Small Screen Revelations

The Bible in the Modern World, 50

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Small Screen Revelations

Apocalypse in Contemporary Television

edited by
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Introduction

James Aston and John Walliss

As the title of this edited volume indicates, *Screen Revelations: Apocalypse on the Small Screen* aims to provide a critical engagement with representations of the apocalypse through the medium of television. Although the representation of the apocalypse within the popular culture has a long history, it has proliferated post-millennium as a representational device to make sense of and provide an outlet for fears and anxieties surrounding war, terrorism, pandemic disease, environmental catastrophe and religious prophecy. We have seen a resurgence of cinematic representations of the apocalypse in big-budget Hollywood blockbusters such as *War of the Worlds* (directed by Steven Spielberg, 2005) and *2012* (directed by Roland Emmerich, 2009), in literature through the continuation of the highly successful *Left Behind* series (Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins 1995–2007) and in television from the use of apocalyptic discourse to frame natural disasters such as Hurricane Katrina, documentaries on various apocalyptic scenarios (e.g., *Life after People* [History Channel], 2008) to the fantasy doomsday narratives of *Lost* (ABC, 2004–2010) and *The Walking Dead* (AMC, 2010–). Therefore, the contemporary explosion of apocalyptic ideas, motifs and imagery demands to be treated seriously in that the varied representations tap into broad concerns of humanity's present and future direction, issue of ethics and morality and, more specifically, issues that address notions of class, gender, race and national identity.

Precisely because representations of the apocalypse abound within the popular imagination and sociopolitical discourse, much has been written on the subject from Wheeler Winston Dixon's hyperbolic text on 'the end of cinema, the end of the world and the end of civilisation' in *Visions of the Apocalypse: Spectacles of Destruction in American Cinema* through the scientific and philosophical treatment of the end-times in David Jay Brown's *Conversations on the Edge of Apocalypse* to R.M. Christofides' *Shakespeare and the Apocalypse*, which studies the influence of religious iconography in Shakespeare's plays. However, despite the amount and range of academic work on the apocalypse, little has been focused on television and in particular the *what, how, and why* of apocalyptic representations within the medium. The need to address this

imbalance is essential, especially because television is an important cultural site featuring a wide array of apocalyptic imagery from the fictional to the documentary and factual news reporting. Thus, television is integral to the understanding of apocalypse: what aspects are selected, how they are represented and the reasons why such imagery is chosen.

Not only is the existing body of work examining television and the apocalypse marked by a paucity of entries, but the texts that are available also tend to provide general analysis over a broad collection of televisual texts or combine the medium of television with other popular cultural forms. For example, Anne Collier Rehill's *The Apocalypse Is Everywhere: A Popular History of America's Favorite Nightmare* looks at cultural expressions of the apocalypse, incorporating television alongside film, literature, graphic novels, games and fine art. While Rehill does analyze popular televisual texts such as *South Park* (Comedy Central, 1997–), the analysis, of necessity, is only partial, offering a point of entry or a starting point with which to engage with the full complexity of apocalyptic representations that populate the medium of television. Likewise, in the anthology *Media and the Apocalypse*, the editors situate television under the broad umbrella of popular culture, discussing *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (WB, 1997–2001; UPN, 2001–2003) alongside American folk music and apocalyptic cinema. While these texts and others (Ames 2012; Freitag 2012) acknowledge the 'multidimensional and dynamic nature of television' (Allen and Hill 2004: 18) in that it interacts with other different media forms and is dependent on audiences, technologies, national contexts and economic factors for its content and reception, they nonetheless fail to capture the scope and complexity of the formal capacities, thematic strategies and the sociohistorical contingency of televisual representations of the apocalypse.

With this in mind, *Screen Revelations* features a collection of essays that address a wide range of televisual texts, from the popularist shows *The Simpsons* (Fox, 1989–) and *Doctor Who* (BBC, 1963–) through the use of apocalyptic discourse in American televangelism to the framing of natural disasters in apocalyptic iconography in news reporting. In doing so, each chapter uses close readings of particular televisual texts to ascertain how the properties of television, their national context and representational strategies make sense of the apocalypse for a contemporary audience. That is, the apocalypse is usually read as a cataclysmic event or an even total annihilation in which a climactic battle between good and evil occurs. In the Christian sense, this is the final clash between God and the Antichrist and, although a small but significant part of the apocalypse detailed in the Book of Revelation, it is this event that structures most of the representations of the apocalypse circulating in contemporary television. Rehill states that dominant strands become ossified over time and through persistent use, in that 'the biblical apocalypse

has been passed down like a psychological gene through the millennia and continues to find expression in surprising places' (Rehill 2010: x) such as that which we find in this book, including *The Simpsons*, *Battlestar Galactica* (Sci-Fi, 2004–2009) and in the news reports of the bush fires in the Australian state of Victoria during 2009. In this respect, we can implement Richard Dawkins's term of a meme (Dawkins 1976), a unit of replication of ideas, styles, forms and themes within the cultural sphere that is passed from person to person. Although *Screen Revelations* is not concerned with meme theory per se, the chapters nonetheless identify the popular, recurrent, imitative and resilient strands of the apocalypse (in both a religious and a secular sense) that pervade contemporary televisual representations.

For example, throughout the course of this book recurrent elements are discussed such as the Manichean notion of good versus evil, archetypal stories of repentance and punishment, survival and renewal in a post-apocalyptic world, the emphasis on the common/everyday person and the dialectic between the past and the future. By focusing entirely on televisual productions of the apocalypse, an understanding of exactly what 'set of formal, narrative and representational structures and capacities' (Allen and Hill 2004: 1) implemented by each television program can be delineated. In doing so, we will be able to analyze clearly what kind of representations are being presented, and the how and why can thus be effectively mapped out so that we can begin to explain and address the crucial role television plays in the public and everyday discourse over the apocalypse—that is, not as a peripheral player but as a central component of contemporary representations and understandings of the apocalypse and how, in turn, they communicate about and tap into very real fears and concerns circulating within the national polity.

Screen Revelations: Overview of Chapters

The first four essays in the collection focus on both the way that apocalyptic themes, ideas and believers are represented on television and the way that television narratives may themselves be framed (consciously or not) in apocalyptic terms. In his chapter, Andrew Fergus Wilson examines the way in which apocalyptic ideas are treated in United Kingdom television. Taking as his examples two contrasting television programs—the documentary *A Very British Apocalypse* (2007) and the police drama *Messiah V: The Rapture* (2008)—Wilson draws on Antony Easthope's analysis of the interplay between 'reason' and 'unreason' to explore what he sees as the innate 'foreignness' of the apocalypse within mainstream British mass culture. The idea of the apocalypse, he suggests, is perceived in Britain 'as a potential threat to the sureties of British national identity', the notions of predestination and apocalyptic prophecy being fundamentally at odds with British secularism and

pragmatism. Both *A Very British Apocalypse* and *Messiah V*, he shows, seek to push apocalyptic ideas beyond Britain's borders representing them as a fundamentally foreign, un-British set of ideas; something 'at best "silly", or, at worst, murderous and mad'.

Moving from the United Kingdom to the North America, Holly Thomas examines a radically different reception of apocalyptic prophecy in her analysis of the ways in which apocalyptic discourses are deployed within American televangelism. Focusing on the televangelist John Hagee, she shows how he seeks to frame contemporary geopolitical concerns in biblical apocalyptic language, thus 'garner[ing] political and humanitarian support for a new breed of Judeo-Christian alliances against Islam while endorsing invasive and imperialistic US foreign policy'. In doing so, she highlights the tension in Hagee's message between fatalistic acceptance of a divinely preordained apocalyptic scenario and human agency. While the fate of humanity is preordained, individual salvation is not, and Hagee actively encourages his audience to play an active role in the apocalyptic scenario in a range of ways, not least political lobbying and civic engagement. Indeed, like a number of other evangelical preachers and televangelists, Hagee encourages the members of his audience to become active participants in apocalyptic history through their support of Israel. He thus attempts to form his audience into an'active evangelical subject who is pro-Israel and anti-Islam' and who are 'responsible for their own salvation at both a personal and a political level'.

Another Christian broadcaster and preacher, Harold Camping, the president of *Family Radio,* is the subject of Jennie Chapman's chapter. Camping (in)famously predicted that the Rapture would take place on 21 May 2011, but he revised the date to October 21st of the same year after an initial prophetic disconfirmation. When this date came and went without Christians being taken up to the clouds to be with Jesus, disenchantment set in among Camping's followers, and in March 2012 he admitted his prophetic error. In her chapter, Chapman presents a content analysis of television news reporting of Camping's prophetic failure that aired in the UK and North America, highlighting several themes in the coverage. Primarily, she shows how reports sought to distance Camping and his prophecies from mainstream Christianity, thus protecting moderate religiosity from being compromised by the perceived extremism of Camping's predictions. Reports also focused on the issue of how Camping's ministry was funded, making subtle associations with past scandals involving televangelists and financial impropriety. Linked with this, experts—typically from within mainstream Christianity—were deployed, again in an attempt to pit the 'good' religion of the mainstream against the 'bad' religion of Camping while simultaneously foreclosing allegations of bias that could arise if secular commentators were used. While dismissing Camping and his predictions however, reportage sought to contextualize them by relating them to recent natural and cultural events, such as the 2011 tsunami

in Japan, that could be interpreted apocalyptically. While dismissing Camping's specific prophecies, reportage thus posited that they were nonetheless understandable in the contemporary context.

Staying for the moment in the Americas, Kevin Whiteside's chapter examines television depictions of prophecies linked with the Mayan 'Long Count' calendar that, it is claimed by some, points to an apocalyptic event in December 2012. After charting the increasing mainstreaming of such prophecies from a form of countercultural millennialism in the 1970s and 1980s to a mass-market phenomenon in the decade or so since Y2K, Whiteside analyszs how the prophecies have been represented in TV documentaries since 2006. He shows how the documentaries draw together a bricolage of different prophetic beliefs, conspiracy theories, scientific predictions and biblical texts to create a form of hybrid mass-market apocalypticism.

Moving again from the northern hemisphere to the southern, Roland Boer's chapter focuses on the way in which natural disasters are framed in apocalyptic terms in Australian television news and current affairs programs. Taking as a case study the series of fires that ravaged the state of Victoria, South-Eastern Australia, in February and March 2009, he argues that television responses to the disaster can be framed in terms of three biblical narratives: Jonah, Noah and Repentance. He suggests that each represents an attempt to come to terms with catastrophe at a deeper level than scientific or rational analysis, in which we fall back into the language of older mythical narratives. Moreover, each response, in the case of the Australian bush fires, acts as an elision from real concerns over the dangers of global warming and the debilitating challenges that peak oil poses in favor of archetypal story forms that enable aspects such as the how and why of environmental disasters to be safely managed. In this respect, Boer's chapter addresses the power of apocalyptic imagery to make sense of catastrophic real-world events and offers a balanced analysis of its uses and misuses.

The remaining six chapters turn their attention to the use of apocalyptic themes and motifs in television dramas. In his chapter, Gregory Stevenson explores the motif of apocalyptic war in four series, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Angel, Supernatural* and *Battlestar Galactica*. The motif of apocalyptic war is, he argues, a powerful one, an evocative metaphor that is used in fantasy, horror and science fiction television pitting heroes against forces that would bring about the end of the world. However, in each of the four series he explores, the emphasis on a cosmic battle is invariably downplayed in favor of exploring the more mundane human struggle between good and evil. Going further, while each series continues the dualistic focus of the cosmic war, each imbues it with a sense of moral ambiguity, suggesting 'that the moral clarity of the apocalyptic battlefield does not always translate into reality, where moral issues must be fought on the ever-shifting sands of life'. He argues that they

offer a form of social commentary, undermining the stark dualisms found in the post-9/11 world.

Similar themes are explored also by Erika Johnson-Lewis, who also discusses *Battlestar Galactica*, alongside *Lost* and *Jericho*. In her chapter, which focuses on how these series represent the post-apocalypse, she argues that these series can be read as responses to the United States' post-9/11 cultural landscape, with the narratives of each 'provid[ing] spaces in which to negotiate with the present while imagining the future'. In this sense, the apocalypse is not an end, as often understood, but rather a starting point for reimagining 'what could be'. Crucially, she argues that each series reimagines this future in terms of rejecting pre-apocalyptic individualism and capitalist competition in favor of cooperation and community. In this way, the post-9/11 emphasis on violence and 'us' versus 'them' is rejected and there is both an acknowledgment of the humanity of the 'Other' and a realization that 'perhaps if we all wish to survive, we need to learn how to live together, or else we all just might die alone'.

James Aston continues the theme of using the apocalypse as a narrative to imagine the future by focusing on how the family in the popular cable show *The Walking Dead* represents fears and anxieties circulating in society over present and future directions. In this respect the dynamic of the family in *The Walking Dead* offers a pivotal base from which to analyze how the apocalypse provides 'meditations on the present and future directions that can offer a "re-imaging" of humanity along the contours of a more positive, enlightened and progressive movement'. However, rather than focusing on the apocalypse as a grand, epic event that posits 'Manichean conceptions of good versus evil, survival versus destruction, chaos versus order and past versus future', the chapter instead concentrates on the intimacy of the family, and in particular the role of the father, as central in providing an understanding of how contemporary apocalyptic texts are represented and received. In a world dominated by apocalyptic imagery through diverse threats such as war, terrorism, environmental collapse and pandemic disease, analysis of how this plays out through the private sphere of the family cogently articulates how the apocalypse serves to comment on contemporary sociohistorical configurations.

Rubina Ramji looks at a key aspect of *The Terminator* franchise that is especially prevalent in the television spin off *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles*. The *Chronicles* examine our 'ambivalent feelings about technology, our increasing anxieties about our own nature in a technological environment, and a kind of evolutionary fear that these artificial selves may presage our own disappearance or termination'. The apocalypse that is threatened in *Terminator* is not an annihilation of humanity per se but instead the replacement of humanity 'by the artificial body, reducing the self to surfaces'. Therefore, similar to Aston, Ramji addresses the fears and anxieties circulating in contemporary society and how religious narratives and iconography give cre-

dence to these fictional apocalyptic scenarios. In the case of Ramji's chapter, it is the return of the prophet—Kyle Reese in the franchise—in which much of the religious allegory resides. Reese is brought back from the future and fathers John Connor, the messiah who rises up against the machines and prevents the human apocalypse. It is on the figure of John Connor that Ramji concentrates, outlining how his character, especially in the TV show, diminishes fears over rampant, out-of-control technology while restating human agency as central to avoiding disaster. In doing so, Ramji again analyzes how intricate, complex and protean apocalyptic texts and images are in representing contemporary issues, fears and concerns.

In his chapter, Mark Seton examines the way in which apocalyptic themes are explored in the flagship BBC science fiction series *Doctor Who*. Focusing on the post-2005 revival of the series, Seton explores how apocalypticism, in both its contemporary sense and its original Greek signification of revelation, hiddeness and the prophetic, plays out in each of the series finales. Seton demonstrates how a simultaneously unfolding and enfolding mystery pervades the narrative of *Doctor Who,* as the concluding episode of each series both clarifies and mystifies the audience about the identity and intentions of the Doctor. Seton identifies key turning points in the Doctor's journey from post-apocalyptic survivor, to pre-apocalyptic savior, to the ultimate of the apocalypse itself. While the finales in Series 1 to 4 focus primarily on the Earth and its inhabitants' future, which are vulnerable to domination or destruction, the finales of Series 5 and 6 shift audience attention toward the Doctor's own longevity, as the ultimate apocalyptic moment that is both personal and universal in its implications. This question of the identity of the Doctor is finally contextualized within the broader consideration of 'who cares', where Seton reflects on why audiences continue to participate enthusiastically in this apparently unending and necessarily irresolvable mystery.

In his chapter, Raoul Adam examines the US cartoon series *The Simpsons*. Since its debut in 1989, the show has offered a satire of Middle America, and it has frequently invoked religious—particularly apocalyptic—imagery and dramatis personae as part of this satire. Drawing on Edward Edinger's tripartite schema of *mythologization*, *demythologization* and *remythologization*, Adam argues that the series seeks to demythologize the literalism of American Christian fundamentalism by drawing on and then subverting its apocalyptic motifs and tropes. In this way, he suggests, the series seeks to 'counterbalance or counteract the more extreme literalisations of myth found in fundamentalisms ... by juxtaposing the serious with the hilarious, the trivial with the grave, and the sacred with the profane'. In doing so, however, he also shows how the series also engages in processes of remythologization by creating and disseminating new apocalyptic stories and imagery through the medium of popular culture.

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1

'See you tomorrow': Apocalyptic Refusal in English Culture

Andrew Fergus Wilson

The Apocalypse Next Door

At the heart of the apocalyptic imagination is a paradoxical relationship between the local and the global that seeks to pronounce an end to all things but that produces a narrowly local cultural context in which this occurs. In film, the apocalypse as a global event has a well-established signifying chain to communicate the globality of the end: prominent landmarks around the world are destroyed by a variety of means. Yet each film's plot is restricted to a defined geocultural area rendering the apocalypse local. To be sure, the restraints of film production demand this; despite its global penetration, American cinema is, with few exceptions, very much rooted in the locales and settings that are familiar to American audiences. It might be argued that US films have a tendency to localize apocalyptic plots because of a shared perception of American exceptionalism. Paul Boyer points to the long history in the United States of conservative belief in the nation's special place in biblical prophecy,[1] while John Walliss has pointed to the extent to which the overcoming of apocalyptic threat by 'everyman' types is deeply engrained in US cinematic culture.[2] Nonetheless, the television and cinema of other nations demonstrates similar tendencies, albeit with less emphasis on the nation as playing a central role in apocalyptic events and more likely to be responding to an end to the world wrought by outside forces rather than internal ones. The apocalypse, regardless of its origin, is largely experienced as a local phenomenon and framed by the context provided by the live(s) of the film or TV program's protagonist(s).

1. Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief In Modern American Culture* (Studies in Cultural History; Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992).

2. John Walliss, 'Apocalypse at the millennium', in John Walliss and Kenneth G.C. Newport (eds.), *The End All Around Us: Apocalyptic Texts and Popular Culture* (Millennialism and Society; London: Equinox, 2009).

The current US television series *Supernatural* is a case in point; in this program the story arc that unites both the episodes and the seven seasons is based on a loosely interpreted biblical apocalypse and draws on themes of angelic war, demonic duplicity and a largely absent God. Urban legends, folklore, historical myths and religious figures—including an assortment of deities from around the globe—contribute to the troubles and travails of the central characters, the Winchester brothers. What is key here is that the setting is predominantly 'small town America'; the end of times may be universal but it is a universal America in which it is played out. Season 4's finale, 'Lucifer Rising' is set in Ilchester, Maryland, while season 5 concludes ('Swan Song') with a battle between Lucifer in Sam Winchester's body and the Archangel Michael in a graveyard in Stull, Kansas, a township close to the brothers' hometown of Lawrence, Kansas. Certainly, the series is necessarily framed by the expectations of a national audience, but the brothers' endless journey across the interior of the United States inscribes the nation with an apocalyptic role. Certainly, this is in keeping with Boyer's appraisal of the part played by apocalyptic prophecy in American exceptionalism, but it is argued here that this relationship between nation and apocalyptic imagination is a universal one. Although the constraints of television markets and audience expectations shape the locality and concerns of any imagined 'end', the cataclysmic 'end' is most readily understood through a universalized national imaginary: the global apocalypse cannot be imagined by individuals whose mental universes are structured by and through national cultures. What then emerges from apocalyptic discourse is the production of narratives of national liminality: what is threatened is the end not of the world but of particular formations of national identity or value.

In the case of the British television programs analyzed in this chapter, it becomes apparent that the idea of apocalyptic belief itself is perceived as a potential threat to the sureties of national identity. What is moot is the cultural scope of the identity at stake. While these are British productions and the title of one indicates a concern with 'Britishness', it is argued here that the focus of each is a rehearsal and confirmation of English national identity. Indeed, it is also suggested that the possibility of apocalyptic belief is, in itself, a revelation of a worldview at odds with the familial comforts of England's sense of enduring fixedness. Where *Supernatural* reconfirms US destiny and a victory over evil in the lives and geographies of small-town America, *Messiah* and *A Very British Apoclaypse* reconfirm an English tendency to withdraw from and disconfirm extremity and prophetic belief. Essentially, such a concept of a predestined elect and prophetic revelation is at odds with English pragmatism. This problematic, the representation of radically different beliefs within national cultures, lies at the heart of this paper and points to the way in which the structured opposition of difference to orthodoxy lies at the heart

of representations of apocalyptic belief in British, and specifically English, television productions.[3]

Although each constituent nation of Great Britain has its own national church, they have all shared a comparable downturn in affiliation. Britain has been used as an exemplar for the idea that modern societies have become indifferent to religious belief.[4] Tabloid newspapers dramatize this declining religiosity in headlines such as '2030: The year Britain will cease to be a Christian nation with the march of secularism' (*MailOnline*, 3 March 2012), and recent social research would seem to give credence to these claims. Data from the 2010 British Social Attitudes survey suggest that religious affiliation is experiencing a sharp decline in British society, with the proportion of the population who report that they do not belong to any religion having risen from 31% in 1983 to 50% in 2010; in England, the Church of England has seen a decline in affiliation from 40% to 20% during this period. The English experience of secularization is typical of Britain as a whole, and the role of faith in public life has undoubtedly declined. In this context any depiction of religious practice or belief that marginalizes it or offers criticism of it would seem in keeping with national cultural trends. It should be noted, however, that counter-arguments stress the diversification of religious practice and an increased nonaligned syncretic spirituality as being typical of current forms of belief.[5] Against this backdrop the viewer might expect some degree of sympathy with the depiction of nonconventional religious beliefs, but this is not the case. As will be discussed, in each instance the depiction of apocalyptic beliefs stresses their 'foreign-ness'. This is the sense not simply that they originate beyond England's borders but that they are shown to be inadmissible to English thought. At the heart of these representations, then, is not the consideration of religiosity or of apocalyptic thought but rather the apocalyptic, a metonym of dedicated religious belief, serves as a vehicle for rehearsing narratives of 'Englishness'.

3. It should be noted that the description 'British television' is moot. As will be shown, the national culture invoked most frequently is a particular rehearsal of Englishness.

4. See Bryan R. Wilson, *Religion in Secular Society: A Sociological Comment* (London: C.A. Watts, 1966). Steve Bruce (*God Is Dead: Secularization in the West* [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 2002]) suggests that Britain has seen a waning of the relevance of religious affiliation, while Callum G. Brown (*The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation 1800–2000* [London: Routledge, 2nd edn, 2009]) links the erosion of institutional Christianity to increased female autonomy.

5. See, for instance, Christopher H. Partridge, *The Re-enchantment of the West: Alternative Spiritualities, Sacralization, Popular Culture, and Occulture* (2 vols.; London: T. & T. Clark, 2004–2005); Paul Heelas, *The New Age Movement: The Celebration of the Self and the Sacralization of Modernity* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1996); and Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1994).

Television and Reality

As part of the mass media, television can be understood to perform, in part, the functions described by Stuart Hall in the following:

> the mass media are more and more responsible (a) for providing the basis on which groups and classes construct an 'image' of the lives, meanings, practices and values of *other* groups and classes; (b) for providing the images, representations and ideas around which the social totality, composed of all these separate and fragmented pieces, can be grasped as a whole.[6]

For Hall, the mass media have 'colonized the cultural and ideological sphere'. In essence, then, what he is suggesting is that it is through the mass media that a group or community knows itself and its others. They therefore can be understood to provide a visual-aural register of what Benedict Anderson calls the 'imagined community' of the nation.[7] In Anderson's view, the nation *as cultural entity* is produced in the imagination of its people—it is this imagined and imagining community that summons into being the nation as an entity knowable as a set of cultural practices. This imagined community, like any 'real' community polices its borders, maintaining the integrity of the 'social totality' and thus confers reality on the 'imagined community'. This semblance of reality of the national culture is what is at stake in its representation. Here, Antony Easthope's 'Great Oppositions' arranged along an axis of (English) reason and ('foreign') fantasy provide a useful framing device with which to explore perceived threats to English cultural totality.[8] And it is this that apocalyptic visions of a *re-imagined* millenarian community ultimately threaten.

Discussed here are two examples of British television productions with apocalyptic belief at their heart. Each belongs to an identifiably different television genre: *Messiah V: The Rapture* is a police drama, and *A Very British Apocalypse*, a documentary. Despite the differences in genre each seeks to convey a relationship with the real. John Fiske suggests that the documentary is intended to reflect reality with mimetic precision so that the viewer feels that 'the camera has happened upon a piece of unpremeditated reality which it shows to us objectively', while the dramatic presentation seeks to 'give the impression that we are watching a piece of unmediated reality directly, that the camera does not exist'.[9]

6. Stuart Hall, 'Culture, the Media and the "Ideological Effect"', in James Curran, Michael Gurevitch, and Janet Woollacott (eds.), *Mass Communication and Society* (London: Edward Arnold, 1977), p. 340.

7. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2nd edn, 1991).

8. Antony Easthope, *Englishness and National Culture* (London: Routledge, 1999).

9. John Fiske, *Television Culture* (London: Routledge, 1987), p. 24.

The presumed objective naturalism of the television camera, when turned upon reality, extends the promise of verisimilitude further than drama is able to. Television fiction is staged according the demands of the narrative and produced as artifice, but it still promises a reliable and consistent *representation* of objective reality. Drama operates as an iconic sign; it stands in for reality. In contrast, the promise of documentary was always that it was not a mere re-presentation but was, instead, a mirror held up to reality, that it corresponded to the real. Leaving aside Baudrillardian fears of the demise of the real of representation, this notion of an objective mediated 'reality' is still invoked by the premise of documentary—there is an expectation that we are being shown something tangibly 'real' that is relatively untouched by the presence of the television cameras and can be experienced as real by viewers. The contract of the real that exists between broadcasters and viewers is that there is an agreement on the direct relationship between the genre of documentary and an observable and experienced reality. Television drama tends, for the most part, toward realism in its representative strategies. The extent to which it does so and the manner in which realism is used to progressive or reactionary political ends are much contested, as is the term itself,[10] but what is crucial here is that television drama is read as having continuity with reality and of contributing to the production of the 'social totality' that Hall refers to above.[11]

The relationship to the real is crucial to both *Messiah V: The Rapture* and *A Very British Apocalypse* because they both seek to defend a particular discourse of the real from external threats: the discursive construct of the 'fact' of England. *A Very British Apocalypse* stakes its claim to the real as documentary, while *Messiah V* draws on the realist conventions of television drama to produce a verisimilitudinous effect. Its reality effect is amplified by its subgenre; Alan Clarke, for example, argues that the police drama has a heightened relationship with the real for the viewer. In his account, normally hidden police procedures and 'back stage' policing are made unusually available through the genre. The fiction of police drama is rendered partially obscure by the sudden proximity to the known but unobserved world of the police. 'For many people their only contact with a speaking policeman is on the television and this reinforces the aura of reality which police series strive so hard to

10. See, for instance, John Caughie, *Television Drama: Realism, Modernism, and British Culture* (Oxford Television Studies; Oxford: Oxfore University Press, 2000); and John Tulloch, *Television Drama: Agency, Audience, and Myth* (Studies in Communication; London: Routledge, 1990) .

11. Glen Creeber (ed.), *Serial Television: Big Drama on the Small Screen* (London: BFI, 2004).

construct.'[12] Thus, the two programs under discussion here seek to reflect or give insight into 'the real' and are watched by their audiences with that understanding. In each case, what is depicted is the cultural location of apocalyptic belief within the 'national real' or, more particularly, interactions between mainstream culture and apocalyptic culture. In the case of *Messiah V: The Rapture,* this interaction is marked by failed integration and violence, while for *A Very British Apocalypse* the interaction is less confrontational but is still founded on the radical difference of apocalyptic belief from the perspective of dominant English culture.

As has been described, it is generally understood that there is a structuring effect at work in the mass media. The passage from Hall above points to the way in which groups learn affinity and difference through the mass media. Fiske also provides useful insight into this and shows that these affinities and differences need not be hegemonic, citing aboriginal affinities between 'American Indians and American black children'.[13] Borrowing from Barthes' 'Myth Today' he further suggests that, despite this, there is still an endeavor to conceal the constructedness of culture through naturalism's appeal to the real:

> those groups with authority ... try to prevent a struggle over meaning by naturalizing *their* meaning—their economic, and social power is mobilized discursively, ideologically, and culturally to exnominate itself beyond the realm of potential opposition.[14]

It is the argument here that both *Messiah V: The Rapture* and *A Very British Apocalypse* are framed with a normative discourse of national identity that seeks to exclude apocalyptic belief from the visual-aural register of the nation and thus to shore up the dominant form of English identity and 'exnominate itself beyond the realm of potential opposition'.

'Real' English

The dedicated tradition of appealing to and seeking to reproduce the real in both documentary and dramatic television production can also be understood in light of the 'empiricist tradition' in English culture that we find delineated by Antony Easthope's Lacanian literary analysis in *Englishness and National Culture*.[15] His concerns are primarily with literature but, as will be seen, the English empiricist discourse is mobilized through television also.

12. Alan Clarke, '"You're nicked!" Television Police Series and the Fictional Representation of Law and Order', in Dominic Strinati and Stephen Wagg (eds.), *Come on Down? Popular Media Culture in Post-War Britain* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 232.

13. Fiske, *Television Culture,* p. 320.

14. Ibid., p. 35.

15. See n. 8 above.

Drawing on the self's reliance on the existence of others in demarcating itself *as* self, Easthope points to the indeterminacy of identity that this produces: the self is always already 'other' to those that it, in turn, casts as other. We can thus understand the desire described by Hall to 'grasp' social totality 'as a whole' through the mass media as a defensive and paranoid reaction to the threat posed by 'others' to a distinctive and whole, internally generated self-identity. They threaten to reveal the potential otherness that exists within each self and must, thus, be kept at bay:'The subject would preserve its coherence by denying what undermines it and projecting internal threat on to the outside.'[16] And so it is with national identity and the culture that mobilizes it. Easthope puts forward the idea of a peculiarly English mode of cultural production, a discourse of Englishness that provides the basis for the assemblage of a unified national subjectivity. It can be understood as underpinning how we perceive the world and guarantees that (in cultural terms)

> a notion of Englishness can be seen to preside over 'the English language' and English 'way of talking', a canon of literature established as English, English landscape, a certain sense of humour felt to be English, English common sense, and so on and so on.[17]

This formulation of a cultural Englishness is unified with the English state, embodied in its institutions, through English empiricist discourse. Through English culture English subjects are led to identify with the nation as state and the state as embodying a timeless and natural condition of Englishness.

For Easthope, English discourse is characterized by a straightforward empiricism that foregrounds a 'matter-of-fact' understanding of the apprehension of reality and the communication of that apprehension. In other words, we perceive the world through our senses, and through the application of reason are able to 'get to the heart of the matter' and fully perceive an indivisible and true reality. Easthope is thus in a position to put forward examples of the 'transparent style' used in the recording of facts, which 'delivers things into words' and thus preserves the real.[18] We might, at this point pause to consider that the reality effect of the television documentary and police drama described above can be seen to conform to this discourse: their promise is an access to reality or an accurate reflection of it. The convention of the invisible fourth wall is thus aligned with empiricist discourse. English empiricist discourse is marked by a seeming lack of artificiality, of a clarity of expression and a distinct correspondence with reality. It is akin to the Barthian account of naturalized dominant ideology that Fiske provides. It is akin but separate, for where Fiske's primary interests are the reproduction of,

16. Ibid., p. 219.
17. Ibid., p. 56.
18. Ibid., p. 96.

and contestation within, the discourses of class, gender and race, Easthope aims to demonstrate that the subject seeks in dominant national culture an identity that transcends and simultaneously gives meaning to the otherwise threatened self within modernity.

This English empiricism is defined in relation to an oppositional 'other' that takes a variety of guises, each of which defines an exteriority and an interiority of Englishness. At the heart of 'Englishness', contends Easthope, rests a binary opposition that informs and predicates an English mode of thinking, writing, and organizing the world; it recreates the world in a particularly English idiom, Easthope's English empiricist discourse:

> English empiricist discourse, I propose, maintains itself on the back of a binary opposition between the real and the apparent, an opposition reproduced and reworked in many directions, including:
>
> objective/subjective
> concrete/abstract
> practice/theory
>
> clear/obscure
> fact/fiction
> serious/silly
>
> common sense/dogma
> sincere/artificial
> amateur/professional
>
> hard/soft
> truth/pleasure
> right/wrong
>
> Protestant/Catholic
> English/French
> home/foreign
>
> centre/extreme
> virility/effeminacy
> masculine/feminine.[19]

This discourse structures English culture with the former positive terms repeatedly competing against the latter in order to maintain the apparent wholeness of English national identity.

The nation is thus not simply imagined but is, rather, protected, defended, contested and continually won from external threats, those others marked by the negative terms in the oppositions that Easthope catalogues. As we shall see, apocalyptic belief is constructed from within the English empiricist dis-

19. Ibid., p. 90.

course and defined through the negative, right-hand terms; it is represented as 'other' and thus alien to English culture, inadmissible.

An Apocalyptic Gore-Fest

Messiah is an ongoing series of crime dramas made by BBC Northern Ireland and shown on BBC Television. Despite its origins, the series is entirely set in England with brief overseas sequences in the fifth installment set in the Middle East. The series is composed of two-part stories that make up each segment of the series. The constituent parts of each installment are roughly an hour long. The first installment was simply called *Messiah* and was broadcast in 2001, featuring the murders of eleven men who shared their first names with the apostles and who met their deaths in the manner of the apostles. This was followed by *Messiah II: Vengeance is Mine* (2003); *Messiah III: The Promise* (2004); and *Messiah IV: The Harrowing* (2005).

Broadcast over two consecutive nights in January 2008 (Sunday the 20th and Monday the 21st), *Messiah V: The Rapture* (2008) continued its reputation for gruesome and bloody murders, which led the Scottish newspaper *The Herald* to describe it as an 'inventive and involving two-part gore-fest'.[20] The motivation for the murders in this installment is gradually revealed to have its basis in apocalyptic beliefs, and these beliefs are constructed throughout the production as being beyond the boundaries of a carefully policed Englishness. *Messiah V: The Rapture* (2008) depicts belief in the apocalypse as existing in the hinterlands between reason and unreason with its origins beyond the boundary of reasonable thought. In the context of Easthope's reading of the terms in which English culture is reproduced, apocalyptic belief is thus understood to be something foreign to and therefore inadmissible to the English mind.

The program opens in Palestine, with DCI Joseph Walker (Marc Warren), his girlfriend Salma Al-Fulani (Sasha Behar) and her brother Khalid (Daud Shah) in a car passing through a checkpoint into Israeli territories. Walker and Salma wave goodbye to her brother. Seconds later there is an explosion with Salma's brother at the center of it. This scene establishes a narrative framed within a discourse of religious extremism and, potently, *foreign* religious extremism. The second scene emphasizes the alien nature of what has preceded it—the camera cuts to the mundanity of the corridors of an English court and its attendant bureaucracy. Here, Alex Iqbal (Tamin Mobayed) and his father, Fareed (Aftab Sachak), are introduced to viewers prior to their being murdered. Alex Iqbal is a prosecution witness in the case of the rape of a daughter by her father—the girl being Alex's girlfriend, Leah Wallace (Laura

20. David Belcher, 'Messiah: Little short of a revelation', *The Herald,* 21 January 2008.

Greenwood). Tensions in the Iqbal family are evident, and Fareed is seen to slap his son; these tensions are the result of Alex's relationship with Leah and the shame that it is perceived as bringing upon the family. Leah, the alleged victim in the case, is revealed to be a member of the 'New Advent Church' (NAC).

The NAC is cast as a dangerous cult—using the term in the populist manner that *Messiah V: The Rapture* is drawing on. A series of signifiers of unorthodox Christian beliefs and negative stereotypes are used to establish the exteriority of the NAC. It is described as practicing, 'personal exorcism or casting out of demons', and the members of the NAC are also described as holding a 'fundamentalist belief in the word of God, strict belief in the Bible'.[21] Here a belief in the inerrancy of Bible again marks the group as 'alien', cultic. It is further revealed that Alex Iqbal was going to speak for the defense rather than the prosecution and testify that he believed that Leah was being 'brainwashed' by the charismatic leader of the NAC, Daniel Hughes (Ciarán McMenamin). With a soft Northern Irish accent, Hughes is at once tied by a signifying chain that leads the viewer to England's Celtic fringe and the troubled history of the region; it is a history characterized as much by religious extremism, difference, and intolerance as by national identity. The extremity of Hughes's beliefs is indexically signified when he is later described as having locked a pregnant follower in a basement for three days so that she might 'seek atonement' for having transgressed the group's beliefs. The beliefs of the church are established on the problematized 'other' side of the self–other duality and further cement the equivalencing of difference and danger that we encounter in the opening scenes. It may be further considered in the light of the outcome of Leah and Alex's cross-cultural relationship—she, brainwashed, in a cult; he and his family, brutally murdered.

The aftermath of the murder of the Iqbal family is shown in detail. Alex, his mother, father and sister are arranged, post mortem, around their dining table with their hands bound, as if in prayer; the father's throat has been cut so that his blood has drained from his face, whitening his skin. There is sand on the floor and this catches the attention of DCI Walker, who has experienced flashbacks of Khalid's suicide bombing while waiting to enter the murder scene. The sand is initially dismissed but is eventually tested and revealed to have been sourced from the Jezreel Valley in Israel, the location of the plain of Megiddo. The murder scene is thus marked by the ongoing trope of 'the foreign' and this, with DCI Walker's memories, refers us along a signifying chain to the framing device of extremism depicted in the program's opening scene.

21. *Messiah V,* episode 1; first broadcast 20 January 2008 by BBC1; directed by Harry Bradbeer and written by Oliver Brown.

Two sisters are then killed, the first of these mistaken for her promiscuous sister who, we learn, was the intended victim. Sand features again at the murder scene, but here it is shaped into the figure of an eye circumscribed by a pyramid with the letters of the tetragrammaton inscribed around it. Here we can have no doubt that the killer is conversant with what Michael Barkun typifies as 'stigmatised knowledge'.[22] The police initially believe it to be a cryptic message to them, but the lead, DCI Walker, comes to doubt this, declaring that the killer is not communicating with them, '[it's] not a message for us, he's talking to God'. Hughes, the leader of the NAC, becomes the main suspect at this point. His character has been constructed under multiple signs of religious fanaticism: cult activity, brainwashing, physical punishment and charismatic leadership. At this point in the narrative, these coalesce into the metalanguage of myth and he becomes a 'cult killer'.[23] Repeated throughout the first half-hour of the program is this tying together of unorthodox religious belief, extremism, violence and alterity. Following another murder, Hughes is quickly arrested, led off mid-sermon. His fervor is underlined as he calls out biblical quotations to his congregation while being ushered away. From here, the episode cuts to an interrogation scene, with the central investigating team of DCI Walker, DI Terry Hedges (Daniel Ryan) and DS Mel Palmer (Marsha Thomason) questioning Hughes.

During the interrogation Hughes interprets the murders as linked by Scripture to the 'seven signs' of the apocalypse. As he quotes scriptural passages, DCI Walker continually pursues his seemingly gnomic utterances where Hedges suspects Hughes of 'playing games'; at one point Hedges angrily exclaims, 'He's getting off on it, the sick bastard!' Less perturbed, DCI Walker asks, 'What is that?'[24] Reason penetrates, finding sense in madness. (As Easthope continually reminds us, there must always the trace of fact beneath all irruptions of the irrational.) Reason prevails—English reason doubly so. Thus, Easthope's theory provides a framing device through which this scene can be read as contestation between the materialist empiricism of Englishness and 'foreign' ideationalism. Faced with further scriptural quotation from Hughes, Walker is energized. He demands, 'What does that mean?' His question does not stem from exasperated disbelief but is born out of a desire 'to know' and 'to understand' and thus to colonize the irrational with reason,

22. Michael Barkun, *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America* (Comparative Studies in Religion and Society 15; Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

23. My choice of this phrase is directly influenced by the British TV Channel 4 documentary *Cutting Edge: Cult Killer. The Rick Rodriguez Story* (originally broadcast 21 August 2006), typifying the populist depiction of deviance associated with New Religious Movements.

24. *Messiah V*, episode 1.

to make it speak to him on his terms so that his role as an investigator is consolidated—the murderer no longer leading them but instead being pursued by the penetrative strategies of knowledge. Hughes brings back news from the other side of reason. Walker may have understood that there was method in the madness that confronted his colleagues and him, but only Hughes, the cultist, could speak of it. Walker's rationalizing instincts led him to the brink, but he required Hughes, established as a cultist, to speak from beyond it. Hughes details the signs that he perceives within the murder scenes:

> HUGHES: Breakdown in family relations, hedonism, a society in despair ... there are seven common signs of the end; these are first three.
> WALKER: The end of what?
> HUGHES: You, me, all of this, everything we know. It's right here on your map. Megiddo is another name for Armageddon.

With equal gravity and disbelief, Walker proclaims, 'Our killer thinks it's the end of the world.'[25] What is crucial here is that only Hughes is able to provide this information. As stated, the knowledge that he carries is stigmatized knowledge, communication from beyond the pale of reason and, crucially here, a knowledge that becomes loaded with danger in its shared use by the cult leader and the psychopathic killer. Here we see a dramatization of the threat to English empiricist discourse from external discourses. Framed by an opening shot of a suicide bomber, the program unfolds around the relationship between the sureties of English rationalism and its others.

The second part of the program opens with a consolidation of the apocalyptic belief of the killer, as DCI Walker addresses the assembled investigative team, 'History has a beginning and an end. That end is signalled by seven signs.' He is supported in his presentation by the NAC leader, Hughes, who adds, 'Common to the Abrahamic religions, Christianity, Judaism and Islam—they each trace their roots back to Abraham—the signs will act as a guide, as a signal. They will act as a warning.'[26] Walker adds further detail by showing how the murders symbolize the first three of the seven signs. The scene opens with the camera positioned among the assembled team, listening to the presentation by Walker and Hughes. We, as an audience, are being instructed in the seven signs of the end in which the killer believes; we are positioned in opposition to this knowledge and thus it is constructed as external to the 'we' that is implied through the perspectival unity between ourselves and the national state, embodied by the police in Walker and Hughes' audience. Throughout this scene the dual-

25. Ibid.

26. *Messiah V*, episode 2; first broadcast 21 January 2008 by BBC1; directed by Harry Bradbeer and written by Oliver Brown.

ism described by Easthope is personified by Walker and Hughes: Hughes, doubly marked as the exotic other through the connotative decoding of his Northern Irishness by an English audience and his leadership of the evangelist 'exorcism cult', while Walker characterizes the left-hand side of Easthope's illustrative binary opposition between English and 'other'. The police, then, are *too English* to conceive of the obscure and dogmatic theory that drives the murderer, and they rely on the stigmatized alterity of Hughes, who must act as a native guide to the police, leading them through the unfamiliar lands of millennial belief. It is clear that the investigating police, typified by the 'average copper' character of DCI Terry Hedges, could not navigate these lands alone; their dedication to the facts alone is both their downfall and their blessing—for them all dangers are external—their pragmatic rationalism reaffirming their normative status.

As the interplay between Walker and Hughes continues, Hughes is asked by Hedges, 'So what's next?'

> HUGHES: Violence and lawlessness. Seven out of the nine shall be killed, the innocent among them.
> HEDGES: Oh for Christ's sake ...[27]

Hedges's invocation of Christ signals a threshold, a leap beyond what is, for him, reasonable. From here only Hughes can continue:

> It's called the Rapture. A time of judgement. When those who shall be saved will vanish from the face of the Earth and go to an eternal dwelling place in Heaven and those who have sinned are left behind to face the final battle between good and evil. [pause] Armageddon.[28]

This could only have come from Hughes—he is an intermediary between reason and unreason; the eschatological theory he outlines is utterly removed from the commonsense world of the 'coppers'. Hedges, for example, dismisses the clue of the sands of Armageddon at the scene of the first murder as having come from builders, working on a swimming pool for the Iqbals. This prosaic explanation provides the viewer with a commonsense approach that is at once familiar and believable. Only Walker, touched by the seeming madness of extreme belief while in Palestine, intuitively senses that the sand is more than that. He has, after all, walked upon this foreign sand and is consistently tied to Israel and Palestine by flashbacks of his final moments with his lover and her brother. Hedges provides a normative position to the viewers, reminding them of the real, but Walker, in his encounters with that which is other, demonstrates the advantages of faith in the real, that the

27. Ibid.
28. Ibid.

solidity of facts may still be found beneath the most obfuscating theories held in the wider world. His is an eternal return to English empiricism, a belief founded on a faith in the facts. In a sense it is inevitable that he be a policeman, and here we find a bridging of the divide between the nation as state and the nation as culture. Walker embodies Easthope's English empiricism as cultural practice in the service of the state. Despite Walker's faith in English empiricism having allowed him to walk upon foreign sands, he can only journey so far before his inevitable return 'home'. Again, Hughes is a necessary guide—Walker may realize that the facts point beyond the everyday experiences of the average 'British bobby', but he still requires a native to show him the way: apocalyptic thought is too foreign, too distant for him to fully 'know'. To remain within English empiricist discourse, the English police must rely on a representative of the irrational to make clear to them the madness that they can never truly 'know'. The police have a dual role: they act as representatives of the state and also as subjects, bearers of the culture of the nation. In this they mark the idealized unification of the impossible 'whole nation' that Easthope describes. As such, they cannot wholly understand the killer's misinterpretation of 'the facts', for that would suggest that the killer's epistemological framework is, in some way, reasonable. For the integrity of the empiricist discourse to be maintained the killer's motivation must be maintained as exotic, as other.

It is the killer's obsession with his theoretical construct that leads to his downfall at the hands of the pragmatic agents of reason; it is, ultimately, a remembered conversation that reveals the killer's identity to Walker and the triumph of practicality over theory and common sense over dogma. This confirms the competing terms of Easthope's oppositions and simultaneously confirms the discursively necessary inevitable victory of English empiricism over any deviance from it. The killer offers Walker a shared role in his apocalyptic quest, but this is turned down and the killer meets an end, albeit a more individuated one than he had hoped for. In thwarting the apocalyptic killer, the English police save the name of reason and redeem the empiricist discourse. But it comes at a cost—Walker's love interest, Salma, with whom he had been reunited, is the final victim, and in this Walker's status as 'insider' is clarified. That which marked him as not wholly located within the home culture is erased and his Englishness recuperated at a personal level. Even here the drama cannot end because it has mobilized a narrative that is more than simply the delusions of an individuated psychotic killer. The killer's world is a shared one—more than one potential suspect is questioned—and a native guide is required to lead the investigating police through it. The killer may have been dispatched, but the apocalyptic discourse he shared with Hughes and the cultic milieu that the NAC suggested are still an unresolved threat to the dominant empiricist discourse. Indeed, here the cultic milieu fulfills the ideational threat implied in Colin Campbell's description of it

as 'the cultural underground'.[29] The full closure of the drama is guaranteed only through the final interchange between Hughes and Hedges. The covered body of Salma, Walker's lover, is seen being wheeled past the three central police characters, DCI Walker, DI Hedges and DS Mel Palmer. DS Palmer says to Walker, 'I'm so sorry ...', to which Walker curtly replies, 'Thanks'. With that, Palmer drops back as they walk and Walker and Hedges walk closer together, filling the space briefly occupied by Palmer, who is obscured from view. With her, the feminine is also excluded. Palmer had carried two plot lines, both of which revolved around her emotional relationships. Here again, her role is to fulfill the exclusion of the emotional from the empiricist discourse, a curt thank you and she disappears from view so that the men can talk and address the apocalyptic discourse raised through Hughes and the killer. And so Hedges and Walker close the piece,

> HEDGES: It will happen one day.
> WALKER: What will?
> HEDGES: The end of the world. Five billion years from now, give or take.
> The sun implodes, boiling away the oceans and us with them.
> WALKER: If you believe in science ...
> HEDGES: I'll take it over religion any day.
> WALKER: ... See you tomorrow.[30]

And so Walker walks away while Hedges remains still. The certainty of the real is established as their shared anchor. Walker's tomorrows are guaranteed in his parting comment to Hedges. This muted, mutual celebration of the real is the program's full closure; just as the murder case had a false ending and the real killer still eluded the police, the drama also had a false ending, in which the demise of the killer signaled the completion of the story but not the closure of the production as text. After the case was solved and the killer dispatched, the apocalyptic discourse inhabited by the killer still remained—indeed the police were exposed to it most fully not by the murders but by their being guided through it by 'cult leader' Hughes, who, we are warned in the first part of the drama, is capable of 'brainwashing'. The killer was transformed through exposure to the same stigmatized knowledge, and here the perceived threat of the irrational to empiricist discourse is exposed and the need for it to be counteracted made evident. The paranoid fear of the other that exists within the self referred to by Easthope is called into being here and must be eradicated so that the 'whole self' can be maintained. The pragmatic Hedges reminds the viewers of the orthodox explanation of the end of the

29. Colin Campbell, 'The Cult, the Cultic Milieu and Secularization', in Jeffrey Kaplan and Heléne Lööw (eds.), *The Cultic Milieu: Oppositional Subcultures in an Age of Globalization* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira, 2002), p. 14.

30. *Messiah V*, episode 2.

world, while Walker's 'See you tomorrow' acts to point to the unimaginable distance between our tomorrow and the tomorrow some five billion years hence that will signal the end. *Messiah* reveals to us the impossibility of an English apocalypse. It is something that is always going to happen to 'them'—foreigners, the insane or the misguided—and which can always be defused through common sense and transparent facts.

While Englishness may reveal itself through a dogged and determined adherence to material reality, it is also experienced as distinctly eccentric. It is in this mode of Englishness that the documentary *A Very British Apocalypse* depicts a range of apocalyptic beliefs. Easthope draws attention to the manner in which English culture is prepared to use its others as a means of shoring up its sense of certainty in itself. He gives examples of self-conscious 'silliness' that depend on a shared commonsense view of the world in order to make their 'silliness' apparent: *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, *Alice in Wonderland*, Edward Lear's works, Edwardian children's literature (*The Wind in the Willows*, *Peter Pan*) and so on. By purposefully deviating from the norm, they recognize and underline the prevalence of the empiricist, 'commonsensical' norm. As Easthope has it, in a commentary on Alice's concern for her increasingly distant feet as she grows after eating the small cake at the bottom of the rabbit hole,

> But of course, all of this is a joke, deliberate absurdity, pleasurable and playful exaggeration and impossibility, fantasy known to be fantasy when seen from the viewpoint of common sense ... English silly discourse recognises the norm of empiricist discourse by departing from it.[31]

It is in the silliness of English culture that 'the homegrown apocalypse' is constructed by *A Very British Apocalypse*. The difference here is that Alice was aware of her absurdity, whereas the subjects of the documentary, shown to have long since departed from 'the viewpoint of common sense', are unwitting exponents of 'English silly discourse'. *A Very British Apocalypse* does not seek to overcome the incommensurability of an English apocalyptic narrative or even to attempt to address it as a serious belief but to confine it to 'English silly culture' and thus to underscore the seriousness of the empirical basis of Englishness.

Originally broadcast on Tuesday, 21 March 2007 on Channel 5, the program is framed by the opening statement from the authoritative—even paternal—voiceover provided by Laurie Taylor, a former professor of sociology who is also known in Britain for his media work. During a short excerpt of film featuring the channeling of 'Aetherius' by Dr George King, Taylor asks,

31. Easthope, *Englishness*, pp. 109-10.

> 'Puzzled? Well, let me help. This weird piece of historic film shows the Cosmic Master, Aetherius talking through the body of George King.'[32]

The film cuts to show Taylor looking unsure, his eyes open and flicking from side to side among a group of people with their eyes closed and chanting, 'Om Mane Padme Om'. Taylor continues,

> This is me fifty years later standing amongst Dr King's devout followers as they endeavour, with their prayers to protect us all from some of the disasters that will, allegedly, precede the end of the world. Now I don't normally hang around with prophets of doom. Like, like most other solid British people I'm pretty sure the Sun's going to rise tomorrow, there'll be sufficient honey for tea and, er, quite enough warm beer to last my lifetime.[33]

Taylor's 'let me help' evidences the audience's need for guidance through the bewildering world he is about to present. He suggests that, although he is a nonbeliever, he hopes to approach believers in the apocalypse in an open-minded way. His opening statement belies this hope and clearly places himself on the side of the 'puzzled ... solid British people'. It should also be noted that his use of 'warm beer' as a signifier of Britishness points to a somewhat colonial vision of Britain understood in English terms. His 'warm beer' calls to mind then Prime Minister John Major's 1993 vision of the future, 'Fifty years on from now, Britain will still be the country of long shadows on cricket grounds, warm beer, invincible green suburbs, dog lovers and pools fillers and, as George Orwell said, 'Old maids bicycling to holy communion through the morning mist.'[34] The cricket grounds and 'invincible green suburbs' here speak resolutely of England as opposed to Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland. The 'Celtic Fringe', after all, would be marked as 'other' in Easthope's paradigmatic opposition. Thus, the 'British apocalypse' described here is very much an English one.

First, Taylor meets Father Dom Benedict Heron, the author of *Our Call to Holiness: The Reflections of a Sinner* (2005), a Catholic apocalyptic awaiting the parousia; Taylor expresses surprise that this 'gentle' Benedictine monk holds such a belief before meeting Abi Freeman, a member of The Family International. Taylor expresses some disappointment that Abi is unable to provide a date for the end, but, despite little detail being provided concerning the Family or their beliefs, he does still find opportunity to ask, 'What's a nice girl like this believing a myth like that?' In so doing he reaffirms the dichotomy between English bourgeois culture and the myths of the apocalyp-

32. *A Very British Apocalypse*; first broadcast 21 March 2007 by Channel 5; directed by Ned Parker and written by Laurie Taylor.

33. Ibid.

34. Prime Minister John Major, 'Speech to the Conservative Group for Europe', 22 April 1993.

tic milieu. From here Taylor describes Newton's obsession with geomatria, which led him to the belief that the world was going to end on 15 July 2060, before introducing Dr Peter Lee, 'Mathematician', and asking him, 'What is the fascination with numerology? Is any of it credible?'[35] Lee responds with an anecdote in which he recounts that he read of someone who had 'conclusively' divined the date of the end of the world through numerology but that the date had long since passed. From here Taylor is quick to summarize apocalyptic belief, with a tip of the hat to Jeremy Bentham, that champion of objectivist English rationalism, as 'nonsense on stilts', thereby recalling the contestation between rationality and the irrational at the heart of English empiricist discourse. Taylor's desire to be as objective as possible has rapidly been reduced to a survey of the silliness that exists beyond the cultural boundaries of Englishness. Taylor's style here plays on a humorous tone that undermines his career as a professional academic and broadcaster; it situates him as the interested amateur whose dismissal of numerology should not, in any way, be perceived as being based on intellectual snobbery. To the 'solid' Briton this, no doubt, would smack of a yearning for the abstractions of theory over 'common sense'. Again, Easthope's distinctive English empirical discourse can be seen to shape the rhetoric of the presenter, the tone of the production and the response to apocalyptic beliefs. Solidly fixed to the right-hand column of Easthope's paradigmatic oppositions, numerology's heightened silliness is cast as just one more fantasy by which England's others live.

Taylor's search for accounts of the end then touches on geopolitical fears of the end and the fear of 'missing' Soviet nuclear devices. He then returns to the religiously based apocalypse and cites work by Bruce Lincoln that shows that the biblical language that underpins many of Bush II's more bellicose speeches and describes his 'apparent religious justification for [bringing about the end of the world]'. While apocalyptic belief is hived off as 'nonsense',[36] the potential for creating apocalyptic scenarios is manifestly foreign—missing Soviet nuclear devices in the hands of terrorists and a US president guided by divine revelation. This sense of the apocalypse as an imported, foreign phenomenon is further compounded when Taylor turns to Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the Iranian president, and his belief in the return of the Mahdi. The transition from Bush to Ahmadinejad is achieved via a cross-fade from Bush's face to Ahmadinejad. At the midpoint they merge, made the same in their dogmatic beliefs and utterly other to the rationalism inherent in the 'solid' British folk to whom and for whom Taylor speaks. Having depicted the source and potential actualization of these beliefs overseas,

35. Ibid.
36. Ibid.

Taylor turns to adherents of Islamic understandings of the apocalypse in Britain (England). He prefaces the segment in the following way,

> Ahmadinejad reminds us that alongside the apocalyptic Christians in this country we have also become dramatically aware of another large group of people who take their holy book literally.

The Christians are marked as being 'apocalyptic Christians', exterior to mainstream Christianity. Indeed, we might take note that Taylor's first apocalyptic Christians are Catholics or cultists. There is not the same demarcation for Muslims; the apocalyptic Christians are seen to be distinct from orthodox Anglicanism. For the Muslim community less demarcation is necessary—their beliefs are always exterior to the kind of England that Taylor addresses: John Major and George Orwell's vision of warm beer, honey for tea and the eternal sunrise. Indeed, the signifier that Taylor employs to preface the segment on British Muslims is Ahmadinejad, whom he has already characterized as a dangerous extremist driven by apocalyptic beliefs.

From here we return to the Aetherius Society, and their views are interspersed with spurious photographs of UFOs. With its headquarters set in the 'tidy terraced streets' and a leader who received his first extraterrestrial visitation while doing the dishes, we are led to a strong sense of the homegrown nature of the Aetherius Society. This is at odds with the sense of the 'right-hand side' nature of the apocalypse that Taylor has hitherto presented, and it is, in fact, the Englishness of the Aetherius Society that is stressed in the program. Taylor finds himself '[s]trangely reassured by the Aetherius Society, like a kind of cosmic Home Guard'. Amid the apocalyptic rhetoric of George W. Bush and Ahmadinejad, the Aetherians are presented as a very parochial set of believers in the apocalypse. With the associative chain between the Home Guard and the eccentric and bumbling cast of *Dad's Army*,[37] their apocalypse seems to resonate with a shoddy amateurism in comparison with the 'professional' pursuits of the numerologists and foreign political rhetoric. This, then, is the 'silly English discourse' version of the apocalypse. Far removed from the aggressive extremism of global apocalyptics, it reassures because, just as Fraser's panic-stricken Caledonian intonation of 'We're doomed!' in *Dad's Army* was always undone by the accidental successes of the Home Guard, we are led to believe that the Aetherius Society serves a similar function—they confirm the eternal fact of England by the ludicrousness with which Taylor presents their alternative.

37. *Dad's Army* was a television comedy produced by the BBC between 1968 and 1977. It centered on the amateur soldiers of the Home Guard (civilian volunteers ineligible for active duty) during the Second World War. The war seldom intruded on the fictional coastal town of Walmington-on-Sea, and the ill-preparedness of the Home Guard was the source of much of the program's humor.

Having met the seemingly very British, even very English Aetherians (for Taylor's vision of 'Britain', as stated, is one more strongly associated with England), Laurie Taylor is moved to comment, 'Some apocalysts do seem nicer than others, not that I can believe a word they say.' He then asks if we are too complacent toward scientific predictions of the end because failed religious predictions had lulled us into a false sense of security.

> You can't beat the Americans when it comes to announcing the end so why don't the British take such matters equally seriously?

To Taylor the long history of failed predictions means that we are unable to take these predictions seriously. What Taylor fails to address is that American apocalyptic culture has a comparable history of failed predictions of the end; indeed, England has little compare to the Millerite Great Disappointment or the subsequent *expansion* of millennial belief in its wake.[38]

Taylor goes on to visit the Mill Hill Synagogue in order to gauge apocalyptic belief among England's Orthodox Jews and finds its rabbi counting the days until the Jewish messianic redemption, citing the divinatory proclamation of the 'master cabbalists' that we are in the end-times. With little comment, Taylor goes on to talk to Ras Keambiroiro, a Rastafarian, and to 'devout follower' of Christ returned, Haile Selassie. Taylor finds him 'a long way from the African sun on the fifth floor of a grey, scarred BNP-graffiti'd housing estate in South London'; his alterity is underscored in multiple ways by Taylor's introduction. Keambiroiro is marked as at once alien ('a long way from the African sun' and rejected by the indigenous population [the 'BNP-graffiti'd housing estate']). Indeed, Taylor seems to suggest that the poverty of Keambiroiro's surroundings discounts the fullness of his vision and in so doing demonstrates little attempt to understand the relationship between millennial beliefs and marginalization, a commonplace of the literature since Norman Cohn's *Pursuit of the Millennium.*[39] The short interview focuses on Haile Selassie's continued presence on Earth despite his apparent bodily death and the strict views of Keambiroiro regarding our living in judgment times. In declaring 'lucky Rastas' for their lives within 'their' end-times, Taylor's informalism betrays his patronizing rejection of them. Taylor then discusses the Rapture Index, returning to the mathematician Peter Lee. Swiftly dismissed in laughter, the Rapture Index does not last long— for Lee there is no precedence and so there can be no significance attached to the 'signs' thus indexed. Once again Taylor returns to scientific apocalypticism from impact events to 'synchronous failure' of Earth systems with a focus on human activity. Scientific believers are labeled as 'too extreme' and other

38. *A Very British Apocalypse.*

39. Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages* (1957; London: Pimlico, new edn, 2004)

apocalyptic believers as 'silly', while, continues Taylor, '[t]here is one other apocalyptic impediment, the well known British inability to get things to run on time and that can really make a mess of an apocalypse'.[40]

We end with the idea that the apocalypse is something that is incompatible with Englishness; it is something that will happen overseas. More than this, it is the very amateurish nature of Englishness, identified by Easthope, that will safeguard us from apocalyptic belief, for this is the repeated refrain of the program: apocalyptic belief is something that exists at the margins. It is either too silly to contemplate or imported by migrant communities with little interest in the topology of apocalyptic belief within hegemonic British culture. The program never asks, for instance, how mainstream British Protestantism currently interprets the book of Revelation.

Conclusion

Depictions of the end of the world may describe a global event, but its discourse is used to frame local concerns. While *Supernatural* affirms the notion of American millennial predestination and the apocalypse as a feature of US geographies and populations, *Messiah* and *A Very British Apocalypse* both seek to push the apocalypse beyond England's borders. Despite these competing representations of apocalyptic belief, what is of importance here is the extent to which the apocalypse becomes a mechanism through which narratives of national identity are mobilized. National television cultures necessarily depict national concerns, but the apocalypse provides a framing device that allows those national cultures to be measured against a total event; *Supernatural*'s America is a motive force, while the two programs discussed in depth in this chapter both make clear that the end of the world is not an English concern: the rest of the world may harbor apocalyptic beliefs, but timeless England shall prevail. In both documentary and fictional forms, the English apocalypse is rendered unthinkable in mainstream culture because that culture is founded on principles that deny the possibility of apocalyptic thought. It is clearly and repeatedly located on the marked, negative side of Easthope's paradigmatic opposition. English culture is a culture that is based in a discourse at odds with the epistemic bases of apocalyptic culture, and thus apocalyptic belief is characterized as, at best, 'silly', or, at worst, murderous and mad. It is something best left to dangerous extremists, the insane and Americans. Easthope's model of English empiricist discourse can thus demonstrate how prophecy, divination and other forms of apocalyptic prediction run counter to the pragmatic solidity of English thought and its canonical culture. Centrifugally repelled, apocalyptic belief can only ever find a voice within English

40. Ibid.

culture at its margins or underground, in the cultic milieu. DCI Walker's England will always be guaranteed in its eternal tomorrow, while the apocalypse remains other, excluded from the social totality but always with it, in the shadows. This is the implication that neither program fully confronts, that despite the inadmissibility of apocalypticism, for all its alterity, it is, nonetheless, the inadmissible exteriority that dwells within. Shunned by mainstream British media culture, these narratives are still present in the weft and warp of popular discourse. This discourse, as Easthope suggests in his conclusion, may be where Englishness is destined to be reproduced, as a cultural affiliation as opposed to a sense of identification with the state.[41] Thus, the importance of recognizing the presence of the 'other' within the national 'self'. To repress elements such as apocalyptic belief as uncountenanceable irrationality and 'nonsense on stilts' will be to ignore the location within the host culture of these themes. To conceal the presence of these beliefs by exteriorizing them and projecting them onto the unknowable 'other' is to preclude their access to the public sphere. Therein lies the danger of ridicule and contempt, for it is in these circumstances of misrepresentation and perceived persecution that apocalyptic fevers burn brightest.[42]

41. See Easthope, *Englishness,* pp. 225-28.

42. See, for instance, John Walliss, *Apocalyptic Trajectories: Millenarianism and Violence in the Contemporary World* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1994); and Catherine Wessinger, *How the Millennium Comes Violently: From Jonestown to Heaven's Gate* (New York and London: Seven Bridges Press, 2000).

2

World War III Is upon Us: Exploring Contemporary Apocalyptic Discourse in American Televangelism

Holly Thomas

The epicenter of contemporary Christian apocalyptic discourse largely emanates from conservative Protestant televangelism originating in the United States. While these discourses vary immensely, they remain consistent in reminding us that the end of the world is imminent. With complex domestic and global impacts, these apocalyptic discourses help shape the reality of social order for believers by forming a governing structure for everyday life constituting culturally distinct forms of evangelical subjectivities. The evangelical discourses considered in this chapter offer biblically rooted explanations for modern and historical conflict all over the world while also accounting for natural and human-influenced disasters as signs of an approaching end-time. Like all apocalyptic discourses, the televangelist discourses considered here are shaped by historical, political and cultural influences while also being reciprocally impacted by these same climates and social trends, thereby blurring the boundaries of a perceived mutual exclusiveness between secular and religious discourse.

Although many Western academics seek to understand Islamic fundamentalism in our so-called 'post 9/11' world, few scholars are turning their gaze inward to explore the conservative evangelical Christian groups that have emerged as a steady fixture of mainstream American culture. Contemporary evangelicals are no longer a marginalized subculture in the United States; their organizations, congregations and belief systems are now deeply embedded in contemporary American culture. This multidenominational flock is increasingly responsibilized by televangelist leaders to become politically active in modern secular institutions where apocalyptic prophecy is mobilized as integral to understanding the biblical roots of contemporary conflict and other major global events. Understanding contemporary apocalyptic discourse and this new face of contemporary Christian fundamentalism in the United States is essential to understanding the considerable impact of the global reach of televangelism and its potential influences on US foreign policy.

This chapter examines the televangelist sermons of popular US preacher John Hagee as a case study of the discursive strategies employed to legitimate prophecy belief and its political agenda in relation to contemporary global conflict.[1] Hagee is a rising star in his field and is as controversial as he is popular. He is both representative of the current landscape of televangelism in North America and also unique in his charitable and political aptitude. His political endorsement of Mike Huckabee and then John McCain in the 2008 presidential election was fraught with scandal as a result of some of his more controversial views, including allegations of homophobic, anti-Catholic, and anti- Muslim sentiments. He brings a convincing sincerity of conviction and traditional fire and brimstone back to the small screen by taking a no-nonsense approach to salvation, using a literal interpretation of Scripture as evidence for all his arguments.

For Hagee, contemporary conflict is only one of many indicators symbolizing a global rush toward a preordained end-time scenario. By locating biblical roots of contemporary conflict, Hagee garners political and humanitarian support for a new breed of Judeo-Christian alliances against Islam while endorsing invasive and imperialistic US foreign policy. Intrusive conflict in the Middle East is not legitimated simply as a 'just war' between nation states, but is constructed as a necessary step in fulfilling apocalyptic prophecies ultimately leading to the return of Christ to earth. Hagee therefore provides scriptural legitimation for a social reality in which peace becomes entirely counterproductive to God's preordained plan for humanity. Working from this foundational belief, where salvation is ultimately a result of choice, Hagee actively seeks to hasten the coming apocalypse through his charitable and political organizations, which translates into further support for Israeli action against their Islamic neighbors.

By examining how contemporary conflict becomes legitimated though biblical discourse and apocalyptic prophecy interpretations, this chapter highlights a discursive tension between preordained end-time scenarios and individual responsibility within the presumably fatalistic belief systems epitomized through US televangelism. The first section of this chapter briefly explores religious programming and televangelism before introducing John Hagee as an active televangelist pastor. The second section looks at the cultural prominence of apocalyptic thinking in the United States, and the third section examines premillennialism and how this strain of apocalyptic prophecy interpretation is employed by Hagee. The remaining sections explore the apocalyptic discourses emanating from Hagee's sermons before offering some final conclusions about the entanglement of evangelicals and politics in the United States.

1. See Hagee 2009 for a link to John Hagee Ministries.

All the Gospel to All the World[2]

All year round at any time of day, most cable viewers can come across a televangelist sermon or two, thus contributing to an American cultural tendency to equate religious television with televangelism (Bruce 1990: 40) and the conservative Protestant values and apocalyptic belief systems that dominate these North American religious programming schedules. While televangelism was initially thought to be drawing churchgoers away from their physical congregations and into electronic churches, contributing to the individualization and privatization of faith, Robert Wuthnow (1987) was among the first to dismiss this contentious claim empirically. Originally on the basis of Gallup data of 1984, Wuthnow found early on that televangelism and religious television serve as a *supplement* to traditional religious practice rather than as a *substitute* for church attendance. Today, televangelism remains prevalent as evangelical electronic ministries move further into the US mainstream. Evangelical groups now own entire broadcast networks devoted to the genre[3] while also reaching far beyond television to colonize cyberspace with new forms of online evangelism. Despite their continuous enthusiasm for embracing new forms of digital media, mediated evangelism of all sorts has been largely neglected by academics since the early 1990s, and few scholars have theorized about the potential connections between the rise of Protestant conservatism and the enthusiastic use of television and other media technologies by these groups.

Christian religious programming continues to be culturally prevalent in the US media sphere. Although accurate numbers are difficult to ascertain, recent reports claim the existence of roughly 250 'Christian' television networks (Fore 2007), broadcasting anywhere from roughly thirty to one hundred hundred prominent televangelists (Televangelists.net 2009), with many local pastors also operating on public airwaves in most regions in the United States. With increasingly global satellite capabilities and the recent trend toward online evangelism, these preachers can potentially maintain physical, electronic and now virtual congregations in the millions. By embracing the full range of media technologies where other religious organizations have resisted, televangelists are always found on the cutting edge of *mediated religion,* most recently exhibiting a convergence of media by broadcasting traditional ser-

2. This is a quotation from Hagee's online ministry home page (Hagee 2009).

3. Christian Television Network (CTN 2009), Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN 2009) and Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN 2009a) are three of the top American Christian networks. In addition to the broad religious programming of the networks, the websites of all three host a wide variety of online programming and resources. In addition, TBN has a theme park, The Holy Land Experience (TBN 2009b), located in Florida. Crossroads Television System (CTS 2008) is the most prominent Christian-oriented television station in Canada, bringing a substantial array of US televangelism across the border.

mons from multiple physical congregations simultaneously through television, their website and a popular online virtual world (see LifeChurch.tv 2009). This further blurring of the constructed boundaries between electronic, cyber and traditional religion challenges the very definition of religious practice in our media-saturated age, where evangelical groups are again found at the forefront of the religious advancement of communication technologies.

John Hagee is a prime example of contemporary US televangelists who are embracing digital media and espousing apocalyptic belief systems grounded in biblical literalism. Hagee is as popular as he is controversial and embraces traditional forums for his sermons as well as harnessing the potential of radio, television and the Internet in his quest to spread his message. According to his website, Hagee 'is the founder and Senior Pastor of Cornerstone Church in San Antonio, Texas, a non-denominational evangelical church with more than 19,000 active members' (Hagee 2009), in addition to his various electronic congregants who participate through radio, television and the Internet. Hagee is also actively involved in charitable and political organizations in support of Israel, exemplifying recent tenuous alliances between evangelical Christian and Jewish organizations. His doctrine and religious-political agendas are controversial in both secular and religious communities,[4] yet are reflective of large segments of the evangelical population in the United States. His television programs, portable podcasts and online sermons have the capacity to reach vast numbers of US and international viewers in over two hundred countries (Hagee 2009), making his potential religious and political influence undeniable.

Hagee's daily televised sermon series, *John Hagee Today,* features conventional televangelist sermons as well as charity updates and special interview segments with like-minded Christian 'experts' often discussing political and international relations regarding Israel and Islam. As with many televangelists, Hagee's sermons centralize apocalyptic prophecy; thus, war and conflict are central themes. Hagee offers theological explanations for current conflicts, explaining that the contemporary war on terror and ongoing conflicts concerning Israel are not at all new wars but simply specific battles in the larger war between good and evil, as foretold in the Bible. For Hagee, contemporary war is one of many events symbolic of a global rush toward a pre-

4. During the 2008 presidential election in the United States, Hagee came under fire after his endorsement of Republican nominee John McCain was publicly rejected by the senator because of alleged comments by Hagee regarding the Holocaust. Previously, Hagee had also been called a heretic by the late Jerry Falwell for his alleged belief in Dual Covenant Theology, a branch of theology that suggests that different religions have different 'deals' with God and that the Jewish faith is privileged and will be able to reach heaven without conversion to Christianity. Hagee and Falwell had apparently reconciled their differences, as Falwell sat on the board of Hagee's organization, Christians United for Israel, prior to his death on May 15, 2007.

ordained end-time scenario. The wars of today are located in biblical history and prophecy and therefore are wars between two faiths, pitting Islam and Judeo-Christian traditions against each other.

I assure you we can hear the trumpet[5]

Apocalyptic belief is found beyond the confines of Christianity in most other religious traditions, as well as within the secular imagination of Hollywood blockbusters and the unforeseeable totalizing risks of potential nuclear or environmental disasters (Wojcik 1997). Apocalyptic discourses have been pervasive in the writings of many early civilizations and have permeated our historical collective imaginary (Boyer 2005). Although it varies historically and culturally, apocalyptic belief is immutable in its prediction of the annihilation of humanity through supernatural, religious or secular means.

Christian apocalyptic thinking is infused into many of Hagee's sermons, particularly those concerning modern conflicts in the Middle East. However, prevailing apocalyptic discourses are constantly in flux; changing as rapidly or slowly as the political and cultural climates from which they emerge, yet consistently remaining a dominant fixture of our popular imaginary. Apocalyptic discourses have been reshaped and reimagined many times to account for the contemporary events, prevalent social anxieties and political climates of any given era, constantly adapting to so-called 'shifting world realities' (Boyer 2005: 113). While the early work of Hal Lindsey in the *Late Great Planet Earth* (Lindsey and Carlson 1970) focused on Soviet enemies (Boyer 2005: 112), and Hollywood has embraced the Mayan apocalypse of 2012, John Hagee remains steadily fixated on Islamic enemies. All of these examples can be seen as culturally specific manifestations of a much larger apocalyptic tradition with far greater cultural resonance than many acknowledge. By understanding the influence of these apocalyptic worldviews on evangelical populations, we can begin to explore the potential cultural and political impacts of these groups as apocalyptic belief resonates in the US mainstream.

Contemporary evangelicals, such as Hagee and his congregants, are no longer a marginalized subculture in the United States. The centrality of apocalyptic prophecy and biblical literalism in Hagee's sermons is representative of his field and central to conservative evangelical doctrine (Boyer 1992). While some are still content to dismiss prophecy belief and biblical literalism as marginalized aspects of religious belief, according to Boyer, there has been a resurgence of this kind of faith (1992: 5). Roughly 40 percent of Americans self-identify as an evangelical or 'born again' Christians (Newport and Carroll

5. This quotation is from Hagee, during the daily televised sermon series *John Hagee Today* (November 2006).

2005: 81),[6] and 28 percent of Americans believe that the Bible is the actual word of God and should be taken literally (Gallup Organization 2006). A more recent survey from the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life (2009) suggests that 90 percent of respondents belonging to an evangelical church are absolutely certain that God exists, with 59 percent claiming to believe in a literal interpretation of Scripture.

The popularity of apocalyptic belief is undeniable. Prophecy-related literature, music, television, radio programming and a multitude of consumer products are now a prominent part of popular culture. As discussed above, whole global broadcast networks are devoted to apocalyptic sermons and other Christian-oriented 'family-friendly' programming grounded in apocalyptic belief systems. In addition to the many television shows and feature films, some highlighted in this volume, apocalyptic prophecy jokes and slogans appear on mugs and T-shirts and a variety of other memorabilia. In addition to the comedic products, a whole host of other, more practical services have also appeared online to help believers with preparations for the Rapture,[7] allowing for new forms of insurance and data storage for those left behind. As Boyer argues, the genre of apocalyptic prophecy interpretation is now a prominent form of collective discourse (Boyer 1992). Whether one truly believes in the Rapture or simply enjoys one of Hollywood's many apocalyptic blockbusters, to dismiss this segment of religiosity as marginal is naïvely to underestimate its embedded cultural influence and the popular landscape of apocalyptic imagery.

It's amazing what you can get out of the Bible isn't it?[8]

Hagee is one such proponent of apocalyptic worldviews who regularly reminds us that the end of the world is upon us. For Hagee, World War III has begun; and in the grand tradition of US prophecy interpretation, the key threats and actors correspond to the most volatile enemies of the United States and their religious divisions. As with others in his field, Hagee's apocalyptic belief system stems from a literal reading of the Bible, particularly the books of Daniel and Revelation (Reasoner 2004: 77). While there is much dispute over the sequential ordering of key prophetic events, many elements remain the same across the variants of end-time scenarios.

6. According to Boyer, 'among US Protestants, prophecy belief usually comes embedded within a larger religious matrix that goes by the label "evangelicalism" or ... "fundamentalism"' (1992: 3).

7. Starting at forty dollars per year, the website youvebeenleftbehind.com (2008) allows users to prepare documents containing personal messages and information such as bank account numbers and passwords to be emailed to nonbelieving loved ones after the Rapture occurs.

8. This quotation is from Hagee, during the daily televised sermon series *John Hagee Today* (November 2006).

Hagee reflects a tradition of premillennialist prophecy interpretation. This dominant stream of apocalyptic prophecy belief is often embraced by contemporary US fundamentalist evangelicals. Premillennialism envisions a pre-tribulation Rapture in which the truly righteous Christians are spared from hell on earth during a seven-year reign of the Antichrist. After seven horrible years with the Antichrist at the helm, we see Christ return to earth to defeat the Antichrist at the battle of Armageddon, ready to take hold of a thousand-year period of peace on earth that ends with the final judgments and the earth being consumed by fire

While there is some disagreement over the British origins of premillennialism (see Boyer 1992; Fuller 1995), most scholars can agree that premillennialism, in various forms, has been a dominant apocalyptic belief system in the United States since the early nineteenth century. While early variants of premillennialism could be described as reformist, later in the nineteenth century a more conservative variant of premillennialism started to take hold in the United States. According to Boyer, this conservative departure was 'deeply skeptical about reform and indeed about the entire contemporary social and intellectual order', which resulted in a serious challenge to liberal Protestantism's hopeful affirmations (Boyer 1992: 80). Soon after, fundamentalism emerged as a subset of religious identification for numerous faiths, and premillennialism became even more conservative. According to Fuller,

> sociological and intellectual trends in the latter part of the nineteenth century forced conservative evangelicals to take hard and fast ideological stands that had been unnecessary a generation earlier. Fundamentalism soon grew out of the nineteenth century's premillennial stirrings and emerged determined to confront mainline Protestantism with a vengeance (1995: 106-107)

Now, we see premillennialism again as reformist—not reformist as in socially progressive but reformist in a prescriptive return to orthodoxy apparent in the modern *culture wars* (see Hunter 1991) of the United States, where a return to a political system based on Christian authority and rule is idealized. Hagee emerges from this premillennial tradition as a likely leader of new conservative, apocalyptic evangelism, producing a rich body of eschatological interpretation as he goes.

> *Those of you that do not make the Rapture,*
> *you're going to be able to see the Antichrist*[9]

According to Damian Thompson, the concept of end-times refers to 'the period from the beginning of the fulfillment of *The Bible's* eschatological

9. This quotation is from Hagee, during the daily televised sermon series *John Hagee Today* (November 2006).

prophecies until the dawn of the millennium' (2005: 181).[10] Simply put, eschatology is the theological study of end-times. While there are a variety of chronological versions of end-time scenarios, the basic elements are similar: rapture, tribulation, peace and the second coming of Christ; it is the timing and specifics that vary. According to premillennial dispensationalists, when end-times arrive, the truly righteous Christians will ascend to heaven and be spared from the Antichrist's reign on earth in the tribulation period. After the seven-year tribulation, we see the return of Christ in the battle of Armageddon, when the Antichrist is defeated and Christ begins his thousane-year reign of peace on earth before the final judgments. In the last stages of this interpretation, final judgments are passed. The righteous assume their rightful place in heaven, and the earth is consumed by fire. Hagee describes this day with exaltation: 'on judgment day when the angels of God with flaming swords drive the millions of people into the lake of fire that have knowingly disobeyed the word of God, you're going to dance with joy that you believe the word of God was true' (*John Hagee Today,* November 2006). What is common to Hagee's scenario and other Christian versions of apocalyptic prophecy fulfillment is the concept of war on earth in the period of tribulation, and in the final battle at Armageddon. Therefore, war and conflict are inevitable and central components of this apocalyptic belief system. It is this preordained battle between good and evil that overshadows any discussion of conflict for prophecy interpreters.

While premillennialist apocalyptic thinking offers us a preordained explanation of history and foretells the end of humanity, it is the biblical beginning of the story that fuels Hagee's discursive legitimation of contemporary conflict in the Middle East. For Hagee, contemporary conflict is a foregone conclusion and is located within a history that traces all the way back to one biblical figure—Abraham. According to Hagee, 'Abraham gave birth to the covenant land, Israel, and Israel is the sizzling fuse to World War III thus leading to Armageddon' (*John Hagee Today,* November 2006). Hagee traces Middle Eastern conflict to the origins of the two dominant divisions of monotheistic religion—Judeo-Christianity and Islam. In an often-recurring sermon series, Hagee tells us that these two religious paths were formed when Abraham had two sons: Ishmael, his first illegitimate son by Hagar, and then Isaac, his second son by his wife Sarah. Hagee tells us that God told Abraham that his son was to inherit the covenant land, Israel. While Abraham expected this to be Ishmael, God told Abraham that it was to be Isaac. Therefore, Islam followed unceremoniously from Ishmael, and the Judeo-Christian faith, as a chosen people, formed through Isaac's descendants.

10. Here, the millennium is referring to the thousand-year peaceful reign of Christ after the defeat of the Antichrist, and not to a specific calendar unit.

If Jerusalem is at war the world is at war.
If Jerusalem is at peace the world is at peace[11]

Hagee sees this original division between Abraham's two sons as the beginning of a long-standing religious conflict that continues today. He states, '[H]ere is the feud between two families that is 4000 years old that is now blossoming into a national and international war' (*John Hagee Today,* November 2006). It is this division that places Israel at the center of Hagee's representations of war and prophecy. Hagee sees Israel as the only nation sanctioned by God. He often reminds his audience that 'Israel is the only nation in the world created by a sovereign act of God' (*John Hagee Today,* November 2006) and that 'any nation, America including, that forces Israel to give up land for peace is going to experience the wrath and the judgment of God' (*John Hagee Today,* November 2006). Therefore, any military or political action against Israel, American or otherwise, is construed as action against God's own divine plan. Hagee also argues on his website that 'God has promised to bless the man or nation that blesses the Chosen People' (Hagee 2009). Therefore, by depicting a scenario in which Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands is seen as divine will, Hagee holds outright disdain for any efforts at peaceful resolutions and encourages congregants to support politicians who will stand firm alongside Israel, charitably and politically.

Current conflicts in the Middle East are therefore viewed as the contemporary result of this historical war between two faiths. Hagee sees sincere religious adherence as the only identity marker that matters and does not distinguish between Muslim people and terrorist groups. In the same way that Herfried Münkler suggests that the term 'terrorist' is used to deny political legitimacy (2005), Hagee refers to radical fundamentalist terrorists as 'Islamofascists' or 'Islamoterrorists' to deny them any political or religious legitimacy: 'if we lose this war with Islamofascists, it will change your world and it will never be the same' (*John Hagee Today,* November 2006). In a commercial advertisement that airs during many of Hagee's daily sermons, viewers are encouraged to watch one of his many documentaries:

> If you're not a radical Islamic fascist, you need to see *Obsession: Radical Islam's War Against the West*. This extremely well produced documentary will shock you beyond belief. As we sleep in the comfort of our homes, a new evil rises against us. *Obsession* reveals the unbridled hatred radical Islam has for Western civilization (*John Hagee Today,* November 2006).

By constantly reinforcing this divide between religious faiths, Hagee frames the division between Judeo-Christianity and Islam as a war between a right-

11. This quotation is from Hagee, during the daily televised sermon series *John Hagee Today* (November 2006).

eous *us* and an evil *them*, a tactic typically used to dehumanize an enemy *other* and undermine their legitimacy (Ruthven 2004; Moore 2005), which further fuels religious intolerance by lending biblical authority to a war against Islam and its believers.

Hagee also argues that Judeo-Christianity and 'Islamofascists' will never come together because of biblically entrenched theological differences. According to Hagee, there will never be peace in the Middle East because if Islam cannot defeat Israel, Mohammed and the Qur'an would be invalidated (*John Hagee Today,* November 2006). Therefore, Hagee further legitimizes the notion of a 'just war' by maintaining that peace is not an option. Because contemporary conflict becomes a result of a four-thousand-year-old division between two faiths, war is inevitable to Hagee and is then scripturally legitimated as part of God's own plan for humanity. As Hagee insists that increased conflict in the Middle East is foretold as a key indicator of impending apocalypse, any tensions in the area become symbolic of an approaching end-time and are expected to be embraced by all Christian believers as God's divine plan. Geopolitical boundaries and nation states do not really matter in this war, as it is a war between good and evil with no possibility for peace.

By drawing these severe religious divisions and legitimating conflict through apocalyptic discourses and biblical authority, Hagee fuels intolerance of Islam while constructing wars that cannot ever come to a peaceful resolution. Contemporary conflicts become blips on his eschatological time line rather than humanized instances of violence and unrest and also serve as increasing evidence of the approaching global end-times. By legitimizing war through biblical authority and reinforcing a historical divide between Islam and Judeo-Christianity, Hagee justifies war as preordained by God and therefore a necessary stage in the fulfillment of an eschatological time line that will eventually result in the second coming of Christ.

God's wrath is an expression of his justice ...
it is the fruit of your choice[12]

The apocalyptic worldview espoused by Hagee and other evangelists is often described as fatalistic and deterministic, as it offers a preordained explanation of history foretelling the unavoidable end of humanity as set out in biblical beginnings (Wojcik 1997). In his assessment of Hal Lindsey, Daniel Wojcik argues that 'the worldview promoted by Lindsey frees one from personal uneasiness and responsibility concerning catastrophes' and violent conflicts (1997: 58). In Wojcik's view, end-time prophecy belief is entirely fatalistic and

12. This quotation is from Hagee, during the daily televised sermon series *John Hagee Today* (November 2006).

encourages believers to accept conditions of war and other environmental and social ills as out of their control. Wojcik thus depicts an oppressive worldview devoid of individual choice and responsibility.

Apocalyptic belief systems, however, do not inherently release the individual from choice or responsibility. While God's plan is preordained through Scripture, Hagee consistently reiterates that salvation or damnation is a choice that one must make for oneself through one's actions and beliefs; neither salvation nor damnation is automatically bestowed upon one by God in the afterlife For example, Hagee comments (all quotations from (*John Hagee Today,* November 2006):

> Some of you are waiting for your ship to come in. Ships don't come in, they are brought in and they are brought in by sweat.
>
> God's wrath is an expression of his justice ... it is the fruit of your choice.
>
> Is Salvation for everyone? No, it's not! It's just for those who believe.
>
> Hell is there whether you believe it or not ... why do people go to Hell? They don't go because God sent them there, they go there because you send yourself.

Here we see Hagee repeatedly highlighting an interesting tension in apocalyptic thought. While the fate of humanity is foretold and unstoppable, believers can still determine their own fate within this plan. Hagee therefore encourages individual action in line with Scripture to achieve salvation and imbues the believer with choice and responsibility.

Therefore, although the fate of humanity is preordained, individual salvation is not. Believers are expected to act out their faith and actively engage in activities that will ensure both personal and national salvation. This may include everyday religious practice as well as political lobbying and civic participation in electoral processes. We see here a complex interaction between belief, individual action and religious identification in which apocalyptic prophecy serves as a governing structure for one's daily life and political activity. Through Hagee's distillation of apocalyptic discourses, the evangelical subject becomes responsibilized to self-govern their everyday actions through this apocalyptic belief system. This palpable tension between a preordained plan for humanity and the responsibilization of the evangelical subject shows us an emergent discursive overlap where we start to see a blending of secular and religious discourses. More specifically, we are starting to see concurrent neoliberal strategies of individualization and responsibilization appearing more frequently in televangelist discourses, constituting unique formations of contemporary evangelical subjectivities where the presumed fatalism of apocalyptic worldviews is called into question.

Standing in that sea of people will be presidents and prime ministers, princes and paupers, powerful and the pathetic side by side[13]

In addition to his televangelist sermons, Hagee encourages a more responsible and politically active evangelical citizen through other forums as well. Hagee is not content to sit idly by and wait for the Rapture; he actively mobilizes these discourses in an effort to accelerate the impending apocalypse. Since Hagee sees Israel is the epicenter of prophecy fulfillment, he works hard to facilitate its prominence in the political, charitable and religious considerations of his congregants. In addition to his lengthy sermons, podcasts, popular books and DVDs on the subject, Hagee has garnered support for Israel through several organizations, most notably Exodus II (Hagee 2009) and Christians United for Israel (CUFI 2009).

According to Hagee's belief system, the return of the Jewish people to the Holy Land is a key indicator of impending apocalypse. Hagee's website quotes Ezekiel 36.24, 'for I will take you out of the nations: I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land' (Hagee 2009). Hagee believes that the return of Jewish peoples to Israel serves as an organizing principle for his charitable and political organizations. Therefore, his charitable organization, Exodus II, aims to bring exiled Jews back to Israel in an effort to hasten biblical prophecy. On the Exodus II website, we are invited 'to become part of biblical prophecy' by making charitable donations to causes that include 'education, repatriation, rebuilding and relocating children to safe zones, as well as providing medical equipment and supplies for the Jewish people injured in terrorist attacks' (Hagee 2009). By actively trying to speed up biblical prophecy through charitable aid, Hagee further encourages his congregants to choose salvation by fulfilling apocalyptic prophecy through charitable action in the name of God's chosen people.

Hagee's more politically oriented organization, Christians United for Israel is self-described as 'a national Christian grassroots movement focused on one issue: supporting Israel'. According to the website (www.cufi.org), since its birth in early 2006,

> CUFI has quickly grown to be the largest Christian grassroots movement in America. We now have state directors in every state in the union, and we have city directors in over 90 of America's leading cities. Since our founding, we've held over 85 Nights to Honor Israel in cities across America. This past July, over 4,000 Christians from all 50 states came to Washington, D.C. to participate in the third annual CUFI Washington-Israel Summit. And CUFI has only just begun (CUFI 2009).

13. This quotation is from Hagee, during the daily televised sermon series *John Hagee Today* (November 2006).

Christians United for Israel has two stated political goals: first, 'they seek to educate and build Christian support for Israel throughout America'. Second, they seek 'to communicate pro-Israel perspectives to our elected officials' (CUFI 2009). In accordance with their second major goal, this organization focuses much of their attention on their annual summer conference in Washington, D.C., where hundreds of participants are educated on Israeli and Middle Eastern conflicts and asked to engage with and lobby their elected representatives through a variety of planned events.

This salvation-seeking, active political engagement has salient implications for the political sphere and broader US culture. Increased support for these organizations and mass participation of believers at such events serve as further evidence of mainstream evangelical participation, while highlighting the often complex relationship in the United States between religion and politics—both foreign and domestic. By encouraging congregants to actively support politicians with pro-Israel platforms, Hagee and his believers hold the potential to influence policy in significant ways. Former President George W. Bush and the 2012 Republican nominee, Mitt Romney, represent two powerful examples of politicians who embrace a strong pro-Israel stance, reflective of values put forth by their GOP base. While it has yet to be determined exactly how much impact Christian eschatology has had on the behavior of 'foreign policy elites', the strong levels of support that Christians in the United States show for Israel (Mayer 2004), combined with their potential power as a voting block, show that Scripture holds some indirect sway in influencing future and current foreign policy concerning Israel and the Middle East (Boyer 2005). As evangelical citizens become more actively engaged in political processes at the urging of pastors and televangelists such as Hagee, we may begin to see further support for pro-Israel policies in US foreign agendas, to the potential detriment of Israel's surrounding Islamic neighbors.

Concluding Thoughts

The apocalyptic discourses emerging through Hagee's sermons and organizational literature are reflective of much broader systems of apocalyptic belief in many ways. At the heart of these discourses is a reliance on biblical literalism and the legitimation of contemporary conflict as natural. In this way, apocalyptic prophecy serves as legitimation for contemporary conflict and religious intolerance while the presence of these very conflicts is construed as evidentiary support for prophecy fulfillment and a nearing apocalypse. Religious conflict is viewed as necessary for the fulfillment of biblical prophecy and legitimated through the scriptural authority of the Bible.

Hagee's sermons reflect these commonalities of apocalyptic discourses while also exposing a unique tension between expectations of individual responsibility and presumably fatalistic worldviews. By locating the source of

modern conflict in the Middle East in the biblical division between Judeo-Christianity and Islam, Hagee paints a picture in which peace is contradictory to the end-time scenario of God's preordained plan for humanity. Efforts at peace are futile under this belief system, and support for such agreements raises the specter of eternal damnation if Israel is forced to share lands with Islamic neighbors. Further guided by an effort to hasten the fulfillment of biblical prophecy by supporting Israel, Hagee encourages his congregation to take charge of their own salvation and participate in both charitable and political activities in order to gain individual and national salvation through the political support of pro-Israel platforms. As such, Hagee's belief system exposes an interesting tension within a literature that typically depicts apocalyptic worldviews as entirely deterministic.

By legitimating conflict through biblical authority and endowing the evangelical subject with the choice of salvation, Hagee contributes to the discursive constitution of a more responsibilized, politically active evangelical subject who is pro-Israel and anti-Islam. Such new evangelical subjects are constituted as persons who are responsible for their own salvation at both a personal and a political level. In addition to leading a good Christian life in the private sphere, the new evangelical subjects must actively support Israel charitably as well as vote for politicians who will endorse pro-Israel American foreign policy, a marked contrast from older evangelical discourses that opposed involvement in 'earthly concerns' such as politics. In this construal of active political and charitable engagement as a requirement of prophecy fulfillment, we see a complex interaction between religion and politics where salvation becomes tied to political activity. Not only does this further blur the imagined boundary between church and state in the United States, but we can now see the potential impact of US televangelism abroad through foreign policy as well as the global reach of televangelism through new digital media.

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3

Making the Millennialist Mainstream: How Television Covered the Apocalyptic Predictions of Harold Camping

Jennie Chapman

When apocalypse appears on our television screens, it is typically in fictional form, primarily because thus far the end of the world exists only in our imaginations. Indeed, this volume is concerned primarily with how the medium of television has been employed to convey stories about the end-times, and how television audiences receive and respond to those imaginative forays into the future. But occasionally the apocalypse breaks out of the realm of televised fiction and into the ostensibly factual and objective world of news reporting, typically when a would-be prophet of doom claims that the world will end on a particular, usually proximate, date. In May 2011, this relatively rare type of news story played out. Californian radio preacher Harold Camping's claims that the Rapture of true Christians to heaven would take place on the 21st of that month garnered widespread media attention to a degree not witnessed since the 'Y2K' scare that made headlines at the end of 1999. Despite Camping's relative obscurity prior to the predictions, his claims were covered—in some cases quite extensively—by major news networks in the United States and elsewhere in the world. Through an analysis of 23 separate reports aired on US and UK news channels, this chapter examines the brief period when the end of the world made the headlines. In particular, by attending to the ways in which this particular story was covered on television, I aim to develop insights into how the religious mainstream is conceived by news media, and where beliefs about the end of the world fit into such a schema.

First, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this chapter. It is not a comprehensive analysis of news coverage of Camping's predictions, nor does it claim to offer a truly representative sample of the reportage in question. The news clips I have studied as part of the analysis that follows have been more or less randomly selected. Most were aired the day before, the day of, or the day after the date to which Camping's failed prophecy pertained, 21 May 2011, though there are a small number of reports that respond to Camping's first public statement after his prophecy failed, which took place

on 24 May. The earliest report in the sample aired on 23 February, several months before the Rapture was predicted to occur. I have elected to focus on reports aired on three major US news providers (MSNBC, ABC, and Fox News) and three UK news providers (BBC News, ITN, and Channel 4 News), though there are of course many other television news sources, particularly in the United States, that also covered the story. There are only five UK-aired reports in the sample in comparison to 18 from the States. This reflects the lesser importance accorded to the story by UK news editors due to its status as 'world news' rather than domestic news. Nonetheless, the UK reports offer a salient point of comparison as far as a content analysis of the coverage is concerned. The style of the reports in my sample is also varied: I include both 'straight' news reports and commentary pieces, in order to get a sense of the breadth of the coverage devoted to Camping's claims. I have excluded, due to space constraints, any expositional discussion of Camping's biography or theological rationale. Readers interested in these topics will find ample material on the Web.

With these qualifications and caveats firmly in place, what this study does aim to offer is an impression of how major news networks covered predictions of the apocalypse by an elderly California preacher in 2011. I aim to formulate some tentative conclusions about the reporting of this story that may be indicative of larger cultural narratives at work with respect to religious belief and, more specifically, apocalyptic belief. My primary contention is that the coverage of Camping's predictions registers a shift in the way in which the 'religious mainstream' is understood in official discourses. What is notable from the US news reports in particular is the degree to which millennial belief—if not belief in the possibility of date setting—has become acceptable and even normative in public discourse. Thus, if news reportage is viewed as a barometer of the cultural consensus, then what it reveals is that, in 2011, while belief that 'doomsday' would take place at a specific time and on a specific date was considered aberrant, belief that the second coming of Jesus will bring about the end of history *at some point* was certainly not.

Reading Reports of the Rapture: Content Analysis

The following sections develop a detailed analysis of the reports in my sample. Rather than reading each report individually, I have organized my analysis thematically. Certain recurrent tropes emerge across the sample, and arranging my analysis thus permits a clearer view of these. The broad areas of analysis on which I will focus are the following: differentiation of Camping's adherents and 'mainstream' Christianity; use of experts; reference to contemporary 'apocalyptic' contexts; reference to the finances of Camping and Family Radio; and justification of news value.

Camping versus 'Mainstream' Christianity

One of the first lessons taught to students of the media is that media do not merely reflect reality—they actively participate in and construct it. They do so through the development and maintenance of particular narratives that become so entrenched through repetition that they come to be taken for 'the way things really are', a standard often known simply as 'common sense'.[1] One of the fundamental narratives that structures religion reporting is that of 'good' versus 'bad' religion, which separates out what is acceptable and what is aberrant in terms of creeds, values and behavior. This classificatory activity works to define, establish and consolidate a consensus view of what religion should and should not be in accordance with perceived social and cultural norms. In short, it posits and then reproduces what can be described as the religious mainstream.

So what are the defining characteristics of the religious mainstream construed and depicted by the media? Robert Orsi offers the following assessment:

> True religion ... is epistemologically and ethically singular. It is rational, respectful of persons, noncoercive, mature, nonanthropomorphic in its higher forms, mystical (as opposed to ritualistic), unmediated and agreeable to democracy (no hierarchy in gilded robes and fancy hats), monotheistic (no angels, saints, demons, ancestors), emotionally controlled, a reality of mind and spirit not body and matter.[2]

Sean McCloud's study of religion stories that appeared in news magazines such as *Newsweek* and *Time* during the period from 1955 to 1993 affirms the standard that Orsi describes. Publications 'consistently described groups and individuals as 'fringe' if they demonstrated high levels of religious zeal, dogma, and emotion'.[3] By demarcating the limits of normativity when it comes to religious belief and behavior, these periodicals worked collectively (and quite unconsciously) to 'symbolically establish boundaries between a mainstream religious center and a suspect periphery'.[4] McCloud contends that, in the public discourse in which media play a crucial role, the religious fringe functions as a 'negative reference group'[5] that shores up the identity of the dominant, mainstream culture by presenting to it what it is not. Recall-

1. See, for example, Stuart Hall, 'A World at One with Itself',' in Stanley Cohen and Jock Young (eds.), *The Manufacture of News: Social Problems, Deviance and the Mass Media* (London: Constable, 1973), pp. 85-94; Roger Fowler, *Language in the News: Discourse and Ideology in the Press* (New York: Routledge, 1991), especially chapter 4.

2. Robert A. Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 188.

3. Sean McCloud, *Making the American Religious Fringe: Exotics, Subversives, and Journalists, 1955–1993* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), p. 4.

4. McCloud, *Making the American Religious Fringe,* p. 5.

5. McCloud, *Making the American Religious Fringe,* p. 6.

ing the news stories surrounding the Branch Davidians and Heaven's Gate, Stewart Hoover notes how 'various religious spokespeople strove to define themselves vis-à-vis these "aberrations"'.[6]

The reports of Harold Camping's predictions studied here clearly bear this logic out. Thirteen of the 23 reports used the story to make explicit (and indeed value-laden) distinctions between Camping's theology and the beliefs of 'mainstream' Christians. Report 1, aired on MSNBC on 21 May, features an interview with pastor Dr Robert Jeffress, who calls Camping and his followers 'ignorant of what the Bible teaches,' adding, 'it shows how gullible people really are'. In report 6, Barbara Rossing, a Lutheran minister, academic, and author, discredits Rapture theology by pointing out its relative novelty. She calls 'the whole notion of trying to predict it [the end of the world] as if the Bible were a script laying out predictions' a 'fairly recent phenomenon' that was 'made popular, invented in fact, by a British preacher in the nineteenth century, John Nelson Darby'. By positioning dispensationalism as a rather recent fad, as opposed to orthodoxy with the weight of history behind it, Rossing bolsters the consensus view that Camping's date-setting forays are an aberration from Christianity proper. This logic is repeated throughout the coverage in my sample. Report 8, aired on Fox News after the prediction's failure, observes that 'Camping's preaching drew harsh criticism from most fellow Christians'; report 13, aired on ABC News, asserts that 'there are many in the worldwide Christian community who disagree with Camping's theology', while the BBC's religious affairs correspondent in report 20 assures viewers that Camping is 'a very idiosyncratic and fundamentalist preacher'.

The tacit desire to protect moderate, establishmentarian, middle-of-the-road religiosity from being compromised by 'extremism' animates many of the criticisms of Camping and his theology propounded in the news coverage. However, while many of the reports work hard to reinscribe a normative concept of 'true' Christianity in contradistinction to that practiced and preached by Camping, within this normalizing impulse a somewhat unexpected current can be discerned, which reveals much about what the contemporary conception of mainstream Christianity in the United States entails as well as what it excludes. What is notable about many of the reports is their a priori assumption that the idea of a physical second coming of Christ is a central and indeed uncontroversial tenet of 'normal' Christianity. While the setting of dates for the Rapture or end of the world is beyond the pale, the central notion of a physical and literal parousia—which is, moreover, likely to be imminent—is not. The expert in report 1, Robert Jeffress, speaks from a clearly premillennial standpoint. 'It's important we don't throw the pro-

6. Stewart M. Hoover, *Religion in the News: Faith and Journalism in American Public Discourse* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1998), p. 10.

phetic baby out with the bathwater', he tells anchor Alex Witt. 'God does know the date [of the Rapture], it's on his calendar, and it means it's going to happen.' By professing the biblical reality of the Rapture, Jeffress positions as generally accepted orthodoxy what is in fact a highly specific and by no means undisputed eschatological position. It is of course to be expected that a pastor with premillennial beliefs would articulate these in an interview. What is more interesting is that these are accepted at face value by the anchor and, by extension, by the editor, as not only legitimate but conventional. Indeed, Witt registers her agreement with Jeffress by stating early on in the interview, 'I'm right with you.' This in turn indicates to audiences that Jeffress is a trustworthy source. The overall effect of the interview, then, is to locate the premillennial perspective within, rather than outside of, the media construction of acceptable, normal religion.

Other reports make similar maneuvers. Report 7 features as its expert a 'debunker', Michael Shermer of the Skeptics Society. Yet he asserts that 'most Christians in fact believe that there will be a second coming'. Along these lines, another notable report in the sample is report 12, which aired on Fox 13 on 23 February—the earliest report in the sample. Reporter Lloyd Sowers describes 'judgment day' unequivocally as 'a universal belief in churches all over the world. Among the religious, the only question is, when?' Report 9 features another 'local pastor' representing the voice of moderate and reasonable Christianity to countermand Camping's claims, who nonetheless states, 'I believe the end *is* near.'

The pitting of Harold Camping and his followers against the normative conception of 'true', 'proper', or 'ordinary' Christianity demonstrates the extent to which the media, far from being neutral in its depiction of religion, is in fact complicit in an ideological enterprise that marginalizes certain expressions of religion that are considered 'deviant' in order to uphold the integrity of others that are considered 'normal'. This is by no means to suggest that media are intentionally or indeed consciously committed to such a project, nor that there cannot be exceptions to this logic within mainstream media reporting. Nonetheless, what my limited sample suggests is that mainstream media participate in the construction of the religious mainstream through the symbolic othering of religious expressions that do not conform to its putative values and expectations. However, the sample also registers a somewhat unexpected presence *within* the parameters of the normative mainstream—that is, the belief in the imminent and physical return of Jesus. The fact that several commentators promulgate this tenet as if it were an essential aspect of Christianity in *all* of its forms, including its most moderate and orthodox expressions, is interesting in itself. What is even more interesting, however, is that news reporters and editors accept this view without question, and indeed in some instances promote it. Therefore, while an analysis of the Camping coverage shows how the story was used to reinforce a culturally

accepted and acceptable idea of the religious mainstream, it also suggests how expansive that mainstream may actually be, especially when it comes to millennialist beliefs and concepts.

Use of Experts

Experts are a common feature of television news programming, and anchors and reporters often turn to such authority figures to help explicate stories for viewers. Of course, the selection of experts is ideologically freighted: those called to expound on a given story will likely conform to the consensus views constructed by the media as part of a larger public discourse. Thus, experts do not merely flesh out a story with the privileged knowledge to which they, as experts, have access. They also, by dint of their authoritative status, tacitly instruct audiences on how to interpret stories by articulating the 'correct' reading of an event. At the same time, to a certain extent the correct reading has already been inscribed prior to any interpretive activity, insofar as it must appear commensurate with widely held, generally accepted cultural narratives. This is what Ruel Tyson means when he describes journalism as both 'consensus-made' and 'consensus-making'.[7]

Given the centrality of experts in ascribing meaning to news events, who they are and what they say can be profoundly revealing. Whereas reporters are expected to be objective and neutral, commentators do not have a similar duty of impartiality and may adopt particular positions, make value judgments, or articulate opinions much more freely than reporters might. Reporters alone may be able to convey the 'facts' of a story adequately to an audience, but the second-order tasks of explaining their significance and interpreting them in the context of cultural norms is often delegated to experts. Indeed, the perceived neutrality of reporters is in many respects dependent on the 'informed partisanship' of experts: as Janet Steele notes, the displacement of opinion into the mouths of experts works to 'detach the reporter from any values or conclusions implicit in the story'.[8] In terms of reproducing a consensus, then, the strategic value of the expert is obvious: he or she both shields the reporter from potential accusations of bias and (perhaps more importantly) instructs the reader in how to interpret the story correctly, that is, in accordance with the normative values of the wider culture. The expert functions, at least in part, as the medium through which orthodoxy is maintained.

The value that television news places on experts can be clearly perceived in the sample discussed here. While two of five reports aired in the UK included

7. Quoted in Hoover, *Religion in the News,* p. 9.

8. Janet E. Steele, 'Experts and the Operational Bias of Television News: The Case of the Persian Gulf War', *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 72 (Winter 1995), pp. 799-812 (801).

expert commentary, only four of the 18 US reports *did not* include this sort of analysis—and two of these were comment pieces as part of MSNBC's 'Last Word' program.[9] Given the privileged role that such commentators play in media discourse, the fact that most reports made some recourse to an expert interpreter is perhaps unsurprising. Rather more intriguing are the decisions made by editors in selecting suitable commentators. According to Mark Silk, 'the media trade largely in tales of good and evil'.[10] If Camping and his predictions habituate the 'evil' territory mapped out by this dichotomy, then it might be reasonably expected that the forces of 'good' conceived to oppose this threat emanate from the secular realms of rationalism, science and perhaps even atheism. But this is not borne out by the reports in my sample. The 'good' foil to the 'evil' of Camping's claims is not secular humanism but mainline Christianity. Among the US reports in the sample, seven included religious experts such as pastors or Christian authors; five used academic experts such as university professors; but only three used what I would call 'debunkers', representing humanist, atheist or secular positions.[11]

This distribution of expertise is significant. For a variety of reasons, program editors selected critical voices from within Christianity far more often than they did from secular institutions. Thus, rather than pitting secularism against religion, the reports collectively pitted 'good' religion against 'bad' religion. Indeed, Silk asserts that '[t]he American media presuppose that religion is a good thing.'[12] It is only when religion is used in ways that diverge from what is deemed proper, normal or natural that it faces censure, and it is almost always the aberrant religious expression, rather than religion itself, that is scrutinized and, if necessary, condemned. More research is needed to confirm whether this pattern can be extrapolated across a wider survey of reports, but the initial findings are certainly suggestive. I would argue that the inclusion of clerical, rather than secular or nonpartisan, experts has a clear strategic motive: it permits criticism of Camping while foreclosing potential allegations of secular bias, which have plagued mainstream media producers since at least the 1980s.[13] But this is not the only reason for preferring religious experts over those from other backgrounds. As we have established, one of the roles of the media is to participate in the construction of a public consensus on religion that works to privilege some beliefs and practices as 'normal' and marginalize others as 'fringe', 'eccentric' or 'unorthodox'. In light of this phenomenon, the reports in this sample demonstrate that one of the

9. Reports 4, 6, 8 and 14 did not include expert testimony.

10. Mark Silk, 53.

11. Reports that used clerical experts: 1, 6, 9, 11, 13, 15, 16, 20, 22; reports that used academic experts: 5, 6, 12, 17, 18; reports that used 'debunkers': 2, 7, 15.

12. Silk, p. 57 .

13. For an overview of the 'secular bias' debate, see Silk, chapter 3.

key roles of the expert commentators on this story—particularly those speaking from positions of religious authority—is to distance Camping and those who believe in his predictions from 'normal', 'mainline' or 'orthodox' Christians. Time and again pastors and theologians interviewed on the programs in the sample stress the deviant nature of Camping's claims, by extension tacitly upholding the integrity, respectability and normalcy of their own faith position. Indeed, what many of these interviews amount to is nothing less than a defense of respectable Christianity and its rightful place in US democracy. Report 15 features an interview with author Gabe Lyons, a progressive evangelical who states that 'a lot of mainstream evangelicals have come out and said that they find this story embarrassing, that it's bad for the faith'. Father Edward Beck, on his 'Moment of Faith' segment on ABC, speaks from a privileged in-group position that gives him the confidence to brand Camping's predictions as 'bad biblical interpretation and bad theology'. And lecturer and commentator Brent Walters, also speaking to ABC, claims that Camping 'has done more with his prediction to undermine Christianity and to kind of make a mockery of the faith than anybody in my lifetime'. Such defensive comments reveal what is at stake in upholding normative religious standards against the threats of heterodoxy, particularly in terms of credibility and reputation.

In fact, the media's collective rebuttal of Camping's claims is absolutely dependent on a shared understanding of what mainstream Christianity is and does. The reports described and interpreted here give weight to the 'public Protestantism' thesis developed by religious studies scholars such as Catherine Albanese and Tracy Fessenden. Albanese proposes a schema of 'oneness' and 'manyness' to make sense of the religious landscape in the United States. While there is indeed a plurality of religious beliefs, expressions and identities operative in the States that should not be disregarded by recourse to a reductive consensus view of religious history, the fact of public Protestantism's enormous cultural force should not be overlooked either. Indeed, public Protestantism is the '*one* religion' around which other religious traditions radiate and from which they deviate.[14] The centrality of this particular form of Christianity in US culture is such that it is largely unmarked and invisible, functioning insidiously as the tacit 'norm' of religious expression. This foundational narrative extends beyond the religious realm to pervade secular discourse: Fessenden argues that a 'Protestantized conception of religion [has come] to control the meanings of both the religious *and* the secular'.[15] This is important: though the news media are often thought to inhabit a secular

14. Catherine L. Albanese, *America: Religion and Religions* (Belmont: Wadsworth, 2nd edn, 1992), p. 395.

15. Tracy Fessenden, *Culture and Redemption: Religion, the Secular, and American Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 4. Italics in original.

realm, if Fessenden and Albanese are correct in their identification of a tacit but powerfully instrumental 'public Protestantism', then there is no reason to infer that this particular knowledge industry is immune to the religious consensus these scholars diagnose.

The public Protestantism thesis explains why, in the world of news media, not all religious sources are equal. John Dart describes a hierarchy of expertise that privileges voices from the center over those that speak from the margins: 'When judging credible sources, journalists will often give the more familiar or mainstream people an edge.'[16] This is largely corroborated in the sample. With one notable exception, of which I will say more presently, the Protestant pastors who are interviewed in the reports in my sample are affiliated with mainline denominations: Methodist, Baptist, Lutheran and Anglican. One report, ABC's 'Moment of Faith' program, features a Catholic priest, Father Edward Beck, and while this could be understood as a deviation from the 'public Protestantism' principle, the views Beck espouses on this program (and certainly in this particular example) adhere to ecumenical Christian precepts and reveal little that could be said to be distinctively Catholic. More interesting, especially as far as my discussion of the mainstreaming of millennialism is concerned, is the selection by Fox News of Sacramento pastor Doug Batchelor, who ministers to a Seventh-day Adventist Church, a denomination that has historically been construed as extrinsic to mainstream Christianity and is certainly excluded from the conventional list of mainline denominations.[17] Indeed, the denomination grew out of the Millerite movement, which was animated by leader William Miller's own date-setting activities: his failed prophecy that the Rapture would take place on 22 October 1844 became known as 'The Great Disappointment'. In a manner identical to Camping's reinterpretation of the prophecy following its disconfirmation, the emergent Seventh-day Adventist movement came to understand October 22nd as marking a spiritual, rather than an earthly, event. In short, the denomination to which Batchelor belongs is distinctly premillennial and indeed has origins in the very kind of date-setting activity both Batchelor and the report in general are keen to undermine. Yet the very fact that Batchelor has been selected for interview on television news at all locates him and his views within the realm of normative religion. Of course, there are multiple factors that inform the selection of contributors to news programs, including practical considerations such as the potential interviewee's availability and proximity to the studio—these may well have played a part in the decisions made by the Fox 40 editorial

16. John Dart, 'Covering Conventional and Unconventional Religion: A Reporter's View', *Review of Religious Research* 39 (December 1997), pp. 144-52 (149).

17. See 'Mainline Protestantism', in Edward L. Queen II, Stephen R. Prothero and Gardiner H. Shattuck, Jr (eds), *Encyclopedia of American Religious History* (New York: Facts on File, 3rd edn, 2009), pp. 603-604.

team. Furthermore, caution should be exercised before drawing any broader conclusions from this single example. It is notable that no mention is made of Batchelor's affiliation with the SDA church. This may or may not indicate some reluctance on the broadcaster's part to reveal Batchelor's membership in a denomination still considered in some quarters as heterodox. Nonetheless, the fact that the reporter tacitly assents to and therefore lends legitimacy to Batchelor's assertions that 'the end *is* near' and that 'a number of signs' such as 'earthquakes and floods and famines' signal that 'we've really reached the beginning of the end' is at least suggestive. The report may indicate the extent to which premillennialism generally is considered a part of Christian orthodoxy among mainstream television news audiences in America.

Contemporary 'Apocalyptic' Contexts

As noted in the introduction, media deemed Camping's predictions to be newsworthy despite their limited influence on the beliefs of the population at large. Consequently, reporters and commentators were required to work harder to persuade audiences of the story's relevance to them, and one way in which they did so was through recourse to the 'wider context' in which the predictions had been made. By referring to a shared reality that connected prophecy believers to prophecy skeptics, television news reports sought to extend the scope of the story. In several reports, discussions of recent events and ongoing cultural conditions which appeared 'apocalyptic' occupied this function.

Eight of the 23 reports in the sample utilized this device in their discussion of the predictions.[18] The majority pointed to the apparent prevalence of natural disasters such as the tsunami that hit the coast of Japan in March 2011 and, closer to home, floods in the Mississippi region and tornadoes in the southern states. Reporting just hours into the aftermath of the prediction's failure, NBC's George Lewis noted that 'recent events might lead some to believe that the world is indeed ending', describing these suggestively as 'disasters of biblical proportions'.[19] Other broadcasts offered similar angles: report 12, aired on Fox 13 several months prior to 21 May, suggests that Camping's predictions are 'a reflection of difficulties in society, including the hard economic times we face', while the presenter of ABC's 'Moment of Faith' segment, Father Edward Beck, points out that one of Camping's 'proofs' for his prediction is that 'gays are thriving'. Taken together, these phenomena register a cultural atmosphere in which apocalyptic expectation might appear reasonable, which in turn justifies the editorial decision to make news of Camping's claims.

18. Reports 5, 7, 9, 12, 15, 16, 18, 20.
19. Report 5.

Through these allusions, reporters and commentators gesture, albeit very tentatively, toward a kind of credibility pertaining to Camping's speculations. Even if he and his followers are wrong—which, they insist, they almost certainly are—their beliefs are nonetheless *understandable* in the contemporary context in which Camping's claims were made. The modicum of possibility that is threaded almost imperceptibly through the official narrative of skepticism has an important function in terms of the intended impact of the story on audiences. The reports in the sample did not engage in scaremongering; nevertheless, for the story to engage viewers, the outside chance that Camping's predictions *might* just turn out to be true was required as an almost invisible subtext. References to natural disasters, the economic downturn and ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan worked to evoke this unspoken possibility. As we will see in the section on Family Radio's finances, reporters do not need to be particularly explicit in articulating these contexts for the predictions because viewers make the connections themselves. Viewers' ability to construct a coherent narrative out of disparate pieces of contiguous but not necessarily explicitly connected information is crucial for this technique to be effective.

More specifically, these allusions to natural disasters, embedded in a general perception that the current historical moment is one characterized by crisis and disorder, presume and depend on a certain level of biblical literacy. The notion that the end of the world will be heralded by 'signs of the times' such as earthquakes, floods, famines, and wars has origins in the New Testament, in chapters such as Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21 (often collectively named the 'little apocalypse'). In all of the reports the connection between such events and the end of the world is assumed to be so widely understood as to require no explicit exposition on the part of the reporter. The supposition that the apocalypse, or the second coming, will be preceded by quite specific 'signs of the times' is naturalized as 'common knowledge' in and by the reports in the sample (especially the US ones), but it is in fact a fairly distinctive Christian tenet, which has moreover gained cultural salience as premillennial prophecy belief has become more mainstream. The presumption of biblical literacy on which the reports are premised tends to support the view, advanced by Silk, Fessenden, Albanese and others, that the media constructs and assumes an audience whose interpretive practices are embedded in a Christian—and, more specifically, Protestant—worldview.

Finances of Camping and Family Radio

The theme of religious hypocrisy is one of the seven topoi identified by Mark Silk in his study of religion reporting in American newspapers.[20] The figure

20. Silk, chapter 7, pp. 80-90.

of the preacher who admonishes his congregation for their manifold misdemeanors while concealing his own feet of clay has quite a genealogy in the US media, leading back to Henry Ward Beecher's adultery case of 1874–75, through the strange case of the disappearance of Pentecostal evangelist Aimee Semple McPherson and, more recently, the spate of televangelism scandals that made for sensational headlines in the 1980s. This topos is one deeply mired in the salacious, frequently detailing sexual indiscretions and transgressions. Yet there is one kind of story that commands even greater press attention than the sex scandal. As Sean McCloud succinctly puts it, 'journalists' most consistent critique of televangelism concern[s] money'.[21] Financial scandal among evangelical leaders—especially those with media ministries—has some lurid precedents in recent American history. The late 1980s saw a number of successful televangelists fall spectacularly from grace through reports of financial corruption and misuse of church funds, underscored by various alleged sexual improprieties—the Jim Bakker and Jimmy Swaggart cases being perhaps the most infamous.[22] The televangelist scandals were instrumental in formulating a new narrative that juxtaposed wealth against 'true religion' which has been mobilized by media searching for angles in potential religion stories, including that of Harold Camping's predictions.

It should be noted that no allegations of financial impropriety have been made against Camping or Family Radio. According to the Family Radio website, 'Harold Camping is a full time volunteer, receiving no salary or other financial compensation'.[23] Nonetheless, the issue of ministry finances is a prominent one in many of the reports discussed here. Seven of the 18 US reports and two of the five UK reports make some mention of money, referring either to the reported value of Family Radio or to the donations made by its virtual congregation.[24] Some of these strayed perilously close to accusing Camping of financial irresponsibility. In report 1, anchor Alex Witt wonders aloud why, when Camping has been wrong in his eschatological predictions before, 'people still give him their *money*' (with strong emphasis on the last word). Witt's interviewee, Dr Robert Jeffress, a Baptist pastor, suggests that continued donations to Camping reveal 'how gullible people really are'. The exchange between interviewer and interviewee works to position Camping as manipulative and possibly mercenary, and his followers as credulous dupes. A similar narrative can be discerned in the 'Young Turks' program on MSNBC,

21. McCloud, *Making the American Religious Fringe*, p. 168.

22. See ibid., pp. 166-72; Razelle Frankl, *Televangelism: The Marketing of Popular Religion* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986); Quentin Schultze, *Televangelism: The Marketing of Popular Religion* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003).

23. 'Who or What Is Family Radio', Family Radio website, http://www.familyradio.com/english/connect/bio/haroldcamping_bio.html (accessed 13 January 2012).

24. Reports 1, 3, 5, 6, 14, 15, 17 (US), and 20 and 21 (UK).

which, in contrast to some other reports in the sample that mention money matters only in passing, places significant emphasis on Family Radio finances. According to presenter Ana Kasparian, 'Between 2005 and 2009, Family Radio took in eighty million dollars.' Her co-host Cenk Uygur evinces outrage at this figure: 'Oh no! Come on, I didn't know that!' Kasparian adds that the ministry is 'currently worth seventy-two million dollars', which provokes further indignation from Uygur: 'Oh what are you people doing! Stop it, stop giving them money!' The exchange is animated by a preexisting narrative in religion reporting, in which religion is compromised by the lure of financial gains, and in which powerful demagogues exploit the faith and trust (as well as the wallets) of their credulous followers. These 'victim' followers also furnish reporters with a second narrative of inappropriate financial behavior. Largely unconfirmed accounts of believers cashing in insurance policies and spending their savings can be found in nine of the reports in the sample.[25]

Television reports on the Camping predictions that made reference to the ministry's finances can be seen to be engaged in a form of discursive practice not unlike the so-called 'dog-whistle' language in which politicians are sometimes accused of engaging. Dog-whistle politics refers to coded speech that signifies differently for a particular in-group than it does for general audiences who lack specialized knowledge of the code in question. For example, David Greenberg contends that when President Ronald Reagan advocated the preservation of states' rights in 1980, those with access to the necessary interpretive schema understood that his references were really a veiled attack on civil rights legislation at the federal level. The president's rather abstract discourse on states' rights, Greenberg argues, was designed to stir powerful cultural memories of the massive resistance against desegregation laws in the South, without running the considerable risk of controversy by making these allusions more explicit. This covert discourse had the added benefit of appearing benign to those without access to—or who chose to ignore—its coded ramifications. The White House need not defend itself against charges of racism because, taken at face value, the comments could not be said to be racist. A prima facie defense is thus built into dog-whistle discourses that effectively defuses critique.[26]

In the case with which we are concerned here, when reporters refer to Camping's finances, however neutrally, they conjure associations that have an abiding legacy in modern American culture. These associations have such potency and are so widely understood that reports need only refer in the most desultory manner to Family Radio's bank balance in order to evoke memo-

25. Reports 4, 5, 9, 10, 14, 15, 17, 20, 21.

26. David Greenberg, 'Dog-Whistling Dixie', *Slate* (20 November 2007), http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/history_lesson/2007/11/dogwhistling_dixie.html (accessed 16 January 2012).

ries of the Bakker and Swaggart scandals that circulate around the Elmer Gantry stereotype of the corrupt revivalist. Indeed, the shorthand functions so effectively that mere mention of matters financial is enough to alert the audience to the unsavory subtext. In this trope, then, we see how media reports function within historically established and narrowly circumscribed narrative frameworks, some of which are so familiar to audiences that very little is needed in the way of clues to elicit a desired response based on time-honored stereotypes.

Justification of News Value

No event is inherently newsworthy. As Greg Philo puts it, '[n]ews is not "found" or even "gathered" so much as it is made.'[27] Camping's predictions, then, became a 'story' only because of the presence of certain conditions and characteristics that accorded with a preconfigured set of news values that are themselves a product of cultural assumptions. Importantly, the news value of Camping's predictions was from the outset contentious. In the case of many stories broadcast on television news, their newsworthiness is, if not intrinsic, then certainly so 'obvious' as to be beyond question. In the realm of so-called religion stories, the Waco siege, particularly its denouement, carried practically undisputed news value, which was reinforced by the deaths of 76 people (in line with the journalistic axiom, 'if it bleeds it leads'); the PTL ministry scandal also corresponded to a number of criteria used by editors and reporters to discern what is and is not worth running (financial corruption, religious hypocrisy, sexual impropriety). But the Camping predictions contained none of these elements. Nobody had committed suicide or engaged in acts of violence; there was certainly no sex angle; and while the financial success of Family Radio was often mentioned, as noted above, no corruption could be found. Thus, reporters had to convince audiences that this was a story worthy of their attention—and, on a more implicit level, a story that conformed to accepted notions of what constitutes 'news'.

One way in which reporters attempted to reassure viewers of the story's news value was by reference to the widespread influence of the predictions. At the start of report 2, aired on 'NBC Nightly News' on 20 May, anchor David Gregory refers to 'all the people around the world who seem to buy his [Camping's] prediction'. The sense of the prediction's pervasiveness is underscored in Kerry Sanders's ensuing report. 'From northern California—to central Florida—and everywhere in between', Sanders intones, as the footage cuts from one location to another, giving an impression that end-of-the-world fever is truly sweeping the nation. The report then cuts to a montage of footage from *other* news outlets, a common tactic in establishing the newsworthi-

27. Quoted in Fowler, *Language in the News*, p. 13.

ness of a story, if one that rests on a peculiarly self-fulfilling logic. In a similar fashion, several reports make reference to the story's popularity on social media such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. Reports 6 and 18 note that the top three Google searches of the day pertained to Camping's predictions.

In total, seven of 18 US reports and a significant four out of five of the UK reports in the sample follow a similar logic. In MSNBC's 'Last Word' program, host Lawrence O'Donnell states that 'this would be laughably ignorable if no-one was taking Mr. Camping seriously—but: people *are* taking him seriously, too many people are actually taking him seriously'. O'Donnell thus acknowledges the tacit accusation that this is a 'laughably ignorable' non-story, only to dismiss it due the volume of people 'taking Mr. Camping seriously'. In report 9, aired on Fox 40, interviewee Doug Batchelor refers to 'thousands' who have engaged in aberrant and extreme behavior in response to the predictions, such as selling their homes, quitting their jobs, or cashing in savings or insurance policies. In report 10, aired on Fox 10 on 24 May, followers of Camping are described as being 'shocked' at the prophecy's failure. 'Making things worse', the reporter continues, 'many spent their life savings believing the world was coming to an end'. Lloyd Sowers in report 13 refers to the perceived apocalyptic expectation as 'a nationwide movement'; report 15 states that 'plenty of people think today, May twenty-first, really is judgment day', and includes a text strapline that reads 'Many Bracing for the End of Days'. ABC News anchor David Muir explains in report 18 that 'the reason we're reporting on it tonight, [is] the sheer number of people who now believe it'. The report adopts the same formula found in report 2 of listing cities and states in order to give an impression of the geographical prevalence of apocalyptic anticipation: 'In Florida, Michigan, California, and New York City, billboards sound the alarm.'

Such references to the scale of Camping's influence are perhaps even more imperative when the story is being reported outside the United States, which may explain why four out of the five reports in this survey that were produced by UK news outlets made some claim about the purported prevalence of apocalyptic speculation allegedly fueled by the predictions. Yet the UK reports take a different angle from most US reports. Whereas the latter frame the story primarily as a domestic one, affecting US citizens '[f]rom northern California—to central Florida—and everywhere in between', the UK reports perceive end-of-days anticipation on a global scale. Report 19, aired on BBC News on 21 May, refers to 'thousands of posters around the world, from Chile to Russia', and interestingly makes no mention at all of the United States in the lead-in. Reports 21 and 22 perceive a similarly global sweep, with particular focus on the Philippines, where believers, according to report 22, are 'geared up for the worst'.

This is not unproblematic in terms of editorial consistency. On the one hand, in order to make a claim for newsworthiness, the scale of the story must

be emphasized: it is worth telling because 'hundreds' or even 'thousands' of people have been affected by it. Yet, in order to protect and maintain the conception of the religious mainstream described above, the reports must also make the contrary claim that 'most Christians' reject the predictions and the theology that underpins them. Thus, we see statements that directly contradict one another: 'there are thousands of people across the country that are selling their homes or quitting their jobs', yet 'there are many in the worldwide Christian community who disagree with Camping's theology'.[28] In one report, the interviewee describes the phenomenon as 'very fringe' at the same time as a strapline appears on-screen reading 'Doomsday Predicted for Today: Why Do So Many Take it Seriously?'[29] The imperative to justify the story's news value conflicts with the imperative to maintain the integrity of normative Christianity. Significantly, this tension is not resolved in any of the news reports in the sample.

The Camping Prophecies and the Rearticulation of the Religious Mainstream

The ways in which television news, as well as other news media, work to shape consensus views is well documented and has been one of the central principles underpinning my approach to the material analyzed above. That one of the media's functions is to shape normative views on religion is hardly up for debate. What is worth considering in more detail, however, is just what that consensus view of religion comprises.

The first thing I would note about US reports in particular is that they take religiosity per se for granted as the default worldview that their viewers are presumed to share. Not one of the US reports criticizes religious beliefs and values in general. Even the highly satirical style of the 'Young Turks' is underscored by the unspoken implication that it is *this particular* expression of religiosity, rather than religiosity in broad terms, that is the target of their ridicule. The extent to which even irreverent or humorous treatments of the story couch their reports and commentaries in neutral language is significant. None of the reports uses pejorative words such as 'cult', 'sect', or 'extremist' (though two refer to Camping as a 'fundamentalist').[30] According to McCloud, '[c]ult and fringe groups are everywhere—at least in the mass media', which further 'conjures images of brainwashing, coercion, deception, exploitation, perversion, and fraud'.'[31] Yet, although the reports in the sample addressed here are frequently critical and, to varying degrees, derisive of

28. Report 9; report 13.
29. Report 15.
30. Reports 16 and 22.
31. McCloud, *Making the American Religious Fringe,* pp. 1-2.

Camping's views, they largely avoid capitulating (at least overtly) to the kind of stereotypes that McCloud describes. This reluctance to challenge religion even where criticism is arguably warranted is consonant with Silk's contention that '[t]he American media presuppose that religion is a good thing' and therefore 'present religion from a religious rather than a secular point of view'. That is to say, far from having a humanistic or atheistic bias, media are in fact animated by certain religious values that have currency in US society in general, and that it is these religious values that underpin and inform the reporting of religion stories.[32] Silk adds that 'coverage of religion typically shies away from finding fault'.[33] While many of the reports do indeed criticize Camping and his predictions, they do so from the premise that Camping has deviated not from a secular norm but from a religious norm.

But it is not simply a religious worldview that is naturalized in these news reports. More specifically, they situate mainline Protestant Christianity as the consensus position from which Camping and his followers deviate. The selection of pastors and theologians who speak from mainline perspectives as expert commentators bears this out, as do the recurrent references to 'orthodox', 'mainstream', or 'traditional' Christianity in the reports. It is tacitly assumed that audiences not only will understand precisely what kind of Christianity is meant by these designations but also will affirm the essential 'rightness' of such a standard. Yet I would go further still in refining the consensus view of normative (or what Robert Orsi calls 'good') religion as implied by these reports. What they seem to show is that mainstream religion, as it is defined by television news media, currently incorporates a distinctly millennial element. If one of the functions of media discourse is to shape, reproduce and police the religious mainstream in contradistinction to the religious fringe, then what the television coverage of the Camping episode indicates is that a belief in the physical second coming of Christ currently occupies the former territory rather than, as we might expect, the latter.

The Camping story, then, functioned at least in part as a way to shore up certain religious values and perhaps even position them as essential to US culture and democracy. But this does not fully explain why this frankly peculiar story was such a significant news event. According to Kathleen Stewart and Susan Harding, 'Idioms of risk, trauma, threat, catastrophe, conspiracy, victimization, surveillance; social, moral, and environmental degradation; recovery, redemption, the New Age, and the New World Order permeate the airwaves',[34] thus indicating the general prevalence of the apocalyptic as a mode of thought that transcends specific eschatological schemata and particular prophetic claims. It therefore stands to reason that Camping's predic-

32. Silk, p. 57, pp. xi-xii.
33. Ibid., p. 7.
34. Kathleen Stewart and Susan Harding, 290.

tions captured the public imagination, even if the majority of those exposed to the story gave it little credence. However, not all predictions of the end of the world receive such extensive attention in mainstream discourse; many remain confined to the communities in which they originated and do not trouble the major media. There are a number of obvious and less obvious factors that help to explain why Camping's predictions had such an impact on the dominant news narrative. First, Camping himself desired such publicity, as demonstrated by the advertising campaign, reportedly costing in the region of $100 million dollars, launched by Family Radio warning that the Rapture would take place on 21 May.[35] Family Radio's adverts were supplemented by the efforts of believers in the predictions: Robert Fitzpatrick, a retired transport engineer and self-published author of a book of prophecy exposition entitled *The Doomsday Code*, gained some notoriety in his own right when he spent $140,000 of his life savings on billboards warning New York's subway passengers of the coming end.[36] Camping also actively engaged the media through television, radio and newspaper interviews. In other words, Camping, Family Radio and some of those who accepted his predictions as truth were involved in a concerted effort to garner publicity for the claims. Consequently, the story came to the attention of the mainstream media more or less 'ready-made'—reporters did not need to put in long hours and engage in difficult investigative work to get to the heart of the story, because Camping had already placed the story in the public domain. The relative ease with which the story could be formulated for broadcast may have been instrumental in the extent to which it was picked up by major networks.

The contemporary nature of television news is also worth noting, in particular, the emergence of 24-hour 'rolling' news in place of discrete bulletins at specific times. That around-the-clock news broadcasts are now unexceptional is a potentially significant factor in explaining why such an apparently esoteric story was afforded such widespread, major network coverage. Editors are no longer required to prioritize stories to the extent that they did in the past: the relaxation of time constraints engendered by rolling news permits coverage of stories that may not have warranted airtime in the era of half-hour bulletins thrice daily. The definition of what is and what is not newsworthy has adapted to these new conditions, and it is consequently notable that cov-

35. Lillian Kwon, 'Family Radio Employee Estimates $100M Spent on Judgment Day Advertising', *Christian Post* (23 May 2011), http://www.christianpost.com/news/family-radio-employee-estimates-100m-spent-in-doomsday-ads-50437/ (accessed 24 January 2012).

36. Neil Graves and Lukas I. Alpert, 'World will end on May 21 says ex-MTA worker Robert Fitzpatrick, who's putting money where mouth is', *New York Daily News* (12 May 2011), http://articles.nydailynews.com/2011-05-12/local/29554018_1_mta-spokesman-kevin-ortiz-doomsday-ad-blitz (accessed 24 January 2012).

erage of Camping's 1994 predictions was markedly less extensive than those made fifteen years later.

We might note, too, the ongoing prominence of apocalyptic and millennial belief in American culture in particular. The Left Behind books were best-sellers between 1995 and 2007 and remain salient on the popular cultural landscape. According to Crawford Gribben, as many prophecy novels were published in the decade after 1996 as were produced during the entire preceding century.[37] One survey indicates that one in five American adults has read at least one novel in Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins's extraordinarily popular series.[38] We might extrapolate from this that the notion that the end of history will be precipitated by the 'rapture' of believers—just as Camping asserted—has become commonplace in American discourse, whether those involved in the conversation adhere to that particular theology or otherwise, and has thus helped make television news audiences more receptive to, if not persuaded by, Camping's claims. The currency of millennial belief in contemporary American culture helps to position Camping's predictions as legitimate material for a genuine news story rather than idiosyncratic pronouncements from what has sometimes been described as the 'lunatic fringe'. When the Left Behind creators publicly rejected and distanced themselves from Camping's contentions—LaHaye published a rebuttal of the predictions on the Left Behind website[39]—they may have failed to recognize their own role in creating a cultural milieu in which such claims are newsworthy.

List of News Reports

1. 'Weekends with Alex Witt', MSNBC, 21/05/11. 3 mins 4 secs. Presenter: Alex Witt.
2. 'Nightly News', NBC, 20/05/11. 2 mins 5 secs. Presenter: David Gregory; Reporter: Kerry Sanders.
3. 'The Young Turks', MSNBC, 20/05/11. 4 mins 34 secs. Presenters: Cenk Uygur and Ana Kasparian.
4. 'The Last Word', MSNBC, 12/05/11. 4 mins. Presenter: Lawrence O'Donnell.

37. Crawford Gribben, Writing the Rapture: Prophecy Fiction in Evangelical America (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 145.

38. 'American Piety in the 21st Century: New Insights into the Depth and Complexity of Religion in the U.S.', Baylor Institute for Studies of Religion (2006), p. 19. Available online at http://www.baylor.edu/content/services/document.php/33304.pdf. Page accessed July 24, 2012.

39. Tim LaHaye, 'Is Harold Camping Right This Time?' http://www.leftbehind.com/05_news/is_harold_camping_right_this_time.asp (accessed 17 January 2012).

5. 'Nightly News', NBC, 21/05/11. 2 mins 29 secs. Presenter: Lester Holt; Reporter: George Lewis.
6. 'The Last Word', MSNBC, 19/05/11. 5 mins 12 secs. Presenter: Lawrence O'Donnell.
7. 'Martin Bashir', MSNBC, 20/05/11. 4 mins 17 secs. Presenter: Martin Bashir.
8. 'Fox News Insider', Fox News, 23/05/11. 48 secs. Presenter: Bret Baier.
9. 'Fox 40 News', Fox 40, 20/05/11. 3 mins 59 secs. Presenters: Stefanie Cruz and Paul Robins; Reporter: Joe Orlando.
10. 'Arizona Morning', Fox 10, 24/05/11. 1 min. 22 secs. Presenters: Alexis Vance and Ron Hoon.
11. '6pm News', Fox 13, 17/05/11. 3 mins 17 secs. Presenter: John Wilson; Reporter: Jeremy Campbell.
12. '6pm News', Fox 13, 23/02/11. 2 mins 14 secs. Presenter: Kelly Ring; Reporter: Lloyd Sowers.
13. '6pm News', ABC 30, 16/05/11. 1 min. 50 secs. Reporter: Liz Harrison.
14. 'Good Morning America', ABC News, 22/05/11. 2 mins 26 secs. Reporter: Ron Claiborne
15. 'Good Morning America', ABC News, 21/05/11. Presenters: Dan Harris and Bianna Golodryga; Reporter Ron Claiborne.
16. 'Moment of Faith', ABC News, 21/05/11. 2 mins 54 secs. Presenter: Edward Beck.
17. 'ABC 7 News', 24/05/11. 1 min. 56 secs. Presenter: Alan Wang.
18. 'World News with David Muir', ABC News, 20/05/11. 2 mins 12 secs. Presenter: David Muir; Reporter: David Wright.
19. 'BBC News', BBC, 21/05/11. 1 min. 5 secs. Reporter: Andy Moore.
20. 'BBC Weekend News', BBC, 21/05/11. Presenter: 2 mins 43 secs. Maxine Mawhinney.
21. 'BBC News', BBC, 22/05/11. 1 min. 18 secs. Reporter: Andy Moore.
22. 'Channel 4 News', Channel 4, 21/05/11. 5 mins 54 secs. Presenter: Krishnan Guru-Murthy; Reporter: Asha Tanna.
23. 'ITN World', ITV, 24/05/11. 2 mins 31 secs.

4

Black Saturday: Representing Catastrophe

Roland Boer

Reports of catastrophe seem to be all around us. It may be the worst economic downturn (beginning in 2008) since the Great Depression if not in the history of capitalism (McNally 2009), or it may be the urgent matter of global warming and environmental collapse (Flannery 2005), or it may the first glimmers of the end of that cheap black energy known as oil (Deffeyes 2003, 2005; Energy Watch Group, 2007). These three jostle for attention, one or the other gaining media attention in light of immediate urgency, but such narratives of destruction are saturated with apocalyptic images and themes. There may be wars over scarce resources, widespread death from starvation and disease, or the destruction caused by monster storms and rising sea levels. However, occasionally another, more immediate catastrophe appears on our television screens. My concern is one of those cases.[1]

On Saturday, 7 February 2009, temperatures in the state of Victoria in the south-east of Australia reached their highest on record—46.9 degrees Celsius. The day came at the end of a severe heat wave with consistent temperatures over 40 degrees. The wind had been blowing from the northwest, straight out of the dry interior, bringing hot, desiccated air with it. Even more, south-eastern Australia was in its thirteenth year of drought, and the fire-loving Australian bush was crackling dry. By the afternoon of 7 February there were more than 400 fires burning in Victoria, which turned into a firestorm. On Saturday evening the wind turned to a southerly, which is normally cool and rain-bearing. But in this case the southerly brought high winds in the opposite direction. The fires turned, fed on themselves, opened up new fronts and wiped out a vast stretch of bush, countless animals, whole towns and 173 people, as well as injuring 414. The fires would not be contained until the middle of March, although the primary destruction happened on 'Black Saturday' itself (see Australian Board of Meteorology 2009; Cameron *et al.* 2009).

1. This study is in many respects an effort to provide a macro-assessment that complements the detailed linguistic study of Mühlhäusler and Peace (2006). A feature of television is that its ephemeral nature is enhanced by the fact that most programs are not stored in public domains after they have been shown. I cite a number of online video samples but otherwise rely on notes made while watching the programs themselves.

My concern is the way the story of these devastating fires was reported on the television news and current affairs programs. What soon emerge are some familiar patterns, ones that we find also with the narratives of economic collapse, environmental collapse, and the prospect of peak oil. These catastrophes might be new in some way, but the shapes of the paradigmatic stories are certainly not. Indeed, they have mythic, biblical precursors, in terms of the narratives of Jonah, Noah and Repentance.

Unlike in many other countries, Australian television is not dominated by cable. The distances between cities and the relatively small population (23 million over a whole continent) mean that cable provision is very expensive. Thus, free-to-air television is still the preferred option for many, of which there are three commercial channels, 7, 9 and 10 (the regional stations are subsidiaries of these three), and two state-run stations, ABC, or Australian Broadcasting Commission, and SBS, a multilanguage Special Broadcasting Service with a nightly world news.[2] In the two weeks following the fires, each channel had at first long stretches of live coverage that reminded a viewer of CNN, frequent updates on the latest developments, longer reports at the regular news times, and the current affairs programs that traditionally fill the slot following the evening news. Given the slightly different time slots for each channel's news hour (10 begins at 5.00 pm, 7 and 9 at 6.00 pm, SBS at 6.30 and ABC at 7.00 pm) and the current affairs programs following them, one may watch news-related programs from 5.00 pm to 8.00 pm. This constant stream of staggered news and current affairs as one channel after another presents its nightly mix falls in between the two categories first theorized by Raymond Williams as 'flow' and 'discrete event' (1990: 86-96). Although the research for my study focuses on one event, the reporting of that event flowed on, at first daily (for the first two days of 7-8 February) and then nightly. It was compelling viewing, and the ratings were stellar. By Sunday evening, 5.3 million people had watched the two major news reports (channels 7 and 9, especially the former's extended bushfire edition on 9 February). Over the next two weeks, more than eight million people watched the news programs on these two channels alone (see the official ratings agency, www.oztam.com.au).

The Jonah Story

The first type of narrative may be called the Jonah story, although we may also include the prophecies of disaster in Ezekiel 4–11 or Jeremiah 5–8. The relevant element of the Jonah story comes from the prophet's perspective,

2. For channel 7, see http://au.tv.yahoo.com; for 9, http://channelnine.ninemsn.com.au; and for 10, http://ten.com.au. ABC may be found at http://www.abc.net.au/tv and SBS at http://www.sbs.com.au/television.

his desire for doom and destruction of the Ninevites (the element of repentance, unexpected for Jonah, will appear later in this analysis). In that fictional novella, Jonah (1.2) is called by God to go and preach doom and destruction to Nineveh (in present-day Iraq). Jonah is unimpressed by the call and sets out in precisely the opposite direction, boarding a ship, incognito (1.3). But God will not give up on Jonah, so he brings on a great storm and then forces Jonah to admit to the crew that he is a prophet fleeing a less-than-attractive commission (1.9-10). They promptly throw him overboard and the storm ceases; but a great fish swallows Jonah and spits him out on the shore near Nineveh (2.1-11). Jonah now takes up his calling with enthusiasm, striding about the city, crying out that the end is nigh, that they have only days left (3.4). Then he takes himself to a hill and finds a place from which to view the impending destruction (4.5).

Thus, in the face of disaster the Jonahs take grim satisfaction in focusing on the devastation wrought by an apocalyptic occurrence.The biblically literate and churchgoing prime minister Kevin Rudd, after rushing to a rescue center near the fires, stated in a sound-bite first shown on channel 9 news and repeated on each of the television news programs on Sunday, 8 February, 'Hell and all its fury has visited the good people of Victoria'.[3] The biblical allusions are many, especially those concerning promised destruction and, in the New Testament, the fires of hell (see Deuteronomy 32; Lamentations 2; Isaiah 13–14; Joel 1.15–2.11; Ezekiel 15; Daniel 7; Mark 13 and Revelation 18–20). And the flowing images from television cameras backed up Rudd during those initial reports over the weekend of 7-8 February. On each channel, footage was replayed with flames filling the screens, weary and blackened fire crews coming and going, and water-dumping helicopters futilely attempting to douse the infernos. Aerial footage after the fires had moved on presented astonishing pictures of grey and black landscapes with spikes that used to be trees, houses literally razed to the ground, and burned-out cars that had been caught in the flames as people desperately tried to escape. It seemed as though the cameras had taken cues from classic post-apocalyptic movies such as *Mad Max* (Miller 1979), *The Terminator* (Cameron 1984) or, more recently, *2012* (Emmerich 2009), as well as biblical texts like Esther 15 and 24, Jeremiah 9.10-22 and Ezekiel 6. One scene showed a burned-out bicycle, another a child's toy somehow saved, another a set of swings and yet another a half-burned shoe with molten sole—reminiscent of the aftereffects of the detonation of a nuclear device that haunt Sarah Connor's dreams in *Terminator 2* (Cameron 1991). All of them showed how fierce the fire had been and how extensive the destruction was. It was, somewhat perversely, a camera operator's delight, each one striving for more haunting footage.

3. See http://news.ninemsn.com.au/article.aspx?id=744898.

Over the following week (9-16 February 2009), statistics began appearing in the leading news reports (see also the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission 2010). People were killed from the heat radiation up to two hundred meters from the fires. Trying to escape at the last minute, they had no chance. The temperatures reached 1200 degrees Celsius, so that even the bitumen on roads caught fire and metal melted. The flames were twice the height of trees, moved up to 160 km per hour and sent rolling balls of flame in front of them over empty fields. They left nothing but ash, not even a tooth in some victims. A police officer was interviewed on 15 February 2009 and said, 'The trouble is human ash looks pretty much the same as any other ash, and there are tonnes and tonnes of ash' (first on channel 9, 15 February 2009, at 6.00 pm). At first, reports indicated that 209 had died, with about 60 of those burned beyond recognition. The news also mentioned that another 30 remained unaccounted for, so police and body identification units had to return and go over the same areas to find evidence that might indicate someone had died. However, by the end of the second week (23 February 2009) it became clear that the reports of deaths had been overestimated, and the official number of deaths was 173, with 414 injured.

In all the filming, reporting and updates, there was one problem: most of the damage had happened late on Saturday and then overnight. The cameras and reporters arrived after the fact and could film only the aftermath. A well-established strategy—given the narrative possibilities and viewer empathy—of reporting on disasters is to move rapidly to focus on the stories of survivors (see the fuller discussion below). On the ABC news on Monday, 10 February, a survivor spoke of the sky raining a hail of fire, a 'piercing orange hail storm of embers' (with an unconscious allusion to Psalm 18 and Revelation 8). A fire usually throws forward embers that then spot fires ahead of the main front. In this case, the embers were bark, branches, sometimes whole trees and dead birds (see also Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission 2010; http://vol4.royalcommission.vic.gov.au/index.php?pid=169). On the same nightly news program, another survivor from the town of Strathewen, spoke of running up a road: 'It's like a war zone, napalmed or something'—thereby evoking imagined scenes not merely from war itself but also from countless Hollywood war films, but especially *Apocalypse Now* (Coppola 1979).[4] A resident of another devastated town, Kinglake, observed on channel 9 that the roar of the fire was like a low-flying jumbo 747 backfiring (see also Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission 2010; http://vol4.royalcommission.vic.gov.au/index.php?pid=176).

But now the television networks were able to exploit a relatively new technological development, namely the possibility of filming footage with

4. One might also add the famous photograph of the aftereffects of the napalm attack on the village of Kim Phuc during the Vietnam War: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phan_Thi_Kim_Phuc.

a mobile telephone or digital camera. This new form of amateur or 'citizen journalism' is part of a wider 'cell phone culture' or indeed 'nokia effect' (Kavoori and Arcenaux 2007; Livingstone 2007; Sterling 2010a, 2010b) that has brought about an almost unmanageable flood of reporting. Phones, blogs and various forms of social networking with their multimedia possibilities have enabled a level of engagement and information that was unthinkable a decade or two ago (Coggin 2006). Yet, since television is primarily a visual medium and since the vast majority of those who experience disasters think first of their own survival, actual footage of disasters unfolding is a unique form of this reporting (Hattotuwa 2007; Robinson and Robison 2007). The key to such footage from the Black Saturday bushfires was that it had been made during the fire, precisely when the television cameras were absent. In place of professional film reports we were shown the shaky, grainy, amateurish footage of the walls of flame. Here were the 40-meter flames coming in on all sides, the roar and explosions and exclamations from the increasingly frightened camera operators. The television networks realized that this was far more effective and mesmerizing than any professional footage, since the mesmerized viewer realized all too clearly, 'That could have been me'. Examples include those of a certain Robert Goss, who thought he was filming his final moments (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=up1J15-3MII&feature=player_embedded); Kath Holton from Healesville in the face of the fire (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gw8nv2HIa-E); and Tony and Natalie Laurie who filmed their house burning as they were escaping (http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=endscreen&NR=1&v=XmEQjh9y7tY).

However, in this case especially one may identify what Roland Barthes called 'the effect of the real' (1986). Applied to news reporting, the effort is continually directed at ensuring that viewers gain the impression that what is reported is 'real', that the events depicted actually happened, that the account is factual. Yet this impression of reality must follow certain generic codes in order to be accepted as such—what we may call generic expectation. In conventional news reporting, it requires a reporter on camera at the scene, which usually forms a backdrop to the reporter. Footage may be relayed of a fire, a riot, a murder, a day of mayhem at the stock market, with the reporter's voice-over providing an explanation. If the reporter arrives after the fact, an 'expert' or one who had experienced actual events is preferred, conveying knowledge and experience in order to vouch for the authenticity of the event. And to provide a sense that the reporter really is on the scene of action, a brief interview with the news anchor conveys the sense that the reporter is indeed far away. However, with the increasing use of mobile phones and digital cameras by those who are not professional reporters, the generic codes of the real have been expanded. Now 'amateurish' techniques become the mark of authenticity, rather than the high-tech and expert work of a trained camera operator. Reality becomes marked by

the 'notations' of grainy, shaky camera work, the odd angles and unedited footage, the broken voice of the narrator witnessing the events. Again, the impression given is one with which viewers may empathize, for their own experiences of such efforts at filming have borne similar results. But that impression is itself constructed upon another set of preset generic codes, especially those derived from the 'shakycam', in which the shaky, tilted and jolted camera work is designed to create the impression that the camera operator is following events as they breathlessly unfold—whether in documentary, war scenes, fugitives on the run, and so on (Gutenko 1997).

An actual Jonah-like figure also appeared, in the shape of Danny Nalliah, a pastor with the Pentecostal church known as Catch the Fire Ministries (http://catchthefire.com.au). Without any sense of the macabre connection with the name of his church, Nalliah released a press statement (Nalliah 2009) and then appeared on 'A Current Affair' (channel 9) on 11 February blaming the fires directly on the recent decision by the parliament of the state of Victoria to decriminalize abortion. Based on a dream, Nalliah claimed that God has stopped protecting the state of Victoria, and indeed Australia as a whole, since we had turned away from God with the abortion bill. Here was a parallel with the message given to Jonah (3.8-10). Asked whether his interpretation struck a problem if some anti-abortion people were killed in the fires, he said—echoing Genesis 19 and the story of Sodom and Gomorrah—that once the protection is gone, God kills indiscriminately.

Here indeed is a Jonah figure who has settled on his hill overlooking an evil generation to await its gruesome end (Jon. 4.5). But Nalliah also provides the connection to other narratives of disaster. Here we find those who delight in stating that the world is coming to end and that there is nothing we can do about it (Revelation 4–22). They will keep on burning oil in gas-guzzling cars, species will keep becoming extinct, and armies will be deployed to shoot and bomb those who come hammering on the gates of the wealthy nations. People have brought this catastrophe on themselves, so damnation to the lot of them. We may call this, following Bendle (2005), a shift from a Promethean to an Augustinian viewpoint, from one of rebellion against the gods and their austere agenda to one of complicity with the gods and their judgment upon us—all of which is embodied in the narrative of Jonah's shift from flight to compliance with God. They preach destruction to an evil generation who will not change. Catastrophe is coming, so we had best prepare ourselves for it.

The Noah Story

A second narrative that appeared in reporting on the bushfires followed the narrative pattern of the Noah narrative from Genesis 6–9. In this case, the focus is on that small wooden boat floating atop the chaotic waters with its

precious cargo of animal pairs and sevens (Gen. 7.1-3).[5] The central issue is unexpected and inexplicable survival (Gen. 7.23). Here television news reporting follows a pattern: tell the story in all its gruesome detail but make sure there is a survivor or two who appear on screen as quickly as possible, not only for valuable information but also to give a sense of hope (Maxson and Simpson 2002). They might be overcome and cry (with a lingering camera close-up), relate how they escaped the fires or perhaps hug someone nearby at the news of another neighbor who has died. At one level, survivors are the only ones who are able to tell their stories, but at another level this approach has a deep narrative logic that finds its origins in myths such as that of Noah (see the unique text by Minot 1981). The key to that story is not the destruction caused by the flood but the small boat, shaped like a square coracle (Gen. 6.15), bobbing in the vast watery waste, eventually coming to land on a small piece of dry ground (Gen. 8.4).

So we were soon seeing footage of those same zones of grey ash, black tree stumps and razed houses, but now with one surviving house that had 'miraculously' escaped destruction either through sheer luck or good management.[6] The trickle of survival stories became a flood: over against the despair of the fire services, which had to retreat before the flames in one town, police in another had led a convoy out and saved a group. Rather than the incinerated neighbors, a woman and half a dozen children around her were saved by the woman's brother running through the flames in a small tractor. In contrast to the account of a man opening a car door and a body falling out there was the car that managed to avoid fallen trees and that burst through a wall of flame; the man who fireproofed his house related how he had gone about the task.

In all this mayhem, the most touching example was that of the surviving koala, named Sam, which was also recorded on mobile phone footage (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-XSPx7S4jr4). With all the focus on human death, this one was a welcome shift to how the animals had fared. Instead of the birds dropping out of the sky, scores of dead kangaroos and cattle, here was a bewildered koala, gingerly walking on the ashen ground with burnt paw-pads. A fire fighter reaches out, the koala puts its paw on his arm, and drinks thankfully from a proffered water bottle. Of course, this fits the standard category of news reporting that one should round off the snip-

5. This scene is also very reminiscent of the film *2012*.

6. The following material is drawn from channel 10 on 9 February 2009, from channel 7 on 10 February 2009, from SBS on 11 February 2009, and from channel 9 on 12 February 2009. See http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hnar9Mp9GR0&feature=related; http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Biwt_p2JFis&feature=related; http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wQUEPSXnoDA&feature=related; http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hj8j7H9cP3g&feature=related; http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MQFF1_FELog&feature=related.

pets of evil and destruction with a heart-warming fluffy or feathered story, perhaps of a cat rescued, a wise dog or ducks crossing a road. But in this case, the koala did not come from the fires at all, since this footage was filmed earlier during standard burning-off procedures to minimize the risk of major fires. Alerted by a story in *The Age* newspaper (Vincent 2009), all the news networks reported the story on the evening of 12 February.

Above all, the Noah narrative was deployed to full effect with the promise by and to the remnant that they would start all over again after having lost everything, in the same way that God promises Noah and his entourage that there will never be destruction like that again (Gen. 9.11-17). Once again, the prime minister, who had quickly become the prime counsellor, appeared on all the television networks on Wednesday, 11 February, promising that the federal government would offer unlimited assistance so that people could rebuild. The premier of the state government of Victoria, John Brumby, quickly followed suit after striding through ruins and shedding a tear on camera.

Within days after the fire, the first green shoots began reappearing. The reality is that the Australian bush loves a fire (Bradstock *et al.* 2002). Eucalyptus trees are gas bombs, even more combustible when green since they are full of oil. Their strategy for dominating the Australian landscape happened tens of thousands of years ago: spread litter on the forest floor, ensure that the leaves are full of oil, and regenerate after fire while other species cannot. It is what Stuart Macintyre calls a 'pyrohistory' of Australia (2004: 9). As with past fires, our screens were soon filled with a reporter walking through a devastated area, bending down by a stump and pointing to the new green shoots.

This intense and dreadful fire is not the only time we see the Noah story invoked in times of disaster. Reporting on earthquake, tsunami, and flood follows very similar lines in terms of form. We also find it in the increasing accounts of global warming or climate change (as it is euphemistically called). More than one story of our impending doom has invoked this story form (Climate Group 2004; Intergovernment Panel on Climate Change 2007). One of the many environmental organizations is in fact called 'Planet Ark' (http://planetark.org). The occasional catastrophe film (meteorite strike, space invasion, monster storm) has its own version of the Noah's ark story, and some in the environmental movement have called on this story as a means of ensuring that some species survive.

Once Noah comes into the picture, the narrative goes as follows: we are already in one of the great waves of species extinction and environmental destruction; it is too late to reverse much of that destruction; we need some way of preserving biodiversity so that the earth may one day be repopulated; the story of Noah and the flood offers a paradigmatic example of such a catastrophe and recovery (Rose 1996: 41; Rigby 2008). The problem with this narrative, however, is that nearly all the appropriations of the flood narrative side with order over chaos, with the human-built ark over the natural chaos

of the waters (see Boer 2009: 75-79). This is a curious move indeed, for it uncritically assumes the dominant ideological position of the story, namely that the victory of order over chaos, of human beings over nature, is a desirable outcome. What would happen if we undermine that dominant ideology and side with natural chaos? What would happen if we actually admitted that the Australian bush does burn and that there is little we can do about it? What if we tried to see that the natural consequences of global warming were actually part of nature's own agency in response to human activity?

Call to Repentance

Overlaying all the other narratives is one of blame, confession and repentance, a persistent theme throughout the Bible, from the Israelite sin the wilderness (Exodus–Deuteronomy), the sinful kings (1–2 Kings), the sinful rulers condemned by John the Baptist in the Gospels (Mt. 3.1-12, Lk. 3.1-20), narratives of Jesus' healings (Mk 2.1-12) and Paul's deliberations on sin and repentance (Romans 5–11). Of course, it is also a feature of the Jonah story deployed earlier, for the Ninevites do repent, to Jonah's consternation. This is where the current affairs programs came into their own—*A Current Affair*, *The 7:30 Report*, and *Today Tonight*.[7] Over the two weeks following the fire, this narrative took two directions, one in a scramble to lay blame and the other in an admission of failure. Soon enough the familiar lines appeared. Some blamed the rescue services, but those services said they could not do a thing apart from retreat or die themselves. Here we found survivors asking why more were not rescued, the police telling people to ignore the Country Fire Authority, and even the city fire brigades saying they were not called to assist—all were denied, and politicians and bureaucrats lined up to defend the Country Fire Authority (Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission 2010). Others blamed the national parks and the greens, since the bush should be 'managed'. Milder were those who argued for better 'management', namely fire trails and more frequent burning off; more extreme were those who suggested that the bush should be forested so that access was easier. On this count, the right-wing critics argued that the greens were culpable for their programs of preservation. Governments at both state and federal levels took a good deal of criticism for not having funded adequate fire services, or for not adopting aggressive policies of fire risk reduction—or for anything else. In order to forestall such moves, the prime minister had stated

7. In contrast to *A Current Affair and Today Tonight*, *The 7:30 Report* has less assessment and pretentions to in-depth analysis and more 'discussion', which Williams defines as follows: 'a situation or problem may be illustrated, usually relatively briefly, but in which the main emphasis falls on relatively formal argument about it' (1990: 79). The direct interview with a central figure—fire chief, prime minister or leading environmentalist—is also a strong element.

already on all the networks on 8 February that those guilty of lighting the fires were no better than 'mass murderers'. Here was a clear scapegoat on which community anger could focus (Leviticus 16). The problem is that arsonists light at most up to half the fires—and even that is a guess, since there is little evidence and few are actually convicted.

Some of the earliest comments focused on global warming, stressing the record temperatures, the prolonged change to dryer weather conditions and the unprecedented heat of the fires (see also Rigby 2009). On this point there was a shift: it was a laying of blame, but on all of us, since we all contribute to global warming through the way we live and the economic system of which we are a part. In short, we have all sinned and fallen short of what is required of us (Rom. 3.23). Now the narrative of confession comes to the fore and links with the wider accounts of global warming. Here the narrative, repeated endlessly on our televisions and other news media for well up to two years, goes as follows. We have overused the earth's resources; in fact, thinking about the earth as a 'resource' is part of the problem. Since the industrial revolution, the parts per million of carbon in the atmosphere have risen to dangerous levels as a result of our thirst for fossil fuels. We have been encouraged to consume more and more, or at least those in the rich third of the world have (Kovel 2002; Kovel and Löwy 2001). Needs we never thought we had have suddenly arisen, encouraged by the advertising industry. We use too much water, too many plastics, we fly too much, drive too much, eat too many processed foods. Our demand for 'energy', produced by heavy-polluting power stations, grows and grows. And when it gets hotter and hotter we simply turn the air-conditioner up. Our 'carbon footprint' is far too high. The scenario here is as grim as possible. Large-scale extinctions are already under way, clean water for human beings becomes increasingly scarce, crops begin to fail in areas that have been until now the breadbaskets of the world, low-lying coastal cities (the major commercial centers) go under water as the sea rises, diseases we never have seen become rampant, increases in starvation follow, the Greenland ice cap melts, the Arctic becomes ice-free in summers, large chunks of the Antarctic ice shelf break away, the Gulf Stream stops and northern Europe freezes up, the tropics extend their reach into temperate zones, the deserts grow and life itself faces its biggest challenge (Flannery 2005). In this scenario of disaster, extreme weather events have a prominent place: we will see an increase in storms, floods, cyclones and fires like the ones in Victoria.

To be added to this collection are the accounts of the looming oil shortage, which have taken a short-term back seat as the economic crash has set back demand for oil. We had a taste in 2008 when oil prices peaked at USD $150 a barrel, before they collapsed with a rapid decline in demand. No doubt it will return with renewed force when the global economy picks up and demand increases once again. When that happens, we will again see that the unprecedented expansion of a ridiculously cheap source of energy (one unit of

energy input produces twenty units of output) has brought us to the dangerous point when demand exceeds supply—the famous Hubbert's Peak. Given that manufacturing, food production, plastics—let alone transport by sea, air, road and rail—all rely on oil, the shortage of oil will have an immense impact on the way we live: mass flying will come to an end, shipping will have to use sail, there will be food shortages, massive unemployment, energy refugees, oil stockpiling by rich nations for their armed forces, and energy wars. The film *A Crude Awakening* (Gelpke and McCormack 2007) offers a brutal scenario of apocalyptic proportions in which economic crisis and collapse engender wars, famine, disease and starvation. The way of life that has been enabled a brief spurt of oil-addicted economic growth (about 70 years) will come to an abrupt end (see Deffeyes 2003; 2005; Energy Watch Group 2007).

Doomsayer after doomsayer paints as grim a picture as possible. But *the purpose of the narrative is to call for repentance.* One current affairs report after another, one interview with a well-known environmentalist after another or one television documentary after another calls on us to repent of our destructive ways—repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand (Mt. 3.2). We are to assess and reduce our 'carbon footprint' or find eco-friendly ways to live, whether growing our own vegetables, showering less, buying carbon offsets, or indeed walking, cycling and taking public transport. In these accounts apocalyptic scenes are richly overlaid, based on scientific consensus. And yet, we are told, it is not too late. If we act now and change our ways, we can still save the planet from its doom. The destructive fires are a warning sign of far worse things to come unless we repent (Kovel 2002; Kovel and Löwy 2001; Flannery 2005).

By now it will be clear that this narrative of imminent doom and the call for repentance is by no means new. Warn your audience of the dire consequences of their acts and call on them to change before it is too late. It was and is the favored mode of fire-and-brimstone preachers, warning of torments of eternal punishments in hell should we not repent and amend our ways. The direct link to biblical calls to repentance comes from our Danny Nalliah, the pastor in the Catch the Fire Ministries whom we encountered earlier (Nalliah 2009). In his identification of the cause of the fires, Nalliah quoted from 2 Chron. 7.14: 'If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land'. More realistic are those who implicitly admitted their fault and said that living in the bush was always a risk in Australia (Manne 2009). Indeed, a good number of people who survived the fires have decided not to return.

Conclusion

What are we to make of these narratives? Some will point out that they are mere fictions, scary doomsday scenarios that we should really ignore, for they

are no different from many similar prophecies of the end throughout human history (Milne 2000; Michaels 2011). The problem with dismissing these stories is that we thereby deny the wall of scientific analysis which shows that the Australian bush burns, that global warming is a real danger, and that peak oil is a massive challenge. The position of denial is, as some have suggested, like still believing in a flat-earth (Carrington and Goldenberg 2009).

One argument is that these three story forms are archetypes (Frye 1957), basic patterns that we as human beings fall back on in 'times of troubles', as the Russians call them (originally periods of complete social breakdown and devastation after invasions and then the slow process of rebuilding). In each case—the Jonah, Noah and Repentance narratives—the narrative offers a way of negotiating catastrophe at a deeper level than that of scientific and rational analysis. In itself, that type of analysis offers yet another narrative, one that is meant to be more 'adequate' than the religiously derived narratives they thought they had banished. But at these moments of disaster, we prefer to fall back on older, mythical narratives in a way that Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno outlined in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (2002): at the seemingly highest achievements of Enlightenment reason, myth returns with renewed force, for myth and Enlightenment are dialectically and inseparably linked. Thus, as I have argued, these apocalyptic narratives concerning the end of the world have a biblical heritage that remains strong at a subterranean level. We may go a step further, for the way we choose to tell the story and the reason we do so are as important as the story itself. Thus, those who indulge in the Jonah narrative (from the prophet's perspective of wished-for destruction) feel that it is the most realistic: people will not change, forests will keep burning, capitalism will keep ploughing on in its destructive path and so a grim forecast is the best approach. Assume the worst and then anything looks like an improvement. By contrast, the Noah narrative has a little more hope, since it presents a story of survival in the face of massive destruction. As for the Repentance narrative, we need to ask not repentance *from* but repentance *for* what? Is it to ensure that people can continue to have leafy getaways or retirement lots in the bush? Is it to keep our current system staggering along with a few bandages and splints? Is it used for an argument to cut the birth rate and reduce the number of human beings on the planet? Is it, as the eco-socialists argue, a wake-up call to change an economic system that has led us to this point (Kovel and Löwy 2001)?

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5

From Counterculture to Mainstream: 2012 Millennialism in your Living Room

Kevin Whitesides

> This the wise *Maya* long ago foresaw:
> That in the Age of tricky *Seven Macaw*
> (Or, to put Finger firmly onto Fact,
> In twenty-twelve, Dec. 21st exact)
> History's great Wheel would tumble to eclipse
> Quicker than e-mail thro' the *Aether* zips;
> For fiery *Sun* with *Milky Way* align'd
> Would make a pretty Mess of things combin'd.
> The *Poles* would flip, and old terrestrial Time
> Fade out within *Eternity's* vast clime;
> The law of Gravitation, grown effete,
> Would scarce secure an Infant in his Seat;
> And all that normal seem'd, the day before,
> Would now essay the Air, or hit the Floor ...
>
> ... A few were saved. For such Escapes must be,
> As shewn forth on Reality TV (Wroe 2011: 154).

Associations between Maya calendar cycles and impending Armageddon arose amid Cold War fears of nuclear annihilation in the 1960s, becoming firmly rooted in the countercultural milieu of the 1970s and 1980s predominantly as a hybrid apocalyptic/utopian narrative representing hopes of great change as a result of some radical disruption of the norms of modernity. The 1990s brought a proliferation of '2012'[1] hermeneutics from new proponents, but it was not until the twenty-first century following the 'great disappointment' of Y2K that what academic researchers have called the '2012 phenomenon' (Sitler 2006) began its efflorescence into mainstream awareness. While more than 2,012 books have been published that discuss the topic (Whitesides 2012), the prolific and sensational representations of '2012' apocalypse

1. Throughout the essay I will use '2012' (in single quotation marks) to represent a polythetic set of millennial beliefs and expectations in order to distinguish from statements that are intended to refer only to the year 2012 in the Gregorian calendar.

scenarios represented on television (predominantly in documentary-style) have delivered '2012' millennialism into the living rooms of a much more mainstream audience. Although the edited interviews and incongruous pastiches of mutually exclusive theories often reflect the goals of producers and advertisers more than the views of the featured '2012' proponents themselves, the popularity of these programs has gone a long way toward promoting a particularly influential understanding of '2012' as the next and greatest 'end-of-the-world' scenario.

This chapter will explore the history of representations of '2012' on television and will demonstrate its transition from a countercultural millennialism to a mainstream apocalyptic phenomenon. I will conclude that the '2012' narrative has been informed by the biblical apocalyptic narrative only by proxy and that where it has been used it has been eclectically cherry-picked with little concern for cohesion with typical biblical hermeneutics. Though biblical influence is nearly impossible to extricate from any Western millennial thread due to its sheer dominance in the sphere of apocalyptic representations, its explicit use in portraying '2012' to North American television audiences has been minimal and highly syncretic.

The Legacy of Suggestive Scholarship

> The idea of cyclical creations and destructions is a typical feature of Mesoamerican religions, as it is of Oriental. The Aztec, for instance, thought that the universe had passed through four such ages, and that we were now in the fifth, to be destroyed by earthquakes. The Maya thought along the same lines, in terms of eras of great length, like the Hindu kalpas. There is a suggestion that each of these measured 13 baktuns, or something less than 5,200 years, and that Armageddon would overtake the degenerate peoples of the world and all creation on the final day of the thirteenth. Thus, following the Thompson correlation, our present universe would have been created in 3113 BC, to be annihilated on December 24, 2011, when the Great Cycle of the Long Count reaches completion (Coe 1966: 149).

The first published source to present an apocalyptic interpretation of the so-called Great Cycle of the Maya Long Count calendar with reference to its completion in contemporary times was not the product of a starry-eyed seeker from the fringes of the 'new age' counterculture, as many suspect. Rather, it came from the pen of a respected scholar of Maya history and culture, Michael Coe, who had no intimation of the 2012 phenomenon that would follow on the heels of his passing 'suggestion'. What began as a supposition by a scholarly author soon became fodder for the 'cultic milieu' (Campbell 1972) of the 1970s. Coe has acknowledged that his interpretation was influenced by assumptions that the Maya would have had a notion of world-ages commensurate with that of the Aztec as well as that the mythic Maya creation

event said to have occurred in '3113 BC' would eternally return in cycles of 13 bak'tuns. He has told the author that his use of the term 'Armageddon,' in describing how the Maya would have viewed this cyclical return, was influenced by his early religious education as well as Cold War fears of nuclear holocaust (Coe, personal communication).[2] Nonetheless, the paragraph (with corrected date)[3] has appeared in every new edition of *The Maya* through the present eighth edition. The epilogue to his book *Breaking the Maya Code* further perpetuates the expectation of apocalypse and adds floods to earthquakes as the potential cause of humanity's destruction (Coe 1992: 275-76).

Ancient Astronauts Return: The Countercultural Appropriation of Scholarly Supposition

In 1968, Erich von Däniken began his career as the most influential proponent of the 'ancient astronaut' theory with the publishing of his book *Erinnerungen an die Zukunft*, which was translated into English the following year under the title *Chariots of the Gods*. Von Däniken proposed that myths of godlike beings in ancient cultures, as well as a cherry-picked selection of their remaining monuments and artifacts, could be reinterpreted, contrary to accepted archaeological and anthropological consensus, as evidence for visits to earth by advanced extraterrestrials in historical times. His books became widely popular and, in 1970, German director Harald Reinl adapted the book into a documentary film of the same title. The film was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Documentary feature. Though it did not win, the film caught the attention of an American producer, Alan Landsburg, who adapted it for an American audience under the title *In Search of Ancient Astronauts*. Landsburg's edited version of Reinl's film was released to an American television audience in 1973, and Rod Serling was hired as the narrator. Serling was already well known as the creator and host of the popular television series *The Twilight Zone*, which delighted a late 1950s and early 1960s audience with fictional tales of the strange and mysterious. His memorable voice

2. In this regard, the influence of a religious education early in life most certainly led to the use of the biblically derived term Armageddon in the very first instances of the life of the 2012 phenomenon.

3. Coe's calculation of the closing of the thirteenth bak'tun as occurring on 24 December 2011, in the first edition of his book, was erroneous. The second edition provided another inaccurate date, 11 January 2013. In the third edition through the current eighth, Coe has settled on the modified GMT correlation, which places the expected millennial moment on the 23 December 2012. Most '2012' proponents and many professional Maya scholars, however, have upheld the standard GMT (which stands for Goodman, Martinez, and Thompson, the three Mayanists who worked to develop the commonly accepted correlation constant between the Long Count and Gregorian calendars), which sees the closing of the cycle two days earlier on the winter solstice, 21 December 2012.

provided a sense of both authority and familiarity to Von Däniken's fringe ideas at a time when attention to such 'stigmatized knowledge' (Barkun 2003) was especially pronounced.

Landsburg followed on the success of the show with two further productions, *In Search of Ancient Mysteries* (aired 1975) and *The Outer Space Connection* (aired 1977), which attempted to provide additional substantiation for the 'ancient astronaut' theory. Serling reprised his role as host and narrator in both. Though all three of Landsburg's documentary-style films include eclectic interpretations of ancient Maya culture, it was *The Outer Space Connection* that provided the first televised 'documentary' reference to a specific millennial expectation associated with the conclusion of the Maya Long Count calendar. Serling's introduction to the program indicates the gravity with which Landsburg hoped the audience would engage the information he was presenting.

> The motion picture you are about to see was filmed by four teams of cameramen in over 120 locations around the world. Scientists representing more than 40 museums and research centers took part in the exploration. There are no actors in the film. Every location is real. The facts that will be presented are true. This may be the most startling and controversial film you will ever see.

This rhetoric of providing a purportedly factual depiction of stigmatized readings of ancient cultures and modern science, with the appearance of being sanctioned by expert opinion, has persisted as the primary televised manner of transmitting '2012' millennialism through the present. The *Outer Space Connection* concludes with the following conjecture:

> We know the Mayans left a calendar, one that stretches back more than 90 million years, long before civilized man walked the Earth, and forward in time to a day that will mark the close of a crucial cycle. An inscription tells us that the modern period will end December 24, 2011 A.D. We may presume that they were computing the length of a space voyage and marking the exact date of return ... Christmas Eve, 2011 A.D. On that day they may return to seek the fate of the colony left on Earth.

It is worth mentioning that no such inscription exists. Landsburg's debt to Coe is clear in his use of Coe's erroneous date, and he must have assumed that Coe's original assertion was based on epigraphic evidence when it was, rather, made through a process of inference whose reliability has yet to be demonstrated.

In addition to the film productions, Landsburg simultaneously released paperback editions of *In Search of Ancient Mysteries* and *The Outer Space Connection*. The latter concludes with a similar message and confirms that the date was obtained from Michael Coe's suggestion in *The Maya*, although Landsburg reinterprets Coe's 'Armageddon' as the return of ancient astro-

nauts who had left a colony on earth in the ancient past (Landsburg and Landsburg 1975: 164). While the information from Coe had been appropriated and developed elsewhere in the milieu of spiritual seekers of the 1970s (most notably in Frank Waters's *Mexico Mystique* [1975] and Peter Tompkins's *Mysteries of the Mexican Pyramids* [1976]), the broadcast of such ideas through the medium of television delivered the message to a much wider audience than the written publications we capable of.[4]

When Rod Serling died in 1975 (the same year *The Outer Space Connection* was released in theaters), Landsburg developed a spin-off television series to follow on the success of the three previous hour-long documentaries.[5] The show was called *In Search Of ...* and was hosted by Leonard Nimoy, who had played the ultra-logical extraterrestrial Spock in the extremely popular sci-fi series *Star Trek*. Like Serling before him, Nimoy would have served as an 'authority' due to the psychological association the audience would have made between him and his most admired television character. A semblance of authority paired with a sense of familiarity and admiration can often be more convincing than the real thing. Episode 4 of the second season aired on 7 January 1978, shortly after the televised airing of *The Outer Space Connection*, and was called *In Search Of ... Mayan Mysteries*. It reprised Michael Coe's erroneous calculation for the end of the Long Count and, rather than focusing on ancient astronauts, corroborated Coe's suggestion that the world would be destroyed by earthquakes (following Aztec cosmology, not Maya) while adding a modern political spin. Nimoy tells us that the ancient Maya

> predicted that on December 24, 2011 A.D. a cataclysmic earthquake would terminate their cycle of civilization. New men of knowledge would then appear to fight the forces of evil and lead the people to create a world government. If the Mayan men of knowledge were right, in just 34 years, we may learn the answers to some of the ancient Mayan mysteries.

The willingness to change the significance of the Maya calendar so readily from one show to the next suggests, as is the case with more recent '2012'-related programming on the History Channel, that Landsburg's goal

4. An important distinction here is that the greater audience size of a television program does not necessarily correlate with greater influence on the ideological development of the phenomenon or, rather, corresponds to a different type of influence. In other words, though *The Outer Space Connection* would have garnered a larger audience and would have primed its viewers for attention to similar beliefs, the books by Waters, Tompkins, Terence and Dennis McKenna (*The Invisible Landscape* [1975]), and Jose Arguelles (*The Transformative Vision* [1975]) were far more influential in the actual development of the 2012 phenomenon among its proponents. For a history of the significance of '2012' book publishing see Whitesides 2012.

5. Landsburg would also go on to create the popular early-1980s reality series *That's Incredible!,* which, among other things, involved the examination of paranormal claims.

was to provide a good story rather than what he believed to be a true one. Urban legend scholar Jan Harold Brunvand has perceptively noted in the title of one of his books that *The Truth Never Stands in the Way of a Good Story* (Brunvand 2001); this appears to hold for apocalyptic television programming as well.

In Seach Of ... Mayan Mysteries begins with Nimoy posing the questions, 'Did Mayan astronomers see a different age in the stars? Was it the end of a cosmic cycle?' The program predominantly features the syncretic ideas of Mexican-born poet and Chicano-rights activist Alurista.[6] Though Alurista's take on Maya history is distinctly developed from syncretic countercultural sources rather than archaeological and epigraphic consensus, he takes on the role of the local expert, and in the context of the program his understandings of the Maya are taken for granted. He informs us that the Maya rain dance worked as a result of 'psychic energy', that their pyramids were consciously laid out on 'energy grids' that 'enabled them to awaken psychic energy within the initiate', and that when the Maya 'disappeared',[7] they traveled to the east carrying their wisdom to Egypt, the Red Sea, and into Nepal and Tibet. The Maya, he continues, established a colony 'at the foot of the Dead Sea where the monastery of the Essenes was located'. It was at this spot that 'Jesus learned about the philosophy of the world'. The influence of the nineteenth-century traveler and antiquarian Augustus Le Plongeon is apparent when Alurista informs the audience that Jesus' last words on the cross were not Aramaic but a stylized Mayan dialect.

Le Plongeon, like Alurista, described the Maya as the oldest and most advanced human civilization, one that eventually spread their culture to Egypt and Tibet as well as to antediluvian Atlantis.[8] In *Vestiges of the Maya* (1881), he describes how Jesus' last words on the cross 'according to St. Matthew ... are pure Maya vocables' and that 'by placing in the mouth of the dying martyr these words: *My God, My God, Why hast thou forsaken me?*, they have done

6. Over the course of his eclectic academic career, Alberto Baltazar Urista Heredia switched interests from business to religion to psychology and eventually completed a Ph.D. thesis on the fiction of Oscar Zeta Acosta, best known as a close friend of author Hunter S. Thompson, appearing as the Samoan lawyer in Thompson's drug-fueled novel *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. Alurista, who was a central figure in the push for indigenous Mexican nationalism, considers himself to be both a Buddhist and a Catholic, participates in sweat lodges, and claims to be able to travel astrally (Allen-Taylor 1999).

7. The notion that the Maya simply 'disappeared' has resulted in all kinds of mystical and science-fictive explanations for their supposed departure. This, of course, ignores the continuity of Maya inhabitation of Mexico and Guatemala, where large populations of Maya still live today.

8. This belief was echoed in the extended trailer for Roland Emmerich's 2009 film titled *2012*, which told us that 'mankind's earliest civilization warned us that this day would come'.

him an injustice'. Le Plongeon would rather have us translate Jesus' words following his understanding of Mayan language as '*Now, now I am sinking; darkness covers my face*' (Le Plongeon 1881: 30). The title of his 1886 book, *Sacred Mysteries Among the Maya and Quiches, 11,500 Years Ago: Their Relation to the Sacred Mysteries of Egypt, Greece, Chaldea, and India: Freemasonry in Times Anterior to the Temple of Solomon,* demonstrates just how eclectic, ancient, and far-reaching Le Plongeon considered the influence of the Maya to be on the development of world culture. In Le Plongeon's and Alurista's minds, it was the Maya who influenced the biblical narrative and not the biblical narrative that influenced our contemporary Maya-inspired apocalypse.

The Hibernation of '2012' Millennialism as a Televised Apocalypse

Following Landsburg's documentaries, television producers showed little interest in Maya-inspired apocalyptic programming. Perhaps due in part to the many decades preceding the proposed moment of millennial hierophany, the 2012 phenomenon did not reenter the living rooms of a popular television audience until the early twenty-first century. In the meantime, however, '2012' millennialism developed in the improvisational world of the American counterculture and 'new age' through the efforts of Terence McKenna and Jose Arguelles.[9] McKenna had developed his strain of transhumanist eschatology through experiences with psilocybin mushrooms in the Colombian Amazon. He was a prolific lecturer and propagated his particularly influential Timewave Theory at conferences and at other 'new age' venues such as the Esalen Institute and the Ojai Foundation. Arguelles's numerologically oriented, anti-technological Maya pseudo-history was most strongly popularized through his 1987 call for 144,000 people to meditate at sacred sites all over the world including Stonehenge, Mount Shasta, Uluru, the Great Pyramid, and Mt. Fuji.[10] He believed that this coordinated act would stave off Arma-

9. For a more in-depth discussion of the early history of the '2012' phenomenon and specifically of the roles of Terence McKenna and Jose Arguelles see Whitesides & Hoopes 2012.

10. Arguelles's focus on the need for 144,000 individuals was, of course, influenced strongly by the instances of the number's appearance in the book of Revelation (Rev. 7.1-8 and 14.1-3) to describe the number of 'elect' (Arguelles's term) that would be redeemed when the day of judgment arrived. This, however, can be easily misconstrued, as as Arguelles's primary basis for his use of the number 144,000 is due to a comparative numerological correspondence rather than an attempt to uphold any standard biblical apocalyptic hermeneutics. Arguelles noted the 'synchronicity' that the same number found associated with the Christian Apocalypse corresponded to the number of days in a single bak'tun of the Maya Long Count: 144,000. On the basis of this instance of 'semiotic arousal' (Landes 2011: 14), Arguelles determined, not unlike Le Plongeon and Alurista,

geddon come 2012 and propel us instead toward a peaceful psychic utopia devoid of the 'artificial' spiritual burden of industrial technology (Arguelles 1987). James R. Lewis has suggested that Arguelles's globe-spanning gathering can be considered in a millenarian context as 'the New Age equivalent of the Ghost Dance of the late nineteenth century, in the sense that they were ceremonies designed to bring in the new world' (Lewis 1992: 12).

Arguelles referred to the event as the Harmonic Convergence, and it received an abundance of popular attention, including numerous interviews in mainstream media sources. CNN broadcast live footage from Mount Shasta during the peak of the event, which took place on 16 and 17 August 1987, including an interview with one of Arguelles's co-organizers, Carolyn Anderson, who helped with public relations for the event under the auspices of the organization Global Family (Carolyn Anderson, personal communication). Johnny Carson spoofed the event on *The Tonight Show*, and conventional media reports persistently misrepresented the details of the Harmonic Convergence, suggesting that anywhere between 'thousands' (Reed 1987) and 'millions' (Nelson 1987) participated and attributing the associated prophecies to an inconsistent variety of cultures from aborigines (Biggs 1987) to Tibetans (Associated Press 1987). (For Arguelles, it was an auspicious confluence of Aztec and Maya prophecy conflated with biblically significant numerology.) Regardless of typical reporting inaccuracies, media attention to the event resulted in the most public worldwide focus of interest in Maya calendar millennialism until the advertising campaign for Roland Emmerich's 2009 film *2012*.

The Harmonic Convergence followed on the heels of 'the airing of the televised version of Shirley MacLaine's *Out on a Limb* in January of 1987'. J. Gordon Melton and Olav Hammer have called this 'the single most important event prompting general awareness of this ['new age'] subculture'. The success of MacLaine's made-for-TV movie stimulated a strong media interest in the flowering 'new age' milieu, 'causing the Convergence to attract more public attention than any New Age event before or since' (Lewis and Melton 1992: ix). *Out on a Limb* features psychic connections with an extraterrestrial from the Pleiades named Mayan and a brief screen shot of several copies of Frank Waters's book *Mexico Mystique*, which was the first to develop a modern metaphysical interpretation of the expected closing of the Maya Long Count as a moment of both apocalypse and utopia.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the 2012 phenomenon developed and was disseminated across the countercultural milieu through the evangelical efforts of McKenna and Arguelles. Aside from the brief moment of fame that the Harmonic Convergence accorded, '2012' millennialism remained on the

that 'the number symbolism of the Book of Revelations [sic] possesses a profoundly Mayan overtone' (Arguelles 1987: 132).

fringes as a piece of stigmatized knowledge to be culled from the cultic milieu as fodder for improvisational millennial[11] bricolage. The only televised attention to '2012' during this intermediate period, when it diversified within the counterculture while receiving little public attention, was an appearance by Terence McKenna on the Fox network television program *Sightings*[12] in an episode called 'A Vision through Time'. The program attempted to draw a connection between the earlier prophecies of Nostradamus and St Malachy and McKenna's Timewave, suggesting that the two earlier prognosticators had predicted 'an apocalypse sometime near the year 2012'. The show also connected prophecy to ecstatic visions, both of which McKenna touted as resulting from the consumption of tryptamine hallucinogens such as psilocybin and dimethyltryptamine (DMT), and emphasized that the expected apocalypse 'is a date within our lifetime', implying a dire urgency of attention. McKenna emphasized the all-encompassing nature of this apocalypse as more than just a change in the social order of the world, such as Arguelles promulgated. 'I mean a *great* change. I don't mean the five-cent cigar or Medicare reform; I mean ordinary space and time is going to disappear.' He continues, 'I predict the most novel event in the history of the world in 2012, and for a conservative mind that might look like doomsday, but it isn't doomsday. It's simply that we are moving deeper and deeper into uncharted territory.' The date 21 December 2012 is identified as the moment when this climactic event is anticipated to occur.

Twenty-first Century Inroads: Mayan Apocalypse Invades the Living Room

> [L]iterary theory has drawn a distinction between fictional and nonfictional texts. In contrast to informational or rhetoric texts which belong to the category of nonfiction, fictional texts do not claim to provide readers with detailed knowledge about the world. It would be a paradox to oblige authors of novels, for example, to stick to the truth when they are writing their sto-

11. Michael Barkun coined the term *improvisational millennialism* as the use of an 'open marketplace of apocalyptic ideas ... wherein disparate elements are drawn together in new combinations ... [C]onstituent elements ... can appear simultaneously in a broad range of belief systems, having slightly different significance in each, depending on the other elements with which they are combined ... and each moves among different audiences' (Barkun 2003: 13). Barkun also developed the term *stigmatized knowledge* to refer to 'ideas which have been marginalized from typical mainstream discourse and are treated as all the more authoritative in light of their marginalization' (2003: 26).

12. *Sightings* might be considered a 1990s version of *In Search Of...* The show 'investigated' sensational claims of extraterrestrial and paranormal activity. Rather than adopting the documentary style of *In Search Of...*, *Sightings* mimicked the hard-hitting style and tone of its contemporary news shows such as *A Current Affair*, also produced by 20th Century Fox.

> ries. At the same time, however, fictional products cannot but contain a lot of information that may be applied to the real world. In novels or television dramas we find true facts mixed with invented ones. As no one has ever convincingly argued for an automatic cognitive switch or toggle which prevents fictional information from entering real world belief systems it seems possible that fictional information, even if blatantly false, alters our view of the world (Appel and Richter 2007: 113).

'The truth is out there', we are assured in a central tagline from the hit science-fiction television drama *The X-Files*, which developed a cult following in the 1990s. Over the nine years it was broadcast (1993–2002), this award-winning[13] program developed for its audience an elaborate conspiracy scenario involving clandestine cooperation between the US government and an invading extraterrestrial race. It touched on topics from UFOs, alien abductions and government conspiracy to crop circles and cryptozoology, as well as a range of psychic and paranormal phenomena.

When the final episode aired in May 2002, however, it was an extraterrestrial apocalypse confirmed by Maya prophecy that turned out to be the ultimate secret and the ultimate truth. Simply called 'The Truth', the two-part series finale concluded with the message, discovered in a secret underground government bunker, that 22 December 2012[14] would be the date of the inevitable and irrevocable alien invasion of earth. We are told that '10 centuries ago the Mayans were so afraid, that their calendar stopped on the exact day that my story begins: December 22, the year 2012, the date of the final alien invasion' and, further, that Maya and Anasazi 'wise men' were 'the original shadow government' who hid in caves while their civilizations were destroyed around them just as 'our own secret government will be hiding when it all goes down'.[15] *The X-Files* functionally combined the theses of the two Landsburg documentaries, extraterrestrial return and world government, in expectation of a destructive apocalypse in 2012.

Sacha Defesche correctly points out that, though the development of the mythos of the 2012 phenomenon developed primarily on the fringes of the counterculture, 'considering the amount of viewers that must have seen these episodes, there can be no doubt that it brought the year 2012 to a much wider audience than relatively obscure esoteric books could ever accomplish on their own' (Defesche 2007). Recent research by Markus Appel and Tobias Richter (2007) suggests that engagement with such fictional narratives, over

13. Including three Golden Globes for Best Drama Series

14. This was a date used frequently by Terence McKenna for the end-date of his Timewave prior to his realization that the 2012 winter solstice fell, rather, on the 21st in that year.

15. The themes of underground bases and shadow governments are well developed in the 'culture of conspiracy' that played a part in the development of '2012' mythology.

time, may increase the likelihood that ideas expressed in this fashion will be taken up into an individual's belief system via a sleeper effect. Information that was originally presented as fictional can eventually become psychologically distanced from its initial source of presentation and simply remembered as a piece of notable information. Of course, this does not mean that every fictional aspect of *The X-Files* is eventually accepted by its audience as a truthful fact, but it does indicate that, just because an idea is presented in the context of a contrived narrative, its audience is not immune to persuasive influence.

It was not until 2006, however, that '2012' millennialism took off as a major phenomenon. Following the release of Daniel Pinchbeck's fashionable book *2012: The Return of Quetzalcoatl*[16], the History Channel began the contemporary trend of the televised '2012' apocalypse documentary with a program called *Mayan Doomsday Prophecy*. A significant feature of this and later History Channel documentaries that broached the topic is the presentation of ideas from a wide variety of authors and thinkers in a style of edited pastiche. Differing opinions are glossed over to present the appearance of a cohesive consensus. This is partly a result of what John Corner has referred to as the 'institutional' aspect of television: 'Television, unlike poetry, cannot exist *non*-institutionally since even its minimal resource, production, and distribution requirements are such as to require high levels of organization in terms of funding, labour, and manufacturing process' (Corner 1999: 12). Unlike the ever-increasing number of books (both traditional and electronic) and the exploding number of websites that are able rapidly and endlessly to adapt and recycle ideas from the cultic milieu to fit a confusingly wide array of individual, and often very small, cultural niches, television programs have a much greater need to cater to both their audiences and their sponsors, requiring a much higher level of collaborative production. While books can be self-published nearly immediately and blogs and websites can be updated instantaneously, documentary television programming requires an abundance of time and resources which ultimately result in a production that fills a relatively short amount of air time.

The History Channel's productions present perhaps the most menacing depictions of '2012' apocalypticism. *Mayan Doomsday Prophecy* simply begins with the words, 'Our days are numbered. Prepare for Doomsday.' The informational errors along the road to conveying the nature of this doomsday are plentiful. Contrary to the long history of apocalyptic end dates predicted and failed, Steve Alten, the author of '2012'-themed nov-

16. Pinchbeck was interviewed as a guest on Comedy Central's *The Colbert Report* on 14 December 2006, promoting the book and the notion that 2012 would see a return of the Aztec deity Quetzalcoatl, whom Pinchbeck had considered himself to have channeled while using the vision-inducing ayahuasca brew in South America.

els, suggests that the Maya stand out from other religious prognosticators of doom in that they predicted a specific date for their supposed apocalypse. The narrator informs us that the Maya committed their 'doomsday prophecy and other predictions to carvings and codices', while, in fact, no such doomsday prophecy is known to exist among extant Maya writings. Author John Major Jenkins, who has done the most to promote the idea that the Maya intended the thirteenth bak'tun of the Long Count to conclude during an alignment of the winter solstice sun with the galactic equator in 2012, complained profusely on his website about his own experience as a participant on the show. In a document titled 'How Not to Make a 2012 Documentary', he excoriates the History Channel for producing '45 minutes of unabashed doomsday hype and the worst kind of sensationalism'. He complained that, though he worked closely with producers who expressed the desire to include a balance between 'doomsday and [world] renewal perspectives' (the latter of which Jenkins represents), the information that he presented to the producers was either 'not included in the final cut, or [was] used in service to the doomsday perspective'. He was alarmed to find the association of his 'galactic alignment thesis with doomsday' and that 'a brief 3-second clip in which I mentioned hurricanes and tornadoes was taken out of context' (Jenkins 2006).

The disparity that Jenkins found between attention given to apocalyptic perspectives on '2012' and that given to utopian[17] views was not unique to *Mayan Doomsday Prophecy* or to the History Channel. A documentary produced in 2010 by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation called 'Apocalypse 2012' is among the most skeptical of the documentaries. Though it claimed to present both apocalyptic and and enlightenment perspectives, it presented an apocalypse to enlightenment ratio of about 12 to 1.[18] Among the dozen or more televised documentaries of '2012' apocalypse that I have included in my survey this is representative and perhaps even on the lower end of that disparity. This represents a significant discrepancy from typical perspectives found among the most influential '2012' proponents and their literature, websites and conference appearances. Although the predominance of opinion among committed proponents of '2012' millennialism appears to be tilted toward

17. The word 'utopian' in this context is meant to apply to perspectives within 2012 millennialism that look to the year as either a moment of enlightenment or a shift in consciousness or, as Jenkins refers to it, 'world renewal'. Such views tend to contrast strongly the fatalistic views of those such as Patrick Geryl and Lawrence Joseph, who regularly appear in 2012 documentaries and see 2012 predominantly in terms of world destruction. Though some 'utopian' views do entail physical upheavals, they frame them in the light of a more positive renewal.

18. This is the ratio of time spent discussing each of these themes in the show.

the side of enlightenment and renewal, the principal popular understanding broadcast into American living rooms seems to be that 2012 is expected to be the end of the world. I would suggest that the focus in mainstream media, especially television, on the many ways that the world might be destroyed represents the major factor in the divergence between esoteric and exoteric understandings of '2012'.

Since *Mayan Doomsday Prophecy*, the History Channel has gone on to produce no fewer than six further documentaries underscoring apocalypse in 2012, including *Doomsday 2012*, *The Lost Book of Nostradamus*, *Nostradamus 2012*, an episode of the series *The Nostradamus Effect* (which creates confluences between ancient prophecy and contemporary events) called 'Extinction 2012', *Apocalypse Island*, and *The Other Nostradamus*. Attention to persistent features in these documentaries highlights certain techniques of persuasive rhetoric that allow the producers to easily gloss over differences of opinion. Perhaps the simplest of these is the use of the phrase 'some say …', which allows an easy bridge over the fact that those 'some' may be a very small minority with little more than their own 'say' to back up their claims. Another consistent trope is the suggestion that all available prognostications point toward 2012. For example, in the 'Extinction 2012' episode (2009) of *The Nostradamus Effect*, '2012' conspiracist Jay Weidner tells us that 'every single disparate culture was trying in every way possible to send a message downstream that something incredible was going to happen'. In *2012: Startling New Secrets* (2009), a Syfy Channel production, longtime motivational speaker and author Gregg Braden says, 'whether we are talking about the Egyptians or the Mayans, whether we're talking about Edgar Cayce or Nostradamus, all of them, as different as they appear from one another, they were all talking about our time in history'. These programs consistently suggest that not only were ancient cultures interested in our times, but they were also trying to transmit coded messages to us to warn and prepare us for what is to come. Braden continues, 'What were they trying to tell us? Why was it so important for them to convey this information to us?'

Richard Landes has called this ubiquitous aspect of millenarian belief 'semiotic arousal' wherein believers develop a heightened state of symbolic interpretation, searching enthusiastically for coded messages that will reveal the nature of the coming millennial hierophany. Landes describes how, in a state of semiotic arousal, 'everything has meaning [and] patterns. The smallest incident can have immense importance and open the way to an entirely new vision of the world' (Landes 2011: 14). This attention to supposedly coded meanings is a central feature of '2012' millennialism at large and is featured heavily in all instances of the '2012' television phenomenon. In an episode of *Conspiracy Theory with Jesse Ventura* titled '2012 Apocalypse,' Ventura, an ex-

professional wrestler and former governor of Minnesota.[19] investigates claims of secret underground government bases (as in *The X-Files*[20]) connected with survival of the 'elite' during the coming apocalypse in 2012. His search takes him to Denver International Airport, a longtime hub for conspiracy rhetoric, where he meets Jay Weidner to examine the 'ominous' décor of the terminal building. While 'translating' 'lost symbols[21] and secret signs', Ventura ponders 'why are they giving us all these hints?' He and Weidner conclude that the creators of Denver International Airport wanted only the perceptive few to be able to understand their cryptic clues. Also in search of cryptic clues, this time left by the Maya, a group of paranormal investigators featured on HBO's *Penn & Teller's Bullshit!*, in their episode titled 'The Apocalypse', begin counting steps on Maya pyramids in hopes of finding numerological clues to the meaning of the supposed '2012' prophecy: 'Since the Maya were really good with math and astronomy, the number of steps could be a clue.' After counting 35 steps on a pyramid at Ek Balam, they conclude, 'There are 35 steps ... 35 must mean something on the Mayan calendar.' When they fail to discover such a correlation, finding only 'lots of 20s' (the Maya used a vigesimal system of counting), an apparent cognitive dissonance prevents them from giving up: 'Maybe it's something multiplied together that creates the number 35 or those particular steps added in with another structure's steps mean something.' Given enough ingenuity and persistence, the hermeneutics of a semiotically aroused millenarian are unlikely to fail to find apparently meaningful connections wherever they look.

While the programs on the History Channel readily champion ancient prophecy as evidence of doomsday, other shows push prophecy aside under the guise of scientific authority. One of Jesse Ventura's guests, for example, says that 'whether you believe in the Mayan calendar prophecies or not is sort of beside the point. There are some actual scientific facts that have been reported by NASA.' While the dialogue in the program comes off as scripted and campy, there is no sense of skepticism or sarcasm when, for instance, Ventura says that *Apocalypse 2012* author Lawrence Joseph 'made a lot of sense ... because he talked very scientifically'. In contradistinction to NASA

19. Throughout the show there is an appeal to authority via Ventura's former role as governor. The introduction to the program has him reminding us, 'I've been governor, a navy seal, a fighter; I've heard things that'll blow your mind.' The guests and the narrator constantly refer to him as 'governor' with no sense of irony that the show is focused on government conspiracy: 'the government plot to save the elite but not you'.

20. Including reference to an alleged secret FEMA base at Mount Weather, the location where agent Mulder discovers the secret of the 2012 alien invasion in the final episode of *The X-Files*.

21. A clear reference to Dan Brown's book *The Lost Symbol*, which is filled with conspiracy-oriented semiotic arousal and even mentions 2012.

spokesman David Morrison's efforts to debunk '2012',[22] the narrator of the program warns that 'incredibly, NASA's own studies are in line with ancient Mayan prophecies'.

In the CBC production *Apocalypse 2012*, after attending a lecture by Lawrence Joseph at Holy Cross High School in Woodbridge, Ontario, Canada, a student invokes the presumed authority of scientific legitimacy on which Joseph and many of the television programs rely: 'Scientists have predicted this, so, once they say scientists, it becomes more convincing.' The appeal to the authority of science can be particularly disturbing in cases where it leads to fearful action in expectation of apocalypse. During his presentation to students at the high school, Joseph claims, 'I have put together really undeniable scientific evidence that our way of life is threatened seriously and soon.' Taking a jocular tone, he uses a birth metaphor for what will happen in 2012: 'like any other birth, it will be accompanied by joy and blood and pain. Me,' he says, 'I was more concerned about the blood and pain.' While this focus has resulted in abundant book sales and television appearances for Joseph,[23] scientists like Morrison have had to respond to serious concern from the public generated by such output. Morrison's NASA webpage, which attempts to alleviate fears surrounding '2012' apocalypticism, began in response to e-mails he received from terrified teenagers contemplating suicide as a means to avoid the destructive chaos that they were led to believe had been scientifically verified for 2012.

Contrasting Morrison's efforts to calm '2012' fears, programs such as the Discovery Channel's *Apocalypse How* (2008) fashion complicity from reputable scientists. The lineup of scientifically backed apocalyptic scenarios includes supervolcanoes, bird flu, bioterror, alien armadas, asteroid impact, coronal mass ejections, global warming, artificial intelligence, nanotechnology, particle accelerators, mini black holes, gamma ray bursts, and ice ages, interspersed with clips of Lawrence Joseph connecting the scenarios to apocalypse in 2012. While it seems likely that the scientists interviewed were unaware that their descriptions would be conflated with Maya calendar millennialism, a result of post-production editing, the destructive scenarios that they represent are clearly intended to be fear-inducing. The show opens with the admonition 'the question is not *if* the apocalypse will happen; the question is *how*' (original emphasis).

22. For instance, see his '2012' page on the NASA website: http://astrobiology.nasa.gov/ask-an-astrobiologist/intro/nibiru-and-doomsday-2012-questions-and-answers. Morrison also appears in the CBC documentary *Apocalypse 2012* as a scientific debunker of astronomically based 2012 theories.

23. Joseph appeared in eight of the twelve documentaries I surveyed, in addition to appearing as a guest on the *Montel Williams Show*, a popular midday talk show, in 2008.

A theme that appears in at least three-quarters of the shows, is the understanding that 21 December 2012 will see a particularly rare and noteworthy astronomical event, namely the 'galactic alignment' championed by John Major Jenkins, which has become a central trope of the 2012 phenomenon.[24] While the general alignment is an actual astronomical event, the attention that televised documentaries have given it is incredibly misleading. In the History Channel's *Doomsday 2012 – The End of Days*, the audience is informed that 'on December 21, 2012, the Earth will be in exact alignment with the sun and the center of the Milky Way galaxy, a galactic event that happens only once every 25,800 years'. This is the most common misrepresentation of the event and indeed would suggest a somewhat interesting, if not significant, event, were it a faithful representation of the actual astronomy. What this framing fails to mention is that an earth–sun–galactic equator alignment occurs twice every year and once per year in a region near the galactic center. The process of precession causes the annual time frame when this alignment occurs to shift over long periods of time and the alignment has been occurring on the winter solstice for over three decades with a most precise alignment in 1998, not 2012.[25] Further, the alignment is not with the center of the galaxy but rather with the galactic equator in a region that is offset from the actual galactic center. Given that television productions allow little ability to develop subtle analysis of available evidence, audiences are also frequently informed that the Maya consciously intended this correlation between the closing of the thirteenth bak'tun (which is usually referred to, inaccurately, as the 'end' of their calendar) and the so-called galactic alignment. Indeed, this is the thesis that John Major Jenkins proposes, but after nearly two decades of endorsing his theory, he has found little support from academic Mayanists, though he has made much effort to present his ideas to them. Nonetheless, despite a significant lack of consensus, when interviewed for Syfy's *2012: Startling New Secrets*, he emphatically states that 'the fact is that the Maya *were* intending the 2012 date to target this alignment process and they thought about it as a transformation and renewal' (original emphasis) and that 'it's very clear that … it's an intentional placement'. Audience familiarity with the concept is increased as Jenkins's opinion is echoed in several of the other

24. Persistent repetition of a message increases *familiarity* with an idea, which, in turn, increases the likelihood of persuasion over time via heuristic rather than systematic cognitive processing, even in the presence of relatively weak arguments (Garcia-Marques and Mackie 2001).

25. Precession is a process whereby, due to the earth's wobble, the background of stars as viewed from the earth shifts in the sky slowly over time, eventually returning to the same point in a nearly 26,000- year cycle. One could pick any day of the year, for instance, the vernal equinox, one's birthday, or Halloween and the sun would line up with the galactic equator yearly on that day during a window of a few decades once every precessional cycle.

television shows as a direct statement, without equivocation, that the Maya believed a galactic alignment would occur at the 'end' of their Long Count calendar. While Jenkins interprets the event as representing transformation and renewal and while the editors of the programs occasionally include brief expressions of utopian attitudes toward '2012', positive spins can be quickly dismissed, as in the History Channel's *Nostradamus 2012*, with the admonition that the 'galactic alignment' may, rather, cause 'unbelievable chaos'.

The overall emphasis of the 2012 phenomenon as portrayed on television is clearly on apocalypse rather than utopia. This is readily apparent in the titles of the programs. My own survey has covered shows with the following titles: *Mayan Doomsday Prophecy*, *Doomsday 2012*, *Apocalypse How*, *Nostradamus 2012*, *Extinction 2012*, *2012 Apocalypse*, *2012 Startling New Secrets*, *2012: Countdown to Armageddon*, *The Apocalypse*, *Apocalypse Island*, *2012 Apocalypse*, and *Apocalypse 2012*. Jenkins has admonished the History Channel for failing to understand that 'clichés and stereotypes don't sell, and the public doesn't buy them', that 'doomsday is an old, old marketing gimmick' that 'the consuming public is too wily for', and for suggesting that audiences would prefer to hear 'the antithesis' (Jenkins 2006). Given unrelenting attention to warnings of apocalypse over the millennia and the persistence and popularity of apocalypse on television,[26] it seems likely that Jenkins is mistaken about what attracts audiences. Not only have these shows proven to be incredibly well watched, resulting in persistent rebroadcasts, they have also proven to be particularly influential on mainstream understandings of the millennial significance of '2012'.

Though it may be a minority of viewers who take the information presented on these programs for granted, research has shown that even those who approach the programs with an air of skepticism are still likely to be influenced by their viewing experience. Just as sleeper effects in persuasion have been found to be associated with information provided in fictional narratives, G. Tarcan Kumkale and Dolores Albarracin have found a sleeper effect associated with communications that are mentally tagged by the recipient with a 'discounting cue,' that is, a reason to doubt their veracity. Though 'persuasive messages are often accompanied by information that induces suspicions of invalidity' meaning that 'recipients may not be persuaded by the advocacy immediately after they receive the communication', as time passes 'recipients of an otherwise influential message may recall the message but not the noncredible source and thus become more persuaded by the message at that time than they were immediately following the communication' (Kumkale and Albarracin 2004: 143). This has particularly interesting

26. The History Channel has produced at least 18 individual shows that deal with apocalypse and doomsday, comprising an entire section of their online store.

implications when it comes to persuasion associated with expectations of apocalypse in which the persuasive message carries with it an air of ontological finality that can lead to a feeling of urgency to act before it is too late.[27] In combination with the effects of familiarity, associations encountered on television, even ones initially taken passively or skeptically, can color an individual's perception.

Conclusion—2012 in your Living Room

> There is an alignment occurring, and it is the first time in 26,000 years that this has occurred. Now, what does that mean, where you have an alignment where this solar system is on direct alignment with the center of the galaxy? That carries with it a very profound electromagnetic frequency … and gravitational pull, hence the weather. What does that do to consciousness? What does that do to our sense of reality? I know everyone is feeling this sense of speed, speed, speed and they don't know what to do about it … What's actually happening, Oprah: For those who understand the precession of the equinox … that's coming to an end. It is the end of that 26,000 year precession of the equinox. At the end of the 26,000 years, which is December 21, 2012 … it is possible that we could be on the threshold of a new beginning. And, I think what this pressure, this psychic, spiritual pressure we're all feeling is about is that your internal soul is telling you 'get your act together'! And, that's why the weather is challenging you to do it, technology is challenging you to do it, poverty is challenging you to do it, anything to do with losing your home is challenging you to understand who you are and who you're not (Shirley MacLaine on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, 11 April 2011).

The 2012 phenomenon began with a small handful of published propositions regarding the millennial significance of the conclusion of the thirteenth bak'tun of the Maya Long Count calendar. From its inception in 1966 through 2005, less than 20 percent of the more than two thousand books about '2012' prophecy currently in print were produced (Whitesides 2012). A similar trend is true for '2012' millennialism broadcast directly into the living rooms of North American television audiences. From 2006 onward, several programs per year were produced that primarily featured expectations of world destruction come 21 December 2012. The view of '2012' as an oppor-

27. One unfortunate instance of this feeling of the necessity for urgent action occurred on 15 December 2011 in Seattle, Washington, where, 'according to charging documents', Sabelita L. Hawkins attacked a two-year-old and stabbed her mother in the face after 'watching a History Channel program about the Mayan prediction that the world would end in 2012'. Sabelita is said to have exclaimed, 'We are all going to die … Get me a gun … I'm ready to die … I'm gonna kill myself. We are all gonna die' (Pulkkinen 2012). While it is likely that the instance involved an already psychologically unstable individual, television producers make little allowance for the mental states of their audiences.

tunity for spiritual growth expressed by Shirley MacLaine to the audience of *The Oprah Winfrey Show* is a notable exception that seems to prove this rule. Where the televised documentaries emphasize various means of destruction, the building of bunkers, and the collection of survival supplies, the countercultural milieu that developed the meme have more often than not looked to create positive messages for the 'end' of a calendrical cycle and the start of a new world age. While the different networks that have aired these shows, including the History Channel, the Discovery Channel, the Syfy Channel, the National Geographic Channel, and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, have each tended to take a slightly different approach to the authenticity of the information presented, all have emphasized '2012' as the next and greatest end-of-the-world scenario. This has become its most firm association among the mainstream populace.

The result has been a conflation between prophecies of distant times and cultures that have even filtered back to the very culture to which the prophecy was originally attributed.[28] Television audiences have been led to believe that disparate prophecies from Mesoamerica, Egypt, India, China, Greece and Europe, as well as contemporary natural and computer science, all point toward cataclysm in the same year. They have been told that this expectation is verifiable as a fusion of ancient wisdom and modern science: 'I think that the question that we really must answer now is do we have the courage to marry the wisdom of our past with the best science of our day', says Gregg Braden in the History Channel's *Nostradamus 2012*. Lawrence Joseph follows suit: 'ancient wisdom and contemporary knowledge; put them together and we just might pull through'.

The direct influence of the narrative of biblical Apocalypse has been relatively minor, limited to Michael Coe's use of the term 'Armageddon', Jose Arguelles's focus on the need to gather 144,000 to instantiate the coming millennium, and a few scattered references to Michael Drosnin's *The Bible Code*, which predicts world destruction in 2012 by analyzing the numerical values of letters in the Hebrew Bible in a crossword-puzzle style of prognostication. The indirect influence, however, can hardly be contested. As a Western phenomenon, '2012' millennialism is difficult to extricate fully from conscious or unconscious connections with biblical Apocalypse. Certainly the ubiquitous use of the term 'apocalypse' in the title of nearly every television program in this survey indicates that we have yet to shake the influence of the biblical narrative from our visions of world destruction, even when actual content from the book of Revelation is extricated from the discourse.

28. In his interviews with approximately one hundred Tzeltal- and Tzotzil-speaking Maya in San Cristobal in the Mexican state of Chiapas, Robert Sitler found that many contemporary Maya were not familiar with any millenarian expectations for 2012 prior to encountering them via the History Channel (Sitler, personal communication).

For each doomsday claim presented as an expectation for 2012, scholarly detractors, whether Mayanists or natural scientists, have developed reasoned rebuttals. But, just as easily as producers have been able to extricate the positive spins on '2012' millennialism from their programs, so too have they typically been capable of dismissing scholarly skepticism by simply changing the topic. 'While skeptics dismiss doomsday with reason, others embrace the prophecy.'[29] Experts may disagree with theories advanced by proponents and with the pastiche of messages presented on television, 'but the experts could be wrong, and if the doomsday prophets are proven right, the living may envy the dead in 2013, and as the world comes to an end, there will be no denying this one simple truth: we were warned'.[30]

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29. From the History Channel's *Mayan Doomsday Prophecy*.
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6

Apocalyptic War in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Angel*, *Supernatural* and *Battlestar Galactica*

Gregory Stevenson

'They want an apocalypse? Well, we'll give 'em one. Because we just became an army. We just declared war.'[1] With those words, Buffy Summers taps into a central component of the apocalyptic worldview: war. Apocalyptic war is a battle of good versus evil, order versus chaos. It is a battle with ultimate and often cosmic consequences. Although apocalyptic literature is primarily an ancient phenomenon that enjoyed its heyday during the period of 200 BCE to 200 CE, the concept of apocalyptic war has persisted throughout the centuries. It manifests itself on the world political stage in battles over land, culture, and national identity. It appears as a distant future hope in mainstream preaching on Sunday as well as a more urgent and literalistic expectation in the secluded teachings of religious fringe groups. It has also taken firm hold in popular culture. Contemporary television, in particular, has breathed new life into the concept by taking what is a decidedly dualistic metaphor of good versus evil and adapting it in creative ways that allow it to communicate in and to a postmodern culture that is often anything but dualistic. An exploration of apocalyptic war in the television shows *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Angel*, *Supernatural* and *Battlestar Galactica* shows that apocalyptic war on narrative television is less about revealing a final, cosmic battle between the divine forces of good and the demonic forces of evil than it is about revealing the never-ending, mundane battles against the darker impulses of humanity and human society. I have selected these four media texts as the basis for analysis because each one employs apocalyptic war as an overarching theme. Rather than using it as a plot contrivance for an individual episode, each series enlists apocalyptic warfare as a narrative device that provides structure and meaning for major character arcs, entire seasons, or, in some cases, the entire series.

1. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer,* 'Bring on the Night,' 7.10.

The Metaphor of Apocalyptic War

Apocalyptic rhetoric is the rhetoric of transformation. The term 'apocalypse' means an 'unveiling' and what is unveiled is a new perspective on the world. Apocalyptic literature creates a symbolic world that offers a competing worldview to the dominant worldview of its audience. This symbolic world is much more than just an imaginative fantasy world where the downtrodden can mentally retreat to comfort themselves with visions of justice. The point of apocalyptic rhetoric is that the perspective offered by this symbolic world is a true perspective. Through its abundant use of symbols and metaphor, apocalyptic rhetoric encourages its audience to see the world from this different perspective, thus essentially transforming the world in their minds.[2] It provides a form of commentary on the world.

There are two features of apocalyptic rhetoric to be noted here. One is that apocalyptic rhetoric is morally dualistic. Moral ambiguity does not exist in the traditional Judeo-Christian apocalyptic mind-set. Apocalyptic presents the world as consisting of the rigid and uncompromising categories of good and evil, right and wrong, faithful and unfaithful. Second, apocalyptic rhetoric is typically employed by and for an oppressed and marginalized minority who identify themselves as the good, right and faithful standing on the wrong side of injustice.[3]

It comes as no surprise, then, that war functions as a dominant and recurring metaphor in apocalyptic literature because war captures well the apocalyptic mentality. War is dualistic by nature. It divides all combatants into two camps—allies and enemies, us and them—with the opposing camps being cast in the starkest of terms. Hence in the Qumran *War Scroll*, the battle is between the self-described 'Sons of Light' and the 'Sons of Darkness'.[4] Apocalyptic war offers no third alternative, no retreat into neutrality. One must take a stand for the forces of good or the forces of evil. It is important to note that, when the metaphor of apocalyptic war functions on behalf of an oppressed and marginalized minority, it functions primarily not as a metaphor of *conquest* but as a metaphor of *justice*.[5] Yet in apocalyptic war, the battle

2. Gregory Stevenson, *Power and Place: Temple and Identity in the Book of Revelation* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2001), pp. 14-15; David L. Barr, 'The Apocalypse as a Symbolic Transformation of the World: A Literary Analysis', *Interpretation* 38 (1984): 49.

3. David Aune thus describes apocalyptic literature as protest literature ('Understanding Jewish and Christian Apocalyptic', *Word & World* 25 [2005]: 235).

4. Alexander Bolotnikov, 'The Theme of Apocalyptic War in the Dead Sea Scrolls', *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 43 (2005): 261-62; John J. Collins, 'The Mythology of Holy War in Daniel and the Qumran War Scroll: A Point of Transition in Jewish Apocalyptic', *Vetus Testamentum* 25 (1975): 609.

5. In contrast, when the language of apocalyptic war is co-opted by the powerful, it can easily become a tool in the service of further oppression.

is never merely about justice for the band of righteous. Apocalyptic war deals in ultimate stakes. The physical, political or social conflict of the marginalized minority is set against the cosmic conflict of good versus evil, God versus Satan, order versus chaos. Apocalyptic war is the war to end all wars, the final battle.

Although the conceptual structure of apocalyptic warfare is rigidly dualistic, as metaphor it acquires a certain malleability that allows for flexibility in application. A brief analysis of the book of Revelation illustrates the point. The original audience of Revelation was a marginalized minority (Christians) trying to survive in a culture dominated by the Roman Empire. As the author of Revelation, John seeks to transform his audience's understanding of their place in relation to Rome and to the larger divine drama. To do so, he employs the metaphor of apocalyptic war in three distinct ways. First, he uses the metaphor to define the nature of Christian existence. Following a spiritual war 'in heaven' (Rev. 12.7-9), the defeated Dragon (Satan) takes the battle to earth and declares 'war on ... those who keep the commandments of God' (12.17). John here redefines for his audience the nature of their Christian experience as one of war. They suffer because Satan has declared war on them, because they are caught in the middle of the eternal and cosmic battle between God and Satan. It is a reminder that their battle is not strictly against the oppressive policies or antagonistic culture of the Roman Empire, but their battle is a spiritual war against evil itself. For them, the world is thus transformed into a battlefield, and they are an army.

Second, John uses the metaphor of war to represent the faithful Christian response to evil. As an army, Christians are called upon to fight; yet that fight is not the doing of violence, but the fight of faithful witness, even the witness of death. The means by which they conquer their enemy is not by force of arms but 'by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they did not cling to life even in the face of death' (Rev. 12.11). Likewise, the one who 'conquers' in this war is not the one with the most physical power but the one who, like their Lord, remains obedient and faithful to God even to the point of martyrdom (Rev. 2.10). The third use of the apocalyptic war metaphor in Revelation is as a metaphor of divine judgment and the triumph of God over all enemies (Rev. 9.14-18; 19.14-15, 19-20; 20.7-10). This is the reason why Christians, though an army, are called to be faithful rather than to fight because it is God who fights this war on their behalf. Apocalyptic war is the war between good and evil. Consequently, God, as the ultimate good, must be the one to bring this war to a close.

This flexibility of metaphor is what grants contemporary television shows the ability to retain the dualistic framework of apocalyptic war and yet play within that framework in unique and creative ways.

Television and Apocalyptic War

In narrative television, apocalyptic war is a highly charged, evocative metaphor with a grand narrative climax centered on the ultimate stakes of (potentially) ending the world. This heightened drama makes it an attractive option for television storytellers, and yet its use is primarily genre-specific. The television genres that employ the apocalyptic war metaphor most frequently are fantasy, horror and science fiction. These three related yet distinct genres are in some respects the modern descendants of ancient apocalyptic narratives. Like their ancient forebears, they each create a symbolic world that may resemble our world to varying degrees but ultimately stands just outside of reality. They are narratives that typically service the marginalized who stand up against the powerful, the monstrous and other forces of evil. They too set up ultimate stakes such as the very survival of an individual, a race of people, or even an entire planet. They share a thematic sensibility with ancient apocalyptic in their fascination with the dualistic conflict of good versus evil.

Not surprisingly, then, the metaphor of apocalyptic war often serves as a narrative structuring device in these stories. It establishes the ultimate conflict between protagonist and antagonist that governs the symbolic world of the story, while at the same time offering comment on the real world. The apocalyptic war metaphor, like all metaphors, is about offering perspective. Metaphor is one way we gain a better understanding of life and of the human condition, since metaphor grants us a perspective on one thing by comparing it to another. A.E. Denham argues that metaphors in fictional narratives inform our moral judgments by allowing us to see the lives of others 'as from their own point of view', thereby opening our eyes to perspectives otherwise unattainable.[6] George Lakoff and Mark Johnson contend that metaphors are not merely about comparison of similarities but are a category of thought. As such, they are an inherent part of how we conceive of things, and they thus aid our 'understanding of our world and ourselves'.[7] Since we use symbols and language to conceptualize reality, metaphor becomes one means of expressing 'how things are'.[8]

Visual narratives such as television provide an additional layer to the concept of metaphor. 'Seeing as' is central to the concept of a metaphor. If I say, 'Time is money', I am encouraging you to see time *as* money, to perceive the conceptual overlap between the two. On television, 'seeing as' occurs visually. Consequently, many metaphors in visual narratives are best described

6. A.E. Denham, *Metaphor and Moral Experience* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), pp. 229-30.

7. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. ix, 3.

8. Max Black, 'More about Metaphor', in Andrew Ortony (ed.), *Metaphor and Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2nd edn, 1993), pp. 38-39.

as *embodied* metaphors.[9] On screen, these metaphors take on flesh, and this quality potentially gives them greater emotive force. Our fears, anxieties, and societal concerns become embodied as demons, monsters, vampires or Cylons. There is a catharsis in seeing these internal or intangible demons take physical form and be dispatched.

Two features make the metaphor of apocalyptic war particularly effective as a means of revealing life as it is and as it ought to be. First, it is a potent metaphor of conflict between good and evil. As such, this metaphor functions as a vehicle for exploring a wide variety of situations in which we find ourselves having to choose sides between competing forces. Second, since apocalyptic war is a war played out against the backdrop of the end of the world, it is uniquely designed to provide perspective on the world and the human situation. Proximity to death, whether through aging, sickness, or the loss of a loved one, generates reflection that often leads to a new perspective on life. In the same way, the steadfast approach of the end of all things opens one's eyes to a new way of seeing the world.

Despite similarities with the metaphor of apocalyptic war as used in ancient apocalyptic literature, contemporary narrative television employs the metaphor in some unique ways. Whereas ancient apocalyptic is theocentric, with God fighting on behalf of the righteous and ensuring victory, contemporary television shifts the focus from God to humanity. The metaphor enlightens not Judeo-Christian existence specifically but human existence generally. If God plays a role at all in the war, it is behind the scenes, not on the front lines. Also, notions of good and evil become complicated. Indeed, the dualism of good versus evil is retained, as a war metaphor could not exist without it, but that dualism is set in rigid tension with moral ambiguity. Good and evil exist but are not often easy to identify.

Buffy the Vampire Slayer: *War and Power*

Buffy the Vampire Slayer (1997–2003) tells the tale of a teenage girl at a California high school who is chosen to fight vampires, demons and other assorted threats to humanity. Creator Joss Whedon has described the episodes of his series as 'fairy tales, not driving manuals'.[10] His point is that, as fairytale, *Buffy* communicates primarily through subtext and metaphor, not through the clear presentation of propositions. This show employs mythology and metaphor as means of exposing truth. Joseph Campbell, while discussing how

9. Gregory Stevenson, *Televised Morality: The Case of Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Lanham, MD: Hamilton Books, 2003), pp. 34, 40.

10. Joss Whedon, *The Bronze* (May 22, 2002), n.p., online at http://www.cise.ufl.edu/cgi-bin/cgiwrap/ hsiao/buffy/get-archive?date=20020522.

monsters function as metaphors in mythology, says that when a hero slays a monster, he or she is really slaying the dark things.[11] It is no coincidence that Whedon made Buffy a 'Slayer'. She slays the metaphorical monsters that represent one's inner demons. Through this show's abundant use of metaphor, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* presents not a true depiction of life but a depiction of what is true about life.

Two themes dominate the series: adolescence and feminism. *Buffy* operates with the root metaphor of 'High School is Hell'. It thus explores the horrors of adolescence—alienation, humiliation, identity challenges, hormonal confusion, etc.—and deals with those real-life horrors by transforming them into demons and monsters that can be fought against and vanquished. The show's feminist outlook grows out of the same concern. Noting that young girls lacked heroes in their cultural mythology, Whedon set out to create for them a hero who could demonstrate that they were more powerful than all the fears and obstacles confronting them in adolescence. Whedon's inspiration for revolving a show around a teenage girl who fights vampires was the traditional horror movie convention of the young blond girl who is lured into an alleyway and killed by a monster. The message of that convention is that girls are weak victims, powerless in a predatory society. So Whedon upended that convention by making the young blond girl the thing that the monsters fear.

Apocalyptic war is a staple on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Throughout its seven seasons, Buffy faces more apocalypses than birthdays, even once losing count herself and having to ask, 'This is how many apocalypses for us now?' ('The Gift', 5.22). The character of Xander even highlights the show's metaphorical treatment of adolescent horror by comparing the high school experience to apocalyptic war when he states, 'Outside of drugs and violence and unwanted pregnancy and unleashing of hordes of Armageddon that comes pouring out of the school's foundation now and then, what trouble could these kids have?' ('Beneath You,' 7.2). Apocalyptic war puts the world in perspective. Just as the strict apocalyptic dualism of good and evil offers a kind of clarity, the rapid approach of the end brings illumination. As the last apocalyptic battle draws near, Buffy states, 'In the midst of all this insanity, a couple of things are starting to make sense' ('Chosen,' 7.22). In fact, the final season of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, season 7, is where the theme of apocalyptic war comes to its own apocalyptic climax and, in doing so, brings clarity to the show's dominant themes of adolescent growth and female power.

In season 7, Buffy and her gang face off against their most daunting enemy yet: The First, as in The First Evil. As the original, pure evil, The First estab-

11. Joseph Campbell, with Bill Moyers, *The Power of Myth* (New York: Anchor Books, 1991), p. 183.

lishes the conflict in the starkest of dualistic terms. Buffy and her army are the forces of good facing off against the source of all evil. Yet from the first episode of the season, the show reframes the discussion less in terms of good and evil than in terms of power. The very first words of the season come from Buffy as she attempts to train her sister Dawn: 'It's about power. Who's got it. Who knows how to use it.' The same episode concludes with The First announcing, 'It's not about right. It's not about wrong. It's about power' ('Lessons,' 7.1). The First's statement is misleading, however, because power is always about right and wrong. How one chooses to use power determines rightness and wrongness, a perspective the show itself makes clear.

In fact the real issue here is choice. Apocalyptic war is a war fought for the very survival of the world. Despite Buffy having thwarted multiple apocalypses in the past, this final apocalyptic battle has upped the ante. As one character points out, 'Buffy seems to think that this apocalypse is going to actually be, you know, apocalyptic' ('Storytellers,' 7.16). Apocalyptic war forces a choice. Time is running out and all participants must choose a side on which to fight. When Xander's date turns out to be a demon, she informs him, 'The end is coming. The final fight and everyone is hearing the drumbeat. It's telling us to pick our partners. Align ourselves with the good or the evil' ('First Date,' 7.14). Yet within the narrative of *Buffy*, this dualistic structure is less about one's ontological identity as either good or evil than it is about choice. As Buffy prepares for the final battle, many of those who stand by her side (Faith, Angel, Willow, Spike, Anya) have in the past served the forces of evil to one degree or another. One of those is Andrew, formerly a self-described super villain, who announces, 'I follow Buffy's orders now' ('First Date,' 7.14). He defines his identity by the army with which he aligns.

How this combination of power and choice, set in the context of apocalyptic war, illuminates the show's theme of growth finds prominent expression in several characters of which Anya serves as an example. A part of navigating the journey from adolescence into adulthood is recognizing that one has strength of one kind or another and having to make decisions along the way about how to use that strength. When Anya first appears on the series, she is a hardcore vengeance demon who uses her power to exact vengeance against men who wrong women. She eventually loses her power and becomes human. As a human, her defining characteristic is self-centeredness, not unlike a lot of adolescents who see themselves as the center of the world. Part of the growth process is learning to value others. The war that Anya fights is a war against her own selfish nature.

As the apocalyptic war of season 7 achieves a resolution, so too does Anya's own internal battle. Anya's power is vengeance, and vengeance flows out of self-centeredness. As the final battle approaches, Anya must make a choice. In the past, she has typically fled town in self-preservation whenever an apocalypse looms. This time is different. She explains her newfound insight into

human nature by saying, 'When it's something that really matters, they fight. I mean, they're lame morons for fighting, but they do. They never, never quit. So I guess I will keep fighting too' ('End of Days,' 7.21). In the light of the apocalypse, Anya finally sees clearly and resolves to fight, a fight that is less against The First Evil than it is against the evil of self-centeredness within herself. In that final battle, Anya, the former vengeance demon who inflicted misery on countless men, now selflessly gives her own life to protect a man (Andrew). Anya is but one example of how apocalyptic war functions for many characters on this show as a metaphorical representation of the internal battles of adolescence and growth, as individuals must choose to indulge their darker impulses or to fight against them.

Buffy the Vampire Slayer's feminist agenda also receives resolution through apocalyptic war. Joss Whedon has said, 'The idea of changing culture is important to me, and it can only be done in a popular medium.'[12] The culture he wants to change through a popular televised narrative about a vampire slayer is the culture that views adolescent girls as powerless. In the apocalyptic showdown with The First, Buffy gathers together an army, but it is not an army dominated by men, renowned warriors, or the power brokers. It is an army of teenage girls. The show's central mythology is that one girl alone in all the world is chosen to receive the power to fight against the forces of evil. The girls from whom Buffy draws her army are all potential Slayers, those girls from whom the next Slayer would be chosen once the current Slayer dies. They do not possess her power but merely the 'potential' for power. The First even mocks Buffy's army for this very fact when it says, 'But then you do have an army of your own. Some thirty-odd pimply-faced girls don't know the pointy end of a stake' ('Chosen', 7.22). Buffy, however, has a different take on things as she tells the girls, 'There's only one thing on earth more powerful than evil and that's us' ('Bring on the Night', 7.10).

But what exactly is the evil against which they fight? The First represents the source of all evil—evil as it exists in demonic form, evil in the heart of humanity and evil in the structures that compose society. In this case, the 'evil' that Buffy's army of 'pimply-faced girls' fights against is, on the metaphorical level, the patriarchal structures of society that have perpetuated the notion of female weakness. In season 7, Buffy learns about the origin of the Slayer line. The Slayer was created by a group of male tribal leaders who imbued a young girl with demonic power so that she could fight against the monsters on their behalf, a not-so-subtle allusion to a male-dominated society in which the power brokers use women to their own ends. When Buffy meets these ancient tribal leaders by passing through a magical gateway, they

12. As quoted in Emily Nussbaum, 'Must-See Metaphysics', *New York Times Magazine* (22 September 2002): 58.

attempt to force more of the same power on her. Buffy refuses the 'gift', ostensibly because the demonic power would make her less human, but more accurately because she does not need power from men. She tells the tribal leaders, 'You're just men … You violated that girl. Made her kill for you because you're weak' ('Get It Done', 7.15). Buffy does not need their power because her true strength does not come from enhanced physical prowess, but from the inner resolve of courage.

Furthermore, the primary agent of The First is a man named Caleb, a misogynistic serial killer of women who describes all women as 'dirty'. That Caleb is a former priest who continues to dress in priestly garb is likewise a not-too-subtle representation of how some segments of organized religion have historically deprived women of their self-worth and reinforced the idea of female weakness. The battle against Caleb and The First is therefore a battle against a culture that has marginalized young women and the language of apocalyptic war is language in service to the marginalized.

Apocalyptic war demands a choice—in this case the choice of young women to embrace their power or to continue as victims of cultural oppression. Or, as Buffy puts it to the young girls, they can stand up and fight or else 'we are not an army. We're just a bunch of girls waiting to be picked off and buried' ('Get It Done', 7.15). That choice comes to a head in the final episode of the series as Buffy's army prepares for battle. Buffy conceives of a way to share her power with the girls so that any girl who has the potential to become a Slayer will become one. She tells them, 'In every generation one Slayer is born. Because a bunch of guys born thousands of years ago made up that rule … I say we change the rule … Make your choice. Are you ready to be strong' ('Chosen', 7.22). They choose strength and then go off to battle, although by that point the real war has already been won. Across the world, adolescent girls are finding themselves suddenly possessing the power to stand up to bullies or abusive parents and to meet new situations with the confidence born of strength. Thus, when Buffy's army emerges victorious and Xander comments, 'We saved the world', Willow corrects him by noting, 'We *changed* the world.' The apocalyptic war on *Buffy* is a war to transform the world by changing cultural perceptions of young women.

Angel: *The Never-Ending Battle*

As a spin-off from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and the brainchild of the same creator, *Angel* (1999–2004) shares many of the same sensibilities. One significant difference in emphasis, though, is that, whereas *Buffy* addresses the horrors of adolescence, *Angel* focuses on the horrors of adulthood. The character of Angel is a vampire who received his soul back as the result of a gypsy curse. Angel thus lives in torment over the guilt accrued from the sins of his past and sets himself on a path toward redemption.

Apocalyptic war in *Angel* is a war fought on two fronts. On the one hand, since Angel possesses both a demon and a soul, he embodies the war of good versus evil as a war between the two sides of human nature. At times, due to the fine print attending the gypsy curse, Angel loses his soul and reverts to his fully demonic self known as Angelus. This duality of Angel/Angelus highlights the tension between good and evil within a single person. On the other hand, given that the primary representative of the forces of evil on this show is an LA law firm known as Wolfram and Hart suggests that the battle between good and evil in the human soul finds its counterpart in the battle between societal forces of good and evil.

As with Buffy, Angel faces several apocalypses of varying severity, even one complete with 'The Beast' and signs straight out of the book of Revelation. These, however, pale in comparison to '*the* apocalypse', the ultimate battle between good and evil, which is being engineered by the law firm of Wolfram and Hart under the supervision of the demonic 'Senior Partners'. According to prophecy, 'the vampire with a soul' is destined to play a pivotal role in this apocalyptic showdown between good and evil. The hitch, however, is that the prophecy does not state whether he will fight on the side of good or that of evil. Will the demon in him win out or the soul?

In this way, *Angel* takes the unambiguous dualism of good and evil that characterizes apocalyptic war and situates it firmly in the realm of moral ambiguity. That good and evil are distinct entities is an accepted reality in the narrative world of this show, and, in fact, they even have a tangible existence in the sense that Wolfram and Hart literally embody evil. There is thus no ambiguity regarding the existence of good and evil as metaphysical realities. The ambiguity lies in the human ability to define those realities and to distinguish properly between them. For instance, the narrative world of *Angel* is populated with demons, but the show deliberately obfuscates the knee-jerk assumption that 'demon' equals 'evil' by presenting demons who fight on the side of good. In one episode, Angel kills two demons under the assumption that they were evil only to discover afterwards that they were not. He comments, 'It's so hard to tell these days. They should wear lapel pins' ('That Vision-Thing', 3.2).

Ambiguity makes fighting a war very difficult. Apocalyptic war draws a clear line in the sand and demands that all participants choose one side or the other. Ambiguity tends to wash away that line. In the episode 'Habeas Corpses' (4.8), a conversation between Wesley (a former associate of Angel who has since chosen a darker path) and Lilah (a lawyer for Wolfram and Hart) illustrates the point:

> WESLEY: I believe a day of reckoning has arrived.
> LILAH: And you just reckon you'll toss in with the good guys?
> WESLEY: I'm choosing a side ... It's about right and wrong.
> LILAH: And you have such a clear grip on those concepts ...

WESLEY: There is a line, Lilah, black and white, good and evil.
LILAH: Funny thing about black and white. You mix it together and you get gray.

Furthermore, this ambiguity extends to the nature of the fight itself. Throughout the series, characters struggle with determining the best means to fight against evil. At times characters try to fight the war against evil through self-sacrifice ('The Trial', 2.9); at other times through the acquisition of power ('Time Bomb', 5.19; 'Power Play', 5.21). In an episode titled 'Why We Fight', two characters argue about whether a war is won by doing whatever it takes or only by doing what is right. At different moments, Angel himself has attempted each of these methods, even trying to fight evil with evil. In season 2, Angel deliberately allows two vampires to slaughter 12 lawyers from Wolfram and Hart ('Reunion', 2.10). When his friends suggest that they will keep fighting 'the good fight' against evil, Angel replies, 'Let them fight the good fight. Someone has to fight the war' ('Redefinition', 2.11).

Angel is a series in search of an answer to the question, How do you win a war against evil? The irony is that in exploring that very question, the series suggests that the question itself is wrong. Winning is not the issue because evil will always exist. Angel himself asks, 'Eradicate all evil? Is that even possible? We've been fighting for so long' ('Shiny Happy People', 4.18). Eventually he concludes that it is not possible. Even were he to destroy the Senior Partners, it would not end the war because evil persists. It would merely rise again in another form. Holland Manners, a junior partner at Wolfram and Hart, explains it this way to Angel: 'See, for us there is no fight ... which is why winning doesn't enter into it. We ... go on, no matter what' ('Reprise', 2.15). This persistence of evil is tied to the human condition. Evil never dies because evil lives on in the hearts and minds of human beings. As long as humans exist, evil will exist. How then does one fight a war against an entity that cannot be destroyed without destroying all of humanity in the process? Perhaps this is why apocalyptic war sets itself up as the prelude to the end of all things, for if humanity persists in its present form, evil will persist. This leads to the inevitable question, Then why fight at all? The final season of *Angel* provides the answer.

In season 5 of *Angel*, Angel and his associates are offered full authority over the Los Angeles branch of Wolfram and Hart, with Angel himself as the CEO. After much soul-searching, they accept the offer, thus raising the question of whether one can do good by compromising with evil. Their aligning themselves with Wolfram and Hart is like ardent environmentalists joining a polluting company and thinking they can serve their cause from within. Will Angel be able to fight the institutionalization of evil from within the institution or will he be tempted by the lure of power? The temptation toward evil by masquerading it as opportunity goes back to the Garden of Eden. It is no

surprise, then, that Angel's liaison to the Senior Partners is a woman named Eve who, upon their first meeting, tosses him an apple and says, 'And just so we get the whole irony thing out of the way' ('Conviction', 5.1).

Angel finds the running of a corporation to be a major distraction from his preparations for the coming apocalypse. Further complicating matters is Angel's discovery that running a corporation is often about navigating the gray areas, and gray areas are not the arena in which wars are fought. He begins to long for the clarity of good versus evil. He finds himself increasingly compromising with evil rather than fighting against it. He has indeed lost the clarity of why he fights the war.

That clarity returns to him through the revelation that the apocalypse for which he has been preparing is already here and has been for a while. As Wesley notes, 'The thousand year war of good versus evil is well under way' ('Time Bomb', 5.19). This series thus redefines '*the* apocalypse' as the ongoing battle between good and evil in the hearts of people and in the structures of society rather than as an end-time cataclysmic war. This war is fought in the daily choices that people make as they either compromise with or fight against the forces of evil, whether it comes in the form of mundane activities or powerful societal structures. Angel finally comes to realize that the reason he fights this war is to make the world a better place one battle at a time.

The very last scene of the series communicates the central message of *Angel*. Angel and his friends strike a mighty blow against Wolfram and Hart. In retaliation, the Senior Partners send hordes of demons after them. The stage is thus set for an epic battle on a truly apocalyptic scale. But we never see the battle. As Angel and his small band of followers stand alone in an alleyway while the demon armies advance rapidly toward them, Angel announces simply, 'We fight ... Let's go to work' ('Not Fade Away', 5.22). Then the episode (and the series) ends. By concluding in this way, *Angel* suggests that the battle against evil is a never-ending battle. The war wages on and the victory comes from the decision to join the fight. Apocalyptic war functions in this series as a metaphor for the never-ending battle against evil, the battle that is fought every day in the human heart and in society as we fight to make the world a better place.

Supernatural: The War Within

In Romans 7–8, Paul describes humans as being at war within themselves. The flesh and the spirit represent dueling forces, constantly pulling the individual in opposing directions so that Paul can say, 'Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me' (7.21 TNIV). This principle encapsulates the television show *Supernatural*. Currently airing on the CW network, *Supernatural* revolves around two brothers, Sam and Dean Winchester, who are

demon hunters. In the symbolic world of *Supernatural*, demons and other supernatural forces of evil are very real and very active in the world. Sam and Dean's sole purpose in life is to hunt these evil forces down and destroy them. Consequently, the concept of war structures the show's entire narrative.

Supernatural stands firmly within the horror genre and within that genre monsters often serve as metaphors for our darkest fears and deepest insecurities. In the rich tradition of horror films, monsters have, for instance, represented cultural outsiders, marginalized ethnic groups, predatory power brokers or embodied individual and cultural fears concerning the stranger, science run amok or health threats like plague or AIDS.[13] Part of the cathartic function of horror shows is that in watching the defeat of these monsters, we witness the defeat of our own anxieties.

The demons on *Supernatural* are metaphors of the human potential for evil. This becomes clear with the revelation that all demons had once been human but hell burned away all remnants of that humanity, leaving only demons behind ('Malleus Maleficarum', 3.9). The point is that the potential for evil, for the demonic, lies in all of us. In the episode 'Sin City' (3.4), a demon visits a small town in Ohio with the intention of corrupting it. The demon discovers the job to be far easier than expected and notes, 'Supposedly God-fearing folk waist-deep in booze, sex, gambling. I barely lifted a finger ... All you gotta do is nudge humans in the right direction ... and they'll walk right into Hell with big fat smiles on their faces.' The demon further claims that this is the reason they will win the war—because the pull toward the dark side of human nature is stronger than the pull toward the light.

Like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel*, *Supernatural* sets up a dualistic war between good and evil yet complicates it with ambiguity. Because 'demon' and 'human' on this show represent flip sides of the same coin, the line between them is often thin. This is why a demon named Ruby can convince Sam and Dean to let her fight by their side by claiming that she still remembers what it's like to be human ('Malleus Maleficarum', 3.9), while Sam and Dean can be accused of being only a stone's throw away from serial killers ('Red Sky at Morning', 3.6). Sam and Dean's war against the forces of evil, though fought on an apocalyptic stage, is a war that is ultimately waged within the human heart as individuals battle the darkness within.

The respective narrative journeys of Sam and Dean Winchester represent this ongoing battle of good versus evil as redefined by *Supernatural*. Right from the start of the series, these two characters are clearly defined. Sam is

13. See Nina Auerbach, *Our Vampires, Ourselves* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Jules Zanger, 'Metaphor into Metonymy: The Vampire Next Door', in Joan Gordon and Veronica Hollinger (eds.), *Blood Read: The Vampire as Metaphor in Contemporary Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), pp. 17-26; Robin Wood, *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 75.

the moral center. Though not overtly religious, he unflinchingly believes in the existence of God and prays every day. For him, human life is sacred and to be defended at all costs. Sam is an idealist who tends toward viewing morality in absolute terms. In contrast, Dean is a skeptic and a pragmatist. He has no faith in God or in humanity, preferring to rely solely on faith and reason. What matters to Dean is winning the war, so, though respectful of human life, he has no qualms about killing a human being if it is necessary to serve what he sees as the greater good.

As the series unfolds, however, Sam and Dean, in their waging of the war against evil, essentially change places. Dean evolves, while Sam devolves. This progression can be noted by examining their respective attitudes toward faith and the sanctity of life. At birth, a demon named Azazel infected Sam with some of his own demon blood, thus establishing the metaphor that what Sam is really fighting against is the demon within himself. Throughout the show's first five seasons, Sam is losing that battle. As each season unfolds and he encounters the harsh realities of life, Sam becomes increasingly disillusioned with his faith and with notions of absolute goodness. He begins to adopt Dean's belief that winning is all that matters, to the point where the same Sam who previously abhorred the killing of a human being as a violation of his moral code, becomes perfectly willing to accept human collateral damage and even to kill someone himself if the situation warrants it.

Dean, on the other hand, begins to encounter the world as a place of spiritual possibility. The Dean of seasons 1 and 2, who once asserted vehemently, 'There is no higher power! There is no God!' ('Houses of the Holy', 2.13), by season 3 replies to the question of whether he believes in God by saying, 'I don't know. I'd like to' ('Sin City', 3.4). Whereas Sam's disillusionment with faith leads him to devalue human life, Dean's gradual opening to the possibility of divine existence leads him to a greater appreciation of human life. He now becomes the one who refuses to kill a human being on principle. In the episode 'Jus in Bello' (3.12), Sam and Dean are trapped in a police station along with a number of innocent bystanders. Surrounding them is an army of demons. For Sam and Dean the war is nearly lost—until the demon Ruby offers a glimmer of hope. She can perform a spell that would save them, but it would require the sacrifice of a virgin girl who is one of their fellow captives. Sam, in a now almost complete reversal of his season 1 persona, is willing to go through with the sacrifice in the interest of saving the lives of the others. It is Dean, the original pragmatist, who now shouts out, 'Stop! Stop! Nobody kill any virgins!' Representing a similar reversal of his earlier persona, Dean proclaims, 'It doesn't mean that we throw away the rule book and stop acting like humans … I mean, look, if that's how you win wars, then I don't want to win.' Dean prevails, but as a testimony to *Supernatural*'s fondness for ambiguity, his seemingly noble decision results in the deaths of several innocent people, including the virgin girl herself. Ruby chastises Dean by saying that this

proves he does not know how to win a war. Yet he does. Dean is beginning to learn that this war will ultimately be won not on the battlefield of dirt and stone but on the battlefield of the human soul.

In seasons 4 and 5, this war between good and evil rises to truly apocalyptic levels. Revelation 12.7 reads, 'And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back.' In season 4 of *Supernatural*, the war goes cosmic. For the first time in the series, angels arrive on the scene and these angels are warriors. In ancient apocalyptic works such as the book of Revelation, the war fought on earth is a reflection of the larger eternal and cosmic battle in the heavens. So it is here. The angel Castiel explains that the war between good and evil has reached a new stage, requiring their entry into the battle. The demons are attempting to break 66 seals and set Lucifer free. If that happens, it will bring hell to earth, leading Dean to ask if he is talking about '*the* apocalypse' as in the four horsemen and five-dollar-a-gallon gas ('Are You There God? It's Me, Dean Winchester', 4.2).

In line with the clarifying function of apocalyptic, the heightened apocalyptic war of season 4 casts Sam and Dean's divergent journeys in a clearer light. Because of his demon blood, Sam now manifests psychic power that enables him to send demons back to hell. Sam views this as a powerful weapon in the fight against evil. The episode 'Metamorphosis' (4.4) offers another interpretation. A man named Jack has a monster living inside him that makes him crave human flesh. If Jack were ever to give in to that craving and take a bite of human flesh, the monster within would consume him. In the tradition of monsters as metaphors, Jack serves as a metaphor for temptation. If he resists the desire to eat, he will not turn. Sam shares the same problem. The power inside Sam may seem like a weapon for good, but all power has the tendency to corrupt. Sam insists he can use the demon power for good, but is that not typically the self-deception that precedes abuse of power? Like Jack, Sam is tempted to use his power even though it may consume him if he does. When Castiel reveals in this same episode that God himself does not want Sam to use his power, the line gets drawn in the sand. Nevertheless, Sam continues to cross the line in subsequent episodes under the rationalization that his power can help them to win the war. This self-delusion that fuels Sam's downward spiral eventually leads to Sam himself becoming the unwitting agent who releases Lucifer from his imprisonment.

For Dean, this apocalyptic war has been a revelation for him, leading him to a greater sense of clarity and purpose. The apocalyptic worldview transforms a person's experience of the world, causing them to see the world in a new way. Consequently, the Dean Winchester who through the first three seasons gradually segued from hardcore atheism into agnosticism, now in light of '*the* apocalypse' makes a startling confession:

> A little while ago I had this, let's call it a near death experience. Very near. And, uh, when I came to, things were different. My life's been different. I realized that I help people. Not just help them, though, I save them. And I guess its ... it's awesome. It's kind of like a gift. A mission. Kinda like a mission from God ('Monster Movie', 4.5).

Dean's newfound faith is quickly put to the test—literally. Castiel, under the belief that Dean is to play a central role in this apocalyptic war, secretly presents Dean with a test to gauge how he 'would perform under battlefield conditions' ('It's the Great Pumpkin, Sam Winchester', 4.7). In an idyllic small town, the demon Samhain is about to rise up. Castiel and another angel, Uriel, inform Dean that if Samhain rises, then Lucifer gets one step closer to freedom. The angels make it clear that they came to destroy the town and everyone in it in order to stop this from happening. This puts Dean in a situation where the abstract concepts of good and evil are suddenly mired in gray. Saving the town may lead to the destruction of the world, while destroying the town may save the world, but at what cost? Dean opts to save the town and afterwards explains his decision to Castiel by saying, 'I don't know what's gonna happen when the seals are broken ... I don't know what's gonna happen tomorrow. But what I do know is that this, here, these kids, the swings, the trees, all of it is still here because of my brother and me.' For Dean, as with the vampire Angel, apocalyptic war is not a battle for cosmic victory but the battle to make the world a better place.

The apocalypse arrives in full force during season 5 of *Supernatural*—Lucifer is free, the four horsemen (Rev. 6.1-8) patrol the earth, and the battle between the angels of heaven and the demons of hell begins to unfold. Following the script of Revelation, these two opposing sides have as their respective generals Lucifer and the archangel Michael (Rev. 12.7). But unlike Revelation's 'war in heaven', this is a war fought on earth with humanity caught in the crossfire.

That this apocalyptic war between angels and demons, Michael and Lucifer, is really a cosmically magnified representation of Sam and Dean's human struggle with good and evil is made clear through the plot device whereby both Lucifer and Michael must choose a human vessel to inhabit in order to meet in battle. Their vessels of choice mirror the respective journeys of Sam and Dean. Lucifer selects Sam, while Michael chooses Dean. In this way, the apocalyptic war between heaven and hell is rewritten as a war between two brothers. It is apocalyptic war reconstituted as the human battle contained within our own nature. Not surprisingly, Dean is resistant to these overtures, for he knows that any war between angels and demons can lead only to the destruction of humanity. When it is suggested to Dean that humanity loses regardless of whether heaven or hell wins this war, Dean replies, 'What if *we* win? I'm serious. Screw the angels and the demons and their crap apocalypse. They want a war? They can find their own planet. This one's ours ... We take 'em all on!' ('Sympathy for the Devil', 5.1).

Dean and Sam (who is now repentant over his role in launching the apocalypse) choose to fight for humanity, but in doing so they are really fighting for their own humanity as best represented by Sam's narrative arc. Eventually Sam allows Lucifer to inhabit his body, believing that the only way to defeat evil is to fight it within oneself. The apocalyptic war that began as a cosmic conflict between heaven and hell now becomes internalized within Sam as he literally battles the devil inside him. It is a battle that Sam is losing until a critical moment at which he wrests control of his body away from Lucifer and sacrifices himself by leaping into a sort of demonic black hole that imprisons both Lucifer and himself ('Swan Song', 5.1). Through this act, Sam has defeated Lucifer, but, perhaps more importantly, he has won a victory over the evil within him.

Sam and Dean Winchester each undertake very different journeys from where they begin the series, and their respective attitudes toward apocalyptic war mark that journey. Sam moves from a faithful believer to a jaded pragmatist who flirts dangerously with his own demon potential. In doing so, he adopts the belief that the primary mission is to win the war at all costs. Dean, on the other hand, moves from a jaded nonbeliever to an agent of God while adopting the belief that the primary mission is to make the world a better place by fighting for people. Through its narrative treatment of these two characters, *Supernatural* employs the metaphor of apocalyptic war to represent the dueling aspects of human nature—that the potential for evil and the potential for good lie in all of us and that life is a constant battle between the two.

Battlestar Galactica: *The War against Perceptions*

Battlestar Galactica (2003–2009), a reimagined version of the original 1970s show, establishes its narrative with the near-annihilation of the human race by Cylons. Cylons are robotic beings originally created by humans, but who have now evolved to the point where they are physiologically indistinguishable from human beings. The Cylons are monotheists who believe that the one true God decreed their act of nuclear annihilation. Humans are polytheists whose religion is rooted in the Greek pantheon. Only about fifty thousand human beings survived the attacks and they wander the galaxies fighting back against the Cylons for their very survival as a species.

On one level, *Battlestar Galactica* could be termed 'post-apocalyptic' in that the action unfolds in the aftermath of nuclear devastation. However, this nuclear devastation does not *end* the war but begins it. Thus, characters on either side of the battle can refer to the apocalypse as a future event ('Exodus Pt. 2', 3.4; 'The Eye of Jupiter', 3.11) as they attempt either to stave off or to accomplish the complete and final ending of the human race. By themselves, both perspectives are incomplete. When President Roslin describes human-

ity as 'waiting for the apocalypse', Commander Adama replies, 'Well, the Apocalypse has happened once before' ('Unfinished Business', 3.10). The war on *Battlestar Galactica* is thus a war fought *between* apocalypses, between the realized apocalypse of the nuclear annihilation of human civilization and the potential apocalypse of the ending of the human race. It is this characteristic of the apocalyptic war as a post-devastation battle for the future of a people that gives it its potency as a metaphor for a post-9/11 American society.

Initially, *Battlestar Galactica* appeared to establish itself as a straightforward allegory of the US post-9/11 war on terrorism. Cylons, as rigid monotheists called by their God to wage war against their pagan oppressors, launch a surprise bombing attack on a tolerant society. The survivors of these human colonies, now cast in the role of victims, fight back in a battle to defend their race and way of life. The allusions to the 9/11 attacks by fundamentalist Islamic terrorists and the retaliatory war by the Western world could not be more thinly veiled. The dualism of apocalyptic war thus establishes this as a battle between good and evil and, given the unprovoked genocidal actions of the terroristic Cylons, it appears obvious who occupies the side of evil.

Yet what makes *Battlestar Galactica* such a riveting piece of contemporary science fiction is that it refuses to take such an easy road. Though employing the dualistic framework of apocalyptic war, no show takes greater pains to imbue that concept with ambiguity. War simplifies things in concept. Characters on each side view themselves as the champions of goodness while, at the same time, dehumanizing and demonizing the enemies as agents of evil. Consequently, war becomes a tool of the righteous. During the trial of an accused traitor, his lawyer mocks the prevailing theory of the human colonies when he says, 'This man is our enemy. And if there's one thing that's good in war, that is right and just and proper, it's slaughtering our enemy! Getting some righteous payback!' ('Crossroads Pt. 1', 3.19). Such a simplistic view is necessary in war in order to maintain the belief that, despite having to commit horrible acts, one is justified because one acts in service to the good. Yet, though war is simple in concept, the reality is immensely complex and *Battlestar Galactica* embraces that complexity.

One of the first times that viewers encounter this complexity is in the first season episode, 'Flesh and Bone' (1.8). A Cylon named Leoben is captured and under interrogation by Starbuck. Initially, both try to maintain the simple dichotomy of good and evil that provides their self-justification. Leoben tells Starbuck, 'I know that God loved you more than all other living creatures and you repaid his divine love with sin, with hate, corruption, evil.' Starbuck retaliates in kind, 'You slaughtered my entire civilization! That is sin! That is evil, and you are evil.' She reminds him constantly that he is not human, only a machine, that he has software and not a soul. Leoben, however, protests that he is human and does have a soul. The question then becomes, What does it mean to be human? When Starbuck employs water

boarding and other forms of torture in her interrogation of Leoben and President Roslin executes him by tossing him out of an airlock, viewers are led to wonder who is in fact more human.

As the series progresses, *Battlestar Galactica* consistently and deliberately blurs the line between human and Cylon, between good and evil. One way it accomplishes this is by constantly shifting perspectives. By the time season 3 opens, the show's initial analogy of humans as peaceful Westerners and Cylons as Islamic terrorists is upended. Season 2 concluded with Cylons invading and occupying the human settlement on New Caprica in an attempt to bring the Word of God to humankind. Through this role reversal, the humans, now as the oppressed and occupied minority, begin to look indistinguishable from terrorists themselves. They engage in suicide bombings and are referred to by their Cylon occupiers as 'insurgents' ('Occupation', 3.1). They even target their fellow humans who collaborate with the enemy. Meanwhile, the Cylons, now in the position of leadership, resemble not terrorists but an oppressive empire as they round up humans into detention centers, torture them, and engage in public executions as a means of swaying the populace ('Occupation', 3.1). This shift in perspective forces viewers to recognize how a simple change in circumstance can quickly blur the line between occupier and terrorist, as when Laura Roslin explains the suicide bombings with the statement, 'Desperate people take desperate measures' ('Precipice', 3.2). Later the humans escape from the Cylons and regain their freedom. With their autonomy restored, Laura Roslin offers a pardon to all who collaborated with the Cylons by announcing, 'We all feel the need for justice, and we all feel the need for vengeance, and telling the difference between the two can be difficult at times' ('Collaborators', 3.5). The shift in perspective proves illuminating for her as it does for the viewer.

Battlestar Galactica also blurs the line between human and Cylon by constantly shifting boundaries. The territorial boundaries in this war shift as Cylons like Sharon join the humans, while some humans like Gaius Baltar align themselves with the Cylons. Then there is the phenomenon of Cylons who are programmed to believe they are humans and so live peacefully among human beings who unknowingly accept them as their own. Toward the end of season 3, four such 'humans' suddenly came to realize, to their own shock, that they were Cylons all along. Through this narrative device of taking characters that viewers have come to know and love as human beings and then suddenly revealing them as Cylons, *Battlestar Galactica* forces viewers to focus on the 'person' rather than the stereotype.

Consequently, apocalyptic war functions on *Battlestar Galactica* as a metaphor for racism. Racism, just as in war, involves the dehumanizing of the Other. Thus, the humans characterize Cylons as programmed 'toasters', while the Cylons identify humans as godless pagans who have forfeited their right to live. In line with the show's post-9/11 allegory, is the view that Islamic

terrorists are 'brainwashed' any different from the human identification of Cylons as 'programmed'? Or, similarly, is the Cylon identification of the surviving humans as godless pagans all that far removed from the fundamentalist Islamic view of all Westerners as 'infidels'?

Battlestar Galactica addresses racism by taking the apocalyptic dualism of good and evil as applied to people on opposite sides of a war and complicating it. By blurring the line between human and Cylon, *Battlestar Galactica* presents viewers with a different perspective from which to view the world. It argues for seeing the Other not in metaphysical terms of good and evil, but as a *person*, whether Cylon or human. One way it does this in season 3 is by regularly taking viewers onto Cylon ships, allowing them to see events from the Cylon perspective. For the first two seasons of *Battlestar Galactica*, the action had nearly always been presented from the human perspective. But by presenting the Cylon perspective, viewers began to see them as more than machines, as in fact the people they claimed to be.

War forces a choice about which side to fight on. This makes it difficult in war to see the Other as anything but an enemy. In the episode 'He That Believeth in Me' (4.1), Starbuck begins to wonder if she may be a Cylon. She confesses this fear to her husband, Sam, who has just learned, unbeknownst to her, that he is in fact a Cylon. He tells her that if she is a Cylon, then she has been one all along. Their conversation unfolds as follows:

> STARBUCK: Spend my entire life thinking I'm one thing ...
> SAM: Yeah, and then you wake up one day and discover you're another. Still doesn't change who you really are.
> STARBUCK: You are a better person than I am, Sam, because if I found out that you were a Cylon, I would put a bullet between your eyes.

War, like racism, divides people into us and them and those who fall into the 'them' camp become characterized as less than human, as allies of evil to be fought against. *Battlestar Galactica*, however, challenges the dualistic assumptions of apocalyptic war by raising the question of whether there is a third option, the option of coexistence. The character of Karl Agathon, aka 'Helo,' represents the moral conscience of *Battlestar Galactica*. He is the only human who actively seeks racial equality, and it is his actions that often force others to face their own prejudice. When the Saggitarians, a fundamentalist sect of humans who refuse to accept medicine as a treatment for illness, are mistreated, Helo alone defends them, leading Commander Adama to describe Helo as 'the lone voice in the wilderness'. His principled stance, however, brings enlightenment to others so that Adama confesses, 'There's hate and there's allowing hate. Two sides of the same coin, really. We're guilty of both' ('The Woman King', 3.14).

Yet Helo not only supports racial equality; he lives it. He marries Sharon, a Cylon who has chosen to fight alongside humanity, and the two of them bear

a miracle child (since Cylon's are supposedly incapable of biological reproduction) that represents the unity of the races. When Lee Adama suggests a tactical military strike that could kill all Cylons, Helo alone protests by claiming it is a matter of 'right and wrong'. What makes Cylon genocide wrong in his eyes is that he refuses to view Cylons as the stereotypical demonized 'Other' and instead sees them as people. Citing his wife Sharon as an example, Helo says, 'She's a person, they're a race of people. Wiping them out with a biological weapon is a crime against ... is a crime against humanity.' Throughout the argument, however, Lee Adama responds with the simple justification that 'they're not human' ('A Measure of Salvation', 3.7). But Helo's actions have once again forced another to confront his prejudice. In a later episode, Lee Adama says to his father concerning his brother, 'Would it matter if he were a Cylon? If he always had been? When all's said and done, would that change how we really feel about him?' ('He That Believeth in Me', 4.1). This change of heart owes much to the 'lone voice in the wilderness' who through both words and actions embodies the show's moral conscience.

Since racial hatred is so tied up in perceptions, *Battlestar Galactica* addresses the problem by shifting perceptions, a task that benefits from the transformative function of the apocalyptic worldview. Ironically, it accomplishes this by undercutting the metaphysical dualism of apocalyptic war that it uses as its own narrative framework. This show embraces the battle of good versus evil, human versus Cylon, but then actively blurs the lines between them. In this way, it can employ apocalyptic war as a metaphor designed to challenge a post-9/11 world in which both sides of the war on terror operate with a moral certainty that they serve the cause of righteousness against a demonized and dehumanized Other.

Conclusion

Though each of the four series explored tailors the concept of apocalyptic war to its own unique narratives, there are several pervasive themes that they all share.

First, each series downplays the *cosmic* battle of good versus evil in favor of the human struggle between good and evil. Although these stories are set within an apocalyptic battle that has cosmic significance, that cosmic battle functions to cast the human war within oneself and within society into higher relief. Second, in each series the apocalypse provides a clarifying function by bringing issues into greater focus and urgency in much the same way that a brush with death brings insight.

Third, the dualism of good and evil is retained in each series, yet imbued with varying degrees of moral ambiguity that suggests that the moral clarity of the apocalyptic battlefield does not always translate into reality, where moral issues must be fought on the ever-shifting sands of life. The reasons for this

embrace of moral ambiguity are varied, but one factor that contributes to it is the general skittishness with which contemporary Western society deals with moral dualism. It is a world in which the disciplines of psychology, medicine, philosophy, history and the criminal justice system have sought to complicate rather than clarify notions of good and evil by attributing them to genetics, brain chemistry, psychological conditioning and human interpretation. In such a 'postmodern' world, moral ambiguity is valued over moral certainty. The term 'ambiguity', rather than 'relativity', is vital here. None of these four series denies the reality of good and evil as categories of human experience, but they question the ability of fallible human beings to be able to identify good and evil accurately and confidently in every case. They counsel striving for good and combating evil within and among us, yet doing so with caution and a sense of humility that acknowledge that our notions of good and evil can be deceptive.

Fourth, each series employs the apocalyptic perspective as a way of providing commentary on the world. In line with the transformative nature of apocalyptic rhetoric, these shows pull back the veil on this world and thus allow us to view it in a new light. Fifth, this new perspective comes through the use of apocalyptic war as metaphor. Each series employs this metaphor as a means of representing the battle between light and darkness within humanity, whether that is the battle within the human soul or within human societal structures.

Sixth, for each series, the metaphorical nature of apocalyptic war holds strong implications for the moral evaluation of violence in televised narratives. Any evaluation that focuses simply on the *portrayal* of violence on these shows misses the point. The book of Revelation portrays violence in its narrative and employs the violent metaphor of war, yet it does so in a way that strongly counsels nonviolence on the part of its audience. In each of the series examined here, violence serves a metaphorical function. It represents the battle that stands at the center of each show—the battle against the suppression of females, the battle against the horrors of adolescence, the battle against temptation and the dark side of human nature, and the battle against racism. When viewed in this light, the metaphorical violence on these shows often serves to argue against real-world violence. Consequently, any moral evaluation of violence in these shows (and others like them) needs to examine not only the portrayal of violence on the screen, but the *perspective* that this violence generates.

Horror, science fiction and fantasy genres keep the apocalyptic tradition alive within popular culture. Through the creation of their own symbolic worlds and their creative employment of the metaphor of apocalyptic war, they generate stories that grant us new perspectives on life in the twenty-first century.

7

After the End: Post-Apocalyptic Narratives in *Lost*, *Jericho*, and *Battlestar Galactica*

Erika Johnson-Lewis

One of the purposes of apocalyptic narratives is to provide meaning. What happens at the end of things? This is a question that naturally arises from the human experience of life and death. Everything has an end, so of course the world, humanity and the universe, which have all had beginnings and must also, presumably, have ends. The time and space after the end, the time of the post-apocalypse, create a space in which to reimagine what the world and humanity's place in that new world could be. This chapter is not so much about the apocalyptic event itself, but is instead about the possibilities for the future that an apocalypse might bring about. What happens after the end of things? This is the question that the popular US television series *Lost* (2004–2010, ABC), *Battlestar Galactica* (2004–2009, SyFy, hereafter *BSG*) and *Jericho* (2006–2008, CBS) ask. Rather than structuring the narrative around oncoming apocalypse, they begin with apocalyptic events and focus on what happens once the dust settles and little remains of the world before by exploring what it means to exist in a post-apocalyptic world.

As a work of cultural criticism, this chapter reads *Lost*, *BSG* and *Jericho* as popular televisual texts that were informed by and responding to, both directly and indirectly, the post-9/11 cultural landscape in the United States within which they were created. During this period, the 'war on terror' was often described using apocalyptic terms, as an 'end-time' battle between the righteous forces of good and the demonic forces of evil. The immediate post-9/11 period was frequently characterized using apocalyptic vocabulary and imagery; the events of 9/11 were rhetorically constructed as both world ending and the harbinger of a new age and new way of thinking. In response to this, we might want to ask, what is at stake in understanding the present as post-apocalyptic new world? What is at stake politically, ethically, socially and culturally when one begins to understand the present as having passed beyond—literally transcended—from one reality into another. This is an especially important question when this supposedly new world requires radically new ways of thinking about fundamental questions such as what it means to

be human or to be just. When invoking the apocalypse it can become all too easy to slip into the logic of necessity wherein whatever it takes to survive is de facto morally legitimate. The pre-apocalyptic world is full of clear certainty—us against them, good against evil. A post-apocalyptic world is one in which what was previously accepted as common sense ceases to function as such. This does not mean that the post-apocalyptic world is a tabula rasa. There are always remnants of the time before. The narratives of the post-apocalypse provide spaces in which to negotiate with the present while imagining the future. The series under examination here, *BSG*, *Lost* and *Jericho*, accept and engage with the popular cultural assertion that the present moment is, in some respects, a post-apocalyptic one. Their stories negotiate with this conception of the present and offer their audiences alternative re-imaginings. This chapter begins the work of analyzing their narrative engagement with the idea of a post-apocalyptic present by paying particular attention to the question of what is 'worth saving' and what must be left behind so that the human remnant might survive.

This chapter is divided into two sections. In the first, I describe the nature and function of the apocalypse in its more traditional sense as future ending. The purpose here is to create a point of comparison for the narratives discussed here and to illustrate how they reconfigure the standard apocalyptic narrative by conceiving of the apocalypse as a beginning rather than an end. I outline how apocalyptic narratives of the end serve to create a sense of meaningful closure, which again will serve as a point of contrast to the end becoming a point of departure and a typical mode of contemporary reevaluation. The second section turns to an examination of how each series appropriates the apocalyptic opening to engage with what 'could be' rather than reinforcing 'what is' or 'what will be'. I look at how each series rejects pre-apocalyptic ethics of competition and extreme individualism in favor of an ethic of cooperation and reciprocity through a discussion of specific character and narrative arcs. What we shall see is that what becomes 'worth saving' is a sense of community while what must be abandoned is a regressive 'us' or 'them' approach to survival. If, as noted above, the war on terror has been framed as an existential battle for survival, these television series and their collective rejection of easy us/them dichotomies provide us with possible alternative ways to conceive of the present as uncertain moment.

I want to begin with a summary discussion of the apocalypse as possible future end in order to contrast it with what assumptions are inverted once the script is flipped. Generally, the apocalypse is understood as a future event or occurrence that will bring about the end of world. However, the apocalypse is not only an event but also a concept through which we attempt to understand and make sense of the world. Frank Kermode in his influential work *The Sense of an Ending* describes how apocalyptic narratives allow humanity to 'imagine a significance' by making all events 'concord' with one another

(1967: 4). At their heart, narratives of 'the End', which are necessarily also narratives of 'The Beginning', work to place humanity in relationship to the infinity of the universe. Apocalyptic fictions underscore humanity's ability to control its collective destiny, and they bring the universe within the realm of human thought and understanding, if not necessarily human control. In a sense, apocalyptic narratives tame the chaos of the universe through explanation and often offer us a sense of humanity's vindication.

In *After the End,* James Berger parses out three different ways in which the idea of the apocalypse has circulated in US culture, and these build and expand on Kermode's fundamental descriptions above. First, the apocalypse is 'the eschaton, or actual imagined end of the world, as presented in the New Testament Apocalypse of John'; second, it is as 'catastrophes that resemble the imagined final end', such as nuclear annihilation or environmental catastrophes; and last, the apocalypse provides 'an interpretive, explanatory function, which is, of course its etymological sense: as revelation, unveiling, uncovering. The apocalyptic event … must in its destructive moment clarify and illuminate the true nature of what has been brought to an end' (Berger 1999: 5). It is this illuminating aspect of apocalyptic fictions that is most important for these televisual reimagings because they often highlight contemporary barriers toward a more fulfilling or enlightened future. Similarly, in *It's the End of the World as We Know It*, Daniel N. Wojcik further differentiates between two primary types of apocalyptic thinking, 'meaningful' and 'meaningless'. The meaningful apocalypse works by 'asserting that history and worldly renewal are predetermined, … affirm that the cosmos is ordered, that evil and suffering will be destroyed, that human existence is meaningful' (Wojcik 1997: 4). Wojcik links the origin of the belief that the apocalypse provides order and meaning to Christian apocalypticism. He contrasts the explanatory power of the religious/Christian apocalypse with the pessimistic meaninglessness of what he identifies as the twentieth-century secular apocalypse. This notion of the apocalypse emerged in response to world-shattering events such as the World Wars, the Holocaust, and the very real possibility of total nuclear annihilation. This narrative explicitly rejects the redemptive power of the religious apocalypse and replaces it with a fatalistic belief that humanity is doomed to destroy itself.

I would like to suggest that, instead of describing these different approaches to the apocalypse as religious or secular, a more constructive understanding might be to describe them as humanist or anti-humanist. Humanist narratives, particularly those characteristic of Western humanism since at least the Renaissance, have emphasized the glory and dignity of 'man'; these ideas were then reimagined during the Enlightenment into notions about the inevitable progress of humanity toward the final creation of the heavenly city on earth, as a kind of secular millennial kingdom. What this secular humanist discourse has in common with the religious/Christian apocalypse is the sense

that humanity is inherently good or, if not completely good, at least capable of salvation. Humanist apocalyptic narratives provide a frame for giving the world meaning and see the apocalypse as the means through which humanity is redeemed. Humanist characterizations of the apocalypse emphasize the power of apocalyptic narratives to explain 'suffering and injustice by promising the destruction of an evil and oppressive old order' (Wojcik 1997: 14). There may be suffering in the world now, but at some point in the future (and it is often in the near future otherwise the explanatory and reassuring power of the apocalypse narrative would be less effective) that human suffering will come to an end and will have been worth something.

In contrast, the anti-humanist conception of the apocalypse offers the end only as an absolute negation; it sees humanity as flawed beyond redemption, beyond hope, and beyond meaning. The anti-humanist apocalypse is rooted in an existentialist worldview. Existentialism emerged as a reaction to the increased meaninglessness of modern Western existence. It embraced the absurdity of existence and found the freedom in it to create a completely human existence. Unlike existentialism, however, an anti-humanist notion of the apocalypse rejects that something like a human explanation of the world is possible or that human suffering can be reduced. In this view, existence is absurd, but the recognition of the absurdity of existence leads only to despair. The apocalypse is then a welcomed mercy killing, putting humanity out of its collective misery. The anti-humanist apocalypse is often represented by the image of a nuclear bomb as a 'concrete embodiment of humanity's potential for global self-destruction' (Berger 1999: 101). A. Costandina Titus, in her essay 'The Mushroom Cloud as Kitsch' argues that in the 1980s and '90s the mushroom cloud had become 'a powerful symbol of … nostalgic kitsch'. An object of nostalgic kitsch 'represents a lost golden moment, real or imaginary … [and] evokes memories to dispel feelings of loss and rootlessness' (2004: 110). The image of the mushroom cloud brought to mind 'simpler better times—times when we knew who the enemy was' (ibid.). In post–Cold War America, the threat of nuclear war seemed to recede, and Mick Broderick notes how in films such as *Independence Day* and *Armageddon* nuclear weapons were 'benign, useful, and expendable technologies that can save the species rather than destroy it' (Broderick 2004: 130). Since 9/11 and in particular in the run up to the Iraq War, the image of the mushroom would no longer hark back to a bygone era of the US golden age but instead would once again loom in the distance as its possible future, and in response, the mushroom cloud returned to television screens during the 2004 season of *Battlestar Galactica*, and in 2006 in *Heroes* (2006–2010), *Jericho,* and *24* (2001–2010). The mushroom clouds in *BSG* and *Jericho* signal the end of one era and the beginning of the new.

What is essential to both the humanist and anti-humanist apocalypses is the sense of fatalism, that—human nature being what it is, or the universe functioning as it does—the apocalypse is inevitable, and both views work to

reaffirm what one already believed about the world. They conform to, rather than challenge accepted wisdom. James Berger notes, 'The apocalypse would be the *definitive* catastrophe—not only final and complete but absolutely clarifying. It would unmistakably separate good from evil, true from false. The apocalypse would replace the moral epistemological murkiness of life as it is with a post-apocalyptic world in which all identities and values are clear' (1999: 8; emphasis in original). The clarifying function of the apocalypse comes through its placement at the end, as the final 'a-ha' moment in which everything one believes about the world is crystallized in the moment of annihilation and revelation. Relying on apocalyptic tropes to understand the events of 9/11 makes sense in light of this, as they provided us with an easy way to make sense of what had happened. In contrast, these three series offer up a different vision, one that works with the knowledge that the apocalyptic event failed to provide any clarity or revelation at all. The revelation emerges not through the event but in how we choose to react to the event, and so they ask, What happens when the apocalypse is the beginning rather than the end? In the pilot episode of *Jericho*, panic and terror begin to take over after a nuclear strike on the cities of Denver, Colorado, and Atlanta, Georgia. As people begin fighting over food and fuel at the local gas station, the town mayor and patriarch, Johnston Green (Gerald McRainey), intervenes and asks the citizens of the town, 'Are we going to use our imaginations to solve problems or to cause them?' This is precisely the question that narratives of the post-apocalypse attempt to answer.

Since these series were created in the post-9/11 period between 2004 and 2009, it is possible to read them in light of the larger cultural context by which they are informed. As noted earlier, the language of the post-9/11, post-Katrina moment in the United States was frequently apocalyptic, in that the language of the apocalypse and the hope that it will provide meaning has been appropriated to explain the void created by catastrophic events. The oft-heard claim that 9/11 'changed everything' framed the period in post-apocalyptic terms, but what we find is that not much changed at all. In place of possible change was a reactionary adherence to previously held beliefs and dogmas. Everything had changed, yet paradoxically we must try to work as though nothing really had changed at all. By invoking the present as post-apocalyptic, one hopes to invest it with the promised clarity of the apocalyptic narrative by separating the good from evil and replacing 'the moral epistemological murkiness of life', but the post-apocalyptic worlds of *BSG*, *Lost* and *Jericho* are not worlds in 'which all identities and values are clear'. In beginning with the end, these series, in a sense, are rewriting, or reimagining the apocalyptic narrative. The apocalyptic events in these series do not clarify or reaffirm; they throw the world into chaos and force the human remnant to examine their past so they might creatively reimagine their future. If, as Berger suggests, 'the apocalyptic imagination takes as its premise the conviction that time has

reached a critical juncture, that there is a unique importance to the present moment, for the nature of things is, just now, being transformed into something utterly different' (2000: 389) these series begin the work of confronting and engaging with what is at stake in conceiving of the present moment as an apocalyptic 'critical juncture'. Rather than repeating the rhetoric that the world is a fundamentally different place without really thinking about what that genuinely means, these series begin with an unthinkable catastrophe and visualize the end of the world in order to begin a conversation about what happens next. Instead of feeding into a collective anxiety about what might be, what could be, or what will be, by deferring the threat to the future, these narratives begin with the apocalypse, the catastrophe, the unthinkable, and ask, 'Ok, so the world ended, now what do we do?'

In the discussions below, I will highlight how the post-apocalyptic narratives of *BSG*, *Jericho* and *Lost* use radical shifts in the conditions of existence to envision possible new ways of being in the world. When one reimagines, one works through and changes the previous version of an idea. When a catastrophic event is filtered through the frame of apocalyptic thinking, the frame demands that new ways of understanding oneself in relationship to the world and others must be rethought. These are the central questions that guide the analysis. Must the status quo necessarily be thoroughly rejected? What assumptions about the pre-apocalyptic world are radically questioned and become subject to reimagining, interrogation and possible rejection in favor of new ways of being? What is worth saving?

'Live together or die alone'

There is a populist notion of capitalism that combines the ideology of competition with a 'Darwinian' characterization of nature as red in tooth and claw. Though the Social Darwinism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries does not retain any kind of cultural legitimacy, the central ideology that the 'red in tooth and claw' kind of capitalism is somehow natural to the human condition, or is in fact the natural condition of human nature, retains ideological significance. The central tenet of this ideology is that humans are ardently self-interested and individualistic and, if given the opportunity, will do whatever is necessary to survive. Contemporary capitalism is then a civilized expression of our innate need to survive in a hostile world, where surviving is equated with the accumulation of wealth through the control of resources. This central tenet also informs the ideology of free-market capitalism. In the 'free market' the best or 'most fit' individuals and corporations (which function as a kind of individual who is bound by law to pursue their own self-interest) will succeed/survive, and regulations must be limited or nonexistent to ensure that 'the fittest' survive. Any kind of intervention would violate the 'natural laws' of the market that are analogous to

the amoral rules of the jungle. I am aware that this is a broad and even overly simplified description of capitalist ideology and its links to Social Darwinism. However, my purpose here is to underscore, if crudely, that the ideology is premised on an overdetermined sense of human nature as self-interested and excessively individualistic, and that it assumes that, in nature or in the cases discussed here, a return to the a state brought into being by the destruction of civilization through a world-destroying apocalypse would necessarily reflect an extreme and violent form human existence wherein each individual fights against all others in order to survive/accumulate wealth.

The reality series *Survivor* effectively exploits this ideology and serves as a nice point of comparison for this discussion because *Lost* was inspired, in part, by the reality series. The program's motto, 'Outwit, Outlast, Outplay', narrativizes the survival of the fittest by equating basic survival with playing a game. Playing and winning the one-million-dollar prize is each contestant's ultimate goal. The contestants not only compete with one another as individuals but also begin the competition divided into tribes. In these tribes, the contestants must work together to gain immunity from elimination, survive elimination, and make it through to the next round. All communal participation within the tribe, the creation of friendships and alliances, is assumed to be cynically undertaken as each person, while momentarily working communally to 'survive', is always working toward her or his own self-interested goal of winning the one million dollars. Because of this, an authentic community is impossible. The tradition of the *Survivor* 'blindside' is perhaps the most salient and cynical example of how this works. Season after season, one contestant is blindsided at Tribal Council by his or her supposed alliance. These contestants are always represented through careful editing as gullible dupes who believed that something like friendship could survive the law of the jungle. *Survivor*'s 'primitive' settings work to naturalize a cynical, winner-take-all assumption, that good guys always finish last, that betrayal is the natural order of things and that, given enough incentive, humans will always sell out their 'tribe' for individual gain. One could suggest that a comparison between a reality series on which the stakes are relatively low (the chance of death in *Survivor* is unlikely) with three scripted dramatic serials in which the stakes are relatively high (death occurs often) is disingenuous. Yet each series engages and negotiates with a core aspect of capitalist ideology, which demonstrates the levels at which the ideology circulates.

Battlestar Galactica, *Lost*, and *Jericho* all either implicitly or explicitly reject the capitalist logic that radical self-interest guarantees survival. Unlike the *Survivor* cynical winner-take-all, law-of-the-jungle conceit, a post-apocalyptic human existence requires individuals to work together in direct opposition to the capitalist (and consumer) logic of contemporary American life, since what is at stake is not only individual survival but often the survival of a larger group of people, if not humanity itself. Resources are scarce and survival

depends on communal effort and the sacrifice of one's individual needs and desires. Consumption for its own sake threatens the community's survival. This is often a source of tension within the narratives, and the tension usually leads to a conflict, often violent, between the individual(s) who are still operating under the rules of the pre-apocalyptic world and those who have realized that the rules need to be actively reimagined. The acceptance of the 'live together, die alone' (as it is succinctly expressed in *Lost*) ethic of mutual care and survival occurs at a different level in each series. In *Lost* it occurs between individual people, in *Jericho* between communities (as neighbors), and in *Battlestar Galactica* between species (Cylon and human).

Lost

The conflict between the pre-apocalyptic 'survival of the fittest' worldview of *Lost* is explicitly addressed early in season 1 in 'Tabula Rasa' (1.03) and 'Solitary' (1.09). In 'Tabula Rasa' a confrontation occurs between Sawyer (Josh Holloway) and the rest of the castaways (as a group) and Jack (Matthew Fox) specifically as the community's reluctant leader. In 'Solitary', the notion that one can survive on one's own is rejected and plays out through Sayid's (Naveen Andrews) internal struggle over his past as a torturer, his self-imposed exile and his subsequent return to the community.

In 'Tabula Rasa' (1.03), Jack and Sawyer rummage through the plane's wrecked fuselage looking for supplies. Jack accuses Sawyer of 'looting' while asserting that he is altruistically 'searching for medicine'.

> SAWYER: You're just not looking at the big picture Doc. You're still back in civilization.
> JACK: Yeah? And where are you?
> SAWYER: Me, I'm in the wild.

Sawyer asserts that Jack naively believes himself to be clinging to the habits of civilized life, while Sawyer see himself as possessing the knowledge that they've left civilization and now reside in 'the wild'. Sawyer's characterization of 'the wild' reiterates the survival-of-the-fittest ideology; he is most certainly not interested in making friends. Sawyer continues to believe throughout most of the first two seasons that he must, like the contestants on *Survivor*, begrudgingly work with the rest of castaways. When he does, it generally takes the form of some kind of transaction or exchange of goods or services. He hordes supplies, and his makeshift tent becomes the island's little black market. Even when an outside threat, 'the Others', appears Sawyer works with the other castaways not out of any sense of collective survival but only in his own self-interest. And throughout these early seasons the rest of the camp rejects him for it. In later seasons, Sawyer eventually rejects his self-inflicted isolation and joins the group both out of a love for

Kate (Evangeline Lily) and out of his sense that he cannot survive on his own—nor, he realizes, does he really want to. He comes to the conclusion that he was clinging to something that did not exist—or, if it did exist, it was fundamentally opposed to survival. Part of Sawyer's self-interest comes out of his self-identification as a criminal. He was a con man in his life before the island, and he murdered the man he thought to be responsible for both his mother's death and the loss of his innocence only to find out that, in the end, he had killed the wrong man. Because of this, he clings to his outsider status and believes himself to be incapable of communal or social identification. Both Kate and Sayid suffer from a similar self-identification as 'bad' people. Sayid was a torturer for the Iraqi Republican Guard, and Kate murdered her father to save her mother from abuse. Sayid exiles himself from the community after torturing Sawyer, who is believed to be hiding medicine that Shannon (Maggie Grace) needs. While in exile Sayid confronts his past and returns to the camp having realized, as Sawyer did, that he must work together with the group if he wishes to survive.

In the episode 'White Rabbit' (1.05), we see the most apparent rejection of the ethics of self-interest. In it, Jack comes to terms with the death of his father, whose body he was transporting back to the United States. On the island, Jack begins to see images of his father. Additionally the supplies, particularly water, are running low, and someone has hidden the remaining fresh water away. Everyone assumes it is Sawyer who has taken the water, given his short history of 'looting'. Through the course of the episode we learn that Boone (Ian Sommerhalder) has hidden the water in order to oversee its distribution. At this point in the narrative, the crash survivors are beginning to accept that rescue seems less and less likely and therefore panic overtakes them as their supplies become scarce. Boone, though attempting to do something good, by hiding his plans from the rest of the group causes more chaos than necessary. Jack, following the visions of his father, eventually finds a fresh water source. Here, Jack reluctantly acquiesces to his position as leader by asserting, 'We'll live together or die alone.' His declaration announces the establishment of a new conception of survival in their post-apocalyptic world. They must accept that the previous way of thinking is no longer useful. None of them can make it on their own, and they must, if they want to survive, understand themselves as inextricably connected to one another. This reimagined ethic of reciprocal care and communal survival stands in contrast to the logic of survival of the fittest.

Lost, in asserting that when survival ceases to be thought of as a game, as something to won or lost, the element of competition so essential to the logic of capitalist discourse and the ethic of radical self-interest is no longer useful. In fact, it is a detriment to survival. I suppose one could argue that this argument begs the question that the 'live together die alone' ethic still plays upon each individual's self-interest (their ultimate desire to live), which leads one to

choose cooperation over conflict. This line of thinking brings us back to the cynicism of *Survivor,* where cooperation is only undertaken strategically. But this would discount the difference between strategic communal identification and an identification with the other in which the individual's interests become the group's and vice versa. In the first formulation, the individual remains as the primary point of identification, and in the second the community becomes the primary focus of identification. This is not to suggest that the community becomes some kind of hive mind in which each individual loses his or her identity to the will of the community. To argue that would be to buy into the capitalist rhetoric of radical individualism that the 'live together die alone' ethic rejects. The identification of self with a community is not so much a loss of self or a loss of the understanding of one's being as an individual as it is a way of understanding that humanity is relational and not atomistic. Ultimately, as all of these examples will demonstrate, *Lost*, *BSG* and *Jericho* are arguing for a different understanding of what it means to be human, which is what thinking in the post-apocalypse calls for. If the apocalypse is humanity's end, the time after requires a re-visioning and reevaluation of what humanity is, and in each of the series the re-vision postulates an acceptance of and integration with the other.

Jericho

As noted earlier in the chapter, the question of what it means to be human brought about through apocalyptic events occurs at different levels in each series. In *Lost* we see the change at a very small community level. In *Jericho* the human is filtered through the lens of what it means to be an 'American'. The conflation of human with nation is typical of nationalist discourses generally, but the nationalist discourse of American exceptionalism arguably makes US nationalism more susceptible to this naive conflation between human and citizen. Though the object of re-vision in *Jericho* is the 'American' and not the 'human', the vocabulary is that of the human in an attempt to re-envision what it means to live in a post-apocalyptic US landscape.

Jericho opens with a nuclear attack on twenty-three major US cities. The attack is followed by the use of an electromagnetic pulse (EMP), which leaves most of modern technology useless. As we see in *Lost*, *Jericho* chronicles how Jericho, a small farming town in Kansas, attempts to survive as a community after the end of their world and their American way of life. Perhaps in a kind of inadvertent response to Thomas Frank's *What's the Matter with Kansas?,* Jericho highlights what is right with Kansas by representing it as an idyllic and mythic vision of the US heartland. In *Jericho*, the town and its inhabitants embody the US pastoral landscape. The American pastoral, as described by Leo Marx in his book *The Machine in the Garden,* is a place halfway between the industrial civilization of the city and the untamed wilderness of the savage

frontier. Here, Marx argued, the full promise of America could be achieved. But Marx also noted that the idyllic space of the pastoral was invaded by the industrial machine, most often in the image of the steam train, which disrupts the peace of the garden. The nuclear attacks in *Jericho* represent the machine's violent intrusion into the American garden. This extreme intrusion of the nuclear machine into the garden is apocalyptic in the sense that it ushers in a new reality, one that is drastically different from the world the inhabitants of Jericho knew before. The EMP removes the technological threat to the pastoral, allowing the town to emerge and thrive once again.

The people of Jericho are forced to reexamine their own values, and, in doing so, like the castaways on *Lost*, they reject the capitalist logic of radical individualism represented in the ideology of survival of the fittest. This rejection, unlike the almost immediate dismissal of it in *Lost*, takes place throughout the course of the first season. Initially, the townspeople strive to retain as much of their previous lives as possible, but as the winter gets worse, as in *Lost*, supplies grow more scarce. The people of Jericho realize that their best chance of survival is to work together. The rejection of survival of fittest occurs less at the level of the individual, as it does in *Lost,* but instead circulates at the level of community. The people of Jericho, as a community, choose to be open rather than closed to outsiders. Together they cultivate a relational identity that, instead of seeing outsiders as competition for resources, sees them as new members of the community who deserve to survive. This change unfolds throughout the season as they realize, especially through the figure of Gail Green (Pamela Reed), the wife of Mayor Johnston Green and the town matriarch, that they cannot isolate themselves. First, they reject dispersing the town's remaining resources based on how long a family had lived in the town. Second, they accept refugees into their community. Finally, the town attempts to work together with New Bern to pool resources and make it through the oncoming winter. This final attempt is undermined by New Bern's decision to invade Jericho. The New Bern attack fails and the implicit lesson here is that the decision to take rather than share dooms the citizens of New Bern to even more loss of life and essential supplies.

In an important scene in the episode 'One Man's Terrorist' (1.17), a struggle ensues between the Jericho's refugees and the new Mayor, Gray Anderson (Michael Gaston), who has decided, based on the projected resources, that the refugees need to leave Jericho. Given the circumstances, this is essentially a death sentence. The refugees, led by Roger (Christopher Wiehl), who was engaged to Emily, a longtime resident of Jericho, refuse. They take a group of police officers hostage in the church, initiating a standoff. For many people in the town, the refugee's attack on the police solidifies their belief that they must leave. However, this perception changes once Gail talks with Kyle, a refugee who has broken into her house, not to loot it or harm her but to find some glue to fix his shoes because 'they are all that [he has] left that are [his]'.

Gail wistfully 'wish[es] there was more we could do'. Kyle does not accept Gail's rationalization. The exchange continues:

> KYLE: Aw ma'am, there are empty houses all over Jericho and we sleep in a shelter.
> GAIL: Those are our neighbors' homes. They were gone when the bombs went off. They're coming back.
> KYLE: Well, wherever your neighbors are, I hope nobody's kicking them out of town in the middle of winter.

Gail realizes that she's clinging to a false hope that things will return to normal or that something like the world she knew would return. Here she accepts that that world is gone, and so the distinction between townspeople and outsiders becomes meaningless. Later in the episode, Gail asks the townspeople while standing in front of the church, 'A woman died on Main Street today and I didn't even know her name. Did you?' Instead of rejecting the refugees and seeing them as possible competition for resources, the town comes to recognize them as people who deserve to survive. Drawing up artificial boundaries between insiders and outsiders destroys the connection that individuals have to one another. Gail manages to convince the town that they should help the refugees by reminding them to '[t]hink about our neighbors who haven't made it back yet. That's who they are.' The placement of this scene outside of the church visually underscores the message of the golden rule, to love one's neighbor as oneself and refuse the ideology that insists that one's neighbor becomes one's enemy in the brutal struggle for survival—we are all, regardless of where we are from, each other's neighbors.

In season 2, the mysterious corporation Jennings and Rall and their private military arm Ravenwood represent the antithesis of Gail's call to care for one's neighbors. Ravenwood terrorize the towns of Rogue River and New Bern. They indiscriminately kill people and steal vital supplies that leave those left behind barely able to scrape out a living. It was New Bern's experience with Ravenwood that led it to establish marshal law and to decide to invade Jericho. Ravenwood robbed the people of New Bern of their ability to connect with and trust others. In the short second season, Jennings and Rall enter Jericho and establish a new corporatized governmental structure. Their objective, to increase profit, is seen as distasteful profiteering and a contaminated vestige of the world before.

Battlestar Galactica

In *Battlestar Galactica* the 'live together, die alone' ethic emerges throughout its four seasons. In the original 1978 series, there was a clear distinction between the humans and their robotic nemesis the Cylons. In reimagining the series for a contemporary audience, creator Ronald Moore muddles this

previous distinction by introducing the 'skinjobs', Cylons who look human and who are sometimes programmed to believe they are human. This complicates the easy distinction between human and machine, self and other, us and them. As the series progresses, the distinction between humans and Cylons is gradually challenged until by the fourth season the distinctions become unimportant. As with both *Lost* and *Jericho,* the moment of realization occurs at a point when resources become scarce and the scarcity forces the choice between cooperation and competition.

Much of season 1 focuses on what makes the Cylons inhuman. Their ability to download and resurrect into new bodies along with their merciless pursuit of the human fleet through the galaxy highlight the radical distinction between Cylon and human. This is made most apparent through the character of Boomer/Sharon (Grace Park). Boomer is an 'eight', a 'sleeper agent' Cylon in deep cover; she is programmed to be completely unaware of her Cylon nature. The narrative follows her internal struggle between her human and Cylon aspects as she works to help the human race survive while simultaneously working to see it ultimately destroyed. Her alien nature is solidified in the final episode of season 1 when her apparent lack of free will loses out to her programming and she attempts to assassinate Commander Adama (Edward James Olmos). In season 2, the differences between Cylon and human are complicated even more. For example, another version of Boomer who, previously in season 1 had rejected her programming in favor of her love for Helo (Tahmoh Penikett), is imprisoned in the Galactica's brig and repeatedly tries to prove her allegiance to the humans. She helps them find a route to earth by finding the tomb of Athena and saving the fleet from Cylon attacks. On Kobol (the original home of humanity in the *BSG* universe) in an altercation with Adama, who understandably refuses to trust her, Sharon declares that she is a different Sharon and that she makes her own choices. She eventually earns Adama's trust, marries Helo, takes a new name, Athena, and rejoins the Colonial fleet as an officer. Following her reintegration into the fleet, in seasons 3 and 4, Sharon/Athena becomes an indistinguishable member of the crew and her allegiance is never questioned.

In addition to Sharon's assimilation into the fleet, Caprica Six (Tricia Helfer) defects and helps the humans in season 3, and by season 4 the Cylons splinter into two factions. One faction joins with the human fleet. Together they destroy the resurrection hub. The hub allowed the Cylons to download their consciousness into a new body when they died. The destruction of the hub renders all the Cylons incapable of downloading, further eroding the differences between the humans and Cylons. Now that the Cylons are subject to death, they are even closer to their human companions; by the end of the series, the integration is complete. This is visually signified through the use of Cylon technologies to repair the Galactica. The mixing of the Cylon fleet and the human fleet is represented also in a variety of situations: the use of

Cylon technology to repair Galactica; the Cylon's new mortality; Colonel Tigh's (Michael Hogan), who we learn at the end of season 3 is a Cylon, reconciliation with Adama; the incorporation of images of the Cylon dead added without outrage to the shrine to the fallen humans aboard the Galactica. These examples all underscore the knowledge that if the Cylons and the humans are going to survive and find a new home, they are going to have to reject the idea that they are capable of surviving on their own. They, like the castaways in *Lost* and the community in *Jericho*, will survive together or die out in the wilderness of space alone.

All three of these series use the time after the end, the time of the post-apocalyptic, to reimagine what it means to exist in relationship to the other. They reject the competitive ethic that demands that one see the other as an adversary in the struggle for survival. The final consequence of this reimagined ethic of acknowledgment and reciprocal care is that it often leads to a further reimagining of the necessity of violence as the final means through which survival is ensured. The cycle of violence grows out of and is fostered by the capitalist ethic of competition (and eventual domination) between people and communities. These fictional rejections of the 'us' versus 'them' dynamic, which dominated the cultural discourse of the post-9/11 period, serve as indirect—and perhaps in case of *BSG*, direct—critiques of the perils of reactionary thinking in which the path is already known. Post-9/11 apocalyptic discourse attempted to reveal, once and for all, what the event meant for the world in an attempt to determine how we ought to respond. Instead, these series begin with the end and reveal that what comes after the end is uncertain. Instead of providing us with clarity of direction, the end requires us to ask what is worth saving, so that the future may be different from the past. These series present us with a way through, one in which we acknowledge the humanity of the other and realize that, perhaps if we all wish to survive, we need to learn how to live together, or else we all just might die alone.

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8

The Post-apocalyptic Family in *The Walking Dead*

James Aston

The Walking Dead originated in 2003 as on ongoing, possibly never-ending, comic about various survivors in a post-apocalyptic United States in which the dead walk the earth. The reason for the zombie infection is never disclosed, and, although at times horrific and violent, the comic concentrates on family relationships both of a blood nature and those formed through and within the group of survivors. The comic has a fierce fan base as well as mainstream interest, which has seen the trade paperbacks dominate the *New York Times* graphic books best-seller lists (Kepler 2012). It has also garnered many critical accolades, culminating in the industry's top prize of an Eisner award in 2010 for Best Continuing Series (Anon. 2012). As a result of the ongoing commercial and critical success of the comic, a television adaptation was announced in 2010. Now in its third season, *The Walking Dead* television series has, like its comic counterpart, been a popular and critical success. The pilot drew 5.3 million viewers in the United States, making it the most popular program broadcast on any cable channel during 2010 (Anon. 2010), which increased to a figure of 8.1 million viewers for the mid-season return of series 2 (Hibberd 2012). Critical reception has also been favorable; in the *Wall Street Journal,* Nancy deWolf Smith wrote that the show is 'so good' and even 'breathtaking' and that what makes it 'so much more than a horror show' is its 'theatrical grandeur' (2010). *Salon*'s Heather Havrilesky also commented favorably on the show's 'film quality'(2010), while Alessandra Stanley of the *New York Times* noted the 'slasher-film gore' of the series, which creates a 'surprisingly scary and remarkably good' suspense shocker narrative (2010).

The focus of the television series, similar to that of the comic, is on patrolman Rick Grimes as he oscillates between his duties as a father and husband and as the de facto leader of a disparate, antagonistic yet fiercely loyal band of survivors as they trek through the southern states of the United States trying to find a safe haven. In this respect, in terms of medium, content and time of release, *The Walking Dead* represents a recent entry into the wide-ranging field of cultural representations of the apocalypse. On account of the abundance of these texts, much has been written about the paradigmatic

framework of the apocalypse and apocalyptic narratives in providing meditations on the present and future directions that can offer a 'reimaging' of humanity along the contours of a more positive, enlightened and progressive movement. From Frank Kermode's *The Sense of an Ending* (1967) to Mervyn F. Bendle's 'The Apocalyptic Imagination and Popular Culture' (2005), writings on the apocalypse have tended to frame the issues on a global, even cosmic, scale that posits Manichean conceptions of good versus evil, survival versus destruction, chaos versus order and past versus future. Yet little has been written about how central intimate representations of the surviving humanity are and how this closeness and intense dynamic is mapped out through the family unit. Indeed, the lack of academic focus on the family becomes even more glaring in the light of the resurgence of apocalyptic cinema during the past decade, in which the sphere of the family is seen as a vital element in the narratives of these cinematic representations.

Hollywood Apocalypse and the Role of the Family

Post-millennium examples of Hollywood apocalyptic scenarios have featured significantly in box office figures, with films such as *Resident Evil* (Anderson, 2002), *War of the Worlds* (Spielberg, 2005), *I Am Legend* (Lawrence, 2007), *28 Weeks Later* (Fresnadillo, 2007) *Cloverfield* (Reeves, 2008), and *2012* (Emmerich, 2009) contributing to a genre consisting of more than thirty films that have grossed over four billion dollars worldwide (Internet Movie Database [IMDb]; Box Office Mojo). In the majority of these films, family plays an instrumental thematic role in which the apocalypse can be imagined. That is, the representation of the family has tended to be negative, which contrasts with the pre-millennium disaster films such as *Independence Day* (Emmerich, 1996) and *Armageddon* (Bay, 1998) in which the family was generally exhorted and ultimately successful in averting disaster, whether that be from the imminent approach of a meteor or the potential annihilation of humankind by alien invaders. The increasing pessimism of these films that center on the family under threat enables fears and anxieties surrounding war, terrorism, environmental catastrophe and pandemic diseases to be addressed. In turn, it also clearly highlights how the apocalypse is used for a contemporary audience. For example, in *War of the Worlds*, Tom Cruise plays an estranged father and divorcé who gradually reasserts himself as the strong, powerful father by keeping his children safe and reuniting them with their mother despite overwhelming threats from the alien invasion. However, as the children embrace their mother, her new husband and their grandparents at the conclusion of the film, Cruise's character is markedly kept apart, instead looking on from a distance. Although the film does reposition the errant and ineffectual male, it is unable to return him fully to the place of patriarchal authority. In *I Am Legend*, Will Smith's character is unable to protect his wife and daugh-

ter after an outbreak of a virus that turns people into crazed cannibalistic monsters, suggesting again an impotent and ineffectual father unable to keep his family safe. In *28 Weeks Later*, perhaps the most pessimistic of all the post-millennium apocalypse films, the traditional nuclear family is destroyed against the back drop of a viral outbreak that induces a murderous 'rage' in infected people. At the beginning of the film, the father abandons his wife only to be reunited with her later as it is revealed that she is immune to the virus though still being a host. Their subsequent reunion and kiss infects the father, who then in turn kills his wife. Later the father infects his son (who is also immune) and is shot and killed by the daughter. The film ends with the son and daughter escaping and running toward the Eiffel Tower. These last shots are not received as positive or hopeful because of the earlier sequence in which the mother infects the father, which suggests that the son will inadvertently infect people as well, thus spreading the virus to mainland Europe, where there is little to no hope of containing the outbreak.

Here, the private sphere of the family acts as a battleground for public fears and anxieties circulating in contemporary society and particularly in the United States, where these films mainly originate. They are pointedly at odds with what Susan Sontag declared in her seminal article 'The Imagination of Disaster' about 1950s apocalyptic sci-fi in that they do not 'normalise what is psychologically unbearable, thereby inuring us to it' (Sontag 1967: 225). The fears and anxieties surrounding terrorism, war, environmental disaster and pandemic diseases are neutralized through the use of fantasy and spectacle. In these cinematic representations of the apocalypse, it is the family that becomes the mechanism that provides a social commentary, along the contours of gender, race and class, and connects the apocalyptic setting with contemporary events and issues that stand as traumatic, unsettling and concerning to the body politic. Therefore, the representation of the family in cinematic apocalyptic narratives offers a valuable point of entry to examine similar figurations in television, especially as the family has become an established element in televisual apocalypse texts such as *Jeremiah* (Showtime, 2002 –2004), *Battlestar Galatica* (SyFy Channel, 2004–2009), *Jericho* (CBS, 2006–2008), *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles* (Fox, 2008–2009) and *Falling Skies* (TNT, 2011–). It is, however, with *The Walking Dead* that the role of the family becomes most relevant in how contemporary representations of the apocalypse can situate the viewer with very real issues circulating in society. Here, the various family units develop the restrictive binary approaches to the apocalypse, which simplistically represent good and evil and past and future. That is, a show like *The Walking Dead* and the intricate, intimate and protean family dynamic contained in its narrative can begin to express the importance of the family in apocalypse texts and also how their construction can cogently articulate how the apocalypse serves to comment on the fears and anxieties circulating in society.

The Family in The Walking Dead

The main group of survivors in series 1 numbers 19, among whom there are five blood-related families. Most prominent of these is the group's leader, Rick, and his wife, Lori, and their son, Carl. Other survivors include Daryl Dixon and his crazed, racist brother Merle; Andrea and her sister Amy; Carol and Ed Peletier and their daughter Sophie; and Morales and his wife and two children. In addition to these families are Dale, who is a type of surrogate father/protector figure; Shane, who is Rick's friend and partner in the police; Jacqui and Glenn, who are, respectively, the helper and scout of the group; T-Dog, an unaffiliated member who moves between the different groups and people; and Jim, a loner figure who rarely interacts with the group. There are also other examples of family not connected to this group of survivors that the series highlights. In 'Days Gone By' (1:01), Rick meets and hides out with Morgan and his son, Duane, and in 'Vatos' (1:04) Glenn is kidnapped by a Latino gang who are in fact former employees of a nursing home in which they still look after the residents including the elderly grandmother of their leader, Guillermo.

As in the cinematic representations of the family in post-millennium apocalyptic sci-fi, the families in *The Walking Dead* are all shown to be under threat, whether externally or internally. The most stable of family units is that composed by Rick, Lori and Carl, and although Rick is separated from them at the start of series 1 and presumed dead, once he is finally reunited with them in 'Tell it to the Frogs' (1:03), their relationship seems strong, stable and central to the hierarchal arrangement of the group. However, as the series proceeds it transpires that Shane began a relationship with Lori after they both believed Rick to have been killed by the zombies. Shane's obvious surprise and subsequent resentment at Rick's return are manifested in aggressive and violent displays of masculinity that threaten the internal dynamic of Rick, Lori and Carl as well as the group itself, as Shane continually challenges Rick's calm and rational leadership. Other family arrangements also come under threat, with Carol in an abusive relationship until her husband, Ed, is killed by zombies in 'Vatos'. Andrea also loses her younger sister in this episode and is plagued by guilt at not being able to protect her, which culminates in an aborted suicide attempt in the series 1 finale 'TS-19' (1:06). Although a strong and protective bond exists between Duane and Morgan, their position is still one of extreme trauma, as Morgan's wife has been 'turned' by the zombies and wanders about outside their home. Morgan attempts to shoot his wife only to break down unable to pull the trigger. Finally, the psychotic, out-of control Merle is handcuffed to a utility pipe after a violent clash with T-Dog, only to be left by the group after zombies threaten to break through onto the roof. Although they return to Merle, he is gone, and only his bloody

hand is left behind, a horrific indication of the extreme measures he took in order to escape the threat.

In *The Walking Dead* there is a very intimate, inside-looking-out quality that reduces a nationwide calamity to the single state of Georgia and a small group of survivors. While other apocalyptic-themed visual representations may take as their locus the United States or, more specifically Manhattan, such as *Cloverfield* or *I Am Legend*, the scale and proficiency of their special effects and the verisimilitude of constructed large scale destruction gives these representations a much more expansive canvas on which the end times can be written. In *The Walking Dead* this is obviated in favor of the rural over the urban and individual psychology over the collapse of nations. Although this may seem to limit the grand narrative form of the biblical apocalypse in terms of forwarding themes of repentance, purification of a fallen society and the overarching confrontation of good versus evil, the show in fact crystallizes these themes within the representational strategy of the family. In doing so, the show addresses the power dynamic inherent, yet overlooked, in apocalyptic scenarios. It is precisely the spectacle of power that exists apart from, yet continues to preserve, the collapsing social institutions and structures that best provides an understanding of how the apocalyptic narrative functions and, more importantly, its use in a post-millennium, post-9/11 context.

Adding to the way power is disseminated in *The Walking Dead* and how this can address the centrality of the family in apocalyptic narratives in terms of both how it comments on contemporary society and how doomsday conflicts are represented in general is the presence of the zombie. The zombie figure is best known in apocalyptic scenarios through the films of George Romero, in which zombies resisted subjection to a controlling master (as was the case in classical zombie films such as *White Zombie* (Halperin, 1932) and *I Walked With a Zombie* (Tourneur, 1943) and thus revealed 'both the contingency of the structures they disrupt and the constructiveness of the identities projected onto them' (Roche 2011: 1). For example, in Romero's films from *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) to *Survival of the Dead* (2009), the zombie challenged and critiqued political ideologies such as consumerism, militarism, conformity, sexism, racism and capitalism. In effect, the figure of the zombie attacks the power relations tied up in state apparatuses and how this is manifested in individual and group subjectivities. Key among these expressions of power is that of the patriarchal order and how the unrelenting zombie attacks 'have their origins in (are the physical projection of) psychic tensions that are the product of patriarchal male/female or familial relationships' (Wood 2003: 103). Therefore, at a time when masculinity and patriarchal order are under threat, it is no surprise that the zombie returns as the repressed tensions and conflicts of a 'social order that has been destroyed . . . "dead" yet automatically continuing' (Roche 2011: 9) that presciently comments on patriarchal

reaction post-9/11, in a world defined by war, terrorism, militarism, financial collapse and environmental disaster.

The spectacle of power is mapped out through the family and, in particular, the patriarchal father and is brought into stark focus by the omnipotent threat of the zombie. In *The Walking Dead*, the power and authority of the father are under threat from the beginning and throughout. It is seen as excessive, violent and out-of-control in that Ed is an abusive husband and neglectful father who is ostracized from the group because of his behavior toward Carol. Ed is thus left in a vulnerable position when the zombies attack, and he is killed first with no one coming to his aid. Merle, who acts as a father figure to Daryl, is the stereotypical villain of the show, highlighting that the internal threat from humans within the group may be greater than the thread of the zombies. Merle is an excessive figure, full of rage and vitriol, who again is ostracized from the group because of his violent expressions of power. His escape from the zombies suggests a return, later on in the series, of masculine anxiety that his debased patriarchal order represents. Conversely, the role of the father is seen as weak and ineffectual, with Jim barely functioning within the group due to his guilt over not being able to protect his family. In 'Wildfire' (1:05), Jim is mortally wounded by the zombies and asks to be left behind so that he may 'turn' and search for his family who have also been 'turned' by the zombies. Morgan similarly is an impotent figure who blames himself for his wife's death. Although he is partially redeemed through his protection of Duane, his guilt prevents him from staying with Rick and potentially the safety of the group that Rick finally joins. Dale is the surrogate father of the group, symbolized by his privileged gaze from his vantage point on top of his RV and his position as group lookout. Although he moves between the members of the group and often acts as a mediator he is absent or excluded from the more masculine pursuits, such as hunting, dispatching of zombies and the frequent dangerous trips into the city. His is a feminized character, which is underlined by Andrea's put-downs of 'yes, mom' when asked to carry out any requests by him. In fact, it is only Morales who can be considered a positive father in that he keeps his family safe and is a calm, rational and measured presence. However, he is only a marginal figure in the group and leaves in 'Wildfire', saying, 'I have to do what's best for my family.' That he leaves for Birmingham, where other members of his family are located, highlights the importance of family unity to Morales. However, that the most positive father figure within the group is not allowed to stay suggests that affirmative, uncomplicated representations of patriarchy are not of concern in *The Walking Dead,* and it is with this in mind that we turn to the figures of Rick and Shane, who represent the clearest expression of patriarchal order and its concomitant structures of power in the first series of the show.

The Incompatible Patriarchy of Rick and Shane

We are first introduced to Rick as he exits his patrol car in a scene that takes place post-infection as he searches the wreckage of abandoned and burned-out cars for petrol. Rick's first act, and one that happens before the credits, comes to define his character and his role as patriarchal leader for the remainder of series 1. While Rick is presented as heroic, resourceful, intrepid, fearless and brave in this early sequence, the shocking appearance of a little girl who has crossed over to that of a zombie and Rick's subsequent shooting of her add a layer of complexity to the more traditional masculine qualities clearly asserted beforehand. The show immediately sets up the restoration of order by having Rick, the lone heroic figure, shoot the zombie, thus neutralizing the threat. Yet the fact that the zombie is a young girl undermines the action as wholly positive, instead providing an ambiguous representation of patriarchal authority that is to emerge in the post-apocalyptic landscape of the United States. The notion of an excessive masculinity that is straightaway articulated in *The Walking Dead* attests to the anxiety over male identity post-9/11 and is further explored with the introduction of Rick's partner, and binary opposite, Shane.

Shane is not only Rick's partner but his best friend, and in their first scene together in 'Days Gone By' they talk openly about personal issues such as marriage and relationships. In these early exchanges, Shane is the more powerful, overtly sexual of the two, making sexist and stereotypical comments about women and how they only serve to problematize traditional notions of masculinity, while Rick voices concern over his relationship with his wife saying, 'It's like she is pissed at me the whole time and I don't know why.' The divergence of characteristics between the two, with Shane the more headstrong, virile and aggressive male identity and Rick the more thoughtful, placid yet keenly observant person, coheres in a workable whole underlined in the preceding scene, in which they apprehend an armed fugitive. Shane's powerful and aggressive masculinity combines well with Rick's measured approach, which sees a potentially violent and dangerous situation averted. However, unbeknownst to the two police officers, there is another armed criminal hiding in the car that they stopped who opens fire, shooting at and badly injuring Rick. The importance of this scene is that the group cohesion of Rick and Shane is shattered, completely separating the two individuals. It is Rick who, when in hospital, is abandoned when the outbreak occurs; and it is Shane who, as the last person with him, leaves him to an uncertain fate in order to preserve his own life and escape the hospital that is now overrun by zombies and ineffectual SWAT teams.

In the immediate post-apocalyptic world of *The Walking Dead*, Shane has established himself as both the leader of a group of survivors who are camped on the outskirts of Atlanta and as a surrogate husband to Lori and father to

Carl, whom he managed to protect and with whom he escapes after leaving Rick at the hospital. In the scenes immediately preceding Rick's reunion with his family, we see Shane cleaning his gun while passing on fatherly advice to Carl about hunting. It is a scene that continues Shane's traditional displays of masculinity before the crisis, but this attitude is now manifested in a more responsible and rational manner, as the more aggressive aspects of his character are absent. When Rick arrives, Shane is markedly sidelined by the reunion, looking on ruefully. The audience knows the reason for this: it is not just because Shane sees Rick as a possible threat to his role as leader, but, more importantly, he is a threat to Shane's familial relationships with Lori and Carl. In a key scene that follows, Ed challenges Shane's authority by putting a log on the campfire, thus increasing the visibility of the group to potential zombies. Shane has to confront Ed with the threat of physical violence in order for him to back down, and this is the first instance of Shane threatening aggression within the group. The action is in direct contrast to the scene immediately preceding Rick's return. In fact, this sequence in 'Tell it to the Frogs' crystallizes the struggle for patriarchal power and authority between Rick and Shane for the rest of series 1. Rather than reunite themselves, as Rick did with his family, and continue the close relationship they had before the apocalyptic event, the changed landscape of this New World Order precludes collaboration between these two very different male identities and father figures.

In the majority of previous zombie films, the survivors 'attempt to preserve the collapsing social structure' (Roche 2011: 2) that the dead zombies threaten, revealed often-tyrannical power structures so that order does not break down. In *Night of the Living Dead*, both repressive racial and gender power dynamics are enforced. In *Dawn of the Dead* (Romero, 1978) consumerism as an institutional assemblage of normative bourgeois ideology is continued by both the dead and the living, and in *Day of the Dead* (Romero, 1985) an unhealthy militarized masculinity continually threatens and ultimately destroys the group hiding out in a military bunker. The spectacle of power in these three films encourages a reading of social critique in that they forward characters who try to uphold the 'natural' order, exposing its oppressive and repressive formations. However, in *The Walking Dead*, aspects such as 'consumerism, conformity, organized religion, and militarism' (Sutherland 2007: 69) are not explicitly carried over to the post-apocalyptic landscape. The military is seen as completely impotent and ineffectual in resisting the threat that the zombies pose. Indeed, by the final episode, 'TS-19', all that is left of the military are burned-out vehicles that litter the streets surrounding the government facility at which the group has arrived. There are no members of the military in the group, and therefore the military does not feature prominently as a structuring agent post-apocalypse. Similarly consumerism is not directly challenged as an oppressive force, as the group lives predomi-

nantly within a camp, surviving on whatever they find in their immediate surroundings. The only items procured are guns and bullets, and there are no scenes of the group ransacking deserted shops as was the case with the survivors in the mall in *Dawn of the Dead*. In fact, very little institutional and state apparatuses are evident in *The Walking Dead*'s post-apocalyptic world. They are either nonfunctional (military), absent (religion, consumerism) or downplayed (issues of conformity), so that the remaining evidence of existing power structures is distilled within the role of the father and leader of the group. Shane represents the break from the past in his increasingly depersonalized and dehumanized response to the zombie threat, while Rick represents the continuation of the 'natural' order pre-outbreak. The fact that Shane and Rick hold irreconcilable positions in this first series highlights the difficulty, if not impossibility, of resolving this fractured social structure in which the individual seemingly has no control.

A key scene between Rick and Shane that highlights the emerging power dynamic of 'them' and 'us' happens after the mass zombie attack on the group in 'Vatos', where a number of key members are killed. When this attack happens, Rick is searching for Meryl with Daryl and Glenn while trying to recover a bag of guns that he dropped when he was last in the city. Rick's decision to go back for Merle is framed as a tough though moral choice and is noticeably opposed by Shane. During this excursion, Glenn is kidnapped, and although he is successfully rescued, they are delayed getting back to the group. Shane retains the physical and practical leadership of the group back at the camp, although, after the arrival of Rick, his leadership has become defined by aggression and violence. He has viciously beaten Ed in an attempt to restore his masculine power after it was stripped by Rick's reunion with Lori and Lori's cutting remark that 'from now on my family is off limits to you', and he aggressively berates and subdues Jim over his stubbornness to not take shelter from the sun. The ensuing zombie attack clearly outlines how the adversarial stance between Rick and Shane has left the group vulnerable and exposed to the all-encompassing presence of the zombie. Rick leaves to bring back Merle, taking valuable members away from the group in order to rescue a character marked as much more dangerous to the internal cohesion and safety of the group than the external threat of the zombies, so that their sense of humanity can be maintained and not lost. Shane's increasing aggression and authoritarian rule has fragmented the group and alienated certain members like Dale, Ed and Jim, which also minimizes the defensive capabilities of the group should they be attacked. Both fathers, Rick with the moral power and Shane with the physical power, are left isolated, their split identities seen as much in a negative light as their conjoined status as partners was seen as positive when we first met them both together. Indeed, both Rick and Shane look on helplessly as Andrea cries uncontrollably as her sister dies in

her arms. Both are impotent and ineffectual bystanders in this final scene, both unable to repel the zombie onslaught and to keep the group safe.

In the aftermath of the attack, the notion of a dominant father/leader is undermined as the portrayals of both Shane and Rick show them to lack the necessary qualities. The power dynamic inherent in these oppositional figures causes uncertainty to arise among the survivors about how best to proceed in this post-apocalyptic world. Daryl declares 'who's in charge here' and that the group is becoming too 'emotional' (1:05) in its decision making when protocol is contravened and the dead bodies of the group members are not burned along with those of the zombies. Daryl's post-apocalyptic sensibility is contradicted by Lori, who suggests that they are losing their humanity. She interrupts Daryl to say, 'we haven't had one minute to hold on to anything of our old selves ... we bury our dead, that is what people do'(1:05). Yet, in a preceding conversation after Andrea buried Amy, Lori blamed Rick for leaving, reinforcing Shane's position. She highlights the dialectic between the two when she says, 'All I can say is that neither one of you was entirely wrong. It's the best I can do right now' (1:05). Lori's reply to Rick emphasizes the difficulty in finding a third way between the pre-and post-apocalyptic worlds and, more importantly, between Rick and Shane. The show seems to suggest that either collaboration is required or a single patriarchal figure needs to emerge.

Later on in the same episode, Rick and Shane do a sweep of the camp in which the very issue of collaboration or a third way is raised. Rick mentions to Shane the distance between their two leadership styles when he implores 'Why can't you back me up?' to which Shane replies 'I want to. I just don't see it' (1:05). Rick further pushes the situation by relating the role of leader to that of being part of a family, explicitly conflating the role of leader with that of the father and thus accentuating how important family is in establishing patriarchal order. Rick goes on to say, 'If it was your family you'd see it', unaware of Shane's involvement with Lori and the close bonds he has formed with Carl. Therefore, the role of the family in *The Walking Dead* similarly poses a problem of establishing a way forward in this post-apocalyptic world in that both Rick and Shane see themselves as husband/father figures to Lori and Carl. Collaboration and/or separate and distinct yet equally involved male presence is withheld, leaving the only possibility of the emergence of one singular, dominant and completely unopposed leader/father figure. *The Walking Dead* intimates that this can happen only with the death of one or the other, and indeed Shane gets the chance almost immediately during their safety check on the camp when they split up to check the surrounding forest. Here their fractured status is seen as another example of weakness and vulnerability now that they are not working together. Yet, although Shane has Rick in his sights, he is unable or unwilling to pull the trigger. Despite the opportunity to kill Rick and take over as the unopposed leader/father and

completely relinquish the past, Shane's inability to do so suggests that the apocalypse, whatever its guise, will not bring about a cleansing of the past so that humanity can move on in a pure and unadulterated state. Dale also happens to see Shane take aim at Rick and simply says 'Jesus' (1:05) at the actions of Shane. Both Dale and the audience know that this schism between Rick and Shane is going to be dangerous to the safety of the group and may even represent a greater threat than that of the zombies.

The last key confrontation between Rick and Shane is in the series 1 finale, 'TS-19'. The group has successfully made it to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) only to find it manned by Jenner, a scientist who has long given up on finding a cure for the outbreak. However, it does represent a safe haven for the group, if only temporarily. As a consequence, the members relax and let their guard down through a combination of good food, wine and generally humorous conversations. Yet, concomitant with this reduction of fear and tension regarding the external zombie threat comes an amplification of internal issues and group divisions, especially for Shane. The copious amounts of wine make most of the group temporarily forgetful of their predicament, but for Shane it increases his aggressive instincts and violent behavior, bringing the monstrous patriarch to the fore. He attempts one final time to reassert his position as leader and as husband/father to Lori and Carl. Shane confronts Lori and drunkenly attempts to explain his actions during the outbreak, 'I'm gonna tell you a few things and you're gonna listen to me.' He tells Lori the reasons for leaving Rick behind at the hospital, 'Do you know what it was like there? Things were falling apart. It was a massacre . . . He was hooked up to machines and I did not know what to do' (1:06). As the conservation goes on, Shane becomes increasing desperate in his attempts to convince Lori that he did not abandon Rick so that he could insert himself within the family unit of Lori and Carl. He bangs on the table, hits the wall and pushes Lori onto a table before putting his hand around her throat in a semi-aggressive, semi-tender action, declaring 'I love you', before becoming increasingly violent and forcing himself on Lori, who violently protects herself by scratching his face and neck. Once again, and perhaps finally, repelled by Lori, Shane stalks the corridors and rooms of the facility before his inevitable confrontation with Rick. Shane has been expelled from the family dynamic of Lori and Carl, first with the arrival of Rick and most recently with his attempted rape of Lori, so the only other way to reassert his patriarchal order is physically to defeat Rick and take over the leadership of the group. Shane initiates the confrontation by threatening to shoot Jenner if he does not open the doors and allow the group to escape the facility after a self-destruct countdown was automatically started. The scene again highlights Shane's aggressive and violent character against Rick's calm and rational one, but this time both refuse to acquiesce. Instead of shooting Jenner, Shane turns his shotgun to the decks of computers surrounding them before Rick grabs the gun and they grapple with each

other. Rick manages to take the gun away from Shane, a clear symbolic action of stripping him of his phallic power, of castrating him and of denying him his masculine authority. Rick emerges with the gun, standing victorious over Shane's prone body, and now finally emerging as the sole leader of the group. However, Shane's continued presence, albeit emasculated, suggests that this spectacle of power and crisis in patriarchal order is only temporarily alleviated and is bound to return in series 2.

Conclusion: Series 2 and Patriarchal Authority Restored?

The commercial and critical success of series 1 and Robert Kirkman's resolute position that the survivors-versus-zombies narrative never come to end makes it rather unsurprising that *The Walking Dead* returned for another series. Series 2 continued the power dynamic between Rick and Shane and thus prioritized the patriarchal father/leader figure in the post-apocalyptic world in which the survivors now found themselves and thus reinforced the importance of the family in making sense of apocalyptic narratives and how it can relate to contemporary issues and concerns. The family becomes ever more important , especially in how it impacts the male identities and authority of Rick and Shane. First, it is revealed that Lori is pregnant and, not surprisingly, there is some question about who the father is, Rick or Shane. Second, Carl is accidently shot by a survivor belonging to a farm near where the group eventual settles and remains up until the final episode of the series. Both narrative developments forward thematic strategies formed and advanced in series 1: the tension between Rick and Shane in their claims to absolute authority and the impossibility, in this post-apocalyptic New World Order, of the two ever coexisting. However, there are two pivotal scenes in series 2 that offer new directions for the issue of masculinity and of the power of the father and patriarchal order. In these scenes, *The Walking Dead* continues its explicit focus on the family that further ossifies the connection between the private sphere of the family and patriarchal authority and fears and anxieties circulating in contemporary US society.

The first sequence takes place in episode 7, 'Pretty Much Dead Already' (2:07), which served as a mid-season finale. In this episode the main story arc comes to an end with the appearance of Sophie, who is now a zombie, ending the mystery surrounding her disappearance in *What Lies Ahead* (2:01) and the group's continual efforts to find her. The episode culminates with the shocking revelation that the barn next to the farmhouse where the group has been living is full of zombies. In fact, the zombies are family and friends of the people who live in the house, including the wife of the family's patriarch, Herschel. However, Shane vehemently opposes Herschel's (and Rick's) approach to the undead, who both believe that they still contain some essence of humanity and should not be killed in case a remedy to their condition or

cure can be found. But Shane is adamant that they should be killed, citing their absolute opposition to the living, and he aggressively leads a mutiny against Herschel and Rick that results in a brutal and savage attack on the zombies after they are let out of the barn. As scores of dead bodies litter the ground, the camera focuses on a final person leaving the barn showing the figure to be that of a child. As the camera pans up, the figure is revealed to be Sophia, ironically with the group all the time, and who now is a zombie. Shane's excessive violence toward the zombies is dramatically undercut by the appearance of the zombie Sophia, and he stands motionless as she walks toward him. Shane's depersonalization of the zombies manifested throughout both series is thrown into a crisis of meaning when Sophia, a person he had previously known, appears before him. Despite the threat, the members of the group are powerless to act until Rick walks forward and shoots her through the head.

Shane's desperate attempt to restore his masculine authority and leadership of the group by brutally killing the zombies in the barn collapses with the appearance of Sophia. Rick's actions in this scene once again underline his leadership position within the group but, more importantly, represent the first clear example of the successful combination of his post-apocalyptic sensibility with the remnants of his previous identity. Rick makes the difficult choice that nobody else within the group is able to make, but it is done in a rational manner as the moral choice. Here Rick understands completely, and perhaps for the first time, that the rules have changed and that there is now a different landscape to traverse, both geographically and psychologically. His ability to resist the debased and barbaric actions of others in the group led by Shane when they indiscriminately shot and killed dozens of zombies suggests also that he has retained his pre-apocalypse sense of self and strong moral and ethical beliefs. Conversely, Shane's violent and aggressive behavior, though linked with a dehumanizing approach to the zombies that is necessary in this post-apocalyptic scenario, is presented in this scene as a denial of his own human nature as violence and aggression have come to define and consume him. Thus, Rick finally emerges as the true post-apocalyptic father; he uses violence when strictly necessary but with a moral certitude in that it is for the benefit of the group and their ongoing survival.

The second key event in series 2 is when Rick finally expels the threat of the violent father/leader by killing Shane. In the penultimate episode, *Better Angels* (2:12), Rick stabs Shane after he purposely kills a prisoner from another group of survivors who potentially threaten the group's security on Herschel's farm. In their final confrontation, Shane attacks Rick's potency as a man and his ability as a father, highlighting once again how central to patriarchal authority in this post-apocalyptic world the issue of the family is. Shane attacks Rick's position as father by saying 'I'm a better father than you ... I'm better for Lori than you man, it's cos I'm a better man than you ... you

have a broken woman, you got a weak boy, you ain't got the first clue how to fix it.' It is the threat to his family and Shane's attempt to usurp as father that Rick cannot allow and what finally urges him to kill Shane.

The final confrontation between Rick and Shane thus unequivocally posits the impossibility of collaboration between the two of them. In many ways, the lack of solidarity between them provides a more conventional representation of the apocalyptic narrative in that a binary of 'them' versus 'us' is set up whereby Shane is seen as the evil, destructive force and Rick as the calm and moral figure. In this way, the narrative contradicts the collaborationist sentiments in other post-millennium apocalyptic TV shows such as *Battlestar Galactica*, *Jericho* and *Lost* (ABC, 2004–2010) and leans toward cinematic representations that have provided a more pessimistic treatment of patriarchy and male identity. In this respect, *The Walking Dead* so far provides perhaps a tacit agreement to US approaches to terrorism and foreign policy that define the issue as a fight between good and evil. Yet the spectacle of power inherent in Rick's development as father and leader in *The Walking Dead* suggests a much more ambiguous denouement to series 2. Rick is able to retain his humanity and sense of self from before the zombie outbreak by being level-headed, fair and violent only when necessary, as exemplified in the sequence where Sophia is killed. This act, however, a direct reference to the first zombie that Rick killed in 'Days Gone By', which initially presented Rick's masculine power and authority in fractured terms, also intimates that his position in this post-apocalyptic world is being compromised by the very structures of power he embodies. That is, in his shift toward seeing the zombie in a more depersonalized and dehumanized manner exposes the breakdown of order that Rick is so desperately trying to preserve. In this way, the series ultimately contributes to the crisis in male agency circulating through contemporary post-millennium and post-9/11 US cultural productions that posit the adversarial power dynamic rather than a collaborationist ethos as destructive not only to the family but to positive male agency. In series 3, one expects that Rick will not have to struggle to assert his authority over the remaining people in the group or his patriarchal position within his family but instead will have to contend with his own corruption of self as the humanizing attributes of the pre-apocalyptic world become subsumed by the dehumanizing aspects of the post-apocalyptic world.

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9

Will the End of the World Take Place in your Living Room? '*Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles*'—The Apocalyptic Prophecy Continues

Rubina Ramji

Over two thousand years ago, Jewish prophets foretold the 'Day of the Lord', a day when God will lay devastation upon the earth in retaliation for sins that have been committed by humanity. The word 'apocalypse' is often understood to mean that period of time when the war between good and evil will take place. In reality, the meaning of the word itself—from the Greek word *apokalypsis*–is 'revelation' (Martens 2003: 4). These revelations are given to humans through a divine source; therefore, one must have faith that such revelation will take place one day. These revelations are rife with the Greek word *eschaton*, meaning 'last', now used to denote 'the end of time'. Biblical eschatologists such as Daniel, Ezekiel, Mark and the author of Revelation tell us that the end is coming (Garrett 2010). The book of Revelation is of central concern to Christian eschatology.

Modern eschatologists, Christian theologians who focus on the end of the world, have spent centuries trying to understand the imagery and symbolism that surround these revelations, in order better to recognize the true meaning that has been handed down by God. Apocalyptic texts tell of a battle at the end of time, where 'good and bad will battle for sovereignty' (Martens 2003: 5). Some proclaim that at the end of the world, God will create a new heaven and a new earth. The messiah or savior will come forth, either sometime before or during the end of times. The idea of resurrection comes from the prophecies of Daniel. Christian eschatologists see the second coming of Christ as a seminal aspect in Revelation. Although these prophetic authors proclaimed the end of the world as a warning for events that were to unfold during their time ('the end is near'), no one knew exactly when that day was to arrive. One was to search for the signs God would send forth and to continue having faith that it would arrive.

Although this pending doom never occurred, those who had faith kept watch. In the West, apocalyptic writings are typically limited to the Judaic and Christian tradition; however, these apocalyptic themes and stories have

become manifest in the secular mind-set through literature, film and television. Today, most apocalyptic fiction focuses on the end of the world as we know it, rather than the end of everything. There are apocalyptic stories of the world being destroyed by aliens, by nature and by technology, and yet humans persevere. Other key elements of apocalyptic revelation remain strong today: the idea of a chosen savior—who may or may not announce the 'Day of the Lord'; a day of judgment, in the face of which the sinful better start repenting or changing their ways; a battle between good and evil forces; and, inevitably, the belief that the revelation itself is true, given by a divine origin, fated to be as foretold.

Popular forms of media in Western society often reflect the Judeo-Christian mythos within what we consider secular culture, without having to deal with the issue of faith (Rushing and Frentz 1995). Any subject can be dealt with from a religious perspective, including popular media, because it is a reflection of the maker's underlying worldview.

The book of Revelation 'has pervaded fantasies, fears and hopes about approaching apocalypse, and has become a meaning-making narrative for most of us in the West, Christian and secular alike' (Garrett 2010: 100). Modern interpretations of the apocalypse inundate us through movies, news, video games and television. Their prevalence illustrates our continuing fascination with apocalyptic themes. Although the particulars of ancient Jewish and Christian revelation may not be known by the general public, the underlying concept of truth in 'revelation' stays with us in the modern retellings of apocalypse. The apocalyptic story pattern of 'revelation' is clearly illustrated in the *Terminator* films and television series franchise.

The box-office and critically acclaimed *Terminator* films have an explicit 'religious allegory' as subtext (Sarder 1992). This religious subtext is carried onto the small screen through the television series *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles*. Like many other science fiction films and television shows made in the last two decades, they examine our 'ambivalent feelings about technology, our increasing anxieties about our own nature in a technological environment, and a kind of evolutionary fear that these artificial selves may presage our own disappearance or termination' (Tellote 1992: 26). The fear is that humans are becoming weak and indistinct, fated to be replaced by the artificial body, reducing the self to surfaces. At the same time, we are the makers of our own extinction.

The Terminator lays before us the dreadful future of humankind—the day of our judgment is at hand. The savior of our future is an unborn child known as John Connor. Sarah Connor receives a revelation about judgment day and the fact that she will bear the son who will save humankind. Her revelation comes from a divinely inspired source: Kyle Reese, a man from the future who has come back in time to save Sarah and her yet unborn son (in fact he has not been conceived yet), the man who will be John Connor's

father. Reese is the prophet, bringing revelation of a future reality, a reality that is distinct from the everyday world. A belief in God is not required to believe that an imminent end is to take place, but Sarah must believe, so that she can reconfigure her world to allow her unborn son to transform humanity when the battle between good and evil is to take place. Not only is John Connor the anticipated savior of humankind, but he also takes the role of God, as he will repair a corrupted world. At the same time, he is the seed of revelation; John Connor is the source of revelation that Kyle Reese bears with him. This revelation, sent back to Sarah Connor about her son, lets her know that her son will be triumphant over evil, an evil created through humanity's greed and lust for power. By accepting the revelation from Kyle, Sarah becomes one of the faithful and loyal followers of God and raises her son to be this triumphant savior of humanity (Garrett 2010).

The Terminator, directed and co-written by James Cameron, was released in 1984 and takes place in the same time period. The future is depicted as a world destroyed by a nuclear holocaust, where intelligent machines rule the earth. The movie then returns us to 1984, where we are introduced to two men who have been sent back from the future. One of the figures from the future turns out to be a cyborg terminator, the T-800, built by an artificial intelligence network known as Skynet. The terminator is played by Arnold Schwarzenegger. It is incapable of feeling pain or emotion, is supernaturally strong and almost indestructible because underneath its human exterior it has a metal endoskeleton. The other time traveler turns out to be a human, Kyle Reese, who was sent back to protect Sarah Connor and her unborn child: a child who will one day rally the few surviving humans against the artificial intelligence takeover of humanity through nuclear war. Kyle Reese explains to Sarah Connor that in the future, when the humans fight back against Skynet, it will in turn send a terminator back in time to kill her before she can give birth to her son, the future leader of the resistance against the machines. Kyle confides to Sarah that he himself volunteered to come back to protect her, and the equipment that permitted his time travel was to be destroyed in the future by other members of the resistance. He has sacrificed his future for her and her son's future. The story sounds delusional, and Kyle is questioned by a psychologist at the police station after the terminator has tried to attack Sarah, but the terminator returns and displays his emotionless strength by killing sixteen police officers. The truth of the future unfurls and Sarah and Kyle escape, only to end up together—it turns out that Kyle has always been in love with Sarah. At the end of the movie, Kyle sacrifices his life to save Sarah from the terminator. The movie then flashes forward to November 1984, and we see a pregnant Sarah making a tape recording for her son, informing him that his father is Kyle Reese and preparing him to be the leader of the future resistance when the apocalypse will inevitably arrive.

> Three billion lives ended on August 29th, 1997. Survivors of the nuclear fire called the war Judgment Day. They lived to face a new nightmare—the war against the machines (*Terminator 2: Judgment Day,* directed by James Cameron, 1991 [USA]).

Terminator 2: Judgment Day followed in 1991 and continues the story eleven years after Sarah Connor destroyed the original terminator, sent from the future to kill her. Now her son is ten years old and two terminators from the future, this time 2029, are sent back to find John Connor. The first terminator is identical to that of the first movie, again played by Arnold Schwarzenegger, and the other is a new model, which takes the form of a police officer. We find that John Connor is living with foster parents, as Sarah has been incarcerated for bombing a computer factory. She has spent the last ten years of her life preparing John for the impending apocalypse and his role in it as the leader of the future resistance, but also Sarah is now taking steps to stop the creation of the artificial intelligence that will rule the world in the future. This time, both terminators find John, but after young John is rescued by the original terminator, the T-800, we come to realize that this old model has been reprogrammed by the future John Connor to return and protect his younger self. The new and advanced terminator, the T-1000 is a prototype made of a mimetic poly-alloy, which is a liquid metal that allows the new terminator to take any shape it touches—it is programmed to kill John.

John orders the old model terminator to protect his mother from the new model and eventually all three manage to escape to the desert. The old-model terminator has information about Skynet, the computer system that will initiate the nuclear attack on humanity in the future, and Miles Dyson, the man responsible for creating the new microprocessor that will allow Skynet to become sentient. At this point in time in the story, it becomes clear that Sarah will no longer wait for fate to intercede. She decides to change the future by killing Dyson. When she confronts him, she is unable to kill him, and eventually she, John and the old-model terminator convince Dyson to destroy his research and the technology he has in his possession from the future—the arm of the last terminator that tried to kill Sarah in the first *Terminator* movie. Eventually Dyson's research is destroyed and Dyson himself is mortally wounded. Both terminators do battle, and in the end both are destroyed, along with the technology that would create the future terminators. The old-model terminator sacrifices itself to save the future of humanity. In the end, Sarah Connor holds hope for a new future, one that does not have to be like the one foretold in revelation through Kyle Reese.

The television series *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles* premiered in January 2008, and viewers were given a new twist to the story line. The series is set in 1999, and we find out that judgment day has not been prevented; only delayed until 21 April 2011. In the pilot episode, two other terminators have been sent back from the future, one sent by John Connor again

in the year 2027 to protect the fifteen-year-old John Connor in 1999. This terminator is female—her name is Cameron. Cameron was reprogrammed by John himself. The other terminator is Cromartie, who is damaged during the time leap and unable immediately to carry out his mission to assassinate John. Cromartie repairs himself and replaces his artificial flesh in order to continue his pursuit of the young John. Cameron, in order to save John from Cromartie, puts together a time machine that has been placed there by other members of the rebellion. The three, Sarah, John and Cameron make a temporal leap to the year 2007, where the anticipated war between the future Skynet and the resistance fighters is gathering strength in the present world. We also learn that Sarah has changed her own fate—she was to die of cancer in 2005 (before judgment day). By making the time leap, Sarah is given more time to prepare her son for the future apocalypse.

The Sarah Connor Chronicles follow from the *Terminator 2* film, in that Sarah and her teenage son strive to avert the impending apocalypse. Even though Dyson was killed in *Terminator 2*, we find out in *The Sarah Connor Chronicles* that Andrew Goode, an assistant to Dyson, has carried on his work in secret and has created an artificial intelligence prototype called 'The Turk'. The aim of the television series is to stop the birth of Skynet. It is their mission to keep the first 'cyborg' from being created, thus attempting to undo the prophecy that cyborgs will eventually destroy their makers, humankind. During the series run, television viewers waited anxiously every week to see how this band of renegades would prevent the end of the world from occurring and, if possible, change 'revelation'. The concept of a meaningless apocalypse brought about by human or natural causes is a relatively recent phenomenon. Instead of having faith in a redemptive new world order—to be established after the present world is annihilated—secular doomsday visions embody nihilism and the absurdity of the catastrophic outcome (Wojcik 1997). From the very beginning of the *Terminator* story line, the religious themes of a judgment day, the creation of the holy family, the fall of humanity from God and the prophecies of the expected messiah coming to conquer the devil emerge powerfully. It is these biblical manifestations that will be critically analyzed in this essay.

Certain aspects of popular culture serve as a repository of society's fears, longings, interpretations and representations. Popular media reflect societal behavior and attitudes and are powerful agents for communicating religious meanings, mythic stories and foundational ideological values of millions of people (Martin and Ostwalt 1995). To overlook the representations put forth by popular media is to overlook much of the underlying impetus that has molded and sustained the way culture is lived (Martin and Ostwalt 1995). To assume that popular media such as television are value-empty and superficial is trivializing in and of itself and ignores the impact that television has on society. Television series are fraught with issues dealing with gender, race,

faith, family, technology and a host of other value-driven concerns. The way we deal with these issues on the small screen reflects the way society negotiates them in daily life.

Television programs, as well as film, exist within a cultural moment, and the images that are broadcast reflect cultural experience and therefore extend beyond the narrative (Kellner 1995). Cultural products of a given time are 'deeply embedded in history, a particular language, and class structure, in specific modes of production, distribution and consumption' (Miller 1992: 10). Popular media are cultural products of our time. They reflect Western society's history, a history enmeshed in the stories of the Christian and Jewish Scriptures such that 'the imagination of any given individual in Western society can and almost certainly does contain a mix of Catholic and Protestant traits whether s/he is agnostic, atheist, Baptist, Buddhist, Catholic, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Pentecostal or Presbyterian' (Shafer 1991: 50).

As cultural events have shifted toward war, terrorist attacks, pandemics and global disasters, the images that are projected from our televisions have transformed as well to reflect the fears of the impending end-time and preordained apocalypse heralding the return of the savior. There is also a fear of the future because of its uncertainty. Television inserts religious understandings into contemporary cultural categories, especially those categories that emphasize the self, allowing the viewer to find religious meanings within secular programming while also encouraging viewers to pick and choose among the religious myths and rituals put forward (Roof 1997).

The Sarah Connor Chronicles places the viewer in the center of these cultural events and does not just reflect the fear of the end of times, but acknowledges the universal myth of the impending apocalypse along with the coming of the savior. The Christ myth is a catalyst for the development on which culture can lean, without dealing with the questions of belief or historical truth. Christ is often depicted as a hero, the embodiment of a mortal, or a redeemer on the supernatural level (Miles 1996). The fear of nuclear war and technology is placed in front of viewers and confronts them weekly with the threat that our judgement day is close at hand. Nevertheless, television also provides a redeemer or messiah who has already arrived. *The Sarah Connor Chronicles* offers hope to its viewers: perhaps Sarah and her son John can actually avert the apocalypse and save humanity from this assumed preordained fate.

Although imagery of the apocalypse runs rampant through US culture, the cosmic showdown between good and evil in the *Terminator* movies takes a crucial step in interpreting biblical prophecy and shaping it around human technology as the downfall of humanity. Rather than waiting for the devil or Antichrist to arrive, humans themselves will be responsible for physically creating the evil.

In episode 103 of *The Sarah Connor Chronicles*, entitled 'The Turk', Sarah reflects on the scientific response to the first detonation of the atomic bomb.

After witnessing the explosion of the first atomic bomb on 16 July 1945, Robert Oppenheimer declared, 'I am become death, the destroyer of worlds.' The stark reality is that, for the first time in human history, humanity could totally destroy itself in mere moments. Even though there was the awareness of the potential danger that this new technology could bring to the world, the nuclear age had begun and the genie could not be put back into the bottle.

Similarly, the creation of Skynet in the *Terminator* franchise further points to human indifference to the threat posed to humanity by such a creation. By attaining sentient thought, Skynet will become the Antichrist that we have created—it is the infrastructure of technology that we have fashioned to control our world. In this way, Skynet utilized humanity's creation of a nuclear arsenal to destroy the world. It is perhaps through our own ignorance that we commit the sin of trying to kill our own creation (Skynet), thereby forcing the evil to rise up against us. According to Christian theologian Gregory of Nyssa, although humans by nature strive to be good, it is ignorance of self-delusion that causes us to do that which is not good for us. Thus, evil is done when we try to create something in our own image (in the context of the series, Skynet becomes cognizant), and by destroying it, we are destroying ourselves at the same time (Martens 2003). It is the attempt to shut down Skynet that prompts its retaliatory action, launching nuclear weapons against Russia, who then retaliates. This wipes out the world in minutes. This is judgment day in *The Terminator*.

Episode 104, 'Heavy Metal,' draws our attention to the fact that Sarah understands our desire to be creators through technology. She also sees the potential for our own downfall. Yet she acknowledges that any creation, whether human or machine, cannot be truly controlled. In the closing monologue of episode 104, Sarah realizes that we, through our own imperfections, can never be God, because we are doomed to produce imperfections in our own creations.

> Not every version of the Golem story ends badly. In one, the monster is a hero, destroying all those that seek to harm his maker. In another, the Golem's maker destroys his creature before it can destroy the world. The pride of man, of parents as well, makes us believe that anything we create we can control. Whether from clay or from metal, it is in the nature of us to make our own monsters. Our children are alloys all, built from our own imperfect flesh. We animate them with magic and never truly know what they will do.

It also points to the fact that even if we destroy our creations, we are destined to make monsters. A continuing idea in *The Sarah Connor Chronicles* is that the technology that will destroy the world is used to help us somehow save the world. Cameron is sent back specifically by John Connor to aid him in his journey toward messiahhood. Therefore the only way to avert disaster is to blend human and technological advancement. But we must make sure

that this technology possesses a highly evolved sense of ethical and moral responsibility rooted in religious sensibilities (Cameron is told that she cannot kill indiscriminately).

Eschatologists claim that human efforts are futile in the face of the struggle with evil—the apocalypse cannot be averted through human will alone. The only way to eradicate it is through supernatural means or intervention. The faithful must believe in the revelation and not work against it. A person who has faith cannot reduce the violence or conflict, cannot stop the suffering of humans, but must realize that all these struggles are occurring as signs of the eschatological revelation of God (Boyer 2005). Instead of waiting passively for doomsday to arrive, *The Sarah Connor Chronicles* pull the viewer into the belief that the destruction of the wicked and triumph of the good can occur without the bloody battle and destruction of the world. The knowledge is provided to the viewer, the 'apocalypse' is unveiled and so the preordained outcome can perhaps be averted by John and Sarah Connor and those who align themselves with them. In episode 201, 'Samson and Delilah', Cameron asks Sarah whether she believes in the resurrection story of Jesus Christ. Cameron claims that she has not been programmed to have faith, and Sarah concurs that perhaps faith is not part of her own programming either. The fact that Sarah hopes to change the future, to stop the day of judgment from occurring, illustrates a move away from futility to optimism and changes the true meaning of 'apocalypse'. Revelation is not necessarily a fixed future, but one that can be potentially transformed. It is Sarah's unyielding hope in human agency that can possibly change future outcomes. In this sense, the eschatological story is no longer predicated on passivity and faith but instead is refashioned for a secular audience where agency and hope offer salvation. In a way, *The Sarah Connor Chronicles* allow the viewer to step away from the deterministic outcome of humanity's future that has formed the universal apocalyptic myth, away from the 'faith-based' beliefs of the apocalypse, to illustrate that we as humans can perhaps save ourselves from ourselves.

The concepts of agency and hope begin in the first *Terminator* movie. When Sarah Connor is told that her son will be the savior of humankind in the future, she does not wait to see how this will happen. The movie ends with Sarah making recordings for her unborn son, preparing him for the future and preparing herself to fight a war. Sarah Connor, in *Terminator 2*, transforms her body into a strong fighting machine, in order to take on the supernaturally strong terminators that are out to kill her and her son. However, even though her goal is to stop Skynet and the cyborg—a mission to eradicate the machines—the terminator(s) in *Terminator 2* and *The Sarah Connor Chronicles* begin to exhibit human qualities. Although the terminators have been reprogrammed, they represent a future where the day of judgment has come to pass. Rather than being destroyed, both come to play important roles in the life of John Connor. They protect and befriend him. In *The*

Sarah Connor Chronicles, episode 102 ('Gnothi Seauton' [Know Thyself]), John Connor states that he needs Cameron, she saves his life.

We cannot forget that the cyborg, or terminator, in its original incarnation is 'a virtually indestructible killing machine, brought into the present from the future, from beyond Armageddon' (Loughlin 2004: 206). In order to protect her son in the present world and to change the fate of the future, in *Terminator 2* Sarah Connor becomes violent and emotionally detached. Although in *The Sarah Connor Chronicles* the figure of Sarah is not as muscular, she remains emotionally aloof, believing that in order to be a strong leader of the future resistance, John must learn to separate himself from his emotions. Perhaps in this way, John loses his own humanity, spending more time with Cameron until the future John cuts himself off from his followers. Cameron becomes John's love interest in the future. In the first two films, the terminator is always male, but in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* we see Sarah Connor evolve physically, fine-tuning her body with machinelike precision in an effort to reach peak physical conditioning. Her body bulges with muscles, and her only goal is to protect her son, no matter the cost. Yet the more she transforms herself physically, the less human she becomes, displaying a cold exterior and emotional detachment. Consequently, the T-800 begins to fill the space of parent in John's young life. In these instances, the machine becomes superior to the human.

In *The Sarah Connor Chronicles*, the terminator that is sent back from the future to protect John Connor is a female, who is then integrated into the family as his 'sister'. She promises to obey John and does not kill at random. She shares secrets with him and alludes to the fact that she knows more about him than he knows himself. She is of an unknown model and no one knows of what she is capable. She also exhibits human feelings and acts like a human. In this way, she comes to resemble an emotional human more than Sarah Connor did in the last movie and in the television series. The reprogrammed terminators, although artificial, are somehow superior to the humans surrounding the savior. Although their sole purpose is to protect John in the present, they are both able to provide the mental, emotional and physical strength John requires to continue. We humans have created machines to watch over us as deities once did so that we know that we are not alone. The only difference is that the machines are tangible and can be seen, whereas gods are ethereal and, in a sense, absent from the world.

Although set in the current technological times, the *Terminator* series not only puts forward the universal mythical story of the apocalypse but also suggests the reality of the sacred to its audience. *The Terminator* begins with the rebel Kyle Reese coming back in time from the twenty-first century to the year 1984 in order to warn a Los Angeles waitress, Sarah Connor. In some instances, Reese can be seen as God, as he impregnates Sarah with the messiah. At other times, he can be viewed as the archangel Gabriel. Sarah is the

modern version of the Virgin Mary, the mother of a political Messiah who will bring salvation to the world (Rushing and Frentz 1995). But in order for the savior to be born, Sarah has to be saved from the cyborg machine, 'also a product of a post-nuclear war future', who is on a mission to kill her (Sardar 1992: 493). In questioning her own ability to bear this child, Sarah Connor states, 'Do I look like the mother of the future?' She proves to be just that. The Connor family is also structured in a very Christian way. John Connor is, in a way, a holy child, as he is fathered from the future by a man who sacrifices his life to make sure he is born. 'The child will grow up to defeat the future killing machines, just so long as they do not kill him first. Thus they send a machine from the future to destroy him, as do the last survivors of humanity to protect him. It is the story of a child saviour, beset by demons and protected by angels' (Loughlin 2004: 207). Sarah Connor makes it her mission to make sure that her son grows up to be the savior of humankind.

James Cameron's *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* continues the saga and at the same time repeats the same religious story. The messiah, John Connor, or the new Jesus Christ, is now an intelligent boy who suffers from an absent father figure and longs for his mother, who has been hospitalized because of her 'delusions' about the apocalypse (Tellote 1992: 31). John forms an alliance with the old-model terminator, sent back to protect John from a newer, deadlier version of the cyborg, the T-1000. Sarah, the virgin, has been transformed into a tough, cold, emotionless fighter, in a sense shaping herself into the 'best human cyborg possible' in order to deal with the future apocalypse brought on by the technological cyborgs (Tellote 1992: 31). She takes on the single-mindedness of the terminator in preparation for the future fight against the evil cyborg, thus becoming what she wishes to destroy. This forces her son, John, to exemplify human qualities for both of them. *Terminator* can also be seen as the New Testament solution to the Old Testament myth of the Fall. 'Man' has made the cyborg, just as God has made humans. But now, the cyborgs have decided to take their fate into their own hands and destroy their makers, humankind. The cyborg thus becomes viewed as an extension of the devil, carrying the sins of humanity (Rushing and Frentz 1995). This 'devil' archetype is reinforced by the terminators themselves: the first glimpse we get of this idea is at the end of the first *Terminator* movie. The cyborg's superficial human covering is destroyed and all that is left is the pure technological device, its red eyes glowing as it tracks down Sarah Connor in its relentless quest to kill her.

A variety of other religious themes come through in the *Terminator* franchise. The apocalyptic eschatology of the Old Testament prophesizes that the messiah will conquer Satan in a glorious military battle, just as Sarah vanquishes the T-800 terminator in the present and her son John is prophesied to do in the future (Rushing and Frentz 1995). In the New Testament, Christ dies for humanity's sins, much as Kyle Reese, the warrior from the future,

does in this film. But the first film does not end with total victory. Sarah Connor knows that an apocalyptic gloom still awaits us because the technological killing machines still exist in the future. This realization leads us to the sequel, *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*.

Terminator 2: Judgment Day intensifies the threat of overdeveloped technology and highlights the individual's responsibility for saving humankind. Arnold Schwarzenegger, a demon in the first movie, is now rehabilitated and becomes 'the savior of humanity', in a sense stealing John Connor's destiny determined in *Terminator* and thus negating human creativity in saving the future (Rushing and Frentz 1995: 184). The terminator comes back this time to protect John Connor with absolute devotion and superhuman strength. The old-model terminator is transformed in the sequel and so becomes the most likely candidate to be a mythological god. He is no longer a soulless killing machine but a highly evolved, superhuman individual, the only character in the movie suitable to be John's father. As Sarah Connor watches her son play with the T-800, she is struck by this revelation:

> Watching John with the machine it was suddenly so clear. The Terminator would never stop. It would never leave him. And it would never hurt him. Never say it was too busy to spend time with him. Of all the would-be fathers that came and went over the years, this machine, this thing, was the only one who measured up. In an insane world, it was the sanest choice (*Terminator 2: Judgment Day*).

Not only is the terminator elevated to a perfect father figure, but in the end he becomes the savior of humankind. The only way the loop of technological evil and impending apocalypse can be stopped is to destroy both terminators. The old-model terminator saves John Connor and Sarah by destroying the T-1000 in molten iron, but he also saves the future by sacrificing himself. The old-model terminator now has the only surviving chip in his head, the site of technological power that can destroy the future. By destroying himself, he saves humankind. He dies so that others can live.

Near the end of *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, Sarah Connor lowers the now humanized T-800 into the same molten iron as the other Terminator, amid the tears of John Connor. God has sacrificed himself again in order to save us from our future sins. As the film ends, we hear Sarah Connor's voice reflecting:

> The unknown future rolls towards us. I face it for the first time with a sense of hope. Because if a machine, a terminator, can learn the value of human life, maybe we can too (*Terminator 2: Judgment Day*,).

In *The Sarah Connor Chronicles*, the role of the terminator in John's life becomes even more complex. Not only has the terminator played the role of his absent father; now it is his love interest. Cameron wields power in the future over John Connor, to the point that resistance fighters come back

from the future to make the young John turn away from her and fall in love with a human, not a machine. But by the end of season 2, John is left with Cameron to decide the fate of the world. Our downfall is caused by our creation of machines and our reliance on them. Although we are the creators, we have given up the responsibility of monitoring and controlling them (Sardar 1992). Our salvation perhaps lies in the machines themselves, because they evolve into the god figures we can never be. The terminator takes over the responsibility of our mistakes by dying for us but also manipulates the human savior, showing the weakness of the human being over the machine.

Unlike the first *Terminator* movie, *Terminator 2* depicts Sarah with a hope for the future. *The Sarah Connor Chronicles* heighten this portrayal in a multifaceted way. From the very beginning of the television series, Sarah provides a running monologue, expressing her hopes and fears for John and for the future of humanity. Interwoven throughout the television series is Judeo-Christian eschatology articulated in explicit ways.

Episode 102, 'Gnothi Seauton' (Know Thyself), has Sarah wondering whether we can change the future or whether revelation is fated to be, no matter how hard we try to control our current situation. In this sense Sarah realizes that she has received revelation; she has tried to tell others of this divinely inspired revelation, and yet she works to try to change the future. She contemplates a future that she cannot change, no matter how hard she tries to change it:

> A wise man once said, 'Know thyself.' Easier said than done. I've had nine aliases, twenty-three jobs, spoken four languages, and spent three years in a mental hospital for speaking the truth. At least when I was there I could use my real name. Through it all I've always known who I am and why I'm here. Protect my son. Prepare him for the future. But lately, it's gotten harder to control. Even as I try to help John find firm ground in this new world, the battlefield shifts beneath our feet. Maybe it's all catching up to me. Maybe if you spend your life hiding who you are, you might finally end up fooling yourself.

In the closing monologue of episode 107, Sarah realizes humanity's weaknesses. But she sees the truth about technology—it can never be human because it can never have faith. And faith is what motivates Sarah to protect and raise her son according to revelation: revelation that he will be humanity's savior.

> There was a time when I was a hero to my son. He thought I walked on water. He knows better now. We all have weak moments. Moments where we lose faith. But it's our flaws, our weaknesses that make us human. Science performs miracles like the gods of old. Creating life from blood cells or bacteria or a spark of metal but they're perfect creatures and in that way they couldn't be less human. There are things machines will never do. They cannot possess faith, they cannot commune with God, they cannot appreci-

> ate beauty, they cannot create art. If they ever learn these things, they won't have to destroy us. They'll be us.

The religious allegory in the *Terminator* franchise is a continuing subtext. The ideas of 'fate and destiny, determinism and free will, the empowerment of the individual and the ability of every person to change the course of the future' are analyzed on both the silver and the small screen (Sardar 1992: 493). Not only does television examine and challenge our prevailing attitudes about society, but it also performs religious and iconographic functions (Martin and Ostwalt 1995). Unlike the movies, catastrophe is not diverted in a television serial by human heroism, and therefore we, as viewers, do not get to experience the triumphant culmination of fixing all the wrongs and making them right. Weekly, we prepare to find out the fate of our future. As viewers we are also at the mercy of the media moguls, who may leave us with no satisfactory ending.

When *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles* opened, it had a short run in the first season of only nine episodes. Nonetheless, the program received the highest rating for a new script series for 2007–2008 and was given another full season (Schneider 2008). After season 2, Fox television decided to cancel the series, much to the dismay of its fans. Viewers had become invested in the characters and the struggles they underwent to be who they were meant to be. The series openly questioned God's role in reality, as well as our own ability to control our destinies. *The Sarah Connor Chronicles* allowed its audience to explore religious themes—with revelation remaining at the heart of it—thereby blending sci fi with spirituality. And it offered its viewers a sense of hope for the future, that the foretold future of apocalypse could be averted with tenacity and perseverance.

Terminator Salvation (2009), the fourth film installment, released in theaters right after *The Sarah Connor Chronicles* ended, does not give the viewer the hope of a better future, the ability to stop the apocalypse: it has arrived. In the year 2018 the judgment day for humanity arrives; the end begins. The only question left is Who will win the war? Perhaps the cancellation of the television series tells us that there is no way to change revelation.

So where does this leave us? Even though apocalyptic themes continue to shape the way we see, the themes do not go very far unless recognized. Religion has found a vehicle in popular media to reach out to more people than ever, but the message is often discounted. The science fiction genre in general tends to pit the little people against the big issues (Shelde 1993). The issues are scientific side effects or mechanical monsters that science has unleashed upon the world. Science fiction gives us a means to vent our fears of having no access to the crucial verdict about where science goes and what it does, but at the same time the sci-fi genre remains weak because it can offer only a dreamlike escapism (Shelde 1993). We live in a world that is changing quickly

because of technology. We are substituting machines for humans to provide us with social interaction and entertainment. We can see that we lack power within the technological world that we have built around us, which isolates us from each other. It leaves us waiting for the unknown superhuman messiah to return and save us from the futuristic apocalyptic fate we continue to inflict upon ourselves. As most of our religious myths and science fiction stories conclude, it is the hero who always wins, and the monster is always killed. And it is 'always one man or woman, who, single-handedly does it' (Shelde 1993: 242). *The Sarah Connor Chronicles* continued the myth and yet offered hope that we do not have to endure the apocalypse that has been prophesied —we can avert the war before it begins. We can have peace and justice without the suffering and bloodshed. Perhaps viewers were looking for hope rather than futility. Unfortunately, they were never given it. *Terminator Salvation* tells us that we cannot alter revelation once it has been given. The future cannot be changed. Get ready for the apocalypse.

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10

Apocalyptic and Prophetic: Revelation and Mystery in the Revival of *Doctor Who*

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Who is Dr Who? Is he a post-apocalyptic survivor? Is he a pre-apocalyptic savior? Or is he the ultimate of the apocalypse itself? These are the emergent questions that have tantalized viewers of the 2005 revival of the BBC science fiction/fantasy series *Doctor Who*. In recent scholarship, two paths are being offered for appropriate 'interpretation' of the world/s and characters that inhabit *Doctor Who* in all its manifestations since its initial appearance on British television in 1963. One perspective, advanced by Piers D. Britton in *Tardisbound: Navigating the Universes of Doctor Who* (2011), is that the new television series should be regarded as part of 'an unwieldly skein of texts' that include, not only the original BBC TV series but its subsequent movie offshoots, novels, comics and audio dramas (2011: 11). As a consequence, it would be inappropriate and possibly counterproductive to try to locate or fix the 'meaning' of the *Dr Who* narrative with regard to specific events and claims in any particular narrative manifestation.

An alternative perspective, according to James Chapman in *Inside the TARDIS: The Worlds of Doctor Who. A Cultural History* (2006), is that the new series was conscientiously produced and promoted as a new series in its own right, with its own 'rules', rather than as a continuation of either the original series or any of its other manifestations in print, film or audio (2006: 186). Rather than review, in this brief chapter, the relative merits of each of these stances I have chosen Chapman's perspective from which to interrogate notions of the apocalyptic and the prophetic as they have played out across the current six series of the *Doctor Who* revival. The 'new' *Doctor Who* series can be usefully evaluated and interpreted as its own entity without needing to be consistent with either its predecessors or its other narrative manifestations in novel, audio or comic book.

Prior to examining the 'character' and dramaturgical function of the Doctor by way of comparison to other fictional heroes in popular science fiction/fantasy, I will draw attention to the significance of scholarly meanings of the terms *apocalyptic* and *prophetic* in distinction from their more popularized

usage. Having then identified the Doctor's iconic significance in the emerging narrative, I will draw special attention to how the concepts of the apocalyptic and prophetic have played out through both the writing of founding producer and head writer Russell T. Davies and his co-writer and successor, Steven Moffatt, and their respective regenerations of the Doctor—Christopher Eccleston, David Tenant and Matt Smith. In conclusion, the question of who is the Doctor will be contextualized within the broader consideration of 'who cares'—why audiences continue to participate enthusiastically in this apparently unending and necessarily irresolvable mystery.

The Apocalyptic and the Prophetic

John J. Collins argues in his discussion of the genre of so-called apocalyptic literature that more recent scholarship has dropped the use of the term 'apocalyptic' as a noun and now distinguishes between 'apocalypse as a literary genre, apocalypticism as a social ideology, and apocalyptic eschatology [the study of the last days, the last times] as a set of ideas and motifs that may also be found in other literary genres and social settings' (Collins 1998: 2). It therefore becomes important to make a distinction between the artefacts of apocalyptic literature and the adjectival use of the term 'apocalyptic'. Collins notes the predominance, in scholarship, of the use of the thesis of *Semeia* 14 (1979) in which an apocalypse is defined as

> *... a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world* (Collins 1998: 5 [italics in original]).

However, Collins reminds us that any genre is not an object in itself but merely an interpretive tool whose efficacy depends on a listener's or reader's expectations:

> An interpreter always begins with an assumption about the genre of a text. If our expectations are fulfilled, the assumptions will need no revision ... There can be no understanding without at least an implicit notion of genre (Collins 1998: 8).

The human recipient and mediator of such revelations is what we have come to recognize as a prophet. A prophet is called and often compelled to speak to either an individual or a community about what has been revealed from another 'place' about what is and what may come to pass. Interpretation becomes crucial, as it can remain ambiguous as to whether things will happen as they have been foretold or, if the current world order changes its behavior, a future judgment may be averted. In either case, the prophetic call is a call to enact one's loyalty to either the age that is or the age that is to come, once

the present age is purged and destroyed. Thus, the noun 'apocalypse' and its generic expectations in literature have become associated with the usually violent and bloody exposing of the penultimate loyalties of divine and human beings.

Yet apocalypse is derived, originally, from the Greek word *apokalypsis*. In the Greek, *kalyptein* means 'to hide', and *apo* conveys a dynamic interchange between hiding and revealing (Moulton 1978: 212, 40). Therefore, revelation may, at a deeper level, be understood as the simultaneous self-manifestation and self-withdrawal of the divine mystery, the unveiling of what is hidden and the veiling of what is revealed. *Revelatio* is the Latin equivalent for the action of unveiling from which we get the English words for 'reveal' and 'revelation'—though without the acknowledgment that when something is revealed it is not necessarily fully exposed. But it is from the German word equivalent for revelation, *Offenbarung*, that the sense of total exposure comes into play. *Offenbarung* also conveys the sense of giving birth to something that can never be covered again or hidden; once revealed, it is totally on view. It is this German sense of revelation—total exposure—that has dominated much Western theological thought in relation to the concept of revelation. The earlier paradoxical and simultaneous dynamic of revealing and veiling is lost in contemporary understandings of revelation. This means that the quality of simultaneous truth and mystery inherent in the root meaning of apocalypse is downplayed.

It is these notions of revelation *and* hiddenness that coexist alongside the penultimate loyalties of 'alien' and human beings in times of crisis to which I wish to draw attention as recurring motifs in *Doctor Who*. However, at the outset I want to indicate that I am not suggesting that there has been any intentional structuring of the narrative to mirror the apocalyptic characters and events described in the Revelation of John in the Bible. Rather I will suggest that the emergent and, in fact, divergent narrative of *Doctor Who* embodies many of the mythical thematics of both Revelation and the four Gospels that precede it, even as one of the chief writers of the series, Russell T. Davies, is reported to be 'avowedly atheist' (Walker 2007: 264, 265). The 'apocalyptic' crisis—spatial and/or temporal—in the contemporary series always exposes us, as audiences, to deeper insights, mysteries and loyalties that 'make a difference' in the world in which we live. Maurice Wiles notes that for revelation to have efficacy it requires both the actions of the revealer and receptiveness of the one to whom it is revealed. In other words, revelation is 'essentially a relational concept; it is the revealing of something by someone to someone else' (Wiles 1997: 100). However, Wiles qualifies this with the observation that revelation is not always the straightforward action of a revealer; it also requires that the recipient be sensitive and available to receive and recognize as meaningful that which is being revealed. Furthermore, sometimes the actions of the revealer may result in new insight and 'revelation' that are unexpected

within the person to whom the action is directed, as well as unanticipated by the revealer who has initiated the action. These dynamics of the process of revelation highlight both 'the ordinary words and actions of a person proving revelatory to the perceptive observer' and 'the revelatory power of a work of art, produced by its creator but now existing in its own right' (Wiles 1997: 106). Therefore, revelation requires simultaneously intended potentiality and imaginative human awareness and engagement for the process of revelation to be complete (ibid.). Rose, the first companion of the Doctor, reflecting on the significance of her journeying with him, declares, 'The Doctor showed me a better way of living your life—you don't give up, you don't just let things happen, you make a stand, you say no!' (Davies 2005). The recurring use of apocalyptic and prophetic narrative 'devices' to advance the story enable the storytellers of *Doctor Who* to engage with audiences over questions of free will, destiny, choice, cause and effect, and responsibility.

Doctor Who? *From Survivor to Savior to Threat*

In the 'world' of the 2005 series *Doctor Who*, we are informed early in the first episode that the main character, known as 'the Doctor', is purportedly the sole survivor of Great Time Wars (Davies 2005). He is the last of an alien race known as the Time Lords and travels through space and time in the TARDIS (Time And Relevant Dimension In Space). (It should be noted that some of the narrative devices that informed prior 'versions' of the series have been preserved in this new series and, where dramatically useful, modified. The fact that the TARDIS looks like an English blue Police Box from the 1960s has been preserved in accordance with the myth that the TARDIS was designed to blend into any surrounding—except that its chameleon circuit malfunctioned and became fixed as the Police Box [Couch, Watkins and Williams 2005: 4].)

In this series, the Doctor has heroic qualities rather than being some kind of superhero—although as the series unfolds he does also demonstrate special gifts (psychic mind-melding powers, the ability to regenerate) and abilities (scientific and cultural knowledge of civilizations, technologies and phenomena across time and space). However, unlike American superheroes, who frequently resort to special powers and brute strength, he primarily uses his wit and intelligence to address conflict and violence. At the same time, it also becomes apparent that he is a traumatized war veteran (Chapman 2006: 190). His desire to bring healing and justice to life across the universe occurs more frequently by circumstance than by intention. It is not clear why he travels through time and space apart from being motivated by a sense of adventure into the unknown and mysterious. Yet the writers of *Doctor Who* also create adventures by which the TARDIS is drawn to a crisis in time and space that the Doctor must, willingly or unwillingly, address. Over the six series we also

learn that the TARDIS does enclose a living consciousness that helps account for such behavior.

By contrast, superheroes of American crime fiction and science fantasy have followed the archetypal template of the mythic heroes of antiquity—uniquely gifted with both strengths and weaknesses and regularly called upon to maintain the status quo. They provide human society with rescue and restitution because of their extraordinary powers, but this, in turn, creates a relationship of co-dependency and perpetual surveillance. The hero believes that he or she must never relinquish the role of rescuer or empower those who feel victimized. Perhaps the crucial test emerges when it is a matter of life and death. Unlike superheroes who can escape death only by eluding it, the Doctor, as a Time Lord, regularly overcomes death by regenerating. He seeks to bring appropriate liberty and justice to communities across the universe but always keeps on the move, trusting that those rescued have been empowered to find their own way forward.

However, this somewhat 'detached' involvement that he perceives he has, as a lone Time Lord, does have costly consequences that he seems reluctant to acknowledge. The recurring trait of hiddenness (that few ever recognize the significance of what the Doctor has done for their well-being) becomes increasingly thrown out of balance by revelations that impact the few who do recognize who he is and what he aspires to do in the midst of evil and injustice. Such revelation often compels those who do 'see with new eyes' to sacrifice themselves, in response to the Doctor and his plans, for the greater good of alien/human beings and/or communities that are in danger. As each series unfolds, the cumulative awareness that the Doctor confronts is that he creates martyrs wherever he goes. It is this tension between mystery and revelation and its implications for choice and destiny that make the revitalized *Doctor Who* series such compelling viewing.

'Endings' and New Beginnings

The paradox of the apocalyptic is not only that there is simultaneous revealing and concealing. If the apocalypse signifies the 'end' of an existing order of life, it also implicitly heralds the genesis of a new and different order—what may be understood as the post-apocalyptic. Exploration of the post-apocalyptic has been one of the strengths of British science fictions from its earliest days in the writings of H.G. Wells, Aldous Huxley and George Orwell. Christian Hoffstadt and Dominik Schrey, in their discussion of British post-apocalyptic fiction, observe that British science fiction is known for its strong sociocritical tradition and the deployment of dystopian visions of the future as a means of questioning contemporaneous culture and society (Hoffstadt and Schrey 2011: 29). This is in contrast to much American science fiction, which dwells more on the visual and violent drama of apocalyptic events

themselves rather than the ideas and values of a culture that are being tested for their integrity and efficacy in the face of a final showdown between an 'old' age and a 'new' age.

In the world of *Doctor Who*, the Doctor understands his identity as that of a post-apocalyptic survivor of his own race, the Time Lords. The paradox is that the end of a 'world/s order' can occur in one time and place while new 'world/s order' can emerge or evolve in other times and places. The Doctor often comments on the development of the human race with a special fondness as he has watched it grow and change over centuries. And it would appear that his commitment to the evolution of alien species across the universe is what motivates him to endeavor to prevent any other perceived 'apocalyptic' threats to space and/or time. The final episode in each of the five seasons of the series has a penultimate apocalyptic climax (often undergirded by prophetic announcements) as suggested in each episode title: 'The Parting of the Ways' (series 1), 'Doomsday' (series 2), 'Last of the Time Lords' (series 3), 'Journey's End' (series 4), 'The End of Time—Part 2' (the specials), 'The Big Bang' (series 5). But the sixth season offers a new hidden twist with the provocative title 'The Wedding of River Song' and a still-to-be-fulfilled prophecy (http://www.bbc.co.uk/doctorwho/dw).

Yet, while it is understandable that having a epic finale for each series is, at one level, a matter of pragmatism to ensure that viewing audiences stay loyal to each series, I would argue that the writers have also used this 'necessity' of programming to take audiences deeper into the ever-contemporary ethical and philosophical issues that *Doctor Who* addresses. These include questions about what it means to be human and to value memory, what it means to have both free will and responsibilities toward all life, and whether cause and effect mean that some circumstances and actions are destined to be and cannot be undone. I will now briefly analyze the ultimate (and, where relevant, the penultimate) episode of each series for 'signs' of revelation and hiddeness, and accompanying prophecies, which may inform these ethical and philosophical quests.

'The Parting of the Ways' (Series 1)

The Doctor (played by Christopher Ecclestone), his human companion, Rose Tyler, and rogue fellow time traveler Captain Jack Harkness are trapped in the twenty-fifth century, where the Daleks (who were supposedly killed in the Great Time Wars), the greatest of enemies of the Time Lords, are planning the annihilation of earth before destroying the universe and transforming the rest to become like them. The Daleks claim that that they now have a Dalek 'god', the Supreme Dalek, that they worship, who will bring about the end of the old 'age' and introduce a new Dalek 'age'. Audiences following the series have noted there have been numerous physical signs declaring 'Bad Wolf'

that have become more prevalent in the many preceding episodes. The Doctor and Rose have interpreted these signs as a forewarning of some danger coming to threaten them and earth in the future. When it seems inevitable that the Doctor will die and earth in the future is doomed, the Doctor tricks Rose into going into the TARDIS and then sends it back to earth in the present day so Rose will be safe and, at the Doctor's request, 'have a great life'. But it is back on earth that she realizes that the message 'Bad Wolf' is not a warning but a message that, in the future, she has/will make/will have made a difference as to how things might be (Davies 2005).

It is this provocation that inspires Rose to risk her life by 'connecting' with the consciousness of the TARDIS and return to the future imminent apocalypse to rescue the Doctor, the earth and the universe. But her action entails looking into the time vortex, which reveals all time and space to her. She becomes godlike, with the ability to destroy all the Daleks in that time and bring back to life Captain Harkness (who has died trying to help the Doctor). It is revealed to the Doctor that it is actually Rose who, with the power of the time vortex, has been leaving the message 'Bad Wolf' across time and space as a sign of the significance of her willingness to say no to evil, to declare her loyalty. However, because Rose is human she is doomed to die while carrying the vortex within. The Doctor embraces once more his 'role' as healer and frees her from the vortex by absorbing it into his body and returning it into the TARDIS (Davies 2005). This process necessitates the need for him to regenerate, and this is when audiences are introduced to the next Doctor, played by David Tennant.

'Doomsday' (Series 2)

This episode offers a different apocalyptic scenario, in which the earth is not so much the focus of attack but the battlefield on which two archenemies of the Doctor, the Daleks and the Cybermen, battle each other in order to gain access to the destruction and domination of two parallel universes. However, it is highlighted that it is humanity's overuse of resources and the resultant climate change that make it possible for the Cybermen and Daleks to cross over, through a breach, between the parallel worlds (Davies 2006b). Over the course of this series, the character of the new Doctor (played by David Tennant) has been slowly revealed through his actions in response to various crises as a Time Lord who seems less traumatized and now claims a certain authority in determining the powers and rights that are due to different species of life, including human life. But he is also reminded, early in this series, of certain legends (or prophecies?) that speak of his own future (Davies 2006a).

The apocalypse is once more averted, as the Doctor creates an attraction field in the breach room that draws in all things that have crossed over the

breach in time and space. However, this places both him and Rose in danger of getting drawn into the breach before it closes for good, with the Daleks and Cybermen disposed of. At the last moment, Rose's father from the parallel world rescues Rose, but, when she is taken into the parallel world, she is permanently separated from the Doctor with whom she has clearly fallen in love during their journeying together. Their final parting, in which he can only speak to her via a final, temporal breach, reveals both her articulation of love and the costliness of emotional involvement with traveling companions that the Doctor has not fully owned (he has deflected personal commitment by claiming that he looked after Rose only as a promise to her mother). When he responds to her articulation of love, the signal fades before she can see and hear his reciprocal response—only the audience sees him, alone in the TARDIS, mouth the words of love toward her (Davies 2006b). This experience of grief and loss of a close companion will impact his subsequent relationships with future traveling companions and begin a process of self-questioning about his proclivity for attracting persons to him who are willing to sacrifice so much for a passing traveler.

'Last of the Time Lords' (Series 3)

The Doctor does, in fact, take on a new traveling companion, Martha Jones, who also comes to desire a relationship with him. However, by series 3, the Doctor is wary of the cause and effect of his own past behavior with the companions who have predominantly been women (in series 2, he reconnects with a former companion, Sarah Jane Smith, who confronts him about his habit of 'picking up and dropping' female traveling companions whenever it suits him) (Whithouse 2006). But it is through a prophesied third meeting with the Face of Bo in this third series that the Doctor learns that he is not alone as the last of the Time Lords (Davies 2007a). The other Time Lord, known as the Master, does not, however, share the Doctor's benevolent intentionality in traveling across space and time. The Master becomes a kind of 'Antichrist' figure, posited against his apparent equal and fellow Time Lord, the Doctor. In the penultimate twelfth episode, the Master, gloating over his success in taking over the world, takes the frail, aged Doctor to look out on the destruction and death below: 'And so it came to pass that the human race fell and the Earth was no more. And I looked down upon my new dominion as Master of all and I thought it good' (Davies 2007b). The Master has collaborated with a species known as the Toclafane that seems initially alien. However, it is revealed in the finale that they are, in fact, one post-apocalyptic future for humanity. When a captured Toclafane is asked why they would kill their own kind, he answers, 'Because it's fun!' (Davies 2007b). As the Master observes, 'human race—greatest monsters of them all' (Davies 2007c). This is again a very confront-

ing 'revelation' implying that such apocalyptic events may be the result of human choice rather than external events.

Martha, sent by the Doctor to the enslaved people of a post-apocalyptic earth, has passed on the Doctor's word that everyone who has heard, through her, of the Doctor and his 'saving power' should think his name at one moment in time. The Master is bemused: 'Nothing will happen!—Is that your weapon? Prayer?' (Davies 2007b). But Martha reminds him that the Archangel satellite network, which enabled him to mesmerise the world into slavery, can now be turned against him in order to restore the Doctor to his former 'glory'. As the Doctor literally revitalizes and rises from his place of humiliation, he confronts the Master with his ultimate powerlessness: 'one thing you can't do—stop them thinking—tell me the human race is degenerate now when they can do this' (Davies 2007b). Here again, as in the previous two series, is the belief that, in spite of what may appear to be prophesied and/or inevitable, individual and corporate choice and action, often coupled with self-sacrifice, can still make a difference. Yet as some things are revealed—loyalties, deep beliefs and values—other things, such as the Doctor's long-term 'calling', with or without human companions, become once more mysterious and veiled.

'Journey's End' (Series 4)

Martha has chosen not to continue to journey with the Doctor. She knows that they can only ever be friends. But in this next series, a new urgency confronts the Doctor as he seems to be drawn to particular human beings who seem to be integral to both the destiny of the human race and his own future destiny, often at an unknown cost to their own lives. In the first episode, 'Partners in Crime', the Doctor finds himself reunited with Donna Noble, whom he, a season earlier, had rescued during an attempted invasion of earth. She regrets having rejected his earlier invitation to be a traveling companion and has been seeking after him ever since by following up conspiracy theories in the hope of finding him. Mysteriously, as she organizes to leave her possessions on earth before traveling with him, she asks for assistance from a woman who, for the audience, is recognizably Rose Tyler, from the parallel earth. This 'revelation' is simultaneously a reminiscence and a warning that something threatening is stirring (Davies 2008a). Rose will reappear more frequently as the series unfolds. By episode 11, 'Turn Left', Rose will be in deep conversation and interaction with Donna as she becomes a prophetic messenger to the Doctor of a coming new threat to time and space (Davies 2008b). Another message from the future comes to the Doctor in the form of a new relationship. In 'Silence in the Library' (episode 10), he and Donna meet River Song, who claims to know the Doctor from the future when she will be his wife (Moffat 2008). Yet a further prophecy is alluded to in episode

3, 'Planet of the Ood', when Ood Sigma speaks both of the future singing in the Ood community of the 'song' of the 'Doctor-Donna' and that the Doctor's song may soon end (Temple 2008).

Therefore, when the Doctor finds himself trapped by the Daleks with all those who have been his close companions, including Rose, Captain Jack, Martha, Sarah Jane and Donna, he is close to believing that his death is imminent. Dalek Caan has acted as prophet to the Dalek community and to the creator of the Daleks, Davros, leading them to believe that the alignment of the planets that they have captured is all part of destiny leading to detonation of the 'reality bomb' and the ultimate revelation and shaming of who the Doctor really is. This is fulfilled as all the Doctor's human associates threaten the Daleks with the destruction of their own world rather than submit to Dalek rule. Davros gloats at this human behavior, which shows how they have not embraced the Doctor's modeling of nonviolence and further makes the Doctor reflect on how many deaths he has caused, the number of those who have died in his name. Davros exposes the Doctor as 'the man who keeps running, never looking back because he dare not ... out of shame! This is my final victory Doctor; I have shown you ... yourself' (Davies 2008c).

What is unforeseen is that, within the TARDIS, Donna melds with a part of the Doctor that gives her Time Lord abilities to free the Doctor and all his companions and put a stop to the Daleks' destruction of the planets. But this fulfilling of the prophecy of the 'Doctor-Donna' (foretold by Ood Sigma) is costly as Donna, similar to Rose, cannot as a human being contain the experience of being part Time Lord. The Doctor can heal her only by making her forget all that they have shared together so that she does not know or remember him (Davies 2008c). Therefore, although she will be eternally significant in the history of the universe and its well-being, she will never appreciate or remember it—it will remain hidden from her.

'The End of Time—Part 2' (The Specials)

The Doctor, having bid farewell to all his companions back safely on earth, chooses to travel alone. In a series of four specials, he increasingly becomes aware that his time is running out and that the prophecy of Ood Sigma may be soon fulfilled. The prophecy comes with an additional warning that 'he' will knock four times and then time will end. In the third episode of the Specials, 'The Waters of Mars', the Doctor, feeling the sting of knowing which points in time are supposedly fixed, goes against this belief by rescuing Captain Adelaide Brookes, whose 'mysterious' death on Mars was purportedly the trigger for human beings becoming more active explorers of the universe. Rather than being grateful for her rescue she confronts the Doctor with his unethical behavior as a Time Lord, which reveals him in a new light.

DOCTOR: For a long time now I thought I was just a survivor, but I'm not—I'm the winner! That's who I am, Time Lord victorious!
BROOKES: And there's no one to stop you?
DOCTOR: No.
BROOKES: This is wrong—I don't care who you are, the Time Lord victorious is wrong!
DOCTOR: That's for me to decide.

She leaves him and goes into her house, but in the next moment the Doctor realizes that she has killed herself in spite of his actions to save her, to change a fixed point in time, a destiny (Davies 2009a). This becomes an early sign that his own future may be more fixed than he anticipates.

In a subsequent confrontation with exiled Time Lords who escaped the Great Time Wars and now threaten the universe with the end of time, (through a prophesied link forged with a resurrected Master who 'knocks four times'), the Doctor intervenes to save the universe in spite of his prophesied death. It is when he realizes that Wilfred has put himself in life-threatening danger and knocks tentatively four times that it is this knocking that the prophecy refers to. Now the Doctor, with a certain bitterness, appears to rage against 'God' or destiny at the potential end of his life as he confronts Wilfred, who has willingly sacrificed himself in aid of the Doctor: '[L]ook at you, not remotely important, but me, I could do so much more, so much more, but this is what I get, my reward, but it's not fair.' But then he offers to change places with Wilfred so that Wilfred need not die. 'I've lived too long, Wilfred, its my honor.' In fact, the Doctor does not die but does need to regenerate, this time with a deeper sense of the loss that each time he regenerates he experiences the 'death' of his most recent persona—his last words before regeneration are 'I don't want to go'. The apocalypse is now becoming more personal in the *Doctor Who* series.

'The Big Bang' (Series 5)

The new, regenerated Doctor (played by Matt Davis) finds himself in a situation where he is rescued from a crashed TARDIS by a young girl, Amy Pond, who seems to live alone without any parents or caregivers. Over the series it becomes apparent that there is a crack in time that is linked, by destiny, to both Amy and the Doctor. The apocalyptic in series 5 and 6 shifts from threats to space, to threats to time and, more specifically, threats to the Doctor rather than to the earth or any particular part of the universe. In the episode prior to 'Big Bang' the Doctor has been tricked by a unique collaboration of many of his enemies—Daleks, Sontarans, Cybermen, and others into becoming trapped in a device, the Pandorica, that is said to hold the most dangerous being in the universe—himself. It was designed to lock the Doctor away and prevent the timestream damage that they believe is predicted that

the Doctor will cause. An alternative interpretation by the Doctor is that the time explosion will be caused by the exploding TARDIS, which he manages to delay, but there are still mysteries as to whether that delay can be held off forever (Moffat 2010).

This episode calls on both the Doctor and River Song to partner in moving between various pasts and futures, using vortex manipulators, in an attempt to rewrite the unfolding of time. And the puzzle of the crack or tear in time is linked to another emerging prophecy that 'silence will fall' either when or if the Doctor is destroyed (Moffat 2010). What is ambiguous in this prophecy is whether the death of the Doctor results in an apocalypse or prevents an apocalypse. But in the midst of this, the importance of memory, the remembrance of events and relationships that are significant over time, becomes a new overarching value in the series, alongside the prior value that peoples' actions matter in time.

'The Wedding of River Song' (Series 6)

Series 6 has been the most disturbing of the new *Doctor Who* saga, as audiences witness, within the first 15 minutes of episode 1, what is believed to be the Doctor's final and nonregenerating death at Lake Silencio in the United States of America. It soon becomes clear that the Doctor is aware of this 'fixed' point in time and is still trying to find a way around it with the help of Amy, her new husband, Rory, and River Song. Over the course of the series, memory plays an increasingly significant role, as one of the first aliens they encounter is a 'religious order' known as the Silence. These creatures linger in the shadows, subtly influencing the actions of others, and their mission is to invariably lead the Doctor to his death. Their great advantage is that, if they are seen, they are forgotten once the person turns away to warn others. Over the journeys of the season, another mystery is revealed—that River Song is the daughter of Amy and Rory and has some Time Lord-like regenerative capacities, because she was conceived when Rory and Amy lived in the TARDIS. But this new revelation also comes with a price. Now that the Doctor knows more about who she is, she knows that she has less time with him in the future (Moffat 2011).

The finale of this series begins with the Doctor trying to find out why the Silence want him dead on this fixed point. He is advised that the Silence is dedicated to averting the Doctor's 'terrifying' future, and that '[o]n the fields of Trenzelor, at the fall of the Eleventh, when no living creature can speak falsely or fail to answer, a question will be asked—one that must never be answered' (Moffat 2011). He recognizes that his 'death' must occur; otherwise time gets 'fixed' in one spot and reality starts to break down. By asking River Song to marry him, he is able to let her know a secret—that he has hidden himself and the TARDIS from detection by the Silence, and that when she

is forced to kill him at Lake Silencio, it is not him but a robotlike duplicate. Once more an immediate apocalypse is averted, but the prophecies remain unresolved and veiled. As audiences await the seventh series of the new *Doctor Who*, the Doctor is now forced to return to 'working in the shadows' to solve the prophecies of 'a battle on the Fields of Trenzalore, the Fall of the Eleventh and the first question hiding in plain sight, lest the universe falls apart—Doctor Who?' (Moffat 2011).

Dr Who?—*Who cares?*

The 2011 Christmas special of *Doctor Who*, about a wife and her two children longing for their father to come home safely from the Second World War, illustrates yet again the importance of memory and relationship in the midst of crisis, so it may be anticipated that further journeys by the Doctor will both reveal and add mystery to the many unanswered circumstances of the preceding two series. But this episode is also an exemplar of what is believed to be the chief reason that the series *Doctor Who* has been the BBC's longest running television series (Tulloch and Alvarado 1983: 35). Tulloch and Alvarado, who led the way for critical reflection on *Doctor Who* in their scholarly analysis of the original series (before its revival in 2005), discuss at length the significance of the BBC's cultural charter in creating quality television. The perception in the 1960s when the first *Doctor Who* was broadcast was that the BBC, in its production and programming, must air the voices of various political and social interests by taking a populist stance. It is noted that the BBC handbook defines this new style of presentation as 'quizzical, amused, slightly sceptical' and these are exactly the kinds of qualities that determined the construction of *Doctor Who*. The Doctor has, both in the original and the renewed series, adopted a populist role in criticising 'sectionist' forces of the political Right and Left and challenging the 'official' and powerful institutions such as corporations, unions, the military or government (Tulloch and Alvarado 1983: 52). Although *Doctor Who* was initially conceived and funded as a childrens' television educational drama series, its longevity can be attributed to its capacity to cater to diverse audiences and their particular interests. The young can enjoy the adventure, the humor and the monsters, while the older viewers can engage with its political and social commentary, as well as its narrative conundrums. In reviving the franchise in 2005, its founding producer Russell T. Davies ensured that the series would delve into areas of contemporary concern from politics, consumerism, the media and popular television to various dynamics of romance and sexuality (Robb 2009: 218). In 2011, the *Doctor Who* Christmas Special touched on the theme of children and families when their loved ones are away fighting in a war from which they may not return. This would be highly relevant to many families in the UK, the

USA and Australia (three of the BBC's key markets) whose loved ones may be involved in protracted warfare and dangerous peacekeeping operations far away from home. It is this conscious attention to writing to a mass audience rather than only the loyal *Doctor Who* fans that Brian Robb highlights as a key reason why it is one of the BBC's most important programs, regularly drawing audiences of between six and ten million (2009: 237).

With regard to the apocalyptic that I have explored in this chapter, it is still uncertain where one might locate the Doctor as, variously, survivor, savior or final cause. However, in this revitalized series, the dynamics of revelation and mystery do continue to generate choices of belief and loyalty that can mean life or death. They are choices about what it means to be human, about the value of memory, about having both free will and responsibilities toward all life, and about destiny in relation to cause and effect. However, the remaining challenge will be how the writers and producers will continue to keep audiences caring about the fate of the Doctor and his human companions as more and more seems to be revealed that would rob the series of its quintessential mystery.

Matt Hills (2010) in his analysis of the new series, cites the work of US scholar Jason Mittell and the notion of 'narrative special effect' as a possible factor in continuing audience loyalty. Mittell suggests that there can be a shift in audience pleasure from 'what will happen next?' to 'how did [the writer] do that?' The complexity now involved in telling the story of the Doctor requires an ongoing puzzle-sorting by audience members either to make sense of or to second-guess where the writers may be taking the Doctor, and, by default, the audience (Hills 2010: 221, 222). It is now evident that the Doctor's own longevity is at stake as the apocalyptic moment that is both personal and universal. The constant reframing and reinterpreting of 'signs' and prophecies proves to be an effective narrative device to keep audiences guessing, alongside the characters, what is going on and what is at stake, but it is also a constant reminder of the unveiling/veiling paradox of the truly apocalyptic in this innovative British science fiction television series. Yet it is this quality of unveiling/veiling that must never be finally resolved in order for audiences to continue to care about *Doctor Who*.

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11

'The Devil Wears Nada': *The Simpsons* and the Demythologization of the Apocalypse

Raoul J. Adam

MARGE: No, it's the Apocalypse! Bart, are you wearing clean underwear?
BART: Not any more.[1]

The Simpsons reveals as many apocalyptic layers as Dante's hell has levels. In the spirit of *apokalypsis* (to take the cover away), the intention of this chapter is to uncover the layers of a family whose members have been known, on the odd occasion, to grab a man's goatee in search of Satan, to store the skeleton of an apocalyptic angel in the family garage, and to ponder the planets wearing nary a fig leaf during the Rapture. As the 'brief' introductory exchange between Marge and Bart Simpson captures well, *The Simpsons* juxtaposes the high tragedy of the apocalypse with satirical and sometimes scatological comedy. Perhaps even more than that other divine comedy, *The Simpsons* vulgarizes *eschata* and brings heaven and hell to the suburbs.[2]

No Freudian or Jungian invocation is needed to suggest a serious side to the satirizing and vulgarizing of apocalyptic themes in America's most popular animation. Indeed, the paradox of the childishly adult cartoon is noted and demonstrated in the cartoon characters' own words. Bart Simpson argues, 'Cartoons don't have messages ... They're just a bunch of hilarious stuff you know.'[3] However, as Lisa Simpson is ironically scripted, 'If cartoons were meant for adults, they'd put them on in prime time!'[4] In short, *The Simpsons* is a seriously silly cartoon. As the introductory examples illustrate,

1. 'Simpsons Bible Stories', *The Simpsons* (AABF14, Fox, WNYW, New York, 4 April 1999).

2. Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy* (trans. Geoffrey L. Bickersteth; New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986). Dante's *Divine Comedy* was written in vulgar (from the Latin vulgus, 'mean folk') Italian rather than the Latin language usually used to express the themes of high tragedy.

3. 'Lisa the Vegetarian', *The Simpsons* (3FO3, Fox, WNYW, New York, 15 October 1995).

4. 'Krusty Gets Busted', *The Simpsons* (7G12, Fox, WNYW, New York, 29 April 1990).

apocalyptic themes provide common content for *The Simpsons'* childishly adult treatment of the tension between the sacred and the profane. Arguably, the prevalence of these perennial themes and the prime time popularity of the cartoon suggest the presence of an apocalyptic archetype in Western consciousness. The thesis offered here is that *The Simpsons'* irreverent satire plays a *demythologizing* role in service of an Apocalypse archetype. This thesis relies on Edward Edinger's definition of the Apocalypse archetype as 'the shattering of the world as it has been, followed by its reconstitution'.[5]

In the fictional town of Springfield (the Simpsons' hometown) and in Middle America, the Apocalypse archetype is often seen conservatively dressed in fundamentalist and evangelical[6] mythologies. Accordingly, heaven and hell, God and Satan, angels and demons, judgment and tribulation, Rapture and 'Riders of the Apocalypse' are the familiar stuff of *Simpsonesque* satire. The dark side of fundamentalist and conservative evangelical dualisms represents the 'shattering' symbols of the Apocalypse archetype, which Edinger identifies variously as *Satan*, *The Beast*, *Demons*, *The Antichrist*, *The Tribulation*, *The Whore of Babylon*, and *Hell–The Lake of Fire*.[7] Conversely, the light side of the dualism represents the 'reconstituting' symbols of the Apocalypse archetype, which Edinger identifies variously as *God*, *The Lamb*, *Angels*, *The Rapture*, and *Heaven–Paradise*.[8] This constellation of symbols gives expression to the Apocalypse archetype that operates in Christian mythology. The situation and satirization of these symbols in *The Simpsons* reflects the significance of the archetype and its idiosyncratic expression in the modern Western milieu. Simpsonesque satire juxtaposes the sacred with the profane, and the apocalyptically serious with the trivial and the mundane. Why does *The Simpsons* do this and how does it succeed in drawing both mirth and ire from its popular audience? To answer this *why* and *how* in terms of the Apocalypse archetype, the following chapter will attempt to (i) provide a brief synopsis of the sacred and profane in *The Simpsons*, (ii) identify its apocalyptic themes in the religious context of Middle America, (iii) further describe the Apocalypse archetype—its *mythologization*, *demythologization*, and *remythologization*, and (iv) reflect on the *demythologizing* function of Simpsonesque satire.

5. Edward Edinger, *Archetype of the Apocalypse: Divine Vengeance, Terrorism and the End of the World* (Chicago: Open Court, 2002), p. 5.

6. The interchange of these terms is fraught with difficulty, but to fail to acknowledge the significant but dynamic overlap between fundamentalism and conservative evangelicalism is neglectful. James Barr notes the overlap in *Fundamentalism* (London: SCM Press, 2nd edn, 1981). The boundaries of overlap between fundamentalism and conservative evangelicalism are drawn up relative to one's position 'on or off' the theological spectrum.

7. Edinger, *Archetype of the Apocalypse,* pp, 5-8.

8. Edinger, *Archetype of the Apocalypse,* pp. 5-8.

The Simpsons: A Synopsis of the Sacred and the Profane

The Simpsons is an animation about the suburban (mis)adventures of a yellow-skinned, four-fingered[9] family living in the fictional town of Springfield. The town's residents caricature a Middle-American demographic and Middle-American religiosity. Reverend Lovejoy runs the local Protestant church; Moe runs the local tavern; Apu runs the local Kwik-E-Mart; and Homer Simpson runs between the three on any given Sunday. Springfield has a nuclear power plant (and three-eyed fish), a school, a library, a bowling alley, an old people's home, a church (with a signboard that once read '*Putting the fun back into fundamentalism*'[10]), and rows of suburban houses with picket fences. It is an animated set used to paint and parody a Middle America with family values, conservative politics and evangelical eschatology. This pastiche makes some sense of the more Kafkaesque moments in Springfield's apocalyptic life: Moe's Tavern is turned into a sushi bar after he sells it awaiting the Rapture;[11] Springfield is domed by the EPA and doomed by President Schwarzenegger to avoid an environmental apocalypse;[12] and *The Simpsons* family exit church and enter hell amid the Great Tribulation.[13] The latter scene from the episode 'Simpsons Bible Stories' aptly illustrates the idiosyncrasies of the Simpson family members.

Family patriarch Homer Simpson is a generally well-meaning dullard whose primary cosmological concerns are beer (particularly Duff Beer) and food (particularly doughnuts and hotdogs). Homer's faith is nominal at best. When Bart inquires of his religion, Homer replies, 'You know, the one with all the well-meaning rules that don't work out in real life. Uh ... Christianity!'[14] As 'Simpsons Bible Stories' concludes and the family descends into hell amid fire and brimstone, Homer's screams echo from the fiery furnace '... they're out of hotdogs! And the coleslaw has pineapple in it!'[15]

Marge Simpson, Homer's wife, is a long-suffering and maternalistic housewife whose considerable smarts and sensibility are most occupied in rescuing her family from her husband's misadventures. As foreshadowed, her maternal sensibility and earthbound humanity are evidenced in her concern for Bart's hygiene as the apocalypse looms—'Bart, are you wearing clean underwear?'[16]

9. Only God has five fingers in *The Simpsons*.

10. 'Whacking Day', *The Simpsons* (9F18, Fox, WNYW, New York, 29 April 1993).

11. 'Thank God It's Doomsday', *The Simpsons* (GABF14, Fox, WNYW, New York, 8 May 2005).

12. *The Simpsons Movie* (Twentieth Century Fox, 2007).

13. 'Simpsons Bible Stories', *The Simpsons*.

14. 'Homerpalooza', *The Simpsons* (3F21, Fox, WNYW, New York. 19 May 1996).

15. 'Simpsons Bible Stories', *The Simpsons*.

16. 'Simpsons Bible Stories', *The Simpsons*.

Ten-year-old Bart (who *was* wearing clean underwear) is Springfield's version of Dennis the Menace. The prepubescent anarchist regularly flashes a bare bottom to denude the moral majority[17] of Middle America. However, the bare bottoms of naughty boys in Middle America are apt to be smacked (with a copy of Dr James C. Dobson's *Dare to Discipline*[18] in hand), and Bart's shenanigans are not without penalty, occasional remorse and tellingly decreasing frequency in later seasons.

Lisa Simpson, Bart's eight-year-old sister, brings a reasoned and humanely sensitive presence to the mix. Her precocious intellect and humanistic moralism make her the family conscience and champion of causes. As the family descends to hell, Lisa is drawn heavenward in a 'rapturous' beam of light, only to be plucked back to earth by Homer, who scolds, 'Where do you think you're going young lady!'[19]

Maggie, literally the baby of the family, features relatively little in the series. Her silent descent into hell at the end of 'Simpsons Bible Stories' reveals less about the theology of infant salvation than about her relative anonymity in the family. Collectively, the Simpson family is described by *Life* magazine as the 'millennium family unit: struggling, skeptical, disrespectful, ironic, hopeful'.[20] It may be this 'mark of disrespect' that made *The Simpsons* the first fictional family to receive a presidential rebuke. Addressing the National Evangelical Convention in 1992, then US President George H.W. Bush remarked, 'American families should be less like *The Simpsons* and more like the Waltons.'[21] This ageless animated family, much like the literalized mythologies of an Apocalypse archetype, has worked its way into a collective psyche within, and well beyond, American borders.

The Simpsons is the longest-running animation in American television history. Now into its twenty-third season and past its 495th episode, the show's popular culture credentials are established by a score of Emmy Awards and Annie Awards, a Peabody Award, a place in 2007 *TIME Magazine*'s top 100 'Best TV Shows of All Time', and the only place for an animated character—Bart Simpson—in *TIME*'s list of 'Top 100 of the Century's Most Influential

17. The Moral Majority was revived by the late Jerry Falwell as the 'Moral Majority Coalition'. Like its predecessor, the organization promoted the political influence of the conservative moral interpretation of the religious right.

18. James C. Dobson, *Dare to Discipline* (New York: Bantam Books, 1970). Dobson's book (which has recently been republished) reflects a conservative reaction to a perceived moral and behavioral decline in children's behavior as a consequence of liberal child-centered approaches to education. Note that Homer's preferred disciplinary approach to Bart's misdemeanors is strangling.

19. 'Simpsons Bible Stories', *The Simpsons*.

20. As noted in Mark I. Pinsky, *The Gospel According to The Simpsons: The Spiritual Life of the World's Most Animated Family* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2004), 3.

21. Cited in Pinsky, *Gospel According to The Simpsons,* p. 1.

People' for 1998. Some odder evidence of the show's popularity includes a prime ministerial endorsement from Tony Blair; the aforementioned presidential rebuke from George H.W. Bush (and the First Lady); official complaints from the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights[22] and the Federation of Hindu Associations;[23] front-page coverage on *Christianity Today*[24] and *The Christian Century*;[25] and the contribution of the exclamation 'D'oh!' to the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Somehow, *The Simpsons* both strikes a popular chord and touches a sensitive nerve. And more often than not, this 'striking sensitivity' involves its treatment of religious themes and their associated eschatologies.

The centrality of apocalyptic themes in *The Simpsons* is well recognized. Perhaps the first hint of the show's eschatological allusions lies in its original title—*Life in Hell*—as a series of short cartoons featured on *The Tracy Ullman Show*.[26] More telling is the volume of secondary literature on religion in *The Simpsons*. Mark Pinsky's book *The Gospel According to The Simpsons* provides a comprehensive description of the show's religious references and an evangelical apologia for its values.[27] The online *Simpsons Archive* houses both popular and scholarly essays on religion in the show.[28] These include Gerry Bowler's *God and the Simpsons: The Religious Life of an Animated Sitcom*[29] and excerpts from *The Simpsons and Philosophy: The Do'h of Homer*.[30] Dozens of episodes including 'Thank God It's Doomsday'; 'Homer the Heretic'; 'The Joy of Sect'; 'The Father, the Son, and the Holy Guest Star'; 'She of Little Faith'; 'Bart Sells his Soul'; 'Simpsons Bible Stories'; 'Missionary: Impossible'; 'The

22. The Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights has lodged complaints concerning representations of Catholicism in several episodes including 'Sunday Cruddy Sunday', *The Simpsons* (AABF08, Fox, WNYW, New York, 31 January 1999) and 'The Father, the Son, and the Holy Guest Star', *The Simpsons* (GABF09, Fox, WNYW, New York, 15 May 2005).

23. The Federation of Hindu Associations later retracted a complaint about an episode where Homer fed a statue of Ganesha (a Hindu elephant deity) a peanut: 'Homer the Heretic', *The Simpsons* (9F01, Fox, WNYW, New York, 8 October 1992).

24. Mark I. Pinsky, 'How Big Is the Simpsons?' *Christianity Today* (5 February 2001).

25. V.A. Rebeck, 'Recognising Ourselves in the Simpsons', *The Christian Century* 107.20 (1990), pp. 622

26. M. Groening, 'Life in Hell', *The Tracey Ullman Show* (Gracie Films and Twentieth Century Fox, 1987–90).

27. Pinsky, *Gospel According to The Simpsons*.

28. *The Simpsons* Archive, online at http://www.snpp.com/ (accessed 10 April 2008).

29. G. Bowler, *God and the Simpsons: The Religious Life of an Animated Sitcom*, online at http://www.snpp.com/other/papers/gb.paper.html (accessed 5 September 2008).

30. C. Matheson, 'The Simpsons, Hyper-Irony, and the Meaning of Life', in *The Simpsons and Philosophy: The D'oh! of Homer* (Chicago: Open Court, 2001; extract online, *The Simpsons* Archive, http://www.snpp.com/other/special/philosophy.html (accessed 20 September 2008).

Monkey Suit'; 'Lisa the Skeptic' and *The Simpsons Movie* offer parody and pastiche to the apocalyptic mythologies most familiar to Middle Americans.

The Simpsons' religious themes naturally have their origins in the scriptwriters' experiences and beliefs. A brief insight into these beliefs and experiences reveals the source of the show's apocalyptic content and its demythologizing intent. On the religious distribution of scriptwriters, Steve Tompkins claims that most 'were atheist Jews or atheist Christians, and only two of us were churchgoing Christians when I was there'.[31] Similarly, Jeff Martin recalls, 'I was in a minority as a Protestant.' The show's originator, Matt Groening, affectionately labels the scriptwriters as 'Harvard-grad-brainiac-bastard-eggheads'. The combination of 'Atheist Christians' and professing Christians like Martin and Tompkins explains the richness of the show's religious allusions. As Pinsky writes, 'Martin also came equipped with considerable knowledge of evangelical Protestantism.' *The Simpsons* satirizes Protestant apocalypticism with the intent to demythologize some of its literalizations.

The Simpsons' demythologizing religious satire springs from its religious, nominally religious *and* nonreligious writers. In an interview for Pinksy's *The Gospel According to The Simpsons*, Tompkins offers the following insight: 'At *The Simpsons*, you are reined in ... You can't stick your neck out and do anything that's overtly religious on its face. You must undercut it.'[32] For the 'rabid atheists'[33] (Tompkins's not unaffectionate term) among the writers, there is an inextricable link between 'true' Christianity and the Christianity that the show lampoons. For the Christian writers there is enough discontinuity between the two to remain within the broader fold. Reflecting on his co-writers, Tompkins says, 'No matter how much those writers pride themselves as being atheists, probably deep down, they're not. They have love for humanity.'[34] It seems that atheism and a 'love for humanity' are as mutually exclusive for some Christians as they are inextricably linked for some atheists. Either way, according to Tompkins, the writers seem to have a common understanding of '[t]he things that should be mocked ... and the things that shouldn't be mocked'.[35] The writing combination of moderate Christians and avowed atheists may explain *The Simpsons'* mutual mockery of Unitarianism and fundamentalism, as two ends of a spectrum. In one episode Reverend Lovejoy mockingly offers Bart and Lisa an *empty* bowl—*full* of 'Unitarian

31. Mark I. Pinsky, 'Simpson's Gospel: Humor Is in Indirect Proportion to One's True belief', in Pinsky, *The Gospel According to The Simpsons*; also online at http://www.snpp.com/other/special/gospel.html (accessed 20 November 2008). Quotations in this paragraph are from this article.

32. Pinsky, 'Simpson's Gospel: Humor Is in Indirect Proportion'.

33. Pinsky, 'Simpson's Gospel: Humor Is in Indirect Proportion'.

34. Pinsky, 'Simpson's Gospel: Humor Is in Indirect Proportion'.

35. Pinsky, 'Simpson's Gospel: Humor Is in Indirect Proportion'.

ice cream';[36] in another, Homer prepares to meet his maker by throwing up a rather ecumenical 'Hail Mary': 'I'm gonna die! Jesus, Allah, Buddha, I love you all!'[37] I have here foreshadowed the function of Simpsonesque satire as a demythologizing influence in the religious milieu of Middle America straddling the millennium. The following sections provide further elaboration of the Apocalypse archetype and the role of demythologization in its purpose and preservation.

The Apocalypse Archetype

An archetype is essentially a pattern. It is a pattern that has emerged out of the collective of human experience. In a sense, an archetype can be said to transcend or exist beyond individual experience, because, having emerged out the collective, it imposes itself back on individual experience. I use 'transcend' and 'exist beyond' as flawed but necessary descriptors to fill the gap that remains when the boundaries between 'collective and individual' break down. As I intend to read *The Simpsons* broadly using Edinger's 'archetype of the Apocalypse',[38] it is worth recording his definition of an archetype as 'a primordial psychic ordering of images that has a collective or generalized quality; it can be understood, therefore, to derive from the collective transpersonal objective psyche—rather than from the personal psyche'.[39] Archetypes permeate, reflect, and create individual and collective identities. For example, we may identify with, against, or between such archetypes as *hero* and *villain*, *peacemaker* and *warmonger*. My interest is not just in *how* the Apocalypse archetype is represented in *The Simpsons*, but *why* it is represented in this way. The *why* of it implies that archetypes serve a purpose.

Archetypes are orienting patterns, constellations of images and symbols like stars clustered to navigate through an otherwise disorientating darkness and confusion. They are templates. My thesis is that the most collective function of an archetype is to maintain and map meaning through the complexity of human experience. However, in order to remain meaningful and vibrant, archetypes must undergo a process of *mythologization*, *demythologization* and *remythologization*. This process is akin to the growth, shedding and regrowth of a serpentine skin—a necessity for survival in changing climes and times. To humanize the metaphor: mythologization *dresses* the archetype in seasonal fashion; demythologization *denudes* the archetype when the seasons change;

36. 'I'm Goin' to Praiseland', *The Simpsons* (CABF15, Fox, WNYW, New York, 6 May 2001).

37. 'Screaming Yellow Honkers', *The Simpsons* (AABF10, Fox, WNYW, New York, 21 February 1999).

38. Edinger, *Archetype of the Apocalypse*.

39. Edinger, *Archetype of the Apocalypse*, p. 2.

and remythologization *redresses* the archetype for the new season. I describe this process with a tacit awareness that the act of description contributes to the 'shattering' and 'reconstitution' of the Apocalypse archetype itself.

It is difficult to conceptualize the relationship between these processes. It is tempting but too simplistic to adopt a linear developmental metaphor that conceptualizes demythologization as the final stage—though perhaps across time there is room for such a conceptualization from the top down (wherever the top may be). However, in the bottom-up, topsy-turvy *Lebenswelt* (life world) of the particular, the three processes can seem to conflict, complement, counterbalance, cooperate or simply coexist. To extend the 'dressed-up' metaphor, the seasonal dress of the Apocalypse archetype may be as relevant in Springfield as it is irrelevant in Antarctica. I suspect that this has something to do with the subcultural clash between *The Simpsons'* 'Harvard-grad-brainiac-bastard-egghead'[40] scriptwriters and their suburbanized subjects. However, collectively and over time[41], these three processes (*mythologization*, *demythologization* and *remythologization*) tend to balance and counterbalance in the service of archetypes that provide meaning and direction to human experience somewhere between the sacred and the profane. It is within these three processes that I locate the Simpsonesque satire of the Apocalypse archetype.

Mythologization

The Apocalypse archetype describes a pattern of violent and tumultuous ending followed by renewal. Given its origins in the collective psyche, the archetype can be identified as manifesting in a particular space and time within this collective. The accumulation and concretization of symbols, stories and characters around an archetype is a form of myth building or *mythologization.* So, archetypes are manifested and expressed in mythologies, just as the *Odyssey* or the *Myths of Heracles* express the archetypal hero on the archetypal journey.[42]. A particular myth provides an effable link to an otherwise ineffable 'reality'. Mythologist Joseph Campbell suggested that myth provides a link 'beyond even the concept of reality, that which transcends all thought. The myth puts you there all the time, gives you a line to connect with that mystery which you are.'[43]

40. Pinsky, 'Simpson's Gospel: Humor Is in Indirect Proportion'.

41. Notwithstanding, a cynic could label such time as a tyranny of academic distance that progressively abstracts theory from the 'real world' of a subject.

42. See *Homer*, *The Odyssey* (trans. S.H. Butcher and Andrew Lang; 1905; New York: Macmillan, 1949); the Myths of Heracles being the Greek antecedent of the Roman Myths of Hercules.

43. Joseph Campbell, *The Power of Myth* (with Bill Moyers and editor Betty Sue Flowers; New York: Doubleday, 1988), p. 57.

For reasons perhaps too complex and diverse to discuss here, myth may be literalized and conflated with the archetype like an idol transposed one-for-one with the inimitable source of its inspiration. The literalization of myth involves the conflation of whole and part, one and many, symbol and symbolized.

For Campbell, some forms of religion are the product of interpretive confusion between mythic and literal modes of meaning.[44] Thus, a significant epistemic task for believers and non-believers alike is to develop a sort of interpretive dexterity between literal and symbolic ways of knowing, without asserting the ultimate primacy of one over the other.

Thus, while the archetype is most powerfully expressed in myth, it can also be irretrievably lost in myth. The tragic ends to the apocalyptic dramas of David Koresh and the Branch Davidians; Jim Jones and the Peoples Temple; and Marshall Applewhite, Bonnie Nettles and Heaven's Gate are perhaps more extreme examples of this literalization of the Apocalypse archetype. Edinger represents such extreme literalizations of myth somewhat differently, but not contradictorily, as 'extreme versions of group possession, concrete group possession by the Apocalypse archetype'.[45] On the more common 'possession' by the archetype, Edinger continues:

> farther along the spectrum of apocalyptic groups are the relatively more moderate and even conventional fundamentalist churches who are convinced that the time of the 'End' is upon us ... today there are millions of Americans who expect to be 'raptured' up to Heaven at any moment. There are millions of Americans who have these convictions.[46]

For Edinger, the Apocalypse archetype is

> manifesting itself in international relations; in the breakdown of the social structures of Western civilization; in political, ethnic, and religious groupings; as well as within the psyches of individuals. One can perceive the Apocalypse archetype active in all these arenas ... One can see further evidence in books, movies, and television programs.[47]

Of course, one such television program is *The Simpsons*. With this theory and context in mind, I turn to a representation of apocalyptic mythologization in *The Simpsons* and the dynamic that perhaps motivates its demythologizing satire.

The Simpsons parodies a range of apocalyptic mythologies. The faith of the family's church—described by the presiding Reverend Lovejoy as the 'Western

44. Campbell, *Power of Myth.*
45. Edinger, *Archetype of the Apocalypse*, p. 6.
46. Edinger, *Archetype of the Apocalypse,* p. 6.
47. Edinger, *Archetype of the Apocalypse,* p. 5.

branch of American Reform Presbylutheranism'[48]—is most representative of a conservative evangelicalism overlapping a fire-and-brimstone fundamentalism. The fundamentalist and conservative evangelical cosmology posits a literal and confrontational dualism between God and Satan, angels and demons, good and evil, heaven and hell, believer and unbeliever that exists in time and culminates in a final conflict at the end of time. For many conservative evangelicals, Scripture offers a linear metanarrative enabled and inspired by an omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent and omnibenevolent God—'the Alpha and the Omega ... the one who is, who was, and who is coming' (Rev. 1.8). A well-represented apocalyptic hermeneutic within this conservative-evangelical eschatology is premillennial dispensationalism. For premillennial dispensationalists, the Christian metanarrative culminates through a literalized though idiosyncratic reading of the book of Revelation. It is the popular worldview of Hal Lindsey's *Late Great Planet Earth*[49] and Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins's *Left Behind*[50] series. Here, Christ returns to collect the faithful (the Rapture) before the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse unleash the wrath of God on a fallen earth (the Tribulation).

The Simpsons' constellation of apocalyptic symbols and images reflects the conservative evangelical mythologization of the Apocalypse archetype. In spite of their nominal religiosity, *The Simpsons* exist and navigate within the cosmological mythologies of conservative evangelicalism. For example, the 'destruction' and 'shattering of the world' that charaterize the Apocalypse archetype are represented in *The Simpsons*' images of hell and Satan. Reverend Lovejoy's pulpit prophesying—'And he was cast into the fiery cauldron of Hell! The searing heat, the scalding rivers of molten sulphur!'[51] has echoes of Jonathan Edwards's sermon 'Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God'.[52] Similar allusions are found in the instruction of Bart's Sunday School teacher, Ms Albright (also of apt name):

> Hell is a terrible place. Maggots are your sheet, worms your blanket, there's a lake of fire burning with sulfur. You'll be tormented day and night for ever and ever. As a matter of fact, if you actually saw hell, you'd be so frightened, you would die.[53]

48. 'The Father, the Son, and the Holy Guest Star', *The Simpsons* (GABF09, Fox, WNYW, New York, 15 May 2005).

49. Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970).

50. Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins, *Left Behind: A Novel of the Earth's Last Days* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1995).

51. 'Homer the Heretic', *The Simpsons*.

52. Jonathan Edwards, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1997; original sermon published in 1730).

53. 'Homer vs. Lisa and the 8th Commandment', *The Simpsons* (7F13, Fox, WNYW, New York, 7 February 1991).

Further reflecting the mythologization of hell and Satan within the Apocalypse archetype, Lisa dreams of going to hell for stealing cable television;[54] Bart sells his soul to the devil;[55] Homer has a near death experience of hell; and Rodd and Todd Flanders sing a popular Sunday school song '... and if the Devil doesn't like it he can sit on a tack—Ow!'.[56] Ms Albright's Sunday School discourse on hell reflects the blurring of lines between children's stories and rational adult theologies that characterize fundamentalist hermeneutics.

This blurring of the mythic and the literal is an interesting dynamic for developmental psychologists of religion like James Fowler, who reflects:

> In fact, we see a fair number of persons—usually men—who may exhibit considerable cognitive sophistication in their occupational worlds (as physicians or engineers, for example) but who in their emotional and faith lives are rather rigidly embedded in the structures of Mythic-Literal faith and imperial selfhood.[57]

Fowler defines a mythic-literal 'stage' where 'symbols are taken as one-dimensional and literal in meaning ... [and] meaning is both carried and 'trapped' in the narrative'. [58]

Phenomenologist of religion Heinz Streib, asks a related question:

> In terms of developmental theory, how can we understand that a person is able to perform formal operations in most domains of everyday life and that this same person takes every word of a guru or fundamentalist leader as the revelation of truth? [59]

His explanation involves a *heterodyning* of mythic and rational 'styles', in which

> [t]he earlier styles not only reemerge, but also they become predominant in matters of religion ... Not only a revival but also a kind of 'heterodyning' of styles takes place. This explains why the fundamentalist orientation is more stable, more rigoristic, and more cruel: It bestows the earlier styles with the power of mutuality in group relationships and the power of systemic—rational arguments, or both.[60]

54. 'Homer versus Lisa and the Eighth Commandment', *The Simpsons.*

55. 'Bart Sells his Soul', *The Simpsons* (3F02, Fox, WNYW, New York, 8 October 1995).

56. 'Lisa's First Word', *The Simpsons* (9F08, Fox, WNYW, New York, 3 December 1992).

57. James W. *Fowler, Faith Development and Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, *1987), p. 86.*

58. James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), p. 149.

59. Heinz Streib, 'Faith Development Theory Revisited: The Religious Styles Perspective', *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 11 (2001), pp. 143-58 (153).

60. Streib, 'Faith Development Theory Revisited', p. 154.

Of course, Homer Simpson is only nominally religious, and he lacks Fowler's cognitive sophistication as an ingredient in Streib's heterodyned style. Aquinas's theological sophistication is hardly challenged by Homer, who thinks that 'omnivorous' is one of the four O's of the Almighty.[61] Reading biblical narrative at all, let alone with a mythic-literal monochrome is beyond Homer, who similarly believes that 'Hercules and the Lion' is a Bible story and that '[i]f the Bible has taught us nothing else—and it hasn't—it's that girls should stick to girls' sports such as hot-oil wrestling, foxy-boxing, and such and such'.[62] So, although Homer is not a fundamentalist, his cosmology is filled with the literalized *eschata* of a fundamentalist discourse. This discourse includes a mythic-literal hell within the apocalyptic vision. That a mythic-literal hell occupies an important place in fundamentalist cosmology is neatly captured by the late Jerry Falwell's remark, 'Ask a Fundamentalist whether he believes there are really flames in hell and he will simply say, 'Yes, and hot ones too!'[63] The question is *why* the *eschata* of the apocalypse find such frequent representation in *The Simpsons*? My tentative answer is that *The Simpsons* represents the 'fundamentalisation' of Christian mythology in order to *demythologize* it, and that this *demythologization* ultimately serves the expression of the Apocalypse archetype.

Demythologization

Demythologization is the temporary disambiguation of literalized myth from the archetype it used to serve. In his essay *God and the Simpsons,* Gerry Bowler notes of the Simpsons' cosmology, 'God, the Devil, Heaven, Hell and angels are all treated as having objective reality'.[64] Fundamentalism's claims to objective reality extend to much more nuanced entities and events than these. In a way, this default hermeneutic obscures or trivializes more ecumenical debate over the extent to which such things *are* objectifiable or archetypically meaningful. In the interpretive scheme of the Apocalypse archetype, *The Simpsons'* satire serves to counterbalance or counteract the more extreme literalizations of myth found in fundamentalisms. Such counterbalancing satire works by juxtaposing the serious with the hilarious, the trivial with grave and the sacred with the profane. For example, Edinger's aforementioned cults 'possessed' by the Apocalypse archetype are represented and demythologized in *The Simpsons.* A fictional amalgam of these apocalyptic cults, the 'Move-

61. 'There's No Disgrace like Home', *The Simpsons* (7G04, Fox, WNYW, New York, 28 January 1990).

62. 'Lisa on Ice', *The Simpsons* (2F05, Fox, WNYW, New York, 13 November 1994).

63. Kathleen C. Boone. *The Bible Tells Them So: The Discourse of Protestant Fundamentalism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), p. 47.

64. Bowler. *God and the Simpsons.*

mentarians', is the subject of some of *The Simpsons'* most stinging satire in the episode 'The Joy of Sect'.[65] The demythologization or 'undressing' of apocalyptic mythology is powerfully portrayed at the end of the episode with a visual metaphor: A spaceship carrying the cult leader (who bears a distinct resemblance to L. Ron Hubbard) rises convincingly into the heavens only to disintegrate into cardboard props and a crude pedal-powered mechanism, housing bags of members' money about to be spirited away. The thousand-year labor of the cultists is cut short and their dream of traveling to the promised paradise 'Blisstonia' is destroyed.[66]

The Simpsons' demythologization also targets the literalization of the 'shattering' forces of the Apocalypse archetype. Thus, when Reverend Lovejoy warns from the pulpit, 'People! The Devil walks among us!',[67] ten-year-old Bart turns in his pew to wrestle a tall thin man with straight black hair, pointed ears and a small goatee. Herein are the point and power of religious satire—to demythologize fundamentalistic literalism by hyperexaggerating the literalization of myth. The authority that holds literalized myth together is held to account by a sort of 'Socratic satire' that sees Bart question his Sunday School teacher with paradoxically trivial and serious questions like 'Wouldn't you get used to Hell, like in a hot-tub?' and 'Will there be pirates in Hell?'[68] Even more serious questions are wrapped in comedy. After his Rapture, Homer complains that he cannot enjoy heaven because his family is suffering the Tribulation on earth—he knows because he's watching the 'Earth channel' from heaven on a big-screen TV.[69] The satirical inversion of expectation has a similarly demythologizing effect. Homer awakes from his near death experience in hell and recalls 'a wonderful place filled with fire and brimstone' with 'guys in red pyjamas sticking pitch forks in my butt'.[70] In yet another descent to hell (a tellingly common occurrence), Homer gleefully states his first impressions—'Ohh, I smell Barbeque!'[71] The Fox Network screening of *The Simpsons* is clearly self-aware of how provocative such eschatological demythologizations and religious satire can be. In one episode, Ned Flanders (the Simpsons' hyperreligious neighbor) laments, 'Oh, the network slogan is true. Watch Fox and be damned for all eternity!'[72] The point to all this satire is that the mythic-literal devil of the mythic-literal apocalypse is perhaps

65. 'The Joy of Sect', *The Simpsons* (5F23, Fox, WNYW, New York, 8 February 1998).
66. 'The Joy of Sect', *The Simpsons*.
67. 'Homer the Heretic', *The Simpsons*.
68. 'Homer versus Lisa and the Eighth Commandment.' *The Simpsons*.
69. 'Thank God It's Doomsday', *The Simpsons*.
70. 'Homer's Triple Bypass', *The Simpsons* (9F09, Fox, WNYW, New York, 7 December 1992).
71. 'Simpsons Bible Stories', *The Simpsons*.
72. 'Marge in Chains', *The Simpsons* (9F20, Fox, WNYW, New York, 6 May 1993).

not to be taken as literally as it is by Middle American fundamentalism. In other words, to quote the title of another *Simpsons* episode and to extend the demythologizing metaphor of undress once more—'The Devil Wears Nada'.[73] The devil, hell and its demons are not the only apocalyptic content represented and then satirically demythologized in *The Simpsons*. God, heaven and its angels attract similar attention.

The God of *The Simpsons* is a bearded old man—crowned, enrobed and enthroned on cotton-white clouds. The Judeo-Christian deity's stereotypical anthropomorphism as a cantankerous and judgmental father who watches, weighs and writes sin and righteousness in the Book of Life; intervenes in human affairs; and answers prayers is subtly established and then satirized. Homer (whose rote knowledge of the Bible consists of verses beginning 'Thou shalt not ...'[74]) reflects briefly on the character of God—'He's always happy. No wait, He's always mad.'[75] On another occasion, after skipping church and finding his house on fire, Homer laments, 'The Lord is vengeful. O Spiteful One, show me who to smite and he shall be smoten!'[76] The satirization again relies on the juxtaposition of the serious and the hilarious, the trivial and the grave, the sacred and the profane, the expected and the unexpected. The God of *The Simpsons* topples a ten-pin to aid a Christian bowling team[77] and ponders giving Reverend Lovejoy a canker sore as punishment for his judgmental sermons.[78] In contrast to the God of fundamentalism, the God of *The Simpsons* is sympathetic to Homer's complaint: 'I'm not a bad guy! I work hard, and I love my kids. So why should I spend half my Sunday hearing about how I'm going to Hell?'[79]

The simplistically literalized cosmology of a God 'up' in heaven is also the target of *The Simpsons'* satire. Marge berates her husband—'Homer, you don't have to pray out loud'—to which Homer replies, 'But he's way the hell up there'.[80] Bart is sent to hell for failing to hold the handrail on the escalator to heaven and spitting over the side.[81] Heaven is also subject to his precocious questioning: 'Will an amputated leg be reattached in Heaven? Will there be animals in Heaven? What about cavemen? Robots with a human brain? What

73. 'The Devil Wears Nada', *The Simpsons* (LABF17, Fox, WNYW, New York.

74. 'Duffless', *The Simpsons* (9F14, Fox, WNYW, New York, 18 February 1993).

75. 'I Married Marge', *The Simpsons* (8F10, Fox, WNYW, New York, 26 December 1991).

76. 'Homer the Heretic', *The Simpsons.*

77. 'Team Homer', *The Simpsons* (3F10, Fox, WNYW, New York, 7 January 1996).

78. 'Homer the Heretic', *The Simpsons.*

79. 'Homer the Heretic', *The Simpsons.*

80. 'Pray Anything', *The Simpsons* (EABF06, Fox, WNYW, New York, 9 February 2003).

81. 'Bart Gets Hit by a Car', *The Simpsons* (7F10, Fox, WNYW, New York, 10 January 1991).

if a ventriloquist goes to Heaven, will his dummy go too?'[82] Heaven and its literalized angels are further demythologized in 'Lisa the Skeptic'[83] when what appears to be an angel is excavated on a school archeological dig. Lisa's skepticism is finally vindicated and the credulity of Springfield's fundamentalist clergyman exposed (Lovejoy: 'Well, it appears science has failed again, in front of overwhelming religious evidence') when the angel is revealed as a hoax for a marketing ploy. The same episode also represents the demythologization of related apocalyptic themes.

For many fundamentalists and conservative evangelicals, the apocalypse is an imminent space-time event. Again, *The Simpsons* represents such literalized mythology in order to demythologize it through satire. In the closing scenes of 'Lisa the Skeptic', Springfield's residents gather on a hill to witness the coming apocalypse as foretold on a sign, 'the end will come at sundown',[84] and communicated to the Vatican, 'Your holiness, there is word from America, they say an angel has foretold the apocalypse.'[85] Among those present, Ned Flanders and Reverend Lovejoy acknowledge the coming Tribulation:

> NED: Reverend, I do have to admit that this doomsday has me just a tridge pitter-painted.
>
> LOVEJOY: Oh do be calm, Ned, but be very afraid also! Tremendously afraid! For the day of reckoning is upon us![86]

With characteristic satire the literalized apocalypse is demythologized. As Marge dresses Lisa with a bow for the coming end, Lisa complains, 'Nothing is going to happen Mom. I hate to disappoint you but the world is "not" coming to an end!'[87] As the sun sets, Marge's sister, the chain-smoking Patty, quips, 'We did it. We beat cancer'[88]—a subtle reminder perhaps that the everyday apocalypse of death is forgotten amid the trumpeted fanfare of a mythologized apocalypse.

The demythologization of apocalyptic chronologies and prophecies is a prominent theme in several episodes and in *The Simpsons Movie*. The episode 'Thank God It's Doomsday'[89] parodies the dispensationalist 'rapture' theology of the popular American *Left Behind* series.[90] While watching a film, *Left Below*

82. 'The Telltale Head', *The Simpsons* (7G07, Fox, WNYW, New York, 25 February 1990).
83. 'Lisa the Skeptic', *The Simpsons*.
84. 'Lisa the Skeptic', *The Simpsons*.
85. 'Lisa the Skeptic', *The Simpsons*.
86. 'Lisa the Skeptic', *The Simpsons*.
87. 'Lisa the Skeptic', *The Simpsons*.
88. 'Lisa the Skeptic', *The Simpsons*.
89. 'Thank God It's Doomsday', *The Simpsons*.
90. LaHaye and Jenkins. *Left Behind*.

(a parody of the film *Left Behind*[91]), Homer becomes obsessed with predicting the Rapture, which he concludes will occur in seven days at 3.15 on May the 18th. Homer's monologue is used to satirize the origins of apocalyptic mythologies: 'It came to me in a religious vision. Or maybe it was a drunken haze. Or possibly an ice cream headache!'[92] Literalized chronologies of the apocalypse receive similar treatment. Homer requests God to 'put this whole rapture hoopdey off for another couple of years or so'. When God points out the difficulties of such a task—'But it's already started. To do what you're asking, I would have to turn back time'—Homer persuades him to relent with a chide, 'Superman did it!'[93] The literalization and concretization of apocalyptic myth is further lampooned in the fulfillment of Homer's biblical prophecy, 'And the stars in the sky fell to earth' (Rev. 6.13). Springfield's credulous residents are easily convinced that the prophecy has come to pass when a Duff Beer blimp carrying movie 'stars' crashes and falls to earth during a Krusty the Clown special.[94] *The Simpsons* offers light relief to the heaviness of apocalyptic themes.

The satire is more subtle but present nevertheless in the shows' treatment of more secular apocalyptic themes. In *The Simpsons Movie*, 'President' Schwarzenegger complains of environmental apocalypticism, 'Ach! Everything is "crisis this" and "end-of-the-world that"! No one opens with a joke!'[95] In 'Homerazzi',[96] Bart's blackboard inscription reads, 'Global warming did not eat my homework'. In another episode,[97] Bart offers the sound effects for Lisa's explanation for the relationship between gaseous emissions and melting glaciers. The satirical lightness is enlightening in its demythologization of literalized religious or aggrandized secular mythologies of the apocalypse. My reading is that this demythologization produces a necessary counterbalance when the mythic-literal reading of the Apocalypse archetype threatens its function as an earthy reminder of destruction and renewal in the 'here and now'. Some would conceptualize demythologization as a linear developmental progression and would perhaps conclude the analysis with the death of myth. There is a sense in which this may be warranted in a particular context, but I'm not sure that is warranted in the broadest sense. My claim is that a demythologized state is difficult if not impossible to sustain across individual and collective psyches. Sooner or later, discontent and disequilibrium upset the demythologized state and the process of *remythologization* begins. For

91. *Left Behind: The Movie* (Cloud Ten Pictures, 2002).
92. 'Thank God It's Doomsday', *The Simpsons*.
93. 'Thank God It's Doomsday', *The Simpsons*.
94. 'Thank God It's Doomsday', *The Simpsons*.
95. *The Simpsons Movie* (Twentieth Century Fox, 2007).
96. 'Homerazzi', *The Simpsons* (JABF06, Fox, WNYW, New York, 25 May 2007).
97. 'On a Clear Day I Can't See my Sister', *The Simpsons* (GABF05, Fox, WNYW, New York, 6 March 2005).

some, this will mean a recapitulation to mythic-literal childhood; for others it will mean the evolution of new mythology. Either way, the teleological linear metaphor is best subsumed under the metaphor of a perpetually evolving spiral centered between two poles, or perhaps thin layers subject to the fractures and upheavals wrought of human life.

Remythologization

The *remythologization* of the Apocalypse archetype involves the creation, constellation and dissemination of new stories, images and symbols forming the pattern of 'destruction and renewal' in the collective psyche. Sometimes this may involve the rearrangement and reconceptualization of past mythologies that have been demythologized. Remythologization requires conceptual space and desire for the re-equilibration of what scholar of religion Karen Armstrong calls *mythos* and *logos*.[98] The *mythos* 'gives meaning to life, but cannot be explained in rational terms', whereas the *logos* describes 'rational, pragmatic, and scientific thought'.'[99] Confusion between the two leads to conflict. This dynamic is played out in the final scenes of 'The Father, the Son, and the Holy Guest Star'.[100] Bart has converted to Catholicism, and Springfield's Protestants are not amused. In a final tense standoff (after all, Marge's blue hair has been paint-balled by a Catholic priest in a sidecar), Bart speaks to both sides: 'Easy on the zeal Churchoes ... I've got something to say. Don't you get it? It's all Christianity, people! The little stupid differences are nothing next to the big stupid similarities!'[101] To Springfield's residents, Bart's wisdom has demythologized and thus defused the small literalizations at the heart of religious conflict. However, the final scene flashes forward one thousand years into a future apocalypse when Bart is worshiped as the last prophet of God. The cycle of mythologization and the Apocalypse archetype has come full circle, and two factions of Bart's followers face off in a final war. Their conflict is twofold. First, they cannot agree on whether Bart preached 'love and tolerance' or 'understanding and peace'.[102] Second, they cannot agree on the details of his death—was he really betrayed by Milhouse (Bart's friend) and ripped apart by snow-mobiles?[103] The implicit dynamic in this futuristic battle is that the phases of the perennial Apocalypse archetype (destruction and

98. Karen Armstrong. *The Battle for God: Fundamentalism in Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (London: HarperCollins, 2000).

99. Armstrong, *Battle for God,* p. 376.

100. 'The Father, the Son, and the Holy Guest Star', *The Simpsons.*

101. 'The Father, the Son, and the Holy Guest Star', *The Simpsons.*

102. 'The Father, the Son, and the Holy Guest Star', *The Simpsons.*

103. 'The Father, the Son, and the Holy Guest Star', *The Simpsons.*

renewal) are motivated by a cycle of mythologization, demythologization and remythologization that seeks equilibration between *mythos* and *logos*.

Armstrong's thesis is that the present age is characterized by a destructively one-sided embrace of the *logos:* 'It is, therefore, a mistake to regard myth as an inferior mode of thought, which can be cast aside when human beings have attained the age of reason.'[104] Is this a mistake and, if so, by what measure? French philosopher Bruno Latour describes modernization as the beginning of this 'age of reason' and the end of this 'myth-imbued childhood': 'Let us wipe our tears', the modernists liked to declare, 'let us become adults; humanity is leaving behind its myth-imbued childhood and is stepping into the harsh reality of Science, Technology, and the Market'.[105] Lisa Simpson echoes this perennial challenge of *logos* to *mythos* in 'Lisa the Skeptic': 'Look, you can either accept science and face up to reality or you can believe in angels and live in a childish dream world.'[106] A similar challenge was issued by Sigmund Freud at the beginning of modernity: '*Religion* is comparable to a *childhood neurosis.*'[107] It is a challenge repeated by Richard Dawkins to the religious right (and left) in the present: 'We need to replace the automatic credulity of childhood with the constructive skepticism of adult science.'[108] Dawkins provides his own satire of the mythologized apocalypse by referring to himself and fellow 'anti-theists' Sam Harris, Daniel Dennett and the late Christopher Hitchins as *The Four Horsemen.*[109] The demythologizing intent is similar to *The Simpsons'* own reference to the four horsemen:

> NED: 'It's the four elephants of the Apocalypse!'
> MARGE: 'That's horsemen Ned.'[110]

However, for Latour and for Armstrong, the Dawkinsean and demythologizing age of reason, for all its emphasis on the *logos* and rationality, is still 'fundamentally devoid of meaning'.[111] This loss of meaning is a prominent

104. Karen Armstrong, *A Short History of Myth* (Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005).

105. Bruno Latour, *The War of the Worlds: What about Peace?* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2002), online at http://www.btgjapan.org/catalysts/bruno.html (accessed 3 April 2005).

106. 'Lisa the Skeptic', *The Simpsons.*

107. Sigmund Freud, 'The Future of an Illusion' (1927), in J. Strachey (ed.), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (Hogarth Press, 1961), vol. 21]

108. *Richard Dawkins, Unweaving the Rainbow: Science, Delusion, and the Appetite for Wonder (*Boston: Houghton Mifflin, *1998), pp.* 142-43.

109. Richard Dawkins, 'The Four Horsemen', in *Discussions with Richard Dawkins: Episode 1* (Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science, 2008).

110. 'Bart Gets an Elephant', *The Simpsons* (1F15, Fox, WNYW, New York, 31 March 1994).

111. Latour, *War of the Worlds,* p. 11.

theme in the modern and postmodern milieu. For some, it is a temporary symptom of withdrawal, a growth pain beyond mythic childhood. For others, it is a potentially terminal condition—the 'vortex of nihilism',[112] which fundamentalists fear lies beyond the 'absolute truth' of their particular mythology. The void evokes French existential philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre's 'God-shaped hole'.[113] For Armstrong, this void 'lies at the heart' of modern culture.[114] Latour writes that the modernists acknowledged the loss of meaning with a 'sort of sado-masochistic joy'[115] and that the postmodernist celebration of multiple meanings comes with a caveat too unbearable for some: 'You possess meaning, perhaps, but you no longer have reality, or else you have it merely in the symbolic, subjective, collective, symbolic form of mere representations.'[116] It is this inability to live without absolute meaning, this fear of the nihilistic void after the demythologization of cherished mythologies, that eventually drives remythologization. In his essay 'The Simpsons, Hyper-Irony, and the Meaning of Life', Carl Matheson portrays the show as speaking with coldness out of the void:

> *The Simpsons* does not promote anything, because its humor works by putting forward positions only in order to undercut them ... I think that the thirty seconds or so of apparent redemption in each episode of *The Simpsons* is there mainly to allow us to soldier on for twenty-one and a half minutes of maniacal cruelty at the beginning of the next episode.[117]

The question is whether, in the broader scheme of maintaining the archetypes we live by, such cruelty is a necessary evil in the service of a greater kindness.

While *The Simpsons* serves a primarily demythologizing role in its Middle American religious context, it leaves the door open for the reentry of Armstrong's *mythos* and the remythologization of the Apocalypse archetype. Lisa and Marge typify an exchange between *mythos* and *logos* in 'Lisa the Skeptic' when they discuss the existence of an angel:

> LISA: What grown person could believe in angels?
> MARGE: Well, your mother for one!
> LISA: You? But you're an intelligent person, mom.

112. Boone, *Bible Tells Them So,* p. 24.

113. The 'God-shaped hole' is attributed to Jean-Paul Sartre in Karen Armstrong, *A History of God: The 4,000 Year Quest of Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (New York: Ballantine, 1994), p. 324.

114. Armstrong, *Battle for God,* p. 199.

115. Latour, *War of the Worlds,* p. 11.

116. Latour, *War of the Worlds,* pp. 14-15.

117. Carl Matheson, 'The Simpsons, Hyper-Irony, and the Meaning of Life', in *The Simpsons and Philosophy,* p. 124.

> MARGE: There has to be more to life than just what we see Lisa, everyone needs something to believe in.
> LISA: It's not that I don't have a spiritual side, I just find it hard to believe there's a dead angel hanging in our garage.
> MARGE: Oh, my poor Lisa, if you can't make a leap of faith now and then, well, I feel sorry for you.
> LISA: Don't feel sorry for me mom, I feel sorry for you.[118]

Later, after the prophesied apocalypse has failed to eventuate and the angel is exposed as a hoax, Marge and Lisa have the following exchange:

> MARGE: Well I guess you were right honey, but you have to admit that when the angel started to talk you were squeezing my hand pretty hard!
> LISA: (*laughs, attempting to continue her disbelief*) Well it was just so loud and … Thanks for squeezing back.
> MARGE: Anytime, my angel.[119]

This openness to *mythos* is reinforced by the guest appearance of an animated Stephen Jay Gould in the same episode. Gould, known for his NOMA (Non-Overlapping Magisteria)[120] approach to science and religion (logos and mythos), is given responsibility for 'scientifically testing' the angel. When Lisa asks why the tests did not reveal the angel to be a fake, Gould replies, 'I'm going to be honest with you Lisa, I never did the tests.'[121] No doubt, this will be seen by some as a conciliatory gesture and by others as a patronizing pat on the head. The former reaction expresses the more sympathetic aspect of evangelical readings. Evangelical Tony Campolo writes in his foreword to Pinsky's book:

> At first glance, what you see and hear while watching might be a 'turn off' because it can easily be mistaken for an assault that ridicules middle-class Christianity. It is not! What the show is really depicting through the antics of *The Simpsons* is the character of some of the people who are in our churches and the ways in which they choose to live out their faith.[122]

The latter reaction is Matheson's reading in *The Simpsons and Philosophy* when he caricatures Simpsonesque satire as a 'cult of knowingness' that taunts, 'I can still show that I understand the intellectual rules by which you operate better than you do. I can show my superiority over you by demonstrating my awareness of what makes you tick.'[123] Such is the poignancy of

118. 'Lisa the Skeptic', *The Simpsons.*
119. 'Lisa the Skeptic', *The Simpsons.*
120. Stephen Jay Gould, 'Nonoverlapping Magisteria', *Natural History* 106 (1997), pp. 16-22.
121. 'Lisa the Skeptic', *The Simpsons.*
122. Tony Campolo, 'Foreword', in Pinsky, *Gospel According to The Simpsons,* p. 9.
123. Matheson. 'The Simpsons, Hyper-Irony, and the Meaning of Life', p. 120.

this criticism that I wish to conclude my analysis of the Apocalypse archetype with its consideration.

Conclusion

I have attempted to account for *The Simpsons*' apocalyptic representations through the *mythologization*, *demythologization*, and *remythologization* of an Apocalypse archetype. My general claim was that the Simsponesque satire surrounding apocalyptic themes could be understood as a demythologizing response to the Middle American literalization of apocalyptic myth. This interpretive framework sought to give some sense to the satire of Bart spitting from the handrail to heaven, Lisa storing a dead 'angel of the apocalypse' in the family garage, and Marge dressing Lisa for the last judgment in one episode and, in another, checking the cleanliness of Bart's underwear during the Tribulation. However, I save the final words to reflect on the interpretive framework itself. Does the process of mythologization, demythologization, and remythologization preclude the possibility that one 'myth' among the many *is* true? Or is 'scholarship' on the apocalypse bound to belong to Matheson's post-knowledge 'cult of knowingness'? Such scholarship finds meaning in pointing out that there is none. It feeds parasitically by demythologizing a 'host' of mythologies that it could not live without. *The Simpsons* reveals its own awareness of these questions and offers two responses worth considering.

First, *The Simpsons* reveals some self-awareness of the limits of its demythologizing satire. In 'Homerpalooza', Homer finds fame for his ability to stop cannonballs with his beer belly, which prompts the following exchange between two teenagers:

> TEEN 1: Oh, here comes that cannonball guy. He's cool.
> TEEN 2: Are you being sarcastic, dude?
> TEEN 1: I don't even know anymore.[124]

A satire that satirizes satire itself, as *The Simpsons* often does, is perhaps not as cold and cruel as Matheson suggests. It offers a winking recognition that demythologizing satire is a role in a drama with other players and scenes where it may or may not star. It is a precursor to a postformal development where the 'thinker knows she/he is helping create the eventual truth of a social interaction by being a participant in it and choosing to hold a certain view of its truth'.[125] In Latour's words:

124. 'Homerpalooza', *The Simpsons*.

125. J.D. Sinnott, 'The Developmental Approach: Postformal Thought as Adaptive Intelligence', in F. Blanchard-Fields and T.M. Hess (eds.), *Perspectives on Cognitive Change in Adulthood and Aging* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1996), pp. 362-63.

> At least we can be sure of one thing; that your gods as much as ours, your worlds as much as ours, your sciences as much as ours, your selves as much as ours are constructed. The only new relevant question ... would then be the following: 'How do you manufacture them?' and especially 'How do you verify that they are well constructed?' Here is where negotiations could begin: with the question of the right ways to build. [126]

The construction and maintenance of the Apocalypse archetype involve some demolition and deconstruction, but to subsume the whole of the project into this part is a mistake, a mistake that Matheson rightly exposes as 'cruel', and Latour as 'sado-masochistic'.[127]

The Simpsons also gives a winking recognition to the possibility that there is still One beyond, as well as within, the many. The diversity of readings that the show generates is as much evidence of its openness to possibility as it is of a closed and certain nihilism. Its openness to possibility is present in the nervous squeeze of 'Lisa the skeptic's' hand in the countdown to the apocalypse.[128] There is also the ambiguous relationship between reality and dream in the Simpson's encounters with the apocalypse—did Homer dream the Rapture during a sermon-induced slumber, or was it 'real'?[129] These examples may of course, be read as a weakness, a final flutter on a Pascalian wager[130]—after all, who wants to risk being *left behind* (or worse)? Or, they may be appreciated as a symbolic acknowledgment of that archetypal gap in knowledge, the dialogical epistemic space between doubt and certainty, where all manner and matter of possibilities await the refining fire of future human experience. Naturally, I leave the final word to a Simpson. Lisa, having exposed the 'Angel of the Apocalypse' as a publicity stunt rages against the accused, 'You exploited people's deepest beliefs just to anoint your cheesy wares'.[131] She then tries unsuccessfully to rally her fellow citizens, 'Well, we are outraged, aren't we?'[132] It seems, in animation as in life, that unanimous outrage against the literalization and commercialization of myth is not as attainable, simple, or even as desirable as Lisa thought.

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126. Latour, *War of the Worlds,* p. 40.

127. Matheson. 'The Simpsons, Hyper-Irony, and the Meaning of Life', p. 214; Latour, *War of the Worlds,* p. 11.

128. 'Lisa the Skeptic', *The Simpsons.*

129. 'Simpsons Bible Stories', *The Simpsons.*

130. Blaise Pascal's wager was that it is better to believe in God because one has everything to gain and nothing to lose.

131. 'Lisa the Skeptic', *The Simpsons.*

132. 'Lisa the Skeptic', *The Simpsons.*

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