfolding. The revelation is, ontologically, the *eschaton*. For Golding, apocalypse cannot be a semiotic or numerological calculus of a divine will revealed two thousand years ago. It is the culmination of human time, and the arrival (not the induction) of the Godly: a time (and a Word) that have been coming into the world forever. Golding wisely leaves absolute fulfilment of that promise veiled in God's mystery and in God's time. The result is that Golding and his readers contemplate the

nature and moment—the manner and manifestation—of the revelation of God’s presence (mediated or otherwise) or truth to the individual character as it occurs as much as they do the substance—the matter or proclamation—of that truth. The true “revelation” of Golding’s fiction, then, is not theological, but ontological: an imaginative representation of communication between the human and the demonic, and the human and the divine, and the latter wins out as it must, given the volume and weight of the apocalyptic influence in his work. The renewal of apocalypse there is already realized in the moment of revelation—the numinous witness of an eternal redemptive Grace—and therein Golding, his characters, and potentially his readers find the promise and the experience of Christ’s coming, and of eternal peace.

ROMANTIC INTERLUDES: A CONCLUSION

Near the end of his reading of Revelation, D.H. Lawrence unloads a final declamation against the Christianity of scriptural apocalypse:

[Revelation] shows us the Christian in relation to the State, to the world, and to the cosmos. It shows him in mad hostility to all of them having, in the end, to will the destruction of them all.

It is the dark side of Christianity, of individualism, and of democracy, the side the world at large now shows us. And it is, simply, suicide. Suicide individual and *en masse*. If man could will it, it would be cosmic suicide. But the cosmos is not at man's mercy, and the sun will not perish to please us. (*Apocalypse* 197-98)

This statement is extraordinarily acerbic. Richard Aldington claimed that what embittered Lawrence the most toward Christianity, what exercised him the most about the question of religion in general, was his very positive desire for the restoration of an elevated "sense-awareness," a "consciousness" of living "breast to breast with the cosmos" (xxvi). His rejection of Revelation as articulated in the quotation above ironically conveys that

romantic sensibility. He wished for communion with the infinite mystery of the heavens, and wished it for all humanity, from the sounds of it. He saw in Revelation an enemy to such a project. Well, perhaps; but only if one stops with the ends, and resists the promise of peace and happiness that comforts a fallen world that seems bent, by its own doing, on having an eventual stop. Lawrence faults the God of Revelation for what Christians bring upon themselves, and fails to consider the deeper message of Revelation: that what the God of scripture sees, what He knows must be, and what He wishes for his creation do indeed transcend the limits of the literary imagination.

Speaking about the Torah in particular, and thus reaching back to the foundations of prophetic discourse in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, Ricoeur posits the following, which might be said to respond directly to Lawrence's withering cynicism:

Prophetic discourse draws from the traditional discourse an unforeseen potential of hope. . . . In other words, narrative when touched by prophetic eschatology liberates a potential of hope, beyond the closure of the established tradition. And the typological recovery of figures borrowed from the traditional narrative rests upon no other principle. The past is not simply exhausted, as the prophets of misfortune say; rather, it leaves behind a storehouse of inexhaustible potentialities. But it requires prophecy and its eschatology to open this initial surplus of meaning that, so to speak, lies dreaming in the traditional narrative.

(Figuring 176)

The contrast with Lawrence is striking. For Ricoeur, prophecy is as essential as eschatology to the interpretation of scriptural discourse. With it, we can see that it is one of the great and beautiful paradoxes of Judaeo-Christianity—one implicit in Huxley's Eustace Barnack and Golding's Pincher Martin—that God “destroys” the counterfeit

being of the world and, if invited, of every individual in it in order to preserve and magnify what is most precious. Donne felt it, and John of Patmos certainly did. After all, his last words ask Christ to come: no mention of vengeance upon gentile or infidel heads for centuries of persecution, no calls for the destruction of the wicked—rather an appeal for the peace and glory of living in the company of Christ.

But Lawrence got Revelation mediated, and by the time it reached him it was a scarified, corrupted, contemptible thing—all its beauty and mercy and love veiled behind a fixed and demotic sneer that emphasized retributive justice. Without at least a suspension of disbelief—though not necessarily the adoption of belief—in the constituent rhetorical identities scriptural apocalypses claim, our encounter with them, in their original forms or as they manifest in literature, will be necessarily limited, closed to certain possibilities of both ironic and “faithful” significance. Ricoeur’s statement is borne out by Lewis’ latent optimism about an aesthetic *parousia*, by Huxley’s desire for “unitivity,” and certainly by Golding’s overall concern with the condition of man. And it speaks additionally to the fundamental reason so much of critical modernism despises scriptural apocalypse and thus seeks to limit its range of meanings and influence: unsuspected, intractable skepticism about the spiritual roots of apocalypse in prophetic discourse and in the self-disclosure of God and the cosmos shuts our eyes to a “storehouse of inexhaustible potentialities” of meaning when that story enters into the fictions we read.

Yet for all of his animosity, Lawrence came very near to seeing through that veil at the end of *Apocalypse*, very near to seeing that the gospel of the Revelation was indeed a gospel of union on a precisely cosmic scale, though the terms of his epiphany are

decidedly his own:

But the Apocalypse shows, by its very resistance, the things that the human heart secretly yearns after. By the very frenzy with which the Apocalypse destroys the sun and the stars, the world, and all kings and all rulers, all scarlet and purple and cinnamon, all harlots, finally all men altogether who are not "sealed," we can see how deeply the apocalyptists are yearning for the sun and the stars and the earth and the waters of the earth, for nobility and lordship and might, and scarlet and gold splendour, for passionate love, and a proper unison with men. . . . (199)

Lawrence cannot maintain that sensibility, for all his cosmic yearning, because he thinks that the "unitivity" Huxley's characters openly sought and that Golding's protagonists sometimes achieved by seeing the infinite in and around them, can only happen here, in the flesh: "[w]hat man most passionately wants," he expostulates,

is his living wholeness and his living unison, not his own isolate salvation of his 'soul.' Man wants his physical fulfilment first and foremost, since now, once and once only, he is in the flesh and potent. For man, the vast marvel is to be alive. . . . [because] the magnificent here and now of life in the flesh is ours, and ours alone, and ours only for a time. . . .

So that my individualism is really an illusion. I am part of the great whole, and I can never escape. But I *can* deny my connections, break them, and become a fragment. Then I am wretched.

What we want is to destroy our false, inorganic connections, . . . and re-establish the living organic connections, with the cosmos, the sun and earth, with mankind and nation and family. Start with the sun, and the rest will slowly, slowly happen. (199-200)

Start with the sun, indeed. And that is precisely where Revelation takes the gaze of the authors I have studied here: not to the past, not to the materialism of earthly life, but forward and upward (*Nota bene*, Eustace!), eyes bright with hope and reverence, with a pulsing fear and a sorrow for what ruins and debases the earth, and a glorious impatience for what drags them and keeps them downcast and sullied. Furthermore, apocalypse is, as a revelation, a verb that has as its indirect object God's people (Minear 15), whoever they may be; and it is no significant stretch to suggest that in the Judaeo-Christian view every human person is, individually and in community, one of God's people. As, in a very significant sense, *the* revelation—the apocalypse—Revelation stands as a moment of open contact with the cosmos, a “breast to breast” awareness of the individual's and humanity's importance to the God of that cosmos. In the fictions I have analyzed here, and in many other twentieth-century fictions, what the characters hear in scriptural apocalypse is a voice that calls them to peace and safety, whatever may happen around them.

Lawrence's particular complaint is fundamentally different from Kermode's, or the complaints of other critics mentioned throughout this thesis. The eschatological vision of critical modernism is rooted in a truncated sensibility about what both eschatology and the larger complex of apocalypse involve. But the outcome is more or less the same: a deep and abiding skepticism not only about the truth claims of scriptural apocalypse, but about its fundamental theological and cultural meanings. In the case of critical modernism, this has led to a tendency to ignore or misread texts, modernist and otherwise, that do not support an explicitly secular or “realist” use of apocalypse and apocalyptic elements.

Of course, in theological terms prophecy is not the work of the imagination, and fictions are not actually or even generically revelations, though they may be offshoots of both the vocational and ontological dimensions of these elements of scriptural apocalypse. This is so even in the fictions of the second stream of modernism for which I have been arguing. What connects Lewis, Huxley, Golding, and their colleagues of the second stream is their very serious self-consideration, their observation in the now of the march of human personality and the erosion of certainty in belief. In addition to the objects of anxiety, scientismic and clinical, they are attuned to the anxiety itself which accompanied the Nietzschean declaration that the modern human was no longer capable of believing in God. The key distinction between these writers and the writers most often treated by critical modernism is that the former do not take Nietzsche at his words, but seek to prove him wrong in subtle, perhaps accidental ways.

Therefore, if we accept, as critics of modernism certainly ask us to, that modernist and other twentieth-century British fiction is by the nature of its concerns, structures, and purposes, patently apocalyptic—that it manifests a highly eschatological, highly personal ontological mode set over against the ends of history and being alike—then we should be able to agree that the spiritual, intellectual, and literary uses of that apocalyptic grammar will run the gamut. Whether they yearn fearfully for a renewal of hope against the anxiety and despair of the cessation of history, turn the eyes of their reader to something outside of tradition with the promise that it will redeem human institution and Being, or staunchly resist the possibility of redemption from any quarter, the characters and fictions I have studied here discover a gap between human consciousness and experience that the human mind wishes to bridge, and they orient the gaze of the reader toward a future rife

alike with threat and promise.

In fictions that take Revelation straight, or at least recognize and interrogate something of value or interest in it, the locus of human potential is the *eschaton* of human history in God's universe—for the Jews, Messianic salvation, and for Christians, the *parousia* of Christ—and the promises of self-definition and self-knowledge for the individual and for humanity at large via renewal/resurrection, both of which culminate in Revelation *as* revelation and as a series of events in which the eschatology of every individual is bound up, and upon which it is projected. In other words, these fictions weave their stories into the whole story of Revelation, even if, like Golding, they stop short of representing it in its entirety. They posit the insufficiency of ethical, political, or social meaning, and imagine the encounter of the human soul with a recognition of its need for “religious justification” (Bakhtin, “Author and Hero” 143).

The insertion of those lives into apocalyptic frameworks serves, potentially, as a precursor to or condition of an otherwise unrealizable greatness (Ricoeur, *Figuring* 92), whether that greatness is realized by God in the individual, or if the individual is permitted by God to enjoy that greatness by virtue of reconciliation with his will. And that spiritual drama is at the heart of the apocalyptic sensibility of the second stream. These novels see apocalypse as more than an end characterized by waste, degeneration, and destruction, but as the continuing, hopeful collusion of individual human destinies into a universal one of peace, prosperity, and of eternal work, bound up absolutely in the revelation of a Godly interest in the subject to the subject itself, a revelation made possible by the subject's own seeking. As a result, apocalypse is taken quite seriously as

revelation in these works, and not more narrowly as a destructive or transformational event imminent or immanent in consciousness.

Indeed, a doctrine of hope translatable into positive action is central to the concepts of individual eschatology and apocalypse. Hope, claims Pieper, is a “theological virtue” in that it is possible only in terms of a hope for salvation (135-36). Says Ricoeur, “We do not *believe* in sin, but in salvation” (93). This hope and belief, like eschatology and apocalypse, and tied inextricably to them because fixated on the hope of resurrection (Ricoeur 93), manifest in individual and universal modes as well:

If hope means that the hoping person says (no, lives), ‘It will turn out all right, it will have a happy ending’, we must ask *what* will turn out all right, *what* will have a happy ending? Well, to begin with, the existence of the person hoping himself. But is it not simultaneously affirmed—since the goal-image of the Christian’s hope bears the name ‘New Heaven and New Earth’—that this mundane reality which meets concrete experience, this ‘waiting’ creation in its entirety, will also turn out all right and, beyond all expectation, have a ‘happy ending’? (Pieper 136-37)

Individual hope and universal hope are mutually inclusive, and both breed an optimism which allows for positive action, for if “God is the Lord of individual lives he is also Lord of history” (Ricoeur 93).

Pieper continues: “only the man who combines in himself this affirmation and this readiness will retain the possibility of historical activity, arising out of a genuine inner impulse, even in the midst of catastrophe” (138). Furthermore, “[h]ope tells me that there is meaning and that I should seek it,” says Ricoeur, with a caution that since that meaning is hidden we should avoid systematizing that meaning, but remain open to expansion and

growth—to living revelation (95). That meaning is immanent in experience; its proof is our desire for it. The novels of this second stream understand that desire, and they believe that the meaning we seek is veiled to human kenning, so they engage God *as* God in discussions which strain at the reason for things, the answers to which are in their conception possible only in the revelation of the nature and knowledge of God himself, the comprehension of which is otherwise impossible to them. The protagonists of these novels learn humility in relation to a divine presence that is actuated in the world of the fiction, and this humility permits them to continue to act in ways and scenes grander than themselves, and to speak with wisdom beyond their own. That wisdom is counterfeit, of course, for it is born in the wit and wisdom of the author, but the earnestness of the portrayal of that wisdom as inspired allows the willing reader to imagine it is God's after all.

And now, as in Frye's cycle of modes and Robinson's hermeneutic round, we have come full circle. Lukács' protagonist and Nietzsche's overman seek to establish a concept or vision of the world without a transgredient Other and fail, since the world is much too big for them to contain. Conversely, a vision of the intersection of the divine with the human is careful to represent meaning or the activity of understanding in ways that open out possibilities of ontology and epistemology rather than outlining the bounds of that meaning and thus presuming to define the limits of comprehension and human potential. This is the very heart of Revelation as revelation, and the crux of its appeal in modern literature, for it comprises the elevation and magnification of the individual mind to subsumption within the infinite mind of God.

This approach acknowledges that some novels explicitly evoke an anagogical level of experience, and project or signal a god-consciousness that binds up the experiences of their characters in the superior and more complex narrative of that fourth level. These “Other” modern novels signal a position in relation to an “Essential Thing” they cannot fully capture, but that they accept as actual all the same. In Huxley and Golding, that narrative is the relation between God and the human subject which requires the willing submission of the human will to the Divine, or the adoption of God’s will as one’s own, even if this results in the apparent and intensely individual death of self (and not the archetypal death of God); in Golding, that essential thing is the transcendent and ineffable Grace that makes the relation—and the hope it offers the subject—possible (Ricoeur 84-85).

The point of this thesis has not been to disprove or even discount readings of either modernist or later texts rooted in a critical sense of the extensible atheism or agnosticism of the period and its heirs, nor has it been to demonstrate that even when the moderns or their critics seek to overturn traditional religious thought that they are somehow affirming the very thing they reject. But the fact that there are texts—many more beyond the few novels I have read as illustrations here—that resist identification with the nihilistic streak in twentieth century fiction, and that this body of texts is potentially “more” apocalyptic in both form and spirit than the other, requires us to rethink the apocalyptic vocabulary of critical modernism and thus our treatment of apocalypse in the century on the whole: to interrogate our use of these terms, and to think more responsibly about what they used to mean and therefore, culturally, still do.

What has been fundamental to this study is to restore to critical study of

apocalypse the option of calling on an apocalyptic sensibility that acknowledges scriptural apocalypse as both a literary genre and, in rhetorical terms, a sacred, prophetic document rich with eternal promise. To say that any body of literature is apocalyptic or invokes apocalyptic feeling, as so many critics have said of the literature of the twentieth century, is to re-situate that literature in a religious context that must not be ignored if we are to appreciate the full dimensions of its aesthetic, psycho-emotional, and even spiritual activity. Should we stop talking about modernism's grand aesthetic and socio-political revolutions or predictions as apocalyptic? No. But we should be very clear about the extent and nature of their apocalypse-ness. A restoration of the scriptural and religious sensibilities to the idea of apocalypse will not only allow us to examine texts like those I have read in this thesis—texts that resist a definition of apocalypse born of the skeptical dispositions of critical modernism—but it will also serve to clarify the character and artistic purpose of texts that do secularizer apocalypse.

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